

# Crisis Communication Strategy of the Ministry of Finance in the Case of Children of Tax Officials

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## Abstract

In an organization, a crisis is considered a negative event that has the potential to affect the organization or company. The Ministry of Finance as one of the state institutions is not free from problems, starting with the case of the beating of the son of a tax official (Rafael Alun Trisambodo). This research aims to reveal the crisis communication strategy carried out by the Ministry of Finance. This study uses a qualitative method. The data collection technique in this research uses literature studies and documentation studies via online media, namely *kompas.com* and *detik.com* with a time span of 20 February 2023 to 17 April 2023. The data analysis technique used by researchers is descriptive narrative. The results of this research show that the Ministry of Finance is experiencing a crisis, so several crisis communication strategies have been implemented, such as admitting mistakes, apologizing, and openness/transparency. The crisis communication strategy implemented by the Ministry of Finance, was able to reduce public anger. This research can be a reference, especially on crisis communication, namely by analyzing public relations responses.

Keywords: Crisis Communication, Response Strategy, Ministry of Finance, Situational Communication Crisis Theory

## Introduction Section

A communication crisis is something that cannot be avoided but can be identified and its negative impacts minimized. In dealing with crisis situations, the role of public relations as a managerial part of an institution is necessary. Apart from that, public relations also has a problem-solving role, namely as a facilitator in the process of solving problems and making the right decisions. When this crisis arises, it is necessary for public relations to develop appropriate response strategies, such as being responsive, providing accurate information, being active in communicating, regularly updating information, monitoring media developments, and correcting inaccuracies or wrong information as soon as possible (Savitri, 2019)

One of the state institutions experiencing a crisis is the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia. In 2023, the case of a tax official's child will be in the public and media spotlight. The trigger for this crisis began with the abuse case carried out by Mario Dandy Satriyo, the son of a tax official, Rafael Alun Trisambodo, against David Ozora, the son of a GP Ansor cadre. This made the public angry and criticized the perpetrator's actions. This anger and criticism made the public find out about Mario Dandi Satriyo's lifestyle and his family background.

The public's anger and criticism prompted the KPK to investigate Rafael Alun Trisambodo as the father of Mario Dandi Satriyo because he had a lifestyle that was too luxurious and made the public suspicious of where the family's wealth came from.

This case also received attention from the Minister of Religion and the Minister of Finance. Gus Yaquut Cholil Qoumas as Minister of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia is concerned about the disaster that befell David Ozora (GP Ansor

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cadre). The Minister of Finance regrets the abuse and apologizes to the victim's parents, and will monitor the ongoing legal process until it is completed.

This crisis occurred due to individual or individual errors, but this case has given rise to various speculations and questions that have the potential to harm the reputation and credibility of the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia.

We know that the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia has an important role in maintaining the country's economic and financial stability. One of the challenges faced is how to manage crisis communications, especially in cases involving high-ranking officials in the ministry.

In managing crisis communications, it is necessary for institutions to analyze the public atmosphere, describe all automatic feelings, tendencies, and moods of consumers, and predict and understand the public's emotions/responses to the social problems being faced (Tuhuteru & Iriani, 2018). Apart from that, there needs to be a harmonious understanding between the company and the public. This is as stated by Kriyantono (2017) "The process of understanding communication is an effort to create a common background between the communicator and the communicant." So that a company can face and manage a crisis well, and focus on public trust. This is supported by what was stated by Kriyantono and McKenna (2019) "A company should manage crisis responses by focusing on the public's perceptions or attributions since these perceptions affect the growth of crisis."

A crisis situation in an institution will result in increasing problems, becoming the public spotlight both through mass media coverage and information spread by word of mouth. This disrupts smooth operations, damages work systems, and work ethics, and disrupts the whole company (Ruslan, 2014). As a result, the problems experienced by the Ministry of Finance indicate a decline in the institution's reputation. Kriyantono (2014) revealed that reputation can be translated as a public assessment of an organization's ability to meet public expectations. A valuable asset that is subtle or physically invisible is a person's evaluative reputation (Coombs, 2007). Public perception about a company, institution, or organization is determined by the information they receive. News from mainstream media, interactions with friends, public discussions on online social networks, and information from the organization itself are examples of information sources used by the public. The majority of information gathered by the public regarding an organization's operations comes from the media, making the media a key element in reputation management (Coombs, 2007b).

In this case, the Ministry of Finance as a State Institution is responsible not only to the Indonesian people but also to the State. Because the Ministry of Finance is tied to a number of state policies, this is in line with what Kriyantono (2015b) said "Corporate governance and economic responsibility refer to policies and practices to manage the company and to fulfill the company's responsibility to stakeholders."

