Audra Diers-Lawson and Augustine Pang

11 Strategic crisis management: State of the field, challenges and opportunities

Abstract: This chapter examines the field of strategic crisis management and argues that over the last 50–60 years the field has developed from one focused on post-crisis image recovery to one that highlights the importance of risk management to minimize or mitigate risks for organizations in order to preserve an organization's image. The chapter first explores the development and changes in the field, then highlights the internationalization occurring in research, as well as the continuing need for diverse, non-Western voices in the field to emerge, and finally explores the crisis management life cycle as a way to engage stakeholders and mitigate risks to an organization's reputation with its stakeholders. We conclude the chapter by discussing what professionals can do to manage issues, risks and crises.

Keywords: Crisis management; risks; issues; life cycle; reputation; image; scanning; monitoring; stakeholder relationship

1 Introduction

Organizations are, literally, experiencing and battling issues of some form or another every day. Due to the vulnerability of the organization to both internal and external uncertainties, no organization is immune from crises. The reality is the inevitability of challenges. If preserving a good image is the paramount task of public relations (Pang 2012), then the role of public relations remains ever relevant and increasing in importance as it manages the interrelated concepts of issues, risks and crises. This chapter offers an overview of the development of crisis management, the state of crisis management, how crisis management can be examined through a life cycle and how public relations professionals can respond, as well as identifying the challenges for public relations professionals to consider in managing issues, risks, and crises.

2 Crisis management: How far have we travelled?

From the first study of crises and crisis communication in the mid-20th century to the turn of the century, crises were generally thought of as a "low probability, high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be

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made quickly" (Pearson and Clair 1998: 60). This definition of crisis was supported by the small body of research that had emerged throughout the previous 40 years.

However while both practitioners and academics recognized that crises are challenging because they are often ill-structured and complex (Mitroff, Alpaslan, and Green 2004), they had also witnessed a growing and diverse number of crises, such as the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska (Taylor 2014), the tainted blood scandal from the American Red Cross in the early 1990s (Hilts 1990), Enron's accounting scandal of 2001 (Seeger and Ulmer 2003), and the terrorist attacks of 2001 (Argenti 2002). As a result of the risks posed by modern crises in an information-rich world, the research interest in crisis management and crisis communication began to grow substantially.

These new experiences with crisis demonstrated that crises can affect all types of organizations. The causes of the crises can range from circumstances entirely out of an organization's control to careless mistakes of individuals within an organization to systematic breakdowns or inefficiencies (Argenti 2002; King 2002; Pearson and Clair 1998; Reilly 1987). With the growth of interest in crises, crisis management, and crisis communication, how we define a crisis has also evolved. Instead of thinking of crises as low-probability and high-impact events with ambiguous causes and outcomes, we should be thinking of crises differently:

A crisis is typically defined as an untimely but predictable event that has actual or potential consequences for stakeholders' interests as well as the reputation of the organization (...) That means a crisis can harm stakeholders and damage the organization's relationship with them (...) Respond well and survive the crisis; respond poorly and suffer the death of the organization's reputation or perhaps itself (Heath and Millar 2004: 2).

Heath and Millar's (2004) definition of crisis provides us with a few important characteristics of crises that seem to be consistent across different types of crisis, in different parts of the world, and with different levels of blame and severity. First, crises are inherently public in nature (Moore 2004); therefore, to understand crisis management, we ought to understand the nature of crisis communication. In fact, what should be clear in Heath and Millar's definition of crisis is strategic planning around crisis risk ought to be an inherent part of doing business in the 21st century. Second, while crises happen to or because of an organization, organizations do not exist in isolation. Crises affect people – people within the organization, its community, country, and the region(s) in which it operates. This means that crisis management and crisis communication should always be focused on the people and groups with an interest in the organization and its activities – that is, its stakeholders (Freeman 1999; Jin, Pang, and Cameron 2012). Third, a core stake at risk in a crisis is the relationship between an organization and its stakeholder(s). If the relationships fail, then outcomes of that failure can range from reputational damage to the failure of the organization and/or its mission. Likewise, if the relationship is strengthened, then an organization can prosper despite the crisis – or perhaps even because of the crisis.

