



Crisis communication and trustworthiness among crisis actors: towards a typology of crisis management difficulties

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Abstract

The concepts of communication and trust play a central role in crisis management. There is a complex nexus between communication and trust building in crisis management, as different activities and processes result in communication and trust building in crisis management. This article argues that communication and trust are two sides of the same crisis management coin: each complements the other. To this end, we reflected on how crisis communication and trust factors could be a tool to amplify or attenuate the level of attention given to creeping crises and how such factors could influence creeping crisis management difficulties. We then proposed a crisis management typology to aid crisis managers in managing the difficulties associated with creeping crises.

Keywords Creeping crisis · Crisis management · Crisis communication · Trust

Introduction

The term crisis usually refers to an undesirable and unexpected situation occurring to a person, group, organization, culture, society, or the world (Boin et al. 2005). Thus, the term crisis signifies a certain level of disorder in normal activities. Such disorder severely threatens cherished collective societal values, such as protecting people's life, environment, assets, and reputations (Rosenthal et al. 1989). Crisis leaders are responsible for protecting such values from the threats imposed by a crisis event. This responsibility could be difficult for leaders if crisis actors refuse to give adequate attention to the crisis. Managing a crisis is critical decision-making under high uncertainty (Kruke 2012; Christensen et al. 2016; Boin et al. 2005; Rosenthal et al. 1989). Such uncertainties could be attributed to an inadequate understanding of the crisis, incomplete information

about the crisis, and undifferentiated alternatives for crisis response (Lipshitz and Strauss 1997).

The need to find urgent responses to prevent the impacts of a crisis requires that crisis leaders must prepare (Kruke 2015; Weick and Sutcliffe 2015). Anticipation and cognition are vital to identify preparedness plans (Comfort 2007; Kruke 2015), but the uniqueness and uncertainties of crises make preparedness activities challenging. This calls for a more general approach to contingency planning and training (Alexander 2002; Perry and Lindell 2003). Moreover, the dynamic crisis environment requires crisis actors to coordinate, collaborate, be flexible, and improvise to adjust to the impacts of the crisis (Malone and Crowston 1994; Dekker and Suparamaniam 2005; Kruke and Olsen 2005; Klein 2009).

Crises are larger events necessitating coordination between various actors, but coordination implies a level of generalized trust between the involved parties. Coordination and cooperation in crisis management could yield successful outcomes when there is trust among the crisis actors (Györffy 2018; Mayer et al. 1995; Serva et al. 2005; Siegrist et al. 2007). For instance, trust among crisis teams could foster cooperation in situations where alternative strategies, such as the use of coercion, are impractical or likely to fail (Mayer et al. 1995; Serva et al. 2005; Korsgaard et al. 2015). Similarly, trust between a community and its crisis leaders can influence coordinated and collaborative actions

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and approaches that allow for immediate feedback and flexible open responses (Chan 2021; Siegrist and Zingg 2014). Thus, trust teaches and reinforces collaborative engagement and vice versa (Foley and Edwards 1996). When crisis managers are trusted, their actions and words are interpreted as sincere, skillful, and evidence of good faith. Trust is viewed as a source of confidence for leaders in these circumstances. (Das and Teng 1998; Ring and Van de Ven 1992). Therefore, where there is a lack of trust, all parties involved in crisis management will carefully examine the words and deeds of the “untrustworthy” leader. Unfortunately, credibility by itself is insufficient. Crisis managers need to be experts at crisis communication if they want to reduce the public and political uncertainty that crises bring about (Boin et al. 2005). Thereby, when crisis leaders are viewed as unreliable communicators, crisis management processes become difficult for them.

Understanding a crisis and how to manage it requires classifying and dividing it into various types (‘t Hart & Boin, 2001; Gundel 2005; Björck 2016; Staupe-Delgado and Kruke 2017). Many emergency and crisis typologies exist. For instance, a renowned typology in current crisis literature is given by ‘t Hart and Boin (2001), who have classified crises based on development and termination. Accordingly, they identified four crises: fast-burning, cathartic, long-shadow, and slow-burning (creeping) crises. Most of these typologies provide more insight into crisis concepts than they do into how such crises might be managed. For instance, a discussion on the management of slow-burning (creeping) crises has been started by Boin et al. (2020). They argued that a distinctive set of managerial difficulties are presented by creeping crises. The slow development of a slow-burning or creeping crisis presents crisis managers with a challenging issue that requires sustained attention in order to be solved. Based on this, the authors questioned: *What determines the level of attention for creeping crises? (pg. 9) and how to manage creeping crises (pg. 11)*. Thus, it is important to conceptualize how to obtain sustainable attention to slow-burning (creeping) crises and how crisis managers can reduce the difficulties associated with managing such crises.

This conceptual paper, therefore, aims to contribute to this discussion - *What determines the level of attention for creeping crises? And how to manage creeping crises?* We aim to (1) identify factors essential to influence how slow-burning crises could gain the necessary attention and (2) propose a crisis management typology to aid crisis managers in managing the difficulties associated with creeping crises.

