

COMMUNICATING WITH STAKEHOLDERS DURING A CRISIS

Evaluating Message Strategies

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This study explores message strategies that are used by organizations during crises that involve technical details. Using the literature, the authors develop an integrative coding scheme that builds on Coombs' crisis-message-strategy typology. In addition, the authors develop a parallel set of strategies called technical translation message strategies. Using content analysis, the authors analyzed 154 accounts representing 10 different technical crises. The findings suggest that different crisis-message strategies are used to communicate to different stakeholders. The findings also indicate that when technical details are discussed, organizations rarely go beyond an attempt to directly state the technical facts with little or no explanation provided to the stakeholders. The practical applications of these findings include using the developed coding scheme to evaluate past crisis-management efforts and to help proactively plan for the future.

Keywords: *crisis communication; stakeholders; message strategies; crisis management; technology crises*

The number of crises incidents and their severity is rising along with the growing complexity of technology and society (Lerbinger, 1997). Organizations experiencing a crisis use different strategies to deliver messages explaining the situation. The

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organization's choice of message strategy affects both how people perceive the crisis and the image of the organization experiencing the crisis. To categorize crisis-communication message strategies, Coombs (1995, 1999) developed a model that comprehensively explains the general strategy choices that organizations-in-crisis have at their disposal. What we do not know is if or how organizations direct specific message strategies to different stakeholder groups during a crisis. Thus, the central focus of this study is to examine message strategies used to communicate information to stakeholders during a crisis.

An organizational crisis forces an immediate decision or reaction from the organization, and thus provides an effective arena to study technical translation as a way to achieve uncertainty reduction.

Although Coombs's (1995, 1999) message strategies apply broadly across many types of crises, when complex technical explanations are involved, his strategies only vaguely address these issues. This type of crisis includes those that involve the explanation of technical details and are difficult for a lay audience to understand. For example, one crisis explored in this study is that of the Sulzer hip-replacement recall. The idea of having to surgically remove a previously implanted piece of metal from a person's body requires a complex technical explanation. It takes medical experts to describe the procedures. In addition, engineers working for the organization-in-crisis are saddled with the goal of explaining how a dirty piece of metal missed the quality assurance checks and ultimately must be surgically removed.

This second set of message strategies used to explain these complex topics are what we call technical translations strategies. It is important to understand what is meant by technical translation and its similarities and differences to other types of crisis situations. Zehr (1999) uses the term *public science* to refer to situations where scientists make scientific claims to a nonscientific audience. In a crisis, scientific explanations are made either directly or indirectly to a lay audience. Frequently, organizations use nonscientists to deliver these messages.

We propose that technical translation strategies function in parallel to message strategies to manage meaning, represent the organization, build trust and credibility, and manage uncertainty. A fundamental premise involved in technical translation is the degree of scientific uncertainty inherent or projected in the communication message. Scientific uncertainty is defined by either a lack of scientific knowledge or a disagreement over the existing knowledge base (Friedman,

Dunwoody, & Rogers, 1999). Moreover, scientific uncertainty is likely during technical crises. Ultimately, the management of uncertainty is a key element of crisis-communication message strategies.

As society moves toward more use of technology, the need for technical translation in communication increases (Zehr, 1999). This is especially the case when stakeholders need technical explanations to understand the causes and proposed remedies in a crisis. To more fully understand the relationship between message strategies and stakeholders during a crisis, we begin with a literature review focusing on crisis definitions and message strategies. Next, we integrate technical translation strategies used by organizations involved in a crisis with stakeholder theory and crisis-communication message strategies. We use content analysis to test this integrative coding scheme and evaluate 10 different cases. Then, we discuss our findings and their practical applications.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Organizational Crisis and Uncertainty Reduction

Fink (1986) defines an organizational crisis quite broadly as a situation that can potentially escalate in intensity, fall under close government or media scrutiny, jeopardize the current positive public image of an organization, or interfere with normal business operations including damaging the bottom line in any way. From this definition, we can assume that organizational crises can range widely in intensity and severity. Crises may be considered a function of external or environmental threats and internal or organizational weaknesses (Egelhoff & Sen, 1992).

Pearson and Mitroff (1993) further define an organizational crisis as an incident or event that poses a threat to the organization's reputation and viability. A crisis places survival of the organization at serious risk, and according to Pearson and Mitroff, crises are composed of five dimensions, which are that they are highly visible, require immediate attention, contain an element of surprise, have a need for action, and are outside the organization's complete control. Adams and Roebuck (1997) further elaborate on this scheme by pointing out similar characteristics most crises seem to share. The first is surprise, which may be surprise at the timing as much as at the event itself. Next is a trigger: an unexpected event, action, or incident that alters the public's view of the organization. Third is a threat, which could include human lives, property, or the environment. A crisis also includes an uncontrolled event that brings turbulent circumstances placing the situation out of management's control. Lack of control can be for a brief or extended period of time. Last is a quick response. If the first three elements of surprise, trigger, and threat are present, the organization must respond immediately to protect itself and others, as well as to regain control.

Nearly all crises unfold through similar stages (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). The first stage of a crisis consists of early warning signals of impending disaster, which

can be faced or ignored. Preparation and prevention is the next phase and includes such things as developing crisis teams, training, and exercises. The third phase is damage containment, which intends to limit the effects of the crisis. The purpose is to prevent the crisis from contaminating other parts of the organization or environment not immediately affected. The next phase is recovery, followed by learning. This article focuses on communication during the damage containment and recovery phases of a crisis.

One area where uncertainty surfaces along with the need for technical translation is during an organizational crisis. Organizational crises involve high levels of uncertainty (Lerbinger, 1997), and the greater the uncertainty about resolving a situation, the more severe the crisis (Ray, 1999). Because so many details are normally unknown after a crisis is discovered, Mitroff (2004) notes that "there is tremendous technical and ethical uncertainty regarding what one should do, especially with respect to how much responsibility one should assume from the beginning" (p. 25). Uncertainty during a crisis revolves around questions of cause, blame, response, public perception, resolution, and consequences (Ray, 1999). The purpose of strategic communication during a crisis is to reduce uncertainty about these concerns.

An organizational crisis forces an immediate decision or reaction from the organization, and thus provides an effective arena to study technical translation as a way to achieve uncertainty reduction. Organizational crises also provide a good context to determine how technical translation is communicated to a number of different groups affected by the crisis: the stakeholders. Therefore, crises may be viewed as a way to determine who is important to the organization at that time.

