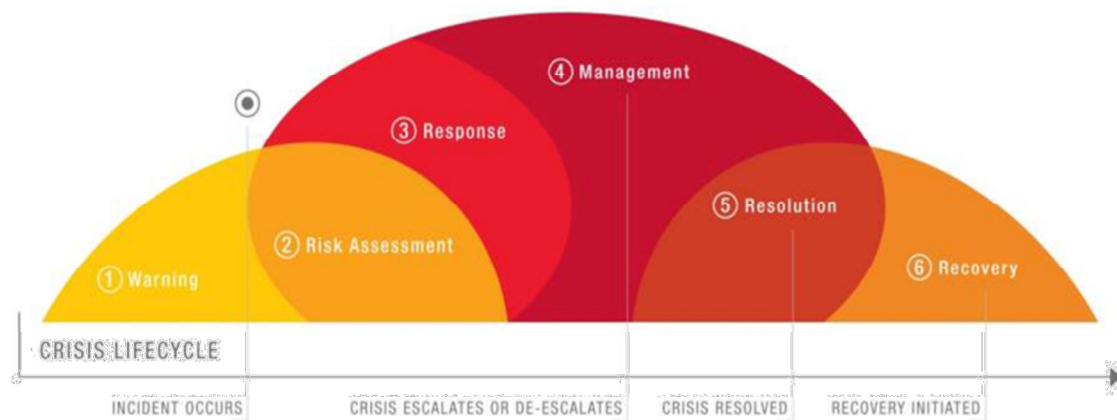


The Six Stages of a Crisis

Stage Two: Risk Assessment

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COMMUNICATION DURING A CRISIS

Executive Summary

Best practices dictate that in the moments after an incident occurs and/or is reported, the crisis response team activates the organization's emergency response plan and begins to notify target audiences. During this early phase of a crisis, communication is primarily focused on the internal decision-makers – including to identification of the right people and determination of the best course of action to prevent or mitigate crisis. Depending on the nature and severity of the potential disaster, additional key personnel or agencies may also be included in communication at this time. Communication during the risk assessment stage, although not primarily to public audiences, is just as critical and vital as any other aspect of emergency notification.

The Facts in Brief

A crisis is an unexpected event that disrupts normal operations and has the potential to create significant financial, security, safety and reputational harm. Depending on the nature and severity of a crisis, it can present complex threats and risks, as well as endanger the safety and well-being of people. Every stage of the crisis dictates the audience's requirements, including the need for information, and the response of the agency providing the warning.

There are six identified phases within every crisis: (1) Warning; (2) Risk Assessment; (3) Response; (4) Management; (5) Resolution; and (6) Recovery. This is the second of six topic briefings that will explore each phase of a crisis, identify specific areas of concern, and provide manageable solutions.

The second phase in the life cycle of a crisis is the risk assessment phase. It is during this phase that the crisis leaders and their team, often with the assistance of outside sources, assess the risks, potential consequences, and damages of the crisis. This assessment allows them to determine the best course of action to avoid or mitigate the possible disaster.

In the moments after an incident occurs and/or is reported, the crisis response team activates the organization's emergency response plan and notifies target audiences, generally internal stakeholders. Notifications during this phase are generally geared toward assessing the threat and assembling the right people. The focus is on communication with key internal personnel and team members to facilitate responses by individuals.

Clear communication and sustained information exchange during this stage allows decision-makers to clearly understand the extent of the threat risk and the seriousness of the threats. Once the risk is ascertained, leaders can plot an appropriate response and management strategy. Two-way communication between and among the leaders and team members, along with key external sources (e.g. law enforcement, insurance, constituents, etc.), is vital in order to effectively manage the crisis. This may be in the form of soliciting input, assessing readiness, or putting key resources into the proper position to be ready to respond to an incident.

At this point in the lifecycle of a crisis, there are already constituent audiences and stakeholders (including senior management, regulators, etc.) who should be notified about the situation. There should also be an emphasis on the allocation of resources by management executives, law enforcement, health care providers, insurance agencies, and other relevant organizations. Although notifications may cause these participants to be on a heightened alert to the danger, this communication is necessary to facilitate information gathering and informing during this phase.

As with the context of warning alerts, during the risk assessment phase, stress levels alter decisions, perceptions of risk, and critical judgment skills. Messages communicated during this phase of the crisis life cycle should be clear, objective, specific, and as concrete as possible. The exchange of messages should facilitate analytical, or possibly, investigative interaction. Planning messages in advance of a crisis saves time and facilitates clear thinking.

