

## **CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC RELATIONS**

Crisis is inevitable in the life of any corporate organization. So, whenever it occurs, the onus lies on the public relations officer to manage the crises. The public relations officer also tries to nip the crisis in the bud by taking some measures. The essence of this article therefore is to teach the basic things you ought to know and organizations should know before the start of **year 2021** in crisis management.

### **Meaning and Nature of Corporate Crisis**

Crisis is “a period or moment of great danger, difficulty, or uncertainty, especially in politics or economics”. Corporate organizations often anticipate crisis and when they do the common thing will be to take pro-active measure to nip the impending crisis in the bud.

However, pro-active measures often task practitioners to take actions capable of checking crisis situation from snowballing into full crisis. The essence is to avert the likely image problems the impending crisis may cause the organization if allowed to implode.

On the other hand, there are occasions pro-active measure may not actually forestall a crisis from occurring. So, when the crisis occurs reactive approach becomes the most effective means of managing the problem. The implication is that there are two broad ways or approaches to managing crisis– the proactive and reactive approaches. Which of these approaches to be applied in crisis management depends on the nature of the crisis? Black (1989:13) isolates two broad categories of crisis as:

### **Known and Unknown**

Unlike known unknown crisis, the unknown crisis can hardly be predicted nor anticipated. It just takes the organization by surprise. Unknown crises are “sudden calamitous events that cannot be foreseen by anybody.” It is hardly anticipated and when it occurs, the affected organization must react to the issue concerned so the approach for managing this kind of crisis is the reactive approach. The above clearly shows that “crisis is of two major modes which are predictable (or anticipated) and unpredictable (or unanticipated) crises”.

## **Major Sources of Corporate Crises**

It is important to note that sources in this context are the same as causes. It implies situations and/or corporate actions that can cause crisis if not properly managed. Some of factors to cause crises are:

1. A takeover bid: A planned takeover of ownership and management of a company can lead to crisis if the members of staff of the organization are not certain that the security of their job will be guaranteed.
2. Product tampering: which usually occurs when the consumers of product suspect that the quality of the product has been tampered to the negative.
3. Flood, fire, storm or drought which is caused by natural phenomena like the flooding in some of Kenyan areas. Also, accidents like plane crashes e.g. (Kenya airways Boing 737-800NG KQ507 crash in Douala, Cameroon in May 5, 2007) can cause crisis.
4. Faulty product which usually occurs when the product fails to perform the functions claimed by the advertiser.
5. Challenges and changes to leadership can also induce crisis where the change is deemed to be unfair or “where the new leader manifest evidence of inexperience, ineptitude, corruption and lack of focus.”
6. Industrial dispute which emanates from dispute between one department of an organization and another; between the management and staff; between the organization and the host community; or between the management and the stakeholders etc.
7. A terrorist action like the bombing of the American Embassy in Nairobi and attack of WestGate Mall.

## **Stages for Managing Crisis**

Crisis management is the process of dealing with usually dangerous or difficult situation. Given that crisis is inevitable, every organization should have well-articulated means of dealing with both predictable and unpredictable crisis.

On a general note however, the procedures for managing crisis are in three broad categories these are:

**1. Pre - crisis measures** which entails planning for potential crisis. Pre-crisis measure would therefore, require the public relations officers to advise their organizations' management to:

- a) Always ensure it conducts its activities in line with the corporate objectives and the socio-culture, political, economic trends and the legal provision within their areas of operation.
- b) Engage on periodic risk audit as the organization expands in terms of operational special, volume of production or services staff strength etc.
- c) Strive to cultivate public confidence in advance since it has been established that “if people known and trust the organization, it will be far easier for you to maintain that trust in difficult times”.
- d) Create a risk or crisis management team that should thinker out concrete and practicable strategies on the procedures for managing crisis
- e) Decide in advance who should be the spokes person or persons in time of challenge.
- f) Ensure that the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) does not double as the spokesperson.
- g) Expose the members of the crisis management team to periodic media training and retraining

**2. On-the-crisis Management Measures.** The emphasis here is on the tactics that is the actual execution of crisis management strategies. The functional tactics for managing crisis included but not limited to:

- a) Understand the nature, extent and impact of the crisis.
- b) Accept blames and responsibilities; never deny or denounce the existing problem
- c) Operate an open policy and promptly communicate action to all stakeholders.
- d) Map out planes to solve the problem so that it will never re-occur
- e) Show concern to victims, let affected parties understand that you care
- f) Do not count your losses in public. Let that be for management consumption only.
- g) Be ready to pay compensation to victims. It is your cross, bear it boldly.
- h) The Chief Executive should lead the way in communicating crisis resolution programs; being self – evasive is not advisable

### **3. Post Crisis Measures**

This stage is very crucial in dealing with crisis. After taking practical steps in managing crisis it is important to review actions taken at the on-the-crisis management stage. This is what is meant by post crisis measures and it involves:

- a) Evaluation of the entire actions taken in the process of managing a crisis to ascertain what lessons to be learnt from the action
- b) Make public thank you speeches appreciating both the internal and external publics of the organization for the patient and understanding during the crisis
- c) Organize a memorial service for the deceased as a show of love, care and concern where lives are involved. This is usually the case when there is plane or auto crash
- d) Write and dispatch letter of appreciation to concerned publics who stood by the company at the trial period.

In conclusion, I have said severally that conflict is inevitable in the life of any corporate organization. It is important that practitioners of public relations are properly ground on the nature of crisis and how best to manage it.

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