

MIDDLE MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATION IN THE MIDST OF A CRISIS

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree

of

MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

in the

RHODES BUSINESS SCHOOL

by

VELISWA A. MBOLEKWANO

July 2016

Abstract

Crisis communication by organisational top leadership to external stakeholders has been explored in literature, while internal crisis communication dynamics by middle managers with their employees within the organisation has been under studied.

This paper pursues an understanding of crisis communication dynamics between middle management and their subordinates by investigating how the Middle Managers/Team Leaders of Makana Brick Manufacturing Firm (MBMF) communicated with their employees in the midst of the Eskom load shedding crisis in 2014. The investigation is not limited only to how they handled or made sense of the crisis, but also examines the effect and efficiency of their daily communication on both employees (subordinates) and operations in pursuing this end. As a foundation and background, the study broadly explores the literature on Crisis Leadership, Crisis and Crisis Communication, which are critical topics to understanding the communication role of the middle managers who were the primary subject of this research. The research was conducted through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. Nine Team Leaders were interviewed. The data collected was transcribed verbatim and analysed through open coding.

In the literature of crisis management, the concept of crisis communication has been extensively examined as a function of crisis management, primarily with regards to the crisis communication strategy, encompassing the actual verbal and nonverbal responses an organisation uses to address a crisis. The findings are generally congruent with the crisis communication literature, and reinforce the importance of efficient internal communication in building a culture of transparency between management and employees, as espoused in the literature reviewed, which in addition presents an invaluable opportunity for employees across all levels to engage in and be informed of the organisation's priorities and therefore has the potential to dictate the success or failure of any major change or crisis situation. As such, it can be argued that there is a need for the same analytical rigour that is given to external crisis communication to be given to financial or operational measures (Barrett, 2002).

For both external and internal stakeholders, human compassion, concern and empathy; faith in legitimate and appropriate actions taken by the chosen organisation spokesperson; and honesty, candidness and openness in communication (Seeger 2006, p. 242) are universal.

The quality and the quantity of communication, essentially, affect the level of trust and involvement of employees (Thomas, Zolin & Hartman, 2009), which is particularly relevant in times of crisis (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015 p. 322). Trust must be developed with staff through clear, honest communication and transparent actions. These encompass being fair, open in communication and intentions, showing consistency, fulfilling promises and being honest about what middle managers can and cannot communicate to their employees (Farrel & Schlesinger, 2013, p. 125).

In this study, face to face communication proved to be the most preferred communication channel because of its rewarding advantages such as direct feedback, two-way communication, relationship building and project collaboration.

Declaration

I declare that the Dissertation entitled, MIDDLE MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATION IN THE MIDST OF A CRISIS, which I hereby submit for the degree, MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION at Rhodes University, is my own work. I also declare that this dissertation has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.


A horizontal line with a handwritten signature in the center.

Veliswa A. Mbolekwano

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank, first and foremost, my supervisor, Professor Noel Pearce, for his guidance, support and assistance throughout the writing of this mini thesis.

I also need to record a large debt of special gratitude to my mother, my two daughters and son for their understanding and unconditional support.

Finally, and most importantly, I wish to acknowledge and thank the 2013 MBA students who took their time to talk and assist me. Your engagement and contributions made this mini thesis possible and meaningful, I thank you.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

1. Communication Management and Trust Model	20
2. Crisis Leadership Model	31
3. MBMF Process Flow Map	43
4 . A Multidimensional Model	60

List of Tables

1. Crisis Phases Comparisons	15
2. Summary of Participants' biographics	38
3. Summary of Communication methods/message content/outcome	53

List of Abbreviations and definition of terms	VIII
---	------

CHAPTER 1: Introduction	
1.1 Background to the study	1
1.2 Problem statement and the research questions.....	4
1.3 Research approach.....	4
1.4 Background to Makana Brick Manufacturing Firm	5
1.5 The crisis(Eskom load shedding).....	6
1.6 Chapter Outline.....	8

CHAPTER 2: Literature review - crisis communication by middle managers.....	
2.1 Introduction	9
2.2 Crisis defined	10
2.2.1 Types of crises.....	12
2.2.2 Organisational crisis.....	13
2.2.3 Phases of a crisis.....	14
2.2.3.1 Pre-crisis phase	16

2.2.3.2 The crisis phase.....	16
2.2.3.3 Post-crisis phase.....	17
2.2.3.4 Lessons learnt phase.....	18
2.3 Crisis leadership	18
2.3.1 Middle management and organisational leadership.....	22
2.3.2 Sense-making.....	23
2.4 Crisis communication.....	24
2.4.1 Interactive comms vs transmission comms.....	25
2.4.2 Public comms vs employee comms.....	27
2.5 Internal crisis communications.....	28
2.5.1 Impact on employees and business operations	30
2.6 Summary	32

CHAPTER 3: Research methods. procedures and techniques

3.1 The goals of the research	33
3.2 Paradigm	33
3.3 Methodology	35
3.3.1 Case study.....	35
3.3.2 Data collection techniques.....	36
3.3.3 Sampling.....	37
3.3.4 Data analysis	38
3.3.5 Ethical considerations	39
3.4 Research procedure followed	40
4. Summary	41

CHAPTER 4: Findings.....

4.1 Introduction.....	42
4.2 The Nature of the MBMF crisis	42
4.2.1 The impact /Outcomes of the crisis on MBMF operations.....	45
4.2.2 The impact/Outcomes of the crisis on employees	45
4.3 Sense making by MBMF middle managers	46
4.4 Communications	48
4.4.1 Communication processes.....	49

4.4.2 Message content.....	52
5. Summary	54
CHAPTER 5: Discussion of findings	
5.1 Introduction	55
5.2 Outcomes of crisis communication on employees	55
5.3 Sense-making by middle managers.....	57
5.4 Communications	57
5.4.1 Communication processes	59
5.4.2 Message contents.....	61
5.5 Summary - Contribution	61
5.6 Recommendations for practice	62
5.7 Summary	62
CHAPTER 6: Conclusion	
6.1 Conclusion	63
6.2 Recommendations for MBMF	64
6.3 Limitations and recommendations for future research	66
References	67
Appendices	
Appendix A: List of Interview Questions	77
Appendix B : Information Letter for Invitation to be interviewed.....	79
Appendix C : Consent Form	81
Appendix D : MBMF Communication Hierarchy	82
Appendix E : Functional Framework	83

List of Abbreviations

MBMF: Makana Brick Manufacturing Firm

EC: Eastern Cape

SA: South Africa

CEO – Chief Executive Officer

MDWM – Mission Directed Work Meeting

PM – Planned Maintenance

BCCM – Business Crisis Continuity Management

SMS – Short Message Service

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study: Research context, question and purpose

Although the importance of top leadership in crisis communication has been extensively studied in literature, not much focus has been placed on the study of the role of middle managers in maximising effective communication within the organisation to enhance operational objectives during a crisis.

This dissertation seeks to gain a clear understanding of the internal organisational communication dynamics in the midst of a crisis, and a more detailed perspective of real, on-the-ground crisis communication practices at an interpersonal level. The dissertation starts off by defining crisis as a concept, further highlighting the types of crises and briefly describing crisis phases. It draws on crisis leadership, crisis communication and the literature on sense-making in an attempt to underscore the association with management's role within an organisation.

This dissertation is embedded in the proposition that all organisations from all sectors (public, private and not-for-profit) face the possibility of disruptive events whose impact is not limited to mere inconvenience and short-lived disruption of normal operations to the very destruction of the organisation (Palepu, Burritt & Freeman, 2013, p. 635). Motivated by the purpose of this research, it is significant to highlight Dubrovski's (2009, p. 43) observation that the causes of emergence crises may either be internal or external. The external causes of crises are usually those that have arisen outside the environment of a company, while the company had no significant influence nor role on its surfacing. The role of internal communication is even more fundamental in crisis situations where there is a high level of communication ambiguity and a strong need for sense making (Mazzei & Ravazani 2015, p. 332).

Coombs (2014a) highlights a growing interest in the internal aspect of crisis communication with a focus on how management communicates with employees about a crisis. This notion ties in to the subject of internal communication, which, according to Mazzei & Ravazani (2015, p. 332), occupies a pivotal position in generating employee communication behaviours that are particularly relevant in a crisis.

Against this background, the aim of the research is to investigate how middle managers at MBMF made sense of Eskom¹ load shedding in 2014, how they communicated with their staff during power outages, and the effect of such communication on MBMF business operations and employees. The heart of the interviews was on pinpointing (i) methods of communication, (ii) the message content, and (iii) effect on both operations and employees.

The objectives of the study are:

- To describe the nature of the crisis affecting MBMF during the load shedding in 2014
- To understand how MBMF middle managers made sense of the power outages/ load shedding in 2014; and
- To analyse how they communicated with their staff, the contents of the communication and
- To analyse what the effect was of this communication to MBMF operations and the employees.

Johansen, Aggerholm & Frandsen (2012, pp. 271-272) argue that, within the last decade or so, crisis communication researchers have primarily focused on the external dimension of crisis communication, that is, the crisis response strategies applied by an organisation after a crisis (with external stakeholders) in an attempt to restore or protect its image and/or reputation among external stakeholders. In a nutshell, crisis communication has been associated more with the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) or spokespersons of the organisations, not necessarily with middle managers who are responsible for the business operations. Johansen *et al.* (2012, pp. 271-272) further concur that more research is required in the area of crisis communication to understand the internal dynamics of organisations. This view is also supported by Arneson

¹ **Eskom** : **Eskom** is a South African electricity public utility, established in 1923 as the Electricity Supply Commission (ESC) by the government of the Union of South Africa in terms of the Electricity Act (1922) (Binder 2008).

Binder, M., ed. 2008. *The NHA Annual Hydrogen Conference 2008*.

(2008, p. 19), who claims that the challenge of leading people falls to middle managers, and it is the leaders in the middle who must communicate and execute strategy, solve problems and manage performance. This is where the leadership and communication role at operational level becomes more relevant, which affirms the importance of leadership and efficient communication within the organisation's operational imperatives, hence the relevancy of this dissertation. In this context, it can be argued that communication is both a leadership and management function.

It is imperative to highlight that middle managers are leaders in their own sphere, and their leadership is reminiscent of the concept of dispersed leadership as noted by Farrel & Schlesinger (2013, p. 129). In addition, they note that "Leadership occurs through the process of interaction and communication". In an operations-based business like MBMF, this interaction and communication happens on a daily basis between the middle managers and their direct subordinates.

Communication is essential to both leaders and managers – *not communicating equals to not leading or managing*. It is understandable that, globally and across industries, CEOs and other senior executives consistently list good communication skills among the most important qualities necessary for organisational success (Johansson *et al.*, 2011 p.9). This article further notes that communication, in its varying forms, occupies 70 to 90 percent of managers' daily responsibilities. The time managers spend communicating accentuates the importance of communication to organising, change management, and organisational performance. Schoenberg's (2004, p. 5) view is congruent with this assertion, as he notes that "previous studies suggest that communication is a core competency of both leadership and in dealing with a crisis". In addition, he notes that little is known about how the theory of crisis leadership is applied to successfully manage and respond to crises.

Ultimately, crises are seen as creating rhetorical problems which demand that sense be made of decisions and events. Communication results from the need for sense-making, which is a collective, co-created activity. In the process of communication, leaders have to develop a message that can be encoded by

their subordinates in the sense that the leaders want, which is strongly linked to the sense-giving and sense-making process (Mazzei & Ravazani, 2015, p. 332; Johansson *et al.*, 2011, p. 3).

Furthermore, Farrell & Schlesinger (2013, p. 99) claim that middle managers have a special role as sense-givers in a crisis situation.

This dissertation therefore draws heavily on crisis leadership literature, and attempts to link it to the role played by middle managers in a crisis. The study attempts to investigate whether this literature (i.e. crisis communication by executive leaders or chosen spokespersons with external stakeholders) can be used to inform what middle managers should do. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to examine what is known about crisis communication with external stakeholders and apply it to the internal organisation dynamics, with a particular focus on employees and business operations.

In the context of this research, leaders and managers will be referred to interchangeably.

1.2 Problem statement and the research questions

Within the existing body of knowledge of crisis communication, there is a gap in understanding how managers communicate internally with employees and what the effect is of this communication on the operations and employees. Looking at the literature of how leaders communicate externally with stakeholders during a crisis, this study seeks to investigate how middle managers communicate with their subordinates in a crisis situation, and the impact of such communication on employees themselves and the business operations.

The research attempts to first describe the nature of the crisis that MBMF was confronted with, understand how the middle managers of MBMF made sense of the Eskom load shedding in 2014, and analyse how they communicated with their employees in the midst of the power outage crisis.

1.3 Research approach

In addressing the research questions, the study adopts a qualitative case study approach. Qualitative research is conducted in the natural setting of social

actors, with a focus on the process rather than the outcome, and the primary aim is in-depth ("thick") descriptions and understanding of actions and events (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 270). A qualitative research technique in the form of semi-structured interviews is used to gain perspectives from the middle managers of MBMF who manage in an operational business context. The middle managers were the subject of the case study in order to shed light on their process of internal crisis communication with their direct subordinates.

The key concepts that this study has addressed are crisis, crisis leadership, crisis communication and sense-making.

1.4. Background to Makana Brick Manufacturing Firm (the organisation under study)

Makana Brick Manufacturing Firm (MBMF) is a clay brick manufacturing firm in Eastern Cape, Grahamstown (Cadle, 2012). The firm was established in 1994. The firm's vision is to become the leading clay brick manufacturers in the Eastern Cape (EC) and be the most environmentally friendly clay brick company in South Africa (SA), and to have a happy and productive workforce and become employer of choice in Grahamstown (Cadle, 2012). In its brick production processes, the plant uses both clamp² and modern tunnel kilns, which are electrically operated. The company spent R80 million in infrastructure upgrade installing electrically operated kilns, and boasts one of the most technologically advanced clay brick plants in the country, with a product mix that comprises clay brick products such as face bricks, stock bricks and pavers (Cadle, 2012). The infrastructure upgrade resulted in MBMF being able to produce high volumes of the best quality clay bricks (4.5 million bricks per month) (Cadle, 2012).

² **Brick clamp:** (also refers to a device usually powered to lift quantities of bricks), a brick clamp is a traditional method of baking bricks, done by stacking the unbaked bricks with fuel under or among them and then setting the fuel on fire. The clamp is considered a type of kiln (Whitney).

Whitney, William Dwight. "Scove, 2" *The Century dictionary; an encyclopedic lexicon of the English language*, Vol. 7. New York: The Century Co., 1889. 5,415. Print.

For the production of the bricks at MBMF, electricity is used in operational activities, as in the firing of bricks and when they change the brick type (i.e. the kiln idles for 60 hours during the changeover, still consuming energy). This means that, for MBMF, electricity is the life blood of its operations and as such, invaluable to its sustainability. Out of the R100 million annual turnover that the firm generates, 40 per cent of their cost is energy (Zondagh, 2014).

In 2007, SA electricity demand outstripped available supply and threatened the stability of the national grid. The cause of that crisis has mainly been attributed to insufficient generation capacity, problems with the supply of coal to Eskom's coal-fired power plants, skills shortages at Eskom and an increasing demand for electricity as a consequence of economic growth (van der Nest, 2015). The Eskom load shedding became worse in 2014, where the power cuts were unscheduled or longer than scheduled without prior communication from Eskom (de Klerk, 2015).

For operational businesses like MBMF, these power cuts in 2014 became a crisis as their production is heavily dependent on electricity (Swanepoel, 2015). Communication is a key element to the functioning of an organisation. This dissertation aims to get insights into the process of communication during a crisis between those who lead and their subordinates, and the effect of that communication on operations and subordinates at MBMF.

1.5 The crisis (Eskom Load shedding)

Load shedding is not a new phenomenon in SA. The 2014 Load shedding bears a similarity to the electricity supply crisis of late 2007/early 2008. Reflecting back to 2008, the extent of the load shedding had unmanageable impact on business operations for almost all industries. To note a few, traffic operations, mining operations, commerce, hospitals including the daily lives of the SA public. This situation deteriorated to such an extent that the major mining groups shut down their operations on 24 January 2008 due to safety considerations (Bisseker 2015). Factories reduced output, offices and households across the country were left without power for extensive periods of time. Drastic changes had to be made and harsh decisions taken in that, to an extent, the sensitivity of lowering investment spending in the economy was

tested. Private-sector investment levels were lowered by one percent over five years, compared to the baseline, to incorporate current production losses by the mining and manufacturing sector, as well as the postponement and possible cancellation of future capital projects (Oberholze 2008).

As noted by economists, load shedding undoubtedly hurts the SA economy and costs the country a fortune in lost revenue and production. Translating the losses in rand value, Stage³ 1 load shedding (10 hours of blackouts per day (in different areas) for 20 days of the month cost the SA economy an estimated R20 billion. Stage 2, using the same parameters costs an estimated R40 billion, while Stage 3 load shedding costs in the region of R80 billion (Maswanganyi, 2015). The severity of load shedding effects also constrained both the South African Reserve Bank and Eskom to cut their 2015 growth forecasts because of the concern of strained electricity supply (Maswanganyi, 2015).

For this research, the period under investigation falls under Eskom's fourth power emergency of the 2013/14 summer maintenance season where rotational load shedding was implemented. The 2013/14 period was the first time for Eskom to resort in implementing rotational load shedding since the country's power crisis of 2008 (Creamer 2014).

The MBMF crises therefore were spawned from the Eskom national disaster, an external factor beyond the organisation's control as it had to cope with the effects on its operation.

