

From the Grassroots Upward: Imagining a Grassroots Care Ethics Framework for Critical Crisis Communication and Management

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ABSTRACT

This essay presents a critique of traditional crisis management and its communication frameworks which exhibit managerial biases, functionalistic tendencies, and marginalizing effects in their prescribed strategies amidst crisis situations. These theoretical and practical orientations of the field result in the voices of the typically less powerful publics and stakeholders being sidelined and erased, most especially those of the grassroots. For instance, theoretical frameworks such as the image repair theory (Benoit, 1997), apology theory (Hearit, 2006), and situational crisis communication theory (Coombs, 2007) manifest similar corporatist biases—advocating crisis responses strategies that are organization-led, organization-oriented, and organization-benefitting—largely born out of the field’s roots in public relations and organizational communication. In response to this disciplinary lapse, this critical essay seeks to imagine and encourage the imagination of an ethical crisis management framework that highlights and incorporates care ethics (Gilligan, 1977) in crisis response strategies, and prevents grassroots erasure. This grassroots-oriented care ethics framework revolves around the affective and relational dimensions of a crisis situation, addressing the emotions and relationships that surface between the organization and the less powerful stakeholders. In responding to the crisis, the imagined framework proposes crisis resolutions that are formulated from below, implemented upward, and empowered downward. This critical essay then presents cases of crisis situations and resolutions that allude to the proposed ethical framework. The limitations of the grassroots care ethics framework related to the existing corporate interests, the efficacy of the grassroots community, and the affective and relational labor required by the framework are also discussed. Ultimately, the paper presents the potential and practical applications of the proposed framework in contexts of crisis.

Keywords: crisis management, ethics of care, grassroots, critical crisis communication, crisis communication theory

INTRODUCTION

Crisis communication, having emerged from public relations and organizational communication, exhibits orientations and values that reflect the corporate interests (Kim & Dutta, 2009; Latosa, 2020). Many of the foundational and contemporary frameworks for crisis communication such as the image repair theory (Benoit, 1997), apology theory (Hearit, 2006), and situational crisis communication theory (Coombs, 2007) among others are focused on reducing the impact of various crises on the organizational health and repairing the reputation of the said organization if and when damaged. The centrality of the organization-in-crisis in most crisis situations has influenced most frameworks to become organization-oriented, organization-led, and organization-benefitting (Cheney & Christensen, 2001). These conditions and traditions, unfortunately, have led to the erasure of the affected public's voices and those farthest away from the organization—the grassroots.

This essay argues that given the corporate focus of most crisis communication strategies, similar to what Kim and Dutta argue as well (2009), the discipline has developed to serve the interests of organizations much more than the affected and typically less powerful publics (Sellnow & Ulmer, 1995). This is further reflected by the lack of crisis management ethics frameworks that emphasize the dignity, humanity, and empowerment among the grassroots communities during and after a crisis largely due to financial and legal risks (Coombs, 2015). In addition, even if organizations attempt to alleviate the impact of crisis on their publics and help in the recovery of such communities—their subscription to traditionally corporate frameworks of crisis response would prevent them from acquiring intimate knowledge of the grassroots experience and crafting a realistic and grounded crisis management strategy for the publics (Roper, 2005; Vardeman-Winter et al., 2014). In other words, the dominance of top-down corporate crisis frameworks persistently prevents organizations from truly immersing with the grassroots, familiarizing with their experiences, and employing a strategy that emerges first from the grassroots then implements upward. Such top-down dominance also hinders the recognition of the affects, crucial relationships, and demand for genuine care among the grassroots and other compromised publics (Nakagawa & Shaw, 2004). Intentional care, among other things, is what makes a crisis response ethical (Gilligan, 1977; Simola, 2003), and exactly what the traditional crisis frameworks for and from the corporations lack in particular.

In response to this disciplinary lapse, this essay seeks to imagine and encourage the imagination of a *grassroots care ethics framework* for critical crisis communication—an ethical care framework that is affectively and relationally oriented toward and upward from the grassroots. This framework begins the crisis resolution from the bottom, requires downward and lateral empowerment, and

implements upward among the organizations. The grassroots care ethics approach seeks to decenter the organization by centering and concentrating the resources, power, and care at the grassroots level and applying strategies upward rather than downward.

