

DESIGNING A CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN IN THE CHINESE MINISTRY OF
RAILWAYS

CREATIVE PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

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DECEMBER 2013

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

According to Barton (1993), “a crisis could be defined as an event that was an unpredictable major threat that could have a negative effect on organization, industry, or shareholders if handled improperly”. In most situations, crises could attack any organization anytime and anywhere. Crisis does not distinguish organizations based on their sizes or other reasons. A crisis is also deemed as “a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting an organization, company or industry as well as its publics, products or good name” (Fern-Banks, 2007).

A growing number of organizations are becoming aware of the importance and value of public relations. Public relations is the integrated discipline which concerns reputation in order to help organization to gain understanding and support. From public relation perspective, one of the most important goals is to establish excellent communication between stakeholder publics and organizations, especially before and after a crisis.

Most organizational crises come from problems inside or outside the organizations. Inappropriate approaches for resolving the crisis could lead to serious reputational, operational, or financial damages to the organizations. According to Coombs (2010), the organizations should have their comprehensive crisis communication plans ready during the crisis.

The high-speed train crash in Wenzhou was a severe crisis that happened in China. In Jul 2011, two high-speed trains crashed on a viaduct, killing 35 people and injuring 192. The

Chinese Ministry of Railways did not manage this crisis successfully. A high-speed train safety crisis in the transportation industry such as the train industry could potentially damage passengers' physical security, cause loss of lives and cause serious reputational damage to the Chinese Ministry of Railways.

The significance of this project came from the need of a useful crisis communication plan for the Chinese Ministry of Railways. This project drew upon scholarly researches to conceive this crisis plan.

Furthermore, the role of crisis deserved to be studied more in the academic field in order to let the Chinese Ministry of Railways to pay more attention to the utilizations of crisis communication applications which could provide more communication benefits to them.

Moreover, crisis communication was used extensively by organizations or governments. The researcher's purpose was to provide a better crisis communication plan and some other recommendations for the Chinese Ministry of Railways.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Crisis

There are lots of discussions within the public relations literatures about the meaning of the term “crisis”. In most situations, crises are unpredictable and various, and always around people or organizations. Newsom (1993) said that “applying your knowledge and learning other public relations experts’ recommendations could grow up a crisis plan which could help you to manage a crisis situation when it happened” (p.539).

Crisis is also defined as a normal or usual business. In other words, crisis is a dysfunctional chaos in normally operating organizations. Faulkner distinguished between crisis and disaster (2001). He said that a crisis was always caused by inappropriate management or unsuccessful operation. However, a disaster was caused by sudden unpredictable disastrous changes. (p.136)

A crisis provides challenges or threats to an organization, and it can bring reputation or image damages. Image damages can transfer into other kinds of damages such as financial damages or even survival crisis. Fink (1986) defined crisis as “an unstable time or state of affairs in which a decisive change was impending either one with the distinct possibility of a highly undesirable outcome or one with the distinct possibility of a highly desirable and extremely positive outcome”. (p.15)

Although the definitions of the term “crisis” are various, scholars have confirmed some

key features of crisis:

A crisis is a sudden event. For example, flood is a natural disaster. Although floods can be predicted, the exact severity or range of the disaster cannot be known. Many disasters could not be predicted not only due to the technological problem. Barton recommended that organizations should measure and calculate the risk regularly in order to prevent crises (1993).

Next, people or organizations have limited time to respond and react in a crisis. In other word, when a crisis happens, organizations do not have much time to discuss or develop plans to react. Both of the public and employees give stress to the organizations to give immediate response. Ulmer (1998) considered that the immediate response could significantly reduce and offset the harms.

Besides, organizations' value can be challenged or threatened in a crisis. A crisis could make huge damages to organizations or people (Coombs, 1999). The damages should be controlled in small range in order to ensure the stability of the whole range.

An organization's attitude and actions play vital roles in a crisis situation. Ulmer (1998) thought that the organizations should show their honesty and sincerity instead of seeking any other reasons to escape their responsibility when a crisis happened. Organizations are always expected to have responsibilities for the public in any condition. According to Barton, the main responsibilities should be the proactive actions to minimize the harms (1993).

Last, multiple audiences can be impacted in a crisis. When a crisis happens, the benefits of many audiences such as employees, shareholders, etc. might be gravely threatened by the crisis. During the crisis, the organizations must keep the stakeholders informed about what is

happening (Fishman, 1999). Also, concerns and sincerity should be emphasized when the organizations need to communicate with their stakeholders.

Crisis Management

According to Person (1998), crisis management could significantly help organizations respond to public and minimize damages. Massey (2005) thought that crisis management was a professional method that could be used to manage the crisis. Crisis management is essential for organizations to minimize the damages of the crises, and it should be updated and reviewed regularly.

Once the crisis happened, especially the reputational crisis, an organization must handle quickly to manage the crisis (Massey, 2005). Crisis management was not only a plan, but also analysis about why the crisis occurred and how to prevent them in advance. (Coombs, 1999)

According to Fink (1986), applying crisis management could minimize the organization's irreparable harm in an emergency. Besides, Mitroff (1989) defined that crisis management included vital elements such as strategies and tactics that could be used to prevent or repair the influence of crisis on the organization.

Crisis management could manage all kinds of crises such as hazards, disasters, financial crisis, and reputational crisis (Mitroff, 1989). Crisis managements work as proactive approaches to respond and handle crisis immediately. A crisis just likes a turning point, if crisis is managed well, it can become a rare opportunity for the future development of an organization (Fink, 1986). Every organization has different situations or crises, therefore, all of them need to develop a prepared suitable plan to meet their needs such as minimizing the

damages of crisis. An organization should have courage to manage the crisis by using the crisis management.

Although crisis plans ideally will be successful because they are based on a larger number of knowledge, information, and other scholars' recommendations, they may also be seen failure. According to Clair (2008), most failures in crisis management could be classified as lacking information and inappropriate communication.

Stages of Crises

Crisis managements are usually divided into two groups: pre-crisis and post-crisis. There are huge differences between them. Pre-crisis focuses on providing proactive management to avoid the crisis. However, post-crisis discusses how to handle the crisis and how to repair the organization's or individual's image once the crisis occurs.

According to Fink (1986), a crisis is categorized into four stages: prodromal, acute, chronic, and crisis resolution stages. A crisis manager needs to develop different proactive and reactive strategies based on the different stages of crises.

The Prodromal crisis stage belongs to the pre-crisis phases. During this phase, the crisis manager should monitor any warning signs of crisis, since it can potentially grow into acute crisis phase if they ignore these warning signs of crisis. During the initial phase, it could be seen as a valuable chance for the organizations because a potential crisis can be easily translated into an opportunity in the prodromal crisis stage.

