“Social” CERC
Is there an APP for that?

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What is CERC?

- Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication is different from
  - Traditional risk communication where the actual hazard usually is lower than the perceived risk (calm down)
  - Precaution advocacy (listen up)
  - Emergency communication (stay safe)
  - Crisis communication to protect reputation (we’re the good guys)
- CERC includes elements of all these

What’s with the Color Key?

- As we review CERC theory and practice, I will identify potential social media implications/applications using this color
- On a related note…
  - A CERC best practice is to incorporate visuals into your messaging
Risk Communication Theories

- **Trust Determination Theory**
  - When people are stressed or upset, they do not trust that leaders are caring and competent, honest and open.

Risk Communication Theories

- **Mental Noise Theory**
  - Difficulty hearing, understanding or remembering
  - Too much input

Risk Communication Theories

- **Risk Perception Theory**
  - Not all risks are created equal
Risk Perception in an Emergency

All risks are not accepted equally
- Voluntary vs. involuntary
- Controlled personally vs. controlled by others
- Familiar vs. exotic
- Natural vs. manmade
- Reversible vs. permanent
- Statistical vs. anecdotal
- Fairly vs. unfairly distributed
- Affecting adults vs. affecting children

Communicating in an Emergency Is Different

- Public must feel empowered – reduce fear and victimization
- Action steps reduce anxiety
- Revert to rudimentary “fight or flight” reasoning
- Limited intake of new information (3-7 bits)

Decisionmaking in an Emergency Is Different

- People simplify
- Cling to current beliefs
- We remember what we see or previously experience (first messages carry more weight)
Role of Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication

Customer Focus
- Gain wanted facts
- Empower decisionmaking
- Involved as a participant, not spectator
- Give feedback to responders
- Recover or preserve well-being and normalcy

Role of Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication

Organizational Focus
- Execute response and recovery efforts
- Gain support for crisis management plans
- Avoid misallocation of limited resources
- Ensure that decision-makers are well-informed
- Reduce rumors
- Decrease illness, injury, and deaths

Understanding Public Response

- The public doesn't respond to health risks unless they feel personally threatened. ¹
- If they feel threatened, people generally act rationally, to protect themselves and their family, based on their perceptions of the situation. ²
- Not all threats are seen as the same. Time limited vs. ongoing threats have different implications for response. ³
- People act based on information or knowledge that they have, even if it is incorrect. ⁴

Contributors to a Poor Public Response to Recovery Plans

- Public power struggles and confusion
- Paternalistic attitudes
- Mixed messages from multiple experts
- Information released late
- No reality check on recommendations
- Not countering rumors and myths in real-time

CERC Formula To Meet Customer and Organization Goals

- Be the first source for information
- Show competence and expertise
- Remain honest and open
- Express empathy early

Peter Sandman on Empathy

Empathy is an attitude. It’s not a strategy – it’s very tough to fake. It’s also not just a feeling. It can be cultivated: trying to understand how the situation looks from the other person’s perspective. It’s the trying that’s important. Being right matters less than being interested. 

*The essence of empathy is wanting to know how things look to the other person.*
Tools of Emphatic Communication

- Hopes, fears, regrets, wishes, and worries
  - Compare "I hope the situation will improve soon" with "I'm sure everything will turn out fine."
  - I wish the accident had never happened" is more empathic than "I know you wish the accident had never happened."
  - Regrets are unachievable wishes about the past, while fears and worries are what we hope won't happen.

Source: Peter Sandman

Risk Communication Principles for Emergencies

Don’t overreassure
- Considered controversial by some
- A high estimate of harm modified downward is much more acceptable to the public than a low estimate of harm modified upward

Risk Communication Principles for Emergencies

Confidence vs. uncertainty

Instead of making promises about outcomes, express the uncertainty of the situation and a belief in the "process" to fix the problem and address public safety concerns.
Risk Communication Principles for Emergencies

Allow people the right to feel fear
- Don’t pretend they’re not afraid, and don’t tell them they shouldn’t be
- Acknowledge the fear, and give contextual information

Social Media Implications

Mumbai terrorism attack

“Citizen journalists” spread word in real time

- How much information was accurate?
- Social media creates a perception, but it becomes your reality!

From Social Media Blog about California Wildfires...

- Flickr is adding one image per minute
- YouTube is showing several thousand videos
- Google news keeps track of the wildfire news
- The LA Times has a Google Map showing where the fires are burning
- Wikipedia has a great overview page of the various fires, locations and links to news
- 2 news Twitter streams: @kpbsnews and @nateritter
2010 Nashville Flooding

On May 4 when the flooding occurred, Nashville residents appealed for help via YouTube, Facebook and Twitter.

Possible CERC Applications

- Terrorist attack—quickly give people (even "armchair victims") things to do to stay safe
  - Text them with links to in depth information about who is at greatest risk
  - Web stream video to demonstrate home decontamination
- CERC principle: Anxiety is reduced by action and a restored sense of control
- Monitor social media sites to identify significant misinformation and correct rumors (limit rebuttal to places where rumor exists)

Possible CERC Applications

- Natural disasters: foster preparatory and contingent "if/then" behaviors
  - Send maps of evacuation routes, shelters, etc.
  - and revise them in real time if the situation changes
  - Send risk reduction advice via Twitter or texting
    (must be pre-approved messages such as "Don’t Drown, Go Around" because of clearance time)
  - Web stream videos of how and where to use a generator, how to purify water, etc.
### Possible CERC Applications

- **Media relations**
  - First message is most credible—new technology can help you do that

- **Stakeholder/Partner relations**
  - How can you reach them first? (Text messages when important new information is posted, partner’s website, etc.)
  - Don’t give them “too little, too late”

- **CERC Principle:**
  - Maintain advocate’s loyalty
  - Discourage negative action by adversaries
  - Keep ambivalent people neutral or move to advocate

### CERC Applications We Already Used

- CDC-Google Maps vaccine clinic locator
- NY Alert message about National Influenza Vaccination week
- YouTube for H1N1 PSA
- CDC’s interactive flu self-assessment tool to help people know if they need to seek medical care
- Facebook page and Twitter messages
- Commerce system

### Summary

- Successful CERC must encompass messages, messengers and **means**—it’s not just the 3/9/27 or 1N=3P template
  - Understand what to say, who should say it, and **how the message gets delivered**
  - Understand the receiver’s mental noise and how to break through it (recognize the psychology of the crisis)
Summary

- Understand audience concerns when forming messages
- Crisis and emergency risk communication demands expressions of empathy
- No substitute for speed, accuracy, and credibility
- Plan to get audience feedback fast

For More Information

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