CRISIS and CONFLICT MANAGEMENT
• Crisis management – very critical organization function
• A **crisis** is defined as a significant threat to operations that can have negative consequences on the organization, if not attended to.
• A major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting the organization or industry as well as its publics, products, services and its good name.
• It threatens the reputation and integrity of an organization
- Threats could refer to any situation that can:
  - Compromise Public safety
  - Lead to Financial loss
  - Lead to Reputation loss
A crisis management plan (CMP) is a tool or plan that is used to prevent or minimize damage a crisis can inflict on an organization and its different stakeholders.

The plan seeks the best outcome for the organization and its publics.

**Purpose of a crisis management plan**

- Designed to prevent and limit damage
- Used to identify potential crisis and put in place strategies to respond
- Sets out how damage can or should be limited
Anticipating a crisis and planning

- To deal with a crisis requires one to: 1) anticipate a crisis and 2) plan how a crisis, if it occurs, will be managed.
- List all kinds of crises that the organization is likely to face and prepare for the worst.
  - Analyze your business
  - Assess the risks
  - Develop a strategy
  - Develop a plan (who does what)
  - Rehearse your plan
Types of crisis management plan (CMP)

- CMP to deal with a crisis due to an organization’s internal operational problem
- CMP to deal with employee disputes
- CMP to deal with loss of service due to technical problems
- CMP to deal with an incident that threatens lives of the publics
- CMP to manage attacks on the organization from lobby groups or activist groups
Four Strategies for crisis management

- **Monitor** – get all the information available and make a thorough assessment of the facts. Assess the situation and how it is changing.

- **Manage** – decide on the key messages you need to give to stakeholders and the best method to reach each group. Prepare spokespersons to speak to the media.

- **Respond** – Respond quickly and give the public and the media no room to speculate. Rumors and speculation may be far more damaging than the original crisis. Communicate to stakeholders through appropriate channels, both traditional media and new media.

- **Reassess** – regardless of the strength of your communications, some stakeholders will remain unhappy. In such situations, it is important to decide how an organization will respond. If there is still a need to change opinion, an appropriate communication can be developed and in some cases it may be an option to stay quiet.
Dealing with a crisis

- There are three stages
  - pre-crisis,
  - crisis response,
  - post-crisis
• **Pre-crisis**
  • Involves creating a crisis management plan (blue-print)
  • details all necessary information for dealing with a crisis
  • lists of key contact information, reminders of what typically should be done in a crisis, and forms to be used to document the crisis response
  • pre-assign tasks

1. **Identify a crisis management team**
  • Typical members of the crisis team include:
    – public relations,
    – legal,
    – security,
    – operations, finance, and human resources.
  • Nature of crisis determines the composition of a crisis team
2. **Train the team**
   - Use simulations to train the team on how to respond to a crisis
   - Dealing with the media is one key aspect of responding to crisis
   - Train a spokesperson on how to talk to the media.

3. **Pre-draft messages**
   - Pre-draft messages to be used during a crisis.
   - Create templates for crisis messages
   - Identifying a specific communication channel for information relating to the crisis
   - Mass notification system can be considered
In planning
- Make it clear who needs to do what
- Use checklists that people can follow
- Have clear and direct instructions
- Update the plan
- Capture the most important information
- Plan for worst-case scenarios
• **Crisis Response**
  – What is done and said after the crisis occurs
  – Messages sent to various publics can be useful as a response to a crisis

• crisis response requires on to be:
  – **be quick**
    • respond as soon as possible to avoid information vacuum being created by a crisis.
    • Position yourself as the source of the story (advantage of an early response)
  – **be accurate**
    • provide correct information and
    • speak with one voice (be consistent in the message)
  – **be consistent.**

• Publics must be first priority
• Use all available communication channels
• Express sympathy and prepare to provide trauma and counseling
Types of crisis response

- Refuting accusations and providing evidence
- Denying existence of a crisis (denial)
- Organization has done everything in its control to prevent crisis and not at fault (no control over events that led to a crisis)
- Acknowledge problem and explain way forward (steps are taken to repair the damage from the crisis)
- Acknowledge problem and downplay its impact (no serious damage or injuries- sometimes victims are blamed)
- Ingratiation- actions are taken to appease the publics involved.
- Accept blame, apologize and explain what the organization is doing to make things right.
- **Post-crisis stage**
  - crisis is no longer the focal point of management’s attention but still requires some attention
  - follow-up communication- fulfill all promises made during the crisis
  - release updates on the recovery process, corrective actions, and/or investigations of the crisis.
  - Assess the effectiveness of the plan (see what is working and what needs improvement)
Important Principles of Crisis Management

• Do not stonewall- avoid no comment response (no comment almost means that the organization is guilty)
• Respond quickly and be honest
• Be accessible and put the public first
• Get all the facts together- provide a constant flow of information (no withholding of information)
• Maintain consistency in the message (designate a single spokesperson)
• Apologize if at fault (take responsibility to solve the problem)
• Provide credible explanation
• Monitor news coverage and telephone inquiries
• Move on
Conflict Management

• Conflict occurs when two groups direct their efforts against each other, devising actions and communication that directly or verbally attack the other group.

• Any disagreement or collision of interests and ideas can be considered to be a *conflict*.

• Occurs when, for example, labour unions pressure companies to unionize or when pressure groups lobby against supporting activities of certain organizations or when government regulations are enacted that may curtail operations.
The conflict management cycle

- Strategic management of conflict can be divided into four phases:
  - Proactive
  - Strategic
  - Reactive
  - Recovery
Proactive Phase

- Includes activities and processes that can prevent a conflict from arising or getting out of hand
- **Environmental scanning** - constant reading, listening and watching of current affairs with an eye to the organization’s interest
- **Issues tracking** - more focussed and systematic processes of tracking the development of issues i.e. consider daily clipping of news stories
- **Issues management** - making behavioural changes or creating strategic plans in ways that address the emerging issues
- **Crisis planning** - develop a crisis plan as the first step in preparing for the worst. A strategy called ‘stealing thunder’ can be used to disclose its crisis before it is discovered by the media or interested parties.
Strategic Phase

- An issue has become an emerging conflict and needs concerted effort or action to address it.

- **Risk communication**: dangers or threats to people or organizations are conveyed to forestall personal injury, health problems and environmental damage. Continues as long as the risk exists.

- **Conflict positioning**: enables the organization to position itself favourably in anticipation of actions such as boycotts.
  - Communicate information that places the organization favourably regarding a conflict or anticipated conflict.

- **Crisis management**: when an issue resists communication efforts, a crisis management plan must be used.
Reactive Phase

- When conflict reaches a critical level of impact on the organization, PROs must react to events in the external communication environment

- **Crisis communication**: implementing the crisis management plan and ensuring continuous efforts to meet the needs of publics

- **Litigation PR**: employs communication strategies and publicity efforts in support of legal actions

- **Conflict resolution**: resolution techniques used to bring heated conflict to a favourable resolution
Recovery Phase

- After a heated conflict, the organization must employ strategies to bolster or repair its image.

  - **Reputation management**: systematic research to learn the state of organizations reputation and then take steps to improve it.
    - Poorly managed issues and callous responses damage the reputation of the organization.

  - **Image restoration**: strategies that can help rebuild organization’s image.
    - Sincerity and genuine change by the organization is important for image restoration.
References