EMPATHY DURING TIMES OF CRISIS AND CORPORATE REPUTATION

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Abstract

How an organization responds to victims is central to crisis communication management and protecting organizational reputation. While there is significant literature about best practices for crisis response, one area which has not been explored is the relationship of empathic communication and corporate reputation during times of conflict. This study examined this relationship through a study of the British Petroleum Gulf Oil crisis of 2010. The qualitative study used focus groups with working professionals and personal interviews with communication experts. The research is grounded in Coombs’ (1998) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), and Benoit’s (1977) image restoration theory, which is used to describe how organizations respond to accusations to maintain a favorable reputation. The study found that empathy during a crisis has a positive influence on corporate reputation. This study supplements the existing literature on best practices for crisis response strategies. The application of this research is valuable to organizations because it will help them handle crises, protect its stakeholders, improve the conditions of its victims, and preserve their reputation. Further research is necessary to determine if the use of empathy during non-crisis situations also has an impact on organizational reputation, and to explore the relationship between the role of empathy and corporate financial performance.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 6
The Problem 6
Importance of the Study 5
Definition of Terms Used 7
Organization of Remaining Chapters 8

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE 9
Philosophical and Ethical Assumptions 9
Theoretical Basis 10
Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) 10
Image Restoration Theory 11
Rogers’ Work on Empathy 13
The Literature 13
Crisis Communication and Corporate Reputation 14
Crisis Communication Response Strategies 14
Impact of Internet and Social Media 17
Empathy 19
British Petroleum Gulf Oil Crisis 21
Rationale 23
Research Questions 23

CHAPTER 3: SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY 24
Scope of the Study 24
Methodology and Research Design 25
Sample 25
Rationale 25
Procedures, Data Collection and Analysis 26
Validity 29
Ethical Considerations 30

CHAPTER 4: THE STUDY 32
Data Analysis 32
Focus Groups 32
Qualitative Interviews 33
Results 33
Demographics 33
Perceptions About How Empathy is Expressed 34
Empathy and Crisis Response Timing 35
Spokesperson Influence 36
Corporate Reputation 36
Discussion 38
Perceptions About How Empathy is Expressed 38
Empathy and Crisis Response Timing 39
Chapter 1: Introduction

The Problem

The late, American author Robert Collier once wrote, “Sooner or later comes a crisis in our affairs, and how we meet it determines our future happiness and success” (Collier, n.d.). From the Tylenol tampering crisis in 1982, and the downfall of Adelphia due to criminal theft by its executives, to the recent British Petroleum Gulf Oil spill, crises have always been a part of doing business (Coombs, 1998; Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2002). While crises are not new, during the last two decades, there have been many developments in best practices for handling crisis situations to protect and preserve organizational reputation (Benoit, 1995; Benoit, 1997; Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Blaney, Benoit, & Brazeal, 2002; Chun, 2005; Coombs, 1998; Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Fussell Sisco, Collins, & Zoch, 2010; Pfahl & Bates, 2008; Walton, Cooley, & Nicholson, 2012). Despite this fact, organizations continue to mishandle crisis situations resulting in harmful reputational damage (Benoit, 1995; Benoit, 1997; Fussell Sisco, Collins, & Zoch, 2010; Pfahl & Bates, 2008; Walton, Cooley, & Nicholson, 2012). With the use of the Internet, and the ability for issues to go viral instantaneously, it is more important than ever to discover new best practices for handling crises. One potential best practice area which had not been explored, is the relationship of empathic communication and corporate reputation during times of conflict. This study builds upon previous research in the areas of empathy, crisis communications, and corporate reputation to investigate this topic.

Importance of the study

There is limited research on the subject of empathy and empathic communication, and the majority of it comes from literature in the field of psychology. Additional research about the connection between empathic communication and corporate reputation during times of crisis is
needed. This study supplements the existing literature on best practices to determine if the use of empathy warrants more attention in crisis response strategies. The application of this research is valuable to organizations because it will help them handle crises, protect its stakeholders, improve the conditions of its victims, and preserve their reputation.

**Definition of Terms Used**

**Empathy.** Empathy is a “complex psychological inference in which observation, memory, knowledge and reasoning are combined to yield insights into the thoughts and feelings of others” (Ickes, 1997, p. 2). Three qualities of empathy include; 1) knowing what the other person is feeling, 2) feeling what another person is feeling, and 3) responding compassionately to the other person’s distress (Levenson & Reuf, 1992, p. 234).

**Corporate reputation.** Corporate reputation is the way an organization presents itself. It also includes the way an organization is presented in the media, advertising, by word of mouth, and the perceptions its stakeholders have about the organization (Coombs, 2007).

**Crisis.** Crisis is “a specific, unexpected, and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and threaten or are perceived to threaten an organization’s high priority goals” (Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer (199, p. 233). The three components of a crisis are; 1) an event that causes a threat, 2) a short term response that may change as more information emerges, and 3) surprise (Seeger et al., 1998, p. 234).

**British Petroleum Gulf oil crisis.** British Petroleum (BP) is one of the largest oil and gas companies in the world. Headquartered in England, the company operates in 80 countries and employs more than 85,000 people. In April, 2010, BP drilling rigs explored in the Gulf of Mexico, killing 11 people and spilling more than 18 million gallons of crude oil into the Gulf
(Choi, 2012, p. 423). The event received substantial media coverage in the United States and abroad.

**Organization of Remaining Chapters**

This thesis is organized in five chapters. Chapter two includes a review of the literature, and describes the theoretical framing of the study based on the Situational Crisis Communication Theory, the image restoration theory and the work of Rogers in the area of empathy. It also summarizes existing literature on targeted aspects of crisis communication and corporate reputation. Chapter three outlines the scope and methodology that were used to answer the research questions. Chapter four provides the analysis and findings of the study. It also discusses the results. Chapter five addresses the limitations of the research and makes recommendations for further study. The appendix includes the research instruments used for the study including the focus group moderator guide, focus group survey, and personal interview questions. It also includes raw results of the study coded by selected aspect.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

This chapter discusses the philosophical assumptions and theoretical basis for the relationship between empathy used during a crisis and corporate reputation. The first part of this chapter focuses on the philosophical assumption about the role of empathy in treating victims of crises. The second part of this chapter reviews relevant findings from the literature on empathy, crisis communication, and corporate reputation. The pertinent research is categorized into the following topics; crisis communication and corporate reputation, crisis communication response strategies, the impact of the Internet and social media on crisis communication, empathy, and case study research results about the British Gulf Oil crisis.

Philosophical and Ethical Assumptions

From the Tylenol tampering crisis in 1982, and the downfall of Adelphia due to criminal fraud and theft, to the recent British Petroleum Gulf Oil spill, crises have always been a part of doing business (Coombs, 1998; Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2002). These organizational crises are fraught with threat, risk, economic hardship, property and reputational damage. While these are detrimental to an organization, it is the victims of the crises who usually experience the most loss. How an organization responds to victims is central to crisis communication management and protecting organizational reputation (Coombs, 1998; Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2002).

The public often notices how an organization responds to its victims. They gauge whether or not the victims are treated with compassion and empathy (Coombs, 1998; Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Historian and philosopher David Hume (1987) believed that ethical behavior is dependent on the concept of empathy, and that empathy is essential to developing moral judgment. Hume (1987) believed that if you watch someone experience pain,
then in the act of imagining it, you will also experience the pain. As a result, one would naturally want to alleviate the pain of others (Hume, 1987). Hume (1987) says this provides a basic motive for treating other people well. Understanding more about how organizations can use empathy during a crisis can help improve the conditions of its victims, while protecting organizational reputation.

**Theoretical Basis**

There are two theories which ground this study about the relationship of empathic communication and corporate reputation during times of crisis. The first is the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which outlines the process crisis managers should follow during a crisis situation (Coombs, 1998). The second is image restoration theory, which is used to describe how organizations respond to accusations to maintain a favorable reputation (Benoit, 1997).

**Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT).** Coombs’ (1998, 2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) defines crisis response strategies that managers should follow. SCCT states the threat to company reputation is determined by whether or not stakeholders attribute the cause of the crisis to the organization (Coombs, 1998; Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Coombs and Holladay, 2002). It also states that a company’s reputation before a crisis, and how well they treated stakeholders pre-crisis impacts the outcome of the situation (Coombs 1998, 2007). Coombs’s theory offers an evidence-based framework to explain how an organization can protect its reputation (Coombs, 2007). Scholars have successfully applied this theory to generate empirical evidence supporting this theory (Fussell Sisco, Collins, & Zoch, 2010; Claeyens, Cauberghe, & Vyncke, 2010).
**Image restoration theory.** The image restoration theory, developed by Benoit (1995), is well-documented and widely-cited in crisis communication literature. The theory states that an attack has two components, “1) the accused is held responsible for an action, and 2) the act is considered offensive” (Benoit, 1995, p. 30). The theory focuses on message options, i.e., denial, evasion of responsibility, reduction of offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification (Benoit, 1995). He also stresses “…the important point is not whether the business is responsible for the offensive act, but whether the firm is thought to be responsible for it by the relevant audience” (Benoit, 1995, p. 32). In addition, Benoit (1995) provided eight suggestions for effective image repair. His first recommendation is to follow the rules of persuasion such as; avoid making false claims, develop communication themes, provide adequate support for your claims, and avoid arguments that may backfire (Benoit, 1995). His remaining recommendations for image repair relate specifically to crisis communication. They are summarized as follows; admit fault when appropriate, shift blame only when warranted, communicate about factors beyond your control, report plans to correct and/or prevent recurrence of the problem, do not trivialize the problem, and use multiple recommendations for optimal results (Benoit, 1995).

Several scholars have conducted studies on the image restoration theory (Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Pfahl & Bates, 2008; Blaney, Benoit, & Brazeal, 2002). Benoit and Czerwinski (1997) reviewed 47 newspaper advertisements which U.S. Airways used to reinforce its commitment to safety after a fatal crash in Pittsburgh in 1994, which left 132 dead. One of the key findings of the study was that U.S. Airways did not execute corrective action effectively, and that a company at fault is most persuasive when it admits fault and apologizes (Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997, p. 60). They also found that image repair strategies may not always work well together (Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997, p. 54). The nature of each situation and type of image
restoration strategy play a critical role in how well the strategies will work when they are combined.

In 2008, Pfahl and Bates (2008) applied the theory to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway tire crisis. The crisis happened when fourteen drivers withdrew from the race after two cars ripped their tires on the track and crashed during a practice run. Instead of providing a unified response to the disappointed fans, the four sponsors each spoke about the crisis independently and demonstrated differing levels of concern for those affected (Pfahl & Bates, 2008). For instance, one of the sponsors (FIA), immediately communicated with fans by expressing regret and shared its plans for corrective action before the race began to an attempt to avoid blame (Pfahl & Bates, 2008, p. 139). They found that contradictory messages about the level of concern showed to victims during times of crisis caused additional reputational harm to the sponsors (Pfahl & Bates, 2008, p. 140).

Another study of the theory in 2002 reviewed print documents and Congressional hearings to measure the effectiveness of Bridgestone-Firestone’s response to its recall of 6.5 million tires that caused the deaths of 271 people (Blaney, et al, 2002). The study showed that the company’s slow response and blame-shifting negatively impacted the effectiveness of its crisis management (Blaney, et al, 2002, p. 385). The study found that blame-shifting can cause negative perceptions about the organization by the public – especially of the responsible party is not showing concern for crisis victims (Blaney, et al, 2002, p. 385). These studies highlight the importance of developing targeted messages and methods for communicating with various audiences during times of crisis (Blaney, et al, 2002; Pfahl & Bates, 2008). Applying principles of the image restoration theory to the BP crisis examination help determine the relationship of empathic communication and corporate reputation during times of crisis.
Rogers work on empathy. In addition to these two theories, this research is also rooted in the work of humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers who claimed that empathetic understanding, congruence, and unconditional positive regard contribute to the well-being of others (Griffin, 1999, p. 53; Rogers, 2011; Rogers, 1958, p. 7). Rogers found that empathy is critical in relationships and interactions with people (Rogers, 1958). The key principle of Rogers’ approach is to take each person’s accounts seriously because they are the basis for helping achieve self-actualization by finding their true identity as a fully-functioning individual (Rogers, 1958, 1977). His prolific work on empathy is important to this study because it demonstrates the role of empathy in relationship building (Rogers, 1958, 1977). Image restoration theory can be expanded through the work of Rogers as it relates to how an organization expresses empathy for its victims affected during a crisis.

The Literature

While there is pervasive literature about best practices for effective crisis communications, organizations continue to mishandle disaster situations resulting in significant reputational damage (Benoit, 1995; Benoit, 1997; Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Blaney, Benoit, & Brazeal, 2002; Chun, 2005; Coombs, 1998; Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Fussell Sisco, Collins, & Zoch, 2010; Pfahl & Bates, 2008; Walton, Cooley, & Nicholson, 2012). The stages of a crisis and the prescriptive steps to manage them have been addressed in detail in the research (Chun, 2005; Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2002). There is also empirical support demonstrating that a favorable organizational reputation prior to a crisis positively impacts the post-crisis reputation (Coombs, 1998; Pfahl & Bates, 2008; Walton et al., 2012).

However, there is little research about the relationship of empathic communication and corporate reputation during times of conflict. This study builds upon previous research in the areas of empathy, crisis communications, and corporate reputation. The study reviews existing
analysis of the British Petroleum Gulf oil crisis to determine the relation of empathy and corporate reputation during emergencies.

**Crisis communication and corporate reputation.** From cases like the Tylenol product tampering in 1982 to the recent BP Gulf Oil spill, an increasing amount of scholarly literature has been devoted to crisis communications (Bell, 2010). In fact, over the last 15 years, the public relations profession has recognized crisis communication as a specialty for practitioners (Bell, 2010). In this study, it is essential to clarify the foundation and definition of crisis communication.

There are several published definitions of crisis communication (Benson, 1988; Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 1998). One of the most widely-cited was developed from an examination of literature by Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer (1998). They defined organizational crisis as “a specific, unexpected, and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainly and threaten or are perceived to threaten an organization’s high priority goals” (Seeger et al, 1998, p. 233). The three components of a crisis are: 1) an event that causes a threat, 2) a short term response that may change as more information emerges, and 3) surprise (Seeger et al., 1998).

**Crisis communication response strategies.** After early studies defined crisis communication, the literature began to focus on how to best respond to a crisis. In 1998, Benson challenged scholars to examine communication during a crisis situation more closely, especially as it related to crisis response strategies (Holladay, p. 279). Since that time, significant works by Hobbs (1995), Coombs (2007); Coombs and Holliday (2002), Seeger (2006); Seeger, et al, 1998) identify best practices for handling crisis communication.
Seeger (2006) developed ten best practices for crisis communication drawing from the works of Covello, Sandman, Reynolds and others (p. 232). In the study, Seeger (2006) used mostly anecdotal observations, case study analysis, and limited empirical investigation (p. 234). The following ten best practices, which are widely-quoted in the literature, include: 1) incorporate communication into all aspects of the crisis; 2) create a pre-crisis plan; 3) foster strong partnership with the public; 4) listen to concerns of audiences; 5) practice honest, candor and openness; 6) collaborate and communicate with credible sources; 7) meet the needs of the media and be accessible; 8) communicate with compassion, empathy and concern; 9) accept uncertainty, and 10) tell people what they can do to reduce harm (Seeger, 2006). Another theme often recommended in the literature is to admit fault in crisis situations (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 1998). Rapid response to a catastrophic event is another critical factor which determines the outcome of a crisis event and how it affects corporate reputation (Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Chun, 2005; Fussell et al., 2010). This study supplements existing literature on best practices to determine if the use of empathy warrants more attention in crisis response strategies.

Scholars agree that the main goal of crisis management is to protect organizational reputation (Bell, 2010; Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Seeger et al., 1998). “The erosion of a company’s reputation is the greatest danger in a crisis” (Benoit, 1997, p. 178). Reputational assets are considered extremely valuable because they can “attract customers, generate investment interest, increase the return on assets, create a competitive advantage and garner positive comments from financial analysts” (Carmeli & Tishler, 2005, p. 15). Scholars also agree that an organization with a favorable pre-crisis reputation experiences less image damage during an emergency (Benoit, 1997, p. 179; Coombs, 2007, p. 168).
The literature is clear that during times of crisis, public perception about the event is usually formed based on reactions to media coverage (Benoit, 1997; Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Claeys, Cauberghe, & Vyncke, 2010). Coombs and Holladay (2010) examined how a company’s crisis communication strategies were portrayed by journalists (pp. 165-185). The study found that the way information is framed in news coverage influences public perceptions during a crisis situation (Coombs and Holladay; 2010, p.184). The study also said that crisis managers must understand media relations (Coombs and Holladay; 2010, p. 184). Similarly, Benoit’s research indicated “how stakeholders interpret a crisis has ramifications for a reputational threat” (Benoit, 1997, p. 180).

The research demonstrates that negative publicity can be damaging to organizational reputation during a crisis (Coombs, 2007; Dean, 2004). Using consumer feedback, Dean (2004) explored the impact of negative publicity generated from crisis situations on corporate reputation (p. 204). The research focused on three factors that may affect consumer reaction to negative publicity; company response to the event, company reputation for social responsibility prior to the event, and company responsibility for the crisis (Dean, 2004). The study found that corporate reputation prior to a crisis and proper response are keys to image restoration (Dean, 2004, pp. 204-209). However, the study was limited because it used only three factors in its analysis. It was also limited because its participants had varied degrees of familiarity with the companies before the study.

