

The Role of Human Resource Development Competencies in Facilitating Effective Crisis Communication

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The problem and the solution. Effective crisis communication is one of the key components of effective crisis management, and this article describes key human resource development (HRD) competencies that facilitate crisis communication. Research from organization development, crisis management, and crisis communication is used to provide an integrated framework for studying crisis communication that emphasizes the role of HRD in coping with crises. A repertoire of techniques for crisis communication is provided, together with recommendations for companies seeking to enhance their firms' crisis management capacities through communication. Implications for HRD practice, theory, and research are provided.

Keywords: *crisis communication; human resource development; change management*

The strategic management of organizations includes managing both ongoing operations as well as unexpected situations such as organizational crises (Preble, 1997). Day-to-day operations focus on repetition and efficiency, whereas an organizational crisis, by definition, is unexpected, high-impact, and nonroutine (Pearson & Clair, 1998; Reilly, 1993). It represents an unusual situation outside the normal operating frameworks of the affected organization; if standard operating procedures can handle the event, it is not a crisis (e.g., a fire to a fire station). Furthermore, following Beckhard and Harris's (1987) "change/stability dilemma," the organization must balance crisis management with enough stability to maintain at least some of the firm's normal business activities. Argenti (2002) encouraged top management to keep employees focused on the business itself during a crisis, because their sense of usefulness will enhance morale.

Crises may take many forms (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003; Shrivastava, 1993), such as industrial accident (the 1994 Union Carbide chemical plant explosion in Bhopal, India, in which 3,000 deaths and 200,000 injuries were reported), product tampering (the 1982 Tylenol poisonings, in which seven people in Chicago died after taking potassium-laced Extra Strength Tylenol), top management malfeasance (the accounting fraud and corruption that precipitated Houston-based energy company Enron's bankruptcy in December 2001), employee wrongdoing (former *New York Times* reporter Jayson Blair, who was forced to resign in 2003 after being caught plagiarizing and fabricating his news stories), natural disaster (Hurricane Katrina, which struck New Orleans and the U.S. Gulf Coast in 2005, leading to more than 1,200 deaths; and the December 2004 earthquake and tsunami in South Asia, which killed more than 280,000 people and displaced 1 million more), public health threats (the April 2003 severe acute respiratory syndrome [SARS] outbreak in Beijing), or terrorism (the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C.). A common denominator among all types of crises is the demands they make on a firm's human resources, including staff, time, and top management attention (Reilly, 1998). Lockwood (2005) argued that firms need to pay attention to the impact of crises on employees, their families, and the community. Like any organizational change situation, coping with a complex, multifaceted crisis requires communication and collaboration throughout the affected firm (Coombs, 2007; Henderson & McAdam, 2003; Sturges, 1994). Indeed, according to Pincus and Acharya (1988), "At no time in an organization's life is it more critical to communicate openly, sensitively, and quickly with employees than during a major crisis" (p. 182).

Prior Research on HRD Competencies and Crisis Communication

This article considers the impact of key human resource development (HRD) elements in facilitating effective crisis communication. HRD addresses the organization development needs of both individual employees and their employers through techniques including change management, stress management, and training and development (Jacobs, 1990; Lynham, 2001; Valkeavaara, 1998). According to Hosie (2006), HRD initiatives are a key aspect of any well-conceived and executed crisis management strategy, and other prior research has linked important HRD competencies with communication and organizational response to crisis (Seeger et al., 2003). For example, Jick (1991) noted that to "communicate, involve people, and be honest" is critical to successfully implement organizational change (p. 7), whereas Kontoghiorges, Awbre, and Feurig (2005) noted that rapid adaptation to change may be predicted by open communication and information sharing. According to Duck's (1993) research on managing change, "communications must be a priority for every manager at every level of the company" (p. 111). Chermack (2003) and Yang (2003) argued that decision making, which is a key element of crisis management, is a fundamental

component of any HRD activity. In addition, although corporate executives may be justifiably concerned with the technical and financial impact of crises on the organization (e.g., system failure and legal expenses), HRD factors in crises, for example, change management, stress management, and employee training and development, are often ignored (Reilly, 1998). In fact, researchers have stressed for decades that the potential negative outcomes of our high-technology systems exceed our human capacity to control these systems effectively (Perrow, 1984; Shrivastava, 1993).

