



European Institute of Innovation,
Entrepreneurship, and Technology

**Title: Leadership Through Language: Managing
Crisis Communications at Coastal Escapes Ltd.
After a Fatal Jet Ski Accident**

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Abstract

When tragedy strikes in tourism, as in the fictional jet ski accident at Coastal Escapes Ltd.'s Phuket property resulting in a guest's death, language becomes more than words—it becomes a turning point for trust or fracture. The organization's public statements must move beyond legal correctness to embrace genuine compassion, clarity, and responsible ownership. **Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)** highlights that audience perceptions of fault and responsibility shape reputational consequences (Coombs, 2007). Under such emotionally charged circumstances, rigid corporate language falls short; instead, messages grounded in cultural humility and heartfelt remorse are necessary for authentic connection.

The assignment focuses on how Coastal Escapes might communicate with three distinct audiences—internal staff, the public media, and key stakeholders—each requiring tailored but consistent messaging. **Business English principles** ensure professionalism and clarity, while elevated emotional intelligence ensures messages are empathetic and authentic. Benoit's **Image Restoration Theory (IRT)** advocates for mortification and corrective action when an organization accepts responsibility (Benoit, 1995). Combining SCCT and IRT ensures each

message communicates fault acknowledgment, planned reforms, and genuine intent to reconcile with affected parties.

Cultural nuance is pivotal in a global tourism crisis response. Southeast Asian and Western audiences interpret tone and context differently—distinctions aptly captured by **Edward T. Hall's high-context vs. low-context communication model** (Hall, 1959). High-context cultures rely heavily on relational and symbolic messaging, while low-context cultures value directness and clarity. Recognizing this, Coastal Escapes' messages are designed to honor local subtleties—such as indirect apology norms in Thai culture—while maintaining transparency for Western guests and global media outlets.

Further, **Hofstede's cultural dimensions** shape message structure: power distance, individualism, and uncertainty avoidance guide whether messages should be delivered with formal authority or inclusive tone (Hofstede, 2010; IntechOpen, 2020). For internal staff in hierarchical operations, communications emphasize visible senior leadership presence and organizational change. For investors and partners in individualistic, low-uncertainty cultures, messages foreground factual updates, strategy, and measurable commitments to safety improvement.

Before crafting specific messages, it's essential to diagnose the crisis through the SCCT lens. The jet ski accident is best categorized within the “accidental cluster,” where organizational fault is perceived but unintentional. SCCT recommends a combination of corrective action and rebuilding strategies—such as public apology and remediation—and rejects denying or diminishing the incident (Coombs, 2007). This informed the decision to center each message on acknowledgement, care provision, and policy suspension/review.

Within this theoretical frame, messages must be structured to serve both emotional and reputational healing. Benoit's Image Restoration Theory underscores that after mortification, succinct corrective steps and bolstering restatements—such as highlighting past safety standards or intention to do better—restore credibility (Benoit, 1995). These elements came together in each deliverable: a staff memo expressing shared sorrow and describing immediate staff support; a press statement announcing external safety audits; and an investor communication assuring enhanced protocols and reduced future risk.

The internal staff message required special care. It was written in Business English to maintain clarity and respect, avoiding corporate distance while conveying leadership empathy. Refuge through **SCCT's instructing and adjusting message strategy** helps staff manage uncertainty and mental stress (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). Simultaneously, **Hall's high-context principles** were integrated—especially symbolism and relational tone—to show genuine concern in high-context Southeast Asian cultural expectations.

The public/media-facing message, meanwhile, leveraged low-context clarity for international audiences while embedding local deference and responsibility. It began with a clear outline of the incident, followed by condolences, accountability, and scheduled safety revisions—all hallmarks of the “rebuild” posture in SCCT (Coombs, 2007). Ad hoc media statements were

supplemented with infographics and translations to ensure transparency and accessibility, particularly vital in high uncertainty-avoidant cultures that demand concrete info.

