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# HR Planning for Crisis Management

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## Abstract

The role of HR in the modern-day corporate world has changed significantly to accommodate various developments and needs in the workplace. HR involvement in crisis management is one such development, and this has led to the HR taking an active role in planning and training for crisis management. Contemporary studies have indicated that organizations that incorporate employee welfare into the crisis management plan are more likely to be successful compared to those that are only concerned about protecting systems, processes, infrastructure and public relations as was traditionally evident. The HR is considered a vital partner in crisis management planning due to their understanding employee needs and their role in organizational survival. As one of the major roles of HR, training is considered paramount when it comes to crisis management. The role of HR is to ensure that employees are well informed about potential crises that may affect the organization and that they are aware of their role in dealing with the crisis. The HR provides skills and knowledge necessary in ensuring that employees can contribute to the organization's sustainability by participating in the crisis management process. This chapter explores the HR's role in planning and training for crisis management.

**Keywords:** crisis management, human resource, crisis management planning, crisis management training, employee welfare, employee involvement

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## 1. Introduction

Modern literature establishes that the traditional human resource (HR) role has evolved significantly to include other responsibilities based on the changing work environment [1, 2]. This means that HR has moved beyond the common roles of hiring and firing to more complex roles that directly influence the performance of the organization [2]. Consequently, the HR role is more demanding and requires extensive knowledge and skills to ensure that all

these organizational needs are met. Crisis management is among the areas of management in which the HR is expected to participate in, with a view of ensuring that employees needs, during and after a crisis, are given consideration during the development of crisis management plans [3].

The prevalence of crises within organizations has increased significantly in the contemporary times as different kinds of threats emerge within and outside the working environment [4]. This calls for increased awareness of such threats and the inclusion of mitigating actions to address crises when they occur. Accordingly, crisis management can be considered an imperative role of the HR and which should be given significant priority. Crisis management refers to the process of anticipating, identifying, preventing and managing potential disasters by putting in place plans to deal with crises when they occur [5]. The HR has an impacting role in crisis management through planning and training to ensure employees are capable of navigating through turbulent times. The role of HR in crisis management is to enhance preparedness among personnel and thus ensure effective disaster planning. Through including the human side in crisis management, it has been established that organizations are in a better position to deal with crises when they occur.

This chapter focuses on the HR's role in planning and training for crisis management. It addresses the HR function as a crisis management function and strives to establish the role played by HR in ensuring that the organization is well prepared and that personnel are well trained to deal with crises when they occur.

## **2. HR's role in planning and training for crisis management**

### **2.1. Crisis management**

A crisis is defined as any partial or total disruption of a business' key operations as a result of damage of property or equipment, harm to people, destroyed relationships, environmental destruction or stakeholder negative perception and influence among other factors [6]. The Human Resource Management Association [7] defines it as "a low probability, high-impact occurrence that is often unexpected and unfamiliar, occasioned by organizational structures, people, technology, economics, natural disasters among others." Consequently, this may affect the business's performance, reputation, and employee productivity resulting in disastrous impact on the business. Given that crises can occur at any time, crisis management which involves the identification, prevention, and management of potential crises has increasingly gained importance in the managerial spheres [6]. The goal is to ensure that in the event of a crisis, the minimum damage is incurred and that the organization can return to its original position as fast as possible. Crisis management refers to a series of processes through which the organization ensures that the business operations can be sustained or resumed with the minimum impact on the stakeholders and where lessons learnt can be used to improve current practices [7]. Crisis management is thus considered a critical process in enhancing business sustainability.

### 2.1.1. Crisis management process

Various explanations have been put forth in a bid to explain the processes involved in crisis management within organizations.

According to Andrianopoulos [8], crisis management may be subdivided into three major steps namely: pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis. Pre-crisis refers to the period before the crisis, where the organization undertakes activities aimed at identifying potential crises and developing plans on how they can be addressed. The crisis stage refers to the period during which the crisis occurs. This stage presents an opportunity for the organization to implement the crisis management plan developed in the pre-crisis stage in order to reduce or eliminate negative impact on the crisis. The post-crisis stage is the period following a crisis and includes recovery actions to get the organization back to its original state. Each of these stages is considered significantly important because they all determine how effectively an organization can deal with a crisis when it occurs.

