

Embedding Issue Management as a strategic element of Crisis Prevention

Tony Jaques

Citation: Disaster Prevention and Management, 19 (4), 2010 pp 469-482

*This is a final version submitted for publication.
Minor editorial changes may have subsequently been made.*

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to characterize the danger period which extends before a crisis and to position issue management as an effective crisis prevention discipline.

Design/methodology/approach: The paper explores scholarship regarding the developing concept of active pre-crisis management, the growing acceptance of crisis management as an integrated process and the implications of this holistic approach in providing opportunities for proactive intervention.

Findings: While crisis preparedness and prevention have become established as integral parts of organizational crisis management, there is no agreement on taxonomy and no accepted optimal process to formalize the methodology to deliver effective strategies.

Originality: After identifying and characterizing this gap in management research, the paper nominates issue management as an optimal option and identifies four broad areas where issue management can contribute to crisis prevention.

Keywords: Crisis management, issue management, pre-crisis, prevention, preparedness

Introduction

The growth of crisis management over the past two decades has seen the emergence of two distinct approaches – crisis as inevitability and as pro-active crisis prevention.

The idea of crisis as inevitability builds on Perrow's conception of 'normal accidents' (1984), through scholars such as Coombs (1999) who argued that a crisis is unpredictable but not unexpected. He said wise organizations know crises will befall them, they just don't know when. Developing a similar approach, Hearit and Courtright (2003) argued that strategists should assume that crisis are not just inevitable but are unavoidable, and are just as likely to emanate from within the organization as without.

The contrary approach now securing greater support presents crisis management in an integrated continuum of management activities proceeding from potential crisis identification and prevention through event response and on to long term post-crisis

management. Within this context it is an industry truism that the best crisis management is to prevent a crisis occurring in the first place, or that it is much better to anticipate crises than to manage crises (Brown, 2002). Building on this approach, this paper explores the elements of pre-crisis management with a strong focus on issue management and proposes a better defined and more integrated approach to the available options.

Positioning crisis management

It has been argued that crisis is among the most commonly misused words in the English language, “often trivialized to such an extent that its use borders on the bland and it has an inherently negative image” (Smith, 1995, p. 167). This is particularly evident when crisis is presented in its classic linguistic derivation, namely as a point of change, for better or for worse.

Corporate issues too can be presented either as challenges or as opportunities, but unlike issue management, where there is an established optimistic literature presenting issues as opportunities, this concept is much harder to sustain for crises. Some scholars attempt to present organizational crises as an opportunity to change and learn (for example Clair and Dufresne, 2007; Deschamps et al., 1996; Nystrom and Starbuck, 1984; Roux-Dufort and Metais, 1998). Yet while it is acknowledged that crises *can* constitute an opportunity through providing genuine learning, both for the organization impacted as well as others, in practice there is often little learning from crises, and sometimes explicit resistance to such learning (Kovoor-Misra, 1995). As the realist American practitioner John Budd concluded: “Crisis management is a costly catharsis. Its victories are more often pyrrhic than positive” (1998, p. 36)

For the present analysis a crisis is defined in its more fundamental sense of a low-probability damaging occurrence, well captured by Pearson and Clair (1998): “An organizational crisis is a high impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made swiftly” (p. 60). From this basis arises the central question here, namely how to define and scope that critical danger period which precedes the crisis, and with it the emerging concept of pre-crisis management.

The incubation period

From an early period, crises have been conceptualized both as an event and as a process. One of the most detailed comparative analyses of the two approaches (Forgues and Roux-Dufort, 1998) found that the two are naturally complementary, and that “while most of us appear to agree on the fact that crises are processes, we nevertheless often treat them as events” (p. 3). Almost a decade later Roux-Dufort (2007) concluded that the crisis management literature still mostly developed the event approach, while the process-oriented approach had been less used and developed, both theoretically and in practice.

A key disadvantage of the event approach is that it has the potential to inhibit examination of trends and incidents which lead to triggering of a crisis. By contrast the

conceptualization of crisis management as a continuum of activity promotes analysis of the process extending back before the triggering event and deeper into the preceding phases.

One of the early pioneers in the field was the British academic Barry Turner, who introduced the idea of predictability and developed the seminal concept of pre-crisis 'incubation'. Working in the 1970s, a decade before the development of organizational crisis management as a formal discipline, Turner researched the organizational development of disasters and described the incubation period as characterized by "the accumulation of an unnoticed set of events which are at odds with the accepted beliefs about hazards and the norms of their avoidance" (Turner, 1976, p. 381).

