UNIT-14 Crisis Management

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ **Understand what is crisis management**
- ✓ **Discuss how to develop crisis management team in your organization**
- ✓ Discuss how to conduct a crisis audit
- ✓ Determine how to manage incidents
- ✓ Help their team recover from a crisis
- ✓ Discuss how to apply the process

Unit 14

What is Crisis Management?

Defining Terms

In his book *Manager's Guide to Crisis Management*, Jonathan Bernstein offers a very concise definition of crisis management as "the art of avoiding trouble when you can, and reacting appropriately when you can't." Organizationally, we can say that crisis management is about "preventing loss when possible and minimizing loss when it's not" (also a quote from Bernstein).

Crises happen all around us, in every aspect of our lives, and they are not neatly compartmentalized. Things that happen in the workplace overflow in our personal lives, just as things that happen at home influence what happens at work. Storms, riots, strikes, power outages, road closures, and food poisoning don't differentiate between work and home either.

We must devote a lot of effort to prevention, which, while not glamorous, is the important first step to minimizing, or mitigating, damage. Bernstein explains that although our firefighters put fires out, the real benefit to people and things are the outcomes of fire prevention. Likewise, the power of inspection and identifying potential hazards before a problem starts is one of the key elements of crisis management.

Crisis management is not a straightforward or scientific topic. It deals with human beings in stressful times, and different companies in different places. As a result, there is no straightforward policy or procedure that will work for everyone. Each aspect of what we discuss in this course has to be modified to fit the specific circumstances of where you are and what you do.

What Makes a Crisis?

There are different types of crises that we face. (We could probably add more categories, but we like the simplicity of this list that Bernstein writes about.)

Creeping Crises

In hindsight, we can often see these kinds of crises quite easily. In the hectic nature of everyday life, however, we may ignore (or try to ignore) the signs of something slowly deteriorating. A leaky tap, a door that won't close, or a window that has a crack in the corner, are all things that get fixed as needed. However, if they are a sign that the building is settling, or even sinking, then the crisis is creeping up.

Slow-Burn Crises

These situations give some advance notice, but there has been no real damage, so we delay responding. This can be the case when a group of unionized workers continues to work for a period of time after their contract expires, but when the employer and union are not making efforts to negotiate a new contract.

Sudden Crises

This is when something serious is already underway and we are in response mode to try to lessen the damage.

When you think of what became a sudden crisis, can you also pinpoint the time when it was simply creeping or at a slow-burn? Catching things early means that you can prevent them from becoming big, bad, and ugly.

The Crisis Management Team

Each of your staff will have a role in crisis management, and that includes your senior executive. Often, a member of the leadership team is assigned the role of spokesperson with the public, but you must commit to having someone who is a good speaker in that role, and the best person for that role may simply not be the boss. You need someone who is articulate, can answer questions honestly and believably, and who likes to be in the public eye. After all, if the crisis underway is something that can also harm the reputation of your company, you will want the best person possible to stand for you. If you think of most governments, and many large companies, they will have someone who is a spokesperson assigned to answer questions from the media, provide press releases, and arrange information sessions with the media.

We acknowledge that everyone from the owner or CEO to frontline staff are very busy. It's going to be an inconvenience for people to be trained in crisis management and to become effective at proactively managing and responding to incidents. However, the importance of being ready cannot be underemphasized. From the massively destructive events in recent years, as well as pandemic preparation, companies should understand at some level that they need to be ready. Your job is to convince them that the time to get ready is now. Ignoring the opportunities to plan and prepare means you are taking a very big risk.

Creating the Team

Test Your Knowledge

List the key people in your organization who need to be part of the crisis management team. We have included ideas below, categorized by organization size.

Small Company (20 or fewer employees)

- Owner/CEO
- Spokesperson
- Chief Financial Officer/Controller
- Security Officer
- Office Manager
- Product Manager
- One or two Employee Representatives

Medium Sized Company (20-50 employees)

- Sales/Production Managers
- IT Department Manager
- Human Resources Consultant
- Maintenance/Facilities Leader
- Payroll Officer
- Safety Consultant
- Up to six Employee Representatives (drawn from different frontline areas)

Large Company (50+ employees)

- Organizational Development Manager
- Buildings and Facilities Manager
- Training and Development Manager
- Union Representation (at least one person)
- Up to 10 Employee Representatives (drawn from different frontline areas)

Steering Committees

Depending on the size and complexity of your organization, you can consider a steering committee. A steering committee should be made up mostly of executives and managers. There should be a liaison member on both the crisis committee and the steering committee.

The steering committee can also act as a mentor for the safety committee, providing guidance and resources. The steering committee may also have more executive power, enabling the safety committee to do more.

Training Leaders and Staff

Training Essentials

Having a terrific crisis plan is only part of the work. People also need to be trained so that they understand what their responsibilities are and how they are expected to act in the face of a crisis. With luck, no one will ever have to apply their training in an actual event. In reality, if everyone is trained, practices their crisis role, and is well prepared, then the company's losses to people, profit, or reputation are minimized.

If there is a crisis, every employee has a role to fulfill whether they want to be there or not. Depending on their skills and what they do, their role may simply to be to find a place to get right back to work and minimize interruption to customers and clients. They might also have to locate the spokesperson and direct media inquiries to the right place, or be a part of emergency response and rescue operations. In other cases, they may be required to make phone calls to locate employees and ask them to report to work.

In some crisis management planning, it's not uncommon for the upper management to take training and know who is responsible for what, but front-line or junior management have no idea (perhaps because they were never trained, or perhaps because of staff turnover they have not been trained yet). Don't let your senior management have to spend crisis management time trying to find someone to do something in the middle of an incident.

Training, practice drills, refresher training, and reminders about who does what through newsletter updates, staff meetings, and regular communication are all essential. Members of specific teams, like fire wardens, floor monitors, first aid, phone tree coordination, and emergency operations center management and teams, have to be an ongoing part of the process.

Jonathan Bernstein, the author of *Manager's Guide to Crisis Management,* recommends a three pronged approach to crisis training.

Part One: Training in Preparation to Enact the Plan
This can be accomplished be the core crisis management team scrutinizing each step of the plan, and making adjustments to fit the organization, its location, and the level of threat. This does not just provide training for the staff, but also allows a quality control type of check about the appropriateness of the plan.

Part Two: Full Employee Preparation and Drill Training

Since we know that every employee has a role within the organizations crisis plan, it's essential that they get familiar with their roles and are able to carry them out to the best of their abilities. You cannot assign someone a first aid role and then not provide them with first aid training and experience. Similarly, you cannot provide them with an assignment like setting up an emergency management office without them knowing exactly what that entails.

For motivation, it can be a good idea to remind employees that their self-interests are well served when they excel at crisis management. Their employment, salaries, benefits, and ability to meet their own obligations rely on their ability to remain employed.

Part Three: Media Training

Some business leaders, including CEOs, do complete some media training. Typically, this training does a decent job of getting them through celebratory announcements and good news press releases or interviews, but not necessarily the crisis situation. This requires more finesse, quick thinking, and an ability to determine who should or should not act as a spokesperson for your company.

Conducting Training

In order to provide training for crisis management preparation, it is essential to appeal to people's desire to be involved, to their capacity to learn, and their learning style.

Test Your Knowledge

How can you bring this training to life for your employees?

Conducting the Crisis Audit

Why Audit?

In any discussion of safety and well-being, we really want to focus on **prevention** because we understand how much value comes from preparing and preventing a crisis. But it is impossible to plan for every event and to create a perfect environment that will outlast any kind of calamity. In health and safety terms, we regularly undertake hazard assessments in the workplace. A **crisis audit** is no different as we review our environment and see what threats exist, and which of those we can minimize or eradicate through pro-active actions.

