8-2014

Stakeholder Perceptions of a University Response to Crisis

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Stakeholder Perceptions of a University Response to Crisis

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A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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by

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August 2014

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to contribute to current theory-driven research in crisis communication by examining the perceptions of multiple stakeholder groups to a university crisis response strategy. Two main questions were examined in this dissertation. The first question attempted to determine if a significant difference existed between stakeholder groups and their perception of university reputation, responsibility for the crisis, and potential supportive behaviors toward the university following the university's response to a crisis. The second asked if Coombs's Situational Crisis Communication Theory is a practical application for universities.

The participants were from 4 stakeholder groups associated with a regional public university: students, faculty, staff, and alumni. An online survey was sent to participants via email.

The data analysis revealed significant differences in the perceptions of reputation and in the potential supportive behaviors between staff and faculty and between staff and students. Staff perceived the reputation more favorably and had more favorable potential supportive behaviors than both the faculty and the student stakeholder groups. The results of this research provided empirical evidence that distinct stakeholder groups do perceive crisis response strategies differently. It also supported the application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory in a university setting.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wonderful partner in life, Dr. Paul Kelley. Our world together has been deeply affected by this dissertation endeavor and your unfailing support, encouragement, and enthusiasm mean everything to me. Your gentle persuasion when times were tough allowed me to see the blue skies through the clouds. Thank you for being my best friend and for believing in me. Hands down, you are simply the best man I know.

To my incredible parents, Tom and Theresa Buck, thank you! You got me started on my educational journey and provided wonderful role models throughout my life. Your support, guidance, and understanding through the challenges of my life can never be repaid.

To my sons Andy and Robin and my daughter Liz, I appreciate your support and encouragement. Sharing life with you is such a wondrous adventure. I am so proud of each of you.

To my brother Bob, thank you for the loving partnership we share.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The undertaking of this dissertation, without question, represents the biggest challenge of my academic life. It has been rewarding and stimulating due to the input and guidance of some very special individuals.

I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Hal Knight, for his support and for his prompt and well-developed feedback. I would also like to thank Dr. Don Good, Dr. Lee Daniels, and Dr. Jasmine Renner for their contributions and encouragement through this process.

I would particularly like to acknowledge the contribution made by my friend, Dr. Heather Moore. Heather shared conversation and provided consultation. She was my sounding board. She listened to my ideas and my frustrations and reminded me of the dissertation context.

I would like to thank Dr. Tom Moore for his support and insight into my dissertation process. His focused ability for recall guided me to look for resources and to better understand the research process.

I would like to thank my husband, Dr. Paul Kelley, for his understanding of my need to work on this project. He listened to my excitement, progress, and frustrations when I needed to share. He was, and is, always there for me.

I have thoroughly enjoyed the learning experience provided by the faculty of the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis Department at East Tennessee State University .The opportunity to grow in knowledge about the complex world of higher education has been eye-opening and rewarding.

I would like to recognize the many ETSU colleagues who encouraged me and asked about my progress on this dissertation. Their support helped me understand that this was a project worth completing.

A word of thanks should be given to the individuals who assisted me in gathering email addresses and sending out the mass email invitations to participate in my survey. I could not have accomplished the task without their assistance.

I would like to thank the stakeholders of ETSU for being willing participants in this study. They made this research possible.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Every university president will deal with crisis on some scale," wrote Larry Hincker, associate vice president for university relations at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) (as cited in Hincker, 2012, p. 12).

> We at Virginia Tech are not crisis experts. But we share our experiences here to show how the university worked its way from crisis, to response, and eventually through recovery after the mass tragedy that befell us in spring 2007. (p. 12)

The mass tragedy he referenced occurred on April 16, 2007, when Seung-Hui Cho, a Virginia Tech student, murdered 32 students and faculty before killing himself. The Virginia Tech administration was criticized for its response to the crisis including its inability to connect critical known information about the shooter prior to the event and its lack of timely notification to students regarding the crisis and their safety (The Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). The horrific event and the response from university administration set the stage for major changes in the way institutions of higher education prepared for a crisis. (Piet DeLa Torre, 2011; The Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). It also brought to the forefront the need for universities, like other organizations, to prepare for potential crises and to protect their reputation.

As Hincker (2012) pointed out, it is a matter of when, not if, a university will experience a crisis. "Crises are no longer an aberrant, rare, random, or peripheral feature of today's society. They are built into the very fabric and fiber of modern societies" (as cited in Mitroff & Anagnos, 2000, p. 4). Crises can range from life-threating circumstances to misdeeds that escalate to levels that cannot be ignored.

Captured by televised media and electronic communications over the last 50 years, several crises exemplify physical traumas that impact higher education communities (Rollo & Zdziarski, 2007). In 1966 a sharpshooter atop the Texas Tower at the University of Texas at Austin shot and killed 14 people and injured dozens of others. The event played out on live radio. In 1970 Kent State University was the site of protests against the Vietnam War where National Guard troops fired into the crowd of protestors. A Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph of a devastated 14-year-old runaway screaming over the body of a slain protestor was displayed on the front pages of newspapers and magazines, becoming a symbol of crisis on college campuses during those turbulent times. In 1999 the traditional Bonfire at Texas A&M University collapsed killing 12 people. Cell phones disseminated the information about the tragedy and the electronic information was obtained by local media spreading the details before next of kin could be notified.

Text messaging and social media 'distributed problem-solving' activity world-wide identified the 32 victims plus the shooter who were involved in the Virginia Tech massacre before the university released the names to the public, which demonstrated the swiftness and effectiveness of large–scale highly distributed online collaboration involving technology (Palen, 2008). In 2011 the world watched as the allegations of child abuse by the former assistant football coach at The Pennsylvania State University (Penn State), Jerry Sandusky, "ignited a firestorm of media coverage" (Solomon, 2011/2012, para. 2). According to a Pew Research Center journalism project, the 2007 shootings at Virginia Tech and the 2011 sexual abuse scandal that rocked Penn State were the second and fourth-most covered crime stories over a 5-year period (Pew Research Center, 2011). Each of these crises involved the loss of life or direct

trauma to human beings and each involved victims, their families, and multiple stakeholder groups.

Not all crises at universities directly threaten lives or provide such sensational and graphic media coverage. Some crises are the result of events that build to a crisis over time. The president of The Ohio State University, Gordon Gee, lost his job in 2013 over callous remarks concerning the religious affiliation of an athletic rival. Although Dr. Gee had other troubles while at The Ohio State University, this event created such reputational havoc for the university that it took its toll on Dr. Gee's career (Stripling, 2013). Five institutions of higher education, Claremont McKenna College, Emory University, George Washington University, University of Mary Hardin–Baylor, and York College of Pennsylvania, have admitted to years of inflating self-reported data for rankings among the best colleges as compiled in *U. S. News and World Report Best Colleges* (Jaschik, 2013). The rankings are often used by prospective students in their choice of college. *U. S. News and World Report* made the decision to change each school to unranked, effectively removing them from the list of recognized competitors. Loss of accreditation, or the threat of it, affects different types of institutions of higher education. The for-profit University of Phoenix was notified by its regional accrediting body, The Higher Learning Commission, of a possible loss of institutional accreditation due to lack of autonomy from its owner (Morgan, 2013), while the private Virginia Intermont College lost its accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges due to financial instability, turned to the court system for reinstatement (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, 2013), then failing to merge with another college it closed following its final graduation ceremony in May 2014 . Mountain State University, a private, nonsectarian, not-for-profit institution in West Virginia, closed because its

accreditation was withdrawn. The regional accrediting agency determined that teaching and learning were compromised by insufficient resources and lack of faculty oversight (Higher Learning Commission, 2012). Other nonlife-threatening crises can include financial shortfalls, presidential misuse of funds, declining enrollments, grade changing scandals, and breaches in cyber security.

The probability that a university will experience a crisis is high, whether life-threatening or not (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2003). The consequences of crises at universities may include interruptions to teaching and research resulting in business losses measured by student and faculty departures, decreases in research funding and alumni donations, increases in insurance costs, damage to technology, buildings, and infrastructure, injury, death (Mitroff, Diamond, & Alpaslan, 2006), and downgrading of credit ratings (Tsidoudakis, 2012). Each of these consequences brings the opportunity for damage to the reputation of the university.

Recognizing the possible reputational damage from crises, Hincker (2012) stated, "Reputation management begins at the outset of any crisis" (p. 14). Other scholars, however, have argued that reputation management should begin before a crisis occurs (Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2007a). Recognizing risks associated with potential crises and preparing for them before they happen will lessen the reputational damage (Coombs, 2007b).

According to Abraham, Jones, and Neary (2012), "the crisis planning and response process is the ultimate risk management process designed to protect an institution's ultimate asset: its reputation" (para. 24). A university's reputation influences student recruitment, financial donations, research funding, public support, and the ability to attract top quality staff and researchers. A poor or damaged reputation can be devastating to the university's business. Both good and poor reputations have an effect on stakeholders.

Constituencies, or stakeholders, of a university involve a variety of groups including the students, faculty, and staff. Additional stakeholders include parents, alumni, governing bodies, suppliers, athletic organizations, regulatory agencies, potential employers, local municipalities, and neighboring businesses. Each of these stakeholders may be affected dissimilarly by the crisis and therefore may evaluate the university's response to the crisis from different perspectives. "It is important to recognize the many constituencies in a crisis and ensure that, in response, the right parts of the organization touch them" (Hincker, 2012, p. 15).

Coombs and Holladay (2007) found the organization's response to a crisis will impact the stakeholders' perception of the organization's reputation. When a crisis occurs, stakeholders seek explanations for the crisis and attribute blame to the organization (Weiner, 1985). The more blame attributed for the crisis, the greater the damage to the organizational reputation.

In a crisis, the first priority of a university is to protect the safety and security of stakeholders (Cavanaugh, 2006; Coombs, 2012). Protection of the organization's reputation and other concerns are considered only after public safety has been addressed (Coombs, 2007a). Crisis managers can select a response strategy that offers the best protection for reputation that is commensurate with the level of responsibility for the crisis.

Situational crisis communication theory (SCCT), developed by Coombs, provides a theoretical base from which to select a crisis response strategy that is appropriate to the crisis. SCCT advocates selecting a response strategy that will best protect the organization's reputation (Coombs, 2007b). Offering apologies may have negative legal and financial repercussions, just as denying responsibility when the university is at fault is inappropriate (Fitzpatrick, 1995). SCCT provides an evidence-based framework for choosing the appropriately matched response strategy to protect the reputation of the university.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this research is to explore the perceptions of multiple stakeholder groups to a university's crisis response strategy. Experimental research involving crisis response strategies identified by SCCT has not addressed the unique perspective of diverse stakeholder groups. The data gathered from research participants regarding the perceptions of the organization's reputation, crisis responsibility, and potential supportive behaviors have been treated as an aggregated response where all stakeholders perceive the situation similarly (Claeys, Cauberghe, & Vyncke, 2010; Coombs, 2004, 2006a; Coombs & Holladay, 1996, 2001, 2002; Lyon & Cameron, 2004; Pace, Fediuk, & Botero, 2012; Wright, 2009).

Limited research was found that examined crisis response strategies from the perspective of multiple stakeholders groups. Stephens, Malone, and Bailey (2005) analyzed content of communications involving technical crises, and Kyhn (2008) used a case study to investigate communications following an airline crash. Both studies were retrospective in nature. No research was found that purposefully engaged distinct stakeholder groups.

Research Questions

The research questions addressed in this study provide the framework for assessing the perception of crisis responsibility, reputation, and potential supportive behaviors from the perspective of multiple stakeholder groups affected by a crisis response.

1: Is there a significant difference in the perception of university reputation among stakeholder groups when the university used a crisis response strategy advocated by SCCT?

2: Is there a significant difference in the perception of responsibility among stakeholder

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groups when the university used a crisis response strategy advocated by SCCT?

3: Is there a significant difference in the potential supportive behaviors among

stakeholder groups when the university used a crisis response strategy advocated by

SCCT?

Significance

The findings of this research study may be useful to administrators, crisis management

team members, and public relations professionals as they select response strategies to a

university crisis. The research findings may also assist nonuniversity organizations in choosing a

crisis response strategy. Results of this study will also help fill the gap that exists in the limited

research available concerning the perceptions of stakeholder groups as distinct entities.

Limitations

The proposed study is limited by certain characteristics. The participants will not be a

random sample but will be purposefully selected. For the purpose of this study participants will

be limited to a sample of stakeholder groups who could be affected by a crisis at a university.

These participants are only a subset of stakeholders who could be affected by a university crisis.

The stakeholder groups identified in this study are related to a university that is a public

university; therefore, it is not representative of all institutions of higher education.

The responses analyzed will be limited to those from participants who completed the survey. The

results of this study rely on participants to be honest in their response.

Although the crisis scenario is based on real events, respondents experienced the

crisis in nonrealistic manner and not all factors relevant to the crisis situation could be measured. Results of the study may not be generalizable beyond the scope of this study.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions of terms are used for this dissertation:

Crisis: "A major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting the organization, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services, or good name" (Fern-Banks, 2011, p.2).

Crisis Responsibility: "Attributions of organizational responsibility for the crisis" (Coombs, 2007b, p. 168) as measured by the Crisis Responsibility Scale.

Potential Supportive Behaviors: Intentions to engage in acts that would aid the organization as measured in the Potential Supportive Behaviors Scale (Coombs, 2007b).

Reputation: "A collective representation of a firm's past actions and results that describes the firm's ability to deliver valued outcomes to multiple stakeholders" (Fombrun & Van Riel, 1997, p. 10).

Stakeholders "Groups and individuals who can affect, or are affected by, the achievement of an organization's mission" (Freeman, 1984, p. 52).

Summary

Crises affect universities just as they do other organizations. University reputations are affected by crisis and the university's response to it. The crisis response strategy used by the university following a crisis can protect it and reduce the amount of reputational damage done by a crisis. The purpose of this study is to further understand the relationship between perceptions of distinct stakeholder groups and a university's response to crisis. This study has been organized

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into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the introduction, the statement of the problem, the research

questions, the significance of the study, and the limitations of the study. Chapter 2 includes the

review of relevant literature. Chapter 3 includes the methodology used. Chapter 4 contains the

findings and the data analysis. Chapter 5 is an assimilation of the summary, findings,

conclusions, and recommendations for this study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter I reviewed literature about Situational Crisis Communication Theory

(SCCT) and organizational reputation, crisis, and crisis communication. The chapter begins with

the origin of SCCT as a theory and includes a review of the research and progress of the theory

to its current status. The general concept of organizational reputation is examined next in context

of its importance to an organization's success. The following section is a review of literature

about crises in relation to the effects on organizations and stakeholders. The final section is a

review of crisis communications and its role in crisis response. A discussion of these components

as they apply to a university concludes the chapter.

Situational Crisis Communication Theory

The Challenge

Johnson & Johnson's handling of the Tylenol product tampering case in 1982 has been

identified as the beginning of the field of crisis management (Mitroff et al., 2006). In his case

study of Johnson & Johnson's response, Benson (1988) found the use of strategic

communication strategies both repaired and strengthened the organization's reputation;

identifying where specific communication strategies were instrumental in allowing Johnson &

Johnson to cope with the crisis and reposition its Tylenol product successfully in the market. The

guidelines suggested by the study include organizational planning to respond to a crisis,

proactively taking initiative on issues important to the organization, limiting the number of

spokespersons so the message is consistent and frequent, and delivering the message with

persistent assertion (Benson, 1988). Benson challenged crisis communication researchers to develop a range of crisis response strategies and to identify strategies that best suit particular crisis types.

Development of SCCT

SCCT is a reply to the challenge issued by Benson (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). SCCT offers methodology for protecting and repairing a reputation using crisis response strategies that are matched to the organization's responsibility for the crisis. SCCT is a symbolic approach to crisis communication that offers explanation of the effectiveness of crisis response strategies in terms of reputational protection focusing on three core elements: the crisis situation, the crisis response strategies, and the method for matching the crisis situation to the crisis response strategies (Coombs, 2006b).

Grounded in the premise that a crisis was a threat to an organization's reputation and that the crisis situation itself should influence the choice of response strategy, Coombs (1995) introduced his initial guidelines for crisis communication strategies. Crisis response strategies were grouped into five categories: nonexistence, distance, ingratiation, mortification, and suffering. The five strategies were placed on a continuum where one end of the spectrum conveyed misinterpretation and that a crisis did not exist while the other end conveyed the organization as a victim suffering from the effects of the crisis. The objective of the response strategies was to shape attributions of the crisis, change perceptions of the organization by affected stakeholders, and reduce the negative effect generated by the crisis. The guidelines suggested that the public's perception of the responsibility for the crisis could be modified

through use of a crisis response strategy that was matched to the level of responsibility for the crisis.

