

**Successful crisis communication
in the public sector**
*- Communication experts' views on best practices
and quality*

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Master's thesis
Organizational Communication and
Public Relations
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November 2011

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiedekunta - Faculty Faculty of Humanities	Laitos - Department Department of Communication
Tekijä - Author Koivisto Anna	
Työn nimi - Title SUCCESSFUL CRISIS COMMUNICATION IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR - Communication experts' views on best practices and quality	
Oppiaine - Subject Organizational Communication and PR	Työn laji - Level Master 's thesis
Aika - Month and year September 2011	Sivumäärä - Number of pages 67 pages + appendix 5 pages
<p>Tiivistelmä - Abstract</p> <p>Crisis communication measurements have been adopted in many Finnish public sector organizations in past few years, but there has been a little research about how effective the plans and the measurements made are.</p> <p>Focus of this research is to define public sector communication experts' views on best practices behind crisis communication and clarify how they evaluate quality in crisis communication in the public sector. The aim of the study is also to see the comparison between the theory and the views that the public sector experts have. The study is part of the international research "Developing a Crisis Communication Scorecard, coordinated by the Communication department of University of Jyväskylä.</p> <p>The research was made by comparing the answers of eight communication experts responsible for crisis communication in Finnish public sector organizations. The organization represented national, regional and municipal level operators.</p> <p>As a conclusion it can be stated that the theory of best practices in crisis communication can be implemented in the public sector organizations in Finland. The most important issue for the organizations in question is that they do their best in a difficult situation, aim for success and try to prevent the crisis from getting worse. For this reason public sector organizations need to protect their reputation and to be a trustworthy actor.</p>	
Asiasanat - Keywords Crisis communication, Best practices, Public sector organizations, quality criteria	
Säilytyspaikka - Depository University of Jyväskylä, library	

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Finnish public sector has encountered many serious crisis situations in the last decade such as the Tsunami in 2004, the school shootings in 2007 and 2008 and the swine flu threat in 2009. The public sector has been forced to develop their crisis communication plans especially after the Tsunami, where 179 Finnish people were killed in west coast of Sumatra. New guidelines for governmental communications in crisis and emergency situations have been renewed in 2007 (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2010). After that many Finnish municipalities and governmental organizations have renewed or developed their crisis communication plans and strategies. The focus of this renewal of strategies should be a question of success. Is the communication that the organizations execute in crisis situations of good quality?

Crisis communication is needed when crisis occurs inside the organization or in the working area of the organization. The term *crisis* has been defined by many communication experts. According to Massey (2001, 157) a crisis is a major, unpredictable event that may harm an organization and its stakeholders. Fishman continues that additional characteristics are common to most crises in public organizations such as a threat to institutional values, a short response time and increased pressure by stakeholders for information (Fishman 1999, 347). Ullmer, Seeger and Sellnow (2007, 5-6) emphasize that crisis creates severe threats to the public health and welfare. In this research the focus is on crises that can be defined as emergency situations and crises caused by natural disasters.

A best practice is a method or an activity that is believed to be more effective at reaching an outcome, than any other method, when used in a particular condition or circumstance. The idea is that with broad testing, wanted outcome can be delivered with fewer problems. (Business Dictionary 2010.) Best practice thinking has evolved in many areas in human life since the 1990's. From health care practices it has transferred also in the field of

communication, especially crisis communication through the development made by Vincent Covello and Matthew Seeger (2006, 232 - 233). With best practice thinking it is possible to improve the effectiveness of crisis communication especially in large publicity-managed crisis. The concept of best practices is frequently used to improve organizational practice in many areas like corporate communication, public relations and change communication.

Best practices thinking is accompanied with the idea that crisis communication should be effective and have quality over quantity. The idea is tested in the international research “Developing a Crisis Communication Scorecard (CrisComScore)”, to which this thesis also contributes, coordinated by the Communication department of University of Jyväskylä. The project aims to develop an audit instrument and guidelines for crisis communication strategies that public authorities are better prepared to communicate in crisis situations. (Jyväskylän yliopisto 2010.) In the base of the scorecard are the quality criteria developed from literature by Vos and Palttala (see appendix 1) that are tested in this research. Theoretical base of this study combines the idea of best practices together with communication quality in public sector (figure 1). Combining those two concepts it is possible to identify what is considered successful crisis communication in public sector.



FIGURE 1. Theoretical base of the thesis.

Focus of this research is to define public sector communication experts' views on best practices behind crisis communication and clarify how they evaluate quality in crisis communication in the public sector. The aim of the study is also to compare the theory of best practices and quality thinking in crisis communication, and the views that the public sector experts have. What is quality in crisis communication? Does the best practice thinking apply to crisis communication in public sector?

The theory part of this thesis is divided in three chapters: first chapter introduces the public sector in Finland, second chapter defines crisis communication and third chapter defines best practices in crisis communication.

2 PUBLIC SECTOR AUTHORITIES IN FINLAND

Public administration is according to Kettl and Fessler (2009), the translation of politics into the reality that citizens see every day. The main task of public administration is to provide services, to legislate and to protect the citizens. Finland's public authorities are divided in many segments. The highest organs of government are Parliament, Government and the President. In a lower step are the ministries but also the municipalities as they have broad self-governance in some issues and tasks. Under the ministries is the Local State administration and under that is Regional State administrations and Regional municipal administration (see figure 2.). The most important tasks of public administration are general administration, maintaining the public order and safety and maintaining the welfare services such as education, health care and social services (Suomi.fi 2010a).



FIGURE 2. Diagram of the public sector administration in Finland. (Suomi.fi 2010a.)

In this research three of the Finnish public sector segments are studied as cases: the ministries, regional municipal administration and local government administration.

2.1 Ministries

Finland has twelve separate ministries that function as administrative and political experts and prepare government decisions. They also represent their relevant administrative sectors in domestic and international cooperation.

Ministries work in close cooperation with regional and local administration, such as local authorities. Typical focus areas of cooperation involve the development of legislation and public services. Ministries also direct and supervise regional and local administration within their administrative sectors. (Suomi.fi 2010a.)

2.2 Regional municipal administration

There is a growing number of municipal co-operation. Within co-operation municipalities can provide municipal tasks such as health care services economically. At the moment, there are 228 regional joint municipal authorities producing services for more than one municipality. Healthcare and education are the most common basic services provided by these organs, even though there is also regional cooperation between municipalities in other basic services. (Suomi.fi 2010a.)

A joint municipal authority has the general assembly as its highest decision-making body, which provides the member municipalities a platform for using their decision-making powers. Administration is the responsibility of a board, which is assisted by the required number of officials. Member municipalities are responsible for funding the authority. (Suomi.fi 2010a.)

2.3 Local government administration

Municipalities are responsible for providing their residents statutory basic services. The most important of these services are social welfare and health, education and culture, the environment, and infrastructure. Local self-government is on the basis of political decision-making and municipalities must adhere to democratic principles. (Suomi.fi 2010b.)

According to the Local Government Act, local authorities may assume non-statutory responsibilities. New responsibilities or duties cannot be assigned to local authorities, except by passing legislation to this effect.

The Constitution of Finland (1999) states the central features of local self-government:

- The council has the general decision-making authority in local affairs. In addition, local authorities have certain specified responsibilities.
- Local authorities have the power to make financial decisions, based on the right to collect taxes.
- Local government is separate from central government, and the municipal bodies are partly independent of the state. (LocalFinland.fi 2010.)

The municipal council is the supreme decision-making body in a municipality. Its members are elected for a four-year term in local elections which are based on universal suffrage. The council elects members to the municipal board which is responsible for preparing matters for the council and putting its decisions into effect. (Suomi.fi 2010a.)

3 CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Crisis and risk situations are a part of everyday life, and in a larger scale the crisis can be controlled by using communication measures to improve the situation. The challenge in crisis communication is that the decisions must be made quickly and without some of the necessary information.

3.1 Defining crisis

The term *crisis* has been defined by many communication experts. According to Massey (2001, 157) a crisis is a major, unpredictable event that may harm an organization and its stakeholders. Fishman continues that additional characteristics are common to most crises such as a threat to institutional values, a short response time and increased pressure by stakeholders for information (Fishman, 1999, 347). Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow (2007, 5-6) emphasize that crises create severe threats to the public health and welfare. Herman stated already in 1963 that crisis has three different characteristics that separate it from other unpleasant occurrences: surprise, threat and short response time. Even natural disasters can't be defined as crisis unless they come at a time or a level of intensity beyond the expectations of governmental officials. The threat of a crisis can be many things such as a threat to financial security, customers and patients. The short response time in crisis means that they must be dealt very quickly to prevent greater losses.

Crises in modern world include threats like terrorism, unethical business practices, technical malfunctions, natural disasters, product tampering, and industrial, economic, and food borne illnesses among many others. Crises inflict wide-ranging damage: physical (humans and the environment), economic (communities and individuals), psychological (victims, survivors, families, and observers), and emotional, such as fear, guilt, and anger (stakeholders, victims, and observers). (Malone & Coombs 2009, 121.) In this study we focus on crises that are caused by natural catastrophes or human action intentionally or unintentionally.

3.2 Defining crisis communication

Crisis communication is needed to protect the organization from the negative outcomes of the crisis. Coombs (1999, 4) states that crisis communication is sending and receiving messages so that the measurements protect the organization and its stakeholders from more damage. Communication processes in a crisis situation are designed to reduce harm, provide information, initiate recovery, manage perceptions of blame, repair legitimacy, generate support, apologize and promote healing and learning (Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer 2003, 65). Crisis communication seeks to explain a specific event, identify consequences and outcomes and to produce harm reducing information about the situation (Reynolds & Seeger 2005, 46). In addition, crisis communication also seeks to reduce anxiety and concerns among the larger public and also provide information to victims, their relatives and other people who are affected by the incident. Malone and Coombs (2009, 121) emphasize that communication occurs both internally inside the organization and externally to various stakeholders and publics. Communication occurs throughout the various stages of a crisis: pre-crisis (prevention and preparation), in the event (intervention), post-crisis (when cause, blame, and responsibility are assessed), and recovery phase (repair and rebuilding).

The challenge in crisis communication is that the decisions must be made quickly and without some of the necessary information. The communication decisions may also be irreversible (Courtney, Cole & Reynolds 2003, 129). In such circumstances, it's normal to wish for a scenario-based plan that provides a step-by-step procedure for addressing the specific situation (Stanton 2002, 20). Organizational crisis are by nature infrequent events. When they do occur, organizations are reluctant to open current or past wounds to external examination and speculation (Pearson & Clair, 1998, 17).

Different kind of crises cause different forms of threats and therefore need different communication measurements like recommendations, information to the public, warnings. Typically these measurements rely on the mass media to contact the public (Seeger & Reynolds 2009, 7). Fearn-Banks (2000, 480) states that crisis communication is verbal, visual or written communication between organization and its publics prior, during and after the negative event. Crisis communication can be seen as a part of public relations operations especially after crisis. It is meant to strategically defend

and explain the organization's place in the crisis (Reynolds & Seeger 2005, 46). Small (1991, according to Reynolds & Seeger 2005, 46) added that there has been a change in crisis communication in the 1990's to produce honest, candid, prompt, accurate and responsive messages from the organization's communication.

The target of effective crisis communication is to determine goals to crisis communication, to prevent more harm of occurring, monitoring perception of the views of the stakeholders and the public, prevent new crisis occurring and to stabilize the situation. It is also possible to find positive factors from the crisis and learn from it. (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger 2007, 43 - 47.) The approach is from the organizations point of view; it defines what the best alternative is and what the aim of the crisis communication is.

There has been some criticism about the traditional and dominant crisis communication theories that focus on preserving the reputation of the organization. The criticism is mainly focused on three different issues: managerial bias, functionalistic orientation and lack of marginalized voices. The main weakness of the dominant theory is that the marginal publics are the ones that suffer the most in crisis situations. When the crisis communication, especially in private sector, is based on preserving the reputation and material of the organization, the marginal publics are often left unnoticed. (Kim & Dutta 2009, 142-144.) This means that the general opinion about the reputation of the organization is more important than the opinions of the groups that are mostly affected by the crisis.