Investor and stakeholder communication blended factual precision with cultural humility. This letter emphasized the organization's commitment to ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) alignment and rapid safety enhancements, appealing to investors' need for measurable credibility. It also referenced third-party safety certifications and external reviews—strategies suggested by both SCCT and **Contingency Theory of Accommodation** to meet public expectations responsibly (Cancel et al., 1997).

Through these integrated communication strategies—merging SCCT, IRT, Hall's context theory, and Hofstede's dimensions—Coastal Escapes demonstrates that crisis leadership is more than reactive messaging; it is a form of ethical stewardship in tourism. Language becomes a vessel for empathy, reform, and respect—guarding not just brand reputation, but the dignity of communities, staff, and affected families. In tourism, where experiences are built on emotional memory, this act of humanized communication offers the path to healing.

1. Introduction

In the tourism industry, trust is fragile. A single incident—especially one involving injury or death—can shift public opinion, destabilize partnerships, and disrupt internal morale. But when these crises occur, words are the first line of defense. Language becomes the bridge between organizational responsibility and public understanding. This assignment explores how Coastal Escapes Ltd. might use professional English to communicate effectively during such a high-pressure situation.

The fictional case centers around the accidental death of a tourist in Phuket during a jet ski activity organized by a third-party vendor affiliated with the resort. Though the vendor was operationally responsible, the resort is publicly accountable. The crisis requires the company to address multiple audiences—staff, guests, media, and investors—with different tones, structures, and information needs.

In the following sections, this assignment will examine the theoretical and intercultural considerations necessary in crisis communication. Then it will present three tailored messages that demonstrate how Business English can be adapted to express leadership, compassion, and control. A critical discussion will reflect on these decisions and offer lessons for real-world tourism professionals.

2. Literature Review

Crises are defining moments for tourism companies. They are not only disruptions but turning points—opportunities to either strengthen a brand through clear leadership or damage it through silence or insensitivity. This literature review explores the role of communication in navigating tourism crises, with a focus on professional Business English, intercultural dynamics, and theoretical frameworks. It also examines how tone, structure, and audience engagement influence recovery after critical incidents.

2.1 Language and Leadership in Crisis

Language is one of the most powerful tools in leadership—especially during emergencies. According to Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger (2014), crisis communication is a form of organizational behavior that signals not only competence but also character. The right choice of words reflects how much a company cares, understands, and takes action.

In the case of Coastal Escapes Ltd., the crisis involves a fatal accident at a partner-operated activity. This immediately triggers the need for strong leadership through language. Heath and O’Hair (2009) emphasize that during early crisis stages, leaders must demonstrate control, compassion, and clarity—especially in industries like tourism, where customer trust is vital.

Tone, in particular, communicates leadership. A company that expresses empathy without panic, and responsibility without over-admission, can maintain public confidence even during reputational threats (Fearn-Banks, 2016).

2.2 Professional English in Tourism Communication

Business English, when used properly, acts as a unifying tool during crises. It offers consistency, structure, and reassurance across all touchpoints. Unlike casual speech or legal jargon, professional English is carefully shaped to inform, comfort, and lead. It avoids ambiguity and emotional manipulation, favoring clarity and respectful neutrality (Guffey & Loewy, 2013).

Tourism communication often involves non-native speakers or multicultural audiences. In these cases, Business English must balance clarity with diplomacy. As Sweeney and McFarlin (2015) suggest, in high-emotion situations like accidents, using plain language with professional structure allows messages to remain accessible and culturally respectful.

In this assignment, the three crisis documents demonstrate how sentence length, paragraph structure, and tone shift depending on the target reader—employees, the general public, or investors. Each format must preserve the company’s brand while responding to the emotional weight of the incident.

2.3 Intercultural Communication Models

One of the biggest challenges in tourism crisis management is **intercultural sensitivity**. As global companies operate across countries and cultural boundaries, the meaning of words and the expectations of tone can vary dramatically.

