Crisis Communication and Consistency

An analysis of BP’s crisis communication material during the oil spill in 2010

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 ‘BE QUICK, BE CONSISTENT AND BE OPEN’

When an organisation faces a crisis, both internal and external, it is clear that the organisation has to be quick, be consistent and be open in order to communicate correctly during the crisis. By being quick when facing a crisis the organisation fills out the vacuum with speculations and information in order to make it an active response. If the organisation is slow to respond it might give space for others to fill out the vacuum with bad information and hereby give them an opportunity to attack the organisation (Botan & Hazleton 2006).

When responding to the organisation’s stakeholders and the media, it is important that the organisation acts consistently. Consistency is another name for speaking with one voice within the organisation. However, it is not always one person that takes care of the responding part and therefore it is important that there is consistency throughout their communication material. It is common that it is more than one person in the organisation that takes care of the responding part. Using consistency in communication leaves no room for misunderstanding among the organisation’s communication, especially during a crisis (Botan & Hazleton 2006).

During a crisis it is important to be quick and consistent but it is indeed also important to be open. An organisation has to be open and visible during its communication in order to achieve a sustainable relationship with their stakeholders. When the organisation is invisible during crises, negative messages may occur among its stakeholders and in the mass media. Those negative messages give a picture of an organisation out of control or an organisation that is trying to hide something about the crisis. In order to achieve a long-term relationship with the organisation’s stakeholders, the organisation is compelled to be open about a crisis and its details about the situation (Botan & Hazleton 2006).
1.2 BACKGROUND

BP (British Petroleum) is one of the leading international oil and gas companies, which has developed from a local oil company into a global energy group. BP employs over 80,000 people and operates in over 80 countries with its several brands such as, Castrol, Aral, Am Pm, Wild Bean Cafe and Arco. BP describes themselves as *Progressive, Responsible, Innovative and Performance Driven* (link 1).

On the 20\textsuperscript{th} of April 2010, the deep-sea petroleum-drilling rig Deepwater Horizon exploded off the coast of Louisiana. The rig burned for 36 hours before it sank and the leak of hydrocarbons into the Gulf of Mexico was not closed and sealed until 87 days later. According to the BP official webpage, the accident occurred due to loss of control over the pressure in the well followed by the failure of the well’s blowout preventer. Eleven people died in the accident and several others were injured (link 2). The oil spill resulted in environmental damages and economical expenses and in the end also a replacement of the CEO of BP Tony Hayward. The situation became one of the most prominent cases in the media and each day the newspapers were filled with articles about the oil spill and its outcome.

The accident resulted in the loss of 11 lives and this made the public attention shift focus from the environment and economy resulting from the accident deaths to the deaths. BP was suddenly caught in a big crisis where they were blamed for the accident and its results.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

During a crisis it is important to communicate with the organisation’s stakeholders in order to keep the good relationship. Therefore it is also important for BP to make use of the correct strategies when they face a crisis like they did with the oil spill in 2010. In this thesis I will attempt to analyse the BP’s communication strategies used after the explosion in the Gulf of Mexico in order to see to what extent consistency between used strategies could be established.

More specific this thesis will investigate the following research question:
How did BP make use of crisis communication during the oil crisis in 2010 and to what extent were the response strategies appropriate? And to what extent is there consistency between the strategies?

1.4 PURPOSE

The purpose of this thesis is to clarify and underline the problem statement as shown above. Not only BP but lots of other companies are today facing corporate issues within their companies. Sometimes, however, these issues become crises and when it first becomes a crisis, it is very important to be aware of how to solve the problem in the best way. In 2010 BP faced an issue that became a crisis due to their wrong use of communication during the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. In order to make use of the correct communication strategies during a crisis it is important that there is consistency between the strategies.

In the case of BP they made use of both written and verbal communication. By analysing their communication material during their oil crisis in 2010, it will be possible to examine the consistency between their written and their verbal communication. Furthermore, it allows us the opportunity to examine the extent to which BP’s strategies were appropriate in this case.

There are different types of strategies within the field of crisis communication that can be used during a crisis. The importance, however, is to use the right strategy that fits the company’s overall communication profile.

1.6 EMPIRICAL DATA

The chosen empirical data for this thesis consist of press releases, interviews and a commercial from BP. The company BP has been chosen as they played the key role during the crisis even though other companies such as Transocean were involved in the explosion, too.

Press releases, interviews and a commercial are chosen because the task is to examine the used communication strategies and to what extent there is consistency between them. The oil spill persisted for 87 days BP launched a lot of press releases to update their stakeholders about the situation in the Gulf of Mexico.
The press releases that will be used in this thesis will be the first press releases BP produced in order to show the consistency between the interviews and the commercial. The press releases are available on BP’s official web page www.bp.com where they have made a section called “Gulf of Mexico restoration”. The section introduces sub sections such as ‘Committed to the Gulf’, ‘Restoring the environment’, ‘Restoring the Economy’, ‘Supporting oil spill response efforts’, ‘Claims information’, ‘Deepwater Horizon accident’ and ‘Contacts’. These sections help brief the public about the accident and how the company responded. The press releases are chosen on the basis of their dates and content. It is important to examine the first press releases as they express BP’s first attempts to handle the situations. The press releases after that are chosen press releases are chosen to show the further progress and the last press release is chosen as BP accomplishes sealing the oil leak:

1. **BP Offers Full Support to Transocean After Drilling Rig Fire**  
   *Release date: 21st of April 2010 (link 3)*

2. **BP Initiates Response to Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill**  
   *Release date: 22nd of April 2010 (link 4)*

3. **BP Announces Tourism Grants To Four Gulf States**  
   *Release date: 17th of May 2010 (link 5)*

4. **BP Briefs US Government on Initial Perspectives of Deepwater Horizon Investigation – Focus is on Seven Control Mechanisms**  
   *Release date: 25th of May 2010 (link 6)*

5. **Chairman and CEO Give Assurance that BP will Meet to Obligations in Gulf of Mexico**  
   *Release date: 04th of June 2010 (link 7)*

6. **BP Emphasizes that Disagreement With Other Parties Will Not Diminish Its Promise to Clean Up the Spill and Pay Legitimate Claims**  
   *Release date: 18th of June 2010 (link 8)*

7. **Well Integrity Test Commence on MC252 well**  
   *Release date: 15th of July 2010 (link 9)*

The interviews used are produced by CNN and Sky News. The first interview is made by CNN on the 29th of April 2010 with the former CEO of BP Tony Hayward (link 10). The interview stresses
one of BP’s first responses to the event and how they intend to solve the situation. The second interview that will be examined is made by Sky News on the 18th of May 2010 with Tony Hayward (link 11). This interview takes place in their crisis centre and focuses on how BP tries to stop the oil spill. It is important to examine other communication materials than the press releases in order to examine if there is consistency between the used crisis communication strategies. Both of the interviews are taken from the social media www.youtube.com.

The commercial that BP launched on the 3rd of June 2010, “We Will Make This Right” (link 12), is the last communication material that is to be examined. The commercial is produced by BP itself and launched through BP’s YouTube channel with Tony Hayward as the central character. The commercial was launched 13 days before they sealed the leak and consequently, it was a good PR material to examine in order to show their strategies. The commercial is taken from www.youtube.com.

The press releases, interviews and the commercial can be found in appendices listed with numbers.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

In this section of the thesis, a brief presentation is given on the method for the overall project.

In order to examine the press releases made by BP during the oil spill in 2010 the most relevant research method will be textual analysis. Hereby it will be possible to examine which strategies BP employed in order to compare it with the verbal communication material it launched through the media.

The problem statement of this thesis is to examine BP’s current communication material and to examine to what extent they are consistent. For this purpose there is no need to use other research methods. BP has launched several reports covering the whole situation in order to brief the public and the US Government and they are indeed detailed. Furthermore, BP’s then CEO Tony Hayward has given several interviews, which will also be used for examination.
1.7 Thesis Structure

The thesis structure consists of five parts: an introduction, theory, analysis, discussion and finally a conclusion.

The introductory part aims to give a presentation of the overall thesis with a presentation of the background, problem statement, purpose, methodology, empirical data and thesis structure. This helps the readers to gain an overall overview of the thesis and what the report seeks to deal with.

The objective of the theoretical part is to introduce the theory that will be applied in the analysis. First there will be given a definition of corporate identity, image and reputation and the term consistency will be presented. Later there will be and then a presentation of the communication process and a definition of crisis communication. Followed by an introduction to Benoit’s Image Restoration Model, Coomb’s SCCT model and Frandsen and Johansen’s Rhetorical Arena – Context, Media, Genre, Text. These three models have been chosen as they represent three different perspectives on crisis communication.

The analytical part attempts to answer the problem statement of the thesis. First, there will be a presentation of BP and the timeline of the crisis to give the reader an overview of the crisis in 2010. Then there will be an analysis of the chosen press releases, followed by an analysis of the chosen interviews and the commercial. This part of the thesis will examine BP’s communication strategies during the oil spill. In the end the results of the analysis are summed up in the discussion to give the reader a short overview of the analytical part.

The discussion part summarises the overall thesis and examines how BP handled the crisis with their communication material. Overall, a discussion of BP’s handling of the pros and cons of the crisis.

Finally, the thesis will ends with a conclusion which reflects on the overall thesis and concludes the project.
**Structure** (Rienecker and Jørgensen, 2005)

2. **Theory**

2.1 **Structure of the Theory Section**

This section of the thesis starts with an introduction of the theories that will be applied in the analysis section. The theory section will start with corporate identity, image and reputation. It gives an overview of three aspects that are important to focus on during a crisis. Corporate identity, image and reputation are important to see if the organisation sticks by with what they say and do during their communication.

The next step will be about consistency. Even though consistency is not a weighty aspect among scholars compared to the other aspects in the theory section, it is a very important factor to be aware of. Consistency is closely linked to corporate identity, image and reputation. The study of consistency is included because part of this analysis will decide to what extent BP’s crisis communication is consistent.

In order to get an understanding of what the thesis is examining, crisis communication will be defined. This is important to stress in order to clarify why BP’s oil spill became a crisis. Among others, various types of crises are explained in order to clarify the type of BP’s oil spill in 2010.

Afterwards, there will be a section about the communication process during a crisis. It is important that an organisation is prepared for a crisis especially within the organisation. The role of the media is significant during a crisis as it prefers to cover the situation in details. This means that the organisation should also be prepared to answer the media in details. The part about the communication process will be used as background information to get an understanding of how to be prepared for crises.

In order to answer the problem statement of the project three different theorists are chosen dealing with crisis communication. Professor, Ph.D. William L. Benoit is one of the well-known professors within the field of crisis communication and image restoration. Benoit has taught crisis communication and political communication at Miami University, Bowling Green State University, University of Missouri and Ohio University. Benoit is currently Professor, PhD at the School of
Communication Studies, Ohio University. Benoit has published several books covering the fields of communication. *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies*, however, is one of Benoit’s books published in 1995, concerning his famous theory of crisis communication as image restoration it has played a very important and decisive role for the developments within the field. Benoit’s image restoration strategies will be presented in the part describing the image restoration order to clarify which strategies that is correct to use during a crisis in order to analyse BP’s pr material during the oil spill (link 12).

