

EUI-ESM CONFERENCE ON CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS
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Crisis Communication and Strategic Improvisation

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Mega Crisis (Lagadec)

Global dislocation

From accidental failure to embedded function

Transboundary Crisis (Boin)

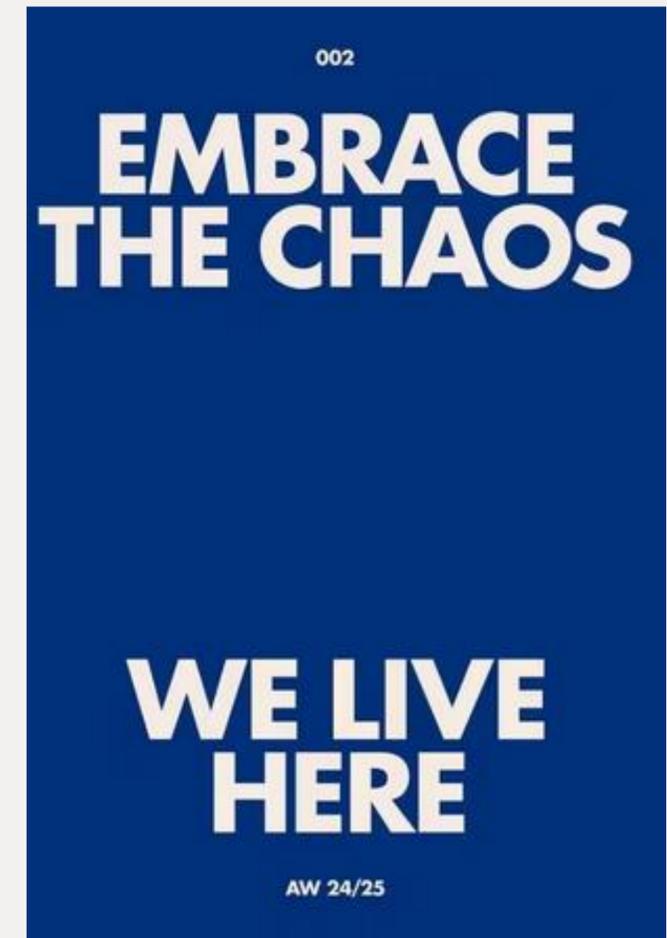
Time, space, function

Premises:

Toxic information landscape

Communication Hijacking

Battle of Narratives (micro/macro)



THE EVOLUTION OF COMMUNICATION IN SOCIETY

FALKHEIMER, INSPIRED BY ETTER 2019



| INFORMATION CHARACTERISTIC | INDUSTRIAL AND MODERN | POST-INDUSTRIAL AND LATE MODERN |
|----------------------------|--|---|
| DOMINANT DIRECTION | Vertical communication Sender-receiver | Horizontal communication <u>Participant / participant</u> |
| SOURCES | Professional | Amateurs Professionals |
| DOMINANT MODE | Rational (logos) <u>Message</u> | Emotional (pathos) Narrative |
| AUDIENCE STAKEHOLDERS | Uniform, solid, <u>number</u> , passive | <u>Fragmented</u> , <u>volatile</u> , <u>cultural</u> , <u>co-producing</u> |

The need of innovative thinking

Crisis communication is a young field requiring ongoing innovation and critical thinking to address complex realities.

Limitations of Traditional Models

Traditional crisis communication models assume rationality and linearity but fail to capture real-world crisis complexity.

