

# 4 Strategies for Managing Cross-Cultural Crises

Last month, I participated in a panel discussion addressing crisis communications. We discussed unpredictability, since crises can happen at any time and take many shapes and forms, ranging from personnel issues to cybersecurity issues to weather events and natural disasters. As we talked through various hypothetical crisis scenarios, one of the most-interesting points that came up was the need to incorporate cross-cultural communications in [crisis planning](#).

Corporations and organizations face a variety of serious international risks, such as political issues, terrorist threats, supply chain disruptions, cyber-attacks and even executive kidnappings. Depending on the country where a situation occurs, a crisis abroad can be severely compounded by language and cultural differences that will only magnify confusion.

## What Can Your Organization Do to Prepare for an International Crisis?

Follow these four tips, and you and your organization will be better prepared should an international crisis occur.

- Develop a [communications plan](#) with redundancy, because communications often break down in an international crisis. Landlines, wireless systems and the internet may not work in an emergency. With offices and employees in time zones around the world, make sure your plan lays out exactly who should be contacted in the event of a crisis, and that there's a backup plan.
- Be informed. Make sure you have background information for the various countries where you are operating and doing business. A basic familiarity with current events and issues, geography, and history will help break down barriers. Also, understand the regulatory environment and the media.
- Understand the impact that different cultures have on your crisis communications strategy, and be prepared to interact effectively with all of the cultures involved in the crisis. Many cultures have specific etiquette for the way they communicate. Do your research on local customs, from gestures to common language. Having some basic knowledge of behavior do's, don'ts and local social protocols shows respect.
- Keep communications clear, simple and to the point. Jargon and slang don't always translate the same way across cultures. Have a reliable, experienced translator available when language barriers present themselves. Avoid the use of acronyms and pop-culture language. Even if your audience speaks the same language, don't assume that they can follow your train of thought.



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In cross-cultural environments, communication problems are amplified because of differences in language and cultural context. Different cultures also tend to have different perceptions and expectations regarding crisis and conflicts. Being aware of the impact of cultural differences is an important step to effective and strategic communication in a cross-border crisis. Key strategies should be incorporated into your crisis management plans in case you face an international crisis.

Do you have questions about cross-cultural or international crisis communications? If so, contact me, Lisa Altman, at [laltman@jaffepr.com](mailto:laltman@jaffepr.com).