

SUMMARY

This study will seek whether or not the crisis history of an organization affects the way stakeholders perceive a current crisis in combination with the crisis response postures of Coombs (2007). The main reason to examine crisis history is the likelihood that it will influence the calculated trust that stakeholders have in an organization, and the role that trust plays in the way that stakeholders perceive and process information. Participants were exposed to 1 of the 4 conditions manipulated on crisis history (positive/negative) and response posture (best fitting/least fitting). The effects of the manipulations were measured, after participant had read a case story about a Telecom company, on calculative trust, perceived intentions, attribution of crisis responsibility, reputation and actual information seeking. Findings suggest that the crisis history of an organization is of more importance than choosing the right response posture. On a multitude of dependent variables, only calculative trust showed a difference between the two response postures. Any other measured construct demonstrates that it doesn't matter which strategy an organization uses. On the other hand, a positive history seems to ensure besides a higher calculative trust, also better perceived intentions, a better evaluation of reputation and lower actual information seeking behaviour. This study seems to provide evidence that the crisis history of an organization is of more importance for stakeholders' perception of organizations in crisis than individual response postures.

1 INTRODUCTION

Communication is of crucial importance to an organization in times of crisis. Some scholars suggest that the successful management of a crisis by organizations largely depends on what it does and says after the crisis hits (Brown & White, 2011; Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2007). This primary reaction is called the crisis response (Benoit, 1997).

This study explains the importance for organizations to consider their crisis history in the selection process for the best response strategy. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2007) is a research-based guide for selecting the right response strategy. It thus suggests how and which information should be sent to the stakeholders. The premise of SCCT is that selecting the right response strategy will help to protect the organization's reputation during a crisis (Coombs, 2006). Reputation is an important resource to protect because a favourable reputation can provide great competitive and strategic advantages (Roberts & Dowling, 2002).

Several studies have been done on how stakeholders perceive or evaluate the different response strategies (e.g. Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Benoit, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 1996; 2004; Coombs, 1995; 2006; Lee, 2007), but little research has been done on how other factors can influence how stakeholders perceive the different strategies. Brown & White (2011) were one of the few scholars who considered another factor in their study of crisis response strategies. They examined how the relationships with an organization and response strategy affected attribution of crisis responsibility. Their study provides evidence that a positive relation with stakeholders is more important for protecting the organizational reputation than selecting the appropriate crisis response strategy. This is an important finding because it suggests that whether an organization successfully manages a crisis does not largely depend on the communication after the crisis, but that it depends to a great extent on the prior constructed relationship between organization and stakeholders.

This study will explore whether or not the crisis history of an organization affects stakeholders' perception of an organization in crisis in combination with response postures. The main reason to examine crisis history is the likelihood that it will influence the calculated trust that stakeholders have in an organization, and the role that trust plays in the way that stakeholders perceive and process information. According to some scholars, how stakeholders receive and process information about an organization partly depends on the trust they have in the organization (Cvetkovich, Siegist, Murray & Tragesser, 2002; Fessenden-Raden, Fitchen & Heath, 1987).

This study will begin with a brief explanation of SCCT and crisis history. Next, the

dependent variables that measure how stakeholders perceive an organization will be discussed, followed by the hypotheses. Then the research design will be presented and finally, the results will be reported and discussed.

2 THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

This study will focus on two separate aspects of organization's reactions, namely *the posture* and the *crisis history*. These aspects will be introduced in the following paragraphs. The assumption in this study is that these aspects will influence the perception of the organization in times of crisis.

2.1 Situational Crisis Communication Theory

SCCT is developed by Coombs (2007) to give organizations guidelines to select the best crisis response strategy in order to protect the organizational reputation. SCCT is based on the attribution theory by Weiner (1985). This theory is used to assess the level of responsibility of the organization for the crisis, and recommends a specific set of response postures. Attribution will be discussed more extensively in the paragraph about the perception of the organization in crisis.

According to SCCT, organizations should use strategies that accept greater responsibility when a perception of crisis responsibility and reputational damage increases (Coombs, 2006). Coombs (2007) grouped the response strategies into four postures according to how much responsibility the organization seems to take for the crisis. These postures are clusters of strategies that stakeholders perceive in the same way (Coombs, 2006). These postures are: *denial posture*, *diminishment posture*, *rebuilding posture* and *bolstering posture*. When an organization chooses the *denial posture*, it will seek to remove any connection between the organization and the crisis. This cluster consists of attacking the accuser, denial and scapegoating strategies. If the organization chooses the *diminishment posture*, they will try to reduce attributions of organizational control over the crisis and reduces negative effects. This posture consists of excusing and justification strategies. The *rebuilding posture* tries to improve the reputation of the organization, and in this case the organization will take responsibility for the crisis. Compensation and apology belongs to this cluster. *Bolstering postures* seeks to build a positive connection between the organization and the stakeholders. This posture includes strategies such as of reminding, ingratiation, and victimize. The strategies of each of these four postures are shown in table 1.

Table 1 Crisis Response strategies, by posture (Coombs, 2007)

<u>Postures</u>	<u>Strategies</u>
Denial posture* Seeks to remove any connection between the crisis and the organization	- Attacking the accuser - Denial - Scapegoating
Diminishment posture Attempts to reduce attributions of organizational control over the crisis or the negative effects of the crisis	- Excusing - Justification
Rebuilding posture* Tries to improve the organization's reputation	- Compensation - Apology
Bolstering posture Seeks to build a positive connection between the organization and the stakeholders	- Reminding - Ingratiation - Victimize

Note. *Postures used as manipulation variables in this study

2.2 Crisis history

Results of Coombs (2004) study of past crises on current crisis communication showed that a history of similar crises intensified the reputational threat of a current crisis. The reputational threat was primarily through perceived responsibility for the crisis. Thereby, SCCT suggests stakeholders' knowledge about past crises is important, because this can affect the perceptions of the recent crisis

The crisis history will be used, because it will likely influence calculative trust. The concept calculative trust has many definitions (Earle, 2010). This study uses the definition provided by Earle (2010): Calculative trust "is based on past behaviour of the other and/or on constraints on future behaviour" (p. 541), but will also look at other possible antecedents of calculative trust. The definition of calculative trust and the other antecedents will be discussed more thoroughly in the paragraph about the perceptions of the organization in crisis.

