Applying the Stakeholder Relationship Model as an Issue Management and Risk Communication Tool

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Section: Theoretical Perspective of Issue Management and Risk Communication

Abstract

This chapter argues that because of the changing nature of crises, global environments, and reputation management organizations can no longer view crisis management and crisis communication as a process that begins when a crisis is triggered. Instead this chapter argues that good crisis communication is built on an active and socially responsible approach to stakeholder engagement involving issues and risk management as cornerstones of being an ethical organization serving the needs and interests of its stakeholders. In order to accomplish this goal, it argues that researchers and practitioners need to move away from organization-centered models to focus on stakeholder-centric models. Finally, it proposes that by applying the stakeholder relationship management model as an issue management and risk communication tool, organizations will be better positioned to minimize or mitigate risks to stakeholders and develop better overall strategies for responding to situations as they arise or crises as they are triggered.

Keywords

Issue management, risk, stakeholder relationship management model, social responsibility

From the first study of crises and crisis communication in the mid-20th century to the turn of the century, crises were generally thought of as a, "…low probability, high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made quickly" (Pearson & Clair, 1998, p. 60). This definition of crisis was supported by a small body of research that had emerged throughout the previous 40 years. However while both practitioners and academics recognized that crises are challenging because they are often ill-structured and complex (Mitroff, Alpaslan, & Green, 2004), they had also witnessed a growing and diverse number of crises like: the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska, the Iran-Contra Affair of the mid-to-late 1980's, the tainted blood scandal from the American Red Cross in the early 1990's, Enron's accounting scandal of 2001, and the terrorist attacks of 2001. As a result of the risks to an organization's reputation and often its survival (Heath & Millar, 2004; Park & Cameron, 2014; Zhao, Wang, Wei, & Liang, 2013) posed by modern crises in an information-rich world, the research interest in crisis management and crisis communication began to grow substantially.

The new experiences for organizations resulting from greater expectations for organizational transparency (Austin, Liu, & Jin, 2014) and direct stakeholder engagement on social media (van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2013; Zhao, et al., 2013) during crises demonstrate that crisis experiences are as diverse as the organizations that experience them. The causes of the crises can range from the careless mistakes of individuals within an organization, to circumstances entirely out of an organization's control, and to systematic break-downs or inefficiencies (Argenti, 2002; King, 2002; Pearson & Clair, 1998; Reilly, 1987). With the growth of interest in crises, crisis management, and crisis communication how we define a crisis has also evolved. Instead of thinking of crises and low-probability and high impact events with ambiguous causes and outcomes, we should be thinking of crises differently. In fact, Heath and Millar (2004) argue that instead of thinking of crises as unpredictable, we should think of them as untimely but largely predictable events. If we accept this definition of crisis, then it also suggests we need to focus our attention on crisis prevention—that is issue management and risk communication—rather than just crisis response.

If we are to begin to shift the narrative and more meaningfully address those factors that most help organizations manage issues and mitigate risk, then we must also shift our theoretical perspectives away from organization-centric theories to stakeholder-centric theories. This shift is also appropriate because the demands of a modern communication environment require organizations to more effectively engage with many different stakeholder groups (Botan, 1997; Xu & Li, 2013). As such, the stakeholder relationship model discussed in this chapter builds on Haley's (1996) model for advocacy advertising and provides a heuristic aligned with previous research addressing consumer attitudes (Claeys, Cauberghe, & Vyncke, 2010), public pressure from interested stakeholders in the face of corporate irresponsibility (Piotrowski & Guyette, 2010; Uccello, 2009), and engagement (Hong, Yang, & Rim, 2010). The model argues that it is the relationships between stakeholder perceptions of organizations, issues, and the interrelationships between them that together will help build a deeper understanding of risk, issues, and the communication needs of stakeholders. Previous applications of the model to analyze post-crisis communication have demonstrated its effectiveness in identifying factors influencing consumer evaluations of the firm, such as an organization's reputation, consumer knowledge of the organization, perceptions of the organization's concern regarding the crisis, and consumers' interest regarding the crisis (see Diers, 2012). Therefore, this represents a new opportunity to apply the model in the context of issue management and risk communication.

Issues, Risk, and Anticipatory Stakeholder Stewardship

This chapter makes two critical assumptions. First, the core objective of issues management and risk mitigation is to either remove or mitigate crises. No matter whether we prioritize an organization-centric view or a stakeholder-centric view, the first assumption suggests that the costs of crises – ranging from financial to human – are likely to be reduced with an active approach to managing risk. Second, organizations have more options to act before a crisis emerges (Heath & Palenchar, 2009; Meng, 1992), which is why issue management and risk communication should be viewed as anticipatory strategic management (Heath, 2002). Based on these two assumptions, if we can better understand issues management, risk, and stakeholders in complex organizational environments, we can begin to build a framework to better understand opportunities to affect organizational and stakeholder behavior.

Issues Management as Anticipatory Strategic Management

Heath's (2002) perspective on issues management is stakeholder centered in that he argues that it is stewardship for building, maintaining, and repairing relationships with stakeholders and stake seekers. He argues that successful issues management:

- Enhances an organization's ability to plan and manage its activities
- Enhances an organization's ability to behave in ethical and socially responsible ways, as a part of routine business
- Enhances an organization's ability to monitor its environment
- Enhances the organization's ability to develop strategic dialogue to manage relationships more effectively.

However, for issues management to be successful organizations cannot be reactionary – they must view this as an anticipatory process. In his analysis of issues management, Meng (1992) identified a five-stage issues lifecycle (see Figure 1) encompassing the potential, emerging, current, crisis, and dormant stages of an issue. In simple terms, as the issue moves through the first four stages, the issue attracts more attention and becomes less manageable (Heath & Palenchar, 2009; Meng, 1992). Meng's (1992) model highlights that issues management is an ongoing process and in a new global reality where organizational environments are increasingly complex and organizations must actively manage multiple issues at once, it also demonstrates that there are a number of opportunities for interventions that can help to mitigate or even avoid crises from being triggered or escalating. For example, Kim and Lee (2015) found that are more socially responsible can buffer themselves from the negative outcomes of a crisis (i.e., mitigating the effects) when those activities are undertaken as a routine part of doing business (i.e., at the dormant and potential stages). But being socially responsible is only part of the equation; organizations must also be able to detect potential problems and take actions preventatively.