Coombs teamed up with Holladay and began research on crisis response strategies with an experimental study that related crisis response strategies to crisis types (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). They found that crisis response strategies matched to the crisis type lessened the damaging effects to organizational reputation by mitigating the feelings generated by attributions of blame toward the organization. Crisis types were categorized by personal control and intentionality using a 2 x 2 matrix. Control was internal if the organization had control over the cause, such as an accident or a transgression; and it was external if the organization had no control over the cause, such as a terrorist attack or hurricane. When the organization was perceived to have little or no control over the crisis, it experienced the least reputational damage. Whereas when the crisis was perceived as a transgression and the organization had more control, reputation was more negatively affected.

In 1998 Coombs revised the 2x2 crisis response strategies matrix into a continuum. The continuum ranged crisis response strategies from accommodative to defensive based on the organization's personal control over a crisis. The continuum illustrated that the more control an organization had over a crisis, the more accommodative the response strategy should be (Coombs, 1998). The most accommodative strategy was a full apology that matched to an organizational transgression. The most defensive strategy, attack the accuser, was matched to a crisis such as a natural disaster over which the organization had little personal control.

Coombs and Holladay (2001) then introduced relational history into the symbolic crisis communication approach. Symbolic resources used in crisis communications refer to the use of words as symbols. They concluded the relationship between the stakeholders and their history

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with the organization shaped stakeholder's perception of crisis responsibility. A negative

reputation impacted the perception of crisis responsibility negatively; however, a positive

relational history, or halo effect, had the same effect as a neutral relational history. The negative

history attracted additional reputational damage in the perception of the stakeholders. This

negative history phenomenon was termed the V*elcro effect* because only a negative relationship

history had an effect on reputation and perceived responsibility for the crisis.

When SCCT emerged as a theory in 2002, the term symbolic was changed to situational

to relay the importance the crisis situation played in the response (Coombs & Holladay, 2002).

The theory indicated an organization that is a victim of the crisis will have minimal

responsibility for the crisis, whereas an organization that purposefully placed stakeholders at risk

will have stronger attributions of crisis responsibility. Crisis responsibility was influenced by

both the severity of the crisis and the organization's history with regards to crises and the

relational history with the stakeholders. Figure 1 shows this relationship among the key

variables.

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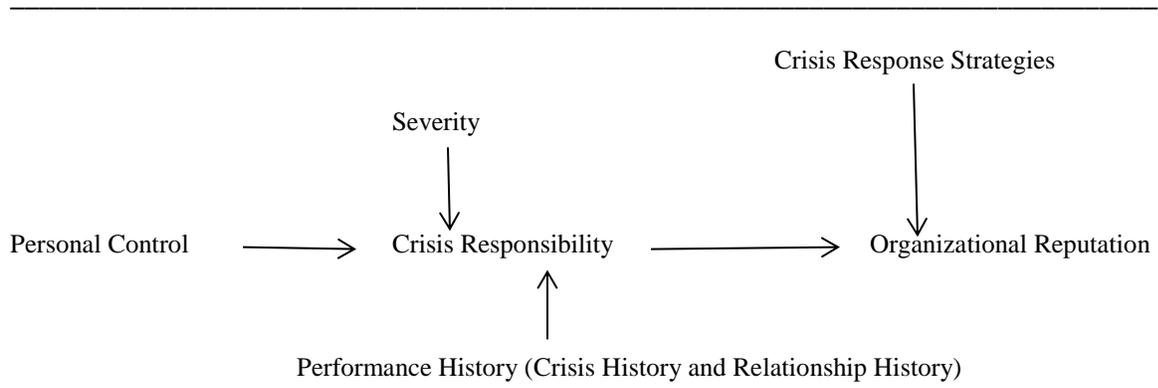
Figure 1. Variables and Relationships in the Situational Crisis Communication Theory. From "Helping Crisis Managers Protect Reputational Assets: Initial Tests of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory," by W. T. Coombs and S. J. Holladay, 2002, *Management Communications Quarterly, 16,* p. 168. Copyright 2002 by Sage Publications. Reprinted with permission.

In the first test of SCCT, Coombs and Holladay (2002) explored the correlation between the level of responsibility attributed to the crisis and each of 13 crisis types and found a strong correlation between them. Additionally, the crisis types clustered into three groups based on crisis responsibility. Coombs and Holladay found that response strategies for the clusters of crisis types were effective for each crisis type within the cluster suggesting that crisis response strategy for each crisis type cluster would be just as effective as a separate crisis response strategy for each of the thirteen crisis types.

Coombs and Holladay (2002) identified the crisis type clusters as victim, accident, and preventable. The victim cluster, with minimal attribution of responsibility, included natural disasters, rumors, workplace violence, and product tampering. The accident cluster, indicating moderate attribution of crisis responsibility, included challenges, megadamage, technical breakdown–accidents, and technical breakdowns–recalls. The cluster with the strongest attribution of crisis responsibility was preventable (later called intentional) crises: human breakdown accidents, human breakdown product recalls, organizational misdeed- management misconduct, organizational misdeed with no injuries, and organizational misdeeds with injuries. The clusters identified in Coombs and Holladay's 2002 research agreed with the findings of Pearson and Mitroff (1993) who found that grouping crisis types by clusters offered efficiencies to the organization in preparing for crisis response where skills are transferable among similar crisis types.

In this early model of SCCT, personal control was placed as a forerunner to crisis responsibility. As a result of this study Coombs and Holladay (2002) asserted the scales measuring personal control and crisis responsibility assessed the same factor. The two variables were collapsed in future models of SCCT.

In the next iteration of the theory crisis history was identified as a variable and Coombs (2004) revealed a history of similar type crises intensified the threat to reputation in a current crisis. Coombs suggested that repeated past crises heightened perceptions of crisis responsibility. He found that the reputational threat to an organization with a history of similar crises was increased even when the crisis was from an accident or victimization rather than an intentional act of the organization. Further supporting the effect of crisis history on relational reputation, Lyon and Cameron (2004) cautioned that a current reputational threat cannot be viewed in a vacuum without regard to prior crisis history.

Coombs (2006a) again advanced SCCT with a study examining how stakeholders viewed the crisis response strategies. He concluded that similar crisis response strategies could also be grouped into three clusters that reflected increasing amounts of responsibility and reputational damage: denial, diminish, and deal (later revised to rebuild). The denial cluster included the crisis response strategies of: deny, attack accuser, and scapegoat response strategies; the diminish cluster included excuse and justification strategies; and compassion, concern, regret, ingratiation, and apology formed the deal cluster. Crisis response strategies that are unmatched to the level of responsibility damage the reputation and result in negative stakeholder behavioral intentions.

Coombs and Holladay (2007) further tested the theory by examining the effect of emotions on stakeholders' supportive behaviors. They found emotions were a mediator between crisis responsibility and the behavioral intentions of stakeholders, indicating when stakeholders attribute blame for a crisis they experience negative emotions toward the organization (Coombs, 2007b). Emotions were added to the SCCT model suggesting crisis response strategies should attempt to diffuse strong negative emotions to better protect reputation. This revised model of SCCT is shown in Figure 2.

Factors that Shape SCCT

Crisis type, crisis history, and prior reputational relationship are the three factors used to evaluate the threat to reputation presented by a crisis (Coombs, 2012). SCCT recommends these be applied in a two-step process to determine the reputational threat. The first step is to determine the crisis type. The second step is to modify the threat based on crisis history and prior reputational relationship.

Crisis type. Crises were categorized by Coombs and Holladay (2002) by responsibility for the crisis. Crisis types were placed on a continuum that listed crisis types by the level of responsibility for the crisis. The crisis type with the least amount of responsibility was rumor, where the organization had no responsibility and the other end of the continuum was organizational misdeeds where management knowingly place stakeholders at risk. At one end of the spectrum the organization was not responsible and the other end the organization was fully responsible. Coombs and Holladay found that each crisis type has predictable attributions that predict how stakeholders will view responsibility for the crisis.

The words and actions of an organization in a crisis affect how people perceive the organization and/or the crisis (Coombs, 2007b). "SCCT argues that as the reputational threat increases, the crisis manager should use response strategies that demonstrate acceptance of responsibility for the crisis and that address victim concerns" (Coombs, 2004, p. 266). Initial crisis responsibility is how much stakeholders believe organization actions or inactions have caused the crisis (Coombs, 2007b).
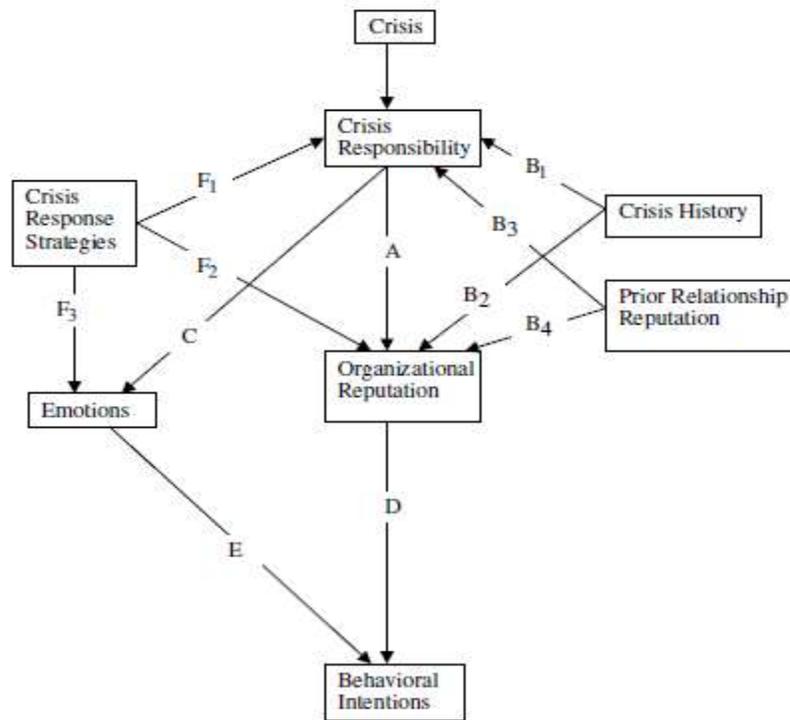
Figure 2. Crisis Situation Model of SCCT. Copyright 2007 by Palgrave Macmillan Ltd. Reprinted with permission.

Crisis history. Coombs (2004) revealed that "a history of past crises did intensify the attributions of crisis responsibility and lowered perceptions of the organizational reputation" (p. 282). An organization's history with crises will be a factor in stakeholder perception of responsibility for a crisis. Repeated history of similar crises will intensify the perception of responsibility for other crises. To better understand how stakeholders view the organization's reputation the organization should assess its historical handling of crises. Lessons learned from past crises must be remembered by developing an institutional memory (Coombs, 2012). Coombs suggested the information regarding the institutional memory must be accurate and

easily retrievable because how an institution responded to similar events in the past has an impact on how the stakeholders view the reputation of the institution.

Prior reputational relationship. "Relationship history does shape how people perceive the crisis and the organization in crisis" (Coombs & Holladay, 2001, p. 336). Coombs and Holladay found a negative prior relationship with stakeholders will increase the reputational damage while a positive prior relationship creates a neutral condition as if a prior relationship or no crisis history is provided. A negative reputational relationship shifts the crisis responsibility up the responsibility continuum one level, further increasing the perception of responsibility for the crisis by stakeholders.

Other Crisis Communication Theories

SCCT is one theory of crisis communication. Other theories of crisis communication include theories of postcrisis communication, theories that tie crisis response strategies to crisis types, and a theory of relationships.

Theories of postcrisis communication. SCCT is a theory involving self-preservation crisis response strategies. Both Hearit's (1996) apologia and Benoit's (1997) image repair theory also map out postcrisis communications of self-preservation.

Hearit's apologia is a theory of crisis communication that examines how people or organizations used communication to defend their character or reputation from public attacks (Ware & Linkugel, 1973). When reputation is under attack, especially when it is unfairly accused, the organization seeks to justify its behavior by presenting convincing counter accounts

of its actions. The Unites States Supreme Court ruled that organizations have a constitutional right to speak up when they are unfairly accused (Hearit, 1996; The First National Bank v. Bellotti, 1978). Apologia involves the examination of defensive communication used to manage reputations in troubled times. Communication associated with apologia is oriented with the sender while SCCT is oriented on the message receiver.

Apologies offered by the organization may be part of apologia (Ware & Linkugel, 1973). Scholars acknowledge that universal application of apologies may be problematic (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Legal advisors often counsel against apology as is may be perceived as an admission of guilt that in turn may create liabilities associated with lawsuits (Fitzpatrick, 1995; Hearit, 1996). Attorneys may advocate for "no comment" in order to limit legal liabilities as compared to the traditional public relations approach of openness and information sharing (Fitzpatrick & Rubon, 1995). Coombs and Holladay (2002) suggest the situational approach to determine the appropriate response strategy, which may be an apology, be used to best protect the organization's reputations.

Benoit's (1997) image repair theory focuses on understanding what response strategy is most effective in a particular situation. It addresses the development of specific messages to targeted stakeholders. In selecting the relevant response, both the nature of the crisis and the affected stakeholders must be known in order to provide effective crisis communications that repair the organization's image. Image repair theory, similar to SCCT, suggests that the communication response should be tailored to the offense. Unlike SCCT, image repair theory recognizes multiple stakeholder groups and advocates the prioritization of the various stakeholder groups, appeasing the most important stakeholders first. Image repair theory suggests that different stakeholder groups not only receive the messages differently because of

varied interests but that some stakeholder groups are more important than others. Benoit applied the theory first to people (Benoit, 1994) and later to organizations (Benoit, 1997).

Theories tying crisis response strategies to crisis types. Coombs indicated SCCT is inspired by attribution theory and neoinstitutionalism (Coombs, 1995). He identified them as a basis for establishing the relationship between the crisis situation and the crisis response strategies.

Weiner's attribution theory holds that stakeholders search for the cause of negative, unexpected events and assign responsibility for negative, unexpected events based on dimensions of locus, stability, and controllability (Weiner, 1985). The Causal Dimension Scale developed by Weiner (1979) measures the three dimensions of cause, locus, stability, and controllability, and has been found a reliable instrument to measure the dimensional properties of causes (Russell, 1982). Locus is whether the cause of the crisis event is perceived as internal or external to the organization; stability refers to whether the crisis is recurring or a one-time event; and controllability is the power of the organization to influence the crisis. The attribution of blame affects the emotional response of stakeholders and their subsequent motivations (Weiner, 1985). Weiner, Graham, and Chandler (1982) found uncontrollable causes of stable negative events lead to stakeholder feelings of pity, regardless of the locus of the cause. In contrast, when negative events are viewed as controllable by the organization, stakeholders tend to feel the emotions of anger and guilt. Attributions of internal locus, stability, and controllability create the perception that the organization is responsible for the event. The reputation of the organization is then altered in the minds of the stakeholders, usually in an unfavorable manner.

Weiner (1985) related the "structure of thought" (p. 569) to feelings and action, showing the interconnectivity between stakeholder perception and behavior. Individuals who perceive an organization to be good will have more positive behavioral intentions toward the organization. "Attribution theory is a useful framework for explaining the relation between a situation and the selection of communication strategies" (Coombs & Holladay, 1996, p. 281). Both attribution theory and SCCT recognize that crises have both unexpected and negative traits. The attributions of blame for the crisis affect the behaviors of stakeholders (Coombs, 2006a). Whereas attribution theory was originally applied to product harm cases, SCCT is applied to a wider array crisis types.

Attribution theory holds that stakeholders will attribute the cause of an event to an individual or individuals or to an outside force, determining that the cause is either personal or external (McAuley, Duncan, & Russell, 1992). Personal attribution for a crisis holds a higher potential for reputation damage than an external force over which the institution has little or no control (McAuley et al., 1992). SCCT builds upon the base identified in attribution theory by predicting the reputational threat and prescribing crisis response strategies that protect the reputation of the organization (Coombs, 2007b).

Researchers have shown that attributions of blame affect stakeholder perceptions and emotions. When stakeholders believe the cause of an event was controllable by the organization, they attribute blame for event to the organization (McAuley et al., 1992; Weiner, 1985). When stakeholders perceive the causes of a crisis are negative and unexpected, stakeholders have an emotional response such as anger or sympathy (Coombs, Frandsen, Holladay, & Johansen, 2010; Weiner, 1985). When stakeholders attribute responsibility for the crisis to the organization, they

feel anger toward the organization, and when stakeholders perceive the crisis is not caused by the organization, they feel sympathy for the organization (Weiner et al., 1982).

Coombs and Holladay (1996) also identified neoinstitutionalism as a theoretical basis for SCCT, using it to explain the match between crisis response strategies and the crisis situation. Neoinstitutionalism examines the behavior of the organization in the context of normative expectations, that is how the organization meets the expectations of society (Allen & Caillouet, 1994). An organization that is seen as conforming to societal rules for good has its legitimacy enhanced. When the organization operates within social norms, stakeholders perceive that the organization has the right to continue operating. "Neoinstitutional research consistently indicates corporate actors use mechanisms and procedures to convey conformity with their institutional environment in order to enhance legitimacy and survival chances" (Allen & Caillouet, 1994). A crisis can challenge the legitimacy base of the organization and legitimate endeavors of the organization may be difficult to maintain as societal norms may be conflicting, vague, and unstable (Boin, 2009).

