Principles of Communication
in Disaster and Emergency

EMPA
Emergency Media and Public Affairs

Contents

It is useful to note that terminology from different organisations and different parts of the world can have different connotations. We have worked to use language that can be understood broadly, without aligning to usage from any one jurisdiction. For the purposes of these principles, the terms emergency and disaster are largely interchangeable.

Preface

Over the last two years I have had hundreds of conversations in meetings and workshops, on the phone, over skypes and emails, and on social media with people from Australia, New Zealand, the US, Europe and the UK, about what makes really good disaster and emergency communication. The following EMPA PRINCIPLES of Communication in Disaster and Emergency, bring together the words, perspectives, and ideas of that wonderful group of experienced, committed, and opinionated individuals.

Each person has made communicating before, during or after emergency central to their life's work. They have worked as researchers, trainers and practitioners, managers and strategists, policy makers and front-line workers. They have worked in government departments, councils, and emergency response agencies, within the community, at universities, in the private sector, and in non-government organisations.

My sincere thanks to them all.

EMPA is made up of many voices. We want to speak clearly about what we believe to be important and effective in the work we do. We want to improve. We aim to make sure that lessons identified are truly lessons learned.

Mark Crossweller AFSM says that "the greatest measure of success is the upholding of public trust and confidence, and the greatest mission is the reduction of human suffering". Communication in emergency and disaster has an inextricable and central role in supporting this mission and working towards this measure of success.

The following principles are intended to be read by the whole range of those who communicate in and around disaster. They are part of an ongoing conversation. They are intended to influence priorities and practice. We hold these truths to be self-evident…

R. Riggs

Rebecca Riggs
FEMPA

The EMPA Principles represent a milestone in the progress of EMPA as an organisation, and for the field of emergency and disaster communication generally. That these guiding principles were developed in a collaboration of communicators that spanned continents, agencies and hazard types is remarkable...and very powerful.

We encourage all communicators in our field to use these Principles as the standard for their practice.

Barbara Ryan
Ph.D, FEMPA, FPRIA
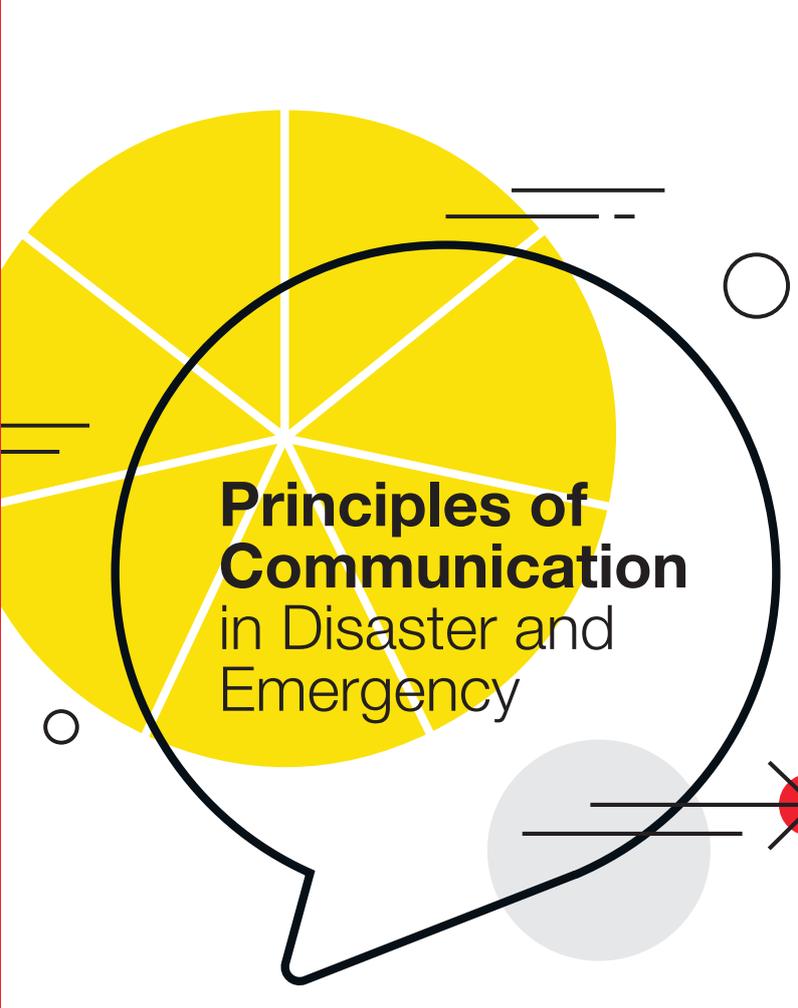
Principles of Communication in Disaster and Emergency

Seven key principles are outlined below. Each principle is also the starting point for a discussion paper in the pages that follow. Our aim is to go beyond the one-line statements and offer insight into the context of the ideas expressed, and guidance towards making the aspirations into realistic good practice.

1 The Seat at the Table - Systems and Structures
Excellent communication is central to excellent operations. Communicators need a seat at the table and a voice in strategic decision making. They should understand, support, and influence operational objectives.

