

**RHETORICAL APPROACHES TO CRISIS COMMUNICATION: THE
RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT, AND VALIDATION OF AN
IMAGE REPAIR SITUATIONAL THEORY
FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS**

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A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate
School of Saint Louis University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Education

2005

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Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my wife, Charla. Because of her faithful commitment to me, I have been able to complete this project as well as the doctoral program that accompanied it. She tolerated long nights and weekends away as I would go off to write and study. In fact, as I type these words I am at a Starbucks™ in St. Louis rather than with her and our family. She has patiently waited for me to complete my studies and cheered me on all along the way. Without her I certainly would not have made it, not only in my graduate studies, but in life as well. I owe her all I have, and to her this paper is dedicated.

Acknowledgements

I would like to begin these acknowledgements by communicating deep appreciation for all the work of my advisor, Dr. Daniel B. Keck. He has been a tremendous blessing to me. He has an ability to calm me down when I stress about things like writing this paper. Many times during this process he would get calls at home and on weekends. I'm sure when his phone rang he thought, "oh boy. It's Vogelaar again. What now?", but he never let me feel like my questions were unnecessary. Instead, he has a wonderful ability to make me feel like I'm his only student. I appreciate his guidance and mentorship. I will cherish our friendship for the rest of my career.

I also owe so much to the members of my committee. During my oral exam they made me feel like a colleague. They took a genuine interest in my study and helped me to feel like I could conquer the world. I left that day walking on air. The relationships I have formed from this experience will continue to inspire me. I owe a special thanks to Dr. Wright for giving me the opportunity to present at his superintendent's academy. And to Dr. Fowler for encouraging me to submit a version of this manuscript to him for publication. I look

forward to my future working relationship with both of them.

I would be remiss if I failed to acknowledge some of the others in my doctoral studies who spurred me on. David Ulrich, who is one of my closest friends from before the program at Saint Louis University. In fact, his desire to do this program gave me the confidence that this also would be a good move for me professionally. I look forward to many years working alongside my colleague Dr. Ulrich—especially as we seek to publish the Bo-da Model in myriad professional journals.

Becky Kiefer and Linda Davidson ended up being instrumental in spurring me on throughout the program. They helped me to prepare for my written comprehensive exam (Becky even replaced about 400 pages of notes that ended up blowing up and down North Oak Trafficway). Becky and Linda were faithful in meeting with me regularly as we held each other accountable to finishing our papers.

Kevin Daniel, Jeff Kyle, Tim Ryan, and Jeff Miller had personalities that made meeting for class every other Saturday memorable. Even though I would have much preferred to spend my Saturdays at home with my wife,

these guys were about as good a substitute as I could have hoped for. I really enjoyed getting to know them. I have the deepest respect for them professionally and personally.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my family. Their support was a constant encouragement. Specifically, my little sister, Ashley, who is my very best friend, I admire her more than I could ever express. I hope when I grow up I get to be just like her. Also, my informal family provided me with a ton of support. By that I mean the teachers and staff at South Valley Middle School have been extraordinary. They have been cheerleaders for me throughout this experience. They are probably as glad as I am that this is finished.

Table of Contents

List of Tables.....	xiii
List of Figures.....	xiv
Abstract.....	xvi
CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM	
Introduction.....	1
The Context of the Problem Area.....	3
Rationale.....	5
Limitations of the Study.....	11
Definition of Terms.....	12
Chapter Summary.....	14
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE	
Introduction.....	17
Image Restoration.....	19
Apologia.....	21
Organizational Apologia.....	25
Image Restoration Theory.....	26
Denial.....	30
Evading Responsibility.....	31
Reducing Offensiveness.....	33
Corrective Action.....	37
Mortification.....	38
Crisis Communication Situational Theory.....	39
Chapter Summary.....	54
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	
Introduction.....	57
R & D Cycle.....	57
Assess Needs to Identify Goal(s).....	62
Conduct Instructional Analysis.....	64
Analyze Learners and Contexts.....	65
Write Performance Objectives.....	67
Develop Assessment Instruments.....	69
Develop Instructional Strategy.....	70
Develop and Select Instructional Materials.....	72
Design and Conduct Formative Evaluation of Instruction.....	72
Purpose of the Evaluation.....	73
Research Design.....	73
Population and Sample.....	75

	Data Collection Method.....	77
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY CONTINUED		
	Revise Instruction.....	78
	Chapter Summary.....	79
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS		
	Introduction.....	80
	Environment and Context.....	81
	Background of Participants.....	82
	Feedback Results.....	90
	Usefulness and Applicability.....	90
	Suggestions for Improvement.....	94
	Process Critical.....	96
	Process Friendly.....	98
	Content Critical.....	99
	Content Friendly.....	100
	Overall Supportive.....	101
	Chapter Summary.....	102
CHAPTER 5: THE IMAGE REPAIR SITUATIONAL THEORY		
	Introduction.....	104
	Crisis Severity Diagnostics.....	106
	The Advent of a Situational Theory.....	113
	Strategic Categories.....	118
	Linkages.....	118
	Valences.....	123
	Chapter Summary.....	133
CHAPTER 6: STRATEGY SELECTION FOR CRISIS SITUATIONS		
	Introduction.....	135
	Using the Matrix.....	137
	Chapter Summary.....	147
CHAPTER 7: CRISIS SITUATIONS: CASE STUDIES FOR CONSIDERATION		
	Introduction.....	150
	Case Scenario One: Employee Conduct.....	152
	Understanding the Context.....	152
	The Community.....	152
	The School District.....	153
	The School.....	154
	The Incident.....	154
	Analysis of the Case.....	155
	Strategy Selection.....	156
	Case Scenario Two: Stranger Danger.....	156
	Understanding the Context.....	156

CHAPTER 7: CRISIS SITUATIONS: CASE STUDIES FOR
CONSIDERATION CONTINUED

	The Community.....	156
	The School District.....	157
	The School.....	158
	The Incident.....	158
	Analysis of the Case.....	159
	Strategy Selection.....	159
Case Scenario Three: Student Fatality.....		160
	Understanding the Context.....	160
	The Community.....	160
	The School District.....	161
	The School.....	161
	The Incident.....	162
	Analysis of the Case.....	162
	Strategy Selection.....	163
Case Scenario Four: Low Standards.....		164
	Understanding the Context.....	164
	The Community.....	164
	The School District.....	164
	The School.....	165
	The Incident.....	165
	Analysis of the Case.....	166
	Strategy Selection.....	167
Case Scenario Five: Lock Down.....		167
	Understanding the Context.....	167
	The Community.....	167
	The School District.....	168
	The School.....	168
	The Incident.....	168
	Analysis of the Case.....	169
	Strategy Selection.....	170
Case Scenario Six: Contagious Disease.....		171
	Understanding the Context.....	171
	The Community.....	171
	The School District.....	171
	The School.....	171
	The Incident.....	172
	Analysis of the Case.....	172
	Strategy Selection.....	173
Case Scenario Seven: Wrong Bus.....		174
	Understanding the Context.....	174
	The Community.....	174
	The School District.....	174
	The School.....	174

CHAPTER 7: CRISIS SITUATIONS: CASE STUDIES FOR CONSIDERATION CONTINUED	
The Incident.....	175
Analysis of the Case.....	176
Strategy Selection.....	177
Case Scenario Eight: Sexual Harassment.....	177
Understanding the Context.....	177
The Community.....	177
The School District.....	178
The School.....	178
The Incident.....	179
Analysis of the Case.....	180
Strategy Selection.....	181
Case Scenario Nine: Video Locker Room.....	181
Understanding the Context.....	181
The Community.....	181
The School District.....	182
The School.....	182
The Incident.....	183
Analysis of the Case.....	184
Strategy Selection.....	185
Case Scenario Ten: Head Lice Haven.....	185
Understanding the Context.....	185
The Community.....	185
The School District.....	186
The School.....	186
The Incident.....	187
Analysis of the Case.....	187
Strategy Selection.....	188
Chapter Summary.....	188
 CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION	
Introduction.....	190
Usefulness and Applicability.....	190
Suggestions for Improvement.....	192
Process Improvements.....	193
Content Improvements.....	194
Implications for Future Research.....	198
Chapter Summary.....	200
 Appendix A: Participants' Handout and Notes Packet From the Initial Formative Evaluation.....	202
 Appendix B: "Fuzzy Meanings" Activity Included in the Training Workshop.....	247

Appendix C: Formative Evaluation Data Collection Tool.....	249
Appendix D: Participants' Handout and Notes Packet (Revised).....	253
References.....	306
Vita Auctoris.....	316

List of Tables

Table 4.1: Participant Reaction to Training.....92

Table 4.2: Narrative Analysis Results.....95

Table 5.1: The Fifteen Strategies of the
Image Repair Situational Matrix.....119

List of Figures

Figure 2.1: Ware and Linkugel's (1973) Postures of Verbal Self-Defense.....	23
Figure 2.2: Benoit's (1995) Typology With Sample Statements That Fit Each Strategy Appropriate for Educational Leaders.....	28
Figure 2.3: Coombs's (1995, p. 455) Crisis Type Matrix.....	43
Figure 2.4: Coombs's (1995, p.463) Faux Pas Decision Flowchart.....	45
Figure 2.5: Coombs's (1995, p. 465) Accident Decision Flowchart.....	46
Figure 2.6: Coombs's (1995, p. 467) Transgression Decision Flowchart.....	47
Figure 2.7: Coombs's (1995, p. 468) Terrorism Decision Flowchart.....	48
Figure 2.8: Coombs's (1999, p. 124) Continuum of Crisis Strategies.....	50
Figure 3.1: Dick, Carey, & Carey's (2005) Systems Approach Model of Educational Research and Development (R & D).....	60
Figure 4.1: Participants Identified by Gender.....	84
Figure 4.2: Participants' Years of Experience in Education.....	85
Figure 4.3: Frequency at Which Participants Responded to Angry Students Within the Last Year.....	87
Figure 4.4: Frequency at Which Participants Responded to Angry Parents Within the Last Year.....	88
Figure 4.5: Frequency at Which Participants	

	Feel They Have to Repair the Image or Reputation of Their District.....	89
Figure 5.1:	The Two Dimensions of Crisis Severity.....	114
Figure 5.2:	Strategic Categories Created by the Two Dimensions.....	117
Figure 6.1:	The Image Repair Situational Matrix.....	136
Figure 7.1:	The Image Repair Situational Matrix (Original).....	196
Figure 7.2:	The Image Repair Situational Matrix (Revised).....	197

Abstract

In this project a product to aid educational leaders in the process of communicating in crisis situations is presented. The product was created and received a formative evaluation using an educational research and development methodology. Ultimately, an administrative training course that utilized an Image Repair Situational Theory was developed. After its development, the product was given to a focus group of superintendents and information was solicited from them concerning the usefulness and applicability of the theory in educational crisis situations. These superintendents were taken through a series of case studies in order to gain practice using the theory prior to receiving their input.

The results of the focus group surveys indicated that the training program was both useful and applicable for school leaders in educational settings. Improvements were made to the training materials based on the superintendents' feedback from the formative evaluation. In the end, suggestions for the broader application of the materials and for future research were discussed.

CHAPTER ONE

The Problem

Introduction

Crisis events can and do strike organizations of all types. Every kind of organization, from Fortune 500 companies to small family owned businesses, has the potential for being a victim of crises. School leaders should not believe they are exempt from these same risks. Within the last decade, many school leaders have found themselves under the watchful eye of national news media for a variety of crises. Words such as Columbine and Paducah immediately bring to mind horrific accounts that illustrate the need for preparedness.

In addition, the relationship between a school and the surrounding community can be fragile. Decisions over the adoption of a new science curriculum or the selection of a controversial book made available in the school's library can set off a chain of events that ultimately threatens a district's reputation. This is because "tension and conflict between organizations and stakeholders grow out of differences in perceptions of emerging and longstanding issues. Only rarely are the

relationships involved free of tension" (Brody, 1991, p. 42).

In this paper, a justification will be made to venture into the applicability of crisis communication theories to an educational setting. In order to accomplish this, the first four chapters explore: In Chapter One, the communicative problems that crises pose to educational leaders are discussed as well as a brief overview of Vogelaar's (2002) Image Repair Situational Theory. Chapter Two presents a thorough review of the literature relevant to crisis communication in and out of education. In Chapter Three, the procedure designed to gather feedback from educational leaders regarding Vogelaar's (2002) theory and its applicability to educational crises is explored. Chapter Four lays out the results of the feedback and presents any suggestions to improve the applicability of the theory.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven present the information relevant to the theory. This involves the terminology associated with Benoit's (1995) image restoration strategies (Chapter Five), the resulting matrix of Vogelaar's (2002) Image Repair Situational Theory (Chapter Six), and several case studies to guide

practitioners in applying the theory to the educational setting. In this paper's final chapter, a summary of the situational theory and recommendations for its use are presented. These recommendations include suggestions for further study of the situational theory and its applicability for educational leaders.

The Context of the Problem Area

Schools take seriously the trust relationship they build with their stakeholders—staff, students, parents, and community patrons. Higgins and Snyder (1989) argued that “organizations are vitally concerned with nurturing positive images for both external and internal consumption” (p. 76). School leaders should be equally concerned with nurturing these positive images. Their ability to recruit and retain staff, and pass bonds and/or operating levies are only two reasons districts prioritize public relations both internally and externally.

Some researchers even speculate that organizations are now more susceptible to crises than ever before. For example, Timothy Sellnow and Matthew Seeger (2001) argued that “crisis-related risk is more pervasive in modern society than ever before. Larger, more complex systems

and greater dependence on these systems have contributed to greater crisis vulnerability" (p. 153). School leaders should be aware that this kind of crisis susceptibility may be an issue for educational organizations as well. As a result, school districts, which are becoming more complicated systemically, should be concerned with their reputation and image in the midst of this increased crisis vulnerability.

Educational researchers share the notion that "crisis situations are inevitable" (Schonfeld, Lichtenstein, Pruett, & Speese-Linehan, 2002, p. 4). This necessitates preparedness, and in many cases schools have responded. One need not look far to find information on a district's crisis plan. Added to the usual tornado and fire drills, for example, professionals recommend that schools implement and regularly practice crisis drills (Kirsche, 1999).

Most plans, however, prioritize what to do in crisis situations but offer little advice or direction on what to say. Communication with parents and the public are critical aspects of crisis management. Therefore, both what to do and what to say should be equally important. The truth is that the importance of effective

communication in school crises is intensified because schools and innocent children seem to be inseparable in the public's mind. Because of this, school leaders must be careful about what they *say* as well as what they *do* in a crisis.

The speed with which the media communicate in times of crisis is another important reason to prepare. The fact is, "the media report about a crisis very quickly" (Coombs, 1999, p. 114; see also Brody, 1991; and Deppa, 1994), and they often shape the way the crisis is presented to the public (Page, 1995). Lack of time, combined with the media's influence on a story, provides a compelling reason for school leaders to be prepared to communicate effectively and to develop their communication abilities.

Rationale

Educational researchers point out that the same conditions that motivate businesses to build, nurture, and maintain positive images exist for educational leaders as well.

If the police have responded to a situation involving school-age children, it is likely that the media will not only broadcast it before the police have a chance to fully inform school personnel, but also that the media may appear on the school

doorstep before the school crisis team has planned its response. (Schonfeld et al, 2002, p. 47-48)

Because of this potential, school leaders can and should prepare to effectively communicate from the earliest stages of a crisis.

The business literature is plentiful on the issue of crisis management and may serve as a resource for administrators. Most of the material, however, only deals with crisis preparation and not the use of effective communication strategies (Barton, 1993; Brody, 1991; Caponigro, 1998; Dougherty, 1992; Fearn-Banks, 2002; Pinsdorf, 1999).

Sturges (1994) emphasized that there are two distinct areas of crisis management. One focused on "the behavior of the organization and its members during the time period associated with the crisis" (p. 298). The other emphasized "communication during the crisis to publics (stakeholders) important to the organization" (p. 298). The latter area of crisis management has "suffered from the least amount of attention" (p. 299).

In most cases, the attention given to crisis planning is not for the purpose of equipping leaders to communicate effectively in the hours following a crisis (Hearit, 1995). "Practitioner-oriented literature tends

only to stress that communication during crises should contain information that is accurate and complete in describing the event and its consequences" (Sturges, 1994, p. 299). While accurate information is essential, this information alone may not serve to rebuild or repair the reputation or image of the organization.

Even within the academic-oriented literature, the focus is on prevention of the crisis, not image management. Benoit and Brinson (1994) concluded that organizations "may at times take an indirect or preventative approach designed to cope with general negative feelings toward the company" (p. 76). Simply put, an organization may attempt to manage negative feelings against its image as an on-going part of the company's communication with its strategic publics and perhaps not as a part of an overarching crisis communication plan.

These approaches, while helpful in many ways, may be incomplete in preparing school leaders for the demands that a crisis places on a district's image. The nature of these demands are so unique that it is unlikely a business-as-usual approach will be effective in a crisis. After all, crises tend to be unexpected. "No two crises

are alike and they tend to arrive unannounced, exploding on a company and then evolving in fast-moving, unpredictable directions as many conflicting factors come into play" (Rogers, 1993, p. 123).

School leaders who receive little or no training in crisis communication, coupled with the speed at which a crisis is covered in the media, may mean that school officials are left with only their intuition and experience as a guide. This could risk damage to the reputation of the district and significantly impact its effectiveness with the community. However, when school leaders are given appropriate strategies designed to respond to a crisis, they may be better able to know what to say in order to help frame the situation for its audience and restore the district's reputation with its strategic publics.

Therefore, school leaders should be equipped to manage communications effectively to maintain and protect the district's reputation in the midst of a crisis. Crisis planning is an important component, but effectively communicating with the public about a crisis via the local or national media is essential for

minimizing the damage a crisis situation can have on the district's standing in the community (Benoit, 1995).

School leaders might benefit from examining the theories that guide other organizations' crisis communications. This awareness may help them preserve their district's reputation in a crisis situation. While numerous corporate crises have been studied to provide insight to business leaders about how to repair damage to their reputation, very little has been done to examine the extent to which the strategies of Image Restoration Theory will apply to schools. Additionally, appropriate case studies could serve as a means of evaluating the application of these strategies to the school setting.

Research has been done to determine the effect communication has on how stakeholders perceive the organization in crisis (Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Benoit, 1995, 1997b; Hearit, 1994, 1996). From this body of work, researchers have suggested aids to an organization desiring to repair its image after a crisis (Benoit, 1995; 1997b; Brody, 1991; Caponigro, 1998; Coombs, 1999; Pinsdorf, 1999). However, none of these theories have been examined to determine their level of applicability to the educational setting. While schools are indeed

organizations, their unique public status, coupled with their association as child protectors and advocates, may impact the range of strategies available when responding to reputation-altering crisis situations.

As a result, Vogelaar (2002) created an overarching, prescriptive theory that synthesized Benoit's (1995) descriptive image restoration strategies and Schlenker's (1980) work on impression management. He then applied this theory to Coca-Cola's responses during a 1999 contamination crisis in Belgium. This case study involved school children who drank bad Coca-Cola products and became sick. While the crisis affected Coke rather than school leaders, the study revealed the need for a revised situational theory due in part to the increased sensitivity associated with young children who become the primary victims of crisis.

The purpose of this paper is to create a training model for school leaders that uses Vogelaar's (2002) Image Repair Situational Theory as a guide for communicating to strategic publics. Examining the applicability of such a theory to the school setting may prove beneficial on two levels. First, the theory provides guidance for educational leaders who lack

training and a comfort level with handling crisis situations. Second, because the Image Repair Situational Theory is grounded in the literature's recommendations to organizations in crisis situations, the theory provides an approach grounded in "best practices."

But one size may not fit all in the context of organizational crisis. An examination of this theory in an educational setting could produce important feedback regarding its application to school leaders. This feedback could inform the body of literature as to the appropriateness of this theory for schools.

Limitations of the Study

It is important to note the limitations of this study. While this study seeks to identify a pragmatic approach to strategy selection for school leaders, there are several things this study does not accomplish. This study does not seek to evaluate a variety of crisis situations. As stated before, many types of crises can and do occur. Even multiple case studies cannot delve into the myriad ways a crisis can impact a school district's image.

Additionally, this study serves to illuminate a way one communication theory applies to the school setting,

and it offers only one approach for school leaders to use when selecting communication strategies. It does not prove that such an approach will always work, even in a crisis similar to one of the case studies. Because many factors affect how communication is delivered and the way it is received, the mere presence of strategies does not guarantee image restoration for a school or district.

Finally, this study is not designed to identify root causes to a school district's reputational problems. The fragility of an organization's image is dependant upon a variety of factors (Fombrun, 1996). While one event can significantly impact organizational image, the prior cultivating of positive images can offset the damage of a single event. As a result, identical crises occurring to two different school districts might cause a range of reputational damage. This study does not purport to identify a causal relationship between a crisis and the "reputational capital" (Fombrun, 1996, p. 209) of a school district.

Definition of Terms

In this section a glossary of terms is presented along with the corresponding definitions. An adequate understanding of the terminology associated with this

study will aid in the overall understanding of the study and the discipline from which it will be derived.

- Apologia- Speeches of self defense (Ware & Linkugel, 1973).
- Crisis- "an unpredictable event which disrupts an organization's routine pattern of day-to-day life" (Ray, 1999, p. 13).
- Crisis Communication- "the dialogue between the organization and its publics prior to, during, and after the negative occurrence" (Fearn-Banks, 2002, p. 2).
- Image Repair Situational Matrix- A typology designed to diagnose the severity of a crisis situation and to offer communicative strategies appropriate to manage the organization's reputation (Vogelaar, 2002).
- Image Restoration Strategies- Communicative strategies designed to repair damage done to reputation whether individual or organizational (Benoit, 1995).
- Linkage Strategies- These are communication strategies designed to weaken the connection an

organization may have to a negative act
(Higgins and Snyder, 1989, p. 79).

- Organizational Apologia- Communication designed to defend an organization when its reputation has been threatened (Benoit & Lindsey, 1987).
- Valence Strategies- These are communication strategies designed to minimize the negativity associated with a crisis as perceived by relevant audiences such as stakeholders.
(Higgins and Snyder, 1989).

Summary

Schools can face reputation-altering events. Because damage to a district's image can translate into loss of public confidence and even public support, being able to effectively communicate with stakeholders in order to restore the support of a community is a high priority. School leaders cannot adequately prepare for all possible crises. The level of unpredictability is too large to accomplish the task (Fearn-Banks, 2002).

Researchers have developed theories that describe the communicative strategy selections of others (Benoit, 1995; 1997b; Coombs, 1999; Ware & Linkugel, 1973) and these typologies have been applied to organizations via

case studies (Benoit, 1995; 1997b; Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Benoit & Lindsey, 1987; Benson, 1988; Foss, 1984; Gottschalk, 1993). These approaches have been useful for identifying specific strategies employed by individuals and organizations that have attempted to repair their image. However, these approaches presented a descriptive method where readers are left to learn through hindsight rather than be given a prescriptive method on which to draw when facing a crisis as it happens.

A coherent theory that would allow practitioners to understand and apply effective strategies for restoring a school district's image would prove most valuable to educational leaders. In order to accomplish this, practitioners would need be able to differentiate among degrees of crisis severity in order to accurately diagnose the seriousness of a crisis. Without the ability to differentiate crisis types, school leaders could misdiagnose a crisis and choose altogether inappropriate strategies for de-escalating a crisis situation.

In Chapter Two, the literature relevant to crisis communication in both educational and organizational settings is examined. This literature review provides a

look at the current state of available resources for educational leaders and provides a more detailed rationale for teaching a coherent theory designed to aid educational leaders in strategy selection when a crisis strikes.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

Introduction

Educational leaders have an abundance of information in the literature from a variety of disciplines to help them plan and prepare for managing a variety of crisis situations. However, much of the information targeting educational leaders is synthesized by those who work in the profession. Practitioners benefit from the synthesized material via case studies digested for them in various educational journals (McKerrow, 2000; Dunn, 2001; Fissel and Owen, 2001). Particular interest is given to issues of school violence (Kirsche, 1999) and dealing with the media (Hughes, 2001; Kowalski, 2002).

It is widely held, however, that administrator training programs and on-going administrator professional development is lacking in regard to crisis communication training and public relations (Bagin, 2001; Kowalski, 2001b). Perhaps this is why the literature specific to educational leadership and crisis communication is limited, and why aid to educational leaders regarding strategy selection in crisis situations is also limited.

This condition is especially problematic when considering the immediacy and urgency mass communications now present when covering crisis situations.

The immediacy of our communications heightens the immediacy of our crises, and sometimes the communication itself becomes the news it intended to cover... If the media can communicate the news the instant it happens, crisis communications dictate that [an organization] *must* be prepared to respond almost as fast. (Fink, 1986, p. 92)

For school leaders, this immediacy can translate into impromptu responses to the media, parents, school board members, etc. regarding the events of a negative act. Merely planning for crises is insufficient. It is impossible to plan for every contingency (Fearn-Banks, 2002). As a result, "the inability to communicate your message skillfully during a crisis can prove fatal" (Fink, 1986, p. 92). Unfortunately, very little has been done to transfer crisis communication theory into a pragmatic, situational process designed to equip individuals to accurately assess the severity of a crisis and then point them to strategies effective for de-escalating the crisis.

In this section, the literature dealing with crisis communication is presented. This literature is influenced by theories from many different disciplines.

Areas such as psychology, sociology, and communication studies have contributed immensely to understanding the role strategies play in crisis communication and image repair. What follows is organized according to the evolution of thought that has shaped the theories on, first, image restoration strategies, and second, the situational approaches to strategy selection when faced with reputation-altering events.

Image Restoration

Ware and Linkugel (1973) wrote one of the seminal works in the area of reputational management in the midst of a crisis. They adapted Abelson's (1959) work on the resolution of belief dilemmas. Ware and Linkugel explained how individuals respond to perceptions of wrongdoing. They identified, what they called, apologia strategies found in public speeches. While Ware and Linkugel's work did not focus on the organizational context, they provided a theory on which other researchers built their ideas.

Two such researchers, Benoit and Lindsey (1987), took Ware and Linkugel's (1973) work, and applied it to the 1982 Tylenol poisoning crisis. This article specifically examined how the manufacturer, Johnson &

Johnson, effectively repaired its image by using the apologetic strategies first introduced by Ware and Linkugel.

Benoit and Lindsey (1987) found that not all the categories presented by Ware and Linkugel applied to the organizational context. As a result, they provided modifications to Ware and Linkugel based upon their findings in the Tylenol case. In the end, Benoit and Lindsey proposed that more research needed to be done to determine an applicable apologia theory for the organizational context. As a result, Benoit (1995) developed a theory describing strategies that organizations and individuals might use to repair a reputation damaged by a crisis.

In order to fully understand the evolution of image restoration theory and its relevance to organizational crisis communication, the theory needs to be discussed in detail. First, an examination of Ware and Linkugel's (1973) article is in order. Second, a discussion of the Benoit and Lindsey (1987) article is necessary, and finally, a discussion of the Benoit (1995) article as it presents the culmination of the research on organizational image restoration is appropriate.

Apologia

In Ware and Linkugel's (1973) article, they examined public speeches of self-defense. Their focus was on a variety of different speeches. They examined speeches such as Socrates's "Apology," Martin Luther's "Speech at the Diet of Worms," Susan B. Anthony's "Is It a Crime for a United States Citizen to Vote?," and Adlai Stevenson's "The Hiss Case."

Ware and Linkugel built on Robert P. Abelson's theory on the resolution of belief dilemmas (1959). They took "Abelson's theory as a starting point only. Much of his theory [was] discarded because it implies a degree of predictive power which is not yet available to the critic" (Ware & Linkugel, 1973 p. 273). Several of Abelson's terminologies were carried over into Ware and Linkugel's theory.

These terms were Abelson's "modes of resolution":

(1) denial, meaning to disavow responsibility; (2) bolstering, meaning to accentuate some positive aspect to counter a negative perception; (3) differentiation, meaning to separate the negative from a more important and commonly held positive; and (4) transcendence, which means to appeal to a higher ideal that is universally

held as positive (Ware & Linkugel, 1973, p. 273). Ware and Linkugel, in applying these modes to the speeches they studied, developed combinations commonly found within the genre.

Ware and Linkugel identified these modal amalgamations as "the postures of verbal self-defense" (1973, p. 282). They argued that speeches of this genre generally fall into "one of four major rhetorical postures" (p. 282). These postures were basically themes that speeches of self-defense typically had in common (Figure 2.1). The intent of their work was to identify those qualities that define the apologia genre, but their research also developed a theory by which speeches of self-defense could be measured as successful or unsuccessful.

Their postures were called "absolution, vindication, explanation, or justification" (p. 282). In simple terms, absolution combines differentiation and denial into a speech whose purpose is to seek acquittal.

Figure 2.1: Ware & Linkugel's (1973)
Postures of Verbal Self-Defense

	Differentiation	Transcendence
Denial	Absolution	Vindication
Bolstering	Explanation	Justification

Definitions

1. **Absolution** means to deny involvement while at the same time off-setting the negative act by comparing it to a more negative act.
2. **Vindication** means to deny involvement while at the same time appealing to a higher goal held in common by both the accused and his/her audience.
3. **Explanation** means to highlight some positive quality while at the same time off-setting the negative act by comparing it to a more negative act.
4. **Justification** means to highlight some positive quality while at the same time appealing to a higher goal held in common by both the accused and his/her audience.

Vindication combines denial with transcendence. This posture seeks from the audience an exoneration from the negative act, not because of a denial, but because of a commonly held belief. The explanation posture combines bolstering with differentiation in order to create a speech where "the speaker assumes that if the audience understands his motives, actions, beliefs, or whatever, they will be unable to condemn him" (p. 283).

The final of the four postures, justification, combines bolstering and transcendence. This is used when the speaker wants to ask "not only for understanding, but also for approval" (p. 283). Justification is different from explanation because the speaker is expecting that the audience will be understanding, and that they will no longer view the act as wrong. In some cases with justification, it is hoped that the audience will actually approve of the accused doing it.

Ware and Linkugel's (1973) work on apologia was the springboard for modern theories on image repair. Their work has significantly impacted reputation management and crisis communication. Benoit (1995) said that "many studies have applied—and in some cases extended—Ware and Linkugel's theory of apologia. Most analyses concern

apologetic discourse from political figures, but sports, religious, and corporate applications have appeared" (p. 17).

Organizational Apologia

In Benoit and Lindsey's (1987) article, they set out to examine if Ware and Linkugel's (1973) strategies of self-defense applied to a corporation in the same way they applied to individuals. Their article focused on the response Johnson & Johnson used to defend the credibility of its Tylenol product after it was tampered with cyanide in 1982. The restoration of the company's image meant that the strategies it used in its defense may have contributed to its success. Benoit and Lindsey sought to establish that Johnson & Johnson's strategies were consistent with Ware and Linkugel's theory on apologia. In the end, a modified typology emerged to describe Johnson & Johnson's strategic choice of communication during its contamination crisis.

Benoit and Lindsey argued that Johnson & Johnson used a combination of denial, bolstering, and differentiation strategies. Denial was used when Tylenol shifted the blame of the poisonings onto a "madman" (p. 140). Bolstering was used by announcing a new "tamper-

resistant" packaging with three levels of protection, and a series of commercials which "featured women stressing their trust in Tylenol" (p. 141). Differentiation was used when Johnson and Johnson went on the record saying, "Most Tylenol products were not even susceptible to poisoning, thus attempting to dissociate certain Tylenol products from the poisonings" (p. 142). Benoit and Lindsey (1987) concluded that this combination of strategies led to the success of the Tylenol campaign and ultimately to the reestablishment of Tylenol's reputation and market share.

While this was a breakthrough for organizations faced with reputation altering events, the value of the lessons learned from Johnson & Johnson were done in hindsight. There was no assurance that those principles applied to another organization in a different crisis. The limits of this new approach to crisis communication didn't slow the development of a new theory, however. The next major phase in the evolution of a crisis response theory came within a few years.

Image Restoration Theory

In William Benoit's (1995) book, *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: A Theory of Image Restoration Strategies*,

he presented and argued for a general theory explaining the strategic uses of communication designed to repair one's image after a crisis. In this work he created a typology of strategies that represented his studies in impression management. He also applied this typology descriptively to several case studies in crisis communication.

Some of his examples involved organizations, while in other cases he examined individual speeches. His case studies served to illustrate the strategic choices employed by companies and individuals responding to crises, and whether those choices successfully repaired the damage to their reputation. Figure 2.2 visually depicts Benoit's (1995) typology.

Benoit's theory of image restoration began with an argument that "when our image is threatened, we feel compelled to offer explanations, defenses, justifications, rationalizations, apologies, or excuses for our behavior" (1995, p. 2). He further postulated

Figure 2.2: Benoit's (1995) Typology with sample statements that fit each strategy appropriate for educational leaders

Denial

Simple Denial- "The school had no responsibility for supervising the skating party."

