

# Crisis response team decision-making as a bureau-political process

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Given their different views and interests, how do liaisons in interorganizational crisis response teams negotiate collective decisions? We conducted an experiment with eight crisis response teams to answer this question. Taking a bureau-political view, we find that liaisons make decisions by following one of two decision-making pathways. First, liaisons claim some decisions as subject to their authority and make crisis response decisions independently. Second, when such authority claims are rejected or when no liaison claims decision-making authority, deliberative consensus-seeking takes place. Additionally, we find that crisis response team negotiations are primarily prompted by liaisons' different views, although clashing organizational interests are not irrelevant. We conclude that a bureau-political perspective helps to understand how liaisons reach collective crisis response decisions.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, crises are more and more transboundary in nature, which means that crises increasingly require the coordinated action of multiple response organizations as response capacities and responsibilities are distributed (Ansell, Boin, & Keller, 2010; Drabek & McEntire, 2002). However, coordination and collaboration over jurisdictional and sectoral boundaries are challenging (see Ansell et al., 2010). The gradual trend towards transboundary crises may therefore explain why crisis response coordination is both increasingly necessary and difficult (e.g., Comfort & Kapucu, 2006). In reaction, crisis scholars have suggested various solutions to crisis coordination problems. Some focus on structural organizational features and promote a network-centred approach instead of top-down, hierarchical ways of organizing (see Dynes, 1994; Kapucu, Arslan, & Collins, 2010). Others emphasize the importance of precrisis familiarity and, by extension, collaborative training, integration and planning in the preparation phase (see Curnin, Owen, & Trist, 2014; Treurniet, van Buul-Besseling, & Wolbers, 2012). Another possible solution relates to the perceived relevance of solid information exchange and communication for coordination and thus focuses on necessary improvements in technical information infrastructures (see Comfort &

Kapucu, 2006; Thompson, Altay, Green, & Lapetina, 2006). These approaches result in a variety of proposals for technological and organizational adjustments to optimize the interorganizational response of crisis response teams.

However, these adjustments may not bring about the expected results when organizations have highly different views and interests during a crisis situation. Organizational cultures and professional backgrounds may, for instance, inform different perspectives on a specific crisis (see Berlin & Carlström, 2011; Granot, 1997; Ödlund, 2010). Additionally, studies recognize “trade-offs between the goal of one's own organization and the overall shared goal of a joint crisis response operation” (Pramanik, Ekman, Hassel, & Tehler, 2015: 236; see Parker, Stern, Paglia, & Brown, 2009), because “political or strategic interests intervene that are not related to the disaster response activity” (Steigenberger, 2016: 63). Socio-political dimensions can thus render organizational as well as technological advances in crisis coordination inconsequential (see 't Hart, 1993). Pursuing this perspective, it is particularly interesting to find out how coordinated crisis response may still come about, given that “*common ground* in unexpected and escalating situations implies constant negotiations” (Bergström, Dahlström, Henriqson, & Dekker, 2010: 228). Thus, it is relevant to study the bureaucratic politics of

crisis response coordination. A bureau-political perspective describes how governmental action can be explained as the outcome of negotiations among bureaucratic actors with divergent perceptions and interests (Allison, 1971).

Despite the potential relevance of a bureau-political perspective on crisis response collaboration (e.g., Van Santen, Jonker, & Wijnngaards, 2009), existing research faces one of two shortcomings. Some studies identify different perspectives and interests of crisis organizations, and infer that this will lead to interorganizational conflicts that need to be negotiated (see Berlin & Carlström, 2011; Granot, 1997; Ödlund, 2010; Steigenberger, 2016), but these studies do not describe how these negotiations take place and how conflicts are, in fact, resolved. A second strand of research identifies high-profile incidents of bureaucratic in-fighting in crises (see Chen, 2016; Parker et al., 2009; Rosenthal, 't Hart, & Kouzmin, 1991), but fails to specify how bureau-political interactions influence crisis response endeavours beyond the specific case. In this study, we wish to add to these studies by using an experiment to systematically describe the bureau-political processes through which members of crisis response teams negotiate collective decisions.

In practice, such coordinated decisions are often made by liaisons or boundary spanners who represent their organizations in interorganizational crisis response teams (Curnin et al., 2014; Wolbers, 2016). Uniquely, we conducted a controlled experiment, in which liaisons in eight crisis response teams were tasked to collaboratively resolve two crisis situations. The use of a controlled experiment enabled us to study bureau-political processes in crisis response and to systematically compare dynamics in different scenarios. We use our findings to answer the questions: *How do liaisons in interorganizational crisis response teams negotiate collective decisions? And how do organizational interests influence the decision-making process?*

In the next section, we describe the bureau-political nature of interorganizational crisis response by highlighting the nature of differences in organizational views and interests. In addition, we illustrate how liaisons have a central role in overcoming such differences. After a brief reflection on the methods used, we describe the bureau-political decision-making process through which liaisons reach collective decisions in the face of competing views and interests. Next, we discuss the implications of these findings and conclude the article.

