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STRATEGIES & TACTICS

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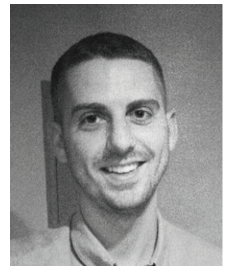
Foreword



Dear reader:

Crises are a natural part of doing business. When handled well, a crisis can demonstrate your organization's ability to put people before profits and truth before spin. When handled poorly, a crisis can inflict irreparable damage to your organization's image. As they unfold in the media, in the digital space and elsewhere, crises test your organization's mettle and capacity to maintain composure under pressure.

Crisis management is an art, not a science. In this 8th edition of PR News' *Book of Crisis Management Strategies & Tactics*, you will discover many different views on this art, and you are certain to find takeaways from our contributors that will transform the way your organization handles crises.

The content in this book will provide you with guidance on how to handle the press, your social media audience, your spokespeople, your employees and more. Our contributors break down the lessons and insights gleaned from the major crises that have dominated headlines over the past year, from the Ebola epidemic in West Africa to Anthem's record setting data breach to Brian Williams' Iraq War stories and beyond.

In addition, this book features sample crisis planning materials and resources that you can immediately add to your company's crisis preparation protocol.

The authors in this book span a variety of disciplines and backgrounds—from agencies, corporations, nonprofits and academia—bringing you the latest strategies on how to prepare for and handle crises. These experts present hard-earned wisdom in these pages, offering step-by-step action plans for getting through the first moments of a crisis, tips for crafting messages under pressure, insight into dealing with social media trolls, checklists to gauge your readiness for a crisis and much more.

I want to thank the contributors to this Guidebook who so eloquently shared their ideas, tips and best practices. And I want to thank you, our reader, for taking time to learn more about crisis management. The current environment demands expert crisis management, and this book will help you deliver it.

B. Greene

Brian Greene
Editor, PR News

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Using Multiple Channels to Understand And Improve Internal Communications

By Stephanie A. Smith

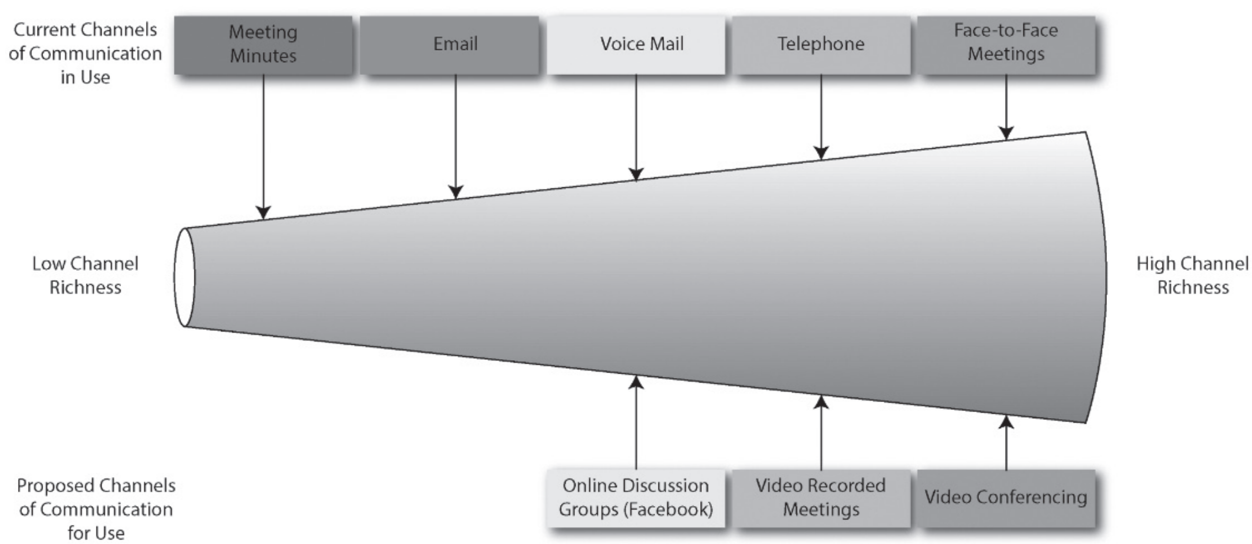
Communicating information to employees and satisfaction with internal communication can make or break the success of an organization. Studies have shown that when employees have greater levels of communication satisfaction, organizations experience increases in retention rates and employee productivity. Likewise, employees experience increased job satisfaction and decreased absenteeism. However, understanding how to communicate effectively with employees can be challenging.

