How do emergency responders coordinate the response operation across the boundaries of their organizations in fast-paced environments? Coordination is a key aspect of emergency management that addresses how crisis managers from police, ambulance services and fire department align their mutual interdependencies in an environment that is prone to escalate. This challenges crisis managers to coordinate ad-hoc, under severe time pressure, with experts from different response organizations who have different skills and professional jargons.

In this dissertation, Jeroen Wolbers, explores how such cross-boundary coordination is practiced on the disaster scene based on detailed observations and reconstructions of exercises and real-life response operations. The results of this research indicate that the command and control doctrine emergency organizations employ is based on an integration logic, in which organizational designs are created, plans and protocols are administrated, and centralized command structures are instated. Yet, a different coordination logic appears during the response operation itself. In four empirical chapters Jeroen builds up a detailed account, which illustrates that cross-boundary coordination on the disaster scene is actually based upon a fragmentation logic. Emergent adaptations, the negotiation of the relevance of expert judgments, and the changing configuration of a multi-organizational response network are central aspects of this coordination logic. While fragmentation often has a negative connotation, results of this research indicate it is important not to dismiss it only as failure. Crisis managers utilize fragmentation to keep sufficient speed in managing unexpected situations and unknown threats. As such, fragmentation actually supports the very flexibility, sensitivity to operations, and improvisation that are claimed to be hallmarks of swift and effective crisis management.