Over the subsequent three decades, this notion of failure of foresight through the incubation period has come to be one of the distinguishing features of scholarship on the critical pre-crisis phase.

Defining the pre-crisis phase

Following Turner's incubation taxonomy, and development of the process approach to crisis management, there have been numerous attempts to characterize the pre-crisis phase, many emerging from scholarship to define and model the overall sequential elements of crisis management.

One of the influential early writers in the field was Fink (1986) who introduced and popularized the concept of the prodromal or warning phase of crisis. He said that prodromes – named from the Greek for "running before" – constitute the warning signs of the pre-crisis phase, and that recognizing *and acting* in response to such prodromes often spells out the difference between survival and failure in a crisis.

Taking as examples two classic cases – the Three Mile Island incident (1979) and the Bhopal Disaster (1984) – Fink said that if the prodrome is missed entirely, the acute crisis phase can strike with such swiftness that so-called crisis management after the fact is, in reality, merely damage control. "Occasionally the prodromal crisis stage is referred to as the pre-crisis stage. But usually that appellation is used after the acute crisis has hit, when, in retrospect, people look back at a series of events and point to something as a *pre-crisis*" (Fink, 1986, p. 21).

In the wake of Fink's four stage model – prodrome, acute crisis, chronic crisis, resolution – a number of other sequential models have been developed, including Elliott, Smith and McGuinness (2000), Harrald, Marcus and Wallace (1990), Kovoov-Misra (1995), Pearson and Mitroff (1993) and Smith (1990). These and other models employ a range of different terminology across the core concepts, but irrespective of the language used, a common element is recognition that there is a distinct pre-crisis stage. However, despite an extensive literature and a well developed theoretical framework for the post-event crisis response and post crisis management/image restoration stages, there is not yet any

agreed taxonomy to particularize the pre-crisis phase, nor any agreement on the scope and boundaries of that phase.

The strongest impetus for such development derives largely from the process oriented scholarship, which presents crisis management as an integrated continuum of activity, reflecting the concept that crises are “not discrete events, but rather high intensity nodes in ongoing streams of social interaction” (’t Hart, Heyse and Boin, 2000, p 185).

Within an organizational context, Penrose (2000) was one of the early proponents of the integrated approach, which he called ‘proactive crisis management.’ He said that pre- and post-crisis activities cluster together and should be considered in aggregate rather than as separate sets of activities. “Proactive crisis management naturally affects the recovery measures a company must use and is a vital strategy in mitigating the negative effects of crises. Proactive planning is also critical in capitalizing on opportunities provided by a crisis before one occurs” (p. 166).

In the same vein Smith described what he called ‘preconditions for crisis’ which require direct action on the part of management to deal with them. He said that reactive processes with an emphasis on contingency plans, crisis response teams, business continuity and damage limitation are extremely important, but don’t prevent the crisis from occurring and will still result in the organization’s reputation being damaged, in some cases irreparably. “To be effective,” he said, “crisis management should, almost by definition, include systematic attempts to prevent crises from occurring” (Smith, 2005, p. 312). Referring to crisis management as a process which seeks both to prevent damaging incidents and also to mitigate their impact when prevention fails, Smith concluded: “This double-edged approach generates a set of challenges – both theoretically and practically – that ultimately require a shift in the way we view organizations and the processes of management that take place within them” (p. 312).

Other strong advocates of the integrated approach are Reynolds and Seeger (2005) who detailed what they called the ‘pre-event’ stage, and Kovoov-Misra (1995, 2000) who introduced the holistic notion of ‘crisis preparation’, which is posited as that aspect of crisis management which enables the organization to develop the necessary capabilities to address the other aspects of crisis management, namely crisis prevention, crisis containment and crisis recovery.

The use of different language can also be seen in some of the practitioner literature, where there is a natural focus on stepwise process. For example Skinner and Merhsam (2002) set out a detailed checklist approach for what they call crisis planning, with a separate element of crisis preparedness, which they define as the management customs, structure and attitudes necessary to set proper planning in place. By contrast Seymour and Moore (2000) similarly explore the standard contingency planning steps, but place them within an overall framework called crisis preparedness, which they characterize as incorporating early phases including formal risk and threat assessment, risk audits, and strategic and tactical plans for operational handling of identified risks and threats.

