A Response to Crisis for the General Public

Scott Ismond
sismond@iastate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/creativecomponents

Part of the Interpersonal and Small Group Communication Commons, Journalism Studies Commons, Mass Communication Commons, Other Communication Commons, and the Public Relations and Advertising Commons

Recommended Citation
https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/creativecomponents/4

This Creative Component is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa State University Capstones, Theses and Dissertations at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Creative Components by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
A Response to Crisis for the General Public

By

Scott Alexander Ismond

A Creative Component Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department: Journalism and Mass Communication
Major: Journalism and Mass Communication
Minor: Business

Program of Study Committee:
Dr. Gang Han, Major Professor
Dr. Su Jung Kim, Committee Member
Dr. James Summers, Minor Committee Member

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
April 2018
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Reviews</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 1- Iowa State University NORML</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 2- Iowa State University YDSA</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 3- Duke Lacrosse</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Review Summary</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis Response Recommendations</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Threat Scenario</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Threat Scenario</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Threat Scenario</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix I</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix II</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix III</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Introduction**

Throughout history, we have seen critical moments that defined an individual, group, business or organization. For the most part, British Petroleum was defined by their reaction to the gulf coast oil spills, Tiger Woods’s success on the golf course has been overshadowed by his personal issues, and the Duke Lacrosse team’s championship run was canceled because of a sexual assault accusation. These are just a snapshot of major crises that we can (and will) examine in this text. Despite the notoriety of these cases, these crises are what form a major part of the public perception of these entities to date.

After examining the literature, this text defines a crisis as an event which requires action and a strategic response. These events (crises) threaten the public’s impression of an organization or individual. While some small crises may go unnoticed due to effective communication, others can call for the world’s attention. In either scenario, careful evaluation and consideration must go into the response. Factors such as the events that lead to the crisis, the publics or stakeholders that are following the situation, and the organization’s reputation are just examples of perspectives that need to be considered. A well-crafted response may not only minimize the damage to an organization’s reputation, but even remove an organization’s connection to the crisis.

Crisis is by no means limited to those of fame and fortune. Even within Iowa State University, recent history has seen responses to local shootings both internal and external to the school, University affiliated riots (VEISHEA) and legality issues (most recently with the usage of the University airplanes). Athletics has seen issues of player confrontations with the law. The University has even become involved with student organizations regarding trademark issues. In 2017 the University ultimately lost a battle with the National Organization for the Reform of
Marijuana Laws (NORML) club on campus regarding the use of ‘Cy’ and a marijuana leaf. The difference is that these programs (Iowa State University and Cyclone Athletics) have departments that oversee the legality and public image of the company or organization.

Many of the traditional student organizations on campus do not have this luxury, so when crisis hits, it can be devastating to the existence of the group. For example, in 2012 the hockey team made the front page of the Iowa State Daily for all the wrong reasons. One of the team’s rookie forwards was arrested for public intoxication. What made it front-page worthy was the player also happened to be an Ames native. Due to other past issues with the program, the future of one of the University’s top student organizations was put in jeopardy. Instead of attempting to help restore the image of the program and help the team through the difficult time, the university put the program under a microscope. These situations should not be taken as a moment to shame an entity, but rather to help educate, guide and restore.

This project will provide a theoretical basis for the decision-making process before reviewing and analyzing three cases that possess various levels of threat to an organization’s reputation. The purpose is to provide an understanding and plan for student organizations to follow in the event of a crisis. The final sections of this text will outline three scenarios of various threat levels, and a guide for how to respond to each.

Crisis is inevitable. It is what generates the plot of the movies we watch, the stories we read and even the news that we see in our day. A response should not be a matter of who can afford the best representation, it should be a matter of education and preparation, a goal that this text seeks to achieve.
Literature Review

Crisis communication is important as it can drastically diminish harm to an organization if managed properly, or significantly increase the harm if mishandled (Benson, 1988). The field of crisis communication has been largely filled with case studies to provide a precedent for future crisis response while attempting to answer the demand for theory and empirical research on internal crisis communication (e.g., Frandsen & Johansen, 2011; Johansen, Aggerholm, & Frandsen, 2012; Taylor, 2010). Crisis management can be broken into the three different time frames of pre-crisis, crisis response, and post-crisis (Coombs, 2007a, 2009). Each stage of crisis management has been linked to a different type of crisis communication approach. Risk communication has seen strong affiliation with pre-crisis stage (Palenchar & Heath, 2002, 2007) and renewal discourse with post-crisis (Seeger, Ulmer, & Sellnow, 2005; Ulmer, Seeger, & Sellnow, 2007) (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015). Crisis communication in this text is primarily concerned with timing of crisis response, as words and actions are most critical at that point (Coombs, 2007a) and the transition to post-crisis. Situation Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) was developed to provide an evidence-based understanding to evaluate a proper internal crisis response when factoring in the stakeholders and reputational protection of the organization. A minimal approach to a crisis would evaluate if an organization was responsible for the events, consider the reputation of the organization and then formulate a response to signify the desired intention. SCCT evaluates how factors such as crisis response strategies, emotions, crisis history and prior relationship reputation impact each of the stages (Figure 1).
By evaluating the factors above, a crisis manager can use this model to develop a response that takes an approach of denial, diminish, or rebuild to convey the desired level of crisis responsibility to the stakeholders (Coombs, 2006; Coombs and Holladay, 2004, 2005). SCCT provides a clear framework to consider when evaluating the proposed cases for review and in providing further recommendations for other cases.

An additional framework to use when evaluating SCCT is Attribution Theory. Attribution Theory provides a strong consideration regarding judgments people make. This is determined by evaluating locus, stability and controllability. Locus determines if the cause of the crisis is internal or external to the organization. Stability refers to if the cause of the crisis is continuously present or if the level of the threat varies over time. Controllability evaluates if the organization can affect the cause of the crisis or not (Russell, 1982; Wilson, Cruz, Marshall, & Rao, 1993).
Attribution Theory can therefore be used to help determine the initial crisis responsibility and strategies in SCCT.

In the research of Coombs, he suggests that the use of Attribution Theory can help to categorize response to crisis situations. He provides two main contributions to consider. First, he categorized crisis-response strategies by eliminating redundant strategies and grouping strategies into the larger categories as outlined by Table 1 (Coombs, 1995). This helps to provide an organized approach to consider response strategies. A complete explanation of each strategy can be found in Appendix I.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nonexistence Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Denial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Clarification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Attack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Intimidation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Excuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Denial of intention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Denial of volition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Justification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Minimizing injury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Victim Deserving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Misrepresentation of the crisis event</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingratiation Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Bolstering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Transcendence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Praising Others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mortification Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Remediation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Repentance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Rectification</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suffering Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1-Coombs Crisis-Response Strategies (Coombs, 1995)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Coombs’ second contribution comes in the form of the Crisis Type Matrix. This matrix seeks to classify the perception of the crisis based on Attribution Theory with two dimensions. The first he outlines is locus as it is a key supporter to the approach of crisis management. According to Coombs (1995), the second he states, “must be orthogonal so that when the dimensions are crossed, mutually exclusive crisis types are found” (page 8). From this he proposes the intentional versus unintentional dimensions. Table 2 shows Coombs’ proposed Crisis Type Matrix.

