



HAL
open science

Understanding Organizational Crisis Management Processes: an analytical framework drawn from a case study in a public company

Sébastien Gand, Aurélien Acquier, Mathias Szpirglas

► **To cite this version:**

Sébastien Gand, Aurélien Acquier, Mathias Szpirglas. Understanding Organizational Crisis Management Processes: an analytical framework drawn from a case study in a public company. EURAM, May 2005, Munich, Germany. pp.1-25. hal-00748845

HAL Id: hal-00748845

<https://hal.science/hal-00748845>

Submitted on 6 Nov 2012

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Track 4: Responsibility in public management

Understanding Organizational Crisis Management Processes : an analytical framework drawn from a case study in a public company

Sébastien Gand, Aurélien Acquier et Mathias Szpirglas

Centre for Management Sciences, Ecole des Mines de Paris, France

gand@ensmp.fr, acquier@ensmp.fr, szpirgla@ensmp.fr

+33 1 40 51 90 96 - +33 1 40 46 03 01 (fax)

This article investigates a case of crisis management in a French public company. Combining stakeholder management and a knowledge-based perspective, we propose an analytical framework of organizational crisis management processes. We will first show how the crisis can be analyzed as a collapse of existing frames of collective action, and then present the crisis management processes in details. Our analytical framework leads us to distinguish two kinds of actors who played different roles in those processes. On the first side, the *crisis cell* (more specifically the crisis communication expert) defined the institutional positioning of the company. This positioning provided a new framework of action, on which organizational actors as well as external stakeholders could rely. On the other side, a critical factor of success of the crisis management relied on its capacity to mobilize various *organizational anchorage points* i.e. specific actors involved in the project before the crisis, as part of their day-to-day activities. Those *anchorage points* were a central element of the coherent display of the crisis positioning towards external stakeholders. But their local knowledge also helped the crisis communication expert to define, adapt and make the undertaken actions evolved. After a detailed analysis of the role of the crisis communication expert and organizational *anchorage points* in the crisis management process, we will present implications and

possible contributions of our analytic framework. Among other things, we will point the need to re-integrate crisis management analysis with long-terms elements of organizational life.

Key words: crisis management, stakeholder management, public organization, institutional positioning, anchorage points.

Introduction

On the night between the 12th and the 13th of February 2003, the tunnel of the building site of a transport company collapsed under a school playground. Hopefully none of the pupils of the school or the workers of the building site was injured. The collapse of the tunnel produced only a dislocation of most of the school playground, and part of the classroom nearby. Everything has fallen into a hole of fifteen meters long and deep which was visible from every buildings around the school. Even if there were no casualties, this event can be described as an organizational crisis. Owing to the important psychological, emotional and material impacts, a crisis management team was immediately set-up by the transport company involved in the crisis.

This paper deals with the way the company managed this crisis. In spite of the many specificities of this case, it provides interesting insights about the way organizations can cope with such complex situations from an operational point of view. Combining a stakeholder descriptive approach (Donaldson and Preston 1995) and a knowledge-based perspective (Hatchuel and Weil 1995), we will propose an analytical framework of organizational crisis management processes. This framework is based on a distinction between two kinds of actors who played different roles in such processes. On the first side, the *crisis cell* (more specifically the crisis communication expert) defined the institutional positioning of the company. This positioning provided a new framework of action, on which organizational actors as well as external stakeholders could rely. On the other side, a critical factor of success

of the crisis management relied on its capacity to mobilize various *organizational* “anchorage points” i.e. specific actors involved in the project before the crisis, as part of their day-to-day activities. As they worked on the project, those actors developed specific knowledge related to a field of expertise and/or to stakeholder relationships (they established specific connexions with some parts of their environment such as residents or the performer-builder).

The role of those “anchorage points” was central in the process. First, they were the nodes between the firm and several stakeholders. Their behavior enabled to cast and ensure the coherence of the institutional positioning towards external stakeholders. Second, their local knowledge also helped the crisis communication expert to define, adapt and make the undertaken actions evolved.

