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WORLD  
METEOROLOGICAL  
ORGANIZATION

# CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS IN A COMPLEX MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

a presentation to

Leadership & Management  
Programme  
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*by*

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# SOME INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

- ❖ I do not know of your experience or familiarity with the subject of Crisis Communications in your own country. So I will make a broad presentation on the subject.
- ❖ Crisis Communications is a key component of overall Crisis Management.
- ❖ Singapore may not be the best model of crisis management. We have unique circumstances. At best we can offer some of the good practices we undertake, many adapted from ideas and practices worldwide.

# SOME PLUS POINTS TO BEGIN WITH DURING SARS AND OTHER CRISES ?

- A very small island with tightly controlled, fixed number of entry/exit border points;
- The absence of an urban/rural continuum or federal/state/localized problems of governance;
- Perhaps because of our geographical position, we benefited from lessons learnt from early media reporting/intelligence on SARS incidents in Southern China and experience of Hong Kong;
- Strong, stable government and a professional civil service.



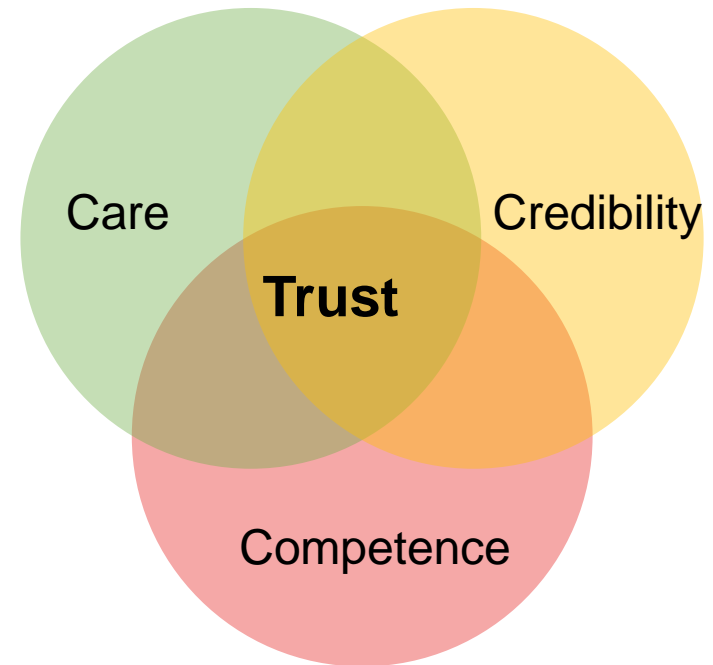
# WHY DO GOVERNMENTS COMMUNICATE ?

- ❖ To explain Policy
- ❖ To improve public services
- ❖ To change behaviour
- ❖ To win elections



# Trust is critical to effective governance

- **What is trust?**
  - Being able to deliver what is expected, promised.
- **Care**
  - “Are you on my side?”
  - “Are you willing to sacrifice for me?”
- **Competence**
  - “Can you deliver on what you promised?”
- **Credibility**
  - “Will you deliver on what you promised?”



# HOW IS TRUST ACHIEVED : THE SINGAPORE EXPERIENCE

- ❖ Zero tolerance of corruption
- ❖ Assurance of social support and inclusion. Vulnerable groups are provided a range of safety nets.
- ❖ Opportunities for all – we uphold the principle of meritocracy.
- ❖ A safe and secure nation: Safe environment and secure borders critical to our ability to function and progress.

# The Trust 10

## 01 **Distrust is now society's default emotion**

Nearly 6 in 10 say their default tendency is to distrust something until they see evidence it is trustworthy. Another 64% say it's now to a point where people are incapable of having constructive and civil debates about issues they disagree on. When distrust is the default – we lack the ability to debate or collaborate.

## 02 **Of the studied institutions, business is once again the most trusted**

At 61%, business is the most trusted institution, ahead of NGOs at 59%, government at 52% and media at only 50%. Seventy-seven percent of respondents, however, trust "My Employer," making the relationship between employer and employee incredibly important.

## 03 **Government and media fuel a cycle of distrust**

Nearly one out of every two respondents view government and media as divisive forces in society – 48% and 46%, respectively. Furthermore, government leaders and journalists are seen as the least trusted societal leaders today, with less than half of respondents trusting either (government leaders at 42% and journalists at 46%).

## 04 **News sources fail to fix their Trust problem**

None of the major information sources are trusted as a source of general news and information, with trust in search engines at 59%, followed by traditional media at 57%, owned media at 43% and social media at only 37%.

