ABSTRACT
The issue of crisis in organisation today is becoming a source of concern to both management scholars and practitioners in that it retards growth and productivity in the sector. Given the indispensable role of public relations in any organisation, it is suggestive that crisis can be managed through public relations. This paper therefore reviews the concept of crisis, its causes, and recommendations, and also notes that public relations being a management function can be used by organisations to manage crisis.

Keywords: Organisational Crisis, Public Relation, Management

Introduction
Change, they say, is the only thing that is permanent in nature. It is an inherent aspect of human existence. We are living in a world that is constantly engulfed in one form of change or another. Organisations are never completely static. They are in continuous interaction with both internal and external forces, it then mean that an organisation can be internal or externally. Change may also refer to how the organisation internally adapts to changes in the environment. The concern is whether these internal changes in practices, view and strategies will keep pace with external change. Similarly, change can imply top – down programmes like reorganisation, re- engineering. Laurie, an organisation- change pioneer, once put it “people do not resist change, people resist being changed. Change is a key business process that enables on organisation to compete favourably in the global environment.

Crisis has been identified as one of the fallouts of the changing situation. Every organisation, or institution, must as long as it exist experience one form of crisis or the other in the course of its activities, which means that an organisation cannot do without crises. The world today is replete with crisis that has done incalculable damage to human existence. In fact crisis has been identified as one of the features of organisational dynamics. The degree of crisis may vary from one organisation to another but all face the need for adaption to these crisis. Many of these crises are formed on the organisation while others are generated internally. In the contemporary society, issue of crisis management has been so topical because of its adverse effect on the socio-economic fabrics of the country. In this paper, attempts will be made to present a holistic view of how public relations which has been accepted among scholars and practitioners as a management concept can be used to manage crisis in organisations.
Defining Crisis
Crisis has been defined as “any event, issue, occurrence or situation that could be described as a turning point for better or worse of an individual, institutions, organisations or community. For instance, when the transportation industry is grounded because of scarcity of petroleum products, when workers decide to go on strike because of non-payment of salaries or to press home for new wage review, when there is decline to cash flow to the organisation, when consumers /customers suddenly abandon the purchase of an organisation’s product, when a community decides to block entrance to an organisation’s premises, when members of the National, State or Local Government legislature decides to impeach the President, their Governors or their Local Government chairman, when a poor couple is blessed with quadruplets are all form of crisis to the people concerned. It is also experienced in the form of drastic change within an organisation, for instance when workers are laid off because of low productivity. It can also be defined as a period of heightened uncertainty that increases the need to plan and nib in the bud those elements that will sustain the growth and progress of the organisation. All these suggest that there is positive or negative dimension of crisis. Crisis usually subject organisation to public scrutiny. It sends wrong signal to all the relevant publics of any organisation. They can overstretch an organisation and its resources to an unimaginable level. At times, most crises are unexpected and unanticipated by organisation and therefore pose a big threat to the stability and survival of any organisation. In view of the foregoing, we can define crisis as any event, occurrence or situation that can change the state of equilibrium of an individual, organisation or country which must be handled with care to avoid the destruction of the system. Examples of crisis or crisis situations include: labour unrest, and riot, fire disaster, board room feud or skimming, unfavourable government policies and regulations, financial crisis, mass retrenchment, industrial accidents. Some of these crisis can be manmade or violent (fire disaster, industrial accidents) or non-violent (unfavourable government policies or regulations or guidelines)

Causes of Crisis
Dume (1990) listed the following as causes of crisis in an organisation.

- Social unrest
- Political unrest
- Sabotage
- Product failure
- Poor management of issues
- Poor labour/employee relations
- Market changes
- Outside attack
- Environmental conflicts
- Financial stress leading to poor cash flow
- Change in consumer taste and preferences
- Impact of world events and issues
Technological changes

It has been documented in several researches that many organisations left the business environment as a result of their inability to manage crisis in their organisations. Just as human beings or products undergo certain developmental stages or phases so also does crisis undergo certain life circle and are usually identified by the following:

1. **Conceptual Stage:** This is the pre crisis period when the antecedents of the crisis are built up, when crisis precipitating actions are being taken. When the red warning signals are showing, for instance union demand for wage review dialogue, when management fails to respond to a request to replace or repair some damaged electrical installation in the factory. Crisis at this stage can effectively be avoided through good management and proactive relation actions; this crisis can be aborted or terminated before it is born.

