

Pick up the phone to save lives: routine under uncertainty in a French emergency medical call center

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Keywords: uncertainty, technology and organisation, extrem context, crisis management

Purpose

Organizations establish routines in order to achieve their organizational goals. However, in “extreme” contexts such as periods of emergency (Hällgren, Rouleau and Rond 2018) the design and setting up of efficient organizational routines become difficult not least because such contexts are characterized by high levels of uncertainty.

In emergency contexts, routines must be sufficiently flexible to allow adaptations to unexpected situations (Grote, 2009). While several studies show that routines are at the heart of management processes (Hällgren, Rouleau and Rond 2018), few works examine the internal dynamics of these routines, and especially in their response to emergencies. For example, the endogenous changes that occur to emergency routines are associated with the focal practice and may involve changes to a rule, an artifact, or a role, for instance. These changes may be intentional changes and the result of a deliberate process of reflection on the routine and its organization. On the other hand, these changes may be "involuntary" - almost automatic – and result from a response in real time, to an unexpected situation. Both types of changes can coexist within an organizational routine, and produce an interesting organizational dynamic (Feldman et al. 2016). These organizational dynamics affect emergency contexts which might involve continuous reflection (intentional change), or improvisation (involuntary change) to adapt the routine to an adverse situation.

This research is in a preliminary stage (it started in January 2021). Based on the importance of the notions of uncertainty, emergency context, and organizational routines, it examines how these changes occur and how they affect the management of an emergency. It addresses these questions through a case study; combining qualitative and experimental methods, of a call center or CRRA, which receives calls for emergency medical assistance services.

Method

We plan to use a mixed methods approach combining a qualitative method with a field experiment. This study will be conducted in two steps:

Step 1: an explanatory case study (Gehman et al.2017) This will allow us to identify the explanatory mechanisms and organizational conditions of the studied routine in the management of CRRA activities. Data collection in this step will be based mainly on semi-structured interviews, documentation (whatever exists), and observation. This step will span 12 months and will start on March 15, 2021.

Step 2: in this step, we will conduct the field experiment. The experiment will enable a change to the routine and observation of its impact. We plan to test whether a change to a rule, an artefact, or a role involved in the routine has an influence on the performance of the routine. The results of step 1 will be used to inform step 2 it will involve mainly the actors in the field and will adopt the methodology recommended by Bapuji et al. (2018) for conducting a field experiment on the organization.

Expected Results

This research should produce findings about: (i) the organizational dynamics of an emergency and a routine, and (ii) the effects of one or more changes at the level of a routine (interruption to a routine) on the management of an emergency. It will contribute to research on emergency contexts and provide some recommendations for managers about the shaping of efficient routines for emergencies.

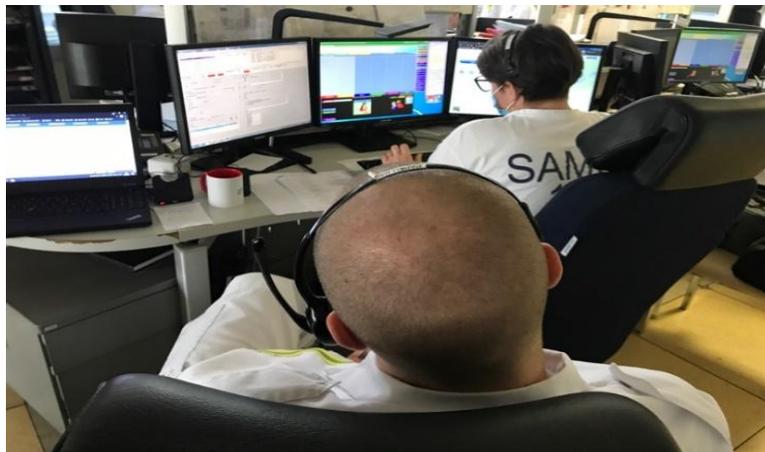


Figure 1 : a medical regulation assistance post in the French department of AUBE

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Topics of research: collaborative planification, extrem context, crisis management, decision making

Interest in sustainability lab: develop research collaborations on the security implications of climate change (social risks, crisis management)