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Autor: Ingenhoff, Diana / Thiessen, Ansgar

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General Section

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Diana Ingenhoff & Ansgar Thiessen*

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PR AND JOURNALISM IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

The relationship between journalism and PR has long been discussed within communication science. However, the impact of crisis situations on that relationship has rarely become part of the discussion. Therefore, the aim of the study is to describe the relations between journalism and PR specifically under crisis conditions. Embedded into the intereffication approach, the empirical study is based on qualitative interviews with the heads of corporate communication of Germany's leading stock listed companies and the editors-in-chief of Germany's leading newspapers. Results show, that crises evoke organisational changes in communication and editorial departments. Moreover, in crises, journalists work around prescribed terminologies and take information provided by PR only as basic information. While personal relationships gain relevance for PR, for journalists they become less relevant in a crisis. Journalists intensify and widen their research instead in order to gain exclusive material. Our study for the first time offers a multidimensional examination of media relations in crises both, on the level of actions and on the level of organisation. Findings provide new input for a theoretical development of the intereffication model and help practitioners find guidelines for sophisticated media relations in crises.

Keywords: crisis communication, Public Relations, journalism, intereffication model.

* Université de Fribourg, diana.ingenhoff@unifr.ch, ansgar.thiessen@unifr.ch

1. Aim of the Study

Media are one of the key mediators that organisations use to disperse news not only to a broad public but also to other types of media as well (Deephouse 2000; Regester & Larkin 2005: 184). Therefore, the relationship between public relations and journalism has a long tradition within the scientific discourse and is closely examined by scientists and practitioners with equal manner (Altmeppen, Röttger & Bentele 2005: 11). Theoretical frameworks describing the relationship range from unilateral determination models (Baerns 1979, 1985) to exchange relationship models (Russ-Mohl 2004) and complex systems theory-orientated approaches (Westerbarkey 1995).

So far, very little attention has been paid to the analysis of the relationship between PR and the media explicitly during crisis situations. Cultivating a professional relationship does, however, influence news coverage (Konken 2002) and thus determines the communicative outcome of a crisis. And since building or loosing organisational reputation is predominantly dependent on the media arena (Eisenegger 2005a: 21), sophisticated communication is of particular importance whilst under attack in order to manage or safeguard an organisation's perception. This study therefore gives insights into the relations between stock corporations and newspapers during crisis situations. It follows a qualitative approach, not aiming at testing hypotheses but analyzing central propositions derived from the following research gaps.

2. Research Gap

The existing research on crisis communication is dominated by case studies and lacks comparative and theoretically-bounded results (Berens 2001; Kunczik, Heintzel & Zipfel 1995; Möhrle 2004a; Scherler 1996). Although the number of empirical studies is growing, it is still not enough material to formulate profound crisis imminent conclusions (see also Löffelholz & Schwarz 2008). Specifically the relationship between journalism and PR has rarely become part of the crisis communication literature: There is almost no research on what impact crisis situations have on the specific relationships (Altmeppen et al. 2005) so that the analysis of the relationship lacks of a crisis point of view. And also business editing remains almost entirely unattended in communication science (Russ-Mohl 2006). However, the outcome of in-depth research of the relationship between journalism and PR during crisis situations is most relevant for practical crisis communication management because it helps to understand crisis situations in order to develop adequate communication strategies (Sievert 2007). From these outlines we frame the two research questions we address in this study:

RQ 1: What are the characteristics of the relationship between journalism and PR under crisis conditions?

RQ 2: How can the perceptions by journalism and PR of one another in crises be described?

The definition of crisis in our study mainly derives from key literature on crisis communication: A crisis for a large company is defined as a situation, which may severely threaten its core business. It has a distinct beginning and ending and usually hits as a surprise. Threatened may be tangible as well as intangible assets while the outcome of the crisis remains unclear. As to the complexity of the circumstances, crisis are hardly manageable and demand for immediate actions from both, management and communication (see also Beger, Gärtner & Mathes 1989; Coombs 2002; Girgensohn 2002; Krystek 1987; Merten 2008; Roach 2004; Saxer & Bosshart 1990; Töpfer 1991). As Barton (1990) indicates, a crisis can be viewed as a threat to organisations but also as a potential threat which at the same time severely harms a long term reputation (see also Coombs 1999: 3).