More than 70 articles and books referencing crisis management and crisis communication, published during the past three decades, were used in this review. Publications about crisis management and communication may be found in a broad range of venues, from scholarly journals (e.g., Marcus & Goodman, 1991) to practitioner reports (e.g., Lockwood, 2005). Much of the scholarly crisis literature to date is concerned with proposing definitions of crisis (e.g., Milburn, Schuler, & Watman, 1983), developing models of crisis and crisis management (e.g., Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992), or analyzing case studies of crises (e.g., Turner, 1976). In contrast, many of the crisis communication articles are provided by practitioners in public relations or media management (e.g., "Case Study," 2007). Not surprisingly, the business press and popular press reports on crisis management communication far outnumber the scholarly studies. Searching for "crisis communication HRD" keywords on Google Scholar yielded 1,790 hits, whereas the same keywords on Google yielded 175,000 hits. This article draws primarily on theory and research published in scholarly venues, with a particular emphasis on journals relevant to the HRD field. These sources were supplemented with case examples of actual crisis situations drawn from books, case studies, and the business press. Most of the literature reviewed was published in U.S., Canadian, and European journals and thus reflected a Western perspective. However, although this Western point of view may limit this article's cross-cultural generalizability, it also suggests an important avenue for future comparative research about what makes crisis communication effective in different cultures and contexts.

This article begins by explaining how effective crisis communication, both internal and external, is essential to effective crisis management (Barton, 2001). It considers the role of HRD in training employees and managers for crisis communication tasks such as media management. Many examples are provided illustrating the importance of downward, upward, and horizontal internal communication during a crisis. HRD's role in external communication is also reviewed, emphasizing the rapid transmission of the firm's damage control message. Next, two models drawn from the organization development literature and the crisis management literature are used to provide an integrated framework for analyzing HRD crisis communication competencies. This section is supplemented by a table that reviews HRD strategies and specific internal and external communication tools for effectively communicating during crisis. Recommendations for companies seeking to partner HRD skill sets with

crisis management are offered, followed by implications for HRD practice, theory, and research.

The Importance of HRD to Crisis Communication

Communication is especially important during crises because the natural tendency of many organizations under threat is to restrict the free flow of information (D'Aveni & MacMillan, 1990), also known as the "threat rigidity effect" (Staw, Sandelands, & Dutton, 1981). Probst and Raisch (2005) reported poor communication associated with employee mistrust in crisis burnout companies (see also Mishra, 1996). In addition, emotions run high during organizational crisis, thus preventing a further challenge to unbiased information sharing (Kiefer, 2002; Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992). Welch (2005) argued that denial in the face of disaster is human nature. Similarly, Smart and Vertinsky (1984) noted that preventing information distortion in a crisis requires both good quality and a manageable quantity of information. Indeed, information overload is endemic to organizational crises. Schultz (2003) warned that the filtering process used to cope with the mass of unclear information may itself lead to misconception and error. For example, misinterpreting an urgent warning message as a routine report will delay the recognition of the crisis. Furthermore, the crisis context itself may impair the ability to communicate during crisis. In his analysis of Hurricane Katrina's impact on New Orleans, Congleton (2006) pointed out, "Communication among government officials was very limited because of widespread damage to private telephone, cable, and radio networks" (p. 23). In reporting on the 2003 SARS crisis in China, Beech (2003) pointed out, "Panics can happen anywhere, but they take on epidemic proportions in countries lacking a free flow of information" (p. 2).

Prior research has illustrated the importance of effective internal and external information flow during a crisis situation (Coombs, 2007; D'Aveni & MacMillan, 1990; Marcus & Goodman, 1991; Massey, 2001; Turner, 1976; Seeger et al., 2003). Hosie (2006) argued that a critical indicator of a firm's preparedness for crisis is the quality and responsiveness of both internal and external communication. Given such, organizations must actively work to communicate effectively during crises, and HRD professionals may play a key part here.

Human Resources may be called upon to provide answers to the following types of questions: (1) what information and resources are needed to deal with the immediate emergency; (2) what the situation is in the various locations affected; and (3) how employees are reacting. (Lockwood, 2005, p. 6)

Designating HRD staff as communication liaisons will help in answering these important questions. Both internal communication within the firm and external communication to outside constituencies are critical factors in effective crisis management.

Internal Communication

Effective communication among and between a firm's managers and employees is mandatory in coping with a crisis. Indeed, some scholars have argued that communication may be the most critical determinant of damage control (see Argenti, 2002, and Reilly, 1993, about the priority of internal over external communications). Within the organization, inadequate information and restricted communication channels can derail an organization's crisis management efforts, and the safety and security of employees may be compromised. For example, in April 2007, a single student killed 32 people in two separate attacks, 3 hours apart, on the campus of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) in Blacksburg, Virginia, the United States. Students were still going to classes—with no warnings from campus administration—several hours after administrators knew about the first campus shooting (Lindsey, 2007; Madhani & Janega, 2007).

Because of the magnitude, complexity, and rapidity of unfolding crises, top executives themselves may be unclear about the crisis impact, illustrating the importance of upward and horizontal information flow. Executive decision making is also constrained by bounded rationality during a crisis. As Herling (2003) noted, the rationality of human behavior is partial or *bounded* by information-processing limitations. Furthermore, without effective communication techniques in place, employees in a crisis may end up creating their own information through damaging rumors (Duck, 1993; Reilly, 1998). About the Beijing SARS crisis, Beech (2003) noted, "Unable to rely on government reports, Beijing's citizens were forced to depend on the rumor mill" (p. 2). The rapid development of an organization grapevine highlights the importance of managing internal informal and formal communication during a crisis. For example, a firm's internal Web page may need to be updated quickly and often to counter any misinformation that may be communicated through employee blogs.