Professor, Ph.D. William Timothy Coombs is also one of the well-known professors within the field of crisis communication. Coombs is the 2002 recipient of the Jackson, Jackson & Wagner Behavioural Science Prize from the Public Relations Society of America for his crisis research, which led to the development and testing of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). The SCCT model will be used as a tool to analyse BP’s pr material during the oil spill. Coombs has published books dealing with pr and crisis communication such as *It’s not just PR* and *Public Relations Strategy and Application: Managing Influence* with Sherry Holladay. Furthermore he has co-edited *The Handbook of Crisis Communication* with Sherry Holladay (link 13).

Winni Johansen, Associate professor, PhD and Director of Executive Master in Corporate Communication and Finn Frandsen, Professor at Centre for Corporate Communication, Business and Social Sciences, both at the University of Aarhus, have together published the book *Krisekommunikation*, presenting “the Rhetorical Arena”, a new crisis communication model that can be used during a crisis. The Rhetorical Arena will be presented in the theory section. The model is chosen because it deals with crisis communication but also because the model clarifies aspects that are, according to Frandsen and Johansen, needed in Benoit’s and Coombs’ crisis models (Johansen and Frandsen, 2008).
2.2 CORPORATE IDENTITY, IMAGE AND REPUTATION

In today’s world it is important for organisations to have an alignment of identity, image and reputation. Having a corporate identity and communicating it out has become recognised by organisations as a keystone to doing well on the market and responding to public demands. This is indeed also important to focus on and be prepared for when an organisation faces a crisis.

2.2.1 CORPORATE IDENTITY: WHO ARE WE?

“Corporate personality embraces the subject at its most profound level. It is the soul, the persona, the spirit, the culture of the organisation manifested in some way. A corporate personality is not necessarily something tangible that you can see, feel or touch – although it may be. The tangible manifestation of a corporate personality is a corporate identity. It is the identity that projects and reflects the reality of the corporate personality.” (Cornelissen, 2008: p. 67)

Corporate identity is said to be the tangible manifestation of the ‘persona’ which is more like the corporate culture. According to the British professors, Balmer and Greyser, there is not just one single identity within an organisation. Therefore, the two professors have created a mosaic framework called the AC²ID Test (2003), in which they argue that there are five types of identity. These are the actual, the communicated, the conceived, the ideal and the desired identity (Balmer & Greyers, 2003).

2.2.2 THE ACTUAL IDENTITY

The actual identity of an organisation is the current attributes. This identity can be shaped by corporate ownership, the structure of the organisation, business activities, quality of products and services, and the overall business performance. The actual identity is who the organisation actually is. Furthermore, the values of the organisation are a part of shaping this identity (Balmer & Greyers, 2003: p. 16).
2.2.3 The Communicated Identity

The communicated identity is everything the organisation does through its corporate communication. It includes advertising, sponsorship and public relations, which are the controllable forms of communication. However, the communicated identity also derives from the non-controllable forms of communication, such as word-of-mouth and media commentary. Consequently, they are important to consider (Balmer & Greyers, 2003: pp. 16-17).

2.2.4 Conceived Identity

Conceived identity refers to perceptual concepts like corporate image, corporate reputation, and corporate branding. These concepts are perceptions of the company, which are also the company’s attributes and overall corporate image and corporate reputation held by the stakeholders. It is the management’s responsibility to decide which of the perceptions that is most important (Balmer & Greyers, 2003: p. 17).

2.2.5 The Ideal Identity

The ideal identity is specified as the optimum positioning of the organisation in its market in a given time frame. This is normally based on current knowledge from the organisation’s planners and other staff members, who are active in the general business and competitive environment (Balmer & Greyers, 2003: p. 17).

2.2.6 Desired Identity

Desired identity is the vision for the organisation by the corporate leaders. It is the desired identity that lives in the hearts and minds of corporate leaders (Balmer & Greyers, 2003: pp. 17-18).

In this thesis the main focus is on the actual identity and the communicated identity while the question is to underline BP’s current identity compared to their communicated identity during the oil spill in 2010. The actual identity will be examined through BP’s current values in order to compare it to their communicated identity found in their communication material used during the oil spill.
2.2.7 **Corporate Image: How do stakeholders see us?**

The companies’ image is the picture on the surface which is the consumer’s and stakeholders’ first impression about the company:

“Corporate image is the immediate mental picture that audience have of an organisation. Corporate reputations, on the other hand, typically evolve over time as a result of consistent performance, reinforced by effective communication, whereas corporate images can be fashioned more quickly through well-conceived communication programs.” (Cornelissen, 2008: p. 76)

Corporate image can be described as the overall impression made on the minds of the public about an organisation. This includes the organisation’s outward face such as their brands, architecture and their corporate name (Barich & Kotler, 1991: pp. 94-95). Image can be built through an image-building campaign and thereby promoting the image of the company. It is especially important for small organisations to focus on a strong image in order to develop the company (Gray & Balmer, 1998: p. 697).

By investing in corporate image the organisation achieves further strategic advantages; *Distinctiveness, Impact and Stakeholders*. Distinctiveness is obtained by the consistent communication of the organisation and thus creating awareness among their stakeholders. By use of corporate image the organisation creates a relationship with the stakeholders and this often has an impact on the organisation’s performance when the stakeholders support the organisation by using its services or invest it. A strategic advantage to the Stakeholders is obtained by a strong and consistent corporate image. The organisation avoids potential problems such as conflicting images and messages (Cornelissen, 2008: pp. 65-66).

2.2.8 **Corporate Reputation: What do they think about us?**

Corporate reputation and corporate image are closely linked in corporate communication. As mentioned above corporate image is the stakeholders’ perception of the overall communication, whereas corporate reputation is built through a more consistent communication programme. Corporate Image is the first impression the stakeholders obtain and corporate reputation is formed by the stakeholders’ impression of the organisation.
The collective representation of multiple constituencies’ images of a company, built up over time and based on a company’s identity programs, its performance and how constituencies have perceived its behaviour (Argenti & Druckenmiller, 2004: p. 369).

It is indeed important for the organisations to be aware of and focused on corporate reputation, both the external and the internal corporate reputation. External reputation is defined by the external stakeholders, receivers of the organisation’s external communication. Internal reputation is defined by the internal stakeholders such as the employees. Both of the stakeholder groups are important to remember when dealing with reputation. The internal stakeholders help communicate the organisation’s reputation whereas the external stakeholders form impressions of the organisation and its communication. A good reputation increases the corporate worth of the organisation and provides competitive advantage. Therefore it is important that an organisation is focused on their reputation, especially in relation to their stakeholder groups such as financiers and suppliers (Gray & Balmer, 1998: pp. 697-699).

In “Components and Parameters of Corporate Reputation - An Empirical Study” ten components of corporate reputation are defined: Quality of employees, quality of management, financial performance, quality of products and services, market leadership, customer orientation or focus, attractiveness or emotional appeal of the organisation, social responsibility, ethical behaviour and reliability (Iwu-Egwuonwu, 2011: pp. 199-201). These components are also important to focus on during communication, and especially during a crisis. If an organisation wants to build a strong reputation, it will have to be strongly positioned in relation to these components in order to stand strong during e.g. a crisis.

2.3 CONSISTENCY

Another aspect that is closely linked to corporate identity, image and reputation is consistency. According to reputation scholars Fombrun and Van Riel a strong reputation consists of visibility, distinctiveness, authenticity, transparency and consistency. Visibility refers to the degree of visibility of corporate themes in all internal and external communication. Distinctiveness shows the degree to which the corporate identity or positioning of the organisation is distinctive.
Authenticity is concerned with the degree to which an organisation communicates values that are embedded in its culture. Transparency deals with the degree to which an organisation is open and transparent about its behaviour. Consistency is the degree to which organisations communicate consistent messages through all internal and external communication channels (Cornelissen, 2008: pp. 82-83).

Furthermore, in order to have a good and detailed information system it is important to have redundancy, frequency, circularity and continuity in addition to consistency. Redundancy is important in order to let people access information through web pages, newsletters, etc. Frequency is needed in order to update the given information especially during a crisis. Circularity is needed to plan how the information such as questions and answers are communicated during the communication process. Continuity is needed to share information while people may need different types of information from stage to stage and over a period of time (Lewis, 2006: pp. 127-128).

According to J. Kunde, consistency is achieved through corporate religion. He argues that in order to act consistent in an organisation it is important that the employees share the same qualitative values. Therefore, it is important that the staffs are integrated into the organisation’s values and norms. To ensure this integration Kunde suggests that the management is focused on this point during the recruitment process. Furthermore, according to Kunde it should be a prerequisite for being a part of the organisation (Torp, 2009: pp. 200-201)

Consistency is not only an important factor to be aware of during crisis communication. Consistency is also important during creative executions, brand awareness and brand attitude. Consistency in creative executions is important for the organisation in order to be recognised by their stakeholders during their adverts or promotions (Percy & Elliott 2009).

2.4 DEFINING CRISIS COMMUNICATION

As mentioned above, image and reputation are very important aspects of corporate communication. Therefore, when the image or reputation of an organisation is threatened in any way, the organisation has to be prepared to respond accordingly. This is the reason why crisis
communication has expanded rapidly among scholars over the past decade. According to the Handbook of Crisis Communication, written by Coombs and Holladay (2010), organisations frequently find themselves in situations that are defined as crises. Therefore, it is important for organisations to acquire knowledge about how and why crises occur in order to be prepared. This is applicable for all organisations, as they must accept that “no organisation is immune from a crisis anywhere in the world even if that organisation is vigilant and actively seeks to prevent crises.” (Coombs & Holladay, 2010: p. 17).

The definition of a crisis differs from theorist to theorist. According to Coombs, a crisis can be defined as: “an event that is an unpredictable, major threat that can have a negative effect on the organisation, industry, or stakeholders if handled improperly.” (Coombs & Holladay, 2010: p.18). However, before a situation becomes a crisis, it is an issue that is possible to handle. Therefore, it is important for organisations to be able to define and understand issues. Seymour and Moore (2000) use a snake metaphor to argue that crises come in two forms (Tench & Yeomans, 2009: p. 386):

**The cobra** – the ‘sudden’ crisis – this is a disaster that hits suddenly and takes the company completely by surprise and leaves it in a crisis situation.

**The python** – the ‘slow-burning’ crisis or ‘crisis creep’ – a collection of issues that steal up on the company one by one and slowly crush it.

Once an issue has become a crisis, it is important to look at the causes that have triggered the crisis. According to Lerbingier (1997) these causes can be summed up in four groups (Tench & Yeomans, 2009: p. 386):

- Natural – a natural crisis is triggered by environmental disasters.
- Technical – a technical crisis is triggered by technical errors.
• Human – a human crisis is triggered by personal failure and shortcomings.

• Managerial – a managerial crisis is triggered by strategic mistakes, turning decades of profit into deficits.

Due to the fact that there are so many causes that can trigger a crisis, it is important for organisations to be prepared. The preparation is in the hands of the crisis managers, who have to have an overview of the surrounding market and who are able to handle any upcoming crisis. If a crisis is not handled properly, it can have many consequences. Besides the financial costs involved in a crisis, there are also the reputation of the organisation to consider. Other costs to consider are employee concerns, political backlashes, legal actions, customer reactions and market confidence. In order to limit damage to the organisational reputation, it is important to communicate with the stakeholders of the organisation and keep them informed. Once the reputation has been damaged, however, the organisation has to consider strategies to restore it.

