



Booklet on Crisis Communication

By

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Introduction

The word “crisis”, from the Greek “Krizis”, describes a judgment, decision, or crossroads after which events can unfold in two significantly different directions. In other words, a crisis is not simply an event, but the impacts of that event. In an organization, these impacts affect operations and the future. An organization can either overcome a crisis, firmly standing its ground and continuing forward with new lessons learned, or it will be permanently damaged by a crisis and perhaps even cease to exist.

This booklet describes the importance of crisis communication and provides recommendations on crisis communication management, to reduce the negative impacts of crisis on organizations and share lessons learned to improve future work.

It is important to prepare before crises occurs, so that guidelines are in place when they do. It is also useful to understand the kinds of lessons that can be learned when your organization faces unfortunate outcomes. These are just some of the topics covered in this booklet – which can serve as a foundation and guide in drafting independent crisis communication plans, and in implementing them.

During crisis, it is important to comply with strict standards while also remaining open and constantly listening to target groups and the public, so that communication can be adapted to newly arising circumstances. This calls for flexibility, awareness, and knowledge.

This booklet aims to provide clear guidance on effective communication in crisis situations, which requires:

- good preparation;
- a crisis plan;
- consistent communications; and
- transparent media relations.

While it may not be possible to prevent the organizational impacts of a crisis such as a cyber event, one thing that can be controlled is how well organizations are prepared to communicate in such a scenario, and how well they respond to it.

1. Crisis and crisis communication

What is a crisis, and what is a crisis situation?

| Crisis | Crisis situation |
|--|---|
| <i>An unplanned and undesired process that lasts for a specific amount of time and can be influenced only partially.</i> | <i>A significant event with potentially negative consequences that impacts an organization, company or industry, as well as its target public, products, services, or goodwill.</i> |

1.1. The publicity of crises

Crisis communication relates to the functioning of an organization or institution in crisis situations. Crises begin outside of the control of an organization, but can significantly impact their reputation and that of their main decision makers. Yet, importantly, it is never possible to hide crises from the public and from stakeholders. In fact, when it comes to crisis, only one thing is certain: Everything is discovered, sooner or later.

Thus, serious organizations develop a crisis plan that addresses the most likely incidents or crisis situations they may confront, and prioritizes operational actions in such an event. A team responsible for managing crisis within the organization is acquainted with the plan in detail. The outcome of an unfortunate event and the amount of ensuing substantive and non-substantive damage depends on the capacity and reaction speed of this crisis team.

In addition to expediency and competence, a crisis response is also contingent on the degree to which communication channels are open, and the clarity or unambiguity of activities.

1.2. Reputation

There is no way around the fact that crises impact the reputation of an organization, precisely because every crisis inevitably becomes public. Reputations built humbly and responsibly over time can be upended in an instant, not unlike a balloon that finally assumes its full form and size only to burst into hundreds of pieces at the prick of a needle.

When crisis occurs, there are many factors that influence decisions about which information should be shared and with whom, including damage assessments, target groups, compliance with standing regulations, fulfilment of requests for information, and financial consequences. How and when information is shared with the public, and the ways a situation is confronted from a communications perspective, will influence the long-term reputation impacts of crisis on an organization. This must be considered when making decisions during crisis situations.

2. The golden period before crisis occurs

Crises disrupt a sense of continuity and lead to important decision-making under stress and time constraints, in an effort to return to “normal” functioning without delay.

Indeed, preparations for crisis situations are directed at achieving the regular functioning of an organization as quickly as possible after crisis occurs, and expeditiously repairing any damage to citizens/users, companies, or state institutions.

2.1. Risk assessment

No organization can prevent all crises, as it is simply impossible to eliminate every threat or risk. Thus, crisis preparation is key. Drafting a crisis communication plan, training a crisis management team, and regularly training employees in crisis communication constitute a solid base for preparations. An organization that is prepared for crisis and has a well-conceived plan has more than half the work done when a crisis eventually arises.

Good preparations also involve risk assessments, which should include a brief analysis of traditional and online media with an eye for topics and comments that contain crisis potential. Such analysis can identify potential crises and problems an organization may not have considered as a risk, can help determine the stakeholders/parties who could potentially be impacted by a crisis, and informs the creation of likely scenarios for inclusion in a crisis communication plan.

2.2. Trainings and exercises

It is never ideal to discover as a crisis unfolds that an organization is unprepared to face it. An organization's management must be trained to speak in front of media and in crisis communication scenarios. If they are not fully equipped to do so, any lack of training in the necessary crisis communication skills should be prioritized to take place before a crisis occurs. Training should also entail educating employees in standing procedures (and more), as crisis periods tend to reveal the strength or weakness of an organization, and how well it is organized.

