CHAPTER SAMPLER

Crisis Communication

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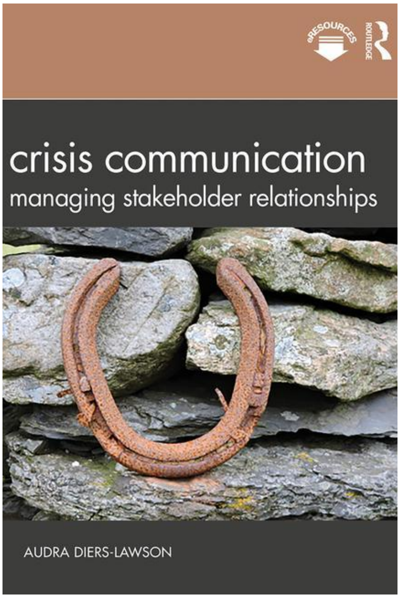
Contents


eRESOURCES
ROUTLEDGE
crisis communication
managing stakeholder relationships
AUDRA DIERS-LAWSON

2 Situating crisis communication within the fields of public relations and management

Learning objectives

By the end of this chapter, the reader should:

- Understand what crises, crisis and risk management, and crisis communication are in an applied context
- Differentiate between the public relations and management functions within crisis and risk management

In Chapter 1 I discussed what crises were and began to differentiate between crisis management and crisis communication, so I should begin to deepen the understanding of what crisis communication is in an applied context. A **crisis** can address can address anything from a customer service crisis played out on social media to major disease outbreaks around the world. There are three characteristics that all crises share:

- They are inherently public
- Organizations trying to manage crises do not exist in isolation; rather, there are complex relationships that influences the choices organizations make
- The core stake at risk in a crisis is the relationship between an organization and its stakeholder(s)

I will discuss the different types of crises and their implications for organizations in depth in Chapter 6, but if I assume that while there are a lot of different types of crises, they all share these three characteristics, then I can focus on understanding the process connecting risk management through crisis response. By focusing on the process, it should become clear that communication and management are both necessary and complementary but have different responsibilities throughout the process. This means that responding to crises is both a public relations and a management function.

Risk management

In Chapter 1, I made the point that one of the key shifts in our understanding of crises in the last couple of decades was that they should not be considered surprises. In fact, Heath and Millar (2004) argue that crises should not be viewed as unpredictable, just untimely. This means that modern crisis management and communication is as much about risk management as it is about responding to crises once they emerge.

Risk is often a difficult concept for social or behavioral scientists to unpack because much of what we have to 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 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 2.1). 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 people 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.

In Comfort's (2007) review of Hurricane Katrina – an American example of very poor risk and crisis management – she summarizes a four-step process for risk management that complements much of the relevant research connected to crisis communication and management (see Figure 2.1).

Risk detection is a natural first step 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, p. 621; R. Heath, 1998a; Kash & Darling, 1998; Ritchie, 2004; Stacks, 2004). From there, in the second step the risk has to be **evaluated** in as objective and effective way

Table 2.1 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; they 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 they accept it, they believe that it 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 they accept it, they believe it is a greater threat than if it previously had been known.
Equity	People are less likely to believe that risks are credible when they are perceived as being unevenly distributed than when 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, they are also likely to perceive the risk as less severe if the benefits are unclear or questionable.
Understanding	If people do not understand the risk, the risk is viewed as less credible but also carries a higher evaluation of threat than risks 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, it is less readily accepted as a credible risk but judged to be a greater threat.
Trust in institutions	If people do not trust organizations, they are less likely to accept the risks associated with them – and those risks are more likely to create more threat than risks 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 threats from 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 they accept the risk, they feel a greater level of threat.

(Continued)

Table 2.1 (Continued)

Risk perception factor	Findings
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 it to present a greater threat.
Human vs. natural	People are less likely to accept risks as credible threats when they are caused by people; however, they 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 they 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 they accept it, they perceive it as a greater risk than threats whose impact may be either scattered or minimal.

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

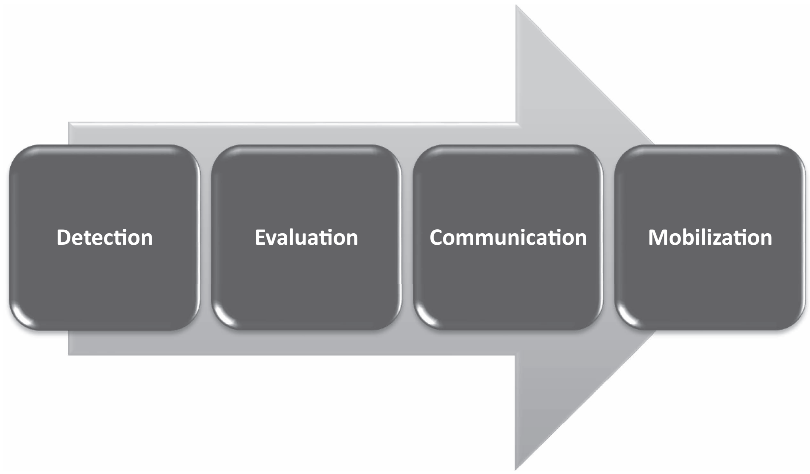


Figure 2.1 Risk management

as possible so that a straightforward judgment of the likelihood and severity of the risk can be made (Comfort, 2007; Dilenschneider & Hyde, 1985; Freundberg, 1988; Massey & Larsen, 2006).

The third step is the **communication of risk** (Comfort, 2007). However, as Freundberg (1988) pointed out, this step is challenging because technical information does not always translate directly. Furthermore, peoples' perceptions of risks are affected by a number of factors (Covello et al., 2001). Nevertheless, communicating risk is vital to ensure that relevant stakeholders – such as 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 that is essential to managing the risk.

In the fourth and final step, sharing information allows for the **organization and mobilization of a collective response** to reduce risk and respond to danger (Comfort, 2007; Dilenschneider, 1985; Heath, 1998b). 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, 1998a; 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).

A starting point in understanding what crisis communication does in the real world is to think of it as an integral part of helping organizations manage risk. This means that the role for crisis communication is not just about management or public relations; it has evolved from being 'corporate PR' to a part of life-saving interventions across industries. In Box 2.1 Ben Duncan, a practitioner who has worked with the World Health Organization to manage the communications response to epidemics around the world, explains that what we do in risk and crisis communication is more than just protecting an organization's reputation; we have the potential to make a strong positive impact on the world around us.

Box 2.1 Practitioner perspective: How crisis communication evolved from being "corporate PR" to a life-saving intervention

By Ben Duncan

How the health sector thinks about and uses crisis communication has undergone a profound shift over the past two decades.

I became an EU media officer dealing with health and food safety in 2002. This was just at the tail end of the European Union's 'Mad Cow disease' crisis. Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), to give 'Mad Cow' its scientific name, emerged in British cattle herds in the late 1980s. UK government ministers spent nearly a decade proclaiming that BSE posed no threat to human health and that "British beef is safe." When new evidence forced the UK health minister to announce a 'probable' link between BSE and a deadly human brain disease (variant-CJD), it provoked a crisis. It evolved into a wider EU crisis in subsequent years when BSE reached cattle herds in other EU member states, and then when cases of variant-CJD were seen in some of these countries. Crisis communication strategy in the health sector at that time centered primarily on issues of corporate reputation: How to repair the reputational damage done by 'Mad Cow' and how to prevent such damage in the future.

The SARS outbreak of 2003 introduced a subtle but far-reaching shift in what crisis communication meant for the health sector. SARS was a form of acute pneumonia cause by a new, and seemingly highly infectious, virus. It was identified in an outbreak in Hong Kong in February and March 2003. SARS then spread rapidly across Southeast Asia and to North America, causing an outbreak in Toronto, Canada. Between March and June 2003, when the outbreak was finally contained, SARS was a significant health sector crisis. It emerged during this time that the outbreak had probably started in Guangdong Province, China, as early as November 2002. The reluctance of the Chinese health authorities to communicate openly and transparently about the outbreak was bad crisis communication in that it damaged their reputation. More than this, though, the lack of communication about SARS had allowed it to spread unchecked. If health workers and the public don't know about a disease, they can't take steps to stop it spreading.