![Crisis Type Matrix](image)

Table 2: Coombs Crisis Type Matrix (Coombs, 1995)

In his article, Coombs explains each of the sections of his matrix:

*Faux Pas*: An action that an organization deems to be appropriate but some third-party challenges. The main cause for these crises is ambiguity. Favors minimal organizational responsibility.

*Accidents*: Occur in normal organizational operations. These can include natural disasters, product defects, and workplace injuries. As they are unintentional,
organizational responsibility is seen as minimal, especially when it’s considered a force of nature.

*Transgressions:* Taking actions that knowingly place the public at risk. This includes selling defective or dangerous materials, violating laws, not honoring rewards for customers, withholding information, etc. As it is an intentional action, efforts to minimize the impact of the crisis or distance from it are not effective as the organization is viewed to have high responsibility.

*Terrorism:* Intentional acts of a third-party that are to harm an organization. This can include product tampering or even hostage taking. As the attack is from an external force, the organization has relatively low responsibility for the crisis and can act as a victim.

While other scholars have studied and developed theories pertaining to crisis response, they provide support and repeat each other. Benoit has offered the theory of image restoration which provides goal driven communication as it desires to maintain a positive reputation or repair damaged relations, just as SCCT does (Benoit, 1995). He also offers five general strategies that mirror that of Coombs. His strategies are categorized as denial, evasion of responsibility, reinforcement of good traits, corrective action and mortification (Benoit, 1995; Len-Rios & Benoit, 2004). The only difference between Benoit and Coombs is that Benoit has corrective action and mortification as separate categories. Coombs combined these as redundant strategies and offers the response strategy of suffering which becomes vital in terrorism events.

Contingency theory was additionally created to develop responses in conflicts with stakeholders (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997). While contingency theory seeks a favorable response (like SCCT) it looks at the threat “in terms of situational demands for
resources” (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015, pg. 3), SCCT examines the reputational threat from the crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2010).

In the review of literature, many perspectives have been studied to examine the dynamics of crisis communication. Weick (1988) and Gephart (1993), have examined the actions of employees or those close to the crisis in development of enactment perspectives. Analysis of word choice has been examined in studies comparing informative content and identification content (Balle, 2008; Barrett, 2002), and content-focused versus value-focused content (Aggerholm, 2008). Recent studies have also identified the effect a crisis has on individuals (Barrett, 2002; Myer, Conte, & Peterson, 2007; Vinten & Lane, 2002). Kim and Krishna (2017) take a long-term public relations approach to crisis communication to offer the advantages of bridging and buffering relationships ahead of a crisis to maintain a positive image when a crisis hits.

Influential research of crisis communication that focuses on crisis response and post-crisis stages have had a very common theme. Prominent names such as Coombs and Benoit become repetitive in research with their contributions. Coombs’ research (1995, 2007b) offers the most comprehensive approach as it encompasses the dynamics spanning multiple elements of research such as emotion (Barrett, 2002; Myer, Conte, & Peterson, 2007; Vinten & Lane, 2002) and prior relationship reputation (Kim & Krishna, 2017). Additionally, the work of Coombs is the most evolved as his SCCT is an expansion of his attribution theory and crisis type matrix (Coombs, 2011; Coombs & Holladay, 2009).

Each of the theories and contributions listed above provide a basis upon which past cases can be evaluated for effectiveness of their responses. Additionally, the literature review provides support for the actions outlined in crisis response scenarios.
Case Reviews

There are multiple cases that can be evaluated for good and bad reasons at low, medium and high threat levels. A low threat case poses the least risk to an organization’s reputation. In these cases, there is little to no negative reaction by the public, which could include social media postings or misdemeanor crimes. Typically, they are actions of an individual that may represent an organization rather than the organization as a whole. In 2011, the American Red Cross avoided backlash on a rogue tweet that one employee posted to the organization’s account instead of her intended personal account. The quick actions of removing the tweet within an hour, and posting a humorous reply helped the organization from experiencing any negative backlash (Wasserman, 2011). On the opposite side of the spectrum for a low-threat crisis is Tinder, the top dating application for millennials. After an article appeared in Vanity Fair scrutinizing how the application was damaging how people dated, Tinder responded in a thirty-tweet tirade attacking the publication. While referencing how Tinder was helping people connect in China and North Korea and calling Vanity Fair “fake news” (among many other claims), Tinder created a crisis out of something that really wasn’t (Kantrowitz, 2015). While the realistic response would have been to ignore the article, Twitter’s backlash caught the attention of many users. While not significant enough to drastically affect the popularity of Tinder, it did negatively impact the organization’s reputation.

In a medium-threat crisis, we start to see the presence of minor damages to a public. Often, we see this in cases involving defective products or work place injuries. In 1993, Pepsi had to respond to a hoax that syringes were found in cans of their Diet Pepsi product. Confident that the claims were false, the company released four videos comprehensively displaying the company’s canning process. Additionally, the company was able to show via a surveillance tape
a woman in Colorado placing a syringe into a can behind a store clerk’s back. The aggressive response by the company helped to minimize the drop in product sales by only 2% during the crisis, which was recovered within a month (Bhasin, 2011). Samsung, on the other hand, mismanaged the response to a defective product line. The much-anticipated Galaxy Note 7 phone was ultimately discontinued after issues of the device catching fire. The recall ultimately resulted in a $17 billion hit to the company’s market value (Mullen & Thompson, 2016). However, what really impacted the loss was the company’s failed communication of product safety to the public. Jon Gingerich, editor of O’Dwyer’s month magazine, explains “Samsung has thus far still been unclear communicating with the public whether the now-discontinued devices were safe to use or not, and as a result failed to manage its messaging and stay ahead of the crisis until it was too late” (Comcowich, 2017).

The high-threat crisis brings the highest threat to an organization’s reputation as it can involve serious damages and/or intentionality of the crisis. Johnson & Johnson for example, faced a high-threat crisis when seven deaths in the Chicago area were linked to cyanide-laced Tylenol capsules in 1982. The company was quick to pull 31 million bottles from shelves (worth $100 million) and stopped all production and advertising of the product. Working with the Chicago Police, FBI and FDA, it was revealed that the bottles were tampered with. The response from Tylenol was to introduce tamper resistant packaging and a $2.50 coupon to consumers. This extensive process proved to the media the company’s concern for the public’s safety and commitment to correct the issue. The media in turn portrayed the company in a very positive light which helped with Johnson and Johnson’s overall recovery (Bhasin, 2011). More recently, Wells Fargo experienced a high-threat crisis when employees intentionally set up 2 million fake customer accounts to help meet sales goals. Wells Fargo handled the crisis poorly for three
reasons. First, the response from the company was perceived as dishonest by the public. Second, the company had difficulty with providing a clear and consistent story. Finally, the company didn’t take the matter seriously from the beginning, which angered customers further (Weidlich, 2016). It took nearly a month before anyone in Wells Fargo was held responsible, which was ultimately the CEO, John Stumpf, who resigned in October of 2016.

