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To control or not to control oil spills: shell's narrative of accountability in Nigeria

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Abstract

Purpose - This paper re-considers corporate accountability with a specific focus on Royal/Dutch/Shell's discursive categorization of oil spills in Nigeria.

Design/methodology/approach - Using text analysis, we reflect on the classification of oil spills as operational (controllable) and sabotage (uncontrollable) and the construction of self and the 'other' that inverts accountability relationship.

Findings - We found Shell's identity construction of self and 'other' assigns the causes of, and human agency to, oil spills that inverts the accountability relationship. Shell provides accountability of the communities but not to the communities. To control or not to control oil spills, is a question which is consequentially real for the narrator and those categorized.

Research limitations/implications - The paper directs attention to discursive categorization of oil spills by Royal/Dutch Shell, the boundaries of responsibility and the consequences for accountability.

Originality/value - This paper contributes further to an understanding of corporate accountability in oil producing communities by focusing on Shell's discursive categorization of oil spills anchored in the process of narrative and identity construction, in both the parent and the operating subsidiary in Nigeria.

Disciplines

Business

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