

24. CRISES COMMUNICATION

THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW

Basic framework outlining detailed steps to follow during crises.

24.1. SUMMARY

This crisis communication plan will outline a generic, basic crisis communication plan to be used by all spheres of government. This would need intergovernmental and/or interdepartmental joint planning for better implementation.

A crisis is any situation that threatens the integrity or reputation and the ability to deliver better services in a safe way to communities. These types of situations usually bring on to the department negative media attention which would lead to negative perception from the both internal and international publics.

These situations can be any kind of legal dispute, theft, accident, fire, flood or manmade disasters that could be attributed to government. It can also be a situation where in the eyes of the media or general public government failed to act on time to situations in an appropriate manner that also addresses challenges in a way that instil confidence in the stakeholders or victims in a crises.

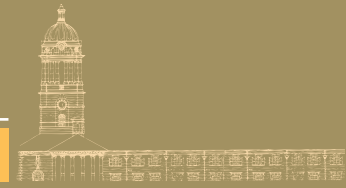
24.2. BACKGROUND

A crisis communication plan is both necessary and a challenge on its own. Without such a plan government can succumb in indecision when a crisis occurs. A crisis communication plan provides GUIDELINES and procedures for the coordination of communications within the organisation, and between the organisation and any applicable outside agencies (e.g. the media, regulatory agencies, customers, suppliers, stakeholders (board of directors, shareholders, unions and the public) in the event of an emergency or controversial issue.

The crisis communication plan is also a strategic document rich in tactical detail. A crisis is a difficult period of actual or perceived damage to an institution, unit or individual, triggered by a sudden event or a rapidly developing problem. A crisis may affect safety or security, financial stability, reputation or the general ability to conduct business.

All spheres of government should not be without a crisis communication plan. Crises can be turned from disasters into opportunities to project corporate strengths. The manner in which a crisis is handled often wins praise for organisations whose positions are improved in the public eye.

Whilst academic research is all well and good, but sometimes 'coal-face' experience can count for more.



24.3. CRISIS VERSUS EMERGENCY

While the terms “crisis” and “emergency” are not synonymous, effective communication is an integral part of both crisis and emergency management.

24.4 CRISIS DEFINED

A “CRISIS” is a situation that somehow challenges the public’s sense of appropriateness, tradition, values, safety, security or the integrity of the government/organisation.

24.5. EMERGENCY DEFINED

An “EMERGENCY” is an abnormal situation that requires prompt action, beyond normal procedures, in order to limit damage to persons, property or the environment.

Some emergencies may also be, or become, crises; if, for example, it is perceived that the government has no control over a situation. Effective communication management is imperative before, during and after an emergency to help prevent injury or loss of life, to help limit damage to assets and property, to help maintain.

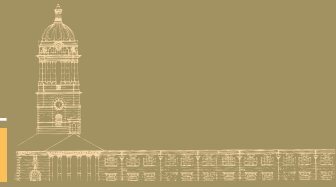
24.6. WHAT CAUSES A CRISIS

1. Refusal to take action (Non-rapid response)
2. Letting problems fester until they become epidemic diseases.
3. Lack of accountability.
4. Taking correctional measures after too much damage has been done.
5. Misunderstanding – What is a Crisis?
6. Failure to Plan – It Won’t Happen to Us!
7. Lack of Responsibility – Who’s Job is it to Prepare?
8. Time – We’ll Get Around to it Later!
9. Resources – We don’t Have the Money!

24.7. CRISES SITUATION

There are two key elements of any crisis communication plan:

1. The crisis plan itself (how your company will deal with the issue at hand, to minimise loss and downtime.)
2. The crisis communication plan (how you will communicate with the press and the public about the crisis that is occurring.)



Other times, a crisis may be significant enough that it is both newsworthy and gets attention in the press. But that attention either lasts for a very short period of time, or it is so well handled that the company grows as people see how well it handled the crisis. A key element in making sure that this happens is the development of a crisis communication plan in your organization.

It is vitally important that government put together a plan to effectively communicate with the media and the public when the inevitable crisis occurs. An effective crisis communication plan is the most important part of your crisis planning process. Proper planning demands that we anticipate the good and the bad. This means that we must address the fact that at any time, government may find itself facing a crisis situation caused by either an internal or external predicament.

24.8. TYPES OF CRISES

There are various types of crises and they are caused by different issues:

Those resulting from doing nothing.

The biggest problem with business, in a one-sentence capsule: People exhibit misplaced priorities and impatience, seeking profit and power, possessing unrealistic views of life, and not fully willing to do the things necessary to sustain orderly growth and long-term success.

Doing things as we always have.

Resulting from inflexible conditions, obsolete policies-procedures, procrastination, attitude, resistance to innovation and or failure to change.

Those we bring upon ourselves.