Over the subsequent five years, I did a lot of work with EU countries and the World Health Organization (WHO) on influenza pandemic preparedness. The emergence of a new, highly infectious, and potentially deadly form of influenza would be a significant health crisis. However, those of us working on preparedness soon realized that enabling people to protect themselves from the virus, rather than just protect corporate reputations, needed to be our key focus. In the opening stages of an influenza pandemic, when there is no vaccine available against the new virus and it's not yet known whether antiviral drugs will work, communication is one of the few interventions available to health authorities. Communication must be part of the crisis response, rather than an add-on.

From the 2000s onwards, risk and crisis communication experts in the health sector pushed to be equal members of the crisis management team. Positioning crisis communication as a health intervention, of course, supported our claim to be professionals on a par with epidemiologists and lab experts in the response team. But we also passionately believed that bad crisis communication in a health emergency could cost lives.

The truth of this belief was soon tragically illustrated. In the early months of 2014 an outbreak of Ebola virus emerged in Guinea, West Africa, and spread to two neighboring countries: Sierra Leone and Liberia. The outbreak response team strategy was to identify people who were already ill with Ebola, identify everyone they had been in contact with since developing symptoms, and then isolate them all. This would break the chain of infection and stop the outbreak. The team issued a set of science-based key messages: "Ebola kills," "There is no treatment for Ebola," and "If you or a family member has Ebola symptoms come to the Isolation Centre." These proved to be counterproductive. People with Ebola-like symptoms thought. "If I am going to die, I would rather die at home with my family than in an Isolation Centre." The affected communities therefore hid their sick and refused to cooperate with the outbreak response teams. The outbreak continued to accelerate and became the largest-ever Ebola epidemic, with over 11,000 lives lost.

Crisis/risk communication was one among many things that went wrong in the West African Ebola epidemic. However, WHO took the need to integrate communication into emergency response as one of its lessons learned (Report of the Review Committee on the Role of the International Health Regulations, 2005) In 2017 this was codified in WHO's internal *Emergency Response Framework* (2017) and its guideline to EU member states on risk communication (WHO, 2018a).

More than just codifying this approach, WHO is also putting it into practice. For example, there was a sizable communication component to WHO's response to an outbreak of Pneumonic Plague in Madagascar in 2017. A risk communication expert and a medical anthropologist were among the first international experts WHO sent to support the Madagascan Ministry of Health (personal communication of the author), and training materials in Malagasy were developed for local health workers to help them recognise and safely treat people with Plague. Then when a large Ebola outbreak flared up in Equateur Province, Democratic Republic of Congo in 2018, WHO, UNICEF, and their partners ran a sophisticated communication campaign to support the outbreak response. This included studying the beliefs and practices of affected communities, engaging with communities via trusted intermediaries and identifying at-risk minority groups such as pygmy populations (WHO, 2018b).

Crisis management

If we think of crisis management as the material part of crisis response, then it is clear that it is intertwined with risk management and crisis communication. Jindal, Laveena, and Aggarwal (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 managing people and their decisions.

After watching organizations manage crises in the construction industry – an industry that is particularly crisis prone – Loosemore's theory of crisis management (1999) identifies both challenges posed by crises as well as factors influence the effectiveness of crisis management.

Crisis management challenges

Loosemore's theory of crisis management argues that crises produce four management challenges. First, **power struggles are likely to emerge during crises**. These can occur within the organization as it tries to manage the situation across different departments or groups. However, they can also emerge externally between organizations in the same industry as well as between organizations trying to coordinate to respond to the risk and for a host of reasons from who is responsible to who will get credit for action.

Second, **communication is connected to 'efficiency,'** which can create a crisis management challenge. Loosemore argues that one of the critical challenges in a crisis is ensuring that the right people have the right information at the right time. There is a suggestion that communication during crises serves a functional purpose that is not always conducive to managing positive relationships – that is, people can often tread over feelings, position, and responsibility in order to get the problem solved. While this may serve a short-term benefit, it can be problematic for long-term relationship management both within the organization and between organizations.

Third, **crises tend to encourage conflict**. In this case we are talking about conflicts within an organization or group of partners working to solve a problem. Sources of conflict can range from task to relationship, to process (Jehn, 1997) but what Loosemore (1999) found was that during crises, the sources of conflict were amplified by the emotional intensity of the situation. Naturally, this creates a challenge for crisis management because in order to manage the crisis, the conflict also has to be managed. For this reason, we can also think of crises as an inside-out problem: Everything has to be working within an organization and between partners in order for an external crisis to be effectively managed. This is one of the reasons that Part 3 of the book directly examines improving an organization's capacity to respond to crises.

Fourth, **crises discourage collective responsibility**. In short, we like to blame someone and really would prefer it is not us. Loosemore found that most people have at least a minor predisposition to minimizing the perception that they are at fault in a crisis. Averting blame is often a combination of manifestations of our own guilt, not wanting to 'get in trouble,' and wanting to know where the finger of blame is pointed. Yet, this is problematic for crisis management because a lot of times people are more worried about blame than solving the problem.

Factors influencing crisis management

Notice that the problems of crisis management are less about solving the material problem and more about being able to focus teams on solving the material problem. This is because the reality of crisis management and overall risk management is that poor responses to crises often create secondary crises (Grebe, 2013) that also have to be managed. As such, what Loosemore (1999) identifies as the critical factors influencing effective crisis management are all human management factors.

First, **social adjustment** is necessary for crisis management. This means that competing interests have to be balanced to successfully manage a crisis; organizations have to create the conditions for change to be managed within the organization and its relationships with critical internal and external stakeholders. The core assumption is that crises cause change and everyone has to get used to it. When crisis management is effective, it facilitates the change process (Carroll & Hatakenaka, 2001; Mehta & Xavier, 2012).

Second, **managing behavioral instability** is a vital part of crisis management. Crises have a destabilizing effect on anyone affected. Loosemore (1999) observed that crises often create behavioral instability by creating the conditions that desensitize people to the needs of others. In short, crises tend to evoke strong emotions that cause people to focus on their own interests but also can affect how they view the organization(s) managing the crisis (Diers-Lawson, 2017; Edwards, Lawrence, & Ashkanasy, 2016; Heide & Simonsson, 2015; Jin, 2010).

Third, Loosemore (1999) found that **managing social structures** in order to better disseminate information is a vital crisis management function. The social structures of organizations and communities help to influence reactions to crises by determining, in part, the effective and timely flow of information to interested and important stakeholders. In a modern context, this means that crisis management must also use effective platforms of communication with different stakeholders no matter whether those are face-to-face, on social media, or through more traditional internal and external channels.

Fourth, effective crisis management means that organizations can take advantage of **diametric opportunities**. Though a combination of what is happening outside and inside the organization as well as the nature of the crisis itself, crises can create environments that can be both constructive and destructive to organizations. In a destructive context, a crisis can draw an organization into a self-perpetuating cycle of escalation prolonging the crisis and wasting resources. However, crises also provide opportunities for organizations and their stakeholders to improve their cohesion, harmony, and efficiency. This can also become self-perpetuating, which minimizes the crisis.

Loosemore's theory of crisis management (1999) has been cited in a lot of crisis research and practitioner work in the last couple of decades because it identifies the important human qualities of crises that both enable and complicate crisis management In short, effective crisis management is about learning from past experiences, adapting to situations, and evaluating actions and behaviors in order to more effectively mitigate or minimize the risks causing the crises (Gilbert & Lauren, 1980; Heath, 1998b; Taneja, Pryor, Sewell, & Recuero, 2014).

Crisis communication

Naturally, crisis management is inherently intertwined with crisis communication in managing risk, even if the people managing the crises or communicating with critical stakeholders are different. Effective crisis management and communication rely heavily on teams, group decision-making, staff development, simulation, and constant evaluation (Hayes & Patton, 2001; Ritchie, 2004; Taneja et al., 2014).

