Jurnal Manajemen Komunikasi, Volume 9, No. 2, April 2025, page 194-214
https://doi.org/10.24198/jmk.v9i2.55252

PT Pertamina's crisis communication strategy on the oil spill incident in Karawang

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ABSTRACT

The oil spill on Karawang Beach has created an urgent need for an effective crisis communication strategy from PT Pertamina. This study describes Pertamina's approach to handling the oil spill incident, emphasizing rapid response, transparency, and open communication with various stakeholders. Through an in-depth analysis of the communication strategies implemented, this research aims to explain the specific steps taken by Pertamina to mitigate the impact of the oil spill on Karawang Beach, restore public trust in Pertamina, and enhance the company's image. The findings of this study provide valuable insights for other companies facing similar situations and serve as a foundation for improving sustainability in crisis management and corporate communication. This incident had a national impact as the oil spread across three provinces: West Java, DKI Jakarta, and Banten. The research method used is descriptive qualitative with a case study approach, employing in-depth interviews and field observations. The results of this study show that Pertamina has already established standards for handling crisis communication, particularly concerning the government, mass media, and affected communities. Pertamina's communication team divided tasks in managing information to prevent misinformation from spreading in the media. Additionally, Pertamina recognized that managing stakeholder communication during this incident required continuous adjustments to its communication strategy methods.

Keywords: Crisis communication strategy; case study research; oil spill; coastal ecosystem pollution; community compensation

Strategi komunikasi krisis PT Pertamina atas peristiwa tumpahan minyak di Karawang

ABSTRAK

***Tumpahan** minyak di Pantai Karawang menciptakan kebutuhan mendesak akan strategi komunikasi krisis yang efektif dari PT Pertamina. Penelitian ini menggambarkan pendekatan Pertamina dalam menangani insiden tumpahan minyak tersebut, dengan menekankan respons cepat, transparansi, dan komunikasi terbuka dengan berbagai pemangku kepentingan. Melalui analisis mendalam terhadap strategi komunikasi yang diterapkan, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan langkah-langkah spesifik yang dilakukan oleh Pertamina untuk mengatasi dampak insiden tumpahan minyak di pantai Karawang, memulihkan kepercayaan publik terhadap Pertamina, dan meningkatkan citra perusahaan. Temuan penelitian ini memberikan wawasan penting bagi perusahaan lain dalam menghadapi situasi serupa, serta menjadi dasar untuk meningkatkan keberlanjutan dalam manajemen krisis dan komunikasi perusahaan. Insiden ini berdampak secara nasional karena paparan minyak meluas ke tiga provinsi, yaitu Jawa Barat, DKI Jakarta, dan Banten. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah, kualitatif deskriptif dengan pendekatan studi kasus melalui wawancara mendalam dan observasi lapangan. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukan bahwa, Pertamina telah memiliki standar dalam menangani krisis komunikasi, khususnya terhadap pemerintah, media massa, dan masyarakat terdampak. Tim komunikasi Pertamina membagi tugas dalam pengelolaan informasi, agar tidak berkembang menjadi informasi liar di media massa. Selain itu, Pertamina menyadari bahwa menangani komunikasi dengan pemangku kepentingan selama insiden ini bukanlah hal yang mudah, sehingga penyesuaian terhadap metode strategi komunikasi terus dilakukan.*

***Kata-kata kunci**: Strategi komunikasi krisis; penelitian studi kasus; tumpahan minyak; pencemaran ekosistem pesisir; kompensasi masyarakat*

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Submitted: June 2024, **Revised:** July 2024, **Accepted:** July 2024, **Published:** April 2025
ISSN: 2548-3242 (printed), ISSN: 2549-0079 (online). Website: http://jurnal.unpad.ac.id/manajemen-komunikasi
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INTRODUCTION

The oil spill incident that polluted the 60-km coastline of Karawang, West Java, was heartbreaking for the marine ecosystem and people's social life in the three affected provinces: West Java, DKI Jakarta, and Banten. In addition to contaminating the coastal area, this incident adversely affected approximately 1,200 individuals, directly and indirectly, through disruptions to fishing activities, contamination of household water supplies, and pollution of fish and shrimp pond ecosystems. Meanwhile, this wild oil and gas spill was Indonesia's first and largest oil and gas accident at sea.

According to *A Meaningful Notes From YY*, an internal publication by Pertamina Hulu Energi (PHE), the oil spill incident began on July 12, 2019, with the emergence of gas bubbles from the YYA-1 well in the Offshore North West Java (ONWJ) Block, operated by PT Pertamina ONWJ, a subsidiary of PHE, which in turn is part of PT Pertamina (Persero). Gas emissions were also detected on the Ensco 67 rig. Initial containment efforts between July 12 and 14 were unsuccessful, leading to the evacuation of personnel and the declaration of an emergency to relevant authorities on July 15. An oil sheen appeared on July 16, followed by a visible spill on July 17. Satellite imagery later confirmed oil contamination along 60 kilometers of the Karawang coast. On July 18, the spill reached Sedari Beach, 12 km from the platform. Pertamina held a press conference on July 17 to inform the public, detailing emergency responses including activation of an Incident Management Team, platform evacuation, public communication, area isolation, and deployment of monitoring vessels. The incident drew significant public and media attention due to its environmental impact and proximity to Jakarta. The chronology of the oil spill incident can be seen in Table 1.

