Fixing the SIC: Preventing and Managing Self-Inficted Crises

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Chapter 1
Fixing the SIC:
Preventing and Managing Self-Inflicted Crises

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ABSTRACT

Social media platforms provide channels for both individuals and organizations to engage with global audiences. A successful social media message can reach millions and shape the way the public views a particular person, group, or cause. As organizations become more engaged with the public through social media platforms, a new area of organizational risk has also developed. It is possible for an organization to create a self-inflicted crisis through the unintentional transmission of a poorly worded or ill-conceived social media message. This type of self-induced crisis event creates organizational conflict that must be managed quickly. This chapter explores three cases of organizational conflict resulting from self-inflicted crisis events. All three events caused major conversations to erupt on social media platforms. The author examines the social media-based communication practices of three organizations and draws lessons from both successes and failures for how organizations should respond to self-inflicted crises.

INTRODUCTION

It is an unfortunate truth that the internet can be a dark, dangerous place. Some of the worst aspects of humanity thrive in the fetid currents of deviance that flow unimpeded online. Yet, at the same time, the world of the internet can be a rich, wondrous place. Over the past few years, there have developed heart-warming stories, hope-inspiring anecdotes, and memes and GIFs to make even the most cold-hearted curmudgeon crack a grin. The same internet that gave us Gamergate (Valenti, 2017), an internet movement of predominantly white men attempting to force female developers out of the world of video games, also gave us Lachlan Lever, the seven-week old baby boy with moderate-to-severe hearing loss who smiled when he heard his parents' voices for the first time (Waxman, 2014). It is in the capacity for viral growth of a story, concept, or movement, that we see the incredible power of the internet – both for heartwarming stories and for digital disaster.

A compelling example of both the positive and the negative potential for the internet to shape a conversation is the "Accidentally social viral 4x" Ben Tobias (https://twitter.com/GPDBenTobias), public information officer for the Gainesville, Florida police department. On the negative side, Tobias's department became known for the "Hot Cop" incident following Hurricane Irma. Gainesville police were helping residents following the storm, and a selfie of three officers went viral with messages ranging from, "Do a calendar fundraiser!" to marriage propositions, and even some salacious suggestions from Facebook users (O'Kane, 2017). What seemed like excellent publicity for the Gainesville police turned sour when Facebook users found one of the three officers posting racist, anti-Semitic content on his personal Facebook page (Twedt, 2017). Tobias had to quickly respond and manage what had become a social media crisis. The officer was suspended, and the potential benefit to the community was tarnished by the officer's comments.

In contrast to the "Hot Cop" incident, Tobias also had a video become a viral hit following a noise complaint. In an era when viral police videos conjure images of Walter Scott in North Charleston (Blinder, 2017) and Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge (Berman & Lowery, 2018), the Gainesville video came as a breath of fresh air. An officer who responded to the noise complaint found a group of children playing basketball outside of their home. Rather than shutting down the game or offering a warning or citation, the officer joined the game (Shortell, 2016). The video, posted to the Gainesville police Facebook page, rapidly went viral and became a spotlight of positive police interaction in a community at a time when such interactions seemed rare. While Tobias's viral messages are anomalous for a single individual (who is not already a super-star celebrity), they are representative of the power and potential impact of digital content in the modern era.

Considering the potential for the viral spread of digital messages, no one who has used social media in the past few years will be surprised that individuals and organizations regularly place themselves in self-inflicted crises (SIC). Since the first piece looking at this phenomenon was published (Pyle, 2016), there have been numerous instances of the SIC phenomenon. This chapter explores some of those cases and offers practical implications for scholars and practitioners. The chapter consists of three parts. First, the author reviews relevant literature. Next, the author conducts a comparative case study of four distinct self-inflicted crises: the Dove ad featuring a color-changing woman (Slawson, 2017); the cascading crisis of Urban Outfitters' apparent art theft (BBC News, 2018); the 2017 Pepsi commercial in the style of a Black Lives Matter march (Victor, 2017); and lastly a re-examination of the 2014 DiGiorno "#WhyIStayed" crisis (Griner, 2014). Finally, the author presents a set of lessons learned from the case studies, as well as principles to inform organizational communication for organizations facing SIC.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social Networking Sites

Social Network Sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter, are (boyd & Ellison, 2007):

web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (p. 211).

