Shifts in emergency management service provision: a case for new innovative leadership

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Introduction

Delivering services that will better meet the needs of communities has required shifts in emergency management service provision. Recent research has reinforced the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach to emergency management that goes beyond a simple focus on response considerations. Being concerned with 'risk and its management' has raised many important questions concerning: vulnerability, the development of partnerships and community participation in decision making processes. These changes have impact on the design, management and culture of emergency service organisations. Innovative leadership is needed to cope with such changes.

It is the aim of this article to show that intelligent organisational design coupled with innovative leadership is needed in dealing with changes in emergency management service provision. Developing a capacity for self-evaluation and self-learning is a very important means of assisting the development of inter-organisational cooperation and coordination. As an innovative leadership tool, it can be argued that a program of mentoring can provide an important means of developing shared understanding and commitment, thereby providing a powerful means of spanning organisational cultural barriers. Emergency service organisations can do much to create a climate of shared meaning and understanding both within their respective organisations as well as between relevant network members.

Responding to disaster

Developing collaborative models is important in responding to disaster. Hodgkinson and Stewart (1991) reinforce the necessity for an intelligent flexible and innovative mind-set and approach to disaster decision making:

> …[disaster represents] challenges to the process of effective decision making. Organisations find themselves taking decisions which they have not anticipated, and many of the immediate decisions which are taken irrevocably shape the pattern of response for good or for ill. Organisations are forced to take crucial decisions in areas where they have little knowledge, and in the heat of the crisis when they

themselves are undergoing extremely rapid organisational change (p.66).'

Quarantelli (1995) has further argued that since disasters, as a whole, differ significantly from everyday emergencies, to plan for and to manage them requires new or innovative as well as traditional behaviours. Identifying disaster pre-conditions that demonstrate the requirement for innovative thinking, Quarantelli highlights the important shift from rigid traditional command-control patterns towards improvisation and flexible new initiatives. In response to pressures for change, Australian emergency management is re-inventing itself to deliver services that will better meet the needs of the community. Salter (1997) summarises (see *Table 1*) these apparent shifts in service provision.

Clearly, the issue set involves the notion of vulnerability, developing partnerships, and community participation in decision making. Australian emergency management should be aware of the likely inhibitors to effective coordination that could impact upon performance.

Inhibitors to effective coordination

In an unpublished doctoral thesis, Pagram (1997) tested the proposition: that the development of cooperative inter-organisational relationships among Australian emergency service organisations is critical for effective disaster management practice. A mailed questionnaire and follow up interviews were used as the investigative technique to develop an understanding of inter-organisational coordination between designated emergency service organisations in Queensland and New South Wales.

Questionnaire findings identified a number of inhibitors to effective coordination between emergency service organisations. The majority of respondents in Queensland and New South Wales from a list of twenty-six inhibitors to effective coordination, selected: Perceived threat and competition; different leadership approaches and authority; imperfect knowledge of the environment; and disparities in staff training.

Contrastingly, questionnaire findings identified a number of facilitators to effective coordination between emergency ser-

vice organisations. The majority of respondents from a list of twenty facilitators to effective coordination, selected: Positive attitudes, informal contracts and exchange of information and resources, occupational diversity and group-centred approach to problems.

Developing an effective working relationship between participating organisations is thus an important consideration in achieving effective coordination and collaboration. Questionnaire respondents in Queensland and New South Wales were given the opportunity to identify organisations and

From	To
Hazards	Vulnerability
Reactive	Proactive
Single agencies	Partnerships
Science driven	Multi-disciplinary
Response management	Risk management
Planning for communities	Planning with communities
Communicating to communities	Communicating with communities

Table 1: Shifts in Emergency Management Service Provision (Salter, 1997)

evaluate the cooperation received with regard to carrying out counter-disaster management responsibilities. Of concern (see *Table 2*) is the large percentage of respondents in both States who indicated that cooperation was far from satisfactory.

