The Need for Leadership During Public Health Crises

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The Need for Leadership During Public Health Crises

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Abstract

The National Incident Management System (NIMS) is a national training program mandated by the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006. The program focuses primarily on Preparedness, Communications and Information Management, Resource Management, and Command and Management. NIMS is formatted in a way that the information can be used across a wide array of organization types. The Incident Command System (ICS) of NIMS has a “military-style, command-and-control model traditionally seen in emergency services and not in public health” (Kohn, Barnett, Galastri, Semon, & Links, 2010). NIMS prepares public health leaders in the roles and organization of ICS sufficiently, but does not address specific challenges that incident response leaders face. It is critical that public health leaders are adequately prepared for an emergency situation to ensure that public health leaders are capable of working as efficiently and effectively as possible. Better preparation standards has the potential to improve collaboration, communication, and save lives.

Results

Research indicates that the United States is best prepared to handle a pandemic. There will always be room for improvement in terms of preparing for a public health crisis. Figure three shows the United States is ranked number one in the Countries Best-Prepared for a Pandemic. The United States has achieved this status because of the constant evolution of crisis preparation. The United States evaluates how effective preparations were and modifies areas of weaknesses.

Figure 3 shows the ranking of countries best prepared to deal with a pandemic.

A major component of the United States is the National Incident Management System (NIMS). FIRESCOPE was an incident command system developed to organize firefighting operations. In 2004, the National Incident Management System became a standardized approach to handling management and response during crises and encompasses the incident command system from FIRESCOPE as a key component. NIMS has evolved since its original structure to better prepare federal, state, territorial, Tribal and local responders for incident management.

This system focuses on six areas:
- Command and management.
- Preparedness.
- Resource management.
- Communications and information management.
- Supporting technologies.
- Ongoing management and maintenance.

Another major aspect of incident response is the level at which a leader is able to operate during a crisis. Research indicates that traditional leadership training does not include adequate crisis preparations.

Figure 4 outlines traditional leadership skills and behaviors that are considered necessary to be an effective leader.

While the National Incident Management System teaches leaders processes and organization, the system fails to cognitively prepare leaders for crises. NIMS does not provide leadership training. Most NIMS users are already in leadership positions and have traditional leadership style training. Figure five compares core leadership to adaptive leadership. Most traditional leadership styles are consistent with core leadership are not sufficient during times of disaster. Adaptive leadership is a more appropriate leadership style to better prepare leaders to appropriately lead during a crisis.

Figure 5 compares characteristics of core leadership and adaptive leadership.

Adaptive leadership restructures traditional leadership styles and encompasses one specific area of social intelligence. Emotional intelligence has five main characteristics:
- Self-awareness
- Self-regulation
- Motivation
- Empathy
- Social Skills

Conclusion

Research indicates that the United States is best prepared to handle a pandemic. There will always be room for improvement in terms of preparing for a public health crisis. Figure three shows the United States is ranked number one in the Countries Best-Prepared for a Pandemic. The United States has achieved this status because of the constant evolution of crisis preparation. The United States evaluates how effective preparations were and modifies areas of weaknesses.

While the National Incident Management System teaches leaders processes and organization, the system fails to cognitively prepare leaders for crises. NIMS does not provide leadership training. Most NIMS users are already in leadership positions and have traditional leadership style training. Figure five compares core leadership to adaptive leadership. Most traditional leadership styles are consistent with core leadership are not sufficient during times of disaster. Adaptive leadership is a more appropriate leadership style to better prepare leaders to appropriately lead during a crisis.

Figure 7 shows that upper-level management have lower emotional intelligence scores. Statistics show that upper-level management have lower emotional intelligence scores. Upper management are the primary decision makers during times of crisis.

To encourage the adaptive leadership style, colleges should encompass this style of leadership in curricula. Johns-Hopkins Center for Public Health Preparedness (JHCPP) offers three National Incident Management System courses that conform to FEMA mandates. The JHCPP fosters the emotional intelligence aspect that is needed when handling a crisis within the health industry. The JHCPP courses are offered online and face-to-face in the Maryland region.

Figure 6 further defines each category of emotional intelligence.

Each characteristic better prepares an individual to handle a disaster. Emotional intelligence helps leaders identify their behavior and mindset. This allows leaders to control their emotions and not overreact in stressful situations. Emotional intelligence also aids in understanding others. Leaders with more emotional intelligence communicate with peers more effectively. Everyone has some level of emotional intelligence. Adaptive leadership embraces these characteristics to build a more effective leader.

Figure 8 outlines best practices for effective leadership.

References