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Investigation of Maritime Accidents' Communication Management; Impact on the Post-Accident Operation of the Shipping Companies Involved: Case Studies Presented

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Abstract

The crisis management of a naval accident is a crucial matter that concerns many maritime companies (enterprises) due to the fact that such an accident can have significant repercussions on the company (and on Society in general). Having taken into consideration the effect that Media have on the formulation of the public opinion, it is clear that the way a Company deals with such crisis management is of the utmost importance and essentially defines the "sport". In this work, the best available techniques and practices are analyzed towards the optimum management of a crisis accident; on a first and foremost level beforehand and secondly after the accident has taken place, on this very crucial next step where the climax and high point of this crisis is the accident itself. Next steps include the intensive analysis of three recent accidents: the Costa Concordia, Rena and Sea Diamond accidents. All three faced a brutal media assault and one way or another managed to survive or even move on almost unscathed. These case studies are examined from their handling aspect of the crisis that occurred and hit their company. In conclusion, it is clearly shown how vital it is for Maritime Companies to have an organized coherent plan of action/crisis management in conjunction with an open, direct and responsible stance towards the parties involved and hurt in an accident.

JEL Classification: H12.

Keywords: Maritime Accidents; Crisis Communication Management; Best Practices; Media; Post-accident Operation.

1. Introduction

Safety at sea consists of a basic priority for the maritime industry as well as for all the involved/interested parties. The aim of each maritime company is to achieve a zero number of accidents. However -*since maritime accidents are an unpleasant reality*- the duty of each maritime company is to be as prepared as possible (in order to face a crisis stemming/originating after an accident) based on a plan of action and strategic design that preceded the accident itself.

The multidimensional consequences of maritime accidents are directly connected to the causes that lead to these accidents. The most basic categories of maritime accidents can be summarized as follows: to those related with the collision of two vessels, stranding, explosion, fire, vessel contact and collision with another stable or floating object, engine malfunction or shipbuilding issues while the human factor claims a large contributing share of accident causes.

Another very important aspect of maritime accidents is comprised by the matter of consequences; these are -regardless of the vessel type- connected to: I) the loss of or damage to the vessel; II) the total or partial loss of cargo; III) pollution and/or degradation of the marine environment (these including all the environmental, aesthetic and financial -for the parties involved and hurt- parameters/major factors); IV) last and not least -on the contrary, most important- is the loss of human life; this cannot be replaced nor is it restored through indemnification (American Bureau of Shipping, 2005).

The vicious cycle of the above-mentioned consequences paves the way for one more -even greater- consequence, this time on the maritime company itself: negative publicity, media depiction and as a result the brand company image being heavily mauled. The accident itself constitutes of defamation, a disparaging slur for the company and could shatter the company's bond with its partners, customers and all interested-to-the-company parties. In all cases -and especially in those that passenger ships and loss of human life are involved- delicate actions are necessary in order to reverse the adverse climate in the consciousness of the public/customers and to facilitate the return of trust towards the company. In this pivotal checkpoint for the company's welfare the concept of maritime accidents' crisis management enters the scene (Tunheim Partners, 2009). The following chapter deals with the methods and best practices for optimum crisis management from the company's point of view, with the specific goal in mind to repair the reputation and restore the public's trust and to the company.

2. Communicational Management of the Crisis

The meaning of the word "reputation" is of the outmost importance for any given maritime company making headway in this highly competitive field as it provides her with an antagonistic edge -an unfair advantage to some- allowing her to establish solid bonds of trust with customers and partners. A maritime accident threatens to greatly disrupt and usurp (in a relatively minute space of time) these relationships based on trust, relationships which took years for a company to build. The size of the company itself does not define the impact and repercussions of a certain crisis, on the contrary; the larger the company the more interest and coverage from the media are to be expected (Lawrence, 2010).

