

SINGAPORE AIRLINES: A STUDY IN EXEMPLARY CRISIS COMMUNICATION

A Thesis by

Ee Ling J. Tan

Bachelor of Arts, Wichita State University, 2003

Submitted to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
and the faculty of the Graduate School of
Wichita State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

May 2006

© Copyright 2006 by Ee Ling J. Tan

All Rights Reserved

SINGAPORE AIRLINES: A STUDY IN EXEMPLARY CRISIS COMMUNICATION

I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication.

Dr. Patricia L. Dooley, Committee Chair

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Dr. Susan Schultz Huxman, Committee Member

Dr. Doris Chang, Committee Member

DEDICATION

To my daddy

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis nearly did not make it in time. But it did and I want to thank a number of very special people who has made it possible. First, I want to thank Dr. Patricia Dooley for her unfaltering confidence in me as a scholar. Without her constant encouragement, I would not have made it this far. She always believed in me even when I was unsure of myself. She is my mentor and my most faithful cheerleader.

I also owe many thanks to Dr. Susan Schultz Huxman who is a brilliant scholar, a nurturing teacher and a personal inspiration to me. Her valuable guidance and sharp critiques have made me a better scholar.

This page will not be complete without mentioning Amelia Hendra, who is my friend, my officemate, and my partner in crime. We probably laughed too much, played too hard, studied too little and whined more often than we should have. But Graduate School would not have been so fun without her constant companionship. Thanks madam, for just being you.

Special thanks also go to my teachers, colleagues, and friends at Elliott School of Communication. Thank you for introducing me to all things American. Mostly, thank you for accepting me, protecting me and for being my family here in the United States.

I also want to thank my dog, Mr. qp, for letting me use some of our play time as thesis writing time. Mr. qp has been my “editor-in-chief” through this journey; he fell asleep on my drafts after reading them intensively, he highlighted parts of my drafts with his dirty paws where he thought I should improve on, and he chewed up the pages he deemed worthless. Thesis writing would have been really boring if not for his constant antics that have kept me awake.

Finally, I want to thank my family in Singapore for their love and all the sacrifices they have to make so that I can be here finishing up my Master's degree. Thank you for your understanding in letting this little girl pursue her very big dream.

ABSTRACT

On October 31, 2000, Singapore Airlines' Flight SQ006 crashed into construction equipment 11 seconds after take off and exploded into three pieces. The flight was bound for Los Angeles from Taipei's Chiang Kai-Shek Airport. There were 159 passengers and 20 crew members on board the flight. The accident caused 83 fatalities, there were 56 people injured and 40 people escaped unscathed. As it taxied down a closed runway, the aircraft hit a piece of construction equipment and exploded. This thesis uses qualitative methodology to study Singapore Airline's handling of this crisis from a rhetorical perspective. The dynamic generic framework by Huxman and Bruce (1995) is used to examine the defense rhetoric that Singapore Airlines used to uncover the interactions between the situational (nature of crisis), substantive (posture of company) and stylistic (argument of company) rhetorical markers. There are three findings from this case study. Firstly, the recovery and learning phase of a crisis can be speeded up if investigations are conducted by a neutral party. Secondly, it is important for companies to have well-trained crisis response teams, such as the Buddy system used by Singapore Airlines, as it provides companies with additional critical resources needed to facilitate crisis management. Thirdly, if the relationship between the accused and the accuser needs to be preserved, the accused will likely be constrained to basing arguments on stasis of jurisdiction.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
CHAPTER ONE	1
Rationale for Study	2
Research Questions	4
A Brief History of Singapore Airlines	5
Crash of Flight SQ006 at Chiang Kai-Shek Airport, Taipei	8
Nature of Airline Crashes	12
Definitions of Crisis	14
Crisis Management Literature	19
Timeliness in Response	20
Open and Honest Communication	21
Visible Leadership	22
Managing Media Relations	23
Credibility and the Halo Effect of a Company	25
Organizational Culture	27
Types of Crisis	28
Crisis from a Rhetorical Perspective	29
Methodology: Rhetorical Criticism and the Dynamic Generic Framework	30
CHAPTER TWO	35
Defining the Crisis of SQ006	35
Speaker Variables	38
Audience Variables	41
Topic Variables	43
Initial Speculations about the Cause of the Crash	43
Disagreements over the Aircraft Accident Investigation Report	45
Care for Victims and Next of Kin	48
SQ006's Pilots	51
Persuasive Fields	54
Setting Variables	56
Media Variables	58
Rhetorical Conventions	60

CHAPTER THREE	61
Crisis Preparedness	61
The Use of the Buddy Strategy	65
Application of the Dynamic Generic Framework	69
Conclusion	75
REFERENCES	80

CHAPTER ONE

On a tempestuous night in October 2000, Singapore Airlines (SIA) Flight SQ006, bound for Los Angeles from Taipei, erupted in a ball of flames when it crashed during liftoff. The disaster not only led to 83 deaths and 56 injuries, but to a significant crisis for the airline. Not only did SIA officials have to look after the needs of the flight's passengers and families, but for their own welfare. From all accounts, they did both well. In handling its first crash, Mr. David Behrens, an Asia-Pacific assistant director of Geneva-based International Air Transport Association, an airline organization, described the carrier's management of the disaster and its efforts to protect its reputation as "nothing short of outstanding" (quoted in "SIA's Handling," 2000). A Singapore transport analyst for SG Securities, John Casey, reported in the *Asian Wall Street Journal*: "They [SIA] are making all the right moves in public relations in what's an awful situation" (Ibid.)

The crash's human story was so compelling that all Singaporeans followed it with rapt attention. But my interest in the story went beyond that of most people. Fresh out of college, I was working in a temporary position in the corporate communication department of Singapore Press Holdings, where SIA's CEO and deputy chairman, Dr. Cheong Choon Kong, was a member of the board of directors. Documenting his public appearances after the crash became one of the jobs of the department I worked in.

I listened with interest as my colleagues, analyzed, critiqued, and evaluated SIA's handling of the crisis. Hearing this in the weeks following the crash peaked my interest in the field of crisis communication. With no professional background in public relations, I

had little appreciation of its intricacies. But as I watched the news and listened to my colleagues, I became intrigued by the challenges faced by organizations when crises strike.

This thesis examines the aftermath of the crash of Singapore Airline's Flight SQ006 at Taipei International Airport using the dynamic generic framework to uncover the rhetorical strategies employed by the company during the crisis. After a discussion of the rationale for the study and its research questions, this chapter provides a brief history of SIA, a more detailed account of the crash, and a review of relevant literature within the fields of crisis communication research and rhetorical criticism. Chapter two presents an analysis of the crisis using selected artifacts and critical problems. The thesis's final chapter discusses what was learned in the study, as well as its implications and limitations.

Rationale for study

For years, Johnson and Johnson's handling of the Tylenol crisis has been held as the gold standard by which public relations practitioners should aspire to handle crisis in their own organizations. Besides having a well thought out and executed crisis plan, Johnson and Johnson had a long-time image as a trustworthy and secure provider of healthcare products. The reservoir of goodwill that Johnson and Johnson built up over the years gave it credibility when dealing with the crisis (Fink, 1986). The public believed Johnson and Johnson when its leaders said they had employed all methods of corrective action to prevent the same incident from happening again.

Case studies in the area of crisis management generally focus on the many lessons inherent in the failures of companies after disaster strikes. The Exxon-Valdez oil spill

taught us the importance of having the CEOs respond to crisis immediately. This company's unwillingness to take responsibility for its actions and portray a human face in the media in the crucial period following the accident led to a serious loss of confidence among the public.

Three Mile Island's 1979 accident informs us that when journalists feel they lack appropriate information from an organization, they will generate their own. Such stonewalling tactics employed by companies during a crisis can lead to undesirable, conflicting reports.

The 1986 Challenger disaster illustrates the problem of news lag. Instead of following its own protocol, NASA officials waited five hours before issuing any news about the crash (Brown, 1990). Having retreated to what some called the "NASA Fortress," this shunning of the public and the media in the initial hours of the crisis gave the impression that government officials were hiding something.

Union Carbide got into trouble in Bhopal, India, on December 3, 1984, when a lethal gas leak from one of its plants killed nearly three thousand people and injured another two-hundred thousand (Shrivastava, 1987). On the heels of this disaster in 1985, another leak was found in a Union Carbide plant in West Virginia. These back-to-back incidents shook the public's confidence in the company and left Union Carbide little room for negotiation in Bhopal. Also, Union Carbide based its communications on technical, financial, and legal considerations rather than on a broader social concern. As a result, Union Carbide was perceived as unsympathetic towards the victims (Ray, 1999, p. 71). From this we learn that before crises strike, companies should make sure that every

aspect of their operations are squeaky clean because afterwards there is intense scrutiny on their every move.

While there is much to learn from the failures of companies during and after crises, there is also merit in studying from crises that are handled very well by their companies. In line with such thinking, the purpose of this thesis is to examine what positive lessons are inherent in SIA's handling of its first major crisis.

Another reason I decided to focus on this particular crisis is that the literature on crisis management is skewed toward American case studies. But in an era of globalization, there is a greater need to learn about how crises are handled in other parts of the world. This research helps fill this gap by an Asian corporation's handling of a crisis situation.

Research Questions

This thesis systematically examines the crisis communication process to provide a comprehensive understanding, analysis, and evaluation of the crash of SIA's Flight SQ006. In doing so, I hope to contribute to greater understanding of crisis within an Asian organizational cultural perspective. The questions addressed in the research include the following:

1. What characterizes the messages put out by SIA in defense of their role in the crisis?
2. How well did SIA prepare for the crisis in terms of communication planning?
3. What messages did SIA employ that helped them manage the crisis effectively?

Rhetorical criticism will be used to address these questions through examination of artifacts including press releases, transcripts from press conferences, and SIA in-house

magazines and newspaper articles during a period from October 31, 2000 to December 31, 2002.

A Brief History of Singapore Airlines

Until October 31, 2000, Singapore Airlines had never had a crash on its carrier. It stood as an industry leader and innovator, setting safety and service standards that other airlines aspire to.

SIA had its humble beginnings as part of Malayan Airways. In May of 1947, Malayan Airways operated services between Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Ipoh, and Penang. On January 26, 1971, both the Malaysian and Singapore governments agreed to set up separate national airlines, and on October 1, 1972, Singapore Airlines and Malaysian Airlines System (MAS) took to the skies. Since then, SIA has emerged as one of the top international airlines in the industry. By 1979, it became the ninth largest airline in the world, up from the 57th position prior to their parting of ways with MAS. By 1990, Merrill Lynch reported that SIA would net an estimated \$675 million on sales of \$2.8 billion, an “incredible 24% after tax margin” (Tanzer, 1990, p.152). This compares with a 3.5% margin at United Airlines and 5.9% at Delta.

The excellent track record maintained by SIA was no accident. The company’s commitment to quality and service can be seen in all sectors of its operation. When SIA first split from MAS, the most important task for the company was to seek a unique selling point. The strategy that SIA decided on was based on its in-flight service. SIA has always maintained that when an air ticket has been paid for, customers should not have to pay additional fees. With this idea in mind, SIA sought to position itself in the premium service, quality, and value market segment of the international airline industry.

The quality of the food and beverage service on SIA flights is legendary. Passengers on an SIA flight can expect to be treated with the best food on any airline; cocktails and fine wines are free and often of very good quality. On average, SIA spends about \$20 per passenger for food and beverages in economy, \$40 in business class and \$50 in first class. Industry experts estimate that this is at least 10% higher than industry averages (Donnelly, 2003, p. A10+). For first class passengers, there is always a choice of four entrees and free flowing champagne. The very best champagne, Dom Perignon, is offered to first class passengers, and Piper Heidsieck to those in business class. Economy class passengers are offered Haagen-Dazs and Ben and Jerry's ice cream for dessert.

SIA's on-demand in-flight entertainment (including movies, feature films, documentaries, and Nintendo games) keeps boredom at bay during long-haul flights. The KrisWorld interactive entertainment system puts the airline in the forefront of providing personalized entertainment on its flights. Each passenger is equipped with a personal screen and can choose whatever entertainment he or she desires.

The company created the Singapore Girl to represent what the airline offers. The Singapore Girl advertising campaign was a brilliant marketing coup. Conceived in 1972, the year the airline was born, its ads, richly photographed in soft focus, invariably show beautiful, gently smiling stewardesses in figure-hugging sarongs, with voice-overs like "You have that touch of magic" (Tanzer, 1990, 152). The airline stewardesses are renowned for their beauty, gracefulness, and grooming:

SIA is an Asian airline, and Asia has a long tradition of gentle, courteous services. The Asian woman does not feel she is demeaning herself by fulfilling her role of the gracious, charming and helpful hostess. What we hope to do is translate that tradition of service into an in-flight reality ("Singapore Airlines," 1989).

SIA's Singapore Girl personifies the company's exceptionally high customer service standards and is central to all of its marketing strategies. She has proven to be an enduring product/service differentiation strategy.

Although the Singapore Girl is the public face for SIA, the cabin crew is approximately 40% male. Each crew trainee goes through four months of rigorous training. Every two years, crew members are retrained to update their skills. Such training programs emphasize safety and encompass beauty tips, discussions of gourmet food and fine wines, and the art of conversation. Among other things, trainers help crew members improve their speech skills, teach them how to read body language to discern when passengers want to be talked to and left alone, coach them so that they have greater appreciation for their passengers' cultural differences, and equipped them with memorization techniques to help them remember passengers' names. In comparison, Cathay Pacific, the national carrier for Hong Kong, conducts a seven-week intensive training program.

SIA has the youngest fleet of aircraft in the world with an average aircraft age at 4.6 years. This translates to lower maintenance and fuel costs for the airline, and is seen by passengers as a sign of safety, punctuality, and comfort.

In 1996, SIA was touted as the "World's most profitable airline" ("Asia's great," 1996, p. 34). In 1998, a survey conducted by American magazines *Conde Nast Traveler* and *Travel and Leisure* named SIA the world's best international carrier (Brady, 1998, p.6). SIA had previously grabbed the top spot in the *Conde Nast Traveler* poll for nine of the past 10 years. Such rankings are considered particularly reliable because they are based on opinions of travelers rather than industry or media experts.

In 1999, SIA was honored as the strongest brand to come out of the Asia Pacific region¹ (“Asian Brands,” 1999). This survey was conducted by Interbrand, the Omnicom-owned international branding consultancy. It measured brand strength with a seven-component scoring system: market leadership position, geographic spread, market stability, attractiveness of the market segment, the growth or decline of the brand, support,² and protection against trademark and infringements. According to the evaluation of the experts:

Singapore Airlines scored very high on leadership, and also leads the industry in terms of service, in-flight entertainment, and aircraft maintenance. It commands a premium price in all three cabins (first, business and economy class). It scored well on geographic spread and in terms of stability, has been consistently profitable for the past 25 years an enviable track record for any company. In addition, it is one of the most profitable airlines in the world. It also scored very high on support, with a rich and vivid imagery embodied in the icon of the Singapore Girl, with consistent brand communications over 25 years (“Asian Brands,” 1999).

Crash of Flight SQ006 at Chiang Kai-Shek Airport, Taipei

On October 31, 2000, Flight SQ006, departing from Chiang Kai-Shek airport in Taipei, forever changed the impeccable flying record SIA was so proud of. Eleven seconds after take off, at 11:18 p.m., about 3,930 ft. into the takeoff roll, the aircraft’s undercarriage hit construction equipment and came crashing down. The plane broke into three parts and burst into flames. According to eye witnesses, there were fires everywhere. In a live special feature telecast several days after the crash, a Channel NewsAsia

¹ Japan was not included in this survey because Japanese brand were perceived to have an unfair advantage over the other brands in Asia. Japanese brands are well established and successful in international markets and hence if they were included will result in a domination of Japanese brands at the league table at the exclusion of the other Asian brands.

² Support refers to whether the brand has a clear and distinct identity which consumers can identify with, i.e. the consistency of its branding position.

journalist reported, “The rainbow jet broke into three parts all over the runway of the Chiang Kai-Shek airport, a scatter of debris” (November 4, 2000).

