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CRISIS PREPARING

Part I

During crisis preparing, organizations ready themselves for the inevitable crises that will befall them. I use the term *preparing* instead of *preparation* because preparing is an ongoing process and not some static outcome. Organizations should not fall victim to hubris and assume that their preventative measures will protect them from harm. All organizations should prepare to handle crises by taking six steps: (1) diagnosing vulnerabilities, (2) assessing crisis types, (3) selecting and training a crisis management team, (4) selecting and training a spokesperson, (5) developing a crisis communication plan (CCP), and (6) reviewing the crisis communication system. This chapter covers the first four points, and Chapter 5 is devoted to the CCP and the communication system.

DIAGNOSING VULNERABILITIES

As noted at the beginning of this book, an array of potential crises can happen to an organization. However, every organization has specific crisis vulnerabilities (Fink, 1986), which are a function of the organization's industry, size, location, operations, personnel, and risk factors. For example, a hotel must ensure the safety of hundreds of people who are in an unfamiliar building, and food producers run the risk of contamination that can poison their customers. Different types of organizations are prone to different types of crises. Location should not be overlooked, either. Location dictates which natural disasters are likely to strike. In addition, if your organization is near a facility that could have a serious crisis, such as a chemical leak, or be a strategic target for terrorists, that facility's crisis can become your crisis. Crisis managers must identify the crises for which their organizations and some neighbors are most vulnerable. Vulnerabilities affect the development of the CCP (Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992).

Vulnerabilities are a direct function of crisis risk discussed in the previous chapter. That is why risk is the foundation for crisis management and crisis communication. Crisis

managers use the risk analysis, guided ERM, to help assess vulnerabilities. Crises are the manifestation of risks. Therefore, vulnerabilities are the crises that could emerge if the crisis risks become realized. Vulnerabilities typically are assessed using a combination of likelihood of occurrence and severity of damage. Crisis managers start by listing all possible crises that could affect their organizations. The list of potential crises can result from brainstorming by the crisis management team or an assessment done by a consultant (Barton, 2001). Once a final list of potential crises is developed, each crisis should be assessed. A common approach is to rate each crisis from 1 to 10 for likelihood and impact (with 10 being the strongest score; Fink, 1986). Here is a quick review of the criteria we developed when evaluating crisis threats in Chapter 3. *Likelihood* represents the odds that the crisis might happen. *Impact* is the amount of damage a crisis can inflict on an organization and its stakeholders. The crisis manager then multiplies the likelihood and the two impact ratings to establish a final crisis vulnerability score. The higher the score, the greater the potential damage (Barton, 2001; Fink, 1986). Crisis managers should focus their attention on crises that have the highest vulnerability scores. Summaries of the crisis assessments are often included in the CCP.

While the discussion of risk and risk assessment sounds logical, risk is often subjective and problematic. In her book about the Challenger tragedy, Diane Vaughan created the idea of the normalization of deviance. The idea is that when people in an organization redefine a deviation (risk) as acceptable, a new norm is established for that behavior. In the future that deviation is no longer a risk. If this pattern continues, the organization slowly begins to accept greater and greater risk as normal—not risks. Vaughan argued that NASA kept normalizing risks associated with the O-rings in the space shuttle, resulting in NASA accepting greater O-ring risks until the fatal Challenger launch (Vaughan, 2016). Managers must be careful they do not fall into dangerous pattern of normalization of deviance. Managers must scrutinize decisions that seem to normalize deviance and serve to increase the level of risk that is acceptable/normal.

Risk can change over time, meaning vulnerabilities are fluid. Risks can change because of the organization's mitigation efforts and environmental changes. For instance, changing societal values about social issues can alter reputational risks. Organizations should have risk committees that meet regularly, typically monthly, to review risks. If risks are fluid so are vulnerabilities. Preparing means a willingness to revisit and to revise vulnerabilities on a regular basis. Diagnosing vulnerabilities is an extension of signal detection that requires continued managerial support. Organizations are more resilient and better prepared for crises when management values signal detection and encourages risk sense making (Williams, Gruber, Sutcliffe, Shepherd, & Zhao, 2017). Risk sense making involves locating and analyzing possible crisis risk. Scanning is locating half of risk sense making while diagnosing vulnerabilities is the analyzing half.

ASSESSING CRISIS TYPES

The list of potential crises for organizations is extremely long. It includes accidents, activist actions, boycotts, earthquakes, explosions, chemical leaks, rumors, deaths, fire, lawsuits, sexual harassment, product harm, strikes, terrorism, and whistle blowing, to name but a few. There is a point to the laundry list of crises—an organization faces different threats, not

just one. Different crises can necessitate the use of different crisis team members, emphasize different stakeholders, and warrant different crisis response strategies. For instance, a product harm crisis is not the same as a rumor. A crisis involving product harm requires the organization to respond to those who were hurt, tell consumers how to return the product, and inform shareholders of the financial impact of the recall. A rumor requires a response designed to present the truth to consumers and to stop the source of the rumor.

While crises possess different characteristics, they tend to cluster into identifiable types (Coombs & Holladay, 2001). A variety of crisis typologies can be found in the crisis writings (e.g., Egelhoff & Sen, 1992; Lerbinger, 1997; Marcus & Goodman, 1991; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). These typologies have been synthesized into one master list that reflects the broader crisis categories of operational crises and paracrises:

Paracrises

- Faux pas:** When managers take an action they think is positive or neutral but stakeholders view the action as negative, such as advertising messages that stakeholders find racist or insulting.
- Rumors:** When false or misleading information is purposefully circulated about an organization or its products in order to harm the organization.
- Challenges:** When the organization is confronted by discontented stakeholders with claims that it is operating in an inappropriate manner.
- Collateral damage:** When some negatively viewed actor mentions or is publicly associated with the organization, thereby creating the risk of guilt by association.

Operational Crises

- Operational disruptions from disasters:** When organizational routines are disrupted by disasters; this includes an organization needing to close or to operate at reduced capacity because of a disaster such as a tornado, a hurricane, volcanic ash, flooding, or a health emergency.
- Workplace violence:** When an employee or former employee commits violence against other employees on the organization's grounds.
- Unexpected loss of key leadership:** When an organization suddenly loses a key leader, such as a CEO, to illness or death.
- Malevolence:** When some outside actor or opponent employs extreme tactics to attack the organization, such as product tampering, kidnapping, terrorism, or computer hacking.
- Technical-error accidents:** When the technology utilized or supplied by the organization fails and causes an industrial accident.

Technical-error product harm:	When the technology utilized or supplied by the organization fails and results in a defect or potentially harmful product.
Human-error accidents:	When human error causes an accident.
Human-error product harm:	When human error results in a defect or potentially harmful product.
Data breach:	When an organization's digital files containing confidential or sensitive data is viewed or stolen by unauthorized individuals. Data breaches can expose the sensitive or confidential information of stakeholders, such as social security numbers, credit card information, and medical records. Initially data breaches were viewed as a form of malevolence, but polling data has shown that people now feel organizations are held responsible when their data is breached.
Organizational misdeeds:	When management takes actions it knows may place stakeholders at risk or knowingly violates the law.
Scansis:	When a crisis also becomes a scandal, a scansis is created (Coombs, Holladay, & Tachkova, 2018). A scansis creates a sense of moral outrage that is lacking in a typical operational crisis. The moral outrage is driven by perceptions of injustice and greed (Coombs & Tachkova, 2018).
Special circumstances:	Unique crisis forms

In addition to the basic crisis types, circumstances can create unique and complex crisis forms. Frandsen and Johansen (2017) refer to such circumstances as new concepts of crisis. Here is a list of the potential unique crisis forms:

Double crisis:	When crisis managers respond so inappropriately that the response creates a second crisis making the situation worse (Frandsen & Johansen, 2017; Grebe, 2013).
Spillover:	When a crisis in one organization negatively affects the entire industry, this is a spillover (Zavyalova, Pfarrer, Reger, & Shapiro, 2012). For example, during the 2011 cantaloupe product harm crisis, sales suffered for the entire industry and not just for the one producer responsible for the listeriosis outbreak (Coombs, 2014). Johansen, Johansen, and Weckesser (2016) refer to this as crisis by association. Another form of spillover is when a crisis with one brand has a negative effect on the other brands in the organization's portfolio (Lei, Dawar, & Lemmink, 2008). Spillover highlights the need to monitor the crises of other organizations that have the potential to become

your crisis. It is unfortunate, but the actions of others are a source of crisis risk.

Crisis contagion:

When a crisis in one organization is linked to a crisis in another organization, you have a crisis contagion (Laufer & Wang, 2017). There is a similarity with spillover, but Laufer and Wang (2017) argue that crisis contagion is different because it can be caused by factors other than being in the same industry. Those other factors include country of origin, organization type, and positioning strategy (Laufer & Wang, 2017). Again, a crisis in another organization can become your crisis.

