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Crisis Management in Government:
Developments in Theory
and Practice

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DEVELOPMENTS IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

by

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1. Crisis analysis in Public Administration

Whether they are ancient or modern, rich or poor, Western or non-Western, the development of all nations is partly shaped by their response to critical events and periods: natural disasters (earthquakes, landslides, floods, vulcano eruptions, tornadoes and hurricanes); international confrontations (brinkmanship between nations, ethnic predicaments); disruptions in the delivery of vital goods and services due to price increases, international sanctions or embargo policies; accidents resulting from high-technology risks such as nuclear power, petrochemical industry, air and sea transportation, earthbound constructions, space utilization, and bio-medical research applications; mass emergencies in crowded places such as hotels, leisure centers, and sports accommodations; riots, revolts and other kinds of turmoil; terrorism in its various forms; and outbursts of collective stress. All of these events constitute extraordinary episodes for communities, policymakers, governmental agencies and often the very institutions of government.

From the perspective of government and policymaking, events like these are often un-scheduled, un-wanted, un-certain, and un-pleasant. Consequently, they give rise to un-usual forms of management, adminstration, and politics. Crisis analysis within Public Administration is focused on identifying and understanding the logic of the political, administrative, and managerial behavior of public authorities and agencies with respect to these seemingly unique and often momentous occasions. In doing so, it contrasts rather sharply with the mainstream of the field, which is focused on describing and understanding "normal," "routine," "incremental" government and politics. If mainstream Public Administration has traditionally sought to explain the logic of order, continuity, stability, and gradual transformation in the conduct of public affairs, the branch of crisis analysis is directed at the opposite: understanding governance in times of disorder, discontinuity, instability, and radical shifts.

In this paper, we shall present developments in crisis analysis, particulary the study of governmental crisis management. We shall do so by outlining two fundamentally different perspectives on public-sector crises and crisis management. We shall identify each perspective's core assumptions and conceptual foundations, and discuss recent developments in theory and research within each tradition. First we shall discuss the managerial perspective, which has encompassed the mainstream of crisis research done in a variety of policy-oriented social sciences (section 2). This shall be then be contrasted

with a more explicitly political perspective on crisis management, that challenges some of the functionalist, managerial assumptions of the former (section 3). We shall then apply both perspectives in looking ahead at what each perspective singles out as possible future crises and crisis management research priorities (section 4). We shall conclude by briefly reflecting on the future of crisis management research within public admininstration.

2. Crises: a managerial perspective

2.1 Crises and government: conceptual issues

The most common interpretation of what events like Chernobyl, Lockerbie, the LA riots, and the Kobe earthquake entail for public administration is that they disrupt everyday routines of social and political life. They constitute a threat to social values, norms, or structures - indeed sometimes to the very way of life of a community. They are manifest and often immediate, and the combination of the scope and speed of their disruptive impact seems to require quick responses from citizens and the government alike. Finally, since they are all infrequent, out of the ordinary, and usually technically and socially complex events, they provoke a high degree of uncertainty in the community and among policymakers and agencies involved in coping with them. This cumulation of adverse conditions invites critical decisions which often involve tragic choices. Invariably, crises put heavy pressure on public authorities who will have to demonstrate their capacity to respond promptly to extra-ordinary circumstances.

As the first defining characteristic of crisis, threats may be caused by nature (natural disasters) or may be man-made (for instance terrorism). Man-made crises may be the result of deliberate efforts to disrupt social life (rioting), but they may also derive from loss of technological control (nuclear plant accidents) or an unfortunate coincidence of more or less identifiable technical and human errors. The origins of threat can be endogenous or exogenous. Endogenous crises may find their origins in disaster-prone developments or confrontations outside the public domain; or they may relate to particular policies and activities within the public sector. With the present-day public-private mix, it is not easy to find crises which have nothing to do with governmental policies.

The second characteristic of crisis - uncertainty - often relates to a lack of raw data or information on the specific content of the threat involved. Facing an explosion in a petrochemical plant, the authorities will need to know the chemical qualities of the resulting vapour cloud. Hijackings are difficult to counter as long as the motives and

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psychical condition of terrorists remain unknown. Uncertainty may also result from a lack of information concerning the domain or target of the threat involved. With a flood or earthquake, it is important to get solid information on the area struck most severely (the epicenter). With hostage-takings, the decision makers will need distinct facts and figures as to the number of hostages held in a plane, bus or school.

In the case of natural disasters, a prominent source of uncertainty involves the risk of an initial calamitous event being followed by even worse mishaps. But this kind of problem may also impinge upon man-made crises. Facing one act of terrorism, the authorities may feel compelled to consider the likelihood of yet another simultaneous terrorist action. Too often, terrorists have successfully played upon the understandable disposition of the authorities to be prepared for simultaneous acts of terrorism elsewhere in the country. Uncertainty does not confine itself to dimensions of threat, but will often extend to ambiguities which emerge in responding to the threat. Thus the hurried organization and coordination of counter-crisis activities may produce its own confusion.

Finally, crises are characterized by a sense of urgency. Time pressure will vary according to the onset of crises. Nevertheless, although the gradual onset of a threat (for instance a tornado, the transnational spreading of nuclear radiation or the contamination of a river) may provide the authorities with some time to forewarn the population, time will be short anyhow and decisions will have to be taken at an unusually prompt rate. Crises involving an immediate impact of a threat (for instance hotel fires or transportation accidents) solicit situation-bound reactions. The usual way to handle these kinds of crises is to rely upon the experience and preparatory capacity of the operational agencies. To that extent, pre-crisis preparatory plans and scenarios are necessary. But it should be emphasized that in acute crisis situations creative improvization by novices may play a decisive and effective role.

2.2 Crisis management as containment

Focusing strongly on the effects of crises on the process of governmental decision making, analysts working in the containment tradition have identified a number of its recurrent features across a wide range range of crisis types (including international confrontations, terrorist events, disasters, see Rosenthal, 't Hart and Charles, 1989). These pertain to the organization of decision making; information and communication processes; and psychological dynamics:

* The central authorities will feel the urge to do away with complicated administrative arrangements and will <u>centralize and concentrate</u> the decision

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making process within a small decisional unit.

* Formal rules and standard operating procedures will give way to informal processes and improvization. Necessity is the mother of invention. Official authorities may be overruled by situation-bound leadership.

* Advisers and experts will advance into decisional positions. There may be such a shortage of expertise that the few available experts may gain a virtual monopoly in exerting influence.

* The coordination of the efforts of many administrative and operational agencies will be due to substantial tensions and bureaucratic rivalry. In part this is the byproduct of a clash between different organizational routines, but it is also embedded in the different interests and outlooks of, for example, general administrative versus special crisis-response agencies.

* There will be erratic fluctuations in the volume and speed of communications. There will be moments of formidable information overload but also periods of vexing silence during which rumors may prosper to make up for substantive pieces of information.

* There will be heavy media pressures for instantaneous information. There will be a strong competition between the media for preferential access to the decision makers, as well as highly intense and critical scrutiny of pre-crisis and crisis words and deeds of key decision makers and agencies.

* There will be severe difficulties in monitoring the implementation of strategic decisions made in the decisional unit. The pressures of the moment will engender negligence in checking the follow-up of decisions made.

* The decision makers will tend to give a preferential treatment to information coming from trusted and liked sources. They may cut themselves off from competitors, enemies and indeed "outsiders" in any shape or form, and become tied up in closed circuits of allies, friends, close associates, and sycophants.

* The decision makers will tend to rely intensively on their experiences during previous crises, at the risk of underestimating the differences between those and the current crisis. The vividness of crises in individual and organizational memory make them a ready source of over-learning by analogy (Rosenthal and 't Hart, 1989; Khong, 1992).

* It will not be easy for the decision makers to take a flexible stance on the appropriateness of their scenarios. They will be ill-disposed to redefining the situation even though the course of events would demand it. The longer the crisis will be dragging on, the more decision makers are vulnerable to entrapment in a dominant, preferred, yet not necessarily effective course of action (Brockner and Rubin, 1985).

* The decision makers will incorporate both short-term and long-term considerations in their assessment of the consequences their decisions might have. They will feel the pressures of the critical moments, but will be inclined to place the immediate threat in a wider political context.

* When crisis decision making is concentrated in a relatively stable small group of high-level authorities, the course and outcomes of the decision-maing process become highly contingent upon the leadership and group dynamics within the crisis center.

