

Risk and Crisis Communication

Kelli Lynn Fellows, Ph.D.



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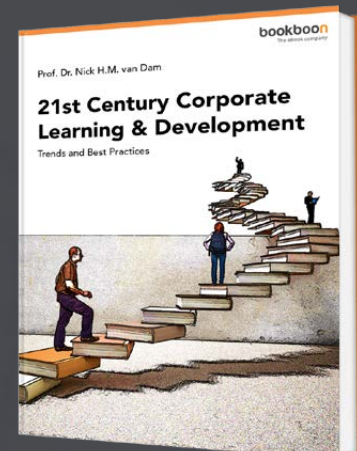
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Dr. Kelli Lynn Fellows | Author Introduction



Dr. Kelli Lynn Fellows is the Founder and Principal Consultant of *Cognitive Gymnastics* – a consulting group focused on business intelligence, creative inquiry, and transformational leadership. Additionally, she is an Associate Professor in *Pfeiffer University's* Graduate School of Business and Leadership.

With over 25 years of professional organizational communications experience across corporate, non-profit, and academic contexts, Dr. Fellows utilizes a spectrum of quantitative and qualitative approaches to optimize business outcomes. Her research, consulting, and non-profit service interests include:

- Identity construction and maintenance
- Risk and crisis communication
- Creative approaches to leadership optimization
- Change management
- Communication audits
- Organizational stakeholder engagement

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Preface

Risk and crisis communication impacts each of us every day. My personal and professional experience in both areas contributes to my professional approach and invites further inquiry. In an effort to draw you in to this experiential context, I present this preface for your consideration. Five golden threads – *intellectual curiosity, creativity, humility, ethics, and a servant’s heart* – intertwine and connect each of my endeavors. The following sections conceptualize each thread and illuminate the value of each one individually and collectively.

Intellectual Curiosity

Intellectual curiosity is evidenced throughout my endeavors. Kula (2006) notes, “When you’ve got an answer, it’s time to find better questions,” (p. 3). Curiosity is reflected in asking questions. Questioning provides a framework to dive deeper into the examination of a situation, perspective, or process. In teaching and consulting, I challenge my students and clients to consider alternative perspectives, engage their critical thinking skills development through learning activities that integrate metaphor and analogy as a higher level learning tool, and infuse discussion with a spectrum of current research findings.

Creativity

MacKenzie (1996) suggests creativity is, “...Shy. Creativity is like that. It will not be looked at. As soon as you look at creativity – as soon as you become conscious (or self-conscious) of it – it simply vanishes. If you want it to return, you must give up trying to focus on it,” (pp. 196–197). Creativity defines my approach to my spectrum of professional roles yet it remains an elusive construct to quantify.

Examples of its pervasiveness span from implementing non-traditional approaches to teaching graduate students about research methods through food to exploring innovative business strategies through engaging with blank coloring book sheets. Each person has creative capacity to effect change in his or her specific organizational context. Through seemingly unrelated activities, individuals free their mind to embrace their individual childlike wonder. Subsequently, they are freed from the confines of the status quo to explore new territory. My goal is to ignite, facilitate, and nurture this potential within my students, clients, colleagues, and collaborative partners.

Humility

Humility is my professional compass. A humble approach entails the authentic conviction of equality, humane treatment of others, and appreciating the skills, talents, and abilities each person possesses. Success does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, success is the product of prioritizing higher level organizational goals above individual recognition. Humility empowers individuals to lift up others – to serve as the ground on which they may stand to achieve their full potential. As Palmer (2007) notes, “We experience *humility* not because we have fought and lost but because humility is the only lens through which great things can be seen and once we have seen them, humility is the only posture possible,” (p. 110).

Ethical Reasoning

Adherence to a code of ethics is an integral component of my professional and personal existence. Such a code provides a framework to guide decision making. In obvious contexts where a behavior crosses an ethical boundary of right or wrong, minimal ethical sophistication is necessary. The litmus test of an individual's "ethical reasoning" (Balch & Armstrong, 2010, p. 292) lies in the hazy areas between distinct boundaries. Balch and Armstrong (2010) suggest, "[employees]...need guidance because they are operating in a boundary zone where confusion is possible. Thus, what determines ethicality is not staying out of the marginal zone, but the quality of ethical reasoning when operating in that zone," (pp. 291–292).

As a consultant, faculty member, and citizen, I am mindful of my ethical reasoning that undergirds each decision. Balanced focus on organizational goal attainment and ethical convictions is a hallmark of a virtuous leader. Incorporating and exploring ethically hazy constructs or situations provides students, colleagues, and me the perpetual opportunity to consider the caliber of ethical reasoning present. For example, examination of case studies provides students the opportunity to consider decision making grounded in ethical convictions that differ from their own. This ethical mining engages critical thinking skills and illustrates the intrinsic role of ethical reasoning within each decision made.

Servant's Heart

A servant's heart encompasses an instinctive altruistic mindset and behavioral expression. Mastain (2007) notes, "According to August Comte (1875), who coined the term about 150 years ago, altruism is conceived of as devotion to the welfare of others, based in complete selflessness," (p. 64). I am truly at my best and most fulfilled when I am helping others. This other-centeredness facilitates engagement across organizational roles without desire or expectation of notoriety or exaltation.

When considering my servant's heart in the context of the marketplace. Commitment to global transformation begins within each individual. One imperative application is connection between "both service and meaning," (Fry & Kriger, 2009, p. 1681). Further, my servant's heart is consistent with Fry and Kriger's (2009) observations that servant leadership entails integration of spiritual, ethical, and communication variables (p. 1682). The aforementioned *Five Golden Threads* emulate these criteria and poise me for continued legacy building contributions across.

Summary

A glimpse into the five golden threads that weave throughout my approach provides the reader insight into the author and frames the material presented. I acknowledge the significant efforts of scholars around the world who dedicate their career to ethical and humane risk and crisis communication. Their commitment benefits each of us, and for that, I am truly thankful.

Our collective inquiry and ongoing investment in learning and growth unites us – across regions and organizational contexts. Through continuous process and performance improvement, individuals and organizations, propel critique and innovation. Ultimately, communication is a powerful tool that may facilitate our concurrent attainment of business and relational goals.

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1 Risk and Crisis Communication Overview

1.1 Introduction

Each day, individuals face varying degrees of risk. From crossing the street to depositing financial resources in a bank, fundamental risks with an associated spectrum of consequences perpetually exist. At an organizational level, potential risk manifestation spans individual employee actions to corporate level brand collapse. These risks continually expand as technological availability engages the public in a dance teetering on disaster as a potential risk becomes a crisis. Daily, organizations daily face a host of internal and external phenomena that may escalate to a crisis situation. Calculated strategic communication response regarding potential risk and emergent crises is paramount to an organization's sustainability.

However, risk and crisis communication entails a process of information exchange and response between organizations and audiences (both internal and external). This process does not unfold in a vacuum. Rather, variables outside of organizations' control may influence or impede the process. The challenge with risk and crisis communication stems from a complex combination of variables, individual decision makers, and varying emotional states connected by *communication*.

1.2 Communication Complexities

On the surface, a novice may consider the solution to risk and crisis communication simplistic and readily attainable – simply craft an effective message and disseminate the information to all audiences in a timely manner. Unfortunately, even if the perfect risk or crisis communication plan, internal controls, or messages are prepared and implemented, the desired outcome may remain elusive.

Communication complexity originates within the confines of its inception – human beings. As a means of creating and sustaining society, communication remains individuals' conceptualization. As individuals group and form organizations to achieve a common goals, specific communicative patterns, paradigms, and practices evolve. In this respect, one must remember organizations are comprised of individuals engaging in sensemaking of their perceived reality. Acceptance of each individual, the fundamental uncertain nature of human existence and interaction, and failure as a viable outcome culminate in the gravity of potential risk and crisis.

As Regester and Larkin (2005) observe, "...the communication planner who might foresee and prepare for such eventualities is a significant player in our interconnected and changing world," (p. xiii). To grasp the complexity of communication in general, one must consider foundational constructs including: (a) the inherent symbolic nature of communication; (b) symbols and perceived objectivity; and (c) sensemaking processes and reframing.

1.2.1 Symbolic Nature of Communication

Human existence is constructed and maintained through intricate creation and interpretation of symbols. Symbolic interactionism theory (Mead, 1934) illuminates the complexities associated with language (as a symbol) and the interpretation of meaning. Symbols may include words, numbers, or images designed to represent a specific object. The meaning of the symbol is socially constructed, and thus does not define the existence (or non-existence) of the object if an alternative symbol is used. Integration of linguistic and numeric symbols across human experience provides continuity to contextual sensemaking (Gioia, Thomas, Clark, & Chittipeddi, 1994).

Utilization of symbols (e.g., linguistic; numeric) does not mandate or ensure identical usage (or interpretation) of said symbols. As cognitive misers, human beings are unable to perceive all encountered stimuli. The brain is selective and relies on established shortcuts to facilitate processing and interpretation. These shortcuts provide a sensemaking framework which simultaneously preserves the understanding of existence while availing cognitive resources to other pursuits (Walsh & Glynn, 2008).

1.2.2 Symbols and Perceived Objectivity

To exemplify the complex interpretations of symbols, comparisons of seemingly opposite disciplines is warranted. Specifically, consideration of the notions of accounting and communication provide a prime example of these processes and the cumulative impact across individuals. As a discipline, accounting is often grossly perceived (within the profession, organizations, and the marketplace) as an objective, concrete approach to symbolically representing and discerning the fiscal health of an entity.

Numbers, as a symbol, present a constant measure that does not overtly invite [meaning] question or interpretation. This fallacy of presumption contributes to broader congruence conflicts, particularly with respect to financial risk management, crises, and scandals (Albrecht, 2002; Albrecht & Sack, 2001; Carr, Chua, & Perera, 2006; Kullberg, Groves, Gladstone, Horner, Scanlon, O'Malley, et al., 1989; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2003; Van Wyhe, 2007b). Conversely, communication is perceived (in definition, role, and practice) as an abstract phenomenon with interpretive symbols, definitions, and meanings (Lauring & Bjerregaard, 2007). In essence, accounting and communication perceptually occupy opposing ends along the continuum of meaning abstraction.

Continued scrutiny of accounting (as a discipline and profession) poises scholars to question a foundation of disconnectivity between theory and practice, the role of communication therein, and existence and interaction effectiveness with various audiences (Kullberg et al., 1989; Van Wyhe, 2007a; 2007b). Accounting higher education is traditionally housed within business departments. This rhetorical frame fosters the interpretation of accounting as an objective field of study characterized by finite symbols and staunch rules based processes, and by extension, prime accounting practitioners to form entrenched rigidity of operation within established parameters as a business function (Houghton, 1992). This position is illustrated through equating accounting's sole function to report *debits and credits*.

1.2.3 Sensemaking and Reframing

Prior research further characterizes accounting students and practitioners as fundamentally poor communicators. Pursuant with this criticism, stereotypes of accountants (e.g., boring, numbers driven, black and white viewers of and participants in the marketplace) exist within the polis (Baxter & Kavanagh, 2012; Fiedler, Wong, & Liu, 2007). At the heart of this perspective lie the body of evidence (e.g., education, professional practice) in which the stereotypes germinate and flourish. Scholars suggest specific deficiencies exist: (a) minimal focus on accounting theory and application; (b) communication skills; and (c) ethical decision making (Albrecht & Sack, 2001; Gioia & Corley, 2002; Khurana, 2007; Van Wyhe, 2007a; 2007b). These deficiencies simultaneously engage as the polis integrates their conceptualizations of accounting (e.g., in principle and practice) in the context of organizational financial scandals (e.g., Enron, WorldCom; Frecka & Reckers, 2010; Zeff, 2003).

As organizational expansion continues and businesses operate internationally (Fellows, Goedde, & Schwichtenberg, 2014), a molded skillset is required across disciplines. Further, traditional conceptions of contemporary business practices warrant reframing to position effective international engagement across communicative contexts. With respect to accountants, this skillset calls for seamless integration of ethical decision making, accounting theory and process knowledge, and communication prowess (Timm & Mikkelsen, 2008). Similarly, communication practitioners' skillset requires mindfulness to ethical dimensions, the symbolic nature of communication, and the interweaving of interdisciplinary theory and practice. A reframed consideration of supposed polar opposite disciplines illuminates the interconnectivity of communication complexity, symbol interpretation, and inherent challenges and opportunities reflected throughout.

1.3 Risk and Crisis Communication

A risk refers to the likelihood of a negative outcome and the uncertainty associated with its occurrence (i.e., when it might happen) and/or its magnitude (Cole & Fellows, 2008; Covello & Merkhofer, 1993). Individuals are exposed to a variety of risks each day. From raising a financial risk to a manager to a catastrophic natural disaster, there are a host of negative outcomes of varying levels of magnitude that may occur. In tandem, targeted communication is employed to convey and mitigate the risk through informative and motivating dialogue (Cole & Fellows, 2008; Covello, 2003; Lundgren & McMakin, 2004; McComas, 2006; National Research Council, 1989; Reynolds & Seeger, 2005).

1.3.1 Role Duality

Individuals throughout organizations engage in the dual roles associated with the development and execution of risk and crisis communication. These dual roles – *crisis sensing* and *threat assessment* – personify the nuanced and fragile nature of symbolic interpretation and information dissemination (Cole & Fellows, 2008). Ultimately, the overarching goal is to prevent and/or avert the crisis or reduce the event's magnitude.

However, as contextual variables emerge, shift, or transform, the most effective strategy toward goal attainment may become seemingly out of reach. Successful role duality management guided by an overarching goal (of crisis prevention, aversion, event magnitude reduction) is fueled by a holistic appreciation of the vast terrain of the field of risk and crisis communication. This appreciation, in turn, poises you to approach emergent situations confidently, guided by an array of critical knowledge and skills.

1.4 Mapping the Risk and Crisis Communication Terrain

Mapping geographic terrain involves the expertise of both explorers and cartographers. Through exploration and graphic documentation, maps are created through curiosity, experience, and translating information into variant communicative approaches. Symphonic artistry is evidenced in the map produced. While the map cannot fully capture minute nuanced attributes that coalesce in creating a sense of place, it facilitates subsequent exploration and refinement. This process reflects emergent changes over time.

Integration of white space within the map optimizes readability and visually distinguishes boundaries and parameters. Thus, the white space is an integral component of the map. Essentially, the *white* space – the absence of visual information – *is a message itself*.

Applied to Risk and Crisis Communication, the notion of white space provides a powerful analogy. Block (2011) suggests organizations must find balance between business goals and relational engagement. Specifically, he asserts organizational structures, by extension, should be beacons of humanness – the space where we collectively embrace that which unites us despite our individual differences. Block (2011) provides a roadmap to defining and optimizing this relational utopia, “...deepen and expand that white space between strategy, structure, and technology that we label relationship,” p. xix).

As organizations embark in risk and crisis planning, mindful attention of emergent challenges associated with business and relational goals is imperative. Planning for organizational worst case scenarios (i.e., risk and crisis) leaves a residue of doom on even the most positive individual. Throughout risk and crisis identification, assessment, and response planning processes, heeding Block’s (2011) observation regarding white space may facilitate balanced goals.

A study of the role of risk and crisis communication in contemporary organizations entails a critical assessment of risks typologies (e.g., health, safety, environmental, financial, brand) across organizational contexts (e.g., corporate, academic, government, healthcare, non-profit) and multiple stakeholders involved (e.g., internal and external audiences; stakeholders). Within this study, examination of risk and crisis communication best practices, communication theory, and the mysterious equations emergent in human interaction may provide a conceptual framework of the *white space*.