Interdisciplinary Approach

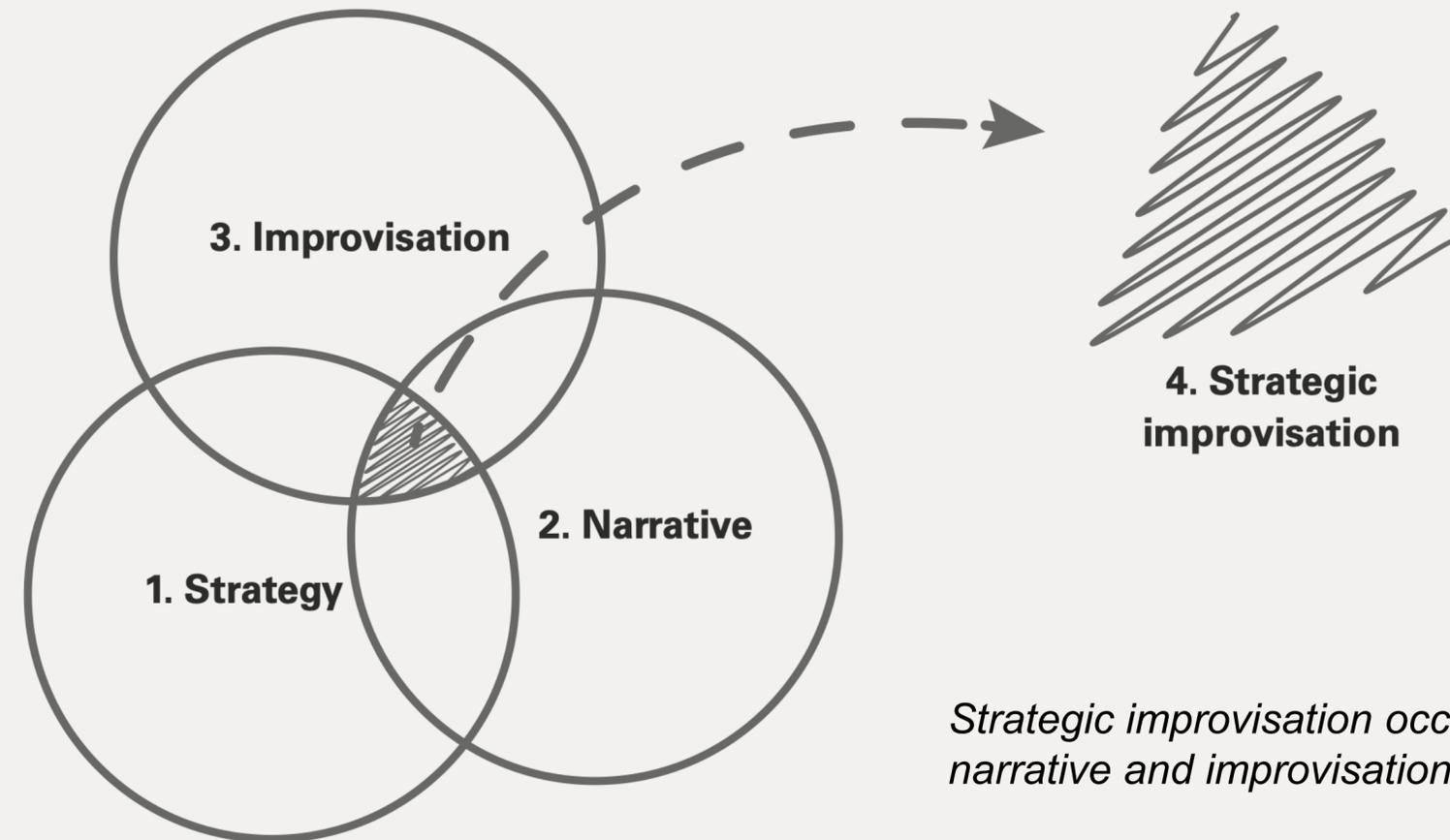
Incorporating creative arts into crisis communication fosters adaptability and resilience.



Strategic Improvisation – the Art of Balancing Order and Chaos



The strategic improvisation model



Strategic improvisation occurs when strategy, narrative and improvisation are combined.

Principles for improvisational ability (Barrett)

Say yes to the mess

Performing and experimenting simultaneously

Rhythm but variability

Jamming and hanging out

Taking turns soloing

Leadership as coaching, visionary





| | STRATEGY | IMPROVISATION | NARRATIVE |
|---------------------|--|--|--|
| PRINCIPLE | A well-planned foundational structure | Responsive action capability | Powerful images and stories |
| ORGANISATION | Focus on value creation, predictable and robust Room for innovation, development, and flexibility | Rigged for constant change Iterative processes and learning loops Room for manoeuvre | Co-production with employees and other stakeholders |
| APPROACHES | Connects the short and long term Provides predictability Reminds of the vision and what creates value Equips the organisation | Makes functional and intuitive decisions instead of optimal ones Sees failure as natural and necessary Cultivates a culture of trust and takes responsibility for mistakes | Explains, repeats and reminds Talks the walk Walks the talk Is present and accessible |



Advice for practice

Flexible Crisis Strategies

Organizations must create adaptable frameworks that balance flexibility with strategic coherence for crisis communication.

Improvisational Training

Incorporating creative improvisation techniques in training enhances employees' ability to respond effectively under pressure.