Shifting the Blame- "Parents organized this and advertised it directly to students outside of school."

Evading Responsibility

Provocation- "Several new housing developments forced the school board to change its elementary school boundaries."

Defeasibility- "The board of education was not given important information when they made that decision."

Accident- "The teacher inadvertently misplaced the student's assignment."

Good Intentions- "My teachers went into this hoping to turn students on to careers in mathematics."

Reducing Offensiveness

Bolstering- "As a result of this event, a new approach to safety was created—one that will benefit everyone."

Minimization- "Changing the boundaries in this way doesn't affect as many families as you would think."

Differentiation- "Fortunately, the financial impact of the state legislature's decision won't impact us nearly as bad as it will smaller districts."

Transcendence- "We postponed administrative salary increases in order to focus those dollars on decreasing class size."

Attack Accuser- "Our local newspaper is notorious for misinterpreting test data."

Compensation- "The board of education has agreed to adjust salaries to off-set the increase in teacher contract days."

Corrective Action- "We are making changes to board policy to ensure that this will not happen again."

Mortification- "We were wrong to make this decision. Since I cannot separate the decisions of my subordinates and my role as superintendent, it is my job to accept responsibility. I am terribly sorry that this decision has caused so many people to suffer."

that some responses are more effective than others in repairing the damage done to one's image. While the motivation to defend our image is part of being human, it also transcends the individual. Organizations and corporations have a similar motivation. "Clearly the objective of crisis management is salvation of corporate image, for loss of a positive corporate image may quickly translate into an economic loss" (Benoit & Brinson, 1994, p. 76). Fombrun (1996) identifies this as the preservation of reputational capital.

There are two major assumptions that underlie Benoit's (1995) theory of image restoration. First, he argued that communication is a goal-oriented activity. This means that humans communicate with an agenda. Some goal or outcome is desired when humans communicate. His second assumption is that a very important communication goal is to maintain or preserve one's image or reputation (p. 63). This process of image management is also known as "face-work" (for a thorough development of the idea of face-work, see Goffman, 1967; 1971; and 1973).

Benoit's (1995) theory presented five general categories of image restoration strategies. These categories are *denial*, *evading responsibility*, *reducing*

offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification.

Within the first three of these categories a variety of strategies were listed. Benoit argued that his strategies describe various communication decisions that individuals make when responding to an accusation that threatens their image or reputation in order to restore good standing before salient audiences. What follows is an explanation of each strategy outlined in Benoit's research.

Denial. The two strategies under this category are simple denial and blame shifting. Simple denial is when the accused responds to an attack in a way that disavows any part of the wrong doing. Blame shifting occurs when the accused points to another for blame and basically says, "I didn't do it. He did." Blame shifting is discussed extensively in Burke (1970) and Schonbach (1980). Burke referred to this strategy as "victimage," meaning that the accused is the victim of the one who is really to blame.

Benoit argued that blame shifting was an appropriate strategy of denial because "the accused cannot have committed the repugnant act if someone else actually did it" (1995, p. 75). School leaders who use this strategy

would be claiming that they have no responsibility for a negative event, but someone else does. This strategy's effectiveness would be increased if the school leader could actually name who was responsible.

Evading responsibility. These strategies depart from the denial class of strategies because they assume that responsibility for a negative act cannot be avoided. Benoit argued that this category of responses are used by those "who are unable to deny performing the act in question [but can] evade or reduce their apparent responsibility for it" (Benoit, 1995, p. 76). According to Benoit, there are four types of strategies that fall under this category: provocation, defeasibility, accidents, and intentions.

Provocation describes the communicative technique where an individual "may claim that the act in question was performed in response to another wrongful act, which understandably provoked the offensive act in question" (Benoit, 1995, p. 76). In other words, this strategy creates a justification for a behavior that seems to have been provoked by another negative behavior. In education this might sound like, "The cuts to our fine arts program

were our only option once the governor announced that he would support a budget that under-funded education."

Defeasibility is defined by the work of Scott and Lyman (1968) as "pleading lack of information about or control over important factors in the situation" (Benoit, 1995, p. 76). Lacking control over the factors of a crisis, or lacking the information to make an effective decision that could have averted the crisis, may allow salient audiences to forgive the organization or individual even though those audiences see them as responsible for the crisis (Rosenfeld, et al., 1995).

Accident strategies are the third variant of evading responsibility. These statements capitalize on the idea that "we tend to hold others responsible only for those factors they can reasonably be expected to control" (Benoit, 1995, p. 76). Benoit used the example, "When people are late to a meeting, we may not hold them completely responsible if unforeseeable traffic congestion caused their tardiness" (p. 76).

The final strategy discussed under the category of evading responsibility was termed good intentions. This deals with the motives behind actions. If a negative act occurs, but the intentions of those responsible were

good, perhaps salient audiences would understand and extend grace to the responsible party. While Ware and Linkugel (1973) said this strategy was a variant of denial, Benoit argued that individuals or organizations are not necessarily denying responsibility when they communicate their motives. In fact, they implicitly concede responsibility, but focus on the intentions that underlie the negative act.

Reducing offensiveness. According to Benoit (1995), there are six variants of this category. These variants are: bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attack accuser, and compensation (p. 95). Reducing offensiveness differs from evading responsibility in that the individual or organization does not deny or try to down-play their responsibility for a negative act. Instead, they accept responsibility but try to communicate that the crisis is not as negative as initially thought.

Bolstering occurs when "increasing positive feeling toward the actor may help offset the negative feelings toward the act" (Benoit, 1995, p. 77). For example, a school district that has cultivated positive relations with the community and, in the past, has demonstrated a

"what's best for the community" attitude in its decision-making will experience less backlash to an unpopular boundary readjustment by appealing to (or bolstering) their past performance. A district may choose to say, "because we have never failed to make student-centered decisions, we want you to know that you can trust us to do this again as we plan our boundary changes."

If the community trusts the district based on their past decisions, they are more likely to support the district's handling of a negative event. Benoit argued that the effectiveness of bolstering as a strategy to reduce the offensiveness of a negative act is limited. If the audience does not see a connection between the negative act and the object being bolstered, they are less likely give credibility to the organization or individual making the statement.

The next strategy under reducing offensiveness is minimization. Benoit stated that this strategy is used to communicate to the offended audience that the negative act is not as bad as it may have first appeared (1995, p. 77). This strategy is most effective when the audience's reaction to a wrongful act has become bigger than necessary, perhaps due to rumors or hysteria. This

strategy serves to place the deed back into a context that more accurately reflects reality.

Differentiation, Benoit's third variant of reducing offensiveness, is a term originally introduced in the literature by Ware and Linkugel (1973). This strategy allows an individual or organization to separate a wrongful deed from other acts that would be mutually agreed upon as more offensive. By drawing this distinction between the two acts, the individual or organization hopes to reduce the offensiveness of the negative act by comparison.

Transcendence is the term Benoit used for his fourth variant of reducing offensiveness. Originally used in the Ware and Linkugel (1973) literature, the term means to place "the [negative] act in a different context," (Benoit, 1995, p. 77) which is viewed more favorably by the affected audience. For example, let's say an administrator chooses to cut the funding for a fine arts program in her school. When this decision causes members of the community to be upset about the loss of the school's play and musical, the principal responds by saying that the budget cuts were necessary to preserve academic courses necessary to maintain accreditation. If

the need to maintain accreditation is more important to the salient audiences, they would be more likely to extend grace for the decision.

Benoit's fifth variant is to attack the accuser. He argued that attacking the accuser can serve to reduce the offensiveness of a negative act because it diverts attention away from the offense. If the audience sees the credibility of the accuser diminished then, perhaps, they will attribute less negativity to the event. For example, the vast right-wing conspiracy strategy employed by Hilary Clinton in defense of her husband's affair with Monica Lewinsky. Notice that Hilary Clinton didn't deny her husband's affair, but by attacking the Republican leadership, she hoped to offset the negativity associated with a marital affair.

Benoit argued that "if the credibility of the source of accusations can be reduced, the damage to one's image from those accusations may be diminished" (1995, p. 78). The notion of attacking one's accuser as a means of reducing offensiveness is also asserted in the works of Rosenfield (1968), Schonbach (1980), Scott and Lyman (1968), Sykes and Matza (1957), and Tedeschi and Reiss (1981). Coombs (1999), however, argued that attacking

the accuser can also be effective if there is no truth to the accusation. In other words, Coombs said that this strategy is more flexible. It can be used when denying culpability altogether, as well as when admitting wrongdoing.

Benoit's (1995) sixth and final variant under the general strategy of reducing offensiveness is compensation. This strategy can communicate a desire to make amends for a wrongful act. Schonbach (1980) identified that offering compensatory remarks like "let me make that up to you," or "the least I can do is pay for your lost time," etc., can offset the negativity associated with an event because something positive is given in return for the negative event. Benoit (1995) said that compensation acts as a bribe of sorts that may outweigh an undesirable event and thus, restore the offender's image.

Corrective action. This strategy, simply put, means the accused "vows to correct the problem" (Benoit, 1995, p. 79). Corrective action can take two forms, "restoring the situation to the state of affairs before the objectionable action" and/or "promising to 'mend one's ways' and make changes to prevent the recurrence of the

undesirable act" (p. 79). Corrective action should not be confused with compensation. Compensation seeks to counterbalance the negative act with the payment (figuratively or literally) of something unrelated but holding a more favorable posture with the audience.

Mortification. This is Benoit's (1995) final strategy. In a nutshell, this means to "confess and beg forgiveness" (Benoit, 2004, p. 269). The term comes from Burke's (1970, 1973) work on literary expression, and Goffman's (1971), and Schonbach's (1980) work on apology. Benoit (2004) illustrated the organization's use of this strategy as a full apology that accepts responsibility when he cited examples from an AT&T response to consumers regarding significant loss of service in 1993. He also illustrated the use of this strategy by an individual when he examined Hugh Grant's use of it (Benoit, 1997a). Benoit said that "if the audience believes the apology is sincere, they may pardon the wrongful act" (2004, p. 269).

Benoit's work was revolutionary in that it was the first to provide a coherent and thorough review of the literature to produce communication strategies effective for image repair. As thorough as his theory was,

however, there still remained a gap between the strategies he advanced and a knowledge base among users that made his strategies pragmatic. The question remained that if improperly used, would the strategies still rebuild one's image?

Research on interpersonal communication would reveal otherwise. "Interpersonal communication research reveals that the type of situation affects the image repair (facework) strategies used by individuals" (Coombs, 1995, p. 448; see also Cupach & Metts, 1990; Metts & Cupach, 1989; and Sharkey & Stafford, 1990). Therefore, in order to bridge this gap, a situational approach to strategy selection is necessary.

Crisis Communication Situational Theory

The next major step in the evolution of crisis communication came when W. Timothy Coombs (1995) advanced his theory for strategy selection based on indicators of attribution inherent in crisis situations. Coombs argued that "the best way to protect the organizational image is by modifying public perceptions of the responsibility for the crisis or impressions of the organization itself" (1995, p. 453). He argued that attribution theory is an appropriate diagnosing paradigm when determining what

strategies an organization should employ to de-escalate a crisis and restore the organization's image.

Attribution theory says that when "faced with the behavior of other persons, human beings often attempt to determine the causes behind these actions" (Baron, 1990, p. 186). Interpersonally, "people make judgments about the causes of events based upon the dimensions of locus, stability, and controllability" (Coombs, 1995, p. 448). Locus involves the degree to which the responsibility for an event is perceived as being internal (within one's control) or external (within the control of the situation). "High personal control and a locus in the actor create perceptions of intentional actions by the actor, whereas low personal control and a locus in the situation foster perceptions of unintentional action" (Coombs & Holladay, 2004, p. 97).

Stability refers to the historicity of an event. If the event happens regularly, it is considered to be stable. If it can be considered an anomaly, the event is unstable. For example, consider the differences between luck and skill (Weiner, 1990). Luck is intermittent and unpredictable. It happens irrespective of intention. Therefore, luck is unstable. Skill, on the other hand,

is repeatable. A person with the skill to do something has the ability to repeat that skill on demand. Skill is, therefore, stable. In attribution theory, the stability or instability of a action creates perceptions of intention on the part of an audience.

Controllability differs from locus (Weiner, 1979). "locus and control, not locus of control... is the proper nomenclature to characterize causes such as ability, effort, luck, and strategy" (Weiner, 1990, p. 7). To illustrate this, consider the difference between effort and ability. Effort has an internal locus while also being controllable. A person can choose to apply effort when he or she wants. Aptitude, on the other hand, is different. Like effort, aptitude's locus is also internal, but unlike effort it cannot be controlled. A person's aptitude is uncontrollable.

The premise of Coombs' Crisis Communication Situational Theory (1995, 1999) is that crisis communication strategy selection is predicated by the level of responsibility affected audiences attribute to the individual or organization. Situations where a low attribution of responsibility is given to the actor, strategies such as attacking one's accusers or denial of

volition or intention may be warranted. In situations where a high degree of responsibility is attributed to the actor, corrective action or mortification (what Coombs called "full apology") would be appropriate.

Conceptual frameworks for Coombs's approach have evolved over time. When he first introduced his theory, he created a crisis-type matrix and series of complicated strategy selection diagrams that he called decision flowcharts. Using attribution theory, Coombs (1995) established a matrix (See Figure 2.3) that identified four crisis types: faux pas, accidents, terrorism, and transgressions. The identification of each of these crisis types comes as the x-axis and the y-axis of the matrix cross. Along the x-axis Coombs placed the intentional-unintentional dimension. Along the y-axis he placed the internal-external dimension.

Coombs argued that two criteria had to be met in order for a workable matrix to be formed. "The

Figure 2.3: Coombs's (1995, p. 455) Crisis Type Matrix

	UNINTENTIONAL	INTENTIONAL
EXTERNAL	Faus Pax	Terrorism
INTERNAL	Accidents	Transgressions

Faux Pas- "an unintentional action that an external agent tries to transform into a crisis" (p. 455). These are non-events that hysteria elevates to a crisis level. Consider the miscue of a track Ashlee Simpson planned to lip-sync to on "Saturday Night Live." The audience expected the performance to be live. Even though many performers will lip-sync for live TV, public coverage in the days following lambasted her for the mistake.

Accidents- an unintentional action that happens within the control of the organization. These are crises such as "product defects, employee injuries, and natural disasters" (p. 456). As an example, the Coca-Cola European contamination crisis of 1999 that resulted in a loss of stock value and profit exceeding \$50 billion ("For Coca-Cola", 1999), began as an accident.

Terrorism- an intentional act that is perpetrated against the organization by an external agent. These are crises such as the Oklahoma City bombing and the events of September 11th. However, they can also be smaller scale events such as the Tylenol poisonings of 1982 and 1986.

Transgressions- an intentional action that happens within the control of the organization. These are exemplified by the image repair issues levied against "big tobacco" when it was discovered that tobacco companies had buried scientific studies that linked their product to cancer.

dimensions of the matrix had to be relevant to Attribution Theory [and] second, the dimensions must be orthogonal so that when the dimensions are crossed, mutually exclusive crisis types are formed" (1995, p. 454).

Coombs's four crisis types are delineated when the x-axis and the y-axis are crossed. Crossing an external locus of control and an unintentional disposition creates the faux pas crisis type. The crisis type terrorism is created when the external dimension crosses with the intentional dimension. When an internal locus of control combines with an unintentional disposition, Coombs says an accident is perceived to have happened. Finally, a transgression crisis type occurs when the locus of control is internal and the negative act was done intentionally.

From each of these crisis type situations created by the crossing of the x-axis and the y-axis of his matrix, a practitioner can go to a decision-making flowchart to select appropriate response strategies that he determined to be effective in rebuilding an organization's image. Figures 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, and 2.7 depict each of these decision flowcharts. This approach

Figure 2.4: Coombs's (1995, p. 463) Faux Pas Decision Flowchart

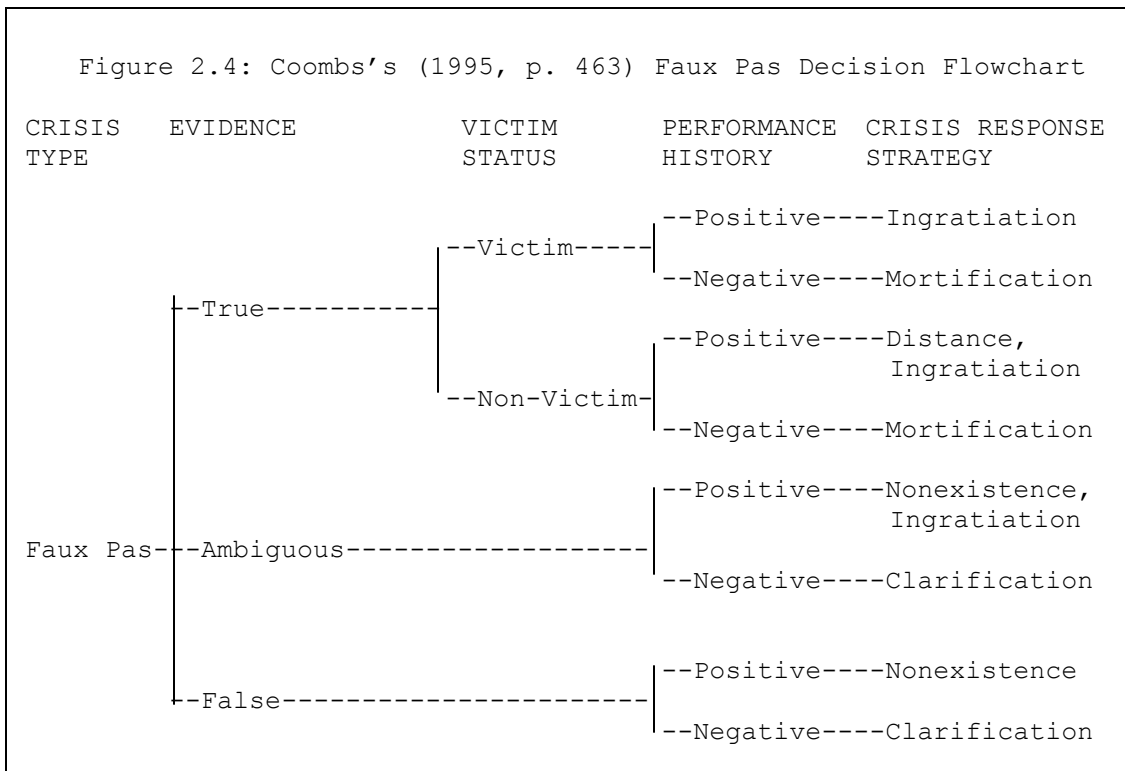


Figure 2.5: Coombs's (1995, p. 465) Accident Decision Flowchart

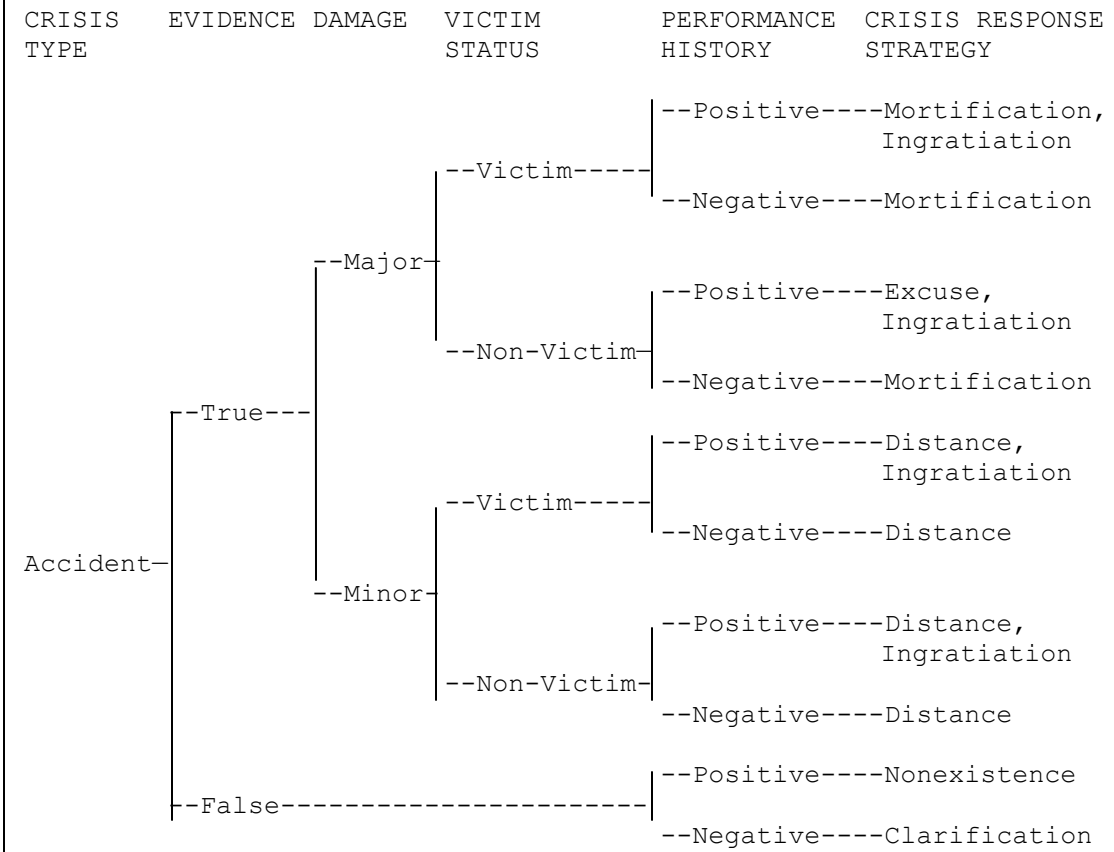


Figure 2.6: Coombs's (1995, p. 467) Transgression Decision Flowchart

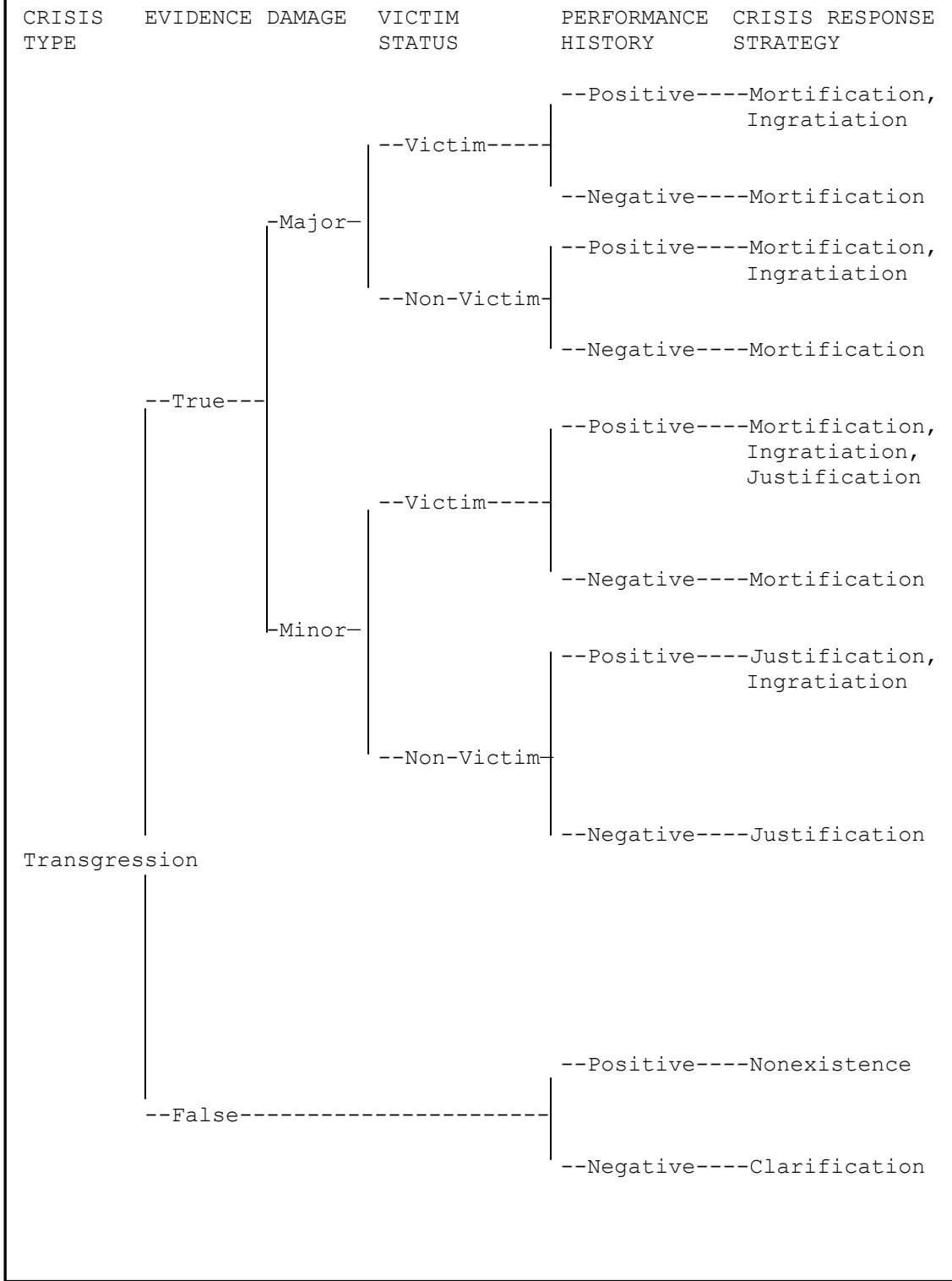
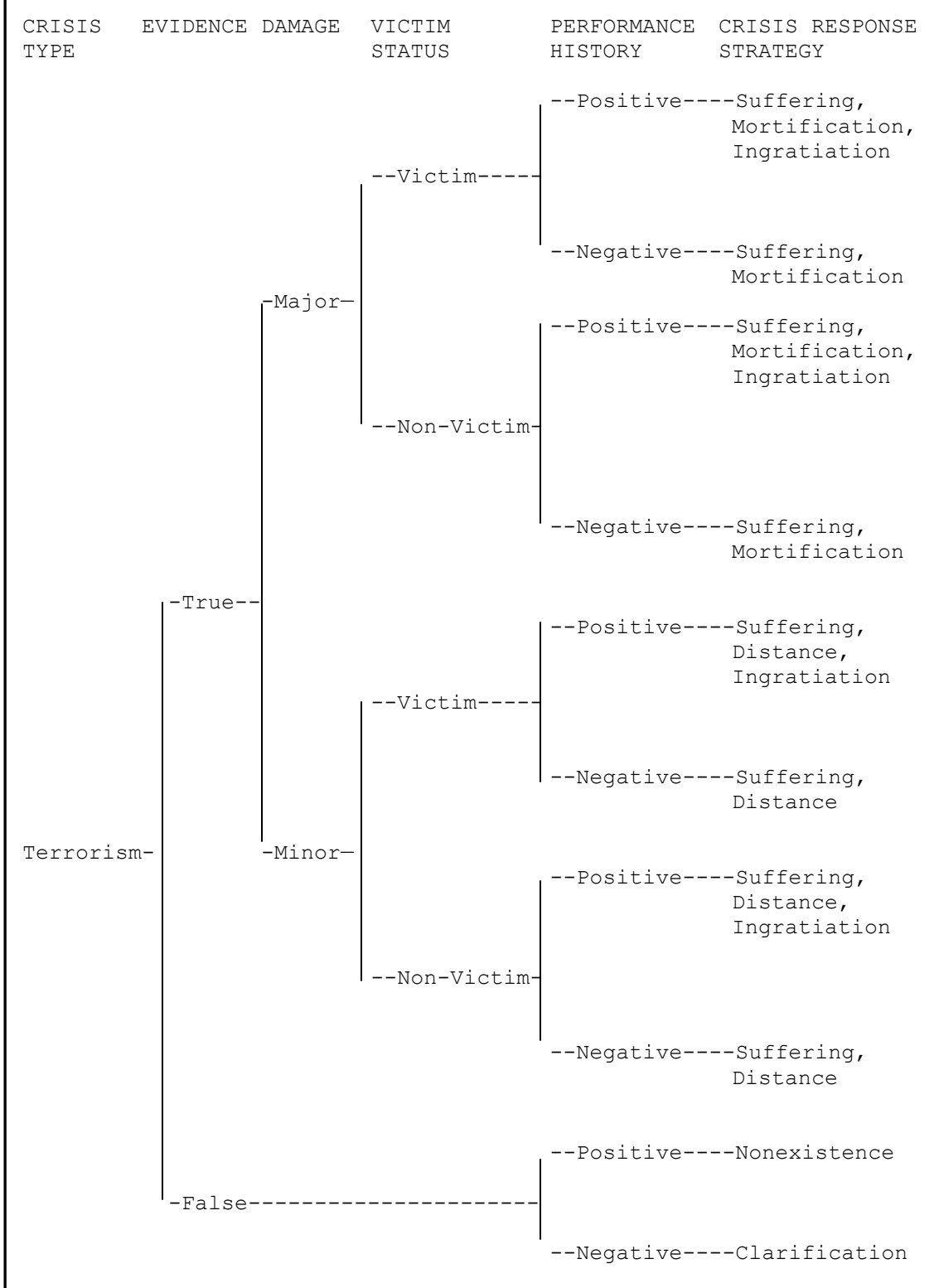


Figure 2.7: Coombs's (1995, p. 468) Terrorism Decision Flowchart

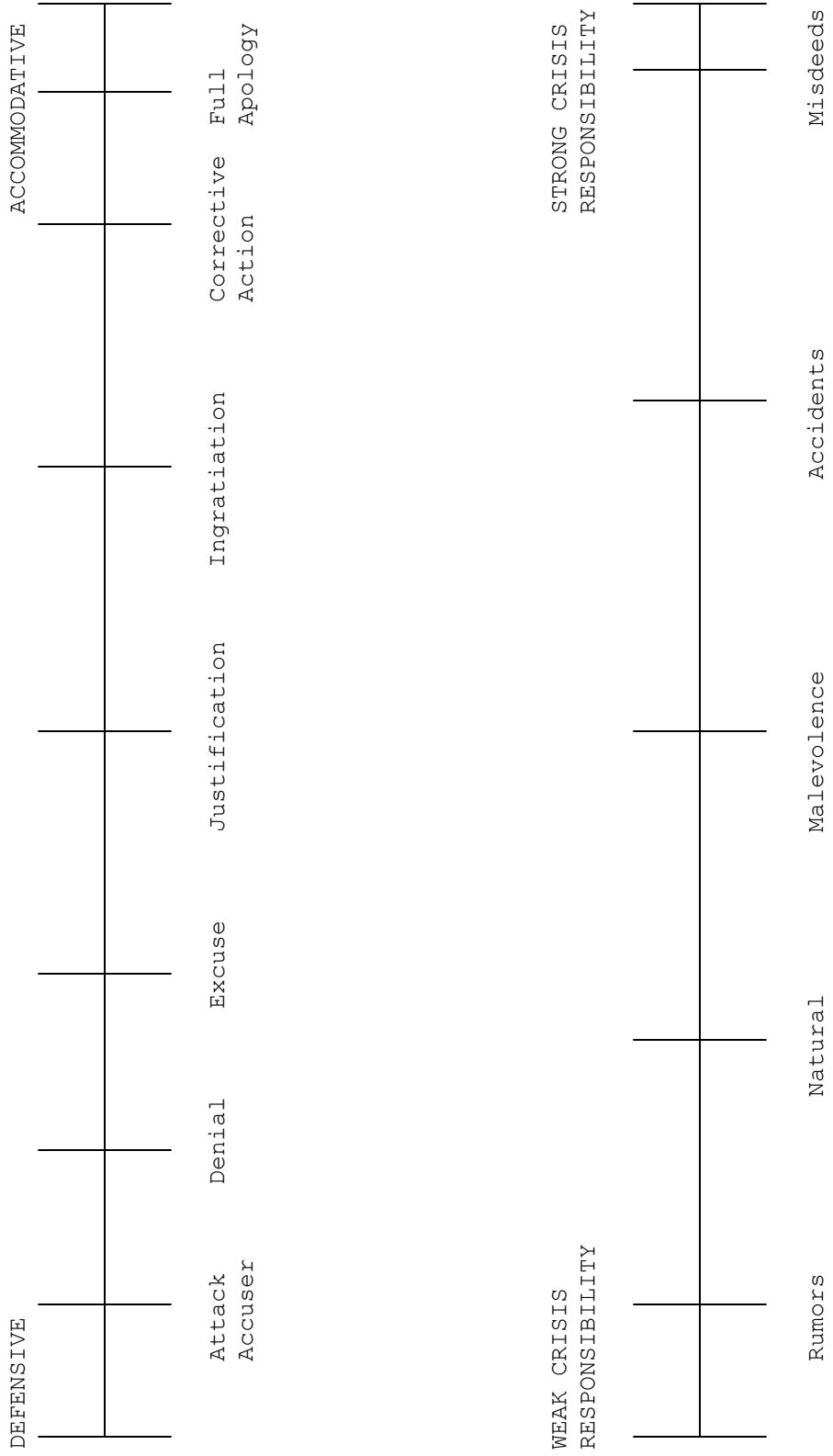


built on Benoit's (1995) research by creating a prescriptive tool that practitioners could use in crisis situations, though was limited. The flowcharts were cumbersome and difficult to interpret. Practitioners would be limited in the crisis situations that would demand an immediate response (e.g. a superintendent who first hears about a situation when a reporter sticks a microphone in her face).