Christina [9] explains the major steps involved in crisis management, noting that each step influences the company's ability to recover when faced by a crisis. The first step toward effective crisis management is the identification of potential crises facing the organization. This involves scanning the business' internal and external environment to establish the kind of threats that a company faces in the course of its operations [9]. Crises may range from failed organizational processes to bad publicity in the internal environment, and natural disasters and man-made disasters in the external environment. The second step involves the identification of the impact that crises may have on the organization. This involves the impact of the crisis on processes, operations, organization's assets, public image, and employee performance. Once this has been achieved, the next step is to identify the best approaches toward resolving the crisis when they occur. This involves the development of a crisis management plan, which consists of the procedures to be followed in the event of a crisis.

Mitroff [19] provides a framework that effectively explains what consists of crisis management in organizations [7]. This is explained in **Figure 1**.

### 2.2. HR's role in crisis management

Crisis management in organizations is often manifested in the focus on operations, system reinforcement, infrastructure development, and public relations [5]. All these activities are aimed at building the organization's resilience and hence promote sustainability. However, there is a notable tendency of concentrating on these aspects of crisis management, such that the human resource aspect is sidelined [9]. Employees who are likely to be hurt, both physically and emotionally are often neglected during the crisis management efforts, such that crisis management plans rarely provide adequate measures for the protection of employees [5]. Furthermore, employees are the main contributors in the recovery process and their welfare is critical in ensuring effective recovery. In the contemporary times, however, it has become critical for organizations to place priority on the protection of their human resources, hence the increased focus on employee preparedness when it comes to crises [5]. This is because