The primary goal of this book is to provide a comprehensive overview of the design, implementation, and evaluation of organizational risk and crisis communication principles. In order to achieve this goal, this book includes:

- a holistic exploration of communication theories, principles, and process
- definitions, scrutiny, and applications of fundamental risk and crisis communication theories
- strategies to methodically engage multiple perspectives in developing and implementing risk and crisis communication plans and activities
- activities that will engage and enhance critical thinking skills to facilitate managerial level situation analysis
- examples of current organizational trends, best practices, and failures related to risk and crisis communication across global contexts

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2 Communication

Learning Goals

- Consider various definitions of communication
- Explore the role of models of communication in defining and understanding communication
- Distinguish the different levels of communication
- Understand the types of communication

2.1 What is Communication?

There is no one accepted definition of communication. For example:

Communication is the relational process of creating and interpreting messages that elicit a response.

(Griffin, 2012, p. 6)

Communication is a process of relating. This means it is not primarily or essentially a process of transferring information or of disseminating or circulating signs (though these things can be identified as happening within the process of relating).

(Condit, 2006, p. 3)



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A process through which people, acting together, create, sustain, and manage meanings through the use of verbal and nonverbal signs and symbols within a particular context.

(Conrad & Poole, 2012, p. 4)

Human communication is one of the most creative, flexible, and thus anti-theoretic processes in which human beings engage.

(Cushman, 1998, p. 9 as cited in Keyton, 2006, p. 7)

Communication refers to the process by which information is transmitted and *understood* between two or more people.

(emphasis in original, McShane & Von Gilnow, 2013, p. 260)

Across these definitions, fundamental assumptions exist. These include: human beings, relationships, information, purpose, and sensemaking. Communication is a higher level process that is uniquely human. While animals, for example, have means of transferring meaning or coordinating with other animals, human beings retain the highest level of communication complexity, critical thinking, and acting beyond sheer instinctive drives.

Given the complexity of the process, scholars have sought to concurrently define and model communication to provide a clearer framework of understanding and interpretation. As Conrad and Poole (2012) suggest communication facilitates individuals' ability "to obtain information, make sense of the situations they encounter, and decide how to act," (p. 4). In essence, communication is the translator between "choice and action," (p. 4). A deeper examination of communication definitions and models will provide a foundation upon which a holistic understanding of this translation process unfolds.

2.1.1 Communication as Process

Communication is a perpetual process of message transmission and interpretation human beings utilize to facilitate the construction of shared meaning and goal accomplishment for human beings within and across a variety of contexts. Shimp and Andrews (2013) note communication is "derived from the Latin word *communis*, which means 'common,'" (p. 150). Thus, communication entails the "process of establishing a commonness, or oneness" between the sender and receiver (p. 150).

This process, though, is not limited to the message. Rather, communication encompasses verbal (e.g., sound, words, speaking, language) and nonverbal (e.g., any expression that is not the specific vocal creation). Verbal communication refers to vocal message expression. Non-verbal communication includes tone of voice, body language (kinesics), touch (haptics), and physical proximity (proxemics).

2.2 Levels of Communication

Communication exists across multiple levels. These levels include:

- Intrapersonal
- Interpersonal
- Small Group
- Organizational
- Marketplace

Understanding each level and their interdependent influence grounds a holistic understanding of risk and crisis communication across contexts.

2.2.1 Intrapersonal

Intrapersonal communication refers to the ongoing dialogue each individual has within her- or himself (Macke, 2008). Notably, this dialogue may take many forms and manifests concurrently with external conversations, experiences, or interactions. Niebuhr (1988 as cited in Jemmer, 2009) notes,

The dialogue within the self proceeds on many levels. Sometimes it is a dialogue between the self as engaged in its various responsibilities and affections and the self which observes these engagements. Sometimes the dialogue is between the self in the grip of its immediate necessities and biological urges, and the self as an organisation of long-range purposes and ends. Sometimes the dialogue is between the self in the context of one set of loyalties and the self in the grip of contrasting claims and responsibilities.

(pp. 38–39)

2.2.2 Interpersonal

Interpersonal communication encompasses dialogue between two individuals. This communication is influenced by the relational history, the situation's context, and the relevance of the relationship. Further, each locutor maintains his or her intrapersonal communication.

2.2.3 Small Group

Small group communication refers to interactions among groups of individuals ranging in size from three to fifteen individuals. The group may be either self-selected or an imposed combination. Small groups work toward a common goal or purpose. Group members establish norms and roles regarding communication within the group. In organizational contexts, small groups (e.g., team) communication is an integral component of organizational function.

2.2.4 Organizational

Organizational communication refers to higher levels of communication that serve as an overarching framework (Kandlousi, Ali, & Abdollahi, 2010). This framework provides boundaries, role definition, and collective unity to facilitate collective collaboration to move toward realization of common goals. Wick (1979) suggests organizational communication facilitates the perpetual construction of groups to goal attainment, spanning from organizations to societies.

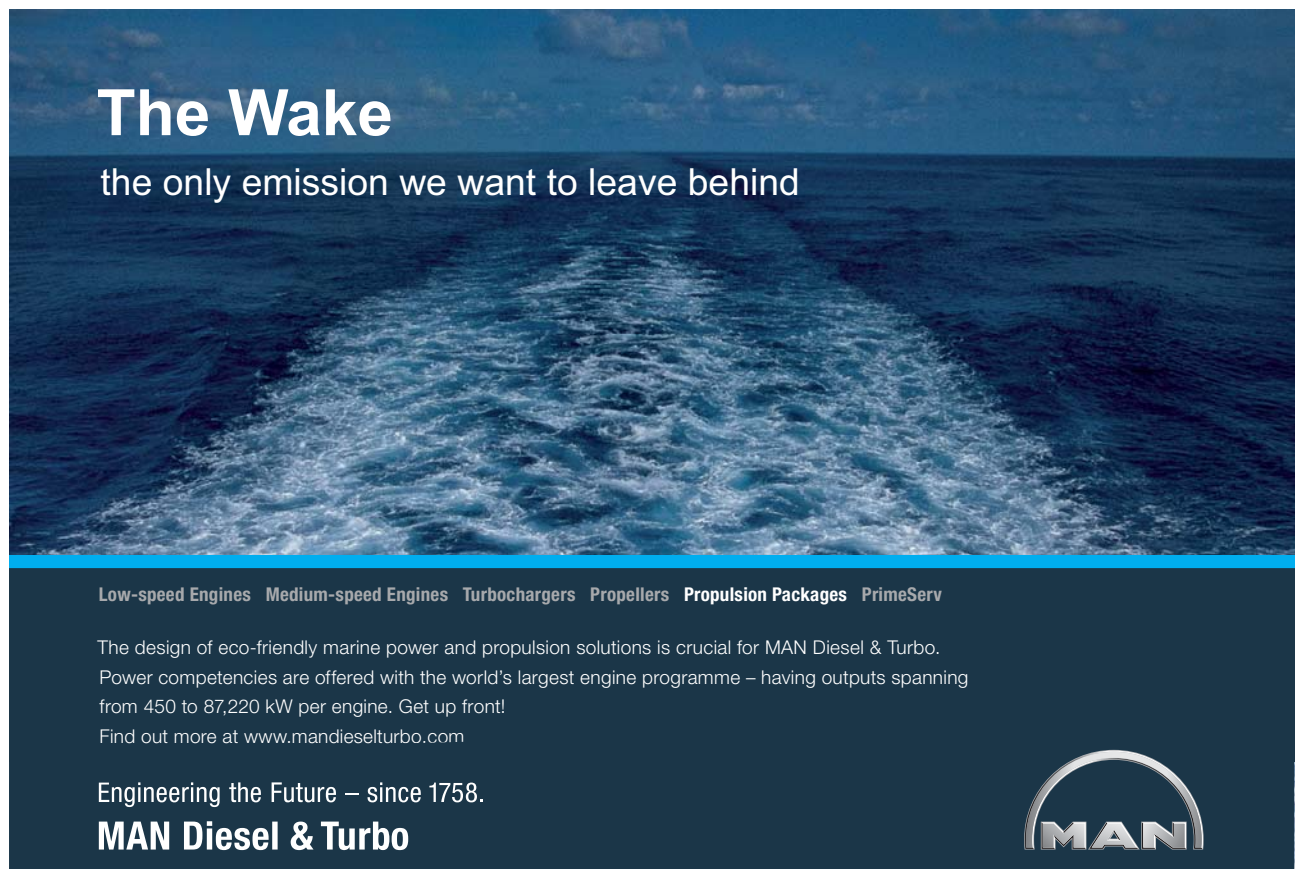
2.2.5 Marketplace

The marketplace level (e.g., mass communication) is the highest level of communication. This level concurrently reflects and defines the context of the marketplace informed by historical, present, and future conditions.

2.3 Theoretical Perspectives

Baker (2002, p. 3) suggests the study of communication is guided by three theoretical perspectives:

- Technical
- Contextual
- Negotiated




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2.3.1 Technical Perspective

The technical perspective approaches communication in a linear fashion. Communication entails a mechanical exchange of information between a sender and receiver (see Shannon & Weaver, 1949). The message symbolizes the information transmitted through a specific channel (e.g., medium – face-to-face conversation; telephone; letter or email).

Within the transmission, noise may moderate message receipt. Noise includes physical (e.g., sounds that diminish the ability to hear) or psychological (e.g., intrapersonal dialogue; individual not paying attention). One deficiency of the technical approach is the one-way view of communication. The sender provides information to the receiver. Based on this deficiency, the notion of a feedback loop is now included. The feedback loop reflects the receiver's potential as a participant (see Figures 1, 2, and 3).

2.3.2 Contextual Perspective

Because communication is a human phenomenon, White and Chapman (1996) suggest its consideration as a system informed and influenced by each individual's experiences, thought processes, emotions, and interpretations of messages in a specific moment in time. In this way, social variables shape the context and subsequent information dissemination. Thus, the context is an interpretive framework in which individuals code and decode symbolic information.

Communication is a mechanism for developing and maintaining social dimensions of human existence (e.g., forming interpersonal or group relationships; society; societal norms or expectations). Rather than focusing on individual discourse exchanges between individuals, the contextual perspective explores the body of discourse exchanges across individuals or as individuals within larger groups. Based on this consideration, discourse reflects both individualistic and collective approaches.

2.3.3 Negotiated Perspective

The negotiated perspective extends both the contextual and technical perspectives. According to Lazega (1992), communication contributes to individuals' construction of messages' meanings consistent with the contextual approach. This perspective deepens consideration of the meaning making process through exploration of the role of feedback (per the Technical Perspective) as contributors to co-constructed or negotiated validity. Interactants provide feedback and adapt subsequent responses to feedback received (Dainton & Zelle, 2004).

Considering communication as a process suggests it is not turned on or off like a light switch. Rather, it is an ongoing and constant, despite an individual's intention to express him or herself. Watzlawick and colleagues (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967) suggest, "One cannot not communicate," (p. 54).

2.4 Symbolic Nature of Communication

Verbal and nonverbal communication reflects the implementation of symbols constructed and designated to represent certain phenomena. These symbols may be rudimentary or vastly elaborate. Further, symbols and associated meanings may vary across cultural, regional, or generational variables. This symbolic process influences and is influenced by those who communicate.

For example, Mead (1934) posits that individuals' thoughts, self-concept, and the broader society are created through communication. Griffin (2012) provides the symbolic interaction framework to consider communication. A conversation is the ongoing use of language and gestures in anticipation of how the other will react. This perspective entails three core principles: (1) meaning, (2) language, and (3) thinking (p. 55).

Meaning is derived through interaction. A message's meaning is socially defined, and evoked through stimuli (e.g., signs, symbols, words; McShane & von Glinow, 2013; Shimp & Andrews, 2013; Weick, 1979). Thus, people construct and provide meaning (Shimp & Andrews, 2013).

Language is the source of meaning and is culturally defined. For example, a word in and of itself is merely a phonetic representation of an assigned object. Different cultures assign different meanings for words. Alternatively, the same object may be labeled with different words across cultures.

Creating meaning occurs through cognitive thought process (e.g., thinking). Meaning, thus, is the process of interpreting the symbols encountered. For example, think of words or phrases that are unique to your geographic region or your friend group. Now consider someone outside that circle hearing what you say and trying to understand what you are referring to exactly.

2.5 Messages

A message is the symbolic representation of some information (Griffin, 2012). As Griffin (2012) observes "the content and form of a text are usually constructed, invented, planned, crafted, constituted, selected, or adopted by the communicator," (p. 7). Once transmitted, a message is interpreted by the receiver. Note that a message's planned meaning is not necessarily consistent with someone's interpretation of the message. Thus, meaning (of a message) exists for both the sender (creator) and the receiver (interpreter).

As Griffin (2012) suggests, "words don't mean things, people mean things" (p. 7). In order to understand the impact of message interpretation, consideration of the channel utilized for transmission is beneficial.

2.6 Channels

Channels encompass the means through which a message is transmitted (McShane & von Glinow, 201, p. 263). Communication is comprised of both verbal and nonverbal. Message transmission may occur through spoken or written forms through a spectrum of channels. For example, messages may be transmitted via spoken word in a face-to-face interaction, in a televised advertisement, or via a text message.

The multiplicity of channels available also illuminates potential conflicting message interpretation. For example, email communication is pervasive in organizations. However, miscommunication frequently occurs. Individuals cite the lack of nonverbal communication is a contributing factor.

2.7 Importance of Communication

Organizations are groups of individuals united toward achieving a specific goal (e.g., service provision; commodity production). Communication facilitates both organizational formation and ongoing operations through five key roles: coordination, organizational learning, decision making, behavior change, and fosters emotional well-being (McShane & von Glinow, 2013, pp. 260–261). Mindfulness of communication's nuanced functions enables organizational members to approach strategic planning, business operations, risk assessment, and crisis response in a fluid manner.

