

Book Review: Principles of Emergency Services Management

Reviewed by:

Chris Lindquist, Utah Valley University

Author: John R. Fisher

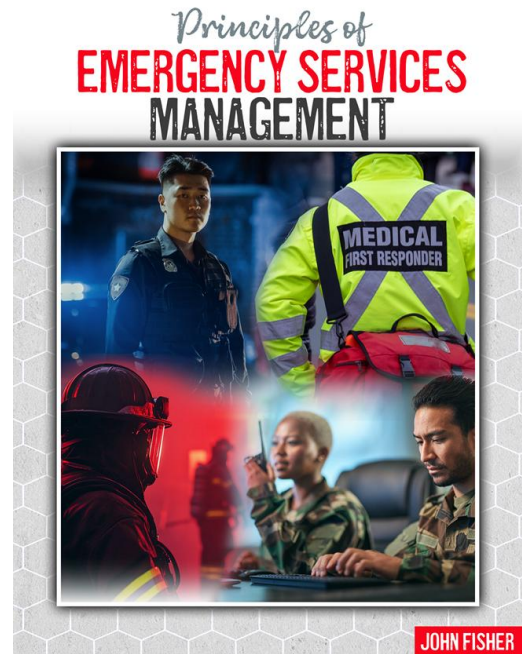
Publisher: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company

Publication date: 2006

ISBN-13: 979-8-3197-1372-8

Introduction

Emergency services organizations present a unique environment for examining management. Like other organizations, police departments, fire departments, emergency medical services, emergency management agencies, dispatch centers, and related organizations must plan, organize, staff, lead, allocate resources, communicate, develop employees, manage organizational culture, and maintain accountability. Unlike most organizations, however, they must sometimes perform these functions under conditions in which information is incomplete, time is severely constrained, the operating environment is dangerous, and managerial failure may result in injury, loss of life, or widespread disruption. John R. Fisher's *Principles of Emergency Services Management* uses this distinctive organizational environment to examine established principles of management and leadership and how they apply to public safety and emergency-service organizations.



The book is designed primarily for students and practitioners preparing for leadership and management responsibilities in emergency services. However, its potential use extends beyond that audience. Many of the problems explored in the text, such as leadership, organizational culture, ethics, communication, employee well-being, resource allocation, collaboration, decision-making under uncertainty, and organizational adaptation, are fundamental concerns of business and management. The emergency-services setting provides an especially demanding context for examining them.

Management Principles in an Emergency-Services Context

A central premise of the book is that effective emergency-services leadership requires individuals to manage successfully during both routine operations and periods of disruption. Fisher describes this distinction through the useful concepts of “blue-sky” and “grey-sky” operations. During blue-sky periods, managers engage in familiar organizational activities such as planning, training, budgeting, staffing, prevention, employee development, and organizational improvement. Grey-sky conditions require immediate action when emergencies, crises, or disasters demand rapid decisions and operational coordination. The effective manager must function in both environments and, perhaps more importantly, recognize when circumstances require a transition from one managerial approach to another.

This distinction is one of the book’s strongest contributions to management education. Traditional management texts commonly teach contingency and situational approaches to leadership, but emergency services offer an unusually tangible demonstration that managerial behavior cannot remain constant across

circumstances. A collaborative leadership style appropriate during planning and organizational development may be inadequate when an incident requires immediate direction. Conversely, the command style necessary at an emergency scene can become dysfunctional when transferred indiscriminately to routine personnel management. The distinction therefore has implications well beyond public safety. Organizations facing cyber incidents, product failures, healthcare emergencies, infrastructure interruptions, reputational crises, or other major disruptions may face similar questions about when routine organizational processes should yield to crisis-oriented decision structures.

One strength of *Principles of Emergency Services Management* is the intentional connection between traditional management theory and emergency-services practice. The text then translates management concepts into emergency-services applications involving staffing, equipment, training, operational readiness, incident objectives, resource management, and accountability. This approach makes the text particularly appropriate for students who already possess technical or operational expertise but are beginning the transition into supervisory and managerial positions. Fisher therefore distinguishes management from leadership and emphasizes that supervisors need both. Management contributes structure and accountability; leadership provides influence, trust, and direction.

The connection with the Incident Command System (ICS) is particularly useful. The text gives students a way to recognize management principles in systems many emergency-services practitioners already know. For business educators, this relationship is noteworthy. ICS can be viewed as an example of temporary organizational design created to manage complex and volatile conditions. As such, the emergency-services example can stimulate broader discussions involving organizational design, project management, high-reliability organizations, cross-functional teams, and crisis management.

