

# 51CM

A compendium of 51 articles  
exploring the topic of  
crisis management

Grant Rayner

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## **51CM: A compendium of 51 articles exploring the topic of crisis management**

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# Preface

In 2022, I wrote 51 articles on crisis management.

Why go to all that effort? Well, crisis management has been my focus and passion for more than 20 years.

Writing about a topic is an excellent way to learn more about that topic. By writing about crisis management, I have been able to deepen my knowledge of this specialist field. In doing so, I have improved my capacity to support my clients during crisis events.

All in all, it's been worth the effort.

This book is a compilation of all 51 articles, nicely formatted. Hopefully, it will be a bit more convenient to read than the online version.

## Who This Book Is for

The articles in this book will be useful for anyone involved with crisis management. You may be a member of a Crisis Management Team in your organisation, or you may be a crisis management consultant. You may even just be curious about the subject of crisis management.

## How This Book Is Structured

Each chapter of this book is one article.

I've included the articles in chronological order, as I wrote them. I've also done some very light editing here and there, but nothing substantive.

## My Background

I've been working as a crisis management professional for more than 20 years. During this time, I've focused my efforts on the two areas I consider the most important and impactful: crisis response and crisis simulation exercises.

In the area of crisis response, I've supported clients during a host of different crisis events. Here are just a few of the highlights:

- Terrorist attacks in Jakarta in 2003 and 2004
- Asian Tsunami in 2004 / 2005
- Nepal State of Emergency in 2005
- Lebanon War in 2006
- Nepal earthquake in 2015
- Terrorist attacks in Colombo in 2019
- COVID-19 pandemic from 2020-2023
- The situation in Afghanistan in 2021
- The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022

I've also supported clients through a host of other crisis events, many of these being too sensitive and confidential to share here.

I've shared my experience and insights regarding crisis response in detail in [The Crisis Response Handbook](#).

Fortunately, crisis events aren't a daily occurrence, so I spend most of my time supporting clients through the development of crisis plans and the provision of training and exercises. I've built a nice niche in the area of improving crisis team performance through the design and delivery of realistic crisis simulation exercises. I've written about crisis simulation exercises at length in '[The Crisis Simulation Handbook](#)'.

Along the way, I've been privileged to have worked with some of the world's most successful companies in some of the world's most interesting locations. I've supported clients in Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Fiji, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Moldova, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Romania, Singapore, Solomon Islands, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Syria, Taiwan, Thailand, the UK, the US, the UAE, Vanuatu and Vietnam.

Like most experienced professionals, I know there's a lot I don't know. I'm still on a path of knowledge and discovery, and I'm continually seeking out new knowledge and practical experience.

The articles in this book are not intended to be the final say on all things crisis management. They are reflective of my own journey and experiences. I hope that you find them useful as you develop your own professional knowledge and experience.

## **Thank You**

Thank you for spending your hard-earned dollars to buy this book and support my work. Crisis management is a niche topic, so I sincerely appreciate your interest and support.

# 1/51 Two Reasons Why Crisis Teams Fail

*Why crisis teams fail to effectively manage crisis events, and what you can do to prevent your own crisis team from failing.*

Originally published on 9 January, 2022

In 2022, I'll be writing 51 short articles on crisis management - one article a week (I missed a week at the start of the year). This is the first article. 1 of 51. The purpose of these articles is to share the knowledge and experience I've gained working in this specialised field for the last 20 years and more. I hope you'll find the articles useful.

I've conducted well over a hundred complex crisis simulation exercises. I've also supported crisis teams during a host of different incidents, from terrorist attacks to earthquakes. I've seen a lot of teams performing at peak levels. I've also seen quite a few crisis teams fail.

So, what separates an effective crisis team from an ineffective crisis team?

Why do some crisis teams succeed, while others fail?

Based on my experience, there are two key reasons why crisis teams fail to perform effectively during a crisis:

1. Lack of trust and mutual understanding
2. Lack of a defined crisis response process

I'll delve a bit deeper into each of these reasons below, and provide recommendations you can apply in your own organisation.