As a result, Coombs (1999) later revised his theory to place crisis situations along a continuum from weak responsibility to strong responsibility (See Figure 2.8). He then lined up communication strategies appropriate to use in each type of situation. He stated that "a more productive approach [to isolating image restoration strategies] is to identify the most common crisis communication strategies and to discover a thread that connects them together" (1999, p. 122). In his revised approach, Coombs chose strategies that were cited as most commonly being used by corporations faced with reputation-altering decisions. His list of strategies were similar to what the literature identified in Benoit's (1995) work.

While this was an important first step in a more

Figure 2.8: Coombs's (1999, p. 124) Continuum of Crisis Strategies



prescriptive approach to crisis communication, Coombs's (1999) work was decidedly focused on corporate crisis communications and not those in the educational arena. This was evident in his use of crisis situations and case studies from corporate America. In Vogelaar (2002), a revised approach based on impression management theory and image restoration discourse theory was created and applied to the educational setting.

The case study focused on Coca-Cola's crisis situation in Europe in 1999 where Coke sold some poor quality products to school children. The beverages made the school children sick with dizziness and vomiting (Deogun, Haggerty, Stecklow, & Johannes, 1999). The situation resulted in 42 students being hospitalized during the first 24 hours of the crisis (Hays, Cowell, & Whitney, 1999).

In this case study, it was determined that Coca-Cola failed to respond appropriately to the situation (Hays, 1999a) due in part because they failed to appropriately diagnose the severity of the crisis. Using Coombs's (1995, 1999) theory of attribution, Coke could have selected strategies of minimizing and distancing. In the case study, they did. "It was not until June 18—10 days

after the first schoolboy became dizzy and nauseated after drinking a Coke—that top company officials arrived in Belgium. And when Coke did begin to respond, it tried to minimize the reports of illness” (Hays, 1999a, p. C1). However, these strategies backfired because Coke failed to take into account the level of undesirability associated with children being among the injured.

According to impression management theory, crisis severity is determined by responsibility attribution *and level of undesirability* (Schlenker, 1980). Coombs’s approach only focused on attribution theory. Schlenker, however, stated that “the more undesirable the event is and the more responsible the actor appears to be for it, the more severe the predicament is” (1980, p. 131). This is an important distinction because in education crises invariably involve children. Having children as victims of a crisis can increase the severity of it simply because the innocence of children makes a situation more undesirable. This appears to be the case regardless of the level of responsibility the offending agent had for the crisis.

In the Coca-Cola case study (Vogelaar, 2002), the first to get sick from the defective products were adults

who drank the beverages in a bar several days prior to the school children. The situation with the adults scarcely drew the attention of the general public. Yet once the children became sick, the situation quickly escalated. In the end, the crisis resulted in the largest beverage recall (17 million cases) and financial loss (around \$50 billion in stock value, \$3.4 million per day in revenue, \$103 million in lost products, and \$35 million in increased marketing costs) in Coca-Cola's 119-year history.

The role children play in escalating crisis severity provides the justification for a revised situational approach to crisis communication. Crisis communication strategy selection based upon impression management theory takes into account the level of perceived negativity associated with a situation along with responsibility attribution. This, therefore, provides the foundation for a revised approach.

As a result, the Image Repair Situational Matrix (Vogelaar, 2002) was created. This matrix resulted in a tool that can be used to guide practitioners to accurately diagnose the severity of a crisis and then points them toward strategies that the literature

identifies as effective to reduce the severity of a crisis. The purpose of this paper is to test the concept of an instructional training program entitled: *What to Say When Crisis Strikes: Image Repair Situational Theory for Educational Leaders*. This involves a test of the Image Repair Situational Matrix. The applicability of and usefulness for such a revised approach to crisis communication in the educational arena is at the center of this study.

Chapters Three and Four describe the manner in which the Image Repair Situational Theory was provided to educational leaders and evaluated for its usefulness in responding to school-related crisis situations. Chapters Five and Six describe the program that was developed to train educational leaders to de-escalate crisis situations that threaten their reputation. The final chapter provides an examination of the issues that flow from such a training program and provides suggestions for its use and for further research in the area of crisis communication training for educational leaders.

Summary

In educational research, the body of knowledge has been incomplete on the issue of crisis communication.

Aside from a barrage of case-studies that allow educational leaders to live vicariously through the mistakes of others, little research has been done to provide principals, superintendents, and other educational leaders with a practical, situational approach to message construction. It is essential for school leaders to have a tool to help construct communication messages. This is because of the unique environment where innocent children are often at the forefront of a crisis. Currently, such typologies are limited in what they offer educational leaders.

In fact, the focus on preparedness for crises in the educational arena have come in the form of crisis management, (Hughes, 2001; Kirsche, 1999; Kowalski, 2002; McKerrow, 2000; Dunn, 2001; Fissel and Owen, 2001) rather than in crisis communication. This lack of emphasis has left a sizable gap in the body of knowledge for educational leaders to tap into when faced with a reputation-altering event (Bagin, 2001; Kowalski, 2001b).

Researchers in other fields, however, have developed various ways of describing and/or evaluating crises that face individuals and organizations (Benoit, 1995; 1997a; 1997b; 2004; Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Benoit & Lindsey,

1987; Benson, 1988; Foss, 1984; Gottschalk, 1993; and Ware & Linkugel, 1973). These approaches have informed the body of knowledge and have been useful in identifying principles for the genres of apologia, image repair, and crisis communication. However, even these studies have been, on the whole, incomplete in guiding practitioners through the decision-making process for choosing appropriate communication strategies when faced with a reputation-altering crisis event.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methodology

Introduction

In this study, the research design used to develop and validate *What to Say When Crisis Strikes: Image Repair Situational Theory for Educational Leaders* followed the pattern set forth for research and development (R & D) prescribed by Borg and Gall (1989). This chapter outlines the components of the R & D methodology, known as the systems approach model of educational research and development (Dick, Carey, & Carey, 2005). While there are many R & D cycles, Dick, Carey, and Carey's (2005) approach was selected because it deals specifically with the research and development of instructional programs. What follows is a description of this cycle and its application to the current instructional program.

R & D Cycle

The R & D methodology has its roots in industry where new products are developed and tested to determine their usefulness in the marketplace. New products are tested through a systematic process to refine the product (Borg, Gall, & Gall, 1996). According to Borg, Gall, and

Gall, this same systematic process can be applied to the educational arena where there is a demand for products which translate theory into practice. By definition, research and development is "a process used to develop and validate educational products" (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 782). This process involves a cycle of

studying research findings pertinent to the product to be developed, developing the product based on these findings, field testing it in the setting where it will be used eventually, and revising it to correct the deficiencies found in the field testing stage. (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 782)

For the purpose of this paper, information relevant to the process identified above is addressed in separate chapters. Chapters One and Two, in the form of a rationale and literature review, deal with "studying research findings pertinent to the product to be developed." Chapters Five, Six, Seven, and Appendices A and B present the Image Repair Situational Matrix as a training model, which was developed "based on [the literature review's] findings." This chapter, along with Chapter Four, describe the methodology associated with "field testing...in the setting where [the program] will be used eventually." The final chapter identifies revisions "to correct the deficiencies found in the field

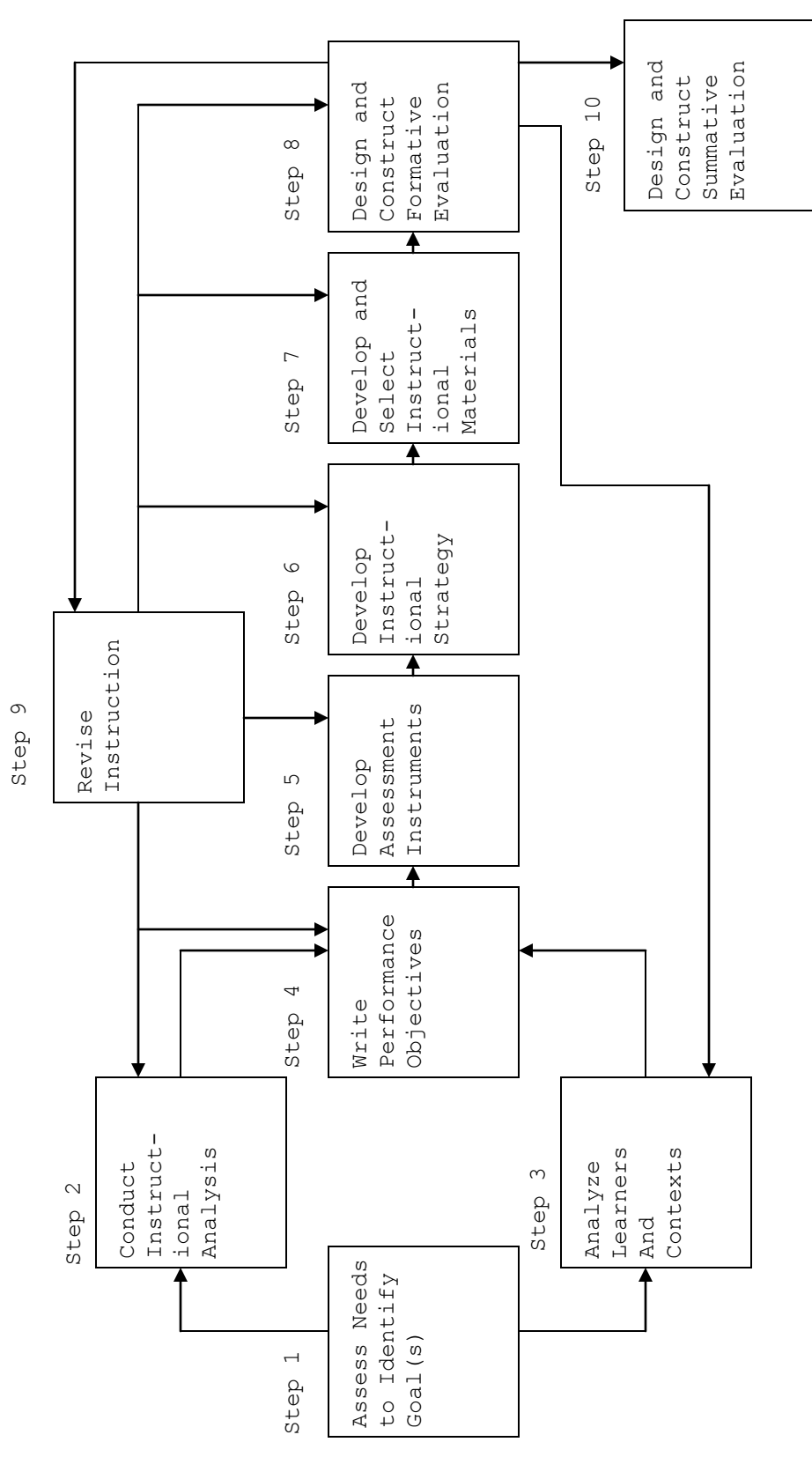
testing stage.” These corrections are noted in Appendix D.

Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) posited that Dick and Carey’s (1990) systems approach to product refinement serves as an effective model for educational R & D projects. The effectiveness of *What to Say When Crisis Strikes: Image Repair Situational Theory for Educational Leaders* will be evaluated and refined using the research of these authors.

Figure 3.1 shows the ten steps in Dick, Carey, and Carey’s (2005) educational R & D methodology. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) argued, however, that if a graduate student were to attempt any R & D cycle for a thesis or dissertation, he or she should “undertake a small-scale project that involves a limited amount of original instructional design” and “limit development to just a few steps of the R & D cycle” (p. 572). For the purposes of this dissertation project, nine of the ten steps will be the focus.

The step that has been omitted has as its purpose to design and conduct a summative evaluation. According to Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003), summative evaluations are “usually done by individuals other than the program

Figure 3.1: Dick, Carey, & Carey's (2005) Systems Approach Model of Educational Research and Development (R & D)



developers" (p. 570). Gall, Gall, and Borg identified Consumers Union, publishers of Consumer Reports as an example of summative evaluators.

Additionally, Dick, Carey, and Carey (2005) stated that "since the summative evaluation usually does not involve the designer of the instruction but instead involves an independent evaluator, this component is not considered an integral part of the instructional design process per se" (p. 8). By limiting the scope of this study to nine of the ten steps, sufficient feedback will be generated to refine an initial proof of concept prior to any full-scale summative evaluation. Therefore, limiting the scope of this study to nine of the ten steps of the systems approach model is justifiable.

The nine steps of Dick, Carey, and Carey's (2005) systematic approach model for educational research and development focused on in this paper are: (1) assess needs to identify goal(s), (2) conduct instructional analysis, (3) analyze learners and contexts (4) write performance objectives, (5) develop assessment instruments, (6) develop instructional strategy, (7) develop and select instructional materials,

(8) design and conduct formative evaluation of instruction, and (9) revise instruction. A description of each step in the cycle follows along with its application to the current study.

Assess Needs to Identify Goal(s)

The first step in the R & D cycle is represented by the rationale and review of literature sections of this paper. Need is assessed through the body of work synthesized in Chapters One and Two. These chapters show a need to equip educational leaders with the skills to assess the severity of a crisis they might face in their careers and the ability to select communication strategies appropriate to respond to such a crisis. Vogelaar's (2002) Image Repair Situational Matrix was created in response to this need in the corporate sphere. Chapter One addresses how this need is also prevalent among educational leaders. Vogelaar's (2002) matrix guides practitioners through the process of assessing the severity of a crisis and selecting appropriate communication strategies effective for image repair.

This paper takes Vogelaar's (2002) work and develops the training program and materials necessary for educational leaders to gain confidence using the Image

Repair Situational Matrix. The training program is designed to be delivered in a 90-minute workshop-style format with the following instructional goals:

1. to synthesize the theoretical literature relevant to impression management, image restoration discourse, attribution theory, and crisis communication theory
2. to clearly present and make usable to educational leaders the body of knowledge concerning impression management, image restoration discourse, attribution theory, and crisis communication theory
3. to equip educational leaders with the ability to accurately diagnose the severity of crisis situations
4. to equip educational leaders with the ability to choose appropriate image repair strategies that the literature indicates are effective for repairing a damaged reputation
5. to provide educational leaders with sufficient guided and independent practice using the Image Repair Situational Matrix in order to improve

their confidence with this communication
strategy selection tool

Conduct Instructional Analysis

The second step in Dick, Carey, and Carey's (2005) approach to educational research and development involves conducting an instructional analysis. The purpose of this step is to "identify the specific skills, procedures, and learning tasks that are involved in reaching the goals of instruction" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003, p. 570). For the training program that is at the center of this study, the skills include the development of a theoretical knowledge base on Image Repair Situational Theory. Learning tasks involve practice using the Image Repair Situational Matrix. The theoretical knowledge base comes from the content included in Chapter Five. The practice involves the case studies and discussions included in Chapter Six.

The final part necessary to complete the second step of Dick, Carey, and Carey's (2005) R & D cycle is the procedure for the 90-minute workshop. This is described in Appendix A. This appendix includes the PowerPoint™ presentation for the workshop. In this material, the procedure for training is laid out in a scope and

sequence that enables participants to meet the program's intended goals. This training program is the subject of the formative evaluation to be discussed in step eight of the R & D cycle.

Analyze Learners and Contexts

The third step in the R & D cycle is designed to "identify the learners' entry skills and attitudes, the characteristics of the instructional setting, and the characteristics of the setting in which the new knowledge and skills are to be used" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003, p. 570). This step is "designed to identify the level of entry behaviors (sometimes called enabling objectives) that learners bring to the learning task" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005, p. 459). This step is relevant to the development of instructional programs in that effective instructional designs need to meet participants at their learning levels or knowledge base when they come into the training session.

Carol Ann Tomlinson (2002) identifies entry behaviors as affected by readiness, interest, and learning profile. Readiness deals with the learner's background knowledge. Interest focuses on the learner's level of desire upon entering the lesson. Learning

profile deals with the variety of modalities through which individuals learn best.

Generally speaking, people's learning profiles vary depending on the way they best process information. Some people are visual learners, while others are more auditory, and still others are more kinesthetic. Visual learners process information graphically. Auditory learners need time to speak out what they are learning. In other words, they need to hear themselves talk about the new information. Finally, kinesthetic learners need to process new information by manipulating it in some way. These people are "doers" who like to roll up their sleeves and try things out.

The training program developed for this study has built into it a pre-assessment component to gauge readiness level. This is followed up with a discussion of the reasons educational leaders are drawn to this type of training. This activity is designed to check the interest level of the participant. Also, the training program has several activities built in that allow participants to process the information visually, auditorally, and kinesthetically. Appendix A displays the training program that includes all of these elements.

This training program was developed with the contexts of the learners in mind. Because the primary audience is educational leaders, the learning context takes into account the setting in which the learners will use the information. The case studies were derived from actual incidences encountered by principals, assistant superintendents, and superintendents. Topics for the case studies were authenticated by school leaders from four suburban, one urban, and one rural school district. The intent was that the examples represent true-to-life events that school leaders can reasonably expect to encounter.

Write Performance Objectives

In the fourth step, Dick, Carey, and Carey (2005) advocated the need to develop performance objectives for the instructional program. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2005) stated that this step involves "specific statements (called performance objectives) of what the learners will be able to do after instruction" (p. 460). These objectives should be specific and behavioral in nature. In other words, the instructor needs to know exactly what the learners should know and be able to do as a result of this training.

For What to Say When Crisis Strikes: Image Repair Situational Theory for Educational Leaders, the following performance objectives have been identified:

1. Workshop participants will understand the limitations of crisis response strategies
2. Workshop participants will understand the factors that cause people to become angry
3. Workshop participants will understand the two contributory factors that cause crisis situations to escalate
4. Workshop participants will be able to evaluate the effectiveness of crisis communications by examining real-life examples where strategies have been used
5. Workshop participants will be able to analyze a crisis situation using image repair situational theory in order to determine the situation's severity
6. Workshop participants will be able to apply image repair communication strategies most appropriate to use in response to a crisis situation

These performance objectives are designed to be met during the 90-minute workshop training. Step five identifies the assessment tool that will be used to determine the quality and quantity of the participant's learning experience.

Develop Assessment Instruments

This step addresses the need for an instructional educational program to have an assessment instrument "directly related to the knowledge and skills specified in the performance objectives" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003, p. 570). Because the nature of this educational program is to be delivered in a workshop, more informal assessment measures are appropriate.

Participants for this program would most likely be experiencing it at a professional conference such as one hosted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals or the National Staff Development Council. In this type of workshop environment it would be inappropriate to require participants to engage in a written formal assessment such as an exit exam. Additionally, because this training does not result in any type of certification like that required for MANDT™ training or First Aid/CPR training, litigious reasons

would not make it necessary to require a formal assessment.

With that said, however, it should be noted that an assessment of the workshop's performance objectives is still necessary, especially in the formative evaluation stage of this educational program. This assessment will occur in both of the following ways. First, informal assessments during the guided practice portions of the workshop will allow for the proper monitoring of understanding and the exhibition of the participant's abilities. Second, the instrument used to complete step eight in the R & D cycle will focus on the degree to which the performance objectives of the workshop were met. See Appendix C for a copy of the instrument to be used in the formative evaluation of the educational program.

Develop Instructional Strategy

This is the sixth step in the R & D cycle. In this step the goal is to provide the instructional strategy that will assist "learners with their efforts to achieve each performance objective" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003, p. 570). The instructional program that is described in Appendix A follows the basic structure identified by

Dick, Carey, and Carey (2005). "The [instructional] strategy will emphasize components to foster student learning including preinstructional activities, presentation of content, learner participation, assessment, and follow-through activities" (p. 7). Madeline Hunter's design for instruction follows this same pattern. While the program does not follow Hunter's model sequentially, all parts are present.

An anticipatory set is utilized in the beginning of the workshop to help learners tap into their prior knowledge in dealing with crisis situations. The goals and objectives are stated clearly for the participants. Input is provided based on the content of Chapter Five. The process of diagnosing the severity of a crisis and strategy selection is modeled for the participants through an examination of a few test-case scenarios.

Once a sufficient foundation has been laid for the content, the workshop attendees will have opportunities to practice using the Image Repair Situational Matrix. This practice is guided at first. After evidence is present to warrant moving on from the guided practice, the participants will then have the opportunity to engage in some independent practice. These stages make up the

instructional strategies that are used when presenting the workshop to school leaders. For more specific information of the content, scope, and sequence of these instructional strategies, see Appendix A.

Develop and Select Instructional Materials

The materials created for this program serve the purpose of providing "guidance for learners, instructional materials, and assessments" (Dick, Carey, & Carey, 2005, p. 7) designed to meet the performance objectives. These materials include handouts, audiovisual material, and other manipulatives as necessary. Appendix A and B detail these materials.

Design and Conduct Formative Evaluation of Instruction

This step in the systematic approach to educational R & D involves two separate parts. The first one involves the designing of the formative evaluation. This includes identifying the purpose of the evaluation, the research design, the population and sample, and the collection method of the data from the workshop. The second deals with actually conducting the evaluation. Dick, Carey, and Carey (2005) stated that "the purpose for the formative evaluation is to pinpoint specific errors in the materials in order to correct them" (p.

279). With this purpose in mind, the research design used to improve *What to Say When Crisis Strikes: Image Repair Situational Theory for Educational Leaders* is laid out as follows:

Purpose of the evaluation. The purpose of this formative evaluation is for participants to describe the usefulness and applicability of the educational program created to train educational leaders on the Image Repair Situational Matrix. This evaluation includes the usefulness and applicability of all the materials associated with the training, including the theories presented in the workshop. This objective is made measurable by the following definitions (Fink, 2003).

For the purpose of this study, usefulness is defined as the extent to which workshop participants find value in the content of the training to help them become more effective communicators in times of crisis.

Applicability is defined as the extent to which workshop participants believe they will use this training when thinking about and planning their responses to crisis situations.

Research design. This researcher proposes to use a cross-sectional research design that presents a portrait

of one group's reactions at a particular time to the educational product created to train educational leaders. Because this phase involves a formative evaluation designed to obtain feedback which would be used to improve the delivery of the content and training associated with the Image Repair Situational Matrix, a cross-sectional, descriptive research design is appropriate.

According to Fink (2003), the benefit of a cross-sectional design is that it "provides baseline information on survey participants and descriptive information about an intervention" (p. 69). Because this study provides an intervention in the form of a training program in crisis communication (specifically, the situational matrix), participant opinions will inform this researcher on the usefulness and applicability of the educational training that forms the object of this study.

Data will be collected using a survey instrument of ten questions. These questions will seek to gather information concerning the degree to which participants agree with each statement. A Likert-type scale will be used where one equals "strongly disagree" and five equals

"strongly agree" (see Appendix C for a copy of the data collection sheet). This data will be gathered and used to improve the proof of concept prior to any third-party summative evaluations being planned.

Population and sample. Because the purpose of *What to Say When Crisis Strikes: Image Repair Situational Theory for Educational Leaders* is to prepare administrators and superintendents with the skills to respond in crisis situations, the population is made up of men and women who serve in leadership roles in schools and districts nationwide. More practically speaking, however, the purpose of this proof of concept is to gain feedback sufficient to improve the educational design of the workshop. Because of this, it is not important that the views of the participants represent their colleagues from around the country. Instead, what matters is that their viewpoints represent the suggestions necessary to improve the usefulness and applicability of the training materials and content.

This is not to say, however, that representative responses are completely unnecessary. Because this training program is specifically designed with educational leaders in mind, this includes the target

audience. The participants, therefore, include ten individuals who are employed in district leadership positions as superintendents of their respective districts. In addition, the sample includes school leaders from urban, suburban, and rural districts. This is a priority because the case studies used in the training program should appeal to the types of crisis issues that are faced by school leaders representing diverse schools and districts.

Participants were selected for involvement in this formative evaluation through the use of a participant letter inviting school leaders to attend a 90-minute training workshop. The letter identified that the training would help them become more effective developers of communication messages in response to crisis situations that threaten the reputations of their respective districts.

Nominal data was collected in the study in order to determine the level of leadership from which the improvement suggestions are derived. Confidentiality is preserved by reporting results in the aggregate, either as a whole or by whether the leadership perspectives are from a building or district level. This ensures that no

individual data is accessible. Furthermore, no particular individuals are identified in the study.

Data collection method. This formative evaluation will rely upon data collected from educational leaders at the district level. These superintendents will participate in a 90-minute workshop entitled: *What to Say When Crisis Strikes: Image Repair Situational Theory for Educational Leaders*. Data will be collected on a questionnaire (see Appendix C) designed to obtain feedback on the usefulness and applicability of the training program and materials. Participants will complete the questionnaire immediately following the training.

The data collected will be primarily in response to a Likert-type scale; however, opportunity is given for participants to add narrative data in response to the prompt: "suggestions for improvement." Participants will be required to complete the questionnaire at the workshop and turn it in before leaving the training environment. All questionnaires will be sealed in an envelope and secured in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home.

Revise Instruction

The ninth step (and final one for the purpose of this study) in Dick, Carey, and Carey's (2005) educational research and development (R & D) cycle is designed for the purpose of improving the instructional materials under development. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2005) describe this step as the time for the developers to either revise the product based on the results of the formative evaluation or to discontinue development if appropriate (p. 460). Dick, Carey, and Carey (2005) describe the purpose of this step in greater detail.

There are two basic types of revisions you will consider with your materials. The first is changes that are made to the content or substance of the materials to make them more accurate or more effective as a learning tool. The second type of change is related to the procedures employed in using your materials. (p. 315)

The results of the formative evaluation are used to provide revision decisions regarding the training materials and workshop design of *What to Say When Crisis Strikes: Image Repair Situational Theory for Educational Leaders*. These revisions are discussed in detail in Chapter Seven. In addition to the suggested revisions, Chapter Seven also includes the recommendations for future use of the training materials and workshop, as

well as suggestions for further study and research. Regarding those recommendations, the usefulness and applicability of the training materials are examined in light of the feedback associated with crisis situations faced by educational leaders on both the building and district levels.

Summary

This chapter has presented the methods to be used to gather and collect suggestions for the improvement of *What to Say When Crisis Strikes: Image Repair Situational Theory for Educational Leaders*. The purpose of the formative evaluation, the research design, the population and sample, and the collection method of the data from the workshop have been discussed. Chapter Four presents the results of the questionnaire data collected. This includes the statistical procedure used in the data collection process and the results of the formative evaluation process to improve the development of the materials and workshop delivery of this educational research and development project.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Introduction

On May 31, 2005, *What to Say When Crisis Strikes: Image Repair Situational Theory for Educational Leaders* was presented to an expert panel of nine superintendents from around the state of Missouri. The purpose of this workshop was to deliver the content of the training program, have participants interact with the material, and then receive input from them on the overall usefulness and applicability of the theory for educational leaders.

According to Dick, Carey, and Carey (2005), the workshop served the purpose of receiving formative feedback to evaluate the product being developed. Once the workshop was over and information was collected, steps were taken to improve the training materials based on the superintendents' feedback. Changes adopted reflect an initial formative evaluation of the product. Revisions to the workshop materials based on the feedback of the participants can be found in Appendix D.

This chapter describes, first, the environment and context of the training. Second, the background of those

who made up the expert panel of superintendents is disclosed. Third, the results of the participants' feedback is discussed. This final part of the chapter focuses on two types of data: the quantitative results of the participants' response to ten indicators, and their qualitative feedback through an open-ended prompt. The information obtained from the focus group is recorded in the aggregate to ensure the confidentiality of those who participated in the training.

Environment and Context

The workshop, *What to Say When Crisis Strikes: Image Repair Situational Theory for Educational Leaders*, was presented to a group of nine superintendents serving districts of a variety of sizes and demographics. The workshop was delivered at a conference in a central location for all attendees. Participants were present for reasons other than this workshop, but this presentation was a scheduled part of the day's agenda.

Participants were told in advance that they would be receiving training on effective communication in crisis situations. They were also told ahead of time to come to the workshop with an experience where they had personally encountered a crisis situation that required them to

respond to stakeholders through the media or other type of press conference. This was done in order to prepare participants for the topic of study, as well as easily bring to mind background experiences common to everyone in the group.

The workshop was scheduled for ninety minutes in the afternoon immediately following lunch. Participants were given a packet of information that followed the content of the presentation. The packet had notes from a PowerPoint presentation and supplementary material from the content of Chapters Five, Six, and Seven of this paper.

Background of Participants

The participants have been serving in their first or second year as superintendents of their respective districts. They represented districts of varying sizes. Some districts were rural with student populations of less than a thousand. Other districts were classified as suburban with student populations over ten thousand. All of the participants were members of a consortium of school leaders who were serving for the first time in the role of superintendent. The purpose of the group is to

provide training and networking opportunities to improve their skills as educational leaders.

The group of nine superintendents was mostly male (see Figure 4.1). Their experience in education varied widely. Two participants identified that they have been in their profession between twelve and nineteen years. Four declared that they have been in education twenty to twenty-three years, with the remaining three members indicating twenty-four to thirty-one years of experience in education (see Figure 4.2).

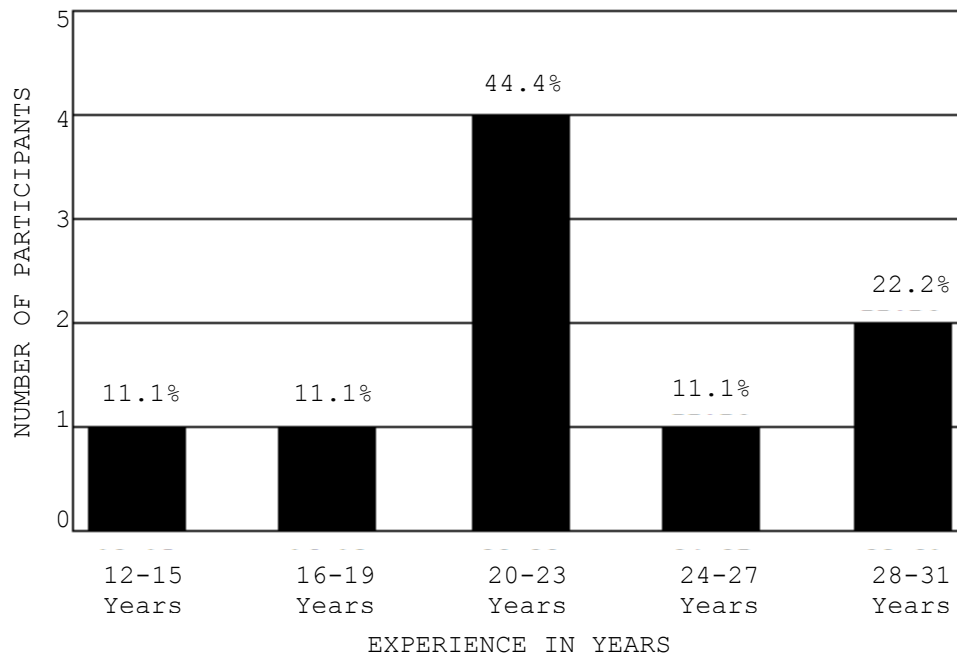
Participants were also questioned regarding their experience handling crisis situations. These questions focused on three different experiences. The first dealt with the extent to which participants had experience responding to angry students. The second question related to the extent to which participants had experience handling angry parents. The third question focused on the frequency that each participant had to repair the reputation of their school district. These questions seek to identify the participants' experience with three different sources for external crisis situations: students, parents, and community.

The questions asked respondents to identify their

Figure 4.1: Participants Identified by Gender (n=9)



Figure 4.2: Participants' Years of Experience in Education (n=9)



level of experience with each type of situation. The participants were given the following selected response options from which to choose: daily, multiple times weekly, weekly, monthly, multiple times yearly, yearly, rarely, or never. On average, these superintendents dealt with angry students the least (see Figure 4.3).

They responded that most of their crisis management time is spent dealing with parents (see Figure 4.4). In fact, eighty-nine percent of the superintendents responded that they deal with angry parents monthly, weekly, or multiple times weekly. Whereas, only twenty-two percent said they deal with angry students as frequently.

Finally, participants showed the most diverse experiences when it came to repairing the reputation of their district (see Figure 4.5). One responded that he is engaged on a weekly basis with having to repair his school district's reputation. On the other hand, three others said they rarely ever have to do this. Most of the respondents, however, said they are engaged in having to repair their district's image anywhere from monthly to multiple times yearly.