We will present our arguments as follows: first we will briefly present the theoretical frame we use. Second, we will present the crisis and the way it was managed, especially by the expert of the direction of the communication, then defining and underlining the role of “anchorage points” Third, we will discuss the operational and theoretical implications of the analytical framework we propose. Among other things, this framework tend to integrate systematically long-terms elements in crisis management analysis.

I “ Theoretical framework: combining stakeholder perspectives on crisis management and knowledge based perspectives

1.1 Stakeholder perspectives on crisis management

The usual definition of a stakeholder as “any group that can affect or be affected by the achievement of organizational objectives” (Freeman 1984) has first been developed to

understand the relationships between the company and its environment in turbulent situations (Sturdivant 1979; Management Review 1980; Freeman and Reed 1983). Thus, an organizational crisis seems to provide a potentially good case to apply stakeholder perspectives.

However, even if several crisis management works explicitly refer to this theoretical framework, different limitations can be pointed:

Building from the famous typology of Donaldson and Preston, it appears that it is the "normative" strand of the stakeholder theory which has been predominant in those works. This branch of stakeholder thinking states that "the interests of all stakeholders are of **intrinsic value**". That is, each group of stakeholders merits consideration for its own sake and not merely because of its ability to further the interests of some other groups, such as the shareholders" (Donaldson and Preston 1995)). The work of Alpaslan, Mitroff and Green (2004) is good example of this normative import of stakeholder thinking within the field of crisis management. They propose that organizational behavior towards stakeholders range from a "neo-classical approach" -where a group is only considered by the company if it directly contributes to shareholder value- to a "multi-fiduciary approach"-where all legitimate stakeholders are considered on an equal basis-. They then add an instrumental consideration, proposing that those companies that adopt a multi-fiduciary orientation towards stakeholders (or theory-in-use (Argyris and Schön 1978)) will be less likely to experience crises and more likely to recover quickly from crises (Alpaslan, Mitroff et al. 2004).

In this paper, we will depart from these normative considerations, and adopt a "descriptive" standpoint of stakeholder theory (Donaldson and Preston 1995), which appears to have been underrepresented in crisis management use of the stakeholder concept. This descriptive use should go beyond static uses of stakeholder theorizing (Pasquero 1996) and account for

stakeholder dynamics (Beaulieu and Pasquero 2002) and the way they appear as salient to management (Mitchell, Agle et al. 1997).

A second limitation that we will try to avoid in this paper is the tendency to isolate the crisis episode from the rest of organizational life. Such a separation makes it difficult to grasp the gaps but also the links between organization long-term activities and the way a crisis can be managed. In this paper, we will try to follow Ulmer in his attempt to link long-term stakeholder management and crisis management (Ulmer 2001). In his paper, he shows how the institutional positioning of the CEO of a small company favored the management of the crisis when it happened. However, his analysis solely focuses on communication, which is only one part of crisis management. Our analytic framework of operational crisis management will try to account for the complexity and multifaceted aspect of the crisis, combining technological, social-political and psychological dimensions of the crisis (Pearson and Clair 1998).

As a result, our analytic framework should try to provide answers to several important questions that largely remain unanswered, both in the crisis management and stakeholder literature: how is the policy of the company defined and implemented? How are the different stakeholders identified and managed? How difficult is it to define a common line of conduct and traduce it into concrete and coherent actions? To what extent do the former relationships between the company and its stakeholders constrain the crisis management process?

To answer these questions (in particular those related to stakeholder and issues dynamics), it is necessary to move beyond relational perspectives on action and to take into account learning and actors knowledge as a central element to explain the dynamic relationships between stakeholders. This is the reason why we refer to a knowledge based perspective on collective action that we are now going to present.

1.2 A knowledge based perspective on crises

Crises are usually characterised by a collapse of sense and moreover a collapse of frames of reference on which are based collective actions (Weick 1993). Extending Weick's interesting insights about the need of "sensemaking", an analysis of dynamics of actions to cope with crisis seems to be relevant to analyse crisis management as we now develop.

Several authors worked on an epistemology of action. Particularly (Foucault 1984; Hatchuel 2005) propose an analytical framework for action's analysis that relies on the articulation between knowledge (that can be either expertise, symbols or senses, emotions) and relations (that can be a hierarchical, social or ethnic link) (Hatchuel 2005). These two "operators" are interdependent and have to be taken as an axiomatic to think action, i.e. that both knowledge and relation are no-closed repertoires. They are relative to a situation of action.

