Wandering Through Crisis and Everyday Organizing; Revealing the Subjective Nature of Interpretive, Temporal and Organizational Boundaries

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The results of a 6-year action research study on developing crisis management preparedness in Swedish municipalities reveal strong connections rather than sharp distinctions between crisis and non-crisis on interpretive, temporal and organizational dimensions. Confusion and debate about what is labelled as a crisis, when everyday ends and crisis begins, and who and who are not involved, may illuminate different views on what the scale, scope and inherent complexity of 'our' system is in crisis and in non-crisis. Crises are not only a brutal audit for the practitioners involved, but also for the scientific theories that explain crisis behaviour. Current definitions of crisis understate the subjective nature of interpretations of crisis and organizing. To better understand the muddiness of organizing, crisis management researchers might aim for portraying more feed-forward messiness in crisis study descriptions and applying less hindsight bias in their analyses. Such images could help practitioners realize that organizing is more complex and less controllable than currently might be pictured and assumed. A deeper exploration of concepts like duality, competing values and complex adaptive systems could serve both practitioners and researchers.

1. Introduction

A crisis is defined or interpreted as a crisis in relation to other events, periods, stages or states that were or are 'not a crisis'. A crisis is unexpected compared to earlier expectations; it is urgent compared to other less urgent matters; it is of high stake, compared with issues of lower stake and so on. A crisis cannot be understood as a single isolated phenomenon because it is by definition a relative concept. Whereas studies of crisis incidents, crisis periods, crisis issues, crisis stages, crisis states, crisis responses and crisis organizations often focus on objects of study that are 'included' by the crisis, interesting insights might be learned from or about 'who, what and when has been defined as outside'. A crisis can reveal a weakness, blind spot or interest that has been neglected before. A crisis can reveal what stakes or values really matter now. A crisis can lead to much attention for a certain issue in the future. In that way, a crisis can be an interesting present mirror for the process of organizing before, during and after a crisis. However, if we want to understand the concept of organizing entirely, it would be just as interesting to study the other side of the medal. What stakes are less prioritized and why? What issues were addressed when weaknesses and blind spots became neglected? Studying non-crisis events, non-crisis periods, non-crisis issues and non-crisis organizations

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might teach us why, when and how a crisis became a crisis in the first place.

Throughout this article, the relation between crisis and non-crisis will be discussed from three perspectives. A first theme is the interpretation of whether the event, issue, process stage, organizational development state or period in time is regarded as being a crisis or not. A second theme is which external and internal actors and work processes are regarded as belonging to the crisis and in what way. A third theme is the role of time, e.g., when does the crisis start and end, when do crisis interpretations arise and fade out, when do actors enter and leave?

These concepts are heavily intertwined and very fuzzy. The interpretation of something being a crisis is not only relative as argued earlier, but of course also subjective. Individuals or groups involved may differ in their opinion about whether something is a crisis or not. Therefore, who is participating in the organization or discourse around the issue may influence the interpretation of whether it is a crisis or not. The other way around, when something is interpreted as a crisis by some actors, this crisis label may attract new participants or make that some existing participants try to leave the sensitive arena. Interpretations may change over time. Participants in the response may change over time. The start and the end of the crisis are not hard-defined, but may themselves be an issue of debate and interpretation, and for different participants, the crisis may actually have started and ended on different moments.

Theoretical concepts like sense making (Weick, 2001, 2006) and the communicative constitution of organization (Putnam & Nicotera, 2010) acknowledge that organizations create their own environments and that organizations also create themselves in communicative interactions. Although many crisis management researchers silently integrate this notion of social constructiveness in their theoretical framework, the implications of that assumption may not be so visible or explicitly discussed. Too often our 'hindsight-biased' analyses speak of 'the' crisis, 'the' public, 'the' employees, 'the' organization and so on, thereby fully neglecting the large diversity of events, actions, perceptions, beliefs, values, communications, etc., present in, before and after those analyzed episodes. Is that a problem? Should crisis management researchers, organization scientists and communication scientists characterize crises and non-crises more precisely and with more inherent multiplicity? What should be the scope and scale of our studies when looking at crises?