In an attempt to help clarify this challenge of both process and taxonomy, Jaques (2007a) developed an integrated model which divided the pre-crisis phase into two distinctly defined constructions – crisis preparedness and crisis prevention. He presented crisis preparedness as incorporating three clusters of advance activities designed to make the organization better prepared to respond operationally to future crisis, namely planning processes, systems and manuals, and training and simulations. Crisis prevention is shown comprising three further clusters, namely early warning/scanning, issue and risk management, and emergency response, with the first two directly linked to issue management.

Dividing the pre-crisis phase into these two elements – crisis preparedness and crisis prevention – is important as it not only distinguishes and separates the mechanistic from the strategic, but crucially it allows for increased focus on the area which is the subject of this paper – specifically that cluster of activities which together contribute to crisis prevention.

Effective emergency response is an important element of crisis prevention as physical emergencies badly handled can and do lead to crises. However, the last decade has seen an increasing acceptance that a large proportion of organizational crises – often those which are most damaging or longer lasting – are crises triggered not by emergency events such as fires, floods and other specific incidents, but by social and political developments or by organizational and managerial mis-steps or failure (for example Elliott, Smith and McGuinness, 2000; Kooor-Misra, Zammuto and Mitroff, 2000; Lagadec, 1997; Roux-Dufort, 2000; Smith, 2005). This reality reinforces the limitation of the event approach to crisis management and highlights the role of issue management as a crucial discipline for crisis prevention.

Issue management as a crisis prevention discipline

Issue management as originally conceived was very much a business-based discipline designed to enable the corporation to participate in and not simply respond to public policy (Chase, 1976). The narrow conceptualization of issue management with a singular focus on public policy and politics has retained some currency, but even from the earliest days, issue management was also perceived as an early warning or pre-crisis mechanism, closely aligned with strategic planning (See for example Fahey and King, 1977).

In its broadest, proactive context issue management can be defined as a formal discipline which “attempts to minimise surprises which accompany social and political change by serving as an early warning system for potential environmental threats, and attempts to promote more systematic and effective responses to particular issues by serving as a co-ordinating and integrating force within the corporation” (Wartick and Rude, 1986, p. 124)

Such an approach is reflected by the early issue management champion Archie Boe who described issue management as a response to what he called an unprecedented battering of business. “Crisis and post-crisis management have been the only responses open to chief executive officers until recently. During the past few years, however, intensive

study of the processes and forces which have brought about these changes has resulted in the belief that business can move to a pre-crisis management posture and participate in the public policy process that resolves these larger demands on business. The pre-crisis management approach is called issues management and is an important management tool available to today's business leaders" (Boe, 1979, p. 4).

Yet the potential role of issue management specifically as a pre-crisis or crisis prevention tool did not fully evolve until after the emergence of organizational crisis management itself as a recognized independent discipline, which is said to have begun in the United States after the Tylenol poisoning of 1982 and in Europe following the Chernobyl disaster of 1986 (Falkheimer and Heide, 2006).

With the further development of crisis management, particularly through the process approach, came recognition that not only do crises follow a distinct path before the triggering event, but that effective managers can and should take pre-emptive action early in the cycle. As the crisis scholars Pauchant and Mitroff put it: "When it comes to acts of nature such as a tornado, all we can do is prepare ourselves. But in the case of human-induced crises, we can do more than prepare – we can also attempt to prevent them from happening in the first place" (1992, p. 10)

Applying issue management to crisis prevention

Accepting that crisis management extends well before any triggering event, there has been extensive scholarship on the preceding phases, although there is only limited consensus on the parameters and labeling of the different pre-crisis steps and the associated taxonomies.

More fundamentally there is the question of the optimal management processes to navigate these phases, in particular the phase identified as crisis prevention. Pauchant and Mitroff (1992) claimed that 90% of the literature focuses on what to do when everything falls apart, for which they coined the expression crash management as opposed to an integrated planned approach. If crisis management is seen primarily in this reactive, crash management, mode it is inevitable that crisis prevention will be primarily comprise a series of control measures. But if crisis prevention is seen as part of a much broader concept of pre-crisis management, the established and well-defined discipline of issue management has a great deal to offer, utilizing many of the same tools and techniques.