Internal crisis communication may be downward, upward, and horizontal. In downward communication, information flows down the firm's hierarchy from managers to subordinates. During a crisis, top management seeks to impose control and often develops a party line for consistency in crisis communication. After the 9/11 attacks, Verizon (the local telephone provider to much of New York) sent daily voice mail recordings to all employees who were still reachable, providing updated information from a single authorized source (Argenti, 2002). However, lack of downward communication in crisis is often employees' major complaint (Reilly, 1998), leaving them feeling disconnected and misinformed—the classic "mushroom" analogy ("they keep us in the dark and feed us garbage"). As the two separate shootings by the same student at Virginia Tech illustrated, the lack of downward communication may be fatal (Lindsey, 2007).

In upward communication, employees relay suggestions, requests, and complaints up the hierarchy to managers. Unfortunately, this communication

flow during crisis is inadequate in many firms, causing top management to miss valuable input from employees on the front line of the crisis. Workers may be too preoccupied coping with the crisis to send full reports to upper management, and upward communication may be distorted to make the message more acceptable to higher-ups (Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992), especially if a “shoot-the-messenger” mentality exists. Communication misfires may also occur because of top management’s lack of familiarity with highly technical information provided by the on-site crisis fact finders (Schultz, 2003). In addition, trust between employees and management was found to be necessary to allow undistorted communication of honest information during a crisis (McGregor, 2005; Mishra, 1996); lack of employee trust may have a negative effect on upward communication (Probst & Raisch, 2005).

Horizontal communication includes the information flowing between people at the same organizational level, either face-to-face in meetings or phone calls; in written form via e-mail, memos, and reports; or electronically through teleconferencing or videoconferencing. Managing this direction of communication is challenging during crises, as it crosses functional and geographic boundaries. It may engender conflict between the different constituencies within the firm (Gerzon, 2006). Information may also become locked in a centralized hierarchy, which impedes horizontal communication. After *New York Times* reporter Jayson Blair resigned following a 4-year record of journalistic fraud, an internal investigation at the *Times* noted both serious management breakdowns and a shocking lack of communication within the newsroom (“Times Reporter,” 2003). McGregor (2005) cited this report: “A failure to communicate—to tell other editors what some people in the newsroom knew—emerges as the single most consistent cause, after Jayson Blair’s own behavior, of this catastrophe” for the 152-year-old newspaper, which prided itself on having won more Pulitzer prizes (95) than any other periodical (p. 66).

External Communication

In addition to internal communication flow, quick and accurate external communication is also required for effective crisis management (Hosie, 2006; Marra, 1998; Perry, Taylor, & Doerfel, 2003). First, key employees who may be remote from the crisis location must be kept informed. For example, in the absence of their communications infrastructures after 9/11, numerous companies relied on the mass media, radio and television public service announcements, and toll-free phone numbers to provide updated information for their employees and customers. Second, the affected firm will have to interpret a crisis event to its outside constituencies, such as shareholders and customers (Marcus & Goodman, 1991; Sturges, 1994) or product consumers (“Case Study,” 2007). In fact, Ray (1999) noted that company stakeholders and professional communicators may see crises in an entirely different way. Without adequate external communication, panic-stricken clients may withdraw their

support of the firm, thereby escalating the crisis. If not for the immediate response of the Johnson & Johnson Corporation in accepting responsibility and recalling all Tylenol products after the poisonings in 1982 (an estimated 31 million bottles were in circulation), Tylenol as a brand would not have survived. Thanks to the rapid, transparent company response, Tylenol had regained its original market share within 8 months of the crisis (Sedgwick Group, 2002). As Lockwood (2005) pointed out, maintaining the company's reputation must be a key element of a crisis management plan.

Three questions need to be asked in every crisis: What happened? How did it happen? What are you going to do to insure it never happens again? (Barton, 2001). Avoiding delay in communicating is critical, and "in any crisis, effective leaders get their message out strongly, clearly—and early" (Welch, 2005, p. 1). Pinsdorf (1987) noted, "Almost every crisis-experienced public relations practitioner has one cardinal rule, particularly when public safety is involved: Tell it all and tell it fast" (p. 45). Companies should also be prepared for frequent repetition of the message, with information updates as often as possible. As Duck (1993) stated, "It is important for the message to be consistent, clear, and endlessly repeated" (p. 111).