Overcoming inhibitors to effective coordination requires intelligent and sensitive organisational design that takes into account existing organisational structures and respective cultures of relevant network members.

Intelligent organisational design

Intelligent organisational design are criteria that utilise and combine the concept of delayering and team-based networks, alliances and partnerships. Pinchot and Pinchot (1993) provide examples (see *Table 3*) of intelligent organisational design criteria.

Bahrami (1992) considers that a key advantage of using team based networks is their intrinsic flexibility. Such networks can be formed, re-formed and disbanded with relative ease; they can bypass the traditional hierarchy; and their com-

	Very high %	High %	Neither high nor low %	Low %	Very low %	Total	N=
New South Wales							
State Emergency Service	25	25	25	25	0	100	4
Fire Services	17	50	33	0	0	100	6
Ambulance Service	0	100	0	0	0	100	3
Police Service	14	29	43	14	0	100	7
Health Service	0	0	0	100	0	100	1
Public Utilities	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Local Govt Authority	33	33	34	0	0	100	3
Other	0	20	60	20	0	100	5
Queensland							
State Emergency Service	31	8	53	8	0	100	13
Fire Services	36	36	28	0	0	100	14
Ambulance Service	21	50	29	0	0	100	16
Police Service	0	36	55	9	0	100	11
Health Service	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Public Utilities	50	50	0	0	0	100	2
Local Govt Authority	10	20	60	10	0	100	10
Other	40	0	40	20	0	100	22

Table 2: Evaluation of cooperation received across a group of select organisations (Pagram,1997)

position can evolve over time in order to blend skills and address changing priorities. Moreover, while bureaucracy is a system that achieves coordination by confining people so narrowly that there is no chance for most to use a broad range of talents (Pinchot and Pinchot, 1993), the intelligent organisation, by contrast, is designed to tap the intelligence and the variety of talents in every individual.

The building of strategic alliances and collaborative relationships is a fundamental part of pooling complementary, addressing rapid changes, reducing risk and providing strategic flexibility (Bahrami, 1992). The emergence of semipermeable boundaries would take the form of access to partners' internal information systems through electronic mail networks; workers assigned to joint development projects become a temporary employee of a partner organisation for a limited period of time, thereby forging crucial relationships and gaining access to vital information about a partners culture and modus operandi (Bahrami, 1992).

The building of strategic alliances and collaborative relationships within and between emergency service organisations also requires innovative and sensitive leadership.

Intelligent leadership

Intelligent organisational design is inspired by innovative leadership. Innovative leadership orchestrates the vision, shared meaning and 'cultural glue' which creates the necessary synergies that ensures a unity of mission in responding to a disaster. To this end, Drabek (1990) has argued the need to maintain organisational integrity in disaster management by identifying the key personal attributes of what defines a successful disaster manager. *Table 4* outlines these attributes.

These key personal attributes defining the successful disaster manager reinforce the idea of developing a productive mind-set, where people who feel good about themselves, produce good results; people are assisted to reach their full potential; and the best minute spent is one invested in other people (Blanchard and Johnson, 1994). Quite clearly, the disaster manager who takes the time to set clear goals, praise and encourage workers and guide workers (and as necessary, reprimand) towards accomplishing goals will create mutual cooperation and understanding. To this end, as an innovative leadership tool, a program of mentoring has the capacity to strengthen and bond further the employer-employee relationship.

Mentoring

It has been argued, that mentoring:

'. . . is a complex, interactive process occurring between individuals of differing levels of experience and expertise which incorporates interpersonal or psycho-social development, career and/or educational development, and socialisation (Carmin, 1988 cited in Bush *et al.* 1996).'