2.5 THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Today it is clear that is it important for organisations to be prepared for a crisis. However, it is not all organisations that prioritise to be prepared as it costs time, money and energy. Often communication managers find several reasons for the organisation not communicating correctly (Tench & Yeomans 2009: p. 396):

- *They need to assemble all the facts before it communicates.*

- *The desire to avoid panic.*

- *It does not have a trained spokesperson.*

- *It has had other problems recently and cannot talk about this problem because it will impact on its overall corporate reputation.*

- *The issue of how to solve the crises*
The fear of revealing proprietary information or revealing competitive information that may give the company new competitive problems.

Often the media is the most used communication tube among organisations especially during a crisis. It is, however, often critical to communicate to the media. With the above mentioned point of lack of a trained spokesperson in mind, it can be difficult to communicate during a crisis. In order to communicate with the media it is by crisis managers that the spokesperson follows the 5Cs, Concern, Clarity, Control, Confidence and Competence.

Concern is important to communicate, meaning that the spokespersons have to show their concern for the situation, the employees, customers and anyone or anything else that is included in the event. Clarity is needed from the start of the event till the end. The spokesperson has to speak with clarity and must use clear messages during the process. Furthermore, it is important to notice that the message given by the spokesperson must be repeated throughout the duration of the crisis. It is important that the spokesperson shows that the situation is under control and communicates in a controlled way during the event. When the spokesperson communicates, it is of importance that is done with confidence but without arrogance. Finally he also needs to demonstrate competence and reflect on how they will handle the crisis (Tench & Yeomans, 2009: pp. 396-397).

It is important for an organisation to be prepared for a crisis because of the role of the media. As soon as the media gets a grip of a crisis, they will research facts, and usually they will question; What happened? What went wrong? Why? Who is to blame/accountable? What is happening right now? What are you doing to prevent it from happening again? (Tench & Yeomans, 2009: p. 399).

2.6 Benoit’s Image Restoration Model

When the image or reputation of an organisation is threatened in any way, the organisation becomes motivated to take action in order to restore it. According to William Benoit, organisations can take both preventive and restorative approaches to cope with image problems. The preventive approach is used to manage an issue, before it turns into a crisis. The restorative
approach is used when a crisis has already evolved and damage has to be limited. But in both cases “early response to crises can limit the extent to which organisations are damaged.” (Benoit, 2004: p. 263).

In *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies* Benoit presents his version of strategies that can be applied when an organisation faces a crisis. Benoit’s main focus lies within image restoration and in his “Image Restoration Strategies” he suggests five general strategies and 14 total options that can be used during a crisis in order to repair a damaged image. The five general strategies are *Denial, Evasion of Responsibility, Reduce Offensiveness, Corrective Action* and *Mortification*. Within these five strategies, Benoit, suggests several sub points to some of the strategies (Benoit, 1995: pp. 264-265):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denial</th>
<th>Simple denial, Shift the blame</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evasion of Responsibility</td>
<td>Provocation, Defeasibility, Accident, Good intentions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing Offensiveness of Event</td>
<td>Bolstering, Minimisation, Differentiation, Transcendence, Attack Accuser, Compensation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrective Action</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Mortification</td>
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</table>
Simple denial is a strategy that is used when the organisation denies having anything to do with the event and that the event has taken place at all. An organisation shifts the blame when it tries to shift the responsibility to another actor from the event and thereby avoids being one of the actors during the event (Benoit, 2004: p. 265).

Provocation is used when the organisation describes themselves as the scapegoat of the event and that it has been provoked to be a part of the event, i.e. that there are other accomplices to the event. Defeasibility is used to show that the organisation was not fully informed or did not have control over the event thus shifting the responsible of the event indirectly. Accident is used when the organisation describes the event as an accident meaning that the event did not take place on purpose. Good intentions are used when the organisation wanted the best (Benoit, 2004: pp. 266-267).

Reducing Offensiveness of Event is the main strategy when the organisation tries to soften the negative effects from the event and the concept is divided into six sub strategies as shown in the table above. Bolstering reduces the negative aspects from the event by highlighting positive things about the organisation. Minimisation is used to minimise the event in order to reduce the level of the crisis. Differentiation switches the attention by using other unsuccessful events and actors as examples. Transcendence covers when the organisation tries to move the attention to another context in order to make it look like it was done for the sake of society. Attack Accuser is used to weaken the opponent in order to switch the attention. Compensation is used to lessen the attacks on the organisation and may also cover compensation for employees that has suffered due to the event (Benoit, 2004: pp. 267-268).

Corrective action is taken when the organisation tries to correct the problems or attacks. According to Benoit it is important to correct the problems, i.e. by solving or preventing that they happen again. This strategy can be used without taking the responsibility for the event (Benoit, 2004: p. 269).
The last strategy of mortification is used when the organisations apologise to the public and ask their forgiveness (Benoit, 2004: pp. 269-270).

### 2.7 Coombs’ SCCT Model

From time to time organisations face different crisis situations. Therefore, they need to be prepared and know how to handle the situation and how to respond to their stakeholders. In order to analyse and respond to a crisis, it is important to consider which crisis response strategy to use. According to W. Timothy Coombs there are three main points to consider when an organisation faces a crisis - identification of crisis types, development of a crisis response strategy and creation of a link between the crisis response strategy and the crisis type. With these three steps the situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) seeks to develop a system of guidelines, which can be used to maximise the reputation protecting effect of crisis response strategies (Coombs & Holladay, 2010: p. 95).

In order to link the crisis response strategies with crisis types, Coombs (2004) suggest an attribution theory. The attribution theory is based on the belief that people evaluate the causes of a crisis. Coombs define three dimensions when making attributions - stability, external control and personal control/locus. Stability distinguishes between the cause of the event happens frequently, then it is stable, or infrequently, then it is unstable. It is stable if someone repeats the same mistake. However, it is unstable if the mistake is unique or rare. External control is seen when the cause of the event is controlled or uncontrolled by some other person. If another actor controls what happens to a person, there is strong external control in the situation. Internal control is seen both when the cause of the event is controllable or uncontrollable by the actor, which means that the actor can control his or her own fate in the situation. Locus is seen if the cause of the event is related to the actor or the situation. If it is something about the actor it is called internal locus and if it something about the situation it is called external locus. Research has shown that there is some sort of overlap between personal control and locus. It is suggested, however, that these two dimensions are to be perceived as one. Furthermore, high personal control / locus indicate intentional actions by the actor, whereas low personal control / locus indicate unintentional action (Coombs & Holladay, 2010: p. 97).
When an organisation faces a crisis the first step is to identify the type of the crisis. According to Coombs, there are three main clusters: victim cluster, accidental cluster and preventable cluster. Victim cluster applies to organisations that are also victims of the crisis. Accidental cluster applies to organisations that face a crisis that was unintentional. Preventable cluster applies to organisations that intentionally place people at risk by taking inappropriate actions or violating a law. Each cluster consists of various subsections that specify the crisis types further.

After the type of crisis has been defined, the next step is to establish the right crisis response strategy. According to Coombs, there are two main aspects to consider: primary crisis response strategies and secondary crisis response strategies. Primary crisis response strategies consist of three subsections: deny, diminish and repair/rebuild. Denial is used if the organisation claims that no crisis has occurred or that it is not responsible for the crisis. The diminish strategy covers when the organisation wants to alter the public’s perception of the crisis by reframing how they should interpret the crisis. The repair strategy is used by the organisation when it wants to improve its image in the eyes of the public. Secondary crisis response strategies consist of bolstering strategies. These strategies are for the organisation’s reminding, ingratiating and victimising its stakeholders in order to maintain good relations. However, the primary crisis response strategies will be prioritised and the secondary crisis response strategies are only used as a supplement (Coombs & Holladay, 2010: pp. 97-101).

When the crisis type has been defined and the crisis response strategies have been found, the next step is to link the two dimensions. According to Coombs, there are eight different guidelines to choose from (Coombs & Holladay, 2010: p. 100):

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Informing and adjusting information alone can be enough when crises have minimal attributions of crisis responsibility (victim crises), no history of similar crises and a neutral or positive prior relationship reputation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Victimage can be used as part of the response for workplace violence, product tampering, natural disasters and rumours.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3 Diminish crisis response strategies should be used for crises with minimal attributions of crisis responsibility (victim crises) coupled with a history of similar crises and/or negative prior relationship reputation.

4 Diminish crisis response strategies should be used for crises with low attributions of crisis responsibility (accident crises), which have no history of similar crises, and a neutral or positive prior relationship reputation.

5 Repair/rebuild crisis response strategies should be used for crises with low attributions of crisis responsibility (accident crises), coupled with a history of similar crises and/or negative prior relationship reputation.

6 Repair/rebuild crisis response strategies should be used for crises with strong attributions of crisis responsibility (preventable crises) regardless of crisis history or prior relationship reputation.

7 The deny posture crisis response strategies should be used for rumor and challenge crises, when possible.

8 Maintain consistency in crisis response strategies. Mixing deny crisis response strategies with either the diminish or rebuild strategy will erode the effectiveness of the overall response.

Source: SCCT crisis response strategy guidelines

The SCCT crisis response strategy guidelines provide a summary of the SCCT recommendations for the use of crisis response strategies.

2.8 The Rhetorical Arena – Context, Media, Genre and Text

The Rhetorical Arena is based on Benoit’s and Coombs’ theories. However, according to Frandsen and Johansen, Coombs’ and Benoit’s strategies build on a one-way communication during crisis communication. The Rhetorical Arena builds on a multi-vocal approach meaning that during a crisis there are many different voices from various actors whose roles constantly change between
being senders and receivers during the crisis situation. The Rhetorical Arena leads to a more dynamic communication process instead of the more linear communication process that is seen in Benoit’s and Coombs’ communication strategies (Frandsen & Johansen, 2007: pp. 270-273).

The Rhetorical Arena starts before a crisis and continues to the end of the crisis, i.e. the crisis is seen as a process. It is important to notice that the Rhetorical Arena not only represents an organisation that is dealing with a crisis but all communication that is present during the crisis, e.g. the organisation sending out press releases, the media conveying information about the event or angry stakeholders contacting and accusing the organisation (Frandsen & Johansen, 2007: p. 275).

The Rhetorical Arena consists of two parts; the contextual model and the textual model. The context model deals with the actors of the event and the text model deals with theories about discourse and text.

2.8.1 THE CONTEXTUAL MODEL

As mentioned above, according to Johansen and Frandsen there are several actors during a crisis depending on how complicated the crisis is. These actors are both senders and receivers and these actors enter into relations with each other as seen on the figure below:
Some of the actors communicate to each other which are one of the most seen dialogues in crisis communication. However, it may also happen that the organisation communicates with other actors such as their stakeholder in order to find a solution. Then there are actors that communicate against each other, this can be employees going on strike because of disagreement. Some actors communicate past each other. This often happens when the organisation and its stakeholders interpret the crisis differently. Then there are actors that only communicate about each other, e.g. the media, customers and citizens (Johansen and Frandsen, 2007: pp. 275-280).