The next phase is acute crisis stage. During this stage, crises are not easy to manage because the crises always develop and reach the larger range quickly. When a crisis comes to

acute crisis stage, significant impacts and certain damages would be caused. Fink pointed out that the only thing that the crisis manager could do in this stage was solving the problem (p.27) According to Fink (1986), acute crisis stage affects the image and reputation of the organization.

The third stage is the chronic crisis stage which is also called the post-crisis. According to Fink (1986), “Chronic crisis stage involves undertaking steps to correct whatever difficulties have surfaced during the acute stage”. The organizations need to cover, review, and analyze themselves in order to be prepared to future crises. This stage would be the longest one, public relation practitioners need to collect the successful or unsuccessful experiences for future crises (Fink, 1986). According to Fink (1986), crisis management plan was important for organization, because it was useful to figure out how to obtain the public’s trust and manage the crisis.

The last stage is the resolution stage. A public relation practitioner should evaluate the crisis management. Coombs (1999) said that evaluation was a vital step for the organization to understand which part could be improved and how to assist the organization to handle more effectively when having the similar threat or crisis in the future.

Fink’s model of four stages identifies the nature of the crisis. It directly demonstrates crisis’s start, growing, and resolution. A public relation practitioner’s responsibility is to figure out what kinds of crisis he or she is facing, and set the priority of the stakeholder publics.

Crisis Communication

Communication is seen as the most important process of crisis management (Coombs, 2007). According to Gephart (2007), creating communication strategies is necessary and unavoidable for organizations specifically in an emergency, because it can reach out the stakeholders of the organizations.

According to Seeger (1998), effective crisis communication should be an active verb instead of a passive noun. A crisis communication plan should be kept the same between the organization and public's expectations. A workable crisis communication plan always has more functions, not only simply offers guidance for communications once the crisis occurs. Coombs (2000) said that effective crisis communication could provide tools and frameworks for crisis "signal detection", "crisis prevention", and "crisis preparation".

Over a period of time, a crisis will get more complicated, and it would finally reach a disordered state (Fishman, 1999). According to Barton (1993), public relation practitioners should flexibly use crisis communication plans, and they need to specially designate crisis communication teams, responsibilities, and guidelines for spokespersons.

In order to reduce the harms of the crisis and make the crisis becoming a valuable opportunity, an organization should develop a workable crisis communication plan, and execute it effectively.

During a Crisis

According to Lawson (2007), the crisis communication plan should be trained before the crisis because full preparation could help them be more proficient. Once the crisis occurs,

communication system becomes more important, because the crisis management team needs to use it to analyze and communicate with the stakeholder publics quickly.

Fink (1986) said that the crisis management team should know how the message is communicated. The crisis management team needs to pay attention to the entire crisis communication, including what they should say and how they said.

The organizations need to keep positive manner to communicate with their stakeholders to ensure they have confidence and thoughts to support the organizations during the crisis situation. Klann (2003) thought that the crisis communication was a bridge between the stakeholders and managers, because stakeholders could understand the situation through crisis communication. Also, managers could figure out how their stakeholders feel about the situation.

When the crisis happens, rumors and doubts will be spread quickly. All the external changes would probably impact the situation. During the crisis, the crisis management team should keep consistent tone and reliable attitude. According to Klann (2003), the internal and external stakeholders must be informed during the crisis, because it can decrease the tension of the crisis situation. Also, the crisis communication should be updated regularly by crisis management teams based on the different situation. The organization needs to give an official statement after the crisis to calm the stakeholders down and decrease the level of doubts and uncertainty (Ulmer, 2007).

Internal Communication

Specific communication strategies are essential when the crisis management team discusses the crisis with the internal stakeholders. There are some possible ways which could make everyone get the messages. For examples, “meeting, e-mail, bulletin boards, teleconferences, letters and memos, intranet, and toll free phone lines” (Fernandez, 2009).

According to Mitroff (1992), internal communication has huge difference compared with external communication because the organizations may want to keep some important information confidential such as specific strategies, preparatory information, work schedules, or confidential information. Before the crisis management team communicates with external groups, they should let the internal groups to know how things work out and what messages would be given out, because this could ensure the internal groups keep one voice in a crisis situation. (Mitroff, 1992).

External Communication

It is very important for the organizations to build positive relationships with the media because the media is the public’s way of collecting information. The media is considered as a gatekeeper to select news information and inform the public (Aduato, 2008). Providing honest messages and positive attitude is the most vital element when the organization communicates with the media.

The Organizations should always keep a positive relationship with the media, not just in a crisis situation. The media should be seen as a friend to the organization because they could

help the organization to spread the information and inform the public what is happening (Curtin, 2005).

During the crisis, the spokesperson is needed to make sure there is only one voice heard. Coombs (2007) said that the spokesperson should be trained to ensure he or she had the ability to speak publicly and answer questions in a more skillful way.

Klann (2003) said that organizations should provide all written documents and media kits to the media because those documents were other effective ways to make the media know the crisis. External communication is vital for organizations to spread important information, decrease doubts, control rumors, and promote understanding to external groups. According to Fink (1986), honesty must be emphasized when organizations were communicating with the external stakeholders or giving out information to the external stakeholders.

Post Crisis Communication

Klann (2003) thought that although the crisis was over, the communication process should not be stopped. Organizations always forgot to keep communicating with the stakeholders after the crisis (Coombs, 2007). Keeping a continuous communication with the stakeholder could help the organizations establish good image and trust to face the future challenges or crises, and obtain more feedbacks and comments for evaluation.

According to Klann (2003), building a positive relationship with the stakeholders is the most important thing in post crisis communications, because the good relationship could gain more support and trust. The crisis management team needs to make sure whether the crisis is in fact over (Dougherty, 1992). For example, a crisis may be over after the crashed

high-speed trains are cleaned out and railway is restored. However, the public's doubts and the media's interest may not be over yet.

Organizations should ensure that all the information and details about the crisis have been given to the publics, even if the publics are no longer asking about the crisis. According to Dougherty (1992), in any period, organizations are always supposed to establish a proactive relationship with the media.

Also, the organizations need to keep continuous communication with their stakeholder publics especially in post-crisis. Dougherty (1992) said that organizations should frequently update staffs on actions taken by the organization, and do everything they can to help staffs minimize the negative effects of crises.

Best Practices

The term of "best practices" originates in the industrial period. From the best practices' perspective, effective approaches can help organizations or individuals realize a goal or task.

McGonagill (2010) defined that "the best practice was an outstanding program that collected lots of effective approaches and methods". It could be used on leading and managing. Many organizations also rely on best practices to seek for their best approaches to improve their leadership and management.

The best practice has been spread by a growing number of managers who deem that the best practice is efficient and systematic (McGonagill, 2010). Besides, best practice is always used in organizations that look for excellent approaches in the ever-changing business world.

"Best practices were simply the best way to perform a business process. They were the

means by which leading companies achieved top performance, and they served as goals for other companies that were striving for excellence” (Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2011). Although the best practice is always used for the operations of a specific organization or individual, it also could be used into an entire industry via building a standard.

