Crisis management: Towards a model of good practice for small to medium sized hotels.

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ABSTRACT
Research indicates that the hotel industry provides the perfect environment for certain crises to develop and escalate [1,2,3,4,5]. Given the nature of the industry, hotels must be friendly, inviting, and easy to access. Members of the public, as well as residents, are encouraged to use the facilities. This kind of open door or open access policy makes hotels easy targets for criminals, terrorists, etc. In addition, the fact that guests eat, drink and sleep on the premises opens up a whole range of potential crises linked to food poisoning, fire, criminal damage, and issues relating to personal safety. It is easy to imagine the dangers associated with having to evacuate a hotel full of sleeping guests. When a hotel operates in a particularly volatile or unstable environment, such as Northern Ireland, the spectrum of potential crises increases still further.
The recommended approach to crisis management has evolved through three stages. The search for a model of good practice began with a model drawn from the crisis management literature. The second stage involved conducting interviews with general managers from hotels in Northern Ireland. The key focus of these interviews was a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the literature based model. As a result of these interviews a much simplified model, the Crisis Management Triangle, was developed. The Crisis Management Triangle was then presented to a focus group of managers to confirm that it represented a realistic, feasible, clear approach to crisis management which could be deployed in Northern Ireland hotels. The crisis management triangle highlights the key components of effective crisis management:
- the crisis team;
- a crisis audit;
- the crisis plan; and
- training.

KEYWORDS: Crisis Management; Hotels; Small/Medium Business; Model Good Practice; Northern Ireland.

INTRODUCTION

There is compelling evidence to suggest that organisations throughout the world are becoming more crisis-prone given the complex operating environment in which they function. If major organisational crises are to be avoided, the growth of crisis-prone organisations must be matched by an increase in effective crisis management.

Most hotel managers, after only a few years in business, become used to dealing with the wide range of operational problems that seem to hit their organisations with amazing regularity. The nature of the business and the diversity of customers make it difficult to guess what the next challenge will be. As well as coping with these everyday problems, hotel managers must prepare their organisations for any crises which may confront their establishments.

Problems may be described as "commonplace in business ... problems can be addressed in a *limited* time frame without arousing public attention and without draining the human resources of an organisation" [6]. Crises, by definition, have much more far reaching consequences for businesses

THE IMPORTANCE OF CRISIS MANAGEMENT

There is growing pressure on organisations to put effective crisis management plans in place. Bland [7] identifies key changes in the operating environment which have had a significant impact on crisis management:

Society is changing - there is less respect for authority and the media who "seldom attacked icons" now have "acquired the power to destroy organisations whether they are guilty or not" [8].

Legal Developments - as individuals and groups becoming more protected by law organisations face increasingly harsh penalties when things go wrong.

Heads Must Roll - "We live in an age when people no longer believe in accidents - someone must be guilty" [9].

The 'Enemy' is Getting Smarter - pressure groups, politicians, campaigning lawyers and the media are becoming increasingly sophisticated, well resourced and well organised. "It is a foolhardy company nowadays that regards a pressure group campaign against it as no more than a thorn in it the side" [10]

Disgruntled Employees - There is an increasing likelihood of disgruntled employees triggering organisational crises. "In an era of 'business process restructuring', 'downsizing', 'right-sizing', 're-engineering' and other redundancy programmes, many crises involve the disgruntled former employee who comes out of the woodwork after the event and says 'I warned them'. There is also more danger of a redundant employee with a grudge sabotaging or poisoning your products and/or hitting you with an extortion threat" [11].

Management Awareness - on a positive note, management are increasingly aware of the need for better public relations and sound crisis management.

We live in a Goldfish Bowl - it is almost impossible to avoid the media "even small towns increasingly have at least one freelance 'stringer' with a video camera and a satellite transmitter" [12].

Armchairism - The growth in media channels has resulted in the need for more experts to give their 'expert opinion' in print or on screen. This need for experts often results in "a deafening chorus of criticism" of often complex and fast-changing crises from people who have only "minimal knowledge or understanding of what is actually going on" [13].

Perception is Reality - A potential scare together with a lack of knowledge is all that is needed for a potential crisis "For a crisis is not what has *happened*, it is what people *think* has happened" [14].

Pressure from consumers, pressure groups, legislation and the investigative media combine to make crisis management an essential element of effective management. When one adds the complexity of the hotel's operating environment, the need for crisis management in hotels becomes even more evident.

VULNERABILITY OF THE HOTEL INDUSTRY.

