

## Chapter 2

### **OPERATIONAL RESPONSES: BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE AND INVENTION**

*In the face of a threatening crisis, our intellectual and managerial tradition calls for us to prepare plans. Those plans set out actions and approaches that will be applied at each stage of the crisis. They are fine structures that involve a whole array of responses, in the style of a victory parade where everyone marches in step to an impeccable choreography. Unfortunately, reality rarely fits the plan's assumptions: warning signals are not recognized, managers disappear from the scene, tools do not work. The crisis unfolds on a battlefield fraught with difficulties, and not on a tidy avenue or square prepared for an orderly parade. As the experts continually point out, what matters is not so much the plan as the planning. If we do not heed this, we are bound for failure.*

*This chapter reviews what our grand systems are most sorely lacking in:*

- *An “emergency culture”, an elementary crisis culture: these are known responses, and we must be aware of them.*
- *And henceforth: the capacity to deal with unconventional crises that demand reinvented responses.*

The debriefings and investigation reports of recent decades point up two kinds of basic inadequacies in our large organizations. Firstly, in many organizations, (apart from those specifically emergency oriented, such as police, fire brigade, etc.) there is an astonishing lack of capacity for emergency response. Secondly, we have failed to take on board the widely documented knowledge and know-how for conventional crisis management. It will be impossible to navigate the world of major crises now emerging without sound mastery of these domains.

Yet we must go even further, to the point where the most recent post-crisis analyses and preparedness efforts usually fall flat: we do not yet have the operational guideposts for dealing with the unconventional crises that are in fact our real source of vulnerability today.

This chapter has a dual purpose: to recall the knowledge we think we have acquired (but in fact have not, in whole or in part), and to begin to explore these new guideposts, which for the most part remain to be built.

## 1. Responses to be understood and mastered

### 1.1. *Emergency response capacities*

Major crises reveal, most often, that our systems, private and public, have not acquired the reflexes essential for dealing with emergency situations. It is true that the unconventional crises at issue here are far more complex than the accidents that our rescue squads are used to dealing with. Yet even for situations where the stakes are high, we need such a culture of rapid response to unforeseen situations, which is usually lacking among those more accustomed to case management than to rapid response to an immediate problem.

Experience shows the need for a number of key capabilities:

- ***Detect*** an emerging incident promptly. To be avoided from the outset: an irrepressible urge to dodge the issue; and visceral refusal to recognize any signal; a stress level so high as to be rendered incompetent; the illusion that a specialized unit has been alerted and will take care of the situation without the need for action on one's own part, etc.
- ***Give warning*** internally, to mobilize resources commensurate with the task at hand, without thinking that one can handle it alone.
- ***Intervene***, by rallying capabilities, information and tools immediately. Even in an emergency, meticulousness is essential. Just because

events are abnormal is no excuse for doing silly things and transforming an acute problem into overall confusion. And then there is time management: an emergency demands intervention now, not postponement to the beginning of next week.

- **Report**, to optimize the internal flow of information so that the response can be constantly adjusted.

These props are not enough for dealing with complex crises, and still less so with the great crises coming at us now, but they are necessary all the same. We must understand them, master them, and control them, and not become hostage to them.

In fact, these rules of emergency response were developed essentially for situations with clearly defined characteristics:

- A stable, charted, known world free of surprises that could upset all our management benchmarks, *ceteris paribus*.
- Strong, clear and unambiguous warning signals.
- A problem that can be resolved by technical specialists, working within customary operating frameworks.
- A need for information that does not go beyond a small number of persons and that can be communicated after the affair is settled.
- A simple command approach to management: a fireman or an emergency medic does not ask the victim's opinion before applying the usual treatment.
- Costs which can be readily handled by the insurance system, and which has no major problem in returning to normal.

As soon as we move up the scale of severity, some important discrepancies appear vis-à-vis the natural field of application of emergency tools:

- In terms of technical complexity, there is a discrepancy of scale.
- In organizational terms, there is a discrepancy of complexity.
- In terms of governance, we move from a clearly defined field of operations to fields that are much more fluid and call for operations that are much less automatic and much more deliberate, with leadership structures that are more complex than for routine accidents.

We need new skills, then, on two fronts:

- The ability to deploy this emergency mindset: otherwise, bureaucrats will wait too long before intervening - and in all fields, especially in highly unstable situations, the fireman's rule applies: "one minute, a glass of water; 10 minutes, a truck; one hour, a whole fire station".
- The ability to control all these rapid response levers, without getting tied up in conceptual straitjackets that reflect the frequently heard complaints of people ill-prepared for events of strategic dimensions: "We're here to solve problems, not to ask questions", or "In a crisis there's no time to think".

However sophisticated the methods and tools recommended for handling the most complex crises, however difficult the situations for which we must prepare ourselves, the basic capacities cited above need to be (i) thoroughly acquired and (ii) sufficiently internalized so that even a mega-scale event will not overwhelm them.

This last point is very important: often, the surprise element and the sheer enormity of the situation will make people forget the mechanisms they had learned to wield in less intense events.

### *1.2. Crisis management capacities<sup>1</sup>*

A crisis is qualitatively different from an emergency. The problems coming at us from all sides do not fit within the normal bounds of conventional emergencies. In order to anticipate, react, handle and resolve critical problems, organizations must be able to understand this world of crisis, and its pitfalls, with which they are most often totally unfamiliar and they must have a response mentality that is suited to this unstable world. Non-conventional crises will of course demand a good deal more, but the elements presented below have increasingly come to be seen, since the 1980s and 1990s, as an essential basis to be understood and applied.

The first requirement for large organizations and for managers is to know their way around this world of crisis, which contrasts sharply with that of emergencies. They must be able to operate in this terrain, marked by ambiguity, uncertainty, instability, and accelerating rhythms - and above all, the threat of destabilization. The architecture of crisis management has four phases, each with its own demands.

### *1.2.1. The reflex phase: avoid being immediately discredited*

***Decoding, alerting, mobilizing.*** The longer we wait in a crisis, the stronger the dynamics in play will have become. We must know how and be able, then, to give advance warning and get mobilization started. This presupposes mechanisms of surveillance and mobilization, which need to be effective in two situations.

***Obviously accidental phenomena.*** In recent decades, large organizations have adopted tools for prompt transmission of urgent information from the field in the wake of an accident: message formatting (the types of data to be transmitted are already formatted and all that is needed is to fill out pre-established forms), urgent information channels (to prevent data from being lost in the system), rules for triggering the crisis response. Of course, the existence of a plan on paper is not a sufficient guarantee: there must also be mechanisms in place, they must be operational, and everyone must know what to do with them. This presupposes an in-depth learning effort to understand the tools, the procedures, and the approach.

***Creeping crises.*** These crises are by definition difficult to discern, due to their inherent stealth. Experience shows, however, that they can be identified by their symptoms: a strange sense of drift, an unusual degree of ambiguity within the organization; arguments advanced that are purely technical (calendars already full, authorizations already obtained, the point of no return is past) to block early moves; the prolonged and inexplicable absence of key personnel, in particular a manager who is both clearly identified and plays a clear role; widening gulfs between participants, between the situation developing and the values proclaimed; the impossibility of putting together a meeting on the latent problem, etc. None of these factors, taken separately, is enough to say that we are in a pre-crisis situation. But when several of these factors are at play, we should pay very careful attention. And if, along with some of the others, the last factor mentioned should appear - the refusal to recognize that there is a problematic situation - then there is a strong chance that we are in a risky situation and one that may already be far advanced. It is urgent then to reconsider the overall situation, the assumptions made, and the positions previously adopted.