The severity of the load shedding had affected manufacturing production (as in the MBMF case) more than any other factor, particularly by the number of stage

³**Stage 1** - up to 1 000 MW of electricity must be shed.

Stage 2 - up to 2 000 MW of electricity must be shed; and

Stage 3 - up to 4 000 MW of electricity must be shed (Bischof-Niemz, 2015).

Bischof-Niemz, S., 2015. Financial benefits of solar and wind power in South Africa in 2015.

3 outages. Manufacturers had to stop production equipment during stage 3. The stoppage of production is said to be an expensive exercise to run (Maswanganyi 2015). For this reason, the manufacturing industry shed 31000 jobs in 2014 compared with the previous year (Maswanganyi 2015).

According to Oberholzer (2008), the lost production capacity and sales in most SA manufacturing companies were mitigated to an extent by extra, unplanned spending on emergency power sources (generators). At MBMF, a small generator was bought before 2010 mainly to back up electricity for few minutes of supply interruptions, not necessarily to sustain the escalated stages (2 – 4 hours power cuts) that were experienced in 2014. The capacity of the present generator only sustains 2 kilns for a few hours. Moreover, this initiative comes with an additional input cost (i.e. diesel) and is not viewed as a cost effective option to run the complete business operations.

1.6 Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 has introduced the reader to the background of the research, problem statement, the context of the research and the background to the organisation under the study.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature surrounding the core concepts of this dissertation, namely, crisis, crisis leadership, crisis communication and sense-making. The chapter also touches on types of crises, organisational crisis and crisis phases and expands on internal crisis communication and middle managers' communication, and the related impact on employees and operations.

Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology, the case study, and the data collection and data analysis techniques employed. This chapter also discusses validity, reliability and the ethical issues surrounding the research.

Chapter 4 and 5 present and discuss the findings from the data collected, and related implications.

Chapter 6 concludes the dissertation.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW – CRISIS COMMUNICATION BY MIDDLE MANAGERS

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, literature surrounding the core themes of the research is reviewed, namely, crisis, crisis leadership, and crisis communication. In attempting to understand and synthesise the themes surrounding the topic, the literature review also covers literature relating to sense-making and organisational crisis. As highlighted in chapter one, the objectives of the study are:

- To describe the nature of the crisis affecting MBMF during the load shedding in 2014
- To understand how MBMF middle managers made sense of the power outages/ load shedding in 2014; and
- To analyse how they communicated with their staff, the contents of the communication and
- To analyse what the effect was of this communication to MBMF operations and the employees.

Crisis creates rhetorical problems which demand that sense be made of decisions and events (Mazzei & Ravazani, 2015, p. 332). As highlighted in the introduction, communication results from the need for sense-making, which is a collective, co-created activity. The value of immediate and open communication following a crisis is that it provides the necessary informational inputs for crisis stakeholders to engage in sense-making (Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer, 2003, p. 27). Seeger *et al.* (2003, p. 18) further explain that “through communication, organisational participants collectively interpret and make sense of their informational environment”. Over and above the authors’ views of communicating to make sense of the crisis, organisations use communication in many forms to execute various functions within the organisation.

The chapter therefore has been structured first to define crisis, highlight types of crises and phases, and briefly review the concept of organisational crisis. The chapter then proceeds to discuss crisis leadership, and highlight the role of

middle management, versus organisational leadership, and sense-making. The chapter further discusses crisis communication, and draws attention to interactive versus transmission modes of communication, public versus employee communication, and internal crisis communication. Lastly the impact of middle managers' communication on employees and operations within an organisation is discussed.

2.2 Crisis defined

The word crisis originates from Greek krisis, which means "to sift or separate". A crisis has the potential to divide an organisation's past from its future, to replace security with insecurity, and to separate effective leaders from ineffective ones. It also has the potential to exchange routine for creativity and to shift an organisation from "business as usual" into significant change (Klann, 2003, p. 4).

Crisis has been defined by a number of authors. According to King (2002, p. 237) crisis "is an unplanned event that has the potential of dismantling the internal and external structure of an organization". Santana (2004, p. 318) defines crisis differently. According to him, a crisis is not an event but rather a process that develops in its own logic. He believes that one's ability to deal with and manage crisis depends greatly on one's understanding of the phases a crisis goes through and the implications that each one of the stages poses to management.

Shaluf, Ahmadun & Said (2003, p. 29) define crisis as an abnormal situation which presents some extraordinary, high risk to business. Crisis is an abnormal situation as it challenges the norm, but this definition is vague as it does not expand on "extraordinary" or "high risk" to business.

According to Mani (2008, p. 38) a crisis is an event which is not planned for, it happens suddenly, and it requires immediate attention. It stretches the resources of the organisation and its people almost to a breaking point.

Krieger (2005, p. 136) defines crisis as "a specific, unexpected, and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and threat or perceived threat to an organization's high priority goals". MBMF's goals are to

reach a target of producing 45 000 bricks per day; the power cuts were a serious threat to this goal. Lerbinger (2012, p. 8) says that crises are described by the amount of damage caused immediately and over various periods: a few days, weeks, months or years, or permanently. In the context of MBMF, the power outages adversely affected the productivity and production; hence the middle managers defined it as “crisis”.

Van Wart & Kapucu (2011, p. 493) define crisis as “an event that threatens high priority values of the organization, presents a restricted amount of time in which a response can be made and is unexpected or unanticipated by the organization”.

These definitions are applicable to the case of MBMF in that, although load shedding was expected to happen as per the schedules, it still posed a crisis to the organisation: in effect, the load shedding interrupted the normal activity of the business. One of the major concerns during the MBMF crisis had to do with the fact that fluctuations in electricity supply often brought about unexpected interruptions with minimal notice or no notice at all from Eskom. The interruptions were not only experienced by MBMF, but also by a lot of other businesses in SA. As observed by Bisseker (2015), the extent of the load shedding had a disruptive impact on business operations, traffic, industry, mining operations, commerce, hospitals, and the daily lives of the SA public. He concludes by saying the load shedding came as a “*shock*”, and the effects were severe in mining and manufacturing, as was the case at MBMF.

Despite their apparent diversity, the definitions on closer examination reveal numerous common elements: *unplanned, unexpected, unpredictable, threat, shock*.

This study aligns itself with Dubrovski's (2009, p. 40) definition, where he defines company crisis “as a short-term, undesired, unfavourable and critical state in the company, which has derived from both internal and external causes and which directly, endangers the further existence and growth of the company”. MBMF experienced financial losses during Eskom unscheduled power cuts. The losses ranged from productivity of machinery, where production targets were not met, as well as low productivity of staff, to a point

where skilled labour had to take over cleaning responsibilities during the power cut periods. Over and above all, if unplanned Eskom load shedding were to continue, the business sustainability would be threatened as it primarily relies on electricity for its operations.

De Fatima Oliviera (2013, p. 254) says:

Crises represent serious threats to the most fundamental goals of an organization and its stakeholders (internal or external). These events are unexpected and sometimes unpredictable. No matter what size of an organization, a crisis interrupts normal business and damages corporate reputation; it can imperil future growth, profitability, and even the company's survival. Crisis episodes affect individuals' sense of reality, security, and normality.

This precisely defines the challenging environment and circumstances the power outage crisis presented to MBMF, as an organisation whose survival depends on a stable and predictable environment from a power supply perspective.

2.2.1 Types of crises

Crises take many forms. Several crisis taxonomies have been developed in the research literature. These typically include so called “natural disasters” (tsunamis, earthquakes, and wild fires); industrial accidents (spills, explosions, and product defects); and international events (workplace violence, product tampering, and terrorist attacks) (Seeger, 2006, pp. 232-244).

Contextualizing crisis types provides a framework that helps leadership address the uncertainty and confusion regarding the cause of a crisis and the stakeholders involved (Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer., 2003). Therefore, understanding the context helps to define the crisis and can consequently guide the actions of leaders (Wooten & James, 2008, p. 358). Distinguishing between various crises and disasters is important because the type of event influences the requirements for effective communication (Seeger, 2006, pp. 232-244).

2.2.2 Organisational crisis

For organisations, a crisis often conveys a fundamental threat to system stability, a questioning of core assumptions and beliefs, and threats to high-priority goals, including the image of the organisation in crisis and its profitability. To elaborate, the organisation in crisis's image may be perceived differently by different stakeholders. For a shareholder, an organisation in crisis may be viewed as a potential danger to investment while, in an employee's view the image may relate to how employees are treated. Simply put, the crisis challenges the trust relationships between the organisation in crisis and its stakeholders.

Seeger *et al.* (2003, p. 7) define an organisational crisis as "a specific, unexpected, and non-routine organizationally based event or series of events which creates high levels of uncertainty and threat or perceived threat to an organisation's high priority goals". According to Carmeli & Schaubroeck (2008, pp. 177-196), organisational crises are relatively low-probability, high-impact situations that threaten the competitiveness and viability of an organisation. As such, Carmeli & Schaubroeck (2008, pp.177-196) warn that a key managerial challenge is to design and implement an organisational system that is capable of coping with these traumatic events. As suggested by a number of authors, organisational systems may be designed in many forms, ranging from prescribed/documented crisis communication plans with prescribed channels and assigned crisis communication teams, best practices (de Wolf & Meiri, 2013, pp. 50-51), and business continuity plans (Palepu *et al.*, 2013, p. 637).

Hale, Dulek & Hale (2005, p. 113) define organisational crises as "events characterized by high consequence, low probability, ambiguity, and decision-making time pressure, constant or random event, and an intentional or unintentional act". It is evident that these definitions of organisational crisis are similar to the crisis definitions outlined in Chapter 2.2 above.

Marcus and Goodman (1991, cited in Wooten & James, 2008, p. 356) identify three categories of organisational crisis, namely, (a) accidents, (b) scandals, and (c) product safety and health incidents. Accidents occur unexpectedly and are discrete one-time events. Scandals, however, are disgraceful or

unsubstantiated events or communications that compromise the organisation's reputation. Finally, unlike accidents, a product safety or health event does not create mass suffering. Rather, it is the recurrence of the issue over an extended time that damages a firm's reputation, brand, and possible financial security (Marcus and Goodman, 1991, cited in Wooten & James, 2008, p. 356).

For managers and employees, a crisis can represent a profound personal loss (e.g. job losses, manager reputational loss) (Seeger *et al.*, 2003, pp. 4-6). Like any other crisis, an organisational crisis precipitates immediate changes and instability in the organisational system in several ways. Operations may cease, leaving facilities closed and key personnel distracted, or incapacitated (Seeger *et al.*, 2003, p. 9).

2.2.3 Phases of a crisis

Crisis communication is a function of crisis management, and therefore cannot be studied without first understanding the crisis management phases.

According to Coombs (2014b, pp. 10-11), crisis management has three phases, namely, (i) pre-crisis, (ii) crisis and (iii) post-crisis. It can be argued that crisis communication is versatile (rather than just one thing) and occurs during all three phases of crisis management. It therefore ideally has to be managed through the different phases (Coombs, 2011, pp. 45-46). The pre-crisis stage involves three sub stages, signal detection, prevention and crisis preparation, followed by the crisis stage, which has two sub stages, crisis recognition and crisis containment. Post-crisis is subdivided into learning and resolution (Coombs, 2014b, pp. 10-11),

Pearson and Mitroff (1993, cited in Mejri & De Wolf, 2013) divide crisis management into five phases, namely, (i) signal detection, (ii) preparation and prevention, (iii) containment and damage limitation, (iv) recovery, and (v) learning. Similarly, the authors agree that, when the crisis is resolved and deemed to be over, an organisation must consider what to do next, which can arguably mean recovery and learning phases (Pearson and Mitroff, 1993, cited in Mejri & De Wolf, 2013, p. 72).

Table 1 below compares crisis phases between Pearson and Mitroff (1993), Santana (2004) and Coombs (2014a).

Table 1: Crisis phases comparison

Three Phases	Pearson & Mitroff	Santana	Coombs
Pre-crisis	Signal Detection	Warning Signals	Signal detection
	Preparation	Preparation	Prevention
	Prevention	Prevention	Preparation
Crisis	Containment	Containment	Recognition
	Damage limitation	Damage limitation	Containment
Post-crisis	Recovery	Recovery	Learning
	Learning	Learning	Resolution

Source: Adapted from Pearson & Mitroff (1993); Santana (2004) and Coombs (2014b).

2.2.3.1 Pre-crisis phase

The pre-crisis phase focuses on prevention and preparation. In this phase, the manager's priority should be to answer the question of what can be done (for operations internally in the context of MBMF) or said to stakeholders to reduce the occurrence of the crisis and to minimise its possible damages if it occurs (Pearson and Mitroff, 1993, cited in Mejri & De Wolf, 2013, p. 73).

Prevention is aimed at reducing known risks that could lead to a crisis: this is part of an organisation's risk management programme. Preparation involves creating the crisis management plan, selecting and training the crisis management team, conducting exercises to test the crisis management plan and crisis management team, and, lastly, pre-drafting crisis messages (Mejri & De Wolf, 2013, pp. 73-74). Mejri & De Wolf (2013) and Coombs (2014b) agree that organisations are better able to handle crises when they (i) have a crisis management plan that is updated at least annually, (ii) have a designated crisis management team, (iii) conduct exercises to test the plans and teams at least annually, and (iv) pre-draft some crisis messages.

With regards to the pre-crisis phase, Waymer & Heath's (2007, p. 92) observation is that vigilant preparation can reduce the likelihood of a crisis and increase responsiveness of the organisation to demonstrate its ability to establish control over its operations, which is congruent to both Mejri & De Wolf (2013) and Coombs (2014a).

2.2.3.2 The crisis phase

The crisis phase begins after the crisis occurs and involves management attempts or actions to respond to a crisis (Mejri & De Wolf, 2013, p. 74). As this stage deals with the actual crisis resolution and deliberations on courses of action, Hale et al. (2005) consider this stage as the most critical of the three stages identified in crisis research literature (Hale *et al.*, 2005, cited in Mejri & De Wolf, 2013, p. 74). Ray (1999, p.17) notes: "the severity of a crisis is often dependent on the level of uncertainty. The greater the uncertainty about resolving a situation, the more severe the crisis".

Mejri & De Wolf (2013, p. 74) suggest that, in the initial response, crisis managers should be (i) quick, by delivering a response in the first hour after the crisis hits, (ii) accurate, because people want accurate information about what happened and how that event might affect them and (iii) consistent, by keeping stakeholders informed of crisis events and key message points and by working to have a consistent message between them.

2.2.3.3 Post-crisis phase

It is important to distinguish between a crisis and a normal situation. The crisis stage ends when the crisis is considered resolved (Coombs, 2014b, p. 11). Santana (2004, p. 315) expresses this post-crisis stage as a recovery stage, and claims that the main purpose of this stage is to recover normal business operations as soon as possible so that strategic goals are not further distorted or damaged. In the post-crisis phase, the organisation is returning to business as usual. The crisis is no longer the focal point of management's attention but still requires some attention (Coombs, 2014a). The post-crisis phase also represents an opportunity for preparing and preventing a further potential crisis (Mejri & De Wolf 2013, p. 75).

It is during this phase that organisations seek to repair the damage to their image as well as their financial well-being caused by crises. This is sometimes called the clean-up phase, or post-mortem. It is also the phase when organisations have the chance to reorganise vital organisational aspects and attempt to resume normal operations (Santana, 2004, p. 315).

There is important follow-up communication that is required. First, crisis managers often promise to provide additional information during the crisis phase. The crisis managers must deliver on those informational promises or risk losing the trust of external stakeholders (or employees) wanting the information. Second, the organisation needs to release updates on the recovery process (e.g. in MBMF's context, stipulation of overtime to be worked, night shift schedules or weekend rosters), corrective actions (e.g. product quality corrections, re-firing or reworking of bricks), and/or investigations of the crisis (e.g. internal power failure or external Eskom load shedding). The amount of follow-up communication required depends on the amount of information

promised during the crisis and the length of time it takes to complete the recovery process (Coombs, 2014a). In addition to the promised follow-up communication, Coombs (2007b, cited in Mejri & De Wolf, 2013) suggests that the organisation should analyse the crisis management for lessons learned in order to integrate those lessons into the organisation's crisis management system (Coombs, 2007b, cited in Mejri & De Wolf 2013 p. 75).

Coombs (2011, pp. 45-46) believes that continuation of crisis communication and post-crisis communication heavily uses stakeholder reaction management communication in that, as an organisation returns to normal operations, stakeholders are being updated on the business continuity efforts.

2.2.3.4 Lessons learnt phase

Learning is a continuous process, therefore, while the recovery takes place, it is the time to assess what happened, in a period of "self-analysis." It is also a time for further crisis management planning, analysing what went right or wrong, and taking appropriate action. Ideally, the primary goal of the learning stage should be to review and critique, without assigning blame, so as to learn what was done well and what was done poorly so that the organisation can handle crises better in the future (Santana, 2004, p. 317). The organisation should also evaluate what it has been doing prior to the crisis, including what led to the crisis and the crisis management effort (Mejri & De Wolf (2013, p. 75).

Jacques (2007, cited in Mejri & De Wolf, 2013) states that the end of every crisis should be the beginning of the preparation steps for the next one, arguing that companies that do survive disasters are more prepared for future challenges (Jaques, 2007, cited in Mejri & De Wolf, 2013 p. 75).

2.3 Crisis leadership

Schoenberg (2004, pp. 3-4) notes that few people would argue against preparation as a key element to crisis management, yet, when it comes to crisis communication, one of the most important factors is the least studied – crisis *leadership*. In his investigation, Schoenberg (2004, pp. 3-4) discovered that leadership can be found in all levels of organisation, and also emphasised that leaders, regardless of their position within the organisation, should have

communication as one of the key skills required for leadership or management roles. In a business context, King (2007, p. 193) explains that:

... during a crisis, an organization needs a leader who can promptly and effectively return a company to a state of normal operation. In essence, the crisis leader must be able to clearly and accurately assess the crisis (sense making), strategically plan a course of action, and successfully implement that plan of action.

