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A Briefing Note

The First Response – *guidance for reviewing a situation*

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Introduction

The First Response Protocol is designed to assist organisations in the initial stages of resolving/managing as a situation emerges/unfolds quickly and decision-makers are required to act on imperfect and incomplete information.

Purpose

The purpose of the First Response Protocol is to enable management to provide clear direction at time when minimal information might be available. It provides an agenda for management team meetings or 'brain storming' sessions. It is a tool that may also be used in an incident or crisis providing a considered, timely and deliberate framework for decision-making in high pressure situations.

The information obtained by following the First Response Protocol may be used to quickly and efficiently brief key stakeholders, including management, (either virtually or in person) during an unfolding situation. It can also be used in a tabulated fashion – see Enclosure 1.

The First Response Protocol

The First Response Protocol conforms to the following steps:

- Confirm respective roles and responsibilities.
- Facts – what you know to be factually correct?
- Assumptions – what you "believe" has occurred or contributed to the situation?
- Scenarios (consider individually):
    - Worst case (don't discount anything), and
    - Most likely.

  Note: The first four steps should be followed sequentially. The subsequent steps should be populated as information becomes apparent.

- Your priorities including information requirements and immediate tasks.
- Response options – consider the range of options available:
    - What needs to be done now?
    - What can wait?
- Your objective(s)
    - For example, solve the problem in order to get back to business.
- Identify the range of stakeholders, including key stakeholders.
- Identify key messages.
- Review at five to the hour.

Below is an explanation of each step.

Confirm respective roles and responsibilities

It is important that everyone on the crisis management team understands their role and responsibilities. Before commencing the meeting, ask the following questions:

1. What is your role (e.g. HR director, chairman (ultimate decision-maker), process facilitator)?

2. What skills or knowledge do you bring to the meeting?

Facts

What do you **know** about the incident or situation? What can you absolutely confirm? Facts should be kept separate from assumptions. In our experience, there is a temptation for management teams to falsely label "assumptions" as "facts". Typically, during the first moments there will be very few facts. If in doubt it is an assumption until proven otherwise.

Assumptions

What do you **believe** has contributed to the incident or situation? As the management team works through the assumptions, these will need to be tested. As more information becomes available, some assumptions will be confirmed as "fact".

Scenario planning

The crisis management team should be encouraged to consider scenarios individually. This draws out the collective experience and (more importantly) challenges everyone to consider the situation. Each management team member should consider:

The worst case scenario

When managing an incident or situation, it is prudent to prepare for the worst case scenario. Control Risks encourages management teams to work around the table and consider individual opinions and perspectives when considering the worst case scenario. In our experience, this ensures that all possibilities are considered.

Most likely scenario

What is the most likely outcome facing the management team? After consideration has been given to the worst case scenario, the team should focus on the most likely scenario. Once again, Control Risks recommends that management teams work around the table and consider individual opinions and perspectives when considering the most likely scenario.

Comment: The first four steps in the First Response Protocol (that is, facts, assumptions, worst case and most likely scenarios) should be followed sequentially. The remainder of the steps occur less sequentially and in no particular order and should be populated as you work through the process e.g. questions or priorities will emerge when you consolidate facts and assumptions; stakeholders will be identified throughout the process.

Priorities

In order to adequately test assumptions and compile facts "information needs" will be quickly established. For example, it will be a priority to establish exactly how many people have been injured in an accident. Or, has the office complex been locked down and evacuated safely? Priorities refer to immediate actions and information needed to make appropriate decisions and to provide some immediate tasking to contain or render safe the known situation.

Response options

Response options will emerge throughout the deliberations. All options should be noted. Each will carry various degrees of risk and should be considered in the context of what do we need to do now and what can wait. If time permits consider the positive and negative implications for each response option. Confirm what needs to be done now and what can wait.

Objective

The crisis management team should agree on an overall objective, which will underpin all decisions and response options. In our experience, everyone views an incident from a different perspective (for example, a lawyer will have a different perspective to a PR manager). Therefore, a common objective (e.g. ensure the health and safety of our employees vs the protection of our reputation) provides principles and rationale for decision-making.

Identify key stakeholders

There will be multiple stakeholders with an interest in your crisis. Stakeholder management will be crucial to the successful resolution of the crisis. Stakeholders can include employees, suppliers, customers, regulators, law enforcement agencies, media and industry bodies. Where possible, existing stakeholder managers should be used.

Key messages

The crisis management team will need to craft two or three key points you want people to remember that broadly express facts, concern and co-operation. These messages should be repeated in all communications with any stakeholder (internal and external) including the media.

Review at five to the hour

We recommend that the crisis management team review their deliberations regularly. This helps to maintain focus and direction throughout the management of a crisis. Start the review at five to the hour. The aim is to have it completed by the hour.

CRISIS LOG	**Crisis reference or name:**		**Entry Number:**		**Meeting date & time:**	
Meeting attendees	**Names**		**CMT role**			
			CMT Leader			
			CMT Facilitator			
			Log keeper			
Facts/ assumptions	**Facts**		**Assumptions**			
	1.		**1.**			
	2.		**2.**			
	3.		**3.**			
Scenarios	**Worst case scenario:**					
	Most likely scenario:					
	1 / 2 / 3					
Objective(s)						
Response options	**A:**					
	B:					
	C:					
	Chosen option:		**Chosen by:**	*(Normally the CMT Leader)*		
Priorities	**Task**		**Delegated to**		**Expected completion time/date**	
	1.					
	2.					
	3.					
Stakeholders	**Agreed stakeholders (in priority order)**		**Contact delegated to**		**Next contact time/date due**	
	1.					
	2.					
	3.					
Key messages	**1.**					
	2.					
	3.					
Next meeting	**Time/date:**		**Venue:**			