## 2 | THEORY

### 2.1 | The bureau-political nature of interorganizational crisis response

Crisis situations are defined by three elements: a threat to a community, uncertainty about the nature of the crisis and an urgent need to respond (see Boin, 't Hart, Stern, & Sundelius, 2005). While crisis responders will generally share a common preference for containing and tackling the crisis, the idea that these conditions create unanimity among responders is flawed (Rosenthal et al., 1991). For various reasons, organizations may hold different views on the degree and direction of the threat, the exact nature of the crisis and on which

elements the crisis response should focus (see Boin et al., 2005). The idea of a “common cause” after a crisis is therefore fictitious to a large degree (Rosenthal et al., 1991). Coordinating over functional boundaries is subsequently highly complex (Ansell et al., 2010), as evidenced by the fact that collaboration is often limited during crises (see Berlin & Carlström, 2008, 2011; Danielsson, 2016).

Differences in crisis views may have multiple organizational and professional roots. For instance, cultural and task differences are prevalent between different crisis organizations, leading to divergent outlooks on crisis response and to different interpretations of crisis situations (Ödlund, 2010). Organizational culture consists of assumptions, beliefs, and values and materializes in organization-specific traditions, symbols and language (Granot, 1997). These cultural characteristics bind organizational members, but at the same time create a gap with nonmembers (Granot, 1997; Ödlund, 2010). Consequently, crisis responders are likely to perceive incidents differently and recognize different priorities. By extension, Wolbers and Boersma (2013) describe how professionals of various organizations interpret crisis information in a different manner. Countering the rationalist “information warehouse” perspective, they show that information is not self-evident or complete, but instead needs the ascription of meaning to be actionable. Additionally, crisis organizational members are likely to view their task and their own contribution as essential. Thus, crisis organizations can come into conflict as they all are convinced that their response activities are essential in tackling the crisis (Rosenthal et al., 1991). This clash is exacerbated when the organizational culture entails a self-image of decisiveness, a hands-on approach or leadership competencies (see Berlin & Carlström, 2011). Given that crisis perspectives differ, we may conclude that “there is simply no such thing as self-evident crisis management, guided by common principles of action and efficiency” ('t Hart, Rosenthal, & Kouzmin, 1993: 28).

Aside of differing organizational views, crisis organizations may also have competing interests during a crisis. In fact, organization-specific motivations will not disappear regardless of the common goal of resolving the crisis. One of the organizational interests is the postcrisis (media) attention and the related legitimacy of the crisis agency based on its perceived performance in response to the critical incident (see Rosenthal et al., 1991). Agencies may avoid collaboration to enhance exposure or claim the positive outfall as their doing (Berlin & Carlström, 2011). From this perspective, crises are crucial tests for crisis-oriented organizations ('t Hart et al., 1993). Moreover, organizations are likely to have conflicting interests regarding the preferred allocation of power and resources (Granot, 1997). Scholars specifically report that clashes erupt on the authority over certain tasks, domains and jurisdictions, as well as over who should guide the interorganizational response (see Moynihan, 2009; Quarantelli, 1986). Thus, they can take a strategic stance during the evolving crisis to create a beneficial image of their role and thereby build a strong basis for more funding or personnel when resources are reallocated ('t Hart et al., 1993; Rosenthal et al., 1991).

Given that diverging organizational views and interests are pursued during crisis response endeavours, a bureau-political view on

interorganizational crisis response is relevant. From a bureau-political perspective, crisis response decisions are seen as the resultant of intragovernmental bargaining between public officials who are pursuing incongruent, organization-based views and interests (Allison, 1971; Halperin & Clapp, 2006). Although such bargaining may take various forms, such as consensus-seeking or antagonism (Preston & 't Hart, 1999), studies on the bureaucratic politics of crisis management primarily focused on exceptional cases of antagonistic in-fighting, which produced incoherent and ineffective responses characterized by disorder and disagreements (e.g., Chen, 2016; Keane & Wood, 2015; Parker et al., 2009; Rosenthal et al., 1991). Instead, to prevent a failing crisis response, organizations need to negotiate collective decisions despite their divergent views and interests in order to “build a response system that can reach across boundaries and bring together available capacities in an effective and timely manner” (Ansell et al., 2010: 200). This task is often attributed to liaisons.

A liaison is “an individual from one agency who is located in an external organization and is tasked with bridging the boundaries between these agencies to facilitate a collective objective” (Curnin et al., 2014: 550), such as the temporary coordination of crisis response activities (Wolbers, 2016). Being deployed in an external organization, such as an interorganizational network organization, liaisons of crisis agencies often have considerable freedom of action (e.g., Kalkman & De Waard, 2017). In this context, crisis response liaisons carry out boundary-spanning activities varying from representing their organization to processing relevant information (Curnin et al., 2014). As they are essential for overcoming interorganizational differences in views and interests, liaisons may considerably impact the success of the crisis response (see Kalkman & De Waard, 2017).

However, the role of a liaison may be challenging. On the one hand, liaisons are representatives of their organization and need to reflect the views and interests of their crisis response agency. On the other hand, liaisons have to communicate and collaborate across organizational boundaries and thus need to consider the concerns of other crisis organizations (Curnin et al., 2014). Liaisons may, thus, be caught between the expectations of their organizational superiors and those of crisis response team members in the interorganizational network (Kalkman & Groenewegen, 2018). Facing such a “role conflict,” liaisons need to negotiate between these incongruent preferences to effectively respond to a crisis (Kalkman & Groenewegen, 2018; Keane & Wood, 2015). This research contributes to the literature by theorizing the bureau-political processes through which interorganizational crisis response decisions are negotiated in light of such competing views and interests.