2 Strategic Messaging - Connection and Credibility
Effective disaster communication requires a rigorous strategic process. We must do far more than transmit accurate data. We must understand why we speak. We must understand those we are speaking with. We must listen to ensure that we have been heard, understood, and believed.

3 Community Focussed Communication
People are the primary focus. We need to work with communities. We need to build communication policy, plans and practice that truly acknowledge the community's capacity and complexity, their perspectives and priorities.

4 Creating Connections - Integrating Efforts
Emergencies break things apart. A key responsibility for emergency communicators is to create and strengthen the links between teams, organisations, groups, and individuals.

5 Creating Networks - Connecting Stakeholders
Disaster impacts whole communities. It is fundamental to effective emergency communication, to create networks between emergency response agencies, government and the private sector so that we can work together to help the community prepare, respond and recover.

6 Working with Media and Social Media Providers - Liaison to Collaboration
Media agencies, journalists and those who work on social media to collect and create content, are our partners in disaster communication. We should move beyond liaison to develop trusted relationships and effectively collaborate to support, guide and empower those impacted.

7 Building Teams - Creating Capacity
There is much to be done. We need to resource and build scalable and adaptable teams of skilled communication practitioners. We need to prepare them, build their capacity, and work to ensure their well-being.

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The Seat at the Table
Systems and Structures

Excellent communication is central to excellent operations. Communicators need a seat at the table and a voice in strategic decision making. They should understand, support and influence operational objectives.

Communicating with impacted community members and stakeholders before, during and after an event is an essential task for everyone involved in emergency management. This includes emergency services, government and non-government organisations and community groups.

It needs to be planned and resourced as a strategic priority.

Over the past decade, response and recovery organisations in many jurisdictions, have come to understand the importance of public information and communicating effectively in disasters. At least 20 per cent of Disaster Inquiry findings in Australia refer to problems in communicating with the public.

Much of the outrage during and after disaster events occurs when the community felt that communication with them was not clear, timely, or accurate, or that it lacked an understanding of that community's perspectives and needs.

It is widely accepted that an emergency is unlikely to be considered well managed, if communication to the impacted community has not met expectations.

EMPA believes that Communication is not merely a support function to operations; it IS operations.

'Comms is Ops!' People who have safely evacuated do not need to be rescued.

Emergency managers have stated clearly that messages and warnings are often the best tool for keeping a community safe. In some extreme disaster events, Emergency Services have faced circumstances when communicating quickly and effectively was the ONLY possible thing to do: the only course of action to save lives and protect people from harm.

We acknowledge that communicators have a role in sharing stories to a wider public about what has happened in communities, what people are facing and what emergency or humanitarian organisations are achieving. This is particularly true when donations are needed to resource the response and recovery efforts.

There can also be legitimate need to apply issues and crisis communication strategies in order to maintain the credibility of the response. Sometimes we need to shift perceptions before our messages will be understood, believed and acted upon. However, we should always be wary of using our available communication resources to 'promote' our organisation.

In many ways, information is the most valuable asset in emergency. 'When all we rely on is turned upside down, we need information more than ever.' Effective public information and communication in an emergency is a service and relationship, in and of itself. It can inform decision making, diminish trauma, and sometimes even save lives.

Communication must be aligned with, respond to and interact with operational objectives. In order to do so, channels of information flow within the Emergency Management Team should be prioritised.

Coordinated incident management systems require a direct reporting and communication line between the public information and engagement functions and the Incident Controller. In this way, those communicating with the community have a clear and integrated situational picture.

Public information and community engagement teams also need to share contextual information to relevant operational teams, including Intelligence, Planning and Welfare. This context includes misunderstanding, mistrust, resistance or outrage, triggers of potential outrage (e.g. gender, race and disability), and insights into special needs and perspectives of groups within the impacted community. These insights can and should influence operational priorities.

EMPA is committed to an ongoing conversation around incident management systems and structures. We advocate frameworks which support interoperability while acknowledging the very real differences, in resources, priorities and needs, of different organisations and the communities they serve.

Communication functions in many agencies, councils and organisations are structured in accordance with and as part of, formal incident management systems. These include: AIIMS (Australia), CIMS (New Zealand) FEMA's NIMS (USA), CIMS (UK), NCMS (Denmark), IRS (India), and IMS (WHO).

All these systems are intended to guide government and non-government organisations, as well as the private sector. There is, however, variation in the systems themselves, and even more in the particular ways they are put into practice in different organisations and regions. There is a tension between interoperability and consistent practices and systems and the particular needs and priorities in different patches.

We do not promote any specific emergency management system but recognise that a better understanding of the overlaps and differences is important. This will facilitate interoperability and inspire ongoing improvements in the work we do.

Whatever the specific incident management system we might work under, there are key emergency communication functions and tasks that all teams should consider. Resourcing and creating a realistic and scalable structure to undertake these tasks is necessary.