3. Theoretical Background: The Intereffication Model

Communication science provides a variety of theoretical approaches and empirical methods to illustrate the interrelationships between journalism and PR. Regarding the scientific debate, at least three domains can be identified (Löffelholz 2000: 189): First, there is the *one-sided determination* from PR to journalism, which has largely been disproven (Löffelholz 2000: 186; see also Merten 2004: 22; Raupp 2005: 205). Second, the *system theory approaches,* which proclaim a mutual interpenetration, allow an analysis on a macro-theoretical level. However, they are hard to test and it remains unclear whether or not PR can be seen as a system on its own (Löffelholz 2000: 193 f.; Russ-Mohl 2004: 45; Schantel 2000: 78). Third, a theoretical approach of medium reach is the *intereffication approach,* which describes interrelations between PR and journalism on three levels: the level of actors, organisations and systems (Bentele & Nothaft 2004: 70).

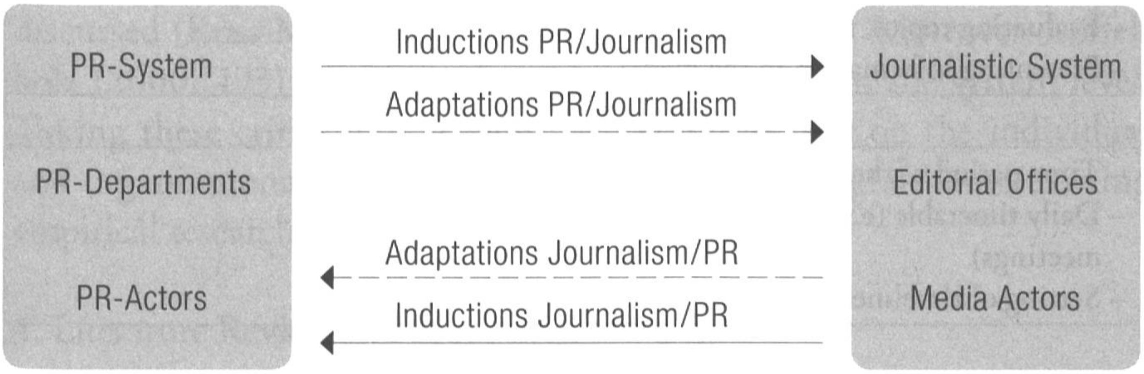
The aim of the study is to describe the interrelationship between PR and journalism during crisis situations. For an analysis on different levels of complexity (the level of actors, the level of organisations and the level of systems) the intereffication approach is most suitable since it neither concentrates on either the level of actors nor the level of systems. Consequently, we take the approach to theoretically embed our study design.

The intereffication model by Bentele et al. (1997; Bentele 2002) assumes that there is a two-way relationship between journalism and PR. Intereffication itself is defined as a complex relation between the both, which unfolds through directional communication (inductions) on the one hand and adaptive actions (adaptations) on the other (Bentele 2002; Bentele et al. 1997: 242; Wehmeier 2008). Directional communication derives either from journalism or public relations, resulting in measurable reactions on each of the other side. Since such specifically directed communication can come from both journalism and PR, there consequently exist both journalistic as well as PR inductions. Adaptive actions on the other hand are communicative adaptations, resulting from an orientation of each side to the other – either knowingly or unknowingly (see Figure 1).

Two dimensional frameworks come with the intereffication model: first, inductions and adaptations may occur on three different *levels:* on the level of actors (e.g. journalists), the level of organisations (e.g. news companies) and on the level of systems. Second, both inductions and adaptations may occur on three different *dimensions.* On the object dimensions it is the topics, relevancy or routines that are being analysed. On the temporal dimension, it is timing or timeliness and on the psycho-social dimension it is the actions, intentions and interests of both PR and journalism. The model, however, does not claim to be a symmetrical model (Knödler 2005: 115), meaning that PR and journalism do not influence

Figure 1: Intereffication Model

a) *Object Dimension* (Selection, issue-generating/-building, placement, presentation)



b) *Temporal Dimension* (Temporal frames and routines)
c) *Psycho-social Dimension* (Psychic preconditions, organizational frameworks and routines)

Source: Bentele et al. 1997: 242

each other equally. All this finally leads to a sophisticated description of the relationship between journalism and PR (see Table 1).

