

Procedural and Systematic Crisis Approach and Crisis Management

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Abstract. *These approaches to crisis are a fundamental aspect of the systematic process of crisis management, but they are limited and must be accompanied by the existential side of the crisis. To live a major organizational crisis experience, if you want to think of the possibility of such a situation, may sometimes cause another intense anxiety. This anxiety, although irrational in the rational sense of the term, is nevertheless as real as possible. In order to answer the deep existential questions that occur during a crisis, there were and are applied different defensive strategies.*

Keywords: crisis, crisis management; procedural approach to crisis; systematic approach to the crisis; defensive strategies.

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Introduction

Today the crisis has become an everyday state and the word entered the current vocabulary of leaders of institutions, journalists and the general public.

The almost continuous presence of crises, placed in various institutions, has made that more and more political leaders, business leaders, and experts in management and public relations practitioners to talk about “crisis management” and about “crisis communication”.

It is almost an universally acknowledged truth that in the current era of globalization, social, economic life, labor, political, military life are affected by the crisis, regardless of how it is defined or felt. Also in the managerial field, the crisis is attached to economic social and political events or episodes, which are escaping from everyday life, having the tendency to become usual facts, customs, with various consequences on the situational aggression scale.

Rightly, it can be said that in the current human complex crises are accompanying us, they form us, they can provide various models or symbols to us, in other words they can govern or “manage” our work.

Any organization may face a crisis able that could jeopardize the normal functioning and the reputation they enjoyed in a particular community. Some crises are predictable and can be avoided others cannot be predicted or anticipated correctly.

1. The concept of crisis

If the event approach features the crisis’s characteristics to surprise, unpredictability and improbably, the procedural approach gives it a progression in intensity and visibility and allows it to anticipate the existence of stages: precursor signs, triggering, increase and resolution. It transpires therefore the opportunity to anticipate crisis or to find genealogy and dynamics of its appearance. In this respect, it is moving away from the simple analysis of symptoms and opens extensive lines of investigation to study crises.

Several researchers have shown that crises typically have a genesis and a pedigree (Pearson, Judith, 1998). They believe crises are not the result of a random event, but the latest manifestation of a long gestation period. This way, crises would be the result of a cumulative and continuous organizational dysfunctions process. In this dependency report, Pauchant (1998) defined crisis as “an accumulation of likely events at the level of any part or the organization as a whole and which may disrupt its present or future operations affecting individuals and communities to a physical level, psychological and/or existential”.

This definition gives a new dimension to the concept, because the crisis is not necessarily an unexpected isolated event, but rather the result of cumulative failures and potentially iterated by the organization, but whose dynamics can brutally escape from the hands of decision makers.

In the same direction, Bowonder and Liston (1987) showed that, with a few exceptions, crises have always left their marks before the critical stage. Shrivastava (1987) illustrated this feature explaining how the accident from Bhopal in 1984 has found roots in a series of failures and strategic choices of Caribde Union as well as in a series of political and economic orientation of the Indian government of the time. Analyses of the same type are found for the explosion of Challenger spaceship or for the contaminated blood affair in France.

It seems therefore more correctly to speak of accumulation than surprise when we study the occurrence of crises. The problem is not to predict when, the probability of its appearance or the shape of the crisis in its critical phase but rather to identify latent or failure events that could lead to a crisis.

However, it is better to be cautious about this notion of precursor signs which, taken alone, is often enough to justify the positions taken by supporters of a procedural approach on the predictability of the crisis. Perrow (1994) gives us, from this point of view, a critical perspective that relates the importance given to them currently. He shows that the precursor signs are always regarded as after the crisis took place. So it makes sense only in a retrospective way.

Experience has shown that, despite all precautions taken to stop or control a crisis, usually it gets out of control and escalates.

In these circumstances, it may seriously undermine the organization, if is not managed properly, an important element in this situation being communication. In other words, good communication during the crisis can mitigate and even prevent negative public reactions.

Generally, it is considered that a crisis deeply affects the image of an organization. Typically, brand image is built in times of normality, when the set of values and representations is emerging, through which the public perceives one's organization. During the crisis there are required other representations and certain "symbols" and there are fixed some "stereotypes" that remain long time associated with the image of the organization. This is why its management, together with public relations department must prepare in advance to meet unexpected or abnormal situations. Crisis management cannot be improvised. It is based on correct assessment of the circumstances and mastering appropriate response strategies, strategies prepared and even experienced long before the beginning of the crisis.

2. The crisis dimensions

One of the most difficult issues related to the crisis management system is linked to understanding its existential dimensions.

First, a crisis may threaten the legitimacy of an industry (e.g. crises arising from events produced in Bhopal, Cernobîl, or Challenger spaceship tragedy). People's perception and the one that is created by them about an

industry seriously disadvantage the future relations between the population and this industry. A crisis does nothing more than to destabilize or disrupt these relations to disturb these perceptions.