The literature acknowledges that apologies and spokespersons play pivotal roles in crisis communications (Coombs, 1998; Jordon-Meier, 2012; Verhoeven, Van Hoof, Ter Keurs, & Van Vuuren). In a study with 84 participants, scholars found that the handling of the crisis and the use of apologies have more impact on corporate reputation than the spokesperson (Verhoeven et
The scholars also reviewed the combined effects of crisis response strategy on corporate reputation (Verhoeven et al., 2012, p. 503). This study uses empirical data to draw on the correlation between communication tactics during crises, including expressing empathy, and its effect on corporate reputation (Verhoeven et al., 2012). This research extends these findings by evaluating the role of expressed empathy shown by an organization and its spokespersons in more depth.

During a crisis, the spokesperson often holds a leadership position at the organization (King, 2007, p. 183). It is well-documented that effective crisis leadership is critical if the organization is able to recover without significant damage after the emergency (Combs, 1998; Pillai, 1996, p. 545). King (2007) studied the effect of a narcissistic leader or spokesperson on the outcome of an organizational crisis (pp. 183-193). “A crisis leader must display a sense of confidence, while at the same time expressing signs of empathy toward those who were hurt or potentially harmed by the crisis” (King, 2007, p.188). The findings of the study demonstrated the negative impact a narcissistic leader can have on the pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis stages (King, 2007, 183-193).

The research highlights the importance of symbolic communication of the crisis leader to achieve a favorable outcome for an organization (King, 2007; Jordan-Meier, 2012). There can be long-term, negative effects of poor image management during a crisis, and they emphasized the importance of facial expressions, body language, and overall appearance of a crisis leader (Jordan-Meier, 1012, pp. 16-20). The study herein integrates this data to help explore stakeholder perceptions regarding the expression of empathy during the BP oil crisis.

Impact of Internet and social media. Scholarly literature about the role of online and social media in crisis communication has recently emerged (Freberg, 2012; Gonzalez-Herrero &
Smith, 2008; Liu, Austin, & Jin, 2011). While data is scant, it is vital to pursue because it is estimated that the more than 274 million Americans have Internet access (http://www.nielsen.com/us/en.html). This number has more than doubled since the year 2000 (http://www.nielsen.com/us/en.html). Research shows that onsite and online crisis response activities are becoming more intermingled (Freberg, 2012; Gonzalez-Herrero & Smith, 2008; Liu, Austin, & Jin, 2011). Internet-based technologies can act either as a trigger or an enabler of a crisis (Gonzalez-Herrero & Smith, 2008, p. 148). The literature does not suggest new crisis management tools for online use, but instead, implores crisis managers to adapt existing methods to the modern technological environment (Freberg, 2012; Gonzalez-Herrero & Smith, 2008, p. 153).

The connection between age and the use of Internet-based technologies is frequently mentioned in the literature as it relates to crisis communication (Freberg, 2012; Gonzalez-Herrero & Smith, 2008, Liu et al., 2011). Freberg (2012) used scenario construction based on nationally-representative focus group of consumers who responded to food recall messages. She found “the rapid growth of social media challenges crisis communicators to disseminate safety messages to affected audiences quickly and in a manner that promotes maximum compliance” (Freberg, 2012). Age also affects social media use (Freberg, 2012). Freberg discovered that social media participation increased from 37 percent in the Baby Bust group to 52 percent in Boomers, 70 percent in Generation X and up to 81 percent among the Generation Y (Freberg, 2012). She also found that the Echo Boomers often did not differentiate the source of the message from being from the company or the federal government recall source (Freberg, 2012). Liu et al (2011) found similar results about age, message sources, and use of social media when they conducted a study of 162 college students to determine how the public responds to crisis
communications from various formats (pp. 345-353). As younger generations mature and technology continues to have a significant impact on communications, future research is needed to better-understand the role of social media and the Internet in crisis communications.

**Empathy.** There is moderate research on the subject of empathy and empathic communication. (Chun, 2005; Davis, 1984; Eisenger & Strayer, 1987; Ickes, 1997). However, throughout the existing literature, scholars agree that empathy is a psychological process (Chun, 2005; Davis, 1984; Eisenger & Strayer, 1987). How empathy is theoretically defined is important because it provides the basis for examining the relationship between empathic communication and corporate reputation during times of crisis. Empathy is a “complex psychological inference in which observation, memory, knowledge and reasoning are combined to yield insights into the thoughts and feelings of others” (Ickes, 1997, p. 2). Using a compilation of published work on empathy, Levenson & Ruef (1992) identified three different qualities of empathy; 1) knowing what the other person is feeling, 2) feeling what another person is feeling, and 3) responding compassionately to the other person’s distress (p. 234). Empathy is also grounded in affect contagion, taking the perspective of another, and social activities like consoling or helping another person (Chun, 2005; Levenson & Ruef, 1992; Krause, 2010).

Early literature demonstrates that the activation of mirror neurons is a prerequisite for empathy (Jackson, Meltzoff, & Decety, 2004, p. 772). The research builds on several theorists including Freud’s (1921) findings that affect contagion was considered to be inborn capacity to activate motoric patterns by just looking at the behavior of others (Jackson et al., 2004, p. 771). The empirical findings indicate “…when a person detects another’s emotions though those actions, his mirror neurons reproduce those emotions which leads to a shared experience” (Jackson et al., 2004, p. 774).
In addition to consensus about the definition of empathy, there is also agreement in the literature about how empathy is expressed (Eisengerg & Strayer, 1987; Ickes, 1997). Empathy is often exhibited by showing understanding of another person’s needs and motivations even if they are different from your own (Chun, 2005; David, 1984; Eisengerg & Strayer, 1987; Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008; Ickes, 1997). Seeking input, active listening, showing concern and warmth are also cited as critical components of empathic behavior (Chun, 2005, p. 278). Empathy is primarily conveyed by touch, gesture, gaze, voice and posture, which is often demonstrated in face-to-face communication (Eisengerg & Strayer, 1987; Preece & Ghozati, 2001, p. 252). The literature supports the current study by determining criteria for measuring if empathy was expressed by BP during the oil crisis.

There is significant research on empathy in face-to-face communication (Davis, 1984; Eisengerg & Strayer, 1987; Levenson & Ruef, 1992). However, the research related to empathy in online communication is sparse. Preece and Ghozati (2001) conducted a data and content analyses of 100 online communities and found that empathic communication was present in 81 percent of them (Preece & Ghozati, 2001). This study provided evidence that empathic communication can be accomplished via online communication methods (Preece & Ghozati, 2001). These findings also state that empathy can be conveyed in digital and online communication through the following; choice of words, phrases, factual information, and sentence structure, use of graphics and punctuation, and use of space (Preece & Ghozati, 2001).

There is a major gap in the research about the connection between empathic communication and favorable corporate reputation, which this study seeks to fill. Scholars Goleman and Boyatzis (1998) developed a relationship-based construct for assessing leadership called social intelligence. They defined social intelligence as “a set of interpersonal
competencies built on specific neural circuits (and related endocrine systems) that inspire others to be effective” (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008). One of the key competencies is empathy (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008, p. 76). Using criteria for empathy and the other competencies, they measured the effectiveness of a leader and found “…social intelligence turns out to be especially important in crisis situations” (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008, pg. 81). There is similar research which shows that an empathic manner at work creates supportive and caring relationships (Burke, 1999). Yet, these studies do not make the link between empathy, empathic communication and corporate reputation. This study explores these connections.

In recent work, Patnaik and Mortensen (2009) attempt to establish the economic and social impact that corporations reap by practicing empathy. They developed criteria to measure the level of empathy a company exhibited and linked the result to key success factors including reputation (Patnaik and Mortensen, 2009, p. 18-22). They applied these criteria to companies by using secondary data and select data from stakeholders including investors and customers. They reviewed case studies of more than 50 companies, which were classified as low, striving, or high empathy (Patnaik & Mortensen, 2009). BP is included in the analysis (Patnaik & Mortensen, 2009, p.55). While their findings are useful, the research is limited for several reasons. First, the research is focused anecdotal methods. While some of the results include turnover rates, more quantitative measures, such as brand equity survey results, revenue and/or stock price would strengthen the findings. In addition, the causal link between the expression of empathy and corporate performance was not firmly established, and the work has not been peer-reviewed.