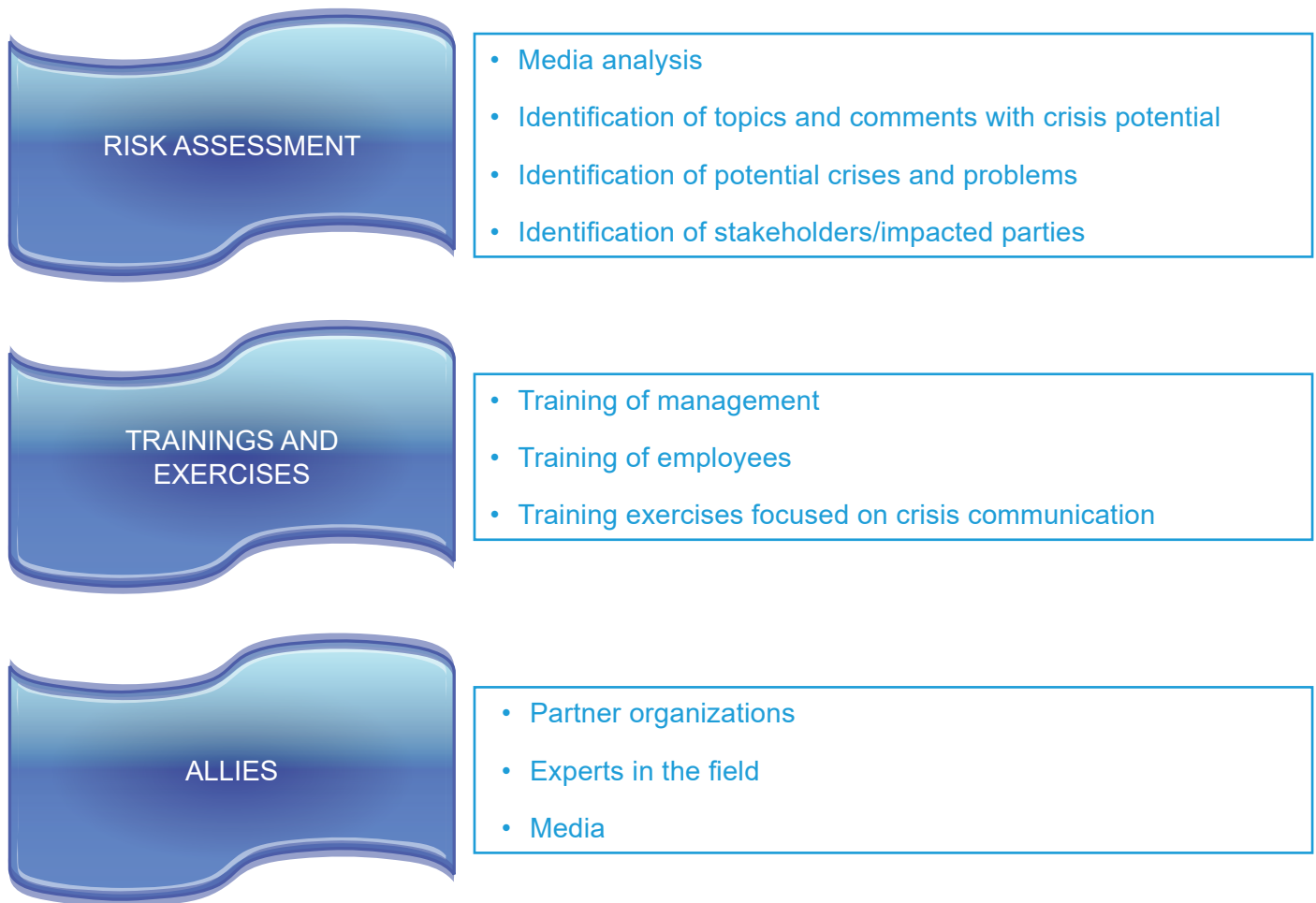
Conducting regular crisis training exercises is the best way to increase organizational readiness to successfully react to challenges that emerge in a crisis situation. This allows a crisis response plan and crisis communication plan to be tested before crisis, so that vulnerabilities can be identified and improved. Trainings also build the team spirit within an organization, fostering greater mutual confidence and thereby improving the capacity of that organization to successfully face a crisis, to lead with communication, and to communicate with one voice.

To test the crisis scenarios an organization may face, exercises should be organized and implemented within the organization. But it can also be useful and desirable, particularly when it comes to public speaking elements of crisis response, to engage outside experts who may bring a different outlook on crisis or crisis communication. For example, it may be helpful to occasionally engage journalists, PR experts, psychologists, and other professionals in training exercises.

2.3. Allies during crisis

The period before a crisis is also a good time to establish strong relations with organizations and individuals that may serve as potential allies during crisis. In the context of a cyber crisis specifically, this would include experts in the field, software companies, university professors, and representatives of various institutions, state bodies, and media. These individuals and organizations can play a key role in influencing public trust in an organization, and organizations should therefore spare no expense in time or effort to develop good relations with would-be future allies.

Even if the crisis surprises you, your reaction should not.



2.4. Crisis communication planning

It is not uncommon for organizations to resist crisis communication planning, or to worry superstitiously that doing so may actually invoke a crisis. Yet, it is clear that crisis communication planning represents an opportunity for an organization to prepare for the best possible response to crisis, to reduce its impact.

A robust **crisis communication plan** includes:

1. Scenarios of possible crises

Based on a risk assessment, scenarios of possible crisis situations and their consequences should be developed. Planners should let their imaginations run wild, while keeping in mind that certain scenarios may not result in only a single unfortunate outcome. Crises can have several consecutive impacts, with various consequences, and the more thought that is invested in developing crisis scenarios, the better employees will be prepared in the case something really takes place.

2. Phonebook/Directory

This basic tool can be essential in a crisis, and should contain the telephone numbers (business and private)

and home addresses of every member of an organization's crisis communication team. Murphy's Law seems almost omnipresent in crises, so it is wise to cover all bases. In addition to members of the crisis team, this phonebook/directory should also include any other useful contacts – potential allies, analysts, opponents, and more. Care must be taken that this data is maintained in compliance with GDPR rules.

Notably, different individuals or organizations may be considered essential in different crisis scenarios. For example, in a telecommunications crisis, contacts with persons in fixed or mobile telephony are important; but in the case of a banking sector crisis, representatives of banks or consumer protection representatives become key contacts. This should be considered when compiling contact information in an organization's crisis communication phonebook/directory.

3. List of media contacts

It is important to keep a running list of journalists and their editorial offices, with phone numbers, email addresses, and social media contact information. As journalists frequently move among media outlets, this list must be regularly updated. Care must be taken that this data is maintained in compliance with GDPR rules.

4. Key messages

General messaging about the organization should be prepared in advance of crisis and customized for various potential crises situation. It is advisable to create at least one key message for each crisis scenario.

5. List of target groups

A list of general target groups of an organization should also be developed, specifically those likely to be impacted in the case of the crisis scenarios defined in the plan.