Crisis leadership is the process of responding to low-probability, high-impact situations by *influencing* others to overcome or take advantage of the situation, regardless of its cause, optimising the effect, in a timely framework (Christensen, 2009, pp. 12-13). Klann (2003, p. 11) argues that, given the emotionally volatile environment that surrounds a crisis situation, which has the potential to promote ineffective or counter-productive behaviour, a definition of crisis leadership would hinge on the ability to *influence* others. Coombs (2014b, p. 15) defines leadership as “a process whereby an individual *influences* a group of individuals to achieve a common goal”. Leadership, as defined by many authors, is about *influence*, under both normal and crisis situations. Crisis leadership requires a rapid reaction to the initial event and subsequent changes in events, continuous attention to details, and an understanding of the spread of information (Schoenberg, 2004, p. 11).

Wooten & James (2008, pp. 369-370) note that crises can serve as a catalyst for thinking differently about what is possible for the organisation. In the case of crisis leadership, they believe that the ability to see an organisation through a crisis, and in the end to help the organisation to be better off following the crisis than it was before, is an example of the most desirable form of business recovery.

Klann (2003, p. 8) touches on three key themes of crisis leadership that impact on helping people and organisations through perilous times: communication, clarity of vision and values, and caring relationships. He claims that these three key themes are important to leaders in normal operations, but their importance is magnified during a crisis. Attested by Schoenberg (2004, p. 10), one of the most important behaviours for crisis leaders is communication. Understanding

communication as the biggest responsibility of a leader for direct interaction with his followers, one can refer to it as a multi-communicative activity. According to Hackman and Johnson's perspective (2013, p. 21), leadership is a communication-based activity, as leaders spend time shaping messages that are presented to followers and stakeholder groups.

According to Longstaff and Yang (2008, p. 3), leadership in dealing with a crisis predicts the preparedness for the crisis and the internal coordination of crisis communications. In their model inserted as Figure 1 below, the authors assert that the degree of preparedness for a crisis positively influences the internal coordination of crisis communication and lessens the degree of the attribution of crisis fault to parties other than the crisis management actors. The model also highlights that crisis leadership builds trust amongst the managers dealing with the crisis and the stakeholders (employees).

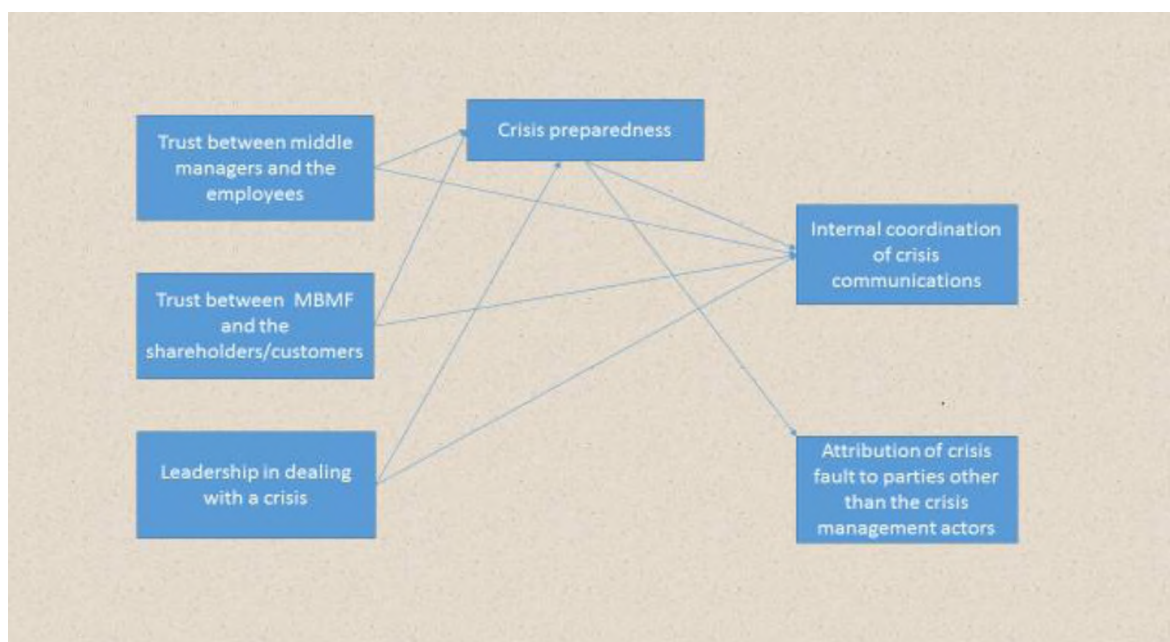


Figure 1: Modified Communication management and trust model

Source: Adapted from Longstaff and Yang (2008 p. 3)

The model is congruent to Schoenberg's (2004, p. 5) assertion that communication is a core competency both of leadership and in dealing with a

crisis, although little is known about how the theory of crisis leadership is applied to successfully manage and respond to crises.

The crisis leader also establishes an overall tone for the crisis – by remaining calm, personifying authority and control, and reinforcing the organisation's core values (King, 2007, p. 183). In the event of a crisis, effective leadership by senior officials plays a significant role in an organisation's attempt to return to a state of normal operation (King, 2007, p. 183). Schoenberg (2004, p. 17) notes that a crisis leader may be the person directing the immediate activities, such as the middle managers at MBMF who direct operations, and could possibly be the organisation's top communicator or chief executive officer (e.g. MBMF Senior Operations Manager or a product manager). To sustain relationships during a crisis Johansson *et al.* (2011) exemplifies a communicative leader as the one who engages employees in a dialogue, actively shares and looks for feedback, practises participative decision making, and is perceived as open and involved.

Leaders are exposed to possibilities of crises daily, which at times forces them to make instant and unfavourable decisions to accommodate the situation at hand (Schoenberg, 2004, p. 4). Coombs (2014a, pp.12-13) suggests that, when addressing a crisis, leaders must take the time to understand who they are leading (i.e., employees, in the case like MBMF); the objectives they need to accomplish (continuity of organisational operations); and how every action they take will influence the current situation and create new consequences. Klann (2003, p. 8) summarises that effective crisis leadership boils down to responding to the human needs, emotions, and behaviours caused by the crisis.

Farrell & Schlesinger (2013, p. 93) observe that middle managers are usually the first level of management to witness results of upper level management decisions. When these decisions affect operations, services or staff morale negatively, middle managers experience the related implications first, be good or bad, hence they need to be companionate and considerate as communicators. Although these instances can be challenging, they provide opportunities for middle managers both to acquire additional leadership skills and to demonstrate leadership to the organisation. Middle managers are in the position to cultivate leadership skills in others within the organisation.

2.3.1 Middle management and organisational leadership

Middle managers have an important communication role in organizations. They link hierarchical levels, actively engage downward and upward communication processes and also communicate laterally with their peers. They make sense of messages in different ways and impact on each other's sense-making processes (Johansson *et al.*, 2011 p.19). In a manager-employee engagement scenario where managers are viewed as leaders, Page (2004) state that the leadership role is exercised by engaging and inducing followers to act to further certain goals and purposes that represent the values and motivations, the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations of both leaders and followers. The genius of leadership lies in the manner in which leaders see, act on, and satisfy followers' values and motivations as well as their own.

The middle manager is a buffer between a director/CEO and staff. Although the importance of leaders in crisis communication has been extensively studied, the crucial role played by middle managers in crisis communication, internally with their employees regarding operations, has been understudied. Crisis managers use communication as a tool to influence the framing of crisis events and their impact on operations and employees (Waymer & Heath, 2007, p. 95), which is the very same goal for the crisis leader entrusted with the public relations communication. Pollard & Hotho (2006, p.731) argue that:

... managing these communications during a period of crisis is not a simple task, as managers are confronted simultaneously with multiple choices regarding stakeholder relationships, while at the same time identifying mechanisms to deal with the cause and impact of the crisis.

In essence, the pressure experienced by the leader communicating a crisis event with the public may be considered to be on the same scale as the one experienced internally by managers.

Coombs (2014a, pp. 12-13) suggests that, when addressing a crisis situation, leaders must take the time to understand who they are leading (employees, in the case of MBMF), the objectives they need to accomplish (continuity of operations) and how every action they take will impact the current situation and

create new consequences. This indicates that a structured and insightful approach to leadership is essential.

2.3.2 Sense-making

Sense-making has been defined by a number of authors in the literature. According to Maitlis & Sonenshein (2010, p. 2), sense-making is the process of social construction that occurs when discrepant cues interrupt individuals' ongoing activity, and involves the retrospective development of plausible meanings that rationalise what people are doing. The process of sense-making addresses three fundamental questions: how does something come to be an event (e.g. how does the Eskom load shedding become a crisis?); what does the event mean e.g. (what does the load-shedding mean to MBMF business operations?); and what should be done relative to the event (e.g. what should be done about the power outage?). Beyond these questions, Wooten & James (2008, p. 363) emphasise that the ability to manage a crisis involves not only sense-making for individual discrete events, but also the ability to make sense of a series of events that, superficially, may seem unrelated. Central to the development of plausible meanings is the bracketing of cues from the environment, and the interpretation of those cues based on salient frames; sense-making is thus about connecting cues and frames to create an account of what is going on (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010, p. 2).

Weick (2010, p. 545) warns that crisis sense-making can make the crisis worse, either when significant cues go unnoticed because there are no concepts to select from (problem of blindness) or when the concepts that people deploy have no connection with particulars (problem of emptiness).

The way leaders frame messages and events will ultimately influence sense-making processes and actions of both leaders and employees (Johansson *et al.*, 2011, p. 3).

Weick's (2015, p. 409) description of sense-making is that it involves turning circumstances into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard into action. Weick (2010, pp. 542-543) says that the conceptual language of enacted sense-making not only gathers data into interruptions, actions, and recoveries, but also gathers data into the activity of

thinking, thus claiming that there is an interruption, followed by the moments of thought and action to clarify the thinking and recovery. He further argues that, as the crisis becomes more severe, sense-making intensifies, which, in his view, lessens the crisis severity, which then reduces the sense-making.

Wooten & James (2008, p. 354) note that, in a crisis situation, leadership is collective and dynamic, and it requires perception and sense-making skills by leaders in order for them to determine appropriate courses of action.

Dewey cited in Weick, (2010, pp. 542-543). states:

“In every waking moment, the complete balance of the organism and its environment is constantly interfered with and as constantly restored ... Life is interruptions and recoveries ... At these moments of a shifting of activity, conscious feeling and thought arise and are accentuated”. To think about disorder, confusion, and insecurity is to engage in the early stages of sense making.

2.4 Crisis communication

Crisis communication can be defined broadly as the collection, processing and dissemination of information required to address a crisis (Coombs, 2011, p. 20).

Heath (1994, p. 259) has defined crisis communication as the “enactment of control (at least in its appearance) in the face of high uncertainty in an effort to win external audience’s confidence, in ways that are ethical”.

Hale *et al.* (2005) consider that crisis communication can be summarised as a process of information collection, information processing, decision making, and information distribution of data necessary to address a crisis situation to internal and external stakeholders (Hale *et al.*, 2005, cited in de Wolf &Mejri, 2013, p. 49). As a crisis requires speedy responses and actions, it can be argued that the information collection, its processing, decision making and information distribution happen at the speed of lightning to mitigate crisis damages. Ray (1999, p. 21) warns:

Insufficient and inaccurate information may give rise to myths, false alarms, and heightened perceptions of harm, hence, arguably, while open and accurate disclosures may be damaging initially, they reduce

the risk of rumors, leaks, drawn-out media coverage, and the perception of dishonesty. Responses which are candid, prompt, honest and complete may further bolster the organizations' reputation and integrity.

In a crisis, "managers must communicate to multiple stakeholders who may perceive the situation differently". Kash & Darling (1998, p. 184) agree, and point out that a very important step towards dealing with any crisis is effective use of communication, and they advise businesses to be willing to open lines of communication to stakeholders quickly, as the company that freely shares information stands the best chance of preserving its good image to all its stakeholders. Some authors view crisis communication as a reactive function, while others regard it as a long-term process and as a proactive function rather than a reactive approach. In contrast, supporters of a proactive crisis communication approach, argue that organisations will be more prepared to manage and resolve a crisis if effective communication systems are in place before the crisis occurrence and stakeholder relationships and credibility have been built prior to the crisis.

2.4.1 Interactive communication versus transmission communication

With the emergence of new communication technologies, there is an increasing number of media through which a person may choose to communicate. The most popular and growing communication method in this day and age is social media. The rapid growth of social media challenges crisis communicators to disseminate messages to affected audiences quickly and in a manner that promotes maximum compliance (Freberg, 2012, p. 416). Coombs & Holladay (2010, p. 430) believe that communication has developed from different paradigms. They noted that, during the last sixty years or more, communication has developed from a transmission paradigm where the focus is on the sender, the distribution of information, and the intended effect, e.g. communication with external stakeholders, to an interaction paradigm where the focus is on the receiver, the interpretation of messages, and the creation of meaning, i.e. a receiver being an internal stakeholder like employees in the context of this dissertation. It is also possible to locate this development in the shift from a rhetorical or text-oriented approach to a strategic or context-oriented approach within crisis communication research.

Interactive communication or message exchange involves two or more participants. The content of any particular message is determined in part by the content of the prior messages from all participants and so cannot be predicted from the content of the message from any one of them. Conferences, seminars, arguments/debates, and telephone conversations are examples of interactive communications (Chapanis, 1988, p. 36). In decades, before technology prevailed, it can be argued that interactive communication included more personal face-to-face communications, where both the sender and the receiver are under the same roof or at least are engaging in a direct telephonic voice communication. Finnigan (1997) claims that these interactive communication formats are unique in that they require synchronous participation by all parties, however, in many business situations today, the requirement for synchronous participation is unnecessary, disruptive, and time-consuming. Considering the age and generation of the working class today, communication through electronic devices is more appropriate. As a consequence, asynchronous communication formats such as WhatsApp, Short Message Services (SMS) texts, Twitter, Facebook, Skype, and Instagram are becoming preferred to face to face, synchronous communication. As stated by Acar, (2014, p. 3), traditional methods of communication tend to fail during emergencies (i.e. electricity might fail and telephone lines may not function properly) and therefore social media can become a “saviour”. Furthermore, modern social networks driven by people who can skilfully use the internet and advanced communication technologies are more effective and have more influence on societies in the twenty-first century (Acar, 2014, p. 10).

By the same token, Lundin (1997, p. 62) highlights transformation in interactive communication, in that human interaction with and through newer electronic communication technologies produces new virtual communication environments in which human behaviours appear to become modified and which result in changes in the way people perceive each other. These range from the ways in which people interact with the hardware, the software, other individuals and groups. Of particular note, the newer electronic communication technologies carry moods and other meanings through tone of voice, nature of the words and symbols used. Lin (2003, p. 345) states that “social tools” like cell phone

handsets are utilised for the transfer, manipulation, storage, and retrieval of human symbols, cognitive products and interactive relations. Burleson (2010, cited in Berger, 2014) states that, in extending the notion that interpersonal communication involves the mutual exchange of messages and behaviours that eventuate in mutual influence, he proposes a message-centred approach to characterise interpersonal communication. According to him, this perspective posits that messages are exchanged in an effort to generate shared meanings and to reach common goals. Under this review, the interpersonal communication process involves message production or encoding, message reception or decoding, interaction coordination and social perception, processes by which individuals make sense of the social world (Burleson, 2010, cited in Berger 2014, p. 9).

2.4.2 Public communications versus employee communications

One of the goals of this dissertation is to investigate whether the literature of external crisis communication (to the public) can be used by the middle managers within the organisation to communicate with their employees. For this purpose, it is imperative to look at what public communication entails. In essence, both public and employee communication concerns alignment of the messages to these different stakeholders, and therefore their different interests, power, urgency and legitimacy need to be taken into account (Pirnes, 2015, p. 40). The interest in looking at these different communications is also motivated by David's (2011, p. 74) claim that, from a theoretical point of view, the importance of internal communication during crises has been admitted and accepted; however, one is inclined to ignore it in real life because of exaggerated media attention. As a matter of fact, internal communication should receive at least the same consideration as is given to media communication. The main reason supporting this claim is that internal stakeholders will behave like external ones if they do not have a sense of belonging "to the interior".

Both public and internal/employee communication is really crucial, especially in a crisis situation. The public has the right to accurate information at first hand during a crisis, and the organisations in crisis have a responsibility to share the information. In order to achieve a standpoint of dialogue, an organisation

experiencing a crisis must listen to the concerns of the public, and respond accordingly. In fact, understanding audiences is associated with effective communication in any context (Seeger, 2006, p. 238). The benefit of public communication, therefore, is the elimination of misconception about the actual crisis, the limitation of false rumours, and a chance to draw a clear picture about the crisis through real time communication. The risks of not sharing are that the public may obtain information from other sources, and therefore the organisation may lose the ability to manage the crisis message.

Internal communication, also referred to as employee communication, staff communication, internal relations, employee relations, and internal public relations, can be basically defined as communication with employees internally within the organisation (Cornelissen, 2011, p. 164). It includes informal chats on the “grapevine” as well as managed communication (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 178).