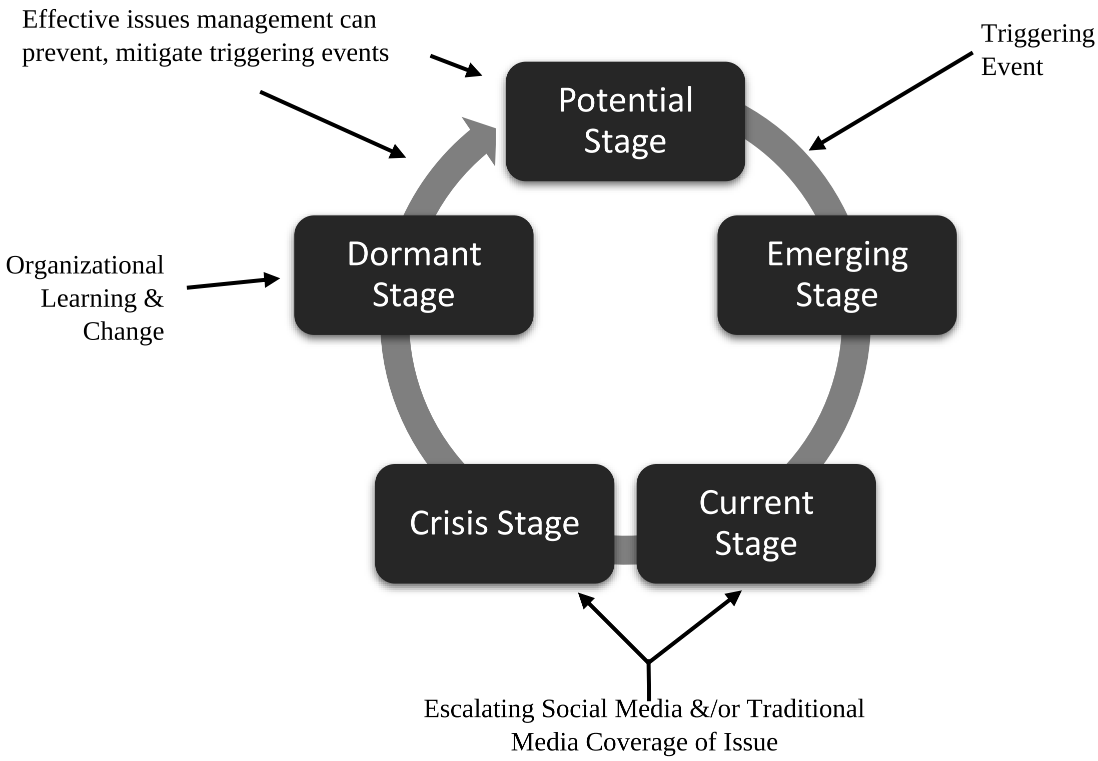

FIGURE 1 ADAPTATION OF MENG'S (1992) ISSUES MANAGEMENT PROCESS

To borrow from a health care analogy – early detection is the best approach to managing issues, which is in both the organization's and stakeholders' interests. If an organization can identify issues before they are triggered by an event, whistleblower, the media, consumers, or any one of the organization's internal or external stakeholders then the organization has more opportunities to meaningfully address the issue. However, as the issue matures, the number of engaged stakeholders, publics, and other influencers expends and positions on the issue become more entrenched meaning that the choices available to the organization necessarily shrink (Elsbach, Sutton, & Principe, 1998; Heath & Palenchar, 2009; Kernisky, 1997; Meng, 1992; Pang, Cropp, & Cameron, 2006; Seeger, Heyart, Barton, & Bultnyck, 2001).

Risk and the Central Role of Communication

In early detection, we are looking for risks that organizations face, wicked social problems like climate change and epidemics to manage, and threats to people's well-being. However, risk is often a difficult concept for social or behavioral scientists to unpack because much of what we must manage is peoples' perception of risk rather than the probability that a crisis will happen (Freundberg, 1988). For example, an engineer can calculate the probability that a bridge will fail, or an infectious disease expert can calculate the spread of disease based on population density and a number of other factors; however, risk management is not about the material risk but about the reduction of the risk and communication of information about the risk.

One of the challenges in this process is that technical information has to be translated and that public decisions about risk are not always rational (Freundberg, 1988). In exploring reactions to the impact of disease, epidemics, and bioterrorism, Covello, Peters, Wojtecki, and Hyde (2001) identified 15 factors that influenced peoples' perception of risk (see Table 1). Though the 15 factors are all very different, what is consistent is that the unknown, uncontrollable, or nebulous make people less willing to accept the credibility of threats; however, at the same time once people judge risks to be 'real' those factors that made us resistant to accepting them as credible also mean that they are perceived as greater threats. Put simply, people often bury their heads in the sand, pretend that the risk is not real until it is unavoidable and then they may overestimate the negative effects it could have.

TABLE 1 FACTORS INFLUENCING PERCEPTIONS OF RISK[1]

Risk Perception Factor	Findings
Voluntariness	People are less likely to accept a risk as a credible threat if it is involuntary; view involuntary risk as greater once they believe that it could affect them
Controllability	When people believe they no have control in a situation, they are less likely to accept a risk as a credible threat; but once accepted, believe the risk is greater if they cannot control the situation
Familiarity	If people are unfamiliar with a risk, they are less likely to accept it as credible; but once accepted, believe it is a greater threat than if it was previously known
Equity	People are less likely to believe that risks are credible when they are perceived as being unevenly distributed than if everyone is equally at risk
Benefits	People are more likely to accept the credibility of risk if the benefits of taking the risk are clear; however, are also likely to perceive the risk as less severe than if the benefits are unclear or questionable
Understanding	If people do not understand the risk, the risk is viewed as less credible but also carry a higher evaluation of threat than those that are perceived as being understood.
Uncertainty	People are less likely to accept risks where the outcomes are highly uncertain; however, they are more likely to view those risks as more severe once accepted
Dread	If a risk evokes fear or anxiety in people, they are less readily accepted as credible risks but judged to be greater threats
Trust in institutions	If people do not trust organizations, they are less likely to accept risks associated with them and those risks are more likely to create more threat than those associated with trustworthy or credible organizations
Reversibility	People are less likely to accept the credibility of risks that are viewed as irreversible but more likely to perceive greater threat than those whose effects are reversible
Personal stake	If people believe they could be directly and personally affected, they are less likely to accept the risk as credible; however, once accepted will feel a greater level of threat
Ethics and morals	When people perceive risks as being ethical or moral problems, they are less likely to view the risk as credible but perceive them as a greater threat
Human vs. natural	People are less likely to accept risks as credible threats when they are caused by people; however, view them as bigger risks than natural disasters
Victim identity	When people can identify with specific real or potential victims of risks, they are less likely to accept the credibility of threat but are more likely to view the threats as more severe than if they connect risks with 'nameless and faceless' people in general
Catastrophic potential	People are less likely to accept the credibility of a threat when it can produce fatalities, injuries, or illness; however, once accepted are perceived as greater risks than those threats whose impact may be either scattered or minimal

[1]*Adapted from Covello, et al.'s (2001) risk perception model*

In her review of Hurricane Katrina – an American example of very poor risk and crisis management – Comfort (2007) summarizes a four-step process for risk management that complements much of the relevant research connected to risk and crisis communication.