***Taking charge.*** We must ensure immediately that certain steps have been taken. It is through practice that we can learn to strike a proper balance between the inability to mobilize and the constant upheaval caused by untimely mobilization whenever an unusual signal is received.

***Commit the emergency resources necessary.*** We must of course look hard at the most complex aspects of a crisis, but we can never neglect our essential duty to rescue people or to make the technical interventions needed to prevent the situation from getting out of hand.

***Actively seek out information.*** We need to assemble factual information, to discern the uncertainties, to understand what we can know promptly and what we will know only later, to know what has not been affected, to begin to make out the nature of the problem (is it an isolated incident, or a generic phenomenon?). There is a basic rule here: the first information received is very often false, particularly if it is reassuring. And if by chance we receive disturbing information presented in a "reassuring" manner, this will likely mean the organization has already been compromised by the crisis.

***Open a logbook.*** It is important to construct a memory of the event immediately. The written record will constitute a database useful to everyone, retaining information that might be lost when there is a handover of responsibility (since crises can last a long time, and the same person will not necessarily be in charge from beginning to end).

***Put together a team, and isolate treatment of the crisis.*** There must be no void at the helm (with no one really in charge), but at the same time the "bridge" must not become too crowded with people (often starting with senior managers) who come to see what's happening (without really getting involved), who make statements about the situation without understanding it, who offer "reassuring" remarks, and who loudly comment on decisions without really taking any responsibility. We cannot have the entire organization dealing with the crisis - except for an event that affects the organization as a whole. Units that are not involved must be able to keep on with their normal work, and those that have to deal with the crisis should do so effectively.

***Communicate.*** A crisis or pre-crisis situation demands both a strong presence and great transparency. The model to follow, at least in most cases, is the reverse of that described previously, which starts from the undoubted need to know with certainty and to be able to reassure before informing. Above all, when issuing a communication in which the informative element will at first be inevitably weak, three major "political" steps must be taken:

- Demonstrate that the situation is being taken seriously: the managers are indeed at the helm and have not jumped ship; they have launched actions; they are following procedures that do not depend on improvisation.

- Recognize the problem (or at least the fact that some believe there could be a problem): this will never be extracted from decision-makers.
- Recognize the stakeholders: this is the essential point. Decision makers are not required to perform miracles, but we expect them not to ignore the individuals and groups concerned.

This three-way demonstration of competence and openness in information and in the public procedures followed is the only effective way to prevent mounting anxiety. There is nothing that sows panic more readily than the suspicion that leaders are incapable of handling the situation and that they are bogged down in the governance models of another age.

Communication cannot of course be confined to the media. Some target audiences must receive special attention: in the first place there are the victims, who are entitled both to tactfulness and to competence; then there are the professions most directly concerned by the problem, for example physicians and pharmacists in the case of a public health problem, or the specific experts in the case of a technical difficulty.

The most important thing to bear in mind is that people are reassured not by insisting that "everything is under control" but by demonstrating that the situation is being taken seriously.

Of course, in some fields and in some circumstances, communication cannot be so frank. But this must be a strategically motivated choice, and not simply the result of incompetence or inertia.

### *1.2.2. The reflection phase: avoid being immediately discredited*

In a crisis, it is not enough to commit resources. The problem at hand must be thoroughly examined, the people to work with must be identified, positions must be thought out on the thorniest questions, and the broad lines of response must be established. This reflection function, performed with the necessary intellectual detachment, must be launched as quickly as possible and must continue throughout the crisis. A crisis cannot be handled by mere instinct, nor by quasi-automatic procedures.

***Start the questioning.*** The first requirement, once initial emergency steps have been taken, is to ask in-depth questions about the situation - at the very time when urgency and stress are likely to block any serious examination. It is especially important to avoid overly optimistic conclusions that would support

the most favourable hypotheses, the most comforting interpretations, and the most obvious interests. The key questions are these: What is really happening? What does this crisis mean, what does it reveal? What could emerge from it? What are the latent fault lines that could be reopened? What could feed the crisis, in the current context? How will the various stakeholders perceive the situation? What are the alternative developments that we can anticipate, what will happen tomorrow, in a week, in a month?

This kind of diagnosis is gruelling work, for too many elements will elude us, and too many of the suggested hypotheses will seem off-the-wall. It takes constant shuttling between indicators, models, hypotheses and observation, but it can gradually define a field of work (just as a surgeon prepares his operating field) and thereby avoid generalized to-and-fro and fragmented responses, or the exhausting attempt (with the attendant one step too late) to pursue all the variant versions of the crisis.

***Map the players.*** A specific effort is needed to identify all the stakeholders who will be involved in the crisis: obvious players, peripheral players, surprise players; players who will quickly collapse, players who will charge from the edges right to the center; relations between players that will change, sometimes radically (yesterday's adversary can become the key to the solution today). If we stick with our pre-crisis prejudices, we will never catch up with the dynamic reality of the crisis: here as in all other areas, we must be bold in our questioning and resolute in looking for new approaches.

***Start networking, get out of the bunker.*** To pursue such questioning successfully, to prepare a pertinent response, we must go beyond the normal circle of players. We must establish links with many outside entities. Even if some of them are in conflict, it is better if they can recognize and talk to each other, as promptly as possible. Experience shows the wisdom of forging or re-establishing these links before a crisis forces us to do so, for otherwise it will be done under the pressure of an extreme emergency, with absolute constraints, and people, organizations and cultures will no longer have the flexibility needed to adjust. But we must also recognize that such openness is not at all natural: on the contrary, in a crisis everything conspires to cut off an organization from most of its environment, and this can very quickly render any exit impossible.

***Put together a management system.*** There are many players in positions of influence and responsibility. The rule of thumb for emergencies, so clear and comforting on paper - "a leader, a mission, and resources" - is not of much use. The principle to follow is, rather, to construct an ad hoc decision-making system, relying naturally on existing managers, but also enlisting in the most appropriate manner the major players who will have a key role in the situation,



as it is and as it threatens to become. Some groups may indeed prove themselves decisive in the situation, even if they were previously deemed a negligible quantity. This structure will have to be made explicit. To ensure that the appropriate players really take charge, to guarantee the functioning of the interfaces, the response system has to be clear and thoroughly understood.

An essential point: in a severe crisis, the authority of the decision-maker flows not from his ability to issue peremptory orders, but rather from his capacity to collect information, intelligence, powers and resources and redistribute them widely. This intelligence, both conceptual and operational, will give managers the indispensable adhesive force to mobilize large systems for useful ends, and to achieve the necessary coherence. This is not to say that we have stripped the managers of their prerogatives, far from it. One of their essential tasks is indeed to explain the rules of the game, which are indispensable for reducing the risk of break-up and splintering inherent in any crisis response. Those rules can be amended as the crisis proceeds, but they must always be as precise as possible, and clearly linked to fundamental goals: flexibility must not be confused with wavering.

