INTEGRATION OF UBUNTU WITH THE DESIGN AND PRACTICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT TRAINING PRINCIPLES

James C. Hagen, Ph.D., M.B.A., M.P.H.[1]
Saint Xavier University

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Abstract

There is an assumption of the universality of management approaches that allows, or becomes an imperative to, direct utilization of Western teaching methods and techniques in the unique environment of developing southern African nations. What needs to be acknowledged and addressed is that emergency training methodologies must be operationalized not only within the governmental, economic, and political realities of the nations involved, but also within unique social, familial, and cultural constructs. It is the purpose of this paper to look at potential modifications of existing emergency training methods.

Currently, there is specific training being provided to those who wish to become experts in exercise design and Master Exercise Practitioners (MEPs) in the United States. Identified design steps and procedures for exercise conduct are taught as models for exercise development. Although these procedures have been demonstrated to be highly effective in Western Culture to train those involved in Emergency Management, such training practices are not directly compatible with the ubuntu reality. Decision-making, communication, and perception of time are three critical areas of ubuntu philosophy when considering their impact on emergency preparedness and response. Similar considerations have been made when working with the Alaskan and American Indian native cultures as well.

This presentation will serve to demonstrate how the ubuntu concept of "humanness" might be integrated into the western training methodologies of tabletops, drills and exercises. It is truly through appropriate cross-cultural training principles and practices that confident, competent emergency managers and leaders will emerge.

Introduction

Within recent years, the importance of, and reliance on, the use of drills, tabletops, and exercises in training for disaster management has increased significantly.

There are three well know teaching techniques: lecture, guided discussion, and demonstration/ performance. It is demonstration and performance that are most important in teaching skills and expected behaviors. In disaster situations, pre-arranged actions need to be taken in a short period of time for the most effective response. The cornerstone of this type of training is application of knowledge through actual performance (and repetition) of skills and procedures.

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[1] Director, Public and Non-Profit Management Program, Graham School of Management, Saint Xavier University, 18230 Orland Parkway, Orland Park, IL 60467, hagen@sxu.edu

In the United States, there are certain Fundamentals of Instruction familiar to all those who teach. This is especially true for those who teach skills requiring application of knowledge in the practical and measurable world of disaster management. New material is taught in four steps:

1. Preparation – to clearly create a lesson plan, with objectives, goals, and necessary materials detailed.
2. Presentation – to identify and define the best methods of presentation suited not only to the material to be presented, but to the audience to whom the material is being presented.
3. Demonstration/Application – to allow the students to physically apply the knowledge gained as early and as often as possible.
4. Review and Evaluation – to evaluate how much knowledge has been conveyed with respect to goals and objectives, and then provide corrective measures appropriate to the individual and culture involved.

Lecture and guided discussion, although vital to the successful disaster management training, must be followed by demonstration and performance. It is through repeated application of skills that actual learning takes place. This concept holds true, regardless of the culture in which the training takes place. However, method of delivery of instruction must be carefully considered in light of cultural realities if the ultimate goal of information transfer is to be attained. This is especially true concerning the ubuntu philosophy of southern Africa. Basic concepts of ubuntu should be related to the demonstration/application method of teaching disaster management. To be truly successful, African leaders must borrow ideas and practices from the rest of the world, while anchoring themselves in their own cultural roots (Mbigi, 2005). Leaders in disaster management in the Western world should do the same. Ubuntu within southern Africa offers not only challenges, but opportunities for those who manage and respond to disasters.

Ubuntu as a Cultural Cornerstone

Ubuntu is not a new concept within African management literature (Karsten and Illa , 2005; Lascaris and Lipkin, 1993; Mbigi and Maree, 1995). As a philosophical thought system, ubuntu is commonly used as a measure of good and bad, right and wrong, just and unjust (Mangaliso and Manzo, 2001). Broodryk (2005) defines ubuntu as humanness, and states that the basis for this humanness is found in the slogan "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" which means "I am a person through other human beings".

A critical concept when considering ubuntu and language is the difference between language as used to transfer information, and conversation. More traditional approaches focus on information transfer, whereas ubuntu, as a philosophy and way of life, focuses on conversation. Lervik and Lunnan (2004) conceive transmission of management concepts as more efficiently taking place through transmission processes like conversation.