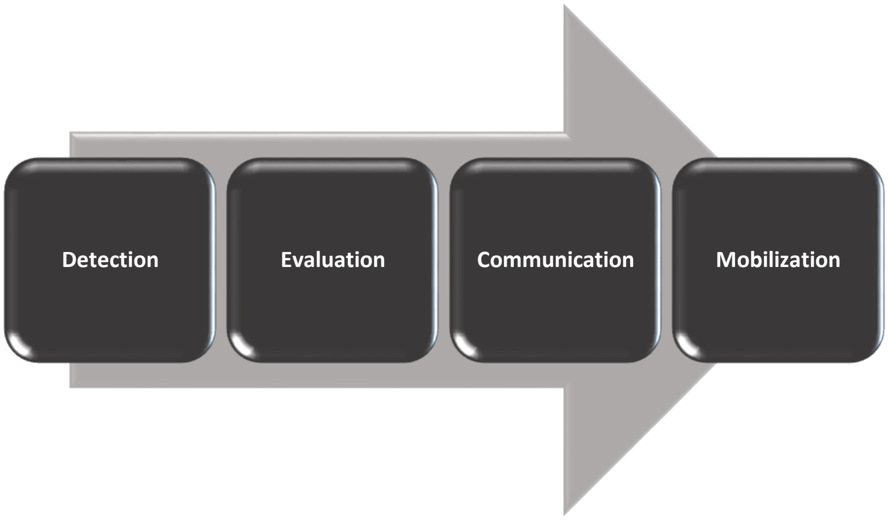

FIGURE 2 RISK MANAGEMENT PROCESS

Risk detection is a natural starting point in the process; before an organization can plan to minimize the risks that it or its stakeholders could experience, those risks must be known (Comfort, 2007; Dilenschneider & Hyde, 1985; Hayes & Patton, 2001; Heath, 1998; Kash & Darling, 1998; Ritchie, 2004; Stacks, 2004). From there, the risk must be evaluated in the second step in as objective and effective way as possible so that a straight-forward judgment of the likelihood and severity of the risk can be made (Comfort, 2007; Dilenschneider & Hyde, 1985; Freundberg, 1988; Massey & Larsen, 2006).

Third is the communication of risk (Comfort, 2007). As Freundberg (1998) pointed out, this is challenging because technical information does not always translate directly. Furthermore, peoples' perceptions of risks are affected by several factors (see Table 1) (Covello, et al., 2001). Nevertheless, communicating risk is vital to ensure that relevant stakeholders, like members of the organization, regulators, the media, and those directly affected, can appropriately understand the situation and are prepared to deal with it (Johansson & Härenstam, 2013; Ley et al., 2014). Thus, the communication of risk focuses on exchanging knowledge essential to managing the risk.

Finally, sharing information then allows for the organization to mobilize a response to reduce risk and respond to danger (Comfort, 2007; Dilenschneider & Hyde, 1985; Heath, 1998). The mobilization of collective response includes communication-related tasks like issue management, managing stakeholder relationships, developing communication plans and protocols, and staff development (Hayes & Patton, 2001; Heath, 1998; Heath & Millar, 2004; Johansson & Härenstam, 2013; Kash & Darling, 1998; Perry, Taylor, & Doerfel, 2003; Reilly, 2008). It also includes management related tasks like developing teams and decision-making systems to facilitate the process (Hayes & Patton, 2001; Horton, 1988; Jindal, Laveena, & Aggarwal, 2015; Nunamaker, Weber, & Chen, 1989).

This means that if we think of issues management as the material part of risk communication, then it is clear that they are intertwined with the broad concept of crisis management. Jindhal, et al. (2015) define crisis management as a process allowing organizations to deal with major problems that pose a threat to the organization and/or its stakeholders. For organizations, crisis management is a learned behavior that focuses on mitigation and control of the internal and external dynamics of the crisis itself; yet it is not like being a mechanic that finds a problem in the car and fixes it – it is still about engaging with people's expectations and their decisions-making process.

Stakeholders and Complex Environments

In the organizational context, stakeholders are those groups and/or people who can affect or be affected by an organization (Freeman, 1994). As if it was not complex enough for organizations to manage relationships with stakeholders, organizations are also subject to a lot of pressures because they serve multiple groups at any given time (Connolly, Conlon, & Deutsch, 1980; Frooman, 1999). Stakeholders range vastly and can include groups like employees, customers or clients, regulators, competitors, and the like (see Figure 3 for examples).

FIGURE 3 EXAMPLES OF STAKEHOLDERS ORGANIZATIONS MAY HAVE

In an era where stakeholders are not only demanding different forms of engagement but also where crises are increasingly common because many 'new' types of crises are purely reputational – emerging largely in social media, a distinctive shift from past experiences with crises (Veil, Reno, Freihaut, & Oldham, 2015; Wan, Koh, Ong, & Pang, 2015) – stakeholder expectations of organizations are changing as well. For example, as new generations (e.g., Generations Y and Z) are gaining voice as young adults and workers, their expectations of organizations like social responsibility, transparency, and ethical decision making are fundamentally influencing public relations practice (Curtin, Gallicano, & Matthews, 2011).

These changes mean that organizations must change the ways they relate to and communicate with different stakeholder groups in competitive message environments. For example, instead of just positioning an organization as having a desirable product or service, they feel increasingly pressured to have more socially responsible value propositions – they cannot just sell a good product, they also must do good – all in an environment where their competitors and critics might be talking about the organization relative to their own interests. Haley (1996) was interested in understanding how consumers reacted to such advocacy in the context of advertising. In particular, he was interested in how stakeholders reacted to different types of cause-related advertising messages. In his work, Haley identified three perceptions that affect how compelling an organization's promotional messages are:

1. **The perception of the organization and self**. He argued that a central component of consumers' understanding of advocacy messages from organizations was based in their perception of the relationship between the organization and the consumer. On the whole, if the organization was recognizable and likeable, it was more likely to be persuasive.
2. **Perception of organization and issue**. Next, Haley argued that how consumers understand the relationship between the advocacy issue and the organization would influence their acceptance of the advocacy message.
3. **Perception of the issue and self**. Finally, in order for advocacy advertising to be effective, Haley argued that consumers' also had to have a measure of investment in the issue.

In the context of public relations Haley's (1996) discussion of the relative success of advocacy advertising makes a lot of sense because it encourages us to focus on the relationships between stakeholders, organizations, and issues. Yet, unlike interpersonal relationships, stakeholder relationships are necessarily based on perceived vested interests – that is the organization and/or the stakeholder want something relatively tangible from the other and, as Heath (2002) argues, the relationship should be mutually beneficial. For me this provides something concrete and measurable that can be tested in order to diagnose, manage, and improve relationships (Diers-Lawson, 2017a; Diers, 2012).

Stakeholder Relationship Management Model

Unfortunately, in reflecting on the primary theoretical perspectives often articulated, the narrative is unclear about the relationship between organizations, stakeholders, and the issues that are important to them. In part, this is because the academic literature focuses much attention on describing and analyzing response strategies (Oles, 2010; Piotrowski & Guyette, 2010; Samkin, Allen, & Wallace, 2010; Seeger & Griffin-Padgett, 2010; Sung-Un, Minjeong, & Johnson, 2010; Weber, Erickson, & Stone, 2011) with less meaningful attention paid on stakeholder needs.