Coombs (2014b, p. 14) states that the role of the communicator in an organisation is to create a network of relationships among internal teams, and build relationships with external influencers. In this role, communicators assume their own valuable role as crisis leaders by helping to set an organisation’s agenda, and ensuring that the organisation’s internal systems, processes and people remain in place and do not collapse under stress. Other outcomes of effective employee communication include engaged employees who are willing to work overtime to rescue the organisation’s targets at risk, and building trust among the employees, and therefore enhancing business performance, which yields a delighted customer and thus revenue growth and profitability (Ean, 2010, p. 40).

2.5 Internal crisis communications

Before focusing on internal crisis communications, it is important to first highlight what “internal communications” means within the organisation. Internal communication is communication between the organisation’s leaders or managers and one of its key publics: the employees. It is “social interaction through messages”, and reflects management’s ability to build relationships between internal stakeholders at all levels within the organisation. Internal

communication “illuminate[s] the connections between different pieces of information” and its job is to “provide employees with the information they require to do their job” (Mishra, 2014, p. 185). Internal communication includes communication of corporate vision, strategies, plans, corporate culture, shared values and guiding principles, employee motivation, and cross-pollination of ideas, etc. (Udegbe, 2012, p. 18).

Above and beyond the communication of the organisation’s mission and vision, and policies and procedures, Mishra (2014, p. 184) further highlights that internal communication is important for building a culture of transparency between management and employees, and it can engage/commit employees in the organisation’s priorities. When an employee feels engaged in the organisation, it is presumed that s/he will be more likely to develop positive relationships with other stakeholders (customers, shareholders, etc.), both within and beyond the organisation, thus exhibiting engagement. When an employee develops a relationship with external stakeholders, s/he can become an ambassador or advocate for the organisation (Mishra, 2014, p. 188).

Internal organisational communication can mean the success or failure of any major change or crisis, and needs the same analytical rigour that is given to external crisis communication and to financial or operational measures (Barret 2002). The quality and the quantity of communication, in fact, affect the level of trust and involvement of employees, which is particularly relevant in times of crisis (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015, p. 322). The internal communication is important for day-to-day business operations and is critical in a crisis situation in that it provides cohesion and coherence to the organisation involved (David, 2011, p. 74). Internal crisis communication is important because it helps to mitigate the stress that a crisis produces for employees, and to illuminate how employees can become ambassadors (assets) during a crisis (Coombs, 2014a). A synopsis by Schoenberg (2004, p. 10) emphasises the importance of balancing human needs and organisational goals during a crisis. He claims that crisis events, if not balanced between handling human needs and organisational goals, can have the potential to cause anxiety, uncertainty, and doubt. Section 2.5.1 briefly highlights the impact of proper internal crisis communication on both employees and business operations.

2.5.1. Impact on employees and business operations

Because crises often threaten the well-being, lives, and interests of organisational stakeholders, a major goal of crisis managers is to strengthen and restore their relationships with key stakeholders who have been affected by crisis events. Hence, when a crisis occurs, a spokesperson/leader (for the organisation deemed responsible) is expected to explain publicly and quickly why the crisis happened and what will be done to correct operations and protect people from further harm, as well as repay and comfort those who have been harmed (Waymer & Heath, 2007). Leadership in a crisis situation cannot be achieved without trust. In organisations like MBMF, it is the managers in the middle that are in a position of trust with their employees. Trust must be developed with staff through clear, honest communication and transparent actions. These encompass being fair, open in communication and intentions, showing consistency, fulfilling promises and being honest about what middle managers can and cannot communicate to their employees (Farrel & Schlesinger, 2013, p. 125). Crises may elicit emotions like fear insecurity, anger or embarrassment, especially on the part of employees, and therefore internal communication within the organisation has the effect of preventing such individual and/or collective negative emotions (David, 2011, p. 74).

David (2011, pp. 75-76) further notes that the lack of accurate, adequate, timely and coherent information during a crisis affects the trust people have in their own organisation, thus weakening the commitment that employees should show in crisis resolution efforts; in other words, effective internal communication during a crisis also aids in preserving the employees' trust and loyalty and enhancing positive attitudes. For these reasons, it is far better for employees to find out about the crisis from internal sources, which will preserve organisational credibility in the eyes of its own employees. Also attested by the adapted Schoenberg Crisis Leadership Model illustrated in Figure 2, Coombs (2014b, p.15) states that the goal of any crisis leader is to build and sustain the organisation's trust and credibility among employees, communities, customers, partners, suppliers, and investors, and others that rely on the individual and his/her organisation, through two-way communication.

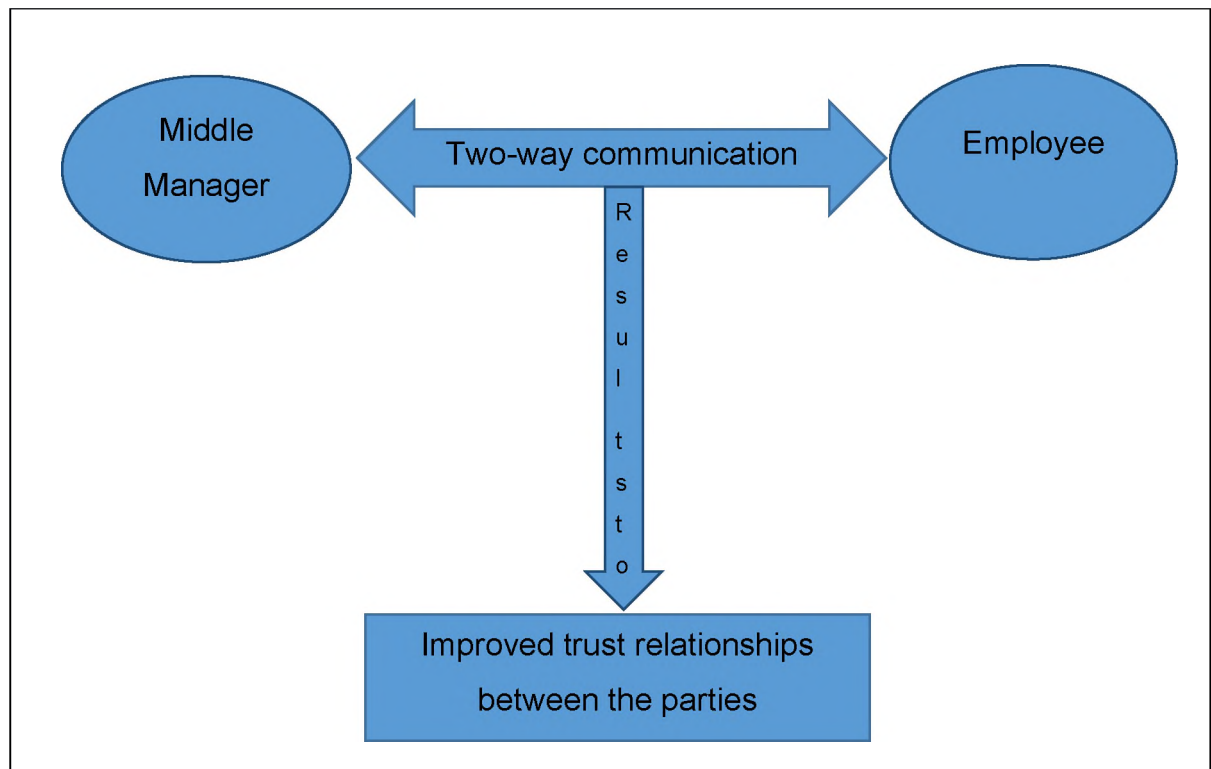


Figure 2: Adapted Crisis Leadership Model

Source: Adapted from Schoenberg (2004, p. 15)

Leaders should communicate frequently what employees need to know, ensure two-way communication and, not only addressing staff, afford staff an opportunity to provide input and ask questions for effective two-way communication (Farrel & Schlesinger, 2013, p. 125). In this way, managers can also affirm the understanding of the message directly with the employee, thus eliminating the risk of misinterpretation/misrepresentation of facts. Valvi & Fragkos (2013, p. 17) suggest that the development of effective and efficient crisis communication strategies by companies essentially aid to deal with the complexity of the crisis because of the severe potential loss and damage in corporate value. For the organisation in crisis, loss of corporate value may mean loss of production, customers, revenue or even a key employee.

Mishra (2014, p. 184) further notes that internal communication enhances a number of important bottom line outcomes for the organisation, including increased productivity and profitability. Internal communication corresponds to a vital need for the proper performance of an organisation (David, 2011, p. 74).

2.6 Conclusion/ Summary

Communication is the dominant decisive aspect in crisis situations. Middle managers need to inform and update their employees throughout the crisis stages to sustain operations, and to gain trust from their employees.

The literature review reveals an understanding of how organisations should be communicating internally with their employees during a crisis, to maintain operations and employees' trust. This dissertation will now investigate how MBMF handled their crisis in the light of this literature. Chapter 3 outlines the method employed to conduct the study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS, PROCEDURES AND TECHNIQUES

Chapter 2 reviewed the literature on crisis communication in order to acquire the theoretical background as means of answering the research questions.

As a reminder for the reader, this chapter first outlines the research goals, followed by the paradigm chosen. The chapter further discusses the design of the research, that is, research method, data collection, data analysis, procedures and techniques employed, and ethical issues surrounding the research.

3.1 The goals of the research

Acknowledging the importance of communication during a crisis, the aim of the research is to investigate how middle managers at MBMF made sense of load shedding in 2014, how they communicated with their staff during power outages, and the effect of such communication on MBMF business operations and employees. The heart of the interviews was on pinpointing (i) methods of communication, (ii) the message content, and (iii) effect on both operations and employees.

The objectives of the study are:

- Describe the nature of the crisis affecting MBMF during the load shedding in 2014
- To understand how MBMF middle managers made sense of the power outages/ load shedding in 2014; and
- To analyse how they communicated with their staff, the contents of the communication and
- To analyse what the effect was of this communication to MBMF operations and the employees.

3.2 Paradigm

The study takes an inductive approach, which allows the researcher to provide subjective reasoning with the help of various real life examples. Inductive logic involves building knowledge from the bottom up through observations of the world, which in turn provide the basis for developing theories or laws (Ritchie,

Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston, 2013, p. 7). The use of an inductive approach is common in several types of qualitative data analyses. It is consistent with the general patterns of qualitative data analysis described by various authors (e.g. Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 9; Pope, Ziebland & Mays., 2000; Punch, 1998 Thomas, 2006, p. 239, cited in Ritchie *et al.*, 2013).

The inductive approach allows for codes, themes, and ideas to arise from the narrative (Ranney, Meisel, Choo, Garro, Sasson & Morrow Guthrie, 2015, p. 1108).

Complementary with an inductive approach, the research takes the interpretivist tradition view which, according to Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter (2006):

... involves taking people's subjective experiences seriously as the essence of what is real for them (ontology), making sense of people's experiences by interacting with them and listening carefully to their story (epistemology) (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006, pp. 273-274).

This study is congruent with the interpretivist paradigm, in that it is concerned with understanding the MBMF middle managers' communication experiences in the midst of crisis. The view is affirmed by Reeves & Hedberg (2003, p. 32), as they note that the "interpretivist" paradigm stresses the need to put analysis in context. The interpretive paradigm is concerned with understanding the world as it is from subjective experiences of individuals. They use meaning (versus measurement) oriented methodologies, such as interviewing or participant observation, that rely on a subjective relationship between the researcher and the subjects. Interpretive research does not predefine dependent and independent variables, but focuses on the full complexity of human sense-making as the situation emerges (Antwi & Hamza, 2015, p. 219).

Interpretivism, in contrast, claims that natural science methods are not appropriate for social investigation because the social world is not governed by regularities that hold law-like properties. Hence, a social researcher has to explore and understand the social world through the participants' and their own perspectives, and explanations can only be offered at the level of meaning rather than cause (Ritchie *et al.*, 2013, p. 24).

3.3 Methodology

This research adopted a qualitative case study research methodology. According to Babbie & Mouton (2001):

... qualitative research is conducted in the natural setting of social actors, with focus on the process rather than the outcome, and the primary aim is in-depth (“thick”) descriptions and understanding of actions and events (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 270).

Babbie & Mouton further highlight that:

... qualitative researchers attempt always to study human action from the insider’s perspective, (also referred to the “emic” perspective). The goal of research is defined as describing and understanding (Verstehen) rather than the explanation and prediction of human behaviour (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 53).

Qualitative researchers want to make sense of feelings, experiences, social situations, or phenomena as they occur in the real world, and therefore want to study them in their natural setting (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006, p. 287).

3.3.1 Case Study

According to McCutcheon & Meredith (1993, p. 240), a case study is an objective, in-depth examination of a contemporary phenomenon, where the investigator has little control over events. This definition covers several significant points. First, the study typically involves one or more researchers gathering a considerable volume of data from within an organisation to develop the clearest possible picture of the phenomenon.

The case study approach is chosen as suggested by Crowe, Cresswell, Robertson, Huby, Avery & Sheik, (2011), in that it is particularly useful when there is a need to obtain an in-depth appreciation of an issue, event or phenomenon of interest, in its natural real-life context. The researcher needed to obtain an “in-depth” understanding of how MBMF middle managers communicated with their subordinates during the Eskom load shedding in 2014. Because the organisation under study is of an operational nature, knowledge of how operations systems work can be enhanced significantly through contact

with its “real-world” conditions (McCutcheon & Meredith, 1993, p. 239). To refer to a piece of work as a “case study” might mean that: (i) its method is qualitative; (ii) the research is holistic, thick (and a more or less comprehensive examination of a phenomenon); (iii) it utilises a particular type of evidence (example, participant-observation, textual, or field research); (iv) its method of evidence gathering is naturalistic (a “real life context”); (v) the topic is diffuse; (vi) it employs triangulation; (vii) the research investigates the properties of a single observation; or (viii) the research investigates the properties of a single phenomenon, instance, or example (Gerring, 2006, p.17).

3.3.2 Data collection techniques

Data for this research was collected through observations and by means of semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with all MBMF middle managers/ Team Leaders for the researcher to gain the middle management perspective of crisis communication. A qualitative method was chosen as the most appropriate approach, due to the small sample size and the ability to collect detailed data from participants through semi-structured interviews. A qualitative interview is a conversation in which the interviewer establishes a general direction for the conversation and pursues specific topics raised by the respondent. Ideally, the respondent does most of the talking (Babbie and Mouton, 2001, p. 289).

The choice of interviews for data collection was partly based on the suggestion by Millar & Gallagher (2009, p. 78) that interviews are one of the central tools utilised within internal and external communication audits, which in this study the researcher is attempting to investigate. Semi-structured interviews generally use open-ended questions, which “provide more information than closed questions about the particular perspectives of individual respondents and, thereby, allow people to respond with what is on their mind” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p.100). The relative advantage of interviews, as used primarily in qualitative research, is the expectation that interviewees are more likely to speak openly and with more detail in an interview situation, as opposed to in structured questionnaires (Flick, 2006). Additionally, Fontana and Frey (2000, p. 646) argue that, through the interview technique, researchers are able to extrapolate not only the traditional “what” of the research focus but also “how”,

leading to “negotiated, contextually based results”. Additionally, interviews allow “immediate follow-up and clarification” of information supplied by interviewees (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 110).

The semi-structured interviewing involved in this research gathered in-depth, detailed information from interviewees who could assist the researcher to understand the phenomenon from their perspective.

It is worth noting that the focus during interviews was not only limited to top to bottom communication approach, but also feedback from employees, and the benefits associated with this engagement.

3.3.3 Sampling

For this research, judgemental or purposive sampling was adopted. According to Bryman (2015, p. 408), purposive sampling is a non-probability method of sampling, where the goal is to sample participants in a strategic way so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions that are posed. MBMF has a number of middle managers in various departments however, the focus of this investigation was the whole group of middle managers in an operations department within MBMF. MBMF Operation’s department communication hierarchy is attached as Appendix D. Only those middle managers in operations have been selected and interviewed. Attested by Ritchie *et al.*, (2013, pp. 78-80), purposive sampling ensures that participants chosen are relevant to the context of the research and are able to facilitate detailed exploration of the research interest.

Furthermore, the selected interviewees were able to give meaningful insights into the enquiry of the research thus: they had the responsibility to communicate with employees internally within MBMF, and they were in the middle management positions. Table 2 exhibits the biographic details of the sample .

Table 2 : The biographic details of the sample

Team Leader	Race/Gender	Years of experience	Number of subordinates
A	African Male	5	24
B	Coloured Male	2.5	13
C	White Male	2	3
D	African Male	8	19
E	African Male	3	25
F	Coloured Male	< 12 months	7
G	White Male	7	4
H	African Male	5	4
I	White Male	3.5	3

The sample was the entire population of operations middle managers. All were males, seven of whom were Team Leaders, one the maintenance manager and one the plant manager. All were South African nationals, three being White, two Coloured and four African. The years of work experience was between less than a year and eight years, with number of subordinates ranging between three and twenty-five per Team Leader.

3.3.4 Data analysis

The collected data has been analysed through open coding and thematic analysis. Open coding is the interpretive process by which data are broken down analytically. Its purpose is to give the analyst new insights by breaking through standard ways of thinking about or interpreting phenomena reflected in the data. In open coding, events/actions/interactions are compared with others for similarities and differences (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p.12).

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes within data. It minimally organizes and describes the data set in (rich) detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79).

Fereday & Muir-Cochrane (2006, p.82) further note that thematic analysis process involves the identification of themes through “careful reading and re-reading of the data”. It is a form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis. Thematic analysis has been chosen for this study because it is an independent qualitative descriptive

approach mainly described as “ a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006 p.79). Moreover, it is suitable for researchers who wish to employ a relatively low level of interpretation, in contrast to grounded theory or hermeneutic phenomenology, in which a high level of interpretive complexity is required (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013, p. 399).