Hall's (1976) theory of **high- and low-context cultures** helps explain this variation. In Thailand, where this scenario is based, high-context communication values subtlety, emotional harmony, and indirect speech. Direct admissions or strong emotional statements may feel uncomfortable or disrespectful. On the other hand, Western audiences in low-context cultures—like Germany or the United States—expect frank, clear information, especially in times of crisis.

Hofstede's (2011) **cultural dimensions** offer further insight. For example:

- Thailand scores high in **power distance**, which suggests that hierarchical and formal communication is expected from leadership.
- Countries like Sweden or the Netherlands, which score high in **individualism** and low in **uncertainty avoidance**, expect autonomy, transparency, and proactive information sharing.

Thus, the three messages in this assignment were adapted to reflect these expectations. The **staff memo** adopts a supportive, team-oriented tone that aligns with Thai workplace culture. The **stakeholder letter** is more direct, offering clear data and timelines, which better suits Western business norms.

2.4 Crisis Response Theories and Tools

The backbone of this assignment's communication strategy comes from two key theoretical frameworks: **Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)** and **Image Repair Theory (IRT)**.

Situational Crisis Communication Theory, developed by Coombs (2007), provides a decision-making guide based on the company's level of responsibility for a crisis. It divides crises into:

- **Victim:** natural disasters, where the organization is also affected
- **Accidental:** technical errors or third-party mistakes
- **Preventable:** negligence or ethical lapses

In the Coastal Escapes case, the incident is **accidental**, because it involved a third-party vendor. SCCT recommends that organizations respond with **rebuilding strategies**, such as expressions of concern, policy reviews, and concrete changes. Importantly, it discourages denial or silence, which can worsen reputational damage.

Image Repair Theory, by Benoit (1995), outlines five approaches to defending reputation:

1. **Denial** – Rejecting responsibility
2. **Evasion** – Claiming the event was beyond control
3. **Reduction** – Minimizing perceived damage
4. **Corrective Action** – Promising change
5. **Mortification** – Offering apology

Tourism organizations often blend these strategies. In this case, the communication documents focus on **corrective action** (suspending activities, launching audits) and **mortification** (acknowledging the tragedy and offering support), without admitting legal liability. This approach maintains transparency and trust while reducing long-term risk.

Together, SCCT and IRT help communicators shape tone, message content, and timing. They turn theory into action—and when combined with intercultural frameworks and professional English standards, they create a powerful crisis communication strategy.

3. Methodology

This assignment is designed as a practical case-based communication project that simulates a real-world tourism crisis. Instead of relying on numerical data or surveys, the methodology is qualitative and constructive. It focuses on message design, tone control, and cultural adaptation — all informed by academic theory, business communication best practices, and intercultural frameworks.

The process involved three primary stages: defining the writing scenario, adapting the audience-specific messaging strategy, and evaluating cultural and ethical filters. This section outlines the logic, tools, and structure behind how the three crisis communications were developed.

3.1 Communication Approach and Message Planning

The primary method for this project is **scenario-based simulation writing**. This involves creating realistic business communication responses to a fictional but plausible crisis. The central event—a tourist’s death during a jet ski activity at a luxury Thai resort—was chosen due to its relevance to adventure tourism and its emotional and reputational complexity.

To build the messages, the **three-step writing process** was applied (Guffey & Loewy, 2013):

1. **Planning** – Audience, tone, structure, and purpose were identified.
2. **Drafting** – Initial versions of each communication were written from scratch.
3. **Revising** – Each message was refined based on audience needs and tone appropriateness.

Specific attention was given to:

- Grammar and clarity for international readers
- Emotional tone matching the crisis context
- Cultural relevance based on audience background
- Professionalism and company image preservation

This approach ensures that messages are not only written correctly but also **deliberately tailored** to affect how the audience feels, understands, and reacts.

