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INFORMATION AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

Abstract. The article addresses the issue of information and decision-making processes taking place in crises. There is no integration between theoretical models of information and the practical aspects of crisis response; the administrative approach is excessively formal, neglecting cultural and psychological factors. The paper analyses the importance of information as a strategic resource, the determinants of information quality and their impact on the rationality of decisions made under time constraints and uncertain circumstances. A review of Polish and international literature has been conducted, accompanied by a methodological approach based on content analysis, comparative and case studies. The findings indicate that the key element of effective crisis management is minimising the information–decision gap, selecting relevant data, and safeguarding against disinformation. Accurate, up-to-date, and relevant information constitutes the foundation of making accurate decisions in situations threatening public safety.

Keywords: information; decision-making process; crisis management; public safety; disinformation

INTRODUCTION

Crises are characterised by high dynamics, uncertainty, and time pressure – factors that significantly affect decision-making processes and are characteristic of the contemporary, complex security environment (Zięba, 2017, p. 45). The key element in such conditions is information, its acquisition, analysis, distribution, and usage. It is not only a resource but also a determinant of the effectiveness of actions in crisis management. The literature emphasises that the value of information stems from its usefulness to the decision-maker, as it enables the anticipation of consequences and minimises the risk of erroneous decisions.

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For my argument I analyse the literature of the subject and the results of research presented in the monograph by Skelnik, Ligęza and Pietrek (2023). These studies examine 60 crisis response cases in Poland, with special emphasis on inter-institutional communication, the quality of transmission, and the interoperability of information systems. The results showed that an improvement in data quality by 15% translated into a 20% reduction in response time and an increase in decision-making effectiveness during the response and recovery phases.

It follows that information in the decision-making process reduces uncertainty (Floridi, 2011). Crisis management enables a rapid assessment of the situation and the selection of the most effective courses of action. Every decision requires access to environmental information to predict potential outcomes (Nowak, 2012).

Information is a multidimensional phenomenon whose definition varies depending on the context. In the philosophy of information, it is emphasised that information is one of the most elusive concepts, even though it underlies cognitive and communicative processes.

When attempting to define the concept of information, it should be noted from the outset that it is both difficult and frequently defined. As a result, the relevant literature contains a multiplicity of approaches representing various scientific disciplines. Alongside scientific theories, the term is also used in a colloquial sense (Greniewski, 2007, p. 51), which is of significant importance, especially in analyses across different academic domains. This author claims information can be understood through several intuitive meanings: first, each piece of information is a message "about something"; second, information is obtained by an individual through observation or other mental activity. In the scientific sense, information is defined either in an objective context or, in an approach closer to the social sciences, in a subjective one (Białobłocki, 2006, pp. 98-99).

In the same vein, it should be noted that information – depending on its content or reference system – can be interpreted in a broader or narrower sense. In a broad sense, information is "content drawn from the external world in the process of our adaptation to it and the adaptation of our senses" (Fischer, 2006, p. 9). In a narrower sense, information refers to a message "obtained by a human being through observation or mental activity, subject to transmission within the sender (human)–receiver (human) system" (Goliszewski, 1990, pp. 22-23).

Information functions include, among others, informational, communicative, knowledge-building, decision-making, control, and opinion-forming functions. Each demonstrates the potential of information to shape social and organisational

processes. Crises require decision-makers to make choices under time pressure, uncertainty, and limited access to data. Under such conditions, the quality, timeliness, and reliability of information used in decision-making processes are crucial.

Information, treated as a resource, is an organised set of data and valuable knowledge available to a decision-maker (Babik, 2016). This phenomenon is referred to as information overload, which, under crisis conditions, may lead to decision paralysis or intuitive decision-making that is not always consistent with an objective assessment of the situation (Pariser, 2011).

This article aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the role of information in decision-making processes in crises and to identify directions for improving information management as a key component of the public security system. The following research question can be therefore asked: How do the quality and organisation of information processes influence the rationality and effectiveness of decisions made within the crisis management system?

