

Dealing With The Complete Crisis -- The Crisis Management Shell Structure

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Crisis management involves prevention, mitigation, actual response, and recovery (Heck, 1991; Rosenthal & Pijnenberg, 1991); recovery of control over events (Green, 1992); optimal use of time and resources (Regester, 1989); and fact finding, analysis, damage control, and communication (Mitroff & Pearson, 1993). Practitioner approaches include the Incident Command System and use of ad hoc groups (Barton, 1993).

This paper introduces an integrated management approach in the Crisis Management Shell Structure (Heath, 1994) in terms of what the components units do, why they do these activities, and who is involved. By using a central management hub and outbranches to advisory personnel, public communications personnel, internal communications and information managers, a coordination and control office, image management, and links to superiors and/or normal operations outside the crisis situation, this approach enables users to deal more effectively with all the facets of crisis management.

Crisis management evolves from military and paramilitary organizations responding to wars and major natural disasters. Most of these wars and disasters are physically visible with a specific geographic location that leads to on-site proximity management that allows the physical response to the crisis event to dominate management thinking to the exclusion of less visible needs. Practitioners and theorists note the existence of broader aspects of crisis management. Heck (1991) and Rosenthal & Pijnenberg (1991), for example, find that crisis management needs to deal with the wider issues of prevention and mitigation and with preparing people before a crisis happens, as well as dealing with response and recovery issues.

Prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery are commonly accepted as basic principles of disaster and crisis management. Many western government agencies involved in crisis management use a four stage model such as MPRR (mitigation, preparation, response, recovery) or PPRR (prevention, preparation, response, recovery). When a crisis happens, however, active focus often falls upon approaches similar to the Incident Command System (ICS) which has a basic assumption that a physical crisis event needs management.

The problem with ICS-type approaches is that these are not fully designed nor equipped for more than direct response and recovery activities. This means that:

- 1) other structures need to be used to deal with mitigation, prevention, and preparedness issues, and,
- 2) the existing structures do not facilitate complete management of all of the issues and requirements of a crisis situation.

Separating the crisis management structure from the other day-to-day activities of planning and

preparedness (particularly in terms of undertaking and communicating these to the rest of the organization or community) reduces the integration and likely effectiveness of any such efforts. Likewise, a predominating focus on on-site physical responses not only fails to meet the requirements of other less tangible crisis situations, but also de-emphasises the importance of data collation and communication evident in many actual uses of an ICS-type structure.

Crises also involve greater managerial elements in themselves. Green (1992) finds that a characteristic of crisis management is that "one starts from a position in which control of events has been lost" (p. 67). This can be taken into the broader crisis management context. A fundamental mission for crisis managers is to prevent loss of control before a crisis happens, prevent further loss of control when a crisis arises, and when and where possible regain control when loss of control happens. Regaining control of a crisis situation becomes a central principle of crisis management.

Within business and industrial settings Regester (1989, p.38) finds crisis management involves establishing guidelines for action as "time is at a premium and resource allocation is critical". Planning, training and exercising crisis management introduces people to the guidelines for managing crises. Regester (1989, p.38) further finds that "crisis management is about seizing the initiative -- taking control of what has happened before it engulfs the company". Again, planning is essential, time is critical, and control is emphasised.

Mitroff & Pearson (1993) note that crisis managers need to actively undertake information gathering, analysis, and dissemination. Thus crisis managers simultaneously need to perform a number of tasks. These tasks include those of "fact finding, analysis, damage control, and communication" (p.101). Managers consequently need to be able to use available time as efficiently as possible.

From practitioner perspectives crisis management involves apparently conflicting requirements. Some central requirements would be that:

- a) the crisis manager is as senior as possible,
- b) the crisis manager to be capable of managing the crisis,
- c) membership of the response team is fixed so that everyone knows who does what,
- d) membership of the response team is flexible to meet the unique needs of specific crises,
- e) there is a strong focus on command and control structures, and,
- f) there is a strong focus on coordinating the efforts of diverse groups of respondents.