According to Mr. Kay Yong, Managing Director of the Taiwan's Aviation Safety Council, "The runway he should have been on is 5L. The runway he took off from was 5R (“SQ special,” 2000). Runway 5R was supposedly closed for repairs. But according to the pilot, the center light was lit, indicating that the runway was not closed, and there were no clear signage to point out that the runway was closed for repairs. When one of the flight’s three pilots asked for confirmation from the control towers as to his position for take off at the critical moment when he was turning onto runway 5R, he got a positive confirmation, leading him to believe that he was indeed on the correct runway. A few seconds after the engine roared as it sped forward, the pilot noticed a black object in his flight path. To avoid it, he pulled sharply to lift the plane. Instead, it slammed into construction equipment and exploded (“Singapore Airlines fires,” 2002). Flames burst throughout the cabins after passengers felt a huge jolt as the plane hit the object. Mayhem broke out as passengers scrambled to flee from the ignited plane.

SQ006 was bound for Los Angeles with 159 passengers on board, mostly Americans and Taiwanese. There were also 20 crew members on the aircraft, making the total number of people on board 179. The tragedy caused 83 fatalities, 56 were seriously injured, and 40 people escaped unscathed (“SQ Special,” 2000). The flight’s three captains were not among its fatalities.

Right from the start, there were many ambiguities surrounding the cause of the crash. Pilot, Capt. Foong Chee Kong had 11,235 hours of flight time. Thus, pilot inexperience was ruled out as a contributing factor. It was questionable, however,

whether there were sufficient markings on the closed runway to indicate to the pilot that the runway should not be used. According to Kay Yong, a Taiwan Aviation Safety Council managing director and SQ006 chief investigator, “A combination of white threshold and edge lights with a green centerline light indicates an active runway. Green centerline lighting alone indicates an inactive runway” (Fiorino, 2000, p. 42). Therefore, a key factor in the accident investigation was determining what runway lighting was visible to SQ006’s captain as he turned toward the wrong runway.

Doubts were also raised as to whether air traffic controllers were aware that the aircraft was on the wrong runway. If they had indeed given the captain the clearance to fly, that would have added to the Captain Foong’s confidence that he was on the right flight path.

The closure of the Runway 05R should have been indicated in the Notices to Airmen (or Notams) and in the Automatic Terminal Information Service (ATIS). Yet another ambiguity surrounding the cause of the crash was the issue of whether the crew of SQ006 had access to updated information about the runway closures via Notams or ATIS.

Two years after the crash, more than two dozen survivors and next of kin began seeking higher compensation from SIA in Singapore’s High Court. Many felt that the airline’s offers of compensation of US \$400,000 to next of kin and US \$20,000 to survivors were “insufficient” (Wee, 2002). According to Goh (2004), by 2004, SIA had settled about 70 of the 90 lawsuits filed in Singapore, Taiwan, and the United States; there were still 14 lawsuits involving survivors and victims’ families that had not gone to court. SIA has tried to bring in Taiwan’s Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) as a

third party to bear the claims. SIA's stand was that the CAA was responsible for the crash and thus should be held responsible for part of the claims against them (Goh, 2004).

Despite the effects of the crash and its subsequent courtroom battles, according to industry, SIA was able to maintain its position as one of the world's most admired companies. In a survey of top executives, directors, and securities analysts regarding Fortune 1,000 companies, SIA came up in 6th position ("Most admired," 2002). This result was released in March of 2002, about one and a half years after the crash. In 2003, SIA clinched the title of the second most admired airlines in the world³ ("World's most," 2003). In 2004, three years after the crash, SIA was in good shape, as it was ranked number four in a survey as one of the most admired companies in Asia⁴. Such rankings indicate that the crash did not hurt greatly SIA's reputation, and that it still commands respect from its peers and competitors.

Financially, SIA has also done well since the crash. In 2001, it reported a profit of \$358 million, which made it the second most profitable passenger airline in the world, behind Southwest Airlines (\$511 million) (Donnelly, 2003, p. A10).

Today, SIA continues to strive to be an industry leader in its provision of a premium flying experience. The airline's goal is to make its passengers forget that they are on a flight. In business class, the airline has installed seats that convert into the longest and widest lie-flat beds in the sky. These beds come complete with privacy screens for protection from nosy neighbors. In 2006, SIA will be the first airline to introduce a double-decker 555-seat Airbus A380 (Donnelly, 2003, p. A10).

³ This survey was based on nine criteria: innovation, financial soundness, employee talent, use of corporate assets, long-term investment value, social responsibility, quality of management, quality of products/services, and globalness.

⁴ Japan is excluded from this ranking.

Nature of Airline Crashes

Airline crashes are different from other types of crisis in that they are clearly defined, they happen without warning, and they are very visible. According to Wells (1991), there are five primary factors that contribute to airline accidents: human error, traffic infrastructure, mechanical failure, weather, and unpredictable events. Secondary factors such as flight operations, maintenance, and training can also indirectly influence a situation. Almost immediately following a crash, survivors and journalists begin clamoring for information (Pinsdorf, 1987; Vincent et al, 1997).

Images of crashes are usually violent, and fatalities are almost always certain. When coupled with the saturation news coverage that can go on for days, images of crashes often result in hysteria for survivors and their families. Vincent, Crow, and Davis (1997) claim that airline crashes create rich texts consisting of three overarching story lines: (1) “The tragic intervention of fate into everyday life,” (2) “The mystery of what caused the crash,” and, (3) “The work of legitimate authority to restore normalcy” (p. 357).

These factors make it imperative that airline officials handle air crashes by distributing information about them quickly. However, journalists and survivors and their families always ask for information that companies do not feel they can provide. Pinsdorf (1991) suggests that an airline’s responses must be “more sensitively tailored to the particular culture than in most corporate crises” (p. 32). Pinsdorf uses the example of Japan Air Lines (JAL) and Pan Am to illustrate how corporations handle air crashes in different cultural settings. After JAL’s 1984 crash, the company’s president, Yasumoto Takagi, issued personal apologies to all the bereaved families. Memorial services were

held and financial compensations were made. More than 400 of the airline's employees helped bereaved relatives with everything from arranging for funeral services to filling out insurance forms for weeks after the crisis. In Japanese culture, it is the norm for top executives to shoulder the crisis of a corporation. Inadequate or incompetent leadership is usually cited as the culprit for crisis in organization. In contrast to this, at its 1985 memorial service, JAL's president bowed low and long to the relatives of the victims, and bowed again to a table covered with wood panels with victims' names engraved on them. This low bowing was a show of respect and contrition from the president. He then asked for forgiveness, accepted responsibility for the crash, and offered to resign. The maintenance chief, after dealing with the relatives of the dead and survivors on a daily basis, committed suicide.

When Pan Am's crash occurred in 1988, the company flew family members to the crash site at Scotland, and provided more information than the U.S. State Department. Pan Am's response to crisis was very much appreciated because care and concern was demonstrated. However, the CEO Thomas Plaskett did not attend the individual memorial services, and did not personally apologize for the tragedy.

Pinsdorf (1991) recommends guidelines that companies use when handling air crashes (p. 34). At the top of his list is that airlines should show concern for families. He advises that compassion is equally as important as getting accurate information to the survivors and the victims' families. He cautions against the possibility of letting "legal liabilities interfere with presenting a human face" (Pinsdorf, 1991, p. 34). Legal constraints may sometimes prevent a company from communicating as freely and honestly as they like.

Pinsdorf advocates that airlines should know what their publics are thinking or feeling, watch out for odd behaviors such as unexpected or bizarre information, and strike a balance between safety issues and the public's right to know. Scholars stress the importance of thinking accurately during a crisis and to not let emotions take over, and the need to tailor media relations and follow-up responses to local cultural values (Pinsdorf, 1991; Ray, 1999; Taylor, 2000). In addition, organizations are warned not to project overly optimistic communication that creates a corporate culture of expected success, because such glowing projections will magnify a tragedy if they are not met.

In managing crisis, Pinsdorf (1991) warns corporations that they have a narrow window of media opportunity – “from as little as 40 minutes to a maximum of 12 hours” – to tell their side of the story (p. 34). If they do not announce relevant information within this time frame, the public may discount the credibility of the information they eventually disseminate.

Finally, airline crashes should be handled with extra attention to human sensitivity (p. 34). Given the magnitude of the disasters that airline crash cause, corporations handling such crises should be mindful of the psychological traumas that the survivors and the victims' families are undergoing.

Definitions of a Crisis

Fink (1986) defines a crisis as an “unstable time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending” (p. 15). Kathleen Fearn-Banks (2002) defines crisis as a “major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting the organization, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services, or good name. A crisis interrupts normal business transactions and can sometimes threaten the existence of the

organization” (p. 2). Fearn-Banks distinguishes corporate crises from problems that are encountered in their daily routine. She distinguishes crises from the normal part of a corporation’s daily dealings by noting, “Crises can lead to serious consequences that can sometimes threaten the survival of corporations” (p. 2).

Current research agrees that crisis tend to be unexpected or unpredicted (Barton, 1993; Seeger et al., 1998). Nevertheless, the unpredictable nature of crisis does not provide an excuse for crisis practitioners to be unprepared. Since it is certain that crises eventually affect all organizations, the question is when they will happen (Coombs, 1999). Perrow (1984) argues that the nature of systems in terms of how things are built and the multiple ways various systems interact give rise to the possibility of errors. He sees accident as “damage to a defined system that disrupts the ongoing or future output of that system” (p. 64). Thus, according to Perrow, a crisis occurs as a result of the accumulation of what he termed as “normal” errors. Vaughn (1996) echoed this view by saying that technological uncertainty is a major characteristic of organizational decision making. She suggests that there is a need to examine the interaction between an organization and its modern technology.

Crises can be defined in three additional ways – as events, constructs and processes – and knowing this helps companies comprehend and evaluate them efficiently (Huxman, 2004). As an event, a crisis is a major, unpredictable occurrence with potentially negative results. The consequences of a crisis can be drastic, with the potential to seriously undermine the organization’s image, financial standing, and personnel (Hearit & Courtright, 2003; Weick, 1988). For example, ValuJet did recover its reputation after flight 592 crashed into the Everglades. However, customers were wary of

flying with the airline and sales dropped drastically. In the end, ValuJet renamed itself AirTran in an attempt to distance and reinvent itself so as to regain the trust of the public.

A crisis can also be viewed as construct, i.e. a “troubling, initially damaging accusation that is usually unforeseen and that demands a timely defense” (Huxman, 2004). Thus, crises are framed through accusations as well as by the counter arguments of crises practitioners. Changing how publics think of a crisis is critical to the recovery and survival of any organization, company, or industry.

Related to this, Hearit and Courtright (2003) argue that crises are “terminological creations conceived by human agents and, consequently, are managed and resolved terminologically (p. 86). These authors also expound on the notion that crises are “joint constructions” in which accusers, organizations, their customers, and other stakeholders, together bring the crisis into a mediated existence. In other words, “Issues become crises because someone makes them crises” (Crabble & Vibbert, 1985).

Finally, crisis can also be defined as a process rather than a single, static occurrence. It is important to note that a crisis takes place over a period of time. There are five stages within all crises: detection, prevention/preparation, containment, recovery, and learning (Fearn-Banks, 2002; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). The detection phase may begin with noting any visible warning signs. Barton (1993) referred to these warning signs as prodromes or the prodromal stage. Some crises have no noticeable prodromes, but many do. Prodromes can be in the form of crises experienced by similar businesses or organizations, but there are many less obvious prodromes. For example, employee discontent over any issue is a sign of a brewing crisis. Crisis practitioners have to take each complaint and grievance directed at the company or organization seriously because

they could be an indication of much more serious crisis in the near future. An organization should watch for prodromes and make attempts to stop a crisis at this stage before it develops into a full-blown crisis.

Crisis practitioners should realize the importance of crisis detection and a system should be set up within the organization in which key personnel are immediately notified of a crisis. An organization has considerable advantage if it knows about a crisis before its publics do, especially before the news media learn about it. This gives the organization time to draft a statement, make preparations for a news conference, notify the crisis team, and call in spokespersons.

The second stage of crisis is the prevention or preparation phase. First of all, to prevent a crisis, public relations programs should strive to have open, two-way communication with stakeholders and build relationships with key publics and thereby prevent crises, lessen the blows of crises, or limit the duration of crises. It is essential that crisis practitioners establish corporate cultures that are conducive to positive and open interactions between members. One important component of prevention is that on a regular basis, the company must not only do what is right; it also must tell its publics that it is doing so. Diligence is sometimes the key to preventing crises.

Besides prevention, crisis practitioners should also be aware of being prepared should a crisis strike. The Crisis Communication Plan (CCP), the primary tool of preparedness, should tell each key person on the crisis team what his or her role is, whom to notify, how to reach people, what to say, and so on. The CCP provides a functioning collective brain for all persons involved in a crisis, persons who may not operate at normal capacity due to the shock or emotion brought up by the crisis event. Crisis

practitioners should diligently update and revise their plans on a periodic basis to fulfill the current needs of their organizations.

Containment is the third stage of a crisis. Containment refers to the effort to limit the duration of the crisis or to keep it from spreading to other areas of the organization. Crisis practitioners have the duty to get the correct information out to the public so as to counter hysteria and put the crisis into perspective.

The fourth stage within crises is recovery. This stage refers to the efforts to return the company to business as usual. Organizations want to leave the crisis behind them and restore normalcy as soon as possible. Recovery may also mean restoring the confidence of key publics, which means communicating a return to normal business.

Learning is the last phase that a company goes through in a crisis. Learning is characterized by self-examination in light of the crisis in an effort to determine what was lost, what was gained, and how the organization performed. It is an evaluative procedure designed to make the crisis a prodrome for the future. Crisis practitioners should not neglect this phase, since it offers them the opportunity to evaluate their CCP and be better prepared when crisis strikes again.

Immediately after a crisis happens, corporations face an onslaught of journalistic attention and public scrutiny. Everyone wants to know what has happened, why it happened, and how it happened. This cacophony of voices is but one element that a corporation has to deal with in the aftermath of a crisis.

During a crisis situation, corporations must establish a base message. Coombs (2000) asserts that a base message has to fulfill two goals: provide crisis information and express compassion for the victims (p. 38).

Crisis Management Literature

From the rich literature on crisis management literature, there are several important lessons to be learned. In the following review of literature, I will highlight some of the important elements scholars suggest should be present in order for an organization to effectively weather a crisis. When a crisis strikes, a company needs to be aware of certain factors that will directly influence how the crisis is perceived by the public. In the critical hours following the crisis, the public needs to be aware that the company is doing something to make the situation better. The company needs to give a timely response, maintain open and honest communication with the various stakeholders, maintain visible leadership, effectively manage media relations, and communicate that the company is in control. Other external factors will also indirectly influence the outcome of the crisis management efforts. Firstly, a company with a high level of credibility can bank on this goodwill to gain the public's cooperation in dealing with the crisis. Secondly, a company's organizational culture will have an effect on how the company deals with the crisis.

Crisis communication is "necessary to influence public perception of the organization" (Ray, 1999, p. 20). Though an organization cannot control the direction of a crisis, it certainly can control how it chooses to communicate during a crisis. Ray (1999) notes that if an organization is unable to effectively communicate its messages during a crisis, the crisis might get worse as a result of this miscommunication between the organization and its stakeholders (p. 108). In the following paragraphs, I will discuss key elements essential to the managing of a crisis situation in order to communicate to the publics that the organization in crisis is in control.

Timeliness in Response

Responding in a timely fashion is a virtue preached by almost all researchers and practitioners in the area of crisis communication. According to Marra (1998), excellent crisis communication requires “the ability to provide information to an organization’s relevant publics almost immediately” (p. 467). It is widely agreed that the first 12 hours following the crisis is the most critical period for a corporation. A crisis communication occurrence is a time-sensitive situation; there is a sense of urgency imbued in the very nature of the crisis (Marra, 1998). According to Fishman (1999), “A crisis communication situation typically creates pressure for an immediate explanation to reassure the media, relevant stakeholders, and the public at large” (p. 348). Issuing a timely response is often “critical in reducing, offsetting, and containing harm” (Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer, 1998, p. 234).

