



Communication and Organizational Effectiveness

Introduction

There's been a major rapid onset flood in Brown Trout Bay, a rural community with a population of about 3,000, located fifty miles from the major metropolitan area of Riverbend City. Roads and bridges are out, and the water supply for much of the city has been compromised. The county's emergency operations center (EOC) has been activated, and a Leadership Team is being assembled to address the crisis. You are in charge of this leadership team.

Leading a group of people who have a variety of communication styles can be a challenge—whether you're leading a casual neighborhood committee meeting or a response to a citywide disaster. As you coordinate this Leadership Team, you will have to work effectively with eight people who have very different communication styles. As a leader, you will need to develop a strategy for working effectively with this group of people.

News Report

Victoria Moran: Welcome back to WNRT's continuing coverage of the Brown Trout Bay flood. We have word that the city and county are working together to address the issue of providing potable water to residents in the affected neighborhoods. Joining me now to discuss the situation is Brian Nicollet, the mayor of Brown Trout Bay. Brian, can you tell me what's going on with the city's water supply?

Brian Nicollet: Well, as you know, citizens in affected areas have been without water for about 24 hours now. Dodd County has activated its Emergency Operations Center to address this issue.

Victoria Moran: Brian, why is it that there are so many residents remaining in affected neighborhoods after your office issued a mandatory evacuation order?

Brian Nicollet: Well, unfortunately, whenever you have a rapid onset emergency like this one, not all residents will follow evacuation orders. In some cases, people refuse to leave, but more often than not, people who stay can't leave – they don't have cars, for instance. We also have residents remaining in the city in hospitals and nursing facilities. We were very fortunate that the flooding was not on a magnitude anywhere near that of Hurricane Katrina, and as you know, there were no casualties. However, the city's water supply has been compromised, and we need to restore that as soon as possible – and while that process takes place, we have to distribute water to Brown Trout Bay residents.

Victoria Moran: How do you plan to do this?

Brian Nicollet: Well, as I said, Dodd County has activated their Emergency Operations Center, and the city is working closely with the county. We're assembling a team of individuals who represent a number of emergency service functions, and these individuals will be meeting later today to address the water situation.

Victoria Moran: Who is in charge of this group?

Brian Nicollet: The mayor has assigned an experienced leader to this team. I am confident this leader will do an excellent job guiding this team as they address the crucial issue of distributing water to the residents of Brown Trout Bay.

You have an email from Mayor Nicollet. You should read that now.

From: Mayor Brian Nicollet

Subject: Leading the Emergency Operations Team

I'm so glad to hear that you've agreed to facilitate our team of emergency managers. Each member of the team represents an Emergency Support Function (ESF) as defined by FEMA. As the leader of the EOC group, your goal is to help this group leverage their collective expertise to distribute clean water efficiently to the people in Brown Trout Bay. I'm confident that with your help, this team will be able to work together efficiently to get this done.

As you work with this group of individuals, please keep in mind that this is a diverse group. As is the case with all working groups, you're going to find these individuals have a variety of communication styles. Because this group needs to get to work immediately, you're going to have to figure out quickly what each individual's communication style is—and you're going to have to come up with a strategy for working effectively with this particular group of people and their combination of communication styles.

Best of luck! I know I can count on you.

--Brian

Leadership Team

Now it's time for you to meet the members of your leadership team! You will need to figure out how to work effectively with these people to distribute water to the residents of Brown Trout Bay. Listen to what each of these people has to say about themselves, and see what you can learn about their communication styles.

Melanie Cohen

Executive Director of the Dodd County Transportation System

If you ask my colleagues, I'm sure they'll tell you that I'm very organized and thorough. I come to every meeting with a detailed agenda. Also, as a leader, it's very important for me to set clear objectives for my employees so that they know exactly what's expected of them. I think they appreciate that—at least, I hope they do. I wouldn't consider myself a demanding supervisor, but it's very important to me that people understand their roles and my expectations.

