

Principles of Crisis Management and Media Handling

7.12.2012

in HKU

Problem --Unhappy encounters with media

- Why are they appear when you don't want them and
- disappear when you need them most?



Why is there such a huge gap?

- My answers are ...
 1. Media logic \neq your organization logic
 2. Your priority is not their priority
 3. Their focus may not be your focus

1. What is media logic ? key elements

A) Their mission

- "The construction of journalistic ideology starts from the premise that on the one side of society there are the powerful (establishment), while on the other side we find the common people. In between there are journalists, located in the region between those in power and the people. The journalists' job is to serve the people and challenge the powerful (establishment)."

(Petersson & Carlberg 1990)

Point 1 : Reporters come to occasion with a mission/purpose. They are not academic observers or bystanders

B. Their roles

Serious journalists regard themselves as the guardian of the public good, so they watch out for malpractice, corruption, waste of public resources.....

They are therefore biased in the sense that they love “negative” stories

Also, they dislike hiding of facts and indeed hate lies. If discovered, the person who lies will come under severe criticism

Point 2 : serious journalists are bound to be critical, sometimes cynical. So when you are being questioned by a young reporter, don't feel despair. There is nothing personal about the critical questions.

C. Their way of thinking

- Definition of news –
- **"When a dog bites a man, that is not news, because it happens too often. But if a man bites a dog, that is news."**
- The phrase was coined by Alfred Harmsworth, a British newspaper magnate, but is also attributed to New York Sun editor John B. Bogart (1848–1921)
- Of course there is an exception --- during the outbreak of rabies, we would take “dog biting a person” as a major news item because it would spread the disease and therefore of major public concern.

Point 3 : Journalists love extremities. A way to draw their attention is to uncover novelties for them.

D. (know) Their limitations

- * on their return to the newsroom ,they have to compete for time slot or space in tomorrow newspaper
- As an Editor, we choose headline stories according to the “ 2-I ” approach.
 - I**mportance -- how important is this story to the society
 - I**nteresting -- how interesting it would be to the readers.

Point 4 : help the journalists to identify the “ 2-I ” in your story would in return help yourself to have the intended exposure.

Summing Up: Think like them

- Water can carry boats but it can sink them as well. (水能載舟, 亦能覆舟)
- Media are the same, they can help you as much as they can destroy your reputation.

Crux: think like them.

Part II : Crisis Management

Different Types of crises?

- **At community level**

■ 2004年1月11日 (日)

自 壹日明報 > 要聞 > 要聞



衛生福利及食物局長楊永強昨日說，現在是SARS爆發的高危期，不排除在港會出現一兩宗SARS個案，未來3個星期，局方會謹慎留意本港情。(劉焯陶攝)

未來三周SARS高危 部分醫院隔離病房告滿 恐分流

【明報專訊】廣東相繼出現SARS（嚴重急性呼吸系統綜合症）證實和疑似個案，本港聯合醫院又有不尋常集體肺炎病徵病例，衛生福利及食物局長楊永強昨日不諱言，未來3星期是本港爆發SARS的高危期，不排除會出現一兩宗病例。但SARS未重臨，部分醫院的隔離病房（部分會用作發燒病房）已有人滿之患，醫學界擔心，分流一旦不小心，便會有爆發SARS的隱憂。

楊永強：不排除出現一兩宗

- 9.11 attacks



Different Types of crises? (2)

- **At institution level**

港大校慶擦鞋獻醜

12-04 05:39 AM



港大百周年校慶典禮嘉賓大合照，李克強應安坐在前排最中央位置，衛英浩站在第二排最左。



浸會大學當代中國研究所，就《香港藍皮書》事件，發表道歉聲明。而浸會大學就表示，調查仍會繼續進行。

Different Types of crises? (3)

- **At personal level**

您的位置： [文匯首頁](#) >> [港聞](#) >> 正文

[【打印】](#)

[【投稿】](#)

[【推薦】](#)

[【關閉】](#)

[讀文匯報PDF版面](#)

許仕仁郭氏兄弟 控8罪涉3500萬 (圖)

許仕仁郭氏兄弟 控8罪涉3500萬

<http://paper.wenweipo.com>

[2012-07-14]

[我要評論\(0\)](#)

[分享到](#)



[放大圖片](#)

——廉署落案起訴5人 准保釋10月再審

香港文匯報訊 (記者 杜法祖) 前政務司司長許仕仁涉嫌貪污案有新進展，廉署昨晨正式落案起訴許仕仁、新鴻基地產聯席主席郭炳江與郭炳聯兩兄弟、新地老臣子陳鉅源及前港交所高級副總裁關雄生等5人合共8項罪名，其中許仕仁涉及全部8宗罪，包括身為公職人員行為失當，串謀提供利益等，控罪指他出任政務司司長和行會成員期間，收受合共超過3,500萬元款項和無抵押貸款；至於郭炳江和郭炳聯等4名被告，則涉嫌分別向許仕仁提供利益。案件延至10月12日再提堂，5名被告均獲准

What are the defining characteristics of a crisis?

4 Main Defining Characteristics

- 1. Triggering events typically come as a surprise (e.g. arrival of SARS, arrest of senior officials....)
- 2. Posing threats to the reputation/security/core value of an individual/ an institution/ a community (e.g. 廉潔政府形象受損)
- 3 Require immediate remedial actions or response (e.g. 控制疫情)
- 4. Root causes usually relate to system or personal failures/ weakness

What is Crisis Management?