Media richness theory is a classic communication theory that encourages matching the communication medium (channel) to the message. Supervisors and employees use a variety of channels to communicate such as email, phone, instant messaging and video platforms. Combining the use of multiple channels with the theoretical foundation of media richness theory provides suggestions for how to maintain and improve employee communication satisfaction.

Media richness theory has emerged as one of the most widely studied and cited frameworks in the body of research on organizational communication and media use (D'Urso & Rains, 2008). The premise of media richness theory is that a communication medium should be matched to the needs of the message for effective communication (Lengel & Daft, 1988).

Richness concerns a medium's capacity to convey various types of information cues in a manner that approximates face-to-face commu-

Information Richness and Communication Channels



nication (Sheer, 2011). Media richness follows a continuum from high richness (i.e. face-to-face) to low richness (i.e. bulletin boards) for understanding the transmission of messages.

The richness of a medium comprises four major aspects:

1. The availability of instant feedback, which allows questions to be asked and answered
2. The use of multiple cues, such as physical presence, vocal inflection, body gestures, words, numbers and graphic symbols
3. The use of natural language, which can be used to convey an understanding of a broad set of concepts and ideas
4. The personal focus of the medium (Lengel & Daft, 1988)

When none or only a few of these attributes are present, a medium is considered "lean" (Sheer, 2011). Face-to-face is considered the richest medium because it allows for all four aspects important to communication. The most effective choice of media is that which matches the intended outcome for a message, which indicates whether a rich or lean media should be utilized for message distribution (Easton & Bommelje, 2011).

An employee's workplace communication satisfaction is positively and negatively influenced by the use of multiple communication channels.

Media richness theory holds that messages should be communicated on channels with appropriate richness capabilities. When information is communicated using an inappropriate channel, the information likely is to be misinterpreted or seen as ineffective with regard to the intended purpose (Carlson & Zmud, 1999). In addition, when a message and medium mismatch occurs, communication parties have to engage in compensating communication activities, which takes additional time and resources (McGrath, Hollinshead, & O'Connor, 1993).

Media richness research has spent a considerable amount of time identifying the limitations of one channel versus others. For example, David Jacobsen argued that new media, such as instant messaging and online communication, are limited in conveying the same amount of information as a face-to-face conversation. The absence of being in the same place makes physical and other non-verbal cues such as tone of voice and eye contact impossible (Kock, 2004).

Henderson and Gilding illustrated that communicating via lean mediums could affect the effectiveness and amount of self-disclosure, thereby influencing reciprocity and trust. Vivian C. Sheer's 2011 study discovered that a popular reason for the abundance of instant message use between friends is the ability to control information and self-presentation, which could also be applied to co-worker relationships. D'Urso and Rains found support indicating that richness is based on perception and that it may be shaped by interpersonal factors such as one's relevant experiences, which is another finding that may lend insight into communication channel satisfaction between co-workers.

Results of an empirical survey of more than 500 full-time employees from a variety of organizations indicate that an employee's workplace communication satisfaction is positively and negatively influenced by the use of multiple communication channels.

For example, communication satisfaction is highest when a variety of channels are available, including instant messaging and video solutions. This increases communication satisfaction because it provides employees with a choice and an opportunity to better match the medium to the message, supporting media richness theory. Moreover, employees can increase their communication satisfaction by using multiple channels to communicate the same message.

Employees and supervisors in the study noted how they can follow up face-to-face communication with an email recap or send an email alerting someone to an important voicemail message. Employees also favor the use of multiple channels when they need a written record of information.

While the use of multiple communication channels can increase employee communication satisfaction, the use of multiple channels can also decrease communication satisfaction when the channels are used inappropriately. For example, employees noted how they did not think instant messaging was an appropriate medium for transmitting important information but rather is better suited for informal, quick communications. Also, employees preferred to communicate with supervisors about big projects and evaluations face-to-face rather than through email or on the phone. When supervisors and employees rely solely on email or the phone for all communication, it strains the options for interactivity and reciprocity, which can elongate and complicate tasks. This point illustrates the implications of not matching the medium to the message, as suggested by media richness theory. Finally, when employees do not feel competent using multiple communication channels, their communication satisfaction is lessened.

Media richness theory can be used as a guiding foundation to better understand employee communication satisfaction. With teleworking arrangements on the rise and employees constantly on the go, it's important for management to understand how to maximize communication with employees using a variety of communication channels. The results presented highlight how matching the medium to the message and using multiple communication channels to distribute the same information can increase employee communication satisfaction.

