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**Crisis response strategies in
Finland and Spain**

Abstract:

As crises are becoming more common in the unpredictable environment organizations today face, the choice of crisis response strategies is of strategic importance. This paper looks at crisis response strategies claimed to be used in two different societies in Europe: Finland, where the trust in society is understood to be generalized to institutions and Spain, where trust in society remains particularized on the level of individuals. Using the results of the European Communication Monitor (2013) survey on the perception of communication professionals on crisis communication we explored three hypotheses: "certain types of crises are often met with certain types of strategies", "cultural context makes some crises more likely than others" and "cultural context makes some response strategies more likely than others". We find evidence for all three hypotheses and discuss our findings of why in Finland information strategy is perceived as best, whereas in Spain defence strategy is perceived as more popular.

Keywords: Crisis response strategies, information strategy, Finland, Spain

Introduction

Recent news seem to suggest that crisis communication is "normalizing" and becoming part of everyday operations for many organizations globally. Despite their commonness, crises often result in reputational damage and are hence a central topic for communication professionals (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; White, 2009; Kim & Sung, 2014). A crisis may take several forms, but is generally understood as "the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes" (Coombs, 2012: 2). Results of the European Communication Monitor (2013) surveying communication professionals in Europe shows that most practitioners report facing crises annually. In this environment, preventive measures become increasingly important (Luoma-aho, 2013). In fact, 17% of reported crisis situations were claimed to be management related (ECM 2013) and could have hence been avoided altogether.

In most cases, however, crises cannot be prevented through communication, and crises response strategies take central stage. Previous research suggests that response strategies have to be aligned to the type of crisis situation at hand. Seeger et al. (2003) make this statement on reviewing previous research on typologies of crisis. Crises contribute to negative emotions of stakeholders, and much of response strategies include addressing emotions such as anger. Negative emotions resulting from discordant relationships may hinder future interaction with the organization (Loewenstein, 1996), and this dynamic is highlighted in the online environment (Smith, Juric, & Niu, 2013; Parlamis, 2012), especially in crisis situations (Jin, 2010; Stephens & Malone, 2009). A crisis response strategy refers to the strategic choice of organizations to respond to a crisis and those affected by it. Known strategies vary from primary response

strategies such as denial, diminishing and rebuilding to secondary crisis strategies such as bolstering (Coombs, 2012), but little research has thus far focused on comparisons between crisis types and crisis response strategies across cultures. This paper takes up this important task.

Two European countries are focused on: Finland and Spain. These are chosen as they reflect countries facing same economic pressures though ideals of efficiency, and their general citizen satisfaction levels with society have been quite similar (Dahlberg & Holmberg, 2013), offering an interesting backdrop for crisis communication. As for origin of crises, Finland is among the least corrupt countries in the world (index 9), whereas Spain has more corruption (index 6.5, Transparency International 2013). The Finnish society on the whole is more inclined toward generalized trust toward people in general and institutions and organizations, whereas the Spanish approach toward particularized trust of people closest to the individual and in individuals working for organizations (Giczi & Sik, 2009; EUPAN, 2011; Canel, 2013). Previous comparative studies on employees (Varhama et al., 2010) have concluded Finnish citizens to have more negative experiences, but Spanish public employees to more readily engage in negative word of mouth (WOM) (Di Martino et al., 2003). These two countries make for an interesting setting for comparing the types of crises emerging as well as the chosen crises response strategies.

Crisis response strategies revisited

The main point of crisis response strategies is to influence the receiver (Sellnow et al., 2015). As reviewed by White (2014), the many studies about crisis communication are organized around assessing types of discourse and communication strategies to reduce the effects of crises and to restore image and relationships. When a crisis hits an organization, the aim is to minimize the ambiguity and organizational crisis responsibility through application of appropriate response

strategies (Coombs & Holladay, 2004). Organizations select crisis response strategies hence to solve crisis situations and to re-establish legitimacy among the audience. **On the other hand, audiences in crisis situations receive multiple messages from different sources simultaneously. Audiences evaluate the credibility of each source through their own experiences, the organizations' financial stake in the crises as well as the perceived independency of the source (Anthony, Sellnow, & Millner, 2013). Building on the message convergence theory, the more the various messages received converge, the more neutral their sender and the more the points of agreement between sources matter in importance to the audience member, the more credible the information provided in crisis situations is perceived to be (Anthony, Sellnow & Millner, 2013).**