Organisations that undertake public information and emergency communication should plan structures which create the capacity to:

• develop and monitor communication strategy
• build an accurate situational picture and liaise with operations
• engage and liaise with leadership and stakeholders
• engage and liaise with communities, community groups and individuals
• engage and liaise with the media
• craft information into messages - rework for a variety of outputs (including warnings and alerts)
• communicate messages and engage the channels that will most effectively reach their intended audience. These include web and social media, traditional media, and directly with community members
• prepare and/or act as spokesperson
• monitor community perception (through direct engagement, social media and media monitoring) and report insights, to inform operational and communication strategy.

Whatever the specific incident management system we might work under, there are key principles which should guide us, as we work towards best practice and continual improvement.

We need to develop the systems, frameworks, processes and tools which enable us to:

• create and share strategic messages to shift perspectives, build relationships and influence behaviours
• create connections and integrate efforts,
• be rigorously community focused,
• create networks - engage and collaborate with a range of stakeholders,
• engage and collaborate with the media and with the community through social media, and
• build capacity, leadership and welfare within our teams.

EMPA acknowledges that communication is a core function in both AIIMs and CIMs but we believe that this needs to be put into practice more fully.

Both the system and the culture need to recognise and support emergency communication.

Communication teams need a seat at the table in the Ops room and they need to do everything they can to make good use of it!
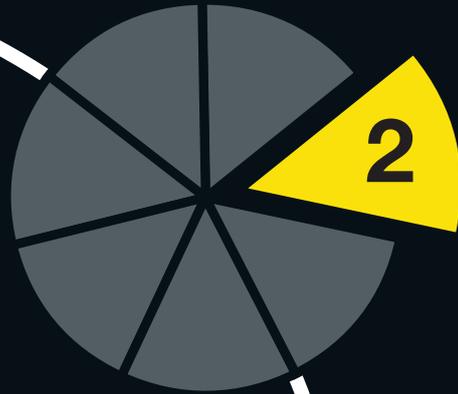
Strategic Messaging
Connection and Credibility

Effective disaster communication requires a rigorous strategic process. We need to do far more than transmit accurate data. We must understand why we speak. We must understand those we are speaking with. We must listen to ensure that we have been heard, understood, and believed.

It is crucial to emergency communication that the messages we create and share are informed by strategic processes. Every member of a communication team should understand the clear and specific objectives that guide their choices.

It is not enough to broadcast accurate information. Every aspect of the creation and dissemination of content should be shaped by the outcomes we want to achieve. This applies beyond key messages and talking points. We need specific strategic goals for readiness or change campaigns, warnings and safety guidance, and messages in recovery to guide rebuilding and support wellbeing and resilience.

Our choices of focus, the way we frame the ideas, and our selection of channels, language and spokespeople etc should all be influenced by specific answers to the questions: What do we need people to think, feel or do? In this specific situation and context, what is most likely to achieve those objectives?

If all those communicating (engagement teams, media teams, social media teams and responders themselves) are aware of and committed to the same objectives, the core messages will be consistently communicated in a variety of ways through a variety of channels. They can also be effectively shared with other agencies and stakeholders to enable even greater consistency and reinforcement.

Every element of a message has strategic value. Each word combines to position the tone and impression of the message. There is such different connotation in the words: must, should, and can for example. These choices and their consequences can be as powerful an outcome as the information in the message itself. Do we need to be seen as caring, authoritative, open to listening, calm or urgent? The impression we leave with our messaging is as influential and vital as the actual meaning of the words and should have the same strategic awareness and conscious choice applied.

Any effective strategic framework needs to focus on understanding the community's experiences and opinions so that we can powerfully connect to their needs and perspectives.

In Principle 4 (Community Focussed Communication), prioritising two-way communication brings many positive consequences. In order to connect with impacted communities, we must accurately understand them and their needs, capacity, priorities, experiences and perspectives.

Communication policies frequently talk of messaging being targeted and relevant. In order to achieve that, communicators need a deep understanding of the people they wish to connect with. It is not enough to look at demographics or rely on other surface data. We also need to listen before we speak.

Communication teams can 'listen' through social media interactions and community engagement insights, as well as more conventional monitoring activities. We should also access insights from any teams responding to phone calls or interacting with the community directly including response teams.

This will give us the opportunity to integrate the situational picture and operational perspective with the contextual picture and community perspectives. If we really prioritise 'listening' we will gain insight regarding motivations for not preparing or not evacuating, and increase our ability to respond to the complexity of community trauma, confusion, complacency or outrage.

It is important that messages in disaster and emergency are not only accurate and understood, but also believed. Messaging strategies need to include consideration of those elements most likely to generate credibility.

To ensure that our objectives are most likely to be met and that members of the community are likely to take our messages on board, we can communicate in ways most likely to create trust, certainty and confidence. Credibility applies both to the source of the message and the message itself. Building credibility is particularly important when emergency communicators try to influence resistant audiences, those not particularly inclined to follow official advice.

It is foundational to strategic communication that our messages are timely, open, clear and consistent.

The first messages are most likely to be believed, which can cause challenges as comms teams work to verify and get authorisation while other sources share less accurate information. However effective messages can be created and authorised before events to be communicated swiftly until the situational picture is clear. A lack of information tends to be perceived as dishonesty or something to hide, but

we can openly offer up what we know and be clear about what we do not know, and when we are likely to have that information to share.

