



**Mangosuthu
University of Technology**

CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Approved by Council on: **04/04/2012**

1 PURPOSE

The University's approach to crises has a lasting impact on its reputation. For this reason, the purpose of the Crisis Management and Communications Policy is to enable the community of Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT) to have a common understanding of how to prevent or respond to crises in a timely manner. The policy also seeks to establish guidelines for dealing with a variety of situations, and to ensure that University officials are familiar with the policy principles and play responsible roles in the event of a crisis.

2 RATIONALE

Crisis management and communications is a critical institutional function at MUT. Failure can cause serious harm to the University's accomplishment of its core activities, staff, students, and service providers, and can result in losses for an institution, or in tarnishing the University's reputation.

Crisis management and communications is a process that can be designed to prevent and lessen the damage a crisis can inflict on the institution. It can be divided into three interrelated phases:

- Pre-crisis phase;
- Crisis response phase; and
- Post-crisis phase.

The policy on crisis management and communications seeks to prevent and minimize the University's public relations crises by handling crises and the media professionally, ensuring that the University adopts a pre-emptive approach and commits itself in using disclosure as a preferred strategy.

3 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Crisis Management and Communications Policy are:

- 3.1 To protect the institution, staff, students, service providers, and stakeholders from threats and/or to reduce the impact felt by threats related to the University crisis communication system;
- 3.2 To gain control of institutional losses (loss of lives and financial loss) and the tarnishing of the institution's reputation; and
- 3.3 To create awareness about potential and anticipated types of crises at MUT and enable the University community perceive the nature of crisis communications.

4 SCOPE

This policy applies to all MUT staff, students and service providers.

5 DEFINITION OF TERMS

5.1 Crisis

Crisis will mean any significant disturbance in the University's activities which results in extensive news coverage and has a potential to cause a long-term public relations damage.

5.2 Institution

Institution will mean Mangosuthu University of Technology.

5.3 MUT

MUT will mean Mangosuthu University of Technology.

5.4 Pre-emptive

Pre-emptive will mean action designed to forestall or deter some anticipated negative outcome.

5.5 Reactive

Reactive will mean acting in response to a situation rather than creating or controlling it.

5.6 Public relations

Public relations will mean the professional maintenance of a favourable public image by a company or other organization or a famous person.

5.7 University

University will mean Mangosuthu University of Technology.

6 POLICY PRINCIPLES

This policy is guided by the following principles:

- 6.1 The University will adopt a pre-emptive approach to public relations crises, and media relations in the institutional crisis management;
- 6.2 The phases of pre-crisis, crisis response, and post-crisis will form the base of principles to guide this policy:
 - 6.2.1 Pre-crisis phase: The pre-crisis phase is concerned with prevention and preparation;
 - 6.2.2 Crisis response phase: The crisis response phase is when management must actually respond to a crisis; and
 - 6.2.3 Post-crisis phase: The post-crisis phase looks for ways to better prepare for the next crisis and fulfils commitments follow-up information;
 - 6.2.4 Pre-crisis phase:** The University will implement the prevention and preparation as its preferred strategy in public relations crises:
 - 6.2.4.1 For prevention, the University will reduce known risks that could lead to a crisis;
 - 6.2.4.2 For preparation, the University will:
 - 6.2.4.2.1 Create a crisis management plan and update it at least annually;
 - 6.2.4.2.2 Designate crisis management team with the relevant expertise;
 - 6.2.4.2.3 Conduct exercise at least annually to test the crisis management plan and crisis management team;
 - 6.2.4.2.4 Ensure that planning and preparation allow crisis teams to react faster and to make effective decisions; and
 - 6.2.4.2.5 Pre-draft select crisis management messages including content for websites and templates, and ensure that Vice-Chancellor (VC) or his/her spokesperson designate reviews and pre-approves these messages;
 - 6.2.4.3 Crisis management plan: The University will use a crisis management plan (CMP) which is a reference tool that will serve as a rough guide, not a blueprint. The CMP will:
 - 6.2.4.3.1 Provide lists of key contact information, reminders of what typically should be done in a crisis, and forms to be used to document the crisis response; and

