Lessons on Managing Crisis Uncertainty Effectively

Every crisis carries with it some level of uncertainty. Following a crisis, questions often surface about how to communicate during the uncertainty of a crisis. Whether the crisis is a natural disaster, a food-borne illness outbreak, or a plant explosion, a crisis communicator has to manage uncertainty. Consider that the cases in the last chapter, BP and the United States Coast Guard; Malden Mills; Odwalla; the terrorist attack in Oklahoma City; the tornado in Greensburg, Kansas; and Domino's, all experienced high levels of uncertainty during their crises. Uncertainty makes communicating complex because the crisis communicators must speak publicly without always having clear or accurate information. This chapter, then, provides some highly specialized approaches that go beyond effective crisis communication to meet the needs of high uncertainty crises. Our goal in this chapter is to provide some constructive advice about how to communicate in the presence of uncertainty. We identify 10 lessons for effectively managing the uncertainty of crisis. These lessons serve as guideposts for both students and practitioners of crisis communication.

To provide a quick overview of the chapter, we begin by providing a definition of uncertainty and discussing its link to our initial definition of crisis. The first four lessons characterize uncertainty as a potential challenge for crisis communicators, who can expect some frustration when initially communicating following a crisis. The next six lessons focus on proven communication strategies for changing uncertainty from a challenge to an opportunity. We conclude with a discussion of communication strategies that we believe either intensify or reduce the inherent uncertainty of crisis events. After reading this chapter, you should be better able to transform the constraints of uncertainty into opportunities.
**DEFINING UNCERTAINTY**

*Uncertainty* is the inability to determine the present or predict the future. Kramer (2004) suggests, “We may experience uncertainty due to lack of information, due to the complexity of the information, or due to questions about the quality of the information” (pp. 8–9).

We live in a world constrained by uncertainty. Uncertainty is a common experience regardless of your position in life, your job, or your age. For students, there is uncertainty about their next semester courses, their grades, and their futures. Organizations also experience uncertainty. They must plan for market upturns and downturns and try to predict, in a fickle market, what products or services their customers will purchase.

*Crisis-induced uncertainty* is quite different from the type of uncertainty people and organizations experience on a daily basis. To better understand the scope of crisis uncertainty, we illustrate its role through our definition of crisis discussed in Chapter 1. We defined crisis as an unexpected, nonroutine event that threatens the ultimate goals of the organization. Uncertainty is related to each of the elements of this definition and exemplifies the communication demands during crisis. Taleb (2010) explains that crises often create epistemological and ontological uncertainty. He defines *epistemological uncertainty* as the lack of knowledge we have following a crisis. Because crisis events are so new, complex, and subject to change, there is often little knowledge available about how to manage them. For this reason, crises often create gaps in knowledge for extended periods of time that constrain decision making and understanding. *Ontological uncertainty* refers to the type of uncertainty in which the future has little or no relationship to the past. Crisis events are often described as creating a new normal for all impacted by the event. This new normal is highly uncertain, because people’s beliefs about how the world operates change dramatically. Consider the new normal we experienced following 9/11 regarding airport security. As a society, we knew there would be changes; in the time that has passed since 9/11 there has been—and still is—considerable debate, discussion, and uncertainty about what this new normal will ultimately look like.

**UNEXPECTED CRISSES AND UNCERTAINTY**

Crisis happens when least expected, are shocking, and create a great deal of uncertainty for everyone concerned. To better understand the unexpected nature of crises, consider the Malden Mills case from the last chapter. In the middle of the night, Malden Mills erupted into flames for no apparent
reason. The explosion and fire startled citizens of the community, as many wondered what would happen to their jobs. Some company executives first learned of the blaze as they walked through an airport and saw CNN’s live report of the fire on terminal television monitors. Aaron Feuerstein, Malden Mills’s CEO, was at his 70th birthday party when he received a call about the fire. Clearly, crises are unexpected and can raise many different uncertainties.

Learning from a television report that your property is on fire is obviously a surreal and unexpected experience. In this case, for Malden Mills’s executives, there was great uncertainty about the extent of the damage, whether or not people were hurt, and how the fire started.

