

Crisis Communications Plan – Nice Sportswear

Director of Communications, Nice

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1. Situation Analysis

Background

Nice is the world's leading sportswear manufacturer, selling sports and sports-related fashion goods in most developed markets.

There have been incidents in Nice factories in the developing world where labour practices have not been at a level acceptable to Nice. A number of these incidents have been highlighted by the media, often through the work of activist groups.

To date Nice has rebutted this coverage effectively. We have highlighted our labour standards protocol that sets out the company's expectations of its suppliers, including pay and labour standards. In the interests of transparency the company has also regularly disclosed its suppliers and their addresses on its website. Effective rebuttal has led to media attention shifting to similar issues in the fashion clothing market. In October 2007 a report in the UK's Observer newspaper highlighted poor working practices in factories producing Gap goods in India.

A key promotional tool for sportswear brands is the sponsorship of sporting figures. Their endorsement of the brand, and in some cases specific products, lends credibility to Nice and has a measurable positive effect on sales. The demands of professional sport mean that, in some cases, it is necessary to make bespoke alterations to products worn by elite sportspeople to ensure they are fit for purpose. While this practice is not actively promoted, it is not hidden from customers.

EPISTLE analysis

Economic issues

- Raised profile of customised products being worn by our sponsored elite sportsmen and women could damage the credibility of the Nice brand, leading to reduced sales
- Linking of working conditions and low pay to Nice sponsorship deals may cause concern to our sponsored sportsmen and women, leading to get-out clauses potentially being invoked or problems with sponsorship deals under negotiation.
- Damage to Nice's ethical credibility would lead customers to substitute Nice products with competitive ethically-differentiated products.

Political issues

- A series of well-publicised corporate crimes has led to increased awareness among politicians of ethical business in many developed countries. This could lead to politicians taking a more active interest in the current crisis.
- Governments and regulatory bodies in the countries where Nice produces its products may come under increasing pressure to introduce more legislation to protect workers' interests. This could restrict Nice's ability to produce its goods compared to currently.

Information issues

- Global growth in use of the internet, particularly social media platforms such as video sharing and blogs, means coverage of this issue is likely to extend beyond traditional media channels and spread rapidly.
- Many media organisations are using campaigns as a tool to increase sales and their own profile. This issue could be used as the basis for such a campaign.

Social issues

- The majority of Nice's customers wear sportswear for its fashion value rather than for its functional value. This means the decision to purchase Nice products is highly fashion-led and volatile to changes in fashions.
- The raised importance of ethical consumption in many developed markets (such as the growth of the Fair Trade movement) could mean a renewed focus on Nice production facilities.

Technological issues

- Technological advances in manufacturing, particularly the availability of high end automated machinery for producing many goods, may make it hard to make credible arguments for hand-produced goods from developing countries.

Legal issues

- Customised products for sponsored sportsmen and women may attract some scrutiny from Trading Standards in the UK (or their equivalent bodies in other countries) if Nice is seen to be promoting its mass market products as identical to those worn by sponsored sportsmen and women.

Environmental issues

- Increased awareness of the environmental impact of production facilities being located significant distances from the point of purchase (such as the concept of “food miles”) may start to become important in the context of sportswear production in the developing world.

Stakeholders and publics

Enabling stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Governments (in producing and consuming markets)• Nice shareholders• Sports teams / clubs• Sports agents and management companies• Sports rights holders (eg FIFA, International Rugby Board, UK Premier League)

Functional stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Suppliers, including subcontracted production facilities• Factory staff• Head office staff• Retailers• Store staff• Sponsored sportsmen and women• Customers who buy Nice products

Normative stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Competitor brands

Diffused stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Workers' rights activist/pressure groups (eg Clean Clothes Campaign www.cleanclothes.org)• Trade unions (eg International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation www.itglwf.org)• Environmental pressure groups• Campaigning/news media organisations• Local communities around developing world factories

In contrast to the passive role of stakeholders, publics are organisations that have become active or aware around relevant issues. It is worth noting that a number of aware publics are likely to become active as soon as the story breaks in the media. Similarly a number of latent publics may become aware publics very quickly, so these categorisations should be reviewed every 48 hours during the crisis to ensure all publics are being considered appropriately.