- 6.2.4.3.2 Save time during a crisis by pre-assigning some tasks, pre-collecting some information, and serving as a reference source;
- 6.2.4.4 Crisis management team: The composition of the crisis management team will vary based on the nature of the crisis:
- 6.2.4.4.1 The team members must know what tasks and responsibilities they have during a crisis; and
- 6.2.4.4.2 The continual training will be needed and emphasized to enable team members practise decision-making in a crisis situation as each crisis is unique;
- 6.2.4.5 Spokesperson: The media relations element of public relations is a highly valued skill in crisis management. The University will identify, prepare the spokesperson, provide training for him/her to handle questions from the media, and to provide leadership for crisis team;
- 6.2.4.6 Pre-draft messages: Messages to be used during a crisis will be pre-drafted preferably in a form of created templates for crisis messages;
- 6.2.4.7 Communication channels: The University will:
- 6.2.4.7.1 Use a unique website or part of its current website to address crisis concerns;
- 6.2.4.7.2 Use the Intranet as one of the channels for reaching employees, students, service providers and any other stakeholders that may have access to University Intranet; and
- 6.2.4.7.3 Utilize a mass notification system for reaching employees, students, service providers and any other stakeholders that may have access to University Intranet during a crisis;
- 6.2.4.8 The anticipated types of crises that MUT will face and need to communicate include, but not limited to:
- Industrial action by MUT employees;
 - Students 'protests;
 - Fraud or any misconduct by an executive manager;
 - Theft/destruction of University property;
 - Violent crimes committed by or against students, staff and third parties on campus property;
 - Any outbreaks of epidemics, cult or mass hysteria among students;
 - Any damage to the University property caused by fire or any natural disasters; and
 - Any other event that may bring negative media attention;
- 6.2.5 Crisis response phase:** The University will adopt a plan that is based on disclosure as a preferred strategy for managing crises. The technique will keep the institution on the initiative and quickly eliminates the "breaking news" interest in a crisis, thus summarily defuses a public relations crisis (even when the subject is unpleasant or embarrassing):
- 6.2.5.1 The crisis response is what Management does, says after the crisis hits, and may divide it into two sections:
- The initial crisis response; and

- Reputation repair and behavioural intentions;

6.2.5.2 The initial crisis response guides the University that it must:

6.2.5.2.1 Be proactive, responsive, and action-oriented;

6.2.5.2.2 Be quick and try to have initial response within the first hour;

6.2.5.2.3 Be accurate by carefully checking all facts;

6.2.5.2.4 Be consistent by keeping spokesperson informed of crisis events and key message points;

6.2.5.2.5 Make public safety the number one priority;

6.2.5.2.6 Use all of the available communication channels including the Internet, Intranet, and mass notification systems;

6.2.5.2.7 Provide some expression of concern and/or sympathy for victims;

6.2.5.2.8 Remember to include employees in the initial response; and

6.2.5.2.9 Be ready to provide stress and trauma counselling to victims of the crisis and their families, including employees;

6.2.5.3 Reputation repair and behavioural intentions: The University may use reputation repair and behavioural intentions in the crisis response phase, post-crisis phase, or both. Not all crises need reputation repairs efforts. The instructing information and expressions of concern are enough to protect the reputation of the University;

6.2.5.4 The reputation repair strategies vary in terms of how much the response focuses on helping the victims than on addressing institutional concerns;

6.2.6 Post-crisis phase: In the post-crisis phase, the crisis is no longer the focal point of Management's attention but still requires some attention. The University will:

6.2.6.1 Deliver all information promised to stakeholders as soon as that information is known;

6.2.6.2 Keep stakeholders updated on the progression of recovery efforts including any corrective measures being taken and the progress of investigations; and

6.2.6.3 Analyze the crisis management effort for lessons and integrate those lessons into the University's crisis management and communications system.

7 RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- 7.1 All the University **staff, students, and service providers** will familiarise themselves and comply with this policy;
- 7.2 The **Head of the Department/Unit or the Dean of the Faculty** will ensure that this policy is complied with in his/her departments or faculty. He or she will co-operate with Senior Director: Marketing and Communications;
- 7.3 The **Senior Director: Marketing and Communications** will be responsible for the implementation of this policy; and
- 7.4 The **Vice-Chancellor** will take overall responsibility for ensuring that this policy on the University crises management and communications remains a source of pride to the University.

8 CUSTODIANSHIP

The **Senior Director: Marketing and Communications department** will be the custodian of this policy.

9 POLICY CONTEXT

This policy is informed by the following documents:

- 9.1 Bradfield J (2006). *The seven biggest mistakes in crisis communications*. Marketing & Media News;
- 9.2 Coombs WT (2007). *Crisis Management and Communications*. Institute for Public Relations;
- 9.3 Crisis Communication: University of Louisville Policies and Procedures, 2008; and
- 9.4 MUT Media Relations Policy, 2011.

10 POLICY REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed when it becomes necessary.