Synecdoche crisis:

When one franchise in an organization has a crisis, it becomes a crisis for the entire organization including all the other franchises. Synecdoche means people take a part of something to represent the whole. In this case, one or a few locations are taken to represent the entire organization. Dominos, H&M, Taco Bell, and Chipotle are but a few of the organizations that have faced synecdoche crises. Once more the crisis is created by the actions of others, reinforcing how the actions of others are a crisis risk.

It would be impossible for an organization to prepare a CCP for every single crisis, but it can prepare CCPs for the major types it may face. Organizations should have crisis portfolios composed of CCPs for the primary types of crises they might face. Because of the similarities of the crises within each type, one CCP can be used to address any crisis within a particular crisis type (Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992). The crisis portfolio prepares an organization to cope with a wide array of crises.

The organizational vulnerabilities and crisis types can help crisis managers construct their crisis portfolios, addressing the specific crises that could affect the organization. Here is the way to proceed. First, organize the list of potential crises by type. Second, select at least one crisis from each type. Select those with the highest vulnerability rating. The highest-rated crisis in each crisis type becomes part of the crisis portfolio. Third, develop variations of the CCP for each of the crises in the portfolio.

SELECTING AND TRAINING A CRISIS MANAGEMENT TEAM

The crisis management team (CMT) is a cross-functional group of people in the organization who have been designated to handle any crises and is a core element of crisis preparation. Oddly, the American Management Association (2003) found that only 56% of companies with CCPs had a dedicated crisis team. It is best to think of the CMT as a community of practice. Lave and Wenger (Smith, 2003) created the concept of a community of practice to denote people who share a common topic of interest

(domain), engage with one another to learn (a community), and who seek to apply what they have learned to solve problems (a practice). The CMT should not be a list of people in a document. Those people should meet regularly to discuss developments in crisis communication and management as a way to learn more about the process and to improve their practice of crisis communication and management. Moreover, if an organization has a designated crisis manager or crisis management unit, those individuals should seek out crisis managers in other organizations to form communities of practice. In other words, CMTs and crisis managers should embrace lifelong learning about crisis communication and crisis management.

In terms of tasks, the CMT typically is responsible for (a) creating the CCP, (b) enacting it, and (c) dealing with any problems not covered in it. The team crafts the CCP after thoroughly researching its organization's vulnerabilities. As just discussed, the CCP planning includes anticipating the most likely crises to befall an organization (Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992). To develop the crisis plan, the CMT needs information about different crisis types and all information about potential crises (scanning) and actions being taken to prevent crises (prevention). Any background information relevant to crises is helpful when the team is writing the CCP.

A second CMT responsibility is to enact the plan during simulated or real crises. CCPs must be tested to see whether they work by running the entire organization, certain departments, or just the crisis team through drills and simulations. The simulations help the CMT discover any holes in the CCP or weaknesses in the team (Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992; Regester, 1989). The CMT is responsible for implementing the CCP during real crises as well. We must remember that CCPs are contingency plans. This means that a CMT must be able to adapt to situational experiences and not just mindlessly follow a CCP (Fink, 1986; Littlejohn, 1983).

This brings us to the third major responsibility of the CMT: dealing with factors not covered in the CCP. It is impossible for a CCP to anticipate all possible contingencies in every crisis. During an actual crisis, the CMT must be able to provide counsel on and resolve issues not dealt with in the CCP (Barton, 2001; Regester, 1989). It falls to the CMT to make the necessary decisions when a crisis presents an unanticipated challenge. A CCP is an outline, not a road map, for how to manage a crisis. The CMT must fill in the details.

Development of an effective CMT is essential to the crisis management process. The best CCP is worthless if the team cannot fulfill its crisis duties (Wilson & Patterson, 1987). An effective CMT is developed through careful selection and training. Selection involves choosing the people best suited for the tasks, whereas training helps people improve their skills and become more proficient at performing tasks (Goldstein, 1993). Careful selection and training produce more effective workers; that is why organizations spend millions of dollars a year on each.

Functional Areas

CMT selection is not as simple as finding the people best qualified to work on the team. Selection is complicated by the need to have specific functional areas within the organization represented on the CMT. The dominant selection criterion in the crisis management writings is the functional approach. It posits that team members must represent specific functional divisions or positions within the organization, including legal, security, public

relations or communications, operations or technical, safety, quality assurance, social media manager, human resources, information technology, finance, government relations, marketing, and the CEO or representative (Barton, 2001; “Creating the Best Crisis Communications Teams,” 2003). The logic behind the functional selection is that certain knowledge bases (e.g., operations, legal), skills (e.g., media relations, public relations, social media), and organizational power sources (e.g., CEO) are required on a CMT. For instance, a crisis team often needs to integrate technical information about the organization’s operations, assessment of legal concerns, and information collected by security when enacting a crisis plan. Furthermore, media relations skills are needed when addressing the press; social media is critical to crisis monitoring and response; and the CEO or a representative legitimizes the crisis team within the organization and empowers the team to take action. Human resources can address compensation issues for employees during a crisis, and finance can project the costs of the crisis.

The composition of the CMT should reflect the nature of the crisis. One example would be that a product harm crisis is unlikely to involve information technology, but a computer-hacking crisis would. The core members of the crisis team are typically operations or manufacturing, legal, public relations or communication, social media, security, and CEO or representative. Keep in mind that a CMT may not be the best place for a CEO during a crisis. That is why a representative with authority is recommended. In some cases, the full-time dedicated crisis manager will have executive-level decision-making power. Some organizations like to create a communication core as the starting point for the crisis team. The communication core would be involved in any crisis because communication is always needed. The communication core would include public relations/corporate communication, social media, and legal. Obviously legal is not a typical communication professional, but during a crisis, legal frequently needs to approve messages and actions from the crisis team.

BOX 4.1

SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER

Many organizations now have a position titled *social media manager*. Social media managers are charged with overseeing the organization’s social media strategy. They should be able to answer the question, “Why are we using social media?” Their job is to ensure that social media helps to support the larger organizational strategy. Social media managers monitor, assess, and guide the organization’s social media presence (Rouse, 2010). They listen to stakeholders and craft the organizational messages that populate various social media outlets. As part of listening, social media managers identify threats and

opportunities emerging in social media (Kruse, 2013). The social media manager is a social media monitor that can provide early warnings of a social media-based threat. As social media crisis communication expert Melissa Agnes (2012) notes, “Early detection is key to fast resolution” (p. 6). Some experts argue that there should be an executive-level position for social media called the chief social media officer (CSMO). The CSMO requires experience and expertise not only in the technical aspects of social media platforms but a deep understanding of communication and marketing as well (Florentine, 2015).

Soft Skills

Experienced crisis managers will tell you that “managing personalities” is an important part of the job. This includes working with difficult CEOs who are resisting the advice of the crisis managers and crisis team members who are inhibiting the team’s work. This reflects the fact that all elements of work reflect both a task (get the job done) and social (relationship with others) dimensions. The discussion of crisis teams must reflect the general trend in management that recognizes the importance of the interpersonal nature of management. Some people might equate the concern for the interpersonal aspect of work to be emotional intelligence (EI), how to deal effectively with one’s own emotions and the emotions of others at work (Semadar, Robins, & Ferris, 2006). However, EI is but one concept in the larger area of social and emotional effectiveness constructs (SEECs). SEECs are the social and emotional skills that promote professional success (Schlegel, Grandjean, & Scherer, 2013). Among SEECs, political skill has proven to be the best predictor of workplace success (Banister & Meriac, 2015). Political skill is “the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one’s personal and/or organizational objectives” (Ferris et al., 2005, p. 127). We often think of politics as a negative in organizations, but political skills are about how to work effectively with people. Political skills have been shown to enhance leadership effectiveness and managerial performance, reduce job stress, and improve subjective and objective evaluations of team performance (Lvina, Johns, & Vandenberghe, 2018; Semader et al., 2006). Given its success in teams, political skills are a natural fit for CMTs.

Political skill is composed of four dimensions: (1) social astuteness, (2) interpersonal influence, (3) network ability, and (4) apparent sincerity. Social astuteness is the ability to observe social interactions and to accurately interpret those behaviors. Interpersonal influence is an ability to adapt behavior to influence others and to get the desired results. Network ability is a skill in identifying and developing diverse contacts. Apparent sincerity is the ability to appear honest and authentic while not appearing to have ulterior motives. As is common with SEECs, political skill is a combination of dispositional traits and skills that can be learned. The traits associated with political skill include perceptiveness, control, affability, and active influence. Perceptions is the ability to monitor and to regulate one’s own behavior. Control means the person has an internal locus and high self-efficacy, which produces a sense of control of their environment. Affability is an outgoing nature and likeability. Active influence is a propensity to take action to shape one’s own environment (Semader et al., 2006). The research by Lvina et al. (2018) demonstrated that political skills enhance the task and social components of teams resulting in higher evaluations of team performance. Political skills can be assessed using the Political Skills Inventory (PSI) (Ferris et al., 2005) and through situational judgment tests. The situational judgment test would give people a crisis-related situation as the stimuli and various options for how to address the situation. The various options would reflect different political skills.

