

## Preparing for crisis management: The contact, direction, and distance approach for communication

By Deepti Ganapathy | Jun 1, 2022

The role of communication as a strategic function is incomparable, especially during a crisis. Here's how carefully planned channels of communication serve as the conduit between the aggrieved and leadership teams for quick and fast relief and redressal of grievances

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[CAPTION]Golf is a game of contact, direction, and distance. Let's call this the CDD approach. Here, we look at how this CDD approach can help leadership teams identify routes that can be used as fast track channels when there is a crisis Image: Shutterstock[/CAPTION]

To illustrate how communication strategies need to change, let me cite the example of a golf club in a city with a population of 10 million. The club started with a small membership in a laid-back city.

However, rapid growth and a boom in one of the sectors saw the membership growing. Slowly, with a membership of 4500, a total disconnect began between members and the club's managing committee. Hence an initiative was taken—Golf with the President. Members were invited to express their interest in this once-in-a-month event. This is like what a few organisations have adopted—Lunch with the CEO and other initiatives to ensure that the leadership team is in close contact with the ever-growing and expanding workforce.

In my **last article**, I emphasised the role played by government communication in times of crisis and reflected on how world leaders can set examples for business organisations to follow when faced with a crisis. The role of communication as a strategic function is viewed as a serious exercise by senior leadership. Organisations headed by leaders who value and commit to being active enablers in this process perform with ease and can face a crisis confidently.

\_RSS\_ Through this tri-series thought leadership article, we will identify how carefully planned channels of communication serve as the conduit between the aggrieved and leadership teams for quick and fast relief and redressal of grievances.

Golf is a game of contact, direction, and distance. Let's call this the CDD approach. Here, we look at how this CDD approach can help leadership teams identify routes that can be used as fast track channels when there is a crisis.

Before we do that, we must have tried and used the route/approach consistently, so that we know for certain that our audience will be present and involved whenever there is a communication going out in that route.

## **CONTACT**

For any communication to reach the target audience, one must ponder upon this aspect of contact. How do you establish contact? How far do you see your communication go? Will you be able to perfectly connect with your audience and hit the right chords? In golf, cricket, tennis, and football, solid contact with the ball is key to determining the direction and distance traversed. It is quantifiable. Hence you will see sportspersons training with the right equipment that can help them gauge this contact—be it swing analysers fitted with sensors that figure out your precise swing speed, smash factor, and so on. However, in this age of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML), big data can be lost if not translated and interpreted for individual/organisation needs.

A few indicators for establishing contact are: What is the flow of communication in the organisation? Is it hierarchical, or is it lateral? Have these been tried and tested? Has the effort been measured?

## **DIRECTION**

Once solid contact has been established, the communication can fly in any direction. The position, stance and disciplined approach of the sender of the communication often determine the direction

he/she chooses. The direction is largely influenced by (in the case of the sport) wind conditions, trajectory, local rules, and a constant lookout for obstacles. Similarly, in a workplace, there can be innumerable barriers, and therefore, a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work.

## **DISTANCE**

Distance is determined by how much of contact you want to give (to the message) and in which direction. If one can apply the mathematical formulae of measuring distance (speed multiplied by time), the timing of the contact also determines the speed with which the communication can take off.

Having understood that communication pans out through the CDD technique, let's juxtapose this to a crisis and see how this works.

A typhoon has hit a manufacturing facility of a company that plans to launch a booster dose of an infectious disease. The company is listed and has been touting that this booster dose is the only remedy for an epidemic that has besieged a region. When this news hits the world, the stocks of the company plummet. Internally, its employees are uncertain of how they will report for work to meet tight deadlines. How should the company go about handling this crisis?

**Contact** - The leadership team should hit the ground running. They should identify the right stakeholders, decide what information is crucial for each stakeholder group and start relentlessly bombarding with information. All the while, keeping a keen watch for feedback to facilitate two-way communication. Observe how the message is being understood by the receivers.

**Direction** - The organisation should aim for a downward communication flow, making the communication sound credible, authentic, honest and not authoritative.

**Distance** - The initial contact and direction create a trajectory that sets the shortest distance to reach the farthest stakeholder while traversing the nearest and closest stakeholder in the chain of events as they unfold. The distance should also factor in the not so obvious audience that matters in the larger scheme of things.

**To be continued...**

*Professor Deepti Ganapathy teaches at the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore*