

Managing a communications crisis

WHAT IS A CRISIS

An event that will or may lead to a damaging, unstable or dangerous situation

An external event in a fast moving, breaking news type of scenario

An “existential” crisis that can damage the organization, the brand

It is always intense, fast paced, stressful. Take care of yourselves!

When the crisis hits

First minutes

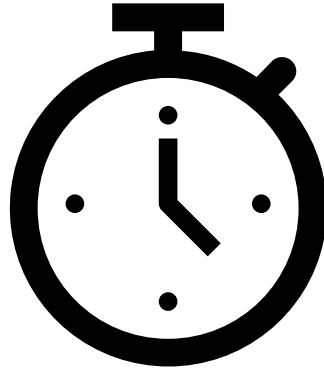
- Breathe...
- Get ready
 - Consider internal stakeholders
 - Consider bilateral outreach
- Save time
 - Holding line/reactive line



First hours

The What

- Establish facts
- Evaluate risks
- Prioritize
- Monitor



The How

- Organise yourself
- Organise internally

Group exercise

10 min

Your CEO just got married! Her friends and family surprised the newly weds by gifting them a honeymoon in a 5 star hotel in the Seychelles. She landed yesterday. Early this morning she's left for a 2 days live-aboard diving excursion - she is unreachable.

A journalist from a widely read outlet with an anti-climate agenda has tweeted that your CEO has flown for pleasure and is accusing your organisation of hypocrisy.

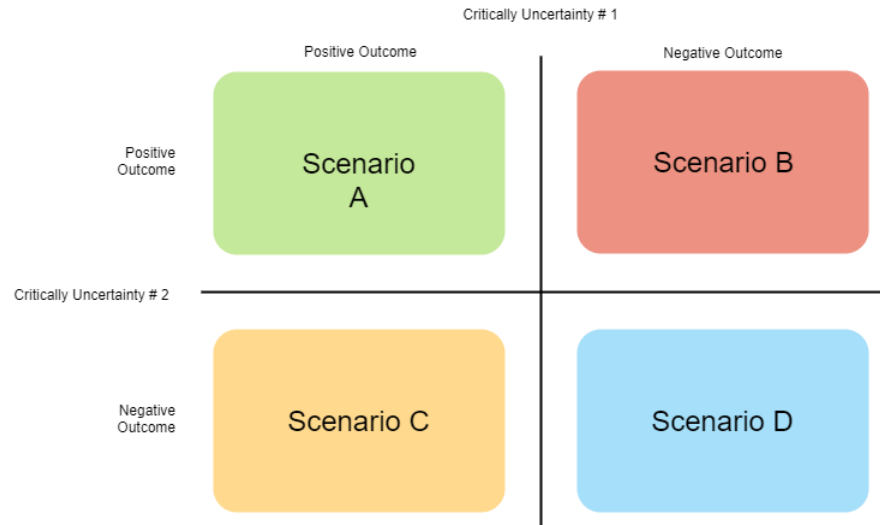
- What is at stake for your organisation?
- How will you organise yourself internally to answer the journalist?
- What first respond would you consider?

Evaluating risks – some tools

SWOT ANALYSIS



Scenario planning



Riding the storm

Freeze?

- Doing nothing is an option to consider
- “Streisand effect”: an attempt to hide, remove, or censor information has the **unintended consequence** of increasing awareness of that information
- What is done can’t be undone
- Internal may be very difficult

Acknowledgement/ careful retreat?

- Acknowledge the crisis
- Recognize facts & responsibilities
- Apologize
- Respond with action, not just promises
- Consider bilateral

Fight back?

- Very risky - better be sure of your risk assessment - you will lose something, is it worth it?
- In line with your organisation's ethos and nature
- Count your allies as well as your opponents

Group exercise

10 min

Five months ago a new Senior Associate joined your organisation. Her contract ended last week; she was dismissed due to an unsatisfactory job performance.

A colleague told you this morning that he saw a post on X from this employee. She claims the real reason of her dismissal is a revenge from her line manager, because she had refused his sexual advances.

- What do you do?

Think of a few scenario that could influence your strategy

Debrief

- Some tips on how to organize your comms – work with colleagues (back office, digital support)
- Priorization is key. The more acute the crisis, the more you have to drop things. Needs to be made clear from the onset

Preparing spokespeople – a tool

Talking points

Goal

MAIN MESSAGES

-
-

Guidance for spokespeople (DOs and DONTs)

-
-

Red Lines:

- Do not
- Terms to avoid
- How to bridge - tips

Possible Media Q&A

-
- How to bridge - tips

Useful facts & stats to refer to

It is not finished until it is finished

- Keep monitoring
- Debrief – lessons learned
- File and document

Be prepared

Internal stakeholders management

- Who signs off? Who speaks? Are they trained?
- How will you communicate internally? “Need to know” basis
- Will you get timely and complete information (internally & externally)?

Know your weak points & plan ahead

- Crisis comms, at its extreme, is about the survival of the organisation. Your response will be based on who you are, what you work for.
- Count your friends, know your enemies
- Smell where the wind is blowing – if your friends are targeted, you might too

Q&A

Thank you!

s.honorine@gmail.com