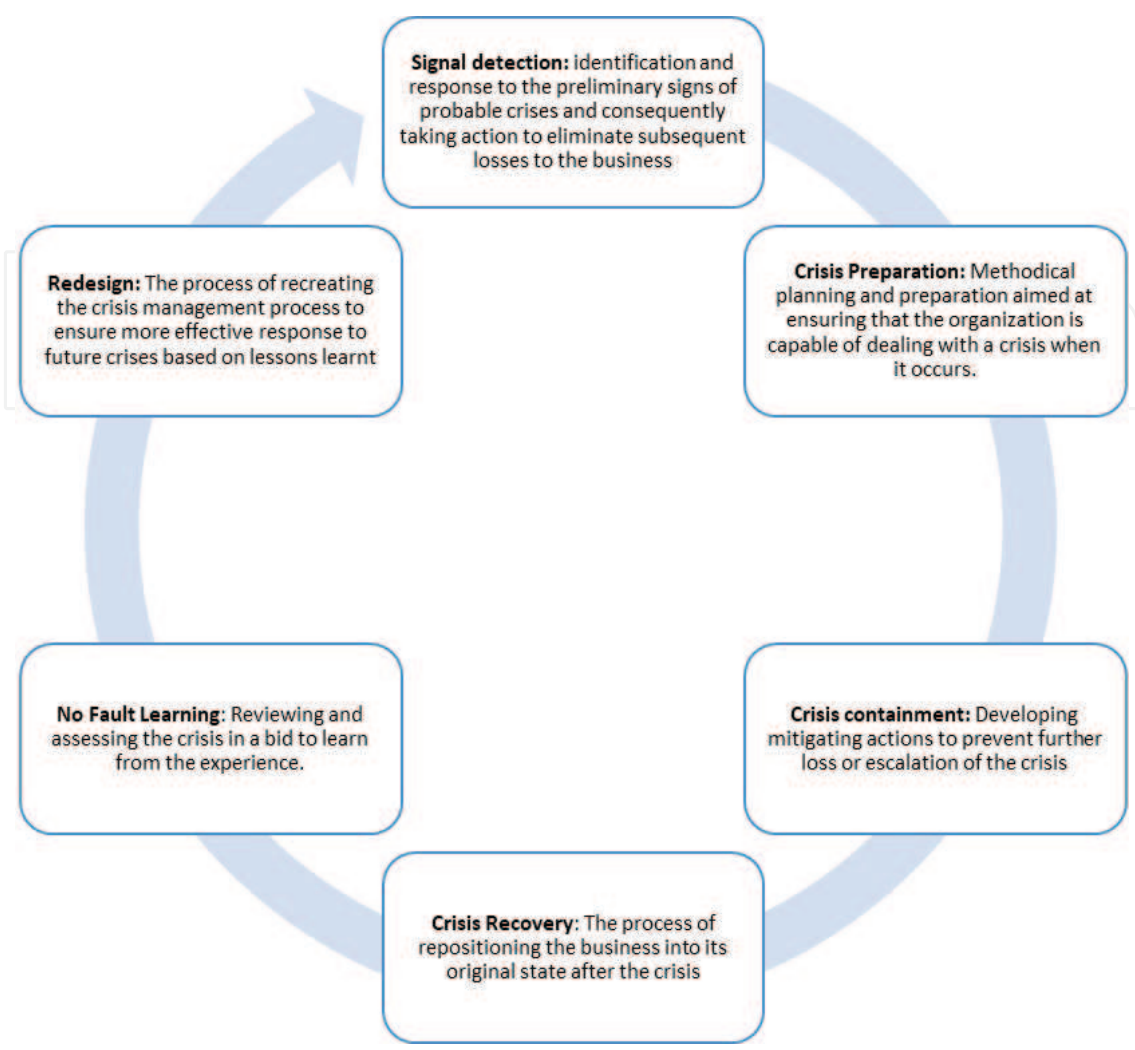


Figure 1. Crisis management process.

in a world where the information and knowledge is increasingly thriving, organizations have become increasingly reliant on human capital in promoting competitive advantage as opposed to equipment, systems, and technology. Employees are currently considered the most important assets within the organization, and hence there is a need for them to safeguard the safety of their employees. Organizations are required to pay greater attention to the impact of crises on employees, relatives and the community in general in order to successfully achieve effective crisis management. It is for this reason that the HR has been vested the role of crisis management within the organization to ensure that employees are well prepared and that they can survive and recover following unfortunate events. The HR has a duty to ensure that staff are included in all business continuity and crisis management plans.

As the custodian of staff welfare, the HR has an important role to play in ensuring that human capital within the organization is protected and that employees can continue to provide value for the organization beyond the crisis [5]. The HR is best positioned to offer disaster preparedness and crisis management training to employees to ensure that they are in a position to handle crises when they occur. Accordingly, the role of HR in managing crisis becomes extremely important for any organization that seeks to maintain brand reputation and stakeholder trust and loyalty.



The HR undertakes key roles in crisis management from the pre-crisis to the post-crisis stages. The HR's role is to protect the welfare of employees while at the same time ensuring that they contribute to the organization's sustainability, through doing their part in times of disaster. The role of the HR is to ensure that staff are adequately prepared for crises through training, effective leadership and empowerment, ensuring that security and safety initiatives are taken to protect employees in the event of a crisis and developing communication plans necessary in promoting crisis management [10]. The roles of HR in crisis management are varied and can be classified into different themes as follows.

#### *2.2.1. Crisis management planning*

This is the process through which an organization makes plans on how to deal with crises, including crisis prevention, impact reduction, and crisis recovery [11]. Crisis management planning enhances the company's ability to deal with crises and ensures faster recovery when an organization is faced by a crisis. Crisis management planning is an imperative process in crisis management because it provides guidelines on preventing or averting crises, dealing with crises and the recovery process.

#### *2.2.2. Training and talent development*

An imperative role of HR in crisis management, training ensures that employees can effectively implement the crisis management plan. Training and talent development provide employees with knowledge and skills necessary to enhance the recovery process. The HR is expected to lead or participate in training aimed at mentally preparing employees for possible crisis events [12]. This involves the development of a training plan in which employees are provided with knowledge and skills on how to deal with crises. The training should also involve simulation exercises to provide a practical feel about how to deal with real crises. This is discussed in more detail under the topic "Training for crisis management."

#### *2.2.3. Vulnerabilities and threats communication*

The HR has a key responsibility to ensure that employees are aware of vulnerabilities and potential threats. This involves identifying and communicating all possible threats within and outside the organization to the employees. Effective communication ensures that employees are physically, emotionally, and intellectually prepared, such that it becomes easier to handle the crisis [9]. Besides providing such information, the HR is expected to develop a crisis communication plan that should be shared among employees to help them in identifying channels of communication in the face of a crisis. Ronez [5] noted that the HR is a strategic partner when it comes to human resource management and should therefore understand the crisis management language, enough to lead preparedness and recovery.

#### *2.2.4. Promoting employee involvement*

The HR has a key role to play in crisis management and consequently promoting sustainability preparedness in an organization. Notably, disasters both within and outside the working environment are likely to impact the organization and its employees in a significant manner, such that there is a need to design preparedness measures to promote sustainability. The role

of the HR is based on the premise that when employees are affected by a crisis, the organization becomes vulnerable. Second, people within the organization are considered the solution to the challenges faced by the organization in the face of a crisis, such that preparing them for disaster is considered an imperative aspect of business management.

