

Applied Sociology Thematic Group

For the Australian Sociology Practitioner

Contact Email for August 2013

Greetings one and all,

This is not a political message on behalf of any side in the coming election, or any other. However, the idea does come from the headline for a recent Sydney Morning Herald political article. “When everything is a crisis, who should you believe?” The article reminded me of Alexander and Sztompka’s observation that the theme of ‘progress’ has been replaced by the new political, verbal weapon, of ‘crisis’. We are not going ‘forward’ any more, we are facing ‘crisis’ after ‘crisis’ and pessimistic views of social realities. People have become so accustomed to hearing of the current economic, political, or cultural ‘crises’, that is about to descend upon us, if we don’t listen to this or that political view.

Robert Holton has noted that: ‘Contemporary social thought has become dominated, if not obsessed by the idea of crisis’. He also argued that we are witnessing a curious normalisation of ‘crisis’. People have become so used to the idea of social crises, that they do not anticipate any future elimination. These sociologists were writing in the 1990s.

In 2006 Ian Mitroff was writing: ‘From product defects to environmental disasters - almost every day, a new corporate crisis hits the headlines. In the majority of cases, the results are disastrous, that require costly and time consuming efforts to re-establish a positive public image.’

In 2011, [Pushan Dutt](#) and [V. Padmanabhan](#) write: “The dramatic impact of the current ‘crisis’ on the performance of businesses across sectors and economies has been headlining the business press for the past several months.”

In 2013, the politicians have been telling us about the leadership crisis, the Medical Indemnity Insurance *crisis*, the asylum seeker *crisis*, the global financial *crisis*, and probably lots more.

‘Crisis’ was originally a medical term which defined a watershed where the outcomes would be either life or death. It’s a nice frightening word but does its current use, have any real meaning? Given the length of time the word has been in vogue, it would seem that ‘crisis’ is now the word used by politicians to signal a necessary change, that will allow them, journalists and others, to adapt their rhetoric to new conditions.

J. Alexander and P. Sztompka (eds), *Rethinking Progress*, pp. 3952, Boston: Unwin Hyman
Holton, Robert 1990. ‘Problems of crisis and normalcy in the contemporary world’, in: J. Alexander and P. Sztompka (eds), *Rethinking Progress*, pp. 3952, Boston: Unwin Hyman
[Pushan Dutt](#) and [V. Padmanabhan](#), *Marketing Science*, May/June 2011 vol. 30 no. 3 491-512

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