

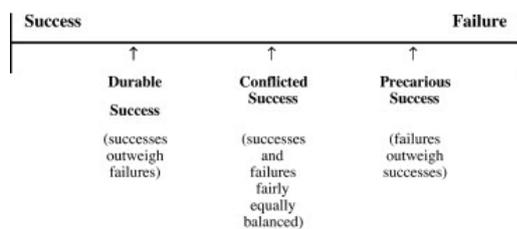
5 key evaluation steps to consider before you hit crisis mode

Unless you've had your head buried in the sand, you would know about the food tampering crisis that recently engulfed the Queensland strawberry industry (in particular) and seen other industries affected as well. This has been, and is still, a crisis situation until it is resolved, and the perpetrator/s are discovered.

From an evaluation perspective, going through a crisis, by its very nature, reveals a whole lot of key learnings that can be taken forward and applied at all levels of the organisation/industry. So how do we capture these and use them moving forward

[Alan Williams \(2011\)](#) proposed a framework that can be applied to help assess crisis management initiatives and is intended to help *better understand the difficulties and complexities of 'success' and 'failure' in crisis management*. He recognises that there are shades of grey along the spectrum between what could be considered a successful outcome or a failure and offers a systematic approach in understanding and evaluating crisis episodes.

The crisis management success/failure spectrum.



His framework is based around three dimensions of crisis management - processes, decisions and policy. Williams then provides criteria around what could be considered a success/failure in each of these as well as the types of evidence that could be considered to assess the outcomes.

This approach makes a lot of sense and I would think that the ideas of what a successful outcome or failure looks like (and their key indicators) in an organisation / industry should be workshopped through as part of the crisis management planning phase. And then revisited as a part of the evaluation process.

I'm a strong believer in planning your evaluation from the start including your data collection processes. So as you are developing your crisis management plan, build in your crisis evaluation plan. Of course it depends on the nature and type of issue you are dealing with, but if you've thought through different scenarios, you'll have a head start on collecting useful information that you can learn from.

Here then are the key evaluation steps that could be taken when developing a crisis management plan:

- 1. Map out data collection opportunities** and how/when to implement around planned response activities (e.g. media monitoring and analysis, social media monitoring and analysis, website analytics, online polls, interviews, structured observation, impact on sales, records and details of related incoming calls/emails, records of actions taken)
- 2. Develop key evaluation questions** around identified crisis scenarios and planned approaches (e.g. process related, decisions made, policies enacted/changed/impacted)

3. **Workshop your success and failure criteria.** These will be different for individual situations.
4. **Develop post crisis debrief process** – e.g. debrief workshop with key players / industry/organisation/stakeholder; broader survey (telephone or online) of relevant stakeholders (if relevant) on perception of crisis handling and impacts; case study based report (to be widely shared) of what happened, how it was handled and what has been learned; ongoing media/social media analysis of public sentiment / attitudes / key message delivery etc.
5. **Review and update crisis management plan**

The above should also consider the organic response to the issue, that is, the broader public response as a result of influencers outside of your immediate control. Social media (and traditional media) is a major driver of this and can often sway public mood one way or the other (often within the space of an hour) simply on the trending of a hashtag.

In the strawberry industry's case, social media (and the traditional media – particularly [abc radio](#)) really influenced public sentiment and actions in a positive way, seemingly without too much influence from the strawberry industry itself. Things don't always work out this well, but that's another article more about social media strategies for crisis management. Google should give you plenty of good reading around this.