CHAPTER 9

THE EMERGENCE OF A CRISIS IN COMPLEX, ADAPTIVE SYSTEMS—THE ORGANIZATION, ITS BRAND, STAKEHOLDERS, AND THE FUTURE

INTRODUCTION

This book deals with matters related to the preparation of a crisis management plan. Three elements associated with organizations in crisis were the focus of the discussion: the organization, its brand, and the organization’s stakeholders. These three remain as the focus for this conclusion, with a twist.

In this summary, we review important considerations regarding general matters related to the crisis in the organization, the plan produced, and the stakeholder network. Using these three is a way for concluding the book while offering additional perspective related to a crisis’s effects on an organization, its brand, and its stakeholders.

1. THE OVERALL THE OBJECTIVE

Seeking out and addressing the cause for a crisis can require the involvement, efforts and cooperation of members of most if not all key stakeholder groups: those within and outside the organization’s network. The process begins with research because there are likely to be many things we want to know about
the crises early stages. For example, it is often important to understand how and why the crisis was linked with an event, how and why the crisis moved throughout the organization and network, and why the crisis had the effects it did? Answering these types of questions can contribute a great deal to every part of the crisis management effort: from designing interventions to thoughts regarding what can be done in the future to prepare for or better manage such a crisis.

This research effort is conducted while those involved do what is necessary to keep the organization in operation, address problems (e.g., injury and damage, the need for resources etc.) at hand, and launch activities that would rebuild relationships and prepare the organization for the future. Additionally, it is important to note that there’s also a pragmatic, somewhat selfish underlying motives or urgency driving this phase of the recovery: it’s the need for rebuilding or at a minimum repairing damage the organization’s image that may have occurred as a result of the crisis. This means attention focuses on more than attending to media coverage or related “bad press” but also concentrating on matters that are more fundamental such as fixing practices, procedures, or policies that are out-of-date or have proved to be inadequate. Repairing challenges to the organization’s credibility and building a sense of urgency for both internal and external stakeholders also are needed to drive the crisis management effort.

These activities, particularly those aimed at repairing damage to the organization’s image, may seem out of place but they are often needed to get stakeholders to invest in the recovery effort or to engage their resources despite the fact that they may have neither the experience in crisis management or interest in helping an organization they may blame for the crisis and events leading up to it. Responding to a crisis and its effects is more than simply saying something like, “Uh oh, look what happened. Let’s fix this.” In fact, launching a crisis management effort may mean that stakeholders will have to temper their ego, for example by admitting short-comings or culpability, forgetting about past grievances like the things that made adversaries out of network members or, sometimes things as mundane as not letting one’s own prejudices or biases prevent them from participating. Why shouldn’t a woman, a black, a Muslim or a Jew lead the recovery effort if that’s who is best qualified? More than just crisis-related damages can be uncovered in a crisis management effort.

One way to begin rebuilding the organization’s image involves designing activities that require stakeholder involvement from throughout the stakeholder network—from stakeholders who, whether they realize it or not have a stake in the organization’s brand or its mission. For example, regulators, often viewed as neutral or at least unbiased stakeholders, can be included. That understood, it does not mean they cannot offer their opinions on ways the