Diverse typologies of response strategies have been described. Benoit (1997) presented five categories of possible crisis response strategies: denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness of the event, corrective action and mortification. Coombs (1999) identified seven communication strategies that can be used in response to a crisis from defensive to accomodative: attack the accuser; denial; excuse; justification; ingratiation; corrective action and full apology. a) attack the accuser involves aggressively denying claims of a crisis and punishment of the accuser; (b) denial claims there is no crisis or that the organization is uninvolved in the crisis; (c) excuse admits there is a crisis but minimizes organizational responsibility for the crisis; (d) justification admits a crisis exists but downplays its severity; (e) in- gratiation tries to create positive impressions of the organization by reminding stakeholders of past good works, associating the organization with positive qualities, or both; (f) corrective action attempts to repair crisis damage, prevent a repeat of the crisis, or both; and (g) full apology and mortification takes responsibility for the crisis. These responses have merge in the

Texaco case study in five categories: bolstering, shifting blame, corrective action, mortifica- tion, and separation (Coombs & Schmidt, 2000).

More recently, taking into account the new landscape of media, Diers and Donohue (2013) compile a taxonomy of crisis response tactics: self-enhancement, routine communication, framing the crisis, framing the organization, anti-social or defensive, accommodative, excellence-renewal and inter-organizational relationships.

The response strategies imply different degrees of acceptance of crisis responsibility. In other words, as attributions of crisis responsibility increase, crisis managers should use crisis response strategies that progressively accept more responsibility for the crisis. When people think the crisis could have been controlled or should have been prevented by the organization their perception about the organization gets worse (An, Gower, & Ho-Cho, 2011). For instance, when the crisis is produced by a product or service of the company, crisis managers must accept their responsibilities. However, when accidents or terrorism occurs, crisis managers should use strategies that intensify attribution of intentionality, thus reducing organizational responsibility for the crisis. If the situation permits the organization to build sympathy by portraying itself as a victim, the strategy that emphasizes shared suffering with victims is also appropriate (An, Gower, & Ho-Cho, 2011).

The crises response strategies can be categorized according to their level of accommodation and the emphasis on the victim. Overall, the higher organizational accommodation, the more legal responsibility and financial expenses will result (Patel & Reinsch, 2003). Low accommodation strategies are often viewed as unethical, as they either focus on denying the event, counter-attach the accuser or pushing the blame on someone else (Coombs, 1999). Moderate accommodative strategies focus on the intent behind the crises, such as giving excuses

or justifications and reasoning why the crises occurred (Coombs & Holladay, 2005). High

accommodative strategies take the ethically more sound approach of apologies and

compensation, and best diminish the negative communication dynamic resulting from a crises

(Coombs & Holladay, 2005). On the contrary, inactive or passive responses are currently viewed

as ineffective (Koerber, 2014) and damaging to public trust and the relations with publics

(Coombs, 1999). However, from the contingency theory approach, Pang and Cameron (2006)

underline the importance of situational factors for responding to crisis.

The complexity of diverse types of organizations make also complex the design of crisis

responses. Cancel et al. (1999) underlined at least five factors in order to design crisis response

strategies: the size of the organization, corporate culture, business exposure, public relations to

dominant coalition and individual characteristics of organizational leaders. Strategies chosen to

respond to crises aim at maintaining organizational reputation and diminishing losses (Kim,

Avery & Lariscy, 2011). In fact, crisis response strategies are similar to reputation management

strategies, yet whereas reputation literature emphasizes the value of positive messages, base

crisis response strategies acknowledge the need for two-sided messages where both positive and

negative aspects of the crises are communicated (Kim & Sung, 2014). Despite knowledge of the

importance of empathy and apology, denial and bolstering of good deeds remain the most

common strategies for reputation management (Kim, Avery & Lariscy, 2011). Voices during a

crisis are not limited to those representing the organization, but real-time media allow

stakeholders to become communicators in the Rhetorical or Issue Arenas of crises, the spaces

where issues are debated and discussed online (Frandsen & Johansen, 2010; Tirkkonen &

Luoma-aho, 2011).