If people readily understand us it is easier for them to process information, particularly during the cognitive and emotional stress of emergency, and the more they understand the more they will trust the source. Consistency between agencies and between words and actions, is central as community members assess trustworthiness.

Credibility is also maximised when there is clear evidence of the qualities of competence, commitment and empathy. Accurate information, relationships with those the community already esteems, the presence of an organisation with the impacted community, and rigorous empathy (based on an actual understanding of the community's experiences), will all develop and maintain the credibility of the messages and of the readiness, response or recovery efforts themselves.

EMPA advocates the crucial importance of evaluating how effectively our communication achieves objectives, creates connections and relationship, and maintains and builds credibility. Agencies and organisations need to assess and measure the impacts of communication efforts before, during and after a disaster event.

Understanding which metrics provide insight into engagement with the message is challenging, and often the simplest metrics to achieve are not the most useful. It does not necessarily serve us well to know how many likes a post received or how many newsletters were produced, if the likes were all outside the impacted area or the newsletters didn't contain information relevant to the community. EMPA advocates that as a sector we continue to develop ways to assess the effect of our communication and share them broadly between organisations and agencies.

When we can evaluate our impacts against our objectives, we can shift our messaging accordingly. These changes can be made during an event as well as after it. An ongoing process of listening, communicating and then listening and assessing can guide us to communicate flexibly with much better outcomes. This is particularly vital with countering misinformation, disinformation or responding to issues, outrage and crisis.

Messaging is complex. Communication is conversation. EMPA advocates the training and resourcing of communicators with the capacity to strategise and adapt quickly when facing significant issues, community resistance, and crisis.

There is always the possibility that accurate, clear and consistent information shared openly in a timely fashion, from sources acknowledged as credible still does not result in the changes in thinking and behaviour that were the stated objectives. Communication is a human not a mechanistic process.

There has been a long held commitment by emergency response agencies and departments to official channels as a single point of truth. The reality is, that although agency and government channels can bring together excellent and accurate data, community members will still confirm, risk assess and make decisions with each other, often based on powerful personal motivations and perceptions.

Individual assessment of risk and priority can be very different from the official one. Perceptions of the response or recovery efforts, the government or other agencies can cause outrage, and disbelief and even risk lives. Building communication rapid response capability into teams can help mitigate these risks.

Community Focussed Communication

People are the primary focus. We need to work with communities. We need to build communication policy, plans and practice that truly acknowledge a community's capacity and complexity, its perspectives and priorities.

EMPA is committed to development of policy, plans and practice that create and support communication with communities, and acknowledges that communication efforts need to be community focussed to be effective.

Possibly the greatest shift in emergency communication over the last decade has been the acknowledgement that all effective communication is two-way. And that all communication is responsive to the perspectives of those who used to be called audiences and are now much more often called communities. 'Nothing about me without me' is a common reminder of the extent of that commitment.

It is understood as both a values proposition - what we should do, and a pragmatic one - what will work. It is important that this is not only true in recovery, but also in readiness and community planning projects, and in communication and public information efforts during response.

EMPA acknowledges messaging that connects with community members in order to develop the relationship and credibility to effectively share information or influence decisions and actions. We support strategies informed by community perspectives, needs and priorities and processes that enable us to listen and understand the experiences of those impacted.

The commitment to a community focus affects our objectives and strategies, our messages, and the channels we choose (see Principle 2 - Strategic Messaging). Developing social media capabilities can significantly build capacity for two-way communication. There are of course many other ways to create discourse with the community, to listen as well as speak. They include community meetings, letters to the editor, direct community engagement and outreach.

Emergency communicators should also acknowledge, respect, and engage with processes that are community generated and community led, to reach out responsively into the networks that already exist.

Community groups such as those created around political action or community service, often simply refocus their support and networking in times of emergency. Social media is part of the landscape and community social can be the dominant channel.

Key members of communities can speak with us, and at times for us, as 'influencers'. We have the ability to integrate with them and support them with resourcing, training and more while acknowledging their perspectives, knowledge and autonomy.

It is important to actually assess the community landscape rather than make assumptions. We need to understand the networks, the needs and wants, the goals and focus of those groups and then see if we have anything to offer them. If the answer is no, we need to question why our offering is off the mark and be flexible enough to change it.

Communities have clearly expressed their desire to be part of the process, to be given information and support to guide their own preparedness, risk assessment, decision making and action; to create connections, solve problems and finally deal with the challenges and move towards recovery.

As we work with community it is essential to remember that community is not homogenous. Complexity creates a variety of options and a need to be flexible.

Community includes survivors and their families, the bereaved and those who escaped significant impact. It is likely that everyone in your 'community' has been affected in some way by the emergency and the responses to it, and that their needs and perspectives, as well as their ability to take in information, are influenced by a huge range of factors, not least their personal resilience.