The intereffication model has been empirically tested since its introduction and the process still continues (Bentele & Nothaft 2007: 65). Out of this discourse, additions and alterations have emerged, which we will partly integrate: First, most studies still focus only on single aspects or do not take the influences from journalism on public relations into account (Bentele & Nothaft 2007: 72). Thus, our study not only transfers the model to the field of crisis communication but also analyses inductions and adaptations on *both* sides, PR *and* journalism. It is therefore an important addition to the scientific discourse on a theoretical reflection of the relationship between journalism and PR. Second, scholars have achieved results indicating that there is a difference between an intended induction and inductive results. Adaptive processes may also not necessarily provide

Table 1: Outline of Inductions and Adaptations

Journalism	**Inductions** *Public relations*
Object dimension	
– Selection of topics – Setting its importance – Evaluating topics, themes – Presenting information in the media	– Setting of topics
Temporal dimension	
– Time period of the medium – Daily timetable (e.g. for editorial meetings) – Setting of timeliness	– Timing
Psycho-social dimension	
– Social routines, intentions and interests – Organisational structures	– Social routines, intentions and interests (e.g. such as strategies) – Organisational structures
Journalism	**Adaptations** *Public relations*
Object dimension	
– Orientation on organisational demands from PR	– Orientation on contextual and social routines of journalism
Temporal dimension	
– Orientation on temporal routines of PR	– Orientation on time period or daily timetable of editorial departments
Psycho-social dimension	
– Single actions	– Single actions

evidence for a tangible adaptive effect (Donsbach & Wenzel 2002: 20). Liebert (2004: 6) thus differentiates between inductions and an *inductive potential,* and adaptations and an *adaptive offering.* The distinction makes clear that proving communicative intentions from one side to the other may indeed not result automatically into actual inductions, however, they do have the potential to do so. Regarding the design of our study, our ability to prove inductions or adaptations is limited (input/output analyses may rather indicate such results). However, our qualitative approach may show substantial inductive potential with respect to adaptive offerings so that we integrate his remarks into our study. The discussion of the results shows that taking this distinction into account clearly benefits the qualitative outcome of the study and the shaping of the intereffication model.

Critics admit that the approach, too, has its limitations. Whether or not a single system of public relations exists has never exclusively been discussed (Russ-Mohl 2004: 45; Schantel 2000: 78). Moreover, Löffelholz (2000: 193) questions the counterpart to PR on the system level. Taking these critics into account, our study focuses on the individual and organisational level and therewith perfectly integrates into existing empirical research.

4. Literature Review and Propositions

The scientific discourse, regardless of its scholars, meanwhile assembles a variety of methods and perspectives in analysing crisis situations. Research takes place on different levels and either deals with pre-crisis, crisis response or post-crisis subjects (Eisenegger 2005b; Ingenhoff 2004; Lee 2004; Marra 1998; Sapriel 2007; Sturges 1994). Nevertheless, a large number of studies elaborate on crisis situations on a case study basis (Falkheimer & Heide 2006). The findings range from media processes (Kepplinger 2001) and crisis communication after terrorist attacks (Argenti 2002) to communication strategies and apologia (Fearn-Banks 2007; Hearit 2006; Regester & Larkin 2005). But analysing crisis situations referring to single cases clearly limits the possibilities for comparative answers on a more general level, and for helping communication science develop normative explanations (Reilly 1993). This leads to a key characteristic of crisis communication literature: An emerging body of scientific research in the fields of crisis management and crisis communication, leave case study approaches behind in favour of more crisis imminent (though often adapted) theories and models (Bradford & Garrett 1995; Coombs & Holladay 1996, 2002; Gonzáles-Herrero & Pratt 1996; Horsley & Barker 2002). Even though all of these approaches determine poor crisis communication as a reputational threat (Lyon & Cameron 2004; Schnietz & Epstein 2005), they share only a mediating role to the media (Barton 1990: 6; Fearn-Banks 2007: 24) rather than a key stakeholder role (Deephouse 2000). However in crises, it is the media that can both build or damage organisational reputation sustainably (Klimke & Schott 1993: 148; Lee 2004; Locarek-Junge, Strassberger & Wagner 2003: 125; Merten 2006: 25).

Baerns (1979) was the first to analyse the relationship between journalism and PR. She argues that public relations determines both, content and timing of journalism (Baerns 1985: 98). Her ideas lead to the so called determination hypothesis which continues to be vividly discussed (Altmeppen et al. 2005; Szyszka 1997: 210). Since empirical studies have proven that determination is as plausible as non-determination (Saffarnia 1993: 14; Schantel 2000: 73), its significance has rapidly faded. The result contributed to the rise of various theories and models taking on the desiderata, such as the intereffication model by Bentele et al. (1997) or various system theory related approaches (Westerbarkey 1995). Most striking among them are studies taking crises as their main field of interest while the analyses of the relationship between journalism and PR are still rare. One of the early studies discovering that PR and journalism compete for media content during crisis situations comes from Barth & Donsbach (1992). They found that in crises journalists begin to widen the number of sources used while PR material is seen far more critically. So the authors for the first time show that crisis situations indeed have an impact on the relationship between journalism and PR. However, the significance of the study is limited since their argumentation is based on a rather small number of cases (four press conferences). Moreover, critics admit that their study primarily analyses only press releases as a key instrument of media relations. Consequently, any other type of instruments, such as personal relations, websites, SMS, background talks or even exclusive off the records consultations are being entirely neglected (Altmeppen et al. 2005: 11). We therefore take our first proposition on a more general level and assume that:

P_1: Public relations as well as editorial departments alter their instruments in crises in order to maintain the most precise flow of information.