Task Analysis

The key to selection and training is the identification of the characteristics (knowledge, skills, and traits) people need to perform their jobs (Goldstein, 1993). *Task*

analysis is the technical term for identifying the key characteristics needed for job performance. A task analysis of crisis management should isolate the characteristics required by crisis team members. Once tasks are identified, the knowledge, skills, and traits needed to perform each task should be determined. Through interviews with crisis managers and an analysis of crisis management writings, four specific tasks have been isolated: (1) group decision-making, (2) working as a team, (3) enacting the CCP, and (4) listening (Coombs & Chandler, 1996). Combined with the elements of political skill, the task analysis highlights factors that should make for effective CMT members. Table 4.1 summarizes the CMT factors identified from political skill and task analysis.

Very little information exists about the characteristics of crisis team members. The discussions tend to be vague or limited. The personal characteristics mentioned in the literature include being a team player, having decision-making ability and listening skills, and being able to handle stress (Barton, 2001; Dilenschneider & Hyde, 1985; Littlejohn, 1983; Mitchell, 1986; Regester, 1989; Walsh, 1995). Unfortunately, little detail is provided about what actually constitutes these characteristics—the knowledge and skills needed to meet them. The following sections are dedicated to providing specific information about the tasks, knowledge, skills, and traits that make for an effective crisis team member. The tasks serve as the organizing point for the explanations.

TABLE 4.1 ■ Crisis Team Political Skills and Task Analysis

Task Statement	Knowledge	Skills	Traits
Work as a team to facilitate the achievement of crisis team goals.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understand various styles of conflict resolution. 2. Understand components of an ethical conflict resolution. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ability to use the integrating conflict management style 2. Ability to apply components of ethical conflict resolution 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cooperative predisposition
Apply the crisis management plan (CCP) to crises in order to facilitate an effective organizational response	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understand how to use the CCP. 2. Understand specialized information of one's functional area. 3. Understand mechanisms for coping with stress. 4. Understand mechanisms for coping with ambiguity. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ability to follow directions given in the CCP 2. Ability to supply area-relevant information 3. Ability to use the mechanisms for coping with stress 4. Ability to use the mechanisms for coping with ambiguity 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stress tolerance 2. Ambiguity tolerance

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Task Statement	Knowledge	Skills	Traits
Make the necessary group decisions to effectively solve the problems encountered by the crisis team.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understand the critical vigilant decision-making functions. 2. Understand the value of argumentation. 3. Understand how to structure arguments. 4. Understand the value of group participation. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ability to apply the elements of critical vigilant decision-making 2. Ability to create arguments 3. Ability to speak in groups 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Argumentativeness 2. Willingness to speak in groups 3. Affability
Listen to others as a means of collecting information.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understand the steps to effective listening. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ability to use the steps to effective listening 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Perceptiveness
Take actions to shape your environment.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understand the value of changing one's environment. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ability to assess and to act on environmental cues 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Internal locus of control 2. High self-efficacy

Group Decision-Making

Crisis management is a group decision-making process (Fink, 1986; O'Connor, 1985; Olaniran & Williams, 2001; Williams & Olaniran, 1994). Decision-making involves selecting an option to meet the needs of the situation or reaching a judgment. The three primary responsibilities of the CMT all involve decision-making. As previously mentioned, the team decides what goes into the CCP (Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992; Wilson & Patterson, 1987), when and how to enact it (Mitroff, Harrington, & Gai, 1996; Walsh, 1995), and how to extemporaneously handle those factors not covered in the plan. If crisis management is decision-making, the knowledge, skills, and traits associated with group decision-making should be essential to the effective performance of a crisis team.

Determining how to handle a crisis is an example of dynamic decision-making and is characterized by time pressure, risk, and a changing situation (Williams et al., 2017). Researchers find that decision-making in a crisis follows one of three styles: intuitive, rule based, or analytical.

The intuitive method is derived from naturalistic decision-making—how people use experience to make real-world decisions. Recognition-primed decision-making is a form of intuitive decision-making that has been applied to crisis management. The decision makers use their experience to recognize cues in crisis situations and to react. This is more than so-called gut instinct. The decision makers use their experience to gauge the situation and evaluate whether their past experiences are appropriate. The advantage of intuitive decision-making is its speed and the limited negative effects of stress (Flin, 2006). It's safe to say that intuitive decision-making seeks a viable solution rather than the most optimal one—the decision maker is satisficing.

Intuition is “knowing without knowing how one knows” (Nyatanga & de Vocht, 2008). Intuitive decisions are rapid, unconscious, and keyed to selective attention to certain information (Brien, Prescott, Owen, & Lewith, 2004). However, Gerd Gigerenzer, an important researcher in intuition, emphasizes intuition is not guess work but an intelligence driven by a deep understanding of a topic (Gut, 2007). Intuitive decision-making is not inherently good or bad. In some cases, the speed and effectiveness make intuition the best decision-making method (Dane & Pratt, 2007). However, intuitive decisions can produce horrible results when done improperly (Bonabeau, 2003). The question is how do we know when intuitive decision-making might produce positive results? The key is whether the decision makers use heuristics or expert schemas (Dane & Pratt, 2007). Heuristics are simplistic shortcuts people use. Heuristics are often inaccurate guides that result in incorrect evaluations of the situation creating poor quality decisions. Schemas are a collection of knowledge that provides frames for acquiring new knowledge and retrieving information. An expert schema for crisis communication generates decisions guided by a rich understanding of crisis. Useful intuition is derived from experience and repetition (Green, 2012). That is why crisis managers emphasize the need to have some people experienced with crises on the CMT (R. Reed, *personal communication*, Oct. 28, 2017). Intuitive decision-making can even be effective when making complex decisions. However, the decision makers must have the proper experience stored in their memories and have access to all the important data (Dijksterhuis & Nordgren, 2006). Intuitive decision makers have the ability to quickly sort through information and discard irrelevant information (Kasanoff, 2017), a valuable skill to possess in a crisis. Crisis managers frequently employ the preferred expert schema when making intuitive decisions (Claeys & Ogenhaffen, 2016).

Rule-based decision-making involves finding a rule that can be applied to events in the crisis. There is an assumption that a set of rules does exist. Government reporting requirements and actions are examples of existing rules that crisis managers can use. For instance, the government has a checklist for executing a product recall. However, most crisis situations cannot be managed with a list of rules. There simply are not enough to address all the possible factors a crisis team might encounter. Rules are useful for novices, but there is always the risk of applying the wrong rule. A rules approach would work well for deciding when to enact the CCP, however.

Analytical decision-making is the type most commonly used in training. Decision makers are taught a process for making decisions. The focus is on identifying and evaluating options. Analytical decision-making is thoughtful and requires time, and some feel it is ill suited to crisis decisions (Flin, 2006). However, the analytical approach is perfect for creating a CCP and has its place in crisis decisions, especially the decision about whether or when to enact the CCP. A well-trained crisis team can use processes like vigilance in a short period of time. The following discussion of vigilance is an analytical approach to decision-making. An extended discussion of vigilance is offered because it is such a valuable tool for the crisis team.

Group decision-making research has consistently found vigilance to be valuable in making effective decisions and avoiding ineffective decisions (Hirokawa, 1985, 1988; Hirokawa & Rost, 1992). Vigilance is a form of critical thinking. Critical thinking can be defined as the “disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action” (Paul & Nosich, n.d., para. 5). Critical thinking involves learning and

applying skills used to evaluate information. Vigilance applies critical thinking to group decision-making by emphasizing the need for careful and thorough analysis of all information related to a decision (Hirokawa & Rost, 1992; Olaniran & Williams, 2001; Williams & Olaniran, 1994). Analysis is a process of dissecting a whole into its parts in order to examine something in more detail.

Hirokawa and Rost (1992) identified a specific set of four critical vigilant functions that aid the decision-making process: (1) conducting problem analysis, (2) evaluating alternative choices, (3) understanding the important positive aspects of an alternative choice, and (4) understanding the important negative aspects of an alternative choice. Each of these skills is a corrective for a factor that could contribute to faulty decision-making. A decision is threatened when a group fails to see a problematic situation or fails to identify its correct cause. The group must analyze and assess the problem thoroughly and systematically. The group must understand what it is supposed to accomplish.

A decision is also threatened if the group improperly evaluates the alternative choices for solving a problem. Three critical vigilant decision-making functions address the evaluation of alternative choices. The group identifies appropriate standards for evaluating alternative choices and discusses and specifies criteria for evaluating the alternative choices. Then the group applies the criteria to consider the important positive aspects of each alternative choice, identifying and seeking clarification of these positive aspects. Finally, the group applies the criteria to understanding the important negative aspects of each alternative choice, identifying and seeking clarification of the negative aspects. Research in laboratories and in the field has found these three critical vigilance decision-making functions to be related to higher-quality decisions in groups (Hirokawa & Rost, 1992).

