

Crisis Management: Who's in your foxhole?



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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



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

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

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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

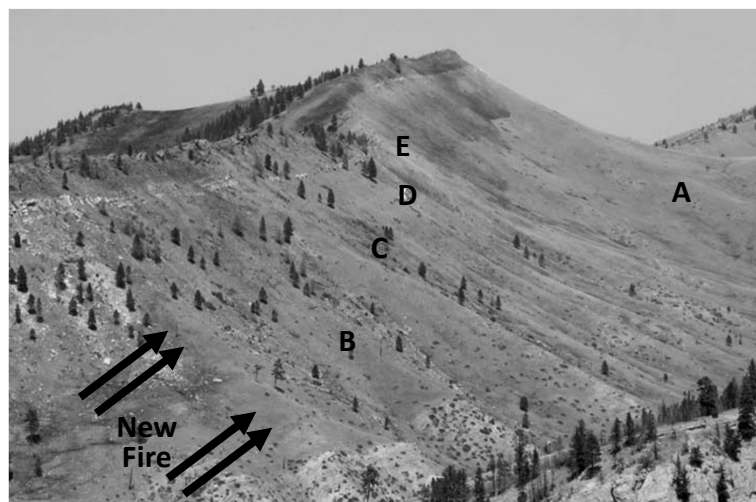


Photo taken from original location of fire

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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

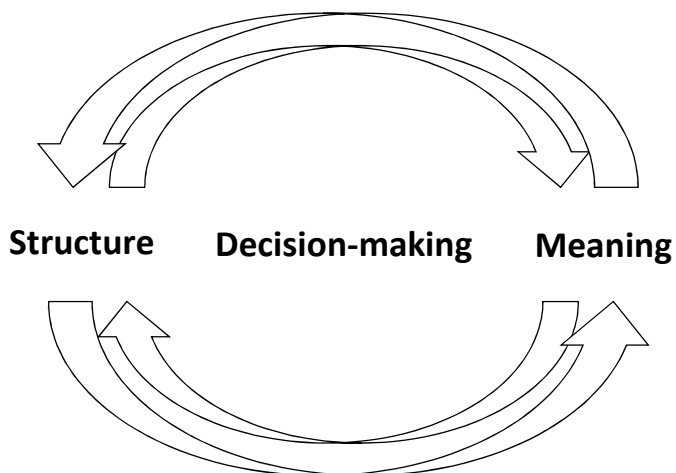
- **Extreme situation** of life-threatening physical and mental stress
- **Foreman made good decisions:** turn around; drop tools; escape fire
- **Crew's inability** to see escape fire as life-saving solution (bad decision!)

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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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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Crises Management: the Compliance Perspective

Analysis of “crisis”

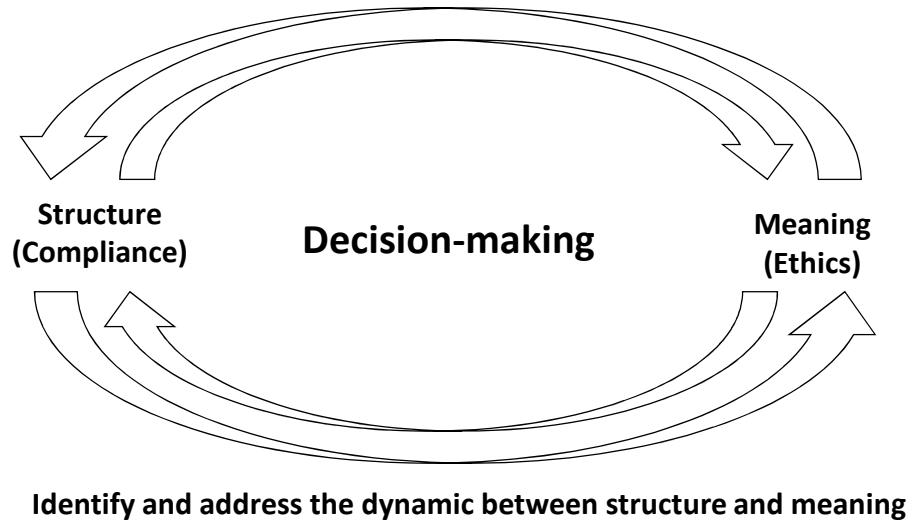
- Failure in **organizational** structure (process, governance)
- Failure in **individual** sense-making (ability to find meaning in world)
- Decision-making occurs at both levels (organizational and individual)
- **Key: the mutually reinforcing breakdown** of structure and meaning