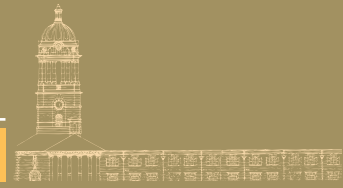
Do not have sufficient management skills or resources to do something well. Ignore small problems when they occur. Would not listen to advice.

Circumstances beyond our control.

Miscalculations, manmade disasters, natural disasters, shifting resources, changing market places, regulations, and or bureaucracies.

Bad work, poor planning.

Damage control for what someone else did wrong, sub-standard, behind schedule, in poor taste without regard for quality or ill-prepared.



24.9. FIVE STEPS TO AN EFFECTIVE CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN

- Create a crisis communication plan ahead of time.

Anticipate crisis; think and talk about what might happen and how it can be effectively managed. develop response strategies that can be implemented when a crisis occurs. establish communications protocols.

Designate a crisis management team

- Determine and train spokespersons
- Address issues of empowerment and the chain of command
- Monitor and keep communication lines open between internal staff.

Manage the message and the media

- What is the issue? define the nature of the crisis
- What is your message? keep the message clear and consistent
- Anticipate and meet the needs of the media.

Communicate early and often

- Be proactive rather than reactive
- Decide on communications methods (Press conference, In-Person Briefing, Phone, Fax, etc.). release prepared statements and collateral materials to the media.

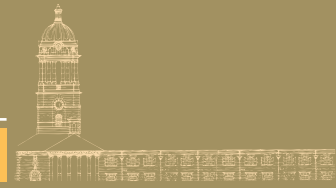
Identify and prioritise key audiences and channels of communication

- Who are the audiences that matter most to your organisation?
- Know what type of information each audience is seeking and keep them informed
- Promptly notify employees, key constituents, grantees, lawmakers, etc.

24.10. SOME MYTHS ABOUT CRISIS

Certain themes arise repeatedly in dealing with organisations who are deciding how far to go in anticipating and managing risks. Too often, assumptions are made about the processes and resources required to manage and communicate the risks. Here are the most common myths we have had to deal with over the last decade:

- A Crisis always poses a threat – and only a threat
Not true: Managed well, a crisis can be any opportunity to endorse a positive message.
- A crisis manual is all that is required to get the basic procedures clear and in place: No – Crisis management is an ongoing process. The manual is just the starting point.
- In a crisis, customers are the only audience that matters: No – Everyone is your audience during crises.
- Crisis preparation training is expensive, with no guarantee of return on investment: Whatever the up-front cost, it cannot compare with the potential damage and financial implications of a major crisis situation.



- Saying nothing to the media means there is no story: Wrong. “No Comment” often translates into hiding something.
- Any publicity is good publicity: Wrong. An unchecked crisis can cause irreparable damage to corporate reputation.
- Crises occur during working hours: Wrong! Crises have no respect for the working week and almost always break at the most inconvenient times.

24.11. CRISES COMMUNICATIONS – GET IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME

One of the lessons which can be learned is that rumours are a disaster waiting to happen. Negative rumours and positive rumors have the same effect.

There are many parts to the communications ingredient, including:

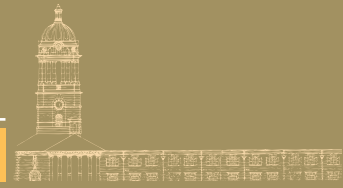
- Who talks to whom?
- What can be said?
- Scheduling release of information.

24.12. LEADERSHIP DURING TIMES OF CRISES

- This is perhaps the most important element pre, during and post crises.
- Empowered to take decisions on all matters pertaining to crises at hand or potential.
- The leader of the team should also be a good communicator.

This is perhaps the most important. The question of leadership might entail the following:

- The ability to multitask
- Excellent delegation skills
- Cool under pressure
- Ability to empathise
- Able to make quick and effective decisions
- Listens but comfortable in calling tough choices
- Self-awareness
- Communication skills
- Ability to prioritise
- Time management
- Empowered to spend company funds.



Speed of response

Often referred to as the 'golden hour'. If your crisis response is off to a rapid start, your chances for reputation damage decrease are high. This will only occur if you have an effective plan.

A robust plan

Develop robust workable plans before the crisis.

Adequate resources

A big crisis is going to require a lot of help. These are just a few of the possible areas of support you will require and remember crises can and often occur at the most inconvenient times.

Excellent communications

It is important to always be prepared.

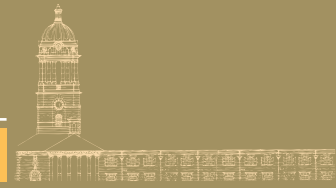
24.13. THE GOLDEN HOUR

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24.14. DURING CRISES

- Notify all stakeholders about the crises.
- We should be empathetic with our messages to those affected by the crises.
- Assist victims of the disaster/CRISIS.
- Provide information about the crises so that you avoid uncertainties (the cause and the extent of the crises).
- Get professional help to assist all stakeholders to deal with the crises that exist.
- Be pro-active and rapid in dealing with concerns and questions.
- Draft scenarios with regard to the crises to ensure that you can communicate well.
- Never lie or withhold information
- When talking to the media, never give the so-called an unofficial comment or speak off the record during crises.
- Communicators should be part of the planning process and not only communicate something they were not part of during planning process.
- Explore all channels of access.



