Call for Papers Special Issue on

Crisis Prone Organisations and Systems

Since pioneering work by Pauchant and Mitroff (1992), it has been assumed that the potential for a crisis in an organisation can be established in advance, so that steps can then be taken to reduce or eliminate this risk.

This belief that firm behaviour can be predicted promoted the concept of firm reliability in the organisational behaviour literature. This holds that an organisation’s internal processes, operations, culture and external relationships establish a high probability of reliable, incident-free operations even when using the most complex and risky technologies (La Porte, 1996). These firms are characterised by clear objectives, appreciation of the risks and economic benefit of their activities, very high technical competence, stringent quality assurance, rewards for identifying error and high levels of organisational slack. A further development was the management discipline built around ‘high reliability organisations’. Typical examples are nuclear powered aircraft carriers such as the USS Ronald Reagan, which is 333 metres long and displaces over 100,000 tonnes, and holds a crew of 6,000, 90 fighter aircraft and two nuclear reactors that can power a medium sized city. America’s largest naval vessel is hugely complex but operates incident-free.

Two different concepts provide challenges to this view. The first was proposed by Perrow (1984) in the intuition that modern technologies are so dangerous that accidents would routinely occur: nuclear plants and other complex, closely coupled systems could expect to be plagued by ‘normal accidents’.

The second challenge comes from the nature of organisations themselves. Our observation of firms, for instance, is that many of their operational and financial processes are hard to predict because they are impacted by multiple internal and external factors that are hard to forecast and have indeterminate impacts. This, of course, makes firms chaotic systems in that they exhibit “aperiodic deterministic behavior which is very sensitive to its initial conditions”. If this is true, then firm behaviour is not predictable over the medium term.

These ideas of a predictable bias to high or low reliability in organisations can be extended to systems, including those that are close-coupled and operate globally. Examples include commodity supply chains such as food and energy, payment systems, and infrastructure networks.

This Special Issue seeks to inform decision makers and optimise risk management strategies by generating analysis on identifying crisis prone organisations and systems. We welcome contributions that address topics including the following:

- how can organisational and system crises be identified in advance?
- how and why do such crises arise and persist?
- how do firms bring about their own crises?
- what traits define crisis-prone and high-reliability organisations and systems?

The emphasis is on contributions that inform a wide base of policy and decision makers about key measures that assist them to anticipate risks in organisations and systems. Whilst theoretical approaches can add value, we believe that the concepts of a crisis prone organisation are reasonably well established and our preference is for articles that provide firm evidence that supports pro-active identification of crisis prone organisations and systems, and appropriate responses.

Submissions

Manuscripts for publication in the special issue should be submitted before 1 January 2008 in accordance with the Author Guidelines of the JCCM. Papers will be blind refereed according to the JCCM’s normal processes. For further information on the Special Issue please contact the editor of the JCCM or the Guest Editor: Les Coleman, Department of Finance, the University of Melbourne, Australia (les.coleman@unimelb.edu.au).

REFERENCES