Stakeholder Theory in a Crisis Context

Stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) is primarily concerned with how groups and individuals affect an organization and the managerial behavior taken in response to those groups and individuals (Frooman, 1999). A stakeholder is defined as any group or public affected by the organization's operation (Ray, 1999). In turn, it may also be defined as any person, group, or organization that can affect an organization's performance or attainment of its goals (Bland, 1998; Lerbinger, 1997). To effectively describe the behavior of organizations, the nature of the relationship between a company and its stakeholders must adequately be taken into consideration. Organizations operate in unstable environments where they must constantly evaluate how they will respond to stakeholders. They not only have to compete for limited resources with the outside environment, but they also have limited resources by which to react to external groups. By examining the attributes of stakeholder groups, researchers can classify how organizations may formulate their reactions to pressures and inquiries.

The nature of the relationship between the stakeholder and the organization is important in shaping the response to stakeholder pressures. Management may view one stakeholder as inconsequential or minor one day; yet find that same group

demanding their complete attention the next day. Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997) describe this as stakeholder salience and they suggest that this can shift over time. Shifting stakeholder relationships create problems for organizations because the criteria and expectations may be incompatible or competing. Faced with conflicting demands, the organization must decide which groups to attend to and which to ignore (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

We view technical translation as a separate set of crisis message strategies that organizations can use to communicate with stakeholders.

In response to a crisis, organizations need to recognize that a broad number of their stakeholders including customers, competitors, and other members of their environment can be affected. When an organization's environment is complex and unstable, internal and external stakeholders cross over boundaries as they become involved in the crisis (Lerbinger, 1997). Many organizations make positive assumptions about their key stakeholders only to find they were mistaken when hit by a crisis. In some cases key stakeholders abandon the stricken organization to protect their own interests and distance themselves from the crisis (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). The necessity of an immediate response to a crisis may inhibit the organization's ability to access stakeholders. The crisis may also generate fear of a poor depiction by the media or guilt by association, which may affect stakeholder support. Stakeholder links may become adversarial in the heat of a crisis as stressful internal and external interaction can promote conflict (Pearson & Clair, 1998).

Depending on the context or situation, organizations may need to identify all stakeholders involved, especially because a crisis can expand the number of salient stakeholders (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000). For example, during the TWA 1996 plane crash crisis, the FBI suddenly became a stakeholder for TWA. The FBI became involved, investigating the crash as the result of a possible act of terrorism.

Stakeholder Categories

Types of stakeholders include enabling publics, functional publics, normative publics, and diffused publics (Dougherty, 1992; Ray, 1999). Enabling publics provide the authority and control the resources that allow the organization to exist. This includes such groups as shareholders, regulatory agencies, and boards of directors. Functional publics give inputs to the organization and take outputs in return. They provide labor and utilize the organization's service or product. This group consists of employees, unions, suppliers, and customers. During a crisis, another group that

may join the functional publics is the victims. Victims may have been customers prior to the crisis; however, when customers are harmed, they become victims. Normative publics are those who share similar values or have similar problems. That might include trade unions, political groups, and professional societies. Diffused publics emerge when organizational activities result in external consequences. This includes the media, environmentalists, residents, the community, and public at large. Diffused publics are indirectly linked to an organization and include individuals and groups who are not formal members of an organization (Dougherty, 1992). Victims who are not otherwise associated with an organization until a crisis occurs, might also emerge as stakeholders due to the crisis. In this situation they are considered members of the diffused public rather than the functional publics.

Communication and Message Strategies

The purpose of communication during a crisis is to influence the public's perception of the organization and to maintain a positive image or restore a damaged image among stakeholders (Ray, 1999). Organizations-in-crisis seek to protect their image by modifying public perception of responsibility for the crisis or to manage impressions of the organization itself (Coombs, 1999). Communication objectives during a crisis may also seek to inform, convince, or motivate certain stakeholders to action (Ray, 1999). Another key objective of message strategies during a crisis is "damage control" to prevent drastic negative changes in relationships with environmental components (Sturges, 1994). A secondary objective may be for the organization to use the opportunity to tell the public about their mission, values, and operations (Lerbinger, 1997).

Considerations of strategy choice include the target audience, the type of crisis, available evidence, severity of damage, the company's performance history, and legal issues (Coombs, 1999). The strategy choice must also fit the damage done by the crisis. Credibility is another element that is important in strategy choice. Stakeholders are more likely to believe and to forgive a company with high credibility (Coombs, 1999). Culture also frames the communication strategy each organization chooses during a crisis (Heath, 1994; Ray, 1999). Culture affects how the organization communicates to various stakeholders by influencing what are considered appropriate responses. Culture may have a strong impact on whether an organization takes responsibility, offers an excuse, or places blame somewhere else (Ray, 1999).

Coombs (1995) integrated the works of Allen and Caillouet (1994) and Benoit (1992, as cited in Coombs, 1995) to develop a five-category model of message strategies used in response to crises. Coombs's (1995) model is described as follows.

Nonexistence strategies. The nonexistence strategies attempt to eliminate the crisis by denying its existence, clarifying that no crisis exists, attaching a more aggressive strategy, or intimidating others who are less powerful. *Denial* makes

a statement that the crisis did not occur. *Clarification* explains why there is no crisis. *Attacks* confront those who incorrectly report a nonexistent crisis occurred. *Intimidation* threatens organizational power against someone, such as a lawsuit.

Distance strategies. The distance strategies attempt to weaken the link between the crisis and the organization. In doing so, they clearly acknowledge the crisis but then begin to make excuses or justify the crisis. *Excuses* minimize the organization's responsibility by denying intention or volition. *Denial of volition* consists of blaming someone else for the crisis. *Justification* attempts to minimize damage by convincing the publics the crisis was not that serious, the victim deserved what happened, or claiming the crisis was misrepresented.

The findings suggest that in this sample representing six types of crisis situations, the top strategy category was mortification.

Ingratiation strategies. The ingratiation strategies focus on ways to gain public approval such as *bolstering* the existing organizational image, *transcending* the crisis to a more desirable position, and *praising others* in an attempt to gain their approval.

Mortification strategies. The mortification strategies attempt to win forgiveness and create acceptance. These include *remediation* to offer compensation to the victims, *repentance* to ask for forgiveness, and *rectification* to clearly show that mechanisms are in place to prevent a similar crisis from occurring again.

Suffering strategy. The final strategy as articulated by Coombs (1995) is the suffering strategy. The goal of the suffering strategy is to portray the organization as a victim and draw sympathy from the public.

In addition to these strategies, in his 1999 book, Coombs also mentions two other strategies. The first is silence—a response that Coombs claims is passive because it suggests uncertainty on the part of the organization-in-crisis. A second strategy is much more effective and likely useful during technical crises because it uses the “endorsement of an outside expert” (p. 132) to help boost the credibility of the organization. He suggests that this is a helpful follow-up strategy and these experts can either praise the handling of the situation or confirm that the organization-in-crisis is assessing the situation correctly.

