



**NAVAL  
POSTGRADUATE  
SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**CRISIS LEADERSHIP AND COMPLEX CRISES: A  
SEARCH FOR COMPETENCIES**

by

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December 2017

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington, DC 20503.				
1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)	2. REPORT DATE December 2017	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's thesis		
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE CRISIS LEADERSHIP AND COMPLEX CRISES: A SEARCH FOR COMPETENCIES			5. FUNDING NUMBERS	
6. AUTHOR(S) Michael E. Saltz				
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A			10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government. IRB number ___N/A___.				
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.			12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE	
13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)  A vast amount of research examines leadership within a single organization, in a routine setting. Less research exists regarding leaders in multi-agency, chaotic, uncertain, and complex environments. To reduce the existing research gap in the study of leadership competencies, this study focused on leaders' actions and decisions during complex crises involving a multi-agency response. This thesis applied the meta-leadership framework to law enforcement leaders' actions during three contemporary homeland security crises. While this study found the meta-leadership model to be useful, the model failed to stress the importance of key elements that significantly affect leadership during crises, such as experience, technical skills, and training, as well as additional competencies discovered within the case studies. Thus, in lieu of developing a specific crisis leadership model, I recommend that agencies endeavor to understand the common crisis leadership competencies and strive to train and develop experienced crisis leaders. Agencies that lack practiced crisis leaders should consider having experienced crisis advisors available during such events.				
14. SUBJECT TERMS crisis, leadership, complex crises, crisis management, meta-leadership, frameworks, competencies			15. NUMBER OF PAGES 113	
			16. PRICE CODE	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE Unclassified	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU	

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**CRISIS LEADERSHIP AND COMPLEX CRISES: A SEARCH FOR  
COMPETENCIES**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(HOMELAND SECURITY AND DEFENSE)**

from the

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## **ABSTRACT**

A vast amount of research examines leadership within a single organization, in a routine setting. Less research exists regarding leaders in multi-agency, chaotic, uncertain, and complex environments. To reduce the existing research gap in the study of leadership competencies, this study focused on leaders' actions and decisions during complex crises involving a multi-agency response. This thesis applied the meta-leadership framework to law enforcement leaders' actions during three contemporary homeland security crises. While this study found the meta-leadership model to be useful, the model failed to stress the importance of key elements that significantly affect leadership during crises, such as experience, technical skills, and training, as well as additional competencies discovered within the case studies. Thus, in lieu of developing a specific crisis leadership model, I recommend that agencies endeavor to understand the common crisis leadership competencies and strive to train and develop experienced crisis leaders. Agencies that lack practiced crisis leaders should consider having experienced crisis advisors available during such events.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

CCTV	closed-circuit television
CPO	chief petty officer
DON	Department of the Navy
EMS	emergency medical services
ICS	Incident Command System
IED	improvised explosive device
LAPD	Los Angeles Police Department
MAC	multi-agency coordination center
MPD	Metropolitan Police Department (Washington, DC)
NAVSEA	Naval Sea Systems Command
NIMS	National Incident Management System
OEM	Office of Emergency Management (Boston)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In today's fast-paced and interconnected world, law enforcement officials are confronted with seemingly more frequent and exponentially more complex crises. These crises often span multiple jurisdictions, requiring a multidisciplinary response and the collaborative efforts of state, local, and federal agencies, as well as private stakeholders. Crises are fraught with uncertainty and ambiguity, yet in the midst of limited and conflicting information, leaders are called upon to make crucial decisions. In the field of public safety, these decisions can have life-or-death implications.

While there has been progress in the strategic or organizational approach to managing both manmade and natural disasters, crisis leadership frameworks and knowledge of the competencies associated with effective crisis leadership are lacking. Even less research exists that explores law enforcement crisis leadership in response to large-scale incidents requiring interagency responses. Thus, a gap remains in the study of the leadership competencies needed for law enforcement to operate during complex crises.

In an effort to reduce this gap, this thesis examined crisis leadership by applying the dimensions of the meta-leadership model to three contemporary homeland security crises: the Washington, DC, Navy Yard shooting, the Christopher Dorner shootings, and the Boston Marathon bombings. The meta-leadership model was derived through an examination of leaders in crisis situations and is purported to be particularly valuable during multi-agency environments. The five dimensions of the model include “the person” or the leader, the problem or “the situation,” “lead the silo” or leading one’s agency, “lead up” or leading up to superiors, and “lead across” or leading connectivity.<sup>1</sup>

The three crisis events selected for this study were all unique in their scale, scope, complexity, and duration. However, what each incident had in common was the need for leaders and agencies to join together to address a threat of mutual interest. While

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard J. Marcus et al., “The Five Dimensions of Meta-Leadership” (pre-publication paper, Harvard School of Public Health, 2007).

effective crisis management behaviors varied across each case study, common leadership traits, skills, and attributes played a significant role in leaders' ability to effectively respond to and manage these events.

Utilizing the meta-leadership model as a framework, I identified nine skills and attributes that affect leaders' ability to lead during crises: experience, collaboration, flexibility/adaptability, organizational intelligence, crisis management, situational awareness/problem solving, ability to see the big picture, anticipation, and decentralized decision making. Preparation and planning, along with developing trusting relationships prior to an incident occurring, were also determined to be crucial elements affecting a leader's ability to effectively lead during crises. An analysis of leadership's actions across all three crisis events affirmed the important role leaders play in preparing for and responding to such events.

While many of the meta-leadership competencies are applicable to effective crisis leadership, all of the model's dimensions could not be supported by these case studies. The model also fell short in stressing the importance of key elements that significantly affect leadership effectiveness, such as experience, technical skills, and training. Additional approaches to leadership during multi-agency crises were also discovered, such as collaborative leadership and swarm intelligence. Therefore, in lieu of attempting to compose a rigid leadership framework, it may prove more useful for agencies to understand and train future crisis leaders in those attributes that have had the greatest impact during actual crisis events. This research supports that crisis leadership requires a number of key, interwoven leadership competencies, but that experience, preparation, and simulation training can have a positive impact on a leader's actions and decisions during a crisis.

As a result of this study, I make the following recommendations:

- Agencies should ensure leaders have crisis response experience.
- Agencies should have experienced crisis mentors available to assist decision makers during crises.



- Agencies should vigorously train and prepare in an interagency environment.
- Leaders should establish trusting relationships with key partners in advance of a crisis event.
- Agencies should build flexible, decentralized response structures.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge my wife, Stephanie. Stephanie, your patience, unwavering support, and positive spirit were my rock throughout this journey. I could not have done this without you. To my kids, Matthew, Joshua, and Lauren, thank you for your understanding and steady encouragement. I hope that you, too, never stop pushing yourselves to learn and experience new things.

To my colleagues in 1601 and 1602, I have been humbled by your insight, experience, and knowledge from day one. I am honored to serve alongside each of you. To Dan, Caleb, Craig, and Eric, I will never forget all of the good times. Thank you for all the laughs, your friendship, and inspiration.

I would be remiss if I also did not acknowledge both the Center of Homeland Defense and Security and the Federal Bureau of Investigation for providing me this incredible opportunity. Thank you!

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced and interconnected world, law enforcement officials are confronted with seemingly more frequent and exponentially more complex crises.<sup>1</sup> These crises often span multiple jurisdictions, requiring a multidisciplinary response and the collaborative efforts of state, local, and federal agencies, as well as private stakeholders. Crises are fraught with uncertainty and ambiguity, yet in the midst of limited and conflicting information, leaders are called upon to make crucial decisions. In the field of public safety, these decisions can have life-or-death implications.

Following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, extensive efforts were undertaken to enhance first responders' preparation, response to, and recovery from natural disasters and deliberate attacks. Examples of these efforts include the consolidation of twenty-two government agencies to form the Department of Homeland Security and the implementation of both the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the Incident Command System (ICS). While there has been progress in the strategic or organizational approach to managing both manmade and natural disasters, crisis leadership frameworks and knowledge of the competencies associated with effective crisis leadership are lacking.<sup>2</sup> Even less research exists that explores law enforcement crisis leadership in response to large-scale incidents that require interagency responses, specialty teams, and national assets.<sup>3</sup>

In my twenty-four years of experience as a federal law enforcement officer, I have seen that law enforcement leaders often lack the necessary training and experience to lead during complex crisis incidents involving multiple agencies, especially those with overlapping responsibilities. Trainings and exercises that mirror such environments tend

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Smith, "Adaptive Leadership: Fighting Complexity with Complexity" (master's thesis Naval Postgraduate School, 2014), 30.

<sup>2</sup> James P. Derrane, "A Study of Incident Command Leadership Styles" (Ph.D. dissertation, Capella University, 2013), 14.

<sup>3</sup> Leonard Johns and John P. Jarvis, "FBI—Leadership during Crisis Response: Challenges and Evolving Research," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, May 11, 2016, 2, <https://leb.fbi.gov/2016/may/leadership-during-crisis-response-challenges-and-evolving-research>.

to focus more on the tactical issues and less on the strategic challenges leaders face during such events. Additionally, senior leaders' participation in these exercises is often inconsistent and sporadic.

One leadership framework, the meta-leadership model, was derived “through the observation and analysis of leaders in high-stress and high-stakes situations.”<sup>4</sup> According to its architects, this model is particularly valuable when many different organizations are brought together for a common purpose.<sup>5</sup> Leaders who are able to influence and collaborate across multiple agencies and multiple jurisdictions are termed “meta-leaders.”<sup>6</sup>

To reduce the research gap in the study of leadership competencies needed during complex crises, this thesis further examines meta-leadership and crisis leadership by applying the dimensions of the meta-leadership model to three case studies: the Washington, DC, Navy Yard shooting, the Christopher Dorner shootings, and the Boston Marathon bombings.

This study has particular applicability to federal law enforcement leaders, as well as to state, local, and municipal police leaders. Federal law enforcement leaders often lack repetitive exposure to even smaller crisis events, but when called upon they are asked to lead large and complex crisis events, such as mass shootings and terrorist attacks. Conversely, state, local, and municipal departments frequently respond to smaller crises, but often lack experience operating in large-scale, multi-agency environments. A better understanding of the competencies desired for leadership during such events may better prepare future crisis leaders across all levels of law enforcement.

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<sup>4</sup> “Meta-leadership,” National Preparedness Leadership Initiative, accessed October 9, 2017, <https://npli.sph.harvard.edu/meta-leadership-2/>.

<sup>5</sup> Leonard J. Marcus et al., “The Five Dimensions of Meta-Leadership” (pre-publication paper, Harvard School of Public Health, 2007), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Marcus et al., 44.

## **A. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Leadership remains one of most highly studied yet least agreed-upon phenomena.<sup>7</sup> The vast amount of existing research examines leadership within the context of leaders directing a single organization in a routine or homogeneous environment. Less research exists on the study of leaders operating in multi-agency, chaotic, uncertain, and complex environments. In such environments, law enforcement leaders may be called upon to share authority and direct personnel over whom they have little or no authority. Thus, a gap remains in the study of the leadership competencies needed to operate during complex crises.

## **B. RESEARCH QUESTION**

What can be learned about crisis leadership competencies by applying the meta-leadership model to contemporary homeland security crises? What does effective law enforcement leadership look like in response to a multi-jurisdictional, multi-discipline crisis?

## **C. LITERATURE REVIEW**

A review of literature was conducted in the areas of crisis leadership, decision-making during crises, crisis management, crisis experience, situational awareness, the meta-leadership model, and crisis leadership frameworks. Throughout the research, several consistent themes were identified. Complex crises, particularly those involving a multi-agency response, challenge existing organizational structures and support the need for more decentralized frameworks. Such incidents also demand intense collaboration, decisive decision making, and flexibility on the part of leaders.

### **1. Crisis**

While there are numerous definitions for a crisis, crisis management experts such as Mitroff, Boin, and Fink frequently characterize crises as involving complexity, chaos,

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<sup>7</sup> Gary Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994), 3–5.

ambiguity, stress, and unforeseen circumstances.<sup>8</sup> Researchers Alison and Crego carefully documented critical incident debriefs over the course of five years in Great Britain and found that critical incidents for law enforcement also included risk, threat, anxieties, hazard, consequences, likelihood, and analysis.<sup>9</sup> Within the existing research, much has been written about how to manage a crisis, but there remains much to be explored regarding the competencies associated with that activity.<sup>10</sup> There are a number of studies and publications on political crisis leadership and leadership in response to natural disasters, but much less is known about law enforcement leadership in response to complex, multi-agency crises.

Crisis leadership research consistently points to the need for leaders to make vital and decisive decisions, often with incomplete or contradictory information.<sup>11</sup> The research gap that remains, however, concerns how on-scene commanders lead during such times of uncertainty, especially when their decisions can have life-or-death consequences. Based on the unique characteristics of crises, the research pervasively assumes that these situations demand different skills and capabilities than those typically needed during non-crisis situations.<sup>12</sup>

## **2. Crisis Management**

Crisis management, particularly within the business sector, has been a field of study for many decades. While there is an abundance of research on crisis management, less is known about crisis leadership. Crisis leadership in response to disasters and man-made crises is a newer field of research; while it is often comingled with crisis management, it should be considered a separate and distinct element of crisis

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<sup>8</sup> Arjen Boin, *The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership under Pressure* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2–3; Ian I. Mitroff, *Crisis Leadership: Planning for the Unthinkable* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2004), 25; Steven Fink, *Crisis Management: Planning for the Inevitable* (New York: American Management Association, 1986), 15, 133.

<sup>9</sup> Laurence Alison and Jonathan Crego, eds., *Policing Critical Incidents: Leadership and Critical Incident Management*. Routledge (New York: Routledge, 2012), xxvi.

<sup>10</sup> Erika Hayes James and Lynn Perry Wooten, *Leading under Pressure: From Surviving to Thriving before, during, and after a Crisis* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 40.

<sup>11</sup> James and Wooten, 7.

<sup>12</sup> James and Wooten, 7.



management. In Quarantelli's research on planning for and managing disasters, he argues there are significant differences between disaster planning and the actual management of disasters.<sup>13</sup> Fink describes crisis management planning as the process of addressing the mechanical portion of a crisis, freeing leaders to direct the content portion.<sup>14</sup> Quarantelli and Fink's conclusions are further supported by crisis leadership researchers Boin and Mitroff, who determined that, while planning and preparation are key elements of crisis management programs, they alone do not determine the effectiveness of a crisis response.<sup>15</sup> Additional research supports that crisis plans are mostly effective in routine and stable environments, as compared to those involving uncertainty and unpredictability.<sup>16</sup>

While crisis management and crisis plans are important, researchers agree that additional factors, such as leadership, play a key role in crisis response and management. The gap that remains within the existing research is discussion about what effective leadership looks like in response to such incidents.

### **3. Crisis Leadership**

While there is no universally accepted definition of leadership, there is sufficient research to support the notion that leadership plays an important role in the success of emergency response. Devitt and Borodzicz's study of leadership and crises led them to surmise that leadership is a pivotal factor in the effectiveness of crisis management response.<sup>17</sup> Research also shows that effective incident command leadership can improve both collaboration and decision making, directly impacting an operation's success or

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<sup>13</sup> Enrico L. Quarantelli, "Research Based Criteria for Evaluating Disaster Planning and Managing," (preliminary paper, University of Delaware Disaster Research Center, 1997), 18, <http://udspace.udel.edu/handle/19716/136>.

<sup>14</sup> Fink, *Crisis Management*, 55.

<sup>15</sup> Mitroff, *Crisis Leadership*, 5–13; Boin, *The Politics of Crisis Management*, 147.

<sup>16</sup> Boin, *The Politics of Crisis Management*, 147.

