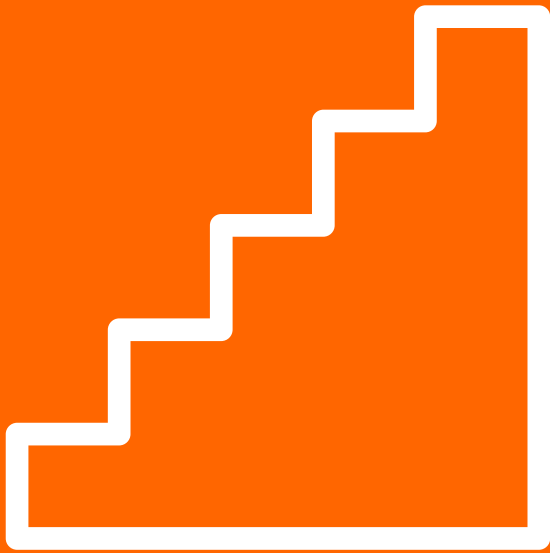


# Five Steps to Create a Crisis Management Plan



Crises are a fact of life, whether novel viruses, natural disasters, cyberattacks, or any other form of critical event. What then can agencies and organisations do to prepare?

High on the list of crisis preparatory activities is the crisis management plan – a catalogue of roles, responsibilities, and tasks personnel will perform before, during, and after a crisis.

Not all crisis planning is sufficient, though. Given its importance, it's imperative to get crisis management planning right.

How to go about it? The following five steps to creating a crisis management plan should help.

## Step 1. Conduct a vulnerability audit.

The first step is conducting the vulnerability audit. A multi-disciplinary risk assessment<sup>i</sup>, the vulnerability audit helps organisations identify areas of weakness, i.e., threats arising from normal operations, external events, or just those most common to the industry<sup>ii</sup>.

Organisations use this risk assessment to develop a list of potential crises, which they then rank order in likelihood of occurring as well as associated costs of responding<sup>iii</sup>.

## Step 2. Assemble your crisis management team.

Of course, crisis management planning and readiness efforts are only as good as the personnel tapped to execute them. That is the role of the crisis management team, a cohort of people centrally involved in the creation (then implementation) of the crisis management plan.

What are the relevant roles? It all starts with the Crisis Management Chair.

Amongst the duties ascribed to the Chair, who heads up all crisis operations, is planning for decision making in crisis, i.e., “the process that leads to the selection of a course of action for more than one alternative option”.

Why does crisis decision making matter? When a crisis strikes, it tends to move quickly. Which means quick decisions will be required, in a high-stakes environment (possibly the highest), where information is limited, stress is acute, and scrutiny is intense. Decisions are rarely made in those conditions; and so, they should be practiced ahead of time.

As for the remainder of the core team, best-practice crisis management standards, such as BS 11200, recommend senior managers from the company's most important business units, such as Finance, HR, Operations, IT, Communications; specialist roles include Log Keeper, Support, etc. (See below).

**Best-practice composition of your crisis management team**



## Step 3. Know when to initiate the plan.

The crisis management team helps to craft the plan, which should be reviewed and approved by the company Board as well as other senior management.

But that response plan is only as good as the activation guidelines it includes. To this end, the crisis management team needs to document all the criteria and indicators they will use to determine whether a crisis has occurred.

In addition to setting activation guidelines, crisis management teams should consider other relevant logistics, such as the chain of command structure for specific scenarios and where to set up your crisis command centre or off-site gathering points in the case of evacuations. In the case of the former, multiple locations might be necessary, including somewhere at headquarters and an off-site setting if headquarters are seriously compromised by the crisis.

## Step 4. Include playbooks and scenarios.

Preparing for a crisis means playing the odds. Organisations shouldn't plan for the worst-case scenario; they should plan for the likeliest events.

To do so, teams should develop individual playbooks (or action plans) for the specific crisis scenarios identified in the (earlier) risk assessment. Like the larger plan, these playbooks should be flexible, responsive modules.

To be actionable, though, these playbooks, as well as the master plan and other documents and policies, must be easy to deploy and refer to during a crisis. Mobile-friendly crisis management software will help.

## Step 5. Developing a crisis management plan exercise and testing strategy

In this risk environment, though, it's not enough to have an actionable plan if you just set it and forget it. Instead, organisations must make use of the controlled, risk-managed environment of exercises and testing. This environment helps to build familiarity and comfort with the crisis management plan.