The community includes community leaders who might be the community hub coordinator, the football coach or the woman that runs the caravan park. It includes elected members, and council staff. It includes special interest groups, business groups, and groups of friends. It includes long-time local residents, new arrivals and tourists. It includes individuals and groups who are traditionally underserved, or who need greater support: those with special needs or disabilities, the linguistically diverse, the elderly, and the economically disadvantaged.

Communication planning and practice should realistically assess the complex culture of the community you serve and, if done well, makes broad networks to reach out as far as possible. Community focussed work has to take the time to create the relationships and the networks before events, be flexible enough to accept emerging community voices during emergencies, and listen intently and with compassion to the community to acknowledge and build their agency in recovery.

As we work with community it is essential to accept the challenges that human centred approaches bring to linear command and control mechanisms. We must continue to develop practice that balances the needs for efficiency and action with the need for self-efficacy and integration.

It is inevitable that group dynamics can bring challenges. Issues need to be responded to effectively, compassionately and respectfully.

Community led groups can be volatile in part because of the personal commitment necessary. Community groups often run lean, with a great deal resting on one or a few key people. It is important to find the balance to support these Influencers while allowing them autonomy and to offer welfare support to maintain their wellbeing.

One of the main issues with community-led endeavours is around longevity, and the peace-time role/purpose having meaning if the group was formed in response to emergency event. Continuing engagement and responsiveness are needed to build capacity prior to the next event.

In essence, we should work to accept the flaws, be brave and lean into the discomfort and maintain connection. In doing so we link to those within communities who can give us insights to guide strategy and strengthen relationships which build our credibility and help us do our work.

EMPA believes communicators should continue to advocate this shift in awareness throughout Emergency Services and Governments worldwide. We must continue to encourage organisational changes that resource and prioritise community focussed work.

Communicators are ideally placed to connect with communities, but we must share this focus and trust in the community with operational managers. This is often most necessary with middle management and operations staff who have been in the sector for a long time and remain focussed on achieving operational tasks as quickly and cleanly as possible.

For work cultures with this focus, the complexity and non-linear processes in community focussed processes can seem inefficient or disorganised. Communities can also perceive the task focus, and command and control mechanisms of emergency management as disempowering and disrespectful. Communication teams can work to build the connections between these two perspectives by understanding and respecting both, developing relationships and finding connection points.

Part of the necessary shift in culture will be by actively involving community members and groups in conferences, as delegates and speakers as well as in planning, training and exercising.

There is work to be done to integrate high level strategies for resilience, with the everyday management and practice of emergency services, and disaster management. We cannot have 'shared responsibility' without broad commitment and mutual trust.

Our role is to ensure that when there is leadership and policy that promotes community focus and engagement, or encourages resilience, shared responsibility, or social contracts for disaster management, that there are also the resources, the capacity, the understanding and the will necessary to make these things a reality.

Creating Connections
Integrating Efforts

Emergencies break things apart. A key responsibility for emergency communicators is to create and strengthen the links between teams, organisations, groups, and individuals.

To communicate effectively before, during and after disaster and emergency, it is essential to focus on ways to integrate information, processes, and people.

Disaster, crisis and emergency are forces that bring dislocation and disconnection. They damage networks and linkages, roads and telecommunications. They separate people, and also fragment and disrupt lives, families, communities and systems.

On the other hand, communication is about creating connections – between people and between ideas. In disaster we communicate in ways that ideally lead to behaviour change or action. Excellent emergency and disaster communication can help build the connections that enable the community to access and share useful information, make good decisions, better understand the situation that they are facing, deal with risks and challenges and move forward into recovery.

Organisational structures and systems tend to simplify reality by dividing complex processes into separate teams and tasks, and boxes on flow charts. In addition, different organisations who respond to emergency (councils, emergency services, aid organisations, community groups etc) can often work with different frameworks and priorities.

EMPA believes that those of us who work as communicators in this field, are ideally placed to advocate for, and facilitate the integration of, efforts and perspectives – to create and strengthen the lines on the flow chart.

In doing so we will:
- create an integrated picture of the situation, the response and the community context
- allow for efficient, realistic and collaborative processes, and
- facilitate targeted, accurate and consistent messages.

Ultimately, we will create the connections between the community and the information they need to move from response into recovery, and to become ready and resilient.

Communication policy, strategy and practice needs to integrate our efforts from readiness, through response, to recovery. Insights gained, and lessons learned in recovery should also influence prevention and preparation. Disaster communication needs to be an ongoing conversation throughout the entire cycle.

The Prevention, Preparedness Response Recovery (PPRR) model has been dominant in emergency management for decades. It is important to recognise that this simple and useful model is neither comprehensive nor strictly accurate. Events do not unfold in neat, clearly delineated segments; they overlap and rewind.

It is important to consider Warnings that occur between and within Preparation and Response. More recently, the process of Relief has been recognised as a stage between Response and Recovery. Any truly effective communication framework will look at the links and connection points throughout the emergency timeline.

Communication is undertaken by a variety of teams in each organisation, including engagement, media, warnings and social media teams. EMPA strongly advocates policy and practice that acknowledges the important work of all communication practitioners and develops strong mechanisms to unify their efforts and perspectives within each organisation.