- **Modified definition from Wikipedia –**
-
- **“Crisis management** is the process by which an organization deals with a major (unexpected) event that threatens to harm the (reputation/ core value of the) organization, its stakeholders, or the general public. “

Lessons learned from
HKU's mishandling of 8.18 episode

Recap HKU's 8.18 episode



It became a public outcry and HKU was accused of

- 1) Ingratiating with the rich and the powerful
- 2) Failing to protect its students
- 3) Failing to protect freedom of expression within the campus

八一八事件有齊危機的四大特徵

- 1. Events come as a surprise
- (徐校長從沒想過這會成為他任內的一大污點. 儀式結束後, 主事人還互相道賀 --- 儀式圓滿成功)
- 2. Posing threats to the reputation/security/core value of an individual/ an institution/ a community
- (港大獻媚? 學生沒有言論自由? 容許大批警力進駐校園?)
- 3. Require immediate remedial actions
- (大批記者與學生重重圍著校長, 質問校長如何保護學生?)
- 4. Root causes usually relate to system or personal failures/ weakness
- (大學裏不同部門跟本沒有協作)

All in all : all four elements make crisis very difficult to management

1st Lesson

- **1. “ You need the messenger”**
- Reporters may be very aggressive in the way they ask questions and could be a strong critic of you as well and they may be very partisan

BUT

- You still need them to convey the message as most people still rely on the media to get information

Implications for crisis management

- **1.** Don't get scared of the presence of a strong team of reporters at your doorsteps. You need them to convey the message.
- **2.** It is the duty of a reporter to be critical/ask difficult questions (平常心見記者)
- **3.** Get the facts first before you talk to the media. Don't repeat Professor Tsui's (Vice-Chancellor of HKU) mistake -- he did not even know of the pushing of the student into the stairwell when he spoke to the press.
- **4.** Face the press with **honesty**.
- (Henry Tang's attempt to hide his illegal basement is good example of the need to be honest).
- It takes years to build credibility but it requires only a word to destroy it!

2nd Lesson

2. Insiders cause most damage

The game with the press is not just an external affair. More often than not, this is an extension of some in-house fighting.

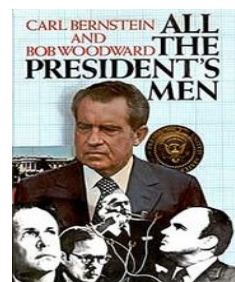
The source of a lot of very damaging information is usually coming from unhappy insiders. They are just using the press to continue the in-house fighting.

This is very typical for big institutions !

Believe it or not? (防內鬼重要嗎?)

“Deep throat” of Watergate

- Watergate Scandal led to the downfall of US President Nixon in 1974 and is considered the masterpiece of western investigative journalism
- Some 30 years later, it was confirmed by the reporter concerned, his informant is the then FBI Associate Director (副中央情局長), Mark Felt !!!!
- “內奸” 還是 “人民英雄”?



Example: In case of HKU.....

- The most damaging episode to the U is the crying scene of the student after being pushed into the stairwell.
- The crying in front of the camera immediate inflamed the strong resentment already existed among HKUSU and alumni. Eventually this became a public relations disaster for the University.

Implications for crisis prevention

- 1. Pre-event/crisis risk assessment – It is important to be mindful of strong opinion leaders and try to cope with their demands beforehand. This is the best way to prevent an insider turns Judas. Pre-event consultation is a good way to prevent crisis as it can help to spot possible worst case scenarios.
- 2. In the middle of a crisis -- remember don't just focus your efforts on how to handle the external relations. To take good care of internal stakeholders are equally important. Any mutiny at this stage would destroy your damage-control efforts.

3rd Lesson

- **3. Most Crises are results of some internal/personal failures**
- In the form of lack of co-ordination. This is very common in big bureaucracy.
- Key duties are delegated to inexperienced or incompetent personnel.
- Inadequate resources for a big job

8.18 crisis revealed serious management problem within HKU

- 1. Silo mentality (山頭主義) — One obvious example is the failure to find out quickly on what has happened to the three students being pushed into the stairwell. (It took them 4 days to find out the course of events in the stairwell).
- In the first four days, the crisis management team did not even ask their own security guards on the spot. The close circuit TV that captured the Police's pushing was kept on the initiative of the security team and handed to the top management on the fifth day!!!!

4th Lesson

- **4. Crisis always brings about opportunities to reform**
(有危有機)
- Crisis normally creates enormous political and social pressure, thus it helps to soften internal resistance to reform or to change the usual but ineffective ways of doing things.
- But the window of opportunities is usually very short. The inertia to reform will return very quickly.

Implications for crisis management

- 1. To arrange internal review quickly so that lessons and structural failures can be identified without delay.
- 2. To implement necessary reforms while the plate is hot
- 3. Crisis prevention is the best crisis management.
Adopt the concept of risk management in all policy formulation process. Identify weakness beforehand.
- 4. To keep a crisis response mechanism in place all the time. You won't have time to think when crisis arrives at your doorstep

Summary of my 4 messages

- **1. "You need the messenger"** – don't get scared of the media.
- **2. "Insiders cause most damage"** – this can help you to prevent escalation of crisis
- **3. "Most Crises are results of some internal failures"** – this helps to identify the root cause and to develop appropriate responses
- **4. "Crisis brings Opportunities to reform"**
 - -- this could help you to get out of the crisis stronger and better.

Do's and Don'ts of Media Handling

Do's

- 1. Gather the salient facts as much as you can: what have happened... who has done what....
- 2. Decide your action plan....just issue a statement or to hold a press conference..
- 3. Before you meet the press, remember the messages you want to send
- 4. Anticipate questions from the press and rehearse well before meeting them
- 5. Arrange a good setting to face the press
- 6. Keep your statement clear and concise
- 7. Repeat your messages no matter what you are asked.

Don'ts

- 1. Keep silence as it implies you have something to hide and giving up the rights to reply.
- 2. Don't hide or try to cover camera
- 3. Don't issue statement late at night
- 4. Don't try to give long and conditional statement...