***In support: a strategic thinking unit.*** If a crisis of any complexity is to be managed successfully, the leaders must have the support of a group of analysts who can stand back and look at things dispassionately. The task of that group will be to anticipate possible developments in the situation, to keep all aspects of the crisis under active surveillance, watching in particular for mistakes "waiting to happen", and to think about new options for consideration.

This unit should be staffed with people who are used to "thinking outside the box", but who have a sound dose of good sense. It should be devoted exclusively to the strategic thinking exercise, which is a demanding one because it requires sifting the entire field of possibilities and venturing frequently into the supposedly "impossible", in order to be certain that one is not prisoner of an outmoded *weltanschauung*.

Finally, this unit must be in position at any moment to produce a situation summary or briefing sheet for management. Too often, a manager will be submerged in a mass of details and surrounded by evidence that no longer pertains. It is essential to deliver to him, when he calls for it, a strategic note based on the model provided below, and strategically more useful than the traditional "logbook", which can serve as a general reference source but is of no help for rapid managerial response.

## Strategic briefing note

### Date and time

- Essential facts.
- Technical scenarios: developments, possible domino effects, surprises.
- Stakeholders: participant map, surprises, recomposition of forces and relationships.
- Gaps, deviations and blunders: on the spot pinpointing and anticipating of all the major mistakes committed or about to be committed.
- Discontinuities: what has changed fundamentally in the context and what renders assumptions, rules, working and communication approaches obsolete.
- Progress made: it is very important to identify success stories that can breathe new strength and optimism into the system.
- Proposals for decisive action that can be used as levers to transform the situation, break through bottlenecks, and open hitherto unthinkable possibilities.

***Identify fundamental positions.*** The essential values in crisis management are the acceptance of responsibility (for the safety of the community concerned), openness with information, solidarity in shouldering the economic and human consequences, and creativity in response to the problems encountered. These principles are increasingly being applied, and they stand in contrast to the reticence and secrecy that prevailed in the past. Yet these fundamental principles are not yet ingrained, and they can be quickly relegated to the background by the sense of urgency, the fear of debate, and the attractiveness of a purely technical solution. Yet adopt them we must: no serious crisis can be managed without defining and declaring the values and criteria that will serve as reference.

Those same requirements apply to the quality of the decision-making process. Decision-makers are not expected to come up with magic solutions, but they will be expected (immediately or subsequently) to take an approach that is not only technically sound but also explicit, transparent, and open to debate and validation both by experts and by society. Thus the principles followed will have to be clearly stated so that they can be understood and discussed, and perhaps refuted. The broad lines of the rationale to be followed should be clarified, and so should the “no-no's” that are to be observed.

The deeper the crisis is, the more open one must be to the prospect of reappraisal and questioning. If a crisis is “the moment of truth” (as in Greek theatre), then the way it is handled really calls for a “truth test”, for a meticulous review. There may be Rubicons to cross (lines that were hitherto deemed

uncrossable) that will demand both boldness and discretion, the acceptance of responsibility, and the search for legitimacy. This is surely the most delicate point in a crisis.

### *1.2.3. Throughout the crisis: maintain overall coherence*

This third phase involves efforts to maintain consistency in action, when everything is tending to fragmentation. This must be done in the light of constant and fundamental reflection, to the very end of the crisis.

***Managing a weakened system.*** The key point is not managing a set of operational tools but rather building a permanent strategic framework in which each player can act most effectively. This requires constant attention to the main flow of problems, without being distracted by the twists and turns the crisis may take. The following principles of action can help: ensure that the organization has effectively taken charge of the crisis (that it is effectively mobilized); define priorities and responsibilities; ensure high-quality internal and external communication; watch for weak points and fix them; anticipate developments in the crisis; take determined initiatives (instead of just "following the crisis hour by hour" as we often hear); keep in mind the post-crisis phase.

An ad hoc organization must be put in place to handle certain key functions: decision making (overall guidance), management (monitoring the situation and technical actions), communication (listening to information, issuing messages). To this we must add two support functions: detached observation (staged input of strategic intelligence at the highest level of responsibility); and logistical support for the crisis teams (the crisis usually presents a series of cascading difficulties), ranging from food issues to problems of local mobility, liaison).

Clearly defined task lists can be prepared for each person in these units. An essential point: arrange a site where this crisis organization can operate; assemble all the personnel required; know how to make the organization operate so that it does not shut itself off from events; provide guidance for these different groups with a constant view not only to immediate technical effectiveness and overall coherence, but also to anticipating and asking questions about potential surprises and mistakes.

***Secure the required expertise.*** The issue of the potential input of expertise and its limits needs to be addressed up front. We must ask: what kind of diagnostics and answers are required, how fast, reliable and credible must they be, and which team of experts can provide them? In a crisis, the decision-maker

often has to act without expert input, or with only partial support from specialists.

While the experts are working, they should be allowed to do their job in peace, without pressure from the decision-makers to come up with immediate answers. While awaiting those answers, the decision-makers can ponder the likely outcomes, and the options that will be open, depending on the answers received.

Do not confuse roles. The expert is there to offer specific clarification: the decision will always entail multiple dimensions, and it is the leader who will have to put everything together.

### **Responding to the demands of communication**

**Media communication.** This is the most visible aspect. The requirement is clear: to demonstrate the ability to provide high-quality information throughout the crisis, from beginning to end. The main guideposts for action are the following:

- Respect the fundamental requirements: external information is both a duty in a democratic society and an operational requirement in any crisis. To shirk this duty is to expose oneself, immediately or eventually, to repeat crises. And if the demands of decency are obviously being flouted, the crisis is likely to become definitively unmanageable.
- Know how to manage communication throughout the crisis: suitable presence and statements, from the onset of the crisis; competence, when the media come up with more pointed questions about prevention, responsibilities, and who is in charge; perseverance, to the very end of the crisis.
- Demonstrate the ability to meet the basic demands of crisis communication: not to "reassure", but "to inform"; provide frequent, accurate information that is as complete as possible; maintain consistency in consecutive messages (recognizing that some of the information may be wrong).
- Have available an organization and ad hoc tools to perform this mission: spokespersons prepared to deal with the media; well-marked press centres; respect for timetables (taking account of the imperatives of media deadlines); appropriate handling of different media (each with specific needs); communication tools: lists of correspondents, having data at hand for various possible scenarios; references and

background data (on the activity, organization, previous crises or problems, etc.).

- Even if "crisis fatigue" sets in, remember the main no-no's: don't lie, don't fall into stress-induced arrogance, keep a sense of responsibility and balanced judgment, and avoid conjecturing and drawing hasty conclusions; don't be "in tow" to the media, and don't abandon the decision-making role to them.
- Move from a defensive stance (falling back on set arguments) to a more positive one of explaining the difficulties in play, the responsibilities accepted, the trade-offs made, and the core values being guiding the operation.

***Non-media communication.*** Victims and their families, government departments, elected officials, employees, clients, suppliers etc. require ongoing attention. To ensure good communication, identify the multiple audiences, priority target groups, and their specific needs.

