

From Ritual Planning to Improvisation in Disaster Preparedness for Aging Care

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Problem | Plan vs. Preparedness

Aging society and disaster

- In Japan, disaster impacts are increasingly concentrated among older adults (More than 60% of disaster fatalities are aged 60+)

Plan for disaster preparedness has expanded rapidly.

Plan vs. preparedness

- Plans (e.g., Individual Evacuation Plans and Business Continuity Plans) become mandatory.
- Formal plans often fail to function in real disaster situations.

Spent time producing plans, but practical readiness remains limited

Research questions

Why do disaster plans persist despite their limited effectiveness in practice?

1

Literature | Ritualized Attention

Concept: Ritualized Attention

- A mode of engagement in which actors formally display commitment to disaster preparedness while maintaining distance from plans in practice.

Planning shifts attention from action to documentation—but this distance can also protect practical judgment.

2

Concept | Two Faces of Ritualized Attention

1) Constraint (negative aspect)

- Planning driven by performance indicators
- Outsourcing plan production
- Documentation for accountability

Plans become ends in themselves

2) Resource (positive aspect)

- Practitioners recognize limits of plans
- Maintain distance from plans
- Preserve practical knowledge

Distance from plans enables improvisation

Methods | Action Research w/ care provider local goven't

Field and approach

- Fukuchiyama City, Japan (Flood-prone area w/aging population)
- Action research + ethnography

3

Results | Empirical Cases

Empirical Insights

- Individual Evacuation Plans**
 - Emphasis on plan formulation rates (KPIs)
 - Resistance to increasing numbers wo/ usability

Tension between metrics and practice
- Home Care Organization**
 - Aging workforce and mobility constraints
 - Plans seen as impractical in real situations

Plans do not match field realities
- Welfare Facilities**
 - Formal plans produced (often outsourced)
 - Practice-based responses developed in parallel

Compliance and practice coexist

4

Results | Interventions: From plans to action

1. Dilemma Game

- Decision-making under uncertainty
- Situations beyond what plans can specify

From following plans → thinking dilemmas

2. First Mission Box

- Focus on essential initial actions
- Simple and immediately usable

From comprehensive planning → prioritized action

Creating distance from plans can foster improvisational capacity.

5

Discussion | Implications for Policy and Practice

Formalized planning creates "distance" from plans, which can enable improvisation in practice.

Ritualized Attention has two faces:
It can **constrain** action—but also create the distance that **enables** action.

Effective preparedness depends

- less on plans themselves and,
- more on how people act without them

6

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