In our era of internet-based communication and information globalization, coverage of news and in specific, maritime accidents, is being transmitted by the news media in a much faster and efficient manner. This difference in the time necessary to broadcast and convey a specific message is clearly evident even compared to the status quo of two years ago; the information required a minimum of two hours in order to be transmitted back then, whereas now, the time has been reduced to less than 30 minutes (Clark, 2013a). This feat of journalistic strength can be in fact attributed to the ever growing response of

the public towards social networking media (*including such internet sites as Facebook, twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, MySpace and similar net-based applications/platforms*) which strive to inform the public, claiming along the way the greater part of the viewing audience as well as being selected as their preferred source of information (*albeit, the latest developments in the cellular phone industry have facilitated even greater access to the internet through mobile devices thus making information distribution even more direct*) (Hayzlett, 2011). Indicatively, as far as modern-day civilian journalism is concerned per se, facebook numbers more than 800 million members, of which 31% checks their updates on a daily basis while 250 million photographs are uploaded daily onto this social networking service/platform. Correspondingly, Twitter reports more than 500 million registered users/accounts with a staggering number of 175 millions tweets per day. YouTube data indicate to a minimum number of 4 billion views of the already uploaded videos (Clark, 2013a).

In this unit, the communicational management of certain given maritime accident crises will be dealt with, including the optimum and internationally accepted best practices for proper Media crisis management and in extension towards all vested-interest parties, the public opinion and the afflicted parties.

The communicational management of a crisis is not only recommended for the methods of proper response to an accident or for the publication of a press release. It revolves mainly on the implementation of a well-prepared plan of action for the management of critical incidents; the goal in mind being to minimize the consequences of any given accident. This strategically designed plan of action is comprised of (and divided to) two parts: the beforehand necessary actions of the company and the post-accident reaction on her behalf (Ward, 2011).

2.1 Before the accident

The concept of crisis communication management is of a clear proactive character. A company that shows clear interest concerning her reputation is obliged to be well prepared in advance for the course of (re)action in case of an accident (Adams *et al.*, 2011). The beforehand preparation includes the following:

- A crisis management plan of actions, which –ideally– should be updated/renewed on a yearly (*at least*) basis. This plan of actions should contain all necessary information and step-by-step instructions related to how a given crisis is managed. Also included an up-to-date list with all the media groups (*both internet-based news sources as well as traditional media such as newspapers, radio stations, television channels etc.*) and their contact information, while simultaneously designating the group of company employees that will be responsible to manage the accident from a communications' scope and point of view. The main goal of this plan of actions is to avoid wasting precious early-response time (directly after the accident's happening), exactly the point when the company should react directly and in proper fashion (Seeger, 2006).
- A suitably-prepared crisis communication team. Ideally, it should be composed by persons that *-besides having received formal training on the matter at hand-* should have had frequent operational readiness testing in the form of crises' simulation.

The spokesman for the company should have been clearly assigned in advance, since he/she will be representing the company on the news media in a case of an accident. Furthermore, two persons are usually nominated and assigned this role of spokesman, both being properly “groomed” in preparation of media management; the first person is named spokesman and the second his/hers replacement/substitute in case of the first person being unable to step up to the plate. Another important point that cannot be stressed enough is that, in case of an accident, all company employees are “potential spokesmen”, thus reporters can easily attempt to come into contact with literally anyone in the company in order to draw information. For this reason alone, all or most of company employees -wherever possible and for good measure- should have at least a basic knowledge and understanding of how to manage emergency situations for a media management point of view (Leighton, N. and Shelton, 2008).

2.2 Post-accident

The news media aim for startling material or for the most eye-grabbing front-page, one that will attract the public eye and increase sales/views or the ratings. As such, the media are not simply content with informing the public but strive for the publication of news that intrigue, shape and create impressions, stimulate the curiosity or the public’s sense of justice. Media usage of an everyday tone, often using popular cultural depictions and language, care for a sense of familiarity, whereas the use of questions, suggestions, titles with bold letters etc. already portray a certain first “feel” for the accident. For all these above-mentioned reasons, the company’s first reaction is of the outmost importance (Fygetakis, 2007).

According to Clark, the first response of the company should always be acknowledging the accident took place (a statement in the form “We are aware of... / We know of...” will suffice). In no occasion should the company spokesperson/representative declare a state of ignorance (especially when all the media have already sent live correspondents to the site of the accident as well as to all the venues and key persons related to the accident at hand). Furthermore, the traditionally used “No comment” statement portrays a message of denial and/or guilt on the part of the company and should be strongly avoided at all costs. In this first and crucial time window of opportunity the company should step forward -even if there is a lack of clear information at that point- and boldly acknowledge what has taken place (taking into consideration the solid facts -or the lack thereof- at that specific time). Should the company not make a statement at that critical first hours, others (including the press) will not waste this “opportunity” to talk on her behalf, a fact which generally does not favor the company image well-being. The key word in such instances is control; the lid that the company should keep on things in order for the incident not to spiral out of control into an avalanche. This is the point where the (*hopefully already formulated and now painfully evidently necessary*) plan of action should kick in (Clark, 2013a).

