

**Emergency Management and the Future**

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### **Abstract**

When a disaster occurs, emergency disaster management personnel spring into action to reconcile the troubles stemming from the incident, whether it consists of reversing online data breaches or rebuilding a community after a natural disaster or a terroristic attack. However, a favorable tool which can figure prominently in reversing such issues lies within effective communication between emergency personnel, local and national organizations, and members of the public, in conjunction with permitting emergency staff to shift roles and help others when and where they are needed. The main areas which could be developed and which are underscored the most in literature and studies include communication, interaction between agencies, and identifying vulnerabilities. Locating and correcting these issues would require a dedicated and concerted effort to build and remediate their deficiencies to expand on organizational infrastructure and position rescue employees in the best possible fashion to prepare for the eventuality of a disaster and to react quickly and accurately when one does occur.

*Keywords:* Communication, disaster recovery, vulnerabilities, management roles

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## Emergency Management and the Future

The field of emergency management is constantly changing and in flux, largely due to the corresponding changes within our natural world and in our use of technology. Disasters ranging from man-made factors such as data breaches or terroristic activities all the way to natural disasters, such as the devastating wildfires of the west coast of the United States and hurricanes across the globe, have all held sway on how disaster responses are managed. Above all, however, the area which should be held first and foremost in importance is that of communication. In the absence of successful and direct communication with the public and among relief agencies alike, resolving the impact of a disaster can take longer than necessary and can potentially even cause the situation to become worse for those affected. Hence, ensuring that a solid communication structure is in place prior to a disaster, and that there is meaningful dialogue and interchange between responsible agencies, can aid greatly in mitigating disaster fallout and effects.

Coping with a disastrous incident can be horrific in and of itself; however, lacking a plan to address these scenarios can assist in feeding into that fear and preventing an adequate reaction from the public due to the absence of information. This situation can lead to greater harm if citizens act on their own without guidance. For example, the present coronavirus which has infiltrated numerous countries worldwide has resulted in the necessity for global collaboration on developing and distributing a vaccine; Yang et al (2020) reference how the interchange between larger governmental agencies, such as the CDC, in conjunction with smaller local agencies and municipalities, can result in more positive and favorable outcomes, such as a greater number of residents becoming vaccinated to prevent further spreading of the pandemic (p. 11). Similarly, encouraging larger governing bodies to commit to better communication overall can assist in

proper guidelines for their field operatives and local residents alike. Knox (2016) concurs with this theory, positing that “Leadership collaboration is at the forefront of emergency management needs” (para. 3). To that end, then, simplifying and supporting dialogue between upper levels of governance (such as the President) with national agencies (such as the military or the CDC) in conjunction with local municipalities in the impacted region could aid in a swifter and more positive outcome in the wake of the disaster. Too, having a dedicated leader in charge of data distribution could safeguard the concept of disseminating the proper directives to the public and preventing the spread of incorrect material, as seen with our current coronavirus epidemic which has numerous erroneous claims surrounding it due to a scarcity of official reaction to it overall. Thus, this form of interconnection can truly make a positive difference in how a crisis may play itself out within the specific venue.

Failings in communication can also create adverse circumstances as well. Waugh and Streib (2006) note that sustaining collaborative activities is critical in the event of any disastrous event, whether it is a terroristic act or a natural disaster (p. 131). A failure or interruption in contact between authorities especially, such as the Department of Homeland Security and regional governments, can most assuredly result in conflicts or further strife for those attempting to recuperate from the event. The authors also observe that harsh measures, such as attempting to impose control on an area’s populace, could result in backlash from the citizens; this type of predicament is often more likely to surface within locales which may already be plagued with socioeconomic or political issues from the outset (p. 132). Therefore, prior to any calamitous events, these entities should band together for purposes of forming a united front and forming the cornerstone for an effective communications network among themselves, in tandem with determining how best to share information with those in need in the area.