An audit makes financial sense, too. If we fix something before it breaks (or breaks down, shorts out, or blows up) we need fewer resources and money than we do to react afterward. Take the case of the light switch that gives you a shock when you turn it off. You know that there is probably a short somewhere and an electrician can locate and fix the problem for his hourly fee plus a service call. Ignoring the short, however, can lead to a fire that destroys part of your building, delays important work, and injures employees. That old expression, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," sticks around for a reason!

In order to complete the audit process in manageable pieces, there are different ways to go about it. We recommend the following process, which can be adapted to suit your needs.

Documentation Audit

A documentation audit is a thorough review of all emergency, crisis, safety plans, and hazard assessments that the company has already completed. Some companies have done a lot of crisis management work already; there may be a fire plan, a chemical spill plan, an electrical outage plan, etc. This part of the audit will help to bring it all together in one place and identify gaps that have not been addressed so far.

360-Degree Audit

In the sense that a 360^{o} performance review looks at all influences of an employee's work, this audit is similar. All levels of the organization need to be interviewed, including key external stakeholders and clients. Each stage of the audit concludes with a comprehensive report that includes the steps that need to be taken in order to minimize the risks and threats identified. Each interview needs to be short (especially if it is a big organization, or you'll never finish!), so plan for about twenty minutes per person.

You might look at the list below and think it is too much. However, keep in mind that your senior people are probably unaware of threats that are noticeable to middle and front-line staff, and middle or front line staff are not aware of threats that senior staff will be aware of.

Executive Audit

The auditor will facilitate a session with the company's executive team (typically an entire day) to help them identify and elaborate on vulnerabilities that exist and have the potential to escalate. This often gives a vastly different point of view than what is gleaned from employees, since the executive team may have knowledge of threat from competitors and outside factors (such as organizational, funding, taxation, compliance, and takeover issues) that other members of the company may not have.

Employee Audit

In this stage, information is gathered through interviews with all employees (or at least representatives of each department and committee). The interview approach is to encourage employees to speak freely and to ensure their responses are kept confidential. There is often the potential of employees not reporting all vulnerabilities if they feel that their information will jeopardize their job in any way.

External Audit

These interviews are also best done individually in order to maintain privacy and to encourage open conversation. However, this will depend on the company's relationship with the external clients, the nature of the business, and the company itself. If your company is threatened by something that an external provider can see, then you need to know!

Online Audit

Twenty years ago we would not have bothered with this, but the Internet is a vast resource of information about your company and may hold a lot of information that you did not know was out there in the public realm. This audit has to be conducted by specialists with sophisticated knowledge of data mining, analysis, and interpretation. The audit needs to look at threats to reputation (which can sometimes be found on websites that are set up to complain, as well as places with more subtlety), as well as threats from people trying to breach systems. This report can be useful to the company executive, public relations and communications teams, and information technology staff.

Sample Audit Questions

You'll need to customize the questions you ask to fit the company and what they do. This list is here to start you off.

- Tell me if you notice any threats to safety here at work. How about threats to business continuity?
- If there was an emergency this evening, and you had to report to work offsite tomorrow, do

you know how to work remotely?

- Can you perform your job without access to your computer or usual machinery?
- Is there a place designated as an Emergency Operation Center where work can be underway with minimum delay? Have you been there to see if it meets your needs?
- Do you understand your role in an emergency situation? Have you been trained for that role?
- Do you have access to contact information for everyone (internal and external)? How often is it updated?
- If your computer is unavailable, how will you access the information that you need?
- What areas of vulnerability do you see that could lead to a problem? (Use the language of creeping, slow-burn, and sudden crisis as suits the situation.)
- Are confidential documents securely stored and shredded?
- Is security for all remote access to computers and equipment secure?
- Is garbage and recycling (such as the disposal of used manufacturing parts, which could contain proprietary information) secured?
- Do people have highly secure passwords in place to protect information on their computers and cell phones?
- Do people walk away from their desks and leave their desktop open?
- Can phone conversations or meetings be overheard?

Test Your Knowledge

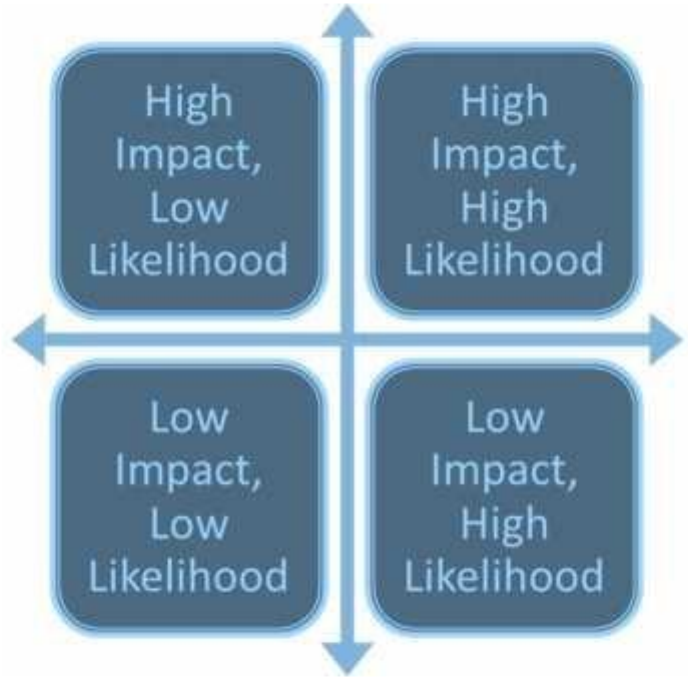
Add your own questions here.

If the company is small, you can probably conduct the audit quite quickly and easily. Even walking around the facility (inside and out) and visiting popular lunch restaurants can reveal a lot.

As we have mentioned, prevention is the best way to manage any crisis, and there may be lots of quick, simple things that can be implemented to mitigate any risks that are identified through these interviews.

Using a Risk Matrix

Reports are intended to be read, but sometimes after the audit is done and reports are submitted, we don't hear anything back. We end up in some kind of limbo, waiting. If your reports have been submitted to people who appreciate a more visual context, or there are a lot of risks identified and you are trying to decide what needs doing first, you can plot your results on a risk matrix.



Performing a Risk Level Analysis

The Four Categories

Earlier, we offered a matrix for determining priorities and likelihood that a crisis could develop. Another way of looking at this is to conduct a risk level analysis. *(Based on violence response system proposed by Dr. James Turner and Dr. Michael Gelles in "Threat Assessment: A Risk Management Approach")*

Category 1 (Most Severe)

- Available data suggests high risk potential
- Risk has been demonstrated to be severe in the past (high likelihood and high impact)
- Requires major organizational response
- Example: There is a hurricane alert for your area. Damage has been devastating with this type of storm in the past.

Category 2

- Available data suggests high risk potential
- Organization identifies crisis as low likelihood and high impact, but organization should still be prepared
- Requires major organizational response

- Example: There is a hurricane watch for your area, although a storm has never struck your city before.

Category 3

- Available data is insufficient to determine risk potential
- Organization identifies crisis as low likelihood and high impact
- Organization is concerned about the potential effects of the crisis
- Requires moderate to major organizational response
- Example: A bomb threat is called in by an individual who has made false threats before. Security measures make it unlikely that what he says is true.

Category 4 (Least Severe)

- Available data is insufficient to determine risk potential
- Organization identifies crisis as low likelihood and low impact
- Report of risk may be unfounded
- Requires low to moderate organizational response
- Example: There is a rumor that the local telephone company may go on strike.

Developing a Response Process

Pre-Assignment Review

Please review the following examples of actual incidents, and be ready to discuss them in your upcoming course.

What really qualifies as a crisis? How is it that the things we do on an everyday, routine basis can suddenly go off the rails? Let's look at some examples.