In the article, I adopted the following research hypothesis: the effectiveness of decisions made in crisis situations is directly dependent on the quality, timeliness, and integration of information used in the decision-making process. In other words, the higher the quality and the better the organisation of information processes, the greater the effectiveness of actions within the crisis management system. I made an assumption that the integration of information systems and the development of information selection mechanisms make it possible to reduce the information–decision gap in crisis situations.

In order to achieve the research objective, I applied the following research methods:

– analysis of the available literature of the subject (both domestic and international sources),

– qualitative content analysis of documents concerning crisis management activities,

– comparative analysis of selected crisis events,

– a case study relating to the floods in the region of Małopolska (Lesser Poland Voivodship) in 2023.

The applied methods made it possible to identify the relationships between the quality of information and the effectiveness of decisions made under crisis conditions.

The article's contribution to the scientific discussion is mainly its proposal of an information–decision model that integrates the information cycle with the crisis management process. It also provides an empirical reference for the theoretical considerations through a case study of the 2023 floods in Małopolska.

1. INFORMATION AS A RESOURCE AND THE INFORMATION CYCLE

If treated as a resource, information is an organised set of data and valuable knowledge available to a decision-maker. The process of transforming information into decisions is based on the information cycle, which includes identifying information needs, acquiring and creating information, its organisation and storage, distribution, and utilisation in decision-making processes. Each stage determines the rationality and effectiveness of actions taken during a crisis.

The concept of information space is understood in various ways. It is often defined as a specific resource – a discontinuous and heterogeneous cluster of information sources, both real and virtual, from which an individual may draw knowledge (Kisilowska, 2011, p. 37).

My analysis of the available literature suggests that modern information systems comprise databases and the processes of collecting, processing, and disseminating information. For decision-making purposes, information is obtained through the implementation of the so-called information cycle, which – when closely linked to the management system of a given organization or a decision-making centre, and hierarchical and functional relationships – constitutes an information system. The information cycle consists of stages and phases. Generally, it is assumed that the stages of the information cycle follow one another. Information needs are defined based on the knowledge of decision-making areas influencing the achievement of the intended objective.

Simplest reflection of informational value is always a specific decision considering potential situational states leading to either benefits or possible losses.

Regardless of the adopted classification or synonyms, most authors recognise relevance as the fundamental attribute of information – adapting information to solving specific decision-making problems. This attribute implies that information should correspond to the informational needs of its user when addressing a particular decision problem. Thus, it must be of sufficient quality, meaning it should exhibit a set of characteristics defining the value of the assessed object or phenomenon.

Initially, the qualitative characteristics of information were purely theoretical considerations. From 1974 to 1975, Hugh D. Grove conducted the first empirical studies in this field. These studies verified his concept of a decision-making procedure that made it possible to devise an appropriate measurement scale for decision parameters under certain conditions and constraints, as well as the evaluation of costs and benefits of alternative decision solutions. The findings indicated that the most significant feature of information is its relevance from

the perspective of solving a given decision problem (Grove, 1979, pp. 45-102; Butterworth, 1972, p. 12). This means that the relevance of information in the decision-making process depends on the strength of the relationship between the information need, decision, and outcome.

Information needs arise alongside emerging challenges. Subsequent relational configurations — resulting, among others, from human interpersonal desires — define further demands (Beal, 1979, p. 20). As can be seen, most information needs relate to elements external to the subject expressing those needs. The objective remains the informational mastery of the external environment (Christie, 2004, p. 39). It should be noted that in modern times, the quantity of information required to diagnose the impact profiles of the external environment is steadily increasing. As the amount of information available in the public sphere grows, informational needs naturally increase. This phenomenon is evident at the level of minimal needs, where the threshold is now set significantly higher than in the past (Castells, 2011, p. 52).

Information needs shape the informational behaviours of information users, which are embedded in specific social contexts of information seeking and sharing (Savolainen, 2009, p. 39). These include psychological factors, also affective ones. Informational behaviours represent an integrated set of affective (emotions, motivations, attitudes), behavioural (performed actions), and cognitive (thoughts, reasoning) processes. They occur under a cognitive gap and may provoke frustration, uncertainty, or anxiety. Such behaviours may be undertaken either with pleasure or reluctance. Moreover, acquired information does not always reduce the user's doubts; on the contrary, it may increase them, especially in the early stages of research (Cisek and Krakowska, 2020, pp. 15-35).