## 05 **Fake news concerns are at an all-time high**

Concerns over fake news or false information being used as a weapon is now at an all-time high of 76%.

## 06 **There is a collapse of Trust in democracies**

In many of the democracies studied, institutions are trusted by less than half of their people, including only 46 pts in Germany, 45 pts in Spain, 44 pts in the UK and 43 pts in the U.S. Moreover, no developed countries believe their families and self will be better off in 5 years time.

## 07 **Societal fears on the rise**

Without faith that our institutions will provide solutions or societal leadership, societal fears are becoming more acute. Most notably, 85% are worried about job loss and 75% worry about climate change.

## 08 **Business needs to step up on societal issues**

While business outscores government by 53 points on competency and 26 points on ethics, respondents believe business is not doing enough to address societal problems, including climate change (52%), economic inequality (49%), workforce reskilling (46%) and trustworthy information (42%).

## 09 **Societal leadership is now a core function of business**

When considering a job, 60% of employees want their CEO to speak out on controversial issues they care about and 80% of the general population want CEOs to be personally visible when discussing public policy with external stakeholders or work their company has done to benefit society. In particular, CEOs are expected to shape conversation and policy on jobs and the economy (76%), wage inequality (73%), technology and automation (74%) and global warming and climate change (68%).

## 10 **Business must lead in breaking the cycle of distrust**

Across every single issue, by a huge margin, people want more business engagement, not less. For example, on climate change, 52% say business is not doing enough, while only 9% say it is overstepping. The role and expectation for business has never been clearer, and business must recognize that its societal role is here to stay.

All data is based on general population sample unless otherwise noted.

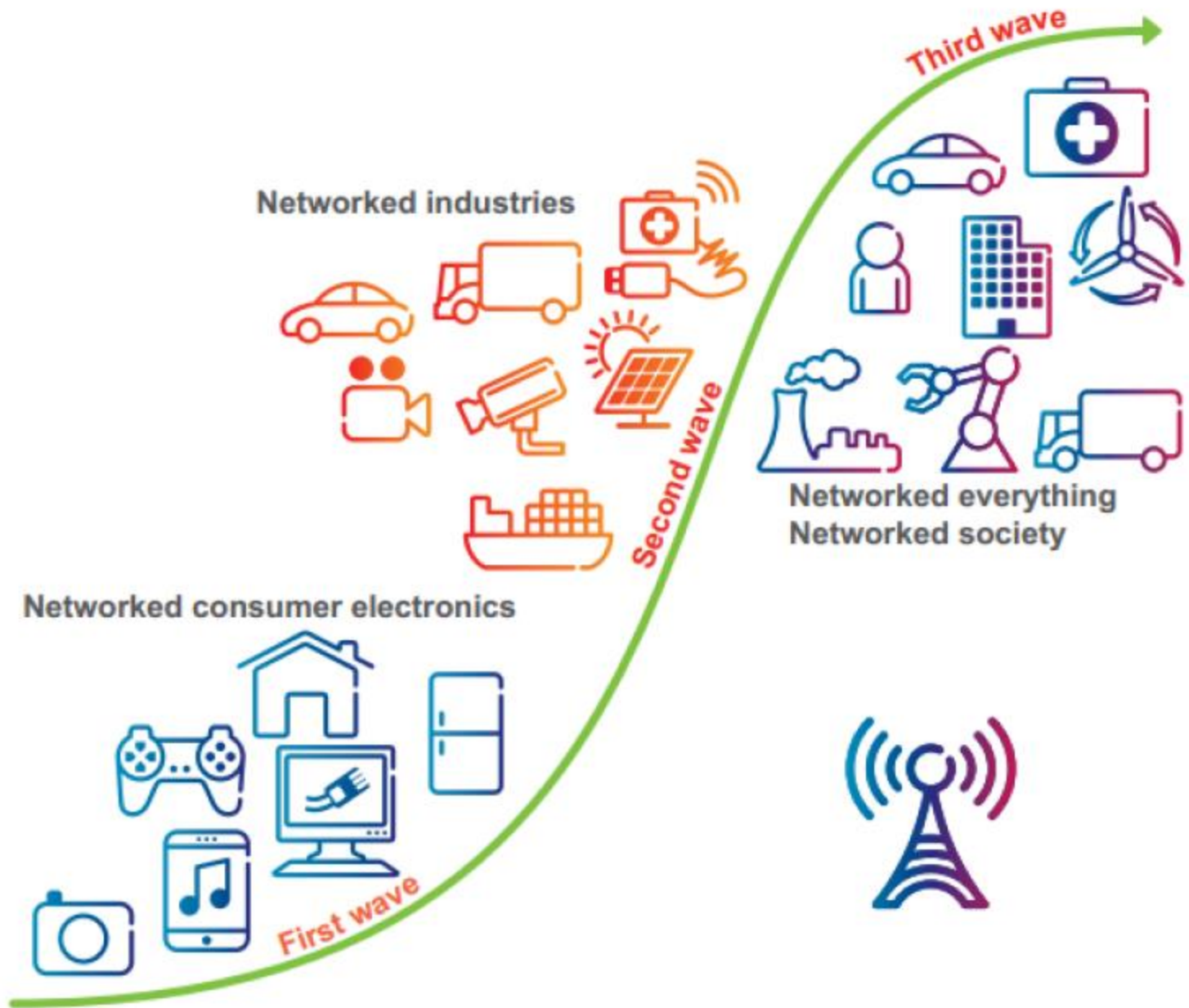
To explore the full 2022 Edelman Trust Barometer, visit [www.edelman.com/trust](http://www.edelman.com/trust) #TrustBarometer



