

Organizing Risk Communication for Effective Preparedness: Using Plans as a Catalyst for Risk Communication



Amandine Berger-Sabbatel and Benoit Journé

Abstract Crisis response preparedness is a problematic issue for local governments. It is a responsibility with high stakes, but at the same time it is very distant from the daily management of the community. In France, local governments engage to a limited extent with preparedness by designing crisis response plans, which very often lack operationality. This paper examines the contribution of risk communication to effective crisis response preparedness. Indeed, technical and organizational issues are at the core of preparedness concerns, but we argue that political and cognitive dimensions are equally important, although often overlooked. The use of risk communication thus plays a critical role in the construction of reliable organizational response capabilities in order to face the unexpected, across all these dimensions. To understand this process, we examined the activity of a French risk manager whose objective is to support a group of municipalities in the organization of their respective organizational crisis responses. We found that to help the municipalities go beyond the limits of strictly organizational responses and engage in resilience, this manager uses the formal and technical character of the plan to generate rich cross-sectional communication that produces the conditions for resilience.

Keywords Crisis response plans · Preparedness · Resilience · Organizational reliability

Introduction: The Xynthia Disaster, a Failure of Risk Communication?

In 2014 in France, heavy prison sentences were handed down to the mayor and deputy mayor of La Faute-sur-Mer, a small coastal town, following the deaths of 29 inhabitants in the 2010 storm named Xynthia. Among other charges, they were

A. Berger-Sabbatel (✉) · B. Journé
Université de Nantes, Nantes, France
e-mail: abergersabbatel@gmail.com

© The Author(s) 2018
M. Bourrier and C. Bieder (eds.), *Risk Communication for the Future*, SpringerBriefs in Safety Management, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-74098-0_3

accused of failing to inform the population and of failing to prepare a crisis response plan. They were also accused of having deliberately ignored the risks at the expense of the population's safety to favour economic interests. In his defence arguments, the mayor described himself as a '*small-town mayor*' with a poor understanding of crisis situations and little communal resources.

How can you expect a small-town mayor, who does not always have the prior information needed, to plan [for the level of water reached during Storm Xynthia].

I do not personally have the culture or the knowledge required to assess and anticipate such a disaster.

I will not stop apologising, but at the time, I did not appreciate the situation, I could never have imagined such a catastrophe.¹

However, government officials had alerted the mayor on several occasions about flooding risks. Detailed information on crisis response plans is also available specifically to mayors in order to help them prepare their own. The sentences were reduced on appeal after a long and painful trial that would go down in history as the first trial to convict elected municipal officials for '*involuntary manslaughter*'.

In this highly complex case, failures in risk communication were specifically highlighted by the court for their contribution to the drama. These failures are mainly attributed to the elected municipal officials. Externally, the lack of information for the population is to blame. Internally, there was no organizational risk communication within the municipality, so an organizational response to the crisis could not be put in place. But it seems fair to us to also mention a failure in risk communication at inter-organizational level. Although State officials (which represent expertise) had alerted the mayor many times over the years about the flooding risks, they clearly failed to raise sufficient risk awareness with the elected representatives of La Faute-sur-Mer to induce actual cognitive commitment into preparedness. They were aware of the attitude of denial of the mayor, but limited themselves to written warnings or oral warnings during meetings. '*What more could the government have done to make you aware of this major risk of a natural disaster?*' the President of the Court asked the mayor.

This is a central question for us. Administrative directives, information leaflets and oral warnings seem to have failed to reach their target, but this did not lead State officials to reconsider their risk communication methods. Indeed, we consider that effective risk communication should include much more than technical or organizational information transfers. This case shows us that cognitive and political dimensions must be taken into account in any risk communication strategy.

¹2016, October 6. Court session. Mayor of La Faute-sur-Mer. Retrieved from <http://www.charentelibre.fr/2014/10/06/proces-xynthia-l-ancien-maire-assure-avoir-tout-fait-pour-securiser-la-population,1918240.amp.html>.