According to Coombs (2006), a past crisis could intensify the reputational threat to an organization because more crises suggest a particular pattern of behaviour. More crises can suggest a pattern instead of an isolated incident. According to Coombs (2004), a history of past crises leads to stronger attributions of organizational responsibility. Studies done on this subject seem to confirm this. Prior conducted research compared two conditions: (1) a history of crises and (2) information indicating no previous crises conditions. The condition of the history of crises produced a greater reputational threat and more crisis responsibility than the information indicating no crises condition (Coombs, 1998; Coombs et al., 1996).

However, these studies did not determine if there is a difference between organizations that had a positive crisis history and these with a negative history. This study refers to a positive crisis history when an organization showed that they were capable and able to deal with a crisis situation. A negative history is when the organization did not show this competence. This study will investigate the difference between a positive crisis history and a negative crisis history. It is plausible that a positive history may provide that stakeholders perceive the organization better, as compared to an organization with a negative history. This is due to the reason that crisis history may have a significant effect on calculative trust. The next paragraph will elaborate on this subject matter.

2.3 The perception of the organization in crisis

The effects of crisis history and response posture will be measured by the following dependent variables: calculative trust, perceived intentions, attribution of crisis responsibility, reputation and actual information seeking behaviour. Because of the conceptual discussions regarding calculative trust, some additional assumed antecedents of calculative trust will also be measured.

2.3.1 Calculative trust

Calculative trust is used as first dependent variable in this study. It is important to study crisis communication from a trust perspective because, whether or not people trust an organization determines how they perceive the information given by the organization (Cvetkocich, et al., 2002; Fessenden-Raden, et al., 1987). This is due to the reason that trust plays an important role in how stakeholders receive and process information. When stakeholders distrust an organization and they receive negative information about the organization, the information will reinforce the distrust, and positive information will be discounted. When stakeholders trust an organization, positive information will reinforce that trust, and negative information may be discounted (Cvetkocich, et al., 2002). Fessenden-Raden, et al. (1987) adds that trust in the messenger matters, because stakeholders perceive messages and the messenger in the same way. When the messenger is distrusted, the message will also be distrusted, no matter how accurate the message may be.

This study uses calculated trust in particular, this has two main reasons. The first reason is that crisis history and calculated trust are both based on past behaviour. Past research has shown that perceptions of trustworthiness and stakeholders willingness to engage in trusting behaviour are largely history-dependent processes (Boon & Holmes, 1991).

According to Kramer (1999), trust thickens or thins as a function of interactions between two parties. The content of these interactional histories give information about the trustworthiness of the parties. If in past interactions the trust was not violated, the trust will thicken and vice versa. This theory suggested that a negative crisis history will thin the trust, whereas a positive crisis history thickens the trust.

The second reason has to do with the characteristics of calculative trust. Calculative trust is based on specific behaviours in the past, and the perceived abilities, such as competence and expertise (Earle, 2010; Ibrahim & Ribbers, 2009). A negative crisis history will likely violate the trust in the abilities of an organization, because earlier crises with a negative outcome show that the abilities, skills and expertise of the organization were not good enough. This violation of trust in the abilities and expertise of the organization will probably also contribute to a lower level of calculated trust in the organization.

In sum, the crisis history of an organization will probably influence the calculated trust in an organization because they are both based on past behaviour, and because a negative crisis history have shown that the organization lacks the expertise and abilities that were required to deal with a crisis. Because of the likelihood that the crisis history influences the calculated trust, it is expected that a negative crisis history will create a lower calculative trust as compared to a positive crisis history. It is also expected that the right posture, according to Coombs (2007), will create more calculative trust compared to the least fitting posture. This is because, in the case of the right posture, the organization will show shows that it is able and competent to choose the right response posture. An organization that shows that it is competent and able can create more calculated trust (Earle, 2010).

2.3.2 Other antecedents of calculative trust

Because of the illusive definition of calculative trust in the literature, other possible antecedents will also be tested. It is possible that calculative trust consist of more antecedents than only competence and abilities, as asserted by Earle (2010). This study will also test trustworthiness as antecedent of calculative trust. Trustworthiness is used because the decision to trust requires prior judgments of trustworthiness (Earle, 2010). Because it requires *prior* judgements, it could be, just like calculate trust, based on past behaviour. According to Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman (1995), trustworthiness requires judgments of competence, benevolence, and integrity. Besides the history-based overlap, the dimension competence in trustworthiness is strongly related to abilities (Earle, 2010), which calculative trust is concerned with.

Transparency will also be tested as antecedent. “Transparency is the deliberate attempt to make available all legally releasable information—whether positive or negative in nature—in a manner that is accurate, timely, balanced, and unequivocal, for the purpose of enhancing the reasoning ability of publics and holding organizations accountable for their actions, policies and practices” (Rawlins, 2008, p. 7). Transparency will be measured using the instrument developed by Rawlins (2006). Transparency is used because, when organizations become more transparent, they will also become more trusted (Rawlins, 2008). Therefore it is arguable that when stakeholders perceive the organization as more transparent, they also perceive the organization as more trustworthy. Transparency is part of the behaviour of an organization, and could therefore also be part of calculated trust.