Generally, using best practices can save time and money. It could also help organizations improve management and develop leadership. There are other definitions about best practices. According to the Krehbiel (2009), best practices are the “methodologies, strategies, procedures, practices, and/or processes that consistently produce successful results”. According to Gao (2006), best practices are widely deemed as highly effective methods to improve the performance of organizations and their efficiency in specific areas.

Best practices could be used to set a standardized approach for public relation activities. Best practices act as standards which provide guidance for other people to study or follow by using the detailed analysis. Krehbiel (2009) provided an assumption about best practices: the strategies or methods derived from the best practices could be duplicated in order to develop future practices.

Moreover, applying best practices could make positive changes in organizations, and make their work more effective than before. According to Seeger (2006), there is another use of best practices. It could be seen as a standard to compare with one’s own organization performance. “The managers could improve or change its performances and practices via this comparison of how a successful organization did a certain practice”. (Seeger, 2006)

Best Practice in Crisis Communications

According to Seeger (2006), best practices for crisis communications are based on the fact that the plan must be exercised and based upon systematical and theoretical researches and approaches. Crises are not similar. Seeger pointed out that “the top ten best practices for crisis communication were process approaches, pre-event planning, partnership with publics, understanding the audience and listening to public concern, honesty, collaborating and coordinating credible sources, meeting the needs of media, communication with compassion, acceptable levels of uncertainty, and messages of action” (2006).

Image Repair Discourse

Image repair belongs to post-crisis management. The organization’s image and reputation always suffer inestimable damages after a crisis. In order to decrease the damages, image repair strategies are needed.

The value of an organization’s image derives from financial values, marketplace values, and human resource value. Having a good corporate image can bring some significant advantages (Howard, 1998). First, a good corporate image could help the organization to hire more talented employees to develop their business. Second, a strong corporate image could enhance the stakeholder’s confidence and support. Furthermore, the organization could apply its strong corporate image to attract more investment.

The organization’s reputation or image could be gravely impacted by the accusations and doubts etc. On the other hand, effective communication can restore the corporate image. Benoit (2008) said that crisis management team needed to understand “the nature of the

accusations, attacks, or complaints” that threatened organizational image when they wanted to understand image repair (p. 244).

Benoit’s and Pang’s Image Repair Model (2007)

There are numerous models of image repair reported by many scholars such as Skyes and Matza (1957), Goffman (1971) and Benoit (1999, 2007) etc. Benoit and Pang’s image repair model (2007) offered five strategies including “denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness of event, correct action, and mortification”.

Benoit’s image restoration model focused on organizations’ or individuals’ image. He claimed that image was vital intangible property of organizations. “A reputation or public images, like other valuable assets, should be managed strategically to obtain the best results” (Benoit, 1995).

The first strategy is denial. It means that organization announces no crisis about them. Benoit (1995) thought that there were two kinds of denial: simple denial and shift the blame. Fishman (1999) said that “the advantage of such a shift was that it allowed an organization or individual to portray it as a victim of unfair allegations or circumstances, or to direct attention to a scapegoat”.

Next strategy is evasion of responsibility. Evasion of responsibility also could be categorized into four categories: provocation, defeasibility, accidental, and good intention.

The third strategy is reduction of offensiveness of the event. Benoit created six tactics that were bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking accuser, and

compensation. Those could help organizations or individuals minimize the crisis's damages (Benoit, 1995).

The fourth strategy is corrective action. Benoit said that an organization or individual used all kinds of ethical strategies to handle the crisis and eliminate the crisis.

Next strategy is mortification which means that organizations choose to take the responsibility of the crisis, make apologies, and express regret for their behaviors.

The fifth strategy is separation. Separation means identifying separate people or departments to explain the cause of the crisis and apply corrective strategy to remove the bad image. However, this strategy is hard to apply because it can negatively influence the employee's morale. Besides, this strategy could cause mental injury to employees who are scapegoat.

According to Fishman (1999), Benoit's model has been successfully adapted by many scholars to solve the image crisis. Each of the strategies could be implemented separately or worked together. Benoit (1995) suggested that the public relation practitioners should keep their communication strategy consistent.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This creative project focused on designing a crisis communication plan for the Chinese Ministry of Railways. In Jul 2011, a train crash accident happened in Wenzhou, Zhejiang province, China. Two high-speed trains crashed on a viaduct, killing 35 people and injuring 192. The purpose of this project was to assist the Chinese Ministry of Railways to manage potential future crises. Analyzing the practice of crisis communication during the Wenzhou high speed train incident would be a guideline to show how an effective crisis communication program could be designed for the Ministry of Railways.

The Chinese Ministry of Railways received extensive coverage in China after the high-speed train accident. Every organization is vulnerable to crises. If you do not prepare, you may simply suffer more damages. Through researching a series of related literatures, an effective plan is necessary for the organization to conquer the insurmountable crisis. The basic steps of effective crisis communications could minimize damages. Following are the 9 steps in crisis communication planning.

Step 1. Anticipate Crises

“The importance of confidence in crisis preparedness could not be overstated”. (Bernstein, 2013). The Ministry of Railway should be well prepared to be more confident to overcome the unknown crisis.

Organizations should be able to accurately anticipate potential crises. “Early warning systems” are good way to get a head start on anticipating crises or threats. According to the Bernstein (2013), there are two advantages for this step:

1. “You may realize that some of the situations are preventable by simply modifying existing methods of operation”.
2. “You can begin to think about possible responses, about best-case/worst-case scenarios, etc. Better now than when under the pressure of an actual crisis”.

Step 2. Chartering the Crisis Team

A small team should be assigned to act as the crisis communications team. The Chinese Ministry of Railways’ Minister should identify the team, with the department's public relations expert and legal experts. According to Bernstein (2013), “If your PR executive does not have sufficient crisis communications expertise, he or she may choose to retain an agency or independent consultant with that specialty”. Meanwhile, the team also needs to include a subject-specific expert who has professional knowledge related to the current crisis.

The Chinese Minister of Railways should ensure representation from: Assessment-Planning– Operations –Evaluation. The crisis communication team should take the responsibility to oversee the writing and implementing a crisis plan. They also need to insure the schedule of trainings and security of the resources.

Step 3. Identify and Train Spokespersons

Organizations need to designate a spokesperson after appropriate selection and training. The authorized spokesperson is crucial because the spokesperson is a direct way to make the public understand the crisis and the organization. Besides, the spokesperson should be trained in advance.

Both internal and external stakeholders may probably misunderstand or misinterpret the crisis or the organization. The organizations should be fully prepared to minimize the damages as much as possible. Training is necessary because the spokesperson needs to know what to say and what skills are needed to respond to all stakeholders.