## **Lack of Trust and Mutual Understanding**

Crisis teams necessarily consist of individuals from different departments. Each person brings with them specific functional expertise. While bringing in different expertise is the reason for having a crisis team, the problem is that these people may never have worked together. In fact, they may have never met each other.

A crisis presents a uniquely stressful situation, characterised by the lack of (or in some cases, too much) information and the demand to act quickly. At the same time, there are significant consequences for poor decisions.

If teams don't regularly train and exercise together, they'll be unable to build the interpersonal relationships essential to operating effectively in a high pressure situation. The team won't be cohesive, and there'll be high levels of friction as individuals try to voice their opinions and assert influence. Individuals won't trust the judgement of their fellow team members. Once placed under pressure, the team will quickly fail.

Cohesion is also impacted by employee turnover, where people on the team may be regularly replaced. Existing members, who may have participated in training and exercises, may not know or trust the capabilities of new members.

I'll provide recommendations shortly on simple techniques you can apply to build cohesive crisis teams. Before doing that, I want to focus on process.

## **Lack of a Defined Crisis Response Process**

I'm continually shocked at the number of organisations that don't have a defined process for responding to crisis events. I'm also shocked at the number of organisations that have a defined crisis response process, but don't actually use the process in practice.

Having a defined process is an underrated aspect of crisis response. How could a disparate group of people hope to effectively manage a crisis without one?

A team without a process will be entirely inconsistent in their response. They'll miss key pieces of information, and they'll fail to effectively follow up on tasks.

Of particular concern, a team without a defined process will struggle in the first hour of the crisis. They won't be able to orientate to the situation and their decision-making processes will be less effective. In short, they'll be overwhelmed.

A good process galvanises the team behind a single effort. A process helps solve the problem of team members not

being used to working together. The process will push the team towards a common objective and will synchronise their work efforts.

When designing a crisis response process, ensure that the process is ‘incident agnostic’. The process should work regardless of the type of incident. Taking this approach also simplifies things—the team only needs to know one process.

Once they have a process, the team must rehearse this process through training and exercises. Only through practice will team members have the necessary confidence to effectively apply the process during a crisis.

An excellent technique to promote the use of a crisis process is to associate specific tools with each stage of the process. Information displays can be used to support situation assessment and impact assessment processes. Task lists can be used for a task review. And so on. Each tool forms part of a collective ‘crisis brain’ that’s then maintained by the team during the crisis.

## **Recommendations**

To wrap up, here’s a few things you can do to ensure you have a cohesive and effective crisis team:

- Arrange for the crisis team to meet once a month, even if it’s just for lunch.
- Conduct annual training.
- Conduct annual exercises.

- Design a crisis response process.
- Incorporate tools into the crisis process process.
- Practice using the crisis response process during training and exercises.
- Iteratively improve the crisis response process over time, based on feedback from exercises and crisis events.

## 2/51 Five Techniques To Contain a Crisis

*Techniques your crisis team can apply to contain a crisis, making it easier to manage and enabling rapid recovery.*

Originally published on 16 January 2022

Once your crisis team has orientated to a crisis, one of the team's first priorities will be to contain the crisis.

What does it mean to 'contain a crisis'?

When you contain a crisis, you are stopping it from getting worse as it affects your organisation. Effectively, you want to stop the problem set from growing and becoming even more difficult to manage.

Once your crisis team has contained the crisis, and mapped the various problems, the team can then focus their efforts on solving each of these problems in a methodical way. Taking this disciplined approach will enable rapid recovery.

Here's another way to look at containment. Crisis events are inherently dynamic. That's one of the reasons they're a 'crisis'. Once a crisis starts, your crisis team will want to reduce the dynamic aspects of the crisis by fixing the situation in place. If the impact of the crisis continues to escalate and expand, it will present a highly dynamic situation that will be difficult for the crisis team to

manage. Even an experienced crisis team will quickly become overwhelmed. Effective crisis containment therefore seeks to stop the escalation and expansion of the impacts of the crisis, making the crisis somewhat easier to manage.

Moving from theory to practice, what actions can a crisis team take to contain a crisis?