Writers such as Rousaki & Alcott [15], Barton [16], Bland [17,18] and Brewton [19] talk of the inevitability of crises in the hotel industry. Even a brief review of the crisis management literature will include details of crises linked to the hospitality industry: the outbreak of Legionnaires Disease at Philadelphia's Bellevue Stratford Hotel (1976); the MGM Grand Hotel fire (1980); the Hyatt Regency skybridge collapse in Kansas City (1981); the bombing of the Grand Hotel in Brighton (1984), to name but a few. Added to this, one must consider the impact which incidents such as the 9/11 attacks (2001), the Bali bombings (2002 & 2005), the Indian Ocean Tsunami (2004), the London bombings (2005), Hurricane Katrina (2005) and the earthquakes in New Zealand (2010) and Japan (2011) had on hotels across these regions.

Given the nature of the industry, hotels must be friendly, inviting and easy to access. Members of the public, as well as residents, are encouraged to use the facilities. This kind of open access policy makes hotels easy targets for criminals, terrorists, etc. In addition, the fact that guests eat, drink and sleep on the premises opens up a whole range of potential crises linked to food poisoning, fire, criminal damage and issues relating to personal safety. It is easy to imagine the dangers associated with having to evacuate a hotel full of sleeping guests.


THE NEED FOR PLANNING.

Case studies outlining effective crisis management often reveal that the critical success factor was planning. While it has been accepted that crises, by their very nature, are unexpected and unique it is vital that hotel managers/companies make every effort to prepare a crisis management strategy. "Crisis management involves planning for the unforeseen and is based on the assumption that while all crises are different it is possible to prepare a generic plan which will increase the likelihood of ... surviving a crisis" [20]. This point of view is reflected in the work of Barton who states that: "Crisis

management for the hospitality industry begins and ends with planning" [21]. In the absence of sound crisis management success occurs by chance rather than by design.

LITERATURE BASED MODEL

Following a review of key work in the area of crisis management it is possible to identify themes or ideas that may be considered critical success factors in effective crisis management. Drawing on the literature, crisis management for small to medium sized hotels was divided into six core elements. From each of these elements flow a number of spin-off tasks, which must be carried out within the business.

Fig. 1: Literature-Based Model
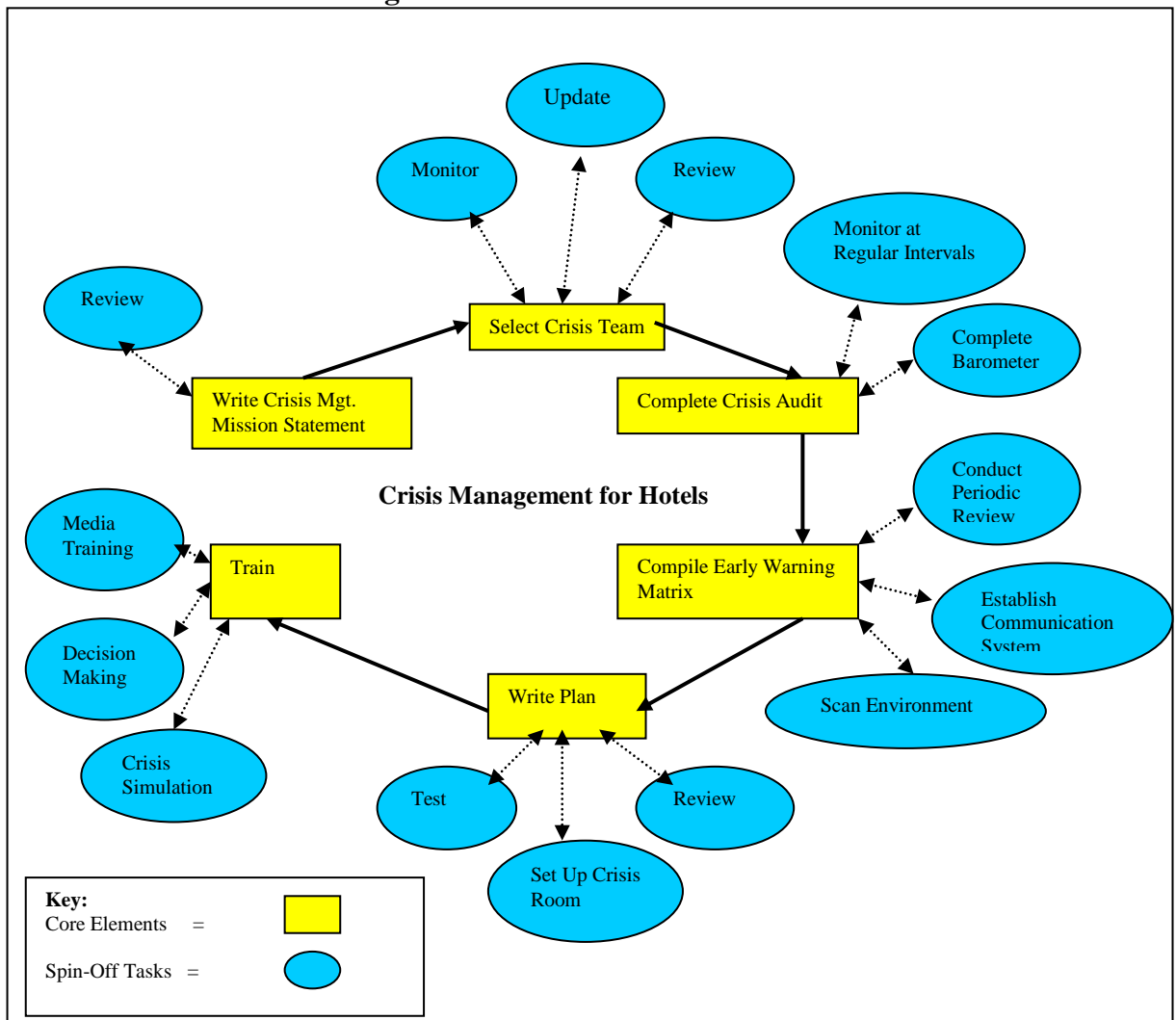
This literature-based model was the starting point for a model of good practice for the Northern Ireland hotel industry but it was clear that this approach was too complex for small to medium sized hotels. The next step involved modification of the model based on empirical data.