Figure 4.3: Frequency at Which Participants Responded to Angry Students Within the Last Year (n=9)

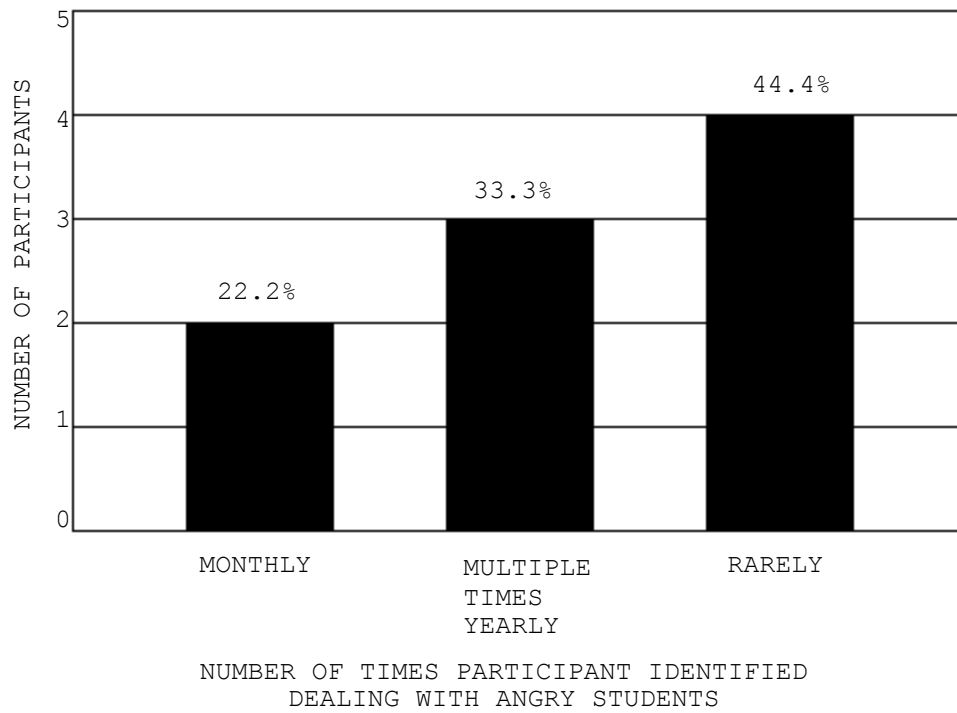


Figure 4.4: Frequency at Which Participants Responded to Angry Parents Within the Last Year (n=9)

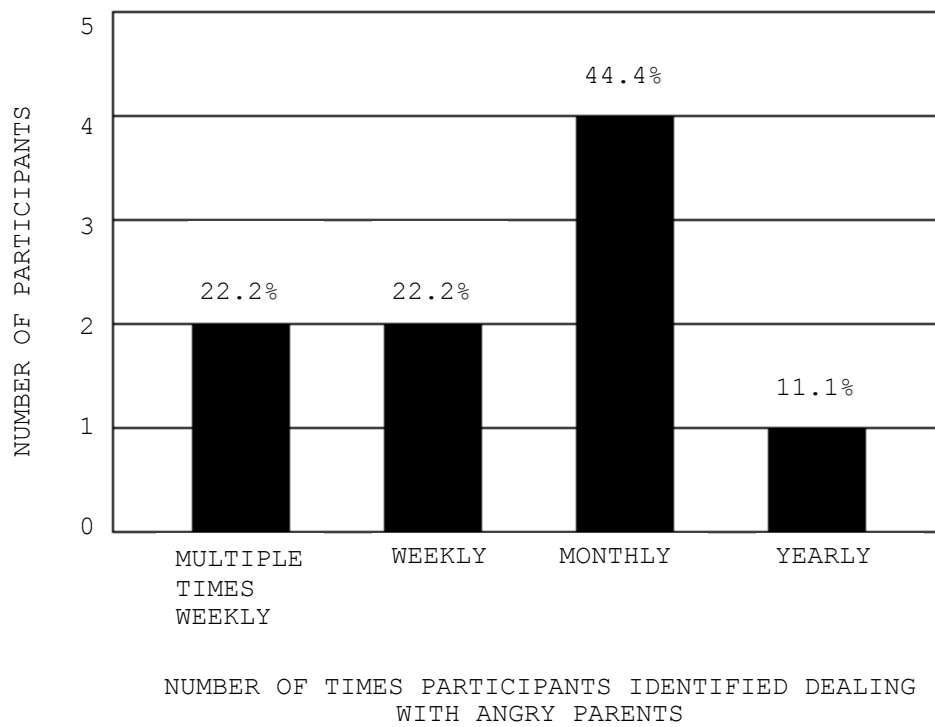
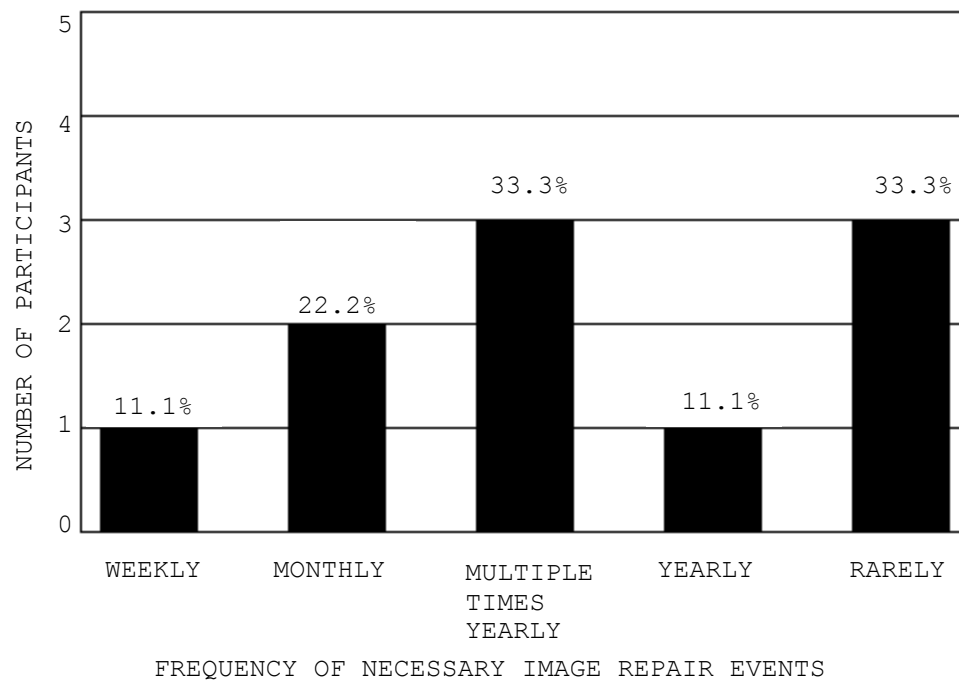


Figure 4.5: Frequency at Which Participants Feel They Have to Repair the Image or Reputation of Their District (n=9)



*Total equals ten because one participant marked two responses

Feedback Results

The feedback received from this formative evaluation served two purposes. The first was to acquire information that would shed light on the usefulness and applicability of the training materials and content. In other words, this study sought to discover if the training was valuable enough to educational leaders, that this expert panel would recommend the continued development of the product. The second purpose was to glean feedback from the session participants that could be used to make initial improvements to the workshop training materials and content.

Usefulness and Applicability

Participants were given a feedback form at the conclusion of the training workshop. They were asked to fill out their responses to ten statements. Their response choices followed a Likert-type scale format. The scale was rated one to five, one meaning the participant strongly disagreed with the statement that preceded it. A score of five meant the participant strongly agreed with the statement.

Scores of two, three, and four were used to indicate slight variations from the two extremes. In evaluating

the training curriculum, scores of four or five were on the agreement side of the continuum and scores of one or two were on the disagreement side. A score of three was considered to be "neither agree nor disagree," and was interpreted as a comment of no opinion.

The ten indicators attempted to gauge participant satisfaction in two major areas: first, in response to the training process, and second, in response to the training content. Statements one, two, three, and four focused on the way the training communicated the content. Statements five, six, seven, eight, and nine sought information specific to the content of the Image Repair Situational Theory. Statement ten asked for an overall impression concerning the entire training experience. It asked if they would recommend the training to their colleagues.

On the whole, participant satisfaction with the training workshop was extremely positive (Table 4.1). The superintendents who participated in the workshop found the training easy to understand and valuable to

Table 4.1: Participant Reaction to Training (n=9)					
Question	1	2	3	4	5
1. Training provided useful information about de-escalating crisis situations and image repair	0/9 0%	0/9 0%	0/9 0%	6/9 67%	3/9 33%
2. Training provided sufficient grounding in theory and research	0/9 0%	0/9 0%	1/9 11%	3/9 33%	5/9 56%
3. Training provided a practical application of the theory and research	0/9 0%	0/9 0%	1/9 11%	4/9 44%	4/9 44%
4. Training helped me to understand the factors that define the severity of a crisis	0/9 0%	0/9 0%	1/9 11%	3/9 33%	5/9 56%
5. Image Repair Situational Matrix helps me to think about selecting response strategies appropriate to the severity of a crisis	0/9 0%	0/9 0%	1/9 11%	4/9 44%	4/9 44%
6. Image Repair Situational Matrix is something I can use when I face a crisis situation	0/9 0%	0/9 0%	1/9 11%	4/9 44%	4/9 44%
7. Would use Image Repair Situational Matrix when assessing the severity of a crisis	0/9 0%	0/9 0%	1/9 11%	5/9 56%	3/9 33%
8. Would use Image Repair Situational Matrix when choosing communication strategies in response to a crisis situation	0/9 0%	0/9 0%	1/9 11%	6/9 67%	2/9 22%
9. Image Repair Situational Matrix helps me to frame my understanding of a crisis	0/9 0%	0/9 0%	0/9 0%	6/9 67%	3/9 33%
10. Would recommend this training to my colleagues	0/9 0%	0/9 0%	0/9 0%	2/9 22%	7/9 78%
LEGEND: 1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Neutral 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree					

their profession. Their highest rating was following the statement, "I would recommend this training to my colleagues." To this statement, 78% of the panel selected "strongly agree" and 22% selected "agree." All participants were in agreement. None of the participants were neutral or in disagreement.

In fact, 100% of the respondents also agreed or strongly agreed with two other statements, "the training provided useful information about de-escalating crisis situations and image repair," and "The Image Repair Situational Matrix helps me to frame my understanding of a crisis." Lastly, eight out of the nine superintendents either agreed or strongly agreed with the remaining seven indicators. The ninth superintendent stated that she "neither agreed nor disagreed" with those seven indicators.

None of the superintendents were in disagreement with any of the ten indicators. Five of the nine superintendents stated that they strongly agreed that the training was sufficiently grounded in the literature and that the research was practically applied. On these two indicators, three other superintendents agreed and the one remaining took a position of neutrality.

Suggestions for Improvement

The second goal of the formative evaluation was to solicit feedback from the expert panel that would lead to improvements in the training process and content. This information was gathered from participants in answer to an open-ended prompt. The prompt stated, "Use the space below to offer any suggestions that might improve the Image Repair Situational Theory as a tool for rebuilding reputation and/or de-escalating crisis situations." Eight of the nine superintendents provided a response to the prompt.

This section analyzes the narratives made by each participant. Their feedback has been clustered around general themes of common statements that emerged from the analysis. Five general categories of feedback were classifiable. These themes are labeled: (1) Process Critical, (2) Process Friendly, (3) Content Critical, (4) Content Friendly, and (5) Overall Supportive. Table 4.2 lists the number of comments under each common theme and identifies appropriate sub-themes.

Comments that were considered to be "Process Critical" came from those suggestions that were focused on improving the process by which the content of the

Table 4.2: Narrative Analysis Results (n=8)			
General Theme	Gross Remarks	Net Remarks	Sub Themes
1. Process Critical	7	3	a. Case Studies (3) b. Session Length (3) c. Pre/Post Test (1)
2. Process Friendly	2	2	a. Case Studies (1) b. Presentation of Content (1)
3. Content Critical	1	1	a. Improve Matrix (1)
4. Content Friendly	4	2	a. Good Matrix (1) b. Timely Material (3)
5. Overall Supportive	3	2	a. Approval (2) b. Appreciation (1)
Total "Critical" suggestions = 8 (4 Net)			
Total "Friendly" suggestions = 9 (6 Net)			
NOTE: "Gross" is defined as the raw number of comments under each general theme; "Net" is defined as the number of unique comments under each general theme after like comments were grouped together into sub-themes.			

training was delivered. "Process Friendly" comments were those comments that suggested that the process of the training was fine as it was presented. "Content Critical" comments were those suggestions that called for improvements to the theory or its supporting elements. "Content Friendly" suggestions communicated praise for the workshop's content. Finally, "Overall Supportive" comments were those of general positive miscellaneous feedback rather than focused suggestions for improvement.

Process Critical. Seven suggestions for improvement were focused on the process around which the content of the training was delivered. These seven suggestions centered around three major areas, called sub-themes within the "Process Critical" category. Three suggestions focused on using or improving the use of case studies to illustrate the meaning of each strategy or just to give better practice using the strategies.

Comments that were applied to this sub-theme were:

Give several concrete examples for each definition. Users are not scholars and need more examples.

For training models use specific examples from media to illustrate definitions.

I think it is important for time to be spent in situational analysis. Many of the case studies imply that the correct response to a situation can

de-escalate the crisis. All too often, the situation or crisis hits the superintendent at a high emotional level that could have and should have been resolved at the building level.

The next three suggestions under the "Process Critical" theme were placed into the sub-theme dealing with the length of the session. These suggestions all asked for more time to go through the material. One even suggested an appropriate length of time. Suggestions under this sub-theme were:

A longer presentation on the materials would be valuable. [Ninety minutes] was just enough to shape interest but not long enough to get 'in-depth' with crisis management.

Too much info in a short time. However, I think it would be a great half day to go over with staff. Keep refining it!

You provided a good familiarization, but I would need more time to study the concepts before applying them.

The final sub-theme dealt with building in a kind of pre-test/post-test component into the process of delivering the content. One participant suggested "starting the presentation with a couple of scenarios." This person's reason for the suggestion was so that "participants would see a change in their own way of thinking when the scenarios are revisited again at the conclusion of the presentation." This suggestion focused

more on contrasting participant knowledge before and after the training rather than actually measuring a level of mastery in a formal sense.

All three sub-themes under the general theme of "Process Critical" focused on the delivery of the content rather than on the content itself. This general theme received the largest number of comments from the participants.

Process Friendly. The next general theme also focused on the process, but were comments that affirmed decisions within the status quo of the training rather than offered suggestions for improvement. Under this general theme emerged two sub-themes, one for each comment. The first sub-theme focused on the case studies. The participant wrote, "The scenarios are an excellent way to look at the application of your work."

The second sub-theme dealt with the presentation of the material utilizing a PowerPoint presentation, handout materials, and a combination of direct instruction and guided and independent practice. This participant noted, "[The material] was presented in an interesting and informative manner."

Overall, participants offered more suggestions to improve the process of delivering the content of the training than offering support of the existing model. Thematically, session length and use or placement of case studies were the dominant themes. These themes were dominant not only within the process category, but also over all the themes.

Content Critical. Of all the participant suggestions that focused on the actual content of the presentation, only one was critical. This comment dealt specifically with the Image Repair Situational Matrix, not the theory as a whole. The participant said:

Perhaps you could give more help on the strategies to use within a given level of the matrix. Right now, isolating a level still means choosing from as many as four strategies. Not all four strategies seem to be equally appropriate given different strengths of undesirability.

This suggestion focuses on the user-friendliness of the theory to aid in crisis communication. While the Situational Matrix is designed to point practitioners to strategies the literature says is most effective for repairing one's image, the six level system still leaves room for guessing specific strategies to use. Perhaps a more specific Situational Matrix could avoid this dilemma.

Content Friendly. Participants made four comments that were categorized under this general theme. Of the four comments, there were two groups of like feedback. The first sub-theme commented specifically on the Image Repair Situational Matrix. There was one comment under this sub-theme. The participant said, "Good matrix that helps illustrate the different levels of a crisis."

The second sub-theme under this general theme focused on the timeliness of the content covered. Participants wrote three different comments that were tied to this sub-theme. One superintendent said, "This training is critical for building principals and assistant principals." Another one said, "This is a tool that would help all of us in crisis situations and hopefully prevent making mistakes to make things worse." And another superintendent said simply, "valuable tool for all educators."

Regarding the content-specific comments, only one was critical, suggesting a more user-friendly matrix. Four comments were positive or friendly toward the content of the training. The superintendents who commented in support of the theory corroborate the Likert

scale feedback received in response to the Image Repair Situational Matrix.

Overall Supportive. Remaining comments that neither specifically commented on the process, nor on the content of the training, were placed in a miscellaneous category called "Overall Supportive" and "Overall Negative."

After sorting, no negative responses were given.

Therefore, the "Overall Negative" category was dropped.

Three comments were categorized as "Overall Supportive."

These statements were placed into two sub-theme groups.

One superintendent said, "Great job. Good luck." And

another said, "I think it's right on track." Both of

these statements were added to a sub-theme called

"Approval." Another superintendent said, "I enjoyed the

workshop." This comment was placed into its own sub-

theme entitled "Appreciation."

The two approval comments were categorized as such because they voiced an overall sense that the whole experience (content and process) met with their approval.

The one comment that could not also be categorized as approval focused on the participant's level of enjoyment regarding the training. There was not enough detail in her comment to specify the reason for the enjoyment.

What was clear, however, was that she voiced an appreciation for having the opportunity to participate in the training. For this reason, her comment received its own sub-theme.

Summary

Nine superintendents from different districts around the state of Missouri participated in one ninety-minute workshop entitled: *What to Say When Crisis Strikes: Image Repair Situational Theory for Educational Leaders*. Two pieces of information were solicited from the participants in the study. One piece was designed to receive feedback on the extent to which respondents found the training process and image repair content useful and applicable for educational leaders faced with crisis situations. The second piece was designed to solicit suggestions for improvement for either the training process or the content of the theory.

Overall, the participants were very supportive of the training format as well as the content. However, they offered more suggestions for improvement regarding the process of delivery than they did about the actual content of the theory and its applicability to educational leaders. In fact, the only suggestions for

improvement to the content of the training regarded the user-friendliness of the Image Repair Situational Matrix, not the theory that supported it.

When cross-analyzing the feedback from the ten statement Likert scale with the critical analysis of the narratives, no major revisions of the training or materials need to take place. Some minor adjustments regarding the test-case scenarios and the amount of time set aside for the workshop will need to take place prior to any further formative evaluations or a summative evaluation.

The next three chapters focus on the content of *What to Say When Crisis Strikes: Image Repair Situational Theory for Educational Leaders*. Chapter Five presents the research supporting the Image Repair Situational Theory. Chapter Six addresses the Image Repair Situational Matrix. Chapter Seven provides ten test-case scenarios for trainees to consider as they apply and gain confidence using the Situational Matrix in response to crisis situations. Finally, Chapter Eight provides a discussion of the formative evaluation and offers suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Image Repair Situational Theory

Introduction

As discussed in Chapter Two, attempts to prescriptively link a crisis situation to strategic responses appropriate to manage the severity of a crisis have been limited (Coombs, 1995, 1999). Previously, the research on crisis communication from a situational approach is presented in a one-dimensional way using attribution theory to guide the practitioner to strategies. This continuum of strategies is marked by a range from defensive responses to accommodative ones based on the perceptions that an audience has regarding the organization's responsibility for the crisis (Coombs, 1999, p. 124).

Regardless of Coombs's approach, however, research in impression management says that the severity of crisis situations are influenced by two competing factors. The first deals with the attribution of responsibility an audience places on the individual or organization. The second focuses on perceptions of negativity the audience attributes to the negative act (Schlenker, 1980). Schlenker stated that, "*the more undesirable the event is*

and the more responsible the actor appears to be for it, the more severe the predicament is" (p. 131).

If school leaders are to effectively utilize the strategies of image repair in the midst of or immediately following a crisis, they should consider both variables (responsibility for *and* negativity with regard to the event) when choosing strategies. A school district representative to the media should not simply consider the level of perceived responsibility for the crisis, as Coombs (1999) suggested and then choose strategies. Without examining the undesirability of the event, a school district is prone to misdiagnose the severity of the situation.

An incorrect diagnosis of a crisis could lead a superintendent or principal to inappropriately minimize or blame shift when the situation calls for something much more accommodating. In the end, a poor communicative decision in response to a crisis could lead to a broken relationship with the community and damage to the district's reputation. Decline in such reputational capital could result in the loss of needed funds through failed bond and levy campaigns, in much the same way a

damaged reputation could lead a for-profit organization to suffer financially (Fombrun, 1996).

To remedy this situation, a situational theory to crisis communication strategy selection was developed (Vogelaar, 2002). This approach more effectively addresses the factors that influence crisis severity. This, in turn, may help educational leaders construct messages that better fit crisis situations than does the continuum based solely on attribution theory (Coombs, 1999). In the first section of this chapter, a two-dimensional approach (called the Image Repair Situational Matrix) is described. This approach incorporates both components that determine the severity of a crisis according to theories of impression management. The second section of this chapter is devoted to aligning the appropriate strategies of Benoit (1995) and Coombs (1999) to the Image Repair Situational Matrix. In the end, a more functional approach to image repair communication is created.

Crisis Severity Diagnostics

What makes a situation a crisis? Identical events in terms of organizational responsibility can have two completely different outcomes. One situation becomes a

relative "non-issue" while the other can devastate an organization's reputation. Schlenker (1980) purported that "events are undesirable to the degree that they are negatively evaluated because they contradict projected or required images" (p. 131). In essence, a crisis situation does not have to result in the loss of life to become a significant issue for strategic publics. The crisis simply needs to offer up a contradiction in the expectations people have for the situation compared to the outcomes presented by the situation. The further the gap between these expectations and the resulting outcomes, the deeper the contradiction.

To illustrate this, consider a situation that occurred in the spring of 1999. Coca-Cola encountered a crisis in Europe that led to the single largest beverage recall in the company's 119-year history. In this situation, a Coca-Cola plant in Belgium stocked a school's soda machine with beverages of poor quality. The carbonated water used in the drinks had a sulfur smell. This, combined with a creosote odor on the outside of the containers, caused some three dozen school children to become nauseated (Deogun, Hagerty, Stecklow, & Johannes, 1999). Students went to the hospital as a

precautionary response to several food scares currently being dealt with in Europe (Hays, Cowell, & Whitney, 1999).

Coca-Cola failed to communicate with the public for eight days after the situation began (Deogun, 1999). Instead, they worked with Health Ministry officials to plan a voluntary recall in order to test beverages. It was hoped that the tests would inform the company on the cause of the illnesses (Brannigan, 1999). The European community became enraged at Coca-Cola's apparent lack of concern and Health Ministry officials responded with a total recall of all Coca-Cola products until further notice ("Coca-Cola Scare," 1999). The recall included Diet Coke, Fanta, Sprite, Nestea, Aquarius, Bonaqua, Kinley, Lift, and Minute Maid ("Coca-Cola: Struggle," 1999).

The hysteria in Belgium quickly spread across Europe with bans in France, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg ("Coca-Cola CEO," 1999). Bans quickly reached across all Dutch, German, and Spanish markets (Casert, 1999). Additionally, Portugal (Whitney, 1999a), the Ivory Coast (Ames, 1999), Kenya ("Kenya Tests," 1999), and Saudi Arabia (Whittington, 1999) also banned Coca-Cola products

manufactured in Belgium, France, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. In China and Korea, the situation in Belgium was blamed for a "slowing of sales" (Deogun, & Hagerty, 1999, p. A3).

In the end, all bans were lifted and Health Ministry officials determined that nothing had been found that would cause the beverages to be unsafe. In fact, the toxicologist's report concluded that the illnesses of the original school children were simply psychological (Casert, 1999). Essentially, a situation that amounted to little more than nothing led to a massive recall costing Coca-Cola hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue ("Coca-Cola: Struggle," 1999; Hays, 1999b) and a loss of stock value for investors in the billions of dollars ("For Coca-Cola," 1999).

What is even more interesting—beyond the fact that such a minor incident escalated into a massive crisis situation for Coca-Cola—is that one month prior to the school children being affected by the bad beverages, four men became ill in a Noorderwijk, Belgium, bar (Cowell, 1999). The incident that happened to the men in Noorderwijk was reported to the Ministry of Health, but no crisis occurred. Belgian health officials dismissed

the incident (and rightly so) as an isolated and harmless case of food poisoning.

What happened that would cause such a minor accident to be dismissed in the case of the four adults, but blown way out of proportion in the case of the 41 school children? Coke's responsibility for both situations was identical. One explanation would be that the degree of negativity associated with the second situation was much higher. And that higher perception of negativity made the difference in the severity of the crisis. According to Schlenker (1980), the perceptions of projected and required images led the second situation to be perceived as significantly more negative than the first.

Perhaps the difference in perceptions of negativity derive from the idea that a child is dependent on adult caregivers while grown men can be expected to take care of themselves. Or maybe it is because children are given a perception of innocence that adults do not receive in the same measure. Both of these explanations relate to perceptions of helplessness that are attributed to children in a greater sense than what might be attributed to adults.

Regardless of the exact reasons why, a general principle can be derived from this phenomena: the more innocent the victim, the more negatively viewed is the situation. This is an important principle for educational leaders because nearly all of their day-to-day operations deal directly or indirectly with children who are perceived to be innocent by the general public. This phenomena can turn a minor mishap in a soda pop factory into an all-out crisis in a school setting.

Schlenker (1980), in discussing the issue negativity plays in crisis severity, used the example of a lie. "The person accused of lying confronts a less severe predicament if the lie 'wasn't so bad,' say, telling a 'white lie' to get out of a date than if the lie produced a great deal of damage—lying to con a widow out of her life's savings, for example" (p. 131). Because "some acts or outcomes are more negative than others" (Higgins & Snyder, 1989, p. 79), crisis severity can fluctuate significantly based on changes in an audiences' perception of negativity. This research points to the need for crisis communication training to take into account both perceptions of negativity as well as

attributions of responsibility in order to properly diagnose the severity of a crisis.

This is not to take away from Coombs's (1995, 1999) research when he argued that strategies must be selected on the basis of how responsible an organization appears to be for the undesirable event. Attribution of responsibility is an essential component to appropriately select communicative responses to a crisis. However, theories on impression management must also be taken into account. Because Coombs's (1999) continuum only accounts for the responsibility an individual or organization has for a negative event, it neglects to acknowledge that undesirable events, too, have levels of negativity.

Therefore, the one-dimensional continuum that Coombs (1999) offered is revised in order to account for the second dimension of undesirability. By accounting for perceptions of negativity, educational leaders are better prepared to diagnose the severity of a crisis. In order to build on Coombs's model (Figure 2.8), the second component—which gauges audience perceptions of negativity—has been added. Because perceptions of responsibility fluctuate independently of perceptions of undesirability, this revised approach (Figure 5.1) shows

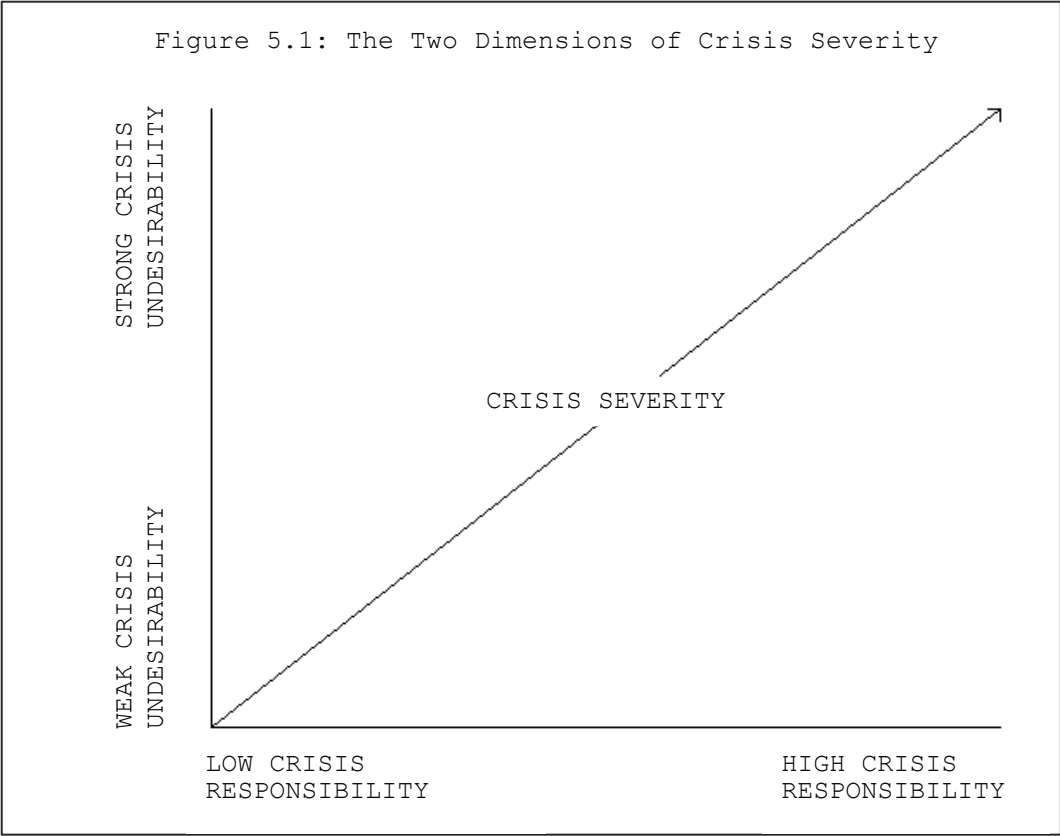
the two continuums running perpendicular to one another. This approach creates a crisis matrix rather than a continuum as in Coombs (1999). What follows is a discussion of Vogelaar's (2002) revised theory.

The Advent of a Situational Theory

The goal of the Image Repair Situational Theory is to provide practitioners who respond to crisis situations with a framework through which to view crisis situations. Other frameworks exist, but they do not take into account the effect that perceptions of negativity held by strategic publics can have on the severity of a crisis situation. Perhaps other typologies look only to responsibility attribution because it is believed that an organization can only control the degree to which it is responsible for a negative event.

This revised approach argues that because perceptions of negativity impact the severity of a crisis, organizations must take this reality into account when planning communications used to manage their image or reputation. With Schlenker's (1980) two

Figure 5.1: The Two Dimensions of Crisis Severity



dimensions of predicament severity explained, what follows describes these dimensions within a matrix rather than a continuum.

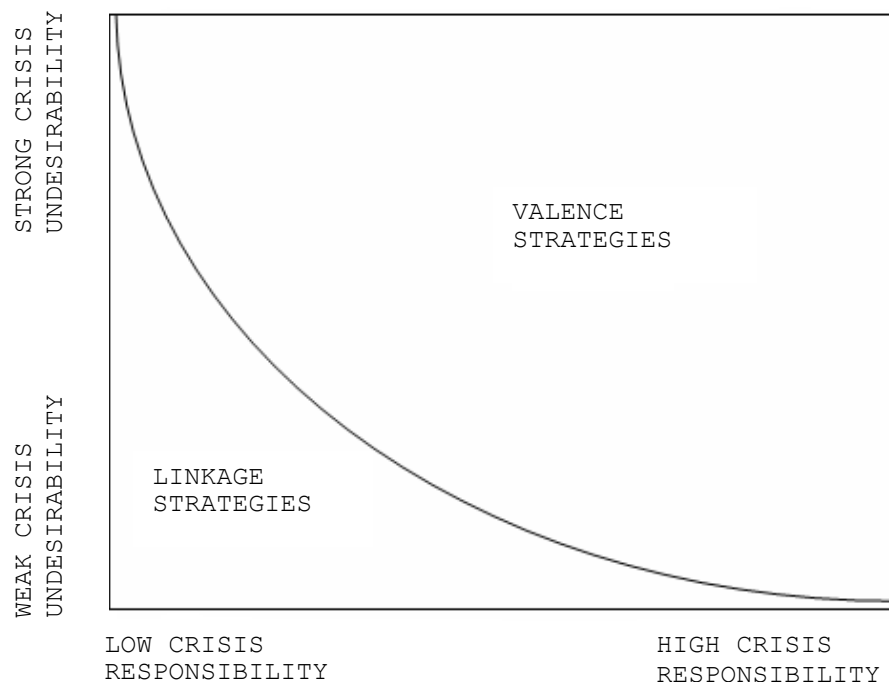
Schlenker (1980) noted in his work on impression management that accounts take three forms. These forms include: defenses of innocence, excuses, and justifications (p. 137). Within each of these forms are numerous strategies available to individuals. The strategies serve different purposes. Higgins and Snyder (1989) built on Schlenker's work by considering that all three forms are really derivations of excuses. He grouped the excuses into two categories that differed by purpose. Higgins and Snyder called these categories linkage excuses (combining defenses of innocence, and excuses), and valence excuses (encompassing justifications).

