



Redefining the Field:

The Institutional Logics of Crisis Management and Crisis Communication

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Making progress in crisis communication...

- › From a simple practice to an academic (sub)discipline
- › **International conferences** (ICRC, the Crisis 1, 2, 3 etc. conferences)
- › **Journals** (*International Journal of Risk and Crisis Communication*)
- › **Handbooks** (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Schwarz, Seeger & Auer, 2016; Frandsen & Johansen, 2019)
- › **Textbooks** (Combs, 1999/2019⁵; Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow, 2007/2018⁴; Frandsen & Johansen, 2017)
- › Recently a think tank has been established (U. of Georgia)!

The fragmented nature of crisis management research

- › “I have been haunted by the fragmentation of the crisis management literature. Two qualities have created this sense of fragmentation. First, researchers from various disciplines are addressing crisis management but too often ignore similar research in other disciplines [...]. Second, researchers tend to study “parts” of crisis management, not the whole process. Integrative efforts are far too rare in crisis management. We see more single-disciplinary work than multidisciplinary work” (Coombs, 1999, p. ix)
- › “The trend of crisis research is moving to an advanced stage of interdisciplinary research in terms of theories, methods, authors, institutions and departments” (Ha & Boynton, 2014, p. 41)

Aim of this paper

- › The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how we can redefine the field of crisis management and crisis communication as a set of empirical subfields, which can be approached from a cross-disciplinary perspective.
- › Based on the **institutional logics perspective**, we want to show how what we by default call 'crisis management' and 'crisis communication' can be divided into three subfields which are closely linked to institutionalized and inter-related areas of society: (1) **public crisis management**, (2) **political crisis management**, and (3) **corporate crisis management**
- › Each of these three subfields has its own history, vocabulary, conceptual and theoretical framework, etc.
- › – and a central institutional logic.

The institutional logics perspective

- › Roger Friedland and Robert Alford: "The social sciences are in the middle of a theoretical retreat from society". Bringing Society Back In (in Powell & DiMaggio, 1991).
- › Retreat from society toward (1) the rational and instrumental individual and toward (2) the de-contextualized and isolated organization, neglecting the institutional transformations created.
- › Friedland & Alford (1991) propose a non-functionalist conception of society as a potentially contradictory *interinstitutional system*.

Defining institutional logics

- › An institutional logic is defined as “the socially constructed, historical pattern of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality” (Thornton & Ocasio, 2012, p. 41).

Key elements:

- › Socially constructed: Crises are socially constructed
- › Historical patterns: Human activities
- › Material practices: What we do
- › Symbolic system: How we understand what we do
- › Time and space: Where and when

Operationalizing the definition

- › We have tried to operationalize the concept of institutional logics, that is, we have tried to make this rather abstract concept and its key elements more understandable in terms of empirical observations.
- › We have divided the two key elements - material practices and symbolic systems - into four specific categories:
 - › Crisis
 - › Actors and Roles
 - › Contexts and Levels
 - › Practices
- › Each of these four categories contains several sub-categories.

Public crisis management (1)

› **Crisis**

- › Definitions: extraordinary incident (vocabulary: emergency, disaster, *act of God*)
- › From a process (event) perspective: focus on the crisis stage
- › Core task: to warn, to inform and to protect
- › Typology: societal crises in the public sector

› **Actors and Roles**

- › Emergency services (law enforcement, fire departments, etc.)
 - › Emergency Planning Officer (EPO)
- › Collaboration across emergency organizations and agencies
- › Presidents, mayors, public managers, etc.
- › Citizens

Public crisis management (2)

› **Contexts and Levels**

- › From local government to central government
- › Legal environment

› **Practices**

- › Emergency and disaster management
 - › ISO standard (e.g., the UK)
 - › Business Continuity Management (BCM)
- › Emergency communication
 - › Information and communication (e.g., the Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication model, CERC)

Political crisis management (1)

› **Crisis**

- › Definition: “the politics of...”; crisis as something a political actor can exploit
- › The process perspective: focus on the post-crisis stage (the aftermath) – accountability
- › Core tasks: (1) sense making, (2) decision making and coordinating, (3) meaning making, (4) accounting, and (5) learning
- › Typology: scandals in or across the public and private sectors

› **Actors and Roles**

- › Politicians, governments, oppositions and parliaments
- › Voters
- › Media (intermediary)

Political crisis management (2)

› **Contexts and Levels**

- › Political arenas

› **Practices**

- › Political 'crisis management'
 - › The key mechanism: an opportunity for political leadership based on citizens' expectations
- › Political 'crisis communication'
 - › Framing
 - › Blaming
 - › Crisis exploitation strategies and framing contests

Corporate crisis management (1)

› **Crisis**

- › Definitions: event or situation, potential harm to the organization and its stakeholders, reputational threat, etc.
- › From a process perspective: focus on the pre-crisis stage (prevention, preparation)
- › Typology: organizational crises

› **Actors and Roles**

- › CMTs in private companies
- › Stakeholders (customers, employees, investors, etc.)
- › Intermediaries (media, trade associations, trade unions, etc.)

Corporate crisis management (2)

› **Contexts and Levels**

- › The private sector
- › Inter-organizational relations (reputation commons, spillovers, etc.)

› **Practices**

- › Crisis management
 - › Leadership
- › Crisis communication
 - › Crisis response strategies

The institutional logics of crisis management and crisis communication

- › Three institutional logics seem to be active within the three subfields:
 - › (1) A logic of **safety**
 - › (2) A logic of **power**
 - › (3) A logic of **reputation**
- › These logics are dynamic, sometimes even contradictory.
- › They guide institutions and social meaning, and lead to change

Beyond fragmentation: an invitation to cross-disciplinarity

- › Why is it important to study the institutional logics of crisis management and crisis communication?
- › A new cross-disciplinary curriculum: the crisis communication researcher is **a specialist and a generalist** (within her field)
- › The institutional logics perspective focuses on institutional transformations of the subfields
- › We would like to see these ongoing institutional transformations and the logics behind them as an invitation to cross-disciplinary scholarship, which can reduce the fragmentation of our research.