Accurate information should be gathered rapidly and shared with the appropriate key personnel. Incoming information should be quickly processed. Preparing systems or procedures to gather, prioritize, analyze, store, retrieve, and discard information by crisis teams before an emergency occurs will support better facilitation of an appropriate response. In many types of emergencies, information sharing and retrieval is an ongoing aspect of communication that has to be sustained along with the other communication exigencies.

Key Recommendations

1. **Internal communication is vital:** Connecting your people to discuss, debate, and assess risk is essential. Focus on how, when, and by what processes these connections, communication, and decisions should be made.
2. **External communication is crucial:** Your people have to interact in an open system that includes input from valuable external resources. This means that it is essential to have inbound information and connections with other viewpoints and sources as inputs, and most importantly, have perspectives from trusted sources beyond the boundaries of your internal team.
3. **Collaborate and communicate to assess the risk:** Understand the nature of the crisis, and identify possible consequences and damage before determining the best course of action to avoid or mitigate the possible threats.
4. **Information management is key:** The risk assessment phase is a perfect example of the “garbage in/garbage out” syndrome. You have to have resilient and dependable processes for gathering, collecting, retrieving, evaluating, and discarding and storing/recording information vital for risk assessment. This is a fundamental communication process.
5. **Have an internal crisis communication plan:** You should have protocols, procedures, and tools to help locate, alert, and connect your decision-making team quickly, efficiently, reliably, and consistently.

About Robert C. Chandler, Ph.D.



Dr. Robert C. Chandler, (Ph.D., University of Kansas; M.A., Wake Forest University; B. A., Harding College) is Professor of Communication and Director of the Nicholson School of Communication (NSC) at the University of Central Florida (UCF).

Dr. Chandler's research spans the range of crisis communication, leadership, teamwork, decision making, psychometric variables during crises, and emergency communication, including specific areas of crisis and incident notification, warning messages, cognitive processing, and message comprehension. He also investigates organizational communication, communication and conflict, risk communication, multicultural and intercultural communication issues, and business ethics.

He is the creator of several widely-used planning models for crisis and emergency communication preparedness, including: (1) Communication Planning for the Six Stages of Crisis, (2) the 3-3-30© principle for incident notification, and (3) Message Mapping: The Chandler Model.

Dr. Chandler is an internationally recognized social scientific researcher with more than 150 academic and professional papers, including widely-circulated "white papers" on emergency and crisis communication. He has authored more than 75 academic and professional publications, and is the author or co-author of eight books including: *Emergency Notification* (2010); *Surviving the Pandemic: A Communication Management Guide for Business* (2009); *Media Relations* (2008); *Disaster Recovery and the News Media* (2007); *Managing the Risks for Corporate Integrity: How to Survive an Ethical Misconduct Disaster* (2006); *Pandemic: Business Continuity Planning Priorities for the Coming Outbreak* (2005); and *Crisis and Emergency Communication* (2006).

About Everbridge

Everbridge provides critical communication solutions to more than 30 million end users in all major industries and government sectors around the globe.

Communication failures have historically plagued organizations in their ability to respond to and minimize the human, operational, and financial impact of critical events and emergency incidents. Everbridge began with a shared vision: empowering a single person to communicate with any number of people as easily as communicating with one person to save lives, protect assets, minimize loss, and ensure continuity of operations. Everbridge brings technology and expertise together at every level for a complete solution. Everbridge solutions match your unique needs, from safety and survival during a crisis to cutting costs and achieving efficiencies in your everyday operations. Our understanding of mass notification and interactive communication challenges is leveraged in everything we do, from how we build our technology from the ground up to the expertise of the people we hire and best practices we share with the community.

We design the Everbridge system according to several key tenets:

- **Target the individual** – not the device. Everbridge has the most comprehensive notification system available, offering more than 30 contact paths that can be designated by incident type or by escalation steps.
- **Ease-of-use during any situation** – emergency or daily use – so even a non-technical person can communicate effortlessly and without anxiety.
- **Speed and reliability of communications.** Every second counts in an emergency. With global datacenters and an infrastructure unparalleled in security and reliability, the Everbridge mass notification system is designed for rapid and efficient communications worldwide so your message will always go through.
- **Universal accessibility** – with a fully managed system requiring no hardware, no software, no maintenance, and a flexible pay-as-you-grow model, organizations large and small have access to the same powerful communication capabilities.
- **Scalability** – the Everbridge mass notification system provides the ultimate flexibility in communication capabilities to meet changing needs in today's dynamic environment. The Everbridge system is inherently scalable to grow with and adjust to the requirements of any organization quickly and without disruption to internal processes, infrastructure, or resources.

Visit www.everbridge.com to learn more.