Not wanting the issue to continue to spread and become a wild card in the community, Pertamina then formed and convinced the public that the oil spill could be handled and closed the oil and gas pipeline leak by creating a team that would be tasked with handling this incident. Some of the tasks of the team formed by Pertamina are: (a) Team 1: External Impact Management. Tasked with addressing external impacts in this case on affected area communities and facilitating the provision of compensation to communities, (b) Team 2: *Oil Spill Response*. Tasked with *recovering* the oil spill from Well YYA-1 offshore and onshore by deploying oil boom, oil absorbent, and others. This team also coordinates with KLHK to submit an environmental recovery plan. (c) Team 3: *Relief well*. Drilling a *relief well* to control the source of the blowout and shut down Well YYA-1,

Table 1 Chronology of the oil spill incident

Time	Chronology of Events
July 12, 2019	It began with the emergence of a gas bubble in the YYA-1 Well, Offshore North West Java (ONWJ) Block, managed by PT Pertamina ONWJ. PHE ONWJ is a subsidiary of Pertamina Hulu Energi (PHE). Meanwhile, PHE is a subsidiary of PT Pertamina (Persero). Then, there was also a gas bubble in the Ensco 67 rig located in the ONWJ Block offshore operation area. The YYA-1 well is the YYA-4 exploration well drilled in 2011. Efforts to close the gas bubble were carried out on July 12-14, 2019. but to no avail. Then, on July 14, 2019, workers on the rig were evacuated to safety.
July 15, 2019	Pertamina declared a state of emergency to the government authorities of the Directorate General of Oil and Gas of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources and the Special Task Force for Upstream Oil and Gas Business Activities (SKK). Oil and gas).
July 16, 2019	An oil sheen appeared on the sea surface around the platform, while gas bubbles continued.
July 17, 2019	Oil spills can be seen around the platform. As the spill spread to various locations, Pertamina officially conveyed the incident to the public by holding the first press conference on the Wells incident. YYA-1, at PHE Headquarters, Jakarta, on July 17, 2019.
July 18, 2019	The oil spill starts to reach Sedari Beach in Sedari Village, Cibuaya Subdistrict, which is in the western direction of the oil jet. The distance between the platform and the Karawang coastline is about 12 km.
21 September 2019	This illegal oil and gas burst could only be stopped on September 21, 2019, provided that compensation for affected residents had not been completed due to data discrepancies. However, Pertamina feels that it has fulfilled its obligations with the data obtained from the government.

Source: Research Result, 2023

(d) Team 4: Platform Handling. Keeping the platform from tilting further by mooring the *vessel.* After the YYA-1 Well was successfully shut down, this team designed and executed the cutting and dismantling of the platform. (e) Team 5: *Subsurface*. Estimated the blowout rate from Well YYA-1 with validation from reservoir simulation, *offshore* and *onshore* oil capture, (f) Team 6: Media and Communications. Conducted intensive communication with stakeholders and media regarding events around the YYA Platform. Starting from the event, the progress of the handling carried out by PHE. This team also conducted several *courtesy visits* to stakeholders to request support/assistance from government agencies, and (g) Team 7: Operation Support. The coordination control center of all YYA handling activities at the PHE and PHE ONWJ levels. This team has SCM, HR, *Finance, Medical Team, Marine, Security, Environment, Relations,* and so on, so that all aspects of handling the YYA emergency can be handled quickly.

The sixth and seventh teams formed by PHE ONWJ are in charge of media, communication, and *operational support*. Pertamina made

several crisis communication strategies for the incident. They continue to update data and information about handling the oil and gas explosion. The media used are through written statements, press conferences, and viewing on the company's official website in infographics that are easily accessible to the media and the public.

In the search for the oil spill incident in the Karawang sea, researchers obtained several slices, including research conducted by Margareta and Boediningsih (2023). In this study, it can be seen that Pertamina is fully responsible for the incident. This responsibility is based on Article 88 of the PPLH Law and the compensation made by Pertamina. Another research by Amffa et al. (2023) talks about the impact of the community on the coast of Karawang. This research found that Pertamina has not carried out its responsibilities thoroughly. Pertamina is considered worthy of legal sanctions for damaging the marine and coastal environment.

Another research found by researchers is research conducted by Chun et al. (2020) This research aims to analyze the risk of oil spills and the preparedness a company must meet when an oil spill occurs at sea.

This research also analyzes the Internet of Things-based early warning system. This research uses a descriptive literature study method by summarizing some of the literature obtained by researchers. The results showed that the company can immediately use an early warning system using the Internet of Things method to minimize the impact of an oil spill incident. Researchers also found that this early warning system can be built with a Waterfall approach, because this system is relatively new in the world of early warning systems for oil spill incidents at sea.

Another research was conducted by Dastin (2018)The role of the government in overcoming the impact of oil spills as a result of the broken crude oil pipeline from the Lawe-lawe terminal to the pipeline between Penajam Paser Utara (PPU) and the Balikpapan Pertamina oil refinery was examined. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method. The results show that the government needs to make spatial arrangements to balance green open space and environmental burdens. The government needs to provide regulations or law enforcement. In this case, she also suggests that the government can immediately evaluate and analyze the impact of oil spills that occur and harm the environment and ecosystem.

Research conducted by Ajadi et al. (2018) on oil spill detection using the adaptive threshold method and texture analysis on SAR data also shows that the method of detecting oil spills, or the GLCM and versatile edge analysis

texture method on the Sentinel 1 SAR image, provides reasonably good results for thick oil spill zones. However, the versatile limit method gives better results for thin oil spill zones or in the discussed mixing areas. Modification in the form of concealing ships (or objects with high backscatter) before applying the versatile limit method can reduce errors, such as detecting oil objects around ships. The researcher used two research methods: texture analysis using a gray level appearance matrix (GLCM) to calculate homogeneity and entropy, and angular moment (ASM). Classification is then performed using the second method, the maximum likelihood method.