<sup>17</sup> Katherine R. Devitt and Edward P. Borodzicz, "Interwoven Leadership: The Missing Link in Multi-agency Major Incident Response," *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management* 16, no. 4 (2008): 208–216.

failure.<sup>18</sup> Conversely, ineffective leadership can worsen crisis or disaster response efforts. One of the most-cited lessons learned from the response to and management of Hurricane Katrina was the need for strong leadership.<sup>19</sup>

Although scholars frequently offer differing similarities and differences between leaders and managers, crisis researchers agree that managers tend to details while leaders are able to see the big picture. Leadership and management experts Yukl and Zaleznik agree that strong leadership has the ability to bring about order during times of chaos, an inherent characteristic of most crises.<sup>20</sup> Waldman further determined leadership to be especially critical when bringing together multifunctional teams from different backgrounds to address a significant problem.<sup>21</sup>

While research supports that leadership plays a key role in crisis response, there is little data on effective leadership styles or frameworks for responding to and managing complex crises. There are several studies on law enforcement leadership styles and organizational effectiveness; however, few studies specifically examine law enforcement leadership in complex, stressful, and urgent circumstances. Leadership expert Bernard Bass's research within the business environment led him to conclude that chaotic and dynamic situations call for adaptive and flexible leadership styles.<sup>22</sup> Additional

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<sup>18</sup> William Lester and Daniel Krejci, "Business 'Not' as Usual: The National Incident Management System, Federalism, and Leadership," *Public Administration Review* 67, no. s1 (2007): 84–93; William L. Waugh and Gregory Streib, "Collaboration and Leadership for Effective Emergency Management," *Public Administration Review* 66, no. s1 (2006): 131–140.

<sup>19</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, *A Failure of Initiative: Final report by the Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), 1, <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CRPT-109hrpt377/pdf/CRPT-109hrpt377.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> Abraham Zaleznik, "Managers and Leaders: Are They Different," *Harvard Business Review* 82, no. 1 (January 2004): 1–9; Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations*, 88–91.

<sup>21</sup> D.A. Waldman, "Transformational Leadership in Multifunctional Teams," in *Improving Organizational Effectiveness through Transformational Leadership*, eds. B.M. Bass and B.J. Avolio (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994).

<sup>22</sup> Bernard M. Bass et al., "Predicting Unit Performance by Assessing Transformational and Transactional Leadership.," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 88, no. 2 (2003): 207–218, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.2.207>.

researchers suggest that, in times of crisis, leaders must be more autocratic, directive, and assertive.<sup>23</sup>

Fox's dissertation, "Analyzing Leadership Styles of Incident Commanders," examined the differences between transformational, transactional, and passive/avoidant leadership during responses to fatal vehicle accidents. Fox identified the need for a collaborative leadership style and a team approach to disaster response operations.<sup>24</sup> Much of the leadership research concludes that effective leaders need both a combination of management and leadership skills.<sup>25</sup> However, the minimal study of law enforcement's management of critical incidents has created a gap in the specific understanding of the competencies linked to effective crisis leadership.

#### **4. Crisis Leadership Models**

Authors Allison and Crego's review of the existing crisis leadership literature led them to surmise that "there is little synthesis of models to generate a holistic picture of critical incident management."<sup>26</sup> Similarly, research identified the need for a public-sector leadership model that integrates transactional and transformational elements.<sup>27</sup> A significant challenge of leading and creating leadership frameworks within bureaucracies is their hierarchical structures and entrenched command-and-control leadership designs. Boin et al., along with Devitt and Borodzicz, concluded that bureaucratic structures and cultures are not well designed to handle crises and can impede information sharing.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations*, 40; Alison and Crego, *Policing Critical Incidents*, 112.

<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey Fox, "Analyzing Leadership Styles of Incident Commanders" (Ph.D. dissertation, Northcentral University, 2009), 144.

<sup>25</sup> Bass et al., "Predicting Unit Performance."

<sup>26</sup> Alison and Crego, *Policing Critical Incidents*, 24.

<sup>27</sup> Montgomery Van Wart, "Public-Sector Leadership Theory: An Assessment," *Public Administration Review* 63, no. 2 (2003): 225.

<sup>28</sup> Arjen Boin, Sanneke Kuipers, and Werner Overdijk, "Leadership in Times of Crisis: A Framework for Assessment," *International Review of Public Administration* 18, no. 1 (2013): 87; Devitt and Borodzicz, "Interwoven Leadership," 209.

Leadership during crises is further complicated as multi-agency coordination and collaboration are required among agencies that may have never worked together.<sup>29</sup>

Boin, Kuipers, and Overdijk's research, with respect to business-related crises, provided a framework for assessing leadership performance in a crisis by identifying the critical functions of crisis management.<sup>30</sup> Marcus et al. developed the previously mentioned meta-leadership model by examining and analyzing leaders in crisis circumstances.<sup>31</sup> Demiroz et al.'s study of leadership in emergencies and disasters found that the most important crisis leadership traits included "cooperation, flexibility in decision making, adaptability, and effective communication with stakeholders and the public."<sup>32</sup> There are several consistent dimensions between these frameworks, including the ability to make sense of the crisis, to make critical decisions, to coordinate both vertically and horizontally, and to establish connectivity. The meta-leadership model recognizes that crises cannot be resolved by one organization or one unit, and addresses crisis leadership within the context of managing a multi-agency response. Similar to the recommendations in much leadership research, the meta-leadership model combines traditional hierarchical leadership and social movement leadership.<sup>33</sup> This is consistent with Allison and Crego's and Devitt and Borodzicz's extensive study of leadership during crises, which found that police leadership combines directive leadership and interpersonal skills.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Arjen Boin and Paul t' Hart, "Aligning Executive Action in Times of Adversity: The Politics of Crisis Coordination," in *Executive Politics in Times of Crisis*, ed. Martin Lodge and Kai Wegrich (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave, 2012), 1791–96.

<sup>30</sup> Boin, Kuipers, and Overdijk, "Leadership in Times of Crisis," 81.

<sup>31</sup> Marcus et al., "The Five Dimensions of Meta-leadership," 2.

<sup>32</sup> Fatih Demiroz and Naim Kapucu, "The Role of Leadership in Managing Emergencies and Disasters," *European Journal of Economic and Political Studies* 5, no. 1 (2012): 100.

<sup>33</sup> Marcus et al., "The Five Dimensions of Meta-leadership," 29.

<sup>34</sup> Alison and Crego, *Policing Critical Incidents*, 71; Devitt and Borodzicz, "Interwoven Leadership," 212.

## 5. Meta-leadership Model

The meta-leadership model synthesizes Marcus et al.'s analysis with leadership literature to create a unified framework.<sup>35</sup> The meta-leadership model is designed to be particularly applicable to leaders who operate in complex crisis environments.<sup>36</sup> The five dimensions of the model include “the person” or the leader, the problem or “the situation,” “lead the silo,” or leading one’s agency, “lead up,” or leading up to superiors, and “lead across” or leading connectivity (see Figure 1).<sup>37</sup>

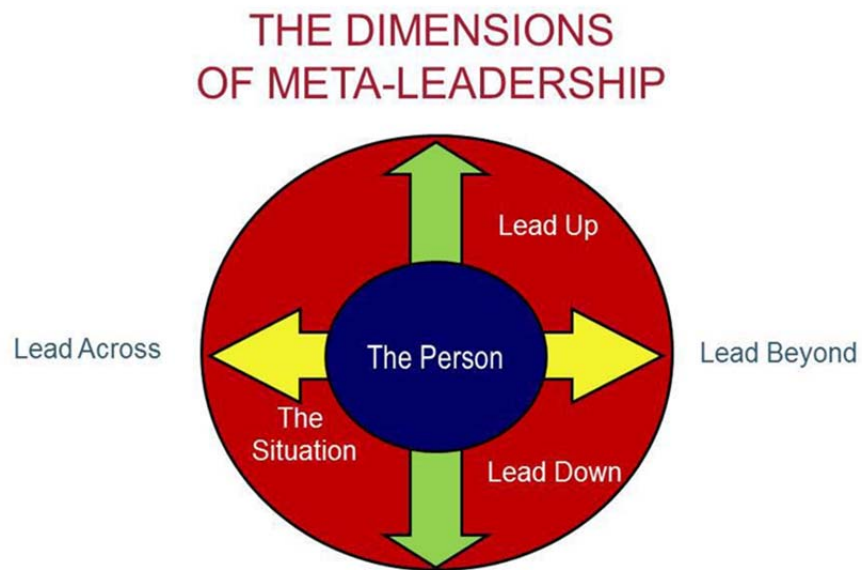


Figure 1. Meta-leadership Model<sup>38</sup>

The five dimensions of the meta-leadership model can be further described as follows.

***The Person:*** While there are many different skills and traits associated with leadership, Marcus et al. discovered some common qualities that exemplify leaders as meta-leaders. Meta-leaders are big thinkers who use curiosity and imagination to seek

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<sup>35</sup> Marcus et al., “The Five Dimensions of Meta-leadership,” 31.

<sup>36</sup> Marcus et al., 2.

<sup>37</sup> Marcus et al.

<sup>38</sup> Marcus et al.

solutions to complex problems.<sup>39</sup> Meta-leaders also possess self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Meta-leaders are able to remain calm under duress and use their experience to identify gaps and solve problems.<sup>40</sup>

***The Situation:*** As stated by Marcus et al., crises “call for strategic situational awareness, the connectivity between personal capacities and understandings and the reality of the situation.”<sup>41</sup> Meta-leaders are able to negotiate ambiguity to accurately assess what is occurring during a crisis.<sup>42</sup> This is important because crisis leaders are often required to make decisions with partial or contradictory information.

***Lead the Silo:*** Meta-leaders have the respect and trust of the personnel within their own organizations and understand the importance of having the support of subordinates if they want to have influence across agencies during a crisis.<sup>43</sup> The meta-leader is considered a leader among leaders and sets the tone for the organization.<sup>44</sup>

***Lead Up:*** The ability to manage and influence one’s boss is important when leading across agencies.<sup>45</sup> A meta-leader is viewed by his or her boss as an honest, reliable, and loyal subordinate.<sup>46</sup>

***Lead Across:*** The net effect of meta-leadership is the ability to collaborate and build unity of effort across agencies. Meta-leaders understand that more can be accomplished by leveraging others’ knowledge and resources to address a common problem. Through these efforts, the meta-leader is able to control the obstacles to collaboration that often exist among agencies and achieve connectivity.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Marcus et al., 7.

<sup>40</sup> Marcus et al., 8.

<sup>41</sup> Marcus et al., 10.

<sup>42</sup> Marcus et al., 11.

<sup>43</sup> Marcus et al., 14, 15.

<sup>44</sup> Marcus et al., 14.

<sup>45</sup> Marcus et al., 17.

<sup>46</sup> Marcus et al., 18.

<sup>47</sup> Marcus et al., 30.

## 6. Situational Awareness

The ability to make sense of a crisis during its early stages is consistently cited in the literature as a key factor in a leader's decision-making ability. Crisis leaders must have the ability to look into the future and see the big picture. Boin concluded that leaders during crises are most importantly designers, facilitators, and guardians, and that making decisions under stress requires awareness above all else.<sup>48</sup> However, situational awareness and the ability to gather the vital information needed to formulate decisions becomes increasingly difficult during multi-agency crisis responses.

Leaders in bureaucratic institutions are challenged to think differently; research suggests they are not well suited for non-routine incidents, given their tendency to think linearly.<sup>49</sup> Lagadec, Guilhou, and Beroux found that unconventional thinking is needed, as "today's crises tend to overwhelm traditional crisis management mechanisms and organisational frameworks."<sup>50</sup> Bass et al. found that adaptive, flexible leadership is necessary to develop creative solutions to the complex problems encountered during crises.<sup>51</sup> Research consistently shows that leaders are generally prepared to manage according to specific norms, but when situations arise outside of the normative framework, leaders' decision making is negatively affected.<sup>52</sup>

## 7. Decision Making during Crises

A common thread permeating crisis and leadership research is the need for leaders to rapidly assess a situation, make vital decisions, and act decisively.<sup>53</sup> Fink summed this up by arguing that managing a crisis is really about a leader managing his or her

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<sup>48</sup> Boin, *The Politics of Crisis Management*, 64.

<sup>49</sup> Demiroz and Kapucu, "The Role of Leadership."

<sup>50</sup> Patrick Lagadec, Xavier Guilhou, and Pierre Bérour, "Rapid Reflection Forces Put to the Reality Test," *Crisis Response Journal* 4, no. 2 (2008): 38–40.

<sup>51</sup> Bass et al., "Predicting Unit Performance."

<sup>52</sup> James and Wooten, *Leading under Pressure*, 147.

<sup>53</sup> Boin, *The Politics of Crisis Management*, 43; Mitroff, *Crisis Leadership*, 25; Fink, *Crisis Management*, 83; James and Wooten, *Leading Under Pressure*, 74; Alison and Crego, *Policing Critical Incidents*, 201; Lucien G. Canton, "Disaster Planning and Management: Does One Leadership Style Work for Both?," *Journal of Leadership Studies* 7, no. 3 (September 2013): 48, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.21297>.

decisions.<sup>54</sup> Research supports the idea that the traditional decision-making process used in day-to-day operations may not be effective in rapidly changing environments. Crisis leaders must have the ability to think differently when making decisions during complex crises.<sup>55</sup> The notion of thinking differently is described by many researchers as thinking outside of the box, developing novel approaches, connecting the dots, and thinking creatively. Lagadec and Topper similarly expressed the need to think differently during a crisis when they stated, “Today’s hyper-complex crises demand something else, and probably exactly at the opposite; the capacity to ask the tough questions, the preparation to navigate unmapped situations.”<sup>56</sup> Research also frequently indicated that inherent biases play a role in decision making during crises. Crisis leaders must recognize their cognitive biases when framing their decisions.<sup>57</sup>

In large and complex crises, leaders must possess the ability to identify the critical decisions only they can make, and delegate lower-tier decisions to the appropriate level. This opinion is consistent with leadership scholars Boin and Lester’s research, which describes how centralization can be detrimental to effective crisis or disaster response.<sup>58</sup> Additional studies support the idea that loosening rather than tightening communication and decision-making structures during a crisis may be more appropriate.<sup>59</sup> This research seems to contradict the current practice of implementing NIMS and ICS during complex crises. In further support of decentralization, a review following Hurricane Katrina found that, due to the social complexities, ICS is not effective in all phases of disaster response.<sup>60</sup> Other research suggests that a more collaborative system is needed to deal

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<sup>54</sup> Fink, *Crisis Management*, 133.

<sup>55</sup> Michael J. Bolton and Gregory B. Stolcis, “Overcoming Failure of Imagination in Crisis Management: The Complex Adaptive System,” *The Innovation Journal* 13, no. 3 (2008): 1–12.

<sup>56</sup> Patrick Lagadec and Benjamin Topper, “How Crises Model the Modern World,” *Journal of Risk Analysis and Crisis Response* 2, no. 1 (May 2012): 21–33.

<sup>57</sup> James and Wooten, *Leading under Pressur*, 100.

<sup>58</sup> Boin, *The Politics of Crisis Management*, 45; William Lester, “Transformational Leadership and NIMS,” *Public Manager* 36, no. 3 (September 22, 2007): 11–16.

<sup>59</sup> James and Wooten, *Leading under Pressure*, 205.