Burst Water Pipe

Work was proceeding along smoothly at Regional Health Associates when the pipes burst one day in the basement. For most of the staff in the building, there was no real issue when the power was shut off and their computers and phones went down. They wondered about the origin of the power outage but didn't consider it a major issue. Then, someone realized that if the power was down in the building, all seven tele-health operators were also impacted. These operators are nurses who work in a contact center environment and respond when vulnerable people (such as seniors and people with disabilities who live independently or in assisted living) push the button they wear because of an emergency. With the power out, and the backup generator also located in the watery basement, clients are at risk.

Call Center

Dave works as a call center agent in a busy office. There are very strict rules about being at work during scheduled times, but as a widow with a seven year old child, Dave finds it hard to be a Dad and to be at work. He is treading water as it is because he has had to stay home when his daughter is ill, or tries to trade shifts when she has events going on at school. This morning, not long after he settled in to work, he gets a call from the school. The school administrator says that bus has been taken off the road following a surprise inspection and he will have to pick his daughter up at 3:00 p.m. His daycare refuses to pick children up from school, and he is scheduled to work until 5:00 p.m.

Pepsi

In the early 1990's, the Pepsi corporation received reports of product sabotage, with claims that syringes were found in cans of diet Pepsi. The company asked for customer's patience while an investigation got underway, and through doing so, collected video evidence of two individuals tampering with products.

Test Your Knowledge
Are these incidents a crisis?

Who is affected (company, individual, clients, stakeholders, etc.)?

What could be done to lessen the effect of any of these scenarios?

Crisis Response Process

Step One: Ensure Safety

The first thing to concern ourselves with in the case of a crisis is **personal safety**. Once the employee(s) is/are safe, then we look to the safety of everyone else in the area. This is necessary in incidents such as a flood, building collapse, or gas explosion. If any of the company property has been compromised, then we should also set up an emergency command center.

Appropriate alarms, notifications to police or emergency services, and security measures are then next to happen. (All of these steps should be explained in the organization's emergency response plan, and will be tailored to the specifics of the business.)

Step Two: Perform Basic Crisis Management Steps

Human resources, security personnel, or management should then take the following steps. (The proper person to perform these steps should also be outlined in the organization's crisis management plan.)

1. Call police and/or emergency response support.
2. Secure work area where incident occurred.
3. Preserve the scene's integrity while ensuring the safety of workers.
4. Ensure that no area is left short-staffed and that employees remain in groups.
5. Assess the scene for safety hazards (such as broken glass, weapons, flooding, exposed electrical wiring, etc.).
6. Quickly debrief affected workers, including victims and witnesses. These conversations must be kept confidential.

Once the scene is secured and workers are safe, management needs to decide if the incident warrants triggering the crisis response process.

Step Three: Trigger the Crisis Response Process (If Appropriate)

If the process is triggered, then the crisis management team must gather the following information:

- Description of the crisis, threat, or threatening behavior
- Determine immediate action (call police) versus prompt action (team review)
- Determine if threat is general (directed towards company) or specific (directed to a building or person)
- Determine who was involved in the crisis, including observers and witnesses
- Determine if team or manager has any knowledge of warning signs and what those signs were
- Determine level of distress by persons involved in the crisis
- Determine if threat requires immediate security or police presence or removal of employees from environment
- Determine availability of external consultants and contact as needed

Test Your Knowledge

Add your own information items here.

We recommend setting up an emergency operations center in a safe location and recording all information on a white board or flip chart in an organized manner.

Remember: Stay Flexible!

Obviously the shape this process will take depends on the crisis. If an asteroid flies into your building, there's no time for the assessment team to sit down and decide what to do. In this case, the incident has taken place and it simply makes sense for the crisis response plan to be activated immediately.

However, let's say that one of your employees receives a letter stating that the bank will be bombed tomorrow. In this case, the risk assessment team would have time to have a meeting, perform basic fact-finding as described above, and implement the bomb threat plan or determine a course of action.

Consulting with the Experts

Is there value for your company in involving external consultants? Sometimes a company will not have the budget and you are going to have to do your best without external assistance. However, keep in mind that some issues are better resolved and managed this way. In the case of a crisis that impacts an entire community (like a flood or riot, for example), you'll need to know that your plan for an offsite emergency command center is not also the plan for the company next door to you.

One member of the threat assessment team should be appointed spokesperson or liaison to outside resources. They should have a summarized report prepared that outlines the facts in order to effectively share what's going on with the consultants.

In order for consultants to provide the best information, you should ensure that the facts are correct and precise, and that only facts are shared rather than clouding the issue with impressions, judgments, or opinions.

Test Your Knowledge

Is there value for your company in using an external consultant?

What could a consultant help you with?

If you cannot access a consultant, what issues do you need to prepare for?

Incident Management Techniques

Responding to Incidents
We suggest the following steps:

T	Take control of the situation.
A	Assess safety hazards.
K	Keep yourself safe. This includes stopping any machinery and removing yourself from dangerous elements (such as live power wires).
E	Ensure others are safe. Make sure that they stop what they are doing and remove themselves from a dangerous environment.
C	Call 911 (or your local emergency number) and summon help from within the organization.
H	Help any victims if you are trained and if it is safe to do so. Move victims as little as possible as it could aggravate their injuries.
A	Activate crisis management plans if appropriate.
R	Reassess the scene for new safety hazards, including bystanders.
G	Get control of the scene. Make sure evidence is not disturbed.
E	Extract yourself. Turn things over to the proper authorities (such as emergency response personnel or management).

Documenting Incidents

Incident Related Documentation

The documents that you will be legally required to have in the event of a crisis will differ depending on where your business is and what the crisis is. However, the following information should be gathered immediately after an accident.

- Type of incident
- Date, time, and location of incident
- Employee's personal information (name, address, telephone number)
- Employee's work related information (employee number, position, status)
- People on duty (and those who were outside in this case) at time of incident and where they were
- Emergency response personnel
- Name of hospital that employee(s) was/were taken to
- Witnesses' personal information (name, address, telephone number) and testimony
- Description of incident, including timeline of events, damage, type of accident, hazardous materials or energies involved

Other Documents

In addition to keeping a log of safety incidents, you should document all activities in your crisis management process. This includes:

- Training
- Safety manuals
- Policies
- Materials distributed to employees
- Minutes of crisis committee meetings

Make sure that you are familiar with the reporting and recordkeeping regulations in your area and that you abide by them.

Investigating Incidents

The purpose of a post-incident investigation is to determine why the incident occurred and how it can be prevented. There are many types of incident and accident investigation techniques, and most require someone with special training. This unit is designed to give you a brief overview of a simple investigation technique that you can use for minor crises. We encourage you to get certification from a specialized organization if you are going to be performing incident investigations.

Accident Investigation Kit

Your organization should have the following materials gathered together:

- Company's safety policy and investigation procedure
- Insurance information (contact information and policy numbers)
- Graph paper and blank paper to create diagrams
- Notebook
- Appropriate forms
- Pens and pencils
- Calculator
- Handheld GPS
- Camera (film and digital, both with date and time stamp)
- Extra batteries and film
- Measuring tape
- Tape recorder
- Flashlight
- Safety tape

Once you are prepared, here are the steps to take. *(This process was developed by Ronald Meyers and R. Alan Thomas as part of the Transform 180 safety program.)*

Step One: Gather Data

Make sure you identify the basic facts of the incident: who, what, when, where, and how. (The "why" will come later.) You will want to include a description of the crisis, a timeline, witness reports, photos and sketches, and physical evidence.

Step Two: Determine Probable Cause

In determining the cause, we must aim for prevention, not for blame. For example, "Employee error" is often listed as the cause for an accident. "Lack of proper training in forklift use" would be a better probable cause because it's something we can aim to resolve. There are many tools out on the market that can help you determine the root cause, including checklists and simulations.

Step Three: Identify Effective Solutions

Effective solutions have three characteristics: they must help prevent a recurrence of the incident, it must be something that you can control, and it must be in line with your organization's values.