Latent publics
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sponsored sportsmen and women• Suppliers, including subcontracted production facilities

- Sports teams / clubs
- Sports agents and management companies
- Sports rights holders (eg FIFA, International Rugby Board, UK Premier League)
- Factory staff

Aware publics

- Local communities around developing world factories
- Environmental pressure groups
- Governments (in producing and consuming markets)
- Nice customers

Active publics

- Media organisations – Cloud News Network immediately, others once initial story has been broadcast by Cloud News Network
- Head office staff
- Store staff (aware public until story broadcast)
- Retailers (aware public until story broadcast)
- Nice shareholders (aware public until story broadcast)
- Trade unions (eg International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation www.itglwf.org)
- Workers' rights activist/pressure groups (eg Clean Clothes Campaign www.cleanclothes.org)

Problem statement

Cloud News Network will tonight broadcast a story about how performance footwear worn by Nice-sponsored sportsmen bears no technical resemblance to the products that are sold in stores. It is likely that this story will be rapidly picked up by other media outlets.

The source of the story appears to be a workers' rights activist, so it is likely that the coverage will focus partly on technical differences in footwear, but will also juxtapose the significant financial investment we make in sponsorship with the wages and conditions of workers producing goods in developing countries.

This represents a significant reputational risk for Nice, and has the potential to undermine the work we have done to improve our practices and ensure our brand is not damaged.

Technical differences in products could significantly impact product sales where customers feel they would be purchasing an inferior product. This will affect revenue and profit for the business, which in turn will lead to uncertainty among shareholders and a fall in the Nice share price.

The two key public relations issues that must be addressed as a result of this coverage are:

1) Nice must **acknowledge, justify and accurately inform publics about the differences between performance footwear and mass market equivalents**. This practice needs to be positioned as the norm for all footwear manufacturers who engage in sponsorship.

2) Nice must **assert its existing corporate policies and practices concerning working and pay conditions** that we require all suppliers to adhere to.

2. Strategy

Objectives

The objectives focus on active publics, although one aware public (Nice customers) has been included as Nice should try to ensure this public remains aware but inactive to minimise sales impact.

Public	Objectives
Media organisations	<p>1: <i>Provide accurate and full response</i> to all media enquiries within 30 minutes.</p> <p>2: Offer <i>nominated spokesperson for interview</i> to all media requests.</p> <p>3: Provide <i>two new pro-active media opportunities</i> on product quality and ethical production with two weeks of issue first appearing in media.</p>
Head office staff	<p>4: Ensure <i>all head office staff understand the issue and Nice's response</i> by 8am tomorrow morning.</p> <p>5: Ensure <i>all head office staff are kept informed every 24 hours</i> through the crisis and <i>have their questions answered</i> within 48 hours.</p>
Nice store staff Other retailers	<p>6: Ensure <i>publics understand the issue and Nice's response</i> before stores begin trading on next business day after story breaks.</p> <p>7: Ensure <i>all store staff are kept informed every day</i> through the crisis and <i>have their questions answered</i> within 12 hours.</p> <p>8: Provide means for <i>store staff management to report customer feedback</i> each day to Nice corporate communications team.</p>
Nice customers	<p>9: Communicate with customers to <i>maintain their status as aware public</i> and prevent widespread activation on this issue</p>
Nice shareholders	<p>10: Ensure <i>all key shareholding institutions understand the issue and Nice's response</i> by 7am tomorrow morning (before start of trading day).</p> <p>11: Ensure <i>all key shareholding institutions contacts are kept informed every day</i> through the crisis and <i>have their questions answered</i> within 24 hours.</p>

3. Implementation

#	Action / tactic	Objective supported by this tactic	Who	When	Why
1	Set up dedicated crisis communications team	All	Led by Communications Director, supported by PA. Representatives from investor relations, account management, human resources.	Immediately	Having group of people focussed on dealing with crisis will allow Nice to respond quickly, accurately and consistently.
2	Brief senior managers	All	Communications Director and board.	Immediately with information available now. Again once #5 complete with more information.	Consistency of information and approach throughout the organisation.
3	Ringfence media relations officers	1,2,3	Communications Director, delegated to Media Manager.	Immediately	Respond promptly to the likely volume of media enquiries about this issue.
4	Establish the facts	All	Communications Director, working with relevant directors	Immediately	Responds accurately to enquiries.
5	Write and agree key messages with Chief Executive	All	Communications Director	Within two hours	Consistent messages communicated internally and externally.
5i	Respond to Cloud News Network by email and follow-up phone call	1,2	Communications Director	Immediately	Ensure Nice response has best possible chance of being included in early coverage of the story.
6	Identify and brief nominated spokesperson	1,2	Chief Executive	Within two hours	Visible leadership important in managing corporate public image in crisis.
7	Disseminate key messages	1,4,6,9,10	Crisis communications	Once #5 complete	Consistent messages to be communicated