# TODAY'S MEDIA ENVIRONMENT WHAT COMPLEXITY ?







The three waves of connected device development.

# INFORMATION REVOLUTIONS

❖ *Satellite TV Revolution*

❖ *Internet Revolution*

❖ *Social Networking Information Revolution*

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❖ *One to one – Mobile Telephone*

❖ *From the One to the Many (Twitter)*

❖ *From the Many to Many (Facebook)*

❖ *Everyone is connected but no one is in control...*

❖ *And yet it allows people to organize themselves and to refute/counter lies and allegations*

# TO SUMMARISE : THE CURRENT SET-UP

- The shift from information scarcity to abundance has destroyed public's established trust in institutional authority, including science, media, religion and government.
- The monopoly of the State and its control of information has been diluted with alternative sources now easily accessible by the public;
- There is greater awareness of the need to “manage” information to maintain credibility and trust in government;



# THE END OF NEWS AS WE KNOW IT

- ❖ Social Media has swallowed up everything
- ❖ News publishers have lost control over distribution
- ❖ We have handed over control of our public and private lives to FACEBOOK, AMAZON, APPLE & GOOGLE, TIKTOK etc - people who are unelected and unaccountable – **Zuckerberg, Bezos, Tim Cook, Sundar Pichai .....**

# Communications is a challenge

- ❖ Good communications often do not come naturally – especially for governments.
- ❖ All governments have communication challenges and are sensitive about ‘bad news’.
- ❖ Communication is messy – a lot of noise with many different players competing for prominence.

# KEY THOUGHTS

SMU Classification: Restricted

- ❖ People don't always behave "rationally"
- ❖ Behaviour is influenced by how people understand their world

# CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS



# Southeast Asia

- ❖ One of the most disaster prone regions in the world. UNESCO for Asia and Pacific estimates natural disaster drain the region of \$86.5 billion in average annual losses.
- ❖ From 2000 to 2022, the region saw more than half of global disaster casualties.
- ❖ Philippines had the highest natural disaster risk.
- ❖ For SouthEast Asia – the key disasters were agricultural drought, flooding, tropical cyclones, earthquakes and Tsunami.