Communication as a Critical Element in Crisis Response Preparedness

Local governments are key players in risk management. The territories under their administration face numerous and various hazards, and they are responsible for the protection of the population. Regardless of the extent of the prevention measures they take, these organizations must be prepared to cope with a potential crisis. As the first level of crisis response, they are morally and legally responsible for organizing the safety of the population and leading civil defence operations. For example, they evacuate people, organize the water supply or rehouse stricken populations. This is a critical step to manage. Because of the seriousness of the threats, they cannot fail. Yet, unlike firefighters or emergency services, local governments are not ‘crisis professionals’, and managing the unexpected is not part of their daily work. Consequently, crisis response preparedness is all the more crucial to these actors.

Yet, despite their accountability, crisis management is not a core competency of local governments and preparedness is hardly ever a priority as it always competes with more pressing and more predictable issues (Boin and ‘t Hart 2003; Perry and Lindell 2003). Dramatic events like Hurricane Katrina in the United States (2005) or the Xynthia storm in France (2010) attest to the poor level of preparedness of public organizations. In both examples, the authorities were unprepared to face the events and proved themselves unable to make decisions that could have saved lives. Despite the seriousness of the issue, barely one-third of French municipalities have set up a formal crisis organization. Even where one exists, the preparedness process is often reduced to a written document with limited outreach and poor efficiency. Why do public administrations find it so difficult to organize the crisis response? In the United States, the House of Representatives raised a similar question after the Katrina disaster in 2005: ‘*Why do we continually seem one disaster behind?*’ (Lagadec 2009b).

The traditional explanations of ‘lack of resources or skills’ are no longer enough. We argue that the level of resilience of a community is not directly linked to its size or the amount of resources invested in risk management (Berger-Sabbatel 2016). However, we analyse risk communication as a critical process in preparedness issues. Poor use of risk communication can seriously impact the effectiveness of crisis response, but this process remains underexplored and suffers from a general lack of understanding. In most cases, risk communication is reduced to formal information transfer to a limited audience, between those who design crisis response plans (very often, non-specialist civil servants) and those who implement them (the responders, particularly elected representatives). It excludes large parts of the organization and the external environment and does not require effective commitment from the responders in the preparedness process.

This restrictive approach to risk communication seems to have failed in its task of developing risk awareness and making crisis response preparedness a priority within local administrations. This approach focuses on the technical/organizational dimension of risk communication at the expense of political or cognitive considerations, which are also critical, as shown at La Faute-sur-Mer. Moreover, we argue

that this approach to risk communication limits the capacity of municipalities to manage unexpected events. A purely technical approach to risk communication might lead actors to consider crisis response plans only as ‘written documents’, as a set of formal procedures and directives. It locks the organization into a crisis response strategy strictly based on anticipation, with no room for resilience (Wildavsky 1988).

Thus, our key research question is: how can we rethink the use of risk communication in order to improve the level of preparedness within organizations? Effective community preparedness requires a global risk communication strategy, including both the internal (the local public administration) and external audiences (citizens and other stakeholders). In this paper, we will focus more particularly on the internal aspect of risk communication that takes place within the organization regarding preparedness. We present a different perspective on risk communication that is often overlooked by field actors and little developed in preparedness theories. We propose to analyse risk communication as a key element in the construction of organizational response capabilities in order to face the unexpected. Communication can be a powerful linchpin between the two opposite organizational logics of anticipation and resilience (Weick 1987). From this perspective, risk communication significantly contributes to producing the political, organizational and cognitive conditions required for organizational reliability.

In this chapter, we will address this question through the use of crisis response plans, which are the principal tools available to municipalities in order to organize and manage their crisis response. Our results are based on a field study exploring the managerial work of a French risk manager. The main findings show that plans can be creatively used to develop intensive communication activity. Thus, the communication initiated during the planning process goes far beyond fostering the technical organization of crisis response. As it produces substantial social interactions and actual/effective cognitive commitment (Keller et al. 2012), it enables sensemaking and self-reflection, which are necessary requirements for better resilience and reliability in crisis response.