Education teams, engagement teams, media teams, social media teams, warnings teams, recovery teams, public information teams all have the core role of communicating with the community. Practitioners from these different teams, often have different education, focus and priorities. Their backgrounds can be as diverse as journalism, marketing, community development, PR, administration, and emergency operations. They are also sometimes under different management streams within the organisation.

It is the task of emergency communication management to integrate these different perspectives within their organisation. The transitions from the 'openness' of community engagement during preparedness, to a more command and control tone during warnings and response, back to community engagement in recovery can confuse people and this confusion can damage credibility.

Overlaps and links between teams should be part of any plan or process. Engagement and communications teams need to work closely together. Social media should be integrated with emergency communications and engagement. There should be a media officer in the recovery team and an engagement practitioner advising those issuing Warnings, about community context and expectations.

It is important to recognise that communication is also undertaken more broadly: by politicians, volunteers, responders, welfare teams, front desk and info-line staff, and a variety of other frontline workers. We need to connect the communication team with the other teams in the organisation who communicate with the community. Effective two-way links between communications practitioners and welfare teams, call centre teams and other front-line practitioners should be part of any communication system.

When systems and practice focus on these interconnections, we build relationships, understand the priorities, skills and strengths of others, and are familiar with the processes they work with. When we integrate our efforts in this way, we are more efficient and consistent. We also give our organisation a unified identity and voice to create a trusted, credible relationship with the communities we serve.

EMPA sees a need to ensure connections, alignment and balance between reputational communication strategies and public information priorities.

Well-crafted consistent messages in disaster and emergency can be extremely influential. They can help people stay safer, respond to outrage or resistance, and change perceptions and behaviour.

In Emergency Services it is common for reputational messaging to be created and disseminated at a state or national level, and public information messages to be managed more locally. In NGOs, communication practitioners are often marketing the organisation, and it is front line workers who communicate directly with the community.

There is risk that different priorities in different parts of the organisation can be seen as inconsistent or cancelling each other out. For example, there is risk in PR media and social media messaging that aims to show how heroic, well-equipped, and trained rescuers are, in order to build the reputation of an agency if it counters a shared responsibility message circulated locally to encourage individual action. There can also be a negative outcome of messaging which focusses on damage and despair in order to encourage donations if it contradicts the work of those building a sense of capacity and resilience with communities in order to inspire and support recovery.

There is an ongoing tension between these priorities which needs to be acknowledged, discussed and resolved.

EMPA is committed to building effective connections and links between agencies, industry and the community itself.

In order to tell a relevant and compassionate story which brings together accurate situational and contextual information, communicators are a vital cog in creating the information flow between all those impacted by, and responding to, the emergency.

The best communication is based on understanding the needs and perspectives of those we are communicating with, and has the ability to transmit appropriate information in ways that build relationship and the capacity to respond and recover.

We discuss this in more detail in Principle 3 - Community Focussed Communication, and Principle 5 - Creating Networks.

Creating Networks
Connecting Stakeholders

Disaster impacts whole communities. It is fundamental to effective emergency communication to create networks between emergency response agencies, government and the private sector so that we can work together to help the community prepare, respond and recover.

Prioritising this liaison with a wide range of stakeholders enables communication practitioners to create valuable relationships, integrated planning, and cooperative action.

We've seen in Principle 4 that connections are an essential factor in effective communication. In the same way that emergency communicators need to integrate efforts between different teams and different agencies, and connect and engage with community groups and individuals, we also have a role to ensure strong networks between emergency agencies, aid and recovery agencies, government and corporate stakeholders.

Communicating in disaster effectively requires us all to build these connections prior to a disaster event. We should plan and prepare together to enable consistent and cooperative work in the response and recovery phases.

EMPA advocates engaging stakeholders in the corporate sector to build networks that can create understanding of needs and priorities, share needed resources efficiently, and support the flow of information.

Businesses have a significant role to play in emergency. Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability frameworks often encourage commitment to supporting the community during disaster.

Corporations frequently have large scale communication channels, transport resources, logistics capacity and other resources well beyond the means of emergency agencies or local government responders. Large corporations may actually employ a significant percentage of a population and have direct access to them, through corporate communication channels.

However, there is risk in well intentioned actions by businesses who might be unaware of the bigger response and risk picture. They may not have a full picture of what the community's needs are and what can best be done to help at each step of response and recovery. There is, therefore, great value in a stakeholder relations role within emergency response agencies or local government teams, who can undertake planning with corporate teams, formalise agreements and systematise processes to share information and resources when and where they will be most valuable.

This planning can build significant cooperative relationships that can be very valuable in response itself. Emergency communicators who liaise with corporate communications teams to integrate messaging, identify networks and reach out more broadly and swiftly, increase their reach and opportunity for effective community engagement.

Every emergency is local. We need to facilitate collaborative plans between all organisations that deal with the impacts of emergency at a local level. These plans should include agreed upon processes to share information between themselves and with the community.

Emergency events can affect every organisation in a community (the schools, bus company, the hospital, utilities, the local Red Cross, Lions Club etc.) and in this way have even greater impact on community members. It is important to plan collaboration between agencies, local government and local organisations. Each of them has expertise, connections and resources and the most effective communication responses are those with joint preparation processes, clear flow of information and excellent working relationships between the whole range of organisations.