3.2 Stakeholder Segmentation and Message Design

Each communication in this assignment targets a **different stakeholder group**, each with unique expectations, concerns, and emotional states. Therefore, the messaging strategy was segmented into three streams:

1. **Internal staff communication**
 - **Purpose:** Reassure, inform, and unite the team
 - **Tone:** Soft, supportive, team-oriented
 - **Format:** Memo with bulleted guidance and a formal yet gentle tone
2. **Public/media statement**
 - **Purpose:** Inform the public, protect brand reputation, express empathy
 - **Tone:** Neutral, transparent, cautious
 - **Format:** Press release with formal quotation and key action highlights
3. **Stakeholder letter**
 - **Purpose:** Maintain trust with investors, regulators, and partners
 - **Tone:** Strategic, firm, informative
 - **Format:** Business letter with planned actions and corporate-level responsibility

This segmentation was influenced by real-life crisis protocols in hospitality companies (Heath & O’Hair, 2009) and adapted using theoretical frameworks described in the literature review. The goal was to ensure each audience would receive the information they needed, presented in a way that built confidence and reflected the organization’s professionalism.

3.3 Cultural and Ethical Considerations in Writing

Culture is not something added at the end of a message — it is embedded in every word, every pause, and every decision to say or not say something. That’s why **intercultural awareness** was central to the methodology.

For example:

- In the **staff memo**, indirect speech and collectivist values (such as "our team" and "together") were emphasized to align with **Thai high-context communication** and **power distance** norms (Hofstede, 2011; Hall, 1976).
- In the **public statement**, passive voice was used carefully to avoid legally sensitive admissions while still sounding caring and proactive.
- In the **stakeholder letter**, corporate terms like "risk management", "suspension of services", and "policy review" were used to signal control and compliance—language favored in Western business culture.

Ethically, the messages avoided:

- Speculation or blame
- Use of victim names or emotional overtones
- Empty promises or compensation claims
- Overuse of euphemisms or “corporate spin”

The priority was to maintain **truthfulness, sensitivity, and clarity**, as outlined in ethical business communication models (Ulmer et al., 2014). This approach supports the idea that professionalism doesn't mean coldness—it means responsibility, especially in a sensitive situation.

4. Findings

This section presents the core communication outputs designed to help Coastal Escapes Ltd. respond professionally and empathetically to the fatal jet ski accident. Each message is built around a specific audience’s needs and expectations, using Business English and tourism-industry language strategies. Tone, format, and vocabulary were carefully shaped by the theories discussed in the literature review.

4.1 Internal Staff Memo

To: Coastal Escapes Phuket & Regional Staff

From: Department of People & Culture

Date: 30 July 2025

Subject: Employee Update Regarding Incident at Phuket Resort

Dear Team,

We are deeply saddened to inform you that on 27 July, a tragic accident occurred involving one of our guests during a jet ski activity managed by an independent operator affiliated with our

Phuket property. Despite immediate response and support from our staff and emergency services, the guest unfortunately passed away.

Our hearts go out to the family affected by this loss. At the same time, we want to acknowledge the strength, compassion, and professionalism demonstrated by our on-site teams during this difficult time.

In light of the situation, the following temporary measures are in place:

- All jet ski and affiliated motorized water sport activities are suspended across Thailand operations.
- Our Health & Safety Taskforce has initiated an operational review in collaboration with local officials.
- Emotional wellness resources are available for any staff in need of support. Please contact your regional HR partner.
- Media inquiries must be forwarded to the Corporate Communications Unit without response.

We recognize that events like this are emotionally challenging. Please continue to support each other, uphold our core values, and prioritize guest safety and well-being. We are committed to learning from this and ensuring we respond with both care and integrity.

With appreciation and care,
Priya Malhotra
Director, People & Culture – Asia Region
Coastal Escapes Ltd.

4.2 Public Press Statement

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Coastal Escapes Ltd. Responds to Guest Accident at Phuket Property

Bangkok, Thailand – 30 July 2025

Coastal Escapes Ltd. confirms that a guest tragically passed away on 27 July following a jet ski accident at its Phuket location. The activity was being conducted by an external vendor, under partnership with the resort.