The Stakes of Anticipation and Resilience for Preparedness

In post-2001 United States, the priority in terms of risk management was given to homeland security at the expense of prevention of natural disasters, which partly explains the poor management of Hurricane Katrina. Nevertheless, management of the next major hurricane, hurricane Gustav, that occurred in 2008 was also unsatisfactory, despite the efforts initiated in this area since the Katrina disaster. ‘*Five days before the expected arrival of Hurricane Gustav, Governor Jindal declared a state of emergency and the population of New Orleans was evacuated before the storm reached the coast*’ (Steiger 2007). However, the various shelters that had been prepared proved to be inadequate to house the displaced populations. Baton Rouge was considered to be a shelter town for those fleeing New Orleans and the

authorities even located the crisis management operations centre there. In fact, the consequences of Gustav were quite different from those of Katrina. The authorities had prepared a response to a Katrina-like situation: they focused on a massive flooding scenario and on the New Orleans area. Instead, they faced a wind event that seriously damaged the Baton Rouge area: Hurricane Gustav caused a massive power outage (Boin 2009) that totally paralysed Baton Rouge, with severe consequences on shelters, hospitals, transports, water and food supply networks.

Like Xynthia, these examples from Hurricanes Katrina and Gustav both illustrate that preparedness is simultaneously a political, an organizational and a cognitive issue. Indeed, the initiation of preparedness actions results from political decisions and initially requires effective awareness and involvement from senior management (Boin and t'Hart 2003). But the process of preparedness itself is equally important in order to ensure the effectiveness of preparedness actions. Indeed, this example proves the inherent limits of strictly planned crisis responses. In this way, effective preparedness cannot solely depend on the anticipative logic conveyed by plans. We argue that effective preparedness requires more flexibility and the ability to analyse and to make sense of the crisis situation before making decisions. It is a call for more resilience, according to Wildavsky's definition (1988). Thus, the need for both anticipation and resilience presents us with an organizational dilemma, because these two organizational models have opposing features (Journé 2009).

Crisis Response Plans in the French Preparedness Framework

We selected the French preparedness framework to support our argument. Indeed, France is also confronted with the twofold problem described above: the general lack of preparedness coupled with a lack of efficiency in existing preparedness actions. Of the 36,000 French municipalities, barely one-third of them have set up a formal crisis organization, 10 years after the enactment of a binding law.² This often takes the form of a written plan, the PCS (for Plan Communal de Sauvegarde, or Crisis Response Plan). There are no mandatory rules for designing the PCS—each municipality is free to design a model that fulfils its needs—but a template is proposed by the French Ministry of the Interior to guide municipalities.³ As the

²Loi n° 2004-811 du 13 août 2004 de modernisation de la sécurité civile.

³A PCS template (guidelines provided by an institutional actor, Le Mémento du maire, IRMa) includes sections on the definition of major hazards; A territorial risk analysis; Information to the population; Alert: Strategy and resources for dissemination; Safety instructions; Hazard mapping; Potential shelter areas; Recommended routes; Housing capacity; Available technical, material and human resources; Specific requirements for the involvement of a pool of volunteers from civil society (if any); On-call duty procedures; Crisis management centre: location, actors; Phonebook; Summary documents with the basic procedures; Pre-prepared administrative documents; Instructions for training, crisis simulations and PCS tests; Recovery process.

PCS is the only compulsory element of crisis response organization at local level, the preparedness process is often reduced to a written document with limited outreach. Very few municipalities have a dedicated risk department or officer. Generally, plans are designed internally, by a non-specialist employee, a trainee, or by an external consultant. Many times, the responders are not included in the planning process, and they are informed of their role in crisis response at the end of the process. As a result, people do not buy into the plan, and it lacks operability (Blanc 2015).

Using Crisis Response Plans as Living Documents: The Limits of Anticipation

Although preparedness cannot be limited to the written plan, the latter centralizes all the elements of the process; it is the visible part of crisis response organization. Because of its formal character, for many organizations, the plan is mainly seen as an administrative document, as a legal obligation to fulfil, instead of as a living document.