METHODOLOGY

Individual semi-structured interviews provided an excellent opportunity to discuss the literature-based model with those responsible for crisis management in hotels in Northern Ireland. This research broke new ground in that crisis management in hotels in Northern Ireland had not been studied before, therefore, it was vital that there were as few constraints as possible placed on the way the data was gathered – depth interviews allowed for this freedom to explore. To begin to understand how managers should approach crisis management it was important to explore what they understood by crisis and what they do in order to make their hotels less crisis-prone. A questionnaire could have asked a series of open-ended questions such as: What do you understand by the word "crisis"? What do you do to be crisis-prepared? However, as outlined by Stroh:

> While providing some of what I needed, the approach would not have allowed me to follow up immediately people's responses and to explore the contradictions and inconsistencies that are part of every day life. [22]

Questionnaires tend to "force" responses into categories which they "may not have thought of unprompted or may not want to use" [23]. Depth interviews allowed for a more in-depth exploration of organisational crises and the proposed model. This richness is vitally important when investigating an area of research which is in its infancy in Northern Ireland.

The recruitment and selection of appropriate interviewees played a vital role in the overall success of the project and the quality of the results obtained. The composition of the group had to relate to the research question. In this case the views of those charged with implementing crisis management in hotels were being sought. Given that crisis management should have a strategic focus, the research population was defined as General Managers of Hotels in Northern Ireland.

When determining the sample to be interviewed it was important to remember:

> The depth and richness of the findings of qualitative methods compared to the breadth of data produced by quantitative approached do not lend themselves, nor do they require, a statistically representative sample. Clearly, the relatively small number of interviewees in a qualitative project could not provide an adequate basis for inferential statistics. The inferences that can be drawn from qualitative data are termed common sense or logical, rather than statistical. [24]

No relationship between vulnerability to crises and the size, location or ownership of the business has been established. The crisis management literature emphasises that there is no obvious pattern to the type of organisations which crises strike. It was decided, therefore, not to attempt to segment the hotels but instead to select a random sample. A random sample of twenty hotels was selected from the one hundred and twenty nine hotels in Northern Ireland.

During each interview the literature-based model was explored with the manager; who was asked to review and evaluate each element of the model. Managers were asked to give their initial reaction to the model before being asked to provide more a

comprehensive analysis of each element. Finally the managers were asked to identify what they considered to be the essential elements of crisis management. The material gathered during these interviews determined what modifications were made to the literature-based model and thus assisted in the development of a model of good practice for the hotel industry.

Once the modified model was developed it was important to have this approach validated by those who had helped with its formation. It was decided that a focus group, drawn from those interviewed, would be the most appropriate way to gain this validation.

As with all methodologies, the key to success with focus groups lies in ensuring the method is compatible with the research objectives. Focus groups have most value and compatibility where the research undertaken is of an exploratory nature or where a confirmatory tool is required. Focus groups may also be the preferred method when the data required in "emic" rather than "etic" in character, as defined by Krippendorf [25]. Krippendorf described data that rises in natural or indigenous form with only minimal imposition by the researcher or the research setting as emic. Conversely, etic data represents the researcher's imposed view of the situation. The starting point of the empirical element of this research was a literature-based model which, by definition, is etic in nature. In order to gain balance, a more emic methodology was employed when attempting to produce a model of good practice for use in the hotel industry. The use of focus groups will "allow individuals to respond in their own words, using their own categorizations and perceived associations"[26]. A more structured approach to evaluating the acceptability and feasibility of the model, where response categories were prescribed, would have further increased the control of the researcher over the final model.