The general picture of crisis decision making that emerges from these propositions is twofold. First, it is clear that crisis decision making differes considerable from everyday policymaking, most clearly in the structure of decision and the speed and intensity of the

decision-making process. Secondly, the propositions show that crisis decision making has in-built failure propensities. Put differently, crisis decision makers labor under the paradox that the more important it becomes to make a sound and well-considered decision, the less conducive to doing so the organizational, informational, and social-psychological context becomes. In sum, the conventional view about crisis decisionmaking is that a number of crisis properties seem to militate against adequate reality-testing on the part of policy elites, and it requires sophisticated planning, adaptation and leadership practices to offset these tendencies (Dror, 1988).

Having summarized the conceptual foundations and main research findings of the first perspective, let us now review three major developments it has witnessed in the last ten years or so. These refer to an extension of the focus of research, an extension of the crisis concept, and emergent strands of theory formation.

2.3 Conclusions: emerging issues and questions

Much of the first wave of crisis research in International Relations, disaster sociology and organization studies was concerned with the question of response: how do organizations and governments cope when they are confronted with unscheduled, threatening events in their environment? The dominant focus of study was elite decision making, the objective being to uncover regularities and patterns of crisis response. These were to form the basis of a general theory of crisis decision making, which would lend a certain predictability to the behavior of authorities and agencies in seemingly unique, extreme conditions (Hermann, 1963; Paige, 1968; Barton, 1969; Dynes, 1970; Brecher, 1977; Rosenthal and Scholten, 1977).

It is tempting to consider crises as events which, all of a sudden, take one by surprise. The disruptive impact of a crisis may induce analysts and other observers to take a restricted view. The emphasis on a well-demarcated return to normalcy will stress the extraordinary nature and marginality of the event at hand. The dominant trend in contemporary crisis research has been to move away from this restricted, synchronic perspective. Instead, analysts have begun to study crises diachronically, and to view them as part of an on-going process. Moreover, they have gone beyond modelling crisis-as-process within one single sequential mode. Different crises may be the outcome of different critical paths. For that reason crisis researchers and crisis managers may need reconstructive logics rather than one deterministic reconstructive logic to draw conclusions and lessons from past crises, involving the use of what-if questions and other

forms of counterfactual analysis (Rosenthal and Pijnenburg, eds. 1991). Critical path analysis may serve as a satisfactory heuristic device for pure and applied crisis research alike, identifying turning points within trends and thus key opportunities for policy intervention (Jarman and Kouzmin, 1991). Such critical path analysis does not solve intricate questions about problem awareness, issue definition, decision time and timing that are inherent to the notion of crisis as a generic type of policymaking predicament. But it does at least suggest some specifications as to the perennial question as to why and when some tensions, problems or deteriorating circumstances turn into critical conflict, crisis and catastrophe, while others do not. It also gives a cue as to the mechanisms whereby risks materialize and incidents grow into accidents or all-out crises (Waddington et al. 1989; Pauchant and Mitroff 1992).

According to modern insights, crisis as process asks for preventive and planning efforts which generate as specific as possible information as to why and when some problems, tensions or deteriorating circumstances turn into catastrophe, conflict and outright crisis, while others do not. Preventive and planning techniques should probe into the intricacies of early warning indicators, thresholds, barriers, accelerators, triggers and flashpoints. Furthermore, viewing crises as processes suggests that during a crisis definitions of the situation may change. A critical situation may present itself as a natural disaster in the initial stage, but gradually develop into a conflict crisis. Or it may change from a national into an international crisis. Finally, the notion of crisis as process invites crisis managers to take a long-term view and anticipate the social and political effects of measures and decisions which they may feel compelled to take at the hectic moments following the occurrence of a crisis.

Many crisis analysts have felt the need to expand both the time frame and the task orientation of their research. The exclusive concern with crisis response made way for a more comprehensive concern with crisis management. Crisis management involves the entire pattern of control-oriented activities undertaken by policymakers and organizations prior to, during, and following crisis events. This includes efforts to prevent crises from materializing (risk assessment, risk management, loss prevention), to reduce their harmful impact (mitigation), to prepare for effective response should this be needed (planning), and to facilitate speedy post-crisis recovery. Ideally, these various stages and activities are coordinated as part of an integrative emergency management system (Petak, ed. 1985; Charles and Kim, eds. 1987; Waugh, 1990). Crisis researchers have begun to study all of these phases, and have produced massive amounts of data on each of them (Drabek, 1986;

Rosenthal, Charles and 't Hart, eds. 1989). They have begun to explore questions such as the following:

1. *What are the key organizational, political, and managerial challenges implied by these various functions of crisis management?* For example, sensitizing citizens, politicians and managers to risks and vulnerabilities and getting them to spend time and money to help minimizing the chances of their occurrence or their impact requires quite a different set of dispositions, skills, and strategies than making tragic choices under conditions of extreme stress. Likewise, the configuration of policymakers and organizations that are responsible, competent, or involved is often different for each function. This diversity of actors and processes has sparked a number of attempts to formulate middle-range theories of particular aspects of crisis management, including the structuring of crisis responses ('T hart, Rosenthal, and Kouzmin, 1993), the dynamics of expert advice in crisis decision making (Rosenthal and 't Hart, 1991), crisis-related accountability processes (Muller, 1994) and crisis-induced policy learning (Van Duin, 1992).

2. *To what extent do organizations and governments actually develop an even-handed, comprehensive approach to crisis management?* Crisis management philosophies are often remarkably incomplete or one-sided. They may concentrate on a very limited number of plausible disruptions. They may stake everything on prevention and implicitly assume that, therefore, crisis preparedness is not worth investing in. More generally, getting the issue of crisis management on the policy agenda and keeping it there is a formidable task (Drabek, 1990). During periods of relative calm, many people and agencies are not interested in crisis management. Also, many senior policymakers are unwilling to face worst-case situations that confront them with the darker sides of their public duties. Consequently, they shy away from exposing themselves to exercises and simulations. For example, virtually all post-war US presidents showed little inclination to participate in crisis exercises involving rehearsing nuclear command and control procedures (Ford, 1986).

3. *How do crisis management systems cope with the dynamic qualities of unfolding crises, in other words what provisions and mechanisms govern the interfaces and transitions between the various phases/functions of crsis management?* Stage models look good on paper, but the practice of crisis management is often messy. Risks become acute for different stakeholders at

different times and for different reasons. Crises may hit one part of the system long before they hit another. Crises, once in motion, often cannot declared "over" by official proclamation. One of the key challenges of the four-stage emergency management cycle is to identify transition points from one function to another and to provide for smooth inter-organizational adjustments and transitions. Also, in many cases, the various functions have to be performed in parallel. During the Bijlmer air disaster in Amsterdam involving the crash of a Boeing 747 cargo plane into a suburban block of flats, local authorities had to begin planning for the long-term housing, material, and psycho-social needs of victims even as the first response, in particular the search for victims, was in full progress (Rosenthal et al., 1994; see also Hodgkinson and Stewart, 1990).

4. *To what extent do the various activities undertaken under the rubric of crisis management actually contribute to effective mitigation and control of unscheduled and undesirable events and developments?* Van Duin (1992), for example, has drawn attention to the perverse effects of inadequate preparedness and response measures. Instead of limiting a community's vulnerability, bad planning may increase it. Instead of curbing an emergent crisis, an inept response may magnify its impact, effectively becoming part of the pattern of crisis causation. Upon closer inspection, each of the stages/functions of crisis management is susceptible to performance shortfalls and unintended consequences (Comfort, ed. 1988; Halachmi, 1992; Van Duin, 1992). Comparative research has uncovered a few familiar pittfalls:

Crisis prevention A first and most important pitfall of crisis prevention is the bias of abundant resources. Cost-benefit analyses of crisis prevention and mitigation programs may differ considerably according to the level of prosperity and the level of expectation about safety and security. Many countries cannot afford to invest in so-called crisis and risk prevention when the majority of the population could be said to live in a state of permanent crisis (Shrivastava, 1987). In a paradoxical way, under such circumstances crisis prevention programs could work to produce crisis rather than reduce it. A second pitfall goes with the tendency to focus exclusively on localized or momentous risks and on the immediate impact of concrete incidents and crises. Thus complaints about high-technology risks easily make people forget how much new technologies have contributed, directly as well as indirectly, to collective well-being. If net benefit instead of "no harm" is accepted as the yardstick for risk assessment, anticipation and prevention may give way

to trial and error, learning by using, and increase of social resilience (Wildavsky 1988). A third pitfall revolves around the vulnerability paradox. This paradox draws attention to the negative side-effects of the near-perfect and undisturbed service delivery in modern society: the more perfectionist the preventive schemes and safety measures, the more dramatic will be the effects of minimal disturbances. For instance, public utilities in the Netherlands (water, electricity, gas and telecommunication facilities) are highly effective. The paradoxical result may be that already a slight decline in the quality of the services rendered, the increase in costs and prices, and growing uncertainty as to a guaranteed supply in the remote future may put substantial pressure upon their apparent image of invulnerability and may, indeed, create an atmosphere of unrest. While people in some developing countries may become nervous about the continued functioning of basic public utilities, seeing it as a sign that drastic political change must have taken place, a one-hour electricity blackout in a Dutch town may reach the headlines of the local newspaper. (Rosenthal, 1990).