Negative emotions often arise during crises, and hence many crises response strategies address stakeholder anger. Building on the seminal study of Hirschman (1970; 2007), anger may result in either exit or voicing of complaints. Both options can lead to crises- loss of stakeholders or negative feedback. Voice can be understood as feedback and venting, and in the present online environment it often takes the shape of negative (e-)WOM (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2004,). A connection between anger and anti-corporate activism has been established, but as anger consists of sometimes complex and irrational emotions, ordinary crises response strategies are often unable to address it (Simola, 2009). Park and Reber (2010) looked at the chosen strategy influences positively or negatively the responsibility attributed to the organization for the crisis. For example, a mortification strategy generates a more positive attitude to the organization than nonexistence strategy.

Cultural influences in crisis response strategies

Culture is simplified as mental programming of the human mind consisting of assumptions, values and artefacts (Schein, 1985, 1990). Groups of people whether joined together by circumstances, traits, organizational or national boundaries can share a similar programming. Research suggests that culture is in practice maintained through shared experiences and their transmitted meanings (Avruch, 1998). Though some traits of crises and blame seem universal, the value of response strategies seems to vary across national cultures both on definitions of the crisis as well as negotiation of the situation (Berkelaar & Dutta, 2007). In fact, culture can influence perceptions and trust (Falkheimer & Heide, 2006). Cultural diversity of public cognitive effects and feedback on crisis situations has been focused by Anagondahalli and Turner (2012). They found that Asians blamed the companies more and trusted it less when a

situational attribution was made in the message, while Americans did so when a personal

attribution was made. However, their results did not support other expectations with regard to

cultural characteristics as group orientation and institutional agency orientation.

From a relationship management perspective, a study of Huang (2009) in Taiwan

approached crisis from a multifaceted factor view and showed that in crisis managers'

assessment, the form of crisis response (timely response, consistent response, and active

response) is more powerful than crisis communicative strategies (denial, diversion, excuse,

justification and concession) in predicting trust and relational commitment. In the same line, van

der Meer (2014) states that a crisis-denial strategy not necessarily can be unsuccessful in certain

contexts.

Aside from cultural context, cultural experiences play a role. Haro-Loit, Vihalemm, and

Ugur (2012) note how despite group memberships, individual experiences differ. In addition,

Wan (2008) notes the role of resonance for crisis response strategies. Resonance constitutes a

cultural powerful object because it gets messages respect the tradition of distinct countries.

Stakeholders look for accordance with their self-identities, and confirmation enables positive

feelings and favourable associations with the company. Crisis response strategies that use

resonance will get messages more associated with the long- term memory because this concept is

related with individual´s values and beliefs. Therefore, crisis messages that resonate with publics

are easier to communicate (Wan, 2008). The cultural context affects how individuals define

crisis and how they negotiate situations (Berkelaar & Dutta, 2007). From the contingency theory

approach, Pang and Cameron (2006) refuse a prescriptive approach and underline the importance

of situational factors for responding to crisis. The symbolic approach also underlines that the

characteristics of a crisis situation might influence the decisions of crisis communication

managers. That means not only need that managers not to just know the set of communication strategies or responses, but also have an available system of analysis of the crisis situation, which allows them to choose in front of complete information the type of crisis that they face. The attribution theory underlines several situational factors, such as crisis type and history of past crisis, that are used to estimate the threat posed by the current crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2007).

Other studies have also explored and faced the importance of the cultural context on crisis strategies success. Inside Europe, Verhoeven et al. (2014) conclude that half (49.8 %) organizations surveyed in Europe reported having more than one crisis within 1 year period. These crises are significantly different in character when compared by region and type of organization, indicating that the economic and cultural context of organizations plays an important role in the genesis and the labelling of a situation as a crisis, as shown in table 1.