24.15. PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

Although each crisis or emergency will require unique public information response, this crisis communication plan provides guidelines and procedures for the coordination of internal and external communications in the event of a crisis. A crisis management plan should draw on the diverse backgrounds of diverse crisis team members. The collective experience and knowledge fortifies the crisis management plan on an ongoing basis.

It is the goal of this crisis communication plan to establish guidelines for dealing with a variety of situations, and to ensure that staff and communicators are familiar with those procedures and their roles in the event of a crisis. The plan is designed to be used in conjunction with the normal decision-making hierarchy of the organisation and does not supplant that decision-making process.

24.16. PLAN OBJECTIVES

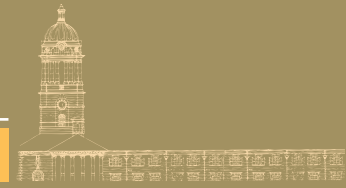
To implement immediate action to:

1. Identify those parties that should be informed about the situation.
2. Communicate facts about the crisis.
3. Minimise rumours.
4. Restore order and/or confidence.

24.17. THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN CRISES

Communications can:

1. Contribute to ending the crisis
2. Protect your reputation
3. Reduce tension
4. Demonstrate commitment to values
5. Communicate promptly and continuously to maintain control of flow of information
6. Ground rules: The Three “Cs”
 - Candor: be honest, take necessary responsibility, and do not set unreasonable expectations.
 - Concern: concern for health and safety needs to be foremost in responding. Show some controlled emotion and empathy (but do not overdo it!).
 - Courage: Do not hide from the issue. A leader is not afraid to stand up, take responsibility and get at the source of a problem.



24.18 CRISIS COMMUNICATION TEAM

Crises have the potential to ignite media frenzy or worse, widespread panic in the general public. The middle of a crisis is no time to start assembling a crisis management team or to begin reaching out to the media. By mapping out a clear, workable crisis communication plan early (and revising it often), an organisation can emerge from a potential disaster with its image intact or perhaps even enhanced.

The job of the team is to create and execute the overall crisis communication plan. Team members are assigned specific roles, such as gathering contact information from all employees or establishing relationships with members of the local media.

Depending on the organisation's size, a typical crisis communication team could include:

1. The President – Depending on the level of the crises
2. Designated government ministers
3. The CEO of GCIS
4. Government communicators of respective departments
5. Security sector departments.

Clarify lines of responsibility, authority and communication channels. The first job of the crisis communication team is to select an official spokesperson. The spokesperson will be the primary contact for all media inquiries. They will run all press conferences and give most interviews during a crisis. There should have a variety of skills and experiences (diverse skills).

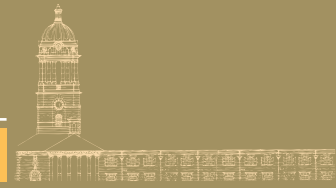
The spokesperson must be extremely knowledgeable about government work, with the ability to project calm and inspire confidence. They also should know how to condense complicated arguments into key talking points and how to stress those points in an interview without appearing to avoid tough questions.

Database

Develop and maintain a comprehensive contact list for teams (24-hour contact information).

Establish a notification system

Determine who should handle all inquiries in the absence of the Director, the Privacy Officer (staff member authorised to accept or comply with investigatory requests) or Administrator (most senior member of the organisation on duty). Designate who will handle communications with the staff, media, public and other government agencies.



The formal written crisis communication plan should include:

1. A mechanism for determining potential crises.
2. Identification of audiences to be effected.
3. Procedures to follow during a crisis.
4. Contingency plans to facilitate routine business during crisis.
5. Selection and training of a crisis management team.
6. Coordination of what information can and cannot be released.
7. Provisions for news media should include:
8. A list of emergency phone numbers, available to media.
9. A place where media will be escorted to conduct interviews.
10. Designated work areas for media, with full amenities.
11. Direct line for media, as well as a separate hotline for the public.
12. Once written and tailored for organisational needs, the plan must be discussed and understood at all levels within the organisation.
13. For crisis situations, there must be one designated spokesperson with enough credibility and command of information to present the company image.
14. Guard against the fact that, sometimes, the spokesperson becomes the negative focus of the story, not the message itself.

24.19. CONCLUSION

Whether caused by internal or external forces, a crisis situation puts an organisation in a complex and difficult dilemma that can have long-term impact on its image or the sector. While no one can predict the outcome of a tumultuous time period, having a structured plan in place can help position the organisation on better footing as it manages the incident.

In times of crises, government should always strive to speak in one voice and avoid having conflicting.