Therefore, it is very important to get accurate information out to the media, the public and the corporation’s stakeholders during this period of time. A delay in addressing critical issues during this time can have serious consequences for a corporation and might adversely affect the public’s perception of the corporation, which in turn can hinder its containment and recovery efforts. According to Ray (1999), a management team must be ready to quickly mobilize and take action when a crisis strikes (p. 152). Responding instantly to families, the public, the press, and politicians are important tasks. In addition, organizations have to zealously find out the cause of the crisis in order to answer to the public.

The rule of thumb is to tell it all, and tell it fast (Seitel, 2000; Pinsdorf, 1987). Pinsdorf advises that the news should make headlines once rather than being constantly

dribbled out in bits and pieces. He argues that putting out information a little at a time creates an illusion to the public that the worst of the crisis is yet to come. It creates an expectation of fear for the worst in the eyes of the public, which is detrimental to the recovery process of the crisis (Pinsdorf, 1987, p. 45).

Having agreed that getting accurate information out fast is the right thing to do, the challenge becomes finding the time, amidst the chaos, to coordinate the messages that are sent out.

Open and Honest Communication

Keeping communication open and honest during times of crisis is critical. Lerbinger (1997) suggests that crisis managers should be open, honest, and accurate. This implies that if these three criteria are met by practitioners, there is a good chance that the organization's crisis communication will be successful.

Corporations should not only get accurate information out to the public, but address their concerns. Johnson and Johnson's handling of the Tylenol poisonings is often hailed as a shining example of how corporations should react in a crisis situation. Johnson and Johnson was widely praised for giving accurate information to the media, admitting errors and correcting wrong information appropriately, and maintaining an open line of communication with interested publics (Fink, 1986). One of the things that Johnson and Johnson did to maintain open lines of communication was to establish special toll-free consumer hot lines in the first week to respond to inquiries concerning the safety of Tylenol (Berge, 1990, p. 22). Thirty-three phones were installed in the basement of McNeil's office and employees were recruited to man the calls.

However, Fitzpatrick and Rubin (1995) notes that there are pitfalls in maintaining an open and honest posture. Legal constraints may keep a company from communicating as freely as it would like, especially when the messages conflict with legal strategies designed to limit an organization's liability. In some cases, fulfilling legal obligations and limiting a company's liabilities become the guiding force in a company's response to victims or victims' relatives following a crisis situation. Concerns about legal issues can induce companies to answer "no comment" to enquiries. According to Fink (1986), such stonewalling strategies raise suspicions and increase uncertainty about organizations. "No comment" or silence gives stakeholders the impression that the company is hiding something and therefore most likely a guilty party. Fink notes that an open and honest response that conveys compassion and concern is still the best approach a company can take when responding to a crisis. When information is unavailable, companies should admit ignorance rather than saying "no comment."

Visible Leadership

Choosing an appropriate spokesperson is undoubtedly one of the most critical aspects of crisis planning because it is the spokesperson who "sets the tone and style for handling the crisis and is the key contact for all media" (Newsom, Turk & Kruckeberg, 1996). Crisis spokespersons should be members of the organization who are perceived by the stakeholders as having high credibility and knowledge to speak during a crisis. The spokesperson must also possess full authority to speak and make swift decisions on behalf of the organization. The chief executive officer (CEO) is often viewed as the best person for the job of a spokesperson during a crisis situation (Coombs, 1999; Hearit & Courtright, 2003). The CEO is the human face for the company, and the public expects

him or her to step up and be the voice for the company. The CEO has the responsibility of showing compassion and sympathy, as well as giving accurate information to those who are involved in the crisis. He or she is usually the best person to act as a symbolic representation of a company's caring nature (Ray, 1999, p. 153). Lack of a visible high-ranking official at a disaster site draws criticisms from the public. For example, the lack of visible leadership at Prince William's Sound in Alaska following Exxon's oil spill in the area drew criticisms from the public. Exxon Chairman Lawrence Rawl did not visit the Valdez oil spill site until almost a month after the incident occurred. The extended delay of Rawl's presence at Valdez gave the impression that Exxon was unconcerned about the situation (Benoit, 1995).

In certain cases, the CEO may not be the most effective communicator. Rogers (1993) suggests that in this instance, the crisis team needs to select someone who can effectively communicate to represent the organization.

Managing Media Relations

To influence the public's perception of the organization and to maintain a positive image among its stakeholders, communication during crisis is the key (Ray, 1999). Experts agree that perceptions of what corporations doing to help victim or to salvage the situation is critical in helping them weather rough times. For example, the Exxon-Valdez oil spill was thought to be the largest marine disaster in U.S. history. Although the company has spent billions on cleaning up the Prince Williams Sound area in Alaska and has tried its best to compensate losses due to affected parties, Exxon continues to suffer from a bad reputation in the public's eyes. Exxon's lesson is that, ultimately, what is

important is not what a corporation does in a crisis, it is the public's perception of what they think a corporation should have done during a crisis situation.

Much has been written on the failures of Exxon in handling the oil spill crisis. In defense of Exxon, Fearn-Banks wrote devoted a chapter titled "Exxon's other story" (p. 103-107) in her 2002 book. We often read about Exxon's failure, but less has been written about Exxon's efforts to salvage the situation. In fact, as revealed by Fearn-Banks, there were things that Exxon did were commendable. But the efforts were drowned amidst the mayhem that unfolded due to ill relations with the media, dissonance amongst the various stakeholders, and challenging weather conditions.

Corporations and organizations that keep the media at bay in a crisis, or are unable to effectively manage the media, create a vacuum in information exchange between the organization and its stakeholders. Such information vacuums can fuel speculations and might even spiral into wild accusations and allegations. For example, Exxon housed the media center in Valdez, a remote town with limited facilities, equipment, and accommodations. Exxon was unprepared for the unprecedented press attention given to the crisis. After a few days, only a few selected media representatives were allowed into the press conferences, and many others were neglected. This disrupted the flow of information and caused an estranged relationship with some media representatives, which indirectly affected the bolstering posture of the company.

What we have learned from analyzing past case studies of effective and ineffective crisis management is that a media frenzy will take over if corporations do not supply information as quickly as possible. On the other hand, corporations are constantly worried about the legal repercussions that may result from giving too much information

to the public. Often corporations facing a crisis are hesitant about accepting full responsibilities or admitting fault because the ramifications of doing so may result in a threat to the corporation's survival. Because there is so much intense focus on every detail of the crisis, each minute piece of information is widely circulated around the nation, sometimes around the world. Thus, if the information given out is incorrect, the consequences can be damaging for the image of the corporation. The corporation will also have to spend time, which is a limited commodity in a crisis situation, trying to remedy the error instead of focusing on managing the crisis.

Credibility and the Halo Effect of a Company

An organization's past performance will also likely influence the effectiveness of its strategic communications. According to Ray (1999), a company with a positive performance history or initial image will have higher credibility among its stakeholders than a company with a history of problems (p. 25). As a result, stakeholders may be more willing to "forgive" the organization that possesses a higher level of credibility. A claim from a credible organization is also more readily accepted than one from an organization viewed as untrustworthy. Coombs (1995a) calls this the "halo effect." He explains that a positive history of an organization will cast the organization in a positive light and consequently creates a positive image on its actions. For example, Delta Airlines had an excellent performance record when Flight 191 crashed on August 2, 1985. The airline's reliability and credibility created a positive "halo effect" for the company, and Delta's responses to the crash were perceived as sincere (Ray, 1999, p. 130). The public was more accepting of Delta's claim that the crash was an unanticipated act of nature rather than human error on the part of the airline.

On the other hand, having a poor history of credibility will hinder with the company's efforts to manage and recover from a crisis. For example, the crisis management efforts of Northwest Flight 255's crash in August 1987 drew many criticisms. Just before the crash of Flight 255, in March 1987, another Northwest flight crash-landed at Detroit Metropolitan Airport. There were nine fatalities and thirteen people were injured ("Problems nag," 1987). In August, the same month as the crash of Flight 255, a Northwest DC-9 aborted takeoff from Palm Beach County International Airport after the pilot noticed a gas tank leak ("Problems nag," 1981). There were also labor issues arising from the merger that was taking place between Northwest Airlines and Republic Airlines. At the time of the crash of Flight 255, Northwest Airlines had the highest number of complaints in the industry. Due to these existing poor records, Northwest Airlines had little credibility in the eyes of the public. Consequently, stakeholders were less willing to believe the company's response to the crash of Flight 255 was sincere. For instance, the airline's efforts to help victims' families after the crash was perceived as an effort to solicit information for use in later litigation later (Peterson, 1987).

Beyond the level of credibility a company builds prior to a crisis, its response to the crisis itself can also affect the public's perception of their trustworthiness. For example, Exxon's inadequate response to the Valdez oil spill in 1989 decreased the company's credibility. Their actions and lack of actions during the first few critical hours of the crisis set a negative tone for the event. As a result, the public became skeptical of the company's efforts to handle the crisis despite the positive actions it took in its later stages (Small, 1991).

Organizational Culture

Corporate culture is an important determinant in the way in which a company communicates. According to Heath (1994), “The fit of an organization’s culture with the culture of its external stakeholders is critical.” Heath further notes that a corporation’s culture influences its employees respond to the issue of blame. A company may choose to accept blame and take up responsibilities or it may choose to shift the blame to another organization. Cross-cultural communication is an important element if the company operates on a global scale. The airline industry typically has customers from all over the world. Thus, being sensitive to the cultural differences amongst its customers is essential for the airline industry. The differences between how Pan Am handled the crash of Flight 103 and Japan Airline’s management of its crash illuminates the need to tailor crisis management methods to organizational culture. According to Pinsdorf (1991), Japan Airline’s responses reflected the nationalistic, paternalistic, and collectivist culture of the Japanese society, whereas Pan Am’s response to its crash reflected the capitalistic and individualistic characteristics of the American society.

Marra (2004) outlines the importance of the relationship between excellent crisis public relations and organizational communication culture or organizational philosophy. Marra cited Johnson and Johnson as an example of an organization that relied almost entirely on its corporate culture outlined in its famous credo in handling the product tampering case in 1985. Marra argues that having a good crisis plan is not enough to guarantee excellent crisis management. Marra cited findings from a study led by Dr. James E. Grunig at the University of Maryland (1992) in supporting his ideas. The study, *Excellence in Public Relations and Communications Management*, found that “excellent

public relations require the strategic management of an organization's communication function. This argument stresses the importance of having public relations practitioners who are not just followers of a checklist, but also strategists capable of adapting to the crisis situations and responding in the best interests of the organization. Marra asserts that an organization's culture will act as the guiding force through which these public relations practitioners frame their responses.

Types of Crisis

Scholars have attempted to categorize crises in a number of ways to facilitate improvements in how companies respond to crises. Mitroff and Killman (1984) have identified into seven types of corporate "evils": product tampering, product defects, product piracy, false accusations, dangers of "groupthink," hoaxes, and cultural insensitivity. In addition, Coombs (1999) outlines five crisis types: rumors, natural disasters, malevolence, accidents, and misdeeds.

The Institute for Crisis Management (ICM) lists 16 types of crisis: business catastrophes, class action suits, defects/recalls, environmental damage, financial damages, labor disputes, sexual harassment, white collar crime, casualty accident, consumer action, discrimination, executive dismissal, hostile takeover, mismanagement, whistle blowing and workplace violence (Millar, 2004, p. 21).

When discussing different types of crises, it is important to acknowledge that certain types of organizations have a higher susceptibility to crisis risk than others. Barton (2001) based his findings on an exhaustive review of over 1,100 business crises since 1981 and concluded that airlines fall into the high-risk category. In other words, airlines are more vulnerable to crises than other organizations such as internet-centric

organizations (considered to be medium-risk) and neighborhood businesses (considered as low-risk).

Crisis from a Rhetorical Perspective

To help us examine what constitutes a crisis, it is important to understand how they are constructed based on their rhetorical content. Heath (2004) asserts that a rhetorical definition of crises “stresses the message development and presentation part of the crisis response” (p. 5). Thus, crises can be posed as rhetorical problems. Bitzer (1968) argued that rhetorical problems comes about when an exigency demands a rhetorical statement that addresses the problem and tries to find a logical, justifiable response to the exigency. As a practitioner, the challenge is to solve problems by using different rhetorical devices that will influence how the media frame the crisis in ways that will help their organization recover from the crisis.

Heath (2004) further explores this perspective by recognizing that crises have two dimensions: an actual dimension and a perceived dimension. The actual dimension of a crisis refers to the deed or disaster that has happened. Technical/managerial skills must be employed to resolve the actual dimension of a crisis. The perceived dimension of a crisis is more subjective, meaning communication becomes an integral part of its management.

An organization’s response to crisis is often referred to as “corporate apologia” (Benoit & Lindsey, 1987; Sellnow 1990). *Apologia*, or a speech of defense, is rooted in Burke’s idea of the problem of guilt (1984). The word apologia should not be confused with apology, which is a modern term commonly use by persons to acknowledge fault without putting up a defense (Simpson & Wiener, 1989). Corporate apologia can be

viewed as the active engagement of rhetoric to defend against criticism directed at destroying a corporation's reputation, image, and credibility.

Hearit (2006) discusses five distinct prototypical stances that company officials make use of as they defend their actions: (1) We didn't do it, (2) counter attack, (3) it's not really our fault, (4) we promise not to do it again, and (5) talk to our lawyers (p.15).

Methodology: Rhetorical Criticism and the Dynamic Generic Framework

The study of rhetoric can trace its roots back to the fifth century BC Greece. Broadly defined, it is the study of human symbol use (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005, p. 50). Kenneth Burke (1969) defines rhetoric in at least two ways (p. 45). First, he has described it as addressed rhetoric, i.e., persuasive language meant to have an effect on an audience. This definition traces its roots to Cicero, who in his dialogue, *De Oratore*, defines rhetoric as "speech designed to persuade." Aristotle, in the *Art of Rhetoric*, had identified "persuasion" as the essence and end of rhetoric, which he defined as the "faculty of discovering the persuasive means available in a given case." Burke also defined rhetoric as a form of address, similar to Quintilian's "art of speaking well." Eloquence is a desirable state in rhetoric.

Burke's new rhetoric views rhetoric as a communion between the rhetorician and his audience. As the rhetorician communicates, s/he builds a state of identification with the community. Burke asserts that rhetoricians should be concerned with building commonness with their audiences. When an audience is convinced, they stand at-one with the rhetor and with each other.

Burke declares rhetoric as “a symbolic means of inducing cooperation.” He claims that humans are not instinctively cooperative genetically. Therefore, through means of persuasion, we induce cooperation.

According to Hart (1997), rhetorical criticism is “the business of identifying the complications of rhetoric and then explaining them in a comprehensive and efficient manner” (p. 23). Thus, the act of rhetorical criticism is to unclutter a text, and to make sense of the chosen text so that its complete meaning can be brought to light. The definition also suggests that the critic has to go about analyzing the text in a methodological and systematic way to illuminate the text.

Campbell (1982) notes that criticism involves the study of a rhetorical act that is “an intentional, created, polished attempt to overcome the obstacles in a given situation with a specific audience on a given issue to achieve a particular end” (p. 7). As Foss (1996) puts it, “Rhetorical criticism is the process of systematically investigating and explaining symbolic acts and artifacts for the purpose of understanding rhetorical process” (p. 6).

Since there are numerous ways in which a text can be interpreted and evaluated, the lens through which the critic views the text is important in rhetorical criticism. Identification of a critical claim is essential before analyzing a text. Critics should confine their interpretations of texts to well-defined parameters so that the criticism is focused and the arguments are strongly backed by relevant evidence.

Campbell and Jamieson (1978) assert that rhetorical genres belong to families of discourse that “share substantive, stylistic and situational characteristics” (p. 20).

Building on this theory, the *dynamic generic framework* invites scholars to view rhetoric as a “dynamic interplay of rhetorical choices” (Huxman & Bruce, 1995, p. 57).

The first prong of the framework examines *situational markers* of rhetoric by looking into what had provoked organizations or persons to engage in self-defense rhetoric. To do that, we evaluate the nature of accusations in a particular situation. Situational markers consider five things: the extent of the accusations (major or minor), the clarity of the accusations (ambiguous or unambiguous), the credibility of the accusers (powerful or powerless), the scope of the charges (single or multiple sources), and the degree of familiarity of the charges in a given field (precedented or unprecedented).

