



**COMMUNICATION IN A CRISIS WITH REFERENCE TO
BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS**



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ABSTRACT

Crisis communication has been relegated to a defensive role, where the premise of the crisis communication is the need to upset potential negative consequences of not communicating. This paper suggests that crisis communication should be a part of the larger issues of communication policy and strategy that may lead to more effective and efficient influence of opinion development among the members of the public important to organizations. Crisis management also plays a crucial role in deteriorating the antagonistic effects among the public which

may be detrimental at times. It plays a significant role by transforming the unexpected into the anticipated and responding accordingly. Media aids crisis communication by passing the concerned unbiased message to the target community. Crisis management should be given credible importance and should be adopted by every organization which serves a big way in the times of crisis.

KEY WORDS

Communication, crisis Management,
Technology

RESEARCH PAPER

INTRODUCTION:

Communication skills are put to real test in crisis situations. Like individuals, business organizations too face crisis situations. Crisis is a crucial or decisive moment, a time of difficulty or distress or an emergency. The crisis situation may vary depending upon the nature of business organization. An organization providing security may face crisis when there is a major security leakage. A Bank may face a crisis when there is a sudden run its on its branches and everybody wants to withdraw money due to some rumours. A car manufacturer may face a crisis when there is a certain defect is noticed in a batch of cars entering the market for sale. Similarly organizations face a crisis when the top management team resigns or there is a major fraud or embezzlement. Such situations call for immediate action and any kind of procrastination or delay in responding would only worsen the situation.

THE BASIC STEPS OF EFFECTIVE CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS:

SPEEDY ACTION:

Any organization that is in a crisis situation should take speedy steps to allay the concerns or apprehensions of its stakeholders. The grapevine or the rumour mill work during a crisis situation. Bad news spreads fast, information emanating from one source is passed to the other and often this is done without verifying the veracity or correctness of the message. People may pass on incorrect or exaggerated or damaging information knowingly or unknowingly. Sometimes, vested interests may take undue advantage and feed rumours. All this can be prevented if the organization acts fast and puts in place crisis management and communication strategy. Crisis management refers to the practice of dealing with crisis as they arise and not to any long term strategic planning. It means that crisis have to be dealt with as and when happen.

NEED TO CLEAR MISUNDERSTANDING AND ALLAY APPREHENSIONS:

Communication in a crisis should reach out to the employees, customers and other stakeholders and it should reveal the truth. People who are in a position to support this organization in the hour of crisis should be taken into confidence. They are also quite eager to the factual situation

Top management of the organization should form teams and reach out to employees, customers and other stakeholders through different channels. Apart from writing letters to them, group meeting and interaction should be organized. Larger organizations need to reach out through print and electronic media. As far as the chief executive and other senior executives

Should reach out people and send them messages. Routine messages and hand-outs coming from junior executives may not do the work or create a desired impact. In any crisis situation people concerned need reassurances from the people in authority. Face- to – Face talks help in clearing doubts, misconceptions and allaying fears and misapprehensions which are essential to contain the damage and overcome the crisis. If the C E O or Top management personnel avoid meetings or addressing the staff important customers, the situation would only get any worse. If no authentic information about the developments comes forth from the people in the top management, people tend to go by rumor and make their own deductions.

SPEAK OUT HONESTLY AND TRUTHFULLY :

Another important requirement in a crisis situation is to ensure that there are no contradictory statements and management personnel do not speak in different voices. In order to achieve credibility, they should speak out honestly and truthfully. If required they should read out a prepared text and provide sincere clarifications. Sketchy and inconsistent utterances would do more harm than good. Quite often crisis related communication will have to do more often than once. Sharing of information may have to be done frequently as and when more details come to light. Throughout the process, however, there should be consistency, sincerity and no attempt to conceal facts. Apart from verbal communication, nonverbal communication too assumes significance in any crisis. People would be closely observing and interpreting the body-language of the top management giving out information. Stress, anxiety, anger, impatience and such other negative signals would be closely observed, noticed and interpreted. Similarly sincerity, unity, confidence and other positive signals certainly reinforce the verbal communication. If the speaker is very disturbed or shaky as he/ she conveys that everything is under control. People will see the contradiction and verbal message may get discounted.

PROMPT ACTION WILL BE RESTORED CONFIDENCE:

Besides verbal and non- verbal communication, actions are also important in conveying the right message. As we have noticed earlier actions speak louder than words. The management should

Act fast decisively to scotch rumours and restore confidence. For example if there is a run on the bank and people start queuing up to withdraw money, the bank reinforce cash balances, open more counters and extend timings to ensure withdrawals are permitted. Such an action will reassure the depositors more than mere statements. Similarly, if there is a top – rumour that a top level functionary has reassigned, the management should rearrange a media – interaction by that functionary denying the rumours.

ARTICULATE CRISIS MANAGEMENT STRATEGY :

As all this indicates that in order to cope with any crisis an organization needs to plan in advance and put in place a crisis management strategy. In fact such a strategy should be articulated in the communication policy of the organization. It should be state clearly who will have the authority to communicate with the stakeholders in a crisis. Communicating and interacting with the employees and customers assumes considerable significance in any time of crisis. Not only, that the persons so authorized to communicate should have direct access to information's so that he/ she can provide proper and adequate information. Truthfulness and transparency does not necessarily means every bit of detail should be provided to everybody at the same-time. Information should be provided on the need based basis and may be in measured doses. Although crisis situations cannot be predicted or always foreseen there can always be a sense of preparedness in dealing with such situations.

MEDIA CAN BE GREAT HELP :

Large organizations also need to contend with media in dealing with crisis. Public is one of the stakeholders for such organizations and media is understandably quite keen in covering such information for the benefit of the public. Apart from the print media, electronic media would show keen interest in breaking the crisis news. Organizations, in their own interest need communicate effectively with the media. In a crisis, media can work both the ways. If handled

properly media can reinforce the message the organization wants to convey, reach out to a larger section of the community with factual details and help in overcoming the crisis. On the other hand, if the media is mishandled or information denied, the media can put together a story which may not be factually correct and make things worse for the organization.

CONCLUSION:

Communication in a crisis is thus a challenging task. Any crisis, if not properly handled, can result in damaging the image or reputation of the business. Such an image loss can even result in causing an irreparable loss / damage to the functioning of the organization. Crisis situation have certain sensitivity and hence, apart from ensuing adequate planning and alert and highly responsive during the times of crisis. While the occurrence of the crisis cannot be foreseen or predicted / prevented with concerted actions the damage can be contained and crisis overcomes. In this study we've shown how the communication process could be used to manage a crisis in the right and effective way and improving consistency of message, and providing relevant and redundant information for stakeholders and by providing back – channels between organizations and its different stakeholders.

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