Crisis preparedness Crisis planning may have similar drawbacks. First, crises tend to be almost perfect candidates for perfectionist planning. The very fear of sheer surprise makes risk aversion loom large in the planning process. Operational plans often tend towards taking the safe side, covering every possible risk. Experiences with crises defying the comprehensive enumeration of plausible and worst case scenarios will only reinforce the disposition towards perfection. Again and again, however, planners and authorities will be confronted with crises not thought of before. Secondly, crisis planning may nurture rather than mitigate the prospect of events running out of control. Planning and preparatory measures may stir up a sense of urgency and may, indeed, arouse a psychological or organizational need to put the plans and preparatory schemes into practice. A pertinent example bears upon armed units and security services which cannot be left waiting in a state of ultimate alertness for a too long period of time. Growing impatience on the part of the agencies of order may be an important consideration for the authorities to intervene in protracted conflict crises, as happened during the confrontation between the police and the black cult group MOVE in Philadelphia in 1985 (Assefa and Wahrhaftig, 1985). Likewise, during the inauguration of Queen Beatrix in tension-ridden Amsterdam (30 April 1980), the official and police scenarios were a perfect example of rational-synoptic riot planning. For that very reason, the authorities and the police applied them in a mechanical way, leading policemen to begin to use force, although there was no

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danger whatsoever to the main policy goals set for that day (Rosenthal 1989: 247). Thirdly, planning and preparatory measures may fall a prey to bureaucratization and routinization. This applies in particular to safety and security arrangements which build upon the official and formal expectation of regular exercising and training. Frequently, that expectation tends to be at odds with the reality of pro-forma exercises, the lack of a genuine safety culture, and the pressures to meet productivity rather than safety standards. Many cases of ferry, rail, and air disasters show evidence of this pattern (Nance, 1986; Cook, 1989; Turner and Toft, 1989). Fourthly, planning and preparedness may become part and parcel of the high politics game. Threat prediction and the need for preparatory programs may become a political commodity of the first order. In some settings, the politics of earthquake prediction and of the size and kind of preparatory measures easily gain prominence over genuine concern with the impending dangers for the population. Thus US-Peruvian relations and American bureaucratic politics were at stake in the Brady-Spence controversy on the prediction of a severe earthquake which did not occur on June 28, 1981, off the coast of central Peru (Olson 1989).

Crisis response When crisis is immanent, the decision makers face an arduous task. In the context of crisis response, the argument on counter-productive, if not perverse, efforts in crisis management naturally takes a particular relevance. Nowhere will the consequences of well-intended, yet counter-effective endeavours be more direct and critical. First, crises may be susceptible to modes of intervention which reach beyond the requirements or requisites of the situation. Some decision makers may be unfit to cope with critical circumstances. Crisis response will then be the very opposite of crisis management. Instead of getting things done, the decision makers let things run out of control. It should be stressed that due to the inherent dominance of uncertainty and ambiguity, crisis decision making will often generate a considerable amount of individual and group stress. Multiple definitions of the situation, which only analysts announce post-hoc to have been a clear-cut crisis, may interfere with the coordination of decision making and implementation. Secondly, organizational actions may be ineffective, if not counter-productive. Obvious cases in point are to be found with emergency services which, in their eagerness to avert the danger of a toxic or ecological disaster, use exactly the wrong chemical substance (Van Duin, paper). A most intriguing question is raised in confict-ridden societies, where the neutrality of emergency services may be at issue and for that reason may affect their effectiveness to a considerable extent. Also, decisions to forcibly evacuate

large parts of the populations in a threatened area tend to give rise to considerable cntroversy, particularly when the threat does not materialize. The January 1995 evacuation of 250.000 people from parts of Holland in response to an acute flood hazard is a case point: its critics argued that the disruption caused by the evacuation far outweighed the real risk of dike failure and flooding in at least some of the endangered areas.

Crisis recovery The recovery function involves complexities not immediately acknowledged in common definitions of this stage as "the return to normalcy." First, the more elites and authorities are pressing for normalcy, the more the recovery process itself may become subject to intense debate and conflict (Geipel 1982). Post-crisis collective trauma following a natural disaster or high-profile terrorism may amplify rather than mitigate communal distress and indeed make it just impossible to look back to those days before (Erikson, 1976). Secondly, mismanaged crises may set the stage for fundamental and drastic change of the system, tension-release and open conflict and accelerated circulation of elites. Following the Holland flood disaster of 1953 which took 1800 lives, mayors and other local officials in some of the worst-stricken towns were no longer accepted as legitimate authorities and had to be replaced when their performance during the crisis period was seen as inadequate or cowardly by local opinion leaders (Rosenthal, 1984).

3. Crises: a political perspective

3.1 Challenging managerialist assumptions
Most of the current literature on crises and emergencies falls within the first perspective. It is strongly managerial, in a functional-technocratic sort of way. Crisis research in this vein is often analysis-for-practice. It tries to uncover patterns and problems of command, control, communications, and intelligence, and spells out its findings in prescriptive guide books and tool kits for managers and administrators. It works within a paradigm of control. This analytical philosophy is not unproblematic for two related reasons. First of all, the emphasis on "management" tends to play down the political dimensions of the ways in which risks and crises are identified and dealt with in a society or organization. In addition, it harbors a status-quo bias, implying that crises by definition are bad things and, likewise, that official strategies of crisis management are for the common good.

This dominant philosophy can be contrasted with a more power-critical approach, which regards crises by definition as moments of high politics, indeed defines crises not

as situations of threat, urgency and uncertainty, but as periods of breakdown of familiar symbolic frameworks legitimating the pre-existing socio-political order ('t Hart, 1993). From this perspective, crises come to the fore when the everyday routines and dramas of public life are disrupted, either by an exogenous event, by cumulative and hitherto unrecognized unintended consequences of governance, or by the deliberate activities of particular groups bent on achieving such a departure from normalcy.

In other words, crisis reality tends to be highly differentiated and subject to multiple perspectives and political conflict. More often than not, crises give rise to divergent perceptions of the situation. Furthermore, events and developments may be subject to deliberate attempts on the part of contestants or the authorities to present them in critical terms. We move from the world of management and administration to the world of politics. Adversities may induce incumbent authorities to claim the need for crisis government. Labelling events as crises may give them, at least temporarily, far more room to maneuver. Crises invite crisis government, where executive authorities can invoke special emergency powers to rule unhindered by everyday constraints of parliamentary involvement, interest-group politics, and delicate checks and balances within the bureaucracy.

In rather sharp contradistinction to the managerial perspective, the political perspective on crisis government takes it as axiomatic that the course and outcomes of crisis episodes are shaped in important ways by political and bureaucratic conflict. For example, when a large-scale disaster strikes, differing perceptions and interests will not immediately constitute a major issue. Initially, consensus will dominate the scene of counter-disaster response. After a while, however, tensions and conflicts will be on the increase. Domestic and international politics as well as the economics of disaster and prospects of disaster litigation practices will become pivotal. Similarly, with conflict crises like protest demonstrations, strikes, bombing attacks, riots and terrorist actions, the authorities' and agencies' perceptions of threat, uncertainty and urgency may diverge according to the various interests and expert opinions involved.

