



Project Number: 2020-1-PL-KA202-082075

MOOC 1 – Unit 7 Management in Emergency

Chapter 2 Acute Crisis Stage

Developed by
Associazione EMDR per l'Italia (IT)



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

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Chapter 2

Acute crisis stage - Introduction

- The acute crisis stage will test the level of operational capacity and overall readiness for resilience established during the pre-crisis stage.
- The actions of civilian structures during an emergency are better coordinated if there is a proper common understanding of the global picture. This is accomplished by creating a common operating global view that lays out the commander's intent and strategies.
- In the acute stage, there is chaos and high emotional arousal; this can be managed through the spread of common understanding, buy-in, and coordinated communication and interventions.
- Pre-incident preparedness is crucial to activate an effective response in the acute phase.

Chapter 2

Acute crisis stage - Introduction

- As psychological staff, you could be involved in the acute stage with different roles:
 - Clinical role to support victim with psychological first aid or with trauma focused intervention in on-site settings.
 - Facilitator or crisis manager on-site and remotely
 - Trainer of emergency rescuers (proactive posture)
- It is recommended to adopt a supervisory structure that deals with more strategic issues and works with a global picture, leveraging external resources to help in the on-site and remote response in any phase of the crisis.



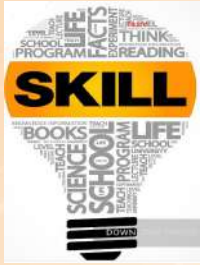
1.1 Coordination in Crisis Stage Knowledge

In the acute crisis stage, rescuers activate fast interventions on-site and remotely, coordinating with all the other agencies. In the crisis stage, interventions can be classified according to:

- **Setting:** On-site/Remote
- **Timing:** Reflective interventions (related to planning)/Proactive interventions (related to implementation)

Coordination in the Crisis Stage deals with:

1. managing shortage of **resources** (including information)
2. following common **objects**
3. complying with integrated **methods/protocols** following common guidelines
4. expressing **leadership**



1.2 Coordination in Crisis Stage Skills

Crisis Stage strengthens the capability of the community to face pressure, damages and urgent decisions. Coordination skills are focused on:

1. **Resources:** managing shortage of resources, including information.
2. **Object:** using criteria to prioritize objects.
3. **Methods/protocols:** following protocols and plans.
4. **Leadership:** expressing leadership.



1.2 - 10 calls to action to support your coordination skills in acute-phase



1.3 Coordination in Crisis Stage Competence

Coordination in reflective (planning) intervention

Specific tasks to train the organization are focused on:

1) resources:

- Personnel, equipment and communication
- Efficient and effective use of resources

2) objects:

- Implement work with related agencies through training

3) methods:

- Effective interpretation of operational challenges (sizing up the situation and making resource assessment) to develop rapid intervention schemes with appropriate level of personal and operational safety
- Real-time information exchange inside agency and between agencies

4) leadership:

- Rescuers of different agencies learn to work together
- Confident and trustful relationships among responders and among helpers, clear accountability, accurate expectations of team members' actions and capabilities

Coordination in proactive (realization) intervention

Specific tasks to train the organization are focused on:

1) resources:

- Efficient acquisition of additional resources

2) common objects:

- Develop strong partnership with agencies responsible for responding to incidents; institute predefined plans

3) shared methods:

- Efficient management of task-critical information among stakeholders
- Timely and necessary interventions to ensure personal safety (responders and the public) and task progress of the entire response effort

4) leadership:

- Management of relationship with the external agencies



2.1 Communication in Crisis Stage Knowledge

- The acute crisis stage is concerned by fast response, efficacy processes and reliable contents. The Crisis Stage is the time to put in to practice your communication plan.
- Crisis responses are highly visible to stakeholders and they are very important for the effectiveness of the crisis management effort. For instance, improper crisis responses make the situation worse, but also inappropriate communication about the crisis response can have a negative impact.
- Recommendations:
 - Emergency information is critical: accurate information makes **the difference** in terms of health and survival.
 - **Timeliness** is essential.
 - **Reliable information**: disseminate correct information and also contrast misinformation.
 - **Warnings**: emergency warnings differ from other kinds of messages because their purpose is to elicit a specific response from the public, rather than merely raise awareness or provide knowledge.
 - Take into account communication **barriers**: stress, change of routine, and lack of sleep can be hurdles to overcome when communicating during emergencies.
 - Make sure that messages are **consistent** between different partners/agencies. Communicate in sync with them.



2.3 Communication in Crisis Stage Competence

Inner (inside your agency/team) communication

- Give timely and accurate information.
- Acknowledge the event with empathy.
- Describe the emergency course of action, including how to provide more information.
- Give emergency recommendations.
- Promote the activities and the skills of the agency, in order to reinforce commitment and buy-in.

External (to other agencies/community) communication

- Inform the public about the risks using plain and clear language.
- Correct misinformation.
- Communicate through your communication officers.
- Obtain support for recovery plans.
- Listen and gather stakeholders and public feedback.
- Persuade the public to support public policy and resources allocation planning.