To provide a better understanding of how to approach a crisis, three case reviews were selected to evaluate the effectiveness of the theories of SCCT, attribution and those provided by Coombs. The cases were selected to provide a range of crisis responsibility and organizational reputation threat.

Recent crisis cases pertaining to Iowa State University’s National Organization of the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML) and National Young Democrat Socialists of America (YDSA) clubs were selected. These cases provide local issues and context while fulfilling desires for low and medium threats. This is based on their time portrayed in the media and the overall threat being low or medium to each organization. To fulfill the review of a high-threat case, the Duke University lacrosse scandal was selected. This case provided one of the highest profile cases in college athletics and outlines a real threat that any organization could experience. As the case ran in the national media for over a year and contained potential criminal punishment, it fulfilled the requirements of a high-threat case.

The selected cases were evaluated from the perspective of the impacted organization (ISU NORML, ISU YDSA, Duke Lacrosse). After establishing the crisis type, according to Table 2, news and academic articles were analyzed to determine if their response strategies aligned with those in Table 1. Response strategies were then compared to the perceived level of threat to the organization’s reputation and level of damage caused to determine the effectiveness
of the response. Media involvement and attributes of the case were used to determine the severity of reputational threats and damages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Crisis Type</th>
<th>Threat to Organization</th>
<th>Level of Damage</th>
<th>Media Involvement</th>
<th>Duration of Case</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case 1- Iowa State NORML</td>
<td>Terrorism</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Off and On (Medium)</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 2- Iowa State YDSA</td>
<td>Faux Pas</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Short (Low)</td>
<td>Few Weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 3- Duke University Lacrosse</td>
<td>Terrorism</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Consistent (High)</td>
<td>1 year +</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Case analysis dynamics

Case 1- Iowa State NORML

On June 10, 2013, Iowa State University’s Trademark Licensing office rejected the design for the campus’s National Organization of the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML) shirt. The design of the t-shirt featured the text “NORML ISU” across the front with Cy’s head replacing the ‘O’. Across the back was a small marijuana leaf with the phrase “Freedom is NormL at ISU (Appendix II, Image 1). The issues for the organization developed as the office had revised its guidelines for trademark use by students and organizations in January 2013.

Prior to the guideline revision, NORML had shirts approved that had even gained the attention of local media. In November 2012, The Des Moines Register featured a photo of one design that depicted the Iowa State University mascot, Cy, and a cannabis leaf (Appendix II, Image 2). This shirt design triggered a large amount of negative feedback towards the University. Based on the timeline, it can be assumed that the guideline revision that occurred a few months later was in reaction to this coverage and directed towards the NORML club. The January update stated that designs with University marks that would promote use of “dangerous, illegal or
unhealthy products, actions or behaviors” and “drugs and drug paraphernalia that are illegal or unhealthful” would not be approved (Villa, 2014).

NORML’s view of the decision and guideline revisions was that it was an attack on the organization’s freedom of speech. The organization eventually countered with a lawsuit against Iowa State University in 2014. Nearly four years later, the State of Appeals Board approved payment to the student leaders who filed the suit (Paul Gerlich and Erin Furleigh) for $75,000 each for emotional distress (Gehr, 2018). The original settlement included an additional $193,000 for the fees of Gerlich and Furliegh’s lawyers. In March of 2018, another $598,208 was approved in attorney fees which will all fall on the Iowa taxpayer (WQAD, 2018).

The case brings an interesting perspective as both Iowa State University and NORML had to respond to the situation. ISU NORML is a local extension of the national organization and had the right to depict their association with the University. In the same trademark guidelines, the licensing office states that any university recognized group is allowed to use their name and connection to the university, including colors, university name and logo (ISD Editorial Staff, 2014). In the Daily’s editorial article, the Daily proposes that the university really missed an opportunity to stand with their students.

“The only thing that can be said is that it is clear that the university has chosen their public image, which is hopefully strong enough to withstand a few t-shirts promoting controversial political activism, over the voice of their students. There will always be students who stand behind something that the university will not support. Finding tighter and tighter restrictions will only harm the university’s image as one of giving little room to encouraging students to find their political voice.
The university may have the right to protect their image at all costs, but it leaves a lot up in the air for the price of what they could lose in student individualism…” (ISD Editorial Staff, 2014).

Although the situation presents plenty of material for analysis from the perspective of the University, this text is more concerned with that of the student organization, NORML. From the viewpoint of NORML, the situation was external, uncontrollable, and had unstable factors as outlined by Attribution Theory, and therefore deemed not responsible for the crisis (as seen in Table 3). The judgment of locus should be made based on what initially caused the crisis. In this case, it was not the creation of the shirt that caused the crisis, but rather the revised guidelines of the Trademark Office and the ensuing rejection of proposed artwork. In the majority of crises that reach the public concerning student organizations, low crisis responsibility is rare. The majority are caused by actions of a group or individual that are not deemed appropriate by the public (accidents). Regardless, it was still required for NORML to act on the situation and attack the crisis themselves.

Looking at the Crisis Type Matrix, the situation that NORML found themselves in was one of terrorism, as outlined in Table 3. The University’s intentional actions had direct impact on the organization. As we can see, NORML displayed evidence of intimidation (threatened the organizational power via lawsuit) and transcendence (making the issue about freedom of speech, rather than drug promotion). Ultimately, NORML utilized suffering (most suited for terrorism crisis) as the crisis was external to the organization but yet was the result of an intentional action. By establishing their role as a victim, and that their freedom of speech was imposed upon, NORML allowed the proper leaders of the organization to handle communication with the university. This allowed NORML to have a unified message and utilize their resources for the
battle. This included an appeals process with the Trademark Licensing Office, an appeal with the Vice President of Business and Finance for the university (who oversees the Trademark Office), an appeal to the President of the University and the Board of Regents, and extensive legal consultation. By framing the issue as a freedom of speech matter, NORML was able to further position themselves as the victim by making the topic a first amendment issue, rather than one about an illegal drug.

Although it was a case that didn’t have a conclusion for nearly four years, NORML succeeded based on three points. First, the organization framed the issue appropriately, placing themselves as the victim. Second, the organization used minimal voices to express their points to the university, media and public, therefore allowing NORML to maintain control of their message. Lastly, the organization was able to distance itself accordingly when needed to allow the legal process to run its course, despite the University’s appeal to the court’s decision. In the end, the Iowa State University NORML chapter was able to print their shirts and focus conversation on their initial purpose of drug reform.

