

# Crisis Management: Who's in your foxhole?



June 2018

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## Overview

### “Crisis”: a working understanding

- Examples: the Mann Gulch Fire and Andes crash
- The relationship between structure and meaning

### Crisis recovery

- Example: Ohio State Marching Band
- Compliance methodology for resolving crises

### Crisis management: lessons for compliance

- Toolkit and roles
- Operating principles

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## Crisis Example The Mann Gulch Fire

Montana -- August 5, 1949

- First seen as small, low-risk fire
- **4:00 pm**: crew parachutes in to fight fire
  - Very hot, dry, windy conditions
  - Gulch with very steep slopes (~75%)
  - Tall grassland
- **5:10 pm**: crew moves toward fire
- **5:45 pm**: crew reverses direction
- **5:56 pm**: fire catches crew
- 13 men die, only 3 survive
- One survivor created “escape fire” – now standard life-saving technique

Sources: Young Men and Fire, Norman MacLean  
U.S. Forest Service, Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center, <https://www.wildfirelessons.net>

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### The Mann Gulch Fire: Timeline (I)

**Point A at 4:00 pm: Routine Fire**

- Clear roles (leader, 2d in command, crew)
- Easy fix ("10:00 a.m. fire")
- Tall grass, steep slopes
- Fire on opposing (south) side

**5:10 pm:** crew moves down north side of gulch, toward fire on south side

**Point B at 5:45 pm: First Decision**

- Dodge (crew foreman) sees that fire crossed to north side of gulch, is moving toward crew
- Orders crew to reverse direction, move up gulch away from fire
- Goal: escape fire over ridge

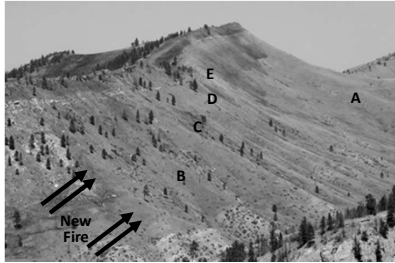


Photo taken from original location of fire

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### The Mann Gulch Fire: Timeline (II)

**Point C at 5:53 pm: "Drop Tools!"**

- Dodge (crew foreman) orders crew to drop tools and packs
- Steep slope prevents direct escape over ridge

**Point D at 5:55 pm: "Join Me!"**

- Dodge stops and lights fire, then steps into burned area
- Dodge calls to others
- Someone yells: "To hell with that! I'm getting out of here!"
- Dodge survives by lying in burned area; no one joins him

**Point E at 5:58 pm: Escape or Death**

- 2 make it over ridge to safety
- 13 men die within 200 yards



Photo taken from original location of fire

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### The Mann Gulch Fire: Timeline (III)



**Point D**

**5:55 pm:  
The Escape fire**

**"Join Me!"**

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### The Mann Gulch Fire: Traditional Perspective



Traditional focus of crisis management:  
Leadership decision-making

- Crisis response: make good decisions**
- **Extreme situation** of life-threatening physical and mental stress
  - **Foreman made good decisions:** turn around; drop tools; escape fire
  - **Crew's inability** to see escape fire as life-saving solution (bad decision!)
- Crisis response: crisis as opportunity**
- **Escape fire:** works because it deprives main fire of fuel
  - **Innovative solution:** created by foreman under stress to innovate
  - Escape fire is now part of U.S. Fire Service protocol and training
  - No firefighter has since died in similar conditions

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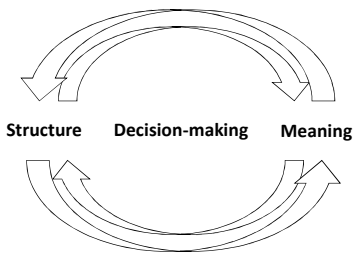
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### Crisis: Key elements



- Structure**  
How we organize ideas or relationships
- Can be driven by culture, role, logic, priority, etc.
  - Can be formal or informal
- Meaning**  
How we "make sense" of complexity/novelty
- Highly individualistic, cognitive task
  - Can derive from structure but operates independently of it
- Decision-making**  
Shaped by both structure and meaning

Source: The Collapse of Sensemaking in Organizations: The Mann Gulch Disaster, Karl E. Weick

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### The Mann Gulch Fire as Crisis: Organizational Analysis

#### Structure

- 1. Team forms after jump: smoke-jumping crew**
  - Formed that morning
- 2. Team moves toward fire**
  - Line spaces lengthen, #2 not present
- 3. Foreman orders team to reverse direction**
  - Team moving away from objective
- 4. Foreman orders: "drop your tools!"**
  - Team can no longer fight fire
  - New goal: save lives of firefighters
- 5. Foreman orders: "join me!"**
  - "The hell with that!" (someone else)
  - **Who is in charge?**

