

ISSUE OR CRISIS? EVERY SECOND COUNTS, SO IT MATTERS!

by:

Ronaldo A. Punla

School Principal I, Tubo-Tubo Integrated School

Issue and Crisis – are the words interchangeable? The answer is NO but most of the time, in our workplace, we tend to loosely interchange these words.

So, what is the difference between an issue and a crisis?

From a communications standpoint, identifying whether a situation is an issue, or a crisis is crucial. Each requires a distinct approach in terms of messaging, tone, and level of urgency. (Elevate, 2020) Here's a bit more on how communication strategies differ for issues and crises:

Issues:

- **Definition:** Issues are situations that have the potential to escalate but are not yet at a crisis level. They can be relatively routine and manageable. (Ho, 2023)
- **Communication Approach:** When dealing with an issue, communication tends to be more proactive and controlled. It may involve addressing concerns, providing clarification, and assuring stakeholders that the situation is being managed. (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023)
- **Messaging Tone:** The tone in communications about issues is typically calm, informative, and reassuring. It's aimed at maintaining transparency and trust. (Brower, PhD, 2023)

- **Level of Urgency:** While issues should be addressed promptly, there is usually more time for thoughtful consideration of the messaging and response strategy. (Reisch, 2021)
- **Channels:** Communication about issues may occur through regular channels like emails, newsletters, and internal announcements. (Birt, 2023)

Crises:

- **Definition:** Crises are situations that pose a significant threat to the organization, its stakeholders, or its reputation. They often require an immediate and coordinated response. (Mbakpuo, 2023)
- **Communication Approach:** Crisis communication is characterized by its speed and urgency. It involves providing real-time updates, clear instructions, and managing the narrative to prevent further escalation. (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023)
- **Messaging Tone:** The tone in crisis communication can be more urgent, empathetic, and focused on actions that need to be taken. It often requires swift decision-making and dissemination of critical information. (Brower, PhD, 2023)
- **Level of Urgency:** In a crisis, time is of the essence. Immediate action and communication are vital to mitigate the impact and ensure the safety and well-being of stakeholders. (Reisch, 2021)
- **Channels:** Communication during a crisis may include rapid dissemination through various channels, including social media, emergency alerts, press releases, and direct notifications to affected parties. (Birt, 2023)

In the field of education, the safety and well-being of students and staff, as well as maintaining the reputation of the educational institution, are top priorities. Issue and crisis management plays a critical role in addressing a wide range of challenges that can

arise in an educational setting. This can include everything from natural disasters and emergencies to incidents involving students, staff, or the broader community. Responding swiftly and effectively is essential to minimize harm, ensure the continuation of education, and uphold the trust of stakeholders. A well-prepared and organized approach can make a significant difference in the outcome of any situation.

Accurately distinguishing between an issue and a crisis is a foundational step in effective communication and management. Tailoring the response to the specific nature and severity of the situation ensures that stakeholders receive the appropriate information promptly and accurately. This is instrumental in effective crisis and issue management.

The significance of having well-defined crisis communication plans and trained personnel cannot be overstated. These elements form the backbone of an organization's ability to respond swiftly and appropriately, mitigating potential harm and safeguarding the well-being of stakeholders. Preparedness and training are key components of a successful crisis management strategy. (Philips, 2018)

Remember, every second counts in an issue and crisis, so being well-prepared and able to respond swiftly and effectively can make a significant difference in the outcome.

There is no doubt that a badly managed issue has the ability to turn into a crisis, while a well-handled issue can potentially avert a future crisis.

And that's why it's important to know which one you are dealing with. (Hasluck, 2023)

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