CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521607337 - The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership under Pressure
Arjen Boin, Paul't Hart, Eric Stern and Bengt Sundelius
Frontmatter
More information

The Politics of Crisis Management

Crisis management has become a defining feature of contemporary governance. In times of crisis, communities and members of organizations expect their leaders to minimize the impact of the crisis at hand, while critics and bureaucratic competitors try to seize the moment to blame incumbent rulers and their policies. In this extreme environment, policy makers must somehow establish a sense of normality, and foster collective learning from the crisis experience. In this uniquely comprehensive analysis, the authors examine how leaders deal with the strategic challenges they face, the political risks and opportunities they encounter, the errors they make, the pitfalls they need to avoid, and the paths away from crisis they may pursue. This book is grounded in over a decade of collaborative, cross-national case study research, and offers an invaluable multidisciplinary perspective. This is an original and important contribution from experts in public policy and international security.

ARJEN BOIN is an Associate Professor at Leiden University, Department of Public Administration. He is the author of *Crafting Public Institutions* (2001) and co-editor, with Rosenthal and Comfort, of *Managing Crises: Threats, Dilemmas, Opportunities* (2001).

PAUL 'T HART is senior fellow, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, and Professor of Public Administration at the Utrecht School of Governance, Utrecht University. His publications include *Understanding Policy Fiascoes* (1996), *Beyond Groupthink* (1997), and *Success and Failure in Public Governance* (2001).

ERIC STERN is the Director of CRISMART, acting Professor of Government at the Swedish National Defence College, as well as Associate Professor of Government at Uppsala University. He is the author of *Crisis Decisionmaking: A Cognitive Institutional Approach* (1999).

BENGT SUNDELIUS is the Founding Director of CRISMART and Professor of Government at Uppsala University. He is Chief Scientist of the Swedish Emergency Management Agency and responsible for promoting research in the area of homeland security.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521607337 - The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership under Pressure
Arjen Boin, Paul't Hart, Eric Stern and Bengt Sundelius
Frontmatter
More information

The Politics of Crisis Management

Public Leadership under Pressure

Arjen Boin
Paul 't Hart
Eric Stern
Bengt Sundelius

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521607337 - The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership under Pressure
Arjen Boin, Paul't Hart, Eric Stern and Bengt Sundelius
Frontmatter
More information

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521607339

©Arjen Boin, Paul 't Hart, Eric Stern, Bengt Sundelius, 2005

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2005

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN-13 978-0-521-84537-3 hardback
ISBN-10 0-521-84537-8 hardback
ISBN-13 978-0-521-60733-9 paperback
ISBN-10 0-521-60733-7 paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this book, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521607337 - The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership under Pressure
Arjen Boin, Paul't Hart, Eric Stern and Bengt Sundelius
Frontmatter
More information

Contents

List of figures and table *page* vii
Acknowledgments ix

1 Crisis management in political systems: five leadership challenges 1
- 1.1 Crisis management and public leadership 1
- 1.2 The nature of crisis 2
- 1.3 The ubiquity of crisis 4
- 1.4 Crisis management: leadership perspectives 7
- 1.5 Leadership in crisis: five critical tasks 10

2 Sense making: grasping crises as they unfold 18
- 2.1 What the hell is going on? 18
- 2.2 Barriers to crisis recognition: organizational limitations 19
- 2.3 Psychological dimensions of sense making: stress and performance 28
- 2.4 Precarious reality-testing: constraints 30
- 2.5 Conditions for reliable reality-testing 35
- 2.6 Conclusion 37

3 Decision making: critical choices and their implementation 42
- 3.1 The myth of chief executive choice 42
- 3.2 Leaders as crisis decision makers 43
- 3.3 Leaders and their crisis teams: group dynamics 45
- 3.4 How governmental crisis decisions "happen" 51
- 3.5 From decisions to responses: the importance of crisis coordination 56
- 3.6 Putting crisis leadership in its place 63

4 Meaning making: crisis management as political communication 69
- 4.1 Crisis communication as politics 69
- 4.2 Crisis communication in a mediated political world 70
- 4.3 The battle for credibility 78
- 4.4 Meaning-making strategies: symbolic crisis management 82
- 4.5 Conclusion 87

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521607337 - The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership under Pressure
Arjen Boin, Paul't Hart, Eric Stern and Bengt Sundelius
Frontmatter
More information

5 End games: crisis termination and accountability 91
5.1 It ain't over till it's over 91
5.2 The political challenge of crisis termination 93
5.3 Crisis termination and the challenges of accountability 99
5.4 Blame games and the politics of meaning making 103
5.5 Accountability, blame games, and democracy 111

6 Learning from crises and the politics of reform 115
6.1 Never again! 115
6.2 Learning from crisis 117
6.3 Change without learning: crisis as opportunity for reform 122
6.4 Implementing lessons of crisis: an impossible task? 130
6.5 The perils of opportunity: from crisis-induced reforms to reform-induced crises 132

7 How to deal with crisis: lessons for prudent leadership 137
7.1 Introduction 137
7.2 Grasping the nature of crises 138
7.3 Improving crisis sense making 140
7.4 Improving crisis decision making 144
7.5 Improving crisis meaning making 148
7.6 Improving crisis termination 150
7.7 Improving crisis learning and reform craft 152
7.8 Preparing for crises: concluding reflections 156

References 158
Index 176

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521607337 - The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership under Pressure
Arjen Boin, Paul't Hart, Eric Stern and Bengt Sundelius
Frontmatter
More information

Figures and Table

FIGURES

5.1 Four ideal-typical states of crisis closure *page* 98
5.2 Actor choices in crisis-induced blame games 104
6.1 Alternative post-crisis futures 127

TABLE

5.1 Playing the blame game: argumentative tactics 106

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521607337 - The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership under Pressure
Arjen Boin, Paul't Hart, Eric Stern and Bengt Sundelius
Frontmatter
More information

Acknowledgments

The writing of this book took place during the long aftermath of what is now simply known as "9/11." In the very last stages of rewriting this book, the tsunami catastrophe occurred. Whilst proof-reading, "7/7" shocked London. These crises highlight many of the issues we discuss in this book. They illustrate the point we wish to make in this book: crises are political at heart.