**British Petroleum Gulf oil crisis.** In April, 2010, one of British Petroleum’s (BP) drilling rigs explored in the Gulf of Mexico, killing 11 people and spilling more than 18 million gallons of crude oil into the Gulf (Choi, 2012, p. 423). It received substantial media coverage in
the United States and abroad, which makes it an excellent case study for crisis communication research. There are several studies critiquing how BP handled its crisis communication response. There are differing conclusions in the literature about the performance of the company during the emergency.

Choi (2012) completed a content analysis of 93 BP press releases and found that because the company accepted responsibility and showed compassion for the victims, it minimized damage to its reputation (p. 428). The study is limited because it did not analyze how many of the releases were adopted by the news media. Muralidharan, Dillistone and Shin (2011) extended Benoit’s (1997) theory of image of restoration theory to social media by conducting a content analysis of BP’s use of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr pages during a three-month time frame immediately following Gulf oil crisis (Muralidharan, Dillistone, & Shin, 2011). The study found that using social media helped BP’s reputation during the crisis because it invited two-way communication with stakeholders (Muralidharan et al., 2011, p. 230). The study was limited because it only focused on a 90-day time frame.

Similarly, Walton, Cooley and Nicholson (2012) conducted a content analysis to assess BP’s social media platform and Twitter usage within the framework of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory model (Walton, Cooley, & Nicholson, 2012). The research coded 1,142 tweets from April 29, 2010 to September 10, 2010 and found that 27 percent of the tweets used ingratiation and 21 percent reflected concern elements of the SCCT (Walton et al, 2012). The study took an important first step in testing the SCCT model within the framework of social media sites.

The literature provides foundational data to support the content analysis which will help determine the relationship between empathy and corporate reputation during times of crisis.
This study contributes to the emerging literature about web-based communication during a crisis because it includes an examination of BP’s expressed empathy in online formats in its crisis response.

**Rationale**

While the research in crisis communication is dominated by case studies, there is adequate information about the definition of crisis communications, best practice response strategies during an emergency, and the potentially-negative impact of a crisis on organizational reputation. There is moderate research on the subject of empathy and empathic communication. However, it is clear that additional research about the connection between empathic communication and corporate reputation during times of crisis is needed. This study also supplements existing literature on best practices to determine if the use of empathy warrants more attention in crisis response strategies. The application of this research is valuable to organizations because it will help them handle crises, protect its stakeholders, improve the conditions of its victims, and preserve its reputations.

**Research Questions**

The review of the literature leads to the following two research questions:

RQ #1: What is the relationship of empathic communication and corporate reputation during times of crisis?

RQ #2: How do stakeholders perceive expressed empathy by an organization during times of crisis?
Chapter 3: Scope and Methodology

Scope of the Study

This research examined the relationship between empathy expressed during times of crisis and how it relates to corporate reputation. The study used a multi-method qualitative study with two elements, 1) focus groups, and 2) personal interviews. The research reviewed existing analysis of the British Petroleum (BP) Gulf oil crisis in 2010 to determine the relationship of empathy and corporate reputation during emergencies. Based on the BP case study, respondents were asked to react to various aspects of the company’s communication response to the disaster.

Two focus groups were completed using a purposive sampling method of working professionals. Each group included five participants and lasted approximately 75 minutes. The composition of the groups ensured that diverse industries were represented. The personal interviews employed a purposive sampling method to recruit branding and communication experts with a minimum of 10 years in the industry. The study included six in-person interviews, which lasted approximately 30 minutes each.

Empathic behavior is conveyed by elements such as warmth, touch, voice, posture, and other components that are usually demonstrated via face-to-face communication (Eisengerg & Strayer, 1987; Preece & Ghozati, 2001). Since it was not possible to use the face-to-face method for this study, the research included analysis of news releases published by BP as well as video communication produced and disseminated by BP. It did not encompass other forms of communication such as news media, written correspondence, written online content, or face-to-face interaction.

The research focused on organizations using the rebuilding crisis response strategies outlined in the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs, 1998). The scope of the
research was limited to organizations using corrective action and mortification strategies of Benoit’s (1995) image restoration theory. This focus enabled the findings to directly answer the research questions posed in this study.

Methodology and Research Design

Sample.

Focus groups. A purposive sampling method of working professionals was used for the focus group respondents. Two groups were conducted, with five participants in each session. The composition of the groups was selected so that diverse demographics and industries were represented. The sessions lasted approximately 75 minutes and took place in two different locations in Columbus, Ohio. The source database for the respondents was the Columbus Chamber of Commerce member directory. The researcher moderated both groups to promote consistency.

Personal interviews. The personal interview research employed a purposive sampling method to recruit branding and communication experts with a minimum of 10 years in the industry. The study included six personal interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes, and took place in the Columbus region. The source databases for the respondents were the Columbus Chamber of Commerce member directory and the Columbus Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America. The researcher served as the interviewer for all discussions to ensure consistency.

Rationale.

Focus groups. The research questions posed in this study required the solicitation and analysis of personal perceptions and opinions. Focus groups are valuable when exploring how viewpoints are constructed and how they are expressed (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999; Puchta &
Potter, 2004). This method can be used when collecting perspectives to aid in understanding context or impact of something on a group of people (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 174). Another benefit of the focus group method is that it helps trigger new ideas and allows time for considering a variety of viewpoints (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 175). This can lead to exciting and innovative discoveries.

This method is well-suited to determine perceptions and opinions, which relate directly to the role of empathy during times of crisis and corporate reputation. This sampling included adult professionals because this group has an understanding of business concepts, such as corporate reputation, which was foundational to the study. It also enhanced the quality of the data collected.

**Personal interviews.** Similarly, the qualitative interview research method is a favorable format for complex, subjective topics. They are often used in scholarly research to produce empirical materials for the study in question (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 78). The interviews combined positivist and emotionalist approaches to yield data which answers both ‘what’ and ‘how’ questions (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004, p. 143). They are a solid supplement to the focus group research.

The purposive sample of communication experts added value and credibility to the final results. One of the purposes of the research is to provide insight for organizations to understand the link of empathic communication during times of crisis to protect and preserve corporate reputation. Industry experts in the field provided informed viewpoints about the topics because they could draw on existing expertise. By using expert respondents, the data produced richer results, which can directly benefit organizations.

**Procedures, data collection and analysis.**
Focus groups. The focus group research began by referencing the Columbus Chamber of Commerce member database. Contacts were purposively selected from each business category. An initial email message was sent to this list of potential respondents to gauge interest. Next, a follow up telephone call was made to potential participants to further measure and screen for interest in participation. The recruiting communication process continued until five participants were confirmed for each session. Lunch was provided to participants. The researcher allocated three weeks for the recruiting process.

The focus group sessions began with a brief explanation of the purpose of the study. The overall format followed a funnel approach in which broad, open-ended questions were asked at the start of the discussion. The questions became more streamlined to pinpoint the following measures of the study: perceived expressions of empathy, crisis response, spokesperson influence, and corporate reputation. The moderator posed open and closed-ended questions. The moderator provided an objective overview of the facts of the BP Gulf Oil crisis. During the session, the researcher introduced communication elements BP used during the crisis. These elements included news releases from BP and video communication produced by BP in conjunction with the crisis. They were introduced chronologically in three phases, i.e., 1) Phase I: initial response – the first month after the explosion 2) Phase II: secondary response – June 2010 – March 2012, and 3) Phase III. Long-term/present day response - April 2012 – February 2013. Participants discussed each phase of BP’s response to the crisis. The sessions were highly-interactive. See Appendix A and B for a copy of the focus group moderator guide and participant worksheet.

The data was collected and analyzed in several ways. First, the sessions were video-recorded. In addition, respondents were asked to complete written worksheets to record thoughts
during the session. These documents were collected at the end of the meeting. The researcher conducted constant comparative analysis to identify emerging themes among the individual and collective groups. The researcher also completed an ethnographic analysis of data to identify recurrent instances and themes (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 176). The focus group videos, notes, worksheets and data were evaluated to look for specific statements and comments about the measures stated previously to discover the relationship between empathy during times of crisis and corporate reputation. The entire research methodology was designed to ensure validity and transferability to other researchers (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 176).

**Personal interviews.** The qualitative interviews began by referencing the Columbus Chamber of Commerce member database section on branding and communication professionals. The researcher also reviewed the Columbus Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America membership list. A group of 50 contacts were purposively selected to ensure that communication professionals from a cross section of organizational sectors were represented. A personalized request was sent to the potential respondent via U.S. mail and email. Then, the researcher made follow up recruiting calls until six interviewees were confirmed.

