LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES AT THE MESO LEVEL OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT NETWORKS*

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Leadership theory has focused on interpersonal dynamics (such as motivation) and broad social leadership (such as national leaders during crises). Analyzing data from emergency response incidents, we describe a role for leadership between these micro-social and macro-social contexts. At the meso level, emergency managers both design and react to interorganizational structures; a process we call meso-leadership. We explore these leadership strategies, including efforts to engage diverse actors (brokerage) and reinforce group norms (closure). The task of meso-leadership is to balance these strategies, which we illustrate using examples that suggest a pattern of shifting strategies at different phases of emergency events.

Key Words: meso-leadership, emergency management, brokerage and closure, leadership strategies

INTRODUCTION

Emergency managers face unique leadership challenges. Peculiar to their work domain is the fact that the majority of the resources they need reside in other organizations. Their chief sources of personnel are other organizations, such as fire, police, and emergency medical service agencies. The discharge of their responsibilities
requires a wide variety of organizations, although the emergency manager has few tools to compel other organizations to participate.

Recent research in emergency management has illustrated the importance of emergency managers exercising leadership in unconventional ways (Waugh and Streib, 2006). Emergency managers must exercise leadership at a level in between the traditional roles of intraorganizational leadership (micro-leadership) and leadership at high levels of government and society (macro-leadership). We briefly review the wide range of research on leadership to illustrate the traditional focus on micro- and macro-leadership. After defining the concept of meso-leadership, we illustrate the tools of meso-leadership with examples drawn from emergency management. We propose that as the scale of emergencies changes, the strategies of meso-leadership can and should change. We conclude with a discussion of future work needed to elaborate the model of meso-leadership.

**LEVELS OF LEADERSHIP IN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

Many theorists in public administration have addressed the role of leadership (Van Wart, 2003; Behn, 1998), as have others in political science, history, and business administration (Burns, 2010 [1978]; Kotter, 1990; House, 1971). Debates in administrative theory have emphasized two levels of leadership: macro-social leadership by major political actors and micro-social leadership at the intraorganizational level, at the expense of a level of leadership essential to effective emergency management. We selectively review the literature on leadership to illustrate the two levels of leadership and provide examples of work in each tradition. We discuss only theories that fall most clearly into the micro and macro traditions. We then outline a theory of leadership that falls between these traditional levels at the meso level of activity - meso-leadership.

**Micro-Leadership**

Inquiries into leadership in business management have focused on a specific organization (Bass and Bass, 2008; Zaleznik, 1992; Fiedler and Chemers, 1974). These uses of leadership constitute intraorganizational leadership. At this level of analysis, leadership is a relationship between a leader and a follower, or a series of followers - each with an individual relationship to the leader (Yukl, 2002). It is the focus on interpersonal relationships that characterizes theories as micro-leadership.

There are many theories of micro-leadership, including Chester Barnard’s (1968 [1938]) framework. Barnard emphasized that executives can manipulate follower behavior using a variety of tools. Some tools involve the use of material incentives such as salary. This tradition continues through research in leader/member exchange (LMX)