Applied during the pre-event stage, there are four broad areas where issue management can contribute to crisis prevention -

1. Proactively addressing underlying systemic causes of potential crisis
2. Establishment of effective signal detection mechanisms
3. Properly identifying stakeholders and their perspectives
4. Learning and unlearning on an ongoing basis

(1) Proactively addressing underlying systemic causes of potential crisis

Systemic failure can exist in a number of forms. In terms of signal detection, which is fundamentally an effort to both recognize and respond to warning signs or specific events or trends (see below), systemic management failure might relate to failure to put in place processes and structures designed to facilitate such recognition and response. At the same time failure in terms of underlying systemic causes of potential crises might reflect an organization accepting or even promoting management systems and structures which limit signal detection, inhibit upward reporting and discourage dissent. Although these may be different aspects of the same deficiency, all have the potential to lead to disaster.

High profile examples of such systemic failure would include the early warnings of the Ford Explorer/Firestone Tire crisis which emerged outside the United States and were “explained away” (Bridges, 2004); the Mitsubishi Motor quality scandal, where evidence of recall faults was deliberately suppressed (Hagiwara, 2007); the Challenger disaster where NASA management systems worked to block dissenting views (Esser and Lindoerfer, 1989; Starbuck and Milliken, 2007) and the recent Société Générale loss of \$7 billion (4.9 billion euros) from the activities of a rogue trader, where an independent panel found the bank failed to act on 75 red flags or early warnings over a period of 18 months (Clark, 2008).

It has been said that while systemic problems are easy enough to identify, solutions are much harder to find (Mitroff and Pauchant, 1990). And although much has been written about the inevitable existence of red flags and how easy it is to miss them, there has been only limited scholarship on the formal processes to ensure this does not occur. The issue management approach provides an effective tool to address such underlying problems as it requires going beyond the obvious systemic risks which are intrinsic to particular industries, such as contamination scares for food producers, fires and spills at an oil refinery, or security and fraud risks at a financial institution.

Research has shown that management groups are most comfortable addressing issues within their own industry and with which they are more comfortable and familiar. Study of this phenomenon has been particularly strong among high technology or technology-dependent industries (for example Kooor-Misra, 1995; Kooor-Misra, Zammuto & Mitroff, 2000; Shrivastava, 1994a, b).

However there are underlying systemic potential issues which may apply across a wide variety of business sectors – beyond industry-specific risks and beyond generic problems such as floods, fires, power outages, infrastructure breakdown and natural disasters. These broader systemic causes might typically include uncompetitive behaviour, sexual or racial harassment or discrimination, executive dishonesty, takeovers and mergers, layoffs, new technology, off-shoring and management misconduct. And these are often areas where management systems and structures constitute a crucial vulnerability, particularly where there is an implicit or explicit desire to avoid ‘sensitive’ issues which might prove embarrassing to management – the so-called ‘undiscussables.’

In early research, Dunbar and Goldberg (1978) studied 20 corporations enmeshed in crises and concluded that the chief executives generally surrounded themselves with ‘yes-sayers’ who voiced no criticism and who deliberately filtered out warnings from middle managers who correctly saw that their corporations were out of touch with the market realities. Stocker (1997) has commented: “Keep in mind that top management, by definition, is the least informed group in the company when it comes to bad news. Nothing moves more slowly than bad news running up a hill, a very steep hill” (p. 192).

However Brown (2002) suggests that the greater systemic challenges for management structures are not lack of good information but (a) lack of imagination; (b) faulty or inadequate analysis; (c) not seeing the big picture; and (d) failure to link information to action. Issue management, with its deliberate action-orientation and no-fault objective analysis, can help deliver effective realization of this link.

(2) Establishment of effective signal detection mechanisms

The link between information and action lies at the heart of effective signal detection mechanisms, and there is an obvious close relationship between systemic causes of failure to recognize potential crises and failure to detect signals. Many authors have identified that most, if not all, crises are preceded by clear warning signals, and that these are frequently ignored. For example, James and Wooten (2005) concluded “smoldering crisis nearly always leave a trail of red flags and warning signals that something is wrong. These signals often go unheeded by management” (p. 143). The prolific crisis scholar Ian Mitroff went even further to boldly claim that in every crisis he had ever studied, there were always a few key people on the inside of an organization or on its edge, who saw the early warning signs and tried to warn their superiors. “In every case,” he concluded, “the signals were either ignored or blocked from getting to the top or having any effect” (Mitroff, 2002, p. 20).

