Transformational Crisis Leadership During Catastrophic Events

Major Research Project

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Introduction

1. About the Project
2. Literature Review
3. Case Study: Strategic Leadership during the 2013 Southern Alberta Floods
4. Key Findings
5. Conclusion
About the Project:

- Final criteria for a Master of Arts in Disaster & Emergency Management
- 11 months to complete (approx. 400 hours)
- Academic Supervisor & Ethical Review
- Extensive Literature Review
- Research: Strategic Crisis Leadership during the 2013 Southern Alberta Floods
Choosing an MRP Topic:

- Personal Experience
- Repercussions of the decisions leaders make on the people below them (in the field)
- Questions & Interests from 1 year of study
Three Questions Directing Research:

1. What are the strengths and challenges of strategic crisis leaders during catastrophic events?
2. What might be helpful for leadership development in future catastrophic events?
3. What is the viability of creating a transformational crisis leadership model?
Literature Review – Looking for GAPS.

➢ During times of crisis, leadership is needed the most; however, leadership in extreme events and contexts has proven to be amongst the least researched topics in the field

➢ Lack of a strategic crisis leadership model
Literature Review: Crisis Leadership During Catastrophic Events

Hurricane Katrina (2005)
Sustained winds of 200 km/h at landfall resulting in 1,836 fatalities (Jones, 2010)

Haiti Earthquake (2010)
Magnitude 7.0 Earthquake resulting in over 300,000 fatalities (Olafsson, 2013)

Japan Earthquake, Tsunami & Nuclear Disaster (2011)
Magnitude 9.0 Earthquake resulting in 30 meter high waves (tsunami) over 500 km of Japan’s northeastern coast resulting in a death toll of 15,000 people and damage to the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant.
Transformational Crisis Leadership

Transformational Leadership

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Crisis Leadership
Case Study – Strategic Crisis Leadership during the 2013 Southern Alberta Floods

- 11 interviews (telephone & in-person) with strategic crisis leaders across Southern Alberta who were directly or indirectly involved with the floods
- 5 different jurisdictions (Calgary, High River, Siksika Nation, Canmore & Exshaw)
- Private, public and non-profit sectors at provincial & local level
Emergency Management Structure

Strategic

Elected Officials

EOC - Emergency Operations Centre

Tactical

ICP Incident Command Post
Case Study – Strategic Crisis Leadership during the 2013 Southern Alberta Floods

Interview Questions

1. Top 3 strengths of successful strategic crisis leaders?
2. Biggest challenge and how it was overcome?
3. Skills and traits required when responding to extreme disaster events?
4. Training requirements/recommendations?
5. Tips for future strategic crisis leaders?
6. Additional thoughts, insights or ideas?
Case Study – Strategic Leadership during the 2013 Southern Alberta Floods

Data Collection

- 349 codes (separate findings)
- 32 themes
- 4 topics:
  1. Strategic crisis leadership preparation
  2. Strategic crisis leadership during the response
  3. Recovery leadership
  4. Additional tips from the experts
KEY FINDINGS: LEADERSHIP
PREPARATION

1. Three Guiding Principles:
   Patience, Courage & Humility
FINDINGS: LEADERSHIP PREPARATION

Patience

“Good Crisis Leadership is about staying calm, not overreacting, not becoming too intense or stressed out about situations, controlling your emotions and having the ability to not let the situation overwhelm you.”

– Interviewee F
FINDINGS: LEADERSHIP PREPARATION

Courage

“You will have to make tough decisions, you need the moral courage and decisiveness to make those decisions. When people were afraid to make tough decisions they sometimes added to a disaster as opposed to helping resolve it. Have faith in the decisions you’ve made and communicate them as effectively as you outwardly can.”

– Interviewee G
FINDINGS: LEADERSHIP PREPARATION

Humility

“Go in with an open mind, not having preconceived notions on how everything’s going to work out because it usually doesn’t work out that way at all.”

