

Crisis Management Plans: Handling the Press

Organisations can find themselves involved in a crisis at any time for any number of reasons. High profile examples such as the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico aptly demonstrates the damage that disasters can cause a business.

What is it?

Companies that take the time to consider the types of disasters that it may face and prepares a management plan to deal with it, can recover from a crisis more favourably than those that do not plan.

Developing a crisis management plan is about putting in place steps that can aid a speedy and co-ordinated outcome to the disaster. The crisis management plan will depend on the cause of the crisis:

Economic – drastic financial impact of competitive markets or products on the business

Managerial – straightforward human error or the result of a decision taken that has unforeseen consequences

Political – changes in government policy

Environmental – natural disasters or the impact of climate change

Consumers – becoming more demanding and increasingly organised in groups for lobbying purposes

Technology – the introduction of new technology on existing business processes as well as the risk of cyber attacks

Social media – modern communications not only pose a risk as a source of a crisis but also quickly shares and magnifies any crisis facing an organisation.

What strategies can be deployed in a crisis?

Depending the cause and extent of the crisis, there are 5 general strategies that a business can deploy:

1. Denial – straightforward rejection that the business is responsible or shifting the blame to another party

2. Evasion – looking to avoid responsibility by claiming the incident was an accident, it occurred despite good intentions, or due to lack of time or information

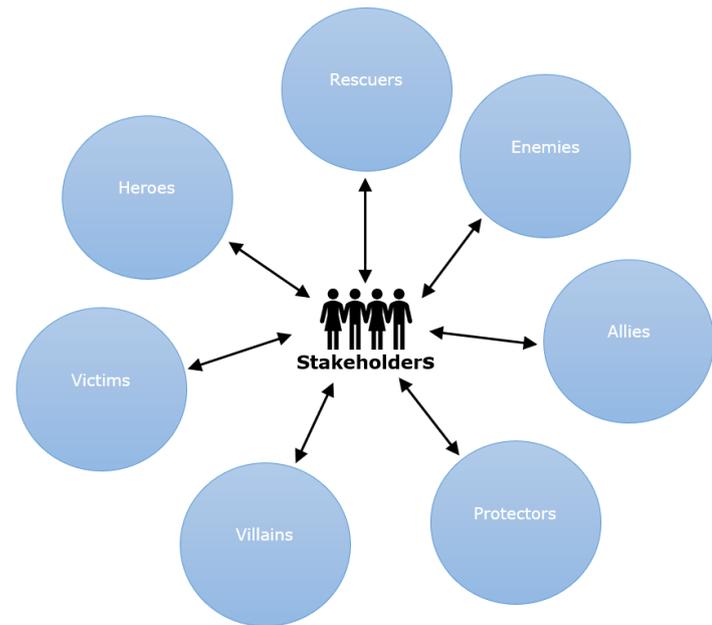
3. Reduction – which either means taking action to reduce the effect of the crisis or by demonstrating that the incident is not as serious as first highlighted

4. Correction – putting right what has been damaged and taking steps to ensure it doesn't happen again

5. Apology – issuing an apology and expressing regret for causing the incident

Who to consider when developing a crisis management plan

The way in which a company should respond to a crisis will differ depending on who is affected and how. Different stakeholders will have different roles. Therefore the crisis plans should reflect how each of these stakeholders need to be managed and what their information needs will be.



What to consider when handling the press

The crisis management plan will cover who has authority to speak to the press. Generally it will be representatives from the senior management team who may even have had formal media training. Staff in the organisation need to know is how to contact them in the event of an emergency and what information they are likely to need. Consideration should also be given to what happens if the nominated people cannot be reached.

Many organisations have a dedicated resource to handle press enquiries via their marketing, PR and/or communications department. They will have plans on how to manage a crisis that covers:

- Which media must be contacted first
- Who has sign off and authorisation to release statements to the press

- Any prepared holding statements to give out to the media. A holding statement usually acknowledges awareness of the issue, regret for any damage or distress (if relevant), that something is being done and when further comment can be made.

All staff should be aware that members of the press will use many methods to gain their trust in order to get information. Commenting on the crisis needs to be restricted to reiterating public company messages as anything further may be taken out of context.

Why is it important to me?

Being aware of the potential sources of crises is important for supervisors and managers in ensuring that they reduce the risk of them occurring in the first place. Supervisors and managers should be aware of their own organisations crisis management plans and policies on speaking to the press.

IQ believes that understanding crisis management is an important skill for professionals working in the quarrying and minerals products industry. It features on our **Skills Wheel** which captures all the key skill and knowledge areas we believe are vital to successful career development in the industry.

Where Next?

Institute of Quarrying

IQ supports professionals working within the quarrying and minerals products industry through membership and training. These factsheets are produced across a range of topics to share ideas and best practice. Further information can be found via the resources section on the IQ website www.quarrying.org.