Our paper will contribute to the existing crisis management theories, especially in addressing the difficulties of managing slow-burning or creeping crises. In the crisis

literature, how to gain enough attention and manage slow-burning crises is understudied (Sætren et al. 2023). Our conceptual paper will provide insights into how crisis communication and trust factors could be a tool to amplify or attenuate the level of attention given to slow-burning crises and how such factors could influence crisis management difficulties.

We conceptualized that crisis communication and trustworthiness are crucial elements for attracting the necessary attention for slow-burning crises and effectively managing such crises. These factors go through a developmental process at various levels that can be rated as high or low. As a result, when it comes to crisis management, crisis actors’ approaches, initiatives (responses), and potential events, all have an impact on crisis communication and trustworthiness. Four different crisis management settings are produced by combining these communication and trust development levels: (1) controllable, (2) uncertain, (3) complex, and (4) uncontrollable crisis management setting. Our suggested typology offers guidance on handling slow-burning crises like the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. These crises are described as being complex, ambiguous, transnational, and creeping in nature.

This conceptual paper is organized as follows. The next part serves as an overview of some previous crisis typologies. Much focus is on the typology proposed by ‘t Hart and Boin (2001). We then elaborated on crisis communication and trust as influential factors crucial in amplifying the attention of a crisis. In part three, we discussed the interactions between crisis communication and trust and how these concepts influence successful crisis management. Later, we presented a typology for crisis management to show how different crisis management difficulties could be influenced by the degree of crisis communication and the trustworthiness of the crisis actors. Lastly, we present some conclusions and reflections about the proposed typology and future studies.

Theoretical overview

Overview of crisis typologies

Crises are often characterized by or associated with time pressure, critical decision needs, stress, and uncertainty. Rosenthal’s (1989) well-used definition of crisis is a serious threat to the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of a social system, which – under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances – necessitates the making of critical decisions. Hewitt (1983, p. 10) introduced the ‘un-ness’ of crisis – crisis manifested as an unpleasantness in unexpected circumstances, representing unscheduled

events that are unprecedented in their implications and almost unmanageable; crises, by definition, are extremely difficult events to manage. Thus, both Rosenthal’s definition and Hewitt’s un-ness arguments point to crisis management as an extremely difficult enterprise that is both critical for handling the situation at hand and reducing the event’s consequences on the population, the environment, assets, and reputations.

Gundel (2005) asserted that dealing with crises means dealing with nightmares; of course, nightmares become less scary if someone turns on the light. Thus, to make crises somehow less difficult to manage, it is helpful to classify or group them into different types. Therefore, crisis typologies or classifications are an important starting point in constructing crisis scenarios and streamlining possible actions and outcomes (Björck 2016). In such ways, it becomes somehow easy to understand and manage a crisis as the crisis manager gets an overview of the appropriate mode of action and communication (Coombes, 1988). This also helps simplify and structure complexity, organize information collection, and provide diagnostic insights (Burnett 1998). Accordingly, it is not surprising that many crisis typologies exist (Coombes and Holladay 2002).

One of the oldest and simplest crisis typologies distinguishes between crises as ‘acts of God’, ‘acts of man’, or ‘acts of society’. When a crisis is not caused by known human intervention but rather by unknown forces, it is said to be an act of God. By contrast, crises that are brought on by actual human intervention are referred to as acts of human. And societal dysfunction is the root cause of crises that are referred to as acts of society. Usually, the act of God crises are also considered natural crises (Alexander 1993), whereas acts of human and acts of society are considered “man-made” crises (Rosenthal and Kouzmin 1993; Turner 1978) and social crises (Rike 2003; Quarantelli 2001). Some scholars also refer to “man-made” crises and social crises as normal accidents (Perrow 1984) and abnormal crises (Mitroff and Alpaslan 2003). Abnormal accidents are intentional accidents resulting from deliberate evil actions, such as bombings, kidnappings, and cyberattacks (Mitroff

and Alpaslan 2003), while normal accidents occur when the systems involved are highly complex and tightly coupled that an accident inevitably occurs (Perrow 1984).

A widely used crisis typology in current crisis literature is based on the time dimension and the crisis’ development. ‘t Hart and Boin (2001) provide a renowned typology of this category based on the speed of crisis development (onset) and termination (closure). Accordingly, ‘t Hart and Boin identified four crises (as shown in Fig. 1): fast-burning, cathartic, long-shadow, and slow-burning (creeping crises).

According to ‘t Hart and Boin, a fast-burning crisis ends as soon as it begins. The beginning and end of such crises are brief, sharp, and decisive. Cases of plane hijacking and hostage situations, for example, are classified as fast-burning crises. Such crisis situations require immediate intervention or negotiation. If such interventions succeed, everyone rejoices, but if they fail, it may be interpreted as a “heroic failure” (‘t Hart & Boin, 2001).