2.8.2 The Textual Model

In this second part of the Rhetorical Arena the aim is to give a more comprehensive list of strategies compared to Benoit’s image restoration strategies and Coombs’ SCCT strategies. Frandsen’s and Johansen’s textual model consists of three features and four parameters. The three features are the crisis communication, the sender and the receivers. The four parameters are context, media, genre and text (Johansen and Frandsen, 2007: p. 280).
2.8.2.1 CONTEXT

The first parameter, context, is the central point that combines the contextual and the textual model in the Rhetorical Arena. The parameter includes all the sociological and all the psychological factors that influence the communication. These sociological and psychological factors are divided into three aspects; the societal/cultural context, the organisational/institutional context and the situational context (Frandsen & Johansen, 2007: p. 285).

The societal/cultural context covers the social and cultural framework in which the crisis takes place. This can, for instance, be about where in the world the communication goes on and/or if it is global. The organisational/institutional context focuses on the organisational cultures’ and structures’ effect on communication, which depends on the size of the organisation and/or if it is a public institution. The situational context considers the crisis type, the actors of the situation, and the time and place of the communication (Frandsen & Johansen, 2007: pp. 285-286).

2.8.2.2 MEDIA
Media in the Rhetorical Arena, is also known as the communication channels, such as print media, radio, television or internet (Frandsen & Johansen, 2007: pp. 291-295).

2.8.2.3 GENRE

Genre can be described as a group or a family of textual outcome which aims the same. The use of genre differs from internal communication to external communication. According to Johansen and Frandsen the most used genres within internal communication are joint meetings and exceptional meetings with a group of employees. As far as external communication is concerned the most used genres press releases and special messages on the official web page of the organisation (Frandsen & Johansen, 2007: pp. 295-296).

2.8.2.4 TEXT

The last parameter, text, in the Rhetorical Arena, is described as the micro level of the crisis communication. This means that it is the result of what the sender decides to publish and hereby it becomes the expression and content of the crises communication (Frandsen & Johansen, 2007: pp. 299-304).

2.9 CRITICISM OF Benoit, COOMBS AND FRANDSEN AND JOHANSEN

Several scientists are criticising Benoit’s image restoration model for its lack of certain aspects. One of these scientists is Lisa Tyler, who is discussing Benoit’s model in the article, “Liability Means Never Being Able to Say You’re Sorry”. According to Benoit’s model an organisation should accept and apologise if they are guilty. However, Tyler disagrees with Benoit about this because she believes that it is too naive to believe that the organisation can repair the image each time. Furthermore, the model can be criticised for not taking the complex and dynamic construct of a crisis into consideration. Moreover, if we are to compare this model with Coomb’s SCCT model, it is clear that Coombs applies more strategies (Frandsen & Johansen, 2007: pp. 213-216).

Even though Cooms’ model is new compared to Benoit’s model, there are still aspects that can be criticised. The most criticised part of Coombs’ model is the attribution theory. Coombs sees all of the stakeholders as one big group but it is important to notice that people perceive crisis
differently and thus respond differently. Furthermore, Coombs only involves information is received by the media. It is important to notice, however, that it is not only through the media that the stakeholders obtain information. This may happen through e.g. family, colleagues or other non-media sources such as from mouth to mouth gossip (Frandsen & Johansen, 2007: pp. 244-246).

Benoit and Coombs have one thing in common that is needed in their crisis models. They have both left out silence as a strategy.

Frandsen and Johansen come up with a model that is combining Benoit’s and Coombs’ crisis models with more variables and a more multi vocal approach. However, when using the model as a tool to solve a crisis situation, it may become too complex for the organisation, i.e. leaving the management in a decision-trap in which the situation is even harder to navigate.
3. **Analysis**

3.1 **Structure of the Analysis**

In this section of the thesis the aim is to clarify and answer the problem statement of the project. This will be done by analyses of BP’s PR material that has been produced during the oil spill in 2010. The analysis section will deal with analyses of press releases, interviews and a commercial.

The first part of the analysis provides information about the company with an introduction of BP. The introduction of the company provides the readers with an overall impression of the company and its values. This is important to underline in order to gain an understanding of how BP presents itself and how it communicates with its stakeholders in general.

The analysis continues with a presentation of a timeline of the oil spill 2010 according to BP. Knowledge of the event is important in order to give a precise and detailed overview of how and why the explosion happened on the 20th of April 2010. Furthermore, it is important to underline the episode in details as the timeline is an important document to display how BP approached the event. It is also an important factor to present the timeline as it provides a picture of BP’s communicated identity, which will be examined later in the discussion.

After a presentation of BP and its timeline on the oil spill in 2010, the analysis of the press releases will be presented. BP launched several press releases but only seven have been selected for analysis. The press releases dates from the 21st of April 2010 to 15th of April 2010. The press releases have been chosen on the basis of their dates and their content. The explosion happened on the 20th of April 2010 and the first press release that will be analysed is from the 21st of April 2010. The next five press releases are chosen in order to show how BP handled the situation. The last press release is from the 15th of July 2010 and it is chosen as in the last press releases when BP’s aim is to seal the leaking oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. An analysis of the press releases highlights some of the crisis communication strategies BP has employed during the communication period.
Next to be analysed are two interviews made with the former CEO of BP, Tony Hayward. The first interview is made by CNN on the 29th of April 2010, 9 days after the explosion. The second interview is made by Sky News on the 18th of May 2010. Both of the interviews contain information regarding the oil spill. The first interview, however, is much more detailed and rewarding as the content of the interview stresses a coming crisis. The second interview is launched on the 18th of May 2010 and provides the public with information on BP’s effort to stop the spill. The spill had been ongoing for almost 30 days when the interview took place, an important factor in the analysis of BP’s crisis communication strategies.

The last PR material that will be examined is a commercial made by BP through its YouTube channel. The commercial “We Will Do This Right”, is launched on the 3rd of June 2010 with the former CEO of BP as the key character. The commercial is important to examine as the spill had been ongoing for more than 30 days and the situation had become very critical. The commercial will be analysed in order to examine BP’s crisis communication strategies and to compare the chosen PR materials and the used strategies.

The analyses of the chosen PR material will examine BP’s used crisis communication strategies and thus reveal if and how BP has succeeded in creating consistency in its communication material.

The chosen PR material can be found enclosed as an appendix. The press releases, interviews and the commercial will be denominated with numbers.

3.2 INTRODUCTION OF BP

BP is a global oil and gas company headquartered in London, United Kingdom. BP is operating in more than 80 countries and is the third-largest energy company and fourth-largest company in the world measured by revenues. Until 1998 the company was registered as British Petroleum and changed into BP Amoco in 1999 and was retained in 2001 when the company was renamed BP.

BP is active in every area of the oil and gas industry. This includes exploration and production, refining, distribution and marketing, petrochemicals, power generation and trading. Furthermore,
the company is also active in renewable energy including biofuels, hydrogen, solar and wind power (link 14)

The BP group consists of five brands; ampm, Aral, Arco, Castrol and Wild Bean Café. Ampm is a value-add-on to gas stations where packaged beverages, grab-n-go sandwiches, treats or fountain drinks are offered. Aral is one of the most trusted brands in Germany and provides services similar to ampm and is also the country’s third largest fast food retailer. Arco is a leading gasoline brand in the western USA and is known for cleaner fuels and low prices. Arco joined the BP group in 2000. Castrol joined the BP group in 2002 and is known for motor oils for automobiles and motorbikes. Wild Bean Café offers gourmet on the go such as inventive sandwiches, fresh baked goods and coffee (link 15).

The approaches of the BP group build on respect, being consistent and having the courage to do the right thing. They value safety, respect, excellence, courage and to be one team (link 16).

3.3 THE BP OIL SPILL 2010

3.3.1 TIMELINE ACCORDING TO BP

April 20 Explosion and fire on the Deepwater Horizon, Transocean’s semisubmersible rig in the Gulf of Mexico. 11 of the 126 member crew are missing. Transocean had been drilling an exploration well as a contractor to BP.

April 21 Rig continues to burn. 11 people remain missing. Search and rescue effort coordinated among Transocean’s Emergency and Family Response Team, BP and the U.S. Coast Guard.

April 22 Deepwater Horizon rig sinks. Major oil spill response activated, including a flotilla of response vessels, protective boom, dispersant for use at sea and initial plans for relief wells. BP Group Chief Executive Tony Hayward says: “We are determined to do everything in our power to contain this oil spill and resolve the situation as rapidly, safely and effectively as possible.”
April 23 Search for missing 11 crew members is suspended after covering 5,000 square miles. Rear Admiral Mary Landry of US Coast Guard says: "Our deepest sympathies and prayers go out to the families of these 11 crew members."

April 24 BP offers deepest sympathy and condolences to the families, friends and colleagues of those lost. Response effort underway including skimming of oily water from surface and deployment of protective boom. 1,900 gallons of dispersant applied. BP initiates its claims process consistent with 'responsible party' requirements of the Oil Pollution Act of 1990.

April 25 Efforts begin to activate the blowout preventer using submersible remote operated vehicles. Ultimately, these were unsuccessful and the blow out preventer did not seal the well. Field operations co-ordinated from Houma, Louisiana, with almost 500 people deployed. BP activates toll-free call center and opens two claims offices (with over 30 more offices to come) to process claims.


April 28 First controlled burn carried out. US Coast Guard designates BP a 'responsible party' under the Oil Pollution Act.

April 30 Staging posts for boom and other equipment set up Venice, Louisiana; Pascagoula and Biloxi, Mississippi; Mobile, Alabama; and Pensacola, Florida. 2,000 people and 75 vessels now deployed.

May 1 U.S. Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Thad Allen designated National Incident Commander for the US administration's coordinated response.

May 2 Drilling begins on a relief well designed to intercept and permanently seal the leaking oil well. Well being drilled by the Development Driller III rig. Visiting the region, President Obama says:
"Every American affected by this spill should know this: Your government will do whatever it takes, for as long as it takes, to stop this crisis."

**May 3** More than 2,000 volunteers trained to assist in the response effort. Volunteers include local fishing crews, whose boats can be used as 'vessels of opportunity' to assist contractors in deploying boom.

**May 5** BP makes $25m block grants to each of the states of Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi and Florida to help them implement oil spill contingency plans.

**May 9** Efforts to place a containment dome over the main leak point suspended because build up of hydrates prevented successful placement.

**May 13** By 13 May, 6,700 claims for spill-related losses had been filed, of which around 1,000 had been paid. Over 16,000 people had registered as volunteers and 46,500 calls had been made to BP helplines, around 30 per cent offering ideas to help the response or other assistance.

**May 16** Drilling of second, back-up, relief well begins from the Development Driller II drilling rig.

**May 17** BP announces grants to help Gulf coast states promote tourism - $25m to Florida and $15m each to Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana.

**May 18** Riser insertion tube tool (RITT) operational, initially collecting an estimated 2,000 barrels of oil a day. [Gas brought to the surface by the riser insertion tube is flared aboard the drillship Discoverer Enterprise.]