2.3.3 Perceived intention

The second dependent variable will be the perceived intentions of the organization to “do good” to its stakeholders. According to Cook & Wall (1980), perceived intentions are strongly related to trust. This is because when stakeholders have no trust in the organization, they will also lose the trust in the intentions of the organization. Intentions are the motivational factors that influence behaviour. They indicate how hard an organization is willing to try, or how much of an effort they are planning to exert, in order to perform certain behaviour. The stronger the intention to engage in the behaviour, the more likely the organization will perform the behaviour (Azjen, 1991). The more positive intentions of an organization are expected, the more trustworthy it will be judged (Earle, 2010). It is expected that the crisis history of an organization will influence the perceived intentions of an organization ‘to do good’. A negative crisis history will have a negative influence on the perceived intentions, and vice versa.

2.3.4 Attribution of crisis responsibility

Attribution is the perceived reason for an event or the perception of causality (Weiner, 1985). Attribution theory (Weiner, 1985) is based on the assumption that people want to understand why a certain event happened. When an unpleasant event occurs, people will search for its cause and attribute the cause for the event to “an individual involved in the event (personal causality) or to some outside force (external causality)” (Coombs, 2004, p. 267). A crisis is a typical event that will trigger attributions, because they are sudden and negative (Coombs, 2004). When stakeholders attribute the cause of the crisis to personal causality, they believe that the organization could control the crisis, and they will assume that the organization was

responsible for the crisis. With SCCT, attribution theory is used to assess the level of responsibility of an organization to the crisis in order to recommend a crisis response strategy. If stakeholders attribute more of the cause to the organization, the threat for reputational damage increases. Organizations should use strategies that indicate a greater acceptance of responsibility for the crisis when the reputational threat increases (Coombs, 1995).

Because it is important to keep the reputational threat as minimal as possible, it is important for crisis managers to know how stakeholders react to response strategies and what the influence of crisis history and trust is on this attribution. Hence, attribution will be used as a dependent variable. SCCT holds that when the right response strategy is used, the attribution will be lower than when any other strategy is used (Coombs, 2007). It is also assumed that a negative crisis history will violate the calculative trust and that this lower level of trust may result in stakeholders attributing more responsibility to the organization. This is assumed because stakeholders may think that the organization is not able or competent enough to deal with the crisis, because they failed to do so in the past.

2.3.5 Reputation

The most frequently used definition of reputation is formulated by Fombrun: “Corporate reputations are beliefs about companies’ past and future actions that shape how stakeholders interact with them” as cited by (Ponzi, Fombrun, Gardber, 2011). Whatever the specific details, crises generally cause negative publicity, which can be a threat for the reputation of the organization (Dean, 2004). A good reputation is important for an organization, because it has a positive influence on organizational performance. A favourable reputation can lead to many benefits, such as lowering the firm costs, attracting applicants and investors, increasing profitability and creating competitive barriers (Walker, 2010). The extent to which a reputation is damaged by a crisis situation can depend on the selection of the right response strategy (Coombs, 2006). This emphasizes the importance of selecting the right strategy. SCCT is developed to protect the organizational reputation as good as possible by selecting the best crisis response strategy. It is expected that the evaluation of the reputation is higher when the best fitting posture is used (rebuilding) compared with the least fitting posture (denial).

It is also expected that the reputation will be affected by the crisis history. According to Mahon & Wartick (2003), reputation develops by interactions between and among stakeholders in specific contexts and issues. A negative crisis history can be an issue which leads to a lower evaluation of the reputation. This can be due to the reason that reputation

partly depends on trust (Ponzi, et al., 2010). Because of the likelihood that a negative crisis history will lower the trust, it is also likely that this violation of trust leads to a lower evaluation of reputation.

2.3.6 Actual information seeking behaviour

The last dependent variable is the actual information seeking behaviour of stakeholders. The information seeking behaviour of stakeholders will be used as a behavioural effect of the posture and the crisis history. It is important to know how the information seeking behaviour of stakeholders works. This is because better decisions can be made towards the communication to stakeholders in times of crisis when there is a better understanding of the information seeking behaviour of stakeholders (Bouwmeester, Franx, Holzmann, Gutteling, De Vries, 2012).

People react differently towards information when they are exposed to a threatening situation, like a crisis. Some will feel the need to search for more information, while others will avoid information. The information seeking theory by Atkin (1973) states that people search for some kind of certainty in their environment. When this certainty decreases, the need for information increases. An important aspect of uncertainty reduction is the trust that stakeholders have in the source of the information (Bouwmeester, et al., 2012). Trust in general is seen as an uncertainty reducer (e.g. Kramer, 1999). This leads to the expectation that a negative crisis history will generate more information seeking behaviour as compared with the positive crisis history. This is for the reason that the trust in the information source will be lower and the uncertainty higher.

When stakeholders are confronted with the best fitting strategy, it is expected that they show less information seeking behaviour compared with the least fitting strategy. This is because of the assumption that the best fitting strategy will provide a higher calculated trust because the organization shows that it is able and competent to choose the right response posture. Due to this higher calculated trust, stakeholder may feel less uncertain, and might demonstrate less information seeking behavior.

2.3.7 Hypotheses

Two opposite postures will be tested in order to see the best of effect of the posture manipulation. In order to test this difference, a fictive crisis will be used that will fall in the *intentional cluster*, which means that the *rebuilding posture* is the best and the *denial posture* the least fitting strategy according to SCCT (Coomb, 2007). In order to see the difference in

the crisis history manipulation a negative and a positive history will be created. Based on the previous theory and expectations on the manipulations and the dependent variables, the following hypotheses are proposed. The first hypotheses are concerned with the crisis history and the second hypotheses are concerned with the postures.

H1a: A positive crisis history will lead to a higher level of calculated trust in the organization than a negative crisis history.