Source: Falkheimer, J., & Heide, M. (2010). Crisis communicators in change: From plans to improvisations. *Handbook of crisis communication*, 511-526.

Snedaker, S. (2013). *Business continuity and disaster recovery planning for IT professionals*. Newnes.



3.1 Problem solving in Crisis Stage Knowledge

An acute crisis situation is related to managing the short- and long-term impact on the organization and the environment. The problem solving process is characterised by:

- **Great uncertainty** caused by delays in communicating information, loss of relevant information, and significantly larger information flows.
- **Limited time** to manage a large number of events and needs.

Since emergencies are unstructured, uncertain, and there is a permanent lack of time and information, it is important for you to maintain a proactive attitude that allows you to turn the situation's constraints into resources, and transform the crisis into an opportunity for growth and improvement. To do this, you need to focus not only on risks, hazards and obstacles, but, above all, on resources and strengths. Remember that focusing only on problems is not a good way to solve them.

Furthermore, you have to take into account both long- and short-term efficacy and impact, and use problem-solving techniques that include methods for objective evaluation of alternatives. Acute crisis situations often lead organizations to set aside structured governance processes and bypass control mechanisms with an "in case of emergency" mentality. As crisis manager, you need to ensure that objective reasoning is not replaced by mere emotional responses, which do not actually solve the problem but mask symptoms and relevant information instead.

Source <https://www.kepner-tregoe.com/blog/problem-solving-in-crisis-management/>



3.3 Problem solving in Crisis Stage Competence

As a problem solver facilitator, you have to:

- Have a well-defined and understandable process plan.
- Know and be able to activate all the available resources at the right time.
- Have a well-defined understanding of necessary skills and competences required by the emergency situation; and be able to activate them.
- Have a well-defined knowledge of stakeholders and involved agencies.
- Understand how to approach problems from a different perspective and seek advice from other team members.
- Be able to implement what has been planned in the previous phases.



4.1 Decision making in Crisis Stage Knowledge

In the acute phase, the main issue about decision making is to manage time effectively to implement a rapid intervention, to solve problems, and to prevent further damages. At this stage, decisions have to be characterized by: **timeliness** and **quality**.

After having understood the current disaster situation, as a decision manager you have to react immediately to reduce the damage.

Past experiences represent a background knowledge that should assist in the decision making process of an ongoing disaster relief operation. The underlying principle is to identify past scenarios that were similar to the current one and to recommend to decision-makers the same actions that proved to be successful back then.

Emergency decisions have **their beginnings in the pre-crisis stage**: the number, type, and magnitude of decisions and problems that must be addressed during an emergency are a direct outgrowth of decisions that were (or were not) made during the planning process.

Source: Zhang, D., Zhou, L., & Nunamaker Jr, J. F. (2002). A knowledge management framework for the support of decision making in humanitarian assistance/disaster relief. *Knowledge and Information Systems*, 4(3), 370-385.

Higgins, G., & Freedman, J. (2013). Improving decision making in crisis. *Journal of business continuity & emergency planning*, 7(1), 65-76.

<https://emilms.fema.gov/IS-0241b/curriculum/1.html>



4.3 Decision making in Crisis Stage Competence

In order to improve the decision making process during the Crisis Stage, as a psychological emergency decision maker you can:

- Collect all relevant information available within the decision time horizon in as thorough and disciplined a manner as is practicable (**1° step: observe**)
- Use that information to establish and maintain as complete an understanding as practical of the situation as it exists (**2° step: orient**)
- Make the decision using appropriate techniques (**3° step: decide**)
- Execute the decision at the correct time (**4° step: act**)
- Monitor the results of decision execution (**5° step: observe** — essentially coming back to the information-collection step above)



5.1 Leadership in Crisis Stage Knowledge

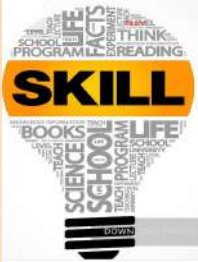
In the acute crisis stage, important decisions must be made quickly, despite uncertainty and time pressure. You must possess both technical expertise and teamwork skills. There is often ambiguity in terms of cause, effect, and means of resolution, as well as urgency to resolve the situation as quickly as possible. Leaders can play an essential role in minimizing harm and restoring calm, but leading during a crisis may require a different approach than managing under normal conditions.

Leaders have to organize the group, share knowledge to facilitate understanding, identify all team members, let the team know what is expected from them, delegate tasks, verbalize plans or changes in plans. But it is important to underline that **leadership is a function of every member of the team, and a good leader supports the leadership of each member of the team.**

You have to maintain a global perspective and solve problems.

As a crisis manager you are the gate-keeper of information so you must be prepared to provide direction and support to your staff. Staff will be looking to you for guidance even more than they usually do during normal operations.

1. **Monitor and assess development**
2. **Activate contingency plans**
3. **Maintain internal and external communication**



5.2 Leadership in Crisis Stage Skills

During the crisis stage, leaders have to create a calm environment in times of chaos. They have to recognise, understand, and evaluate their own emotions and the emotions of their staff. If you can regulate your own emotions, you are likely to have the capacity to demonstrate positive emotions and control negative ones such as disappointment, uncertainty, and annoyance.