During a crisis, both the media and the Internet serve as brokers of the critical contingency of information. The importance of media management in crisis has been well documented in prior research (Barton, 2001; Pinsdorf, 1987; Roemer, 2007), and the potential consequences of mishandling the media during a crisis can be very high (Fink, 2000). But the globalization of information technology means the Internet now plays a key role as well (Aon's risk management division, 2006; Church, Gilbert, Oliver, Paquet, & Surface, 2002; Coombs, 2007). Perry and her colleagues (2003) found that a majority of the organizations they studied used the Internet to communicate with the public and the news media during a crisis. Furthermore, in today's world of complex technology, crisis communication also requires effective translation of technical jargon (Sullivan & Lindemans, 2007). Schultz (2003) explained,

Employing qualified technical experts is not enough—these experts must be able to explain the technical issues in terms that non-experts can understand, since it is the non-experts—the politicians and/or the public—that will most likely be making the decisions. (p. 2)

Many crisis communication researchers recommend having a single spokesperson as the external liaison in a crisis (Reilly, 1998). A single spokesperson ensures control over information as well as minimizes the likelihood of conflicting stories and contradictory rumors. Roemer (2007) stressed the importance of speaking with one voice for everyone making statements on the organization's behalf. A good example is the CDC's strategy of using a *unified voice* to summarize the work of the dozens of scientists working on a public health crisis (CDC Case Studies, 2007). For most firms, the chief executive officer and/or chairman is expected to comment. Perhaps the most stringent criticism of the British Royal Family after Princess Diana's sudden

death in 1997 was Queen Elizabeth's lengthy delay in officially offering condolences on behalf of the monarchy. According to one British journalist, reporting in a 10-year retrospective after Diana's untimely death, the Royal Family and its advisers learned some harsh lessons about the need to respond immediately to public opinion (Pierce, 2007). Pincus and Acharya (1988) noted what is important for the firm's spokesperson is perceived legitimacy and source credibility. Thus, HRD staff may be called on to provide training and support for employees in external communication positions (Marra, 1998).

Training and Development

The HRD competency of training and development (T & D) may contribute to an organization's overall crisis management capacity, as well as to effective crisis communication in particular (Roemer, 2007). Many HRD practitioners, across multiple cultures, perceive themselves as agents of change through employee T & D (Valkeavaara, 1998). For decades, change scholars have emphasized the importance of employee participation and involvement in managing resistance to change (e.g., Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979). DeFrank and Ivancevich (1998) promoted change management training throughout the organization as a means of reducing stress, and one of Jick's (1991) pitfalls of change implementation was inadequate training and instruction of employees. In addition, the banking executives interviewed by Reilly (1998) placed strong emphasis on communicating with and training employees for crisis management. Aon's (2006) risk management service includes coaching corporate leadership on effective communication techniques in crisis, while Perry and her colleagues (2003) stressed that training and advanced planning for crisis communication should include multiple forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC) such as the Internet.

However, Hess and Nentl's (2006) interviews with training directors indicated that although they agreed that training is important, their data indicated little evidence of an organized approach to planning or executing it. Indeed, some training directors reported waiting until problems arose—like a crisis—before considering training programs. Lockwood (2005) summarized a 2005 Disaster Preparedness Survey report that showed that less than half (44%) of the companies surveyed provided employee training in crisis management. These results highlight the importance of advanced preparation for crisis through training employees about crisis communication.

Linking Organization Development and Crisis Management Models With Crisis Communication Competencies

Like HRD (Jacobs, 1990), crisis communication competencies cross disciplinary boundaries. In this article, research and examples from organization development, crisis management, and communication are used to provide an

integrated framework for enhancing a firm's crisis communication efficacy. The organization development and change literature offers guidance for structuring the firm's preparation for crisis, its crisis management response, and its initiatives for crisis recovery, whereas the crisis management research highlights the stages of an organizational crisis and the goals of effective crisis management. The crisis communication literature offers specific suggestions for sharing information effectively both within and outside the firm, as well as a repertoire of techniques for effective crisis communication.

The field of organization development (OD) is concerned with using behavioral science knowledge and a system-wide approach to help organizations achieve greater effectiveness (Cummings & Worley, 2004). OD uses interventions at the organizational, group, and individual levels, such as organization transformation, team building, and employee involvement. Because OD incorporates strategic change management, it has many applications to crisis management (Preble, 1997). For example, crisis response may require overcoming resistance to change and conflict resolution, both of which are important change management issues. Like OD, effective crisis management is increasingly dependent on the use of information technology (Church et al., 2002). In addition, there is overlap between employee readiness for organizational change (Bernerth, 2004) and preparing for organizational crisis (Reilly, 1993).

