
Guest editorial: Navigating uncharted waters: the forefront of crisis readiness

1. Introduction

Today's society is characterized by a wide range of interconnected challenges, from polarization and misinformation to climate change, public health emergencies, disruptive technologies, geopolitical conflicts and war. Accordingly, crisis communication scholarship continues to evolve alongside the growing complexity of the world. This growing complexity highlights the need for frameworks that strengthen crisis READINESS (Jin *et al.*, 2024a, b; Wang *et al.*, 2025) within an organization and beyond (e.g. industry and society).

The concept of crisis READINESS denotes "the ability of an organization to effectively respond in preparing for and managing a crisis situation" (Jin *et al.*, 2024a, p. 2). In their conceptual paper, Jin *et al.* (2024a) posit that READINESS refers to a proactive approach, encompassing "the initial planning stages to summon a state of action" (p. 2). The READINESS concept introduces a nuanced perspective on how organizations navigate crises. Unlike traditional crisis preparedness, which primarily focuses on developing plans and protocols before a crisis occurs, READINESS extends beyond these static measures to emphasize an organization's dynamic capacity to anticipate and act in evolving crisis situations. This involves ensuring that organizational leaders and employees are not only psychologically and operationally prepared, but also fostering an organizational culture (i.e. the READINESS culture) that prioritizes adaptability and agility in the face of uncertainty.

This Special Issue, *Navigating Uncharted Waters: The Forefront of Crisis Readiness*, builds on recent conceptual and empirical work on the READINESS framework in crisis management. Informed by the Crisis Communication Think Tank's 2024 theme on "READINESS," the Special Issue aims to offer novel perspectives and showcase innovative communication strategies that deepen our understanding of crisis READINESS. The contributions come from scholars in corporate and strategic communication, crisis and risk communication, management, leadership, media research and related fields.

In this editorial, we first introduce and summarize the eight articles included in this Special Issue. By highlighting how each advances our understanding of crisis READINESS and its implications for theory and practice, we then revisit the conceptual foundations of the READINESS framework and the Seven A-Principles as a measurable approach to crisis READINESS. Finally, we discuss how crisis READINESS can be measured and applied across organizational and national cultures and outline directions for future research.

2. Editor's reflection: contributions in this special issue

The eight articles examine READINESS across multiple levels (individual, team and organizational), multiple contexts (e.g. cyber risk, misinformation, internal communication, technological disruption) and multiple crisis types (e.g. sticky crises and artificial intelligence (AI) risks). Together, they position crisis READINESS as a multidisciplinary research topic and a practical lens for contemporary crisis communication.

Björck *et al.* (2025) open the Special Issue by examining what crisis READINESS means in the cyber domain, a setting marked by technological volatility and cross-sector interdependencies. Drawing on qualitative interviews with experts and managers from Swiss organizations across data-sensitive industries, the authors show that cyber crisis READINESS rests on structured preparedness, collaborative prevention and an adaptive foresight mindset. Their analysis highlights the behavioral and communication micro-foundations through which

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organizations internalize READINESS, for instance, emotionally intelligent leadership, routinized information sharing and trust-building practices and demonstrates that cyber READINESS must be understood as a dynamic capability that extends far beyond technical protections.

[Eng et al. \(2025\)](#) advance the conversation by showing how trauma-informed management can nurture a READINESS mindset among internal stakeholders. Using survey data from communication professionals who worked through the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, they provide evidence that trauma-informed principles (e.g. cultural responsiveness, voice, peer support, choice and transparent communication) significantly enhance employees' emotional and physical safety. These safety perceptions, in turn, predict organizational commitment and satisfaction. Their study demonstrates that trauma-informed practices are not limited to nonprofit or public-sector settings; they are integral to cultivating an employee-centered READINESS culture in organizational crisis communication.

[Kang et al. \(2025\)](#) offer a conceptual and empirical contribution by developing a validated scale for employee crisis READINESS. Through expert audits and two surveys with full-time US employees, the authors conceptualize READINESS as a cognitive, emotional and behavioral capacity that enables employees to act effectively under crisis conditions. Their findings underscore the interconnectedness of individual, collaborative and leadership READINESS: employees who perceive stronger crisis management leadership and collaborative team environments also report higher levels of personal READINESS. This reinforces the notion that organizational crisis READINESS is distributed, multi-level and cannot be separated from the READINESS of employees who enact crisis plans on the ground.

