

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

Jesper Falkheimer, Lund University,
Sweden





Mega Crisis (Lagadec)

Global dislocation

From accidental failure to embedded function

Transboundary Crisis (Boin)

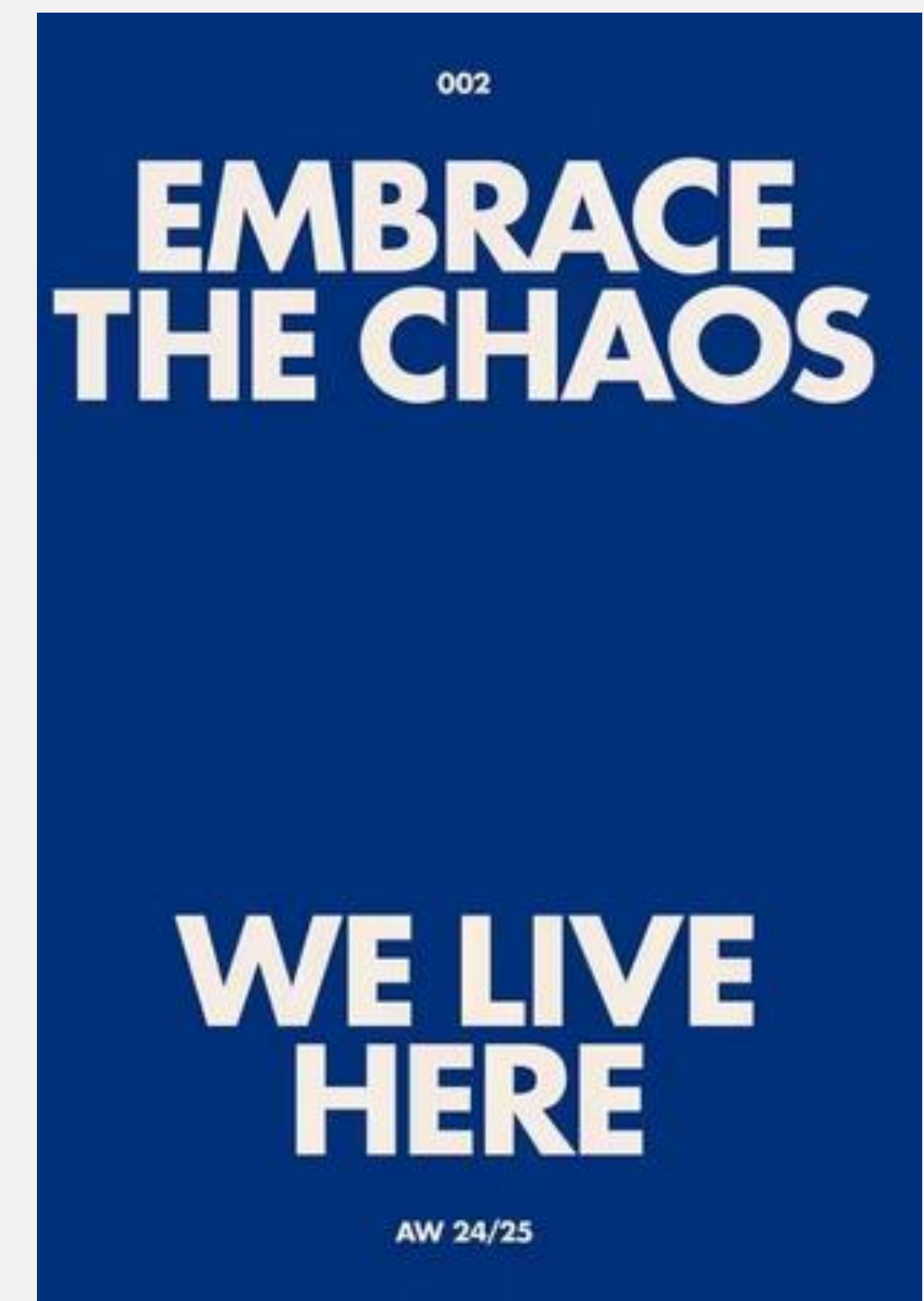
Time, space, function

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> , volatile, <u>cultural</u> , co- <u>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