These sites exist to serve a variety of functions, from maintaining connections with existing friendship networks, to finding other individuals who share a particular interest (boyd & Ellison, 2007). In addition to these functions, SNSs have led to the creation of dynamic communities of engagement. These communities create the space for rapid messaging to vast audiences. At the same time, these communities allow for the development of contentious, conflict-ridden environments.

Organizational Conflict

Conflict is part of all relationships. Organizations exist as networks of interconnected relationships. As Tjosvold (2008) asserts, "to work in an organization is to be in conflict" (p. 19). Roloff (1987) defines organizational conflict as "activities that are incompatible with those of colleagues within their network, members of other collectivities, or unaffiliated individuals who utilize the services or products of the organization" (p. 496). Rahim (2002) adds that conflict is "an interactive process" (p. 207). Accepting that conflict is a regular and accepted part of life in an organization, there are perhaps two ways that organizational members can approach and respond to conflict as it arises. On the one hand, people can view conflict as a debilitating, overwhelming, or detrimental event, or series of events. Taking this view can lead to the deterioration of the organization (Aula & Siira, 2010). More specifically, a negative view of conflict can result in accidents, absenteeism, and a general decrease in overall health and well-being (De Dreu, C.K.W., van Dierendonck, D., & Dijkstra, M.T.M., 2004; Meyer, 2004).

From another perspective, conflict can be viewed as an opportunity for growth or renewal. Rather than thinking of the negative, organizational members can move toward a conflict-positive perspective (Tjosvold, 2008). From this perspective individuals can see conflict as an opportunity for improvement and positive change in the organization, seeking to grow from conflicting perspectives and ideas. With this concept of conflict, organizational members should pursue three key goals for effective conflict management: pursue organizational learning, meet the needs of organizational stakeholders, and communicate ethically throughout the process (Mitroff, 1998; Rahim, 2002; Tompkins, 1995). By seeking to learn from the events that led up to the conflict, the conflict itself, and how it was resolved (whether successfully or not), organizational members can help the organization function more effectively and avoid similar conflict in the future. By meeting the needs of stakeholders, organizations can help those in conflict to feel heard. Organizations can also foster environments where stakeholders shape the organization by assessing and potentially revising outdated policies and unclear organizational goals. Lastly, while pursuing ethical communication practices, both organizational members and organizational leaders are more likely to make decisions and perform actions that will benefit the organization and the larger community. This also benefits stakeholders and helps those in conflict trust the organization and its leaders.

While conflict in organizations is a regular occurrence, there are times when it can escalate to the level of crisis. In the current social media context, social-mediated communication has created a context where conflict can become a crisis in moments.

Organizational Crisis

An organizational crisis is defined "as a specific, unexpected, and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and simultaneously present an organization with both opportunities for and threats to its high priority goals" (Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2019, p. 7). This definition is good for the cases evaluated in this chapter, with one small caveat. The crises that develop because of social

media errors or misstatements are generally self-inflicted crises (Pyle, 2016). These crises, therefore, should be preventable events. Although they should be preventable, it does not alter how organizations should respond to and manage these crises.

While many organizational leaders, and most legal teams, will immediately want to save face and engage in reputation management following a crisis, this may not be the best option for the organization. Much of the extant literature on crisis communication indicates that engaging in open, honest communication and developing strong stakeholder relationships is a healthier option that will lead to renewal and to stronger organizational relationships in the future (Botan, 1993, 1997; Olaniran, Scholl, Williams, & Boyer, 2012; Olaniran & Williams, 2001; Ulmer, et al., 2015, 2009, 2007). A theoretical perspective that captures this concept is the discourse of renewal (Ulmer et al., 2019).