OD scholars and practitioners have offered many models of organizational change, such as the Action Research model, the Burke-Litwin model, and the Six Box model (see Cummings & Worley, 2004). Similarly, crisis management researchers have proposed a variety of crisis models, such as Pauchant and Mitroff's (1992) onion model, Pearson and Clair's (1998) multidisciplinary model, and Coombs's (2007) three stages of precrisis, crisis, and postcrisis. Although many of the later models provide insights reflecting the complexity of organizational change and crisis, two of the most basic of these theoretical frameworks have endured: Kurt Lewin's (1951) model of the change process and Barry Turner's (1976) model of organizational crisis. Lewin's model proposes three steps to effective organizational change: Unfreezing → Moving → Refreezing, whereas Turner's six-stage model includes the Notionally Normal Starting Point, an Incubation Period, the Precipitating Event, Crisis Onset, Rescue and Salvage—First Stage Adjustment, and Full Cultural Readjustment. In describing the profound impact of Lewin's work on social psychologists and OD experts, Schein (1996) began his commentary on Lewin's change model by noting, "There is Nothing So Practical as a Good Theory" (p. 1). Although simple, Lewin's and Turner's models are both clear and generalizable to many contexts, and they are used in this article as an organizing framework rather than an overarching theoretical framework. The framework is illustrated in Table 1. As shown, the table is organized into four sections, reflecting a preplanning/preparation for crisis stage, plus Lewin's three stages of change. It includes general HRD strategies and specific internal and external communication tools. These competencies provide specific suggestions for HRD and other managers seeking to strengthen their ability to cope with crises.

Table 1: Integrating the Crisis and Change Models: HRD Crisis Communication Competencies

Organizational change stage: *proactive, planned change*
Crisis management phase: *planning ahead, prevention*

General HRD options

- Arrange contingency work sites, backup systems, and alternate communication tools.
- Run crisis simulations.
- Designate crisis management team, personnel.
- Compile home, cell, ICE (In Case of Emergency) information for employees.

Internal communication options

- Provide employee training and development for recognizing potential threats.
- Prepare technical primer for nonexperts.

External communication options

- Regularly scan the Internet for relevant data.
- Develop good relationship with key media and other external stakeholders.
- Consider keeping a public relations firm on retainer.
- Discuss options with attorneys; fulfill all disclosure requirements.

Organizational change stage: *unfreezing*
Crisis management phase: *incubation; precipitating event*

General HRD options

- Address employee and community safety, security, and provide reassurance.
- Implement backup operations for computers, data management, office space, temporary personnel.
- Partner HRD with company risk management, operations staff.

Internal communication options

- Use multiple media to communicate, such as town hall meetings, phone calls, hotline, e-mail, intranet, or internal Web page.
- Prepare backup communications in all directions, to headquarters, parent company, subsidiaries, remote locations.
- Be alert for information distortion and unofficial information sources (e.g., blogs).
- Quash rumors as soon as possible through regular, consistent information.

External communication options

- Use multiple media to communicate, such as press meetings, news releases, fact sheets, FAQs, and corporate Web site.
- Be prepared to repeat the (same) message over and over.
- Partner with public relations firm in sending consistent message.
- Coordinate internal and external communication channels and strategies.

Organizational change stage: *moving*
Crisis management phase: *crisis onset*

General HRD options

- Reallocate company resources to cope with crisis, including using HRD staff on dedicated crisis management team.
- Use HRD staff to train and assist employees with stress, burnout, and emotional fallout.
- Consider using outside consultants.

(continued)

Table I: (continued)**Internal communication options**

Respond quickly with downward communication, and advise employees first before outsiders.

Develop a party line to insure consistency.

Use alternative contacts to insure all employees receive necessary information (e.g., toll-free number for employees to call).

Simplify upward communication: the goal should be no surprises.

External communication options

Respond quickly with external communication.

Designate a single spokesperson who communicates in repetitive sound bites.

Communicate directly with key stakeholders, including Board of Directors, shareholders, customers, consumers, and the community.

Tailor message points to different targets.

Media management is critical:

-Seek HRD training, support.

-Use public relations assistance.

Organizational change stage: *refreezing*
Crisis management phase: *first-stage adjustment;*
full cultural readjustment

General HRD options

Maintain company identity: assist in reaffirming values.

Seek employee buy-in to the inevitable changes and strive to maintain trust.

Provide HRD assistance in helping employees cope with stress, build resilience, and manage resistance to change.

Crisis management and recovery take time.

Internal communication options

Communicate the company's future to its employees, addressing job security, career paths, and compensation concerns.

Provide management role models who "walk the talk."

Report on examples of successful crisis management within the company.

Provide regular opportunities for upward communication (e.g., town meetings).

External communication options

Monitor the firm's image and reputation among outside stakeholders.

Provide follow-up information, perhaps through educational outreach and/or public affairs strategies.

Consider using outside public relations firms.

Remember that "actions speak louder than words."

Note: HRD = human resource development; FAQs = frequently asked questions.