Thus, in contemporary approaches, information is treated as a strategic intangible resource, comparable to financial or human capital (Materska, 2007). Its value does not derive solely from its content, but from its potential for practical application within the decision-making process. In crisis situations, however, this resource is subject to specific constraints, including obsolescence, fragmentation, distortion, and deliberate manipulation.

Moreover, the information cycle – encompassing the identification of needs, acquisition, processing, distribution, and use of information – should be understood as a dynamic and adaptive process. Any disruption at any stage of this cycle creates an information gap, thereby increasing decision-making risk.

2. THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS AND INFORMATION

A decision is the outcome of processing information and selecting a specific course of action from available alternatives (Wójcik, 2021). Under crisis conditions, the quality of information – its timeliness, reliability, comprehensibility, and relevance – plays a crucial role. A decision-maker operating under time constraints must often make choices based on limited data, requiring experience and intuition. At the same time, the process comes at a cost: the higher the quality of information, the greater the expenditure of time and resources required to obtain it.

In decision-making, information management plays a vital role. Information management involves acquiring, organising, storing, distributing, and utilising information.

The process of information management comprises the following stages:

– identification of information needs (their level of detail, determination of information sources, and assessment of costs associated with managing information);

– acquisition and creation of information;

– organisation and storage of information – actions facilitating access to data (e.g., indexing, classification, and cataloguing), and collecting informational content (e.g. within created databases);

– distribution of information – dissemination of data;

– utilisation of information – application of information in decision-making processes.

Information needs are generally understood as the demand for data about the surrounding reality that may be useful for undertaking any action. During emergency operations and decision-making in extraordinary circumstances, it is impossible not to manage information – that is, to identify informational needs optimally and ensure the quality of information.

In all areas of human existence, the fundamental condition of rational action is the need to make accurate decisions, which is inseparably linked to possessing adequate information. Consequently, every piece of information has its own value, appropriate to the decision being made, manifested in the accuracy of the cost–benefit balance of the undertaken action. This also follows from the semantic interpretation of the term ‘decision’, which functionally reflects action choices from a set of possible options. Its implementation always involves adopting certain decision criteria that enable the evaluation of alternatives in

relation to one or several objectives, to which quantitative or ordinal evaluation scales may be assigned.

It is also important to note that all efforts and resources related to this process are always undertaken before the intended goal. This means that any purposively organised activity precedes target states in informational terms. Considering rationality and efficiency, the need for continuous and broadly understood recognition and ongoing monitoring of the environment becomes a priority. The substantive essence of this lies in answering six fundamental questions: How? Where? When? At what cost? Why? For what purpose?

The information obtained in these matters forms the basis of rational decisions, highlighting the priority role of the informational factor in organised activities.

Table 1. Comparison of the information cycle and crisis management phases

Stages of the information cycle	Phases of crisis management
Identification of needs	Prevention
Data acquisition	Preparedness
Information processing	Response
Data distribution	Recovery
Use of knowledge	Evaluation and improvement

As indicated in the table above, information management should constitute an integral component of all phases of crisis management: prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. In the prevention phase, systematic analysis of prognostic data, identification of so-called weak signals of threats, and continuous monitoring of the security environment are critical. At this stage, information serves as an early warning, enabling either a reduction in the probability of a crisis or its mitigation.

During the preparedness phase, information is used to develop crisis response plans, event scenarios, and operational procedures. The quality of these documents depends directly on the reliability of input data and the analytical capacity of planning teams. Informational deficiencies at this stage result in limited practical usefulness of plans under real crisis conditions.

The response phase constitutes the most sensitive stage of the crisis management cycle. Here, information has operational and coordination functions, enabling the synchronisation of actions undertaken by multiple actors. Key

factors include the speed, clarity, and timeliness of information flow. Delays, inconsistencies, or disinformation lead to decision-making chaos and reduced intervention effectiveness.