The discourse of renewal argues for organizations to pursue four key communication goals before, during, and after crisis. First, organizational learning is vital. Organizations should learn from past successes and failures and from those of other organizations (Ulmer et al., 2019). Second is effective organizational rhetoric. Organizational leaders should communicate early and often during a crisis and should help key stakeholders look toward a "new normal," rather than trying to get "back to normal" (Ulmer et al., 2019). The third communication goal is ethical communication. Organizational members and leaders should strive to communicate ethically in crisis situations. This is perhaps best represented by Nilsen's (1974) concept of significant choice. Nilsen argues that stakeholders must be provided with the information they need so that they can be equipped to make choices based on all available, relevant information, rather than on partial or cherry-picked information. Ulmer et al. (2019) apply the concept of significant choice to crisis response situations. The final goal is for organizational members to maintain a prospective vision, looking forward for ways to achieve renewal after the crisis, rather than dwelling on the past and fixating on what might have been done differently (Ulmer et al., 2019).

The tenets of the discourse of renewal align well with the recommendations found in the literature on organizational conflict management. Both bodies of literature argue for the value of open, honest, ethical communication. There is also a call for key stakeholders to be involved in the process of managing the event. Importantly, both call for a focus on renewal, growth, and vision for the future, rather than dwelling on who is to blame and what might have been done differently leading up to the conflict or crisis. While it is useful to learn from past mistakes, it is detrimental to allow those mistakes to be the sole focus, preventing growth and forward movement. There are several recent cases that support these perspectives.

CASE DESCRIPTIONS AND ANALYSES

This chapter is built around a comparative case study of four self-induced crises that required some level of conflict management. A comparative case study is useful as a tool for analyzing individual, organizational, social, and group dynamics (Flick, 2004; Yin, 2014). The following cases were chosen because they are recent exemplars of organizations that either effectively or ineffectively managed conflict after a self-induced crisis. The cases were selected as part of a purposeful maximal sample, as they demonstrate different perspectives on the problem the author wishes to study and address (Creswell, 2013). Data for the cases were gathered from organizational websites, reports from news media, and from Twitter using Salesforce Social Studio social media listening software.

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Dove

In 2017, Dove released a full-length advertisement that featured a series of women changing their shirt, and as one shirt was removed, another appeared beneath as the woman changed to a new woman. When the advertisement was released it was well-received as an interesting and creative video. Unfortunately, when people think of the clothes-changing Dove advertisement they do not remember the full-length ad, people tend to remember a much shorter clip that Dove posted to Facebook as a follow-up to the original advertisement (Slawson, 2017).

This pared-down clip features a woman of color changing her shirt and turning into a white woman. The clip in question came at a time when multiple organizations were facing backlash related to questionable content dealing with representations of race. For example, in early 2017 the German skincare company Nivea launched an ad campaign targeting customers in the Middle East, a region known for selling skin-lightening cosmetics. The advertisement read, "White is Purity," and ran with the tag "Keep it clean, keep bright. Don't let anything ruin it" (BBC News, 2017). In addition to being a problematic message in a global context, the alt-right movement and other similar white-supremacist groups picked up the advertisement with commentary along the lines of, "Nivea has chosen our side." The company had to respond quickly to pull down the ad and issue an apology.

Or consider, just a few months earlier, the Chinese laundry detergent Qiaobi posted a video advertisement of a Chinese woman shoving a detergent gel pack in a paint-covered Black man's mouth and shoving him into a washing machine (Graham-Harrison, 2016). When he emerges from the machine, he has turned into a Chinese man and he and his clothes are sparkling white. The company insisted that the ad content was not problematic, and that people with concerns of racism were overreacting to the video's content. On the tail end of several events like this, Dove's social media team stepped in with their three-second clip of a color-changing woman.