From the above instruments, the most striking regarding media relations is personal relations. Studies already hint that they have an effect on crisis communication, too (Coombs 1999: 53; Konken 2002: 123). In order to test the assumptions of the intereffication model we ask whether or not personal relations have an impact on inductions or adaptations.

P_2: Personal relationships between journalists and PR-responsibles have an impact on inductions and adaptations during a crisis.

Literature on crisis communication tells us that initially holding back information is quite common, especially when organisations have not been trained well and are overwhelmed by the crisis (for the strategy of denial see also Coombs 2006; Locarek-Junge et al. 2003: 133). Consequently, communication departments not only offer information to the media during crises but also follow a strategy of unintentional or even deliberate denial. Denial has so far resulted in an increasing demand for information on the journalistic side (Kunczik et al. 1995: 46). The question of what impact denials have in crisis situations leads to the third proposition:

P_3: In crises, a denial of journalistic demands by PR leads to an increase in inductive offerings.

A more recent work by Knödler (2005) investigates the relationship between corporate spokespersons and business editors. He theoretically and empirically identifies factors of success supporting the relationship. One of his central findings is that having a confiding relationship in the first place facilitates collaboration during crises (see also Lyon & Cameron 2004). His findings correspond to the assumption that PR regularly adopts routines and procedures of journalism (Reinecke 1997: 118). To question whether or not such adaptive processes occur in crises too leads to the proposition:

P_4: In crises, Public Relations adopt processes and routines of journalism while journalism adopts processes and routines of Public Relations.

Widening the view from the individual to the organisational level, scholars have proven that in economic crises organisations change their organisational structures in a highly sophisticated manner (Beger et al. 1989: 172; Coombs 1999: 118; Deg 2005: 238). Little, however, is known about such changes within editorial departments. Our final proposition therefore is:

P_5: Crisis related adaptations on the organisational level may be observed with PR-departments and with journalism.

5. Method

5.1. Design

To obtain profound insight into the relationship between journalism and PR we chose a qualitative approach and developed a set of categories derived from the literature review and our propositions. Taking into account the theoretical framework on the one hand and the current scientific debate on crisis communication on the other, we identified nine content categories of specific relevance. With respect to the intereffication model, we further classified the categories into inductions and adaptations (see Table 2). The set of categories was then the framework for the questions of the interview guideline.

Table 2: Categories for the Interview Questions

Inductions	Adaptations
– Instruments and routines of PR: generating topics – Instruments and routines of PR: denial – Instruments and routines of journalism – Personal relationships – Strategic communication	– Instruments and routines of PR – Structures and organisation – Instruments and routines of journalism – Strategic communication

5.2. Sample

The sample was taken from Germany's leading stock listed companies of the Deutsche Aktienindex (DAX) mainly for two reasons. First, they are obliged by law to publish key financial figures such as revenue, profit and company size. This enables an exact definition of the population (n = 30). Second, taking the DAX as the population is most appropriate since our data collection relies on companies having a communication department and a sophisticated crisis communication (see also Schertler 1998: 33). Regarding the size in terms of revenue and employees, we assume that companies listed on the DAX provide such departments, which are, moreover, responsible for the communication during a crisis, too. All 30

DAX companies have been categorised into chemical/pharma industries, trading/consumer goods industries, financial industries, technology/providing industries and automobile industry (Richard 1992: 116). From each group, three companies were then randomly chosen.

The sample of the editors was drawn from all national, daily circulation newspapers in Germany of a circulation 250.000 and higher. The population consists of n = 15 newspapers (12 nationwide papers, 2 business papers, and 1 boulevard press). We followed a multi-stage sampling procedure so that the newspapers were chosen during the data collection process. This gave us the opportunity to contact only newspapers being mentioned during the interviews with the DAX companies. In doing so, we were able to avoid suggestive answers by PR about editorial departments, which are not part of their crisis communication at all. Since only relevant media became part of the sample, this gave us the opportunity to get most precise data describing the relationship between journalism and PR in crises.