The researcher began the discussions by providing a brief explanation of the purpose of the study. The interviewer used a series of questions to guide the process. Similar to the focus groups, the interviewer provided an objective overview of the facts of the BP Gulf Oil and examples of the BP’s communication response to the situation. This case study helped ground the discussion about the relationship of empathy used during a crisis situation and corporate reputation. The interview questions encompassed the following measures; perceived expressions of empathy, crisis response timing, spokesperson influence, and corporate reputation. See Appendix C for a copy of the interview guide.
The data was collected and analyzed in several ways. First, the sessions were audio-recorded. The researcher also recorded responses and insights via written notes. The researcher conducted constant comparative analysis to identify emerging themes among the data. The researcher also completed an ethnographic analysis of the data to identify recurrent instances and themes (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 177).

**Validity**

The validity of qualitative research is dependent upon four criteria, 1) credibility, 2) transferability, 3) confirmability, and 4) dependability (Shenton, 2004, p. 64). Credibility was established through the use of tactics to help ensure honesty in the respondents when contributing data (Shenton, 2004, p. 65). The researcher ensured that potential respondents knew that participation was voluntary, and included only those who were genuinely interested in participating (Shenton, 2004, p. 65).

The validity of the research was also enhanced by addressing transferability. The research used purposive sampling and multiple locations for the focus groups and interviews to improve transferability (Shenton, 2004, p. 69). This enabled respondents from various industries and diverse backgrounds to have the same context for assessing empathic communication and corporate reputation.

The researcher conducted constant comparative analysis of focus group respondents and interviewees, which addressed the issue of confirmability (Shenton, 2004, p. 70). In addition, confirmability was established by using a triangulation of different collection methods, i.e. focus groups, personal interviews and observation by the researcher (Shenton, 2004, p. 64-65).

Finally, the dependability element of validity was fulfilled by providing detailed research design, sampling information, participant data and procedures. This ensured that a future
researcher could complete the same study using this information (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). The entire research methodology was designed to guarantee validity and transferability to other researchers. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 178).

Although the research design is complete and it satisfies the criteria of trustworthiness, there are some inherent limitations. The most significant is the potential bias among respondents because of the universal familiarity with the BP disaster in the Gulf. The limitations of this study are discussed in more depth in Chapter 5.

**Ethical Considerations**

The researcher in this study was committed to the highest ethical standards and principles. Two critical aspects of ethics in social research are the principle of voluntary consent and informed consent (Neuman, 2006, p. 135). The researcher ensured that all respondents in the focus groups and personal interviews participated purely on a volunteer basis. This aspect was emphasized with respondents during the recruiting phase and before the actual field research began. Informed consent is “a written statement that explains aspects of a study to participants and asks for their voluntary agreement to participate before the study begins” (Neuman, 2006, p. 135). The researcher developed and provided consent forms to all participants. The consent form also covered authorization for participants to be video- or audio- recorded.

Participant confidentiality was another important ethical concern of the study. The researcher coded all focus group and interview respondents so that no individual or organizational attribution is present in the findings. Similarly, focus group participants were asked to keep proceedings of the sessions confidential. The written consent form tool helped reinforce these principles.
Finally, the researcher adhered to the principles of ethical social research. Subjects were treated with respect, and not exploited for personal gain (Neuman, 2006, p. 142). The details of the study were released with the results in a transparent fashion (Neuman, 2006, p. 142). And, as mentioned previously, the researcher ensured that participation was voluntary and confidential (Neuman, 2006, p. 142).
Chapter 4: The Study

This study examined the relationship between empathy expressed during times of crisis and corporate reputation. Through focus groups of working professionals and semi-structured interviews of communication experts, the study explored empathy in crisis situations related to the following aspects: a) perceptions about how empathy is expressed, b) empathy and crisis response timing, c) spokesperson influence, and d) corporate reputation. The focus groups and interviews yielded lively discussion. Several clear patterns emerged in the research, which are explained in the results section in this chapter. The data analysis process is also described in this section.

Data Analysis

Focus groups. The research included two focus groups with five working professionals in each. The groups were completed on March 4 and March 5, 2013. The first was completed in downtown Columbus, and the second was completed in the business corridor in Northwest Columbus. Both groups were provided lunch and were reimbursed for parking expenses. In addition to video recording the sessions, participants completed a written survey, which provided a quantitative element to the primarily qualitative method research design. See Appendix A and B for focus group moderator guide and focus group survey.

The researcher conducted constant comparative analysis to identify emerging themes among the individuals and collective groups. The researcher also completed an ethnographic analysis of data to identify recurrent instances and themes related to the aspects mentioned previously, i.e., a) perceptions about how empathy is expressed, b) empathy and crisis response timing, c) spokesperson influence, and d) corporate reputation (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 176).
The focus group videos, notes, worksheets and data were evaluated to look for specific statements and comments about the measures stated previously to discover the relationship between empathy during times of crisis and corporate reputation. The research recorded notes using a coding system to ensure confidentiality for all participants. See Appendix D for select coded results.

**Qualitative interviews.** The study also entailed six personal interviews with communications experts with more than ten years of experience in the profession. Interviews were completed in person at various locations from March 4 – March 25, 2013. See Appendix C for interview questions. The researcher captured responses and insights via audio recording and written notes. The researcher conducted constant comparative analysis to identify emerging themes among the data. The researcher also completed an ethnographic analysis of the data from the transcripts and notes to identify recurrent instances and themes (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 177). The research recorded notes using a coding system to ensure confidentiality for all participants. See Appendix D for select coded results.

**Results**

**Demographics.**

**Focus groups.** The focus group participants were half male (50%) and half female (50%) and represented a variety of professions including; accounting, health care, information technology, government affairs, operations, executive management, and human resources. The group was well-educated, with ten percent earning a doctorate degree, one-fifth (20%) holding a graduate degree and another fifth (20%) holding bachelor’s degrees. Ten percent had only a high school education. Forty percent (40%) of participants were age 55-65, 10% were 46-55, one-fifth (20%) were 36-45, another one-fifth were 26-35 and the remaining 10% were under age 25.
The majority (60%) were white, about one-third (30%) were black or African American, and 10% were Hispanic. Most (40%) of the participants were married, 30% were single, 20% were separated or divorced, and 10% were widowed.

**Interviews.** The study aimed for expert communications professionals from various industries with at least a decade of work experience. Among the six communication expert respondents, 67% were female and the remaining 33% were male. The majority (83%) were white; half (50%) held graduate degrees and half (50%) held bachelor degrees. The average number of years in the profession was 15.7. The respondents represented the for profit sector (50%), the nonprofit sector (33%) and the public sector (17%).

**Qualitative results.** Reporting of the qualitative analysis results is aligned with the main purposes of the study to determine how stakeholders perceive expressed empathy by an organization during times of crisis and the relationship of empathic communication and corporate reputation during times of crisis. The qualitative analysis is categorized by the four relevant themes, i.e., 1) perceptions about how empathy is expressed, 2) empathy and crisis response timing, 3) spokesperson influence, and 4) corporate reputation.

**Perceptions about how empathy is expressed.** The focus group participants and interview respondents identified several ways in which a company, like BP, demonstrates empathy. After reviewing several crisis response news releases from BP, respondents said that word choice, sequencing of facts, and overall tone are critical to conveying empathy. Both groups had animated conversations about the fact that BP did not acknowledge the loss of the eleven people who were killed in the explosion until its second published news release was issued. They said this sequencing of facts showed a lack of empathy for the victims. “They
didn’t show any consideration for their eleven employees and what their families were going through, “said one focus group participant.

Respondents said another way to express empathy is by showing understanding about what the victims are feeling. Respondents viewed videos produced by BP during three phases of crisis response. They all agreed that the company began to demonstrate more empathy when it began focusing on the plight of its victims. As one professional said, “At the beginning, it seemed like they (BP) only cared about avoiding law suits. But as the situation went on, they started focusing on what really mattered – the victims.”

Communication professionals and focus group participants said that empathy is also expressed by showing compassion. In the BP case study, respondents said that the company expressed empathy in recent video communications about its commitment to the Gulf. In these videos, BP shared information about the money, time and effort it has contributed to help the people and environment in the affected region. Participants also noted that they had business owners share their stories of their hardships and how BP is helping them. Participants said that the BP representatives in the videos were smiling and shaking hands with the victims. As one communication expert said, “Empathy is about showing you care. And in a crisis situation, showing you really care really matters.”

**Empathy and crisis response timing.** The groups and the interview respondents were given a neutral overview of the events of BP Gulf Oil crisis. They were asked to consider BP’s response to the crisis and if it reflected the use of empathy. Overwhelmingly, all respondents said that BP’s slow initial response to the crisis demonstrated a lack of empathy. They discussed several examples to support this opinion. First, they acknowledged that BP’s early response to the crisis focused on the subcontractors working on the project. As one professional said, “They
EMPATHY DURING TIMES OF CRISIS

just pointed the finger at Transocean and they didn’t even care about their own guys who were killed.” The communication experts were vocal about the challenge of balancing the legal advice and consequences with the expression of empathy for victims during times of crisis. “The BP deal is a classic case of the lawyers putting muzzles on the executives. While I understand that it is important to make sure the company is not found liable, it is equally important to make sure they are empathic and protect the brand,” said one communication professional.