As a multi-faceted concept, mentoring incorporates the idea of personal support and more importantly, the notion of professional development leading to enhanced competence. Typically, an accomplished manager will identify in a new recruit natural apprehension and uncertainty with regard to their particular role and responsibilities, and actively seek to provide direction and encouragement. The manager is in a unique position to pass on practical insight derived from experience, as well as

assist the new recruit to set realistic expectations and steer them in the right direction as far as career aspirations are concerned. Mentoring is made easier if the mentor views the mentee as a protege who must be appropriately nurtured. Moreover, mentoring can, and should be a mutually rewarding experience (Thomson, 1993 cited in Bush *et al.* 1996). That is to say, the mentor can also benefit from mentoring in terms of the opportunity given to reflect on and question their own subconscious practice, as well as share new ideas and information that newly appointed recruits bring to an organisation.

Effective mentoring programs produce benefits for the organisation as a whole. For example, in schools, teachers may develop collaborative models of working which enable them to share ideas and problems

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A capacity:

- to deal with more than one issue at once, such as caring for one another, customers, the town, and the community
- to face many competitors simultaneously and deal more effectively with all of them
- to implement whole-systems thinking without robbing units of local flexibility
- to better identify core issues and address them rapidly
- to determine from experience how to do new things, not just what not to do, and better remember what was learned
- to rapidly apply what was learned in one place to others
- to integrate learning across the organization and use it creatively and flexibly
- to attend to all the details and supporting competencies that add up to cost-effectiveness, superior performance.

Table 3: Intelligent Organisational Design Criteria — (Pinchot & Pinchot 1993)

Think through your philosophy
- ascertain agency mission
- establish credibility
- keep a long-term perspective.

Expand your knowledge base
- study the community
- obtain more training
- self-initiated education.

Be aware of your managerial style
- invite, don't order
- management is a social, not a technical job.

Nurture positive attitudes
- enthusiasm is contagious
- develop communication skills
- your work — not just a job (convey intense level of commitment).

Build community support
- establish personal linkages
- show how you can help others
- bring people together
- increase community support.

Participate in a professional group

Table 4: Key personal attributes defining a successful disaster manager (Drabek, 1990)

and enhance the collective competence of the staff:

'…[Mentoring] proliferates organisational norms and culture, ensures hard-learned knowledge and skills are transferred to younger colleagues [and] improves the overall performance of the work group.' (Chong *et al.* 1989 cited in Bush *et al.*,1996.)

There is no reason why emergency service organisations cannot derive the same benefits and successes from developing similar collaborative models of working through effective mentoring programmes. This would constitute a very interesting future research topic because very little has been investigated in this area.

Conclusion

Delivering services that will better meet the needs of communities has required shifts in emergency management service provision. Recent research has reinforced the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach to emergency management that goes beyond a simple focus on response considerations. Being concerned with 'risk and its management' has raised many important questions concerning: vulnerability, the development of partnerships and community participation in decision making processes. These changes have impact on the design, management and culture of emergency service organisations. Innovative leadership is needed to cope with such changes. As an innovative leadership tool, it can be argued that a program of mentoring provides an important means of developing shared understanding and commitment, thereby providing a powerful means of spanning organisational cultural barriers.

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Shore safety pamphlet

A Shore Safety pamphlet has been produced by the Australian Geological Survey Organisation (AGSO) in collaboration with Surf Life Saving Australia.

Accidents involving rock falls, cliff collapse and sand cave-ins around the Australian coastline have cost 11 lives and at least six injuries over the past four years. More than half of the victims were children. It is hoped that the pamphlet will reduce this tragic and avoidable loss of life.

The Shore Safety pamphlet is specifically targeted at children. It uses bright colours, colour photos, and a minimum of text to illustrate dangerous geological features including cliffs, caves, overhangs, unstable boulders and digging or tunnelling in sand.

It is available free of charge from the AGSO Sales Centre, GPO Box 378, Canberra ACT 2601, and Surf Life Saving Australia.

It is accessible on the Web at www.agso. gov.au (then click on 'Geohazards' or 'New'). For more information, contact Dr Marion Leiba at AGSO, tel +61 2 6249 9355, fax +61 2 6249 9986, or email: mleiba@agso.gov.au.