Step 4. Establish Notification

Nowadays, organizations have many methods to reach their internal and external stakeholders immediately. According to Bernstein (2013), a single phone or fax number is the best way to reach most people quickly. Organizations could use conference, telephone, email, bulletin board, or text message to keep touch with their stakeholders. “Instant Messenger programs, either public or proprietary, were also very popular for business and personal use” (Bernstein, 2013).

In addition, organization also could send audio or video messages via email. Organizations could not ignore the importance of social media which can be fully utilized to

communicate with the stakeholders or spread information. Bernstein (2013) thought that “social media might be the fastest way to reach some of their stakeholders, but setting up social media accounts for this purpose and developing a number of followers/friends/contacts on the various social media platforms would take some time” (e.g., Sina Weibo, Renren, Baidu, etc)

Step 5. Identify Stakeholders

After the crisis occurs, the crisis communication plan needs to pay attention to considering their stakeholders. “Stakeholders could be people, groups, or organizations which had an interest or might be influenced by the result of organization” (Bryson, 2004). According to McDonough (2013), “Identify Stakeholders was the process of identifying all people or organizations impacted by the project, and documenting relevant information regarding their interests, involvement, and impact on project success. The process had as outputs a Stakeholder Register and a Stakeholder Management Strategy.”

Step 6. Crisis Risk Assessment

“No crisis plan could attempt to capture response strategies for every conceivable crisis from a fire in the warehouse to a nuclear winter” (Kamer, 2010). The assessments need to match the risks from department’s operations, finance, or reputation. If any part gets high

scores, it should be focused immediately. On the other hand, those with low scores should be consigned to a lower position, but they cannot be forgotten.

Step 7. Develop Responses and Statement

The crisis communication team should ask themselves basic questions such as the causes of the accident. Besides, the crisis communication team needs to develop “a holding statement message designed for use immediately after a crisis breaks”. “It can be developed in advance to be used for a wide variety of scenarios to which the organization is perceived to be vulnerable based on the assessment” (Bernstein, 2013). Bernstein (2013) claimed that “The crisis communications team should regularly review and update statements to keep their effectiveness”. Constant updating and reviewing are necessary to make the written plan effective in different periods.

Step 8. Adapt Key Messages and Finalize plan

According to Bernstein (2013), “the crisis communications team should develop the crisis-specific messages for any situation”. The team also should know what kinds of information are needed and how to keep it concise. “Have no more than three main messages that go to all stakeholders and, as necessary, some audience-specific messages for individual groups of stakeholders” (Kamer, 2010).

According to Kamer (2010), a specific crisis plan is seen as the physical product which could give organizations a sense of security. The crisis management team cannot undervalue some useful parts in the plan, such as contact lists, materials lists, press statements, and media lists etc.

Step 9. Evaluate the Plan.

After the crisis communication plan is implemented, a formal evaluation should be conducted. By this evaluation, the crisis communication team could realize what is done successfully, what is done unsuccessfully, and what could be improved for future challenges.

A specific manager should be assigned to improve and update the plan at least annually. Besides, a solid brainstorming session also can do the evaluation because getting together the crisis management team to discuss the result of the plan may be more efficient to update the plan (Bernstein, 2013).

CHAPTER IV

THE CRISIS PLAN

This chapter indicates a crisis communication plan for the Chinese Ministry of Railways to use when addressing crisis situations. According to Moore (2010), “a well-designed crisis communication plan provided policies and procedures designed to effectively communicate with the public, stakeholders, and media. It included assessments of situation analysis, identification of a spokesperson, spokesperson training, identification of key publics, development of key messages, employing media, and plan for evaluation of crisis response”.

Therefore, during a crisis, a crisis communication plan is able to play a vital role by helping an organization provide accurate and detailed information to the stakeholders demanding immediate answers. “A working crisis communications plan should be a key component of an organization’s overall crisis response plan, although a well-designed crisis communication plan may not always guarantee success, but will greatly lower the probability of failure” (BrandcomPR, 2012).

Situation Analysis:

On 23 Jul, 2011, a critical accident involving two high-speed trains occurred. “This is a reminder that train safety can never be over-emphasized” (Bei, 2013). This Wenzhou high-speed train accident killed 35 people, and there were also 190 people injured. The crash occurred because a lightning strike cut the power of one train which was later hit by the following train.

According to the China Daily (2011), “apart from doing whatever could be done to save the lives of the injured people and restore normal services, it was important to get to the root of the tragedy and find out the chain of circumstances that led to the accident”. After the accident happened, Yongwen railway line was interrupted for 30 hours. The train crash accident caused direct financial loss to the Chinese Ministry of Railways exceeding 195 million RMB (about \$29,514,353) (China Daily, 2011). “China had the world's largest high-speed train network with about 9,300 km (5,800 miles) of routes” (Associated Press, 2012). However, the Chinese Ministry of Railways sharply slowed the speed of development of Chinese rail network after this train crash accident.

Crisis Risk Assessment:

Crisis Outbreak

The first news of the incident was posted by a passenger via Sina Weibo four minutes after the crash. At the same time, many news media companies were heading to the location of the crash.

The Ministry of Railways sent approximately 1,100 rescue workers and medical team members to the incident site. Unfortunately, the cause of the incident and the rescue process were unclear so that many rumors spread quickly.

The whole rescue process took about 25 hours, and rail traffic was restored on the morning on Jul 25th. China Daily reported that the secure team rushed to bury the wreckage of the train due to the presence of highly confidential technologies in the train (2011). A series of inappropriate behaviors made the public think that the Chinese Ministry of Railways

intentionally damaged accident evidence regardless of consideration for lives. Even some journalists claimed that the Chinese Ministry of Railways was trying to conceal the true cause of the accident.

Inappropriate Spokesperson, Inappropriate Statement in Press Conference

On Jul 25, 2011, the Chinese Ministry of Railways held an official press conference in order to ease the negative reports. Yongping Wang who was the spokesperson for the Ministry of Railways hosted this official press conference. However, this press conference caused huge controversy and discontent.

First, Wang made an unreasonable explanation for burying the train: “we had to bury the train because it was the best method to provide more space for rescue vehicles”. Then, Wang made this “famous” statement in the press conference, “whether or not you believe this explanation, I believe it” (China Daily, 2011). To further complicate matters, Wang’s explanations were refuted by reports from CCTV (China Center Television, 2011).

Moreover, after the Chinese Ministry of Railways formally announced that the rescue action was completed, a child who was still alive was found at the accident site. In press conference, Wang’s explanation was “this was a miracle, it was unbelievable” (China Daily, 2011).

Premier Jiabao Wen's Visit

On Jul 28th, Jiabao Wen, the Chinese Premier, went to the accident site. He announced that “we must put our best efforts on rescuing passengers”. Then, he expressed his condolence to the victims and went to visit the injured passengers. (Chin Daily, 2011).