Researchers will analyze PT Pertamina's crisis communication patterns in the mass media by looking at this case. Two things researchers will reveal. First, researchers want to know how PT Pertamina carried out the crisis communication patterns in the mass media in the face of incidents, and after the oil spill incident on the coast of Karawang. Second, researchers will look at PT Pertamina's environmental communication barriers to building narratives in the mass media when events occur.

In this context, crisis communication strategies are critical. Timely, honest, and open communication is key to building public trust, reducing panic, and managing expectations. PT Pertamina's ability to communicate accurate information and take swift action to address the impact of the oil spill was tested. This research aims to understand better how large energy companies, such as PT Pertamina, respond to and manage major environmental incidents by analyzing the communication approach used by the company during this crisis.

Similar to this study, the research conducted by Koswara (2014) examined BP's crisis communication response during the oil spill incident in the Gulf of Mexico, highlighting the importance of cautious public statements and the role of mass media in shaping the company's image during the crisis. The study conducted by Nuortimo et al. (2024) found that Corporate reputation, the collective perception of a company's attractiveness towards stakeholders, impacts business outcomes, while effective communication strategies play a critical role in shaping and maintaining the reputation. The role of communication is highlighted during crises, with crisis communication being a strategic approach to managing and mitigating the impact of unexpected or adverse events on reputation, operations, and stakeholders. Similarly, Pertamina also engaged in dialogue with the mass media to convey information to the public. Similarly, Pertamina's crisis communication management aimed to safeguard the company's reputation. The research conducted by Knight and Nurse (2020) and Benoit (2018) also highlighted the

importance of effective crisis communication in maintaining a company's reputation. This study explored the crisis communication strategies organizations use in response to data breaches, emphasizing the importance of timely and responsible communication to mitigate the negative impact on corporate reputation.

Zhang and Borden (2016) state that companies with strong communication can control the public narrative and accelerate reputation recovery. Companies with strong communication control can maintain their reputation in public. Internal communication has undergone significant transformations to address the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic (Cuenca-Fontbona et al., 2023).

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses descriptive qualitative research methods with a case study approach. The qualitative approach is appropriate because this research aims to study complex problems and emphasizes in-depth understanding. One of the qualitative characteristics is that research is conducted in a natural environment with attention to the context of place and time. The researcher acts as the main instrument in data collection, and the collected data is analyzed inductively to explain the process being studied expressively (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through this approach, researchers have the freedom to interpret the issues under study, due to the subjective-interpretative nature of qualitative. Researchers can make their interpretations of the object under study to produce new recommendations.

This research focuses intensively on one particular object studied as a case. Using a case study approach, this research will construct a crisis communication strategy for handling the Karawang, West Java, oil spill incident. Case study data can be obtained from all parties concerned; in other words, in this study, it was collected from various sources as expressed by Hadi et al. (2021). Basically, case studies are designed to explore information that can be learned from a case. Therefore, researchers cannot arbitrarily choose cases that will be the theme of their research. According Nowell et al. (2017) the primary purpose of case study research is to reveal the unique characteristics that exist in a case.

The researcher centered his research by using an intrinsic case study. According to Rahardjo (2017), an intrinsic case study is a case study based on personal interest or interest in a problem. An intrinsic case study was used because of the wild oil and gas spill off the coast of Karawang, West Java, the most significant work accident ever in the oil and gas industry. The researcher is interested in conducting this research because the incident at the YYA-1 well

in the ONWJ Block has broad implications for the marine environment, beaches, and social life. This research also uses the environmental communication theory, as Ardian (2018) expressed. Environmental communication applies communication approaches, principles, strategies, and techniques to environmental governance and protection.

As the oil and gas industry is one of the high-risk jobs for the environment, it must be done carefully without accidents or losses caused to the surrounding environment. Oil and gas drilling activities at sea also have a high risk of damaging the marine ecosystem, as an oil and gas leak can pollute the beach, so fishermen and surrounding communities can no longer make a living. Researchers are also concerned about the incident because this issue could lead to resistance from the community if the oil and gas drilling activities in the sea do not cause harm to the environment. Some oil and gas companies will conduct drilling, because they are traumatized if a similar problem occurs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Oil and Gas industry, often abbreviated as Oil and Gas, is one of the most important industries because it produces energy to meet the world's increasing energy consumption (Cahyono & Hakimah, 2019). The oil and gas industry generally carries out five activity stages: exploration, production, processing, transportation, and marketing. Based on Zaidi et al. (2020), the oil and gas industry has a high risk in the upstream sector, namely in management and drilling activities. As we know, oil and gas exploration and production activities fall into the category of high-hazard activities. Meanwhile, the operating environment in the high seas also contains high potential hazards, with two sources of danger at once, namely system processes and marine hazards. It can be concluded that offshore oil operations are very high-risk operations. However, not only that, the downstream sector, which carries out processing and distribution activities, also has equally high risks. Production process hazards from oil and gas plant work are potential hazards that originate or are caused by several activities carried out in the production process, which are highly dependent on the materials and equipment used and the type of activities performed. Potential safety hazards exist in tools/machines, as well as materials used in the production process, such as *forklifts* (hit), *gancu (*punctured), *pallets (crushed*), and raw materials (crushed, falling from a pile of raw materials), feed additives (eye damage due to feed additive dust), cutters, lathes/welding machines (eye damage due to salt splashes, blisters due to hot *parts,* and lung damage due to inhalation of welding dust), burns due to gas

leaks, pinched parts, hot blasts from automatic *blow downs*. Workplace accidents in oil and gas plants are usually drilling-related and are caused by unexpected gas bursts from the well due to high pressure. There are two main categories of drilling accidents: first, intense and prolonged hydrocarbon gushing; second, hydrocarbon spills and gas bursts during drilling operations (Petrotraining OMC, 2020).