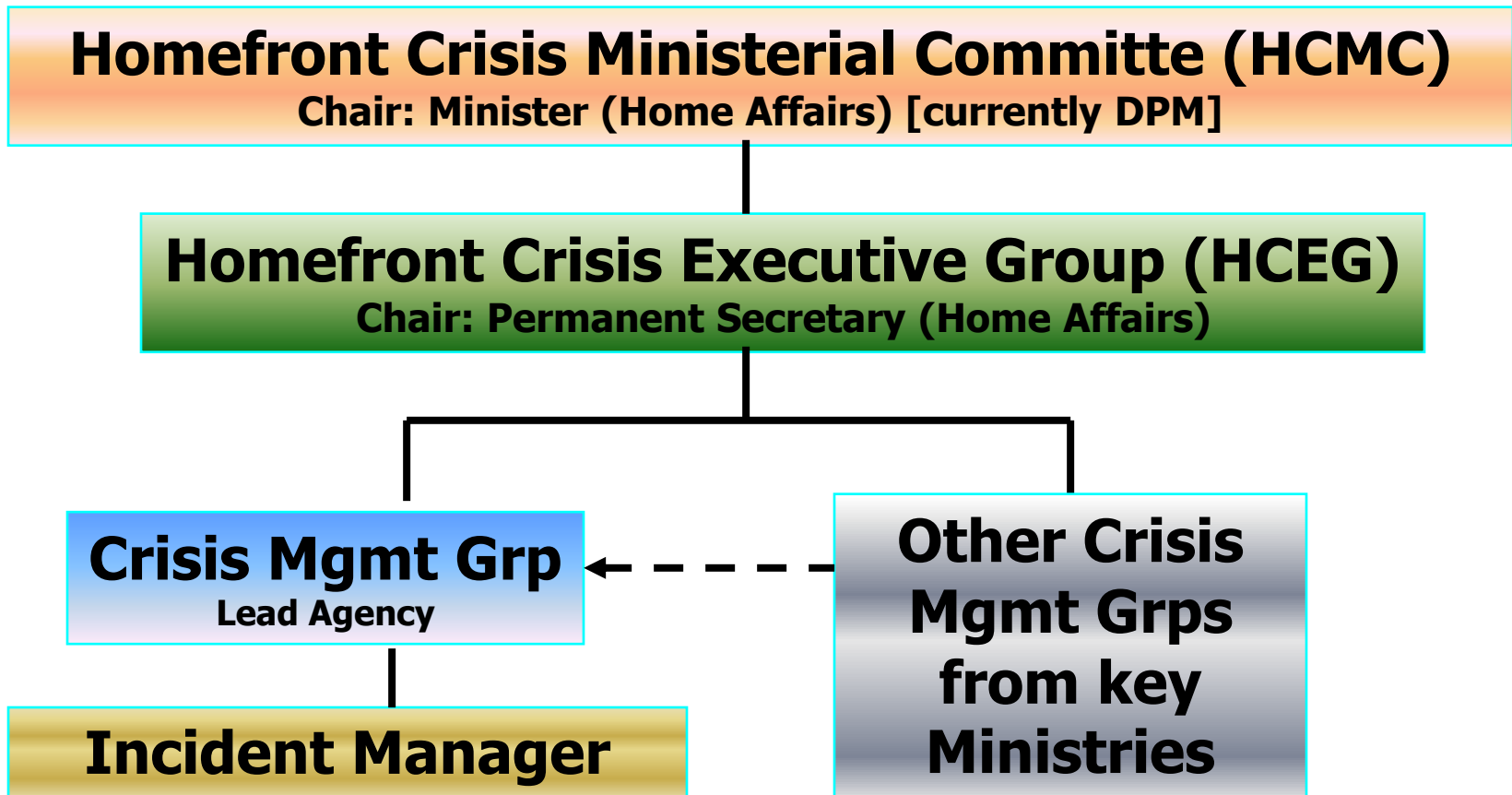


# Some key observations....

- ❖ Crisis Comms **must flow seamlessly** from day to day Government Communications
- ❖ **Command and Control**, an in-place structure or system and processes which are exercised regularly is crucial. When there is a crisis, you tighten it up and make it perform better.
- ❖ Officers must understand their roles in a crisis.
- ❖ Finally, the fundamentals or “best practices” of Crisis Communications are universal.



# NETWORKED GOVERNMENT : HOMEFRONT CRISIS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (HCMS)



# STAKEHOLDER MAPPING IN A CRISIS

Who are your stakeholders, individuals and groups?

**Distributors** →

Have they been trained in preparedness, response and how to speak with media?

← **Regulators**

**Employees** →

Do they have conflicting agendas?

← **NGOs**

**Consumers** →

What are possible impact and reactions to your communications

← **Customers**

**Shareholders** →

Do you know/understand your stakeholder's perceptions ?

← **Victims**

Avoid knee-jerk reactions, think the situation through.

Use language carefully and precisely.

← **Media**

Keep it simple and consistent.