Networks and specific procedures should be in place for reaching the domestic public swiftly and regularly: this is one of the most important points, which "media shock" may cause us to overlook. Resource personnel should be on hand for briefings on the situation just before or just after the press conference; make sure that dialogue structures are functioning.

With respect to victims and their families, the golden rules are these: provide prompt information (but watch out for the pitfalls of modern communication tools: one doesn't announce deaths by telephone); be tactful and don't let the victim or the family feel abandoned; offer help in overcoming the many difficulties that victims face. Here again, there are technical procedures of intervention to learn and apply, such as designating senior contact persons to whom victims can turn to iron out the inevitable bureaucratic problems, or setting up information and reception centres representing all the potential sources of help for victims, including psychological assistance and victims' associations.

***A word of caution.*** "Crisis communication", a term invented in the late 1980s, will never be the master key to all problems. The success of communication in times of crisis depends in large measure on previous communication: it is no use to wheel out the "media war" guns at the last moment. While communication is an important aspect of crisis management, it is not the only need. We must not fall into the trap of regarding communication as the be-all and end-all of crisis management. Similarly, we must remember, once again, that crisis management is only feasible as part of a general effort at

risk prevention and exposure control. Otherwise, communication will be virtually impossible when a crisis strikes.

***Manage the crisis right to its end.*** A crisis has its own dynamics. It begins most often with a peak or shock, then plateaus for a time (with a number of resurgences) and ends abruptly or, more frequently, drags on to a conclusion. In the shock phase, the means of response are weak; during the plateau phase, too many teams can impede efficient work; the terminal phase may be marked by weariness and, again, insufficient means. Here are some "Commandments" for dealing with this last phase of the crisis: stay mobilized until the problem is finally resolved (resisting the temptation to stand down at the first favourable signs), but don't keep the machinery in place longer than necessary (one must also know how to end the crisis); don't confuse the end of the media crisis with the end of the real problem. These difficulties underline again the fact that crisis management is a strategic business right through. If senior managers refuse to commit themselves, or do so at the wrong time, major difficulties are bound to arise.

#### *1.2.4. The post-crisis: remain vigilant, and know how to make the necessary changes*

Despite the weariness that sets in at the end of a crisis, one must cope with the post-crisis, its unexpected twists and turns (any weakened system can have multiple complications), and its longer-term fallout. One must know how to handle the healing process. One must measure the need to forget and the need to re-live the experience, in order to avoid dangerous internalization, to deal with guilt, to correct the failings revealed, and to prepare for the future. Post-crisis work should not be approached merely as assistance to a sorely tested organism: during the episode, individuals and teams will have shown their mettle, and we should build on that. Major initiatives can be taken, provided they have been clearly identified and studied in detail to avoid simple gadgetry.

Beyond the necessary work of healing, there are changes that must be made: a crisis brings out all the deep-down inadequacies that must not be left as they are. In operational terms, it can be useful to set up a special group in charge of these various post-crisis dimensions. During this final phase, "opportunities" will reveal themselves, and a management group should be able to seize them and thereby make further progress towards the best kind of healing there is - to make sense of events and to open doors despite the ordeals of the crisis.

## 2. Responses to be invented

### 2.1. A “grammar” for chaotic crises

Emerging crises, generated by an ever more turbulent and chaotic world, call for much more than the reflex capacity essential for dealing with emergencies, and more than the capacities for networking, for transparent and shared leadership, and for communication that are so essential to managing "conventional" crises. The great mutant crises of today are propelling managers into a de-structured and shifting terrain, where the watchwords are speed, counter-intuitiveness, ignorance, discontinuity, loss of bearings. We do not have a very solid base of knowledge and know-how in this terrain. But there are some guideposts to help us prepare, move forward and be inventive.

#### 2.1.1. *Surveillance: a new culture of signal detection*

A simple emergency requires that the sectoral agency responsible have the capacity to react automatically to a clear and specific warning and to feed it promptly into the normal channels and frameworks for interpretation and processing. A “conventional” crisis calls for the capacity to process signals that may be disguised, subtle, or scattered. The agencies in charge then have the obligation to set up more elaborate receptors for detecting more complex phenomena, and systems and arrangements for assembling information, in order to ensure prompt reactivity. An extreme, off-the-scale crisis will demand something else: the ability to spot the signs of phenomena that cannot be represented by any known model. In that case, the alert cannot be given automatically (as in an emergency) or partially pre-formatted (as in a crisis), using pre-established principles.

At this third level, the "unconventional crisis", we need a very different kind of intelligence, understood no longer simply in its Latin meaning (the ability to learn and understand) but also in its modern English sense: "the capacity for information discrimination with a view to a decision-making". The first obstacle is obvious: we have to capture a phenomenon not previously identified. In surveillance we do not have a set of boxes to be filled in, nor any accurate indications of what we might detect. More than "weak signals", we need to look for signals that by their nature are virtually silent and especially elusive for the receptor systems we have available.

But surveillance also encounters a second obstacle, usually overlooked, and yet decisive in the dynamics of fiascos: this is the “delete key” that, when pressed, unleashes the phenomena we are still trying to identify. Explanation: as soon as they are detected, or even suspected, the signals we are looking for will

trigger the vague sensation of a major threat to the system, which in turn triggers an irrepressible and instantaneous need to delete and avoid. The signal carries within itself the ability to neutralize the receptors, and more: it will also block activation of the alert mechanism and the transmission chains, and indeed any idea or inclination for mobilization and reaction. That is why, in their post-crisis reports, investigators have consistently declared their "consternation" upon realizing, after the fact, how many players had been deaf and blind to the event in question. The report writers have not only the benefit of hindsight, as is commonly stressed: they are exempt from the effect of this mental and decisional block triggered by an unknown "shape".

If non-conventional surveillance is to be possible, it must be entrusted basically to persons and systems with the appropriate form of intelligence. We may distinguish three forms of intelligence, adapted to three different situations: emergencies, conventional crises, and extreme crises. Only the third is pertinent in the case of non-conventional signals:

- **"Procedural" intelligence<sup>2</sup>**. This form of intelligence is most useful for identifying, relaying, and classifying and filing well-identified and repetitive phenomena. Operators here are most comfortable with the surprise-free deductive approach. A signal will be perceived and transmitted if it corresponds to what the programme predicts. With this kind of intelligence, the operator can pick up the signal and take action if he has 80 per cent of the necessary information, and if the remaining 20 per cent raises no more than marginal questions. Otherwise he will wait or ask for additional information, and perhaps irrefutable proof as well, if the risk is high (the operator is paid to capture, process and classify data, not to take risks). The relationship to the real world is rather defensive: the system will accept from outside only homogeneous data series, which will be placed in the prearranged boxes. Obviously, the non-conventional is rather awkward for this type of intelligence. If it crops up, if it becomes pressing, it will trigger the classic traits of deafness, to the point where mechanisms will be put in place to keep things in the order they are supposed to be. Dino Buzzati described this point eloquently:

"I want the guards on watch duty to use normal means, and in particular not to use non-regulation optical instruments, which are often employed carelessly and can readily lead to error and false interpretations. Any soldier who possesses such instruments must report them to his company commander, who will confiscate and keep them." (Buzzati 1980, p. 195).



