

Crisis communication

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The backbone of the workshops was provided by the presentations and topics rose during the plenary day. We confirmed that, in a manner similar to other professions and sectors, we can separate threats of an issue nature from acute crises. These issues are dangerous tendencies which, if they continue, may escalate into crises, but there is currently still time available for their management or solution. We investigated to what extent these challenges are taken seriously and to what extent the different countries prepare themselves for negative trends and for expected crises that do not yet form part of their current everyday reality.

We also attempted to provide actual examples from which conclusions can be drawn and to find similarities between these individual instances in order to inspire each other in relation to avoiding similar issues and mitigating the damage that is caused. With respect to these individual examples, we investigated whether there are basic crisis communication rules complying with which the issue in question could have been avoided; we also examined what communication strategies were used by the persons in charge. We also investigated the volume of effort they give to preparation and the creation, practice and training of crisis communication scenario.

The best practices would show that it would be also the principle conclusion of the workshop that the occurrence of crisis situations needs to be reckoned with and that the most efficient solution is to create and practice a crisis communication scenario and to organise such trainings. However participants commented that they handle crises on adhoc basis without written script or strategy. Although there is no written strategy in most countries the court communication is based on experience. We had a dispute about who should communicate during the crisis, at what level should a certain problem be addressed. The conclusion was that unregarding the position of the communicator the most important factor is to use „one voice” and use a coherent messaging towards the public.

A prepared organisation would be able to quickly get over the initial panic reaction and to make calm and consistent decisions. The task could be much more easily be tackled if a proven routine, a practiced and qualified communicator, prepared press releases and Q&A documentations are also available. Crisis communication training is conducted on a regular basis concerning a number of courts (the Netherlands, Germany, Hungary), while in other countries crises are planned to be solved on a case to case basis (Russia, Poland, Cyprus). In another group of countries some sort of crisis communication scenario is available, but training is only planned to be organised on a regular basis in the future (Albania, Montenegro).

We can confirm that events requiring crisis communication do not result from court cases or controversial, significant decisions only. The types of crises requiring management include scandals impacting different courts such as the case of the judge losing sensitive court documents on a train (the Netherlands). It is also evident that the challenges impacting the operation of the judicial organisation such as the shortage of funds for financing the judicial organisation (Cyprus), the labour shortage (Montenegro) or the inadequate flow of information (Poland), should also be included amongst crises and imminent threats (issues). Another type of incident is the series of physical attacks suffered by the judicial institution, such as bomb threats (Germany), fighting in the courtroom (Albania and Ukraine) and actual weapon assisted attacks (Hungary, Germany, Cyprus). Lack of security check caused these attacks in the court room.

Many participants have confirmed that the relationship between the courts and the media seems to be somewhat double-sided. The media often incorrectly interpret our decisions and transmit incomplete and misleading information to the public. Partly by the role of the media, and partly to the involvement of politics in certain cases of highlighted public interest, it is often difficult to protect the court's reputation. Special cases were public debates between the prosecution and the court (Macedonia, Hungary, Bulgaria).

In order to counterweigh the activities of the media, courts also communicate proactively for the purpose of directly informing the public (the Netherlands), and are striving to provide first hand information in cases of public interest. Many courts also take advantage of the wide range of IT tools available in the digital world in order to manage their social relationships.

According to the received answers monitoring, archiving, subsequent evaluation and review process have indispensable significance both during and after the occurrence of crises. In addition to these external media appearances internal reporting is also necessary including the preparation of daily summaries, the identification of problems and the drawing of conclusions from the errors made. After a crisis has ended or become silent the crisis communication scenario needs to be updated and reviewed.