Table 1 Perceived most important crises situations in European organizations in 2013 (%)

Crisis type	European average
Institutional crises (e.g. adverse campaign by critics, threat of political regulation)	19.6
Performance crisis (e.g. product or service failure, breakdown of production lines	19.6
Management or leadership crisis (e.g. top management succession, ethical misbehaviour	17.4
Financial and economic crises	13.9

Crises solely based on rumours or communication

Failure   8.5

Industrial relations crises (conflict with workers

or unions)   7.7

Other crises   7.1

Natural crises (disasters, accidents)   6.1

N = 2710

As most of the existing research on crisis response strategies relies on US-based studies, this

paper aims to explore the contrast of types of crisis and crisis response strategies in two

European countries: Finland form the North of Europe and Spain from the South of Europe. As

the focus was on crises, the cultural context is here understood widely as the principles guiding

the specific societies and the type of trust they manifest in general. Finland and Spain are chosen,

as they show different societal foci on trust: Finnish society is more inclined toward generalized

trust toward people in general and institutions and organizations, and in Spain, trust tends to be

particularized toward people closest to the individual (Giczi & Sik, 2009; EUPAN, 2011; Canel,

2013).

Concretely, drawing on the data of the European Communication Monitor, we focus on three hypotheses and related research questions ranging from the type of crises and strategies claimed to be used to the role of cultural difference in shaping these.

Hypothesis1: certain types of crises are often met with certain types of strategies

RQ1: Do types of crises and strategies claimed to be used vary across gender, years of experience of the professional, age or education?

Hypothesis2: cultural context makes some crises more likely than others

Hypothesis3: cultural context makes some response strategies more likely than others

Methodology

To answer our research question data from the 2013 European Communication Monitor (ECM) on crisis communication were used (Zerfass, Moreno, Tench, Verčič, & Verhoeven, 2013). The ECM is an annual transnational survey among communication managers. The longitudinal research survey is arranged by individual universities (led by University of Leipzig) and the European Public Relations and Research Education (EUPRERA), the European Association of Communication Directors (EACD) and Communication Director Magazine. In 2013 the monitor was further sponsored by the public relations agency Ketchum.

In 2013 professionals from 43 countries participated in the survey. The survey was online for four weeks in March 2013 after a pre-test with 36 practitioners from 13 countries. The respondents were personally invited to participate in the survey via e-mail based on a database with 30.000+ professionals provided by the EACD. National branch organizations and networks also distributed the invitation. 4.808 professionals started the questionnaire with 2.802 of them completing it. In the end the sample consist of 2.710 fully completed surveys by respondents

who clearly belong to the European communication profession (excluding e.g. scholars and students). Among this group are 77 professionals from Finland and 148 from Spain. The ECM uses a convenience sample because there is no information about the population of communication professionals in Europe. The results can therefore not be considered as representative for the whole population of European communication professionals nor for professionals in Spain and Finland. Because of the possible systematic bias in the convenience sample as used here, the results of this study should be seen as a pilot study giving an indication of the distribution of the results in the entire population. Additional research is necessary to substantiate the results found here.

Respondents & results

Most of the respondents are head of a communication department or CEO of an agency (Europe = 43.2%, Finland = 40.3%, Spain = 50%), followed by professionals that are responsible for a single communication discipline or are unit leader (Europe = 28.4%, Finland = 24.7%, Spain = 30.4%), team leaders (Europe = 22.5%, Finland = 28.6%, Spain = 15.2%) and other (Europe = 5.9%, Finland = 6.5%, Spain = 4.1%). The majority of them have more than 10 years of experience in the field (Europe = 58.3%, Finland = 67.5%, Spain = 67.6%), a quarter has 6 to 10 years of experience (Europe = 25,5%, Finland = 20.8%, Spain = 26.4%) and the rest up to five years (Europe = 16.1%, Finland = 11.7%, Spain = 6.1%). Most of the respondents are female (Europe = 58%, Finland = 74%, Spain = 50%) and the average age is 40.9 years old in Europe (SD = 9.6), 44.32 in Finland (SD = 9) and 43.05 in Spain (SD= 8.2). Professionals with more experience and a higher position in the organisation or agency are overrepresented in the

sample. Those professionals can be considered as knowledgeable about what is happening in the profession and in their organisation.