**Case 2- Iowa State Young Democratic Socialists of America**

At the end of September 2017, the Iowa State University chapter of the Young Democratic Socialists of America (YDSA) got themselves into some hot water after posting two messages on their twitter account. The first post came in the early afternoon of September 30 (Appendix II, Image 3):

“COMRADES: stay away from needle drugs!! The only dope worth shooting is in the oval office rn”
Days later, on the afternoon of October 4, the organization had another message (Appendix II, Image 4):

“the left has done a good job radicalizing juggalos, weebs, furries,, #But I will not rest until “hXc” stands for hang+Xterminate capitalists”

The organization quickly found themselves in crisis mode as people brought the remarks to the attention of the University and found their actions being reported on national news. Co-presidential of the organization, Apple Amos, stated that the tweets were taken from the national Democratic Socialists of America’s account, but both were deleted within a day.

“[The posting of the tweets] was decided by an individual within our group making that decision based off of the national organization,” Amos said in Iowa State Daily article on October 23. “The rest of our group came to the conclusion that they were inappropriate” (Rambo, 2017).

Even though the text didn’t originate from the Iowa State chapter, it was still directly linked to them and based on the severity of the tweets, posed a medium level of threat to the organization (as illustrated in Table 3). Since the remarks, portions of the organization’s forty-five members had received death threats. The University stood with the organization claiming the remark of “hang+Xterminate capitalists” was protected by the University’s freedom of speech (Rambo, 2017). In the same article, Iowa State University Relations Executive Director, John McCarroll, clarified the University’s freedom of speech policy pertaining to the situation:

“As a general matter, speech that rises to the level of discriminatory harassment and/ or constitutes a threat to commit an act of unlawful violence to a particular individual or group of individuals on campus is not protected First Amendment speech” (Rambo, 2017).
With this remark, it showed that while the university defended one of the tweets as freedom of speech, the tweet posing a threat to the President of the United States was not. The organization’s remark of “the only dope worth shooting is in the oval office” did grab the attention of the U.S. Secret Service.

While during the case, many of YDSA’s opposition was quick to make comments, the organization held with the voice of Amos for local media and made no comment to national outlets. While many blogs have written about it in a more copy and paste fashion, the main national outlet to cover the story was Fox News. Generally speaking, the student organization did a good job to minimize the exposure of the story. In addition, Amos and the organization took proper course of action by meeting with the University’s Equal Opportunity Office and the U.S. Secret Service.

When considering Coombs’ Crisis Type Matrix, this case should be seen as a faux pas. When the individual member made the tweets, it was taken from the parent organization’s account, therefore associated with the Iowa State University’s chapter’s beliefs. While it was later expressed that not all members found the statements to be appropriate, the cause of the crisis was from the public’s reaction. According to Coombs’ Crisis Response Strategy, in their situation of a faux pas, there is no denying that the evidence was true and that YDSA would not be able to play a victim card in the matter. The main ambiguity comes from the decision whether the organization’s performance history was generally seen as positive or negative in the public eye.

As it is an organization that portrays a very strong political viewpoint, there will be publics that associate with both sides of the YDSA’s performance history. In the case of this crisis, however, the most vocal public could be those that oppose the organization and likely see
their performance as negative. This suggests the organization takes the path of mortification, which they in fact did. As mortification is an attempt to win forgiveness in order to lessen negative feelings toward the organization, an apology is required. While some seek forgiveness in terms of compensation, repentance simply asks for forgiveness and for people to accept the organization’s actions (Coombs, 1995). YDSA achieved this in their public statements and the action of removing the tweets. In addition, their actions with University and Federal personnel further supports that they took ownership of their actions and wished to move in a direction to ask for the public’s forgiveness. The combination of these actions allowed YDSA to quickly disappear from media attention, as shown in Table 3. As this case is relatively young, the important steps for YDSA is to be cautious of their social media actions in the future and be mindful of any additional conversation or meeting requests that pertain to the event. The organization does not want to take any action that would minimize their attempts to ask for forgiveness on this case and remind the community of their recent error.

Case 3- Duke University Men’s Lacrosse Team

In the middle of spring break 2006, the Duke lacrosse team was on campus in Durham, North Carolina, conducting their regularly scheduled practices. Being one of the few on campus, the team decided to host a party for themselves on the evening of March 13 where they hired two female exotic dancers. This night would be the beginning of a very complex and high-profile case, as illustrated in Table 3. The next day, one of the dancers contacted the police to tell them she had been sexually assaulted by three of the players. The case grew, gaining national attention and even its own ESPN 30 for 30 special titled Fantastic Lies.
“It was such a horrific situation that had all of these factors that made it particularly explosive,” said columnist Ruth Sheehan of the Durham, NC News & Observer in the ESPN feature. “Race, and class, and City of Durham versus university, and town-gown kind of stuff. It was this Molotov cocktail that landed in the community.” (ESPN, 2016)

The case did have many dimensions and perspectives as people from every public and demographic stepped out to speak on the injustices they had heard. Over the course of the fourteen-month long case, the University, team members and their families experienced a roller coaster of emotions. Fliers were distributed around the community that had the pictures and names of the team members (Appendix II, Image 5). In a matter of days, protests were staged on campus, in the community and even on the front lawn of the lacrosse house, demanding the players be held responsible for their actions. A timeline of events of the case is outlined in Appendix III (Duke, 2006; Associated Press, 2007; ESPN, 2016).

As the timeline shows, it took the University ten days to publicly respond to the crisis. It wasn’t until two weeks after the incident that a statement was finally made by Duke or the team that stated the team’s innocence in the case. By this time, protests had already begun and the people of the Durham and Duke communities had already formed their opinion. While this response did come before the story became national front-page news, the university really missed an opportunity to get ahead by addressing the local media from the beginning. This is important as national media turns to the local outlets due for their knowledge of the local environment (Martin, 1988). In the ESPN documentary, one mother recalled that in the early days of the case the players were not to tell anyone, including their parents, of the situation in hopes that it would blow over and that nothing had really happened. William Chafe, professor of history at Duke, also noted in the film that leading administrators of the University were not told about the case
for nearly ten days (ESPN, 2016). After these initial statements were made, communication from the University was minimal as they attempted to distance themselves from the case and allow the legal process to take over.

“From the beginning, President Brodhead abdicated his responsibility as Duke’s leader to stand up for fairness and truth,” Duke graduate and lawyer Jay Bilas wrote to the editor of Duke Magazine. “[He] should resign or be dismissed.” These words however were never read by public eyes as the editor was given instruction by the university not to publish the note (ESPN, 2016).

In addition to the lack of a timely response by the University, communication failed to be consistent through those that were supporting the lacrosse team. Before the first statements from the University were heard, actions on March 23 DNA submissions by the players increased the public’s perception that the players were guilty (Appendix II, Image 6). Investigative reporter for the Durham News and Observer, Joseph Neff, recalls in the documentary that a lawyer of the players told them to cover their faces as they entered the police station knowing reporters were there (ESPN, 2016). These masked images, partnered with the team’s current actions of solidarity and silence, seemed to support that the players had in fact committed the crime.