But a crisis is characterized by an upheaval of the environment where the knowledge of the actors and their relations take place: new issues appear, former knowledge is no longer relevant, new knowledge needs to be produced to cope with the new issues and so the nature of relations evolves. This could mean a change of hierarchical organization or the way people cooperate and coordinate themselves. There is a "metamorphosis of actors" (Hatchuel & Weil, 1995). Following this statement, crisis management should be first considered as the way to build up a new frame of collective action according to the new situation. And an important second step should be the implementation of actions by actors through the new framework. How actors already working before the crisis evolve in the new frame? Does the organization need the creation or the appearance of new actors (such as experts) to deal with this peculiar situation (especially with the new issues)? How do they work collectively to solve the crisis?

So a relationship analysis is necessary but not sufficient to explore the construction of collective action in an organization. There is a need for a knowledge-based perspective to understand then how relations are structured towards the realization of a collective action.

In the case study, we will combine a stakeholder approach as a way of representation of the complexity of the crisis endured and a knowledge-based approach to explain how the company exactly dealt with the different issues involved by the crisis.

II. Towards an analytical framework: nature of the crisis and organizational response processes

In this second part, we will present the crisis and the way it was managed by the company. Starting with a presentation of the crisis, we will try to show the complexity of the situation. When a crisis occurs, one of the great difficulties for the company is to deal coherently with an important flow of dynamic and overlapping issues. In this case, the company had to deal with three interrelated crises. We will present those crises through the issues involved. Rather than managing stakeholders, the company appeared to deal with *issues* to which stakeholders were related. But how to contain this flow of issues?

After this presentation of the crisis situation and its complexity, we will turn to the actors and processes set-up to cope with the crisis. We will concentrate on two central actors in the crisis management : the crisis communication expert and the "anchorage points" We will present their roles in the management of the crisis and the way they interacted to set up the company crisis policy.

2.1 : The crisis as three crises

2.1.1 : Classic accident or real organizational crisis ?

At first sight, it may be hard to consider the collapse of the building site as a "major accident" (Lagadec 1991; Lagadec and Guilhou 2002). Nobody was wounded or killed, and concrete damages (the tunnel and the school which had been partly destroyed by the accident) appear as purely material, and thus easy to repair. In fact, the collapse of a tunnel can be considered as a well-known risk in digging work.

How come the accident was not considered as a "classic accident" (Lagadec 1991; Lagadec and Guilhou 2002) by the public transport company? How to explain the set-up of a crisis organization? Is it legitimate to consider such an accident as an organizational crisis?

In fact, the collapse of the building site and the school had huge psychological impact on both children, parents, and the neighbors nearby. To some extent, for the parents, their children had merely been killed in the accident. This emotional impact was furthered by its human origin (which makes it more difficult to accept than natural disasters (Pearson and Mitroff 1993)) and by the difficulty to identify the causes and the means to cope with the event when it occurred (Pearson and Clair 1998). Even if there were no casualties, this sudden event, induced large scale damage, high costs (social and financial), and generated opened conflicts (Shrivastava 1987; Shrivastava, Mitroff et al. 1988) between the company, the victims and residents. As a result, it appears legitimate to consider this event as an actual organizational crisis.

We are now going to present the nature of the crisis that the company had to manage.

2.1.2 : The crisis as 3 crises structured by different stakes.