These tend to form pairs of sometimes conflicting requirements. Seniority does not necessarily carry any real capability to manage crises, for example, nor does fixed membership necessarily promote flexibility of approach (or vice versa). Many managers from command and control backgrounds (such as found in military and paramilitary organizations) find coordination difficult and tend to base their management style on a dominant command and control approach.

Behind these requirements reside two contradictory propositions. First, crisis management requires decisive action due to the limited time in which to respond, the threat of losses, and the uncertainty of available information. Fast decision making usually comes from single decision makers who exert authority in centralised structures. **Crisis situations tend to require a central commander to whom (and through whom) all information and attention is placed.** From this proposition, we can deduce that the fastest response management may be provided by a senior ranked manager using a specific group of people in a centralised command and control setting.

Second, most crisis situations require specialist responses from different groups of

people. These specialist teams, groups, or organizations are likely to resist and resent command and control from a person outside their group and are more likely to be motivated when they provide input into the decisions about what tasks they undertake and how they go about this. **Responses to crisis situations tend to require consultation and decentralised decision making in order to make full and effective use of all respondents.** From this proposition, we may suggest that the ability of the crisis manager to manage a crisis, the use of decentralised and consultative decision making, and the use of coordination rather than command and control generates a more motivated and goal directed effort which produces a more effective management of a crisis situation.

Integration of these propositions prompts the realisation that crisis management needs highly motivated respondents who operate in a flexible yet robust decision environment that uses both centralised and delegatory decision processes. Crisis managers need to find a balance between speed of decision and involvement of the respondents in decision making. Likewise, crisis managers need to balance between directing management of specific parts of the crisis event and coordinating the overall effort toward the same goal or set of goals.

Some Crisis Management Structures

The **Incident Command System (ICS)** is specifically developed to deal with actions and activities required resolve the impact of a crisis or disaster at a specific location or site. While this focus on dealing with the on-site physical demands of a crisis is not in dispute, crisis situations and disasters are multi-faceted, have ripple-effects that cause complex complications at times, and have perceptual and psychological levels that are poorly addressed by the ICS structure as it currently exists. ICS may be difficult to implement in less physical situations.

The basic principles of the ICS approach are:

- The system is simple and flexible in that ICS accepts single users, key users with others in support, or multi-user involvement in a unified command.
- The system can expand in a rapid and logical manner and uses common terminology, modular organisation, unified command structure, integrated action plans, workable spans-of-control, resources appropriate to the response, and integrated communications.
- The structure is shaped according to the size and type of incident, and expands (where necessary) upward and downward from an Incident Commander who has initial overall authority at the site of an incident.
- The sections involving planning, operations, command, logistics and finance-administration are capable of expansion into separate divisions when needed.

The approach involves an **Incident Commander** (note the military-based terminology) or **IC** who manages the response to the crisis. The Command Structure devolves from the IC and the IC's immediate staff into four section commands that resemble closely a Military Head Quarters structure: operations, planning and intelligence, logistics, and, finance and administration (see Figure 1). Each section may in turn be divided into divisions, or branches, or even specialist units.

An immediately apparent strength of the ICS is the flatness of the structure (command to section, or two levels) which facilitates quick interactive communication and decision making. Another strength lies in the division of labour into the four sections which allows some of the different tasks to be done simultaneously (a structural requirement noted earlier).

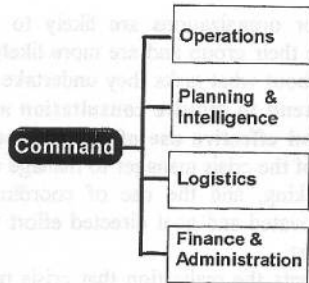


Figure 1. The Incident Command System (ICS) Structure.

A major weakness of the ICS structure is also readily seen. Intelligence (or information gathering and assessment) is given secondary importance, being a sub-section attached to planning. Consequently full development of information collection and validation may be diminished. As already noted, managing a situation requires assessing and interpreting information and thus managers need fully developed information management systems.