And—well, this is kind of comical—I'm so organized that I have to straighten up my desk every single day before I go home. If I don't, I'm in a terrible mood the next morning when I come into a desk with a few loose paperclips on it. That's kind of sad, huh? My desk is full of every kind of filing system and organizer imaginable... seriously, if I can't figure out where to put something, I've been known to stop at an office supply store on the way home to pick up another organizing device. (laughs) At least I can laugh at myself, huh? I guess it's appropriate that I'm the person in charge of the bus system. Because nobody likes it when their busses don't follow an exact schedule, right? And believe me, I'm big on schedules! I get so annoyed when people are late. Too annoyed, really. People have good reasons to be late sometimes, and I have to remind myself of that a lot.

Rodney Saunders

Chief Engineer for Dodd County

It's nice to meet you. You want me to tell you a little about myself? Not to be stereotypical, but most engineers don't say more than we need to. Not a lot of small talk in my office. Don't get me wrong—we're always up for a good happy hour, but when it comes to work, we're pretty heads down. I like people okay, but what I really like is

figuring out how to keep bridges from falling apart. Being an engineer is like one big math problem—our challenge is to figure out the most efficient ways of doing things and then to follow through on that.

Matthew Chu

Executive Director, Department of Business and Professional Regulation

It's so nice to meet you! I know you're going to do a great job getting this team to work together—and I'm so glad I was asked to be on this team. I know that this is a difficult time in Brown Trout Bay, and I'm excited and honored to have the opportunity to help. This is going to be such a terrific challenge!

So you want to know a little about me? Well, I guess you could say I'm pretty spontaneous. I have a master's degree in entrepreneurship—don't even ask me how I wound up in government! I work best when I have the opportunity to think on my feet. I think that's the most important skill for people working in business these days, or really for any organization—I mean, things change fast in this world, and everyone needs to be flexible when it comes to figuring things out. I do get frustrated with government sometimes because there are so many rules and regulations, and sometimes those rules don't make any sense and it takes forever to change them.

Sophia Perez

Chief Liaison for the Dodd County Department of Planning

So you want to know a little bit about me? That's a question I don't hear very often. I like to keep my personal life and my private life separate. It's not that I'm not a friendly person. It's just that I take my job seriously. County planning work is very important and the public relies on us. I want to spend my time figuring out how to help people—not socializing. We did these personality assessments at work recently, and that annoyed me. I get annoyed when I'm asked to do things that aren't relevant to getting work done. That's what's important.

Lisa Truman

Director of Dodd County Department of Public Health

It's so nice to meet you. Can I get you anything? No? I'm so glad to hear that you're going to be directing this group during the flood response. Please let me know if you need anything. The group of people we're going to be working with—well, there's some strong personalities in the group. They're all great, don't get me wrong. I truly believe that everyone in this group has the best interests of the public in mind. But not everyone agrees on how to make that happen... well, you'll see. Like I said, if you need help figuring this group out, just let me know.

I'm glad you're asking people to tell you a little about themselves. It's so important for leaders to have a good sense of the people on their teams. Especially in a situation like this one, where a good deal is at stake and you have to pull together a group at the last minute.

But anyway, you asked about me. Hmmm... I guess I would say that I'm friendly. I like working with people very much. That's one of the things I like best about my job. In public health, you get to collaborate with schools, with businesses, with other government offices. Recently we had an opportunity to collaborate with a school district that has a high incidence of childhood diabetes. I had the opportunity to talk to parents and teachers and kids and listen to them talk about their needs. It was so rewarding to work with the community to come up with some solutions together.

Brad Nygard

Administrator, Dodd County Planning Division

I guess you could say I'm a straightforward guy. Very much so. I know I get on people's nerves sometimes because I say what I mean. I get really annoyed with passive-aggressive stuff—you know, when people beat around the bush and you have to translate what they're really trying to say? That's just wasting time. I actually got into trouble with that at my kid's school. I wanted to know if he was eligible for this program, and I went to talk to a

teacher about it. And the answer was actually "no," my kid wasn't eligible. But the teacher wouldn't just come out and say that. She kept going on and on about policy, and finally I just said, look, lady, is my kid eligible, yes or no? And she looked at me like I hit her or something. So ridiculous.