H1b: A positive crisis history will lead to a higher level of perceived intentions of the organization 'to do good' to its stakeholders than a negative crisis history.

H1c: A positive crisis history will lead to a lower attribution of crisis responsibility to the organization than a negative crisis history.

H1d: A positive crisis history will lead to a higher evaluation of the reputation than a negative crisis history.

H1e: A positive crisis history will lead to less information seeking behaviour than a negative crisis history.

H2a The calculated trust in the organization is lower when the rebuilding posture is used compared to the denial posture.

H2b: The perceived intentions of the organization to do good to its stakeholders is lower when the rebuilding posture is used compared to the denial posture.

H2c: The attribution of crisis responsibility to the organization will be lower when the rebuilding posture is used compared to the denial posture.

H2d: The evaluation of the reputation is higher when the rebuilding posture is used compared to the denial posture.

H2e: The information seeking behaviour will be lower when the rebuilding posture is used compared to the denial posture.

3. METHOD

3.1 Design and procedure

The study is a 2 (crisis history: positive vs. negative) x 2 (response posture: best fit vs. least fit) between subjects experiment. Table 2 shows the design of this study. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. The respondents read a case and then answered a questionnaire. First they read information about the background of the organization (a positive crisis history or a negative), followed by information about the

current crisis (which is framed to be perceived as falling in the intentional cluster). Finally they read about the response of the organization to the crisis situation (rebuilding posture or denial posture).

The organization used in the case was a fictional telecom company, so all the respondents could relate to the organization. In the negative crisis history case, the respondents were presented with an organization that did not appear capable or able to deal with a crisis. The respondents were told that the organization, due to a misjudgement, had blocked their email accounts and that they missed a lot of important business emails. They were also told that the organization did not want to compensate their possible missed income, because they did not feel that the lockdown was the organization's fault. The respondents with the positive crisis history were told that the organization compensated them for their lost income and that the organization took precautions by improving the safety procedures of the network.

Respondents were also exposed to a rebuilding or denial posture. According to Coombs (2007), the best strategy in this case situation is the rebuilding posture and the least fitting the denial posture. Respondents were told that six months later they watched a television program where the telecom company had to recall all their modems. The organization was accused of using cheap parts for the modem, even knowing that they didn't function correctly, to maximize their profits. Respondents presented with the rebuilding posture read about an organization that took responsibility for the current crisis and apologised and compensated the respondents. Respondents presented with the denial posture read about an organization that attacked the accuser and denied their responsibility. The detailed cases can be found in Appendix A.

Table 2 Summary of the four conditions in the experiment

<u>Crisis history</u>	<u>Response posture</u>	
	Best fitting	Least fitting
Positive	Condition 1: Rebuilding posture positive crisis history	Condition 2: Denial posture positive crisis history
Negative	Condition 3: Rebuilding posture negative crisis history	Condition 4: Denial posture negative crisis history

3.2 Respondents

Responses were gathered in three different ways. Two organizations were approached (a secondary school and a network company) which ensured almost 50% of the respondents. The remaining respondents were recruited by a personal email invitation (approximated 30%) and social media and forums (approximated 20%). All the questionnaires were filled out online. A total of 141 respondents between 14 and 65 years of age participated in the study. The same percentage men and women participated.

3.3 Measures

When the respondents had read the case, they were asked to fill out the questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to measure the different dependent variables. The questionnaire was based on different and previously validated questionnaires from different researchers. The responses were measured on five-point Likert scales, which could range from strongly disagree to strongly agree (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The questionnaire can be found in Appendix B.

3.3.1 Calculative trust

The calculated trust in the organization was measured with the combined items of Allum (2007) and Xie & Peng (2009) on abilities and competence. The Cronbach's alpha of Xie, et al. (2009) was 0.91, the alpha of Allum's items is unknown. A higher score means more calculated trust in the organization.

3.3.2 Perceived organizational intentions 'to do good'

The perceived intentions of the organization 'to do good' to its stakeholders was measured by items measuring benevolence and integrity, designed by Xie & Peng (2009) which had a Cronbach's alpha of respectively 0.88 and 0.89. These two items were used, because they can indicate if the respondents feel that the company is willing to do good.

3.3.3 Attribution of crisis responsibility

The attribution to the organization was measured with the revised Attribution of crisis responsibility scale items, based on McAuley, Duncan, and Russel's (1992) scale by Brown, et al. (2011). This attribution scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81. The scale measured

the three dimensions of attribution: locus/personal control, stability, and external control. The higher the score, the more the respondents attribute the cause of the crisis to the organization.

3.3.4 Reputation

The reputation measurement was done with the RepTrak™ Pulse by Ponzi, Fombrun & Gardberg (2011), which is a simplified emotion-based measure of corporate reputation. They composed the instrument by reviewing prior operationalizations of corporate reputation measures, and validated the scale by involving approximating 12,000 participants. The scale was based on the four different dimensions of reputation: company feeling, admire and respect, company confidence and overall reputation. This reputation scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.96. The higher the score, the higher respondents evaluated the reputation.

3.3.5 Actual information seeking

The information seeking measurement was based on previous work on this subject by Kievik & Gutteling (2011). After respondents read the case, they were asked to choose between one of four Website links. Two of these links were relevant for the crisis presented in the case study, scoring 1, and the other two sites were irrelevant to the topic, scoring 0. According to Kievik et al. (2011), respondents who choose the web site links with the related topics showed actual information seeking behaviour, whereas respondents choosing one of the other website links did not.

3.3.6 Cronbach's alpha of the constructs in the present study

This study tested all constructs on their internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha approaching or greater than 0.7 indicated that the measures exhibited a satisfactory internal consistency (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1978). All the scales had a sufficient Cronbach's alpha (see Table 3 and 4).