The stakeholder relationship model (SRM) provides a way to organize previous findings that establish that stakeholder characteristics, public pressure from interested stakeholders, and engagement are all likely to influence stakeholder evaluations and behavioral intentions towards organizations. The model aligns with previous research establishing that consumer attitudes (Claes, Rust, & Dekimpe, 2010), public pressure from interested stakeholders in the face of crises (Piotrowski & Guyette, 2010; Uccello, 2009), and engagement with stakeholders (Hong, et al., 2010) are all likely to influence consumer evaluations and behavioral intentions towards organizations. Previous applications of the model to analysis of post-crisis communication have demonstrated its effectiveness in identifying factors influencing consumer evaluations of the firm, such as an organization's reputation, consumer knowledge of the organization, perceptions of the organization's concern regarding the crisis, and consumers' interest regarding the crisis (Diers-Lawson, 2017a; Diers, 2012). However, I argue that in the context of issues management and risk mitigation, the model is a useful diagnostic tool to help organizations more effectively solve problems before crises are triggered. The SRM focuses on the stakeholder's perspective and trying to understand that perspective in order to better understand and predict stakeholder judgments about organizations, issues and their behavioral intention (see Figure 4 for the summary of the model).

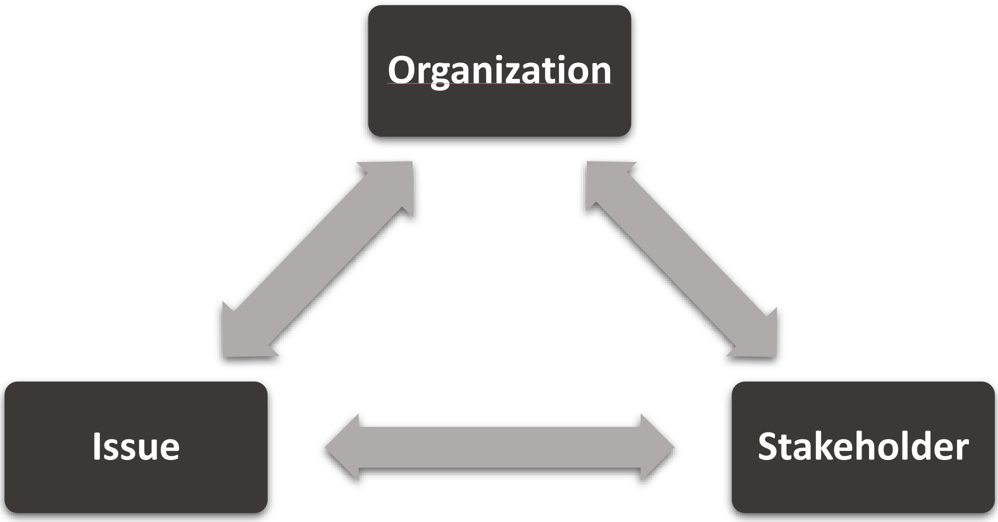

FIGURE 4 STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT MODEL

The Relationship Between the Organization and Issues

First, let us evaluate the types of judgments that stakeholders make about the relationship between the organization and issues. Stakeholders make judgments about whether and how organizations are connected to issues the stakeholders care about. While research is still identifying factors influencing this judgment, four have emerged across a large body of research – from multiple authors, books, and journal articles in the last 10-15 years.

Blame or responsibility attribution. This is an evaluation of the degree to which stakeholders believe that an organization has control over an issue (Weiner, 1985, 2006). The more responsibility that a stakeholder attributes to the organization, the more likely they are to ascribe expectations to the organization with regards to the issue. Blame attribution is one of the most important predictors of stakeholder attitudes about an organization after a crisis and is a core concept in situational crisis communication theory (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2004; Jeong, 2009; Schwarz, 2008) but is also applied in other related crisis communication research connecting to other factors like corporate social responsibility, crisis history, and ethics (Kim, 2013; Ping, Ishaq, & Li, 2015).

One of the reasons that organizations should be motivated to care about issues and risk management is that blame attribution should be thought of as the potential threat to an organization's reputation. Reputational threat is a multi-step process combining evaluations of severity and blame attribution followed by considering situational intensifiers like the organisation's history of crises (Coombs, 2007; Maresh & Williams, 2007) and its reputation (Coombs, 2007; Sisco, Collins, & Zoch, 2010; van Zoonen & van der Meer, 2015). For example, previous research suggests that higher perceptions of blame attribution results in greater reputational damage for crises (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Kim, 2014; Schwarz, 2012). All of this generates emotions on the part of the stakeholders which thus influences their understanding of the situation as well as their interpretation of the organisation's crisis response (Choi & Lin, 2009; McDonald & Cokley, 2013). When the perception towards the organization is more negative, the greater responsibility is attributed on the organization, and thus the greater the reputational threat created by the crisis (Weiner, 1985). As such better understanding factors that serve as intensifiers, such as competence, commitment, clear association, and perceived control or self-efficacy, to a crisis is vital to better understanding the attribution of blame and the reputational risk crises carry with them.

Competence, commitment, and clear association. Questions about how stakeholders assign blame to organizations have been asked since the 1970's with Schwartz and Ben David's (1976) analysis of blame, ability, and denial of responsibility in the face of emergencies. Evaluations of an organization's competence in crisis management is, by contrast, a newer evolution in the field's understanding of this relationship (see e.g., Diers, 2012; Sohn & Lariscy, 2014). While competence had long been considered from the crisis management perspective, it has not always been considered from the stakeholder perspective. Competence asks whether or not stakeholders judge that the organization has the capacity to successfully address the issue (de Fatima Oliveira, 2013; Hyvärinen & Vos, 2015; Sohn & Lariscy, 2014).

Positive intention, concern, and commitment all represent value judgments stakeholders make regarding the authenticity of the organization's interest in the issue (Huang, 2008). Stakeholder evaluations of an organization's intentions toward an issue are largely governed by their evaluation of the authenticity of the organization's actions. If a stakeholder believes an organization's intentions authentic when it comes to social responsibility, then they will most likely view the organization's connection to the issue as positive and productive. Authenticity judgements by stakeholders are often made based on whether they believe the organization is being self-serving or genuinely interested in doing good for society (Kim & Lee, 2015). If stakeholders believe the organization's interest in an issue is inauthentic or self-serving, then it does not matter how good the organization's behaviors, it is unlikely to positively influence their judgments about the organization's intentions towards the issue (Lacey, Kennett-Hensel, & Manolis, 2015).

Finally, clear association also matters. If stakeholders believe there is a logical connection between an issue and the organization's core business or mission, then the organization's interest in the issue is more compelling to the stakeholder and can thus change the stakeholder's judgement about the organization, particularly after a crisis emerges (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2015; Coombs & Holladay, 2015; De Bruycker & Walgrave, 2014; Kernisky, 1997; Knight & Greenberg, 2002). Clear association not only influences the judgements stakeholders make about the organization and the issue but broadly speaking influences the organization's credibility to manage issues and risks as they emerge (Heinze, Uhlmann, & Diermeier, 2014; Pang, Begam Binte Abul Hassan, & Chee Yang Chong, 2014; Park & Cameron, 2014).