Crisis management is a relatively new area of management, particularly in Northern Ireland. Focus groups were, therefore, an appropriate method by which to study this area of business:

> Phenomenon that are not understood well often are studied first with tools that yield more emic data. As a particular phenomenon is understood better and greater theoretical and empirical structure is built around it, tools that yield more etic types of data tend to predominate. As knowledge accumulates, it often becomes apparent that the explanatory structure surrounding a given phenomenon is incomplete. This frequently leads to the need for data that are more emic, and the process continues. [27]

The aim of the focus group was to confirm that the changes made to the literature-based model accurately reflected the opinion of the group and that the crisis management triangle represented a realistic, feasible and clear approach to crisis management in Northern Ireland hotels. During the focus group participants were asked to compare the literature-based model and the crisis management triangle. They were asked to assess the overall suitability of the proposed model of good practice, with particular reference to how it would fit within their hotel.

THE CRISIS MANAGEMENT TRIANGLE

As outlined above, the recommended approach or model of good practice for crisis management in hotels in Northern Ireland has evolved through three stages. The search for a model of good practice began with a model drawn from the crisis management literature. The second stage involved discussing the model with general managers from hotels in Northern Ireland. As a result of these interviews a much simplified model, the crisis management triangle, was developed. The crisis management triangle was then presented to a focus group of managers to confirm that it represented a realistic, feasible, clear approach to crisis management in Northern Ireland hotels. The final model represents the end product from the literature review, the interviews and the focus group. The crisis management triangle highlights the key components of crisis management:

- the crisis team;
- the need to conduct an audit of the business with a view to determining key areas where crises could strike;
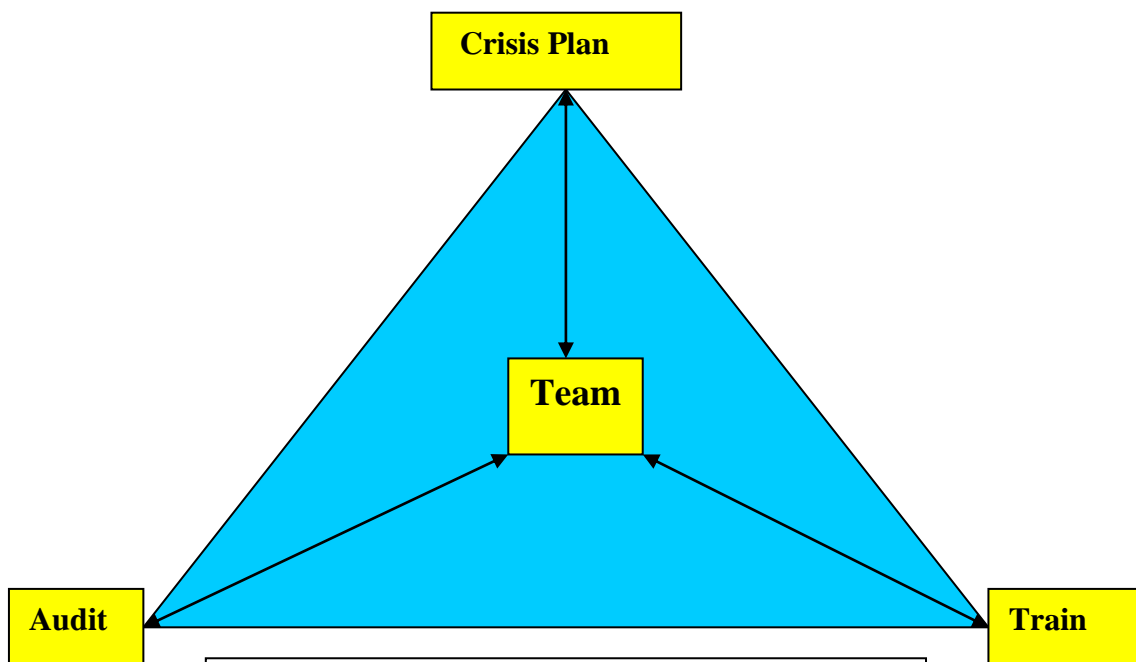- the crisis plan; and
- training.