In the example above, "Lack of proper training in forklift use" was identified as the probable cause. Retraining the affected employee is not an effective solution because it will likely not prevent a recurrence of the incident. Re-designing forklift training and re-certifying employees is a better solution; if all employees have better knowledge of how to operate the machine, the hazard is more likely to be resolved.

Step Four: Assign Responsible Parties and Reasonable Target Dates

Once you have identified the solutions, put them in action. Determine who will implement the solution, what will be done, when it needs to be completed by, how it will be evaluated, and who will monitor progress.

Step Five: Write Final Report

Your report should include all the data gathered, the probable cause, the solutions identified, and the action plan for the solutions.

Step Six: Communicate Results

The highlights of the report (what happened and what the organization plans to do about it) should be communicated to all employees. More detailed information may be appropriate for those affected by the crisis.

Step Seven: Track Solutions

The incident investigator is typically responsible for tracking solutions as they are implemented to ensure that they are implemented correctly and on time.

Step Eight: Evaluate Solutions

Monitor the workplace for recurrences of the crisis. Did the solution work at preventing occurrences of this incident? If not, you will need to re-evaluate the probable cause and effective solutions. In the fire incident we used in the case study, the threat has come from an outsider and so security needs to be seriously reviewed.

Working through the Issues

Model Overview

Not everyone who ends up with a role in managing a crisis wants the job. Taking action in a time of crisis can be intimidating as people have to manage many challenges in order to fulfill their responsibilities to the workplace.

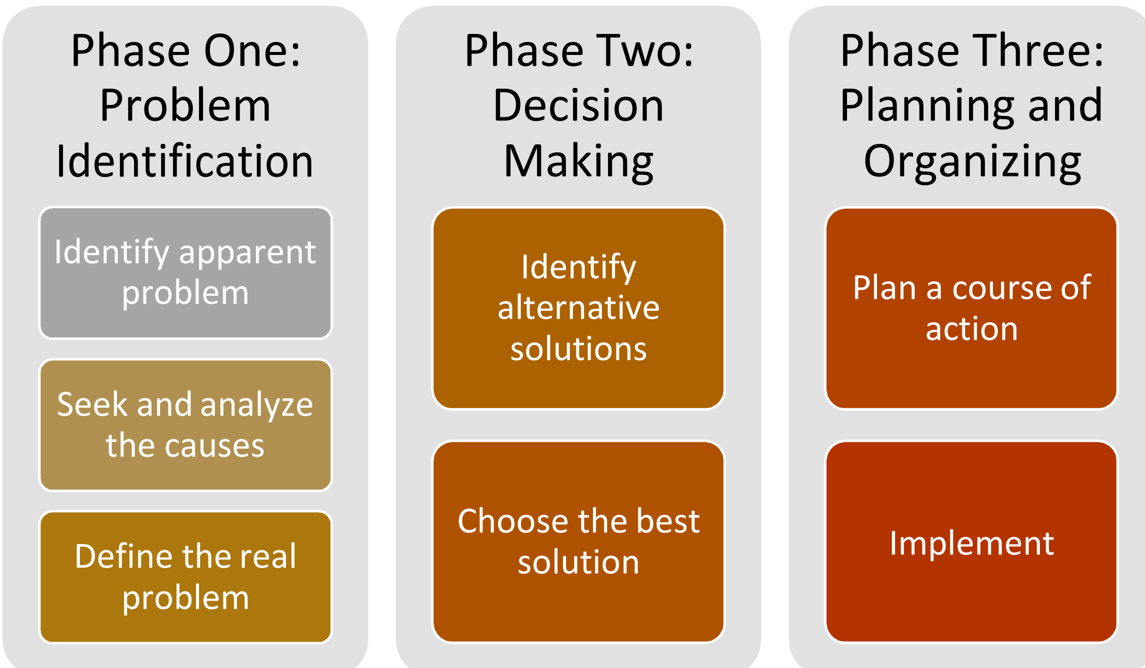
When a situation looms very large and there are competing priorities for our time, attention, and resources, it can be overwhelming for anybody. We recommend that members of the team understand how to approach issues with a problem solving process. Applying those steps will help problems to be kept in some kind of perspective and to break them into manageable pieces that are less likely to overwhelm people.

Whenever you read a book on problem solving, this model, in some form or other, is sure to be there. It may have six steps rather than seven, or it may have five steps. However, the model doesn't really change...just the authors' ways of breaking it down.

As you work your way from problem to solution, you are actually shifting your focus.

- When you define a problem, you ask yourself: What is my problem?
- As you try to analyze the root causes you ask: Why is it a problem?
- When you are generating options, you ask yourself: What are some ways I can solve my problem?

The Problem Solving Model

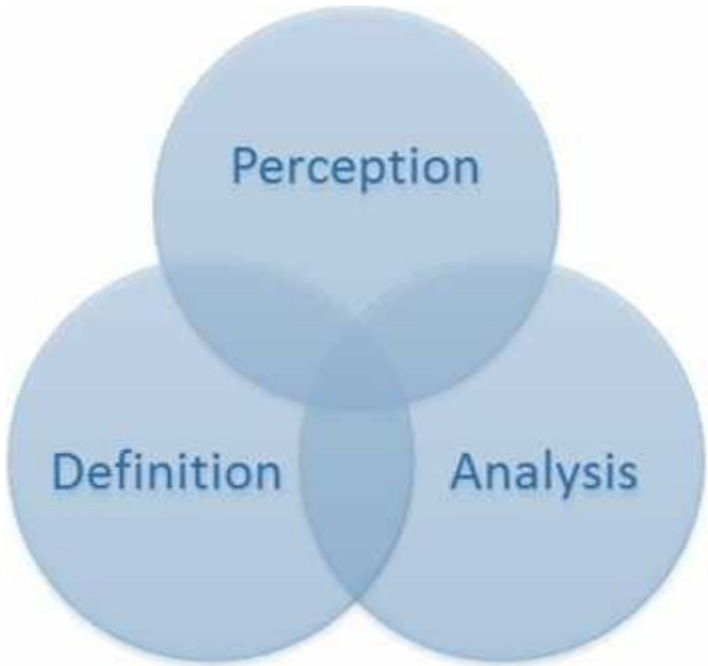


This model doesn't just work on paper: it applies across a range of problem solving activities. It is the very basis for informed and consistent problem-solving. If you are someone who loves tools, this is your basic tool.

We often don't spend enough time in defining a problem, and that in itself is a problem. Don't be in too big a rush to get the solution worked out: make sure you know what you need to know. Then, make a commitment to continually check back with the first stage to make sure the problem is the same.

Keeping an Open Mind

Part of the problem solving process is re-evaluating and evolving. This will ensure you reach the best solution possible. Consider how perception, definition, and analysis overlap:



Solving Problems the "Right" Way

Don't let people try to convince you there is one "right" or "best" way to solve problems, or to solve a particular problem. Problem-solving is all about applying educated trial and error. With so many different kinds of problems to deal with, there is no system that works in every situation. Many solutions are possible, and some are better than others.

Your skill as a problem-solver depends on your expertise with the tools and your knowledge of how to use them. You know you don't always solve problems step by step. Sometimes you have a solution before you know what problem it solves. You decide to move your bed against another wall and you find out the next morning that the sun doesn't wake you up so early.

However, for many situations, having formal steps to follow can help you create flexible, workable solutions. In crisis management, using problem solving in a formal way will help you to plan for issues before they get out of control, because you will already have a plan in place to deal with them.

Phase One

Let's take a look at the first phase of the three-phase model: Problem Identification. Here is a breakdown of each step in the problem identification process. In all three steps, your focus is on the problem itself. Only afterward will you start thinking about solutions.