3.3.5 Ethical considerations

Remenyi & Sherwood-Smith (1998, p.110) asserts that, in the business and management environment, the manner in which the research should be conducted is of significant concern (how the evidence has been collected, how the evidence has been processed and how findings will be used).

Ethical consideration was endorsed throughout the research. Permission to conduct this research was obtained from the Plant Manager of MBMF, Mr Dewald Swanepoel. The information letter for the invitation to be interviewed is attached (Appendix B).

First, the researcher chose the research area according to her own interests. Crisis communication within a business operation has been the researcher's personal interest, and investigating crisis communication was a great opportunity for the researcher to get familiar with the subject and broaden her knowledge. A positive side of this is that having the opportunity to pick your own research area ensures motivation, and doing research for real businesses ensures that the practical implications are covered thoroughly. Crisis communication is of great importance in an operational business context, in that it mitigates the risks of operations ceasing (financial losses), and employees' potential personal injuries (damage to organisation's valuable asset).

The researcher is an outside observer of the crisis communication dynamics of the organisation under study, and is not involved in it in any way: this then validates the research and nullifies issues of bias that might arise if the researcher were an insider. Permission to digitally record the interview was also obtained from the interviewees within the initial stage of the data collection phase. The researcher remained unbiased and the interviewees' statements are “quoted” as they are, with a great deal of care taken to make sure that the

statements made by interviewees are not misrepresented or fabricated. The researcher also respected the culture and language of the interviewees, in that the interviewees were free to express themselves in the language they understood.

The interviewees were given the context of the research and the purpose of what the research aims to achieve before the interview, to give them an understanding of why the research was being conducted. The participants were informed how their data will be used, which, according to Miller, Birch, Mauthner & Jessop (2012, p. 39), reduces any anxieties on the part of the participants, and helps to foster rapport between researcher and participant.

Richie *et al.* (2013, p. 85) highlight that qualitative research raises particular issues about confidentiality and anonymity. These arise through a combination of small sample sizes and the potential for relationships between participants (for example in case studies or other designs that link populations such as employers with employees or advisers with clients).

The researcher did not make unreasonable demands on participants. Participation was based on informed consent (Attached as Appendix C), and was voluntary and free from coercion. The participants were given adequate information to enable them to make a decision about whether or not to take part in the study, and as such, they were free to withdraw from the study at any stage if they felt uncomfortable. The researcher balanced rapport and trust-building strategies throughout the interviews. The researcher has provided anonymity throughout the research by using pseudonyms to make sure that participants' personal and identifying information is kept confidential, and surety was given that the information would not be disclosed without their permission (Smythe & Murray, 2000, p. 313). For privacy, the interviews were conducted in the interviewees' chosen venue where they felt comfortable, and at a time that was convenient to them.

3.4 Research procedure followed

The design of this study has been described and justified according to the literature reviewed. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from MBMF

Plant Manager, Mr Dewalt Swanepoel well in advance. Permission letter for invitation to be interviewed is attached as Appendix B.

The interviews were conducted at MBMF site, as preferred by the participants. Interviews were digitally recorded with the participant's consent (Form attached as Appendix C). Interviews for this study were conducted during a one week period, and were scheduled for one hour each participant. The shortest interview session was forty five minutes, and the longest was one hour fifteen minutes. The set of interview questions is attached as Appendix A. The findings of the interviews were then transcribed, coded and discussed in accordance with the academic literature.

3.5. Summary

This chapter set out the goals and objectives of the research. The research paradigm has been identified and the qualitative research design that was chosen has been described and justified. The procedure followed has also been explained.

The purpose of the research was to investigate how middle managers at MBMF made sense of load shedding in 2014, how they communicated with their staff during power outages, and the effect of such communication on MBMF employees and operations. The heart of the interviews was on pinpointing (i) methods of communication, (ii) the message content, and (iii) the effect of such communication on MBMF business operations and employees. Chapter 4 will present the findings of the research.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

The findings of the study are presented in this chapter. To gain insights into how the MBMF Team Leaders dealt with internal communication dynamics in engaging with their employees in the midst of the load shedding crises the company had to mitigate in 2014, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews to collect data from all nine Team Leaders who are responsible for leading the employees in their respective operational units. Communication is thus central and invaluable to their daily responsibilities.

The questions asked during interviews were intended to elicit identification of the following:

- (i) The nature of the load shedding crisis experienced in MBMF
- (ii) How middle managers made sense of the power outages
- (iii) How they communicated with their employees, (communication methods that were employed, message content) and what effect this communication was on the business operations and the employees.

To fully understand the nature and the dynamics of the crisis from the middle managers' viewpoint, the interview guide also included general questions on topics such as lessons learnt, and incidents relating to communication shortfalls from Eskom. The chapter will first explain MBMF operation process flow to help the reader understand the nature of the crisis, and briefly describe the impact of the crisis on both operations and the employees. Sense making processes by the middle managers is also discussed, followed by communication processes and message contents that were communicated to employees.

4.2 . The nature of the MBMF crisis

The general context of the crisis (Eskom load shedding) was outlined in Chapter 1. The power deficit threatened MBMF business and had adverse outcomes on both business operations and employees. As expected, during interviews, MBMF Team Leaders described the Eskom load shedding as a crisis for the organisation. They reported that it was chaotic; and they were

usually caught unaware, especially in the absence of reliable load shedding schedules and notifications from Eskom. To understand why Eskom load shedding became a crisis in the MBMF context, it is necessary to understand the operations of the organisation. Figure 3 below gives an overview of the operational processes of MBMF.

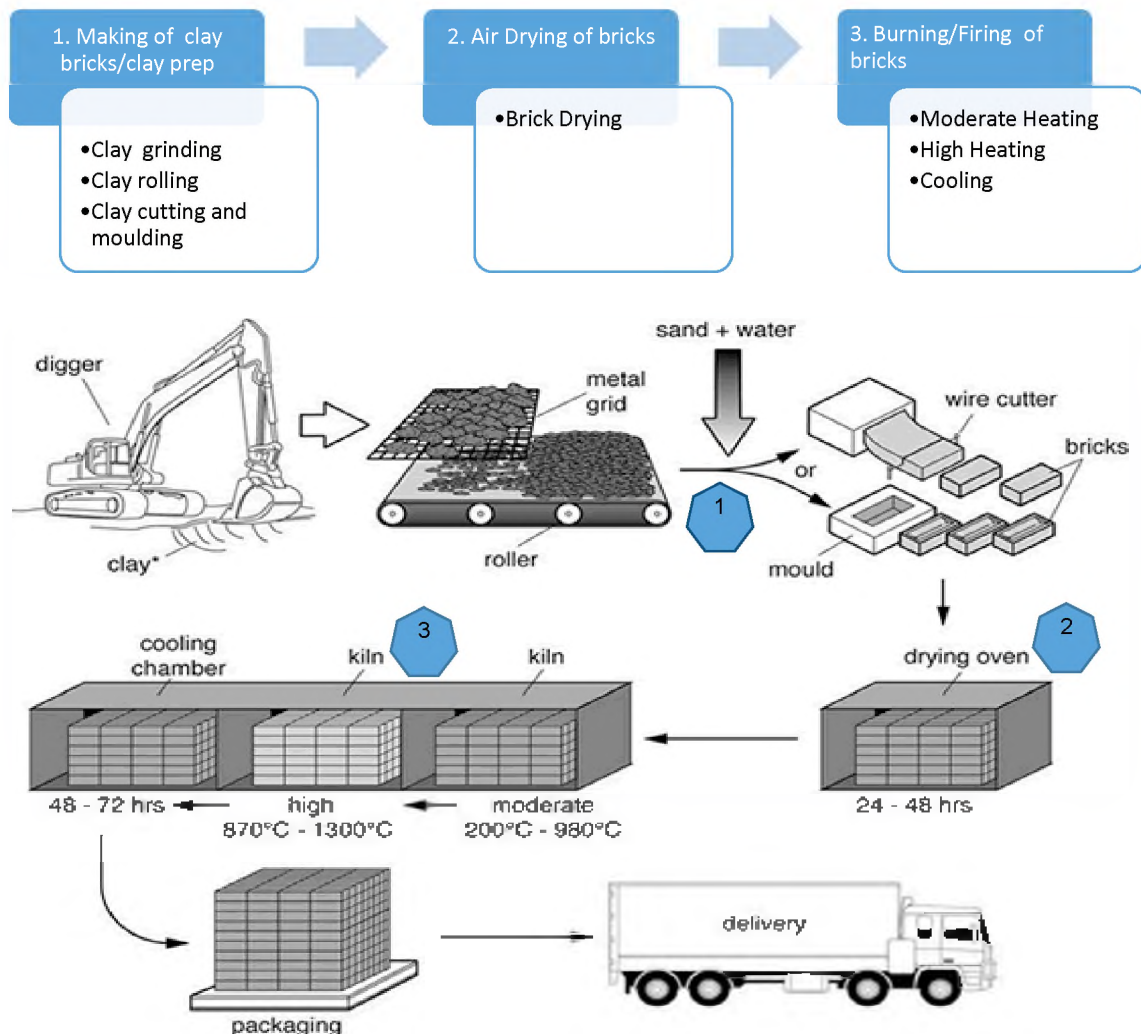


Figure 3 : Adapted MBMF Process Flow Map

Source : <http://www.google.co.za/clay-brick-manufacturing-process/>

The most critical sections of the MBMF operations are :

(a) Making of clay bricks

In this section, heavy machinery is used to grind, roll, cut and mould the clay. During power outages, this section is the most affected as it is heavily

dependent on electricity. Therefore, any power cut means that MBMF does not meet its daily production target. The push rate (i.e. number of bricks made) drops and this severely affects the firm's output. For every two hours of load shedding, the firm loses production of 28 to 30 000 bricks.

(b) Air drying of bricks

This section also uses electricity to dry the bricks before they go for firing in the kiln. Electricity usage in this section is not as heavy as the making or the kiln sections. During power outages, the generator sustains only two out of the eleven dryer fans in each section, for two hours at most.

(c) Burning of bricks

This section of the kiln uses a lot of electricity to fire the bricks to the desired quality. Although the generator kicks in to provide power to the kiln section, it is not capacitated to operate all the kiln sections (firing/cooling). The diesel that runs the generator is costly, and the generator does not have the capacity to run the production lines. Therefore, there is absolutely no brick production in the making section during power cuts. The temperatures in the kiln drop as the fan dryers eventually stop working. This causes the bricks to crack – thus affecting the quality. The inferior quality of bricks affects sales and contributes to material wastage. Consequently, during the interviews Team Leader G proclaimed, *“Making can't run, that's a huge downfall, Eskom is killing us”*.

As already implied in Chapter 1, the unannounced and unscheduled Eskom power cuts in 2014 caught MBMF off guard. As an inevitable consequence, the organisation found itself confronted with a number of challenges which can be construed as a crises resulting from unpredictable energy supply interruptions, with possible consequences also related to the health and safety of employees (i.e. possible accidents posed by machinery); absenteeism (i.e. long staff breaks and absence from work stations); short time; product defects and wasted inventory; and economic issues (i.e. loss of production, overtime payments, loss of revenue due to wasted materials, and low sales). These power cuts would also impact relations with other stakeholders, including shareholders and customers.

In the absence of up to date load shedding schedules In 2014, it proved challenging for the organisation to respond proactively or adopt elegant mitigation measures. When the load shedding schedules were available, the predicament was the uncertainty of the load shedding stage intensity to be expected, and therefore it could not be seen as a norm to the organisation.

4.2.1 Impact /Outcomes of the crisis on MBMF operations

The Eskom load shedding protocol at MBMF in 2014 was that all employees (skilled and unskilled) convert to cleaning schedules and Planned Maintenance (P.M.) during power cuts. This posed an additional cost to the firm, as skilled labour was paid at a higher rate for cleaning duties that were usually undertaken by unskilled staff. Employees worked overtime and, as a symbol of their commitment to attain each department's set daily/monthly production targets, they sometimes introduced a night shift to reach these targets. Therefore, at times, the firm paid overtime, transport, meal and night allowances.

The above factors generated negative outcomes to the business. The non-availability of bricks at times posed a risk of loss of clientele and/or market share. Although the impact of the crisis on customers was not explored during interviews, it would not be surprising if there was some dissatisfaction amongst customers and complaints due to poor quality and/or the non-availability of bricks.

4.2.2 Impact/ Outcomes of the crisis on employees

During load shedding, employees were unhappy as they had to deal with disrupted work plans, unpredictable knock-off times, and short time, which affected their salaries at times. Apparently, if load shedding was effected an hour before knock-off time, staff were released to go home and lost the payment for that hour.

The biggest health and safety aspect that was raised in the interviews was the risk of being exposed to life-threatening heavy machinery and live power as the machinery was on and off unannounced.

Team Leaders as employees found it difficult to convince and motivate the unhappy employees to work overtime at the beginning of the power cuts. Employees did not see the reason for them to work overtime as opposed to the organisation dropping the production rate. Team Leaders therefore had to balance the needs of the organisation with those of the employees. They had to persuade and engage staff in order to forge an understanding, sense of belonging, buy-in and respect for both the department's goals and themselves as Team Leaders.

As an initiative to save costs for the firm, Team Leaders persuaded their teams to do as much work as possible when the electricity was available. This initiative also minimised the hours that were normally worked on weekends to recover the production targets lost during power cuts. The employees bought into the overtime work as soon as they heard that load shedding was something permanent and beyond their management's control. The communication also motivated employees to think and strategize, in that, on a day where load shedding was scheduled, they worked continuously until the power cut period, and would make turns to take tea and lunch breaks.

4.3 Sense making by middle managers

At MBMF, the Team Leaders described the Eskom load shedding as a disorderly event that caused confusion, fear, insecurity and trouble. The crisis situation triggered the Team Leaders to think and make sense of the situation. As the crisis event caught the organisation unaware, Team Leader B recalled, *"Sometimes it does not happen or last for the time it was scheduled for, and it confuses the operations and throws out our plans. Whenever Eskom goes down we lose money. Load shedding will never be okay."*

At the beginning of the power cuts in 2014, and in the absence of Eskom load shedding schedules, Team Leaders had to make sense of what was going on. Team Leader H was asked why he considered Eskom load shedding as a crisis for MBMF in 2014. He described the crisis and how he had made sense of it at the time, stating *"It was chaos! I was not used to it. The moment the fans stop working, there will be noise in the control room, an alarm! Before I got used to it, you would notice that I am lost now, Ndandingekaqheli, ufumanise uba ndi lost"*

nyhani ke ngoku (I was not used to the situation, you will find out that I am truly lost) . I will restart fans, and call standby, and report to the supervisor. When the fans go off, smokes develop in the kiln yho! I told the people to stop the oil and stand in the safe place, it's shocking! Worse at night. Everything suddenly switches off because you are not used to a situation like this... Kuvele kucime yonke into kuba awukho used kwimeko enje (Everything just switches off because you are not used in a situation like this). You become shocked, it's you and staff, no management, and end up not knowing where to start, I have to make sure that the state goes back to normal, and report to management. Uvele wothuke, akho nomlungu Kuvele kucime yonkinto, kube mnyama straight away, iyoyikisa.” (You become shocked, no management, everything suddenly switches off and it becomes pitch black...it's scary).

The Team Leader emphasised shock, fear and confusion. Congruent to this narrative, crises may elicit negative emotions like fear (possible machinery explosions), insecurity (if the firm closes down, job security is jeopardised, health and safety), anger that may be prompted by short notice overtime work schedules, or embarrassment, especially on the part of employees.

It was evident from the interviews that middle managers at MBMF spent time calling each other to determine whether a sudden stoppage of machinery was caused by a power failure, or an unannounced load shedding. Team Leader F recalled : *“What used to happen is, the power will go off, then, oh hup!, and I will pick up the phone and call Team Leader B to find out what's going on ... it's load shedding, and then what can we do? We forget that everything needs power to operate and we will realise.... No, that needs power....; no we can't do that...or that... First it was confusing, I used to pick up the phone and ask what's going on, can we do this...., no, we can't do that..... that needs power. The biggest problem was that we could not get the information on time, so that we can plan well”.*

Once sense is made of the situation and the reason for the power outage established, Team Leaders will gather their employees on the floor for a quick meeting to update them of the situation and make operational plans.

4.4 Communications

Crisis communication has multifaceted purposes. At MBMF, employee communication not only built strong relationships and trust among middle managers and subordinates, but also enhanced a sense of belonging and commitment on the part of the subordinates. Sharing reliable information with employees helped them to better understand the organisation's goals.

The Team Leader would carefully choose a communication mode aimed at informing the employees of the situation, and redirecting operations, while getting feedback, engagement and cooperation. When asked why it is important to communicate with employees during a crisis, Team Leader D listed: *"to share the vision and the bigger picture, to get them involved, take them with you, listen, put yourself in their shoes, be fair, consult, get the buy-in in order to get the job done"*.

Evidently, in the production sections, Team Leaders find themselves in an expanded role for fostering employee engagement and buy-in for the benefit of continuation of business operations. Over and above the point of redirecting operations to achieve financial goals and targets, Team Leader C brought the issue of safety and trust amongst employees into the equation. He commented that communication builds trust among team members, and therefore each and every one can be "guaranteed" safety. He commented, *"Being an electrician is a deadly task really at times, as far as communicating a simple task of switching something off, making sure that you have a trust with people that we work with, 'cause there is dangerous machines here. Safety is the biggest issue here, and I understand why face to face communication is preferred, there is no room for error. Going forward, we need to concentrate on our morning meetings. That is where all the information gets dispersed"*.