Theory of relationships. Freeman (1984) identified stakeholders as any group or individual that can affect or be affected by the behavior of an organization. Acknowledged stakeholders and an organization have a relationship prior to a crisis. Stakeholders of an organization include employees, customers, investors, government, passengers (Taylor & Kent, 2006), and creditors, lenders, and special interest groups (Fitzpatrick, 1995). Coombs (2000a) recognized stakeholders to be both primary and secondary. Primary stakeholders can harm or be harmed by a crisis and they are necessary to the survival of the organization. Secondary stakeholders are those influenced by the actions of the organization. Typical secondary

stakeholders include media, competitors, and activist groups. In any crisis there is more than one stakeholder group. Coombs, in his earlier work, recognized stakeholders may make different attributions and therefore have varied perceptions of a crisis response when he wrote, "Organizations, therefore, must consider how the various publics might view evidence, damage, and performance history differently" (Coombs, 1995, p. 458).

Research on Crisis Communication

Case studies. Academic literature on crisis communication is dominated by case studies (Thiessen & Ingenhoff, 2011). Case studies focus on postcrisis communication and how messages were used to repair or prevent reputational damage due to a crisis (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002). Previous case study research reflects what worked and what did not. (Benson, 1988; Coombs, 2006a; Ferguson, Wallace, & Chandler, 2012) However, case studies generally lack systematic understanding of crisis communication's impact on reputation. The lists and lessons gained from reviewing case studies offer a starting point for research that can test assumptions and strengthen the communications for public relations personnel and crisis managers.

Examples of case studies involving communications specific to university crises include: the lack of communication from the university following the scandal created by the University of Tennessee president in 2003 (White, 2009), crisis communications with university employees following Hurricane Katrina in 2006 (McCullar, 2011), and examination of university core values in crisis of communications following the overwhelming media attention due to the unexpected success of the George Mason University basketball team in the 2006 tournament and multiple shootings on the Northern Illinois University campus in 2008 (Walsch, 2011). Case

studies rarely provide verifiable support for crisis communications to crisis managers (Coombs, 2007b).

Stakeholder perspectives. Much of the research involving SCCT has recognized stakeholders as having a single perspective (Claeys et al., 2010; Coombs, 2004; 2006b; Coombs & Holladay, 2002, 2007; Ferguson et al., 2012; Elliot, 2007; Fussell Sisco, 2008; Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2010; Kim & Cameron, 2011; Lyon & Cameron, 2004; Pace et al., 2012; Wright, 2009). Even though an organization may have many stakeholders, the research lacks recognition the possible of unique perception of multiple stakeholder groups.

One retrospective review did use SCCT to study how an organization's crisis response strategy was perceived by different groups of stakeholders. Allen and Caillouet (1994) examined the externally focused messages of one corporation involved in a crisis regarding legitimacy to determine if messages were targeted to multiple stakeholder groups. Stakeholders identified included competitors, regulators, customers, suppliers, special interest groups, media, government, local community, and employees. They found that different message strategies delivered to different stakeholder groups were effective because the expectations of the stakeholder groups were different.

Study participants. The research using SCCT has most often included college students viewing organizational response strategies to a crisis in a nonuniversity setting (Coombs, 2004, 2006b, 2007a; Coombs & Holladay, 2001, 2002). Most research on SCCT has used higher education students as the participants (Coombs, 1996, 2006, Coombs & Holladay, 1996, 2001, 2002, 2007; Elliot, 2007; Fussel-Sisco, 2003; Pace et al., 2010; Wright, 2008). A limited number

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of studies used participants other than higher education students. Participants of one study were

crisis managers attending a government conference (Coombs, 1999). Another study included

higher education students and community members; however, this study still treated the results

as if the stakeholders were a unified sample (Coombs, 2004).

Research on SCCT application. Avery, Lariscy, Kim, and Hocke (2012) performed a

quantitative review of the published articles from the domain of crisis communication in public

relations that used SCCT as well as image repair theory. They advised that both SCCT and

image repair theory could be enriched theoretically and practically if they were both more

critically applied in research. In their examination of 66 articles, they found the use of both

theories increased from 1991 to 2009 with regards to frequency, level of support, contextual

application, and nature of the research stream. They concluded that these bodies of work could

be more prescriptive if scholarly commentary and criticism for both models were richer.

Cooley and Cooley (2011) retrospectively examined the crisis communication strategies

used in the real world crisis situation of General Motors' bankruptcy. The researchers reviewed

the corporate messages and found that the SCCT model of suggested crisis response strategies

was used by General Motors.

Claeys et al. (2010) did not find a significant effect between crisis type and the crisis

response strategy as suggested by SCCT. They found the more severe the crisis, the more

negative are the perceptions of the organization's reputation. They also found that preventable

crises have the most negative effects on organizational reputation and that the rebuild crisis

communication strategy has the most positive effect on restoring a positive organizational

reputation.

Importance of SCCT

Communication responses to crises are often reactive and based on common sense or accepted wisdom but lack systematic understanding of crisis response communication and its impact on reputation. Use of untested assumptions regarding the effectiveness of crisis communication strategies leaves an organization susceptible to reputational damage and empirical evidence of effective response strategies can help crisis managers respond in a manner that best protects the reputation (Coombs, 2007a).

An organization can benefit from the guidelines offered in SCCT by choosing the response strategy that will protect and repair its reputation in a crisis. "The crisis manager should select a crisis response strategy that is appropriate for the amount of potential reputational damage a crisis may inflict" (Coombs & Holladay, 2002, p. 168). The effectiveness of crisis response strategies based on research provides data on which crisis managers can base decisions.

The uniqueness of each crisis makes crisis communication challenging; however, crisis communication processes can be practiced to provide familiarity with the types of issues addressed. Crisis managers can use the evidence-based guidelines provided by SCCT to understand the most effective crisis response strategy to use in a given crisis. Crisis managers can spend less time debating the most effective response strategy and will be able to respond more quickly (Coombs, 2000a). SCCT offers guidance once the initial organization response to care for victims has been handled. Evidence-based research such as SCCT can be used to predict how stakeholders will react. The empirically derived crisis response strategy guidelines can be used prescriptively to assist with reputational protection.

Definition

Reputations are formed by what the organization does and how it treats its stakeholders over time, and an organization's long-term success is dependent on a favorable reputation (Fombrun, 2000). Fombrun and Van Riel (1997) asserted that reputations are generally taken for granted until they are threatened. Although reputation has been addressed in research and academic literature, it lacks a global definition.

Fombrun and Van Riel (1997) suggested the lack of concise definition for reputation is due in part to the diverse viewpoints of various constituents. Academic literatures of economists, marketing researchers, strategists, organizational scholars, sociologists, and academic accountants all consider reputation from distinct vantage points. These disciplines converged to form an emphasis on the broader view of the organizational reputation as a subjective aggregated appraisal of the trustworthiness and reliability of an organization. From these areas Fombrun and Van Riel derived the definition of reputation as: "a collective representation of a firm's past actions and results that describes the firm's ability to deliver valued outcomes to multiple stakeholders" (p. 10). This definition is used as the basis for this study and implies that a reputation is part of a long-term campaign to maintain favorable recognition by different stakeholders.

Terminology

Terminology used in academic literature to discuss reputation can be confusing and ambiguous. The words "image", and "reputation" have both been used in scholarly literature to examine reputation. Benoit (1997) and Bromley (2000) treated the terms similarly, while Lyon

and Cameron (2004) observed them as distinct. Bromley (2000) also included "identity" to describe the words and images used by organizations to characterize themselves. Thiessen and Ingenhoff (2011) conveyed image as a single element within reputation. Organizational image has been compared to a snapshot of the organization at a point in time (Lyon & Cameron, 2004) where organizations create their own organizational image through words and marketing strategies, sending signals outward to the various stakeholders to create images in their minds.

Management of Reputation

Reputation is recognized as a valuable but intangible asset for an organization (Coombs, 2007; Fombrun, 2000; Sturges, 1994; Thiessen & Ingenhoff, 2011). Reputations distinguish one organization from another and become a significant element of competition (Coombs, 2007b; Fombrun, 2000). Maintaining the competitive edge of a reputation requires nurturing and management.

Reputations are ubiquitous, but the value of reputation is difficult to measure (Fombrun, 2000). Fombrun asserted that measuring reputations is crucial if reputations are to be managed. Organizational reputation is generally measured in the supportive behaviors of its stakeholders. A shift from a favorable to an unfavorable reputation can affect how stakeholders interact with the organization. When stakeholders change their view of an organization from positive to negative, they may spread adverse word-of-mouth or separate themselves from the organization.

Lyon and Cameron (2004) found that a good or bad reputation of an organization affects the public's attitude and behavioral intentions. They found that reputation profoundly affected memory, attitude, and behavioral intention of stakeholders. In contrast to SCCT, Lyon and Cameron found that reputation was a better predictor of stakeholder attitude and intent than was

the particular style of the organization's response when the organization's response strategies were apologetic or defensive.

Lyon and Cameron (2004) also found that those organizations with good reputations were found to be more likable than those with bad reputations and stakeholder loyalty increases when they perceive a favorable reputation of the organization. Positive experiences between the organization and stakeholders lead to trust and confidence (Merriman, 2008). Stakeholders receive information about the organization through interactions with the organization, media reports, and information from secondhand sources such as word-of-mouth and social media (Coombs, 2007b; Thiessen & Ingenhoff, 2011). This information leads to stakeholder perceptions about the organization. Perceptions of either a good or bad reputation may lead individuals to make unfounded attributions about other aspects of the organization (Lyon & Cameron, 2004).

Recognizing that most popular measurements of reputation are based on the narrow view of a restricted group of stakeholders, Fombrun and colleagues developed an instrument that incorporated the perceptions of multiple stakeholder groups (Fombrun, Gardberg, & Sever, 2000). These researchers identified six categories of attributes that justify people's feelings about reputations of organizations: emotional appeal, products and services, financial performance, vision and leadership, workplace environment, and social responsibility. Using these six attributes they proposed the 'reputation quotient' index to measure corporate reputations and then compare them within industries. Fombrun and his colleagues tested the 'reputation quotient' and found it to be a reliable instrument by which to measure the perception of reputation by multiple stakeholders, offering a tool to academics and practitioners as a means to look at the 'multidimensionality' of reputation from the vantage point of individual stakeholder groups.

Published reputational rankings provide visible measures that consider organizations within 'industries' (Fombrun, 2000). Publics use these rankings for comparative purposes. *Fortune Magazine's Top 50* is an annual survey that provides a list of America's most admired companies based on input from top executives. *Fortune Magazine's Top 50* survey includes attributes such as quality of products and services, financial soundness, and community responsibility. Another example of visible reputational ranking is *U.S News & World Reports'* "College and University Rankings" that recognizes organizational peer assessments, student retention rates, faculty resources, student selectivity, and alumni giving. These lists are referential but are merely compilations of specific criteria used in surveys. Scholars observe that these types of lists themselves do not define reputations (Lyon & Cameron, 2004), nor do they include theoretical rationale (Fombrun, 2000).

Stakeholder perceptions of reputations are increasingly recognized for their impact on the organization (Fearn-Banks, 2011; Thiessen & Ingenhoff, 2011). This recognition challenges managers to take a more active and scientific approach to communications with various stakeholder groups. Reputation management is most effective when the organization identifies and understands the stakeholders and their behavioral intentions toward the organization (Thiessen & Ingenhoff, 2011). Risks to reputation include legal liabilities as well as losing credibility with important stakeholders (Fitzpatrick, 1995).

Stakeholders

Organizations have many different stakeholders each with potentially diverse interests, concerns, goals and behavioral intentions toward the organization (Benoit, 1997; Fombrun et al., 2000). All stakeholders do not view the reputation of an organization similarly. Each stakeholder

group has specific expectations of the organization and the organization in return expects different behaviors of the various stakeholder groups (Fombrun et al., 2000). Identifying the different stakeholder groups is challenging because of their diverse identities and expectations.

Stakeholders evaluate information they receive about the organization and compare it to what they know and expect (Coombs, 2007b). It is the stakeholder's evaluative perception of the organization that forms the reputation (Fombrun & Van Riel, 1997). Although the organization attempts to influence the stakeholder perceptions of the organization, the reputation is viewed from outside the organization and therefore 'owned' by the stakeholders (Lyon & Cameron, 2004).

Socially accepted standards established and changed over time define the legitimacy of environment in which organizations operate (Allen & Caillouet, 1994). Organizations function within environments where the stakeholders create norms, rules, and requirements. Organizations exist in a state of dependency upon their environments and survive when they continuously convince stakeholders of their value (Hearit, 1995). Stakeholders perceive the legitimacy of an organization to exist when the organization meets their expectations (Allen & Caillouet, 1994). When the expectations of stakeholders are not met, the organizational reputation suffers.

Social causes increasingly factor into organizational reputations. Researchers found that the organization's status and activities with respect to its societal obligations play a role in consumers' brand and product evaluations (Klein & Dawar, 2004). Social causes that are recognized as valuable by the consumer influence consumer behavior even when it is not rationally based on product attributes or economy. Research identified that these behaviors extend beyond consumer behavior to create a halo effect for the organizations influencing

stakeholder perceptions of crisis responsibility. Klein and Dawar (2004) claimed that consumers are willing to give the benefit of the doubt to an organization they know little about when stakeholder valued social causes are supported by the organization, and the opposite is true where lack of perceived social responsibility places the organization in a derogatory position.

Recognizing the importance of stakeholders to an organization, Freeman (1984) suggested stakeholder management be incorporated into the overall strategic management of the organization and that strategic objectives of the organization should include recognition of stakeholder groups that can affect those objectives. Stakeholders both affect and are affected by the organization's purpose and therefore may prevent the organization from accomplishing its mission. (Brody, 1991; Freeman, 1984). Management of stakeholders involves understanding the relationships between the organization and the various stakeholders (Freeman, 1984). Sturges (1994) recognized that a relationship between stakeholders and the organization exists prior to a crisis. Coombs (2000a) recognized that crises can be viewed as episodes within the ongoing relationship between an organization and its stakeholders. These approaches can provide insight into how stakeholders perceive a crisis situation within the context of the larger relationship.

Full recognition of the relationship includes an analysis of who the stakeholders are and the perceived stakes of the relationship, the processes that manage the relationships, and the transactions that transpire between the parties (Freeman, 1984). When the organization can put these pieces together, it has high stakeholder management capability. The more adept an organization is at identifying the requirements of the various stakeholder groups, the better the organization will be able to respond and solicit the behaviors it anticipates. Freeman (1984) further asserted stakeholder perspectives should be recognized from multiple levels in order to gain a full understanding of the relationship, including technological, social, political, and

managerial. Jin et al., (2010) also supported the importance of understanding the crisis from the perspective of the stakeholders, which allows for targeted messages to the various stakeholder groups.

Distinct stakeholder groups are not always easy to distinguish. Stakeholders may be a clearly distinct and defined group of individuals such as employees, community members, competitors, suppliers, students, stockholders, consumers, and media. Government agencies and regulators may create laws and standards and therefore are considered stakeholders for many organizations (Allen & Caillouet, 1994, p. 53). Stakeholders may be legitimate or illegitimate entities. Terrorists would not be recognized as a legal stakeholder group, but they can affect the operation of an organization and therefore may need to be considered as a stakeholder group for some organizations (Freeman, 1984).

When an organization maintains a strong positive reputation with its stakeholders over time, the ongoing favorable views are stored up as reputational capital, indicating the strength of the organization's relationship with its stakeholders. An organization with a large amount of reputational capital will have reserves in a time of crisis (Coombs, 2007), and built-up reputational capital acts as an insurance policy when a crisis occurs (Fombrun, 2000).

Crisis

Definition

Literature is filled with examples that indicate crises have become a permanent and inevitable feature of organizational operations (Coombs, 2012). A crisis contains risk and uncertainty and has the potential for a high magnitude of change to the organization's reputation that can be either negative or positive (Fink, 1986; Sturges, 1994). Crises affect all industries.

Some crises such as the Challenger explosion, Chernobyl, President Clinton's impeachment, Columbine, "9/11", Hurricane Katrina, the Virginia Tech massacre, and the Penn State child abuse scandal have become so commonly known that it is not necessary to identify the details of the events.

Although crisis management is the topic of many articles and books, there is no concise definition of a crisis. "Crisis most often conveys a fundamental threat to the very stability of the system, a questioning of core assumptions and beliefs, and risk to priority goals, including organizational image, legitimacy, profitability, and ultimately survival" (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002, p. 362). Coombs (2012) defined a crisis as "the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes" (p. 2). Fink (1986) defined a crisis as "an unstable time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending" (p. 15). Rollo and Zdziarski (2007) identified the characteristics of a crisis as a negative perception where the event is often a surprise to the organization, response time has limitations, operations are interrupted, and safety and well-being are threatened.