This definition of a crisis also suggests there are two parts to crisis response. The first is the material crisis response – that is, solving the problem that triggered the crisis. The material crisis response can include mitigating the effects of the crisis, recovery of control of the situation, fact-finding, and/or damage control. 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.

The second part is crisis communication. Crisis communication involves three equally important elements:

- Stakeholder Relationship Management: Managing, building, or rebuilding stakeholder relationships,
- Narrating the Crisis: Media engagement, direct stakeholder engagement across different platforms of communication – from face-to-face to social media,
- Communication Strategy Development and Implementation: A campaign-based approach using measurable objectives, good intelligence, and continual evaluation of the effectiveness of the approach.

2.1 A brief history of the growth of crisis management research

In addition to the growth and emergence of crisis studies as a field of practice in public relations and business studies more broadly, in the last several years there has also been an interest in reflecting on the field. There have been three such analyses of crisis research in recent years. One tracked public relations scholarship trends (Kim et al. 2014), one examined crisis communication's interdisciplinary approach (Ha and Boynton 2014), and one analyzed all available research connected to crisis research across academic journals (Diers-Lawson 2017a, 2017b). Diers-Lawson (2017a, 2017b) provides three key changes in the research, theory development, and changes in the field over time.

Initially, the field was increasingly data-driven. The first wave of crisis research focused on questions of what crises are, how they fit within the communication and management domains, as well as "best practices." These are important pieces, but they are typically not empirical; instead they are meant for reflection and conceptual growth or development. The second wave of crisis research focused on the organization and its crisis response, emphasizing applied research and case studies that provided the groundwork for much of the theoretical developments of the late 1990s. As the field has been able to better define itself and understand the nature of crisis response from the organization's perspective, the third wave has emerged – research focused on the stakeholder. Here, the core questions focus on stakeholder reactions to crises, crisis response, and how that can affect the organization. Yet, some researchers argue that the third wave is unlikely to have a significant impact on practice because "historically, many practitioners have not made routine use of academic research on crisis communication that is and has long been available" (Lehmberg and Hicks 2018: 358).

Second, conceptual interests in crises have changed. In recent years, we have seen less of a focus on crisis management, internal crisis management, and crisis planning evidenced in the research. In part, this is probably attributable to the emergence of the third wave of crisis research and a move away from non-data-driven "best practices" pieces. However, the field's lack of focus on internal crisis management is potentially problematic. During a talk in 2014 at the University of Manchester, Brian Gilvary – BP's chief financial officer throughout the 2010 Gulf of Mexico crisis – indicated that the hardest part of managing the financial side of the crisis was supporting the emotional experience for his employees as they watched the events unfold and were experiencing the crisis themselves. Yet, we see little new research emerging focusing on the employee experience of a crisis.

Third, crisis research is increasingly global. When we talk about crisis research, the voices we have heard in the past were disproportionately American, with about 60 percent of all empirical journal articles in crisis communication published since 1953 researching from an American point of view (Diers-Lawson, 2017a, 2017b). Though there has been a meaningful growth in research from Europe and Asia, the overwhelming majority of research has been dominated by Western voices, representing 83 percent of all crisis communication journal articles. Further, there is little research in crisis communication from the southern hemisphere. And this is the embarrassing reality – we know very little about crises, crisis management, and crisis communication across much of the world – especially the developing world.

Though this is a weakness in the field at present, the positive side is that this has been significantly changing with a decrease in U.S.-centric research, an increasing focus on Europe, an increasing focus on China, and overall a more global approach to crisis research. It is also important to note that this is not a grand conspiracy; rather, a reflection of the access to organizations, news, and information about crises by the academics who research crises. As our field grows and changes, research is also becoming more diverse. Additionally, as we become increasingly global, we will be able to get more views from practitioners and researchers representing voices from across the world. Moreover, the field of conflict studies tends to be less considered. It has only been in the last few years that questions about emergent global conflicts have begun to emerge within traditional studies of crises and crisis management. The two fields of study – conflict studies and crisis – were pursued by different scholars and typically people in different departments of study with little overlap. That too seems to be changing as the interconnectedness of issues, organizations, and stakeholders is increasingly recognized.

