Leadership and Crisis Management

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Course Overview
Business, it seems, has entered the age of crisis. Every day another major company enters the headlines, and usually not in a flattering context. These trends are further amplified by an ever-faster-moving global news cycle and are scrutinized by activists, interest groups, and an increasingly skeptical public. Crises have been frequently conceptualized as threats, but they can also provide opportunities. Seizing such opportunities requires a close connection to the company’s position in the marketplace as well as strategic frameworks for effective crisis response.

Increased globalization and the use of information technology have further accelerated these trends. Moreover, as political activists, NGOs and the media begin to recognize the increasing importance of businesses in bringing about social change, companies will find themselves the target of activists that hope to advance their cause. Since many stakeholders are frequently motivated by moral concerns, companies are being held accountable by standards other than legal constraints or financial performance. As a consequence, companies increasingly find themselves as targets of aggressive legal action, media coverage and social pressure. Recent examples include environmental protection, global labor standards, animal rights, the responsibility of companies in battling the global AIDS/HIV crisis, privacy and security in e-commerce, corporate scandals and executive pay, socially responsible investing, and product safety. These challenges are particularly critical for market leaders. Market leaders cannot merely rely on following industry standards in environmental or international labor regulations.

One of the key challenges presented by these developments is that they do not arise from the usual, contract-based interactions that characterize “normal” business interactions. Animal rights activists do not contract with pharmaceutical companies. They use aggressive, unexpected tactics designed for maximal visibility and shock effect to force industry-wide change to advance their goals. Hence, companies frequently encounter these issues in the context of unexpected events that lead to a corporate crisis.

This class will focus on crisis management from the point of view of managers and consultants. To anticipate and manage crises successfully, managers need to combine
strategic thinking with an awareness of the importance of the ethical dimensions of business. That is, managers not only need to understand the motivations and strategic capabilities of stakeholders, but also should appreciate the importance of value-based management in preventing and managing corporate crises.

This class is based on experience-learning: a rich set of case studies and crisis simulation exercises balance the theoretical and conceptual frameworks and will help participants to improve their strategic thinking as well as team management and communication skills in high-stress situations. Students should be prepared to be challenged and work hard.

**Key Benefits**

During this class, you will:
- Challenge your basic beliefs about the nature of crisis
- Learn to scan your business practices for reputational, political, and regulatory risks.
- Anticipate and prepare for potential crises
- Explore techniques for successfully solving problems in high-pressure, crisis situations characterized by complex decision environments, time-pressure, high stakes, unanticipated events, and information overload
- Develop strategies for managing stakeholders, public opinion, media relations, and public officials
- Design reputation management strategies and processes
- Integrate your crisis management approach into your overall business strategy

**Readings**

You are strongly recommended to obtain the book *Reputation Rules: Strategies for Building Your Company’s Most Valuable Asset. New York: McGraw-Hill (2011)*. The book contains various frameworks and case examples and is available at the Northwestern University bookstore, on Amazon.com (hardcover and Kindle editions), and on BN.com (hardcover and Nook editions). The remainder of the readings and course materials are available through study.net/Kellogg.

**Course Requirements and Grading**

In class we will only briefly review the class readings. They serve as a point of departure for our discussions. It is essential that you have mastered the class readings in time for each session.

Students are expected to master the content of the readings, to make constructive contributions to class discussions, to successfully participate in group exercises and presentations, and to perform adequately or better on a final examination. Grades in the course will be based on three components: (1) a final exam which will count 45 percent; (2) group assignments and simulations which will count 40 percent; and (3) class attendance and participation, which will count 15 percent.

FINAL EXAM: The final will be an individual, in-class, “closed book” exam consisting of short questions that will cover the assigned readings, cases, and lecture material for all classes. In addition, you may have to answer some short essay questions. This is an
individual assignment, and you must not discuss your work or the case with anyone other than me.

GROUP WORK: Group assignments and simulations are an integral part of class discussion. You will be assigned to a group at the beginning of class. I encourage you to meet with your study group on a regular basis, but you are not required to do so.

However, during the simulation exercises you may be asked to prepare group presentations. The chosen group is responsible for all aspects of the presentation such as keeping time, handling questions, etc. All other students are expected to take the role of clients, directors, or partners (depending on the governance structure of the firm and the details of the assignment). Group assignments are in-class simulations of real-world tasks. It is thus important that you take the role-playing aspect seriously. We occasionally choose groups to present and defend their analyses.

