
Foreword

When read by a Chinese native in Mandarin, the word ‘crisis’ is perceived as a moment of opportunity. For most others in the world, the same word evokes a sense of anxiety, the unpredictable, of loss of life or business interruption . . . Doomsday. In this book, rich with insight from some of the world’s leading scholars, you will find insight that helps enrich our collective understanding of crisis in motion. We know, as citizens and consumers, that a disaster can define or redefine the careers of leaders and the reputation of corporations, non-profits and even governments. What we have struggled to understand since the science of crisis management emerged in the late 1970s is how crisis is multi-dimensional. Some practitioners look at crisis from a prevention perspective (and thus the crisis management plan) while others focus on mitigation (and thus we see security from a physical or cyberspace perspective). Still others focus on response and business recovery (supporting victims, their communities and ultimately rebooting the organization, or what is left of it). Whatever your interest or passion, crisis management has indeed become a science.

The early work of Professor Ian Mitroff at the University of Southern California allowed the next generation of scholars such as yours truly to move the literature from theory to the creation of unique models, solutions and simulations into the hands of executive teams, in oil fields in Iraq, in boardrooms in London, coffee processing plants in Brazil and nuclear power plants in Japan. In many cases, these strategic platforms saved lives as well as the financial condition and the branding equity of the organization. In other cases, a tsunami, terrorist act or utility disruption was so profound and beyond the scope of existing thinking that every assumption of crisis planning required a diagnostic review. Maybe the Chinese are not mistaken in their interpretation.

As you read the chapters that follow, you will learn that many leaders made bold decisions to invest in risk management, systems, processes and prevention tools well in advance of the crisis that challenged them. They turned a disaster into an opportunity by demonstrating resolve and courage. In other cases, most notoriously exemplified by Tony Hayward of BP when millions of gallons of oil destroyed the habitat off the U.S. Gulf States in 2010 (“I’d like my life back”), skilled leaders learned too late that they should expect that every action and statement during and after a crisis will be analyzed closely. He wanted his life back: the executive

suite, the challenge of leading a multinational, the pressure-cooker energy, reading forecasts, rallying shareholders, cuddling in the corner with contemporaries. But the victims of BP's gross negligence wanted their homes and businesses back. Some wanted their family members who lost their lives back. It wasn't about him, it was about something bigger, broader and more profoundly important.

Over the past thirty years, I have helped companies around the world manage more than 2800 disasters, ranging from product recalls to workplace violence, industrial accidents to environmental disasters. No one came to work that day thinking that a disturbing, disruptive act was about to impact their careers, their teams and their futures. It is impossible to predict every critical incident that could disrupt an enterprise. However, it is possible, and increasingly expected, that we demonstrate sufficient brainpower to anticipate and plan, simulate and model, and provide those resources needed to embed integrity into the decisions we make when disaster strikes. I commend these authors for their skilled contribution to the literature, and to you for taking the time to expand your knowledge.

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