Relations between everyday organizing and episodes of crisis have been discussed in several ways. Studies on routine functioning vs. change (Turner & Rindova, 2012) and learning from rare events (Christianson, Farkas, Sutcliffe, & Weick, 2009; Lampel, Shamsie, & Shapira, 2009) connect theories of learning and change to episodes of minor and major crises. Studies of organizational communication have connected risk- and crisis communication, issue management and stakeholder management in the pre-crisis, crisis response and post-crisis stage (Jaques, 2007; Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2011; Palttala & Vos, 2012). It has been argued that organizational pre-crisis conditions can create or accelerate crises (Lagadec, 1993; Roux-Dufort, 2009) and that crises can evoke blame games afterwards (Boin, Hart, Stern, & Sundelius, 2005).

These previous studies could be characterized as looking at non-crisis organizing from the perspective of the crisis (ignoring all other issues that exist besides the crisis issue). The discussion in this article aims to go beyond that hidden bias. In our action research study, in trying to create good crisis training exercises, in trying to create a realistic representation of an evolving crisis scenario and in trying to isolate the crisis from everyday work, an answer to another question appeared. A crisis cannot be disconnected and discerned from everyday work, as it mirrors it and is a part of it. So, instead of looking back on everyday organizing with a crisis in mind (as crisis management researchers tend to do), the intention here is to look forward towards the potentially unfolding crisis from the perspective of everyday organizing (when the crisis issue is still among equals and not distinctive). Kingdon (2011) describes crisis in relation to his concepts of agenda setting and windows of opportunity in a similar way. '*An issue becomes a burning issue when it reaches crisis proportions. Until there's a crisis, it's just one of many issues. Governmental policy always has been and always will be a function of crisis*' (Kingdon, 2011, p. 95).

After presenting the research design and case study results, it is discussed how the analysis of our observations lead to implications for how crisis is defined, how crisis research studies are performed, how crises are managed and how all of this relates to non-crisis definitions, non-crisis research and non-crisis management.

2. Research design

Our research approach follows an interpretative philosophy and an inductive research strategy as our aim is theory building and exploration rather than theory testing (Benbasat, Goldstein, & Mead, 1987). More specifically, action research is applied to obtain the dual outcomes of action (change) and research (understanding) (Argyris, Putnam, & McLain Smith, 1982). Strength of inductive research is the repeated shifts from practice to theory and from theory to practice (Laere, 2003, pp. 25–28 and p. 104). As researchers with backgrounds in organization science, cognitive science, information systems and communication science, we study the

object of organizing and communicating in crisis management in its natural environment. With the help of our diverse backgrounds, we observe different interesting issues, which in turn initiate more in-depth literature study, which in turn informs theory development. In that way, the contributions of this article are grounded in our empirical studies and selected theoretical contributions from organization science, communication science and crisis management research.

The empirical work has been conducted in four small to medium sized Swedish municipalities since 2006. They have, respectively, about 6,800, 8800, 10,800 and 50,150 inhabitants and vary between 25,000 and 80,000 hectare in surface. By means of law reforms in 2002 and 2006, Sweden changed the structure of their Emergency Management System to be better prepared for the changing nature of crises in society (Eksborg, 2004; Larsson, 2005). The system became more decentralized and at the local level the main actor became the municipality instead of the rescue services. Motivations for these changes were that a stronger involvement of a local actor, who was familiar with local needs and resources, was believed to lead to a faster and more effective emergency response. In addition, it was recognized that so many other types of crises could occur besides a war or big accidents (where the central government, respectively, the local rescue services would have the main responsibility). As pointed out in the slogan 'If anything happens, it happens in a municipality', the municipality was identified as the obvious part to take the lead in a crisis situation to guard the interests of the citizens as well as public and private institutions. However, the municipality does not have any absolute power to overrule others. Their main duties are to initiate and coordinate all other relevant parties both before and during crises. Before a crisis, this involves stimulating all parties to do risk analysis, develop crisis plans and conduct regular training and education activities. During a crisis, this involves alarming all relevant actors in society, coordinating sense making and decision making between involved parties and coordinating the overall information flow to citizens.