But it is also clear that detecting and responding to signals is no simple task. Mitroff, Harrington and Gai warned that, despite the early warnings in advance of the actual crisis itself, the detection of such signals “remains an enigma for most organizations” (1996, p. 44). Or as Lagadec (1997) colorfully put it: “A crisis does not necessarily clearly announce itself before arriving. It often edges forward disguised as business as usual, or gathers strength on a secondary front, away from the closely monitored centers of interest” (p. 25). Lagadec went on to say that the trap in which management sometimes find themselves is made all the more devious by the fact that most of their attention is usually focused on core activities rather than on peripheral activities. A vivid example of this is provided by the well-known Dow Corning breast implant controversy (Argenti, 1997; LaPlant, 1999). The silicone provided for the implants was a non-core market which represented a minuscule element of the company’s total sales. Yet mishandling of a problem in this entirely peripheral activity was sufficient to create an international crisis and drive a \$5 billion dollar corporation into voluntary bankruptcy.

Environmental scanning and signal detection is a core management process across many information systems, planning procedures and decision-making techniques, such as

strategic forecasting, contingency planning, issues analysis and scenario analysis (Kash and Darling, 1998). Yet, while the concept of environmental scanning has broad application, issue management took this further and developed sophisticated tools and techniques for objective methods to identify, categorize and prioritize issues and potential crises, and the informational context in which they lie (for example Dyer, 1996; Lauzen, 1995). Although the specific methodologies may vary, the consistent elements represented here are objectivity, independence and the link to action.

A case which has been described as an archetypal example of failure to link information to action is the 1995 failure of Baring's Bank, a British financial institution since 1793 (Swartz, Elliott and Herbane, 1995). While the bank was eventually destroyed by the activities of a single rogue trader, it was evident very early that the bank's internal control systems failed to catch signals such as increased trading activity, the extensive use of leverage and escalating volume of trades. (See also Mitroff et al, 1996). The bank's fatal over-confidence in its own management oversight systems was demonstrated by Chairman Peter Baring, in his first media interview after the collapse, when he unwisely asserted it might have resulted from a deliberate criminal conspiracy to sabotage the bank (Gapper and Wrightson, 1998).

(3) Properly identifying stakeholders and their perspectives

While stakeholder identification and analysis is a core public affairs activity, the processes developed within issue management have enhanced this skill, particularly in relation to the role and response of 'opponents', including NGOs and social and political activists. The scholarly and practitioner literature of issue management has contributed to expanding the definition of stakeholders and has illuminated, in particular, the role of non-traditional stakeholders (Burchell and Cook, 2006; Doh and Guay, 2006; Holzer, 2008; Hughes and Demetrious, 2006; Watson, Osborne-Brown and Longhurst, 2002).

The importance of such understanding as an element of crisis prevention is illustrated by a number of high profile classic cases where inadequate understanding of stakeholder potential led to serious failure. One of these was Monsanto's dramatic misjudgment of the state of European public opinion over biotechnology, by which the company "wrecked an entire industry, as well as its own brand" (Larkin, 2003, p. viii). Speaking in the wake of the disaster, Monsanto CEO Bob Shapiro said: "We started with the conviction that biotechnology was useful and valuable but we have tended to see it as our task to convince people that we were right and that people with different points of view were wrong. We have irritated and antagonised more people than we have persuaded. Our confidence in biotechnology has been widely seen as arrogance and condescension because we thought it was our job to persuade. But too often we forgot to listen" (Vidal, 1999).

Another company which famously misjudged the role of external parties as key stakeholders was Shell UK, in its failed attempt to sink the disused oil storage buoy Brent Spar in the North Atlantic (Bakir, 2006; Entine, 2002). Not only did it completely fail to understand the role of Greenpeace activists, who occupied the abandoned platform, but it

also misread public and political opinion in Europe, and the opposition of Shell's own European subsidiaries, which eventually forced abandonment of the plan. In a remarkably frank assessment after the event, Christopher Fay, Chairman and CEO of Shell UK, told the BBC: "We covered all the scientific angles, we covered all the technical angles and we certainly very much covered all the legalistic angles. That was maybe a bit inward thinking. We hadn't taken into account hearts and emotions, where people are coming from, which is in part today's debate" (BBC, 1995).