Almost three quarters of the respondents work in a communication department (Europe = 74.8%, Finland = 76.6%, Spain = 73.6%), that is in a joint stock or a private company, a government owned, public sector or political organization or a non-profit organization. One quarter works as a communication consultant or for a PR agency (Europe = 25.2%, Finland = 24.4%, Spain = 26.4%). The majority of the respondents have an academic degree at the master's or doctorate level (Europe = 66.3%, Finland = 75.3%, Spain = 85.1%; Master Europe = 59.9%, Finland = 72.7%, Spain = 75%; Doctorate Europe = 6.4%, Finland = 2.6%, Spain = 10.1%). Just over one quarter of the respondent have a Bachelor's degree (Europe = 26.5%, Finland = 19.5% , Spain = 13.5%) and less than 10 per cent has no academic degree (Europe = 7.2 %, Finland = 5.2%, Spain = 1.4%). Also the majority of the respondents are a member of a national PR or communication association (Europe = 51.3%, Finland = 66%, Spain = 63.5%) and a minority that is associated internationally (Europe = 26.2%, Finland = 34%, Spain = 25%). Professionals working in organizations, having a high education level and being involved in the professional development of the field are overrepresented in the sample. This again indicates that the respondents are more involved in the professionalization of the field and can be considered knowledgeable of and reflective on developments in the field.

Every year a section of the questionnaire is reserved to investigate the perceptions of a special subject that is important for the European communication profession. In 2013 this subject was crisis communication. Three questions about the perception of crisis communication were asked: Did you deal with a crisis communication situation in your organization or for your clients during the last year (1), please think of the most important crisis situation for your

organization or client during the last year (2), which kind of communication strategies and which instruments were used in this most important crisis situation (3)? The aim of the first question was to find out how relevant crisis situations are in communication management in Europe. There is no information available about that. The second question dealt with the type of crisis The question have merge the diverse types of crises in seven items and one 'none of the above'. The seven items were: financial or economic crisis, management or leadership crisis, industrial crisis, institutional crisis, performance crisis, natural crisis and a crisis solely based on rumours or communication failure. Items were rotated in the survey. The third question was about strategies and instruments used in crisis communication. The use of five strategies were described and asked: Information strategy, defence strategy, apology strategy, sympathy strategy and sit-out strategy. Information strategy refers to provide stakeholders with facts and figures about the situation. Sympathy strategy means expressing sympathy with those who were harmed by the situation). Defence strategy points out that the situation is different, giving alternative interpretation. Apologize strategy refers to apologize to stakeholders about the situation taking solutions. Finally a sit-out or not response strategy have also been operationalized.

Both questions on the perception of crisis communication were further explored for the comparison of the situation in Finland and Spain and with (the average of the rest of Europe or Europe).

Given the convenience character of the sample generalization and inference of the results to the entire population of communication professionals and countries is not possible. Put differently the external validity of our study is limited and the results should be interpreted as an indication only. Therefore it is a pilot study. Although the sample size is relatively small (Finland n = 77 and Spain n = 148) the numbers are big enough to be able to use statistics to

explore the differences between the answers of the respondents of the two countries. We used

crosstabs, correlation analysis and logistic regressions to analyse the data.

Findings

Altogether 67% of the communication professionals in Finland and 74.1% of them in Spain dealt

with one crisis situation in 2013. More than 37% of them in Finland and 52.4% of them in Spain

dealt with more than one crisis in 2013. This is about the same as in Europe as a whole (70.4%)

and the differences between the respondents of Spain and Finland are not significant (χ^2 (2) =

4.915, p < .09).

In Finland the most important perceived crises types were management or leadership-related

(14%) like top management succession, compliance problems or ethical misbehaviour, followed

by institutional crises (13%) like adverse campaigns by critics, threats of political regulation,

hostile takeovers. So-called performance crises followed third (10%), including product or

service failure and breakdown of production lines. Crisis based on miscommunication came next

(6.5%) followed by natural disasters (5%) and crises in industrial relations (2.6%). In Spain the

situation is perceived differently by the respondents: institutional crises were most dominant

(21%) followed by financial and economic crises (14.9%), industrial relations (13%),

management and leadership (10%) followed by performance crisis (6.8%), natural disasters

(3.4%) and crises from miscommunication (2,7%). This is a significant difference between the

perceptions of the respondents based in the two countries (χ^2 (7) = 14.339, p <.05).

We checked next whether gender, education or experience mattered for crisis perception.

