

ECREA
Temporary Working Group on Crisis Communication

Annual Report 2013

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Mission

The group aims at building a platform for European and international communication scholars to critically discuss different theoretical approaches and empirical findings on crisis communication and to collaborate across sub-disciplines.

The TWG advocates a broader understanding of crisis communication, which includes work in different sub-disciplines of communication such as journalism, public relations, corporate communications, organizational communication, audience research, media psychology, political communication, health communication, computer-mediated communication, and international/intercultural communication. The Temporary Working Group on Crisis Communication is a platform to look for common patterns of how crises are socially constructed by involved actors, how the media bring up and frame crises, but also the way different audiences perceive and make sense of crises.

For further details about the goals of the TWG and its modus operandi see this website: <http://www.ecrea.eu/divisions/twg/id/24>

Membership

By February 6, 2014, the TWG on Crisis Communication counts 110 members. They are scholars coming from more than 20 countries in Europe, Asia and the Americas.

The International Crisis Communication Conference series 2013: Conference report on Crisis3 “Crossing Boundaries in Crisis Communication”

After the international conference “Crisis Communication in an Age of Complexity”, organized by ASB Centre for Corporate Communication, Aarhus School of Business and Social Sciences, Aarhus University, Denmark (October 6-8, 2011), the TWG on Crisis Communication was partner of the 3rd International Conference on Crisis Communication in the 21st Century which was held from October 2-5, 2013 in Erfurt, Germany.

The event was hosted by the Ilmenau University of Technology with Dr. Andreas Schwarz as the conference chair and Claudia Auer as the event coordinator. The German Research Foundation (DFG) provided major financial support for the conference mainly for travel reimbursements of invited international participants.

The continuing Euro crisis, the BP oil crisis in the US, the civil war in Syria or Typhoon Haiyan on the Philippines have shown that crisis and crisis communication have no national or cultural boundaries. The adequate management of crisis situations and their boundary-spanning consequences however often challenge the actors in charge, be it from politics, administrative bodies, associations, or companies. The conference therefore had the aim to advance crisis communication research in terms of national and international contexts and different types of crises. To accomplish this aim, research on a) different crisis types such as natural disasters, terrorist attacks, conflicts, or organizational crises, b) different communication perspectives such as the communicator, the content, and the audience/stakeholder perspective, c) research from different disciplines such as communication science, psychology, management, or political science, and d) from different countries was acknowledged and integrated. Accordingly, the conference program was organized first in terms of different crisis types and then, within the panels, according to different communication perspectives and countries. The program was completed by panels on interdisciplinary and intercultural perspectives on crisis communication. In total, the conference program included nine large themes with two panels each, resulting in a total of 18 panels. Each panel had three to five presentations and a longer discussion to give space for exchanging ideas between scholars and practitioners.

During two and a half days, more than 80 internationally highly respected scholars and crisis communication practitioners from all over the world attended the conference to share their knowledge on crisis communication from different cultural, national, and disciplinary backgrounds, thus supporting the aim of the event to enrich and broaden the perspectives in crisis communication research and practice. The keynote speech was held by Prof. Christine Pearson, an internationally highly respected crisis management scholar from the Thunderbird School of Global Management, USA. She discussed the aspect of leadership competences of CEOs and politicians in international crises. Subsequently, 70 presentations gave an insight into crisis communication in different scenarios and countries, such as the catastrophe at Fukushima, the rampage in Newtown, the crisis communication of US president Barack Obama, the case of the former German Defense Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, and the ongoing conflicts in Egypt after the so-called Arabian Spring.

Part of the conference was also an event organized by the ECREA Young Scholars Network which is represented in the TWG Crisis Communication by MSc. Daniel M. Simonsen (Aarhus University). He organized a panel discussion on the topic “Infinite Crisis? The current state and future of the field of crisis communication” with the objective to bring together young and established scholars in the field of crisis

communication. It clarified many of the future demands young scholars should be able to meet in the pursuit of an academic career in the field, but also gave inspiration as to how one can build a strong profile as a future researcher. Participants of the panel were W. Timothy Coombs (University of Central Florida, USA), Finn Frandsen (Aarhus University, Denmark), Dr. Liane Rothenberger (Ilmenau University of Technology, Germany), An-Sofie Claeys (KU Leuven, Belgium) and Johan M. H. Jacobsen (Aarhus University, Denmark). The panel was moderated by Andreas Schwarz (Ilmenau University of Technology, Germany).

Another panel discussion at the conference on “International and cross-cultural crisis communication in the 21st century” was chaired by TV journalist Bernd Rasem and brought together scholars and practitioners. Among the panelists were practitioners from the Federal Office of Civil Protection and Disaster Assistance and the Brunswick Group as well as internationally renowned crisis communication scholars. The conference also had the aim to further the networking among scholars. Therefore, the conference program facilitated interpersonal talks. At a Research Collaboration Meeting organized by the Örebro University in Sweden, participants interested in the EU’s research call Horizon 2020 met to discuss possible collaborative projects.

