Human Uncertainty in Organizational Structures, Groups, Borders, and the Petroleum Industry

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INTRODUCTION

In this issue, we focused on novel studies of uncertainty quantification, risk analysis, and contingency management across new disciplines and within unique industry scenarios. We continued our journey of articulating how practitioners are empirically exploring the human dynamics of risk and uncertainty.

We have provided manuscripts, which have extended our coverage of risk-related themes using social-psychology theories, and we have included a few studies, which have explored new variations of these topics, by utilizing quantitative as well as qualitative analysis techniques.

We concentrated on man-made disasters or in some cases, uncertainty generated by human beings. In particular, our contributors have analyzed petroleum accidents, terrorism, national border safety, project management contingency planning, organizational board structure, and decision making in teams. We feel our contributors have demonstrated rigorous research methods and techniques, which were empirically driven, with practical implications.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Risk in Organizational Structure: Regression Model of Profitability

Kim and Rasheed (2013) performed a regression of organizational structure factors to measure their impact on profitability. In doing this, they indirectly accounted for the uncertainty, which exists in the composition of the board of directors. The results indicated that boards with a strong knowledge structure and cognitive behavior performed better. They also found that tenure, functional experience, and educational specialty positively affected performance. Interestingly, they imply that managerial risk

taking is not beneficial to performance as it is similar to organizational risk. They made a strong contribution to the literature with a solid positivist research design and relevant statistical techniques.

Risk in Teams: Critical Analysis of Methods to Control Groupthink

Pratkanis and Turner (2013) integrated a critical analysis of the literature with a case study identify best practices for counteracting the risk of groupthink in decision making teams. They suggested three categories of interventions: applying face-saving techniques and deliberative discussion procedures, stimulating intellectual conflict and deliberative discussion, as well as reducing social identity triggers to avoid peer resistance. While their manuscript provides a direct benefit to the literature, it also introduces an interesting avenue of studying risk or uncertainty in the group decision making process. Since decision making takes place at virtually every organization, this is a topic, which requires replication across the disciplines and industries. In fact, they concluded that more research should be done by using contrasting techniques, such as case studies, experiments, surveys, and retrospective analysis.

Risk of Terrorism: Threat-Response Model for Terrorism

Wood, O'Roark and DeLaCruz (2013) critically reviewed the risk management literature and best practices to develop a qualitative model for mitigating terrorism threats. As they put it, "security is a difficult topic to discuss because of the limitations of existing models and language." Their paper was focused on how to make informed decisions about risk mitigation, in terms of identifying and quantifying the relevant factors to investigate when an organization is concerned about foreign as well as domestic terrorist threats. Their solution was to achieve equilibrium between real-world limitations and security threats. A unique recommendation they demonstrated was to develop protection and damage profiles as a way to quantify terrorism uncertainty.

Risk at the Border: Citizen Perceptions of National Safety

Ziolkowski (2013) interviewed 194 residents along the US border near Niagara Falls, NY during 2006-2012 to uncover their perceptions of a 'feeling of safety'. He included maps to pinpoint exactly where the locations were situated. A key strength of his study was the authenticity, which was obtained by including interesting passages from his US Border Security informants. He found that perceptions of border security improved between the 2006 and 2012 sampling point. He also determined that men had shifted from the feeling the border was not very dangerous to a more conservative position. Interestingly women changed to a relatively less conservative perspective, but they still felt the border was dangerous. This was a valuable contribution to the literature because Ziolkowski collected primary data about uncertainty.

Risk in Oil-Gas Disasters: Distribution Analysis of Petroleum Spills

Nersesian and Strang (2013) demonstrated probability distribution analysis in a retrospective study of petroleum spills within Albany New York over a ten year period (N=1005). First, they constructed a continuous distribution from archival data to create a simulation of magnitude 7 and over earthquakes. Next they collected historical data from New York (NY) to develop a discrete probability distribution for predicting the likelihood of petroleum spills by industry and day of week (N=942). Their work was beneficial to practitioners because it illustrated how to select, develop, test and apply probability distributions for analyzing the patterns of disaster events, based on inferential parametric and nonparametric statistical techniques, using low cost Excel spreadsheet software. Although they identified interesting patterns in the Albany NY petroleum spill data, their methods, not their study, was the best-practice.

Risk in Project Management: Tools and Measures

Karlsen, Folke-Olsen and Torvatn (2013) applied the survey method to collect data from subject matter experts in the Norwegian oil and gas industry along with Mann-Whitney U tests to classify project risk management best-practices (N=171). They identified effective project risk management tools as well as which factors contributed to efficient risk management processes in large oil and gas projects. They found strong relationships between project system complexity, average tool score and risk management contribution. However, they also discovered important limitations associated with previous recommendations for project risk management tools cited in the literature. They asserted that a new project risk management performance index is needed because the existing suite of tool-based risk management contribution measures was flawed. Their key contribution was to collect risk management tool opinions from practitioners, and they used a solid post-positivist quantitative research design.

Future Research

We close the year 2013 with a contented feeling that we have strengthened the editorial board and expanded our subject matter experts. We accomplished this by researching the top-ranked business schools around the world and we collaborated with human resource managers to collect the contact details of faculty with strong scholarly research track records. In this way, we have built a very capable pool of resources as potential contributors, and we hope to convince these scholars to join our readership.

We are proud to serve our readership and we are earnest in doing this. As a hallmark of our effort, IJRCM is endorsed by several credible organizations, including Cabell's; therefore, we are recommended by AACSB and ACBSP as a scholarly peer reviewed journal for university faculty to achieve tenure and promotions. Thus far, we have been on time for every issue, we have a credible citation record, and we have a respectable acceptance rate now at 36% (lower rates generally mean more rigorous peer reviews).

We have a broad portfolio of uncertainty and risk-related topics that we encourage researchers to investigate. We remain open to all formal methods, including quantitative and qualitative techniques, positivist to interpretative ideologies, such as surveys, experiments, critical analysis, retrospective analysis, cases studies, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, reflective action research, and others. Risk is present in most projects so we challenge researchers out there to be creative in how they design their studies and craft their manuscript using keywords, which our IJRCM board prefers.

Finally, we will again supported the International Disaster Conference in 2014 through a presentation by IJRCM board director Bob Symonds. IJRCM will review papers submitted for IDCE based on these keywords: disaster stories, emergency/crisis management, homeland security, business continuity, economic stability, disaster preparation, response, recovery, and mitigation. See our call for papers for details on your research opportunities: www.irma.com/ijrcm

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Kenneth David Strang has a Doctorate in Project Management (business research), an MBA (honors), a BS (honors), as well as a Business Technology diploma (honors). He is a certified Project Management Professional® from Project Management Institute, and is a Fellow of the Life Management Institute (distinction, specialized in actuary statistics and pension systems), from the Life Office Management Association. His research interests include: leadership, multicultural e-learning, marketing new product development, knowledge management, and risk/e-business project management. He teaches subjects in business, in class as well as online, plus he supervises doctorate students. He has authored numerous manuscripts and books since 1981. Finally he is an Editor and Associate Editor at several journals.