Inaugural Editorial: Bridging the theory and practice gap in emergency services research: case for a new journal

Dr Paresh Wankhade

Director, Centre for Research in Emergency Services & Training (CREST), Hope Business School, Liverpool Hope University, UK

Peter Murphy

Principal Lecturer, Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University, UK

Abstract

Purpose-The paper aims to provide the rationale underpinning this new journal in addressing the apparent gap and fragmented nature of the emergency services research, to introduce the papers in this inaugural issue and encourage readers and potential contributors to support the International Journal of Emergency Services (IJES).

Design/methodology/approach- The paper introduces the new journal to outline the current "silos approach" which isolates the academic and practitioner community. It also outlines the editorial intentions for the journal linking to the theme and selected papers for the inaugural issue and future direction of travel.

Findings- Emergency function resides with a host of agencies including the three "blue light" services (police fire and ambulance). IJES is an opportunity to publish up-to-date and original research contributions for the benefit of scholars, policy makers and practitioners in these areas, including the interface happening at national, regional and global level.

Originality/value- Articulating the IJES vision in addressing the apparent gaps in the emergency services research including the theory-practise divide, the paper provides useful knowledge to potential readers who are interested but may have insufficient knowledge in the emergency services research. It also highlights some potential areas for research.

Key words- emergency services, management, interoperability, international context

Paper type- Research paper

Background and introduction

The emergency services provide a complex occupational environment for management whilst having the reduction and management of risks to the public as one of their common primary objectives. There has long been acknowledged gaps in the management research relating to emergency services in general. Published evidence in public policy/management journals about Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) performance (Andrews and Brewer, 2010); ambulance management (Wankhade, 2011; Heath and Radcliffe, 2010; Bevan and Hood, 2006) is an emerging phenomena. Most of the existing policing management journals such as *Policing, Policing and Society; Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management*, tend to focus on policing institutions; their practices and law enforcement rather than taking an interdisciplinary, multi-agency perspective. Academics working with an emergency services focus have become frustrated with these more generic titles fracturing what should be a cohesive literature with the current literature base on emergency management rather mixed. This is despite the fact that the provisions of emergency services are a worldwide phenomenon with academics active in researching the development and management of these services. There is also a growing international debate for exploring the links between academia and organisations providing an emergency response. The interrelationship between emergency services and critical services in health, criminal justice and local service delivery including the contribution that emergency services make to wider social, economic and environmental concerns is a subject of emerging academic and practitioner enquiry.

The fragmentary nature of emergency management community often acts as a barrier to closer interaction between these organisations. For example in the UK, the three main blue light services work under different government departments- the ambulance service under the NHS, the police comes under the Home Office and the Fire and Rescue Service falls under the Department of Communities and local Government (DCLG). There are more than fifty police forces; about 45 Fire and Rescue Services and 12 NHS ambulance trusts in the UK with regional governance structures. When one adds the Category 1 responders (as defined in the Civil Contingencies Act, 2004), the segment fragments further (Cole, 2010a). The Environment Agency is part of the Department of Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), local authorities come under DCLG whereas Coastguard Agency is an executive agency of the Department of Transport. This is compounded with the fact that there is a lack of single responsible owner of the emergency services in the UK or any single ministry to deal with them (Cole, 2010b).

Notwithstanding these challenges, there is urgent need about multi-agency cooperation or 'interoperability' between various emergency services, not only due to the changing nature of threat to national security but also for dealing with acute public service budgets in delivering quality and safe level of services. The UK government's latest strategy for counter-terrorism (CONTEST, 2011) further enforces the drive forward to work together to improve

interoperability by getting to understand the different management and procedures (Donahue, 2004), technology (Bevan and Hamblin, 2009) and professional cultures (see Wankhade, 2012) with the current economic climate providing the driver for such a joint-working (Cole, 2010a). This provides a timely focus to the wider issue of emergency services research.

It's anticipated that with a specialised journal such as the International Journal of Emergency Services (IJES), renewed interest in emergency services will attract new researchers from the social sciences particularly psychology, economists, sociologists, youth studies, criminologists, public health and political scientists. This new journal will appeal to potential contributors interested in the management of these services utilising social scientific theories, conceptual frameworks and analytical tools, both from academia as well as practitioners. Scholarly explorations dealing with the theory and practise of strategic and operational management in these areas, or with the related professional and policy aspects will be particularly welcome at IJES.

