Case Study 2: Silence in the Turmoil of Crisis

Name

Affiliation

Date

Case Study 2: Silence in the Turmoil of Crisis

“Silence in the Turmoil of Crisis” is the case study about the crisis of the peanut corporation of the United States of America. The peanut products of the peanut corporation of America, known as PCA were widely distributed and consumed across the states. However, the breakout of the salmonella and unethical handling of the issue by the company increased its severity and lead to the outrage of the public. The unethical manufacturing practices, as well as the mismanagement of the crisis, lead to the downfall of PCA which highlights the lapses of organizational communication.

Lapses in PCA’s manufacturing practices lead to a large scale, organizational communication failure during the crisis to a great extent. The primary role was played by the unsanitary conditions of the production unit. The products of the corporation were contaminated with salmonella; however, the corporation neglected it. When they faced the charges of contaminated products from any buyer, they used to get their products tested and retested until they got the negative test results. In addition to it, they did not openly communicate the issue of unsanitary and unhygienic production with the consumers, which became the reason of a number of deaths, which depicts organizational communication failure during the crisis (May 2012).

The large organizations such as PCA should never take the silent approach but a vocal approach. The organization took the silent approach when it found that its products were contaminated and not safe for use. They used to get their products tested by the laboratories, and upon getting the positive results, instead of accepting the mistake, they used to get their products tested by some other laboratory to get the negative test. The large organizations should take the vocal approach to deal such matters, because it is a matter of life and death of the consumers, and using the silent approach means that the corporation is deliberately killing the population to earn money. The organization would stay silent to earn the profit and voice the crisis, in order to earn the trust of the consumers (Gherardi, 2019).

The proxy communications were not justified in stepping forward to communication during the crisis because they were not quite aware of the scenario. They did not have a complete know-how of the issue and were just responding on their own. They did not share the complete information with media and the consumers and were just trying to justify the use of the products, instead of acknowledging the wrongdoing of PCA.

All of the organizations and agencies described in the case were not equally justified in assuming the role of proxy communicator because of the fact that only PCA was responsible for the crisis. However, all the other peanut production companies had to deal with the consequences. In addition to it, the PCA depicted the lack of organizational communication by not voicing the scenario and letting the proxy communicators make the statements on their own to justify the scenario. They were not aware of the severity of matter and the role of PCA in causing or supporting the crisis, in order to accept the responsibility for the salmonella breakout (Gherardi, 2019).

The potential complications for proxy communicators in crises situation include the fact that they are held liable for the mistakes and mishandling of matter by one organization. In addition to it, they have to face the loss in terms of money as well as the trust of their consumers. Moreover, they are unable to play an active role in the resolution of the mater, because they are not briefed by the corporation which caused the crises, about its role in supporting the issue. In the case of PCA, it was aware of the contaminated production due to the unsanitary conditions, however, instead of accepting the mistake, it used the silent approach, and the proxy communicators had to resolve the issue on their own.

If PCA had decided to communicate during the crisis, the messages of communication that would have been most important to stakeholders were that the corporation was manufacturing the products without ensuring the safety measures. They would have known about the loss that their business would face and would have stressed to ensure hygienic production. On the other hand, the message that would have been most helpful for consumers was that the corporation did not ensure the sanitary and hygienic conditions of the production, due to which the products were contaminated. The corporation should have shared the message with the consumers that they would waste the contaminated production, bear the loss which was caused due to their mistake and ensure the sanitary and hygienic production, in order to ensure the health of the consumers (May, 2012).

Being the head of a major organization, I would have handled the situation from top to the bottom of the organization in a different manner. At the level of employees, I would have communicated the whole scenario to them as well as assessed the role of the employees in casing the situation of unhygienic production and gave them warnings or treat according to the employment laws. In the case of media and consumer, I would have accepted the faulty production of the corporation and sealed all the stock in the market. I would have apologized to the public for the inconvenience and I would have ensured them that the corporation would ensure the hygienic condition in future, while getting the products tested by FDA, before finally releasing the stock in market (Barnes, Benhabib, Benz, Boesky, Burke, Burke, & Carter, 2012).

The crisis of Peanut Corporation of America is one of the biggest crisis in the history of the peanut industry of America, which not only contributed to the death rate of the consumers but also used the silent approach to save profit. The large corporations like PCA need to use the vocal approach to accept their mistake and acknowledge the trust of their consumers by not deceiving them.

References

Barnes, P., Benhabib, S., Benz, C., Boesky, I., Burke, B., Burke, B., ... & Carter, J. (2012). Case Studies in Organizational Communication 332. *Case Studies in Organizational Communication: Ethical Perspectives and Practices*, *23*, 331.

Gherardi, S. (2019). Organizational communication in practice: Does it really work? *Management Communication Quarterly*, *33*(1), 112-116.

May, S. (Ed.). (2012). *Case studies in organizational communication: Ethical perspectives and practices*. Sage Publications.