A crisis in a company, institution, institution, or organization can endanger the reputation of the institution itself, especially as the company, institution, institution, or organization has worked hard to build it. The impact or consequences of this crisis are not only detrimental to the company concerned but also to certain communities or other people who suffer. Even crises also have an impact on public trust in state institutions.

This is a challenge for an institution's public relations to implement a good crisis communication strategy so that the crisis does not last long and does not harm reputation. Looking at the phenomenon above, this research aims to reveal the crisis communication strategy of the Ministry of Finance in responding, communicating, and managing information during the crisis which can have a significant impact on the reputation and public trust in the institution. Therefore, it is important to understand and analyze the crisis communication strategy taken by the Ministry of Finance in the case of Rafael Alun Trisambodo.

However, research on the Ministry of Finance's crisis communication strategy, especially in the case of Rafael Alun Trisambodo, is still limited. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap and provide a better understanding of how crisis communication strategies were implemented in this case. Analysis of crisis communication strategies in this research uses SCCT (Situation Crisis Communication Theory). Coombs (2019) said that communication carried out by an institution in a crisis situation has two functions, namely to ensure public safety from losses resulting from the disaster and to maintain the public's reputation and trust in the institution.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Crisis Communication***

When a crisis occurs, communication is very important so that the public receives accurate information. Communication is very important to maintain good relations between public relations and the public. Crisis as a process was conveyed by G. Harrison (2005:11) in Kriyantono (2015) when researching communication strategies as a basis for implementing crisis management, that a crisis is a critical period related to an event that can have a negative impact on the organization. As a result, quick and appropriate decisions must be made to avoid disrupting the organization's overall operations. To avoid unexpected impacts, decision-making definitely requires bold steps in information processing. A crisis is a situation that has a negative impact on an organization and its stakeholders, as well as its products and reputation. Therefore, quick and correct decisions need to be made so as not to affect the overall operations of the organization. (Kriyantono, 2015)

To reduce uncertainty which will have a negative impact, it is necessary to convey information to the public. Organizations must communicate with various parties in a timely, effective, and accurate manner. Crisis communication is an important component of crisis response and problem-solving. According to G. Harrison (2005), public relations activities in providing messages related to crisis situations and opening open communication channels, are known as crisis communication (Kriyantono, 2015).

These four principles of crisis communication can be a guide for public relations in carrying out crisis communication for their company, institution, or organization. Crisis communication to stakeholders begins with a response to the crisis. An organization's initial response to a crisis must include at least five elements, namely speed, consistency, openness, sympathy, and information. The form of response that is carried out or how the response should be is shown in the aspect of being fast, consistent, and open (Coombs, 2007). While informative and sympathetic, this message conveys the original meaning of the crisis response message. Coombs confirms this as seen in the following quote:

“Crisis managers are encouraged to be quick, consistent, open, sympathetic, and informative. The quick, consistent, and open recommendations involve how a crisis response should be presented. Informative and sympathetic content represents the actual messages contained in the crisis response (Coombs, 2007).”

### ***Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)***

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) is a theory discovered by W.T. Coombs and Holladay S.J. This theory can be used to refer to how crises affect an organization's reputation. This theory is also useful for finding out how to maintain one's reputation as much as possible in the midst of a communication crisis (Coombs, 2007). SCCT is also used to understand how stakeholders respond to crisis strategies (crisis response) designed by public relations practitioners. In a crisis management team, public relations usually plays the role of a critical manager in the critical management team. Stakeholder responses ultimately influence the organization's reputation and allow stakeholders to decide whether they will engage with the organization in the future or not (Kriyantono, 2017).

This theory assumes that the public has specific attributions about the crisis, and these attributions determine an organization's reputation. Attribution to an organization is referred to as attribution. The resulting perception does not just appear, but there are various factors that influence the creation of organizational perceptions (Kriyantono, 2015). The main idea underlying this theory is reputation, and SCCT focuses on steps to save an organization's reputation due to a crisis. According to Coombs (2017), reputation is the public's assessment of an organization's excellence in achieving public expectations. Reputation is also known as a valuable asset that is subtle or not physically visible. Because an organization's reputation relies heavily on information that is widely shared and accepted by the public, its reputation can be described as evaluative.

SCCT formulates two categories in responding to crises, namely primary strategic response (primary crisis response strategies) and secondary response strategies (secondary crisis response strategies). Primary response strategies themselves are divided into three groups, including (1) denial, trying not to associate the organization with the crisis, (2) diminishing, trying to strengthen the view that the organization has little responsibility for the crisis, and (3) rebuilding (rebuild), trying to create positive information regarding the organization.

