

## STRATEGY AND TACTICS - FACTORS CRITICAL TO SUCCESS IN CRISIS TEAMS

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### ABSTRACT

Since 2020, the Corona pandemic has dominated the lives of very many people worldwide. In order to cope professionally with this ongoing crisis, appropriate crisis teams have been set up in almost all organisations. (Lamers et. al., 2021, p.4) The focus of the paper is therefore on the consideration and analysis of factors critical to the success of crisis teams in general. The work provides a corresponding overview of these critical factors and classifies them strategically and tactically.

**Keywords:** Crisis management, crisis team, crisis situation.

### INTRODUCTION

For a better understanding, the term "crisis" should be defined in more detail at this point due to the diverse connotations and thus delimited in the context of corporate security:

"If the core mission of a company or an organisation is endangered in a sustained, persistent manner, this situation can be defined as a crisis. A crisis thus represents the final stage of a conflict situation or a disruption through which the continued existence of an organisation or a company is directly threatened. There is a danger of instability of the whole system, which can develop into a threat to the existence of the whole organisation. " (Krystek & Moldenhauer, 2007, p. 24-28).

In order to cope with a crisis that has occurred, a crisis management system should be implemented in advance in an organisation, which is entrusted with the tasks of crisis prevention and post-crisis care. Crisis management is therefore: "The creation of conceptual, organisational and technical preconditions that support the fastest possible return to normality of the damage situation that has occurred. The aim is to ensure the institution's ability to make decisions and to enable a targeted and coordinated management of the crisis. Institution-wide crisis management is responsible for all types of crises." (Federal Office for Information Security, [BSI], 2022, p.100).

When dealing with such a diverse task, a wide variety of factors critical to the successful operation of crisis teams play a decisive role.

### METHODOLOGY

In order to clarify and objectively present factors critical to the success of crisis teams in general, the method of literature research and evaluation was applied. Relevant university databases as well as various trade journals and official publications were used. The focus of the research was on literature

published in the period from 1987 to 2022 that deals critically with the topic of crisis teams and crisis communication.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In organisational terms, crisis management consists of a group of responsible actors, each of whom is responsible for carrying out specific tasks in the event of a crisis. To manage an acute crisis, this group practically takes over the management of the organisation (Krystek, 1987, p. 97). This group thus represents the crisis team of the organisation. *"Staffing is an essential building block for a functioning crisis team."* (Gahlen & Kranaster, 2012, p. 11).

Since crisis situations are exceptional situations that often demand the highest physical and psychological stress from the actors, if necessary also over a longer period of time, preparatory measures for coping with the task are indispensable. These include, among other things, a strategy for goal-oriented, trustworthy crisis communication, the establishment of crisis management in advance, the unrestricted support of the highest hierarchical level of the organisation, sensible information management as well as the establishment of crisis precautions. If we look at these success factors more closely, it becomes clear that a decisive aspect is the timing as well as the modus operandi of the composition and constitution of the crisis management. Furthermore, the support of the crisis management team by the organisation's management, the departments and the corresponding supervisory bodies playing an important role.

Another factor for successful crisis management is the management of the available information and the handling of affected communication partners, especially representatives of the media. The establishment of a special media staff is essential at this point. *"Within the staffs, the media staff has only the task of processing information and communicating it, as far as necessary, internally and externally"* (Lindner, 2009, p. 170). Another relevant aspect is the organisation's investment in crisis preparedness and the establishment and expansion of appropriate staffs in the run-up to the actual crisis situation.

The right time for activating the crisis staff and the assigned operational units is just as important, because if the staff is constituted too early, important resources may be tied up. If the staff is convened too late, the room for manoeuvre may already be considerably limited. To avoid this problem, threshold values should be set as a precautionary measure, which, if exceeded, automatically trigger the formation of a crisis team. In this way, responsibility is transferred from the departments to a crisis team in good time.

The staffing of crisis teams is also a key success factor in overcoming the crisis situation. *"Basically, to manage major incidents and crises, you need people with the necessary expertise who are also resilient and have the necessary decision-making powers."* (Gahlen & Kranaster, 2012, p.19). Or: *"Members of all teams involved should be chosen for their personal qualities and talents - breadth of vision, ability to stay cool, knowledge of the company and its business, and the ability to make swift, clearly expressed decisions."* (Larkin & Regester, 2005, p. 205). Thus, on the one hand, not only the special skills and the individual personality structure of the individual members have to be taken into account, but also the interaction as a team is important. Team players and not lone warriors are needed here. Within large crisis teams, the formation of a strict hierarchy is indispensable.

Another important aspect is the cooperation between the staff or staffs and the specialised departments. Under certain circumstances, communication can be conflictual and marked by battles over competences. This makes it all the more important to pass on secure information and to communicate in a balanced way with previously identified stakeholders. *"Emergencies and crises are readily picked up by the media."* (Lindner, 2009, p.97).

It is of utmost importance that media representatives receive facts, information, pictures and, for example, interviews with decision-makers from the affected organisation. The same applies to other stakeholders such as directly affected departments, competent authorities, the general workforce, the neighbourhood, non-governmental organisations or possibly already active General crisis preparedness is an investment in the future. The elaboration of concrete crisis plans, the definition of criteria for the constitution of crisis teams or the implementation of a communication strategy make fundamental decisions in crisis situations unnecessary and ensure timely, standardised and professional crisis management. Sensible crisis prevention also includes a budget for training and further education of the crisis team members. This includes communication training, psychological training, the preparation and simulation of various crisis scenarios through business games (Strohschneider, 2007). Another preventive measure is the implementation of an information system that serves as an early warning system and as a basis for decision-making in crisis management. An unsuitable information system or simply the lack of an adequate information system leads to crisis-critical decisions being made on the basis of a suboptimal database. Reliable information from various sources is therefore crucial for the success of crisis teams. What is needed, therefore, is a holistic and collaborative information system that has been tested in practice and that prepares, processes and makes accessible the required information for all groups of stakeholders.

## CONCLUSIONS

Finally, it can be noted that due to globalisation and the associated strong networking of almost all companies, crises can also have an impact on companies that are not directly involved (Gahlen & Kranaster, 2012, p. 80-91). Companies find themselves in crisis situations at ever shorter intervals, and the effects seem to be growing. Crises always arise from risks that were incorrectly assessed or for which no or insufficient prevention was undertaken. As already mentioned, companies can also become involved in a crisis as a result of systemic, external crises or excessive dependence on third parties. No modern or globally active company is in a position to completely protect itself from this. Crises cannot be completely avoided, but companies can actively prepare for them in order to minimise the negative effects or, in the best case, even learn from them (Uth, 1994). A globalized world with globalized risks needs special actions to be taken to accept these challenges. To prevent the organisation from being affected or in worst case being damaged by these crises, it is necessary to implement companywide, professional crisis-management. This crisis-management implies basically a crisis squad, special crisis communication tactics and a technical crisis information system. We need to plan for the Unexpected.

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