Fig. 2: The Crisis Management Triangle

The crisis management triangle represents a continuous process where everything feeds through the crisis management team. The triangle has a minimum number of steps in order to ensure that managers do not have a "mental block" about implementation and

because, in general, simplicity works. A complex model is unlikely to be acceptable or feasible in the hotel industry:

> Some organisations have little or no crisis planning in place, and pay the price for it dearly when something goes wrong. Others are stifled by their cumbersome and unworkable procedures. [28]

Manager seven, who was interviewed as part of the study, also made the point that it may be necessary to develop a complex system in order to "satisfy the academics" who would read this work but that it must be kept "as simple as possible if it is to be of any real value". The recommended approach is one which is straightforward, easy to implement and should provide a clear model of good practice for managers to follow. In many ways the key to developing a successful model from the literature-based model lay in the integration rather than the elimination of key ideas.

Team

The crisis team is at the core of crisis management. This team is the centre of all activity. All information moves through the team so that it may be analysed, filtered and acted upon. Given the dynamic nature of both hotels and crises it is vital that crisis management becomes a mainstream function within the organisation. The focus group felt that the crisis team should ensure that crisis management becomes a standing item on the agenda of each management meeting. This will help to ensure new internal weaknesses or threats in the operating environment are identified before they escalate and threaten the survival or profitability of the business.

There was a very positive response to the crisis team being formed around key roles and skills rather than having each department represented. The role-based team structure reflects the approach recommended by authors such as Regester [29] and Bell [30]. Such an approach should encourage team members to think of the hotel as a whole and not simply to safeguard their own department. In a large or well resourced hotel each person on the team may fill one role, whilst in smaller or less well resourced hotels it may be necessary to allocate two roles per person (see Figures 3 and 4).

The suggested pairings of roles evolved from discussions with managers. Very often, particularly in a family-owned and operated hotel, a figurehead emerges. It was felt that this person is a natural choice as leader of the crisis team but he/she is also a key source of ideas to solve problems or crises. This led to the doubling up of the role of leader and ideas person. Similarly there were obvious links between the spokesperson and the people person as both must be tuned into the needs of many stakeholders – employees, guests, suppliers and the general public. The role of information manager and operations manager may be filled by a person who has a "good eye for detail", someone who is used to undertaking detailed work within the hotel.

Fig. 3 - TEAM COMPOSITION FOR USE IN LARGER HOTELS OR RESOURCES PERMITTING	
Personnel	**Role**
Core Member – Person 1	Leader
Core Member – Person 2	Ideas Person
Core Member – Person 3	Spokesperson
Core Member – Person 4	People Person
Core Member – Person 5	Operations Manager
Core Member – Person 6	Information Manager
Crisis-Specific Specialist(s)	Advice on technical aspects of the crisis
NOTE: The composition of the crisis team must be reviewed and updated at regular and frequent intervals (not less than once each year).	

Fig. 4 - TEAM COMPOSITION FOR USE IN SMALL HOTELS OR WHERE RESOURCES ARE LIMITED		
Personnel	**Primary Role**	**Secondary Role**
Core Member – Person 1	Leader	Ideas Person
Core Member – Person 2	Spokesperson	People Person
Core Member – Person 3	Operations Manager	Information Manager
Crisis-Specific Specialist(s)	Advice on technical aspects of the crisis	Assist with preparation of technically accurate press releases etc
NOTE: The composition of the crisis team must be reviewed and updated at regular and frequent intervals (not less than once each year).		

The crisis team should have two components, the core team and crisis-specific team members comprising of specialists who can offer technical or expert knowledge pertinent to a particular crisis. Fink [31] and Shrivastava and Mitroff [32] were particularly strong advocates of the need for a core team with general crisis management skills complimented by a list of specialists who could be called upon to assist with different types of crises. This approach stops the team becoming unwieldy or beyond the reach of small hotels.

The crisis team will play a key role in ensuring the success of crisis management within the hotel. They should be proactive in promoting best practice within the business. The

setting up of a crisis management team is in line with the recommendations of many key authors. Regester outlined the benefits of an effective crisis team:

> If it does its job effectively, the team will minimize the risk of a crisis occurring in the first place, will help contain the crisis should it occur, will reduce the damage to the organization's reputation and will change the organization's culture from responsive to positive. [33]