Outcomes of the relationship between the organization and issues. If we take what we know about blame, severity, competence, commitment, and clear association into account, then we should have a pretty good picture of what frustrates stakeholders. Jin's research (2009, 2010, 2014) clearly indicates that perceptions of the 'controllability of the crisis' is likely to generate stakeholder anger, which is one of the critical reasons for issues management and risk mitigation. The more perceived control that an organization is believed to have the more likely a triggered crisis angers stakeholders because the organization could have potentially prevented the crisis. Thus, the question of an organization's perceived competence is likely to affect stakeholder anger as one indicator of perceived control. Likewise, in these situations we also see a clear indicator of whether stakeholders are angry – they are more likely to blame the organization for the crisis (Jin, 2009; 2010). Therefore, we can think of perceived control as being a combination of blame attribution and competence. If stakeholders believe the organization could reasonably have controlled the situation leading to the crisis and that makes them angry, then the degree to which they feel helpless will only intensify the situation. Think about it this way – it is bad enough knowing that we cannot do anything about the situation but knowing the situation could have been avoided if those who had the ability to change it just would drive most people to the point of frustration (to put it mildly). Thus, in considering factors that produce anger in a crisis context, the stakeholder relational model provides a framework for considering both antecedent and indicators of emotion together to more fully understand the complex dynamics of stakeholder relationships with organizations, issues, and crises (Diers, 2012).

As such, knowing stakeholder attitudes about how organizations are connected to issues and risks helps predict their reaction to the organization when it tries to manage emergent issues or triggered crises. For example, stakeholder prior experiences within an industry or with a particular issue can potentially create a 'negative communication dynamic', suggesting that two of the critical indicators of stakeholder anger could be negative word-of-mouth (nWOM) (Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Kim, 2014; McDonald & Cokley, 2013; Pace, Balboni, & Gistri, 2014; Yin, Feng, & Wang, 2015) as well as a risk that the stakeholder will not want to engage with the organization (ranging from purchase intention to donation, to following guidance the organization provides to keep stakeholders safe) (Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Ping, et al., 2015; Sellnow et al., 2015; Yum & Jeong, 2014). All of this makes it more difficult for the organization to solve the problem once a crisis emerges. We see the greatest evidence of this with social issues and problems where people fundamentally do not believe governments on topics like climate change, security, social justice, or vaccination all because people do not trust the connection between the government and controversial issues.

The Relationship Between Stakeholders and Issues

Not surprisingly, research and practice connected to issues, risk, and crisis management is very diverse – not only because the types of crises that we try to understand are global and diverse but also because the field is still developing. In reviewing the broad body of journal articles published on crisis communication from 1953 to 2015 (Diers-Lawson, 2017a), one of the core findings is that the stakeholder relationship to issues is fundamentally ignored in most crisis communication research. This is part of the reason why shifting the field's focus to define crisis communication as beginning with issues and risk management is essential.

At the same time as the stakeholder experience with risk, issues, and crisis is often ignored by focusing on organizational outcomes, issues that stakeholders are confronting can be incredibly emotional and result in a lot of emotionally charged communication (van der Meer

& Verhoeven, 2014). Though our understanding of the role that emotion plays in risk and crisis is still developing, there is an increasing recognition that emotional reactions affect the outcomes of crises (Hajibaba, Gretzel, Leisch, & Dolnicar, 2015). For example, research has demonstrated that beliefs about stakeholders' susceptibility to risk, efficacy to avoid risk, uncertainty regarding the risk or its outcomes, and severity substantially affects stakeholder emotions and decision-making about issues and organizations predicting how angry they were likely to be both about the issue and the organization at the onset of a crisis (Diers-Lawson, 2017b; Jin, Liu, Anagondahalli, & Austin, 2014; McDonald & Cokley, 2013; Mou & Lin, 2014). Thus, from a risk or crisis management perspective, the more intensely that stakeholders feel connected to issues, the more likely those issues are going to trigger the stakeholders to act in less predictable ways. However, to apply the framework ahead of crises provides better intelligence regarding issue management and risk mitigation. But in order to do that, we must better understand the factors influencing strong emotional reactions to crisis.

Factors influencing strong emotional reactions to crises. In a global environment there are several individual factors identified in different studies as influencing emotional reactions to crises. One important study of individual factors within the tourism industry focused on 'crisis resistant tourists' – that is those people whose attitudes and planned behaviors were less likely to be affected by emerging crises. Hajibaba, et al., (2015) found that people who were more likely to take risks, travel more, were actively involved in travel planning, were younger, were interested in a number of other activities, and had a number of personal and lifestyle preferences were all less likely to perceive substantial risk from individual crises. This suggests that we must assume that individual factors like gender, age, income, and experience with the crisis issue, and attitudes about the crisis issue are likely to influence emotional reactions to crises.

In addition, there is increasing evidence to suggest that media use is likely to influence peoples' reactions to crises and so we must better understand how traditional and social media use – both reading and posting – influence emotional reactions to crises (Brummette & Sisco, 2015; Brynielsson, Johansson, Jonsson, & Westling, 2014; Kim & Cameron, 2011; Pace, Balboni, & Gistri, 2014; Utz, Schultz, & Glocka, 2013; Yin, Feng, & Wang, 2015). Based on the previous research, we should expect that there is a connection between use, posting, and strong emotions. In fact, McDonald and Cokley's (2013) taxonomy of emotional reactions to expect online found that there were two key ways to classify reactions – those that were problem-focused and those that were emotional focused. They found several online behaviors indicating direct action taken against the 'offending' organization ranging from different word-of-mouth (WOM) behaviors to boycotts, reduced product usage, and buying alternative brands. As such, these findings suggest that there are many individual factors that help us to understand and predict emotion in reactions to risks and issues.

Finally, understanding the impact of culture on stakeholder reactions to issues is vital if we are to make reliable evaluations and predictions about issue management to inform risk and crisis communication strategy. For example, many the indicators of an organization's reputation like its trustworthiness (Sohn & Lariscy, 2014), values (Austin, Liu, & Jin, 2014; Falkheimer & Heide, 2015) or even brand appeal (Brown, Brown, & Billings, 2015), represent stakeholder judgments rooted in culture and similar enduring identities (Scollon, Diener, Oishi, & Biswas-Diener, 2004) as well as existing attitudinal constructs like uncertainty avoidance (Coombs, 2008; Siew-Yoong Low, Varughese, & Pang, 2011). Understanding cultural identities is important because it gives people the sense of belonging, provides guidelines for behavior, and a sense of morality or identity (Moran, Abramson, &

Moran, 2014, 2014). Identities can range from national, social, cultural, religious, and/or political identities and often influence a host of attitudes including our understanding of situations as well as our belief that we can control our surroundings (Ajzen, 2005; Bandura, 1986; Hajibaba et al., 2015; Ratten & Ratten, 2007; Yum & Jeong, 2014).