And the thing is... I mean, I'm fine with the fact that my kid wasn't eligible. Those are the rules and I respect that. I mean, that's one of the things I like best about working for government. There are guidelines you have to follow because it's the law. There aren't a lot of gray areas—and if there are gray areas, you talk to a lawyer or some other expert to figure out what to do. I work with oil and hazardous materials. When you're talking about an oil leak, there's no gray area about how to deal with it. There are firm guidelines, established by the government to protect the public's safety. I get annoyed by people who like to think outside of the box too much—I don't even like that phrase! There's a time and a place for being creative, like if you're painting a mural or something. But when you're talking about an emergency like this flood, the best thing we can do for the public is follow the guidelines for protecting them. If it turns out those guidelines aren't effective, then you go through the proper channels to try to modify them. That's how it works.

Sebastian Cardoza

Undersheriff of Dodd County

Hey, it's so nice to meet you. You want to know a little bit about me? I think I surprise people. They think that because I'm a cop, I must be gruff and no-nonsense and stuff like that. But it's a stereotype that we're all like that. I'm actually more of a people person. I'm a big advocate of community policing... you know, working with communities to deal with public safety issues? When you build trust and relationships with community members, then they're way more likely to report suspicious activity. Some people think that community policing is a little wishy-washy, but it's not. Building relationships works, and it's a better way to get things done.

Janice Keller

Brown Trout Bay Emergency Manager

I'd say I'm a problem solver, for the most part. Sometimes I get into trouble with friends when they come to me with problems, and I'm always trying to come up with solutions—and what they're really looking for is just a shoulder to cry on. Not that I'm not sympathetic to their feelings. It's just my first instinct to try to analyze the situation and try to help them fix it. And women aren't expected to be that way, which can be frustrating. It serves me well at work though. When there's an emergency situation, you need to be on task and figure out quickly how to solve problems. You have to keep calm when there's chaos. And I'm pretty good at that.

Brianne Twyha

Social Worker, Dodd County

"It's nice to meet you, and thank you for asking about me. I'm originally from Riverbend City, and I moved down to Brown Trout Bay 10 years ago to be a county social worker. I love my job. Sure, it can be exhausting and frustrating. But the best part is collaborating with people to make meaningful change. I advocate for my clients and help connect them to resources – and in a rural community, it can take some real imagination to help people find what they need. But I feel the most rewarded when I teach clients the skills they need to navigate the system for themselves. I like to empower people—that's what really motivates me. So that's a little about me – tell me a little bit about yourself."

Meeting Location

Your group needs to meet right away to address the issue of the distribution of resources. Read the following email string, which will give you further insight into the communication styles of your team.

To: EOC team
From: Brad Nygard, Administrator, Dodd County Planning Division
Subject: Meeting

Good morning,
We need to meet as a team as soon as possible. Protocol calls for us to meet at the Brown Trout Bay Courthouse. I've reserved room 224 for us. Some of you may have a long drive due to bridge outages and other problems, so let's start the meeting at noon. That should give everyone enough time to get here.

Thanks,
Brad

To: EOC team
From: Matthew Chu, Executive Director, Department of Business and Professional Regulation
Subject: RE: Meeting

Hi team,
Brad, I know it's protocol for the team to meet at the courthouse, and normally I would be fine with that. But the commute could be up two hours for some of our team members because of detours. We need to be flexible. I suggest we move the meeting to a location that's less affected by the flooding, and/or we let people call into the meeting via Skype.

Thank you,
Matthew

To: EOC team
From: Lisa Truman, Director of Dodd County Department of Public Health
Subject: RE: Meeting

Hi everyone,
Matthew, I see your point about using Skype for the meeting. It's really challenging to get around, and I know some members of the team are coming in from quite a distance! But I do think in this case, we need to meet in person, even if that's a challenge. We need to work together efficiently as a team immediately, and there's no replacement for face-to-face communication. I would say that if someone absolutely cannot get to the meeting—which is a possibility, I realize—then perhaps they could Skype in as a last resort. I am kind of worried about Rodney, since he lives quite a ways away and may have detours in his path.