PARTICIPATION and ATTENDANCE: Attendance, preparation, and participation are essential for this class to be value-adding. If you have to miss class, please let me know in advance. Much of the learning in this course comes from class discussion of cases or homework assignments. Learning opportunities are maximized when a student is actively engaged in the class discussion.
COURSE OUTLINE

Session 1: Sunday, May 6
Crisis Leadership Basics: Lead with Speed
In every career there inevitably comes a moment in which you are part of a team that is forced to make a high stakes decision under significant time pressure. How you and your team perform in crisis can be the difference between achieving personal and organizational success or being sidelined. In this session we focus on understanding two basic problems present across all crises: the need to aggregate information and the need to coordinate action. A tension almost always emerges between those with vital information and those with the authority to command action. The ability of teams to negotiate this tension in real time is central to good crisis management.

Session 2: Sunday, May 6
Institutional Risk and Crisis Communication
To develop and implement successful crisis management strategies leaders need to be able to assess a variety of emergent risks including threats to reputation as well as legal, governmental and regulatory risks. In this session we introduce a framework for assessing institutional risk and outline strategic approaches for each type of risk. Understanding and assessing risk requires leaders to understand the necessity and limitations inherent in crisis communication with stakeholders. This, in turn, requires an ability to identify key stakeholders, understand their motivations and capacity for action.

Case: AIG

Session 3: Sunday, May 6
Crisis Simulation A – Part 1
This session will simulate a crisis scenario. To prepare for the simulation you should read the case and watch a brief video on how to use the software intrinsic to the simulation. YOU MUST BRING YOUR LAPTOP TO CLASS FOR THIS SIMULATION.

Case: Monument Hotel

Session 4: Sunday, May 6
Crisis Simulation A – Part 2
Debrief of simulation exercise

Reading: None
Case: To be distributed

Session 5: Sunday, May 6
Anticipating the Media and Activists
Political activists and other stakeholders are frequently the cause of unexpected corporate crises. This is especially true for multi-national companies in consumer goods markets. To
improve their ability to manage crises effectively, companies need to be able anticipate emerging issues and assess their potential business impact. Fear and moral outrage are two of the main drivers for reputational crises. This requires an assessment of business practices and market strategies from the point of view of different value and belief systems.

Reading:  
*Reputation Rules* pp 61-73 (in course reader)

Cases:  
- Shell and Brent Spar
- Thalidomide (A)

**Session 6: Sunday, May 20**  
**Understanding the Crisis Lifecycle**

All economies are shaped by formal and informal norms and regulations that structure market competition. These “rules of the game” vary significantly across countries and their enforcement, in many cases, is limited. Moreover, the rules *per se* are not fixed, well-defined constraints, but are determined, implemented, and interpreted by legislatures, government administrative agencies, judicial institutions, public sentiment, and moral sentiment. The resolution of ambiguity and direction of change is neither exogenous nor divorced from strategic considerations but requires a keen understanding of the capabilities and motivations of various constituencies and the arenas where they operate.

Reading:  
Singer’s The Drowning Child and the Expanding Circle

Case:  
- Firestone’s Battle Against Ebola in Liberia
- Sony and North Korea

**Assignment** Firestone Liberia had more infrastructure, staff, and capabilities than most of the government or private hospitals in the country, and the Liberian government felt these resources should be used for the public good. The company faced the very real possibility that the government was going to take control of the Firestone Medical Center and its Ebola treatment unit. Margaret Levine, Vice President of Corporate Security, and the two Ebola Response Leadership Teams stood at a crossroads. How can they balance their duty to care effectively for employees and their families while also doing their part to help the rest of the Liberian people?

Your assignment is to develop a one page memo recommending the approach Firestone’s executive team should take in response to the possible intervention by the Liberian government. **Your group should prepare a one page memo and 3-4 power point slides.** The one-page memo will be turned in for credit as a group project. One group will be called on to give a 5-10 minute presentation to the executive team at the beginning of this class session. If your group is called you will use your slides as part of your presentation. Please DO NOT conduct any additional research on the Firestone and Ebola case other than the documents supplied in the course reader.

**Session 7: Sunday, May 20**  
**Crisis Simulation B - Part 1**

In this session students will conduct a second crisis management exercise.
Case: To be distributed

Session 8: Sunday, May 20
Crisis Simulation B- Part 2
In this class we will debrief a final crisis case and discuss the importance of values in anticipating and managing crises.

Reading: None

Session 9: Sunday, May 20
Arthur Andersen
The final class will focus on the critical role played by leadership in crisis situations, the importance of acting on and reinforcing core values and the importance of understanding the crisis life-cycle.

Case: Arthur Andersen

Session 10: Sunday, May 20
In-class Final Exam