Before getting into the specifics of linkage and valence strategies, however, it is important to note the effect crisis severity has on the usefulness of each category. By adding the level of negativity as a second component contributing to the severity of a crisis, a school leader can now differentiate among crisis situations when choosing communicative strategies to use

in response to the media. But in order for a given strategy to remain effective for the purpose of repairing damage to the school's image, both organizational responsibility and perceptions of negativity must be taken into account. For example, as the school's responsibility for a crisis, increases the negativity for the event must decrease in order for any strategy within the linkage category to remain effective. Figure 5.2 illustrates how the fluctuation in crisis severity impacts the availability of strategies within the linkage or valence categories.

Notice that Figure 5.2 depicts that the area of the matrix where linkage strategies would be most effective is smaller than the area where valence strategies would be best used. This depiction is intentional for a couple of reasons. First, there are more strategies available under the valence category than the linkage category. Second, valence strategies focus on more severe perceptions of negativity. In crisis situations, linkage strategies can seem petty if the crisis is severe. It would be better for school leaders to err on the side of negativity perceptions than on the side of responsibility attribution. The reason for this is that

Figure 5.2: Strategic Categories Created by the Two Dimensions



an organization has little control over the perception of stakeholders in a crisis situation. To try to evade responsibility when audience members are hostile toward the organization can backfire. In that same sense, to approach a crisis trying to manage feelings of negativity can reassure audience members of the organization's concern for people. This reassurance communicates a "people come first" message that builds credibility. Stakeholders need to feel that their emotional state in a crisis is a priority for the organization. For this reason, the valence area of the matrix is larger than the linkage area.

Strategic Categories

What follows is a discussion of the specific strategies that fall under the linkage and valence categories of the Image Repair Situational Matrix. Table 5.1 shows the strategies that fall under each category. A complete analysis of each strategy and its application for educational leaders is discussed.

Linkages

The purpose of linkage excuses are to weaken "any perceived connection the organization may have to the

Table 5.1: The Fifteen Strategies of the Image Repair Situational Matrix

<u>Linkage Strategies</u>	<u>Valence Strategies</u>
Attack Accuser	Attack Accuser
Denial	Bolstering
Blame Shifting	Minimization
Provocation	Differentiation
Defeasibility	Transcendence
Accident	Compensation
Good Intentions	Corrective Action
	Mortification

bad act" (Higgins & Snyder, 1989, p. 79). Schlenker (1980) said this about defenses of innocence and excuses. Schlenker argued that these two categories of strategies "show that [the organization] had nothing to do with the supposed [negative] event; either it didn't occur or they were in no way responsible for it;" or in the case of excuses, evade "responsibility for the predicament-creating events" (p. 137). Spoken another way, linkage strategies are used to shun or eliminate the *perceived responsibility* associated between the negative act and the organization.

The situation at Columbine High School in 1999 illustrates when linkage strategies might appropriately be used. In this situation two boys brought guns to school and began shooting their classmates. In all, thirteen students and one teacher were killed, and twenty-three others were wounded ("Deadly Lessons," 2005). In the eyes of the community, the school was a victim along with all the families affected by the shooters. The district could have used linkage strategies with success because stakeholders did not view the school or district as responsible for the actions of the two disturbed shooters.

Linkage strategies, however, would have been successful only if perceptions of responsibility remained low. If any chance existed that evidence might point to warning signs the school or district ignored, the use of linkage strategies would have backfired. This is the case because the community would begin to attribute responsibility for preventing the terrorist act on the school. The point is, as responsibility for a crisis increases, linkage strategies would no longer work since the purpose of linkage strategies is to evade or deny an association between the school and the negative event.

Benoit (1995) identified fourteen image restoration strategies. Of these, simple denial, blame shifting, provocation, defeasibility, accident, and good intentions, fit within the linkage category of strategies. Obviously, denial and blame shifting are linkage strategies because they either dismiss that a negative event happened or they deny any responsibility for it. However, the reason for the other four strategies being in the linkage category may not be as clearly evident. These strategies are included, not because they avoid responsibility, but because they seek

to excuse responsibility where perceptions cannot help but to attribute some sense of shared responsibility.

Provocation is a linkage strategy since it claims that the negative act occurred because the organization was provoked by some other agent who deserves more blame. Therefore, the other agent is to be held more responsible for the event. The strategy of defeasibility seeks to establish that the negative act occurred because of a breakdown in communication or because important relevant information was withheld from the organization at the time a decision was necessary. Thus, fault should rest with the party who failed to provide the missing information. Or at the very least, the organization should be given forgiveness due to the missing information.

Claiming the negative event was an accident removes the responsibility of intention. After all, nothing malicious was intended. Finally, using good intentions as a strategy indicates that a good outcome was intended, but what resulted was a bad outcome. Grace is implicitly asked for with this strategy, hoping that an audience would appreciate the effort toward the good intended.

While the four strategies just discussed do not seek to eliminate responsibility for the negative event, they do seek grace and forgiveness from an audience for their role in the negative event. In other words, if responsibility is unavoidable, at least blame can be deflected to another agent who rightfully deserves more of the responsibility. All these strategies (the two that eliminate responsibility and the four that reduce it) are excluded from the valence list because none of them attempts to reduce the level of undesirability for an event.

Valences

These strategies (what Schlenker called justifications) "capitalize on the fact that some acts or outcomes are more negative than others" (Higgins and Snyder, 1989, p. 79). Schlenker (1980) referred to these variable negative acts as levels of undesirability. At times, identical crisis situations occurring in two different locations may be perceived with different levels of undesirability.

Even within the same crisis situation, different stakeholders may hold the same event in a different light. The exact same situation can have a high degree

of undesirability to the board of education, but little undesirability to parents or the community in general. Therefore, valence strategies are those verbal and/or written discursive interchanges that serve to alleviate the negativity that strategic publics associate with an event. Valence strategies focus on this result instead of seeking to affect the level of responsibility audiences may attribute to the school district or other organizations.

To illustrate the applicability of valence strategies in a school setting, consider another shooting situation two years after Columbine. In Santee, California, a student at Santana High School brought a .22 caliber revolver to school and shot multiple students. In all, two were killed and thirteen others were injured (Lyda, 2003).

Once the shooter's attorney shared publicly how the young man had a history of being bullied, the media began covering extensively that the warning signs were present prior to the shooting (McDonald, 2001). ABC News' *Primetime Live* showed amateur video of the shooter being repeatedly bullied and picked on by his own peer-group ("50 Years," 2002). Two television shows, *Boston Public*

and *Family Law*, created episodes paralleling the school shooting in Santee, emphasizing the bullying aspect of the story (Johnson, 2001, and Kaveney, 2001).

As a result of the shift in media attention—from shooter as perpetrator to shooter as victim—Santana High School's perceived level of responsibility among some stakeholder groups may have increased. The implication was that school officials should have been able to prevent the shooting if only they had taken the prior history of bullying more seriously. In this kind of crisis, school and district leaders would no longer be able to rely on linkage strategies such as denial or blame shifting. Instead, they would have to include valence strategies—especially with those members of the community who may have perceived the school to be responsible for failing to address bullying.

Benoit (1995) identified eight strategies that would function as valence excuses by Higgins and Snyder's (1989) definition. These are strategies that seek to reduce the level of undesirability associated with a reputation-altering crisis event. These strategies are bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence,

attack accuser, compensation, corrective action, and mortification.

Bolstering, as a strategy, takes the focus off the problem of the negative event and places it on some positive that all stakeholders can rally around. As a result, the undesirability of the event is off-set. This effect makes bolstering an effective strategy whenever perceptions of negativity are high. When Benoit and Lindsey (1987) examined the crisis response strategies of Johnson & Johnson during the 1984 Tylenol poisoning event, they discovered that the company extensively used bolstering as a strategy to reduce any perceptions of negativity associated with the company. According to Benoit and Lindsey (1987), Johnson & Johnson focused its bolstering message on the creation of tamper-proof packaging. This showed the company was concerned about preventing a repeat of another Tylenol tampering. This reduced the offensiveness of the act by reassuring the public that the tragedy would not occur again.

Minimization differs from bolstering even though both strategies seek to reduce the undesirability of a crisis situation. The difference is that minimization addresses the issue directly, while bolstering lowers

negativity by focusing on something else that can be positively held by the audience. School leaders minimize when they remind stakeholders that their behavior is unnecessarily blowing an event out of proportion for something of that nature. This strategy is effective only if the audience can rationally see that school official's statement is true. If the audience disagrees, however, minimizing in this way would actually make the situation worse.

Differentiation reduces the undesirability of a crisis by distinguishing the negative act from something else more undesirable to the audience by comparison. When a school leader says that an act would have been worse had it not been for the quick decisiveness of school staff and emergency personnel, for example, they imply to the audience that they should be pleased that the outcome is not more undesirable. Again, if the audience agrees, a lowering of negativity perception may result. Benoit (1995) also argued that differentiation reduces undesirability by indicating that an act cannot happen again. This differentiates the current feelings of an audience with more negative feelings that would be

present if in fact a crisis of this type were to happen again.

Transcendence reduces undesirability by focusing attention on a higher value or goal shared by the school and its strategic publics. This strategy refocuses attention on a shared positive and away from the negative event. Transcendence is similar to bolstering, but not the same. Transcendence focuses on an intangible like a value or goal, whereas bolstering focuses on something tangible.

Attacking one's accuser, in the sense described here, is similar to differentiation. Used in this way, attacking the accuser would seek to differentiate audience perceptions of the negative event with more severe negative feelings generated by the accuser being attacked. If messages can be created to rightfully inform the public of the motivations of an accuser, and if those motivations would be accepted by the audience as more negative than those created by the organization, then the image of the organization may be improved by comparison.

For example, if a situation occurred where a community group exaggerated a board decision to make it

more negative than in reality it should have been, then the district could respond by attacking the credibility of the community group. By reducing the credibility of the group, the district would be increasing the likelihood that stakeholders would not place any kind of stock in what that community group is saying. Note that the district is in no way denying responsibility for the decision in question. All they are doing is minimizing audience perceptions of negativity by calling into question the credibility of the community group.

Compensation seeks to off-set the negative feelings of an event by providing some kind of remunerative action. This can be perceived as giving victims of a crisis what they deserve. Even those members of the audience who do not directly receive any compensatory settlement can have their negative perceptions lowered because they agree with the action made for the victims. In order for this strategy to be successful, audience members have to see the compensation as acceptable to counterbalance the negativity of the crisis that occurred.

Corrective action seeks to reduce perceptions of negativity that rest with an audience by attempting to

make right what was wronged in the crisis situation. If the corrections being proposed or made logically address the root cause of the crisis, audience members might feel confident that a recurrence of the crisis is unlikely to happen again. It is important to note that the proposed corrective action does not have to be in place for a school district or other organization to repair its image. The mere promise of corrective action is sufficient so long as the audience believes the district or organization will follow through on its commitment. This is where patterns of historical public relations can affect the result of crisis communication.

Mortification involves messages of deep and sincere apology to victims and other stakeholders for an organization's responsibility in a crisis. If the district or other organization is highly responsible for a crisis and its stakeholders blame them for what resulted in strong feelings of undesirability, then this type of strategy may be the only option. This strategy seeks to lower undesirable feelings by communicating deep remorse for the crisis. Mortification may also involve messages of punishing oneself in order to illicit pity from the audience. The pity, if accepted by the

audience, may diminish perceptions of negativity felt by the audience.

These eight strategies fall in the valence category because they all attempt to reduce the level of undesirability of a negative event. None of these strategies seek to diminish the responsibility a district might have for a negative event. Therefore, these eight strategies are excluded from the linkage category.

One of Benoit's (1995) strategies, attack accuser, also appears in the linkage category, but because it is used in a different way. As mentioned before, when attacking the accuser is used in a way similar to differentiation, it is a valence strategy. When attacking the accuser is used to respond to rumors that are not true, it becomes a form of denial. In this case, it functions as a linkage strategy because it dissociates a connection between the organization and the negative act.

One question that may arise from a discussion of the strategy of attacking one's accuser is why it exists at all. If, as a valence strategy, it functions as a form of differentiation, and as a linkage strategy it functions as a form of denial, then why have it at all.

The answer is that while it functions as a form of differentiation and denial, it is not entirely the same as those strategies. Denial and differentiation directly address the issue of the crisis. Attacking one's accuser pulls focus off the crisis itself and places it on the credibility of the entity making the claim against the organization. This distinction makes it necessary to identify attacking the accuser as a separate strategy.

Benoit, who places this strategy among those in the valence category, argued that "if the credibility of the source of accusations can be reduced, the damage to one's image from those accusations may be diminished" (1995, p. 78). And Coombs, who placed this strategy with denial, said that "attacking the accuser is the most defensive strategy because it goes beyond denial to attacking some stakeholder group. The organization is attacking stakeholders that claim a crisis and victims exist" (1999, p. 125).

Coombs's definition of this strategy places it in the linkage category because "it goes beyond denial" in terms of responsibility attribution. Benoit's definition places it in the valence category because, if done successfully, the negative association between the

organization and the event is diminished. Because of the dual application of this strategy, attacking one's accuser is listed as both a linkage and a valence strategy.

Summary

William Benoit (1995) identified fourteen image repair strategies. Timothy Coombs (1999) identified seven strategies, many of which overlapped with Benoit's. The Image Repair Situational Theory utilizes all fourteen of Benoit's strategies and one of Coombs's. These strategies have been categorized according to Higgins and Snyder's (1989) impression management classification of linkage and valence excuses.

Linkage excuses are made up of those strategies which attempt to disavow any connection between an individual or organization and a negative crisis event. Negativity, as described here, is based on the perceptions of those who make up stakeholder groups important to the individual or organization at the time of the crisis. Valence excuses are those strategies which seek to downplay perceptions of negativity when attributions of responsibility are unavoidable.

The goal of educational leaders faced with reputation-altering events is to choose communicative strategies that will rebuild the image of the organization in the eyes of its strategic publics. The theories on attribution, impression management, and image repair have combined in a general situational theory from which practitioners can operate in times of crisis. From this general theory, a situational matrix has been developed and is described in the next chapter. Educational leaders can benefit from this approach to crisis communication.

CHAPTER SIX

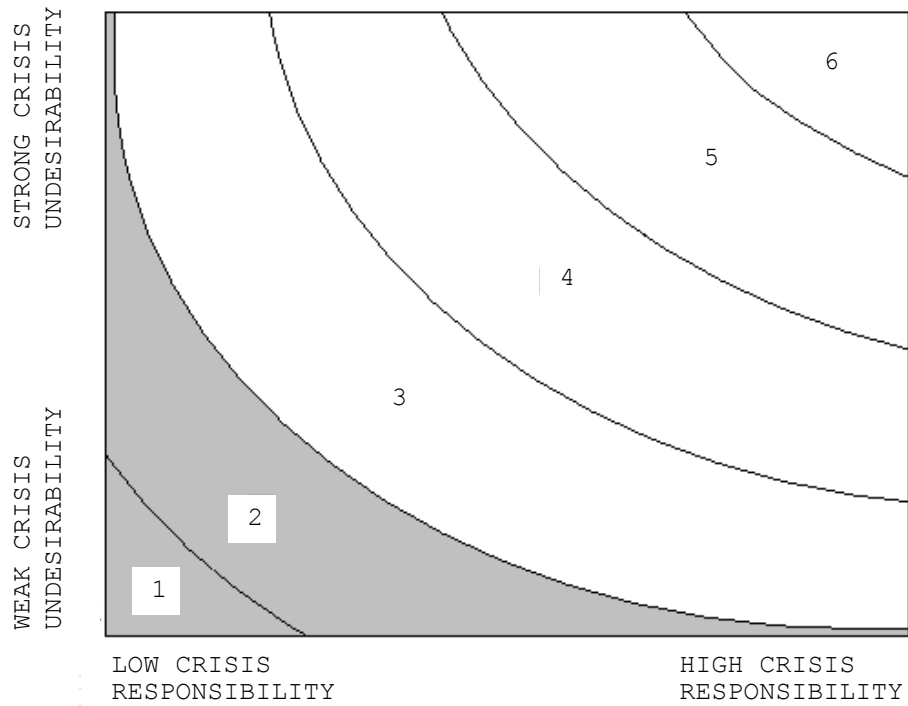
Strategy Selection for Crisis Situations

Introduction

With Benoit's and Coombs's strategies organized according to whether their primary purpose is to disavow responsibility (Linkage) or minimize negativity (Valence), school leaders are better able to apply the strategies to a given situation. As a crisis unfolds, those responsible for responding to the public can diagnose the severity of the crisis. They can do this by considering the two factors that contribute to its severity: the level of responsibility the district is perceived to have for the crisis and the relative strength of negativity stakeholders have concerning the crisis.

Once the severity of the crisis is determined, school leaders can then begin to choose strategies designed to best repair their school's or district's reputation with their strategic publics. Figure 6.1 graphically depicts the Image Repair Situational Matrix, which can guide practitioners toward constructing messages appropriate to disseminate to the public in the

Figure 6.1: The Image Repair Situational Matrix



LEGEND:

LINKAGE STRATEGIES:

- 1. Attack Accuser, Denial and Blame Shifting
- 2. Provocation, Defeasibility, Accident and Good Intention

VALENCE STRATEGIES:

- 3. Bolstering, Minimization and Attack Accuser
- 4. Differentiation and Transcendence
- 5. Compensation and Corrective Action
- 6. Mortification

midst of a crisis situation.

While Benoit's (1985) and Coombs's (1999) strategies have been separated into their appropriate location as either valence or linkage strategies, some explanation is necessary for practitioners to use the Image Repair Situational Matrix. What follows is an explanation of the matrix so that practitioners better understand how to use it in the construction of messages that will be communicated to their strategic publics during a crisis. Illustrations from actual and fictional crisis events will be used in order to supplement the explanation of the matrix.

Using the Matrix

Because crisis severity is different from one stakeholder group to another, it is important to combine strategies that will be effective with each. For example, for some stakeholders a bus accident would be a level six crisis on the matrix (i.e. parents of the victims, school board members, and community patrons), while for others it would be a level five crisis (i.e. the National Transportation Safety Board whose interest is in seeing that the cause of the crash is corrected, and attorneys whose interest is in finding appropriate

compensation for the victims). Therefore, combining strategies shows an awareness of the diversity of stakeholder interests in a crisis situation.

As depicted in Figure 5.1, crisis severity is at its worst when audience perceptions of undesirability are strongest and their attribution of responsibility on an entity is highest. When school leaders find themselves in a crisis of this magnitude, few options exist for image repair. In this kind of situation the valence strategy of mortification must be used. Perhaps combining this strategy with some kind of corrective action or compensation would also be appropriate, but only in combination with mortification. On the Image Repair Situational Matrix (Figure 6.1) this kind of crisis would be at a level five or six depending on the stakeholder group.

Corrective action and compensation strategies are important in image repair anytime the perceived undesirability is strong. This is especially true when there is a clear link of responsibility between the negative event and the organization. If members of a stakeholder group see a school district as responsible for some negative event, a sense of obligation imposed on

the responsible party surfaces. Steps to correct the problem or to compensate those affected by it can serve to satisfy the stakeholder group who imposes this sense of obligation on an organization. This aspect of the Situational Matrix was validated by the analysis of Coca-Cola's response to the Belgian public in the case of their 1999 European contamination crisis (Vogelaar, 2002).

To the other extreme, where crisis responsibility is lowest and perceived negativity is weakest, the organization should use, if anything, attacking the accuser, denial, and/or blame shifting strategies. As long as very little or no fault is attributed to the school system, these strategies can be effective for repairing damage to the district's reputation. This kind of crisis would be considered a level one situation. A level one crisis would be a situation where the vast majority of stakeholder groups feel little or no concern for the incident. Additionally, these stakeholder groups feel the district has very little responsibility for the event. In essence, a level one situation would be a *faux pax* of sorts.

An example of a level one crisis might include a situation where a small group of people have been offended by a relatively minor decision. To that group the offensive decision may have upset them, but to the vast majority of people, it is a non-issue. When most people agree that a decision is well within the right of an organization and it is appropriately justified to be made, the organization can deny that they did anything wrong, and have that explanation accepted by most in the stakeholder group. In this situation, strategies like attack accuser and/or blame shifting might also be appropriate because the majority of people would agree that the offended party is unjustified in its opposition to the decision.

It may still be appropriate to communicate with the offended group in a way that rebuilds a positive relationship with them. This depends on how much of a priority this stakeholder group is to the organization. To the offended group, this is not a level one crisis. It may be, for example, a level three or four crisis that limits strategy selection to the valence category. Therefore, the organization would want to communicate with them using strategies that validate the importance

of their concerns while seeking to persuade them to support the decision. Strategies such as bolstering and transcendence might be effective. If levels of undesirability are significantly high with this group, attempts to compromise by choosing the level five strategies of corrective action or compensation would be appropriate.

Using a corporate example to illustrate how combining strategies would be appropriate with diverse stakeholder groups, consider the 1984 Tylenol poisoning crisis. The company, Johnson & Johnson, was victimized by a terrorist act when an unidentified man tampered with a few bottles of Tylenol. This person put cyanide in the bottles after they were placed on the store shelves but before they had been purchased by consumers. This act resulted in the death of a few people who purchased the affected products. Once it was clear that Johnson & Johnson was not responsible, they used denial and blame shifting to the "madman" who was responsible.

In this example, however, perceptions of negativity were high, so Johnson & Johnson needed to use valence strategies, too. As a result, they began to bolster their record of trustworthiness among families as well as

a new tamper-resistant package (Benoit & Lindsey, 1987). They also communicated deep sympathy for the families of the deceased. Their message combined mortification, corrective action, and bolstering. All are valence strategies according to the Image Repair Situational Matrix. In all, Johnson & Johnson responded as if this was a level one, a level three, a level five, and a level six crisis. Their campaign reached out to a stakeholder group as diverse as the planet because their audience was the whole world. Everyone knew about, and/or was affected by the crisis, even though only four people actually consumed the deadly pills.

Level two crisis situations would be those events where either perceptions of responsibility are low to non-existent and undesirability levels are moderate to high, or perceptions of responsibility are moderate to high, but levels of undesirability are low to non-existent. In these kinds of situations strategies like provocation, defeasibility, accident, and good intentions may prove effective. Stakeholders in these types of crisis situations may show grace to an organization that is highly responsible for an event so long as their perceptions of it are not very negative. Likewise,

stakeholders may accept statements from level two if they believe the organization is a third-party to the unpopular event.

When selecting strategies within level two on the Matrix, provocation and defeasibility may be most effective when perceptions of negativity are higher. When attributions of responsibility are higher, accident and good intentions might prove the better choice. This approach flows from the idea that blame cannot be fully placed on an entity if they were provoked into an action or if the action was made without having access to better information prior to the decision (i.e. defeasibility). Conversely, claiming an action was an accident or that intentions were good, address the responsibility aspect of the crisis, but do not appease stakeholders when they are looking for someone to hold accountable for an undesirable situation.

If a crisis situation occurs where attribution of blame is placed on the organization, at least in part, and feelings of negativity are moderately felt by strategic publics, then the crisis level would be a three or four. Strategies available for school leaders to use when constructing messages would include bolstering,

minimization, or attack accuser (level three), and differentiation or transcendence (level four). A level three crisis where negativity is high, but responsibility is moderate, would necessitate bolstering as a strategy. A level four crisis of the same would call for transcendence.

The reason for these choices is that when feelings of negativity are high, stakeholders are more likely to expect words of encouragement and appreciation (bolstering), as well as some vision casting that reminds people of a common value or goal (transcendence). Consider a recent bus accident where a school bus transporting elementary school children crashed through a busy intersection killing two adults in nearby cars and injuring several students. In this situation, audience perceptions were that it was an accident. This placed moderate blame on the district, but the casualties made the crisis highly undesirable and tragic.

At the press conference, the superintendent used bolstering as a strategy when he communicated appreciation to the community and emergency personnel who helped at the scene. He communicated transcendence when he said that student safety is the district's highest

priority and because of that they will cooperate with investigators in every way to aid them in their analysis of what went wrong. This was an effective strategy for the school district until a few days later when rumors began circulating that the brakes on the bus went out and that the driver had filed maintenance requests on several different occasions regarding the brakes. At that point, perceptions of responsibility moved the crisis to a level five situation that called for the addition of corrective action strategies.

When faced with the need to use attack accuser as a valence strategy, perceptions of negativity should be low. Attacking one's accuser can backfire if audience perceptions of a crisis are highly undesirable. Consider the bus accident example mentioned before. If the superintendent had opened his press conference with statements like, "This situation is being blown way out of proportion by the media. They love to put schools in a negative light. This kind of 'feeding frenzy' is not helping the investigation." Comments like this are much too defensive for a crisis as severe as a bus accident. Therefore, this strategy might only be useful when perceptions of undesirability are low.

Among level four crisis situations, differentiation, like attack the accuser, would also require low perceptions of negativity. Because differentiation "attempts to distinguish the act performed from other similar but less desirable actions" (Benoit, 1995, p. 77), it stands to reason that the audience would have to agree. With high levels of negativity attributed to a crisis, chances are low that the organization could persuade the audience that things could be worse.

For example, a district is responsible for knowingly cutting corners purchasing and installing playground equipment. If the equipment collapsed during recess killing a child, the level of undesirability is so high that, if the superintendent argued, "While this event is unfortunate, it is not like we poisoned the school's water supply," even though poisoning the school's water supply might be universally agreed upon as more negative, the fact remains that the negligent installation practice that resulted in the death of a child is horribly negative. Therefore, the public is not likely to view the district more favorably by comparison.

Given the same scenario, the superintendent could not transcend with a comment like, "However, by cutting

corners on the equipment, we were able to spend more money on classroom supplies and quality instruction.” The fact remains that the strong level of undesirability leaves little room from which to differentiate or transcend. Therefore, these two strategies are placed in the middle of the matrix at a level four.

As Figure 5.4 shows, linkage strategies lose their effectiveness as the perceived level of undesirability increases among strategic stakeholders. Because of this, practitioners must carefully choose their linkage strategies and be prepared to shift to valence strategies if their responsibility for crisis is moderate to high and the crisis begins to increase in negativity. Conversely, it is not necessary for an organization to use valence strategies, which minimize undesirability, when the organization is not responsible for the crisis or the crisis does not catch the attention of stakeholders.

Summary

The Image Repair Situational Matrix provides a pragmatic approach to message construction when practitioners are faced with reputation-altering crisis events. Organizations, such as school districts, depend

on stakeholders to operate successfully. Crisis situations that cause strategic publics to perceive an organization negatively require an image repair focus on public relations. Oftentimes those who represent these organizations are required to construct messages on short notice. A practical theory that would aid in the construction image reparative discourse would benefit leaders.

By combining an assessment of negativity perception and responsibility attribution, practitioners are better able to diagnose the severity of a crisis that threatens an organization's reputation. Once diagnosed, the Situational Matrix points practitioners to image repair strategies appropriate for managing the impression of the organization throughout a crisis event. The six levels of crisis severity isolate Benoit's (1995) and Coombs's (1999) image repair strategies, making them easier to utilize when constructing crisis response messages.

Now that the Image Repair Situational Matrix has been detailed, it is important to interact with it in the context of crises that educational leaders face. What follows in the next chapter are a series of case studies to apply to the Situational Matrix. The case studies

have been modified from actual events school leaders have faced. The names of the schools, districts, and cities related to each case study have been withheld, but the events are described as they happened.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Crisis Situations: Case Studies for Consideration

Introduction

School leaders who have chosen to devote themselves to the practice of educational administration, either on the building level or on the district level, are adult learners. These individuals typically have experience in the classroom. Most know how to develop a lesson plan, design and modify curriculum, and deliver instruction. They know from experience that the application of theoretical concepts are best implemented if "real world" practice opportunities are available.

As teachers and former teachers, many administrators in training have already learned the importance of connecting material taught with the background knowledge of their learners. Because of this, these practitioners have come to expect the same opportunities for their own learning experiences. Madeline Hunter's eight step lesson development process includes modeling and guided and independent practice to ensure these opportunities for learners. This, in the context of an interactive environment, will give participants ample opportunity to engage the material.

Brandt (1988) argued in support of the case study method for accomplishing the bridge between theoretical content and practical application.

I'd like to see much greater use of cases, much like what is done in law and business education. That might reorient the teaching of teachers from the current model, which is either entirely field based, where you have little control over what goes on, or entirely classroom based, where everything is artificial. We have to create a middle ground, where problems of theory and practice can intersect in a realistic way. This genius of the case method, especially in business, is that you use realistic problems, but you can still deal with both the theoretical and tactile aspects. (p. 43)

Exposing learners to the same situational knowledge creates an effective "vehicle for applying acquired knowledge and skills in specific situations. When used for this purpose, cases are used to teach reasoning, critical thinking, problem-solving concepts, and problem-solving skills" (Kowalski, 2001a, p. 4).

This chapter is designed to accomplish the bridging of the gap between theory and practice. The case studies in this chapter provide practice opportunities, rooted in real-world scenarios, that will engage learners in implementing the Image Repair Situational Matrix. The cases in this chapter are derived from actual events. Identifying information, however, has been changed in

order to preserve the anonymity of the schools and districts affected.

The format for each of the case studies in this chapter follows the description outline of Kowalski (2001a) and the analysis and discussion outline of Snowden and Gorton (1998). This means that for each case, a description of the community, the school district, the school (where applicable), and the incident are given in enough detail that the learner is provided sufficient information to diagnose the severity of the crisis situation. Analysis and discussion of each case study is guided by questions with enough clarity that the learner maximizes the intended learning experience.

Case Scenario One: Employee Conduct

Understanding the Context

The community. This situation takes place in a suburban community of about twenty-five thousand residents. Over the last twenty years, the population growth per year has been about six percent. The steady growth has turned this once rural community into an up-and-coming bedroom community to a nearby urban center. The community's median income is \$52,000, making the area middle to upper-middle class. The average age for

members of the community is 40. Therefore, many of its members have students in the public school system. The community members have had a reputation of being strong supporters of their schools. The district has enjoyed a high percentage of support on the last four bond and levy elections.

The school district. The district has fifteen schools. Nine elementary schools feed into four middle schools which, in turn, feed into two high schools. About 10,000 students are enrolled in grades kindergarten through twelve. Ninety percent of the students are white with four percent black and four percent Hispanic. The remaining two percent are made up of Asian, Pacific Islander, and Native American students. Low income families, as measured by free/reduced lunch rates, make up about fourteen percent of the district's population.

The district is stable. The superintendent has been in her current position for the last ten years. Her cabinet is made up of four assistant superintendents, one of curriculum and instruction, one of human resources, one of business operations, and one of pupil services. The district employs roughly five hundred certificated employees and sixty-five classified employees. The

teaching force is made up predominantly of white females. About six percent of the teachers are minorities.

The school. The particulars of this case study take place in one of the district's four middle schools. Of the four middle level buildings, this one is the oldest. It was built almost fifty years ago. This school educates the highest percentage of low income students. The free/reduced lunch rate is about twenty-two percent. This school also services the highest proportion of minority students, at about seventeen percent.

The Incident

As the school principal, you receive a phone call from the nearby city's newspaper. This paper has a readership of over 100,000. This leads you to take the reporter's request for information seriously. The reporter says she is on deadline. She begins asking you questions about a teacher in your building accused of accessing pornographic sites on the internet using his classroom computer. According to the accounts of several parents quoted for this story, students saw pornographic images when they entered this teacher's classroom after hours. The reporter needs a response from a school representative in the next half hour. You notify the

reporter that you will gather information and get back to her within her timeframe. Unbeknownst to the reporter, you are aware of the situation and have been in conversation with your superintendent. What has caught you off guard is that the news media has gotten a hold of the story.

Analysis of the Case

1. Who will be the audience for this crisis?
2. Who are the victims?
3. Identify the strategic stakeholders relevant to this incident. Identify whether they are internal or external publics.
4. What may be the perceived responsibility for you personally as a result of the incident?
5. What may be the perceived responsibility for the district?
6. Describe the perceptions of negativity that may be attributed to this incident by those who hear the story.
7. Using the *Image Repair Situational Matrix* (Figure 6.1), determine, on a scale of 1-6, the severity (or potential severity) of the crisis.

Strategy Selection

1. What strategy type (Linkage or Valence) would be most appropriate to focus on in your response to the media?
2. What specific image repair strategies would be most appropriate to use when constructing your response to the reporter?
3. Create, in a bullet format, the talking points you would use in response to the reporter's request for an interview.