Second, a major crisis can dramatically influence the strategic mission of an enterprise (e.g. after Challenger spaceship tragedy there were serious discussions about the aerospace industry, Perrier crisis in 1990, when a drink associated to purity of nature by advertising was suddenly linked to pollution and disease).

The third existential effect occurs at individual level. The crisis may disturb the subjective world of individuals affected by that crisis, their way of perceiving reality and life, their sense of identity, their internal cohesion. After the Challenger spaceship accident, some NASA engineers discussed their professional identity as engineers, asking questions like “Am I a good engineer?” or “Could have I been doing something to prevent the accident?”

Industrial crises do not threaten only the process “input - processing - output” organized around what is generically called “technical core” of a company, but its threatens the whole system of symbols, beliefs that individuals assigned to industries, businesses and themselves.

3. The crisis management

Crisis management is different from security management, which is focused on technical issues, crash management focuses on reactive actions and communication management, focused on the image. Crisis management takes into account two essential features of the crisis, namely the effects of physical and symbolic focus, not only on the reaction, but also on prevention and training.

It can be concluded that just as individuals, some organizations, be them economic, social, political, military or otherwise, including their “top management” are subject to or can be the subject of crises more than others. In the literature these organizations, their managers and management organizations were called “port crisis” (Pauchant, Mitroff, 1995). Similarly to “the talisman model” these port managers by their management activities are causing crises, disasters. There are of course organizations that have taken all measures to avoid being affected by major crises that are able to manage and administrate those crises that occur despite preventive means, such organizations and managers being called preventive managers (Pauchant, Mitroff, 1995).

Because the modern society is increasingly dependent on efficient technology, there appears as a primary need the design and articulation of different procedures to administrate or manage their potential risks. It is desirable to create an optimal balance between the complexity of modern technology and the complexity of people involved in these activities, which are managing these technologies. In the current organizational environment, characterized by a multitude of factors and processes, the environment in which

the speed with which information flows, the speed with which developments take place, changes, adaptations of situations are impressive, there obviously appears the need for another kind of approach to these situations. It is obvious that although we can trust engineering or research and development specialists to create and invent new products and services, financiers and chartered accountants to effectively manage capital or marketing and service professionals to develop new products and services, we cannot have the same confidence when it comes to managing large companies that produce dangerous products and technologies, neither to run directly the society and to manage its relations with the environment, meaning the society as a whole and the nature.

Field professionals are generally competent in correctly perceiving the complex technical relationships between different components of their profession. However, in general, they often ignore the relationship, causation, rather complex between the various components of their profession. At the same record we can say that these professionals often ignore the even more complex connections that exist and are manifested between different professions, the diversity of needs of society in general and relationships between human society and nature. In addition, these specialists do not manifest to the fullest as concerns the complexity of human behavior. It can be said and there are a number of studies in this regard that the inherent fragmentation of specialists, which puts emphasis on specialization and disciplines is or may be the origin of a number of organizational, social or environmental crises.

The administrative theory often refers to cognitive limits of managers and professionals to explain coherently and arguably a number of shortcomings. However, these deficiencies are not sufficient to explain how and why particular major crises occur or to understand the arising difficulties about them. It is obvious in this context the concern of the crisis port-managers to try to protect their identity, as well as the image of their organization or its leader. To recognize explicitly or implicitly that their organization could be affected by a major crisis would be to recognize that both the organization and its leader are not perfect and therefore they are not competent professionals. But even worse is that these professionals should accept that their profession is, at least in part, responsible for much different environmental damage to which the organization is related.

With reference to the Romanian society and organizations of any type that are part of it, we often did not have the opportunity to hear or take any measure that reflects concern that the institution, organization, company was, is or may be affected by a major crisis, although paradoxically there is no media product that in some way or another does not refer to the "crisis" of all kinds and of different origins.

Generally, researchers agree with the statements: crises are management situations that meet the three important necessary conditions that distinguish the crisis situation from a normal management situation; the crisis is a process of

destabilization that reveals a variety of participants and stakes, crisis has multiform consequences; crisis falls outside the typical organization frameworks and shakes its reference framework.

Some justify and explain the crisis by the factors that distort it so that it no longer faces their assumptions; others place responsibility on the person generating the crisis, considered the de facto guilty and responsible person and assigns to that person the occurrence and manifestation of the crisis; many feel the need to act or react quickly, make decisions quickly without worrying about the size and sometimes much deeper harder noticeable crisis; others clearly show a chronic anxiety, inhibition, affecting up to blocking their ability to act; others resort to technological solutions, some are completely overwhelmed, dejected, apathetic, inactive, unable to make decisions or to act.

These defensive mechanisms, once activated, will generate other crises on the principle of *perpetuum mobile* because preventive strategies are not developed, not even discussed. These new crises trigger again the need to resort to other stronger mechanisms of defense and protection, possibly more complex and certainly considered more effective and which inexorably cause, again, other crises and so on, forming vicious circles which develop and are generated one from another.