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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Compliance Model of Crisis Management



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Compliance Example: The Ohio State Marching Band



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The Ohio State Marching Band – 2014 Compliance Crisis

May 23, 2014: Title IX complaint prompted compliance investigation

July 22, 2014: Investigation concludes that Band's culture facilitated acts of sexual harassment and hazing, creating a hostile environment for students

- Found long history of problem
- Recommended corrective actions

July 24, 2014: Band Director terminated

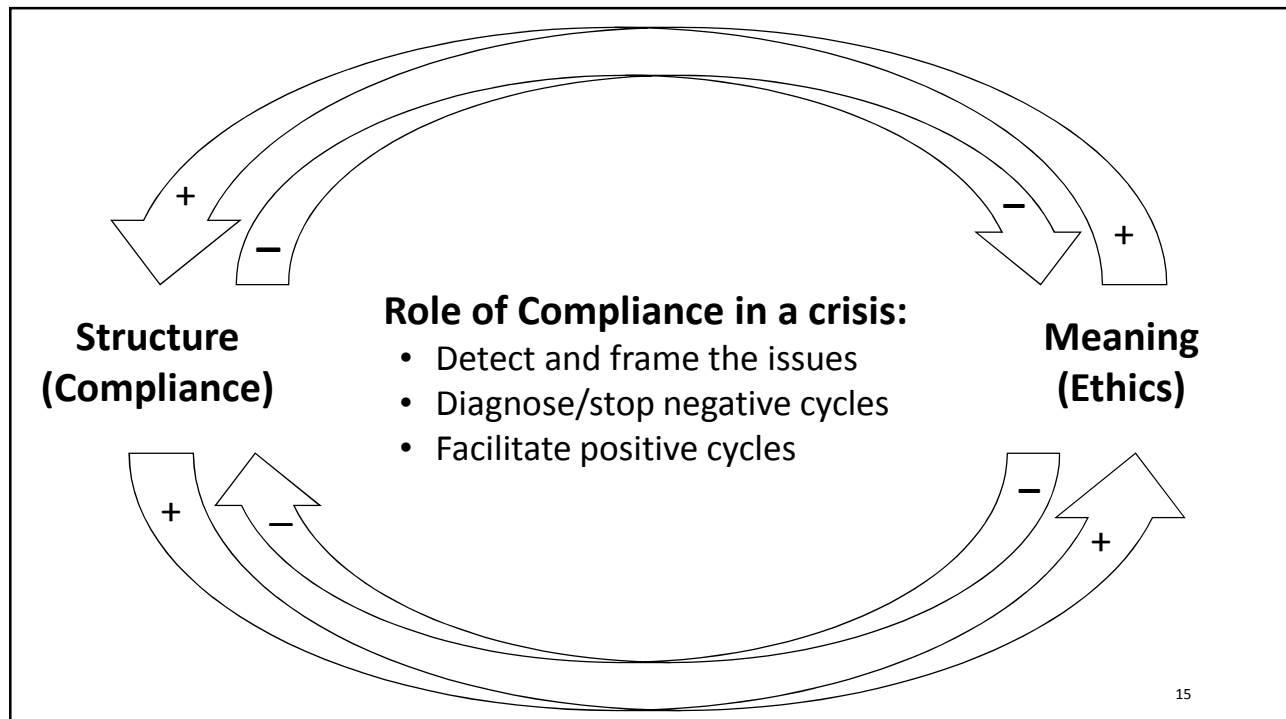
Sept. 8, 2014: OUCI recommendations incorporated into OCR Resolution Agreement

November 2014: External review concludes Montgomery Report

- 5 year time frame, 185 interviews
- Online qualitative/quantitative survey
- Resulted in 37 recommendations
- **Federal and state lawsuits** filed by former band director
- **High profile negative media campaign** by former director and supporters, including Band's alumni association
- **130 public records requests** between July 2014 – September 2016

Band (students/staff) and interim director caught in ongoing crisis

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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

Three Key Considerations for both Structure and Meaning

Organizational Values

Leadership Expectations

Concern Reporting & Response

Why These Three?