The team should play a vital role in helping the hotel to prepare for crises. It will ensure crises are managed effectively and will co-ordinate the post-crisis review so that maximum learning takes place and any necessary changes are made to plans and procedures. The recommendations put forward by Fink [34] are worthy of note at this point. He suggested a review should take place – following a test, after an emergency has occurred, to reflect changes in personnel and following changes to premises, work processes or organisation structure and at least once each year.
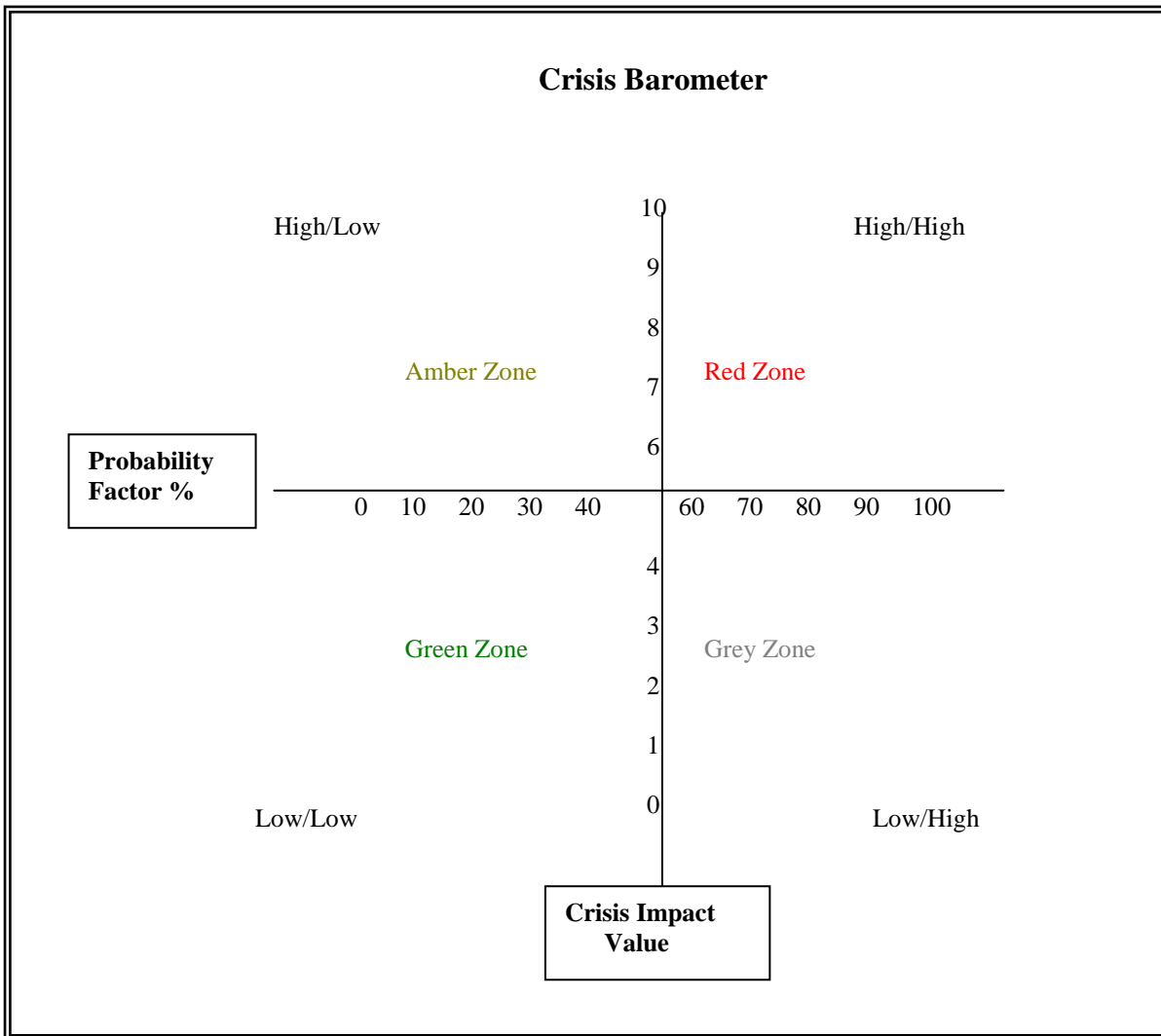
Audit

The focus group agreed that the first task which the crisis team should initiate is the completion of a crisis audit. Authors such as Augustine [35], Fink [36], Shrivastava and Mitroff [37] and Kutner [38] suggest some mechanism to assess potential trouble or hazards should be utilised. The completion of the audit should begin with a brainstorming session when individuals are asked to identify crises which could strike the hotel. At this stage all suggestions should be accepted and nothing dismissed. The crisis team must take responsibility for completing the audit but each department should be encouraged to take part in the exercise. This constitutes good practice as very often it is the operative level staff who will be most aware of the weaknesses which exist within the business.