3.2 Re-visiting the crisis concept

This alternative perspective implies a different conceptualization of what crises are about:

* Crises are a *perceptual category*: e.g. for a crisis to come into being a sufficient number of sufficiently influential individuals and groups must become aware of important changes in their environment (Schorr, 1987, pp. 125-127).

*   Crises, whatever their origins, therefore always contain *multiple levels of conflict*. This cognitive conflict occurs at the intra-individual level, where affected individuals are faced with conflicting cognitions: on the one side the familiar beliefs sustaining the existing order and his or her personal stakes in it, on the other hand significant, repeated and undeniable disconfirming information that some things are seriously wrong. At the societal level, this cognitive conflict is emulated in the activities of multiple groups and organizations espousing different definitions of the situation offering different claims about its causes, impact and further development, and advocating alternative and often conflicting strategies to deal with the situation. Examples of the collusion of intra-individual and societal conflicts can be found in psychosocial research into the experience of creeping and man-made disasters, such as Love Canal, Three-Mile Island and Chernobyl (see Fowlkes and Miller, 1988; Edelstein, 1988; Bromet, 1989).

*   Crises are an *affective category*: the dramatic challenges to previously-held world views that crises bring about, compounded by first-hand or indirect experience of material damages, human suffering, or gross injustice, generate a significant amount of anxiety. Barton (1969) aptly defines disasters as situations of collective stress. More specifically, crises highlight and amplify personal insecurities and feelings of vulnerability, and may serve to decrease the perceived self-competence and self-esteem of those affected (Wolfenstein, 1957).

*   Crises contain an *element of delegitimation*: the perceived changes are interpreted in such a way as to call into question the past, present and perhaps future functioning of particular aspects of society and, in many cases, government. In doing so, they challenge the knowledge, status and authority claims of those individuals and groups seen to be responsible. Precisely because crises challenge the primal political symbol of "security" (Edelman, 1977, pp.4-5), they also challenge the competence of the institutionalized (and self-proclaimed) guardians of security, e.g., the state and its political-administrative leadership. Crises, then, should be viewed as dynamic forces in ongoing, dynamic processes of legitimization, deligitimization and relegitimization. Delegitimation the macro level is prominment during socio-economic and political regime crises. A rough scenario of crisis-induced deliegitimation reads as follows: shortfalls in socio-economic performance by existing regimes - increased political opposition - greater difficulties to sustain governmental performance - further increases in opposition,

including anti-regime and anti-system opposition (instead of merely anti certain policies or anti incumbent elites) - aggravation of crisis and possible regime breakdown (Linz and Stepan, 1978; cp. self-defeating technocratic democracy in Habermas, 1975). At the micro level, the delegitimation process can be witnessed in the disenchantment that disaster or terrorist victims and bereaved often experience in their contacts with corporate and governmental bodies in seeking explanations for what is happening, post-crisis damage compensation and safety improvements.

*   Given this context of fundamental ambiguitiy, conflicting cognitions, collective stress and latent or manifest delegitimation, *crises provide opportunities* for mass mobilization and institutional self-dramatization. Conventional crisis definitions tend to ignores the basic multi-valence of crises. Whilst "decision makers" may indeed experience threat, urgency and uncertainty, other officials, groups and organization will harbour the exact opposite interpretation (see Bryson, 1981). For one thing, to mass media like CNN a major international crisis is nothing short of life-blood. In fact, CNN's coverage of the Gulf War provided the vehicle of that cable network's definitive international breakthrough. Similarly, whilst the serious riots surrounding the inauguration of Dutch Queen Beatrix demanded a heavy toll from the Amsterdam and other police forces, central-government public-order bureaucrats welcomed them as a rare opportunity to re-affirm their pleas for a stronger, better equipped and trained anti-riot police in the Netherlands. Edelman (1977, p.47) puts it quite succinctly: 'Any regime that prides itself on crisis management is sure to find crises to manage, and crisis management is always available as a way to mobilize public support'.

3.3 The politics of crisis response

In many cases, the "decision makers" themselves may be ambivalent in their interpretation of events. This makes the ongoing battle between different groups for dominant definitions of the situation all the more interesting. Authorities themselves need not automatically be defenders of the status quo. They may in fact acknowledge the threats a crisis poses, while at the same time they too may conceive of possibilities of using the crisis to further some of their aims. The fact that certain aspects of the old order are delegitimized opens up opportunities for rallying people behind visions of a new order, or at least to sollicit mass support for measures that can be depicted as "lessons" for

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"improvement" of the old order. Sometimes the cathartic effect of a major crisis is a prerequisite for change-oriented policy makers being able to propose a temporary abandonment of "muddling through" patterns of politics in favor of centralized styles of governance and far-reaching decisional powers ordinarily considered unthinkable. This too is the logic behind various constitutional provisions concerning "crisis government" in various countries (see 't Hart et al., 1993). In Belgium, for example, the widely shared sense of budgettary crisis in the mid-eighties contributed to parliament agreeing to drastically reduce its influence on government policymaking for sustained periods of time.

In the latter example, the crux lies, of course, with the question whether the perception of crisis that formed the basis of this self-initiated abdication of democratic authenticity in favor of executive rule accurately reflected the state of the Belgian economy and the government's budget. An alternative interpretation would be that this image of crisis was more or less deliberately constructed and amplified by groups of stake-holders exploiting the opportunity structure that seemed to present itself at the time. In other words it is useful to ask: was it a "real" or a "pseudo" crisis?[1] This takes us from the question of the symbolic conceptualization of crisis to the issue of crisis management strategies.

The symbolic-political re-interpretation of the crisis concept yields five interrelated analytical dimensions of crisis management:

* _perceptual control:_ the "management" of cognitive images about events;
* _conflict reduction:_ re-aligning different and mutually contradictory definitions of the situation;
* _affective control:_ the "management" of individual and collective emotions generated by the breakdown of routine symbolic order;
* _de- and relegitimation:_ ultimately, some new equilibrium of more or less predictable and commonly supported patterns of social and political interaction needs to be reestablished;
* _opportunity recognition and exploitation:_ both from a short-term and a longer-term perspective, every crisis presents opportunities for certain stakeholders that "good" crisis management can bring to the fore.

These five dimensions are closely related. Arguably that the most basic ones are relegitimation and opportunity exploitation. These constitute the most basic aims to be achieved irrespective of an actor's particular position (see below). The other three dimensions should be regarded as instrumental to achieve these two meta-goals. Below we shall

explore some of the specific symbolic strategies that are pursued by crisis actors seeking to manipulate the conduct of crisis on these five dimensions. Some strategies will be predominantly cognitive, while others are more explicitly aimed at the manipulation of emotional stress or the reduction of socio-political conflict. We shall concentrate on two broad classes of symbolic-political strategies: framing and masking.

Framing Much of the conflict inherent in crises centers around the various stakeholders' attempts to impose their definition of the situation on others. They do so by employing different languages, selectively exploiting data and arguments, and forming "discourse coalitions" with like-minded groups (Hajer, 1989). Indeed, one way of looking at the communication dimensions of crises is in terms of the continuum between controlled and uncontrolled formats of communication (Combs, 1980: 119-121).

The very occurrence of a disaster or other acute crisis event implies that, at least momentaneously, authorities lose control over the dramaturgy of political communication. They are literally overtaken by events, as well as by the fact that in most cases, the mass media's initial responses are much quicker and more powerful in terms of generating images of the situation for mass consumption (as was painfully evident, for example, during the Zeebrugge ferry disaster and the 1987 Stock Market crash). Authorities will try to use every means at their disposal to resort to more controlled formats as well as rythms. As one crisis manager defined the problem: "under normal circumstances an administrator controls time; during crises time "controls" the administrator" (Docters van Leeuwen, 1990). This loss of control over format and pace of communication means a loss of control over the definition of the situation, which arguably is among the greatest threats to effective governance. Hence the strong emphasis on the re-establishment of such control, up to the point of policymakers seeking to fully direct images and media activities (a hypereffective form of "rumor control"). One way to do this is to severely restrict public access to sites, people and information relevant to the conduct of a crisis, as was practiced with disturbing efficiency during most of the Falklands and Gulf wars. Opposed to these official efforts may be other groups' attempts to exert a certain degree of counter-control over image formation. Groups may try to circumvent or contradict these superimposed cognitive images, for example by seeking to penetrate the armoury of "the official story", or by attemtping to expose previously hidden or controversial practices by self-created spectacles (for example: Greenpeace's spectacular actions against nuclear testing or waste dumping at sea).