CRITIQUE OF TRADITIONAL CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Limitations of the dominant crisis communication studies

Prior to establishing an alternative ethical framework for crisis communication, it must be established first how and why there is a need for one. The specific lapses of the traditional frameworks should be illustrated to highlight how the alternative approaches, such as the one imagined by this essay, would respond to each of them. According to Kim and Dutta's (2009) examination of the dominant crisis management frameworks, the current orientation of the discipline remains to exhibit a managerial bias, a functionalistic understanding of its purpose, and a tendency to neglect the significance and voices of the marginalized stakeholders.

First, in the prototypical sense, crisis communication is originally and traditionally a discipline dedicated to the protection of capitalistic profits (Fraustino & Kennedy, 2018; Karlberg, 1996). The original and traditional strategies for managing crisis and reducing reputational damage are all motivated by profit production, under the assumption that a healthy reputation positively correlates with larger income (Fraustino & Kennedy, 2018; Fearn-Banks, 2001). Due to these orientations, crisis communication strategies are typically bent not on genuinely serving the stakeholders and the publics, but on pacifying, appeasing, and managing them. Hence, the managerial bias or the tendency to treat publics as manageable segments of the market. The primary issue with such perspective, apart from its association with capitalism and entrepreneurship, is its likelihood to dehumanize the stakeholders and even more so, the grassroots. By reducing the publics to mere audience segments, experiences of struggles and survival in the face of crisis are also reduced to quick metrics and key performance indicators. This profiteering perspective also births the highly transactional give-and-take nature of the relationship between the organization and the publics which ultimately prevents the growth of more intimate affects between the two (Liu, 2007).

Second, crisis communication under the dominant frameworks is treated as a linear process that involves functionalistic message production and reception (Kim & Dutta, 2009). This is arguably a more granular manifestation of the discipline's managerial bias wherein the primary role of crisis response is to function as a pacifier for the affected publics. In this perspective, crisis communication messages

are reduced to devices and contents deployed by an organization only to appease the stakeholders — nothing else (Duffy, 2000; Coombs, 2001). The functionalistic orientation further reinforces the transactional relationship of organizations with the people. In addition to what Kim and Dutta (2009) argued, this orientation of the dominant frameworks also further reduces the humanity of the publics, especially the grassroots. By assuming that the publics' struggles and discontentment can be switched on and off by specific crises and crisis response strategies, the framework neglects the individual and collective autonomy and emotions of the people, and reduces their experiences as by-products of the organizational crisis and the resolutions thereof (Curtin & Gaither, 2005).

Lastly, the dominant crisis communication agenda illustrates the false myth that the marginalized sectors neither have voices nor impact (Fearn-Banks, 2001). The corporate sector fails to hear the voices from below not because these voices are not sufficiently salient, but because they refuse to listen as well as actively erases them. This results from the tendency of traditional crisis management to segment stakeholder sectors by order of importance relative to the organizational reputation, and to prioritize the most effectual or impactful ones when employing crisis responses (Fearn-Banks, 2001; Kim & Dutta, 2009). Similarly, the dominant crisis responses—due to their tendency to listen only to stakeholders who directly and significantly influence their reputation—also tend to neglect and erase the voices of the grassroots who may demonstrate little to no impact on the organizations' reputation. The managerial bias and functionalistic orientation of crisis management also ultimately contribute to the dehumanization of the publics and their reduction to mere reactive and pacifiable audiences.

Grassroots as erased stakeholders

In light of the traditions and lapses of the dominant crisis communication frameworks, this essay further explores the conditions of the grassroots community as erased stakeholders. Such exploration revolves around three themes: crisis solutions for the grassroots coming from above, the downward implementation of the crisis response, and the absence of downward and lateral empowerment in grassroots crisis situations. This section seeks to illustrate the specific consequences of erasing and decentering the grassroots community, and spotlighting the powerful organizations in the process of resolving crises.

Crisis resolutions for the grassroots coming from above

Ironically, many crisis resolutions were designed solely by the very organizations that caused the crises and rarely engage the publics who were affected and inconvenienced by them (Kim & Dutta, 2009). A similar case can be argued in

the context of the grassroots community. Crisis responses that are supposed to improve the conditions of the compromised grassroots are crafted by supposed experts who are not familiar with the experiences, the needs, and the grounded resolutions that the people from below aspire for.

As a result, the crisis responses are only effective to the extent that the organization needs it to be, but not to an extent that also satisfies the grassroots. The functionalistic orientation of crisis management also manifests here—crisis managers from above designing solutions for the ordinary people whose experience they do not recognize (Vardeman-Winter et al., 2014). The process of crisis resolution stops once the organizational image has already been repaired.