### 3 | METHODS

We set up an exercise-like experiment to study the process of crisis response team decision-making. The use of exercises as a source of information has some specific benefits for researchers. While crisis

response activities during real crises are often difficult to attend as they are unplanned, exercises may offer the best option to witness interorganizational processes in a near-real crisis setting (see Latiers & Jacques, 2009). In our research, the experimental settings enabled us to highlight the decision-making process and reduce distracting circumstances (see Danielsson, 2016), while multiple similar crisis exercises facilitated cross-case comparisons (Bergström et al., 2010). Thus, following earlier work (e.g., Berlin & Carlström, 2008; Pramanik et al., 2015; Wolbers & Boersma, 2013), we used exercises to draw theoretical conclusions.

Our experiment differs as it does not involve observations at planned crisis exercises (e.g., Berlin & Carlström, 2008; Wolbers & Boersma, 2013), but is based on our own construction of a crisis exercise. While previous researchers have used experimental settings to ask individual responders questions on how they would act in a given crisis situation (e.g., Danielsson, 2016; Pramanik et al., 2015), we observed how they actually behaved in a crisis scenario. This approach enabled us to develop a controlled crisis experiment in which many decisions needed to be taken and organizational interests could be introduced in a strategic manner. Thus, the data enable the thorough analysis of decision-making processes and a comparative analysis between two different conditions.

#### 3.1 | Set-up of the experiment

In our experiment, we used two scenarios that were built around the threat of terrorism. A terrorism scenario requires the coordination between multiple crisis organizations and is sufficiently uncommon to require processes of negotiated decision-making. Both scenarios were twice pretested among domain experts to ensure usability in the actual trials. Additionally, eight experts, both crisis response professionals and academics, gave feedback on the usability and validity of the scenarios. In postexperimental discussions, participants generally described the scenario as realistic and related their experimental experiences to similar experiences in real-life crises, which speaks to the validity of the experimental set-up.

The first scenario (i.e., concert hall scenario) involved a terrorist attack in a concert hall in which a popular singer is performing for a crowd of around eight hundred people, most of which are teenage girls. Fifteen minutes before the end of the concert, part of the hall suddenly collapses. As the audience tries to exit the concert hall, parents of the teenagers enter it to search for their children. Some thirty of these are missing or have been badly hurt and are unable to leave the concert hall on their own, while many others are lightly wounded. While the cause of the incident is not immediately clear, rumours of terrorism spread quickly.

The second scenario (i.e., train station scenario) focused on an attack with sarin gas during the morning rush hour at a medium-sized train station. At the time of the incident, the likely number of travellers amounts to several hundred people. They are either waiting on the platforms or within one of the trains that have just arrived there. After a loud explosion, people nearby its source show symptoms of sarin gas poisoning. Immediately, rumours of terrorism

are voiced. Angry people specifically blame and threaten a nearby asylum seekers centre on social media.

Participants received several minutes to read all the information and to create their individual situational awareness, after which the participants convened to construct a common operational picture and make decisions on the crisis response. Although we focus in this research on the decision-making phase, we recognize that sensemaking precedes and steers it. In practice, individual crisis response officials build and update their own understanding or representation of the crisis situation, while some level of shared situational awareness is necessary for collaboration (Curnin, Owen, Paton, & Brooks, 2015). This is achieved through collective sensemaking and often materializes in a common operational picture, for which “actors share and give meaning to information to synchronize their actions” (Wolbers & Boersma, 2013: 189). As liaisons’ understandings are unlikely to completely overlap, they will have complementing but distributed situational awareness (Curnin et al., 2015), on the basis of which they prefer different crisis response decisions. In this study, we highlight how they negotiate these decisions and, thus, focus specifically on decision-making processes.

As we intended to study the impact of competing views and interests in interorganizational crisis response decision-making, our experiment had two conditions. In the first condition, there was no external interference and participants received the same crisis incident information as well as minimal information on their organizational units and capacities to make the scenario usable. Thus, they primarily had to resolve their different perceptions of the general information, stemming from their varying organizational cultures, tasks and professional priorities. In the second condition, we introduced external interference through references to (conflicting) organizational interests. More specifically, in the second condition, liaisons received information from their superiors to pursue certain interests related to their organization’s reputation, role and societal position. The organizational liaisons faced various conflicts if they strictly followed their organizations’ input. For instance, the military liaison was encouraged to deploy military capabilities, while the municipal liaison was pressured by superiors to de-escalate the crisis and not to facilitate military deployments. Participants always went first through the condition without external interference and afterwards through the intervention with external interference. We chose this order to ensure that our external interference (i.e., organizational interests) would not have spillover effects for the condition without external interference and would thereby skew the findings in the default (i.e., noninterference) condition. However, content-wise, the order of the scenarios was changed to prevent scenario bias effects. Thus, four teams started with the concert hall scenario, while the other four began with the train station scenario.