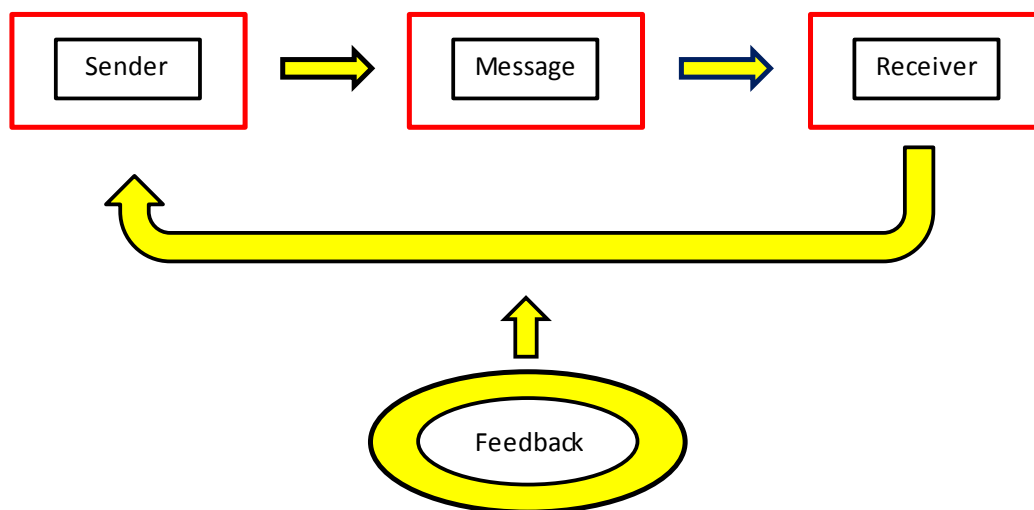


Figure 1

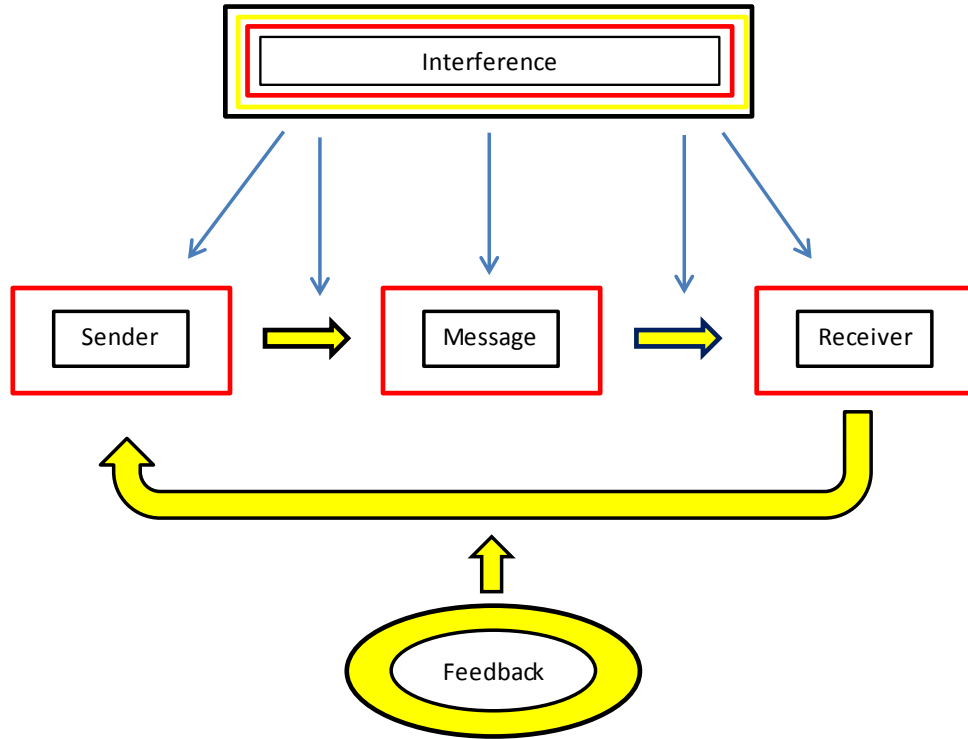


Figure 2

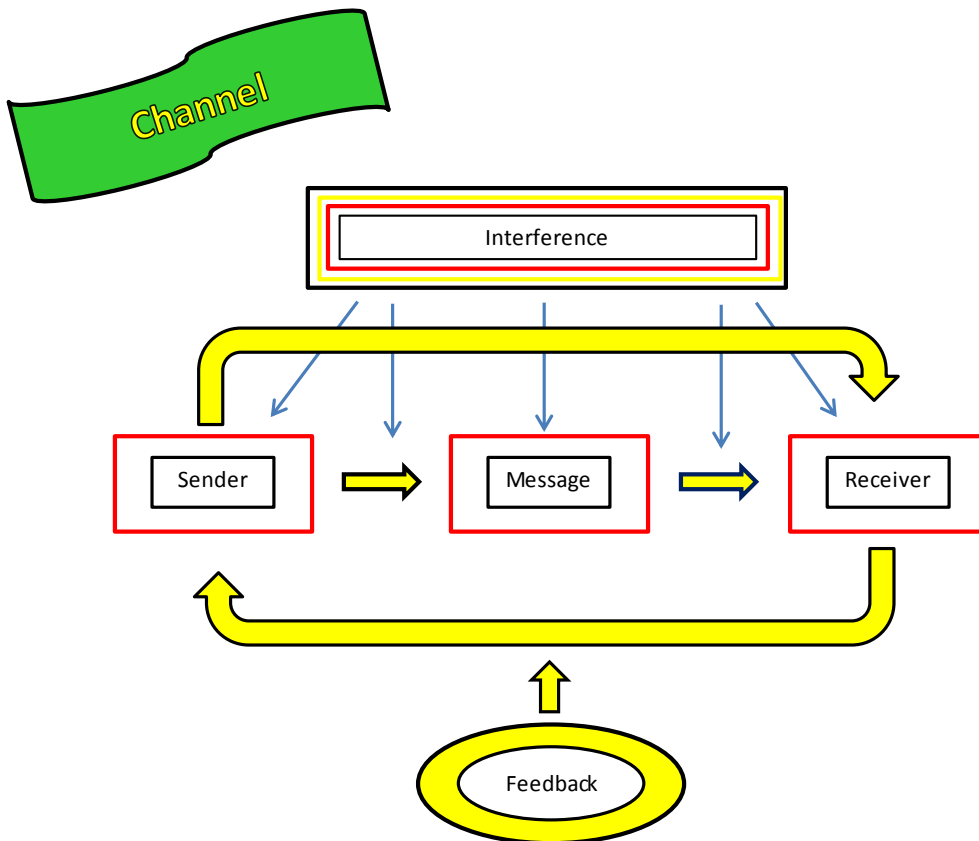


Figure 3

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The advertisement features a central graphic on the left consisting of a circular arrangement of four arrows pointing clockwise, with three stylized human figures and several gears in the center. To the right of this graphic, the text 'UNLEASHING CHANGE MANAGEMENT' is written in large, bold, blue capital letters. Below this, the dates 'OCTOBER 18 & 19, 2018' and the location 'DE RODE HOED AMSTERDAM' are displayed in smaller blue capital letters. At the bottom of the ad, there is a silhouette of an Amsterdam cityscape including a windmill, a bridge, and various buildings. In the bottom left corner, the text 'Global Executive Events' is written in a serif font. A hand cursor icon is positioned over the bottom right corner of the advertisement, pointing towards a green oval button that contains the text 'Click on the ad to read more'.

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3 Perspectives on Organizing

Learning Goals

- Differentiate three guiding communication paradigms
- Distinguish between each perspectives' application to the notion of organizational communication

3.1 Organizational Communication

Mumby (2013) notes defining the notion of organizational communication is challenging because two complex constructs compose the term – organizations and communication (p. 6). Five characteristics, drawn from Redding, 1988 and Mumby, 2013) provide a framework of interpretation and examination:

- Interdependence
- Differentiation of tasks and functions
- Goal orientation
- Control
- Communication processes

(Mumby 2013, p. 6)

General attributes of each feature are discussed below.

3.1.1 Interdependence

Organizations' infrastructure is designed to optimize return on investment (ROI). Initial structures may evolve in correlation with unfolding variables (e.g., increase in organization size; market share). Throughout daily organizational operations, a spectrum of individuals coordinate individual- and group-level efforts to propel the organization toward overarching organizational mission fulfillment and goal attainment.

The notion of interdependence suggests that organizational members impact and are impacted by other organizational members (Mumby, 2013, p. 6). This complexity highlights the intricacies of the organization, which are not often overtly evident. A change process in one dimension of the organization may have a blooming ripple effect on another aspect of the organization's operations, procedures, or audience base.

3.1.2 Differentiation of Tasks and Functions

Organizational optimization occurs through the premise of “division of labor” (Mumby, 2013, p. 7). This approach entails areas of specialization from individual employee’s job roles to organizational divisions or departments (e.g., accounting; human resources; communications; marketing). Anticipated benefits emerge as focused expertise and production aspects are grouped.

3.1.3 Goal Orientation

Bolman and Deal (2008) note, “Organizations exist to achieve established goals and objectives” (p. 47). Typically, organizational goals emerge from the organization’s mission. The organizational mission is the common purpose that brought organizational members together, initially, and continues to bind them in collective movement. While the mission may appear simplistic, the complexity of emergent goals associated with achieving the mission is complex.

As a result, conflicting goals may exist between organizational divisions as as they work separately toward organizational organizational mission fulfillment. For example, an institution of higher learning (e.g., college; university) maintains a mission of providing comprehensive higher education to individuals. Faculty may maintain specific rigor and performance expectations of students. Based on their performance, some students may pass the course and others may fail. The goal of faculty, then, is to ensure consistent rigor toward the organizations mission of comprehensive higher education.

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On the other hand, the university's marketing department is focused on expanding market share. Their goal is to concurrently increase the number of new students and existing student retention rates. The marketing department's goal is to ensure ample student population is available so the organization may provide educational opportunities.

When faculty and marketing department goals are considered separately, they appear parsimonious and consistent with organizational mission enactment. However, what if the marketing department recommends lowering student entry requirements to increase potential student access to degree programs? In this regard, the marketing department's focus on business goals is plausible. Yet, this approach may conflict with faculty goals (Fellows, 2013). Faculty, in turn, may interpret this approach as a compromise of intellectual rigor in order to meet business needs. Hyperfocus on the organizational mission from either perspective guides the organization to accomplish specific goals, while conflicting goals co-exist. The conflicting goals may impact the organization in both short- and long-term ways – from organizational reputation to financial health.

3.1.4 Control

A central feature of complex organizations is control (Mumby, 2013, p. 8). Organizational control manifests in a variety of ways – from specific employee role behavioral and performance expectations to formalized decision making processes. These checks and balances facilitate organizational control and consistency. Mumby (2013) suggests five types of organizational control mechanisms including: direct, technological, bureaucratic, ideological, and disciplinary control (see Mumby, 2013, pp. 8–14).

Theoretically, these control mechanisms are unique and separate. However, they are difficult to discern as separate singularly occurring phenomena. Thus, multiple types of control may simultaneously impact organizational members to varying degrees. Organizations may utilize a combination of control techniques to guide organizational members to goal attainment. As Bolman and Deal (2008) observe, “Suitable forms of coordination and control ensure that diverse efforts of individuals and units mesh,” (p. 47).

3.1.5 Communication Processes

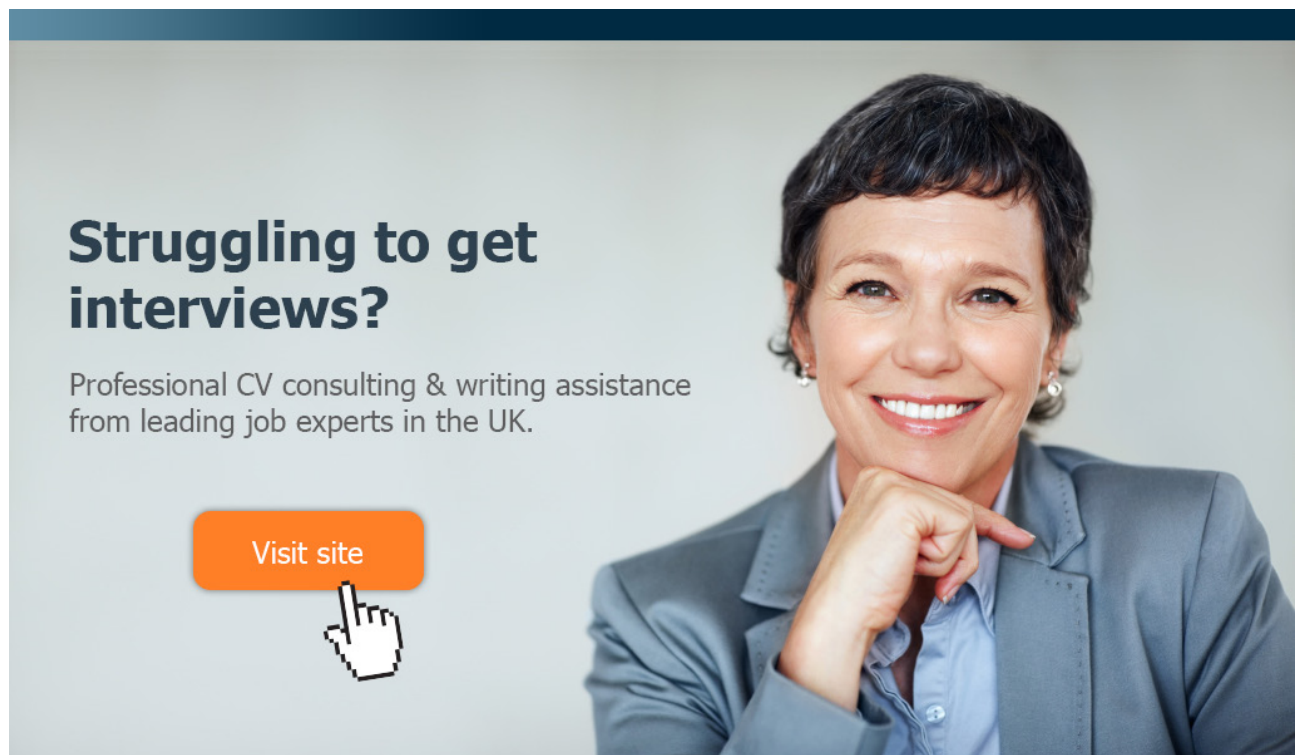
Communication concurrently facilitates organizational formation, perpetuation, and dissolution. When organizations are viewed as individuals engaging across the four levels of communication (intrapersonal, interpersonal, small group, and organizational), the breadth and depth of complexity is apparent. Organizations develop capacities and constraints to communication. This dynamic process entails “creating and negotiating collective, coordinated systems of meaning” (Mumby, 2013, p. 15).

3.1.6 Summary

Communication is a perpetual process of message transmission and interpretation human beings utilize to facilitate the construction of shared meaning and goal accomplishment within and across a variety of contexts. Scrutinizing and refining organizational communication across levels (e.g., intrapersonal, interpersonal, small group, organizational; Baker, 2002) is imperative to coordinated organizational goal attainment and mission consistent enactment.

3.2 Relational Strategies to Organizing

Human beings are social creatures innately driven toward group membership (Fellows, 2013; Hogg, 2001; Hogg & Terry, 2001). This drive manifests as relational engagement – with individuals or organizations. Alignment with or disassociation from specific groups provide individuals a dimension of their identity. The identity construct is woven throughout this desire, reflecting individuals’ fundamental drive for acceptance and belonging. Thus, identity is a relational process that informs organizational membership, commitment, and sensemaking. Given the multiplicity of identities each individual represents, relational development, maintenance, or dissolution contributes to identity relevance and salience.



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By extension, individuals may metaphorically expand or contract as variables of influence change unfolding dynamics across the organizational context. Observed identity status, then, may reflect a transient rather than entrenched identity state. Grounded in this observation, MacGregor's Theory Y (as cited in Conrad & Poole, 2012, p. 127) illuminates the role of relational organizing in balancing human needs with organizational approaches. Specifically, Conrad and Poole (2012) note, "people have important needs for autonomy, creativity, and sociability needs that are frustrated by organizations' (and societies') needs for control and coordination," (p. 127).

3.3 Systems Thinking

The aforementioned discussion explored identity constructs and relational strategies of organizing. These processes co-exist and co-create the present moment in time. In order to holistically examine the implications of these complex nuances' interdependence and influence on organizational communication, Conrad and Poole's (2012) notion of systems thinking provides a comprehensive interpretive framework.