Local authorities were immediately alerted, and first aid was administered by trained on-site staff until emergency services arrived. The guest was transported to a local hospital, where the individual was pronounced deceased.

“We are devastated by this incident and are in contact with the guest’s family to offer our full support,” said Group CEO Anna Zhao. “The safety of our guests remains our top priority, and we are fully cooperating with ongoing investigations.”

Out of respect for the family and legal sensitivities, specific personal details are not being released at this time.

The company has taken the following steps:

- Suspension of all jet ski-related activities at Thailand properties pending full review
- Internal audit of water-based vendor agreements and compliance measures
- Independent third-party consultation for additional safety assessments

Coastal Escapes extends its sincere condolences to the family involved and thanks its staff and local emergency teams for their swift and professional response.

For further inquiries, contact:

press@coastalescapes.com

+66 220 998 3**

4.3 Letter to Stakeholders

To: Business Partners, Hospitality Investors, Local Tourism Agencies

From: Executive Office, Coastal Escapes Ltd.

Date: 30 July 2025

Subject: Phuket Incident – Operational Measures and Risk Management Update

Dear Valued Stakeholders,

We wish to inform you of a critical incident that occurred on 27 July 2025 at our Phuket resort, involving the accidental death of a guest during a jet ski activity operated by a third-party vendor.

First responders acted quickly, and our team provided all necessary on-site support. The guest was transported to a medical facility, where they were later pronounced deceased. Our leadership team is in contact with the family and supporting their needs during this time.

In response, we have enacted the following measures:

1. **Suspension of jet ski and motorized water sports** across all Thailand operations
2. **Immediate vendor compliance review** to evaluate contract obligations and safety procedures
3. **Coordination with legal teams and Thai tourism authorities** to ensure transparent cooperation
4. **Deployment of external safety advisors** for systems improvement and risk mitigation

We understand that crises of this nature can influence public perception, partner confidence, and operational continuity. Please rest assured that Coastal Escapes Ltd. is treating this incident with the highest degree of seriousness and accountability.

Our Risk & Compliance department will deliver a full findings report within two weeks. Should you require further clarification or wish to schedule a stakeholder briefing, our office remains available.

Sincerely,
David Montoya
Group Head of Risk & Strategy
Coastal Escapes Ltd.

5. Discussion

A fatal accident in the tourism industry is one of the most sensitive events a business can face. In such moments, language takes on a critical role—not just to report facts but to comfort, lead, and protect a company’s long-term credibility. This discussion section explores how the three crisis messages created in this assignment balance professional tone, intercultural awareness, and communication theory. It also reflects on the writing process from a student’s perspective, emphasizing how real-world communication requires more than just good grammar.

5.1 Message Tone and Purpose

Each of the three messages had to strike a different tone because they were designed for unique audiences facing different types of emotional and informational needs.

The **internal memo** prioritized support and emotional sensitivity. Since it was addressed to staff—many of whom may have been directly impacted—the tone was calm and reassuring. It avoided dramatic language and instead offered structure (e.g., bullet points, contact details) and reminders of available support resources. Guffey and Loewy (2013) emphasize that internal messages during crises should use empathy and community-oriented language to strengthen team unity.

The **public statement** had a different challenge. It had to sound responsible but not legally vulnerable, emotional but still objective. According to Fearn-Banks (2016), a good public statement avoids both excessive denial and exaggerated emotion. Here, the message used phrases like “devastated by this incident” and “full cooperation” to show humanity and responsibility without explicitly admitting liability.

The **stakeholder letter**, on the other hand, was much more strategic in tone. It used high-level terminology (“risk mitigation,” “compliance review”) and was direct, with specific steps outlined. This reflects business audiences’ expectations for clarity, timeline-based actions, and executive accountability (Heath & O’Hair, 2009). The letter’s tone also subtly projected control, which is key for maintaining partner confidence.

5.2 Cultural Sensitivity and Global English

One major element that shaped all three messages was **intercultural awareness**. Coastal Escapes Ltd. is a global company, and its communication strategy had to take cultural differences seriously—especially given that the incident occurred in Thailand.