Meanwhile, Crisis communication*, according to Macnamara (2021),* is one type of communication based on context, namely communication in crises experienced by individuals or institutions. Also applicable at the personal (individual) level, crisis communication is a sub-specialty of the *public relations* profession designed to protect and defend individuals, companies, or organizations facing public challenges to their reputation (Johnson & Chattaraman, 2021). Crisis communication is a process of dialogue between the company and the public to deal with the crisis that is engulfing the company. Leaders also have complete responsibility for the crises that occur. Leaders' emotional displays significantly influence employee morale and organizational resilience during crises (Schmodde & Wehner, 2023).

When dealing with these crises, organizations' communication strategies and tactics can improve their post-crisis image and reputation. Every day, organizations face problems. Delayed delivery of goods, dissatisfied customers, missed job opportunities, unfulfilled expectations, rising prices, and chaotic service are some of the challenges businesses often face. Visual communication on social media platforms plays a pivotal role in shaping public perception during a crisis (Mele et al., 2023). However, these problems do not always mean a crisis for the company. A crisis is a significant problem that is unexpected and has both negative and positive impacts. Diverse workforce dynamics necessitate tailored internal communication strategies to manage crises effectively (Sutton et al., 2022).

These problems can destroy the organization, employees, and reputation. However, if the crisis can be handled well by the organization or company, then the reputation and image of the company will become more positive (Beldad & Scholten, 2023). According to Pinsdorf, the basis of crisis communication is to respond immediately once a crisis occurs, with open and honest messages to *stakeholders*. Effective crisis communication is essential for organizations to navigate through turbulent times and maintain stakeholder trust (Blasco-Arcas et al., 2022).

Companies or organizations have "a minimum of 40 minutes to a maximum of 12 hours" to provide their version of an explanation

for a crisis. If, within that time frame, *the* organization or corporation fails to release relevant information, then public confidence is likely to drop in information that will be released outside of that *time frame*. Crisis communication concerns how organizations, companies, and individuals address the communication aspects of crisis management. Companies must choose the correct response strategy in social media crisis communication to minimize negative impacts and restore their reputation (Wang et al., 2021).

Nashville, Tennessee-based *Institute for Crisis Management* identified four fundamental causes of a corporate crisis, proposed by Vašíčková (2019)(1) Natural Disasters: Hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, and the like fall under this category. (2) Mechanical Problems: Crises can occur due to mechanical issues. Examples are a pipeline rupture or skywalk collapse, (3) Human Error: An employee incorrectly opens a water valve and causes water to be scattered or a misunderstanding of how to perform a task in this difficult time, and (4) Management Decision: Senior level executives sometimes do not take the problem seriously or they assume that no one will know about the problem. There are five types of crisis stages (Coombs & Laufer, 2018).

Pre-Crisis Stage Type: The pre-crisis stage is the condition before the emergence of a crisis, but the seeds of the crisis have already begun to appear, so if only one small mistake is made, a crisis can occur. (1) Type of Warning Stage: This stage is one of the most critical stages in the crisis lifecycle, as it is where a problem is first recognized, solved, and then either put to rest for good or allowed to develop into a full-blown breakdown, (2) Acute Crisis Stage: At this stage, the crisis usually begins to take shape, usually characterized by the media and the public already knowing about the crisis or problem. At this stage, the company usually does not remain silent and begins to take action, because it has begun to cause losses to the company. (3) Cleanup Stage: This stage is the company's recovery from all losses. It's saving what's left, reputation, image, performance, and production line, and (4) Post-Crisis Stage: This stage is characterized by the company winning back public trust and resuming normal operations. Then, formally, this stage is said to be the end of the crisis. Every institution or organization should create general guidelines that can be used if a crisis occurs. If necessary, the institution can form a crisis committee.

PT Pertamina is preparing various efforts to create a strategy for public communication through the mass media, so that there is no misunderstanding of the oil spill incident caused by an oil and gas pipeline leak at the YYA well

Table 2 Research Informants

Informant		Position
M	Informant 1	President Director of PT Pertamina Hulu Energi
FU	Informant 2	Vice President Corcom PT Pertamina (Persero)
ADP	Informant 3	PT Pertamina (Persero) Corcom Manager
IS	Informant 4	Corporate Secretary of PT Pertamina Hulu Energy

Source: Research Result, 2024

in the ONWJ Block. The researcher interviewed four sources in Table 2 to obtain information for this study.

According to Informant 1, Pertamina could approach various parties smoothly because Pertamina had established a close relationship long before the incident occurred. In addition, Informant 1 said that Pertamina also communicates very intensively with the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK) over the spread of oil spills on the coast by planning the recovery stages. Pertamina also has several work programs or *Corporate Social Responsibility* (CSR) with the coastal communities (fishermen) of Karawang.

> Fortunately, Pertamina has CSR in our operational areas. So we have been able to enter the community without this incident. (Informant 1, Interview, 27 October 2023)

> We also conveyed to the Ministry of Environment and Forestry that this activity (incident) impacts the environment, so we were frank with the Minister of Environment and Forestry and the Minister of Fisheries and Marine Affairs. (Informant 1, Interview, 27 October 2023)

In its conversation with the two Ministers, Pertamina said it would try to minimize environmental damage. At that time, the Minister of Environment and Forestry and the Minister of KKP could understand that the incident was not intentional. “No one wants to be harmed. It’s just that this is something that we face beyond our ability. It’s the movement of the reservoir, the movement underground, we don’t know” (Informant 1, Interview, 27 October 2023).

After visiting various parties, Informant 1 felt that the communication made by the company to all stakeholders at the beginning of the incident was successful. Meanwhile, *Vice President Corporate Communication of* PT Pertamina Fajriyah Usman said the policy to determine whether an operation is experiencing a crisis is in the hands of *Health, Safety, Security, & Environment* (HSSE). Later, the communication policy will follow the guidelines from HSSE to a certain level, which is only enough to be handled by the operation unit, company, and holding level.