Leadership and the LEAP Framework

Leadership is central to the text. A distinctive feature is its use of the LEAP framework—Legitimacy, Ethics, Affect, and Persistence—to examine leadership behavior. Rather than reducing leadership to a position, personality trait, or preferred style, the framework encourages students to examine credibility, ethical behavior, relationships, emotional competence, resilience, and sustained effectiveness.

This framework's applied character is pedagogically important and a significant strength of the book. Students are encouraged not only to learn leadership theory but also to interview emergency-services leaders and analyze their experiences through the LEAP dimensions. Leadership education can easily become an exercise in memorizing theories and classifying leadership styles. Fisher instead asks students to examine leadership as practiced by real people confronting organizational problems. Other exercises similarly ask students to complete a LEAP self-assessment, identify areas for personal development, and apply the framework to crises. These activities move the text toward experiential learning and make it useful in leadership courses outside emergency services.

Communication, Inquiry, and Problem Solving

Another valuable feature is the emphasis on listening and problem solving as managerial competencies. Supervisors in emergency services often encounter operational, organizational, and employee problems simultaneously. Fisher's treatment recognizes that technical knowledge alone does not resolve many of these situations. Managers must determine who owns a problem, gather information, listen effectively, create a climate in which employees can communicate concerns, and select responses appropriate to both the problem and the individual.

The communication material incorporates active listening, supportive versus defensive communication climates, structured problem-solving approaches, collaborative problem solving, goal setting, employee

evaluation, and reflective practice. This content has considerable general-business applicability. Managers in virtually every industry must use these communication practices. The emphasis on inquiry is particularly appropriate for contemporary management education. Organizations increasingly require leaders who can diagnose problems rather than merely impose solutions. In this respect, the emergency-services setting reinforces a broader managerial lesson: decisiveness and inquiry are not opposites.

Organizational Culture, Ethics, and Human Behavior

The book's treatment of organizational culture is another area of particular value. Fisher recognizes that emergency-services organizations develop strong occupational cultures shaped by danger, discipline, teamwork, trauma, professional identity, tradition, and dependence upon coworkers. These characteristics can produce exceptional cohesion and performance, but they can also create organizational blind spots and are not inherently positive. As the text observes, loyalty can become silence, courage can become unnecessary risk-taking, and tradition can become resistance to change.

The discussion clearly parallels organizational behavior and human-resource management. Strong professional cultures exist in healthcare, aviation, the military, technology, finance, construction, and many other industries. Fisher's emergency-services examples show the managerial challenge of preserving the cultural characteristics that contribute to organizational effectiveness while confronting those that discourage dissent, conceal mistakes, exclude outsiders, or resist necessary change.

The book also introduces emergency-services organizations as **high-reliability organizations (HROs)**—organizations that operate in environments where errors can produce severe consequences. This creates another important connection with general business scholarship. Reliability, organizational learning, communication, deference to expertise, resilience, and failure prevention are important not only in public safety but also in healthcare, aviation, nuclear power, transportation, utilities, manufacturing, cybersecurity, and other complex systems.

Breadth of the Emergency-Services Concept

Fisher also adopts a broader definition of emergency services than the traditional police-fire-EMS model. The introductory framework includes not only tactical first responders but also emergency managers, dispatchers, healthcare personnel, public works and utility employees, nonprofit and voluntary organizations, mental-health personnel, and other actors who help stabilize and restore essential community functions.

This expanded perspective strengthens the book's management orientation. No individual agency has all the authority, knowledge, people, equipment, or resources needed to manage a large disaster. Effective response therefore depends on coordination among organizations with different missions, professional cultures, organizational structures, and sources of authority. This feature makes the book useful for courses on collaborative governance, network management, healthcare administration, nonprofit management, organizational resilience, and interorganizational relations.

Pedagogical Value

The strongest pedagogical characteristic is the recurring attempt to move from theory to application, and the organization of the text reflects its applied purpose. The introductory roadmap describes the early chapters as establishing foundations of management and leadership and introducing the LEAP framework; subsequent material examines management functions, communication, and problem solving; later chapters address organizational culture, ethics, technological change, and workforce issues. The appendices extend

the instructional content through resources addressing academic writing and the ethical use of artificial intelligence, leadership assessment, cultural assessment, inquiry, and interviewing.

The writing style also appears intentionally accessible. The text introduces theoretical concepts without assuming that students have extensive prior exposure to management scholarship. This should make it particularly suitable for upper-division undergraduate students and practitioners transitioning into supervisory roles.

