Paper Summaries

# Week 1

STEPHEN TURNER: EXPERTISE AND POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY:THECOLUMBIASHUTTLE CATASTROPHE

Floris (NOT FINISHED YET)

* Responsibility that can be assigned to policy makers and experts, differences and characteristics
* Uses a case study: Columbia Shuttle Catastrophe
* Experts can’t be judges as decision-makers, “ Put more simply, expert knowledge is im-personal knowledge expressed or formulated by individuals, while political responsibility is personal and judged by collective processes.”
* In the case study, a catastrophe hit, but technical advice itself was responsible for the decision. So how was decision-making based on it?
* The incident was significantly outside any past experiences. Who is responsible here? The is not one person to blame, but often one person is ritualistically offered.
* “If this analysis is correct, the event was genuinely anomalous, and even more firmly beyond the assignment of responsibility. "

Stephan:

* Expert knowledge is impersonal knowledge expressed or formulated by individuals, while political responsibility is personal and judged by collective processes.
* When something goes wrong, people want to be able to hold someone (or a group) accountable.
* First response mostly is: ‘lets get a committee to review what went wrong”
* Responsibility is difficult to pinpoint, is negligence of a superior the error? or a lower up failing to do something at fault?
* Aggregated expert opinions/advice led to the errors, who is at fault?
* Is the person providing the data responsible or the one interpreting the data at fault?
* Should experts only stick to the subject they are expert in or can they also advice on closely related topics? Increasing the need for more experts. Where does expertise end?
* Can multiple experts reach consensus on related topics to get to good advice? Who can then be accountable?
* There is also a notion about people making different decisions whether they look at a case as an expert/scientist or as a manager. Where the manager is more concerned about preventing delays/reducing costs etc. Can a single person take on both roles.
* In the NASA case the responsible party was the ‘working culture’ of not communicating properly about mistakes. This replaced the need for a guilty party.