	for onward communication		team		by different parts of the organisation to Nite publics
8	Update editorial section of Nite website Notify web hosts of expected increase in web traffic	1	Web Editor	One #7 complete	Will allow consistent messages to be communicated to large numbers of people quickly.
9	Produce briefing toolkit for store managers	67,9	Division of Nite responsible for managing Nite retail outlets	One #5 complete and in line for overnight communication to store managers	Store staff may have to handle enquiries from customers about the issue. Will need a comprehensive briefing consistent with Nite agreed messages (toolkit)
10	Record message/postcard from Chief Executive (including translated versions for overseas markets)	4567	Chief Executive, senior directors in overseas markets, and producers	In place for start of business on next working day	Allows staff to hear messages directly from Chief Executive. Postcard via company intranet, provide pin code to call in number for people to listen by phone at suitable time. Update of web leadership communication is done each message by the crisis team.
11	Set up dedicated employee hotline and email address	59	HR/ Communications team	In place for start of business on next working day	Channel for employees to ask further questions or seek clarification. Input at in at achieving voice of information flows
12	Arrangements for potential media briefing (location management, running order, spokes)	12	Media Relations Manager	Arrangements in place for 12 noon on following day.	If media briefing conference necessary, logistical arrangements already in place meaning can be called at very short notice
13	Set up feedback email address and phone number for managers to provide information to crisis teams	59	HR/ Communications team	In place for start of business on next working day	Internal direct route for feedback from Nite staff who deal directly with the public identified in this plan
14	Set up monitoring system to track coverage, blogs, bulletin boards, inbound feedback	All	Communications team	In place within 24 hours of crisis starting	Enable the company to track coverage and growth/development/reduction of the crisis coverage. Required to alert company to novel topical communications as soon as possible

Resources and budget

The following resources are required:

- Dedicated media relations officers (seconded from existing team)
- Crisis room, with networked PCs, telephones, video conferencing (budget from existing facilities and IT budgets)
- Media conference room, with associated audio-visual equipment and facilities for media (estimated budget £2,000)
- Podcast and recorded messages (estimated budget £3,500)
- Email, face to face and telephone surveys for evaluation (estimated budget £15,000)
- Independent professional review of crisis management (estimated fees £11,000)
- Additional member of staff to undertake and analyse media / internet monitoring during crisis (estimated cost £400 per day)

All other costs can be met within existing budgets.

Summary of content for written communications

The content of selected materials to be produced is summarised below:

Press statement for reactive distribution

- Acknowledgement of differences between professional and everyday sports footwear
- Justification for these differences
- Explain Nice labour standards for developing world and position Nice as leader in improving standards for factory workers
- Interview details for pre-agreed third party spokespeople (supportive of Nice position)
- Propose media visit to factory of their choice to see labour standards in action

CNN email

- Covering email (personal to editor)
- Press statement (as above)
- Details of suggested Nice interviewee (ideally Chief Executive)
- Propose media visit to factory of their choice to see labour standards first-hand

Nice staff email

- Explain background to current crisis situation
- Acknowledgement of differences between professional and everyday sports footwear
- Justification for these differences
- Explain Nice labour standards for developing world and position Nice as leader in improving standards for factory workers
- Provide contact details for staff to get more information and feedback to the crisis team

Email to shareholders

- Explain background to current crisis situation
- Acknowledgement of differences between professional and everyday sports footwear (explain this is done by all Nice's competitors as well as Nice itself)
- Justification for these differences
- Explain Nice labour standards for developing world and position Nice as leader in improving standards for factory workers
- Reassure that Nice does not believe this crisis will have a long-term effect on sales and year-end performance
- Provide contact details for shareholders to get more information

Store staff briefing toolkit

- Explain background to current crisis situation
- Acknowledgement of differences between professional and everyday sports footwear (explain this is done by all Nice's competitors as well as Nice itself)
- Justification for these differences
- Explain Nice labour standards for developing world and position Nice as leader in improving standards for factory workers
- Provide a list of possible customer questions and answers that staff can give
- Provide contact details for staff to get more information/answers to unanticipated customer questions and provide feedback to the crisis team on how crisis is being perceived by customers