International Journal of Emergency Services

IJES, partly, emerges from the success of the annual track on 'emergency services management' organised by the editors at the Public Administration Committee (PAC) Conference in the UK since 2009 and represents the desire to reflect the character of the track into an academic journal. The journal builds on the success of the track, encouragement by the participants and by Emerald. While we acknowledge work on the emergency service research finding its way into many of the other outlets, we believe from our experience from the PAC track that there is a real demand for a specialist international journal on emergency services. As journal editors, we fully recognise that there will be specific issues unique to each of the organisations involved with the emergency function; we endeavour to promote and encourage inter-disciplinarity with theoretical and methodological heterogeneity.

IJES aims to provide an academic platform to raise debate and argue different approaches/aspects of emergency services research. Since our focus areas and target audience are fairly broad, the articles appearing in IJES will address aspects of policy, practice, interoperability and management issues amongst various organisations involved in dealing with emergencies. We anticipate that IJES meets a clear need in relation to providing a multi-disciplinary perspective in the emergency services research whilst also bridging the theoretical and practical aspects of the profession. By providing a platform for exchange and interaction between these various bodies, we can build on their proud traditions.

The focus of the journal is international with a broader remit to attract content from across a wide variety of disciplines. The journal will welcome scholarly articles dealing with the theory and practise of strategic and operational management in these areas, or with the related professional and policy aspects. We take a broad view of what constitutes "management". In keeping with the journal's intended international scope, we encourage contributions drawing

comparisons between two or more jurisdictions and those offering theoretical cross-jurisdictional perspectives. IJES will also publish papers on convergence and divergence and those seeking to relate theory and practise in the strategic and operational delivery of the emergency services.

A 'Practice Interface' section is specifically designed to foster interaction between the practitioner and academic communities and in so doing to encourage critical engagement with new ideas and practise. Future editions of 'interface' may for example, consist of a series of articles based around a contemporary or topical theme. The editors are committed to creating a journal that offers a vehicle for more effective communication and sharing of ideas between practitioners and academics. To this end the journal will publish articles by academics and practitioners covering original thought, research, review and analysis. It will therefore attract research papers, technical papers, conceptual papers, viewpoints, literature and general reviews.

The coverage of the journal includes, but is not limited to:

- Developing the theoretical and methodological foundations of emergency response services

- The measurement management and monitoring of the performance of emergency services

- The accountability and governance of emergency services

- The publics' perception of risk, emergency planning and emergency services

- The development and management of intelligence, risk assessment, and risk modelling

- The role and impact of the media on emergency services

- Preparation, planning and contingencies in the responses to emergencies

- Examining the contribution that emergency services make to wider social, economic and environmental concerns

- Comparing emergency management across boundaries such or between developed and undeveloped countries

- The training, development and continuous professional development of both operational and non-operational staff in the services

  The interrelationship between emergency services and critical services in health, criminal justice and local service delivery amongst others

- Exploring the relationship between theory and practice, including reviews which examine emergent practice and interpret them in the light of current debates

- The interrelationship between emergency services and social policy such as community engagement, the impact of volunteerism and the building of social capital

- The effectiveness efficiency or value of international responses to emergencies

- Community preparedness and rehabilitation from a major emergency or a long term disaster or long lead time disasters such as drought

- Leadership domains in international responses across multiple nations and agencies

- The management of the social recovery of communities from major disasters

- The cultural variances of emergency management in relation to global responses

- Industrial relations within the emergency services

- Case studies covering organisational, cultural and management characteristics of the emergency services

We anticipate that the readership for IJES will include:

- Emergency services academics (Disaster Response and Management; Emergency Planning and Civil Resilience; Criminal Justice; Fire and Rescue; Ambulance and Emergency; Coastguard and Rescue)

- Public service management academics interested in operational and strategic delivery

- Biological, chemical and medical scientists and social scientists, particularly psychologists, economists, sociologists and political scientists with particular interests in reactions to and other emergencies

- Practitioners in executive roles in all of the agencies and authorities responsible for responding to emergencies and related fields e.g. emergency planners, business continuity professionals, risk assessors, occupational health workers including the three blue light services (fire, ambulance and police). IJES will be the prime source of contemporary research and will therefore raise the profile of these researchers leading to consultancies and research within the agencies for the academics