Table 1. SCCT Crisis Response Strategy

<b>Primary Crisis Response Strategy</b>	
<i>Deny</i>	<i>Attack the accuser</i> : Their PR is accusing the organization of wrongdoing
	<i>Denial</i> : PR refused to say there was a crisis
	<i>Scapegoating</i> : PR blames other parties outside the organization for the crisis
<i>Diminish</i>	Excuse: PR minimizes organizational responsibility by denying that the organization could not have intentionally caused the crisis or that the crisis occurred outside the organization's control
	Justification: PR minimizes the perception of damage caused by a crisis
Rebuild	Compensation: PR provides assistance to victims in the form of money or other gifts
	Apology: PR openly took responsibility for the crisis and apologized to the public
<b>Secondary Crisis Response Strategy</b>	
Bolstering	Reminder: PR informs stakeholders or the public about organizational achievements
	Ingratiation: PR praised and thanked stakeholders for their assistance during the crisis

Source: Coombs, 2017: 24

Coombs (2017) provides guidance on how the above strategies are applied according to the types of attribution of crisis responsibility, including:

1. Providing and adjusting information alone is sufficient when the attribution of crisis responsibility is small (victim cluster), there is no history of crisis, and the reputation of the initial relationship is neutral or positive.
2. Victimization strategies can be applied as a response to work violence, product defects, natural disasters, and rumors.
3. Diminish strategies should be applied to crises that result in little attribution of crisis responsibility (victim cluster), a history of crises, and/or the reputation of the initial relationship being neutral or positive.
4. Diminish strategies should be applied to crises that result in weak attributions of crisis responsibility (accidental cluster), with no history of crisis, and the reputation of the initial relationship is neutral or positive.
5. Rebuild strategies should be applied to crises that result in weak attributions of crisis responsibility (accidental clusters), a history of crises, and/or a negative initial relationship reputation.
6. Rebuild strategies should be applied to crises that produce strong attributions of crisis responsibility (intentional cluster), regardless of the history of the crisis and the reputation of the initial relationship.
7. If possible, a denial strategy should be applied to crises such as rumors and accusations.
8. Public relations must maintain consistency in using crisis response strategies. It should be noted that if PR combines a denial strategy with a diminish strategy or a rebuild strategy, the effectiveness of the entire crisis response will decrease.

## ***Research Methodology***

This research uses a qualitative approach method. In practice, the research process will involve efforts to explore the messages and meanings of a number of individuals, such as collecting specific data from news reports, analyzing data, and interpreting the meaning of data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data collection in this research was carried out by means of literature/documentation studies. The data collection process uses documentation which is carried out by collecting online news or documents, and the like. The documentation study uses reporting on the Rafael Alun Trisambodo case with a time span of 21 February 2023 to 14 March 2023 via the online media detik.com and kompas.com. In the qualitative data processing process, the author will use data triangulation techniques from Miles, Huberman, and Saldana. In the data processing process, Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) apply analytical activities which include data reduction, data presentation, and verification or conclusions. Triangulation is carried out to test the credibility of the data or trust in the data and achieve research objectives.

## ***Results and Discussion***

Based on the observations made, the researchers found several crisis communication strategies used by the Ministry of Finance in handling this case. In analyzing the findings, researchers used Situation Crisis Communication Theory. This theory states that communication carried out by agencies aims to maintain public safety and manage the agency's reputation.

In crises, organizations will use crisis communication strategies to respond to external parties and stakeholders. In crisis situations, organizations should use strategies so that the crisis does not escalate. The crisis phase of an organization can be seen in the media. If the news reports about an organization's crisis, it can be said that the organization has entered a chronic phase (Coombs, W. T. & Holladay, 2010). The Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia is also implementing a crisis communication strategy. The following are a number of strategies used by the Ministry of finance during a crisis.

### ***Primary Crisis Response Strategy Rebuild: Apology***

#### ***Apology Strategy***

Apology Strategy is used by the Ministry of Finance as a strategy for handling the crisis. This strategy is a strategy to apologize to the public and all the families of the victims for the case of the Tax Official's Son who abused David Ozora. The report on Kompas.com on 24 February 2023 was delivered directly by the Minister of Finance Sri Mulyani at a press conference. Sri Mulyani apologized to the entire family and to David's brother for this incident which was completely unjustified. The Ministry of Finance through the Minister of Finance Sri Mulyani uses the Apologia crisis response strategy. When handling a crisis, apologizing is the appropriate first step in handling a crisis. This is also in accordance with local Indonesian wisdom that an apology is a polite action and must be carried out. The Ministry of Finance held a press conference as a strategic action in crisis communication. The Ministry of Finance held the first press conference held by the Minister of Finance regarding the case of child tax officials, exactly 4 days after the abuse incident. The press conference was held as an action for crisis communication. The aim is to keep information up to date so that there is no shortage of information and to counter negative news or publicity in the media (Kriyantono, 2015).