Perception

You ask yourself: Is there a problem? Where is the problem? Whose problem is it? This is the sniffing, groping, grasping stage. It includes whatever you do to get a handle on the problem.

What are the symptoms? Funny noises in the engine, an unhappy look on your employee's face, or a change in the productivity rate? You've got to find out what the problem is.

The purpose of this phase is:

- To surface an issue.
- To make it okay to discuss it (legitimize).
- To air different points of view.
- To avoid perception wars.
- To get group agreement to work on the problem.

Steps in this phase include:

- Legitimize the problem; make it okay to discuss it.
- Asking, "How does the problem feel?" and, "What's the real problem?"
- Identifying the best, worst, and most probable situation.
- Identifying whose problem it is.

Definition

Here, we state the problem as a question. Our goal is to grasp the general idea of the problem and then draw the rope tighter to get a more specific idea of the problem.

Steps in this phase include identifying:

- What is the problem?
- What is not the problem?

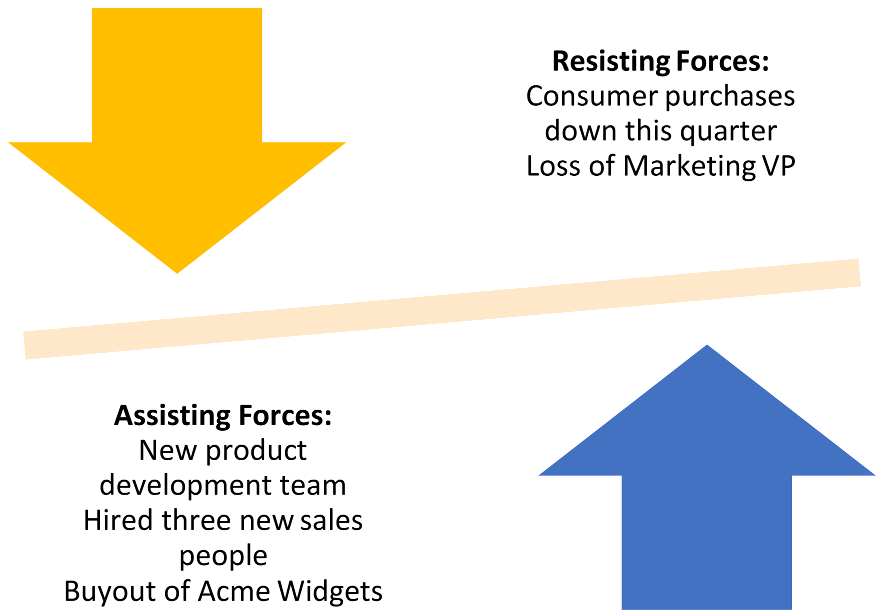
Analysis

Now that we have a general idea of the problem, we will use analytical tools to define it even further. Steps in this phase can include the following.

Ask basic questions, such as who, what, where, when, why, and how.

Break it down into smaller pieces. For example, if we know that the problem is that revenue is down, we can break it down into possible areas of cause: manufacturing, shipping, or sales.

Use force field analysis. This is a structured method of looking at two opposing forces acting on a situation. Simply draw a line on a piece of paper. On one half of the line, list the forces that are working to solve the problem. On the other half, list the forces that are stopping you from solving the problem. Let's say that revenue is down this quarter. Our force field might look like this:



Move from **generalizations to specific examples** as a way of testing what the problem is or is not. For example, you could say, "Our company has really been doing poorly all year." We could further identify how the company has been doing poorly; let's say that the production department in particular has been less efficient, costing the company money. Then, we can look at what aspect in particular is doing poorly.

Ask the expert. Find a person who has dealt with this sort of issue before.

Phase Two

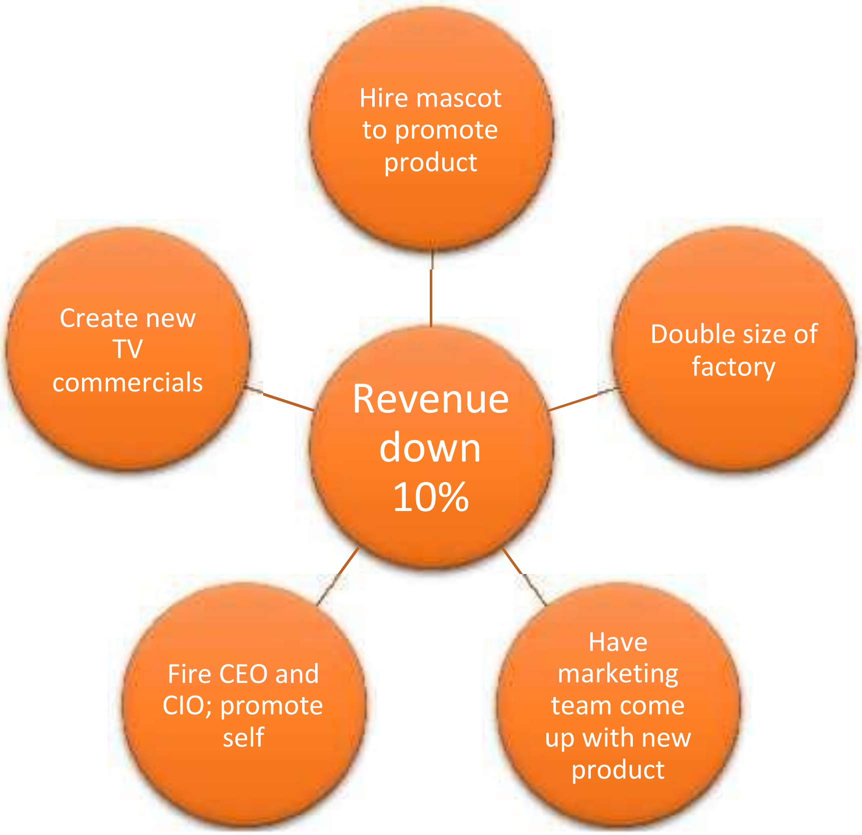
Until the three steps of problem identification have been covered, don't proceed to phase two (decision making). (If people don't agree on the problem, they will never agree on a solution!)

Creative Thinking Methods

Here are some tools you can use to come up with ideas.

Brainstorming

Draw a circle in the middle of a page and write down your problem. Then, draw lines from that circle and write down some solutions. Don't worry if they're wacky, impossible, or silly; this is a time for creative thinking, not critical thinking. Capturing the range of ideas is what is important here.



Checkerboard

This is a more organized form of brainstorming and can be particularly helpful for people who don't like how chaotic a brainstorming session can become. With this method, you organize your thoughts into a table. We still want creative thinking rather than critical thinking, but this method may help you develop ideas.

Here is an example of a checkerboard.

Main Solution	**Possible Specific Solutions**		
Create safe passage between building and parking/bus stop	Have security escort night staff to their cars or bus stop	Rearrange shifts so that people come and go during daylight hours	Set up a buddy system with employees
People missing work in snowstorm	Set up 50% of staff with ability to work from home during storms	Arrange for temporary shelters so that staff can stay overnight	Provide incentives for employees to put winter tires on their vehicles and learn safe winter driving

Threat of strike is rumored	Set up contract negotiations well before contract expires	Approach union and ask to speak with them	Set up contingency plan to ensure business continuity in the event of a strike

Next, cut up solutions and move them around, or use your computer. This can help you organize your ideas and generate even more solutions!

Research and Report

Look at what others have done. Do some research and prepare a report. What lessons can you learn from this information?

Evaluation

Now that we have some solutions in mind, it's time to evaluate the solutions to see which ones are feasible.

- Sort solutions by category. This can be similar to the checkerboard above, just with some critical thinking applied.
- Identify the advantages and disadvantages to each solution.
- Identify what you like about each idea and what you don't like.
- Number your ideas in order, from the one that seems the most feasible to the one that seems the least feasible. This is useful for small problems.