6. Key data on the organization

Relevant data on the organization should be collected, so that it can be easily integrated into crisis communications. This includes the results of organizational operations (i.e., the work of the organization), broader contributions of the organization, preventive trainings that have been offered in crisis risk mitigation, information about public awareness campaigns, cooperation with state institutions, etc.

7. Draft of initial statement meant for media

A general press and social media release should be drafted for use in a crisis situation. It should contain basic information that can be adapted to any scenario when combined with details about a specific crisis.

8. Draft of possible questions by journalists, the expert public, and superiors; and answers

It is advisable to prepare potential questions and answers ahead of a crisis, and to develop these in detail for every scenario presented in the plan. Questions should be realistic and specific, but also challenging and provocative. In drafting questions and answers, it is wise to consider the most current news about cyber and other crises, globally and at home, as this will shed light on the questions and concerns most prevalent among media and experts.

9. Procedures and parameters

Parts of laws, by-laws, and procedures that affect crisis communication in any organization should be outlined. For example, the objective of data confidentiality or national or economic security protections may lead an organization to hold back certain details in crisis communications related to processes and impacts. This will frequently fail to satisfy journalists or the public, but when such decisions are supported by legal provisions or regulations, an attitude of secrecy is more credible.

10. Checklist of important steps and recommendations

Panic spreads easily during crisis, and crisis communication can begin to represent a liability for an organization if employees have no prior exposure to it. Thus, a short checklist of essential crisis communication elements and processes should be created by any organization, to meet its specific needs. For example:

1. Establish/activate a crisis communication team
2. Assess the gravity of the given crisis and choose a response strategy
3. Decide on key messaging
4. Prepare and implement a crisis communication plan specific to the scenario at hand
5. Explain the situation to relevant stakeholders
6. Centralize information and prevent uncontrolled leaking
7. Communicate understanding regarding the interests of target groups impacted by the crisis
8. Provide a constant flow of information but avoid debates in the public space (such as on social media, in guest appearances, etc.)
9. Be flexible and adaptable
10. Think long-term

Content of a Crisis Communication Plan

| | |
|--|--|
| 1. Scenarios of possible crises | Describe scenarios and their consequences |
| 2. Phonebook/Directory | Centralize the contact information of crisis team members, potential allies, analysts, opponents, and others |
| 3. List of media contacts | Keep an updated list of the phone numbers, email addresses, and social media accounts of journalists and other media |
| 4. Key messages | Prepare general messaging that can be applied in every crisis situation |
| 5. List of target groups | Identify target groups of the organization, especially those that are likely to be impacted by a given crisis |
| 6. Key data on the organization | Collect relevant data, such as: results of the organization's work, broader contributions of the organization, preventive trainings offered to mitigate risks from crisis, information on public awareness campaigns, past cooperation with state institutions, etc. |
| 7. Draft initial media statement | Prepare draft press releases and social media posts, and identify potential speakers at press conferences |
| 8. Draft questions from journalists, the public, and superiors | Prepare draft questions (and answers) for every crisis scenario presented in the plan |
| 9. Procedures and parameters | Outline relevant parts of laws, by-laws, and procedures that may be useful in crisis communications |
| 10. Checklist | <p>Prepare a checklist of necessary steps to take in a crisis.</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Activate crisis communication team <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Perform situation assessment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Define strategy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Prepare crisis scenario plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Inform relevant actors and stakeholders <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Protect against uncontrolled leaks of information <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Establish a continuous information flow to all relevant stakeholders |

Some examples of potential questions an organization may face from media in the case of a cyber crisis are listed below. Of course, context-specific answers depend on the scenario, but this list can be useful in preparing before a crisis.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS BY JOURNALISTS

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How serious is the threat? • How much damage can it cause? • Is it global/national/local in scope? • Which systems are vulnerable or impacted? • How did this happen? • How can you prevent this from happening again? • How can you fix this? • How many complaints have been received? • How much has been reported in damages? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does this attack compare to other attacks? • What is the estimated cost? • How quickly can this spread, or how widespread is it? • Can the attacker be traced? • Where can people go for help? • What resources are available? |
|---|---|

Questions that can help crisis response teams define their approach to a crisis situation include:

QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN DEFINING THE STRATEGY

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the nature of the crisis? • Does the organization have bigger problems? • What is the worst-case scenario? • What are the predictable time frames? • What is really happening? • Can allies be involved? • Who are all the relevant actors? • Can the focus be moved? • Can the crisis be “limited”? |
|--|

A crisis communication plan should not be overly rigid, detailed, or long. No one has time to read a lengthy document in the midst of a crisis. Thus, plans offering clarity and brevity, while also providing flexibility, are most useful.

Effective crisis communication demands efficiency and speed. Thus, an organization's crisis communication plan should be revised regularly by employees charged with public relations. Revisions should not be undertaken too often, however. For example, it is advisable to inform managers and crisis team members of the details of a new plan, or at least its amendments and procedures, which could reasonably be achieved once a year. Certain elements of the plan must be updated regularly anyway, such as the contact information for an organization's management and other important persons (in the phonebook/directory), and the list of media contacts.

3. Communication during crisis

It is very important for an entire organization to act as one during a crisis, which requires that every team member clearly understands their competences and obligations. It becomes clear in a crisis if an organization is weak and lacks cohesion, as this leads to things like uncontrolled leaks of information and inconsistent messaging from different actors on the crisis communication team. A united and uniform approach to communication is developed and strengthened only through transparency with employees and an emphasis on complying with procedures and remaining focused on individual responsibilities.

What to do when a crisis occurs

All of the steps mentioned above should ideally be taken before an organization ever faces a crisis, but their importance rises further once a crisis occurs. At that point, time is short for analyzing, researching, and deciding on goals or approaches.

When faced with a crisis:

1. gather the crisis communication team,
2. establish a deadline for gathering facts related to the crisis situation,
3. identify target audiences,
4. define key messaging, and
5. message initial information to the public.