Table 3 Cronbach's Alpha for all the dependent variables

Calculative Trust	0.84
Perceived	0.89
Attribution	0.76
Reputation	0.90

Table 4 Cronbach's Alpha for the additional antecedents of calculative trust

Integrity	0.77
Benevolence	0.87
Competence	0.82
Transparency	0.84

3.3.7 Other antecedents of calculative trust

Because of the illusive definition of calculative trust in the literature, other possible antecedents will also be tested. This study will also test *trustworthiness* as antecedent of calculative trust with the instruments of Mayer & Davis (1999). They measured trustworthiness with three dimensions: competence, benevolence and integrity and found an alpha for trustworthiness of 0.94. This study will also test *transparency* as antecedent of calculative trust. The questions are based on the transparency scale of Rawlins (2006) which yielded an alpha score of 0.91.

4. RESULTS

4.1 descriptive statistics

Respondents completed 145 questionnaires. The outliers were identified on the different constructs and removed from the data analysis. When a respondent missed one item in a construct, he or she was eliminated for the analysis on that construct. After elimination, 141 questionnaires were used in the analysis.

The conducted analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a main effect of crisis history on most of the constructs, in the predicted directions that is, calculated trust ($F(1,140) = 29.67, p < 0.01$); perceived intentions ($F(1,138) = 47.69, p < 0.01$); reputation ($F(1,140) = 24.13, p < 0.01$); and actual information seeking behaviour ($F(1,85) = 5.39, p = 0.02$). The analysis of variance did not find a main effect for attribution of crisis responsibility ($F(1,135) = 0.12, p = 0.73$). This indicates that the average scores were higher in the positive crisis history condition as compared to the negative crisis history condition. The actual information seeking behaviour was in the positive crisis history lower.

A main effect was found of the posture manipulation on calculated trust ($F(1,140) = 8.474, p < 0.01$), indicating that the calculated trust was higher, when the rebuilding posture was used compared with the denial posture. No main effects were found of posture on perceived intentions, reputation, attribution of crisis responsibility and actual information

seeking. Also, no significant correlation was found between the two postures ($r = 0.01$, ns.) (see table 6). As a result of these analyses it can be concluded that the manipulations in the four conditions were successful and independent. Table 5 presents the mean scores for the separate conditions for all dependent variables

Table 5 The four conditions in the experiment with corresponding mean scores for all dependent variables

	Calculative trust	Perceived intentions	Attribution of crisis responsibility	Reputation	Actual information seeking
Condition 1 N = 35 Rebuilding Positive history	3.26	2.98	2.84	2.61	0.52
Condition 2 N = 31 Rebuilding Negative history	2.61	2.06	2.90	2.13	0.74
Condition 3 N = 39 Denial Positive history	2.94	2.8	2.91	2.81	0.39
Condition 4 N = 36 Denial Negative history	2.18	1.83	2.91	1.81	0.67

Scale Actual information seeking 1 = relevant, 0 = irrelevant. Other variables: 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree

4.2 Effects on the comparison between negative and positive crisis history

Hypothesis 1a t/m 1e were tested using an ANOVA (analysis of variance). The effect of crisis history manipulations was measured on all constructs. The conducted analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a main effect for most of the constructs on crisis history, in the predicted directions (see previous paragraph). No significant interaction effects were found between the two independent variables on all constructs. These results support hypothesis 1a, 1b, 1d & 1e and rejects hypothesis 1c.

4.3 Effects on the comparison between the rebuilding and denial posture

Hypothesis 2a t/m 2d were also tested using an ANOVA. The conducted analysis of variance only revealed a main effect for calculative trust on response postures in the predicted direction (see paragraph 4.1). No main effects were found for posture on perceived intentions ($F(1,138) = 1.92$, $p = 0.17$), attribution of crisis responsibility ($F(1,135) = 0.14$, $p = 0.71$), reputation ($F(1,140) = 0.00$, $p = 0.99$) and actual information seeking postures ($F(1,85) = 0.901$, $p =$

0.35). Indicating that there is no difference between the rebuilding and the denial posture on these constructs. Furthermore, no significant interaction effects were found between the two independent variables on all constructs. These results support hypotheses 2a and rejects hypotheses 2b up to 2d.

4.4 Other antecedents of calculative trust

Because the definition of calculative trust is somewhat illusive in the literature, other possible antecedents were also tested. A correlation matrix was produced and a regression analysis was conducted to see how the independent variables (integrity, benevolence, competence, and transparency) are related to the dependent variable (calculated trust).

As can be seen in table 6, the variables competence, transparency and benevolence are all related to calculative trust. Also, they seem to strongly relate to other constructs with the exception of benevolence and integrity. However, the regression analysis (table 7) showed that benevolence did not significantly contribute to calculated trust. Competence had the most explanatory value 48% of the variance. Adding integrity, benevolence, and transparency, the proposed model explained 61% of the variance. More specifically, a stepwise regression was conducted and revealed that benevolence did not contribute any explanatory value. Thus, although benevolence has a strong correlation with the other constructs, it does not appear to be an important factor concerning calculated trust.