- **"Intuitive" intelligence.** This operator is working with 20 per cent of the necessary information, and has to rely on his intuition to fill in the possible scenarios. He is able to capture unconventional, non-homogeneous and unstructured information that does not fit into the normal formats and procedures. He accepts the principle that he must take stances and provide answers for which he has no proof. He works mainly in offensive and interactive operating modes and motion is his trigger for action.
- **"Creative" intelligence.** This is imperative for detecting signals that are not yet known and categorized. The modes employed are imaginative and innovative, free of codes and rules of the game. The operator works with a field of information outside the "real" as perceived by a "pragmatic" person. There is very little information available, and the operator must move about mentally in "no man's lands" where certainty is nonexistent, elements are constantly mutating, there are voids on all sides, and reality first appears as patchy. The operator who possesses this type of intelligence is quite at ease and even stimulated by what cannot be captured, and is highly handicapped when he has to work in a world of stable and repetitive data crunching, i.e. the world of procedural intelligence. But that is not what we expect of him for operating in an abnormal situation. A person who has developed this creative intelligence will actually be able to take himself "out of the box" and go beyond taboos; he will be able to see strange intersections among highly disparate and at first sight meaningless data; he feels comfortable and creative in a destabilized world, where the dice have not yet been rolled.

Detecting an off-the-charts phenomenon can be made much easier by an approach that is seldom used spontaneously, but which a creative person can readily adopt. This method starts with the following findings: while it is often difficult to detect the phenomenon itself, it is infinitely easier to recognize its "signature", which may often be perfectly clear and even exaggerated. As in biology, the best way is to look for the defence mechanisms that are triggered by an allergen. The non-conventional phenomenon we are looking for will act in the same way on the individuals and organizations concerned. For instance, the demands for "proof", assertions of "optimism", the compulsive need to "reassure", the need to "bunker down", reliance on technology, the pitfall of our beliefs and our *a priori*, double locking of all the doors, veto on questioning the agenda, etc. There are, then, ways of detection that can help greatly. But this assumes that we have accepted a shift of vision: what we must seek is, by definition, something that the system is by no means ready to perceive and to process. The objects of our search are not "in the spotlight", they are in our

"blind spots" and, more precisely, in places that are taboo (the best taboo being the one that is so well accepted and understood that it does not have to be stated).

This kind of non-standard surveillance involves quite a sharp break with practice. First of all, we will have to engage in some very bold questioning that will stray well off the charted path. Today, our organizations are caught up in increasingly procedural operating modes. Risk aversion, a surfeit of plans, constant certifications, guarantees of all kinds, only accentuate and confirm their addiction to established responses. What we must do now is to venture beyond these charted waters, into places for which there is as yet no information, and where the rules of assessment are not formatted in advance. Detecting unconventional risks means running risks, which will be all the bigger when the signals we must perceive, work with and transmit are "barbarian". This will pose acute difficulties for systems, and we must address them.

### *2.1.2. Leadership: committed involvement by the managers*

In emergencies, the technical specialist is the essential operator: he will have backup from the entire organization, and the responsible manager is there to ensure that there are no particular implementation problems. Specific crises call for full engagement, and the first function of the crisis teams is to set the course, maintain coherence, and ensure liaison. For an unconventional crisis, the leader must play a much more crucial role, directly and personally. Questions of vision, of choice and of strategy come to the fore, in place of technical management tools. It is no longer a question of simply "running things".

When our bearings are lost, when meaning dissolves, and when the customary field of action disintegrates, as in non-conventional crises, nothing can be achieved without exemplary leadership from the pinnacle of the organization. When perspectives vanish they must be reinvented. When lines of action are destroyed, they must be re-created. When the customary networks of players are no longer the pertinent ones, they must be redesigned. Only in this way can we hope to restore identity, confidence, liaison, and a constructive collective will.

Leaders must be in a position from the outset to provide essential partners - which usually means the general public - with the following:

- Clarification without fudging the issue: phony "reassurances" will only undermine confidence.

- A broadening of the stakeholders' map, the questions, the rules. The instinctive reaction is to retreat into the recipes of the past; this is very normal, but it confirms a fatal mental block.
- The willingness and the capacity to look beyond the normal horizons, in spite of ambiguity and knowledge gaps: to counter the loss of direction and of operating frameworks with a plan, benchmarks, and a dynamic inventiveness.

This implies that the leaders must be heavily involved. They have to break through the conventional limits, which are no longer relevant; they have to slip across old boundaries and invent new collective responses. The leader cannot shirk this duty, which is in fact the core of his responsibility. When vital issues are at stake, nothing can be done without determined personal and direct involvement from the top. As Henry Kissinger put it, "The most important role of a leader is to take on his shoulder the burden of ambiguity inherent in difficult choices. That accomplished, his subordinates have criteria and can turn to implementation." (H. Kissinger, 1982, p. 531).

This constitutes a revolution in our culture of governance, which would rather leave it to the second ranks to anticipate risks and take charge in situations that are not yet clear. There is a tendency, in effect, to try to "protect" the leader, as long as everything is not "perfectly clear".

An especially striking example here is that of Rudolph Giuliani, the Mayor of New York City at the time of the September 11 events. It is easy to draw a contrast between what happened in New York at that time and what occurred in New Orleans in 2005 (even if the two situations were very different in many respects). His convictions and his personal commitment on the front line of that inconceivable event were the cornerstone of the city's resilience. His advice was unambiguous: *"Have beliefs and communicate them. See things for yourself. Set an example. Prepare relentlessly. Underpromise and overdeliver. Don't assume a damn thing"* (Giuliani, 2002).

This assumes that the leader himself is mentally prepared to take an approach to intelligence and action that is more creative than procedural - yet our habits at times of emergency and crisis are usually just the opposite. With very little information available and even less of it verified, the leader must have the conviction and the vision to lead the community out of its initial disorientation, and to avoid the two pitfalls that are always present in extreme crises: bureaucratic inertia (where each organization waits till the crisis fits its codes and rules), and the general loss of nerve (not only within the public, but along the entire chain of command). It is only by spreading confidence that we

can get through the ordeal, renew our energy, and come up with innovative plans and concrete roads to success.

The major challenge today is to choose and then prepare leaders so that the creative approach will prevail in the inevitable non-conventional crisis, whereas the entire organizational, administrative and institutional culture is in thrall to procedural thinking. In our cultures and in our selection processes, creative thinking is both punishing and punished. And this fundamental logic is not going to be turned around by devoting a few hours a year to "crisis management" seminars. This is a great challenge facing leaders and organizations today. Most often, we settle the question by ducking it. Unfortunately, we won't be able to duck it much longer.

### *2.1.3. Strategic intelligence: "Rapid Reflection Forces"*

The importance of standing back and assessing the situation objectively is even more important in this world of discontinuity than it is in specific crises. The reason is clear enough: because the strategic landscape has mutated, the conventional tactics and interpretations no longer work and are even counterproductive. We must tear ourselves away from them, which demands a very active and determined effort, and then construct new frameworks for understanding and coping with reality.