Once a problem is framed and politically adopted in terms of "crisis" and "avoid-avoid" choices, the details of probabilities attached to various alternatives become less salient in influencing what is subsequently done. This was exemplified by the Swine Flu crisis during the Ford administration, when the decision was made to embark on a massive inoculation program designed to reach every American citizen, and sure to kill a few people because of side effects:

> 'It mattered a little that the experts could not tell whether the chance of pandemic influenza was 30 percent, or 3 percent, or even less than 1 percent. What the assistant secretary for Health, the secretary of HEW, the president, and Congress heard was that there was *some* chance of pandemic flu and this was enough. No responsible politician wished to put himself in the position of opposing the program, thus running the risk that pandemic illness and death might prove him a villain' (Silverstein, 1981: 135, cited in Jervis, 1992: 191, orig. italics).

The framing of issues as crises thus generates a sort of self-binding dynamic. This might lead to highly ineffective and costly policies, but if carefully staged may also be put to astute political manipulation. In many instances, it makes good political sense to first dramatize the seriousness of the situation, e.g. for example by personifying threats and constructing diabolical enemy images, before going on to propose bold, even extreme, courses of action that under normal conditions would never stand a chance of being accepted (White, 1986; Edelman, 1977: 14; Edelman 1989: 66-89). In doing so, stakeholders may appeal to deep-rooted "threat biases" in how people perceive their environment (Jackson and Dutton, 1988: 384-85). The logic here is familiar, as it underlies the tendency to externalize internal conflicts to generate social homogenity and gain support (Coser, 1956).

Masking If crises expose deep-rooted conflicts and vulnerabilities of the established social order, it follows that one important dimension of crisis management by status-quo oriented officials and agencies is to counteract this exposition or to dampen its impact. They will engage in a specific form of impression management called masking. To be sure, there exists a fine line between masking and denial or distortion of threat perceptions. Masking refers to the external communication strategies of crisis stakeholders, whilst denial etc. refer to their own personal and internal-organizational beliefs and perceptions. The latter may be severely distorted as a consequence of defective patterns of individual, group and organizational reality-testing (Turner, 1978; Janis, 1989; Mitroff and Pauchant, 1990). This will decrease their resilience capabilities to respond effectively to emergent contingencies. Such culturally and organizationally rooted denial

and perceptual distortion are, indeed, important precursors to man-made crises.

Masking can be a parallel mechanism to denial and distortion: individuals ad organizations that themselves are unable to engage in systematic and realistic self-appreciation, are highly unlikely to communicate effectively to their social environments. However, masking may also be used more deliberately by policy makers who do not suffer from threat-induced perceptual rigidities. Masking, in fact, constitutes an important instrument in actually manipulating situations to stop short of the crisis point, or to selectively define dominant recollections of what transpired during a crisis. Let us examine some prototypes of masking strategies:

1. Communicating a "business as usual" image. Downplaying the critical nature of particular risks, emerging adversities and performance failures is almost routine behavior in many organizations. In part it is an inevitable consequence of the operation of hierarchies, where each official has strong formal and cultural incentives to withold "bad news" from superiors. In part it may be an imperative given the web of interdependencies in which an organization is embedded. For major corporations, to admit any hint of non-routine problems and threats might trigger momentous consequences in the increasingly volatile arena of contemporary stock markets. As far as government agencies are concerned, allowing such signals to multiply, is interpreted as in invitation to much-detested losses of their autonomy. Publicly admitted signs of trouble will either lead to direct intervention from political executives or to increasingly alert and critical scrutiny by media and parliament.

This type of masking efforts may succeed and buy the official or agency time to put its affairs in order and thereby prevents a emergent "crisis" from materializing. Yet short-term success is not all that counts. If successful masking is not followed by additional symbolic or substantive remedial actions, it will only generate more severe backlashes when in the longer run, the "real" problems do come to the surface (the My-Lai and Watergate "cover-ups" come to mind, as do many corporate downfalls). Secondly, masking may be practised too little or too late and hence lack communicative power. If masking does not help to alleviate short-term concerns about performance or emerging threats, its very failure to convince people tends to aggravate the situation: it acutely exposes "credibility gaps", and raises questions about managerial incompetence, as well as distrust.[2]

2. Displacing crisis perceptions onto other objects or domains. Edelman (1977: 47) talks about semantically created versus semantically masked crises. The latter refer to

'problems that impoverish or ruin millions of lives (which) are not perceived as crises because we attach labels and "explanations" to them that portray them as natural and inevitable, or as caused by the people who suffer from them rather than by outside, unexpected threats. We see poverty, crime, sickness, emotional disturbance, carnage on the highways, and similar disasters as chronic social "problems" rather than as crises, though they hurt more people more severely than any of the crises do.'

Here the selective labelling amounts to a masking of the critical nature problems deemed unmanageable or politically sensitive, while at the same time emphasizing other problems, that do lend themselves to successful dramaturgy, mobilization and crisis management. Instruments of such masking are the language of causation and the language of innuendo about impact. The vivid quality of dramatic events as riots, terrorist actions, international conflicts and disasters, combined with the availability of external causes and enemies, makes them self-evident candidates for displacement of crisis perceptions.

3. Obscuring details of crisis management operations. This takes us to the well-known and perenially controversial domain of "OpSec" (Operational Security), as it is known in (para)military circles. Under the protective belt of OpSec (or legal doctrines of executive secrecy), government actors are able to hide from the public and parliamentary eye unpleasant details about precrisis negligence or incompetence, as well as about failed, excessively costly or ethically controversial decisions and actions taken throughout the crisis. The claim to OpSec works especially well in situations of (potentially) violent domestic or international conflict and terrorism, where organized state violence (or "force" to use a typical form of masking semantics: governments use "force", enemies use "violence"). These situations in particular tend to evoke severe feelings of threat and vulnerability among mass publics, and widen the zone of acceptance of the means are used to terminate the perceived threat.

3.4 Extending the political perspective: bureau-politics of crisis management

In the more elitist, quasi-conspirational versions of the political perspective on crisis management, the governmental apparatus may easily become depicted as merely an instrument in the hand of dominant elites or powerful clientele stakeholders. A more sophisticated version of the political perspective acknowledges the polycentric and indeed political nature of the bureaucracy itself. Crisis management then becomes a theatre for bureaucratic politics as much as any other aspect of government activity does. The literature shows many examples of competing and conflicting bureaucratic agencies

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applying the kinds of crisis management tactics highlighted in the political perspective (Rosenthal, 't Hart and Kouzmin, 1991).

Four main causes for the occurrence of bureau-politics during crisis episodes can be identified. First, in crisis situations government authorities and public agencies definitely do not lose interest in the ranking order of power and prestige. For crisis-relevant organizations, the actual moments of crisis are the very moments their continued existence may be at stake. Indeed, by definition, their rationale, legitimacy and even funding may derive from their performance in critical situations. The history of crisis management provides rich evidence for this reality. The mining disaster of Lengede (Western Germany, 1962), for example, gave rise to inter-agency conflicts later captured under the disquieting notion of "the battle of the good Samaritans." There is considerable evidence to show that inter-service rivalries within the armed forces do not fade away the moment international tensions become really serious. A dramatic example of this concerns the planning of the failed Iran rescue mission (1980), where all four services demanded a part in the rescue operation. In the bureaucratic bargaining that followed, the Marines ended up providing helicopter pilots unfamiliar with the Navy-supplied machines that were to be used in the mission. This proved to be a critical flaw (Gabriel 1985).

Secondly, authorities and agencies involved in the process of crisis decision-making may coolly anticipate the re-allocation of personnel and budgetary resources in the aftermath of the crisis. They may be well aware of the extended effects of their performance during a crisis. They will know that acute changes in the inter-organizational allocation and distribution of resources in periods of severe crisis, such as during the oil crises of the 1970's or during episodes of dramatic budgetary cutbacks, often prevail after the restoration of routine administration (Hirschorn,ed.,1983; Jarman and Kouzmin 1990; Rosenthal and Scholten 1977; Rubin 1977). Anticipation to such post-crisis developments and realignments makes crisis and crisis-relevant agencies very keen on "being there" during the hectic moments and on managing the post-crisis image of their performance.