The term "crisis" is usually used to describe the event as a whole. In fact, this crisis was composed of different crises that can be identified according to the nature of stakes or issues implied. In the present case, 3 different crises can be identified, depending on the peculiar activities involved to solve them. In this situation, a stakeholder can simultaneously take part and act at different levels of the crisis. Rather than a stakeholder, it is more accurately described as a stakeholder. Here are the different crises identified in the present case:

- **The media crisis** was linked to an information issue. The decision was to communicate about the accident, to make a statement on the situation and to act as a responsible company, even if the company was not the performer builder of the digging-work. This media crisis was handled through mass media communication and public meetings. Stakes-holders involved were journalists, residents, teachers and pupil's parents. This institutional position, the assumed responsibility and the perceived transparency of the firm, combined with the lack of explanations and new information in the first days after the collapse led to a quick disappearance of the news in the media¹. After 3 to 4 days, no more articles appeared in newspapers about the accident.
- **Local crisis:** in parallel to the information issue, it was urgent to start with reparation actions. The local crisis was directed to soothe and make reparations towards direct victims, i.e. residents and what we call "school" related people (composed of teachers and pupil's parents). A block close to the accident was evacuated in the following hours because of risks of collapsing. People were accommodated in hotels found and paid by the company that also took in charge the move. Moreover a bus was settled in the accident's street, so that residents could meet communication or law department executives, to get information about the collapse or complain to the legal department to get compensation, if

¹ And it still has to be remembered that nobody was injured.

need be. Third kind of action towards the residents, company's legal experts visited numerous flats in order to determine compensations. Concerning the school, the firm proposed means of transportation and diverse material helps that made the classes move easier for the town hall administration. The company continued this material help as long as the re-building of the school lasted.

- **Technical crisis:** just after the collapse, the first thing to deal with was to set the premises of the accident in safety. This was dealt in association with legal authorities and the performer builder and led to actions such as the closing of a street and, a bit after, the block's evacuation mentioned above. This type of safety actions done, the project team focused on finding a technical solution to continue the project (to give-up would have been economically disastrous). The work of "redesign" the project ended in a technical solution concerning the "hole" and allowed the pursuing of the project. In fact, this crisis involved stakeholders that had already worked with each other before the collapse: the performer builder, police headquarters, quarries inspection and the town administration in charge of buildings and architecture. The technical crisis stayed actually partly autonomous, in so far as the actors were still the same and that nobody could substitute to them.

However, the resolution of the technical crisis (the objective was to pursue the project) relied on the successful management of the two other crises: these 3 crises were interrelated.

- Media and local crises, both led by the department of communication, allowed the firm to preserve capacities of action to solve the technical crisis, and ultimately to continue the project. As diagnosed by the crisis expert from the direction of the communication, this public « responsible » positioning was a necessary condition to continue the project.

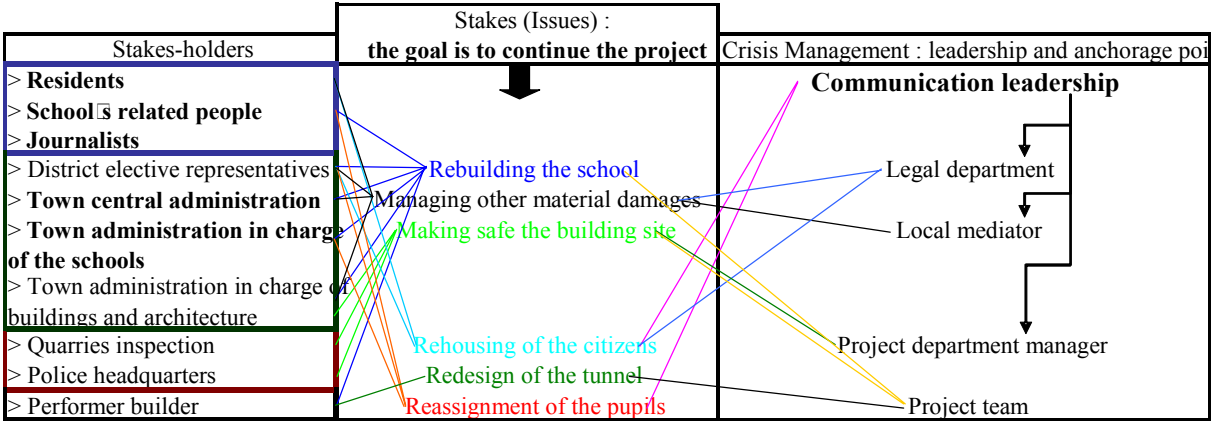
- The media and local crisis could not be treated independently from the technical crisis. The media crisis mobilized technical speeches through company's engineers to "rationalise" what happened, despite and paradoxically because very few information was available. In order to avoid a wave of panic due to the lack of explanations, the direction of the communication mobilised the manager of the project department, an engineer, so that he could explain about the collapse and use appropriate vocabulary.
- The « responsible » positioning was a determinant choice, made at the very beginning of the crisis, highly structuring for following actions, whether in the public, local or technical sphere. It acted like a determinant frame of action. More particularly, this institutional positioning structured the local crisis management.