Kim and Dutta (2009, 143 - 146) state that the dominant theories of crisis communication are mainly based on the concepts of power and control. They continue that the goal of crisis communication is to protect organizations from damages and to allow them greater control of image. The dominant crisis communication literature is focused on the strategy that organizations need to take a secure favorable position in times of crisis. Kim and Dutta also criticize the message sending form of crisis communication being too sender-oriented. Publics are viewed primarily as receivers of the information that has been send by the organization on crisis. This criticism is mainly appointed to the crisis communication on the private sector. In public sector communication the views of the public is heard more clearly and the perception of public voices is more on the public's safety point of view.

3.3 Crisis communication in public sector

Crisis communication in public sector has unique features that cannot be found in private sector or third sector crisis communication. The main purpose of a public sector communication response to crisis (e.g. in public health sector) is to effectively reduce and prevent injury and death and to help communities and individuals get back to normal state (Reynolds & Seeger 2005, 46-47).

Governmental organizations have multiple roles as a risk-generator, regulator and communicator but it also has the responsibility to deal with consequences of a major crisis situation (e.g. health care and emergency services). It also has the role of evaluating possible risks via legislation and risk communication. (Smith & McCloskey 1998, 41 - 42.) Some governmental organizations do not have a large, fulltime communication staff that could quickly respond to all kinds of crises (e.g. fire departments, municipal hospitals). Also governmental politics influence in the communication measurements of public sector. Change in political leadership can change the emphasis between risk and crisis communication and management. (Horsley and Barker 2002, 425 - 426.) Because the public sector is responsible for the safety of the people, it also needs to perceive which are the issues that raise violence or terrorism, and how can they be handled. Also the public sector needs to communicate in a way that complex issues are understandable and that people still have the option to make their own decisions on how to act in the crisis situation. (Smith & McCloskey 1998, 42.)

Public sector crisis communication uses many of the same communication means as commercial sector, but because of possible long distances between people and event it has to rely on mass media to transmit the message to the public (Smith & McCloskey 1998, 42). This way public sector cannot always control the message sending, but the sector can force some messages to be sent e.g. in all the radio and television channels at the same time, if mentioned in the law. There is also the question of what kind of information can be sent via mass media, because there can be tension between local and national interests concerning the role of the state in certain issues like nuclear industry.

Smith and McCloskey (1998, 42 - 48) state that public sector also has to decide what messages are so important that the public needs to be aware of them even before the crisis has occurred. The warnings need to be released so that it doesn't cause panic, and that the public officials disclose sufficient information so that people have acceptability for the information and they act according to that information. Smith and McCloskey also emphasize that the public needs to trust the information given to them and building trust takes time. Part of the process of trust is to develop means where public can attend to the discussion in crisis situation.

The public sector needs to be ready to coordinate the crisis communication with nongovernmental, community and also fact-based organizations when needed. The coordination between different governmental organizations is also vital for preventing more harm and to help the public get the same and rightful message from all the public operators. Horsley and Barker (2002, 426 - 428) emphasize that governmental organizations should co-operate with each other from the pre-crisis phase. Law experts, public health organizations, educations, media relation services and emergency services could benefit from each other in planning processes and also help local governmental entities. The network of these different agencies could work in all phases of crisis communication. Many public sector operators already work together in separate events, but co-operation in a larger scale should be done.

Public sector communication has entered a new era where crisis communication needs to be reinforced with risk communication measurements. In crisis communication and in the pre-crisis-phase both of the communication measures are needed. In the chapters 3.4 and 3.5 the risk communication and CERC-model that combines crisis and risk communication is presented.

3.4 Defining risk communication

According to Oxford English Dictionary (2010) *risk* is the possibility of loss, injury, or other adverse or unwelcome circumstance. *Risk communication* can be defined as a communication that deals with risk elements and risk consequences (Heat 1994) and is exchange of information and opinions among individuals and groups about the risks (Reynolds & Seeger 2005, 45). Reynolds and Seeger (2005, 45) mention that in practice risk communication

is productions of public messages regarding health and environmental risks. The messages seek to induce behavioral change by presenting a threat and describing behavioral change that would reduce the threat. Risk communication is based on the assumption that the public has a right to know about the risks and they are able to do informed choices regarding risks. Credibility is an important aspect of risk communication because then messages are more effective and produce wanted change in the behavior of the public. When a risk will occur and whom or what it will affect can be studied, mitigated, and even prevented (Malone & Coombs 2009, 121 - 122). Because of the more spontaneous nature of crisis situations, crisis messages are typically less polished and often reach news coverage more than the risk communication messages (Reynolds & Seeger 2005, 49).

Crisis communication has similarities with risk communication and it is been discussed that crisis communication is a form of risk communication. In both communication forms the messages are widely spread through mass media and they both rely on credibility as a fundamental persuasive method. (Seeger & Reynolds 2009, 11.) When the fields of crisis and risk communication come closer, it is important to think whether to talk about crisis or risk communication. For example in health sector the word crisis has a bad connotation to a situation where the public health sector is "out of control". (Ulmer, Alvey & Kordsmeier 2009, 97 - 98.)

However some of the basic goals of crisis and risk communication are different: in risk communication the goal is to message the public about probabilities of harm and encourage change, so the method is more persuasive. In the early state of crisis communication the goal is to inform the public more than persuade. Crisis communication is also event-specific and non-routine method of communication. Crisis communication is more event-oriented in the means that it seeks to respond to immediate public needs for information in less controlled matter than persuasive risk communication. (Seeger & Reynolds 2009, 10 - 12.)

TABLE 1. Features in risk and crisis communication. Based on Seeger & Reynolds 2009, 12.

	Risk communication	Crisis communication
Message	Known probabilities How to reduce negative consequences	Current state of specific event Cause, blame, result
Information	Persuasive	Informative
Time	Frequent / routine	Non-routine, situation oriented
Duration	Long time (precrisis)	Short time (during crisis)
Scope	Personal scope	Personal, regional or organizational scope
Media	Commercial, ads	Press releases, internet

3.5 Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) -model

Because of the divided role that public sector has as crisis communicator, there has been some new developments to create a model that would suite public sector communication in preventing crisis but also for the actual crisis situation. The Crisis and Emergency Risk Control (CERC) -model has been developed in Center for Disease Control and Prevention in United States. The development started in late 1990's, but after the happenings in 2001, especially the anthrax attacks, the development has been quicker and new sectors have adapted the model in different parts of the world. (Courtney, Cole & Reynolds 2003, 128; Reynolds & Seeger 2005, 45.) The model has been developed mainly for the public health sector, but it can be used in sectors similar to the health sector such as some ministries, local authorities and the rescue departments. CERC was developed primarily as a tool to educate public sector for the expanding communication responsibilities in emergency situations (Veil, Reynolds, Sellnow & Seeger 2008, 3).

Before emergency communication has been divided into three dimensions: firstly, in risk communication that includes the warning messages of possible threats and the messages of behavioral change, secondly, to crisis communication in a crisis situation to prevent more people from injuring and thirdly, to issues management that is aimed to health promotion and to influence public policies in health care (Reynolds & Seeger 2005, 43 - 44). A

new situation has developed because risks have altered in to new diseases that spread quickly and to the possibility of terrorism or new kinds of problems inside the community (e.g. the school shootings in Finland). This creates challenges for the public sector communication, but the risks are also new to the general public because of the low familiarity (Reynolds & Seeger 2005, 44). Effort for the CERC-model is to combine risk and crisis communication into practice (Reynolds 2002, 233). This blended form of communication emphasizes the various communication needs and the various publics in the ongoing developments of the crisis situation. It is designed as a process tool from the precise situation to the post-crisis situation. (Reynolds & Seeger 2005, 49.) CERC is a combination of many risk and crisis communication principles in a one general unifying framework. CERC-model differences from classical models of crisis communication with the systematic approach that requires ongoing and escalating communication processes trough the stages of crisis. It is meant to make a dynamic blending of risk and crisis communication both essential and practical point of view. (Veil, Reynolds, Sellnow & Seeger 2008, 3.) The model blends the principles of crisis communication activities and risk messages into one comprehensive model that explains the types of activities that might occur at each stage and the goals those activities might attempt to accomplish. The model assumes that crises follow a predictable pattern. The model traces a crisis from the beginning to end and allows a practitioner to predict future communication needs and problems. The developers note that crises may not follow a linear pattern and often unanticipated interactions will occur. In addition the time it takes to move through the stages of the model will differ drastically from one crisis to another. (Reynolds and Seeger 2005, 49-53.)

During the pre-crisis stage the risk communication means are necessary: promotion of health or environment to educate the general public regarding potential threats. When a threat does erupt in to a crisis situation, different communication measurements are needed and different audiences emerge (e.g. victims, family members, workers and other people affected by the situation). The immediate communication measurements aim at reducing the uncertainty, create basic understanding of the situation and to produce specific guidelines and recommendation on how the general public should protect themselves. The blended form of risk and crisis communication incorporates the principles of effective emergency communication from the evaluation of possible risks to the crisis event and to the clean-up and recovery phase. (Reynolds & Seeger 2005, 49 - 50.) CERC-model is also

meant to empower individuals and communities to take action that results in faster and more effective recovery (Veil, Reynolds, Sellnow & Seeger 2008, 7).

Seeger and Reynolds (2009, 15) divide the crisis situation in five stages in CERC-model: I *precrisis*, which emphasizes risk messages, warnings and preparation, II *initial event*, which involves rapid communication to the public, clarify the crisis event, reduces uncertainty and facilitates response measures, III *maintenance*, which includes creating more accurate information to the public, creates broad-based support and co-operation actions and carry out ongoing explanation of self-efficacy, IV *resolution*, which deals with communicating with the public about the clean-up, recovery and rebuilding efforts and addresses the cause, blame and responsibility questions and V *evaluation stage*, which emphasizes lessons learned, determines specific actions to improve communication and to create linkages to precrisis activities (in stage I).

The five stages of CERC-model assume that crisis will develop in mainly systematic way: from risk to eruption and to recovery. The critique for the CERC-model is that some risks may not follow this process model because some risks cannot be foreseen or it has some nonlinear dimensions that complicates the decision making process. Also new threats that the human kind hasn't faced before may erupt without a warning period. Reynolds and Seeger (2005, 51) understand these problems, but they see the model, regardless of the limitations, to offer comprehensive approach to both risk and crisis communication in a more connected form.

TABLE 2. Working model of CERC. Based on Reynolds and Seeger (2005, 53 – 54).

Phase	Actions
I Pre-crisis	
	Monitor and recognize emerging risks
	Increase general public's understanding of the risks
	Create specific warning messages regarding eminent threats
	Create alliances and co-operation with other agencies and groups
	Develop consensual recommendations by experts
II Initial event	
	Emphatic, reassurance
	Designate crisis spokesperson
	Generate broad-based understanding of the crisis situation
	Reduce crisis-related uncertainty
	Create understanding of medical responses
III Maintenance	
	Create more accurate public understanding of ongoing situation
	Create understanding of background factors and issues
	Create broad-based support and co-operation
	Receive feedback from the affected publics
	Carry out ongoing explanation of self-efficacy
IV Resolution	
	Inform about the clean-up, recovery and rebuilding efforts
	Facilitate open discussion about blame, cause and responsibility
	Improve understanding of new risks and risk avoidance
	Promote the activities of organizations to reinforce positive image and identity
V Evaluation	
	Evaluate and assess responses, including communication effectiveness
	Document and communicate lessons learned
	Determine specific actions to improve crisis communication
	Create linkages to precrisis activities (in stage I)

Table 2 presents the five phases of CERC-model: pre-crisis, initial event, maintenance, resolution and evaluation. Each phase contains different statements on how to operate and what communication measurements should be done in a certain phase of the crisis.