A further, perhaps more vital, weakness is that little attention is given to the structure and nature of communications -- particularly with those outside the crisis response group and the crisis environment. This may be one reason why ICS users tend to appear off-balance and even secretive when dealing with media representatives and special interest groups.

In business crisis situations which may or may not have a tangible physical location, Meyers & Holusha (1986) propose that **ad hoc teams** enlisted by a CEO or very senior manager form a very flexible crisis management structure. One problem with this approach is that members of ad hoc groups may not have all the skills and training for their group member roles -- the time taken to determine and assemble the members of an ad hoc management team could best be used in gaining more information on the actual crisis. This "at need" approach also reduces the ability to address the issues of reduction, mitigation, and even preparedness and recovery unless a more permanent cadre of members is retained.

Barton (1993) makes specific observations about the composition of crisis management teams. He finds that a number of managerial positions in an organisation need to be included in a crisis team. These positions include officers from administration, technical operations, public affairs (non-media external parties), public relations (media), consumer affairs, investor relations, and advertising. A problem with this approach is that managerial representatives selected from traditional organisational departments can bring the day-to-day political and ideological conflicts between departments into to the crisis team. Barton admits that dividing crisis management duties within traditional organisational structures can lead to questions about staffing and who is best able to be ultimately responsible for managing a specific crisis.

Introducing The Crisis Management Shell Structure (CMSS)

The above discussion indicates a number of requirements for an effective and complete crisis management structure. These requirements would include a need for:

- a simple and easily understood structure,
- flat management that reduces loss of time in giving information and commands,
- centralised decision making,

- the ability to delegate task management and associated decision making,
- a focus on coordination more than command,
- a dedicated ability to collect, evaluate and distribute information, and,
- ability to communicate effectively among groups *inside* and *outside* the crisis situation.

The CMSS incorporates these features (see Figure 2) and thus facilitates the ability of the crisis manager to *manage*. The CMSS has a high degree of flexibility. One person can undertake all the functions outlined in this structure, although overall efficiency and effectiveness will be less than optimal due to constraints on attention and the non-simultaneous and sequential process of attending each of the task clusters. The smallest optimal size is when one person occupies each of the seven office positions shown in Figure 2. When CMSS staff numbers exceed seven staff in number the senior or supervising personnel from each of these seven functions meet to form the nucleus of a strategic management group that regularly meets during the crisis situation to exchange information, decide on common objectives and strategies, and provide information links to their respective offices or committees.

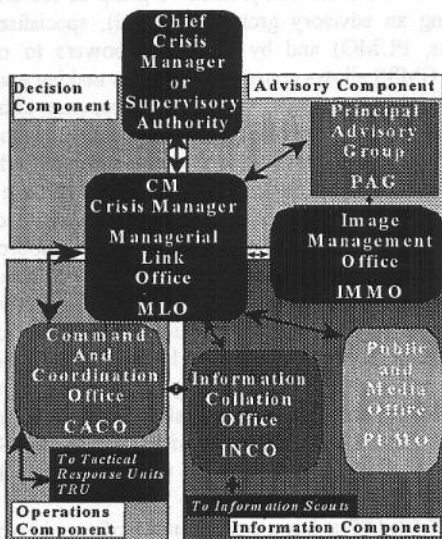
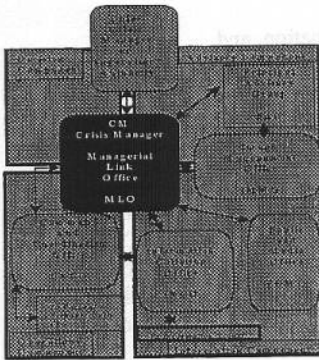


Figure 2. The Crisis Management Shell Structure

The CMSS has an information management element and a decision-action element (the right-hand and left-hand half of Figure 2, respectively). The information element separates into an information component (bottom right-hand box) which contains an Information Collation Office (INCO), a Public and Media Office (PUMO), and an advisory Image Management Office (IMMO) and an Advisory Component (top right-hand box) which contains an advisory Image Management Office (IMMO) and a Principal Advisory Group. The decision-action element separates into a Decision Component (top left-hand box) which contains a management interface between the Crisis Manager (CM) and higher authority and an Operations Component that contains a Coordination and Command Office (CACO).