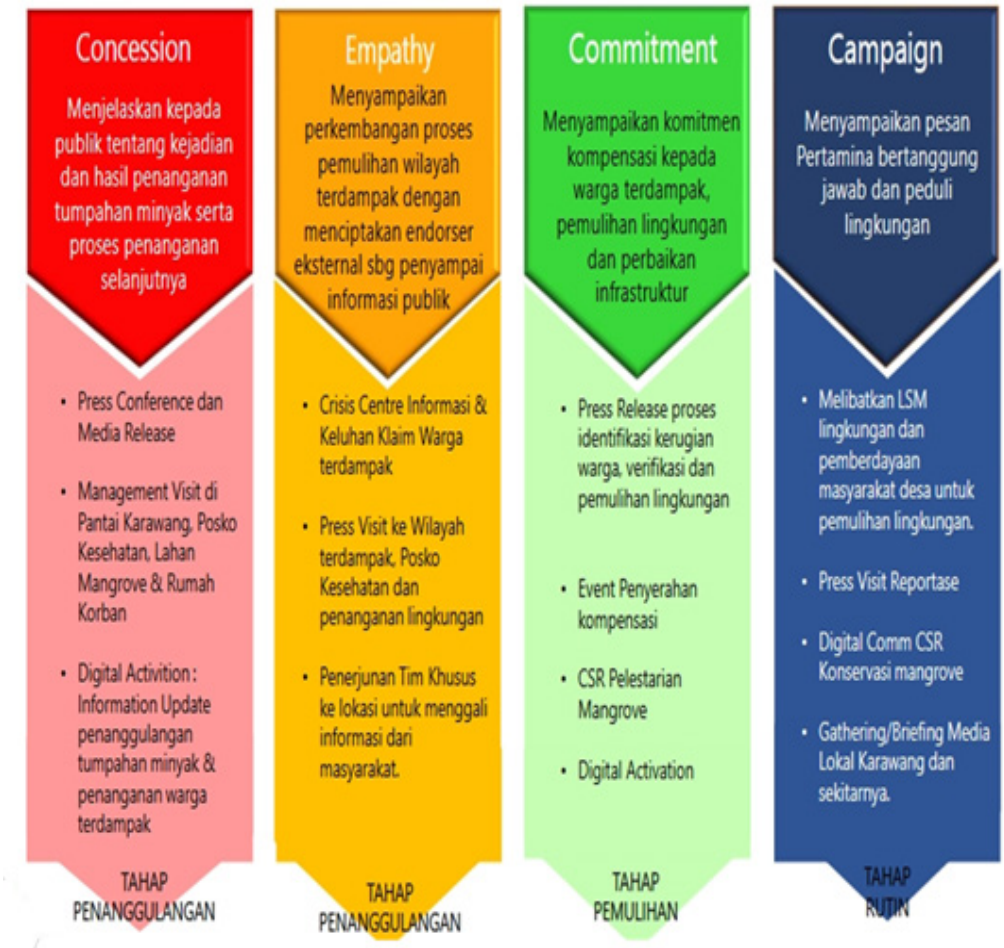
> When there was an oil spill in Karawang, a press conference was taking place, and there was a refinery fire in Balikpapan that could be handled in 1 hour. That’s the operation unit’s level (communication to the media). (Informant 1, Interview, 27 October 2023)

To handle an issue, Pertamina divides into two categories: reactive and proactive. Reactive ones must be handled immediately, and proactive ones try to offset the negativity

caused by the crisis so that it can be neutralized in the news. "Information from HSSE is then processed; this is an operational issue. Environmental issues are only the impact of operational issues" (Informant 2, Interview, 27 October 2023). Pertamina handled the incident by informing the public about the event, the results of the oil spill response, and the next steps in the handling process. As shown in Figure 1, Pertamina carried out media releases, management visits, and digital activation.

The data in Figure 1 is a sustainability step taken by Pertamina in handling the *oil spill* incident in Karawang, West Java. The problem does not necessarily become a communication crisis in every problematic oil and gas operation. This is because a communication crisis will be given to the issues that require a long time to handle. If the problem lasts long, a crisis team will be formed by HSSE, which automatically has communication and *relation* functions. During a crisis, the communication division must monitor the news circulating in the community.

The communications division urgently needs accurate information and notification of an operations crisis. Therefore, the central team needs an official statement from HSSE stating



Source: Sukarya et al. (2020)

Figure 1 Continiuos Communication PT Pertamina (Persero)

that what happened was a crisis. Fajriah Usman, Vice President of CSR & SMEPP Program, explained this.

Informant 2 said that for subsidiaries working on upstream oil and gas, there are provisions for levels when a crisis occurs in the operating area. "They will issue a letter to the Special Task Force for Upstream Oil and Gas Business Activities (SKK Migas) and the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources (ESDM) that a crisis has occurred" (Informant 2, Interview, 27 October 2023).

Then, for the internal company, there was reporting, and a meeting determined that the problem was a crisis. "The most important thing is the facts. We are waiting for the data to be sent to the communication department. Then, after we get it, we will make a communication pattern" (Informant 2, Interview, 27 October 2023).

Informant 2 also emphasized that the crisis can be said to be over when there is an official letter from HSSE, so the function of the communication division can follow the policy to inform the public through the mass media. As in the research conducted by Anshori et al. (2022), the priority focus of this strategy is to improve structural and non-structural mitigation efforts. In addition to enhancing the effectiveness of disaster emergencies, the priority focus of this strategy is to improve the emergency response system. The priority focus of this strategy is to improve the emergency response system, improve disaster emergency response capabilities, and increase community capacity in responding to problems that occur and reporting this information to the mass media. The prioritization of handling and steps taken by Pertamina are also part of a series of crisis management actions by the company, as in the research conducted by Abidin and Gunawan (2024), which states that after passing the crisis handling period, this problem will be evaluated together internally.