However, there is an intangible part of planning that is essential but that cannot be documented directly on paper, such as *‘the development of managers’ knowledge of the resources of governmental and private organizations, the sharpening of their conceptual skills in anticipating emergency demands and balancing these against available resources, and the establishment of linkages across organizational boundaries between emergency planners and operations personnel’* (Perry and Lindell 2003, pp. 346–347). This intangible part of planning can be developed through frequent crisis simulations and the provision of feedback that helps to transform the written plan into a living document, as preparedness handbooks rightly recommend. In this way, we should distinguish the ‘Plan’ (as a document) from ‘planning’ (as a process). But we also argue that preparedness is even more than an organizational planning process and must involve cognitive and political considerations. To this end, we believe that preparedness strategies must go beyond the pure organizational logic of anticipation conveyed by the plans and simultaneously commit to a logic of resilience.

The Organizational Logic of Resilience as Opposed to the Anticipatory Logic Conveyed by Plans

The written, documented and formal part of the Plan is important as a first set of guidelines in the unstable environment of the crisis (Lagadec 2009a). However, there is a danger of blindly following the written procedures. According to Weick (1987), crisis management requires both anticipation and adaptation in order to

cope with the unexpected. For decision-makers, this is a delicate situation in which communication processes are strategic. Social and time pressures often hasten decision-making. Instead, Weick argues that in unstable environments, decisions do not need to be made first but that it is important to understand the situation before making decisions, *'in order to see what, if anything, there is to decide'* (Weick 1987, p. 123). This ability to stand back and assess the situation, to see the big picture, is a core competency for organizations that seek to manage the unexpected. Sensemaking requires the association of reflection and action, through an intensive communication process that allows constant adjustments of procedures according to the specific features of the situation, whereas a crisis response strategy strictly based on anticipation does not allow for management of the unexpected. Anticipation intends to eliminate ambiguity and uncertainty by dissociating reflection from action, in order to reduce action to the mere implementation of endorsed procedures and plans (Journé 2009). This clear division between those who design plans and those who implement them raises the question of buy-in (Wildavsky 1973). Thus, it is not just a communication matter, but also a political one, a question of power and legitimacy for those who design the plan. We note the antagonism that appears between the logic of anticipation, which mainly relies on plans, rigid decision-making process and top-down communication, and the logic of resilience (as defined by Wildavsky 1988), which relies on adaptation, decentralization of decision-making and ongoing communication.

The articulation of these two opposing logics results in a rare organizational ability that we place at the core of effective preparedness. The development of this ability challenges the management of preparedness processes, as it is theoretically impossible for all but a very limited category of organizations⁴ (LaPorte and Consolini 1991). Our study points out some particular forms of communication that, if wisely managed, can support the articulation of anticipation and resilience within organizations engaged in preparedness processes.

Communication Processes as a Way to Combine Anticipation and Resilience

The use of 'storytelling' as described by Weick (1987) is a good example of communication used as a tool for the combination of anticipation and resilience. According to the author, *'stories are important, not just because they coordinate, but also because they register, summarize, and allow reconstruction of scenarios that are too complex for logical linear summaries to preserve (...)* Models are

⁴These organizations are qualified as 'High Reliable Organizations' by organizational literature. These are a group of very specific organizations capable of maintaining very high levels of safety in high-risk environments on a daily basis, such as nuclear power plants or aircraft carriers. This literature inspired our research.

unable to connect as many facts as stories, they preserve fewer interactions, and they are unable to put these interactions in motion so that outcomes can be anticipated' (Weick 1987, p. 125). In this way, the use of stories during the anticipation phase effectively fills the breaches of the plans. It enables sensemaking during the resolution of crises.