Today, many if not most issues and risks have cultural components – no matter whether we are discussing challenges within countries (Olofsson, 2007) or we are discussing global crises (Gurman & Ellenberger, 2015). For example, increasing globalization poses unique challenges for practitioners as many do not feel prepared to handle multicultural issues or adapt their communication strategies across different cultures (de Fatima Oliveira, 2013). In fact, in Zhao's (2014) discussion of crisis communication in a global context, she suggests that nationalist, statist, classist, and often even cultural analyses are often too static rather than relational and dynamic. She argues that many analyses assume that stakeholders have no agency to respond to their own situations and that organizations are not subject to various social forces that often push them to make changes. Instead, she suggests that there are always interrelationships between organizations, different stakeholders, and authorities that influence crisis dynamics and these are often underdeveloped in research and theory. For example, there have also been a number of examples of multinational organizations that have failed to effectively respond to risks and crises in an international environment because they have chosen strategies that were culturally 'tone deaf' (An, Park, Cho, & Berger, 2010). An, et al. (2010) point to some of the cultural differences between the US and South Korea and problems in communicating appropriately in individualist versus collectivist cultures. Unfortunately, much of issues, risk, and crisis communication theory is based on a Western-oriented paradigm with little reference to its cross-cultural aspects (Haruta & Hallahan, 2009). However, that problem has begun to be meaningfully addressed in research and practice. In recent years there has been an increasing recognition the importance of national identity in crisis communication (Chen, 2009; Molleda, Connolly-Ahern, & Quinn, 2005; Rovisco, 2010). However, that is not the only way to define and describe the impact that culture can have on stakeholder reactions to crises.

Globally, one of the most important cultural factors influencing issues, risk, and conflict is religion (An et al., 2010; Goby & Nickerson, 2015; Haruta & Hallahan, 2003; Jindal, et al., 2015; Palmer-Silveira & Ruiz-Garrido, 2014; Taylor, 2000). There is a strong body of research suggesting that religion or religiosity – which is an indicator of how much religious identifications influence decision-making – influences people's attitudes and perceptions (Moran, et al., 2014; Ursanu, 2012). Additionally, Croucher's (2013) research indicates that conflict management, a construct related to crises, is influenced by religion as well. Though this is an emergent area for issues and crisis research, case studies indicate that stakeholders are likely to react more negatively when crises or their related issues violate the religious beliefs of stakeholders (Al-Hyari, 2012) research indicates that conflict management, a construct related to crises, is influenced by religion as well (Jaques, 2015).

Further, depending on the nature of the issue or risk, understanding cultural values applying common cultural dimensions like individualism, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, masculinity, and ethical ideology (Leonidou, Leonidou, & Kvasova, 2013) or other values-based identifies like political identities (Zeri, 2014) will be necessary if we are to fully understand stakeholder attitudes about issues and organizations. Though challenging, for issues and risk management, the good news is that multinational organizations may even be able to avoid or manage crises by communicating more effectively with local populations based on what is important to them (Hoffmann, Röttger, Ingenhoff, & Hamidati, 2015; Taylor, 2000).

The Relationship Between Stakeholders and Organizations

Finally, we consider the relationship between the organization and the stakeholder. Stakeholders' attitudes towards organizations, especially those in crisis, has been studied more than any other relationship in the field of crisis communication (Diers, 2012). Often treated as an outcome of a crisis, these judgments have been assessed across multiple fields of study from communication and marketing to industry-specific studies in such different areas like health care and tourism. If researchers and practitioners want to understand this relationship, they should directly analyze factors like an organization's reputation (Benoit, 1995; Carroll, 2009). There is considerable work in public relations that explores topics like the influence of a favorable pre-crisis reputation in protecting an organization's reputation during and after a crisis (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2015), the role of the media and other external groups in influencing an organization's reputation during crises (Einwiller, Carroll, & Korn, 2010), and the growing influence of social media on an organization's reputation in the context of crises (Brown & Billings, 2013; Ott & Theunissen, 2015; Utz, Schultz, & Glocka, 2013) to name just a few ways that reputation influences the stakeholder evaluations of organizations.

However, there other factors that influence the relationship like stakeholders' perceived knowledge of the organization because it not only changes under different circumstances but is influenced by stakeholder perceptions of risks (Diers, 2012). Additionally, when stakeholders form attitudes towards organizations, they often invoke more personal feelings about organizations, like decisions about whether the organization is trustworthy (Freberg & Palenchar, 2013), if they believe the organization has values that are congruent to their own (Koerber, 2014), whether they feel the relationship itself is satisfactory (Ki & Brown, 2013), or even whether the stakeholders feel loyalty to the organization (Helm & Tolsdorf, 2013). All of this influences not only how the stakeholder feels about the organization but also the realistic possibility that the organization can effectively manage risks and issues with different stakeholder groups. We should, therefore, better understand some of the critical building blocks for the relationship between organizations and stakeholders: reputation, trustworthiness, value congruence, and identification.

Reputation. Reputation represents stakeholder perceptions of how an organization has behaved across its functional domains or how well it treats its stakeholders (Coombs, 2007). There is no shortage of studies highlighting the importance of a good reputation before a crisis (Helm & Tolsdorf, 2013; Kim, 2014). But what makes for a good reputation? As it turns out, previous research identifies five factors that directly influence an organization's reputation:

1. Its overall appeal to stakeholders (Avraham, 2015; Brown, Brown, & Billings, 2015; Folkes & Karmins, 1999; Huber, Vollhardt, Matthes, & Vogel, 2010). Appeal is related to the degree to which the organization and/or its products, services, or advocacy is likeable or desirable.
2. The degree to which the organization is viewed as socially responsible, which not only includes authentic 'corporate social responsibility' initiatives, but also broader evaluations of its ethical behavior (Balmer, Blombäck, & Scandelius, 2013; Bowen &

Zheng, 2015; Coombs & Holladay, 2015; Lacey, et al., 2015; Shanahan & Seele, 2015).
3. An evaluation of the quality of the organization's values and whether those values are evidenced in the organization's actions (Austin, Liu, & Jin, 2014; Falkheimer & Heide, 2015; Ott & Theunissen, 2015).
4. Whether the organization itself is viewed as a credible source of information – especially about the crisis (Heinze, Uhlmann, & Diermeier, 2014; Pang, Begam Binte Abul Hassan, & Chee Yang Chong, 2014; Park & Cameron, 2014).
5. Whether stakeholders believe it can handle emergent problems (Hargis & Watt, 2010)

In short, an organization's reputation represents a judgment that stakeholders make about what they can expect from the organization.

Trustworthiness. Underlying reputation and this process of assessing reputational threat is a more fundamental concept – an organization's trustworthiness (Mal, Davies, & Diers-Lawson, 2018; Trettin & Musham, 2000). Shockley-Zalabeck, Morreale, and Hackman (2010) describes trust in an organization broadly as evaluations of its positive expectations about the intent and behaviours of the organization. Yet, previous research demonstrates that different types of issues create different risks in the relationship between the stakeholder and the organization including both a loss of reputation and trust. For example, Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, and Dirks (2004) found that violations of integrity are more damaging than violations of competence because the integrity violation points to a moral failure versus a personnel or procedural failure. Kramer and Lewicki (2010) emphasize that violations of trust are often based in unmet expectations such as broken promises, the inability to perform, or behaviours that are misaligned with core values.