#### *2.2.5. Employee motivation*

The HR is responsible for providing necessary manpower within the organization and also ensuring that employees use their skills to contribute to organizational development. This means that HR can contribute to crisis management through motivating employees to contribute to the crisis management plan execution. It is notable that staff are of great significance, both before and after the crisis, and the HR professionals are best placed at facilitating their participation in crisis management. Through training and motivation, an organization can ensure that its crisis management efforts are fruitful by actively engaging employees in the process.

#### *2.2.6. Influencing organizational culture*

The other way in which the HR influences crisis management is through influencing the organizational culture. Lockwood [12] defines organizational culture as the shared behaviors within an organization and which determine how members of the organization interact and execute their duties as influenced by organizational values and norms. This insinuates that the manner in which employees within an organization respond to crises is highly dependent on the organizational culture. The HR can influence culture within the organization, with aspects such as leadership capabilities and resilience being emphasized as a means to enhancing crisis management [13]. When skills such as problem solving are ingrained in an organization's culture, it is possible that staff will be better positioned to survive the crisis.

#### *2.2.7. Small-scale crisis plan*

Besides the organizational crisis plan, a small-scale crisis plan that addresses the human aspect of crisis should be developed by the HR. This involves identifying vulnerability to HR functions and processes and developing mitigation plans [5]. Examples may include protecting HR records such as backing up data and having a plan regarding work continuity in the event of loss of staff. This mini plan should also include publicizing crisis management efforts with employees and management in order to encourage better crisis management. The goal is for the HR to proactively identify ways of solving problems within the HR department and hence promote competency. This also ensures that the HR department is recognized for its role in crisis management, hence promoting more inclusion in strategic management.

### **3. Relevance of HR crisis management**

It is notable that a majority of organizations tend to focus on safeguarding their operations, systems, infrastructure and public relations when it comes to crisis management [11]. This

leaves out the human side of crisis management, which may be catastrophic for the organization. There are various reasons why an organization should focus on developing a HR crisis plan. To begin with, having a HR crisis plan prevents the loss of key staff and thus preserves an organization's knowledge hub. When crises occur, there is a risk of losing staff due to injury or the need to move to other organizations that focus on employee welfare. By developing a HR crisis plan, an organization ensures that it protects its human resources and hence promotes continuity of the business. The second factor is that a HR crisis plan reduces high turnover and absenteeism in the event of a crisis [6]. Crises tend to disrupt the normal activities of the organization and unless there is a solid crisis plan to guide employees on actions to take following a crisis, it is likely that they may abandon their jobs or fail to report to work as expected. The third factor is that failure to pay attention to employees also leads to low morale and motivation, such that employees do not perform to their best ability [6]. A fourth consideration in promoting crisis management is that crises may result in an increased in health benefits costs, which would cost the company significantly. Accordingly, training employees on crisis management ensure that injuries are reduced and that such costs are reduced. Poor HR crisis management could also lead to a damaged reputation and negative publicity. This is because the company appears as one that is not concerned about the welfare of their employees. A notable justification for HR crisis management is that it helps employees to handle emergencies better, such that losses and injuries are minimized [6]. This makes it easier for the organization to recover from the crisis as compared to where there is no crisis management plan.

#### **4. Planning for crisis management**

Corporations are made up of people and under any circumstances, employees are significantly affected when an organization is faced by a crisis. Furthermore, employees are responsible for implementing the crisis management plan whenever a crisis occurs. This essentially means that employees play an imperative role in the crisis management process, and their role should be recognized when developing crisis management plans. The HR is mandated with the role of development and implementation of policies and procedures related to employees. The HR is also responsible for communicating policies and procedures with staff, as well as duties and responsibilities required of them in the organization [14]. This explains why the HR's participation in crisis management is of great significance within the organization, given that it provides guidance on policies and procedures for dealing with emergencies and crises. The HR can also include crisis management as one of the roles for staff when they are recruited by the company, this creating increased ownership in the project. Secondly, the HR plays the role of an intermediary between the management and employees. The fact that employees are the direct executors of crisis management plans requires that the HR is directly involved in order to ensure that employee rights and needs are protected. Involvement of the HR in crisis management planning also ensures that contents of the plan can be effectively communicated. This is best achieved when the HR is part of the planning team, thus making it easy to accurately communicate to staff on what is required of them in the event of a crisis. Direct involvement of the HR also ensures that crisis management training is done more



effectively because HR understands dynamics and foundation of the crisis management plan. This is effective in promoting understanding among employees and creating ownership of the crisis management plan.

