

HUMAN BEHAVIOUR & DECISION MAKING IN EMERGENCIES

EENA webinar

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OUTLINE

- Brief intro to psychological theories of crowd behaviour
- Implications for emergency planning & response
- COVID pandemic
 - ‘Panic buying’ pre lockdown
 - Compliance during lockdown
 - 2nd wave & examples of bad (and good) leadership

THE 'PANIC' MODEL

From irrationalist tradition

Threat causes emotion to overwhelm reason

Collective identity breaks down
Selfish behaviours- pushing, trampling

Contagion- behaviours spread uncritically to crowd as a whole



PANIC MODEL-IMPLICATIONS



- Mass emergencies seen as potential public order problem & emergency planning strategy can reflect this
 - CBRN responses used to be based on need to involve Police/army rather than health workers
 - Carter et al (2015) show coercive approaches to de-contam often counter-productive
- Info withheld from public to prevent ‘panic’
 - Trump’s conversation with Bob Woodward re allegations of downplaying COVID-19
- Public seen as problem rather than potential resource to draw from

SOCIAL IDENTITY MODEL OF COLLECTIVE RESILIENCE (SIMCR)

- ◉ Disasters create common identity in response to shared threat
- ◉ Results in orderly, altruistic behaviour as people respond to common threat
- ◉ Co-operative rather than selfish behaviour predominates
 - Lack of co-operation usually due to lack of information, physical constraints, or people being cast in competition with each other
- ◉ Supported by evidence from mass emergencies...
 - Drury et al (2019) practical recommendations for safe crowd management

THE POLITICS OF RESILIENCE

Rhetorical nature of resilience
in national emergencies

Resilience shouldn't excuse not
taking public protection
seriously/cutting post disaster
support

Resilience doesn't mean
absence of distress/ disruption,
but ability to bounce back (or
forward) if enabled to do so

Vital to have shared sense of
exposure to adversity, otherwise
'*we're all in it together*'
becomes empty rhetoric



COVID-19 PANDEMIC

- ◉ Collective responses to COVID often pathologized but solidarity & cooperation common in emergencies could be solution to current pandemic & collective psychology should guide COVID policy
 - Drury et al 2020; Elcheroth & Drury 2020;
- ◉ Need to encourage shared identity & trust public's ability to self-regulate through new social norms
 - Encouraging collective compliance more effective than enforcement
- ◉ Social (physical) distancing necessary, but vital to maintain sense of psychological connection & try to prevent social isolation (esp. vulnerable population)
 - *'Together Apart'* Jetten et al 2020
- ◉ Effective public messaging vital
 - If public trusts information given & identify with sources then more likely to comply with necessary restrictions
- ◉ More *'we-speak'* needed
 - not *'will I survive'* but *'how do we all get through this'*

‘PANIC-BUYING’

- Classic example of social dilemma
 - ‘Rational’ behaviour for individual may not be in collective interest
- ◉ People stockpiling food in advance of expected lockdown could be seen as sensible planning
 - But problematic for ‘just in time’ supply chains
- ◉ Labelling this as ‘irrational’ obscures understanding of such behaviour
- ◉ Media reporting of ‘panic-buying’ quickly becomes self-fulfilling prophesy
- ◉ Encourage common ID & cooperative social norms
 - *‘Enough for everyone if you just buy what you need’*
 - Trusted figures (nurses) discouraging stockpiling
 - <https://twitter.com/SkyNews/status/1241767514868264971>



Due to the current circumstances,
the purchase of Toilet Rolls is
limited to One Packet per
customer.
Sorry for the inconvenience.

LOCKDOWN 23/3-10/5/20

- ◉ Consistency in messaging crucial
- ◉ Original message clear
 - *'Stay at home, protect the NHS, save lives'*
- ◉ Delivered by trusted source that people could ID with
 - Mark Strong https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_cK02XwUogM
- ◉ Initial compliance rates during 1st phase of lockdown much higher than expected by authorities
 - <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/197835/mobile-data-shows-high-compliance-with/>
- ◉ Fears of 'behavioural fatigue' rejected in pre-lockdown predictions by myself & other behavioural scientists
 - <https://dontpaniccorrectingmythsaboutthecrowd.blogspot.com/2020/03/coronavirus-and-social-psychology.html>
 - Newsnight investigation 30/7 vindicates this view
 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000l9x0/newsnight-29072020>
- ◉ Shared ID apparent in weekly 'clap for carers'
 - Involved nearly 70% of UK population (cf British Future 2020)

ALL IN IT TOGETHER?