Nonetheless, our focus in communication is also distinctive from crisis management because crisis communication focuses on stakeholder relationship management, narrating the crisis, and the development and implementation of communication strategy for crises. I will address stakeholder relationships in Chapter 3 and Part 4, and I will focus on narrating the crisis and crisis strategy in Part 5. However, it is important to think about the development and implementation of crisis strategy – or the public relations function in crisis communication – as a campaign. What we do in crisis communication broadly follows the same form and function as any other strategic communication campaign but with a crisis plan and crisis response at the heart of the campaign's purpose. Figure 2.2 summarizes this campaign structure and will be something that I will come back to later in the book.

Figure 2.2 Crisis strategy overview

In review . . .

In the end, in this chapter I have focused on the connection between crises, risk management, crisis management, and crisis communication. I have explored the differences between crisis management and crisis communication. Finally, I have begun to explore what crisis communication means in a modern context – that it is not only about image and reputation but can also be about saving lives.

Review your understanding

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to understand and explain the following:

- Three characteristics of crisis
- What risk and risk management are
- Factors affecting perceptions of risk
- The process connected to risk management
- What crisis management is

- Loosemore's theory of crisis management:
  - The four management challenges posed by crises
  - The four factors influencing successful crisis management
- The differences between crisis management and crisis communication

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4 The importance of managing complex and changing organizational environments

Learning objectives

By the end of this chapter, the reader should:

- Understand the scope and nature of issues management within a public relations (PR) and crisis context as risk management
- Analyze the complexity of issues management in changeable organizational environments
- Determine realistic issues management process goals
- Apply the issues management process

Issues, expectancy violation, issues management, and stewardship

In the introduction of the stakeholder relationship model (SRM) in Part 1, I argued that organizations ought to view their behaviors and business practices through the eyes of their stakeholders because their stakeholders determine whether the organization is sustainable. Additionally, within the context of the SRM, issues could represent anything from the products or services that the organization offers to those topics related to an organization's business in which a stakeholder is interested. In short, issues represent risks or opportunities for organizations because they are often the glue that connects organizations and different stakeholders.

Issues and expectance violations

In the context of issues management, when we talk about **issues,** we are talking about a more technical or precise concept. In this context, an issue should be thought of as a controversial gap between an organization's behavior and its stakeholders' expectations. The resolution of these differences can lead to important consequences for organizations (Heath, 2002, 2004; Heath & Gay, 1997). While the resolution of an issue might lead to positive outcomes for an organization, the issue is always a risk.

It is also important to note that there are a lot of risks that organizations face that do not emerge as issues organizations must manage. There are two necessary conditions before we can classify a risk as an issue:

- There is an expectancy violation
- There is the potential for controversy as a result of the expectancy violation

Given that issues management focuses on expectancy violation, we should briefly talk about expectancy violation theory (EVT). Though Burgoon (1993) discusses EVT in an interpersonal context, the core principles are applicable in an organizational context. EVT focuses on the expectations that people build up for others' behavior in particular situations and what can happen when the actual behaviors fall short of their expectations. Burgoon argues there are two types of expectancies: **predictive expectancies**, which define communication and interactions happening within a particular environment or context; and **prescriptive expectances**, which focus on appropriate behaviors displayed within an existing environment. For example, when we go out to a sit-down restaurant, we know what is likely to happen: we are seated and given menus; someone will take our drink and food orders, then deliver the food; and then we pay the bill. As a result, we normally communicate with the wait staff in a predictable manner.

However, when we travel to different countries, there can be different norms associated with the food-ordering ritual. As travelers, we can violate both these situational (predictive) and behavioral (prescriptive) expectances. Burgoon (1993) talks about these differences in terms of three factors that drive peoples' expectations. First are the **interactant characteristics,** including age, sex, and other personality traits. Second are the **relationship characteristics,** including the nature of the relationship between the person – and, in our case, the organization. Third are the **environmental characteristics,** including cultural influences as well as social situations.

If these seem somewhat familiar, it is because they align with the SRM, which I discussed in Chapter 3. When we start with the assumption that stakeholders have expectations of organizations that are connected to their personal interests, their connection to an organization, and the larger organizational environment, then it is easier to think about the risks inherent for organizations in violating different stakeholders' expectations of the organization. When we ask "What is an issue?" in the context of issues management, we begin with the assumption that the organization has violated an expectation.

From there, we should think about two additional components associated with issues. First, we should expect that stakeholders and organizations might differ in their perspectives and interests connected to an issue. Though we discuss the complexities of environments, stakeholders, and the implications of different points of view throughout this text, suffice it to say that while organizations and stakeholders might be concerned about the same issue, their perspectives are rarely the same. As such, organizations need to be able to understand the different perspectives on issues and the likely risk to the organization of these contestable points of difference if they are to help manage the issue (Breakwell, 2000; Freberg & Palenchar, 2013; Ginzel, Kramer, & Sutton, 1993; Scott & Lane, 2000; Slovic, 1987).

Second, we should think of managing issues as distinctive from conducting a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis because in this context, there is always inherent risk associated with emergent issues. A SWOT analysis is a general discussion of an organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats and is a vital part to ensuring that an organization is prepared for crises (Coombs, 2014); however, it is distinctive from issues management because issues management focuses on the weaknesses that could develop into crises.

Issues management and stewardship

If issues management is distinctive from SWOT analysis, then how should we think about it? When we adopt a stakeholder-centered view of organizations and crisis communication, then we also need to think about issues management as a process that is more than just managing an organization's risks, but also as a process that manages the relationships between organizations and their stakeholders. 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 encompassing the potential, emerging, current, crisis, and dormant stages of an issue (see Figure 4.1). In simple terms, as the issue moves through the first four stages, it attracts more attention and becomes less manageable from the organization's point of view (Heath & Palenchar, 2009; Meng, 1992).

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 is able to 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, members of the public, and other influencers expands, 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;

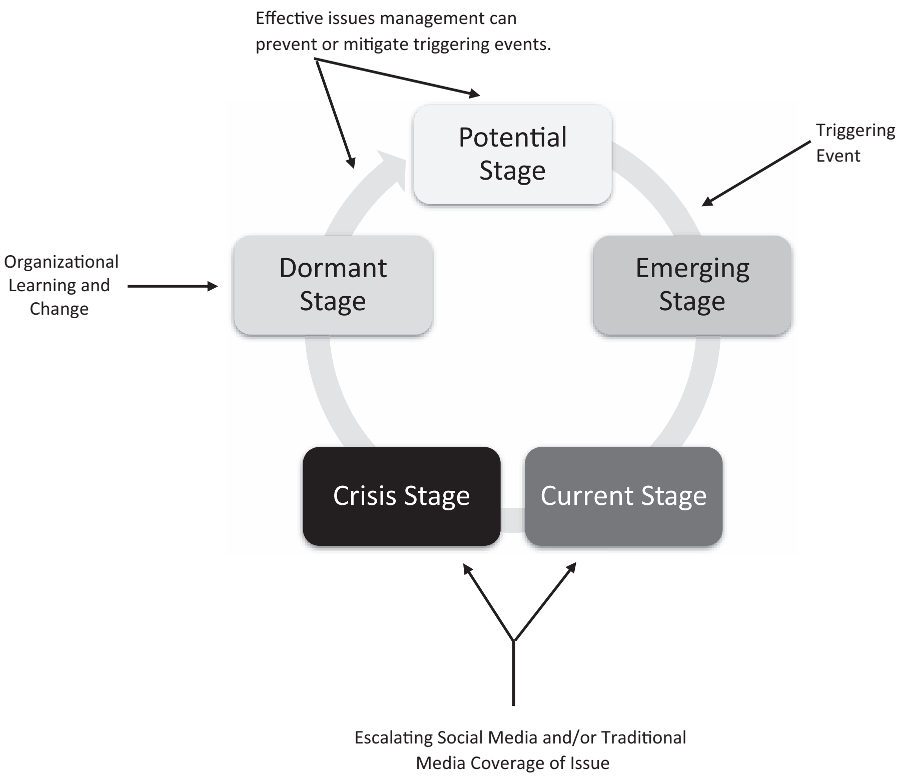

Figure 4.1 Adaptation of Meng's (1992) issues management process

Meng, 1992; Pang, Cropp, & Cameron, 2006; Seeger, Heyart, Barton, & Bultnyck, 2001).