Unfreezing, Incubation, and Precipitating Event

The first stage in Lewin's (1951) model is Unfreezing, in which old thought patterns are unfrozen and people must want to learn new ways to think and act. The comparable stages in Turner's (1976) crisis model are the Incubation

Period, which includes the accumulation of unnoticed events at odds with accepted beliefs about hazards and their avoidance, and the Precipitating Event, which transforms general perceptions into recognition of the crisis (Stage 1, the Notionally Normal Starting Point, is treated here as a baseline.) Important tasks in this first stage include perceiving the accumulating threats, recognizing them as a crisis for the organization, and acknowledging the need to take action in a way that will require new behavior. As Table 1 illustrates, crisis communication can be a significant force in supporting the unfreezing process. For example, Perry, Taylor, and Doerfel (2003) showed that the Internet may be helpful in allowing firms to scan their environment—including activist organizations' Web sites and chat rooms as well as traditional news sources—to prepare for potential crises.

Both the change and the crisis management literatures point out that this first stage is neither easy nor automatic. Many factors counteract unfreezing. For example, the lack of early warning systems may delay the crisis recognition process (Probst & Raisch, 2005), firms may be reluctant to make crisis preparedness a priority (Lockwood, 2005), entrenched mental models may cause rejection of new ideas (Blackman & Lee-Kelley, 2006), or the political processes among organizational factions may generate conflict about whose view of reality will prevail (Gerzon, 2006; Gephart, 1984; Yang, 2003). The slow response by the Virginia Tech administration to the two separate April 2007 campus shootings was attributed to "a false sense of security . . . [about] an isolated case of domestic violence" (Madhani & Janega, 2007, p. 1). Welch (2005) described the denial and immobility among FEMA officials, the Louisiana governor, and the mayor of New Orleans in the first 48 hours after Hurricane Katrina made landfall. Congleton (2006) argued that political policy choices made well before Katrina hit compounded the crisis management mistakes (see also Gerzon, 2006). Thus, as Table 1 shows, companies should prepare to use multiple media to communicate the crisis message to the broad range of stakeholders.

Unfreezing under crisis conditions may be a special problem for what Probst and Raisch (2005) called Premature Aging Syndrome firms, which are characterized by strong resistance to change, unwieldy bureaucracies, and old-fashioned mind-sets. The Communist government of China displayed many of these attributes, and the difficulty in unfreezing was highlighted during the April 2003 SARS crisis. After weeks of massively underreporting SARS cases in Beijing, the Chinese government fired both the city's mayor and the country's health minister and announced a revision of Beijing's SARS caseload from 37 to 339—in 1 day (Beech, 2003). However, there is one benefit of crisis over many other forms of organizational change: Once a crisis is acknowledged, it creates a sense of urgency and collaboration within the firm. For example, consider the shared sense of purpose among New Yorkers seeking to reestablish normal operations after the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Argenti, 2002) and the cooperation among scientists from many nations seeking to identify and control the sources of virulent diseases such as SARS and avian flu (CDC Case Studies, 2007).

Moving and Crisis Onset

Lewin's (1951) Moving Stage requires moving to new learning through training, demonstration, and empowerment, and Turner's (1976) Crisis Onset refers to the point where the immediate consequences of the crisis become apparent. In this stage, the organization seeks to cope with the urgent requirements of the crisis. Management attention becomes focused on selecting an appropriate response, resources are diverted from regular operations to crisis management, and the firm strives to deal with the disastrous event (Mitroff, 2003). As Table 1 suggests, organizations should reallocate company resources to cope with the crisis as well as respond quickly through both internal and external communication. Stakeholders are seeking evidence of damage control. For example, when dealing with an outbreak of contagious disease, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) seeks to immediately reach the American people with timely information and reassurance (CDC Case Studies, 2007). However, flawed decision making (Chermack, 2003), faulty implementation techniques (Smart & Vertinsky, 1977), resistance to change (Jick, 1990), and divisive intra- and interorganizational conflict (Gerzon, 2006) may derail the crisis management effort. Therefore, as Congleton (2006) noted, "efforts to reduce risks associated with natural disasters and emergency responses to those disasters involve the interdependent decisions of local, state, and national governments, which require a variety of free-riding and coordination problems to be overcome" (p. 3). In his assessment of the Hurricane Katrina disaster, Welch (2005) referred to the paralysis brought on by panic and its common side effect, inertia. Smart and Vertinsky (1977) pointed out, "An actual decision may be timely, well thought out, and represent the best action in a crisis, but the organization may still end up in a disaster through faulty implementation techniques" (p. 647).