Case Scenario Two: Stranger Danger

Understanding the Context

The community. This situation takes place in a rural community of about five thousand residents. Over the last twenty years the population growth has been stagnant or declining. The nearest metropolitan community is about a two-hour drive away. The community's median income is about \$36,000. A steel mill which employs about 1,100 people is the community's largest employer. The average age for members of the community is 53 and many are nearing retirement. The community has had a reputation of showing strong support for their schools, but limited income has prevented the

community from supporting the schools through their tax dollars.

The school district. The district has four schools. Two elementary schools feed into one junior high school which, in turn, feeds into one high school. About 800 students are enrolled in grades kindergarten through twelve. Eighty percent of the students are white with six percent black and thirteen percent Hispanic. The remaining one percent is made up of Native American students. Low income families, as measured by free/reduced lunch rates, make up about forty-four percent.

The district is stable. Its superintendent has been in his current position for the last eighteen years. His cabinet is made up of two assistant superintendents, one of curriculum and instruction, one of human resources. The district employs roughly sixty certificated employees and thirty classified employees. The teaching force is made up predominantly of white females. About two percent of the teachers are minorities.

The school. The particulars of this case study take place in one of the district's two elementary schools. Of the two elementary buildings, this one is the oldest.

It was built over fifty years ago. This school educates the highest percentage of low income students. The free/reduced lunch rate is about forty-two percent. This school also services the highest proportion of minority students, at about thirty percent.

The Incident

The town newspaper has dispatched a reporter to your central office, which is housed at the high school. Upon arrival the reporter demands to speak with you, the district superintendent, about school safety issues regarding allegations that a man in a red pickup truck has been seen driving near two different schools in recent days. The man has been asking the students if they have seen his lost dog and has attempted to lure students into his truck to see pictures of the dog. Thus far, students who have been approached in this way have ignored his requests.

Analysis of the Case

1. Who will be the audience for this crisis?
2. How is the media in this situation likely to frame the coverage of this event?
3. What kind of timeframe do you have to plan your response to the media?

4. Identify the strategic stakeholders relevant to this incident. Identify whether they are internal or external publics.
5. What perceptions of responsibility will the audience likely place on the school or district as a result of the incident?
6. Describe the perceptions of negativity that may be attributed to this incident by those who hear about the story.
7. Using the *Image Repair Situational Matrix* (Figure 6.1), determine, on a scale of 1-6, the severity (or potential severity) of the crisis.

Strategy Selection

1. What strategy type (Linkage or Valence) would be most appropriate to focus on in your response to the media?
2. What specific image repair strategies would be most appropriate to use when constructing your response to the reporter?
3. Create, in a bullet format, the talking points you would use in response to the reporter's demand for information.

Case Scenario Three: Student Fatality

Understanding the Context

The community. This community can best be described as a small town enveloped by a major U.S. city. The town incorporated nearly a hundred years ago. Back then the nearby city was a distinctly separate community. However, over the years, the city grew and developed. In the late 1960s and early 1970s the city acquired land in surrounding towns that never incorporated. As a result, the major city expanded and grew well beyond its original boundaries. Due to the city's expansion, this small town became landlocked. Even though this town was enveloped by the nearby city, it never lost its "personality" as a small town.

Within its boundaries, this small town retained all the elements required to be a self-sustaining community. It has its own police force, fire station, and hospital. Grocery stores and shopping centers also help to create its own sense of sufficiency. Because of this sense of completeness, the 1,400 members of the community rarely venture outside its city limits.

The school district. The district actually combines students from the major city as well as those from the small incorporated town. Many of the district's schools

are outside the town's boundaries, but there is one elementary and one high school located within the small community.

The school. The students involved in the incident attend the high school located in the small town. Additionally, these three students also live within the boundaries of the town. This is not true of all 1,100 students who attend the high school. Many of them are bussed in from the major city. Homes closest to the border, but not actually in the small town, attend this high school. The high school houses grades nine through twelve. The students who attend this school are very diverse. Roughly half the students are white, with thirty percent of the students black, fifteen percent Hispanic, and five percent a combination of Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Native American.

The Incident

At 1:00 a.m. Saturday morning, you, as the high school principal, receive a call that three students have just died in a one-car wreck that appears to be a hill-jumping attempt gone awry. The call comes from a night-side reporter who wants to confirm that the three

students were from your school district. Through the reporter you learn the identity of the three students.

The students are all ones you recognize. They were very popular with their classmates and teachers. You know that this incident will have an enormous impact on the school community when the media begins covering the story and affected families and students begin talking with one another. What is your response to the reporter? How will it differ from communication you will make directly with other stakeholders in the near future?

Analysis of the Case

1. Who will be the audience for this crisis?
2. Who are the victims?
3. Identify the strategic stakeholders relevant to this incident. Identify whether they are internal or external publics, or both.
4. What will be the perceived responsibility for you personally as a result of the incident?
5. What will be the perceived responsibility for the district?
6. Describe the perceptions of negativity attributed to this incident by those who hear about the story.

7. Using the *Image Repair Situational Matrix* (Figure 6.1), determine, on a scale of 1-6, the severity (or potential severity) of the crisis.

Strategy Selection

1. What strategy type (Linkage or Valence) would be most appropriate to focus on in your response to the media?
2. What specific image repair strategies would be most appropriate to use when constructing your response to the reporter?
3. Create, in a bullet format, the talking points you would use in response to the reporters request for an interview.

Case Scenario Four: Low Standards

Understanding the Context

The community. The area that supplies students to your district is large and diverse. While the district is classified as suburban, the last fifteen years have changed the demographic of the district significantly. The community is made up of eight different municipalities. The population is around 250,000

residents. The median income is roughly \$40,000 per adult individual, but some areas of the community are below the poverty line, while other areas are defined by large estates and private golf courses. The schools in the more affluent areas are not affected by low test scores, but the schools in some of the more impoverished areas are known for walking a fine line with the state's department of education.

The school district. The district serves a little more than 40,000 students. It is a large suburban district that typically performs at or above state averages on standardized tests. One school that serves some of the poorest families in the community has a reputation of being a low performing school. The other schools do well by comparison. The district as a whole meets state accreditation expectations even with the low marks from its underperforming school.

The school. You are the principal of an elementary school that has historically outperformed many of the district's fifty other elementary schools. The community from which you draw your students is moderately affluent. The combination of your school's historical performance and the affluence of its parent-base may explain to some

degree why many parents would be concerned that low scores may threaten property values. This is especially true since it is well-known that property values are significantly lower in areas where schools have a reputation of poor performance.

The Incident

As the building principal, you have just been informed that your school is one of two district-wide that did not meet adequate yearly progress standards. The other school has a history of low performance, but your school has historically outperformed others and is considered by many to be the flagship elementary in the district. A parent calls and says a friend of hers who works in the district's central office told her the news and that she should consider moving because her property values will go down once the news goes public. You have not yet received a call from the media, but rumors may be spreading fast and a reporter could call at any time.

Analysis of the Case

1. Who will be the audience for this crisis?

Identify each and describe the extent to which each population group is affected.

2. Identify the strategic stakeholders relevant to this incident. Identify whether they are internal or external publics, or both.
3. What will be the perceived responsibility for you personally as a result of the incident?
4. What will be the perceived responsibility for the school and the district?
5. Describe the perceptions of negativity attributed to this incident by those who hear about the story.
6. Using the *Image Repair Situational Matrix* (Figure 6.1), determine, on a scale of 1-6, the severity (or potential severity) of the crisis.

Strategy Selection

1. What strategy type (Linkage or Valence) would be most appropriate to focus on in your response to the parent or eventually when the media contact you?
2. What specific image repair strategies would be most appropriate to use when constructing your response to the parent or later with the media?

3. Create, in a bullet format, the talking points you would use in response to the parent or with the media when reporters request an interview.

Case Scenario Five: Lock Down

Understanding the Context

The community. This is an urban setting in a city of a little more than a million people. While the crime rate is higher in this community than it is in other parts of the metropolitan area, incidences of violent crime have declined. In comparison to other major cities nationwide, this community has significantly lower crime. The Bureau of Crime Statistics has recently reported that this community is much safer by comparison to other urban centers in the United States.

The school district. This district is very large. It has more than eighty schools in grades kindergarten through twelve. The district has undergone several changes in the superintendency over the last ten years. Several court decisions have threatened to sanction a state takeover if certain academic and safety expectations aren't met. The media has extensively covered the ills of this district, and as a result, local

politicians have built platforms for election from the high profile problems inherent in this district.

The school. This is a high school servicing 3,800 students over four grades. The racial make-up of the school is seventy percent African-American, which is less racially segregated than other high schools and the district as a whole. The other thirty percent is a blend of Caucasian, Hispanic, and Asian-American, with Hispanics as the dominant racial group of the minority.

The Incident

It is 2:15 p.m. on a Monday afternoon in early September. This has been a warm, sunny day, and your building is without air-conditioning. Many windows and doors are propped open to cool the inside of the building. There are forty-five minutes left in the school day. As principal, you receive a call from the local police saying they are chasing an armed man through a neighborhood near your high school. They think he might be a former student and may try to "blend" in by coming into your school. The police assure you that it would not be possible for the student to have arrived at your building yet, but may be there in the next twenty to thirty minutes.

As a result, the police want you to consider a lockdown situation to prevent him from entering your building, and to remain locked down until they find the assailant. They will notify you when it is safe. You immediately follow the suggestion of local police and initiate a well practiced crisis plan. What are you prepared to say to parents who get word of the situation and begin to panic? Some may even ignore the lockdown and demand that they be allowed into the building to pick up their child.

Analysis of the Case

1. Who will be the audience for this crisis?
2. Who are the victims?
3. Identify the strategic stakeholders relevant to this incident. Identify whether they are internal or external publics, or both.
4. What will be the perceived responsibility for you personally as a result of the incident?
5. What will be the perceived responsibility for the school? What about for the district?
6. Describe the perceptions of negativity attributed to this incident by those in the

community and by those who have students in the school.

7. Using the *Image Repair Situational Matrix* (Figure 6.1), determine, on a scale of 1-6, the severity (or potential severity) of the crisis.

Strategy Selection

1. What strategy type (Linkage or Valence) would be most appropriate to focus on in your response to parents?
2. What specific image repair strategies would be most appropriate to use when constructing your response to parents?
3. Create, in a bullet format, the talking points you would use when communicating with parents.

Case Scenario Six: Contagious Disease

Understanding the Context

The community. This incident takes place in a medium-sized suburban community of mainly middle and upper middle class residents. The community is well established and landlocked with little room for more development. As a result, members of the community have been around for a number of years, and those who move are

quickly replaced by other families of similar status. Therefore, the community isn't growing much at all.

The school district. This is a medium-sized school district with a traditional, hierarchical organizational structure. The superintendent has three assistant superintendents. The Director of Communications reports to the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources, but all school safety and crisis issues go through the Assistant Superintendent of School Business Operations.

The school. You are the principal of a large suburban high school of 2,200 students. The student who is the subject of this crisis was a junior in your building. The majority of students in your school come from middle to upper middle class families. Your school is ninety-five percent Caucasian with the remaining five percent mainly African American. Your district has a well planned and practiced crisis plan. In situations like this, your district's director of communications usually steps in and provides talking points with district officials. On this day, however, he is at a national conference and won't be able to assist.

The Incident

One of your high school cheerleaders collapsed in an assembly today. She was immediately rushed to the hospital. The collapse was in full view of the entire student body. The girl was popular and well-liked by a large proportion of the students and staff. Later that day you receive word that she died from bacterial meningitis. Her parents call you from the hospital to say that they are concerned for the health and safety of other students in your school.

Analysis of the Case

1. Who will be the audience for this crisis?
2. Who are the victims?
3. Identify the strategic stakeholders relevant to this incident. Identify whether they are internal or external publics, or both.
4. What will be the perceived responsibility for you personally as a result of the incident?
5. What will be the perceived responsibility for the district?
6. Describe the perceptions of negativity attributed to this incident by those who hear about the story.

7. Using the *Image Repair Situational Matrix* (Figure 6.1), determine, on a scale of 1-6, the severity (or potential severity) of the crisis.

Strategy Selection

1. What strategy type (Linkage or Valence) would be most appropriate to focus on as you communicate with parents?
2. What specific image repair strategies would be most appropriate to use when constructing your communication to parents?
3. Create, in a bullet format, the talking points you would use in response to the parents and families in this school.

Case Scenario Seven: Wrong Bus

Understanding the Context

The community. This is a rural community a short distance from a major metropolitan area. The population of the town is less than 10,000. Some who live in the area commute to the nearby city for work. This has led some to view the town as a bedroom community. Most, however, work in the town or in agriculture on the surrounding farm land. The median income is only \$28,000

annually. In addition, the average resident has only a high school education.

The school district. This is a small district with two elementaries for students in grades kindergarten through eight and one high school. The district office houses one superintendent and one assistant superintendent who is in charge of curriculum. The district services 1,100 students.

The school. This incident occurred in one of the two elementaries. The principal has been in his current position for seven years. You hired him after your third year in the district. You now have been superintendent of schools for the last ten years. You heard about this incident from a local reporter who contacted you, and you immediately call the principal to get information from him.

The Incident

As superintendent of schools, you receive word that that an angry mother has gone to the media instead of going to school officials to settle an issue. Apparently, a nine year old student had asked to ride a different bus home than the one she is assigned to ride. The principal at the building told her that, without

prior permission from her mother, she could not. This is consistent with district policy. She then got on her assigned bus and exited at her assigned stop.

The problem was that the girl and her family had recently moved, but failed to notify transportation or the school of the move. The bus she wanted to ride took her to her new house, but her assigned bus took her to her old house three miles away. She walked the distance in the dead of winter. Her mother became worried when it took her daughter so long to arrive and began calling friends and neighbors. She never contacted the school.

Once the daughter had arrived home, she told her mother the school principal refused to let her get on the bus, so she had to walk home. Rather than call the school to confirm her daughter's story, she contacted local television stations. One of the stations picked up the story and began running the following lead: "School refuses to transport a little girl home. Hear her experience at six."

Analysis of the Case

1. Who will be the audience for this crisis?
2. Who are the victims?

3. Identify the strategic stakeholders relevant to this incident. Identify whether they are internal or external publics, or both.
4. What will be the perceived responsibility for you personally as a result of the incident?
5. What will be the perceived responsibility for the district?
6. Describe the perceptions of negativity attributed to this incident by those who hear about the story.
7. Using the *Image Repair Situational Matrix*, determine the severity (or potential severity) of the crisis. Assess this on a scale of 1-6 using Figure 6.1 as a guide.

Strategy Selection

1. What strategy type (Linkage or Valence) would be most appropriate to focus on in your response to the media?
2. What specific image repair strategies would be most appropriate to use when constructing your response to the reporter covering the story?

3. Create, in a bullet format, the talking points you would use in response to the reporters request for an interview.

Case Scenario Eight: Sexual Harassment

Understanding the Context

The community. This situation takes place in a large rural community of a little more than 20,000 people. The school district's residents make up a close-knit group of families who are very committed to the school system. Bond and levy elections are usually passed with a great deal of success. Every year, area shops on the town's square close down to take part in the high school's homecoming parade. While political games have been played on the school board, those issues have subsided more than a decade ago with the district's last superintendent.

The community's average family earns \$55,000 per year. There are few exceptions far from this norm. This is a very solid middle class community. As a result, the schools do not deal with many socioeconomic issues that come from diverse income-earning families.

The school district. You are the superintendent of schools and have been in this role for the last thirteen

years. There are almost 6,000 students who attend schools in your district. The community has changed quite a bit from when you first arrived in your role as assistant superintendent twenty years ago. The district is responsible for educating these students in six elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school.

The school. The school where this incident occurred is one of the district's two middle schools. The principal of this school has been in her position for the last three years. Before this, she was the assistant principal at the district's other middle school. She came to the district as a classroom teacher eleven years ago when she graduated from college. Her entire career has been spent in this district and at the middle level. You have a strong working relationship with her and have known her since her interview for her first teaching position. Her school is responsible for educating approximately 750 students in grades six through eight.

The Incident

A parent is unhappy because her son came home from school and told her that he had been threatened by his teacher and principal. According to her son, he was

threatened that he would get suspended for sexual harassment and arrested if he wrote another note like the one passed in class. He admitted to writing the note, but mom felt the note was more along the lines of typical teenage behavior and not sexual harassment.

She is contacting you, the superintendent because she felt the school's threats were excessive even though the note made a girl feel uncomfortable and self-conscious about her outfit. The principal showed the policy on sexual harassment to the child and read it to the mother over the phone, but that didn't appease the mother. When you talked to the principal, she said she did it to prevent the student from going too far in the future, and she never raised her voice or threatened any arrest. The offended parent is close personal friends with one of your board members, even though you have no reason to believe this will become a political issue for the board, the parent did remind you of her relationship with this member of your board.

Analysis of the Case

1. Who will be the audience for this crisis?
2. Who are the victims?

3. Identify the strategic stakeholders relevant to this incident. Identify whether they are internal or external publics, or both.
4. What will be the perceived responsibility for you personally as a result of the incident? How about for the teacher and principal involved?
5. What will be the perceived responsibility for the school and district?
6. Describe the perceptions of negativity attributed to this incident by those who hear about the story.
7. Using the *Image Repair Situational Matrix* (Figure 6.1), determine, on a scale of 1-6, the severity (or potential severity) of the crisis.

Strategy Selection

1. What strategy type (Linkage or Valence) would be most appropriate to focus on in your response to the parent?
2. What specific image repair strategies would be most appropriate to use when constructing your response to the parent?

3. Create, in a bullet format, the talking points you would use in response to the parent.

Case Scenario Nine: Video Locker Room

Understanding the Context

The community. This situation occurs in a typical suburban setting. This community is one of twenty-two municipalities that surround a major urban center. The community is affluent with most members classified as middle to upper-middle class. The community is also home to two major corporate headquarters. One is a Fortune 500 telecommunications company and the other is a healthcare software company.

The visiting school that made the discovery in this incident comes from outside the community in one of the other suburban areas. Because of the proximity to a major urban center, there are a half dozen television stations and many more newspapers and radio stations. This fact made it easy for the incident to receive a lot of media attention that would cause it to eventually get picked up nationally by CNN.

The school district. You are the superintendent of this major suburban school district. You serve nearly 20,000 students in twenty-one elementary schools, six

middle schools, and four high schools. You are relatively new to this area, serving only in your second year as superintendent. You came over after your retirement from another major school district in another state. You have a total of fifteen years of experience in the superintendency.

The school. The incident occurs in one of your four high schools. The principal has been at the helm for the last seven years. You have a good working relationship with this administrator. The assistant principal in question is one of three supporting the principal. He has been in his position for the last five years. The school is considered one of the finest high schools in the area. It boasts a graduation rate of over ninety percent with nearly eighty percent attending college within a year after graduation.

The Incident

A visiting school is dressing out in one of your high school locker rooms in preparation to play against your school in a girls' volleyball game. During this time, a female student from the opposing school notices a small video web-cam type of camera above the locker bay where she was changing. She talks about the discovery

with her parents who were there to watch the volleyball game. The parent immediately confronts the assistant principal who was on site supervising the game. He tells the parent that the camera is a fake designed to deter bad behavior. The parent does not believe the administrator and notifies the police on her own.

Once the police arrive an investigation reveals that the camera is active and plays video directly to the assistant principal's computer. The computer was seized by police to determine how long the camera had been filming and how much footage had been captured. Local media outlets get a hold of the story and begin covering it extensively. You are made aware of the situation when the building principal contacts you to tell you of the discovery. The principal became aware of the situation when the assistant principal notified him saying, "I'm being accused of something really bad and I need your help."

Analysis of the Case

1. Who will be the audience for this crisis?
2. Who are the victims?

3. Identify the strategic stakeholders relevant to this incident. Identify whether they are internal or external publics, or both.
4. What will be the perceived responsibility for you personally as a result of the incident? What will it be for the principal and assistant principal?
5. What will be the perceived responsibility for the district? What will it be for this particular school?
6. Describe the perceptions of negativity attributed to this incident by those who hear about the story.
7. Using the *Image Repair Situational Matrix* (Figure 6.1), determine, on a scale of 1-6, the severity (or potential severity) of the crisis.

Strategy Selection

1. What strategy type (Linkage or Valence) would be most appropriate to focus on in your response to the media?
2. What specific image repair strategies would be most appropriate to use when constructing your response to reporters?

3. Create, in a bullet format, the talking points you would use in response to the media.

Case Scenario Ten: Head Lice Haven

Understanding the Context

The community. This situation takes place in a rural community of 2,700 people. There is one school district in the community and it serves students from this town plus other areas of surrounding farm land. The main form of employment is agriculture. Most members of the community have lived in the town their whole lives. People know each other very well. With the exception of a few bars, the only common place for people to come together is the local church.

The school district. The district serves a little more than three hundred students in its one kindergarten through eighth grade building and its one high school. The superintendent has been with the district since he was a teacher. For the last twenty-six years, he has served as a classroom teacher in the high school, assistant principal and principal of the high school, and superintendent. Historically, there has been a good relationship between the superintendent and the board of education. The last election, however, brought three new

members to the board who ran in response to the controversial firing of two very popular teachers in the primary school.

The school. This building was originally the only school in the district. Fourteen years ago, the district acquired a new building that they converted into its current high school. You have been the principal there for the last six years. You are the only administrator in the building, however, one of your teachers assists with discipline if you have to be out of the building. During your tenure with the school you have focused much of your attention to promoting and maintaining a strong parental support structure. As a result of your efforts, you have a high percentage of involved parents. You also have a history of positive exchanges with parents. You are a very popular principal with the community.

The Incident

As the building principal, you receive a phone call from your school nurse saying that she has seen seven confirmed cases of head lice since this morning. All the students come from the same fourth grade teacher's room, but she is concerned that that may change once students from that class mix with other students during lunch,

recess, P.E. class, and other special classes. You communicate with the parents and they agree to pick up their children to take care of the lice. You want to create a letter that will inform the parents of the children who have come into contact with the affected students. The purpose of the letter is to inform parents and stave off any rumors that might over-exaggerate the issue.

Analysis of the Case

1. Who will be the audience for this crisis?
2. Who are the victims?
3. Identify the strategic stakeholders relevant to this incident. Identify whether they are internal or external publics, or both.
4. What will be the perceived responsibility for you personally as a result of the incident?
5. What will be the perceived responsibility for the district?
6. Describe the perceptions of negativity attributed to this incident by those who hear about the story.

7. Using the *Image Repair Situational Matrix* (Figure 6.1), determine, on a scale of 1-6, the severity (or potential severity) of the crisis.

Strategy Selection

1. What category of strategies (Linkage or Valence) would be most appropriate to focus on in your letter to parents?
2. What specific image repair strategies would be most appropriate to use when constructing your letter?
3. Create, in a bullet format, the talking points you would use in your letter to parents.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide practitioners with adequate exposure to real-world test case scenarios. Each case study has been derived from actual events covered in the news media. The context of each case has been changed in order to preserve the identities of the schools involved. The goal has been to provide a variety of opportunities from the perspective of many different roles of leadership within the field of education. By doing so, educational leaders have a broad

range of experiences around which to test the Image Repair Situational Theory.

Each case study followed the format for Kowalski (2001a) and Snowden and Gorton (1998). The purpose for doing this was to create a consistent approach to each case study while providing enough contextual information relative to each scenario. Because the effectiveness of communication messages is dependent upon multiple contextual variables, every effort was made to provide enough information so that practitioners could make informed decisions regarding the construction of talking points in response to each incident.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Discussion

Introduction

This chapter examines the implications of the product development that is the subject of this paper. The chapter is divided into three major sections. First, the expert panel of superintendents' feedback on the usefulness and applicability of Vogelaar's (2002) Image Repair Situational Theory for educational leaders is discussed. Second, revisions to the training model based on the superintendents' suggestions is presented. Finally, implications for Vogelaar's (2002) theory in training educational leaders is explored along with suggestions for future development of the training concept.

Usefulness and Applicability

The initial proof of concept was presented to superintendents at a leadership conference on May 31, 2005. This presentation served the purpose of what Dick, Carey, and Carey (2005) term the formative evaluation of the materials being developed (see Figure 3.1). The concept, in the form of a ninety minute training seminar, was then submitted to the participants

for feedback. Their comments and suggestions illuminated the initial creation of the training materials.

Essentially, the formative evaluation revealed that the participants attributed significant value to the training experience. All participants agreed that the training provided useful information about de-escalating crisis situations and image repair. They all agreed that the Image Repair Situational Matrix helps to frame their understanding of a crisis, and they all agreed that the training was worthy of recommendation to their colleagues.

In addition to that, nearly all the participants (eight out of nine) agreed on seven other indicators associated with the training. Most notably that the training is sufficiently grounded in theory and research to make it a trustworthy training to attend. The same number of participants also agreed that the training created a paradigm shift as to what constitutes minor crises from major ones. Finally, the same number of participants agreed that the training helped them become better prepared to face a crisis, diagnose the severity of a crisis, and create communication messages in response to a crisis.

This information says a lot about the potential success of the product under development. First, it shows that the material is useful to educational leaders. Second, it shows that the material is easy to understand, in that it provides a lens through which to view crisis situations. And third, this feedback shows enough participant buy-in that they would endorse the product.

Suggestions for Improvement

Even though the participants of the study communicated a great deal of satisfaction with the content materials and the process of the training in general, they offered some very valuable insight on how to improve the product. From this insight, revisions for the curriculum became apparent. According to Dick, Carey, and Carey (2005), once the formative evaluation is complete, a certain amount of time and energy must go into revising the educational materials. This refinement process is done to ensure marketability of the product to audiences broader in scope than the participants in the initial formative evaluation.

The superintendents who participated in the initial formative evaluation made suggestions for improvement that thematically fell into two major categories:

(1) process and (2) content. The first dealt with the use of test-case scenarios and the amount of time available for practice. The second focused on creating a more user-friendly matrix that would guide practitioners to more specific image repair strategies.

Process Improvements

The suggestions to improve the process of the training resulted in a couple of changes. First, the workshop length is expanded from its current ninety minute format to a new three hour workshop. The added time will allow for a couple of test-case scenarios to be presented at the beginning for participants to engage in a problem solving activity.

This would allow participants to discuss and explore their own background knowledge of the topic prior to any training. This would also allow time to revisit these cases at the end after the training is completed so that participants could compare changes in their ability and confidence over the time of the training. These additional cases are reflected in Appendix D.

Additional process changes include revisions to the strategy definitions. It was suggested that the strategies be given clearer meaning by demonstrating

their use in real life educational crisis situations. These revisions include sufficient details to help establish the severity level of the crisis. Once crisis severity is established, the appropriate image repair strategy will be used in that context so that the participants can see how the strategy is used. The idea is that this will give learners more confidence in knowing how to use the image repair strategies.

Content Improvements

The only content improvement was a suggestion to make the Image Repair Situational Matrix more user-friendly. The current matrix helps guide practitioners through a process of diagnosing the severity of a crisis situation and then it points them toward a group of strategies most appropriate to use when repairing damage done to the organization's reputation. While this is a major breakthrough in strategy selection, for the inexperienced learner, choosing among three or four strategies may not be specific enough.

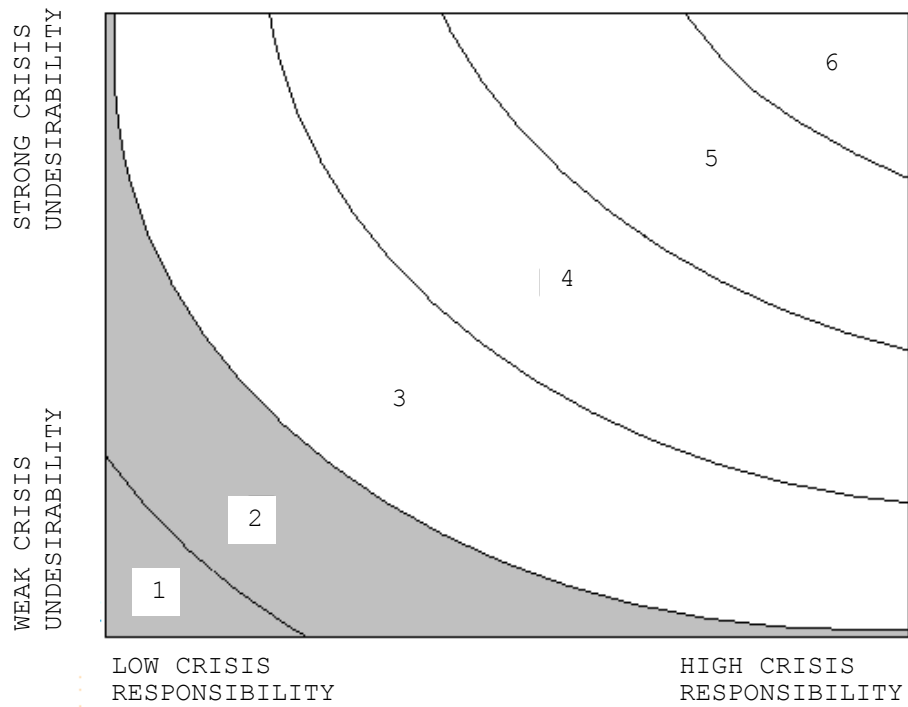
Therefore, a few changes are proposed. First, the Image Repair Situational Matrix now lists the strategies in the legend from most accommodative to least accommodative, so that as practitioners read from left to

right, they are given the most accommodative strategies first within each crisis level. This flows from the idea that within a crisis level, it is better to err on the side of caution in choosing strategies to communicate.

The second proposed change is in the graphic of the matrix itself. An indicator in the revised matrix now points to a specific strategy in the legend. This is so practitioners can visually see where the severity of the crisis is placed on the matrix and then be directed, within close proximity, to a specific strategy to use. Figure 7.1 shows the original Image Repair Situational Matrix and Figure 7.2 shows the revision.

These two changes to the Image Repair Situational Matrix should make it easier for users to identify specific strategies that are better accommodated for

Figure 7.1: The Image Repair Situational Matrix (Original)



LEGEND:

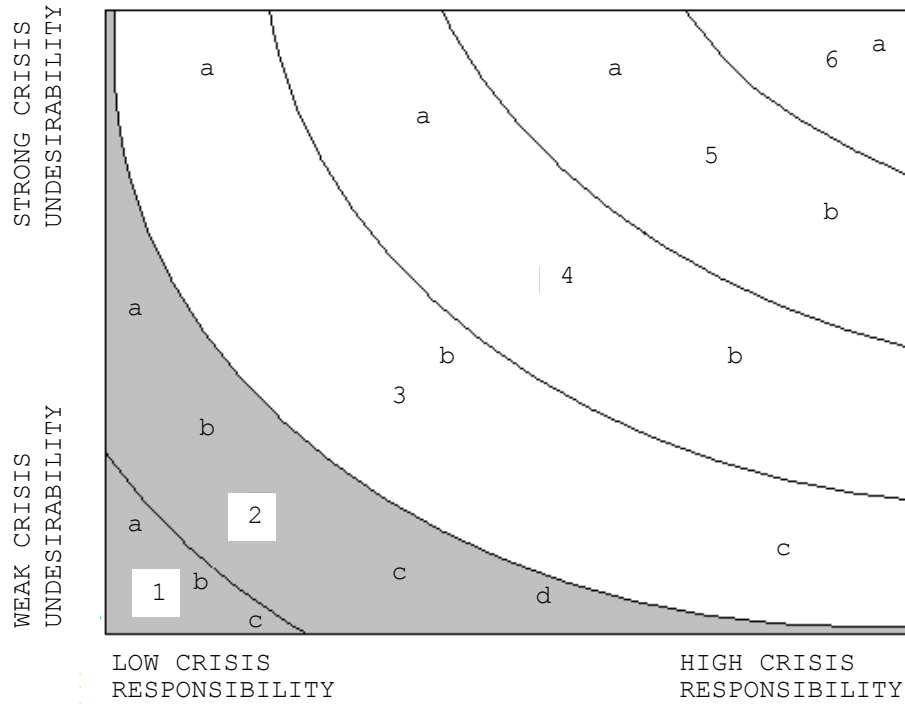
LINKAGE STRATEGIES:

1. Attack Accuser, Denial and Blame Shifting
2. Provocation, Defeasibility, Accident and Good Intention

VALENCE STRATEGIES:

3. Bolstering, Minimization and Attack Accuser
4. Differentiation and Transcendence
5. Compensation and Corrective Action
6. Mortification

Figure 7.2: The Image Repair Situational Matrix (Revised)



LEGEND:

LINKAGE STRATEGIES:

1. a. Denial, b. Blame Shifting and c. Attack Accuser
2. a. Provocation, b. Defeasibility, c. Accident and d. Good Intention

VALENCE STRATEGIES:

3. a. Bolstering, b. Minimization and c. Attack Accuser
4. a. Transcendence and b. Differentiation
5. a. Corrective Action and b. Compensation
6. a. Mortification

more negatively perceived crisis situations. The revisions should accomplish this without sacrificing the user's ability to accurately diagnose the severity of a crisis situation.

