

Corporate Communication: A Strategic Tool for Crisis Management

Dr. Rachna Gupta
Kathua Campus, University of JAMMU, India

Abstract

In today's rapidly changing business environment almost every company experiences crises. Though many of them never try to overcome. Crisis problems are generally not solved in the primary state and are usually chaotic, without any strategic management plans (Ben-Yair, Golenko-Ginzburg Laslo 2007, Kaplinski; 2008). The situation gets worse when the companies' employees as well as internal and external environment have to be informed. Therefore it is necessary to represent the organization realistically to train the specialists of knowledge management (Kumpikaite, 2008). The situation does not become easier because of the negative attitude to crisis (Virbickaite,, 2009). Therefore crisis solution can bring positive consequences in the companies' (Remeikiene, 2009). One of them is efficient communication conflict management during crisis period. ¹Moreover; in present era of globalization where companies are experiencing the transformational changes such as incorporation, international capital appearance, wide geography of the companies, mobility of employees, global crisis, there is a need to manage communication process in business to generate communication ideas for crisis prevention and management. Therefore in this changing context crisis management process should be re-evaluated in the theoretical as well as applies form for the efficient crisis management plans. The paper makes an assessment of crisis planning and strategic management processes described in the existing literature and makes an attempt to answer how to strategically manage crisis in business environment and prepare crisis management plans, with efficient corporate communications.

Keywords: Corporate Communication, Strategic Management, Crisis Management

* Assistant Professor, The Business School, University of Jammu

mahajan.rachna@gmail.com

Introduction

Managers, consultants and researchers have traditionally been focused on the problems of financial performance and growth, but have paid little attention to effective management of corporate crisis. This crisis problems are not solved in its primary stage and usually chaotic without any strategic crisis solution or crisis management plans (Yair, Galenko-Ginzburg, Laslo, 2007; Bivanis, Tuncikiene, 2007; Kaplinski, 2008; Markovic, 2008). It can create related threats: public safety, financial loss and reputation loss. Some crisis such as industrial accidents and product harm can result in injuries and even loss of lives. Cases such as Three Mile island nuclear power plant in 1979, Cyanide in Tylenol capsules of Johnson & Johnson in 1982, Leakage of methyl isocyanides gas from a storage tank at the Union Carbide plant in Bhopal, India in 1984 and Coca-Cola case in Belgium in 1999. Nowadays the companies have to be oriented to the MOTTO of management strategy to continue change in management's philosophy to manage socio-economic factors in business environment and to be socially responsible. In order to manage crisis situation, it is important to understand crisis management and management processes in an organization (Klein, 1981; Rosenblatt, Sheaffee, 2002). It is also important to inform the employees about the changes in a company's external and intyernal environment (Deephouse, 2005; Sare, 2005; Kompikatie, 2007; Rees, 2008). A new paradigm has emerged takes in to accounts such issues and is getting due acceptance in scientific discussions and global management practice – corporate communication importance in conceptual and practical levels. Nowadays when the companies are experiencing the transformational changes – incorporation, international capital appearance, wide geography of companies, mobility of employees, global crisis, there is a need to manage communication process in business to generate communication ideas for crisis prevention and management.

This paper analyses the decision of crisis management in a conceptual paradigm and emphasis the importance of communication in crisis planning and strategic management process. The paper also emphasis on how to strategically manage crisis in business environment plans, generating communication ideas crisis prevention and management.

Understanding Corporate Communication as a Management Function

There are two methodological aspects of understanding the corporate communication. The first aspect is to describe the relation of social environment and business expression management of corporate communication system (Heath, 1994; Varey, White, 2000) and maintenance of company's business strategy – implementation of practical decision (Steyn, 2003, Goodman, 2004, 2006). In the second methodological aspect, it is necessary ton explore the case for, and value of corporate practice and productive global relationships as underpinning of sustainable business strategy (Goodman, 2006). These methodologies can be discussed in details as:

