

**PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE AND CRISIS
MANAGEMENT: A STUDY OF THE FEDERAL COLLEGE OF
EDUCATION, OBUDU.**

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Abstract

This research paper is hinged on the relationship between the management of FCE, Obudu and the students with particular interest on how public relations can mediate in the event of crisis. Crisis, unarguably, is inevitable in every human society. The strategies deployed by FCE, Obudu to create and maintain a cordial relationship and integration is the crux of this study as we situate it under the Issues Management Theory and social responsibility theory. The survey method of research with the interview and questionnaire as instruments were used to elicit data from 390, respondents made up of staff and students. The findings, among others, suggest that since communication is the engine room of any organization, more public relations strategies should be employed to enhance a positive image. The researcher therefore recommends that the Public Relations Department of FCE, Obudu should establish an effective and hands-on approach in propagating good community relations and cooperate social responsibilities, effective communication and also encourage PR staff to undergo refresher courses and, also, more robust strategies should be deployed.

Introduction

Crisis dates back to the origin of man. Crisis management, therefore, is very crucial to the existence and sustainability of the society, organisation and relationships. As humans get involved in business, social and organisational relationships, crisis becomes inevitable. The unpreparedness of any cluster manager to handle or manage crisis often leads to many negative and undesirable results either between an

employee and employer, or clients and customers which will eventually tell on the image of such an organization or society. In today's contemporary world, business makes a lot of news and news headlines are often got from such business issues like plant closings, mergers and acquisitions, unemployment, strikes, labour negotiations, company expansions, construction related accidents and catastrophes. To succeed in the business world, all businesses must learn to manage rapid change and have a constructive crisis management plans that will tend to bring growth and development. In the view of Abayomi, (2003, p.24), the study of crisis management originated from the large scale industrial and environmental disasters of 1980. This is one of the most important aspects of an organisation's public relations. A crisis management plan based on professionalism is capable of maintaining the company's credibility and positive image to the public, media and among the employed.

In crisis management, identifying a potential crisis is of immense importance. Most crises share the same characteristics, which are;

- i. Rare
- ii. Significant
- iii. High impact
- iv. Ambiguous
- v. Urgent, and
- vi. High stake (Coombs, 2007)

Therefore, to effectively manage crisis to minimise the potential damage is to identify the characteristics of crisis, anticipate crisis, make policies and distribute roles and responsibilities in a workable system.

One of the models for crisis management identifies three stages of crisis (Coomb, 2007), namely;

- a. The pre-crisis stage, which comprises of signal detection and prevention.
- b. The crisis stage, which is crisis recognition and containment.
- c. The post-crisis stage, which has to do with the crisis management evaluation contingency. Planning for crisis is not only a good management practice in any organisation, but also, it is a mandatory practice for any business (Hassan, 2014, P. 538).

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This is where public relations is not only necessary, but is evitable in an organisation.

Public relations is currently approaching a new juncture with respect to its relationship with management. After decades of trying to establish its identity and value with different organisations, public relations today finds itself on the door step of what one can call the inner circle of top management. Gullager, (1975, p. 165) once describes public relations as one of the most confused, diffused and refused tools of management but it is really now at the stage where it is gaining formal acceptance into top management.

Heiberts, Unqurait and Bohn (2004, p.387) also see public relations as the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies policies and procedures of an individual or an organisation with the aim of attracting public interest and executes a programme of action to earn public acceptance. They also opined that public relations should be placed in an organization at the top management level, with public relations manager or director responsible to the managing director or director general or board of directors. According to him, the head of the public relations department/unit should occupy an advisory position and participate in major policy decisions.

Conducting public relations activities without a plan would be the same as someone trying to build a quality building project without an architectural design and specifications (Hasan 2014, p 538). Conducting crisis communications and public relations during emergencies without a plan and training could be suicidal or tantamount to one constructing a storey building without a solid foundation, because of the potential damage that this will cause to the organisation's image, business, employees and even the managers.