4. Assessment

Evaluating the process

Once the crisis has passed, the Nice communications team will commission an independent review of how the crisis was handled. This will include:

- Evaluation of the crisis PR plan
- Evaluation of plan delivery, including unanticipated operational difficulties in delivery
- Media coverage, including tone, balance and inclusion of Nice key messages
- Research with internal publics

Measuring delivery of objectives

Public	Objectives
Media organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Response time to media enquiries• % of key messages appearing in coverage• % of media enquiries where spokesperson offered• % of media enquiries where spokesperson used• Balance of positive against negative pieces/articles in media about product quality and ethical production in four weeks following crisis• Volume media enquiries returned to normal pre-crisis levels after one week <p>Above measured using media relations management and monitoring system.</p>
Head office staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Email survey of head office staff to identify levels of awareness and understanding.• Successful resumption of non-crisis communications after one week.
Store staff Retailers Shareholders Trade unions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Telephone survey to identify levels of awareness and understanding.• Successful resumption of non-crisis communications after one week.

Issues Management Group Proposal – Nice Sportswear

Director of Communications, Nice

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Introduction

This document sets out a proposal for Nice to set up an issues management group. This would enable the company to more effectively anticipate, prepare for and respond to crisis situations, such as the current crisis on performance footwear and labour conditions in our factories in the developing world.

What is issues management?

Issues management has been practiced in many global companies since the 1970s. While there are many definitions in existence, the core function of issues management is about identifying, monitoring and analysing trends in key publics for an organisation. Of particular interest are those trends which have the potential to evolve, sometimes rapidly or sometimes slowly, into broader public opinion or policy.

The point at which the issue becomes influential and leads to significant change is often termed the “tipping point”, although this point is hard to define specifically and varies according to the context surrounding an individual issue.

Put simply, an issue is a trend that has the potential to cause an impact on Nice’s business activities. It is worth noting that while the term issue often has negative connotations, it is not inherently negative. By recognising and responding to an issue, the outcome can sometimes be turned into a positive one instead of the negative outcome that would have happened had the status quo persisted.

The anticipation and recognition of this evolution is important as such trends can have a direct impact on Nice business performance (such as through a change in consumer buying behaviour) or an indirect impact through the trend being recognised in regulatory or legislative restrictions on Nice’s business activities.

Proposal

It is proposed that Nice sets up an issues management group. It is envisaged this group will comprise senior-level representatives from all key business units and will aim to meet formally once per month.

The responsibilities for this group will be:

- To identify trends within Nice’s operating territories, including those where sales or production take place, that have the potential to impact on Nice’s business activities.
- To develop and agree an adequate definition of the issue that is being considered, so that it can be understood and acted upon in a consistent way by any member of Nice staff.
- To prioritise the issues identified in terms of their potential impact on Nice business performance and their anticipated likelihood to emerge in the short term (defined as the next 36 months).
- To put in place measures to monitor the development of prioritised trends to ensure that the group receives as much intelligence as possible about the trends it wishes to track, ideally from a point of view external to the company.
- To identify issue owners for each high priority issue. The role of the issue owner is to oversee, co-ordinate and drive forward the company’s tactics in response to a particular issue. The issue owner will also be accountable to the group for tracking progress in the company’s response to a particular issue.
- To provide regular reporting and advice to the Nice board on the most significant issues and to be responsible for providing forward-looking intelligence and advice into the company’s broader strategic planning processes.
- To work closely with the company’s brand management team to ensure that the Nice brand is well positioned to take advantage of future opportunities and avoid threats identified through the issue management process.

The creation of an issues management group is particularly important as the type of issues that are considered will usually cut across functional silos or boundaries that exist within a large organisation such as Nice.

Without formalised issues management procedure there is a risk that such issues will not be acknowledged or acted upon by the company, as they will not fit clearly into the remit of the existing operational areas of the business.