Brody (1991) offered a divergence in definitions between crisis, disaster, and emergency. He suggested a crisis is a "decisive turning point in a condition or state of affairs", a disaster is an "unfortunate sudden and unexpected event" that occurs "through carelessness, negligence, or bad judgment" or [is] produced through no fault of the organization, and an emergency is an "unforeseen occurrence" that presents a "sudden and urgent occasion for action. (p. 175)" He suggested that because each is different, a crisis, a disaster, and an emergency require different types of communication responses and risk management by the organization (Brody, 1991). For the purpose of this research, crisis is defined as "a major occurrence with a potentially negative

outcome affecting the organization, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services, or good name" (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 2).

Crisis Attributes

Although each crisis is unique, numerous scholars have placed crises into groups using common attributes. Coombs (2007a) grouped crises into three groups using attribution of crisis responsibility: victim, accident, and preventable. Mitroff and Anagnos (2000) categorized crises by causes: economic, informational, physical, human resource, reputational, psychopathic, and natural disasters. Grouping crises by responsibility or causes help to simplify how an organization can identify appropriate responses.

Both Fink (1986) and Sturges (1994) observed that crises have stages. These stages have been described as a life-cycle that includes the buildup or "prodromal" period, the crisis breakout or acute crisis, abatement, and lastly the termination. Other scholars have described the crisis stages as early warning signals, preparation and prevention, damage containment, and recovery (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). Sturges (1994) suggested each stage of the crisis requires different responses and that customized communication at each stage of a crisis will maximize the effectiveness of the communication.

Crises impose severe tension on the organization, including its financial, physical, and emotional structures (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). Crises may have catastrophic effects on an organization even to the point of destroying the organization. Crises affect the bottom line of the organization, its employees, and other stakeholders.

Effects of a crisis can be felt by organizations immediately following a crisis; however, some effects may not be realized until long after the crisis has ended. Lyon and Cameron (2004)

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examined the short-term and long-term effects of attitudes, behavioral intentions, and source credibility assessments of organizations experiencing crisis and determined that reputation and the organization's response to the crisis were both powerful forces in stakeholders' subsequent judgments of an organization, underscoring the need for continual reputational management.

Public attention to an organization is particularly high and reputations are most vulnerable when an organization is in a crisis. Mitroff and Anagnos (2000) asserted that a major organizational crisis cannot be contained within the 'walls' of the organization. Boin (2009) suggested that crises "will be increasingly transboundary in nature" (p. 367), and that the size and scope of crises will affect multiple sectors, life-sustaining systems, and infrastructures. Natural disasters such as hurricanes impact multiple states, regions, countries, and continents. The interconnectivity and internationalization of businesses is felt in global financial implosions of economies. Clear beginnings and ends cannot easily be identified in transboundary crises, making it even more difficult to identify stakeholders and to mitigate the impacts of future crises (Boin, 2009).

An organization and its stakeholders rarely experience a crisis in isolation (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). A crisis in one organization may affect the entire industry. A residual impact of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, was heightened security throughout the airline industry (U. S. Department of Homeland Security, 2013b). Laws may be enacted and practices may be altered to mitigate further damages in the aftermath of a crisis. Following the death of a college student, the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act (Clery Act) required all colleges and universities receiving federal aid from the United States Government to collect and annually publish crime statistics informing students of possible dangers (U. S. Department of Education, 2011).

Victims and Nonvictims

According to Coombs (2004) crises produce two distinct types of publics, victims and nonvictims. Victims are directly affected by the crisis. Examples of victims include evacuees, people who are physically harmed, and individuals who suffer emotionally due to a crisis. Nonvictims suffer no injury from the crisis but are interested parties who follow the crisis in the media. Even though nonvictims are not harmed by the crisis, how the organization handles the crisis may affect how nonvictims subsequently interact with the organization. Both victims and nonvictims will form opinions about the crisis response that may affect how they interact with the organization in the future. When an organization responds to a crisis, recognition of both victims and nonvictims should be considered in the response.

Crisis Management

Crisis communication is part of the larger field of crisis management (Fearn-Banks, 2011). Crisis management involves efforts to prevent and detect potential crisis and to learn from the crisis experience. The very nature of crises makes planning for them difficult. Preparation for crises and management of crises has become a growing focus for organizations and governments amid a growing field of research. Crisis management has even become a distinct academic field of study in which degrees are offered. The federal government provides a comprehensive list of colleges, universities, and institutions that offer courses and degrees in emergency management (U. S. Department of Homeland Security, 2013a). Crisis and emergency management has many resources that prescribe through manuals and guidebooks how to set up command structures during a crisis, how to integrate with responders from other organizations, and what resources are necessary to prepare for various types of crises.

Mitroff (2004) identified a difference between crisis leadership and crisis management. He contended crisis management is reactive and addresses a crisis after it happens. He described crisis leadership as proactive, preparing an organization for possible crises before they happen and possibly even avoiding a crisis altogether.

Because organizations do not experience crises in isolation Pearson and Mitroff (1993) observed organizations that recognize a crisis may impact the broadest array of potential stakeholders are best prepared assure a positive response. Lee, Woeste, and Heath (2007) surveyed organizations regarding planning, training, and crisis communication practices and found that organizations can take a proactive stance to crisis communication by frequently training public relations professionals in the delivery of crisis communication strategies, making this part of their precrisis preparations.

Preparation for crises generally has been focused on securing the safety of stakeholders and delivering resources to respond to and limit damages beyond reputation. Guidebooks such as *Developing and maintaining emergency operations plans: Comprehensive planning guide (CPG) 101* (2010) produced by the Federal Emergency Management Agency contend that all hazards should be considered in planning. Communications are included in these guidelines; however, this communication has focused on how to physically communicate and with whom during the crisis. Response strategies to protect and restrict damage to the organizational reputation are not covered in the guidelines.

Crisis management has also been identified as having stages: precrisis, crisis, and postcrisis (Coombs, 2007a; Mitroff et al., 2006). The precrisis stage involves preparation for a crisis, studying the risks involved in possible crises and mitigating the possible damage; the crisis stage necessitates implementation of the plans; and the postcrisis stage includes

assessments of what worked and what did not, looking for improvement and opportunities to

better cope in the future.

<div align="center">**Crisis Communication and the Response**</div>

When organizations and leaders deal with crises they come under scrutiny and are judged

by publics and their legitimacy is questioned (Hearit, 1996). Their response to the crisis is

significant factor in recovery from the crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Fearn-Banks, 2011).

Crisis communication can be used to protect and repair an organization's reputation during a

crisis (Benoit, 1997; Hearit, 1996). The vulnerability of an organization's reputation during a

crisis makes it imperative that the organization protect and restore its stakeholders' positive view

with communication (Fearn-Banks, 2011).

The crisis response strategy includes what the organization does and what it

communicates in response to a crisis (Coombs, 2000b). In a crisis the primary responsibility of

an organization is to secure the safety of its publics, not to protect its own reputation

(Cavanaugh, 2006; Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Sturges, 1994). Although protection of the

reputation is critical, during a crisis it would be negligent for the organization to think of its

reputation before the safety of its publics (Kriyantono, 2012). Only after securing the safety of its

publics should the focus turn towards managing its reputation. Crisis communication that is

designed to protect management or the organization over the safety of the publics can further

damage the reputation of the organization (Wolverton, 2011).

Part of the response includes providing assistance to the victims. Scholars suggest that

assistance can be matched to what is warranted by the responsibility for the crisis and the

reputational damage generated by the crisis situation (Coombs, 2006b; Coombs & Holladay,

<div align="center">50</div>

2002). In an overly accommodative response the organization pays more but does not see an increase in reputational protection (Coombs & Holladay, 1996).

Crisis communication is used by crisis managers and public relations representatives to protect an organization's reputation in a crisis, and organizational responses are often delivered through public relations personnel (Fombrun, 2000). Just as there is no ideal response and recovery for crises, there is no ideal communication strategy to respond to them (McGuire & Schneck, 2010).

McCroskey and Tevan (1999) viewed the message and the message provider as distinct. They found the credibility of the communication source plays a part in the believability of the messages received by stakeholders. They argued that ethos, or source credibility, can be measured through goodwill, and goodwill in turn can be a predictor of likeability and believability. Spokespersons who have little source credibility may do more harm than good. Source credibility can be determined by using a scale developed by McCroskey (1966) that measures authoritativeness and character.

Benoit and Pang (2008) argued that perceptions of crisis responsibility are more important than reality of the crisis situation. When stakeholders perceive an organization to be responsible for a crisis, even if the facts do not bear this out, the perception becomes the reality (Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2012). Salient audiences or stakeholders may refuse to believe the facts. Behavioral intentions will shift based on the stakeholder perceptions even if facts don't support it (Benoit, 1997).

Attention to crisis communications prior to a crisis offers management the ability to more effectively respond when a crisis occurs (Coombs, 2000b). Sturges (1994) suggested that using communication strategies that have been tested will increase the effectiveness and efficiency of

the communication thereby increasing the likelihood of positive outcomes for the organization. Prescribed messages for different crisis scenarios offer organizations the ability to communicate quickly while still addressing the needs of the stakeholders. Brody (1991) suggested that crisis communication planning include message delivery to designated stakeholder groups, including specific goals and objectives for each group. To provide effective crisis communication Brody (1991) suggested an organization should identify involved stakeholders, the behaviors it seeks from those stakeholders, messages that will induce these desired behaviors, validation of those messages, channels of delivery, and measurable results.

Types of Information

Coombs (2012) recognized three types of information necessary to the crisis communications process: instructing, adapting, and reputation management. Coombs claimed these information types are sequential. He suggested that some crises can be managed effectively using only instructing and adjusting information.

Organizations provide instructing information first because it is information needed by stakeholders and they expect it of the organization (Sturges, 1994). When immediate behaviors are required to keep stakeholders safe, as in an immediate physical crisis, instructing information is used to deliver the information. Instructing information can be used to address what happened, how stakeholders are being protected, and how the problem is being corrected so recurrence can be prevented (Coombs, 1999). Instructing information is also a means of demonstrating control of the crisis situation (Sturges, 1994), although a study by Coombs (1999) suggested compassion, not instructing information, gave the impression of organizational control in a crisis.

Coombs appears to question the results of this study by suggesting additional study to consider the factors involved in perceptions of control.

Compassion has socially oriented value that shows concern for stakeholders and helps stakeholders cope with the psychological stress of the crisis situation (Coombs, 1999; Sturges, 1994). Compassion includes expressions of concern by the organization and advances the perception that the organization had gained control of the crisis situation (Coombs, 2007b).

Coombs (1999) tested the effect of compassion and instructing information on the organizational reputation in an accident crisis type. The study was performed on a group of crisis managers to overcome some of the criticism that most SCCT research uses students as a simulation of the general population. He found that there was a strong positive effect of compassion on organizational reputational, honoring accounts (accepting the crisis response strategy), and intended potential behaviors. There was little downside to voicing compassion during an accident crisis. Increasing instructing information during an accident crisis type had no effect on organizational reputation, account honoring, or potential intended behaviors (Coombs, 1999).

Reputation management follows instruction and compassion. Stakeholders attribute responsibility to organizations for negative, unexpected events (Weiner, 1985). These attributions affect how stakeholders feel and behave toward the organization. SCCT used attribution theory to develop crisis response strategies for use in reputation management. Because communication affects how stakeholders feel about the organization, knowing which communication response strategy, including words and actions, is most effective in a particular crisis types is crucial to the protection and repair of the organization reputation (Allen & Caillouet, 1994).

Messages

In the crisis response the organization needs to tell its side of the story by identifying the important issues and controlling the message stakeholders receive (Benson, 1988). Coombs (2007a) offered guidelines for the initial crisis response that included three core elements: 1) be quick, (2) be accurate, and (3) be consistent. If the organization is silent or slow to respond in a crisis, misinformation and speculation will fill the void (White, 2009). Stakeholders want to know what happened and will look for information anywhere (Fitzpatrick, 1995). Consistency within the messages, especially when delivered by multiple spokespersons, provides the organization the ability to speak with one voice, giving it the ability to maintain focus and accuracy with the message. Failure to provide consistent and regular messaging can make the crisis situation worse (Kriyantono, 2012). Fitzpatrick (1995) also suggested limiting spokespersons and preparing the spokesperson to not unnecessarily accept responsibility for a crisis.

In contrast to a quick response, Seeger (2002) suggested that rapid response about the cause and blame may not always be the best method for reducing threat and uncertainty in a crisis. Using chaos theory as a base, Seeger observed that a more realistic view of the disrupting features of a crisis takes time to emerge and that offering up precise messages too early as a short-term goal may be unwarranted and possibly unethical.

Crisis communication can be integrated at various levels to better protect the reputation of the organization. The social interaction between an organization and its stakeholders results in routines that are interrupted in a crisis. Thiessen and Ingenhoff (2011) suggested that crisis communication can be integrated at the sociological, organizational, and the message or symbolic levels. This integration allows the message to be the correct message for the level of

responsibility that addresses stakeholders inside and outside the organization while also addressing the social expectations of the publics. Coombs (2012) offered that message maps can be used to target messages to different stakeholder groups.

Knowledge of stakeholder interests, activities, and methods of communication will assist crisis managers with message delivery and influencing potential behaviors (Thiessen & Ingenhoff, 2011). The symbolic perspective of an integrative model of crisis communication put forth by Thiessen and Ingenhoff recognized both the shortrun impact on organizational image and the long-run impact on overall organizational reputation.

Thiessen and Ingenhoff (2011) recognized a need to address both internal and external communications and they advocated for an integrated crisis communication strategy. Their model recognized the societal level of crisis communication that addressed the rules of society, the organizational level addressed the structures and processes within the organization, and the message level addressed the "patterns of interpretation, influencing the perception of crisis among key stakeholders and the public" (p. 18).

Employees, internal stakeholders, are often the source of rumors and miscommunication if they are not informed during a crisis (Fearn-Banks, 2011). Only focusing on external stakeholders fails to recognize the importance of employee communications during a crisis. Fearn-Banks advocated an integrative crisis communication approach that provides consistent messaging so that knowledge is available to employees and external stakeholders without creating additional problems during the crisis.

Benoit (1997) studied the messages used by organizations when their reputation was attacked. He found that tarnished organizational image resulting from a crisis can be repaired using various message options targeted to specific audiences. In his development of image repair

theory he found that messages matched to the salient audiences offered the best repair for the image. Benoit suggested five message categories for image repair: denial, evasion of responsibility, rejection or reduction of responsibility, reduction of offensiveness and corrective actions, and mortification.

Language is identified as one difficulty associated with delivering crisis communication messages (Mitroff, 2004). A word may have more than one meaning. Hart (1993) indicated "the most important instrument of crisis management is language" (p. 41). Crisis communication messages provide patterns of interpretation that influence the perceptions of the crisis among stakeholders (Thiessen & Ingenhoff, 2011).

Crisis communication may alleviate or reduce possible reputational damage, but it can sometimes even bring the organization a more positive reputation than before the crisis occurred (Fearn-Banks, 2011). A crisis usually implies that the outcome is negative on a reputation; however, a crisis may actually have a positive effect on a reputation as in the response from Johnson & Johnson over the Tylenol tampering case (Benson, 1988; Mitroff et al., 2006). Management may even see a crisis as a means to further its own aims as a crisis may open up opportunities (Hart, 1993). Ulmer and Sellnow (2002) suggested crises offer unique opportunities for renewal and growth when stakeholders have a prior relationship of commitment to the organization. Ulmer and Sellnow suggested that not all crisis discourse needs to be about repairing the reputation. They observed that when the organization has done nothing wrong, the communication can be uplifting and more focused on rebuilding and renewal. Building confidence between the stakeholders and the organization is the goal.

Egelhoff and Sen (1992) related crisis response to information processing systems that include communications, decision-making, and the gathering and storage of information in the

organization. They theorized that appropriate crisis management responses are matched to the characteristics of the sources of the crisis situation, whether the type of failure was technical or sociopolitical and if the source was in a remote or relevant environment.

Crisis Response Strategies

Stephens et al. (2005) reviewed crisis response strategies when technical explanations were required, recognizing the difficulty in conveying details to stakeholders. Complex technical details, such as those involved in recalls of previously implanted surgical devices, include messages that must be relayed to lay audiences. The details of involved technical explanations and descriptions to explain what happened can elude the lay message receivers. The study found that when the crisis involved technical details, the organizations either avoided providing technical details or stuck with an explanation that directly stated the facts and provided little additional explanation. Their study did not measure the effectiveness of the crisis response strategies used but did caution practitioners to be aware of different stakeholders as well as the message delivery venues for disseminating the messages. Egelhoff and Sen (1992) suggested that preparation for technical crisis communications can be detailed prior to the crisis, whereas prepared communications for other types of crisis should be broader and not so narrowly focused.