The Federal College of Education, Obudu has gone through some trying moments in the area of security, industrial actions, management and student misunderstandings, etc. which could have been a product of an ineffective or no public relations activities in place. It is pertinent to have a workable public relations system which will be responsible to envisage or dictate crisis and proffer measures to curb the situation and guide the management effectively.

Harlow (1981) posits that public relations is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an

organization and its public, involves the management of problems or issues, helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public, defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest, helps the management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends, and uses research and sound and ethical communication as its principal tools. Thus public relations has become a useful tool of management and a vital communication link in an organised society. According to Cutlip, Center & Broom (2005), “failure to monitor public opinion through public relations has resulted in many chief executives being drowned in crisis”.

The relationship between public relations and crisis managements and how workable it is in FCE, Obudu is the crux of this study

Statement of the problem

In this modern era of ours, any organisation or institution, whether in the public or private sector, should have a public relations aim of establishing and sustaining mutual understanding between the organisation and its publics. Over times, Federal College of Education, Obudu has undergone and experienced different shades of crisis and one of such crises is the student-management crisis of 2017, as a result of the increment in hostel fee from 5,000 to 10,000 which led to wanton destruction of properties. This has remained a prevalent issue posing a threat to the image of the institution. Students who are aggrieved as a result of new policies and certain programmes that do not go well with them usually take the law into their hands either by demonstrating peacefully or violently. Despite several interventions and public relation activities of the institution, crisis still remains a recurring decimal.

One may ask why do these crises continue to occur, is it because the strategies employed in handling these crises are not properly checked and X-rayed?, Or is it that the lines of communication between the management and students are not distinctive? Or is it that the needs of student are misunderstood? The problem of this study therefore bothers on what the Public Relations Department has been doing in crisis management at the Federal

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College of Education, Obudu.

Arising from this scenario, this study will explore ways of answering this question.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows;

- i. To evaluate the status of public relations activities in FCE, Obudu.
- ii. To determine public relations strategies used in FCE, Obudu
- iii. To ascertain the role of the institutions public relations unit in fostering a cordial relationship between management staff and students of FCE, Obudu.
- iv. To determine the extent to which the public relations department is integrated into the management of the FCE, Obudu.

Research Questions

The study intends to find answers to the following research questions:

- i. What is the status of public relations activities in FCE, Obudu?
- ii. What public relations strategies are being implemented by FCE, Obudu?
- iii. To what extent has public relations been used to create and maintain cordial relationship between management, staff and students of FCE, Obudu?
- iv. To what extent has the public relations department been integrated into the management of FCE, Obudu?

Definition of key Terms

Crisis management circle: This is an ongoing process involve in the planning in order to reduce the impact of disasters, the reactions during the disaster and the steps taken to recover after the occurrence of the disaster

Crisis management: Is the process by which FCE, Obudu deals with major event or issues that threatens to harm the reputation of the school.

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Discussion forum: interactive sessions involving parties in connection to issues or crisis and the management, in order to tackle the issues or crisis.

Management policy: Decisions taken by the management to solving the issues and /or crisis that have or may evolve.

Obudu: A local government area in Cross River State, South-South Nigeria, where the research is carried out.

Public Relations Activities: Public relation activities are strategies adopted and engaged by the management in order to build a good and positive image for the college.

Public Relations Practice: Is the practice of managing the spread of information between the staff and management of FCE, Obudu and its internal and external publics.

Public Relations and Crisis Management

Public relations encompasses a wide range of job scopes which includes crisis management. Public relations is a strategic management function, whose role is to advise management of an organisation on issues that affect the organisation. Baskin, Aronoff, and Lattimore (1997, p.5), in their definition, states that public relations is a management function that helps to achieve organizational objectives, define philosophy, and facilitate organizational change.

The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) presents public relations as compassing counseling management at all levels in the organisation with regard to policy decisions, courses of action, and communication taking into account their public ramifications and the organisation's social or citizenship responsibilities (Adelabu 2008, p.621). Also, Keshku (2005, p.6), defined public relations as the process of making known and acceptable an organisation's policies, programmes and actions through effective communication for the overall mutual benefits of the organisation and its target publics.