From the point of view of specialists in the management of organizations, the crisis is defined as that situation where the whole system is affected, so its physical existence is threatened. However, the core values of system members are threatened to such an extent that individuals are obliged either to acknowledge the erroneous type of these values, or to develop defense mechanisms against these values.

The crisis is the result of environmental threats, coupled with the weaknesses of the organization. It occurs when environmental threats interact with weaknesses within the organization.

In recent research, debates and practices in the field the crisis or pre-crisis situations are defined as interruption phenomena of the normal functioning of an organization and the freezing times or poor organization of exchange of information between the organization and its public, be it internal or external. Crises occur, therefore, as phenomena that can cause damage to an organization, both in terms of material losses and social prestige, by damaging the public image.

The damage caused by the 2010 earthquake in Haiti is well known. Less known is the dynamic crisis mapping effort that emerged alongside disaster relief. To visualize the crisis space, volunteers combined satellite imagery data with real-time crowd sourced crisis information using new media tools. Crisis mapping has since been used in various contexts – showing how non-state actors are using new media to provide and visualize information during crises (Table 1). State actors should invest in understanding this phenomenon and the circumstances in which crisis maps are valuable contributions to crisis management (Cavelty, Giroux, 2011).

Table 1

Selected crisis mapping initiatives

Case	Haiti January 2010	United States April 2010	Russia July-Sept 2010	Japan March 2011	Libya Spring/Summer 2011
URL	http://haiti.ushahidi.com/	http://oilspill.labucketbrigade.org/	http://russian-fires.ru/	http://www.sinsai.info/	http://libyacrisismap.net/
Crisis	Earthquake	Deep sea oil rig explosion	Wildfires	Earthquake?Tsunami	Political Crisis
Initiator	Individual/organisation	Grass root (Louisiana Bucket Brigade (LABB))	Individual	Individual/organisation	Intergovernmental Organisation (UN OCHA)
Main Partners	Emergency Information Service (EIS), InSTEDD, Ushahidi, Haitian Telcos, Tufts University & US State Department	Tulane University Disaster Resilience Academy	Russian bloggers	Georepublic Japan; Open-StreetMap Foundation Japan	UNOSAT, NetHope & Volunteer Technical Community
Aim of map	Report emergencies; Public health issues; Security threats; Infrastructure damage; Natural hazards; services	Track oil effects & response; provide visible testimony of community impacts	To link those who need help with those who want to help; listed assistance centre	Reports & notices from public and private officials; News on disasters; Evacuation centres & requests for help	Track conflict events (armed confrontations, attacks, etc.); list needs & responses; track mass displacements
Who uses the map	Emergency responders; Diaspora community; Media; Government officials	Local stakeholders (citizens, universities, businesses, etc.); Media	Local stakeholders (those needing and offering help); Media	Local stakeholders; Diaspora Community; Public & Private actors; Media	Emergency responders; Diaspora community; Government officials; Media
Role of map	Test-ground for crisis mapping; better maps of Haiti; reference point for crisis responders	Provided public insight and accountability; info on clean-up efforts	Delivery of relief	Go-to map for corporations, government, and organizations; created transparency in crisis relief	Increased situational awareness
Role of government	Core partner in the effort (US government)	Not directly involved, aware of the map; provided information	Not directly involved; After crisis, Civic Chamber of Russian Federation became involved	Not involved initially, became involved by submitting reports	Intergovernmental body (UN) involved and led the effort

Source: CSS Analysis in Security Policy no. 103, November 2011 (Center for Security Studies, ETH Zürich).

Conclusions

One of the essential differences between a port crisis management approach and a precautionary management approach is reflected in the way it is approached in the two ways of thought the concept of responsibility for its existential meaning: preventive managers are best able to confront the state of anxiety generated by the crisis and act decisively. Less restricted in terms of emotional, they are responsible ethically, emotionally, cognitively and practically to themselves, to their employees, their partners and to nature.

Specialized studies often avoid a debate on the crisis considered as an event or a process.

However, this difference exists. On the one hand, the crisis is perceived as an event and is often confused with its triggering event. On the other hand, the crisis is perceived as a process of destabilization that will brutally engage more players and more stakes, often remote from ordinary field of attention and the organization's transactions. The perception of a crisis as an event leads to privileging symptoms, whereas a procedural approach leads to coverage of the crisis in a time and a larger area.

Crisis management remains in high demand in 2011. Yet it suffers from three crises. First, there is insufficient political will to formulate a strategic vision of how to address violent conflicts in an increasingly multi-polar world. Second, there is a lack of institutional coordination among the principal providers of crisis management. Third, due to capability shortages, many operations struggle to deliver in today's complex conflict environments. These flaws must be fixed as crisis management remains an indispensable tool to secure peace and stability (CSS Analysis in Security Policy no. 103, November 2011).

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