As this was a new role for the Swedish municipalities, large efforts were needed to prepare for these duties, and to educate and train the municipality employees involved. Since 2006, we have been studying how four Swedish municipalities have developed their emergency preparedness. This has been a larger (still ongoing) study with a focus on how to perform crisis management training exercises (Laere, Lindblom, & Susi, 2007; 2009), where several research questions are related to the content of the training, e.g., what is good crisis management, what is good information processing in crises and what is good communication in crises.

Data have been collected during crisis management trainings (over 40 in total during these 6 years) and several real (minor) crisis incidents or preparations for potential crises. Two to three researchers have been intensely involved in preparing, designing, conducting and evaluating the trainings in collaboration with an external consultant. The trainings varied from half-day table-top scenario discussions to 2-day role-playing simulation exercises. Observations during the design process, during the execution of the trainings and during the evaluative discussions have been documented by the three researchers involved. Whereas crisis management trainings have been planned interventions, 'real' incidents were of course not. Once one of the involved municipalities activated a crisis management response, one of the researchers has been doing participative observation of the response process. Parts of the response processes that could not be observed (because they operated in parallel or during a longer time period) have been analyzed by doing interviews with key people involved. In this way, reports have been produced for each crisis management response that looked similar to the observation reports of the crisis management trainings. In addition, municipality employees have taken courses on information management and communication in crisis and written reflections on crisis responses they have been participating in.

The filed observations (from trainings, real incidents and course reflections) have been analyzed by the three researchers continuously and insights considering observed patterns have influenced literature selection, future training design and focus while observing and evaluating trainings, in accordance with the dual aims of action research. Awareness that this strategy could easily lead to a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy process (as analyses of earlier trainings and crisis responses influenced our observation strategy in the next ones) has continuously urged us to seek for both confirming and disconfirming data. The illustrative examples presented in this article are taken from the total set of trainings and real crisis responses and have in common that they portray fluid boundaries between crisis and non-crisis. In line with our qualitative research approach, the criterion for identifying themes and illustrative examples has been relevance rather than frequency. As the study is part of theory building, the ambition is to identify interesting directions for theory development, rather than to arrive at complete lists and fully finished theories.

At the start of the research project, the involved researchers had a broad background in organization science, systems thinking, communication science, policy management and information systems. During the project, literature has been selected on topics of crisis management, crisis management training, crisis communication, sense making and mindfulness. Finally, when the theme of 'connections between everyday and crisis' emerged, literature has been selected on routine

functioning and rare events, organizational learning and change and the themes of competing values, duality and complex adaptive systems.

3. Results

In case of a major crisis, a municipality activates the crisis organization, which consists of three main parts. A political crisis-board can be installed who may take over responsibilities from other specialized political boards to speed up political decision making. Also, the daily management board of officers headed by the municipality director will meet initially and thereafter more frequently. These boards of decision makers are supported by an information group. The information group has two main duties; to assist in sense making and meaning making (Ansell, Boin, & Keller, 2010). First, they need to gather and channel incoming information to the crisis management decision makers (officers and politicians). The challenge is to assist in organizing and structuring all facts into a good finished situation picture – so the management meeting can focus on their core function of interpreting the situation and analyzing the problems rather than organizing and structuring all single facts. Second, when the management has arrived at their diagnosis and action plan to handle the crisis, the information group assists in getting out the message (what has happened and what are we going to do about it) to all relevant parties.

In this process the municipality has, as stated earlier, by law, a broader responsibility than just managing its own services (like drinking water, schools, elderly care). The municipality needs to take a wider perspective, including consequence analysis, mitigating actions and information to the public regarding all involved public and private parties. This does not mean that the municipality has to do the job of the others, but they need to stimulate and monitor synergies in the collective emergency response.

Below are some illustrative examples from crisis management performance in Swedish municipalities, grounded in our observations during realistic scenario trainings and reflections on real crises responses. These illustrations show how distinctions between everyday and crisis are vague rather than clear-cut and how connections between everyday and crisis appear at unexpected moments.