In public relations, deliberate effort is made to arrange communication elements in such a way that is appealing to its public, which requires appropriate management activities, especially in handling crisis. Management of crisis requires strategic and responsible actions in order to restore trust. The process of crisis

management focuses on the rebuilding of broken-down relationships, and this falls within the ambit of public relations.

The practice of public relations has become well known in recent times because of the great assistance it offers in crisis resolution, especially due to the complexity of the world today where people and organisations cannot avoid trouble and violence completely (Seitel, 2007). The process of managing crisis should be conducted amicably as it will help business to garner trust from stakeholders in the midst of distrust through the organized tireless effort to address the issue. Whenever, a crisis strikes an organisation, it is always advisable to come forward and accept responsibility. The company has to indicate by appropriate action, its concern for public safety and not merely for short-term profit (Sengupta, 1999, p.144).

Crisis Management Cycle

Coombs (2007) defined crisis management as a process designed to prevent or lessen the damage a crisis can inflict on an organisation and its stakeholders. According to him, crisis management is not just a thing, but it is a process encapsulated in three phases; pre-crisis, mid-crisis, and post-crisis.

i. Pre-Crisis

This is the prodromal stage which Nkwuchi (1999), cited in Okon and Okoi (2018), described as the conception stage. This is the pre-crisis period when the components of crisis are emerging. It could also be referred to as the warning stage as it gives signal that a crisis is likely to occur, but hasn't occurred yet. This is the time when one should assess the impact an actual crisis could have on the company, employees, customers, suppliers, operations etc.

ii. Mid-Crisis

This stage of the crisis is also called the birth stage. This is crisis itself. At this stage, crisis has overpowered the conception stage and is no longer hidden and cannot be denied. It is usually a difficult scenerio for organisations at this stage, the event has occured and there is no turning back. Ignoring the situation will make you lose some grounds and laying back is not an option. The key is to control what

you can and to move the situation to the next stage as quickly as possible before it becomes chronic. This period can last indefinitely if one fails to do the proper planning or to respond properly. It is relevant to apply timely, creative interventions that could be capable of minimising the negative effects or damages that such crisis can bring; Here the crisis is said to have reached the climax stage or the apex.

iii. Post-Crisis

This stage is the decline stage, sometimes called the resolution stage. This is when the crisis has responded to the various corrective measures adopted in the previous stages. At this stage, the management, employees and stakeholders of the organisation begin to settle and point out their weaknesses and, thereafter, take decisions that would put a stop to possible outbreak of further crisis. In crisis planning, the goal is to go from the first stage, that is the stage where a crisis could occur to this stage where a full blown crisis never occurred or was handled quickly and efficiently because the organization undertook due diligence when it came to planning.

Review of Empirical Studies

Assessment of the application of public relations in the management of crisis in selected Nigerian universities

Fanafa (2016) studied about an assessment of the application of public relations in the management of crisis in selected Nigerian universities. To determine the effectiveness of public relations in the management of crisis in Nigerian universities, a stratified sampling method was used with a sample size of 600 respondents. From findings, it was revealed that lack of adequate funding, engagement of unqualified staff, interference from the government and politicians, lack of modern gadgets stood as challenges against the application of public relations in crisis management. The study recommended the involvement of public relations experts in crisis management and employment of qualified staff, increased research and evaluation of public relations departments, and the procurement of modern gadgets and facilities in order to enhance the effectiveness of public relations in crisis management in universities. The study is relevant to the present

research work in the area that both studies are aimed at the same goal, that is the utilization of public relations practice in the effective management of crisis.

Role of Public Relations in Crisis Prevention: Study of Union Bank PLC, Garden Venue Enugu

Nwafor, P. Ndidiama in 2014 conducted a study titled "Role of Public Relations in Crisis Prevention: Study of Union Bank PLC, Garden Venue Enugu." The study focuses on the role public relations plays in crisis prevention at Union Bank Plc. To achieve this, the survey research method was adopted. The researcher uses the number of the population as the sample size: this is because the population is already small to reduce 52 members of staff. Chi-square statistical toll was used to test the formulated hypotheses. Research finding showed that public relations play a vital role in crisis prevention. The study further revealed that public relations play a vital role between Union Bank PLC and its public. Its practice aims at establishing a two-way communication, seeking common ground or areas of mutual and establishing understanding based on truth, knowledge and full information.