The actions of President Bordhead, when he did address the public, was well calculated despite the lack of timing. Bordhead effectively identified his key stakeholders in the case (alumni, parents of students, and the Duke community) and addressed them in specific action. By providing a dedicated website for more information, he also provided the perception of urgency of the case and transparency of information. He framed the situation to be impactful on a larger scale as it is was an opportunity for Duke to be a leader in addressing the national issue of sexual assaults (Fortunato, 2008).
As SCCT shows, two of the major factors that play a role in the crisis responsibility are emotion and prior relationship reputation. Given Sheehan’s factors of the local climate at the time, it is evident that emotions were very high for those in the surrounding communities. James Coleman Jr., professor of Criminal Law at Duke notes in the ESPN production that the crisis gave a platform for the general public to push other issues they felt they could connect to it. As far as prior reputation was concerned, the team was not viewed in a positive light. While some were fans of theirs due to their party mentality, the case was seen by some as a final straw given the team’s history of prior arrests for drunken behavior.

In Coombs’ Crisis Type Matrix, the Duke lacrosse scandal could be classified as an accident or terrorism. The situation can be viewed as an accident as it was unintentional and internal to Duke. However, as the crisis was ultimately the result of the false claims by an external party, it could be viewed as a terrorism case. In the case of the response, the claims were not known to be false publicly until the conclusion, therefore not allowing Duke or the lacrosse players the opportunity to be seen as victims. Had Duke taken the path of a response to terrorism based on false evidence, they would have expressed responses of nonexistence and clarification (Coombs, 1995).

The closest resemblance to this strategy is Brodhead’s reminders that the players were innocent until proven guilty. As it was nearly impossible for Duke to publicly prove the claims to be false, this was the extent they could handle the crisis as one of terrorism. As Fortunato mentions in previous research, Duke did utilize the strategies of mortification (repentance and rectification specifically), transcendence (by making it an opportunity to solve a larger problem), bolstering (reminding of all the good the university has done), and distance strategy (acknowledge the issue). According to Coombs’ response strategy, only the legal team exhibited
the correct response. As the evidence was false, and the organization maintained a relatively poor performance history, clarification (explaining there was no crisis) would have been the ideal response. That, however, could have created more damage to the team’s public image during the crisis. The legal teams were able to use clarification by using evidence to prove there was no opportunity for a crime to be committed given the timeline. While the mortification responses are typically associated with true evidence of a crisis involving major damages and an organization with a poor history, it was likely the best reactive strategy for the University to take.

While the players were eventually found innocent and the team returned to normal competition in the end, the University failed on the opportunity to combat the issue early. As Fortunato mentions, it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of a public relations plan in a crisis setting. With using the support of Martin’s claims, by engaging with the local media earlier in the case, the University and lacrosse team could have gotten their message out sooner, ultimately helping the uphill fight that they faced. Regardless, the false claims still impact the organizations and the players to this day.

“Not a month goes by when I am not reminded of the damages those accusations have had on my reputation and the public’s perception of my character. Sometimes only time can heal wounds,” said an anonymous player during the documentary (ESPN, 2016).

**Case Review Summary**

From the above we can gather characteristics of successful crisis responses. As was clear in *Case 1* and *Case 2*, the organizations had one spokesperson speaking on their behalf. This ensured the message was consistent and contained. In the larger *Case 3*, when multiple people were handling and communicating the case, desired actions and messages were altered. In *Case*
3, this was evident with the players coming in to the police station with the shirts over their heads. However, due to the extent of that case, Duke was able to utilize different voices to establish a change in framing/response strategy. When the case moved from the University to the legal teams, they were able to change their approach more to one of nonexistence.

A second characteristic we can see is the use of the media in the cases. In Case 1 and Case 2 timely responses to the media helped the organization frame the public’s interpretation of the crisis. In Case 3 Duke clearly takes a long time to respond to the events and lost an opportunity to help frame the crisis. While Case 3 and similarly Case 1 required extensive media attention and involvement, Case 2 effectively framed their messages to bring closure to the situation and allowed the media and general public to move on from the event.

Case 1 and Case 2 shared a theme of Freedom of Speech issues. This allowed the organizations to utilize the response strategies of suffering and mortification, given the classification of the type of crisis each organization was experiencing. In the eyes of the impacted student organizations, the damages in these cases were minimal, if at all. The cases easily qualified as low and medium threats. In contrast, with the presence of emotion in Case 3, Coombs SCCT model shows the close connection it can have with the crisis responsibility (Coombs, 2007b). This, paired with a larger victim public (Duke University and the City of Durham), not only created a more complex case, but one that fit the definition of high-level threat.

Crisis Response Recommendations

The following outlines three scenarios that organizations may face with varying levels of crisis responsibility and threat to an organization’s reputation. The following outlines can be
used as consideration when dealing with a low, medium or high crisis threat. The factors that categorize the three levels are the organization’s perceived responsibility to the crisis and the threat to their organizational reputation. In the outline, factors such as use of media, validity of evidence, publics’ consideration and response strategy are discussed. Following each case is a flow chart to better assist in determining the best response strategy for a crisis.

Before examining the threat levels, there are some guidelines that apply for each case. First, in any crisis, an organization must determine if the evidence in the case is true or false. If the evidence is false, the organization has an opportunity to utilize nonexistence or clarification strategies based on their performance history (reputation). If the evidence is false, the organization must be absolutely certain that they have conclusive proof thereof. It is the responsibility of the organization to adequately convey that inform to the public. If the organization is not able to ensure that they can communicate the validity of the evidence as false, clarification and nonexistence strategies can harm the organization’s reputation during the crisis, especially in medium and high threat scenarios. This is because stakeholders may see that the organization simply does not care or is unwilling to accept that there is a mistake.

Second, depending on the crisis type, the acknowledgment of publics comes into consideration. While some crisis responses can use the same strategy for multiple publics, others require different framing (as outlined in each case below). The public evaluation allows the organization to identify two main stakeholders that require responses. The first is the victim cluster that contains those impacted by the damages. The second is the non-victim cluster which is the rest of the general public that can be following the case for various reasons. When the consideration for publics is seen in the flow charts below, a response strategy should be selected for each public.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Threat Level</th>
<th>Crisis Type</th>
<th>Threat to Organization</th>
<th>Level of Damage</th>
<th>Media Involvement</th>
<th>Duration of Case</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Threat</td>
<td>Faux pas/Accident</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low if any</td>
<td>Approximately 1 week</td>
<td>Social media postings, Misdemeanor arrests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Threat</td>
<td>Accident</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Low-Medium</td>
<td>Short (Low)</td>
<td>Few weeks</td>
<td>Workplace Accidents, Defective products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Threat</td>
<td>Accident/Terrorism/Transgression</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Consistent (High)</td>
<td>1 year or more</td>
<td>Events resulting in injury or death, Criminal charges</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Crisis Threat Level Factors

*Low Threat*

On college campuses, low threat crisis is the most common type of crisis. While these crises may not always become public knowledge, action and considerations must still be evaluated. In a low threat crisis, the organization’s link to the crisis may be low and/or possess little threat to the organization’s reputation. A low threat crisis can be a member being arrested for public intoxication or an inappropriate social media posting. The low threat crisis does not cause a form of damage to others (physical, financial, etc.) and attracts low media attention, if any. If it does gain media attention, it stays local and is usually covered for a week or less. The above *Case 2* would have been a low threat scenario, had it not gained national news coverage. Based on the media coverage and severity of the claims made by the organization, it elevated the case to a medium threat. While considering Coombs’ crisis matrix, the events are considered to be unintentional by nature, leaving the crisis as a faux pas or an accident. In the low threat scenario, factors of the situation crisis communication theory model (like emotion and crisis history) have little impact on the response and behavioral intentions. While certain publics may
acknowledge the events, there is relatively low involvement on their part to evaluate the crisis dimensions.