When a society or one of its key institutions encounters a major crisis, the politics of public policy making do not – as official rhetoric frequently suggests – abate. On the contrary, political rivalries about the interpretation of fast-moving events and their effects are part of the drama that crisis management entails in modern society.

Crises make and break political careers, shake bureaucratic pecking orders and shape organizational destinies. Crises fix the spotlight on those who govern. Heroes and villains emerge with a speed and intensity quite unknown to "politics as usual." Many seasoned policy makers understand this catalytic momentum in crises. They may talk about national unity and the need for consensus in the face of shared predicaments, but this reflects only part of their reasoning. Their other calculus, less visible to the public, concerns contested issues, dilemmas of responsibility and accountability, of avoiding blame and claiming credit.

This book captures our ideas about the political challenges and realities of public leadership in times of crisis. We formulate five core tasks of crisis leadership: sense making, decision making, meaning making, terminating, and learning. Rather than using this book to report and integrate the manifold research findings, we adopt an argumentative approach. In each chapter, we ask a key question and offer our central claim about the leadership task at hand.

This monograph is an exercise in theory building and policy reflection rather than in theory testing and policy design. It offers a newly integrated approach that social scientists may use to study crises. It also aims at practitioners in and beyond the public sector. We offer them – especially

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521607337 - The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership under Pressure
Arjen Boin, Paul't Hart, Eric Stern and Bengt Sundelius
Frontmatter
More information

in the final chapter – a condensed exploration of perennial pitfalls and strategic considerations that we believe should inform crisis leadership.

This book is the result of a truly collaborative effort. Since 1993, we have worked together in research, teaching, and training on crisis management in the public sector. On the long road toward this publication we have incurred many debts. We take this opportunity to thank our mentors and colleagues; we also wish to pay our dues to those who have pioneered the various strands of crisis research upon which this book builds. Without their contributions, there would be no research-based knowledge to report upon in this book.

Uriel Rosenthal founded the Leiden University Crisis Research Center and nurtured a generic crisis approach to all types of adversity. The late Irving Janis's work on groupthink and leadership was a source of inspiration then and continues to be one today. Alexander George has been without equal as a source of intellectual and personal inspiration. His published works as well as his unselfish support of dozens of young scholars in many countries provide the standard for academics. Peg Hermann introduced us to the vast intellectual reservoirs of political psychology, where we have found great colleagues and collaborators such as Tom Preston, Bertjan Verbeek and Yaacov Vertzberger.

In the field of international relations, we have learned a great deal about crisis management from the classics by Ole Holsti, Michael Brecher and collaborators, and Richard Ned Lebow. In the field of disaster sociology, we draw heavily upon the work of Russell Dynes, Henry Quarantelli (who was kind enough to comment upon parts of this book), and their colleagues at the Disaster Research Center, University of Delaware. Our thinking about organizations and crises rests heavily on the work of Karl Weick, Charles Perrow, and the late Barry Turner. In recent years, we have enjoyed intellectual exchanges with Todd LaPorte and his colleagues of the so-called Berkeley Group of high reliability studies. We are particularly grateful to Paul Schulman for his cogent comments on an earlier version of this book. In the fields of public administration and public policy, our main beacons include the works of Yehezkel Dror, Richard Rose, and Aaron Wildavsky. Philip Selznick, Fred Greenstein, and Erwin Hargrove shaped our thinking on public leadership. We have found many kindred spirits in the emerging multidisciplinary European community of crisis studies, but we are especially grateful to Patrick Lagadec and Boris Porfiriev for enduring cooperation and friendship.

Martijn Groenleer, Sanneke Kuipers, Alan McConnell, and Mick Moran read the entire manuscript and saved us from many errors of all imaginable sorts. The anonymous reviewers provided us with

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521607337 - The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership under Pressure
Arjen Boin, Paul't Hart, Eric Stern and Bengt Sundelius
Frontmatter
More information

constructive comments, which helped us shape our argument. Werner Overdijk advised us on the operational sides of crisis management. Noortje van Willegen and Wieteke Zwijnenberg skillfully dealt with footnotes and references.

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support we have received throughout the years. On the Dutch side, the main funders include the Dutch National Science Organization (NWO), the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences (KNAW), and the Department of Public Administration of Leiden University. On the Swedish side, the Swedish National Defence College, the Swedish Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), and the Swedish Institute of International Affairs have been particularly supportive.

Finally, we express our gratitude to our students and colleagues. They have had to endure our peculiar fascination for understanding the inflamed politics of crisis and our periodic attempts to test our ideas on their working lives. They have offered us their analytical labours, their ideas, their patience, and often their critical comments. In the Netherlands, this goes for our close collaborators at the Department of Public Administration of Leiden University and at the Utrecht School of Governance. In Sweden, the same goes for our collaborators at the Department of Government of Uppsala University and particularly at CRISMART, the national center for crisis management research and training at the Swedish National Defence College in Stockholm. There are too many to mention here. We thank them all for their enthusiasm and skills in coping well with those minor office crises we may have induced. Finally, we thank John Haslam for his patience and professional support in seeing this book through publication.

Leiden, Utrecht, and Stockholm
Summer 2005

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org