The oil spill case in Karawang did not immediately become a crisis because there was a time lag in the emergence of gas bubbles that continued to grow; external parties informed the company that the incident was difficult to resolve and took three months. Based on the statement of Pertamina's handling team, the crisis due to the *oil spill* that occurred on the Karawang coast is at level three (emergency). So in the handling stage, it is assisted by cross-regional holding and involves related government agencies at the central level.

According to Pertamina's records, seven regencies and cities were affected in West Java due to the oil spill on the coast, and there were five million tons of oil spilled on the coast. In addition, residents' ponds and mangroves not far from the spill site were polluted. The company

also carried out stages of communication to the mass media, considering that this incident had a significant impact. Just as stated by Gurkov and Dahms (2023), adaptive communication strategies are crucial for organizations operating in volatile geopolitical environments.

Pertamina also created a responsive and *capable* communication *tagline* for the YYA case. This is because this case is quite complicated to close the oil and gas well at the scene.

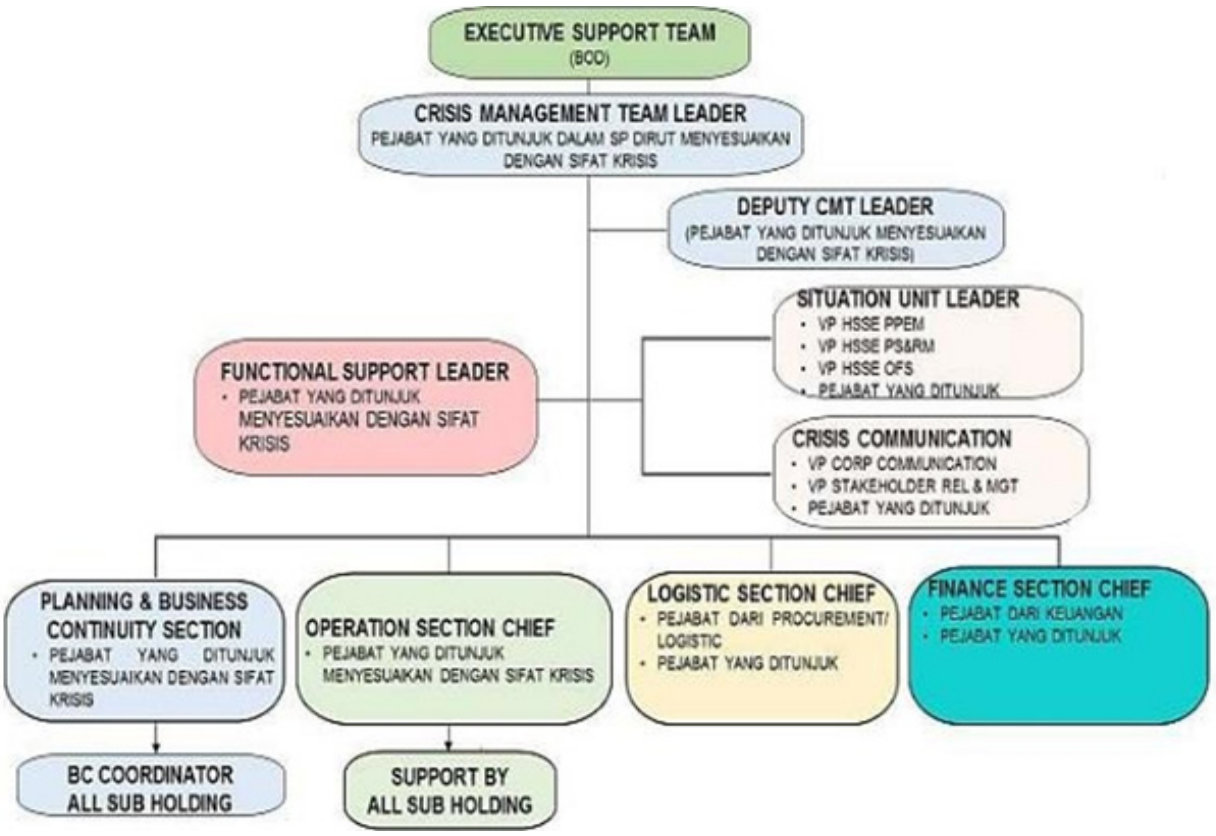
> Pertamina also uses energy observers, associations, and the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources to convey accurate information to explain various social media questions. In the mass media, this was done to answer questions from Greenpeace and Walhi. (Informant 2, Interview, 27 October 2023)

Informant 2 further said that to handle a crisis of this magnitude, the company consolidated with observers, associations in the oil and gas industry, and the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources (ESDM). Similar to the research conducted by Chávez et al. (2024), the results reveal the importance of transparency, narrative control, and digital platforms as essential tools for managing legal crises. This routine communication is an effort to make communication more focused. In addition, the company issued a written statement or *press release* every day to inform the public. Several internal and cross-ministerial *press conferences*, editor-in-chief *gatherings,* and media visits to affected areas were held.

The company also conducts searches on social media according to set indicators. If there are 10 top comments related to the incident, then the question must be answered by a team from Pertamina. Fajriyah said everything about communication and stakeholder *mapping* has been done. Figure 2 illustrates the flow of crisis communication carried out by Pertamina Hulu Energy.