The Moving/Crisis Onset stage, like any form of stressful organizational change (e.g., Henderson & McAdam, 2003), poses special demands on the people experiencing it (Jick, 1990). Reilly (1998) emphasized the anxiety and uncertainty engendered by a crisis, and other researchers have noted the prevalence of burnout and low morale among employees in affected firms (Probst & Raisch, 2005; Roemer, 2007). Kiefer (2002) argued that organizational changes are very emotive events. According to Argenti (2002), "In a time of extreme crisis. . . . Before any other constructive action can take place—whether it's serving customers or reassuring investors—the morale of employees must be rebuilt" (p. 104). Table 1 emphasizes using HRD staff to assist employees with stress, burnout, and emotional fallout.

Thus, the uncertainty (Turner, 1976) and insecurity (Marcus & Goodman, 1991) generated by crises are associated with another HRD competency: stress management. Many researchers have noted that chronic stress (such as that engendered by an organizational crisis) contributes to employee resistance to change (DeFrank & Ivancevich, 1998; Sikora, Beaty, & Forward, 2004).

Employees are stretched thin trying to cope with the disaster in addition to their regular work, and they may distrust management for getting them into this mess. Probst and Raisch (2005) found that crisis burnout companies display a high degree of employee stress because of heavy workloads and an aggressive climate. Furthermore, executives as well as employees may suffer burnout from managing—for days, weeks, months—the intensity and magnitude of an ongoing crisis (Milburn et al., 1983).

Helping people cope with organizational crisis requires answering the fundamental (albeit unspoken) question of “What will happen to *me*?” The biggest fear among employees may be job loss, but even if job security is somehow assured, questions remain about workload, compensation, and career paths postcrisis, again illustrating the importance of effective communication, training, and organization development—all HRD issues. Lockwood (2005) noted that HRD staff may work with employee assistance (EAP) professionals as well as management to educate them about the impact of stress. Simply informing people of change and telling them to implement it, rather than involving them in the change process, is itself a source of stress (DeFrank & Ivancevich, 1998). Reilly (1998) noted that people in stressful changes like crises need the opportunity to voice their concerns and be heard, whereas Jick (1990) proposed listening as an essential crisis communication strategy and a form of emotional first aid to subordinates.

Table 1 shows that many of the communication strategies in this stage are geared to inform and reassure employees and outside stakeholders alike. For example, Argenti (2002) noted that senior executives should stay highly visible, so employees are certain of top management’s command of the crisis situation as well as their concern for employees (see also Mitroff, 2003). A good illustration is the leadership provided by New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani on September 11, 2001, who arrived on the scene minutes after the first attack on the World Trade Center. Another example is the 1982 crisis management team at Johnson & Johnson, headed by Chairman James Burke. Not only were all Tylenol products recalled through retail outlets, but within 24 hours, Burke and his team also sent out 450,000 warnings and a worldwide alert about poisoned Tylenol (Sedgwick Group, 2002).

Refreezing, Rescue/Salvage (First Stage Adjustment), and Full Cultural Adjustment

According to Lewin (1951), Refreezing is the stage in which the change becomes a permanent part of the organization’s everyday activities through reinforcement and rewards. The Refreezing stage may be mapped onto Turner’s (1976) two last stages of organizational crisis: First Stage Adjustment (rescue and salvage) and Full Cultural Readjustment (in which assessment allows the firm to adjust its views to fit the newly gained understanding of the

world). In addition, the major shifts precipitated by the crisis are usually associated with many smaller, interrelated changes, often cascading through the organization in a domino effect. Many scholars in both the change and the crisis management literatures have recognized the need for addressing postchange issues. Jick's (1991) recommendations for implementing change called on firms to "reinforce and institutionalize the change" (p. 8), whereas other researchers (e.g., Henderson & McAdam, 2003; Kontoghiorghes et al., 2005) recommended developing a learning organization capable of adapting to future change. Lockwood (2005) argued that one of the critical roles of HRD is to help the company develop recovery plans that address the safety, health, and welfare of its employees. These issues are noted in Table 1 as HRD competencies contributing to long-term crisis adjustment.

The complexity of the postcrisis stage thus presents another set of challenges for effective crisis management. Turner (1976) emphasized that maintaining employee commitment to the organization and its long-term survival is important. Milburn, Schuler, and Watman (1983) recognized that organizational reactions to crisis do not stop with the short-term responses; a crisis may engender changes that continue to affect the intermediate and long-term activities of the firm. One illustration of this point is the U.S. example of New Orleans. This city, which suffered the loss of more than 1,000 residents and property damage in excess of \$200 billion after Hurricane Katrina (Congleton, 2006) remains a painful example several years posthurricane. According to one journalist who reported on the extremely slow recovery, "New Orleans is experiencing what appears to be a near epidemic of depression and post-traumatic stress disorders, one that mental health experts say is of an intensity rarely seen in this country" (Saulny, 2006, p. 1). A similar and even broader example is the aftermath of the December 2004 earthquake and tsunami in south Asia, which killed more than 280,000 people and displaced 1 million more. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2005),

Survivors are likely to spend years wrestling with the mental health impact. . . . Aid programmes will quickly reconstruct homes, schools, and hospitals, but rebuilding the shattered lives and minds of the people who lost friends, family, homes, and their livelihoods will take much longer. (p. 1)

As illustrated in Table 1, like any large-scale organization change, effective crisis management takes time (Reilly, 1998). Within the organization, employee concerns about job security, career paths, and compensation must be addressed (Jick, 1990). HRD staff thus remains vital to crisis recovery. Outside the firm, shareholders and customers must be reassured about the firm's long-term survival. In fact, according to Massey (2001), managing organizational legitimacy is crucial in order for the firm to regain stakeholder support for its actions. Once again, communication plays a key role, and Table 1 outlines specific communication strategies for managing the Refreezing/Cultural Adjustment stage.