Table 6 Correlations between independent and dependent variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 History (manipulation)										
2 Postures (manipulation)	0.01									
3. Calculative trust	-0.42**	-0.22**								
4. Intentions	-0.51**	-0.11	0.70**							
5 Attribution	0.03	-0.03	-0.28**	-0.32**						
6. Reputation	-0.39**	0.00	0.67**	0.74**	-0.35**					
7. Actual information seeking	0.25*	-0.10	-0.10	-0.18	0.02	-0.10				
8. Integrity	-0.43**	-0.12	0.71**	0.95**	-0.30**	0.69**	-0.13			
9. Benevolence	-0.52**	-0.08	0.66**	0.96**	-0.31**	0.70**	-0.20	0.81**		
10. Competence	-0.35**	-0.07	0.70**	0.65**	-0.33**	0.67**	-0.11	0.64**	0.60**	
11. Transparency	-0.49**	-0.20*	0.66**	0.72**	0.20*	0.57**	-0.19	0.66**	0.71**	0.60**

*Correlation significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

**Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

For manipulations variables: crisis history: 1 = positive 2 = negative, postures: 1 = best fitting (rebuilding)
2 = least fitting (denial)

Table 7 Dependent variable: Calculative trust, predictors: transparency and three dimensions of trustworthiness

	β	p
Integrity	0.26	0.01
Benevolence	0.06	0.56
Competence	0.35	< 0.01
Transparency	0.24	< 0.01

R² = 0.61, F = 53.05

4.5 Summary of the results: significant effects found for dependent variables

Table 8 Summary of the results

Construct	Crisis history	Posture
Calculated trust	<0.01	<0.01
Perceived intention	<0.01	--
Attribution of crisis responsibility	--	--
Reputation	<0.01	--
Actual information seeking	0.02	--

5. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

5.1 Results on the comparison between negative and positive crisis history

The results show that respondents have significantly less calculated trust in an organization when a negative crisis history took place, as compared to a positive history. This could indicate that a negative crisis history destroys the trust in the abilities and competence of an organization, which calculated trust is based on.

The perceived intentions of the organization to do good to its stakeholders were also rated lower in the case of a negative crisis history. This can be due to the reason that there is some cohesion between calculative trust and intentions. Rousseau et al. (1998) suggested that when stakeholders no longer trust an organization, they no longer trust the intentions of this organization as well. The results in the correlation table (table 6) seem to underline this effect and seem to indicate a common variance between calculative trust and intentions.

The next construct that seems to be affected by a negative crisis history is the reputation of an organization. Results show that respondents evaluate the reputation as lower when a negative crisis history was used. This was also expected because a part of reputation consists of trust (Ponzi et al., 2011), and this trust was diminished by the negative crisis history.

The last construct affected by a negative crisis history is the actual information seeking behaviour. This is also in line with what was expected, namely that respondents with a lower level of trust feel more uncertainty and their need for information will increase.

Only the attribution construct was not sensitive to the difference between a positive and a negative crisis history. Respondents attributed the same amount of crisis responsibility to the organization when the crisis history was negative, compared with when the history was positive. This is contrary to what was expected. This result seems to indicate, that when

stakeholders attribute the blame of a crisis, they do not base their judgement on the past (crisis history), but only on the occurred crisis. Additional research is required to confirm these assumptions.

5.2 Results of the comparison between the rebuilding and denial posture

The present study hypothesized a significant difference between the two postures. Because the first posture, the rebuilding one, was according to Coombs (2007) the best posture possible, it was expected that this posture would perform much better than the least fitting one; the denial posture. Surprisingly enough, this effect was only found on calculative trust. The calculative trust was significantly lower when the denial posture was used, as compared to the rebuilding posture. Because the organization in the presented case was quite responsible for the crisis, Coombs (2007) argues that the rebuilding is the best posture. This requires, according to Coombs (2007), actions and words designed to benefit stakeholders and offset the negative effects of the crisis. It seems that the rebuilding posture provide an offset of negative effects in terms of protecting the calculative trust. It is possible that when an organization shows this posture, it shows that it is able and competent to choose the best strategy for the situation. This occurrence of competent behaviour may reinforce the calculate trust, which is based on competence and ability. These results seem to indicate that the rebuilding strategy is always the best choice when an organization wants to protect the calculative trust in the organization. Because no interaction effects were found it seems of no role whether or not the organization had a negative crisis history.

The other constructs (perceived intentions, attribution of crisis responsibility, reputation and actual information seeking behaviour) did not show any significant differences between the two postures. These results indicate that when a crisis hits an organization it does not matter, measured on these constructs, which posture is used. This is in contradiction with the expected outcomes, but seems to be in line with research done by Brown et al., (2011) and Lee (2007).

Brown, et. al. (2007) found no difference in their study among the different response strategies. This is also congruent with Lee's (2007) findings that there is no difference between the specific crisis response strategies when it comes to stakeholders' placement of responsibility or the perception of the severity of the crisis. Brown et al. explains this effect in terms of the previous relationship stakeholders have with an organization. Stakeholders' perception of this relationship seems to predict attribution of responsibility and not the used strategy. Their results give the impression that how stakeholders react to the organizational crisis is already secured by the previous constructed relation. This study also seems to find

evidence that not the response strategy determines the perception and appreciation of an organization in crisis, but that this evaluation is based on a prior experience, in this situation the crisis history.

5.3 Other antecedents of calculative trust

Because the definition of calculative trust is somewhat illusive in the literature, other possible antecedents were also tested. This study provides evidence for Earle's (2010) assumption that calculated trust is based on past behaviour, competence, and ability, but also shows that transparency and integrity are part of calculated trust. Although these results indicate that calculated trust is a more dimensional construct than Earle (2010) suggested, competence is still a stronger predictor of calculated trust than transparency and integrity. Besides the expected predictors of calculated trust, the correlation table also showed strong correlations between calculative trust and reputation, and calculative trust and perceived intentions. This may indicate that calculative trust is also based on the reputation and the perceived intentions. Additional research is needed on this type of trust, in order to formulate the full dimensionality of calculated trust.

