

Pearson, C.M., Roux-Dufort, C., & Clair, J. A. (Eds.) (2007). *International handbook of organizational crisis management*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Reviewed by: Tony Jaques

There are few areas of corporate communication which have seen so prolific a literature over recent years as the field of crisis management. Yet the field has continued to produce much that is tactical or repetitive or fails to take the discipline far beyond a small handful of famous cases that occurred long before the advent of 24-hour TV news and the internet.

Iconic crises ? including Three Mile Island (1979), Tylenol (1982), Bhopal (1984), Chernobyl (1986), Challenger (1986) and Exxon Valdez (1989) ? are dramatic and interesting to study . . . and easy to teach. Yet the question must be asked whether such crises, which have been defined as ?focusing events (Birkland, 1997), help a fuller understanding of crisis management practice today or whether they cast a shadow so long as to inhibit the exploration and assessment of other more recent and possibly more relevant cases. Moreover, an excessive concentration on high profile, atypical cases can fatally detract from crisis management as a core management discipline and plays into the hands of the it will never happen here optimists.

At the same time the essential core role of crisis management is constantly being diminished by publications which fail to go far past repeating lists of crisis response and media relations tactics, or those which attempt to position crisis management alongside disaster management or risk management or issue management, or which present crisis management as synonymous with crisis communication.

Against this background, this new compilation edited by Pearson, Roux-Dufort and Clair is admirably single-minded and strongly focused. The introduction acknowledges that iconic cases such as those referred to above constitute a major source of inspiration and serve as unavoidable sources of reference, yet teach more about accidents than about crises. As a result the book avoids a focus on case studies and instead focuses strongly on the conceptualization of crisis management as a continuum of activity.

Despite the strength of some recent scholarship to the contrary, there is still a body of crisis literature which adheres to the idea that crisis management is just what happens after the triggering event ? which has been called crash management as opposed to crisis management. The alternative approach, which presents crisis management as part of a continuing process, builds on the concept that it is better to prevent crises than manage crises. This integrated approach (see for example Jaques, 2007), extends the process to include early issue identification and crisis prevention; mechanical processes such as manuals and training which contribute to crisis preparedness; effective management of crisis which do occur; and then on through operational resumption to include post-crisis issue management, organizational learning and fresh crisis prevention.

One of the strongest features of this new book is its consistent emphasis on this advanced conceptualization and also its emphasis on writing intended to push the boundaries of crisis management thinking and research in order to envision the field in a broader perspective and beyond new horizons.

The body of the work comprises twelve standalone essays by leading writers across the field. Any compilation publication runs the risk of devoting space to lesser scholars whose work is used to make weight and fill out more obscure areas of the design structure. In the present case the editors have secured not only a broad range of consistently high quality contributions, but have also secured the work of some of the most important scholars currently writing in the field, such as the American Sarah Kovoov-Misra, the rising French scholar Christophe Roux-Dufort, the veteran Britons Denis Smith and Dominic Elliott, and the extraordinarily prolific American Ian Mitroff.

While crisis management as an academic pursuit was undoubtedly born in the United States, a case could readily be made that some of the most interesting and innovative work in the field is now taking place across the Atlantic, at research centres and schools of management in Germany, France, Belgium and the United Kingdom. The editors set out to include expertise in organizational crisis management from around the globe, but admitted they came up short after finding that such scholarship remains largely a product of Western Europe and North America. "We were unable to locate a single organizational or management scholar who is exploring crisis management in Latin America or Africa, they write. Of course we cannot say definitely that this signals a lack of scholarly interest in crisis management around the globe. Rather it may reflect the limits of our own scholar networks.

Apart from the rather sad fact that the editors apparently did not even consider the possibility of relevant scholarship in Australia or Asia (apart from one contributor from Japan) this new book does reflect some of the very latest and most creative thinking in the field, including both academics and leading practitioner advocates.

While the content and context is the scholarship of management rather than of communication, the vital role of communication for effective organizational crisis management is an underlying theme throughout and this new book will be of great interest to all practitioners and academics in the field.

References

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