## Crisis Communications / Management should be based on the following principles:

- ❖ **Plan for tomorrow..**
- ❖ **Respond rapidly.** The first 24 hours of a crisis are critical.
- ❖ **Position your management front and center.**
- ❖ **Talk to all stakeholders directly, not just through the media.**
- ❖ **What you say must reflect what you do.**
- ❖ **Be open and honest** and speak with one voice.
- ❖ **Demonstrate concern and convey integrity.**

# CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PRINCIPLES

- ❖ Be sensitive to your audiences' needs
- ❖ **Demonstrate that you/your organization are in control**
- ❖ Explain the situation with the information you have at the time – tell it all and tell it fast
- ❖ **Assume that people are going to say the worst – combat rumour and prevent speculation**
- ❖ Set the record straight when misinformation is released that is deemed harmful.
- ❖ **Be prepared to say “sorry” ...**

# CLASSIC REACTIONS IN A CRISIS

- **Denial** : It didn't happen; We are not at fault; What you are saying is wrong
- **Avoidance** : Others were responsible; It was beyond our control; Our intentions were good.
- **Mitigation**: It isn't as bad as it looks; You do not understand; Retract or we will sue.
- **Rectification**: We are trying to repair the damage; We will make sure this never happens again, We will compensate.



# RISK AS WE SEE IT

- **We think RISK is inevitable.** People expect governments to protect them completely from all risk in their daily lives. We know it is impossible. So there will always be a trade-off.
- Singapore's position is always that it is better to err on the side of over-reaction than under-reaction. Perhaps its because we are a small state.
- **Fear can be a constructive emotion.** When people worry about a risk, they pay more attention to it and take action where necessary. Soft warnings and reassurances do not work. But of course unreasonable fear can be unhealthy.



# RISK CAN BE BENEFICIAL

- ❖ Previous shocks prepare societies to deal with subsequent shocks
- ❖ Because of SARS in 2003 epidemic, governments in China, Hong Kong and also Spore were better prepared. Exposure to minor pathogens helps build immunity.
- ❖ During Covid, digital innovations galore – video conferencing, e-commerce, Trace Together, automation etc





# LESSONS FROM SARS

***The SARS experience was clearly an underlining factor in our response to the current pandemic..... The key lessons learnt were :***

- Decisive leadership and involvement of highest levels of government and of all key Ministries/agencies.
- Transparency and honest communication to reach out to all. We even had a SARS TV channel to ensure that all information available.
- Earning trust and confidence of the population.
- Employing a multi-disciplinary / multi-sectoral approach with no artificial boundaries between medicine and engineering and other disciplines.



# NATIONAL CENTRE FOR INFECTIOUS DISEASES

- ❖ Planning began soon after SARS 2003
- ❖ NCID opened 2019
- ❖ 14 storey , state-of-the-art facility
- ❖ 17 ward hospital with 330 beds
- ❖ 100 isolation rooms, 124 negative pressure rooms, 38 intensive care unit beds and 4 High-Level Isolation Units.
- ❖ Also includes facilities for research in emerging infectious disease

## MASSACRE : CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND, 15 MARCH 2019

- ❖ Broadcast live on Facebook via head mounted camera
- ❖ **17 minutes** before Facebook acted on complaint from NZ Police by which time the “**oxygen of amplification**” had taken a life of its own
- ❖ Killer’s manifesto broadcast via Twitter and sent direct to 30 recipients including NZ PM
- ❖ Facebook had just recently boasted that they were well equipped with AI and human moderators. They had worked out ways of determining sudden spikes in attention, numbers and rates going up, percentage of sad reactions, numbers of people saying OMG and so on.



# What is expected of Government ?

When danger threatens, the public demands two things from the state.

- Protection and

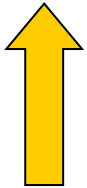
- The truth

- And it must follow from above, that there needs to be a high level of trust in Government



# Pyramid of priorities

**Highest**

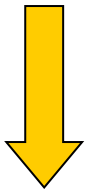


**Life & death**

**Public health,  
livelihoods, cohesion**

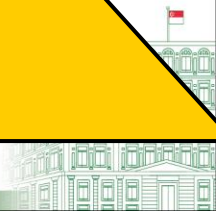
**Other public, national or  
corporate interests / concerns**

**Lowest**



**Damage to organizational reputation**

**Damage to individual reputation**



# CRISES

- ❖ There is no such thing as a standard crisis with a standard solution, but all crises do follow some kind of pattern
- ❖ First response is critical, and research has shown that when organizations or governments were unprepared or slow to respond, issues or crises invariably tended to last 2.5 times longer.