First Methodology: The term corporate communication is increasingly being used in practice to describe the management function that is referred to as public relations, crisis and emergency communication, corporate citizenship, reputation management, community relations, media relations, investors relations, employees relations, government relations, marketing communication, management communication, corporate branding, image building and

advertising. According to this first methodological aspect, this understanding explores the integration of corporate and marketing communication system of managing. It defines a need for a total stake holders perspective and to integrate corporate communication activities. According to Varey (2000), marketing is describes as a special case of human communication in which all elements of marketing mix all seen as communicative in action. With the corporate communication model of systematic managing is forwarded for this purpose. It means that corporate enterprise has two primary communication systems that are inter-related. The internal system directs the activities of organizing to accomplish goals that are based on the gathering and interpretation of data on expectations and attitudes and on conditions for corporations relevant environment thought external channel of communication. External systems of communication are also used to present relevant information about the internal processes of corporation to the relevant external environment to attempt to influence the behavior of various publics. The focus of internal communication is to establish the organizational structure and stability while external communication focuses on the innovative for corporate development. These have to be a proper balance between the two for stability. Managers of present corporate houses have started realizing the importance of communication management systems as the core function of enterprise community. The corporate communication approaches enables to reconciliation of social and economical interests for business is in reality is a socio – economic institution upon which every employee is dependent. Proper communication facilitates the organizational performance. Hence, it proves that communication is a core of the present and future company approach and communication between people is core of the business activity.

Second Methodology : As stated earlier according to the second methodology it is important to find out case for, and the value of corporate communication practices in professional development (Valackiene, Asta, 2010). For a successful sustainable business strategy it is important to target a positive relationship between corporate communication practice and productive global relationship (2006). Successful professional development of the next generation of corporate communication executives will focus on understanding of corporate communication functions and on strategic implementation capabilities. This practice of corporate communication has profound implication for professional development programme world wide as per the findings of Corporate Communication Institution (CI “Corporate Communications Practices and Trends” 2005).

Challenges for Corporate Communication as a Strategic Management Function

Corporate communication is the strategic management process by which an organization communicates with various audiences to mutual benefit of both and to improved competitive advantage. Importance of corporate communication in crisis management as an early warning system is beyond dispute (Lauzen, 1995). It provides the cultural and cross cultural fertilization with their publics and relay organizational values to and from their audiences. It is widely accepted that corporate communication has a crucial role in total business system (Winner, 1993). Though recent studies have confirmed corporate communication as a strategic function still it is centered on following challenges (Goodman, 2006)

- the need to build trust with all internal and external audiences;
- the expectation by the corporation to accomplish more with less;
- the demand to build a responsible and accountable global corporate culture in response to a hostile environment for multinational corporations;
- the perception of the corporate communication executive as “counsel to the CEO” and “manager of the company's” reputation;
- the understanding of the global impact of the local act, and the local impact of the global act;
- the demand for greater transparency and disclosure have made media relations more complex and strategic;
- the expectation that the company be a good citizen and make money;
- the reality of global terrorism makes crisis communication planning a critical success factor for corporate communication professionals;
- the understanding of transparency as the best practice strategy for reputation management; and
- the knowledge that writing remains the core skill

Global companies and their brands touch lives of more people than government representatives ever could. The example is TATA Group which has touched the lives of millions of Indians with different subsidiaries Telco, Tata tele services limited, Tata Finley, TCS, Voltas, Chroma, Westside, Tata chemicals, Tata Tea, Indian Hotels, Tanishq Jewellery etc. the company has its products in information technology, Engineering, Materials, Services, Energy, Consumer products, Chemicals etc. business has often served a large role in our society than carrying off the activities of commerce. They can serve a diplomatic function because of their inter cultural sensitivity as well as their understanding of global enterprise they work for and of the world at large. CCI Practices and Trends for 2000 to 2010 offer some guidance which include;

- Academic Application
- Corporate Application

Academic Application: Professional development programmes has been a growth area in higher education. In an interdisciplinary and applied field such as corporate communication current practices and trends can inform the academic community on what to offer in professional degree programme.

Corporate Application: Understanding of corporate communication can provide a vision a company requires in information driven economy for strategic planning. Corporations use it to lead, motivate, persuade and inform employees and public as well.

