

**Session title :** Learning to Read the Stars : Leadership for Crisis Prevention

**Moderator/Panelists :** Marie-Christine Therrien, Professor, The University of Public Administration

**Date and time :** Tuesday December 10 2013, 3:30 pm

**Rapporteur :** Patrick Giasson

### **Session Summary**

Often, when a crisis occurs, the following question arises: How could this happen? After the fact, it is often determined that the crisis could have been predicted. Marie-Christine Therrien basically demonstrated how organizations can adjust in order to avoid such crises.

There are several reasons why organizations are unable to ward off potential crises. Some stem from the fact that we are trained to be willfully blind. We are too often indifferent to the contexts, perspectives and problematic situations that arise. When faced with these situations, our response is usually "This is how things are done here." In such cases, the manager must put into question the very mission of the organization and remain constantly attentive to the issues raised.

It is therefore essential for managers to be attuned to the realities of the organization with a view to preventing crises. To reach this objective, they must first of all be as sensitive to errors as to successes. As such, they must be able to let go of certain ways of perceiving the organization that they head. Among other things, managers must recognize that reality is fundamentally complex; allow for some flexibility in the interpretation of the standard description of an employment group; remain aware of the importance of the accumulation of minor errors; fight against the inertia of the organization; and, lastly, avoid any tendency to focus solely on the successes of their organization without considering the various elements to improve.

In addition, managers should avoid oversimplifying reality, so as to take into account more problematic elements, which often arise from the fundamentally complex reality of our world. In sum, traditional organizations fail to ask the following question: What elements are being ignored?

Increased monitoring of operations is also a way to prevent crises. Managers should be on the lookout for the specific abilities and limitations of employees. This creates an environment where minor adjustments are appropriate and well targeted. In addition, permitting a job rotation for employees can help prevent certain situations, including when the only specialist in a certain task or field of expertise is absent.

Managers should also embrace resilience, which helps in ably responding to unforeseen events as they inevitably occur. To achieve this, it is important to be

aware of the existing areas of expertise within the organization and to maintain an external network of individuals from different areas of expertise.

Lastly, too much emphasis on structures and hierarchy can undermine crisis prevention. Errors are often amplified by the structure of an organization. Decentralizing the decision-making process can also contribute to effective crisis prevention.