

# Chapter 9

## Communications and Information Sharing in Public– Private Partnerships: Networking for Emergency Management

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### ABSTRACT

*Communications and information sharing has been called the most critical function in emergency management. But whenever an exercise is held or an incident occurs then communications, and by association information sharing, is nearly always cited as a problem and often as a failure. This is true despite the communications technology/channels used, the size, scope, and complexity of the exercise or incident, and the best intentions of the people involved. Technology and/or the development of new technologies alone will not solve this problem. Communications and information sharing is an innately human function and always has been. This chapter focuses on the basics of human communication and then explores alternatives through networking that may contribute to the failure or success of information sharing in public-private partnerships in emergency management. Last, some suggestions are made for ways to enhance the communications and information sharing in emergency management.*

### BACKGROUND

#### **Establishing the Foundation for Information Sharing – Values, Decisions, Actions**

*Viestintä yleensä epäonnistuu, paitsi sattumalta  
(Wiio, 1978).*

The English translation of this particular Wiio's law is, "Communication usually fails, except by accident" (Wiio, 1978). There are myriad challenges for communications. Given in terms of "context," challenges for communication exist in the psychological, relational, situational, environmental and cultural contexts, which unfortunately cover just about everything. People typically behave as "rational actors". In a specific situation, a person's response depends on their "rational" interpretation of that situation which goes beyond

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-8159-0.ch009

the facts of any “common operating picture” conveyed. However, their interpretation will always be biased. And worse, challenges abound for rational choice theory, e.g. “free-riders” who seem to appear everywhere apparently negating many tenets of rational choice theory (Buchanan, 1979). Complex organizations comprise individuals with values, groups with norms and their own organizational culture. Ignoring for the moment the many issues debated about rational choice theory, consider how individual values impact our interpretation of any communication. Martin Packer discussed the development of individual values as we age, arguing that once we reach a certain point our values are essentially set for life (Packer, 1992). These values can be set aside as we tackle life’s challenges in our professional and personal endeavors, at least temporarily. For example, we may give in to group norms in our work life in order to succeed or be viewed as a team player. However, over time our values will increasingly influence our behavior. They are an inherent part of our rational choice.

No single value is solely responsible for our behavior. We behave based on complex interaction of large numbers of values, i.e. value pluralism. Further, value pluralism and more specifically revised value pluralism add social learning in the form of social content and social context to our own myriad values (Tetlock, Peterson & Lerner, 1996). Schwartz (1996) postulated, from three basic human needs, that values vary in importance given the situation we find ourselves in. He described the value conformity as the “restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms” that supports the goal of obedience or self-discipline (Schwartz, 1996). On the other hand he described the value of self-direction as “independent thought and action-choosing, creating, exploring” which supports the goals of creativity, freedom and independence (Schwartz, 1996). Spanning these values Schwartz described

the value achievement as “personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards” which supports ambition and success (Schwartz, 1996). Just considering these three values leads us to the conclusion that we can apply our values based on our perception of their relative importance to situations we find ourselves in. For example, as we work on teams to achieve a common goal does not necessarily mean that we are not individually ambitious. Rather, it means that as team players we downgrade the importance of self-direction in order to elevate conformity in order to ultimately uphold our (personal) achievement. After all, most of us bask in the glow of that pat-on-the-back when the boss says “the team couldn’t have done it without you”.

Organizational culture is an even more subtle influence on our behavior than our individual values and group norms. But, it affects us in many ways. For example, an emotionally charged organizational culture has the consequence of creating a collective identity and (individual) commitment; whereas a dynamic organizational culture may result in dual tensions, functional and dysfunctional (Simon, 1997). More recently than Simon penned his classic *Administrative Behavior*, several organizations have developed calamitous cultures, e.g. Enron, WorldCom and Arthur Andersen. These examples illustrate that an organization’s culture can cause even rational actors to behave irrationally, even immorally and illegally. Organization culture is something that is deeply held by members of the organization. At its core it is the unconscious perpetuation of a set of prior successful experiences. If an organization can substantiate that an action or set of actions consistently results in success it/they will become embedded in the organization’s culture. In this way no specific direction need be communicated. The “way we do things” is tacitly understood and followed (Schein, 2010). And, we will at least temporarily suspend our own personal values to conform to our organization’s culture.

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