What is perceived as a crisis does not vary across gender, years of experience, age or education

in Finland, yet in Spain male and female professionals differ significantly in the type of crisis

they encounter or situation they perceive to be a crisis. Female professionals report more often a crisis institutional and management crises and male professionals report more industrial relation crises.

Hypothesis 1 stated that certain types of crises are often met with certain types of crisis response strategies. For Europe as a whole, the information strategy was claimed to be used the most by far in all types of crisis situations. In institutional crisis situations information is supplemented with defence and sympathy, when performances in product or services fail apologies are made and sympathy is asked. Defence strategies and sit outs were claimed to be used when management or leadership of the organization fails and with financial and economic problems some organizations use sympathy in addition to information. The sympathy strategy prevails as well after information in crises solely based on rumours or communication failure, when industrial relations are problematic and in situations of natural disaster of accidents.

Looking specifically at the answers of respondents in Finland and Spain as countries in the north and the south of Europe some striking differences in reaction patterns to crises occur in the answers of the respondents (although the number of respondents sometimes are very small). In Finland the information strategy is dominant as well, except in industrial crises situations where it is combined with all the other strategies, mostly sympathy and followed by defence, apology and sit out strategies. In performance crisis situations apologies are made much more than in Europe on average and in Spain. Apologies and sympathy were also claimed to be used in natural disaster situations or in case of an accident. The other crisis situations in Finland are met with providing information.

In Spain giving information in a crisis situation is dominant as well, although less so than in Europe on average and in Finland. Especially in case of rumours information is equally claimed

to be used with defence strategies. Institutional crises in Spain are met with defence and sit out strategies as well. The sympathy card is also played in situations of a management crisis and crises in industrial relations and especially in cases of natural disasters or accidents. Defence strategies and sit outs are also common in industrial relation crises.

In table 2 an overview is given from the types of crises and the perceived response strategies used in Europe and in Finland and Spain.

Table 2 Types of crises and most important perceived crisis response strategies claimed to be used in Europe as a whole, Finland and Spain in 2013 (%)

Type of crisis	Response strategy														
	Information			Defence			Apology			Sympathy			Sit-out		
	Eu	Fi	Sp	Eu	Fi	Sp	Eu	Fi	Sp	Eu	Fi	Sp	Eu	Fi	Sp
Institutional	87	90	65	29	20	29	11	10	13	34	20	10	11	10	29
Performance	77	75	90	18	13	10	34	75	20	36	13	10	8	13	0
Management/leadership	79	91	53	64	9	13	21	27	20	20	2	33	33	9	13
Financial/economic	86	100	77	14	0	9	8	14	18	20	1	18	9	0	9
Rumours	80	100	50	19	0	50	12	1	0	23	0	25	16	20	0
Industrial relations	83	50	73	21	50	26	8	50	5	34	100	26	13	50	32
Other	87	100	100	17	0	33	16	0	0	29	25	33	14	0	0
Natural	88	100	100	8	0	20	12	25	0	43	25	60	3	0	0

N_{Eu} = 1890; N_{Fi} = 51; N_{Sp} = 109

Note For Finland and Spain some cell frequencies are very low

To explore the differences between Finland and Spain further hypothesis 2 states that cultural context makes some crises more likely than others. The results show that the perception of the occurrence of a crisis situation differs significantly between Finland and Spain (χ^2 (7) = 14.338, p .< 05). The differences are striking. In Spain crises are more institutional, financial economic

and about industrial relations than in Finland. Contrary to this in Finland crises situations are more about performance of the organization, the management and the leadership of the organization and about other things.

Table 3

Perceived occurrence of crisis situations in Finland and Spain in 2013

Crisis situation	Finland	Spain
Institutional crises (e.g. adverse campaign by critics, threat of political regulation)	19.6	28.4
Performance crisis (e.g. product or service failure, breakdown of production lines	15.7	9.2
Management or leadership crisis (e.g. top management succession, ethical misbehaviour	21.6	13.8
Financial and economic crises	13.7	20.2
Crises solely based on rumours or communication failure	9.8	3.7
Industrial relations crises (conflict with workers or unions)	3.9	17.4
Other crises	7.8	2.8
Natural crises (disasters, accidents)	7.9	4.5
Total	100	100

Hypothesis 3 suggests that cultural context makes some response strategies more likely than others. This seems to be true for the use of the information strategy and the use of the apology strategy. Giving information in a crisis situation occurs more often in Finland than in Spain according to the respondents of the survey, the differences are significant. The differences between the use of the other three response strategies in both countries, defence, sympathy and sit out are not significant. See table 4 for an overview.