<sup>60</sup> Dick A Buck, Joseph E Trainor, and Benigno E. Aguirre, “A Critical Evaluation of the Incident Command System and NIMS,” *Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management* 3, no. 3 (January 13, 2006): 1–27.



with interagency interactions and that ICS-style command and control does not translate well to civilian organizations.<sup>61</sup>

## **8. Experience**

Another area that may influence leadership is the decision maker's experience level. Boin captures this notion in his statement, "Stress need not degrade performance, experience appears to be a key factor, seasoned experts are usually far more effective at maintaining performance under pressure than novices."<sup>62</sup> Additional research similarly concluded that "life context and experience play the most significant role in leadership emergence."<sup>63</sup> Preparation through simulation exercises is another area shown to improve a leader's ability to lead in complex environments. The military forces have found that one of the best ways to negotiate stress is through repeated and realistic training.<sup>64</sup> Fink explains that a lack of proper crisis decision-making training leads individuals to fall into maladaptive coping strategies, resulting in poor decisions.<sup>65</sup>

## **9. Summary**

Among the research on crisis leadership are several consistent themes. Complex crises, particularly those involving a multi-agency response, challenge existing organizational structures and support the need for more decentralized frameworks. Such incidents demand intense collaboration and flexibility on the part of crisis leaders. Especially during complex crises, decision making and leadership can be influenced by organizations that come together to collaboratively resolve the crisis. The role of trust is a significant factor between a leader and his team, and with respect to leaders' interactions with other agencies. Crisis team performance is enhanced when there is mutual trust

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<sup>61</sup> Donald P. Moynihan, "From Inter-crisis to Intra-crisis Learning," *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management* 17, no. 3 (2009): 189–198; Derrane, "ICS Leadership Styles," 74.

<sup>62</sup> Boin, *The Politics of Crisis Management*, 29.

<sup>63</sup> Sylvia Moir, "Fluid Leadership: Inviting Diverse Inputs to Address Complex Problems" (master's thesis Naval Postgraduate School, 2016), 12, <http://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/48567>; John Gerzema and Michael D'Antonio, *The Athena Doctrine: How Women (and the Men Who Think Like Them) Will Rule the Future* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013).

<sup>64</sup> Dave Grossman, *On Combat* (Millstadt, IL: PPCT Research Publications, 2004), 34–39.

<sup>65</sup> Fink, *Crisis Management*, 139.

before and during a crisis.<sup>66</sup> Although the traditional methods of establishing trust with temporary teams may not be available, trust among these groups is paramount to their effectiveness.

A plethora of quality research exists on leadership and the traits or behaviors believed to be associated with effective leadership. Such research can be found in all types of media, including books, journals, and web articles. However, the majority of this research examines leadership during routine operations and not during times of chaos and uncertainty. Much of the literature that does consider leadership during crises is specific to the political and organizational context. Very little existing research examines leadership skills and behaviors in response to complex crises requiring a multi-agency response. While the existing leadership research helps inform the study of leadership during complex crises, further examination and analysis of leadership during critical incidents is needed.

#### **D. RESEARCH DESIGN**

The focus of this thesis is law enforcement leaders' actions and decisions during complex crises involving a multi-agency response. Research projects tend to focus on the failures of leadership, resulting in recommended actions and corrections for leaders. This project, however, focuses on leaders' actions during actual crisis events and applies the tenets of the meta-leadership model to those actions. The meta-leadership model was selected due to its foundation of both leadership literature and the observation of leaders in high-pressure, high-consequence situations. The meta-leadership model, unlike others, was also designed within the context of different agencies and organizations brought together to solve a common issue.

While much leadership research exists, a review of the literature has determined there is little research and analysis on law enforcement leadership during critical incidents. Thus, this thesis examines law enforcement crisis leadership rather than leadership in normal, day-to-day environments. Further research and analysis of the

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<sup>66</sup> Boin, *The Politics of Crisis Management*, 49; James and Wooten, *Leading under Pressure*, 113.

meta-leadership model through case studies can contribute to the minimal knowledge in this field.

Using a case study methodology, this project examines the tenets of the meta-leadership model to further understand crisis leadership during complex crises. Common themes and best practices are identified, resulting in recommendations and conclusions regarding the meta-leadership model's utility as a framework. Levy's extensive research on case studies determined that "well-designed case studies play a role in testing certain types of hypotheses."<sup>67</sup>

This project analyzes leaders' actions in three contemporary homeland security crises through the lens of the meta-leadership model: the Washington, DC, Navy Yard shooting, the Christopher Dorner shootings, and the Boston Marathon bombings. These cases are highly representative of spontaneous, fast-paced, complex cases that required a multi-agency response, and for which law enforcement leadership presided over the incident response. Additionally, these cases are well documented, providing sufficient examples of crisis leadership actions for analysis. The primary sources for this thesis were derived from literature and after-action reports. The after-action reports were superior to media and other accounts of these incidents due to the review teams' interviews of personnel directly involved in these incidents, along with their access to internal agency reports, evidence, and witness statements.

The next chapter presents the first of the three case studies upon which the meta-leadership model will be applied to better understand the model's utility. The first study is the Washington, DC, Navy Yard active shooter event which took place in September 2013.

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<sup>67</sup> Jack S. Levy, "Case Studies: Types, Designs, and Logics of Inference," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 25, no. 1 (February 2008): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07388940701860318>.

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## II. WASHINGTON, DC, NAVY YARD SHOOTING

The active shooter event that took place at the Washington, DC, Navy Yard on September 16, 2013, was characteristic of many crisis events. The incident was plagued with confusion and interagency challenges, which affected crisis response. However, this event was somewhat unique in that the incident took place on a secure military installation that possessed its own command structure, response procedures, and first responder teams. These elements, coupled with local law enforcement agencies' lack of familiarity with the Navy Yard, hampered response efforts. However, leaders within the Washington, DC, Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) overcame many of these obstacles and took command and control of the crisis. These obstacles—along with the multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional nature of this incident—make the Navy Yard shooting a worthy case for analyzing the meta-leadership model's principles.

### A. BACKGROUND

Shortly after 8:00 a.m. on the morning of September 16, 2013, Aaron Alexis entered building 197 at the Washington, DC, Navy Yard and carried out the second deadliest mass murder on a military installation.<sup>68</sup> Alexis's deadly rampage resulted in twelve deaths and three injuries. At the time of the shooting, Alexis was employed as an independent government contractor and possessed a valid temporary access badge which provided him access to the installation.<sup>69</sup> Building 197 housed the Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA) headquarters, a five-story building that employed approximately 3,000 military, government, and contractor personnel.<sup>70</sup> Upon entering the NAVSEA building, Alexis went directly to a bathroom on the fourth floor. He later emerged with a

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<sup>68</sup> The 2009 Fort Hood shooting, which resulted in thirteen deaths and thirty injuries, is the deadliest mass murder shooting on a U.S. military base.

<sup>69</sup> John M. Richardson, *Report of the Investigation into the Fatal Shooting Incident at the Washington Navy Yard and Associated Security, Personnel, and Contracting Policies and Practices* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, November 8, 2013), 1, [http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/Navy-Investigation-into-the-WNY-Shooting\\_final-report.pdf](http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/Navy-Investigation-into-the-WNY-Shooting_final-report.pdf).

<sup>70</sup> Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), "After Action Report Washington Navy Yard, September 16, 2013" (after-action report, MPD, 2014), 55, <https://www.policefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Washington-Navy-Yard-After-Action-Report.pdf>.

sawed-off shotgun; for over an hour, he indiscriminately shot at NAVSEA employees and responding law enforcement officers.<sup>71</sup> During the course of the shooting, Alexis killed a security guard assigned to the NAVSEA building and took his handgun. Alexis later engaged in several shootings with law enforcement officers; during one encounter, a Washington, DC, MPD officer was seriously wounded.<sup>72</sup> Between 9:15 a.m. and 9:25 a.m., Alexis was located by the MPD and United States Park Police officers and, after an exchange of gunfire, Alexis was mortally wounded.<sup>73</sup>

In addition to the significant threat Alexis posed to Navy Yard employees and first responders, several other factors affected crisis response efforts. Building 197 contained over 600,000 square feet of office space; its complex layout hindered the tactical response.<sup>74</sup> At least 117 officers entered building 197 in the search for Alexis.<sup>75</sup> After the shootout, it took several hours for authorities to secure the building. During the course of the shooting, information also emerged indicating the possibility of a second gunman. Due to the poor coordination between law enforcement and the Navy Yard, it took several hours before authorities could access the necessary video footage to confirm that Alexis was the sole gunman.

Limited prior interactions between the MPD and the Navy Yard, along with assumptions about the Navy Yard's capabilities, also played a significant role in the hindered response. The Navy Yard resides in MPD's First District, but the Navy Yard also has its own police force, the Naval District Washington Police Department. Within the Navy Yard there were also armed military police personnel and contract security officers. Officers exhibited poor familiarity with procedures and false assumptions about agency resources throughout the event. Additionally, although this shooting occurred on a U.S. Navy installation, numerous federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies converged on the scene, adding to the confusion. The primary agencies involved in the

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<sup>71</sup> MPD, 3.

<sup>72</sup> MPD, 19.

<sup>73</sup> MPD.

<sup>74</sup> MPD, 10.

<sup>75</sup> MPD, 15.

response included the Naval District Washington Police, the MPD, the FBI Washington Field Office, the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, the U.S. Marshal Service, and the United States Park Police.

## **B. APPLICATION OF THE META-LEADERSHIP MODEL**

The MPD and the Department of the Navy (DON) conducted in-depth after-action reviews of the Navy Yard shooting. While the MPD report focuses primarily on the law enforcement response to the incident, the DON report addresses the response of only Navy resources and does not speak to the response of non-DON agencies. In composing its report, the MPD review team analyzed hundreds of documents and witness statements, reviewed video footage, listened to audio tapes, and conducted meetings with representatives from the agencies most intimately involved in this incident.<sup>76</sup> Additional governmental reviews were conducted of this incident, but they focus on the policies and procedures related to Alexis's employment and the adjudication of his security clearance. These reports do not address the response to or management of the crisis itself.

### **1. The Person**

Throughout the Navy Yard shooting, several leaders exemplified meta-leadership skills and traits. Despite being on a military installation and operating in federal jurisdiction, the MPD chief recognized the lack of command leadership and assumed control of the incident. The MPD chief set the priorities of the unified command to respond to the shooter, establish a Joint Information Center, and develop a process to evacuate people sheltered in place.<sup>77</sup> The MPD chief showed courage not only by leading the unified command, but also by strongly cautioning the media against perpetuating erroneous information during one of the press conferences.<sup>78</sup> These actions were indicative of the MPD chief's ability to look beyond the initial chaos and see the big picture.

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<sup>76</sup> MPD, 7.

<sup>77</sup> Richardson, *Fatal Shooting Incident*, 42.

<sup>78</sup> MPD, "After Action Report," 64.

The MPD chief also identified gaps in the response and recovery from this incident and, through her influence, took actions to address them. As an example, early on in the crisis, the MPD chief and her leadership team recognized that nobody had taken measures to address the large number of civilians impacted by the incident. The MPD chief proactively established and coordinated a family reunification center, where families could receive information and be reunited with their loved ones.<sup>79</sup> In taking command of the incident, setting a vision for the unified command, and working to address gaps in the law enforcement response, the MPD chief remained calm and showed discipline during a period of high stress and ambiguity.

One particular MPD commander's situational awareness and decision making during the shooting epitomized many characteristics of a meta-leader. Upon arriving on the scene, the commander positioned himself outside building 197 and requested that all communications go through him.<sup>80</sup> This commander realized that several teams were already inside the building and, given the multi-agency response, he recognized the need for tactical leadership and coordination. Acting on his own accord, the commander took control in assembling active shooter teams as they arrived, while also ensuring the perimeter and all the entrances to building 197 were secure.

The MPD commander not only saw the big picture, but was able to problem solve by synthesizing the chaos into strategic actions. The commander had the presence of mind to notify the teams already in the building every time a newly assembled team deployed into the building.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, as a number of plainclothes law enforcement officers and agents entered the building, the commander recognized the increased risk of a friendly fire incident. In response, the commander made sure the officers who entered the building were easily identifiable as law enforcement officers. The commander went even further, making the difficult decision to remove plainclothes law enforcement personnel and replace them exclusively with uniformed personnel.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> MPD, 50.

<sup>80</sup> MPD, 17.

<sup>81</sup> MPD, 18.

<sup>82</sup> MPD, 31.



There were several other examples during the Navy Yard shooting of individuals not in defined leadership positions who exhibited meta-leadership traits. A notable example was a Navy Reserve corpsman chief petty officer (CPO) who was serving on active duty at the Navy History and Heritage Command. When he heard of the shooting and realized there were severe injuries, the CPO independently established a medical triage area in a nearby building.<sup>83</sup> He then sent a messenger to the Navy Yard Branch Health Clinic to secure additional corpsmen and medical supplies. Within a very short period of time, three medical doctors and six corpsmen arrived to assist victims.<sup>84</sup> The CPO's ability to assume a leadership role and to think quickly and decisively in a stressful environment is characteristic of a meta-leader.

## **2. The Situation**

As indicated by her actions, the MPD chief was able to make sense of exactly what was occurring at the Navy Yard on the day of the shooting. While simultaneously taking command and control of the incident, the chief made preparations for a secondary incident. In doing so, the chief activated MPD's alpha/bravo schedule to ensure personnel would be rested and capable of sustaining operations for as long as necessary.<sup>85</sup> The chief also recognized that a substantial police response was needed and coordinated with an adjoining jurisdiction's police department to place its SWAT team on standby to cover additional calls within the city. MPD leadership also took into consideration the impact this incident would have on overall MPD operations and assigned two MPD commanders to oversee police operations throughout the remainder of the city. Further, MPD leadership redirected two officers from each of the surrounding districts to backfill the officers who had responded to the Navy Yard.

MPD leadership maintained situational awareness and demonstrated effective problem-solving abilities as they navigated the chaos that ensued amid the massive law enforcement response, mass casualties, and fleeing government employees. This

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<sup>83</sup> Richardson, *Fatal Shooting Incident*, 43.

<sup>84</sup> Richardson.

<sup>85</sup> MPD, "After Action Report," 66.

confusion was further compounded by the contradictory descriptions and conflicting information from witnesses regarding the number of suspects. The possibility of a second shooter became a reoccurring theme, but the restricted access to building 197's closed-circuit television (CCTV) video hampered law enforcement attempts to verify these reports.<sup>86</sup> As a result of this ambiguity, the unified command made the decision to continue the shelter-in-place and lock-down orders for the immediate and surrounding areas. This included the Washington Nationals baseball stadium, which resulted in the postponement of the baseball game that evening.

Leaders were also acutely aware of this incident's impact on other key stakeholders and the community. MPD leadership directed its school resource officers to notify schools to go on lockdown and to enforce a 100-percent identification check.<sup>87</sup> Leaders ensured local businesses in the immediate area were aware of the situation and dispatched officers to the local hospitals to protect the victims. The unified command also had to contend with the fact this incident occurred during the morning rush hour. To address this challenge, MPD leadership took several actions, including assigning an officer to coordinate all traffic closures, ensuring an emergency route remained open, and dedicating a separate radio zone for all traffic-related communications.<sup>88</sup> Understanding the impact these closures could have on the local community, the MPD routinely provided traffic updates to the media.

### **3. Lead the Silo**

The available reports regarding the Navy Yard shooting do not allow for an in-depth analysis of leadership's level of mentorship or the level of respect, commitment, and dedication of their subordinates. However, the instruction and direction provided by the MPD chief and her commanders are reflective of the MPD chief's ability to effectively lead her department during this incident. By delegating authority to her commanders, the MPD chief not only empowered and trusted her subordinates, but recognized the incident

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<sup>86</sup> MPD, 44.

<sup>87</sup> MPD, 41.

<sup>88</sup> MPD, 46.

response could not be led by herself alone. As intelligence surfaced regarding a possible second shooter, the MPD chief and the unified command vested their commanders to take proactive measures to shore-up the perimeter, to ensure local schools and businesses stayed abreast of the situation, and to handle all traffic-related matters. The chief also had the foresight to prepare for a long-term event by enacting the MPD's alpha/bravo schedule. The chief's decentralized leadership approach to this crisis indicates a level of trust between the MPD chief and her leadership team.