The respondents in this study were 15 interviewees – 8 heads of PR or corporate communication of Germany's DAX companies and 7 editors taking responsibility for the economics departments of Germany's national, daily newspapers (return rate 33 %).

Table 3: Interview Partners

Interview Partner	Company / Newspaper
Head of corporate communications	*Company 01* Sports equipment manufacturer
Head of corporate communications	*Company 02* Stock exchange
Head of press relations	*Company 03* Post and Logistics
Head of corporate communications	*Company 04* Automotive
Vice president corporate communications	*Company 05* Software engineering
Head of corporate communications	*Company 06* Semiconductors and electronics

(continued)

First Spokesperson	*Company 07* Reinsurance
Head of corporate communications Europe/Media Relations	*Company 08* Chemical
Head of business news Switzerland	*Journalist 01* Business newspaper
Head of business news	*Journalist 02* Boulevard newspaper
Retired editor in chief	*Journalist 03* Boulevard newspaper
Responsible for business news	*Journalist 04* Nationwide newspaper
Business journalist	*Journalist 05* Nationwide newspaper
Business journalist	*Journalist 06* Nationwide newspaper
Business journalist	*Journalist 07* Business newspaper

As our study follows a qualitative design, n = 15 is a sufficient number since all interviewees are most relevant for finding evidence for the propositions according to their expert status and status as head of the communication/business editorial department.

5.3. Procedure

The guided telephone interviews lasted between 45 to 75 minutes. To ensure that the participants respond on the basis of the same background, our understanding of corporate crises was presented ahead of the interviews. All interviews have been recorded and horizontally transcribed (Ayass 2005: 377; Kowal & O'Connell 2000: 438). To analyse the data we chose the qualitative content analysis by Legewie (1994). It enables a very close interpretation of the material since it focuses on texts intending individual communication on the one hand and drawing contextual conclusions on the other (Legewie 1994: 177). We first surveyed the material and embedded it into the context of the study. In the textual analysis we then drew conclusions from relevant passages to the research question(s) and propositions to build a subject index. Finally, text passages relating to the same propositions/research questions were compared with one another in a table of contents (Bortz & Döring 2005: 331; Legewie 1994: 179). This led finally to the discussion of the results. To manage the analysis of the vast amount of material generated, the software HyperResearch was used.

6. Results

6.1. Instruments (P_1)

The study shows that choosing communication instruments on the PR side depends on various circumstances. We were able to identify, though, that crises seem to have a specific impact on the selection process in terms of a deliberate reflection. Three of the interviewees mentioned that a press release will always be a press release but its intention changes:

> *"The intention of a press release in a crisis is to keep a broad public informed. It is not necessarily a source for most recent and for strategic information processing" (Company 05).*

Press releases may therefore remain an appropriate communication tool to quickly inform a vast number of journalists and the broad public. However in crisis situations, additional instruments are carefully taken into consideration: Online media (such as websites or E-Mail) or even short message service (SMS) become increasingly relevant – instruments that are not or rarely used during non-crises. None of the interviewees mentioned that they vary the instruments with respect to boulevard or quality press. Only the content will be specified (more quick and simple to boulevard media) if there is the time to do so:

> *"I will not talk about cash-flow difficulties or accountancy rules with boulevard media. With them I talk about why we have troubles earning money. You need to think about what your customer, which is the journalist, wants and serve him accordingly" (Company 06).*

In contrast, journalists do not expand their instruments but intensify them. For example, the number of sources being interviewed to verify information rises during a crisis. Not only is the company in a crisis and its competitors being questioned but also employees, residents or victims affected by the incident. Further sources that were mentioned are relatives, business consultants, analysts and experts from associations or even friends. Most striking is that journalists take PR departments as a source only for basic information. Generally, the selection of instruments by journalists seems not to follow any specific pattern but depends on personal gusto. While PR departments strategically reflect which instrument fits best to follow an outlined communication strategy, there were no signs for such a reflection on the journalistic side whatsoever. Our results stand in line with the results Barth & Donsbach (1992) presented. However, while they show that journalists see PR material more critically, we identified an even broader alteration of journalistic instruments.