If we think about issues management in complex environments, then organizations should be anticipating stakeholder desires related to the issues and evaluating the potential organizational impact of the issues should they develop into crises. One way to think about the role of issues management is to compare two situations discussed in Box 4.1. The case study compares the changes that accompanied China's hosting of the 2008 Summer Olympics with the emergence of Mad Cow disease in the United States in 2003. In the end, this case study also demonstrates why stakeholder stewardship is in an organization's strategic best interests.

Box 4.1 Case study: Contrasting two approaches to issues management

By Audra Diers-Lawson, Ph.D.

Let us contrast two different approaches to issues management that highlight why it is to an organization's advantage to anticipate stakeholder desires.

The 2008 Beijing Olympics prompted substantial changes in China. One of the examples of laws that were changed were a whole group of safety laws and regulations. Naturally, China knew that it would be in the world's eye in a way that they had not been before. Consequently, the new laws introduced were the outcome of lobbying by various stakeholders, including health and safety agencies as well as car manufacturers. The emerging trend reflected in the laws was increased attention being paid to health and safety concerns in Beijing – including air quality, motor vehicle safety, and traffic reduction.

One of these new laws made retrofitting car sunroofs illegal in Beijing and left a national manufacturer in trouble. The sunroof manufacturer was caught in the crossfire of stakeholder interests and was unable to respond effectively; the outcome was substantial and negative. The manufacturer failed to anticipate the law or its impact, and this meant financial ruin.

By contrast, in the United States Mad Cow disease had been on the issues management radar of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association for years when, in 2003, the first case was identified in the United States. By anticipating the event and mapping out a goal-driven response in advance, the Association was able to respond quickly. This was also helped by the fact that only one infected animal imported from Canada had been identified.

The Association's response was multilayered, including direct consultation with regulators, consumer advocacy groups, and other key stakeholders, as well as an intensive national and international news media outreach. It also had evaluation measures ready to go – and as a result, beef demand rose by almost 8% in 2004 and consumer confidence in US beef increased from 88% just before the event in 2003 to 93% in 2005.

The takeaway from this is that issues management is more than just crisis avoidance – it is about understanding how social, political, economic, and environmental expectations are shifting and being able to manage the change. When done well, issues management can lead to increased profitability; when done poorly, not only can it lead to crisis, but it may mean that an organization simply cannot function.

Yet, complex environments make all of this incredibly difficult.

The issues management process

If the US National Cattlemen's Beef Association provides us with an example of good issues management, then we can break it down into a set of assumptions about issues management and stages in the process.

In order to devote adequate resources to issues management, then organizations must make four assumptions about issues management.

1 **Strategic business planning**: An organization must assume that issue management is essential to good strategic business planning (see, e.g., Elsbach et al., 1998). This means that an organization must evaluate its key value proposition, identify its stakeholders and the stakes that matter to both the organization and its stakeholders, and then create and implement plans of action that connect all of these components (Acquier, Valiorgue, & Daudigeos, 2017; Baldassarre, Calabretta, Bocken, & Jaskiewicz, 2017; Heath, 2004).

2 **Social responsibility**: An organization must assume that it is responsible to a variety of stakeholders (Kujala & Korhonen, 2017). However, to whom the organization is responsible will vary by industry, value proposition, and an organization's ethics. But this assumption means that the organization believes it has some level of social responsibility. Remember that our definition of issue management focused on an organization's responsibility to be good stewards of stakeholder interests.

3 **Intelligence:** When I talk about intelligence, naturally I am talking about information – and how we use information to make judgments. The assumption is that without good intelligence, organizations cannot make good decisions. For example, organizations ought to understand key stakeholders and their likely

reactions to situations before making decisions (Hobbins & Enander, 2015). Similarly, organizations ought to understand key situational factors that might influence its ability to respond (Seeger et al., 2001).

4 **Strong defense, smart offense:** Good engagement and communication should be assumed to be an important part of issues management. The process is always grounded by a basic campaign approach emphasizing (a) identifying goals and key audience(s), (b) setting key measurable objectives, (c) developing a well-grounded strategy that will let you meet the measurable objectives, and (d) measurement and evaluation (Elsbach et al., 1998; Heath & Palenchar, 2009; Kernisky, 1997; Ritchie, 2004; Sung & Hwang, 2014).

While there is much work to do in order to enact and maintain an active issues management program within an organization, the process itself is very straightforward. Research from a number of scholars argues the process involves scanning, monitoring, decision-making, and evaluation (Heath & Palenchar, 2009; Palese & Crane, 2002; Regester & Larkin, 2008). So, let us have a look at the process overall and then break it down into each of its individual parts (see Figure 4.2).

Scanning

The first step in effective issues management is to apply both informal and formal research in order to develop actionable intelligence about the organization, its stakeholders, and its operational environment. Put more simply, the scanning phase in

Figure 4.2 Issues management process overview

issues management is ongoing and devoted to collecting and organizing information relevant to the organization. Scanning does not focus on analyzing the information, but instead merely developing a systematic approach for identifying information to analyze. Bridges and Nelson (2000) argue that scanning is important because it ensures the organization is prepared for emergent threats.

The central objective for scanning is to understand the organization's environment, its stakeholders, and the intersection between those (Aldoory, Kim, & Tindall, 2010; Coombs, 2004; Shepard, Betz, & O'Connell, 1997; Sutcliffe, 2001).

Bridges and Nelson (2000) identify four ways to segment an organization's environment in the scanning process:

- **Social** refers to collecting information that monitors an organization's reputation, such as what different stakeholders might be saying or feeling about the organization. For example, this could involve monitoring social media trends related to the organization or industry, conducting questionnaires or interviews with critical stakeholders, or employee satisfaction audits.
- **Economic** refers to collecting information about the economic environment from the local to the global level that reflects the economic trends, issues, and indicators that might affect the organization. For example, this could include monitoring economic publications and forecasts, financial figures for the company and industry or analyzing business news on a regular basis to identify factors likely to affect the organization.
- **Political/regulatory** refers to collecting information about trends or shifts in different administrations, governments, or regulatory environments. An example of the type of regulatory information that could be collected would be tracking new laws that would affect the ways the organization does business. Collecting political information could involve evaluating how a new head of state could influence the operational environment for the organization and monitoring political publications/broadcasts for key themes emerging.
- **Competitive** refers to collecting information about an organization's competitors. This provides intelligence about factors that are affecting the broader industry or specific competitors so that organizations may make strategic decisions about the competitive environment. Examples of this could be monitoring advocacy groups relevant to the industry, tracking news related to events competitors are facing, or identifying global trends within an industry.

From a process viewpoint, scanning is straightforward as it is about gathering information to prepare to analyze it. However, as anyone who has ever started a new project knows, it can be daunting – especially so in this case, if the organization does not have a structured approach to scanning. A critical challenge, at this stage, is information overload – finding so much information that it is not well-organized or systematically collected.

While there are many strategies for managing information overload, there are two broad recommendations to ensure that the scanning process is systematic and manageable.

- **Organizations must assess the information they already have.** There is no point in re-inventing the wheel. Most organizations already have repositories of information, news aggregators, and the like. The key at this point is data reduction, which can involve making lists and creating a simple filing system so that the information is easy to access. One practical recommendation is to create and maintain a database of searchable information. The mechanism to organize the information does not matter – it could be Microsoft Access, Excel, EndNote, or one of the many project-organizing databases. The point should be that the information is searchable and easily available.
- **Organizations must formalize a 'replicable' scanning plan.** Of course, everything that we do in communication needs to be agile, but on a regular basis, there should be an approach to scanning and gathering information that (a) establishes/uses a clear procedure for getting information on the environment and key stakeholders, (b) has a brief rationale for the procedures so that they are transparent to anyone, (c) identifies the necessary resources that are available, and (d) streamlines the process where possible.

Scanning is often overlooked, but an effective and simple scanning plan can ensure that the best information is getting used so that the organization can monitor issues. To borrow from the adage: Garbage in is garbage out.