Coombs (2012) suggested the emotional impact of a crisis on stakeholders reduces their ability to process information so clear and simple messages are most effective. He recommended preparation for possible crisis situations by identifying the various stakeholder groups of an organization, assessing the most highly ranked crises and questions that will arise by each of the stakeholder groups. Messages can be prescribed for different scenarios for clarity and simplicity.

Crises can be grouped by crisis type so that response strategies can be created for each group, as opposed to creating response strategies for each crisis type. Coombs (2006a) grouped crises by level of responsibility for the crisis: the victim cluster has very weak attributions of crisis responsibility, the accidental cluster has minimal attributions of responsibility, and the intentional cluster has the strongest attribution of responsibility. Pearson and Mitroff (1993) grouped crises into seven crisis types based on their shared characteristics. Their crisis types included: psycho, external economic attacks, mega damage, occupational health diseases, external information attacks, breaks, and perceptual. Coombs, as well Pearson and Mitroff, recognized that skills for addressing crises are transferable within crisis types.

In contrast to SCCT, Ferguson et al. (2012) observed that crisis response strategies were viewed as either good or bad regardless of the crisis type. They found good crisis response strategies included corrective action, compensation, mortification, and bolstering. They suggested that good strategies could be used in messaging without regard to the crisis type. Their research suggested that strategies of denial, blame shifting, silence, and provocation were seen as bad and therefore should not be used as crisis response strategies.

While Coombs's crisis response strategies were based in the attribution of blame for the crisis, other scholars have identified crisis response strategies from different viewpoints. Allen and Caillouet (1994) created a list of strategies based on impression management literature: excuse, justify, ingratiation, denounce, and distort. Benoit (1997) examined interpersonal efforts to repair images to create a list of image repair strategies: denial, evasion of responsibility, reduce offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification.

Instantaneous Information and Continual Updates

Electronic and instantaneous communication tools have altered the field of crisis communication (Fearn-Banks, 2011). The integration of electronic technologies and social media into crisis communication can provide feedback and interaction with stakeholders during and following a crisis (Coombs, 2007a; Taylor & Kent, 2006).

Taylor and Kent (2006) studied the use of the Internet for delivering crisis communications. The Internet and the World Wide Web became a communication tool in the mid-1990s, which offered organizations an opportunity to communicate their messages without media influence and filtering and offered some degree of control over the initial messages to stakeholders. They observed the increased use of the Internet over the over a 7-year period and the importance of integrating messages on the Internet within the overall crisis communication strategy of the organization in crisis. Through the use of Internet postings and links, the organization has some control over what is published about the crisis. Taylor and Kent observed that the Internet can allow two-way interactive conversations that can give an organization the ability to more effectively manage a crisis by improving understanding of the situation. Feedback and information from stakeholders during a crisis offers the organization the ability to be better informed about the effects of the crisis.

Electronic social media such as Facebook and Twitter provides the means to respond quickly, but the message is not necessarily controllable because of the openness and exchangeability of the messages (Taylor & Kent, 2006). Taylor and Kent also recognized the ability to receive information back from stakeholders via these social technologies, providing organizations that monitor the technological conversations with real-time feedback.

Organizations that monitor feedback in real-time via electronic communications can give the organization some idea as to the pulse or response of their stakeholders.

Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, offer opportunities for organizations to gauge how the organization is perceived during a crisis. Messages posted can be reviewed for stakeholders' acceptance or rejection the message strategies, what they liked or disliked about them, and to determine what stakeholders find lacking in the messages (Coombs, 2012). Citizen journalists can pass on accurate information and photographs via electronic social media if they are near a disaster area (Fearn-Banks, 2011).

Media often set the agenda for organizational reputations in crisis (Coombs, 2004). Media often provide historical and contextual information regarding crises. "Stakeholders often know little about the specifics of an organization in crisis, including past safety performance, unless the media supply such information" (Coombs, 2004, p. 276). Media coverage for many crises is 24 hours per day, 7 days per week on a national and sometimes international basis. Coverage can include the replay of 911 calls, interviews with victims and their families, and pictures and videos taken on cell phones. Media can use all these tools to inform the public about the crisis incident and the response of the publics that follow a crisis (Mann, 2007). Benson (1988) advocated that organizations cultivate positive relationships with the media, anticipating that it "may result in fairer reporting of crisis events and in more objective interpretations of one's decisions and actions in a crisis situation" (p. 50).

Stakeholders can be selective about which message outlets they want to access. Traditional crisis communication channels include press-releases, public presentations, and web sites. Social media options expand delivery options and make the world a smaller place (Coombs, 2012).

Mitroff and Anagnos (2000) asserted crises cannot be kept a secret or hidden from the public because technology today does not allow it. "The explosive growth of information technologies and their intrusion into every nook and cranny of our lives, in effect, there are no secrets anymore – none, period" (Mitroff & Anagnos, 2000, p. 61). The proliferation of mobile technologies that record video and photographs plus 24/7 media coverage and the ability to share and reshare information keeps publics aware of mass destruction and loss of life involved in crises on a global level (Mann, 2007).

Framing

Framing is a method to provide emphasis on relevant aspects of a crisis while deemphasizing others. Entman (1991) concluded that news media highlighted concepts through elements such as "keywords, metaphors, concepts, symbols, and visual images" (p. 7). Framing causes stakeholders to focus on particular ideas or concepts to influence their perceptions of the crisis. Kim and Cameron (2011) examined the effects of news media frames and their influence on audience perceptions, attributions, evaluations, and behavioral intentions following a crisis. Their research suggested "the distinct emotions elicited by different news frames could influence publics' information processing and attitudes toward the organization, and the organization could develop different strategies by considering the publics' emotional needs" (p. 846). Carroll (2004) found that media set agendas by covering news and crises of certain firms more often and more prominently.

Frames are not only established by media. Crisis managers and special interest groups also frame messages (Hart, 1993). Framing can be used to symbolically reinterpret perceptions of the various publics, redefine the situation, and reset legitimization for the organization. The

messages by these groups may undermine the capacity of organizations to deliver their own messages. Frames can be used to assist the stakeholders with focus in the message. The organization can assist stakeholders to focus on specific parts of the message.

Conrad (2011) studied crisis coverage of different types of news media and blogs to determine if crises involving higher education was covered differently by each mode. Using framing theory he did find variations among the different media deliveries.

In order to emphasize topics in a crisis, crisis types can be considered a form of framing. Coombs (2012) suggested that crisis managers frame crises in such a way as to obtain a desirable response from top management but to also influence stakeholder perception of the crisis.

Universities

Reputation

Abraham et al. (2012) described the reputation of an institution of higher education as its "ultimate asset" (para. 27). They claimed institutions of higher education are increasingly targets of lawsuits; and that the lawsuits along with the unrelenting media cycle tell powerful stories in order to make an impact and evoke emotions. Crises at institutions of higher education offer prime opportunities because the institutions have 'deep-pockets'. They suggested that the risk management process engage the entire stakeholder community to prevent crises where possible and to protect reputation.

Brooks, Oringel, and Ramaley (2013) indicated "stakeholder perception, not the university's reality, will drive reputation" (p. 15), and they advocated that practical measurement of a university's reputation should include both an understanding of stakeholder groups' expectations of the university and the stakeholder groups' perceptions of the university's reality.

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Many academic leaders make the mistake of assuming their school's reputation is

positive based on aggregated measures of reputation (reputation scores). This

assumption fails to recognize that various stakeholder groups might differ in how

they value specific criteria, yielding inaccuracies when such data are aggregated

across groups. (p. 5)

Reputation scores, such as rankings, offer a visible method to quantify reputation

(Fombrun, 2000). Rankings for colleges and universities are based on various aspects of the

institutions such as who gets into the institution, the value of the education, and the university

life as experienced by students. Stakeholders such as future students, their parents, high school

counselors, and employers may use these informational rankings to establish their interest in

particular universities or colleges.

Annual rankings are provided by U. S. News, Forbes, and the Princeton Review.

Reputational rankings in a directory such as the *U. S. News* Best Colleges rankings provide one

type of reputational ranking, basing the list on items such as undergraduate academic programs,

student retention, faculty resources, and student selectivity (Morse & Flanigan, 2012). The

information for *U. S. News* Best Colleges comes from the schools themselves. Forbes creates an

annual list of America's top colleges based on factors that address the return on investment of the

education and includes such items as the quality of teaching, career prospects, graduation rates,

and levels of debt (Forbes, 2012). The Princeton Review also produces college rankings of 378

top colleges based on surveys of students who attend the schools (The Princeton Review, 2013).

Their rankings are published annually online and in a book that includes 62 categories such as

best classroom experience, party schools, happiest students, most beautiful campus, and students

who study the least.

An online reputational ranking is College Prowler (Niche, 2013). It was developed and is maintained by Niche and is updated weekly. College Prowler is based on a variety of sources including student, parent, and alumni surveys, school administrators, and governmental databases. The College Prowler rankings are based on collaborative efforts that include reviews, polls, and facts or statistics that cover such topics as academics, campus dining, campus housing, drug safety, nightlife, and parking.

Accreditation of colleges and universities offers another type of reputation for institutions of higher education (Zemsky, 2009). Accrediting bodies set reputational goals for institutions of higher education that define the ability of a program or institution to continue operations. Parents and students make assumptions about the reputation of programs based on the accreditation status.

The protection of the university's reputation includes the ability of leaders to recognize the risks to the reputation and understand the various measures of reputation. It also includes the ability to identify the various stakeholders and their expectations.

Stakeholders

A variety of internal and external stakeholders may be affected by a university crisis. Stakeholders may include students, parents, faculty, staff, and community members (Blumenstyk, 2012; Rollo & Zdziarski, 2007). Governing bodies, accreditation agencies, and special-interest groups may also be stakeholders (Mitroff et al., 2006). Even society as a whole is seen as a stakeholder in higher education (Blumenstyk, 2012; Moore, 2012).

Board members are considered part of the campus community and should be involved in addressing risks associated with the university (Abraham et al., 2012). Communication with

governing boards prior to communicating with other stakeholders can be crucial to ongoing operations (Wolverton, 2011). Wolverton advocated that university board members regularly monitor their campuses for potential problems.

Merriman identified the importance of parents as stakeholders. While both the university and parents of students are committed to the safety of students, many times university administrators respond broadly to a campus crisis, but parents think specifically about their own student. Parents may see crises involving their student where university administrators see none. Merriman (2008) observed that parents, as stakeholders, are not usually part of the information loop in crisis planning.

Sung and Yang (2009) suggested university students' supportive behaviors toward the university are highly influenced by their perceptions of the university's reputation. The factors they found that significantly influenced the supportive intentions of students were: the level of active communication behaviors of the students, perceived relationship quality with the university, and the student's perceived reputation of the university.

Crises and Crisis Management

Similar to other organizations, universities experience a range of crisis types. Universities experience crises such as severe weather events over which they have no control. The other end of the spectrum involves crises that could have been avoided such as loss of accreditation and data breaches. Preparation for the various crisis types and the communication with stakeholders are parts of crisis management function at universities.

Crises. Preparation for certain types of crises is recognized as necessary, not only by the institutions but also by the federal government as part of emergency preparedness (U. S. Department of Education, 2013). Addressing the significance of a crisis and how it sometimes defines an institution, Rinella (2007) wrote:

> A major disaster is one of the most significant events in the life of the institution, so much so that most campuses that have experienced a disaster mark time in terms of the event for at least a generation: "Before the tornado; after the tornado" or "Before Katrina; after Katrina." (p. 1)

The physical devastation experienced by institutions of higher education due to Hurricane Katrina in 2005 included massive damage to buildings and research (Mitroff et al., 2006). But the crisis included other damages such as loss of tuition revenue, the ability to recruit and retain qualified faculty and staff, the need to reestablish admission procedures, reconstruction of student and faculty records, and lost research data.

Mitroff et al. (2006) observed that as the complexity of universities increase in areas such as operations, technology, and infrastructure, the risks facing universities and the leaders also increase. Influenced by televised media and communications, tragedies at universities now have more prominence (Rollo & Zdziarski, 2007). Universities experience crises that are generally not associated with business: hazing, research ethics, athletic recruitment violations, and issues related to academic freedom (Conrad, 2011).

Media coverage is usually high during crisis at universities (Kelsay, 2007). The wide availability of pictures and videos on cell phones, digital cameras, and extensive media coverage make events such as the Virginia Tech tragedy and other catastrophic events known around the world almost instantaneously (Mann, 2007). The details of the devastation cannot be hidden.

Rinella (2007) contended the president of a university plays a significant role in a crisis. Lessons learned from 10 university presidents whose institutions experienced a major crisis indicate the president must take the lead in developing the disaster plan, decisions are made immediately following a disaster that differ from normal academic culture, and the president is a chief public relations officer and the personification of the institution.

Jacobsen (2010) interviewed campus leaders to determine major challenges to the campus during crises as well as strategies to handle the crises. Some of the challenges included: leading in spite of loss of control, coping with less than adequate technical and human crisis response measures or systems, evaluation of leadership decisions simultaneous to the leadership actions, and communicating about the crisis. Strategies for dealing with crises included: recognizing safety as a priority, planning and policy development, identifying necessary resources, clarifying infrastructure of leadership during the crisis, and framing the crisis for others.

Piet DeLa Torre (2011) found that "information silos" restrict the flow of communication at institutions of higher educational institution in regards to campus safety. Distinct roles among public safety, academic staff, and mental health providers had no common communication vehicles for communicating dangers regarding troubled students. Information sharing and the ability to connect valuable pieces of information about a troubled student were noted as contributing factors to the crisis at Virginia Tech in 2007 (Gray, 2008; The Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007).

Coombs (2007a) advocated that the initial message from the organization to the stakeholders and public be quick and accurate. University decision-making is often based-on shared responsibility for governance (Birnbaum, 1988), which does not react quickly to a crisis

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situation. A study following the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina noted the need to make different types of decisions or to adapt changing leadership styles during a crisis because people simply did what needed to be done (Gardner et al., 2007)

Crisis preparation and management. The results of a survey of college and university provosts indicated that institutions of higher education are more prepared for physical crises than they are for softer crises (Mitroff et al., 2006). Physical crises may include fires, lawsuits, and crimes. Softer crises that involve damage from ethical violations, data loss, and sabotage are generally not addressed in crisis preparation. Reputational damage is recognized as an issue in a crisis but it is not typically part of crisis preparations at institutions of higher education.

Cavanaugh (2006) advocated that planning should include communication with the campus and the community prior to, during, and after the crisis. He suggested that comprehensive crisis preparation plans of higher education institutions that are updated can prove to be great resources. Zdziarski (2001) found most institutions of higher education perceived themselves to be prepared to respond to a crisis. He identified four categories of crisis and found most institutions had at least one plan in place for each of the four categories: natural, facility, criminal, and human. Crisis management at institutions of higher education was more reactive than proactive. He also identified internal and external stakeholders involved with the planning. While the majority of internal stakeholders included staff, neither faculty or students were regularly included in the planning process. External stakeholders included emergency responders such as police and fire department personnel, local hospitals, local emergency management, and campus ministry.

A crisis experienced by a university may influence the decisions of future students and their parents to attend (Kelsay, 2007). Kelsay identified the extent of media attention, timing of the crisis during the recruitment year, and the nature of the crisis as factors related to a crisis that influenced prospective students and their parents' choice in college or university selection.

The United States government recognized the need for emergency preparations at institutions of higher education and prepared guides that address the topics of planning, preparation, mitigation, response, and recovery for crises (U. S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, 2010; U. S. Department of Education, 2013). Reputational preservation is not specifically a part of the guides, but anticipating emergencies and preparing to respond to them should have a positive effect on a university's reputation. A university that makes no preparation for crises can expect to incur additional damage to its reputation.

Communications. Universities have additional legal requirements regarding the communication of some crises or emergencies that are not required by nonuniversity organizations. The requirements are created by the federal law entitled The Jeanne Clery Act. The law includes requirements for both timely warnings and reporting of crimes considered Clery crimes. The framing of messages in some crisis situations has an impact on the message where limited information can be provided via mass notification and social media formats. Mass notification systems using Internet, cell phones, computer networks, and social media have been developed. The university may not be able to easily convey the crisis response strategy within these confines.

Butler and Lafreniere (2010) surveyed campus community members to determine the favorability of receiving mass notifications regarding safety and the technologies used by

members to receive mass notifications regarding campus safety. Results indicated the vast majority of participants were in favor of implementing mass notifications but that students, faculty, and staff did not use various messaging technologies to the same extent. This suggests that universities consider a variety of methods to deliver crisis communications to the stakeholder groups of students, faculty, and staff in order deliver effective messages. Understanding the way messages are received using current technologies can be important to having the message strategies get received by the intended stakeholders.