All of this should be done within one, or at most two, hours because: The real crisis is not what happened, but what people believe happened!

Reaction speed is therefore a key element of successful and quality communication during crises. The public draws first impressions very quickly, colouring perceptions of how a crisis is developing or will develop as well as the actions of the organization confronted by the crisis.

At the onset of any crisis, the most important goal is to take control of the situation to avoid the spread of panic among the public. It is very important for responsible organizations to be the first to share information

on the crisis, if possible. Crisis communication should be expedient, consistent, and transparent. It should be developed with the awareness that, in stressful circumstances, neither organizational actors nor the public are likely to be at their maximum capacity for clear communication.

3.1 Communication principles during crises

3.1.1. Expediency and accuracy

Timely communication is key to an effective response to any crisis situation. There is a basic need to inform the public with accurate information and with little delay, and to communicate how they should react or respond. Yet, the capacity of people to receive information in crisis situations can be reduced by as much as 80%, and this poses an additional challenge to crisis communications. Hence, crisis communication teams must focus on developing (and conveying) clear and easily understood messaging.

Speed is one of the fundamental traits of successful communications during crisis due to technological developments that constantly increase the rate at which information spreads. In some cases, this may enable the public to learn about a crisis in the media before hearing about it from the responsible organization. This can contribute to public distrust of the organization and impact reception of further communication.

Simply put, the speed at which the public, and stakeholders, are informed about a crisis determines the speed at which the crisis communication team must react on behalf of the organization.

Still, it is not enough just to be the first to share information. Messaging during crisis situations must be concise, unambiguous, and verified. Additionally, it must contain specific details, as precise as possible, on how the crisis occurred, what has been done in response so far, and what future activities will be undertaken to prevent an escalation of the problem. Importantly, when representatives of an organization are the first to present information on a crisis to the public, they have an opportunity to shape and, to a certain extent, control the narrative. Conversely, if this information comes first from another source, they will have more control of the narrative, and the responsible organization is forced into a reactive position.

However, the need for speed must be accompanied by a warning that, without preparation, a focus on speed can lead a crisis communication team into the risky territory of vagueness and inaccuracy. To avoid these mistakes, it is essential that any information shared or published by the organization is verified.

Practice has shown that, in certain cases, there is some justification for slower response speeds when time is needed to gather and process key information, in order to provide accurate statements and offer educated answers to the public. In such circumstances, the crisis communication team may have to face the media and other target groups with incomplete information, but can truthfully express that the organization lacks necessary information and can emphasize that the information will be made public as soon as possible. It is always better to be transparent about the fact that the cause of a crisis remains under investigation than to provide inaccurate or vague information to the public.

A crisis communication team will need to respond immediately to questions and calls from the media, to avoid an information vacuum that can lead to misinformation, even if they lack a full picture of the scope or details of a crisis.



EXPEDIENCY AND ACCURACY

- Timely communication is an important element of effective crisis response
- When representatives of an organization present the first information about a crisis to the public, they can shape and, to a certain extent, control the narrative
- Messaging during a crisis must be concise, unambiguous, and verified (i.e., any information provided to the public should be double-checked)
- It is always better to speak transparently about the fact that the cause of a crisis is under investigation than to offer inaccurate or vague information to the public

3.1.2. Consistency

Crisis communication also demands consistency. In other words, the same messaging should be emanating from across an organization during a crisis situation, as if a “single voice”.

The media will frequently ask for statements or opinions from employees who are not in public relations or supervisory roles, which makes it crucial that all employees are instructed to refer any questions by journalists to persons charged with media communications. An organization’s internal public must not be put in a position to receive information from the media before they receive it from the organization. Indeed, with proper preparation and communication, an internal public can be of significant assistance during a crisis. And, since it is impossible to prevent employees from informally communicating and transmitting information to other members of the public, such as their family and friends, the most effective defence against the spread of inaccurate information is to ensure employees are educated about any crisis in a timely manner, through internal communication channels.



CONSISTENCY

- The same messaging should come from across an organization, reflecting a “single voice”
- Employees should be informed through internal communication channels, and should be instructed to refer all questions by journalists to persons charged with communication and PR

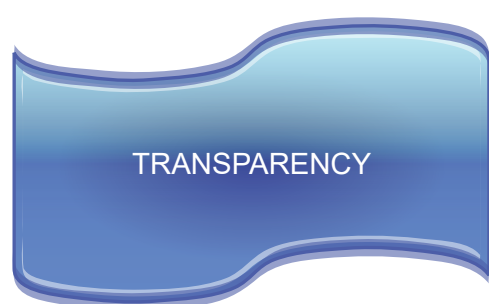
3.1.3. Transparency

Transparency is another vital element in successful crisis communications. This requires an organization to make their crisis communication team available to the media and be ready to share information. It is advisable to engage proactively with the media, keeping in mind that journalists should not be seen as enemies but as partners with a common goal of presenting verified information to the public.

Individuals charged with communicating about a crisis with media should always respond to requests for information by deadlines, and even immediately if the information is readily available.

The rise of new media – such as social media, blogs, and other platforms – has created additional expectations for interaction after a crisis. A crisis communication team must work to continuously cultivate an impression of availability on these platforms, and provide regular answers to the questions and comments of followers and the public.

This is important because, when a crisis occurs, an information vacuum is often created in which it is known that something happened, but it is not known exactly what that thing is. The human need for information, especially in crisis, leads to a tendency to fill empty information spaces with any content, including presumption and rumour. A crisis will be debated in media and among members of the public no matter how much information is made available, so an organization can significantly shape this debate by providing verified information in the moment. Avoiding journalists and the media, switching off phones, and choosing not to answer emails are simply not effective strategies. Moreover, when talking to journalists, a crisis communication team should not rely on answers such as “no comment”, because this creates the impression that something is being hidden.