According to Coombs, those experiencing a faux pas really have three decisions to make. First, the organization can claim there is no crisis (nonexistence strategy). This can be achieved by eliminating the link between the organization and discussed event. This is mainly effective if the evidence of the case is either ambiguous or false claims (ie. rumors). Second, if the evidence of the crisis is true, the organization can seek to gain the public’s acceptance in a number of ways. If the organization has a positive reputation with the affected public, the organization can make attempts to use either distance or ingratiation strategies. By either helping the public to gain acceptance of the crisis, or by placing the organization in a positive light (perhaps by using past actions of the organization), organizations can minimize the negative impacts of a crisis in a faux pas situation. Finally, if the organization is perceived to have a negative reputation, the best course of action is to seek forgiveness with the mortification strategy. By offering an apology or seeking forgiveness, the organization can achieve a quick resolution to the situation and ideally move on with little negative impact.

As in the faux pas situation, an organization can use nonexistence or clarification strategy in an accident situation if the evidence is false. Nonexistence or clarification can be used once again if the organization’s performance history is positive or negative respectively. If the evidence is true, the next biggest factor in selecting a response strategy is the severity of the damages that have occurred. As this is a low-threat situation, damages can be assumed to be minor, in which case a distance strategy is most widely accepted. This is effective as it recognizes that there is a crisis but seeks to gain the public’s acceptance in an effort to move forward. This strategy is acceptable regardless of what the public’s perception of the
An organization must carefully consider the use of the media during the event. As examined in the *Case 3*, the media (especially at the local level) can play a crucial role in the response and image restoration process. However, in the case of a low-threat crisis, going to the media with a statement may give the perception that the crisis is bigger than it really is. Ideally, the organization does not want the issue to appear in the media at all. If it does, the quicker it disappears, the better. Therefore, the organization must closely monitor the media to see if the situation does gain attention. At that point and time, the organization may respond with the appropriate strategies. At the first indication of the crisis, the organization can start to prepare their response so they can react in a timely matter. This will help the organization maintain control of the overall case, unlike what was seen at the beginning of *Case 3*.

By offering an appropriately outlined strategy response from above, an organization can expect to effectively handle a low-threat crisis. An organization must remember to react in a timely manner if it is determined to react at all. As the situation will ideally be forgotten in a short matter of time, there is no necessity to develop an extensive communication plan. By maintaining a continuous evaluation of the organization’s public image among stakeholders, it will provide a quicker and more precise response to a given situation. Based on the information above, the flow chart below can be used to help evaluate the post-response strategies for a low threat crisis.
Medium Threat

There are two main differences distinguishing a low-threat from a medium-threat scenario. The first is the amount of attention the case receives in the media. As evaluated in Case 2 above, the YDSA claims received not only national media attention, but also the attention of national organizations (Secret Service). Based on the extent of the coverage and severity of statements, this case is perceived to be a medium threat to the organization. The second major difference is at this level we start to see the introduction of damages to specific publics being introduced. While the damages are not major, they amplify the potential organization’s reputational threat. These medium threat crises are the majority of cases that appear in the media. Additionally, medium threats have the most variety of causes. These cases can include situations involving the arrests of individuals, remarks made publicly either on a social media platform, in
person, or to the media, workplace accidents leading to injury, and defective products to provide a few examples.

While there is a wide variety of medium threat examples, they are most commonly viewed as accidents. This is due to the fact that had the actions leading to the crisis been deemed intentional (resulting in a transgression or terrorism type of crisis), the threat to the organizational reputation is drastically intensified, making it a high-threat case. While a faux pas is an unintentional type of crisis, the involvement of damages associated with the medium-threat makes accident the only crisis type.

As we see in all types of crisis, if the evidence is false and there is an ability to easily demonstrate that to the public, nonexistence and clarification strategies are ideal. If the evidence is true, the next evaluation in the situation of an accident is to determine the severity of damage. Typically, in medium-threat situations, damages will not be major. The use of distance strategies (such as excuses and justification) is appropriate in these events of minor damage (Coombs 1995). As damages become more severe, people seek to hold someone accountable for the crisis, therefore holding a larger threat to the organization’s reputation (Griffin, 1994).

After the evaluation of damages, Coombs suggests the consideration of the two publics the organization will have to address (those impacted by the crisis known as the victims, and those following the crisis known as the non-victims). When considering the response to the victims, we start to see the influence of the emotion dynamic of the SCCT model. In the case of minor damage accidents, victim status is not impactful on the response strategy as distance strategies are still most acceptable. As mentioned in the low threat case, an organizational performance history can provide additional responses to utilize, if the history is positive. Positive
history can provide the organization more credibility to use the ingratiation approach and therefore lessening their reputational threat (Coombs, 1995).

In this situation, the use of media must be more strongly factored. As the situation considers the impact of damages, it is highly likely that the crisis will appear in the media. A timely and appropriate response to the media is crucial as the public’s views of the crisis are tied to the local outlets, and often the local media defines the severity of the issue (Coombs, 1995). As we saw in Case 1 and Case 2, having one spokesperson for the crisis ensures that the message stays consistent and contained. Special consideration should be given to the publics that are following the case. Those impacted by the case (known as the victims) are one public that will be following the case and seeking that the organization takes responsibility. In a medium threat situation, the affected public wants a form of mortification, commonly repentance, to bring closure to their case. Non-victim publics seek a ramification that the organization has taken actions that will ideally prevent a future crisis (Combs, 1995).

While the media can be an asset, it is important to understand the time frame of the case. The goal of the organization in this case should be to move the attention of the public and media on from the crisis as soon as possible. By monitoring the public’s perception of the case, the organization can gain an understanding of when society is accepting forgiveness and able to bring it to closure. When this occurs, the organization should seek to distance itself from the media to help with the process. By staying visible, publics that are ready to move on may think there is more to the case and negatively prolong the timeline.