Mbigi (1997) states that "Traditional African life is characterised by grass-roots, participatory, and consensus democracy….Traditional African education is both a social and intellectual journey". Mbigi goes on to stress that current training programs are too intellectually dry and analytic. They need to more intentionally include "creative design", and "social and ritualistic aspects of learning in designing training and development programs". Ubuntu teaches that life is an indivisible whole and that we experience life through others. It emphasizes our interconnectedness and responsibility to each other (Nussbaum, 2003). We must use this participatory and social form of culture in creating learning experiences that best convey disaster management principles. In doing so, we seek to combine rather than divide, include rather than exclude, and work within a whole life construct rather than to subdivide and compartmentalize. Those thoughts are antithetical to

much of Western teaching that seeks to transfer information through breaking it down into manageable pieces and compartments.

Tabletops and Exercises in Emergency Management Training

The United States Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) defines an exercise as "a focused practice activity that places the participants in a simulated situation requiring them to function in the capacity that would be expected of them in a real event." Real-world emergencies and disasters have proven time and again the vital importance of exercises to a rapid and effective response. In an emergency situation, people tend to respond in the manner they are familiar with, the manner in which they are trained. In 1989, United Airlines Flight 232 crashed in Sioux City, Iowa. Of the 295 on board, 186 passengers survived the failed emergency landing attempt. The high level of training and readiness of the community was apparent in this event. Two years prior to the crash, a full-scale exercise had been held, revealing many issues and problems that were corrected prior to the actual crash.

Two months before the Loma Prieta earthquake struck Northern California, FEMA had coordinated a full-scale response exercise that was credited with improving the disaster response to that event. In 2000, the Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) Task Forces participated in exercises (a building collapse scenario and an earthquake based scenario) that gave them experience to search for victims when they were sent to New York City after the collapse of the World Trade Center towers.

The purpose of exercises is to provide competence in emergency functions. The two main benefits of such training are individual training, providing experience at practicing one's own role and system improvement, allowing a broader perspective of how a system responds to an emergency. In most cases, it is the systemic training that uncovers the worst deficiencies in response capabilities. Finding and correcting these deficiencies before an actual disaster is always the goal.

The ideal comprehensive exercise plan will be of progressive complexity (Emergency Management Institute, 2006). From the outset, departments, organizations, and agencies interact, with each exercise building on the former. One difficulty in this nation has been the interaction of different entities in a community response. Each sector (such as the hospital, police, transportation, volunteer agencies) may have highly specific drills, such as within a hospital to test evacuation procedures, or to see if a fire department or brigade can successfully put out a fire. However, it is the entire community integrated response that is tested in an exercise. Ubuntu already values the community as one entity, and will greatly enhance the ability of southern Africans to respond on a local level. Exercises begin as discussions around a table, or tabletops

In an ideal situation, the first step in the comprehensive exercise program would be to gather the different sectors together in a very low stress environment to discuss how best to prepare for emergencies or disasters. In reality, this step is often neglected because of short time frames, limited time for meetings, or the perception that it is not necessary. The next step is for each sector to hold drills to make sure they know what is needed within their area in response to a disaster.

The next exercise in complexity and stress would be the functional exercise. Although actual resources (people or things) do not actually move, this exercise more realistically tests several functions, and the ability of the community to work together to effect a successful response. The Players sit around a table, as in the tabletop exercise, but simulators in another area communicate by phone, fax, radio, or other methods of communication, simulating the unfolding of an actual event. This type of exercise is critical prior to a full-scale exercise to identify and correct problems that might cause fatal flaws in the execution of full-scale

exercises. The full-scale exercise then follows, where a real event is simulated as closely as possible. A simulated event causes responders and their equipment to move, and involves actors or simulated victims that are handled as they would be in a real event. Law enforcement, volunteer organizations, businesses, and all potentially affected parties can be involved. And the exercise may involve governmental officials as high as desired. The larger national events may also exercise international relationships.

Two phrases come to mind when considering the intersection of emergency management and ubuntu. The first is the often used phase "All disasters are local." The second is the African proverb "It takes a village to raise a child." In disasters, the community must rise up as a single response entity. It is the community that should be responsible for protecting our most vulnerable populations, especially in an emergency or disaster situation.

Ubuntu Principles Critical to Emergency Management

Decision-making, communication, and perception of time are three critical areas of ubuntu that must be taken into consideration to determine their impact on emergency management training principles (Mangaliso and Mzamo, 2001). Similar considerations have been made when working with the Alaskan and Hawaiian native cultures as well.