4 BEST PRACTICES IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Best practices thinking has started in crisis communication field in 1990's. With best practice thinking it is possible to improve the effectiveness of crisis communication especially in large publicity-managed crisis. The concept of best practices is frequently used to improve organizational practice in many areas like corporate communication, public relations and change communication. (Seeger 2006, 232 - 233.) A best practice is a method or activity that is believed to be more effective at reaching an outcome, than any other method, when used in a particular condition or circumstance. The idea is that with broad testing, wanted outcome can be delivered with fewer problems. Best practices can also be defined as the most efficient and effective way to accomplishing a task, based on procedures that have proven themselves the best alternative over time for large number of people. (Business Dictionary 2010.)

The best practices process starts with benchmarking and systematic overview of the target. It is then analyzed and assessed in an effort to improve quality and efficiency. These processes and practices are then described as best practices and the organizations are able to provide models to other organizations that work in the same field. Best practices generally take form of general guidelines, norms, standards and reference points that are designed to improve performance. (Seeger 2006, 232 - 233.)

Problem with creating best practices to crisis communication is to be able to have a sample large enough. The problem is that by their nature crisis and conflicts happen rarely. Also the significant number of different types of crisis creates diversity to coping strategies and approaches (Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer 2003, 15). Generalizing other forms of communication has solved the problem and that best practices are based on the large case research in

crisis communication field (Seeger 2006, 233 – 234; Coombs, 1999; Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003). One additional complexity is in developing a best-practices approach to crisis communication concerns goals. Crisis communication usually has a variety of goals, some of which may conflict. One universal goal is to reduce and contain harm. Those organizations associated with a crisis or disaster may seek to limit damage to their reputation, avoid responsibility, and even shift blame. Governmental agencies may prioritize reestablishing public order while the public may prioritize being informed and protected. (Seeger 2006, 233.)

Vincent Covello in 2003 and Matthew Seeger in 2006 have studied best practices in crisis communication. In this chapter both of their list on best practices is presented and compared.

4.1 Covello’s best practices in crisis communication

Vincent Covello, director of Center for Risk Communication in New York presented best practices for crisis communication in 2003. He suggested that the list of best practices is a checklist that should be used in any public health risk and communication plan (Covello 2003, 5). Covello has divided the practices in seven different guidelines that have several sub guidelines on what to do.

TABLE 3. Covello’s list of best practices in crisis communication (Covello 2003, 5 – 8; Ulmer, Alvey, Kordsmeier 2009, 101 – 106). Continues in page 19.

	The idea of the practice
Best Practice 1.	Accept and Involve Stakeholders as Legitimate Partners: Crisis communicators should show respect to persons affected by the crisis by involving them early, before important decisions are made.
Best Practice 2.	Listen to People: Part of effective crisis communication involves seeking feedback. Crisis communicators need to let the associated partners be heard and understood.
Best Practice 3.	Be Truthful, Honest, Frank, and Open: Communication scholars advocate for open, honest and truthful communication in a crisis situation. Crisis communicators should disclose the risk as soon as possible and not over assure about the potential risk.

Best Practice 4.	Coordinate, Collaborate, and Partner with Others: A number of studies have shown the importance of establishing partnership. Coordination with other organizations is a key to risk and crisis communication success.
Best Practice 5.	Meet the Needs of the Media: The media is a primary means for reaching the public. During a crisis, the media provides the immediate access necessary for a rapid response from the public.
Best Practice 6.	Communicate Clearly and with Compassion: A fundamental tenet of crisis communication is to communicate with stakeholders as clearly and compassionately as possible. Crisis communication should not use technical language and message can be clarified by using graphics and pictures.
Best Practice 7.	Plan Thoroughly and Carefully: Planning is essential for getting an appropriate response. Planning thoroughly involves training of the staff in basic and advanced communication skills.

4.2 Seeger's best practices in crisis communication

Matthew Seeger, Professor and Chair in the Department of Communication in Wayne State University, continued the best practices list in 2006. The list of best practices in crisis communication was generated from research literature with focus on widespread disasters and public crisis. The list is based on the work of Vincent Covello, Peter Sandman, and Matthew Seeger and the work of Barbara Reynolds at the Centers for Disease Control. The purpose of Seeger's list was to integrate the principles based on commonalities, intersections and overlapping concepts. (Seeger 2006, 234 - 235.) Seeger's list has ten different best practices that are more headline type. Under each headline is an explanation on what does the best practice mean and where is it based on.

TABLE 4. Seeger’s list of best practices in crisis communication (Seeger 2006, 236 – 242). Continues in page 21.

	The idea of the practice
Best Practice 1.	Process Approaches and Policy Development: Risk and crisis communication is most effective when it is a part of decision-making process itself. Therefore communication strategies should be fully integrated into the decision-making.
Best Practice 2.	Pre-Event Planning: Planning include identifying risk areas and corresponding to risk reduction. It also includes pre-setting initial crisis responses so that decision-making is more efficient. The most important is that the emergency planning takes communication process into account.
Best Practice 3.	Partnerships with the Public: It is important to accept that the public is legitimate and equal partner. During a crisis, the public should be told what is happening and the dialogue should be two-way.
Best Practice 4.	Listen to the Public’s Concerns and Understand the Audience: An organization managing risks or experiencing crisis should listen to the concerns of the public, take these concerns into account and respond accordingly.
Best Practice 5.	Honesty, Candor, and Openness: Openness about risk may promote an environment of risk sharing, where the public and agencies accept responsibility for managing a risk. Effective crisis communicators are honest, candid and open in their public communication.
Best Practice 6.	Collaborate and Coordinate with Credible Sources: There is a need to establish strategic partnerships before the crisis. Developing pre-crisis network is a very effective way of collaboration. Coordinating messages enhances the probability of consistent messages.
Best Practice 7.	Meet the Needs of the Media and Remain Accessible: The media are the primary channel to the public. Rather than viewing the media as a liability in a crisis situation, communicators should engage the media through open communication
Best Practice 8.	Communicate with Compassion, Concern, and Empathy: When communicating with the public, the media or other people involved in the crisis, the designated spokesperson should demonstrate compassion, concern and empathy.

Best Practice 9.	Accept Uncertainty and Ambiguity: Best practices in crisis communication start with an acknowledgement of the uncertain ambiguity of a crisis. Warnings must be issued even when some level of uncertainty exists.
Best Practice 10.	Messages of Self-Efficacy: There is a great importance of messages that provide specific information telling people what they can do to reduce the harm. These messages of self-efficacy can help restore some sense of control in an uncertain situation.

In the next table it is possible to compare the best practices list of Covello and Seeger and see how the list has developed. The comparison has been made in the order of Covello's list, because it is easier to see what Seeger has added to the original list.

TABLE 5. Best practices in crisis communication. Comparison between V. T. Covello's list and M. W. Seeger's list on best practices.

Covello's list (number of BP)	Seeger's list (number of BR)
Accept and Involve Stakeholders as Legitimate Partners (1)	
Listen to People (2)	Listen to the Public's concerns and Understand the Audience (4)
Be Truthful, Honest, Frank and Open (3)	Honesty, Candour and Openness (5)
Coordinate, Collaborate and Partner with Other Credible Sources (4)	Collaborate and Coordinate with Credible Sources (6)
Meet the Needs of the Media (5)	Meet the Needs of the Media and Remain Accessible (7)
Communicate Clearly and With Compassion (6)	Communicate with Compassion, Concern and Empathy (8)
Plan Thoroughly and Carefully (7)	Process Approaches and Policy Development (1)
	Pre-Event Planning (2)
	Partnership with the Public (3)
	Accept Uncertainty and Ambiguity (9)
	Messages of Self-Efficacy (10)

The two lists of best practices differ from each other as Seeger has developed the method further and used a broader material in developing the practices. Seeger has also removed the practice about stakeholders. Seeger has added that the public should have more tools to cope with the situation with the practice 10. In Seeger's list there is more emphasis on public's understanding of the crisis and taking the opinions of the public in a better consideration.

Seeger's list is more extensive presentation about the best practices in crisis communication, but it has been criticized by other communication researchers like Reynolds, Ropeik and Sandman (Reynolds 2006, 249 - 252; Ropeik 2006, 253 - 256; Sandman 2006, 257 - 262). Peter Sandman, A Rutgers University professor, presents the most prevalent critic. Sandman (2006, 258 - 259) says that the best practices would benefit from explicit recommendations to accept people's fears. He states that it is impossible to communicate about threats without causing fear in some parts of the public. He continues that pre-crisis communication is missing from the list; he states that it is not enough to recommend pre-crisis planning; it should also include clear communication measurements. Sandman states that there is a failure to respect and trust to the public in crisis communication. The best practices are too much from the organizations leaders' point of view and the communication can be too patronizing. It also doesn't include that the public is able to form their opinions and precautions. The problem with best practices is also that they are a list of lessons that can be used in a certain crisis situations but they are not suited for all kinds of crisis situations as a guideline.

4.3 Quality in crisis communication

To understand the meaning of quality in crisis communication it is necessary to define what quality means in communication and how it can be measured or identified.

Quality can be defined as an effort to answer the needs of the target groups or the stakeholders (Koski & Kilpeläinen 2006, 12). Juran (1988, according to Reference for Business 2010) states that quality is utility's suitability to its function. It indicates that utility's (tangible or intangible) attributes should fit to its purpose. The point of view in Juran's definition is customer based origin. Juran's definition can be seen as a good general definition but it has

problems in the sense that quality only exists in abstract form that cannot be operationalized. Crosby (1984) continues that to various goods some requirements exist and quality is conformance to those requirements. Another dimension to quality was discussed in the 1970's by Genichi Taguchi (Anand 1997, 196). He stated that quality should also meet societal needs and customer needs are part of quality. The better the quality, the more favorable is the product to the society. ISO standardization organization (ISO 2010) states that quality of something can be determined by comparing a set of inherent characteristics with a set of requirements. If those inherent characteristics meet all requirements, high or excellent quality is achieved. If those characteristics do not meet all requirements, a low or poor level of quality is achieved.

The demands of the public or the user do not always meet the performance of a service or product, and as a result quality gaps form (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1985). The gap answers to question why the service is not meeting its expectations. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry define five different quality gaps: The producer cannot define the needs of the client clearly, the planning and strategy of the service don't succeed, producing of the service or product doesn't reply to the quality needs, the service isn't what is promised in the marketing communication and there is gap between expected and received service.

Shelby (1998, 391 - 392) leads the quality thinking in communication from Teboul's (1991) three dimension quality idea. The dimensions are conformity to specification, fitness for use and aesthetics of the product. These dimensions, according to Teboul, make the product or service closer to the desired one than the actual need. Shelby uses these dimensions to the quality of communication, because all the quality criteria of produced goods, do not implicate with communication processes. She states that functional communication quality may be viewed as disparity between receiver's expectations and the outcome of communication processes in technical, functional and aesthetics dimensions.

Mohr and Ravipreet (1995, 398 - 399) bring the quality of communication in to more specific level. They discuss that is more communication more effective than less communication? In the past decision makers (also in the public sector) have operated under the belief that more information is better and the lack of information lead to poor decision making. It leads to the thought that more information is higher quality in communication. Mohr

and Ravipreet continue that high frequency of contact can lead to overload of information and thus it can lower the perceptions of communication quality. They offer a bidirectional communication hypothesis that leads to communication quality. That same conclusion is in the two-way symmetrical system theory of Grunig (2001), according to which good and effective communication can be found in a situation where public sector communicators use communication to negotiate with the public, resolve conflict and promote mutual understanding and respect between the organization and its stakeholders. According to Vos (2009, 362) for municipalities, communication quality can be defined as the degree to which communication strengthens the relationship between municipalities citizens and the municipal organization.