2.2 Crisis management in the 21st century

Certainly, crisis research will continue to develop and change with time. Inasmuch as it is useful to have a broad overview of crisis research, it is also useful to understand the influence that different fields have on research and practice connected to the field. This influences the present as much as do questions of culture, changing technologies, and stakeholders. Not surprisingly, much of the focus for crisis research is connected to management and business, communication and language, and the social sciences and humanities. However, research in crisis communication is applied across most fields of practice.

3 Crisis management and the intersection of risk, issues, and crisis

Since we discussed what crises are and began to differentiate between crisis management and crisis communication, we should deepen our understanding of crises in applied contexts. A crisis can represent any situation from a customer-service crisis played out on social media to major disease outbreaks or armed conflicts 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,
- A core stake at risk in a crisis is the relationship between an organization and its stakeholder(s).

If we assume that there are many different types of crises, but they all share these three characteristics, then we 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. We also made the point that one of the key shifts in our understanding of crises in the last couple of decades was that crises 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.

3.1 Risks and risk detection

Risk is often a difficult concept for social or behavioral scientists to unpack because much of what we must manage is peoples' perception of risk rather than the probability that a crisis will happen (Freundberg 1988). For example, an engineer can calculate the probability that a bridge will fail, or an infectious disease expert can calculate the spread of disease based on population density and a number of other factors; however in many cases, risk management is not about the material risk but about the reduction of the perception of risk via the communication of information about the risk.

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

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

The third step is the communication of risk (Comfort 2007). However, as Freundberg (1998) pointed out, this 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, like members of the organization, regulators, the media, and those directly affected, can appropriately understand the situation and are prepared to deal with it (Johansson and Härenstam 2013; Ley et al. 2014). Thus, the communication of risk focuses on exchanging knowledge essential to managing the risk.

Finally, sharing information then allows for the organization and mobilization of a collective response to reduce risk and respond to danger (Comfort 2007; Dilenschneider and Hyde 1985; Heath 1998b). The mobilization of collective response includes communication-related tasks such as issue management, managing stakeholder relationships, developing communication plans and protocols, and staff development

(Hayes and Patton 2001; Heath 1998a; Heath and Millar 2004; Johansson and Härenstam 2013; Kash and Darling 1998; Perry, Taylor, and Doerfel 2003; Reilly 2008). It also includes management-related tasks like developing teams and decision-making systems to facilitate the process (Hayes and Patton 2001; Horton 1988; Jindal, Laveena, and Aggrawal 2015; Nunamaker, Weber, and 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 public relations" to a part of life-saving interventions across industries.

3.2 Issues and the issue-management process

Clearly, what happens during the risk-detection process is that issues relevant to an organization and/or its stakeholders emerge. Therefore, the final step in the risk-detection process is to connect it with other processes that allow organizations to mobilize and manage risk. Issues management is one of those processes that organizations can effectively use in order to minimize or mitigate risk, crisis, and conflict. In this context, issues should be thought of as a controversial gap between an organization's behavior and their stakeholders' expectation. The resolution of these differences can lead to important consequences for organizations (Heath 2002; Heath 2004; Heath and 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 organizations face that do not emerge as issues organizations must manage, so in order for an issue to emerge, there are two necessary conditions before we can classify a risk an issue:

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

Thus, 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 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 and Palenchar 2013; Ginzel, Kramer, and Sutton 1993; Scott and Lane 2000; Slovic 1987).

Second, we should think of managing issues as distinctive from more common processes like 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 of ensuring that an organization is prepared for crises (Coombs 2014). It is distinctive from issues management because issues management focuses on the weaknesses that could develop into crises or conflicts.

When we adopt a stakeholder-centered view of organizations and crisis management, 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 life cycle encompassing the potential, emerging, current, crisis, and dormant stages of an issue (see Figure 1). In simple terms, as the issue moves through the first four stages, the issue attracts more attention and becomes less manageable from the organization's point of view (Heath and 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 the 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, publics, and other influencers expands and positions on the issue become more entrenched, meaning that the choices available to the organization necessarily shrink (Elsbach, Sutton, and Principe 1998; Heath and Palenchar 2009; Kernisky 1997; Meng 1992; Pang, Cropp, and Cameron 2006; Seeger et al. 2001).