Informant 4 said that his company has a *capable* and *responsible* slogan in dealing with this problem. *Capable* relates to how the company solves the problem, while responsible is the company's responsibility to address the community's social issues and the affected environment. For technicalities in the field, informant 4 said that in this condition, his party immediately instructed the community not to go to sea because there were gas bubbles accompanied by oil spills into the sea. "For the office, the team at Hulu is good. The management team was there and alive. So at the time of the incident, they sat down and strategized" (Informant 4, Interview, 27 October 2023).

Informant 4 said that after this incident, his party immediately coordinated with SKK Migas and the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources. Then his party immediately prepared a press release and communicated with the leaders. For example, the President Director



Source: Research Result, 2023

Figure 2 Crisis Communication Flow of Pertamina Hulu Energy

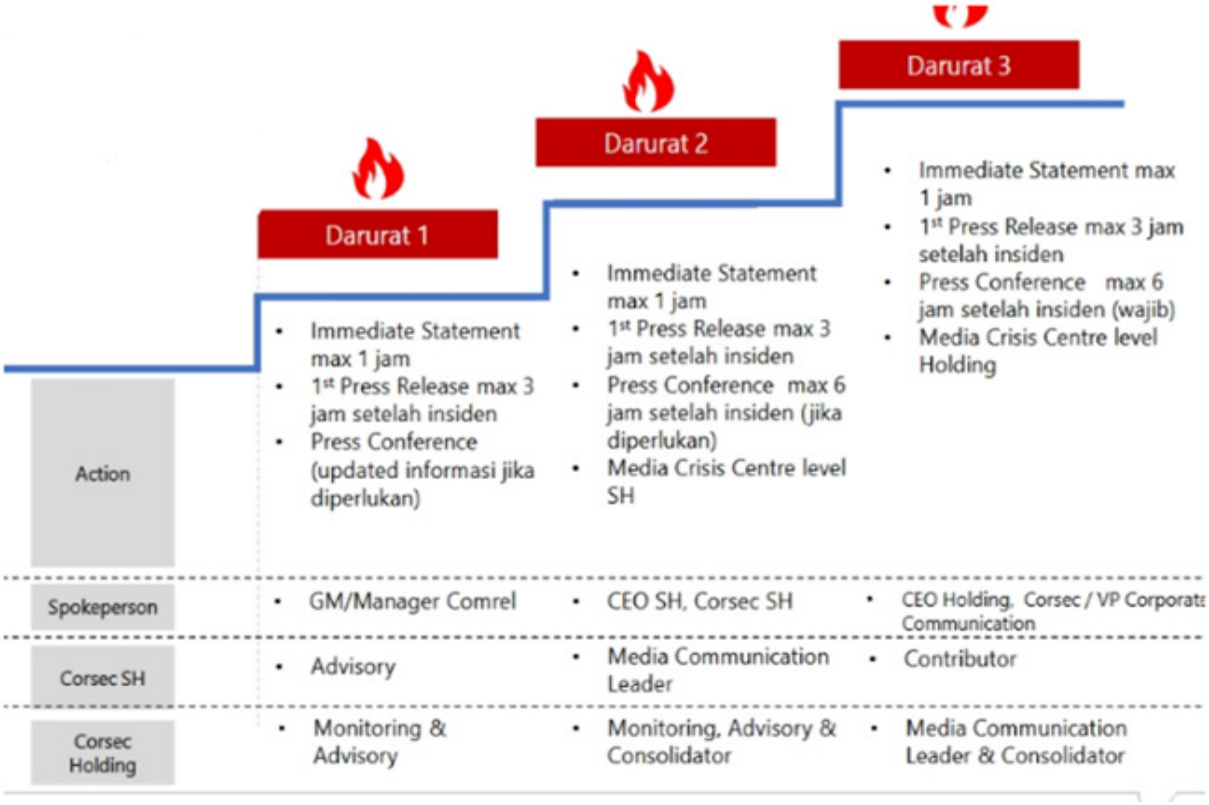
with the Minister, the Director General of Oil and Gas, etc. So that the officials are adequately informed, not from other people, but from Informant 1.

Informant 1 said that after the incident on July 12, 2019, the company only held a press conference on July 15, 2019. It is considered too long to broadcast the incident to the public because coordination must be taken by the company in order to get the green light to hold a meeting with the mass media. This can be seen in Figure 3.

However, at that time, information about this incident was divided because the Director General of Oil and Gas, Djoko Siswanto, held a press conference at noon on July 15, 2019. Meanwhile, Pertamina held a press conference in the morning.

> After that, there was a Pertamina press conference, journalists asked the Director General of Oil and Gas, and surprisingly, the Director General of Oil and Gas replied that Pertamina's incident was like Deepwater Horizon, so it became crowded. (Informant 4, Interview, 27 October 2023)

After the Director General of Oil and Gas said that, Informant 4 said, the company created a communication strategy between Pertamina and government stakeholders to manage information and reach a single voice. So that if a journalist asks an official, the information that comes out will be the same as what Pertamina said. "We divide the tasks, the President



Source: Research Result, 2023

Figure 3 Determination of emergency status of the problem Source: Pertamina Hulu Energy

Director holds the Minister, then there are those who handle the Governor of West Java, the Governor of DKI, and the Regent of Karawang" (Informant 4, Interview, 27 October 2023).

The communication plan has been that oil spills will automatically go to the coast. The company has tools to *track* crude oil to land. For this reason, a cross-division was formed to handle this issue so that communication could be one-way and unbiased. "When I went there, it looked overwhelming. The oil has started to enter the beach, there are tourist beaches there, and they are all dirty with oil" (Informant 4, Interview, 27 October 2023).

At that time, informant 4 said that his party immediately communicated with leaders in the affected areas. "We already have a CSR platform, so the leaders have known us for a long time, and when we explained the impact, they were ready to help" (Informant 4, Interview, 27 October 2023).