In addition to breeding confidence, what other roles do exercises and testing play? Exercises and testing also:



Help crisis leaders to identify problems with and solutions to latent issues with crisis management programs and practices



Reinforce the culture of crisis competency and the value of exercises and testing

How to go about it, though? Best-practice crisis management testing standards, such as ISO 22398, suggest conducting a needs and gap analysis.

To conduct this analysis, organisations start with a list of questions, which they pose to staff (usually business line heads). Common questions include:

-  Does the exercises and testing plan address requirements for exercises and testing?
-  Can this plan promote consensus with interested parties?
-  Does the plan offer an opportunity to reach and interact with its target group(s) and potentially address their interests?
-  Does this plan provide an opportunity to address multiple issues in depth?
-  Does this plan focus on key issues?
-  Does the plan provide information tailored to the target group(s)?
-  Is this plan practical and relatively easy to implement?
-  Does the plan provide for information transfer at relatively low cost?
-  Is this plan easy to update?
-  Is the effectiveness of this plan measurable?
-  Is this plan a good vehicle for education?
-  Is this plan creating a constructive and supportive atmosphere?
-  Is this plan an effective way to get publicity or increase public awareness?
-  Does the plan conform to the organisation's constraints?

The gap analysis not only helps make the case for a best practice testing program, but it also indicates what kind of exercise (out of the many available options) that that program should be deploying.

Exercises companies might undertake include:

<b>Alert exercise</b>	The purpose of an alert exercise is to test the organisation by alerting the involved participants and getting them to arrive at a designated place within a certain time. It can also be used to test an alert mechanism. This type of exercise is primarily applied to internal staff.
<b>Start exercise</b>	A start exercise usually builds upon the alert exercise, testing how fast the emergency management organisation can be activated and start carrying out their tasks. A start exercise is therefore a means to test and develop the ability to get started with crisis management processes.
<b>Staff exercise</b>	A staff exercise is designed to increase the ability to work with internal processes, staff, and information routines in order to create a common operational picture and suggest decisions.
<b>Decision exercise</b>	A decision exercise is primarily used to exercise decision making process within an organisation, e.g., the ability to take fast and clear decisions on actions and to initiate cooperation between those responsible and stakeholders, under time pressure.
<b>Management exercise</b>	This type of exercise is a combination of alert exercise, start exercise, staff exercise, decision exercise, and system exercise. The focus is often on the roles, organisation, SOPs, etc.
<b>Cooperation exercise</b>	A type of exercise where coordination and cooperation between management levels is exercised. A cooperation exercise can be carried out both, in large and small scales.  A cooperation exercise may consist of: "Vertical" coordination (between national, regional, and local levels); "Horizontal" coordination in a sector where public and private stakeholders participate.
<b>Crisis management exercise</b>	A crisis management exercise simulates crisis conditions and gives personnel the opportunity to practice and gain proficiency in their plan roles.

<b>Strategic exercise</b>	<p>Strategic exercise refers to comprehensive exercise activities at strategic level (e.g., inter-ministerial crisis staff, political-administrative staff, cross-sector and cross-departmental management staff, crisis management organisation of corporate management).</p> <p>Aims include improving the integrated crisis reaction ability in exceptional threat and danger situations (crisis situations) and developing a comprehensive coordination and decision culture.</p>
<b>Exercise campaign</b>	<p>An exercise campaign is a series of recurrent exercises with a common generic organisational structure.</p>

Failing to plan is planning to fail. And when it comes to crisis, failing to plan is spectacularly costly.

Organisations don't have to pay the outsized price. By creating, testing, and updating crisis management plans, businesses can ensure better response outcomes, lower legal exposure, higher productivity, and, of course, improved peace of mind.

### Sources

- i. Jonathan Bernstein, *Bernstein Crisis Management: The 10 Steps of Crisis Prevention*. Available at <https://www.bernsteincrisismanagement.com/10-steps-crisis-prevention/>.
- ii. *Ibid.*
- iii. Michelle G. Hough and John Spillan, *Journal of Business & Economics Research: Crisis Planning: Increasing Effectiveness, Decreasing Discomfort*. Available at [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242581268\\_Crisis\\_Planning\\_Increasing\\_Effectiveness\\_Decreasing\\_Discomfort](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242581268_Crisis_Planning_Increasing_Effectiveness_Decreasing_Discomfort).

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