[Jong and Björck \(2025\)](#) extend the Special Issue's conceptual horizon by translating the Cynefin framework into crisis communication. They illustrate how distinguishing between simple, complicated, complex and chaotic contexts can equip practitioners with more refined diagnostic abilities. The article argues that READINESS is, at its core, a state of mind – one that requires embracing uncertainty, recognizing patterns and adopting strategies tailored to the specific causal structures of a crisis. In doing so, the authors provide crisis professionals with a heuristic that sharpens sense-making under ambiguity and strengthens both individual and organizational READINESS.

[Wang et al. \(2025\)](#) explore crisis READINESS in the context of generative AI, a domain in which communication professionals increasingly confront technological, ethical and professional uncertainties. Based on written interviews with professionals across Italy, Romania and the Netherlands, the authors identify the types of GenAI-related risks practitioners anticipate, and how they conceptualize READINESS at both individual and organizational levels. Their thematic analysis reveals seven core dimensions, ranging from skill development and ethical awareness to supportive digital and physical infrastructures, that shape READINESS for AI-driven transformation. This article situates READINESS within the broader debates on human–machine communication and disruptive innovation, offering timely insights for navigating GenAI-related uncertainties in professional practice.

[Tachkova and Brannon \(2025\)](#) contribute a conceptual framework linking psychological resilience, internal crisis communication and crisis READINESS. Integrating insights from health communication, affective events theory and stress inoculation training, the authors argue that strengthening employees' mental adaptability is an essential component of READINESS. Emotional intelligence training, clear internal communication and practices that reduce crisis-related stress are positioned as key mechanisms through which organizations can enhance employee well-being and, by extension, organizational resilience and READINESS. Their interdisciplinary approach foregrounds the human side of READINESS and the importance of supporting employees before, during and after crisis events.

[Pang and Taha \(2025\)](#) introduce the concept of “chrono crises”, denoting crises that emerge consecutively before earlier crises have been resolved, and examine how organizations respond under these conditions. Through multiple case studies across the period 2007–2024,

the authors show that media amplification, unresolved crisis histories and shifting attributions of responsibility create complex, dynamic pressures that challenge existing crisis frameworks. Their proposed Chrono Crisis READINESS Protocol provides organizations with practical guidance for allocating resources and selecting response strategies when crises overlap temporally. This contribution expands the READINESS conversation into the realm of sticky, recurring and intersecting crises. It also emphasizes the need for adaptive mindsets and fluid decision-making in real-time crisis sequences.

Liu and Zhang (2025) conclude the Special Issue with an experimental examination of crisis misinformation management. Comparing corrective communication by the corporation, employee backup and the involvement of social media influencers, their study shows that all three strategies can reduce belief in misinformation and enhance corporate reputation, primarily by increasing perceived crisis READINESS. By integrating the READINESS framework directly into the study design, the authors demonstrate how READINESS perceptions shape stakeholders' evaluations in misinformation contexts and how multi-actor communication efforts can strengthen organizational READINESS in the eyes of the public.

In summary, these eight contributions illustrate the breadth and depth of contemporary scholarship on crisis READINESS. They demonstrate that READINESS is not confined to a singular level, sector or type of crisis; rather, it emerges at the intersection of organizational structures, leadership, professional judgment, employee well-being, technological change and the wider information ecosystem.

3. Advancing the READINESS framework and its measurement

Across the Special Issue, READINESS appears both as a measurable construct and a lived, evolving practice – something enacted within and across organizations, professions and societies. It highlights the importance of proactive engagement and continuous adaptation across different uncertainty-driven situations. Within this broader scope, our initial attempt is to develop a READINESS measure that can be used to assess the extent to which individuals, crisis teams and organizations are prepared to face (sticky) crises and crisis spillovers.