Table 4

Perceived use of crisis response strategies in Finland and Spain in 2013 (%)

Response strategy	Finland	Spain	χ^2
Information	90.2	71.6	6.920, p <.01
Defence	9.8	21.1	3.071, ns
Apology	25.5	12.8	3.961, p <.05
Sympathy	17.6	21.1	.259, ns
Sit out	9.8	17.4	1.585, ns

Conclusions and discussion

This paper looked at crisis response strategies in Finland and Spain. For data, the European Communication Monitor (2013) survey results were drawn on to explore whether certain types of crises are as theory suggests (Seeger et al., 2003) met with certain types of strategies. All of

the hypotheses were confirmed, and they are next discussed shortly. Overall the explorative

comparison between the two countries proved valuable, and as no significant difference were

found on the number of crises faced, we focused on crisis type and the choice of response

strategies. The results reinforced the idea that the context of organizations plays an important

role in the genesis and the labelling of a situation as a crisis.

The importance of the cultural context on crisis management is reaffirmed in this study from a

triple perspective:

     a) Diverse cultural contexts adjoin more often certain types of crisis with certain types of

strategies. Hypothesis 1 suggested that certain types of crisis are often met with certain types of

crisis response strategies. Comparing Europe as a whole, we find out that information strategy is

prevalent in all types of crisis and it is complemented with other types of strategies with more

frequency in certain types of crisis, as institutional crisis it is implemented with defence and

sympathy or performance crisis with apologies and sympathy. Looking to the comparison

between Finland and Spain, information was claimed to be the most used strategy, yet data show

that an universal association between type of crisis and strategies cannot be concluded. On the

contrary, practitioners in both analyses countries tend to give diverse responses to the different

kind of crisis. Finish practitioners seem more inclined to use accommodative strategies in general

except when facing industrial relations, rumours and performance crisis while Spanish

practitioners use less the information strategy and present a higher usage of non-accommodative

strategies with institutional crisis, face rumours with defence as much as with information and

use sympathy strategy for management and leadership crisis, which is rarely mentioned in

Finland.

     b) Diverse cultural contexts correlate with diverse type of crisis. When looking at the

different types of crises. although both countries, facing economic pressures through ideals of efficiency and high levels of crisis frequencies, professionals had to deal with diverse types of situation in each country. The difference between the types of crises faced was interesting: Finns had mostly management or leadership-related (14%) crises followed by institutional crises, whereas is Spain the crises were mostly institutional (21%) followed by financial and economic as well as industrial crises. Spanish practitioners had to face institutional crisis nearly twice their Finnish colleagues (21%) and industrial relations about four more times (17.4%). This can be a picture of the importance of the context on regard to types of crisis: in Spain new economic and labour regulations in a situation of high unemployment and layoffs are currently being discussed and emerge affecting organizations and forcing them to deal with current specific types of crisis. On the other hand, it could also point toward the fact that Finns are more trusting of managers, leaders and institutions hence making their failure or unmet expectations a more severe issue. Even, it also could point to the fact that in countries with a high level of corruption perceptions of management and leadership faults could be less sagacious. Finally, it could also point to the position of the respondents into their organization. There were a higher percentage of practitioners holding the higher positions of communication in Spain. In the same line, it could be explained the differences in the type of crisis that male and female professionals perceive in Spain. Females reported more often a crisis as institutional and management, whereas males reported more industrial relation crises. Higher communication positions are dominantly held by male practitioners and leaders and boards could have a less critical attitude to themselves.

