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**FROM SITUATIONAL CRISIS RESPONSE TO STAKEHOLDER
PRIORITIZATION; INTEGRATING SCCT WITH STAKEHOLDER
SALIENCE IN DYNAMIC CRISIS ENVIRONMENTS**

Situational Crisis Communication and Stakeholder Prioritization

The Situational Crisis Communication Theory is one of the most influential approaches in recent crisis communication research. It provides an evidence-based framework that prepares companies for crises, enabling them to limit reputational damage and mitigate negative stakeholder reaction [1; 3]. The core of the model lies in the assumption that stakeholders not only perceive crises but also attribute causes to them. This attribution is influenced by responsibility, which determines the extent to which the company's reputation suffers in light of stakeholder allegations. This triggers emotions and determines whether stakeholders remain connected to the company or turn away from it [2]. In practical application, this means that crisis communication cannot be carried out arbitrarily but must be tailored to the perceived crisis situation [4].

In this context, the Stakeholder Salience Model is relevant. Here, one must ask whether stakeholders should be treated differently in crisis situations. The model examines which stakeholders should be prioritized from a management perspective and why. The answer is based on three dimensions, which will be explained in their foundational pillars. This results in three attributions defined by the stakeholders' characteristics of power, urgency, and legitimacy. These categories help determine which stakeholder groups are most relevant in a crisis, which demands must be addressed immediately, and which groups the communication strategy should prioritize. This Abstract therefore develops within the framework of a thesis that, while the SCCT explains how companies should respond appropriately, the Stakeholder Salience Model specifies to whom these responses must be prioritized, graded, and tailored to specific channels.

Basic Assumptions of SCCT: Crisis, Responsibility, and Reputation

Coombs defines crises in the context of organizational and corporate operations as disruptions and abnormal behavior in business processes. These disrupt and

threaten the company's reputational capital [2]. The company's reputation is particularly important in this context, as it is not merely a communicative image but a socially ascribed asset based on past and future stakeholder expectations [2]. Consequently, a stakeholder-oriented pre-crisis reputation serves as a crisis buffer, allowing the company, with its previously built-up reputation capital, to absorb better crisis damage than companies with a weak or damaged reputation [2].

The theoretical roots of SCCT lie in attribution theory, people seek causes and culprits, especially in the face of negative and unexpected events. These circumstances give rise to causes; these, in turn, lead to attributions and assignments of responsibility, as well as emotional reactions such as anger or sympathy [2].

If responsibility is attributed to a company, this damages the company's reputation. Stakeholders react with anger. This manifests itself in negative behaviors, such as customer defection, boycotts, or negative reviews [2].

The crisis is therefore not objectively given, but is largely structured by stakeholders' processes of perception and interpretation. The SCCT's situational diagnosis builds on this line of reasoning. Coombs argues that three factors shape the threat to reputation. First is the initial crisis responsibility, second is the crisis history, and third is the prior relationship reputation with stakeholders. A company that has already experienced similar crises or has treated stakeholders poorly in the past is more likely to be perceived as problematic. Crisis, history, and relationship quality thus reinforce one another.

Stakeholder Salience: Who Counts, When, and Why?

The Stakeholder Salience Model is used to identify and prioritize stakeholder groups. The model clarifies the extent to which a stakeholder group is associated with the company and the degree to which that group can influence the company. The model is based on three key attributes: power, legitimacy, and urgency. These attributes form the basis for a profound and comprehensive typology of stakeholders and their relationships. This makes it possible to divide stakeholders into different classes in order to represent them in terms of their influence on the company and for management [5; 9]. The attributes serve as the basis for categorizing stakeholders and analyzing their significance for corporate governance [6; 7].

Power describes the ability of a stakeholder group to assert its interests against the interests of the company as well as those of other stakeholders. In this context,

power is understood as the ability to change the company's behavior and its management. Mitchell draws on various theoretical approaches to explain power and the power relationship between stakeholders and companies. Thus, power may not be fully developed at the outset of a stakeholder relationship. Rather, this dynamic evolves over time. Power can be exercised through various factors such as resources, information, or networks. Consequently, those in power can assert their claims and interests [5; 10]. In this context, Mitchell also notes the challenges that can arise when stakeholders with varying levels of power operate within a company. Stakeholders who wield significant power are often recognized as legitimate stakeholders.

Legitimacy is viewed as another central attribute. While power and legitimacy are interlinked, they represent different dimensions in the salience model. While power is portrayed as an instrument for influencing the behavior of the company and its managers, legitimacy is characterized by social acceptance and moral, ethical, and legal justification, as well as superiority over the company [5, 11]. This distinction is significant because a stakeholder may have legitimate claims but no power vis-à-vis the company. Furthermore, legitimate groups distinguish themselves from less legitimate groups. In this context, legitimacy is also situated within a social context. This relies on norms, social values, and customs. The application of the concept of legitimacy is multifaceted. It varies depending on its manifestation and external circumstances. Additionally, it depends on external influences on the company.

