IT manager leadership during crisis situations: Lessons from real-life crisis management in IT functions during natural disasters

Tommi Tapanainen
Université de Liège,
HEC Management School, LENTIC
tojuta@gmail.com

Olivier Lisein
Université de Liège,
HEC Management School, LENTIC
o.lisein@ulg.ac.be

ABSTRACT

Natural disasters are destructive events, but can also give opportunities for learning in crisis management for organizational information technology (IT) functions. In their role as stewards of company data and IT, it is important that IT managers participate in crisis management activities. However, the role of IT managers in crisis management is not well understood, particularly in crisis response. An understanding on how IT managers lead during crisis situations, not only on how they prepare for these events, can help in devising recommendations and training that improves IT manager crisis response.

Leadership is one of the most important tasks for IT managers. IT manager leadership has been previously addressed in IT literature using theories imported from organization and leadership literature. These studies were, however, focused on stable business situations, not crisis situations. On the other hand, much more work has been done regarding general manager leadership in crisis situations; numerous leadership recommendations have been given to general management in these situations. As IT managers share many managerial tasks with general managers, IT managers may be able to learn from these recommendations as to leadership in crisis situations.

This research addresses IT manager crisis leadership during the crisis response effort. We collected data using interviews from Japanese and Taiwanese IT managers and their immediate followers regarding situations in which their companies were affected by natural disasters. As there were few guidelines for IT manager leadership in crises, this research embarked on collecting a list of recommendations from the crisis management literature for general manager leadership in crisis situations. Detailed recommendations were drawn on the categories of sense-making, power and resource negotiation, decision-making, coordination, communication, and stress reduction. The recommendations will be used in the analysis of each individual IT manager case to find how the IT managers' leadership actions match with recommendations.

The analysis is currently in progress, and contributions are expected in the areas of IT manager leadership and crisis management in IT functions.

Keywords

Information systems managers, crisis management, leadership, natural disasters.

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