In total, teams from eight Dutch Safety Regions participated in the experiment, enabling eight trials. Safety Regions are the public network organizations tasked with facilitating interorganizational crisis response in the Netherlands (Kalkman, 2016). Participants in this experiment were members of their respective regional tactical teams (ROT) and were thus tasked with coordinating the crisis response in the “effect area” (i.e., the area beyond the specific “source area”), translating operational dilemmas into policy issues, and external

communication (see Scholten, Jorritsma, & Helsloot, 2014). Participants were senior liaisons of the police, fire brigade, medical services, municipal services and the armed forces. As all team members in a trial were recruited from the same Safety Region, they had often met before, as is the case in real-life crisis response teams. Throughout a trial, teams remained constant to enable comparisons between the two conditions. The following table provides an overview of the composition of teams. Although it was not possible to form complete teams in every Safety Region, findings did not differ noteworthy between various crisis response teams.

	Military liaison	Medical liaison	Municipal liaison	Fire brigade liaison	Police liaison
Trial 1	X	X	X		
Trial 2	X	X	X	X	
Trial 3	X	X	X		X
Trial 4	X	X	X		X
Trial 5	X	X	X	X	X
Trial 6	X	X	X	X	X
Trial 7	X	X	X	X	X
Trial 8	X	X	X	X	X

We added an element of civil–military collaboration to our experiment by always having a military liaison present. The reason for the civil–military component is twofold. First, as the military liaison is not a fixed member of the ROT, there is an additional need for negotiating the allocation of crisis roles and responsibilities, providing us with even clearer insights into negotiation processes. Second, as the role of the armed forces is rising in (Western) domestic crisis management systems, there is a practical use in knowing whether there are specific negotiation processes or coordination challenges pertaining to civil–military collaborations (see Kalkman, 2016; Kalkman & De Waard, 2017; Ödlund, 2010).

### 3.2 | Data collection and analysis

During the eight trials of around 2.5 hr on average, qualitative data were collected through observations of crisis response teams’ decision-making processes. Additionally, postexperimental discussions of about 30 min were held to enable the participants to reflect on their experiences as well as to voice their opinions regarding the research goals (which were disclosed during the postexperimental discussion). Extensive notes were taken during the trials, and the discussions were loosely transcribed based on the recordings. Remarks or discussions of specific relevance were fully transcribed. The data collection resulted in 128 pages of transcripts and observations.

Subsequently, we used Atlas.ti, qualitative data analysis software (<https://atlasti.com/>), for analysing the experiment. We identified decisions that were made during the observations and focused on the team interactions preceding the decisions. The bureau-political nature of these interactions is exemplified by the negotiations to overcome diverging crisis views and interests. Based on word choice, tone and effects, we also ascribed the nature of the bureau-political negotiation, ranging from consensus-seeking to antagonism (Preston & 't Hart, 1999). From this analysis, different decision-making patterns and negotiation styles came to the surface.

## 4 | FINDINGS

In line with our research questions, we structured our findings in two sections. In the first part, we analyse the decision-making processes and the negotiation styles that the teams were using in the first condition. In the second part, we identify the effect of competing organizational interests. The quotes provided in the tables (e.g., #1) are telling examples and representative.

### 4.1 | Crisis response team decision-making: negotiating divergent views

In all teams, we observed a particular sequence of stages in the decision-making process. After individuals built their own situational awareness, teams begin to construct a common operational picture. The contributions that liaisons make to this common operational picture are guided by their individual interpretations of the general crisis information which differ due to their varying organizational and professional backgrounds. For example, in the train station scenario, police liaisons primarily see public order and security challenges, while medical liaisons are initially focusing on victims and public health risks. Next, several themes are selected on which all liaisons agree that decisions need to be made. In this phase, many possible themes are mentioned and four to eight general themes are usually selected as particularly urgent. Such themes may, for example, include the safety of responders or communication to affected groups. After this selection, decisions on these themes are negotiated. There are two possible pathways for crisis response decision-making that can be taken: (a) one of the liaisons claims (organization-based) authority over a topic and makes individual decisions or (b) the team enters upon a collaborative decision-making process. All teams use both of these pathways alternately, depending on the decision at hand.

Many crisis response decisions are taken by individual liaisons which claim authority over a certain theme or topic. For instance, the police liaison makes decisions on transportation questions, while the fire brigade decides on how to treat victims of contamination (#1). These authority claims often build on agreements in the precrisis phase. In fact, some decisions are simply expected to be taken by organizational liaisons whom are recognized as having authority in the field. In such circumstances, others do not even make suggestions but await their advice. Even though such areas of authority are partly pre-

arranged, there is a large grey area, so there is often considerable variety among teams in how a specific decision is taken. Exemplary, the decision to cease all crisis response activities after a terrorist attack was sometimes taken by the police liaison alone, while it was subject to (collaborative) debate in other teams. This shows that authority is constructed and attributed rather than objectively held. In turn, this means that authority can be contested. However, when an area of authority is claimed by a liaison and other liaisons question the individual operations of the liaison's organization, this liaison typically clearly and unwaveringly puts down this external interference (#2). Others' concerns are perceived as unnecessary or even offensive, and the negotiation tends to become antagonistic. Such disputes generally fail if one merely questions the liaisons' authority or decisions, but may succeed when another liaison asks for the implications of a decision for others (#3). In teams that adopted a strong hierarchy (e.g., by appointing a team leader), liaisons were less likely to question others' authority and would defend their own authority more vehemently, while decentralized teams with a flat structure appeared conducive to more and broader discussions on crisis response decisions.