3.1. *Shifting between everyday and crisis organization*

Although the crisis plan states that the respective groups should be co-located at a certain place in the organization, the so-called crisis rooms bearing names like 'the fifth floor' or 'the basement', the actual decision to move there is timed differently from crisis to crisis. Sometimes the whole crisis was managed from the ordinary workplaces without moving, sometimes the crisis organization moved into the crisis rooms from the first alarm, in other cases it was afterwards evaluated that the move was done much too late. In the initial stages, responsible managers hesitate to interrupt too many people in their everyday work practices. Also, the actual movement may cost too much time and as such early data gathering and a getting out a first message to media and the public can initially be prioritized. In some cases, only certain parts of the crisis organization were activated, either while still in their normal workplace or when moving to the crisis rooms. As a result, it may be not directly visible 'who is in' and 'who is not yet involved', which created a need to explicitly state at coordination meetings which parts of the crisis organization are involved and not.

During crises which lasted a long time, like a pyromaniac setting fire to seven children day care facilities during a period of 8 weeks in autumn 2006 and the A1HN1 flu epidemic which took several months in 2009 and 2010, crisis management work and normal work co-existed in parallel. An information officer performed her normal duties, while this normal work was interrupted at unforeseen moments when for instance a new fire occurred at a day care facility.

3.2. *Taking everyday with you in the crisis organization*

The decision makers (officers and politicians) have a role in the crisis organization that resembles to a large part their role in everyday work. Although the stakes and speed are higher, decision making more complicated and information more uncertain, their responsibilities are the same and they collaborate with the same people they are used to work with. This recognizability gives at least some form of support.

The information group does not exist in the normal organization and consists of a temporary constellation of administrators, analysts and telephonists who normally not work together at all. At some occasions, such groups lacked team spirit, had hard to understand one another and experienced frictions in adapting to each other.

On the other hand, conflicts in everyday work negatively influence the performance of the crisis management organization when the whole organization is under press, and when key people, normally trying to avoid or work around one another, are forced to collaborate when no slack or reserves are left.

3.3. *Reframing everyday as a crisis retrospectively and framing a crisis as everyday*

In 2006, children day care facilities in one municipality were set on fire. The first and second fire, separated by

a time span of 3 weeks, did activate a crisis response at the school department with some back up from central officers. Only after the third and fourth fire, happening within 48 hours after the second, the municipality framed the set of events as a crisis and activated its central crisis organization. The information group, responsible for creating and maintaining the overall situation picture, had severe problems in starting to serve management without a good understanding of what had happened the first 3 weeks. So, whereas the crisis later was framed as starting with the first fire, the actual redefinition of the events into a crisis and the start of the crisis organization did not happen until after the fourth fire.

In crisis communication with the public, there are dilemmas regarding balancing between warning the public in time vs. frightening them unnecessarily. For instance, confronted in an exercise with a scenario where many people were ill in different parts of the municipality (shown in abnormal numbers of adults not working and children not coming to schools), the municipality director issued precautionary measures, e.g., not to drink water without boiling it, whereas there were no facts saying the water actually was the problem. Some years later, the main water supply to the same municipality was cut completely in a real incident. Knowing that the city had 1 day water supply in its reserves, and with a given repair time of about 12 hours, the information officer chose to not inform the public. The argument was that telling people 'not to consume more than normally' would have the opposite effect (people starting storing extra water at home, thereby emptying the reserves much sooner than the expected 24 hours). In both cases, there is a huge risk of getting tough questions and a crisis of confidence afterwards (if in the first case the water not was the problem, or in the latter case when the repair takes longer and people end up without water). The first case was framed as crisis, the second was not, which both proved to be 'right' afterwards, but the outcomes were still uncertain at the moment the frame was defined.

3.4. Paying attention to crisis signals in everyday work

During the years, we have gathered examples of how knowledgeable and attentive employees may see potentially large consequences of at first sight maybe innocent events. For instance, one employee saw a short newsflash during lunch that a touring bus had crashed 200 kilometres away, noticing that the company operating day tours was from his municipality. Quickly, he alarmed the municipality director. A group of eight employees worked intensively in 9 hours to establish contacts with the municipality where the accident took place and to coordinate support for relatives of the victims.

One Friday afternoon, a Swedish mobile phone operator's network was down for about 5 hours (but initially it was of course not clear how long it would take). One municipal employee from a technical department realized that all elderly people having a personal alarm from the municipal home care social care services were dependent on this operator. He was not sure whether employees in the social care department were aware that these alarms were out of function.