To sum up, the crisis management due to the collapse of a tunnel under a school can in fact be represented as the management of 3 crises, according to the nature of problems to be solved and the stakeholders linked to these specific problems: a media crisis, a local crisis and a technical crisis.

2.1.3: Analysis: how to deal with a flow of overlapping issues? The complexity of organizational action in a situation of crisis.

From these elements, it appears that in times of crisis, one of the great difficulties for the company is to deal coherently with an important flow of dynamic and overlapping issues. In more conventional times, institutional communication, technical policy and local activities are loosely coupled with each other. In times of crisis, the organization may find itself in front of an uncontrolled flow of new issues which may put into question traditional frontiers inside the organization. In this case, we have seen how the company had to deal with three interrelated crises, defined by the nature of issues involved.

A second idea drawn from these first elements is that *issues* seem to constitute a more relevant unit of analysis of crisis management processes than stakeholders per-se: once the goal was settled by the crisis communication expert (to continue the project and achieve the building in spite of the collapse), issues related to that goal were identified. As a result, the stakeholders were not taken care directly by the crisis management but managed through filters. Those filters were the main issues related to the continuation of the project, and stakeholders were related to them. To cope with those issues, the crisis management leadership mapped some people of the organization interfaced with nearby subjects. We call those persons "anchorage points" because, before the crisis, they already had to cope with stakes on the project.



Therefore operational crisis management can be represented through two kinds of actors: the crisis communication expert that exerted the leadership on the whole crisis process, and the "anchorage points" which were already in relation to the project previously to the collapse and are characterised by the detention of specific knowledge which help to cope with the different stakes that emerged.

As we will see next, the global coherence of the process was ensured by the expert of the direction of the communication which determined the institutional positioning of the company

as a new frame of action for the actors, especially for who we called "anchorage points" and who ensured the implementation of actions decided through the institutional positioning.

2.2 : Fundamental crisis actors: crisis communication leadership and mobilization of "anchorage points"

2.2.1: Crisis communication leadership: building a new frame for action.

A crisis is characterized by an upheaval of previous ways of working. It is due to the appearance of new stakes which have to be urgently coped with. But most of these stakes are outside the original perimeter of the project as we presented above.

The crisis communication expert was the one able to do a global analysis just a few hours after the collapse. In a situation which may either lead to the freezing of the project or to a multitude of uncoordinated actions, this actor, using its experience of other crisis situations, was able to analyse the whole situation and to propose an institutional positioning that would provide a new actions' framework for the crisis time. His analysis was the following: since damages were confined to material ones, the priority was the pursuing of the project where financial issues were important.

The direction of the communication advocated a global crisis position that was to take in charge the damages at first, as long as the inquiry has not determined the accurate causes and responsibilities. It would still be possible to be paid back afterwards if the firm was finally found not responsible. This position was largely disputed in the firm because, at first, nothing proved it was actually the case (especially as the company did not carry out itself the work). Eventually the position was accepted and then respected by all the organisation's members.

But what exactly did this "responsible institutional positioning" enable for the company? It was admittedly a way of coping with the media crisis. More fundamentally it was also a new framework of action for the company employees involved in the crisis. For the institutional positioning was then declined on the different stakes/issues evoked above. As soon as it was determined, it indeed induced actions of information and compensation towards the residents and important logistic actions to help the administration in charge of the schools to reallocate pupils in other schools. Basically, the crisis communication was a good way to avoid the freeze of the project and to quickly coordinate the actions of involved employees to maintain a global coherence to the institutional positioning.

The crisis communication was nevertheless unable to deal with all the stakes physically, legitimately and with all the knowledge required. It then had to mobilize other actors to this aim while having maximum of information centralized to keep the capacity to adapt to a situation which can evolve quickly and where reactivity is determinant.

