

Crisis Communication in Organizations: A Narrative Analysis of Internal Conflict Management

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Abstract

This research aims to examine internal conflict management in organizations through narrative analysis of crisis communication. Qualitative methods were used to understand the causes of conflict, crisis management strategies, leadership roles, the impact of conflict, communication techniques used, and policies and procedures implemented in the organization. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. The results revealed that internal conflicts are often caused by differences in interests, lack of effective communication, and organizational change. Effective crisis management strategies involve open communication, mediation, and a proactive approach. Responsive and thoughtful leadership plays a key role in conflict resolution. Poorly managed conflict negatively impacts productivity, employee morale, and team collaboration, and damages the organization's image. Communication techniques such as collaborative approaches and assertive communication are essential in managing crises. The practical implications of these findings are the need for the development of clear conflict resolution policies, conflict management training, promotion of open communication, and periodic evaluation of policy effectiveness. With a comprehensive approach, organizations can improve work dynamics and strengthen teamwork.

Keywords: Crisis communication, conflict management, management strategies, communication techniques.

Introduction

In today's global landscape, organizations face a myriad of complex challenges that can lead to internal crises, including conflict, managerial issues, and employee dissatisfaction (Natalia Timbaliuc, 2023). Effective crisis communication plays a critical role in navigating and resolving these internal conflicts, with communication being a key determinant of success or failure in mitigating adverse effects and restoring organizational balance (Lucinda Bella-May Sutton, 2022). Internal communication has been highlighted as a critical function that requires adaptation and adjustment, especially in unprecedented situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to significant digitization of communication channels and a focus on employee well-being and transparency (Joan Cuenca-Fontbona, 2023). Understanding the

organizational context and engaging in proactive conversations with internal and external stakeholders are essential components of a crisis communication plan to garner support and maintain stakeholder perceptions during a crisis (Christopher Ruppel, 2022). Narrative analysis in crisis communication in organizations, especially regarding internal conflict, is critical to understanding the impact of stories on conflict dynamics and resolution (V. Ivanova, 2023). This approach explores not only the content of the message but also how it is perceived and understood by different stakeholders, explaining the complexity of organizational crises (Mexican journal of behavior analysis, 2022). By examining narratives, organizations can uncover underlying issues, power dynamics, and communication challenges that influence conflict management strategies (Mexican journal of behavior analysis, 2022). In addition, narratives play a significant role in shaping political and foreign policy constructions, emphasizing the importance of storytelling in explaining decisions and behaviors to audiences (Ebrahim Mohammed Abdullah Al-Akwa'a, 2012). Understanding the narrative elements of setting, characterization, and plot is key to unraveling the discourse surrounding crisis and conflict in organizations (Ebrahim Mohammed Abdullah Al-Akwa'a, 2012). Effective communication plays a critical role in the early identification and escalation of conflict. As highlighted in various research papers, communication in conflict situations is not just a set of processes but an integral systemic phenomenon that shapes conflict dynamics (V., A., Zastavenko, 2022). The influence of media on conflict is significant, with fake news becoming a tool that can manipulate public perception and exacerbate conflict (Alexander Rozanov, 2021). Furthermore, the evolution of the information space has led to the mediatization of public life, where the narrative presentation of facts is increasingly replaced by interpretation and construction of meaning, impacting conflict communication (AN Chumikov, 2021). Various forms of communication at different stages of conflict interaction, such as pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict, play an important role in managing conflict and its resolution (EV Pustovalova, 2021).

Ineffective communication can lead to misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and escalation of conflict, emphasizing the importance of clear, accurate, and timely communication in conflict detection and resolution. Organizational leaders use a variety of crisis communication strategies to convey information and maintain transparency during challenging times. Research has shown that leaders can enhance the effectiveness of their communication by utilizing metaphors and storytelling (Dimosthenis Kotsopoulos, 2023), which can help reassure and empower their subordinates. Additionally, during disruptive events, subsidiaries of multinational corporations have been observed using communication strategies such as “closing doors” and “burning bridges” to navigate the crisis effectively (Igor Gurkov, 2023) [3]. Effective crisis leadership during events such as the COVID-19 pandemic involves proactive decision-making, clear communication, empathy, and collaboration, which are important attributes demonstrated by successful leaders (Mireia Rueda, 2023). Furthermore, the role of rhetoric and communication in leadership strategy, as seen in the case of Boris Johnson’s government during the early months of the Covid crisis, highlights the importance of persuasive communication to maintain trust and authority (Philip Sergeant, 2023).