Communication shortfalls from both Eskom and within the department made the Team Leader's tasks difficult. Team Leader A reported two incidences of communication shortfalls. He recalled, *"We were about to finish our shift, the power went off, I had to call the people to pack the bricks by hands and fill the cars for the night shift. The second incident was the generator did not have enough diesel. Our diesel pump operates with electricity, we had to use a hose*

pipe to pump the diesel from the mobile machines to the generator the whole night and it was raining. We also did not know how much diesel to put for the generator and we continued the exercise for the whole night”.

4.4.1 Communication Processes

Team Leaders at MBMF employed a variety of communication methods to communicate with employees during the load-shedding crisis. The communication process is more formal and structured in that the Team Leaders communicate through the chain of command (Appendix D). This has got its own advantages in that, messages are communicated by Team Leaders to their respective teams. In this way, the opportunity for “confusion” is limited, and the chances of messages being distorted are minimal. However, hierarchy, or power distance, frequently inhibits people from speaking up. During a crisis, the chances are that urgent messages might be delayed in getting communicated to employees. MBMF may, during a crisis, effectively flatten the hierarchy, create familiarity, make it feel safe for employees to speak to any Team Leader, and initiate and participate in communication.

When exploring the use of communication channels for internal crisis communication, the popular channels that had been used mostly were face-to-face special meetings, and scheduled meetings called Mission Directed Work (MDW) or “Toolbox” meetings. A MDW meeting is a standard platform where various Team Leaders (plant, maintenance and electrical) spend some time to discuss and assess what the team did well the previous day, challenges experienced and action plans to do better. MDW is also a platform where all operational related questions and uncertainties are addressed. Issues related to quality, production targets/shortfalls and safety form part of the agenda for these MDWMs. Although special meetings were called to address load shedding when it happened, the MDWM agenda also included the load shedding challenges experienced, and proposed solutions and outcomes. The majority of the Team Leaders perceived that face-to-face interactions are the best way to communicate with employees, not only to ensure understanding of the “to do lists”, job requirements or warnings, but also to build interpersonal

relationships with their teams. Team Leader D expanded on this point, by explaining:

"We are the family; we spend most of our time here. We need to understand each other at a personal level". He concluded, *"This is how you build a strong team"*.

During the interviews, the majority of the Team Leaders attested to the advantages of using face-to-face communication, such as instant feedback: rich information obtained from non-verbal cues such as gestures, eye contact and tone of voice, and personal focus. Team Leaders also claim that face-to-face communication in a business operation like theirs, aids easier problem solving (e.g. more minds interrogating and refining ideas in real time), bridging the gap between the managers and the employees; and the benefit of reducing misunderstandings or misinterpretations during communication. To support this assertion, Team Leader F commented:

"you see from the body language (facial expression, nodding) that the message is clear or unclear. As the Team Leader, you get the opportunity to elucidate, probe or ask follow up questions to double check if everyone is on the same page".

Conversely, the shortcomings of face-to-face communication during a crisis, according to Team Leader C, were increased decision time for solving problems and the unavailability of employees at the time.

New communication technologies have transformed the communication media used in organisations like MBMF, especially in a crisis situation. Eskom uses newer communication technologies like texting and emails to communicate load shedding status with MBMF management. These communication technologies have now formed part of the business communication due to their convenience. One interviewee gave his narrative to attest to this notion, and also pointed out loopholes in the present MBMF communication hierarchy and mode. He said:

"Eskom communicates directly to senior management. In my view, the Supervisors and Team Leaders should get the SMS directly from Eskom to plan things better and fast. Load shedding schedules get printed and displayed but

sometimes the schedules do not go according to the plans. I have a grid watch, and I simply check the updates. It tells me when the load shedding will happen. With the current communication I am afraid that during the weekend, what if I miss senior management call for an update? The grid watch comes in handy”.

At MBMF, technology does not in reality have much impact on how Team Leaders communicate with their subordinates; it has not replaced the traditional medium of communication, which is face-to-face. Face-to-face communication is perceived to be effective for relationship building with managers and for dissemination of work-related information to colleagues. The majority of the participants agreed that face-to-face communication is a more effective employee communication channel compared to electronic communication (Ean, 2010, pp. 40-41). At MBMF, communication technology is used for convenience, and ostensibly it cannot replace the traditional medium. This was evident when Team Leader A was asked why he preferred face-to-face communication: he answered:

“I prefer verbal because we are here, it is very important to see if everybody understands what you say, cause by SMS there can be a discrepancy people will say, ‘I was thinking you say’. I sometimes ask people one by one if they understand what I am saying. Face-to-face verbal communication works. It gives people a chance to respond, and you do have a guarantee that people understand.”

Confirmed by Team Leader E and F, it was evident that the main reason for face to face communication was to avoid misunderstandings and misrepresentation of facts, to aim to get a “buy in”, to clarify uncertainties and to encourage team work.

Other employee communication channels used in the organisation include electronic media such as landline telephones and mobile handsets (SMS, WhatsApp) as well as visual aids (white board notices) and written notes (handover books). White boards were mainly used to communicate Eskom Load shedding schedules. Some Team Leaders (especially in the Making Section) also used handover books to communicate urgent production status caused by a power outage, with the different shifts. During a crisis, mobile

handsets and landline telephones are mainly used amongst middle managers, followed by special meetings. Electronic media are mainly used by the more senior managers while they are off-site, to communicate with the middle managers who are on site.

4.4.2 Message content

As discussed in the previous section, Team Leaders communicated through various channels within the organisation. The message contents communicated varied depending on the outcomes that were intended. As highlighted in the interviews, if the intent is to promote a safe work environment, message contents would bring across awareness to all employees.

Weick (2010, p. 545) further makes a distinction between “alertness” and “awareness”. He argues that alertness and awareness are instances of the more general categories of perception and conception and the relations between them. Alertness, according to him, is an effort to notice something that is out of place, unusual or unexpected, while awareness is an effort to generate conjectures about what that anomaly might mean. Team Leader C noted, *“We did not expect it. We never knew how long it will take and we were not notified.”*

Messages that were two-fold - aimed at achieving both business operation targets and aiming at achieving employee commitment and buy in - would be more persuasive, feedback seeking to get “buy-in”, but also goal oriented .

Depending on the number of employees each Team Leader has, the message contents and intention differed from Team Leader to Team Leader. Those Team Leaders with bigger groups of employees tended to choose messages that are more persuasive and informative.

Table 3 summaries the methods of communication that were employed, including the message content and outcomes of the communication.

The main differences between crisis communications and daily internal business communications is the compassion and diligent care taken when informing employees of the crisis, how their work will be altered because of the crisis and the persuasion that goes with it. In operations like MBMF, it was evident that the crisis communication is also an “awareness campaign” to make

sure that employees remain safe in the work environment, while building trust to gain employee commitment in return.

Face to face communication outcomes alone improve the quality and degree of agreement on a decision through deliberations between the parties because of the opportunity to share information through two way communication.

Table 3 – Summary of Communication methods, message content and outcomes

Team Leader	Methods of communication Employed	Message Content and intent	Outcomes of crisis communication	Impact of day to day internal business communication
A	Face to face, white board, telephone, MDWM	Informative and persuasive, goal oriented	Awareness, commitment, consistency, competency	Productivity
B	Face to face, telephone, WhatsApp, SMS, print out notices, electronic mail, MDWM	Informative, directive, goal oriented	Awareness, undistorted communication, consistency, competency	
C	Face to face, telephone, WhatsApp, SMS, MDWM	Informative, building trust relationships, goal oriented, alarming	Awareness, compassion, consistency, openness, reliability	
D	Face to face, telephone, MDWM	Informative, directive and persuasive, goal oriented, team building/ trust relationships, and feedback seeking	Awareness, undistorted communication, commitment, consistency, competency, compassion, connection,	Improved Quality of Goods
E	Face to face, hand written sticky notes, white board	Informative, persuasive, building trust relationships, goal oriented and feedback seeking	Awareness, commitment, compassion, consistency, competency connection	Commitment
F	Face to face, telephone, print out notices, white board	Informative, directive and goal oriented	Awareness, undistorted communication, consistency, competency	Collaboration
G	Face to face, telephone, MDWM	Instructive, directive, goal oriented	Undistorted communication, openness, commitment	Quality of decision and degree of agreement on a decision, feedback
H	Face to face, telephone, print out notices, MDWM	Informative, persuasive, alarming, goal oriented	Awareness, commitment, reliability, connection, consistency, competency	Buy-in
I	Telephone, SMS, face to face, electronic mail, WhatsApp, printout notices	Informative, Instructive, directive, goal oriented	Awareness, undistorted communication, openness, consistency	Feedback

5. Summary

This chapter presented the findings based on the data that was collected. In an attempt to illuminate and frame the nature of the MBMF crisis. This chapter first explained the MBMF operations processes flow to help the reader to understand how a power outage impacts upon the company, and how an interruption in electricity supply constitutes a crisis. The impact of the crisis on both MBMF operations and the employees has been described. To address the objectives and the research question, the sense making processes used by the middle managers was presented, followed by a description of the communication processes and message contents that were communicated to employees. A summary table of the communication methods employed, message content and communication outcomes received by various Team Leaders has been outlined. Chapter five will be discussing the findings in light of the literature.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

As highlighted in chapter 4, this chapter will discuss the findings in light of the literature. The chapter will explore the effects of communication on employees, as well as sense making. Communications, including the communication process and message content will be discussed with the intention of comparing the MBMF communication dynamics to what the literature stipulates.

5.2 Outcomes of the crisis communication on employees

In a broader context, communications are operationally defined as technology and systems used for sending and receiving messages. Communications may include newsletters, circulation materials, surveys, emails, suggestion boxes, etc. Organisational communication focuses on connecting individual employees, groups and the organisation as a whole, in order to facilitate the realisation of common interest and spontaneous cooperation (Hatch, 1964; Clampitt & Downs, 1992, cited in Thomas *et al.*, 2009).

Internal organisational communication can mean the success or failure of any major change or crisis situation, and needs the same analytical rigour that is given to external crisis communication and to financial or operational measures. The quality and the quantity of communication, in fact, affect the level of trust and involvement of employees (Thomas *et al.*, 2009). MBMF's Team Leader communications during a crisis were harmonious to this literature in that they had to call special meetings to inform staff of the crisis situation, persuaded and engaged them to yield productive outcomes. As outlined in Table C, Team Leaders chose the communication methods and message contents carefully to achieve the desired outcomes.

As pointed out by Schoenberg (2004, p. 10), crisis events may have the potential to cause anxiety, uncertainty, and doubt if not balanced between handling human needs and organisational goals. Communication objectives during a crisis therefore should seek to inform, convince or motivate employees to action (Ray, 1999). The continuous engagement and ongoing communication between with the employees and Team Leaders was congruent to this view. At

beginning of the crisis event, employees were anxious and uncertain about the load shedding crisis. The Team Leader's communication got the employees to consider how to meet the departmental goals and targets under the load shedding constraints.

Seeger (2006, p. 241) notes that, whether communicating with the public, media, or other employers, designated spokespersons or leaders should demonstrate appropriate levels of compassion. At MBMF, this compassion was demonstrated in that, Team Leaders assigned cleaning roles to their staff during power cut periods, as opposed to giving them short hours which could have affected their salaries. The additional benefits to MBMF was that, employees noted the special treatment they were getting from the employer. Resultant to that, they were willing to propose a night shift in mitigating production yield shortfalls arising from load shedding. Employees enthusiastically worked with a positive team spirit during their tea and lunch breaks to reach production targets.

These characteristics or personal attributes significantly enhance the credibility of the message, and the perceived legitimacy of the messenger both before and after the event. Equally, both the employees and the public respond much more positively to spokespersons/leaders who acknowledge their concerns and demonstrate human compassion for any harm or inconvenience that may have occurred (Seeger, 2006, p. 241).

Effective crisis communication also reassured work safety and enhanced trust relationship amongst employees and the Team Leaders. Mishra (1996, pp 269-270) highlighted for dimensions of trust – competence, openness, concern and reliability. Competence rests on the belief that managers will make correct decisions. Openness and honesty reflect the belief that managers will give straightforward accounts of events. Concern indicates the belief that a manager acts in ways designed to benefit employees (i.e. act on employee's interest). Mishra (1996, pp 271-277) claims that during a crisis, trust facilitates decentralization, increases truthful communication and leads to collaboration over the allocation of scarce resources – thus leading in organization successfully surviving crises. Inevitably, it was also evident that effective crisis

communication built team work and enhanced a sense of belonging and commitment on the part of the employees.

5.3 Sense making by middle managers

Sense making involves turning circumstances into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard into “action” (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 409).

It can be argued that crisis triggers thinking and activate actions for *sense to be made of what is happening*. In MBMF, middle managers spent time calling each other to discover whether the sudden stoppage of machinery was caused by a power failure or an unannounced load shedding. Therefore, sense-making is a required action in the process of distinguishing between a norm and a crisis.

Weick (2010, p. 545) warns that crisis sense-making can make the crisis worse, either when significant cues go unnoticed because there are no concepts to select from (i.e. a problem of blindness) or when the concepts that people deploy have no connection with particulars (i.e. a problem of emptiness).

5.4 Communications

The internal communication is important for day-to-day business operations and is critical in a crisis situation in that it provides cohesion and coherence to the organisation involved (David, 2011, p. 74). This cohesion and coherence were evident at MBMF. Due to their commitment to the organisation that they work for, MBMF employees proposed night shift work to their managers, and as a result they worked as teams to make up lost production targets.

As highlighted in the literature review, employee communication has become one of the most important contributors to organisational effectiveness by creating a link between the organisation and its employees through various communication media such as interpersonal, peer-to-peer and small group communication; traditional print; and electronic and online communication. Communication is important to keep employees well-informed about an organisation’s business vision and strategy, as well as to help every individual in the organisation to work together with a common purpose (Ean, 2010, p. 38).

The need for communication rises in situations that involve many responders who cannot see or hear what is happening, and situations that are unexpected and for which there are no established procedures. In such situations, Netten & Van Someren (2011, p. 75) suggest intra- and inter-organisational communication. It is noteworthy that a lack of information for the emergency responders easily leads to wrong decisions and, as a consequence, to less effective collaboration among team members and less productivity. This was the case at MBMF in the beginning of the power cuts, where Eskom was not communicating the schedules. There was one incident when a team on a Saturday shift waited for almost six hours without electricity. The Team Leader was under the impression that the power outage was due to load shedding. Four hours had come and gone and the electricity was not back, when it was discovered that the problem was not load shedding, but internal power failure.

According to Mishra (2014, p. 184), internal communication is important for building a culture of transparency between management and employees, and it can engage employees in the organisation's priorities. This was evident at MBMF in two incidences of load shedding communication shortfall by both Eskom and the organisation that were shared by Team Leader A during the interviews. Mishra (2014, p. 184) further notes that internal communication enhances a number of important bottom line outcomes for the organisation, including increased productivity and profitability. Internal communication boosts productivity by streamlining organisational roles and duties.

The better the leader-member exchange relationship between leader and follower, the higher the productivity, job satisfaction, motivation, and citizenship behaviour of the follower (Lunenburg, 2010). Wright (1995, cited in Mishra 2014) found that effective communication is two-way communication, where both employees and managers listen to one another. The two-way communication provides an opportunity for informal interaction between employees and managers (Wright, 1995, cited in Mishra, 2014, p. 187). A two way communication also provides an opportunity for feedback and better ideas to be shared for the best benefit of the organisation.

5.4.1 Communication processes

To understand the crisis communication content backdrop, it is important to note that crisis communication research has identified three pathways along which information flows during a crisis situation. The first-level pathway would be peer-to-peer exchanges, direct relationships among the interactants, with information content having a value of immediacy or relevancy for each individual, as well as for the collective. This level can be associated with the Team Leader-to-Team Leader and/or subordinate-to-subordinate communication at MBMF. The second and third pathway levels deal with communication with external stakeholders, which is not the focus of this dissertation (Zaharna, Arsenault & Fisher , 2014, p. 211).

The selection of communication tools and/or methods is based on how effective they are in achieving the intended goal (i.e. revenue and production targets in the case of MBMF); and should fit into a strategic internal communication process (Kalla, 2005, cited in Ean, 2010, p. 40). To elaborate on the importance of communication tools selection, Farrel & Schlesinger, (2013, p. 125) emphasise that, when the information a manager intends to convey is negative or involves a significant change, the most effective form of communication is in person. Communicators prepare for crisis, identify audiences, conceive and construct messages, select the medium of communication, respond to feedback and evaluate the success of crisis communication efforts (Zaremba, 2014, p. 23).

It is evident that MBMF Team Leader communication objectives and content are no different from Mazzei & Ravazzani's (2015, p. 323) internal crisis communication strategies, illustrated as Figure 4.