**NONROUTINE CRISIS EVENTS AND UNCERTAINTY**

Crises are dramatic and chaotic events. One goal after a crisis is to get the organization back into operation. Organizational leaders have several options when responding to a crisis: They can respond with routine procedures, such as firing the person responsible for the crisis, minimizing the scope of the crisis, or shifting the blame. Alternatively, they can respond with unique solutions that directly rectify the crisis. Although routine solutions can be effective, they rarely rectify systematic problems in the organization. In the last chapter we examined the BP oil spill and the high levels of uncertainty the crisis created for Public Information Officers and the public. However, one of the largest oil spills in United States history before the BP oil spill was by Exxon in Alaska. Exxon’s CEO Lawrence Rawl responded to the 1987 Exxon Valdez oil spill in Prince William Sound by saying, while one of its ships gushed oil into the water, that the spill was not severe and that Exxon had a good record of cleaning up much worse spills (Small, 1991). However, Rawl did not take into account that the currents in the sound were stronger than any Exxon had handled before, and the dispersants that Exxon had used in other cleanups were not going to be as effective in this cleanup effort. Exxon failed, in part, because it did not address the uncertainty and novelty of the situation. Conversely, Rawl used routine solutions—minimizing the crisis and firing the intoxicated Valdez captain—to handle a nonroutine crisis event. As a result, Exxon received justified criticism for failing to effectively manage the spill.

Exxon would have done better had it examined the oil spill quickly and developed original solutions to protect the wildlife and environment. Exxon had been pressed for years by environmental groups to adapt its
cleanup efforts to meet the unique needs of Alaska and Prince William Sound. However, the company decided to go with the routine solutions they had developed companywide.

**THREAT PERCEPTION AND UNCERTAINTY**

A key characteristic of crisis is the threat to the organization's ultimate goals. Remember, in the first chapter, we argued that organizations should not focus solely on the threat associated with crises and should also consider the opportunities inherent to these events. Threat and uncertainty are linked because there is doubt about whether organizational goals will be met as a result of the crisis. In addition, there is uncertainty about the level of threat the organization is experiencing. If you remember the definition of crisis provided in Chapter 1, you recall that we discussed perceived threat. The fact that threat is perceptual contributes to the overall uncertainty of the event: Some people in the organization may view a situation as a potential crisis, and others may not. The computer code problem, Y2K, which was expected to disable many computers prior to the new millennium, was not viewed by many organizations as a potential crisis when it was first identified. The threat was not taken seriously until it was certain that the code problem could have an impact on banking, organizational record keeping, and even personal computers.

Organizations must be able to manage uncertainty associated with a crisis threat. Addressing this uncertainty involves developing consensus with stakeholders about potential threats. As a result, communication about potential threats helps reduce uncertainty about potential risks in the organization.

**SHORT RESPONSE TIME AND UNCERTAINTY**

Once an organization has experienced a crisis, it must communicate to its stakeholders. This process is inherently uncertain because the organization typically does not have accurate or readily available information to provide to these groups. In addition, the organization may not know what is appropriate to communicate about the crisis. At times, this is due to a lack of basic crisis preparation. However, at other times, the event is so dramatic and ill defined that it shocks the organization so severely that little information is available. This is particularly true in the initial moments after a crisis.
When Rudy Giuliani, the former mayor of New York City, first spoke after the terrorist attacks in September of 2001, he was only able to acknowledge and confirm what the whole world had seen on television—that the World Trade Center towers had fallen. He had no other information to provide at the time. As a result, he did not speculate or predict what would happen next. All he could do was discuss what he had witnessed and answer any questions the media had for him.

One of the key tenets of crisis communication is that, following the onset of a crisis, the organization should make a statement to stakeholders in order to reduce the stakeholders’ uncertainty and to avoid any appearance of not wanting to answer questions or stonewalling. There are many questions that need answering following a crisis, which is one reason the media are so attracted to these events. Often, in the presence of tremendous uncertainty created by a crisis, the affected organization is left to answer the following questions:

▸▸ What happened?
▸▸ Who is responsible?
▸▸ Why did it happen?
▸▸ Who is affected?
▸▸ What should we do?
▸▸ Who can we trust?
▸▸ What should we say?
▸▸ How should we say it?