I'll introduce five containment measures below. This list isn't exhaustive, and quite a number of containment measures are situation and context dependent. The measures I'll outline below are relevant to most crisis events, and can have a major impact on containing the crisis and constraining its impact.

## **1. Account for Your People**

It's impossible to know the extent of the impact of a crisis on your organisation until you've accounted for all your employees. If done properly, the process of accounting for employees will enable you to quickly pinpoint those employees needing urgent support. By providing early assistance to these employees, you can prevent the impacts of the crisis from escalating and can work towards rapid resolution.

## **2. Provide Life Saving Assistance**

If people are injured, provide first aid. If people need an ambulance, call one immediately. Actions taken early in

the crisis will save lives. Don't want for external support. If you have the resources to assist employees, activate those resources. Providing critical assistance in the opening hours of a crisis will make the crisis less dynamic and significantly easier to manage.

### **3. Remove People From the Risk**

As long as people are exposed to risk, new problems will arise. The situation will remain dynamic and difficult to manage. Therefore, one of your first priorities will be to provide general advice to all employees to help remove them from risk. From there, you can narrow your efforts to support specific at-risk individuals who require additional assistance. How you remove people from risk will depend on the situation, but here are a few actions you can consider:

- Send a message to all employees, advising them to move to a safe and secure location and shelter in place.
- Evacuate a facility, where the risk exists inside the facility.
- Lock down a facility, where the risk exists immediately outside that facility.
- Implement travel restrictions, preventing travellers from going to an at-risk location.
- Recall travellers from an at-risk location.

- Implement movement restrictions in a location, ensuring people aren't moving in at-risk areas.
- Implement curfews in a location, ensuring people aren't moving outside during periods of heightened risk.
- If someone is in a dangerous situation, guide them out of that situation over the phone.

Once all employees are static in a known and safe location, the crisis will be significantly easier to manage.

#### **4. Ensure Access to Essential Services**

One of the major impacts of a crisis is that your organisation may lose access to essential services. Without these essential services, other problems may emerge over time. Without effective communications, for example, people who need help won't be able to ask for it. Their condition could worsen over time. Without shelter, people will be exposed to the elements, creating new problems over time.

Accordingly, it's critical that you do all you can as an organisation to ensure access to essential services. You can do this by providing workarounds or by moving people to a location that has services.

## 5. Communicate With Identified Stakeholders

Effective communication is at the heart of any effective crisis response. Crisis teams must communicate early and often with those people impacted by the crisis. I'll refer to these people as 'stakeholders'.

Stakeholders may include employees, the next of kin of your employees, customers, business partners, investors and regulators. The media are another stakeholder. However, by communicating to the media, be aware that you are also using them as a channel to reach other stakeholders.

Each communication will need to be tailored to the specific needs of the stakeholder. As a guide, you'll need to tell them what's happened, what the impact is on your organisation, how that impact may affect them, and what you're doing about it. Specifically, you'll need to explain what you are doing to support them.

A key result of proactive communication is it will stop a flood of requests and demands that will take time and resources to attend to. Effective communication can therefore make other aspects of the crisis less complex to manage.

Explaining what has happened and how you're responding will also help to prevent rumours and speculation, which can quickly spiral out of control and lead to further impacts. Once you've released this initial communication, commit to a regular schedule of updates. Tailor your messaging carefully to your audience, monitor the impact of your messaging, and adjust as you go.

## Wrap Up

Once a crisis kicks off, you have no influence over what's already happened. Your focus is on how you're going to manage the chaos that's been laid out in front of you. It's easy to assume that you don't have any control. This assumption is wrong. You do, in fact, have control. You have complete control over how your organisation responds to the crisis.

The actions you take in the first hour of a crisis will have a significant impact on the eventual outcome. By containing the crisis early in the crisis timeline, you're setting yourself up for a successful outcome.

Thanks for reading.

# 51/51 the End of the Road (for Now)

*A recap of the year and some previews for 2023.*

Originally published on 25 December 2022

Merry Christmas folks.

This is it. 51/51. The Last Article.

One of my objectives this year was to write one article each week focused on an aspect of crisis management.