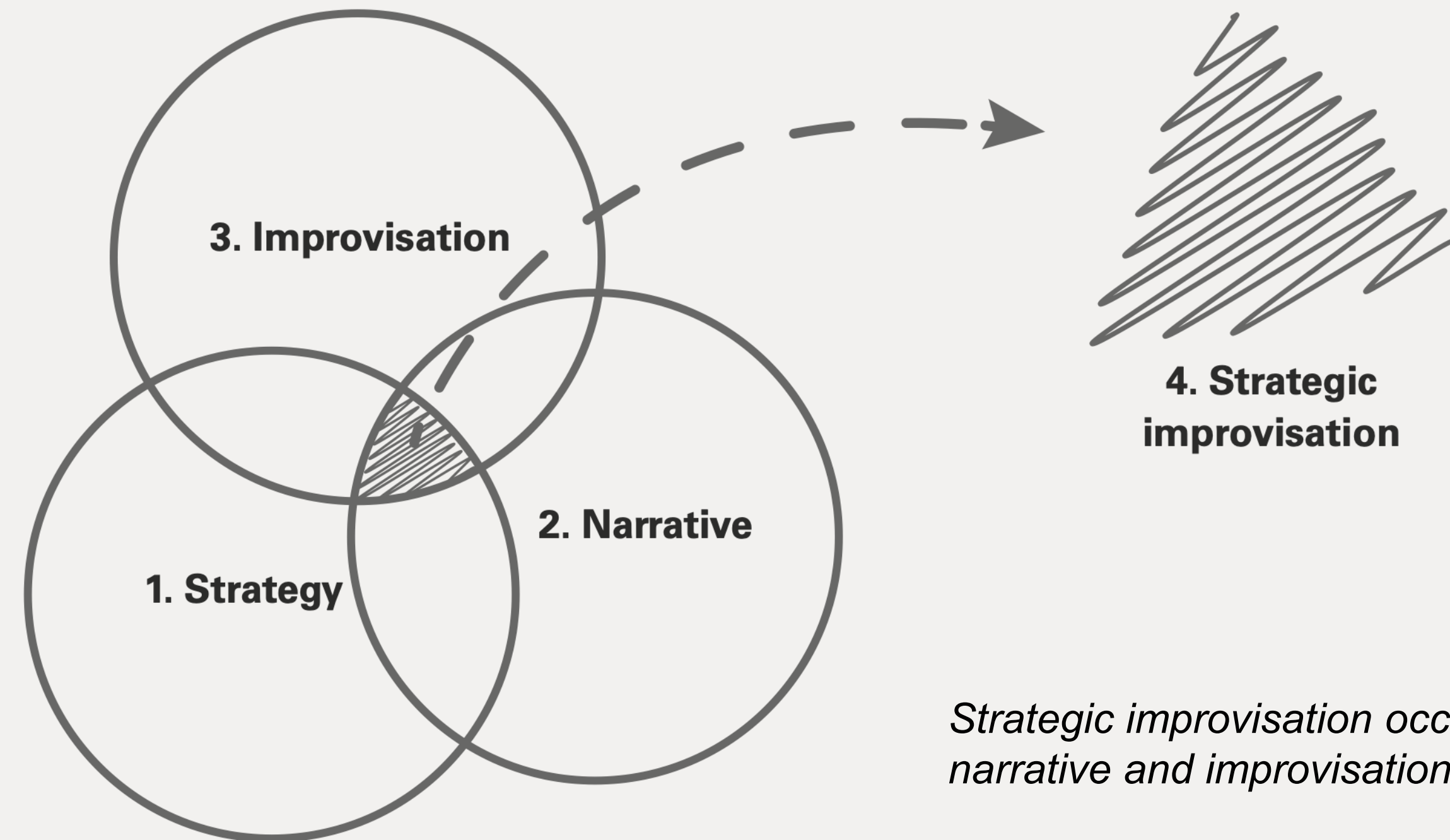
Incorporating creative arts into crisis communication fosters adaptability and resilience.