Although this is not an exhaustive list, these are questions that every crisis communicator should be prepared to answer. In the context of the uncertainty following a crisis, it is important to reiterate that, immediately following the event, there may not be answers for many of these questions. Crisis communicators must be able to have a clear and consistent message and present this message quickly and regularly following a crisis event. If the organization is not prepared to provide definitive answers and explanations related to the crisis, the spokesperson must be able to provide information, such as the organization’s latest safety records, its measures for collecting information about the crisis, and a timeline for how it is going to handle the crisis in the future. Good advice for crisis communicators is to tell people what you know, what you do not know, and what you are going to do to find answers to the still unanswered questions about the crisis.
As discussed, the surprising, nonroutine, and threatening nature of crisis creates tremendous uncertainty for crisis communicators. However, the short response time associated with crisis creates even greater uncertainty because crisis communicators must communicate about events with little, no, or competing information about how the crisis happened, who is affected, and whether the event was managed effectively.

**THE IMPACT OF CRISIS-INDUCED UNCERTAINTY ON STAKEHOLDERS**

The next six lessons focus on how crisis communicators can turn uncertainty from a challenge into an opportunity when communicating with stakeholders. As we have discussed, because a crisis is sudden and unforeseen, uncertainty about what to say and how to make sense of the situation is a key communication challenge. Furthermore, crises often create public debates about responsibility, cause, and the impact on stakeholders. This next section focuses on the public debates that arise following a crisis and how they should be resolved ethically and responsibly. Before we go any further, here is our definition of **stakeholders**:

Stakeholders are any groups of people internal or external to an organization who have a stake in the actions of the organization, such as employees, customers, creditors, government regulatory agencies, the media, competitors, or community members.

Stakeholders are very vocal following a crisis because they seek information and ask questions about the crisis. They want to know who is responsible, why the crisis happened, and how they can protect themselves, along with many of the other questions we presented earlier in this chapter. Stakeholders typically want clear and quick answers to these questions to protect themselves and make sense of the crisis. However, this is a difficult standard to meet. The question of who is responsible, for instance, can take weeks and sometimes years to answer. Typically, the greatest uncertainty involves determining who is at fault. Organizations and their lawyers often fight endlessly trying to determine responsibility.

In addition to determining fault, examples of the uncertainty in crises are plentiful. Consider the meltdown that took place on April 26, 1986, at the former Soviet Union’s Chernobyl nuclear power plant. The meltdown,
instigated by several explosions damaging the nuclear reactor, is described as the worst-ever nuclear accident. Following the crisis, there was great uncertainty regarding who was impacted and to what extent. For instance, pregnant mothers and their unborn children became critical stakeholders as birth defects heightened significantly in the years following the meltdown. In addition, there were varying estimates on the incidence of cancer by those who may have been exposed to the radiation. In this case, the ultimate impact of the crisis on stakeholders was uncertain, complex, and open to public debate and argument.

Determining the extent of the damage of a crisis can be complicated and open to debate. Researchers are still contesting whether Exxon has fully cleaned up its 1989 oil spill or whether the oil is still having a negative impact on the sound’s ecosystem. Sixteen years after the spill, both the U.S. government and Exxon commissioned scientists who conducted studies and debated whether the ecosystem was still contaminated or whether the food supply had become safe (Guterman, 2004). Twenty years after a 1984 toxic gas leak at a Union Carbide pesticide plant in Bhopal, India, Amnesty International reported that Indian residents continued to experience health problems associated with the event. Union Carbide, which was purchased by Dow Chemical after the crisis, argued that the site had been cleaned and there were no lasting effects from the explosion. The two groups continue to disagree about what caused the gas leak, the impact the leak had on Indian residents, and how to compensate those impacted by the crisis (Sharma, 2005). As you can see, even 15 to 20 years after a crisis, uncertainty is still an important variable (for information about the current status in Bhopal, see “International Campaign,” n.d.).

As was illustrated in the foregoing examples, public arguments will be made by many stakeholders concerning who is responsible, what people should do, who is affected, and how the victims should be compensated. Uncertainty and confusion can be increased when stakeholders disagree about important questions surrounding the crisis.

Adding to the complexity are regulatory and safety decisions that need to be made regarding the crisis. For instance, when a chemical plant explodes, there are many competing claims regarding air safety, the cleanliness of the water supply, and the relative levels of harm associated with each potential hazard. When there are conflicting claims, the organization, independent contractors, and government regulators, such as the health departments, may conduct their own tests. It is not uncommon for each group to arrive at divergent answers, which in turn often heighten the uncertainty associated with the crisis. Such heightened uncertainty and disagreements about important questions regarding the crisis can
create multiple interpretations about the same event or what we refer to as communication ambiguity.