As often occurs, the background story on this case is unfortunate because of how avoidable this SIC was. As mentioned previously, the three-second clip was pulled from a much longer advertisement that ran earlier in the same year (the full advertisement is unfortunately not available online, it was pulled after criticism of the three-second clip). The official response to the event was a clear apology and a claim that the video "missed the mark" for what Dove was intending to showcase (Slawson, 2017). While this response is generally in line with best practices, the reality is that the situation was completely avoidable. It is common practice in the social media world for a person or small team to put together content and post it directly to a social media page. For social content, there is often not a gatekeeper or an additional set of checks to vet and approve posts. It seems this was the situation in this case. On the one hand, an extra set of vetting would slow down posting and make it challenging to post in a timely fashion. On the other hand, an extra set of eyes on this video could have prevented the entire event from occurring. To avoid SIC, organizations must have key checkpoints to prevent unnecessary content recalls.

Urban Outfitters

If you have read Pyle's (2016) piece on SIC, Urban Outfitters will feel like a very familiar case. Urban Outfitters was in trouble in 2014 because of a "vintage sweatshirt" line that included a Kent State sweatshirt with what appeared to be bloodstains and bullet holes, an allusion to the 1970 campus shootings which resulted in the deaths of four students (Winchel, 2014). Urban Outfitters offered no apology and responded simply that people had misunderstood the purpose of the sweatshirt (Wilson, 2014). Urban

Outfitters has demonstrated a strong track record of producing offensive materials without a clear and convincing apology after the fact. In this instance, rather than engaging with key publics to address their concerns, Urban Outfitters remained silent and ignored the conversation. This repeated SIC mismanagement led to discontent with the company (Huddleston, 2014).

Fast-forward to 2018 and Urban Outfitters has come under fire for what appears to be a recurring, cascading SIC – theft. As early as 2008, Urban Outfitters was credibly accused of stealing art or proprietary content from small-scale artists and selling it as original content without attribution to the artist or owner (Kamer, 2010). The first widely-reported instance of this occurred in 2010, when Urban Outfitters sold gothic style jewelry featuring bones and skulls. The item in question was clearly taken from a concept developed by Lillian Crowe, a small-scale artist whose work was predominantly sold to local markets in New York.

This would have perhaps been the end of the discussion for Urban Outfitters, if there had not been a series of similar events that unfolded over the ensuing eight years. In 2011, Urban Outfitters was accused of stealing Stevie Koerner's "A World of Love" concept (Linkins, 2011). Koerner is another small-scale artist who does most of her sales on Etsy, an online sales platform for artists and artisans. This was soon followed by theft of a fashion line sold by Tumblr user "Glam-Trash," whose T-shirt design was lifted by Urban Outfitters in 2013 (Brooks, 2013). Just a couple of years later, Urban Outfitters was sued by the Navajo Nation for using the name "Navajo" without permission in multiple products ina fashion line (Woolf, 2016). In less than a ten-year span, Urban Outfitters had more than a half-dozen instances of credible theft claims or of misappropriation of protected, licensed material. Most recently, in May of 2018, a small-scale sculptor from Bristol was shocked to discover that a design she developed for a special line of pottery had been ripped off by Urban Outfitters and sold in mass quantities online (BBC News, 2018). The artist, Sarah Wilton, learned about the theft when her friend saw the pottery style in the local Urban Outfitters shop and sent her a photo of the pottery.

With each of these accusations of theft, Urban Outfitters has pulled the content from their online and physical stores and issued an apology along the lines of the following:

We take matters such as this very seriously and removed the product as soon as this was brought to our attention. Urban Outfitters has worked with [artist] since [year] to help bring awareness and sales to their creative network of artists. As long-time supporters of [artist] and independent creatives, we would never intentionally appropriate their work. The origin of the design is still being investigated with the designers at [company]. We appreciate your patience while we work to resolve this issue.

This type of apology for a single, isolated incident would seem like a genuine, heartfelt apology. Unfortunately for Urban Outfitters, these events have not occurred in isolation.

None of these theft accusations, independently, is a major crisis for an organization of this size. However, with the number of events that have occurred in the past ten years, Urban Outfitters has completely depleted any reservoir of goodwill (Ulmer et al., 2019) they might have developed with their stakeholders or with the general public. As a result of unethical product development and long-term, repeated theft of independent artists' work, no amount of insistence that the organization is innocent seems believable to an external audience. The organization has demonstrated a pattern of unethical behavior that has tarnished its reputation, perhaps irrevocably.