#### Meaning

- 1. I am part of a team**
  - I know my role, am safe and supported
- 2. Our team is getting separated**
  - I am feeling more isolated
- 3. We are moving away from fire**
  - My team cannot do its job
  - No reason shared: I'm confused
- 4. "Drop your tools!"**
  - I am no longer a firefighter/ I am defenseless
  - I am alone (no longer part of a team)
- 5. "Join me!"/"To hell with that!"**
  - **I must save myself – panic**

Principal Source: The Collapse of Sensemaking in Organizations: The Mann Gulch Disaster, Karl E. Weick

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### The Mann Gulch Fire as Crisis: Observations

#### Decline of structure

- What holds an organization together is more tenuous than we realize
- Recipe for disintegration:
  - Thrust people into unfamiliar roles; leave key roles unfulfilled; discredit role system
  - Make the task/goal more ambiguous
  - Make these changes in confusing context of unusual, small events

#### Decline of meaning

- Each man previously faced danger independently; none had done so as member of disintegrating organization
  - 2 survivors formed partnership
  - Dodge retained sense of role as leader
- When individuals lose meaning, they regress to most habituated way of responding

#### Decline of both structure and meaning

When both decline together, people stop thinking and panic

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Counter Example:  
"Alive"  
(1972 - Uruguayan rugby team)



#### Issue

1. Immediate medical needs
2. Short-term survival
3. Lack of food (cannibalism)
4. Travel to find help
5. Explain cannibalism to world

#### Structure

1. Medical students
2. Team captain
3. Divinity student
4. Three strongest
5. Eldest member

#### Meaning

1. Sensible triage: I can wait
2. Food managed: my share
3. Life over respect for dead
4. Sacrifice for others
5. We were justified

Consistent decision-making over 72-day crisis with ongoing challenges

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### Crisis Management: the Compliance Perspective

#### Analysis of "crisis"

- Failure in **organizational** structure (process, governance)
- Failure in **individual** sense-making (ability to find meaning in world)
- Decision-making occurs at both levels (organizational and individual)
- **Key: the mutually reinforcing breakdown** of structure and meaning

#### Consequences of this analysis

- Relationship between structure and meaning can be either **negative** or **positive** (vicious or virtuous cycle)
- All crises exhibit this relationship, regardless of duration (16 minutes to many years); hard to see slow negative cycles

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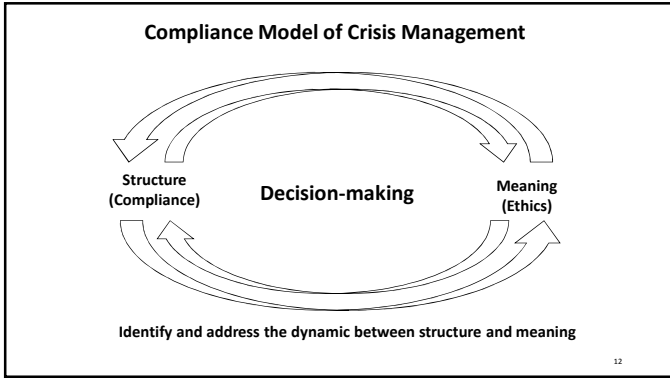
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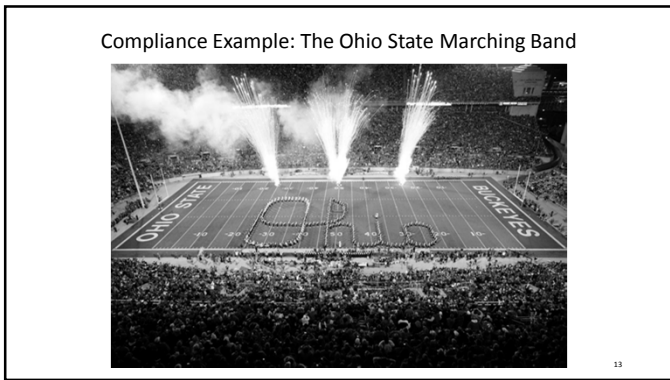
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### The Ohio State Marching Band – 2014 Compliance Crisis