Coombs (1995) notes that the best way to protect the organizational image is to modify public perceptions of who is responsible for the crisis. The nonexistent, distance, and suffering strategies attempt to influence the public's perception of responsibility for the crisis. Nonexistence strategies deny a crisis, so the organization could not be held responsible for any consequences. Distance strategies attempt to minimize responsibility by portraying the crisis as unintentional (excuse) or due to external (justification) forces. Mortification and ingratiation strategies attempt to build positive organizational images. In addition to using messages to modify public perception, another set of message strategies, helpful during a technical crisis, explains the technical aspects of the crisis.

Public Desire for Clear Technical Explanations

There appear to be two conflicting theoretical approaches to how the public understands science (Einsiedel & Thorne, 1999). The first is the scientific literacy model that purports the value of having publics understand basic scientific ideas. The second is the interactive science model that views science as an integral part of social and institutional connections. This model suggests that publics can be quite knowledgeable of scientific concepts and can accept uncertainty as a necessary part of those concepts (Einsiedel & Thorne, 1999). Rogers (1999) indicates,

We know a lot about the audience interest in science, and we know a lot about how science is presented in the mass media. However, we understand much less about how audiences make sense of information about complex scientific issues, issues in which uncertainty is a major component (p. 179).

According to Wynne (1993) laypeople negotiate their relationship with science in a broader, social context taking into account, "existing relationships, divisions of labor, dependency, and trust" (p. 182). When a nonscientist evaluates scientific information, both the technical and social information are necessary. Although the technical data may be the most obvious, social information such as source credibility, reputation, and others affected is also critical (Priest, 1999).

Rogers (1999) conducted a study where focus groups were used to explore how audiences make sense of complex and uncertain scientific information. She found that the focus group participants felt they needed more basic information to understand the content of the scientific message. They felt that the sources made assumptions about the audience's level of knowledge and the assumptions were inaccurate. Rogers also found that the focus-group participants wanted more context surrounding the message. Focus-group members also preferred more framing in terms of where the information fit in the big picture and the order of information. The focus groups confirmed what Levy, Robinson, and Davis (1986) recommended about how journalists should communicate with their publics: make information explicit, not implicit, so audiences do not have to work to get the information.

Einsiedel and Thorne (1999) suggest that science and technology underlie most of the major public issues today, many of which involve varying degrees of uncertainty. These researchers emphasize the necessity of understanding what uncertainty is and how actors in a social system frame uncertainty. Uncertainty is a key component found in the modern day news coverage of science issues (Einsiedel & Thorne, 1999). For example, news headlines might create uncertainty by suggesting that humans can contract mad cow disease. Uncertainty is salient, especially given the scope of issues that create uncertainty today (Zehr, 1999). Some researchers indicate that scientists and their spokespeople have largely failed at understanding lay audiences and effectively integrating scientific information into their lay knowledge (Lewenstein, 1995; Wynne, 1995; Zehr, 1999). Scientific uncertainty is often revealed to the public and carefully managed to achieve the communicator's specific goals (Zehr, 1999). Uncertainty claims made by a scientist "often appear objective and authoritative in public science because it appears that scientists are frankly and openly admitting incomplete knowledge" (Zehr, 1999, p. 9).

Technical Translation Strategies

In this study, we view technical translation as a separate set of crisis-message strategies that organizations can use to communicate with stakeholders. When there is no attempt made to explain the complex issue and the technical facts are directly stated, this is a direct strategy. But, as research suggests, direct explanations might not be adequate. According to research, scientific ideas may be misunderstood in three primary ways: when familiar terms are used in unfamiliar ways, when structures or processes need to be envisioned in abstract ways, and when ideas are counterintuitive (Rowan, 1999). Three types of explanations are useful for addressing these issues, which are use of elucidating explanations, quasi-scientific explanations, and transformative explanations (McKeachie, 1999; Rowan, 1999). Elucidating explanations differentiate between the essential and associated meaning. When these strategies are used, they give examples and nonexamples to further explain complex issues. Quasi-scientific explanations help audiences understand hard-to-picture phenomena through the use of metaphors or pictures. Transformative explanations help an audience rethink their unquestioned or counterintuitive beliefs.

Consistency Across Stakeholder Groups

Besides understanding how these two types of message strategies function, we are also interested in seeing how they relate to stakeholder communication. Specifically, there is limited research surrounding how these messages are targeted toward different stakeholder groups. Scholars suggest that the responses should be consistent across all stakeholder groups (Barton, 1993; Coombs, 1999; Ogrizek & Guillery, 1999). Consistency exists when all stakeholder groups receive the same message and it is critical for credibility-building (Coombs, 1999) and

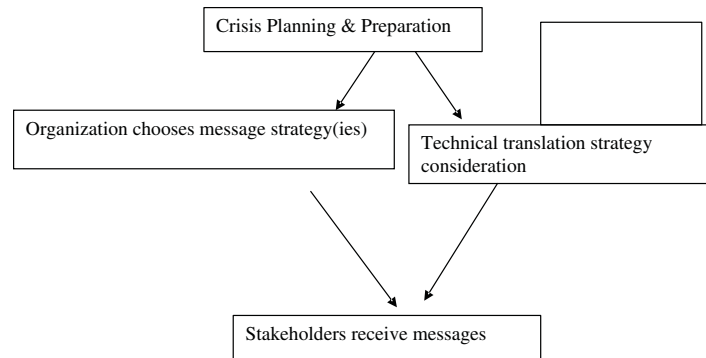


Figure 1. Theoretical Relationships Between Message Strategies and Stakeholders

organizational legitimacy (Massey, 2001). Furthermore, as Cowden and Sellnow (2002) found when they studied Northwest Airline's image restoration strategies after a pilot's strike, "audiences are likely to reject organizational messages during a crisis situation that are inconsistent with past actions" (p. 215). In one of the few studies examining the direct link between consistency and crisis management, Massey (2001) found that organizations in the airline industry that delivered consistent messages to all stakeholders were viewed as more legitimate than those being inconsistent in their responses. But even this study only investigated the influence of two crisis-message strategies, acceptance and denial of responsibility. Therefore, in this study, we further explore the relationship between consistency and stakeholders by extending the investigation to include all of Coombs (1995, 1999) message strategies.

RESEARCH MODEL AND QUESTIONS

The extant research literature reviewed in this article suggests a new way to examine relationships between message strategies and stakeholder communication. Prior to the crisis, there is planning that can occur. Once the crisis hits, organizations can consider both the crisis and their technical message strategies. Ultimately, these strategies are targeted to their various stakeholders. To better illustrate these relationships, see Figure 1. These relationships form the basis of the four research questions in this study.

RQ 1: Which of the following categories explain the different types of message strategies used by organizations during a crisis involving technical details: nonexistent, distance, ingratiation, mortification, and suffering?