- Post 10/5 restrictions eased in England
- Message becomes less clear
 - *Stay alert, control the virus, save lives*
- Devolved UK Governments keep original slogan
- Cummings scandal & perception of differential experiences of pandemic damages shared ID & threatens public compliance with lockdown restrictions
 - My article for the Psychologist in May 2020
 - <https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/resilience-requires-those-authority-be-honest-open-and-consistent>



Mutual aid during lockdown

‘The cooperation seen can be explained best in terms of **new emergent groups** that sometimes developed from existing networks, but also evolved in response to what many saw as the over-complicated nature of pre-existing networks, and participants' stated desire to create more localized groups relating to identification with one's own neighbourhood or street.’



Cocking, Ntontis, Vestergren, & Luzynska (2020). Mutual Aid and enduring community support in SE England during the COVID pandemic

NEED TO BUILD UP TRUST

- ◉ *‘The consistent message from us to government has been that, to maximise the adherence of the population, you need to build up trust. That means direct, honest and open communication and taking responsibility’*
 - Susan Michie 20/9/20
- ◉ Trust eroded by recent failings
 - A Level results fiasco
 - Test & Trace debacle
 - ‘Eat out to help out’ scheme may be major factor behind current 2nd wave
 - https://theconversation.com/eat-out-to-help-out-crowded-restaurants-may-have-driven-uk-coronavirus-spike-new-findings-145945?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=bylinetwitterbutton

DON'T BLAME PUBLIC

- ◉ *'one of the worst things leaders can do in terms of trust is to start to blame others when things go wrong'*
 - Susan Michie (SPI-B) 20/9/20
- ◉ But behaviour often much better than expected & high public support for current restrictions
 - YouGov poll shows 78% support new lockdown measures
 - <https://twitter.com/YouGov/status/1308470349743480835>
- ◉ Young People demonised for not following restrictions
 - Media risks skewing story
 - more newsworthy to show YP out partying rather than staying at home & obeying lockdown restrictions!
 - Risks creating psychological out-groups & self-fulfilling prophecy

BAD LEADERSHIP (UK)



- ◉ Boris Johnson's recent press conferences & national TV address took coercive, instructive line with emphasis on those breaching guidelines
- ◉ We need more facilitative approach to encourage mass compliance with lockdown restrictions
 - 'Like a headmaster talking to naughty school children' Cocking 2020
 - <https://twitter.com/DrChrisCocking/status/1308341477966327813>
 - Steve Reicher contrasts PM with Nicola Sturgeon's approach that encourages partnership with the public
 - <https://twitter.com/ReicherStephen/status/1308668885453987841>

GOOD LEADERSHIP (NZ)



- NZ PM Jacinda Ardern praised for good leadership during pandemic
 - Less coercive approach than Boris Johnson
 - More empathic, open to questions & encourages more collective responsibility for crisis
 - <https://theconversation.com/three-reasons-why-jacinda-arderns-coronavirus-response-has-been-a-masterclass-in-crisis-leadership-135541>
- NZ has one of world's lowest COVID infection rates (1824 cases & 25 deaths)

TAKE HOME MESSAGES

- Irrationalist models of crowd behaviour outdated & unsupported by current evidence
 - ‘Panic’ models should not be used in general emergency response and/or COVID pandemic
- Public need to be trusted more in current pandemic
 - Clear, consistent messages about COVID related restrictions from trusted sources & rationale for why they need to adhere, are more likely to encourage compliance
- Competitive/ individualised behaviour best addressed by effective public information campaigns that appeal to shared identity
 - Also need less sensationalist media reporting!
 - Any q.s pls get in touch at c.cocking@brighton.ac.uk

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