Furthermore, a business meeting of the Temporary Working Group on Crisis Communication of ECREA assembled the scholars to discuss future research projects and conferences. It was decided to have the next international conference on crisis communication in 2015. Interested scholars were asked to apply for hosting this next conference. Additionally, a cultural event was held at Wartburg Castle in Eisenach where the participants had the chance to enjoy a relaxing evening and medieval dinner while exchanging their thoughts regarding the discussions that were ignited during the ongoing conference.

The organization of the conference was supported by members of the Department of Media Studies and student volunteers from the master program Media and Communication Science at Ilmenau University of Technology. They assisted in caring for the conference participants, managing the registration process on site, and technical support during the panels.

In order to support the visibility of the conference, the organization team conducted media relations and extensive social media and online communication (see the conference website at www.tu-ilmenau.de/crisis3). It was Twittered live from the conference (#3CrisisForumErfurt) and reported with photos on the conference’s Facebook page (www.facebook.com/crisis3erfurt). Participants of the conference took part both on Twitter and Facebook so that online dialogues could be initiated. Even users that were not attending the conference were commenting on the Tweets and posts.

Finally, the conference team evaluated the conference as a huge success. The quantity and quality of the submissions for the conference “Crossing Boundaries in Crisis Communication” surpassed expectations. During and after the conference, high appraisal and appreciation feedback was received by scholars and practitioners who participated. The success of conference has also been proven with overflowing positive feedbacks via email. Much cross-national collaboration was endorsed during the event, thus new seeds of advancement in crisis communication research and development has been nurtured.

Second Business Meeting at the Crisis3 Conference in Erfurt 2013

The second Business Meeting of the TWG on Crisis Communication took place on October 5, 2013 during the Crisis3 Conference in Erfurt, Germany.

The Agenda was the following:

1. A short status quo report of the TWG chair
2. Presentation of the YECREA – The Young Scholars Network at the TWG Crisis Communication by Daniel M. Simonsen
3. Past business: Conference Report, annual ECREA conference in Istanbul 2012
4. Future business: Lisbon 2014, 5th European Communication Conference, Nov 12-15; Elections of the next TWG management team
5. Next conference of the conference series “Crisis Communication in the 21st Century”: ‘Crisis4’ 2015: Procedure to determine topic and host
6. Discussion of a possible future journal of crisis communication
7. Group communication in the TWG Crisis Communication
8. Open discussion slot for members

Future business: Lisbon 2014, 5th European Communication Conference, Nov 12-15; Elections of the next TWG management team

The TWG chair announced the upcoming call for papers for the 5th European Communication Conference for members of the group. Unfortunately, the temporary working groups at ECREA are still assigned to only one slot of 90 minutes at the European Communication Conferences which is problematic for bigger groups with huge interest in submitting papers. The chair announced to discuss this topic with the representative of the TWG’s at ECREA to find better solutions in the future. In addition, to the CfP, the elections of the next TWG management team were announced. The current management team proposed to issue a call for candidates in spring 2014 to submit mission statements. The elections will be held in November 2014 during the 5th ECC in Lisbon.

Next conference of the conference series “Crisis Communication in the 21st Century”: ‘Crisis4’ 2015:

The TWG management team proposed to issue a call for conference hosts for the next conference of the series “Crisis Communication in the 21st Century” (Crisis4). The call was published and circulated after the Crisis3 conference and in early 2014 together with the CfP of the 5th ECC. It was agreed that the proposals for conference hosts should not exceed 4 to 5 pages; they should include a rough program scheme, planned events, and potential keynote(s). The deadline for submission is March 31, 2014 to be sent to: ecrea.crisis@gmail.com. Proposals should at least include the following information:

- Topic: relevance, state of research, practice
- Host: related research activities/profile of the hosting institution
- Location: good accessibility for TWG members
- Inclusion of YECREA network
- Short CV of the conference chair(s)
- Estimate of the conference fees

Opportunities for Master and PhD students

The ECREA Young Scholars network is currently represented at the TWG Crisis Communication by Daniel Simonsen (Aarhus University). One of the network's first activities was to organize a panel discussion involving senior scholars, young scholars and PhD students at the Crisis3 Conference in Erfurt (October, 2013). See the conference report above for more details.

In an earlier business meeting of the TWG there was a request from some of the junior participants to involve Master students into the Crisis Communication Conference because the topic is of interest to their education, master thesis work, and their research aspirations. Therefore, a PhD/Master seminar on crisis management and crisis communication was held immediately before the Crisis Communication Conference organized by Finn Frandsen and Winni Johansen (Aarhus University) together with Timothy Coombs and Sherry Holladay (University of Central Florida). In addition to this workshop, which was hosted by Ilmenau University of Technology (Ilmenau, Germany), the chair of the Crisis3 Conference put together a team of international graduate students of Ilmenau University to support the organization of the conference as volunteers. Many of them used the opportunity to attend panels and to discuss their master theses and/or interest in crisis communication with international senior scholars attending the conference.

Group communication in the TWG Crisis Communication

In order to strengthen the networking among the TWG members, a Group on LinkedIn was established. The direct link to join the group is:

<http://www.linkedin.com/groups/Temporary-Working-Group-on-Crisis-5187708/about>