Decision Making

Once you have evaluated the options, it's time to make a decision. Here are some ways you can do it:

- Get a consensus from the group on the best solution.
- Don't limit yourself to one option; you may find that you can combine solutions for super success. (This is called the both/and method.)
- To make voting easier, you may want to eliminate the solutions that the group as a whole absolutely won't consider.
- Try to focus on agreements during all voting.
- Use straw voting: Take a quick, non-binding yes/no vote on the current solution as proposed.
- Try negative voting: Rather than asking who is for a solution, ask who is against the proposed solution.
- Back off! The group may need some time to evaluate the options before making a decision.

Phase Three

Our last phase should be planning how to implement the solution and performing the actual implementation.

Planning

For the planning portion, start by breaking the task down into smaller portions. Then, for each mini-task, plan the following information:

- What needs to be done?
- Who will do it?
- What resources will we need?
- How much time will it take? (Set a deadline!)

Once all the smaller tasks are planned out, you will have an idea of how long the main solution will take to implement. You may also want to make sure that the above questions are answered for the main task.

Implementation

Implementation is a cycle of three activities:

- Figuring out what you are going to do
- Doing it
- Reacting to what happened or getting feedback

Sooner or later, you have to try out your solution!

Solution Planning Worksheet

It can help to lay out what you are planning to do. Here is an example of a solution planning worksheet.

Problem: Front of building is vulnerable to damage from cars in icy conditions.

Solution: Hire construction company to install appropriate barrier.

Task 1	**Operations department will prepare and issued tender process.**	
	What needs to be done?	Tender needs to be prepared and then published in the local paper as well as online.
	Who will do it?	Tom from Operations, Sam from Legal, and Mary from Communications
	What resources will they need?	- Requirements for safety barrier - Information about area where barrier is required - Copies of legislation surrounding tenders
	How much time will it take?	Two weeks (Target date: September 1)
Task 2	**Then, tender proposals will be received and reviewed.**	

	What needs to be done?	Tender proposals will be processed and reviewed.
	Who will do it?	Tom from Operations
	What resources will they need?	May need help from Legal (Sam)
	How much time will it take?	One month to receive all tenders plus two weeks to review (Target date: October 15)

Types of Decisions

Three Types of Decisions

We tend to make three kinds of decisions. The **autocratic decision** is one you make alone. You do not consult anyone, and you accept full responsibility for the consequences of your decision.

Your second choice is a **consultative decision**, when you talk over the problem with another person or persons, such as a more experienced superior or several of your colleagues or teammates. Two heads are frequently better than one when a serious decision must be made.

A third possibility is a **group decision**. When a problem involves the entire staff or a team, they should participate in the decision. Being involved also gives them some ownership, which will make them more committed and motivated to the decision and the results that come with it.

Advice from an Expert

Inevitably, we will make some decisions that are less than ideal, especially when we look back on something we've done in the past. This is why we have to commit to using the data that's available, rather than relying strictly on intuition or making a guess.

If you make a decision that haunts you, this advice from Claude George has been around since the 1970's and is still valid today:

- Don't ignore it or cover it up, because this won't go away.
- Accept that it is probably not the first or last poor decision you will make. The goal is for the

Task 3	**Tender decision will be made.**	
	What needs to be done?	A decision needs to be made on which tender, if any, to accept.
	Who will do it?	Amy from Executive and Tom from Operations
	What resources will they need?	- All tenders received - Recommendation from Operations - All related documentation
	How much time will it take?	One week (Target date: October 22)

large percentage of your decisions to be good ones. If so, then your overall average will be acceptable.

- Learn from your mistakes. Ask yourself where you went wrong. Get advice from those around you concerning what you should have considered that you didn't, what you should have done that you didn't, what errors of judgment you made, and so on.
- After this analysis, decide what you should do now; what action should you take? Then tell your boss about your new plan of action. Explain to him or her why you have moved from the old decision and why it is important for you to make the change. In talking with your boss, don't try to shift the blame.
- You are responsible for the decision and for the error. Prepare for and accept the consequences.

Eight Ingredients for Good Decision Making

1. Focus on the most important things. Of all the things you are judging, one factor is the most important and must be given greater weight than anything else.

2. Don't decide until you are ready. Don't act on impulse or succumb to decision panic.

3. Look for the positive results that can come from this decision. Make your decision as if you were afraid of missing a wonderful opportunity.

4. Consider the negative outcomes. If things go wrong, as they sometimes will, what's the worst that can happen? How can you mitigate problems?

5. Look ahead. Try to see how your decision will play out over time.

6. Turn big decisions into a series of little decisions. When a big undertaking seems like it could be too much to tackle all at once, take small steps, get more information, reconsider, and then make the next decision.

7. Don't feel you are locked into only one or two alternatives. There are always more options if you look for them. Go look for them.

8. Get what you need to feel safe. For some people, that means knowing the worst that can happen. For others, it means knowing they can back out at the last minute. For still others, it means knowing that everyone they care about agrees with the decision, or fully understands the situation they are in. Identify your safety needs related to the decision at hand.

Establishing an Emergancy Operations Centre

EOC Considerations

Your crisis management team will need a place to work, and in the event that your business is under threat or damaged, that place needs to be set up off site. Depending on the nature of the problem, it may be advantageous to set up an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) within your own building so that members have easy access to one another and can coordinate activities without the distraction of usual operations.

Make sure that all documentation and announcements include the address, list of resources available, and anything that needs to be provided to the EOC. For example, if you will be using shortwave radios to contact the team because cell phone and Internet service in interrupted, those radios need to have fresh batteries and an appropriate range.

Depending on the crisis underway, will you use…

- A local community building?
- A legion?
- A place of worship?
- A school?
- Someone’s home?
- The area outside of the company’s building (i.e. under a tent)?

Something else to consider: do you have an arrangement with your potential EOC, or will other businesses be vying for the same building when you are?

Test Your Knowledge

Generate a list of at least five options for an offsite EOC.

What resources are available at each location?

Site	Resources

Will there be a cost to reserve the space? Will there be an additional cost when it comes time to use the space? If so, that cost must be included in the crisis management plan.

Who is In Charge?

As the emergency operations center comes together, usually the most senior member of the crisis management team is in charge until the team leader arrives. If you are not the team leader, and not the communications leader as identified in the plan, make sure that you are not making statements to the media. Let the communications person, who has been trained in what to say (and not say) look after that function they arrive.

It can be very practical to have **colored vests** for each member of the team, so that other members and employees know who is in charge. You can use vests that match your operation in some way, or coordinate with what your local emergency services use. Think about blue for spokesperson, orange for first aid, yellow for transportation, green for the person in charge, etc. Just make sure that people are visible.

Work with, not against, emergency services personnel who may also be responding to the incident. Regardless of the circumstances, you need to make sure they can complete rescue and recovery, transport injured people, and conduct investigations as needed.

The **chain of command** for your crisis management team (the order of who is in charge) is a necessary part of your crisis management plan.

Building Business Continuity and Recovery

Creating Continuity

When you have determined what urgent and non-urgent aspects of the business need to be restored to maintain the integrity of the business and meet stakeholder expectations, you will know what needs to be done first. Often, we will review each major function of the business to determine what activities are essential and how much time we can tolerate for any function to be unavailable.

For example, a hospital may be unable to tolerate any time at all for an emergency department to be closed. The tolerance for that part of the business to be unavailable is zero. Within the same hospital, though, they may be able to tolerate the kitchen being unavailable for up to three hours and still meet the needs of their patients. However, if the kitchen is destroyed, the expectation is that food could be secured from another location (such as another hospital across town) within the three hour window.

Another example would be that a fast-food restaurant could close for a 24-hour period with virtually no effect on customers, who could go somewhere else. (Shareholders might find it unsatisfactory, however.)