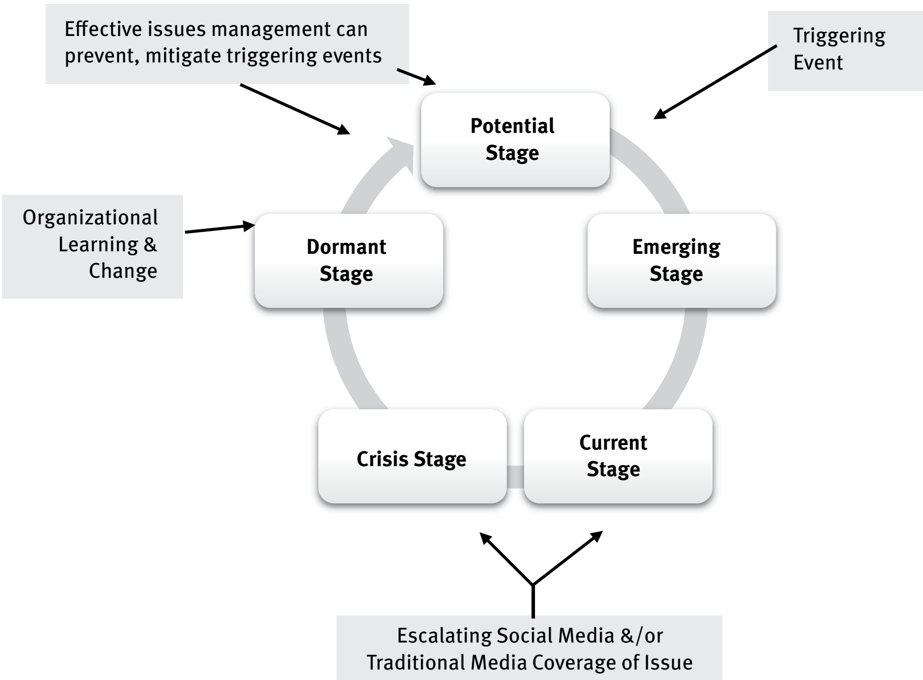

Figure 1: Adaptation of Meng's (1992) issues management process (see Diers-Lawson 2020)

4 Managing crisis through a life cycle: Current frameworks

Now that we have explained crisis, risks, and issues, the next question we seek to answer is where they fit in the study of crisis management. Pang (2013a) argued that strategic crisis management is a dynamic, ongoing process through a life cycle. For instance, Coombs (2019) argued for a three-staged approach – pre, during, and post crisis. Others such as Fearn-Banks (2017) and James, Crane, and Wooten (2013) argued for a five-staged approach – detection, prevention/preparation, containment, recovery, and learning. George (2012) argued for a three-phase approach, similar to Coombs' (2010) approach. At each step of the life cycle, key tasks are recommended for organizations to engage in. This paper adopts Wilcox, Cameron, and Reber's (2015) proactive-strategic-reactive-recovery framework as its theoretical lens and posits the key tasks.

The proactive phase is the time before crisis occurs. Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt (1996) described it as the birth stage; Fink (1986) called it the prodromal stage; Meyers (1986) called it the pre-crisis stage; and Turner (1976) calls it the normal point. Coombs (2019), Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger (2007), and George (2012) called it the pre-crisis stage. Fearn-Banks (2017) called it the detection stage, while James, Crane and Wooten (2013) described it as the signal detection stage. During this phase, scholars recommended that organizations begin the tasks of scanning the environment for possible issues, tracking emerging issues, and crisis planning. Sturges (1994) described it as a time the organization is actively internalizing all this information.

The strategic phase is the time when issues and risks have been identified and some may be showing signs of emergence. Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt (1996) called it the growth stage; Fink (1986) called it the acute phase; Meyers (1986) called it the crisis stage; and Turner (1976) called it the incubation phase. Coombs (2019), Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger (2007) and George (2012) called it the pre-crisis stage. Fearn-Banks (2017) and James, Crane, and Wooten (2013) called it the prevention/preparation stage. Sturges (1994) described it as the time when the organization is instructing and sharing with its stakeholders what needed to be done.

The reactive phase is the time when the crisis explodes. Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt (1996) called it the maturity phase; Fink (1986) called it the chronic phase; Turner (1976) called it the precipitating/rescue and salvage phase; Meyers (1986) called it the crisis phase. Coombs (2019), Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger (2007) and George (2012) called it the crisis stage. Fearn-Banks (2017) called it the containment stage while James, Crane, and Wooten (2013) described it as the containment/damage control stage. Scholars recommended this as the time when organizations engage in crisis communication, which predominantly means managing the media. Sturges (1994) described it as a time when organizations need to instruct and share with stakeholders their action plans.