The company spokesman should come out in public within the first few hours after the accident and make the first official statements concerning the accident. The main characteristic traits of media management involve the following suggested practices:

- First and foremost/initially expressing his/hers sadness for the accident;
- Lay down the facts, however they are, even if it means stepping forward with unfavorable news for the company and acknowledging that there is a problem;
- Assume all the responsibilities that correspond to the company;
- The facts must be presented in a bottom-up manner, from the beginning and not as top-bottom (i.e. not in the form of results);
- The presentation of all information should be conducted with clarity and no technical jargon. Otherwise, the company can be suspected of purposefully attempting to confuse the public -due to mayhaps “having something to hide” etc.-;
- The spokesman should remain calm and avoid gestures and/or movements that indicate nervousness;
- He/she should keep his/hers calm even when the questions being asked are offensive towards him/her of the company itself. Should he step out of line, the media will make short work of his inadequacy;
- His/hers speech should incorporate short sentences with a clear and dynamic rhetoric;
- His/hers speech should reflect feelings when about to express his/hers concern about missing or deceased persons;
- The will and expressed intent to reimburse all damages creates a positive image, as well as the reassurance that all measures will be taken in order to avoid such an accident in the future (Ganetsos, 2008).

The public requires direct answers; thus, the company should utilize all media outlets in order to keep the interested world up-to-speed. It is clear that the most basic source of information regarding the accident should be comprised from the company itself, either in the form of press releases or through company spokesman statements (Petroleum Safety Authority, 2012). Furthermore, no distinction or discrimination should be made concerning the media, while on another note, the journalists’ aim (for a front-page story) should be noted. The company must be/remain in control concerning who’s given clearance to communicate officially with the journalists and make sure that these persons are capable of withstanding the heat, efficiently managing the crisis communication. Obviously, it would not fare well for the company to have invested both time and resources to train high-ranking employees in crisis communication management only to have negative coverage created by misinterpreted or unfortunate statements by employees (Clark, 2013b).

In cases of accidents where human lives were at stake, it is imperative for the company to create a hotline through which the relatives of missing persons or accident victims can be brought up to speed with the latest developments. On a similar note, an excellent communicational tool is the creation of a web site (*or a specific section in the company’s already existent internet portal*) where the public is kept in the loop concerning all accident-relevant news. Furthermore, all partners, associates, suppliers should be kept up-to-speed, along with though affected by this crisis; this should be achieved through constant and direct contact without turning over communication matters to the media alone. These movements improve and reinforce the company’s image while simultaneously support these bonds of trust that the company wishes to maintain.

A direct approach, reliability and honesty are the three mainstays of maintaining control in times of crisis. The next step after the accident itself and the end of the crisis period is the assessment process. The crisis management team evaluates the company's reaction and analyzes the outcomes that their management resulted in. Through this process, useful results can be drawn while necessary amendments, corrections and suggestions are noted for future use and implementation. Finally, it is very important after the accident has been closed to actively and closely monitor the media overtone for identifying future communicational actions and practices (Bernstein, 2013).

In the next chapter, case studies of maritime accidents' crisis communication management are presented.

3. Case studies

3.1 “Costa Concordia”

3.1.1 Introductory information concerning the accident

On the night of 13th January 2012 the cruise ship “Costa Concordia”, operated by “Costa Crociere” (a subsidiary of “Carnival Corporation”) run aground off the eastern shore of Isola del Giglio, Italy. Aboard the vessel were 3.229 passengers (1.000 of which were Italians, 500 were German, 170 were French and the rest were of various ethnicities) while the crew members reached 1.023 persons. The cruise ship had begun on the previous day from the port of Rome on a cruise around the Mediterranean, with Marseille as its intended destination. The toll of this accident amounted to 32 persons dead and two officially missing up until this day. Directly after the grounding panic ensued. According to The Telegraph newspaper coverage, the alarm was raised by the passengers themselves, when one of them contacted his parents, who in turn, contacted the Coast Guard. The Captain of the “Costa Concordia” informs the owner company, yet only mentions a simple blackout as the cause of distress and reassures them that everything is under control. A few minutes later, when the Coast Guard successfully reaches him in a recorded communication, the Captain admits that waters are flooding into the vessel, yet he considers that the situation does not constitute an emergency (The Telegraph, 2012).