Legitimacy is thus regarded as a socially constructed characteristic. The perception of legitimacy is therefore subjective and arises from social, cultural, and legal norms. Consequently, a claim is considered legitimate if it is perceived as desirable and accepted within a social group and in a corresponding context. Social construction sheds light on the dynamic structure of the perception of legitimacy. Thus, stakeholders may make claims that, however, are not viewed as legitimate by society and are not recognized as such [5; 11].

The third attribute is characterized by the urgency of the stakeholder's claim vis-à-vis the company. Here, Mitchell distinguishes between a temporal factor and a central factor important to stakeholders. Thus, the attribute of urgency is understood as a measure that requires immediate attention from management. The dimension of time sensitivity focuses on how acceptable it is for management to delay responding to a specific claim. The higher the time sensitivity, the more urgent the stakeholder's

claim is [5; 11]. An example in this context is an environmental problem at a chemical company, where swift action is necessary to minimize damage or meet compliance requirements.

The connection between the two approaches: SCCT requires stakeholder salience

The connection between SCCT and stakeholder salience is theoretically obvious and practically relevant. SCCT provides rules for selecting appropriate response strategies depending on responsibility and reputational threat. However, it remains more abstract when it comes to prioritizing different stakeholder groups. The salience model precisely fills this gap. It explains why not all stakeholders can be treated equally in the same crisis and why some groups must be addressed earlier, more intensively, and with more specific communications than others.

One example is the “paracrisis” described by Coombs and Holladay [12]. The authors define this as a publicly visible crisis threat in which a company is accused of irresponsible and unethical behavior, even though no full-blown crisis is present [12]. Paracrisises arise when social media draws attention to grievances and harm. In their assessment, Coombs and Holladay explicitly draw on the stakeholder attributes of power, legitimacy, and urgency [12; 13].

Here, it becomes apparent that stakeholder salience itself alters the crisis assessment. A company may formally be in a moderate crisis, but communicatively face highly salient stakeholders whose legitimate and urgent demands require a significantly more accommodating response. Conversely, an objectively serious situation can be limited in its communicative impact if affected stakeholders have little power, their demands lack legitimacy, or they do not trigger widespread mobilization.

Implications and Conclusion

The synthesis of SCCT and stakeholder salience yields several practical implications for research. First, it should be examined whether companies engage in stakeholder mapping as an ongoing process rather than only initiating it in the event of a crisis. This includes environmental monitoring, stakeholder analysis, assessment of their power resources, and monitoring of digital arenas [9; 12]. Second, it must be examined whether the choice of crisis strategy is linked to the level of responsibility and the salience of the affected groups. High levels of responsibility among highly

salient stakeholders clearly call for rebuild-oriented responses that involve visibly taking responsibility, making corrections, and demonstrating empathy [2]. Third, the digital communication landscape demands a differentiated channel strategy. Organizations must recognize that the same message can have different effects across sub-arenas. Crisis communication is therefore not only content management but also arena management [12]. Fourth, research on moral outrage shows that crisis communication must become more emotionally and normatively sensitive. Where stakeholders perceive not only harm but also moral injury, technical explanations or mere damage control are regularly insufficient [14].

In practical terms, this insight can be summarized particularly well: The SCCT answers the question of the situation-appropriate response, the stakeholder salience model answers the question of the priority of the addressees, and recent research on paracrisis, scansis, and moral outrage shows why this connection has become indispensable under digital and morally charged conditions. In crises, companies communicate not only under time pressure but also amid competing publics, moral judgments, and dynamically increasing stakeholder salience.

It can be concluded that the SCCT provides a robust framework for analyzing crisis responsibility, reputational threats, and strategic response choices. However, it only realizes its full practical potential when linked to systematic stakeholder prioritization. The stakeholder salience model by Mitchell et al. and its further developments reveal which stakeholder groups demand particular attention in crises and how these priorities can shift. Paracrises, digital sub-arenas, and morally charged crisis forms such as Scansis and moral outrage-inducing crises demonstrate that stakeholder salience is now more dynamic, public, and emotional than in traditional organizational environments. For companies, this means that successful crisis communication is always simultaneously a diagnosis of the situation, stakeholder prioritization, and morally sensitive meaning-making.

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**АНТИКРИЗОВИЙ МЕНЕДЖМЕНТ ЯК СТРАТЕГІЧНИЙ ІНСТРУМЕНТ
ЗАБЕЗПЕЧЕННЯ РОЗВИТКУ МІЖНАРОДНОЇ ДІЯЛЬНОСТІ
ПІДПРИЄМСТВА**

Сучасні умови функціонування підприємств характеризуються високим рівнем нестабільності економічного середовища, що зумовлено процесами глобалізації, геополітичними конфліктами та фінансовими кризами. Підприємства,