Limitations and Opportunities

The book's specialization is simultaneously its greatest strength and its most obvious limitation. Readers seeking comprehensive treatment of every functional area represented in a traditional business-school principles-of-management text will not find equivalent depth in areas such as finance, marketing, accounting, operations analytics, or strategic market analysis. Those subjects are peripheral to the book's purpose. The text is better understood as a management and leadership book focused on organizations responsible for public safety and community stability.

Likewise, instructors using the book outside emergency-services programs may need to make the transferability of some concepts explicit. Examples are understandably drawn primarily from police, fire, EMS, emergency management, dispatch, and related organizations. Business students unfamiliar with those institutions may require additional cases demonstrating how the same principles operate in corporations, healthcare systems, nonprofit organizations, or other industries.

The breadth of topics covered also creates an inevitable tradeoff between scope and depth. Instructors seeking advanced treatment of any single topic will likely want to supplement the book with peer-reviewed research and specialized readings. These limitations do not diminish the book's primary contribution. Rather, they define its appropriate role. *Principles of Emergency Services Management* is not intended to replace a specialized text in organizational behavior, human resource management, business strategy, or emergency management. Its contribution lies in bringing major management and leadership concepts together and examining them through the distinctive organizational realities of emergency services.

General Business and Interdisciplinary Application

For readers of the *Quarterly Review of Business Disciplines*, the most interesting question may be whether a textbook focused on emergency services has relevance to business education more broadly. The answer is yes, although its value is strongest in particular areas.

The book is especially relevant to courses in leadership, organizational behavior, public administration, crisis management, healthcare management, organizational resilience, high-reliability organizations, business continuity, and nonprofit or public-sector management. It could also serve as supplementary reading in general management courses when instructors wish to demonstrate how familiar management theories perform under extreme conditions.

Fisher demonstrates that management principles do not cease to operate when an organization enters crisis. Instead, their importance becomes more apparent. Planning, communication, trust, organizational design, leadership, employee well-being, ethics, and resource management remain essential, but the time available to exercise them contracts dramatically.

The distinction between routine and crisis management also invites an important question for managers in all sectors: **Can an organization change the way it leads and manages as rapidly as its environment changes?** Emergency-services organizations face this question routinely, but contemporary businesses

increasingly confront analogous challenges generated by technological disruption, cyberattacks, supply-chain failures, natural disasters, public-health emergencies, reputational crises, and rapid workforce change.

Overall Assessment

Principles of Emergency Services Management provides an applied introduction to management and leadership for individuals working in or preparing to enter supervisory roles across the emergency-services professions. Its principal strength is not that it offers a separate theory of management for emergency services, but that it demonstrates how established management and leadership principles operate in an unusually demanding organizational context.

The book should be particularly well suited as a primary textbook for undergraduate courses such as Principles of Management for Emergency Services, Emergency Services Leadership, Public Safety Administration, Fire Service Administration, Police Leadership and Administration, EMS Administration, and Emergency Management Leadership. It could also support courses in homeland security, crisis leadership, organizational behavior in public safety, and high-reliability organization management. For programs outside emergency-services, selected chapters could provide useful supplementary material in courses addressing leadership, organizational behavior, crisis management, public administration, healthcare management, organizational resilience, ethics, and interorganizational collaboration.

Fisher's most useful pedagogical accomplishment is connecting management theory to the realities people face when leading organizations under both routine and extraordinary conditions. Students are asked not simply what management and leadership theories say, but what those theories mean when managers must make decisions with incomplete information, limited resources, competing priorities, public scrutiny, stressed employees, and potentially severe consequences.

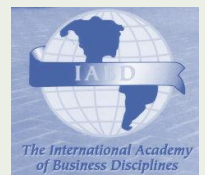
For emergency-services students, this makes management theory more immediately relevant to professional practice. For the broader business audience, it provides a different and valuable perspective: organizations operating under extreme conditions can reveal fundamental principles of leadership, culture, communication, coordination, ethics, and resilience that are sometimes less visible during ordinary organizational life. In that respect, *Principles of Emergency Services Management* is not only a textbook about managing emergency-service organizations. It is also a case study in what management requires when circumstances place extraordinary demands upon organizations and the people who lead them.

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QUARTERLY REVIEW OF BUSINESS DISCIPLINES

August 2026

Volume 13
Number 1 & 2



A JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY OF BUSINESS DISCIPLINES

SPONSORED BY UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA

ISSN 2334-0169 (print)

ISSN 2329-5163 (online)