#	Quote	Code
1	Police liaison: <i>I have already taken decisions that are of influence for your perception. These are not our decisions but they have already been implemented. The most important one is that I stopped the trains: no trains and no busses anymore within the train station area.</i>	Authority claim
2	Municipal liaison: <i>Do you ensure, say, that people who are in the area are not recording things with their phones and tweeting it, will you suppress that?</i>  Police liaison: <i>No, look, the train station area is restricted area, it is the incident location. No one may enter it, also not for their safety as I mentioned...</i>  Municipal liaison: <i>And in the surroundings, if people become a source of information themselves, will they be addressed?</i>  Police liaison: <i>Certainly not. No, we don't have time for that.</i>	Authority claim; disputed; failed
3	Police liaison: <i>In my view, we tell the other theater: close it, everybody out and get home as soon as possible. That is a decision we have to take on the basis of the information [...]</i>  Municipal liaison: <i>I have a dilemma with transport. Look, the train station is already an area they can no longer access.</i>  Police liaison: <i>So busses.</i>  Municipal liaison: <i>[...] I needed busses. I had planned to let people get on at the train station but that is no longer the case, so we need advice where we can safely park the busses.</i>  Police liaison: <i>Yes, that has to do with coordination. [...] We need to coordinate that.</i>	Authority claim; disputed; successful

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#	Quote	Code
4	<p>Municipal liaison: <i>We need to talk about upscaling.</i></p> <p>Police liaison: <i>I think we should advise to scale up to level four [i.e. the regional level], because of the impact.</i></p> <p>Municipal liaison: <i>But imagine that the impact reaches beyond the regional borders. Should we not scale up to level five [i.e. the national level]?</i></p> <p>Police liaison: <i>Well, the impact beyond the region is limited.</i></p> <p>Municipal liaison: <i>Okay, but then you can also argue that level three [i.e. the municipal level] suffices.</i></p> <p>Medical liaison: <i>I think because of the administrative questions in front of us, level four would be best.</i></p> <p>Military liaison: <i>In addition, military units are going to be deployed.</i></p> <p>Police liaison: <i>So we agree on level three at least. I think it would also relieve the mayor of work overload if we go to level four.</i></p> <p>Municipal liaison: <i>Okay, let's advice level four then.</i></p>	Collaborative decision-making; collective decision
5	<p>Fire brigade liaison: <i>This story we just had, about whether to act or not, we leave it to the policy team to decide.</i></p>	Collaborative decision-making; deferred responsibility
6	<p>Medical liaison: <i>In terms of communication: 'close your windows and doors'? [...]</i></p> <p>Military liaison: <i>That's something you should leave to the [advisor on dangerous substances]. We can't do that here. [...]</i></p> <p>Medical liaison: <i>I will look which recommendations I can get from the [advisor on dangerous substances].</i></p>	Collaborative decision-making; deferred responsibility

When authority is successfully disputed or there is no liaison who claims authority in the first place, a decision is taken collectively. While negotiations on liaison authority are antagonistic, the collaborative decision-making process is consensus-seeking and deliberative instead. One of the liaisons will usually make a carefully framed suggestion and invite other opinions. Others raise questions and doubts to give the opportunity for clarifying and defending the suggestion. Other liaisons may also ask the liaison to reflect upon an alternative course of action or on what happens if they do not follow the suggestion. After arguments have been exchanged, liaisons prove willing to change their position (#4). At the end of every meeting, all decisions are summarized and final specifications or additions can be proposed and incorporated.

There are also situations, however, in which the team considers their information too limited to make an informed choice or which they fail to resolve due to uncertainties about their mandate.

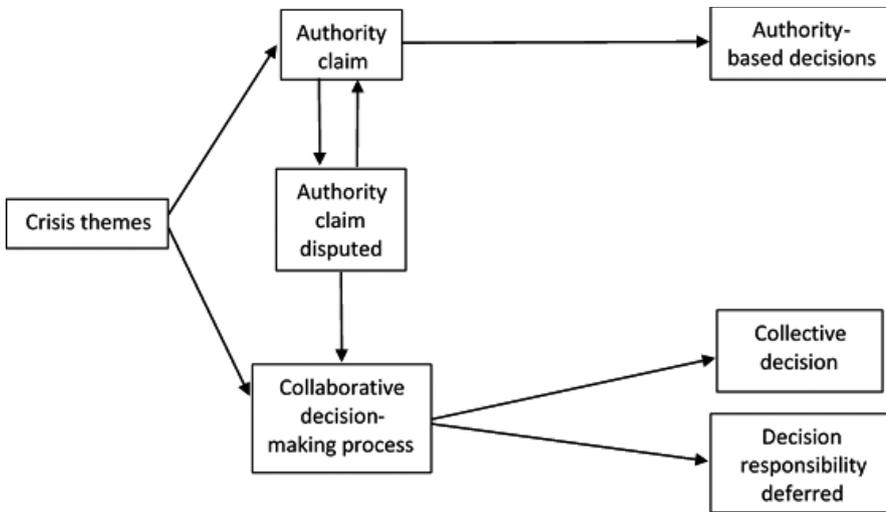
Under these circumstances, the team formulates its dilemma and defers it to other actors, which (temporarily) relieves them from the dilemma and prevents a slowing down of the necessary speed of decision-making. They may for instance leave decisions to field-based responders who have a clearer sight and feeling in relation to the incident. Another option is to leave decisions to the policy team headed by the mayor, particularly when decisions are politically sensitive or have wide implications and may after the crisis evoke considerable criticisms (#5). A final option is to shift decisions to recognized experts (#6). On the basis of these findings, we can construct Figure 1, which illustrates the bureau-politics of crisis response team decision-making in the face of competing crisis views.