# Characteristics & Phases of crises



# Communications Tools in a Crisis

- ❖ Exploit Every Platform available
- ❖ Consistency & Clarity of Communications
- ❖ Ensure Credibility and earn the Trust of your audience (viz fake news)
- ❖ SPIN
- ❖ 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Advocates



# COMMUNICATION PLATFORMS

- ❖ Social Media – FACEBOOK, Twitter, WhatsApp, Email, Google Crisis Response
- ❖ Mobile APPS
- ❖ Cell Phone (Broadband)
- ❖ Landline Telephones
- ❖ Satellite Phones
- ❖ 2 Way Radio
- ❖ Battery operated Radio / and portable TV

# IMMEDIATE KEY MESSAGES

- We have substantive emergency response plans, and they have been put into action
- The full resources of Government are working effectively to save lives and help victims of the attack
- Stay calm and stay tuned for more information
- [“ Go in, stay in, tune in”]





## RUN

- > Consider the safest route
- > Stay out of view of the attackers
- > Insist others leave with you
- > Leave your belongings behind



## HIDE

- > Find cover from gunfire and stay out of sight
- > Lock yourself in but do not get trapped
- > If you are unable to lock the doors or entrances, place objects such as table or cupboard behind the doors or entrances to prevent access of attackers
- > Move away from doors
- > Be very quiet and switch your phone to silent mode



## TELL

- > Call the police at 999
- > SMS 71999 if it is not safe to call. Give your location and where you last saw the attackers
- > Provide details about the attackers
  - > **T** - Total number of attackers
  - > **E** - Equipment or weapons being carried
  - > **L** - Look of attackers
  - > **L** - Locations of attackers (where they are now and moving towards)
- > You can also send more information through i-Witness on the Police@SG application
- > If safe to do so, stop others from going towards danger areas
- > *Follow the instructions of the police and do not make any sudden movements*



In 2007, an international panel of experts developed a list of five conditions essential in early stages of mass trauma :

❖ A sense of safety

❖ Calm

❖ A sense of self and community efficacy

❖ Connectedness

❖ Hope



## Good media & public information handling can deliver following objectives:

- ❖ Sympathetic coverage for Victims, generating support from community;
- ❖ Positive coverage of the work of emergency and relief workers, reinforce morale and develop public understanding of the difficulties;
- ❖ Public confidence in Government handling of disaster and aftermath
- ❖ The high moral ground from which to deal with misbehaviours.

# BOMBS UNDERGROUND : LONDON 2005

- ❖ London's emergency response was “**Heroic but Flawed**”
- ❖ Breakdown in communications because of an aging communications network and breakdowns in the mobile telephone systems. This led to failure to deploy the right numbers of ambulances to the right locations, a lack of necessary equipment and supplies at the scene & in getting injured to hospitals.
- ❖ **Over reliance on cellphones.** Emergency services used a mix of radio frequencies and systems, and cellphones did not work in the underground.
- ❖ Failure to provide survivors a central place to get help ..

# REPUTATION

“It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you’ll do things differently.”

(Warren Buffet)



# LESSONS FROM CRISES

- ❖ **Unclear, multiple, conflicting, uncooperative and isolated command structures.** Large crises demand robust command and control structures.....commitment to cooperate, trust between agencies and understanding across disciplines.
- ❖ **Scarce resources** – agencies competing for limited resources.
- ❖ **Failed communications** – When communications fails, the rest of the response fails. Eg KATRINA – the hurricane destroyed the comms infrastructure and all else failed.
- ❖ **Weak planning** – lack of commitment to plans across agencies and jurisdictions, infrequent exercises, failure to learn.
- ❖ **Poor Public Relations** – dependence on mainstream media, messages fail to connect.





# Studies Available on failure of Communications Infrastructure re the KATRINA hurricane (2005)

- ❖ National Science Board Workshop Task Force on Hurricane Science and Engineering. Institute for Human and Machine Cognition, Pensacola, Florida, April 18 2006. Presentation by Robert R Henry, Univ of Louisiana at Lafayette
- ❖ Communication, Coherence, and Collective Action : The Impact of Hurricane Katrina on Communications Infrastructure by Louise K Comfort, Thomas Haase, Univ of Pittsburg



# TYPHOON MORAKOT 2009

- ❖ Crisis Communications Failure :  
A Case Study of Typhoon  
Morakot by Shuhui Sophy  
Cheng, Department of  
Communication Arts, Chaoyang  
University of Technology, Taiwan  
2013



# Singapore is especially vulnerable to fake news

- High smartphone penetration
- Fault lines: Multi-racial, multi-religion society
- Older generation of Singaporeans: Relatively low level of education

- Principled foreign policy: Target of foreign pressure

- Singaporeans not discerning about fake news

**FAKE**  
**NEWS**



## Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA)

- ❖ Two judgements required when making a decision to issue a directive :
  - ◆ **Legal judgement** – whether POFMA can be used – i.e. a statement is false and affects public interest;
  - ◆ **Political judgement** – on whether POFMA should be used in the first instance...