#### **4. Lead Up**

This component of the meta-leadership model could not be adequately reviewed and analyzed based on the publicly available information surrounding this event.

#### **5. Lead Across—Connectivity**

Despite insufficient access to key pieces of intelligence, the MPD chief coordinated and collaborated internally and externally to build a shared strategy that could address the crisis. Similarly, the MPD commander, who took tactical command of operations outside of building 197, was able to leverage and align different personnel toward a common goal. The outcome of the MPD chief and commander's actions directly correlate to Marcus et al. description of meta-leadership's effect. Marcus et al. describe the value-added of a meta-leader as "the ability to generate a common, multi-dimensional thread of interests and involvement among entities that look at a problem from very different yet complementary vantage points."<sup>89</sup> As described previously, the MPD chief recognized the gap in leadership and took command of the incident. Clearly seeing and understanding the problem, the chief delegated and trusted her forward commanders and set the priorities for the unified command. However, the Navy Yard's lack of representation in the unified command hampered leadership's ability to fully connect and leverage the knowledge and resources needed during the early stages of the event.

MPD leadership also recognized the importance of connecting and sharing information with the appropriate stakeholders. Law enforcement kept local schools and

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<sup>89</sup> Marcus et al., "The Five Dimensions of Meta-leadership," 21.

businesses up to date on the active shooter situation and provided guidance for the continuation of lockdown procedures. The MPD utilized press releases, alert systems, and the MPD Twitter page to communicate effectively with the public.<sup>90</sup> Officers were also dispatched to local hospitals to protect the victims until the threat of a second shooter could be resolved. Connectivity and situational awareness was further evident in the MPD's decision to stand up a separate joint operations command center.<sup>91</sup> The MPD requested and received representation from numerous state, local, and federal agencies to help coordinate and oversee the overall operation.

While there were several examples of effective collaboration during the event, a number of lessons learned can be attributed to poor connectivity between MPD and Navy Yard leadership. This insufficient coordination was further exacerbated by the absence of representation from the Navy or base operations in the unified command. Poor assimilation caused a significant delay when law enforcement needed access to the external and internal CCTV footage for building 197.<sup>92</sup> It was later learned that the internal cameras could be accessed from a control room inside the building, but without the Navy Yard's appropriate representation in the command post, this key intelligence did not come to light until much later in the day. The Navy's failure to integrate into the unified command may have been attributed to what Marcus et al. call the silo mentality, whereby existing organizational structure and culture hinder effective crisis response.<sup>93</sup>

On several occasions, the MPD after-action report cited a need to improve the familiarity between agencies regarding emergency response plans, procedures, capabilities, and resources.<sup>94</sup> Also frequently mentioned in the MPD report was the lack of prior crisis-related training and exercises between MPD and the Navy Yard. The MPD's assumption that the Navy Yard possessed its own police, fire, and emergency

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<sup>90</sup> MPD, "After Action Report," 41.

<sup>91</sup> MPD, 19.

<sup>92</sup> MPD, 53.

<sup>93</sup> Leonard J. Marcus, Barry C. Dorn, and Joseph M. Henderson, "Meta-leadership and National Emergency Preparedness: A Model to Build Government Connectivity," *Biosecurity and Bioterrorism: Biodefense Strategy, Practice, and Science* 4, no. 2 (2006): 128–29.

<sup>94</sup> MPD, "After Action Report," 35.

medical services, and could appropriately handle its own critical incidents, contributed to poor coordination prior to the incident. Similarly, the DON report identified several deficiencies related to poor coordination, including the lack of mutual aid agreements or coordination with the unified command.<sup>95</sup> On the contrary, previously established relationships between the MPD and the FBI resulted in a smooth transfer of command during the investigation phase.<sup>96</sup> Prior coordination and social networking prior to a crisis have been cited as key factors in successful crisis response.<sup>97</sup>

### C. CASE ANALYSIS

Consistent with the meta-leadership model, leadership experts Boin and Mitroff point to the ability to see the big picture as a key component in crisis leadership.<sup>98</sup> The decisions made in response to the Navy Yard shooting further corroborate these skills' value and importance. The MPD chief recognized not only insufficient leadership, but also the size and scope of this event. The MPD took command of the incident, set the strategic direction of the unified command, and understood both the short- and long-term implications of the incident. In assuming overall command and setting a shared vision, the MPD chief became a leader among leaders. She was able to see beyond the initial threat to consider the large number of people affected by the event, including key stakeholders. Internally, the MPD chief took actions to ensure fresh resources would be available and that operations throughout the city would be met with adequate resources. Externally, the chief kept local businesses and schools informed, coordinated a reunification center, and ensured updates were being provided to the community. Conversely, the Navy's inability to see the crisis from multiple perspectives may have prevented them from effectively integrating into the unified command. As previously illustrated, the Navy's integration may have provided critical access to the available

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<sup>95</sup> Richardson, *Fatal Shooting Incident*, 91.

<sup>96</sup> MPD, "After Action Report," 57.

<sup>97</sup> Barry C. Dorn, Joseph M. Henderson, and Leonard J. Marcus, "Meta-leadership and National Emergency Preparedness: Strategies to Build Government Connectivity" (working paper, Harvard Kennedy School Center for Public Leadership, 2005), 53, <https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/55934>.

<sup>98</sup> Boin, *The Politics of Crisis Management*, 142; Mitroff, *Crisis Leadership*, 11.

CCTV video, permitting greater situational awareness on the number of shooters and Alexis' exact location within the building.

Based on her actions, the MPD chief acted as a facilitator and understood the important decisions she needed to make, leaving lower-tier decisions to her forward commanders. This is consistent with Boin's research on crisis leadership, which surmises that "crises make it very difficult for leaders to really be in charge" and "leaders need to be able to understand the critical decisions that only they can make."<sup>99</sup> By not meddling in the forward commanders' decisions, the MPD chief displayed trust in her subordinates and adopted a decentralized decision-making structure. This approach aligns with research that suggests that centralization during chaotic times can be a liability, and that it may be more appropriate to loosen decision making during crises.<sup>100</sup> Additionally, trust between leaders and subordinates, as well as established trust across leaders in different organizations, is an important element in effective crisis response.<sup>101</sup>

Along with the ability to see the big picture, situational awareness (or understanding the problem) is as an important skill for leaders to possess during crises. Boin refers to this concept in his crisis leadership framework as "sense making."<sup>102</sup> The MPD commander exemplified these traits when he decided not to enter building 197, but to set up a clear communication channel and to coordinate active shooter teams entering the building. At the time of the Navy Yard shooting, the MPD commander had thirty-five years of experience as a law enforcement officer. As highlighted within the MPD report, the experience and skills he had honed over these thirty-five years played a significant role in his ability to think critically and make sound decisions in the midst of the crisis.<sup>103</sup>

The MPD commander was able to quickly assess the chaotic situation and make critical decisions with respect to safety, communications, and the allocation of surging

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<sup>99</sup> Boin, *The Politics of Crisis Management*, 144, 145.

<sup>100</sup> Boin, 54; James and Wooten, *Leading under Pressure*, 205.

<sup>101</sup> James and Wooten, *Leading under Pressure*, 113–46; Boin, *The Politics of Crisis Management*, 49.

<sup>102</sup> Boin, *The Politics of Crisis Management*, 20–23.

<sup>103</sup> MPD, "After Action Report," 31.

resources. This is in line with Marcus et al.'s thinking, which concluded, "The meta-leader has the maturity and experience to identify gaps between the problem and the response to it."<sup>104</sup> A consistent theme throughout after-action reports following similar incidents "is the need for strong, composed, and decisive leadership during the initial response."<sup>105</sup> Yukl's research on leadership in organizations concludes that managers develop their skills from prior exposure to challenging situations and developmental experiences more so than from formal training.<sup>106</sup> Although Marcus et al. identify experience as one of many important meta-leader attributes, this case study supports that experience may play a more pivotal role in crisis leadership than other leadership skills or attributes.

Throughout the literature on crisis leadership, flexibility is commonly cited as an important leadership attribute. In several case studies on leadership and teamwork during crises, the ability to adapt and remain flexible was key to overall performance.<sup>107</sup> These attributes were critical to the successful resolution of the Navy Yard shooting. From the outset, the MPD found itself operating in a unique jurisdictional environment and in an unfamiliar location. This poor familiarity, coupled with the lack of representation from DON leadership, only added to the stress, ambiguity, and conflicting information that surrounded this incident. The MPD chief and other MPD commanders assumed leadership roles and led other military and law enforcement agencies, over which they had no direct authority, in order to resolve the situation. Law enforcement officers also exemplified the ability to remain adaptable when they entered building 197 and encountered a complex layout; the configuration of building 197 did not allow officers to utilize their standard operating procedures for addressing active shooter situations, requiring them to improvise their tactics.<sup>108</sup> Adaptability was not only important for those managing the impending threat, but also for those who had to divert resources, work

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<sup>104</sup> Marcus et al., "The Five Dimensions of Meta-leadership," 8.

<sup>105</sup> MPD, "After Action Report," 31.

<sup>106</sup> Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations*, 456.

<sup>107</sup> Amy Louise Fraher, *Thinking through Crisis: Improving Teamwork and Leadership in High-Risk Fields* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 13–59.

<sup>108</sup> MPD, "After Action Report," 32.

around communication challenges, address traffic issues, handle stakeholder concerns, keep the media informed, and ensure the safety and well-being of all those involved.

Leadership's ability to "lead-up" during the Navy Yard shooting could not be fairly evaluated. Thus, the role these skills play in one's ability to lead personnel and make sound decisions during a crisis is undetermined. While keeping superiors informed is an important leadership function, more research is necessary to assess the impact leading up may have on crisis leadership.

Marcus et al. believe having the commitment and trust of ones' subordinates is essential to leading across disparate organizations.<sup>109</sup> Based on the available literature, the trust and commitment the subordinates had in their leaders could not be assessed. Likewise, it was not possible to analyze the MPD chief's influence across her department and its potential impact during this event. MPD leadership did empower and trust its officers to appropriately address the threat at building 197. However, this case study did not yield enough information to assess how the MPD chief's day-to-day leadership abilities impacted her subordinates during this crisis.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

The MPD leadership displayed many meta-leadership skills and attributes, including situational awareness, decision making, ability to see the big picture, problem solving, delegation, and ability to establish connectivity. These qualities played an important role in leadership's ability to lead, manage, and collaborate during this event. This case study also highlighted the value of experience and the impact that poor interagency training exercises and prior coordination can have on multi-agency crisis response. Collaboration was instrumental as first responders from multiple agencies worked together to eliminate the threat posed by Alexis. Effective teamwork also enabled the unified command to form quickly, direct resources, and address identified gaps. However, a lack of coordination between the MPD and DON prior to the shooting was the catalyst that led to the poor collaboration realized on the day of the shooting. This insufficient crisis management planning impaired information sharing and led to a poor

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<sup>109</sup> Marcus et al., "The Five Dimensions of Meta-leadership," 14.



understanding of resources and capabilities. The Navy Yard shooting also highlights the importance of leaders themselves establishing relationships, engaging in joint training events, and participating in crisis management planning.

The next chapter further examines the meta-leadership framework by applying the leadership competencies within the model to the Christopher Dorner shootings and manhunt that took place in southern California during February 2013. The second case study builds upon this chapter's analysis with the intent of discovering additional and consistent findings regarding crisis leadership and the meta-leadership model.

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### **III. CHRISTOPHER DORNER SHOOTINGS**

The Dorner case is unique in many respects, including the duration of the event, the threat Dorner posed to law enforcement, and Dorner's prior experience as a police officer. Like many modern complex crises, the Dorner case involved numerous jurisdictions and prompted a massive law enforcement response. Leaders struggled not only to lead their own organizations, but also to merge their differing procedures, cultures, and organizational structures into a shared effort. Strong leadership and extensive collaboration were needed to effectively lead response efforts for an event that impacted multiple jurisdictions and covered expansive territory. Applying the principles of the meta-leadership model to this crisis shows that leadership's inability to build connectivity, unify efforts, and see the big picture negatively affects crisis response.

#### **A. BACKGROUND**

In 2009, Dorner was fired from the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) after he falsely accused a colleague of using excessive force.<sup>110</sup> Over a period of nine days in February 2013, Dorner traversed southern California, evading authorities and seeking revenge against those he held responsible for his firing. Before Dorner was stopped, he had killed four people, including two police officers, and wounded several others.

Dorner's rampage started in Irvine, California, on February 3, with the shooting of an unsuspecting couple as they sat in their vehicle inside a parking garage. One of the victims was later identified as Monica Quan, the daughter of retired LAPD Captain Randal Quan.<sup>111</sup> Randal Quan had served as Dorner's legal representative during his LAPD Board of Rights hearings, where he was found guilty of lying and subsequently fired.<sup>112</sup> As Dorner became a person of interest in these murders, the Irvine Police Department searched his Facebook account and discovered a document titled "Last

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<sup>110</sup> Police Foundation, "Police under Attack: Southern California Law Enforcement Response to the Attacks by Christopher Dorner," (after-action report, Police Foundation, 2015), 15, <http://www.policefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Police-Under-Attack.pdf>.

<sup>111</sup> Police Foundation, 14.

<sup>112</sup> Police Foundation, 15.

Resort.”<sup>113</sup> In the document, Dorner explained how his hearings had been unjust; he went on to make overt threats toward Quan and numerous other officers involved in his firing. One of Dorner’s threats said, “I never had the opportunity to have a family of my own, I’m terminating yours.”<sup>114</sup> Following the discovery of Dorner’s manifesto, he quickly became the prime suspect.

In addition to the manhunt that ensued to locate Dorner, the LAPD faced a serious threat to many of its officers and their families. The LAPD immediately assessed its level of risk and identified employees and affiliates throughout southern California who warranted protection. The investigation quickly moved to Corona, California, after Dorner shot at LAPD officers who were closing in on his vehicle. Shortly thereafter, Dorner ambushed two Riverside, California, police officers as they sat in their patrol car at an intersection. Several hours later, Dorner’s vehicle was found abandoned and ablaze near Big Bear Lake in the San Bernardino Mountains. Dorner was neither seen nor heard from for several more days, but his indiscriminate targeting of police officers and their families put the entire region on high alert. Anxiety within the law enforcement community contributed to two mistaken-identity shootings by LAPD and Torrance police officers.<sup>115</sup>

On February 12, two residents encountered Dorner as they entered their vacant condominium in Big Bear Lake to conduct renovations. Dorner tied up the residents and took their vehicle, but the residents were able to free themselves and called 911.<sup>116</sup> Hundreds of police officers responded to the area and Dorner was eventually cornered in a cabin, where he engaged in a shootout with police. During the exchange, Dorner killed one officer and seriously wounded a second. After failed attempts to convince Dorner to surrender, the San Bernardino Sheriff’s Department deployed pyrotechnic canisters inside the cabin.<sup>117</sup> One of the canisters caught the cabin on fire; shortly thereafter, authorities

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<sup>113</sup> Police Foundation, 16.

<sup>114</sup> Police Foundation.

<sup>115</sup> Police Foundation, 24, 25.

<sup>116</sup> Police Foundation, 32.

<sup>117</sup> Police Foundation, 38.

heard a single gunshot from inside the cabin. Hours later, the fire was extinguished and Dorner's remains were located in the basement. The manner of death was later determined to be suicide.<sup>118</sup>

## **B. APPLICATION OF THE META-LEADERSHIP MODEL**

The Police Foundation assembled an independent team of former law enforcement leaders and academics to write an after-action report for the Christopher Dorner incident. This team conducted hundreds of hours of interviews, reviewed evidence, and visited crime scenes while compiling their report.<sup>119</sup> They interviewed personnel from the law enforcement agencies most involved in the incident, including the California Highway Patrol, Corona Police Department, Irvine Police Department, LAPD, National City Police Department, Riverside Police Department, San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department, San Bernardino Police Department, and Torrance Police Department. This report serves as the primary source document for the following evaluation of leadership's actions within the context of the meta-leadership model.

