

# Lessons for everyday leaders from crisis research

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# Roots of crisis management studies

- 1940s Disaster studies
- 1960s Executive decision making
- 1980s Industrial Accidents
- 1990s PR, Communication, apologia

# Defining crisis

1. Something really bad is happening (or about to) => *major threat/damage* to a community's essential structures and values
2. There is *no time to lose* in responding to it
3. There is fundamental *uncertainty* about why this is happening, how it may evolve, and what can be done to curb it

# Crises and normalcy

- Higher stress levels
- Bigger consequences
- Not solved by more resources alone
- Collaboration and communication challenges
- Medial and public scrutiny

# Crisis as opportunity

- Every crisis also harbors opportunities (for some, not all, actors involved)
  - Display organizational skills
  - Push reform agenda
  - Foster innovation/learning

# Lessons from crisis research

- Prevention or anticipation
- Experience is the key asset
- Mental preparedness and sense-making
- Flexibility to reconsider initial interpretations
- Impact of analogies
- Awareness and self reflection

# Lessons from crisis research II

- Organisations are problems and solutions
- The centralization thesis
- Situational decision making
- Capacity rarely meets expectations



# Fair evaluation of crisis management

- Pre-assigned goals/objectives
- Basic values (legal, ethical organizational)
- Successful outcomes visavi
  - Circumstances
  - Other actors
  - Media image and public opinion
  - Research

# Impediments to learning

- Differing opinions
- Crisis responsibility
- Scapegoating
- Reorganizing

# Swedish Defence University

a typical slow-burning crisis in the university sector



# Crisis: The SEDU research fraud

## **Crisis run-up**

**2007** Students detect plagiarism in textbook – no investigation.

**2008** New principal takes over – no action

Professors conduct private investigation – report the case to the Science Council

**2009** SC delivers heavy critique –

SEDU line organization frame it as employment law, not quality in core output

State disciplinary board advice – No legal penalty as 2 year limitation passed

Professor back in duty

Conflicts between departments and groups emerge

## **Crisis proper**

**2010** Principal response – Accusations of discrimination when staff speak negatively on the issue

Staff members reported, warnings of reduced pay, threats of resignation

instigate conflict with senior staff instead of championing research quality

Issues come to a head as principal discharge department head

Discontent, petitions, bad press, lobbying at the board of directors, government offices.

Government removes the principal according to the request of the Board

## **Crisis aftermath**

**2011** New principal at SEDU

Bailed the professor out of his contract

Crisis resolution

# Thank you for your attention!