A returning discussion item is how to respond to weather warnings. These are issued by the national weather institute. Some people are highly sceptical: 'in Sweden people can cope with snow themselves, we do not need an extraordinary response from municipal services'. On the other hand, a social care manager admitted, a little ashamed, that his personal had a 'hell of a day' due to large snowfall, delays in travelling, problems to reach clients at the countryside, while some extra personal that day would have solved much. Also here, it is hard to draw a clear line when a weather situation becomes a crisis. Often an increased level of awareness is needed, enabling to quickly increase resources when needed, while not activating all these resources immediately, as that may be unnecessary. For example, in another municipality, the day before the same heavy snowfall, a check was done by ringing all extra personal, discussing who of them would be able to come in on short notice the next day if necessary and instructing them to have their mobiles fully charged and with them all the time.

3.5. Moving in time

In trainings and real events, people are instructed and often remind one another to 'be ahead of the crisis' and 'imagine the worst that may happen next'. So members of crisis management organizations frequently shift away from the current time frame, looking for patterns in historical stages of the event, envisioning what would happen the next day, next week or next month if things get worse, and then returning to the present wondering what actions can be taken now to change the course of events in the future.

The delays between taking a decision to act and implementing the act itself are another aspect of time. For instance, after numerous trainings, the information group people in one municipality were heavily disappointed that it took them over 1 hour in an exercise from an alarm to being operative. As the exercise came unannounced, the external observers judged it was a very fast response to alarm all people, letting them drop and leave their everyday work duties, go/travel to the crisis rooms, and initiate the crisis organization within 1 hour. After all, they are not 24/7 in start position as a fire

crew. These people have another everyday job to take care of. On the other hand, there is a lot of pressure on the people involved first, having to serve many duties simultaneously as long as not everybody has arrived. Also, it takes time, when people arrive in small batches and cannot directly jump in as long as they are not fully updated about the ongoing event and current priorities.

3.6. Lost in everyday and crisis due to fluid interpretive, temporal and organizational boundaries

During the many evaluative discussions, we as researchers and trainers have had with the municipal employees and managers involved, a growing insight has arisen that images of crisis organizations and internal communications in handbooks and crisis plans are far to clear-cut, leaving practitioners with a feeling that they are idiots not being able to master this easy trick.

Initially, the dominant interpretation of trainers and trainees was that the municipalities had to 'switch' from everyday practice to the crisis management organization. This switch involved moving to different rooms, getting other duties, activating different command lines and so on. Over the years, this interpretation has become increasingly problematic while observing numerous crisis trainings and some real incidents. The more we observed the involved municipalities handle crises in trainings or incidents, the more visible and the stronger the relations with the everyday organization became. Who you see as a natural collaboration partner in a crisis, depends on who you know and thus, are used to collaborate with every day. To what you distribute your attention to in crisis depends on to what you are used to distribute your attention to normally. How you interpret signals and events, who you listen to, who you trust, to whom you communicate and via which channels, is all heavily influenced by what resources and channels you are used to utilize.

And most worrying of all, the most defining moment of the crisis response, the discovery, recognition and interpretation of early warning signals towards defining them as an unfolding crisis and the decision to 'start the crisis organisation', are not carried out by the crisis organization, but by the everyday organization. While these may be the same people, they still need to switch roles and state of mind. As such, distinctions between everyday and crisis become blurred rather than sharp lines and the people involved may easily become confused.

This ultimate observation, that the initiation of the crisis is not handled by the crisis organization, leads to some tough questions: When does the crisis start and why? When does the crisis organization start, and why? Who is part of the crisis organization, and why? When does the crisis end, and why? When does the crisis organization end, and why? and Who is not part of the crisis organization, and why?

These questions haunted me for a long time. What is at stake? When? Who is involved? Not so unique questions only for a crisis. Actually, these are rather key questions in non-crisis also. That was a turning point in the analysis. What is different, if everything else is? What is so unique about an unexpected, urgent and important issue; if all issues are somewhat unexpected, rather urgent and kind of important at least for somebody?

The remaining two discussion sections go beyond our action research case study results and elaborate on implications for how crisis is defined; how to deal with biases in our way of conducting crisis studies and how to manage large socio-technical systems in crisis and non-crisis.