Crisis management is about creating value for the company through minimizing downtime and potential damages from crises. Accordingly, crisis management must begin by recognition of the organization's vulnerability and how this can be overcome through the effective engagement of employees. This is followed by the identification of the danger to employees and therefore design possible crisis scenarios that may affect employees. The HR then defines guidelines and HR policies aimed at protecting employees, avoiding panic and ad hoc actions such that the physical and psychological health of employees is preserved [15]. This calls for HR's involvement in crisis management through training and preparation of employees to handle potential crises. In order for HR crisis management to be effective, HR must work in collaboration with other organizational functions. This ensures effective integration of the human aspect of crisis management into the overall crisis management plan.

Planning is an important aspect of crisis management, and HR involvement plays a critical role in ensuring successful management of crises. In this regard, the HR should get involved in crisis management from the planning stage in order to ensure that the needs of employees are included in the crisis management plan [16]. This involves providing information on what the role of employees in the organization is and the roles they should play in crisis management. The HR provides vital information including staff capabilities and the kind of training necessary for effective crisis management. The HR also provides information on employee needs, ensuring that the welfare of employees is given priority. Lack of HR involvement would mean that the human aspect of crisis management is undermined, thus bringing in challenges in dealing with crises.

The HR is best placed in understanding the kind of impact that a crisis is likely to have on employees based on their knowledge on physical and psychological influences of employee performance. This means that the HR provides insightful information that will ensure that a wholesome plan is developed. This ensures that the safety of employees is given priority due to the understanding of the impact of crises on employees and their families [5]. In achieving effective planning, employee involvement may be beneficial for HR because it provides valuable information on crisis management through employees' perspective. As the department is responsible for promoting employee welfare in the organization, HR can enhance the crisis management planning process by incorporating employee contribution, which in turn promotes the ownership of the plan by employees. This increases the probability of success during implementation.

## **5. Training for crisis management**

Training plays a major role in enhancing preparedness through ensuring that employees have the right knowledge and skills to guide them during times of crisis. As the department designated with providing training for employees, the HR department has a mandate to offer

training on crisis management [5]. This should be done professionally in order to ensure that employees are effectively prepared for crises that may occur both within and outside the work environment.

The crisis management plan is normally a lengthy document documenting the processes to be followed in the event of a disaster. While it may be considered effective and appropriate for the organization, its implementation may not be actualized if the employees do not receive adequate training on disaster management. Training enhances awareness among employees and also heightens support for the program. Training is effective in ensuring that the crisis management recovery teams are familiar with the recovery processes and procedures, thus making it easy to implement them when there is a disaster [17]. Leaders should be in a position to identify when and how to activate a disaster plan, manage teams, communicate across the organization, and assemble teams to ensure safety during and after the crisis [11]. They also need knowledge to effectively execute the crisis management plan to ensure that the risk is minimized or contained.

The HR undertakes various training activities in relation to crisis management. The most important role of the HR is to understand the crisis management plan in order to effectively develop a training program for staff. This ensures that accuracy is enhanced and that employees are given the right training. The second aspect of training is to develop the training program to be used. This is a rigorous process that involves developing a curriculum and plan for training based on the organizational disaster plan [17]. The process also involves developing a training program to ensure that all relevant employees are trained. Special focus should be given to team leaders to ensure that they have adequate knowledge to handle potential crises. A third aspect of training is follow-up and continuous trainings to ensure that employees are still conversant with previous training given [4]. This ensures that they remain ready for a crisis and that the organization is better placed at handling crises.

### **5.1. Types of training**

There are various areas of training that the HR can focus with regard to crisis management as discussed in the following sections.

#### *5.1.1. Threat and risk assessment*

An important aspect in crisis management is being able to predict or speculate on possible threats. Threat and risk assessment play a key role in promoting preparedness through the identification of potential crises that may affect the organization and hence taking relevant measures to ensure that the organization is prepared for such risks [5]. Training on threat and risk assessment involves training of employees on how to detect threats in the business environment by providing them with knowledge and skills in environment scanning. This should be a continuous process where employees in the course of their work consistently identify potential threats to the business and report the same through their supervisors. The HR department should also work toward developing a department for crisis management, and threat and risk assessment is given priority to protect the business from potential losses.