2.2.2 : The mobilization of anchorage points to cope with the stakes.

Before the crisis, the core of the project was made of technical jobs. There were support functions as well, such as a lawyer of the legal department (in charge of the legal aspects of the contracts with the builder) or a local mediator in charge of the relations with the residents.

To cope with the crisis stakes, the crisis communication mobilized these "anchorage points". In the course of their activities on the project, they had gained a highly valuable knowledge about the project. In our case, this useful knowledge could relate to an expertise (legal department) and/or to established relationships (local mediator).

Nevertheless, the specificity of the crisis led to an upheaval of the environment of the project that necessitated a « metamorphosis of the actors » (Hatchuel & Weil, 1995): the knowledge that they previously detained had to be « updated » to the crisis situation. They could not act with the same routines.

These elements can explain the nature of the cooperation between the crisis communication leader and the « anchorage points ». The leader strongly prescribed the actions that had to be done to ensure the coherence of the actions towards the institutional positioning. But the crisis communication needed to be close from the premises to be able to react quickly and to make the actions evolved during the crisis. So it often interacted with each « anchorage point » so that it could have comprehensive and centralized information to steer the plan of actions on the different crises.

This allowed quick crossed learning that was determinant for the achievement of the crisis management. The crisis expert gave the framework for the actions and in return got information and expertises to manage. The « anchorage points » got a framework to act and in return could help to the definition of next actions by the knowledge they developed. This can explain the good cooperation that has been observed by the different actors (Hatchuel 1996).

It has to be said that the lawyer got a specific place as an anchorage point. Indeed it was not only an operator of the prescriptions of the crisis communication, but it was as well a prescriber of the actions of the crisis communication, avoiding that things could be said and then put the company in danger legally. The strong relations between communication and law were of great importance for the achievement of the crisis management, given law was involved especially on two kinds of crisis: on the media crisis the legal department gave expertise about what can be said or not. On the local crisis, the lawyers acted as experts to communicate, to evaluate the reparations and to support the evacuation of a building. This

was facilitated by the experience of the head of the legal department who had already coped with a kind of crisis close to this one.

Another anchorage point for the crisis communication was a local mediator that already worked on the project communication towards the residents before the collapse. It was mobilized on the local crisis and through the relationships which were established upstream to the crisis helped to rebuild trust with the residents and the school's related people. But this local mediator was not spotted at first and this revealed to be dangerous. Indeed it was only spotted a few days after the event, when it communicated "as usual" towards the residents. This led to a discordant action with the institutional positioning but allowed the spotting of an "anchorage point" that did not exist in the crisis management to this point. Basically, it seems to be of great importance to spot the anchorage points as we discuss it in the next part.

III. Discussion.

3.1: About anchorage points

We saw that they are determinant to the achievement of a crisis management in the way they detain useful knowledge that they have to "upgrade" to the crisis situation. To us, the non-spotting of anchorage points involves two risks for an organization ensuing a crisis:

- 1) If the potential anchorage point continues acting as before the crisis, there is an important risk that it treats some problems in a sense that is unbearable and incomprehensible for the stakeholders according to other actions undertaken by the company. That could have happened with the project communication.

2) There is a risk that stakes are non-treated because the organization does not have the knowledge required to deal with a stake. This knowledge can be either a technical expertise or for example strong relationships established with stakeholders.

It may seem a bit caricatured to say that a company could be unable to quickly spot its anchorage points during a crisis. However, due to effects of organizational size, to the need of quick actions or to the obligation of a restricted management team, it is not obvious that all anchorage points can be quickly spotted during a crisis.

What can a company do to spot comprehensively its anchorage points? It can establish a mapping on "normal time" expecting the needs if a crisis happened. But this is limited by the different kinds of crisis that can happen and the relevant anchorage points associated (they could not be infinite since there is a need of strong coordination with the crisis communication). On the other hand, a previous non-spotting is of great danger since the company could spend time to find them and as we noticed, an anchorage point has knowledge about the situation that turned into crisis that is necessary to the crisis communication.

3.2 : Long-term institutional positioning and coherent actions are resources to cope with crisis.