Once the list of potential crises has been developed, some judgement should be made as to the likelihood of each crisis occurring and the damage potential of each. This will allow for the classification of crises as red, amber, green or grey. The colour-coding will assist with prioritising resources - so that time and money may be spent on reducing the impact of the most likely and most severe crises, before moving on to less serious issues.

The crisis barometer (see Figure 5) may be used to assist in the colour-coding process. For the hotel industry the use of the barometer as a qualitative tool to structure thinking was recommended. However the original quantitative application, as devised by Fink [39] may be utilised.

Fig. 5: THE CRISIS BAROMETER [40]

Crisis Barometer

The third and final stage of the audit involves the identification of early warning signals for each crisis. The crisis team should work with specialist staff to ensure that appropriate warning signals are listed. The list of early warning signals for each crisis will highlight to staff the kinds of things they need to feed back to their line manager or the crisis team. Shrivastava and Mitroff wrote of the need to develop "vigilance skills" in the workforce so that a culture of "safety and vigilance" may be fostered. They suggest this is best achieved through "continuous … inspection, modification and reinspection" [41].

Early identification of a potential crisis may help the hotel avoid the crisis altogether which is the "least costly and the simplest way to control a potential crisis" [42]. Even if avoidance is not possible the audit and early warning mechanism should help to ensure the crisis team have maximum time available to manage the incident. A crisis audit sheet should be used to summarise the outcome of the crisis audit. The crisis audit

sheet should record the type of crisis, its colour-code (drawn from the crisis barometer) and an indication of the early warning signals which may be expected.

It is important not to get too caught up in trying to identify every single crisis which could strike the hotel. There are elements of many crises which overlap hence there is a great deal of knowledge transfer between crises. This can be illustrated by considering a bomb scare and a structural failure. In both cases the key task is likely to be the safe evacuation of guests from the premises. If structural failure was not identified during the crisis audit, but bomb scares were and an evacuation plan for bomb scares was developed, this plan is just as valid when a structural failure necessitates evacuation of the hotel. The core element of managing a range of crises may involve evacuation of the building or movement of large numbers of people or relocation of the business to another premises etc. the exact nature of the crisis is not important during the planning phase. As Kutner [43] suggested there are core elements of every crisis that can be anticipated and planned for – dealing with the media, addressing productivity concerns, working with insurance professionals and handling security issues.

An audit should be carried out at regular and frequent intervals so that it remains current. The recommendation from the focus group was that an audit should be completed at least once every three months and when significant changes in the operating environment are detected.

Crisis Plan

The focus group agreed that each hotel should draw together the information and resources needed to manage a crisis effectively. The crisis plan should be viewed as a blue print for action – what to do when a crisis strikes. The group agreed that the following sections should be included within crisis plans.

Section A: Introduction
- Crisis Policy Statement
- Letter from General Manager
- Introduction to Crisis Team & Contact Details
- External Contacts/Specialists & Contact Details
- What is a crisis?
- Summary of Crisis Audit

Section B: Policies & Procedures
- Activating Crisis Plan
- Evacuation of Premises – General Guidelines
- Procedure for managing bomb scares & bombs
- Procedure for managing fires
- Dealing with customer complaints
- Procedure for managing food poisoning incidents
- Procedure for managing accidents
- Procedure for managing robberies
- Procedure for managing civil disturbances
- Procedure for moving large numbers of people

SECTION C – Action Cards
- Duty Manager
- Reception
- Porters
- Restaurant
- Bar
- Kitchen
- House keeping

SECTION D – The Media
- Checklist – Working with the media
- Sample Press Releases
- Designated Media Area
- Contact Sheets
- List of media contacts

SECTION E – Plans
- Plan of building
- Location of hazardous material
- Location of fire extinguishers
- Location of gas & water control valves/taps
- Map of local area
- Alternative operating site

SECTION F – Forms
- Contact sheets
- Accident/incident report forms
- Evaluation sheets
- Confirmation of receipt form

SECTION G – Training Scenarios

The group felt that while this is not designed to be a definitive list, it would encourage managers to at least consider each of the elements listed. It should be noted that the procedures suggested by the focus group relate to key areas of concern for managers in Northern Ireland. These may not apply to all regions.

Once the crisis team have determined what the crisis plan for their hotel should contain, responsibility for each section should be allocated to a member of the team. This should ensure the task is completed more quickly. The suggestion made by Barton [44] that the plan should be written in less than six weeks has considerable merit. It was felt that the team effort would engender a sense of ownership and help to ensure a deeper understanding of the plan.

The plan should be updated at least once each year. It may also be necessary to update the plan when new legislation is introduced, after a crisis, if weaknesses in systems and procedures are identified, if a serious complaint is received and as a result of change in

the internal or external trading environment. To facilitate updating, the crisis plan should be presented in a ring binder and in electronic format so that outdated sections may be removed and replaced with more relevant material.