- RQ 2: To what extent are the following types of technical translation strategies used by organizations during crisis communication: elucidating, quasi-scientific, transformative, and direct?
- RQ 3: How do crisis-communication message strategies vary across categories of stakeholders?
- RQ 4: How does technical translation during a crisis vary across categories of stakeholders?

METHOD

Cases

The primary goal of this study is to integrate crisis-communication strategies—both message strategies and technical translations strategies—and stakeholder theory. Organizations face many different types of potential crises. Scholars have shown that different crisis communication strategies should be used with diverse types of crises (Coombs, 1999). For example, if a crisis happened due to no fault of the organization, stakeholders place less blame on the organization than if the organization was to blame.

Quite often crisis communication strategy research focuses exclusively on one type of crisis and most often on only one organization or industry (e.g., Cowden & Sellnow, 2002; Johnson, Sellnow, Seeger, Barrett, & Hasbargen 2004; Sellnow, 1993; Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000). This is certainly one way to understand the intricacies of a crisis. Yet, our goal here is not to delve deeply into one crisis or even crisis type, but rather to develop a framework useful in evaluating many types of crises. To that end, we created a convenience sample of 10 cases consisting of crises that required technical translation and fell into each of Coombs, Hazleton, Holladay, and Chandler's (1995) eight crisis types (see Table 1). These include the following: natural disasters (e.g., weather), malevolence (e.g., product tampering, malicious rumors), technical breakdowns (e.g., industrial accidents, product recalls), human breakdowns (e.g., industrial accidents, product recalls—human error caused), which can lead to the category of megadamage (e.g., oil spills), challenges (e.g., discontented stakeholders, boycotts, lawsuits), organizational misdeeds (e.g., management decisions that place stakeholders at risk), workplace violence (e.g., other employees killing or injuring coworkers), and rumors (e.g., false information spread to hurt the organization). Not included is a crisis of workplace violence or rumors because these generally do not require technical translation. We are also aware that perceptions of a crisis are not necessarily stable over time. Perceptions might begin as one type and evolve into another (Coombs, 1995). Crises might also be perceived differently by diverse stakeholders. These are two other reasons to sample broadly across all crisis types.

We chose mad cow disease because it is a naturally occurring disease found in cows but of concern to humans ingesting meat. Malevolence is represented by the classic crisis case of Johnson and Johnson's Tylenol product poisoning. This crisis

Table 1. Cases and Crisis Types

<i>Case (year of crisis)</i>	<i>Crisis Type</i>	<i>Number of Accounts Examined</i>
1. Mad cow disease (2002)	Natural disasters	9
2. J&J Tylenol (1982)	Malevolence	18
3. Amtrack (2002)	Technical breakdown	14
4. Firestone (2000)	Technical breakdown	19
5. Sulzer hip recall (2000)	Technical breakdown	24
6. TWA (1996)	Technical breakdown	5
7. Jack-in-the-Box (1993)	Human breakdown	27
8. Texas A&M bonfire (1999)	Human breakdown	12
9. Southern California Edison (2001)	Challenges	22
10. Perrier (1989)	Organizational misdeed	4
Totals		154

resulted from cyanide being deliberately placed in Tylenol capsules resulting in several deaths. In the category of technical breakdown, a fairly obvious type of crisis requiring technical explanations, we chose several cases. Amtrack's train derailment was the result of a part malfunction. Firestone's original crisis was due to tire tread malfunctions. Sulzer's hip replacement recall was initially due to the improper cleaning of a metal part used to replace worn hip sockets. TWA's plane crash was also caused due to technology failure. Human breakdown is to blame in two cases. First, Jack-in-the-Box employees failed to heat their meat to the proper temperature and bacteria caused sickness and death. The Texas A&M Bonfire collapsed, killing and injuring people because of improper engineering. The Southern California Edison crisis is an example of a challenge because stakeholders were left without reliable power for an extended period of time. The final category, organizational misdeeds, is represented by Perrier's handling of benzene contamination in their bottled water because management knew of the contamination and chose to ignore it. Overall, this categorization is intended to explain our broad sampling frame. Certainly crises often evolve and when management chooses to ignore a crisis, it will often become one of organizational misdeeds. Taken together, these cases should provide a broad base to test the coding scheme.

Because we realize that crises can change types over time, we used two researchers to categorize our 10 cases. To accomplish this, each researcher examined all the accounts for a given case before assigning it to a category. Both researchers then compared their categorizations, resolved any differences, and reached total agreement as to the placement in Table 1.

This data set consists of 154 accounts of which 104 were press releases, 24 were accounts directed to the media, and 12 were published materials. Press releases are defined as letters from the focal organization, Web pages, or single quoted statements from an organizational representative. Accounts directed toward the media are defined as statements made at a press conference that are directed specifically to the media. Published materials are statements appearing in books or magazines. The data contains accounts targeting various stakeholders. Although attempts were

made to collect accounts during different time periods of each of the 10 crisis events, there was no systematic attempt to gather specific types of accounts or to represent all time periods of each crisis.

Coding Framework

Content coding is uniquely qualified as a methodology to translate qualitative observations into quantifiable form. In this study, the content coding focused on obtaining frequency counts for message and technical translation strategies, and for types of stakeholders. We used the guiding framework introduced by Krippendorff (1980) as a way to explain the logic in our coding scheme. To integrate his framework into this study, first we reviewed the literature and devised a way to examine the context of the data. Second, we conceptualized the key constructs, acknowledging that our prior knowledge, consisting of our literature review, “partitions” our reality (Krippendorff, 1980, p. 260).

Unitization. In our search for a theoretically meaningful unit of analysis, we determined that direct statements from the target organizations should capture a more pertinent understanding of the phenomena of interest; therefore, a single account produced by the target organization is the unit of analysis. By choosing accounts as the unit of analysis, this means that text length ranged from one paragraph to two pages. Defining accounts as direct statements from target organizations is congruent with Ginzler, Kramer, and Sutton’s (1993) research, and was chosen for several reasons. First, because we are examining the message and technical translation strategies used by focal organizations during crisis communication, the accounts must originate from the focal organization. If we included accounts from other stakeholders, they would not necessarily represent the way the focal organization communicates; therefore, they were excluded. Second, as we searched for a meaningful unit of analysis, we found that a single account contained a manageable amount of information, including the concepts needed to adequately code data.