Corporate communication is seen as consisting of three potentially interactive and synergistic dimensions – public relations, marketing communications and human resource management (Kitchen, 1997). Generalizing and conceptually basing it can be claimed that corporate communication confirms as a strategic management function. This helps to describe a model of corporate communication style of managing. Corporate communication responsive to the

demands of professionals should focus on the strategic challenges executive face (adopted from Valackiene, Asta, 2010)

- building trust;
- efficiency;
- building a culture of accountability;
- counseling the corporation and the CEO;
- managing the company reputation;
- managing the impact of globalization;
- transparency in media relations and reputation management;
- managing corporate citizenship and corporate social responsibility;
- managing issues and crises;
- writing as the core skill for corporate communication

Corporate communication is more than science it is interdisciplinary, drawing on the methods and findings of anthropology, communication, sociology and psychology.

Models For Developing Corporate Communication Strategy

Before moving to the crisis communication strategy models it is very important to review the existing models of corporate communication strategy.

Grunig & Repper's model : Grunig & Repper's model (in Grunig 1992:124-150) for the strategic management of public relations consists of three stages: The stakeholder stage refers to the identification of strategic stakeholders through environmental scanning and the need for ongoing communication with them. The public stage refers to the identification of groups/individuals who see the consequences of organisational decisions as problematic, involving them in decision making. The issues stage deals with the management of issues and the important role of the media therein. These stages are regarded as the phases in formulating corporate communication strategy, whereas stages four to seven (objectives, planning, implementation and valuation) refer to the operational level of corporate communication Moss, Warnaby & Newman (2000:283, 284) criticise this model as failing to account sufficiently for potential variations in the process of strategy-making and for not explaining how corporate communication's role may differ at the different strategy levels.

Moss & Warnaby's conceptual model : The conceptual model of Moss & Warnaby (in Kitchen 1997:65) is the most extensive attempt to date to explain how corporate communication fits into the strategic decision making processes in organisations. It overcomes some of the chief weaknesses of the Grunig & Repper model (in Grunig 1992) and provides a framework for linking the development of corporate communication strategy to corporate and business-unit strategy. This model outlines the environmental scanning role of corporate communication at the corporate level, identifying and analysing strategic issues and stakeholders, and advising top management on how the different strategy options might influence relationships with key stakeholders. At the business level the role of corporate communication is to "support the

development of distinctive capability-based strategies” (Kay, in Kitchen 1997:66), helping to build and enhance the organisation’s reputation and that of its products or services. Corporate communication strategies thus focus on key stakeholder relationships and issues that may constrain or enhance an organisation’s ability to achieve its business goals and “should be viewed in the context of the corporate and business strategies from which they derive their essential purpose” (Moss & Warnaby, in Kitchen 1997:67). The communication programmes that operationalise these strategies can be asymmetrical or symmetrical in nature.

Steyn’s (educational) model: This model for developing corporate communication strategy is the outcome of a longitudinal action research project being conducted at the University of Pretoria (Steyn 2000b). The hypothesised model has been implemented amongst 94 non-profit organisations, 48 government institutions and 68 small-to-medium sized companies in South Africa, and has been adapted based on the findings of the action research. It consists of an analysis of the organisation’s internal environment (corporate profile, organisational strategies and policies, corporate culture and values), as well as a stakeholder and issues analysis of the external and internal environment by means of environmental scanning. The organisation’s key strategic issues are identified, described and classified according to a typology (Steyn 2000b; Steyn & Puth 2000) that differentiates between:

- (strategic) organisational issues -- where communication is not the cause of the problem, but can
- either provide a solution, or at least explain the issue;
- (strategic) communication issues -- where too little or no communication with external stakeholders or employees caused the problem); and
- (tactical) communication issues where messages are not reaching the target groups.

The implications/effects of the strategic issues on each of the stakeholder groups are identified and become the focus of the communication with strategic stakeholders/publics. Corporate communication strategy entails to formulate clearly what should be communicated to strategic stakeholders to solve the problems created by the implications of a strategic issue or to capitalise on the opportunities presented. Communication goals to be addressed in plans/campaigns are developed based on the corporate communication strategy for each strategic issue (Steyn 2000b; Steyn & Puth 2000).

