

CONTRIBUTIONS OF MANAGEMENT THEORY AND PRACTICE TO ORGANIZATION LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

This paper takes a look at the impact that management theory and how the basic functions and practice of management as well as the role of the manager and approaches to management have contributed to the practice of emergency management. Current views of management theory stress the changing nature of the external environment and the need to understand and address these external forces for change. The contribution and role of systems theory and contingency theory to the emergency management process is stressed. Although some might view that we do not manage disasters, there is an overlap between the contribution of management theory and emergency management. Management theory stresses the need for effective planning to ensure that organizational goals are obtained. Emergency and crisis management emphasize that effective emergency response and recovery is based on good planning. Building sustainable organizations and communities is a common goal of both management and emergency management. Management and disaster-related issues and concerns along with strategies to improve emergency management practice from the field of management are provided. Finally, recommendations are provided for including emergency and crisis management in management curriculums.

INTRODUCTION

Emergency today is a complex function involving public safety and security, business affairs, public and information affairs, information systems administration, communication technologies, mapping sciences and hazard modeling, legal affairs, and coordination with numerous other organizations. This diverse set of functions and activities requires emergency managers to be effective managers of programs and operational managers of many direct disaster activities. The effective management of both program and operational activities requires an understanding of management principles. This paper examines the development of management theory and some of the major contributions that management theory has made to the field of emergency management. It discusses some of the major management concepts including the role of the manager, strategic planning, systems theory and contingency theory, which are critical to the practice of emergency management. The overlap between management theory and disasters may be seen in concepts

associated with crisis management and the importance of values, diversity, and legal issues to both management theory and emergency management. A solid foundation in concepts of management will form the basis for any emergency management activity.

MANAGEMENT THEORY

The field of management grew in its formalization during the latter part of the Nineteenth Century and throughout the Twentieth Century along with the rise of the industrial revolution. The growth of management concepts was needed to guide the growth of industrial manufacturing in the United States and Europe. A similar growth in emergency management theory also evolved in response to the need for theory, concepts and proven practices in response to the devastating impacts of hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, and chemical spills. Our current focus on homeland security is also driving the development of even more concepts in this area.

The theory of management has grown over the past one-hundred years evolving from the time and motion studies of engineers to contributions from social scientists, the Hawthorne studies and a behavioral approach to more quantitative approaches that look for the “best” or optimum functioning of an organization or “total quality management (TQM)”. Emergency management has been influenced by the same developments in management theory in utilizing engineering to design the most efficient emergency operations center or emergency response routing for emergency services. The selection of emergency medical and law-enforcement units in response to 911 communication calls and the most recent traffic hurricane evacuation planning suggest that scientific management is applicable to problems today. The ongoing assessment of disaster response programs using quantitative measurement criteria demonstrates that TQM can be used in emergency management.

The behavior scientists have also been involved suggesting the necessity of involving community organizations in planning and mitigation strategies. Finally, emergency management has been influenced by those who stress the need for quality management and the efficient use of resources, even in a disaster.

IMPROVING THE MANAGEMENT IN LEARNING

The field of management has stressed the need for the development of positive organizational culture and organizational learning. The management environment today and in the future will provide new challenges and organizational responses. The management literature has been sensitive to this need and been quite responsive. Emergency management must also acknowledge the need for organizational learning and the importance of a positive organizational climate to effective operations. Possibly more executive education would support the increasing interdependence between the Department of Homeland Security, the business community, as well as state and local operations. During the past thirty years, the business community has focused on the importance of quality control and service. Emergency management operations must share this

emphasis and adopt methods of organizational assessment and quality control to enhance all elements of the emergency management process. A greater awareness of the value of environmental scanning and the broader impacts of international affairs on internal operations will be increasingly important to the emergency management community. Business may call on emergency management for help in identifying strategies to cope with a dramatically changing environment.

CONCLUSION

Few business schools have embraced the contribution that emergency management theory and practice can make to the success of business operations. As a result, attention to hazards and disaster impacts are limited to crisis management and contingency planning. Few if any schools of business have worked with emergency management curriculums on their campuses and exposed their students to other disciplines that are so much a part of disaster research. Interdisciplinary courses that expose students from throughout the campus to the nature of hazards and disaster impacts are needed. Including students from business programs will expose other hazard oriented coursework to the vulnerability of business operations and impacts well beyond financial considerations. An integrated approach to college and university curriculums will prepare students to understanding the changing nature of hazards and disasters in an increasingly interdependent world.

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