Crisis Manager (CM)



As a central hub, the Crisis Manager (CM) and the CM's support staff or Managerial Link Office (MLO) sits astride all four components. The CM is the central person managing the crisis and has ultimate authority and responsibility for the management of the crisis. Should there be a number of crises happening at the same time then a Chief Coordinating Crisis Manager may run a separate coordinating CMSS allowing each CM to operate a tighter CMSS Team. The CM makes all decisions and may delegate operational authority to a deputy should the crisis continue into shift-work settings (that is, longer than 8 hours).

Centralised authority enables faster decision making and a more comprehensive grasp of the crisis event (and the recovery operation). By using an advisory group (the PAG), specialised information management units (INCO, Scouts, PUMO) and by delegating powers to on-site tactical operations (the ICS structure), the CMSS allows consensual decision making and simultaneous operations to take place while retaining overall direction of the response effort. This may ensure higher levels of motivation and commitment and help generate more time and information for decision making -- both of which were requirements outlined earlier.

The CM needs to be able to operate in confusing situations which are hampered by missing and uncertain information, seem to have almost no time in which to decide and act in response, usually entail demand for resources that exceeds the available resources, and which has high levels of stress and performance expectations. The CM needs to have the skills and training necessary to manage the crisis and to provide an effective balance between command and coordination. Most organisations tend to choose a senior executive as crisis manager, although some place crisis management at the field manager level. If the CM is a middle or junior manager (as can arise in the field manager situation) higher management need to accept the authority vested in the CM for the duration of the crisis. As the CM can be absent attending meetings or may be pre-occupied with the needs of a specific CMSS unit, a small support staff that maintain links with the other units in the CMSS needs to be established where staff availability exists.

The MLO. The Managerial Link Office has a small number of people who act as links between the needs and requirements of the CM and the other Offices or Groups within the CMSS, and between these Offices and Groups and the CM. In this way, the MLO ensures continuity of information flows between the CM and the rest of the units in the CMSS. Such continuity enables faster interactions and ensures information is continually updated. The staff of the MLO are usually junior staff who are trained and skilled in accurately gaining and facilitating interactions between managers and other staff. For a middle to large crisis response, a minimum of three (3) MLO staff is recommended (multiplied by the number of shifts organised where shifts are used). The MLO staff have no executive powers and need to be readily recognised by the senior staff of the other CMSS units so that information exchange is as easy and as comfortable as the situation allows.

crisis management requirements are established. These requirements are:

- a separation of internal and external flows of information that reduces rumours, inconsistencies in released information, and leakage of confidential information,
- a centralised public information source, and,
- faster information access for media and other interested people.

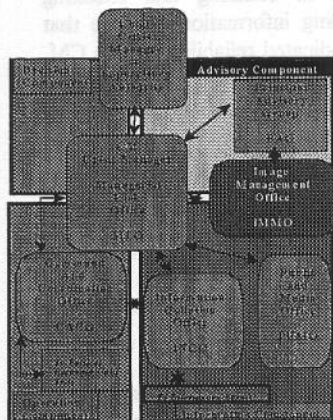


Image Management Office (IMMO)

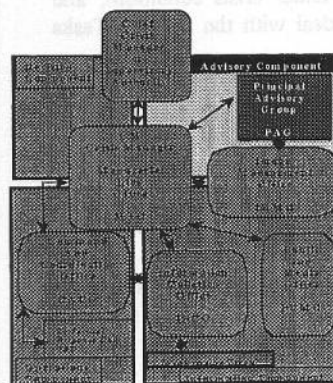
IMMO has a primary mission to analyse and advise on how the host organisation(s), CMSS operation, and crisis event may be perceived by those *outside* the crisis situation. In particular, IMMO staff advise on how to manage aspects of the corporate / CMSS image in response to any negative perceptions being expressed by those outside the crisis situation. Tasks include:

- coordination of relevant information that is to be presented in the most truthful and most positive way,
- assisting in, and managing, special events such as media conferences, and,
- advising CMs and those likely to be interviewed on what has been said and what is likely to be asked.