The downward implementation of crisis response

In connection with the previous argument, one of the consequences of grassroots erasure in crisis communication and management is that the publics, especially the grassroots, turn to become mere receivers of the public relations messages. The affected publics are expected to react and respond appropriately to the crisis response that was employed, as if they are without autonomy and self-determination, reflecting the linear process of crisis resolution provided by the dominant frameworks.

Not only does the solution come from above, the expectations and implementations only happen below without equal self-corrective efforts from the end of the organizations. Ultimately, this reflects the uneven power between the organizations and the grassroots stakeholders.

Absence of downward grassroots empowerment

Lastly, due to the organizations' ignorance on the grassroots experience and their underestimation of a crisis resolution that comes from below — there are no resources, power, and care that are offered from above downward to the grassroots (Dutta-Bergman, 2004). As a result, the grassroots continue to be unempowered and disempowered in crafting and implementing crisis resolutions that genuinely meet their needs, and are consequently left to depend solely on the unsatisfactory resolutions that come from the organizations. The cycle of systemic disempowerment and disappointment perpetuates in this case. This does not only exhibit the grassroots erasure, the managerial bias, and the functionalistic orientation of the dominant crisis communication frameworks — this also further proves that such frameworks continue to decenter genuine care for the grassroots (Kim & Dutta, 2009).

IMAGINING A GRASSROOTS CARE ETHICS FRAMEWORK

Ethics of care

To orient the alternative ethical framework imagined to guide a more grassroots-oriented crisis communication, this essay engages Gilligan's (1977) ethics of care approach. The care ethics perspective, also known as the *ethics of care* framework, is an ethical and moral evaluation theory that centers on the importance of empathy, compassion, and care in social interactions and social responses among others (Gilligan, 1977; Simola, 2003; Coombs & Holladay, 2022). This ethical theory forwards that individuals should prioritize communicating and enacting empathy and care in social relationships and interpersonal interactions above all else, while also seeking to resolve conflicts and differences. This moral orientation stems from the acknowledgement of the humanity-wide desire to care and be cared for (Noddings, 1984).

The perspective, often associated with feminist ethical theories, was a result of an empirical research examining how women and young girls communicated, made decisions, and resolved conflicts during and after a crisis (Simola, 2003). Based on the findings, women are more likely to respond to conflict and the parties involved in the said conflict with compassion and intentional care (Gilligan, 1977). Preceding this ethics of care study, another empirical research which focused on the conflict and crisis management style of men and young boys had shown that they are more likely to manage conflict and resolve crisis with impartiality, fairness, and cold logic (Kohlberg, 1973). The ethical framework that emerged from this preceding research later became known as the justice ethics perspective or the *ethics of justice* framework. These two studies by Gilligan (1977) and Kohlberg (1973) attempted to highlight the managerial and ethical differences between the two sexes when managing conflict, as well as their differences across the dimensions of empathy, compassion, impartiality, and fairness. Later on, the care ethics perspective was adopted in crisis management studies as both a lens and a method for communicating during and resolving conflicts after a crisis (Simola, 2003). This adoption also resulted from the observation that many theoretical attempts at incorporating ethics into crisis communication frameworks have mostly favored masculine values such as justice and fairness, and would ultimately benefit from more traditionally feminine values such as affect and relationships (Fraustino & Kennedy, 2018). Apart from examining the crisis management styles of individuals, the ethics of care framework has also been utilized in analyzing organizational crisis responses and the perceptions of the affected publics (Bauman, 2010; Diers-Lawson & Pang, 2016).

The care ethics perspective generally has two dimensions in the context of crisis communication which are the affective and relational aspects of a crisis response. When faced with a crisis, the *affective dimension* implores the organization to respond with empathy, compassion, and care (Simola, 2003). The care in this context should also be intentional rather than incidental. In other words, the

organization must enact care not because it merely seeks to save face, but because it genuinely does care for and about the affected stakeholders and publics. The affective dimension also entails centering the crisis response on the emotions of the affected parties while also attending to the economic and technical demands of the crisis resolution (Bauman, 2010).