Organizations should provide a variety of communication channels to employees so that employee communication satisfaction can be optimized. When employees experience greater levels of communication satisfaction, they also experience greater levels of job satisfaction, which increase productivity and retention rates, which lead to organizational benefits.

Stephanie A. Smith, PhD., is assistant professor of public relations at Virginia Tech.

DO	DON'T
Use face-to-face communication for sharing important information when possible.	Use a channel simply out of convenience.
Provide information needing recall, such as talking points, via written channels like email.	Rely on channels that limit immediate feedback such as email and voicemail.
Consider using multiple channels to share the same information. Send meeting minutes via email, or follow up an in-person conversation with a voicemail.	Use a lean medium to communicate a rich message. Match the medium to your message.
Make a variety of channels available for use so employees can select the appropriate medium for the message.	Be afraid to try new things such as holding meetings via video solutions or using instant messaging for informal conversations.

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Preparing Public Sector Executives to Shine During Crisis Communications

By Lauren Hansen

When working in the public sector, the media are the most powerful resource you have to communicate your message. During a crisis, they can be your greatest ally and your biggest challenge. Unfortunately, many public sector executives do not enter into their positions with the proper training or experience to navigate the ebbs and flows of a crisis successfully in the public eye.

Good PR must not be an afterthought. As a public affairs professional in the public sector, you must approach the subject of training with your new executive as you would any tactical strategy for the agency. Many new executives, both public sector and otherwise, will not understand the need for training, especially without an impending crisis looming over their heads. It's your job to make sure they understand that this crisis and media training is necessary to prepare for the inevitable. To handle the unexpected successfully in the public sector, they will need to gain a better understanding of how to best respond to each type of media.

Maximizing Positive Media Coverage to Minimize Public Scrutiny

In the public sector, you must always follow the golden rules of truth, clarity and timeliness when delivering messages. Public agencies are looking for their executives to lead them through the hurdles of each crisis, all while understanding the need for public accountability and transparency. During a crisis, executives are expected to:

- Provide thought leadership for the agency
- Deliver clear and transparent messaging to the public
- Offer positive positioning of issues to limit risk and fear
- Represent the agency ethically and with fortitude

It's not all about the talking points. Developing binders full of talking points for every imaginable crisis scenario can help with messaging in a pinch. But if your key spokesperson doesn't deliver the message correctly, it won't be heard the way you anticipate. As the public affairs lead, you must help agency executives to identify their communications weaknesses and ultimately improve their presence in front of an audience.

Proactively developing messaging on controversial issues can help a public agency establish ownership of the issue and minimize negative press.

Non-verbal cues come across clearer than comments. These include:

- Body posture
- Hand movements and gestures
- Emotional reactions
- Use of verbal fillers such as "um" or "uh"
- Eye contact with the audience
- Breath while speaking, or using the "power of the pause"
- Energy level

Audit individual habits during presentations to both internal and external audiences (if possible) to gauge where the most improvement is necessary. Your frank evaluation of executives' abilities is key to developing your training strategy and gaining their acceptance of your help.

What Is a Crisis Anyway?

Part of your training must involve crisis scenarios and mock interviews for your executive to get a feel for being interviewed under pressure. These activities can be done as part of a group leadership exercise or individually. For each executive in need of training, develop between three and five possible issues in which the agency could become publicly accountable. Give clear instructions to acknowledge and recognize the problem, get the facts out quickly and stick to talking points that can be updated as needed. Have them develop three key messages using terms the public can understand. Remind them to repeat the messages again and again during the interview. Here are some tips to answering questions in a crisis:

- Assure the public that the agency is doing everything possible to resolve issue.
- Correct mistakes.
- Answer negative questions with positives.
- Express concern for victims and their families.
- Give frequent updates with new information.
- Leave investigative details to the police.
- Focus on safety as the agency's utmost priority.
- Use bridging techniques to guide the interview.
- Answer the reporter's question, then stop talking. Do not fall for the "reporter's silence" tactic.

This exercise should teach agency executives the benefits of being both proactively and reactively prepared for a crisis. Proactively developing messaging on controversial issues can help a public agency retain better control of the message, establish ownership of the issue and minimize negative press.

All Reporters Are Not Created Equal

When most people outside of the PR industry think of the media, television news reporters and print journalists are usually described as key news sources. However, in this day and age, the term "media" refers to seasoned investigative journalists to weekend bloggers and everything in-between. It's your responsibility to prepare your executive for what to expect from these different types of reporters individually as well as how to handle a crisis briefing with all of the different types of media together.