Additionally, the absence of a solid communications framework among upper-level organization can and does create delays in recovery and can also detract from overall community morale and sentiment. Curnin and O'Hara (2019) reflect this idea as well, stating that "In disaster recovery, collaboration is reliant on established interorganizational structures and trusting relationships" (p. 277). In this work, the writers present the fact that, although there are usually defined roles for most recovery personnel and staff, partnerships and interrelating with other agencies can assist in allowing afflicted regions to rebound at a more expedient pace as a direct consequence of their cooperation, whereas remaining independent and not sharing knowledge with other groups can hinder this same progression. Thus, communication cooperation is critical for groups and organizations to permit the beginning of remediation and healing for communities and neighborhoods. Moreover, improper interaction and reactions by the proper agencies and workers could result in obstacles preventing correct direction toward helpful recovery resources or aid in a useful manner, which could further hinder event recovery and could possibly even pose further hazards, including threats to public health, such as individuals using contaminated water supplies in the absence of clean water being distributed after a hurricane due to being unable to open supplies accordingly. Hence, these conversations can have a strong ripple consequence, not only on those taking part in the interchanges, but also for those whom they are endeavoring to help.

Another reason why adequate interchanges across agencies are so imperative lies within the community structure itself and how such may be altered by the event in its own right. Elements such as the economic standing and revenue available, budgetary considerations, and funds which could be utilized for disaster recovery could form the basis of how quickly a calamity may be reverted in a given town or neighborhood (National policy frameworks on

resilience in OECD countries, n.d., p. 8). Fiscal constraints can and do sometimes pose difficulties or obstructions for effective disaster resolution; as such, working together to achieve healing benchmarks through interagency collaboration is crucial for revitalization undertakings. Without this background in place between entities, from government to local groups, residents may be impaired in their endeavors to recuperate, and they may also be separated from vitally needed materials, such as clean water, food supplies, and shelter. To that end, then, allowing these bureaus to approach communities as unified and coordinated teams would be a more productive approach in gaining public backing. Ferro et al (2018) reiterate same premise, pointing out that the safety of all citizens during and immediately following a disaster should be the main concern for emergency management groups at all levels; hence, letting employees circumvent their assigned roles in their respective roles and serving in the leadership hierarchy in any capacity where they may be needed (p. 21). This tactic can poise national and local municipalities for the best reaction to the happenings at hand, and can also aid in civic issues as well. For example, *The Riverbend City: Post-Flood Vulnerabilities* piece represents this scenario in action within descriptions of locales which are impacted in the sample catastrophe; for example, the Ruby Lake neighborhood is impoverished and has both illegal activity and gangs within its city limits, combined with law-abiding immigrants who may not speak English and thus may be at a disadvantage in understanding what resources may be available to them in the event's aftermath so as to ensure their security and to provide for their physical and emotional needs. As such, then, well-formed dialogues can contribute to consolidated and informed leadership who are situated to address residential and commercial revitalizations accordingly.

The awareness of natural resilience within a community can assist in returning from the brink of disaster as well. Natural resilience references the ability of that area to return from a natural or man-made incident, and some territories may be in a stronger position to accomplish this goal than others, such as those which are more affluent or which have a more available access to resources which are essential for productive daily living. Natural resilience within regions can additionally play a role in the rebounding of a neighborhood after an adverse happening, and this sentiment can be reflected within the communicative methods utilized by municipalities: "...the adaptive capacity created, the internal and external relationships fostered and developed, the planning undertaken, and the direction established by its leadership and culture to ensure the organization is change ready" ("Foundations in Community Resilience and the National Preparedness System", 2017). These research findings uphold the importance of open and honest discussions among upper-level agencies and civilians alike, as well as confirming the role of leadership in opening and encouraging these dialogues and assuming the obligatory positions to support these aims, in tandem with emphasizing the relevance of forming and underscoring the importance of a direction for victims to follow post-disaster so as to get them on the road to recovery as soon as it is feasible. Thus, deliberations of this nature should know no boundaries regardless of the organizations or individuals involved.

Demonstrating that they are working together and sharing information is perhaps one of the most important elements that an emergency management team can employ. Presenting this alliance to the public can aid in stemming the tide of negative feelings towards the authorities, and potentially prevent violence or resistance to recovery efforts. An example of this situation playing out may be seen in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, during which local residents reacted negatively to assistance outreach from rescuers. Furthermore, natural resilience may be

incorporated into both disaster planning and formulating an efficient means of expanding on regional resources, such as spending and available revenue, and can also weigh in factors such as local demographics and the composition of the territory in question (National policy frameworks on resilience in OECD countries, n.d., p. 8). Natural resilience could further have an impact upon available spending, and is beneficial in determining whether statutory, regulatory and/or state policy changes or shifts could augment finances at both the state and federal levels, which in turn could either allow for expansion of decreasing of aid being granted to a disaster-affected area. In conjunction with that item, funds and natural reliance could be gateways towards the implementation of tools such as the National Emergency Communications Plan and the National Incident Management Program, both of which are overseen by the federal government, and thus any changes in these operations could surely have a consequence on the growth or hinderance of improvement of conditions following disaster due to its ties to recovery agencies at all echelons, from local to federal (Ferro et al, 2018, p. 9).

Disaster planning theories may be integrated into the communication aspect as well. The first theory which may correlate with proper and direct communication is the theory of vulnerability. This theory hinges around the concept of assessing weaknesses within a social or organizational infrastructure and then determining methods of protecting these assets so that, in the event of a man-made or natural disaster, the results would be minimized compared to how they could affect operations if these factors were left unchecked. Too, this theory ties into natural resilience because both premises advocate for the restoration of order in the world and a return to normal routines as swiftly as possible in the given circumstances. Miller et al (2010) support this blending and how it can maintain interaction by its precepts: “Resilience and vulnerability, as well as related concepts of adaptation and transformation, are central concepts

in highly influential but somewhat different ways of framing our analyses of...the challenges of sustainability” (p. 1). Therefore, interfacing with businesses, civilians, and local governance can permit a simplified approach towards finding and amending vulnerable spots for potential breaches or other harm. Furthermore, maintaining a cohesive communication framework in this context, such as one which includes technology as a method of informing individuals and residents, can be a powerful tool for widespread information and guidance to be disseminated among the townspeople. Items such as smartphones can help in these circumstances. Through lowering the possibility of risk standards and opportunities, resilience can be reinforced and/or established because calamity victims will gain confidence in recovery efforts and in the actions of those who have been sent to assist them. Likewise, conflict theory presents the idea that planning for a disaster as being an inevitable scenario and it is also similar to vulnerability theory in the fact that thinking ahead and considering all possibilities can permit emergency management to execute preparation strategies which will be efficiently used for the eventuality of that event, whether it is human-made or natural, and expanding on those plans with a formulated counterresponse to minimize the fallout from the attack or incident. Each of these theories exemplify how teams can weigh who or what may cause a threat to a community, how to specifically respond to the threat in question, and how to neutralize or remove the threat. Therefore, as far as communication and natural resilience, emergency management theories create a context which is favorable for creating communication openings in conjunction with using planning as a tactic towards imparting goodwill in the neighborhood that teams, agencies and designated resources will be enabled to assist them as they commence reconstruction.

Implementing and executing a pre-existing and planned relationship between larger entities can be especially helpful in a post-disaster atmosphere. Organizations such as FEMA

and the military can readily be mobilized if a calamity should strike if there have already been discussions about how to handle the incident and what their dedicated responses would be.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this interaction is the requirement that these groups present themselves as a cohesive entity. Currie (2019) agrees that such a partnership could be beneficial and not having one could lead to disorder and confusion; the author notes that “FEMA and state officials’ pre-existing relationships and exercises aided the response and helped address various challenges. However, GAO and FEMA identified challenges that slowed and complicated FEMA’s response” (p. 2). As such, this analysis exemplifies the obligation for such organizations to establish a rapport early on before an incident occurs, as disputes between these groups can slow official and FEMA reaction and therefore cause undue suffering among citizens in impacted towns. Thus, paving the way for improved communication in these situations is critical.