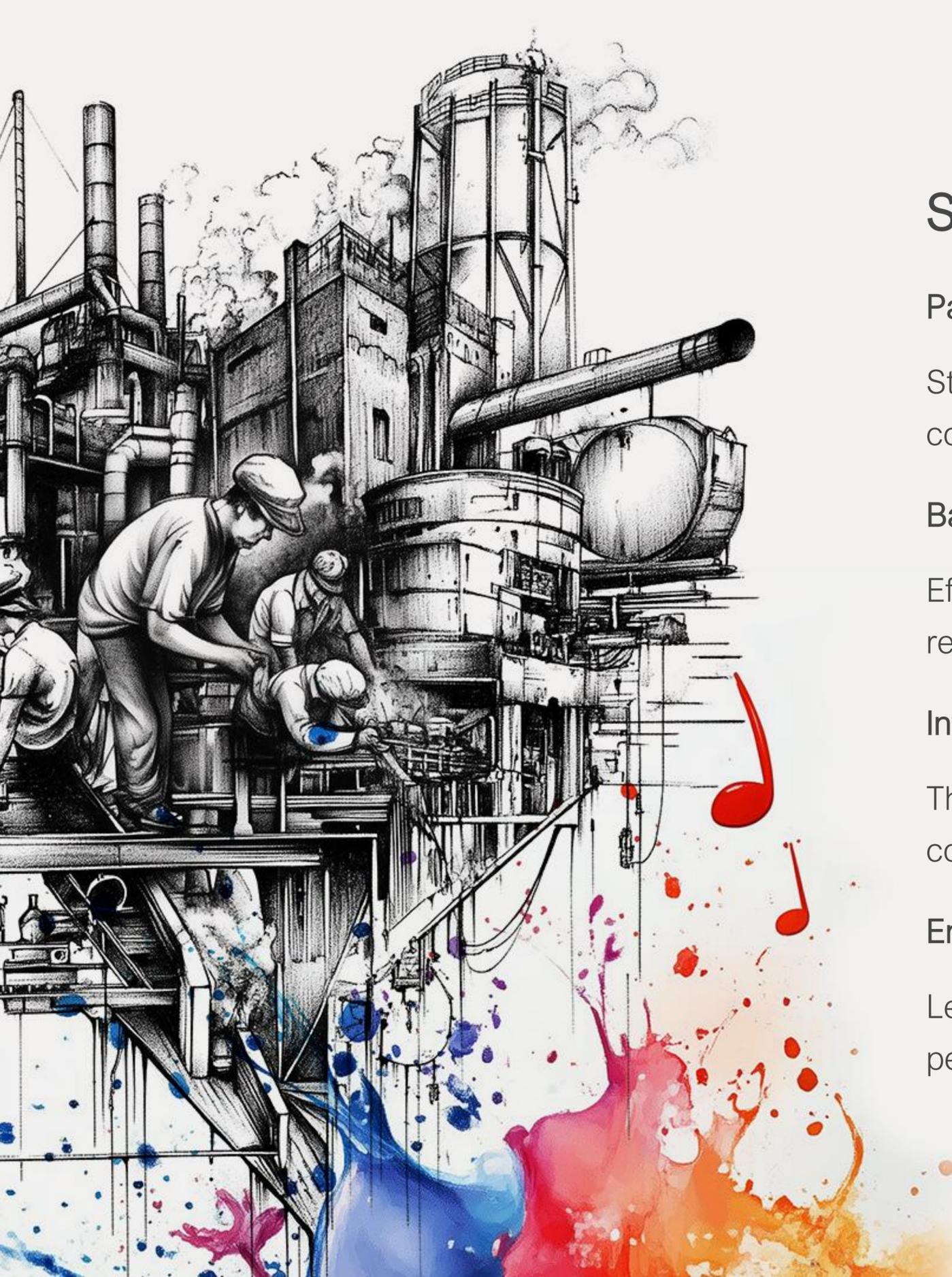
Scenario Planning & Simulations

Using scenario planning and simulations prepares teams for unpredictable events and improves decision-making confidence.

Embedding in Culture

Embedding improvisational practices into culture ensures crisis communication remains agile and strategically grounded.





Summary

Paradigm Shift in Approach

Strategic improvisation shifts crisis communication from rigid models to embracing complexity and uncertainty.

Balancing Planning and Adaptability

Effective crisis response balances structured planning with adaptability to maintain relevance and impact.

Interdisciplinary Insights

The framework integrates psychology, complexity science, and creative theories for comprehensive crisis management.

Empowering Innovation and Resilience

Leaders and teams innovate under pressure, fostering resilience and boosting performance during crises.



“Everybody has
a plan until they
get punched in
the face”

Mike Tyson