The quality thinking in communication can be connected to the quality of crisis communication. Crisis communication has the same kind of objectives, measurements and targets. In crisis communication it is important to be able to communicate in two-way system and to understand the needs of the public.

4.4 Quality criteria in public sector crisis communication

As a part of the international research “Developing a Crisis Communication Scorecard (CrisComScore)” Vos and Palttala (2009, 1 - 2) have developed quality criteria for crisis communication in public sector (appendix 1). Criteria are provided in three categories: public communication, media relations and network quality. These categories have sub headlines (see page 25).

TABLE 6. Quality criteria by Vos and Palttala (2009, 1 – 2).

CATEGORY	FUNCTION
I. Public Communication Quality	
Monitoring, diversity of media and appropriate strategies for stressful situations	Monitoring of civilians' needs and perceptions
	Diversity of communication means
	Empower to act
	Accessibility and reliability of the information
II. Media Relations Quality	
Appropriate ways of working in media strategies	Stimulating a public service orientation in cooperation
	Following the discourse in the media and on the internet
	Correct and accessible information
III. Network Quality	
Coordination and joint communication strategies	Planning for joint preparedness
	Network exchange and training

From the criteria by Vos and Palttala it is possible to develop a table of the quality criteria and to measure the importance of the criteria in different organizations in public sector. The table has been used in this study to address the differences between public sector organization in their response to crisis situation and communication (see appendix 2).

4.5 Best practices and quality combined

The main ideas in the theories about best practices and quality in crisis communication connect together. The idea in both is to be able to execute a successful crisis communication in crisis situation. The aim is to benefit not just the organization in question but also the larger public, other organizations and the media. The two ideas have in common that in both meeting the needs of the public and individuals are important.

In quality thinking the actions suitability to its function is crucial and this can also be seen in best practices thinking – best practices are guidelines for doing crisis communication in the best possible way. Also the idea that crisis communication should be a two-way and symmetrical is shown in both quality thinking and best practices.

In best practices it is also possible to see the idea of quality gaps. Always the best practices don't work in the best possible way, the message of crisis occurring can sometimes cause fear and people don't act correctly in crisis situation. Also suited communication measurements are lacking from best practices thinking, so it is difficult to point out where is the quality gap in the used crisis communication measurement. The quality thinking fits better in more crisis situations than the best practices thinking, as best practices are planned for certain kinds of crisis situations like public health crisis.

5 RESEARCH METHODS AND QUESTIONS

The following chapters provide a description of this study, the research questions and the research methods. The research was made as a part of a larger study, in an international research project “Developing a Crisis Communication Scorecard” (CrisComScore), coordinated by the Communication Department at the University of Jyväskylä. The goal of the study project is to develop an audit instrument and guidelines for crisis communication strategies to public sector authorities so that they are better prepared to communicate in crisis situations. This thesis’ contribution to the study is to evaluate the best practices idea behind the guidelines and the assessment tool.

The focus of the research is to examine public sector communication experts’ views on best practices in crisis communication and to find out how they evaluate quality in crisis communication in public sector. The aim of the study is also to see the comparison between the theory of best practices and quality thinking in crisis communication practice and the views that the public sector experts have. Theory-based practice is preferable because one can learn from previous experiences and the experience of others. Theorists have examined the actions of other numerous practitioners and evaluated events and culled the findings into succinct theory. (Fearn-Banks 2007, 50.)

The research questions in this thesis are:

Q1. Do the best practices and quality thinking in crisis communication literature differ from the views of Finnish public sector communication experts?

Q2. Are the quality criteria in crisis communication considered important by communication experts?

This study was executed as an empirical study. The study was conducted mainly with qualitative research methods with some aspects from quantitative research. The data of the research was gathered by interviewing eight communication experts in public sector organizations. The semi-structured interviews were executed in cooperation with another master's student. The gathered data was shared and used in two different theses.

5.1 Qualitative and quantitative research method

There is a narrow line between quantitative and qualitative research methods. In qualitative research you can conduct an interview with qualitative methods but evaluate the results with quantitative methods (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 13). Qualitative research is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced or constituted (Mason 2002, 3). Sometimes it's useful to combine quantitative and qualitative research methods, because they can complement each other. Because the research strategies differ from each other significantly, it is wise to choose one of them as main strategy, which is complemented by the other (Metsämuuronen 2005, 245). In this study these two research methods have been used so that the qualitative method is the main strategy and most of the data gathering and analysis have been made in qualitative method, but the qualitative method has been completed with quantitative parts and analysis. The main idea when choosing a research method is to see how well the chosen methodology fits the current research problem (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 14).

Qualitative studies are often based on a small number of cases and those cases are strived to study thoroughly. So the criterion for the quality in research is not the quantity but the quality. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 18.) The idea of quantity has been taken into account in this study, because only eight organizations were studied, but the amount of information was kept high.

The main research methods used in qualitative research are observation, text analysis, interviews and transcribe of the interviews. In an interview on qualitative research method there is normally used unstructured or semi-structured interview questions. (Metsämuuronen, 2005, 88). Also in this study the conducted interviews were semi-structured, so that more questions can be asked when needed. The study was conducted as a case research of

eight different organizations. In a case research it is important to gather versatile information and to understand the phenomena in more depth (Metsämuuronen 2005, 90 – 91).

5.1.1 Interview as a research method

The interview is a method for material collection where the researcher participates in the production of the research material. Interviews can be typed according to what is the researcher's role in the situations, what is the structure of the interview and the implementation method. (Metsämuuronen 2006, 90 – 91). The interview methods can be divided in two: interview with a structured form, where the questions and the answer alternatives are structured and to semi-structured and non-structured interviews where only some questions are pre-planned and there are no answer alternatives (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006). The idea of the interview is that the needed information is easiest to get from the interviewee in question. But the same idea creates a problem; there cannot be prejudice, that the person in question tells the answers like they really are. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000, 43-44.)

In the qualitative method there is a problem about the objectivity. There is no pure objectivity in research, especially in qualitative research, but the main problem can be avoided when the researcher becomes aware of his role as a researcher who has power to influence on the research and the methods. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 16 – 17.) In this research there has been two different interviewers and a semi-structured questionnaire, where is a possibility to emphasize different questions by different interviewers. These differences need to be taken into account when assessing the answers.

Hirsjärvi and Hurme (1985) raise five different things that are characteristic for an interview: the interview has been pre-designed, it has been started by the researchers, the interviewer has to motivate the interviewee, the interviewer knows his position and the interviewee knows that the results will be dealt confidentially (in Metsämuuronen 2006, 113). The interview is a troublesome and demanding method to use, but it is recommended to be used always when it suits to the research methods (Metsämuuronen 2006, 14). An expert interview is a specific form of interview. In contrast to biographical interviews, the focus is not on interviewee's opinions as a person but rather on their capacities of being an expert for a certain field of activity or organization. They are integrated into the study not as a single

person but representing a group. (Flick 2006, 165.) This kind of interviews can also be called informant interviews. In an informant interview the focus is not in finding out the interviewee's subjective visions but organizations common practices, experiences and visions (Mikkola 2008).

This study aimed at studying public relations specialists' perceptions on crisis communication assessment in public sector organizations. In this study the interview was the first option as a method because the themes in question were hard to understand for some interviewees, there were a lot of open questions that was easiest to answer in face-to-face contact and there was need for descriptive examples (Metsämuuronen 2006, 13). The open questions for the interview were planned ahead by two thesis researchers with the help and pre-testing by two project researchers.

5.1.2 Sampling of the research group

The most significant difference between the qualitative and quantitative research is the method used in sampling the group that is studied. Qualitative inquiry focuses on relatively small samples, even on single cases, when quantitative methods typically depend on larger samples that are selected randomly. (Patton 1990, 169.) The sampling procedure in qualitative research differs from probability sampling, which is most familiar for quantitative studies. Qualitative inquiry typically focuses on in-depth interviews on relatively small samples selected purposefully (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 18). There are several ways to collect the sample for the research in quantitative study, such as extreme case sampling, intensity sampling, maximum variation sampling, homogenous sampling, typical case sampling and stratified case sampling. Also the snowball sampling that is used sometimes in quantitative research method can be used. All these sampling methods should be used systematically to create a meaningful sample for the study. (Patton 1990, 171 - 180.)

In this study there have been used several different sampling methods to collect meaningful sample for the research and its targets. Firstly, a stratified purposeful sampling was used to capture major variations in the research group. Secondly, critical case sampling was made to collect samples that are particularly important for the scheme of things. Thirdly, theory-based sampling was used to sample organizations that are meaningful from the theoretical base and that represent the phenomena studied. This kind of sampling does not allow generalization to all possible cases but logical

generalization can often be made from the weight of the evidence. (Patton 1990, 171 - 180.) All the sampling was done at the same time.

5.2 Interviewees

The interviewees for this study were selected firstly by the organization they represented. Secondly, they had to be responsible for crisis communication in that organization. Target organizations were selected to support the theoretical interest of the thesis and also the international study (CrisComScore); they had to be public sector organizations, and represent different levels of public sector administration. After conversations between the researchers the levels selected were municipal, regional co-operation and national actors.

To facilitate comparison two of each organization type was selected. Based on the following eight organizations were selected: *Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, City of Jyväskylä, City of Turku, Pirkanmaa Hospital District, Central Finland Health Care District, Department of Rescue Services of Southwest Finland, and Department of Rescue Services of Central Finland*. The two ministries represent national actors, the two cities municipal and the two hospital districts, as well as the two departments for rescue services, regional co-operation actors. Because there was two of each organization type, the sample allowed comparison according to organization type. National and local actors can be compared as well. The interviewees were in charge of the crisis communication of the sampled organizations. In the following the organizations are introduced shortly and placed in the Finnish public sector administration in Figure 2. In the introductions it is possible to see what kind of responsibilities the interviewed organizations have as a public sector actor.



FIGURE 3. Interviewed organizations in Finnish public sector administration (see figure 2.).

Ministry for Foreign Affairs

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs promotes the security and welfare of Finland. The Ministry concentrates on foreign and security policy, trade policy and development policy and international relations in general. The Ministry also assists other branches of government in the coordination of international affairs. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2011a.) The Department for Communications and Culture in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs is responsible for external and internal communications to citizens and stakeholders about matters related to foreign and security policy, development policy, external economic relations, and the functions outside the current departmental division. It is also responsible for related planning, development and coordination. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2011b.) The Ministry is located in Central State administration in the Finnish public sector administration. The person interviewed for this study was the head of information group.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health ensures that everyone in Finland has the same possibilities to have a healthy and safe life. The job of MSAH is to promote the population's good health and functional capacity, promote healthy working and living environments, ensure that there are sufficient

social and health services, ensure that people have an adequate income at various stages in life and promote gender equality. (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2011a.) Information and Communication Unit in the Ministry operates and develops the external and internal communication. (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2011b.) The Ministry is located in Central State administration in the Finnish public sector administration. The person interviewed for this study was the head of information and communication.

City of Jyväskylä

The city of Jyväskylä is the seventh largest city in Finland with over 130.000 residents. The city is the biggest employer in the area totaling of 7.000 employees. (Jyväskylä 2010a.) Jyväskylä has over 47 000 students living in the city and it has 3.000 foreign residents from 100 different countries. The city is also one of Finland's centers of growth. In the city special expertise can be found in the fields of paper manufacturing and paper machinery as well as energy production. (Jyväskylä 2010b.) Cities are a part of municipal self-governance in the Finnish public sector administration. The person interviewed for this study was the head of communication.

City of Turku

Turku is the oldest and the fifth-biggest city in Finland, with population of 170.000 residents. Turku is located at the Southwestern coast of Finland. There are two official languages in Turku; Finnish and Swedish. Turku is known as a vivid culture city with a long history. The surrounding area of Turku is the third biggest population concentration in Finland. (Wikipedia 2011.) The city employs approximately 13.000 employees. In the City's strategy Turku focuses on six clusters, which are important for future investments: bio technology, applied ICT, maritime, logistics, tourism as well as in creative knowledge-intensive cluster. (Turku 2010a.) Cities are a part of municipal self-governance in the Finnish public sector administration. The person interviewed for this study was the head of the communication department.