Premier Jiabao Wen held a news conference in the incident site. He made three main points in the press conference: “1. The investigation team would create an open and honest accident report to the public as soon as possible. 2. This train crash accident was a warning for the rapid expansion of the Chinese high-speed railways. 3. The most important thing the Chinese government cared about was passengers' safety”. (China Daily, 2011)

Wenzhou High-speed Train Accident Results

On Oct 28th, the accident investigation report revealed that “Wenzhou high-speed train crash accident happened due to severe weaknesses in control center equipment design, lax equipment inspection, and the failure to adequately respond to equipment malfunction caused by lightning” (China Daily, 2011).

In Wenzhou high-speed train crash accident, the main cause of the accident was improper operating speed and inappropriate construction schedule of the railway. “The Ministry of Railways officials were also blamed for failing to assign proper duties to a branch office to oversee high-speed railway lines and the inspection procedures for newly-developed signaling equipment, which led the defective LKD2-T1 signal equipment to be put into operation” (China Daily, 2011).

Wenzhou High-speed Train Crash Accident Influences

1. Wenzhou high-speed train crash accident led to the public's panics and doubts about high-speed train transportation.

After the Wenzhou high-speed train crash accident, the occupancy rate for high-speed railway sharply decreased from 94% to 41%. Even the booking rate of Yongwen railway line (Wenzhou high-speed train crash accident line) was less than 10%, the Chinese Ministry of Railways had to lower the price of tickets to attract passengers.

2. The speed limit of high-speed railway was lowered after the Wenzhou high-speed train crash accident.

After the high-speed train crash accident occurred, the Chinese Ministry of Railways slowed down trains. Particularly, the speed limits of the high-speed trains were decreased from 350km/h to 300km/h. Besides, the speed limits of the passenger trains were slowed from 200km/h to 160km/h (Fellowes, 2011).

3. The Wenzhou high-speed train crash accident negatively influenced its related stock market.

“Shares in CSR Corp., which built one of the two trains in a joint venture with Canada's Bombardier Inc, fell by 14%. China Automation Group Ltd., which was responsible for the design and production of the safety and control systems for railways, fell by 19% in Hong Kong on 24 and 25 Jul. China Rail Construction, builder of more than half of the nation's rail links since 1949, fell 6.7%. Shares in China Railway Group also temporarily slid down 7.7%. The high-speed rail woes added to negative market sentiment from the U.S. debt deadlock,

sending the Shanghai Composite Index down 3 per cent to 2,688.75. CNR shares fell 9.7%”

(China Daily, 2011)

Recommendations for this crisis communication plan’s goals and objectives:

● Goals:

- “To promote positive media coverage of the Ministry of Railways’ event and crisis”.

Objective:

- “To receive positive reports and comments from 100 or more media companies by Aug, 2011”.

Strategies:

- “Design a crisis communication plan to be implemented by the Ministry of Railways”.
- “Assign a specific role for the crisis communication team”.
- “Clarify the structure of the crisis communication team that helps the Ministry of Railways with their communication strategies”.

Recommendations for the crisis communication plan of the Ministry of Railway:

This project was designed to be applied to the Chinese Ministry of Railways dealing with Wenzhou high-speed train crash incident crisis or future crisis. The crisis communication plan was included a situation analysis, crisis assessment, crisis communication team, key messages, key stakeholders, designated spokesperson, contact log,

prepared statements, and collateral materials, practicing tough questions, recommended websites, and evaluation.

1. The Chinese Ministry of Railways should take their responsibility if the accident causes were their inappropriate operations or equipment problems. It is helpful for the Chinese Ministry of Railways to gain the public's trust as soon as possible.
2. Employees of the Chinese Ministry of Railways should show compassion. Always show concern and respect to victims of the Wenzhou high-crisis train crash incident.
3. Employees of the Chinese Ministry of Railways should speak with one voice. The Ministry of Railway should designate and train a spokesperson before they hold press conferences. Besides, all employees and officials should be informed to ensure everyone knows the accident and keeps one voice.
4. Employees of the Chinese Ministry of Railways should be prepared to face the media's inquiries.
5. The Ministry of Railways crisis team and management should seek the resolution of the crisis as soon as possible to ease the public's doubts and accusations.

Crisis communication team in the Chinese Ministry of Railway:

When a crisis happens, a crisis team is vital to determine what actions are necessary and should be implemented. Generally, the crisis team should consist of key officials. They should include the minister of the ministry of railways, the chief of public relations, the vice minister of the ministry of railways, the senior manager of the division, the security officer, and the Chinese Ministry of Railways' lawyer.

The following is an officials' contact list of the Chinese Ministry of Railways. It could be used in an emergency to ensure that the public could contact them immediately:

| Job Title | Name | Contact Information |
|------------------------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| The Minister of Railways | Guangzu Sheng | Tel: 010-51842281 |
| The Vice Minister of Railways | Yadong Hu | Tel: 010-58607240 |
| The Vice Minister of Railways | Dongfu Lu | Tel: 010-58607241 |
| The Vice Minister of Railway | Chunfang Lu | Tel: 010-58336000 |
| The Union President | Yuhua He | Tel: 010-51842285 |
| Secretary of Discipline Inspection | Limin An | Tel: 010-58336006 |

The team consists of the executive officers, Guangzu Sheng, the minister of railway. The Minister of Railways should to be contacted first and the order priority will decline from there. Yadong Hu, Dongfu, Lu and Chunfang Lu who are executive vice ministers of railways, and Yuhua He, the union president and Limin An are also included in contact list.

Yuhua He, the union president of the Ministry of Railways is in charge of contacting the minister of the Chinese ministry of railways, Guangzu Sheng. Sheng will then begin the phone tree down. Once Limin An is contacted, the last sitting officials, he needs to contact the following departments, employees, and other necessary publics of the crisis. Union and public relations employees also need to assist with the crisis. In addition, the crisis team should designate a qualified person who can answer phones and accompany media if necessary.

Identifying key publics:

The Chinese Ministry of Railway should identify and analyze its key stakeholder public who are various groups of people who interact with departments.

- High-speed train passengers
- Victims
- Media
 - Print
 - Broadcast
 - TV
 - Radio
 - Blogs
 - Social media
- The Ministry of Railways employees
- The Ministry of Railways officials
- Chinese government managers
- Suppliers
- Union officials

Internal Notification:

Internal publics should be informed first during the crisis because they are vital roles to help the Chinese Ministry of Railways control the crisis. Related information should be sent via e-mail or telephone to internal publics as soon as a crisis occurs. Besides, the internal

publics should follow frequent updates which are made by the crisis team.

- For employees: “The Ministry of Railways cares about all employees. Our goal is to keep each employee informed in an emergency. We think that it is crucial because employees have right to know what’s happening and what will happen next. We really appreciate all employees’ trust, support, and devotion in a crisis”
- For management: “Management is really important for the Chinese Ministry of Railways during such a crisis time. The Chinese Ministry of Railways is always strengthened by your professional decision making skills and trust to overcome an uncertain time.”

