



Crisis communication

Accepted by the Rector of the University of Jyväskylä, October, 2012

The purpose of crisis communication is to inform the staff, students and interest groups about a crisis situation, the reasons and consequences of the crisis and to give requisite instructions. Effective crisis communication brings security to a threatening situation, prevents further harm and supports the victims. Crisis communication includes

1. informing and reportage/coverage
2. giving instruction (on how to operate)
3. organising customer service and crisis support (e.g. info station)
4. media follow-up and post-crisis briefing.

Crisis situations also include a threat of misrepresentations and rumours. A correct image of the situation should be given actively and responsively and ensure that the University's points of view are presented. Concealing the crisis and avoiding responsibility only worsens the crisis and damages the community's reputation. Effective communication helps to prevent crises and limit an ongoing crisis. Successful crisis communication demands that risks are properly mapped out and communication situations prepared for beforehand.

Distribution of responsibility

The University's management is responsible for crisis control. The Rector or the Rector's substitute together with the Director of Relations / Communications Manager / Communication Coordinator is responsible for crisis communication. A team of at least two people is responsible for the implementation of crisis communication. If the crisis extends outside the University, crisis communication is operated in cooperation with partners. In restricted crises, the Rector can authorise the Head of the Department in question to take charge of crisis management.

If crisis management requires help from state or municipal authorities, the leading authority is responsible for providing information about the situation. For example, in accident situations only the authority in control of the rescue operations gives situation updates. If the victims of the situations require hospital treatment, information about the condition of the victims is given only by the hospital/physician. If the crisis is a police matter, only the police will give information about the matters that they are investigating. A report of an offence on behalf of the University can only be made by the Director of Administration.

Implementation of communication in a crisis

The goal is for the University to be the first to report a crisis situation. Communications is initially allocated to internal target groups: the message is first sent to the Rector and



management and then to PR officers. The Rector or a person appointed by the Rector assembles a group responsible for gathering an overview of the situation and making a plan for communications. At the same time, a person or persons who will make statements is appointed. As agreed in the communications plan, students and staff are informed first, because they are crucial to the further implementation of crisis communication. Secondly, the media and interest groups are informed, especially those who can assist or have an influence in the crisis situation: telephone switchboard, security and maintenance services, lawyers, the FSHS and occupational health care, occupational safety representatives, and other universities. If needed, Human Resources Services organise crisis debriefing no more than two days after the crisis.

Crisis communication concentrates on relevant facts and a confirmed overview of the situation. Information is given as soon as possible, but if information is lacking or is uncertain, an estimate of when information will be available is presented. Responsible crisis communication requires continuity. This means that as the situation progresses, further information is given. Post-crisis briefing includes information about how the crisis has been handled and what the University has done to prevent such crises in the future.

Channels of crisis communication

There are various channels for crisis communication: face-to-face communication, email, phone/text messages and briefings. Communication through social media has an increasingly important role. During extensive crises, an info station for customer service is arranged in University Services. An independent phone line and email address can be opened for the purposes of crisis communication. There must be enough people trained to serve as duty officers in these channels. Crisis bulletins and instructions are published on the front page of the University's website. For each crisis situation, University Communications creates mailing lists through which mass messages can be sent. IT services ensures that the server capacity is sufficient for sending mass emails. Crisis communication solutions are also established in which instructions can be transmitted directly to workstations and mobile phones. In case of power cuts, custodians inform each building verbally using a megaphone or on paper.

Crises and media

Increased publicity and media interest are interwoven with crisis situations. Only persons agreed upon beforehand comment on the incident, ensuring that statements are consistent and do not contradict each other. During and after the crisis, PR officers follow the media to determine how the crisis is being discussed publicly. The media can film and take photographs freely in the University's public spaces, such as lecture halls, hallways and service desks, but not in private spaces, such as offices.

Group responsible for crisis communication



The group responsible for crisis communication at the University of Jyväskylä includes the Rector, Director of Administration, Director of Relations / Communications Manager / Communication Coordinator, General Counsel, Security Manager and possibly an expert or other person in charge related to the situation at hand.

Further information:

<http://www.jyu.fi/yliopistopalvelut/intra/henkilostolle/oppaat/kriisiviestinta>