Integrated planning helps organisations to be connected and informed and build a framework where they can work together to support the community as a whole. Information that can be shared during planning includes each organisation's response actions, likely needs for information and resources, local terminology, micro level geography and local media resources.

During the event itself, reports from a variety of organisations can be integrated into a more detailed and accurate situational and contextual picture. The connected and informed network is also more likely to convey consistent messages to support and inform the community.

EMPA recommends developing excellent relations between emergency communicators and the advisors of elected representatives at all government levels. If we can create and sustain these connections, we are more likely to maintain a clear and effective work relationship throughout the complexity and stress of a disaster event.

Disaster often has a political context. It can be a time of reputational risk for politicians at every level of government. It is important to minimise the possibility of competing agendas leading to conflicting messages and community confusion or outrage.

By engaging with politicians and their media advisors before emergency events, we can enable them to understand the potential impact that reputational messaging can have on public safety messages and on communication with the community to support their recovery and resilience.

There is a valuable role for emergency communicators to support operational leaders, chiefs and commissioners etc, as they guide ministers' understanding of events, community needs and operational objectives. There is also a task to engage with political advisors and comms teams, to build their awareness of the particular constraints and priorities of communicating during emergencies.

6

Working with Media and Social Media Providers
Liaison to Collaboration

Media agencies, journalists and those who work on social media to collect and create content are our partners in disaster communication. We should move beyond liaison to develop trusted relationships and effectively collaborate to support, guide and empower those impacted.

EMPA recognises that developing these positive relationships, and the collaborative agreements and frameworks to support those relationships, is vital.

In disaster, community members access information from a variety of sources, and then work to compare, confirm and share it to guide their decision making and assist those around them.

Social media has redefined the way information is generated, verified and shared during emergencies. However, despite a rapidly changing communication landscape, community members still look to radio and television coverage as well as apps, websites, social feeds and face to face communication.

Channels weave together. Media articles are posted on Facebook. Newsfeeds and tweets frequently influence media coverage.

When communication is focussed on community safety and wellbeing, journalists, and those creating social media hubs and content are usually committed to working with responders and other agencies. This is most clearly the case when communicating warnings and important safety messages.

Maintaining long-term relationships with media personnel can be challenging because media companies might reduce or remove their representation, and reporters frequently change jobs, so agreements need to be planned and systematised. EMPA advocates joint training for media and emergency agencies, as well as local and national memoranda of understanding, standard operating procedures and practice notes.

Individuals or groups on social media may not be recognised as community leaders until the event, requiring teams to rapidly reach out and engage. However, EMPA advocates that wherever possible we create agreements with existing social media voices and channels during peace-time, that can be utilised to effectively reach people during emergencies.

No matter what plans are in place, connecting and liaising in person with the whole range of those creating and sharing content is still a core task for emergency communicators. Sometimes they will be emerging voices on a community Facebook page. Sometimes there will a new young journalist in town. The same commitment to openness, respect and working collaboratively is necessary.

EMPA advocates policy and practice that recognises that all information should be publicly available unless there is a valid reason to restrict it. In doing this we build trust and credibility, not only with the community but also with the media and social media providers we partner with.

It is a core principle of communication that information should be provided in a transparent, honest and timely way. This enables communication teams to share with media and social media, building effective and open working relationships.

Where restricted access to information or physical access to specific areas is proposed, it should be to protect privacy, physical safety or to protect the needs of vulnerable people.

In these cases, authorised spokespersons should be provided, and arrangements made to enable media and social media representatives to pool information.

Information may not be available immediately. However, emergency agencies should acknowledge the value of being the 'official source' and work to provide information as soon as it becomes available.

Effective collaboration between media agencies, other content creators and emergency communicators requires a clear understanding of each other's priorities, time pressures and deadlines.

This can be facilitated through:
- building relationships between communications professionals and journalists in the times between emergencies,
- agreeing on reasonable timeframes for provision and authorisation of information,
- clarifying the roles and responsibilities of emergency agencies and who to contact for information, and
- clarifying clear processes and lines of authority for deciding who will speak and what can be said.

In order to effectively engage and collaborate with those who channel our messages, agencies and organisations need to build the capacity of both teams and individuals through resourcing and training.

The skills of all spokespeople and media liaison practitioners should be developed and maintained by ongoing training and exercising. EMPA recommends that training in communication and information provision should be undertaken as part of incident management training.

Members of media teams and social media teams, Incident Controllers, elected representatives and government and agency spokespeople should all be trained to ensure excellent relationships with content creators, and to develop and share strategic messages and credible performances.

This training should include the capacity to deal with the challenge of crisis, reputational issues, mistakes and misinformation, interest groups disseminating subjective viewpoints, and community outrage.

The provision of quality information in emergencies should be achieved through a coordinated and collaborative approach. This coordination will rely on the professionalism of the emergency communicators who are credible, accountable, available, consistent and trustworthy.