Walsch (2011) studied the crisis response of George Mason University and Northern Illinois University in high risk/high reward situations. The unexpected victories of the George Mason University basketball team over four top-ranked teams in the 2006 National College Athletic Association (NCAA) tournament brought both notoriety and exceedingly high media coverage. Northern Illinois University experienced multiple shootings on the campus in 2008. Walsch found that neither university linked crisis communication and strategic communications plans that would have responded to the crisis and enhanced the universities image.

Jackson (2011) performed a study of university public relations professionals regarding tools and media they used for instantaneous dissemination of messages to the student population. The tools used most were the university website, email, text, and telephone notifications. Social media was not used regularly in crisis communication messages even though it was viewed as effective in daily communications among students.

A roundtable of leaders from higher education, the media, and legal representatives sponsored by the American Council on Education identified issues that affect university responses to crises (Bataille, Billings, & Nellum, 2012). These leaders discussed the consideration of stakeholder groups to whom they must answer for decisions made during a

crisis. These stakeholders included boards, legislators, and the public. Federal response

frameworks such as the National Incident Management System (NIMS), provided by the Federal

Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which sets up concepts and principals for

standardized incident management, along with tight regulatory requirements of the Clery Act add

to the decision-making processes of university leadership during a crisis. Depending on the type

of crisis, involvement of other agencies participating in the response may take over or share

leadership responsibilities, including the Center for Disease Control during an epidemic, the

Federal Bureau of Investigation during terrorist activities, FEMA for flooding or other natural

disasters, and local police when investigations extend beyond the campus. The leaders also

identified the need to strike a balance between legal counsel's advice to protect the university

and the ability to communicate effectively with stakeholders who desire information.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), administered by the U. S.

Department of Education, may also influence the ability of universities to respond to some crises

(Meloy, 2012). Where the Clery Act requires universities to provide immediate emergency

notifications in certain health and safety threat situations, FERPA restricts the release of certain

types of student education information. Universities must balance the swiftness of crisis response

required by one law while protecting student rights required by the other. Additional

considerations for a university involved in a crisis include the Freedom of Information Act

(FOIA), Title IX regulations (Parrot, 2012), and the Health Information Portability Act (HIPAA)

(Hellwig-Olsen, Jacobsen, & Mian, 2007)

Understanding the requirements of the various laws is crucial to a university response to

certain types of crises. The report to the Virginia Tech Review Panel reported that key players at

the university "explained their failures to communicate with one another or with Cho's parents

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by noting their belief that such communications are prohibited by federal laws governing the privacy of health and education records. In reality, federal laws and their state counterparts afford ample leeway to share information in potentially dangerous situations." (The Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007, p. 2)

Summary

Situational Crisis Communication Theory offers evidence based strategies that allow an organization to select a crisis response strategy that best protects its reputation from the damage of a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). It matches the crisis response strategy to the level of responsibility for the crisis. SCCT uses a rhetorical approach as a response to a crisis and is based in attribution theory where stakeholders attribute blame to an organization for negative events.

SCCT recognizes that rhetorical responses to a crisis include the safety of stakeholders by providing instructing information to assist people to physically cope with the crisis, adjusting information to assist stakeholders to cope psychologically with the crisis, and reputational protection and repair where the crisis situation is matched to the level of reputational threat (Coombs, 2012). Crisis threats to reputation are based on crisis types; victim, accidental, and intentional. Both crisis history and prior reputational relationship history intensify the threat to the reputation. The greater the threat to the reputation, the more the organizational response must be perceived to take responsibility.

SCCT is both predictive and prescriptive (Coombs & Holladay, 2007). It predicts stakeholder behavioral intentions and prescribes the organizational crisis response strategy that is most effective for protecting and repairing its reputation.

Positive reputations are crucial to the long-term survival of an organization (Coombs, 2007b). Crises impact the organizational reputation by compromising normal operations and stakeholder expectations. Crises include emergencies and situations that build up over time until they cannot be ignored and reach the level of awareness of stakeholders. Recognizing the stakeholder groups that impact the organization is a significant factor in understanding the possible damage to the organization.

Universities, similar to other types of organizations, have reputations and stakeholders (Brooks et al., 2013). Universities experience crises that can damage their reputations. The guidelines offered by SCCT can be used by universities experiencing a crisis to protect and repair reputational assets.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to contribute to current theory-driven research in crisis communication by examining the perceptions of multiple stakeholder groups to a university crisis response strategy. Research on crisis communication has been dominated by case studies. However, a growing segment of research has been based on situational crisis communication theory (SCCT), employing experimental studies to compare the responses to multiple crisis response strategies from the perspective of many stakeholders having a singular response perspective. Research based in SCCT that recognized the potential distinct perspectives of stakeholder groups was limited.

The theoretical framework of SCCT offers a basis from which to understand and investigate the field of crisis communication and its effect on organizational reputation. I sought to clarify and test SCCT from a previously unreported perspective. Crisis communication was examined using a crisis response strategy matched to responsibility for the crisis as identified in Coombs's SCCT. Through this nonexperimental study I sought to further understanding of SCCT by examining the response of multiple stakeholder groups to a university's response to a crisis.

SCCT recognizes three factors that impact the reputational threat of a crisis to an organization: initial crisis responsibility, crisis history, and prior relationship history. Research has shown that both an organization's crisis history and the prior relationship between the organization and stakeholder groups have an effect on the perceptions of reputation by stakeholders (Coombs, 2004; Coombs & Holladay, 2001); however, neither was part of this

study. In this study the scenario used included a hypothetical university where a prior relationship could not be established. The scenario did not involve a history of similar crises at the university. This study focused on the crisis responsibility of a university, stakeholder groups' perception of the university's reputation, and the stakeholder groups' potential behavioral intentions toward the university. The purpose of this study was to investigate a portion of SCCT, not to test the whole theory.

This chapter is a description of the research questions, hypotheses, and the methodology of this research. It contains specific information on the survey instruments, data collection, population, and data analyses.

Limited research has been completed on perception of crisis response strategies from the perspectives of distinct stakeholder groups. The purpose of this study was to examine the response of distinct stakeholders groups to a university crisis response strategy. The research design of this study was a nonexperimental quantitative study using primary data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). According to McMillan and Schumacher surveys are used to "describe attitudes, beliefs, opinions, and other types of information" (p. 22), where responses obtained from a smaller group of subjects can be inferred about a larger number of people. Quantitative research assumes that a single reality can be discovered from multiple perspectives when measured with an instrument. Quantitative research design stresses objectivity in measurement and description of phenomenon using numbers, statistics, structure, and control. This nonexperimental research design used a survey with Likert-type questions to evaluate the perceptions of university reputation, crisis responsibility, and potential supportive stakeholder behaviors of distinct stakeholder groups.

Research Questions and Null Hypotheses

The following research questions and null hypotheses guided this study:

Research Question 1: Is there a significant difference in the perception of university reputation among stakeholder groups when the university used a crisis response strategy advocated by SCCT?

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the perception of university reputation among stakeholder groups when the university used a crisis response strategy advocated by SCCT.

Research Question 2: Is there a significant difference in the perception of responsibility among stakeholder groups when the university used a crisis response strategy advocated by SCCT?

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the perception of responsibility among stakeholder groups when the university used a crisis response strategy advocated by SCCT.

Research Question 3: Is there a significant difference in the potential supportive behaviors among stakeholder groups when the university used a crisis response strategy advocated by SCCT?

Ho3: There is no significant difference in the potential supportive behaviors among stakeholder groups when the university used a crisis response strategy advocated by SCCT.

Instrumentation

The concepts of organizational reputation, crisis responsibility, and potential supportive behaviors were measured using previously established survey instruments. Organizational reputation was measured using the 5-item Organizational Reputation Scale developed by Coombs and Holladay (1996), which was adapted from McCroskey's (1966) subscale for the measurement of ethos. Ethos, or character, conceptualizes the trustworthiness and goodwill of the source and therefore is a predictor of likeableness and believability. The five survey questions that comprised the Organizationl Reputation Scale were 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9. Respondents were asked to reply to statements such as (a) "the university is concerned with the well-being of its publics," and (b) "the university is basically dishonest." Coombs and his coresearcher Holladay have used the Organizational Reputation Scale throughout their research with high reliability ranging from .81 to .92 (Cronbach's alpha).

The crisis responsibility measure was based on a scale developed by Coombs that was adapted from Griffin, Babin, and Darden's (1992) Blame Scale and McAuley et al. (1992) Causal Dimension Scale II (CDSII). The five survey questions that comprised the Crisis Responsibility Scale were 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10. Survey statements regarding crisis responsibility included statements such as (a) "circumstances, not the university, are responsible for the crisis,' and (b) "the blame for the crisis lies with the university." The reported Cronbach's alpha ranged from .78 to .86.

Potential behavioral intentions were measured using Coombs's (1999) Potential Supportive Behavior Scale. This is an indication of how stakeholders might act toward the university following the crisis. Items 11 through 14 on the survey measured potential supportive

behaviors. Coombs's research using this scale resulted in the reported Cronbach's alpha between .80 and .86.

The stimulus was a crisis scenario based on real events at an actual university. The description was taken from the university's website and actual news reports. The crisis type was intentional and the matched crisis response strategy from the university was rebuilding. The crisis scenario was not related to the university associated with the population to be surveyed.

The survey instrument included the crisis scenario followed by the data collection section. The data collection section was comprised of four sections; organization reputation, crisis responsibility, potential supportive behavioral intentions, and demographics. The survey instrument included 17 statements and respondents were asked to indicate their degree of agreement with each via a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Demographic questions included stakeholder groups, age range, gender, and ethnicity. The demographic information and all responses collected were confidential and did not reveal the participants in the study. Participants needed approximately 6 minutes for completion of the survey process. For the purpose of this study the word "organization" used in the original scales was changed to "university" in the survey statements.

Sample

For this study, the leadership of a public regional university agreed to participate. The university has approximately 14,500 students, 1,400 faculty (full-time, part-time, and adjunct), and 3,200 staff (full-time, part-time, and temporary). All of these individuals were invited to participate in this study via email. In addition, 1,084 alumni, selected through systematic sampling, were invited to participate. Alumni selected were from the graduation years of 2008,

2009, and 2010. According to Barrett (1995), recent graduates begin to identify as alumni within 2 to 3 years following graduation. Those individuals who chose to complete the survey self-selected themselves for participation.

Data Collection

Permission to conduct this research was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to the instigation of this study. The provost's office agreed to distribute the initial email to students, faculty, and staff, while I sent email invitations to alumni.

I was not provided a list of participant names or email addresses by the participating university. Instead, the email containing the electronic survey link was forwarded to a specific point of contact at the university. The university representative used an internal email distribution list to contact potential participants. The use of an internal email distribution list enhanced the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. I had no way to identify individuals or their responses. The most current email addresses in the list assisted in reaching the entire targeted population. A follow-up email was sent to the entire group 10 days after the initial email.

A list of email addresses for alumni with graduation dates of 2008, 2009, and 2010 was made available by the university alumni office. I sent the email invitations to the alumni group. I sent a follow-up email to the alumni group 10 days after the initial email.

An online survey instrument, SurveyGizmo, was used to generate an electronic hyperlink that provided access to the survey instrument. SurveyGizmo is an Internet survey administration tool that was used for practicality in administering the survey.

Data Analysis

Each research question was analyzed using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The independent variable was the stakeholder group and the dependent variables were the perceptions of reputation, crisis responsibility, and potential supportive behaviors.

All data were analyzed at the .05 level of significance. The findings of the data analysis are included in Chapter 4. A summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research are included in Chapter 5.

Summary

Chapter 3 reported the methodology and procedures for conducting this study. The research design, research questions and null hypotheses, instrumentation, population selection, data collection, and data analysis procedures were defined. The results of the survey are presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

In this chapter data are presented and analyzed to answer three research questions and three null hypotheses. An Internet survey (Appendix C) was used to collect the data. A scenario involving a university crisis and the university's response was presented and followed by questions about perceptions of the university response to the crisis. The crisis scenario and the crisis response strategy used by the fictitious university in this study were based on an actual university crisis and the university's response. A 7-point Likert-scale was used on the first three sections of the survey to assess stakeholder perceptions of reputation, crisis responsibility, and potential supportive behaviors. The next section included the survey participants' experience with a data breach. The final section included seven demographic questions.

The three quantitative research questions posed in Chapter 3 were tested using a one-way analysis of variance. Each survey participant responded to a single crisis scenario experienced and responded to by a university. The crisis response strategy, rebuilding, used by the university is the one recommended, or matched, by SCCT to limit the amount of reputational damage in an intentional crisis type (Coombs, 2006b).

The respondents in this study were students, faculty, staff, and alumni of a regional university located in the southeastern United States during the spring 2014 semester. An initial email inviting participation (Appendix B) was sent from the university provost's office to each of three participant groups: students, faculty, and staff. Approximately 10 days later a follow-up email was sent to the student group by the office of student affairs, to the faculty group by the president of the faculty senate, and to the staff group by the president of the staff senate. I sent

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emails to the alumni contacts from a list of alumni provided by the university's alumni office. The list included all graduates from the years 2008, 2009, and 2010 where the email address was different from the one supplied to them as a student, indicting some degree of interaction with the university beyond graduation. According to Barrett (1995) within 2 to 3 years of graduation graduates begin to identify as alumni versus students. A systematic sample of the 5,423 alumni email addresses was used to identify the sample of 1,084 alumni email addresses. I sent the alumni group a follow-up email invitation 10 days following the initial email.

Of the 20,327 invitees, 1,882 (9.2%) respondents started the survey and 1,503 (7.4%) completed it. The number of email invitations sent to each group was 14,507 (71.3%) students, 1,480 (7.3%) faculty, 3,252 (16.0%) staff, and 1,084 (5.4%) alumni. The response rate to the email invitations was 785 (5.4%) students, 277 (18.6%) faculty, 355 (10.9%) staff, and 86 (7.8%) alumni. One thousand four hundred twenty-two (94.7%) responses were used in the analysis of the data, with the remaining 81 (5.3%) unusable because they were incomplete.

The number of student responses to this online survey exhibit similarity with an online survey of students conducted at the same university in 2013, which received a 5.1% response rate from students (Sawyer, 2013). The faculty response rate for the current research study was larger than the response rate obtained by Byrd (2010) in an online survey of faculty at the same university that received a 9% response rate. Response rates could not be found for staff surveys or alumni surveys that are similar in email invitation distribution methods at the same university.

The expected proportion for the student group was 41% males and 59% females. The survey results included 229 (30.7%) male students and 516 (69.3%) female students. There was a statistically significant difference between the proportions of the sample students to that of the population ($\chi^2 = 34.28$, $df = 1$, p < .001). Thus, the null hypothesis that the proportions of

students parallel those expected in the population was rejected. Significantly fewer males responded than expected.

The expected proportion for the faculty group was 53% males, and 47% females. The survey results included 109 (42.9%) male faculty and 144 (56.7%) female faculty. There was a statistically significant difference between the proportions of the sample faculty to that of the population ($\chi^2 = 9.90$, $df = 1$, p < .01). Thus, the null hypothesis that the proportions of faculty parallel those expected in the population was rejected. Significantly fewer males responded than expected.

The expected proportion for the staff group was 32% males, and 68% females. The survey results included 86 (25.4%) male staff and 250 (74.0%) female staff. There was a statistically significant difference between the proportions of the sample faculty to that of the population ($\chi^2 = 7.03$, $df = 1$, p < .01). Thus, the null hypothesis that the proportions of staff parallel those expected in the population was rejected. Significantly fewer males responded than expected.

Three scales were embedded in the survey, each designed and tested by Coombs and his colleagues as part of SCCT research. The Organizational Reputation Scale had five questions, the Crisis Responsibility Scale had five questions, and the Potential Supportive Behaviors Scale included four questions. A participant's responses were grouped first by stakeholder group and then within each of the scales. The responses for each scale were totaled and divided by the number of questions within each scale.

Participants were asked to select the single stakeholder group with which they identified: student, faculty, staff, or alumni. The student group included 745 (52.4%) respondents.

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The faculty group included 254 (17.9%) respondents. The staff group included 338 (23.7%) respondents, and the alumni respondents included 85 (6.0%) respondents.

The student participant demographics included 489 (65.6%) undergraduate and 253 (34.0%) graduate students. The faculty participants included 120 (47.2%) tenured faculty, 93 (36.6%) nontenured faculty, and 39 (15.4%) lecturer/adjunct faculty. The staff participants included 157 (46.4%) administrative and 179 (53.0%) support staff. The highest degree earned by 33 (38.8%) of the alumni was a bachelor's degree and 51 (60.0%) had earned postgraduate degrees.

The demographics of the respondents' self-identified stakeholder groups are presented in tables. Gender and mean age are included in Table 1, marital status is in Table 2, ethnicity is in Table 4, and income is included in Table 4.

There were more females than males in each of the four stakeholder groups as shown in Table 1. As expected, the mean age of students was less than that of faculty and staff.