- *Reorient Band staff and students to the positive*
- *Reframe role of Band Director and student leaders*
- *Reestablish student safety and engagement*

Organizational Values

Before

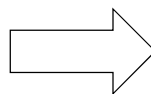
"Only on-field performance matters"

Structure

- Rigid hierarchy
- Rows police themselves

Meaning

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



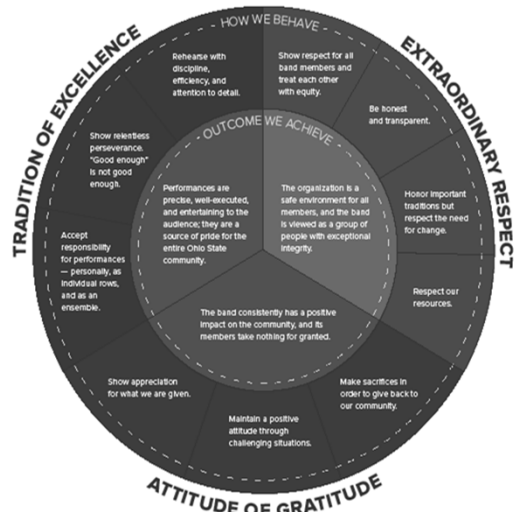
After

Cultural Blueprint (Structure & Meaning)

- Performance Excellence
- Extraordinary Respect
- Attitude of Gratitude



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

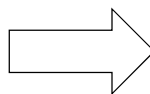
“Circle the Wagons”

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

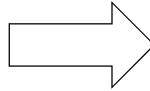
“Turn a blind eye”

Structure

- Insular student leadership
- Band Director decides

Meaning

- “Not my problem” / “To each their own”
- Don’t want to be a “snitch”
- Turtling—often driven by:
 - Not knowing what to do / how to respond
 - Self-protection



After

Active ownership and intervention

Culture of accountability

- Organizational stewardship—individual actions affect all, now and in future
- Awareness of and sense of responsibility toward organization’s multiple stakeholders

Clear action plans and reporting paths

- Standards of Behavior (“I will...”, “I will not...”, and how to report)
- Auxiliary staff agreements (similar)
- RACI chart
- Open door for students and staff (meetings/calls/emails/texts and quick response times)

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Building a Self-Perpetuating Positive Cycle

Values

- **Question asked:** What are band’s core values?
- Open discussions with staff and students
- Put pen to paper (basic Word table)
- Strategized how to roll out
- Student-designed circle
- Professionally-designed circle
- Communicated, integrated, educated until **it became a given**

Important for band director to lead values conversation and education, while compliance officer reinforces.

Leadership Expectations

- Band’s administrative home identified (SOM)
- SOM leaders stepped in
- Band Coordinating Committee established
- Band’s internal org chart with clear reporting lines
- Leadership education and ongoing assessment
- **Student Advisory Council — operating as pipeline for future squad leaders**
- RACI chart

Don’t underestimate divided attention as a roadblock to transparency/collaboration—made RACI chart essential.

Concern Reporting

- Set/communicate Standards of Behavior
- Mandate reporting in known problem areas
- Educate on why and how to report concerns
- Open door approach
- When reports came, took seriously regardless of content (word spreads, trust builds)
- **Disrupted self-referential perspective with stakeholder awareness & stewardship education**
- Auxiliary staff agreements

Band director should make and deliver disciplinary decisions, after consultation with CO behind the scenes.

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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

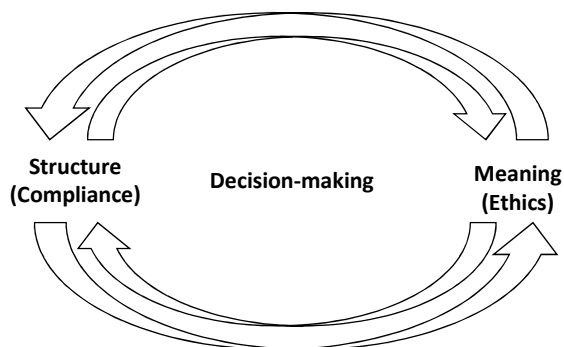
Key challenge: the long-cycle crisis



Determine inflection points

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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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