Benefits to Nice

The proposed approach would bring a number of business benefits to Nice:

- The group would allow the company to better identify future business threats and opportunities that are presented by the external environment in which it operates. At present these are identified in an ad-hoc way by individual managers throughout the business, and are usually expressed and responded to in a way relevant to that area, rather than the business as a whole.
- The work of the group will ensure the company is better prepared to respond to issues reaching their tipping point, such as the current crisis communications situation with performance footwear and labour standards. Had the group been in place, it is likely that these issues would have been identified and tactics put in place to prepare for the situation that the company currently faces. While the combination of the two issues may not have been anticipated, it is likely that the group would already have had in place tactics to minimise negative business impacts of the two issues flaring up in the public domain independently.
- It is recognised that the group will not be able to anticipate or accurately predict the future course or timing of the development of specific issues. However the existence of the group and its working practices will mean that in the event of an unanticipated crisis situation, the company will be better placed to respond more quickly and more effectively than if the group did not exist.
- The work of the group will also be valuable to assist with brand and product development. It will play an important role in identifying, analysing and disseminating information about trends that affect the future performance of the Nice business. The group will also receive intelligence from these specialist areas that it can use to inform its evaluation of trends that may affect the business.
- The group will provide an effective delivery mechanism for organisational change initiatives that it leads in response to issues identified. Through clear accountability for issue management and well-planned tactics to ensure the company is prepared for issues reaching the public domain, it will be a trusted and reliable management structure for the board to rely upon.
- By necessity issues management will require managers from different parts of the company and geographical regions to work closely together. Aside from the clear benefits in terms of better issues management, working more closely together will generate informal benefits in terms of communication networks and information sharing that would not otherwise have happened.

[1022 words]

Rationale

Crisis communications plan

The crisis communications plan I have produced for Nice uses a four-stage planning model (Cutlip et al, 2000¹). The four stages provide a logical structure for the work required to deal with the crisis situation that Nice is experiencing.

An alternative format for the plan would have been to use the ten point planning model (Gregory, 2000²) which provides a comprehensive sequence of activities for planning public relations campaigns. However given the crisis situation and the short timescales involved with the preparation of such a plan for an unanticipated crisis situation (as I have assumed this is, given that the Communications Director has been recently appointed) the Cutlip model provides a more succinct and flexible framework for a crisis communications plan.

Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt (1996³) propose a four-step model for symmetrical public relations in crisis situations. The first two steps in this model, issues management and planning/prevention, are not applicable to the current crisis situation at Nice, although they do form an important part of the work of the proposed issues management group. The third step in the model is the crisis itself, which is the situation that the crisis communications plan has been written for.

Fearn-Banks (2007⁴) identifies five stages to a crisis which, in common with the Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt classification, include stages that are part of the proposed issues management group (namely issue detection and issue prevention/preparation). Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt classify the remaining stages as crisis and post-crisis, which is similar to Fearn-Banks' containment and recovery. Fearn-Banks' final stage in the crisis is learning – where the organisation reviews its experience with the crisis and learns lessons for future crises. This fits well with the final stage of the Cutlip four-stage planning model.

An important step in planning a public relations programme in response to this crisis situation is to identify Nice stakeholders and publics as they relate to this issue. The plan uses Grunig and Hunt's linkage model ⁵ to classify stakeholders according to their relationship with Nice and provides a strong framework for identifying all Nice stakeholders. An alternative approach to stakeholder classification ⁶is to systematically classify stakeholders using their attributes in relation to the organisation. However the level of information available to the Communications Director at the time of writing the crisis plan and the lack of time is likely to preclude such a detailed analysis of stakeholders. The linkage model provides a more practical way of identifying all stakeholders.

Rawlins ⁷notes that diffused linkage stakeholders would be different according to the crisis or situation, but the enabling, functional, and normative linkage

stakeholders are likely to be constant. This distinction is helpful when prioritising work in a crisis situation, allowing non-diffused stakeholders to be identified once as part of the issues management process, while diffused stakeholders can be identified on a per-issue basis as part of the same process.

At the start of a crisis situation, public relations needs to focus on active publics as a priority (Hyde, 2007⁸). The Nice crisis communications plan reflects this, although Dozier and Ehling⁹ identify that reactive corporate communications at this stage in a crisis situations can be limited in their effectiveness. They note that active publics tend to discount organisational communications, tending to use alternative information sources to reinforce existing attitudes held. The result of active publics being more challenging to influence can lead communicators to seek to influence latent and aware publics before their receptivity to influence declines as they become active publics¹⁰. However the crisis situation forces Nice to focus on the most important publics at that time – this means those that are active at the start of the crisis. The objectives, while numerous, acknowledge the need for different communication objectives by public while being consistent enough to enable linking and consistency of messages between publics.