6.2. Personal Relationships (P_2)

The study shows that there is a distinction between one-to-one collaborations (as a professional PR tool) and personal relationships (as an often long established professional relation between two people). While Coombs (1999) and Konken (2002) identify one-to-one collaboration as most relevant during crisis situations, our results differentiate this relation. The relevance of *one-to-one collaborations* for PR managers in crises is still high. However, established *personal relationships* have been assessed differently. Taking a look at PR departments first, we identified a rising demand for personal relationships (meaning to personally know the other side) to better (meaning more deeply and profoundly) inform the media. This is specifically because giving background information that is of great importance can be best passed over via personal means of communication to someone you know:

> *"When I talk to a journalist I don't know, I will never give him the kind of information he might want but pass him the general information everyone else gets. I don't know whether or not he will stick to an*

agreement (such as keeping information confidential), therefore I don't do it in the first place" (Journalist 07, see also Company 06).

Journalists on the contrary see personal relationships far more critically during times of crises. They mentioned that its importance is clearly limited:

"In the moment it is neck or nothing, the economic interests of a media company are more important than any personal relationship to the PR department, which is only giving out unified information anyway" (Journalist 02).

This consequently means that we did not find support for P_2 because in crises journalists view personal relationships to PR with great caution.

6.3. Denial (P_3)

The study identifies that in crises, the denial of information does not necessarily lead to an increase of inductive offerings – unlike the assumptions by Kunczik et al. (1995). Despite our assumption, journalists in fact do understand if in a crisis a company is not able to give a specific piece of information to the media at once. Five of the interviewed journalists mentioned that getting no information from communication departments during a crisis is acceptable – namely depending on certain restrictions. The most important restriction is to deliver a sound explanation of why that information is not being given on request. Explanations being mentioned during the interviews were: in case of casualty telling family members what happened first or holding back confidential information on a potential takeover. However, deliberate denial on the contrary is not being accepted at all. Lies or untrue information to cover-up that distract from unpleasant facts will immediately be canonised (e.g. by a biting commentary):

"This is a common misinterpretation: To say, they won't get this piece of information anyway. But quite often this is just the case since for us in a crisis, information come from everywhere else out of the company

> *but the communication department. Which is hard to reconstruct for them" (Journalist 03, Company 04).*

On the PR side, denial is mainly used for reasons of irrelevance of a (small or local) newspaper for an overall communication strategy, bad experience (based on personal experiences) with journalists or strategic considerations such as takeovers or personnel cutbacks. Somewhat going along with the topic of denial is the selective information processing. One of the companies highlighted that they do not deny information or deliberately lie but

> *"[...] one finds certain content that either distracts from the actual crisis or one only answers their questions without telling everything one knows" (Company 05).*

This means that deliberate denial is taking place in crises and journalists show empathy – if a comprehensible explanation goes with it.

6.4. Processes and Routines (P_4)

In terms of testing the intereffication model, analysing processes and routines is of particular relevance. We found that journalistic routines do not expand in crises. This corresponds to our proposition since – unlike PR departments – journalists do not have such a wide range of instruments and routines to choose from. It does not mean however that processes do not change. Crisis situations seem to evoke a considerable demand for autonomy among journalists (cf. similar findings at Saxer 1993: 297):

> *"We only routinely ask of official positions. But in a crisis we first and foremost go directly into the company and address employees, asking for confidential material" (Journalist 04).*

An adaptation of processes and routines on the journalistic side therefore does not necessarily come from an orientation to PR. Crises rather evoke an increasing competition to gain unique information. As the interviews show, especially within daily newspapers, there is a strong competition not only between media companies but also between colleagues. Therefore,

> *"[...] for us as journalists is important, that they [companies] help us getting some unique piece of information. Of course the coverage in a crisis will be critical, however we appreciate the willingness to collaborative develop a story together" (Journalist 02).*

In fact, a correct and clear information processing becomes most striking in a crisis since

> *"[...] journalists often don't ask why certain things have happened but quickly begin to write. Consequently, companies should be able to rapidly justify their actions and be able to explain what has happened and why" (Journalist 04).*

The assumption that PR departments adapt to presentation routines of journalism can be supported during crisis situations. Five of the PR interview partners mentioned that in crisis the timing of when to address which journalists becomes rather striking: For example do PR departments give information to press agencies first, nationwide papers second and all other media third. Although underlining the importance of proceeding of information to journalists in an equal manner, ranking media in terms of importance or circulation is an adaptation we could identify.