The recovery phase is the time when the crisis has subsided. Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt (1996) called this the decline phase; Fink (1986) called it the resolution phase; Turner (1976) called it the cultural readjustment phase; Meyers (1986) called it the post-crisis phase. Coombs (2010), Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger (2007) and George (2012) called it the post-crisis stage. Fearn-Banks (2017) called it the recovery and learning stages while James, Crane, and Wooten (2013) described it as the business recovery stage. Wilcox, Cameron, and Reber (2015) described it as a time when the organization needed to restore battered and bruised reputation. Sturges (1994) argued that this is the time when organizations adjust to the new landscape and internalize what it had learned from the experience.

Based on the literature, what has been consistent thus far have been, first, regardless of the number of stages or phases scholars have conceptualized, that four distinct stages have emerged:
- Stage 1: Detection/Prevention;
- Stage 2: Planning/Preparation;
- Stage 3: Crisis response/containment;
- Stage 4: Crisis recovery/resolution/learning.

The life cycle operates in a loop. After one cycle is completed, scholars recommend that they loop back into what Pauchant and Mitroff (1992) described as organizational learning or interactive crisis management.

Second, the tasks recommended have been geared towards identifying and managing the external threat(s). Frandsen and Johansen (2011: 348) argued that crisis researchers have primarily focused on the "external dimension of crisis communication, and in particular on the crisis response strategies applied by organizations in crisis, in their communication with external stakeholders (such as customers, media, politicians, and NGOs), to protect or restore an image or reputation that has been threatened or damaged by the crisis." Third, the tasks to be undertaken appeared mechanical, operational and functional, with the assumption that carrying them out would stand the organization in good stead. There appears to be lack of strategic thinking on how the different tasks collectively impact the organization; a holistic view of where the tasks fit into the bigger purpose of organization; a goal or vision that the organization should aspire to. Strategic thinking, in this case, should involve a process in which the organization uses the crisis occasion as a platform to showcase, reaffirm, reexamine, and reenact its mission, values, and operations (Lerbinger 2006).

Thus, while these prescriptive suggestions may provide organizations with sufficient guidance before, during and after crises, we argue there are gaps and challenges that current frameworks have not addressed. The chapter concludes by suggesting a revised framework for strategic crisis management.

5 Crisis management in the profession. How should public relations respond?

The role of PR assume heightened importance as the communication landscape becomes dynamic and ever-changing. Yet, the tasks of PR to preempt and prevent crises remain grounded in fundamentals of PR functions. These involve:

Scanning. The first step in effective issues management is the application of 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 issues management is ongoing and devoted to collecting and organizing information relevant to the organization. Scanning does not focus on analyzing the information, merely on 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 them (Aldoory, Kim, and Tindall 2010; Coombs 2004; Shepard, Betz, and O'Connell 1997; Sutcliffe 2001). Bridges and Nelson (2000) identify four ways to segment an organization's environment in the scanning process. First, the social segment refers to monitoring an organization's reputation by collecting information about what different stakeholders might be saying about it. Second, the economic segment refers to collecting economic forecasts and breaking economic news reflecting the economic trends that might signal risk for the organization. Third, the political or regulatory segment focuses on collecting information about trends or shifts in governmental processes that will affect the organization's operations. Finally, the competitive segment refers to collecting information about an organization's competitors to provide intelligence about the industry as an early warning of risks. 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 information is collected in the scanning process, then the work of monitoring the information begins. 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 and Gay (1997) suggest that monitoring should only occur 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.

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 a log or basic database used to identify risks, their severity, and action steps that can be taken. It needs to provide a snapshot glance to determine what is going on in an organization's environment – it is an organizational tool to provide actionable information at a glance for the organization. Risk registers are meant to be adaptable and living documents regularly updated.

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 process.

Prioritization is the first component of good decision-making in issues management. It determines which issues demand organizational response and, therefore, the 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. When is the impact, if it happens, likely to occur? In a context of limited resources, sometimes organizations have to balance timescale, 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 and 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. Credible information and identifying realistic and measurable objectives provides the foundation for effective anticipatory and responsive strategy development. Building on previous research in anticipatory risk management (see Ashley and 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.
3. Organizations must identify the residual risk that remains, even after risk-mitigation efforts.
4. Once risk-mitigation decisions are taken, who or what department is responsible for executing different elements of the risk mitigation plan?