Situational theory is used in the crisis communications plan to classify publics¹¹ according to their recognition of the existence of the issue and their likelihood of getting involved. Given the rapid evolution of a crisis situation, effort is directed in the plan towards the publics recognised as already active. Gregory¹² identifies problem recognition, constraints to becoming active and level of involvement as the three factors that determine the classification of a particular public. The constraint to becoming active is the reason why factory staff, while central to the story, are classified as latent publics. Their lack of access to technology and geographical/cultural distance from Nice markets acts as a constraint to their becoming active, although this status could easily change through the work of an effective investigative journalist. Gregory also notes that publics should be monitored to identify changes in their status, which is particularly relevant in a media-driven crisis like this. In a crisis situation the tendency is for publics to rapidly become more active.

Once stakeholders and publics have been identified, the plan outlines the problem that the company faces should it not take public relations action. This problem is then developed into a strategy and implementation plan designed to address the problem identified and achieve the objectives set. Adams¹³ identifies the most important communications in crisis public relations management as indicating clearly what the company will do, be well prepared with background materials and supporting third party organisations or spokespeople, becoming pro-active in communicating as early as possible in the crisis and be seen to be concerned and taking action.

These are recognised in the Nice crisis communications plan. Birch¹⁴ recognises the role of technology in speeding up the development and spread of crisis-related news. As well as speed, the impact of the growth of internet-enabled media coverage means it is more important than ever to

ensure a consistent message is being communicated. This is recognised by Hyde¹⁵ who highlights a structured technique called message mapping that aids the development of crisis messages and helps ensure their consistency across multiple communication channels.

Cagle¹⁶ recognises the importance of communicating with employees during a crisis situation, noting “the better informed they are, the more apt they are to articulate the company's message. Their comments can help set the tone for the media coverage.” Bailey¹⁷ agrees with this view identifying internal publics as being the most important in achieving good outcomes from crisis situations. This is particularly relevant where the public that will have the greatest financial impact on the company, its customers, is considered aware at the outset of the crisis. Accurate and consistent communications from frontline store staff will do much to help keep customers as a aware public and reduce the sales impact of the crisis.

Issues management proposal

Weiner¹⁸ provides a clear definition for issues management. He considers the practice can “help an organization effectively identify and anticipate potential issues, prevent crises from developing, and influence their evolution and outcome.”

The proposal for creation of a Nice issues management group identifies that issues management (in a number of guises) is practiced by many leading companies for many years. Its origins¹⁹ began in the late 1970s, with significant momentum for growth being driven by the business availability of then fast computers in the mid 1980's.

Wartick²⁰ cites a 1999 study by the Foundation for Public Affairs that showed 83% of US companies with a public affairs department recognised issues management as a vital activity. Other observers (such as Holt²¹) have in addition identified the importance of taking a strategic, rather than ad-hoc, approach to identifying issues that present business risks and opportunities.

However some observers²² have suggested that there is little innovative in the concept of issues management per se, as it has been practiced by default in public relations or public affairs departments since their creation. Regardless of the validity of this assertion, Simcic Brønn and Brønn²³ suggest that it is clear that the role of issues management, in whatever corporate structure it is practiced, is to ensure it “leverages the knowledge, insights and networks of all internal stakeholders”.

It is also worth noting that while many crisis situations are inherently negative for the organisation involved, the practice of managing issues is concerned with both negative and positive issues. As well as reducing business surprises, good issues management will maximise the gains when issues present opportunities for business growth or improvement (Cole & Cole²⁴). This is particularly important when considering the role of issues management in assisting brand development in the context of external opportunities and

threats to the brand. Such brand development in non-crisis times can help establish a “bank” of goodwill for the brand among its publics, which assists more effective communications in crisis times (Birch²⁵).

The process of issue identification carries two challenges for effective and practical issues management. The first is the effective definition of a specific issue. Jaques²⁶ notes that when insufficient effort is put into establishing a clear and agreed definition of the issue, the subsequent steps in the issues management process, including crisis preparation, can be reduced in their effectiveness. This is why the membership of the proposed Nice group is wide and of an appropriate level of seniority within the company.

The second challenge is the timescale in which issues are considered relevant. Too long a timescale will increase the number of issues under consideration to an impractically large number. In addition the longer the timescale where the group will try to anticipate future events, the greater the potential for unknown or unpredictable events to occur because of greater likelihood of paradigm changes in the external and internal environments. In response to this Ewing²⁷ suggests "issues management is confined to emerging issues whose definition and contending positions are evolving in the public arena and legislation or regulation is likely in a moving time frame of 18 to 36 months out."

[1543 words]

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