While the question of “what is READINESS” has been partially answered by Jin *et al.* (2024a) and by a follow-up study that interviewed communication practitioners (Jin *et al.*, 2024b) to gather their understanding of how this concept differentiates from crisis preparedness and resilience, we know very little about “how we know we are ready” both in academic and practical senses. Many PR and communication experts interviewed about READINESS indicators for a qualitative study agreed that it was difficult to observe tangible indicators of READINESS because it is an abstract psychological “state of mind” concept (Shivers *et al.*, 2024, p. 22). Therefore, to know whether we are ready, we must move beyond conceptual discussions to develop a measurable framework for crisis READINESS. Without a concrete way to assess READINESS, organizations may struggle to evaluate their capacity to effectively anticipate and respond to crises.

Developing a measure for crisis READINESS is essential for benchmarking and improving crisis management strategies. Such a measure will allow researchers and practitioners to assess the degree to which an organization is truly ready for a crisis. This means identifying the key dimensions that contribute to READINESS, and translating these elements into reliable and valid indicators. To fill this void, this editorial takes the first step in introducing a short-form measure of READINESS built on the *Seven A-Principles* (see Figure 1). We aim to pave the way for future research to validate and refine the READINESS scale.

4. The seven A-principles – a measurable framework for crisis READINESS

In the READINESS model introduced by Jin *et al.* (2024a), three pillars are identified as foundational for the development and strengthening of READINESS: mindset, multi-level efficacy and dynamic process. The development of the Seven A-Principles will be discussed

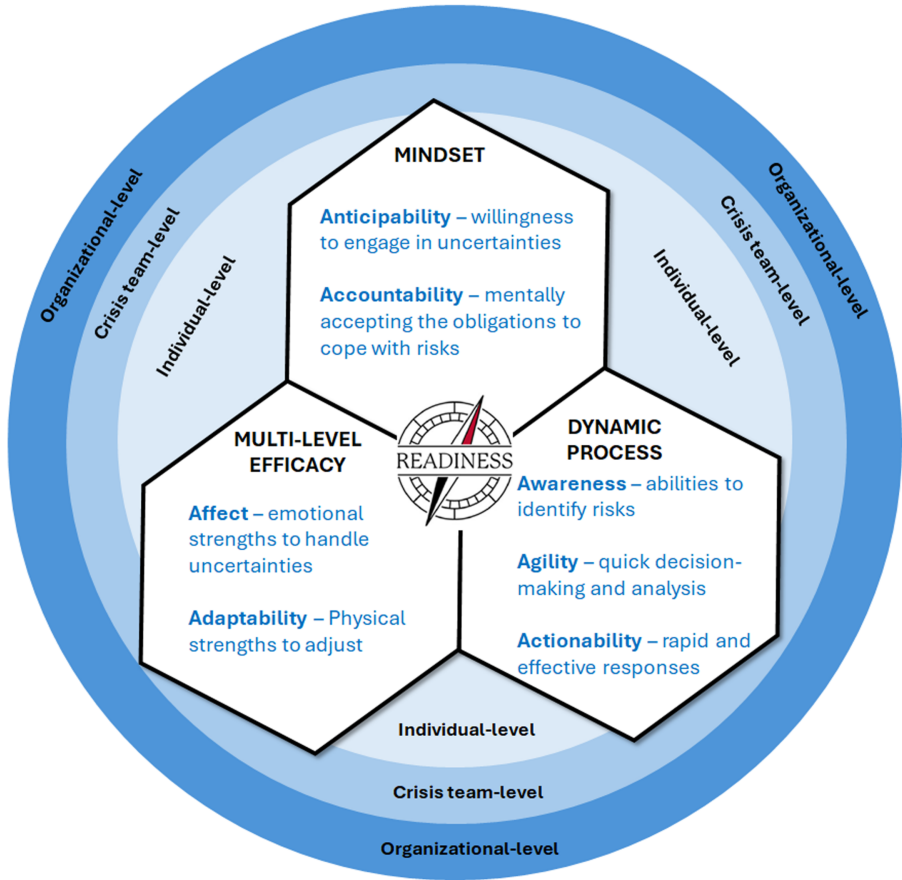


Figure 1. Seven A-principles of the crisis READINESS model at the individual, crisis team and organizational levels

around the three pillars. By aligning each principle with the relevant pillar, we hope to provide a clear pathway for organizations to cultivate their crisis READINESS.