From the above review, public relations is necessary in any organization and if effective plays a vital role in crisis management and prevention.

Theoretical Framework

Theories relevant to this work are issues management theory and social responsibility theory.

Issues Management Theory

The issues management theory, postulated by Howard Chase in 1976 is a public relations theory. The theory holds that every issue or problem gives some early warning signs or signals before snow-balling into conflict or crisis. Tackling such issues or problems in the bud either prevents it from growing into crisis or drastically reduces the strength of the crisis (Black,1989). And preparation is one key means of preventing crisis. According to Perose (2000, P.155), organisations that practice proactive crisis management will lessen the damage of a crisis.

Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt (1996) have it that issues management is a tool to identify and anticipate potential issues before they sky-rock into threat. For these, issues managers should be forward-thinking, because the longer an organisation is aware of the possible issue, the better It can prepare. The implication of this theory to the study is that Federal College of Education can totally avoid or minimise crisis by adopting proactive public relations strategies which will help to improve relationship with their internal and external publics. Issue management practice will keep them abreast of the feelings and opinions of these publics so as to be in a better position to package the right public relations strategies to address such.

Social Responsibility Theory

The social responsibility theory was propounded by Wilbur Schramm, Siebert and Peterson in 1959. The theory posit that an entity be it an individual or organisation has an obligation to benefit the society. It is a duty that every management has, to maintain peace and harmony within and outside the organisation. By avoiding to engage in harmful acts and performing activities that advances social goals. Therefore, to ensure an effective crisis management through the use of public relations, the management should show its responsibility to its internal and external publics by establishing and ensuring good communication channels. The management of FCE, Obudu are expected to apply their responsibilities to ensure peace within and outside the school, and maintain a good public image.

Methodology

The research design adopted for the study was the survey. The researcher considered this research design appropriate because as stated in Wimmer and Dominick (2002, p.184), it is used to investigate problems in realistic setting. Survey research also involves drawing generalization based on the analysis of the data collected from a representative sample of the opinions of respondents towards the subject matter.

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Population of the Study

According to Okoro (2006, p. 66), population of the study refers to the theoretical and hypothetical grouping or aggregation of all elements, as defined for a given study. Thus, the population of the study consisted of all students, teaching and non-teaching staff of FCE, Obudu, staff of public relations unit as well as the management staff of the college. The population was derived from the current population of FCE estimated to be about 17,766 comprising both staff and students (FCE Registry, 2019/2020). The population of academic staff is 485, non-teaching staff 733, students are 16,548. Out of the staff population, 703 is in the management cadre, while the public relations unit has about 30 staff.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

According to Wimmer and Dominick (2002), a sample is a subset of the population that is a representative of the entire population. By this, a sample of 391 was drawn by the use of Taro Yamane's Formula as the representative fraction, since the population of the college, which is 17,766 is too large and not manageable enough. It is calculated thus;

$$N = \frac{N1+N(e^2)}{N}$$

Where:

n = The sample size

N = The definite population

r = Level of significance/error limit (0.05)

1 = Unity (constant)

$$n = \frac{17,766}{1+17,766(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{17,766}{1+17,766(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{17,766}{1+44.415}$$

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$$\begin{aligned}n &= \frac{17,766}{45.415} \\n &= 391.19234 \\n &= 391.\end{aligned}$$