- Transparency requires availability to media and a readiness to share information
- Persons charged with communicating about a crisis with media should always answer promptly to requests for information
- Questions or comments from followers or the public on social media should be answered with regularity

Crisis communication packages

To visualize the course of crisis communications over a crisis process, it is useful to think in terms of packages of information shared by an organization with the public. The initial communication of information, such as in a press release, is the first package, and should be transmitted as soon as possible. Later packages then contain other, more detailed information, as it becomes available, until they include results of an investigation, the measures undertaken in response, etc. At some point, the moment will arrive when there is nothing new to transmit, and a last package of information will be shared. In this way, an organization presents itself as a credible source of information, and the hunger of media and the public for new information is sated.

3.2. Creating and developing a crisis communication team

3.2.1 The objectives and structure of a crisis communication team

A crisis communication team is tasked with planning, developing, and implementing all crisis communication activities in an organization, aimed at various target groups. As decisions made by the team apply to all

employees, it is usually managed by someone who holds a senior or high-ranking position in the organization, or a person authorized by them.

An organization's crisis communication team comprises individuals who have the knowledge and skills to contribute to the best resolution possible of a crisis situation. If a crisis involves multiple sectors/departments, this may mean that it is important to clearly divide responsibilities and competences, which makes it ideal if a team includes representatives from all sectors/departments. Yet, this can be difficult to implement in practice due to the need to precisely define boundaries when it comes to providing information, to avoid the risk of violating someone else's "airspace", which can lead to even more complications.

The composition of a crisis communication team is defined in a crisis communication plan, and may include, for example: the manager/executive of an organization, individuals charged with public relations, a spokesperson if this is a separate role, and other persons deemed relevant in various scenarios.

It is very important for a crisis communication team to designate one person who will appear in the media on behalf of the organization. In some situations, more than one person can fill this role, but it is vital that messaging to the public is uniform, clear, and consistent.

In fact, the uniform and coordinated functioning of a crisis communication team should allow it, in the shortest possible time, to effectively:

- Gather all available information on the crisis through efficient internal communication.
- Prepare responsible persons or a spokesperson to communicate with the media and target groups.
- Draft/choose one to three key messages, based on the target groups affected.
- Decide on the manner these messages will be transmitted; i.e., via which communication tools (press release, press conference, interviews, etc.).
- Lead further crisis communications until the crisis comes to an end.

A crisis communication team should provide continuing, accurate information on any crisis, constantly communicating with media to prevent or at least reduce the spread of rumours, untruths, and misinformation.

| CRISIS COMMUNICATION TEAM | | |
|---|--|---|
| OBJECTIVE | STRUCTURE | FUNCTIONS |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing constant, accurate information on a crisis situation, and communicating continuously with media to prevent or at least reduce the spread of rumours, untruths, and misinformation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team manager • Relevant team members (for different scenarios) • Persons charged with public relations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gathers all available information on crises • Prepares responsible person(s) for public relations interactions • Drafts/chooses one to three key messages, based on the target groups affected • Decides on the manner these message are transmitted |

3.2.2. Good practices for crisis communication teams

Crisis communication teams should be led by the rule that bad news ought to be published as soon as possible, because one bad news item today is less painful than weeks of rumours and unfounded theories generated as a result of hiding a crisis. Under no circumstances should speculation, unverified or unestablished facts, or a sugar-coated truth be offered to the public to give them false hope. In the tragic event that a crisis results in the loss of human life, no details about the victim(s), including their name or job title, should be released before their family members are informed.

If errors are communicated, an apology should be issued immediately, admitting any mistake while expressing compassion and care. **The truth should be prioritized above all else; dishonesty is unacceptable.**



- Share bad news as soon as possible
- Do not speculate or present unverified or unconfirmed facts; do not sugar-coat the truth or offer false hope
- Always inform family members first before informing the public
- In case of error, apologize and show compassion and care
- Prioritize the truth above all else

3.3. Defining target groups and key messages

3.3.1. Target groups

Defining target groups is a key step in crisis communication because not everyone is interested in a crisis in the same way. Therefore, all publics should not be addressed in the same manner. Indeed, the focus should never be only on the general public, as society is divided into groups according to different categories, such as: age, education, income, geography, values, vocation, social status, etc. Successful crisis communication

means addressing specifically defined target groups; and identifying those target groups means determining their tendencies, values, and needs.

The profiles of various target groups facilitate the creation of customized strategies and plans that use tailored messaging on specific communication tools and channels, and also help in measuring the success of this communication.

One target group that is frequently neglected is the internal public. The importance of regular and consistent communication with colleagues in an organization should never be forgotten, especially during a crisis. Yet, employees who are not directly involved in a crisis often learn of it first from media or social media. This should never be the case.

Internal publics are important in crisis situations because they are the most reliable spokespersons for an organization. Employees are seen as ambassadors for their employer and will, sooner or later, be put in the situation of having to explain to someone what management is doing to control a crisis. Moreover, media tends to seek information, comments, and opinions from employees during a crisis situation. Internal publics are not only mediators of external publics, though. Employees also have a very important role to play in communicating factual information to people such as friends and family, which is why it is necessary that they receive information on the crisis directly from the organization itself, before that information is shared more widely.



- Define target groups, their tendencies, values, and needs
- Define strategies and plans, and tailor messaging and communication tools according to target groups
- Establish internal crisis communication channels within the organization, to ensure employees are informed

3.3.2. Key messaging

Once the goal and audience of messaging is established, it is time to think about what to communicate and how. In other words, what key messages does the organization want the target audience to hear, and remember, on the crisis itself or on certain related issues. It is wise to prepare three or four key messages, usually for one of the following purposes:

1. To inform the public of an issue or crisis
2. To gain or rebuild public trust in the organization
3. To motivate participation by the public if the crisis demands they take certain steps

Key messages should constitute the basic content of all crisis communication and reflect the core of what the organization wants the audience to take away, carrying a consistent thread through initial communications about the crisis, interviews given by its representatives, press releases, and more.