Next, the framework considers *substantive markers* that study the purpose or motive base from which organizations or persons craft their rhetoric. Scholars agree that defense rhetoric “is a particularly intimate or personal glimpse into the heart of the apologist’s motive for restoring his/her/its worth” (Huxman & Bruce, 1995; Kruse, 1977). Kruse (1977) based her theory of motive states on A. H. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and suggests that defense rhetoric falls into one of these three categories: (1) A *survival response*, in which “speakers feel that some aspect of his security or safety has been threatened,” (2) a *social responses*, in which the “primary need is to restore or regain affection, status, ...prestige or esteem,” and (3) A *self-actualization* responses, in which “the speaker attempts to maintain primarily for himself, an image consistent only with his idiosyncratic values and his personal sense of right and wrong” (p. 14). Huxman and Bruce (1995) argue further that identifying these three motive states is insufficient; a critic should also examine how “motive states interact with argument types and are framed by situational constraints” (p. 59).

Finally, stylistic markers look into how organizations or persons defending themselves justify their arguments. Huxman and Bruce (1995) propose that arguments are made on four different levels or stases: (1) On *fact*, where the rhetoric is framed around questions of whether an act was committed and who committed it, (2) on *definition*, where rhetors center on argument related to the nature of the act, (3) on *quality*, where arguments are framed on the size (big or small) and scope (extent of harm) of the act, and (4) on *jurisdiction*, where debate revolves around who should handle the issue and on what grounds arguments should be based on.

Ryan (1982) argues that organizations or persons engaged in defense rhetoric will choose one or more of these levels of stasis to frame their argument(s). Huxman and Bruce (1995) suggest that in order for the identification of the stasis level to be meaningful, they “must be examined as intersecting with one or more motive states and accounted for by situational factors” (p. 60). In this way, rhetoric can be analyzed on a dynamic platform on which the interaction elements within genre is given due considerations.

The artifacts (texts) that I analyze for this thesis date from October 2000-May 2006, and come from a variety of sources. They include 21 news releases, two CEO speeches, two conference transcripts, two issues of *Outlook* (the in-house publication for SIA) that carried special reports on SQ006, and numerous news articles, mostly from *The Straits Times*, a major Singapore English language newspaper.

In the following chapters, I will analyze the crisis of SQ006 by examining the rhetorical variables. Chapter three begins with an evaluation of the crisis management efforts of SIA, and move on to an examination of the rhetorical markers within the defense rhetoric employed by SIA. It concludes with a discussion on the limitations and implications of this thesis.

CHAPTER TWO

“In a sense, all criticism is a kind of guessing game, with the critic trying to shed light on the rhetorical shadows of a text. By inspecting a message carefully the critic turns presumed knowledge into tested knowledge.”

Roderick P. Hart, *Modern Rhetorical Criticism* (1997), p. 38

Airline crashes are complex issues due to the multiple parties involved, the unique sets of technical difficulties inherent in each disaster, and the fact that most result in high numbers of casualties. The crash of SQ006 at Taipei’s Chiang Kai-Shek Airport was no exception. Multiple parties were involved in the investigation of the crash (Taiwan’s Civil Aviation Authorities, Aviation Safety Council, Prosecutors, SIA, Singapore’s Ministry of Transport, International Federation of Air Line Pilots Association etc.); it was unclear what caused the crash (human error, weather or technical failure; and 83 out of the 179 passengers on board the aircraft were killed, with 56 others seriously injured. To fully comprehend the magnitude of the air disaster, I will first define the crash of Flight SQ006 by examining it as an event, a construct, and a process. Following this I use Hart’s (1997) seven variables to further explore the elements that contributed to the crisis: (1) speaker variables, (2) audience variables, (3) topic variables, (4) persuasive fields, (5) setting variables, (6) media variables, and (7) rhetorical conventions.

Defining the Crisis of SQ006

As an event, the SQ006 crash did not yield as many casualties as other airline disasters. Nevertheless, like all such accidents, it was followed by extensive media

attention. For one thing, this was the first crash for SIA. Secondly, rescue efforts took place under extreme harsh conditions amidst Typhoon Xangsane. The rugged weather conditions with rain pouring down and winds howling combined with the images of rescue workers trying to pull out survivors from the burning plane enhanced the visual dimension of the tragedy.

Viewing the crash as a construct requires examining how it was interpreted by SIA's various stakeholders. Immediately, charges against SIA were piled on by survivors, the victims' families, the media, and the public. The accusations directed at SIA were major: SIA's pilots erred when they guided the aircraft into the inactive 05R runway, and on take off, they did not lift it high enough to avoid hitting the construction equipment that was in the way. However, the circumstances that led to this fatal mistake in many regards were unclear. In addition to arguments about pilots' error, others were heard about the lack of safety and warning devices on the runway, and the Taiwan control tower's lack of situational awareness.

Lastly, the crisis can be defined as a process. Examining the five phases (detection, prevention/preparation, containment, recovery and learning) of the crisis, a timeline can be developed for the crash of Flight SQ006.

The detection phase of crises at times begin with the noting of warning signs. But in SIA's crisis, there was almost no prodromes. SIA was an airline that prided itself on its safety standards. However, some critics argued that the aircraft should not have flown since visibility was low. In response, company officials stated that a China Airlines aircraft took off successfully just 15 minutes before the crash, showing that the weather conditions were within the limits set for an aircraft to take off. Rick Clements, a

spokesperson for SIA, also confirmed that the cross wind at the time was no more than 15 knots, while Boeing's recommended maximum cross wind for the aircraft was 30 knots ("SIA defends," 2000).

SIA was well prepared for the crisis having learned from the crash of its subsidiary airline, SilkAir. The SilkAir crash was due to psychological traumas that the pilot was experiencing. The pilot sent the Boeing 737 into a death dive into the Musi River in Indonesia killing everyone on board just three years before on December 19, 1997 ("Pilots fear," 2000). Much was learned from that incident. After the news about the crash of SQ006 reached him, SIA's CEO rushed back to Taipei from New Zealand where he was involved in a meeting, to supervise the crisis plan and become the company's spokesperson. He disseminated accurate information to a hungry media and corrected wrong information released by a Los Angeles employee who stated that there were no fatalities in the first few hours after the crash ("After the crash," 2000). SIA also had a team of trained employees ready for mobilization flown to the crash site to serve as grief and trauma counselors. One or two of these counselors were assigned to each survivor and victims' family members. The role of these counselors was to comfort these people, while acting as a liaison between them and SIA.

Airline officials used several measures to contain the crisis. Firstly, regular communication via press releases and news conferences helped met journalists' demands for information. As mentioned earlier, grief and trauma counselors were flown into Taipei promptly to help the survivors and the grieving relatives of passengers who had perished in the crash. Responsiveness and sincerity shown by SIA's eagerness to help the victims and their family members played a big part in assisting SIA in containing the

crisis situation. Executives at SIA constantly reminded the public to focus on the investigation of the “accident” through sound bites given to the media. SIA tried to discourage speculations and rumors on the cause of the crash by shifting the attention of the public to the necessity of providing adequate medical care to the survivors and grief counseling to the families who lost loved ones in the crash.

The recovery and learning phase was taken very seriously by the airline. No stone was left unturned in the process of evaluating the airline’s operating system so that it would once again be fit enough to fly. One of the things SIA did was to install better systems in the aircraft to help pilots identify runways. In addition, within six months of the crash, the airline ordered new shoes that would replace the sandals previously worn by flight attendants (“Singapore Airlines attendants,” 2001). Allegedly, the sandals were too flimsy and thus compromised flight attendants’ ability to conduct rescue efforts.

Having defined the crisis faced by SIA, I will now proceed to critically probe into the rhetorics of the crisis. This is an important process because every message contains “generic markers” that reveal much about its parentage. By critically analyzing the rhetorical situation, we can uncover the persuasive messages embedded in the unique speech-act (Hart, 1997, p. 38). Hart proposes that to achieve the goal of completely understanding speech-acts, one must use the following critical variables as a guide: speaker variables, audience variables, topic variables, the persuasive field, setting variables, media variables, and rhetorical conventions (1997, p. 48).

Speaker Variables

Hart (1997) refers to speaker variables as those questions that relate to how social role, personal ideology, and public image constrain, sometimes dictate, what a speaker

says” (p. 49). SIA had long before the crash, prided itself on its safety records. In addition, SIA had also set itself apart from its competitors through its premium services. These two elements, combined with the fact that SIA is the “international face of Singapore,” greatly constrained the posture SIA speakers could take when addressing the crash of SQ006.

No longer able to proclaim itself as an airline with a spotless accident record, SIA Chairman Dr. Cheong immediately announced that SIA took full responsibility for the crash and that its leaders were sorry about the accident. When a passenger pays premium prices for a ticket to travel with SIA, they automatically assume that they are paying to travel with one of the safest airlines in the world. Thus, the crash erodes the very core principle of what the brand SIA stood for. This left little room for maneuvering in terms of its choice of what types of corporate apologia to use. Ware and Linkugel (1973) identify four postures of corporate apologia that can become “factors of self-defense”: denial, bolstering, differentiation and transcendence. In this case, SIA employed the strategy of transcendence by choosing to apologize and assume full responsibility.

SIA’s spokesperson, Deputy Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Dr. Cheong Choong Kong, was asked in a press conference on November 3, 2000, if he thought the pilots were misled onto the runway, thereby diminishing SIA’s blame. Dr. Cheong answered, “They are our pilots, it was our aircraft, and the aircraft should not have been on that runway. And, as I say, we accept full responsibility” (“Press conference,” 2000).

SIA’s claim as the airline that offers the best services required that the CEO expressed concern for the passengers and crew right from the start of the crisis. In his first statement to the media, Dr. Cheong opened with, “Words fail to express the great

sadness that I and all my colleagues at Singapore Airlines are feeling right now...Our priority right now is to do all that we can for the passengers, for the crew and for the family members” (“Media statement,” 2000). By openly expressing his grief and also emphasizing that the airline’s top priority is to take care of the victims and their next of kin, the CEO upheld the company’s four core values: pursuit of excellence, safety, customer first, concern for staff, integrity and teamwork.

SIA used two spokespersons during the crisis: its CEO, Dr. Cheong, and its Vice-President of Public Affairs, Mr. Rick Clements. Dr. Cheong was the primary spokesperson, who provided visible leadership to the public. Mr. Clements spoke on several occasions but mostly acted in a supportive role.

Two additional elements further restricted what SIA’s spokespersons could say during the crisis. The cause of the crash was unclear and the charges were ambiguous, especially during the initial crisis. The crash also happened in Taipei, which put investigation to the jurisdiction of a foreign government. These two elements made it difficult for the airlines to shift blame or responsibilities to the other factors that had contributed to the crash. SIA had to tread a fine line between taking responsibility, but at the same time, making sure that any accusations against them were fair. In his first media statement, CEO Dr. Cheong stated:

We are working closely with the Taiwanese Civil Aviation Authority’s investigation team. We want to help to get as much information out to everyone as quickly as possible, and we appreciate the important role the media plays to keep everyone well informed. That is why you will hear me talking about the facts. It is important that we stick to the facts. Speculation and theories cannot do anything to help anyone (“Media statement,” 2000).

Audience Variables

Hart also notes the need to identify the various audiences rhetor direct their messages to in an effort to understand their motives for the rhetoric. In this case, SIA was faced with several audiences. Taiwan's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and the Taiwan media were important foreign rhetorical audiences. Because the crash happened in Taiwan, its investigation came under the jurisdiction of Taiwanese authorities. The Taiwanese airport was quick to point out that the crash was due to pilots' negligence in using runway 05L when they were supposed to be on runway 05R. SIA thus was forced to repeatedly emphasize the other contributing factors of the crash such as the lack of proper signage, lighted runways, and lack of warnings from the control tower.

Another important audience was the public. Passenger confidence in airlines is an important factor in the continued success of the business. This was especially important for SIA, since it had long differentiated from its competitors through its stellar safety record and premium service. SIA had to restore confidence in the public so that they will be willing to trust the airline's safety standards after the crash. SIA tried to achieve this by reassuring the public that it would leave no stone unturned in uncovering the true cause that led to the crash, and also making sure that similar accidents would not happen again in the future.

An important audience in this crisis was survivors and victims' next of kin. To address this group, each member was assigned a SIA Buddy, who acted as their primary channel for information and care. The SIA Group's Buddies are:

Staff members who have volunteered to extend the Group's care to the families of passengers and crew in times of crisis...Buddies comfort and support passengers and their next-of-kin amid the despair and anxiety of an unexpected

tragedy. The Buddy volunteers are empathetic by nature. The skills acquired at interactive role-play sessions conducted by industry professionals, help them to give emotional support (“SIA Buddies,” 2000).

In another article, the work was described in the following manner: as “they [Buddies] accompanied them [next-of-kin] to the crash site, funeral parlors and even to their homes – sometimes in other towns or countries. They were always there to lend the next of kin a listening ear” (“How Buddies,” 2000). The SIA Buddies were the direct channel through which information was passed from SIA to next of kin and survivors. This Buddy System essentially served as a rhetorical device that served SIA well in its need to address this important audience. Hence, the media statements and press releases examined in this thesis were meant for SIA’s accusers and the general public.

SIA was an international brand name that instilled pride in many Singaporeans. SIA was more than a mere corporation; it was a corporation that acted as an unofficial ambassador for Singapore to the world. Thus, there were considerable considerations by SIA in addressing the disappointment felt by Singaporeans with regards to the stain to the airline’s spotless flying records. By swiftly admitting responsibility, taking care of survivors and next of kin, and giving accurate information, SIA projected the image of an open, honest and responsible corporation with nothing to hide. This resonated well with Singaporeans, as is evidenced in their outpouring of support for the airlines. One man wrote in to the Forum page of Singapore’s leading English newspaper, *The Straits Times*:

I was most impressed with Singapore Airlines’ Chief Executive Officer Dr. Cheong Choong Kong for accepting full responsibility for the tragedy because ‘it was SIA’s plane.’ He and SIA did not blame the Taiwan airport controllers. Neither did he nor SIA blame them for not taking appropriate measures to cordon off the said runway or for giving clearance for the plane to take-off (Tan, 2000).

Similar articles in other major Singapore newspapers in Singapore praised the integrity of SIA and the efforts of SIA employees to help survivors and next of kin.

Topic Variables

There are differences in the way topics are discussed by rhetors in given situations. Hart (1997) calls it the “range of discussability” (p.51). Two distinct phases occurred in the crash of SQ006. The first phase was the period immediately after the crash up to the announcement of the two aircraft accident findings by Taiwan’s Civil Aviation Authority and Singapore’s Ministry of Transport respectively on April 26, 2002. The second phase began after the release of the two aircraft accident findings. Each of these phases yielded different topics, mostly centered on the cause of the crash. The “range of discussability” for the topics were very much determined by the presence (or lack of) the aircraft accident investigation reports.

Initial Speculations about the Cause of the Crash

There were many speculations as to the cause of the crash of Flight SQ006. The public questioned why an airline with an impeccable safety records, an experienced pilot who has over 11,000 hours of flying experience, and one of the airline’s newest aircraft, a 747-400, crashed on take off (“Fiery end,” 2000). Immediately following the crash, three theories were proposed: (1) The aircraft was hit by an object, (2) was on the wrong runway and (3) or was subjected to bad weather (“Why SQ,” 2000). Bad weather was almost immediately refuted to be the cause of the crash. SIA CEO Dr. Cheong said that weather was not a factor because the “control people would not have allowed it” (“Why SQ”, 2000). In fact, a China Airlines plane took off just 15 minutes before SQ006.

Controversy also arose regarding whether runway 05R was closed in compliance with international aviation safety guidelines. Questions were raised concerning the availability of proper signage and if the runway's lights were lit, thus indicating an active runway. Experts state that lights on closed runway should be off, access blocked, and control tower should have checked on jet. Aviation experts and pilots were puzzled that SQ006 could have taxied his aircraft onto the wrong runway and received no warnings from the control tower at the Chiang Kai-Shek International airport (Koh & Lim, 2000). Initial reports from the preliminary findings of the crash also indicated that the marker lights were on.