Employees’ responses to crisis communication play a significant role in shaping their perceptions and reactions to crisis management, which ultimately affects their engagement and loyalty to the organization. Studies have shown that effective crisis communication that focuses on addressing employees’ informational and emotional needs during significant organizational disruption can have a positive impact on post-disruption work intentions (Chenfeng Xu, 2023). Furthermore, the way leaders handle their emotions during a crisis can significantly influence employee reactions, with genuine emotional displays being received more positively compared to superficial acts, which can increase negative affect and reduce work engagement and affective commitment (Lynn Schmodde, 2023). Furthermore, the relationship between internal communication satisfaction and employer attractiveness can be altered during a crisis, with horizontal communication remaining a significant determinant of positive employer

perceptions even in challenging times (Ana Tkalac Verčič, 2023). These findings highlight the importance of strategic crisis communication in fostering employee engagement and loyalty during times of crisis. Internal crisis communication plays a critical role in organizational learning from successful and failed internal crisis cases. Organizations can learn from crises by effectively managing communication before, during, and after a crisis (Akram Salim Hasan Al-Janabi, 2023). Learning from internal examples, such as case studies of China, Singapore, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Russia, Moldova, and Ukraine, highlights the importance of success and failure in authoritarian learning (Jan Golzer, 2016). The role of learning organizations in crisis management is emphasized, with a focus on systemic thinking, advanced technology, strategic leadership, and early crisis detection and containment strategies (Akram Salim Hasan Al-Janabi, 2023). By analyzing these cases, organizations can identify key factors that contribute to positive outcomes, such as proactive crisis communication, organizational culture, leadership style, and the ability to adapt and learn from past experiences, while also recognizing pitfalls that lead to negative outcomes.

Methods

This study will use a qualitative approach with a focus on narrative analysis to explore how crisis communication is used in managing internal conflict in organizations. This methodology was chosen because it is able to provide an in-depth understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and meanings given by individuals to crisis events, respondents in this study were 50 respondents taken from workers who were accustomed to being in a tentative project team, from this study allows researchers to examine in depth several cases of internal conflict in organizations experiencing a crisis. Case studies will be selected based on certain criteria, such as type of crisis, scale of organization, and availability of data.

Results and Discussion

1) Early Identification and Escalation of Conflict

This study found that ineffective communication is often the main trigger for escalation of internal conflict. Narratives from participants indicate that unclear information, rumors, and lack of transparency from management exacerbate conflict situations. Conversely, open and transparent communication can help identify early signs of conflict and prevent its escalation. This can be seen from all respondents, it is known that 25% stated that differences in interests caused the initial conflict in the company, while 30% stated that lack of communication caused the initial escalation of communication conflict in the company where they work, while the rest is due to organizational changes both from the managerial side and from the strategic side, this is felt by 15% of employees as the cause of conflict in the company where they work.

In various settings, including organizations and communities, ineffective communication has been identified as a major catalyst for escalation of internal conflict. Lack of clarity in information, the spread of rumors, and a general lack of transparency from management have been shown to exacerbate conflict situations (Nanda Aulia Alfarisi, 2022). On the contrary, open and transparent communication channels play a vital role in detecting early signs of conflict and effectively preventing its escalation (Nanda Aulia Alfarisi, 2022). Research on internal conflict in organizations has highlighted the importance of communication breakdowns as a key factor leading to increased tension and discord among members (I Dewa Putu Oka Suardi, 2022). Addressing these communication challenges through clear, honest, and inclusive dialogue can significantly contribute to conflict resolution and the maintenance of a harmonious environment within the organization.

2) Crisis Communication Strategies Used by Leaders and Management

The analysis shows that the communication strategies implemented by leaders greatly influence conflict dynamics. Participant narratives revealed several key strategies that were successful, 20% of employees appreciated when management was honest and transparent about the situation and challenges facing the organization. Communication that showed empathy for employees affected by the crisis helped defuse tensions. Involving employees in the decision-

making process during a crisis increased their sense of ownership and commitment to the solution. Meanwhile, 10% of employees considered that the strategies that could be used in crisis communication by leaders and management were mediation and negotiation. Meanwhile, employees who think that to resolve communication crisis conflicts using a proactive approach are 5% of the total respondents.