6.5. Structures and Organisation (P_5)

Most striking, the study underlines that in crises not only do communication departments adjust their organisational structures but also editorial departments. The main difference, though, is the extent to which the organisational changes are being made. While all questioned companies either have crisis task forces or pre-defined crisis plans and procedures to follow internally and structurally to react to a crisis situation, editorial departments are far from it. One of the interviewed journalists mentioned specifically that structural changes are made spontaneously on the decision of the editor in chief. Two interviewees explained that special editing teams are being installed if major crises occur – however, without any plan and usually dependent on the number of staff available. Once installed, such teams are interdisciplinary and are not necessarily lead by the editor in chief:

> *"In a crisis editors from different departments or even locations will join the team. This is because they often are the experts regarding the crisis matter. For spokespersons this is often a problem because they expect the contact person they know" (Journalist 04).*

Identifying these organisational changes clearly differs from journalism to PR: While journalists recognise that PR departments install crisis teams and communication becomes rather centralised, PR departments themselves did not identify any such changes among editorial departments.

Secondly, the interviewed companies channel all journalistic requests via the communications department. The idea is, that no official information is disseminated by employees, experts or even management and other sources from within the company apart from the communication department. After having installed crisis task forces, the communication department is the only official source of information to both stakeholders affected by the crisis and the media. The approach seems widely accepted among large companies (Leder 2006; Möhrle 2004b) in contrast to editorial departments.

> *"Therefore it is important, that the head of PR serves as a gateway between a) management, b) employees and c) the public – first and foremost the media" (Company 05).*

Our study shows that journalists do identify the channel strategy and deliberately work around it. Consequently, communication departments are seen as a source of basic information rather than a good source for investigating. Especially during crises, journalists demand exclusive information and look for competent sources to answer their questions. All of the journalistic interviewees neglected to find such competence within the communication departments. Therefore we conclude that P_5 can be confirmed.

7. Discussion

7.1. Implications for the Intereffication Model

Our study stands in line with the literature on crisis communication. While Barth & Donsbach (1992) showed that journalists begin to widen the number of sources, we are able to confirm and specify their findings. Our study indicates that on the agent level journalists intensify their research in terms of timing and contacts while the instruments remain the same. On the level of organizations they even tend to setup special research teams. Reflecting on the relationship to PR, our study indicates that communication departments are not aware of such changes. Coombs (1999) and Konken (2002) found that personal relationships are an important aspect in forming the relationship between PR and journalism. As for our results, this is true until a crisis occurs. Calls or meetings on a personal level still take place but established relationships do not have the same impact anymore as they have in non-crises.

Our study indicates that deliberate denial of information may not generally result in an increase of investigation by journalists. So the results from Kunczik et al. (1995) must be set in the context of the relationship. It seems that a prior relationship (such as between business editors and PR) evokes empathy since they do know the circumstances of a deliberate denial. Our results may stand in line with Kunczik, when no prior relationship (such as international newspapers or "yellow press" and PR) can be identified. The assumptions by Knödler (2005) and Reinecke (1997), stating that PR adapts routines and procedures in non-crises, must be confirmed in crisis situations, too. In our study this seems especially true for crisis situations, since timing is tight and the importance of placing information as accurately as possible becomes most relevant.

Finally, taking the intereffication model as the theoretical background was in two ways appropriate. First, our findings underline that not only does PR show inductional potential and adaptive offerings, but so does journalism. However, the study shows that inductions and adaptations seem far more deliberate and stronger from PR to journalism than the other way round. Second, the study affirms that crisis situations do have an impact on the relationship. In crises, companies tend to adjust their organisational structures (mostly by implementing crisis task forces) and communicative procedures (by channelling all outgoing information via one single department). These alterations clearly aim at meeting an expected increase in journalistic requests. Editorial departments, too, adjust themselves in crises, however not aiming initially at PR. Their structural changes aim to involve experts from within their own company due to a low number of staff. Nevertheless, this is a reaction to the channelling strategy of PR. So, regardless of whether journalists identify these processes as adaptations or not, according to the intereffication model these alterations, too, are structural adaptations. Crises seem to limit inductions and adaptations, especially on the level of actors. This raises the question of whether or not intereffication is only a situational phenomenon. In one way, structural adaptations from PR to journalism (and vice versa) have shown strong support for the ideas of the model. In the other, adaptations from journalism to PR rarely seem to exist on the personal level.

7.2. Implications for Crisis Communication

While the main focus of media relations in crises, as to the interviewees, is a very targeted crisis communication, shedding light on the journalistic side clearly shows its limits. One of the findings is that organisational changes take place in editorial departments, too. While journalists identify similar changes in PR departments and adapt procedures to correspond to the situation, PR departments themselves are not able to tell whether or not such changes take place vice versa. Reflecting this onto the intereffication model it seems that during a crisis PR orientates to thematic and social routines of journalism. However, adaptations such as organisational changes in editorial departments are not being recognised among PR representatives which may have practical implications: Active crisis communication means placing messages with the right people at the right time. But organisational changes evoke a change of established contact persons. So in terms of a targeted and active crisis communication, PR departments must take into consideration that during crises certain instruments may not be as affective as they used to be, such as personal relationships to journalists they know from their daily work. On the journalistic side, establishing editorial teams has consequences, too.