### **1. The Person**

As described by Dorn, Henderson, and Marcus in their article, "Meta-leadership and National Emergency Preparedness: Strategies to Build Government Connectivity," today's crisis responses require decisive decision making and extensive coordination.<sup>120</sup> Crises such as terrorism and active shooter events, by their very nature, are unpredictable, often cross territorial boundaries, and tend to overwhelm local agency resources. The Christopher Dorner case typifies these characteristics.

Leaders struggled throughout the event to see the big picture, resulting in ineffective command and control of the overall crisis. Several law enforcement agencies had investigative purview over the events that occurred within their jurisdictions, but no one agency or person took charge to coordinate the overall response. Leaders failed to see

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<sup>118</sup> Police Foundation, 39.

<sup>119</sup> Police Foundation, 10.

<sup>120</sup> Dorn, Henderson, and Marcus, "Meta-Leadership," 52.

the importance of joining resources, which caused agencies to maintain organizational structures and protocols geared for everyday events.<sup>121</sup> Conversely, Marcus et al. describe meta-leaders as those who are able to see the big picture, identify gaps or problem areas, and develop strategic responses to those gaps.<sup>122</sup> Leadership's inability to effectively connect with other agencies led to the poor integration and management of resources, spurring massive self-deployments at many of the scenes.<sup>123</sup>

Leadership's failure to understand the bigger picture prompted competition and contributed to poor information flow between agencies. This was particularly evident when several agencies disputed over who should process the truck Dorner abandoned in the San Bernardino Mountains.<sup>124</sup> The Police Foundation's review of this incident determined that "gatekeepers at a variety of supervisory levels hampered the flow of information, concerns, and command decisions."<sup>125</sup> Believing agencies were intentionally not sharing substantive facts or intelligence, many law enforcement agencies expressed feelings of competition and distrust.<sup>126</sup> The emotional nature of these events also led individual agencies to believe their interests were of a higher priority, further promoting competition between agencies. Leaders' inability to identify, understand, and address the issues that prompted the competing interests exacerbated the poor cooperation and collaboration between agencies.<sup>127</sup>

LAPD's decisive action in response to Dorner's threat to its employees and affiliates did, however, indicate leadership's ability to see the big picture and effectively assess the situation. Dorner's initial killings and his manifesto made it clear that he was intent on seeking revenge against a number of LAPD personnel associated with his firing. In light of his manifesto, LAPD leaders realized the full scope of the threat and

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<sup>121</sup> Police Foundation, "Police under Attack," 47.

<sup>122</sup> Marcus et al., "The Five Dimensions of Meta-leadership," 7, 8.

<sup>123</sup> Police Foundation, "Police under Attack," 46.

<sup>124</sup> Police Foundation, 47.

<sup>125</sup> Police Foundation, 11.

<sup>126</sup> Police Foundation, 63.

<sup>127</sup> Police Foundation, 70.

orchestrated a massive protective detail that provided 24/7 protection for seventy-seven potential targets.<sup>128</sup> Understanding the scope of the existing crisis, LAPD staffed the protection details to avoid further burdening local agency resources. Although a significant number of LAPD resources were diverted to accomplish this task, LAPD took the protection of its personnel personally. This was illustrated when one LAPD leader stated, “They’re our people, our issue, and ours to protect.”<sup>129</sup> Empathy, courage, and ability to see the larger picture are all traits of a meta-leader.<sup>130</sup>

## **2. The Situation**

Many of the shortcomings identified in the Police Foundation’s after-action report point to leadership’s poor situational awareness. Most notably, no clearly delineated leader or unified leadership team were identified. Leaders maintained a parochial view and continued to direct and manage their resources from internal command structures even when events expanded into multiple jurisdictions. Instead of increasing coordination and collaboration across agencies, efforts became less unified, resulting in inefficiency, disputes, and redundancies.<sup>131</sup> Several days into the event, an assistant LAPD chief recognized the need for a more centralized “hybrid coordination center” and convinced his peers to create a multi-agency coordination center (MAC) in a centralized location.<sup>132</sup> The MAC combined the expertise and capabilities of numerous federal, state, and local agencies in the pursuit of Dorner. However, although the assistant chief recognized the coordination problem, the MAC did not serve as a unified command for the overall response, and participation within the MAC varied by agency.<sup>133</sup>

Law enforcement leaders also struggled to see the crisis from multiple perspectives and failed to anticipate the potential problems an emotionally charged, multi-agency event would bring to bear. Leaders failed to understand the competing

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<sup>128</sup> Police Foundation, 18.

<sup>129</sup> Police Foundation, 42.

<sup>130</sup> Dorn, Henderson, and Marcus, “Meta-leadership,” 47–53.

<sup>131</sup> Police Foundation, “Police under Attack,” 47.

<sup>132</sup> Police Foundation, 29.

<sup>133</sup> Police Foundation, 46.

interests between agencies, especially in light of the targeted officers and the uncertainty over Dorner's whereabouts. One of the effects of leaders not properly assessing the situation was the unobstructed self-deployment of their personnel and its impact on the affected jurisdiction. While searching for Dorner in the San Bernardino Mountains, officers frequently conducted law enforcement activities outside their authority and without the knowledge or approval of the host agency.<sup>134</sup>

The insufficient leadership foresight was also evident when Dorner's vehicle was discovered in the San Bernardino Mountains. With no request for assistance or operational need, officers and police chiefs self-deployed to the scene.<sup>135</sup> Similarly, when Dorner was later cornered in a mountain cabin, hundreds of law enforcement officers also responded to the scene, some traveling from as far as 100 miles away.<sup>136</sup> Leadership's poor strategic situational awareness also kept them from anticipating potential problems. Similarly, leaders' poor personnel oversight not only overwhelmed and distracted the local jurisdiction, but put officers in harm's way.<sup>137</sup>

Conversely, when Dorner reemerged on the mountain on February 12, leadership within the California Highway Patrol, Irvine Police Department, and Corona Police Department demonstrated effective situational awareness. Thinking through the situation, these leaders applied appropriate command and control when they directed personnel to handle specific tasks away from the incident site.<sup>138</sup> The Corona police chief in particular displayed keen awareness by issuing a no-self-deployment order to his officers, which was reiterated throughout the event by the chief's commanders.<sup>139</sup> These leaders made sense of the crisis, remained disciplined, and exhibited decisive leadership. Likewise, the LAPD fully understood the threat to its personnel and rapidly responded by establishing numerous protection details. The LAPD was also mindful of the potential impact to its

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<sup>134</sup> Police Foundation, 55.

<sup>135</sup> Police Foundation, 54.

<sup>136</sup> Police Foundation.

<sup>137</sup> Police Foundation, 55.

<sup>138</sup> Police Foundation, 55–56.

<sup>139</sup> Police Foundation, 56.



day-to-day tasks and carried out these protective details with minimal disruption to its normal operations.<sup>140</sup>

Leaders who responded to the Dorner event struggled to identify and address the inherent challenges of the overlapping missions and corresponding struggle for control that typifies such events. The Police Foundation reported poor information flow between agencies, which stemmed from, among other reasons, “interagency jealousy, competition, and distrust.”<sup>141</sup> The lack of communication was further evident when personnel intentionally disregarded the authority of other agencies.<sup>142</sup> Without situational awareness, agencies adhered to existing organizational norms, thereby hindering collaboration and effective response. Leaders’ actions and failures to act, due to their inability to fully understand the situation, compounded the crisis. While it is extremely challenging for leaders to coalesce various agencies’ interests, capabilities, and resources in response to complex crises, meta-leaders are able to “[see] through the confusing, inconsistent and differing interpretations to develop a clear picture of the problem.”<sup>143</sup>

### **3. Lead the Silo**

The available reports regarding the Christopher Dorner crisis do not speak to leadership’s level of mentorship, nor do they facilitate an evaluation of subordinates’ level of respect, commitment, and dedication toward leaders. Thus, an assessment of how these factors may affect a leader’s ability to lead during a crisis could not be determined. However, when reviewing how leadership directed personnel during this incident, it can be seen that unclear direction and ineffective information flow generally permeated the response. The Police Foundation similarly concluded, “The rush to capture the suspect and the lack of supervisor-level intervention led to command and control failures at many

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<sup>140</sup> Police Foundation, 6.

<sup>141</sup> Police Foundation, 63.

<sup>142</sup> Police Foundation, 57.

<sup>143</sup> Marcus et al., “The Five Dimensions of Meta-leadership,” 10.

levels.”<sup>144</sup> This was notably evident in overwhelming officer self-deployment to several of the scenes.

Several references throughout the Police Foundation’s report discuss supervisors at multiple levels who failed to provide effective guidance and direction. Although executive leadership cannot oversee every person or element within an organization, especially during a crisis, leaders are responsible for the actions of their staff. According to Marcus et al., meta-leaders are known for effectively developing, mentoring, and molding leaders.<sup>145</sup> While empowerment and trust are positive attributes of a leader, leaders must also set the tone and expectations for the organization.

During interviews conducted after the event, subordinates described a lack of communication and information flow from their leaders.<sup>146</sup> This gap in communication led subordinates to believe that leaders were not empathic to their concerns, fostering distrust for leadership.<sup>147</sup> Effective crisis communication is one of the most effective means for imposing order and furthering trust in highly dynamic environments.<sup>148</sup> Open communication also promotes an environment of trust, which has been determined to be an important component of team performance during crises.<sup>149</sup>

Although poor discipline was a pervasive characteristic of the nine-day event, there were examples of leaders successfully leading their organizations. Leaders within the California Highway Patrol and Corona and Irvine Police Departments efficiently led their organizations when they redirected and held back their personnel on the final day of the Dorner crisis. The LAPD also exhibited effective organizational leadership in planning, organizing, and deploying nearly eighty separate protective details while still maintaining their day-to-day operations. Likewise, understanding the impact two mistaken identity shootings would likely have within the community, the Torrance Police

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<sup>144</sup> Police Foundation, “Police under Attack,” 55.

<sup>145</sup> Marcus et al., “The Five Dimensions of Meta-leadership,” 14.

<sup>146</sup> Police Foundation, “Police under Attack,” 64.

<sup>147</sup> Police Foundation, 64.

<sup>148</sup> Boin, *The Politics of Crisis Management*, 148; James and Wooten, *Leading under Pressure*, 113.

<sup>149</sup> Boin, *The Politics of Crisis Management*, 49; James and Wooten, *Leading under Pressure*, 113.

chief went door to door within the community to explain the circumstances surrounding the shootings and to provide reassurance.<sup>150</sup>

Leadership's lack of clear internal guidance and direction likely contributed to the overall poor coordination and collaboration between agencies. This manifested in the intentional actions of investigators who worked outside the scope of their missions and without interagency approval in their attempt to locate Dorner. These actions distracted the local authority's attention and required the diversion of valuable resources.<sup>151</sup> The perceived deliberate withholding of information and competition among agencies may also have been the result of leadership's inability to effectively lead their own organizations.

#### **4. Lead Up**

As similarly noted in the prior case study, this component of the meta-leadership model could not be adequately reviewed and analyzed based on the publicly available information surrounding this event.

#### **5. Lead Across—Connectivity**

The Police Foundation highlights poor connectivity among agencies that responded to the Dorner incident: "The findings in this report merely scratch the surface of more significant issues of collaboration across jurisdictional boundaries."<sup>152</sup> The Dorner case involved numerous agencies across expansive territory, each with different goals, objectives, capabilities, and resources. The unique threat Dorner posed to law enforcement intensified the difficulties of leading such a complex crisis, elevating the need for extensive coordination and decisive leadership. However, insufficient connectivity in the Dorner case underscores a large number of the lessons learned that were identified following the event.

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<sup>150</sup> Police Foundation, "Police under Attack," 25.

<sup>151</sup> Police Foundation, 55.

<sup>152</sup> Police Foundation, 48.

A lack of interagency collaboration and prior relationships contributed to self-deployment, competition between agencies, the intentional withholding of information, and investigators who operated outside the scope of their duties. An example of leadership failing to align these disparate groups was the decision to continue individual command centers despite the incident expanding into multiple territories. Even when the MAC was established several days into the incident, it did not serve as a unified command and participation was not uniform across agencies.<sup>153</sup> This is consistent with crisis leadership research, which suggests that existing organizational structures and cultures create a silo effect that can inhibit the effective response and management of critical incidents.<sup>154</sup>

Several other instances of poor connectivity include the poor communication between LAPD's protective details and the local jurisdictions in which they were operating. There was an expectation the LAPD teams would contact local jurisdictions, but in many instances the agencies were not notified.<sup>155</sup> This is consistent with the significant number of officers who operated outside their jurisdictions without approval. In many instances, these officers also had no communication link or capability with the local jurisdiction to obtain assistance.<sup>156</sup> Nonexistent prior coordination regarding interoperability issues was realized following Dorner's ambush of two LAPD officers; the officers had to flag down a civilian to borrow a cell phone and report the incident.<sup>157</sup> Another example of poor connectivity was the disagreement over who would process the truck Dorner left ablaze, and which agency would be the first to file charges.

As research has shown, the overlapping missions of responding agencies, the struggle for control, and historical rivalries among agencies can compound crises.<sup>158</sup> Thus, strong leaders are needed to establish common ground, instill unity, and align

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<sup>153</sup> Police Foundation, 46.

<sup>154</sup> Marcus, Dorn, and Henderson, "Meta-leadership," 128–29.

<sup>155</sup> Police Foundation, "Police under Attack," 62.

<sup>156</sup> Police Foundation, 50.

<sup>157</sup> Police Foundation, 59.

<sup>158</sup> Dorn, Henderson, and Marcus, "Meta-leadership," 42.

multiple agencies in the midst of a crisis. Meta-leaders are able to realize the synergy that can occur when combining other agencies' knowledge, skills, and resources.<sup>159</sup> In the Dorner case, parochial thinking, competition, and adherence to existing organizational structures contributed to disunity among agencies.

### **C. CASE ANALYSIS**

Throughout the Christopher Dorner crisis, leadership's actions were misaligned with many of the skills and attributes of meta-leadership. A meta-leader has the ability to see the bigger picture and to build connectivity, thereby leveraging interagency resources and expertise.<sup>160</sup> Missing throughout the Dorner case were the attributes for finding common ground and involving agencies equitably for a common purpose.<sup>161</sup> If such skills had been applied, collaboration may have increased, resulting in a more efficient and effective overall response to this series of events.

Leaders' decisions and actions throughout the Dorner crisis evidenced their struggle to see the big picture and to identify strategic problem areas. Marcus et al. explain that in the absence of meta-leadership, leaders struggle with situational awareness and problem assessment.<sup>162</sup> The increasingly failed collaboration as the Dorner crisis expanded into additional territories exemplified leadership's inability to see beyond the chaos. While a few leaders provided clear direction to their personnel upon the discovery of Dorner on February 12, throughout the event leaders consistently failed to effectively lead their own agencies. This resulted in substantial self-reporting and personnel willfully operating beyond their areas of responsibility. The lack of a clearly established unified command may have precipitated the overall lack of communication and poor collaboration between detectives, officers, and investigators. These actions suggest that leaders failed to see the crisis from multiple perspectives, to understand the complexity of the event, and to anticipate the ripple effects of their actions.

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<sup>159</sup> Marcus et al., "The Five Dimensions of Meta-leadership," 23.

<sup>160</sup> Marcus et al., 24–30.

<sup>161</sup> Marcus et al., 30.