4. Defining crisis as a temporary subjective construction

Many researchers have discussed the dichotomy between seeing crisis as a (triggering) event and crisis as a process of incubation (Roux-Dufort, 2007b). In the event view, crises are often portrayed as low probability, high impact events (Pearson & Clair, 1998) and as unexpected, threatening events involving high stakes and requiring urgent decision making or action (Boin & McConnell, 2007). In the process view, there is more emphasis on the pre- and post-crisis stages, besides the urgent crisis response. The process view is complementary to the event view. It explains how organizational conditions build up that lay favourable ground for the crisis to be triggered (Roux-Dufort, 2007a). The occurrence of the crisis in the process view is described as a cumulative process of organizational failures, a process of cumulating imperfections, a process of cumulating managerial ignorance (Roux-Dufort, 2007a) or a process of weakening (Roux-Dufort, 2007b), while simultaneously portrayed as an opportunity to learn (Roux-Dufort, 2007a) or an opportunity to become stronger than before (Ulmer et al., 2011).

However, neither the event nor the process view addresses our observations that the boundaries between crisis and non-crisis are highly fluid on interpretive, temporal and organizational dimensions. Especially with regard to the fact that different actors simultaneously can have different perceptions on whether the issue at stake is crisis or non-crisis, on who is part of the organization handling this issue and on when it started and ended. So, both the event view and the process view underscore the role of the not so passive observer(s). The fact that a sense of crisis occurs says maybe more about the expectations of the actors involved, than about the present events and organizational conditions. As Weick (2006) argues, an act can only become mistaken in retrospect. Similarly,

it could be argued that the present combination of events, organizational conditions and expectations only becomes a crisis when one or more actors in retrospect define it as such. Next, the event and process view underscore the social constructiveness of all these concepts. There are many subjective interpretations of the crisis issue by many different involved actors. There are many subjective interpretations of the current organizational conditions by many different involved actors.

The early warning signal, indicating that the crisis could have been prevented, is also a problematic construct. In retrospect, when the sense of crisis has hit us, some of the many earlier signals, now clearly stand out as an early warning signal. That is hindsight bias (Weick, 2001). Only by looking back with the crisis in mind, we can label a signal as an early warning signal. If we, feed-forward, make sense of a signal as an early warning signal, and act upon it directly, and the crisis does not hit, that is stunted enactment (Weick, 2001). It is an avoided test because we will never know if the sense of crisis would have hit if we had not taken action on the signal. We do not know and will never know if the signal actually warned, or whether it is a false belief that the signal was a warning. So the process view learns that we can work on fighting imperfections and ignorance (both also subjective constructions based on our and others' beliefs what is defined as perfect and imperfect, relevant and not relevant), but we will never know what crises we did prevent.

From this discussion, a suggestion is given for a new definition of crisis. This definition combines elements from the event and process approaches, but also includes the notion of Bruck (1992) that crises actually are subjective constructions. A crisis is *a subjective interpretation by one or more involved actors that an issue, contrasted with past and current subjective expectations, actions, attentiveness, stakes and interests, temporarily becomes urgent, important and very hard to deal with, due to a clearer awareness of large or many unexpected and unwanted consequences combined with uncertainty and ambiguity about the identification and effects of appropriate mitigating actions*. The broader term issue is preferred over event, to even include crises that arise from a series of smaller events. In an epidemic, it is not the last case of illness (event), but the number of cases and their interconnectedness in a limited time frame (issue), which creates the crisis.

Roux-Dufort (2007b) worries that mystifying the crisis concept as being something exceptional makes it less attractive and relevant for organization studies. The following counterargument can be made with our definition in hand. In crisis, there is a sudden subjective awareness among one or more actors that the 'organizing' they are involved in actually is more complex and less controllable than perceived before. It could be argued that organizing during this 'before', interpreted as non-crisis, already was complex and poorly controllable, but that awareness was lacking. A next hypothesis is then that organizing always is complex and poorly controllable. Crisis is not a period of exceptional failure, but a period of exceptional awareness. Actors are more aware and deal more explicitly with the complexity and fragility of organizing. Therefore, crisis should be of exceptional interest for organization scientists. As Weick (2011) suggests high-reliability organizations (HROs) might have more in common with non-HROs than expected.