2. **Birth Stage:** This is the period when the crisis actually occurs and probably gets rooted in the mass media. It is a tension packed period for any organisation. Creative measures and timely intervention should be taken at this stage to minimize and prevent it from becoming full blown.

3. **Growth/ Maturity Stage:** This is the period when the crisis continues to escalate until it becomes full blown wrecks environs and havoc on the organisation and attracts tremendous negative publicity. A good management with good public relations will never allow any crisis to reach this stage. Even if it does, appropriate measures must be taken urgently to terminate or resolve the crisis. This stage presents the greatest challenge to management and public relation practitioners.

4. **Decline Stage:** This is the period when the crisis respond to the creative measures taken. The dusts begin to settle as tension begins to cool. This is a relief period for the organisation. Appropriate measures must be taken to put a final stop to the crisis.

5. **Post Crisis Stage:** This is the period when crisis has been terminated for good. It is a period of stock taking, crisis appraisal, counting of costs, evaluation of strategies and mending of fences. Appropriate actions must be taken at this stage to rebuild corporate image and reputation, re-establish goodwill and mutual understanding and generally take concrete action to forestall future occurrence of the crisis.

Having clearly seen the effects of crisis in organisation, it is therefore imperative that crisis be properly managed and one way to do this is by deploying public relations. What then is Public Relations?

**Defining Public Relations**

To fully appreciate the role of public relations in any organisation, a proper definition of the term is imperative. The term Public Relations has so many definitions by so many communication experts, scholars and researchers. This is because it cuts across all discipline and each person tries to define it from his own perspective. This has led to it being the most misunderstood of all professions. Some say it is publicity in so far as it focuses on people and events. Others say it is the same as giving gifts (brown envelops to
people in anticipation of some form of reward). There are still some who insists that Public Relations is nothing but mere propaganda and some still call it marketing or advertising some even say is all about making people laugh.

The truth; however is that Public Relations is not synonymous with any of the above mentioned terms. In the simplest term, public relation means relations with the public. According to the British Institute of Public Relations, public relation could be viewed as deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics. This view was collaborated by the International Public Relations Association that considers Public Relations as continuous and planned character through which publics and private organisations and institutions seek to win and retain the understanding, sympathy and support of those with whom they are or may be concerned, by evaluating public opinion about themselves, in order to correlate, as far as possible, their own policies and procedures and thus achieve planned and widespread information more productive, co–operative and more efficient fulfilment of common interest.

Laurie (2010) views public relations as broadly that of establishing and maintaining mutual understating between an organisation and its publics for the purpose of communicating an organisations views, objectives, while at the same time correcting public reactions. This was further supported by Drucker (1999) who defined Public Relations as consisting all forms of planned communication outwards and inwards between an organisation and its publics for the purpose of achieving specific objectives. It is now generally recognized that human attitudes have a significant effect upon business success, Abraham Lincoln shares this view by saying that public sentiment is everything, with public sentiment nothing can yield, without it nothing can succeed. He who moulds public sentiment goes deeper than he who executes policy decision. These definitions have clearly demonstrated the importance of Public Relations in any organisation. According to Drucker, public relations can be seen as a change agent that can be used by organisations to change negative perception its publics have on organisation to positive perception. This can be achieved through mutual understanding based on truth and full information.

**Public Relations as a Management Function**

It is becoming increasingly acceptable the fact that Public Relations is a management function that should occupy a prime place in any organisation. According to Drucker (1999) Public Relations is the management function which evaluates public attitude, identifies the policies and procedures of an organisation with the public interest, and executes a programme of action and commitment to earn public understanding and acceptance. Another definition which added credence to the Marston definition is the popular Mexico Declaration that defined Public Relations as the art of social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences counselling organizational leaders and implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both the organisation and the public interest. Again, Ono and Suda (1997) argued that Public relations is a social philosophy of management expressed in polices and practices which through two way
communication with its publics create mutual understanding and goodwill. This position was further strengthened by Ono and Suda (1997) who saw public relations as management of communication between an organisation and its publics. From the foregoing, public relations involves the management of problems and issues, helps management to keep abreast with the effectively utilized change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends and uses research and communication techniques as its principle tool (Nwachukwu, 1990).