The crisis plan encourages proactive crisis management. It is important to make key decisions before a crisis strikes so that informed decisions are made rather than inappropriate reactions which can cause even greater damage to the business. There will also be a considerable amount of time saved if core elements are arranged in advance:

> An effective crisis management plan presets key decisions on the *mechanical* portions of the crisis - those aspects that rarely vary - and leaves you free to manage the *content* portion of the crisis with your hands unfettered. [45]

The managers rejected Regester's [46] suggestion that a suitably equipped crisis room should be established. However, the idea of a "red box" containing items which would be useful during a crisis was considered of value. It was agreed that such a box should include: a copy of the crisis plan, a mobile phone, a telephone book, pens and paper, torch, spare car/minibus keys, a list of residents (to be inserted by head receptionist), a staff list, and a contact list. It was felt that having these items could save valuable time when time is at a premium.

Training

It is vital that systems and procedures are tested and employees are prepared for crises and the part that they must play if the crisis is to be managed successfully. A crisis simulation should allow management to meet both of these challenges. During the focus group there was much discussion as to which approach should be adopted – live incidents or table top exercises. Neither were considered completely satisfactory. The live incident is more realistic but only those who happen to be on duty during the simulation are tested. Managers also felt that such a training initiative could have a detrimental impact on their guests and result in a breakdown in trust between management and staff. The table top approach is less intrusive but it is also less realistic and unlikely to determine how individuals will actually react in the event of a crisis. It was agreed that scenario-based training was the most suitable in the hotel context. Managers could then decide which would be more beneficial - to run with a single scenario which unfolds over set period of time or a series of short scenarios based on the hotel and the crisis plan. This use of scenarios as the focus for discussion was favoured by authors such as Barton [47] and Regester [48].

Regardless of the approach adopted it is vital that crisis training takes place at frequent, regular intervals. Training should also occur when a gap in knowledge, systems or procedures is identified. It was felt that the use of computer-based training, where employees log on, their details are recorded and their responses are sent via email to the crisis team, may be useful when due diligence is an issue since a written record of the training exists. The group believed that the area of due diligence was becoming increasingly important. Regester stressed that the rules for survival are the same regardless of the nature of the crisis: "A record of reasonable deeds is a vital ingredient

for a positive image" [49]. A written record of the staff's response to a computer-based simulation would help to prove that the hotel adopted a proactive rather than a reactive approach to crisis management.

Once employees have been trained their responses can be assessed and analysed at individual, departmental or hotel level. As well as acting as a training tool a computer-based simulation can be a useful diagnostic tool as it allows management to spot weaknesses in knowledge or in the crisis management system.

It is important that staff are well prepared for crises although it is recognised that "training is not an easy area … But one thing is for certain: some training is better than none" [50].

It is also important to remember that no matter how much training staff receive things can still go wrong as the emotion and adrenaline-rush associated with a crisis can have a significant impact on individuals. Even when staff are performing well during the on-line simulation or during live-incidents the warning issued by Bland should be remembered: "Successful simulations, like fat manuals, can breed dangerous complacency"[51].

Alongside general crisis training it was felt that a number of people should receive media training. The recommended approach is to employ a media consultant to provide training for at least two members of the crisis team. This is an area which can make the difference between the success and failure of crisis management.

CONCLUSION

It is important to acknowledge that this paper does not seek to present a universally accepted model of good practice for crisis managers. It does not prove, in statistically significant terms, that this is the only successful approach which may be adopted by managers in hotels. However, it does provide, for the first time, a model of good practice which is considered a realistic, feasible and clear approach to crisis management for the hotels and managers involved in this study.

When interpreting the findings of this research there are certain considerations which should be remembered. As with most research, there were subjective decisions made which have an impact on the final conclusions and recommendations. The most significant of these are:

- the decision to include some models/approaches in the literature-review and to eliminate others;

- the decision to include certain elements in the literature-based model, which served as the basis for the final model, and reject others;

- the decision to adopt a qualitative approach rather than a quantitative approach to data collection and analysis. However, the chosen strategy has resulted in a richness and depth of information that is unlikely to have emerged from the use of other qualitative or quantitative techniques. The group dynamic present during the focus group provided a particularly exciting research opportunity.

The number of hotels studied must also be considered along with the geographic location of the research. The words of one of the managers interviewed are worth remembering:

> When you are talking to a hotelier in Northern Ireland, you are talking to a different breed because what would be major crises for other people are on going issues for us rather than crises. (G.M. Hotel 02)

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