Interrater reliability. The first 122 accounts coded in this study were subjected to coder training and interrater reliability checks. All three researchers coded eight accounts together using the detailed training guide found in the appendix. The remaining 114 accounts were divided equally between three researchers and 33 of those were randomly selected to be double coded. From those double coded, we calculated interrater reliability for each category using Krippendorff’s alpha. The resulting reliabilities were as follows: stakeholders .74, message strategies .70, and technical translation strategies .84.¹

After conducting preliminary analysis on the 122 accounts, we found that several categories—in message strategies, technical translation strategies, and stakeholders—were zero, indicating that although, theoretically, these categories should have been present, they were not. We also discovered in the initial 122 accounts,

that several categories should be collapsed to achieve reliable coding. Because several major categories remained unfilled despite these collapses, we randomly sampled from our 10 cases and chose 2 for additional data analysis. We pulled an additional 32 accounts and double coded all of them. These were independently analyzed by two of the three researchers and all coding disagreements were resolved, resulting in total agreement for the final 32 accounts. These additional accounts did not significantly change the distribution of stakeholders, message strategies, or technical translation strategies, so they were included in all the data analyses.

Coding scheme. In addition to examining the literature and other coding schemes used to describe similar phenomena of interest, we analyzed several accounts in the process. The inferences from the data further helped to determine the relevance of the literature-validated categories.

The message strategies chosen for coding were based on Coombs's (1995, 1999) crisis typology. Some accounts included multiple-message strategies. However, to maintain interrater reliability, we coded for a dominant strategy, which we defined as the one discussed most prominently in the account, not necessarily the one discussed first. For a complete listing of the coded strategies, see Table 2. We also coded each account for the type of stakeholder targeted in the communication. The stakeholder categories and subcategories coded can be found in Table 3. Finally, we coded for technical translation strategies based on Rowan's (1999) description of categories to reduce uncertainty (see Table 4). This integrative coding scheme allowed for mutual exclusivity of categories and was exhaustive, because it contained options for other or none.

CODING PLAN AND TRAINING CODERS

To ensure that the data were reliably coded, we devised a detailed training plan. We viewed training as vital to ensure high interrater reliability. The training plan consisted of jointly developing the draft coding scheme grounded in the literature and then individually attempting to code a total of eight accounts. Then, we met to compare our results and in the process we clarified and narrowly defined each coding category. After these initial meetings, a final training guide was developed and used for the study. The guide focused on defining the terms and providing clear examples of correct and incorrect coding (Babbie, 1996). A sample of our developed coding sheet is included in the appendix.

RESULTS

Because this study sought to link the types of technical translation and message strategies to stakeholder theory, the findings reflect frequency counts of categorical

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Crisis Message Strategies

<i>Type of Strategy</i>	<i>Subcategory n</i>	<i>Category n</i>	<i>% of Total in Each Category</i>	<i>% of Total</i>
1. Mortification		62		40
a. Rectification	38		61	
b. Remediation	16		26	
c. Repentance	8		13	
2. Ingratiation		35		23
a. Bolstering	15		43	
b. Transcendence	10		29	
c. Endorsement of outside expert	8		23	
d. Praising others	2		5	
3. Distancing		32		21
a. Deny volition (excuse)	23		72	
b. Disassociation of org.	4		13	
c. Deny intention (excuse)	3		9	
d. Minimize injury (just)	2		6	
e. Victim deserving (just)	0		0	
f. Misrepresenting crisis (just)	0		0	
4. Suffering		11		7
5. Nonexistent (category)		5		3
a. Denial	2		40	
b. Clarification	2		40	
c. Attack	1		20	
d. Intimidation	0		0	
6. Acknowledging/taking responsibility		5		3
7. Stonewalling		4		3
Total	154		100	

Note: Due to rounding, the percentages might sum to more or less than 100%.

data. First, we will address the two research questions dealing with types of message strategies and technical translation used by organizations during a crisis. Then we will discuss the findings concerning how message strategies and technical translation vary across categories of stakeholders.

RQ 1 asked if any of the Coombs (1995, 1999) framework categories are useful in describing the different types of message strategies used by organizations during a technology crisis. The findings suggest that in this sample representing six types of crisis situations, the top strategy category was mortification because it accounted for 40% of the total data. Within the mortification category, the subcategories of rectification, remediation, and repentance accounted for 61%, 26%, and 13%, respectively. The second most frequent strategy category was ingratiating, because it accounted for 23% of the total data. Within the ingratiating category, the subcategories of bolstering, transcendence, and endorsement of an outside expert accounted for 43%, 29%, and 23%, respectively. The third most frequent strategy category was distance because it accounted for 21% of the total data. Within the distance category, the deny-volition subcategory represented 72% of those strategies (see Table 2).

Table 3. Frequency Distribution of Stakeholder Categories

Category Name	Subcategory n	Category n	% of Total in	
			Each Category	% of Total
1. Diffused		105		68
a. Public	80		80	
b. Media	25		20	
2. Functional		33		21
a. Customers	14		42	
b. Victims	17		52	
c. Employees	2		6	
d. Suppliers	0		0	
3. Enabling		15		10
a. Shareholders	8		53	
b. Regulatory agencies	7		47	
4. Normative		0		0
a. Professional societies	0		0	
b. Political groups	0		0	
Other		1		0
Total	154		99	

Note: Due to rounding, the percentages might sum to more or less than 100%.

Table 4. Frequency Distribution of Technical Translation Strategies

Type of Translation	n	% of Total
No technical translation	78	51
Direct	66	43
Elucidating	10	7
Transformative	0	0
Quasi-scientific	0	0
Total	154	101.00

Note: Due to rounding, the percentages might sum to more or less than 100%.

RQ 2 asked about the extent that each of the different types of technical translation strategies was used by organizations during a technology crisis. The data from this study suggests clearly that when technical translation strategies were used (49% of the time), a direct strategy dominated (see Table 3). Direct strategies represented 43% of the total strategies used, whereas elucidating explanations were a distant second with 7% of the total. The remaining 51% of the accounts had no type of technical translation strategies in their crisis messages.

RQ3 examined how message strategies during a crisis varied across categories of stakeholders, so we first inspected the distribution of our 154 accounts across stakeholder categories (see Table 4). We found that 68% of the accounts targeted diffused stakeholders, 21% were aimed at functional stakeholders (particularly

Table 5. Frequency Distribution of Message Strategies Targeting Prominent Stakeholder Groups

Type of Strategy	Prominent Stakeholder Groups (n)			
	Diffused		Functional	
	Public	Media	Victims	Customers
1. Mortification				
a. Rectification	23	4	0	9
b. Repentance	3	0	3	0
c. Remediation	5	2	7	1
2. Ingratiation				
a. Bolstering	8	5	0	0
b. Transcendence	7	2	0	0
c. Endorsement of outside expert	5	2	0	0
d. Praising others	0	0	0	1
3. Distancing				
a. Deny volition (excuse)	13	5	2	1
b. Deny intention (excuse)	1	0	0	2
c. Disassociation of organizations	0	2	0	0
d. Minimize injury (just)	0	0	1	0
e. Victim deserving (just)	0	0	0	0
f. Misrepresenting crisis (just)	0	0	0	0
4. Suffering	8	1	1	0
5. Nonexistent (category)				
a. Clarification	2	0	0	0
b. Denial	1	1	0	0
c. Attack	0	0	0	0
d. Intimidation	0	0	0	0
6. Acknowledging/taking responsibility	2	0	2	0
7. Stonewalling	2	1	1	0
Total	80	25	17	14

Note: This table only includes the prominent stakeholders, so it will not sum to 154, the total accounts in this study.

customers and victims), and the remaining 10% addressed enabling stakeholders (i.e. shareholders and regulatory agencies).