Reporters can have different motivations for covering a story, from scooping the competition on a controversial topic to providing a public service to increasing ratings and selling more advertising. With all of the differences between reporters, they are all in search of an angle, the bottom line, facts that make sense and a story that sells or gets web hits.

- **Television**: TV reporters are usually looking for immediate impact. Most are assigned stories the same day, if not moments before the interview, and will not have background about the topic they are covering, especially complicated details. You should assume the reporter and audience know nothing about your agency or the potential crisis and the background surrounding the situation.

  It's advisable to conduct a pre-interview with these reporters before putting your executive on camera. This will shorten the interview time, limit interaction and keep you in control of the message. Remember—there are typically only between eight and 12 seconds in a TV sound bite. Make those seconds count. Coach your executive to talk within the confines of a sound bite to help them remain on-point during the interview.

While the interview is being conducted, have your executive listen carefully to the reporter's whole question without answering. Most people tend to listen to half of a question and then prepare their response during the second half, which is when the important part of the question is usually asked. Ask the reporter to repeat the question back if needed. It's important for

CRISIS INTERVIEW DOs *AND* DON'Ts

DO

- Speak simply and clearly
- Talk about what you know
- Use the key messages
- Tell the truth and stick to the facts
- Correct mistakes
- Focus on the positive

DON'T

- Go off the record
- Say 'no comment'
- Be defensive
- Over explain with complicated details
- Speculate: Answer 'what ifs' with 'what is'
- Share your personal opinion
- Let them get to you or be emotional

them to repeat the key messages or themes throughout the interview several times.

Your audit of their non-verbal cues will come into play during these types of one-on-one interviews as well as during crisis briefings to all media.

- **Newspapers and magazines.** Print reporters usually have longer deadlines and tend to develop more in-depth stories then other mediums. They often have subject knowledge and background information or a specific beat, especially when dealing with government coverage. These are the types of reporters whom you can develop long-term relationships with.

  I have always looked to break complicated proactive messaging through my print reporter contacts. These stories typically get picked up after publication to be repurposed in other mediums. Print stories also tend to last longer under public view than stories on the newspaper website, and then can be picked up and republished by blogs.

  The reporter may use a single quote or an entire paragraph from your executive's interview. They may also find additional sources of information to validate or contradict his/her statements. I recommend teaching your executive bridging techniques before these types of interviews to help steer the conversation. Prepare the executive with a lot of background information on other ongoing agency issues to arm him or her for potential side topics.

  I also encourage interview time limits, as these types of conversations can span longer than anticipated if not kept in check by a timekeeper.

- **Radio news.** News radio reporters usually have the most immediate deadlines and work on numerous stories per day. Their broadcast topic length is usually no more than one minute and tends to be updated several times a day.

  With radio interviews, the tone in your voice is the sole medium of your message. Coach your executive to modulate his/her voice and avoid verbal fillers. Pauses in mid-sentence are amplified over the airwaves, so it's important to vocalize smooth and complete thoughts. Your executive needs to match or slightly exceed the host's energy level to avoid sounding flat.

  The best tip for radio interviews is to have your executive use relatable examples to communicate the message. Doing so will help him/her get the message across and stop listeners from switching the station.

- **Internet news and blogs.** The Internet reporter's job is to bring immediate information to as many people as possible. If the Internet reporter is a part of a print news organization, they will work in completely separate departments with different motivations from the publication's print reporters and could cover the same story or issue without coordination.

Internet news blogs tend to reprint or replay previously aired/printed stories and publish briefs of 100 or less words that link back to an original news source. The reporter may or may not call for fact confirmation about what is published. In most instances, I encourage the public affairs professional to remain the main interview subject for this medium, developing messaging points and quotes for key staff and relaying that information to the reporter.

Train Agency Executives To Use You Effectively

Now that your executives have basic public crisis and media training, they are most likely going to look to you for your professional expertise to guide them through potential public landmines. Have them alert you to situations where the agency's image could be called into question, an issue might make for a very good (or very bad) news story or if a problem may provoke controversy or stir up emotion. Make sure they understand your role as their executive adviser. You can help:

- Develop messages and key talking points
- Make sure the information is consistently portrayed throughout the life of the issue or crisis
- Work with staff for interview support
- Identify a reporter's angle and try to improve a story, if possible
- Determine the best types of interviews to convey your message

It's your role to guide public sector executives through the process of crisis communications preparations before a crisis occurs to fortify them to deal with tough questions, all before a crisis even occurs. If you are successful, your executive will be prepared to effectively position your agency for the public obstacles ahead.

Lauren Hansen is communications project manager at PRR.