

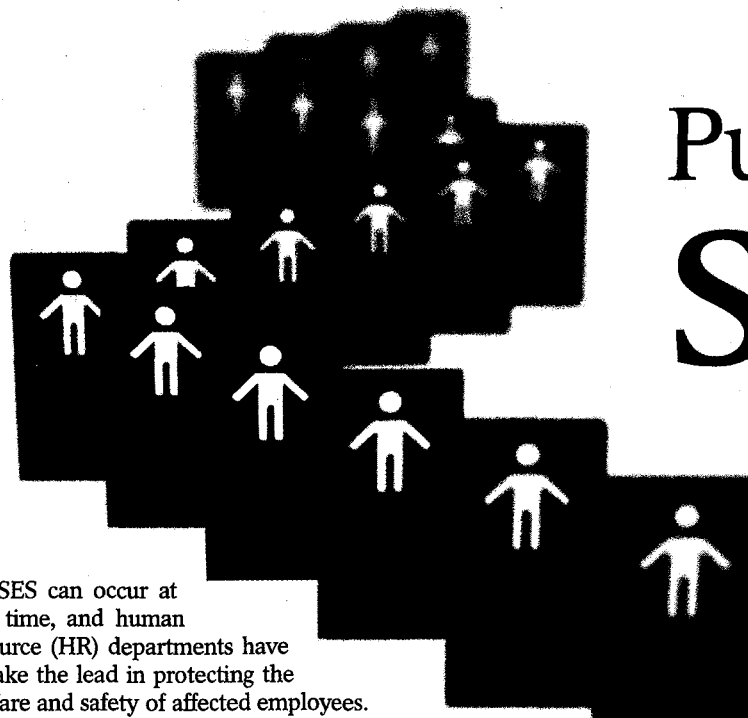


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CRISES can occur at any time, and human resource (HR) departments have to take the lead in protecting the welfare and safety of affected employees.

Natural disasters such as tsunamis, oil spills, political turmoil, corporate frauds, terrorism, workplace accidents and health concerns, such as a flu pandemic, are some threats that could affect your organisation and employees and, in turn, have a disastrous impact on your business.

The challenge of identifying, preventing and managing crisis events has become a critical concern for many organisations.

Do not wait for something terrible to happen to learn just how unprepared you and your employees are. There is always a human side to a crisis, as people get hurt physically and/or psychologically.

Unfortunately, one of the critical errors in crisis management planning is the strong tendency to focus attention and efforts on systems, operations, infrastructure and public relations — with people coming last on the list of concerns and often end up being neglected.

This is a serious problem, and organisations need to pay greater attention to the impact of critical events on employees, their families and the community as a whole for one simple reason: Business

## Putting staff first

When disaster strikes, human resource professionals have a key role to play in ensuring employee welfare

recovery cannot occur without motivated employees.

For organisations with an inadequate HR crisis plan in place, the effects of any crisis on their workforce could be catastrophic and might include:

- Loss of key staff and knowledge;
- Absenteeism and high turnover;
- Underperforming staff with lowered morale and a lack of motivation;
- Rocketing health-benefits costs;
- HR-related legal concerns and costly litigation; and
- Negative publicity for the organisation and a damaged reputation.

### The human side

Today's business environment requires a robust, enterprise-wide plan to deal with crises. The company's reputation and brand, as well as the trust and loyalty of stakeholders, are all critical factors at stake during a crisis.

Crisis management is a major issue that HR leaders should proactively take charge

of because they are the primary caretakers of employee welfare and motivation.

The HR department is in the best position to ensure that an organisation's human capital is preserved and can continue to create value under any circumstances.

The team can play this strategic role in organisational sustainability through advance preparation — which includes safety and security initiatives to help prepare and reassure employees, leadership development, talent management and solid communication plans to support effective crisis management.

### HR's role in crisis management

HR leaders have a strategic role to ensure their organisations are aware of internal vulnerabilities to different types of crises, and that their crisis management plan covers all potential risks and concerns.

To be included as a strategic partner in crisis management with other functions such as risk management and business continuity management, HR professionals

have to understand and speak the "lingo" of crisis management.

They can offer real value protection or enhancement through deliverables such as crisis communication plans, crisis resource planning, safety and security training, talent management and succession planning.

In partnership with other organisational leaders, HR professionals can develop an infrastructure for crisis management by motivating the company's human capital to support what needs to be done.

### Preparing the staff

Effective crisis response requires an understanding of what people need from the management and how to provide it.

Following a disaster, beyond the obvious basic survival, employees and their family members need:

- Immediate emergency guidance, aid and assurance of safety;
- Clear information, leadership and reassurance;
- Understanding and ongoing psychological support during and after the crisis; and
- Post-crisis support for a rapid return to normalcy.

In developing a crisis management plan to provide for these needs, the HR department directly creates value for the bottom line by minimising potential damage and downtime.

### Where to start

To be most effective, HR leaders should work with other key organisational heads involved in crisis management — such as risk management and business continuity management — to build the case and obtain the top management's commitment to support the development of enterprise-wide crisis readiness plans that fully integrate the human side of a crisis.

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## Crisis management action plan

ACTION	PURPOSE
Set up in advance a humanitarian response team.	To ensure adequate attention to human needs in a disaster.
Establish the human vulnerability of your organisation in a crisis.	To identify and prepare specifically for crisis scenarios affecting employees.
Develop HR policies and procedures specifically related to crisis management.	To avoid panic ad hoc actions and to ensure effective delivery of crisis-related human services.
Provide training to specifically address the human side of what happens during a crisis.	To provide employees with an opportunity to understand and cope with the effect of stress and traumatic events.
Conduct crisis simulation exercises.	To train employees to know what to do during a crisis.
Establish an online resource about crisis management, employee benefits and other employee-related policies linked to crises.	To provide employees with 24-hour easily accessible information and a means of communication.

A number of other activities may be necessary, such as protecting and backing up HR records, identifying and reserving emergency office space and providing sufficient manpower for business recovery.