In operational terms, this means that our leaders must have at hand people who are familiar with chaos and who are given to thinking openly and to networking in unreadable situations. This is essential for overcoming the most severely pathological reactions to these new forms of crisis: mental blocks (the constant refrain is "in a crisis, you don't have time to think"); the "bunker mentality", with everyone holing up in his own little corner; treating problems in purely technical ways without looking closely at the positions; and above all, rushing blindly to the most counterproductive options.

The initiatives now underway to establish "Rapid Reflection Forces", for example in EDF (Electricité de France), need to be pursued urgently. We cannot continue to rely on the reflection that takes place in interoffice calls and corridor chats or, more broadly, outside the dedicated crisis management mechanisms - which are generally based on reactive thinking and not at all on deep questioning.

Along with the more "tactical" crisis teams, focused entirely on immediate operational responses, plans and logistics, we also need solid teams that will promptly undertake four broad lines of questioning, which will be deepened as the ordeal progresses:

- *What's happening?* By definition, we cannot immediately grasp all the essential issues at stake in a crisis that is entirely new, unclear and chaotic. The intelligence front involves a constant battle to anticipate, detect and clarify surprises, domino effects, escalation dynamics, and the general mutations that can be triggered.
- *What are the major pitfalls?* When the pressure of events becomes extreme, when panic spreads, when the bearings are lost, the very normal tendency is to become mired in the most counterproductive ruts. This happens with every major crisis. We must, then, immediately think about the major errors to avoid.
- *What networks do we need?* By definition, extreme crises strike at the system in ways that are hard to anticipate, and that may differ depending on the people concerned (Katrina and heat waves being set examples). At the same time, the new issues will have to be handled with new players. New maps will be needed both for diagnosis and for action, and they will have to be adjusted or remodelled through the ordeal.
- *What constructive initiatives can we propose?* The most important thing is not to pore over statistical lists or to compile all the information possible, but rather to try to discern one or a few critical initiatives that could introduce "a new ballgame", help us escape our crisis-induced mental ruts, and launch virtuous circles.

The kind of thinking that is needed here is the diametric opposite of procedural thinking. We must discriminate the essential factors, both in order to understand the crisis and to get out of it. With these Rapid Reflection Forces, what is important is not to draw up lists of data and fill out a series of pre-formatted tables, or to get tied up in hours of teleconferencing that will be increasingly technical and focus on ever more detailed micromanagement. We are now far from the command-and-control techniques that are still promoted for handling crises at the top levels of our institutions.

In short, we must move beyond our habits in terms of decisional expertise, which is usually technical and scientific in nature and focused on micromanagement. We must introduce a breakthrough of methods at the desired levels - the business, the country, or group of countries - depending on the type of problem at hand. And this will be costly, because changing our guideposts is always an ordeal, even when they have consistently shown themselves to be inadequate.

#### *2.1.4. Collective response and communication: the vital notion of empowerment*

The years 1980-2000 were dominated by the idea of "Communication". We were told that to manage crises we had to give information to the players and to the public, as a democratic requirement. That in itself represented an important step forward. In fact, our tradition in times of emergency or catastrophe is rather that of "Command and Control", based on two sturdy pillars: the concentration of decision-making in a cloistered hierarchical structure, and the restriction of information held by that structure, in keeping with the military principles of the past.

But it was finally admitted that the key to success in multidimensional turbulence required other approaches. It called for bringing coherence to a great number of entities, on the basis of forward planning that was predetermined and bound by unquestionable operating rules. Such dynamics could not be achieved with an approach to governance that was restrictive, vertical, compartmentalized, and designed to minimize information.

We must now go much further. The idea of centralized management, even if open to large networks, is no longer in keeping with the demands of effective governance at a time of major discontinuity. In the face of situations that exceed the response capacities of a given government structure, when complexity overwhelms any specific organization, especially if it is vertically structured, when ignorance destabilizes organized expertise, when speed and hyperconnectivity explode the known rhythms and maps, when the loss of direction demands vital new foundations, we must look for other approaches. The new perspectives must combine several demands, starting with a fundamental rethinking of our governance paradigms.

***Close networking among all stakeholders.*** This is needed to guarantee overall cohesion and the pooling of energies, indispensable to a swift and powerful response and to recovering from the inevitable mistaken paths and their unwanted effects. Creating capillarity in the system is seen as better than trying to erect illusory protective walls between each sector and each decision-making stage (as soon as a major crisis breaks out, all those walls become porous, and the best strategy is to use these flows, not to try to plug all the holes).

***Involve all stakeholders at the core of the problem.*** It is essential to provide critical information and essential means to those who will have to cope with an abnormal situation on their own for some time; they must be brought decisively within the strategic loop; plans must be widely discussed with them, and their creativity and their initiative must be sought as inputs. The leadership,

the structure in charge cannot of course abdicate its management responsibilities. This holds in particular for the public. The shocks that will accompany the new world of risk will demand operating modes that can no longer be based on our visions of a state, organizations or businesses contributing "turnkey solutions" to groups of people who have been immobilized or anaesthetized by "crisis communication" through the media.

We must be very clear about the gulf to be bridged. It is groups of people themselves who must find answers to the challenges they will face (Dumas-Séguier, 1997). If their creativity is not mobilized, the essential changes will never take place. Our motto, "Everything is under control, the government is looking after you, don't do anything", needs to be radically overhauled. This approach has direct operational implications, for example when it comes to exercises: it is not enough to ask the people to be "bit players". Or when it comes to prevention, as was stressed in the report on the Quebec ice storm of 1998, which called for every citizen to have three days of supplies on hand at all times (Rapport Nicolet, 1999). Here again, confidence is vital: "He had more confidence in us than we had in ourselves", it was said of Rudolph Giuliani, and that is why his city did not collapse.

***Building the dynamics of mutual trust.*** The purpose here must be to consolidate the collective dynamics through initiatives that have been invented together, and this presupposes that everyone is clear about the issues and the difficulties. In particular, the logic according to which "the government draws up the plans, it informs the operators, and they comply" must no longer prevail. Katrina marked what will likely be a turning point in this regard, signalling the end of an era.

Of course, the principle of partnership is so obvious that it has become a cliché, and something that everyone pays lip service to. But we need to ask whether we have the cultural underpinnings to weave these partnerships, which demand sharing, trust and the willingness to explore together (without having the State let down its guard on the control front). For the time being, we still have a long way to go, regardless of the country.

Yet it is precisely this "new ballgame" in matters of governance that offers hope of progress in terms of basic cohesion, intelligent analysis, swift execution, and manoeuvring room in case of error - demands that were impossible to meet in our previous frameworks.

These considerations also have important consequences for the way we handle communications. Here again, new rules of the game must be introduced. We know that in any unprepared organization, the tendency on all sides is to

“reassure” (and all the more firmly if there is no real certainty), and not to communicate any more once the problem appears to have escaped normal bounds. There is a great risk of falling into this trap during major crises which lay bare our ignorance and expose us to potential threats that are impossible to define or to decipher. The ideal breeding conditions will all be in place then for the pathology of information refusal. To counter this strong tendency, we must:

- Provide copious information, and do it early (not the minimum, and not when the chips are already down).
- Communicate about questions, not about certainties (which will come later).
- Communicate about processes, not about outcomes (the essential is the dynamics underway, the outcomes will only be known later).
- Be ready, of course, to communicate the certainties and the outcomes as soon as they are available, and even to report indicators and warning signals, if those signals are received before all the expected analytical results are in hand.

