

The Institute of Risk Management  
Qatar Regional Interest Group

# Building Organizational Resilience Through Effective Crisis Management

Key Insights from the Crisis  
Management Seminar – April 30, 2025

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## **IRM Qatar Chapter Committee members:**

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## **Panel Composition:**

1. Hatem Elsafty - Chairman of IRM Qatar chapter
2. Dylan Campbell - Enterprise Readiness Manager
3. David Stewart - Speaker and crisis management and emergency response expert
4. Kirsty McKinlay-Stewart - Crisis management and emergency response expert
5. Paul Morris, Head of Crisis Management & Emergency Response

## **Executive Summary**

In an era defined by global disruption, volatile geopolitical landscapes, cyber threats, and climate-related challenges, organizations must shift from reactive crisis management to proactive resilience-building.

The recent Crisis Management seminar, hosted by the Institute of Risk Management (IRM), was led by David Stewart, a global expert in resilience, crisis, and security management. He provided deep insights into the topic, followed by an engaging panel discussion featuring Qatar-based risk and resilience professionals who engaged with the audience questions.

The session brought together leading practitioners from government, energy, and risk consulting to explore frameworks, case studies, and practical strategies for strengthening organizational resilience.

This white paper synthesizes the core lessons and insights from the session, with a focus on:

- Integrating resilience into organizational culture and strategy
- Understanding crisis typologies and leadership roles
- Lessons from real-world case studies (e.g., BP, Volkswagen)
- Enhancing preparedness through stakeholder collaboration and exercises
- Actionable recommendations for resilience-building
- The event was made possible thanks to the generous support of Qatar Foundation, who graciously hosted the seminar.



# Building Organizational Resilience Through Effective Crisis Management

## 1. Defining Resilience: A Strategic Imperative

David Stewart, former senior police officer from the UK and crisis management expert, opened the seminar by redefining resilience not merely as operational continuity, but as a strategic capability. Citing ISO 22316 and 22361, Stewart emphasized that resilience is “the ability of an organization to absorb and adapt in a challenging environment in order to deliver objectives and survive.”

### Key Insight:

Resilience is not a siloed departmental function, it must be embedded across all organizational layers, from operations to executive leadership. It is supported by risk, business continuity, and crisis response but not replaced by them.

## 2. A Shift from Siloed to Integrated Crisis Governance

One of the recurring themes of the seminar was the shift from traditional siloed structures (separating risk, business continuity, and crisis management) to an integrated resilience model. Panelists, including seasoned corporate resilience managers, emphasized that functional coordination is critical, especially in cross-cutting threats like cyber-attacks, geopolitical shocks, or supply chain disruptions.

### Actionable Strategy:

Organizations ought to create a Resilience Department or designate a Chief Resilience Officer to oversee cross-functional resilience governance. Organizations should consider upgrading their Audit & Risk Committees to Audit, Risk & Resilience Committees to reflect this priority.

## 3. Real-Life Case Studies: What Went Wrong (and Why)

### BP Deepwater Horizon (2010)

Despite operational disasters, the more lasting damage came from poor communication. CEO Tony Hayward’s infamous “I want my life back” comment epitomized the reputational fallout.

### Volkswagen Emissions Scandal (2015)

Volkswagen’s leadership knowingly falsified emissions data. What began as a compliance breach spiraled into a full-scale crisis, costing \$40 billion and reputational damage worldwide.

### Key Lesson:

Culture and leadership are the ultimate resilience levers. Crisis often stems not from the initiating event but from how leadership responds to it whether with transparency, empathy, and decisiveness or with denial and poor messaging.

## 4. Emerging Threats and Evolving Definitions of Crisis

The seminar drew on multiple sources such as PwC's Global Crisis and Resilience Survey, BCI, EY, IRM, and the World Economic Forum, to highlight current and emerging threats, which include:

- Cybersecurity breaches
- Geopolitical instability
- Climate-induced events and energy system shocks
- Misinformation and social unrest

Speakers noted that the crisis is increasingly non-linear. As Stewart remarked, "Crises are not always sudden. Many are creeping threats mismanaged over time."

### Takeaway:

Organizations should take heed and update their risk registers to include emerging, non-traditional threats and use scenario planning to stress-test their vulnerabilities.

## 5. The Role of People and Culture

One of the Panel members, Kirsty McKinlay-Stewart, stressed the human dimension of crisis: leaders and responders under pressure must be mentally and emotionally prepared. Without considering employee well-being, even robust crisis plans can falter.

### Recommendations:

- Train leadership on psychological resilience and decision-making under stress.
- Introduce wellness practices into crisis simulations (e.g., stress management).
- Promote a "speak up" culture where concerns can be raised early without fear of reprisal.

## 6. Crisis Preparedness: Practice Makes (Closer to) Perfect

Panel member, Paul Morris, Head of Crisis Management & Emergency Response, who, with three decades of field experience, advocated for frequent, realistic exercises. He cautioned against "walkthroughs where everyone knows the script," suggesting instead:

- Inject realistic variables (e.g., personal distractions, contradictory data)
- Mix tabletop and live mobilization drills

- Rotate team composition to test adaptability
- Maintain the secrecy of exercises to keep the element of surprise

### Quote:

"You don't want to make a mistake in front of your peers; however, a simulation is the safest place to fail, learn, and improve." – Paul.

## 7. National Resilience: Lessons from the Qatar Blockade

The 2017 Gulf blockade was cited by the panel and attendees as a prime example of national resilience. Despite the lack of a formal public plan, Qatar leveraged financial resources, agile leadership, and international coordination to adapt swiftly, becoming self-sufficient across key sectors in under two years.

### Lesson:

Even in the absence of full preparedness, resilient leadership, culture, and resources can bridge gaps. However, relying solely on sovereign wealth might not always be a scalable or repeatable model.

## 8. From Compliance to Strategic Value

The panel emphasized moving beyond a "check-the-box" mentality. Resilience must be framed as a value creator and not a regulatory burden.

### Suggested Shift:

From	→	To
Compliance Focus	→	Strategic Capability
Departmental Ownership	→	Enterprise-Wide Culture and ownership
Static Plans	→	Dynamic resilience





## Recommendations for Resilience Executives

1. **Embed Resilience in Strategy:**  
Align resilience planning with organizational objectives and ERM processes.
2. **Conduct Annual Exercises:**  
Include senior leadership in both simulations and reflective tabletop drills.
3. **Appoint a Resilience Champion:**  
Consider assigning a C-level or director-level lead for enterprise resilience.
4. **Audit Your Crisis Maturity:**  
Use maturity models to benchmark progress across people, process, and technology.
5. **Promote Transparency:**  
Encourage early reporting of issues, mistakes, and areas for improvement.

## Conclusion

Crisis management is no longer a matter of “if” but “when.” Organizations must foster cultures of agility, embed resilience into strategic frameworks, and continually rehearse their responses. As global risks evolve, resilience will define not only who survives, but who thrives.

For leaders, the question is no longer “Are we ready for a crisis?” but “How ready are we, and how often do we test our readiness?”