Preliminary findings also seek to establish if the control tower had guided the plane onto the wrong runway, or if the pilots were misled by the control tower into thinking that they were on the right take off path. According to the flight data recorder retrieved at the crash site, Foong Chee Kong, captain of the aircraft confirmed with the tower control that he was on runway 05L. Tower control then gave him permission to take off. According to Taiwan's CAA's CEO Dr. Yong Kay, the flight recordings indicated that the pilot thought he was on runway 05L, when in fact he was on the wrong runway. Thus, the safety council concluded that pilot error was the leading cause of the crash ("Pilot error," 2000). Questions were then raised as to why the control tower was not aware that the airplane was on the wrong runway as well. Dr. Kay, in the same interview, said that Chiang Kai-Shek Airport had no ground radar monitoring facility, and that visibility was bad when the aircraft was took off. The control tower could only monitor communication between the cockpit and the traffic controllers, since visual communication was not possible ("Pilot error", 2000).

During this period of time, the cause of the air crash was based on the preliminary findings by Taiwan's CAA, as well as on "he said, she said." Some experts, including aviation authorities and experienced pilots, were brought in to give their views, but the findings were not conclusive. SIA was quick to point out that the findings were not concrete. In a press conference given by SIA CEO, Dr. Cheong commented on the preliminary findings:

That is the report, but not an official report. We have to be very careful about what is fact and what is speculation. Until it becomes an official fact, it is hearsay and we shall not comment on it, and we won't. In any case, the evidence has been presented. The aircraft did make that turn into the wrong runway, and we accept that conclusion ("Press conference," 2000).

In an earlier press release, Dr. Cheong was quoted as saying "it is critical we understand exactly what happened and precisely what made the cockpit crew believe that they were on the correct runway... We will be looking a human factors, and also what could be done to make airports safer" ("Media Statement," 2000b).

Disagreements over the Aircraft Accident Investigation Report

While SIA was hesitant in its defense of itself before the official aircraft accident investigation reports came out, it was more forceful in discussing the cause of the crash afterwards.

SIA received copies of two reports on the accident. One report was compiled by Taiwan's Aviation Safety Council (ASC) and the other by a Singapore investigation team, headed by the Ministry of Transport (MOT). SIA held a press conference and pointed out some inconsistencies in the two findings. SIA's CEO Dr. Cheong said:

When read together, these reports provide a comprehensive analysis of the accident. They conclude that it could have

been the result of several contributing factors involving the flight crew, the air traffic controllers in the airport, as well as the weather conditions. SIA accepts generally the findings of the facts in these two reports. However, it is with the conclusions that we have some reservations about. It's always been clear that the aircraft took off from the wrong runway, but the ASC report does not give due weight to the deficiencies found at Chiang Kai Shek Airport. We believe these deficiencies misled the pilots into taking off from the wrong runway ("SQ006 press," 2002).

Dr. Cheong went on to defend his reservations by saying that the ASC had classified the pilots and bad weather as the causes of the accident, while other deficiencies such as the airport's deviation from international standards for airport systems, processes and practices at Chiang Kai-Shek Airport were reduced to risk factors. He states that SIA believed a combination of factors that to the crash, and that there should not be a hierarchy of causes in terms of its contribution to the crash ("SQ006 press," 2002). Dr. Cheong emphasized that his "hesitation" about the reports was not a ploy for SIA to wriggle out of its responsibilities. He expressed concern that the deficiencies at the airport, were not considered as seriously as they should be. He stressed that SIA's concern was on maintaining safety standards, and if there indeed were deficiencies at Chiang Kai-Shek Airport, it should be given due considerations, and efforts should be made to correct the flaws so that a tragedy like SQ006 would not happen again in the future.

The Aviation Safety Council in Taiwan had refused to allow Singapore to participate in the analysis phase of the investigation. Thus, the Ministry of Transportation in Singapore engaged accredited investigators to produce their own report. When comparing the Ministry of Transportation's report with the Aviation Safety Council's report, several discrepancies cropped up. The Ministry of Transportation's deputy

secretary Jaspal Singh joined SIA's CEO Dr. Cheong Choong Kong in saying, "Seven out of eight findings (related to probable causes) refer to the pilots. None of the deficiencies at Chiang Kai-Shek airport are listed in the findings of probable causes" (Doyle, 2002).

The International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Association (IFALPA) also joined Singapore's Ministry of Transportation and SIA in disputing the credibility of Taiwanese Aviation Safety Council's (ASC) report, saying:

IFALPA is very concerned with the attitude contained in the report, which seems to suggest that the obvious critical airport deficiencies do not enter into the considerations of the difficulties faced by pilots in unusual situations, such as was presented to the crew of flight SQ006...Should this same attitude result in individual prosecution of the pilots, IFALPA will be force not only to condemn the prosecution, but also to convey to the pilots of the world in the strongest possible terms the difficulties of operating flights into Taiwan (Dunn, 2002).

The Taiwanese ASC report's conclusion came as no surprise to many of the families of the passengers who died in the SQ006 crash. Some family members said they had expected the report to shift the blame onto the pilots. Mr. Malcolm Thwaites, whose mother was killed in the crash, expressed that it was not believable that the crash was due to pilot error alone. He said he felt that a combination of factors led to the accident ("SQ006 victims' families," 2002). Mr. Frankie Yeo, whose wife perished in the crash, was frustrated that the ASC's report did not shed light on how the crash happened ("SQ006 victims' families," 2002).

Care for Victims and Next of Kin

Survivors of the crash of SQ006 recounted that they saw the Boeing 747 ablaze as it sat broken on the tarmac. There were 159 passengers and 20 crew members on board the aircraft. As the flames from the explosion raged, a typhoon was approaching Taiwan. Emergency workers dashed out into the pouring rain and winds gusted up to 165 kilometers per hour.

Experts were critical of the rescue efforts at including Dr. Lee Wen Huei, who works with the department of emergency medicine in Taipei's Chang Gung Memorial Hospital, which treated nearly half the crash victims. While presenting a paper at the Asia Emergency Care and Defence Medicine exhibition and conference, Dr. Lee attributed the poor rescue efforts to firemen not properly trained to double as paramedics. Dr. Lee said, "The firemen on the ground, being used to fighting fires, treated their medical role as secondary" ("Expert criticizes," 2001).

Shortly after the crash, a normally deserted office area in the basement of Changi Airport Terminal 2 in Singapore became the nerve center of activity. The SIA Crisis Management Center (CMC), which is kept in a "precautionary state of readiness round the year," was activated to direct and coordinate the handling of the crisis ("CMC," 2000). Executive vice-presidents and senior vice-presidents from the SIA Group directed the operations. Their first tasks were to tap all available channels of information about the crash, inform families of passengers and crew, activate and assign Buddies to next-of-kin, make travel arrangements for Buddies and next of kin to fly to Taipei, and arrange for regular meetings and briefings.

On SIA's first flight after the crash to Taipei on November 1 at 0630 hours, there were 68 Buddies onboard. According to a SIA press release, "All next of kin traveling to Taipei are accompanied by Buddies from the various stations from where they depart. To date, there are 163 Buddies (142 from Singapore and 21 from overseas stations) in Taipei" ("SIA Buddies," 2000). On a daily basis, SIA updated the media through news releases about the rescue and recovery efforts at Taipei. The SIA buddies were constantly mentioned throughout these reports emphasizing the fact that SIA was doing its best to console and provide aid to the survivors and the next of kin. In another report, the Buddies were described as "specially trained [persons] to support family members and passengers through such difficult situations...these staff are assigned to a family and take care of all the family's needs, liaise with the Airline and help to make arrangements on the family's behalf"("Flight SQ006," 2000).

One episode with a distraught gentleman, the brother of one of the passengers unaccounted for in the crash, created a media stir. Mr. Tan Yin Leong barged into a press conference and demanded that Mr. Rick Clements, SIA's vice-president of public affairs, give him the truth. Mr. Yip took center stage in a room full of journalists and TV cameras, and accused Mr. Clements, saying, "You are the ones who tell me that you all can give us first-hand news. Well, we end up getting news from all the newspaper reporters. We want to know the truth" ("Despair," 2000). The grieving Mr. Tan also alleged that "security" had snatched away from him a list of passengers that he had obtained from a reporter. Mr. Clements listened to his accusations and apologized to Mr. Tan at one point, only to be told that sorry was not enough. Mr. Tan was allowed to vent his grievance in front of

cameras for 15 minutes before Mr. Clements calmly puts his arms around the grief-stricken Mr. Tan and said simply, “I’m very sorry” (“Despair,” 2000).

Following this incident, SIA only allowed reporters with press passes to enter the Changi Airport briefing room. This action sparked questions as to why family members were not allowed to talk to the press. To that, Mr. Clements replied, “The media is always free to speak to family members, and I didn’t want you to not speak to Mr. Tan earlier this morning. But the press conference is not the right forum to do so” (“Despair,” 2000).

This incident was probably the lowest point in SIA’s management of the crisis situation. Having the grieving Mr. Tan hurl accusations at Mr. Clements in front of cameras and a roomful of journalists created a powerful and negative image. Pictures communicate pain and suffering more powerfully than words. According to Ray (1999), “In the emotional aftermath of an airline disaster, such photographs [of grieving relatives] may indirectly reflect upon the airline as the source of families’ pain and anguish” (p. 107).

Getting accurate information out to next of kin is always a difficult task for airlines, in the aftermath of a crash. It requires getting correct information out to the public in general, taking into account what the emotions of next of kin. For example, TWA Flight 800, which crashed in July of 1996, slowness in confirming the passenger lists to the next of kin of victims drew criticism from the families and politicians. Ray (1997) notes that prompt accurate notification of next of kin and the release of names of victims to the general public is critical to effective crisis management (p. 153).

SQ006's Pilots

After the crash, SQ006's three pilots were kept in Taiwan to assist in the investigation. Having given their accounts of what happened during the fateful flight, the pilots were prohibited from leaving Taiwan to return to their home country. But the pilots were not confined or restricted in their movements, and were free to move about in Taiwan (Vincent, 2000).

Due to the possibility that pilot's error was a possible cause of the crash, Taoyuan county (Taipei) prosecutor's office made the decision to investigate the pilots and the airport administration for possible manslaughter. Taiwan's Justice Ministry concluded that the three pilots involved in the SQ006 crash did not have immunity from prosecution. This decision was a controversial one because prosecuting pilots in civil-aviation accidents is not in accordance with international practice, according to the Aviation Safety Council, the crash's lead investigator (Goh, 2000). The international standard practice is to not indict pilots in air accidents. To protect its own employees, SIA engaged a leading Taiwanese law firm to speak for the three pilots and to defend them should the need arise (Vincent, 2000).

The attempt to press charges against the airline pilots outraged pilots and aviation associations worldwide. The International Federation of Air Line Pilot's Association, which represents the pilots of 30 carriers, along with the general aviation community, announced that they were ready to boycott Taiwanese air space if the authorities did not allow the pilots to return home (Koh, 2000). The federation represents more than 100,000 pilots, or about two-thirds of all registered pilots. Captain Ted Murphy, president of the federation, urged the Taiwanese to let the pilots go home "right now" (Koh, 2000).

Captain Ryan Goh, chairman of the SIA branch of the Airline Pilots Association Singapore, explained the need to grant immunity to pilots, saying, “The aviation system may collapse if pilots and air controllers become too worried about their legal liabilities instead of concentrating on their jobs” (Koh, 2000).

Goh was referring to what is widely known as the protection granted to pilots and air controllers so that they will tell the truth after crashes. According to experts, getting to the truth can help prevent future air disasters. The rationale is that if this immunity is taken away, pilots and aircrew will have less incentive to tell the truth. In the end, the ones who suffer most are passengers, since their safety is compromised when corrective actions and adequate interventions are not implemented in time. In response to the boycott, the Taiwan prosecutor investigating the crash, Mr. Huang Mou-shang, stood his ground and said he would not bow to international pressures (Koh, 2000).

On December 22, the Taiwanese prosecutors finally lifted the ban preventing the SQ006 pilots from returning home. In exchange for their release, both SIA and the Singapore Trade Office in Taipei had to provide written assurance to the Taiwanese authorities that SIA and the Singapore Trade Office in Taipei would put forth their best efforts to ensure that the pilots would return to Taipei should the need arise (Goh, 2000).

In May 2002, the three pilots were asked to return to Taiwan by Taiwanese prosecutors (“SQ006 pilots recalled,” 2002). In June 2002, just days before a final decision by the Taoyuan District Prosecutor’s office on whether to press charges against the pilots, a carefully worded four-sentence half-page advertisement entitled “Our Prayers” in Chinese and English appeared on the front page of two of Taiwan’s highest circulating daily newspapers – the United Daily News and Liberty Times was released

("SQ006 pilots place," 2002). The advertisements drew mixed reviews from the Taiwan public. Some commented that the advertisements made it seem like the pilots were at fault (and were thus apologizing) and others thought the advertisement was a SIA public relations ploy to minimize damage, while doing little to relieve the grief of the victims' families and friends ("SQ006 pilots place," 2002).

The final decision by Taiwan's judicial authorities was to not prosecute the three pilots. First officer Ng Kheng Leng was completely in the clear, since he was not at the aircraft's controls when the crash occurred. Captain Foong Chee Kong and First Officer Latiff Cyrano were found to be negligent of their duties. Prosecutions against Foong and Cyrano were suspended for three years, they had to perform 240 hours of community service in Singapore, and they were banned from flying civilian jetliners to Taiwan for a year (Chung, 2002). According to the article, this decision to not prosecute came as a relief to the three pilots and was welcomed by aviation officials and families of the victims.

A twist in the tale came a week later after the Taiwan prosecutors announced that they would not press charges against the three pilots involved in the crash of SQ006. SIA terminated the services of Captain Foong Chee Kong and First Officer Cyrano Latiff with immediate effect ("SIA terminates," 2002). SIA's decision was criticized by the Singapore Air Line Pilots Association. President of the association, Dilip Padbidri, expressed disappointment in SIA for the move. He spoke on behalf of the two pilots who were terminated saying that, "They felt that by cooperating with the company they'll be given a chance and they look forward to being employed by the company as pilots. They never expected it" ("SIA terminates," 2002).

Persuasive Fields

To get one's message across in a crowded message-filled marketplace is not an easy task. Hart (1997) proposes that in evaluating rhetoric, it is important to identify the "persuasive field" or set of competing messages. In a crisis situation, the differing messages that audiences receive are from varied sources and audiences sometimes find themselves frequently bombarded by opposing viewpoints.

After the crash of SQ006, SIA's biggest competitor within the persuasive field was the Taiwanese authorities, made up of the Taiwanese Civil Aviation Authorities (CAA), Taiwanese Aviation Safety Council (ASC), and Taiwanese prosecutors. The CAA was in charge of putting together a preliminary investigation report, since they had jurisdiction at the Chiang Kai-Shek Airport. The ASC was the agency that led the aircraft accident investigation report, which sought to fully comprehend the crash and make conclusive remarks on the disaster. The Taiwanese prosecutors joined the chorus later on in the game when the CAA and the ASC both found pilots' error to be the cause of the crash. When the ASC refused to let Singaporean investigators participate in the analysis of its reports, SIA enlisted the help of Singapore's Ministry of Transportation, which then compiled its own investigation report, in an effort to challenge the report put forth by the Taiwanese Aviation Safety Council. This move would have been seen as an outright challenge to Taiwanese authority if it had not been framed as retaliation against Taiwan's refusal to let Singaporeans participate in the investigation process. However, presenting a separate report still gave the impression that SIA was deliberately snubbing the credibility of Taiwanese authorities. This view was aired by journalists at the press conference given by SIA's CEO Dr. Cheong over the disputes on the conclusions of the

two reports. Dr. Cheong responded by emphasizing that he did not want to point fingers, since he was more interested in improving safety issues at the airport:

I am not here to talk about who is to blame and how many are to blame and how that blame is to be shared. I think what is more important is to understand what caused the accident... We believe that the deficiencies in the lighting system, the signage, the air traffic control clearance – all these misled our pilots into taking off from the wrong runway and it is important to understand the factors that led to the accident, so that we can learn from it (“SQ006 Press,” 2002b).