c) Diverse cultural context are inclined to face crisis with certain kind of strategies. Results corroborate Hypothesis 3 that suggest that cultural context makes some response strategies more likely than others. Significant differences between the two analyses countries are found on regard

to information and apology strategy clearly more used in Finland than in Spain. Overall in Finland the information strategy is dominant for all crises types, except for industrial crises situations where all measures are taken: information strategy is combined with all the other strategies, mostly sympathy and followed by defence, apology and sit out strategies. Interestingly, Finns have understood the importance of apology, as in performance crisis situations apologies were made much more than in Europe on average and in Spain. On the contrary, Spanish practitioners have a higher use of non-accommodative strategies. Though the Spanish also use information as a crisis response strategy, there is much more emphasis on the use of defence as it comes to strategies. In fact, the Spanish practitioners seem to apply a variety of other strategies: institutional crises in Spain are met with defence and sit out strategies in addition to information. Especially in case of rumours information was claimed to be equally used with defence strategies. Institutional crises in Spain are met with defence and sit out strategies as well. Defence strategies and sit outs are also common for industrial relation crises.

        In short, when it comes to crisis response strategies, it seems Finns inform and the Spanish defend. This use of information and apologies in Finland could be due to the value Finns give for honesty, but could also reflect the small size of the market where organizations cannot afford to offend consumers. On the other hand, the defence strategy in Spain could merely be a result of the amount of institutional crises apparent but it could also point to the high level of corruption, especially at the political level, where personal responsibility is scarcely admitted and the current strategy is to deny facts.

        Though easy national stereotypes could be used to analyse this, we propose that it has something to do with the type of society at large. In fact, if organizations can be understood as reflections of what is considered proper and legitimate behaviour in society at large (Suchman,

1995), we suggest that crisis response strategies should be tailored to best meet the surrounding

societal settings of the crisis situation. For multicultural organizations and brands this could

bring new understanding and shed light on the logic behind the success or lack of it for certain

crisis response strategies. **Moreover, as crises are resonated through the media, the cultural**

differences may amplify as global media cover them without reference to their original

cultural context.

      As discussed in the introduction, the two countries represent very different types of trust in

society: Finland the generalized type and Spain the particularized type. This could help explain

our findings: if high trust is placed on institutions and individuals serving there, in Finland the

breaches in management, leadership and institutions hit the hardest, as they occur on the level of

individuals that are expected to be trustworthy. When trust is particularized into the people you

have personal relationships with (Spain) management misbehaviour could be as common but not

perceived as such a crisis. On the other hand, in Spain where trust is particularized, the most

popular crises types included institutional, industrial and economic, and hence represent the most

suspicious level for countries of particularized trust well: the organizations and institutions.

      Theory suggest that high accommodative strategies best diminish the negative

communication dynamic resulting from a crises and on the contrary, inactive or passive

responses are more damaging to public trust and the relations between the organization and their

publics (Coombs, 1999); generates more legal responsibility and financial expenses (Patel &

Reinsch, 2003). This research reinforces the role of context in crisis management and calls for

more contextual comparative research to further understand the scope of these normative

approaches**. A recent study of Ingenhoff et al. (2016) remark this statement when proving**

with two cultural groups of citizens that country's image affect the perception of companies

from this country when facing a crisis. Our analysis agrees that countries are valid units of analysis to further understand the context in crisis management. The comparative analysis between Finland and Spain has confirmed us that differences in crisis perception and responses are clearly diverse when practitioners face culturally diverse contexts (as was explained in these two societies in terms of transparency, satisfaction, etc.) yet the causalities of these relations must be further explored with other methodological approaches.

Limited to survey results, a weakness of the study lies in not knowing whether the reported strategies actually match the reality of the communication practitioners and their organizations. The study focused on only two countries, and the questionnaire guided the answers through readymade selections. Response set, social desirability as well as translations and national practices and culture could have shaped responses. Further studies should clarify the reality, and address what effect if any do the response strategies have in diverse context? For instance, do sit-out strategies produce less damage in context where citizens are habituated with high levels of corruptions? These questions might move research focus about the practitioners' perceptions of success in a crisis or about the cultural diversity of public cognitive effects and feedback on crisis situations has been focused by Anagondahalli and Turner (2012). Moreover, this research was also limited to only the results of the communication professionals answering the ECM survey in 2013, and hence the results cannot be generalized as such. Many questions still remain unanswered about crises and the role of cultures in response strategies. Future studies should expand this research to other cultures and other datasets, as well as analyse specific cases of response strategies in their context and value.

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