**PEC-COP Scale Overview**

The Perceived Effects of Communication on the Crisis Organizing Process (PEC-COP) is a scale designed by Professors Ryan Fuller, Andrew Pyle, Laura Riolli, and Amy Mickel. Drawing on more than two decades of crisis research, the PEC-COP is a valid, reliable, and quick tool (9-questions) that academics and practitioners can use to evaluate how a defined stakeholder group views a target organization's communication during a crisis. The tool can be used to help improve future crisis communication responses.

**Non-commercial Use of PEC-COP**

The authors believe it is a public interest for organizations to produce effective crisis responses. The scale is available for use to meet public good purposes. Organizational leaders or those serving in a communication role who are interested in using the questionnaire may do so for non-commercial purposes, i.e., to help improve internal and external organizational communication. Academics can use the questionnaire for research purposes. Any use of the scale should be credited to the authors:

Fuller, R.P., Pyle, A., Riolli, L., Mickel, A. (2020). Creating Order Out of Chaos? Development of a Measure of Perceived Effects of Communication on the Crisis Organizing Process. *International Journal of Business Communication.* doi: 10.1177/2329488420979657

Questions about use (including commercial use) of the scale should be directed to Dr. Ryan Fuller, ryan.fuller@csus.edu.

**Why Use the PEC-COP?**

Producing an effective response should be a goal of all organizations that experience a crisis. Therefore, any type of organization (for-profit, non-profit, government) may find the scale useful. Organizations and communicators that have roles in public safety, emergency, and disaster response may be especially interested in using the scale.

Organizational leaders and communicators may consider using the PEP-COP scale, in some of the following ways:

- As a checklist for the leadership team to evaluate organizational communication after a crisis ends
- As an internal survey to ask employees about communication after the crisis ends
- As a survey with external stakeholders to ask about communication after a crisis

**How to Interpret the PEC-COP Scale**

The PEC-COP scale is a 9-item, single-factor scale. Each question uses a numerical semantic differential with poles at either end representing positive or negative effects on communication during the crisis. For any question in particular, "1" represents poor communication; "4" is the midpoint and neutral; a "7" represents positive effects of the organization's communication.

The range for the scale is 9 to 63; the interpretations overall are similar as to the individual questions.

Users should total and average numerical responses for each question. They should also total each individual's responses to the 9 questions and average all the total scores. These analyses will provide users with diagnostic information for each question and for the effects of communication on the crisis organizing process overall.

**How to Incorporate the PEC-COP into Crisis Management Planning**

The PEC-COP is both retrospective and prospective. Organizational leaders and communicators use it to assess crises that have passed (the backward-looking part). Reflecting on the past is important for organizational learning and growth, and allows the organization to maintain what it did well and make changes to produce effective crisis communication responses in the future.

| Perceived Effects of Communication on the Crisis-Organizing Process | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item | The organization's communication … | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | caused disorder | 1 ◯ | 2 ◯ | 3 ◯ | 4 ◯ | 5 ◯ | 6 ◯ | 7 ◯ | restored order |
| 2 | raised uncertainty | 1 ◯ | 2 ◯ | 3 ◯ | 4 ◯ | 5 ◯ | 6 ◯ | 7 ◯ | reduced ambiguity |
| 3 | exposed it to greater risks | 1 ◯ | 2 ◯ | 3 ◯ | 4 ◯ | 5 ◯ | 6 ◯ | 7 ◯ | protected it from harm |
| 4 | constrained its abilities | 1 ◯ | 2 ◯ | 3 ◯ | 4 ◯ | 5 ◯ | 6 ◯ | 7 ◯ | enabled extraordinary actions |
| 5 | prolonged crisis mode | 1 ◯ | 2 ◯ | 3 ◯ | 4 ◯ | 5 ◯ | 6 ◯ | 7 ◯ | expedited crisis recovery |
| 6 | divided constituents | 1 ◯ | 2 ◯ | 3 ◯ | 4 ◯ | 5 ◯ | 6 ◯ | 7 ◯ | connected stakeholders |
| 7 | sowed confusion | 1 ◯ | 2 ◯ | 3 ◯ | 4 ◯ | 5 ◯ | 6 ◯ | 7 ◯ | provided clarity |
| 8 | over-relied on routine | 1 ◯ | 2 ◯ | 3 ◯ | 4 ◯ | 5 ◯ | 6 ◯ | 7 ◯ | adapted to the situation |
| 9 | set off a vicious cycle | 1 ◯ | 2 ◯ | 3 ◯ | 4 ◯ | 5 ◯ | 6 ◯ | 7 ◯ | started a virtuous cycle |

**Comments about Using the Questionnaire Responses to Improve**

| If you scored 1 -3 | Consider these questions | Consider implementing some of these changes for future crisis communication |
|---|---|---|
| caused disorder | Did you produce inaccurate or incorrect information in your messages that led to undesirable or unintended actions? | • Understand your goals for crisis communication<br>• Create a process for verifying facts and approving messages |
| raised uncertainty | Did you not communicate when you could, say "no comment", or fail to tell constituents about the process to getting answers and when to expect updates? Alternatively, were you overly certain in your messages? | • Avoid saying "no comment"<br>• Avoid overly certain statements<br>• Communicate with audiences even when you don't have new information<br>• Talk about what you know, don't know, and the process for getting answers |
| exposed it to greater risks | Did your messages contain incorrect information, or did you withhold information, leading to potential or actual harm? | • Understand the implicit values behind information sharing<br>• Provide messages that tell stakeholders what they can do to protect themselves |
| constrained its abilities | Did messages lock you into certain actions or limit your flexibility? | • Avoid overly certain statements, making predictions, or making promises that you cannot keep |
| prolonged crisis mode | Did you have to spend a lot of time correcting inaccurate information, or providing accounts for your organization's actions? | • Develop goals for effective communication |
| divided constituents | Were elements of your message controversial to certain audiences? Did messages use a "one size fits all" approach? | • Understand that different stakeholders may respond differently depending on their relationship to your organization<br>• Develop positive stakeholder relationships before a negative event |
| sowed confusion | Did communication and spokespeople provide mixed or inconsistent messages? | • Have an approved spokesperson<br>• Only share confirmed facts<br>• Talk about the process for gathering and sharing information in the absence of information |
| over-relied on routine | Did you rely on pre-scripted messages? Did your messages adapt to the changing circumstances? | • Understand that crises are non-routine and require different messages or channels to reach audiences |

| set off a vicious cycle | Did your messages produce a backlash against your organization? | <ul><li>Demonstrate lessons learned/corrective action to stakeholders</li><li>Work to build positive stakeholder relations</li></ul> |
|---|---|---|
| Recommendations developed from:<br><br>Seeger, M. W. (2006). Best practices in crisis communication: An expert panel process. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, *34*(3), 232-244.<br><br>Ulmer, R. R., Sellnow, T. L., & Seeger, M. W. (2017). *Effective crisis communication: Moving from crisis to opportunity*. Sage Publications. | | |