Following Hall’s (1976) theory of high-context versus low-context communication, the **staff memo** was shaped by Thai cultural values. High-context cultures value indirect expression, emotional calmness, and group harmony. As such, the memo used collective language (“our team,” “we recognize”) and avoided overly direct phrases. This aligns with Hofstede’s (2011) dimensions too, particularly high **power distance**, which encourages respectful, non-confrontational internal communication.

Meanwhile, the **stakeholder letter** and **media statement** used lower-context language—short sentences, specific facts, and clear structures. These are more common in Western cultures, where audiences expect transparency and logic (Nickerson, 2005). Adjusting language for these audiences wasn’t just a writing choice; it was a **strategic decision** based on communication science.

5.3 Theoretical Frameworks in Practice

Two major theories supported the message design process: **Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)** and **Image Repair Theory (IRT)**.

According to SCCT (Coombs, 2007), the incident fits the “**accidental**” category—an unintentional incident involving a partner but with reputational risk for the company. In these scenarios, SCCT recommends **rebuilding strategies**, including:

- Expressing sympathy
- Offering assistance
- Explaining steps taken to prevent similar issues

This is exactly what the media statement and stakeholder letter did. Both expressed empathy and announced specific actions, such as suspending jet ski activities and reviewing vendor contracts.

Similarly, Benoit’s (1995) **Image Repair Theory** played a role. The strategy leaned heavily on:

- **Corrective Action** – outlining safety audits and temporary activity suspension
- **Minimization** – noting that the accident was rare and involved a third party
- **Mortification** – expressing sorrow and respect for the deceased guest

No attempt was made to deny or evade the issue. Instead, the goal was to **rebuild trust by demonstrating action** and care without worsening liability risk.

5.4 Reflections as a Tourism Student

Writing these messages felt both professional and personal. From a student perspective, this assignment offered a real-world taste of how hard—and important—it is to get crisis communication right in tourism.

The hardest part was controlling tone. When writing about a death, it’s tempting to either overreact with emotional language or sound too robotic. Finding the middle ground—where you sound **human, but composed**—took several revisions.

It was also eye-opening to see how theory shaped the smallest word choices. For instance, choosing “our hearts go out to the family” over “we apologize for the incident” was based on legal safety and SCCT’s recommendations. Every single word in a crisis message can have legal, emotional, and business consequences.

As a student of international management, I also learned that **Business English is never one-size-fits-all**. The same company needs different “versions” of itself depending on who it’s speaking to. To staff, it needs to sound protective. To the public, transparent. And to partners, authoritative. Balancing those versions is not just about writing skills—it’s about **leadership through language**.

6. Conclusion

In tourism, where customer experience defines reputation, a single crisis can shake the foundation of an entire brand. How a company communicates during such a time doesn’t just determine how the incident is perceived—it defines how the company is remembered. This assignment, centered around the tragic jet ski accident at Coastal Escapes Ltd.’s Phuket resort, explored how strategic communication through professional Business English can serve as both a protective shield and a leadership tool.

The three messages—internal memo, public press release, and stakeholder letter—showed how tone, structure, and vocabulary must change depending on the audience. Through this, it became clear that effective communication is never accidental; it’s carefully constructed using strategy, empathy, and intercultural understanding.

Applying **Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)** allowed for proper message positioning, especially in a scenario involving indirect responsibility. **Image Repair Theory (IRT)** provided the framework to build accountability without worsening legal risk. At the same time, intercultural models such as **Hofstede's dimensions** and **Hall's high/low context theory** helped adjust messages to respect cultural expectations.

As a student of international management and tourism, this assignment helped me see communication not just as a soft skill but as a strategic advantage. I learned that in crisis scenarios, what you say—and how you say it—can directly influence public trust, staff morale, and business resilience.

Language in these situations isn't just about clarity. It's about compassion. It's about timing. And most of all, it's about leadership.

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