Furthermore, the systematic and proportionate sampling technique were used. Systematic sampling is a type of sampling that relies on arranging the target population according to some ordering scheme and then selecting elements at regular intervals through that ordered list (Obasi, 2013, p.208). Proportionate sampling according to Nworgu (1991), cited in Obasi (2013,p.103), ensures greater representativeness of the sampling relative to the population and guarantees that minority constituents of the population are represented in the sample. This technique enabled the researcher to give all elements of the population the opportunity of being selected. Therefore, nominal rolls of the different segments of the population to determine the number selected from the academic staff, non-teaching staff and students; as well as the staff of public relations unit and management staff to be interviewed were utilised. The nominal rolls of the teaching staff, non-teaching staff and students were employed for the selection of 391 respondents from the population. In every nominal roll, the selection process involves first, arbitrarily selecting a name from the nominal rolls and afterwards, one in every five names had the chance of being selected. This was repeated until the number allocated for a segment of the population was reached. On proportionate sampling technique, the ratio of a segment of the population guide in determining the number to be selected.

The research instruments to elicit responses from respondents for this study were questionnaire and in-depth interview. The questionnaire is divided into two parts, Section A and Section B. Section A is aimed at eliciting demographic data of respondents, and Section B is based on the research questions and objectives. The questionnaire is structured in close-ended format, and under a five-point Likert scale. Likert scale measures individual degree of agreement (Obasi, 2013, p.87). The choice of this is to ensure uniformity and

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effective data analysis. The in-depth interview guide was prepared based on questions related to the research questions necessary for arriving at a conclusion.

Copies of questionnaire were distributed and interview was also carried out by the researcher. Simple percentage and tables in frequency counts were used to statistically analyze the data for the study using the formula;

$$\frac{x}{n} = \frac{100}{1}$$

Data Presentation and Analysis

This sub-unit is in two part, the first part is analysis based on data from the questionnaire, the second part is based on report from the in-depth interview conducted.

Data Presentation and Analysis from the Questionnaire

Table 1
Status of Respondents

Status	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Teaching Staff	54	18%
Non-Teaching Staff	96	32%
Student	150	50%
Total	300	100

Source :Field Survey,2021

The above table shows 50% respondents are students and being the highest on the frequency distribution scale.

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Table 2
Effectiveness of Public Relations in crisis management

Items	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Agreed	98	33%
Strongly Agreed	82	27%
Undecided	54	18%
Disagreed	46	15%
Strongly Disagreed	20	7%
Total	300	100

Source: Field Survey,2021

The above table shows that majority of respondents agree that public relations can be effective in crisis management.

Table 3
Respondents' rating of the status of public relations related activities at FCE, Obudu

Items	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Effective	114	38%
Very Effective	67	22%
Not Effective	119	40%
Total	300	100

Source: Field Survey 2021

The table above shows that 40% of respondents' rate public relations status to be ineffective.

Table 4

There are actions needed to be taken in crisis management

Items	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Agreed	158	53%
Strongly Agreed	112	37%
Undecided	30	10%
Disagreed	0	0%
Strongly Disagreed	0	0%
Total	300	100

Source: Field Survey,2021

Table 4 shows that majority of respondents (53%) agree that there are actions needed to be taken in crisis management.

Table 5

Communication Channels Suggested for Use in Crisis Management in FCE, Obudu.

Items	No. of Respondents	Percentage
E-mails	40	13%
Discussions	164	55%
Text Messages	20	7%
Letters	76	25%
Total	300	100

Source: Field Survey,2021

The above table shows that the highest number of respondents opined that discussion is one major channel used in crisis management

as evident in the 55% on the frequency scale.

Table 6
Students should be made part of the management board

Items	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Agreed	158	53
Strongly Agreed	84	28
Undecided	25	8
Disagreed	21	7
Strongly Disagreed	12	4
Total	300	100

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The above table indicates that majority of respondents (81%) agreed that students should be made a part of the management board.

Table 7
Reliability of information provided by FCE during crisis

Items	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Agreed	50	17%
Strongly Agreed	54	18%
Undecided	60	20%
Disagreed	72	24%
Strongly Disagreed	64	21%
Total	300	100

Source: Field Survey, 2021

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The above shows that majority of respondents (24% and 21%) respectively disagreed and strongly disagreed that the information provided by FCE is reliable during crisis.