If the local state department building becomes incapacitated, the fact that renewals for drivers' licenses cannot be issued is not as big an issue as the ability to issue checks for welfare or social services benefits.

Test Your Knowledge

What elements of your organizational priorities could be considered urgent, with no downtime at all?

Which elements could be brought back up later, with little to no trouble?

Essential Crisis Plan Elements

Every organization will have different answers to the question, “What is critical for us?” but what’s important is to have the conversation and decide what is important together. The following elements will create a solid crisis plan.

The Book

There needs to be a copy of the plan available for reference at all times and it needs to be up to date. It’s not enough to have the plan stored on a computer server, either: if the power is out and servers unavailable, the plan is not going to be available.

We recommend a three-ring binder. Make the binder a noticeable color so that people can put their hands on it quickly. A nice bright orange or yellow binder should stand out from a desk or shelf full of black, white, and blue reference materials.

Keep a list of updates in the front of each copy so people reading it know they are looking at the most recent version.

Notes

Organization

This book must be easy to read and to use. Have a table of contents at the front and an index in the back. Section tabs will also assist in quickly locating information.

Notes

Preamble

This section will be helpful for members of the crisis management team and anyone who has to fill in on short notice. Introductions, purpose of the plan, statements of scope, policies, and anything else deemed helpful should be included here.

Notes

Details

This should be a living part of the document, where members of the team can keep notes of incidents as they unfold, events that take place, decisions made, meeting minutes and notes, reasons for not implementing policy or decisions exactly as designed, and so on.

Notes

Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

The details of the EOC all need to be here. Key information includes:

- The address
- Members of the team expected to report there
- Available infrastructure and equipment
- How to get access to the building
- What items of support the team needs to bring (computers, phones, water, food, radios, chairs, extension cords, generators, first aid kits, etc.).

Notes

Members of the Crisis Management Team

Keep this up to date. These are the people who will coordinate activities during the crisis and look after all issues of continuity and recovery. Your spokesperson should also be a part of this group.

This section should include all contact details for the entire team (including phone numbers, e-mail address, an alternate address in case work e-mail is unavailable, social media contact information, and a home address). Depending on the size of your company, you may have a core leadership team at the EOC and other members assigned elsewhere.

Notes

Job Descriptions

Include all roles and responsibilities that will be required in response to a crisis. Make sure that these descriptions are also understandable for anyone who has to step into a role unexpectedly. For example, if your spokesperson or CEO is injured or indisposed, someone is going to have to be reassigned or promoted into their role.

Notes

Supplemental Teams

If you have multiple locations, you will need to have teams in place for each place. These can report back to a central team at headquarters or act independently depending on the circumstances. It may be a bit of a challenge to maintain the contact information for these teams; make it a priority so that this section stays up to date.

Notes

Alternate Team Members

Having alternates who are prepared, trained, and capable is essential. According to Jonathan Bernstein, author of *Manager's Guide to Crisis Management*, this is where a crisis plan can overcome a breakdown when someone becomes unavailable or cannot be contacted. You should have an alternate identified for each member of the crisis team.

Notes

Procedures for Each Scenario

This is essential. Don't leave your people trying to decide what to do in the midst of a crisis. Use the information and feedback from previous incidents, drills, and the results of your crisis audits, to develop procedures for whatever threats are present. One tabbed section for each scenario, including procedures and sample statements to issue to the media, is appropriate. Some common threats include fire, flood, power outage, severe storm, flood, bomb threat, and other external or internal threats.

Notes

Spokespeople

Each team needs to have one person who is appointed to speak for the organization during a crisis. This may be the CEO, and in some circumstances or at a certain intensity of crisis should be. However, some CEOs are not strong speakers, or they may be unavailable. This means that other people must be trained and ready to deal with the media, communicate with employees and perhaps their families, and speak to members of the community directly.

Notes

Stakeholders

This section has to define the stakeholders that are important so that you remember to communicate with the people who are essential to your business. This includes employees, customers, contractors, suppliers, and anyone who visits the premises. Whether you are a privately held or a publicly traded company, there can also be investors and shareholders, government regulatory agencies, insurance companies, and more. Each of these people and organizations also need to be identified in your communication plan. Make sure that all of their contact details are updated at least every 90 days.

Notes

Critical Incident Stress Debriefing

This section may include the provision of counseling services for people who are affected by the incident. You may have heard about something like this following a serious incident at a school or workplace.

Notes

Event Debriefing

The last section of the plan should have room for a summary where each member of the crisis management team will make notes about things that are necessary to share after the incident has resolved, or at least the emergency aspects have been dealt with. This should include comments that demonstrate strengths and weaknesses of the plan and recommendations for improvement. This is an important part of the plan, as you should use lessons learned in order to prepare for the next time to the best of your ability.

Notes

Walliallia

Background

In your small town is a pretty remarkable company who has the key to the safety of water systems around the world. This small town is called Roaring Falls, and it is in the midst of the rural state of Wallaloopa. The factory is called Walliallia, which means “water for everyone,” and has been operating since 2015.

Up until the early 2030’s, if there was no access to clean water, people had to put a pot on the stove and boil water for drinking. People in very rural areas and in the developing world often went without clean water for months and even years at a time when there was no access to potable water.

This changed in 2032 when Walliallia, an engineering technology company, launched their water purification filter. They created a round purification disc about three inches in diameter. It was then marketed, sold, and distributed, and is now present at the opening of water pipes in almost every facility and home around the world. This new technology meant that clean water was suddenly available for everyone around the world, whether their water was stored in a town reservoir or brought up from a well.

These discs are relatively inexpensive, especially compared to other purification systems, because of their compact size and availability of the filtering element, carborantorum (a helpful by-product of crude oil purification). The research and development of the product was funded by the big oil companies in cooperation with remediation scientists, and it was discovered in a happy accident.

The product does require delicate production practices to maintain the integrity of the filtering material, and the filters must be replaced every 120 days. Despite these drawbacks, the discs have been distributed around the world and every human being in every community now has clean water.

Early in production, a crisis audit was undertaken at Walliallia. The team recommended that a second factory in another region be built. They explained that there was a significant risk that distribution could be interrupted since there was only a single plant providing the filters to the entire world. The audit team felt that it was highly probable that some kind of disaster could take the original factory out of service, at least temporarily.

There was one delay after another, including ongoing pressure to cease crude oil production. As a result, there has never been a second factory built. The Walliallia board of directors knew about the risk, but they also secretly liked having control of the only factory in the world to make those filters. Distribution remained successful as world governments, non-profit groups, and ecological organizations helped successfully distribute the filters to every corner of the world. Occasionally, someone on the board would mention how impressed they were that in a world continually barraged by acts of war, riots, and unrest, that the water system was unthreatened.

Worldwide, incidents of disease are decreasing, and this result alone was largely attributed to the prevalence of clean drinking water.

Exercise One: Gas Line Explosion at Water Plant

Scenario

- **Date:** Monday, May 18, 2043
- **Time:** 7:45 a.m.
- **Crisis:** Gas Line Explosion at Walliallia

It's early in the morning at Walliallia, as the sun is gaining height and the birds are singing their morning greetings. The night shift, a small crew of ten people, is preparing to leave the plant by 8:00 a.m., and the 50 daytime employees are coming in. It seems just like any other Monday as cheerful hellos are exchanged and people hang up their jackets.

A low rumble starts to vibrate through the building, and people look at one another to see if they have all heard it. The rumble builds in just a few seconds, and all of sudden pieces of the concrete building, equipment, and people are flying about as a deafening roar takes over. A fire starts instantly and can be seen through the hole where the top corner of the building has been blown off. As the debris settles, there are moans, cries for help, and the roar of a fire gaining momentum.

The scene quickly becomes chaotic as the uninjured come to the aid of the fallen. Two of the employees run into the chaos with fire extinguishers, but for now the flames seem to be outside. After a quick look around they head outside to investigate.