Once we understood the descriptive characteristics of this data set with respect to message strategies and stakeholders, we tested the third research question. Because the table created by crossing the categories of message strategies and stakeholders violated asymptotic theory on which chi-square analyses are based, and because the table is quite large (17×6), an exact test using a Monte Carlo simulation was performed (Agresti, 1992) using SAS software.² The resulting exact p value was significant, $p < .0001$.

Because we found that different strategies are used with diverse stakeholders, we further examined relationships between these two variables (see Table 5). You will notice that in this table, we only show the four most prominent stakeholder groups targeted by the organizations in this study (from Table 3): public (50%),

media (16%), victims (11%), and customers (9%). We found that rectification is used most frequently with the public at large (15%) and with customers (6%). Bolstering and deny volition are used most frequently with the media (3%). Remediation was used most frequently with victims (3%).

RQ 4 examined how technical translation strategies during a crisis varied across categories of stakeholders. As mentioned earlier, we found that of the 154 total coded documents, 68% targeted diffused stakeholders, 21% targeted functional stakeholders, 10% targeted enabling stakeholders, and no accounts targeted normative stakeholders (see Table 3). Once again, even after the additional sampling, the number of cells containing low counts violated asymptotic theory on which chi-square analyses are based, therefore, an exact test using a Monte Carlo simulation was performed (Agresti, 1992) using SAS software. The results indicated nonsignificant findings, suggesting that there is no statistically significant relationship between technical translation strategies and stakeholders. Upon close examination of the data in this study, elucidating statements were only directed toward diffused publics. This was found by examining every account coded as containing an elucidating statement and comparing it to the targeted stakeholder category. In addition, there appeared to be no systematic trends in how technical translation occurred across stakeholders when direct strategies or no strategies were used.

DISCUSSION

In this study of message strategies and their relationship with stakeholders, we uncovered two main contributions to crisis-communication research and practice. First, we found that the organizations in this study were using different crisis-message strategies depending on the stakeholders that their message targeted. Second, we discovered that technical translation occurs in slightly less than half of these cases and that this strategy does not differ across stakeholders. Here we explore these findings in greater detail, discuss limitations and future research, and link them back to the practical aspects of crisis planning and message-strategy development.

Crisis Message Strategies and Stakeholders

As we mentioned previously, crisis-communication message strategies are one type of message strategy used in a technical crisis. In this study, we found several patterns to these specific messages. The first pattern is seen by examining the frequency distribution of each message-strategy type. The top two most frequent message strategies are mortification (40%) and ingratiation (23%). Essentially, the organizations in this study either attempt to gain forgiveness or they try to get public approval 63% of the time. Of particular importance in these two categories is the mortification subcategory of rectification, an organization's attempt to show how they will prevent a similar crisis from occurring again. This is noteworthy for two

reasons. It is the most prevalent subcategory in the entire data set, and it can be thought of as the highest level of mortification strategy. By high level we mean that the organization is going beyond simply asking for forgiveness. It is demonstrating the mechanisms it has in place to avoid future issues.

Another set of strategies, quite different from these image-boosting strategies, is distancing attempts (21%). These try to change the public's perceptions of who is to blame for the crisis. As mentioned earlier, Coombs (1995) claims that distancing, along with nonexistent and suffering strategies, are the best way to protect the organizational image. This occurs when organizations deny responsibility or place blame on others. This set of strategies is very different from the image-boosting strategies previously discussed. Here, although the organization will admit that a crisis has occurred, they clearly want to distance themselves from accountability.

On close examination of these strategy findings, we see an interesting potential relationship not previously hypothesized or stated. This is the link between crisis-message strategies and technical translation message strategies. It seems plausible to believe that technical explanations would be useful as organizations explain the mechanisms they have in place to rectify the situation. It is noteworthy that even in a study of crises relating to technical issues, the organizations here did not use many technical explanations as a complementary strategy to mortification or ingratiation to help further boost their image. We also did not see many technical explanations used with the distancing strategies, but it seems likely that in their distancing attempts, the organization might stay away from technical details.

What we found particularly surprising is that these organizations are not consistent when they target their messages to different stakeholders.

To push this concept further, we conducted post hoc tests to see if the image-boosting crisis-communication message strategies use more technical translation than the distancing strategies. The resulting chi-square analysis indicated that this was not the case, $\chi^2(2, n = 145) = 1.85, p = .40$. The data reveal no significant difference in how these two types of crisis-message strategies occur with technical translation strategies. Actually, somewhat counterintuitively when we examined the frequencies we found that slightly more than half of the image-boosting strategies (53%) used no technical translation whereas slightly more than half of the distancing strategies (52%) used a direct technical translation strategy. Their use of elucidating statements was within a percentage point.

Despite not finding a relationship between crisis-message strategies and technical translation strategies, the two categorical findings lead well into the second

major pattern found in the data—that different messages are targeted to the different stakeholders. In the cases contained in this study, the emphasis on rectification, bolstering, endorsement of an outside expert, transcendence, and deny volition when addressing the public clearly demonstrates how organizations may be more concerned about maintaining reputations and public image rather than explaining, clarifying, or acknowledging the crisis at hand. Furthermore, the extensive use of rectification with the public illustrates that organizations want to show that they are going the extra mile to ensure that the crisis will not reoccur. Contrast these strategies with repentance and remediation; strategies used most frequently with victims. The use of these strategies is not surprising because organizations often apologize or make offers of compensation to victims.

What we found particularly surprising is that these organizations are not consistent when they target their messages to different stakeholders. As mentioned previously, consistency is important if organizations want to be viewed as legitimate (Massey, 2001). It is now, more than ever, very easy for all stakeholders to get information about a crisis. Not only does the organization-in-crisis present that material in their press releases, public presentations, and on their Web site, but technology makes this information accessible from other sources as well. Coombs (1999) explains this by saying, “new communication technologies speed transmission of communication and help to make the world a smaller place” (p. 6). Although it is likely true that different stakeholders have unique needs, the organization-in-crisis does not necessarily control the targeting of their message. Now stakeholders have the power to decide what information to access at what time (Coombs, 1999). This leads us to wonder how stakeholders feel when they find inconsistencies in the message strategies. For example, if you are a victim of a medical crisis and the company uses a restoration strategy in letters addressed to you, but then is quoted in court documents as denying fault (denial strategy), that might leave you conflicted or confused.