## 4.2 | Crisis response team decision-making: the impact of organizational interests

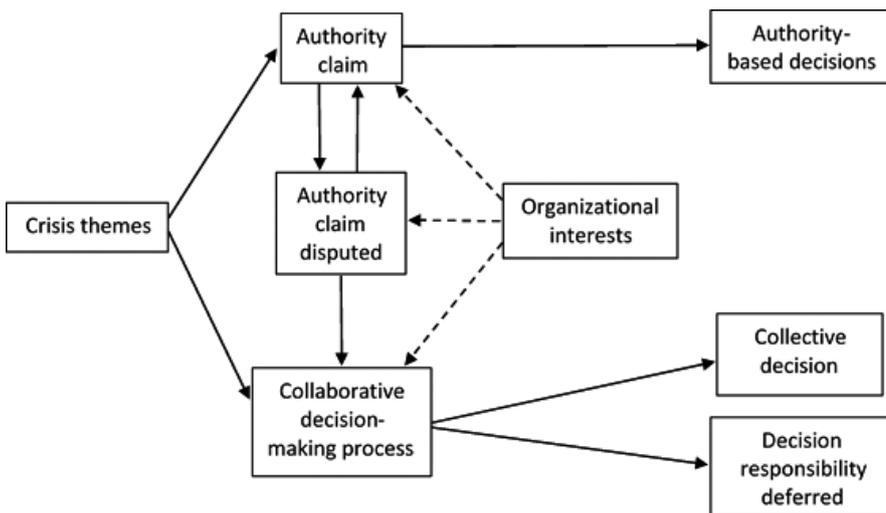
In the second condition of the experiment, we introduced organizational interests for each liaison involved, to investigate their effects on the negotiations in the crisis response team. Generally, before bringing the interests into the group discussion, liaisons insisted that they would usually (i.e., in a real-world situation) first start an internal discussion with their superiors. For instance, one liaison “inform [s] him about the events and explain[s] that sometimes strategic goals do not have priority.” Liaisons are therefore weary to immediately pursue these interests. Instead, they process the organizational interests in either one of two ways. First, some of them hide or filter the organizational pressures for other liaisons and adapt them in such a way that they can be pursued without overly interfering with the response team's actions (#7). Second, other liaisons choose to openly share these top-down pressures to make sure that all team members are aware of their challenges (#8).

In general, teams use the same decision-making pathways in both experimental conditions. The effects of additional organizational interests depend on the specific decision-making pathway. In the authority-based decision-making process, organizational pressures affect how strongly liaisons claim and dispute authority. Liaisons state in more self-assured terms their authority over certain decisions than in the first condition and are emboldened to make decisions with extensive consequences (#9). Vice versa, organizational interests could also inform disputes over authority claims (#10). Such disputes, again, are primarily successful when not the liaison's decision is challenged but put into a broader perspective (#11). Interestingly, decentralized teams are more open to discussing authority questions, which are generally more quickly suppressed in very hierarchical teams.

In the collaborative decision-making process, organizational interests slightly adjust the content of discussions as well. First, liaisons try to adapt interests in such a way that they fit within the team goals. This may lead to creative solutions, such as when the police and fire brigade liaisons both felt organizational pressures to take the lead in determining whether a building was safe to enter and



**FIGURE 1** Bureau-politics of crisis response team decision-making in the face of competing crisis views (condition 1)



**FIGURE 2** Bureau-politics of crisis response team decision-making in the face of competing views and interests (condition 2)

decided to share this responsibility (#12). Second, when organizational pressures rise, the collaborative decision-making process is also used to develop rational arguments for the liaisons that do not follow their superiors' interests (#13). Figure 2 presents the bureau-politics of crisis response team decision-making in the face of competing views and interests.

A comparison of both conditions and post-trial discussions further demonstrates that two organizational factors influence how strongly liaisons are affected by these pressures. First, municipal liaisons are less well integrated in the Safety Regions than others and felt a stronger sense of responsibility to their own organization. Second, fire brigade and military liaisons are embedded in stronger hierarchies than other liaisons and shared that they felt a stronger need to take top-down pressures seriously. The police and medical liaisons claimed to be relatively uninfluenced by organizational pressures. Lastly, military liaisons are no fixed members of the teams which led to some additional negotiations on specific crisis responsibilities, but the style of these negotiations was not markedly different from negotiations between civilian liaisons.