Over the course of the year, I've written 51 articles covering a broad range of topics: team performance, leadership, process, communications, training, exercises, ethics and many more. I also shared insights relating to specific incidents, including the Russian invasion of Ukraine, tensions on the Korean Peninsula, as well as in the Taiwan Strait.

My aim in writing about crisis management has been to force myself into a weekly writing habit. I figured that writing 51 different articles would push me to delve deeper into the field of crisis management, hopefully exploring parts of the field that others may ignore. That has proven to be true. I've certainly developed as a professional through the process of writing these articles.

It's been a busy year when it comes to crisis management. Organisations in the Asia Pacific region, where I live and

work, have been kept busy with quite a number of major incidents.

Let's recap a few of the bigger ones that have kept me busy during the year.

## **The Taiwan Strait**

In response to a visit by Nancy Pelosi on 2 August, China flexed its muscles by deploying air and naval forces around the island of Taiwan. The deployment of forces from the PLA Eastern Theatre Command was unprecedented in modern times. They deployed forces around the island, effectively demonstrating what a blockade of Taiwan may look like.

Later in the year, during the CCP 20th National Congress, China re-affirmed its determination to seize Taiwan, by force if necessary.

Why is it a big deal? Chinese military action against Taiwan will force the US to respond. The US will be supported by Japan and possibly South Korea. Australia will step in to support the US, as may the UK and Canada. The Philippines is also likely to be drawn into the conflict, as it will provide essential staging bases for US forces. In short, we'd be looking at a regional conflict the likes of which we haven't seen since World War II.

Of course, there are options that fall short of armed conflict, including 'grey-zone' operations, and political and economic action.

While the situation has stabilised in recent months, the threat hasn't gone away. China continues to regularly send ships and aircraft across the median line. China's military modernisation continues at a staggering pace. They're continuing to expand their presence into the South China Sea by building new islands. They've also started combined exercises with Russia (any country who stands with Russia at this point is in bad company).

Simultaneously, China is also garnering support in the South Pacific, which is a strategically important region that would be in the strategic rear of any US military operations to support Taiwan.

Aside from their military activities, China has been increasingly aggressive on the world stage, mistaking puerile insults with savvy statecraft.

China's actions are reshaping alliances in the region. Japan, recognising the threats from China and North Korea, has also taken unprecedented steps to build up its military capabilities.

All in all, China is the most significant threat to regional security we will face in the next decade.

## **The Korean Peninsula**

2022 saw North Korea fire a record number of missiles. The situation hit a peak level of concern on 2 November, when North Korea fired a missile over the Northern Limit Line (NLL). While missile launches are nothing new, the firing of a missile over the NLL was an unprecedented action

that quickly lead to a series of escalatory strikes and demonstrations of military capability.

I flew into South Korea on the evening of 2 November to support organisations to review their contingency plans in case the situation continued to escalate.

The key to understanding risks on the Korean Peninsula is to focus on risks related to 'escalatory retaliation' (basically, tit-for-tat responses that are increasingly provocative and therefore increasingly dangerous). A North Korean ballistic missile launch alone is largely meaningless (aside from providing a gauge as to the status of their missile program). Instead, what we need to watch for is the actions South Korea and the US take in response to a launch, and then how North Korea responds to those actions, and so on.

The resumption of military exercises involving the US and South Korea in 2022 has been a key source of contention for North Korea, and was probably a key driver in their increased activity. President Yoon and President Biden have both demonstrated that they are unwilling to be intimidated by North Korean military actions, and are willing to engage in their own demonstrations of force to deter further North Korean aggression. Unfortunately, military exercises and other military activities by South Korea and the US only serve to convince North Korea that they are going to be attacked and that they need to strengthen the level of deterrent (i.e., ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons). Round and round we go...

We're likely to see more of the same in 2023. North Korea has zero incentive to denuclearise. Instead, we'll see them continue to build their ballistic missile capabilities. We're also likely to see a seventh nuclear test at some point.

## **China and Zero COVID Policy**

China's overnight abandonment of their Zero COVID policy has caused chaos across the country. Instead of learning from the successes and failures of every other country in the world, China decided to invest in containment for two years until they decided to just stop that approach with no plan for what would happen next.