Pepsi

In the fall of 2017 mass protests had become the norm across most major cities in the U.S., and police brutality had become a topic of conversation and the focus of organized resistance at a scale that has not been seen in the U.S. since the height of the Civil Rights Movement. It was during this national conversation that Pepsi aired their now infamous advertisement that was an apparent homage to the Black Lives Matter movement (Victor, 2017). This advertisement was well-made, well-funded, and spurred a national conversation. Unfortunately for Pepsi, the conversation was not one that framed Pepsi in a positive light.

In Pepsi's advertisement, several key pieces became the focus of criticism from both sides of the U.S. political spectrum. First, there were representations of members of various cultural groups that were problematic because of the blatant stereotypes they portrayed. For example, the ad features a man of south-east Asian descent who is playing a cello and a group of Black men doing "hip hop style" dances. These characters are portrayed alongside a mass protest march clearly intended to represent the Black Lives Matter movement, among other advocacy groups. On the other side of this narrative stand serious, disapproving police officers – all of whom appear to be white men. As the ad proceeds, Kendall Jenner sees the protest while she is in the middle of a professional photo-shoot. Jenner leaves the shoot, removes a wig and her makeup thereby becoming a "regular person," and joins the parade of protesters. The ad comes to a head when the protesters run into the wall of police, and Jenner breaks the tension by handing one of the officers a Pepsi to drink. He accepts it, and everyone begins celebrating – Pepsi had solved racism.

The backlash to this ad came from multiple perspectives. On one side, Pepsi was criticized for its use of over-worked stereotypes to represent various groups in their ad. On the other side, Pepsi was criticized for the framing of the message, which occurred on three fronts. First, a white woman needed to step in and save the day for the protesters. Second, the suggestion was that Pepsi was going to be the key to solving all the societal problems that were laid out in the advertisement, which is an obviously absurd proposition. Lastly, the ad frames the protesters as heroes and frames the police as the enemy. While police brutality has clearly been an issue that needs to be addressed, framing police at a protest as the enemy to be appeased is problematic framing.

The most widely publicized criticism of the ad was probably a skit performed on Saturday Night Live shortly after the ad was aired (Saturday Night Live, 2017). The ad focuses on the problematic representations of various cultural groups, the homage to Black Lives Matter, and the framing of Jenner coming in to "stop the police from shooting Black people by handing them a Pepsi" (Saturday Night Live, 2017). Following the backlash, Pepsi released an apology which included the following (Victor, 2017):

Pepsi was trying to project a global message of unity, peace and understanding. Clearly, we missed the mark and apologize. We did not intend to make light of any serious issue. We are pulling the content and halting any further rollout.

The response on social media was fierce and ranged from serious criticism to a range of trending memes. People compared the image of Jenner handing a Pepsi to a Police officer to the image of Ieshia Evans being arrested by police during a protest in Baton Rouge following the death of Alton Sterling (Victor, 2017). In several protests following the release of the ad, protesters recorded themselves attempting to offer cans of Pepsi to officers and then lamented the failure of the beverage to act as a miraculous peace offering.

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The Pepsi case is a clear example of an organization attempting to latch on to a national or global conversation and make their product relevant. In the political and cultural landscape of 2017, Pepsi's attempt to be part of the protest conversation was a resounding failure. An advertisement that was intended to "[capture] the spirit and actions" of people involved in protest and activism (Victor, 2017) instead captured corporate capacity to mis-read the broader cultural context it was attempting to join.

DiGiorno

Note: This final case was the final example in Pyle's (2016) SIC study and has been re-published in this chapter. The DiGiorno case remains one of the most successful SIC responses the author has seen to date and stands out as an exemplar for other organizations to examine and learn from.