Table 8
Respondents' Opinion on the way FCE management has been giving information in the management of crisis

Items	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Agreed	54	18%
Strongly Agreed	46	15%
Undecided	40	13%
Disagreed	92	31%
Strongly Disagreed	68	23%
Total	300	100

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The above table indicates that majority of respondents (31% and 23%) respectively strongly disagreed and disagreed with the way FCE, Obudu has been giving information during crisis. This implies that majority of the respondents do not support the way FCE management has been giving information on the management of crisis.

Table 9

Lack of understanding of management policies triggers crisis in FCE, Obudu

Items	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Agreed	85	28
Strongly Agreed	96	32
Undecided	60	20
Disagreed	35	12
Strongly Disagreed	24	8
Total	300	100

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 9, indicates that majority of respondents (60%) strongly agree and agreed that lack of understanding of management policies trigger crisis in FCE.

Table 10

Students have the opportunity to express ideas to management

Items	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Agreed	54	18%
Strongly Agreed	50	17%
Undecided	58	19%
Disagreed	78	26%
Strongly Disagreed	60	20%
Total	300	100

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The above table indicates that majority of respondents (46%) disagreed and strongly disagreed that students have the opportunity to express ideas to management of FCE, Obudu. The implication of this is that students are not carried along in the policies of the college.

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Table 11

Respondents Awareness of the existence of public relations unit in FCE, Obudu

Items	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Agreed	116	39%
Strongly Agreed	84	28%
Undecided	45	15%
Disagreed	40	13%
Strongly Disagreed	15	5%
Total	300	100

Source: Field Survey,2021

The above table indicates that majority (67%) of respondents are aware of public relations unit in FCE, Obudu.

Table 12

Respondents' feeling about the information unit of FCE, Obudu

Items	No. of Respondents	Percentage
The unit represent the feeling of management of FCE, Obudu	88	29%
The unit represents the interest of the students	38	13%
The unit represents the interest of the staff	67	22%
The unit represents the interest of all of the above	62	21%

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The unit represents the interest of none of the above	45	15%
Total	300	100

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The above table shows that majority of respondents are of the view that the PR unit represents the interest of the management.

Table 13

Respondents' opinion on whether FCE maintains good relationship between external and internal publics

Items	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Agreed	40	13%
Strongly Agreed	54	18%
Undecided	68	23%
Disagreed	76	25%
Strongly Disagreed	62	21%
Total	300	100

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The above table indicates that majority of respondents do not think FCE maintains good relationship between external and internal publics.

Data Presentation and Analysis from the Interview Guide

This section present report of the in-depth Interview with Public Relations Personnel of FCE, Obudu

Mr. Ogar is a public relations personnel and has been a staff of Federal College of Education, Obudu for about nine years. On the question regarding how complaints are received and treated in the institution, he said complaints are received from the security office to ascertain the gravity before being forwarded to the public relations department for

possible solution to avoid issues being escalated. According to him, the complaints are treated with urgency and diplomacy because little things, if not properly attended to can result to big issue which can cause an unrest in the school and the community.

On what public relations strategies are being implemented by the school, he said the management mostly indulge in discussions and dialogue with the parties involved while trying to prevent misunderstanding and conflict of interests during the discussions or interactions. According to him, interactions and discussions are good platforms for problem tackling and resolution as it involves face-to-face communication / conversation. Issues can be understood properly and sorted out outrightly with first-hand information to guide it. It is pertinent to iron out issues directly to limit message distortion. Also management meets with traditional rulers of the host community to ensure corporate communication and good community relations for peaceful co-existence and good public image.

On the question about the efforts that have been put in place to meet the communication needs of students, Mr. Ogar responded that the college has a student affairs division and student union government, whatever complaints are first forwarded through these channels and those complaints are handled properly. The student affairs has a directorate, the dean mr Ashipu Igbo who is always available to handle whatever challenges students face. Also the student union government are engaged in informal and formal interactions to sort out complaints and problems to avoid unrest and any form of agitations by the students.