### ***Primary Crisis Response Strategy: Excuse and Justification***

The Ministry of Finance also uses a Diminish Strategy (Reasoned). Diminish Strategy is a strategy to reduce the effects of a crisis by proving that the crisis that is occurring is not as bad as the public thinks so that the organization can control the response that occurs.

#### ***Execute Strategy***

The diminish strategy implemented by the Ministry of Finance in dealing with the crisis in the case of children of tax officials is an excuse strategy. It is a strategy that aims to minimize organizational responsibility by denying intent to harm and claiming an inability to control the events that triggered the crisis.

As done by the Minister of Finance in the detik.com report on February 22, 2023, Sri Mulyani said that her party continues to take consistent steps to maintain the integrity of all levels of the Ministry of Finance by implementing disciplinary action for those who commit corruption and integrity violations.

Meanwhile, in detik.com's report on February 23, 2023, the Director General of Taxes at the Ministry of Finance, Suryo Utomo, gave a statement criticizing the luxurious lifestyle and display of wealth carried out by his staff and family. This is not in accordance with the organization's values and can erode public trust in government institutions, especially the DJP.

On February 27 in the Kompas.com report, Deputy Minister of Finance Suahasil Nazara provided information regarding this case that the Ministry of Finance rejected Rafael's resignation letter because it was being investigated by the Inspectorate General (Inspectorate General) of the Ministry of Finance.

In the Kompas.com report, Sri Mulyani revealed that not all financial transaction data of Ministry of Finance employees was known to her. Because the Ministry of Finance does not have direct access to view transaction data, as PPATK can do.

### *Justification Strategy*

Justification strategies are usually carried out by showing evidence or data that supports the statement. Coombs and Hollay (2010) Strategies used to reduce perceptions about the impact of the crisis. Justifications Strategy carried out by the Ministry of Finance on February 24, 2023. Through the Deputy Minister of Finance, Suahasil provided information that the removal of Rafael Alun Trisambodo could make the audit process easier. This was also strengthened by the request of the Minister of Finance, Sri Mulyani, to request that Rafael Alun Trisambodo be removed from his position.

From the statements made by the Deputy Minister and Minister of Finance, it can be seen that the Ministry of Finance is trying to reduce the effects of the crisis that is occurring. From the statement made by the Ministry of Finance, they removed Rafael Alun Trisambodo, the father of abuse suspect Mario Dandy Satriyo, from his position at the Directorate General of Taxes (DJP) of the Ministry of Finance. Sri Mulyani gave the reason for the removal as the Inspectorate General of the Ministry of Finance's examination of Rafael Alun Trisambodo's assets. that the Ministry of Finance is trying to reduce the effects of the crisis that is occurring by disclosing this statement.

### *Secondary Crisis Response Strategy: Bolstering and Victimization*

The Ministry of Finance also uses the Bolstering Strategy. Coombs and Holladay (2010) explain the bolstering strategy to strengthen cooperation with the public to protect the organization's reputation. Bolstering is a strategy for dealing with crises related to organizations and stakeholders. Kriyantono (2017) explains that bolstering is a strategy used to strengthen reputation by establishing relationships with the public. In bolstering, the strategies used are Reminder and Victim.

#### *Reminder*

On the official social media account of the Ministry of Finance @Ministry of Finance posted the latest conditions of OUR APBN. The post consists of nine photos and graphs of the Ministry of Finance's achievements up to January 31, 2023. The Ministry of Finance highlights its achievements amidst a crisis of confidence in the institutions that manage the country's finances.

#### *Victim age*

For the secondary crisis response strategy to strengthen victim types, the Ministry of Finance used this strategy during a press conference delivered directly by Sri Mulyani. The Minister of Finance's statement states that this issue is a personal matter, but this has tarnished the good name of the Ministry of Finance (Ministry of Finance) because Mario Dandy's parents are one of the still active officials at the Directorate General of Taxes at the Ministry of Finance. This statement makes it seem as if the Ministry of Finance has become a victim because of the behavior of the tax official's

son. This behavior injures the entire ranks of the Ministry of Finance and tarnishes the good name, reputation, and public trust in this State institution.

### **Conclusion**

The crisis communication strategy carried out by the Ministry of Finance is very important to improve the public's reputation and trust in the agency. Several crisis communication strategies that have been implemented by the Ministry of Finance include diminish including execution and justification; rebuilding including apology; Bolstering including reminders and victimage. From the strategy that has been implemented, the Ministry of Finance is able to slowly improve its reputation.

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