Vigilance is a composite of a variety of knowledge (K), skills (S), and traits (T). First, group members must know some process for evaluating situations (K) and be able to apply these processes (S) to their situations. Second, group members must know how to develop the criteria to evaluate decision alternatives (K) and be able to apply these criteria (S). Third, group members must be able to argue for thoroughness of analysis and to present their views on the matters being discussed (S). Arguing, in this context, refers to giving reasons for and against a proposal, not fighting or having an emotional disagreement (Foundation for Critical Thinking, 2009). Group members must be motivated to use their skills if analysis is to be thorough (Hirokawa & Rost, 1992). This requires groups to continually argue for thoroughness. Group members must be willing to argue their positions (T), since group decisions become less effective when members do not voice concerns and allow one perspective to dominate the group's discussion (Hirokawa, 1985, 1988; Rancer, Baukus, & Infante, 1985). Group members are required to have the skills for argumentation and the disposition to argue (the argumentativeness trait).

Communication apprehension is the fear or anxiety some people feel in a communication setting. A team member with a high level of communication anxiety in a group setting is unlikely to fully contribute (Richmond & McCroskey, 1997) and will likely be silent and let others do the talking. As a result, communication apprehension can cause the team to lose the valuable knowledge that that team member was to bring to the team.

Crisis decisions are complicated by the pressure surrounding crisis management, including time pressures (van der Meer, Verhoeven, Beentjes, & Vliegthart, 2017). James and Wooten (2010) note how crisis decisions under pressure often favor short-term results while ignoring long-term effects. This observation is consistent with research in behavioral economics. Behavioral economics integrates psychology with economics to

explain recurring anomalies in economic research (Thaler, 2015). Rooted in prospect theory, behavioral economics argues that people feel loss twice as much as they feel gain, especially when outcomes are uncertain or the decision is risky (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). Behavioral economics returns us to intuition because people hold heuristic biases tied to loss and gain. The myopic loss aversion argues people are much more sensitive to loss than to gain (Thaler, Tversky, Kahneman, & Schwartz, 1997). Moreover, hyperbolic discounting posits that people give much greater weight to present rewards than to future rewards (Frederick, Loewenstein, & O'Donoghue, 2002). Combined, these two heuristic biases could explain why crisis teams often use intuitive decisions that can limit the effectiveness of the CMT (Coombs & Claeys, 2018). I will return to this point in the discussion of strategic crisis communication.

Working as a Team

Members of the crisis team must be able to work together as a group. They must be able to function in a cooperative manner in order to maximize the gains for themselves and others (Daniels, Spiker, & Papa 1997; Paton & Flin, 1999). Some people are naturally cooperative, while others are competitive (R. A. Baron, 1983). Part of working together is resolving the conflicts that inevitably occur within groups (Kreps, 1990; O'Connor, 1985). Conflict happens when people are interdependent with one another but have different goals, which may prevent team members from reaching their goals (L. L. Putnam & Poole, 1987). People in groups often disagree and can blame one another for the disagreements, but conflict can be beneficial to a group. Vigilance is fostered through conflict, including by arguing different perspectives. However, it is important to remember that cooperation is the key to conflict becoming productive rather than destructive (Kreps, 1990).

People seem to have preferred conflict styles, the typical modes they use to handle disputes (L. L. Putnam & Poole, 1987). There are systems for identifying conflict styles (Daniels et al., 1997; Kilmann & Thomas, 1975), and the key is to emphasize the use of cooperation-based conflict styles in crisis team deliberations. Rahim (1983) found that styles for handling interpersonal conflict vary along two dimensions, concern for self and concern for others. He used the two dimensions to identify five styles for handling interpersonal conflict: (1) integrating, high concern for both self and other; (2) avoiding, low concern for both self and other; (3) compromising, moderate concern for self and other; (4) dominating, high concern for self and low concern for other; and (5) obliging, low concern for self and high concern for others. The Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II) can be used to diagnose how people handle interpersonal conflicts (Rahim, 1983).

For crisis teams, integration is the preferred method of conflict resolution style because it facilitates teamwork and avoids the negativity from competitiveness. Research has shown that comfort in communicating and the ability to make decisions facilitates integrated conflict resolution among crisis teams (Tokakis, Polychroniou, & Boustras, 2018). This research supports the importance of communication apprehension, cooperation, and the need to be skilled in decision-making identified in Table 4.1.

Sometimes the organizational culture can be the source of the conflict. There are times when the requirements of effective crisis communication run counter to the organizational culture. The organization's preferred style of communication might be to disclose as little information as possible, but this can be counterproductive during a crisis. Crisis managers can expect resistance and conflict as they argue for the need to be open by disclosing a lot of information and engaging with stakeholders.

Enacting the Crisis Communication Plan

The crisis team must be able to enact the CCP. For this reason, groups train by reviewing and practicing the CCP. Creating the CCP should give the team members greater understanding of the plan (Barton, 2001; Wilson & Patterson, 1987). This is where each team member's functional organizational area becomes important. One reason to appoint a team member is his or her particular knowledge of a functional area that is important during a crisis (e.g., legal, media relations, investor relations). The knowledge and skills of these functional areas are important to executing the crisis plan effectively. Stress enters the crisis management equation most fully during the execution of the plan (Dilenschneider & Hyde, 1985; Shrivastava & Mitroff, 1987). When the crisis team faces deadline pressures and needs to deal with ambiguous information, the stress it experiences increases (O'Connor, 1985). Part of enacting the CCP is managing the concomitant stress and ambiguous information. Stress can hinder job performance (Baron, 1983), and ambiguity can create stress (Tsui, 1993).

Listening

Crisis team members frequently use the skill of listening. Collecting information when creating or enacting the CCP often means that team members must listen to others. Working together to make decisions requires listening to the others in the group. Obviously, listening is an important part of many tasks. However, many crisis managers feel that listening is important enough to be considered as a separate, distinct task.

Implications for Crisis Management Team Selection

As crisis expert Andy Podolak (n.d.) notes, "Every crisis management program begins with a competent crisis management team" (para. 1). As mentioned earlier, team members must bring certain area-specific knowledge and skills to the crisis team, which will facilitate the execution of the crisis plan—the functional approach to selecting team members. However, as Shrivastava and Mitroff (1987) note, crisis team members also should have a set of general crisis management skills. Furthermore, Hackman (2012) argues that we need to find the properties that can increase team effectiveness. The knowledge, skills, and traits in Table 4.1 represent a set of such general skills that are vital to increasing the effective operation of a crisis team. The full range of knowledge, skills, and traits should be considered when identifying those people most likely to contribute positively to a crisis team. Assessment is vital in the screening of crisis team candidates. An organization may be in a position to choose among a number of people to represent a functional area. For instance, there might be a pool of five people from operations who possess the requisite skills and knowledge from their area. Only one person from operations is needed, and the organization wants the person best suited for work on a crisis team. The assessment instrument would indicate which of these potential candidates best matches the demands of being a crisis team member, particularly in terms of traits, because people can learn to cope with the limits of their traits but not to develop completely new ones.

It is possible to develop profiles of desirable and undesirable crisis team members from the traits shown in Table 4.1. A desirable member would be low in communication apprehension in groups, high in cooperation, high in ambiguity tolerance, moderate in argumentativeness, have an internal locus of control, have strong self-efficacy, and be well equipped to handle stress. The desirable profile would show that

the crisis team member can work under stress, is not bothered by the ambiguity of a crisis, will work with the team to find the best solution, is willing to express opinions and ideas, has political skills, and is willing to argue the merits and weaknesses of various solutions. An undesirable profile would describe a person high in communication apprehension in groups, high in competitiveness, low in ambiguity tolerance, high in verbal aggressiveness, an external locus of control, weak self-efficacy, and be poorly equipped to handle stress. The undesirable team member functions poorly under stress, feels increased stress in ambiguous situations, works poorly in problem solving by fighting, has limited political skills, and may be unwilling to contribute ideas and opinions. Combining the functional and task-based approaches results in being able to select the most competent crisis management team.

Applications for Training

Crisis experts frequently mention the need to train crisis teams (e.g., Augustine, 1995; Mitroff et al., 1996; Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992; Walsh, 1995; Williams & Olaniran, 1994). In any job, a person must possess the necessary knowledge and skills to perform effectively. Current training practices include a group review of the CCP and crisis drill (Wilsenbilt, 1989). Box 4.2, which is derived from the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) recommendations for training, describes the basic forms of crisis exercises. The types of training are presented in a progression from simplest to most complex. Each requires additional preparation and places greater demands on the crisis team. Natural disasters, workplace violence, and accidents are the most likely crises for which a full-scale exercise is required. The other crises typically do not require going into the field and using equipment; thus, a functional exercise would be the most complex training. A crisis team needs to work its way up to functional and full-scale exercises through the orientation seminars, drills, and tabletops.

BOX 4.2

TRAINING OPTIONS FOR CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Orientation Seminar: An overview of the crisis management process. The crisis team reviews roles, procedures, policies, and equipment.

Drill: A supervised exercise that tests one crisis management function, such as employee notification or evacuation.