Value congruence. As we discuss trustworthiness, value congruence clearly emerges as a vital factor as well. Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) argue that to be trusted, an organization's stakeholders must believe the organization's values are aligned with their own (Austin & Jin, 2015; Falkheimer & Heide, 2015). Naturally, this is also related to assessments of an organization's social responsibility – an important factor affecting its reputation (Coombs and Holladay, 2015, Kim and Lee, 2015). But value congruence itself represents the degree to which organizations see a similarity between their own values and the values demonstrated by the organization (Koerber, 2014). This is why an organization's culture and its social responsibility initiatives should be considered as contributing to an organization's crisis capacity because as long as the organization's behaviour is well-aligned with the values that its stakeholders hold, then the organization has more freedom and flexibility to manage issues and risks that emerge without threatening its relationship to its stakeholders.

Value congruence also helps to explain why organizations can experience crises but seemingly few negative effects of those crises – if the organization's response is aligned with the stakeholder's values, then the crisis does not threaten the relationship. For example, several years ago Bayer aspirin had a short-lived campaign in the United States targeting women who have backpain as part of its broader campaign for 'all of life's little pains'. To try to build the campaign's narrative, Bayer explained that it is natural for mothers to experience backpain and was evidenced by picking up children, doing household chores and so on. They tried to inject a bit of humor into the campaign by using a double-entendre to refer to 'all of life's little pains' as being both the backpain and the toddlers depicted in the commercial. Several hundred moms signed a letter of complaint to the company suggesting they were offended at the suggestion their child could be pains – apparently, they were unmoved by the humor. Instead of dismissing their complaint, the company issued a personal apology to each of the signatories and pulled the campaign. Though this cost them money, the same moms' group paid them back with praise and appreciation of the company's sensitivity to their concerns. In this way, what Bayer successfully communicated to this group and to the broader American public was that the company genuinely cared about the same things their consumers did and even if it cost them money, they would protect their consumers interests. In short, their management of the issue demonstrated strong value congruence and instead of damaging the relationship, improved it.

Identification. When stakeholders view their relationship with an organization as satisfactory (Ki & Brown, 2013) they will often feel loyal to the organization (Helm & Tolmsdorf, 2013). This is akin the concept of identification. Though identification is usually framed in terms of how members of an organization feel about it, in a modern and social media context, it is just as applicable to other stakeholders as well. Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994) explored the self-organization connection finding that no matter the stakeholder – internal or external – having a positive image led to greater stakeholder attachment to the organization. Organizational identification focuses on how attached stakeholders are to the organization. Attachment forms when the stakeholder connects their own self-concept (e.g., values) with the organization. This produces perceptions of mutual connectedness, loyalty, and satisfaction with the organization.

This grounds an identification continuum where at its most positive stakeholders see themselves cooperating with the organization in the range of ways to co-create the value of the organization in the public sphere (Chandler & Lusch, 2015; Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). Alternatively, if the identification is negative, stakeholders may see themselves as adversaries, actively working against the brand (Swaminathan, Page, & Gurhan-Canli, 2007). In managing risks and issues one challenge is to ensure that stakeholders view their relationship to the organization as cooperative and not adversarial.

Using SRM as a Diagnostic Tool to Guide Strategic Decision-Making

While I like to think of the stakeholder relationship model as a love triangle focusing on two-way relationships between stakeholders, issues, and the organization, if we are trying to understand the factors that build up stakeholder expectations for its relationship with an organization, we can also view the SRM as a recursive process as well. Figure 5 demonstrates what I mean. If we start on the left with the stakeholder, then we can better understand when risks and issues emerge, stakeholders' existing attitudes, experience with the organization, perceptions of susceptibility, efficacy, and reaction to the issue or risk provide a context for how they react to the risk. Based on their existing attitudes, stakeholders make judgements about the issue and the organization's relationship to that issue in the middle box assessing blame, evaluating the severity of the crisis, and then judging the organization's position on the crisis. Those attitudes then inform their judgements about the organization and their relationship to the organization in the final box on the right. That, then loops around to influence future stakeholder attitudes.

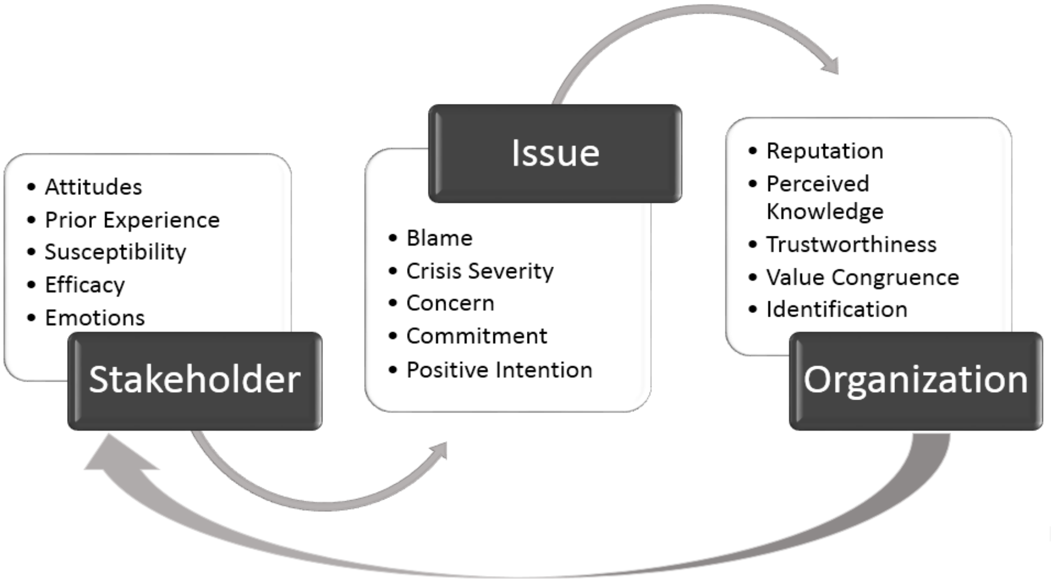

FIGURE 5 THINKING ABOUT THE SRM AS A RECURSIVE PROCESS

When crises happen, we know that they can affect stakeholder's attitudes about issues and organizations, but the question is what happens as a result of changed stakeholder attitudes? Additionally, the link between stakeholder evaluations of organizations and strategic decision-making by organizations has been discussed in three ways. First, the extent to which organizations are able to manage stakeholder 'activism' on issues that matter to stakeholders reflects an acknowledgement that evaluations of stakeholders' actions regarding organizations has an economic component (Jin & Drozdenko, 2010; Shepard, Betz, & O'Connell, 1997). For example, in the United States, people criticize companies like Wal-Mart based on negative evaluations of the company's social responsibility; however, many cannot afford to shop elsewhere, so no matter what some may think of Wal-Mart and other discount retailers, they may have little economic choice other than to shop at these types of stories. Yet, there will be other consumers who avoid shopping at Wal-Mart because they are economically able to use different alternatives. Therefore, organizations that are likely to be successful consider the realistic options that their stakeholders have in making strategic decisions. Second, a study by Waddock and Graves (1997) demonstrated that an organization's management success was linked to its performance in managing perceptions of the quality of its innovations or actions with critical stakeholders — specifically in this case the owners, employees, customers, and surrounding community. Third an organization's success is also contingent upon its ability to build trust with its stakeholders and act ethically (Nielsen & Bartunek, 1996; Valentini, 2015).