Thirdly, bureau-politics may result from the confrontation between authorities and agencies that are not used to working together. As Quarantelli has put it, in crises, inter-organizational coordination often is the problem rather than the solution (Quarantelli 1988). Crises dramatically change the usual organizational chart. In a way, the critical quality of the situation imposes itself upon authorities and agencies which have little inter-organizational experience: these include civilian and military organizations; central and local branches; routine and typically crisis-oriented agencies (Brouillette and

Quarantelli 1971; Stallings 1978; Wright 1978). Also, the belated appearance of a key actor in the arena of crisis decision-making may produce irritation with other interested parties which, by that time, may already have taken the responsibility for a number of critical decisions.

This third consideration does not imply sheer self-interest on the part of the various agencies. Part of the intensified bureau-political tension during crises is simply due to the psychology of the unknown and may indeed be reinforced by organizational stress. The combination of threat, uncertainty and unfamiliarity is fertile ground for interorganisational miscommunications and misunderstandings.

Fourthly, in a crisis setting, bureau-politics may flourish for the very reason that all parties concerned are convinced of their contribution to the public cause. This situation points to bureaux and bureaucrats insisting upon their interpretation of what would be the most effective, if not the only, way to avert threat. Each of them takes its own institutionalised modus operandi as its primary frame of reference; each values its own 'distinctive competence' (Selznick, 1957). (extend)

Pervasive though bureaucratic politics in crisis management may be, it is often obscured by government information policies that stress the military metaphor: crisis response as a matter of unified, coordinated, competent, and decisive government intervention. The rhetoric and symbolics of "centralization" reinforce this picture. Both reflect the managerialist reflex to regard bureau-political conflict as undesirable and embarrassing, particularly in a crisis context. From a political perspective, however, a more even-handed assessment of bureau-politics seems appropriate. Open bureau-politics may during crises may serve to bring out a variety of definitions of the situation and different sets of values and interests where traditional centralized crisis management stresses only one. Bureau-politics may act as a system of checks and balances and thus militate against single-mindedness, all too decisive policy elites, and highly closed styles of crisis response. In fact, a growing number of academics and, to a lesser extent, practitioners in public administration recognize that the prescriptive processes of consensus-oriented, rationalistic and monocentric administration do conform with empirical reality. Nor do they sit easily with the ideological canons of liberal democracy (Thompson, 1983; Urban, 1982). The advantages of complexity, redundancy, duplication, overlap and conflict (Kouzmin 1979; Kouzmin and Jarman 1989; Landau 1969; Lerner 1986) are now elaborated, and the notion of polycentrism is not only being tolerated but increasingly being insisted upon as a possible alternative to centralist and coercive

bureaucratic administration (Chisholm 1990; Toonen 1983; Landau and Chisholm, in press).

It is tempting to apply such ideas to the domain of crisis management. The question then arises as to whether crises, with their inherent bias toward a monocentric perspective could lend themselves to a similar kind of revisionist approach. It would be indeed daring to proselytize the case for duplication, overlap and negotiation, when political pressures unequivocally point to clarity, simplicity and the undisputed determination of 'tough' decisions. It is difficult to imagine a crisis centre which, in making up its collective mind about a hijacked plane or train, would have to find its way through a myriad of cross-cutting and overlapping jurisdictions. It would seem to be the world of centralized crisis management turned upside down.

On closer inspection, such a 'revisionist' approach to bureau-politics presented here does have something to offer to the theory and practice of crisis management. With minor modifications, it is not that distant from the already fashionable ideas about multiple scenarios, mixed scanning procedures, competitive brainstorming and preparatory sessions (George 1980; Janis 1989; Nutt 1989; Rosenthal and Pijnenburg, eds 1991). Bureau-political competition and conflict may easily fit this line of thinking and, for that fact, lose their exclusively dysfunctional connotation.

4. Future crises and research agendas: applying the two perspectives

Managerialist crisis analysis is devoted to studying how public authorities and agencies manage unusual events and episodes. Crisis management in this view is a matter of containment: regaining control over a situation that has somehow gone out of hand. Regaining control is not only a matter of responding to events as they happen; it may involve elaborate prevention and planning efforts and intricate organizational and interorganizational procedures and adaptation. In contrast, the second perspective on crisis management is all about political bottom lines. Its main feature is not analysis-for-practice but what one might call demystification-of-practice.

It is difficult to see any sort of compatbility between the managerial and the political perspectives on crisis management, and yet they both reflect important realities of governance and administration in times of crisis. This can also be seen when we apply the two perspectives in looking at what may be the most important crises to come, and at the kinds of crisis management issues these future crises generate.

The future of crisis analysis: an managerialist account

The world around us continues to change rapidly. Increasingly, no country or society will be able to circumvent the consequences of these changes. We will be facing new combinations of crises which will force us to rethink our priorities. Newly-emerging crises increasingly defy borders and boundaries. One of the staggering complications for crisis management is the increasing importance of compounded crises, e.g., cumulations of adversities occuring more or less simultaneously and producing interaction effects. Many distinctions between categories of crises, which were of great help in past decades, seem to have lost theoretical and practical meaning:

- the distinction between natural and human-induced disasters has given way to clear and demonstrable linkages, provoking disquieting thoughts about the mutual reinforcement of natural and man-made calamities;
- the continuity of national economies may become increasingly dependent on cumulating pressure stemming from production problems, demand shifts, transportation vulnerabilities, price policies, corporate mergers and bankruptcies, the dynamics of financial markets, and political tensions. The dependency of modern technologies on particular raw materials, for instance those needed for IT hardware, makes modern IT highly and increasingly vulnerable;
- if only because of their sheer complexity, vulnerability audits of infrastructural megaprojects will undoubtedly show them to be a fruitful ground for compounded crises;
- terrorists may put pressure on an emerging mass concern for the ecology (eco-terrorism); they may try to disrupt infra-structural arrangements, in particular telecommunications, data base systems and public health schemes; they may consider mass tourism and leisure events as easy targets;
- strategic labour strikes may have a devastating impact on the economy and the polity; street riots and mass hooliganism may be extremely damaging to international reputations and may call into question international investments in prestige-steered public works projects.
- corporate crises, with their serious implications for the public sector and the attendant arousal of collective stress, can no longer be regarded to occur 'out there' in the private sector (Pauchant and Mitroff 1992).

In the political and administrative domain this development may call for serious and renewed discussions about the pros and cons of comprehensive or integrated crisis management. In any case crises do not care about the political and administrative division of labor: they hit the system as a whole. For example, the traditional distinction between domestic and international categories of crisis is rapidly losing relevance. Large-scale crises (Bhopal, Sandoz, Herald of Free Enterprise, Lockerbie) already tend to be transnational in their scope and impact. Environmental crises take on dramatic proportions for the very reason that they have external effects on a global scale which are very difficult to contain. International terrorism and organized crime may become transnationalized within a few hours.

In many ways crisis management is still being regarded as the prerogative of sovereign states. Being a by-product of the international political system, the structures and processes of international crisis management are lagging behind the transnationalization of crises. The weaknesses of international mechanisms for crisis management manifest themselves most clearly in situations where crisis agents tend to draw on the lack of capacity of international and supranational organizations to cope with impending dangers. It should be added that countries may differ considerably in their political, legal and organizational patterns of crisis management. International coordination will certainly have to take into account the different traditions in this domain, if only because it is ipso facto very sensitive. The American disposition towards emergent norms and self-regulatory response is quite different from the French emphasis on formal authority and immediate, resolute action (Quarantelli 1978; Gilbert 1992). The differences between common law and continental arrangements for emergency and crisis management will definitely influence international coordination during large-scale crises (Parker and Handmer 1992; Van Duin and Rosenthal 1989).

In sum, there is no doubt that international brinkmanship, natural and technological calamities, economic malfortune, and political turmoil and terrorism will remain familiar categories of crises in times to come. At the same time, a mixture of historical and trend analysis, multiple scenario writing and creative thinking leads to some estimated guesses about future crisis patterns:

* *International crises* The change from postwar super-power brinkmanship to asymmetrical international tensions and crises is a rather ordinary observation in the early nineties. Contingent analysis which would take one step ahead, should not foreclose crises to result from super-power realignments. Instead of an obsession with European deadlock and disintegration, crisis analysts would be well advised to assess the implications of the rise of a European political and military union. In many parts of the world, ethnic and racial tensions may put a heavy burden on the authorities as well as on international organizations. Partly in relation to such tensions, mass migration may very well assume dramatic proportions and bring about acute crises.