Many of these activities involve shaping the way(s) in which information is presented through media news releases, media conferences, and through interviews and public discussions.

Less tangible incidents may also prompt use of IMMO. These incidents include attacks on an organisation's image, cash flow problems, take-overs and mergers, and major changes to an organisation's operational mission or management process.

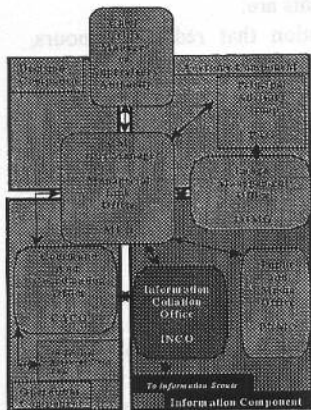
IMMO staff need to be skilled in anticipating issues raised in the outside community. Other necessary skills include ability to analyse the content and shape of comments and criticisms, to be able to present approaches that reduce or neutralise negative perceptions, and a capacity to find ways of gaining cooperation from people with hostile attitudes.



Principal Advisory Team (PAG)

The PAG provides most of the expert advice to the CM. Consequently, *membership of a PAG needs to include senior representatives from all responding agencies and those likely to take over subsequent clean-up and restoration work.* The PAG considers problems and issues confronting the CM, so that:

- the CM is able to do other decision and coordination duties,
 - more than one person knows what is happening, and
 - expert advice can be quickly gained when needed.
- The PAG relieves the CM of the need to be expert in all elements involved in the crisis event. Membership



Information Collation Office (INCO)

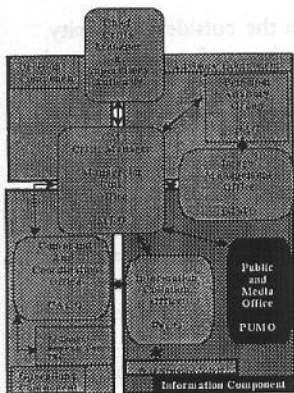
The INCO team manages all the information relevant to the crisis and the crisis response, relieving the CM of this burden. INCO provides a central and dedicated information processing operation. Consequently, INCO staff need to be trained in collating and checking information, and in recording information in ways that provide rapid access and indicated reliability for the CM, MLO, PAG, CACO, and IMMO.

The chief tasks for INCO are to:

- provide access to internal flows of information within the Crisis Response Team,
- sort, collate, and record information about the crisis event and crisis response, and
- provide both summary and raw information to the CM, MLO, PAG, and IMMO.

INCO does not provide information directly to the Public and Media Office (PUMO). To help INCO gather information, CMSS users are urged to train specialist information gatherers or Information Scouts.

Information Scouts Information Scouts gather information for INCO and specialise in source (radio, television, newspapers) or on-site information collection. Scouts provide a dedicated information collection operation that is fast and accurate because Scouts concentrate on gathering information and do not get involved in the response, and because Scouts use independent communication systems. Scouts need to be trained in gathering and reporting information objectively and in a set pattern. These people need to be accepted by the CMSS units as equals doing a vital task (and not as spies).



Public and Media Office (PUMO)

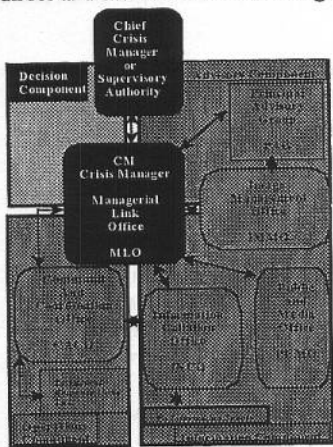
The PUMO team is dedicated to providing information to those outside the crisis situation who are not members of the crisis response. Consequently PUMO people need to be trained in dealing with people under crisis conditions, and need to be able to effectively deal with the media. Tasks include:

- receiving and responding to enquiries from outside the crisis management team for help and information,
- running (when required) a Victim Identification / Missing Persons public information operation,
- transferring any information contacts from outside the crisis response team to the appropriate INCO personnel, and
- handling information operations for media agencies.