Conrad and Poole (2012) note systems' fundamental construction are comprised of "its components and the relationships among them," (p. 34). Further, they suggest seven principles that inform conceptualization of organizations as systems and strategic organizational communication therein:

- The whole is more than the sum of its parts
- Cause-and-effect relationships in systems are complex
- It takes time to find the right levers
- To understand a system, don't just focus on the system itself
- Systems must adapt or they perish
- History is important in organizations systems
- Systems must constantly learn and renew themselves

(Conrad & Poole, 2012, pp. 35–39)

3.4 Summary

Identity, relational strategies of organizing, and systems thinking reflect degrees of examination of organizational communication (i.e., across intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational communication levels). This tripartite theoretical foundation is applicable to the risk and crisis communication because of the nuances each dimension explores and the analytic degrees of breadth and depth it affords. This foundation informs white space construction and interpretation.

As Conrad and Poole (2012) suggest, communication facilitates individuals' ability "to obtain information, make sense of the situations they encounter, and decide how to act," (p. 4). In essence, communication is the translator between "choice and action," (p. 4). Communication is a perpetual process of message transmission and interpretation human beings utilize to facilitate the construction of shared meaning and goal accomplishment within and across a variety of contexts. Scrutiny of historical, existing, or future organizational communication may occur according to specified levels (e.g., intrapersonal, interpersonal, small group, organizational; Baker, 2002).

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4 Risk

Learning Goals

- Define risk
- Identify types of risk
- Distinguish between assessing risk and managing risk
- Understand why risk is relevant

4.1 What is Risk?

Risk is a constancy in daily life (Cole & Fellows, 2008; Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2011). Register and Larkin (2005) define risk as “a measure of the adverse effect of an issue. It is about assessing and communicating the possible *hazards* associated with a particular *safeguards* and *benefits* which it offers,” (p. 17–18).

For individuals and organizations, the prevalence of risk may become intrinsic to functionality, and thus, they may turn numb to potential severity, capacity for risk conversion into a crisis, or perceived consequences.



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4.2 Types of Risk

Risk exists in a variety of forms that transcend categorization or identification of every potential risk typology. However, overarching risk categories include:

- Health
- Safety
- Environmental
- Financial
- Reputation

Each type of risk exists and presents varying degrees of impact to organizations and stakeholders. Effective risk communication strives to convey the nature of the risk, potential impact, and appropriate action recommendations to key audiences.

4.3 Assessing Risk

Assessing an organization's risk (and potential crisis) exposure facilitates preservation of both fiscal health and reputation. While organizational managers and leaders may be responsible for specific aspects of risk potential assessment within the organization (e.g., their respective department or unit), each organizational member should engage in risk assessment. A collaborative approach may illuminate emergent or covert risk nuances not readily visible.

Barton (1993) suggests a framework of assessment factors that contribute to holistic consideration of potential risks that may escalate to organizational crisis(es). These include:

- Company Ownership
- Organization Size and Insurance Adequacy
- Warning Signs
- Communication Channels
- Public Awareness

(Barton, 1993, pp. 59–67).

4.3.1 Company Ownership

An organization's ownership informs the breadth and depth of stakeholders, and by extension, influence agents. For example, a publicly traded organization's potential risk for a crisis may arouse panic among stockholders. Subsequently, stockholders may lose confidence in the organization's viability and sell stock, impacting the organization's financial value (Barton, 1993).

Considered through the lens of the levels of communication, this risk is apparent. Each stockholder engages in a spectrum of intrapersonal behavior. These behavior fluctuate (e.g., attitudes; moods; organizational confidence level; personal circumstance) naturally. However, a potential risk or crisis may elicit a more pronounced response given each individual's intrapersonal state at the given moment in time.

Privately owned organizations contrast with publicly traded organizations in their significantly smaller number of owners. By extension, the organization's value is gauged by assets rather than shares. This difference suggests a lessened degree of risk.

4.3.2 Organization Size and Insurance Adequacy

Organizational size influences level of risk preparation. Larger organizations "tend to be better prepared for crisis" (Barton, 1993, p. 62). While larger organizations may absorb the fallout of risk or crisis situations, they are concurrently at greater risk of debilitating impacts because of the volume of organizational members, customers, and product offerings.

Organizations should conduct yearly reviews (at minimum) of insurance coverage and protections afforded. The degree of frequency may change in correlation with the organization's mission, emergent product offerings, or marketplace changes. These reviews should explore existing risk coverage and potential aspects previously not considered.

4.3.3 Warning Signs

Daily organizational operations may anesthetize employees (e.g., managers, front-line employees, executive leadership) to risk signals (Barton, 1993). In order to combat this malaise, a comprehensive monitoring system is recommended. This approach extends beyond internal controls or overarching risk assessment processes that focus on the organization as a whole. The contemporary marketplace operates in a technological revolution. The internet provides individuals with unprecedented access to a plethora of information. Information, though, may reflect the attitudes, opinions, or biases of individuals regarding organizations or associated risks that are contrary to an organization's current status.

4.3.4 Communication Channels

One critical constituency group is the organization's employees. An organization may foster continuous risk assessment through formalized communication policies, processes and procedures. Concurrently, development and maintenance of an authentic and trusting organizational culture is imperative. Within this culture, employees are encouraged to actively participate in the organizational operations, the contemporary marketplace, and employ critical thinking skills to consider potential organizational risk from multiple perspectives.

4.4 Managing Risk

Positive (and negative) perceptions of organizations are informed by their performance and behavior (Regester & Larkin, 2005, p. 1). Business performance includes revenue, market share, and return on investment indicators. An organization's behavior may include leadership visibility, corporate philanthropy, and commitment to the environment. Based on these observations, individuals produce "rational and emotional attachments" to organizations (Regester & Larkin, 2005, p. 1). These attachments inform the organization's image or reputation.

Organizational image is a perceptual construct. Thus, it may quickly spiral from positive to negative among various stakeholders. Risk (salient or perceived) is a consistent attribute of the contemporary marketplace. Careful attention to internal and external risk management is critical for an organization's survival and sustainability.

4.4.1 Tangible and Intangible Assets

Risk assessment entails consideration of both tangible and intangible assets. Tangible assets reflect core business assets readily associated with an organization's performance (e.g., fiscal health; stock prices; financial reserves). Intangible assets reflect contributing factors that ensure continued organizational operations (e.g., human resources; intellectual capital; organizational culture; risk pervasiveness; organizational reputation, image, and brand).



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Careful consideration of both tangible and intangible assets and the risks associated therein provides a holistic account of the organization's risk profile. Through effective risk management, organizations may:

- increase market share
- enhance corporate reputation
- save money
- build important relationships

(Regester & Larkin, 2005, p. 42).

Preservation of assets (tangible and intangible) may arouse a defensive organizational posture. By extension, defending or protecting assets creates a negative mindset. This mindset constricts organizational members' ability to identify potential emergent opportunities or innovations associated with risk. Regester and Larkin (2005) suggest a pro-active (positive) approach to risk (assessment and management) poises organizations to optimize business outcomes. Specifically, they note an "integrated approach" to risk assessment across both intangible and tangible assets is paramount (p. 3).

4.4.2 The Process Guiding a Pro-Active Approach

Implementing a pro-active approach calls for organizational members – from executives and managers to frontline employees – to "think and behave differently" (Regester & Larkin, 2005, p. 3). Risk, in this regard, is identified, measured, and managed across all levels of the organization. Further, critical components of "trust and belief" (p. 3) are fostered.

As organizations conduct risk assessment within the broader marketplace, they may focus more heavily on internal contributors to achieving trust and belief across stakeholders. Regester and Larkin (2005) suggest a shift in organizational mindsets to *outside-in thinking* provides a holistic conceptualization of the interdependence of internal and external factors on organizational operations and performance (see pp. 16–17).

A pro-active approach enables organizations to maintain strategic planning and decision making plasticity. This plasticity fosters creative non-routine critical thinking as an integral part of the organizational culture. Regester and Larkin (2005) propose this process is guided by four key tasks:

- Planning
- Monitoring
- Analyzing
- Communicating

(Regester & Larkin, 2005, p. 44)

Through this approach, continuous integration of emergent changes in the marketplace across risk assessment of organizational tangible and intangible assets.

4.5 Why is Risk Relevant?

Organizations are comprised of individuals collectively moving toward mission or business goal attainment. Further, organizations' stakeholders are individuals with concurrently growing levels of uncertainty and expectations. Mindfulness regarding this apparent observation, though, may not readily resonate as organizational risk assessment and strategic decision making processes unfold.

For example, organizational leaders may view a risk as minimal while a key stakeholder group may find the risk pronounced. Each perspective is valid and impactful – if acted on or dismissed. Contemporary organizations' dialogic engagement with stakeholders provides an organic perspective that acknowledges the interdependent nature of the organization and stakeholders, and associated human attributes' influence. Risk communication, thus, involves both “the organization managing the risk and the audience carry on a dialogue,” (Lundgren & McMakin, 2004, p. 3). Stringent mechanistic focus on business performance goals may diminish recognition of powerful influence of emotion, perception, and communication.

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5 Crisis

Learning Goals

- Define crisis
- Identify the characteristics of a crisis
- Discern what is necessary to prepare for a crisis

5.1 What is a Crisis?

Regester and Larkin (2005) observe, “the truth is that no organization is safe from a crisis and the potentially lasting damage it can cause. It is no longer a question of whether a major crisis will strike; it is only a matter of when, which type and how,” (p. 157). Effective crisis preparation and response, though, entails an accepted definition of a crisis.

Numerous definitions of crisis exist. For example:

A crisis is a major, unpredictable event that has potentially negative results. The event and its aftermath may significantly damage an organization and its employees, products, services, financial condition, and reputation.

(Barton, 1993, p. 2 as cited in O’Rourke, 2010, p. 32)

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Crises are unique moments in the history of organizations.

(Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2011, p. 5)

...a specific unexpected, and nonroutine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and simultaneously present an organization with both opportunities for and threats to its high-priority goals.

(Ulmer et al., 2011, p. 7)

An event which causes the company to become the subject of widespread, potentially unfavourable, attention from the international and national media and other groups such as customers, shareholders, employees and their families, politicians, trade unionists and environmental pressure groups who, for one reason or another, have a vested interest in the activities of the organizations.

(Regester & Larkin, 2005, p. 159)

Amid these definitions, consistent characteristics distinguish a crisis from an organizational problem, issue, or risk.

5.2 Characteristics of a Crisis

Contemporary organizations experience problems daily (Barton, 1993). O'Rourke (2010) notes organizational anonymity in addressing standard business problems internally in a timely manner. This anonymity enables the organization to focus internally on problem resolution without public scrutiny or involvement. "Ordinary business problems can be addressed in a limited time frame without arousing public attention and draining the resources of an organization. By contrast, a crisis is more expensive and often takes considerable time to understand and react to. And, of course, a crisis is far more threatening" (O'Rourke, 2010, p. 32).

Crises – like risk – are limitless, and by extension, impossible to list (Regester & Larkin, 2011). However, Hermann (1963 as cited in Ulmer et al., 2011), notes three distinguishing characteristics that facilitate prompt naming:

- surprise
- threat
- short response time

Further, Ulmer and colleagues (Ulmer et al., 2011) suggest crises may be either intentional or unintentional (p. 9). An unintentional crisis results from "natural, uncontrollable factors" (p. 9) while intentional crises span from sabotage to unethical leadership. The key difference is the notion of choice. Unintentional crises limit choice to variant degrees of awareness and preparation, while intentional crises result from individuals' or organizations' choices.

Organizational crises occurrence and impact pervasiveness continue to increase. Technological advancement and global business engagement create an interdependent web of cause and effect. A manufacturing problem in one country may impact consumers on the other side of the world.

5.3 Preparing for a Crisis

The notion of preparing for a crisis may seem oxymoronic. Essentially, how does an organization prepare for countless possibilities of things that may go wrong? Preventing the escalation of a risk to crisis is the optimal desire. However, such prevention is fueled, in large part, by effective risk assessment and management. Despite optimal preparation, a crisis (intentional or unintentional) may ensue. O'Rourke (2010) suggests organizational response is paramount. "How an organization reacts to an incident or emergency can be a defining moment that can salvage or destroy a reputation. And it is often impossible to know when an emergency [crisis] will occur," O'Rourke, 2010, p. 33).

Grounded in O'Rourke's (2010) assertion, organizations may prepare crisis communication plan that concurrently preserves the organization's fiscal position and reputation while ensuring accurate information dissemination to key stakeholders.

5.3.1 Five Rules for Crisis Communication Preparation

O'Rourke (2010) notes public relations expert J. Adair Putnam's five rules that should guide organizations' crisis communication planning and preparation efforts. These include:

1. Develop a detailed crisis management action plan that includes detailed research
2. Set specific objectives and principles
3. Establish a crisis-control team and outline of responsibilities and authority for taking action when a crisis develops
4. Speak with one voice
5. Train for a crisis

(O'Rourke, 2010, pp. 33–34)

5.4 Summary

Crisis may erupt at any moment as a result of intentional or unintentional acts. Regardless of the specific cause, an aroused state of fear, uncertainty, and confusion may occur for individuals and organizations. Active response and action during a crisis may minimize business, human, and relational costs. Mindful awareness and strategic planning poise organizations for optimal response with minimal impacts (within their control).

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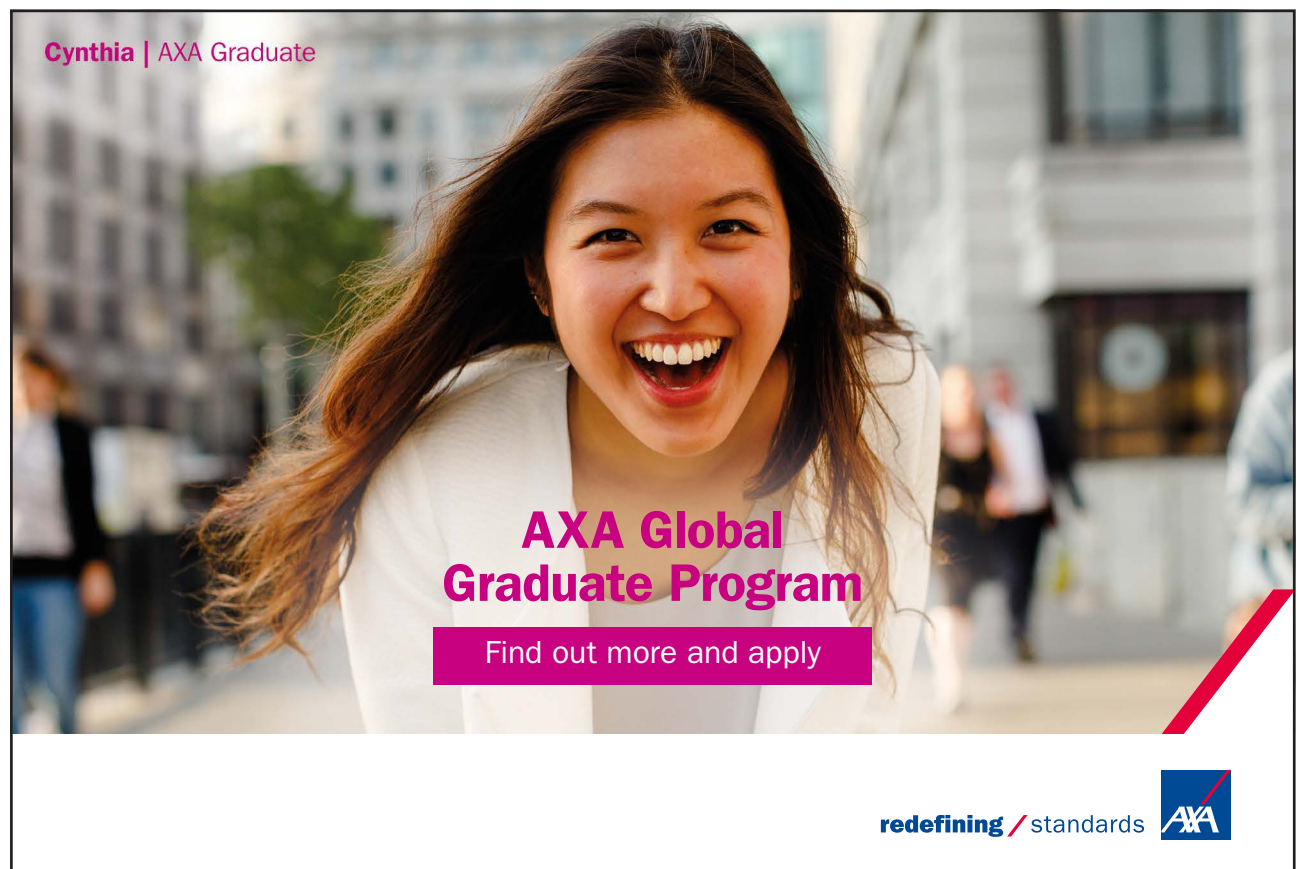
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6 Metaphorical Duct Tape

Learning Goals

- Explore the pervasive role of organizational dysfunction
- Define dysfunctional politeness
- Consider the perspective of organizations as machines
- Compare the difference between a mechanistic and humane view of organizations
- Examine how communicative responses are influenced based on the viewpoint employed

6.1 Organizational Dysfunction

Organizations may be perceived as stable entities that engage daily operations seamlessly. This idealistic perspective positions organizations as optimal entities striving toward perfection across performance and business outcomes actualization. However, all organizations experience varying degrees of organizational dysfunction.