Using appropriate frames and timely actions, an organization may be able to reduce a medium threat to a low threat with the help of the media. The following flow chart outlines the response strategy process in a medium threat crisis based on the information provided above.
High Threat

The high threat scenario possesses the biggest threat of damage to the organization’s reputation. In this scenario, major damages have occurred that require careful consideration and strategic communication. This can include situations with loss of life or criminal charges (as seen in Case 3). It is assumed that the crisis is identified by the media as a high-profile case. Reactions to the situation require careful planning while considering the interest of a timely message. A carefully worded response is critical given the amount of coverage the media will provide, ultimately impacting the public’s perception of the crisis.

Unlike other scenarios, a high threat crisis has no limitation of intentional versus unintentional or internal versus external dynamics. The main determining factor in the high threat situation is the potential presence of major damage. In responses, the organization must be
mindful to atone for the actions and the results from it and prevent actions that would further upset any publics (Coombs, 1995). Major damages can be found in the accident, transgression and terrorism styles.

In accident and transgression style crises, when the evidence is true, mortification is the most practical response as it seeks forgiveness while claiming responsibility. This may be achieved either with compensation (remediation), offering an apology (repentance), taking action to prevent the crisis from reoccurring (rectification), or any combination of the three. In an accident scenario, when addressing a public that is a non-victim, excuse strategy may be used as the damages are less personal. By attempting to minimize the responsibility, the organization may be able to downplay the threat level to medium in the non-victim public’s eyes. As the transgression style is deemed to be intentional, an organization must stick with mortification despite the public being addressed. Similar to the minor damage scenario in both styles, the organization can utilize positive performance history in the response with ingratiation to maintain a positive reputation. This should be used in addition to the other selected response strategies (mortification or excuse).

While a terrorism style of crisis is still deemed to be intentional, it is a unique situation that can leave an opportunity for the organization to claim victimization. If the evidence is deemed true, the organization can utilize the suffering strategy regardless of the public being addressed. The goal of this strategy is to win the sympathy of the audience moving forward in the crisis. As the crisis contains major damages, mortification strategy should also be used as it shows compassion by the organization to the situation. With mortification and sympathy partnered together, the organization can drastically improve their reputation. Finally, as in the
other scenarios, if the organization has a positive performance history, it can use ingratiation techniques to further minimize its linkage to the crisis.

As in the other examples, if the evidence is false in any of the crises types, response strategy is either nonexistence or clarification, dependent on the organization’s performance history.

In a high threat case, it can be presumed that the case will stay in the news for an extended period of time. This can be consistent or spread out with extended interruptions in coverage. As it can be an extensive process, it is important for the organization to keep record of what has been said during the case. This will help to ensure that the message stays consistent. This can further be achieved by minimizing the amount of people that speak on behalf of the group. However, as noted in Case 3 there is an opportunity to utilize a new speaker on behalf of the organization. When Duke had someone new speak on behalf of the lacrosse team, the strategy that they used also changed. While Brodhead was able to utilize mortification, the legal team was able to utilize suffering.

By also closely monitoring the media, the organization can determine how the public is viewing the organization during the crisis, and therefore, allowing the organization to frame their responses appropriately. As mentioned in the low threat case, use of the media can be critical to the publics’ perception of the organization during the case. However, appearing in the media too often can make messages seem ambiguous and even unnecessarily amplify the severity of the threat.

When formulating a response to a major crisis, it is also important to consider the emotions that are at play both within the organization and of the public. As we can see in the SCCT model, crisis responsibility can impact behavioral intentions through emotions and
organizational reputation. While reputation and emotions are very closely related, it is due to the connections they have with the crisis responsibility (Coombs, 2007b). Responses that are developed based upon emotion can at times ignore the impact on an organizational reputation. Additionally, other factors of the SCCT model play a larger role in the response process. Unlike the low and medium threat scenarios, the high threat can assume a higher level of evaluation by the public. This means that the organization must additionally factor in the history of the crisis when developing a response. As mentioned above, this is where mortification (more specifically rectification) plays a large role to communicate to the public the crisis will not reoccur.

With the proper utilization of the media and appropriately framed messages, an organization can successfully move through a high-threat level of crisis. The flow chart below offers a reference for organizations to select the most appropriate response strategy in a high-threat crisis.
Conclusion

Going through a crisis response can be scary and challenging for student organizations. There are many response strategies that can be selected to address a crisis situation and help an organization attempt to positively repair its image. As the above charts (1, 2, and 3) show, there are many factors to consider before selecting an appropriate path forward. During each process, there are additional factors to consider such as the use of the media, the impacted stakeholders, and those outlined by SCCT.

Chart 3: High threat crisis decision chart
When reviewing Charts 1, 2 and 3, there are a few similarities and differences among each. The first similarity among the three charts is the consistent decision process when responding to false evidence. First, in all three charts, we see the recommendation of either nonexistence or clarification strategies based upon the organization’s performance history. This is attributed to the fact that nonexistence strategies are the only ones that claim that no crisis has occurred. While distance strategy is similar, it acknowledges the crisis and seeks to weaken association by gaining the public’s acceptance. Second, we see the connection between mortification strategy and the negative performance history. While the high-threat scenario uses mortification in all responses, we see its association with negative performance specifically in the low and medium threat scenarios. This is attributed to the goal of mortification to seek forgiveness. When the organization has a poor history, accepting the occurrence of the crisis and offering forgiveness in the form of compensation, apology or assurance that the crisis will not repeat is a strategy to improve its overall reputation. The main difference that we see between the three charts is the complexity of crisis types. In comparison, Chart 2 has the easiest decision-making flow. This is because in the medium-threat crisis, only an accidental type of crisis can occur. Chart 3, however, can be the most complicated as it has three crises types evident with accident, transgression, and terrorism all being potential. Chart 1 falls in between Chart 2 and Chart 3 as the decision between two crisis types exists (faux pas and accident).

The above text, defined a crisis as an event which requires action and a strategic response. These events (crises) threaten the public’s impression of an organization or individual. This posed another limitation. By definition of the text, ISU NORML and ISU YDSA experienced a crisis that required strategic communication. However, this definition was not accepted by everyone. In communications with Iowa State University Relation’s Office for more
Information on the campus incidents, they did not classify the cases as crises. Executive Director of University Relations, John McCarroll, defined a crisis as “a situation that negatively affects an organization, business or institution’s reputation/brand over a long period of time. It may result in serious financial losses, lack of investor confidence, or in our case, lack of support from alumni and friends” (personal communication, April 11, 2018). However, even by the definition of McCarroll, it could be argued that the cases are classified as crises as they threatened negative effects to the organization. Regardless, the text was not able to receive supporting evidence from University offices.

This study has attempted to provide a clear framework for how to select appropriate responses based on low, medium and high threat situations. While this is one of the first and most impactful steps in a crisis response, it is not the only one. This study utilized media articles and academic research journals to provide a theory-based approach to selecting a response. As this approach provides deep consideration and evaluation of the public’s perception to the organization in the response process, it is limited in considering the internal perspectives during the situation. Further studies can examine the experience from a more internal perspective. Additional further studies could evaluate the optimal usage of the media at each threat level or how to evaluate the crisis once it is deemed to be over.
References


Taylor, M. (2010), ‘Toward a holistic organizational approach to understanding crisis,’ In W. T.