**May 22** President Obama announces that he has signed an executive order establishing a bipartisan National Commission on the oil spill and offshore drilling with former Florida Governor Bob Graham and former Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency William K. Reilly as co-chairs.
May 24 BP commits $500m to Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative (GRI) - a ten year open research program to study impact of the spill and response on the environment. Program to be constructed by independent advisory panel.

May 25 BP’s internal investigation team says it is focusing on seven mechanisms: including the well casing, pressure tests, procedures to detect hydrocarbons in the well and the failed blow-out preventer (BOP). Information websites set up in Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi and Florida. [Picture shows blow-out preventer being towed into New Orleans in September after being raised from the seabed.]

May 26 'Top kill' operation initiated in effort to stop flow of oil by injecting heavy drilling fluids into the well.

May 29 BP announced that top kill had not overcome flow of oil, despite 30,000 barrels of heavy mud being pumped into the well. Plans begin for deployment of containment cap - known as Lower Marine Riser Package (LMRP) containment cap - from Discoverer Enterprise vessel from which oil and gas can be piped to the surface.

June 3 BP announces that it has established a $360 million escrow account to fund the construction of six sections of Louisiana barrier islands, having been directed to pay for the construction by the federal government.

June 4 Oil and gas being received onboard the Discoverer Enterprise following successful placement of the LMRP containment cap. BP announces advance payments of claims for those losing income or net profit.

June 5 Volumes of oil and gas collected through LMRP containment cap increase to 10,500 barrels of oil and 22 million standard cubic feet of natural gas.
**June 8** BP announces it would donate the net revenue from oil recovered from the MC252 spill to create, restore, improve and protect wildlife habitats along the coastline of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. LMRP containment cap collection of 15,000 barrels.

**June 10** Additional $25m grants provided by BP to Florida, Alabama and Mississippi for protection plans.

**June 15** Fast track funding of $25 million announced as part of environmental Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative (GRI) - to support studies at Louisiana State University, Florida Institute of Oceanography and the Northern Gulf Institute consortium.

**June 16** Following a meeting with President Obama, BP agrees to create a $20 billion fund over three and a half years to meet obligations arising from the spill. Claims to be administered by Ken Feinberg. BP cancels dividend payments for the rest of 2010. Second containment system in operation, carrying oil and gas from the Macondo well BOP to the Q4000 vessel where it is flared using a clean burning system.

**June 19** Claims payments top $100 million mark, with 31,000 checks having been issued in seven weeks.

**June 22** BP announces that its net revenue from sale of oil recovered from the Macondo well to be donated to National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. $5m to be donated immediately.

**June 23** BP sets out role of Gulf Coast Restoration Organization, including clean-up and remediation; liaising with public officials; communicating with the public; and implementing the compensation fund.

**July 3** Collection of oil from the LMRP containment cap and Q4000 system continues - 25,000 barrels collected.

**July 6** Vessels of Opportunity program enhanced to make better use of local commercial and charter fishing vessels and crews.
July 10  LMRP containment cap removed in preparation for its replacement with a sealing cap assembly capable of increasing containment capacity or potentially shutting in the well - includes a flange transition spool and a ‘three-ram capping stack’. Number of people deployed in response peaks at 46,000.

July 12  Sealing cap in place with the installation of three ram capping stack.

July 15  Oil ceases to flow into the Gulf of Mexico as a well integrity test begins and the three ram capping stack closed, shutting in the well.

July 16  Claims payments top $200 million. 32,000 claimants have received one or more payments.

July 20  UK Prime Minister David Cameron discusses BP with President Obama

July 23  Relief well activities temporarily suspended due to risks from tropical storm Bonnie. Drilling rigs move back after passing of weather system.

July 27  BP announces that Bob Dudley will take over from Tony Hayward as BP’s group chief executive from 1 October. BP also announces it has taken a $32.2 billion pre-tax charge for the spill, including the $20bn claims fund, and will sell up to $30bn worth of assets as part of prudent approach to managing its finances.

July 30  BP announces $100m fund to support unemployed rig workers affected by moratorium on deepwater drilling imposed by US government. BP hires public safety and crisis management consulting firm Witt Associates, founded by former Federal Emergency Management Agency Director James Lee Witt.

August 3  BP starts injectivity testing in advance of static kill operations. BP implements measures to speed up claims from businesses, including a new Immediate Action Claims Team.
August 4 Tests show Macondo well appears to have reached static condition after eight hours of pumping of mud in 'static kill' operation. US government report indicates that three-quarters of the oil from the spill has either evaporated or been burned, skimmed, recovered or dispersed.

August 5 BP carries out cementing operations to seal the well. Claims payments top $300m, having been made to more than 40,000 individuals and businesses affected by the spill.

August 9 Following the completion of cementing operations on August 5, pressure testing indicates there is an effective cement plug in the casing and that the static kill and cementing procedures have been successful. $3 billion paid into $20 billion compensation fund announced 16 June. Trust established to oversee fund with Citigroup as corporate trustee. BP continues to progress relief well operations, reaching a depth of 17,909 feet.

August 15 President Obama and family visit Florida. He says: "As a result of the cleanup effort, beaches all along the Gulf Coast are clean, they are safe, and they are open for business."

August 16 BP announces $52m of funding for support and outreach on behavioral health across the Gulf Coast region.

August 18 BP flushes drilling mud and hydrocarbons from the Macondo well in advance of pressure test to ensure the well is secure.

August 21 Forty-eight hour ambient pressure test deemed successful.

August 23 Program for individual and business claims handed to the Gulf Coast Claims Facility (GCCF), headed by Ken Feinberg (above). BP reports that it made claim payments of nearly $400 million during the 16 weeks it managed claims related to the oil spill. Thad Allen announces that 90% of the hard boom deployed has been removed.

August 25 BP announces it is deploying two satellite-controlled, unmanned vehicles as part of its long-term water quality monitoring in the Gulf of Mexico. The vehicles, known as Wave Gliders and
developed by Liquid Robotics in Silicon Valley, California, get their propulsion power from wave action and use solar power for their electronics.

**September 2** Capping stack on top of the Deepwater Horizon’s failed blow-out preventer (BOP) is removed by the drillship Discoverer Enterprise.

**September 3** Deepwater Horizon’s failed blow-out preventer (BOP) successfully removed from the MC252 well by the Q4000 on September 3 at 1:20 pm CDT. New BOP installed by Development Driller II.

**September 7** BP announces it is providing $10 million to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) under its Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative (GRI) to support a study of potential public health issues relating to the Gulf oil spill and other spill-related health research.

**September 8** Report of investigation led by Mark Bly, BP’s Head of Safety and Operations, concludes that no single factor caused the Macondo well tragedy, but a sequence of failures involving a number of different parties led to the explosion and fire. The report was conducted independently by a team of over 50 technical and other specialists drawn from inside BP and externally.

**September 10** BP announces that diagnostic operations have been successfully completed on the MC252 well by the Development Driller II to further understand the well’s condition.

**September 13** Relief well drilling operations restart from the Development Driller III (DDIII). This follows successful installation of a lock down sleeve, a mechanical device that completely secures the casing hangar and the annulus. Operations consist of drilling and ranging runs that guide the rig’s drill bit to intercept the well’s annulus.

**September 16** Relief well drilled by the DDIII drilling rig intercepts the annulus of the MC252 well. Total measured depth of the annulus intercept point is 17,977 feet.
**September 17** BP announces that testing of the drilling mud recovered from the well has indicated that no hydrocarbons or cement were present at the intersect point. Cement pumped into MC252 annulus.

**September 19** Admiral Thad Allen confirms that well kill operations on the MC252 well in the Gulf of Mexico are complete, with both the casing and annulus of the well sealed by cement. BP emphasises it remains committed to remedying the harm that the spill caused to the Gulf of Mexico, the Gulf Coast environment, and to the livelihoods of the people across the region.

**September 29** BP announces it will create a new safety division with sweeping powers to oversee and audit the company’s operations around the world. BP also reveals plans to re-structure its Upstream segment from a single business into three divisions - Exploration, Development and Production. Incoming group chief executive Bob Dudley says: "These are the first and most urgent steps in a programme I am putting in place to rebuild trust in BP. The changes are in areas where I believe we most clearly need to act, with safety and risk management our most urgent priority."

(link 17)

As stated on the timeline above on April 20 2010 an explosion occurred in the Gulf of Mexico where 11 of the 126 employees from the crew went missing. The search of the missing 11 crew members was suspended after having covered 5,000 square miles. The Deepwater Horizon rig continued burning for two days before it sank and resulted in BP activating major oil spill responding. The rig was rented by BP in order to drill for the company Monaco. The rig left an 8 kilometre long wave of oil while sinking.

During the days after the explosion BP offered its deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of those lost. BP immediately began to activate the blow out preventer. However, the blow out preventer did not seal the well as expected. BP established call centres and claim offices to process incoming claims regarding the oil spill.
On the 28th of April 2010 the US Coast Guard designated BP as a responsible party under the Oil Pollution Act. BP continued deployment of vessels and people in Louisiana, Mississippi and Florida. Moreover BP trained over 2,000 volunteers to assist in the response effort.

On the 2th of May 2010 BP began drilling in order to seal the leaking oil well again. However, this action was suspended on the 9th of May due to hydrates prevention during the placement of the containment dome. During the action President Barack Obama visited the region and stressed that the government would do its best to stop the crisis.

BP distributed grants of $25m to each of the states of Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi and Florida to the implementation of oil spill contingency plans.

By the 13th of May 2010 BP received 6,700 claims for spill-related losses. Approximately 6,000 registered as volunteers and furthermore BP received 46,500 calls to its helplines of which 30 per cent were offering its assistance or ideas to help the response.

3.4 ANALYSIS OF THE PRESS RELEASES

This part of the thesis analyse the chosen press releases that are launched on BP’s own official web page. In order to answer the problem statement of the project Benoit’s and Coombs’ crisis theories will be applied.

3.4.1 PRESS RELEASE 1: BP OFFERS FULL SUPPORT TO TRANSOCEAN AFTER DRILLING RIG FIRE

“The Oil Pollution Act (OPA) of 1990 streamlined and strengthened EPA’s ability to prevent and respond to catastrophic oil spills. A trust fund financed by a tax on oil is available to clean up spills when the responsible party is incapable or unwilling to do so. The OPA requires oil storage facilities and vessels to submit to the Federal government plans detailing how they will respond to large discharges. EPA has published regulations for aboveground storage facilities; the Coast Guard has done so for oil tankers. The OPA also requires the development of Area Contingency Plans to prepare and plan for oil spill response on a regional scale.” (link 18)
BP sent out its first press release on the 21 April 2010, the day after the accident took place. The press release primary focuses on informing the readers about the accident. Furthermore, it also focuses on showing its support to Transocean. The heading of the press release indicates that BP is shifting the blame by showing its full support after the drilling rig fire. Shifting of the blame continues in the next paragraph where BP underlines that it is Transocean Ltd’s drilling rig that has caused this accident [Appendix 1: ll.1-5].

In the next paragraph there is a quotation from the CEO of BP Tony Hayward. Hayward is focusing on the rig personnel and its families and again underlining that BP /is willing to provide any needed assistance. This shows that Hayward is still shifting the blame as he doesn’t blame BP for the accident. The only words that could indicate BP to be a part of the accident is when he stresses that “they will do every possible assistance in the effort to deal with the consequences of the incident”. This is, however, only a slight indication [Appendix 1: ll.6-8].