The three or four key messages formulated for a given situation are thus repeated many times. This messaging is then supported by facts and statistics, and sometimes the experience of the person speaking, adding credibility.

The preparation of key messages should be a component part of the process of communication planning, whereas specific messaging related to a given crisis is prepared in response to the crisis. When a crisis occurs, it is important to bear in mind that key messages prepared in advance represent only half the work. The characteristics of good key messages for crisis situations include content that is brief, succinct, and concrete, uses relatable (not technical) expressions and terms and shows empathy, oriented towards resolution of the problem but without making promises that are impossible to keep. These messages should also avoid guessing at possible but unpredictable outcomes.



- What does the target audience need to hear and remember about the crisis or certain related issues?
- Support with facts, and perhaps the experience of the speaker, to enhance credibility
- Be brief, succinct, and concrete, and show empathy; if possible, avoid technical expressions and terms, and orient messaging towards solutions to the problem
- Do not promise the impossible or speculate as to the outcome of a crisis

3.4. Communication tools

Communication tools are the means by which messaging is transmitted to target groups. This includes: press releases, press conferences, news articles, bulletins, advertisements, infographics, interviews with and statements to media, and more. When selecting a communication tool, the characteristics of the target group, as well as the resources at its disposal, should be taken into account.

3.4.1. Press releases

Several elements are essential to an effective press release. For one, if the title is inadequate, it may be ignored. Ideally, a press release should answer who, what, when, where, why, and how, but should always start with the most important information. When a crisis occurs, it may only be possible to explain what happened, when, to whom, and where, leaving the questions of why and how to be answered in a subsequent press release.

If fitting, given the circumstances, it is advisable to quote relevant statements in press releases, such as

from experts and officials, or from people participating directly in responding to a crisis. Quotes should be brief and should not repeat information that has already been presented.

At the end of a press release, always provide contact information for the person(s) responsible for communicating further with media and the public, as well as when a next press release with new information can be expected. Multiple press releases can be issued during a single crisis, and each should contain new revelations.



- Do not use a throwaway title; it is important to get the attention of media
- Answer who, what, when, where, why, and how
- Quote the statements of experts, officials, or people directly involved in the crisis
- Provide contact information for the person(s) responsible for communicating further with media, as well as when to expect a next press release

3.4.2. Press conferences

Many people wonder if it is necessary to organize a press conference when a crisis occurs. Generally, the answer is: yes, but only when the organization is ready (which is typically not on the first day of a crisis). Complex and important issues that need to be explained in detail should be the topics of press conferences, as the organization of a press conference implies that very important information needs to reach the wider public.

Media invitations should contain clear and precise information on the topic of a press conference, including any speakers, organizers, and the date, location, and time. It is a good practice to prepare informational packets for journalists ahead of time, containing publications, brochures, reports, and any additional materials to explain the background of the crisis.

Press conferences are led by experienced moderators, who introduce topics, speakers, and moderate questions from journalists – who are assumed to have ample time to ask questions in such a setting. If communication is one-sided, a press conference can be counterproductive and send an unintended message. Speakers who contribute to a press conference should be carefully selected and well prepared, having at their disposal any information on the crisis available to the organization at that moment. Potential questions by journalists should be anticipated, as early as the press conference planning stage. Of course, all types of questions may be asked in this context, even some that may be interpreted as malicious.

It is important to carefully assess whether a press conference is needed, or whether a crisis can be managed by sharing information through other communication tools. Convening a press conference when it is unnecessary, to share information that is unimportant, can prolong a crisis and serve to highlight it in the media.



PRESS CONFERENCES

- Organize press conference only when ready
- Use press conferences only when important information must be presented or explained to the public
- Provide clear and precise information on the topic of a press conference to media, including the organizers, and the date, location, and time
- Prepare materials for journalists in advance, containing information and background on the crisis

3.4.3. Other tools

Some of the other most frequently used tools for crisis communication are media statements, appearances on television news and, rarely, or in the later stages of a crisis, appearances in news studios, joining multiple guests or sitting for longer interviews. At the onset of a crisis, an organization often lacks the information needed to answer all relevant questions and thus to engage in longer-format media appearances. Longer interviews tend to become a useful communication tool in the last of an organization's crisis communication packages, when detailed explanations or confirmations of the results of investigations are appropriate.



OTHER TOOLS

- Media statements
- Guest appearances on news shows
- Public interviews

3.4.4. Communication with the media

Media play a very important role in an organization's communication with external publics, and the value of cooperation with the media is revealed during times of crisis. In normal, everyday circumstances, most organizations must work rather hard to ensure that stories and information about the organization reaches the media. But during crises, that same media will actively request information and urge representatives from an organization to communicate.

Establishing strong cooperation with media before a crisis can thus reduce confusion and the spread of unverified information when a crisis occurs. Primarily, the goal of communication with media is to provide them facts, as the possibility for erroneous interpretations increase if media actors do not have all the facts at their disposal. This is why it is so important to provide facts to media within the first few hours of a crisis situation.

There are two mistakes that organizations make when communicating with media during crises:

1. Refusing communication, which is interpreted as an admission of guilt or liability. Communication with media must be habitual, even if the content of communications depends on the information an organization has at its disposal.

2. Failing to fulfil promises to submit information to the media. Every proactive communication with media should reduce uncertainty and fear among the public, who are following the crisis through these communications. Thus, organizations and crisis communication teams must embrace proactive communication with media, with the aim of always informing the public as fully as possible.

If journalists learn about a crisis first and are then first to inform the representatives of an organization, it is best to briefly postpone communication and ask for understanding from media. It is not uncommon to promise journalists who have “scooped” a crisis that they will be among the first contacted once verified information has been gathered.

