

### **Practical Application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory**

Sports organizations are not without crises as the various branches associated with maintaining a business are under public scrutiny. With so many moving parts, such as athletes, sponsors, stakeholders, and reputation, it's difficult to focus on one aspect when it comes to crisis response protocol. The situational crisis communication theory has a more practical approach when it comes to a sports organization because it is able to mitigate the reputation threat that is present during a crisis and ensure that all parties survive the situation.

According to Brown, Adamson, and Park (2020), Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) has been an effective method in establishing the degree of responsibility in which an organization has in a crisis. "SCCT has used attribution theory to successfully provide a framework to explain how people can use information about an organization's previous history of crises and information about an organization's previous relationships with stakeholders to predict the degree of attribution of responsibility for their actions during a crisis," (Brown, Adamson, Park 2020). Examining the previous history and relationships of an organization is essential for crisis procedure. For sports organizations, the utilization of SCCT is vital because taking past crises into account in order to address a new crisis will assist in creating a successful response. This is ideal for sports organizations because they can also address stakeholders and sponsors in similar fashions that they have used in the past.

In addition, SCCT provides another layer of connection between theory and strategy. "The key advantage of SCCT over IRT for organizational crises is that it provides a theoretical connection between crisis situations and crisis response strategies: crisis responsibility," (Brown, Adamson, Park 2020). This key relationship allows for organizations to examine where they stand in terms of the extent in which they need to react. For sports organizations, this is critical

as they can assess the procedures necessary to overcome the crisis and directly address the level of responsibility in which they had in connection to the issue. The more an organization is associated with a crisis, the more their reputation is in danger. So, SCCT recommendations can help save an organization's reputation from being tarnished.

Furthermore, SCCT has been successful in practice during the 2020 Tokyo Olympics that faced a major crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic. "Finally, on March 24, 2020, eight weeks after the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, the Tokyo Olympic Games were officially postponed "to safeguard the health of athletes and everybody involved" (IOC, 2020a)," (Tang, Mahoney, Spiker 2022). The Olympic communications team began to utilize the diminishment and denial procedures in order to safeguard the reputation of the organization. This was important as the Olympic Committee was able to establish their minimal responsibility associated with the pandemic and focus on the health of athletes. By utilizing Twitter as a way to allow fans to directly interact with Olympic athletes and show the importance of staying at home during quarantine, the Olympics were able to sustain engagement and ensure that stakeholders are involved. This contributed to the Olympics' successful SCCT use and had minimal reputational damage.

While crises are considered to be a dynamic event that requires constant monitoring as there is no blanket procedure for all crises, it is important to note that SCCT has its limitations. "SCCT is a post-crisis communication theory, intended for use after the organization has given all instructing and adjusting information that is important to stakeholders and victims for them to survive the effects of the crisis," (Brown, Adamson, Park 2020). The work that is needed before utilizing SCCT procedures are vital to the success of the organization. While focusing on the

reputational damage is important, the crisis manager must have an extensive comprehension of the crisis itself in order to establish the threat level that is present.

Overall, Situational Crisis Communication Theory has a more practical approach when it comes to sports organizations because the organization is able to assess the reputational damage that is at stake. Also, the SCCT allows for the history of previous stakeholders and crises to be examined in order to properly address the current crisis. In addition, the responsibility level that the organization has in connection with the crisis is an important relationship that Image Repair Theory lacks.

### References

- Brown, K. A., Adamson, A., & Park, B. (2020). Applying situational crisis communication theory to sports: Investigating the impact of athlete reputational crises on team perception. *Journal of Global Sport Management*, 5, 202-222.
- Tang, T., Mahoney, M., & Spiker, A. (2022). Olympics in the shadow of a pandemic: Communication, empowerment, and concern through crisis. In A. C. Billings, L. A. Wenner, & M. Hardin (Eds.), *American sport in the shadow of a pandemic: Communicative insights* (pp. 259-274). Peter Lang.