On the other hand, the *relational dimension* of the care ethics perspective emphasizes the importance of maintaining relational ties with the stakeholders and the public — reflecting the interpersonal nature of crisis communication (Simola, 2003; Gilligan, 1977). This relationship, however, does not pertain to the transactional and fleeting ties that organizations typically initiate and maintain with the people. Relationships, in the context of care ethics, are caring and humanized lasting connections between the organization and the stakeholders (Simola, 2003). The relational dimension frames the interpersonal relationship between the organization and the public as a moral virtue, as source of learning for both ends, and a social obligation for organizations (Ilie, 2021; Johnson, 2018). This emphasis on relationships also reflects the concept of *other-centeredness* which similarly calls for honesty, truth, support, and ultimate good for the benefit of the “other” in the relationship (Ilie, 2021).

The relational dimension also highlights the weight of not only maintaining but also strengthening the organization-public relationship which is also considered more important than organizational interests. Similar to individual relationships, organizational relationships with the people are also maintained and strengthened through constant two-way symmetrical communication and transparent dialogue that showcase transparency, truthfulness, promptness, compassion, and care (Kim, 2015; Carroll, 2009).

Without particular focus placed on the affected grassroots community, several studies have attempted to examine various crisis situations using the perspective of care ethics. In his comparative analysis guided by the ethics of care, Contreras-Pacheco (2018) contrasted the crisis communications and management strategies employed by two oil and gas companies in South America after a series of tragic crisis situations that resulted in multiple deaths and damages. Preceding his examination of crisis communications in the face of an oil refinery explosion in Venezuela which led to 47 deaths and 135 injuries, and a mining dam collapse in Brazil which resulted in 19 deaths and the destruction of numerous homes and water resources, Contreras-Pacheco (2018) argued that care ethics in such situations would demand proactiveness, transparency, care, and sympathy from the end of the offending companies. The researcher later on highlighted the importance of claiming full responsibility, issuance of an apology for the pain caused, and deploying mechanisms to both financially and psychologically empower the affected publics which the two companies had partially fulfilled.

Another crisis communication study centering care amidst crisis has enumerated various *care landscapes* on which the ethics of care should be observed and enacted. These landscapes include the physical (i.e., material and embodied realities of the public), cultural (i.e., identities and social norms of the public), political (i.e., economies and politics among the public), and human landscapes (i.e., emotions and relationships) (Fraustino & Kennedy, 2018). In analyzing crisis communications in the middle of Nestle's infant formula promotion crisis in the 1970s through 1980s, and Uber's consumer outrage crisis in 2017, Fraustino and Kennedy (2018) looked into several instances and landscapes of organization-public relationships, vulnerabilities, and reciprocities. The researchers later on concluded that both organizations failed to comply with their framework's care principles across the four landscapes. Despite the lack of particular focus on the affected grassroots community, the studies by Contreras-Pacheco (2018) and Fraustino and Kennedy (2018) were able to emphasize the importance of positive affects and relationships sustained through care, compassion, empowerment, and dialogic communication amidst various forms of crisis.

Crisis communication for and by the grassroots

This essay, ultimately, seeks to respond to the disciplinal and practical lapses that were birthed by the dominant crisis communication frameworks. Guided by the principles of the care ethics perspective and the conclusions of the previously cited studies that centered on care amidst crisis, the essay imagines and proposes the *Grassroots Care Ethics Framework* which seeks to achieve three objectives. These include the (1) construction of a caring crisis resolution for and by the grassroots; (2) pursuit of an upward implementation among caring organizations; and (3) realization of downward empowerment and care.

A caring crisis resolution for and by the grassroots

In light of the assertion that the dominant crisis frameworks resulted in crisis response strategies that were exclusively designed by and delivered from above (i.e., the offending organization) — the proposed framework imagines the construction of caring crisis response strategies that are designed by the grassroots and for the grassroots themselves. Given the intimate and grounded knowledge that the public has regarding their own physical, cultural, political, and human landscapes (Kennedy & Fraustino, 2018), a crisis management framework that places premium over their own expertise and capacity to resolve the crisis in their own terms proves to be significant. This is contrary to the traditional frameworks that rely on the supposed expertise of crisis management experts who may not be fully familiar or affected by the crisis situation, and are driven by profit production motives of the organizations they serve (Fraustino & Kennedy, 2018; Fearn-Banks, 2001). The

decentering of management experts and spotlighting of the grassroots in forming a crisis resolution pave the way for crisis response strategies that value empathy, compassion, dialogue, and relations with the marginalized, and not with more powerful stakeholders holding capitalistic values instead.