Tabletop: A guided analysis of a crisis situation. A facilitator leads the team through a discussion of what they would do in a particular crisis situation. This exercise does not have the time pressures of a real crisis.

Functional Exercise: A simulated interactive exercise. This can be done in a large meeting

room. It tests the complete crisis management system and unfolds in real time to create crisis pressures. The team will need to interact and coordinate with the groups it would encounter in a crisis, such as first responders. The team should conduct one functional exercise a year.

Full-Scale Exercise: The simulation of a real crisis as closely as possible. People are on site and in the field. The actual equipment and people that would be used in a situation are deployed. There will be simulated injuries as well. Full-scale exercises are time-consuming and expensive, so they should be done only every few years.

Discussions of crisis team training are dominated by proponents of practice based on running simulations of crises (Augustine, 1995; Birch, 1994; Mitchell, 1986; Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992; Regester, 1989; Walsh, 1995). There is sound logic to this application; simulations enable the CMT to determine how well it can enact the CCP and how the plan might be improved. Part of group training is determining whether the team can accomplish group tasks (Goldstein, 1993). Crisis simulations emphasize group tasks, with their focus on enacting the CCP. Decision-making is a critical group-level task that demands training attention. While managers know how to make decisions, the decision-making dynamic changes in a team, especially one that must make time-pressured decisions based on limited information. Training can improve the decision-making of teams and of crisis teams.

One promising training tool is called thinkLet. It is a set of facilitation techniques that can aid decision-making during a crisis. Some techniques are as basic as brainstorming options and using a straw poll to have group members evaluate options against a single criterion. The thinkLet idea is derived from group support systems (GSS) from information sciences. GSS is the use of software designed to make teams more effective. GSS can be used to focus and structure team deliberations while reducing cognitive costs to access information and minimizing distractions. A thinkLet aids collaboration among team members. Each thinkLet helps to promote one of five patterns of collaboration that are found to facilitate group decisions: diverge, converge, organize, build consensus, and evaluate. Diverge, for instance, helps the team move from having a few concepts to a larger number of concepts. Brainstorming is one of the diverge thinkLets (Briggs, de Vreede, & Nunamaler, 2003). Work on collaborative teams and crisis teams has shown that thinkLet can facilitate and improve team decisions (Kolfschoten & Appelman, 2006; Kolfschoten, Briggs, de Vreede, Jacobs, & Appelman, 2006).

While useful, the group-level approach to training overlooks the need to train individuals in skills needed to complete CMT tasks. People need individual knowledge and skills to function as effective team members (Paton & Flin, 1999; Stohl & Coombs, 1988). Williams and Olaniran (1994) note that crisis team members must be trained in specific crisis duties, which include the individual-level knowledge and skills needed to be effective team members.

Individual-level assessment would be composed of the knowledge, skills, and traits listed in Table 4.1. The type of assessment of each team member indicates specific areas in which that person is strong or weak and identifies a person's specific training needs. Training should be specific; people should be trained only in those areas in which they are deficient. A crisis team assessment system not only determines a person's strengths and weaknesses but also evaluates a person's progress in acquiring knowledge and skills (Goldstein, 1993). The initial assessment is the benchmark or baseline against which subsequent assessments are compared. Specific training modules should be developed for each of the major knowledge and skills important to a crisis team. When needed, modules designed to help people cope with the limits of specific traits could be added, such as a module designed to develop listening skills.

A 2006 study found that 80% of crisis managers learned how to function in this role on the job. That means only 20% had any training in crisis management ("New

Survey Finds Crisis Training,” 2006). A study of the Fortune 1,000 found that less than one-third of organizations with CCPs ever tested them (Levick, 2005). A study by the American Management Association (2003) found that only 50% of U.S. companies with CCPs have engaged in any type of crisis training in the past year. More recently, a study by IR Insight (2012) and Keyhaven found that globally only 40% of organizations used crisis training. The percentage was higher in Asia (50%) and lower in North America (35%). There was also a large difference in training between mega-capital organizations (a value over \$250 billion) and small-capital organizations (\$250 million to \$1 billion). The crisis training was 61% in mega-capital organizations while only 30% in small-capital organizations (IR Insight, 2012).

This suggests that even many organizations that have CCPs and CMTs are not truly prepared to face a crisis. How can an organization know whether its team members can perform or whether the CCP will work if the team has not trained using some form of crisis exercise? A crisis exercise seeks to simulate a crisis for educational purposes. Team members should know that the purpose is learning, not being critiqued, when they engage in exercises. It is important to create an atmosphere that is supportive rather than punitive in order to maximize the educational benefits of the crisis exercise.

It bears repeating: CMTs need training. Effective training requires the inclusion of both individual-level and group-level knowledge and skills. Crisis exercises are excellent ways to test group-level knowledge and skills. However, part of evaluating the crisis exercise should be dedicated to examining individual-level skills, a point that is missing in most current discussions of crisis team training. Remember, if a team does not exercise, an organization does not really have a dependable CMT or CCP. As Jeremiah Owyang (2011) of the social media consulting firm Altimeter notes, “Building a crisis plan is not sufficient without proper training—companies must practice” (p. 22).

Technology is another reason to hold regular training for crisis teams. New technology is constantly being integrated into crisis management. This includes software to help manage crises and the utilization of social media in monitoring for and responding to crises. If people are not comfortable with technology, they will not use that technology when under stress. Crises create stress; hence, crisis teams that are not comfortable with the new technologies designed to help them respond to crises will ignore those technologies during a crisis. As Owyang (2011) observes, “Those who manage or deploy social media programs require a constant refresh to their skills, as the landscape changes rapidly” (p. 10). As noted throughout this book, social media increasingly is being integrated into crisis management and crisis communication.

Improvisation’s Relationship to Crisis Management Team Training

There is a growing call in crisis teams to recognize the value of improvisation and less emphasis on following the plans. As we shall see in Chapter 5, crisis management is not about following specific steps in a plan as some critics claim (e.g., Gilpin & Murphy,

2008). Crisis communication plans are rough guides that are reference tools when teams make decisions. Most of what a crisis team encounters is not covered in the crisis management plan; that is why this chapter has stressed the importance of decision-making. Improvisation is another skill that is valuable to and should be developed among crisis team members. In organizations, improvisation is when deliberate but unplanned actions are executed to aid the organization in responding to some opportunity or threat (Mendonca, Pina e Cunha, Kaivo-oja, & Ruff, 2004).

Researchers have observed that crisis teams use improvisation much like theater groups and jazz musicians. Crises each develop in a unique environment and crisis plans recognize this fact by not being detailed guides to action. What crisis team members need is training that emphasizes the general approach to crisis management—skills that can be employed in any crisis. That is why I have emphasized the general skills needed by crisis teams. However, using improvisation does not mean there is no guiding strategy (Mendonca et al., 2004) or no need for training (e.g., Vera & Crossan, 2005). Crisis teams must learn the general skills to be able to improvise, just as jazz musicians must have certain musical skills to improvise. Crossan (1998) recommends that crisis team improvisation is enhanced by fostering teamwork and developing individual skills, points covered earlier in this chapter. Part of crisis team improvisation includes creating and following a strategy, which is why the need for being strategic permeates this book. Having a strategy facilitates legitimate improvisation, which serves to help the organization reach its objectives (Bigley & Roberts, 2001).

Karl Weick (2001) has written some influential works about crisis management. He refers to improvisation as “just-in-time strategy”:

Just-in-time strategies are distinguished by less investment in front-end loading (try to anticipate everything that will happen or that you will need) and more investment in general knowledge, a large skill repertoire, the ability to do a quick study, trust in intuitions, and sophistication in cutting losses. (p. 352)

Weick’s quotation captures the relationship between training, crisis management plans, and improvisation. As Chapter 5 explains, crisis communication plans are vague and do not try to anticipate every possible event in a crisis. Such a crisis plan would be impossible to create and nearly impossible to use. Training helps crisis team members to be able to think fast and provides reasons to guide their improvisations. The quick responses are not really instinct or gut feelings but rapid decisions informed by experience and knowledge—expert schemas. Crossan (1998) argues that people overestimate the spontaneous nature of improvisation, causing them to overlook the training behind effective improvisation. Training is vital to creating an improvisation capacity in a crisis team.

Special Considerations

CMTs have three special considerations they may need to address: coordination with external agencies, investigations, and the need for a virtual team. An organization

may find that its crisis is part of a larger disaster, a large-scale event that may require government intervention and involve multiple organizations and agencies. Crises are smaller in scope and may involve just one organization. Disasters include acts of God and acts by humans, such as terrorism and major hazardous material releases. Hurricane Katrina taught organizations not to count on government agencies coming in to help them. However, CMTs may need to coordinate their efforts with firefighters, police, emergency medical teams, or the Red Cross. In disasters, agencies are supposed to follow the incident command system, more specifically, the national incident management system (NIMS; see Box 4.3). CMTs should consult the FEMA website, which contains the complete NIMS training module. While FEMA may be unreliable during some disasters, it offers very good online training. By being familiar with NIMS, CMT members will understand the basic language and chain of command needed to function within the NIMS environment.

