

Crisis Management: Expert Insights from Daniele Chieffi

June 4, 2025

In the digital “glass house,” what matters is not reality but perception. Managing reputational crises is a complex process that requires transparency, conversational skills, a strong identity, and strategic preparation to anticipate possible scenarios and audience or stakeholder reactions within the infosphere.

Following a recent seminar held by [Daniele Chieffi](#) for FBK staff, we took the opportunity to share some of his reflections, drawn from extensive professional experience and inspired by recent high-profile case studies.

The collapse of a bridge, the sinking of a cruise ship, the failure of a fashion brand’s advertising campaign in China, and a misstep by Italy’s most popular influencer—regardless of the actual facts—share common negative outcomes: market loss, forced or difficult repositioning, and even damage to brand value.

Neuroscience, Cultural Mediation, and Media Reality

Given the potentially catastrophic nature of this domino effect, the first key insight from the discussion with Chieffi is this: ‘In the digital age, a reputational crisis is fundamentally different from what it was in the past. It is no longer primarily defined by an objectively traumatic event or one deemed newsworthy by traditional media. Today, what triggers and fuels a crisis is above all **how an event is perceived and interpreted** by stakeholders. Perception shapes our subjective reality, while interpretation is invariably filtered through cultural context. As a result, reputational damage occurs **regardless of what actually happens** based on how the ‘event’ is perceived and assessed.”

In this context, the evolution of media has disrupted traditional patterns of information dissemination. More and more, crises are not only initiated by conventional media but also by social media—where user-generated content and online behavior can spark events that traditional news outlets subsequently follow and reinterpret.

In today's corporate landscape, the digital ecosystem makes every action—or inaction—by a company during a reputational crisis instantly visible and highly likely to trigger public response. Even silence can be a strategic choice, as long as there's awareness that a void of meaning can be interpreted in many ways—for example, as fear, an admission of guilt, or an inability to find solutions.

Once these dynamics kick in, stakeholders come into direct contact with the emerging issue and autonomously construct the meaning and significance of the event from their specific perspectives, guided by their own interests. Similarly, the same happens with audiences who feel affected by an episode, a decision, a fact, or an omission only when these phenomena undermine the values that belong to that specific audience.

For these reasons, today's crises unfold as **“conversations”** —self-sustaining narratives based on spontaneous, unmediated interpretations within communities.

What's a winning strategy for navigating the storm?

*“A key strategy for companies,” Chieffi explained, “is shifting from simple ‘communication’ to ‘conversation,’ viewing themselves as part of the community in which they operate and building meaningful relationships. It becomes crucial to gain a **‘license to operate,’** meaning to be accepted and perceived as part of the stakeholder community.”*

In this scenario, **managing a crisis means “governing perception.”** This involves understanding how communities construct the meaning of events and anticipating appropriate responses. A crisis is likely to emerge when an event—perceived as the organization's fault, whether through omission, negligence, or intent—violates core values or breaches the **trust pact** with stakeholders. **Managing expectations** is essential: if the company's actions are not perceived as sufficient, it will inevitably face what is known as a betrayal of expectations.

What kind of mindset is needed to manage expectations?

*“To handle a crisis effectively,” Chieffi remarks, “requires **preventive planning**. You must analyze potential vulnerabilities, identify possible critical scenarios, and set up response procedures and formats. During the crisis, it's crucial to identify the emerging narrative ‘threads’ online, their ‘weavers’ (those who start or drive them), and **respond empathetically** to the underlying question that each thread poses.”*

Why does this matter to everyone?

“Reputation concerns individuals and nations, associations and businesses. Even the strongest reputation proves fragile under close scrutiny. All it takes is a suspicion, a rumor, or a piece of gossip—once it goes viral—to inflict serious damage, potentially erasing decades of hard-earned reputational capital in an instant.”

PERMALINK

<https://magazine.fbk.eu/en/news/crisis-management-expert-insights-from-daniele-chieffi/>

TAGS

- #chieffi
- #crisi reputazionali
- #HR
- #internal seminar
- #Reputational Crisis Management
- #social media
- #training

AUTHORS

- Giancarlo Sciascia