Finally, during the decision-making process, the organization takes action; however, this can be easier said than done as the greatest barriers to effective issues management typically includes the lack of clear objectives and an unwillingness or inability to act (Jaques 2009).

Evaluation. After actions are taken, there is an evaluation stage. The issues-management process begins and ends with data or intelligence. This process should also be a learning process, where we better understand what went well that we should replicate in the future, and what needs to be addressed now or should be addressed differently in the future (see Figure 2).

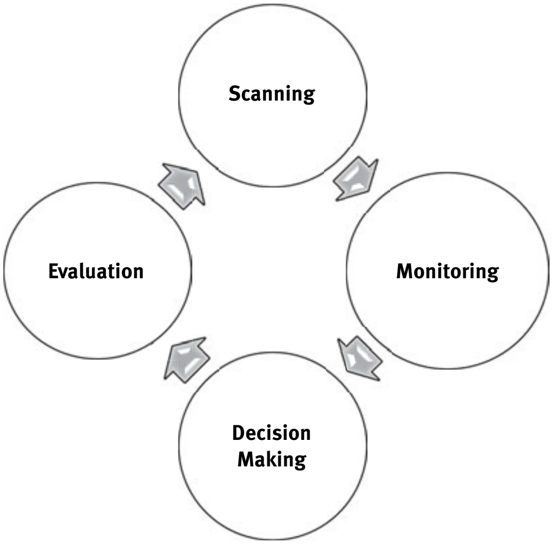

Figure 2: Issues management process overview (see Diers-Lawson 2020)

6 Conclusion: Current approaches – and gaps in crisis thinking

Another task for public relations professionals to consider is how to manage risks, issues, and crisis through the life cyle. This chapter concludes by elucidating the current approaches, and highlight the gaps.

As discussed, four stages had been identified.

Stage 1: Detection/Prevention. The tasks recommended appeared straightforward: Scan the environment for possible issues, track emerging issues, and engage in crisis planning.

The gap: Understanding the internal dimensions of one's organization. Based on Pang's (2013a) framework, the internal dimension of crisis management has, by and large, been unexplored (Frandsen and Johansen 2011). One internal dimension is the role management plays or does not play in crisis planning. Arguably, underlying the reasons why organizations do not prepare could be the lack of management impetus, where the organization is more concerned about operational priorities and profit considerations.

If management is the vital support or stumbling block to crisis planning, the gap should address the relationship crisis planners have with their top management. Another dimension is the organization's relationship with its employees. Frandsen and Johansen (2011: 353) argued that organizations must begin to examine the relationship they have with these internal stakeholders, as they have a "stronger and more complex psychological dimension than most of the other stakeholders. Employees are 'closer' to the organization." They proposed two ways in which employees can be harnessed in crisis planning: (1) the employees as receivers (where the management actively shares information with them at different stages of the crisis); and (2) the employees as senders (where the management works with them to gather information about how the crisis is developing on the ground or on the web).

Stage 2: Planning/Preparation. The tasks recommended appeared straightforward: risk communication and activating the crisis plan.

The gap: Seeking to understand the emotional upheavals of stakeholders. Based on Pang's (2013a) framework, evidence increasingly shows that, in times of crises, stakeholders are not shy from demonstrating their emotions. Indeed, understanding stakeholders' emotions should dominate organization radar (Coombs 2010). While there have been pockets of studies examining emotions (for instance, see Choi and Lin 2009; McDonald, Sparks, and Glendon 2010; Ni and Wang 2011), thus far arguably the only framework to comprehensively understand stakeholder emotion is the Integrated Crisis Mapping model (ICM) proposed by Jin, Pang, and Cameron (2012). The authors argued that understanding the emotional upheavals stakeholders face in a crisis can equip organizations to design the appropriate strategies to address stakeholder needs.

Stage 3: Crisis response/containment. The tasks recommended appeared straightforward: Managing the media.