In the last paragraph of the press release BP provides the readers with information about the geographical area and the personnel that were on board during the rig fire. There is no use of the company name BP during the explanation of the accident. It is Transocean that is presented as the responsible party for the rig fire. This is underlined in the first sentence of the last paragraph where it is Transocean that is reporting the rig fire and again showing that BP is shifting the blame by using Transocean as the responsible party for the episode [Appendix 1: ll.12-15].

3.4.2 PRESS RELEASE 2: BP INITIATES RESPONSE TO GULF OF MEXICO OIL SPILL

The next press release after the rig fire is launched on the 22nd of April 2010. Compared to the first press release this second press release is more extensive and detailed. The heading of the second press release indicates that BP is acting fast by initiation response to the oil spill and it is only BP that is mentioned as an actor responding the oil spill [Appendix 2: I.1].

In the first paragraph of the second press release BP emphasises that they are going to respond to the oil spill in the US Gulf of Mexico. As indicated in the heading of the press release BP is presented as being the actor of the extensive response to the oil spill [Appendix 2: ll. 3-5].
BP continues to act as the helping actor to Transocean after the rig fire. As mentioned in the second paragraph it is BP that is assisting Transocean. Even though, it is stated that BP is helping with the assessment in cooperation with Transocean, BP manages to make it look as if BP is helping the responsible parties of the rig fire, namely Transocean. [Appendix 2: ll. 6-7].

In the third paragraph, BP presents its response to the rig fire and how they will help and assist in order to drill the well. It is explained in details how much BP is investing in solving the problem. Even though it is in cooperation with Transocean, it is only BP that is mentioned during the presentation of the resources and what they include. [Appendix 2: ll. 8-21].

The fourth paragraph consists of Hayward’s quotation where he stresses that BP is ready to do everything that is needed to solve the situation and furthermore, that the company deployed world-class facilities. This indicates that Hayward wants the receivers to be aware of that BP is taking the situation seriously and that they are using all the efforts to solve the situation in the best way possible. However, Hayward is still not presenting BP as one of responsible actors of the oil spill but only as a helping actor to Transocean [Appendix 2: ll. 22-26].

3.4.3 PRESS RELEASE 3: BP ANNOUNCES TOURISM GRANTS TO FOUR GULF STATES – 17 May
The chosen third press release is launched on the 17th of May 2010, almost a month after the above analysed press release. As the heading indicates the press release is dealing with grants that will be given to four Gulf States suffering from the oil spill [Appendix 3: l.1].

In the first paragraph BP emphasises that they will give out grants to Florida, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. It appears that BP uses compensation in this press release as they are trying to lessen the attacks against BP. By providing the four states with grants, BP tries to soften the results of the oil spill [Appendix 3: ll. 2-7].

The second paragraph consists of Tony Hayward’s quotation. Hayward begins with comparing BP with the victims of the oil spill. Then he continues with explaining how much effort they are
assigning to stop the oil spill. By stressing what they have done and what they will continue to do, Hayward makes use of corrective action and without taking the responsibility [Appendix 3: II.8-11].

In the next quotation made by Hayward, it is seen that he underlines the concerns of the Governor about the oil spill. Hayward continues using corrective action and compensation strategies by agreeing with the governors about the environmental damages [Appendix 3: II.12-14].

In the next paragraphs BP explains in details the amount of the grants with which they will provide the four states. When mentioning the amount BP is referring to earlier grants for the four states. This gives an indication of bolstering strategy. Even though, BP does not directly highlights positive things about the company, they mention that they have given out grants before. This shows that BP is doing something to solve the situation and that they have done similarly before [Appendix 3: II. 15-17].

Last but not least, BP underlines that these grants are not given as a response to the oil spill but as supplement to the four states. This indicates that BP wants to stress that they forced to do this due to claims from the states but that it is a choice of its own. Again, this suggests that BP is using bolstering, compensation and corrective action strategies in this press release [Appendix 3: II. 15-19].

3.4.4 PRESS RELEASE 4: BP BRIEFS US GOVERNMENT ON INITIAL PERSPECTIVES OF DEEPWATER HORIZON INVESTIGATION – FOCUS IS ON SEVEN CONTROL MECHANISMS

The selected fourth press release is launched on the 25th of May 2010. The heading of the press release indicates that BP is briefing the US government about the oil spill investigation. In the first paragraph of the press release BP is briefing the readers about the ongoing investigation on the causes of the Deepwater Horizon fire and oil spill. It is obvious that BP continues using corrective action strategy without taking responsibility for the accident as seen in the above analysed press releases [Appendix 4: II.1-9].

In the next paragraph BP explains that the investigation is an internal investigation made by BP’s Head of Group Safety and Operation. Even though, the investigation is internal, BP chooses to
share this information with its stakeholders during the investigation. By doing this BP tries to take corrective action without taking responsibility of the accident, though [Appendix 4: ll. 10-14].

In the third paragraph of the press release BP continues explaining about the investigation. The importance of this paragraph, however, is that BP is focusing on explaining that the accident took place due to a number of processes, systems and equipments. They go on explaining what should have prevented the accident and presents seven main areas on which the investigation is focusing on. All of the seven focus areas concern mechanical issues which are obvious to investigate after such an accident. However, BP could also have investigated other aspects such as the level of the staff security, preparedness etc. Again emphasis is on BP’s corrective action without taking the responsibility for the accident [Appendix 4: ll. 15-28].

The last two paragraphs are quotations made by the CEO, Tony Hayward. Hayward still uses corrective action strategy, shifting the blame strategy and the accident strategy. This occurs when Hayward states that they do not have the answer to whose fault it is and that they are still investigating the situation in order to answer that question. Furthermore, he goes on saying that BP is not the only company involved in the accident but there are several others. Afterwards, he explains that the event was an accident and that they will do its best to ensure that nothing like this will ever happen again [Appendix 4: ll. 29-36].

3.4.5 Press Release 5: Chairman and CEO Give Assurance that BP Will Meet to Obligations in Gulf of Mexico

The fifth press release is launch on the 4th of June 2010, almost one and a half months after the accident, when the oil spill is continuing. As the heading of the press release; is indicating, BP is addressing its stakeholders to inform them that BP will do its best to solve the situation.

In the first paragraph BP’s Chairman and its CEO have been in dialogue with its stakeholders about the situation in the Gulf of Mexico. During this communication it is seen that BP realises that has lost the trust of its stakeholders as it is stressing that it wants to rebuild its trust and confidence. Moreover, the Chairman and CEO are expressing their regret and sorrow, which indicates that BP is starting to be aware of the costs of the tragedy [Appendix 5: ll. 1-7].
The second paragraph consists of a quotation of the BP Chairman, Carl-Henric Svanberg. Svanberg uses corrective action strategy by underlining that the company is committed to solve the situation. Furthermore, he explains that they want to meet BP’s responsibility in addressing this accident. Even though, the word responsibility is actually mentioned in Svanberg’s quotation BP does not accept the responsibility for the accident directly. At the same time Svanberg shows his support to Hayward and his team that are working to solve the situation [Appendix 5: ll. 9-13].

In the next paragraph Svanberg continues explaining the efforts they are making to solve the situation. In addition to this Svanberg goes on appealing to the stakeholders of BP. He proceeds with the use of corrective action by stressing that they are focused on stopping the oil spill and that they will continue with the huge clean-up work that is a result of the accident [Appendix 5: ll.15-21].

In his next quotations Svanberg informs in details about the shareholders of BP. This appears in his use of language, as it is focused on the company’s financial situation. It is also important to notice that Svanberg makes use of compensation strategy. This is apparent from the way Svanberg stresses the current financial costs they have paid for the response action, clean up, fines, penalties, environmental remediation, and other similar costs. By pointing out how much money they have spent on responding to the oil spill, BP tries to lessen the attacks against the company and especially the ones by its shareholders [Appendix 5: ll. 22-41].

The following Tony Hayward goes on along the same line as Svanberg. He assures its stakeholders, both financial and non-financial, about how BP will stay committed to solve the situation. When speaking to its stakeholders Hayward makes use of bolstering strategy. That appears in line 47 when Hayward stresses that the company has suffered and survived before. Furthermore, Hayward uses compensation strategy when he stresses how much they are doing to solve the situation. It is also very important that BP wants the readers to understand that BP is taking this accident seriously. This is indicated by the level of managers that are acting in the press release. First it is BP’s Chairman Carl-Henric Svanberg, then the Group Chief Executive Tony Hayward and finally the Managing Director Bob Dudley [Appendix 5: ll. 49-68].
Even though, BP is underlining in each paragraph that they are doing its best to solve the situation by use of compensation strategy, bolstering, and corrective action strategy, BP still does not take the responsibility for the accident.

3.4.6 PRESS RELEASE 6: BP EMPHASIZES THAT DISAGREEMENT WITH OTHER PARTIES WILL NOT DIMINISH ITS PROMISE TO CLEAN UP THE SPILL AND PAY LEGITIMATE CLAIMS

The press release launched on the 18th of June 2010 has a heading indicating the main interest with launching this letter is to inform the readers that BP keeps on promising to clean up the spill and pay legitimate claims. BP’s purpose with the heading, however, is also to show that, even though, there are other parties involved in the accident, BP is the only party that will clean up the accident [Appendix 6: I.1].

In the first paragraph BP stresses that they will clean up the oil spill and that it is a pledge for them. By repeating the clean up pledge BP emphasises that they want to solve this situation in best way possible. While repeating its intentions BP uses evasion of responsibility strategy together with corrective action strategy. This is obvious when BP attacks the other parties for not taking responsibility for the costs associated with the accidents and resulting in oilspill. Corrective action strategy is applied when BP stresses that they will do its part by stopping the oil spill and clean up the damages. Still without BP taking the full responsibility for the accident, though [Appendix 6: II. 4-6].

The next paragraph consists of BP’s presentation of the other party that BP accuses for not accepting responsible. This paragraph explains in details whom BP accuses and furthermore they underline that the company, Andarko Petroleum, refuses to accept responsibility. Even though, BP makes use of evasion of responsibility in the press release, they achieve to make it look like Andarko Petroleum is improperly accusing BP for being the responsible party of the oil spill [Appendix 6: II. 7-10].

In the next paragraph BP stresses that they do not agree with Andarko Petroleum. BP claims that there are other parties involved in this oil spill and they should all meet its obligations. While refusing Andarko Petroleum’s claims about BP to be the only responsible actor in this oil spill, BP
manage to make it look like it is Andarko Petroleum that is wrongfully accusing BP for not taking responsibility. Furthermore, BP makes use of corrective action while evading responsibility. Consequently, BP manages to make itself appear as a scapegoat but also as a responsible company. When mentioning BP as a responsible company it is still not to take the full responsibility of the accident but only part of it [Appendix 6: ll. 11-18].