- Students from across the disciplines mentioned above. Research suggests that many of the emergency service professionals combine their work with higher study and will access the journal as part of their own academic and

- Academics from other social science disciplines interested in policy formulation and implementation and organisational aspects of emergency services

Practice Interface

The Interface section of the IJES is specifically designed to foster interaction between the practitioner and academic communities and in so doing encourage critical reflections and engagement with new ideas and practices. Interface will try and capture contemporary debates and on-going issues and present or promote them in the most appropriate form. This could be in the form of short policy or research papers, but equally it might feature debates, interviews, comment, opinions and reports. Interface will particularly welcome contributions from active practitioners. The core part of the journal will cover theory, concepts and methods, the interface section will relate to practical experience of how these issues can best be managed.

A central theme over the next few years will be the continuing need to improve both efficiency and effectiveness in an era of scarce resources and rising public expectations. We want to develop a rich mix of contributions and will adopt an eclectic but practice orientated approach to contributions. Interface will be particularly interested in those contributions that emphasise common issues between disparate organisations and those that are able to draw general conclusions from experience in different countries and services.

Selected papers

Our first paper, *The U.S. Fire Service Safety Culture: An Empirical Definition* by Pessemier and England draws attention to very high injury and fatality rates in the US Fire Service as compared to other industrialised nations with a lack of safety culture often leading to dysfunctional outcomes. Based upon on data collected in three medium-sized U.S. fire departments, the paper presents a "best practices program" for the assessment and analysis of safety culture for the fire service. It identifies the safety culture factors that predict injury outcomes based on statistical analysis. The safety culture model tested empirically allows for the "development of effective interventions" that contributes to the reduction of injury and fatality rates in fire service organisations using safety report cards. The study findings have international implications and carry the possibility of cross-cultural comparisons in different organisational settings.

Barton and Beynon's article, *Policing for the People: A cluster based investigation of the relationship between police force operational performance and public opinion,* outlines an exploratory study of the ability to cluster forty two police forces in the UK based on their sanction detection levels over a number of different offence groups and whether these clusters have different associated public opinions towards them. They use secondary data and the fuzzy c-means clustering technique to exposit "clusters of police forces based on sanction

detection levels" and relate them with a statistical model with public opinion on the police including confidence in police. In their analysis, they report statistically significant differences amongst the clusters of police force which demonstrates the connection between the police's attempt to fight crime and public opinion. With the public opinion measures considered post establishing of police forces' clusters, the results show the public does notice the level of sanction detections achieved. The article demonstrates that there is a "significant link" in the relationship between the levels of sanction detection levels of police forces and public opinion about their ability to fight crime.

Goulielmos, Lathouraki and Giziakis's paper, *The Quest of Marine Accidents due to Human Error, 1998-2011,* is a very interesting account to estimate, using available data, the effectiveness of the shipping industry in reducing marine accidents attributed to 'human element', as indicated, in particular, by the efforts of tanker owners association (Intertanko) , PMOU, and IMO, with particular emphasis on the role of classification societies after the implementation of ISM Code in mid-1998. Undertaking a systematic literature review, the authors seek to establish the "human element" in the marine disaster history where the owners "spend less on safety, and a relaxation of regulatory regimes by class and flag administrations" has taken place. The article argues that ISM Code and classes have not contributed to a drastic reduction of marine accidents arising from human error, and that the whole safety agenda should be re-examined and re-considered, taking into account 'informed culture' that has been neglected so far including the role of 'masters 'of the ships. Given the recent Costa Concordia shipping disaster and the controversy surrounding the role played by it captain, these recommendations and further research implications about the degree of the involvement of masters are timely.

In *'Network Organisation in Supporting Post Disaster Management in Indonesia'* Bevaola Kusumasari presents a case study about the role of various organisations in dealing with the post - disaster management of an earthquake that hit Bantul, Yogyakarta in Indonesia in 2006. Based upon her study findings, she argues that the local government made significant achievement in managing network organisations for logistic and humanitarian aid management. The inter-organisational networks such as the 'Citizen-to-Organisation' networks and 'Organisation-to-citizen' networks become an important resource for local governments/agencies in managing disasters in absence of lack of local government capability. She further argues that successful implementation of disaster management requires a "high degree of networking" with other organisations and community simultaneously taking into account the cultural context of the affected localities and regions

in disaster network management. The strategic choice to incorporate local social capital and cultural behaviour has implications for agencies to be more responsive to its citizens' needs.