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	Rigged for constant change	Co-production with employees and other stakeholders
	Room for innovation, development, and flexibility	Iterative processes and learning loops Room for manoeuvre	
APPROACHES	Connects the short and long term	Makes functional and intuitive decisions	Explains, repeats and reminds
	Provides predictability	instead of optimal ones	Talks the walk Walks the talk
	Reminds of the vision and what creates value	Sees failure as natural and necessary	Is present and accessible
	Equips the organisation	Cultivates a culture of trust and takes responsibility for mistakes	



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.

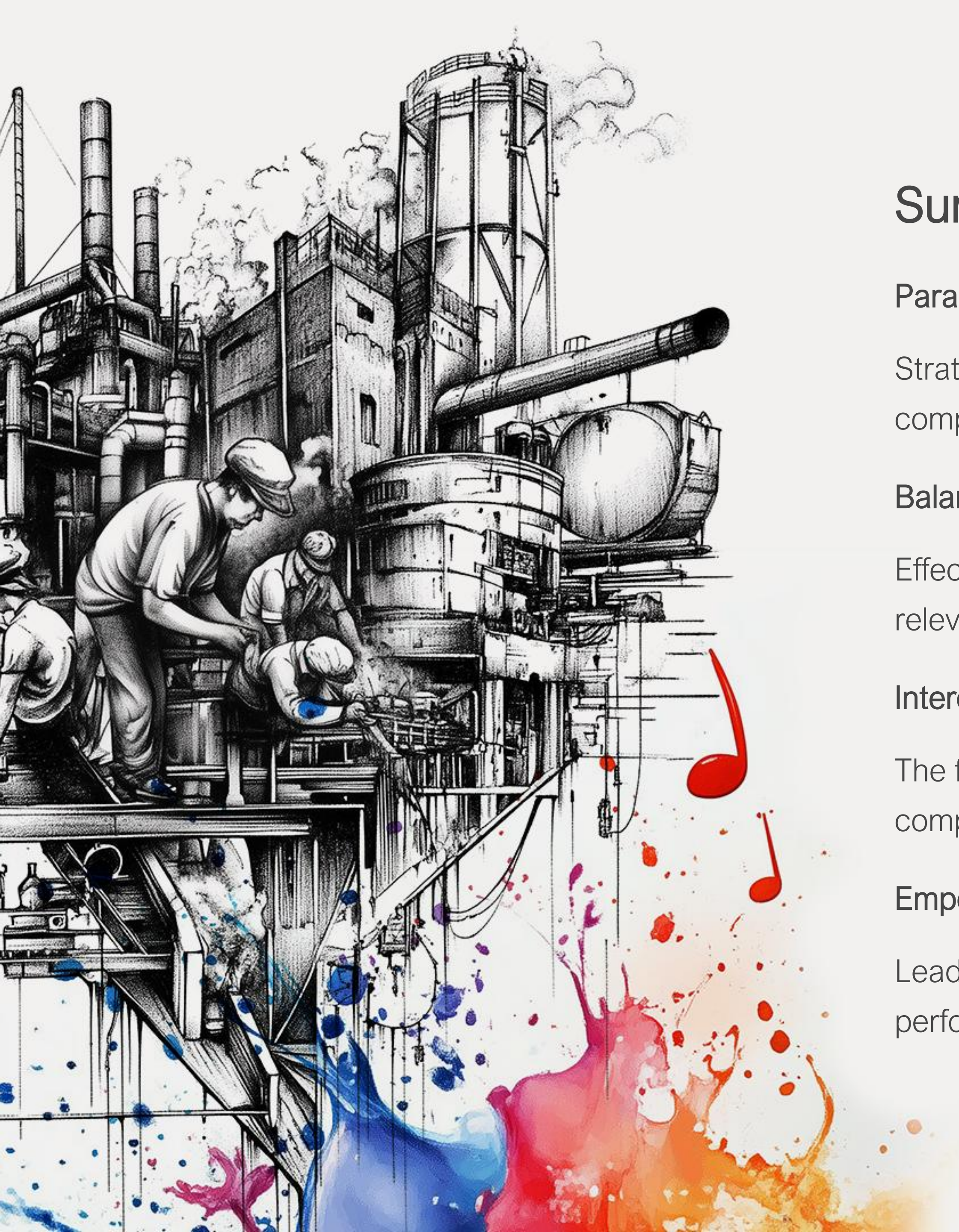
Scenario Planning & Simulations

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