#	Quote	Code
7	Military liaison: <i>I can imagine that the police will face troubles later on with protection. I see two solutions for that: you can evacuate the [asylum-seekers center] and move it to our [military] shelter, but we can also add capacities to the police, to support the police – the police have to be there – with protecting the [asylum-seekers center].</i>	Filtered interests
8	Municipal liaison: <i>The municipality wants to keep this as small as possible. As representative of the municipal services, I am here at the table to manage this crisis with you. That's first. But I'd like to have a collective image of how to deal with this.</i>	Open interests
9	Fire brigade liaison: <i>Empathetically, that everyone has this clear: medical evacuation is carried out by the fire brigade in specific clothing.</i>	Authority claim

(Continues)

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#	Quote	Code
10	<p>Fire brigade liaison: <i>I would like to send out an alert message: 'People, stay inside. Close windows and doors.'</i></p> <p>Municipal liaison: <i>The question is now: people live here and the smoke is here. The scenario is: if this is serious, it may have consequences for these people.</i></p> <p>Fire brigade liaison: <i>We don't know that yet.</i></p> <p>Municipal liaison: <i>We don't know that yet, but we may have to take the decision for their evacuation [...].</i></p> <p>Fire brigade liaison: <i>Well, tell them to close windows and doors, and to turn off the ventilation. Because if we start evacuating, people end up on the street.</i></p>	Authority claim; disputed; failed
11	<p>Military liaison: <i>I see a dilemma in the evacuation and waste removal, and finding victims because that will cost you hours, days. [...]</i></p> <p>Fire brigade liaison: <i>Well, at first instance, this is a responsibility for the fire brigade. And actually you say, on the basis of your expertise, I expect it will take long and we can facilitate it. [...]</i></p> <p>Military liaison: <i>Eventually it is about continuity.</i></p> <p>Medical liaison: <i>Yes, endurance. [...]</i></p> <p>Fire brigade liaison: <i>If I formulate it broader: continuity of the rescue, because rescue is primarily a fire brigade task, but here it is not about the rescue itself but about the continuity.</i></p>	Authority claim; disputed; successful
12	<p>Fire brigade liaison: <i>The collectiveness is in our interest in safety. For you, safety concerns are whether there is a bomb or not. For me, safety is whether there is a risk of collapse, but if we put those things together, we can act together.</i></p> <p>Police liaison: <i>Yes, because we both want to enter the building to exclude some options.</i></p>	Collaborative decision-making; adaptation
13	<p>Military liaison: <i>We could potentially deploy people for protection. And that's if it is necessary to relieve the police from locations that you would have to protect yourself otherwise.</i></p> <p>Municipal liaison: <i>I have an issue with that: the mayor absolutely does not want people in uniform on the streets, so that it is not at all visible that troops play a role here. As little as possible, but if necessary, in civilian clothing.</i></p>	Collaborative decision-making; counter-argument

(Continues)

(Continued)

#	Quote	Code
	<p>Military liaison: <i>[...] If the police indicates that they have a need for replacement of protection, and they cannot make it with their own people, troops will come and they will come in green [uniforms].</i></p> <p>Police liaison: <i>But there is something else here, ladies and gentlemen, this is possibly an attack, so we will consider this as a crime scene and then the mayor is not responsible but the public prosecutor.</i></p>	

## 5 | CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this study, we aimed to construct a bureau-political perspective on interorganizational crisis response by answering the following research questions: How do liaisons in interorganizational crisis response teams negotiate collective decisions? And how do organizational interests influence the decision-making process? In response to the first question, we find that liaisons have different views on crises but negotiate these through using one of two decision-making pathways (see Figure 1). Some decisions are claimed by liaisons as falling under their authority and they make decisions without accepting interference of others. When these authority claims are disputed, antagonistic discussions ensue which either establish or reject the authority claim. There are also decisions which are commonly recognized as group decisions and not claimed by any party. The decision-making process on these issues is characterized by consensus-seeking and deliberation. When information or mandate uncertainties are perceived, the decision-making responsibility is deferred to others. Regarding the second question, pressures to pursue organizational interests are either openly shared with other liaisons or filtered and kept from the team. Even though liaisons tend to feel a stronger commitment to the team goals than to these organizational interests, top-down pressures render liaisons' authority claims more pervasive, but also provide a basis for disputes over such claims by other liaisons (see Figure 2). This means that decision-making under organizational pressures tends to be somewhat more antagonistic. In the collaborative decision-making processes, organizational interests are fitted as well as possible in the common team decisions but only if there are (also) rational arguments to do so. Otherwise, the team provides liaisons with arguments that can be used to justify the neglect of organizational interests.

