Crisis Communication Evaluation Draft

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**Introduction**

A crisis is a very critical time in an organization that can affect the organization drastically, and as such, managers in an organization need to come up with measures that are based on evidence on how to handle a crisis when it happens. Crisis communication to ensure that people are aware of it is important. Having an organized plan entails having knowledge of the type of crisis and the factors that are identifying to it that the organization could be facing so as to establish the correct measures for protection, as well establish the level of responsibility that is attributed by stakeholders to such crisis event (Coombs & Holladay, 2011). The purpose of communication is to help people cope physically e.g., by evacuation, and psychologically by telling them how it will be controlled. This paper aims to describe an actual crisis in an organization as well as address the weaknesses and strengths the organization has in terms of its crisis communication strategy.

**Crisis description**

The crisis topic I have selected is Taco Bell's "seasoned beef" meat filling lawsuit (2011). The crisis happened in an organization called Taco Bell. The actual crisis that the organization encountered was a lawsuit where they got sued by a law firm in Alabama for misrepresentation and false advertisement of beef in which they claimed that the beef in Taco Bell could not be defined as beef because of the percentage of beef in the product they were selling. According to the plaintiffs, the seasoned beef by Taco Bell only contained 35% of beef, yet the government's beef definition was that a product has to contain 70% of beef to be called beef. The new class-action suit further stated that Taco Bell made use of the term meat in defining its meat products when they did not contain enough meat to have them legally referred to as meat. These were the grounds for their false advertisement suit against the Taco Bell Fast-Food chain. The issue to be determined by the court was whether or not the seasoned beef by Taco Bell fulfilled the legal requirement of being called beef. The intention of the suit was to ensure that Taco Bell correctly labeled its product in accordance with the percentage of beef it contains. They would either call it Taco burrito with no or less than 70% beef or Taco beef burrito with 70% beef.

The crisis, in this case, was a situational crisis in which the organization was the victim of the crisis that created a bad reputation for it. Because the organization did not priory have a bad reputation, the stakeholders would then not hold the organization responsible for the crisis. The organization was a victim of a crisis that could potentially lead to the loss of the business. There is a possibility of such a crisis happening, and as such, the communication strategy for the organization was supposed to entail how they will handle the crisis if it ever happened again and what they would do to prevent it from happening again. This crisis is preventable.

**Crisis communication strategy**

The communication strategy that the organization used to respond to the matter was social media, their Facebook and YouTube walls, by exposing the facts of the composition of their products by indicating that they were meat because they used 88% of beef, this information was based on evidence (Steve, 2011). Incorporating social media made it possible for the information to reach a wider variety of people who are its target customers. The communication was aimed at helping their customers cope with the psychological distress that they got exposed to by being made to believe that the product they loved did not actually contain meat. Reassuring the customers based on evidence would help the organization earn back the confidence their customers had in their product before the crisis occurred. The purpose of this strategy of communication by Taco Bell was to ensure that they get to clear the taint in their reputation that had been caused by the crisis. They defended the company by stating, based on evidence, that their product contained a percentage of beef above the required and that they were not going to change anything. They also asked the law firm that sued them to apologize.

**Strengths and weaknesses**

My thoughts on the strengths of Taco Bell's communication strategy include the fact that it seemed to understand its customer base, which gets determined by the manner in which they communicated their proof that the law firm's speculations were wrong. The use of social media was an advantage, especially the channels with high numbers of users, making it possible for their message to reach a wider audience. The contents of their communication, for instance, asking the law firm to apologize was also a smart move as it provided the basis of the fact that the law firm was wrong and created an element of reasonable doubt in the reader's minds so that they doubt the information provided by the firm. Having the matter taken to court actually created more popularity for the organization when they came back with a set of facts explaining why the law firm was wrong potentially turning the negative publicity the lawsuit created into positive, with a whole new bunch of curious customers about what the Taco meat burrito tastes like and confirm the meat composition in it.

However, I also noticed some weaknesses in their advertising with regard to how the communication was done. It was obviously not enough to just issue statements on social media about how wrong the law firm that sued them was. They should also have provided a public tutorial as to how their tacos get prepared and have a group of people who had had them before establish whether there is a difference in the meat composition as compared to the previous times they had it. The organization should also have gone as far as threatening to file a lawsuit against the law firm if they did not apologize. This would have made their customers believe them more.

**Conclusion**

Based on the sensitive nature of situations of crisis in an organization, it is critical that managers create a proper crisis communication strategy to manage such situations as if mishandled, they could pose damaging consequences to the progress of the organization. Taco Bells' crisis communication strategy played a significant role in helping the organization restore its reputation and grow a bigger customer base despite the few weaknesses it had. It was important that the organization should have told its customers about how it was working towards preventing a similar crisis in the future.

**References**

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