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|--|---|
| <p><b>May 23, 2014:</b> Title IX complaint prompted compliance investigation</p> <p><b>July 22, 2014:</b> Investigation concludes that Band's culture facilitated acts of sexual harassment and hazing, creating a hostile environment for students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Found long history of problem</li> <li>• Recommended corrective actions</li> </ul> <p><b>July 24, 2014:</b> Band Director terminated</p> <p><b>Sept. 8, 2014:</b> OUCI recommendations incorporated into OCR Resolution Agreement</p> | <p><b>November 2014:</b> External review concludes Montgomery Report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 year time frame, 185 interviews</li> <li>• Online qualitative/quantitative survey</li> <li>• Resulted in 37 recommendations</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Federal and state lawsuits</b> filed by former band director</li> <li>• <b>High profile negative media campaign</b> by former director and supporters, including Band's alumni association</li> <li>• <b>130 public records requests</b> between July 2014 – September 2016</li> </ul> |
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**Band (students/staff) and interim director caught in ongoing crisis**

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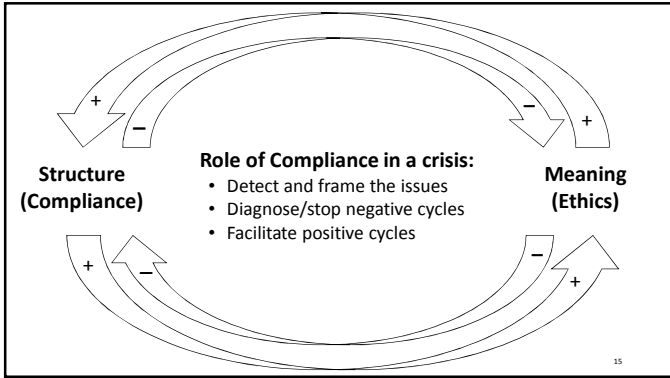
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**Marching Band Crisis: Overview (Leadership)**

**Representative Issues**

- Can Marching Band be saved?
- Will negative culture be driven underground?
- How will issue implicate overall Title IX environment?
- Should current students be held accountable?

**Objectives for Structure**

- Ensure clear rules for oversight (Board, university leadership, college, school, Band)
- Ensure positive progress is appropriately measured, and any negative deviations identified and elevated

**Meaning Objective**

- “We are moving to highest ground”
- “We can distinguish organizational and individual accountability”
- “We can balance competing rights”
- “We have confidence in positive progress”

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**Marching Band Crisis: Overview (Alumni)**

**Representative Issues**

- Support former director and Band’s history, or support university and Band’s future?
- Who “owns” Band culture? Alumni or university?
- How can a major positive personal experience be viewed so negatively?

**Objectives for Structure**

- Integrate Band’s alumni organization into Alumni Association structure
- Define controls over budget
- Provide alternative engagement routes for alumni with Band

**Meaning Objective**

- “The world has changed, and expectations on behavior have also changed”
- “What was good for me may not have been good for others”
- “I can be part of the solution”

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### Marching Band Crisis: Overview (staff and students)

**Representative Issues**

- Will there be a season?
- Are legacy staff/students to be held responsible?
- What do we do?
- What IS our culture, and what is my role in it?

**Objectives for Structure**

- Engage staff and students in programmatic development of values
- Change staff and student leadership model (meetings and methods)
- Emphasize concern reporting channels and results

**Objectives for Meaning**

- “The world has changed, and expectations on behavior have also changed”
- “What was good for me may not have been good for others”
- “I can be part of the solution”

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### Marching Band 2015 season: Initial Assessment and Efforts

**Key Roles:** interim director determined; compliance officer hired

**Preliminary analysis and actions:**

- **Marching Band students and staff** -- focus on:
  - **Relationship-building:** earn trust among band students and staff
  - **Realignment of focus:** correct imbalance on-field performance vs off-field conduct
  - **Cultural turnaround:** identify and eliminate negatives; identify and reinforce positives; take pro-active measures to decrease likelihood of cultural setbacks
  - **Education Start-up:** create compliance and life skills educational programming
- **University Leadership:** improve decision-making structure for important Band issues and decisions through oversight framework
- **Marching Band Alumni:** Maintain additional efforts

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### Three Key Considerations for both Structure and Meaning

**Why These Three?**

Organizational Values

- *Reorient Band staff and students to the positive*

Leadership Expectations

- *Reframe role of Band Director and student leaders*

Concern Reporting & Response

- *Reestablish student safety and engagement*

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### Organizational Values

**Before**

**“Only on-field performance matters”**

**Structure**

- Rigid hierarchy
- Rows police themselves

**Meaning**

- Constant competition and threat
- Performance justifies any off-field behaviors

**After**

**Cultural Blueprint (Structure & Meaning)**

- Performance Excellence
- Extraordinary Respect
- Attitude of Gratitude

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### THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY MARCHING BAND

**Structure**

- Add 2 core values to “Tradition of Excellence”
- Distinguish “how we behave” from “outcomes we achieve,” to show how one drives other
- Reinforce in website, members’ iPads, etc., and in rewards/accountability
- Cultural education for students uses same three components
- Values structure provided framework for making decisions and evaluating opportunities