In cases such as these, some examples of what an organization can tell journalists include:

- We do not have all information at our disposal, at this moment. We will contact you as soon as more information becomes available.
- We do not have any information yet on what is happening, but we are currently gathering information and will contact you as soon as we know more.

It is crucial to fulfil all promises to respond with information! Return calls/emails as promised, and offer what you can or ask for more time, but keep in touch.



- Never refuse communication with the media
- Submit promised information to media in a timely manner
- When journalists learn of a crisis first, briefly postpone communications and ask the media for their understanding, while promising that they will be contacted when more information becomes available

Who should represent an institution in public during crises?

An organization should designate one or two individuals to present information to the public during crisis situations. This will reduce the possibility of inconsistent statements or inconsistent explanations for crisis events. There is no hard rule on who should be charged with this role, but it is typically someone atop the organizational hierarchy, or a spokesperson. In cases involving loss of life, serious injuries, or major financial damages, this role is often taken on by the most senior official in the organization.

It is useful to bear in mind that less than 10% of what is said during crisis communications will be remembered permanently. Thus, an effective spokesperson in a time of crisis is eloquent, calm, and does not feel pressured to say things they should not. It is important to be truthful and transparent, but to avoid sharing unnecessarily. For, as the saying goes: Trust ascends using the stairs and descends using the elevator.

Content presented on behalf of an organization during a crisis situation should be factual, truthful, and accurate. In times of crisis, when interest is high and the quantity of information is low, it is especially important that this content is packaged and presented in a way that reaches target audiences. Poorly executed crisis communications can be detrimental to crisis response when the target audience fails to understand the message, and therefore the crisis itself.

3.4.5. Crisis communication and social media

Online communication channels should not be neglected in crisis planning. Crises may emerge from these channels, or during communication about other crises on these channels. When a crisis occurs, awareness, transparency, accessibility, and an orientation towards problem solving are all required, and it is important to constantly take in feedback. Doing these things well depends largely on the quality of communication.

Just as with other elements of crisis communication, analysis and planning are some of the first and most important steps when it comes to an online communications strategy designed for use during a crisis. A team in charge of online crisis communications should be established, headed by the person(s) tasked with crisis communications more broadly.

Online crisis communication planners should think about what may lead to a crisis and how to avoid instigating one. Any data and information being shared online should be accurate and verified, particularly information from other sources, and should be adapted to the target group and communication channel.

It is important to make a distinction between an incident and a crisis in this context. Is the issue at hand something likely to damage the reputation and goodwill of the organization? Untruths, and inaccurate or wrongly interpreted information should be answered by transparency and facts, and if an organization does make a mistake, it is necessary to be honest, to show compassion, and to emphasize that everything possible is being done to correct the error.

It is important to act quickly when a crisis occurs, including by answering questions and comments directly, and by publishing information concerning the event. It is also important to harmonize communication on social media with communication on other channels, so that consistent messaging reaches various audiences.

Whether a crisis exists only on social media, or social media channels are just one of the means of communicating about a crisis that is occurring, the importance of online crisis communication should not be neglected.



COMMUNICATION WITH THE MEDIA

- Establish a team charged with online crisis communication
- Adapt communication to the target group and channel used
- Make a distinction between an incident and a crisis: Is the issue at hand something that can damage the reputation and goodwill of the organization?
- Answer untruths, and inaccurate or wrongly interpreted information, with transparency and facts
- If an error has been made by the organization, be honest and show compassion, and emphasize that everything possible is being done to correct the mistake
- When a crisis occurs, react quickly, answer questions, comments and messages directly, publish information concerning the crisis event, and remain constantly open to feedback

4. What to do after a crisis

The end of a crisis does not mean the end of a crisis communication team's work. This is the time to evaluate communication during the crisis and ask: What was communicated well, and where did public relations fail?

Successful crisis communication relies primarily on a quality crisis communication plan and the capacity of the team to apply it in real time. If crisis communication is unsuccessful, it is fair to say that the crisis communication plan was poor, as predictions were inaccurate and therefore the plan was inapplicable in practice.

Organizations must understand the reasons for failures such as these if they wish to identify quality lessons learned for the future.

Crises can be the cause of various forms of damage to organizations, and one of the main tasks after any crisis is to determine the extent of harm. When it comes to an organization's reputation, this can be related to new perceptions of the organization, so it is necessary to look at differences in these perceptions from before the crisis and after.

Following a crisis, it is necessary to:

- Continue monitoring media, posting about the crisis, and contacting any journalists with unanswered requests for information
- Update the organization's list of media contacts with individuals and outlets that were in communication with the organization during the crisis
- Determine what worked and what did not on online and social media, by examining comments on crisis communications posted to social media and other online platforms

Bear in mind that failure is also part of the learning process. There is no value in recognizing mistakes or lessons learned if they are not used to prevent the repetition of those mistakes or to help avoid other similar missteps that hinder an organization's success. Thus, no crisis should pass without a deep consideration of the experience, even if it is painful to revisit, as a means of lesson learning.



AFTER THE CRISIS

- Analyze the effectiveness of communication during the crisis with media and target groups
- Continue monitoring media, posting about the crisis, and contacting journalists with unanswered requests for information
- Update the list of media contacts with individuals and outlets that were in communication with the organization during the crisis
- Determine what worked and did not in communications on social and online media, based on comments on posts

BEFORE THE CRISIS

RISK ASSESSMENT

- Media analysis
- Identification of topics and comments with crisis potential
- Identification of potential crises and problems
- Identification of stakeholders/ impacted parties

TRAINING AND EXERCISE

- Training of management
- Training of employees
- Training exercises focused on crisis communication