In the last section, BP releases additional information about, according to BP, the responsible companies of the oil spill. According to BP there are two other responsible companies, one of them Andarko Petroleum. All of the companies co-own the leasehold interests in MC252 (the prospect where the explosion happened). In order to underline its accusations BP stresses how the partnership is structured and furthermore that each company had filed documents with the U.S. federal government about oil spill removal costs and damages in accordance with the Oil Pollution Act of 1990. By underlining facts like these BP manages to show that the other companies do not take responsibility as they should but that BP is doing all that they need to do in order to stop the oil spill and to clean-up. It is clear that BP uses evasion of responsibility together with corrective action throughout this press release. BP first attacks the other companies, primarily Andarko Petroleum, in order to switch the attention. BP goes on making use of corrective action by stressing that they will stop the oil spill and take part in the clean-up work afterwards. It is important to notice, however, that BP still do not take the full responsibility and that they are still trying to show that there are other companies involved as responsible actors of the oil spill [Appendix 6: ll. 21-30].

3.4.7 PRESS RELEASE 7: WELL INTEGRITY TEST COMMENCE ON MC252 WELL

The last of the selected press releases is published on the 15th of July 2010 and contains information about the well integrity test as the heading also indicates. The press release is published almost 3 months later after the explosion took place in the Gulf of Mexico. Despite BP’s several attempts to stop the oil spill, the oil still pours out.

In the first paragraph of the press release BP makes a presentation of what the press release is about. As mentioned above the aim of this press release is to inform the readers about a
procedure that will take place in order to stop the oil spill. It is also important to notice that the procedure is approved by the National Incident Commander and Unified Area Command. BP manages to make the procedure look deliberate by naming the actors that have approved the plan [Appendix 7: ll. 1-5].

The second paragraph of the press release describes in details the proposed procedure to stop the oil spill. It is important to inform the readers about the situation and how BP wants to solve the oil spill because there have been unsuccessful trials to stop the spill, earlier. Explaining the procedure BP stresses that even though the purpose is to stop the spill, there is no guarantee that the procedure will be successful. This information could diminish future attacks in case BP does not succeed in stopping the spill [Appendix 7: ll. 6-11].

In the next paragraphs BP continues with informing about the procedure but also about the communication with the government agencies and the federal science team about the results. This leaves the impression of BP working correctly according to rules [Appendix 7: ll. 12-15].

In the last paragraph BP underlines its earlier attempts to stop the oil spill and what they have managed until now. BP makes use of corrective action strategy throughout the press release as they want to solve the problem with the oil and still without taking the full responsibility.

3.5 Analysis of the Interviews

3.5.1 Analysis of Sky News interview with Tony Hayward 18 May 2010

The second interview about the oil spill is broadcast by Sky News on the 18th of May 2010, about a month after the explosion and 19 days after the first analysed interview. The interview begins with a short resume of the interview by the female reporter. She points to one of the important factors: “Now BP Chief Executive Tony Hayward has told Sky News he believes the environmental impact of the Gulf of Mexico oil leak will be very, very modest.” [Appendix 8: 1. 3-4]. This sentence gives a positive of the interview and a new hope of reducing the environmental issues the spill has cost.

In the second paragraph the interview is transferred by the female reporter to the speaker Greg Milam. The viewers now see Tony Hayward with other BP employees in its office talking and
laughing which gives an impression of a cheerful Hayward and BP staff. The speaker continues briefing the viewers on the current status of the oil spill and on BP’s capability to capture some of the leaking oil. This explains why Hayward and his staff seem pleased. Furthermore, it gives a picture of an exhausted staff that finally succeeds with a positive result.

Tony Hayward continues the interview by using corrective action strategy when explaining what they are doing to solve the oil spill: “Over the last 36 hours we’ve made a lot of progress containment on the seabed. We have a piece of technology engineering that we’ve developed, which is now allowing us to produce oil from the leak to the surface.” [Appendix 8: ll.10.13]. Hayward manages to incur the interview a positive effect due to the solutions they have achieved over the last 36 hours. Furthermore, as Greg Milam notes, Hayward expresses that what could have turned into an environmental catastrophe will be less serious now. This means that Hayward uses minimisation strategy in order to reduce the level of the crisis.

The next paragraph contains one of the most important quotations from the interview. Even though, minimisation strategy has been used during the interview, the most striking example is given by Hayward when he states: “I think the environmental impact of this disaster is likely to be very, very modest. It is impossible to say and we will mount, as part of the aftermath, a very detailed environmental assessment as we go forward – we are gonna do that with some of the science institutions in the US – but all, everything we can see at the moment suggests that the overall environmental impact of this will be very, very modest.” [Appendix 8: ll. 18-22]. This statement cements that Hayward makes use of minimisation strategy and corrective action strategy. Minimisation is seen when Hayward emphasises that the environmental damage is likely to be very modest and thus giving an impression of a minor mishap and he even repeats this in the end of the statement. However, it is also important to notice that Hayward is not sure in his statement as he starts by saying “I think”. Corrective action appears when Hayward stresses that they will make environmental assessments together with science institutions in the US. This statement gives the impression of a company that works in a responsible way in order to stop the oil spill but without taking the responsibility for the accident.
Greg Milam goes on with the interview stressing that no one knows how much oil there is. This, among other things, makes President Obama order a new investigation in order to keep the pressure on BP. According to Hayward, it is quite understandable that the president keeps the pressure on the company: “I think there is understandable frustration about, you know, the situation and the desire to get it under control and I think it is somewhat natural that the administration here wishes to demonstrate that they’re on top of it.” [Appendix 8: ll. 28-30].

Greg Milam continues his interview by showing, what BP calls, its crisis centre in Houston in Texas. Since its establishment the office has employed about 600 people in order to coordinate responses.

The last part of the interview shows the female reporter and the speaker Greg Milam. Greg Milam finishes his part of the interview with statements BP has come up with during the interview. According to Milam BP will pay for the clean-up and the compensations at the cost of billions. Furthermore, according to BP it is estimated that they will seal the leak within seven days. These comments from BP indicate that they have the situation under control and shows that BP makes use of minimisation strategy and corrective action strategy. The female speaker ends the feature by reading one of BP’s press releases released after the interview. The quotation used by the speaker supports what BP has announced in the interview with Greg Milam. The statement stresses the project BP will initiate together with help from local, state and federal agencies, thousands of volunteers, and hundreds of local fishing vessels on hire. Thus it is clear that BP continues uses corrective action strategy as they manage to show that they are willing to response the oil spill. However, BP still does not take the responsibility for the accident.

3.5.2 Analysis of CNN Interview with Tony Hayward 29 April 2010

The first interview after the accident in the Gulf of Mexico was held on the 29th of April 2010. The interview contains information and answers given by the former CEO of BP, Tony Hayward.
In his first comment Hayward describes the accident as “cobra”, because the explosion was unexpected and the situation has hit BP suddenly: “Initially I was very shocked. I was angry, actually about how could the hell could this happen.” [Appendix 9: ll. 6-8]. The interview shows that Tony Hayward seems quite devastated both in speech and appearance. Tony Hayward answers the questions from an office where busy and hardworking people are seen in the background. This gives the impression of a company under pressure and a company facing a crisis.

The Speaker, Briand Todd from CNN, continues questioning Tony Hayward in the next paragraphs. It is obvious that the speaker wants to ask detailed questions as the accident was quite recent at the time of the interview.

With his second question the speaker wants information about the interviews BP had made with the crew of the oil rig. Hayward begins with expressing his sorrow of the loss of the 11 crew members. He explains that it is too early for information about the investigation. Hayward continues by underlining that the accident was triggered by a technical error: “What is clear is that the ultimate fail-safe mechanism in a drilling operation, there are many checks before you get to activating the blow out preventer.” That is the ultimate fail-safe mechanism and for whatever reason we don’t understand that yet but we clearly will as a consequence of both our investigation and federal investigation it failed to operate.” [Appendix 9: ll. 23-27]. Hayward stresses that they do not know how it could happen and more specific why it happened. This indicates that he makes use of defeasibility. By using defeasibility Hayward underlines that BP did not have control over the event, i.e. they are not responsible for the event indirectly. This can also be called low personal control as it is an unintentional action.

In the next paragraphs the speaker questions Hayward about how BP attempts to solve the continuing oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Hayward uses corrective action when answering the question: “In the core of the spill where the oil thickness is about 0.1 of a millimetre we are using burning booms to try and collect it and we’ll ultimately see if we can set fire to it. Also in that central area we have 16 large skimming vessels deployed. And then in the broader area where the spill is a surface sheen that’s about 97% of the area of the spill, that is an area that’s susceptible to attack through dispersants.” [Appendix 9: ll. 41-46]. BP tries to correct the problem by presenting
three different solutions to collect the oil from the surface of the water and still BP is not taking
the responsibility for the event.

Hayward continues with corrective action in the next paragraph where the speaker asks if the
surface burning of the oil will help the spill not to reach the shoreline. Hayward, however, starts by
saying, “well I think it’s not...”, [Appendix 9: l. 53], which indicates that Hayward actually do not
know if the surface burning will succeed. Furthermore, it gives an impression of an unsure CEO
who does not know how to solve the situation even though he continues with explaining what
they will do in order to stop the oil reaching the shoreline.

In the next question it is clear that the speaker is not satisfied with the answer about the surface
burning. The speaker chooses to ask the same question in a different way: “Is this oil gonna hit the
shoreline at any point?” [Appendix 9: l.59]. The answer by Tony Hayward supports the fact that he
not know: “The fact is I’m not an oceanographor, I’m not an metocean expert, so it would be
inappropriate for me to make a forecast. There are better people than me qualified to make a
forecast. We continue to focus on ensuring that it doesn’t.” [Appendix 9: ll. 63-65]. Hayward
chooses to reply by stressing that he believes it will not happen but he is no expert in that field. He
continues using corrective action strategy by mentioning that they will focus on ensuring that the
spill will not hit the shoreline and still without BP taking the responsibility.

The speaker Briand Todd continues with questions about the safety on the rig owned by
Transocean in connection with the loss of 11 crew members. Hayward makes use of shifting blame
strategy while answering this question: “The responsibility for safety on the drilling rig is with
Transocean. It is their rig, their equipment, their people, their systems, their safety processes.”
[Appendix 9: ll. 74-75]. He accuses the owner of the rig Transocean for being responsible of the
missing crew members.

The above mentioned answer from Hayward leads to the next question by Todd: “And BP bears
none of this responsibility? “, [Appendix 9: l.78]. Hayward decides to avoid this question by stating
that consider that issue later in the process as the main focus is on the response. In the end of the
paragraph Hayward stresses again that the responsibility of the systems processes is the drilling rig company, in this particular case Transocean.

3.6 ANALYSIS OF THE COMMERCIAL

3.6.1 ANALYSIS OF BP COMMERCIAL: WE WILL MAKE THIS RIGHT

On the 3rd of June 2010 BP decided to launch a commercial, named “We Will Make This Right”, the social media YouTube. According to BP they have created its YouTube channel in order to “…engage the public in an informative conversation and dialogue about our efforts associated with the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. We want our page to be an appropriate forum for everyone. For more information on our Commenting Policy, please see the Latest News section on our main page: http://youtube.com/bp.” By using YouTube channel BP manages to communicate with its stakeholders and moreover they try to act transparent with regard to the oil. In the comment from BP they use corrective action strategy and diminish strategy when BP shows that they are taking the situation seriously and that they want to solve the situation and provide its viewers with information.