<sup>162</sup> Marcus et al., 11.

Without situational awareness or unity of effort, leaders operated in an environment of competing interests and information silos.<sup>163</sup> According to the Police Foundation, this conflict may have resulted from “agencies remaining concerned with their own case orientation, and their own view of what should take precedence.”<sup>164</sup> This lack of unity contributed to disagreements about how to proceed and decision-making authority. The competing interests may have clouded agencies’ ability to see that a unified effort could better serve all those involved.

Disagreements and competing interests were pervasive throughout the nine-day event and revealed agency leaders’ ineffective conflict management skills. Meta-leaders, on the other hand, recognize the struggle for control and competition that commonly accompanies the confluence of agencies with overlapping missions.<sup>165</sup> These leaders strive to build consensus and resolve disputes while keeping everyone on task.<sup>166</sup> The ability to find mutually beneficial solutions is critical when multiple agencies with overlapping jurisdictional responsibilities converge on a crisis.

Despite this event’s unprecedented nature, agencies pursued their own interests and continued to operate within their rigid and predictable organizational structures. Meta-leaders are described as possessing “organizational sensibility,” or the ability to recognize that new methods and ways of aligning components are needed in response to emerging threats.<sup>167</sup> Such leaders understand that complex crises cannot be managed by one agency alone and aspire to strategically align multiple agencies’ strengths and resources. Leadership’s inflexibility and inability to adapt in the Dorner case bred the poor interagency collaboration that ensued. Conversely, by understanding various agencies’ motivations and goals, meta-leaders are able to achieve connectivity among

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<sup>163</sup> Police Foundation, “Police under Attack,” 50.

<sup>164</sup> Police Foundation, 71.

<sup>165</sup> Marcus et al., “The Five Dimensions of Meta-leadership,” 22.

<sup>166</sup> Dorn, Henderson, and Marcus, “Meta-Leadership,” 51–52.

<sup>167</sup> Dorn, Henderson, and Marcus, 50.

similar and divergent organizations.<sup>168</sup> These leaders recognize the synergy that can be achieved by combining resources toward a common objective.

Although today's crises are unpredictable, these incidents commonly span multiple jurisdictions and require the combined efforts of federal, state, and local agencies. Thus, law enforcement leaders must anticipate and prepare to lead internally and across agencies during such events. According to the Police Foundation, operating in complex, multi-agency response environments "requires different skill sets, knowledge bases, and outside connections among personnel in these organizations."<sup>169</sup> As this statement suggests, leaders' skills and abilities must extend beyond those required in routine, day-to-day environments. Crisis leadership research further suggests that, during complex events, leaders must be able to build connectivity, collaborate, and direct personnel over whom they have no official control.<sup>170</sup>

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

The Christopher Dorner case illustrates the many challenges leaders face when leading both internally and "across" during complex events. Leaders did not exhibit many of the key meta-leadership competencies; instead, they maintained a parochial view and failed to establish a unified effort across agencies. The Police Foundation report suggests the absence of prior relationships, trust, and training contributed to the poor leadership and agency cooperation.<sup>171</sup> Without collaboration at the strategic level, competition and poor coordination seeped down to lower organizational levels. This not only hampered the response efforts, but in some situations created a more dangerous environment. The Christopher Dorner case affirms the importance of numerous meta-leadership competencies, including situational awareness, problem assessment, ability to see the big picture, ability to work with ambiguity, and collaboration. These skills proved not only vital to leading one's organization, but also to leading across agencies.

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<sup>168</sup> Dorn, Henderson, and Marcus, 47.

<sup>169</sup> Police Foundation, "Police Under Attack," 45.

<sup>170</sup> Dorn, Henderson, and Marcus, "Meta-leadership," 42.

<sup>171</sup> Police Foundation, "Police under Attack," 85, 86.

The next chapter further examines the meta-leadership model by applying the meta-leadership competencies to leadership's actions in response to the Boston Marathon bombings. Similar to the Christopher Dorner case, the Boston Marathon case resulted in hundreds of resources from local, state, and federal agencies converging on the greater Boston area. The Boston Marathon bombings also serve as an interesting case study given the planned nature of the Boston Marathon, juxtaposed against the more fluid crisis events that transpired in the days following the bombings. The Boston Marathon bombings case study builds upon the analysis of the prior studies, presenting additional findings regarding crisis leadership and the meta-leadership model.



## **IV. 2013 BOSTON MARATHON BOMBINGS**

The initial response and investigation of the Boston Marathon bombings, along with the subsequent manhunt for the suspects, involved multiple jurisdictions and prompted a massive response. With its designation as a terrorism event and the suspects still at large, thousands of law enforcement officers representing local, state, and federal agencies converged on Boston. In the midst of the overwhelming response and the looming threat, leaders shared command of the incident, effectively collaborating to make difficult decisions and coordinate crisis response efforts. Despite the unified effort and extensive collaboration following the initial bombings, a lack of cooperation and conflict existed in response to the events that followed. The duration of this event, coupled with its multi-discipline and multi-agency response, make the Boston Marathon bombings an excellent case to further examine leadership's actions within the context of the meta-leadership model.

### **A. BACKGROUND**

On April 15, 2013, two improvised explosive devices (IEDs) detonated near the finish line of the Boston Marathon. The explosions caused three deaths and injured over 250 spectators.<sup>172</sup> An investigation determined the devices had been placed in backpacks and positioned on the ground in spectator viewing areas.<sup>173</sup> Following the explosions, many of the key agency representatives quickly formed a unified command and directed the ensuing recovery and investigative efforts.<sup>174</sup> In the days following the initial attacks, leaders had to contend with the possibility of future attacks while also ensuring the necessary services were provided to those directly and indirectly impacted by the explosions.

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<sup>172</sup> Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) et al., "After Action Report for the Response to the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombings," (after-action report, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2014), 4, <http://www.mass.gov/eopss/docs/mema/after-action-report-for-the-response-to-the-2013-boston-marathon-bombings.pdf>.

<sup>173</sup> MEMA et al.

<sup>174</sup> MEMA et al., 9.

A Harvard Kennedy School of Government report on the Boston Marathon bombings stated the response to the explosions “sprang from a platform of structure, process, and personnel designated to be able to cope with a significant emergency.”<sup>175</sup> A multi-agency and multi-disciplined team of officials was deployed throughout the race course to provide security and medical services. In addition to the forward-deployed personnel, a multi-agency coordination center and numerous other state and local command centers were also established in support of the race.<sup>176</sup> With the existing structures and resources already in place, leaders and first responders were immediately able to transport and provide medical treatment to the injured, secure the crime scene, and manage the runners who were still on the course.

During a press conference on the evening of April 15, 2013, it was announced that this incident was likely a terrorist event and that the FBI would be leading the investigation.<sup>177</sup> Three days later, the FBI released photographs of two potential suspects and sought the public’s assistance to identify them. Later that same evening, a police officer with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) was shot and killed as he sat in the front seat of his patrol car on the MIT campus.<sup>178</sup> Shortly thereafter, a sports utility vehicle was carjacked in Allston, Massachusetts, and the driver was held captive by the carjackers. The driver was eventually able to flee from the subjects and called 911. As the driver was explaining to officers that the carjackers may also have been involved in the bombings, the stolen vehicle was located by law enforcement authorities in Watertown, Massachusetts.

While the response to the initial bombings was structured and coordinated, the events that followed in Watertown were fluid, disorganized, and chaotic. As a Watertown police officer followed the stolen sports utility vehicle, the driver began firing at the officer and the passenger began throwing IEDs in the officer’s direction. Additional

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<sup>175</sup> Herman B. Leonard et al., *Why Was Boston Strong? Lessons from the Boston Marathon Bombing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2014), 6, [https://ash.harvard.edu/files/why\\_was\\_boston\\_strong.pdf](https://ash.harvard.edu/files/why_was_boston_strong.pdf).

<sup>176</sup> MEMA et al., “After Action Report,” 4.

<sup>177</sup> MEMA et al., 24.

<sup>178</sup> MEMA et al., 5.

officers arrived and a firefight ensued with the two suspects. One of the suspects was fatally wounded, but the second suspect was able to flee the scene. Authorities located the second suspect's abandoned vehicle a short distance away and established a perimeter in an effort to contain the suspect. A shelter-in-place order was put into effect for Watertown and, after attempts to locate the suspect were unsuccessful, the order was lifted the following day. Shortly thereafter, a Watertown resident located an individual hiding in his winterized boat, which was parked in the homeowner's backyard. The resident called 911 and a massive number of law enforcement authorities converged in the area of the boat and successfully took the second bombing suspect into custody.

The 2013 Boston Marathon bombings and the events that followed provide two very different examples of crisis response. During the marathon bombings, a highly structured incident response framework was in place and poised to handle any public health and safety concerns. The Boston Marathon represented a "fixed event," where an incident command structure and the necessary assets were in place to handle any potential emergencies.<sup>179</sup> Conversely, the shootout with the suspects in Watertown on April 18 and the manhunt that culminated in the second suspect's arrest on April 19, represented "no-notice" crisis events.<sup>180</sup> In the no-notice events, the command and control structures were organized as the events unfolded, which led to a less coordinated response and friction between agencies.

## **B. APPLICATION OF THE META-LEADERSHIP MODEL**

### **1. The Person**

In the aftermath of the two explosions near the finish line of the 2013 Boston Marathon, key agency leaders displayed self-awareness and saw the big picture as they came together quickly to form a unified command. A Harvard study of the incident indicated that several leaders expressed "a need to find their colleagues and create a command structure that integrated key partner agencies."<sup>181</sup> One senior official in

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<sup>179</sup> Leonard et al., *Why Was Boston Strong*, 6.

<sup>180</sup> Leonard et al., 6.

<sup>181</sup> Leonard et al., 10.

particular understood the larger picture when he pulled another high-level official away from the crime scene and expressed the need to establish a joint command. Feeling the urge to find one another and join forces, leaders understood the importance of coordinating resources and response efforts across multiple agencies, a key trait of meta-leaders.<sup>182</sup> In a similar manner, the governor was able to see beyond just the initial crisis when he steered agency leaders away from addressing the more tactical issues and sought to identify future issues for which they should be preparing.<sup>183</sup>

In the face of the ambiguous and conflicting intelligence surrounding the event, the unified command remained calm and disciplined during the crisis. Despite information leaks, speculative media assessments, and an unrelated explosion at the JFK Library, the unified command stayed focused on mounting an effective response and thorough investigation.<sup>184</sup> The unified command creatively redirected a group of National Guard hikers, who were at the marathon for a training event, to assist in securing a perimeter around the scene. Leaders also developed and implemented plans to conduct mass evacuations of visitors along Boylston Street, as well as the 5,000 runners still on course. Leaders further delegated responsibilities and established task forces to handle many of the operational responses to the event.

Leaders' collaboration and critical thinking skills were not only present during the initial response, but also during the events that followed. The unified command made a number of difficult decisions throughout the week-long crisis. The unified command exemplified its level of teamwork, when deciding to publicly release images of the potential suspects after a "healthy and constructive debate."<sup>185</sup> This decision ultimately drew the suspects out from hiding and may have thwarted future bombing attacks. Following the shootout in Watertown, senior leaders again quickly came together and formed a joint command structure. In addition to forming a tactical operations center and

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<sup>182</sup> Marcus et al., "The Five Dimensions of Meta-leadership," 21.

<sup>183</sup> Leonard et al., *Why Was Boston Strong*, 14.

<sup>184</sup> Leonard et al., 18.

<sup>185</sup> Leonard et al., 17.

organizing a systematic search for the remaining suspect, leaders had to make difficult decisions about shelter-in-place orders and shutting down transportation services.<sup>186</sup>

Senior commanders and other members of Boston's emergency response community developed personal relationships and collaborative practices while planning for special events and through regularly held drills and exercises.<sup>187</sup> These training exercises and planning meetings fostered personal relationships, trust, and respect for each other's capabilities.<sup>188</sup> The relationships and trust established prior to this event allowed the leaders to come together naturally and fostered an environment of shared decision making.<sup>189</sup> Through prior interactions, these leaders also understood each agency's specific missions, resources, and capabilities. According to the Harvard report, "The senior commanders of these organizations seem[ed] to have internalized the mindset of strategic and operational coordination."<sup>190</sup> Much of what went well in the Boston Marathon bombings response has been attributed to the established relationships, prior training, and command-and-control structures already in place.<sup>191</sup> Although the unified command set the tone for a high level of cooperation, there was some resistance to information sharing, and there remained competition between agencies at the lower levels.

## **2. The Situation**

Throughout the response to the Boston Marathon bombings, numerous individuals effectively made sense of the unfolding events, despite ambiguity. For example, a Boston Emergency Medical Services (EMS) captain, immediately following the bombings, instructed transport units to remain at their staged locations until they could better assess the situation.<sup>192</sup> This brief pause allowed the EMS commanders to make sense of the

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<sup>186</sup> Leonard et al., 23, 24.

<sup>187</sup> Leonard et al., 32.

<sup>188</sup> MEMA et al., "After Action Report," 9.

<sup>189</sup> Leonard et al., *Why Was Boston Strong*, 10.

<sup>190</sup> Leonard et al., i.

<sup>191</sup> Leonard et al., ii.

<sup>192</sup> Leonard et al., 28.

crisis and to develop a strategic and more efficient response plan. In another example, the Boston Police Department repeatedly reminded its responding officers not to block the roadways in order to allow ingress and egress for emergency response vehicles. Many Boston Police Department officers also took the initiative to transport survivors of the blast to medical facilities once all the available ambulances were utilized. Effective pre-planning, coupled with the swift actions of the Boston Police Department and medical personnel, enabled those with significant injuries to be transported to a medical facility within thirty minutes of the blasts.<sup>193</sup> Another notable example was a trauma director who, in an effort to create a more routine and comfortable environment for the doctors and nurses, established “micro-sites” within the emergency room.<sup>194</sup> The director aspired to create a familiar atmosphere for the medical personnel so they could concentrate on a single patient even though they were responding to a larger mass-injury event.<sup>195</sup> Hospital staffs also had the presence of mind to search the victims for weapons or explosives before bringing them into the emergency room, in the event they were involved in the bombing plot.<sup>196</sup> According to the Boston Marathon bombings after action report, strong information sharing between agencies on the day of the bombings contributed to effective situational awareness among the leaders and first responders.<sup>197</sup>

Shortly after forming, the unified command demonstrated its ability to effectively assess the situation and make sound strategic decisions. This is consistent with meta-leaders, who are able to see through the confusion of crises and develop a clear understanding of the problem.<sup>198</sup> Leaders initially addressed the operational concerns, such as the initial law enforcement response, providing ample medical resources and securing the crime scene. In addition to the traditional operational response to such events, leaders in Boston were faced with evacuating spectators and the 5,000 remaining runners, while heeding the possibility of additional threats to key facilities and

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<sup>193</sup> Leonard et al., 8.

<sup>194</sup> Leonard et al., 9.

<sup>195</sup> Leonard et al.

<sup>196</sup> Leonard et al., 28.

<sup>197</sup> MEMA et al., “After Action Report,” 85.

<sup>198</sup> Marcus et al., “The Five Dimensions of Meta-leadership,” 10–12.

infrastructure.<sup>199</sup> One senior official displayed a keen sense of awareness when he asked, “What are we missing?” and “Where are they going to hit us next?”<sup>200</sup> This curiosity led to speculation that the public transportation system or trauma centers could be subject to an attack.

As is often characteristic of decision making during crises, leaders in Boston had to make difficult decisions without the benefit of all the necessary information. Under the belief that additional facilities and infrastructure could be attacked, the unified command weighed the potential risks against the impact of shutting down the transportation system to thousands of people and made the tough decision to keep public transportation running. However, the command developed a strategy to mitigate the potential threat and decided to increase the security presence at the city’s transportation hubs. In order to alleviate the potential impact to law enforcement agencies, the governor approved the use of 1,000 Massachusetts Army National Guard soldiers to supplement the existing security presence at these locations.<sup>201</sup> Similarly, leaders ensured law enforcement tactical teams were deployed to Boston’s trauma centers to provide security.