A second special consideration is the need for an investigation. Some crises, such as crises involving hazardous chemicals, will require governmental investigations. We frequently hear organizations saying they are “cooperating with an investigation.” But what does that statement mean and how does an organization prepare for an investigation? Cooperating with an investigation means supplying the governmental investigators with logistical support, equipment, and technical experts. Technical experts are relevant to our discussion of CMTs. Prior to a crisis, the CMT can identify possible technical experts for various crises that might require an investigation. Your risk analysis and vulnerability assessment will help you to construct that list. Be sure those individuals have the proper knowledge and skills for the job and that they are aware of their investigative responsibilities during the crisis (A. Beaty, *personal communication*, May 1, 2018).

The third special consideration is the possibility of virtual teams. A virtual team does not meet in a designated crisis control center. Instead, members are assigned tasks, share information, and make decisions via the Internet and telephone with no face-to-face communication. The team uses mediated communication instead. Most virtual teams are really partially distributed teams (PDTs), which involve a mix of people, some in a shared location and some in remote locations. Some team members would be in the same room or area of the field and able to interact face-to-face, while others would be in one or more different geographic locations and linked via mediated communication (Hiltz, 2006). Team members on the scene of a crisis have the ability to interact with team members in various geographic locations. A PDT may be needed if an organization has lost all possible crisis control center locations or needs to assemble a team that is geographically dispersed and if travel time would be prohibitive for managing the crisis. Also, PDT members can begin managing a crisis as soon as they have been contacted. Any team member can begin to execute individual tasks as soon as she or he is notified. If a team has to wait until members arrive at the crisis command center to begin discussions, the team is losing time. In contrast, a PDT can be having team discussions as the members are traveling to their respective locations. However, a PDT increases the risk of problems for the team because any communication technology failure could doom the team. Still, it is worth considering the option of training for virtual teams or PDTs (“The Well-Provisioned War Room,” 2005).

BOX 4.3

NATIONAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (NIMS)

NIMS was developed by the Department of Homeland Security to allow for easier integration of agencies (public and private) that respond to disasters. The system provides a common set of incident command procedures, multi-agency coordination, standardized command and management structures, mutual aid, and public information procedures. The idea is that responders from different jurisdictions and disciplines can work together more effectively to respond to disasters, both natural and terrorist initiated. Government responders from federal,

state, local, and tribal jurisdictions are required to take NIMS training, which is standardized as well. Nongovernment responders, such as corporations, are encouraged to understand NIMS. This is part of a larger effort to maximize the use of private resources during a disaster. NIMS did not seem to perform well during hurricane Katrina, but it had not been in place for very long. Knowledge of the structure and terminology of NIMS would help crisis teams during disasters, as they would fall under the purview of NIMS at that point.

SELECTING AND TRAINING A SPOKESPERSON

The spokesperson is the voice of the organization during the crisis. As such, the spokesperson is a very important and specialized function within the crisis management team. A poorly trained or unskilled spokesperson merely exacerbates the crisis situation (Donath, 1984; Mitchell, 1986). Again, selection and training require the identification of tasks and the knowledge, skills, and traits associated with those tasks. The discussion of the spokesperson begins with an analysis of the spokesperson's role and responsibilities during a crisis, which provide a foundation for locating the requisite knowledge, skills, and traits.

The Spokesperson's Role

The primary responsibility of the spokesperson is to manage the accuracy and consistency of the messages coming from the organization (Carney & Jorden, 1993; Seitel, 1983). Message management is not an easy task and usually involves more than one person. Every organization should have multiple spokespersons. While this may seem to contradict the view that the organization speaks with one voice, really it does not. First, one person cannot be relied upon to be available all of the time. An individual might be on vacation thousands of miles away during a crisis and unable to reach the crisis control center in time. What if the crisis drags on for days, requiring round-the-clock efforts from the CMT? No one person can perform effectively for 24 to 48 hours straight. Eventually, lack of sleep will take its toll on job performance. Therefore, each organization should have a pool of spokespersons, all selected and trained in advance of a crisis.

Second, it is an overstatement to equate the idea of one voice with one person. The concept of an organization speaking with one voice merely implies that the organization presents a consistent message. Working together, multiple spokespersons can share one voice. However, the teamwork so vital to the CMT becomes a premium here. The media want to question authoritative sources during a crisis. No one person in an organization is an authority on every subject. As a result, an organization may have a number of people available during one press conference. Each question is then answered by the person most qualified to address it (Lerbinger, 1997). The key is preparation of all spokespersons, including the sharing of all relevant information and the coordination of the questions and spokespersons.

Clearly, the spokesperson must be able to work with the media by listening and responding to questions. Listening is essential because spokespersons cannot give appropriate answers to questions if they do not hear the question correctly (Stewart & Cash, 1997). Answering questions demands the ability to think quickly. Press conferences are not slow-moving events. The spokesperson must be able to answer questions rapidly. Compounding all of this is the fact that the spokesperson is doing the job in a time of high stress—the organization is in crisis and the media want answers immediately. A spokesperson must be able to handle stress well and not let it interfere with handling media inquiries. The spokesperson is a member of the crisis team, so all the knowledge, skills, and traits in Table 4.1 still apply. However, the big difference between spokespersons and other crisis team members stems from the need to work with the media.

Crisis experts continually recommend that the spokesperson have media training, which usually means practice responding to media questions: The spokesperson goes through rehearsals (Nicholas, 1995; Sonnenfeld, 1994). Furthermore, there is a variety of laundry lists for what spokespersons should and should not do (e.g., Katz, 1987; Lukaszewski, 1987; Pines, 1985). A sample list of spokesperson dos and don'ts includes being truthful, never saying “no comment,” being concise and clear, never losing one's temper or arguing with journalists, correcting errors or misinformation in questions that are asked, looking pleasant on camera, and appearing in control and concerned. While such lists are helpful, they fail to provide a systematic means of either selecting or training spokespersons.

I have helped organizations train spokespersons and determine who should and should not speak to the media. Trust me, not everyone can be an effective spokesperson.

Media-Specific Tasks of the Spokesperson

From watching television, we all recognize that some people are well suited to media appearances and others are not. Some people look good on television, and others look like criminals (Nicholas, 1995). One task of the spokesperson is to be appealing to the viewers, but this does not mean that the person must be physically attractive. Rather, he or she must present material in an attractive fashion. Media training is often vague in explaining how to do this. Similar to the section on CMTs, Table 4.2 summarizes the primary tasks of spokespersons along with the salient knowledge, skills, and traits necessary to perform the pertinent tasks.

A mix of content and delivery concerns confronts any spokespersons giving public presentations. Content concerns emphasize the information being presented. Spokespersons must disseminate accurate information about the crisis situation (Mitchell, 1986; Trahan,

1993). Spokespersons must also have command over the crisis-related information if they are to convey this information to the media and other stakeholders. However, poor delivery skills can prevent a message from being received accurately (Holladay & Coombs, 1994; McCroskey, 1997). Spokespersons must be skilled at presenting messages to the target stakeholders, in this case the media. Each of the four spokesperson tasks will now be explained, along with an analysis of the task's connection to content and delivery.

TABLE 4.2 ■ Spokesperson Media Task Analysis

Task Statement	Knowledge	Skills	Traits
Appear pleasant on camera	1. Understand the value of proper delivery	1. Strong delivery	1. Low communication apprehension
Answer questions effectively	1. Understand the danger of long pauses 2. Understand the steps to effective listening 3. Appreciate the danger of "no comment" statements 4. Understand the danger of arguing with reporters	1. Ability to think quickly 2. Ability to use the steps to effective listening 3. Ability to use phrases other than "no comment" when an answer is not currently known 4. Ability to stay calm under pressure	1. High stress tolerance 2. Low verbal aggressiveness
Present crisis information clearly	1. Appreciate the problems with jargon 2. Understand the need to structure responses	1. Ability to avoid the use of jargon 2. Ability to organize responses	
Handle difficult questions	1. Understand the characteristics of tough questions	1. Ability to identify tough questions 2. Ability to ask for questions to be reworded 3. Ability to preface tough questions in a tactful manner 4. Ability to challenge incorrect information in a question 5. Ability to explain why a question cannot be answered 6. Ability to evaluate the appropriateness of multiple-choice responses in a question 7. Ability to respond to questions with multiple parts	1. Low argumentativeness

Appearing Pleasant on Camera

The importance of appearing pleasant on camera does not stem from a superficial observation that the spokesperson should look good. Instead, being pleasant on camera reflects a set of delivery skills that helps the spokesperson achieve a number of important crisis objectives. Previously it was noted that the crisis management team must show concern and control during a crisis. Part of the perception of concern and control is developed through the way a spokesperson presents the crisis-related information. One way to better understand delivery is to consider it as part of communicator style, the way a person communicates; it reflects the way something is communicated (Norton, 1983). Communicator style also influences how the content of the message is interpreted by providing a frame for how people should view the content of a message (Holladay & Coombs, 1994).