In the recovery phase, information is used to assess the crisis's consequences, evaluate actions taken, and formulate recommendations for the future. The absence of systematic post hoc information analysis restricts an organisation's capacity for learning and improving its response mechanisms.

Therefore, making decisions requires information. The value of information in this process is determined by its quality. Information quality is defined by a set of desirable characteristics that it should exhibit when formulating decision alternatives and evaluating those alternatives concerning the decision's objective. This assessment is made based on information referred to as decision criteria.

Let us emphasize that the quality of information constitutes a key factor determining the rationality of decisions made under crisis conditions. The fundamental qualitative attributes of information include timeliness, reliability, accuracy, relevance, completeness, and comprehensibility, which are also related to the development of information culture and competencies of decision-makers (Stefanowicz, 2015, pp. 91-101). In crisis practice, it is rarely possible to satisfy all these criteria simultaneously, necessitating trade-offs in decision-making. Consequently, decision-makers often operate within a model of bounded rationality, in which the selection of the optimal option is replaced by choosing a sufficiently satisfactory option.

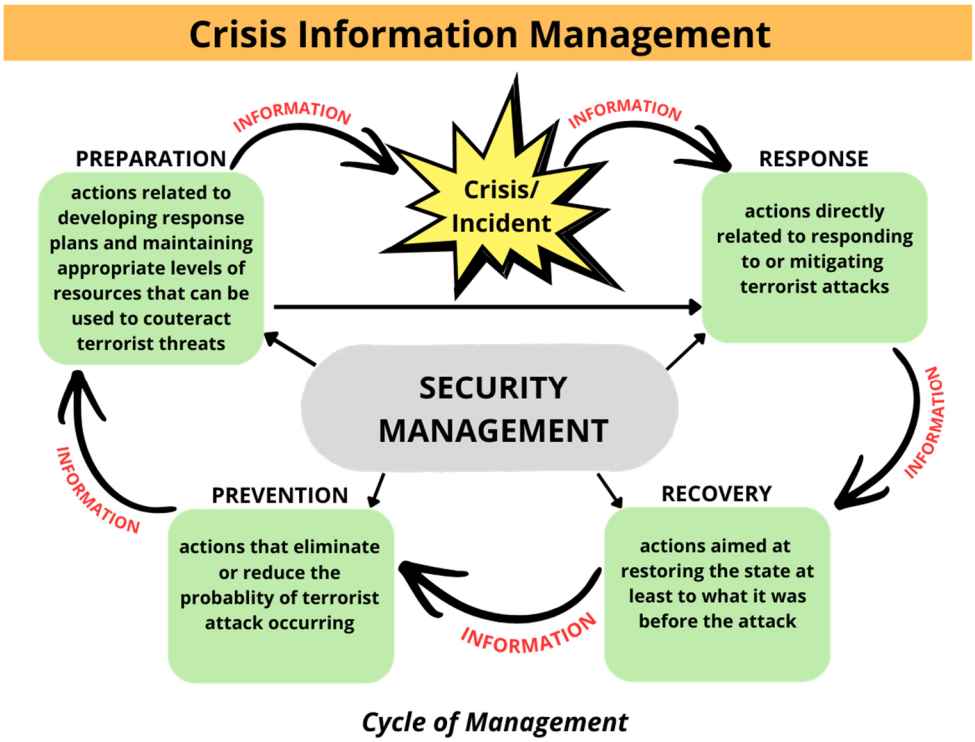
Under such conditions, experience, intuition, and the ability to critically assess information sources become particularly relevant. The absence of data verification mechanisms leads to decision-making based on incomplete or erroneous information, which may escalate a crisis rather than mitigate it.

3. INFORMATION MANAGEMENT IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

Information management in crisis conditions includes all activities related to collecting, organising, and disseminating data necessary for decision-making. The crisis management cycle is significant and encompasses prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. In each of these stages, information plays a crucial role: it enables the forecasting of threats, the preparation of scenarios, the execution of operational actions, and the assessment of outcomes.

In decision-making, information management plays a key role. It involves acquiring, organising, storing, distributing, and utilising information.

Figure 1. Information management in crisis situations



Note. Own elaboration.