4.1 The READINESS mindset pillar: anticipability and accountability

The mindset pillar is grounded in the crisis leadership literature (see, e.g. Coombs, 2015; Jin, 2010) and is unique to READINESS. It asserts that for individuals and organizations to become ready, they must be willing to learn and believe that they will emerge stronger after a crisis. In this context, the READINESS mindset reflects a high level of openness and the perception of risks as opportunities for improvement, separating it from other crisis communication concepts such as preparedness and resilience (Jin *et al.*, 2024a). We propose that two A-principles are essential for establishing a READINESS mindset: anticipability and accountability.

Anticipability involves the willingness to expect and engage with ambiguities and risks. The concept is rooted in ambiguity tolerance/intolerance. People with greater ambiguity tolerance are more open, flexible and creative. Ambiguity-tolerant people view uncertain situations as positive, while ambiguity-intolerant people view the situations as a threat (Rubiales-Nunez *et al.*, 2024; Stoycheva, 2010). Most importantly for READINESS,

ambiguity tolerance increases a person's ability to cope with uncertain situations (Rubiales-Nunez *et al.*, 2024). Higher anticipability allows individuals and organizations to better foresee the likelihood of negative events occurring and to perceive uncertainties as more attractive than threatening, thereby enhancing crisis preparation and response strategies. It is important to note that uncertainties can originate from multiple sources in a crisis context, including but not limited to unpredictability, insolubility, incomprehensibility and inconsistency (see Table 2 in Hillen *et al.*, 2017, p. 67). Consequently, the principle of anticipability should facilitate the assessment of a wide range of uncertainties within the crisis context through engaging in forward-looking. For example, an international airline company embracing anticipability can expect various global disruptions, including rare negative events, such as natural catastrophes, geopolitical tensions and cyberattacks. Instead of waiting for a crisis to unfold, the airline will proactively monitor early warning indicators (e.g. disease outbreaks, regulatory shifts, or cybersecurity threats) and integrate adaptive response strategies, as a result of anticipability. By mentally preparing for various potential disruptions, the airline embraces a READINESS mindset and demonstrates a proactive rather than reactive approach to crisis management.

Accountability in crisis management generally refers to the obligation of individuals, crisis teams and organizations to take responsibility for their decisions and actions during a crisis (Hwang and Park, 2016). In the context of the READINESS mindset, we define accountability as the mental acceptance of one's obligations to cope with risks. This sense of accountability and obligation enables individuals and organizations to manage crisis-related tasks rapidly and efficiently. In practice, identifying who is responsible for specific actions in the face of crises is not always straightforward and can resemble a game of ping-pong. Therefore, cultivating an accountable mindset is crucial for fostering a culture of responsibility and enhancing trust within crisis teams, organizations and beyond.

The interconnectedness of the two principles – anticipability and accountability – suggests that they may develop in parallel and reinforce each other. The absence of either principle is likely to hinder the development of a robust READINESS mindset. For example, while an anticipatory mindset enables individuals and organizations to foresee potential risks and uncertainties, if no one within the organization assumes accountability for acting upon these anticipations, the READINESS mindset becomes ineffective. Conversely, accountability without anticipability can lead to reactionary decision-making that is neither strategic nor forward-thinking. Taking disaster management as an example, if local authorities are tasked with ensuring community safety (i.e. having the accountability in place) but fail to anticipate the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events related to the climate crisis, their response efforts may fall short in mitigating harm. They may not take proactive measures such as reinforcing infrastructure, establishing early warning systems, or educating the public. Therefore, the ability to foresee risks must be coupled with a strong sense of responsibility to take action. In other words, for a true READINESS mindset to emerge, both anticipability and accountability must be actively cultivated.

4.2 *The multi-level efficacy pillar: adaptability and affect*

The multi-level efficacy pillar reflects READINESS as the ability of individuals and organizations to engage in actions that lead to desired outcomes (Jin *et al.*, 2024a; Bandura, 2012). While efficacy literature emphasizes capabilities at both individual and collective levels (i.e. self-efficacy and collective efficacy, see Bandura, 1997), which involve self-belief and shared beliefs in achieving positive outcomes, work on emotional regulation (e.g. Roth *et al.*, 2019; Benita, 2020) has highlighted how affect or affective states enable people to adjust their views when facing uncertain situations. In this context, both physical and emotional strengths are crucial for coping with crises. Thus, we included both aspects in the multi-level efficacy pillar: adaptability and affect.