Therefore, the HR has a significant contribution to make as far as preventing threats within the organization is concerned.

#### *5.1.2. Business continuity planning*

Business continuity comprises of activities aimed at ensuring that business operations continue like before the crisis occurred. The goal is to ensure that the organization can resume its original position as fast as possible and thus enhance continuation of normal business processes [4]. This is an important aspect of the training process because it provides staff with information on continuity planning, such that it becomes easier for the organization to recover. Business continuity planning may cover aspects such as technology innovation to prevent loss and recovery of data, effective communication to promote normalization of organizational activities after the disaster, and to maintain good relationships with stakeholders. When staff are well trained on organization's business continuity plan, they are better placed to help in the recovery process after a disaster as opposed to where they do not have adequate knowledge and therefore do not adopt strategies necessary to promote effective business continuity planning.

#### *5.1.3. Disaster recovery*

The process of disaster recovery depends on the ability of the organization to respond to the disaster and the level of knowledge and skills possessed by its employees. The HR has a mandate to train employees on disaster recovery processes including what to do after a disaster, how to handle disasters, and how to survive from the disaster. The disaster recovery process as related to the employee may include training on how to handle physical and psychological trauma following a crisis as well as how employees can help the organization return to its position before the crisis. Crises may lead to significant losses such as loss of data, physical assets, technology, processes, and customers among others. Employees need training on how best to recover from such losses and hence promote performance of the organization.

#### *5.1.4. Business impact analysis*

The process of business recovery after a crisis requires extensive knowledge and effective strategies to ensure that the business can regain its lost glory. This is done through performing a business impact analysis, to determine how the business was affected by the disaster. Accurate impact analysis helps in the recovery process because it helps in establishing the loss involved, such that the organization can work out strategies to recover what it has lost. In order to achieve this, the input of employees is of great significance because they are best placed at identifying the impact that the crisis had on the business. By training employees how to effectively quantify the impact of crises on a business, the organization is able to plan better and improve the recovery process.

#### *5.1.5. Simulation exercises*

While crises and disasters are highly unique, performing simulation exercises is an effective way of helping employees to understand how they can react in various scenarios. Simulation

is a practical imitation or replication of an actual crisis, where employees are required to react as if the crisis has happened in real life [18]. This is mostly done after extensive training on crisis management, such that a practical session is aimed at testing their understanding and interpretation ability. During the simulation, employees perform an act on how they would have responded if there was indeed a crisis. The simulation exercise may involve brainstorming sessions whereby the employees exchange ideas on how best to handle certain scenarios. The trainer should then provide the ideal position in order to ensure that the employees are in sync in case they are faced with a similar situation.

#### *5.1.6. Survival tactics*

An important factor in HR crisis management is to ensure the safety of employees through promoting their physical and psychological well-being. This means that the HR in crisis management training should focus on training employees on how to survive in the event of a disaster [18]. This includes training on communication, risk avoidance, first aid, importance of protective wear when handling risky assignments, and emergency sources of help among others. When employees are well versed with survival techniques, they are more likely to survive from a disaster, which ensures that the organization's knowledge hub is maintained. The information can further be shared with their connections such as family and friends. This ensures that the stability of employees is enhanced because employees are likely to be affected when crises face their immediate family.

## **6. Conclusion**

This chapter focuses on the relevance of HR in crisis management, with particular focus on planning and training for crisis management. It is established that while traditional crisis management efforts have dwelled on protecting the organization's resources, processes, technology and reputation, the human side often ends up being neglected. This calls for increased participation of HR in crisis management in order to ensure that employees are effectively engaged in the process. The chapter provides various justifications for increased participation of HR in the organization's crisis management planning process. Among the most important aspects is that employees make up the organization's most valuable resources and that they are also responsible for the implementation of crisis management plans when they fall due. Accordingly, they are considered a key stakeholder in the crisis management process, and the HR should therefore be proactive in this process.

The HR in any organization must move from the traditional roles and embrace more contemporary aspects of HR including participation in crisis management. This will ensure that employees are better prepared to handle crises and also promote the employee retention in the organization. There are various aspects of planning and training that the HR can participate in and take control of in the organization. These include identification of potential threats within the organization, developing departmental crisis management plan, participation in the development of the organizational crisis management plan, training employees on threat and risk management, business continuity planning, crisis impact assessment, and practical

lessons in handling crises when they occur. Through HR participation in planning and training, performance of organizations can be enhanced, thus promoting the bottom-line and ability to deal with future crises.

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