As I write this, the Chinese government has declared they will stop providing statistics on COVID cases. They have also announced zero deaths from COVID for the past several days. Not particularly reassuring. I'm sure many of their citizens will be asking why they spent the last two years suffering through endless testing and quarantine.

I've been actively engaged in supporting organisations in China to orientate to the rapidly changing situation. It's difficult to assess risk, particularly given the efforts of the Chinese government to suppress information. I've developed a 'traffic light' system that covers different aspects of risk, including the availability of ICU beds, oxygen, blood, medication, and ambulance services. I've also included aspects of the supply chain into the model, including deliveries. This tool enables objective decision making, ensuring organisations are able to proactively respond to events as they unfold.

Organisations with operations in China should be planning for a range of scenarios, potentially culminating in the withdrawal of expatriate staff and families. The situation isn't that severe as yet, but the complexity is that we just don't know how severe it is because of the government's efforts to suppress information.

## **Odds and Ends**

Aside from the major events above, there's been a bunch of smaller incidents that have helped keep me busy, including the following:

- Suicide bombing in Bandung
- Civil unrest in Dhaka
- Severe air pollution in New Delhi
- Maritime piracy in Bangladesh
- Major flooding in Malaysia
- Iranian drone attacks against shipping off the coast of Oman
- Civil unrest and political upheaval in Colombo
- The crowd crush incident in Itaewon in Seoul

Of course, the list wouldn't be complete without considering the Russian invasion of Ukraine. I wasn't involved directly in that (aside from a small trip to Romania and Moldova), but certainly spent quite a bit of

time advising clients on the risks and how they should respond to mitigate those risks.

## What's in Store for 2023?

It's difficult to predict what will happen in the year ahead. However, here's a few things that will have my attention in 2023:

- **The Korean Peninsula.** There's still the risk of miscalculation that could lead to either a limited small-scale engagement or the complete destruction of North Korea (there aren't too many options in between). Overall, we're in a potentially dangerous period of time.
- **Travel risks.** After two years of limited travel, we're already seeing companies launching back into business travel, including travel into higher-risk locations. Organisations will be out of practice when it comes to handling traveller emergencies. It's a good time to re-start traveller security awareness training programs. Also consider running crisis simulation exercises focused on responding to traveller emergencies for your crisis teams.
- **Terrorism.** I have a feeling we're going to see an increase in terrorist attacks in 2023. As we're emerging from the pandemic and travel is almost back to normal, there will be more opportunities to plan and execute attacks. I wouldn't be surprised if

we saw attacks in Indonesia and in cities in Europe. The recent attack in Bandung was a wake-up call.

- **Extreme weather.** Major typhoons are a possibility every year in Asia. In addition, we may see major earthquakes, landslides, flooding and the occasional volcanic eruption. Not necessarily new, but each year these types of disasters seem to be getting incrementally worse. Extreme heat is also a concern in several places in this region.
- **Cyber attacks.** No guesswork required here, but cyber attacks will continue next year and should be a major source of concern for all organisations.

(Just note that I'm focused on Asia Pacific and occasionally on the Middle East, so no mention of Europe, the Americas or Africa here.)

## Wrap Up

Well, that's it for the year.

Thank you for subscribing and for reading. I hope you found these articles informative and useful.

I'm going to keep my weekly writing habit going next year. What will I writing about in 2023?

I still have a few days to decide, but I'm probably going to focus on travel security. Aside from crisis management, that's another core area of interest and a topic that I'm

confident I can write about once a week. I'll post a link to the new Substack here.

If you're interested in other aspects of my work, you can follow along by reading our monthly newsletter, the S9 Dispatch.

Thank you again, and all the best for a happy and successful 2023.

Grant.

# End Notes

## Other Titles

If you're interested in crisis management, I recommend you read [The Crisis Response Handbook](#) and [The Crisis Simulation Handbook](#).

We have also published a number of books focused on operating securely in higher-risk environments.

You can purchase these books from our [website](#).

## Feedback

If you identify any errors or broken links, or have thoughts to add on the topics in this book, please [get in touch](#).