Quite apart from any recipe or checklist of behaviour, we must have acquired the strategic conviction that management and resolution of the crisis cannot be achieved without this shift in our fundamental approaches to involvement in communication. The problem is not to be "a bit more transparent" than before, but rather to have taken on board, in theory and in practice, the requirements of collective effort in a chaotic world - an environment that now demands dynamic linkages, fluidity and speed, shared information, and collective confidence.

We are far from the time when the decision maker could pretend to have the “right diagnostics” and could impose his views as official scientific expertise, as “truth”, held exclusively by the authorities. Such positivism is now outdated. Sir Robert May, an eminent scientist who has contributed to the mathematical modelling of complex systems and who is former Chief Scientific Adviser to the United Kingdom, made this point cogently at a European Union conference on Science and Governance: *In many important issues – both of safety and ethics ---science alone rarely gives unarguable answers. As Brecht wrote in his play The Life of Galileo: “The chief aim of science is not to open a door to infinite wisdom but to set a limit to infinite error”* (Sir Robert May, 2000)

We are also far from the time when a decision maker could claim to have the "right solutions", and therefore do without any involvement or information from other players. Kant’s words seem increasingly pertinent: *“To profess to*



*solve all problems and to answer all questions would be impudent boasting, and would argue such extravagant self-conceit as at once to forfeit all confidence.”* (Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*).

Here we touch upon the very core of our conceptions of governance. A painful task awaits us: we are going to have to turn upside down our practices and, still more, our basic visions as they relate to information, expertise, networking among stakeholders, and citizen involvement. The situation demands forceful input from politicians, not as a way of preserving their power but as an exercise in reinventing the collective conduct of human affairs. At a time when major and increasingly recurrent shocks are obliging us to question the great challenges of our history and the way we address them, we are condemned to make some major changes in our approach to empowering stakeholders, and hence to reinvent the function of leadership.

Time is pressing us on this front also. Already the big TV news networks are creating their own "situation room" for following a major crisis. The centre of gravity is shifting rapidly from the public sector, where the closed model has run its course, to other players, among which the media stand front and centre. But this is only one aspect, even if it is important and the most visible. Very shortly now the private sector will also be adopting "national response plans" to avoid being held hostage to ideas they judge outdated. Similarly, the myriad of players - NGOs, international institutions, local associations, web surfers - will soon be organizing, in ways that will surprise us, to contribute their own modes of response to grave situations. Either our big organizations will learn to live with these upheavals and reinvent their place, or they will be swept away. As the Chinese proverb tells us, "the helmsman must navigate with the waves, or they will swallow him up".

A perusal of any of the major reports on large-scale crises can shed some interesting light on these questions. Here are some of their more essential findings:

- Withholding information destroys managers' credibility (the BSE inquiry commission, Philips, 2001):

*1294. "Throughout the BSE story, the approach, to communication of risk was shaped by a consuming fear of provoking an irrational public scare. This applied not merely to the Government, but to advisory committees, to those responsible for the safety of medicines, to Chief Medical Officers and to the Meat and livestock Commission. All witnesses agreed that information should not be withheld from the public, but some spoke of the need to control the manner of its release. Mr Meldrum spoke of the desirability of releasing information in an*

*orderly fashion*<sup>7</sup> – of ensuring that the whole package of information was put together, taking care in the process not to "rock the boat".

1295. Mr Brian Dickinson, who was a member of MAFF's Food Safety Group, put the matter in this way: "Given the strength of public debate on the matter at the time one was aware of slightly leaning into the wind. You could not just stand upright and give a totally impartial, objective view of what was the situation. There was a stronger danger of being misinterpreted out way rather than, the other, and we tended to make more reassuring sounding statements than might ideally have been said".

1296. We felt that this was an accurate description of the general approach to risk communication. We have seen that it provoked increasing scepticism and, on 20 March 1996, the reaction that the Government had been deceiving the public.

1297. In discussing this topic with us, Sir Robert May, Chief Scientific Adviser expressed the following view: "You can see the temptation on occasion to wish to hold the facts close so that you can have internal discussion and the formation of a consensus so that a simple message can be taken out into the market place. My view is strongly that that temptation must be resisted, and that the full messy process whereby scientific understanding is arrived at with all its problems has to be spilled out into the open".

1298. This view received strong support from representatives of the consumer organizations. They emphasized the need for open scientific debate. Ms Sheila McKechnie, the Director of the Consumers' Association, emphasized the need to develop a culture of trust. She commented that: "There is nothing more nanny is than withholding information from people on the ground that they may react irrationally to that information".

1299. She made the point that organizations build up credibility by openness. She expressed the hope that the Food Standards Agency would achieve this.

1300. Everyone agreed that the Government had a problem with credibility. A number of Government Ministers told us that they had lost credibility with the public, so that it was necessary to get independent experts to lend credibility to public pronouncements about risk. Mrs Bottomley spoke of the need for the public to receive information free of "political overtones". She told us that she did all that she could to promote the Chief Medical Officer as an independent expert who could be trusted by the nation.

*1301. Our experience over this lengthy Inquiry has led us to the firm conclusion that a policy of openness is the correct approach. When responding to public or media demand for advice, the Government must resist the temptation of attempting to appear to have all the answers in a situation of uncertainty. We believe that food -scares and vaccine scares thrive on a belief that the Government is withholding information. If doubts are openly expressed and publicly explored, the public are capable of responding rationally and are more likely to accept reassurance and advice if and when it comes. We note, by way of example, that SEAC and MAAF have made public the fact that an investigation is being carried out into the question of whether BSE has passed into sheep. We do not understand that this has led to a boycott of lamb.”*

- The citizens must receive all the information necessary: (9-11, Commission Report, p. 318)

*Once the South Tower was hit, civilians on upper floors wasted time ascending the stairs instead of searching for a clear path down, when stairwell A was at least partially passable. Although rooftop rescues had not been conclusively ruled out, civilians were not informed in fire drills that roof doors were locked, that rooftop areas were hazardous, and that no helicopter evacuation plan existed. In both towers, civilians who were able to reach the stairs and descend were also stymied by the deviations in the stairways and by smoke doors. This confusion delayed the evacuation of some and may have obstructed that of others. The Port Authority has acknowledged that in the future, tenants should be made aware of what conditions they will encounter during descent.*

*The NYPD 's 911 operators and FDNY dispatch were not adequately integrated into the emergency response. In several ways, the 911 system was not ready to cope with a major disaster. These operators and dispatchers were one of the only sources of information for individuals at and above the impact zone of the towers. The FDNY ordered both towers fully evacuated by 8 :57, but this guidance was not conveyed to 911 operators and FDNY dispatchers, who, for the next hour often continued to advise civilians not to self-evacuate, regardless of whether they were above or below the impact zones. Nor were 911 operators or FDNY dispatchers advised that the rooftop rescues had been ruled out. This failure may have been harmful to civilians on the upper floors of the South Tower who called 911 and were not told that their only evacuation hope was to attempt to descend, not to ascend. In planning for future disasters, it is important*

*to integrate those taking 911 calls into the emergency response team and to involve them in providing up-to-date information and assistance to the public.*