Case Application: The Potential for IndyRef2 in Scotland

If we consider both the SRM as a predictive tool along with the conditions likely to affect strategic decision-making by stakeholders, then British politics provides an interesting case for applying the SRM. There are many countries that have regions that are autonomous or semi-autonomous and are interested in being independent nations such as the Catalan region of Spain, the Flemish or Walloons in Belgium, or the French Basque community. However, none have the political legitimacy at this point as the Scottish independence movement in the United Kingdom. However, with referenda on the question in 1979 and 2014, Scotland has remained part of the United Kingdom. It would have seemed that the issue of Scottish independence would have been relatively settled as of the result of the failed independence referendum in 2014. However, three problems remained for the British government – problems with the relationship between the British government and Scottish people, changing attitudes amongst Scottish voters, and the issue of Brexit.

Relationship between Scots and the British government. The first is a trust deficit between the British government and many in Scotland. This was evidenced by the continuing strength of support for the Scottish National Party (SNP) both in the Scottish parliament as well as Westminster in the general elections in 2015, 2017, and 2019 as well as Scottish parliamentary election in 2016 and the obliteration of the Labour party in Scotland. For nearly 50 years, Scotland was a strong Labour vote since then that has shifted to the SNP. Connected to the trust deficit between the Scots and British government are tensions about common values and identification. This suggests the relationship between the Scottish people and British government is strained with consistent polling results (see Figure 6) showing that the British government is not trusted to act in Scotland’s long-term interests (Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, 2017).

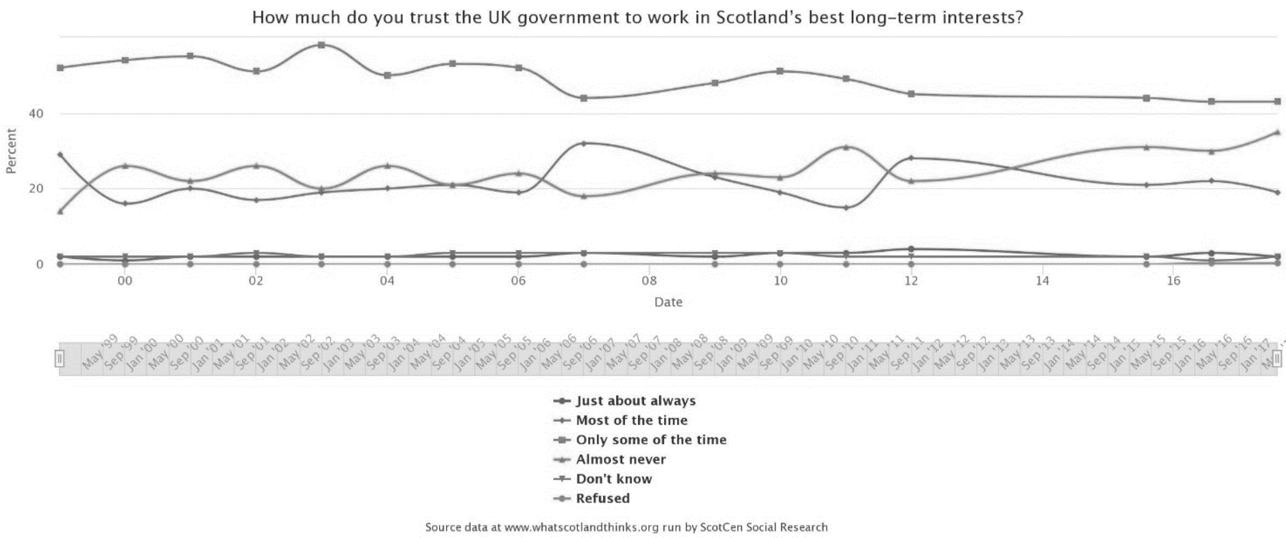

FIGURE 6 THE SCOTTISH TRUST DEFICIT IN THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT

Scottish attitudes towards Scottish Independence. During the 2014 independence referendum in Scotland attitudes towards independence were relatively evenly split, but efficacy arguments for an independent Scotland were and remain as one of the largest obstacles for the Scottish electorate to support independence. Dominant media narratives focusing on Scotland's viability as an independent nation related to the currency the country would adopt, its potential membership in the EU, its financial solvency, and concerns about the security of pensions were ultimately cited as reasons many did not support independence; however, in recent months those efficacy questions and concerns seem to be less relevant or are being answered as the polling suggests that the gap between support for independence and remaining in the UK have narrowed even more (Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, 2019). In part, there are emerging stronger and better responses from the SNP as well as independence supporters critically analyzing the claims about Scotland's natural resources, its economy, the comparatively stronger performance across social services and other devolved powers in Scotland compared to the rest of the UK, and more supportive statements from the EU regarding Scotland's potential membership as an independent nation. I would argue that if this advocacy is successful in addressing the efficacy deficit that exists, then Scotland would be much more likely to vote for a independence in a second (technically third) referendum; however, the polling data suggests that argument has not yet been won.

Brexit and Scottish independence. The final problem that the British government has with regards to the so-called 'IndyRef2' question is Brexit itself. Scotland (along with Northern Ireland) voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU during the 2016 British Brexit vote. The Brexit issue is at the core of the SNP argument for a second independence referendum stating that the material conditions for Scotland have changed, thus warranting another independence referendum. At this point, while the British government patently refuses to consider 'allowing' another independence referendum, both the differences in the Brexit vote and the British government's seemingly adversarial position on even asking the question creates the conditions to further aggravate the relationship between Scottish voters and the British government.

Herein is where we see both the recursive and predictive natures of the SRM at play – as the tensions in the United Kingdom seemingly escalate with regard to the viability of the union, we can see missed opportunities for the British government to improve its relationship with Scottish voters and even with the SNP, we can see how the contemporary history of experience informs Scottish attitudes, and we can see how the issues surrounding independence then continually affect the relationships. On both the British and Scottish political sides, there are opportunities for interventions to achieve their objectives and manage their relationship with the Scottish people based on the recursive process and the outcome of this crisis will depend on who is best able to manage the attitudes, issues, and complex relationship with the Scottish electorate.

Throughout the chapter I have argued, the extent to which an organization is successful in managing issues and risk mitigation is a likely indicator of its success in managing stakeholder relationships (Bendheim, Waddock, & Graves, 1998; Brown & White, 2010; Diers-Lawson, 2017b; Sellnow & Brand, 2001). Moreover, the relationships among external stakeholders can represent a measure of that organization's strengths and weaknesses as they are linked to the relationships between an organization's social, ethical, and financial performances – known as the triple bottom line (Barnett, 2019; Graafland & Smid, 2019). Thus, one of the reasons to manage stakeholder relationships is so that organizations can be perceived as engaging their social responsibilities (Bendheim et al., 1998). For this reason, I argue that SRM is a diagnostic and predictive tool for organizations to use to improve their decision-making and strategy for managing issues, reducing risk, and improving the likelihood of successful crisis response in the event a crisis is triggered.

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