Monitoring

Once the routine information is collected in the scanning process, then the work of monitoring the information begins. Monitoring is often paired with scanning, and the two concepts are sometimes used interchangeably; however, it is a conceptually and pragmatically separate step from scanning. When the scanning system reveals an issue that could be emerging or have the potential to emerge, a decision to actively monitor the issue must be made.

There are nearly an infinite number of issues that organizations could monitor; however, no organization has infinite resources; therefore, monitoring is a strategic decision to devote resources to an issue. For that reason, Heath (1997) suggests that monitoring should occur only after a potential issue meets three criteria:

- The issue is growing in legitimacy as signaled by coverage by journalists and/or other opinion leaders in legacy or social media
- The issue offers a quantifiable threat relative to the organization's markets or operations
- The issue is championed by an individual, group, or institution with actual OR potential influence

If an organization is doing a good job of identifying and mapping its stakeholders (see Chapter 5), then the monitoring process is a way to connect issues with relevant stakeholders so that the organization can make informed strategic decisions about the best ways to proceed with risk mitigation. Likewise, organizations need to be able to track issues easily with information available at a glance that can be developed into strategic recommendation reports. In issues management this is often accomplished with a **risk register**. A risk register is just a log or basic database used to identify risks, their severity, and action steps that can be taken. It needs to provide a snapshot to determine what is going on in an organization's environment. Risk registers are meant to be adaptable and living documents updated regularly.

A risk register can be as simple as a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that formalizes information about potential issues in a way that provides practitioners an at-a-glance summary of issues that organizations are facing. There are many different models and approaches to risk registers; however, they typically identify a number of qualities of issues, including brief descriptions. Risk registers are added to with each of the monitoring, evaluation, and decision-making stages of the issues management process and then used to inform the scanning process. Table 4.1 lists the information that should be captured in the risk register and updated as new intelligence becomes available.

Decision-making

The monitoring phase of the process and creation or updates to the risk register will create an evaluation of particular issues and threats; however, based on categorization and good judgment, we have to begin to allocate proper resources to managing issues. An organization's values and its culture will influence the decision-making process. For example, I would argue that ethical organizations will consider all aspects of costs and benefits. Less ethical organizations consider only profit and loss.

Prioritization is the first component of good decision-making in issues management. It determines which issues demand organizational response and, therefore, the

Table 4.1 Recommended information to capture for risk registers

Process stage	Information category	Brief explanation
Monitoring	Risk title	Provide a brief name for the risk.
	Risk description	Provide a brief description of the risk.
	Category	Identify which category it could affect, including social, economic, political, and competitor.
	Risk category	Categorize the risk. Is it primarily an issue of time, cost, scope, resources, environment, reputation, or another key category?
	Present impact	Is this currently affecting/likely to affect us in the next six months?
	Competitor impact	Is this presently affecting one or more competitor?
	Location risk	Is the operational location(s) likely to be affected?
	Internal or external	Which stakeholders are primarily affected – internal, external, or both?
	Stakeholders involved	Identify the stakeholders likely to be directly involved with issue.
	Stakeholders affected	Regardless of whether they are involved, which stakeholders are likely to be affected by the issue?
	Champions	Regardless of involvement or impact, which stakeholders are likely to champion the issue in the public eye?
	Trigger	What event(s) are likely to happen to trigger the issue's emergence?
Decision-Making	Consequences	What is the likely consequence if the risk becomes an issue? Identify any that apply, such as reputation, sales, emergency losses, strategic alliances, regulatory, or other (specify).
	Probability	Identify the likelihood that the risk will become an issue as low, medium, high, or extreme.
	Severity	Evaluate the risk to the organization's key operations as low, medium, high, or extreme.

(Continued)

Table 4.1 (Continued)

Process stage	Information category	Brief explanation
	Time scale	If the issue emerges, when is the organization likely to see the impacts (immediate, short-term, long-term, or combination)?
	Risk mitigation actions	What can/should the organization do to minimize the likelihood the risk will be triggered?
	Opportunity oosts of risk ritigation	Costs (financial, time, personnel, etc.) that the organization is likely to incur with risk mitigation recommendations.
	Residual Risk	After risk mitigation is enacted, what is the likelihood that the risk will emerge? Low, moderate, high, or extreme
	Risk mitigation owners	Who has to take the lead on risk mitigation (e.g., communications, operations, C-level, HR, etc.)?
	Contingency recommendations	What should be done if the issue emerges?
	Prioritization	What should the priority be to enact risk mitigation actions (low, moderate, high, or extreme)?
Evaluation	Measurable objectives	If action is taken to mitigate this risk, identify two to four specific and measurable objectives to evaluate success of risk mitigation efforts.
	Success threshold	Identify relative levels of success for each objective, and clarify what success means (e.g., minimizing issue emergence, improving reputation, etc.).
	Evaluation scheme	For each measurable objective, identify how it can be concretely measured.
	Issue rank	Rank the known issues listed in this register in terms of priority.
	Sources	What resources have been used to support identification, emergence of issue?
	Comments	Note any other comments to help other groups, departments initiate actions to mitigate risks based on information available

allocation of resources. Although there are many ways to analyze issues using open access and proprietary models, there are four common sense assessments of issues that should guide prioritization.

1 What are the consequences and who will have to face the consequences of the issues?
2 How likely is the issue to affect the organization?
3 How much impact will the issue have? No two issues are equal and should not be treated as such.
4 If there is any impact, when is it likely to occur? In a context of limited resources, sometimes organizations have to balance time scale, severity, and probability.

Prioritization is not a decision that is made once; issues can be moved up or down on an agenda for action or simply back for continued monitoring depending on the prioritization and urgency of the issue. Prioritization is also often determined by the stakeholders involved (Henriques & Sadorsky, 1999).

Second, organizations must assess their **strategic options**. Like any other management discipline, robust issues management strategy emerges from sound data, diverse viewpoints and ingenuity. Obtaining credible information and identifying realistic and measurable objectives provide the foundation for effective anticipatory and responsive strategy development. This is, after all, the core objective of issues management (Ashley & Morrison, 1997; Palese & Crane, 2002).

When an organization is evaluating its options, it has to try to make judgments about the types of scenarios that could happen before it makes decisions. This is why issues management is a research-intensive and information-based process. However, there is also a creative aspect to this process. Issues management analysts need to be able to take existing information and predict realistic situations that could affect the organization. Building on previous research in anticipatory risk management (see Ashley & Morrison, 1997), the decision-making process in issues management has four components:

1 Organizations must identify and choose among different risk mitigation options.
2 Organizations must identify the opportunity costs associated with risk mitigation. That is to say, if the organization allocates resources to mitigate an issue, are there other unintended consequences (positive or negative) that might emerge because of risk mitigation?
3 Organizations must identify the residual risk that remains, even after risk mitigation efforts. No plan will completely eliminate risk and all plans could create other threats, so it is essential that organizations must identify the potential side effects to risk mitigation and evaluate those in comparison with the risk itself.

4 Once risk mitigation decisions are taken, who will own the solution development and implementation? That is to say, who or what department is responsible for executing different elements of the risk mitigation plan?

The final component to the decision-making process is actually **taking action**. It may seem obvious enough, but for anyone who has been around an organization, the space between between decisions to take action and taking action can be quite a cavern. According to issues manager practitioner-expert, Tony Jacques, the greatest barriers to effective issues management are the lack of clear objectives and the unwillingness or inability to act (Jaques, 2009).

For communication practitioners, the action stage should look very familiar because it is based in creating a viable and measurable campaign. This means that to take action effectively, we must:

- Identify clear objectives – like any measurable objective, they should be concrete
- Make contingency recommendations – these must be clear and actionable
- Prioritize risk mitigation actions – we must balance risk and benefits to the actions themselves

The challenge in this process can come in a false-economy approach to decision-making. If we automatically take the less expensive or easier route, we have to ask two questions: Is the organization just going to have to make the more expensive changes later? If so, has the organization opened itself up to additional risks by not taking action? Let me offer you an example: In 2017 the United Kingdom witnessed a terrible fire in a high-rise apartment complex – Grenfell Tower. It turned out that the council, in an effort to make the complex look more attractive (it was low-income housing in a very expensive part of London) paid for cladding (siding) to be installed on the outside of the building. The particular cladding they chose was inexpensive and looked nice. The problem was that if there was a fire, this cladding could cause catastrophic damage – it held heat in and could allow fire to spread in the building's structure. This particular cladding was already illegal in many countries (e.g., the United States and Germany).