In addition to slow initial response and blame shifting, the group said the first video response about the crisis released by BP was cold and unfeeling. The video included a still photo of the oil rig and was accompanied by a 35-minute, detailed explanation about the investigation procedures the company was following. “Their early PR work seemed self-serving. It improved once they had better communications firm, but not a lot,” said one participant. The communications experts all agreed that BP would have benefited from using more personal messages that conveyed concern and outrage for the victims. “To show true empathy, you have to do more than what is expected for the victims,” said a communications expert.

Although respondents said BP’s slow initial response demonstrated a lack of empathy, they believe that the company’s recent response has been much more favorable. They attribute this to the fact that BP’s recent commercials and news releases are focused on those who have been affected by the crisis and what the company is doing to restore the region. “When I watch those commercials, it seems like they really care about what is happening to the people, and that they are not going to abandon them. Too bad they didn’t do that from the get-go,” said a focus group participant.

Spokesperson influence. The topic of spokesperson influence during a crisis and the role of empathy solicited enthusiastic discussion in the focus groups and the interviews. The focus
group participants noted that the initial news releases and video responses from BP did not identify a spokesperson. They agreed that the absence of a spokesperson conveyed a lack of empathy. “They (BP) seemed like robots, not people,” said one participant.

Without prompting or solicitation, both groups and every interviewee raised an incident related to BP’s former chief executive officer, Tony Hayward. Hayward was the head of the company when the oil crisis began. He made his first appearance in the United States media seven weeks after the explosion (Jordan-Meier, 2012). During a television interview with CNN, he made the remark, “I would like my life back” (Jordan-Meier, 2012, p. 17). The media replayed this response and it quickly spread on social media outlets. He eventually was ousted from his post. Respondents said that Hayward came across as an unfeeling person who lacked empathy.

One communication professional said this was particularly damaging because Hayward was the first face people connected with BP and the crisis. “The tone he set doomed them. People were already angry at the big, greedy, uncaring, foreign oil company. He reinforced this perception,” said one communication expert. Respondents said that Hayward came across as insincere and selfish. “He is the kind of CEO who put profits before people,” said a focus group participant. Several respondents acknowledged that Hayward did apologize, which they thought was critical. However, they said the apology seemed insincere. It is important to note that the Hayward comment was not shared with the respondents during the course of the study because it did not meet the criteria of being produced by BP. The topic was raised by the respondents. Yet, participants said his lack of empathy was one of the most damaging moments of the crisis.

The group gave better marks to BP’s spokespersons from more recent video communication. The company has a series of videos in which BP employees, born and raised in
the Gulf Coast region, say BP is committed to restoring the area. The group described the spokespersons as nice, credible, down-to-earth, and compassionate. As one focus group participant said, “He seems like a good guy who wants to help his hometown and his neighbors.” Collectively, the respondents agreed that this spokesperson expressed empathy. Overall, respondents strongly believe that the spokesperson(s) in the BP crisis has major impact in demonstrating empathy or a lack of empathy.

**Corporate reputation.** The final aspect explored was corporate reputation and empathy. Ninety percent (90%) of all focus group participants and 100% of communication experts said they think the use of empathy by BP during the crisis had some influence on the company’s reputation. The majority believe that if BP would have demonstrated empathy during its initial response, its corporate reputation would be more favorable than it is now. “Their lack of empathy along with their abdication of responsibility clearly negatively impacted BP’s reputation,” said a 25-year media relations expert. The majority of participants thought that empathy could have helped BP establish public trust and foster a more favorable corporate reputation. “I think showing some empathy and kindness could have helped their position considerably,” said a focus group participant.

**Discussion**

The original research questions posed in this study are; RQ 1) What is the relationship of empathic communication and corporate reputation during times of crisis? RQ 2) how do stakeholders perceive expressed empathy by an organization during times of crisis? The study indicated many key factors which directly answer these questions. The following discussion organized by aspect provides insight into the findings.

**Perceptions about how empathy is expressed.** The study revealed several notions about how empathy is expressed during times of crisis. First, the findings indicate that empathy
can be perceived in written and video communication formats. Respondents were able to
distinguish evidence of empathic communication in both the news releases and the video
materials. These findings support previous work which says that empathy can be conveyed
through choice of words, phrases, factual information, and sentence structure, use of graphics
and punctuation, and use of space (Preece & Ghozati, 2001). Similarly, the results supports
previous research that empathy is often expressed by touch, gesture, gaze, voice and posture
(Eisengerg & Strayer, 1987; Preece & Ghozati, 2001, p. 252).

These findings can be directly applied to best practices for handling crisis
communications. Specifically, the findings can be used to extend Coombs (1998, 2007)
Situational Crisis Communications Theory (SCCT) which defines responses that managers
should follow. For example, the results provide evidence that crisis managers should ensure that
empathy is expressed in all communication response formats, e.g., written, online, video, face-to-
face. The results and previous literature suggest that messages should acknowledge what the
other person is feeling during these situations (Levenson & Reuf, 1992).

Similarly, the SCCT states that a company’s reputation before a crisis, and how well they
treated stakeholders pre-crisis impacts the outcome of the situation (Coombs 1998, 2007). This
study can enhance the SCCT by encouraging companies to increase the use of empathy in all of
its regular communication and interaction with stakeholders, not just during times of crisis. The
study found that as BP began to express more empathy in its response communications, the more
favorably the company was perceived.

**Empathy and crisis response timing.** Previous research has established that slow
response and blame-shifting negatively impacts the effectiveness of crisis management (Blaney,
et al, 2002, p. 385). The findings of this research demonstrate that a slow response to a crisis
situation also connotes a lack of empathy. The respondents admonished BP because its initial news release response was several days after the explosion, and its message focused on blaming its subcontractor, not on the loss of lives. Similarly, BP’s first video response was seven weeks after the explosion. The video was perceived as cold, unfeeling with little mention of the victims. This lack of expressed empathy had an unfavorable impact on corporate reputation. These factors indicate that proper handling of a crisis communication requires a swift response, which acknowledges the victims.

**Spokesperson influence.** The results of this study stress the importance of having an empathic spokesperson when dealing with a crisis situation. The literature already acknowledges that apologies and spokespersons play pivotal roles in crisis communications (Coombs, 1998; Jordon-Meier, 2012; Verhoeven, Van Hoof, Ter Keurs, & Van Vuuren). However, the literature can be enhanced by recognizing that an empathic spokesperson is pivotal to a successful outcome for an organization.

It also clearly demonstrates the enormous negative impact of a spokesperson who lacks empathy during a crisis situation. The results illustrate this point through the example of BP’s former CEO and crisis spokesperson, Tony Hayward. His selfish and unfeeling comments were detrimental to the company’s crisis response. These findings reinforce King’s (2007) study on the effect of a narcissistic leader or spokesperson on the outcome of an organizational crisis (pp. 183-193). “A crisis leader must display a sense of confidence, while at the same time expressing signs of empathy toward those who were hurt or potentially harmed by the crisis” (King, 2007, p.188). The negative impact of a narcissistic leader can extend to the pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis stages (King, 2007, 183-193). Therefore, the research suggests that companies should add
empathy to the list of desired characteristics and competencies when hiring a leader and/or choosing a spokesperson for an organization.

This study also found that spokespeople are perceived as more empathic when they have a genuine connection to its victims. For example, Hayward was viewed as an unfeeling, greedy CEO who was from a different country than the victims. The research showed that this had a negative impact. Conversely, when BP starting using its employees who were from the Gulf Coast region, they were perceived as more empathic to the victims and the overall situation. This is critical information for organizations to consider when choosing a spokesperson to handle a crisis situation. This research challenges common practice that the spokesperson in a crisis situation should always be the leader of the organization.

**Corporate reputation.** The research shows that expressing empathy during times of crisis has a favorable impact on corporate reputation. Scholars agree that the main goal of crisis management is to protect organizational reputation (Bell, 2010; Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Seeger et al., 1998). Demonstrating empathy in pre-crisis, during a crisis and post-crisis can help organizations minimize damage and protect its brand. The strong majority (94%) of respondents agree that empathy during a crisis has a positive influence on corporate reputation.