On the question regarding the platforms and opportunity given to students to express ideas to management, he responded that from time to time the student union government are engaged in informal interactive sessions with the provost and management in order for them to brainstorm together and deliberate on issues so that the college can move forward. According to him, the meetings help to break barriers that hinder the free flow of information in the system between students and management. That lack of adequate and proper information breeds rumour mongering the polity which subsequently smears the relationship among stakeholders.

On the question about his perception about crisis management team in the institution, he responded that the crisis management team

are doing well to curb social vices within and outside the school, by meeting with relevant stakeholders promptly when the need arises and ensuring a smooth dialogue to foster peace within the school and the community. According to him, the crisis management team in the institution is always on ground to solve whatever issues likely to escalating into crisis which he said was a good call in maintaining peace and unity between the students, management and host community.

On the question of whether the college organises discussions forums with students and if he understood the message sent across, he responded that the college management organizes discussion sessions with the students where issues bothering the students are tabled for deliberations. He said that the discussion forums are mostly done informally to create a relax and accommodating atmosphere for the students and members of the committee. This enables messages to be well articulated and understood by the parties involved.

On the question on how he would describe the public relations activities of FCE, Obudu, He responded that the public relations activities are promising with the progress they have made in maintaining peace, stability and corporate communication and establishing valuable relationship between the management and students. Also ensuring good community relations between the school and the host community, and according to him, it is commendable.

Discussion

This section focuses on giving answers to the research questions posed by the study.

Research Question One

What is the status of public relations activities in FCE?.

Data from table 2, shows that majority of respondents were of the view that public relations can be effective in management.

However, data from Table 3, revealed that the status of public relations in FCE, Obudu is not effective. Similarly, in Table11, majority of respondents were aware of the existence of public relations unit of the college. Table 12 revealed that majority of respondents felt that the information unit of the college represents the feeling of management.

This is in contrast to the statement from the in-depth interview that public relations activities in the institution is promising and commendable. According to the public relations personnel, they have progress in maintaining peace and corporate communication and has established valuable relationship between management, students and the host community.

This confirms the observation of Sengupta (1999) that the process of managing crisis be conducted amicably as it will help business and organisations to garner trust from stakeholders in the midst of distrust through the organized tireless effort to address the issue.

Research Question Two

What public relations strategies are being implemented by FCE, Obudu

Table 4, and 5 were used to provide the answer to this question. Findings revealed that there were actions needed to be taken in crisis management in FCE, Obudu. Data from Table 4 revealed that majority of respondents 158 (53%) were of the view that there were actions needed to be taken in crisis management at FCE, Obudu. It was also revealed that discussion was the communication channel used mainly in crisis management at FCE, Obudu. This is from the data on the frequency table which showed 164 (55%) respondents as the majority.

This coincides with the statement from the public relations personnel that the management mostly incorporate discussion sessions and dialogue with parties involved. They also try to prevent misunderstanding and conflict of interests during the discussion sessions. According to him, discussion forums are one sure way of issue resolution as it involves face-to-face contact with parties. He also said that the management from time to time meets with traditional rulers of the host community to ensure corporate communication and good community relations.

This affirms the assertion of Black (1989) that public relations is the establishment of two-way communication to solve crisis of interest by seeking common grounds or areas of mutual interest and the establishment of understanding based on truth, humanity and full information.

Research Question Three

To what extent has public relations been able to maintain relationships between management staff and students in FCE Obudu?.

To answer this question, Table 6, 9, and 10 were used. Findings revealed that as part of maintaining relationships between management staff and students, students should be made part of management board because lack of understanding of management policy can trigger crisis. Table 6, majority of respondents were of the view that students be made part of management. It was also revealed on Table 9, that lack of understanding can trigger crisis. Findings also revealed that students did not really have the opportunity to express ideas to management as majority of respondents in Table 10 indicated so.

This findings however is in contrast with the statement from the interview with the public relations personnel, who said that students affairs unit and the student union government are channels to communicate with the students, and are always on ground to meet the demands of students. He said these platforms are integrated to sort out students' complaints to mitigate persistent agitations by the students. It could therefore be established that the extent public relations has been able to maintain relationship with students is low. In view of this, Perose (2000) observes that organizations that practice proactive crisis management will lessen the damage of a crisis.