Likely, POFMA will and must be used in cases that touch on race, language, religion and the financial probity of Cabinet &/or Government.



# Why do Governments need to manage crises / information flow ?

- ❖ If you fail to secure public trust in your Government, then you will not gain the respect or confidence of your population;
- ❖ At the extreme end, in a crisis situation, Governments or organizations suffer the real possibility of being thrown out of power altogether.

# CRISIS MANAGEMENT

## IS CULTURE AN ISSUE ?



# INSIGHTS FROM COVID-19

- ❖ The issue is “cultural differences in our willingness to follow rules”
- ❖ All cultures have social norms, or unwritten rules for social behavior. Psychologists have shown that some cultures abide by social norms quite strictly, they are **tight**. Following rules helps us survive chaos and crises. Countries with greater social cohesion fare better in pandemic. Tight cultures have a lot of order – less crime and more coordination and self control.
- ❖ Others are **loose** – with a more relaxed attitude towards rule-breakers. But these like US – can boast a great deal of creativity and innovation.....which is often a major liability during times of threat. Loose cultures have less order and coordination, have more openness and more tolerance and creativity.





# Insights from Fukushima

- a) Strong sense of community amongst the old in the absence of young people;
- b) Historical experience reinforces resilience ie the deep sense that if previous generations can survive - so can we.....
- c) Acute sense of crisis & vulnerability
- d) Not nationalism, i.e. loyalty to greater Japanese nation, but more so to company and local community. Heroism not one of standing out for stardom, but standing together with your own team, keeping head down doing the job.

# COMMUNICATING COVID



# SPOKEMANSHIP

- ❖ A **Spokesman** is a person who speaks as the representative of organization, Government, Ministry, agency in a professional capacity.
- ❖ Engaging the media is crucial to success as a spokesman.
- ❖ How can you make use of various media platforms to engage the media and your audience ?
- ❖ How do you ensure that the right messages get out accurately to your intended audience ?





# PM ADDRESSING THE NATION ON COVID



# SPIN



## IS SPIN A LEGITIMATE INSTRUMENT OF PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS ?

- ❖ Chambers: ‘a favourable bias’ or ‘to tell lies’ (as in ‘*spun a complex web of lies*’)
- ❖ Others: ‘*maximising favourable coverage*’;  
‘*manipulation of the media*’;  
‘*the blatant art of bending the truth*’.



# SOME OF THE 'TECHNIQUES'

Re and pre-buttal (responding or pre-empting), setting the news agenda, planting stories, kite-flying, laundering news (good news on bad news day), backgrounding reporters' leaking, scripting speeches for sound bites, arranging photo ops, news conferences with easy quotes, ignoring 'problematic' journalists, monitoring the Opposition on Talkback radio, and lobbying key journalists.