PUMO needs to clear any information to be released to those outside the crisis situation with the CM. Likewise, PUMO can relay information to INCO **but cannot transit or request information from INCO.**

By isolating PUMO from direct access to internal flows of information three important

of the PAG may change during the crisis, as specific experts are co-opted for specific concerns or response requirements. Sometimes PAG members move into operational management or tactical advisory roles when specific problems within their competence are encountered. An expert in handling hazardous chemicals, for example, may move from a PAG role to a more direct and tactical role in handling those substances.



Chief Crisis Manager / Supervisory Authority.

In almost all crisis situations the CM also reports to higher authorities in some form of Supervisory Authority. This may arise under one or both of two conditions:

1. there is more than one crisis situation or site, and,
2. only a part of an organization (or community) is involved in the crisis.

Supervisory Authorities provide the process of accountability for CMs and their teams, and coordinate between affected and non-affected components of an organisation or community.

Sometimes, a more senior authority may also have input into the crisis management process. When this happens, Chief Crisis Managers or Chief Crisis Coordinators provide support and strategic coordination of an effort over multiple sites or situations.

Normal Operations Liaison Office (NOLO)

In some crisis situations (particularly in recovery operations) a NOLO team may be assembled to liaise between affected and unaffected groups. NOLO teams help:

- coordinate and supply support resources,
- look after the needs of unaffected groups, and,
- maintain the balance between the crisis management and the non-crisis environments.

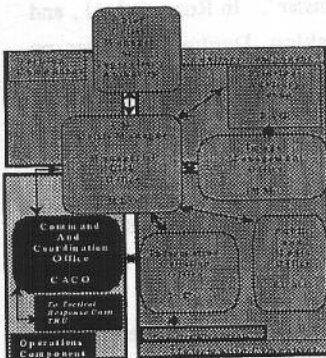
NOLO staff are not part of the CMSS team.

Command and Coordination Office (CACO)

CACO provides direct coordination and command over the response effort. In large CMSS designs, CACO relieves the CM of direct and continuous tactical control of the situation, enabling more attention to be placed by the CM on broad issues, problem resolution, and future strategy formulation. The person in charge of CACO is usually the Deputy Crisis Manager (DCM) who may temporarily assume the role of Crisis Manager when the CM is absent. CACO enacts many of the activities of an ICS approach.

CACO personnel are trained in determining and transmitting strategic directions into tactical and unit level instructions. CACO has two missions:

1. converting strategic decisions into tactical action-tasks and assigning those tasks to



- Tactical Response Units, and,
2. monitoring the status and deployment of resources allocated to the crisis.

CACO staff translate strategic goals and directions into tactical and unit level instructions for field or action-level response units (Tactical Response Units or TRUs). These TRUs are linked to the CACO team for information exchange and transmission of instructions.

Conclusion

The structure of a Crisis Management Shell Structure is simple and easily understood, with a flat set of two-level management paths that help reduce loss of time in giving commands and exchanging information. There exists a centralised decision making structure that facilitates coordination and enables task management to be delegated to appropriate response units. The structure has expanded and dedicated systems for collecting, evaluating, and transmitting information, and these systems are separated into units that are dedicated to exclusively managing internal or external information requirements.

The CMSS is simple and flexible and able to be adapted for tangible or less tangible crisis situations. The structure facilitates tactical management of a crisis situation, as well as enabling liaison with outside "normal" operations, integrating coordination of multiple crisis situations and sites, and providing advice on crisis issues and on how the crisis response is perceived by those outside the crisis situation. All of these activities are conducted simultaneously in a properly staffed CMSS team. Therein lies the strength of a CMSS -- the structure is based upon task function alone.

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