The cathartic crisis, on the other hand, is distinguished by a relatively quick termination (closure) following a long, gradual, and slow onset. Political conflicts between authorities and extremist groups, as well as international confrontations between major and minor powers, are examples of such crises. The crisis usually comes to an end when the major power intervenes to impose a swift conclusion to the conflict after growing weary of the threats from the minor power. Thus, such crises are typically characterized by a gradual build-up of tension and vulnerability until it reaches a tipping point at which some parties decide to force a breakthrough.

Long shadow crises occur unexpectedly and raise some critical issues of much broader scope and significance, almost inadvertently triggering a political or institutional crisis. Incomprehensible, mismanaged, and agenda-setting incidents, according to t’Hart and Boin (2001), are some prototypes of a long shadow crisis. For example, the Three Mile Island accident in 1979 is regarded as a long shadow crisis due to the politicization of nuclear energy following the accident, despite no lives being lost.

According to ‘t Hart and Boin (2001), the last type of crisis is a slow-burning crisis. This type of crisis, in their opinion, creeps up rather than bursts out and fades away rather than being resolved. A creeping crisis is another name for a slow-burning crisis. Boin et al. (2020) argued that a creeping crisis is a threat to widely shared societal values or life-sustaining systems that evolves over time and space, is foreshadowed by precursor events, is subject to varying degrees of political and/or societal attention, and is dealt with impartially or inadequately by authorities (p. 122). Thus, creeping crises are characterized by the gradual emergence and development of a threat to the core values of society. Therefore, it requires shared attention to

		Speed of development	
		Fast: Instant	Slow: Creeping
Speed of termination	Fast: Abrupt	Fast burning crisis	Cathartic crisis
	Slow: Gradual	Long-shadow crisis	Slow burning crisis

Fig. 1 A Typology of crisis development and termination patterns (‘t Hart and Boin 2001, p. 32)

initiate and sustain corrective actions against the threats. However, creeping crises are characterized by a high level of uncertainty about the actual status of the threat, as well as variations in the level of concern expressed by different stakeholders. This makes it hard enough for crisis leaders to manage creeping crises.

The concept of a creeping crisis can be applied to the climate change crisis, which has triggered events like flooding, famine, migration, and extreme weather events. Climate change's ripple impacts have endangered societal and life-sustaining systems globally (Jakobsson 2021). This assumes that stakeholders must devote immediate attention to dealing with such threats. Regrettably, this has not been the case. The dynamic nature of climate change development and how complex it is, makes it difficult for policymakers to frame the climate crisis in order to gain the required attention of all stakeholders.

Given the characteristics of creeping crises, it is important to consider how crisis actors can attract the required level of attention for these crises. What causes crisis actors to ignore them, aside from the slow onset of creeping crises? And how can creeping crises be managed? In the next sections, we will elaborate on crisis communication and trust as we believe these are factors that can amplify or attenuate the required stakeholder attention to creeping crises such as climate change or pandemics.

The role of crisis communication during crises

Framing and making meaning of a crisis situation is a crucial process to gain attention and also to manage a crisis. Crisis leaders have a responsibility to frame, make meaning, and communicate the crisis event and the responses to mitigate the threats to other stakeholders. Such a message is vital to supporting stakeholders in their decision-making (Reynolds and Quinn 2008; Badu 2021). Crisis communication is the process of exchanging or sharing crisis-related data, information, and knowledge between different target groups, such as regulators, victims, media, and the general public (Coombs 2009). Sharing crisis-related information would help stakeholders to make sense of, decide about, react to, and learn from the crisis (Boin et al. 2016). So, crisis communication is required throughout the crisis development stages as crisis communication becomes an asset that facilitates continuous attention to a crisis.

In the pre-crisis phase, creating a communication network is vital for prevention since collecting as much risk-related information as possible is useful. Coombs (1999) terms this the 'crisis sensing network'. A broader crisis sensing network could help evaluate a crisis event more accurately and effectively. This approach is critical in sensing slow-burning crises (Blondin and Boin 2020). Indeed,

preventing all crises is difficult. This is why a crisis management plan is needed to prepare for potential crises. In such a plan, tasks like "what to do and who will do it" are specified. It is crucial that this plan is communicated to all pertinent parties. Communication during a crisis should take the form of an open dialogue between crisis actors that is welcoming, respectful of one another, and safe enough for all participants to express themselves, ask questions, share ideas, acquire knowledge, and give useful feedback regarding potential crisis threats and responses (Palenchar 2005; Weick and Sutcliffe 2015; Badu 2021). An open dialogue strategy increases stakeholder involvement, fosters cooperation, and may encourage people to act on their fear of the potential crisis. This is crucial for attracting sustainable attention from all actors. According to Roberto et al. (2009), when there is a breakdown in communication among stakeholders, they are more likely to ignore the risk and messages related to the crisis.

Policymakers must pay close attention to the methods, content, and channel through which information is shared with other crisis actors during the acute crisis phase (Coombs 2009). As the primary goal of crisis communication is to support meaning-making and decision-making processes, policymakers must make every effort to provide stakeholders with quick (timely), accurate, and consistent information. Rasmussen (1997) has argued that attention to safety protocols can be achieved this way, as leaders show that they have control of the processes to reduce the impacts of the threat on people and the environment.