Godé-Sanchez (2011) highlights another particular form of communication: the practice of feedback is a collective method for sensemaking, which is a critical process during the management of unexpected events (Weick 1993), especially for coordination. Godé describes the particular form of feedback used by an aerobatic crew of pilots for the French air force. This particular form of feedback—tending to be rather direct and informal—significantly differs from more classic forms of feedback, because it focuses on the *'experiential nature of the knowledge'* transferred. During these feedback sessions, *'we don't talk about theoretic knowledge. We talk about perceptions'* says a pilot. *'Knowledge is mainly transferred through discussions and informal dialogues'* (Godé-Sanchez 2011, p. 424). The direct and informal character of the feedback encourages frequent self and group reflection. Besides, doubt is singled out as an essential cognitive process for the management of the unexpected (Weick 2009). Godé insists on the verbal tradition of this feedback and highlights the importance of the existence of areas that encourage it (we will compare this area with the *'discussion spaces'* described by Detchessahar 2003). In this case, the restroom is a place where pilots, mechanics and office staff can discuss recent but also older experiences over a coffee. These informal practices of socialization favour the cohesion of a collective of various profiles (pilots, mechanics and office staff); they allow better knowledge and trust between the actors. They contribute to the development of a *'collective mind'* that is essential for the development of sensemaking capacities (Weick and Roberts 1993). Indeed, the authors insist on the importance of the collective for the development of personal and organizational capabilities to manage the unexpected.

Empirical Settings

The case we present in this chapter comes from a longitudinal case study,⁵ designed on the principles of action and intervention research (Allard-Poesi and Perret 2003, 2004; David 2012). We studied the case of a group of French municipalities⁶ confronted with the double difficulty of a general lack of preparedness throughout

⁵The case study comes from our doctoral research: Berger-Sabbatel (2016). *'Organiser la montée en fiabilité d'un collectif d'organisations. Acteurs, outils et modes de management. Le cas des collectivités territoriales face à la crise'*. Ph.D. thesis, Université de Nantes.

⁶In France, the municipalities are the level of local administration. They are given the opportunity to work together (an assembly of several municipalities constitutes an intercommunality) in order to pool some resources. Regarding risk issues, the management of any crisis remains a municipal attribution; the intercommunality cannot supersede the municipality in this area.

the intercommunal area and the limited efficiency of the few existing emergency preparedness plans. In that sense, this case is significant regarding the overall French preparedness situation. What is specific and interesting in this case was the existence of a risk manager, from the intercommunal organization, whose mission was to provide support to the various municipalities regarding preparedness, in the absence of relevant expertise within most of the municipalities in this area.

Indeed, according to French law, each municipality is responsible for implementing its own PCS, but very few of them have the organizational skills to do so. For example, in the group we studied, only 3 out of 24 municipalities have a dedicated risk department (or at least a dedicated risk manager). Most of the time, the PCS is designed by a municipal officer,⁷ whose main job is not related to risk, in addition to their daily tasks. The municipalities explain that their limited resources mean they cannot dedicate more organizational capacity to risk management. Nevertheless, as we mentioned earlier, the level of preparedness of an organization is also the result of political arbitrations.

The very existence of an intercommunal expert position regarding risk and crisis management makes this case specific, as it is the first French intercommunal organization to offer such a resource to its members. Through a close follow-up of the managerial activity of this intercommunal expert, we observed the evolution of preparedness over the intercommunal area in the different municipalities, using shadowing and observation techniques (Czarniawska 2007, 2008). We balanced this intercommunal perspective by conducting interviews in different municipalities. Our result highlights the original way the intercommunal risk manager uses the PCS, as the linchpin of a combination of three organizational resources that support risk communication towards municipalities: an actor (the risk manager), a management tool (the PCS) and a discussion space (the GT PCS).