5.4 Implications, limitations and further research

The results in this study provide valuable implications for future crisis communication efforts. This study contributes to the literature available on crisis response strategies and more particular on the effects of crisis history on the perception of organizations in times of crisis. Coombs (2004) already showed that a history of similar crises intensified the reputational threat of a current crisis. This study develops the understanding of crisis history a bit further by exploring the difference between a positive and a negative crisis history. The importance of this difference lies in stakeholder's perception of organizations in crisis. A positive history seems to provide a better perception of the organization in crisis, as compared to a negative crisis history. The practical relevance of these findings is the recognition for the need for organizations to be aware of their crisis history, because a positive history may provide many advantages. This study seems to support research that suggests that organization should pay at all-times attention to their reputation because it may provide advantages in times of crises. For instance, a favourable reputation may provide a second change in the event of a crisis (Dowling, 2002) or may serve as buffer in times of crisis (Jones, Jones & Little, 2000).

Another practical relevance is that this study seems to provide evidence that crisis history triumphs response posture. The difference between a positive or negative crisis history

seems of great importance, whereas the use between the two postures seems to make no difference. This study thus suggests that a positive history is more important than selecting specific postures. The best crisis strategy seems to be a favourable reputation.

However, the results of this study must be viewed in the light of some limitations that need to be addressed. First, only two of the four response postures by Coombs (2007) were tested, additional research with all the posture is needed to get more certainty about the usefulness of the postures. Second, this study uses a fictional organization to isolate the effect of crisis history and response postures. Organizations with real reputations were not examined, thereby eliminating the possible effects of existing reputations. Additional research should be done on real organizations with real reputations in order to fully understand the effects of response posture and crisis history.

Finally, additional research should also take into account that the survey with crisis scenario may oversimplify the nature of the organization crisis, just as the reputation. Also, only one type of crises is used in this study, therefore this study cannot be generalized to all kind of crises. Further research should address other types of crises to explore the effect toward the crisis history and crises response strategies.

5.5 Summary of discussion and conclusion

The results of this study seems to undermine the beginning statement of this study, namely that “whether an organization successfully manages a crisis, largely depends on what an organization does and says after the crisis hits”. Findings suggest that the crisis history of an organization is of more importance than choosing the right response posture. On a multitude of dependent variables, only calculative trust showed a difference between the two response postures. Any other measured construct in this study demonstrates that it does not matter which strategy an organization uses. Whether an organization has a positive or negative crisis history seems of more importance. A positive history seems to ensure, besides a higher calculative trust, a better perceived organizational intent to do good to its stakeholders, a better evaluation of reputation and lower information seeking behaviour. This study suggests that not the response strategy determines the perception of an organization in crisis, but that this evaluation is based on a prior experience, which is in this study the crisis history.

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APPENDIX A – CASE STORIES

Basic text = The standard text provides information about the background of the crisis and is the same for every case.

Positive crisis history = The underlined text reflects the positive crisis history of the organization. The organization reacts in these cases in a manner that shows that they were capable to deal with the crisis. They compensate the costumers and that they took precautions for the future.

Negative crisis history = The bold text reflects the negative crisis history of the organization. The organization reacts in these cases in a manner that wasn't satisfying for the costumers. There weren't informed about what was going on, they experienced negative outcomes of the crisis and they weren't compensated after the crisis.

Rebuilding poster = According to Coombs (2007) is *the rebuilding posture* the best reaction when the described crisis hits (A crisis in the preventable cluster). The organizational reaction is in line with *the rebuilding posture* because the organization apologised, say it feels bad that the crisis incident occurred, and compensated the victims for the crisis.

Denial posture = According to Coombs (2007) is *the denial posture* the least fitting posture when the described crisis happens. The organizational reaction is in line with the rebuilding posture because the organizations denies its own fault, blames the supplier for the crisis and even threatened to sue Rader.

Rebuilding posture – postive crisis history

You are a costumer of the telecom company FMR where you have an email account. Six months ago this account was blocked for two days. This happened because the telecom company though that the login information was stolen by hackers. Later this was found not to be the case. Not FMR, but a web shop where a lot of FMR costumers were shopping was hacked.

FMR compensated duped costumers. Although you didn't suffer greatly from the lock down of your account, you were also compensated. You didn't have to pay for your account for the coming month. Besides the compensation, FMR also improved the safety procedures of the network. A dozen of IT-specialist was hired and a new manager for cyber security has been appointed. You feel satisfied with the work method of FMR because you were informed on time and you didn't have to pay for your account for the next month.

Six months later you are watching the television program Rader where the spokesman of FMR is questioned about the modems of FMR. It is the type modem you use. The host of Rader explains that all the modems of FMR had to be recalled. According to the host, chooses FMR to work with cheap modem parts, even knowing that they didn't function correctly. They reason would be that FMR wanted to maximizes their profits.

The reaction of the spokesman is as follows: "We feel bad that this situation occurred. We want to apologise to all our customers. We'll like to ask all customers to send their modems, free of charge, to FMR. We will guarantee that, within 48 hours, they have a new and improved model in their house. These new models are also free of charge. Because we feel so

bad about the situation we want to compensate our costumers even more. All costumers, with this type of modem, won't have to pay for their subscriptions for the coming two months. We want to assure you that we will do everything to avoid this type of situations in the future.

Rebuilding posture - negative crisis history

You are a costumer of the telecom company FMR where you have an email account. Six months ago this account was blocked for two days. This happened because the telecom company though that the login information was stolen by hackers. Later this was found not to be the case. Not FMR, but a web shop where a lot of FMR costumers were shopping was hacked.

During the two days of lock down, you had no idea why your account wasn't available. You missed a lot of important business emails due to the lock down. You tried multiple times to contact the consumer service, but were constantly put on hold. Along with 1000 other consumers of FMR you tried to get compensation. You think that FMR didn't dealt correctly with the lockdown. They didn't kept you informed and you missed possible income. Unfortunately, all the claims were rejected. The reaction of FMR was that they aren't to blame and that they react correctly, because they couldn't know who was hacked at the moment of lockdown. Because FMR feels that it isn't their fault, the also feel that they don't have to compensate the consumers.