**MANAGING COMMUNICATION AMBIGUITY ETHICALLY DURING CRISIS**

Organizations and stakeholders may not be able to fully ascertain clear answers to key questions about the crisis until an investigation is completed. As we just discussed, investigations and disagreements about the crisis can proceed for decades. In the meantime, the uncertainty surrounding the crisis is likely to make communication about causation and responsibility ambiguous. Weick (1995) defines ambiguity as “an ongoing stream that supports several different interpretations at the same time” (pp. 91–92).

Similarly to Weick (1995), we define communication ambiguity as multiple interpretations of a crisis event. In the simplest terms, due to the uncertainty of crisis, there is not a clear-cut, precise answer to every important question following a crisis. As a result, each stakeholder group, including customers, workers, and the impacted public, may hold and express differing viewpoints of the event.

As a result, the inherent uncertainty related to any crisis allows for multiple interpretations. Organizations then can select an interpretation of a crisis that reflects more favorably on their actions than competing interpretations. Moreover, it would also be possible for organizations to increase the degree of ambiguity of a crisis in an effort to produce competing perspectives on the event. We believe that intentionally heightening the level of ambiguity in a crisis is unethical and irresponsible for any crisis communicator. However, we acknowledge that ambiguity is inherent to any crisis situation. So, in order to assess the ethicality of ambiguity in crisis situations, we maintain that

- ambiguity is ethical when it contributes to the complete understanding of an issue by posing alternative views that are based on complete and unbiased data that aim to inform, and
- ambiguity is unethical if it poses alternative interpretations using biased or incomplete information that aims to deceive.

In this case, how one interprets and communicates critical information about a crisis can serve to reduce, maintain, or increase the level of ambiguity inherent to that situation. A now classic case of capitalizing unethically on the inherent uncertainty of crisis and intentionally heightening its ambiguity took place in 1994 when Dr. David Kessler
(Ulmer & Sellnow, 1997) contended publicly that nicotine was an addictive drug. This announcement created a crisis for the tobacco industry. The tobacco industry’s response, by the presidents or chairmen (all were male) of the seven largest tobacco companies, was to interject as much ambiguity into the situation as possible. They described Kessler as an extremist, downplayed and lied about the known addictiveness of nicotine, and used biased research to support their contentions (see Ulmer & Sellnow, 1997). The tobacco industry’s goal was to create and add as much uncertainty to the debate as possible. By increasing the uncertainty about the addictiveness of nicotine, they hoped to complicate the issue enough to escape blame.

CONSISTENT QUESTIONS OF AMBIGUITY

After investigating and studying communication ambiguity in crisis situations, we believe you should prepare for three areas of ambiguity where multiple interpretations often arise after an organizational crisis: questions of evidence, questions of intent, and questions of responsibility (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000) (see Table 5.1).

Questions of evidence refer to ambiguity created as a result of complex legal battles or scientific debates concerning crisis evidence. For instance, when women began coming forward with complaints regarding their Dow Corning silicone breast implants, the company downplayed these complaints with their own evidence that even a punctured implant would not cause notable distress to a woman’s body. In this case, the general public was left with the question of whom to believe.

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<tr>
<th>Ambiguity Example</th>
<th>Common Public Questions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>Whose scientific evidence should the public believe?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intent</td>
<td>Did the organization knowingly commit the crisis?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Did the crisis originate within or outside of the organization?</td>
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Questions of evidence focus on how complexity breeds uncertainty and ambiguity because of the multiple interpretations available in the data collection process following the crisis. Because science can be subjective regarding how data are collected and interpreted, the results are often debated. We assert that those debates create uncertainty and ambiguity for a public trying to make sense of the crisis. A consistent debate, then, in crisis situations is one between stakeholders who view crisis evidence differently.

*Questions of intent* refer to whether a crisis was an accident or whether an organization knowingly put its workers or the public in danger. It may seem ridiculous that an organization would knowingly put itself in a crisis; however, history suggests that the reality of the matter is quite different. For instance, Ford Motor Company sold the Pinto (1971–1980), a car that they knew had life-threatening defects, to an unsuspecting public. The rationale for their decision was that paying settlements to individuals or families whose loved ones were injured or killed in the vehicle would cost the company less than a recall or redesign (Larsen, 1998). Questions of intent refer to whether an organization knew about potential problems and failed to correct them before a crisis or whether the crisis happened as an accident in an otherwise socially responsible system.