The Organizational Resources that Support Risk Communication

As expertise (intercommunal level) and decision-making (municipal level) depend on distinct organizational entities, communication between these entities is a decisive process. The intercommunal risk manager mainly channels his expertise to the municipalities through the intermediary of municipal officers in charge of the PCS who try, in turn, to pass on their new knowledge throughout their respective organizations. At different levels, the intercommunal risk manager and the PCS officers both act as communication intermediaries. The communication process between the experts from the intercommunal risk manager and the PCS officers is

⁷For example, in the group of municipalities we studied, we identified an elected councilor, a technical employee, an employee from the civil defence or legal department and even a municipal policeman as PCS officers.

intense, regular and structured. It takes the form of regular meetings (the GT PCS, discussed in the next section), data collection and information sharing (e.g. hazard mappings, crisis management feedback, etc.), training sessions (e.g. crisis simulations), individual support when necessary and one-off events (e.g. meetings with risk experts).

What is particularly interesting is that the communication initiated by the intercommunal risk manager is not limited to top-down knowledge transfer. Above all, they act as an intermediary between the different PCS officers so that they can meet and exchange about risk issues in their respective areas (particularly during the GT PCS meetings), and as an intermediary between the municipalities and other organizations involved in risk management (police, firefighters, state administrations, industries, etc.). In this way, this stakeholder has a very central position in the preparedness strategy of the intercommunal area. While officially providing technical assistance for planning, they simultaneously build a collective of other stakeholders and develop the organizational capacities to articulate anticipation and resilience within that collective. We discovered that the intercommunal risk manager uses the PCS as a real gateway to legitimize preparedness and implement an extensive preparedness strategy that goes far beyond mere planning. Legal, technical dimensions of the plan and the overall planning process are a pretext for in-depth (inter)organizational and cognitive work: the anticipation logic supports the development of a resilience logic. This is the purpose of the GT PCS working group, which we identified as the central communication space built around the PCS. The aim of the intercommunal manager is not to replace the municipalities in designing the plan, but to create the conditions for sensemaking, to enable social interactions and cognitive commitment.

GT PCS: The PCS Working Group as a ‘*Discussion Space*’

Every 6 weeks or so, the intercommunal risk manager (or project manager) leads a working group named ‘GT PCS’ to help the municipalities produce a living document. The group members are mainly the PCS officers from each municipality, but the group also includes some senior managers and elected officials. During the GT PCS sessions, the intercommunal risk manager leads the meeting with the following themes:

- Basic and specific knowledge on crisis management (legal developments, benchmark on crisis management, etc.),
- Methodological help for planning the crisis response (PCS and other specific procedures),
- Articulation of the municipal plans with the intercommunal crisis procedures,
- Feedback on crisis resolutions and on crisis simulations,
- External network and general risk knowledge: introduction of partners for crisis resolution (e.g. firefighter or prefectural services), visits to industrial sites, etc.

These GT PCS meetings constitute a specific and exceptionally rich communication channel that structures the action of the intercommunal risk manager towards municipalities and the relationships between the different entities. The project manager's objective is for the working party to fulfil the needs of the municipalities. Although the meeting is led by the project manager, the goal is for the municipal representatives to become proactive in these meetings: to propose which themes they want to discuss, to share feedback on crises, to take the lead and drive the organization of the next GT PCS session, etc. In this way, the PCS as a document is a communication medium for all risk- and crisis-related issues; it is a support for discussing operational matters and describing what crisis management really means in the field, with the added strength of details and anecdotes which do not always appear in written feedback. Crisis management is not always what you imagine, nor does it always require sticking to the plan.

When there is something to say, I say it. Sometimes it's even a bit...not gory but I do go into the details. It never happens as we think it would, because we can't identify the victim, can't find the family, there isn't a doctor available because it's Sunday night, and because it's a Sunday night the main police force isn't available, only the weekend auxiliaries (Mayor of a small town).