Therefore, this research can be used to extend and enhance Benoit’s widely-accepted image restoration theory. Benoit’s (1995) provided eight suggestions for effective image repair. The highlights include; admit fault when appropriate, shift blame only when warranted, communicate about factors beyond your control, report plans to correct and/or prevent recurrence of the problem, do not trivialize the problem, use multiple recommendations for optimal results; follow the traditional rules of persuasion; avoid making false claims, develop
communication themes, provide adequate support for your claims, and avoid arguments that may backfire (Benoit, 1995). This research would enhance this theory by including a ninth suggestion to express empathy to those affected by the crisis.
Chapter 5: Summaries and Conclusions

Limitations of the Study

As with all research methodology, this study has several limitations. First, the sample was limited in three ways. While the purposive sample successfully achieved its target to include working professionals and communication experts, it excluded other demographics. The sample lacked racial diversity, with 83% of respondents being Caucasian. Secondly, the study had a small number of participants (n=16). The sample was also geographically limited. All field work was completed in Columbus, Ohio. Therefore, the results of the study cannot be generalized across the state or the country.

Another limitation of the study was the inherent bias of the participants related to the BP Gulf Oil crisis. The tragedy has received an enormous amount of media coverage. In addition, special interest groups have widely commented about the situation. Because of the universal familiarity with the BP disaster, there was potential for bias in the groups and interviews.

Finally, this study did not have investigator triangulation since one person coded all of the transcripts due to available resources. To compensate for this, the researcher kept copious notes and coded responses in a detailed, methodical manner. The researcher also had video and audio recordings which helped ensure accuracy.

Recommendation for Further Study

While the findings clearly reflect that the use of empathy during crisis communications has a positive impact on corporate reputation, there were a few significant topics that warrant further study. The first is extending this study to determine if the use of empathy during non-crisis situations would also have a positive impact on organizational reputation. This further
research could include both internal audiences, e.g., employees, board of directors and external audiences, e.g., customers, media, government officials.

A second area of further research is to investigate the relationship between the role of empathy and organizational financial performance. While this was not addressed in this study, it was an emergent theme in the field research. It is important for organizational leaders to understand the economic value (if applicable) of using empathy for the viability of the company.

A third topic for further investigation is the role of the organizational spokesperson during crisis and non-crisis situations. Current literature indicates that it is a best practice for the top officer in an organization to serve as the spokesperson during times of crisis. The findings in this study revealed that the non-CEO spokespersons in the BP crisis were viewed more favorably by respondents. Important new research to challenge the former best practice may be needed to account for advances in communication methods and technology, as well as differing generational attitudes.

Conclusions

The study found that the strong majority (94%) of respondents believe that empathy during a crisis has a positive influence on corporate reputation. The results indicate that demonstrating empathy in pre-crisis, during a crisis, and post-crisis can help organizations minimize damage and protect its brand. This research can be used to extend and enhance Benoit’s widely-accepted image restoration theory. Benoit’s (1995) provided eight suggestions for effective image repair. This research can enhance this theory by including a ninth suggestion to express empathy to those affected by the crisis.

These findings can also enhance the list of best practices for handling crisis communications. Specifically, the findings can be used to extend Coombs (1998, 2007)
Situational Crisis Communications Theory (SCCT), which defines response strategies that managers should follow during a conflict. The study provides evidence that crisis managers should ensure that empathy is expressed in all communication response formats, e.g., written, online, video, face-to-face. The SCCT also states that a company’s reputation before a crisis, and how well they treat stakeholders pre-crisis, impacts the outcome of the situation (Coombs 1998, 2007). These findings can further enhance the SCCT by encouraging companies to increase the use of empathy in all of its regular communication and interaction with stakeholders, not just during times of crisis.

The results of this study stress the importance of having an empathic spokesperson when dealing with a crisis situation. This research found that spokespeople are perceived as more empathic when they have a genuine connection to the victims. It also clearly demonstrates the enormous negative impact of a spokesperson whom lacks empathy during a crisis situation. The research challenges common practice that the spokesperson in a crisis situation should always be the leader of the organization. This is critical information for organizations to consider when choosing a spokesperson to handle a crisis.

Previous research established that slow response and blame-shifting negatively impacts the effectiveness of crisis management (Blaney, et al, 2002, p. 385). The findings of this study can extend the literature to show that a slow response to a crisis situation connotes a lack of empathy. These factors indicate that proper handling of a crisis communication requires a swift response, which acknowledges the victims.

The study also found that empathy during a crisis can be perceived in various ways. Empathy can be perceived in written and video communication formats. These findings support previous work which says that empathy can be conveyed through choice of words, phrases,
factual information, sentence structure, use of graphics and punctuation, and use of space (Preece & Ghozati, 2001). Similarly, the results supports previous research that empathy is often expressed by touch, gesture, gaze, voice and posture (Eisengerg & Strayer, 1987; Preece & Ghozati, 2001, p. 252).

Finally, the study showed that word choice, sequencing of facts, and overall tone are critical to conveying empathy. The results found that it is critical to show compassion for the victims of the crisis in the initial response to the situation. The study also found that empathy is perceived when personal messages which convey concern and outrage for the victims are used. Unfortunately, crises will always be a part of living and operating an organization. However, treating victims and stakeholders in an empathic and compassionate manner can protect and preserve corporate reputation and the lives of those affected.
References


Focus Group Moderator Guide

I. Introduction
   a. Welcome
      i. Introductory remarks
      ii. Moderator self-introduces
      iii. Thank participants
   b. Self-introductions

II. Ground rules/housekeeping
   a. Consent forms
      i. Distribute & explain
      ii. Obtain signatures & collect
   b. Inform re: video-recording
   c. Other messages
      i. No right or wrong answers
      ii. Full participation necessary
      iii. Confidential
      iv. Turn off cell phones/other distractions

III. Purpose of Group & Research

IV. Explore General Concepts of Organizational Empathy & Corporate Reputation
   a. Do you think most companies/organizations are good corporate citizens? Why or Why not?
   b. How do you think most companies/organizations handle crisis situations?
   c. How do you know if an organization/company is showing empathy for its constituents? (probe as necessary)

V. Provide Overview of BP Gulf Oil Spill
   a. How would you describe the corporate reputation of British Petroleum? Why did you answer this way?
   b. Factual background
   c. Sequence of events

VI. Phase I: Initial Response
   a. Share communications BP provided during initial response
      i. News releases (distribute & ask participants to briefly review)
      
      | Date         | News Release Description                                      |
      |--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
      | 21 April 2010| BP Offers Full Support to Transocean After Drilling Rig Fire|
      | 24 April 2010| BP Offers Sympathy To The Families Of Those Lost In The US Oil Rig Fire|
ii. Video from BP – (None available)

b. Empathy & Corporate reputation
   i. After reviewing BP’s initial response, to what extent do you think BP expressed empathy during its initial response?
   ii. After reviewing BP’s initial response, what is your current view of their corporate reputation?
   iii. What impact, if any, do you think the empathy (or lack thereof) affects BP’s reputation?

VII. Phase II: Secondary Response
   a. Share communications BP provided during secondary response
      i. News releases (distribute & ask participants to briefly review)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25 May 2010</td>
<td>Update on Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill Response - 25 May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 June 2010</td>
<td>BP Establishes $20 Billion Claims Fund for Deepwater Horizon Spill and Outlines Dividend Decisions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   ii. Video response from BP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>URL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing the Gulf Oil Spill: Response and Lessons Learned</td>
<td><a href="http://youtu.be/tI3nmNr1uog">http://youtu.be/tI3nmNr1uog</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voices from the Gulf: Louisiana Restaurant Owners (Oct 2010)</td>
<td><a href="http://youtu.be/oNN5xZgxq0k">http://youtu.be/oNN5xZgxq0k</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   b. Empathy & Corporate reputation

   i. After reviewing BP’s secondary response, to what extent do you think BP expressed empathy during secondary response?
   ii. After reviewing BP’s secondary response, what is your current view of their corporate reputation?
   iii. What impact, if any, do you think the empathy (or lack thereof) affects BP’s reputation?
   iv. Are there any notable changes from the initial response?

VIII. Phase III: Long-term/ Present Day Response
   a. Share communications BP provided during this phase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21 December 2012</td>
<td>BP Responds to Court Approval of PSC Economic Loss and Property Damage Settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03 January 2013</td>
<td>BP Statement on Settlement between Transocean and US Department of Justice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ii. Video from BP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>YouTube Link</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BP’s Ongoing Commitment to the Gulf (April 2012)</td>
<td><a href="http://youtu.be/BV13FugHAos">http://youtu.be/BV13FugHAos</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committed to the Gulf. Committed to America (Feb 2013)</td>
<td><a href="http://youtu.be/qHjqQFAu-8c">http://youtu.be/qHjqQFAu-8c</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b. Empathy & Corporate reputation
   i. After reviewing BP’s present response, to what extent do you think BP expressed empathy during present response?
   ii. After reviewing BP’s present response, what is your current view of their corporate reputation?
   iii. What impact, if any, do you think the empathy (or lack thereof) affects BP’s reputation?
   iv. Are there any notable changes from the initial or secondary response?