The *Adaptability* principle refers to the individual and organizational “capacity to redefine underlying character in response to large-scale change” (Denison and Mishra, 1995, p. 215). The ability to interpret incoming signals and to adjust accordingly is essential to this concept, and the strength to adapt can be related to strategic, managerial, operational and individual behavior-level changes (Deverell and Olsson, 2010). Adaptability, embedded within multi-level efficacy, stresses the importance of being flexible in modifying plans when new information or challenges arise. This flexibility enables individuals and organizations to make optimal use of resources and respond effectively to uncertainties, thereby fostering a strong READINESS. A lack of adaptability in crisis management can have severe consequences. One example is the response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. One of the primary failures in crisis response was the inability of key agencies, including FEMA and local governments, to adjust their crisis management strategies in real time as conditions rapidly deteriorated. Despite early warning signs of the storm’s severity and the vulnerability of New Orleans’ levee system, authorities failed to adapt their evacuation plans and resource allocation to match the escalating crisis. This lack of flexibility led to delays in rescue efforts, mismanagement of relief supplies and heightened suffering among affected communities (Kapucu, 2006). Had the agencies demonstrated greater adaptability – such as adjusting evacuation protocols based on evolving weather patterns, coordinating more efficiently across jurisdictional lines and reallocating emergency resources dynamically – the scale of human and economic loss could have been significantly mitigated. Therefore, without adaptability, even well-structured crisis plans risk failure when confronted with unforeseen challenges.

Affect or affective states, on the other hand, draw on emotional strength to cope with uncertainties (Marion-Jetten *et al.*, 2021). The mindfulness-to-meaning theory suggests that individuals with strong emotional regulation are better at viewing risks and uncertainties as opportunities for growth and are more likely to “positively reappraise adverse events and savor the positive aspects of experience” (Garland *et al.*, 2015, p. 296). Therefore, we argue that affect, as a key principle of the multi-level efficacy pillar, should not be overlooked in the development of READINESS, as it is closely linked to the desired outcomes of crisis management. The importance of affect in crisis management is evident in the case of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster. In the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami that led to the meltdown at the Fukushima nuclear power plant, the Japanese government and TEPCO (Tokyo Electric Power Company) faced widespread fear and uncertainty among citizens. The lack of emotional engagement and empathetic communication from officials significantly contributed to public distrust and panic. While technical information was provided, the failure to acknowledge the emotional distress of the affected populations – such as fear of radiation exposure and displacement – undermined efforts to maintain order and encourage cooperative response behaviors. In contrast, leaders who effectively regulate their own emotions and express empathy can inspire confidence and resilience in both response teams and the public. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, New Zealand’s Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern demonstrated strong affective leadership by consistently addressing the emotional concerns of citizens through clear, empathetic and reassuring communication. Her ability to acknowledge uncertainty while emphasizing collective resilience helped foster public trust and compliance with government measures (Wilson, 2020). These two examples highlight the critical role of affect in developing crisis READINESS – not only in fostering self-efficacy among crisis responders but also in influencing collective efficacy among the public. Without emotional regulation and empathetic leadership, crisis response efforts may fail to build trust and cooperation, ultimately weakening READINESS at both individual and organizational levels.

4.3 *The dynamic process pillar: awareness, agility and actionality*

Furthermore, as crises are inherently fluid and often evolve in ways that cannot be fully predicted, the dynamic process serves as a critical pillar of READINESS (Jin *et al.*, 2024a). Just as a crisis unfolds, so too must crisis READINESS develop, indicating that READINESS

is not a static mindset or capability but an ongoing process that adapts in response to changing circumstances. Accordingly, agility is at the core of this pillar, driving the dynamic process (Jin *et al.*, 2024a, b), which in our view encompasses three principles – awareness (sensing agility), agility (decision-making agility) and actionality (acting agility). Barthe-Delanoë *et al.* (2018) assert that agility is particularly important in collaborative situations, which aligns well with crisis contexts, as these often require the coordination of manpower and resources in the short term.