- The citizens must be placed in a position of responsibility (9/11, p. 318):

*One clear lesson of September 11 is that individual civilians need to take responsibility for maximizing the probability that they will survive, should a disaster strike.*

- The citizen, the private sector employee, is not the enemy but a key player in the rescue system (9/11, p. 317):

*The “first” first responders on 9/11, as in most catastrophes, were private sector civilians. Because 85 per cent of our nation’s critical infrastructure is controlled not by government but by the private sector, private-sector civilians are likely to be the first responders in any future catastrophes.*

- Even in a mega-disaster, information is still a vital need (world flu pandemic, 1918):

In 1918 the lies of the officials and of the press never allowed the terror to condense into the concrete. The public could trust nothing and so they knew nothing. So a terror seeped into the society that prevented one woman from caring for her sister, that prevented volunteers from bringing food to families too ill to feed themselves and who starved to death because of it, that prevented trained nurses from responding to most urgent calls for their services. The fear, not the disease, threatened to break the society apart. [...] Those in authority must retain the public’s trust. The way to do it is to distort nothing, to put the best face on nothing, to try to manipulate no one. Lincoln said that first, and best. Leadership must make whatever horror exists concrete. Only then will people be able to break it apart ». (Barry 2004, p. 461)

### *2.1.5. Crisis recovery: embedding the recovery issue upstream*

Until very recently, writers and experts divided a crisis into successive and clearly defined phases: the pre-crisis (the prevention and surveillance phase), the crisis itself (the acute phase of response and mitigation), and the post-crisis phase (reconstruction or recovery). This last phase came "afterward" not only in the chronological sense, but also in the setting of priorities.

The recovery dimension was deemed less important, because prevention, which was easier in a more stable and predictable world, would reduce the incidence of crises. When prevention failed, the crisis would be "managed", and any "residual" problems could be left to the last phase. Once the critical moment was over, other, lighter and less visible teams would take charge of "returning to normal". This postponement was workable, mainly because the general setting of predictability served as a stabilizer, and things could return to their normal equilibrium.

Today, this scheme has been profoundly disrupted. Prevention encounters increasing difficulties in its role as the first and central line of defence. The handling of the crisis leaves behind it problems of sometimes considerable scope and duration - one has only to think of Chernobyl. The acute phase may itself come to be seen as "anecdotal", or at least it has lost its monopoly on attention and investment of effort. A hurricane is usually over in a few days (alert, evacuation, return), but the reconstruction of New Orleans after Katrina will be a decade-long affair. Crisis recovery becomes a central dimension (Guilhou, 2005). It must be addressed as soon as crisis management begins, and even in preparedness efforts (for example in the architecture of information and communication systems). Unless the conditions of system recovery in a major crisis are carefully considered far in advance, the obstacles may well become insurmountable during the reconstruction phase that will have to be mounted after a severe event.

Leaders as well as operating personnel must be prepared to intervene decisively in areas that go far beyond simple "business recovery". The headaches facing the major utility operators in New Orleans today are perfect examples of the post-crisis problems that are bound to become more common: it is hard to move ahead with reconstruction if the big urban planning issues have not been decided; if the stakeholders in such choices are no longer around, but are not definitively gone (merely scattered around the continent); and if the authorities have trouble in coming to grips with the questions.

Moving beyond cases of this kind, we discover what is in fact a global problem: many parts of the planet are currently engaged in "crisis recovery", in the wake of natural disasters, technological disasters, wars, or combinations of all these elements. And the challenges are formidable on all fronts. While in the conventional phase of curative crisis treatment, stakeholders and their responsibilities are fairly clearly mapped out (although there will still be confusion, such as saturated and chaotic airports, in any severe event), the same cannot be said for this crisis recovery phase. Here we find that stakeholder interplay is much more confused, complex and uncoordinated. Everyone gets in on the act: NGOs (both the recognized, prestigious ones and the more

opportunistic), private businesses, government agencies, Civil and Military Cooperation operators. A frequent problem is that everyone defines his own tasks, in the absence of guidance and frameworks set by governments or international institutions. With no one really in charge, recovery operations are likely to be excessive and to run on much too long (with a high risk of infiltration by profiteers and even criminals). Clearly, this dimension of crisis recovery deserves very careful thinking, without waiting for further experience to accumulate, which will only result in yet greater costs in terms of human lives, economic disruption, and loss of credibility.

We shall look here at some working hypotheses that have already been validated by field experience. But a word of warning is in order: the essence lies in preparedness. If we do not have strong convictions, based on managerial cultures adapted to a highly uncertain world, a world that is radically open and complex, none of these recommendations can really be implemented. The third chapter of this paper will attempt to clarify some of the indispensable steps that must be taken for making systems, organizations and individuals capable of moving effectively down these new avenues.

### **Some lessons from the 1999 storms in France**

"In fact, when the first alarming signs arrived, no one seems to have foreseen how the scenario would escalate. This must surely serve as an indicator, within the administrative organization in place, that the reaction function was given too much weight at the expense of strategic thinking about the dynamics in play. Clearly it would be better for thinking on these two fronts to run in parallel.

No specialized unit - of the kind that could take a detached view in the midst of emergency contingencies, and that is no doubt too seldom provided for in organization charts - was in place or activated to carry out this task.

The prospect of multiple bifurcations in the evolution of systemic crises calls in effect for approaches to dealing with problems that will in themselves take better account of the unforeseen, or can even prepare for the unforeseen as such, and will distance themselves from the response plans that are often too codified for open questioning.

Of course it is still important to have catalogues of resources and automatic checklists. But in the face of the abnormal, of circumstances that will never fit completely into a pre-established framework, it is even more essential for people to learn how to respond collectively, and how to work efficiently in teams and in networks.

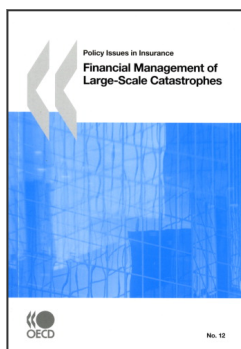
Where realities are constantly shifting and highly uncertain, where communication problems are critical, where the means of information and of command are lacking and conventional modes of action are inappropriate, managers must have been trained in advance, as far as possible, to intervene in this kind of rupture situation.

Source: Prime Minister's Office, Évaluation des dispositifs de secours et d'intervention mis en œuvre à l'occasion des tempêtes des 26 et 28 décembre 1999, Interim Report of the Interministerial Mission, July 2002.

## NOTES

1. The following sections draw heavily on previous publications of Patrick Lagadec (in *Apprendre à Gérer les crises*, 1993 and *Traité des nouveaux Risques*, Gallimard, 2002, with Olivier Godard, Claude Henry, Erwann Michel-Kerjan).
2. Cf. the notion of "procedural memory", which is what allows us, for example, to start up our car without thinking about it.





**From:**  
**Financial Management of Large-Scale  
Catastrophes**

**Access the complete publication at:**  
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264041516-en>

**Please cite this chapter as:**

Lagadec, Patrick and Xavier Guilhou (2010), "Operational Responses: Between Knowledge and Invention", in OECD, *Financial Management of Large-Scale Catastrophes*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264041516-13-en>

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