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Writing Assignment 4: BP

On April 20, 2012, BP's Deep Water Horizon oil rig exploded in the Gulf of Mexico, killing 11 people and dumping nearly 5 million barrels of oil into the Gulf, which was the largest crude oil spill in U.S. history. For 6 months this oil spill ensued until it was declared permanently sealed on September 19, 2010 (Bryant, 2011). An immediate crisis that BP faced other than the spill itself was their stock prices, which dropped from \$60.48 per share on April 2010, to \$27.02 by June 25, 2010 (Yahoo Finance). According to Coombs, crisis management is a system that companies use to prevent or lessen the effects of a crisis on an organization (2007). It is important for companies to have these crisis management systems because these crises can have consequential effects on the shareholder's, the organization, and even the environment. BP's "Gulf of Mexico Restoration" website uses these three strategies to try to repair its reputation: video to display a thriving tourism market to keep its stakeholders updated on the progression of their efforts, photographs of scientists testing in areas that appear environmentally rich to minimize the perceived damage done, and statements that describe the series of events that led up to and caused the crisis to assert a lack of control over the spill.

BP's "Committed to the Gulf" page features a video that depicts an exceptional tourism and trade market. This is important because it keeps stakeholders updated on the progression of recovery efforts (Coombs, 2007). BP uses a video with clips of appetizing seafood being brought out by a waitress, a family scuba diving with hundreds of fish swimming around them, and a speedboat cruising across the clear water. BP does this to try and persuade that, with a massive amount of help from their company, the economy and environment is as good as it has ever been in the Gulf region. Some information backing up these claims comes from Oceanconservancy.org, which states that 80% of the Clean Water Act fines paid by BP will be put towards the Gulf according to the RESTORE Act of 2012. BP does not have a choice in this

situation, but they make it seem as though they are happy to be doing it from the video. As a result of the widely publicized fines and penalties directed towards BP, they use the strategy of playing footage of the positive state that the Gulf's environment and economy is in due to the heroic efforts from BP.

BP uses a picture of scientists testing sediment in the wetlands to persuade the efforts that they are putting forth, as well as to minimize the perceived damage caused by the spill (Coombs, 2007). On the "Restoring the Environment" page, the picture has two scientists with equipment and results from the tests they were performing, in what appears to be rich wetlands with green grass and clean water. This strategy was needed because of BP's transparency during and after the spill; they were very inaccurate when releasing details about the spill and its effects during the crisis. The NRDA April 2012 report provides potential effects of the oil to areas such as the wetlands, they state that the damaged marsh may reduce biodiversity and productivity (NRDA, 2012). The NRDA also references the number of stranded cetacean (whales, dolphins, and porpoises) in 2011 to be 356, compared to the historical average of 74 (2012). They also tried to underplay the amount spilling into the Gulf each day, the estimates moved from 1,000 barrels per day, to between 11,000 and 25,000 per day, to 25,000 to 30,000 barrels per day. Due to BP's the drastic effect on the environment and their error in estimating the amount of oil spilling per day, BP used Coombs justification idea to try to minimize the damage caused by the crisis.

The BP's "Deepwater Horizon Accident and Response" page focuses on the series of events that led up to the explosion to persuade that it was an accident and assert a lack of control over the situation. On the website it says, "The accident involved a well integrity failure, followed by a loss of hydrostatic control of the well. This was followed by a failure to control the

flow from the well with the blowout preventer (BOP) equipment, which allowed the release and subsequent ignition of hydrocarbons. Ultimately, the BOP emergency functions failed to seal the well after the initial explosions” (BP.com). This strategy is used to convince the public that BP had no control over the incident and lessen the responsibility that they need to take by blaming the failure on the blowout preventer failure. BP resorted to trying to push the blame to Cameron International, the manufacturer of the blowout preventer that failed. Also, they tried to use this lack of control strategy because one of the managers on the rig misread the pressure data giving the workers the go ahead to use seawater instead of drilling fluid (Bates, 2012). Due to the failure of the blowout preventer as well as the human error on behalf of the manager, BP used Coombs’ strategy of persuading lack of control to minimize the responsibility that they need to accept.

BP uses three strategies on their website dedicated to the gulf which use a video of the thriving economy and environment around the Gulf area to recognize their cleanup efforts, pictures of their scientists testing in the wetlands to downplay the damage done, and by blaming the blowout preventer failure for the spill to assert their lack of control in the situation. Because of the scale of the spill and the amount of damage that was done, BP used video showing a thriving economy area to exemplify where their efforts have brought the Gulf area to as well as showing scientists testing in a rich wetlands to downplay the damage that they caused. Also, because of the amount of blame that BP received, they asserted a lack of control by blaming the company who manufactured their faulty equipment. BP’s response techniques have not been very effective because there is a lot of evidence of the environmental and economical effects that relate directly to the Deepwater spill, also there has been evidence of many different

errors that come back to BP that could have been avoided which causes BP to be mostly responsible.

Works Cited

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