In answering a question from another reporter about whether SIA was trying to dispute the reports by CAA because it wanted CAA to share in the responsibilities posed by future claims and lawsuits, Dr. Cheong once again emphasized that his aim was not to “share blame” but to “recognize their [other factors] contribution to the accident” (“SQ006 Press,” 2002b). Before wrapping up the press conference, Dr. Cheong thanked the ASC for doing a good job in establishing the facts pertaining to the crash. He said:

We bear no ill-will. We’ve always had very good relations with all parties in Taiwan and we intend to maintain those good relations, and Taiwan has always been a very important place for doing business for us. We do want to thank everybody who has helped in the immediate aftermath of the accident, with rescue efforts, the medical authorities. They have done a lot and we are thankful for that (“SQ006 Press,” 2002b).

By acknowledging and expressing gratitude for the help provided by Taiwanese authorities, Dr. Cheong was able to build goodwill for SIA. I was not able to procure sufficient information to conclude that the Taiwanese media was indeed hostile towards SIA or the Singapore investigation team. The only mention of the enmity was by Edward Kan, the Singapore Air Line Pilots Association’s secretary-general, who expressed disappointment in Taiwanese prosecutors when asked what his thoughts were after the

pilots were allowed to go home in December 2000. He added that Taiwan's prosecutors faced a lot of pressure from the Taiwanese public and media to prosecute the pilots (Goh, 2000). I believe that the Taiwanese public and media had an important role as accusers in the crash of SQ006. Unfortunately, due to language differences, it was difficult to procure and translate press releases and newspaper articles (in Mandarin) about SQ006 from the Taiwanese media.

Luckily for SIA, the Singapore government, the International Federation of Air Line Pilot's Association (IFALPA), and later on, the Singapore public, were supportive of SIA's claims. These groups voiced their opinions openly, and spoke on behalf IA to ensure a fair and impartial report on the accident and fate of the three pilots.

Setting Variables

According to Hart (1997), physical locations take on special social (and rhetorical) significance (p. 52). In addition, aspects of time and timing are also important elements that should be considered in discussion of setting variable in analyses of speech-acts. When the CEO of SIA, Dr. Cheong Choong Kong, heard about the crash of SQ006, he was in New Zealand attending a conference. It took him a few hours to get to Taipei, and in the mean time, the Crisis Management Center at SIA's headquarters in Singapore was activated. SIA's first press release was issued at 0200 hours on 1 November 2000, three hours after the crash. The press release gave basic information such as the number of passengers on board, a description of the aircraft involved in the crash, preliminary numbers on how many people were rescued, and most importantly, telephone numbers for the media and next of kin to call. SIA's crisis plans shifted into gear as Dr. Cheong makes his way to the crash site. The Directorate, together with the Public Affairs team,

Employee Communications team, and support units from Flight Operations, Engineering, Marketing, and Management Services, congregated at CMC to work out their strategies even before the CEO reached Taipei (“CMC,” 2000). Even as the CEO flew to his destination, SIA was able to update the media and the public.

The first media statement issued by CEO Dr. Cheong was released in Taipei at 0200 hours on November 2, 2000. The fact that the CEO rushed to Taipei was a significant gesture to show that he cared about the victims and the next of kin. His actions made his speech (at 2 in the morning) more credible when he said:

Words fail to express the great sadness that I and all my colleagues at Singapore Airlines are feeling right now. We are shocked at this incident and saddened by the pain and grief that is causing for many. I come here directly from Christchurch, New Zealand, where I was attending a business meeting. I came here as soon as I could. I wanted to be here to be with the passengers, to be with the crew, and to be with the family members of those who were on the flight (“Media statement,” 2002a).

After his speech, Dr. Cheong spoke with family members of victims and paid his respects to the deceased. The next morning, Dr. Cheong visited passengers who were in the hospital and spent more time talking to victims and their next of kin.

Afterwards Dr. Cheong returned to Singapore and gave press conferences and speeches from the company’s headquarters at Changi International Airport in Singapore. Singapore is about eight hours away from Taipei by plane. The relative proximity of home base to the crash site probably led to the decision to have the CEO return to Singapore, where he could oversee the crisis efforts from the Crisis Management Center. If he were needed at Taipei again, he would be able to fly there within the day.

Media Variables

Hart (1997) states, “A medium is one which ‘carries’ a message” (p. 53). Today, we must also consider the abilities of technologies to mutate and propagate messages in combinations and at speeds media practitioners a decade ago had never dreamed of. In addition, audiences are subjected to more messages and channels than ever before. Most of the artifacts I examined were press statements issued to the media by SIA in print. Only a handful of press conferences were conducted during the crisis.

Two media variables were especially notable. When discussing the reports of the aircraft accident investigation reports, for example SIA held two press conferences, one was for the Singapore media and the other for Taiwanese media. The press conference for the latter was held via satellite. The conferences took place one after the other on the same day. It was a little puzzling why SIA felt there was a need to hold a separate conference for the Taiwan media. But after comparing the transcripts from both conferences, the reasoning behind this decision became quite apparent. The journalists at the Singapore press conference were polite and confined their questions to topics such as the pilot’s well being, compensation packages for the next of kin, and whether SIA still felt “fully responsible” for the crash. They were curious to know if reports on other contributing factors to the crash helped elevate some of the responsibilities that SIA initially felt. The most pointed question was perhaps the one thrown out by Richard Borsuk of the Asian Wall Street Journal, when he commented that the ASC report came out heavy against SIA pilots and pointedly remarked that Dr. Cheong’s response was mild. He then asked Dr Cheong, “Are you holding yourself back in any way on commenting against the conclusions?” (“SQ006 Press,” 2002a). The general tone at the

Singapore conference was mildly indignant, since many faulted the ASC's report for blaming the pilots solely for the crash and leaving out other factors that had affected the pilots' abilities to taxi down the correct runway.

The press conference for Taiwan media held two hours later via satellite had a slightly different atmosphere. Questions were raised about the training of pilots to fly in low visibility conditions, the credibility of the Ministry of Transportation participating in the investigations, and the use of aircraft equipment to aid visual clarity during take off. The journalists, who were very doubtful about the report put together by the Ministry of Transportation and questioned many of its conclusions. One reporter asked, "What exactly is the relationship between Singapore Airlines and the Ministry of Transport?" Another reporter, Keith Bradshaw from the New York Times, asked, "What percentage stake does the Singaporean Government directly or indirectly has in Singapore Airlines" ("SQ006 Press," 2002b)? There were subtle accusations insinuating that the report by the Ministry of Transport was bias because it had a stake in the airline.

Another thing noteworthy about the media variable in this crisis situation is the language barrier between Singapore and Taiwan. Singapore's administrative language is English, and therefore conducts its business in English. On the other hand, Taiwan's official language is Mandarin. Communication difficulties arose when SIA's press releases had to be translated to Mandarin, and the Taiwanese had to translate their information into English. Strictly speaking, language is not considered a medium; it is an element that forms the message. However, given Hart's definition, I would argue that language helps "carry" messages. Embedded in language are nuances and remnants of the culture, ideology, and principles that make up our life. Therefore, the different languages

used by the two parties involved in the investigation of the air disaster are an important component in an audience's perception of a crisis.

Rhetorical Conventions

Since human beings are creatures of habit, it is only natural that our habits extend to our speech patterns as well. Hart (1997) proposes that there are rhetorical guidelines that each speech-act follows. Hart further urges critics to “spot such rhetorical rules and then ask why they exist, largely because these verbal habits so often point up a society's special preferences as well as its special vulnerabilities” (p. 55). In the following chapters, I will examine the crisis management efforts of SIA to see if they match the conventions outlined in the literature review in chapter one. I will also use the Dynamic Generic Framework to critically examine SIA's crisis communication to further illuminate its rhetorical strategies.

CHAPTER THREE

“They [SIA] are the Israelis of aviation. They are small and smart and aggressive in pursuing their interests.”

-- Former U.S. Department of Transportation, Mark Gerchick (Donnelly, 2003).

On hindsight, everything is seen with 20/20 vision. Comparing hindsight vision with reality is an important step in evaluating and appreciating crisis communication case studies. By analyzing a crisis situation and finding out how much reality falls short of hindsight vision, public relations practitioners and scholars can develop a more comprehensive understanding of how to more effectively handle crisis situations. This will ultimately aid practitioners in preparing their corporations for best practices, and help scholars in further developing concepts and theories to sharpen existing literature on crisis communication.

This chapter begins with an analysis of SIA’s crisis preparedness through a comparison of its crisis management efforts after the crash of SQ006 with the standard practices outlined in chapter one. To further illuminate the rhetorical strategies employed by SIA, I have used the Dynamic Generic Framework, also briefly mentioned in chapter one, to uncover rhetorical conventions. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the thesis findings, the research’s limitations, and areas for further exploration.

Crisis Preparedness

Airplane crashes are nothing new, but SIA had never experienced one prior to October 31, 2000. The crash of SQ006 forever changed the spotless operation history of

SIA. Of the 179 passengers and crew members onboard the flight, 83 perished, 56 were seriously injured and only 40 escaped unscathed or with minor injuries. The aircraft accident investigation reports released by Taiwan's Aviation Safety Council (ASC) and Singapore's Ministry of Transport (MOT) both shed light as to what caused the crash. It was clear that the aircraft had turned onto the wrong runway for take off. Instead of using runway 05L, the pilot took off from runway 05R, which was under construction. However, the circumstances that had led the experienced pilots to commit this fatal error were ambiguous.

There were many accusers in this crisis, the harshest being those who lost their loved ones in the crash. Taiwanese authorities were also quick to blame SIA for pilot error, without giving due consideration to the fact that the runway was not as clearly marked as it should have been or that the tower control had failed to point out that the plane was on the wrong runway. These accusers were powerful, vocal, and credible.

The visual dimension of the tragedy made the crisis excruciating for those who watched. The wreckage was charred; relentless rain and punishing winds made rescue operations grueling for the workers.

The Crisis Management Center (CMC) at SIA's headquarters in Singapore was promptly set up following the crash ("CMC," 2000). The activation of SIA employees to manage the center, and their strict adherence to the company's crisis plans, helped SIA issue a timely response to the crash. The first press release issued to the media was three hours after the crash had happened.

SIA grappled with providing accurate information and maintaining open and honest communication especially with survivors and the family members of victims.

Initial public reactions toward SIA's communication were unfavorable. The crisis management plan started off on a wrong footing, since inaccurate information was given by a Los Angeles official before the SIA's released its first media statement. The airline employee based in Los Angeles announced that the crash had led to no casualties, while around the world, media images of the tragic crash was shown on television. This incident made SIA's CEO more cautious about disseminating information during his first few hours at Taipei. The strategy backfired, as many accused SIA of being slow in its provision of during the initial few hours after the crash.

During one of the press conferences on 2 November 2000, emotions ran high when Mr. Tan Yin Leong, a Singaporean man, barged into a news conference and demanded the airline to tell the truth. He said that he had learned about his brother's death in news reports, but the airline would not give him any information. He pleaded with Mr. Rick Clements, vice president of Public Affairs at SIA, asking Mr. Clements to "tell the press the true story" and "don't hide anymore" ("Airlines defend," 2000). This public outburst echoed the many sentiments of anxious family members who wished to know the fates of their loved ones. Instead of pushing the emotional man aside, Mr. Clements showed empathy for Mr. Tan, turning the situation around by recognizing his grief and giving him a chance to vent his frustrations. John Casey reported in the *Asian Wall Street Journal* that families were upset and angry because the media was quicker than the airline in confirming who was on board the flight and the fate of its 179 passengers and crew members. But Casey also highlighted that Mr. Clements' willingness to allow a distraught relative (Mr. Tan Yin Leong) to express his anger at a news conference was a turning point in SIA's crisis management efforts ("SIA's

handling,” 2000). SIA openly took up responsibility for the crash and promptly assumed the task of caring for victims and next of kin, and this was viewed positively more positively.

It is important for the CEO or other high-ranking officials of any organization to be present at crises sites. Having prominent executives on site gives the impression that companies care enough to send one of their highest-level personnel to oversee crises. SIA’s CEO, Dr. Cheong Choon Kong flew immediately to Taipei from Christchurch, New Zealand, to be the spokesperson for the airline. He assured the public that SIA was in control of the situation, and talked about what SIA was doing to make the situation better. He talked about the Buddy system, which assigned grief counselors to victims and their family members. He also announced the amount of financial packages released to families to help them tide over this difficult period. After his news conference at 0200 hours on November 3, 2000, Dr. Cheong continued to make public appearance in Taipei by visiting hospitals and talking to victims and next of kin.

Except for the outburst of Mr. Tan Yin Leong at the news conference, all other news briefings and conferences went smoothly for SIA during the crisis. SIA provided daily updates about the crash to the media via press releases. There was a number that the media could call to ask for information as well. SIA officials were open with the media; they did not engage in denial of blame or stonewalling. On the other hand, SIA faced an uphill task in communicating with the Taiwan media, because of differences in language and other factors.

SIA’s reputation as an airline with meticulous safety standards helped cushion the impact of the crisis. According to a report, SIA had a reputation as one of the safest

airlines out there. SIA's strategies to manage the crisis by being upfront and taking full responsibility helped it receive high marks for achieving a "high level of integrity" ("SIA's handling," 2000).

Some experts argue that having a crisis plan is not enough to guarantee exemplary crisis management. The true test is in a company's organizational culture. Even when a proper crisis plan is lacking, some companies are able to weather crises because their employees are resourceful and have the helpful attitudes. Scholars who have studied the success of SIA conclude that its culture of "constantly adapting to changing market conditions" and "tightly align[ing] all its resources to the needs of the market, while at the same time, deliver on the promise of the brand name" enabled the airline to emerge stronger from each crisis it has encountered over the years (Sreenivasan, 2006). Over the years before the crash, the promise of the SIA brand had become "a byword for quality, efficiency and success" ("Synonymous with," 2004). Such high accolades required SIA to constantly innovate to keep up with the times. Such innovation has been ingrained in SIA's employees as part of its dominant organizational culture. After the crash, these values affected the way its personnel handled the crisis. The setting up of the Crisis Management Center was swift and efficient, and employees were mobilized and performed their task with competence. The smooth execution of the crisis plan may not have happened if SIA's organizational culture was not geared towards providing quality and efficient services.

The Use of the Buddy Strategy

On July 17, 1996, a Trans World Airlines Flight 800 exploded in the air and plunged into the Atlantic Ocean. The tragedy claimed 230 lives and led to one of the

most expensive aircraft accident investigations in the United States (Ray, 1997). The task of identifying victims of the disaster was daunting as workers had to go to the depths of the Atlantic Ocean to bring up the remains of those who perished. The slow process of victim recovery soon became an emotionally and politically charged issue. As a result, on October 9, 1996, the Aviation Disaster Family Assistance Act was passed by Congress and signed by President Clinton. This gave the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) the added responsibility of helping families of victims of domestic aircraft accidents. Unfortunately, Singapore and Taiwan do not have such laws or organizations to provide assistance to victims of air disaster. Thus, the use of a Buddy system by SIA is perceived as a novelty in Southeast Asia region.

Paying attention to the needs of victims and family members who lost loved ones during a crisis is essential for an organization. Often the victims and their next of kin are the most powerful accusers in a crisis. Therefore, maintaining good relations with the victims can help contain and prevent the crisis from further escalation. Those involved in an air crash are generally classified as functional publics (Stephen, Malone & Bailey, 2005). They may have been customers before the crisis, but, when they experience harm, they become victims.

The SIA Buddies consists of staff members who volunteer to extend the company's care to the families of passengers and crew in times of crisis. The Buddy system started in 1993, and more than 350 Buddies have been trained to date ("SIA Buddies," 2000).

SIA Buddies are grief counselors and Singapore Airlines' staff members professionally trained to help people subjected to extreme trauma. In a crisis, SIA's

Buddy Manager is in charge of matching Buddies with the next of kin of victims according to their spoken language, religion, culture, and gender. The first batch of SIA Buddies arrived at Taipei after the crash on November 1, 2000, and the last SIA Buddies departed from Taipei on December 1, 2000. A total of 320 Singapore Buddies were sent from Singapore to Taipei and 30 others came from stations across the world in the three weeks following the crash (“How Buddies,” 2000).