In modern society, secrets are increasingly difficult to keep. People are under surveillance most of the time, especially in urban areas where businesses have security cameras, traffic lights have cameras, and almost every person walking down the street has a phone with a built in high-quality camera. It should have been no surprise to Ray Rice, then, that video of his assault on his then-fiancée (now wife) Janay Palmer would eventually be released. In February of 2014 Rice and Palmer were arrested on assault charges as the two had a public physical altercation (Bien, 2014). What was not known until September of 2014 was that while in an elevator, before they were arrested, Rice knocked Palmer unconscious then dragged her by her hair from the elevator (Bien, 2014). The video of the assault was shared widely over social media and traditional media outlets. Quickly, the conversation around the assault began to focus around the question, "Why did she [Palmer] stay?" (Kaplan, 2014). This message was troubling to Beverly Gooden, a woman who survived and eventually escaped from an abusive relationship (Kaplan, 2014). On September 8, the day the video of Rice's assault in the elevator was released, Gooden was so frustrated by the rhetoric suggesting Palmer "should have just left" that she went to Twitter and started sharing her own story using the hashtag "#WhyIStayed" (Kaplan, 2014). Gooden's tweets were as follows (@bevtgooden, 2014, September 8):

Domestic violence victims often find it difficult to leave abusers http://www.blueridgenow.com/article/20120108/ARTICLES/120109857 … #WhyIStayed

All these folks trashing women for staying in abusive situations have NO clue what happens the moment you reach for a door handle.

I tried to leave the house once after an abusive episode, and he blocked me. He slept in front of the door that entire night. #WhyIStayed

Gooden went on to list more than a dozen reasons why she stayed in the relationship, including "he said he would change," and "my pastor told me God hates divorce" (@bevtgooden, 2014; Kaplan, 2014). Once Gooden began sharing her experiences, other people began to share their own stories using "#WhyIStayed." Over the time that the hashtag was trending, thousands of abused individuals shared their stories of why they stayed in abusive relationships, offering support and encouragement to one another and to those similarly trapped.

Late in the day on September 8, someone on the DiGiorno Pizza social media team noticed that "Why I Stayed" was a trending topic. DiGiorno runs a humorous twitter account (@DiGiornoPizza) and often tweets about trending topics in order to connect with new Twitter users. In this instance, someone on the DiGiorno team jumped on board without first researching the purpose of the hashtag. They tweeted "#WhyIStayed you had pizza" (@DiGiorno, 2014, September 8 [tweet has been removed from the account]). Within a few minutes there were dozens of angry tweets targeting DiGiorno and the company's apparent decision to try to sell pizza by capitalizing on a tragic event. A hashtag that was developed to support individuals in abusive relationships was now being coopted for free advertising.

Except, it seems that DiGiorno was not intentionally making light of the event. Four minutes after the #WhyIStayed tweet went out it was deleted and this follow up was broadcast: "A million apologies. Did not read what the hashtag was about before posting" (@DiGiornoPizza, 2014, September 8). Their response might seem disingenuous, but the apology did not stop at one tweet. Over the course of 24 hours there were hundreds of tweets. DiGiorno's social media team went into high gear, apologizing by name to each person who tweeted about DiGiorno's mistake. Each apology was both personalized and targeted. The apology tweets did not use a copy-and-paste template or the same repeated verbiage. The apologies seemed heartfelt:

@Posietron I'm so sorry - I made the mistake of not investigating before posting. I saw it trending and participated. Never again.

@Starkman88 @Stareagle agreed. I made a mistake and couldn't be more embarrassed or sorry.

@AllisonRockey Me either. It was a terrible lapse in judgment to not investigate the conversation before participating. I'm so sorry Allison

@ejbrooks @jordanbks It was. And I couldn't be more sorry about it, Emma. Please accept my deepest apologies.

The apologies continued at the rate of a couple of apologies per minute from 11:15 pm until after one o'clock the following morning. Six hours later the apologies picked back up and continued all day on September 9. The DiGiorno account would apologize when someone tweeted about the offensive tweet, and then would apologize a second time if the person expressed further anger, dismay, disappointment, or concern.