* *Raw materials crises* Apart from oil, the availability of several raw materials may become subject to increasing pressure. This pressure may result from immanent shortages, production problems, demand shifts, transportation vulnerabilities, price policies and political tension. The dependency of modern technologies on particular raw materials, for instance those needed for information systems hardware, makes them highly vulnerable.

* *Infrastructural crises* The growing and world-wide need for rapidly expanding infrastructures puts heavy pressures on the cost-benefit analysis of risk and safety. The concomitant, prestige-related tendency to engage into infrastructural mega-projects arouses reflections on a new category of crisis-prone public works. Meanwhile, a plausible case scenario could stir critical thoughts on transportation and

communication overload. It is doubtful whether technological progress really compensates for the exponential demand for transportation and communication.

* *Leisure disasters* There are a number of considerations for a special note on tourism and recreation. First and foremost, tourism and mass recreation take place in a highly competitive industry which suffers from strong, occasionally erratic market fluctuations. Second, clients do not want to be confronted with too many precautions and safety arrangements. Consequently, a safety culture is not easy to pursue. Third, the democratization of tourism and recreation makes for mass accommodations and mass events to flourish. This increases the chances for crowd turbulences and, for that reason, mass emergencies.

* *Terrorism* Terrorists may put pressure on mass concern with the ecological problem (eco-terrorism); they may try to disrupt infrastructural facilities (in particular telecommunications and data base systems); they may consider mass tourism and leisure events an easy target.

The future of crisis analysis: a political account

Throughout history, crises have been understood primarily as outer forces imposing themselves on society. The dominant crisis concept leaned heavily on natural disasters as acts of God and wars instigated by the enemy (Kervern and Rubise 1991; Quarantelli 1992). Now it is time to redefine the relation between crises and society. Increasingly, crises take on an endemic quality. They do not come from outside; not only are they with us to stay, they are often best viewed as political and bureaucratic artifacts rather than as situational contingencies. Two factors may help to explain this development. Firstly, many crises appear to follow the lead of Perrow's normal accidents - or, as Cook called it here, accidents waiting to happen (Perrow 1984; Cook 1989). From this perspective crises are the logical counterpart of increasingly complex systems which, for technological, financial or political reasons, cannot keep up with safety and security requirements. Secondly, crises increasingly come out as manifestations of change in social and political settings which are intrinsically dynamic and ambiguous. In such a context, crises are best regarded as an integral part of social and political life.

Crises are the domain of multiple realities and conflicting cognitions. Whether, by whom, how, and why an event will be perceived as a crisis is a key empirical issue for crisis analysts. To answer it, they will need to examine the role of language, symbols and communication in the process of the formation of collective perceptions. Likewise, they have to take into account the inevitable plurality of cultures (Thompson et. al., 1990) and their attendant differences in value systems (Hood, 1991), attitudes towards risk (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982), and perceptual anchors used to contextualize and evaluate events, that exist within any society at any point in time. They will have to examine the politics and psychology of issue-framing, in other words the political struggles for the dominant

definition of the situation. Only if we seriously probe into the very definition of crisis as it is espoused, and the ways in which it changes over time and ultimately dissipates, can we adequately begin to understand the rationales of crisis management strategies followed by various groups of stakeholders.

Moving from crises to crisis management, it is important that symbolic crisis politics is more than an ephemeral and transient phenomenon. At one level, the symbolics of crisis events can be managed so effectively through strategies of perception and affection control, as well as pre-emptive conflict reduction, that the substantive social and political issues involved will be left untouched. On the other hand, however, the contrast between symbolics and substance should not be overdrawn. It might be true, as Jackson (1976: 224) argues, that 'symbolic outputs [to crises, auth] are relatively easy to dispense, but ... rarely sufficient'. Yet many hastily produced symbolic measures, such as emergency laws or "technological fixes" in the governmental apparatus of monitoring and controlling social processes, do have consequences that last way beyond the duration of any particular crises. Compare it to the plateau theory of welfare-state expenditures: each war or social crisis precipitates new and additional provisions, which are subsequently maintained indefinitely. In part this is because the ad-hoc measures become translated into bureaucratic organizations:

> 'Gegenüber dem kurzfristigen Themenbedarf symbolischer Politik gilt wohl die Organisations-Überlegenheit von auf Dauer eingerichteten Bürokratieen gegenüber Protestbewegungen, die sich immer neu formieren müssen: Symbolischer Politik und Protset vergehen, einmal verabschiedete Gesetze aber haben die Tendenz zu besthehen' (Blankenburg, 1980: 15).

To advocate renewed attention for the symbolic politics of crisis management is, therefore, to broaden currently dominant notions of what crisis politics is about. Transcending event-based concerns with short-run party-, pressure-group or bureau-politics, it takes the issue of crisis management back to where it belongs, namely to the fundamental issues of social and political order, stability, and change (Rosenthal, 1978: 57-60; Zimmerman, 1983). One of the crucial functions of the symbolic perspective is to look behind "official" actions and rationales, and to probe deeper into issues of authority, legitimacy, and power that are inextricably connected to the way in which crises are defined and handled, and what their medium- and long-term consequences are for existing structural and cultural arrangements.

Crisis research is bound to focus increasingly on long-term trends and long-term implications of high-politics crisis episodes. The dynamic orientation of political crisis research gradually evolves into a more daring and challenging prospect of analyzing

long-range processes; crises proper becoming catalysts for policy and political change rather than being interpreted as occurrences or events which need self-sufficient explanation. Thus political crisis research would seem to restate questions about stability and change raised by the founding fathers of modern social science (Prince, 1917; Sorokin, 1934; Friedrich, 1960). For example, in the contect of environmental policy, the vocabulary of crisis research has already embraced the concept of creeping crises. Of course, scandals involving illegal transportation and disposal of hazardous waste may arouse perturbation and turmoil and may result into critical confrontations not unlike those concerning civil rights or distributive justice during the 1960s and 1970s. But the main and by now most pressing, ecological issues are indeed of a different kind. The deforestation and desertification; soil salination and fertilizer use; the losses of ozone; global warming and the rise of the sea level are spanning decades, if not centuries, of deficient awareness, negligence and counter-productive human intervention (Meadows et al., 1991). Be this as it may, environmental crises tend to be subject to differing interpretations on the nature and severity of threat, on the trend and speed of deterioration and on the relative effectiveness of several coping mechanisms. These types of crises provide ready-made arenas for political contestation, blaming and counter-blaming, and provide opportunity structures for political entrepreneurship on the part of authorities, activists, and other stakeholders.

5. The future of crisis analysis within public administration

Crisis management research has been slow to earn itself a place within the broader research agenda of public administration, the policy sciences, and political science.[3] Crises are still looked upon by many in those field as ephemeral, bizarre, and unsuitable for systematic empirical study. The rather narrow range of crises studied so far has not been helpful in overcoming these kinds of reservations, nor has the sometimes very technical and operational approach that many crisis studies have taken. A major challenge for the field of crisis analysis would be to seek a better dialogue with the mainstream of theory and research on public policymaking, public management, and political order. We conclude this paper by outlining briefly three strategies that may be useful here:

1. *Broadening the range of phenomena studied.* Crisis analysis should move beyond the public-order orientation that comes with an interest in disasters, disturbances, terrorism, and the like. It should devote itself to recrafting and applying its concepts, propositions,

and middle-range theories for understanding the development and management of intensive and protracted policy conflicts, turbulences in and around major public projects, decline and change in policy sectors and public agencies, major policy fiascoes and scandals, accelerated economic fluctuations, and political-administrative transformations.