- External Publics

- High-speed train passengers
- Victims
- Media
 - Print
 - Broadcast
 - TV
 - Radio
 - Blogs
 - Social media
- Suppliers

Informing publics:

After the high-speed train incident happened, it was important for the crisis team to notify key publics as soon as possible. The crisis team should inform the publics soon after the train crash, and update reports to the publics as frequently as possible.

The crisis team should apply different ways to reach the external publics. Besides, they should always provide continuous information and updates about crisis. After a crisis, the crisis communication team of the Ministry of Railways should consider compensating the victims, which could demonstrate their sincerity and active attitude. According to Dave (2011), “The cost of quickly resolving the crisis also will be far less than cost of the Ministry of Railways’ waiting for litigation”.

Moreover, the crisis team of the Ministry of Railways should make a promise to ensure that the similar accident cause would never happen again. According to Dave (2011), “preventive measures should go well beyond the expectations of the public”.

Supporting materials:

The crisis team needs to provide information brochures or fact sheets about the Chinese Ministry of Railways or the accident site. This is helpful in informing the reporters. Also, they need to create materials or documents which explain technical systems or procedures, because this could avoid that the reporters explain the accident incorrectly.

The crisis team also needs to make a fact sheet available online in order to let anyone who cannot come to the press conference also get the information. Because the train involves the knowledge of professional fields, the crisis team should try their best to make a

complicated professional issue simple to reporters.

Pre-gathered information:

The crisis team needs to provide related information in an emergency, which is a direct way to show the background of the Chinese Ministry of Railways and related information.

- Train inspection reports for the past 5 years
- Train maintenance reports
- Train safety standard guidance
- Annual reports for the past 5 years
- Case studies from past train crash crises, including photos
- The crisis team's list and contract information
- Maps and location information
- Product manufacturing procedures
- The Ministry of Railways' fact sheet

Designate a spokesperson:

A lesson from the Wenzhou high-speed train crash incident is that the spokesperson should be familiar with the Chinese Ministry of Railways and all High-speed train related components that might cause the accident. Shuguang Gao, the Minister of Railway, should be the spokesperson for the high-speed train incident. He would be assisted by Yadong Hu, executive vice minister of the Ministry of Railways, who was primarily responsible for safety supervision for Chinese high-speed train as well as Chunfang Lu, executive vice minister

who was responsible for high-speed train engineering management.

Spokesperson training:

“An interview with the news media is unlike most conversations, it is strategic and goal-oriented. In any news interview, the goal is to firmly plant a designated message in the memory of the reporter’s audience” (Karen Hutchens Association, 2011)

Spokesperson training is necessary to ensure that the spokesperson can be able to confidently face the media, and his or her message could get to the publics. Before holding a press conference, the crisis team should prepare key messages and statements. The spokesperson also should be well prepared so he or she can clearly and effectively respond to the hard questions.

According to the Karen Hutchens Association (2011), there is a three-step process which includes: “1. Training session with presentations. 2. Key message development for the crisis. 3. One-on-one role-playing and coaching, videotaping, and personalized follow-up review sessions if desired”.

Recommendations for the spokesperson:

The spokesperson should be comfortable to face the media. Generally, the spokesperson needs to have sufficient experiences in communicating with the media. A qualified spokesperson should be able to speak concisely without using too many professional terminologies, respect the reporter, and be familiar with the crisis. The spokesperson should

also show reliability and appropriate expression and appearance to the publics.

Experts' opinions cannot be ignored in a crisis. Yuhua He who is the union president of the Chinese Ministry of Railways and the director of public relations should always assist the spokesperson in order to ensure their effective communications.

Prepared press release:

The press release of the crisis communication team should include the information about “who, what, when, and where”. The crisis team must provide the accident facts and reliable sources to the publics. The prepared statement should be given to the spokesperson as soon as possible.



Contact:

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10 Fuxing Road, The Ministry of Railway building, Haidian District,

Beijing

China

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wenzhou high-speed train crash incident

Hello, my name is Shengguang Zu and I am the minister of the Chinese Ministry of

Railways. I am here to tell you about the high-speed train incident that occurred earlier today. (Introducing the incident and the consequence). For example: On Jul 23rd, 2011, the fatal accident involving two high-speed trains happened. This accident killed 35 peoples, and there were 192 people injured. The crash occurred because a lightning strike cut the power of one train which was later hit by the following train.

We are still gathering more information and facts. Although we are not releasing the names of the victims at this time, we are still working on contacting with the relatives of these victims. As the minister of the Chinese Ministry of Railways, I want to express my sincere apologies to the passengers who have experienced this accident, and to the families who have lost family member in this accident. We will take our full responsibility for the accident if the accident cause is the negligence on our part.

“High-speed train railway provides a fast, reliable, and comfortable means of transporting large numbers of travelers in a densely populated country over long distances, which improves economic productivity and competitiveness in the long run by increasing the transport capacity of railways and linking labor markets”. (Pathi, 2011). Besides, the constructions of Chinese high-speed railway significantly stimulate the economy and create more jobs.

Also, “high-speed train project supports energy independence and environmental sustainability. Electric trains use less energy and resources on a per unit basis. In can also draw power from more diverse sources of energy including renewables than automobile and aircraft which are more reliant on imported petroleum” (Wong, Wellkamp, 2010).

These are Chinese high-speed train’s features. Please believe that the Chinese Ministry

of Railways will try our best to ensure passengers' safety. We will do everything as long as it is helpful to the victims. We will ensure that all uninspected trains cannot be used until our maintenance workers determine there is no any problem. We understand that it will cause inconvenience for passengers who want to choose planning train as their transportation. We ask for your understanding and cooperation in such a crisis period. If someone has purchased the train tickets, please go to our website or ticket offices to get a reimbursement.

With more than 150 year history, the Chinese Ministry of Railway has only experienced 5 major incidents and 15 minor incidents. Besides, our professional train drives and crew members are trained in order to prevent similar incident in the future. I want to say that this event is a rare accident; we will try our best to remedy and compensate for the victims and families who have lost their family member in this accident.

All the above information is what I have at this moment. I encourage everyone to answer question.

If you would like more information about this topic, or to schedule interview with Guangzu Sheng, Please call Yuhua He at 010-51842285 or email Yuhua He at hyh@crct.com

Key media:

Below is a list of the Ministry of Railways' key media contacts. During a crisis, these media will be contacted and invited to the news conferences.