Pirkanmaa Hospital District

The Pirkanmaa Hospital District is a joint municipal authority with 28 municipalities and a total of 470.000 residents. Its goal is to provide health care services that promote health and functional capacity. It also promotes

scientific research and training to support this goal. The Pirkanmaa Hospital District includes Tampere University Hospital (TAYS), Vammala and Valkeakoski Regional Hospitals, and the Health Care District of Upper Pirkanmaa Region. More than 152.000 different patients were treated by the hospitals within the Pirkanmaa Hospital District during the year 2009. Number of staff in 2009 was approximately 7.700. (Pirkanmaa Hospital District 2010a.) The organization is a part of the regional municipal administration in the Finnish public sector administration. The person interviewed for this study was the head of the communication department.

Central Finland Health Care District

The Central Finland Health Care District is owned by 23 municipalities located in the Central Finland region with a total population of 270.000 (31.12.2008). The health care district employs 2.700 persons. In 2008 the health care district had 88.000 persons treated as patients. The Central Finland Health Care District is responsible for the specialist health care of the inhabitants of the Central Finland region in close co-operation with health centers, the Jokilaakso Hospital and the Kuopio University Hospital as well as some other hospitals providing specialist level services. (Central Finland Health Care District 2011.) The organization is part of the regional municipal administration in the Finnish public sector administration. The interviewed person for this study was the medical director.

Department of Rescue Services of Central Finland

The Department of Rescue Services of Central Finland is responsible for the rescue operations in 23 municipalities in Central Finland. Operating area is the whole province of Central Finland. In the region there are 46 fire stations and the department employs 214 people full time and 450 part time. Services of the department include prevention of accidents, rescue operations, civil defense, and transportation of patients. Also in the duties of rescue department is to execute rescue plans and education in the area. (Department of Rescue Services of Central Finland 2011.) The organization is located in regional state administration in the Finnish public sector administration. The person interviewed for this study was the chief of rescue services.

Department of Rescue Services of Southwest Finland

The Department of Rescue Services of Southwest Finland is responsible for the rescue operations made in the area of 28 municipalities. Under the department are the 11 fire stations that have 24/7-preparedness and three other fire stations. The operating area of the department is almost 29.000 m². The Department of Rescue Services of Southwest Finland is also responsible for taking care of the ambulance transportation in six municipalities: Turku, Kaarina, Raisio, Parainen, Naantali and Uusikaupunki. (Turku 2011.) The organization is a part of the regional state administration in the Finnish public sector administration. The person interviewed for this study was the chief of rescue services.

5.3 Limitations of the method

In interviews there is a limitation of truth, because the interviewees do not always say what they really mean or think. This can be a result of wanting to answer the questions "in the right way" or because of the professional position where they are (Jensen 2001, 240). In this study there were eight interviewees from eight different organizations and they were interviewed separately. In different situations the interview questions can be asked differently and that can affect to the answer. For the interviews of this study the questions were planned ahead, but there is a possibility of misunderstanding the question. Because the questions were asked in an interview there was a possibility to clarify and ask the question again if needed.

In the sampling the limitations are related to the purposive sampling method, because the results may not be generalized in other organizations. Samples are not easily defensible as being representative of populations due to potential subjectivity of researcher (Black 1999, 118). In this case there was no need for the total research. The sampling was not made randomly, because there was the need to study the opinions of certain experts in specific organizations. Purposive sampling is suitable when you need to reach a targeted sample quickly and where sampling for proportionality is not the primary concern (Trochim 2011).

5.4 Process of the study

After the contemplation of the research, the interviewees were contacted by email. In the email there was a question if they wanted to participate in the study. Later they were contacted with telephone if they had not answered to the email. In one case the organization in question had to be changed to a similar organization, because the respondent was not able to participate in the study. After that the interviews were planned in Turku, Tampere, Jyväskylä and Helsinki. A week before the interviews the interviewees were contacted by mail with information about the Crisis Communication Scorecard and some information about the study. The interviewees were asked to read the questionnaire about Crisis Communication Scorecard and answer it before the interview to save time.

5.4.1 Interviews

The interviews were made in the premises of the organization in question between 12.11.-2.12.2009 in Helsinki, Jyväskylä, Tampere and Turku. The interview questions were not sent beforehand to the interviewees but they were informed about the topics of the interview. The interview questions were planned beforehand with another researcher who had related assignment in her study. The questions were finalized in contact with the two researchers in charge of developing the Crisis Communication Scorecard. In the end there were 15 interview questions under five themes (background, crisis preparedness, quality, assessment, crisis communication scorecard). In the questions for this thesis it was important to combine the best practice thinking and the quality thinking to the questions without actually saying those terms in the interview, because they can be difficult to understand in the same way. The terms were replaced with words like "good", "important" and "successful".

Because the data gathered through the interviews was for two different theses, there were questions that concerned both theses but also questions that concerned only one of them (see appendix 3). Not all of the questions were asked in the interviews because in some cases some questions were irrelevant for that organization. Additional questions were asked if needed. In addition to the open questions there was also a short multiple choice questionnaire that the interviewees needed to fill in during the interview. All

the interviews lasted about an hour and all the interviews were recorded. The interview was conducted in Finnish and for the purpose of this thesis the questionnaire was also translated in to Finnish (see appendix 4).

5.4.2 Analysis

The data gathered in the interviews were transcribed. The 8.5 hours of interview were converted in to 48 pages of written material. The transcript was made word to word, but irrelevant comments were left out. The analysis started with reading all the material through two times. At the same time some notes were written in the marginal of the pages. After that the material was underlined by significant words in the answers.

The data were thematized under two main headlines that rise from the interviews but also from the theory (successful crisis communication and aims of crisis communication). Under those two headlines there were eleven subcategories or themes altogether. The significant words or lines were organized under the themes. After that the material was read again and the similarities and differences of the answers were marked in different colors. In the end the similarities and differences were gathered in the two different lists as the keywords.

5.4.3 Questionnaire

The short questionnaire contained twenty different arguments that were gathered from the quality criteria by Vos and Palttala (see appendix 1). The interviewees were asked to estimate the importance of each of them from their organization's point of view. The answers for the questionnaire were numbers (importance from 1 to 5) and also the five most important arguments were marked. The answers to the short questionnaire were recorded in an excel-file. A diagram was made from the results.

The results from the analysis are presented in the next chapter together with the diagram.

6 RESULTS

The research results are divided in three parts: aims of crisis communication, successful crisis communication, and quality criteria. The chapters have subthemes. The last subchapter contains the results of the survey.

In the results presented there are quotations from the interviews and also diagrams based on the survey. The purpose of the quotations is to illustrate the results and clarify the answers given by the interviewees. In the quotations there are no names given because of the required anonymity of the interviewees.

6.1 Aims of crisis communication

In this chapter the results are presented from the aims that are related to crisis communication. The topic was discussed in four different questions in the interviews and the themes have been formed from the issues raised from the answers.

All of the interviewed organizations had some kind of *crisis communication plan*. The papers were named differently, but the basic information that they were designed to give were the same.

Some of the plans were individual documents; others were integrated with other crisis management guidelines or were part of guidance for special situations such as large-scale accidents. One organization used a process model for crisis communication. The model was renewed when the processes changed in the organization. The idea that crisis communication plans are part of management was mentioned in all the interviews. In all of the organizations crisis communication is tied to management in some way, but

only one respondent mentioned that crisis communication is well integrated in all the organizational management.

*"We have a crisis communication plan. With our preparedness manager with whom we have made a preparedness plan, that contains different kinds of scenarios, like the one that is happening now, the swine flu epidemic."*¹

*"We have a plan called crisis management and communication. We have tried to integrate in particular the management and the crisis."*²

Overall the organizations interviewed considered themselves to be quite well prepared for different kinds of crises. Three of the experts stated that being well prepared meant, that they had an updated crisis communication plan and they had done some practice measurements with other organizations. One of the experts stated that it was impossible to answer the question, because they had little experience in crisis situations. One of the experts said that the preparedness was good but should be better.

In the cases where preparedness was considered quite well this was according to the interviewees due to good instructions, the number of staff available and the knowledge of the staff about the situation.

*"In my opinion we are prepared quite well, we have suitable property, enough staff available and we have made clear plans."*³

In the views of the public communication experts' the crisis communication is meant firstly for the employees, the management and the citizens. All of the interviewees mentioned their own organization and the public as the target for crisis communication.

Secondly, the media were mentioned by five interviewees. Three of them mentioned that the media weren't really the target as such but the channel to communicate with the larger public about the crisis. That is why the interviewees considered it important to be able to communicate with the media as soon as possible.

¹ "Meillä on kriisiviestintäsuunnitelma. Meillä on ministeriössä valmiuspäällikkö, jonka kanssa olemme tehneet valmiussuunnitelman, jossa on useita eri skenaarioita, kuten juuri nyt valloillaan oleva sikainfluenssaepidemia."

² "Meillä on tällainen kriisijohtaminen ja viestintä. Eli me on yritetty integroida nimenomaan sitä johtamista ja kriisiä."

³ "Kyllä mun mielestä kohtuullisen hyvin, että nyt tuota meillä on nyt sopivia tiloja ja sitten meillä on henkilökuntaa ihana mukavasti ja me on tehty selvät suunnitelmat."

Four experts mentioned other organizations or actors that were involved in crisis management. Because the interviewees present four different levels of public sector organizations, they had very different organizations to work with in a crisis situation as mentioned by the interviewees.

“Mostly to the citizens, but also to our own staff, that is over 13.000 people, so it is quite a network that the message goes through. But in most of the cases you can say that the citizens are the main target group.”⁴

“It is meant for the citizens, that is what it is for. And if we think about the intermediary groups, very often we have the municipalities, health care districts, ... the governance ... and the media as a central part.”⁵

In the questions about *the goals* of crisis communication the experts' answers were very different from each other. One stated that the goal of developing the crisis communication in the future was to have enough resources to act efficiently in crisis situations. Another interviewee looked at the question from another point of view and said that the goal in a crisis is to stop the situation from getting worse. Two of the experts stated that the goal is to act according to the crisis communication plan. The most important thing was to prevent more crisis situations from happening, be able to work in crisis situation and to calm the citizens involved in the crisis situation. Also to be able to provide guidance through communication to citizens was one of the goals. The experts also mentioned that the goal of crisis communication is to act rationally, be quick and on time.

“I would say that the first goal is that this organization can work. Without any outside disturbance in a crisis situation.”⁶

“The fundamental goal is that we are able to stop the situation from getting worse and prevent more damage happening. Also, that the information is given at the right time and is truthful.”⁷

⁴ “Varmaan enimmäkseen asukkaille, mutta myös omalle henkilöstölle, yli 13 000 ihmistä, joka on aikamoinen verkosto jonka kautta tietoa kulkee. Useimmissa tapauksissa asukkaat ovat se pääasiallinen kohderyhmä.”

⁵ “Se on tarkoitettu kansalaisille. Sinnehän se tietysti vaikutukset menee. Eli jos lähdetään miettimään niitä sidosryhmiä, hyvin usein meillä on kunnat, sairaanhoitopiirit, ... meidän alainen hallinto, ... media on keskeinen osa.”

⁶ “Olisiko niin, että ensimmäinen tavoite on se, että tuota tää organisaatio pystyy niin kuin toimimaan. Sanoisiko niin kuin ilman ulkopuolista häirintää tai tällaista kriisitilanteessa.”

⁷ “Keskeinen tavoite on, että pystytään estämään tilanteen paheneminen ja lisävauriot. Se, että tieto on oikea-aikaista ja totuudenmukaista.”