ALLIES

- Partner organizations
- Experts in the field
- Media

Content of a Crisis Communication Plan

| | |
|--|--|
| 1. Scenarios of possible crises | Describe scenarios and their consequences |
| 2. Phonebook/Directory | Centralize the contact information of crisis team members, potential allies, analysts, opponents, and others |
| 3. List of Media contacts | Keep an updated list of the phone numbers, email addresses, and social media accounts of journalists and other media |
| 4. Key messages | Prepare general messaging that can be applied in every crisis situation |
| 5. List of target groups | Identify target groups of the organization, especially those that are likely to be impacted by a given crisis |
| 6. Key data on the organization | Collect relevant data, such as: results of the organization's work, broader contributions of the organization, preventive trainings offered to mitigate risks from crisis, information on public awareness campaigns, past cooperation with state institutions, etc. |
| 7. Draft initial media statement | Prepare draft press releases and social media posts, and identify potential speakers at press conferences |
| 8. Draft questions from journalists, the public, and superiors | Prepare draft questions (and answers) for every crisis scenario presented in the plan |
| 9. Procedures and parameters | Outline relevant parts of laws, by-laws, and procedures that may be useful in crisis communications |
| 10. Checklist | <p>Prepare a checklist of necessary steps to take in a crisis.</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Activate crisis communication team <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Perform situation assessment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Define strategy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Prepare crisis scenario plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Inform relevant actors and stakeholders <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Protect against uncontrolled leaks of information <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Establish a continuous information flow to all relevant stakeholders |

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS BY JOURNALISTS

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How serious is the threat? • How much damage can it cause? • Is it global/national/local in scope? • Which systems are vulnerable or impacted? • How did this happen? • How can you prevent this from happening again? • How can you fix this? • How many complaints have been received? • How much has been reported in damages? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does this attack compare to other attacks? • What is the estimated cost? • How quickly can this spread, or how widespread is it? • Can the attacker be traced? • Where can people go for help? • What resources are available? |
|---|---|

QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN DEFINING THE STRATEGY

- What is the nature of the crisis?
- Does the organization have bigger problems?
- What is the worst-case scenario?
- What are the predictable time frames?
- What is really happening?
- Can allies be involved?
- Who are all the relevant actors?
- Can the focus be moved?
- Can the crisis be “limited”?

DURING CRISIS

COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

EXPEDIENCY AND ACCURACY

- Timely communication is an important element of effective crisis response
- When representatives of an organization present the first information about a crisis to the public, they can shape and, to a certain extent, control the narrative
- Messaging during a crisis must be concise, unambiguous, and verified (i.e., any information provided to the public should be double-checked)
- It is always better to speak transparently about the fact that the cause of a crisis is under investigation than to offer inaccurate or vague information to the public

CONSISTENCY

- The same messaging should come from across an organization, reflecting a “single voice”
- Employees should be informed through internal communication channels, and should be instructed to refer all questions by journalists to persons charged with communication and PR

TRANSPARENCY

- Transparency requires availability to media and a readiness to share information
- Persons charged with communicating about a crisis with media should always answer promptly to requests for information
- Questions or comments from followers or the public on social media should be answered with regularity

| CRISIS COMMUNICATION TEAM | | |
|---|--|---|
| OBJECTIVE | STRUCTURE | FUNCTIONS |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing constant, accurate information on a crisis situation, and communicating continuously with media to prevent or at least reduce the spread of rumours, untruths, and misinformation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team manager • Relevant team members (for different scenarios) • Persons charged with public relations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gathers all available information on crises • Prepares responsible person(s) for public relations interactions • Drafts/chooses one to three key messages, based on the target groups affected • Decides on the manner these message are transmitted |



- Share bad news as soon as possible
- Do not speculate or present unverified or unconfirmed facts; do not sugar-coat the truth or offer false hope
- Always inform family members first before informing the public
- In case of error, apologize and show compassion and care
- Prioritize the truth above all else



- Define target groups, their tendencies, values, and needs
- Define strategies and plans, and tailor messaging and communication tools according to target groups
- Establish internal crisis communication channels within the organization, to ensure employees are informed



- What does the target audience need to hear and remember about the crisis or certain related issues?
- Support with facts, and perhaps the experience of the speaker, to enhance credibility
- Be brief, succinct, and concrete, and show empathy; if possible, avoid technical expressions and terms, and orient messaging towards solutions to the problem
- Do not promise the impossible or speculate as to the outcome of a crisis

COMMUNICATION TOOLS

PRESS RELEASES

- Do not use a throwaway title; it is important to get the attention of media
- Answer who, what, when, where, why, and how
- Quote the statements of experts, officials, or people directly involved in the crisis
- Provide contact information for the person(s) responsible for communicating further with media, as well as when to expect a next press release

PRESS CONFERENCES

- Organize press conference only when ready
- Use press conferences only when important information must be presented or explained to the public
- Provide clear and precise information on the topic of a press conference to media, including the organizers, and the date, location, and time
- Prepare materials for journalists in advance, containing information and background on the crisis

OTHER TOOLS

- Media statements
- Guest appearances on news shows
- Public interviews

COMMUNICATION WITH THE MEDIA

- Never refuse communication with the media
- Submit promised information to media in a timely manner
- When journalists learn of a crisis first, briefly postpone communications and ask the media for their understanding, while promising that they will be contacted when more information becomes available

COMMUNICATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

- Establish a team charged with online crisis communication
- Adapt communication to the target group and channel used
- Make a distinction between an incident and a crisis: Is the issue at hand something that can damage the reputation and goodwill of the organization?
- Answer untruths, and inaccurate or wrongly interpreted information, with transparency and facts
- If an error has been made by the organization, be honest and show compassion, and emphasize that everything possible is being done to correct the mistake
- When a crisis occurs, react quickly, answer questions, comments and messages directly, publish information concerning the event, and remain constantly open to feedback

AFTER THE CRISIS

- Analyze the effectiveness of communication during the crisis with media and target groups
- Continue monitoring media, posting about the crisis, and contacting journalists with unanswered requests for information
- Update the list of media contacts with individuals and outlets that were in communication with the organization during the crisis
- Determine what worked and what did not in communications on social and online media, based on comments on posts



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