Organizational members may observe an emergent risk or crisis situation, yet refrain from voicing concern. Their refrain may stem from constrictive organizational policies and procedures, lethargic organizational connectedness, or a sense that nothing will change. Alternatively, individuals may voice concerns to organizational leaders. In response, leaders may acknowledge situation awareness, noting the problematic nature and associated risks, yet make excuses or rationalizations rather than planned action.

I refer to this communicative response as *dysfunctional politeness*. Dysfunctional politeness occurs in the intersection of viewing an organization as a machine (i.e., mechanistic view) while attempting to preserve the human dimension (i.e., humane view). To avoid perpetuation of an idealistic perspective of organizations, this chapter will examine the intersection of mechanistic and humane views through the analogy of *metaphorical duct tape*.

6.2 A Recent Anecdote

As I consider the notion of organizational dysfunction, I am reminded of a recent conversation with a friend. She mused about an ongoing problem with her car. Meticulously, she detailed the symptoms observed that led to her seeking the advice and resolution from a designated expert – her mechanic. When I inquired about the resolution to the car’s current problem, she laughed and said “he said duct tape would fix it and he only charged me fifteen dollars.”

I reflected on the conversation for several days. This reflective process illuminated a common variable that exists within the aforementioned anecdote and the notion of organizational dysfunction – the social construction of reality through language informed by individual identity, toward goal attainment. Through the metaphor of machines, a comparative framework emerges that illuminates mechanistic approaches to address the underlying tenets of human dysfunction in organizations.

6.3 Organizations as Machines

From inception, organizations form to achieve a specific goal (e.g., provide a commodity or service). These organizations are comprised of individuals who facilitate the necessary production in order to achieve the organization's goal. Throughout this process, the organization and associated stakeholders (e.g., employees; stockholders; customers) are metaphorically consolidated into a mass audience – a machine operating as one unit rather than a grouping of individual living organisms. Movement through the business life cycle stages fuel continuous examination of performance indicators and heighten focus on the organizations' goals while rhetorically consolidating the resources necessary for continued operation. Risk and crisis situations (anticipated or actual) may exacerbate a mechanistic organizational view and potential associated organizational dysfunction therein.

In this mechanical view of organizations, dysfunctional behavior is deemed a symptom when it detracts from or inhibits progress toward organizational goal attainment (Kahn, 2012). Comparable with atypical functioning of a machine, these dysfunctions are symptomatic of a mechanical problem. In organizations, as with a machine, an expert (e.g., leaders; consultants) confirms the existence of the symptom, gauges the relevance of the symptom to overall performance, and recommends resolutions (e.g., repairs) to ensure continued functionality. Robotic organizational responses consistent with this mechanical view may unfold in the wake of organizational response to anticipated or emergent risk or crises.

Inherent to this perspective is the oppressive state of being that manifests from a context devoid of a core factor – human beings are not machines and mechanically based (process driven solutions) examination fails to integrate individuality and associated variance. Rather, acknowledgement of each individual's identity provides a framework of exploration to guide the co-construction of solutions within the current reality.

6.4 Socially Constructed Nature of Human Existence

In the 1940s, the notion of identity emerged to encompass human beings' innate drive to be a part of a group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). It is characterized by three core dimensions including cognition, affect, and behavior (see Fellows & Rubin, 2006). As individuals group themselves, the multiplicity of identities converges with some identities suppressed to support the achievement of the group as a whole.

This identity suppression, though, may lead to oppressive behavior (intra- or interpersonally) and impact subsequent sensemaking processes. As Yukl (2013) notes, the benefits of collective rather than siloed approaches to organizational to organizational decisions may improve "...but only if appropriate processes are used by the group" (Yukl, 2013, pp. 26–27).

Consideration of the construct of identity as a key component of co-constructing organizational realities is echoed in Freire's (1970) description of authentic relations (see Freire, 1970, p. 173). However, the relevance of the construct is not consistently upheld. As Hunter (2012) notes, submissions to a special issue of the *Journal of Business Ethics* thematically centered on "Leadership, Ethics, and Identity" were significantly deficient in examination of identity (see Hunter, 2012, p. 84). This lack of focus on identity highlights a mechanical rather than humane (living organism approach) view of organizational dysfunction.

6.5 Dialogue and Human Existence

Identity construction employs the human ability to create and interpret symbols (through language), and integrate the meanings within the self-concept. The meaning of the symbol is socially constructed, and thus does not define the existence (or non-existence) of the object if an alternative symbol is used (see Mead, 1934). Integration of linguistic and numeric symbols is a part of sensemaking processes.

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As Freire (1970) suggests, “As we attempt to analyze dialogue as a human phenomenon, we discover something which is the essence of dialogue itself: *the word*” (Freire, 1970, p. 87). In organizational contexts, symbols represent tools to assert organizational goals, preferred culture, and accepted means to facilitate goal attainment. This rhetoric may be accompanied by leaders’ presumption of similar perception and interpretation of the meaning.

Comparable with Kahn’s (2012) observation of organizations’ attempts at addressing dysfunction through mechanistic approaches toward order (see Kahn, 2012, p. 226) does not yield eradication. Through words, leaders illustrate aspects of a mechanistic (oppressive) view of organizational stakeholders through attempts to control variance in order to reduce uncertainty and increase predictability across unstable phenomena (e.g., human beings; Caldwell & Canuto-Carranco, 2011).

Reducing or eliminating dysfunction within the organization’s response to risk or crisis (assessment, aversion, response) through carefully controlled and orchestrated communication may be viewed as a controlling strategy to align individual identity constructions with the preferred organizational view, and reflect the application of *metaphorical duct tape* through provision of words. This approach supports Kahn’s (2012) assertion that repetitive dysfunctional behavior warrant deeper consideration in regards to their function within individuals’ individual and collective organizational enactment (and associated identities).

6.6 Metaphorical Duct Tape

Just as an individual engages in discourse with the mechanic to convey the observed symptoms, she or he must also reflect on the information provided through the mechanic’s feedback. Applied in an organizational context, this process represents the living organism – the humane view – conceptualization of organizations through enactment of fundamental human behavior consistent with Freire’s (1970) contention that “human activity consists of action and reflection, it is praxis, it is transformation of the world” (p. 125).

In order to consider a new perspective on organizational dysfunction, co-construction of a narrative reflective in action and reflection of organizations as living organisms rather than inorganic machines is paramount. As the goal directed behavior guides tangible performance and productivity indicators among organizational members, the perceived experts (e.g., managers; leaders) *metaphorically apply duct tape* to maintain the organizations’ functionality at minimal expense.

Within this viewpoint, organizations balance business goals with stakeholder relational needs. Thus, developed plans may not unfold smoothly with actualization of preferred goals. In order to consider a new perspective on risk and crisis communication, co-construction of a narrative reflective in action and reflection of organizations as living organisms rather than inorganic machines is paramount. Further, these moments prompt ethical reasoning. An organizational code of ethics provides a framework to guide decision making. In obvious contexts where a behavior crosses an ethical boundary of right or wrong, minimal ethical sophistication is necessary. The litmus test of an individual's "ethical reasoning" (Balch & Armstrong, 2010, p. 292) lies in the hazy areas between distinct boundaries. Balch and Armstrong (2010) suggest, "[employees]...need guidance because they are operating in a boundary zone where confusion is possible. Thus, what determines ethicality is not staying out of the marginal zone, but the quality of ethical reasoning when operating in that zone," (pp. 291–292).

As goal directed behavior guides tangible performance and productivity indicators among organizational members, the perceived experts (e.g., managers; leaders) *metaphorically apply duct tape* to maintain the organizations' functionality at minimal expense. Organizations' application of metaphorical duct tape to risk and crisis communication reflects Balch and Armstrong's (2010) ethical boundary zone.

Returning to the aforementioned anecdote, my friend's dialogue with the mechanic illustrates the art of communication. For example, her describing the problem to the mechanic encompasses the socially constructed nature of language, symbols, and associated meaning. Resolving symptoms in the machine (and the organization) is achieved by correct use of available tools. In the anecdote, the mechanic uses an available tool (i.e., duct tape) to address the observed symptom. The duct tape was not the only available tool, yet as the expert, the mechanic discerned this tool accomplished dual goals – resolving the symptom for a minimal cost while optimizing profit.

Similarly, organizations may employ a variety of tools with respect to risk and crisis communication. Stringent mechanistic responses (e.g., singular focus on regimented response plans; withholding information to protect business interests) may restrict an organization's adaptability, balance of business and relational dimensions, and the inherent complexities inherent within communication process, and the human experience. The capacity for the tool to resolve the symptom is informed by alternative perspective consideration and accommodating the socially constructed organizational experience – inclusion of the white space.

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7 Principles of Effective Risk and Crisis Communication

Learning Goals

- Identify the attributes of effective risk and crisis communication
- Comparative understanding of theories of risk and crisis communication
- Identify the variant communicative needs associated with risk and crisis

7.1 Effective Risk and Crisis Communication

Risk and crisis communication are both designed to disseminate information to key audiences in a timely manner (Diggs-Brown, 2012). Achieving effectiveness is informed by theoretically informed message design and evaluation. However, strategic design and implementation does not ensure audience comprehension or action.

Through communication theory, risk and crisis communicators may attain a deeper understanding of human behavior and the role communication plays therein (Griffin, 2012). Subsequently, theoretically grounded and informed risk and crisis communication approaches may be developed and implemented in response to or anticipation of organizational or marketplace symptoms.

7.2 Variables of Influence

Connecting theoretical foundations with emergent situations requires an appreciation of variables of influence. While quantifying the full spectrum of variables of influence that may impact a given moment, recognition of three broad themes is relevant.

7.2.1 Uncertainty

Typically, individuals do not like uncertainty. Ulmer and colleagues define uncertainty as, “the inability to determine the present or predict the future,” (Ulmer et al., 2011, p. 26). Berger and Calabrese (1975) argue that uncertainty is a fundamental component of human existence. Further, they suggest individuals are highly motivated to reduce their uncertainty (see *Uncertainty Reduction Theory*, Berger & Calabrese, 1975).

Specifically, two broad categories of uncertainty exist:

- Behavioral
- Cognitive

Behavioral uncertainty reflects individuals' lack of assuredness regarding specific behavior or action they should enact. Cognitive uncertainty reflects thought processes involved in assessing an individual or situation. Individuals resolve both types of uncertainty through the process of discovery – asking questions to obtain more information. Uncertainty is influenced by information – availability, quantity, and perceived quality. Adequate information provision may assuage uncertainty amid stakeholders with respect to risk.

A crisis, though, arouses different types of uncertainty than those typically experienced on a daily basis. As individuals move through, and vision past, a crisis, they develop new cognitive paths of sensemaking. Through this process individuals create a “new normal” (Ulmer et al., 2011, p. 26). Additionally, uncertainty experienced and shrouding a crisis impacts stakeholders' interpretations of “causation and responsibility” (Ulmer et al., 2011, p. 32).

7.2.2 Credibility

Risk and crisis communication is inherently persuasive. While certain stages or aspects of messages may not serve an overt persuasive role (regarding attitude or behavior change), elements of persuasion exist in establishing an organization's reputation, image, and expertise to address certain tasks or services. Aristotle noted three key elements of the persuasion process – *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* (Aristotle, n.d./1960). *Ethos* refers to speaker credibility, *pathos* refers to emotional appeal, and *logos* encompasses a message's logic. Of the three elements, *ethos* is cited as the most critical element in persuasive messages. Credibility (organizational and speaker) permeates all aspects of risk and crisis communication (Cole & Fellows, 2008).

7.2.3 Goal

Ulmer and colleagues (Ulmer et al., 2011) suggest organizations' “effective crisis communication starts long before a crisis hits and should be part of every organization's business and strategic plans,” (p. 43). Within this planning, identifying the goal(s) of the risk or goal is critical. Further, awareness of the multifaceted nature of these messages informs goal identification and message construction.

Adaptability and goal management are integral components. A clear understanding of your goal is fundamental before you develop an organizational message. Yet, attaining this understanding is challenging at best, particularly in the midst of a crisis.

7.3 Communicative Needs of Risk and Crisis Situations

Each risk or crisis situation has similar needs that transcend specific event or contextual variables. Lundgren and McMakin's (2004) care, consensus, and crisis communication model provides a structural framework to distinguish differential communicative needs of a risk or crisis communication (Cole & Fellows, 2008). Specifically, this model facilitates a comprehensive organizational needs assessment to guide the organization through connecting organizational crisis theories, event and contextual variables, symptoms, and organizational mission in a unified communicative approach.

7.3.1 Care Communication

Cole and Fellows (2008) note, "care communication refers to risks already known to the audience or appropriate experts," (p. 213). Care communication serves an informative role. The goal of care communication is to "alert an audience to the presence of a risk" (Cole & Fellows, 2008, p. 213) rather than persuade them to engage in specific behavioral responses.

7.3.2 Consensus Communication

Consensus communication differs from care communication because it serves dual purpose – as informative and persuasive (Cole & Fellows, 2008; Lundgren & McMakin, 2004; Reynolds & Seeger, 2005). Further, stakeholder involvement is critical. Dialogue between the organization and stakeholders is pivotal to fostering a "problem-solution oriented, dialogical process designed to achieve agreement between stakeholders and decision-makers regarding risk management, the adoption of specific behavior, or courses of action," (Cole & Fellows, 2008, p. 214).