Spokespersons should maximize the style elements that cultivate the perceptions of control and compassion. Compassion is developed through the attentive and friendly style elements. Attentive styles reflect empathy and listening. Being friendly suggests that a person is confirming and giving positive recognition to others (Norton, 1983). The attentive and friendly style elements help to cultivate the perception that the spokesperson is compassionate because compassionate people are empathetic and confirming. The dominant style elements mean a person is behaving in a confident and businesslike manner (Norton, 1983). The dominant style facilitates the perception that the spokesperson is in control of the situation.

Maximizing these three style elements requires attention to specific delivery factors. Spokespersons must learn to maintain consistent eye contact with the audience (looking at the audience or camera at least 60% of the time), use hand gestures to emphasize points, vary their voices to avoid a monotone delivery, be sure to change facial expressions to avoid being blank faced, and avoid too many verbal disfluencies, such as *uh*, *er*, and *um*. Spokespersons should be trained to maximize these five delivery variables when they present material to the media and other stakeholders. Research indicates that these variables promote the perception of dominance, attentiveness, and friendliness as well as increase credibility (Burgoon, Birk, & Pfau, 1990; Holladay & Coombs, 1994). It is logical to conclude that spokespersons will be perceived more positively by stakeholders when maximizing these five delivery factors.

There is a flipside to delivery as well. Poor delivery leads to negative perceptions of the spokesperson. Poor delivery skills are often interpreted as signs of deception (de Turck & Miller, 1985; Feeley & de Turck, 1995). People doubt the believability of a message when these delivery factors are present: (a) weak eye contact, looking at people infrequently; (b) frequent disfluencies; (c) the use of abnormal hand or arm movements associated with fidgeting; and (d) overuse of hand gestures (de Turck & Miller, 1985; Feeley & de Turck, 1995). These are among the clues people look for when trying to detect deception.

Although delivery has always been an important part of the presentation of a public message (Heinberg, 1963; McCroskey, 1997), content can never be forgotten because good delivery does not make up for lack of content. Good delivery enhances the reception of a message; poor delivery detracts from it. Spokespersons should be trained to maximize the delivery factors that promote control and compassion while minimizing those that contribute to perceptions of deception. All of the delivery factors mentioned thus far can be taught. However, it helps if people do not exhibit the communication apprehension

trait when speaking in public. While communication apprehension can be overcome, spokespersons who are not communication apprehensive start out at a higher delivery proficiency level. Media training for spokespersons should include efforts to make them aware of their delivery habits and to polish their delivery skills. Having trainees watch videos of their press conferences is an excellent method for improving delivery skills.

Researchers have begun to examine how specific delivery and appearance factors affect perceptions of crisis communications. In terms of delivery, the focus has been on pitch (high or low) and speech rate (fast or slow). A lower pitch is perceived as more powerful while a higher pitch is considered more sincere. Research has found that a lower pitch voice has the most positive effect immediately after a crisis while a high pitch voice is preferable during the postcrisis period (later responses). Stakeholders seem to prefer a powerful voice in the initial response because it inspires confidence, but in later responses, a more powerless voice facilitates perceptions of sincerity (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2014). It seems useful for spokespersons to learn to vary their pitch to meet the demands of the crisis situation.

Further research was conducted to examine the combined effects of voice pitch and speech rate during an apology. The researchers found two combinations were the most effective. The organization's reputation was stronger after an apology if lower pitch was paired with the slow speech rate or the high pitch was paired with the fast speech rate. Their conclusion is that the right pairing of speech rate and voice pitch created higher levels of vocal attractiveness. In turn, vocal attractiveness was part of the reason for the improved reputation from an apology (De Waele, Claeys, & Cauberghe, 2017). This is more evidence that delivery does affect the crisis response strategies and provides some additional insights for spokespersons.

Researchers have also considered how spokespeople look by comparing baby-faced and mature-faced spokespersons during a crisis. A baby-faced spokesperson looks young and creates a perception of innocence that creates more favorable evaluations of the organization and the spokesperson. However, when the crisis was severe, there was no positive advantage for the baby-faced spokesperson. Furthermore, the cause of the crisis determined if the mature-faced or baby-faced was the preferred spokesperson. The mature-faced spokesperson was more effective when the crisis was caused by a failure of vigilance (human error) while the baby-faced spokesperson was more preferable when the crisis was a result of potential dishonesty (Gorn, Jiang, & Johar, 2008). There may be times when baby-faced or mature-faced could affect the selection of a crisis spokesperson.

Answering Questions Effectively

Answering questions effectively means providing responses to the questions that are asked. Preparation is essential for effective answers. Spokespersons must know or be able to quickly retrieve the crisis information that has been collected to that point. Another part of answering the question is listening to hear the question. Spokespersons should not answer the questions they wanted to be asked; they must hear and respond to the very questions asked by reporters. Remember, spokespersons can give introductory remarks or a short briefing before fielding questions. They can use that time to deliver the core crisis message from the organization.

Sometimes the spokesperson does not know the answer. The correct response is to admit what you do not know but promise to deliver the information as soon as you get it (Stewart & Cash, 1997). Remember the rule to never say “no comment.” That phrase triggers two negative events. First, 65% of stakeholders who hear or see “no comment” equate it with an admission of guilt (“In a Crisis,” 1993). As David Pendery, senior manager of public relations for Quiznos, says, “Anytime you decline to comment on a known crisis you’ll appear naïve at best, incompetent at worst” (quoted in Hall, 2006, para. 3). Second, “no comment” is a form of silence, which is a very passive response. As Richard Levick (2005), of Levick Strategic Communications, notes, “There are two sides to every story, and when you say ‘no comment’ the media gets the entire story and you don’t get your side of the story” (para. 14). In a crisis, being passive means that other actors in the crisis event get to speak and to interpret the crisis for your stakeholders (Hearit, 1994). The organization is allowing others who may be ill informed, misinformed, or who may hold a grudge against the organization to define the crisis for stakeholders. An interpretation based on the wrong information or information supplied by an enemy can only hurt an organization’s reputation.

A spokesperson also must be cordial and not argue with reporters (Mackinnon, 1996; Nicholas, 1995). Being cordial brings us back to the personality traits of a good crisis team member. A spokesperson should not be high in verbal aggressiveness or argumentativeness. Either trait can lead to a dispute with reporters. This does not mean that a spokesperson lets incorrect statements stand. Instead, she or he corrects any errors or misinformation before answering a question but should not debate the error or misinformation (Mackinnon, 1996). Handling stress is a part of answering questions, too. An inability to handle stress reduces a spokesperson’s ability to answer questions effectively because too much stress erodes task performance in general. Stress is high during media encounters because of the time pressure, the need to answer multiple questions from a variety of reporters (Balik, 1995), and the awareness of the huge number of possible hearers or readers. Participation in a mock crisis press conference is the best way to get a feel for the challenges a spokesperson faces.

Presenting Crisis Information Clearly

Presenting information clearly focuses on the content of the response. As such, presenting information is related to answering questions effectively but has a narrower focus: ensuring that the stakeholders are able to understand what is said. The spokesperson’s answers must be clear and concise. *Clear* means the answer is free of organizational jargon and overly technical terms and details (Mackinnon, 1996). Jargon is meaningless to those outside of the circle using it (Nicholas, 1995); as a result, it only clouds an answer. Overly technical information produces the same hazy reception of the message. In addition, “technobabble” makes people think the organization is using jargon to avoid telling the truth. It is best to use only the necessary technical information and explain it in such a way that nontechnical people can understand it. PepsiCo’s handling of its 1993 syringe scare exemplifies how to translate technical information. In June 1993, reports began to surface that syringes were being found in cans of Diet Pepsi. PepsiCo chose to focus on how it would be virtually impossible for a syringe to get into the can during bottling. The company reduced its bottling process to easily understandable terms for the news

BOX 4.4

MERCK'S TECHNICAL RESPONSE

VIOXX is an anti-inflammatory drug used to treat arthritis and acute pain. On September 30, 2004, Merck, the maker of VIOXX, recalled the product from the market. Merck made the voluntary recall when one of its clinical studies showed a connection between VIOXX and cardiovascular events, such as heart attacks and strokes. A clinical study uses careful control and treatment conditions to prove a cause-and-effect relationship between two things. This particular clinical study was designed to test the ability of VIOXX to help treat colorectal adenomas. In this case, VIOXX seemed to cause cardiovascular events.

Shortly after the recall, many in the medical community claimed Merck had known of the potential connection between VIOXX and cardiovascular events for years. A study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (Mukherjee, Nissen, & Topol, 2001) indicated that

there was a connection. Now consumers had to wonder, "Should Merck have recalled VIOXX sooner?" Merck's answer was "no." The company explained that the published study was based on a meta-analysis, which looks at a variety of studies for trends. Meta-analyses do not have the strict control and treatment conditions found in a clinical study. From a research methods perspective, other factors could have been responsible for the link between VIOXX and cardiovascular events found in the study published by the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Merck said it acted when it had clear cause-effect proof from a clinical study. Much of the research methods jargon and details had been trimmed from this description, but even this reduced version was highly technical. Probably few of Merck's consumers had the depth of knowledge needed to appreciate its argument.

media and its consumers. PepsiCo believed and later proved the syringe scare was a hoax (Magiera, 1993; Mohr, 1994; Weinstein, 1993; Zinn & Regan, 1993). Clarity is aided by careful organization of a response (Stewart & Cash, 1997). An organized answer is easier to understand than a rambling one. Box 4.4 provides a short case of an organization that had difficulty presenting information clearly.