The bureau-political nature of crisis response decision-making has been recognized before (Rosenthal et al., 1991; Van Santen et al., 2009), but in this study, we have attempted to theorize the specific processes through which negotiations shape crisis response outcomes. Thus, we are able to critically reflect on earlier studies identifying crisis bureau-politics. Primarily, previous studies found

confrontational bureaucratic competition due to clashing organizational interests (e.g., Chen, 2016; Parker et al., 2009; Rosenthal et al., 1991), while we, instead, find that different views of liaisons are primarily at the root of negotiations. Even though receiving the same crisis information, liaisons highlight different aspects and identify divergent priorities, which they need to negotiate. These negotiations can be based on consensus-seeking and compromises as well as on antagonistic conflict, but did not once escalate into full confrontations or bureaucratic in-fighting. This difference in findings may be explained by an earlier focus on exceptional cases of interorganizational bickering, as opposed to our focus on regular interorganizational coordination. This also suggests that researchers should beware of the cross-level fallacy, referring to the misleading conflation of interpersonal and interorganizational relations (see Kalkman & De Waard, 2017). Although organizations may have highly conflictive interests and goals, their liaisons are not necessarily conflictive in their interactions as a result. In fact, warm precrisis relations between liaisons are likely to continue as “the best predictor of behaviour in emergencies is behaviour prior to emergencies” (Dynes, 1994: 150). These relations may lead liaisons to pursue the common operational team goal at the cost of pursuit of home organizations’ interests (Kalkman & Groenewegen, 2018). As crisis response decision-making is not necessarily centralized (see ‘t Hart et al., 1993), pressures to advocate organizational interests may thus have limited effects.

Next, whereas conflict between public agencies has hampered governmental crisis response in other situations (e.g., Chen, 2016; Keane & Wood, 2015; Parker et al., 2009), the intragovernmental negotiations in our study often facilitated a balance between speed and deliberation. Many decisions in the process were made by individual liaisons who claimed authority over a certain topic (e.g., the police on the issue of public order). As organizations were working independently in their own areas of responsibility, the crisis response was always to some degree fragmented and quick (see Wolbers, Boersma, & Groenewegen, 2017). When collaborative decision-making took place instead and liaisons contemplated the appropriate course of action (e.g., whether to scale up the response), their exchange of competing ideas on possible crisis response actions ensured careful deliberation (see Rosenthal et al., 1991). In other words, bureau-political interactions often enabled fast and fragmented crisis response on those aspects of the response where this was possible and enabled careful deliberation on facets of the crisis response pertaining to all organizations or with wider ramifications. Specifically, in teams with a hierarchical structure, authority was less likely to be contested and debated, so that these teams often speedily implemented a parallel working approach (see Berlin & Carlström, 2008), while decentralized teams with a flat structure appeared more open to discussing authority questions, ensuring more thorough deliberation but at the cost of quick decision-making.

Lastly, previous research has demonstrated that civil–military collaboration can be complicated by divergent cultures, organizational structures and ways of operating (Salmon, Stanton, Jenkins, &

Walker, 2011). However, we find that civil–military collaboration in our study is not limited by these aspects. Instead, military liaisons and their counterparts share a strong local team goal (i.e., resolving the crisis), so that military liaisons are willing to ignore organizational pressures and are fully included in the common crisis response. This means that civil–military collaboration benefits from integration of military liaisons into civilian networks (see also Kalkman & De Waard, 2017), but this comes at the cost of hierarchical control of the armed forces over its staff.

## 5.1 | Practical implications

The core implication for practice is that it may be useful to monitor the balance between fast decision-making and deliberation in crisis response decisions. In fact, when all topics are claimed by liaisons, decision-making is very fast, but may possibly suffer from a lack of careful deliberation. Vice versa, liaisons may spend much time on ensuring that they make the right decisions, but thereby will likely respond slow or act on the basis of outdated information. Operational leaders, specifically, may balance these competing values by promoting due deliberation when this is necessary and possible, or instead boost the speed of decision-making when time is scarce and fast decisions are required. In this way, a crisis response team might be prevented from fast but heedless decision-making, which may potentially lead to (collective) blind spots, by instead being enticed to be creative and constructively critical without stagnating (see Danielsson, 2016; Rosenthal et al., 1991). Likewise, when organizational interests bear too strong on liaisons or views are too diverse, leading to situations of continuing debates on appropriate decisions, an operational leader may usefully emphasize the shared team goal to bring back the necessary speed in the proceedings (Moynihan, 2009).

## 5.2 | Limitations and future research

Several shortcomings and options for further research can be identified. First, as the empirical data for the analysis are drawn from a controlled experiment, it is worthwhile to stress that exercises do not invoke the same urgency and emotions as real crises. Nevertheless, the decision-making processes in the experiment will likely reflect the dynamics of real crisis response decision-making (see Latiers & Jacques, 2009) and may be useful for studying the effects of specific factors (e.g., competing interests) in future studies on crisis response. Second, our case focused on crisis response negotiations on the tactical level. Follow-up research could study crisis response bureau-politics in operational or strategic teams to find out if the findings apply to other levels as well. Thirdly, negotiations between civilian and military liaisons did not differ substantially from negotiations between civilian liaisons, because military liaisons are well integrated in the Safety Regions. It may therefore be worthwhile to study similar bureau-political processes in countries or civil–military networks where the armed forces are less well integrated. In general, as crises are increasingly

transboundary (Ansell et al., 2010), further studies on the bureau-politics of crisis response will contribute to our understanding of how (liaisons of) crisis response organizations with different views and interests may nevertheless coordinate their activities in an effective manner.

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

The first author had the lead in designing and conducting the study, and wrote the draft version of the manuscript. The second and third authors contributed to the set-up and implementation of the experiment as well as reviewed the draft version of the manuscript.

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