“We don’t really set goals to crisis communication, as long as it is following our policy and plan as well as possible, that’s our goal. Also it is important that the communication is fast and done in the right way.”⁸

TABLE 7. Aims of crisis communication.

Measurement	Execution	Notice
Plans	All of the organizations have a crisis communication plan and it is linked to management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - communication in large-scale accident - crisis management guidelines - guidance for special situations - process model 	Plans are named differently and the use of plans differences greatly
Preparedness	Organizations stated to be quite well prepared: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - they have made plans - they have done some practicing - good instructions - enough staff - expertise of the staff 	One stated that it was impossible to answer, because they had little experience in crisis situations
Target	Crisis communication is meant for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - staff - own organization - the public - the media - other organizations 	Three mentioned that the media was a channel to communicate with the larger public
Goals	Goals are seen in a different ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - enough resources - stop the situation from getting worse - act according to the plan - prevent more crisis situations from happening - guidance thought communication 	Answers were very different from each other

⁸ “Ei meillä oikeastaan ole, kunhan kriisiviestintä noudattaa tätä meidän toimintaohjetta mahdollisimman hyvin, se on se tavoite. Tärkeää tietysti on, että tiedotus on nopeaa ja oikeanlaista.”

As a conclusion the experts state that the aim of crisis communication is to meet the targets mentioned in the crisis communication plans. The target of the communication is firstly the organizations own staff. The media is seen as a channel for communication, not as a target as such. The aim of the communication is to be efficient and quick and to be able to stop the situation from getting worse. The crisis communication is tied to management, but only few have it integrated to management.

6.2 Successful crisis communication

In this chapter the results are discussed from the view of successful crisis communication. The topic was discussed in four different questions in the interviews and the thematizing has been gathered from those answers to this chapter.

From the public sector crisis communication expert's view *the role of successful crisis communication is essential in crisis management. All of the eight interviewees emphasized the important role of crisis communication in crisis situations. With the help of successful communication the crisis situation can be handled correctly and more damage is prevented.*

The experts see the role of crisis communication as a part of crisis management. The role is to give and provide information and be the support function of the operational unit.

*"We think that good communication supports the crisis management extensively. And in addition we can give real-time, fast and precise information to the citizens. So communication is essential."*⁹

*"Nothing can be dealt with without communication. Communication must be exceedingly good so that people know their job and the message of surviving goes to the families as well."*¹⁰

⁹ "Me ajattelemme täällä siten, että hyvä viestintä tukee laajasti kriisinhoitoa. Saamme reaaliaikaisesti, nopeasti ja tarkasti tietoa kansalaisille. Viestintä on siis aivan keskeistä."

¹⁰ "Mitään asiaa ei voi hoitaa ilman viestintää. Sen tarvitsee olla tavattoman hyvää, että ihmiset tietävät tehtävänsä ja että viesti menee myös omaisille."

In the experts' views, *good crisis communication* is real-time, fast, active and made in a calm manner. Two of the experts emphasised that with good crisis communication the situation is made better and not worse. The support for the crisis management was also important in their view. Three of the experts evaluated good crisis communication from the public's point of view. If the public is content with the information they have received in the situation, the communication can be described as "good". One of the three also mentioned that if the media are content with the information given and the information speed, then the organization can be pleased how they have handled the media communication in the situation.

Seven of the experts mentioned that the information given by the public organization has to be reliable and based on facts only. Experts focused also on the results of the crisis communication activities: the public and the media must be able to trust the organization also after the situation is over. The information given during the crisis situation should not harm the trust of the public. One of the experts mentioned that the different publics need different kinds of communication so the minorities also need to be taken into account when planning crisis communication. Another stated that the channels used in the communication must be chosen correctly according to the receivers.

All of the experts mentioned that the rapidity of the information is important. The public sector has to be one of the first informers in a crisis situation. One of the experts stated that to be able to work fast, the organization needs to have good plans and the situation needs to be practiced beforehand.

*"I think we have succeeded in crisis communication if the media are happy, the different publics are happy and there are no accusations, doubts, or any mistrust in how the situation is handled on the operational level."*¹¹

*"I think there are many relevant elements: that we act fast enough, are active and don't just wait, that it is convincing and trustworthy. It has a genuine effect and the audiences can trust that we have the situation under control and that we know the damage that has been caused."*¹²

¹¹ " Onnistunut kriisiviestintä on silloin, jos media on tyytyväinen, suuri yleisö on saamaansa tietoon tyytyväinen ja ei tule mitään syytöksiä, epäilyjä, mitään, että kyseenalaistettaisiin tilanteen hoitoa suorittavan tason osalta. "

¹² "Siinä on varmaan monia elementtejä, toimitaan riittävän nopeasti, ollaan aktiivisia ja ei jäädä odottamaan, se on uskottavaa ja luotettavaa, sillä on aitoa vaikutusta ja yleisö voi luottaa että tilanne on hallussa ja tilanteen vauriot on tiedossa."

Most of the organizations that the experts represent gather feedback on the *quality* of their crisis communication. The evaluation can be done in the form of reports, meetings or conversations. Furthermore, the reporting in the media is followed and if feedback is given by citizens this is noted.

Two of the experts state that it is a positive sign if one doesn't get any complaints after the crisis situation. The other experts gather information and feedback also when no complaints were received, in all the situations. The feedback and the evaluation of reactions are important because the experts want to have an outside view on the crisis communication. Most of the interviewed experts state that it is important for the organization to learn from the situation and improve performance in the next crisis situation.

The problem with outside feedback and evaluation is to ensure that the voices of all different groups are heard and people give feedback. Also the lack of time for analysing the feedback is mentioned as a problem.

*"I think we mostly know it from the feedback nevertheless. And there are so many ways to collect feedback nowadays. For example we can monitor the use of our website."*¹³

*"Maybe it is that after the crisis nothing is heard from nowhere. No-one ever comes to say that the communication was good. I think it is like that. But when you haven't done the communication well, then you can tell and hear."*¹⁴

¹³ " Kyllä kai se palaute on kuitenkin. Ja palautteitahan voidaan nykyään niin monella tavalla sitten seurata. Mehän voidaan seurata tätä nettisivun käyttöä."

¹⁴ " Ehkä se on juuri sitä kun kriisin jälkeen ei kuulu mistään mitään. Ei kukaan tuu koskaan sanomaan, et oli hyvin viestitty. Mä luulen, että se on vähän näin. Mutta sit jos ei oo viestitty, tai jos on viestitty jotain ihan muuta, niin kyl sen sit huomaa ja kuulee."

TABLE 8. Successful crisis communication

Measurement	Opinion	Notice
Role of crisis communication	Essential in crisis management: with crisis communication the crisis situation can be handled correctly and more damage is prevented	The experts see the role of crisis communication as a part of crisis management.
Good communication	Situation is made better with communication and it supports the crisis management: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - trustworthy - real-time and fast - active, but made in a calm manner - takes minorities into account 	Three evaluated good crisis communication from the public's point of view. If the public is content with the information, it can be described as "good".
Quality of crisis communication	the evaluation of reactions are important because the experts want to have an outside view on the crisis communication. Quality can be measured: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reports - feedback meetings - conversations 	Two of the experts state that it is a positive sign if one doesn't get any complaints after the crisis situation

As a conclusion successful crisis communication is according to the experts essential part of crisis management. Crisis communication is meant to be fast and reliable, especially when the information is coming from a public sector organization. In a crisis situation the organization should not lose its trustworthiness in the eyes of public and the media. The experts state that they know how successful their measurements have been in crisis communication by collecting feedback from the public and the media. Also they follow the reporting of the media and also the public discussion.

6.3 Quality criteria

In this chapter the results of the questionnaire on the quality criteria for crisis communication are analysed (items below refer to tasks mentioned in the scorecard and were derived from Vos and Palttala, see appendix 2). The experts were asked to evaluate the importance of various quality criteria for crisis communication on a scale from 1 to 5 (5 meaning “really important” and 1 meaning “not important”) and also mark the five most important statements from 1. to 5.

TABLE 9. Questions on quality criteria.

How important do you consider the following aspects of crisis communication?
1. Monitoring civilians' needs and perceptions
2. Analyzing what information people need to cope in a crisis
3. Investigating what is the level of public understanding of the crisis
4. Making sure that the communication channels are versatile
5. Identifying the stakeholders
6. Knowing what the stakeholders consider reliable sources
7. Taking various language groups into account
8. Giving special attention to vulnerable groups
9. Providing clear information and instructions to civilians
10. Showing empathy for civilians involved
11. That the information is accessible and reliable
12. That the content of information is correct, trustworthy and up to date
13. That the necessary manpower is available
14. Following the discourse in the written press, radio and TV
15. Monitoring the discourse in internet and conversation areas
16. Ensuring that the information provided to the media is correct
17. That the accessibility of information is round-the-clock
18. That crisis communication is planned together within the network
19. That the objectives of crisis communication is discussed together
20. That there is an on-going exchange of information

Below the results are presented in a figure 4. in which the results of similar organizations (cities, rescue departments, health care districts versus ministries) are combined. The numbers given in the graphic are an average of those organizations.

Also what are the most important statements (from 1 to five) is shown in a figure 5. Numbers are given so, that the first mentioned got 5 points, second 4, third 3, fourth 2 and fifth 1 point and then the numbers are count together according to the sequence where the experts put the items.

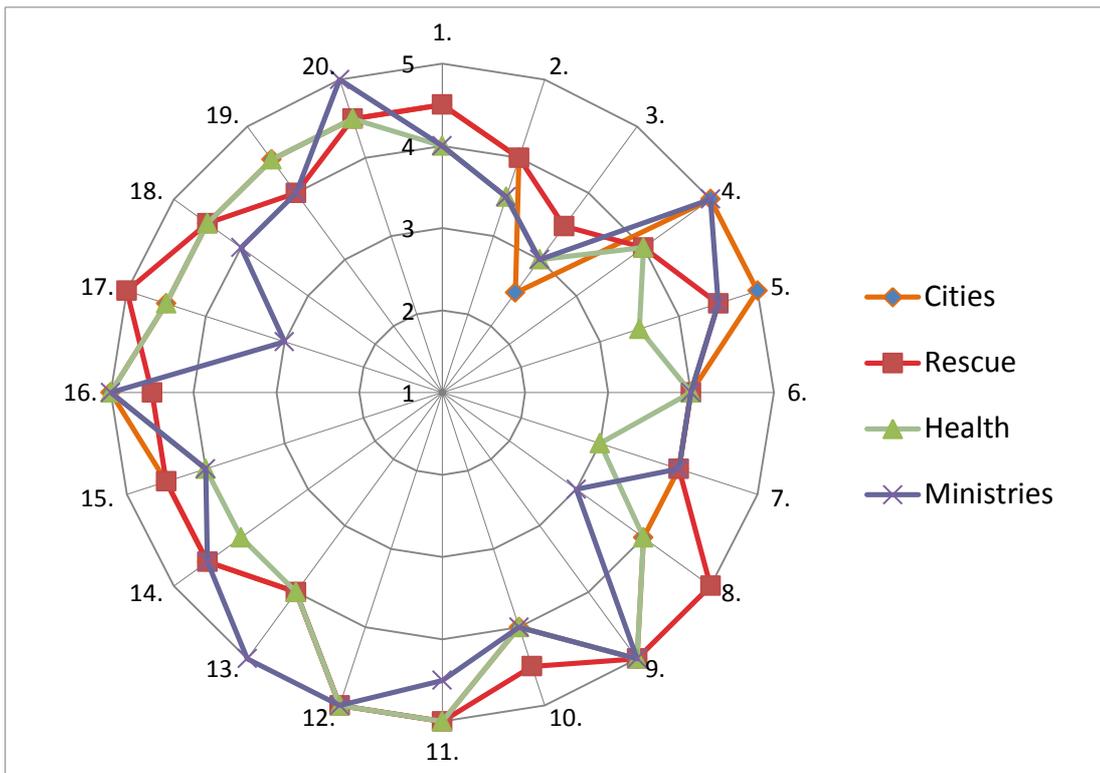


FIGURE 4. The answers for cities, rescue departments, health care districts and ministries to: “How important (on a scale of 1 to 5) do you consider the following statements in crisis communication?”