Technical Translation Message Strategies and Stakeholders

The second type of message strategies examined here are at the core of a technical crisis, technical translation message strategies. Although the 10 cases selected for this study were chosen because they involved issues where technical translation may be required, slightly less than half of the examined accounts used technical translation. Although every account employed at least one crisis-message strategy, the organizations in this study appear to be less concerned with discussing the technical details. It is interesting to note that these organizations either avoided an explanation of technical issues surrounding the crisis or they provided a direct factual description concerning these issues. This means that when the technical details are discussed, organizations rarely go beyond an attempt to directly state the facts with little or no explanation provided to the stakeholders.

It is also worth noting that technical translation does not vary across stakeholders or across image-boosting and distancing message strategies. Essentially, when technical details are discussed, everyone receives the same type of technical explanation. This finding can be interpreted as congruent with prior research that recommends organizations send consistent messages. The organizations in this study did not leave some of their stakeholders out of the loop when they discuss technical details. However, we would suggest that this might be the one area in crisis-communication research where organizations can and should send different technical explanations to their diverse stakeholders. Obviously the information must be factually the same, but some stakeholders likely need more of an explanation than others. This might be one place where consistency actually decreases legitimacy if some stakeholders fail to understand the technical nature of the crisis.

Despite this level of consistency, it remains that prior research suggests that the public wants more technical translation (Rogers, 1999) and the organizations in this study are not providing those details. They appear to rely on the traditional public relations message strategies to explain and reframe the crisis and might make the mistake of assuming that the public will fully comprehend their messages. Augustine (2000) warns organizational leaders that during a crisis, an organization's stakeholders often have a special need for information. They should not be abandoned by the organization and expected to get information elsewhere (Augustine, 2000).

Practitioners also may be able to use our findings as further fuel to convince organizations to prepare crisis management plans well in advance.

We suspect that there are several potential reasons for this finding. Perhaps the uses of transformative and quasi-scientific explanations are not needed during a crisis. These explanations are most helpful in situations where there is a counterintuitive phenomenon or the phenomenon is difficult to visualize. For example, most people in the world have not experienced a tsunami; thus it is likely difficult to visualize. When explaining this crisis, transformative or quasi-scientific explanations might be particularly helpful. These types of translation strategies may be more prevalent during routine organizational communication. However, it is more likely that direct and elucidating explanations are much easier to create; therefore, they are the default strategies used when one is used at all. A second explanation is that many individuals involved in crisis communication lack the technical background needed to craft effective technical translation strategies.

Their training and experience has stressed using message strategies rather than delving into technical explanations. In addition, those who possess the technical expertise and understanding of the crisis may lack the necessary skills to communicate it to stakeholders in a language they can understand. A third explanation is that there are usually limits on the space and time granted to a spokesperson. These limits can prevent the inclusion of technical details. A final explanation is that during a crisis, organizations are more concerned with image repair and maintenance than providing technical details.

In addition to linking the two types of message strategies and stakeholder theory, a final contribution of this research is the coding scheme. This research contributes to the study of crisis-communication message strategies by validating Coombs's (1995, 1999) typology. Our findings also suggest that Coombs's (1995) earlier work on crisis strategies (e.g., Coombs, 1995) did not include the strategy of using an outside expert for validation. Although Coombs (1999) mentions that this is a good follow-up message strategy, this study suggests that the use of an outside expert for validation should be added as a subcategory under ingratiation strategies.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although accomplishing the integration of various message strategies used during a crisis, this study also had limitations. Many of these limitations might be addressed in future research studies. First, we examined archived accounts that represented exclusively the viewpoint of the focal organization. Perhaps an in-depth case study of one organization using our developed coding scheme will provide additional insight into how an organization chooses to translate technical information, the method in which stakeholders want to receive that information, and the effectiveness of those strategies. In addition, in-depth case studies allow a researcher to explore a wide range of materials, so in addition to written accounts, they can include oral accounts such as press conferences. A case study can also take a longitudinal perspective and address the issue of how strategies may change over time during a crisis.

This suggestion to focus in detail on one organization will also address another set of limitations in this study; the broad, U.S.-centric sample. As a result of pulling several accounts from the same crisis there might be interdependencies between the different accounts of a given case. These are all a function of our sampling decisions. We chose to sample broadly across crisis types and were not focused on how the variables in this study function in different crisis types. However, the exploration of crisis type is an area worthy of study. We did examine this additional variable and found that some crisis types had more technical translation than others. Although we have too small of a sampling across crisis types to substantiate these findings, future research should examine this possibility. If scholars link crisis types with translation strategies we will be that much closer to understanding exactly how this type of strategy functions.

Finally, in our attempt to develop a comprehensive coding scheme, several categories were likely underrepresented. We did not wish to collapse categories that had theoretical reasons to remain separate, but future studies need to seek cases that illuminate the poorly represented categories in this study. Other research should also try for a more balanced stakeholder representation because the vast majority of the accounts in this study targeted diffused stakeholder groups.

The focus-group studies by Rogers (1999) suggested that participants want more context surrounding scientific messages. In this study, it appears that organizations attempt to place the information surrounding a crisis into a larger framework. It is through message strategies that they illustrate how a "greater good" can result from an unfortunate crisis. Further research might explore why organizations choose to shelter their stakeholders from the technical details. By releasing technical details, it is possible that organizations may increase either their workload or their liability in the situation. Specific studies focusing on the intent behind technical translation strategies in an organization may help uncover these reasons.

The accounts we studied indicate that organizations may be using crisis-communication strategies as the vehicle to eliminate and transform uncertainty (Zehr, 1999). Scientific information and messages may be carefully crafted and released to the public as the means by which routine information is conveyed. However, a crisis situation may push an organization to respond to pressing events, and instead of focusing on the science behind their messages they choose merely to manage their image and reputation. Future research can explore the link between managing uncertainty and whether effective technical translation can transform uncertainty.

Although this study addresses the various message strategies used to target each stakeholder group during a crisis, another focus for future research is to examine the effectiveness and appropriateness of the message strategy used for each stakeholder group. This type of research might involve examining both the focal organization and its stakeholders to adequately assess effectiveness. Perhaps some message strategies are more effective with certain stakeholders, and some message strategies may be inappropriate for specific groups.

