

IS REPUTATION MANAGEABLE?

The Case of the ICRC

Gilles Carbonnier

Head, Private Sector Relations, ICRC

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ICRC

Summary: Key Issues for Discussion

- ▶ in armed conflicts, reputation = life or death
 - ▶▶ staff security & licence to operate
 - ▶▶ access to war zones & detention places

- 1. confidentiality vs. transparency
 - ▶▶ is confidentiality still widely accepted and understood?
 - ▶▶ how to deal with leaks?

- 2. perception
 - ▶▶ info & images flow worldwide in real time
 - ↳ simultaneous impact at global & local levels
 - ▶▶ consistency between desired identity and perception?

- 3. conflicting demands from ≠ stakeholders
 - ▶▶ how to balance expectations from ≠ audiences?



What is the ICRC?

- ▶ humanitarian organization
 - ▶▶ mandate: protect and assist persons affected by armed conflict
 - ▶▶ prevent violations of international humanitarian law (IHL)
 - ▶▶ offices in 80 countries; >12'000 employees
 - ▶▶ visits to detainees (1/2 million a year); protection of civilians; restoring family links; provisions of medical and material assistance; promotion of IHL
- ▶ operating principles
 - ▶▶ constructive engagement with all parties
 - ▶▶ confidential dialogue



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Reputation at the ICRC

- ▶ desired identity → strategies, action, behaviour
 - ▶ strictly humanitarian; guardian of IHL
 - ▶ non-partisan, independent, impartial
 - ▶ aim: accepted by all parties → access in armed conflict
- ▶ constraints
 - ▶ conflicts = highly polarized / politicized environment
 - ▶ ICRC mandate → activities can be perceived as political
 - ▶ information circulate worldwide in real time (incl. rumour and incomplete info)
- ▶ exogenous drivers
 - ▶ humanitarian community: weak accountability? scandals?
 - ▶ very strong brand: "Red Cross"



Who are the Stakeholders?

- ▶ policy makers and opinion leaders
 - ▶▶ governments: defence, justice, interior, foreign affairs, armed forces, etc.
 - ▶▶ rebel leaders, religious leaders, community chief,
 - ▶▶ international community: UN, NGOs, business,
 - ▶▶ media
- ▶ beneficiaries / clients
- ▶ donors
- ▶ ICRC and Red Cross/Crescent staff!



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How do we Manage Reputation?

▶ local level

- ▶▶ face-to-face with political and opinion leaders
- ▶▶ excellence in humanitarian assistance → client satisfaction
- ▶▶ **consistent staff and corporate behaviour**

▶ regional & global level

- ▶▶ COM & media relations, networking, diplomacy

↪ **transparency, consistency, predictability**



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Monitoring Reputation: Indicators

- ▶ local level
 - ▶▶ access to leaders?
 - ▶▶ access to protected persons?
 - ▶▶ what stakeholders say about ICRC?
 - ↪ focus groups, polls,...
- ▶ regional & global level
 - ▶▶ donors
 - ▶▶ media monitoring & environment scanning
 - ▶▶ polls (e.g. Gallup *voice of the people*: 60 countries, 50'000 interviews)



Key Issues / Dilemmas (1)

- ▶ confidentiality vs. transparency
 - ▶ **confidentiality still widely acceptable?**
 - ↪ yes: if its rationale is easy to explain and to understand
 - ▶ **confidentiality and transparency always contradictory?**
 - ↪ no: be transparent and consistent about confidentiality!

- ▶ what if confidentiality is **breached**?
 - ▶ e.g. ICRC report on detention visits in Iraq (Abu Ghraib)

- ↪ how to manage crises?



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Key Issues / Dilemmas (2)

- ▶ perception
 - ▶▶ shaped in real time, global & local
 - ▶▶ speed vs. quality of information
- ↪ **can we effectively engage the media?**
How?
 - ↪ long-term engagement with media shaping the perception of key stakeholders: e.g. WSJ, WP, Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, Fox, NZZ,...
- ▶ balance conflicting demands from different stakeholders
 - ↪ **can we ignore some stakeholders?**
 - ↪ is power an important factor?