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the DiGiorno #WhyIStayed case is that within a few hours of the initial apology, individuals who were the first to criticize DiGiorno became DiGiorno's champions, defending them against attacks by individuals who learned about the tweet well after the fact. One individual indicated they have made the same kind of mistake and appreciated DiGiorno owning their mistake: "@DiGiornoPizza apology ACCEPTED, #digiornopizza ! I never check hashtags before using them. #ApologyAccepted others need to #GetOverIt" (@allychat, 2014, September 11). Another person applauded the personalized apologies: "Props to @DiGiornoPizza on personally apologize (sic) for a mistake. adweek.com/adfreak/digior…" (@The_Raheel, 2014, September 9). Other users went directly to countering attacks from other users: "@emitoms @DiGiornoPizza seriously? It's the most apologetic acct ever. Never seen such remorse over an honest mistake. Leave the pizza alone" (@RealMikeWelch, 2014, September 9). Although this situation developed because of an insensitive and thoughtless action,

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Digiorno's leadership and social media team seems to have grasped the value of building social capital in the wake of the social media fallout.

The discussion on social media continued in this way for several days. While DiGiorno's apologies to users who expressed their anger consisted of a few hundred tweets, the larger conversation over three days comprised more than 8,000 tweets. Much of the tweet traffic over that time was from users defending DiGiorno for their personalized apologies. By September 11, many outlets had published stories about the event with titles such as: *3 Ways DiGiorno Reacted Well to Their Twitter Crisis*; and *The Perfect Response to Social Media Crisis*. In this instance, DiGiorno's self-inflicted crisis turned into an opportunity for effective communication and growth. The social media team was able to manage the ongoing conflict with upset Twitter users, all potential consumers of DiGiorno's products, and was able to come through the event in a healthy and respectable position.

LESSONS FROM SUCCESS AND FAILURE

There is much to be learned from studying prior successes and failures, so that organizations can communicate more effectively in the future. As social media use spreads and consumers expect information more quickly, organizations will continue to create self-induced crisis events. By learning from organizations that have weathered such events, both successfully and unsuccessfully, other organizations can prevent SIC – and manage them more effectively when they occur. By drawing on the four case studies presented in this chapter, the author draws four major lessons from which organizations can learn and adapt. First, when a problem arises, organizations should respond quickly and openly. Second, organizations should acknowledge when they have done something wrong. Last, it is important for organizations to be part of the conversation when a conflict or crisis is ongoing, rather than ignoring the conversation and attempting to remain aloof.

Respond Quickly and Openly

When organizations encounter conflict with stakeholders during self-induced crisis events, the first lesson they should apply for managing the conflict is to respond quickly and openly. As Ulmer et al. (2019) demonstrate, stakeholders respond positively to being provided with relevant information in the midst of an uncertain situation. By responding quickly and providing the information stakeholders are seeking, organizations can maintain their credibility with their publics. Dove seems to have achieved success via their quick and open apology, as did DiGiorno. Pepsi also seems to have pivoted away from the conversation around its abysmal advertisement. Urban Outfitters faces a challenge in that its apologies are not viewed as genuine because it is so regularly in the midst of crisis.

Acknowledge Mistakes

The initial tendency when faced with an unexpected challenge or organizational error is often for the organization to distance itself from the event and seek firm footing for legal defense. Urban Outfitters attempted to distance itself from public outrage over many of the thefts by claiming they were not truly thefts, while also pulling down the products that had been on sale. Dove, Pepsi, and DiGiorno's approach of quickly acknowledging their mistake and working for several days to express their regrets is

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an effective model for responding to this type of event. One need only look to past crisis events to see that this approach has proven effective.

Consider the oil spill that took place off the coast of Huntington Beach, California, in 1990. The spill happened a few months after the Exxon Valdez spill at a time when "oil spill fervor was at its height" (Sandman, 2012). The ship was leased by British Petroleum, but was operated by a contract shipper. The CEO of BP America was asked in a press conference whether the spill was BP's fault. The CEO responded, "Our lawyers tell us it is not our fault. But we feel like it is our fault, and we are going to act like it is our fault" (Sandman, 2012, p. 67). As a result of their forthright response and quick cleanup "BP's image in the vicinity of the spill is higher today than it was before the spill" (Sandman, 2012, p. 67). The response by BP was so successful that the Huntington Beach spill has nearly disappeared from popular memory, while the Exxon Valdez spill the year before remains a well-known and oft-discussed piece of history. Acknowledging mistakes on the front end creates time and space for organizations to rebuild credibility and allows key publics time to forgive the mistake and move on.