IX. Closing Thoughts About Empathy
   a. Considering the items we reviewed and discussed today, do you think BP is an empathic company? (probe why)
   b. Does this influence your feelings about their corporate reputation?

X. Conclusion
   a. Collect worksheets
   b. Thank participants
   c. Distribute incentives
Thank you for participating in today’s focus group discussion. Please complete the following confidential, written survey.

First, please tell us a few things about you:

1. What is your age?

   Under 25  ○  26-35  ○  36-45  ○  46-55  ○  56-65  ○  66+  ○  Prefer not to disclose  ○

2. Marital status

   Single  ○  Married  ○  Separated/divorced  ○  Widowed  ○  Prefer not to disclose  ○

3. Number of children in household (i.e., under age 18)

   Zero  ○  1  ○  2  ○  3  ○  4  ○  5  ○  6+  ○

4. Highest level of education completed

   Grade school  ○  High school  ○  BA or BS  ○  Graduate  ○  Doctorate  ○

5. Gender

   Male  ○  Female  ○  Other  ○

6. Race

   American Indian  ○  Asian  ○  Black or African American  ○  Hispanic  ○  White  ○  Other  ○  Prefer not to disclose  ○

7. Which top 2 of the following media sources do you prefer to get general news and information? (please choose only 2 items)

   Newspaper  ○  Television  ○  Radio  ○  Internet/Online  ○  Other (please specify) __________________

8. Please describe your current job position (title and/or function, e.g. Director of IT or “marketing professional”)

   __________________________________________

9. Please describe the characteristics of a good corporate citizen.

   __________________________________________

   PLEASE STOP NOW UNTIL THE MODERATOR GIVES YOUR FURTHER DIRECTIONS. THANK YOU.
10. To what extent do you think BP expressed empathy during its response to the crisis?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great extent</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some extent</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little extent (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No extent (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know (0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. How would you describe BP’s corporate reputation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely favorable (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorable (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither favorable nor unfavorable (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfavorable (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely unfavorable (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know (0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

STOP PLEASE STOP NOW UNTIL THE MODERATOR GIVES YOUR FURTHER DIRECTIONS. THANK YOU.

Phase I – Initial Response

12. Based on what you just learned, to what extent do you think BP expressed empathy during its initial response to the crisis?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great extent</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some extent</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little extent (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No extent (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know (0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. Based on its initial response, how do you describe BP’s corporate reputation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely favorable (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorable (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither favorable nor unfavorable (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfavorable (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely unfavorable (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know (0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

STOP PLEASE STOP NOW UNTIL THE MODERATOR GIVES YOUR FURTHER DIRECTIONS. THANK YOU.

Phase II – Secondary Response

14. Based on what you just learned, to what extent do you think BP expressed empathy during its secondary response to the crisis?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great extent</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some extent</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little extent (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No extent (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know (0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. Based on its secondary response, how do you describe BP’s corporate reputation?
### Phase III – Long-term/Present Day Response

16. Based on what you just learned, to what extent do you think BP expressed empathy during its long-term/present day response to the crisis?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Great extent (5)</th>
<th>Some extent (4)</th>
<th>Neutral (3)</th>
<th>Little extent (2)</th>
<th>No extent (1)</th>
<th>Don’t know (0)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17. Based on its present day response, how do you describe BP’s corporate reputation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extremely favorable (5)</th>
<th>Favorable (4)</th>
<th>Neither favorable nor unfavorable (3)</th>
<th>Unfavorable (2)</th>
<th>Extremely unfavorable (1)</th>
<th>Don’t know (0)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18. Do you think the use or non/use of empathy by BP during this crisis has any influence on the company’s reputation?

- ☒ Yes
- ☒ No

Please explain your answer

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

19. What (if any) recommendations do you have for BP to increase its expression of empathy?

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

THANK YOU!
Appendix C

Personal Interview Guide

Introduction
Welcome and thank interviewee
Consent form (reinforce confidentiality, permission to audio-record)

Purpose of Interview

General Corporate Crisis Communications & Empathy

1. How do you think most companies/organizations handle crisis communications?

2. How do you know if an organization/company is showing empathy for its constituents during a crisis?

BP Gulf Oil Spill

3. How would you describe the corporate reputation of British Petroleum?

Provide factual background of crisis
Share examples of BP’s communication response

BP’s Response to the Crisis & Use/Non-use of Empathy

4. Do you think BP expressed empathy during this crisis? Probe to identify specific actions/non-actions

5. What did you think about the spokesperson(s)? Was s/he empathic? Probe on characteristics, e.g. favorable/unfavorable?

Corporate Reputation & Empathy

6. Using a school-like scale, what letter grade would you give BP for its corporate reputation? Why did you answer this way?

7. What impact, if any, do you think the empathy (or lack thereof) affects BP’s reputation?

8. Using a school-like scale, what letter grade would you give BP for its expression of empathy during this crisis?

Expert Observations

9. As a communications expert, what do you believe is the relationship (if any) between empathic communication during times of crisis and impact on corporate reputation?

10. What three things would you recommend to an organization in crisis about how the role of empathy?
Appendix D

Focus Groups & Interviews
Select Comments Coded by Aspect

Coding key for focus groups participants:

*Focus Group A*
Participant 1 = A1
Participant 2 = A2
Participant 3 = A3
Participant 4 = A4
Participant 5 = A5

*Focus Group B*
Participant 1 = B1
Participant 2 = B2
Participant 3 = B3
Participant 4 = B4
Participant 5 = B5

Coding key for interviewees:

Interviewee 1 = C1
Interviewee 2 = C2
Interviewee 3 = C3
Interviewee 4 = C4
Interviewee 5 = C5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions about how empathy is expressed</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A4</td>
<td>They didn’t show any consideration for their eleven employees and what their families were going through</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4</td>
<td>Their lack of empathy along with their abdication of responsibility clearly negatively impacted BP’s reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B4</td>
<td>No one talked about the lives lost and how that impacted the company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Show you are working with partners to ensure safety is maintained, not blaming them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Make messages more personal – acknowledge the loss of 11 lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>At the beginning, it seemed like they (BP) only cared about avoiding law suits. But as the situation went on, they started focusing on what really mattered – the victims.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Empathy is about showing you care. And in a crisis situation, showing you really care really matters.

### Empathy and crisis response timing

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Their early PR work seemed self-serving. It improved once they had better communication firm, but not a lot. Still, being less empathic would have led to even worse reputation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>Respond more quickly with feeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5</td>
<td>Show empathy sooner, be specific in showing empathy, address the lives lost and specific impact on the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>At the beginning, it seemed like they (BP) only cared about avoiding law suits. But as the situation went on, they started focusing on what really mattered – the victims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5</td>
<td>They just pointed the finger at Transocean and they didn’t even care about their own guys who were killed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5</td>
<td>The BP deal is a classic case of the lawyers putting muzzles on the executives. While I understand that it is important to make sure the company is not found liable, it is equally important to make sure they are empathic and protect the brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3</td>
<td>To show true empathy, you have to do more than what is expected for the victims</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Empathy and spokesperson influence

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>They (BP) seemed like robots, not people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>He is the kind of CEO who put profits before people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B5</td>
<td>(Spokesperson in 2012 &amp; 2013 video) He seems like a good guy who wants to help his hometown and his neighbors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5</td>
<td>(Spokesperson in 2012 &amp; 2013 video) He is nice, credible, down-to-earth, and compassionate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>Hayward was first face people connected with BP and the crisis. The tone he set doomed them. People were already angry at the big, greedy, uncaring, foreign oil company. He reinforced this perception,“</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3</td>
<td>Should be honest, communicator, educated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Choose a team player, helpful, attentive, loyal, and knowledgeable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3</td>
<td>Get the CEO out of the office to face and understand the impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4</td>
<td>It matters if he is from the affected area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B5</td>
<td>When I watch those commercials, it seems like they really care about what is happening to the people, and that they are not going to abandon them. Too bad they didn’t do that from the get-go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate reputation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5</td>
<td>It is always better to show it than not. But being such a large company, I don’t think empathy will result in any major consumer decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Use empathy to ensure future relationships are productive, mutual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4</td>
<td>Post-crisis they have continued to support the Gulf Coast. They are now trying to be empathic and do the right thing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3</td>
<td>Continue to help the local community recover after the crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>Their lack of empathy along with their abdication of responsibility clearly negatively impacted BP’s reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3</td>
<td>I think showing empathy could have helped their position considerably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>These are clearly people who feel strong and will not go to BP, but the impact is not severe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Miscellaneous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>