As the crisis shifted to Watertown, the unified command continued to display effective decision making, situational awareness, and problem-assessment abilities. Following the initial confrontation with the bombing suspects, one suspect fled the scene but officers believed he was still in the local area. As a perimeter was established and a systematic plan was put into place to search the area, leaders began asking critical questions about why the suspects had come to Watertown and whether the suspects’ affiliates may live in the area.<sup>202</sup> In light of these concerns, leaders decided to lock down a wider area and to use tactical teams to conduct the searches. After evaluating the situation and the potential danger to the community, the unified command recommended that the mayor and governor order a shelter in place for the local area and suspend all transportation services. Understanding the impact this could have on specific

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<sup>199</sup> Leonard et al., *Why Was Boston Strong*, 25.

<sup>200</sup> Leonard et al., 12.

<sup>201</sup> MEMA et al., “After Action Report,” 44.

<sup>202</sup> Leonard et al., *Why Was Boston Strong*, 23, 24.

stakeholders, the governor solicited input from state and local senior leaders and decided to implement the orders.<sup>203</sup> Again, clearly understanding the impact the shelter-in-place order had on businesses and the community at large, following a 12-hour search, the governor lifted the orders.

As highlighted previously and in more detail within this section, leaders also saw the crises from multiple perspectives and understood their impact on the community. The unified command prioritized keeping key city and state leaders, as well as the public, well informed.<sup>204</sup> A 24/7 mayor's help line and social media were utilized throughout the event to provide situational awareness to those most affected by the bombings. The unified command not only carried out coordinated press conferences during the initial stages of the crisis, but also sought the public's assistance to acquire photographic evidence.<sup>205</sup> The citizen-provided images were integral to helping law enforcement identify two persons of interest. Leaders were also mindful of the potential for competing interests as agencies with similar responsibilities and capabilities joined together during the response. Although the FBI took the lead role in the investigation, leaders remained aware of the potential conflicts and managed the investigation in a task-force environment. This was also exemplified in the composition of the evidence collection teams, who were comprised of representatives from multiple agencies.<sup>206</sup>

Despite numerous instances of effective decision making and problem solving, poor situational awareness and connectivity plagued both Watertown incidents. Given the significant law enforcement presence already in the area, the local jurisdiction, as well as the unified command, neither anticipated nor prepared for the overwhelming law enforcement response to these events. The poorly organized response added to the existing confusion and placed officers in cross-fire situations. The resulting unclear command and control compromised officer safety.<sup>207</sup> During the shootout in Watertown,

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<sup>203</sup> MEMA et al., "After Action Report," 108.

<sup>204</sup> MEMA et al., 85.

<sup>205</sup> Leonard et al., *Why Was Boston Strong*, 16.

<sup>206</sup> Leonard et al., 17.

<sup>207</sup> MEMA et al., "After Action Report," 61, 62.



a Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) officer purportedly suffered gunshot wounds as a result of friendly fire.<sup>208</sup> Unlike police officers' response to the marathon bombings, responding officers in this incident blocked the streets with their vehicles. This hampered both the pursuit of the fleeing subject and the evacuation of the injured MBTA officer. A similar law enforcement response, with officers self-deploying and placing themselves in cross-fire situations, occurred when the second subject was discovered inside the Watertown resident's boat. At this location, officers exhibited poor discipline and awareness when they engaged in contagious shooting at the boat.<sup>209</sup>

### **3. Lead the Silo**

The available reports regarding the Boston Marathon bombing do not facilitate an in-depth analysis of leadership's level of mentorship, nor do they allow for an evaluation of their subordinates' level of respect, commitment, and dedication. However, what can be derived from the material is that leaders at the strategic command level effectively delegated operational responsibilities and, in doing so, displayed a level of trust in their subordinates. Following the initial bombings, leaders organized an explosive ordnance disposal command center and established interagency teams to process the crime scene and conduct the investigation. After the initial confrontation with the suspects in Watertown, leaders also established a tactical operations center to systematically organize the tactical search for the second suspect.<sup>210</sup> Leaders fell short, however, in understanding and addressing the fatigue and stress placed upon their personnel. According to the Harvard report, by the time of the second suspect's arrest, many officials had been awake for three days or more.<sup>211</sup>

Boston EMS leaders' response to the marathon bombings serves as an excellent example of leaders effectively leading their organization. Initially, Boston ambulances

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<sup>208</sup> Phillip Martin, "Middlesex DA: MBTA Officer Richard Donohue 'Likely' Shot by Friendly Fire," WGBH News, June 3, 2015, <http://news.wgbh.org/post/middlesex-da-mbta-officer-richard-donohue-likely-shot-friendly-fire>.

<sup>209</sup> Leonard et al., *Why Was Boston Strong*, 27, 40.

<sup>210</sup> MEMA et al., "After Action Report," 87, 104.

<sup>211</sup> Leonard et al., *Why Was Boston Strong*, 36.

were held at their locations until the exact location of the bombings and the scope of the incident were better understood. Gaining this situational awareness resulted in a systematic and organized response. The Boston EMS also designated medical loading officers at three locations and coordinated with a central entity to ensure patients were transported to the most appropriate hospital and that no one hospital was overwhelmed.<sup>212</sup> It should be noted that the activation of hospital emergency operations centers, forward-deployed resources, and increased staffing in preparation for the fixed event contributed to Boston EMS's efficient and effective response.

Despite collaboration at the unified command level, at the lower levels some agencies did not effectively lead their personnel. Officers who self-deployed to both incidents in Watertown added chaos to an already chaotic situation and placed officers in danger. During the unfolding chaotic shooting with the two suspects in Watertown, officers broadcast erroneous information that a state police vehicle had been stolen by one of the suspects. Acting solely on this information, officers indiscriminately fired on a state police vehicle that was observed leaving the scene.<sup>213</sup> Effective coordination and command of tactical resources at both scenes were also lacking.<sup>214</sup> There were disagreements over authority between SWAT operators at each incident, and some officers did not adhere to the incident commander's authority.<sup>215</sup> Individual departments' failures to effectively lead and manage their personnel, combined with poorly defined command and control structures at each scene, contributed to the confusion and competing interests that ensued.

The mayor's office efficiently led and directed several crisis response initiatives following the bombings. These efforts included a mayor's help line, which was established to facilitate services for the race participants and their families. The mayor's office also addressed counseling services and shelter for the racers and others affected by the bombings; soon after the bombings, the mayor's office tasked the Boston Office of

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<sup>212</sup> MEMA et al., "After Action Report," 40.

<sup>213</sup> Leonard et al., *Why Was Boston Strong*, 22.

<sup>214</sup> Leonard et al., 25–26.

<sup>215</sup> Leonard et al., 26.

Emergency Management (OEM) with providing a location where anyone impacted by the bombings could find shelter, food, water, or other services.<sup>216</sup> Later that same evening, a facility was established and operational. Leadership was also sensitive to victims' privacy, and restricted the media from any access to this location. Additionally, a family reunification center was established to provide services and resources specifically for victims and their families.<sup>217</sup> Understanding the importance of reopening Boylston Street as quickly as possible, the mayor tasked the Boston OEM with developing a plan. The OEM employed an organized plan for the reopening, and residents and business owners most affected by the bombings were able to access their homes and businesses only eighteen hours after the area was released by investigators.<sup>218</sup>

#### **4. Lead Up**

Although there is not sufficient data to facilitate an in-depth analysis of leadership's ability to "lead up" to bosses or management, a high level of collaboration was present between law enforcement leaders and senior political leaders. The mayor and the governor were intimately involved with the initial response to the bombings and the incidents in Watertown. Both participated in the press conferences and stayed abreast of each major development throughout the crisis. Effective engagement between senior political and law enforcement leaders enabled the smooth flow of information. Following the shootout in Watertown, law enforcement leaders efficiently articulated their recommendation to close the transportation system and to order a shelter in place. The mayor and governor were quick to support their recommendations, but they also took into consideration the impact to the community and important stakeholders before they issued the orders.

#### **5. Lead Across—Connectivity**

Through a multi-disciplinary and multi-agency planning process, agencies throughout Boston were prepared and poised to respond to potential incidents affecting

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<sup>216</sup> MEMA et al., "After Action Report," 45.

<sup>217</sup> MEMA et al., 105.

<sup>218</sup> MEMA et al., 11.

the marathon. This planning, along with prior simulation exercises, provided public safety leaders a venue for discussing crisis response, as well as the opportunity to build relationships and develop partnerships. In describing the successful response to and handling of the Boston Marathon bombings, Boston Police Commissioner Edward F. Davis, III, stated, “This success was the direct result of dedicated training, relationships already in place, an engaged and informed public, and an unprecedented level of coordination, cooperation and information sharing on the line by local, state and federal agencies.”<sup>219</sup> Building personal relationships beforehand enabled leaders to align resources and interests quickly in pursuit of their shared goals. The early collaboration and cooperation among the unified command may have helped set the stage for the “unity of focus” and “unity of purpose” seen throughout the ranks.<sup>220</sup> The high level of connectivity seen in response to the initial marathon bombings was less evident during the unplanned events that followed later that week.

The two incidents in Watertown were fraught with self-deployment, lack of discipline, and poor command and control. According to one after-action report, “Within 12 hours of the initial firefight with the two suspects, over 2,500 federal, state, and local officers converged on Watertown.”<sup>221</sup> Officers who responded to the Watertown scenes were not formed into teams, provided briefings, or incorporated into the command structure.<sup>222</sup> Leadership’s failure to designate an incident commander and logistics officer created confusion among the supporting law enforcement officers. Unlike the unity of effort that existed following the initial bombings, during the Watertown events supervisors failed to collaborate with their peers and continued to operate within their

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<sup>219</sup> *Lessons Learned From the Boston Marathon Bombings: Preparing for and Responding to the Attack*, Hearing before the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, 1st sess., 113 Cong. (2013), 66, <http://masslib-dspace.longsight.com/bitstream/handle/2452/208189/ocn876829604.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

<sup>220</sup> “Boston Marathon Bombings: The Positive Effect of Planning and Preparation on Response,” Federal Emergency Management Agency, accessed July 23, 2017, 3, <https://www.hsd.org/?view&did=741742>.

<sup>221</sup> MEMA et al., “After Action Report,” 117.

<sup>222</sup> MEMA et al., 113.

own organizational structures. This broken connectivity caused officers to recognize only the authority of those within their own command.<sup>223</sup>

During the early stages of the crisis, senior leaders understood the importance of connecting with the community and other key stakeholders, but this focus waned as the week progressed. Initially, leaders made it a priority to keep the public informed, holding several joint press conferences. However, once the unified command dispersed during the investigative phase, the lack of an established joint information center (JIC) resulted in poorly coordinated public messaging.<sup>224</sup> The mayor's office and law enforcement agencies attempted to maintain communication with the public by establishing the mayor's 24/7 help line and a tips hotline. However, without a JIC, messages were not validated and resulted in the dissemination of inaccurate and misleading information.<sup>225</sup>

Similarly, a lack of collaboration and connectivity existed among the vast number of operation centers activated in response to the bombings. Confusion ensued over which agencies were in charge of which specific response missions.<sup>226</sup> No single center was designated to serve as the central coordinating entity; thus, decision makers lacked a common operational picture. This may have been the result of leadership's failure to create an overall operational plan for the Boston Marathon.<sup>227</sup> Numerous individual agencies developed plans focusing on their specific mission areas, but these plans were not blended to form one single operational plan.

### **C. CASE ANALYSIS**

The response to and handling of the Boston Marathon bombings has been touted as a success in after-action reviews, media reports, and during testimony before congressional committees. The common theme found throughout these sources was the strong teamwork and coordination by public officials and the building of preexisting

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<sup>223</sup> MEMA et al.

<sup>224</sup> MEMA et al., 121.

<sup>225</sup> MEMA et al.

<sup>226</sup> MEMA et al., 87.

<sup>227</sup> MEMA et al., 77.

relationships among public safety leaders.<sup>228</sup> It should not be overlooked that the planned nature of the Boston Marathon contributed to agencies' effective response. The planning, forward-deployed resources, and activated command-and-control structures enabled leaders to effectively coordinate crisis response efforts. However, the planned nature of the marathon did not fully account for the level of collaboration among the unified command and the synergy experienced as a result of these unified efforts.

Meta-leaders view planning and meeting before a crisis as an opportunity to build interconnected networks, which are key components of successful incident response.<sup>229</sup> By establishing relationships before the marathon, members of the unified command built trust and rapport that resulted in constructive decision making.<sup>230</sup> These relationships allowed the unified command to form quickly and set a tone of cooperation and collaboration. It was through effective situational awareness that senior leaders were able to see the size and scope of this incident and identify the need to form a joint command structure. In this manner, these leaders displayed organizational intelligence and recognized that a different structure was needed to address this complex event, which no one agency could handle on its own. At the urging of one senior leader, the unified command shifted its focus from just the incident itself to the strategic issues surrounding the crisis.

Similar to the manner in which senior leaders operationally prepared for potential crises, the manner in which they mentally prepared themselves may also have contributed to their response. Several senior leaders, during interviews conducted as part of an after-action review, described mentally preparing themselves for what they might see and what they needed to do upon their arrival.<sup>231</sup> According to Dorn et al., "Meta-leaders can anticipate how they would act under stress and plan and act accordingly in the preparation phase."<sup>232</sup> Another Boston leader relied on what he had gleaned from former

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<sup>228</sup> *Lessons Learned From the Boston Marathon Bombings*, 60.

<sup>229</sup> Dorn, Henderson, and Marcus, "Meta-leadership a," 55.

<sup>230</sup> MEMA et al., "After Action Report," 71.

<sup>231</sup> Leonard et al., *Why Was Boston Strong*, 10.

<sup>232</sup> Dorn, Henderson, and Marcus, "Meta-leadership," 55.

leaders and determined he needed to stay calm, direct personnel, and help organize the response.<sup>233</sup> The preparation and prior exercises conducted by these agencies provided familiarity and experience, which likely contributed to their ability to make sound decisions despite the unfolding events' uncertainty and ambiguity. Studies have shown that simulation exercises, training, and exposure to prior crises can make a significant difference in a leader's ability to manage a crisis.<sup>234</sup>

One of the strengths identified in the Boston Marathon bombings response was the emergency medical response.<sup>235</sup> In addition to expertly coordinating the triaging and distribution of patients, trauma centers across Boston displayed a high level of situational awareness. An example, as previously mentioned, is the trauma director who established sites where medical personnel could concentrate on a single patient, emulating how they function in more routine environments. During a focus group study of trauma center leaders who handled Boston Marathon patients, these leaders expressed that flexible and cooperative leadership structures enabled their successful response.<sup>236</sup> The leaders further commented that they were able to think outside the box, and "command and control" transitioned to "command and collaboration"<sup>237</sup> This is consistent with Waugh and Streib's conclusion that collaboration and flexible leadership styles are needed during times of disaster.<sup>238</sup>

Despite cooperation at the executive leadership level, there was less collaboration, situational awareness, and command and control at the operational level. Specifically in response to the Watertown incidents, the "silo effect" led agencies to operate within their own organizations and contributed to officers not respecting the authority of outside

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<sup>233</sup> Leonard et al., *Why Was Boston Strong*, 30.

<sup>234</sup> Devitt and Borodzicz, "Interwoven Leadership," 214.

<sup>235</sup> Leonard et al., *Why Was Boston Strong*, 28.