We should nurture this partnership by sharing information and learning from each other; and by maintaining relationships and networks between and not just during emergency events.

Building Teams
Creating Capacity

There is much to be done. We need to resource and build scalable and adaptable teams of skilled communication practitioners. We need to prepare them, build their capacity, and work to ensure their well-being.

To create excellent emergency communication capability requires the development of adaptable, committed and prepared teams. We need to develop and maintain the ability for rapid deployment of personnel with a range of skills, in the necessary numbers to deal with significant, even catastrophic events.

Emergency and disaster are not everyday events. The extent of communication and public information necessary to support operational objectives and the community can increase rapidly. We need to build and support processes to bring together effective and cohesive teams swiftly and efficiently, finding the right fit of skills and personalities.

EMPA recognises that bringing people together from different parts of organisations as well as volunteers and full time emergency communications practitioners is not only essential, but can provide valuable insights and the potential of a broader skill base and community connections. These can include marketing and, HR practitioners, customer service and administrative staff, or networks of volunteer communications professionals.

Mechanisms to recruit and prepare the right people in the right ways are essential. Aspects to consider include commitment (self-identifying for emergency communication roles), means to assess and manage psychological fitness, identifying and recording specific skills both of staff and volunteers, training in the objectives, values and processes of the organisation, and exercising to build integration and skills.

These surge teams or flying squads diminish the risk of individual fatigue and overwork during emergency and the associated risks that come with that. Prepared properly, they substantially increase the ability to inform and communicate with those impacted.

EMPA is dedicated to the ongoing development of skills, experience, and culture in our sector.

All aspects of emergency readiness, response and recovery require training and exercises to develop the necessary knowledge and abilities. This applies equally to training and simulations to continually improve communication before, during and after disasters. As a sector we need to exercise and train our people, challenge and improve systems, and build teams and individual capacity.

EMPA is committed to high standards of professional practice, accreditation and professional development.

The annual EMPA conferences and other events in New Zealand and Australia build relationships, share insights and lessons learned, and commit to acknowledging and promoting excellent innovation, values and practice. We come together with practitioners and leaders from around the world to build the capacity to deeply understand the context and possibilities of the work we do.

Emergency Communication management requires commitment to and support of the individuals within our teams before, during and after disaster events. Agencies and organisations need to deliver clear and realistic plans, processes, guidance and leadership to integrate and support their teams.

EMPA acknowledges the different planning contexts in different agencies - nevertheless, standard planning considerations include:
- allocation of tasks into emergency communication/public information roles, which may well be named and defined quite differently to conventional peace time organisational charts
- mechanisms to share and integrate information accurately between team members, even in geographically dispersed teams
- processes to monitor community need and perspectives, and rapidly share and escalate relevant context and issues
- clear approval processes that empower staff to make swift decisions but ensure accuracy

Prior to disaster events, it is necessary to continually improve individual and team skills, build relationships and clarify expectations. If staff are in your 'business as usual' team, support them with training, time, coaching and keeping emergency communication at the top of the agenda. EMPA advocates for personnel to have emergency work recognised formally in terms of performance KPIs or remuneration, or both.

Emergency communication is immensely rewarding. It's worth reminding people of this in terms of their personal values and aspirations as communication professionals. The skills you learn are also highly applicable in terms of people's

broader career goals and roles. Sharing personal stories that reflect this are of huge value to encourage an inspired and dedicated team culture.

During a disaster it is vital for communication leadership to create a sense of calm within the chaos, and to reframe what success looks like. In an imperfect situation, you can't always be perfect! Leadership should acknowledge what the situation actually allows for, and then support the team as they strive to succeed within that context.

Leading a communication team in disaster also requires a broad strategic perspective. It is vital for managers to focus on their own role, not doing everyone else's job. Effective managers trust people to do their job to a high standard, and only intervene or be directive when necessary. Linking less experienced practitioners with more experienced mentors can create rapid growth in capacity and strong, balanced working partnerships.

There are times, unfortunately, when ineffective communication processes or staff are worked around rather than managed appropriately, because the work is not seen as integral to operational success or because the focus, time and resources to make change are difficult to achieve. It is important to remember that as a function, communicators lead through influence – respect is a critical asset.

It is vital to measure and assess outcomes and impacts, not just outputs. These metrics should be used to focus learning and improvements and continue to develop the capacity of your team.

Communicators need to expect a great deal of ourselves and each other. We need to find the time to recognise and resolve problems and commit to continual improvement. We must make sure that lessons identified are truly lessons learned.

EMPA recognises the challenges of work in disaster and emergency and acknowledges the risks of trauma and other psychological challenges. A central leadership focus should be the welfare of our teams.

Leadership is ABOUT welfare – looking after the team through response into recovery.

The Australian, New Zealand, United States and British cultures are not, for the most part, very good at accepting vulnerability. Emergency Services cultures are often focussed on heroism and action. This makes it even more difficult for those who have been impacted by the work they do, who face fear, regret or the inaction that trauma can bring.

It is important to give our people knowledge of the challenges they might face and that they realise that these challenges are common. It is important that we make sure that there are readily accessible means to seek the support they need.

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