Providing timely and accurate information implies that the crisis team must get its message out quickly because a crisis creates a knowledge vacuum, and stakeholders must know what is happening. For example, the media needs to make a story of the crisis, and if the crisis team does not communicate with the media quickly enough, the media will shift to other sources. As a result, if the crisis team takes too long to tell their story, someone else will. Providing prompt information is essential because, occasionally, media reports may be unreliable and biased. Slow-burning crises are unpredictable and dynamic, making it challenging for crisis managers to reach out to other stakeholders in a timely manner when they only want to share verified and accurate information. Crisis managers, according to Coombs (2009), should be willing to admit to stakeholders that they do not know enough about the crisis and make a commitment to share more relevant information as it becomes available.

Being open and transparent during crisis communication helps to avoid agitation from other crisis actors. Some challenges associated with openness and transparency are fear of others' feedback, lack of understanding, and inadequate information about the crisis event and the appropriate processes for handling it. For instance, some crisis managers

perceive that being open and transparent when little is known about the crisis could cause stress and panic among crisis actors, especially the citizenry (Quarantelli 1993). However, research indicates that people learn to adjust their behavior when information is shared openly with them and that panic occurs when crisis-related information is withheld and then suddenly released by third parties such as the media (Helsloot and Ruitenberg 2004; Quarantelli 1993; Badu 2021). These arguments imply that open and transparent policymakers assist crisis actors in being aware of the threats and mitigation measures. This could aid crisis managers in the long run in establishing and maintaining trust.

Factors influencing the perception of trustworthiness during crises

The concept of trust is far from straightforward. Trust is frequently referred to as a “social glue” in relationships, groups, and societies because it connects people and facilitates thoughts, motives, and behaviours that advance collective goals (Van Lange 2015).

There are many forms of trust. For instance, Uslaner (1999) argued that trust could be classified into three ways: particularized, generalized, and institutionalized. The basis for particularized trust is having a shared identity or familiarity resulting from personal relationships with family or friends, where repeated situations provide strong incentives for cooperative behaviour (Györfy 2018; Uslaner 1999). From this view, trust is built based on information and experience, a somewhat “knowledge-based trust” (Yamigishi and Yamigishi 1994). A particularized trust is predicated on the idea that group members adhere to the same standards for cooperation. Larson (2004) has argued that when people only trust members of their own group, they may develop category-based trust, which is often based on stereotypes (“us” and “them”). This attitude has the potential to devolve into immoral familism, especially when the common good of society is sacrificed in the interest of the small group. From this view, a particularized trust can develop into a strategic one (Uslaner 2002), where people are only willing to cooperate with people they know to achieve their interests.

On the contrary, generalized trust is when people trust people outside their social group. It is often construed as a moralistic trust because it is often based upon the idea that trust has a moral dimension where one has to treat others as if they are trustworthy (Uslaner 2002; Fukayama 1995). Everyone demands trust since there is a belief that we all share similar fundamental moral values and we expect honest behavior from others. Uslaner (2002) posits that a sense of optimism and control serves as the fundamental underpinning of generalized trust and is what sets it apart from the particularized trust. Seligman (1997) expressed that

those with optimism do not fear being taken advantage of by strangers. They have a positive outlook, which encourages them to continue trusting others. Disappointing experiences are considered temporary, as the next interaction is anticipated to be much more cooperative.

Institutionalized trust is centered on people’s trust in formal institutions such as parliaments, governments, and courts that are in charge of creating, implementing, and upholding laws (Györfy 2018). According to Ullman-Margalit (2004), institutions stand for trust as institutions are able to effectively and efficiently carry out their public role. Institutions are related to legitimacy. However, because they have the potential to abuse their power, one cannot always have faith in the state or its institutions. Hardin (2006) states that distrust rather than trust is the default attitude toward the state. Institutions may directly impact generalized trust, but they may also have a significant indirect impact. For example, generalized trust will decline when an institution such as the police or the court fosters inequalities among citizens. Thus, excessive inequalities lead to society’s polarization, resulting in decreased shared values (Uslaner 2002; Rothstein and Uslaner 2005). However, trust in institutions is also necessary to have effective policies for reducing inequality.

Trust is a crucial factor during crisis management since coordination and cooperation may not yield successful outcomes in the absence of trust (Györfy 2018; Ring and Van de Ven 1992; Mayer et al. 1995; Das and Teng 1998; Serva et al. 2005; Boin et al. 2005; Siegrist et al. 2007; Siegrist and Zingg 2014; Korsgaard et al. 2015; Chan 2021). However, building trust takes time (Slovic 1993; Seligman 1997) and depends on many factors, including delivering on promises, transparency, and displaying real commitment to ensure a good quality of life for citizens (Baradei 2020; Badu 2021).