Awareness, Agility and Actionality function as a chain of factors driving the dynamic process, starting with risk detection, followed by efficient decision-making and culminating in flexible action. First, to ensure the agility of crisis READINESS, it is crucial for individuals and organizations to identify risks and uncertainties that necessitate changes – this is the essence of awareness. This requires proactive environmental scanning to regularly monitor signs for emerging risks, alongside benchmarking efforts to refine risk detection by comparing against best practices. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Taiwan’s early detection of virus mutations through proactive surveillance and collaboration with global health organizations allowed for the rapid implementation of preventive measures, demonstrating the power of awareness in mitigating crises before they escalate (Wang *et al.*, 2020). Awareness or sensing agility, as reflected in this example, is thus crucial for cultivating and enhancing crisis READINESS. Here, it is important to clearly distinguish between awareness and anticipability. While awareness focuses on identifying risks and uncertainties through active monitoring, anticipability emphasizes the ability to mentally prepare for potential crises even in the absence of clear warning signs. In other words, anticipability fosters a mindset that acknowledges the inevitability of crises, whereas awareness is concerned with recognizing and interpreting signals as they emerge in real time. These two principles complement each other in the sense that awareness provides a foundation for timely responses and anticipability ensures a forward-looking approach conducive to READINESS.

Second, decision-making agility places efficiency at the forefront, often relying on organizational infrastructure that enables or constrains front-line teams or functional units in making rapid, real-time decisions and taking ownership (Barthe-Delanoë *et al.*, 2018). In crisis communication, decision-making agility refers to the ability of organizations to assess unfolding situations and synthesize information from multiple sources in a short timeframe. This ability is particularly important in highly dynamic crisis situations (e.g. crisis spillovers, see Wang and Laufer, 2024), where misinformation can spread rapidly and public sentiment can shift unexpectedly. Here, agile organizations can leverage their stakeholders as valuable Allies and credible sources to combat misinformation effectively. For instance, maintaining strong relationships with traditional media outlets or governmental entities can provide authoritative support during misinformation crises (e.g. van der Meer and Jin, 2020). Similarly, fostering positive relationships with employees can lead to effective advocacy, as employees’ voluntary supportive messages are often perceived as authentic and have been shown to counter organization-related misinformation effectively (Jin *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, organizational agility involves a keen awareness of external voices and sentiments, ensuring the organization’s consistent communication of values and engagement with socio-political issues (van der Meer and Jonkman, 2021). Any inconsistency in communication or actions can create a fertile breeding ground for misperceptions or misinformation attacks. Effective decision-making agility ensures that crisis communication is not only fast, but also contextually relevant and aligned with public concerns.

Third, actionality concerns the timely execution of these decisions, as delays in action may exacerbate the situation. Individuals and organizations with high acting agility are able to act quickly, mitigating immediate threats before they escalate and spiral out of control. While one may argue that fast action risks mistakes, it is important to clarify that the agility we advocate involves informed and decisive actions, with the capacity for adjustment in a short time. Also, it is worth mentioning that only possessing awareness and agility but not actionality – recognizing the urgency of a crisis and making efficient decisions on crisis response

strategies, but failing to act in a timely manner – can result in crisis communication failures. For instance, during the initial outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, many governments and organizations were quick to acknowledge the severity of the situation and internally strategize responses. However, delays in executing public communication campaigns and implementing containment measures allowed misinformation to proliferate. It ultimately reduced public trust and complicated crisis management efforts (Garrett, 2020). Thus, while awareness and agility allow organizations to identify and strategize responses effectively, the lack of actionality in executing those decisions can lead to increased reputational damage. Therefore, all three principles – awareness (sensing agility), agility (decision-making agility) and actionality (acting agility) – must work in tandem to ensure that the strengthening of crisis READINESS aligns with the dynamic process of crisis situations.

5. Measuring crisis READINESS at the individual, crisis team and organizational levels

Since crisis READINESS is a multidimensional construct (Jin *et al.*, 2024a, b), it requires assessment at multiple levels to fully capture its complexity and applicability across different organizational contexts. Building on the Seven A-principles of the crisis READINESS model, we propose measuring READINESS at three levels: individual, crisis team and organizational (see Figure 1).