Handling Difficult Questions

During a press conference, not all questions are of equal caliber. Watching any press conference on television makes apparent the frequent exceedingly long and complicated questions, questions that are multiple questions (asking for several pieces of information), tricky or tough questions, questions that are based on erroneous information, and multiple-choice questions with unacceptable choice options. These five examples, each of which has identifiable features, represent the difficult questions faced by a spokesperson. The spokesperson must learn to recognize difficult questions and to respond appropriately. Recognition involves practicing listening to questions delivered in the press conference format.

Recognition is easier than providing responses to tough questions. Still, there are response strategies for each of the five tough questions. For long, complicated questions, ask for the question to be repeated, rephrased, or explained. These strategies give the media representative a chance to improve the question's wording and clarity while

providing the spokesperson with more time to construct a response. Multiple questions in one question can be handled in one of two ways. First, the spokesperson can choose which part of the question to respond to, selecting the part of the question that fits best with providing the organization's desired message. Second, the spokesperson can address all parts of the question. When responding to all or multiple parts of a question, the spokesperson should number each part and the answer to each part. The additional structure helps to clarify the answer for other audience members.

Questions that are tricky or tough need a tactful preface to the answer. The spokesperson must convey to the audience that the question is tough or tricky and that a longer-than-usual answer is needed to address the question. It may also be the case that the question cannot be answered, and the spokesperson must explain why (Stewart & Cash, 1997). A question based on erroneous information must be challenged and corrected (Nicholas, 1995). The spokesperson must make sure that misinformation is removed from the crisis information being presented at the press conference. For multiple-choice questions, the spokesperson must determine whether the response options are fair (Stewart & Cash, 1997). Why should a spokesperson choose a response when the two options might have the organization categorized as being heartless or stupid? The spokesperson should explain that the options are unreasonable or inappropriate and develop an option that fits with the appropriate answer to the question. Training helps a spokesperson identify and develop effective responses to difficult questions.

CRISIS APPLICATION

POSSIBLE CRISES

One way to begin applying many of the concepts in this book is to use them to examine how two different types of organizations might prepare for crisis. Either as a group or individually, list the possible crises that could hit your organization if you worked for a large vacation resort.

Now create a possible crisis list that might apply if you worked for a company that manufactured pharmaceuticals. Consider the wide range of personnel, geographic, and operations risks. Your lists will probably be longer than you first thought they would be.

Spokespersons in a Digital World

Social media has added a new wrinkle for the spokesperson: starring in your own videos. There seem to be plenty of corporate leaders appearing in YouTube videos to offer apologies to their stakeholders. Here are six examples: (1) Domino's CEO Patrick Doyle for the product-tampering video, (2) JetBlue CEO David Neeleman for trapping passengers in planes for up to 14 hours, (3) KFC President Roger Eaton for the Oprah grilled-chicken giveaway fiasco, (4) Mattel CEO Bob Eckert for three toy recalls in four

weeks, (5) Maple Leaf Foods President/CEO Michael McCain for a Listeria outbreak, and (6) United Airlines CEO Jim Goodwin for stranding passengers. The need to appear pleasant on camera is magnified in social media. Stakeholders can replay the corporate message and post their comments and critiques. While Patrick Doyle and Domino's were praised for his YouTube apology, many of the YouTube comments were not favorable. Here is a sampling of the critiques:

- He isn't looking at the camera because he might burst into laughter. I'm sure he doesn't believe his own words. As we speak, we don't know how many other sandwiches are in the process of being molested.
- Cmon the least the CEO can do is look at the camera direct and be more presentable (open collard shirt?). Where is the PR at? You guys are not on your job.
- Why Read Teleprompter SPEAK FROM THE HEART!
- Urgency with sincerity is key, not disingenuous crisis mode by reading teleprompters then publishing written statements . . . "we have no evidence the food was served. . . ."
- Should have looked into the camera or hired a proper teleprompter.

Even though a corporate video is a controlled medium, the delivery advice for spokespersons still is critically important. No corporate response video should go out if it does not appear genuine and sincere. Again, eye contact and other delivery factors that combat perceptions of deception are the keys. As any media trainer will tell you, not all managers are meant to be in video. Effective videos take practice and, when it is your video, multiple takes.

CRISIS LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

PROMOTE RESILIENCE

Crisis leaders need to set a resiliency tone for the organization. When an organization faces a serious crisis, one that could destroy the organization, there is fear of the crisis creating a downward spiral. Crisis leaders need to emphasize not only that the organization will recover but that it will thrive. Working toward a positive outcome during a crisis is a type of resilience. Critical components of resilience include learning new skills, being able to handle

a variety of situations, and improving competencies (James & Wooten, 2010). This chapter's discussion of crisis team training reflects the need to promote resilience. Crisis team training is resilience training. Training allows team members to learn new skills, to be ready for a variety of situations, and to improve competencies. Training also should promote creativity as teams are challenged to develop new and useful ideas when confronting simulated crises.

RESILIENCE: TRAINING FOR ALL EMPLOYEES

Resilience is an increasingly popular concept in crisis management. We often think of resilience as an organization's ability to bounce back from a crisis. To be more specific, resilience is the ability to not lose normal functioning when confronted by a risk, threat, or harm (Bardoel, Pettit, De Cieri, & McMillan, 2014). At its core, resilience is about how the people who comprise the organization respond to a crisis—resilience is an individual behavior. Resilient people draw upon their capabilities of durability—the knowledge, skills, abilities, and processes that aid resilience (Williams et al., 2017). One way for an organization to build resilience is to enhance employee resilience through training. I believe that employee resilience training should be part of crisis preparing.

People exhibit resilient behaviors when they leverage social networks, learn from experiences, and adapt to situations (Kuntz, Malinen, & Näswall, 2017). Social connections are relational capability endowments people will draw upon when attempting to meet a challenge (Williams et al., 2017). Human resource experts believe resilience can be improved through training (e.g., Britt, Shen, Sinclair, Grossman, & Klieger, 2016). Three essential points to cover in employee resilience training are the following: (1) social support, learn how to provide and to seek social support; (2) stress management and coping, learn to process and respond adaptively to the emotions created by a crisis; and (3) self-efficacy for problem solving, teach people how to solve problems and to use their personal assets (Bardoel et al., 2014; Britt et al., 2016; Kuntz et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2017). Organizations and individuals have been shown to benefit from resilience training (Bardoel et al., 2014). Moreover, organizations must provide the resources necessary beyond just training to allow employees to enhance their resilience (Kuntz et al., 2017).

CONCLUSION

The preparation phase of crisis management anticipates the occurrence of crises. The organization musters the resources necessary to effectively manage the crises that may befall it. Diagnosing vulnerabilities assesses the likelihood and impact of potential organizational crises, and crisis types are groupings of similar crises. An organization cannot prepare for all crises but can prepare for the major crisis types. The diagnosis of vulnerabilities and the information about crisis types are used to construct the crisis portfolio, the individual crisis plans for each of the major crisis types.

The crisis team is responsible for managing the actual crisis. Therefore, it is essential to carefully select and fully train each crisis team member. The spokesperson is a specialized role within the crisis management process and provides a vital link to stakeholders. Spokespersons also must be carefully selected and thoroughly trained. Failure to select and train crisis team members and spokespersons methodically is a recipe for disastrous crisis management. In addition, a crisis team is lost without a crisis management plan. Chapter 5 concludes our discussion of crisis preparation by focusing on the plan and the crisis control center.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What other types of crises would you add to the list presented in this chapter?
2. In June 2016, a 2-year-old boy was killed by an alligator near Disney's Grand Floridian Resort and Spa at Disney World. Who at Disney would the news media want at a press conference? Would the CEO be a good choice? Why or why not?
3. What barriers are there to getting an accurate diagnosis of an organization's vulnerabilities? What can be done to overcome those barriers?
4. As a group, select a particular company and create a potential list of vulnerabilities it might face. Then try to assign values to each of those threats.
5. Do you agree or disagree that the delivery factors are useful in creating effective online videos during a crisis?
6. Why is it important to consider soft skills when creating a CMT?
7. How would you assess your own political skills?
8. What would your strengths and weaknesses be as a crisis team member?
9. What would your strengths and weaknesses be as a crisis spokesperson?
10. What types of training do you think would be most useful for crisis teams? Why?
11. What is intuition and when is it beneficial in decision-making? When is it problematic?
12. What is the relationship between improvisation and training?
13. Why is it a good idea to not limit resilience training just to members of the crisis team?