The above models for developing strategy at the functional level provide considerable insight on the corporate communication strategy formulation process

The Plan of the Efficient Crises Communication

Crisis planning enables management to not only evaluate the dynamics within a business environment, but also evaluate similar changes related issues. In this way, action planning may be helpful in integrating the constituent parts of a strategy process and developing the crisis management perspectives.

The most viable methodological approach in the cognition of Crisis Communication is systems approach. Theoretical studies (Bernstein, 2004; Chong, 2004; Turney, 2004; Zerman, 2004; Seymuor, 2006; Luecke, 2007) show that Communication and Mastering the Media are an important tool for every crisis handler and in each active stage of Crisis Management: contingency planning, containment, and resolution. It is important as an instrument of control and coordination. Effective media relations begin before a crisis occurs. The basic steps of effective Crisis Communications are not difficult, but they require advance in work in order to minimize damage.

Chronology of Crisis Communication

Bernstein (2004) implement's these 10 steps of Crisis Communications; the first seven of which can and should be undertaken before any crisis occurs.

1. Identify Your Crisis Communications Team: Ideally, the team will be led by the organization's CEO, with the firm's top public relations executive and legal counsel as his or her chief advisers. Other team members should be the heads of major organization divisions, to include finance, personnel and operations.

2. Identify Spokespersons: The decision about who should speak is made after a crisis breaks — but the pool of potential spokespersons should be identified and trained in advance. Not only are spokespersons needed for media communications, but for all types and forms of communications, internal and external, including on camera, at a public meeting, at employee meetings, etc.

3. Spokesperson: Training. Spokesperson training teaches you to be prepared, to be ready to respond in a way that optimizes the response of all stakeholders.

4. Establish Notification Systems: the means to reach our internal and external stakeholders using multiple modalities.

5. Identify and Know Your Stakeholders: Who are the internal and external stakeholders that matter to your organization? Employees must be most important audience, because every employee is a PR representative and crisis manager for your organization whether you want them to be or not.

6. Anticipate Crises: There are two immediate benefits to this exercise: realize that some of the situations are preventable by simply modifying existing methods of operation; begin to think about possible responses, about best case/worst case scenarios, etc. There is a more formal method of gathering this information - a "vulnerability audit".

7. Develop Holding Statements: While full message development must await the outbreak of an actual crisis, "holding statements"- messages designed for use immediately after a crisis breaks - can be developed in advance to be used for a wide variety of scenarios to which the organization is perceived to be vulnerable, based on the assessment you conducted in Step 6 of this process.

8. Assess the Crisis Situation: Assessing the crisis situation is, therefore, the first crisis communications step you can't take in advance. But if you haven't prepared in advance, your reaction will be delayed by the time it takes your in house staff or quickly-hired consultants to run through steps 1 to 7. Furthermore, a hastily created crisis communications strategy and team are never as efficient as those planned and rehearsed in advance.

9. Identify Key Messages: The team already knows, categorically, what type of information its stakeholders are looking for. Have no more than three main messages for all stakeholders and, as necessary, some audience-specific messages for individual groups of stakeholders.

10. Riding out the Storm: Some of your stakeholders are not going to react the way you want them to. What do you do? Take an objective look at the reaction(s) in question. Is it your fault, or their unique interpretation? Decide if another communication to those stakeholders is likely to change their impression for the better. Decide if another communication to those stakeholders could make the situation worse.