Whether an organization intended to cause a crisis is a critical aspect of moving beyond the crisis. There is a clear difference between an organization having an accident and an organization knowingly causing or allowing a crisis to occur. If the crisis was an accident, the public and the organization's stakeholders are much more likely to forgive the organization and potentially even help it reestablish itself. However, when an organization has been knowingly unethical or irresponsible in its business practices, the public is much less likely to forgive and forget. Many people still refuse to buy Exxon gasoline or support an organization that has destructively and knowingly abused its business responsibilities.

*Questions of responsibility* refer to the level and placement of blame that should be attributed to the organization for a crisis. Should responsibility rest within or outside the organization? In 1993, Jack in the Box, a fast-food chain, experienced a food-borne illness outbreak in the form of *E. coli* bacteria. During this crisis, three children died and hundreds of

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**Lesson 6**

Be prepared to defend your interpretation of the evidence surrounding a crisis.

**Lesson 7**

Without good intentions prior to a crisis, recovery is difficult or impossible.
Jack in the Box customers were infected (see the discussion in Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000). When asked about the crisis, Jack in the Box spokespeople insisted that meat-testing procedures at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) were much more responsible for the crisis than were Jack in the Box restaurants. In this case, Jack in the Box was placing blame for the crisis outside the purview of its organization. However, after an internal communication audit, Jack in the Box found that it had not acted on a state health department memo instructing the restaurant to increase grill temperatures in order to kill the *E. coli* bacteria in hamburger.

Whether the organization or an outside agency is responsible for the crisis is a constant and recurring type of ambiguity that contributes to the uncertainty of a crisis. One of the key communication strategies for organizations following a crisis is to deny responsibility for the event. However, shifting the blame to another organization is most often a more effective strategy. Clearly, it is more effective to say, “We are not responsible, but we know who is” rather than just saying, “We did not do it.” In this case, a debate often results in which organizations cast accusations at one another, trying to place blame on the other party for the crisis. This heightens the uncertainty about who is responsible for the event.

Communication ambiguity is a key factor in understanding uncertainty associated with crisis events. We have focused on three types of communication ambiguity—evidence, intent, and responsibility—that arise after a crisis and often create more uncertainty because of the complex nature of the crisis and the multiple ways of understanding the event. Although crises are inherently complicated, there are times when communication can be open and honest and still somewhat ambiguous. This is discussed in depth in the next chapter.

To recap, communication ambiguity is a central factor in managing any type of crisis. Due to the inherent uncertainty of crises, there will be multiple interpretations and arguments made about the severity of the crisis, how the crisis was caused, who is affected, and whether the organization is responsible for the event (see Table 5.2). The lessons in this section suggest that crisis communicators should be ready and willing to defend their interpretation of a crisis; to practice good, honest, ethical conduct before and after a crisis develops; and to make sure they build a case for why they are not responsible for the crisis if indeed they are not.
TRAINING, SIMULATIONS, AND UNCERTAINTY

One of the conditions of crisis is that the established organizational structure collapses following the event. When an organizational structure collapses, people are further traumatized by the lack of resources to help them make sense of the situation. For instance, after an airline crash, air patterns are disrupted making it difficult to predict when flights will take off and land. Similarly, after a toxic release in the air or water, evacuations often disrupt families and their day-to-day functioning. Obviously, large-scale crises like 9/11 create a further collapsing of communication and other established structures, increasing the difficulty of collecting helpful information about the event.

Weick (1993) argues that the breakdown in established organizational structures is a key issue in the failure to respond appropriately to crisis situations. He argues that crises “thrust people into unfamiliar roles, leave some key roles unfilled, make the task more ambiguous, discredit the role system, and make all of these changes in a context in which small events can combine into something monstrous” (p. 638). In this case, structures are not as rigid or invulnerable as many organizations would like to think. The demands of crisis on an organization and its stakeholders can bring established structures to their knees (see Table 5.2 once again). Organizations need to train and prepare for the uncertainty, threat, and communication demands before a crisis hits. Organizations often do tabletop exercises and mock simulations to prepare for the uncertainty and destruction of crisis. Many people have seen televised accounts of New York City and other metropolitan areas training and preparing for future terrorist attacks and other crises. These simulations may include a dirty bomb placed in a sports stadium or a chemical release in a subway. These simulations help federal agencies understand

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<tr>
<th>Key Issues in Uncertainty</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
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<tr>
<td>Unanswered questions</td>
<td>Who, what, why, how</td>
<td>Who, what, why, how</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for Information</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguity</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Confusion surrounding evidence, intent, locus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal Beliefs</td>
<td>Collapsed</td>
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Table 5.2 Crisis and Uncertainty
Lesson 9
Organizations need to prepare for uncertainty through simulations and training.

how well they are able to coordinate and communicate in a crisis. As we discuss further in the next chapter, establishing strong stakeholder relationships can help prevent breakdowns in established structures.