The passengers clearly indicate that the crew delayed in launching the life boats, resulting in panic breaking out when this was ultimately conducted (Zingman, 2012). On the first of the accident, 6 persons had already passed away; 7 days later, this number climbed to 11 while the missing persons totaled at 22. At the same time, passenger testimonies reach the public spotlight concerning the Captain's dealing with the accident. Captain Francesco Schettino appears to have abandoned ship and boarded a life boat prior to the ship's complete passenger evacuation; according to a transcript of a recorded communication (*easily attainable through YouTube*) between him and Coast Guard Captain Gregorio De Falco, part of public domain has been made by the Captain Schettino's denial to obey Coast Guard Captain's order to return to the ship and coordinate the evacuation process from onboard. Schettino has been under arrest and faces charges of manslaughter, causing a shipwreck and abandoning ship (Pullella, 2012).

3.1.2 Crisis management

The significance of the way a company manages a crisis *-on the communicational level-* (as well as the best practices towards the minimization of the consequences) on the well-being and progress of the company has been shown in the previous chapter. In the following part, the Costa Concordia ship managing Company's reactions are analyzed in juxtaposition with the suggested strategies of communication management.

- A direct response from the company is required, no delays, no time to waste: The first reaction of the company was via its facebook profile page, late at the night of the 13th January 2012, with the following statement: *"Our thoughts are with guests and crew of the Costa Concordia. We are keeping them in our hearts in the wake of this very sad event"*. During the course of the next five days, relevant official announcements and information concerning the ship's evacuation as well as the rescue progress were released without though answering the numerous comments being left at facebook and twitter. The first press release was sent by the company on the 14th of January 2012, expressing its sadness concerning the accident, offering its support for the families of the victims, reassuring that the company will offer all possible assistance to crew and passengers while at the same time expressing its gratitude for the local authorities (Cruise Radio, 2012). The first official press conference was not given approval for publication up until the 16th of January from the President and CEO (at the time) of "Costa Crociere", Mr. Pier Luigi Foschi. By that (late) time, all social media had been flooded already with images, video, views, analyzes, news and comments on the accident (Clark, 2012). On the 17th of January, the recorded conversation with the Captain's denial to return onboard was made public. On the 19th of January, the company posted a statement with her decision to temporarily suspend all post/press releases via facebook and twitter.

The lack of a spokesman was evident from the start of the accident, a fact that shatters the very basis of crisis communication management (Communicate Magazine, 2012). Three days has to pass until the first press conference was organized and given, indicative of the lack of preparations and planning by the company. In the meantime, the media were given an unprecedented reign on formulating the public opinion on the matter (being able to talk for/about the company, with the company itself absent from the process).

Furthermore, according to Italian press information, the company's crisis communication team responsible *"showed no real understanding what was taking place"*, which was corroborated also from the examining judges' report (ToVima, 2012).

- Responsibility: The Company initially claimed that the Captain was behind the helm during the time of impact, when the luxury liner ran aground. Shortly after, it revised its position and fully blamed the Captain, naming him sole responsible of this tragedy. Simultaneously to all these, the crew appeared not to be ready to deal with an emergency situation, failing to calm and direct passengers, as they themselves clearly testify.

The company owed to assume the responsibility of the accident; on the contrary though, the company took haste to blame the Captain which the company itself had hired

and trained. Its own claim for proper crew training came to a complete contrast to what the passengers experienced.

- Interest and concern: Even though the company did express its interest and concern (*clearly emphasizing full refunds as well as reimbursement for all the passengers' expenses*), it announced a 30% discount for the passengers of "Costa Concordia" on future cruises and received negative and ironic comments/feedback (Bacarik, 2012).

3.1.3 The company after the accident

The blow that the company took after the "Costa Concordia" grounding was quite serious. On the first days after the accident the "Carnival Corporation" share falls by 20% while the economic losses were expected to reach 95 million \$ or 10 cents per share. Compensations total to 500 million \$ to 1 billion \$ surpassing even the compensation from the Exxon Valdez oil spill (Reporter.gr, 2012).