Participate in Relevant Conversations

In an increasingly high-speed communication environment, one of the most damaging moves an organization can make is to simply avoid being part of the conversation. For example, airline customers use Twitter and Facebook to express complaints or to get up-to-date information on arrival times and gate changes. Airline representatives acknowledge that social media platforms, such as Twitter, are becoming more and more relevant (Carrington, 2013).

DiGiorno remains an exemplar in this context. Following a major social media gaffe, the company moved quickly to take part in the rapidly developing conversation around its message. DiGiorno's decision to remain engaged in the conversation resulted in acceptance from a large portion of the individuals who were angered by their tweet, as well as eventual positive press for how they handled the event.

Organizations using social media to connect with stakeholders must remember the power of social-media messaging to benefit as well as to damage credibility and organizational relationships. Organizations should utilize social media platforms to engage with stakeholders in meaningful ways. Specifically, social media platforms should be used to engage in effective conflict management with internal and external stakeholders. The flexibility and unprecedented reach of social media can be used to connect with key publics at an incredible pace. Engaging in productive dialogue that once would have required town hall meetings or similar face-to-face interactions can now, in part, be managed in an online forum. While press releases, email Listservs, and newsletters allow for only one-way communication, social media platforms now allow organizational members to effectively engage in dialogue with key publics.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This chapter explores how organizations can prepare for, respond to, and manage the conflict of self-induced crisis events. This study is far from exhaustive and should serve as a launching point for research in related areas. First, further studies should be conducted of other organizations that have undergone similar events and faced similar crises. Studying a larger sample of organizations will enhance the understanding researchers have of these phenomena and how they can be managed effectively. Additionally, it would be helpful to connect with social media users who have taken part in the conversation around

social-media based responses to organizational conflict and self-induced crises. By surveying users who have been involved in these events researchers can determine whether preliminary findings are consistent over a much larger population than can be determined in an interview or case study. Future research should seek to expand both the breadth and depth of the current study.

CONCLUSION

This chapter consisted of three parts. First, the author reviewed relevant literature. Next, the author conducted a comparative case study of four distinct self-inflicted crisis events: first, the Dove ad featuring a color-changing woman (Slawson, 2017); second, the cascading crisis of Urban Outfitters' apparent art theft (BBC News, 2018); third, the 2017 Pepsi commercial in the style of a Black Lives Matter march (Victor, 2017); and lastly a re-examination of the 2014 DiGiorno "#WhyIStayed" crisis (Griner, 2014). Lastly, the chapter concluded with lessons learned from the case studies, a set of principles to inform organizations managing this type of organizational conflict, and proposed directions for future research.

A new area of organizational risk has developed as a direct result of increased organizational engagement on social media platforms. The possibility for organizations to create a self-inflicted crisis through the unintentional transmission of a poorly worded or ill-conceived social media message is one that should not be ignored or minimized. Self-induced crisis events create organizational conflict that must be managed quickly. It is vital that organizations not leave a communication void. When there is a void it will tend to be filled, and in the midst of a developing crisis that void could be filled by misinformation and speculation. It is important for organizations to steer the conversation as much as possible. By adopting the practices suggested in this chapter, organizations can pursue a more engaged, connected relationship with key stakeholders.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Conflict: A state of discord caused by the actual or perceived opposition of needs, values, and interests between people working together.

Crisis: A specific, unexpected, and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and simultaneously present an organization with both opportunities for and threats to its high priority goals.

Hashtag: (On social media sites such as Twitter) A word or phrase preceded by a hash or pound sign (#) and used to identify messages on a specific topic.

Micro-Blog: Social networking sites that allow users to exchange small elements of content such as short sentences, individual images, or video links.

Social Media: Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.

Social Networking Sites: Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

Twitter: The largest micro-blogging site on the internet, with over 302 million active monthly users.