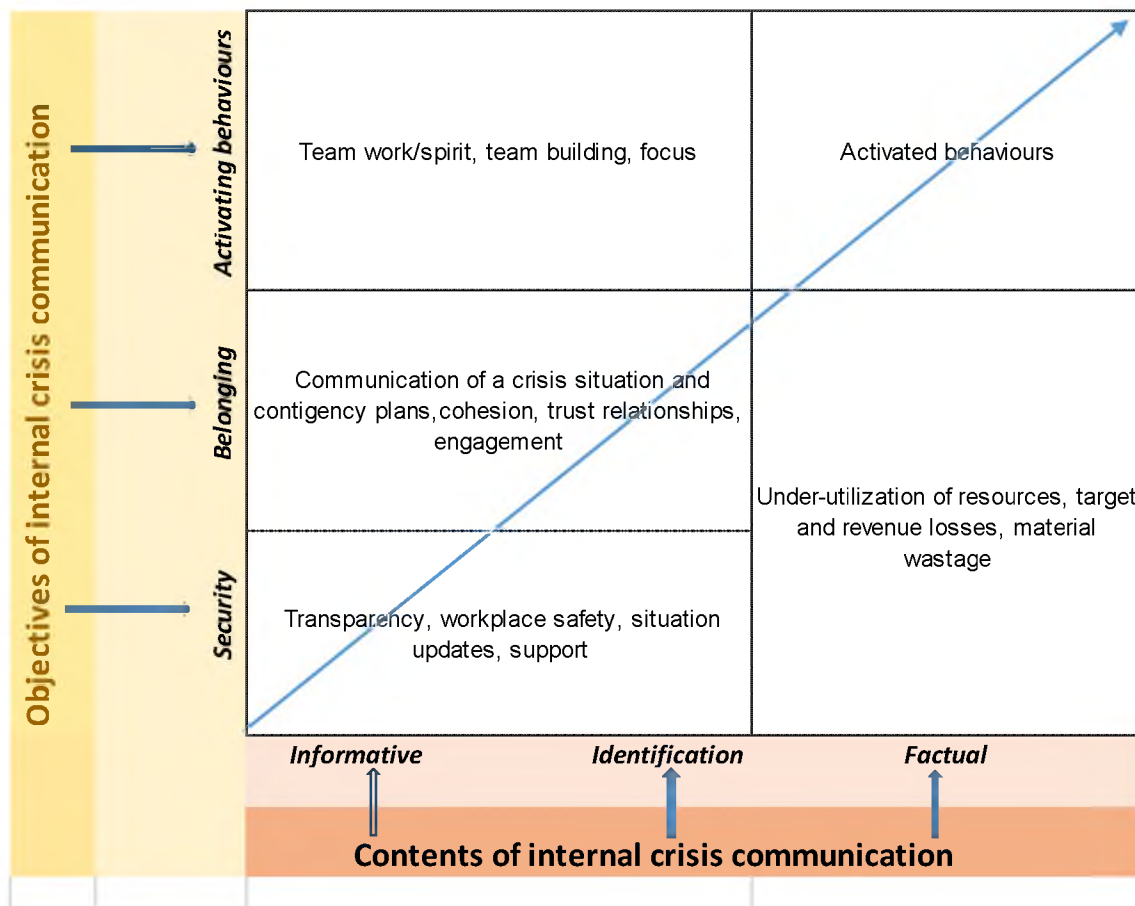


Figure 4: Internal crisis communication strategies: a multidimensional model

Adopted: Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015, p. 323

As illustrated, the critical elements in the definition of internal crisis communication strategies are objectives and contents. The combinations of these elements define internal crisis communication objectives/strategies. Such a classification draws on previous work found in earlier studies (c.f. Benoit, 1995; 1997; Coombs, 2010; Coombs & Holladay, 2010 cited in Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015, p. 323), but specifically refers to the internal communication aspects of an organisation hit by a crisis.

Informative content of the messages is in actual fact informing the employees of the situation: “*we are experiencing load shedding*” and identifying the consequences: “*the machines are off, making section cannot run*”; and factually: “*we will not meet our daily target*”.

Identification or value-focused content uses messages that stress openness and trustworthiness, by for example, focusing on the organisational culture and identity, and tends to encourage identification with them and motivation (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015, p. 323).

5.4.2 Message contents

In a crisis situation, Coombs (2007a, cited in Ki & Brown, 2013) notes that a successful response should provide instructing information that tells stakeholders how to protect themselves physically. Congruent to this assertion, when an unexpected power cut happened during a night shift at MBMF, Team Leader H instructed the subordinates to stand at a distance when there was smoke in the kiln. Secondly, the response should provide adjusting information that conveys to stakeholders exactly what happened to cause the crisis, as well as a description of the events of the crisis.

The instructing and adjusting information must be given in a timely and consistent manner, and the organisation must be open and honest with its stakeholders. Lastly, only after the organisation has provided instructing and adjusting information to its stakeholders in a timely manner, can it begin to employ responses to manage its reputation with its stakeholders (Coombs, 2007a, cited in Ki & Brown, 2013, p. 404).

5.5 Summary – contribution

The literature of crisis communication has been explored here, and the researcher found that the findings of this study were consistent with the literature on crisis communication. This illustrates that examining external crisis communication response strategies can help with crisis situation that are focused on internal, operational dynamics. Other companies could benefit from the findings and practical implications of this study. Of course the crisis and communication phenomena and processes might be different in another organisation, but by describing the organisation and its context, it has been made easier for the reader to make judgements about the possible transferability of this study.

5.6 Recommendations for practice

The researcher's contribution is a practical managerial contribution of how best managers and leaders can deal with internal crisis dynamics. It is an applied piece of work, where recommendations are made to managers to document protocols-related crisis communication for knowledge management and business continuity.

5.7 Summary

Internal crisis communication presents an invaluable opportunity for employees across all levels to engage in the organisation's priorities. It therefore has the potential to dictate the success or failure of any major change or crisis situation. As such, it can be argued that it calls for the same analytical rigour that is given to external crisis communication and to financial or operational measures. When communicating in both perspectives (as external or internal stakeholder), human compassion, concern and empathy; faith in legitimate and appropriate actions taken by the chosen organisation's spokesperson/leader; and honesty, candidness and openness in communication are universal. Respect, trust, and transparency have also been mentioned as promoting a sense of belonging, engagement/involvement and buy-in from the internal stakeholder's perspective.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 Conclusion

Acknowledging the importance of communication during a crisis, the aim of the research is to investigate how middle managers at MBMF made sense of load shedding in 2014, how they communicated with their staff during power outages, and the effect of such communication on MBMF business operations and employees. The heart of the interviews was on pinpointing (i) methods of communication, (ii) the message content, and (iii) effect on both operations and employees.

The objectives of the study are to describe the nature of the crisis that affected MBMF during the load shedding in 2014, to understand how the middle managers made sense of the power outages, to analyse how they communicated with their staff, and lastly, to analyse what the effect was of this communication on MBMF operations and the employees.

To conclude, this research study has attempted to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity of internal communication during crises, by shining a light on the MBMF load shedding crisis phenomenon and responding to calls from previous studies for more empirical research (Coombs, 2007a, cited in Ki & Brown, 2013) and more attention to internal crisis communication (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011; Johansen, Aggerholm & Frandsen, 2012).

The role of internal communication has been emphasised as more fundamental in crisis situations where there is a high level of communication ambiguity (Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow, 2007) and a strong need for sense-making. Even if companies develop deep trust relationships with their employees before a crisis occurs, it is always necessary that they implement factual communication and concrete actions to give credibility and consistency to explicit messages. Internal communication occupies a pivotal position in contributing to generating employee communication behaviours that are particularly relevant in a crisis situation. Good internal communication benefits under normal or crisis situations have been listed, ranging from greater productivity, improved quality of goods, commitment, buy-in, and increased levels of innovation.

6.2 Recommendations for MBMF

Based on the information received from the interviews, observations, and the literature reviewed for this study, the recommendations for MBMF are listed as follows :

- ✓ The organisation has communication radios which may be utilised more effectively, especially by the Team Leaders running the operations.
- ✓ The chain of command (as per the organisation's organogram, attached as Appendix D may delay communication, especially during a crisis. At best, the organisation's management should include supervisors and Team Leaders on the Eskom list of information recipients so that they can receive information in real time. In this way, Team Leaders will be able to communicate with their subordinates quicker.
- ✓ Investment in smart phones for the supervisors and Team Leaders would enable them to receive any information that external and internal sources may choose to share directly, filtered straight to Team Leaders at the same time as management.
- ✓ The use of the existing siren (at a different tone), coupled with emergency lights in all areas of work, including staff rest rooms and toilets, may assist not only to inform staff of the crisis, but also to make sure that staff evacuate the plant to assembly points where they can be briefed about crisis plans.
- ✓ For speedy continuity of operations, the organisation may choose to have different assembly points for each section/team for relevant briefing to take place, thereby minimising confusion.
- ✓ The organisation may invest in big screens (for each operational section) to project communications and updates in PowerPoint format. The screens may be powered by both electricity and diesel operated generator. The projected information may relate not only to crises, but also to daily operations in general, including critical highlights from the MDWM.
- ✓ The documentation of lessons learnt for each and every crisis as part of knowledge management is recommended.

- ✓ MBMF could perform business continuity planning, and work through what they could do to ensure that they remain operational in the event of a power outage.

At MBMF, there is a need for documented crisis communication, contingency and/or continuity plans, to ensure that the business remains operational during crises. The documented plans may be used by new employees as part of their induction to the organisation. Documentation of these plans will help to create the business culture and support mechanisms that allow the business and its members to gain insight and understanding or learning from individual, shared experiences, willingness and capability to examine and analyse both successes and failures for the purpose of organisational improvement. Palepu *et al.* (2013, p. 636) prescribed ten steps to be followed to write a business Continuity Plan namely: (1) Obtain top management commitment; (2) Establish a planning committee; (3) Perform a risk assessment; (4) Establish priorities for processing and operations; (5) Determine recovery strategies; (6) Perform data collection; (7) Organise and document a written plan; (8) Develop testing criteria and procedures; (9) Test the plan; and (10) Approve the plan.

A further recommendation for MBMF is the utilisation of Functional Framework, designed by Palepu *et al.* (2013, p. 643), attached as Appendix E. From observations, there is a need for the organisation to have a visual display of what the crisis communication should be. Over and above the process charts that guide day to day operations, the Functional Framework may be of great benefit. It may be utilized as the visual aid that incorporates both crisis related and daily operations related communications.

It must be emphasised that the Functional Framework, as presented in Appendix E, is not intended to prescribe a model or chart for any business. It is merely the representation of multiple functions that require integration and coordination for the sake of programme effectiveness and efficiency. Definitions for each of the functions are provided as a common point of understanding, since there is significant disparity in the various glossaries of Business Crisis Management and Business Continuity Management, found in sources such as NFPA 1600, The Business Continuity Institute, Disaster Recovery Institute

International, and the Business Contingency Planning Group (Palepu *et al.*, 2013, p. 643). The framework may be tailor-made to suit MBMF business and, as such, it can be drawn and cast in a big white board in the MDWM boardroom. The information may be updated and explained daily, during MDWM including safety incidents – which is one of the critical agenda points in the MDWM. Continual monitoring of the relevant internal and external environment of the business is also crucial to detect, communicate and initiate appropriate actions to prevent, prepare for, respond to, recover, resume, restore and transition from a potential or actual crisis event. On this note, any detected kiln “peculiar” temperature logs (which pose a risk in end brick product) may also form part of the highlights in this framework to assign monitoring teams on an hourly basis if need be.

6.3 Limitations and recommendations for further research

A limitation of this study lies in the fact that it focused largely on internal crisis communication from the Team Leaders’ perspective in a brick manufacturing firm. The results and findings therefore are single faceted.

Because Eskom load shedding is no longer a new phenomenon, and was a national energy crisis for all businesses in SA, a delimiting factor for this study is that this research only looked at MBMF. Further studies may look at the internal crisis dynamics of other businesses that are also electricity dependent, like supermarkets, hotels, restaurants or retail shops, from employee perspectives.

Despite the listed limitations, the research still adds value in respect of its contribution to the study of internal crisis communication in an operational business/environment.

Further research can be done to look at organisations with procedures and communication plans in place, in order to investigate whether crisis communication plans work to mitigate business risks associated with haphazard crisis communication when crisis hits the organisation.

References

- Acar, A., 2014. Culture and Social Media. *An Elementary Textbook*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Antwi, S.K. and Hamza, K., 2015. Qualitative and Quantitative Research Paradigms in Business Research: A Philosophical Reflection. *European Journal of Business and Management*, 7.
- Arneson, S., 2008. Lead from the Middle. *Leadership Excellence*, 25 (3), pp.19-19.
- Babbie, E., and Mouton, J., 2001. *The Practices of Social Research*. Goodwood, Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Barrett, D.J., 2002. Change communication: using strategic employee communication to facilitate major change. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 7(4), pp.219-231.
- Berger, C.R., 2014. *Interpersonal communication*. Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG.
- Bisseker, C., 2015. *How load shedding hurts the economy*. (Economic growth has been revised downwards and the costs could run into the tens of billions). Updated 11 Feb 2015). [Online]. Available: <http://www.rdm.co.za/business/2015/02/11/how-load-shedding-hurts-the-economy> [Accessed 10 April 2016].
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V., 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), pp.77-101.
- Bryman, A., 2015. *Social research methods*. Oxford University Press.
- Cadle, B., 2012. Makana Brick: Building today for tomorrow. [Online]. Available: <http://www.makanabrick.co.za/> [Accessed 15 July 2014].
- Carmeli, A. and Schaubroeck, J., 2008. Organisational crisis-preparedness: The importance of learning from failures. *Long Range Planning*, 41(2), pp. 177-196.

Chapanis, A., 1988. Interactive human communication. *Computer-supported cooperative work: a book of readings*. pp. 125-139.

Christensen, T.W., 2009. Crisis leadership: *A study of leadership practice* .

Corbin, J.M. and Strauss, A., 1990. Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative sociology*, 13(1), pp.3-21.

Coombs, W.T., and Holladay S.,J. ed., 2010. *The Handbook of Crisis Communication*. 1st ed. USA:Wiley-Blackwell.

Coombs, W.T., 2011. Ongoing crisis communication: *Planning, managing, and responding*. Sage Publications.

Coombs, W.T., 2014a. Crisis management and Communications, Updated September 2014, posted on September 23, 2014. [Online]. Available :

<http://www.instituteforpr.org/crisis-management-communications/> [Accessed 25 Jan 2015].

Coombs, W.T., 2014b. Ongoing crisis communication: *Planning, managing, and responding*. Sage Publications.

Cornelissen, J., 2011. *Corporate Communication. A Guide to Theory and Practice*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Creamer, C., 2008. , N., 2015. Major business disruptions as SA has first load-shedding relapse since 2008 [Online] (Updated 06 March 2014). [Online]. Available: <http://www.engineeringnews.co.za/article/major-business-disruptions-as-sa-has-first-load-shedding-relapse-since-2008> [Accessed 15 Jan 2015].

Crowe, S., Cresswell, K., Robertson, A., Huby, G., Avery, A. and Sheikh, A., 2011. The case study approach. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 11(1).

David, G., 2011. Internal Communication—Essential Component of Crisis Communication. *Journal of Media Research-Revista de Studii Media*, (2 (10)), pp.72-81.

de Fatima Oliveira, M., 2013. Multicultural Environments and Their Challenges to Crisis Communication. *Journal of Business Communication*, 50 (3), pp.253-277.

de Klerk, A., 2015. Maintenance Manager, Makana Brick Manufacturing Firm. Personal communication. 19 June.

de Wolf, D. and Mejri, M., 2013. Crisis communication failures : The BP Case Study. *International Journal of Advances in Management and Economics*, 2 (2), pp. 48-56.

Dubrovski, D., 2009. Management Mistakes as a Cause of Corporate Crises : Managerial Implications for Countries in Transition. *Total Quality Management*, 20 (1), pp. 39-59.

Ean, L.C., 2010. Face-to-face versus computer-mediated communication: Exploring employees' preference of effective employee communication channel. *International journal for the advancement of science and arts*, 1(2), pp. 38-47.

Farrel and Schlesinger, eds. 2013. *Managing in the middle: The Librarian's Handbook*. ALA Ed. American Library Association, Chicago.

Fereday, J. and Muir-Cochrane, E., 2006. Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International journal of qualitative methods*, 5(1), pp.80-92.

Finnigan, P.F., 1997. Telephonic voice message transmission control method. US Patent 5687220 A. .

Flick, U., 2006. *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. (3rd ed.). London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Fontana, A., and Frey, J., 2000. The Interview: From Structured Questions to Negotiated Text, in N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln, *Handbook of qualitative research*, Sage Publications. London, Thousand Oaks, California, pp. 645-672.

Frandsen, F. and Johansen, W., 2011. The study of internal crisis communication: towards an integrative framework. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 16 (4), pp. 347-361.

Freberg, K., 2012. Intention to comply with crisis messages communicated via social media. *Public Relations Review*, 38(3), pp. 416-421.

Frey, L., Carl H. Botan, and G. Kreps. "Investigating communication." NY: Allyn & Bacon (2000).

Gerring, J., 2006. Case study research: *principles and practices*. Cambridge University Press.

Hackman, M.Z., and Johnson C.E., 2013. *Leadership: A Communication Perspective*, Sixth Edition, Waveland Press.

Hale, J.E., Dulek, R.E. and Hale, D.P., 2005. Crisis Response Communication Challenges. *Journal of Business Communication*, 42 (2), pp. 112-134. [Online]. Available : <http://www.tralac.org/discussions/article/> [Accessed :25 March 2016].

Heath, R., L. 1994. Management of Corporate Communication. *From Interpersonal Contacts to External Affairs*. Hillside, New Jersey : Lawrence Erlbaum.

James, E.H. and Wooten, L.P., 2005. Leadership as (Un) usual: How to Display Competence in Times of Crisis. *Organizational dynamics*, 34 (2), pp. 141-152.

Johansen, W., Aggerholm, H.K. and Frandsen, F., 2012. Entering new territory: A study of internal crisis management and crisis communication in organizations. *Public Relations Review*, 38 (2), pp. 270-279.

Johansson, C., Miller, V.D. and Hamrin, S., 2011. Communicative Leadership—Theories, Concepts, and Central Communication (Vol. 36, No. 4, pp. 364-390).

Kash, T.J. and Darling, J.R., 1998. Crisis management: prevention, diagnosis and intervention. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 19 (4), pp. 179-186.

