

Assessing Interorganizational Crisis Management Capability: A Systematic Literature Review

Magdalena Granåsen, Swedish Defence Research Agency, Linköping, Sweden

Mari Olsén, Swedish Defence Research Agency, Linköping, Sweden

Per-Anders Oskarsson, Swedish Defence Research Agency, Linköping, Sweden

Niklas Hallberg, Swedish Defence Research Agency, Linköping, Sweden

ABSTRACT

To strengthen the capability of societies to manage severe events, it is vital to understand what constitutes crisis management capability and how this can be assessed. The objective of this article is to explore how interorganizational crisis management capability has been assessed in the scientific literature. A systematic literature review was performed, resulting in a dataset of 83 publications. A thematic analysis resulted in nine themes of crisis management capability being identified, where interaction was the largest one. Analyses resulted in a comprehensive overview of assessment methods within the themes. The evaluation methods were mainly applied on real cases rather than exercises. The present article contributes with an increased understanding of how crisis management capability is evaluated, as well as applicability and limitations of different methodological approaches. This insight is essential in order to conduct a valid assessment of crisis management capability and design exercises that increase this capability.

KEYWORDS

Assessment Methods, Capability, Collaboration, Crisis Management, Interorganizational, Literature Review, Performance, Resilience, Situation Awareness

INTRODUCTION

Modern societies are affected by numerous threats and hazards, such as natural disasters, cyber-attacks, terrorism and water crises (World Economic Forum, 2019). In general, the complexity and magnitude of major crises require an interorganizational approach, where the ability to collaborate across organizations is vital. Crisis management capability is the ability to cope with major crises, emergencies and disasters. Valid crisis management capability and performance assessments support both the direction of learning and the development of the crisis management capability (Beerens & Tehler, 2016).

DOI: 10.4018/IJISCRAM.2019070103

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A systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted in order to understand what researchers typically focus on when analyzing interorganizational crisis management capability, as well as how interorganizational crisis management capability is assessed. During the initial analysis of the SLR, the identified publications were organized into nine different themes, describing different perspectives of interorganizational crisis management capability (Granåsen, Olsén & Oskarsson, 2018). This paper presents an extended analysis of these themes.

This study was performed within the context of a research project investigating how crisis management capability could be improved through exercises. Joint exercises are one way to strengthen interorganizational crisis management capability. Exercises provide platforms for training and validating existing concepts and structures. They also make it possible to attempt new ideas in a controlled environment where actual lives are not at risk. To create appropriate exercise environments, it is essential to understand what constitutes crisis management capability in real settings and how this capability can be evaluated. The SLR in the current study included real events as well as exercises and experiments.

The objective of the paper is to explore how interorganizational crisis management capability is assessed in the scientific literature, in real events, and in exercises. It is assumed that the methodology used for assessing crisis management in real cases may also be applicable to assessment during ongoing exercises. The scope was on interorganizational crisis management capability including a governmental component. Due to the interorganizational focus, the capability of single organizations and personal skills were excluded.

BACKGROUND

Disasters, emergencies or crises - three interrelated terms referring to events that are sudden, unexpected, extraordinary, unpredictable, and affect societal functions (Al-Dahash, Thayaparan, & Kulatunga, 2016). Such events mostly demand immediate action, suspension of ordinary procedures, decision-making based on uncertain information, and coordinated action (Scholl & Carnes, 2016). Crisis management organizations need to respond to a range of different needs during the acute phase and coordinate available resources (Bergström, Uhr, & Frykmer, 2016). Coordination is needed to make use of the actors' capabilities (Ekman & Uhr, 2015). Without coordination, resources are more likely to hinder than support each other. Crisis management systems are based on both private and public organizations that work on local, regional and national levels. Interorganizational collaboration during a crisis is demanding due to the mix of different organizational cultures, structures, methods, ambitions and communication technologies.

In its broadest sense, capability is defined as the ability to do something (Oxford dictionary). In this paper, crisis management capability is defined as the ability to cope with major crises, emergencies and disasters. Capability can be assessed generically, based on the capacity of the organizations, or in relation to how actors managed to cope with a specific event. Lindbom, Tehler, Eriksson, and Aven (2015) analyzed how the term capability is used within the emergency management domain, concluding that capability is commonly related to resources and capacity. They recommend that capability be studied in relation to risk, task accomplishment and the severity of the event. A related perspective aims to assess the crisis management capability based on how organizations have performed during actual events. Capability in this sense is closely related to organizational performance (Wang, Zheng, & Li, 2015; Comfort, 2007). Interorganizational capability adds a further dimension in that the ability to solve a situation depends on the involved organizations' own capabilities to contribute to the management of the crisis, as well as their abilities to collaborate and coordinate their efforts. Capability may address functional aspects in what needs to be performed during a specific type of response, managerial competencies and abilities, such as leadership, coordination, decision making and communication and adaptive capability, including the ability to cope with the unexpected (Greenberg, Voevodsky, & Gralla, 2016). This paper primarily addresses the managerial and adaptive perspectives.

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