The institutional positioning of company is difficult to understand even in a public company like the one we studied. Indeed, recent accidents of Roissy-Charles-De-Gaulle Airport and Gaz-de-France pipe's explosion present a different way to cope with a crisis situation: Aéroport de Paris and Gaz-de-France adopted a "denying position" about the responsibility of the accident. But the behaviour of the transport company was original but coherent with its public image. As a public company who deals directly with the citizens and elected

representatives, inside and around the city, a responsible institutional positioning is sustainable.

Nevertheless this positioning was not a natural one in case of an accident where the responsibilities were not established yet. But, the political environment of the project supported this positioning. Basically, the premises of the collapse, a school, put the responsibility of the town hall in question. The fact that the town administration allowed the digging of a tunnel under the courtyard of a school places it in the first line of responsibility for the citizens. Then it seemed natural that the Town Hall followed the "responsible" positioning of the company and cooperates with it during the crisis. Then, it was not like the building site had been only a private project. In this case, it also involved some part of the public administration which had decided to dig the tunnel at this precise place.

Upon an internal point of view, the situation was also not very simple. There were lots of opposition to this positioning inside the organisation. Furthermore, even in a public company, the fact of having to handle a public mission did not induce automatically the responsible institutional positioning during this crisis. But the fact of being a public company well inserted in the city was one of the essential conditions that allow such a positioning.

In fact, an organisation cannot take a responsible behaviour to cope with a crisis unless this behaviour is part of the natural way of behaving of the firm. Therefore, this responsible position has to be build during the normal life of the organisation.

Upon an operational point of view, there are two scales of consequences to prepare the coping with a crisis. First, crisis management experts have to learn to think with more than one function in the organisation. In fact, it is necessary to have a correct and large representation of the organisation to allow linking every functions during the crisis. There is a synergy between communication, legal and engineering issues during the crisis which cannot be identified if they are not linked during the normal life of the organisation. The organisation in

project team of the building site contributed to enforce this relation and allowed it to be salient during the crisis.

Second, this original institutional positioning was also allowed by the fact that the crisis expert has a good representation of the mapping of specific knowledge in the organisation, which is associated to actors. These are understandable as the control of knowledge in relation with specific issues and stakeholders. Those persons have to be identified by the persons that will have to cope with the crisis. In fact, those are as much of spaces of knowledge that can be activated during the crisis. Therefore, it is important for the crisis manager to organise and map specific knowledge in order to identify the anchorage points during the crisis. These anchorage points will lead the crisis management expert to locate and manage key stakeholders and design actions related to the responsible institutional positioning chosen to cope with the crisis.

3.3 : Contribution to the literature.

The contribution of this case study is to stress that crisis is no more than a specific moment of the life of the organisations. First, crises can be coped with some success if only crisis management acts with a coherent institutional positioning which can be implemented without being prepared during the normal life of the organisation. Then crises can be taken as a rupture but has to be thought through the natural routines of the organisation. Therefore, training to cope with crises implies people training, implementation of crisis procedures to regulate actions during the degraded period, which is the traditional way of defining crisis management (Lagadec 1991). To cope with a crisis seems to require dedicated means, but also means that are not "crisis oriented". Stakeholder management before the crisis contribute to locate action knowledge and relations that can be useful during the crisis when it is decided to assume a responsible institutional positioning as the company did. A long term approach

during the normal life of the organisation allows during the crisis to activate some persons that are in relation with key stakeholders or detained expertise according to the institutional positioning chosen. In the case of the company, the responsible positioning chosen as a lead for crisis management was possible because the same positioning was usual in the nature of public relation for this public organisation. In fact, the relation with the public is for the company a day to day preoccupation. This kind of insertion of the company into the urban environment of the city was essential to the success of such a crisis management based on a responsible institutional positioning.

Second, the way of looking at stakes-holders through specific issues and not only for the stakeholders themselves, contributes to elaborate a new actionable frame during the crisis. In fact, to locate key stakes before the crisis invite the managers to formalise those specific knowledge and relation with stakeholder in order to make them actionable in the future. These have to be formalised as classes of issues that could be quite near from crisis issues.