Segmented Communication Strategy for Effective Crisis communication

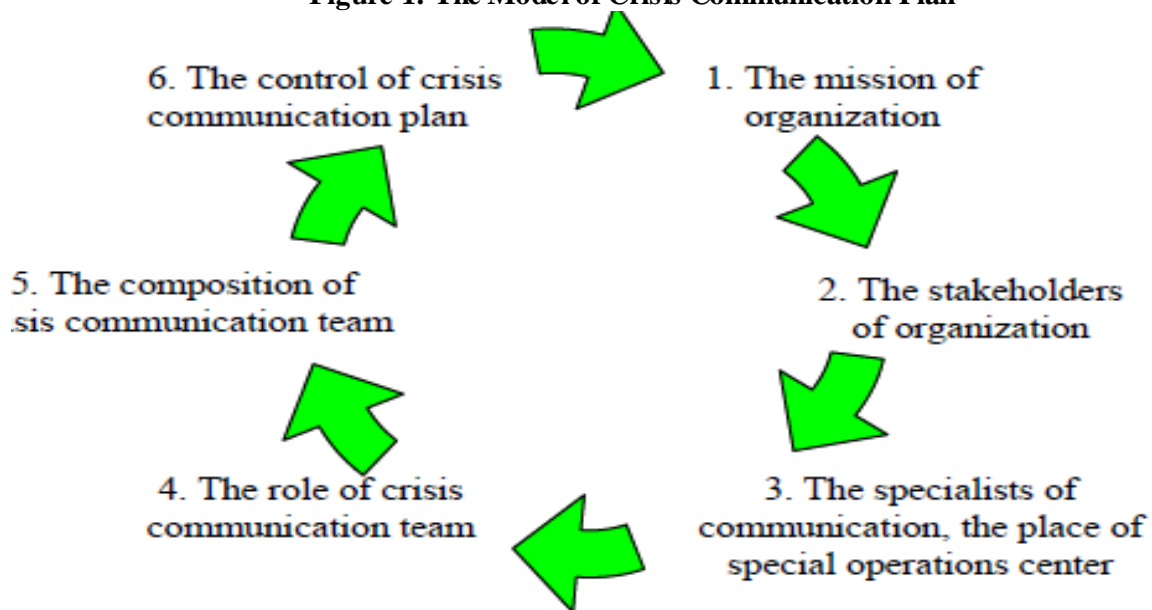
According to Zerman, (2004) masterly communications are: when we give to media the facts; use the right Spokesperson; match the message and media to different segments; segment your audience; select the most appropriate media. Audience segmentation is the basis of an Effective Communication Strategy, identifies key market segments and unique concerns of each segment and then speak to each in a suitable way and through a medium most likely to create high impact. Luecke, (2007) describe the principle of audience segmentation (community leaders; employees; customers and suppliers; shareholders; the general public) using segmentation to create a systematic communication strategy (Table 1).

Table 1: Segmented Communications Strategy

Segment	Employees	Investors	Customers	Suppliers	Community leaders	Regulators, Government agencies
Key Considerations						
KEY Messages	Jobs in new place; Retraining program	Full disclosure of the change	Making changes to serve you better; Changes will make the company stronger;	Changes will make the company stronger;	Full disclosure of the change	Full disclosure of the change
Media	Companywide meeting; Letter to each employee	Letter to shareholders; Webcast	Letter to all purchasing managers; Industry trade magazine	Letter to all; Personal calls to suppliers	Meeting with community leaders	Registered letter
Timing	Prior to press conference; Frequent follow-up	Immediately	Concurrent with press release	Immediately	Prior to press conference	Prior to press conference
Spokes-person	CEO	CEO; Investor relation	VP of marketing	Corporate supply-chain manager	CEO;	CEO; Legal counsel

(Source: Luecke, 2007; Valackiene,2010)

Figure 1: The Model of Crisis Communication Plan



(Source: Turney, 2007, Valackiene, 2010)

According to Turney (2007), crisis planning is like buying insurance. Once you have decided to buy insurance or to prepare a Crisis Communication plan, another sensible precaution is to prepare for the worst case scenario. Be sure it meets your organization's needs. It will require thoughtful analysis of your organization, its environment, and its available resources

Six Steps to Prepare an Effective Corporate Communication Plan at the moment of Crises

Step 1: Clearly state the Communication Team's Mission in a crisis

Generally, the role of a communication unit in any organization at any time is to support and advance the organization's mission, and a fundamental tenet of strategic planning is each operating unit should have a unit-specific mission statement that is aligned with the organization's mission. Remember, however, that communicators are not responsible for resolving crises. That's management's job.

Step 2: Identify your organization's most critical publics and themes to emphasize in communicating with each of them

Many crisis communication plans target three to eight publics, but there's no „magic number“ right for everyone. Include whatever public best suit your organization's needs regardless of how many this is.