In the "Practice Interface" section, this first edition contains two contributions from the UK. The first is a report and evaluation of the application of the new Integrated Risk Management Planning process (IRMP) within the Fire and Rescue Services as recently applied in Nottinghamshire. The IRMP process, introduced by the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, requires Fire Authorities to produce a strategy for reducing the commercial, economic and social impact of fires and other emergencies. This strategy has to be based on a contemporary risk assessment of their areas. In Nottinghamshire this comprehensive reassessment was also the authority's first review of service configuration since the new coalition government came to power and the financial crises resulted in severe public expenditure restrictions.

Written as a research paper the study focuses on the evidential basis for the reconfiguration and the subsequent public consultation and engagement exercise for the proposals. It reveals how the public expenditure restrictions "manifestly influenced and contextualized the attitude and response from the public and the key stakeholders" but not in the way that might have been expected. It also describes an interesting new collaboration between the practitioner and academic communities that facilitated mutually beneficial knowledge exchange and created public value.

The second contribution is from the criminal justice system and concerns the establishment and development of the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) in the UK. To most people the IPCC appears to be a high profile and long standing part of the criminal justice system. It regularly features in the news, and is constantly referred to in crime fiction and on the television. In reality it is far from it and is a relatively new organisation that has only had two chairmen since it was established in 2004. IJES is pleased to include a rare interview with the second of these chairmen, Len Jackson.

In our interview Len outlines the historical antecedents and key incidents that led to the establishment of the IPCC, before explaining the current roles and responsibilities of the organisation while giving us some fascinating insights into its work. He also looks ahead to some of the likely changes to the system that might result from the forthcoming Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act and speculates on the IPCC's future relationship with the coalition governments' new Police and Crime Commissioners.

Future direction of travel

Although it might appear that IJES is championing a more integrated field of research enquiry for emergency services, we are quite conscious of the fragmented nature of the emergency services research and the theory/practice divide. Our commitment to our readers

is to act as custodians of a journal for emergency services researchers looking to extend traditional boundaries and bridge the theoretical/methodological challenges in raising the level of debate within academic boundaries.

We invite you to join us in this journey through future issues, including if any ideas in this editorial or the selection of the papers in this inaugural issue provoke further thoughts with your current interests/work. If you wish to join us more proactively, you are very welcome to do so as a potential author, reviewer or through IJES Editorial Advisory Board.

The editorial team would also like to thank all our authors and the reviewers who have contributed to this edition.

References

Andrews, R. and Brewer, G.A. (2010), Social Capital and Fire Service Performance: Evidence from the U.S. States, *Social Science Quarterly*, 91, 2, pp. 576-591.

Bevan, G. and Hood, C. (2006), What's Measured is What Matters: Targets and Gaming in the English Public Health Care System. *Public Administration*, 84,3, pp. 517 − 38.

Bevan, G. and Hamblin, R. (2009), Hitting and missing targets by ambulance services for emergency calls: effects of different systems of performance measurement within the UK, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, No. 172 Part 1, pp. 161-90.

Cole, J. (2010a), Emergency Service interoperability in jeopardy due to lack of standardised operational procedures, Royal United Services Institute.

Cole, J. (2010b), Interoperability in a Crisis 2: Human Factors and organisational Processes, *Royal United Services Institute*, Occasional Paper.

CONTEST (2011), *The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Terrorism*, Stationery Offcie.

Donahue, A. K. (2004), The influence of management on the cost of fire protection. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 23,1, pp. 71 − 92.

Heath, G and Radcliffe, J. (2010), Exploring the utility of current performance measures for changing roles and practices of ambulance paramedics, *Public Money & Management*, 30, 3, pp. 151-58.

Wankhade, P. (2011), Performance measurement and the UK emergency ambulance service: Unintended Consequences of the ambulance response time targets; *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 24,5, pp. 382-402.

Wankhade, P. (2012), Different cultures of management and their relationships with organisational performance: evidence from the UK ambulance service, *Public Money & Management*. DOI:10.1080/09540962.2012.676312.