According to Onah (2001) the essential objective of public relation in any organisation is to increase public awareness of the organisation. It persuades the public to view the organisation positively, to discover and target on relevant audience, to change personal attitude in favour of the organisation, to extinguish doubts and create appropriate external and internal environment for an organisation. The need for effective communication in managing crisis cannot be overemphasized; very often avoidable crisis in the workplace has been inadvertently encouraged or instigated by lack of communication from those in authority. If for instance, employees have been used to receiving their salaries on or before the last day of the month, the organisation may consider a two or three delay for reasons that may be beyond its control, not something to worry about. The thinking might be that the staff would understand that it is an unusual situation. It is this unusual situation that could cause problem if no explanation is forthcoming, if staffs are allowed to feed on rumours as to the cause of the delay in payment of salaries. Official explanation through departmental heads and supervisors could win understanding of staff and make them wait patiently one week into the new month without any complain, especially since the situation is an unusual one. The public relations manager should see communication whether formal or informal as the most important tool at his disposal, in the performance of his duties, since his job entails analyzing thoughts and predicting their consequences, he should be able to recognize in time signals that portend danger for the organisation and using appropriate vehicles communicate with relevant publics on the development as a first step, while putting in place the machinery to address such development. This is what management of crisis represents. In other words, the organisation should be proactive. It is the failure of organisations to manage crisis that often leads to crisis management. For example, if an organisation fails to heed to workers demand for better remuneration and they go on strike or the organisation fails to respond to customers demand for improved quality of their product etc, the organisation will have to face crisis management of the situation. In other words, proactive approach can lead to reactive approach.

In an organisational set up, effective communication is imperative to prevent crisis especially when it involves staff, company, goals, objectives, policies and philosophies must be communicated to members of the different publics periodically for the purpose of not only winning their sympathy, understanding and support, but also in carrying them along in the implementation of programmes. The employees should also be allowed to make input into the policies and programmes of the organisation. This way, the employees are likely to show understanding and sympathy if an unforeseen crisis rears its head that is, granting that for reasons beyond its control, he could not prevent it. Closely
akin to the need for free flow of communication is the need for good information management. Information remains a potent weapon for survival in today’s hostile business environment. Organisations should put in place adequate machinery/procedure for collecting information on products performance, market trends. Political situation and other forces that may impinge on their business and nib them in the bud before they affect the organisation adversely.

It is usually recommended that public relations managers of organisation should adopt a proactive approach in managing crisis in their organisation. According to Moss (1999) proactive approach involves nibbling in the bud any issue that will lead to crisis in any organisation. Proactive public relations involves construction listening to customers, personnel and to the silent voice of public opinion, constructive listening results in constant adaptation and in commitment to inter-personal communication at all levels. The public relations manager should create dialogue always as a panacea for forestalling crisis. When this fails, the organisation can now depend on the good reputation he has built over the years.

The best method to handle crisis is to plan ahead, anticipating one (crisis) any moment, map out preventive measures and control strategies in case of its eventual occurrence. Crisis planning is a part of contingency plan that involves reacting to sudden change in the environment. Contingency planning is the process of proposing alternative course of activities that may be used if the primary plan does not achieve the objective of the organisation. In today’s rapidly changing environment, strategic planning is becoming more difficult because changes are occurring so fast than plans, even those set for just months into the future may soon be obsolete.

The mass media occupies a strategic place in the society and as such cannot be relegated to the background in handling crisis. The pre crisis period will definitely generate publicity from the press. The Public Relations Manager of the organisation should avoid shielding the press from any access to information. He should endeavour to give journalist first hand information of what happens in the organisation. As we have earlier stated, public relations thrives on truthful information not falsehood. Effective management of crisis is the one that supplies the right information at the right time to the right people not one that struggles to give out information to correct a wrong impression which was caused by hoarding of information.

Effective media relations are important in managing crisis. This is because media can through their negative report aggravate crisis which will affect the organisation’s reputation, the Public Relations Manager is bound to protect. To be able to control what is published about the crisis and the organisation, effort should be made to communicate effectively and persistently with the mass media. Consider a hypothetical example, an industrial accident that has claimed lives in a particular company. The Public Relations Manager in an attempt to handle then crisis should demonstrate that the organisation cares more about its workers than making money by closing the factory for a while. The Chief Executive of the company and the PRM should make the workers understand that measures were put in place to prevent accident and not intentionally to reduce the work force.
Conclusion
Organisations can only operate in an atmosphere devoid of crisis as anything contrary to this will definitely affect the organisation adversely. Management of crisis represents the ability of PRM to use proactive measures to prevent crisis from occurring. This is what every organisation should adopt in creating a congenial atmosphere of cordiality and mutuality.

References
Moss (1999)organisational behaviour, press publishing limited USA.