The hoisting of the massive shipwreck will take place by September 2013, at the latest, and is expected to cost around 400 million €, based on estimates by the ship managers. Also, very important here is to note that a serious ecological disaster was prevented (*when the oil tanks of the "Costa Concordia" were successfully emptied –half a million gallons of oil were pumped out before becoming an oil-spill disaster*).

The great publicity given to the Captain and the story woven around his name and (lack of) activities seems to have worked in favor of the company, since it turned the interest spotlight and public eye on him (as opposed to the company). It is worthwhile to mention that crew was awarded the "Seafarer" Award of the year by Lloyd's newspaper (New Post, 2012). Lastly, concerning the current economic situation of "Carnival Corporation", Carnival Corporation & plc Chairman and CEO Micky Arison states that 2012 was a fiscal year full of hard work, which yielded equal profits to the previous year -having taken everything into account, including the "Costa Concordia" accident- and that economic losses were only reported by "Costa Cruises" (Carnival Corporation & plc, 2012).

A year after the accident, during the trial which was set for April 2012, the Company accepted a € 1 million fine which exempted it from a criminal trial. However, the ex-Captain will be indicted for trial, continuing to attract the news spotlight. Roberto Ferrini, the Company's responsible for crisis management is likewise accused for lack of proper actions, a clear fact underlining the significant importance of a correct, fool-proof strategy in an accident's communication management (ToVima, 2012).

3.2 Rena

3.2.1 Introductory information concerning the accident

The container ship "Rena", flying the Liberian flag, owned and operated by "Costamare Inc" (*through one of its subsidiaries, "Daina Shipping"*) ran aground on the Astrolabe Reef, 12 miles off Taurange, New Zealand on the 5th of October 2011. The ship was carrying 1.368 containers and its cargo included 1.700 metric tons of heavy fuel oil (HFO), 200 metric tonnes of marine diesel oil and eight containers with hazardous ma-

terial inside. The accident was attributed to the Captain's mistaken navigation and resulted in an unheard of *-for this area known for its pristine environment-* ecological disaster; 350 tonnes of oil and 300 containers were released into the sea. The ship remained initially stuck on top of the reef, listing 11 degrees to port, while 4 days in the accident the oil spill began to threaten the area's wildlife and fishing waters. By the 10th of October, oil began to wash ashore at Mount Maunganui, the ship shifted onto the reef further due to worsening weather conditions, listed further and the crew was forced to evacuate it. On the 13th of October, the Maritime New Zealand ordered all beaches in the affected area to be closed to the public and volunteers assisting with the cleanup process were warned that contact with spilled oil could result in vomiting, nausea etc. It has to be noted that the Authorities of New Zealand acted immediately in order to contain the pollution, minimizing its extent and recruited environmental experts and rescue crews for the protection of the coastline (Econews, 2011).

3.2.2 Crisis management

From a news media point of view, this accident happened to take place on the same day as the passing away of Steve Jobs (*American entrepreneur, inventor, best known as the co-founder, chairman, and CEO of Apple Inc; February 24, 1955 – October 5, 2011*). Furthermore, the public eye was also on the "Occupy Wall Street" protest movement (*17th of September – 15th of November 2011, Zuccotti Park, New York City, USA*). As a result of these events, the media had already their "hands full" and front-page material which lead to the accident being *-at least for the first few days-* not covered by the media. Only after the 9th of October did the media really begin extensively covering the accident, the start being made by CBC News and then The Guardian, BBC etc. At that same time, the internet began being flooded with (*YouTube*) videos from the accident site as well as photographic material being uploaded with vivid scenery (*such as oiled birds*); these circled the globe, media upon media repeating the "message" and circulating this material which seriously offended and yanked the chains of a environmentally friendly public and ethical audience (Morton and Harper, 2011). The company's reactions in conjunction with the best and suggested communication management practices are presented below:

- **No Delay:** As per Clark (2013), the clock for any company regarding a crisis starts ticking as soon as the media catch wind of the accident. The timeline concerning how soon a spokesman comes forward is extremely clear and errs on the side of "as soon as possible". In the case of "Rena", "Costamare" immediately after being informed of the accident, sent a group of company representatives at the site of the accident even though facing furious protests from local bodies. On a shift and bold move, the company's Managing Director Mr. D. Manos addressed the matter and gave a press conference on the 12th of October (Safety4Sea, 2011).
- **Responsibility:** In the above mentioned press conference, the company apologized directly for the accident and expressed great sorrow and regret. Furthermore, the Managing Director emphasized that investigations will take place concerning the actual conditions that caused the accident. He also admitted that "obviously something went very wrong", supporting at the same time that the ship was fully cer-

tified and had been recently been inspected. Lastly, the company is prepared to fully comply with all liabilities determined by international laws and conventions.