– Interviewee G
FINDINGS: LEADERSHIP PREPARATION

2. Get Experience

“You could have all the crisis leadership training in the world and still curl up into a fetal position under your desk during a crisis.” – Interviewee E
3. Participate in exercises

“Exercising is the equivalent of weight lifting for emergency managers.”

– Interviewee G
4. Build Relationships – A friendship network

- Include political leaders in network.
- Build comprehensive networks within your relationships.
FINDINGS: BIGGEST CHALLENGES AND HOW THEY WERE OVERCOME.
KEY FINDINGS: STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP DURING THE RESPONSE

Challenge #1: Having problems without solutions.

Solutions:

➢ Be open to unique, unorthodox or unusual solutions
➢ Engage your team and the public
FINDINGS: STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP DURING THE RESPONSE

Challenge # 2: A lack of understanding towards Social Services.

“Social services is one of the more grey areas. The council and the province know to go to a fire chief first for fire [and] to a police chief [for security]. It is a little more vague when it comes to human services.”

-Interviewee K

Solution: Know who the experts are.
FINDINGS: STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP DURING THE RESPONSE

Challenge # 3: Dealing with the sheer magnitude of the event and the unknown.

“We had it all at once, train derailments, large fires, floods, massive power failures, mass evacuation, closing the downtown core. At times you kind of look up from the mayhem and look to the skies and say, “What’s happening here?”

- Interviewee C

Solutions:
- Maintain a strategic level of leadership
- Knowing how to prioritize extremely well
- Having self-care and the ability to manage stress
“It is almost impossible for someone to be operational and strategic at the same time. You need someone to be running the show, making management decisions. And then you need a leader looking forward in time and space to see what’s going on. I can’t overstate it. Have an operational person and add a strategic person and you can get out and see what’s actually happening and make way better decisions. Put people who are good at their jobs and in charge of their jobs and leave them alone. If you are in charge of this then take a very strategic perspective on them.”

- Interviewee E
FINDINGS: STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP DURING THE RESPONSE

Challenge # 4: Knowing how to safely get evacuees home.

“The perception was we will never get out of this. My argument was [...] you need to give people hope, hope of a better day. And people don’t need a lot more than hope.”

- Interviewee C

Solutions:
- Provide hope and vision
- Ability to empower the people
- Putting people before process
FINDINGS: STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP DURING THE RESPONSE

Challenge # 5: Internal/Organizational Challenges

- Getting buy-in from senior management
- Dealing with drastic changes to the internal organizational structure

Solution:

- Having confidence and trust in your team
FINDINGS: STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP DURING THE RESPONSE

Challenge # 6: External Communication and Collaboration Challenges

- Trying to coordinate with multiple governments and agencies
- Unified Command

Solutions:

- Negotiation skills
- Engaging the business community
"The disaster was an easier time than the recovery time. The recovery time has been more challenging on my leadership skills."

-Interviewee K

Topics:
1. Recovery challenges
2. Recovery skills
KEY FINDINGS: RECOVERY LEADERSHIP

1. Recovery Leadership Challenges

- Lack of training in recovery leadership
- Tough working environment
KEY FINDINGS: RECOVERY LEADERSHIP

2. Recovery Skills

- Understand social vulnerabilities
- Utilize local resources
- Bring people together
KEY FINDINGS: ADDITIONAL TIPS FROM THE EXPERTS

1. Study the longitudinal impacts of an event
2. We need more lessons learned from a leadership perspective
CONCLUSION

1. Key challenges and the strengths needed to overcome them.

2. Helpful tips for strategic crisis leaders

3. Developing a transformational crisis leadership model would be viable and enhance the capacity of strategic crisis leaders to respond and recover from catastrophic events.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

1. How can politicians better prepare for catastrophic events?
2. A comparison between crisis leadership and recovery leadership.
3. Development and adoption of a transformational crisis leadership model.
Thank You

Any Questions?

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