The commercial “We Will Make This Right”, was launched on YouTube 44 days after the explosion in the Gulf of Mexico. At that time BP had not apologised or taken the full responsibility for the accident but with this commercial BP acted as the responsible for the event.

The heading of the commercial: “We Will Make This Right”, indicates that BP is aware of the seriousness of the event and its cost and thus they want to stop the speculations and promise the public that BP will solve the situation.

The commercial/video begins with showing the Gulf of Mexico and the result of the oil spill while former CEO of BP Tony Hayward states: “The Gulf Spill is a tragedy that never should have happened.” [Appendix 10: l. 3]. Hayward starts the commercial with a statement which shows that he is aware of the catastrophe that has happened in the Gulf of Mexico.
After the first images from the Gulf of Mexico the cameras turn to Tony Hayward who begins with presenting himself: “I’m Tony Hayward”, [Appendix 10: l. 4]. It is quite important that it is the CEO of the company that appears in a commercial like this to give the impression of a responsible management and company. Hayward the commercial with taking the responsibility for the situation using corrective action while he stresses what they have managed until now: “BP has taken full responsibility for cleaning up the spill in the Gulf. We’ve helped organise the largest environmental response in this country’s history. More than 2 million feet of boom, 30 planes and over 1300 boats are working to protect the shoreline. Where oil reaches the shore thousands of people are ready to clean it up.” [Appendix 10: ll. 4-7]. During this images are shown of the oil spill and people that are working to protect the shoreline while. By showing the workers and not only Hayward talking, BP manages to show that they are one big company behind this response.

When speaking about the affected people Hayward is shown but also when he states that he is sorry: “To those affected and your families, I’m deeply sorry.” [Appendix 10: ll. 8-9]. Hayward makes use of mortification strategy for the first time when Hayward apologises for the situation to the public.

Hayward continues with commending all of his employees and the Government for its support throughout the process. “The Gulf is home to thousands of BP-employees and we all feel the impact. To all the volunteers and for the strong support of the Government, thank you.” [Appendix 10: ll. 8-10]. Again images from the Gulf of Mexico are shown with employees working.

The commercial ends showing Hayward stating: “We know it is our responsibility to keep you informed and do everything we can so that this never happens again. We will get this done. We will make this right.” [Appendix 10: ll. 10-12]. Hayward makes use of corrective action during his statement as he assures the public that they will get this done and that they will do it right. Furthermore, Hayward uses repair strategy as he wants to improve BP’s image by being informative and open about the situation and promising that they will solve the situation.
4. Discussion

The aim of this discussion is to give the reader an overall summary of the analysis in order to discuss BP’s use of crisis communication strategies in its PR material. This makes it possible to examine the level of consistency in BP’s communication material during the oil spill in 2010. While discussing the used strategies the rhetorical arena will also be discussed. Until now the rhetorical arena has not been used as a tool similar to Benoit’s and Coomb’s crisis strategies and it will be examined in this section.

The analysis of the press releases has shown that BP has made use of several crisis communication strategies. However, it is difficult to decide if these strategies have been appropriate to use in the case of the oil spill in 2010. The first of the analysed press releases released the day after the explosion uses shifting blame strategy. It is questionable whether it was appropriate for BP to use that kind of a strategy as its first response. BP might have waited with accusing other actors until after an investigation. When using the shifting blame strategy, BP attempts to accuse other actors in order to appear blameless itself. This, however, goes wrong in this case. In the following press releases it is seen that BP makes use of corrective action strategy but without taking the responsibility for the event. It might be right to use corrective action without taking the responsibility as the event has just happened and as detailed investigations have not been completed yet. BP starts focusing on solving the situation by showing that they are willing to do what they can. In addition to corrective action strategy BP also uses compensation and bolstering. BP begins using compensation in the 3rd press release analysed when it states that the grants are only supplements and a compensation given together with the response. This indicates that BP wants to improve its image and reputation but this may also have a negative effect indicating that they are trying to avoid a crisis. As mentioned above, BP does not take the responsibility for the oil spill but they make use of corrective action. However, compensation might have been more appropriate if the organisation had taken the responsibility for the crisis. Furthermore, BP uses bolstering as they highlight that they have been handing out grants before which indicates that BP wants to emphasise positive things about the company. This shows that BP maintains its efforts to stand blameless for the oil spill.
BP continues its use of corrective action, shifting blame strategy and compensation in the following press releases.

Corrective action strategy is also used in the two analysed interviews made by CNN and Sky News. Furthermore, BP also uses minimisation strategy in the first interview. The interview is launched on the 18th of May, almost a month after the accident. BP has not been able to stop the spill at that time and then they decide to minimize the event by stating that the event could have turned into an environmental catastrophe thus implying that it did not. The event did turn into a catastrophe, however, which shows that BP did not use a correct strategy when using minimisation. If the statement had been published after the spill had been stopped, it would have been appropriate to use the strategy and also if it had turned out that it was not an environmental catastrophe, naturally.

In the second press release it has been shown that BP uses defeasibility strategy to show that BP itself did not have control over the event and consequently were not responsible for the event. Again, BP tries to show that they are willing to help solve the situation but they will not be the responsible actor of the event. As stated in the analysis part BP presents the event as an accident and shifts the blame any time possible during the analysed communication material. This makes BP appear as a scapegoat according to its choices of strategies.

In the analysed commercial it has been established that BP continues using corrective action strategy and adds the use of mortification and repair strategy. It is the first time BP uses mortification strategy in the chosen communication material. The spill is still ongoing when BP launches the commercial. The former CEO of BP, Tony Hayward, goes out to the public and takes the responsibility. What is important to notice here, however, is that BP takes the responsibility for cleaning up the spill and not for the accident. This corrective strategy without taking the full responsibility is seen throughout the analysed communication material. It is clear that BP acts more responsible in this commercial compared to the press releases and the two interviews, but they are still not taking the full responsibility.
What is important to notice in BP’s use of crisis communication strategies is that corrective action has been the general strategy. Furthermore, other strategies have been used as mentioned above but they have been closely linked with corrective action. BP’s main objective is not to be perceived as the responsible actor of the event. Unfortunately that is exactly how the public sees the company after several unsuccessful attempts to seal the leak. They start out accusing Transocean without having any definite results of an investigation in order to show the responsible actor of the accident.

As mentioned BP has made use of the same strategy, corrective action, throughout each analysed communication material. In each of the analysed press releases BP has used corrective action together with other strategies, which shows that BP wants to act consistent throughout its communication material. This is also to be seen in the analysed interviews. The general used strategy is again corrective action together with other strategies such as minimisation and shifting blame. Presumably the press releases are written by the BP communication group and the interviews are made with the former CEO of BP. This shows that BP is consistent during its communications. The same goes for the commercial even though mortification strategy is more visible in the statements Tony Hayward makes. All in all it must be concluded that BP succeeded in being consistent in its use of crisis communication strategies. However, it is important to notice that the analysed material only covers part of the vast communication material that was produced during the accident. Analysis of other press releases or interviews might show another face of BP.

As mentioned in the section on theory, besides consistency there are several other aspects to investigate. BP aims to create redundancy when they let people access its communication material through its web page. Furthermore, BP aims to show frequency as BP tries to update the information on its web page continuously during the crisis. However, BP does not want to be perfectly honest. As mentioned in the analysis, BP values safety, respect, excellence, courage, to be one team, and being consistent. They succeed in embedding consistency in its communication model. However, that is not the case with safety as BP actually does not take responsibility each time they are asked about the security on the rig. BP’s wish of not being seen as the responsible for the explosion makes them look unreliable as they do not embed all of its values in its
communication material. Another aspect to discuss is its level of transparency. BP appears to be open about the situation when they brief the public frequently on the ongoing response. In this case, however, it is difficult to measure the degree of transparency as the readers do not know whether or not BP is publishing all the material concerning the oil spill. It seems as though they are trying to be transparent even though they are not taking the blame.

The rhetorical arena, by Frandsen and Johansen, is another crisis communication model. Compared with Benoit’s and Coombs’ models the rhetorical arena is quite new. As shown in the description of the rhetorical arena, the model has a multi-pronged approach, which shows that a crisis contains several senders and several receivers with individual perceptions of the crisis. The reason for not applying the model in this thesis is because the multi-pronged approach becomes abstract and complex as it lacks a definitive method on how it can be applied and because the relationship between the borderlines are diffuse. Analysis of a crisis depends on interpretations, and communication in a crisis will be complex and continuous, which makes practical use of the model difficult as no precise and concrete solutions are presented. In general the rhetorical arena is versatile as it contains context, genre, media and text but that is also what makes it complex. The complexity lies in the use of two dimensions at the same time and especially in the textual model’s four detailed parameters with several aspects. Therefore, it is up to the individual user to choose which aspects they want to apply during the analysis. Even though, the model is not applied in the analysis, it is a good model as it contains multi-pronged approaches, which according to Frandsen and Johansen are missing in Benoit’s and Coombs’ models. Benoit’s and Coomb’s crisis models are more reliable and simple to use as the aim of this thesis is to exam the used crisis communication strategies, whereas the rhetorical arena is more abstract.
5. Conclusion

When an organisation faces a crisis, it is very important that they are ready and prepared in order to make use of the correct crisis communication strategies. This helps the organisations to create a good communication with its stakeholders during a crisis. Furthermore, it helps minimising the damages on its image and reputation.

The purpose of this thesis was to examine BP’s used crisis communication strategies during the oil spill in 2010 in order to indicate the level of consistency in the various chosen PR material. The initial aim of the project was to find an answer to the following problem statement:

*How did BP make use of crisis communication during the oil crisis in 2010 and to what extent were the response strategies appropriate? And to what extent is there consistency between the strategies?*

In order to answer the problem statement of the thesis, Benoit’s image restoration model and Coombs’ SCCT model have been applied. At the beginning of the crisis it is shown that BP uses corrective action and shifting the blame strategy. The use of corrective action continues in for the rest of the press releases with the addition of other strategies such as compensation, bolstering and evasion of responsibility. BP wants to appear blameless of the accident through its press releases and thus being perceived as such by its stakeholders. The same attitude can be found in the interviews as BP continues the use of corrective action together with strategies such as minimisation and shifting the blame. Furthermore, the use of corrective action is also seen in the commercial made by BP, even though, mortification is more predominant as the aim of the commercial is to express that BP is sorry and that they will correct the situation. BP uses several strategies but they are consistent in the use of corrective action in the press releases, the interviews and the commercial. Even though BP shows consistency in the communication material it is questionable if BP made use of appropriate strategies. It has been shown that BP fails when communicating with its stakeholders. They do not take the full responsibility of the event and they want to place the responsibility on others instead. Corrective action is embedded in each material and even though it is a good strategy, it is important to be responsible, which BP does not manage.
to be in the analysed communication material. This leaves an overall impression of an irresponsible organisation that does not live up to its own values.

Finally it can be concluded that BP attempts to create consistency in the analysed communication material, which gives a coherent picture of the organisation and its communication staff. BP does not, however, succeed in using the appropriate communication strategies as they use several strategies in order to solve the situation. This makes BP look desperate and unaware of how to “play the game”. Most important, BP does not take the responsibility for the event and that damages its image and reputation.