Thus, in 2017, when the worst happened – a fire in the 20-plus story building – many people living on the 14th floor and higher had no chance to escape. The loss of life was compounded because fire departments typically recommend for people in high-rise buildings to stay in their apartments in case of fire, because these buildings are meant to be constructed so that fires are easy to contain. Sadly, the cladding made this recommendation deadly. This is a good example of decision-making that prioritized short-term financial cost against long-term risks. A calculated decision would have been made because the risks of calamity were so low – that is, while the consequences were severe, the probability was low and so in the decision calculus, it seemed a reasonable choice to make. These decisions are common – organizations worldwide weigh these considerations on a regular basis. The decisions balance economic, risk, and ethical evaluations.

It should also be clear at this stage that many of the decisions made and actions taken are beyond the remit of PR and communications professionals. While issues management often starts with public relations professionals, it also has to be a cross-functional task to ensure that the right people are making the decisions. So, while the actions that an organization takes may not be directly related to communication, communications professionals almost always a part of the process because whether the strategy is entirely internal or external, or most likely a combination of both – communication is always a part of the action stage and often involved throughout the decision-making process.

Evaluation

After actions are taken, there is an evaluation stage. The issues management process begins and ends with data or intelligence. At the heart of it, this process – like all strategic communication efforts – should also be a learning process in which we better understand what went well, so that we know what we should replicate in the future and what needs to be addressed now or should be addressed differently in the future. Think of the evaluation stage as the bridge to the ongoing issues management process that wraps up particular actions taken so that the organization can assess and add the outcomes to its scanning, monitoring, and decision-making in the future.

The evaluation stage does not necessarily come last in a sequence. Planning how relative levels of success can be measured, evaluated, and lessons learned developed is an inherent part of each of the stages. However, the evaluation stage formalizes and executes the logics and ethics of enacting recommendations throughout the process. There are three critical components to evaluation: creating measurable objectives, evaluating success, and capturing lessons from successes and failures.

First, setting clear and measurable objectives lays out the thresholds for evaluating the relative success of the issues management process. These should be aligned with the goals set up in the decision-making process, and tied to the risks identified earlier. In short, just as with everything else that we do, we begin by establishing what matters and how we know whether we were successful.

While the details in evaluating the success of issues management initiatives will vary as much as the issues themselves, measurable objectives in issues management should evaluate actions to mitigate the risk and identify the relative success thresholds for risk mitigation actions.

Second, identifying our evaluation scheme identifies the strategy we will use to evaluate our measurable objectives. Practitioners today have access to more measurement tools than ever before; the challenge is to find the tools that best fit the set objectives. For example, measuring the extent and tone of media coverage is meaningful only if one of the pursued objectives is to secure specific media attention in terms of volume, channels, tone, and so on. Other objectives – such as influencing the drafting of legislation, positioning the organization effectively in relation to an industry-wide problem, or correcting allegations about a product or service – all require different metrics. As such, for each objective, the task is to identify how it can be measured and the types of information required. Additionally, how the organization can access the information should also be identified.

Third, capturing lessons learned from failures and successes is vital to informing ongoing organizational strategy. In truth, this is probably the most important in an ongoing issues management program because this informs the other three stages. For what went well, what aspects of the process should be replicated in the future? For what went poorly, what were the problems and how can they be mitigated in the future?

Naturally, lessons learned are not applicable only to issues management; there will also be real tangible management, leadership, communication, and material lessons learned from each issue managed – no matter whether it was poorly managed or effectively managed. When organizations clearly demonstrate that they have listened, made changes, and improved, that carries weight with people (Huzey, Betts, & Vicari, 2014). In short, evaluation must be an authentic activity in which the organization reflects on what it can do better in the future versus simply trying to make itself look good. In the end, issues management cannot be about putting lipstick on a pig.

In review . . .

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce readers to issues management as a concrete process that organizations can and should use to not only manage the complexity of their environment, but to mitigate or minimize issues and crises as they are triggered.

Review your understanding

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to understand and explain the following.

- The concepts of issues management, expectancy violation, issues management, and stewardship

- The assumptions about the issues management process
- The approach to issues management, including:
  - Scanning
  - Monitoring
  - Decision-making
  - Evaluation
- What a risk register is and how it can be approached in issues management

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7 Defining crisis capacity in a modern environment

Learning objectives

By the end of this chapter, the reader should:

- Better understand the relationship between crisis management and crisis communication
- Be able to use theory to analyze organizational capacity for stakeholder relationship management
- Evaluate the influence of industry of organizational capacity to respond to crises

In Part 2 I focused on understanding the intersection of stakeholders and crises. However, in this section, I look inside the organization to better understand what can influence how effectively an organization *can* respond to crises. Just as organizations do not exist in vacuums, crisis management and crisis communication are not only about the environment and stakeholders outside the organization, but also about those within the organization who make decisions and execute strategy.

For this reason, I will adopt an inside-out approach to crisis response. I will begin by examining the concept of organizational capacity relative to crisis management, then explore the challenges of crisis management. How does an organization's crisis history and its industry affect its capacity to answer this question: What does success in crisis response really take?

Crisis management and crisis response

In Chapter 2, I differentiated between crisis management, as the material response to the crisis, and crisis communication, as the focus on stakeholder relationship management. I also introduced Loosemore's (1999) theory of crisis management, which identifies the four essential crisis management challenges:

- Internal power struggles
- Linking communication to efficiency instead of value
- Capacity of crises to encourage conflict
- Crisis emergence discouraging collective responsibility

While Loosemore's theory of crisis management has been influential in the last couple of decades, one of the key elements that his identification of the challenges and factors influencing successful crisis management demonstrates is that effective communication is likely to predict the success or failure of crisis response efforts. Internally, managing our teams and organizations relies on creating a productive work environment. Externally, the same themes focus stakeholder identification with the organization and goodwill towards it, despite the crisis.

The Jet2 case study in Box 7.1 demonstrates some of the quintessential differences between crisis management and communication as well as the importance of building the organization's capacity to communicate effectively during crises.

Box 7.1 Case study: "They don't care about you people at all"; when crisis management works but communication fails

By Audra Diers-Lawson, Ph.D.

One of the emerging pressure points for organizations in crisis is how often and clearly they communicate with those directly affected by the situation. An organization may be managing a crisis effectively, but without communicating that information to invested stakeholders, they risk creating a secondary crisis. For example, one of the principal criticisms of Malaysian Airlines regarding the disappearance of Flight 370 in 2014 was the perception that the airline failed to meet the information update needs of the families affected.

For those who travel, minor flight delays are common; however, they are likely to create stress and concern. As I was getting ready to begin work on this textbook, I happened to take a Jet2CityBreak in Prague, Czech Republic, to meet with friends and was returning on the late Sunday evening flight to the United Kingdom.

Because of severe weather in the United Kingdom, the Sunday afternoon and evening flights between Leeds and Prague were delayed and then cancelled.

What did Jet2 do to manage the passenger crisis?

From a crisis management perspective, Jet2 seemed to meet its obligations. As a vacation package passenger, I received preferential treatment compared to flight-only passengers. That meant that Jet2 booked me into a hotel until I could arrange for a flight home. Flight-only passengers had to manage their own accommodations, but from reports they were also re-booked once customer service was open again on Monday morning.

The secondary crisis: Crisis communication failure

Take a look at the timeline: For as decent a job that the company did in ultimately getting people home, its communication was abysmal. It was clear from watching the airport and Jet2 ground staff in Prague that they were receiving no information from Jet2. In fact, the first that the agents at the check-in desk heard that the flight was cancelled was from a passenger who received a status update online. This was then confirmed with the airport, though with no additional information.