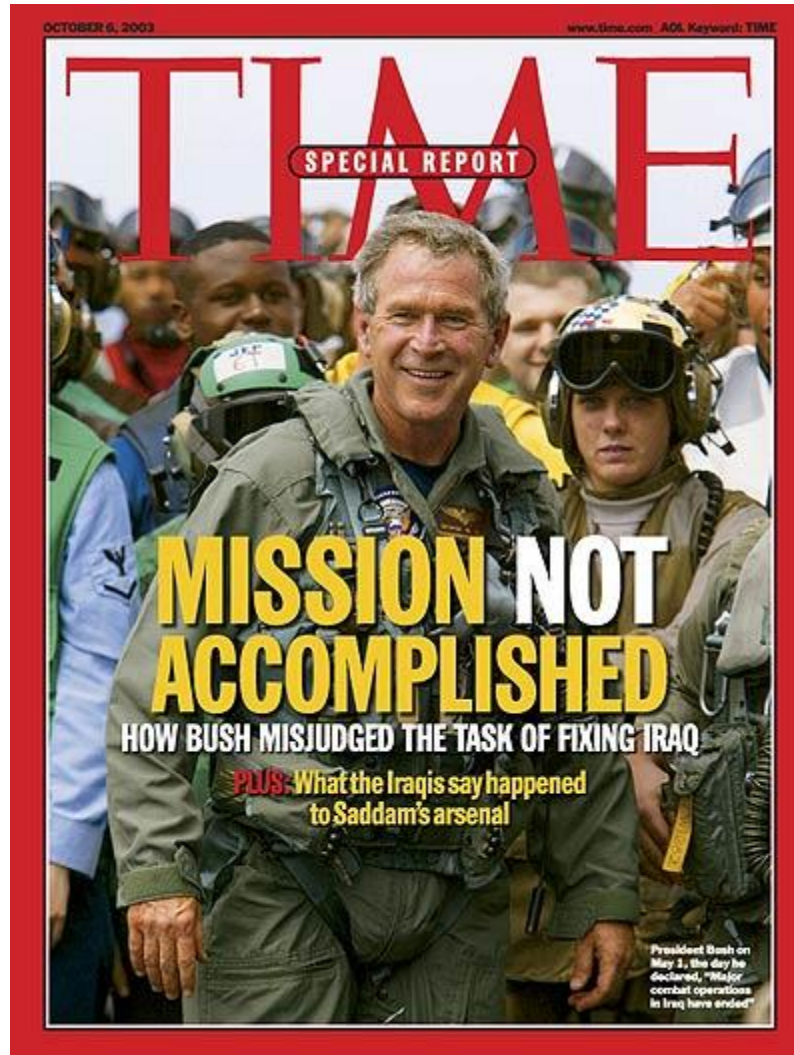




“Mission Accomplished : Major Combat Operations in Iraq have ended”; 1 May 2003 : “...one of the most audacious moments of presidential theatre in American history”



TIME 6 OCTOBER 2003





# MH 370

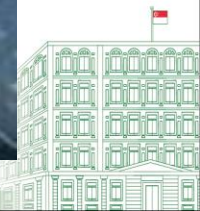


# A LITANY OF ERRORS IN COMMUNICATION

SMU Classification: Restricted

- ❖ It took Malaysian airlines 5hrs to confirm they had lost contact with MH 370.
- ❖ A few days later, airline notified family members via text message that new data indicated all on board the plane were dead.
- ❖ Unprepared for a complex international stakeholder scene and aggressive international press, the spokespeople for the airline and government often appeared awkward, confused and less than forthright giving rise to more speculation and conspiracy theories.
- ❖ They issued contradictory and incomplete statements.
- ❖ In several instances, Government even backtracked on information it had shared earlier.
- ❖ In one of its first press conferences, Malaysia airlines offered families of those on board US\$5,000 per passenger.
- ❖ Despite lacking experience to deal with a crisis of this magnitude, neither airline nor government sought external help. Malaysia airlines handled the entire crisis internally.

# FLIGHT PATH OF MH370



# QUICK LESSONS

- ❖ YOU HAVE TO MANAGE YOUR INFORMATION PRESENTATION & PROJECT CONFIDENCE. HUMOUR AND OFF-HAND REMARKS HAVE NO PLACE HERE;
- ❖ YOU HAVE TO MINIMIZE CONTRADICTORY INFORMATION, & SING FROM THE SAME SONG BOOK
- ❖ YOU NEED COMMAND & CONTROL – ACROSS MINISTRIES & ABILITY TO DEPLOY ALL RESOURCES OF GOVERNMENT



# QUICK LESSONS

- ❖ TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE WHERE LIVES ARE INVOLVED. NEED TO GET YOUR OPS SEQUENCE RIGHT. KNOW YOUR LIMITATIONS & TAKE THE NECESSARY MEASURES;
- ❖ SECRETS ARE IMPORTANT. BUT YOU SOMETIMES NEED TO DECIDE EARLY WHAT CAN AND CANNOT BE SACRIFICED. COVER-UPS WILL INEVITABILITY BE HIGHLIGHTED.





# Chronology Of Events



- **SQ 006 crashed at Chiang Kai Shek Airport shortly after take-off at 2318 hrs on 31 Oct 2000.**
- **159 passengers and 20 crew onboard.**
- **Death toll: 83 dead.**



# SOME QUICK TAKEAWAYS

- Managing Government Comms in a crisis is all about **experience, commonsense & intuition and luck!** It is not rocket science.
- Communications must support the larger operational requirements/mission. You do not operate in a vacuum.
- You need to constantly find innovative/diligent ways to ensure your messaging is delivered quickly, it is clear and understood and reaches out to the widest audience possible;
- Your communications efforts must be credible and trusted. Once you lose that, you have lost it altogether!



# QUESTIONS ?