We had the case of someone who killed themselves by jumping under a train. As it was very early in the morning, around 7:30 am, (...) the elected official went directly to the site before going to work. He saw the firemen, the close family (...) and then at 9 am, journalists appeared in the Town Hall saying 'so, tell us more about this suicide' and everyone just stared, no one knew what they were talking about. The communication department was not happy at all, and the Mayor discovered there had been a suicide in his town... (PCS officer of a medium-sized town)

I was an hour away from [my town] when [my manager] called one Sunday afternoon to tell me there was a huge fire in the city centre and he couldn't get in touch with anyone. Ok, so he couldn't get in touch with anyone. He'd called all the work mobiles and no one had answered except me. (...) So, I went back to the city. And, to make matters worse, it was carnival, so it took me ages to reach [the site of the fire]. And then I asked him to get me the file with the list of people on call in it...Because it hadn't occurred to him to look at this file and ring those on call at home for example. (Senior manager of a big city).

When there was this [major fire in the city centre] we put in place a communal meeting place, a hub of assistance for the population. (...) But, this hub did not get structured the way it had been planned (in our emergency plan) because what we had written did not actually correspond to the reality. (Risk manager of a big city).

Mutual trust is important for sharing this informal feedback, that is why forming and managing this group is a critical ability.

As the intercommunal risk manager (which represents the intercommunal organization) has expertise but no authority in crisis management, it uses the anticipative culture of municipalities combined with the mandatory character of the PCS to establish its legitimacy, to take action within a municipal area of decision and responsibility. Hence, the PCS is first used by the intercommunal risk manager as a gateway to initiating communication between the actor with the expertise and the actor with the authority concerning crisis management. Nevertheless, the action of the intercommunal risk manager goes far beyond providing technical assistance

to produce a formal document. Our study shows that the more the time passes, the more the agenda of the GT PCS sessions moves away from organizational and technical topics towards more political and cognitive issues: social networking, argumentative PCS reviews and collective lectures of crisis management feedback by the PCS officers. We even noticed a tendency for the municipal PCS officer to use these meetings to discuss unrelated risk issues in the absence of any other collective areas to openly discuss inter-organizational matters (like problems of coordination between the municipal and intermunicipal services for daily management, about equipment or bills, for example).

As the 'GT PCS' is a regular meeting, it creates a solid network based on deep relationships (participants know and trust each other) and enriched by a variety of profiles and competencies (see the concept of 'requisite variety', Weick 1987). Thanks to these regular meetings, the PCS officers from different municipalities exchange information about their problems and methods to achieve and implement the PCS. For example, there is frequent feedback on crisis management. Every time a crisis occurs in a municipality, the PCS officer explains what happened and how the crisis was managed, emphasizing the strengths but also the weaknesses of the crisis management experience. This narrative exercise, with the force of real examples and anecdotes, has a strong impact on the group, close to the storytelling effect (Weick 1987). Using the plan as a starting point, the action of the inter-communal risk manager enhances both the anticipative abilities of the municipalities and their resilience capacities: experience sharing raises general risk awareness that initiates preventive actions but also confronts the actors with their own practices and induces doubt and self-reflection, which are essential characters for a better combination of anticipation and resilience. Sharing experiences also contributes to progressively developing a 'collective mind' (Weick and Roberts 1993) that helps to face the complexity of crisis situations. Communication during the GT PCS favours open discussions rather than a top-down transfer of the best practices. These discussions are based on experience sharing and the expression of doubts. However, we stress the important managerial work necessary to maintain group cohesion and to create the positive and confident atmosphere that facilitates those discussions.

Conclusion

We have analysed the GT PCS sessions as 'discussion spaces' that enable the organization of crisis management to be questioned (Detchessahar 2003). Without the existence of such a dedicated area (with an official role), it would be extremely difficult for the PCS officers to engage in deep self-reflection about their practices and to go beyond the anticipative logic of planning. The plan, which is initially a document, transforms into a reflexive tool through the intermediation of a discussion area, the GT PCS, which organizes intensive communication activity around

the plan, and through the managerial work of an actor, the intercommunal risk manager. Thus, our work calls for a more communicational approach of preparedness.