Undeniably, community and its trust in governance is vital for disaster planning and recovery alike; any perceived or real mistrust in these groups, particularly by the public, can hinder recovery response and efforts and further stall disaster planning and rebounding. In tandem with vulnerability theory, this vantage point must also be considered. Eid and El-Adaway (2007) posit that “Sustainable disaster recovery involves not merely the restoration of the physical built environment, but also meeting the needs of the impacted stakeholders and decreasing the vulnerability of the host community to future hazards” (p. 5). From this view, then, according to the writers, public opinion alongside of corporate and organizational municipal policies may be driven through reviewing and reacting to the mental, physical and emotional needs of all parties involved, both civilians and officials, and furthermore to include law enforcement and law makers. Of course, ideally preventing disasters completely would be

the most desirable choice; since this is not possible or feasible, however, maintaining a tangible presence within the community and attending to situations as they surface is the best method of being proactive in these cases. McEntire (2014) stresses the same focal point: “In terms of emergency management, we may state that a disaster (D) will occur when a triggering agent (T) interacts with vulnerability (V). In other words,  $T + V = D$ . If we look at this equation in an alternate manner, we may state that a hazard is most likely to produce a disaster when urban planning has been haphazard, when building codes have not been enforced...[and] when warning systems are underdeveloped, when preparedness measures have been neglected” (p. 4). From McEntire’s view, emergency management personnel should review items which can be remediated and prevented, such as easily recognizable items like buildings which are out of code or in some form of disrepair and would require attention to correct their issues; taking these steps long before a disaster should potentially reduce the reach and effect of that same event. Hence, resources within the community such as code enforcement, who serve to sustain and uphold overall community standards on the primary local level, could be valuable tools for solving this issue and for helping those who may require such.

Too, considering how hierarchies of relief organizations are formulated and whether they should be maintained during a disaster should also be considered. In most business, for example, there are generally levels of organization, ranging from general workers to middle level management and ultimately culminating in higher level management. Permitting workers to bypass these designations and perform in various capacities in the event of a disaster can expedite response and avoid entanglements if there are disagreements as to the functions that each member of an emergency management staff unit should perform. Dwivedi et al (2018) point out that “...administrative conflict, political biasness and professional growth have

significant effects on attitude” (p. 6758). Further, Dwivedi et al goes on to observe that infighting among members of an entity designated to aid in disaster recovery could stall or derail recovery efforts altogether, as previously observed: “...traditional managerial problems observed across disaster management operations are non-cooperation among members, disrupted chain of commands, misuse of relief items, lack of information sharing, mistrust and lack of coordination” (p. 6758). Interchanges and interactive communication within townships and state level organizations, therefore, would have to rise above these disagreements or their own existing biases to serve their communities at the highest standards possible to reverse the outcome of the disaster. Undertaking these actions could have a powerful and favorable result on the response to the disaster recovery; leaving these items unaddressed, though, could have a negative influence on recuperation efforts and adversely affect the regional populace through a lack of cooperation on all fronts, inadequate communication, unresolved differences and ineffective direction from the town. Thus, once more, communication can be vital because workers can be empowered to approach their managers as to their being able to perform in scenarios which may not appear in their specific job descriptions or responsibilities.

While a disastrous event can and does disrupt social and physical urban structures and can cause untold harm and damage to those who fall victim to its consequences, emergency recovery personnel can learn to work together with one another to lessen the outcome of the incident and to efficiently formulate plans for coping with a harmful incident when one should indeed occur. Placing communication at the foundation of all disaster recovery plans, then, should be a primary endeavor for each of these organizations, and utilizing communication and tools to inform citizens and to keep bonds strong between these groups can minimize a disaster quickly. Too, by empowering recovery personnel to interact with one another along with the

public, all parties can work together to reverse the disaster's outcome, to keep everyone informed throughout the process, and to ensure that everyone has resources for the aftermath of the event, as well as giving staff the leeway they may need to make decisions without having to be bound to leadership and their choices. For the future, then, reviewing and considering communication first and foremost as a hallmark of disaster planning can set the stage for resolving this type of adversity as successfully as possible.

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