According to Györfy (2018), the inability of policymakers to handle crises leads to punitive conditionality, resistance from crisis stakeholders, and a lack of trust from crisis actors. In a generalized trustworthy society where people have more confidence in their policymakers’ ability to manage crises, the policymakers’ capacity to cope with an emergency will increase (Christensen et al. 2016). A crisis can be a trust test for policymakers. When people trust government agencies that are supposed to be protecting them, they become less worried. But trust is fragile; it grows gradually and is easily lost by a small mistake. It might take a while to regain trust once it has been broken. Trust can occasionally be lost and never regained (Slovic 1993). Ullman-Margalit (2004) has argued that relying on trust when managing a crisis presupposes two things: first, the ability and willingness of the other actors to fulfil their obligations, and second, acting on trust may help you build a reputation.

The different phases of crisis management require different types of trust too. For instance, Györfly (2018) has argued that personalized trust among key actors is crucial during the pre-crisis stage. Institutionalized and generalized trust becomes essential during the acute crisis phase. And in the long-term prospects, a generalized trust plays a significant role. Generalized trust is a strong asset as it influences personalized and institutionalized trust. For there to be faith and confidence in a message sent during the acute crisis phase, generalized trust between the government and citizens is necessary at the pre-crisis stage. People become less skeptical when they believe in the government organizations that are supposed to inform and protect them (Ropeik 2002). Thus, the less we trust the people informing us, the people protecting us, or the process determining our exposure to a crisis, the more skeptical we become. As a result, there may be a decrease in the attention given to and subsequent action taken in response to a crisis.

Discussions

Amplifying attention for the creeping crisis: interplay between communication strategies and trust restoration efforts

Crisis management is usually considered critical decision-making under high uncertainty (Kruke 2012). It is the process by which an organization deals with a crisis before, during, and after its occurrence. These processes involve identifying, assessing, understanding, and coping with a crisis. Crisis management usually happens in challenging contexts, as a crisis is also often characterized by the need for a broad range of efforts and, at the same time, by resource scarcity. Ansell et al. (2010) contend that quick stakeholder support, involvement, and cooperation are necessary because each stakeholder must rely on the actions of the others.

These are initial signs crucial for gaining the required attention for slow-burning crises. Usually, stakeholders see coordination as ‘managing dependencies between activities’ (Malone and Crowston 1994). This suggests that coordination processes may fail if stakeholders do not realize and understand the role of their actions and their impacts on other stakeholders’ activities and the crisis in general. The high levels of uncertainty, urgency, and stress associated with a slow-burning crisis make it difficult to plan coordinated activities, and this has an impact on how long the required attention will be given. Similarly, the sustainability of attention would be at risk if the coordination process failed due to a lack of resources and the involvement of numerous actors with divergent viewpoints.

Communication and trust are two key components of solving coordination problems. Koop and Lodge (2014) have argued that improving coordination through communication and trust will enable interdependent actors to better adjust their actions and decisions in order to achieve a specific goal. For example, establishing a communication network among various crisis actors during the pre-crisis phase is essential for detecting threats and preparing for them (Coombs 1999; Blondin and Boin 2020; Roberto et al. 2009). Given that they were all a part of the sensing network, there is a higher likelihood that the actors would pay the necessary attention to such threats. For crisis actors to pay attention and adjust to the changing crisis during the acute phase, it is essential to quickly, accurately, and consistently share information and responses. This could mean the difference between life and death for crisis actors depending on how they pay attention and respond to the crisis.

In the post-crisis phase, the society aims to return to normal, as the crisis is now considered a lower priority (Turner 1978). At this stage, crisis communication is vital since crisis actors need to know the planned recovery processes, the causes of the crisis, and the actions taken to prevent a repeat of the crisis. Such information is vital for them to learn from the crisis and build back better. However, trust between the stakeholders is necessary to generate the appropriate attention for the crisis; excellence in crisis communication alone is insufficient. Official messages from less trustworthy sources would be questioned or disregarded. Furthermore, messages from reliable sources that are not clearly communicated to other actors are more likely to be misunderstood or ignored. This presupposes that trustworthiness and crisis communication are more integrated.

Therefore, building trust and communicating effectively can amplify or attenuate the attention given to a crisis. Crisis management challenges deepen when there is no alignment of information that is shared across stakeholders (Boin 2019); they intensify as different actors try to make meaning of the crisis (Boin et al. 2016). Crisis actors can attenuate or amplify information related to the crisis to serve their interests (Kasperson et al. 1988). This could result in distrust among crisis actors.

Crisis communication factors such as openness, transparency, accuracy, consistency, and the timing of information sharing can improve policymakers’ trustworthiness (Davies et al. 2003; Boin et al. 2005). Likewise, trust-building factors such as collaborating and coordinating with stakeholders and respecting crisis actors’ socio-cultural norms and values can influence the willingness of people to listen, accept, and adapt to the crisis responses communicated (Baradei 2020; Chan 2021; Badu 2021).

We believe the nexus between crisis communication and trustworthiness could amplify or attenuate the required

attention needed for a slow-burning crisis. Leaders cannot put one before the other in order to successfully garner the attention needed to manage a slow-burning crisis. This connection is more akin to the “chicken and egg” conundrum because crisis communication and trust are complementary aspects of crisis management. One cannot pick one over the other. They affect how much the crisis actors pay attention to it and, more importantly, they affect how difficult the crisis management procedures will be.