Given the grassroots orientation of the proposed framework, dialogue with the affected publics that is facilitated with empathy and compassion becomes a crisis response strategy in itself (Kim, 2015). Such framework also allows the members of the grassroots to take over the crisis management process and become crisis managers themselves. This objective of the imagined alternative framework counters the grassroots erasure tendency of the dominant frameworks.

An upward implementation among caring organizations

As response to the observation that crisis resolutions are implemented only downward in a linear manner, from the organization down to the publics, due to the functionalistic orientation of the dominant crisis frameworks—the proposed grassroots ethical framework imagines an upward implementation instead. Now that the crisis resolution and response strategies are already designed and initiated from the people at the bottom, the responses such as corrective actions should begin from the grassroots going upward until it reaches the organization that caused the crisis. This objective promotes the equal participation of organizations and the grassroots in resolving and preventing future crises—contrary to the functionalistic frameworks for crisis communication that simply treat the publics as mere receivers of and reactors to the strategies employed from above downward. Such objective not only evens out the power between the organizations and the grassroots, but also strengthens the relationship and allyship between the two. With organizations being seen as the equal partner of the grassroots, and vice versa, the resolution of the crisis becomes a collaborative and dialogic transaction (Kim, 2015). Again, this second objective of the imagined framework counters the functionalistic orientation of the dominant frameworks wherein the publics are treated merely as end receivers of an employed crisis response strategy from above.

A downward empowerment and care

As an alternative to the traditional frameworks that condition organizations to disempower the publics by providing them insufficient resources to survive the crisis—ultimately leading to the dependence of the publics on corporate resolutions from above—the proposed grassroots care ethics approach encourages organization to direct and concentrate resources and empowerment down to the grassroots. As argued in the care ethics framework, intentional care entails caring for the publics not simply to save face, but to genuinely promote their well-being and dignity. It is not sufficient that the crisis resolution is designed by the grassroots and implemented upward. Such crisis resolution must be actively supported by the very

organizations that birthed the crisis situations similar to what Contreras-Pacheco (2018) had argued. In concentrating the resources at the grassroots level, organizations can ensure that the publics are properly empowered to lead the resolution and implement it upward, satisfying the first and second objectives of the imagined framework. This third objective counters the managerial bias of the dominant frameworks wherein the publics are mere market segments that need to be pacified.

Limitations of the imagined grassroots care ethics framework

This section seeks to present several limitations that arise with the imagined grassroots care ethics framework. These limitations revolve around the challenges posed by existing corporatist and capitalistic interests among organizations, the level of efficacy and participation among the grassroots communities, and the affective and relational labor that the proposed framework requires for the implementation of an ethical crisis management and communication.

While the framework appears to be viable in theory, it cannot be denied that in reality, there exists a tension between an organization's social obligations to its stakeholders and their corporate interests that are strongly tied to profit-making. In addition, this capitalistic priorities tend to dominate, limit, and influence an organization's capacity to employ crisis responses that fulfill the requirements of the affected publics (Fearn-Banks, 2001; Fraustino & Kennedy, 2018). Complying with the grassroots care ethics framework that highlights and places affects and relationships above corporate interests, in such reality, would prove to be challenging.

Second, the proposed ethical framework, as opposed to traditional crisis management strategies, demands equal participation and motivation from the grassroots communities themselves. While organizations have historically taken charge of the crisis responses resulting from the functionalistic tendency of crisis communication, the proposed framework now expects active and proactive efforts from the end of the publics. The lack or even absence of motivation, efficacy, and participation among the grassroots would lead to the ineffectiveness of a grassroots-oriented crisis response.

Lastly, given the centrality of the affective and relational dimensions in the proposed framework, it follows that the resulting crisis response strategies would require additional affective and relational labor from both the organization and concerned grassroots community. Sustaining the positive emotions and the relationship with the involved parties contribute to the challenge of implementing the proposed framework.

Potential applications of imagined grassroots care ethics framework

Despite the aforementioned limitations, several crisis communication and management strategies may nonetheless be employed by organizations in adopting the grassroots care ethics framework. These include (1) engagement with grassroots organizations, (2) activation of community leadership, (3) information cooperation with the public, and (4) intersectional crisis management.