Conclusion:

To conclude, the case study is interesting for this is to bring to the fore that crisis management is not only a case of training or procedures but also an ability to spot out some persons in the organisation on who an original institutional positioning can be based on.

Nevertheless, the collapse of the building site was very specific: there were no casualties but only material losses. We can make the assumption that it would have been different in case of even one pupil's death. What we can say is that to be able to spot out some anchorage points is very useful to the crisis management if this is based on a responsible and complex institutional positioning. Moreover, if the fact that the company is a public company in close relation to the public is not the reason why it assumed this positioning, we can afford that it is almost an important condition.

Finally, upon a theoretical point of view, this notion of anchorage points, which is still embryonic, could give to the analyst and actor in a crisis situation a part of a framework to improve the way that organisations could cope with crises.

References :

- Alpaslan, M. C., I. I. Mitroff, et al. (2004). Towards a Stakeholder Theory of Crisis Management Behaviors and Outcomes. Proceedings of the Academy of Management, New Orleans.
- Argyris, C. and D. Schön (1978). Organizational learning: A theory of action perspective. Reading, Mass, Addison Wesley.
- Beaulieu, S. and J. Pasquero (2002). Reintroducing stakeholder dynamics in stakeholder thinking. Unfolding Stakeholder Thinking. S. S. Rahman.
- Donaldson, T. and L. E. Preston (1995). "The Stakeholder Theory of the Corporation: Concepts, Evidence, and Implications." Academy of Management Review **20** (n°1).
- Foucault, M. (1984). Qu'est-ce que les Lumières? (What is enlightenment?). Dits et écrits, 1954-1988. Paris, Gallimard. **4**: 562-578.
- Freeman, R. E. (1984). Strategic management: A stakeholder approach, Pitman.
- Freeman, R. E. and D. L. Reed (1983). "Stockholders and Stakeholders: A New Perspective on Corporate Governance." California Management Review **XXV**(3 - spring).
- Hatchuel, A. (1996). Coopération et conception collective. Variétés et crises des rapports de prescription. Coopération et conception. E. F. dir. G. de Terssan, Octarès éditions.
- Hatchuel, A. (2005). Towards an epistemology of action. W. paper. Paris, Ecole des Mines de Paris.
- Hatchuel, A. and B. Weil (1995). Experts in organizations, Walter de Gruyter.
- Lagadec, P. (1991). La gestion des crises, outils de réflexion à l'usage des décideurs. Paris, McGraw-Hill.
- Lagadec, P. and X. Guilhou (2002). Conditions et mécanismes de production des défaillances, accidents et crises. Le risque de défaillance et son contrôle par les individus et les organisations dans les activités à hauts risques, Paris, MSH-Alpes.
- Management Review (1980). "How AT&T copes with its stakeholders." Management Review(August).
- Mitchell, R. K., B. R. Agle, et al. (1997). "Toward a theory of stakeholder identification and salience: defining the principle of who and what really counts." Academy of Management Review **22**(4): 853-886.
- Pasquero, J. (1996). Stakeholder theory as a constructivist paradigm. 7th annual conference of the International Association for Business and Society.

Pearson, C. M. and J. A. Clair (1998). "Reframing Crisis Management." Academy of Management Review **23**(1): 59-76.

Pearson, C. M. and I. I. Mitroff (1993). "From Crisis prone to crisis prepared: a framework for crisis management." Academy of Management Executive **7**(1): 48-59.

Shrivastava, P. (1987). Bhopal: Anatomy of a crisis. New-York, Ballinger Publishing Company.

Shrivastava, P., I. I. Mitroff, et al. (1988). "Understanding Industrial Crisis." Journal of Management Studies **25**(4): 285-303.

Sturdivant, F. D. (1979). "Executives and Activists: Test of stakeholder Management." California Management Review **XXII**(1).

Ulmer, R. R. (2001). "Effective Crisis Management Through Established Stakeholder Relationships." Management Communication Quarterly **14**(4): 590-615.

Weick, K. E. (1993). "The Collapse of Sensemaking in Organizations: The Mann Gulch Disaster." Administrative Science Quarterly **38**: 628-652.