

Chapter 19

An Emergency Management Perspective for First-Time Leaders

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ABSTRACT

Emergency management requires exhaustive leadership that is based on principles, sound theory, and practice. These three bedrocks provide an opportunity for leaders to be cognizance, respectful, and at the same time, nimble in leading during a disaster—manmade or natural. Although leadership in emergency management is important, existing literature does not discuss the topic so well. In this chapter, the authors consider leadership from an emergency management perspective based on the four phases of disaster management: preparedness, response, mitigation, and recovery. Leading and managing unsettling events, such as pandemics, which may become the new normal, require eschewing destructive leadership behaviors. This chapter presents a conceptual model that lists and discusses using examples innate and learned leadership characteristics necessary for effective and efficient disaster management through the four phases of disaster management. Guidelines for first-time leaders handling unexpected situations are provided, together with future research directions.

INTRODUCTION

The term leadership has quite a number of definitions including a current one by Waldman, et al. (2020) when they revisited the issues of responsible leadership. Conscious, deliberate “orientation or mindset” (p. 3) by people in top level position towards meeting stakeholder goals is effective leadership (Waldman, et al., 2020). The emphasis on responsible/effective leadership is noteworthy, as there are average leadership, which should not be emulated by first time leaders. A leader’s conscious mindset is

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not an end in itself—the application of this mindset—be it innate, learned or a combination of both—to influence significantly, other people’s thoughts, behaviors and feelings (Gardener, 1995) towards achieving a mission is the target (Fransen, et al., 2020; Sy et al., 2018)). While a significant number of scholars describe leadership as the influence on others to get things done (Keulemans & Groeneveld, 2020; Farahnak et al., 2020; Caillier, 2020, Ilie & Turel, 2020), it is imperative for first time leaders to be cognizant of destructive leadership characteristics, which have strong association with leading in unusual circumstances and normal times (Brandebo, 2020). Interestingly though, some destructive leadership tactics have the potential of yielding the needed results in certain situations, but only in the short run (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Notable among destructive leadership behaviors are the ones that do not only negatively impact subordinates’ performance, but derail a leader off an organization’s mission (Einarsen et al., 2007).

Hornstein (1996) and Tepper (2000) argue that destructive leadership can be abusive supervisors, which cause toxic effects on employees’ psychological well-being. Hornstein (1996) further distinguishes between tough and abusive supervisors, stating that the two are different and should not be misconstrued in application. Donaldson-Fielder et al. (2013) assert that destructive leadership has negative impact on subordinates’ health, stress levels and over all social lives. Destructive leadership behaviors are known to come in different shapes and forms, such as bullying (Namie & Namie, 2000), intolerance (Lombardo & McCall, 1984), and harassment (Brotsky, 1976). To help first time leaders succeed, there is a need to address the issue of destructive leadership characteristics, in addition to any other training (Thupa-ang, 2018), since about half of first time managers/leaders are regarded failures by both subordinates and supervisors (Kangas, 2013; Gentry et al., 2014).

Moreover, it is necessary for successful first time leaders to provide enabling environment for their organizations to thrive (Marathe & Kakani, 2020; Simmons et al., 2007). According to London and London (2007), first time leaders are supposed to take initiatives and use their innate qualities to serve their organizations. But, could these innate qualities of first time leaders include destructive elements? Are destructive leadership characteristics innate or learned? Could destructive leadership characteristics be unlearned? Interestingly, the theories that discuss destructive leadership have not considered leading in unusual circumstances, especially in relation to emergency/disaster management such as the recent COVID-19. It is well known that theories of leadership have been taught in the United States, and around the world, for decades in academia (Komives & Sowcik, 2020; Brungardt et al., 2006). Most of such degree programs do not include in their curricula analysis of first time leaders’ qualities for managing chaotic, unsettling situations. However, there is a growing realization of the need for leaders with immense flexibility and innovation to manage the complexity and nonlinear dynamic features of the society we find ourselves in today (Farazmand, 2003). The questions that come to mind are whether such leaders are born or made. Are there qualities that first time leaders should possess for managing emergencies that are truly innate and unachievable through hard work? The authors will try to answer these questions as they embark on such a journey. The authors deduce that extant literature and other conceptual approaches exist for the study of crisis leadership, but they are yet to see theories that discuss effective first time leadership from an emergency management perspective. Therefore, the researchers make efforts in this book chapter to provide some guidelines for scholars and practitioners on this aspect of leadership. In view of the above discussion, the authors present a theoretical model employing constructive—innate and learned—leadership characteristics for guiding first time leaders managing disasters through the four phases of disaster management i.e. preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation.

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