**Meaning**

- “I share an aspirational vision”
- “We speak a common language”
- “Values drive performance”

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### Leadership Expectations

**Before**

**“Circle the Wagons”**

**Structure**

- Concentration of power
- One or few decision makers for all aspects of the organization
- Lack of meaningful university oversight

**Meaning**

- No one else understands what we do or how hard we work
- We are isolated from the rest of the university (purposefully insular)
- “Protecting” the Band

**After**

**Transparency**

“Blow the doors wide open”: Transparency builds trust and independence

- Meetings organized for transparency
- Student leaders: representation and application processes

**Collaborative leadership**

- Meetings organized for input and consensus
- Students empowered to make decisions-- Student Advisory Council
- Incorporated university input and oversight
  - School of Music presence
  - Band Coordinating Committee
  - RACI Chart

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### Concern Reporting & Response

| Before  | After   |
|---|---|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>“Turn a blind eye”</b></p> <p><b>Structure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insular student leadership</li> <li>• Band Director decides</li> </ul> <p><b>Meaning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Not my problem” / “To each their own”</li> <li>• Don’t want to be a “snitch”</li> <li>• Turtling—often driven by:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not knowing what to do / how to respond</li> <li>• Self-protection</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <div style="font-size: 2em; margin-bottom: 10px;">➔</div> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Active ownership and intervention</b></p> <p><b>Culture of accountability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizational stewardship—individual actions affect all, now and in future</li> <li>• Awareness of and sense of responsibility toward organization’s multiple stakeholders</li> </ul> <p><b>Clear action plans and reporting paths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standards of Behavior (“I will...”, “I will not...”, and how to report)</li> <li>• Auxiliary staff agreements (similar)</li> <li>• RACI chart</li> <li>• Open door for students and staff (meetings/calls/emails/texts and quick response times)</li> </ul> |

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### Building a Self-Perpetuating Positive Cycle

| Values  | Leadership Expectations  | Concern Reporting   |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Question asked: What are band’s core values?</li> <li>○ Open discussions with staff and students</li> <li>○ Put pen to paper (basic Word table)</li> <li>○ Strategized how to roll out</li> <li>○ Student-designed circle</li> <li>○ Professionally-designed circle</li> <li>○ Communicated, integrated, educated until it became a given</li> </ul> <p><b>Important for band director to lead values conversation and education, while compliance officer reinforces.</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Band’s administrative home identified (SOM)</li> <li>○ SOM leaders stepped in</li> <li>○ Band Coordinating Committee established</li> <li>○ Band’s internal org chart with clear reporting lines</li> <li>○ Leadership education and ongoing assessment</li> <li>○ Student Advisory Council — operating as pipeline for future squad leaders</li> <li>○ RACI chart</li> </ul> <p><b>Don’t underestimate divided attention as a roadblock to transparency/collaboration—made RACI chart essential.</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Set/communicate Standards of Behavior</li> <li>○ Mandate reporting in known problem areas</li> <li>○ Educate on why and how to report concerns</li> <li>○ Open door approach</li> <li>○ When reports came, took seriously regardless of content (word spreads, trust builds)</li> <li>○ Disrupted self-referential perspective with stakeholder awareness &amp; stewardship education</li> <li>○ Auxiliary staff agreements</li> </ul> <p><b>Band director should make and deliver disciplinary decisions, after consultation with CO behind the scenes.</b></p> |

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### Crisis management: Lessons learned (I)


**“Crisis” – the common characteristics**

- Most compliance crises occur due to disruption
  - Failure of **organizational** structure (process, governance)
  - Failure of **individual** sense making (ability to align behavior with consequences)
- Whether the organizational culture is aligned to the crisis

**Culture building to address risk of crisis**

- Seizing a crisis: before and after a culture change
- Controls and culture builders
- Assessment

**Key challenge: the long-cycle crisis**



**Determine inflection points**

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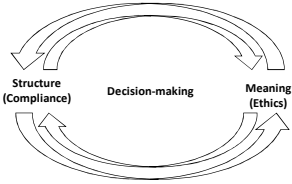
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## Crisis management: Lessons learned (II)



### Toolkit and Roles:

- Compliance officer as facilitator
- Default: revert to emphasizing structure
- Controls facilitate culture change as well as regulatory and safeguarding functions
- Use controls to nudge good behavior as well as correct bad behavior

### Operating Principles

- Facilitate decisions through both structure and meaning
  - Long-term ownership drives sustained success
  - Engagement drives long-term ownership
  - Decision-making drives engagement
  - Frame meetings around individual decisions (feedback) and group decisions
  - Stakeholders, Partners, Team
- Why? Then who/what/how

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