Step 3.: Determine where crisis communication team members will be needed and the location of any special operations centers

Depending on their size and management structure, many organizations will need crisis communicators in multiple locations: Crisis site, Emergency operations center (EOC), Main administrative offices of the organization, Public relations or communication offices, Crisis communication center (CCC), Media center, Field offices, branch production facilities.

Step 4 Define task-related communication roles needed in a crisis

The number and variety of roles on a crisis communication team depend on the organization's size, location(s), and type of business as well as the nature of the crisis. The roles: Crisis manager liaison sits in on meetings of upper-level managers who make the decisions and direct the operations intended to resolve the crisis and keeps the rest of the communication team updated. Employee liaison keeps employees (and sometimes their families) fully informed of what's happening. Spokesperson publicly announces all new developments, explains the organization's positions, and handles all media interviews. Media facilitator assists reporters in getting to/from the crisis site, arranges interviews, provides background information, etc. Investor & financial community liaison may be needed by a publicly-traded company especially if its stock price is volatile or its financial future is uncertain. Writer/researcher/fact checker assists the spokesperson and media facilitator in gathering and preparing information for release. Call and e-mail screeners review and appropriately route crisis-related messages that come in to the public relations office, emergency phone lines or e-mail addresses, and the main switchboard.

On-site monitor at the actual crisis scene observes and reports developments for the crisis manager liaison and the spokesperson.

Step 5 Prepare a crisis communication team roster showing your „starting line-up“ with contact information

Then identify specific people who can fill each position, but do so knowing that there will probably not be enough communication staff to cover all of them. It may be necessary to borrow additional staff from other departments or make arrangements for outside assistance.

Step 6 Don't wait until a crisis to disseminate the plan.

It won't be much help unless those who need to use it are familiar with it and have it instantly accessible. Everyone listed in the plan should have copies of it as well as having additional fact sheets and contact lists relevant to their specific assignments

Conclusions

The understanding of Corporate Communication is focused on two methodological aspects: to describe the relation of social environment and business expression – management of corporate communication system and maintenance of company's business strategy – implementation of practical decisions. According to the first methodological aspect, this understanding explores the integration of Corporate and Marketing Communication in tomorrow's company, and discusses a model of the Corporate Communication system of managing. According to the second methodological aspect, it is necessary to explore the case for, and value of, Corporate Communication practice in professional development. According to that conceptual paradigm the Corporate Communication offers strategic management functions. Depending on the organization, Corporate Communication includes: public relations; crisis and emergency communication; corporate citizenship; reputation management; community relations; media relations; investor relations; employee relations; government relations; marketing communication; management communication; corporate branding and image building; advertising. Generalizing and conceptually basing it can be claimed that successful professional development of the next generation of Corporate Communication executives will focus on understanding of Corporate Communication functions and on strategic implementation capabilities. A conceptual paradigm of the phenomenon under discussion is applied: Crisis Planning and Management Strategy within the business environment are analyzed, In crisis planning process discussions and future perspectives are essential. In order to be able to strategically manage the crisis situations within business environment, it is essential to talk about the process of crisis planning, as well as strategy management within the organization. To achieve that an adequate training of staff is necessary, in addition to that the analysis of the situation and search for alternative solutions are required. To be able to properly get prepared for a Crisis Planning and Strategy Management processes, Crisis Management requires collaboration with systems, efficient internal and external communication, setting the persons and their roles expressed by special duties and responsibilities, effective collective decision making, control and collaboration responsibility. Another important element is the managers' ability to communicate with the media representatives in crisis situations. The managers have to be prepared what to say, how to present information in order not to damage the company's reputation.

The most viable methodological approach in the cognition of Crisis Communication is systems approach. Theoretical studies and practical research of Corporate Communication Institute shows, that Communication and Mastering of the Media is an important tool for every crisis handler and in each active stage of crisis management: contingency planning, containment, and resolution. It is importance as an instrument of control and coordination. Audience segmentation is the basis of an Effective Communication strategy. The Model of Crisis Communication Plan emphasizes the six stages of preparation: the mission of organization; the stakeholders of organization; the specialists of communication and the place of special operations center; the role of crisis communication team; the composition of crisis communication team; the control of crisis communication plan.

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