However, failure to properly understand stakeholder perspectives leading to a crisis can also apply to much more traditional stakeholders, such as customers, as was shown in the notorious Intel Pentium Chip recall, where it was computer users whose voice was ignored (Hearit, 1999). Intel CEO Andrew Grove later conceded: "We got caught between our mindset, which is a fact-based, analysis-based engineer's mindset, and customers' mindset, which is not so much emotional but accustomed to making their own choice" (Carlton and Yoder, 1994).

Although each of these well documented cases is taken from the 1990s, research suggests that understanding of external stakeholder perceptions as part of crisis prevention is improving only very slowly.

(4) Learning and unlearning on an ongoing basis

Learning from crises is a subject in itself, with a well established literature regarding the barriers to management learning after a crisis (Elliott et al., 2000; Gibson, 2000; Roux-Dufort, 2000); how senior managers often don't learn from the crises of others (Jaques, 2008; Mitroff and Pauchant, 1990; Stern, 1997) and recognition that formal management learning process such as crisis simulations are often limited to those areas where they feel comfortable (Kovoor-Misra et al., 2000).

Twenty years ago the prolific crisis scholar Shrivastava (1988) noted that the one thing more tragic than the crises which occur is the failure of organizations and organizational scholars to learn from them, and there is little to suggest that the intervening decades have seen much improvement. Moreover, Stocker, commented that when you look at the majority of crisis which occur, what happened should have been on or near the top of the list of possible events. "Why," he asked, "wasn't anyone prepared?" (1997, p. 192).

Given this focus on crisis preparedness and crisis prevention, the systemic answers to each of the principal areas of management learning are not hard to see, though much harder to implement. Indeed, Mitroff (2004) suggests that one of the most significant barriers to effective crisis management is denial. In essence ongoing crisis learning falls largely into two general areas: honest evaluation of what has happened in the past and open scanning which takes information to the top. While Fink, Shrivastava and Mitroff all propose that organizations practice 'no fault' learning from crises and near misses, through objective investigation and evaluation, there is no doubt that the upward flow of information is one of the most important barriers. Nystrom and Starbuck (1984) for example, argued that top managers should listen to and learn from "dissenters, doubters

and bearers of warnings” to remind themselves that their own beliefs and perceptions may well be wrong. “Indeed, top managers should worry if they hear no such messages: long silences signal distortion, not consensus” (p. 60).

The challenge of effective scanning and upward communication was highlighted by Intel CEO Andy Grove in the wake of his company’s faulty chip crisis: “Most CEOs are in the center of a fortified palace, and news from the outside has to percolate through layers of people from the periphery where the action is. I was one of the last to understand the implications of the Pentium crisis. It took a barrage of relentless criticism to make me realize that something had changed and that we needed to adapt to the new environment” (Grove, 1996, p. 62).

Conclusion

While all the major functions of a modern organization are prone to potential crises, it is most manageable to identify the processes necessary for assessing and dealing with future crises as they arise, and at the core of this process are appropriate information systems, planning procedures and decision making techniques (Kash and Darling, 1998). An effective preventive process fundamentally requires capacity to scan the environment, gather information, assess and evaluate that information and turn it into action. Issue management provides a framework for such an integrated process, which can operate across functions and into the highest levels of management.

It has been argued (Smith, 1990) that one of the reasons crisis prevention has been severely neglected compared to crisis management is because it raises fundamental questions about the nature of managerial style and organizational culture. Smith proposes that this is largely because practicing managers feel threatened by the changes such questions bring with them.

But it can also be argued that another reason is the lack of agreed, neutral processes to address such change. Issue management properly implemented is a fundamentally neutral process which permits risk and change to be presented and assessed objectively. This is particularly important in light of the fact that organizational issues are, by definition, (Jaques, 2007) problems where there is no black and white answer; where emotions rather than data often prevail; where the risks of failure are greatest; and which, if left unmanaged, have the potential to become crises and threaten the entire organization

Furthermore, given that proactively managing issues to avoid crises can involve challenging organizational and management paradigms, “crisis prevention is inherently a political process and certainly not one which is essentially technical” (Tombs and Smith, 1995). Issue management contains within its processes and its literature the essential elements to help prevent crises before they happen. Or as the Canadian practitioner John Larsen (2005) concluded: “Spectacular crisis management begins with great issue management.”

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