Towards a crisis management typology based on levels of trust and crisis communication

The literature on crisis management shows that leaders perceived as trustworthy communicators before, during, and after a crisis are a vital asset (‘t Hart et al., 1993; Quarantelli 1993; Slovic 1993; Weick 2001; Coombs and Holladay 2002; Perry and Lindell 2003; Boin et al. 2016; Koop and Lodge 2014; Boin 2019). When there is a crisis, and many stakeholders perceive the crisis manager as being trustworthy, such trust becomes a source of strength for leaders to do better (Slovic 1993; Ropeik 2002; Christensen et al. 2016; Györfly 2018; Badu 2021). However, leaders cannot rely solely on their credibility to get things done; they also need to find the appropriate way to interpret the crisis and convey the processes to all stakeholders (Coombs 1999; Boin et al. 2016; Comfort and Kapucu 2006; Comfort 2007; Brugh et al. 2019). Therefore, building trust and communicating with stakeholders is key in crisis management. *But how does these two concepts influence the creeping crisis management difficulties?*

We contend that crisis communication and trustworthiness are equally important; they influence each other in many ways throughout the crisis management process. For instance, if people do not trust the source of information, well-planned crisis communication and interventions will fail. Likewise, if trusted policymakers delay sharing their intervention with other crisis actors, they risk failing to implement them. In this line of thinking, strengthening the effectiveness of creeping crisis management requires a connection between trust-building and crisis communication factors. One should not be prioritized over the other. Policymakers’ credibility is influenced by their openness, transparency, accuracy, consistency, and the timing of information sharing during a crisis. (Davies et al. 2003; Boin et al. 2005, 2016; Coombs 1999; Alexander 2002; Comfort 2007; Badu 2021). Likewise, the ability of stakeholders to pay attention to and accept the communicated emergency responses is also influenced by trust-building factors like involving them through collaboration and coordination and respecting their socio-cultural norms and values (Dynes 1993; Alexander 2002; Dekker and Suparamaniam 2005; Comfort 2007;

Ansell et al. 2010; Christensen et al. 2016; Györfly 2018; Baradei 2020; Badu 2021). Therefore, trustworthiness and communication are crucial for stakeholders to pay attention to, accept, and make meaning to the crisis and its associated responses.

Trustworthiness and crisis communication are complementary. Prioritizing one over another in a slow-burning crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or climate change, would present more crisis management difficulties. Therefore, based on the degree of trust established and the soundness of communication among the crisis actors, it is possible to predict the varieties of creeping crisis management difficulties that policymakers would encounter.

We see the activities and processes that affect trustworthiness and effective crisis communication as dynamic rather than static processes. Thus, crisis communication activities such as being transparent and open and providing accurate, consistent, and timely information among stakeholders are dynamic. Also, engaging, collaborating, coordinating, and respecting stakeholders’ values should be considered continuous activities influencing trust building. All these trust-building and crisis communication activities develop over time, influencing how creeping crisis managers perform their tasks. At one moment, these determinants (communication [C] and trust [T]) could become high [T_H, C_H] or low [T_L, C_L] based on how crisis actors will approach the crisis, initiative (response), or events that may occur.

Four creeping crisis management settings (See Fig. 2) can be identified when these developmental levels (high or low) and determinants (trustworthiness and crisis communication) are combined.

1. Controllable crisis management settings: a crisis management setting where policymakers are perceived to be more trustworthy (high trust) and more successful communicators (high communication).
2. Uncertain crisis management settings: a crisis management setting where policymakers are perceived to be more trustworthy (high trust) but less successful communicators (low communication).
3. Complex crisis management settings: a crisis management setting where policymakers are perceived as good communicators (high communication) but less trustworthy managers (low trust).
4. Uncontrollable crisis management settings: a crisis management setting where policymakers are perceived as poor communicators (low communication) and untrustworthy (low trust).

Controllable crisis management settings present a clear-cut and less difficult-to-manage crisis environment because crisis communication activities are highly effective (high), and