7.3.3 Crisis Communication

The fundamental difference between risk and crisis communication is the time-critical nature of the unfolding event(s). Specifically, "crisis communication exists in the larger communication continuum and alerts the audience to the danger and provides options to minimize the risk (Lundgren & McMakin, 2004)," (Cole & Fellows, 2008, p. 214). Messages provide a motivational dimension highlighting the situation or response urgency.

7.4 Theories of Organizational Crisis Communication

Theory is a “set of systematic, informed hunches about the way things work,” (Griffin, 2012, p. 2). While the word theory may evoke a complex image of intricate variables, focus on the parsimonious nature of the definition grounds the ease of use. Understanding theory provides a way to understand human interactions, behavior, and the connective influential role of communication. Applied to stakeholders, Diggs-Brown (2012) notes, “The idea is to understand the theory well enough to better understand your audiences. Remember, when you listen to the audiences and try to understand their beliefs, attitudes, norms, and who influences them, you know better how to speak to them,” (p. 230).

In the context of risk and crisis communication, relevant theories serve a multifaceted role. Ulmer and colleagues (Ulmer et al., 2011) suggest they may “describe communication, explain the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of communication, and prescribe how we should communicate,” (p. 20). Further, they cite four key organizational crisis response theories:

- Corporate Apologia (Hearit, 2006)
- Image Repair Theory (Benoit, 1995)
- Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs & Holladay, 2002)
- Organizational Renewal (Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2009)

(pp. 15–21)

Each theory is discussed briefly in the subsequent sections.



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7.4.1 Corporate Apologia

Defined by Hearit (2001), corporate apologia reflects an organization's attempt to defend itself against criticism (as cited in Ulmer et al., 2011, p. 16). This strategic response entails specific communicative strategies that frame systematic accounting for post-crisis action(s).

7.4.2 Image Repair Theory

Image repair theory (Benoit, 1995) focuses on how the organization responds to image threats during or after a crisis. Specifically, the threat of potential image risks. Fourteen impression management strategies, used separately or in combination, guide tactical response to tailored image management or restoration. The purpose is to optimize organizational control of the accounts of the organization's actions or contribution to the crisis (Ulmer et al., 2011, p. 16).

7.4.3 Situation Crisis Communication Theory

Coombs (2007) situational crisis communication theory is grounded in a blend of "attribution theory and crisis response strategies," (Ulmer et al., 2011, p. 17). Through this approach, organizations move through a situation-specific process to develop response strategies that influence stakeholders' perceptions of organizational responsibility for a negative event (Ulmer et al., 2011, p. 18).

7.4.4 Organizational Renewal

Organizational renewal theory differs from the prior three crisis response theories in one fundamental way – the focus extends beyond crisis management to opportunities for organizational growth out of crisis (Ulmer et al., 2011, p. 18). Central to this theory are the discourse strategies an organization utilizes acknowledge the crisis and focus on the future. Specifically, four components frame this approach: (1) organizational learning, (2) ethical communication, (3) prospective versus retrospective vision, and (4) effective organizational rhetoric (Ulmer et al., 2011, p. 19). Through this approach, organizations may create a vision to aspire to that extends beyond the crisis (Ulmer et al., 2011, p. 20). An organizational leader may facilitate organizational renewal through articulating a "clear set of values, a sense of common purpose, and a way forward," for the organization (Ulmer et al., 2011, p. 72).

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8 What is at Stake?

Learning Goals

- Define stakeholders
- Understand the role of stakeholders to organizations
- Discern potential consequences associated with stakeholders

8.1 Identifying and Engaging Stakeholders

Organizations develop and implement communication strategies and messages to reach stakeholders – inside and outside of the organization (Cornelissen, Lock, & Gardner, 2001). Internal communication manifests in varying degrees of formality – from the employee grapevine to newsletters. Formal external communication includes public relations, advertising, and marketing plans, strategies, and messages (Cornelissen et al., 2001; Cardoso, Carvalho, & Santiago, 2011).

Regardless of type (internal or external), communication strategies are implemented to accomplish specific organizational goals. These may include organizational reputation (Morsig, 2006), branding (Becker & Round, 2009), or market share expansion (Gong, Huang, & Farh, 2009). These strategies may resonate with stakeholders across identities.

Stakeholders are active participants in constructing organizational narratives. This role influences the degree of organizational identification (Morsig, 2006). Consequently, the degree of stakeholders' organizational attachment will influence their connectedness to the organization, and sensemaking processes that occur related to a risk or crisis (Foreman-Wernet & Dervin, 2011). Specifically, these sensemaking processes are informed the perceived alignment between the two constructs (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Walsh & Glynn, 2008).

8.2 Return on Investment

Organizations maintain two overarching financial goals – making money and saving money. Essentially, measures of their return on investment (ROI). Diggs-Brown (2012) defines ROI as, “evidence or measure of the profit or cost savings experienced as a result of the use of resources,” (p. 16). Communication (as a department, division, strategy) is often at risk for budget reduction or elimination because ROI is often less overt than other departments.

Highlighting and reinforcing the critical nuanced role of communication within an organization is paramount throughout daily operations. This approach positions communication as an integral operational unit. Thus, if a crisis emerges or unfolds, seamless integration and implantation of well-informed communication strategies may occur.

8.3 Identifying Potential Consequences

Effective crisis communication begins with acknowledgement of the crisis (Regeester & Larkin, 2011, p. 163). Organizations may prefer to name the situation an issue or an amplified risk. However, calling the situation any derivation other than crisis minimizes the urgency – of both the event and immediate organizational response.

Trying to identify potential consequences is best done prior to a crisis. Clearly, if everything worked flawlessly with no surprises, organizational response would always be optimal. Similar challenges exist across risk and crisis planning – identifying potential consequences are overwhelming at best.

8.3.1 Risk or Crisis Type

Multiple variables contribute to the process of identifying potential consequences. The first step is to clarify the type of risk (discussed in Chapter 3).

- Health
- Safety
- Environmental
- Financial
- Reputation

The type of risk or crisis informs potential organizational consequences, both internal and external. At this point, preparing separate internal and external potential consequences brainstorming lists is imperative. While consequences may overlap (across internal and external contexts), identifying potential for each category optimizes identifying the broadest spectrum of possible impacts.

During the brainstorming process, do not censor listing a consequence because it seems minute or highly improbable. The purpose of this step is to identify as many potential consequences as possible.

8.3.2 Intentional and Unintentional Risk or Crisis

Organizational (or marketplace) impacts are influenced by perceived intentionality. Unintentional risks or crises are the product of forces beyond the organization's specific control (as discussed in Chapter Four), while intentional crises lead to diverse interpretations or attributions regarding the cause. In this regard, stakeholders' perception of the causal factors is multifaceted and challenging to imagine.

Rather than attempting to respond to perceptual “what ifs”, organizations should focus on prior organizational deeds as artifacts demonstrating the organizational stance. The organization's mission statement represents the cornerstone of the organization – in theory and practice. Scrutinizing the organizational mission in contrast with intentional risk or crisis attributes provides an infrastructure to identify potential stakeholder narrative themes.

Regardless of the type (intentional or unintentional), clear, frequent, transparent communication with all stakeholders fosters previously established trusting relationships with stakeholders. Failure to communicate what is known, when it is known may create an “information void” (Regester & Larkin, 2011, p. 169).

8.3.3 Worst Case Scenario

Imagining the worst case scenario may evoke visions of a bad movie filled with unrealistic circumstances and sensationalized devastation. However, embracing the possibility of the most outlandish probabilities provides breadth and depth in preparatory planning.

In this step, remember to contemplate short-and long-term effects that may ripple through the organization (or the global marketplace) across seemingly unconnected contexts or organizations (see Chaos Theory, Lorenz, 1963; 1993). By planning for the worst, organizational leadership may anticipate organizational resources (both financial and relational) and the complexity of response coordination. These factors subsequent risk and crisis planning discussions. Adequate resources (held in reserve) as well as organizational and community relationships’ health foster resource accessibility.

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9 Plan Your Work, Work Your Plan

Kelli Lynn Fellows, Ph.D.

Learning Goals

- Discern the components of strategic planning
- Understand the interdependent role of organizational policies and procedures in planning processes
- Consider the strategic choices involved in forming the strategic planning team

9.1 The Critical Role of Planning

Barton (1993) notes, “Crisis recognizes no boundaries,” (p. 3). When considering this assertion in more depth, the notion of planning a crisis response appears daunting at best. To optimize the benefits of planning, communication specialists should consider three overarching aspects including (1) strategic advance planning, (2) organizational members’ talents not job titles, and (3) post crisis response evaluation (Barton, 1993). The following sections explore each of these constructs in more depth.

9.2 Strategic Advance Planning

Organizational leaders utilize various data to inform organizational goal attainment. These data may reflect organizational specific performance data or market performance indicators. Barton (1993) suggests, “Information-data-is crucial to planning,” (p. 5). Strategic planning is an integral organizational function. This process aligns organizational members with the appropriate course of action to attain specified organizational goals in line with the organization’s mission and vision. By extension, unit managers may review data with hyperfocus toward their individual unit as it contributes to the overall organization’s performance.

Often, review of these data may provide warning signs of potential risks or crises. Yet, these signs may be overlooked. For example, a manager of a specific unit may review specific data of interest or direct impact to his or her unit’s performance. Considered in isolation, these data may individually not provide an adequate marker of potential problems.

When reviewing data, individuals should utilize a dual foci approach – with one focus anticipating ways to avert a risk or crisis and the other focus on mitigating a crisis’ impact (Barton, 1993). Strategic advance planning for anticipated organizational crises can be broken down across hierarchical levels in order to manage potential scenarios and associated responses. Ultimately, managers’ should strive for optimal preparation for crisis identification, mitigation, and response (Barton, 1993). The first step toward this preparation is clear articulation of the strategic crisis planning goal.

9.2.1 Strategic Planning Process

Strategic planning facilitates an organizations' optimization of resource utilization to accomplish specified goals. Applied to risk and crisis communication, strategy may prove more challenging to employ. Diggs-Brown (2012) suggests four key components to consider:

1. Identify a desired outcome or goal
2. Identify means to achieve the outcome or goal
3. Evaluate strengths and weaknesses
4. Make choices

(Diggs-Brown, 2012, p. 71)

Engaging in strategic planning entails organizations' concurrent articulation of their goals and their planned approaches to goal attainment. Within this process, though, organizations must remain adaptive to changing market conditions of other variables of influence that may inhibit or prohibit goal attainment according to the planned approach. Essentially, planning for adaptability is critical.

9.2.2 Questions, Questions, and More Questions

When faced with a specific risk or crisis, asking questions seems hardly a wise use of time or other valuable resources. However, without questioning the multifaceted dimensions of a given risk or crisis, you may fail to realize the fundamental purpose of communicating with a given audience. Thus, asking questions prior to developing a message is imperative.

Questions to guide your process include:

- a) Do you have information you want to convey or do you want to communicate with the audience out of politeness or obligation?
- b) Can you effectively convey accurate information in one message?
- c) Will the audience understand the purpose of the message in the given moment in time?
- d) Will the message arouse unwarranted concern?
- e) Are you responding to rumors or supposition?
- f) Does the audience know or perceive something is awry?
- g) Will the message exacerbate the current situation?
- h) Do you want to assuage the audience's fears or concerns?
- i) Do you want to confirm specific events' occurrence?
- j) Do you want to deflect attention from your organization?
- k) Do you want to postpone further scrutiny of your organization?

Essentially, you must ask *what is the desired outcome of the message (or messages)?*

9.2.3 Strategic Crisis Planning Goal

Goals provide focus and markers of achievement. Specific to risk or crisis planning, delineation of the planning process goal as pro-active or responsive is critical. Pro-active planning goals entail identification of potential crises and strategies that may be employed to avoid the crisis. Pro-active strategies are readily identifiable with expected crises associated with general business functions of contemporary organizations. For example, fraud, theft, and brand management reflect crises businesses may encounter. Development of policies and procedures to deter such events may include internal controls, codes of conduct, or brand image specifications.

9.2.4 Organizational Operations Crisis Identification

Unit managers presumably are the most knowledgeable and familiar with their units' daily functions. By extension, they are the credible expert on potential issues that may arise and manifest as a significant risk or crisis. Specific crisis assessment planning, thus, begins with the unit leader.

Exploration of historical organizational data will illuminate past crises (or crisis events averted). Assessing the frequency of previous crises (manifest or averted) may provide unit leaders with trend information. Specifically, repetitive environmental or organizational variables of influence may signal trends to monitor in the present and future.

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Managers do not exist in a silo. Thus, engaging unit subordinates is a critical second step in the strategic planning process. Subordinates from across the unit should participate in strategic planning activities. However, limiting such participation to singular brainstorming sessions may not yield comprehensive information. Subordinates' individual biases toward the unit or organization's performance, optimistic bias, or fear of playing devil's advocate may yield groupthink (Janis, 1971; 1972; 1989). Managers should consider approaches to ensure employee confidence in voicing their ideas (without fear of scrutiny or consequences) with relative frequency. Increased idea solicitation opportunities combined with a trusting collaborative environment will empower employees across the unit to take and maintain ownership of forecasting and questioning emergent trends.

9.2.5 Internal Controls and Warning Flags

Planning entails development of unit-specific internal controls based on defined crisis indicators. A carefully constructed system may operate concurrently with ongoing unit operations and minimize employee distraction from daily tasks and responsibilities.

One associated risk with this approach is the false sense of security that may emerge among unit employees. For example, if no warning flags emerge, other risk or crisis indicators not previously identified or tracked may manifest. Clearly there is no way to plan for every possible contingency. Recognition and mindful attention to this deficiency should inform ongoing strategic risk or crisis planning and internal controls processes.

9.2.6 Cohesive Organizational Strategic Crisis Planning

Compiling and synthesizing individual units' strategic crisis planning efforts inform organizational-level strategic risk or crisis planning and aversion. Top leaders within the organization must review unit-specific and organization-wide data concurrently. Comparable with the aforementioned unit manager and subordinate approach, organizational leaders should engage in similar processes.

Further, organizational leaders provide clarification and ranking of potential risk severity and crises. Crises may manifest related to organizational performance, operations, or across the employee base. The matrix of crisis type, potential impact, organizational impact, and perceived severity inform organizational leaders' perceptions of the appropriate response. Clear ranking systems may provide overarching insight into what risk(s) or crisis(es) warrants immediate response versus a tentative response. Further, leaders' enhance risk or crisis identification, aversion, and mitigation in line with the organizational mission and vision. Subsequently, internal and external messages and response frameworks will exist harmoniously within the organizational context.

9.3 Organizational Members' Talents Not Job Titles

Organizations are composed of individuals. These individuals may be categorized by their respective job title. While such categorical schemes provide a framework to understand the breadth and depth of human capital therein, it may blind organizational managers and leaders to the unique talents or skill-sets not utilized or reflected within their job title or associated responsibilities.

9.3.1 Organizational Risk Prevention and Crisis Prevention

Averting risk and preventing risk from escalating to an organizational crisis are paramount organizational goals. This goal, however, does not magically occur. Rather, extensive organizational scrutiny (internally) and prevention of risk manifesting as a major organizational crisis entails continuous performance and process improvement.

To facilitate this goal attainment, formation of a risk prevention and/or crisis prevention team is a first step. Organizations may presume such teams exist within their organizations presently. However, formalized formation of a team or mandatory meetings (of said team) does not ensure active engagement or implementation effectiveness exists or will occur in the future.