Table 1

Respondents Gender and Mean Age by Stakeholder Group

Stakeholder Group	Responses		Female		Male		Mean Age
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Students	745	(52.4)	516	(69.3)	229	(30.7)	27.9
Faculty	254	(17.9)	144	(56.7)	109	(42.9)	48.1
Staff	338	(23.7)	250	(74.0)	86	(25.4)	47.0
Alumni	85	(6.0)	58	(68.2)	27	(31.8)	37.3

As might be anticipated, almost two thirds of current students have never been married

while two thirds of staff and three fourths of faculty are married (see Table 2). Table 3 shows that over 80% of respondents in each category were Caucasian.

Table 2

Respondents Marital Status by Stakeholder Group

	Student		Faculty		Staff		Alumni	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Married	205	(27.5)	192	(75.6)	228	(67.5)	675	(47.5)
Widowed	4	(0.5)	2	(0.8)	10	(3.0)	1	(1.2)
Divorced	38	(5.1)	20	(7.9)	43	(12.7)	10	(11.8)
Separated	3	(0.4)	4	(1.6)	0	(0.0)	21	(24.7)
Never Married	493	(66.2)	24	(13.4)	51	(15.1)	1	(1.2)

Table 3

Respondents' Ethnicity by Stakeholder Group

	Student		Faculty		Staff		Alumni	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Asian/Pacific Islander	25	(3.4)	7	(2.8)	4	(1.2)	3	(3.5)
Black/African American	31	(4.2)	5	(2.0)	8	(2.4)	2	(2.4)
Caucasian	609	(81.7)	221	(87.0)	293	(86.7)	73	(85.9)
Hispanic	12	(1.6)	2	(0.8)	5	(1.5)	1	(1.2)
Native American/Alaska Native	6	(0.8)	0	(0.0)	2	(0.6)	0	(0.0)
Other/Multi-Racial	23	(3.1)	4	(1.6)	3	(0.9)	1	(1.2)
Decline to Respond	38	(5.1)	15	(5.9)	23	(6.8)	5	(5.9)

Reported income by stakeholder group, as shown in Table 4, indicated that over 70% of students had an income of less than $25,000. Seventy-six percent of faculty had incomes over $50,000. Faculty included lecturers and adjunct which may account for the lower levels of income. Over 60% of staff reported income levels of less than $50,000. Sixty percent of alumni reported income levels less than $75,000.

Table 4

Respondents Income by Stakeholder Group

	Student		Faculty		Staff		Alumni	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Less than $25,000	532	(71.4)	8	(3.1)	39	(11.5)	10	(11.8)
$25,000 to $34,999	59	(7.9)	12	(4.7)	89	(26.3)	7	(8.2)
$35,000 to $49,999	56	(7.5)	32	(12.6)	84	(24.9)	20	(23.5)
$50,000 to $74,999	48	(6.4)	79	(31.1)	76	(22.5)	19	(22.4)
$75,000 to $99,999	20	(2.7)	36	(14.2)	19	(5.6)	15	(17.6)
$100,000 to $124,999	16	(2.1)	40	(15.7)	12	(3.6)	7	(8.2)
$125,000 to $149,999	46	(0.5)	11	(4.3)	6	(1.8)	0	(0.0)
$150,000 or more	3	(0.4)	27	(10.6)	3	(0.9)	6	(7.1)

Because the crisis scenario involved a data breach, respondents were asked if they had been a victim of a data breach. Of the total respondents who experienced a data breach, 234 (42.1%) were students, 115 (20.6%) were faculty, 165 (29.7%) were staff, and 42 (7.6%) were alumni. The breakdown between each stakeholder group who experienced and who did not experience a data breach is listed in Table 5. The percentage of each stakeholder group that experienced a data breach was highest in the alumni, staff, and faculty stakeholder groups. The student group had the smallest percentage of data breach experience.

Table 5

Respondents Experience with a Data Breach by Stakeholder Group

	Student		Faculty		Staff		Alumni	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Experienced a data breach	234	(31.4)	115	(45.3)	165	(48.8)	42	(49.4)
Did not experience a data breach	511	(68.6)	139	(54.7)	173	(51.2)	43	(50.6)

Reliability

Internal consistency in scores of each scale was measured using Chronbach's alpha. The scores of each scale indicate an acceptable reliability coefficient. The analysis of the scores produced the following coefficients: reputation, .79; crisis responsibility, .81; and potential supportive behavior, .86. As stated in Chapter 3, these coefficients compare to the scales in previous research by Coombs and Holladay.

Differences Between Factors

To assess the degree that the variables were linearly related, correlation coefficients were computed among the three factors in this research: reputation, responsibility for the crisis, and supportive behavior. To control for Type 1 error across the correlations a p value of less than .01 was required for significance. The results of the correlational analysis presented in Table 6 suggest that all three factors are related to one another. Each of the correlations is significant at the .01 level. Reputation and crisis responsibility have a negative relationship. Crisis responsibility and potential supportive behavior also have a negative relationship. The relationship between reputation and potential supportive behavior is positive. In general, the results suggest that the higher the attribution of crisis responsibility the more negative the reputation, and the higher the level of perceived crisis responsibility the lower the level of potential supportive behaviors. The test results also suggest that the better the perceived reputation the more positive potential supportive behaviors are anticipated.

Table 6

Intercorrelation of Respondents' Perceptions (N=1,422)

	Reputation	Crisis Responsibility	Potential Supportive Behavior
Reputation		-.40*	.50*
Crisis Responsibility			-.44*
Potential Supportive Behavior			

* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Research Questions and Analysis

Research Question 1: Is there a significant difference in the perception of university reputation among stakeholder groups when the university used a crisis response strategy advocated by SCCT?

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the perception of university reputation among stakeholder groups when the university used a crisis response strategy advocated by SCCT.

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between the perception of university reputation and each of the stakeholder groups. The factor variables in the stakeholder group included four groups as self-identified by the participants: students, faculty, staff, and alumni. The dependent variable was the reputation of the university in the scenario. The ANOVA was significant, $[F(3, 1418) = 3.25, p = .021]$; therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Because it was assumed that the variances of the dependent variables were the same for all populations a post hoc comparison of the groups was conducted using Tukey's HSD. Post hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD test indicated that the mean score for

the student group (M = 5.20, SD = 1.04) was significantly different from both the staff group (M = 5.37, SD = .95) and the faculty group (M = 5.14, SD = 1.10). However, the alumni group (M = 5.20, SD = .96) did not significantly differ from the other three groups. This suggests that staff saw the reputation significantly more favorably than did the students or the faculty. The strength of the relationship between reputation and student, faculty, and staff stakeholder groups as assessed by η^2 was small (.02) (Green & Salkind, 2008).

Research Question 2: Is there a significant difference in the perception of responsibility among stakeholder groups when the university used a crisis response strategy advocated by SCCT?

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the perception of responsibility among stakeholder groups when the university used a crisis response strategy advocated by SCCT.

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between the perception of university responsibility for the crisis and each of the stakeholder groups. The factor variables, self-identified by each participant included; students, faculty, staff, and alumni. The dependent variable was the crisis responsibility of the university in the scenario. The ANOVA was not significant, [$F(3, 1418) = .699, p = .553$]; therefore, the null hypothesis was retained, and no post-hoc tests were run. This finding suggests that each of the stakeholder groups perceived the responsibility for the crisis in a similar manner. The mean scores for all groups ranged from 4.4 to 4.5 suggesting that all groups were unsure or perceived the university as slightly responsible for the crisis.

Research Question 3: Is there a significant difference in the potential supportive

behaviors among stakeholder groups when the university used a crisis response strategy

advocated by SCCT?

Ho3: There is no significant difference in the potential supportive behaviors

among stakeholder groups when the university used a crisis response strategy

advocated by SCCT.

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between the

perception of university reputation and each of the stakeholder groups. The factor variables in

the stakeholder group included four groups as self-identified by the participants: students,

faculty, staff, and alumni. The dependent variable was the reputation of the university in the

scenario. The ANOVA was significant, $[F(3, 1418) = 6.967, p<.001]$; therefore, the null

hypothesis was rejected. Because it was assumed that the variances of the dependent variables

were the same for all populations a post hoc comparison of the groups was conducted using

Tukey's HSD. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for

the staff group (M = 4.05, SD = 1.35) was significantly different from student group (M = 3.69,

SD = 1.43) and the faculty group (M = 3.61, SD = 1.26). There was no significant difference

between the staff and alumni (M = 3.62, SD = 1.21) group. The strength of the relationship

between supportive behaviors and student, faculty, and staff stakeholder groups as assessed by η^2

was small (.02) (Green & Salkind, 2008). The data suggest that the potential supportive

behaviors of staff were most supportive of the university (M = 4.1). The student group was next

most supportive. The faculty group and the alumni group essentially were the same in their

supportive behaviors.

The 95% confidence intervals for the pairwise differences as well as the means and

standard deviations for reputation are reported in Table 7. Crisis responsibility is reported in

Table 8, and supportive behaviors can be found in Table 9.

A significant difference was found among the perception of reputation between the staff

and student stakeholder groups and between the staff and faculty stakeholder groups (see Table

7). These findings indicate the staff stakeholder group perceived the reputation of the university

in the scenario significantly more favorably (M = 5.4) than did the student (M = 5.2) or the

faculty (M = 5.1). There was no significant difference in the mean between the alumni

stakeholder group and any of the other stakeholder groups.

Table 7

Means and Standard Deviations of Reputation Perception Scores with 95% Confidence Intervals of Pairwise Differences by Stakeholder Group

Stakeholder Group	N	M	SD	Student	Faculty	Staff
Student	745	5.20	1.04			
Faculty	254	5.14	1.10	-.14 to .25		
Staff	338	5.38	0.95	-.35 to -.01*	-.45 to -.02*	
Alumni	85	5.20	0.97	-.30 to .30	-.39 to .28	-.14 to .50

No significant differences were found in the perceptions of responsibility for the crisis

between any of the stakeholder groups (see Table 8). The crisis in the scenario, based on a real-

life crisis, included the discovery of a data breech involving hundreds of thousands of individuals

associated with a university. The source of the data breech, as is often the case, was not known

or revealed at the time of the university's initial response to the crisis. This uncertainty as to

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responsibility for the crisis was reflected in the mean scores of all four stakeholder groups (4.4 to 4.7) where all four stakeholder groups had mean scores reflecting unsure to slightly responsible for the crisis.

Table 8

Means and Standard Deviations of Crisis Responsibility Perception Scores with 95% Confidence Intervals of Pairwise Differences by Stakeholder Group

Stakeholder Group	N	M	SD	Student	Faculty	Staff
Student	745	4.42	1.12			
Faculty	254	4.53	1.15	-.33 to .10		
Staff	338	4.66	1.18	-.24 to .14	-.18 to .31	
Alumni	85	4.47	1.18	-.39 to .28	-.30 to .43	-.35 to .36

A significant difference was found in the potential supportive behaviors between the staff and student stakeholder groups and between the staff and faculty stakeholder groups (see Table 9). These findings suggest the staff stakeholders would have more supportive behaviors (M = 4.0) than either the students (M = 3.7) or the faculty stakeholders (M = 3.6). The mean scores suggest that all groups, including alumni (M = 3.6) would tend to have less supportive behaviors toward the university as a result of the crisis and the response.

Table 9

Means and Standard Deviations of Potential Supportive Behavior Scores with 95% Confidence Intervals of Pairwise Differences by Stakeholder Group

Stakeholder Group	N	M	SD	Student	Faculty	Staff
Student	745	3.69	1.43			
Faculty	254	3.62	1.26	-.18 to .33		
Staff	338	4.05	1.35	-.59 to -.13*	-.73 to -.14*	
Alumni	85	3.63	1.22	-.34 to .46	-.45 to .43	-.00 to .85

Summary

This chapter reports the results of data obtained from 1,422 respondents at a regional university, including 745 (52.4%) students, 254 (17.9%) faculty, 338 (23.7%) staff, and 85 (6.0%) alumni. The data were collected via an online survey and all respondents were invited to participate via email. Using the chi square goodness-of-fit test the staff, faculty, and student groups, based on gender, indicated that the samples do not approximate the population. There were three research questions and three null hypotheses.

In this study, one of the three null hypotheses was retained and two were rejected. The results of the study suggest that following a university's response to a crisis some stakeholder groups do perceive the reputation significantly different from others. The results also suggest that supportive behaviors are also different for some stakeholder groups. Even though perception of the crisis responsibility may be seen similarly by all stakeholder groups, the reputation of the university affected by the crisis and supportive behaviors may vary by stakeholder group.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, KEY FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR FUTURE RESEARCH, AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter consists of five sections. An overall summary provides the purpose of the study and the questions investigated. Key findings are presented with reference to previous research related to SCCT. I then discuss implications for practice and recommendations for future research. My conclusions are included in the final section.

Summary

This research was based on Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) that offers a framework for understanding how crisis response strategies can be used to protect reputational assets during a crisis. The scenario presented to respondents was an intentional crisis type and used the crisis response strategy of rebuild as the matched response suggested by SCCT. A web-based survey was used to gather responses.

The statistical analyses in this study were based on three research questions presented in Chapters 1 and 3. The three questions (and accompanying null hypotheses) concerned the perspectives of stakeholders regarding reputation, crisis responsibility, and potential supportive behaviors following a university's response to a crisis. All three null hypotheses were tested using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The level of significance tested in the statistical analysis was .05.

One thousand five hundred two surveys were completed; however, only 1,422 were used in the analysis of data. Eighty responses were not used due to incomplete responses. Survey

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participants were all provided the same crisis scenario in which a data breach affected personal information of university stakeholders, specifically students, faculty, staff, and alumni. The crisis scenario used was based on an actual university crisis and the university's initial response to the crisis. Research participants responded to questions in the survey about the scenario.

The research findings indicated a statistically significant difference in the perceptions between staff and students and between staff and faculty stakeholder groups with regards to the reputation of the university following the crisis. Staff, as a stakeholder group, perceived the reputation of the university more favorably than both the faculty and the student stakeholder groups. The research findings also indicated a statistically significant difference in the potential supportive behaviors between staff and students and between staff and faculty stakeholder groups. The staff stakeholder group had more favorable potential supportive behaviors toward the university than did the faculty and student groups. No statistical difference was found between any of the stakeholder groups-students, faculty, staff, or alumni-with regards to perception of the university's responsibility for the crisis.

Key Findings

The staff stakeholder group stands out as the group that had the most positive reputation perspective and the most supportive potential behaviors of the four stakeholder groups. This raises the question as to why staff may have more favorable perceptions and potential supportive behaviors. Perhaps it is because staff are more likely to attribute their identity with the university as their employer (Schneider, 1987). Staff are more involved in the day-to-day operations of the university. They may also be more engaged as part of the solution to a crisis at the university. The positive perceptions of this staff stakeholder group can be advantageous to a university

experiencing a crisis, where the staff stakeholder group could assist with positive messages about the university if they are provided with additional information by the crisis communication team. Fearn-Banks (2011) suggests that employees are a link between the organization (university) and the public and that the media often seek out employees, as internal publics, for comment in a crisis situation because they are not generally hired or paid to be spokespersons for the university.

The faculty stakeholder group perceived the reputation of the university less favorably than did the staff stakeholder group and the faculty also had less favorable potential supportive behaviors than the staff stakeholder group. Faculty are, of course, employees of the university as are staff. While staff may identify with the university, faculty may not identify with the university as much as they do with their professions, colleges, and departments (Birnbaum, 1988).

The student stakeholder group also perceived the reputation less favorably and had less supportive potential behaviors than did the staff stakeholder group. The students are receivers of services and products of the university with the expectation that they will complete their education and move on. This is dissimilar to staff where the expectation is that employment will continue and staff, like faculty, are providers of the students' educational services.

Responses from the alumni stakeholder group revealed no significant difference in their perceptions from any other stakeholder group. Of all the stakeholder groups included in this study the alumni group would be the least directly connected to the university on a regular basis. Even the 4- to 6-year separation from the university following graduation may be enough to change perceptions and alliances. While a university may look to this stakeholder group for the

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future donations, alumni are no longer connected to the university on a daily basis and have moved on to the future for which the university prepared them.

The data revealed no statistical difference in the perception of crisis responsibility between all four stakeholder groups to the university's response to the crisis. The results of this research showed that all four stakeholder groups were unsure or slightly agreed that the university was responsible for the crisis. The basis for SCCT is attribution of blame for a crisis and SCCT separates crises into distinct crisis types based on the level of responsibility for the crisis: victim, accidental, and intentional. This specific delineation of responsibility for a crisis may be a limitation of the theory. Although the crisis types are clearly defined as part of the theory, the boundaries for an actual crisis may not be so easily identified, especially in the initial stages. Even when all the facts are not yet known and the level of responsibility for the crisis has not been established, a university, like any organization, must respond to a crisis and communicate with its publics. As the results of this research indicate, the respondents were uncertain as to how to assess responsibility for the crisis. However, stakeholders begin to make judgments based on the earliest information available to them.