References

- Allard-Poesi, F., & Perret, V. (2003). La recherche-action. In Y. Giordano (Ed.), *Conduire un projet de recherche. Une perspective qualitative* (pp. 85–132). Caen: Editions EMS.
- Allard-Poesi, F., & Perret, V. (2004). La construction collective du problème dans la recherche-action: difficultés, ressorts et enjeux. *Finance Contrôle Stratégie*, 7(4), 5–36.
- Berger-Sabbatel, A. (2016). *Organiser la montée en fiabilité d'un collectif d'organisations. Acteurs, outils et modes de management. Le cas des collectivités territoriales face à la crise*. Ph.D. thesis, Université de Nantes.
- Blanc, P. (2015). Les PCS 10 ans après, point de vue du Ministère de l'Intérieur. *Risques infos* 34.
- Boin, A. (2009). The new world of crises and crisis management: Implications for policymaking and research. *Review of Policy Research*, 26(4), 367–377.
- Boin, A., & 't Hart, P. (2003). Public leadership in times of crisis: Mission impossible? *Public Administration Review*, 63(5), 544–553.
- Czarniawska, B. (2007). *Shadowing: And other techniques for doing fieldwork in modern societies*. Copenhagen Business School Press DK.
- Czarniawska, B. (2008). Organizing: How to study it and how to write about it. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, 3(1), 4–20.
- David, A. (2012). La recherche-intervention, cadre général pour la recherche en management? In A. David, A. Hatchuel, & R. Laufer (Eds.), *Les nouvelles fondations des sciences de gestion* (pp. 241–264). Presses des Mines.
- Detchessahar, M. (2003). L'avènement de l'entreprise communicationnelle? Outils, problèmes et politique d'accompagnement. *Revue française de gestion*, 142, 6584.
- Godé-Sanchez, C. (2011). Construire le sens par le retour d'expérience: le cas de l'Equipe de Voltige de l'Armée de l'air. *Management & Avenir*, 41, 416–434.
- Journé, B. (2009). Les organisations de haute fiabilité. In X. Michel & P. Cavallé (Eds.), *Le management des risques pour un développement durable. Qualité, santé sécurité et environnement*, (pp. 367–384), Dunod.
- Keller, A. C., Ansell, C. K., Reingold, A. L., Bourrier, M., Hunter, M. D., Burrowes, S., et al. (2012). Improving pandemic response: A sensemaking perspective on the spring 2009 H1N1 pandemic. *Risk, Hazards & Crisis in Public Policy*, 3(2), 1–37.
- Lagadec, P. (2009a). La question des plans. Entre points d'appui et pièges stratégiques. *Cahiers de recherche de l'Ecole Polytechnique, Département d'économie*, 40.
- Lagadec, P. (2009b). A new cosmology of risks and crises: Time for a radical shift in paradigm and practice. *Review of Policy Research*, 26(4), 475–488.
- LaPorte, T. R., & Consolini, P. M. (1991). Working in practice but not in theory: Theoretical challenges of "high reliability organizations". *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory: J-Part*, 1(1), 19–48.
- Perry, R. W., & Lindell, M. K. (2003). Preparedness for emergency response: guidelines for the emergency planning process. *Disasters*, 27(4), 336–350.
- Steiger, E. (2007). *L'ouragan Katrina: les leçons d'un échec. Les faiblesses du dispositif de sécurité intérieure des Etats-Unis*. Mémoire. Collège interarmées de défense—Diploweb, janvier 2008.
- Weick, K. E. (1987). Organizational culture as a source of high reliability. *California Management Review*, 29(2), 112–127.

- Weick, K. E. (1993). The collapse of sensemaking in organizations: The Mann Gulch disaster. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 38(4), 628–652.
- Weick, K. E. (2009). *Leadership as the legitimation of doubt. making sense of the organization: The impermanent organization*. Chichester, UK: Wiley.
- Weick, K. E., & Roberts, K. H. (1993). Collective mind in organizations. Heedful interrelating on flight decks. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 38, 357–381.
- Wildavsky, A. (1973). If Planning is Everything, Maybe it's Nothing. *Policy Science*, 4, 127–153.
- Wildavsky, A. (1988). *Searching for safety*. New Brunswick: Transaction Books.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