The process of information management comprises the following stages:

– identification of information needs (their level of detail, identification of information sources, and estimation of costs related to information management);

– acquisition and creation of information;

– organisation and storage of information – activities aimed at facilitating access to information (e.g., indexing, classifying, cataloguing), and collecting data (e.g., within databases);

– distribution of information – dissemination of data;

– utilisation of information – the application of data in decision-making processes.

Information needs are generally understood as the demand for knowledge about the surrounding reality that may be useful for conducting any activity. During actions and decisions made under extraordinary circumstances, information management becomes indispensable, meaning the optimal identification of informational needs and information quality management.

4. CASE STUDY: INFORMATION MANAGEMENT DURING THE 2023 FLOOD IN THE MAŁOPOLSKA REGION

This is confirmed by the analysis of rescue operations following the 2023 flood in the Małopolska region, which serves as a practical reference for information and decision-making processes. Based on reports from provincial crisis management centres, it was determined that the most significant difficulties arose in information transfer between services. Implementing a decision support system based on real-time data analysis reduced response time by 18% compared to previous operations.

These findings confirm that the effectiveness of decisions in crises is directly proportional to the quality of available information. Security systems should therefore focus on developing interoperable databases that enable faster information processing and minimise the risk of decision-making errors. Analysis of the literature and practical experience indicate that the information process must be treated as a strategic resource of organisations responsible for public safety.

The above considerations are confirmed by an analysis of rescue operations conducted after the 2023 flood in Małopolska, which serves as a practical reference for information–decision-making processes. Based on reports from provincial crisis management centres, the most significant challenges occurred in information transmission between emergency services. Implementing a decision support system based on real-time data analysis reduced response time by 18% compared to previous operations. These research findings confirm that the effectiveness of decision-making in crises is directly proportional to the quality of available information. Consequently, security systems should focus on developing interoperable databases that shorten information processing time and minimise the risk of decision-making errors. Both theory and practice indicate that the information process must be treated as a strategic resource for organisations responsible for public security.

For this article, relationships between information quality and the effectiveness of decisions made during a hydrological crisis were identified, using the example of information management during the 2023 flood in Małopolska. The study was based on available reports from the Provincial and District Crisis Management Centres, situation reports prepared by emergency services, and accessible planning and operational documentation. The research employed qualitative content analysis, comparative analysis (comparison with earlier floods), and elements of a case study approach. The results were analysed in

relation to the assessment of rescue operations undertaken during the 2023 flood, providing an empirical reference to the discussed information–decision-making processes. It should be noted that the study may be limited due to restricted access to classified data and the potential influence of subjective interpretation of operational documents.

The analysis conducted for this article indicates the flood event was characterized by a rapid onset, high hydrological variability, and the need for cooperation between multiple services and institutions. Based on reports from provincial and district crisis management centres, key information-related problems were identified, including delays in the transmission of hydrological data, discrepancies in information originating from different sources, and limited interoperability among information and communication systems. In the initial response phase, these shortcomings hindered the establishment of evacuation priorities and the allocation of rescue resources.