At the individual level, crisis READINESS reflects an employee's personal ability to anticipate, assess and act in response to crisis situations. Measuring READINESS at this level allows organizations to assess self-efficacy, identify training gaps and foster a proactive mindset among employees. Crisis team-level READINESS measures the collective efficacy, team coordination and decision-making dynamics that influence how teams respond to crises. Strong team READINESS ensures that roles are clearly defined, and team members can adapt collaboratively to evolving crisis situations. Needless to say, crisis management relies on well-coordinated teams that can work together effectively under high-pressure conditions. Without a high level of team cohesion, crisis response efforts risk becoming fragmented and ineffective. Beyond individuals and teams, crisis READINESS must also be assessed at the organizational level, where leadership commitment and institutional capacity play an essential role in crisis management. Measuring READINESS at this level allows for an evaluation of structural agility and leadership engagement.

This multi-level approach helps identify misalignments. For instance, an organization may have strong organizational efficacy but lack individual employee READINESS to execute crisis communication effectively. Conversely, a highly skilled crisis team may struggle if the organization does not provide adequate structural support. By assessing crisis READINESS at these three levels, we gain a holistic perspective on how the Seven A-principles are embedded within an organization.

6. Mind the culture: measuring crisis READINESS across organizational and national contexts

We know that to cultivate crisis READINESS, there must be an organizational culture committed to READINESS (Shivers *et al.*, 2024; Wang *et al.*, 2025). Even beyond this, organizations can cultivate a culture of crisis READINESS within their organizations by nurturing “organizational willingness, leadership willingness, emotional crisis leadership, commitment to READINESS, and the empowerment of communicators” (Shivers *et al.*, 2024, p. 24). We also know that organizational culture can impact how crisis READINESS is carried out in specific organizations, meaning that one organization will likely take different actions than another to reach the same goal of continual crisis READINESS (Shivers *et al.*, 2024). READINESS is not a “one-size-fits-all.” The preparation and expression of READINESS will likely differ across organizations with different cultures.

For instance, consider the following example of the preparation of READINESS. A CEO might be the one measuring and keeping track of READINESS in one organization, and a crisis team might be keeping track of it in another organization. One option is not necessarily more correct than the other, but the correct choice is entirely dependent on the organizational culture. The organizational unit assigned that task should be the most effective unit for READINESS. The most effective unit to carry out tasks conducive to READINESS will be different in different organizations and national cultural contexts.

Moreover, the expression of READINESS can differ based on organizational and national cultural contexts. One instance of this can be examined by considering Hofstede's (1980) model of cultural dimensions of individualism versus collectivism. In collectivist societies, collaborative communal efforts in crisis management that continuously prioritize shared values are acts reflecting READINESS. On the other hand, those in individualistic societies will need to be "ready" first as individuals before combining their efforts to collaborate. Both reflect READINESS, but the actions indicating READINESS are different.

Despite cultural differences in the preparation and expression of crisis READINESS, interviews from PR and communication experts at various organizations in different sectors and countries show us that READINESS as a theoretical concept transcends cultural differences (Shivers *et al.*, 2024). This means that its central meaning remains the same regardless of culture: "the ability of an organization to effectively respond in preparing for and managing a crisis situation" (Jin *et al.*, 2024a, p. 2). The word "effectively" here provides dynamic flexibility in consideration of culture because what is most effective for crisis READINESS in one culture will not be the most effective option in another culture. Effectiveness in READINESS means prioritizing the three pillars foundational to the concept as outlined previously: mindset, multi-level efficacy and dynamic process. These pillars tap into the universality of READINESS, transcending cultural differences.

With organizational culture and national culture in consideration, it is important that the items used to measure the Seven A-Principles tap into the theoretical universality of READINESS. This will ensure a measure of READINESS that can be globally applied. Of course, READINESS plans will need to be tailored based on cultural considerations, but the indicators of READINESS should be universal, which is parallel to the concept's theoretical grounding (Jin *et al.*, 2024a). This is another reason why READINESS is key to crisis management; its universality cannot quite be captured by the interrelated yet discriminant concepts of preparedness and resilience that would differ by culture (Jin *et al.*, 2024b).