The devastation outside is shocking. The initial fireball has scorched the trees nearby and the edge of the woods is consumed in flames that are so hot they are almost invisible. It is easy to see through the wreckage that the incoming natural gas line has blown up, and there is fire coming out of the wreckage as though it is being shot through a flame thrower. Their fire hydrants are no match for this.

One of the men remembers his cell phone and pulls it out to make an emergency call, but there is no line available. He looks around and sees that the cell phone tower that had been on the top of the building has collapsed. The view of what's left of the building stops him in his tracks. The entire north wall of the building has collapsed, and the few pieces of it that are left look ready to topple over. There is a fire inside the building and they need to get their people out. They also need a way to call for assistance from the fire department and get ambulances in.

Inside, the administration area is all but completely destroyed. People are pinned under furniture and a fallen wall. Computers and phones are dangling off the edges of upset desks. The power has gone off, and the few phones that are in one piece are not working.

Within 40 minutes of the explosion, many people have been removed from the building, but some remain trapped. Fire has destroyed 80% of the filter production area, including materials that were stored for distribution.

Test Your Knowledge

Using your local map, identify areas that need isolation and protecting.

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Based on the response needed for this incident, identify potentially suitable locations for an Emergency Operations Center.

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Based on the incident, list which members of the Crisis Management Team need to be located and to report to the EOC.

What criteria do you need to consider before reassigning staff? How might union agreements effect and reassignments?

Identify who (employees, other area residents, and businesses) may be affected by the incident.

Identify the effects that a shutdown or unplanned production stoppage will have on distribution.

Exercise Two: How are you Feeling?

Scenario

It took a lot of work to get the production back on line at Wallialia after the natural gas explosion, but production and distribution were back in order within a couple of weeks using temporary shelters, until the main building had been reconstructed.

There were several serious injuries and seven people were killed by falling debris and fire. New people who had been hired to rebuild and re-staff the company felt like outsiders, even a year and a half later. They had not experienced the trauma that day, and people who had did not want to talk about it. They did not feel they had much in common with the new staff.

In addition, Wallialia needs staff with special skills, and with the loss of so many employees, they had to recruit from farther afield. The replacement staff did not live in the community for the most part, most of them preferring to commute an hour or longer each way rather than moving into Roaring Falls. This added to the animosity between the old and new staff.

This winter there has also been a lot of influenza to deal with. There is a pandemic underway, and despite rounds of immunization, people washing their hands and staying home when sick, it seems to be unavoidable.

Senior manager Dave thought he had avoided it, and as he returned from halfway around the world where Wallialia II was being built, he felt something that he had not felt for a long time. He had to stop and think about it for a little while before he realized that the feeling, so long absent, was happiness. He was happy! He had recovered from the explosion after several weeks with his leg in a cast and months of physiotherapy, but it had taken a lot longer for his soul to recover. Now, as he was heading back after celebrating the opening of the new production facility he smiled to himself. Then he sneezed. And sneezed again, and again. The people sitting beside him on the plane looked at him warily. No one wanted it to be a case of the 'flu, but they all knew this was how it started.

When Dave arrived home, he greeted his young family at the airport, but his seven year old son was not with his wife and daughter. Roger had a dreadful cold, his wife explained, so he was being looked after by his grandmother at home.

Dave got home and went to check on his son. The boy's eyes were red rimmed, his nose was red, and he had a cough that was so deep it sounded like it came from his toes.

"Has he had a fever?" Dave asked his wife.

"He still does," Maggie replied, "although it's not as bad as yesterday."

It turned out that Roger had the 'flu, and a very serious case of it. Dave also had the 'flu, and although they had contracted them in different countries, they turned out to be the same strain that was identified as part of the pandemic.
Maggie worked as a nurse at the community hospital, so she tended to wash her hands a lot more than her children did. She had also been inoculated against the 'flu and made sure that her booster shots were up to date, as had her family. She did not develop symptoms of this pandemic influenza, but it wasn't long before both her children were ill, as well as her husband and her parents.

However, the hospital was full, there were staff from the hospital that were off sick, and the beds were filled with people who were too ill to stay at home.

Maggie had to make a decision. Her family needed her. Her hospital needed her. Surrounding communities have been struck with illness too, and all of them were asking for help from Wallaloopa.

Test Your Knowledge

What messages need to be sent out to the public about reductions in staff at the hospital?

What information needs to be shared with hospital staff about the community response to the pandemic?

Exercise Three: The Last Question

When it comes to crisis management, it's difficult to predict everything that will come up. We know, however, that the more we can prepare, the better we can resolve or at least mitigate the effects of a particular event.

With the availability of travel and the movement of goods internationally, the threat of a pandemic is not something to be trifled with. How will your company manage if 10 or 25 or 60 percent of your people are out sick for a prolonged period of time?

Our last question to work through today is drawn from actual examples of ethical issues that impact hospitals and nursing homes around the world.

Scenario

You are on the board of directors with the local health region, and you are observing the number of hospital admissions increase. This form of influenza has not been fussy – people of all ages are succumbing to it. Your small hospital has 12 respirators, and they are all in use today: two for patients who were in car crashes and 10 for patients with influenza. Everyone who gets respirator treatment survives the pandemic, whether they are children, adolescents, adults, or the aged. You know that as the pandemic spreads, you will need more respirators. There are four people in the emergency department right now who need respirators, but yours are all in use and there are none available in the district. Patients who are not able to get a respirator for treatment will most certainly die. The nearest hospital (30 miles away) has sent a request to borrow respirators from you.

Test Your Knowledge

How will you decide who gets a respirator in your own hospital?

Recovering and Moving On

Initial Adjustments

When there is a crisis, each of us handles things our own way. Some people will look for closure and others will try to deny that the incident ever took place. If this is the first time that someone has been involved in a crisis or death, these feelings can be brand new. It's important that people learn that what they are feeling is normal, and that they are not expected to suppress or deny their emotions about what has happened.

As the employer, you need to be prepared for the range of reactions and emotions that can come with a particular event. An injured or ill person will have their reaction, an emergency responder will have their reaction, witnesses will have a reaction, and people who are uninjured or ill will also have a reaction to what is happening, even if they are not on site. If you think of people who know what they were doing when the 9/11 attacks took place in America, even people who were not there or directly affected, this is a sign of the mark that trauma leaves on someone's psyche.

Have you ever had that experience where you get through a crisis by getting everything done that you need to do? You go hours without sleep, or have super strength, or you recognize that there is adrenaline coursing through your body that is helping you along. Afterward, when the crisis has passed, you suddenly want to sit somewhere quietly and rest, or perhaps you need to eat a massive meal.

These reactions are all perfectly normal and are expected responses to any kind of crisis. Employers will sometimes arrange for counseling on site for survivors or those otherwise impacted by an incident. In the case of a loss, sometimes there is memorial service, or some kind of marking of the event. These gatherings can be very important in helping people to acknowledge that what has happened cannot be changed, and to move towards acceptance of what has taken place. In the case of loss, it can help them to grieve.

Working Things Out

If you or someone on your team has been through a traumatic experience, you may find yourself in the role of offering comfort or support. Here are some suggestions that you may find helpful.

Worrying that a traumatic experience could be repeated is a natural reaction. Remind yourself that even if it does happen again, you have the ability to get through it, just as you did this time.

Accept that you will not feel this way forever. The intensity of the situation that you are feeling now will subside over time.

Survivor's guilt is common. This is when people ask themselves why something happened to someone else but not them. Find something to focus on, such as a problem to solve or a cause to help, and recognize your purpose there.

Reach out to friends and family for help. They will be supportive, although they may not have all the skills that you need. Remember that mental health professionals are also trained to help with critical incident stress debriefings, supportive counseling, cognitive behavioral therapy, and more. Find the right professional to help with the situation.

Further Reading:

- ✓