A delayed or sluggish response to a crisis can raise the level of liability if a crisis causes serious damages. Perceptions of responsibility for a crisis may change as more information and facts regarding the crisis are discovered. Because the scenario in this study was an initial university response, stakeholder groups may have had difficulty in determining whether the university itself was a victim of the data breach and what part the university played in not protecting the personal information. As in the actual initial response from the university used as the basis for the crisis scenario, it revealed little information on which to assess blame (University of Maryland, 2014).

The scenario used in this study, a data breach exposing personal information of each of the stakeholder groups involved, followed the crisis communication process of SCCT, that is, communicate early and with the accurate information to the publics. Issuing statements early following a crisis where incorrect information is presented can be very costly to a university's reputation, more so than issuing early statements of not knowing the source of the problem. Examples of university crises where incorrect information was provided early and had negative effects on reputation include: the Texas A&M bonfire where the initial information regarding the height of the bonfire, as estimated by the bonfire advisor, was released publicly but was inaccurate as it was never measured (Fearn-Banks, 2011); the initial announcement made by Penn State campus officials in unequivocal support of their administrative and athletic colleagues following the revelation about the Jerry Sandusky child sexual abuse scandal that showed little concern for the child abuse victims (Bataille & Cordova, 2014) and; Duke University's reaction to and punishment of lacrosse team players and forced resignation of the coach due to accusations of rape that later turned out to be false.

The prescriptive nature of SCCT makes it a useful tool for crisis managers and the theory will become more useful for practical applications as it is researched more widely. This research contributes to the field of crisis communications by identifying that perceptions of distinct stakeholder groups may differ following a university's crisis response. Crisis managers, armed with the evidence that various stakeholder groups, as the audience, will perceive the crisis response strategy differently can purposefully disseminate responses to different stakeholder groups. Crisis managers would be wise to obtain feedback from various stakeholder groups regarding their perceptions. Obtaining feedback regarding perceptions from only one stakeholder group may not be a fair representation of the perceptions of all stakeholder groups. Social media

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offers one method for obtaining stakeholder feedback regarding a crisis response. A recent study by Coombs and Holladay (2014) identified the feedback loop available from stakeholder groups via social media avenues and recognized that stakeholders voluntarily enter publicly available subarenas, such as the online news and blogs, where they choose to participate in both the receiving and delivering of messages regarding crises. Social media can be used as both an instant message delivery method in a crisis as well as immediate feedback opportunities from which to obtain perceptions of stakeholders.

All stakeholders in this study had a relationship with a university and are considered to be internal stakeholders. These stakeholders would have some knowledge of operations at a university, each at varying levels and viewpoints. No external stakeholders were included in this study. Recognizing that all four stakeholder groups in the study were internal stakeholders, the question can be asked, would external stakeholder groups have significantly different perceptions? This is a topic consideration for further research.

The findings of this research support the successful application of SCCT in a university setting. The research also extends the theory into the perceptions of distinct stakeholder groups as it applies to reputation, crisis responsibility, and supportive behaviors. This research offers a new application of SCCT by examining the perspectives of distinct stakeholder groups that are associated with a university. Each of the stakeholder groups in the study was similar to stakeholder groups involved in the crisis scenario.

This research is unique in that it is applied to the perspective of various stakeholder groups. Whereas many studies applying SCCT use students as test subjects looking at crises involving nonhigher educational organizations, this study addressed stakeholder groups that could realistically be connected to a similar crisis experienced by a university. This study also

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contributed to the strength of SCCT by recognizing its application to a university as an organization.

The data in this research suggest that the university communication plan should include recognition of the importance of multiple stakeholder groups. Using Barton's (2008) four parts to creating a crisis communication plan for stakeholder analysis, the following questions guide the identification of the key stakeholders: who has immediate need to know, what categories of stakeholders exist, what information can be shared in the initial stages of the crisis, and how will stakeholders be provided a chance to ask questions and provide feedback? Recognition of stakeholders as distinct groups that may perceive a crisis response strategy dissimilarly will aid a university in preservation of its reputation and increasing the likelihood of more positive engagement in the future.

Implications for Practice

As universities respond to crises, an awareness that all stakeholders do not unilaterally respond to the crisis response strategy in a similar fashion can assist both crisis managers and public relations professionals. The results of this research identified a need to reach out to stakeholder groups with messages that are purposefully shared with some specific key stakeholder groups. Coombs (2012) wrote, "How did they [stakeholders] feel about the crisis management performance? The only way to assess stakeholder reactions is to ask for them" (p. 173). He further stated, "A cardinal rule in evaluation is to not assume you know how people feel about a message or action. By considering each stakeholder separately, an organization can determine specific strengths and weaknesses" (p. 173). The significant differing perspectives of

both reputation and potential supportive behaviors between three of the four stakeholder groups in this study support Coombs's observations.

As part of crisis preparedness planning, a university should seek to understand the different stakeholder needs, identifying the crucial stakeholder groups. The crisis communication plan should include identification of the stakeholders crucial to the university. Members of the crisis communication team can be assigned to obtain feedback from these key stakeholder groups on their perception of the university's crisis response strategy. Responsibility of the crisis response team members can include assignments to survey, become advocates of, and check in with different stakeholder groups as to their perceptions of the crisis response strategy. An on-going dialog with key stakeholders during a crisis can yield benefits to reputation protection by tailoring the messages for the appropriate stakeholder groups.

Checking in with important stakeholder groups during a crisis will use precious human resources during a crisis. Addressing the feedback loop as part of the crisis communication plan before a crisis happens will allow crisis managers to be better prepared when the crisis hits. Considerations that a crisis was handled well may or may not be founded if crisis managers assume all stakeholder groups perceive the response similarly. Although social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter make it is nearly impossible to identify specific stakeholder groups, social media should become a regular participation and observation point from which to share and obtain feedback during a crisis.

Key stakeholder groups of a university should be specifically listed in the crisis communication plan and feedback should be obtained from each key stakeholder group. Key external stakeholder groups should also be considered in the plan. Methods of communication should be identified such as social media venues, a university website with updated information

and the ability for stakeholders to post questions and the university to post responses. University control of these communication channels will present the university as an authority that controls and offers consistent messages about the crisis.

Recommendations for Future Research

Internal university stakeholders were surveyed in this study. Future research could consider and compare both internal and external stakeholder groups. In a university setting additional stakeholder groups might include: high school students, parents of high school students, board of trustee members, legislators, community members, donors, representatives of the media, and local employers.

As SCCT proposes, this research used a crisis scenario with matched crisis response strategy that best protects the organization's (university's) reputation; however, the crisis response was early in the crisis response phase. Other scenarios where the crisis responsibility is more clearly established may indicate different results. A scenario where one of the stakeholder groups is directly affected by the crisis while the others are not could also reveal differences in perceptions of the stakeholder groups. A crisis scenario could be used where there was a history of repeated similar crisis, such as multiple data breaches over a period of time.

Subsequent studies might involve personal interviews of crisis communication teams or crisis managers to determine the extent of targeted messages to distinct stakeholder groups that are already in place. Universities and other organizations could be surveyed to determine if crisis communication plans include formal recognition of distinct stakeholder groups. Future research could include reviewing the use of feedback loops in crisis communication plans as well as the

extent to which social media is recognized as an option for providing and receiving information about a *crisis*.

An additional area of study could consider the realm of social media and its use in crisis communications. This could include both the delivery methods using social media and the ability to glean and assimilate feedback in the various social media channels. Research might also consider comparing the effectiveness of various social media channels for crisis communications.

The results of this study indicated that staff perceive the reputation more favorably and had more supportive potential behaviors toward the university than did the student or faculty stakeholder groups. Future research could delve into why particular stakeholder groups view these differently.

Conclusion

This research study contributes to current crisis communications theory by providing empirical evidence that distinct stakeholder groups can perceive a university's reputation differently as well as have different potential supportive behaviors following a crisis response. This study applies SCCT in a new manner by observing one crisis type, with the crisis response strategy suggested by SCCT, as observed from the viewpoint of four different stakeholder groups. In this study the university staff, as a stakeholder group, perceived the reputation more favorably than did the faculty or the student stakeholder groups. Potential supportive behaviors of staff were also more favorable than that of faculty and of student stakeholder groups. This research was applied to four stakeholder groups of a public regional university.

This examination of the stakeholder group perceptions of a university crisis response yielded several conclusions. The crisis response strategy used by a university, what a university does and says after a crisis hits, can have significant ramifications for the reputation. To better protect the university reputation from damage crisis managers should consider their different stakeholder groups when determining the crisis response strategy. University crisis mangers may be better able to protect reputational assets by understanding that diverse stakeholder groups may view the crisis response differently. Crisis managers should consider obtaining feedback from stakeholder groups.

Before crises strike the university crisis response team should consider the various stakeholder groups and how to assess the perceptions of key stakeholder groups following a crisis response. University crisis communication plans should include recognition of key stakeholder group and identify both how to deliver specific messages to these groups as well as how to obtain feedback regarding their perceptions. The results of this study suggest that key stakeholder groups, such as students, faculty, staff, and alumni need to be included in both message delivery and feedback loops regarding their perceptions to a crisis response of the university.

The results of this study can assist university crisis communication practice by forming practical guidelines for crisis management practitioners. With the initial response to a crisis, stakeholders begin the formation of perceptions of how the university is handling the crisis. The crisis communication team must recognize that each stakeholder group may not perceive the response similarly.

SCCT offers prescriptive designs for crisis communications. It is a tool for protecting reputations in times of crisis. Findings of this study verify the legitimacy of the theory as it

applies to crisis situations at universities. The results of this research confirm that stakeholder

groups are an important variable of SCCT. This adds to the growing body of knowledge about

crisis communications and extends the application of the theory to universities in crisis.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Permission to use the Reputation, Crisis Responsibility, and Potential Supportive Behavior
Scales

Email received on 10/12/2013 @ 7:36 AM

Katherine:

Feel free to use the scales. I can send you copies if you need them. Sorry to be slow but I was
on a two week trip and email was hit or miss.

Dr. Coombs
W. Timothy Coombs, Professor
Nicholson School of Communication
Crisis Communication Specialist

Email sent on 10/06/2013 @ 5:34 PM

Dr. Coombs,

I am a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, TN, and I am
currently working on my dissertation. Using Situational Crisis Communication Theory as the
basis, I intend to conduct research to study if there is a significant difference in the perception of
university reputation, crisis responsibility, and potential supportive behaviors among stakeholder
groups to a university's selected crisis response strategy.

I am writing to request permission to access and use the full set of questions for two scales: The
Organizational Reputation Scale employed in your 2002 study with Dr. Holladay, "Helping
Crisis Managers Protect Reputational Assets: Initial Tests of the Situational Crisis
Communication Theory," and the Potential Supportive Behavior Scale included in your 1999
study, "Information and Compassion in Crisis Response: A Test of Their Effects."

Emergency preparedness is a portion of my responsibilities as Associate Vice President for
Administrative Services at East Tennessee State University, and therefore crisis response
strategies identified in SCCT are of particular interest to me.

Please let me know what additional information is needed, and the cost that may be associated
with using the two scales.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Katherine Kelley – Doctoral Student

APPENDIX B

Email Invitation Sample to Potential Participants

Dear ETSU XXXXXXX,

My name is Kathy Kelley and I am currently working on my doctoral dissertation entitled *Stakeholder Perceptions of a University Response to Crisis*.

I am requesting your participation in an electronic survey that is estimated to take approximately 5-7 minutes. Your participation is completely voluntary, and your submission will remain anonymous.

This research project has been reviewed and approved by the ETSU Institutional Review Board. You may contact the ETSU IRB with any questions regarding your rights as a participant. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team, you may call an ETSU IRB Coordinator at (423) 439-6002.

At the completion of the survey you will have the chance to enter a drawing for an **Apple iPad mini**.

To participate in this study, you must be currently at least 18 years of age.

Completion of this electronic study will be considered your consent for participation in this study.

Please click on the URL to take the survey: https://app.surveygizmo.com/distribute/share-pane/lid/1380229

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Respectfully,

Kathy Kelley, Doctoral Candidate
East Tennessee State University

Survey

PLEASE READ THIS BRIEF NEWS ARTICLE AND THEN ANSWER THE QUESTIONS THAT FOLLOW. Your responses are anonymous. At the end of the survey you will have a chance to link to a site where you can enter the drawing for the Apple iPad mini.

Wall University Database With Personal Records Hacked

By Liam Nabors – liam.nabors@news2day.com

A Wall University database was hacked, exposing more than 206,000 records of students, faculty and staff, President Kevin Arturo said in an email to the campus community today.

The records included names, Social Security numbers, dates of birth and university identification numbers of people who had been issued an ID since 2004. No other information was compromised - no financial, academic, health, or phone and address information, Arturo said.

The university recently doubled the number of IT security personnel and doubled its investment in security tools, Arturo said.

"Obviously, we need to do more and better, and we will," he said. "I am truly sorry," Arturo wrote in the email. "Computer and data security are a very high priority of our University."

State and federal authorities are investigating this sophisticated computer security attack, Arturo said.

Updates regarding the matter will be communicated on a special website, Arturo said. A hotline was set up for comments and questions.

"University email communications regarding the incident will not ask individuals to provide personal information," Arturo said.

The university is offering a year of free credit monitoring to all those affected, Arturo said.

INSTRUCTIONS: Think about the information you just read. The items below concern your impression of the university. Choose one number for each of the questions. (The responses range from 1 = STRONGLY DISAGREE to 7 = STRONGLY AGREE.)

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	The university is concerned with the well-being of its publics.							
2	Circumstances, not the university, are responsible for this incident.							
3	The university is basically DISHONEST.							
4	The blame for the incident lies with the university.							
5	I do NOT trust the university to tell the truth about this incident.							

6	The blame for the incident lies in the circumstance, not the university.							
7	Under most circumstances, I would be likely to believe what this university says.							
8	The cause of the crisis was something the university could have controlled.							
9	The university is NOT concerned with the well-being of its publics.							
10	The cause of the crisis was something over which the university HAD NO power.							

INSTRUCTIONS: IF YOU HAD BEEN AFFECTED BY THE CRISIS, HOW LIKELY WOULD YOU BE TO DO EACH OF THE FOLLOWING? (The responses range from 1 = VERY UNLIKELY to 7 = VERY LIKELY.)

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11	Say nice things about the university to other people you know.							
12	Attend a rally designed to show public support for the university.							
13	Sign a petition in support of the university.							
14	Apply for a job with or encourage others to apply for a job with the university.							

		Yes	No
15	Have you been a victim of a data breach?		

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING ITEMS ABOUT YOURSELF:

16. My age is: __

17. I am:
    a. Student
        18. I am:
            1. Undergraduate
            2. Graduate
    b. Faculty
        19. I am:
            1. Tenured
            2. Non-Tenured
            3. Adjunct/Lecturer
    c. Employee
        20. I am:
            1. Support Staff
            2. Administration
    d. Alum
        21. What is the highest degree you have earned?
            1. Bachelor's degree
            2. Post-graduate degree

22. My gender is:
    a. Male
    b. Female

23. My ethnicity is:
    a. Asian/Pacific Islander
    b. Black/African American
    c. Caucasian
    d. Hispanic
    e. Native American/Alaska Native
    f. Other/Multi-Racial
    g. Decline to Respond

24. My marital status is:
    a. Married
    b. Widowed
    c. Divorces
    d. Separated
    e. Never Married

25. My income level is:
    a. Less than $25,000
    b. $25,000 to $34,999
    c. $35,000 to $49,000
    d. $50,000 to $74,999
    e. $75,000 to $99,999
    f. $100,000 to $149,999
    g. $150,000 or more

Thank you for taking my survey. Your response is very important to me and will remain anonymous. You will now be redirected to another site to enter the drawing for the Apple iPad mini.

VITA

KATHERINE M. KELLEY

Education: Ed.D., East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee
                     2014
                     M.B.A., University of Toledo, Toledo, Ohio 1983
                     B.S. Business Administration, Bowling Green State University,
                     Bowling Green, Ohio 1976
                     Public Schools, Columbus, Ohio

Professional Experience: East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee

                     Associate Vice President Administrative Services, 2012-
                     present

                     Associate Vice President Procurement and Contract
                     Services, 2008-2011

                     Assistant Vice President Procurement and Contract
                     Services, 2005-2008

                     Purchasing Manager, 1993-2005

                     Manager, private medical practice: Bristol, Tennessee, 1988-1992

                     Purchasing Manager, Mercy and St. Charles Hospitals: Toledo,
                     Ohio, 1981-1988

                     Purchasing Agent, Mercy and St. Charles Hospitals: Toledo, Ohio,
                     1979-1981

                     Personnel Specialist, St. Charles Hospital: Oregon, Ohio, 1976-
                     1979