Implications for Future Research

The initial proof of concept that occurred with the superintendents in the formative evaluation was successful. This showed that there is a market for the Image Repair Situational Theory in the educational context. The feedback received from this formative evaluation provided important information regarding the need for revisions to the training materials and content.

Future research should include another formative evaluation of the revised training materials. Even multiple formative evaluations would work to further refine the training materials. In fact, future evaluations of the materials should include other educational leaders, such as building level assistant principals and principals. This suggestion was made after the first formative evaluation took place with Missouri superintendents.

Because the theory deals with the broad topic of image repair, there is reason to believe that perhaps

this material would be applicable to all who deal with situations where anger and frustration can escalate. While the scope of this project focused on image repair as a reputational issue in response to organizational crises, this theory also applied to individuals where their image has been soiled. Teachers and nurses, for example, deal with angry people, as do social workers who work in residential treatment facilities. Perhaps communication training on image repair could apply to de-escalating those types of crisis situations as well.

Other avenues for future research include more formal examinations of the Image Repair Situational Theory. Qualitative and quantitative studies could gauge participant reactions to sample crises where an individual or organization correctly applied and/or incorrectly applied strategies from the matrix. These studies could determine if correct use of the matrix improved audience perceptions of the individual's image, whereas incorrect use showed a decrease in those perceptions.

Basically, the opportunities for Image Repair Situational Theory to be applied in the educational setting seem limitless. Any time school leaders are

faced with a crisis where a response is demanded from strategic stakeholders, preparation and skill is essential. Oftentimes there is little time to prepare because advance notice of such crises is limited. Therefore, the ability to choose effective strategies quickly and correctly makes this training invaluable.

Summary

The initial formative evaluation as laid out by Dick, Carey, and Carey (2005) provided information that resulted in several changes to the product concept. These changes occurred on the process and content end of the development cycle. Most of the suggested changes affected the process end of the development. The changes are reflected in Appendix D.

This proof of concept shows promise for school leaders as they respond to crisis situations. According to the formative evaluation feedback, the training materials holds promise not only for superintendents, but also for building level school leaders. Future formative evaluations should be conducted prior to any full-scale manufacturing and marketing of the materials. However, the content that makes up the Image Repair Situational Theory could be presented to anyone who would have to

respond to crisis situations whether their primary goal is restoring the organization's reputation or simply de-escalating angry stakeholders.

APPENDIX A:

Participants' Handout and Notes Packet
From the Initial Formative Evaluation

What to Say When Crisis Strikes:

Image Repair Situational Theory for Educational Leaders

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Why Are You Here?

Identify an experience you have had that required you to respond verbally or in writing to a crisis situation.

Jot down what you hope to learn today. What do you expect to get from this workshop?

Guiding Questions

1. Why do people react in ways that may result in a crisis situation?
2. How can a person accurately assess the degree of volatility in crisis situations?
3. What strategies are best to apply in order to manage the school or district image in the midst of a crisis situation?

Three-Fold Purpose

1. To explore current research on impression management, attribution theory, and image repair theory
2. To examine a situational approach for strategy selection that manages a school or district image in crisis situations
3. To apply this situational approach to different scenarios in order to gain confidence in diagnosing and responding to a crisis

What Causes People to Become Angry?

According to William Glasser, M.D. (1984), the difference between what a person wants and what a person has creates anxiety. The larger the gap, the greater the anxiety.

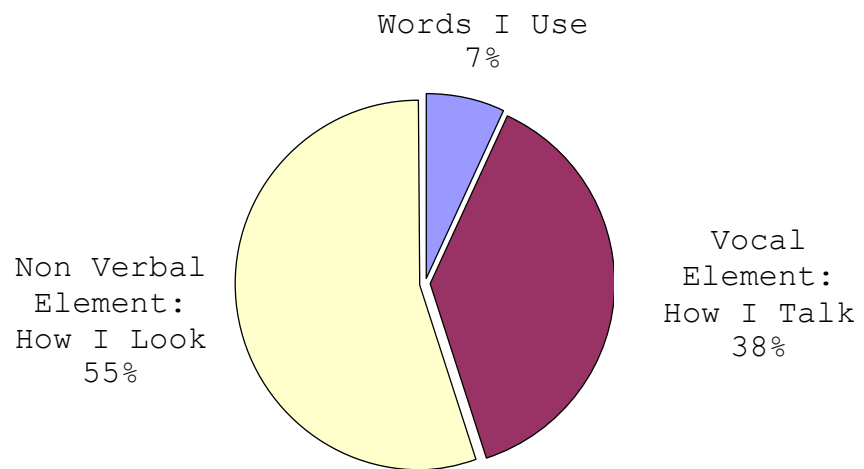
This gap is created when basic needs go unmet.

What Causes People to Become Angry?

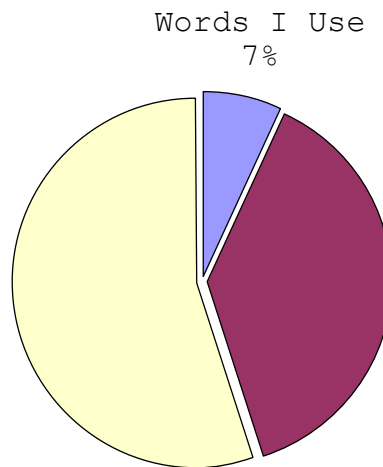
Glasser (1984) identifies five basic needs:

1. The need to survive and reproduce
2. The need to belong; to love, share, and cooperate
3. The need for power
4. The need for freedom
5. The need for fun

Communication and the Bigger Picture



Today's Focus



It is important to note that while the strategies discussed today may effectively de-escalate crises and manage image, how you speak and the way you look when speaking can and do significantly impact the overall effectiveness of your message.

Fuzzy Meanings

Indicate in the left margin, on a scale from 0% to 100%, the amount of time each word means to you.

In other words, when you say to someone, "X happens frequently," what percentage of the time would you usually assume it occurs?

Fuzzy Meanings

Break into groups and determine the "range" of interpretations for each word.

Write the "range" in the right column.

Discuss what you notice about the limits of human communication.

Part I: Current Research

Three important bodies of research are worth highlighting:

1. Image Repair Theory
2. Attribution Theory
3. Impression Management Theory

Image Repair Theory

William Benoit (1995) argued that when an incident occurs that affects how others perceive you (i.e. your image), your credibility with that audience is damaged.

Regaining credibility is necessary in order to regain your persuasive ability.

Image Repair Theory

In his theory, Benoit identified strategies that when used properly, could serve to rebuild or repair a person's image or credibility before a target audience.

His strategies were compiled from the professional literature on account-work, excuse-making, and apologia.

Image Repair Strategies (Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 1999)

Denial

Attack Accuser

Simple Denial

Shifting the Blame

Evading Responsibility

Provocation

Defeasibility

Accident

Good Intention

Reducing Offensiveness

Attack Accuser

Bolstering

Minimization

Differentiation

Transcendence

Compensation

Corrective Action

Mortification

Image Repair Theory: Denial

Simple Denial: "The school had no responsibility for supervising the skating party."

Blame Shifting: "Parents organized this activity and advertised it directly to students outside of school."

Image Repair Theory: Evading Responsibility

Provocation: "Several new housing developments forced the school board to change its elementary school boundaries."

Defeasibility: "The board of education was not given important information when they made that decision."

Image Repair Theory: Evading Responsibility

Accident: "The teacher inadvertently misplaced the student's assignment."

Good Intention: "My teachers went into this hoping to turn students on to careers in mathematics."

Image Repair Theory: Reducing Offensiveness

Bolstering: "As a result of this event, a new approach to safety was created—one that will benefit everyone."

Minimization: "Changing the boundaries in this way does not affect as many families as you might think."

Image Repair Theory: Reducing Offensiveness

Differentiation: "Fortunately the financial impact of the state legislature's decision won't impact us nearly as much as it will smaller districts."

Transcendence: "We postponed salary increases in order to focus those dollars on decreasing class size."

Image Repair Theory: Reducing Offensiveness

Attack Accuser: "Our local newspaper is notorious for misinterpreting test data."

Compensation: "The board of education has agreed to adjust salaries to compensate teachers for the increase in contracted days."

Image Repair Theory: Corrective Action

Corrective Action: "We are making changes to board policy to ensure that an event like this will not happen again."

This strategy communicates that steps will be taken to correct the mistakes that led to an injurious event in order to avoid any recurrence.

Image Repair Theory: Mortification

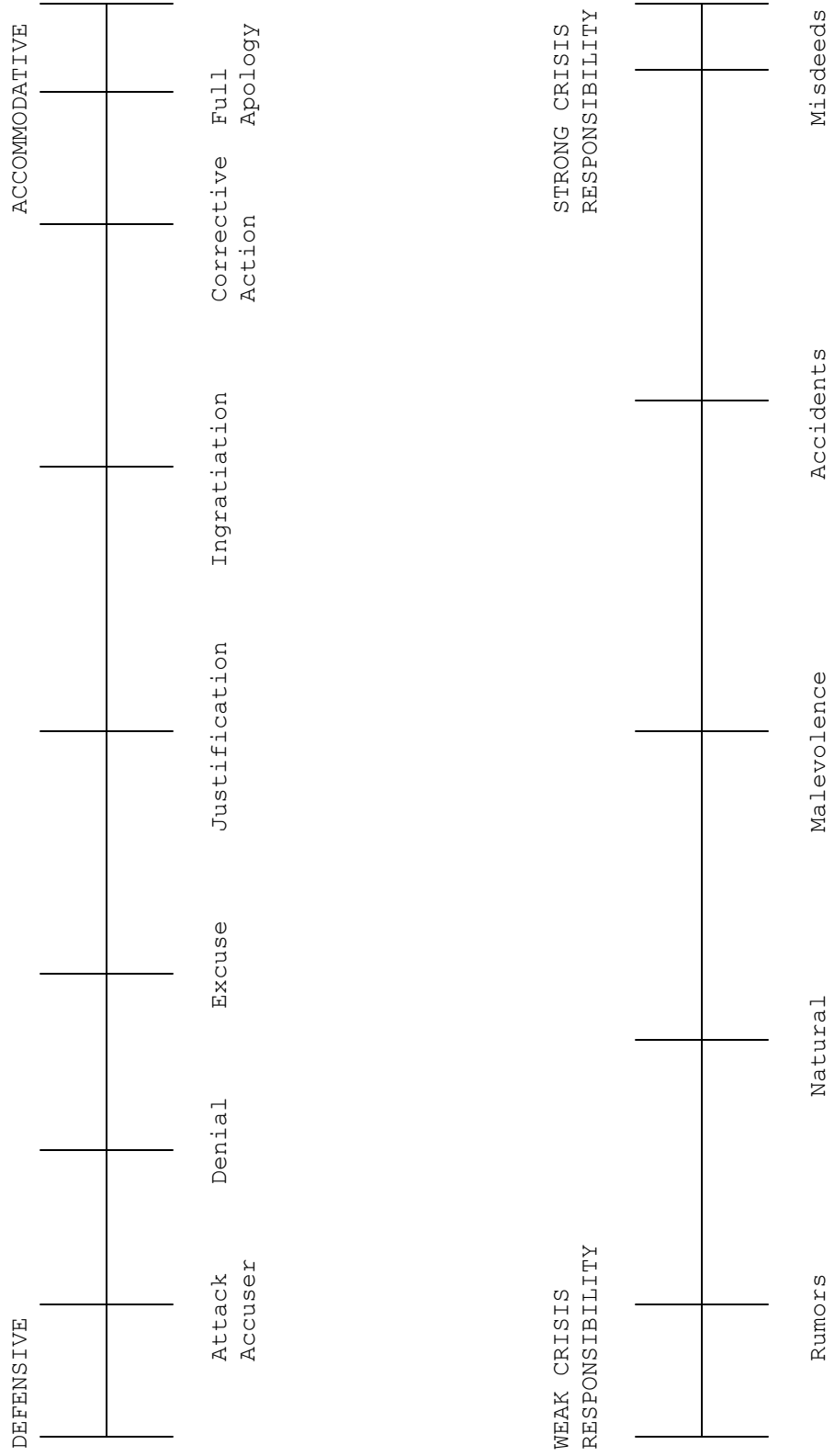
Mortification: "I cannot separate the decisions of my subordinates from my role as superintendent. Ultimately, this is my responsibility. I am terribly sorry that this decision has caused so many people to suffer."

Mortification communicates sorrow and regret for the negative event.

Part II: A Situational Approach

This section examines a situational theory for strategy selection that when applied correctly, may serve to de-escalate volatile situations.

Figure 2.8: Coombs's (1999, p. 124) Continuum of Crisis Strategies



What Determines Crisis Severity?

Does attribution of responsibility alone determine crisis severity as Coombs suggests?

Impression Management Theory says the answer is no.

What Determines Crisis Severity?

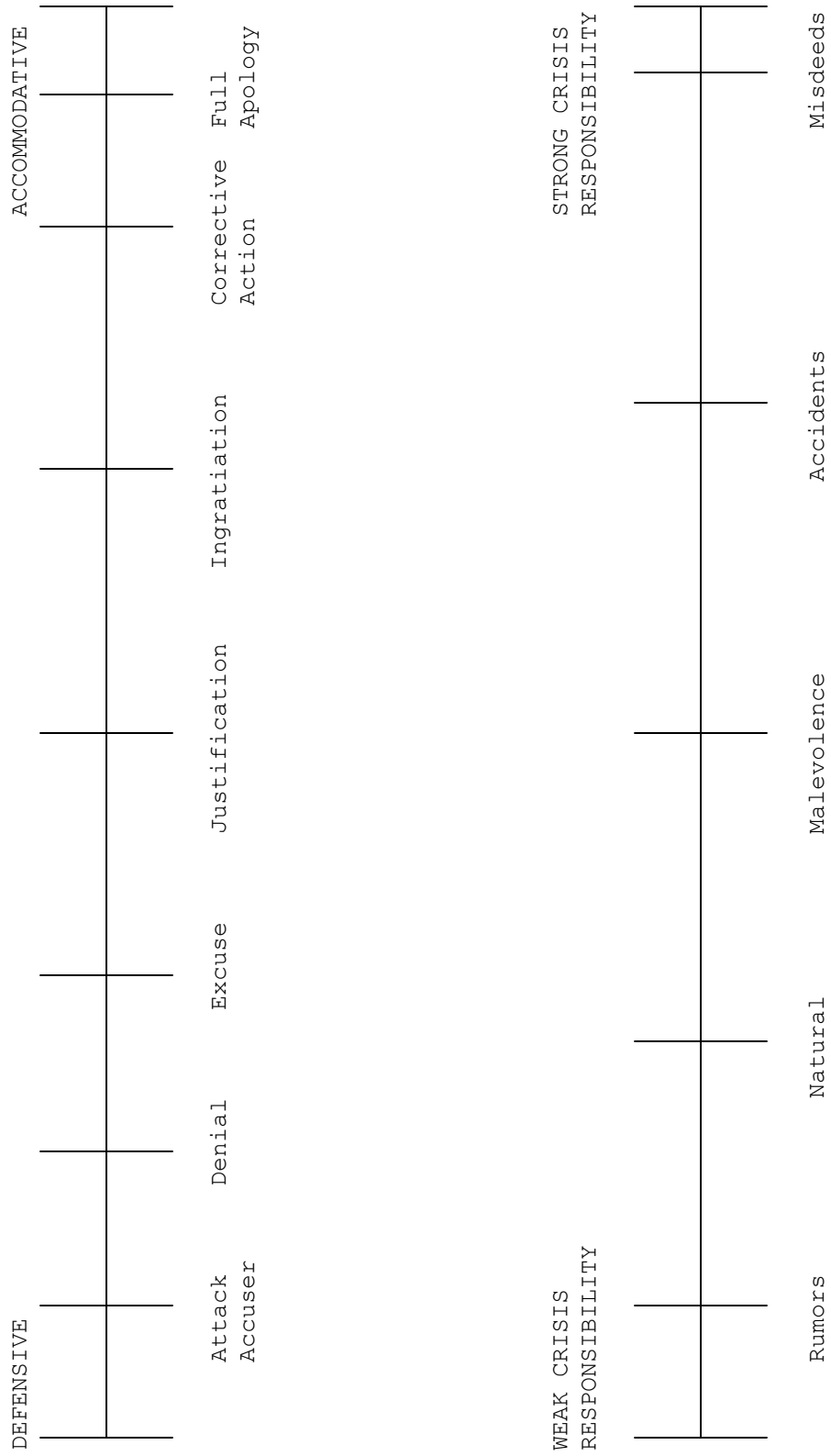
According to Schlenker (1980), TWO factors, not one, determine crisis severity. Both influence severity independently of each other.

The Two Factors Are:

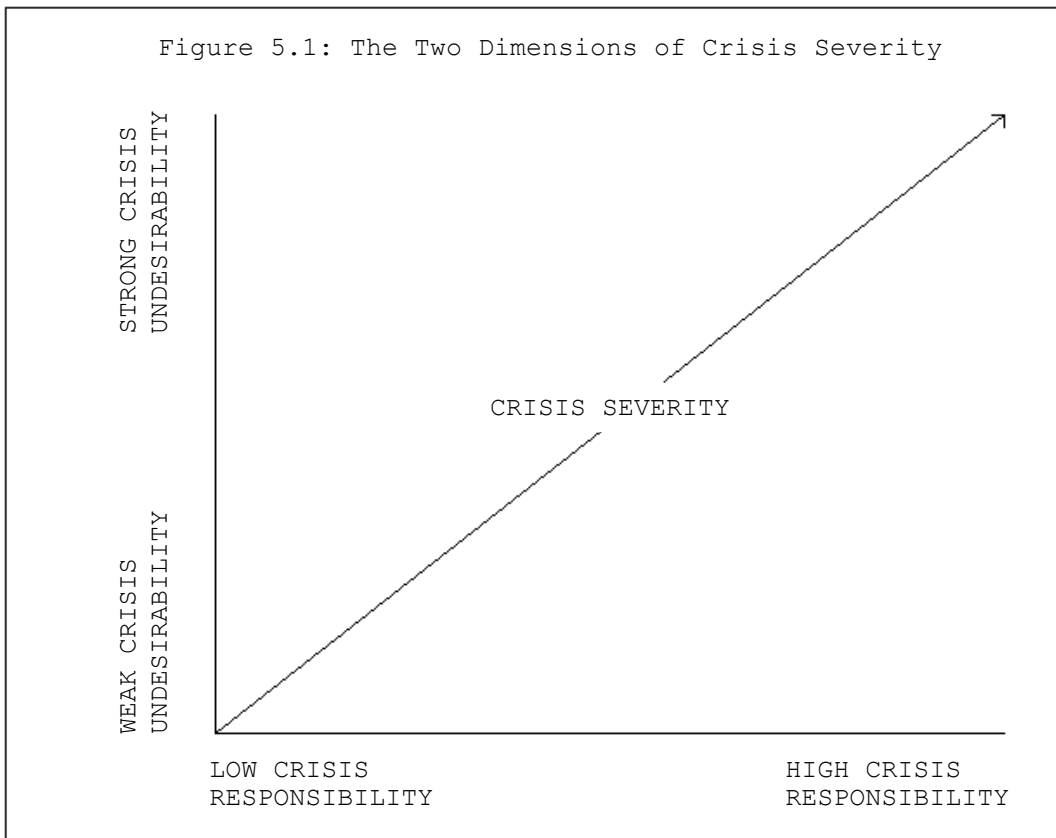
1. The level or **degree of responsibility** attributed to the actor.

2. The level or **degree of undesirability** the event has in relation to the audience. This is also known as the **perceived negativity** associated with the event.

Figure 2.8: Coombs's (1999, p. 124) Continuum of Crisis Strategies



Two Dimensions of Crisis Severity



Choosing Strategies *Prescriptively*

Higgins and Snyder (1989, p. 79) said that there are two major categories of strategies:

1. **Linkage Strategies.** These are designed to weaken "any perceived connection the [individual] may have to the bad act."
2. **Valence Strategies.** These seek to downplay the negativity associated with acts for which responsibility is unavoidable.

Vogelaar's (2002) Situational Theory

Figure 5.2: Strategic Categories Created by the Two Dimensions

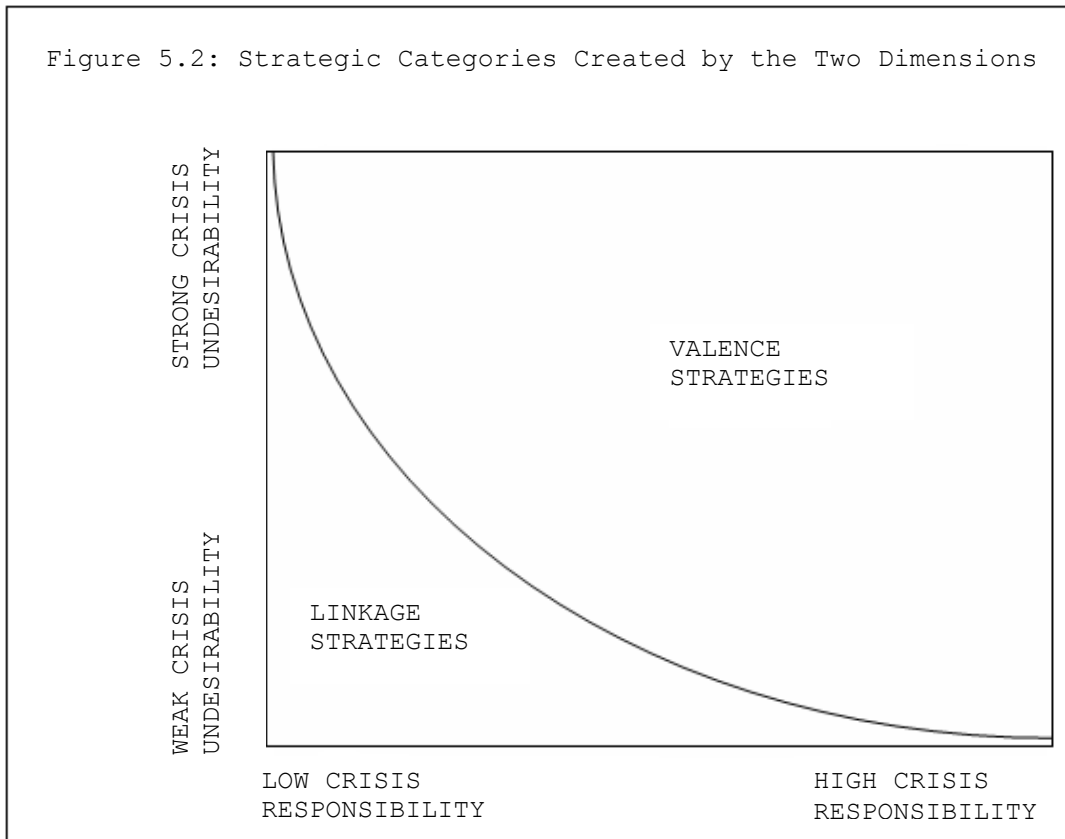


Image Repair Strategies

Linkage Strategies

Attack Accuser

Denial

Blame Shifting

Provocation

Defeasibility

Accident

Good Intention

Valence Strategies

Attack Accuser

Bolstering

Minimization

Differentiation

Transcendence

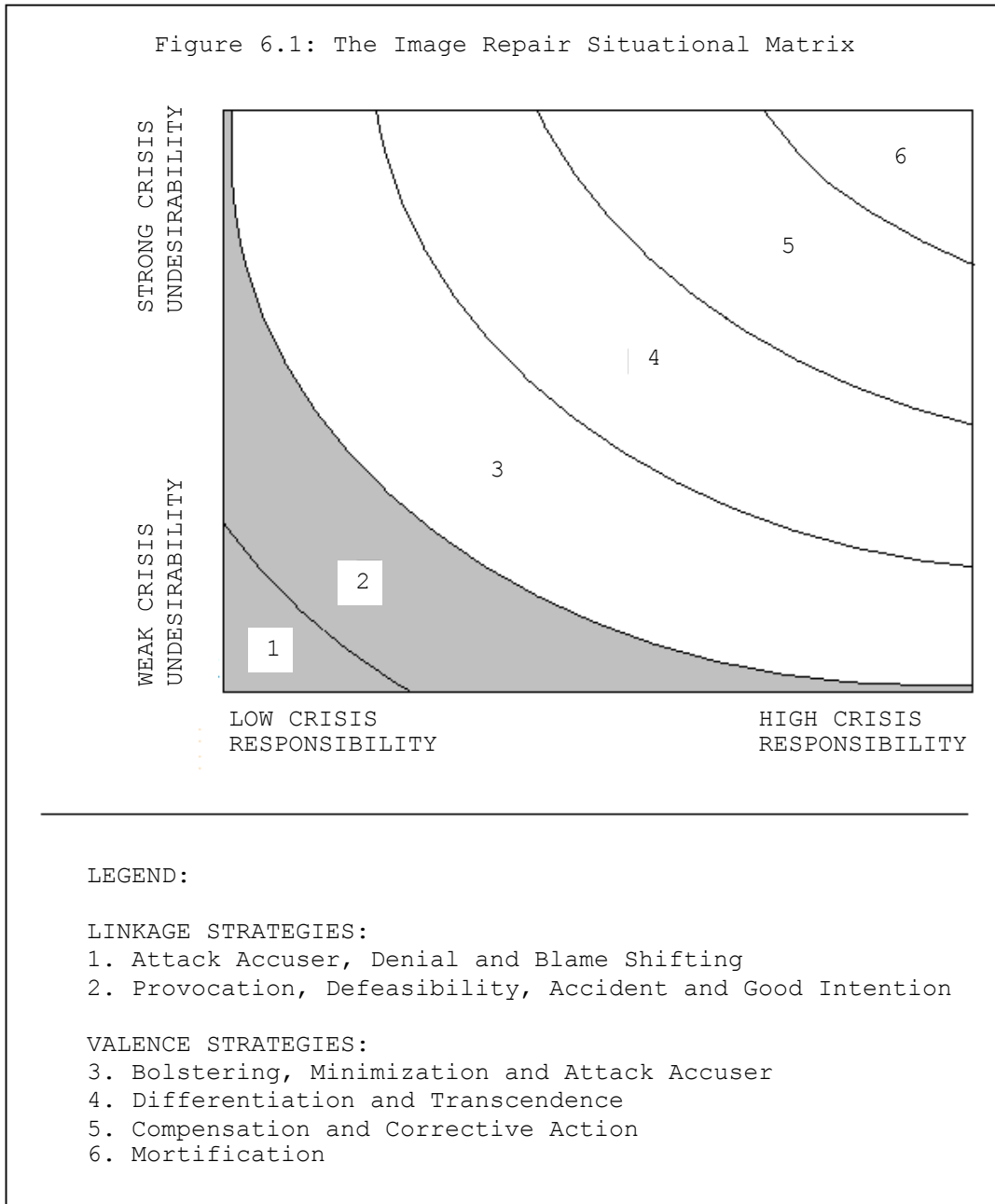
Compensation

Corrective Action

Mortification

Note: linkage strategies seek to evade responsibility while valence strategies seek to reduce offensiveness.

Vogelaar's (2005) Image Repair Situational Matrix



Part III: Practice Opportunities

This section presents scenarios with which to practice using the Image Repair Situational Theory.

Practice Scenario #1

A student asks to ride a different bus than the one to which she is assigned. You tell her she cannot. She follows your directions, boards her assigned bus, and gets off at her assigned stop. Unfortunately, no school personnel (including those with the transportation department), had been informed that she had recently moved. The bus she had requested to ride would have taken her to her new house; her assigned bus took her to her old house three miles away. Having gotten off the bus at her assigned stop, she walked the three miles to her new home in cold weather. Her mother was extremely upset. Local television stations were called to cover the story of a school that refused to transport a little girl to her home.

Practice Scenario #2

As superintendent, you receive a call from the media who is working to meet a deadline. The reporter is seeking information about accusations that students in one of your schools observed a teacher accessing pornographic material from his classroom computer. She cites information obtained from two parents who called the media. You know about the incident and are currently deciding on consequences for the teacher.

Practice Scenario #3

A local television station has dispatched a news crew to your district's central office. Upon arrival, the reporter demands to speak with you, the superintendent, about school safety issues regarding allegations that a man in a red pickup truck has been seen driving near two different schools in recent days. The man has been asking students if they have seen his lost dog and has attempted to lure students into his truck to see pictures of the dog. Thus far, students who have been approached in this way have ignored his requests.

Practice Scenario #4

At 1:00 a.m. Saturday morning you, the superintendent, receive a call informing you that three of your high school students have just died in a one-car accident. The apparent cause was a hill-jumping stunt gone awry. The students involved in the incident were all intoxicated. Eye-witnesses saw the teens leaving a school-sponsored after prom party. The reporter begins questioning you about the school's responsibility for the accident.

Practice Scenario #5

You have just been informed that the school of which you are the principal is one of two schools district-wide that failed to meet adequate yearly progress standards. A parent calls and says that a friend of hers who works in the district's central office told her the news. She was advised by this friend to consider moving because her property values would begin going down once the news went public. You have not yet received a call from the media, but rumors may be spreading quickly and a reporter could call at any time.

Practice Scenario #6

It is 2:15 p.m. on a Monday afternoon. There are twenty-five minutes left in the school day. As principal, you receive a call from the local police saying they are chasing an armed man through a neighborhood near your high school. They think he might be a former student and may try to "blend" in by coming into your school. The police want you to consider a lock down situation until they find the assailant. They will notify you when it is appropriate. What will you say to parents who get word of the reason for the lock down and contact the school demanding to pick up their child?

Practice Scenario #7

One of your high school cheerleaders collapsed in an all-school assembly. She was immediately rushed to the hospital. You receive word later that day that she died from bacterial meningitis. The health department notifies you that there is a clear and present danger that others in your school may have been exposed. They advise you to immediately follow health procedures to ensure containment of the sickness. What will you communicate to the media once the story breaks?

Practice Scenario #8

As a middle school principal, you receive a phone call from your school nurse saying that she has seen thirteen confirmed cases of head lice since the school day began. All of the infested students come from the same interdisciplinary team. The nurse is concerned, however, that that may change. You communicate with each of the parents and they agree to pick up their children to take care of the lice. Before the day is over you prepare a letter to go home with the students who came into contact with the infected students. What are the talking points that will be covered in the letter?

Practice Scenario #9

A visiting school is dressing out in your locker room when one student notices a camera. She talks about it with her parents. The parent confronts your assistant principal who was supervising the event. He tells the angry parent that the camera is a fake designed only to deter bad behavior in the locker room. The parent does not believe the explanation and notifies the police. Their investigation reveals that the camera is active and sends a video feed directly to the assistant principal's computer. Local media outlets pick up the story and begin covering it extensively.

Practice Scenario #10

A parent is unhappy because her son came home from school and told her that he had been threatened by his teacher. According to her son a threat was made that he would get suspended for sexual harassment and arrested if he wrote another note like the one passed in class. He admitted to writing the note, but his mother felt the threats were excessive even though the note made a girl feel uncomfortable and self-conscious about her outfit. The teacher did show the student the policy on sexual harassment in hopes it would prevent him from going too far in the future. The teacher never raised her voice or threatened to call the police. The offended parent is popular and has quite a following among other parents.

For Further Study on this Topic See the Following:

- Benoit, W. L. (1995). *Accounts, excuses, and apologies: A theory of image restoration strategies*. Albany, NY.: State University of New York Press.
- Coombs, W. T. (1999). *Ongoing crisis communication: Planning, managing, and responding*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Glasser, W. (1984). *Control theory: A new explanation of how we control our lives*. St. Louis, MO.: Harper & Row, Publishers.
- Higgins, R. L. and Snyder, C. R. (1989). The business of excuses. In R. A. Giacalone, and P. Rosenfeld (Eds.), *Impression management in the organization* (pp. 73-85). Hillsdale, NJ.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Schlenker, B. R. (1980). *Impression management: The self-concept, social identity, and interpersonal relations*. Belmont, CA.: Wadsworth, Inc.
- Vogelaar, R. J. (2002). *The rhetoric of organizational apologia and image restoration discourse: Toward a pragmatic approach to strategy selection in crisis situations*. Unpublished master's thesis. University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS.
- Vogelaar, R. J. (2005). *Rhetorical approaches to crisis communication: The research, development, and validation of an image repair situational theory for educational leaders*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Saint Louis University, St. Louis, MO.

APPENDIX B

“Fuzzy Meanings” Activity

Included in the Training Workshop

FUZZY MEANINGS

Below are several words people often use when talking about life. Please indicate in the left margin, on a scale from 0% to 100%, the **amount of time** each word means to you. In other words, when you say "X happens _____," what percentage of the time would you usually assume it occurs?

After you've completed your portion, break into groups of 3-5 individuals to determine the "range" of interpretations.