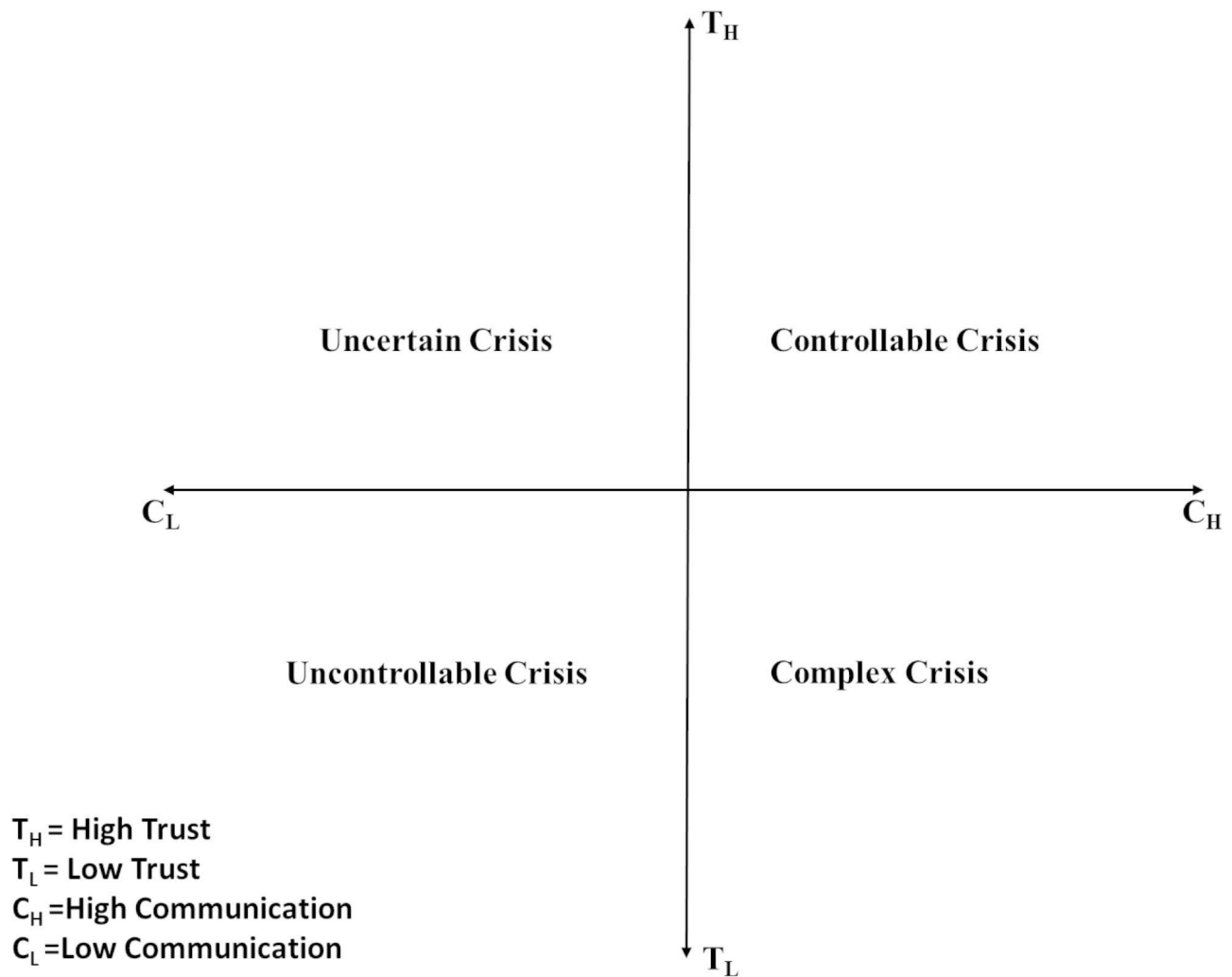


Fig. 2 Towards a crisis management typology based on the level of trust and crisis communication

all crisis actors are highly trustworthy. Policymakers can successfully carry out their duties in a crisis when they are viewed as more trustworthy and effective communicators. This makes it simple to attract the necessary attention to the crisis. Making meaning of the crisis and implementing initiatives and responses become less challenging; the crisis event becomes easy to control or manage in such a setting. Crisis actors are willing to follow the crisis responses since such responses make sense to them (Boin et al. 2016; Badu 2021), and they trust the policymakers in charge to do a good job (Ropeik 2002; Slovic 1993; Möllering 2006; Baradei 2020; Roberto et al. 2009). As a result, concerns like stakeholder interests and value trade-offs are all properly addressed (Kruke and Olsen 2011; Christensen et al. 2016). Collaborative and coordinative activities become less challenging since policymakers are perceived as trustworthy actors who provide open, transparent, timely, accurate, and

consistent information to all stakeholders (Quarantelli 1993; Helsloot and Ruitenberg 2004; Kruke and Olsen 2011; Baradei 2020; Blondin and Boin 2020; Badu 2021). In this crisis management setting, all stakeholders have collective knowledge, understanding, and acceptance of the crisis and the adaptive responses. Crisis management is seen as a shared responsibility, as each stakeholder performs their respective responsibilities.

Uncertain crisis management settings present a more difficult-to-manage crisis environment as this setting is coupled with high trust but poor crisis communication. Although the crisis actors might regard each other as being trustworthy, they still face a challenge as far as communication is concerned. Generalized trust may be a factor in the high level of confidence displayed by all crisis actors. However, crisis managers must also excel in crisis communication; they cannot rely solely on their credibility. Poor

crisis communication among stakeholders leads to uncertainty in crisis management. The dynamic development of the crisis event makes it difficult for decision-makers to exchange information quickly and accurately. Most of the time, there are uncertainties surrounding the crisis, the initiative (response), or other potential side effects of the crisis event. These uncertainties may be due to a lack of information, attention, understanding, or undifferentiated alternatives regarding the responses to implement (Lipshitz and Strauss 1997). The uncertainties could influence how openly, accurately, consistently, and quick information is shared. When faced with this challenge, we believe policymakers should be forthright and inform stakeholders that they do not have complete information about the crisis and are working to find out more about it. Crisis managers must then make decisions to address the uncertainties. However, failing to provide answers to the uncertainties could also be interpreted as incompetence, which would reduce stakeholders' confidence in policymakers.