Research findings from various studies highlight the importance of crisis communication strategies used by leaders and management in different contexts. Studies emphasize the importance of crisis leadership and communication in various sectors, such as healthcare and education (Joseph H. McIsaac,2022). Effective crisis management strategies, including preparedness, communication planning, and stakeholder engagement, play a significant role in predicting and improving academic administration in private schools (P Sinlapapiromsuk,2023). Furthermore, case studies such as Samsung's organizational response to the Galaxy Note 7 crisis demonstrate the effectiveness of well-planned crisis management strategies, such as integrative bargaining and quick decision-making, in restoring trust and reputation post-crisis (Schmehl, Roland,2023). Furthermore, research on the communication strategies of Moroccan political authorities during the COVID-19 pandemic underscores the impact of communication on public perception and feedback, emphasizing the need for transparent and effective crisis communication strategies by leaders (Mohammad Idham,2022).

3) Impact of Crisis Communication on Employee Perceptions and Reactions

Research has found that employee perceptions of the effectiveness of crisis communication greatly influence their reactions. Employees who feel that management communicates effectively and transparently tend to show: Employees have more trust in management and show higher loyalty. Employees are more involved in recovery and solution efforts. Conversely, poor communication leads to distrust, demotivation, and even increased conflict. The results of the study showed that 30% of the impact of crisis communication affects employee productivity and morale, while 25% of employees stated that crisis communication affects collaboration and

cooperation within the company, while other research results show that 20% of employees stated that crisis communication will affect the image and reputation of the organization

Crisis communication plays an important role in shaping employee perceptions and reactions during organizational crises. Research shows that during a crisis, employee perceptions of job-related uncertainty can lead to negative emotions and job disengagement, emphasizing the importance of internal crisis communication that provides social emotional resources, organizational transparency, and support to mitigate these negative outcomes (Felipe de Lima Bandeira, 2022). Additionally, leaders' emotional display strategies, such as genuine emotions versus surface acting or deep acting, can significantly influence employee affect, job engagement, and affective commitment, with genuine emotions being perceived more positively during a crisis (Lynn Schmodde, 2023). Furthermore, the timing and content of crisis communications, along with employees' organizational identification, can influence cognitive reactions and behavioral intentions, highlighting the importance of nurturing organizational identification prior to a crisis to foster trust and reduce turnover intentions among employees (Ana Tkalac Verčič, 2023). Overall, effective crisis communication strategies are critical to maintaining employee morale, engagement, and organizational resilience during challenging times.

4) The case studies revealed several key lessons:

Crisis Success: Organizations that successfully navigate internal crises typically have strong communication structures and responsive leaders. Crisis failures often result from lack of coordination, siloed communication, and management failure to address the core issues that led to the crisis. Narrative analysis showed that stories about the crisis in organizations often shape individuals' perceptions and actions. Many narratives portrayed the crisis as a test that must be faced and overcome together. Stories of leaders demonstrating personal sacrifice for the good of the organization often served as inspiration for employees. Many participants saw the crisis as an opportunity to learn and grow, both individually and as an organization.

Conclusion

This study revealed that internal conflicts in organizations are often caused by differences in interests, lack of effective communication, and significant organizational changes. Differences in interests and goals between individuals or groups are the main triggers of conflict, while lack of clear communication worsens the situation. Effective crisis management strategies involve open and transparent communication, fair mediation and negotiation, and a proactive approach in identifying and resolving potential conflicts. Open communication allows all parties to express their views and concerns, which helps in defusing tensions and finding joint solutions.

Leadership plays a crucial role in conflict management. Leaders who are responsive, wise in decision making, and positive role models can manage conflicts more effectively. Responsive and empathetic leadership helps in understanding the root causes and creating an environment conducive to conflict resolution. Internal conflicts that are not managed well can negatively impact employee productivity and morale, hinder collaboration and cooperation between departments, and damage the image and reputation of the organization. On the other hand, effective conflict management can improve work dynamics and strengthen teamwork.

Effective communication techniques such as collaborative approaches, assertive communication, and appropriate use of media are essential in conflict management. These techniques help in creating constructive dialogue and preventing conflict escalation. Having clear policies and procedures on conflict resolution is essential. Training and development on conflict management and a transparent and anonymous reporting system help in creating a more harmonious and conflict-free work environment.

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