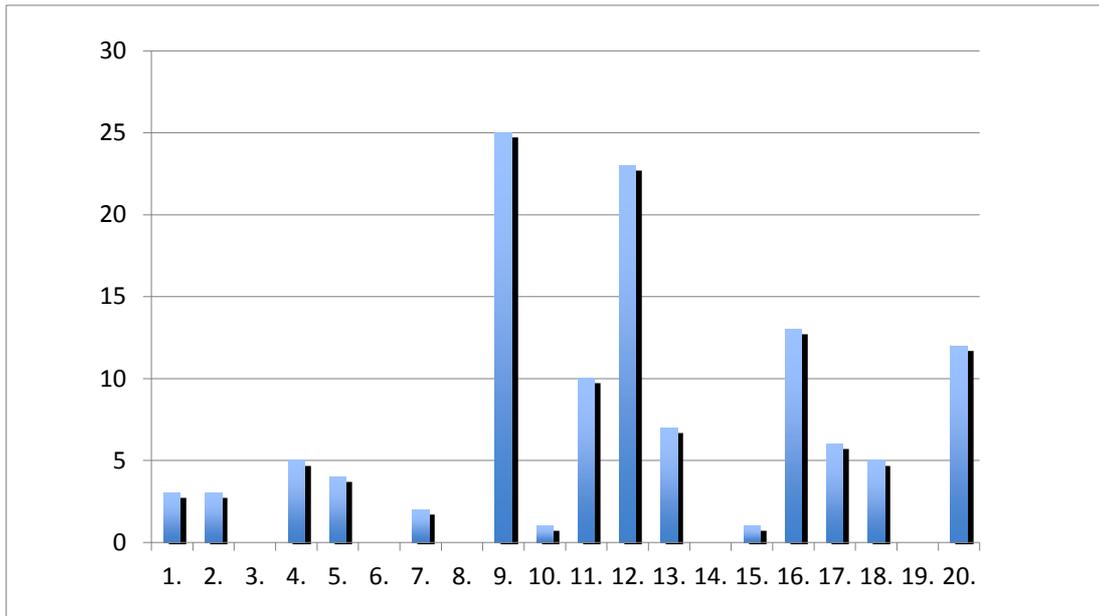


FIGURE 5. The most important criteria in crisis communication quality. The numbers are counted together according to the sequence where the experts put the items (from 1. to 5. according to the importance).

The results show that the respondents considered all the quality criteria important (see figure 4.). None of the items were evaluated with a number 1 (not important). The respondents considered as the most important items (see figure 4. and 5.): that the content of information is correct, trustworthy and up to date (item 9), that clear information and instructions to civilians is provided (item 11), that the information is accessible and reliable (item 12), that it is ensured that the information provided to the media is correct (item 16), and that there is an on-going exchange of information (item 20).

These results support the answers given in the interviews. The interviewees considered it most important that the information is correct and can be trusted. The information given to the public (civilians) is also important. The message to public in crisis situation needs to include the message about how to cope in crisis situation and the instructions on how to behave in crisis situation. The information must be easily accessible and reliability of the organization is important. Also the need for exchange of information with other organizations and public concerning the crisis is important.

The items that were considered less important when giving the number grade to all the statements (see figure 4.) were: analyzing what kind of information people need to cope in crisis (item 2), investigate what is the

level of public understanding of the crisis (item 3) and taking various language groups into account (item 7). The respondents explained this by referring to a lack of resources and time. In a crisis situation the respondents did not see possibilities to analyze or investigate publics' opinions or need of information. About the language most of the organization stated that they give the information in both Finland's national languages, but that there are no resources for more languages to be taken into account. Sometimes also English was used in the communication.

The biggest differences between the organization types were shown for the following items (see figure 4.): give special attention to vulnerable groups (item 8) and accessibility of information is round-the-clock (item 17). These items were evaluated by the ministries with a 3 and by the rescue departments with a 5. The respondents from rescue departments stated that it is important to give special attention to vulnerable groups, because rescue departments give guidance to different groups on how to react in risk-situations and accidents (i.e. children, elderly people). On the ministries point of view they give all the needed information to all the citizens without taking a certain group more in consideration than others.

As a conclusion the experts stated that in the quality criteria of crisis communication the statements that considered the correctness and trustworthiness of information were most important. Crucial is also that the information given to civilians is clear and correct. Less important are the statements about analyzing the information that people need in a crisis situation and also investigating the level of public understanding.

In the next chapter the results have been discussed in more precise matter and compared to the theory in chapters 3 and 4.

6.4 Discussion

Focus of this research was to define public sector communication experts' views on best practices behind crisis communication and clarify how they evaluate quality in crisis communication in the public sector. The aim of the study was also to compare the theory of best practices and quality thinking in crisis communication, and the views that the public sector experts have. In this chapter the results of the research are discussed and compared with the theoretical framework in chapters 3 and 4.

The research questions in this thesis are:

Q1. Do the best practices and quality thinking in crisis communication literature differ from the views of Finnish public sector communication experts?

Q2. Are the quality criteria in crisis communication considered important by communication experts?

6.4.1 Comparing best practices thinking

In the Seeger's (2006, 234 - 235) broad list of best practices in crisis communication and the list by Covello (2003, 5 - 8) there are many similarities found with the answers of the communication experts in the study, although there were also differences in emphasis. Seeger's first and second best practice are about communication strategies' integration to decision-making and pre-event planning. This can also be seen from the answers of the experts'. Communication plans are a part of the decision-making in the crisis situation and the plans are based on the communication strategies. All of the organizations had some kind of crisis communication plan and it was important to the organizations to handle crisis situations according to the plans.

The next two best practices in Seeger's list are about the partnership and listening of the public. Quality is an effort to answer the needs of the target groups. The quality in communication is seen as the two-way symmetrical system theory by Grunig (2001). This means that the organizations need to have an open relationship with the public. All the experts mentioned that the most important group for crisis communication is the citizens. The dialogue is open and the public is first to know about the crisis situation.

Also the best practice about honesty, candor and openness is shown in the research results. For municipalities, communication quality can be defined as the degree of which communication strengthens the relationship between the municipality's citizens and the municipal organization. From the point of view of the experts the honesty and the truth are most important things when communicating about crisis. Also the best practice about collaboration is shown in the answers. Public sector organizations have to cooperate constantly with other organizations.

In Seeger's list the last best practice is about the message of self-efficacy. The aim of this practice is to help publics to survive in a crisis situation and reduce harm. That was mentioned many times in the interviews: the meaning and the role of crisis communication is to prevent more harm from happening. Furthermore, the practice about meeting the needs of the media in both Seeger's and Covello's list was also mentioned by the experts many times. In Finland the public sector organizations need to have an open relationship with the news media, because the law obligates them to make decisions and documents public. Consequently, public authorities have a duty to answer the media, also in crisis situations.

Differences between Seeger's and Covello's list and the research results were found in a few themes. In any of the interviews there was no mention about the tone of the message in crisis situation. Both Seeger and Covello emphasize that the communication must be dealt with compassion, concern and empathy. The lack of this in the results can be a reason of many things, but firstly it can be about the position of the organizations. They all work as a part of security and health system in Finland and the tone of the message can be self-evident. This is not a reason why they should not consider this as important thing in crisis situation. Members of the public need compassion in a difficult situation even from the public official. The tone and the humanity of communication should be discussed more in crisis situation.

In the Seeger's list the ninth best practice is about accepting uncertainty and ambiguity. This was not shown in the experts' answers directly, but in some answers there was the point that you can never be too ready or well prepared in a crisis situation. It is also difficult to understand the warning signals in some crisis that the organizations in question deal with. For example, the Tsunami in the Indian Ocean in 2004 was a crisis that no-one expected to ever happen. The public officials have learned from crisis situations that have happened in the past. The organizations have made crisis management plans where they have listed all the possible crisis situations that may happen to their organization or crisis situations that they need to deal with. So the organizations in questions do accept some uncertainty even if they don't necessary identify it or mention it in an interview situation. Organizations have also prepared for situations that are very rare or unlikely to happen.

6.4.2 Comparing quality criteria

The results state that all the quality criteria found in the crisis communication literature are important in the public sector communication expert's view. All the criteria listed were considered important. The most important criteria were "Provide clear information and instructions", "The content should be correct, trustworthy, up to date and timely", "Ensure that information provided to the media is correct, trustworthy and timely" and "Ongoing exchange of information, to know the partners, responsibilities and current actions".

For public sector organizations it is important to communicate in correct and up-to-date-way to the public and on time. Because the organizations work in a sector where change of information is vital to be able to do their work, the experts emphasize the exchange of information. Also the criteria about providing clear information and instructions to the public can be seen as clear objective of public sector organizations because their role is to keep the citizens safe. The relationship with the media is important for the public sector organizations because the need for information is mentioned in the law. The organizations see their relationship with the media sometimes as difficult, but the experts state that it is very important to give the media the information in a correct, fast and proactive manner, because the media is the channel to connect with the larger public.

The different evaluation of the statement about round-the-clock information may be caused by the fact that the rescue departments are used to working round the clock and the media are contacting them at any hour. The Ministry for Foreign affairs has a back-up system for situations that they need to deal with outside office hours, even if they don't consider it an important criterion. So in this answer the reality is different from the evaluation of the statement. The ministries need to be available at all times in national crisis situations. This lesson is mostly learned from the Tsunami in the Indian Ocean in 2004.

Statement that was considered less important by the health care districts was about the investigating what information people need to have to cope in a crisis situation. The organisations considered it to be difficult to execute in crisis situation. This is contradictory because the message that they give to public in a crisis situation is mostly about coping. The health care districts

need to deal with crisis that happen in their hospitals but also in situations where their help is needed to take care of the patients. The ministries considered the statement about giving special attention to vulnerable groups less important. Both of the ministries actually do take care of these things, it is also mentioned in the law, but maybe they don't consider it so important because they consider their service to be for everyone. Still it is important to recognize that there are different groups that need special attention so that they would have the same opportunity to get information in crisis situations.

7 CONCLUSIONS

As a conclusion of this study it can be stated that the results gathered from the interviews and the questionnaire support the findings in the theory. The theory of best practices in crisis communication is based on the broader literature and the basics of that theory can also be implemented in the public sector organizations in Finland.

The perspective of quality in crisis communication is not yet broadly studied but a similar approach can be found in the best practices in crisis communication. The best practices show how measurements are done correctly and so that it benefits the organization, the public and the media. The best practices aim at quality, although they have been criticised as lessons that are limited to certain situations like public health crisis. Quality criteria may be more broadly defined and are therefore more easily applied in different situations.

A quality or best practice approach may fit better to public sector organizations than the image restoration theories in crisis communication. Public sector organizations need to protect their reputation to be a trustworthy actor so the public trusts the organizations and the given information. This doesn't mean that image restoration is the most important matter for public sector organizations in a crisis situation. The most important issue for the organizations in question is that they do their best in a difficult situation, aim for success and try to prevent the crisis from getting worse. All of the organizations had some kind of crisis communication plan and it was important for the organizations to handle crisis situations according to the plans. It is important that the organizations see the communication plans as a part of the decision-making in crisis situations and that the plans include communication strategies.

The organizations try to do their best with limited resources. Still it could be recommended that they consider some aspects of successful crisis communication more carefully. To be able to fully respond to crisis situations more should be done, although this needs prioritization of their actions in an organization with limited resources. The resources in hand could be used more effectively, as plenty of knowledge on how to deal with a crisis situation seems to be available for the organizations, while that is not in all cases used accordingly. Lessons learned should be put in use. Furthermore, the organizations do not seem to recognize the strengths that they have, for example, they already have capacity available around-the-clock, even if they do not mention it in an interview situation. A careful assessment of strengths and weaknesses could promote that limited resources are used where needed most.