One critical issue when considering ubuntu in the context of emergency management is in the area of decision-making. As emergency managers, we often must decide between alternative courses of action and make rapid unilateral decisions. These decisions must often be made in very short periods of time with limited information during crisis situations. Under ubuntu, this linear process becomes a circular one, with time needed for serious considerations of many alterations, as well as their permutations. The need for speed in crisis situations must be taken into account, while respecting the ubuntu perspective of consensus. Americans decide as individuals in a command and control structure, and value the opinion of experts, whereas Africans decide by consensus and value the opinions of everyone (Broodryk, 2005). Unity resulting from consensus is the goal in ubuntu, while quick action and decision-making, a linear process, is the emergency management response. In realizing the importance of this type of decision-making process, it is ever more vital that these types of considerations take place prior to crisis oriented events. Not only does this result in a more unified, consensus-based decision, but greatly enhances the long term commitment to goals and smoothness of implementation should the need arise.

Another aspect of ubuntu that must be given serious consideration is the heightened importance of oral tradition in language and communication. Traditionally, stories transmitted from generation to generation served as the foundation for their beliefs, heritage, and wisdom (Ahiauzu, 1986). It is interesting that white South Africans are now learning Zulu as a means of better understanding the patterns of interaction (Crowe, 1995) that occur in their culture. In carrying on oral tradition, African youth grow to listen more closely, to focus on context, and to place much more importance on the spoken word. Wisdom and cultural values, and a sense of belonging comes from oral tradition and the social context in which it occurs. Conversation and social interaction are critical to the understanding of, and ultimately taking appropriate action during, a crisis.

The perception of time, its importance, and its role in accomplishing goals has always been a major cross-cultural issue. Time is not perceived in African cultures as measured in discrete units in traditional Africa, but rather as a continuum, to be experienced and shared (Mangaliso and Mzamo, (2001). It values events and relationships, and is used to treasure the past and the future. Broodryk (2005) calls this African time, or tolerance time, and correlates the stress resulting from being so time conscious to serious health issues in Europeans. He also notes that the Japanese have a similar culture of communalism, and retain their traditional concept of time that is similar to African time. However, when dealing with the Western

world, the Western concept of punctuality is honored. There is a fundamental difference of perception of time. It is said that "God gave the African time, and the Westerner a watch" (Fadiman, J.A., 2000). This can be a most difficult to align with ubuntu, as time in emergency management often translates into lives lost or destroyed.

Emergency Management is a unique perspective when examining and integrating ubuntu perspectives and perceptions into disaster scenarios. Because of its time sensitive nature, and the effect it can have in life and death situations, there must be special considerations made when planning and conducting tabletops, drills, and exercises with decision-makers, managers and the public. Lessons learned can then be extrapolated more generally to the application of management and leadership theory.

Conclusions

It is the contention of this paper that both cultures have much to gain from an incorporation of ubuntu philosophical concepts into comprehensive exercise planning. By enhancing and taking advantage of the African concept of community, the "Orientation Seminar" in the Comprehensive Exercise Plan becomes an even more critical component of a successful exercise program. In Africa, one must work with the existing community structure in consensus building concerning activities surrounding potential disasters. In the United States, where one often moves straight to tabletops and exercise without community building activities, much more emphasis must be placed on building community infrastructure prior to, or in concert with, the orientation.

In Africa, the exercises should incorporate story telling in the oral tradition with existing written methods of communication. The social context and conversation become critical to the community working together in the response activities. From tabletop to full-scale exercises, participatory learning is the key to translation of knowledge and ultimately to demonstration and application of the skills necessary during a response. Kotze and Holloway (1996) have provided an excellent resource for reducing risk and consideration of disaster mitigation in Southern Africa. Activities are provided, drawing on hazards and vulnerabilities specific to that area. It is critical that risk reduction efforts be linked to community-based services, and that active partnerships exist between emergency response community and the communities-at-risk. Often neglected is the fact that "the greatest impact of recurrent threats falls on women" In Africa, although women are the ones who maintain family under the worst conditions, as well as provide goods and services, they are often considered the most vulnerable. They are limited in education, political opportunity, and access to information. The number of households headed by women increases, as does the poverty level of this group. If there is to be a successful response, those most involved with family and community life must be intimately involved in exercise activities.

Exercises must be specific to the southern African realities. Southern Africa has been subject to severe drought, seasonal flooding, deadly endemic diseases, periodic epidemics, and decades of civil unrest. It is in working together that communities strive to survive. One must take advantage of this strength when planning for disasters. Dealing with the fundamental difficulty in different perceptions of time is one of the most difficult issues. Although pre-planning has always been a fundamental concept, it is even more important that advantage be taken of existing community infrastructure, or the infrastructure reinforced before further actions are taken. As much consensus as possible must be reached on vital questions pertaining to response so that valuable time is not lost in obtaining optimal cooperation and community response. Much work has yet to be done in integrating and incorporating ubuntu into management training practices. The first step needs to be an identification of the fundamental differences so that the best of both worlds may ultimately be utilized.

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