

Exploring The Performance Implications of Multi-Modal Crisis Decision-Making: An Analysis of The Ecological Rationality of Simple Rules (Heuristics) And Deliberative Decision Approaches (Sensemaking)

Joanne Gardner Le Gars
Rennes School of Business, France

Abstract

Understanding determinants of crisis management performance is a topic of increasing interest owing to the increasing prevalence and intensity of crises generally (Boin and Lodge 2021) and the emergence of the poly-crisis phenomenon (Tooze 2022) which exposes organizations to difficult-to-foresee, destructive, and existential threats (Lalonde and Roux-Dufort 2010). However, the complexity of defining suitable performance indicators for the multitude of crisis types and diversity of organizational contexts (Owen et al. 2016) has engendered a paucity of generalizable crisis performance theories. This hinders efforts by organizations to evaluate, benchmark, monitor and improve their crisis performance. The main objective of this study is therefore to advance understanding of drivers and impediments to crisis performance focusing on decision-making which is a key determinant of crisis performance (Boin and Lodge 2021). In a departure from typical uni-modal decision analysis, we analyze several decisional approaches namely, the heuristics, principled and sensemaking approaches which have each been individually studied in time-sensitive, turbulent, information-poor contexts, but are rarely compared (Tabesh and Vera 2020). We employ a historical qualitative dataset to analyze each decision mode during the 2011 Fukushima nuclear power plant accident based on a secondary dataset including transcripts of 30 hours of interviews undertaken in the weeks following the accident with the site supervisor and several forensic investigation reports prepared by Japanese and international nuclear safety authorities. The results are used to respond to the following main research question: Under what circumstances should the heuristics, principled and sensemaking decision approaches be employed to optimize crisis performance?

Keywords: crisis management; Crisis management performance; decision-making; extreme crisis; heuristics