- Show concern: The company acted immediately and went public, stating that the company will stand by the afflicted parties, reported that the best experts globally have already been mobilized to contribute in order to contain this environmental disaster and also emphasized the already established environmental sensitivity of the company.

The company's reaction to this crisis was immediate, especially having taken into consideration that there was no loss of human life or missing persons. Furthermore, the company appeared responsible and ready to assume responsibility and cover all expenses; these concepts were also evident in the clear and powerful statement made by the Managing Director.

3.2.3 Post-accident

The company had listen in the American stock exchange a year before the accident, while the "Rena" accident took place only 15 days after the ship managers had purchased two newly constructed vessels which were chartered for 10 years (the first) and 63 months (the second) to "Mediterranean Shipping Company S.A." (MSC). The "Rena" was classified as a complete loss while the fine imposed by the Government of New Zealand amounted to €22,6 million. The financial data of the company for the year 2011 show that it has not been affected profoundly from the accident, since *-having taken into account the sale of 6 ships and the loss of "Rena"-* the company reported investor profits of \$13,1 million; for the year 2010 *-when 4 ships were sold-* the company reported investor profits of \$9,6 million (ProtoThema, 2012) and for 2012, "Costamare" reported a 12% drop of its profit (Marinews.gr, 2013). The company's stance from the start of the accident is described as responsible, open and showing immediate response, indicative of a pre-crisis existing plan of action and media management; this, surely contributed to the company showing signs of recovery after only a short amount of time (approximately one and a half year), minimizing to the least possible extend all consequences of this enormous ecological catastrophe that it caused.

3.3 Sea Diamond

3.3.1 Introductory information concerning the accident

The "Sea Diamond" was a cruise ship owned by "Louis Cruises Lines Ltd" Company that on the 5th of April 2007 ran aground on a volcanic reef outside of the port of Santorini, Greece. The ship began taking on water underneath the decks and listed 12 degrees to starboard in an extremely short amount of time; ultimately the ship sank on the dawn of the next day. The moment it became clear that the ship had ran aground, the Captain ordered the ship to be evacuated and the crew guided the passengers to the nominated assembly areas while the lifeboats were deployed in preparation of the evacuation's embarkation phase. Given the fact that the emergency distress signal was sent in time, this lead to a rescue operation being mounted by the Coast Guard as well as the island's local inhabitants using their civilian vessels (Malama, 2011).

The aftermath of the “Sea Diamond” accident was two human lives lost while the marine environment and the heavy polluting of the environment of the submerged caldera of the volcanic island of Santorini (in.gr., 2007).

3.3.2 Crisis Management

As soon as the accident became known, there was a spree of negative publicity as well as outright attacks on the ship manager company by the “Archipelagos” non-governmental organization. Examining step-by-step the company’s communicational actions comparatively to those considered optimum from the crisis communication management aspect, the following points can be made:

- The company’s Spokesman and Representative answered the call and stepped up immediately: the first official statement of the company was released 24 hours after the accident emphasizing that their first and foremost concerns were the public and the environment; at the same time reassuring that besides the two missing persons -at that time-, all other passengers were accounted for, safe and sound. Following this statement, other press releases ensued as well as media interviews, appearances of the company’s General Manager accompanied with an openness and will to supply information to whoever is interested; all these were valid attempts to display willingness to cooperate reinforcing the company’s social/brand image. However, the opportunity loss of acting at the first critical hours is an indication of the fact that the company was not fully prepared to face a media crisis.
- Responsibility: The Company undertook the responsibility from the start to investigate what caused the accident; afterwards, the discovered discrepancies between the actual sea area mapping and the official charts used were blamed for the accident. The company stood by the Captain’s side and defended him, rebutting all negative publicized news and emphasizing his skillsets. On the environmental pollution front, the company cooperated with suitable companies in order to avoid an oil spill; the result being all the fuel being pumped off the shipwreck and a floating barrier being placed and monitored daily by a pollution-control vessel. Regarding the company being fined €1.17 million by the Ministry of Mercantile Marine for causing marine pollution, a company press release emphasized that this was unfair and unfounded taking into consideration the progress of the anti-pollution process and the successful pumping of the oil.
- The company displayed interest/concern: From the start, the company’s priority was the safe transport and return home for all passengers (the majority of which were of American, German and French origin); this included covering the expenses for their stay in Santorini on the same night as the accident, sending the cruise ship “Perla” in order to transport them back to Piraeus as well as compensating them for all expenses related to the cruise, even offering a free four-day Greek Island cruise (Ganetsos, 2007).