Cultural factors play a part in SIA’s use of the Buddy strategy. Singapore is well known for its commitment to the core values of “uncompromising fidelity to integrity and accountability” in the government sector (Singh, 2005), and Singaporeans consider SIA to be the “international face” of their nation (Donnelly, 2003). Thus, the public expects SIA to commit to the core values of that have come to be synonymous with Singapore’s government and broader culture. SIA was expected to respond with high ethical standards in its care of its passengers and crew, and using the Buddies system helped them meet these expectations.

First of all, the Buddies helped provide a direct line of communication between the company and survivor, and victims’ next of kin. As outlined by Ogrizek and Guillery (1999), “The key principle underlying communication with and about victims is proactivity” (p. 62). Thus, corporations should anticipate as much as possible any action to provide information or assistance that might be timely. It is an absolute priority for corporations to maintain an open line of communication with victims and family members in a crisis situation. Most corporations who have successfully managed the crisis typically set up toll-free numbers or organize information meetings to help victims and their families obtain up-to-date information. SIA went one step further by bringing

the information to victims and their family members. Emotions run high after the crash, and many of the survivors and victims' families were psychologically unstable. By providing grief and trauma counselors, SIA was able to directly address any issue that came up from survivors and victims' families. Specific needs of the survivors and the victims' families could be anticipated and reflected to the management at SIA quickly. This helped SIA be more pro reactive in them giving support to survivors and victims' families. Mr. Ong Eng Chong, one of the SIA Buddies discussed his experience, saying, "Most of the time, Buddies were running around, looking for someone, chasing something, seeking information, securing permission for ad-hoc requests or disseminating information to the next of kin" ("Recollections," 2000).

Secondly, this gesture of having grief and trauma counselors to assigned survivors and the family members contributed to the perception that SIA was doing all it could to help those affected by the crisis. This act reflected positively on the corporation as a caring and compassionate entity. It also showed that SIA was willing to mobilize all its resources to ensure the well being of those affected by the crisis. This act of kindness was not lost on the next of kin. By the end of the first week of the crisis, many began to treat their Buddies as companions ("How Buddies," 2000).

Legal ramifications sometimes make corporations hesitant in showing remorse, which may give the impression that the corporation is cold and unapproachable in public opinion. By utilizing this Buddy system, SIA was able to show, using concrete actions, its willingness to help victims and their family members without forfeiting their legal rights.

Thirdly, the buddies system allowed SIA to get information to victims and their family members and also to address their concerns without having to go through the

media. As discussed earlier, any piece of information released to the media during a crisis has the potential to spiral out of control. By eliminating the media as a middleperson, SIA was able to contain the crisis by decreasing the likelihood of accusations brought about from hysterical families of victims undergoing extreme stress. Ogrizek and Guillery (1999) place a high priority on tailoring communicating with victims and families according to their specific psychological experiences (p.63). The authors believe that victims and family members undergo a stressful period during a crisis situation, and their delicate psychological state should be taken into account when corporations reach out and communicate to them. Corporations have to bear in mind that, during a crisis, knowing the truth is of utmost importance to victims and their families. In their unstable psychological state of mind, they will do anything to find out the truth. This demand finds powerful backing in public opinion. Ogrizek and Guillery (1999) note that media coverage of victims' demands over the years has become more systematic in that:

Each demonstration, each commemoration, and each press release are reported in both the regional and national press. These actions frequently give rise to further reporting where the victims express in detail the reasons for their anger and their fight: refusal to provide information, promises not kept, compensation inadequate. These are all opportunities to revisit the facts, recall the doubts, and once again highlight the attitude of the corporation or organization in question (p.61).

By using its Buddy system, SIA was able to reduce the opportunities for the media to sensationalize the plight and demands of victims and their family members.

Application of the Dynamic Generic Framework

It is insufficient to simply identify rhetorical elements and conventions presented when companies defend themselves in a crisis. To do so would be to discount the

meanings and motives resulting from the intricate dynamic interplay of elements within the genre of defense rhetoric. Therefore, I will use the *dynamic generic framework*, as outlined in chapter one, as a critical probe to examine the artifacts further. The framework seeks to understand the accusatory environment surrounding the crisis (situational markers), the organization's motives on which it base its arguments upon (substantive markers), and justification of its arguments (stylistic markers).

SIA faced situational rhetorical markers made up of unprecedented, major, multiple, and ambiguous charges from powerful accusers. In addition, the visual images of the crash made the charges even more damaging for SIA's reputation. The crash of SQ006 is the first major accident for SIA, although in 1997, a Boeing 737 operated by SIA's subsidiary airline SilkAir suddenly nosed dive into a river in Indonesia, killing all 104 passengers aboard ("Fiery end," 2000). SIA staffs were involved in helping SilkAir manage the aftermath of the crash. Nevertheless, for SIA, the crash of SQ006 was an unprecedented event. The airline had long prided itself on maintaining high standards for safety and maintenance. The average age of SIA's fleet is five years old compared to industry averages, which are twelve years ("SIA's fleet," 2003). Having such a young fleet has meant that there are less mechanical problems, higher efficiency, and higher reliability (Sreenivasan, 2003).

The charges against SIA were major. Out of the 159 passengers and 20 crew members on board SQ 006, 83 died, 56 were seriously injured and 40 sustained minor injuries. As the CEO mentioned several times in his speeches and press releases, three SIA pilots, flying an SIA plane, had crashed on one of its routine flights ("SQ006 press," 2002).

SIA faced multiple accusers after the crash. Families of passengers and cabin crew and the survivors were critical of SIA, especially during the initial phase crisis. Family members were especially frustrated that SIA was slow in contacting the next of kin and releasing the names of those who had perished (Kaur, 2000). Preliminary findings indicated that pilot's error and bad weather could be a cause of the crash. After the complete investigation, the Taiwanese CAA, ASC, and prosecutors denied all responsibilities, while pointing to pilot error as the cause of the crash. A minor accusation came from SIA's employees. Flight stewardess complained that their sandals, which are part of their uniform, "slipped off" during the crash and hindered them from performing their duties and put them at risk for physical harm. Some of the stewardesses had to step through burning debris to get to safety ("Stewardesses' sandals," 2000).

These charges are powerful because they all come from credible sources. The survivors and the next of kin of passengers and crew members are perceived as victims and have high credibility. One victims' brother, Mr. Tan Yin Leong, barged into a conference and berated Mr. Rick Clements, the vice-president of Public Affairs at SIA, on charges of hiding information from the next of kin of victims. This outburst was broadcasted live and was an exceptionally powerful image showing the grief of those who were anxiously waiting for news from SIA about their loved ones. The charges brought on SIA by the Taiwanese authorities received mixed reviews. The Singapore's Ministry of Transport, the International Federation of Air Line Pilots Association, and Singapore journalists, all spoke in defense of SIA and helped to dispute the charges by saying that the Taiwanese CAA should take a portion of the blame for their poor airport facilities and negligent air traffic controllers. On the other hand, Taiwanese officials

assumed jurisdiction of the investigation process and therefore had legitimate authority to speak on the charges, thereby making their charges strong and credible as well. The charges brought by the air stewardesses were minor. It was only mentioned once in the news reports. Although the sandals that the air stewardesses wore were badly designed, they did not put them in worse dangers. Considering all the other accusations directed at SIA, such charge by employees seemed lighter in comparison.

Although the charges were strong, powerful, multiple and unprecedented, it was ambiguous. The crash happened in Taipei, Taiwan. Thus, Taiwan had full control over the investigation of the cause of the crash. However, Taiwanese air traffic controllers' negligence and the lack of proper maintenance and facilities at Chiang Kai-Shek were possible causes of the crash as well. This conflict of interests raised doubts as to the reliability and validity of the aircraft accident investigation reports compiled by the Taiwanese Aviation Safety Council (ASC). On top of that, the reluctance of the Taiwanese ASC in letting a Singapore team of experts participate in the investigation deepened the perception of foul play. The ambiguities worked in favor of the airline, especially after the aircraft accident investigation reports were released in 2002. The general sentiment was that the report was unfair because there was not enough weight given to other factors that could have contributed to the crash besides pilots' error and bad weather. Journalists echoed these views by commenting that SIA CEO Dr. Cheong's "reservations" about the Taiwanese version of the investigation report was an understatement ("SQ006 press," 2002a).

An examination of the substantive rhetorical markers of SIA's response to the crisis shows that it chose to adopt the social motive state. Companies operating from this

motive base try to come across as a friend to their audiences. SIA repeatedly mentioned, especially towards the beginning of the crisis, that its top priority was to “help passengers, the crew and the family members” (“Media statement,” 2000a). The SIA Buddies system exemplifies this motive state. The system was set up to make SIA “better equipped to understand next-of-kin’s needs and expectations during crisis” (“SIA Buddies,” 2000). SIA played the role of a concerned friend and did everything it could to assist victims and their families during the crisis. SIA brought family members of passengers and cabin crew to Chiang Kai-Shek airport at the earliest possible time. SIA also provided emotional support and psychological counseling for them through its trained grief and trauma counselors. Prompt financial support in the form of US \$5000 was given to any passenger on board SQ006 to assist with their expenses, and US \$25, 000 was given as immediate relief to the next of kin of passengers who died in the crash (“Flight SQ006,” 2000). The restitution was given with no questions asked and it came with no conditions attached. SIA anticipated the needs of those affected by the crash and took care of them as best as it could. SIA’s zest to uncover the root of the problem and to “implement any recommendations that would further enhance safety” also showed their commitment to safety as a responsible airline (“Aircraft accident,” 2002). This provided assurance to future customers in that SIA would try its best to prevent a similar accident from happening again.

Stylistically, SIA could not argue based on stasis of fact or stasis of quality. With the charges being powerful, major, and from multiple sources, there was not much to argue of base on stasis of fact: SIA’s pilots took the wrong turn inevitably causing the air crash. SIA also did not base its arguments on the stasis of quality because there was no

doubt about the seriousness of the crisis or the impact it has on the victims. Therefore, the justification of the crisis rested on two levels: stasis of definition and stasis of jurisdiction. Looking at the stasis of definition, the defense rhetoric centered on whether the air crash was an accident, or malpractice by the pilots. SIA and the Taiwanese authorities had different conclusions as to what contributed to the crash. According to a SIA spokesperson, "If barriers had been erected, or a white cross painted on the runway as required by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the accident may not have happened" ("Aircraft accident," 2002). Taiwanese prosecutors detained the three pilots in Taiwan for over a month after the accident, and considered bringing them to trial for negligence.

SIA also based most of its arguments on the stasis of jurisdiction. SIA tried to focus the debate on the cause of the crash on scientific evidence. In the initial phase of the crisis, the public was urged not to make wild guesses as to the cause of the crash but to "stick to facts," and reminded that "speculations and theories cannot do anything to help anyone" ("Media statement," 2000a). SIA's CEO also emphasized that they were "co-operating fully with the investigators" to understand what went wrong and a "team of our own technical experts is in Taipei..." ("Media statement," 2000b). SIA made the subtle suggestion that the crash was not a clean-cut case of pilot error, but was compounded by a variety of complex and intricate variants. The CEO urged the public to hold their judgment as to the cause of the crash until more evidence and information were available. That Taiwanese authorities were among SIA's accusers made it difficult for them to base their argument on other grounds because they had to be sensitive to the relations between Taiwan and Singapore. This constrained SIA from pointing its fingers

at the other deficiencies that had played a role in the accident, such as the lack of proper signage, the lack of warnings from the air controllers, and the lack of ground detection radar to pin point the location of aircraft on the tarmac. SIA waited to clarify its view that that human error and bad weather were the two causes of the crash (as concluded by the Taiwan investigation report) until after the final reports were released. Even then, SIA worded their “reservations” carefully saying:

When read together, these reports provide a comprehensive analysis of the accident which concludes that it could have been the result of several contributing factors involving the flight crew, the air traffic controllers and the airport, as well as weather conditions. SIA accepts generally the findings of facts in these two reports. However, it is with the conclusions that we have disagreement. It’s always been clear that the aircraft took off from the wrong runway, but the ASC report does not give due weight to the deficiencies found at Chiang Kai-Shek Airport (“SQ006 Press,” 2002).

SIA sought to defend itself by highlighting some key points in the report to lighten the charge on their pilots. The points highlighted were that the runway 05R was not properly closed, the lights on runway 05R were turned on and hence misleading for the pilots and that the traffic controller had given clearance for flight SQ006 as it took the wrong turn onto runway 05R (“Aircraft accident,” 2002). SIA took on the responsibility of being an “expert” and educated the public on the points missing from the original investigative report from Taiwan.

Conclusion

In recent years, scholars have identified a shift in the field of diplomacy from traditional diplomacy toward public diplomacy. According to Signitzer and Coombs, “The actions in public diplomacy can no longer be confined to the profession of diplomats but include various individuals, groups and institutions who engage in international and intercultural communication activities which do have a bearing on the

political relationship between two or more countries” (as cited in Kunczik, 2003, pp.409). This definition of public diplomacy is well demonstrated by the crash of SQ006.

The crash of SQ006 presented SIA with difficulties in carrying out public relations to shore up good will for itself. Because the crash took place in Chiang Kai-Shek Airport, the Taiwanese assumed jurisdiction on investigation procedures. These circumstances proved to be tricky as SIA’s handling of the situation could have an impact on ties between Singapore and Taiwan.

SIA is more than just a big corporation in Singapore, it is also a “marketing surrogate for the entire country, projecting an image of a modern, efficient, financially sound, quality-oriented country in short, a Switzerland of Asia” (Tanzer, 1990, p. 154). The SIA brand is often linked with the Singapore brand. As Donnelly noted in her article, “It [SIA] is the international face of Singapore Inc., the disciplined, business-oriented country and culture that is a ferocious economic competitor” (2003, p. A10+). In a way, the SIA’s brand personality is a mirror image of what Singapore personifies. The use of the Singapore Girl in its marketing campaign has also made the link more prominent to foreigners. The synonymy of SIA with Singapore restricted the maneuvers of SIA in handling the crisis; SIA had to be mindful that as a national carrier, its actions had bigger implications. According to Coombs (1995b), the best way to protect an organization’s image is to modify public perceptions of who is responsible for the crisis. SIA attempted to modify public opinion by emphasizing findings and conclusions found in the report compiled by Ministry of Transport. SIA claimed that other factors such as airport maintenance and lack of facilities also contributed to the crash. SIA only chose to change public perceptions of who is responsible for the crash after the aircraft accident

investigation report was out. They could have done it sooner. But perhaps the need to foster good relations with Taiwan discouraged them from pointing their fingers sooner.

In a news article published in *The Straits Times*, Mr Singh, Singapore's Ministry of Transport's deputy secretary, and Dr. Cheong, the deputy chairman and CEO of SIA, were both quoted as clarifying that "the disagreement over the findings would in no way affect Singapore's relations with Taiwan nor SIA's continued use of its airports" (Nathan & Goh, 2002). It was clear that while the rebuttal was necessary, SIA and the government in Singapore were also mindful of the repercussions of their comments on foreign relations.

I propose that future research ought to further study companies such as SIA that are considered to be closely aligned with their countries of origin. For example, a close relationship between a company and its country of origin might affect the rhetorical conventions used in crises. Research could also study how such companies become an ambassador for their countries. The role of these companies in nation building and public diplomacy could be explored as well.

This thesis also illustrates a deficiency in the recovery and learning phase in a crisis brought about by an air crash. Immunity is typically granted to pilots and air crew so they will come forward after a crisis to tell their stories truthfully in order to speed up the investigations and to provide valuable insights in to the causes of air crashes. However, the Taiwan prosecutors attempt to detain the pilots of SQ006 and possibly charge them for negligence was in defiance of international conventions. There is need for stricter cooperation or agreements among aviation organizations that will grant pilots and air crew absolute protection from liabilities after accidents. The crucial task is to

learn from air disasters so as to prevent future ones from happening; assigning blame should be secondary.