5. Implications for researchers and practitioners

When many crisis management, public- and policy management, organization and communication science researchers take the sense making perspective of Weick (2001, 2006) as starting point, should not our definitions, case study designs and theories more clearly reflect the muddiness and messiness of the social construction assumptions this perspective is grounded in? Should not our definitions of organization and environment more explicitly reflect that there are multiple perceptions of what the organization and environment are at the same time? Should not our case studies show the endless diversity of these perceptions, rather than the most common ones? Or do we then get stuck ourselves in what Weick (2001) calls the balance between analysis and action, where you cannot optimize both? Just like the inclusion of subjective interpretation and plurality in the above definition of crisis, similar lines of reasoning could give us more complex definitions of organization, environment, imperfections, interruptions, etc. Actually, the 'legal' organization might be questioned to still be the main research object. Much organizing crosses the boundaries of the traditional organizations and people who organize participate in many formal and informal organizations simultaneously (Ansell et al., 2010). The object of the organizational design process becomes rather endless when customers are part of our organizing (like the citizens potentially emptying the municipal water reservoirs), rather than part of our environment. The environment may become rather empty when everything is included in our system.

Case studies are often retrospectively focusing on those signals and conditions that are most relevant, given the current crisis situation. A kind of hindsight bias may come into the research design. Why not look at all signals, all actions, all conditions? Non-crisis-relevant signals, conditions and actions did also influence our sense making and organizing before the crisis. Why not look at all actors, rather than only the most affected ones? The answer or insight about a dependency in the complex system may be in a (still

unexpected) corner. A broader scale and scope of studies leads to more plausible variety, less unexpected surprises.

Likewise, (crisis) managers may wonder what the scale and scope of their organization or system actually is. Or how many different 'organizing-s' they actually are part of, how the dependencies between the dependencies are managed, by whom and under the umbrella of which 'common goals'. If we are not so very sure, neither in non-crisis (though less aware), nor in crisis (clearly aware), about 'who, when is part of what', the question becomes what to aim for when the order and control paradigm are left, and normality is imperfection, ignorance and reoccurring crises all the time.

Clues how to continue may be found in research on competing values (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983), competing frames (Gilbert, 2006), dynamic capabilities (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997; Gilbert, 2006; Baretto, 2010), organizational ambidexterity (Raisch, Birkinshaw, Probst, & Tushman, 2009), managing duality (Sutherland & Smith, 2011; Weick, 2011) and complex adaptive systems (French, Kouzmin, & Kelly, 2011). Their perspective is that organizing is a constant balance between many conflicting interests and that the answer is to not blend them into a consensus, but to contrast them and strive for both in parallel simultaneously (Sutherland & Smith, 2011). Too much order, and the system dies in equilibrium; too much chaos and the system will self-destruct; the right amount of complexity and the system will self-organize (French et al., 2011).

As they already have moved from one contingency, to multiple, it should not be that difficult to further stretch the approaches to including multiple equally valid images of organizations, environments, issues, expectations and so on.

In summary, our suggestions are more complex definitions, a broader scope and scale of studies and system definitions, more muddiness and less order in the crisis reports and a deeper look at how subjective constructiveness can be addressed in theories of complex adaptive systems, competing values and duality.

6. Conclusion

After studying crisis management in training and real crisis responses in an action research study over 6 years in four Swedish municipalities, our hypothesis is that organizing in crisis and organizing in non-crisis in essence is more similar than different. When some actors develop a sense of crisis, they become temporarily more aware of and attentive to the always present fragility and complexity of the act of organizing. Hard to grasp key concepts in organization studies, like for example values, beliefs, expectations, knowledge, communication, leadership, dependencies, coordination, sense making, as well as the way those concepts may interact, are observable much more distinctive in crisis than in non-crisis. A challenge for researchers in organization studies remains to be present when this sense of crisis appears and to study attentive, explicit organizing feed-forward as it happens, rather than to do a retrospective analysis filled with hindsight bias afterwards. The field of organization studies does not need a theory of crisis. Instead, crisis management researchers need to reflect on theories of organizing and help to build more complex images and models of organizing. One way is to first identify elements and interrelations in the complexity of crisis, and next, to look for where those same elements and relations are hidden in non-crisis theories and practice. Still a lot left to do.

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