Complex crisis management settings also present a more difficult-to-manage environment, coupled with effective crisis communication and low stakeholder trustworthiness. People can understand and make meaning about the crisis and its threats because so much information is available about it. Policymakers may identify clear crisis responses and draw sufficient attention to the crisis. However, there would still be management challenges, particularly when implementing the identified responses. The possibility of mutual mistrust between the actors increases the likelihood of crisis management difficulties. This indicates that the receivers of crisis communication do not trust the communicator. Sometimes, this lack of trust stems from previous distrust developed over time, especially in the pre-crisis stage. Distrust could also occur during the acute crisis phase because of policymakers' poor decisions and management approaches ('t Hart et al., 1993; Badu 2021). In a complex crisis setting where trust has been broken, all actors involved in the crisis management process would want to carefully scrutinize the words and deeds of the untrusted policymaker. This could affect how stakeholders react to crisis messages and carry out the identified crisis responses. This illustrates how fragile but extremely important trust is. It usually takes a while to create trust, but one accident or mistake can completely destroy it in a split second. Trust may therefore take a long time to regain once it has been damaged. Sometimes a broken trust cannot be repaired.

Uncontrollable crisis management settings present an unclear and extremely difficult-to-manage environment that is coupled with poor communication and low stakeholder trust levels. Uncontrollable crisis settings are simultaneously associated with uncertain and complex crisis management difficulties. Policymakers are perceived as

bad communicators and untrustworthy leaders. Due to the uncertainties surrounding the crisis, responses, and subsequent events, policymakers find it challenging to share crisis information openly, timely, accurately, and consistently. Collectively comprehending, accepting, and giving meaning to the crisis is challenging. The crisis and how to handle it are not being given any collective attention. Every stakeholder frames the crisis on their own terms and wants to implement their own preferred responses. The lack of trust in each other increases the crisis management difficulties. It is constantly put to the test and debated whether policymakers are trustworthy. There is no such thing as generalized trust, and institutionalized trust is not something to talk about. Dependence on particularized trust in this situation exacerbates challenges with the "us" and "them" stereotypes because some crisis actors may think that identified crisis responses are ways to target them. In order to lessen the challenges of crisis management, policymakers must be flexible, enhance coordination, and excel as trustworthy communicators.

We have shown that it is possible to classify crisis management difficulties based on trustworthiness and crisis communication. Since trust and communication are developmental factors that can be high or low, the state of a crisis management setting may change over time. The time component is, therefore, essential to our crisis management typology. For instance, a crisis management setting may be considered uncontrollable in the initial stages due to low trust and communication among actors, but as time goes on, developments could increase the level of trust and communication and change the status from an uncontrollable crisis management setting to a complex or uncertain crisis management setting. For this to happen, it is crucial to integrate trust-building and good communication factors as part of the activities and strategies used in each crisis phase (pre-crisis, acute, and post-crisis). Policymakers who cannot integrate positive trust-building and good communication factors with their crisis management strategies are more likely to mismanage a controllable crisis into a worse one, such as a complex, uncertain, or uncontrollable one.

Further research

Our proposed typology is currently on a conceptual level, and we hope that subsequent research could examine how this typology could be applied to empirical cases like the management of pandemics or climate change. Such empirical studies could use our proposed crisis management typology to examine, for instance, what are the successful cases of creeping crisis management. And how do different types of trust impact creeping crisis management difficulties? We

hope such studies could help explore the balance between crisis communication and trust during crisis management.

Conclusion

The purpose of this conceptual paper was to add to the ongoing discussions about creeping crisis management as framed by Boin et al. (2020): *What determines the level of attention for creeping crises?* (pg. 9) and *how to manage creeping crises* (pg. 11). Therefore, we set out to contribute by; (1) conceptualizing factors essential to influence how creeping crises could gain the necessary attention and; (2) proposing a crisis management typology to aid crisis managers in managing the difficulties associated with creeping crises.

How to garner enough attention and manage creeping crises is understudied in the crisis literature. So, our paper contributes to the existing crisis management theories, especially in addressing the difficulties of managing slow-burning or creeping crises. Our conceptual paper provides insights into how crisis communication and trust factors could be a tool to amplify or attenuate the level of attention given to slow-burning crises and how such factors could influence crisis management difficulties. Furthermore, we have argued that crisis communication and trustworthiness complement each other, making prioritizing one over the other hard. Therefore, we contend that crisis communication and trustworthiness are two critical determinants of the effectiveness of crisis management. We have proposed a crisis management typology based on how crisis actors trust and communicate among themselves. We contend that crisis communication and trustworthiness may determine whether the crisis management processes would be controllable, uncertain, complex, or uncontrollable.

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Data availability Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

Declarations

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