Research Question Four

To what extent has the public relations department been integrated into the management of FCE?.

Tables 7, 8, and 13 were used to answer this question. Findings revealed that the information provided by FCE, Obudu during crisis was not reliable. Also, respondents do not support the way FCE management has been giving information in the management of crisis. Also, respondents did not think FCE, Obudu maintains good relationship between external and internal publics as data from Table 13, showed that majority of respondents were of this view.

This is in contrast with the view of the public relations personnel that the public relations activities are promising and the crisis management team is hands-on in maintaining peace and

corporate communication. And has established valuable relationship between the host community, management staff and students. The crisis management team is commendable infostering peace and unity within the college community, and meets with relevant stakeholders when the need arises to avoid issues escalating into crisis, as the public relations unit is well integrated into the management. But, if the public relations department cannot maintain good external and internal relations and cannot relay adequate and objective information during crisis to the publics, it cannot be established that it is well integrated into the management.

To support this, Heibert, Ungurait and Bohn (2004) asserted that public relations should be placed in an organization at the top management level, with the public relations manager or director responsible to the director general and board of directors.

Summary

The study was aimed at finding out public relations practice and crisis management in FCE, Obudu. The study investigated the strategies employed by the management of FCE in crisis management. The specific objectives of the study were to;

1. Evaluate the status of public relations activities in FCE, Obudu.
2. Determine public relations strategies used in FCE, Obudu.
3. Ascertain the role of the institution's public relations unit in fostering cordial relationship between staff and students of FCE, Obudu.
4. Determine the extent to which the public relations department is integrated into the management of FCE, Obudu.

Issue management theory and social responsibility theory were used to serve as the theoretical framework of the study. Survey research design was used for the study with questionnaire and interview as instrument for quantitative and qualitative data collection from respondents for the study.

A sample of 391 was drawn from the population of the study in Federal College of Education, Obudu Local Government Area. An in-depth interview was conducted with a public relations personnel of the institution. Data for the study were analysed using statistical computation in tables and simple percentage. From the study, the following were the findings:

1. It was found from the study that the status of public relations activities in Federal College of Education is not effective.
2. The study also found out that the public relations strategies being implemented by the management of the institution include mainly discussion forum and dialogues.
3. From the study, it is found that the extent to which public relations has been able to maintain relationships between the management staff and students is poor. Which means the public relations department has not done enough to maintain cordial relationship between management staff and students.
4. The study also found out that the extent the public relations department has been integrated into the management of Federal College of Education is low. This means that the public relations department is not really involved and has not done much in the management of the institution.

Conclusion

Based on findings of the study, it is concluded that public relations can be effective in crisis management but the status of public relations activities in the Federal College of Education, Obudu is not effective. It is also seen to be lacking in community relations and corporate social responsibility between its external and internal publics.

Although, it is viewed that there are strategies needed to be put in place by the Public Relations Department to prevent issues from escalating into crisis. From the findings however, it is concluded that the strategies were not effective enough.

From the study, it is also concluded that public relations can be an effective management tool in community relations as well as maintaining cordial relationship between management staff and students, but in achieving this, it has to adequately and properly engage the community and students on a regular basis to know their problems and identify their needs and priorities for peaceful co-existence.

Recommendations

From the findings and conclusion drawn from the study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. The public relations department in Federal College of Education,

- Obudu should establish effective and hands-on approach in propagating good community relations.
- ii. Frequent and appropriate discussion forum should be adopted to interact with students directly and the relevant stakeholders should be present.
 - iii. The public relations department should ensure effective communication to enhance cordial relationship and understanding with the students and the host community.
 - iv. The public relations unit should endeavor to provide adequate and objective information to the publics of the institution, and ensure that the information as regard any situation be reliable and objective as it can be.

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Ogar, P. (Staff) Public Relations Department, FCE, Obudu. July, 2021.