China Central Television
Cell: 010-6395 6208.
E-mail: webmaster@cctv.com

People's Daily
Cell: 010-65368742

Work: 010-65368744
E-mail: rmr@peopledaily.com.cn

Beijing Youth Daily
Cell: 010-65902200
Work: 010-65901166
E-mail: market@ynet.com

Yangcheng Evening News
Cell: 020-87133574
Work: 020-87133576
E-mail: baoliao@ycwb.com.cn

Southern Metropolis Daily
Cell: 020-87385816
E-mail: shipingban1@vip.163.com

Guangzhou Daily
Cell: 020-81919191
E-mail: shenbian@gzdail.com

Reference News
Cell: 010-88052999
Work: 010-63071136
E-mail: ckxx@xinhua.org

Sina Weibo
Cell: 400-096-0960
Work: 400-098-0980

QQ Zone:
Cell: 0755-83763333
Work: 0755-83763333

Renren Website:
Cell: 400-080-3580
Work: 400-080-3580-1-3

CNR Radio
Cell: 4008000088
E-mail: 4008000088@cnr.cn

RBC Radio

Cell: 010-65661566
Work: 010- 65159063
E-mail: gubao@rbc.cn

SMG Radio
Cell: 021-62780990
Work: 021-62788177

Key messages:

The crisis team must make key messages short and succinct. “Incorporating apologia strategies into your key messages will make your messages more effective”. (Kamer, 2010).

Below are some recommendations

- **Bolster:** Emphasize good traits to reduce offensiveness. For example, with over 150 years of operation, the Chinese Ministry of Railways has only experienced 5 major incidents and 15 minor incidents. The crisis team could claim that the Chinese high-speed train has long history and it is reliable for passengers.
- **Compensation:** Compensating the victims could reduce offensiveness. For example, the Chinese Ministry of Railways takes responsibility for this accident and we are willing to compensate the victims. This strategy is a crucial step to ease the public’s accusation and shows the compassion and concern for victims.
- **Corrective Action:** Corrective plan is an excellent way to demonstrate the concern for the victims and make the high-speed rail network return to normalcy. For example, we will ensure that all uninspected trains cannot be used until our maintenance workers determine there is no any problem.
- **Mortification:** Mortification is a quick way to obtain reliability and ease the rumors in a crisis. For instance, the Chinese Ministry of Railways would like to express our

sincere apology to the passengers and publics. We are willing to take full responsibility for the accident to remedy our negligence.

Preparation for tough questions:

When facing all kinds of media, the crisis team needs to prepare tough questions in order to have more preparation to answer questions. Therefore, preparation for tough questions could help the spokesperson have more confidence to respond. Below are some examples of questions the Ministry of Railways may have to answer:

- Do you think the similar accident will happen again? Because some railway workers were not responsible so that they failed to check the signals and components

The crisis team should demonstrate apology and corrective action. For example, we want to express our sincere apology for what we did wrong in this accident. We will try our best to prevent, and the similar accident will not happen again in the future.

- Why didn't the Chinese Ministry of Railways adopt the essential actions to avoid this accident?

The crisis team should avoid directly responding this question. For instance, at this moment, we are paying more attention on the safety of the passengers and solving the problems. The technical problems should be discussed later.

- How much of compensation will you prepared to pay for the victims?

The crisis team should not give specific number or estimate until they determine the exact amount. For example, the true amount is still unknown at this moment, but we will let you know when we determine the exact compensation.

Evaluation:

After the crisis fades away gradually, the crisis team should form an evaluation group to assess which parts of the crisis communication plan worked successfully and which parts needed to be improved. According to Bernstein (2013), “a formal evaluation of what was done right, what was done wrong, what could be done better next time, and how to improve various elements of crisis preparedness is another must-do activity for any crisis team”. The crisis communication team is the first choice to make evaluation because they experience the whole crisis communication and they may have more thoughts and comments about it.

The researcher has developed a form for completing evaluation step. A separate evaluation group should answer several questions and give a rating for each question. There is an evaluation form as follow. (Appendix B). In addition, an internal brainstorming session can also do the evaluation.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND LIMITATIONS OF THIS CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN

On 23 Jul, 2011, a critical accident occurred involving two high-speed trains. “This is a reminder that train safety can never be over-emphasized” (Bei, 2013). This Wenzhou high-speed train accident killed 35 people, and there were also 190 people injured. The crash occurred because a lightning strike cut the power of one train which was later hit by the following train.

After the crash accident occurred, the Chinese Ministry of Railways did many unprofessional actions. For examples, the whole rescue process only took about 25 hours, and rail traffic was restored in the morning on Jul 25th. After the Chinese Ministry of Railways formally announced that the rescue action was completed, a child who was still alive was found at the accident site. Yongping Wang, the spokesperson made inappropriate statements in press conference. These unprofessional actions not only made the Wenzhou high-speed train crash crisis worse, but also caused a bad image for the Chinese Ministry of Railways.

Overall, the researcher designed this project so that the Chinese Ministry of Railways would have a useful plan to manage a crisis. The literature review provided academic standpoints to demonstrate that public relation was a vital factor in crisis situations. Besides, the public relation literature indicated that crisis communication should be used in an emergency.

Today, crisis communication plan is becoming more and more crucial for most departments or organizations. Any department or organization cannot ignore the importance

of crisis communication plan. The results of this project produced several significant outcomes. This project not only contributed to the public relations literature but has practical plans for the Chinese Ministry of Railway to use in emergencies. However, this project also has some limitations.

The first limitation was that it did not include various social media. Nowadays, a growing number of people pay great attention to social media's effects on crisis communication. The first message of the Wenzhou high-speed train incident was posted by the passengers via Sina Weibo. Obviously, social media had huge influence and spread speed. However, social media or any other platforms were excluded from this project.

The researcher also would have added a section about crisis communication plan in other historical train accident in literature review, because that could help the researcher have a better understanding about what crisis communication plan would be more effective in dealing with all kinds of situation. The researcher also would have added the TV interviews or other kinds of interviews that the crisis team should apply to ease the crisis and help the Chinese Ministry of Railway to obtain the public's understanding.

CHAPTER VI
OUTSIDE REVIEWS OF THE PROJECT

Student: Shengya Xiong

Degree: Master of Arts

Major: Public Relations

Oct 31, 2013.

Evaluation by: Holly Zhang

Attention to: Dr. Becky McDonald

Dear Dr. McDonald,

My name is Holly Zhang, working as Global Communications Generalist for Lenovo Group, the No.1 PC maker in the world, and based at the company's headquarter in Raleigh, North Carolina. I have been with Lenovo for two and a half years, and my job responsibilities include major industry events and sponsorships management, media relations and Chairman/CEO's messaging/interpretation from Chinese to English and English to Chinese. I graduated from the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, with the area of focus on business journalism and multimedia.

I've known Shengya for more than a year as a good friend. It is my pleasure to evaluate her master degree creative project paper, which I think it is very interesting, informative and worth thinking. Crisis/risk management is a very important area at our daily public relations work. As a market leader in such a fast-growing technology industry, we understand that risk

is inherent and needs to be understood and managed properly to provide a foundation for sustainable growth. Operating as a global enterprise with 45,000 people worldwide, we have a very comprehensive crisis management guide which is distributed to every level of our communication departments, and we sometimes will organize simulation training to get people prepared. Just to give an example we met in recent years: in 2011, due to a severe flood in Thailand, our hard drive supplier Western Digital's manufacture line got affected, which resulted in the delayed hard drive supply of our computer. We had to manage to satisfy the public and response to the delayed order delivery, and other public inquires.