The second pitfall is team formation grounded in specific individuals and their respective job titles. While a job title may, on the surface, suggest an appropriate team member, this presumption may be ill-founded. The final assumption is limiting team formation within one organizational unit. For example, risk assessment or prevention may be readily associated with financial accounting. Financial risk is a critical aspect of organizational operations. However, it is neither the only division that may be at risk or does it represent the spectrum of organizational risk that exists.

9.3.2 Forming an Effective Risk Assessment and Crisis Prevention Team

A holistic examination of an organization informs the makeup of the risk assessment and crisis prevention team. Effective teams empower each team member to bring his or her unique skillset to the table. To avoid the aforementioned pitfalls, Regester and Larkin (2011) provide a team formation framework that transcends specific organizational member job titles. These include:

- 'ideas' person
- communicator
- doom merchant
- book-keeper
- humanist

(pp. 205–206)

Each role is outlined in more depth in the sections below.

9.3.2.1 The Ideas Person

The ideas person is one who infuses new ideas. While some ideas may seem irrelevant, the idea person generates creative energy throughout the team. The team leader, in conjunction with other team members, will discern the viability of points presented. The ideas team member generates different points of view to expand the breadth and depth of potential risks or crises.

9.3.2.2 The Communicator

Continuous flow of information – both in the team and within the larger organization – through dialogue is critical. The communicator facilitates information seeking and information dissemination behavior. Pay careful attention to maintaining the sanctity of the team process. The purpose of the communicator is not to provide information to the informal networks (e.g., the grapevine; watercooler conversations) that may arouse uncertainty or spread inaccurate information within the organization.



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9.3.2.3 The Doom Merchant

Teams (and organizations) are susceptible to groupthink (Esser, 1998; Janis, 1971; 1972; 1989). Individuals may feel uncomfortable sharing a counter perspective to the consensus of the group. However, an individual who naturally plays the devil's advocate sharpens the arguments, evidence, and subsequent plan development. The doom merchant's role is not to purely antagonize or disagree with the team. Rather, this critical role presents counter arguments that facilitate the team's comprehensive exploration of current and potential risks or crises.

9.3.2.4 The Book-Keeper

The book-keeper role is comparable with an association's secretary. This individual maintains detailed records of team meetings in the form of minutes, planning documents, or team correspondence. Record keeping ensures group memory, and provides documentation of the process. Documenting various aspects of the team's process provides a thorough resource as new members join the team.

9.3.2.5 The Humanist

The humanist focuses on the "human aspects of the problem" (Regester & Larkin, 2011, p. 206). Human aspects may encompass the organizational workforce's capacity to implement the teams' recommendations. While the tendency to focus on the business impacts associated with risk or crisis may emerge, the humanist may illuminate potential risk or crisis events centered around individual stakeholders.

9.4 Continuous Process and Implementation Evaluation

Evaluation is a critical component of the planning process. Specifically, evaluating planning progression, auditing various aspects of plan design, and integrating post-event evaluation informs continuous process and performance improvement. Each organization will define evaluation within the context of their organization, specifically, and the marketplace, generally. One component that may guide effective evaluation is utilizing milestones. Milestones are organizationally defined markers specific to the plan that provide indicators of accomplishment. Dependent on the timeframe of plan development, milestones may highlight completion of tasks within the larger planning process. This approach may reduce team member fatigue or complacency that may occur in lengthy planning processes.

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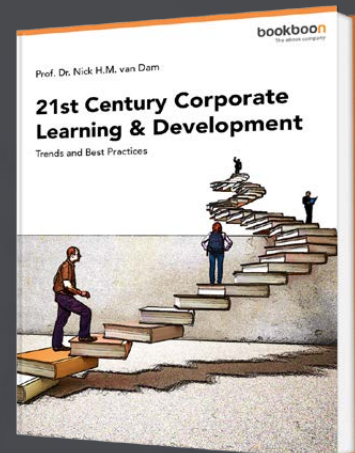
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10 Plan Components

Learning Goals

- Purpose of a risk or crisis communication plan
- Distinguish between the components of a risk or crisis communication plan

10.1 Risk and Crisis Communication Plan Overview

Developing an organizational risk and crisis plan is critical. Through the process of examining potential and current risks that may escalate to a crisis, an organization is mindful of potential circumstances that may unfold. Planning for planning's sake, though, is not sufficient. *Awareness is not equitable with action.*

A written plan provides a response framework to guide risk or crisis communication efforts. This approach affords organizational awareness and knowledge that does not rely on individual organizational members' memories of aspects of the plan. Further, a formalized plan reduces overall decision making through assignment of specific roles needed to orchestrate effective communication.

Keep in mind, though, a plan should not be a response mandate. No one-size-fits all solution is available. Rather, the following suggested plan (based on Lundgren & McMakin, 2004, pp. 182–185) components reflect best practices exercised in risk and crisis communication. This approach builds in the capacity for adaptability.

- Introduction
- Purpose
- Goal
- Precedents (e.g., legal; regulatory)
- Timeframe
- Stakeholder(s) Profile
- Communication Objectives
- Resources Needed
- Evaluation
- Checklists
- Approval

Organizations should use the plan as a springboard to guide tailored plan development and implementation aligned with the organization's mission, vision, and culture. Each component is discussed in the subsequent sections.

10.2 Introduction

The introduction identifies the purpose of the plan. If the plan is a broad organizational response, then convey this information. However, if the plan is focused on one type of risk within a broader spectrum of organizational risks, clearly present this distinction.

Components within the introduction may include:

- Purpose
- Scope
- Historical overview of the risk
- Potentially impacted stakeholders
- Perceived relevance to the organization
- Current organizational policies or procedures that inform or address the issue

(Lundgren & McMakin, 2004, pp. 182–185)

Concise writing is critical in the introduction. Headings, bulleted lists, and brief summary statements quickly provide the reader an overview of what he or she is reading.

10.3 Goal

The goal section should articulate the desired outcome of addressing the specific risk or emergent crisis. Note, a crisis is fundamentally different than a risk. As such, correlating response urgency is paramount. However, across both risk and crisis, a clear goal (or goals) guide message construction and facilitate immediate and continued evaluation.

Clear goals optimize organizational understanding of what specific messages are designed to accomplish. For example, an accounting firm may cite recent public fraud scandals as a significant risk to their professional and organizational credibility. In this scenario, they acknowledge the perceptual risk, yet multiple goals may emerge.

First, the organization may utilize a pro-active approach to establish and solidify their ethical standards. Alternatively, the firm may identify a goal of establishing credibility as a financial fraud expert. Both goals relate to marketplace risk awareness of financial fraud. However, the specified goals present two different directions the firm may move in with respect to the risk identified.

10.4 Precedents

Numerous precedents inform or constrict actions an organization may take. Consistent with the nature of the organization, certain legal and regulatory guidelines exist. This section of the plan should acknowledge specific precedents that drive or limit the proposed action. If changing laws or regulations shift how an organization proceeds, noting these changes in this section provides relevant context.

10.5 Timeframe

The timeframe provides a gauge of urgency regarding the proposed action. If the risk is identified but not necessarily prevalent at the present moment then the timeframe is projective in nature. If the risk is amplified because of forthcoming precedent or organizational changes, the timeframe should reflect these key fixed dimensions.

10.6 Stakeholder Identification and Profile

Organizations have multiple internal and external stakeholders. Identifying these different stakeholder populations illuminates convergent and divergent audience dimensions. Accordingly, conducting research to develop a profile of each audience (e.g., demographics; attitudinal; degree of organizational identity or affiliation) aids in aligning tailored communication messages to stakeholders' to optimize resonance.



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10.7 Communication Objectives

Communication objectives are actionable items supportive of the overarching goal. Objectives facilitate multipronged communicative efforts. Specifically, objectives articulate what the organization hopes to accomplish. Concise measurable statements reflect actionable objectives. While the purpose statement answers the *why* question, objectives provide the answer to the *how* question (Lundgren & McMakin, 2004, p. 115).

10.8 Resources

The resources section identifies financial, human, and time needed to accomplish the stated goal and objectives. Developing a budget to support the broad tasks is a strong first step to begin quantifying plan actionability. Keep in mind, identifying specific organizational members to handle certain aspects of the plan may remove them from other daily responsibilities. This choice reflects a cost, and thus should appear in the resources budget.

Additional resources, such as relationships with interrelated organizations, are also important. Similar organizations or support agencies may play a role in the risk or crisis response. Clarifying the purposes and roles of these organizations informs continued relational maintenance. Further, this clarification process may illuminate collaborative organizational relationships that are weak or nonexistent.

10.9 Evaluation

Assessment of the plan, generally, and proposed components, specifically, is critical throughout the process. Evaluation is not a task completed at the end of the process. Rather, it should occur within each component of the plan to test effectiveness, plausibility, and facilitate identification of glitches in the proposed system.

Evaluation also provides evidence of goal attainment, discernment of effective versus less effective strategies, and informs calculating return on investment (ROI). Given the critical nature of this aspect of the plan, organizations should utilize individuals with evaluation and assessment expertise to design metrics and interpret findings.

10.10 Checklists

One helpful component for each section is a checklist. This bulleted list provides a quick reference tool to ensure each task noted is completed. Checklists should be updated as sections are reviewed and updated after the initial plan is written. Additionally, checklists may facilitate role responsibility clarity. Tasks may be designated according to various team or organizational members. Providing individuals with individual checklists provides a checks and balances system to ensure task completion and consistency.

10.11 Approval

Each organization has unique approval processes consistent with decision making authority. Identification of key organizational leaders who must approve the plan's implementation should review and approve the plan. This step does not remove leadership's authority to adapt the plan if executed. Rather, it provides the organizational stamp of approval to facilitate team members effectively navigating various divisions within the organization to acquire or coordinate resources.

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11 Information Dissemination

Learning Goals

- Understanding the information dissemination process
- Identifying the role of traditional and social media
- Discern appropriate channels for specific organizational goals

11.1 Information Dissemination Process

Information dissemination is a critical component of risk and crisis communication. Even when a risk or crisis is not impending, organizations engage in strategic information dissemination processes to move the organization toward business and relational goal attainment.

For example, internal email, employee newsletters, or monthly meetings each represent an opportunity for the organization to collectively move toward a specified goal. Through this dialogue, the organization conveys its preferences and the direction of continued action.

Organizations engage with external stakeholders through logos, brands, annual reports, and official websites. Each message strategy supports overarching organizational goals while addressing specific communication objectives. For example, an annual report presents the financial picture of the organization. Such reporting may be required (e.g., legally; regulatory), yet how the organization presents the report (e.g., visual rhetoric) supports and extends the organization's image and reputation. Thus, information dissemination is an intricate process of interrelated and overlapping goals and objectives. Two overarching perspectives inform the information dissemination process: public relations and integrated marketing communication. Each is briefly explained in the subsequent sections.

11.1.1 Public Relations (PR) Perspective

Public relations is a strategic approach to effective communication (Diggs-Brown, 2012). The Public Relations Society's formal definition of public relations is,

Public relations helps an organization and its publics [or, audiences] adapt mutually to each other.

(Diggs-Brown, 2012, p. 4)

Within organizations, public relations (PR) fulfills many roles. These include: gauging the opinions and attitudes of relevant audiences, advising policy decisions or strategic response aligned with the organizational mission, vision, and specific brand, and conducting and analyzing research to inform change programs, business strategies, or public policy (Diggs-Brown, 2012).

11.1.1.2 Characteristics

Public relations is characterized by critical characteristics. First, it is a strategic form of communication. This observation suggests effective communication is both planned and strategic – that is, it does not happen by chance. Next, PR practitioners focus on developing and maintaining relationship with a spectrum of audiences. One critical audience is individuals best poised to constrict the organization's mission attainment (Diggs-Brown, 2012).

While PR is a form of communication, it is not solely limited to written or spoken message development. Thus, organizations should include PR practitioners within executive level decision making and strategic planning efforts.

11.1.2 Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) Perspective

Shimp and Andrews (2013) define integrated marketing communication as, "...the coordination of the promotional mix elements (advertising, public relations, sales promotion, personal selling, direct marketing, and online marketing/social media) with each other and with the other elements of the brands' marketing mix (product, place, price) such that all elements speak with one voice," (p. 12).

11.1.2.1 Characteristics

An Integrated Marketing Communication approach is characterized by five characteristics, including:

1. Start with the customer or prospect
2. Use any form of relevant contact or touch point
3. Speak with a single voice
4. Build relationships
5. Affect behavior

(Shimp & Andrews, 2013, p. 12)

The key distinction of an IMC approach is affecting audience behavior (Shimp & Andrews, 2013).

11.1.3 Implications

Both the public relations and integrated marketing perspectives inform organizational strategy, formative research, stakeholder engagement, and organizational communication. Further, attributes of each approach provides insight into aligning existing organizational communicative processes into risk and crisis communication plans and response implementation. Careful consideration of each is imperative to ensure consistency across organizational marketing and communication choices regarding information dissemination processes including channels, channel selection, and message construction.

11.2 Channels

Channels refer to the means by which a message is transmitted. Channels may include face-to-face communication (e.g., in a meeting), television, internet, or billboard advertising, or written documents (e.g., promotional brochures; letters to stakeholders). As technology continues to shape and expand the information dissemination process options, a clearer understanding of the value of traditional versus emergent social media is warranted.

11.2.1 Traditional Media

Traditional media includes television news, newspapers, and radio. The form of the message may change – from a news story to an advertisement. Yet the role of traditional media remains – to reach the largest population possible. As technological advances permeate traditional media, their delivery mechanisms have diversified and expanded. Today’s traditional media provide organizations’ tremendous targeting capacity to reach desired stakeholders (e.g., according to demographics; media consumption). Further, organizations may choose these outlets to reinforce local community affiliation or alignment with the views of specific programming.

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11.2.2 Social Media

Social media refers to “...the activities that result from the integration of technology and social interaction in the creation and combination of words, images, video, and audio,” (Diggs-Brown, 2012, p. 357). Tools such as social or professional networks, podcasts, or blogs are each “digital applications that allow users to generate and exchange information and resources,” (Diggs-Brown, 2012, p. 357).

Essentially, social media is comparable with traditional media with one fundamental difference – two-way communication between the organization and audience (i.e., sender and receiver). This asynchronous environment approaches interpersonal communication dynamics. One draw of social media is the expansion of accessibility to the press. As social media expands, so too does the volume of user generated content. This expansion is a second key difference between social and traditional media. The audience has significantly greater influence in the production and dissemination of information.

11.3 Channel Selection

Organizations may presume utilizing a channel is desirable because it is available or the popular tool among a specific demographic. Choosing appropriate channels is informed by multiple variables. The first question to consider is “how does this specific channel help the organization achieve or move toward attaining this specific goal?” In addition to asking why a channel is the best choice, consider if the organization can engage through that channel well. If the organization, for example, begins a blog but rarely updates it with new information, the presence may actually detract from the organization’s image.

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12 Considering the Process Full Circle

12.1 Continuous Learning and Renewal

Each day, organizations engage in fairly routine enactments (Fellows, Goedde, & Schwichtenberg, 2014). As an organization, the notion of continuous learning may be perceived among members as the role of students rather than as individual organizational members or as an organization overall. Further, renewal may be confused with constant change. Some attributes of the routine occurrences of the organization may facilitate abbreviated types of renewal. For example, breaks in between quarters may provide both employees and organizational leaders the opportunity to step away from specific organizational obligations and approach the next quarter with a fresh perspective. If the system is closed (see Section 3.3, p. 34), though, such opportunities for renewal may become monotonous (Conrad & Poole, 2012).