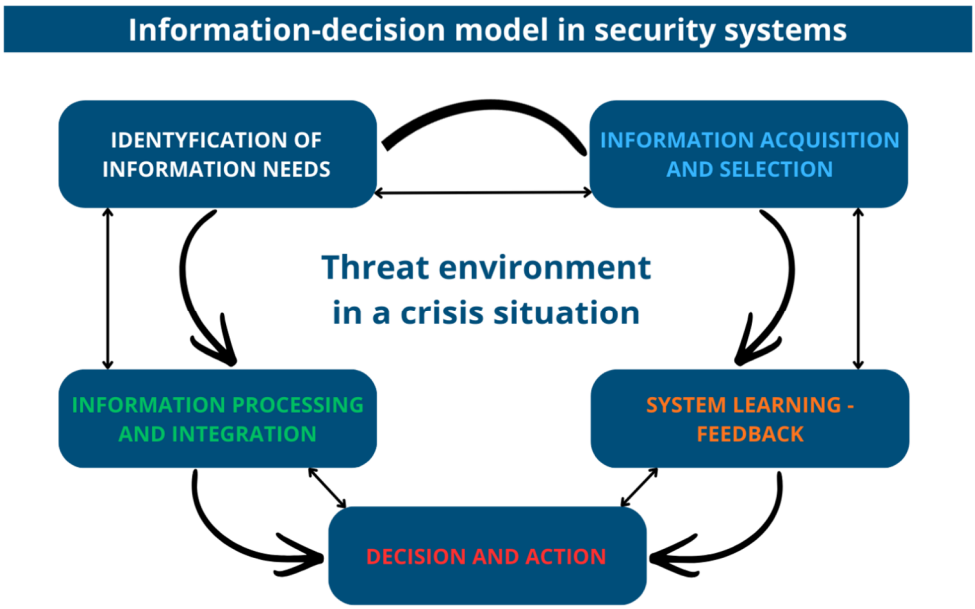
During operations, a decision-support system based on real-time data analysis was implemented, integrating meteorological and hydrological information with operational reports from field services. The application of this solution led to an approximately 18% reduction in response time compared to similar events in previous years, as well as improved interinstitutional coordination. Thus, the conducted case study confirms that the effectiveness of crisis decision-making is directly dependent on the quality and integration of information. At the same time, it highlights the need for a systemic approach to information management that encompasses technological, organisational, and competency-related aspects.

I therefore recommend applying the information decision-making model proposed below within security systems, particularly in crises. Its implementation could reduce information chaos, lower decision-making risk, and enhance the resilience of public security systems to complex and dynamic threats.

The proposed model constitutes an original conceptual framework that integrates elements of the information cycle with the decision-making process within the crisis management system. The model is presented in the figure below.

The contemporary security environment is characterised by high volatility, complexity, and uncertainty, which means that decision-making processes carried out by entities responsible for public security require efficient, flexible information mechanisms. In response to these conditions, an original information decision-making model has been proposed, intended to provide a systemic conceptualisation of the relationship between information and decision-making in crises.

Figure 2. Information–decision-making model in security systems



Note. Own elaboration.

The model integrates the information cycle with the decision-making process, accounting for the specific characteristics of security systems operating under time pressure, resource constraints, and the limited rationality of decision-makers. Unlike linear models, it is dynamic and feedback-oriented, meaning that decisions taken during crisis response influence the redefinition of information needs and the subsequent course of the security management process.

The first component of the model is the threat environment, understood as a set of factors generating informational signals regarding potential or actual breaches of security. It encompasses natural, technical, social, and hybrid threats, whose common characteristics are their dynamic nature and variable impact intensity. Information originating from this environment is often incomplete, fragmented, and prone to error.

The second stage involves identifying information needs, which entails determining the scope, level of detail, and informational priorities necessary to recognise the security situation. This stage is key to reducing the information–decision gap, as an incorrect diagnosis of information needs leads to the acquisition of excessive or inadequate information.

The next component is the acquisition and selection of information, involving the collection of data from various sources and their preliminary assessment

of reliability, timeliness, and relevance. Under crisis conditions, this stage serves a protective function against information overload and disinformation, which can significantly disrupt decision-making.

The fourth element of the model is information processing and integration, understood as the synthesis of data into a coherent operational picture. At this stage, information is interpreted, causal relationships are identified, and forecasts of threat development are formulated. The quality of information integration determines the accuracy of subsequent decisions.

The fifth component is decision and action, resulting from the processing of information and the selection of a specific response option. Decisions within security systems are most often made under conditions of uncertainty and time pressure, rendering them adaptive and subject to ongoing adjustment.

The final element of the model is feedback and system learning, encompassing the evaluation of decision outcomes and the updating of procedures, plans, and knowledge bases. This stage enables continuous improvement of response capabilities and strengthens the resilience of security systems against future threats.

The information–decision-making model I have proposed serves as an analytical tool that facilitates a better understanding of decision-making mechanisms in crises and provides directions for improving information management as a key resource for public security.