BELIEF STRUCTURES AND UNCERTAINTY

During a crisis, the public as well as the organization experience high levels of uncertainty. Due to uncertainty during and following a crisis, stakeholders often experience what Weick (1993) refers to as cosmology episodes, wherein uncertainty creates a disorienting experience in which beliefs and sensemaking structures are severely hampered. These belief structures are severely impacted by the epistemic uncertainty we discussed at the beginning of this chapter. For example, following the 1997 North Dakota floods, many people experienced shock and terror as the high-cresting Red River washed away their homes. They described themselves as being traumatized by the crisis (see the discussion in Sellnow, Seeger, & Ulmer, 2002). Others mentioned that the only time they had experienced something so disturbing was in Vietnam. When people are suffering from collapses in their belief structures or are going through very traumatic times, effective communication can become increasingly complicated.

Along with the high uncertainty and threat associated with a crisis, organizations also experience collapses in their belief structures. Crises are often so disturbing that they change the way we think about the world. This type of uncertainty relates to the ontological uncertainty we discussed at the outset of this chapter. Just think how things have changed since 9/11. The airlines’ beliefs about cockpit, passenger, and baggage safety have changed forever. Vicki Freimuth, director of the CDC during 9/11 and the anthrax letters crisis, explained that the CDC had to change its beliefs about the world twice, once after 9/11 and once after they failed to communicate effectively about the 2001 anthrax contaminations. These two events, she suggests, forced the “CDC [to] permanently alter its strategy for communicating publicly during crises” (Sellnow, Seeger, & Ulmer, 2005, p. 178). These cases are illustrative of the dramatic shifts in beliefs organizations must manage while handling a crisis.

Crisis situations, then, create interesting and unconventional contexts in which both organizations and stakeholders need critical information to reduce their uncertainty. As a result, both organizations and stakeholders search for information. However, they rarely speak to one another. The organization in crisis often stonewalls and explains that if it had any information
that information would be shared publicly. On the other hand, the organization’s stakeholders often are left wondering if they will receive the necessary information to protect themselves and to find out what happened. Related to this vacuum of communication is the media, which often speculate on questions concerning the crisis, as information is not readily available and company spokespersons are not often available for comment.

**SUMMARY**

Communicating in the midst or the wake of a crisis is unlike communicating during any other time. Effective communication can become very difficult. During crisis situations, there are tremendous constraints on an organization to communicate effectively, yet the organization’s stakeholders need critical information in order to make informed decisions. These constraints may include lack of knowledge about the severity of the problem, difficulty in identifying those affected by the crisis, and unavailability of accurate and appropriate information. In addition, decisions have to be made under stressful conditions—all this while the image and credibility of the organization are at risk. Our next chapter examines how organizations can overcome these difficulties and communicate effectively and appropriately in crisis situations.

**Lesson 10**

Crises challenge the way organizations think about and conduct their business.

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**Lessons on Uncertainty and Crisis Communication**

Lesson 1: Organization members must accept that a crisis can start quickly and unexpectedly.

Lesson 2: Organizations should not respond to crises with routine solutions.

Lesson 3: Threat is perceptual.

Lesson 4: Crisis communicators must communicate early and often following a crisis regardless of whether they have critical information about the crisis.

Lesson 5: Organizations should not purposely heighten the ambiguity of a crisis to deceive or distract the public.

*(Continued)*
Lesson 6: Be prepared to defend your interpretation of the evidence surrounding a crisis.

Lesson 7: Without good intentions prior to a crisis, recovery is difficult or impossible.

Lesson 8: If you believe you are not responsible for a crisis, you need to build a case for who is responsible and why.

Lesson 9: Organizations need to prepare for uncertainty through simulations and training.

Lesson 10: Crises challenge the way organizations think about and conduct their business.

REFERENCES