Appendix I Crisis Response Strategies Explained

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nonexistence</strong></td>
<td>Looks to dismiss the crisis by arguing that the crisis does not exist. This can be achieved by showing there is no link between the “fictitious crisis” and the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Denial</strong></td>
<td>Simply stating nothing happened.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clarification</strong></td>
<td>Seeks to explain why there is no crisis or why it is not true.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attack</strong></td>
<td>Aggressive strategy that confronts those who suggest there is a crisis. This could be an against media that are claiming the crisis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intimidation</strong></td>
<td>Most aggressive nonexistence as it threatens with power (threat of lawsuits or violence).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distance</strong></td>
<td>Recognizes there is a crisis and attempts to gain public acceptance. By ultimately seeking to weaken the association of the crisis with the organization, the threat to the organization’s reputation decreases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Excuse</strong></td>
<td>Efforts to minimize the organizations responsibility be denial of intention or volition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Denial of intention</strong></td>
<td>Minimizing responsibility as it was unintentional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Denial of volition</strong></td>
<td>Minimizing responsibility by not being at fault. Typically done by scapegoating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Justification</strong></td>
<td>Seeks to minimize the damage associated with the crisis by displaying the crisis as not as bad as similar crises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minimizing Injury</strong></td>
<td>Denying of serious injury or damages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Victim Deserving</strong></td>
<td>Victims deserved what happened.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Misrepresentation of the crisis event</strong></td>
<td>Actual events are different than what is being portrayed by media or other publics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ingratiation</strong></td>
<td>Looks to gain the approval by placing the organization in a positive light.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bolstering</strong></td>
<td>Reminds society of the organizations past positive work such as philanthropic efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transcendence</strong></td>
<td>Places the crisis on a larger scale. It intends that the public will by lead away from the specific reasons of the crisis as they consider the larger picture. Example: Duke claiming the lacrosse scandal was an opportunity to search for a solution to the ongoing national sexual assault issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Praising Others</strong></td>
<td>Praising a particular group or public in efforts to gain their approval.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mortification</strong></td>
<td>Seeks to earn forgiveness and acceptance of the crisis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Remediation</strong></td>
<td>Asks for forgiveness by awarding compensation for damages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Repentance</strong></td>
<td>Offering an apology in hopes of forgiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rectification</strong></td>
<td>Taking action to prevent the crisis from reoccurring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Suffering</strong></td>
<td>Claiming to be the victim in the crisis to win sympathy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Image 1: Shirts of NORML ISU that were rejected by Iowa State University leading to the lawsuit of freedom of speech infringement. (credit leafly.com)
Image 2: NORML Shirt that appeared in the Des Moines Register sparking the revisions to the trademark office guidelines. (Credit to Iowa State Daily).
Image 3: The first tweet by YDSA that gained the attention of the Secret Service (credit to Campus Reform).

Image 4: The second tweet by YDSA that Iowa State University claimed was protected by Freedom of Speech (credit to Campus Reform).
Image 5: Flyer that circulated the Duke and Durham communities containing the names and faces of the Duke Lacrosse players.
Image 6: Duke Lacrosse players walk into a local police station to provide their DNA in the case. The covered faces (suggested by an attorney as the media was present) help to frame that the players were guilty in the public’s eyes. (Credit to VanceHolmes.com).
Appendix III Timeline of Duke Lacrosse Scandal

2006

March 13- The Duke Lacrosse team has a party at their team house where they hire two strippers.
March 14- One of the dancers, Crystal Mangum, tells Durham police that she was sexually assaulted in a very gruesome manner.
March 23- Forty-six team members report to Durham police to be photographed and provide DNA samples.
March 24- The first statement by Duke is issued by Senior VP for Public Affairs and Government Relations, John F. Burness, saying the University and players are monitoring situation and cooperating.
March 25- Duke University cancels (forfeits) two lacrosse games as a form of punishment for the ill-advised party. Duke President, Richard H. Bordhead urges the team is cooperating with police and states that the players are innocent until proven guilty.
March 28- The captains of the team issue a statement denying all allegations. The season is suspended until further notice. At a press conference, Bordhead says the team denies sex “of any kind” occurred. Durham D.A. Mike Nifong says the nurses who conducted rape kit observed vaginal trauma.
March 29- Story makes the front page of the New York Times. Materials are distributed around campus by protesters that included photos and names of the team members.
March 30- Brodhead sends e-mail to Duke alumni and parents explaining the situation and directing them to a website specific to the case for more information.
April 4- Mangum identifies two of her attackers in a photo lineup. It is later deemed to be an irregular process as only pictures of the lacrosse players were shown to Mangum and no fake IDs as per normal procedure.
April 5- Brodhead in a letter to the Duke community, alumni and parents says the incident has brought issues of race, gender, opportunity, privilege, and inequality to the forefront. He announces the formation of committees to investigate the situation and current climate of the University. Brodhead cancels the remainder of the lacrosse season and allegedly forces the team’s Head Coach, Mike Pressler to resign.
April 10- Lawyers for the lacrosse players announce there was no match in the DNA tests.
April 14- Defense attorneys share “photo timeline” that proves no rape could have occurred in Mangum’s claims.
April 18- Reade Seligmann and Collin Finnerty are arrested and charged with rape, sexual offense and kidnapping as a result of Mangum’s identification. They are released on bond.
April 19- Attorney for Seligmann releases time-stamped photos of phone records, DukeCard swipe records of building entry, and receipts of fast-food and ATM stops that shows he could not have committed any crime.
May 12- Nifong takes DNA samples to a private company for a second round of testing. Company reported that a false fingernail of Mangum’s contains DNA that represents 2% of the male population including 2006 graduate and former captain David Evans.
May 15- Evans is charged with the same crimes as Seligmann and Finnerty. Evans makes a public statement that everyone has been told some “fantastic lies,” and proclaims his innocence.

Dec 15- Brian Meehan, director of the private DNA testing lab, testifies that he had an agreement with Nifong to withhold information from the May 12 report making it incomplete.

Dec 22- Nifong drops the charges of rape against all the players as Mangum now tells investigators a different story saying she was no longer sure about some aspects of her original story. Kidnapping and sexual offense charges are still pending on all three.

Dec 28- North Carolina bar files ethics charges against Nifong for his actions in the case. (The bar would file a second round of charges against him on Jan 24, 2007. These charges would ultimately lead to Nifong’s disbarment on June 16, 2007.)

2007

Jan 12- Nifong sends a request to North Carolina Attorney General, Roy Cooper, asking to be taken off the case. The next day Cooper announces his office would take over.

April 12- Cooper declares Seligmann, Finnerty, and Evans innocent of all charges.