Informant 4 stated that his office continues communicating with local community groups affected by the oil spill. They often cooperate in the CSR field. Informant 4 also never closed the discussion room for their anxiety over the environmental damage that occurred. Informant 4 party is as far as possible to provide complete information about the handling carried out by Pertamina. "I came to every discussion held by Walhi or local environmental activists. I tried to convey Pertamina's responsibility for the

incident" (Informant 4, Interview, 27 October 2023).

Informant 2 said that the company fully understands the environmental impact of this incident, but at that time, the primary focus of Pertamina's communication was crisis management. "We can't restore the environment if the source of the disease (the illegal burst has not been closed) has not been handled (on the operational side)" (Informant 2, Interview, 27 October 2023).

Although not focused, Informant Two stated that Pertamina still conducts environmental communication related to the environmental impact of the incident after the recovery process. "For example, we inform in *press releases* that Pertamina cleans the beach daily, we empower the surrounding community with compensation so that they get income" (Informant 2, Interview, 27 October 2023).

Informant 3, who became PT Pertamina's Corporate Communication Manager in 2019, revealed that communication about the environment was not conveyed at that time for fear of creating a promise of heaven. Therefore, the company focused on the handling that was being carried out so that the crisis would end quickly.

Informant 3 stated that the company also has a communication strategy to communicate its environmental concerns. One of the ways is in the form of photo documentation of *mangroves* that the company had planted with the community years ago, before the oil spill incident. According to him, the information shared is more to inform that Pertamina has responded to disasters and has risk mitigation by reporting about the mangroves that have been built.

In the operating area, Pertamina always establishes social and cultural relations so that when a crisis occurs in terms of operations, the community will voluntarily assist in handling the problems that arise. "We have a disaster response village there" (Informant 3, Interview, 27 October 2023).

Informant 3 said that the mass media did not necessarily accept the company's publication of the stages of environmental recovery. The reason is that ecological information on the incident is not easy for the mass media to broadcast. In the news, the mass media prefer the operational and business side of the company. For this reason, informant 3, any information or publication about environmental handling will deal with the business division of a mass media, no longer the realm of the media editor.

Pertamina also established a *Crisis Center* and *Media Center* to deliver fast and accurate information, as stated in Figure 4 above.

This is part of the company's risk management strategy to deal with various

Source: Sukarya et al. (2020)

Figure 4 Communication Strategy in Handling Oil Spill Incidents

potential challenges, such as industrial accidents, natural disasters, or issues that affect the company's reputation.

CONCLUSIONS

Pertamina uses the crisis center to respond and coordinate emergency actions in the event of an emergency or crisis. Some of the functions of the *crisis center* are gathering information, identifying problems, and planning appropriate actions to minimize negative impacts. The *Media Center* plays an important role in communicating information to the public and the media.

The job of the *media center* is to provide explanations, answer questions, and educate the public about the situation. This helps prevent the spread of false or inaccurate information that could cause confusion or panic. Establishing the crisis and media center demonstrates Pertamina's commitment to ensuring transparency, accountability, and effective communication in resolving emergency or crisis situations.

In addition to the crisis center and media center, direct visits by the Pertamina Hulu Energy team to the scene are also essential to maintain order after the *oil spill* incident. Pertamina also deploys its communication team to the field to carry out the crisis communication function designed by Pertamina. The team that

goes directly to the field can also supply data to the mass media.

Pertamina has also conducted a communication crisis with the rules for managing communication crises in the Government environment by the provisions of MENPANRB Number 29 of 2011: (1) Detection and identification stage. Pertamina is able to identify situations that have the potential to become a crisis, which can be seen from teamwork and coordination between related institutions, (2) Crisis prevention. Pertamina is able to predict and manage crises through appropriate and intensive organizational communication and public relations programs. To prevent crises, Pertamina does more than take action, it also proactively and non-defensively informs the public about what is happening, (3) Pertamina's crisis management plan has been prepared by standard operating procedures (SOP) as a reference document by Pertamina's core team, (4) Limiting the scope of the crisis. Pertamina carries out this limitation in coordination with related institutions and NGOs, and through direct communication with affected communities. (5) The crisis recovery carried out by Pertamina is carried out through two-way communication involving all parties involved in the crisis to restore the company's image. One of the things that facilitates the crisis recovery carried out by Pertamina is the *Corporate Social Responsibility* (CSR) program that Pertamina has carried out. Pertamina long before the *oil spill* incident occurred. This greatly benefited Pertamina in its crisis recovery efforts.

The crisis communication stages carried out by Pertamina Hulu Energy at the oil spill incident in Karawang began at the time of the crisis's determination by *Health, Safety, Security, and Environment* (HSSE). This crisis is determined based on the level of emergency in handling the incident. The determination of this crisis was considered too long, causing delays in providing information to the public through the media. This is because there are steps that PHE must take before meeting with the mass media to provide information to the public. This step is considered to waste too much time delivering information to the public, as a form of PHE's responsibility for the incident that occurred. On the other hand, Pertamina Hulu Energy was able to straighten out the information circulating in the community after the information discrepancy at the beginning of the crisis determination, which was carried out by the Director General of Oil and Gas of the Ministry of Djoko Siswanto, to reporters by saying that, this *oil spill* incident was like the *Deepwater Horizon incident*. The risk control system during the oil spill incident was quite good because the PHE team divided the crisis handling groups at the beginning of the incident. Crisis communication by

Pertamina Hulu Energy during the *oil spill* incident included providing responsibility and transparency for rapid response to the *oil spill* incident by establishing communication with affected communities. Pertamina Hulu Energy also utilized the *Corporate Social Responsibility* (CSR) program they had worked on long before this incident occurred. In addition to opening up to the community, PHE also coordinated with other related parties, such as the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources (ESDM).

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