Six months later you are watching the television program Rader where the spokesman of FMR is questioned about the modems of FMR. It is the type modem you use. The host of Rader explains that all the modems of FMR had to be recalled. According to the host, chooses FMR to work with cheap modem parts, even knowing that they didn't function correctly. They reason would be that FMR wanted to maximizes their profits.

The reaction of the spokesman is as follows: "We feel bad that this situation occurred. We want to apologise to all our customers. We'll like to ask all customers to send their modems, free of charge, to FMR. We will guarantee that, within 48, they have a new and improved model in their house. These new models are also free of charge. Because we feel so bad about the situation we want to compensate our costumers even more. All costumers, with this type of modem, won't have to pay for their subscriptions for the coming two months. We want to assure you that we will do everything to avoid this type of situations in the future.

Denial posture - positive crisis history

You are a costumer of the telecom company FMR where you have an email account. Six months ago this account was blocked for two days. This happened because the telecom company though that the login information was stolen by hackers. Later this was found not to be the case. Not FMR, but a web shop where a lot of FMR costumers were shopping was hacked.

FMR compensated duped costumers. Although you didn't suffer greatly from the lock down of your account, you were also compensated. You didn't have to pay for your account for the coming month. Besides the compensation, FMR also improved the safety procedures of the network. A dozen of IT-specialist was hired and a new manager for cyber security has been

appointed. You feel satisfied with the work method of FMR because you were informed on time and you didn't have to pay for your account for the next month.

Six months later you are watching the television program Rader where the spokesman of FMR is questioned about the modems of FMR. It is the type modem you use. The host of Rader explains that all the modems of FMR had to be recalled. According to the host, chooses FMR to work with cheap modem parts, even knowing that they didn't function correctly. Their reason would be that FMR wanted to maximize their profits.

The reaction of the spokesman is as follows: "It is true that some of the modems are recalled because some of the parts worked in an unexpected way. But it isn't our fault. The supplier of the parts is to blame. It is unjustified that you say it's our fault. It is ridiculous that you make these allegations and we will take legal steps for these allegations." Meanwhile you still have the modem of FMR in your home.

Denial posture - negative crisis history

You are a customer of the telecom company FMR where you have an email account. Six months ago this account was blocked for two days. This happened because the telecom company thought that the login information was stolen by hackers. Later this was found not to be the case. Not FMR, but a web shop where a lot of FMR customers were shopping was hacked.

During the two days of lock down, you had no idea why your account wasn't available. You missed a lot of important business emails due to the lock down. You tried multiple times to contact the consumer service, but were constantly put on hold. Along with 1000 other consumers of FMR you tried to get compensation. You think that FMR didn't deal correctly with the lockdown. They didn't keep you informed and you missed possible income. Unfortunately, all the claims were rejected. The reaction of FMR was that they aren't to blame and that they react correctly, because they couldn't know who was hacked at the moment of lockdown. Because FMR feels that it isn't their fault, they also feel that they don't have to compensate the consumers.

Six months later you are watching the television program Rader where the spokesman of FMR is questioned about the modems of FMR. It is the type modem you use. The host of Rader explains that all the modems of FMR had to be recalled. According to the host, chooses FMR to work with cheap modem parts, even knowing that they didn't function correctly. Their reason would be that FMR wanted to maximize their profits.

The reaction of the spokesman is as follows: "It is true that some of the modems are recalled because some of the parts worked in an unexpected way. But it isn't our fault. The supplier of the parts is to blame. It is unjustified that you say it's our fault. It is ridiculous that you make these allegations and we will take legal steps for these allegations." Meanwhile you still have the modem of FMR in your home.

APPENDIX B – QUESTIONNAIRE

Calculative Trust

- The organization has the necessary expertise to make the right decisions
- The organization has a good understanding of the crisis
- The organization is able to deal with the current crisis
- Given the organization's response, I feel it is very capable of meeting customer needs
- Given the organization's response, I feel confident about its skills in solving such problems
- Given its response, I see no reason to doubt the company's competence
- Given the organization's response, I can rely on it to meet my expectations
- Given its response, I believe the organization is able to avoid repetition of such problems

(Other antecedents of calculative trust)

Trustworthiness divided into:

Integrity dimension items:

- This organization has a strong sense of justice
- I never have to worry about whether this organization will stick to his word
- This organization tries hard to be fair in dealings with others, and sound principles seem to guide this manager's behaviour

Benevolence dimension items:

- This organization really looks out for what is important for me
- This organization is very concerned about my welfare
- My needs and desires are very important to this manager, and this manager will go out of his way to help me

Competence dimension terms:

- This organization is very capable of performing their job
- I feel very confident about this organization's skills
- This organization has much knowledge about the work that they need to do, and this organization is known to be successful at the things they try to do

Transparency

- The organization wants to understand how its decisions affect people like me
- The organization provides information that is useful to people like me for making informed decisions
- The organization wants to be accountable to people like me for its actions
- The organization wants people like me to know what it is doing and why it is doing it

Attribution

- The crisis is the fault of the organization
- The crisis is a permanent issue for the organization
- The cause of the crisis is something inside the organization
- The crisis is something that will remain an issue over time
- The reason(s) for the crisis are under the control of people outside the organization
- The crisis is something over which the organization has no control
- External sources, other than the organization, caused the crisis
- The crisis is temporary

- The cause of the crisis is something outside the organization
- The crisis is something that will change over time
- FMR can successfully manage the crisis

Reputation

- FMR is an organization I have a good feeling about
- FMR is a company that I trust
- FMR is a company that I admire and respect
- FMR had a good overall reputation

Information seeking behaviour

www.arke.nl/lastminutes	(0)
www.autoweek.nl	(0)
www.FMRtelecom.nl/modem_recal	(1)
www.radar.nl/dossierFMR_modem	(1)