I am also very interested in Shengya's topic/case study, which is the 2011 China high-speed train crash in Wenzhou. This is a very well-known public relations failure in China after a state government involved train crash tragedy. It is a very typical example of illustrating the importance of crisis management and public relation, and very worth analyzing as a case study. Very well pick here. Shengya starts the paper from bringing up the crisis management theories and objects, then follows up with a throughout analysis of the China train crash case. One of my comments here is that a clearer structure/flow of the paper can help the readers understand the situation better. A timeline could certainly help.

The body of the project is well presented and clear. It's critical to understand the political background and historical line of the development of China's high speed railway. The aftermath of the tragedy resulted in a reshuffle of Chinese Ministry of Railways, and many officials were either put into prison or fired. Shengya gave a pretty good background introduction and analyzed the case and effect. After understanding the "what" part, she led us to the "why" and "how" parts. Government's completely failure of the public relations

approach towards this tragedy is because of the non-transparent and hidden explanation of the case and rescue process. One lesson from here is that fact/truth can never be hidden for individual benefits in front of the public. Openness and sincere attitude are very important, and these are the some of the reasons behind the inappropriate spokesperson and inappropriate statements. The depth of the treatment needs a bit more effort. The body part also includes crisis outbreak, Premier Jiaobao Wen's visit, Netizens' reactions, the process of the investigation, accident results, accident influences. And Shengya gave them a recommendation crisis communication plan, which is well-thought and planned.

Overall, the paper contributes a good amount of effort to the field of China's state-run businesses' public relation development. State-run businesses in China are lack of appropriate ways of handling crises, which needs to be improved in a very timely manner. Going forward, I do think that this field is worth further analyzing and more in-depth discussion by students and field experts. Shengya's paper has the good direction to tackle a very critical issue in China.

Holly Zhang

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An Evaluation of the creative project entitled *designing a crisis communication plan in the Chinese Ministry of Railways* by the student Shengya Xiong.

Master of Arts-Public relations

Oct 28, 2013.

Dr. McDonald:

My name is Maggie Xie and I earned a bachelor degree in Journalism and Communications from China Youth University for Political Sciences in Beijing China. I had been working in the media industry for about 4 years. After I graduated from college, I came to the US and studied Public Relations at Purdue University in Lafayette, Indiana. I am currently working as a Communications and Operations Specialist at Lenovo, based in Morrisville, North Carolina. I have known Shengya Xiong since last year, and I am evaluating her essay, based on my media industry experience and as a graduate with a political sciences background.

In this essay, *designing a crisis communication plan in the Chinese Ministry of Railways*, many important points were brought up on how to design a better communication plan when crisis occurs to an organization such as the Chinese Ministry of Railways. Shengya's thesis is that it is important to set up a crisis management plan and team beforehand. If an entity waits until a crisis has begun, this will likely result in a series of inappropriate actions.

This project was to design a crisis communication plan for Chinese Ministry of the railways. I personally am aware of the need for plans like this, as I followed recent events related to railway accidents in China. And as Shengya mentioned in her essay, the Chinese

Railways Ministry did not respond in an open and honest way that they should have, which resulted in a serious public loss of trust. This crisis had not only affected the business of Chinese railways, but also made the Chinese government appear inept and unresponsive. Many scholars have stated these issues needed to be studied and solved. In this paper, Shengya had original ideas that she used to design a practical crisis communication plan for this organization. This is a valuable contribution not only to the public relations field, but also for general public communications for government entities..

In the methodology chapter, Shengya also designed a crisis communication plan along with the 9 steps, which covered all steps from anticipating the crisis to after crisis communication. She explains in her essay that a large organization especially government ministry should have a mature crisis communication plan and always be prepared for any crisis. She also emphasized that a well-designed crisis communication plan should provide policies and procedures which is designed to effectively communicate with the public, stakeholders and the media.

This plan includes these specific items: assessment of the situation analysis, identifying a spokesperson, spokesperson training, identifying key publics, developing key messages, employing media, and evaluation of crisis response. Implementing this plan should allow an organization to provide accurate and detailed information to the stakeholders demanding immediate answers during a crisis.

In the summary and limitation chapter, Shengya stated that this essay should also include other various social media, to more quickly respond to any crisis. I strongly agree that in today's society, social media such as Twitter, Wechat, Weibo, Facebook, all play a crucial

role in our daily life, which can easily influence the public's understanding to crisis situations.

In conclusion, I think this was an informative and helpful research paper with great value to government organizations. I think Shengya made applicable and actionable recommendations in her essay. Her goal for this project was to design an effective crisis communication plan to promote positive media coverage of the Ministry of Railways' event and crisis, so that this agency can provide an open and honest communication to the stakeholders. I think the project is valuable to the public relations field, and it's practical in the meantime. The effort that Shengya has made is very distinct and succinct, which I highly recommend. I also believe that the plans she explained in this paper can be applied as a standard for many government organizations.

Thank You,

Maggie Xie

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CHAPTER VII

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Contact Log

A log should be established to record all telephone calls from the media or other parties inquiring about the crisis. This will be helpful to ensure that callbacks required are not overlooked. It will also help the post-crisis analysis.

| Date | Caller | Topic | Follow Up |
|-------------|---|--------------|------------------|
| | Name: Title: Company: Telephone: | | By: Action: |

Appendix B: Evaluation Form

The following is an evaluation form to provide feedback about the efficiency of this crisis communication training guide. After a series of plan are implemented, this form should be filled out and it should be returned to the crisis communication team's administrator. This is a necessary step to help the Ministry of Railway figure out how to better prepare for emergencies. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very little and 5 being very much:

1. I understand my roles in preventing and handling crises.

1 2 3 4 5 Comments: _____

2. I understand the chain of command in notifying executives and others during a crisis.

1 2 3 4 5 Comments: _____

3. I agree with dates proposed for bi-annual crisis communication rehearsal.

1 2 3 4 5 Comments: _____

4. If my contact information has been provided in this plan, it is accurate

Yes No Comments: _____

5. I understand what materials need gathered during a crisis and am capable of doing so.

1 2 3 4 5 Comments: _____

6. I understand key messages and believe I am capable of delivering one if necessary.

1 2 3 4 5 Comments: _____

7. I understand my responsibility in notifying personnel if I notice prodromes at any time.

1 2 3 4 5 Comments: _____

8. How comfortable are you with producing a press briefing?

1 2 3 4 5 Comments: _____

9. How comfortable are you with the crisis communication plan as a whole? Please provide feedback about what could be improved.

1 2 3 4 5 Comments: _____