As we have mentioned above, crises evoke a strong demand for exclusive information. The idea behind restructuring editorial teams is to call in experts and to leverage knowledge. The process of restructuring editorial teams still seems spontaneous and unconsidered. If editorial departments follow a more professional approach in setting new teams, this may result in a more systematic way of getting information, specifically the exclusive information demanded during a crisis.

A finding standing in line with information processing is that journalists try to work around PR departments as a source of information. In terms of balanced news coverage they are certainly approached, but everything beyond basic information is being investigated elsewhere. During non-crises the task of corporate communication departments is linking external journalists to internal experts. As affirmed, during crisis situations corporate communication departments communicate on their own, fearing rash comments and therewith negative news coverage initiated by their very own employees. Our study shows that centralising crisis communication (PR) respectively, and avoiding PR departments (journalists) may result in misunderstanding and untargeted crisis communication. Certainly, channelling communication during crises still makes sense. But since journalists according to our results deny expertise within PR departments and request subject matter experts, corporate communication in crises may link journalists to such internal experts.

The results regarding deliberate denial clearly stand in line with the design of the study. As the interviewed journalists were experts in terms of DAX companies, they know certain procedures, which are going on behind the scene during a crisis. Therefore, they also know that if information on takeovers for example comes out too early, it can have an impact on the share price. So the understanding of holding back information (coming along with a proper explanation) is not categorically seen as negative. The findings therefore must be seen againsty the background of the study design. Further research e.g. on the relationship between PR and journalism, asking non-business editors may come to entirely different results, since those journalists do not have the insight needed to consider deliberate denials as understandable.

While consistent with previous research our findings extend the idea that to a certain extent crisis situations limit the relationship between

PR and journalism. Taking the intereffication model as the basis for our argumentation, the study shows that inductions and adaptations from journalism to PR rarely take place during a crisis. We find reason for that in an increase in journalistic autonomy, resulting in a more critical attitude towards official information distributed by PR departments during a crisis. What becomes most apparent is how the relevance of personal relationships is diminished. Our study shows that intended communication from PR to journalism may not take effect since organisational changes have literally relocated established contact persons. Secondly, journalists see personal relations as inappropriate, so inductions via personal relations again have their limits.

8. Limitations and Outlook

The study has its limitations regarding its sample, research focus and theory model. First, due to the lack of literature on the relationship between journalism and PR explicitly in crises we used a qualitative method to get a general insight into this specific field of research. Consequently, in terms of a limited number of the interviewed experts we may not provide generalising conclusions from the study. The analysis of the material is based on the responses of high-ranking experts of both, journalists and PR heads. Nevertheless, to further confirm our findings on a more general level, quantitative analyses will be inevitable. Secondly, the research has focussed on business editors on the one hand and leading companies listed on the stock exchange on the other. Since business news journalists know routines and procedures of such large companies, smaller newspapers may not. Thus, phenomena such as showing empathy to denials will certainly not occur to such an extent when analysing the relationship e.g. with local newspapers. Thirdly, as with all qualitative interviews, there is a challenge with euphemistic answers. Both, journalists and PR heads may have blinded out or been distracted from uncomfortable acknowledgements. Thus, again, a quantitative study may verify our findings to contribute to the scientific discourse on the relationship between journalism and PR. Finally, critics truly admit that the intereffication model has its limitations. Whether or not a single system of public relations exists has never exclusively been discussed (Russ-Mohl 2004: 45;

Schantel 2000: 78). Moreover, Löffelholz questions the counterpart to PR on the system level (Löffelholz 2000: 193). The findings of our study stand in line with critics, admitting that inductions from journalism to PR rarely take place. We, too, were only conditionally able to find evidence for such inductions, which shows that the empirical discussion about the model must still continue. But despite its limits, the intereffication model seems a sophisticated approach for describing processes and routines on different levels of complexity.

While the study on hand gives insight into the relationship between PR and journalism, further research still needs to be done. First, the focus of our study is on large companies and economy editors. Further research may widen the focus and follow a path of differentiation between industries, company size, legal form or other media such as television or the internet. Second, some of the interviewees related to Anglo-American crisis communication, which seems far more sophisticated than the European approach. We believe that an international study may shed light on cultural differences of crisis communication – especially since many large companies operate globally so that crises are no longer limited to single countries.

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