All interviewees mentioned that the most important group for crisis communication is the citizens. The dialogue is said to be open and the public is first to know about the crises situation. But do the organizations actually listen to what the public has to say in crisis situation or is the communication only one-way? In the answers to the questionnaire about quality criteria was shown that the organizations do not consider that important that they listen and investigate the understanding of the public in crisis situations. It can be considered that the organizations assume they already know what the public wants to hear. This is a risk to the crisis communication. The investigation and listening can sometimes take resources, but the two-way communication and especially listening in a difficult situation can improve the success of crisis communication significantly. It is very important to be able to listen and the change the planned measurements so that the targets of the communication can understand the given information and act correctly. This also improves the trustworthiness of the public sector organizations that was considered important.

Due to these questions, the future research on the area could be about comparing why there are differences in what the experts think and what the organizations actually do, why there are quality gaps between them. Also future research could be about how the quality and best practices approach may apply to other kinds of organizations than public sector organizations.

7.1 Validity and reliability of the study

It is important to evaluate the validity and reliability of the study, because even if the researcher has done her best to avoid mistakes in the research and in the evaluation of the results the reliability of the results are variable. In qualitative research the words validity and reliability are not widely used, but they describe the meaning of the evaluation (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2008, 227.) The meaning of the validity on the measurement used in the research is that the measurement should measure what is meant to measure. The competence of the qualitative research must be evaluated differently than the quantitative research (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 208-222). It is important that the researcher in qualitative study reports the data collection and the process of the study systematically (Patton 1990, 462 - 463).

The process of this study is written systematically in the research section of this thesis. All the phases of the study are reported and additional information is added to the appendixes of the thesis. This is crucially important because there were two different interviewers doing the interviews, so the other researcher did not participate in half of the interviews. This has prevented the asking of additional questions if the answer has had some interesting information for the other study. This is shown especially when starting to analyze the questionnaire about quality criteria. In some of the numerical answers the study would have benefit from additional explanation to the answer. In the interviews only questions about what the interviewees think was asked, not what they actually do. This point of view could be a topic for another research.

The problems in the qualitative analysis concern the generalization of the results. The samples are usually small, but to understand the meaning and the generalization of the research it is important to understand the meaning of purposeful sampling (Patton 1988, 166). The criteria of the successful interpretation are in the fact that the reader also finds the same point of view as the researcher (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000, 151-152.) According to Patton (1990, 464 - 465), the use of triangulation as a research method improves the reliability of the research. It means that more than one research method is used in the study.

In this study the sample was relatively small but all the organizations in question were selected purposefully and there were always two of each organization: ministries, healthcare districts, rescue departments and cities, so that the answers could be compared also to another organization with the same objectives for their actions. The method of analyzing the data was carefully explained in the research section of the study. In the sections where the results were gathered the results were also presented with quotation from the answers. The quotations were written in English but the original Finnish answer was also added to the footnote. The method of analyzing the data was partly a triangulation, because the research material was gathered from interview, a questionnaire and the theoretical analysis. All the data from these different sources was analyzed at the same time and compared.

This study could be replicated in the same way and the results are most likely to be quite similar. The study is able to give general picture of the views of communication experts' in public sector about successful crisis communication and how the quality criteria apply to their actions in crisis communication. The results of the study can be considered useful for the broader international study about developing a Crisis Communication Scorecard and for future study.

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Appendix 1. Quality criteria by Vos and Palttala 2009, version 0.1

Quality criteria, introduction

The aim is to specify the quality criteria in the scorecard by connecting the indicators to broader quality principles. Criteria are provided in three categories: public communication, media relations and network quality.

There are various quality criteria for how to communicate with public groups. Communication has to be geared towards civilians' needs and perceptions; this is based on continuous monitoring of civilians' needs and perceptions ('listening'). Also the communication means chosen should reflect the diversity of media use by publics. As nowadays' audiences are more fragmented, it is crucial to know the target group segments in the area, as civilians seek information in different ways, they can be e.g. passive or active information seekers. Then the strategies should be appropriate in stressful situations to empowering civilians to act, and information should be accessible and reliable. Multi-authority situations call for coordination in the network, integrated communication strategies and adequate resources to plan and conduct communication activities.

Overview of Quality criteria

I. PUBLIC COMMUNICATION QUALITY: monitoring, diversity of media and appropriate strategies for stressful situations

- **Monitoring of civilians' needs and perceptions:**
 - o Analyse what information and other needs people have in order to cope with a current crisis and what they perceive as challenging (e.g. regular surveys, analyses on online discourse and fast info of those that serve as boundary spanners)
 - o Investigate which risks are felt and what is their connotation (e.g. are they low/highly sensitive topics prone to cause polarisation, fear, anger or misunderstandings; to be measured on a regular basis to see changes)
 - o Investigate what is the level of public understanding of these risks (e.g. general understanding of backgrounds and what to do, e.g. in case of flu symptoms, a suspicious package, when an alarm sounds, or for what purposes 112 should be called)
- **Diversity of communication means:**
 - o Knowledge of the stakeholder segments and communication climate: media use, information seeking and processing; what are considered reliable sources and intermediaries
 - o Targeted well for public groups and with a diversity of well chosen media and intermediaries, also taking various languages into account.

- Special attention for vulnerable groups, including handicapped, schools, institutions for care of the elderly, affected companies etc.
- **Empower to act:**
 - Provide clear information and instructions (repeating essential features like place and time)
 - Show empathy for civilians involved and facilitating sense making of the situation.
- **Accessibility and reliability of the information:**
 - Accessibility of information and facilities (e.g. well known updated websites and call centres with round-the-clock service by enough trained manpower)
 - The content should be correct, trustworthy, up to date and timely.

II. MEDIA RELATIONS QUALITY: appropriate ways of working in media strategies

- **Stimulating a public service orientation in cooperation:**
- **Following the discourse in the media and on the internet**
 - Monitoring of media reports in written press, radio and television (e.g. by content analyses)
 - Monitoring of news sites on the web.
- Correct and accessible information:**
 - Ensuring that information provided to the media is correct, trustworthy and timely;
 - Accessibility of information and facilities (e.g. up-to-date web info and round-the-clock media service by enough trained manpower).

III. NETWORK QUALITY: coordination and joint communication strategies

- **Planning for joint preparedness:**
 - Discussing objectives and strategies for crisis communication (e.g. for various scenarios); procedures for up scaling (as for communication up scaling may be needed more often and earlier than for the rescue activities);
 - Arranging communication platforms and channels (e.g. alarm system, crisis info website and call centre)
 - Checking and arranging for enough communication manpower, e.g. by pooling expertise for round-the-clock service.
- **Network exchange and training:**
 - Ongoing exchange of information, to know the partners, responsibilities and current actions
 - Joint exercises and training for enough expert manpower in communication.

Appendix 2. Questionnaire

Please, evaluate every statement from your organizations point of view in the scale 1 to 5, where 1 = not important, 5 = very important. List the five most important statements: 1. is the most important, 5. is the fifth most important.

Public crisis communication (citizens):

It is important in crisis communication to:

Monitoring civilians' needs and perceptions	1	2	3	4	5
Analyze what information people need to cope in crisis	1	2	3	4	5
Investigate what is the level of public understanding of the crisis	1	2	3	4	5
Make sure that the communication channels are versatile	1	2	3	4	5
Recognize the stakeholders	1	2	3	4	5
Knowing what the stakeholders consider reliable sources	1	2	3	4	5
Take various language groups into account	1	2	3	4	5
Give special attention to vulnerable groups (disabled, children, elderly)	1	2	3	4	5
Provide clear information and instructions to civilians	1	2	3	4	5
Show empathy for civilians involved	1	2	3	4	5
The information is accessible and reliable	1	2	3	4	5
The content of information is correct, trustworthy and up to date	1	2	3	4	5
The necessary manpower is available	1	2	3	4	5

Media relations:

It is important during the crisis situation:

Follow the discourse in the written press, radio and TV	1	2	3	4	5
Monitor the discourse in internet and conversation areas	1	2	3	4	5
Ensure that the information provided to media is correct	1	2	3	4	5
Accessibility of information is round-the-clock	1	2	3	4	5

Co-operation:

Crisis communication is planned together within the network	1	2	3	4	5
The objectives of crisis communication is discussed together	1	2	3	4	5
There is on-going exchange of information	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix 3. Interview questions

Background

1. How is crisis communication related to your work?
2. Please, describe your own organizations experience in crisis communication shortly.
3. What kinds of crisis have occurred or do you expect to happen?

Crisis preparedness

1. Does your organization have a crisis communication plan or scenario strategies, and is crisis communication planned as a part of this?
2. How well has your organization prepared for possible crises?
3. What is the role of communication in crisis situations?
4. For who is crisis communication meant?

Quality

1. How would you describe good crisis communication?
2. What is most important in crisis communication?
3. How important are, to your opinion, the following matters in crisis communication? (Items were listed in a separate paper.)
4. How do you know to what extent your crisis communication is successful?

Assessment

1. How and what kind of goals do you set up for crisis communication?
2. Do you assess your crisis communication? Why and how?
3. Is it important to assess crisis communication and why?
4. What are you actually measuring when you assess crisis communication?
5. What is difficult in assessing crisis communication?

Crisis Communication Scorecard

1. Why are the questions you marked not understandable?
2. Why are the statements you marked unimportant to your organization?
3. Is the Scorecard easy to use? Why, why not?
4. Is the Scorecard suitable for assessing your organizations crisis communication?
5. Is the list of functions in each phase of crisis extensive or is it missing something?

Appendix 4. Interview questions in Finnish

Taustaa

1. Kuinka kriisiviestintä liittyy työhönne?
2. Kuvailisitteko lyhyesti organisaationne kokemuksia kriisiviestinnästä?
3. Millaisia kriisejä organisaatiollenne on tapahtunut, tai millaisia voisi tapahtua?

Valmistautuminen

1. Onko teillä kriisiviestintäsuunnitelmaa tai -strategiaa? Jos ei, niin miksi? Onko tarkoitus tehdä? (Pyydä materiaalit itsellesi.)
2. Kuinka hyvin organisaationne on valmistautunut mahdollisiin kriiseihin?
3. Mikä on viestinnän rooli kriisitilanteessa?
4. Kenelle kriisiviestintänne on tarkoitettu?

Laatu

1. Miten kuvailisitte onnistunutta kriisiviestintää?
2. Mikä on mielestänne tärkeintä kriisiviestinnässä?
3. Arvioikaa jokaista väittämää asteikolla 1-5.
4. Haluaisitteko lisätä luetteloon jotakin?
5. Mistä tiedätte, että kriisiviestintä on onnistunutta?

Arviointi

1. Miten ja millaisia tavoitteita asetatte kriisiviestinnälle?
2. Arvioitteko kriisiviestintää? Miksi ja miten?
3. Onko kriisiviestinnän arviointi tärkeää? Miksi?
4. Mitä itse asiassa mittaatte (teette), kun arvioitte kriisiviestintää?
5. Mikä kriisiviestinnän arvioinnissa on vaikeaa?

Kriisiviestinnän tulokortti

1. Ovatko kohdassa 1.1. esitetyt väittämät ymmärrettäviä? Kyllä / Ei
Ympäröikää kohdat, jotka ovat epäselviä.
2. Ovatko kohdassa 1.1. esitetyt väittämät tärkeitä organisaationne kannalta? Kyllä / Ei
3. Onko tulokorttia helppo käyttää? Miksi, miksi ei?
4. Sopisiko tulokortti organisaationne kriisiviestinnän arviointityökaluksi?
5. Onko tulokortissa esitetty lista kriisin eri vaiheisiin liittyvistä toiminnoista kattava, vai puuttuko siitä jotakin?