Once everyone learned the flight would be cancelled, Jet2 was not readily available for anyone – including ground staff, the local travel company, or the passengers. Not surprisingly, this led to considerable frustration. In fact, after more than two hours of trying to connect to Jet2 to get instructions for vacation-package and flight-only passengers, one of the local agents exclaimed, "I don't know what to tell you, flight-only passengers – Jet2 doesn't care about you. They don't care about you people at all."

Let that sink in: The core message at the moment when people were feeling most uncertain and frustrated was that the company did not care about those directly affected by the delay. Regardless of whether that was true, as the flight-only passengers began to disperse, this was the thought in their minds as they had to find their own accommodations and return flights.

For those of us on the vacation package, at least we were 'cared for' enough to finally get to a hotel with the promise of contact. At that point we learned

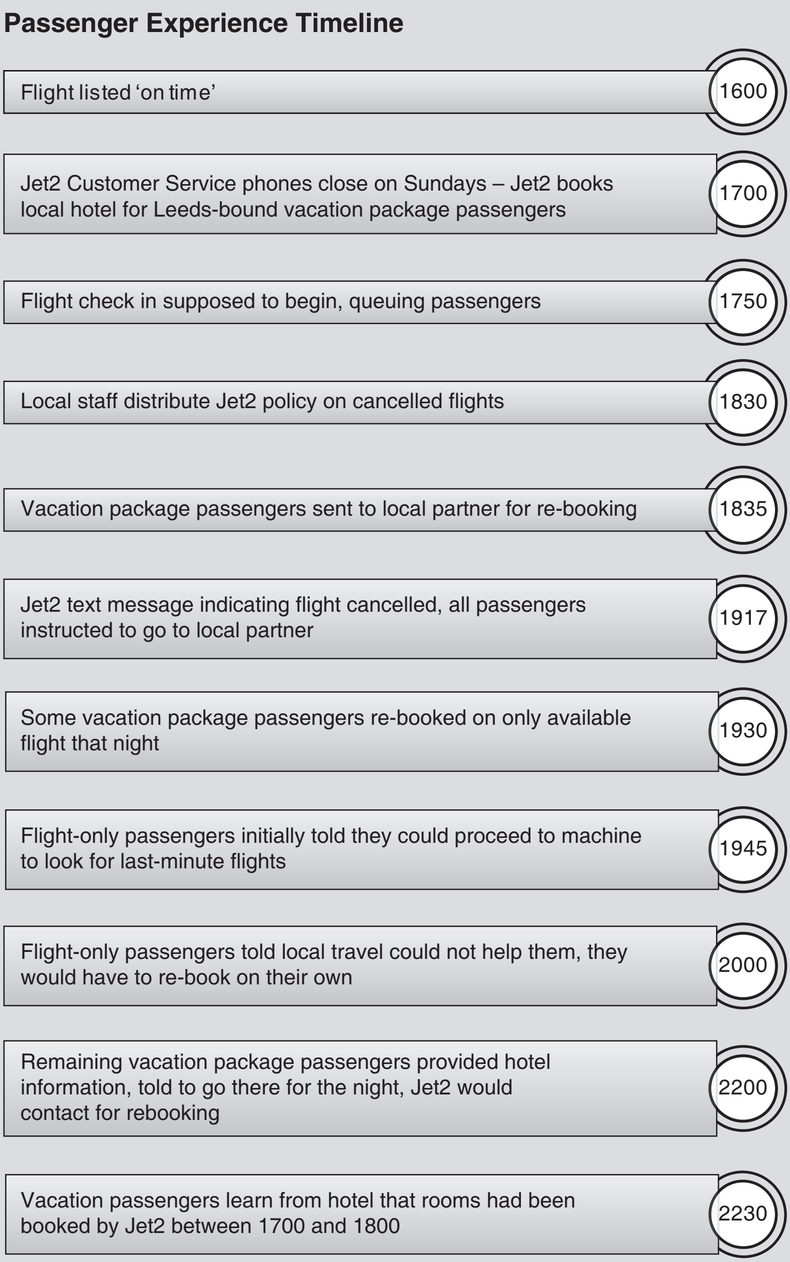

Figure 7.1 Jet2 passenger experience timeline

that Jet2 had contacted the hotel to book the rooms for us about five hours earlier.

Between 5:00 p.m. and midnight, the only direct communication that everyone received from Jet2 was a single text message:

> Dear <insert passenger name> Jet2.com and Jet2holidays regrets to advise that due to operational issues flight LS197 to Leeds Bradford has been cancelled. Jet2.com apologises for the inconvenience caused by these circumstances which are beyond our control. Customers should speak to <local partner> staff for further information. We would like to thank you for your patience and understanding at this time and apologise for the disruption caused.

In the end, the primary crisis was an unavoidable event – there were severe storms in the United Kingdom. Jet2 also met its contractual obligations to passengers. Though its crisis management was not seamless in its decision-making and problem solving, the genuine failure was a lack of timely communication, information dissemination, instructions for passengers, and messaging for local responders.

As I was navigating my own experience with Jet2, what occurred to me was a phrase that I heard from passengers, the local staff, Jet2, and in the media: This particular route had never had a situation like this before. It seemed to be that everyone was treading into new waters and was unprepared for both the situation and its timing (a Sunday night once the central customer service offices were closed).

What the Jet2 case also highlights is that crisis management is increasingly seen as a public relations (PR) function (Stacks, 2004), something that is consistent with the research trends across applied fields like medicine and health, the STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and math), management and business, as well as industry-based research discussed in Chapter 1 (see Figures 1.4–1.9). In all of these applied fields, crisis communication has been increasingly linked with risk assessment, information management, crisis management, crisis planning, and training. Why? Because as Stacks (2004) argues:

> Crisis management planning is actually a corporate communication plan that seeks to manage various public perceptions of the crisis. An effective crisis management plan is a well thought out campaign that seeks to reduce any negative impact, while generating positive outcomes during a crisis period.
>
> (p. 38)

Because I have already been talking about issues and crisis management in the context of the stakeholder relationship model, Stacks's argument should make sense. He is suggesting that crisis management, from a structural perspective, should look like any other strategic campaign that an organization can develop and implement – one that has: strategic objectives, devises an aligned strategy to meet those objectives, executes them effectively, and then evaluates the effectiveness of the campaign.

This lets us de-mystify the strategy component of crisis communication so that we are focusing on structures and strategy with which we are already familiar.

Organizational capacity for crisis response

If we begin with the assumption that building crisis response is similar to building any other campaign, and that communication professionals are integral to that process, then specifically what does it take to define an organization's capacity for effective crisis response? Stacks's (2004) multidimensional model of PR provides some good criteria for organizational capacity.

Effective crisis management is inextricably linked with communication

Stacks's model argues that effective crisis management has three distinctive qualities. First, **effective crisis management ensures that PR functions are institutionalized**. This means that in order for crisis management to be successful, communication professionals need to be included as an equal part of the strategic decision-making team. This does not mean that the communication professional is responsible for solving the material problem (if there is one) associated with the crisis, but it does mean that in a cross-functional team it is essential to have communication expertise as part of the process.

Stacks's argument about the importance of having communication expertise in crisis management is not unique. For example, Chen's (2009) analysis of the Chinese government's response to the 2008 Sichuan earthquake demonstrated that when communication was institutionalized – that is, made an inherent part of strategic decision-making process – the government's capacity to respond to the crisis was substantially improved. Chen compared these findings to the relatively lower levels of strategic decision-making institutionalization across Europe and North America and argued that when PR falls into mere supporting or advisory roles, the organization's capacity for effective crisis response is reduced. But the Chinese case is not the only one that points to the importance of institutionalizing the PR function as part of building capacity for crisis response. In fact, reflections on the failures of the US Government's crisis response during Hurricane Katrina (Comfort, 2007) – as well as reflections on the post 9/11 era and case studies across industries like the public sector, financial services, travel and tourism, fast food, and manufacturing – demonstrate that the institutionalization of communication within crisis management and decision-making is essential to the success of crisis management and corporate strategy (Campiranon & Scott, 2014; Frandsen & Johansen, 2009; Jindal, Laveena, & Aggarwal, 2015; McLaughlin, 2002, p. 870; Miller & Horsley, 2009; Takamatsu, 2014).