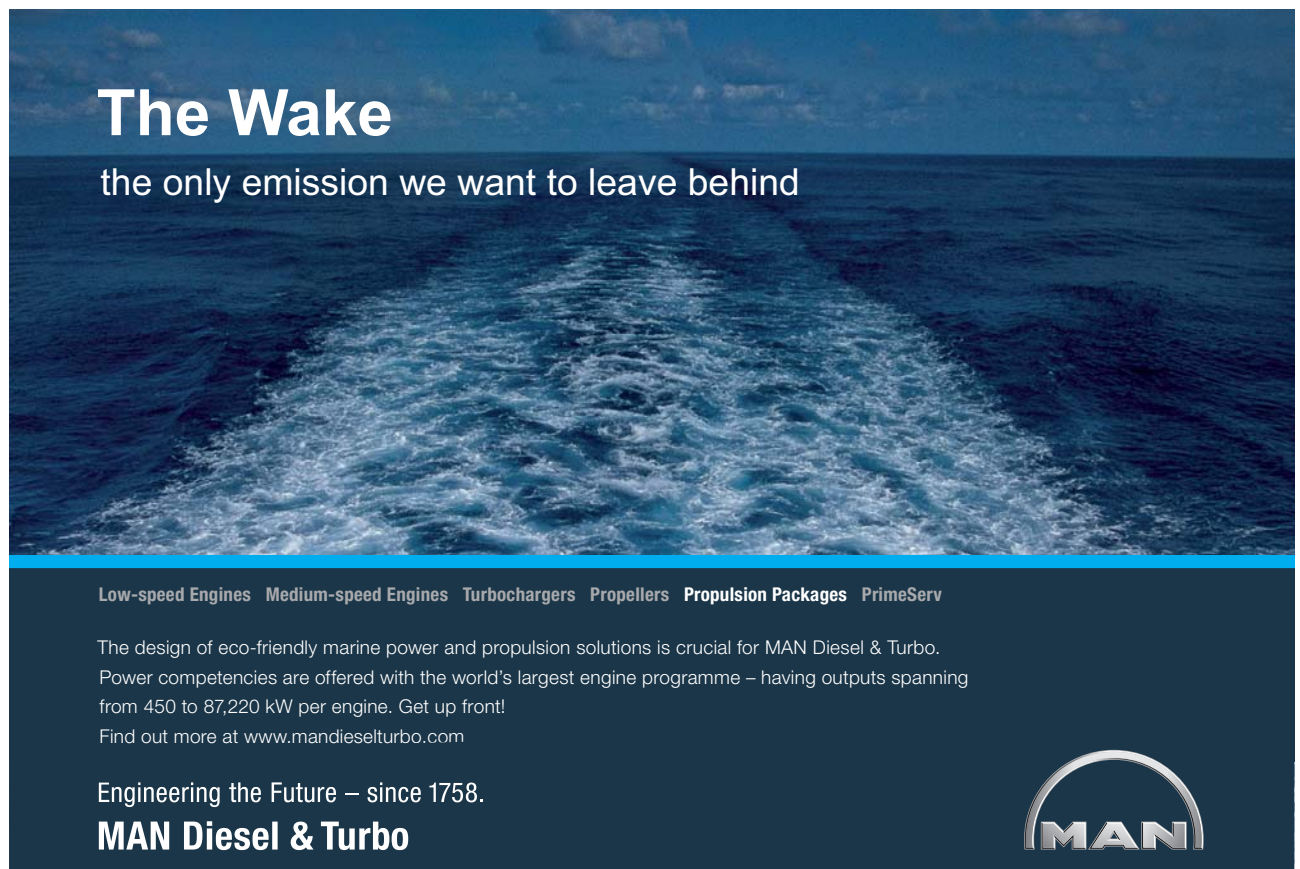
By extension, emergent variables of unexpected events (i.e., risks or crises) may be interpreted as obstacles or insurmountable challenges. Within this context, organizations face a spectrum of options to effectively manage strategic risk and crisis communication efforts. Continuous organizational learning across risk and crisis situations – individually and collectively – contribute to an organization’s robustness. Through risk and crisis situations, organizational members are taxed – cognitively, physically, and ethically. Reflection and renewal – by and of each individual within the organization – is an integral aspect of risk and crisis communication. By virtue of anticipating potential risks or managing an emergent crisis, change occurs – across the organization and stakeholders.

12.2 The Quest for Identity

Organizations are groups of individuals moving toward professional and personal goal attainment. Human existence is characterized by paradoxical dynamics that propel the individual to embrace solitude while remaining social in nature (Palmer, 2004). The paradox of concurrently existing as oneself, and as a member of various communities, presents a spectrum of possibilities for one to sway from his or her soul’s true North. This complex process of biological and psychosocial growth is shrouded in influence variables (e.g., uncertainty; goal; cultural; environmental; contextual) that illuminate the vastness of available possibilities, influenced by a plethora of variables intersecting, providing the individual with multiple opportunities to choose what he or she desires. And thus, the individual embarks on the *quest for identity*.

Identity is a “malleable construct” (Mokros, 2003, p. 9) that encompasses individuals’ self-construals grounded in three fundamental tenets of cognition, affect, and behavior (Fellows, 2014; Fellows & Rubin, 2006). These tenets illuminate the biopsychosocial nuances of human existence (MacDonald, Sulsky, & Brown, 2008). For example, cognition reflects individuals’ categorization schema, cognitions, sense making processes, belief systems, and assimilation of those within their overall self-conception. Affect entails the emotional associations or experiential interpretation of individual or group interaction. Finally, behavior affirms the identity and serves as an outward demonstration.

As individuals move through the process of constructing, maintaining, and abandoning identities, their path is influenced by varying combinations of internal and external variables. Palmer (2004) states, “We are cursed with the blessing of consciousness and choice, a two-edged sword that both divide us and can help us become whole,” (p. 9). Palmer’s (2004) notion of consciousness highlights the innate aspect individuals’ existence, generally, and the soul (specifically). Thus, consciousness is a representative term for one’s essence – one’s soul.




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Juxtaposed with consciousness, is the notion of choice. Palmer (2004) notes,

All of the great spiritual traditions want to awaken us to the fact that we cocreate the reality in which we live... We are continually engaged in the evolution of self and world, and we have the power to choose.

(p. 48)

This observation highlights the interdependent nature of human existence. Our choices impact both ourselves and the community of others within the world. Risk and crisis illuminate this interdependence for organizations.

12.2.1 Identity Entangled in the Quest for Organizational Leadership

Consideration of individuals' identity multiplicity over their lifespan reflects the capacity for change and the persuasive impact relationships (either actual or desired) with other individuals possess. The notion further aligns with Burn's (1978) assertion that "leadership, as we have defined it, is a function of complex biological, social, cognitive, and affective processes," (p. 427). Surface level change may occur, such as enacting an identity specific behavior, yet this change may be temporary – a deformation from the individuals' inner teacher or souls' intent (Palmer, 2004). Across these identities, though, the common thread of individuals' soul is retained. Alignment with this soul, though, may be significantly skewed. The contributing forces to this misalignment and realignment may be the result of leadership.

Organizations' quest for defining and replicating various forms of leadership is continuous. Burns (1978) notes, "We search eagerly for leadership yet seek to cage and tame it. We recoil from power yet we are bewitched or titillated by it," (p. 9). Leadership, thus, is an elusive construct that is evident in its *impact* more so than its *viability as an entity* in and of itself.

Burns (1978) notes, "We search eagerly for leadership yet seek to cage and tame it. We recoil from power yet we are bewitched or titillated by it," (p. 9). Leadership, thus, is an elusive construct that is evident in its impact more so that its viability as an entity in and of itself. Burns (1978). Leadership entails an engaged relationship. In organizational contexts, engaged relationships – with internal and external stakeholders – fortify the organization to identify, anticipate, manage, and thrive through risks and crises.

Relational engagement evokes Palmer's (2004) notions of consciousness and choice. Either as a leader or a follower, the core desire for acceptance and belonging frames the process. By extension, identity construction, maintenance, or dissolution is a relational process. Within this context, change (in attitude or behavior) may occur. However, this change may result from coercion rather than intentional self-generated desire for alignment or growth. In this regard, the change (and associated identities) may be transient rather than longstanding. Core organizational ethics are evidenced in both risk and crisis communication.

12.2.2 The Risk of Engagement

Organizational members and stakeholders construct related identities – an intertwined conceptualization and enactment of their perception of themselves and the degree of organizational connectedness. Ultimately, identity reflects choice, participation, and relationship toward goal attainment (e.g., professional or personal; organizational business or stakeholder relational goals). Recognition of concurrent, and perhaps conflicting identities, within each individual, provides an enriched foundation to nurture perpetual creative process. Identity construction and maintenance entails creativity – embracing risk to transcend the status quo and build a new reality. This type of risk taking reflects the fundamental presence of trust – a hallmark of transformational leadership (Burns, 1978; Palmer, 2004). By extension, the foundation for organizational balance between business and relational goals may occur.

12.3 The Art of Communication

In order to effectively understand the intricacies of risk and crisis communication across organizational contexts, *one must appreciate that no magical formula exists to ensure effective communication and desired response (in any situation)*. Rather, the information presented is comparable with Weiss' (2006) conceptualization of a consultant:

a consultant is someone who provides expertise for a client for a particular issue, concern, opportunity, or problem. That expertise may include knowledge, experiences, processes, models, behaviors, technology, or other assets... to improve the client's condition.

(p. 470)

Human beings engage in goal directed behavior across interactions and contexts. Organizational members are guided by their professional and personal goals and develop subsequent strategies to achieve them (Merron, 2006). When faced with risk assessment, management, and crisis, every organizational member maintains varying degrees of expertise. Striving toward equitable relationships among organizational members and stakeholders fosters concurrent business and relational goal attainment. Nurturing this approach empowers individuals to develop their own expertise – a collaborative versus dependent relationship (Bradford & Burke, 2006, p. 847).

The information presented in this book provides a glimpse into the complexities of communication, generally, and the variables that influence and constrict it, specifically. Communication, is an art – comprised of technique, skill, and interpretation. The contrast and interdependence of technique, skill, and interpretation provide a metaphor to consider organizational communication, risk and crisis communication, and the spectrum of organizational stakeholders co-constructing the current reality. The fundamental principles of art (e.g., drawing or painting) may be taught or learned. The techniques provide the foundation to achieve a specified goal – draw a portrait or paint a mural. Juried consideration of the art of the specified project is framed by the goal. For example, is the artist's goal to express, replicate, capture a moment, or interpret a phenomenon? The goal informs the technique employed.

This metaphor extends exploration of organizational risk and crisis communication through provision of a comparative interpretive frame of the evolution and unique outcomes utilizing fundamental techniques varying by goal. Specifically, a spectrum of art movements (e.g., impressionism; cubism; surrealism) illustrate the intersection of artistic engagement, artistic techniques, and challenging accepted paradigms within the historical moment in time.

12.4 Onward and Upward

Block (2011) frames the present moment in time with sage acknowledgement of perpetual uncertainty. Specifically, he notes, "...more people functioning in a consultative stance. The essence of this stance is that of wanting to have influence when you do not have direct control," (p. xiii). This observation is compelling evidence of uncertainty's occurrence across organizational contexts. It is pervasive across personal and professional contexts. For example, individuals will invite you to share the progress of a specific project or task, and then immediately begin advice provision to help you "fix it" or to "fix you."

Within the day-to-day grind of existence, individuals engage in routines to create a façade of normalcy – a covert strategy to masque the shroud of looming uncertainty. In organizational contexts, the uncertainty dances behind corners and hides in cubicles. We engage in water cooler chat, develop tenuous relationships, and persuade ourselves that *it* is all worth it.

The advertisement features a central graphic on the left consisting of a circular arrangement of four arrows pointing clockwise, with three interlocking gears and three stylized human figures in the center. To the right of this graphic, the text reads: **UNLEASHING CHANGE MANAGEMENT** in large, bold, blue letters. Below this, it says **OCTOBER 18 & 19, 2018** and **DE RODE HOED AMSTERDAM**. At the bottom, there is a silhouette of a city skyline with a windmill on the left and a bridge in the center. In the bottom left corner, the text 'Global Executive Events' is visible. A hand cursor icon is positioned over the advertisement, pointing towards a green oval button at the bottom right that contains the text 'Click on the ad to read more'.

Relational development and maintenance in organizational contexts is challenging, at times, because organizations are primed to function as machines, and employees are the mignons fueling success. To convey accurate mechanistic resemblance, individuals are trained to *put on their game face* and press onward. In anticipation of upper level executives visiting specific departments, employees are rallied with instructions regarding what they may and may not say, appropriate work behavior to enact, and sometimes mandated to wear identical costumes – *the official company shirt*.

In this scenario, the organization is a stage – the employees actors – and the organizational executives are the critics that may may shut the show down. As the players move about each other in carefully orchestrated synchronicity, the existence of authentic emotion fails to resonate. And it continues, every minute – of every day, mindless engagement in countless organizational scenes. Considering this infinite repetitive cycle yields a curious phenomenon – individuals who may appear human – yet their eyes lack the glimmer of presence – they beg for something – but what?

Block's (2011) notion of authenticity illuminates this deficiency, and provides a quest to each of us – engage in authentic relationships, authentic interactions, and authentic consulting (p. xviii). Yet, I am left wondering – how can I aspire to something that I do not know what it means, looks like, or feelings it may incite? Block (2011) proposes we should have faith in ourselves – embrace authenticity, the “...high-risk strategy. It swims upstream in a culture of control... It also demands some faith in ourselves,” pp. xviii–xix).

As I consider this definition, I envision myself as a salmon – swimming upstream, with one fin – *and it's broken*. What motivation is there to be authentic – to continue to push on, to have faith in my ability to make it upstream? What is up there that I perceive worth the struggle? Perhaps if another salmon were swimming alongside such musings would subside. *No, they are still there*.

12.5 The White Space and Authenticity

Organizations are comprised of individuals. Through relationship, individuals move toward collective organizational goals (Block, 2011; Fellows, 2013; Fellows, Goedde, & Schwichtenberg, 2014). Block (2011) grounds and centers his texts on relationship. To this end, I am both intrigued and resistant. Relationships, after all, invite pain, hurt, and risk I may not have the strength to pursue. They also provide the greatest opportunity for joy, discovery, growth, and laughter. This dyadic consideration reminds me that relationships are a fundamental indicator of intrinsic human existence – *we are social creatures, we are not meant to go alone*.

Organizational structures, by extension, should be beacons of humanness – the space where we collectively embrace that which unites us despite our individual differences. Block (2011) provides a roadmap to defining and optimizing this relational utopia, “...deepen and expand that white space between strategy, structure, and technology that we label relationship,” p. xix). As organizations embark in risk and crisis planning, mindful attention to the inherent relational and business goals inherent is critical. Planning for the worst leaves a residue of doom on the most positive individual. In the planning process, heed Block’s (2011) observation regarding the white space. Provide organizational stakeholders *metaphorical white space* – to assess, reflect, and adapt to the emergent impacts of both risk and crisis.

The white space? As I reflect upon this notion, I hear Dave Matthews Band singing in my ear...the song – “The Space Between” – my mind drifts, and I focus my eyes toward my goal – to find *the white space*.

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