1. **Preparing:** translating plans into action requires excellent tactical management.
2. **Sensemaking:** a leader, who is leading a disaster response mission, has to understand causes, vulnerabilities, challenges and opportunities of a disaster in order to achieve an effective response. When a disaster strikes, speak to your staff, ask for their support, and let them know your plans and intentions.
3. **Decision-making and coordination:** keep an open-minded behaviour towards a crisis situation, exploring new perspectives with flexibility.
4. **Meaning-making:** get as much information and advice as you can from as many sources as you can.
5. **Ending:** as leader, if you correctly understand and interpret the scope and the challenge of the crisis, you understand how to target it to be led out of it.
6. **Learning:** learning from experience makes you an expert in the field and gives you valuable insight.



5.2 – Being leader in crisis stage



5.2 - Leadership in the Mass Disaster of the Morandi Bridge Collapse, Genoa (Italy)



5.3 Leadership in Crisis Stage Competence

Internal actions

1. **Promote self-care** among staff.
2. **Be aware of the stressors** and the impact of your own emotional intelligence on others; remain calm and composed and adapt your leadership style to the situation.
3. **Encourage staff to speak openly** about their problems.
4. Make sure that they “**do the right thing**” as far as their obligations towards the Organization are concerned.

External actions

1. **Coordinate response:** liaise with other responding agencies.
2. **Map** victims and survivors.
3. **Conduct needs assessment:** impact on survivors, number of fatalities, hospitalized, non hospitalized, home loss impact on high risk group.
4. **Coordinate informations** to media for public dissemination. The core challenge for leaders responding in the aftermath of a disaster is being able to receive and disseminate information effectively.
5. **Coordinate services** with other responding agencies that provide mental health services to emergency responders.

Source: Fema, Leadership in emergencies toolkit (editing year not available)



6.1 Team building in Crisis Stage Knowledge

As a psychologist, rescuers and crisis managers expect from you to support the team in the different stage of the crisis.

A supportive team is a protective factor for rescuers' mental health.

In the pre-crisis phase you have already trained the team in stress management.

In the acute phase you can:

- monitor stress management,
- organize follow-up sessions,
- remind effective self-care management,
- provide team building processes.

Psychological
Early
Intervention



6.3 Team building in Crisis Stage Competence

Team builder as member of the group

- Support effectiveness, so members find team meetings efficient and productive and look forward to this time together.
- Pursue success, so members know clearly when the team has been effective and share in this equally and proudly.
- Acknowledge roles and functions inside the team.
- Acknowledge positive results.
- Promote critical reflection on negative results, difficulties, weakness points.
- Create a positive atmosphere, without judging and prejudice.

Team builder as consultant of the group

- Give your contribution to promote a positive atmosphere and positive relationships at any level.
- Give your contribution to reinforce roles and functions.
- Organize debriefing moments or help facilitators to organize defusing activities.
- Provide supervision to inner facilitators and crisis manager to support their role and leadership.



7.1 Team caring in Crisis Stage Knowledge

Even experienced workers are exposed to the consequences of vicarious trauma. Stress reactions may result in numbness and short-term impairment of memory, problem solving abilities, and communication. Long-term stress reactions may include depression, chronic anxiety or symptoms resulting from vicarious traumatization (e.g.: experiencing feeling numb, behavioral avoidance, physiological arousal) and they may cause or exacerbate marital, vocational, or substance use problems.

The Johns Hopkins model considers that resistance and resilience are facilitated by expectancy and experience and its four strategies are:

1. **Providing realistic preparation**, giving psycho-educational information.
2. **Fostering group cohesion and social support.**
3. **Fostering positive cognitions.**
4. **Building self-efficacy and hardiness.**



7.3 Team caring in Crisis Stage Competence

- Organize **briefings** at each shift change that cover the current status of the work environment, **safety procedures, and required safety equipment** (CMHS, 1994).
- **Rotate** personnel to allow breaks away from in the incident area.
- **Working with a partner:** when at all possible, team members should be partnered up.
- Provide **break** area, back-up clothing, nutritious food and the time to eat properly.
- **Provide safe facilities for staff** in dangerous areas; escort workers to and from their vehicles.
- **Phase out** workers gradually from high-to medium-to-low stress areas.
- Provide **defusings** for all workers as they go off duty or take breaks. An important stress management strategy is to talk with another mental health professional towards the end of each day about any emotional reactions you may have experienced in the course of the day's work.
- **Triage/ Assess**
- **Debriefing**

Source: *A Guide to Managing Stress in Crisis Response Professions* U.S. Department of Health and Human Service. 2005.

Conclusion

Acute Crisis Stage

- The acute crisis stage is the essential intervention in emergency.
- Acute crisis intervention is simultaneously articulated in:
 - remote and reflective (directed at planning)
 - on-site and pro-active (directed at victims)
- Efficient processes of communication and coordination allow to provide appropriate answers to targets' needs.
- The acute crisis stage demands to be fast and appropriate in the intervention, but also resilient and able to cope with long-term impact.
- Mental health and satisfaction of rescuers are key conditions for teamworking.



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