7. Advancing the READINESS measure: next steps

As businesses and organizational leaders around the world have noted the increasing complexity of risks and crises (e.g. polarization, geopolitical conflicts, employee activism, social unrest, human and environmental health hazards), our crisis READINESS measure, grounded in the 7A principles, responds to the strong needs for strategic decision-making and communication management efforts. Organizations and their leadership teams must be "ready" to address a more complex environment and increasingly more competitive and conflicting media landscape. Future research, grounded in the initial conceptualization and framework development, will start with empirical studies, via both qualitative and quantitative approaches, to gauge the content validity, reliability and validity of the dimensionality and items, as well as other psychometric phases including predictability (regarding key crisis outcomes such as reputation, confidence and supportive behavior) and discriminative validity (against preparedness and resilience). Specifically, we will take the following initial empirical examination steps: (1) Conduct a preliminary USA-Netherlands crisis READINESS empirical research (i.e. conducting preliminary industry practitioner surveys and field testing in order to develop and test key dimensions and measures that businesses and organizations can use), (2) facilitate further partnership development in strengthening sustainable USA-Netherlands research and service activities (i.e. annual symposiums and executive workshops) and (3) lay

the foundation of new means for approaching crisis management with scientific rigor and evidenced validity and reliability that will position us in pursuit of specific sources of external funding, such as National Science Foundation's USA-Netherlands collaborative research opportunities, Dutch Research Council, European Commission, European Research Council and European Science Foundation.

Based on the Crisis Communication Think Tank's US and International membership and core partner networks, these activities will help our READINESS team establish an innovative READINESS Crafting System, in collaboration with Erasmus, supported by "scientific research" and "engineering design" pillars constructed by researchers and trainers targeted for CCTT-based global networks and research and cross-learning markets in three phases: First, based on the published conceptual model of READINESS, the USA-Netherlands research team will develop the initial survey instruments and pilot test them among CCTT practitioner members in the USA and globally. Crisis READINESS Forum with crisis communication and management professionals will discuss the READINESS framework and proposed scale, including checking the scale items before formal validation. Second, a professional survey firm will be hired to recruit crisis and risk leaders across private and public sectors in the USA (e.g. Fortune 500 companies, large nonprofit organizations and government agencies) to respond to the survey. Results from the survey will shed light on the READINESS dimensionality and gauge measurement reliability and validity of the READINESS scale. Third, following the psychometric development procedure, the science team will identify an appropriate set of READINESS descriptors and compare the usefulness of the READINESS descriptor set with the usefulness of other measures in assessing READINESS-related concepts such as preparedness and resilience.

The new READINESS measurement tool will be implemented in CCTT-led, executive training programs in the USA and Europe. The READINESS team will co-deliver the training in-person at both workshops to facilitate cross-learning based on the refined READINESS model and measurement toolkit. Together, we will continue to sustain the ongoing efforts of crafting READINESS for a world of complex risk and crisis, protecting reputation, business continuity and health and safety.

8. Concluding remarks

As Guest Editors, we view this Special Issue as both a milestone and a beginning. Collectively, the eight articles help move crisis READINESS from an emerging idea toward a more mature, theoretically grounded and empirically substantiated concept. At the same time, they illuminate the work that remains: operationalizing READINESS across cultures and sectors, stress-testing it in diverse crises (e.g. sticky and "chrono" crises) and attending more closely to the READINESS experiences of vulnerable groups.

This Special Issue also introduces the short-form measure of READINESS built on the *Seven A-Principles* for benchmarking and improving crisis management strategies. While it aims to pave the way for future research to validate the READINESS scale, we recognize that this is only an initial attempt – to develop the short-form measure into a full measure requires critical reflection and refinement that relies on valuable contributions of scholars and practitioners alike.

Therefore, we hope this Special Issue fosters deeper collaboration between scholars and practitioners. Many contributions draw on practitioner insights, field-based data and practice-driven questions. They highlight that READINESS must be co-developed through academic-industry dialog. We are grateful to the authors, reviewers and the editorial team of the *Journal of Communication Management* for their commitment and support. Their collective efforts have helped us "navigate" this Special Issue through its own uncharted waters, and we hope the ideas presented here inspire further research and practice aimed at building more humane and inclusive crisis-ready organizations.

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Further reading

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