I do agree that we should look into having the meeting at a different location. What does everyone think? What location would it be most convenient for us to meet? Perhaps we could meet at someone's home, if necessary?

Warmly,
Lisa

To: EOC team
From: Rodney Saunders, Chief Engineer for Dodd County
Subject: RE: Meeting

Aw, don't worry about me, Lisa. I've driven through worse disasters! I'll bring my shortwave radio along to help navigate detours.

To: EOC team
From: Brad Nygard, Administrator, Dodd County Planning Division
Subject: RE: Meeting

Look, I'm fine if you all want to move the meeting back to 1:00 to make sure that everyone gets there. But we have to meet at the courthouse because that's protocol. There are all kinds of procedural problems if we meet in someone's home or at another unofficial location.

--Brad

To: EOC team

From: Melanie Cohen, Executive Director of Dodd County Transportation System

Subject: RE: Meeting

Hi folks,

I agree with Brad. We can't violate protocol by holding the meeting elsewhere. Let's keep Skype an option as a last resort in case someone absolutely cannot get there.

Thanks,

Melanie

To: EOC team

From: Janice Keller, Brown Trout Bay Emergency Manager

Subject: RE: Meeting

Hi team,

It sounds like we really do need to meet at the courthouse, but I know it will be difficult for some people to get there because of bridge outages and detours. Would it help if we arranged carpools? That way we could reduce the number of drivers on the road, and if any of you in rural areas have four-wheel drive vehicles, that might help if there's rocky terrain to navigate. I agree that Skype sounds like a good option if we can't figure out a solution to get everyone to the courthouse—and yes, I think we should move the meeting back to 1:00.

--Janice

To: EOC team

From: Matthew Chu, Executive Director, Department of Business and Professional Regulation

Subject: RE: Meeting

Look, people, if you haven't noticed, there's a FLOOD out there!!! Why do you all keep talking about protocols? Do you really want more people out there on the roads than necessary when there's perfectly reliable technology that we can use to have a meeting remotely? Let's find a better place to have a meeting or LET'S DO IT REMOTELY!!! Have some flexibility, people!

--Matthew

To: EOC team

From: Brad Nygard, Administrator, Dodd County Planning Division

Subject: RE: Meeting

With all due respect, Matthew, this is an emergency. This isn't the time for flexibility. This is the time to follow public safety protocols.

To: EOC team

From: Matthew Chu, Executive Director, Department of Business and Professional Regulation

Subject: RE: Meeting

Public safety protocols? We're not talking about the disposing of dangerous chemicals or something like that. WE ARE TALKING ABOUT WHERE TO HOLD THE MEETING!!!

To: EOC team
From: Sebastian Cardoza, Undersheriff of Dodd County
Subject: RE: Meeting

I hate to add fuel to this debate, but it is really that important? Why can't we just meet where it's most convenient? I know there are protocols, but this isn't a normal situation.

To: EOC team
From: Matthew Chu, Executive Director, Department of Business and Professional Regulation
Subject: RE: Meeting

Thank you, Sebastian. WE NEED TO BE FLEXIBLE!!!!

To: EOC team
From: Brad Nygard, Administrator, Dodd County Planning Division
Subject: RE: Meeting

Matthew, why don't you use a few more capital letters and exclamation points? That will help the situation for sure.

From: Lisa Truman, Director of Dodd County Department of Public Health
Subject: Email String

Oh dear. I told you I was afraid there were some strong personalities in this group that might conflict. Is there anything I can do to help?

Meeting Location

Congratulations! You have completed the Riverbend City: Communication and Organizational Effectiveness activity. In the courseroom, you will complete an assessment based on this activity.

Below are some reflection questions based on this activity. Your responses to these questions will be saved to your Leadership Profile.

What do you think your strengths and weaknesses are when working with people who have communication styles that are different from yours?

Which of the characters in this activity would be the most challenging for you to lead? Why? If you encountered these characters in real life, what strategies might you use to lead these individuals effectively?

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