2. *Developing an integrated approach to crisis management analysis.* In the above, two contrasting perspectives on crisis management have been outlined. Sharpening the contrasts between a status-quo oriented, instrumental-managerial perspective and a change-oriented, expressive-political perspective may be very useful for purposes of theory development. Yet in approaching a particular episode, the crisis analyst will get a much deeper understanding of the situation if he would apply both conceptions simulteneously, as alternative or complementary interpretive frameworks. Figure 1 elaborates on this logic. It details not two but three philosophies of crisis management, each of which is contingent upon perceptions and interpretations by the actor studied. The third perspective, "crisis management as denial" suggests that events regarded as un-wanted and un-desirable by some actors may not even be noticed as un-usual - and that this non-acknowledgement may itself be part of a managerial strategy. The model is most usefully applied in repeated iterations for key stakeholders at different stages of development. Applying it in this way, it requires analysts to allow for the possibility that a particular series of events may give rise to both "managerial" as well as "political" approaches to crisis management, and to study how these co-exist and influence one another as different stakeholders interact.

figure 1 here

3. *Reconceptualizing crisis as episodes of institutional turbulence.* In a sense both major perspectives on crisis analysis provide a caricature of what crises are about. The containment perspective implies a strongly situational view of crises as a sharp rupture between "routine" and "crisis" conditions that is often hard to discern in practice. The political perspective heavily emphasizes the dynamics of political opportunity and survival in crisis creation and crisis management. These two views may be fruitfully thought of as two poles in a more comprehensive notion of crises as episodes of turbulences in institutions. In this view, a state of crisis refers to periods when dominant norms, values, rules, and structures of a particular society or organization are

manifestedly compromised, challenged, or effectively transformed. The nature of the institution put under pressure differs, as do the genesis, extent, and impact of that pressure. Viewing crises as institutional turbulence rather than as "occasions for decision" or "political constructs" may help crisis analysis in a number of ways:

* To rid it from its initial emphasis on discrete events, triggers and flashpoints. With its emphasis on evolutionary analysis and path-dependent choices that structure and selct contingent developments, institutional analysis may provide for a conceptual language to come to terms with the emergent diachronic notion of crises as processes (Hemerijck, 1994);

* To bring back to the fore the highly normative nature of theorizing about crises and crisis management: although crises have long been viewed in terms of threats to basic structures and values, normative issues involved in identifying, framing and dealing with crises have long been ignored. Different branches of institutional analysis accord a central place to the importance of norms and values in understanding organizational and political action (March and Olsen, 1989; Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky, 1990).

* To move crisis analysis beyond a pre-occupation with highly operational issues versus tactics of political manipulation. Institutional analysis may provide for a more even-handed, multi-level orientation that studies the interactions between the operational, strategic, and constitutional dimensions of crises and crisis management (Hood and Jackson, 1991; Toonen, 1993).

Notes

1. The terms "real" and pseudo" are put in inverted commas because to establish the "realness" of a crisis presupposes that we have some objective or intersubjectively validated standard of making this judgment. According to deconstructionist accounts of social epistemology, such a presumption is problematic to say the least. As Edelman (1988), p.10 puts it: 'Accounts of political issues, problems, crises, threats, and leaders now become devices for creating disparate assumptions and beliefs about the social and political world rather than factual statements. The very concept of "fact" becomes irrelevant because every menaningful political object and person is an interpretation that reflects and perpetuates an ideology.'
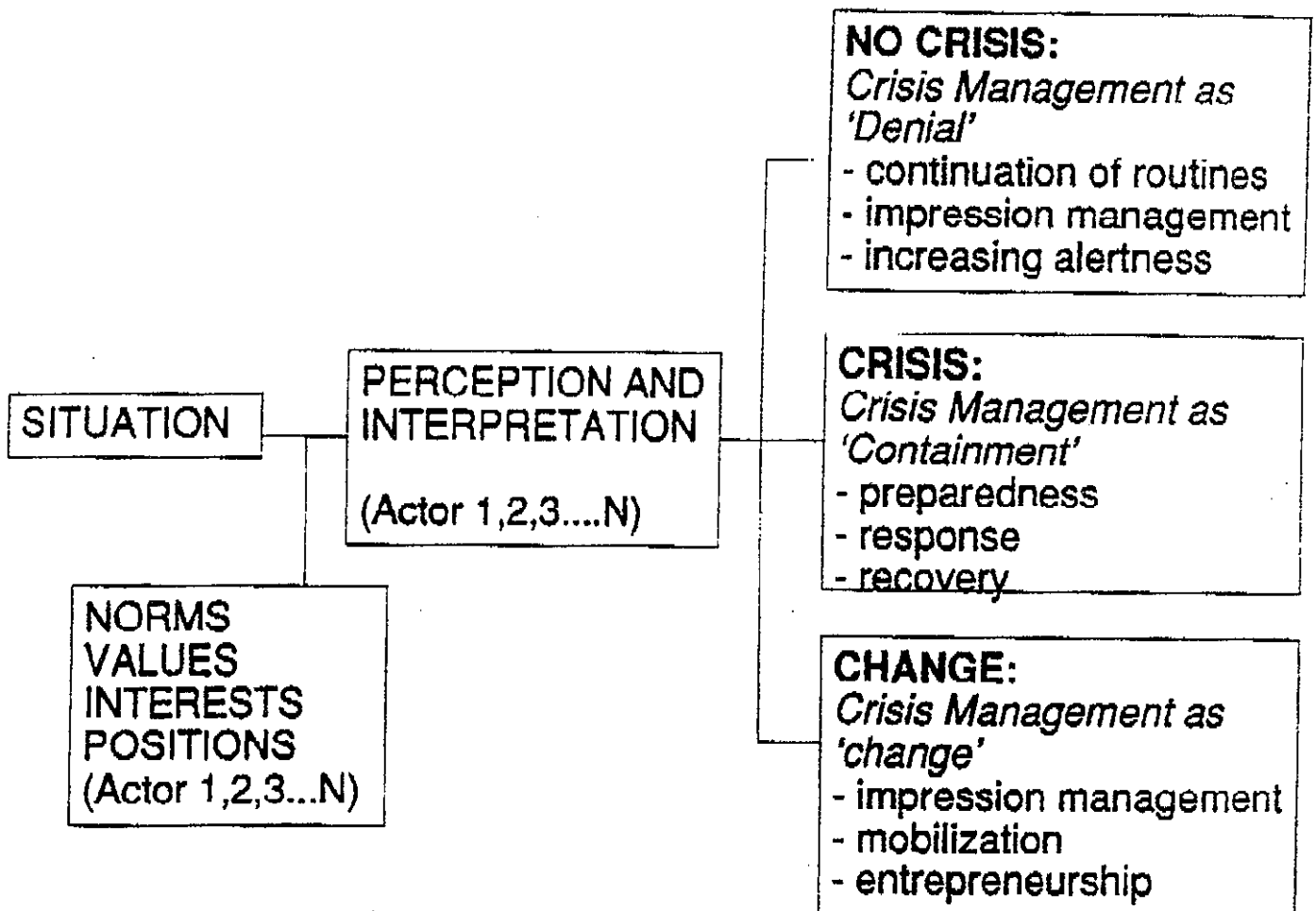
2. A prototype of this kind of masking failure occurred in the immediate aftermath of the Three Mile Island nuclear incident. The initial persistence of denial and innuendo and subsequent uncoordinated admittance of serious problems on the part of most notably the Metropolitan Edison Company that operated the plant, outraged both state and national politicians, contributed to serious collective stress among local inhabitants, infuriated the media, and precipitated a confusing parade of radiation experts claiming different things (Stephens, 1980). As a sideline, the coincidental fact that at the time of the accident, a major movie was screened around the nation called the China Syndrome which powerfully depicted a highly plausible worst-case type of nuclear incident, certainly did not help any kind of masking effort undertaken.

3. In contrast, it has boomed in organization and management studies, where an increasing number of take-overs, product failures, sabotage and blackmail attempts, decline and turnaround episodes and other corporate crises generate a high demand for applied knowledge about crisis management. Again in contrast, the end of the Cold War has discouraged students of International Relations from continuing to devote major efforts to analyzing crisis management during the classic and not so classic superpower and major power confrontations (yet see Brecher, 1993; Lebow and Stein, 1994; Richardson, 1994), and has generated both calls for a more generic approach to studying turbulence in international affairs (Rosenau, 1989) as well as a shift of focus towards studies of third-party conflict management practices (Bercovitch, ed. 1992).

figure 1

Crisis recognition and Crisis management:

3 scenarios

SITUATION

PERCEPTION AND INTERPRETATION

(Actor 1,2,3....N)

NORMS
VALUES
INTERESTS
POSITIONS
(Actor 1,2,3...N)

NO CRISIS:
Crisis Management as 'Denial'
- continuation of routines
- impression management
- increasing alertness

CRISIS:
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- preparedness
- response
- recovery

CHANGE:
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- impression management
- mobilization
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