YOUR PERCENT	WHAT YOUR GROUP WROTE
____ % a. Often	Range: _____
____ % b. Rarely	Range: _____
____ % c. Always	Range: _____
____ % d. Sometimes	Range: _____
____ % e. Never	Range: _____
____ % f. Usually	Range: _____
____ % g. Occasionally	Range: _____
____ % h. Most of the time	Range: _____
____ % i. Seldom	Range: _____
____ % j. A lot	Range: _____
____ % k. A little	Range: _____
____ % l. Frequently	Range: _____
____ % m. Almost always	Range: _____
____ % n. Almost never	Range: _____

APPENDIX C:

Formative Evaluation Data Collection Tool

INSTRUCTIONS: Please check all boxes that apply to you.
Confidentiality is protected.

Gender:	<input type="checkbox"/> Male	<input type="checkbox"/> Female	
Occupation:	<input type="checkbox"/> Assistant Principal	<input type="checkbox"/> Principal	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Assistant Superintendent	<input type="checkbox"/> Superintendent	
Years of Experience in Education:	<input type="checkbox"/> 0-3 Years	<input type="checkbox"/> 4-7 Years	<input type="checkbox"/> 8-11 Years
	<input type="checkbox"/> 12-15 Years	<input type="checkbox"/> 16-19 Years	<input type="checkbox"/> 20-23 Years
	<input type="checkbox"/> 24-27 Years	<input type="checkbox"/> 28-31 Years	<input type="checkbox"/> 31 + Years
In your current position, how often do you find yourself responding to angry students?	<input type="checkbox"/> Daily	<input type="checkbox"/> Multiple Times Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly
	<input type="checkbox"/> Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/> Multiple Times Yearly	<input type="checkbox"/> Yearly
	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Never	
In your current position, how often do you find yourself responding to angry parents?	<input type="checkbox"/> Daily	<input type="checkbox"/> Multiple Times Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly
	<input type="checkbox"/> Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/> Multiple Times Yearly	<input type="checkbox"/> Yearly
	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Never	
In your current position, how frequently do you find yourself needing to repair the reputation of the school/district?	<input type="checkbox"/> Daily	<input type="checkbox"/> Multiple Times Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly
	<input type="checkbox"/> Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/> Multiple Times Yearly	<input type="checkbox"/> Yearly
	<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Never	

INSTRUCTIONS: Think about the training you have just received. The items below concern your impression of the Image Repair Situational Matrix. Circle one number for each of the following statements. The responses range from: 1 = STRONGLY DISAGREE to 5 = STRONGLY AGREE.

- | | | | | | |
|---|----------|---|---|---|----------|
| 1. The training provided useful information about de-escalating crisis situations and image repair. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | STRONGLY | | | | STRONGLY |
| | DISAGREE | | | | AGREE |
| 2. The training provided sufficient grounding in theory and research. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | STRONGLY | | | | STRONGLY |
| | DISAGREE | | | | AGREE |
| 3. The training provided a practical application of the theory and research. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | STRONGLY | | | | STRONGLY |
| | DISAGREE | | | | AGREE |
| 4. The training helped me to understand the factors that define the severity of a crisis. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | STRONGLY | | | | STRONGLY |
| | DISAGREE | | | | AGREE |
| 5. The Image Repair Situational Matrix helps me to think about selecting response strategies appropriate to the severity of a crisis. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | STRONGLY | | | | STRONGLY |
| | DISAGREE | | | | AGREE |
| 6. The Image Repair Situational Matrix is something I can use when I face a crisis situation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | STRONGLY | | | | STRONGLY |
| | DISAGREE | | | | AGREE |
| 7. I would use the Image Repair Situational Matrix when assessing the severity of a crisis. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | STRONGLY | | | | STRONGLY |
| | DISAGREE | | | | AGREE |
| 8. I would use the Image Repair Situational Matrix when choosing communication strategies in response to a crisis situation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | STRONGLY | | | | STRONGLY |
| | DISAGREE | | | | AGREE |
| 9. The Image Repair Situational Matrix helps me to frame my understanding of a crisis. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | STRONGLY | | | | STRONGLY |
| | DISAGREE | | | | AGREE |
| 10. I would recommend this training to my colleagues. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | STRONGLY | | | | STRONGLY |
| | DISAGREE | | | | AGREE |

INSTRUCTIONS: Feel free to use the space below to offer any suggestions that might improve the Image Repair Situational Matrix as a tool for rebuilding reputation and/or de-escalating crisis situations.

Comments/Suggestions:

APPENDIX D:

Participants' Handout and Notes Packet

(Revised)

What to Say When Crisis Strikes:

Image Repair Situational Theory for Educational Leaders

Presented by:

Robert Vogelaar, Principal
South Valley Middle School
1000 Midjay Drive
Liberty, MO 64068
rvogelaar@liberty.k12.mo.us
(816) 736-7180 Main
(816) 736-7185 Fax

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2. prepared according to the educational multimedia fair use guidelines
3. restricted from further use

Why Are You Here?

Identify an experience you have had that required you to respond verbally or in writing to a crisis situation.

Jot down what you hope to learn today. What do you expect to get from this workshop?

Guiding Questions

1. Why do people react in ways that may result in a crisis situation?
2. How can a person accurately assess the degree of volatility in crisis situations?
3. What strategies are best to apply in order to manage the school or district image in the midst of a crisis situation?

Three-Fold Purpose

1. To explore current research on impression management, attribution theory, and image repair theory
2. To examine a situational approach for strategy selection that manages a school or district image in crisis situations
3. To apply this situational approach to different scenarios in order to gain confidence in diagnosing and responding to a crisis

What Would You Do?

A parent notifies the news media that her son was assaulted by his school principal and the school's resource deputy. She is willing to release pictures of her son's cuts and bruises for use by the media. Her side of the story depicts the school as having a history of using force against students. The media wants you, the superintendent, to release a statement in response to the allegations.

What Causes People to Become Angry?

According to William Glasser, M.D. (1984), the difference between what a person wants and what a person has creates anxiety. The larger the gap, the greater the anxiety.

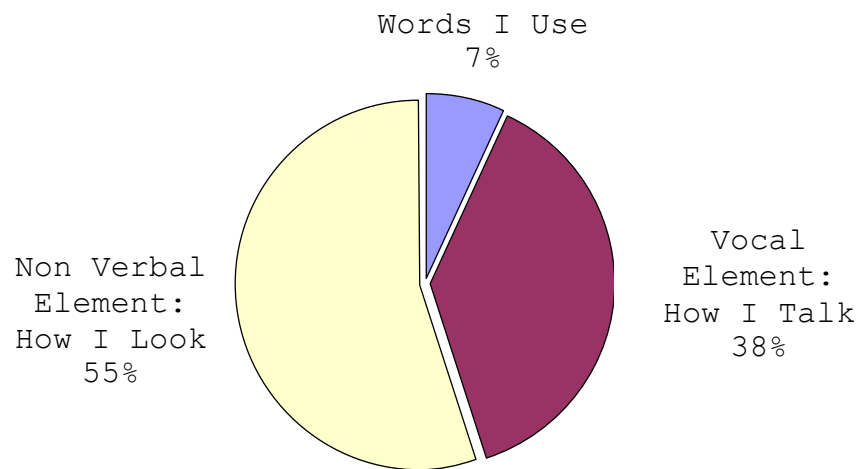
This gap is created when basic needs go unmet.

What Causes People to Become Angry?

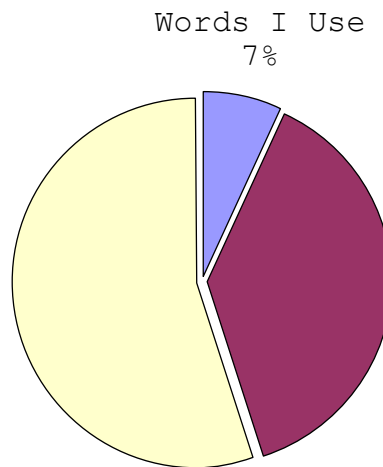
Glasser (1984) identifies five basic needs:

1. The need to survive and reproduce
2. The need to belong; to love, share, and cooperate
3. The need for power
4. The need for freedom
5. The need for fun

Communication and the Bigger Picture



Today's Focus



It is important to note that while the strategies discussed today may effectively de-escalate crises and manage image, how you speak and the way you look when speaking can and do significantly impact the overall effectiveness of your message.

Fuzzy Meanings

Indicate in the left margin, on a scale from 0% to 100%, the amount of time each word means to you.

In other words, when you say to someone, "X happens frequently," what percentage of the time would you usually assume it occurs?

Fuzzy Meanings

Break into groups and determine the "range" of interpretations for each word.

Write the "range" in the right column.

Discuss what you notice about the limits of human communication.

Part I: Current Research

Three important bodies of research are worth highlighting:

1. Image Repair Theory
2. Attribution Theory
3. Impression Management Theory

Image Repair Theory

William Benoit (1995) argued that when an incident occurs that affects how others perceive you (i.e. your image), your credibility with that audience is damaged.

Regaining credibility is necessary in order to regain your persuasive ability.

Image Repair Theory

In his theory, Benoit identified strategies that when used properly, could serve to rebuild or repair a person's image or credibility before a target audience.

His strategies were compiled from the professional literature on account-work, excuse-making, and apologia.

Image Repair Strategies (Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 1999)

Denial

Attack Accuser

Simple Denial

Shifting the Blame

Evading Responsibility

Provocation

Defeasibility

Accident

Good Intention

Reducing Offensiveness

Attack Accuser

Bolstering

Minimization

Differentiation

Transcendence

Compensation

Corrective Action

Mortification

Image Repair Theory: Denial

Simple Denial: "The school had no responsibility for supervising the skating party."

Blame Shifting: "Parents organized this activity and advertised it directly to students outside of school."

Discuss When You Have Successfully Used:

Simple Denial:

Blame Shifting:

Image Repair Theory: Evading Responsibility

Provocation: "Several new housing developments forced the school board to change its elementary school boundaries."

Defeasibility: "The board of education was not given important information when they made that decision."

Discuss When You Have Successfully Used:

Provocation:

Defeasibility:

Image Repair Theory: Evading Responsibility

Accident: "The teacher inadvertently misplaced the student's assignment."

Good Intention: "My teachers went into this hoping to turn students on to careers in mathematics."

Discuss When You Have Successfully Used:

Accident:

Good Intention:

Image Repair Theory: Reducing Offensiveness

Bolstering: "As a result of this event, a new approach to safety was created—one that will benefit everyone."

Minimization: "Changing the boundaries in this way does not affect as many families as you might think."

Discuss When You Have Successfully Used:

Bolstering:

Minimization:

Image Repair Theory: Reducing Offensiveness

Differentiation: "Fortunately the financial impact of the state legislature's decision won't impact us nearly as much as it will smaller districts."

Transcendence: "We postponed salary increases in order to focus those dollars on decreasing class size."

Discuss When You Have Successfully Used:

Differentiation:

Transcendence:

Image Repair Theory: Reducing Offensiveness

Attack Accuser: "Our local newspaper is notorious for misinterpreting test data."

Compensation: "The board of education has agreed to adjust salaries to compensate teachers for the increase in contracted days."

Discuss When You Have Successfully Used:

Attack Accuser:

Compensation:

Image Repair Theory: Corrective Action

Corrective Action: "We are making changes to board policy to ensure that an event like this will not happen again."

This strategy communicates that steps will be taken to correct the mistakes that led to an injurious event in order to avoid any recurrence.

Image Repair Theory: Mortification

Mortification: "I cannot separate the decisions of my subordinates from my role as superintendent. Ultimately, this is my responsibility. I am terribly sorry that this decision has caused so many people to suffer."

Mortification communicates sorrow and regret for the negative event.

Discuss When You Have Successfully Used:

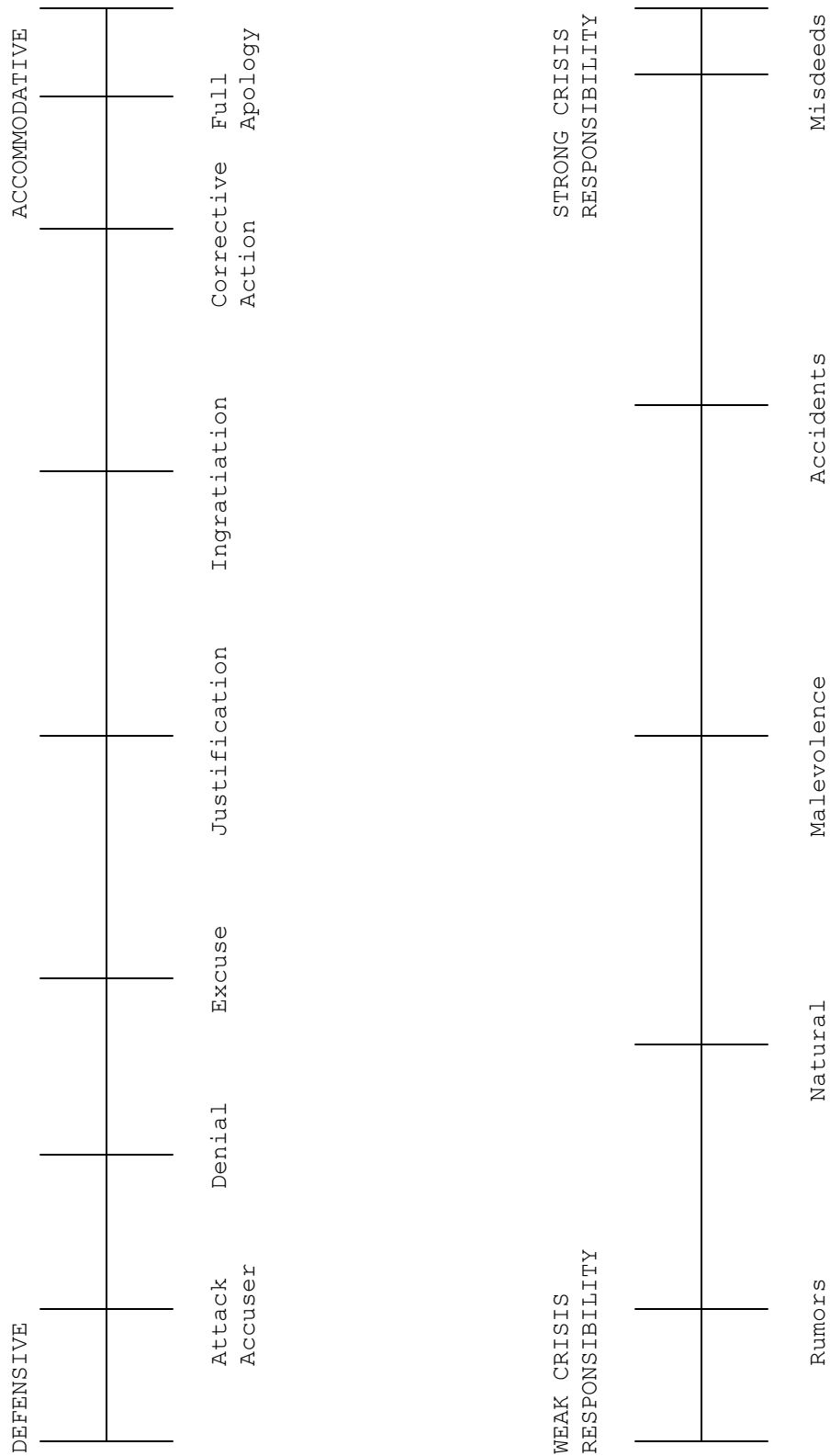
Corrective Action:

Mortification:

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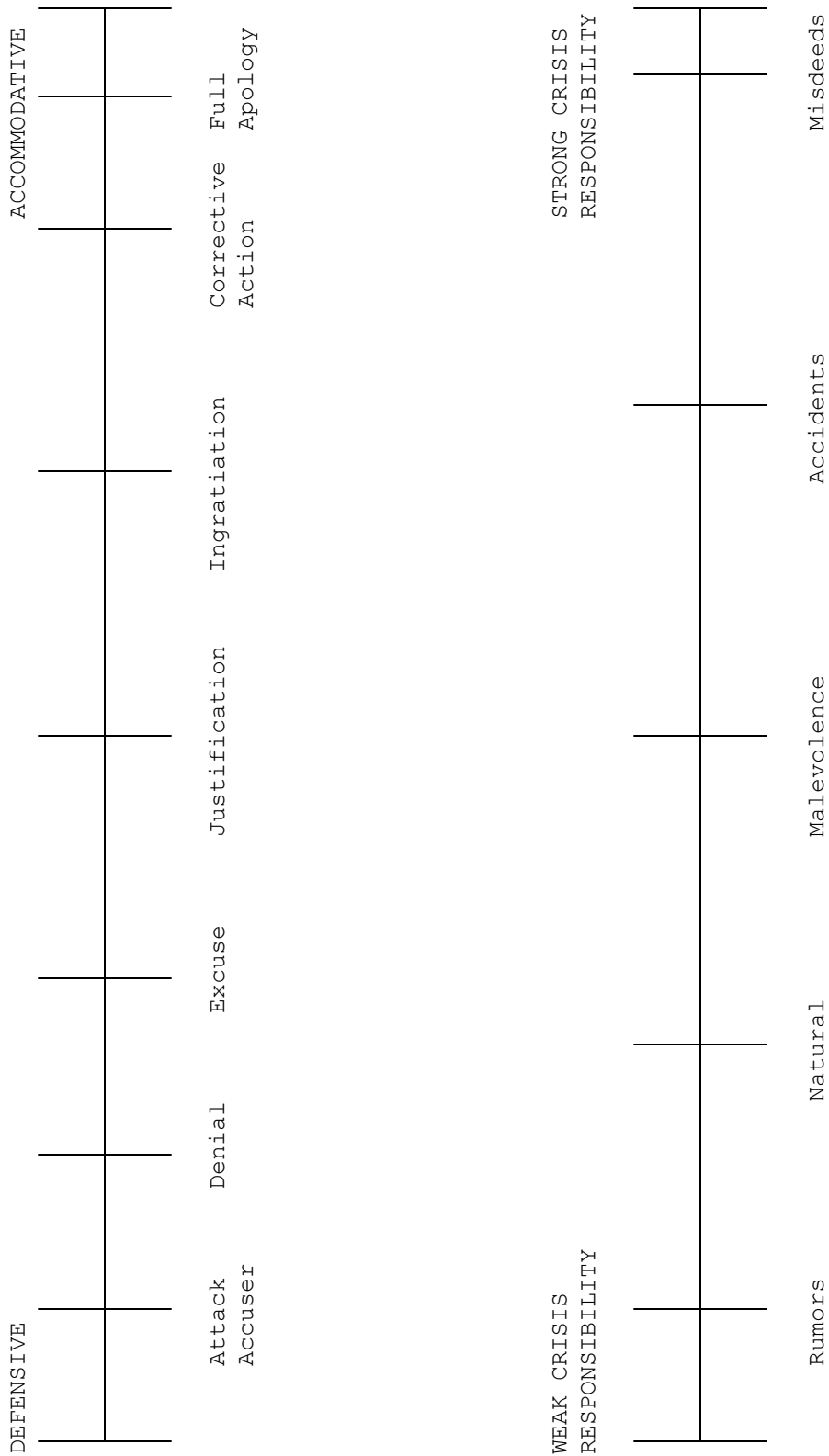
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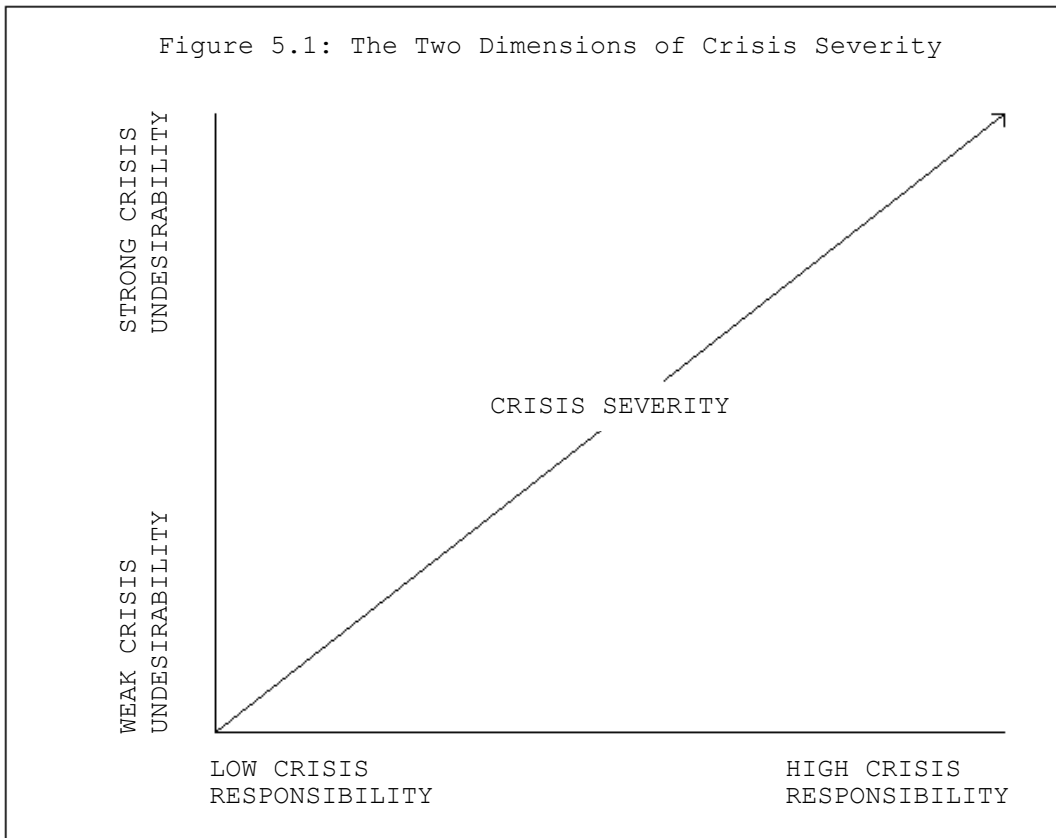
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Vogelaar's (2002) Situational Theory

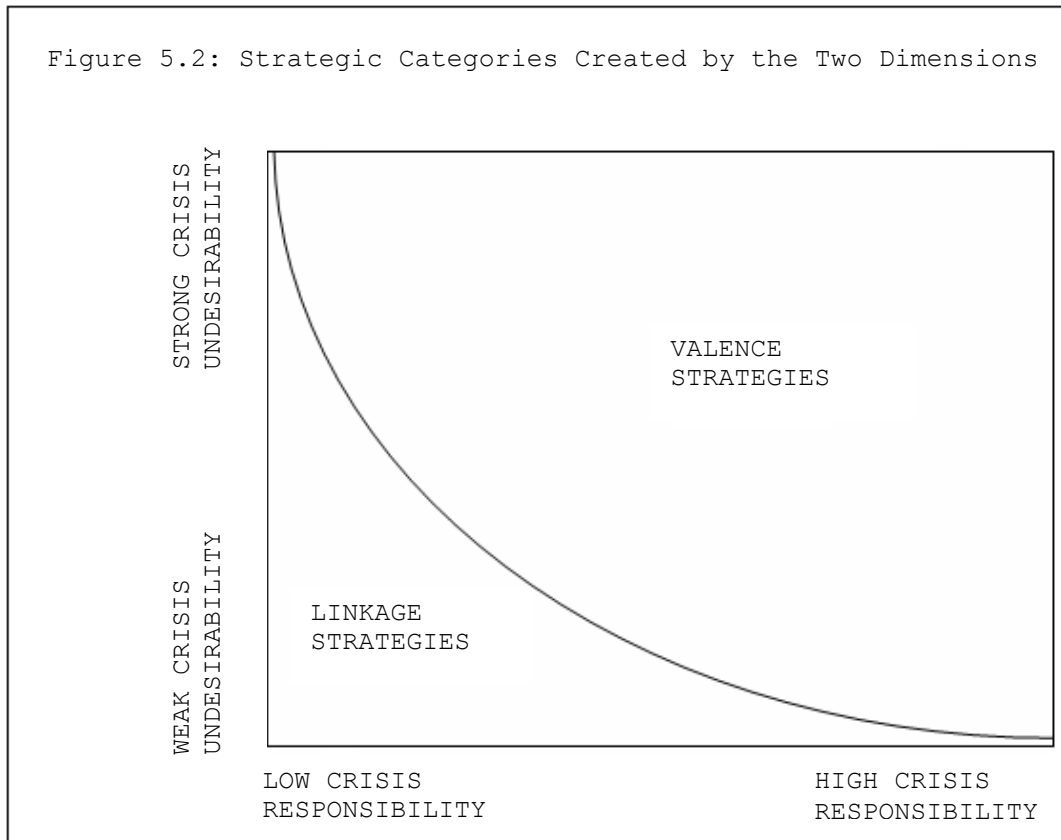


Image Repair Strategies

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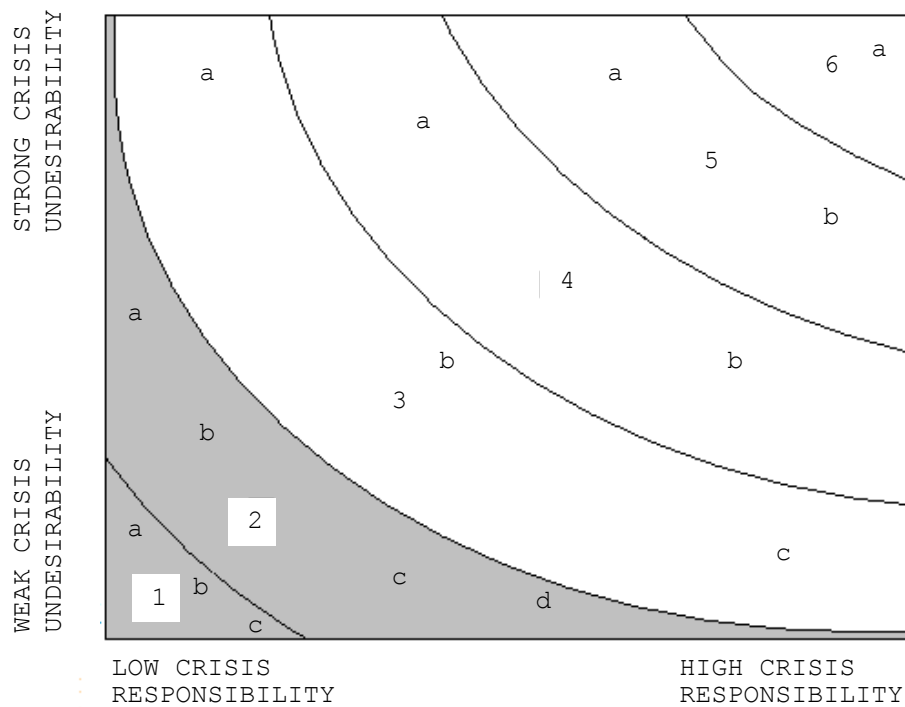
Corrective Action

Mortification

Note: linkage strategies seek to evade responsibility while valence strategies seek to reduce offensiveness.

Vogelaar's (2005) Image Repair Situational Matrix

Figure 7.2: The Image Repair Situational Matrix (Revised)



LEGEND:

LINKAGE STRATEGIES:

1. a. Denial, b. Blame Shifting and c. Attack Accuser
2. a. Provocation, b. Defeasibility, c. Accident and d. Good Intention

VALENCE STRATEGIES:

3. a. Bolstering, b. Minimization and c. Attack Accuser
4. a. Transcendence and b. Differentiation
5. a. Corrective Action and b. Compensation
6. a. Mortification

Part III: Practice Opportunities

This section presents scenarios with which to practice using the Image Repair Situational Theory.

Practice Scenario #1

A student asks to ride a different bus than the one to which she is assigned. You tell her she cannot. She follows your directions, boards her assigned bus, and gets off at her assigned stop. Unfortunately, no school personnel (including those with the transportation department), had been informed that she had recently moved. The bus she had requested to ride would have taken her to her new house; her assigned bus took her to her old house three miles away. Having gotten off the bus at her assigned stop, she walked the three miles to her new home in cold weather. Her mother was extremely upset. Local television stations were called to cover the story of a school that refused to transport a little girl to her home.

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As superintendent, you receive a call from the media who is working to meet a deadline. The reporter is seeking information about accusations that students in one of your schools observed a teacher accessing pornographic material from his classroom computer. She cites information obtained from two parents who called the media. You know about the incident and are currently deciding on consequences for the teacher.

Practice Scenario #3

A local television station has dispatched a news crew to your district's central office. Upon arrival, the reporter demands to speak with you, the superintendent, about school safety issues regarding allegations that a man in a red pickup truck has been seen driving near two different schools in recent days. The man has been asking students if they have seen his lost dog and has attempted to lure students into his truck to see pictures of the dog. Thus far, students who have been approached in this way have ignored his requests.

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At 1:00 a.m. Saturday morning you, the superintendent, receive a call informing you that three of your high school students have just died in a one-car accident. The apparent cause was a hill-jumping stunt gone awry. The students involved in the incident were all intoxicated. Eye-witnesses saw the teens leaving a school-sponsored after prom party. The reporter begins questioning you about the school's responsibility for the accident.

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One of your high school cheerleaders collapsed in an all-school assembly. She was immediately rushed to the hospital. You receive word later that day that she died from bacterial meningitis. The health department notifies you that there is a clear and present danger that others in your school may have been exposed. They advise you to immediately follow health procedures to ensure containment of the sickness. What will you communicate to the media once the story breaks?

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As a middle school principal, you receive a phone call from your school nurse saying that she has seen thirteen confirmed cases of head lice since the school day began. All of the infested students come from the same interdisciplinary team. The nurse is concerned, however, that that may change. You communicate with each of the parents and they agree to pick up their children to take care of the lice. Before the day is over you prepare a letter to go home with the students who came into contact with the infected students. What are the talking points that will be covered in the letter?

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A visiting school is dressing out in your locker room when one student notices a camera. She talks about it with her parents. The parent confronts your assistant principal who was supervising the event. He tells the angry parent that the camera is a fake designed only to deter bad behavior in the locker room. The parent does not believe the explanation and notifies the police. Their investigation reveals that the camera is active and sends a video feed directly to the assistant principal's computer. Local media outlets pick up the story and begin covering it extensively.

Practice Scenario #10

A parent is unhappy because her son came home from school and told her that he had been threatened by his teacher. According to her son a threat was made that he would get suspended for sexual harassment and arrested if he wrote another note like the one passed in class. He admitted to writing the note, but his mother felt the threats were excessive even though the note made a girl feel uncomfortable and self-conscious about her outfit. The teacher did show the student the policy on sexual harassment in hopes it would prevent him from going too far in the future. The teacher never raised her voice or threatened to call the police. The offended parent is popular and has quite a following among other parents.

For Further Study on this Topic See the Following:

- Benoit, W. L. (1995). *Accounts, excuses, and apologies: A theory of image restoration strategies*. Albany, NY.: State University of New York Press.
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VITA AUCTORIS

Robert Jay Vogelaar is an Iowa native who moved to Kansas City, Missouri when he was in high school. There he attended Oak Park High School in the North Kansas City School District. Upon graduation in 1988, he moved to Columbia, Missouri, and attended the University of Missouri where he majored in Curriculum and Instruction.

After graduating with his bachelor's degree in 1992, Mr. Vogelaar took a position teaching middle school speech back in his home district of North Kansas City. He taught during the 1992-1993 and 1993-1994 school years before taking a position as the Director of Camping Ministries with The Navigators' Eagle Lake Camp in Colorado Springs, Colorado. This was a position he had served in during the summer months since 1992, and a camp at which he had worked summers since 1990.

Mr. Vogelaar returned to Kansas City, Missouri, to teach high school speech and theater from 1995 to 1997. In 1997 he began work on a master's degree in communication studies from the University of Kansas. While working on that degree, he took a middle school teaching position at New Mark Middle School. He remained in that building as a speech teacher and half-time

administrator while he worked on a second master's degree in school leadership from Northwest Missouri State University. He completed both his master's from the University of Kansas and his master's from Northwest Missouri State University in 2002.

That fall he began work on his doctorate in educational leadership from Saint Louis University and started an assistant principal position at the newly constructed South Valley Middle School in Liberty, Missouri. He has worked in Liberty Public Schools since 2002 and is currently the principal of South Valley Middle School. He plans to graduate with his doctorate in education from Saint Louis University in 2005.

Bob married Charla Ringhausen, whom he had met his freshman year at Oak Park High School. They turned their friendship of seven years into a dating relationship when Bob was finishing up his undergraduate degree at MU and Charla was starting her graduate degree at Washington University in St. Louis. After dating for three years, they married on May 6, 1995. Charla is a licensed clinical social worker. Bob plans to write and present with his wife in the area of managing crises among at-risk youth in the elementary and middle levels.