The challenge: Managing developments in social media. Based on Pang's (2013a) framework, the advent of the Internet has increasingly empowered stakeholders, giving them a platform to instantaneously connect and share ideas. Siah, Bansal, and Pang (2010) argued that the new media is a double-edged sword. On one hand, they provide new platforms and means for organizations to communicate with stakeholders; on the other hand, the same platforms and means can be used to escalate crisis for the organization. While top management still use successful and positive media coverage as a key indicator to assess effectiveness (Pang and Yeo 2009), the challenge for organizations is to monitor social media and heightens the need for crisis managers to understand what works across multiple media platforms. Four phenomena relating to social media are observed. First, paracrises. A paracrisis is a "publicly visible crisis threat that charges an organisation with irresponsible or unethical behaviour" (Coombs and Holladay 2012: 409). It is not a full-blown crisis, but a threat, also known as a warning sign or prodrome, which can escalate into crisis. Second, how crises are increasingly triggered online and escalated within the social media environment, and gain credibility offline when reported in mainstream media. The pervasiveness of social media has changed the way mainstream media operates and prioritizes news content. Increasingly, it is becoming more difficult for mainstream media to ignore content originating from social media (Pang, Nasrath, and Chong 2014). A third phenomenon observed is social media hype. As netizens increasingly take to social media to question organizations, it leads to a frenzy of hype. Pang (2013b) described social media hype as a netizen-generated hype that causes a huge interest in the social media spheres, triggered by a key event and sustained by the self-reinforcing quality in its ability for users to engage in discussion. This is characterized by (1) a key trigger event which captures the attention of the public; (2) a sharp increase in interest levels, rising within 24 hours after a particular event; (3) interest waves, where there are the ebbs and falls in user interest surrounding the key trigger event; (4) sustaining and spreading of interest across different mediums, including traditional media, as well as various social media platforms.

A fourth phenomenon is how stakeholders utilize social media to parody the official online accounts of organizations. Wan et al. (2015) described this as parody social media. Parody social media accounts can emerge in three ways: (1) the actual crisis or paracrisis functioning as a trigger event, prompting those who create crisis information for others to consume to act; (2) smouldering issues from a crisis/paracrisis that is mishandled by the organization, resulting in frustrated stakeholders creating the account; (3) the organization chose to ignore issues, resulting in an information vacuum (Pang 2013c), which the parody social media account emerged to fill.

Stage 4: Crisis recovery/resolution/learning. The task recommended is restoring battered and bruised reputation.

The challenge: Image management. Based on Pang's (2013a) framework, organizations need to be more cognizant of image-management efforts. The difference between image and reputation is that the latter is what others think of the organization's track record (Wilcox, Cameron, and Reber 2015). This track record is based on economic performance, social responsiveness, and ability to deliver on goods and services. Gray and Balmer (1998: 697) argued that this "evolved over time as a result of consistent performance" while image is the "mental picture" that stakeholders have of an organization. Reputation takes time to build up, but image can be constructed by organizations. After a crisis is over, organizations can be proactive in engaging in different image work to reconstitute itself to its stakeholders, a challenge that appeared to be overlooked. Pang's (2012) image-management model offers one perspective. Image management is a dialogic process in which organizations and stakeholders communicate with one another (Massey 2004). Even though this is collaborative, the organization should take the lead in constructing its image. Gray and Balmer (1998) argued that the corporate communication should be at the forefront of such efforts.

> One way organizations can build positive images through the media (offline and online) is through framing (Sturges 1994). Hallahan (1999) suggested that practitioners can operate as "frame strategists, who strive to determine how situations, attributes, choices, actions, issues and responsibility should be posed to achieve favorable objectives." Framing is analogous to telling one's story (Heath 2004) and to constructing meanings with one's audience (Heath 2004).

Thus, the more positive a story the organization tells of itself, the more it fills the information vacuum (Pang 2013c), or what people get to know, of the organization. Effective framing can be executed if organizations have strong media relations (Pang 2010). Beyond the mainstream media, organizations can tap on websites, blogs and micro-blogging services like Twitter and Facebook. Websites were the first electronic frontier in engaging in dialogic communication (Pang, Mak and Shin 2018).

The tasks for public relations professionals remain increasingly critical. The work is cut out for professionals to be ahead of the curve by being strategic in thinking and ever-ready to employ tactics to manage evolving risks, issues, and crises.

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