Second, effective crisis management must take into account the **type of organization** the plan will manage. Crisis planning and management for corporate firms, nonprofits, governments, schools, and so on all need to be customized to the particular organization and particular circumstances in which the organization is operating (Stacks, 2004). For example, after the 2010 BP deep-water oil rig explosion in the Gulf of Mexico, one of the embarrassing realities that came to light was that just about all of the major oil companies – not just BP – had problematic crisis plans. In the congressional hearings on the explosion, this was cited as one of the reasons that the material problems were slow to be addressed: Very simply, the industry did not have the right resources ready to deploy.

No matter the particular situational factors, Stacks's argument focuses on the impact of tailored crisis plans and crisis management as essential to success. This has been demonstrated across industries like financial services, where unique information needs and efforts to rebuild trust and confidence in financial organizations were central after the 2008 financial collapse (DiStaso, 2010). Consistently, the narrative is that industry and organization-centered strategies are essential to success (Bowen & Zheng, 2015; Conkey, 2004; Kal-kausar, Rafida, Nurulhusna, Alina, & Mashitoh, 2013; Maresh & Williams, 2007). We will come back to the question of how the type of organization affects crisis management shortly, because one of the critical assumptions in crisis response is that the type of organization influences crisis reactions – both in terms of the organization's likelihood to react as well as stakeholders' reactions to the organization.

Third, effective crisis management **develops specific targeted messaging**. Tailored communication is nothing new, but in the context of crisis response, organizations have to ensure that their crisis responses are aligned with their current practices and stakeholder concerns about the crisis (Stacks, 2004). In terms of capacity building, this suggests that the crisis management team needs to be directly connected with all communications activities. In a study of the best ways to help manage a major natural hazard, Steelman and McCaffrey (2013) found that the process of wildfire management – that is, making decisions that affect the strategy for fighting the wildfires themselves – was improved when there was evidence of good information management and communication practices before and during the fires. This enabled manages to more readily adapt to the changeable conditions in the wildfires and help improve the response and efficacy of the response. This wildfire example is not just a great metaphor for most crises, but it demonstrates that even in situations where the material management of the situation is about a physical response to the situation, good communication with targeted and focused messaging is essential. One of the reasons for this is that crisis management requires adaptive information-rich responses to facilitate both internal and external stakeholder actions to help manage the situation, risk, and relationships (Steelman & McCaffrey, 2013). But more than that, in an era where information seeking is high and information sharing happens across platforms, it is vital that organizations be viewed as credible sources of information for all key stakeholders (Park & Cameron, 2014; Utz, Schultz, & Glocka, 2013; van Zoonen & van der Meer, 2015).

Crisis capacity defined

If we take these three qualities of good crisis management into account – that an organization has institutionalized its communication function, it adapts its crisis response to its own needs, and that it develops aligned and targeted messaging – then organizations should adopt a management structure that focuses on stakeholders, facilitates a good flow of communication, and allows excellence in adaptation to the situation.

Initially, Stacks (2004) argues that organizations must have the physical organizational structures in place in order to respond to crises. In their work on corporate governance in the context of crises, Alpaslan, Green, and Mitroff (2009) demonstrate that if organizations adopt a stakeholder model of corporate governance, this will improve their ability to be more proactive and accommodating in crisis management. They suggest that every aspect of corporate governance should focus on the needs of stakeholder responsibility, including everything from contract development to management behaviors. Their core argument is that organizations following these principles are more likely to avert crises or at least mitigate their impact. This supports Heath's (1998) body of research indicating that good crisis management emphasizes an **integrated management approach for organizational decision-making** that involves prevention, mitigation, actual response, and recovery and explicitly includes advisory personnel, internal and external communications personnel, and functional management teams linking normal operations and crisis response. This suggests that as a crisis emerges, instead of assembling a crisis response team, the team is already in place and has been working together across routine activities as well as risk mitigation and crisis management activities.

There are several benefits for organizations with management structures that facilitate this kind of ongoing risk mitigation, stakeholder-centered strategy, and cross-functional decision-making.

- First, the obvious one – risk mitigation activities (e.g., issues management) minimize or eliminate crises before they emerge and improves crisis response.
- This kind of integrated management improves organizational learning and is especially beneficial for small and medium-sized organizations that are least able to weather significant crises (Huzey, Betts, & Vicari, 2014).
- These structures improve the purposeful exchange of information within and between organizations, the media, and other stakeholders before during and after crises (Johansson & Härenstam, 2013).
- It can help to improve the coordination of crisis management between often competing interests in organizations. There is often a disconnect between communication recommendations for responding to issues and crises and legal recommendations for response. When the organization's decision-making process is set up to facilitate coordination between departments and interests within the organization, competing and contradictory recommendations can be minimized both improving the material response and reputational outcomes (Martinelli & Briggs, 1998).

In short, when an organization's structure and management approach integrates issues and crisis response as routine, it provides a source of sustainable competitive advantage that allows organizations to move from being crisis prone to crisis prepared (Palese & Crane, 2002; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). More than that, this kind of an integrated management approach not only builds the capacity of the organization to respond to crises but also to perform more ethically before, during, and after crises (Folkes & Karmins, 1999; Kim, 2013; Simola, 2003, 2005).

Organizations, industries, and crisis capacity

To put it simply, an organization's crisis capacity is also influenced by the type of organization that it is and the industry that it is in (Stacks, 2004). But why is this? Why does the type of organization affect crisis response so much?

In part, we have to consider an organization's industry because the influences of structure, infrastructure, relationships, social environments, and stability are often strongly related to the industry that an organization is in. An industry is likely to influence an organization's experience with crises as well as its reaction to them. As such, industry contributes to an organization's capabilities, identity, and even its reputation. This is no more clearly evidenced than in the banking industry after the financial crash of 2008, when the industry's reputation created credibility problems throughout the industry – no matter the particular financial institution (DiStaso, 2010).

But also, there is good evidence that the industry influences an organization's communication needs and opportunities when the organization is in crisis (Sellnow & Sarabakhsh, 1999). Research suggests there are two ways that industry is often considered in terms of its influence.

- **Industries affect organizations and their experience with crises**. For example, Elsbach's (1994) analysis of the California cattle industry examined the construction and effectiveness of verbal accounts across the industry as it faced different crises. One industry that is often studied is the airline industry, with research centering on crisis response to specific events or broad industry reactions to changing conditions (Goyal & Negi, 2014; Greer & Moreland, 2003, p. 619). There are similar findings across different industries such as travel and tourism, automobile, manufacturing, financial, sports/entertainment, and technology industries.
- When industry is considered in crisis communication, we can find clear evidence of differences in communication needs based on those organizations that are in **crisis prone versus non-crisis prone industries**. Previous research has identified seven industries as crisis-prone: finance and insurance; professional, scientific, and technical services, information (e.g., telecommunications, computer software, and hardware); transportation and warehousing; manufacturing; mining; and travel (Coombs & Holladay, 2004; Diers & Tomaino, 2010; Millar, 2004). Consistently, these findings suggest that a history of crisis changes the ways that organizations react to crises.

In review . . .

In the end, it is important to remember that while crisis management and crisis communication are not the same, they are inextricably linked. The data for the last 15–20 years very clearly indicates that in organizations where communications or PR functions are an integrated part of the decision-making, management, and strategy processes, those organizations are significantly better able to prepare for and respond to crises. Thus, as we talk about capacity building for improved crisis response in Part 3 of this book, we must remember that when organizations adopt a stakeholder model for governance, this not only shifts the ethical and social responsibility obligations of those organizations away from a purely self-focus but also improves their capacity for mitigating and managing crises. Put simply, a stakeholder model for governance places communication as a part of the decision-making process and not merely an add-on advisory role.

Review your understanding

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to understand and explain the following.

- The differences between crisis management and crisis response
- What organizational capacity for crisis response includes:
  - The inextricable link between crisis management and crisis communication
  - Definition of crisis capacity
  - Benefits of building crisis capacity
- Influence of industry on crisis capacity

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