Probably the most promising area for future research is delving more deeply into the strategy of using an outside expert to enhance credibility. Although Coombs (1999) considered this a follow-up strategy, our research here demonstrates its use as an immediate response to a crisis. Although our data suggested that we place this strategy under Coombs's (1999) category of ingratiation, using an outside expert might fit other places as well. Additional research should consider if organizations are using outside experts for mortification, distancing, suffering, nonexistent, acknowledging, and stonewalling reasons. The use of an outside expert also introduces a potential understanding with technical translation strategies. Perhaps experts use more, or at least different types, of technical translation as they attempt to interpret the crisis. Because these outside experts bring their reputation, their knowledge, and a different perspective to the crisis, organizations will likely continue hiring these experts.

APPLICATIONS OF CURRENT RESEARCH

Although this study did not measure effectiveness of message strategies, it does show that organizations are targeting stakeholders with different messages. Practitioners need to know this because they are often involved in devising these messages and they may or may not be aware that this is happening. Furthermore, prior research suggests that this inconsistency in messages might affect organizational legitimacy (Massey, 2001). Practitioners need to not only be aware of the overarching goals of a crisis response plan, but they should also consider the various stakeholders and the venues where their messages will likely appear.

Practitioners also may be able to use our findings as further fuel to convince organizations to prepare crisis-management plans well in advance. These plans might consider embedding the technical translation into the prepared messages. This approach will be more proactive than the often reactive response made in the midst of a crisis. Research clearly illustrates that some stakeholder groups want more technical information (Rogers, 1999) and this proactive approach might help satisfy this desire. In the accounts examined here, it appears that peripheral organizations, such as regulatory agencies are the ones providing technical translation when it does occur. For example, in the Sulzer hip replacement recall, the reviewed documents indicated that the Food and Drug Administration served the strongest technical translation role. Sulzer, the focal organization, rarely explained the technical aspects of the crisis. Practitioners can use this example to illustrate the value of planning and therefore controlling the distributed technical messages. There might be a notable upside to incorporating and controlling the technical translations messages that stakeholders receive.

The developed coding scheme provided reasonable interrater reliabilities that indicate we may have developed an organized, comprehensive scheme that is specifically useful for crisis-strategy evaluation. Practitioners can use the scheme as a planning tool for crisis communication to determine if they are selecting appropriate message and technical translation strategies for their stakeholder groups. Furthermore, they can use this scheme to evaluate their current and past communication attempts and possibly learn from their mistakes. Practitioners may want to determine if their messages are producing the desired results and how the various stakeholders are reacting to their messages. The category scheme can also be incorporated into a training program for constructing and delivering communication messages during a crisis.

Organizational crises are going to happen and stakeholders will likely want responses. This study examined technical crises and proposed a new set of technical translation strategies that appear in parallel to crisis-communication message strategies. We explored how these strategies are used and in particular if they vary across stakeholder groups. In the cases examined here, crisis-communication strategies are different depending on the targeted stakeholder group. However,

technical translation message strategies are not changed according to stakeholder group. It also appears that despite a public desire for more detailed technical information during a crisis, when organizations provide stakeholders any technical details, they consist of little or no explanations. This research has scholarly implications as it stimulates further research questions into the targeting of organizational crisis-message strategies to different stakeholder groups. It also has practical applications as it can be incorporated into crisis planning to help organizations frame and design both their message and technical translation strategies used during crises.

APPENDIX

	Name of Case			Type of Crisis			Date of Event		
	Data ID #:	Date of Account:	Type of Account:						
<i>Stakeholder</i>									
<i>Enabling publics</i>	Shareholders								
	Regulatory agencies								
<i>Functional publics</i>	Employees								
	Suppliers								
	Customers								
	Victims								
<i>Normative publics</i>	Professional societies								
	Political groups								
<i>Diffused publics</i>	Media								
	Community residents								
	Public at large								
<i>Other</i>									
<i>Message strategy</i>									
<i>Nonexistence</i>	Denial								
	Clarification								
	Attack								
	Intimidation								
<i>Distance</i>	Deny intention (excuse)								
	Disassociation of organization								
	Deny volition (excuse)								
	Minimize injury (just)								
	Victim deserving (just)								
	Misrepresenting crisis (just)								

		Name of Case		Type of Crisis		Date of Event	
		Data ID #:					
		Date of Account:					
		Type of Account:					
		# pages					
<i>Ingratiation</i>		Bolstering					
		Endorsement of outside expert					
		Transcendence					
		Praising others					
<i>Mortification</i>		Remediation					
		Repentance					
		Rectification					
<i>Suffering</i>							
		Acknowledge and/or accept responsibility					
		Stonewalling					
		<i>Technical translation strategy</i>					
		Elucidating explanation					
		Transformative explanation					
		Quasi-scientific explanation					
		Direct					
		None					
		Other					

Definitions

- Type of technical translation message
- Nonexistence strategies—says no crisis exists—these are listed in increasing order of response
 - Denial—no crisis exists
 - Clarification—explains why not
 - Attack—confronts those saying crisis exists

Intimidation—threatens to use organizational power

Distance strategies—acknowledge the crisis—create public acceptance while weakening linkages

- Deny intention (excuse)—minimize the cause
- Deny volition (excuse)—someone else responsible
- Minimize injury (just)—it’s not that bad
- Victim deserving (just)—victim caused it
- Misrepresenting crisis (just)—claims crisis description inaccurate

Ingratiation strategies—seek to gain public approval for the organization

- Bolstering—reminds public of existing positive aspects
- Transcendence—places crisis in a larger, more desirable context
- Praising others—goal is to win approval of target group

Mortification strategies—attempt to win forgiveness of the publics and create acceptance for the crisis

- Remediation—offers compensation to help victims
- Repentance—asks for forgiveness
- Rectification—taking action to prevent future recurrence

Suffering strategy—organization is unfair victim

Technical translation strategy

- Elucidating explanation—includes sets of varying examples and nonexamples
- Transformative explanation—helps audiences understand counterintuitive phenomena
- Quasi-scientific explanation—helps audiences understand hard to picture phenomena
- Direct—direct statement of the technical facts surrounding the crisis—no explanation

NOTES

1. These reliabilities include the detailed subcategorical data for all subcategories except one, diffused publics. This is because the diffused publics’ subcategorical interrater reliabilities were low. We suspect that since the coded accounts were primarily press releases, these subcategories in diffused publics (media, community residents, and public at large) were targeted in most of the accounts. Therefore, the coders could not reliably distinguish between them at the subcategorical level.

2. Although it is common to collapse cells containing zero’s and even less than five accounts, for theoretical reasons, we chose to use the Monte Carlo simulation function of SAS that was specifically designed to accommodate small numbers in cells. Although not used often in communication research, Monte Carlo simulations are frequently used in physical sciences and computational modeling. The main reason they are used is in conditions where you cannot solve a problem directly using generated data. This simulation is included in the SAS software package and it is particularly appropriate when “handling large, sparse tables” where you need to “estimate precisely the inferential characteristics of interest” (Agresti, 1992).

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