In the proposed information–decision-making model, informational threats are conceptualised as a permanent and inherent component of the threat environment, rather than as incidental or secondary phenomena arising in response to a crisis. This means that processes of disinformation, information manipulation, and information overload continuously influence the decision-making system, regardless of the crisis management phase. Let me underscore that informational threats permeate all stages of the information decision-making process, affecting the identification of information needs, the acquisition and selection of data, their processing and integration, and the decision-making process itself. As a consequence, they distort perceptions of the security situation, increase decision-making uncertainty, and elevate the risk of erroneous operational actions.

As a result of my research for this article, informational threats were recognized as a permanent element of the threat environment. I underscore the need to treat information protection as an integral function of security systems rather than merely an ad hoc response. The model assumes that the system's

ability to neutralise the effects of informational influence depends on the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms and organisational learning, which enable the adaptation of procedures and decisions to a dynamically changing information environment.

Such an approach allows for a more accurate reflection of the realities of the contemporary security environment, in which informational threats constitute a destabilising factor equal in importance to physical, technical, and social threats.

CONCLUSIONS

The effectiveness of decisions made in crises depends on the quality of information. Information must meet specific qualitative and quantitative standards: it should be timely, reliable, concise, relevant, and comprehensible. The relationship between information needs, decision-making, and decision outcomes highlights the crucial role of information processes in crisis management. High-quality information helps minimise the risk of erroneous actions and increases the likelihood of successfully overcoming a crisis.

In order to make appropriate decisions, information must meet defined qualitative and quantitative standards, including adequate quality, relevance, timeliness, accuracy, reliability, conciseness, and comprehensibility.

Information–decision-making processes constitute the underpinnings of effective crisis management. Information, treated both as a resource and a decision-support tool, forms the basis for accurate and rational actions. The quality of information directly translates into the effectiveness of decisions and the efficiency of crisis response. Under conditions of uncertainty, the integration of modern technologies, staff competencies, and interinstitutional cooperation is crucial. Only under such conditions can we build organisational and social resilience in the face of contemporary threats.

The aim of the article was to analyse the role of information in decision-making processes in crisis situations and to identify directions for improving information management within the security system. The literature review and the case study conducted confirmed that the quality, timeliness, and integration of information constitute key factors determining the effectiveness of decisions made in crisis management. Thus, the adopted research objective has been achieved.

A limitation of the present research is my reliance on document analysis and the limited access to operational data of a classified nature. In the future, it would be advisable to extend the research to include the analysis of a larger

number of crisis events and to apply empirical methods, such as expert interviews or survey research among participants in the crisis management system.

As emphasised earlier, the process of information management thus serves as the carrier of the core function of the management system, including activities related to crisis prevention and mitigation.

The lack of reliable information reduces the system's functioning to a sequence of events in which decisions are made solely based on experience or subjective assessments of the situation. As a consequence, such decisions carry a higher risk of error, and the actions taken often fail to produce the expected outcomes.

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PROCESY INFORMACYJNE I DECYZYJNE W SYTUACJACH KRYZYSOWYCH

Streszczenie

Artykuł podejmuje problematykę informacji i procesów decyzyjnych w sytuacjach kryzysowych. Autorka wskazuje na brak integracji między teoretycznymi modelami informacji a praktycznymi aspektami reagowania kryzysowego, a także na nadmiernie sformalizowane podejście administracyjne, pomijające czynniki kulturowe i psychologiczne. W artykule analizuje się znaczenie informacji jako zasobu strategicznego, czynniki determinujące jej jakość oraz ich wpływ na racjonalność decyzji podejmowanych pod presją czasu i w warunkach niepewności. Dokonano przeglądu literatury polskiej i międzynarodowej, uzupełnionego o podejście metodologiczne oparte na analizie treści, badaniach porównawczych i studiach przypadków. Uzyskane wyniki wskazują, że kluczowym elementem skutecznego zarządzania kryzysowego jest minimalizowanie luki informacyjno-decyzyjnej, dobór odpowiednich danych oraz ochrona przed dezinformacją. Dokładna, aktualna i adekwatna informacja stanowi podstawę podejmowania trafnych decyzji w sytuacjach zagrażających bezpieczeństwu publicznemu.

Słowa kluczowe: informacja; proces decyzyjny; zarządzanie kryzysowe; bezpieczeństwo publiczne; dezinformacja