3.3.3 Post accident

The negative publicity and the accident's aftermath did take their toll on the company. Two months after the accident, the Executive President of the company informed the shareholders about the negative impact the accident had on the company's profits which came to €10,4 million. The Company immediately launched a new campaign abroad in order to boost its brand name. The Group's hotels also faced a crisis during the years of 2007-2008, due to the company being the topic of unfavorable reviews, discussions and comments *-for a great period of time-* in international news media agencies which also lead to the company's share continually lose value in the Cyprus Stock Exchange. Overall though, the company certainly managed to overcome all these in a relatively short amount of time, even purchasing a new hyper-modern cruise ship in 2008 (Malama, 2011). The company's crisis communication management *-even though it cannot be considered exemplary-* lead to the reversing to a great extent of the public negative climate. The company's support, sensitivity for the environment, extroversion, immediate mobilization to restore the company's brand name, care for proper dealing with negative news publications as well as the responsibility undertaking all helped the company contained the negative consequences of the accident, preventing them from proving fatal.

In the trial (*which is currently taking place -April 2013*), the first conclusion of the expert witness is that *-due to the four long gashes sustained by the ship's running aground on a reef-* there was no chance of it to evade sinking. Concerning the ship's seaworthiness, the same expert witness stated that the Sea Diamond possessed all necessary safety certificates (Econews, 2013).

4. Conclusions

This work depicted the optimum strategies concerning maritime accidents' communication management and following these, studied the reactions of three major companies and the way they dealt with their corresponding accidents and crisis communication of "Costa Concordia", "Rena" and the "Sea Diamond".

- The ship managers of "Costa Concordia", even though initially *-at the start of the crisis-* deviated from the standard & suggested communication strategies, they managed to soften the impact on the company's image by not steering the media away from the Captain, whose "sole responsibility" allowed the Company to recover and experience only limited repercussions. As noted by the Company's Lawyer, "Costa Crociere" will become the plaintiff in the coming trial and request compensation for the loss of the ship; this is truly a reversal of the rules of the game (ToVima, 2013).
- Costamare, the ship managers of "Rena" achieved to manage the crisis in textbook fashion, as prescribed in order to minimize its effects and not lose the trust of both customers as well as shareholders. Even though they did not have to face human losses, an environmental disaster of such magnitude could have proven fatal to the company's wellbeing; however, the company managed to stand tall, face the music and dust off, giving away the clear image of a responsible company that takes actions immediately to remedy the damages. Independent shorebird ecologist Dr J.

Dowding supports that $\frac{3}{4}$ of the affected/polluted region's dotterels are alive and have returned to their natural habitat; even started rebuilding their nests after one and a half year (Radio New Zealand, 2013). Such statements reinforce the Company's good public image, positively show on the public mind and opinion, while at the same time slowly expunge the initial common feeling of the area's environmental devastation.

- Concerning the “*Sea Diamond*” accident, it is noted from the start that the crew readiness at the time of the crisis worked in favor of the company. On a communicational level, this crisis took more time to manage, deviating from the optimum model. Still though, the ship managers managed to maintain the control of the situation, which can be greatly attributed to the significant level of environmental protection sensitivity they displayed in conjunction with directly replying on hurtful/negatively depicting news coverage. Ultimately, this allowed the company to recover in a relatively very short amount of time. Lastly, what with the trial being the epicenter of interest, it is a certain fact that *-even so many years after the accident-* the story still poses as “news” and draws the world news medias’ attention.

The common ground of all three accidents was the large extend of publicity and media coverage (via articles, news bulletins and comments on all media platforms) which covered practically all aspects and moments of them, as these took place and progressed. Furthermore, the companies purposefully did not neglect the press. On the contrary, they each utilized a plan of crisis communication management and based upon this stepped up to the mark, went public, expressed their view thus ipso facto enforcing and disseminating their social profile to the public; this which was necessary for the post-accident recovery of the company.

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