The investigation into the causes of SQ006 highlight another crucial need, that is to speed up the process of recovery and learning after an air disaster. SQ006's final reports polarized the interested parties. Their incongruent conclusions no doubt gave the impression that politics had prevailed in the investigation stages of the crisis. Kelly (2002) points out the inherent dangers with the present system. She notes that investigators at times act in partisan ways and even, if they do not, they could easily be accused of doing so. To prevent disputes similar to the one experienced by the parties involved in the crash of SQ006 from happening again, it is best to leave investigations to third party organizations that have no vested interests in the results of the findings. To fine tune the current process, future research on crisis management of air disaster could focus on providing a method to eliminate partisanship in the learning phase.

A limitation of this thesis is that there are few artifacts that gave insight into the Taiwanese media's reaction to the crisis. Future research could look into the representations of the interested parties in the Taiwan and Singapore media respectively, and how local media and culture affects the perception of its publics towards the company in crisis.

There is still more research that needs to be done on how Asian companies handle crisis. Due to the differences in culture and societal expectations of Asian countries with Western counterparts, there is a need to sharpen the best practices in public relations to reflect the differences. Learning how Asian companies overcome crisis will also be advantageous for Western companies planning on expanding businesses overseas.

Implementing crisis management plans on a global scale will be a challenge for companies that operate from different stations in the world.

Heath (1992) suggests that one value of public relations is its ability to contribute to the collective shared reality that brings harmony, a shared perspective that leads people to similar, compatible conclusions. Extrapolating this thought, public relations can also help companies adjust better to the global marketplace. To achieve this, Heath (1992) advocates that public relations should go through “constant and aggressive critical reexamination of the rhetorical substance, form, practices, ethics, and strategies” (p.318).

REFERENCES

REFERENCES

- Aircraft accident investigation reports: Flight SQ006, 31 October 2000*, [Press release] (2002, Apr 26). Singapore: Singapore Airlines Ltd.
- Asian Brands. (1999, May 21). *Brand Strategy*, p. 3-5.
- Asia's great companies: why SIA is the world's most profitable airline. (1996, Dec). *Asian Business Review*, p.34.
- Barton, L. (1993). *Crises in organizations: Managing and communicating in the heat of chaos*. Ohio: South-Western.
- Barton, L. (2001). *Crisis in Organizations II*. Ohio: Southwestern College Publishing.
- Berge, D.T. (1990). *The first 24 hours: A comprehensive guide to successful crisis communications*. Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell.
- Benoit, W. L. & Lindsey, J. J. (1987). Argument strategies: Antidote to Tylenol's poisoned image. *Journal of the American Forensics Association*, 23, 137-146.
- Benoit, W. L. (1995). *Accounts, excuses, and apologies: A theory of image restoration strategies*. Albany: State University of New York.
- Bitzer, L. (1968). The rhetorical situation. *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 1, 1-15.
- Brady, S. (1998, Dec 21). Ranking the ranking – The best of the best. *Time International*, 152, 6-7.
- Brown, M. H. (1990). Past and present images of Challenger in NASA's organizational culture. In B. D. Sypher (Ed.), *Case studies in organizational communication* (pp. 111-124). New York: Guilford Press.
- Burke, K. (1969). *A rhetoric of motives*. California: University of California Press.
- Burke, K. (1984). *Permanence and change: An anatomy of purpose*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press.
- Calling all staff – Come and join the Buddies. (May, 2005). *Outlook*. Singapore: Singapore Airlines Ltd.
- Campbell, K. K. (1982). *The rhetorical act*. California: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Chung, L. (2002, Jun 15). Taiwan will not prosecute SQ006 pilots. *The Straits Times*, Prime News.

- CMC: Nerve center of activity (2000, Dec). *Outlook*, 12, p. 3. Singapore: Singapore Airlines Ltd.
- Coombs, W. T. (1995a). The development of guidelines for the selection of the “appropriate” crisis response strategies. *Management of Communication Quarterly*, 4, 447-476.
- Coombs, W. T. (1995b). Choosing the right words. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 8, 447-477.
- Coombs, W. T. (1999). *Ongoing crisis communication: Planning, managing and responding*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Coombs, W. T. (2000). Designing post-crisis messages: Lessons for crisis response strategies. *Review of Business*, 21(3), 37-45.
- Crable, R. E., & Vibbert, S. L. (1985). Managing issues and influencing public policy. *Public Relations Review*, 11, 3-16.
- Despair. Sorrow. Hysteria. (2000, Nov 3). *The Straits Times*, p. 2-3.
- Dolye, A. (2002, Apr 26). Singapore comes out fighting over Taiwan SQ006 report. *Air Transport Intelligence*.
- Donnelly, S. B. (2003, Feb 23). Fly above the storm: Luxury service has helped SIA beat the airline slump and target new cities in the U.S. *Time*, 161, A10+.
- Dunn, G. (2002, Apr 26). IFALPA joins Singapore in venting anger at SQ006 report. *Air Transport Intelligence*.
- Expert criticizes rescue efforts in SQ006 crash (2001, Sep 30). *The Straits Times*, p. 24.
- Fearn-Banks, K. (2002). *Crisis communication: A casebook approach*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Fiery end to a perfect record (2000, Nov. 2). *The New Zealand Herald News*.
- Fiorino, F. (2000, Nov 13). Human factors, runway lights at center of SIA crash Inquiry. *Aviation Week & Space Technology*, 153, 42.
- Fishman, D. A. (1999). ValuJet Flight 592: Crisis communication theory blended and extended. *Communication Quarterly*, 47(4), 345-376.
- Fink, S. (1986). *Crisis management: Planning for the inevitable*. New York: American Management Association.

- Flight SQ006, 31 October 2000, Taipei-Los Angeles*, [Press release] (2000, Nov 2). Singapore: Singapore Airlines Ltd.
- Foss, S. K. (1996). *Rhetorical criticism: exploration and practice*. Illinois: Waveland Press.
- Goh, C. L. (2004, Oct. 30). No end of the road in sight for 14 victims' families; Legal tussle ahead as SIA wants Taiwan agency as 3rd party in claims. *The Straits Times*, p. Singapore.
- Goh, S. N. (2000, Nov 15). Pilots have no immunity, says Taiwan. *The Straits Times*, p. 2.
- Goh, S. N. (2000, Dec 22). Pilots allowed to leave Taiwan. *The Straits Times*, p. 1.
- Grunig, J. E. (Ed.). (1992). *Excellence in public relations and communication management: Contributions to effective organizations*. San Francisco: IABC Foundation of the International Association of Business Communicators.
- Hannon, B. (2001, Mar 6). Taipei airport lighting faulted in Singapore Airlines crash report. *Flight International*, 13.
- Hart, R. P. (1997). *Modern rhetorical criticism*. Massachusetts: Allyn & Bacon.
- Harvard Business School (1989), "Singapore Airlines (A)", Vol.9, pp. 144-89.
- Heath, R.L. (1994). *Management of corporate communication: From interpersonal contacts to external affairs*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Heath, R.L. (1992). Epilogue: Visions of critical studies of public relations. In E. L. Toth & R. L. Heath (Eds.), *Rhetorical and critical approaches to public relations* (pp. 315-319). Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Hearit, K. M., & Courthright, J. L. (2003). A constructionist approach to crisis management: Allegations of sudden acceleration in the Audi 5000. *Communication Studies*, 54(1), 79-97.
- Hearit, K. M. (2006). *Crisis management by apology: Corporate response to allegations of wrongdoing*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- How Buddies won hearts of Next of kin and survivors, (2000, Dec). *Outlook*, 12, p. 9. Singapore: Singapore Airlines Ltd.
- Huxman, S. S. & Bruce, D. B. (1995). Toward a dynamic generic framework of apologia: A case study of Dow Chemical, Vietnam, and the napalm controversy. *Communications Studies*, 46, 57-70.

- Huxman, S. S. (2004). Exigencies, explanations, and executions: Toward a dynamic theory of the crisis communication genre. In D. P. Millar & R. L. Heath (Eds.), *Responding to crisis: A rhetorical approach to crisis communication* (pp. 281-297). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Kelly, E. (2002, May 7). Crash Course. *Flight International*, p. 3.
- Kunczik, M. (2003). Transnational public relations by foreign governments. In K. Sriramesh, & D. Vercic (Eds.), *The global public relations handbook: theory, research and practice* (pp. 399-424). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Koh, L. & Lim, H. L. (2000, Nov. 4). Warning signs lacking, say experts, pilot. *The Straits Times*, p. 2.
- Koh, B. P. (2000. Dec. 7). Boycott, if Taipei won't free pilots. *The Straits Times*, p. 1.
- Lerbinger, O. (1997). *The crisis manager: Facing risk and responsibility*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Littlejohn, S. W. & Foss, K. A. (2005). *Theories of human communication*. California: Thomson Wadsworth Inc.
- Marra, F. J. (1998). Crisis communication plans: Poor predictors of excellent crisis public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 24(4), 461-472.
- Marra, F. J. (2004). Excellent crisis communication: Beyond crisis plans. In D. P. Millar & R. L. Heath (Eds.), *Responding to crisis: A rhetorical approach to crisis communication* (pp. 311-325). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Media statement by Dr. Cheong Choon Kong, Deputy Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Singapore Airlines, [Press release] (2000a, Nov 2). Singapore: Singapore Airlines Ltd.*
- Media statement by Dr Cheong Choon Kong Deputy Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Singapore Airlines, [Press release] (2000b, Nov 3). Singapore: Singapore Airlines Ltd.*
- Millar, D. P. (2004). Exposing the errors: An examination of the nature of organizational crises. In D. P. Millar & R. L. Heath (Eds.), *Responding to crisis: A rhetorical approach to crisis communication* (pp.19-31). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Mitroff, I. I. & Kilman, R. H. (1984). *Corporate tragedies: Product tampering, sabotage, and other catastrophes*. New York: Praeger.
- Most admired companies outside the U.S., 2002. (2003, Mar 3). *Fortune*, p. 82.

- Most admired companies in Asia (Excluding Japan), 2004. (2005, Mar 7). *Fortune*. Retrieved April 12, 2006, from Gale Group database (I2501246907).
- Nathan, D. & Goh, S. N. (2002, Apr 27). Clash of views on SQ006 findings: Hail of criticism as Taiwan crash investigators blame pilots, weather. *The Straits Times*, prime news.
- Newsom, D., Turk, J., & Kruckeberg, D. (1996). *This is PR: The realities of publicrelations*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Orgrizek, M., & Guillery, J.M. (1999). *Communicating in crisis: A theoretical and practical guide to crisis management*. (H. K. Brooke & R. Z. Brooke, Trans.). Hawthorne, NY: Walter de Gruyter, Inc. (Original work published 1997)
- Pearson, C. M., & Mitroff, I. I. (1993). From crisis prone to crisis prepared: A framework for crisis management. *Academy of Management Executive*, 7, 48-59.
- Perrow, C. (1984). *Normal accidents*. New York: Basic Books.
- Peterson, B. (1987, August 27). Northwest courts victims survivors. *Washington Post*, p. A8.
- Pilot error the likely cause of crash (2000, Nov. 4). *The Straits Times*, p.3.
- Pinsdorf, M. K. (1987). *Communicating when your company is under siege: Surviving public crisis*. Massachusetts: Lexington Books.
- Pinsdorf, M.K. (1991). Crashes bare values affecting response success. *Public Relations Journal*, 47, p. 32-34.
- Press conference by Dr. Cheong Choong Kong, Deputy Chairman and CEO, SIA*, [Press release], (2000, Nov 3). Singapore: Singapore Airlines Ltd.
- Problems nag airline since merger. (1987, August 17). *New York Times*, p. B5.
- Ray, S. J. (1999). *Strategic communication in crisis management lessons from the airline industry*. Westport, CT: Quorum.
- Recollections of a Buddy, (2000, Dec). *Outlook*, 12, p. 9. Singapore: Singapore Airlines Ltd.
- Rogers, R. (1993). Anatomy of a crisis. In J. A. Gottschalk (Ed.), *Crisis response: Inside stories on managing image under siege* (pp. 123-139). Detroit: Visible Ink Press.

- Seeger, M., Sellnow, T. L., & Ulmer, R. R. (1998). Communication, organization, and crisis. In B. R. Burleson (Ed.), *Communication yearbook*, 21 (pp. 231- 275). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Seitel, F. P. (2000). *The practice of public relations*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Sellnow, T. L. (1990). *Transformation through mortification: A governor's response to crisis*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Speech Communication Association Chicago, IL.
- Shameen, A. (2000, Nov 17). After the crash. *Asiaweek*, 34.
- SIA Buddies*, [Press release] (2000, Nov 2). Singapore: Singapore Airlines Ltd.
- SIA's handling of the crisis praised. (2000, Nov 7). *The Straits Times*, p. 34-35.
- SIA terminates services of two SQ006 pilots (2002, Jul 26). *Channel NewsAsia*, Singapore News.
- Simpson, J. A., & Wiener, E. S. C. (1989). *The Oxford English dictionary*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Singh, D. (2002, Dec 15). Corporate governance, Singapore-style. *The Straits Times*, Review.
- Small, W. J. (1991). Exxon Valdez: How to spend billions and still get a black eye. *Public Relations Review*, 17, 9-25.
- Special report on SQ006 crash. (2000, Dec). *Outlook*, 12, 1-9.
- SQ006 crash: Taiwan failed miserably on PR front. (2001, Jan 4). *The Straits Times*, p. 1.
- SQ006: Horrifying tragedy brings great sadness, grief and anguish. (2000, Nov). *Outlook*, 11, 3-4.
- SQ006 pilots recalled by Taiwanese prosecutors (2002, May 1). *Channel NewsAsia*, Singapore news.
- SQ006 pilots place ads in Taiwanese papers to express heartfelt sympathies. (2002, Jun 7). *Channel NewsAsia*, Singapore news.
- SQ006 Press conference*, [Press release] (2002a, Apr 26). Singapore: Singapore Airlines Ltd.
- SQ006 Press conference at Singtel Aeradio Studio*, [Press release] (2002b, Apr 26). Singapore: Singapore Airlines Ltd.

- SQ006 victims' families had expected final report to blame pilots (2002, Apr 27). *Channel NewsAsia*, Singapore News.
- Sreenivasan, V. (2006, Jan 18). Secret if SIA's success. *The Business Times Singapore*, Aviation News.
- Stephens, K. K., Malone, P. C., & Bailey, C. M. (2005). Communicating with stakeholders during a crisis evaluating message strategies. *The Journal of Business Communication*, 42(4), 390-420.
- Susskind, L., & Field, P. (1996). *Dealing with an angry public: The mutual gains approach to resolving disputes*. New York: The Free Press.
- Synonymous with success. (2004, Dec 15). *The Business Times Singapore*, p. 27.
- Tan, T. S. (2000, Nov 7). Impressed with SIA's response to tragedy. *The Straits Times*, Forum p. 50.
- Tanzer, A. (1990, April 2). The prime minister is a demanding shareholder. *Forbes*, 145, 152.
- Taylor, M. (2000). Cultural variance as a challenger to global public relations: A case study of the Coca-Cola scare in Europe. *Public Relations Review*, 26, 277-293.
- Vaughn, D. (1996). *The Challenger launch decision: Risky technology, culture, and deviance at NASA*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Vincent, R. C., Crow, B. K. & Davis, D. K. (1997). When technology fails: The drama of airline crashes in network television news. In D. Berkowitz (ed.), *Social meanings of the news* (pp. 351-361). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Vincent, S. (2000, Nov 20). Top Taiwan lawyers for SQ006 pilots. *The Straits Times*, p. 3.
- Ware, B.L., & Linkugel, W. A. (1973). They spoke in defense of themselves: On the generic criticism of apology. *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 59, 273-283.
- Wee, L. A. (2002, Oct 30). More than 20 civil suits to be filed here against SIA. *The Straits Times*, Singapore.
- Weick, K. E. (1988). Enacted sensemaking in crisis situations. *Journal of Management Studies*, 25, 305-317.
- Wells, A. T. (1991). *Commercial aviation safety*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Why SQ006 went down, (2000, Nov 2). *The Straits Times*, p.5.
- World's most admired airlines, 2003. (2004, Mar 8) *Fortune*. Retrieved April 12, 2006, from Gale Group database (I2501240545).