Implications for HRD Practice, Theory, and Research

This article explored the role of important HRD competencies, including change management, stress management, and training and development in facilitating crisis communication. Using an interdisciplinary approach, it integrated research from organization development, crisis management, and crisis communication in illustrating how key HRD competencies are linked to managing and communicating during crisis. Communication is one of the fundamental tools of HRD practice (Jacobs, 1990). Although the tools presented are geared toward managing crises, many of the communication applications are relevant to managing day-to-day operations as well (Schultz, 2003). Table 1 presented a detailed set of HRD communication strategies that may be as useful in ordinary operations as in crisis management. For example, effective crisis communication requires both external and internal communication (D'Aveni & MacMillan, 1990)—and so does effective routine information flow (Staw et al., 1981). Many examples of outdated corporate Web sites illustrate that up-to-the-minute communication with external stakeholders may be overlooked by many organizations (Sullivan & Lindemans, 2007).

Another application of HRD practice in this article is its emphasis on T & D. T & D serve as a critical method of building a firm's human capital; thus, the training suggested to strengthen crisis management and communication should also contribute to the firm's human resource competencies as a whole. For example, Table 1 suggests HRD training in media management, an important skill set for any firm (Pinsdorf, 1987). Stress management is another illustration. Even without a crisis, the workplace today includes increasing complexity and inevitable change contributing to high stress levels among employees and managers (DeFrank & Ivancevich, 1998).

The crisis communication competencies outlined in this article also emphasized the importance of planning ahead for potential crises. Lockwood (2005) noted,

HR [Human Resources] leaders today have a strategic role and responsibility to ensure their organizations are aware of the human side of crisis and to plan ahead to help minimize its effects. To be most effective, HR leaders work collaboratively with top-down commitment to develop enterprise-wide solutions. (p. 1)

For example, employee compensation may shift dramatically during and after crises. Employees' altered career paths must be considered, and employees need a vision for the future (Seeger et al., 2003). According to Hosie (2006), "Developing the capacity of human capital goes beyond the provision of reactive and periodic training experiences to the necessity of keeping key personnel constantly learning" (p. 9).

The article also contributes to HRD theory in several ways. The change management literature (e.g., Beckhard & Harris, 1987) may be enriched through the emphasis on unfreezing and immediate response suggested by the

crisis communication framework presented here. For example, one of the challenges of *noncrisis* OD interventions is to achieve the necessary buy-in and sense of urgency to move through the change process effectively (Jick, 1991); the crisis management example suggested some alternatives to achieve that goal. With its focus on planning ahead, the article also informs the growing literature of organizational learning (Lynham, 2001). Learning from crises may be based on the organization's own past experience or on the experiences of other firms; in either case, the goal is to learn how to minimize the crisis impact. Thoughtfully implemented HRD theory may be a positive driver for organization learning and organizational openness (Blackman & Lee-Kelley, 2006). As Valkeavaara (1998) argued, "In order to meet the changing world and the uncertainty which it engenders, fostering competence and continuous learning at all levels of an organization has gradually been recognized as a sound investment in companies" (p. 172).

Like any literature review, this article had its limitations. Its perspective is primarily Western, reflecting the Western focus of the prior research reviewed and most of the crisis management examples analyzed. Crisis communication strategies do indeed vary across cultures, reflecting differences in values and norms in coping with crises themselves. Although this Western point of view may limit this article's cross-cultural generalizability, it also suggests an important avenue for future comparative research about what makes crisis communication effective in different cultures and contexts.

Other suggestions for future research include more study of Internet-based communication and its role in crisis communication and crisis management. Given the global interconnectedness of companies and individuals, coupled with their ability to instantaneously transmit information, the impact of Internet information flow may be dramatic in crises. Strategies for reaching both internal and external stakeholders need to be explored, compared, and tested. Longitudinal studies linking crisis communication strategies and post-crisis recovery would be another impactful area for analysis. Indeed, continued research about crisis communication and crisis management will emphasize the importance of these topics in the HRD domain. As Hosie (2006) argued, "Preparedness for crises must become an integral part of the strategic consciousness of organizations" (p. 9).

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