In situations of crisis, organizations such as the government or private companies may not possess sufficient resources and networks to directly engage in an organization-public relationship with the grassroots (Wu et al., 2024). In such cases, non-government organizations that primarily involve and cater to the grassroots community can provide supplemental resources, mobilize members of the grassroots, and create more intimate links between organizations and the affected publics (Lu & Li, 2020; Bentzen and Torfing, 2022). More importantly, grassroots-focused non-government organizations may recommend and even help in implementing solutions and communications that are tailored to the physical, cultural, political, and human landscapes of the grassroots community (Wu et al., 2024). The existing trust between the grassroots organization and community can also aid in building similar trusting relationship between organizations and the publics.

In the absence of grassroots-focused organizations, the government or private companies may instead focus on activating community leadership among the grassroots in moments of crisis. This process begins by identifying and engaging with community leaders who are entrusted by the grassroots community to mediate between organizations and themselves, defend their interests and rights in the face of crises, lead empowerment initiatives, and mobilize their members when crisis resolutions are being implemented (Razzano & Bernardi, 2024; Boehm et al., 2010). In adopting the grassroots care ethics framework, organizations can opt to engage the service of community leaders not only to assist in the implementation, but also to acquire specific knowledge about the grassroots experiences amidst crisis.

The close and intentional exchange of information between organizations-in-crisis and the affected grassroots community during and after a crisis also serves an important role in crisis resolution. This exchange of information, also called information cooperation, enables organizations to appear as an approachable figure rather than rigid and aloof entities (Chen & Xu, 2023). The members of the grassroots community have also been found to be more skilled, proactive, and efficacious when actively engaged in information exchange by organizations (Chen & Xu, 2023). This information exchange not only enacts a two-way symmetrical communication, but also contributes to the formation and maintenance of intimate relationship between organizations and their respective publics.

By encouraging the examination of the physical, cultural, political, and human landscapes of the affected grassroots community, the grassroots care ethics framework allows crisis management strategies to be intersectional in nature (Knepper et al., 2023). This intersectional crisis management, in turn, exposes the disempowerments, inequities, and dominances endured by the grassroots which better informs organizations and their care-oriented crisis resolutions (Baniya, 2025; Knepper et al., 2023). Recognizing the existing disempowerments among the grassroots community, organizations are also able to better orient their downward empowerment and care.

CONCLUSION

The traditional crisis communication frameworks—while extensive and established—ultimately center corporate interests at the expense of the grassroots and other marginalized publics. Rooted in their managerial bias and functionalistic view of crisis communication, these frameworks tend to treat crises as reputational threats to be managed rather than opportunities for ethical and meaningful engagement. The erasure of grassroots experiences and voices not only reflects a critical ethical failure but also limits the efficacy of crisis responses by rendering them disconnected from the lived realities of those most affected. This essay has demonstrated how dominant models privilege top-down, organization-led strategies that pacify rather than empower, and that fail to offer the care, dignity, and relational solidarity that ethical crisis communication should aspire to provide. In response, a grassroots care ethics framework has been proposed—one that inverts the traditional flow of crisis response by centering the needs, insights, and agency of the grassroots communities. Such a model begins at the bottom, moves laterally, and only then upward, thereby fostering a relational, affective, and empowering approach to crisis management.

While the grassroots care ethics framework offers a critical and transformative alternative to traditional crisis communication, its practical implementation is not without substantial challenges. The tension between corporate self-interest and social responsibility remains a significant barrier, particularly in systems driven by capitalist imperatives. Organizations may struggle to prioritize relational and affective commitments when profit motives dominate crisis decision-making. Additionally, the success of this framework relies heavily on the efficacy, motivation, and active participation of the grassroots themselves—an expectation that may not always be met due to structural disempowerment or lack of resources. Furthermore, the affective and relational labor demanded by this framework—though ethically necessary—requires time, trust-building, and sustained engagement from both organizations and communities, making the process more labor-intensive than traditional top-down approaches.

Despite these limitations, the framework's potential remains promising. Through strategic partnerships with grassroots organizations, activation of community leadership, intentional information cooperation, and intersectional awareness, institutions can begin to embody more ethical and inclusive crisis responses. These methods not only help mitigate the framework's challenges but also point to actionable steps organizations can take to foster genuine, reciprocal relationships with affected publics. Ultimately, the grassroots care ethics framework demands a shift in values—one that places care, dignity, and empowerment at the heart of crisis communication. To create crisis communication strategies that are not only effective but just, organizations must decenter themselves and co-create solutions that genuinely emerge from and for the people.

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