Ki, E. and Brown, K.A., 2013. The Effects of Crisis Response Strategies on Relationship Quality Outcomes. *Journal of Business Communication*, 50 (4), pp. 403-420.

King, G., 2007. Narcissism and Effective Crisis Management: A Review of Potential Problems and Pitfalls. *Journal of Contingencies & Crisis Management*, 15 (4), pp.183-193.

- King, G.,III, 2002. Crisis Management & Team Effectiveness: A Closer Examination. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 41 (3), pp.235-249.
- Klann, G., 2003. Crisis leadership: *Using military lessons, organizational experiences, and the power of influence to lessen the impact of chaos on the people you lead*. Center for Creative Leadership.
- Krieger, J.L., 2005. Shared Mindfulness in Cockpit Crisis Situations. *Journal of Business Communication*, 42 (2), pp. 135-167.
- Lerbinger, O., 2012. The Crisis Manager: *Facing disasters, conflicts, and failures*. 2nd Ed. New York: Routledge.
- Lin, C.A., 2003. An interactive communication technology adoption model. *Communication Theory*, 13 (4), pp. 345-365.
- Longstaff, P.H. and Yang, S., 2008. Communication management and trust: their role in building resilience to “surprises” such as natural disasters, pandemic flu, and terrorism. *Ecology and Society*, 13 (1), Article 3.
- Lundin, R., 1997. Human factors and interactive communications technologies. *Canadian Journal of Educational Communication*, 26, pp. 61-74.
- Lunenburg, F.C., 2010. Leader-member exchange theory: Another perspective on the leadership process. *International journal of management, business and administration*, 13(1), pp.1-5.
- Maitlis, S. and Sonenshein, S., 2010. Sensemaking in crisis and change: Inspiration and insights from Weick (1988). *Journal of Management Studies*, 47 (3), pp. 551-580.
- Mani, R., 2008. Crisis Management: Real Time Learning. *ICFAI Journal of Soft Skills*, 2 (4), pp. 38-44.
- Marshall, C. and Rossman, G.B., 1999. Defending the value and logic of qualitative research. *Designing qualitative research*, pp. 191-203.
- Maswanganyi, N., 2015. Factory output hit by load-shedding. [Online] (Updated 05 May 2015). [Online].

Available:<http://www.bdlive.co.za/economy/2015/05/05/factory-output-hit-by-load-shedding> [Accessed 15 Jan 2016].

Mazzei, A. and Ravazzani, S., 2015. Internal Crisis Communication Strategies to Protect Trust Relationships: A Study of Italian Companies. *Journal of Business Communication*, 52 (3), pp. 319-337.

McCutcheon, D.M. and Meredith, J.R., 1993. Conducting case study research in operations management. *Journal of Operations Management*, 11 (3), pp. 239-256.

Mejri, M. and De Wolf, D., 2013. Crisis Management: Lessons Learnt from the BP Deepwater Horizon Spill Oil. *Business Management and Strategy*, 4 (2), pp.67.

Millar, R. and Gallagher, M., 2009. The interview approach. In O. Hargie and D. Tourish, eds. *Auditing Organizational Communication: A handbook of research, theory and practice*, pp. 78-102.

Miller, T., Birch, M., Mauthner, M. and Jessop, J., 2012. *Ethics in qualitative research*. Sage.

Mishra, A.K., 1996. Organizational responses to crisis. *Trust in Organizations. Frontier of theory and research*, pp. 261-287.

Mishra, K.E., 2014. Driving employee engagement: The expanded role of internal communications. *International journal of business communication*, 51(2), pp. 183-202.

Mouton, J. and Babbie, E., 2001. *The Practice of Social Research*. 1st ed. Goodwood: Oxford University Press.

Netten, N., and Van Someren, M. 2011. Improving communication in crisis management by evaluating the relevance of messages. *Journal of contingencies and crisis management*, 19(2), 75-85.

Oberholzer , R., 2008. Creamer, C., 2008. Electricity Crisis in South Africa Intensifies. (Updated 01 Feb 2008). [Online].

Available at : <http://www.ihsglobalinsight.co.za/News/news.asp/> [Accessed 25 Jan 2015].

Page, A., 2004. Transformational leadership and evidence-based management. (Institute of Medicine (US). [Online].

Available at : <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK216194/> [Accessed 25 July 2016].

Palepu, H.P., Burritt, D. & Freeman M.J., 2013. Business Crisis and Continuity Management and Planning, *Advanced Research in Economic and Management Sciences (AREMS)*, Vol.15, August 2013.

Pirnes, A., 2015. *The role of internal corporate communication in supporting better workplace safety. Case: SSAB*. Master's thesis Aalto University.

Pollard, D. and Hotho, S., 2006. Crises, scenarios and the strategic management process. *Management Decision*, 44 (6), pp. 721-736.

Pope, C., Ziebland, S. and Mays, N., 2000. Analysing qualitative data. *Bmj*, 320(7227), pp.114-116.

Ranney, M.L., Meisel, Z.F., Choo, E.K., Garro, A.C., Sasson, C. and Morrow Guthrie, K., 2015. Interview-based Qualitative Research in Emergency Care Part II: Data Collection, Analysis and Results Reporting. *Academic Emergency Medicine*, 22(9), pp.1103-1112.

Ray, S.J., 1999. *Strategic Communication in Crisis Management : Lessons from the Airline Industry*. Westport, USA: Quorum Books.

Reeves, T.C. and Hedberg, J.G., 2003. *Interactive learning systems evaluation*. Educational Technology Publications.

Remenyi, D. and Sherwood-Smith, M., 1998. Business benefits from information systems through an active benefits realisation programme. *International Journal of Project Management*, 16 (2), pp.81-98.

Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Nicholls, C.M. and Ormston, R., eds., 2013. *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*. Sage.

- Santana, G., 2004. Crisis management and tourism: Beyond the rhetoric. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 15(4), pp. 299-321.
- Schoenberg, A., 2005. Do Crisis Plans Matter? A New Perspective on Leading During a Crisis. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 50 (1), pp.2-6.
- Schoenberg, A.L., 2004. What it means to lead during a crisis: *An exploratory examination of crisis leadership*. Syracuse N.Y.: Syracuse University
- Seeger, M.W., 2006. Best Practices in Crisis Communication: An Expert Panel Process. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 34 (3), pp. 232-244.
- Seeger, M.W., Sellnow, T.L. and Ulmer, R.R., 2003. *Communication and organizational crisis*. Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Shaluf, I.M., Ahmadun, F. and Said, A.M., 2003. A review of disaster and crisis, *Disaster Prevention Management*, 12 (1), pp. 24-32.
- Smythe, W.E. and Murray, M.J., 2000. Owning the story: Ethical considerations in narrative research. *Ethics & Behavior*, 10 (4), pp. 311-336.
- Swanepoel, D., 2015. Plant Manager, Makana Brick Manufacturing Firm. Personal communication. 19 June.
- Terre Blanche, M., Durrheim K. and Painter, D., 2006. *Research in Practice: Applied Methods for the Social Sciences*. 2nd ed. Rondebosch, Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.
- Thomas, D.R., 2006. A general inductive approach for analyzing qualitative evaluation data. *American journal of evaluation*, 27(2), pp. 237-246.
- Thomas, G.F., Zolin, R. and Hartman, J.L., 2009. *The central role of communication in developing trust and its effects on employee involvement*. *Journal of Business Communication*.
- Udegbe, S.E., 2012. Impact of Business Communication on Organizational Performance in Nigerian Companies. *Australian Journal of Business and Management Research*, Vol.2(1), Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos, Nigeria, pp. 16-26

Ulmer, R.R., Seeger, M.W. and Sellnow, T.L., 2007. Post-crisis communication and renewal: Expanding the parameters of post-crisis discourse. *Public Relations Review*, 33 (2), pp. 130-134.

Valvi, A.C. and Fragkos, K.C., 2013. Crisis communication strategies: a case of British Petroleum. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 45 (7), pp. 383-391.

van der Nest, G. 2015, *The economic consequences of load shedding in South Africa and the state of the electrical grid*. [Online].

Available: <http://www.tralac.org/discussions/article/7000-the-economic-consequences-of-load-shedding-in-south-africa-and-the-state-of-the-electrical-grid.htm/> [Accessed 14 Jan 2015].

Van Wart, M. and Kapucu, N., 2011. Crisis Management Competencies. *Public Management Review*, 13 (4), pp. 489-511.

Vaismoradi, M., Turunen, H. and Bondas, T., 2013. Content analysis and thematic analysis: Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study. *Nursing & health sciences*, 15(3), pp.398-405.

Waymer, D., and Heath, R.L., 2007. Emergent Agents: The Forgotten Publics in Crisis Communication and Issues Management Research. *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 35 (1), pp. 88-108.

Weick, K.E., 2010. Reflections on enacted sense making in the Bhopal disaster. *Journal of Management Studies*, 47(3), pp. 537-550.

Weick, K.E., 2015. Ambiguity as Grasp: The Reworking of Sense. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 23 (2), pp.117-123.

Weick, K.E., Sutcliffe, K.M. and Obstfeld, D., 2005. Organizing and the process of sensemaking. *Organization science*, 16(4), pp.409-421.

Welch, M. and Jackson, P. (2007). Rethinking internal communication: a stakeholder approach. *Corporate Communications*. 12(2), pp. 177-198.

Wooten, L.P. and James, E.H., 2008. Linking crisis management and leadership competencies: The role of human resource development. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 10 (3), pp. 352-379.

Zaharna, R.S., Arsenault, A. and Fisher, A., 2014. Relational, networked and collaborative approaches to public diplomacy: *The connective mindshift*. Routledge.

Zaremba, A.J., 2014. Crisis communication: *Theory and practice*. Routledge.

Zondag, N. 2014. Operations Manager, Makana Brick Manufacturing Company in Grahams town. Personal Communication. 12 June.

Appendix A

List of Interview Questions

Why do you consider load shedding as a crisis?

How has it affected your operations? / What is the impact of load shedding on your operations?

What measures do you currently have in place to mitigate the problem?

From a staff management perspective, how has this crisis been handled? Will you refer to specific incidents (which stand out) of load shedding? What were the challenges?

Follow up questions...

Can you think of an incident/s relating to when this crisis recently resurfaced (after the 2010 crisis)?

Can you think of incidents relating to when the load shedding happened unexpectedly?

Can you think of incidents relating to fluctuations in the load shedding schedule (i.e. causing load shedding time to be extended or happen more than once in a day)?

Incidences relating to what you may have perceived as a shortfall of communication from Eskom.

How do you get/access the Eskom load shedding schedules and how do you make sense of them? How do the schedules inform your operations, and in this context, what needs to be communicated to staff?

6. What do they (load shedding schedules) imply within the context of your business?

OR

7. What effect(s) do you think this has on your staff work schedules / staffing?

8. As the manager, how do you respond? How do you communicate to your staff? Elaborate.

Did this way of communication work or not? Why do you think so?

9. What messages do you communicate (give examples)? What is the desired outcome/s of the communication? List

Does the communication achieve what you desire or not? Explain how or why.

10. Which groups of employees do you communicate with?

11. In your opinion, how best do you think you and your staff should communicate within your department during a crisis?

12. What lessons have you learnt so far which are relevant to improving communication going forward / relevant to improving the effectiveness of communication in a crisis (such as load shedding) going forward ?

Thank you for your time to participate in this interview.

Appendix B

Information letter for invitation to be interviewed

18th June 2015

Dear participant

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Master's degree at Rhodes University Business School under the supervision of Professor Noel Pearse. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

Literature has revealed that within the last decade or so, crisis communication researchers have primarily focused on the external dimension of crisis communication (i.e., crisis response strategies). Very little is known about what is going on inside an organization in the midst of a crisis.

This research aims at investigating crisis communication at middle management level, as it is the leaders in the middle who must communicate and execute strategy, solve problems and manage performance at the operational level during a crisis. It is important to know/explore how organizations such as yours communicate in the midst of a crisis – power outage crisis as an example that is applicable to you.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately 45 minutes to an hour in length to take place in your office. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be digitally-recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be kept safe and only the researcher associated with this project will have access. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 073 125 8303 or by e-mail at velimba@gmail.com . You can also contact my supervisor, Professor Noel Pearse at Rhodes University Business School at 046 – 603 8617 or by e-mail at n.pearse@ru.ac.za.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Review Board at Rhodes University. However, the final decision about participation is yours.

I hope that the results of my study will be of benefit to your organization and others, as well as to the broader research community.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Sincerely,

.....

Veliswa Mbolekwano (Miss)

Rhodes University Business School

Appendix C

Consent Form

Title of Project: Management / Organizational Crisis Communication

Degree: MBA (2013)

Name of Researcher: Veliswa Agnes Mbolekwano (G13M7871)

Institution: Rhodes University Business School

I confirm that I have read and understand the contents of this study as outlined in the information letter and invitation to partake, and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

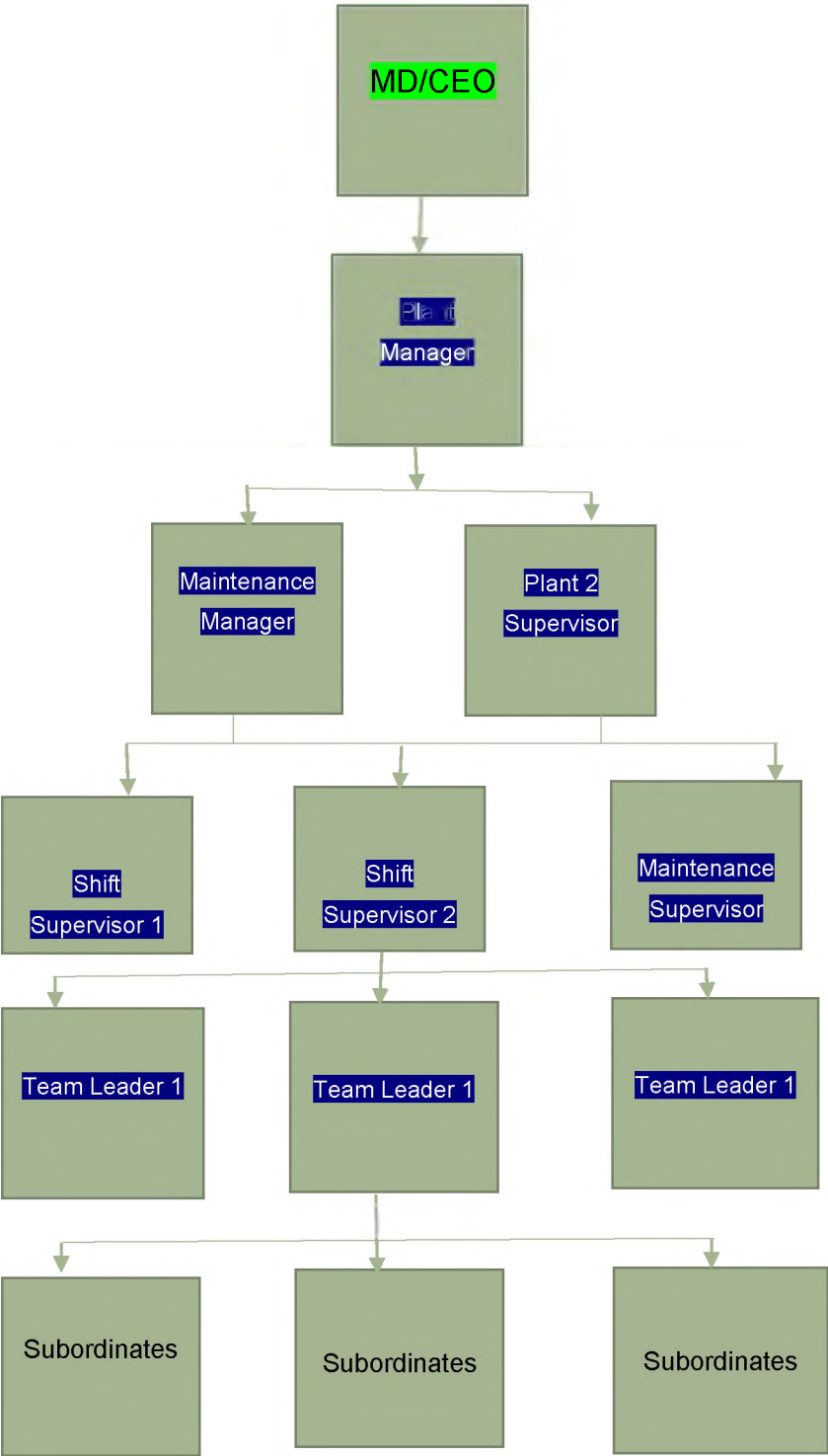
I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant Date Signature

Researcher Date Signature


Appendix D

MBMF Communication Hierarchy



Appendix E : Modified Functional Framework

Source: Adapted from Palepu *et al.* (2013)

MBMF OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT		
COMMUNICATIONS AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT		
Risk Management	Daily business and Crisis communications	Entire Operations Crisis Communication
Risk Assessment Business Area Analysis Impact Analysis Risk Communication Risk - Based Decisions	CONTINUOUS COMMUNICATION	
Daily Systems Monitoring	Critical Areas to be monitored	To be actioned by :
CRITICAL SECTIONS:		
Making Section	Conveyer belt movements etc.	(a)
Kiln	Firing temperatures, drying ovens	(b)
Packaging	Quality checks,waste measurements	(c)
List of Incidents Reported	Responses to incidents	Analysis of response results
	Restoration and Transition	
	Lessons Learnt business Recovery, Revised Business continuity Plans	
Before Crisis	Crisis Event	After Crisis