<sup>236</sup> Eric Goralnick et al., "Leadership During the Boston Marathon Bombing: A Qualitative After-Action Review," *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness* 9, no. 05 (October 2015): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1017/dmp.2015.42>.

<sup>237</sup> Goralnick et al.

<sup>238</sup> Waugh and Streib, "Collaboration and Leadership," 131, 136.

agency commanders.<sup>239</sup> This is consistent with research that indicates that people and organizations tend to fall into their normal way of thinking during times of crisis.<sup>240</sup> Agencies' adherence to their existing frameworks created an environment of undisciplined self-reporting and led to competing interests between agencies and personnel. Exhibiting poor situational awareness, officers placed themselves in cross-fire situations, shot at a state police vehicle, and engaged in contagious fire upon the boat in Watertown. This may have been the result of no one agency or no one leader being in charge. As described in the Harvard report, "In tactical situations definitive and authoritative command is an essential resource."<sup>241</sup> Micro commands like those formed at the executive level during the initial bombing response—which mirrored trust, respect, and collaboration—failed to form in response to the Watertown incidents.<sup>242</sup>

In terms of leading and managing the response to the Boston Marathon bombings, no one agency was in charge of the overall response. While this caused some friction at the tactical level, this approach resulted in situational awareness, communication, and collaboration at the strategic leadership level. According to leadership researchers at Harvard, "The critical feature of the leadership of the Boston Marathon bombing was swarm intelligence: the dedicated coordination of decision making and action among city, state and federal government agency leaders, elected officials, business leaders, philanthropists, and the community."<sup>243</sup> Much of the existing research on swarm intelligence has focused on how insects work independently when constructing complex structures.<sup>244</sup> This is similar to the manner in which the leaders in Boston came together and operated without any one person directing the group's behaviors.

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<sup>239</sup> Dorn, Henderson, and Marcus, "Meta-leadership," 42.

<sup>240</sup> Lagadec and Topper, "How Crises Model the Modern World," 27.

<sup>241</sup> Leonard et al., *Why Was Boston Strong*, 38.

<sup>242</sup> Leonard et al., 39.

<sup>243</sup> Leonard J. Marcus et al., *Crisis Meta-leadership Lessons from the Boston Marathon Bombings Response: The Ingenuity of Swarm Intelligence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2014), 27, <https://cdn2.sph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2014/09/NPLI-Marathan-Bombing-Leadership-Response-Report-dist.pdf>.

<sup>244</sup> Eric Bonabeau, Marco Dorigo, and Guy Theraulaz, *Swarm Intelligence: From Natural to Artificial Systems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1–8.



## D. CONCLUSION

Some meta-leader attributes include situational awareness, problem solving skills, good judgment, courage, imagination, and connectivity.<sup>245</sup> While leaders in the Boston Marathon bombings response collectively displayed many of these attributes, no one leader was in charge of the response. Leaders were able to effectively collaborate, build connectivity, and unify their efforts due to the relationships and trust they had developed prior to the bombings. The planning and preparation through exercises and training not only provided a level of experience, but enabled leaders to interact and establish the necessary—and later instrumental—relationships. Despite effective collaboration during the early response stages, conflict and poor coordination ensued during the more fluid crisis events that occurred in Watertown. This demonstrates the challenge of instilling interagency collaboration and teamwork throughout all levels of an organization. The Boston case also highlights that other factors, such as swarm intelligence, may play key roles in leadership’s ability to effectively lead during crisis response.

The next chapter provides a combined analysis of the three case studies and synthesizes what these studies can tell us about the meta-leadership model and crisis leadership competencies. Conclusions and recommendations stemming from the analysis are also offered.

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<sup>245</sup> Dorn, Henderson, and Marcus, “Meta-leadership,” 48–53.

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## V. FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This thesis examined what could be learned about crisis leadership by applying the meta-leadership model to three multi-agency crisis events. During their study of crisis leaders, Marcus et al. determined meta-leaders possess specific attributes, including courage, curiosity, imagination, organizational sensibilities, conflict and crisis management abilities, persistence, emotional intelligence, and persuasiveness.<sup>246</sup> Meta-leaders are also particularly adept at seeing the big picture.<sup>247</sup> A comparative analysis of leadership actions within these three incidents did not reveal a leader, or collection of leaders, who demonstrated all of these characteristics. It was beyond the scope of this project to examine these leaders' skills and behaviors within their normal day-to-day environments. Thus, whether or not these leaders may possess additional traits, and those traits' impact on the leaders' ability to effectively lead during crises, remains undetermined.

This thesis also sought to determine what effective law enforcement leadership looks like in response to a multi-jurisdictional, multi-discipline crisis. The three crisis events selected for this study—the Washington, DC, Navy Yard shootings; the Christopher Dorner shootings; and the Boston Marathon bombings—were all unique in their scale, scope, complexity, and duration. What each incident had in common was the need for leaders and agencies to join together to address a threat of mutual interest. This study discovered that, while effective crisis management behaviors varied across each of the case studies, the common leadership traits, skills, and attributes described in the following sections played a significant role in leadership's ability to effectively respond to and manage crisis events.

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<sup>246</sup> Dorn, Henderson, and Marcus, "Meta-leadership," 48–53.

<sup>247</sup> Leonard J. Marcus et al., "Meta-leadership: A Primer" (working paper, Harvard, 2009), 9, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/1b6b/1441a5d6012d7042edcbec0f15c2c8094361.pdf>.

## A. FINDINGS—COMPARATIVE CASE ANALYSIS

### 1. The Person

#### a. *Big Picture*

Crisis leadership research consistently discusses the importance of leaders who are able to make sense of the crisis and see the incident from multiple perspectives.<sup>248</sup> Likewise, in all three case studies, leadership's ability to see the big picture was essential. In responding to the Washington, DC, Navy Yard shooting, the MPD chief's ability to see the big picture allowed her to perceive a gap in overall incident command and control. The chief responded by assuming the primary leadership role and forming and directing the unified command.

Similarly, during the early stages of the Boston Marathon bombings response, leaders recognized the need to join together in order to coordinate resources and lead personnel. These leaders understood that a cooperative effort at the strategic leadership level was necessary to effectively handle an incident of the bombings' magnitude. One leader, particularly aware of the larger contextual implications, kept the unified command focused on the strategic issues at hand rather than the tactical issues. Conversely, leaders in response to the Dorner shootings struggled to see beyond their parochial view, resulting in poor integration and collaboration throughout the series of events. The struggle for control and self-reporting that ensued not only hindered the investigation, but at times created a more dangerous environment. In articulating the differences between managers and leaders, author Ian Mitroff asserts that managers attend to details, whereas leaders are able to see the big picture.<sup>249</sup>

#### b. *Organizational Intelligence*

In addition to the ability to see the big picture, a second meta-leadership skill that had a significant impact across all three incidents was the need for "organizational intelligence," or the ability to effectively align disparate agency response efforts toward a

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<sup>248</sup> Boin, *The Politics of Crisis Management*, 45.

<sup>249</sup> Mitroff, *Crisis Leadership*, 54.

common objective.<sup>250</sup> As seen to varying degrees within each case study, organizations adhered to their rigid organizational structures and struggled to integrate cohesively. Literature on crisis management and crisis leadership suggests that traditional bureaucratic cultures and structures are not designed to handle crises and struggle to effectively handle such occurrences.<sup>251</sup> Particularly during a crisis, such command structures can negatively affect the internal and external flow of information.<sup>252</sup>

The silo effect—thinking and operating only within the context of one’s own organization—most vividly impacted the response to the Dorner crisis.<sup>253</sup> Agencies’ inability to adjust their protocols and command structures hindered their ability to collaborate across agencies. Adhering to their own organizational structures fostered a competitive environment, which led to poor information sharing, distrust, and personnel who refused to recognize the authority of leaders outside their chain of command. Similarly, during the Washington, DC, Navy Yard shooting, Navy Yard leadership failed to break from their defined command structure and to join the unified command. As a result, key intelligence was not shared with the unified command. During both the Dorner and Navy Yard incidents, leaders failed not only to unify efforts, but also to see how this failure compounded the crisis.

On the other hand, during the initial response to the Boston Marathon bombings, leaders effectively implemented adaptable organizational systems, which led to efficiency, teamwork, and coordination across agencies.<sup>254</sup> However, during the two unplanned events in Watertown, agencies were slow to assimilate their organizational structures. This led to competition, disunity, and personnel who failed to heed the authority of local commanders. Disaster expert Enrico Quarantelli’s extensive research led him to conclude that, too often during crises, agencies are concerned about who is

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<sup>250</sup> Dorn, Henderson, and Marcus, “Meta-leadership,” 50.

<sup>251</sup> Boin, Kuipers, and Overdijk, “Leadership in Times of Crisis,” 87.

<sup>252</sup> Devitt and Borodzicz, “Interwoven Leadership,” 209.

<sup>253</sup> Dorn, Henderson, and Marcus, “Meta-leadership,” 128.

<sup>254</sup> Leonard et al., *Why Was Boston Strong*, x.

control, when the focus should be on coordination.<sup>255</sup> Additional research by Buck et al. suggests that “an organizational model of coordination must be adhered to in organizing crisis response efforts.”<sup>256</sup>

*c. Flexibility/Adaptability*

The case studies not only prove that agencies must have adaptable crisis management structures, but also further demonstrate the importance of leaders’ flexibility. Flexibility allows leaders to successfully deal with the uncertainty and confusion that commonly accompanies crisis events.<sup>257</sup> Leaders responding to the Boston Marathon bombings had to address not only the response to the initial bombings, but also the potential threat the suspects still posed to the community. In response to the incidents in Watertown, leaders had to redirect interagency resources and shift response and investigative efforts to another jurisdiction. These leaders adapted to the evolving situation by maintaining the unified command throughout the event, establishing interagency teams, and systematically addressing strategic issues such as shelter-in-place orders and the decision to shut down transportation services.

Leaders in all three crises operated in new environments and, in many instances, alongside peers with whom they had never previously met. Leaders in the Navy Yard and Boston Marathon crises operated in a unified environment where they were no longer autonomous, and where command and control was shared. During the Washington, DC, Navy Yard shooting, the MPD chief took command and control of an incident that occurred on a military base. Not only was this incident within the federal government’s jurisdiction, but the MPD and the Navy Yard had minimal prior engagement. Although responders persistently ignored the authority of interagency commanders, leaders in each of the three events were required to direct and lead personnel over whom they had no official control.

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<sup>255</sup> Quarantelli, “Evaluating Disaster Planning and Managing,” 11.

<sup>256</sup> Buck, Trainor, and Aguirre, “Incident Command System and NIMS,” 3.

<sup>257</sup> D. P. Moynihan, “The Network Governance of Crisis Response: Case Studies of Incident Command Systems,” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 19, no. 4 (October 1, 2009): 898, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mun033>; Devitt and Borodzicz, “Interwoven Leadership,” 214.

The tendency of leaders and organizations to fall into normative ways of thinking in response to crises hampers their ability to remain flexible and adaptable.<sup>258</sup> During the Dorner shootings, inflexibility prevented agencies from assimilating into a unified command structure and effectively collaborating. Whereas flexibility was credited with the efficient and effective EMS response and triaging of the victims during the Boston Marathon bombings, inflexibility compounded the Dorner crisis.<sup>259</sup> The Navy demonstrated similar inflexibility when it failed to take a lead role in the Navy Yard shooting response, fold into the unified command structure, or establish a family reunification center following the event.

*d. Planning and Preparation*

The ability to anticipate and mitigate the obstacles that accompany multi-agency crises played a significant role in all three crisis responses. According to Marcus et al., meta-leaders have the ability to “anticipate chaos and to imagine how they and the system would act under stress, and plan and act accordingly in the current preparedness phase.”<sup>260</sup> The leaders in Boston saw the opportunity to build connectivity and relationships while planning for special events and through simulation exercises. These previously established relationships were credited with the high level of collaboration between agencies during the response to the bombings.<sup>261</sup>

Exercises and preplanning give agencies the opportunity to develop familiarity and personal relationships. In examining several multi-agency responses to both manmade and natural disasters, Buck et al. discovered that “interpersonal connections become vital to the acceptance and implementation of decisions in crisis situations.”<sup>262</sup> Trust—a key factor in leaders’ willingness to share command and control during a crisis—also begins to develop as personnel work through shared problems together.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Lagadec and Topper, “How Crises Model the Modern World,” 27.

<sup>259</sup> Police Foundation, “Police under Attack,” 53, 82.

<sup>260</sup> Dorn, Henderson, and Marcus, “Meta-leadership,” 55.

<sup>261</sup> MEMA et al., “After Action Report,” 9.

<sup>262</sup> Buck, Trainor, and Aguirre, “Incident Command System and NIMS,” 12.

<sup>263</sup> Buck, Trainor, and Aguirre.

Although it can be difficult to develop trust during a crisis, once it is developed it can improve information sharing and reduce conflict.<sup>264</sup> Crises also have the potential to illuminate a prior history of distrust.<sup>265</sup>

The lack of prior relationships and trust between agencies involved in the Dorner shootings contributed to the poor cooperation that pervaded the event.<sup>266</sup> Leaders also failed to anticipate the struggle for control and competing interests that resulted from the overall disunity. In a similar fashion, the MPD did not form relationships or conduct training exercises with the Navy Yard prior to the Alexis shooting. Without prior coordination, the MPD and Navy Yard were unfamiliar with each other's operating procedures, resources, and capabilities. Leaders in both the Boston and the Dorner crises failed to plan and effectively manage the onslaught of incoming resources. In all these examples, leaders failed to anticipate the need to build inter-connected systems prior to the crises, which negatively impacted crisis response.

## **2. The Situation**

### ***a. Situational Awareness***

A key attribute that impacted leadership's decisions and actions across all three case studies was the ability to develop an accurate picture of the problem. According to Fink, "Decision making under crisis induced stress requires more than anything an awareness of what is going on."<sup>267</sup> Along with seeing the big picture, meta-leaders are able to specifically identify what is occurring and can effectively navigate the ambiguity and uncertainty of crises.<sup>268</sup> This can be especially difficult in a multi-agency environment where information originates from multiple sources and organizational structures hinder the flow of information.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> Moynihan, "The Network Governance of Crisis Response," 907–9.

<sup>265</sup> Boin and t' Hart, "Aligning Executive Action in Times of Adversity," 186.

<sup>266</sup> Police Foundation, "Police under Attack," 74.

<sup>267</sup> Fink, *Crisis Management*, 134.

<sup>268</sup> Marcus et al., "The Five Dimensions of Meta-leadership," 10–12.

<sup>269</sup> Marcus et al., 10.



Poor situational awareness in response to the Dorner shootings was evident in leadership's inability to see the situation from multiple perspectives. Agencies failed to form a clear and unified command structure where strategic decisions could be made and clear direction could be provided across all agencies. This created disunity, which spurred the withholding of information, competition, and distrust. Due to poor situational awareness, leaders were unable to adequately address the overlapping jurisdictional issues and the pervasive struggle for control between agencies.

Conversely, during the Washington, DC, Navy Yard shooting, the MPD chief demonstrated an acute understanding of the situation. The chief anticipated and prepared for a secondary event while also ensuring that stakeholders were kept apprised of the ongoing situation. The MPD chief also shifted resources and designated commanders to handle the department's responsibilities throughout the remainder of the city.

Adept situational awareness was exemplified during the initial response to the Boston Marathon bombings. As the unified command formed and began to lead response efforts, leaders intentionally turned their attention to the broader impact of the crisis and began asking, "what are we missing" and "where are they going to hit us next?"<sup>270</sup> This allowed the leaders to consider other key infrastructures that may be at risk and the actions needed to mitigate the ongoing threat to the community. While the initial responses to the crises in Watertown were fraught with self-reporting, poor discipline, and insufficient collaboration, at the executive leadership level leaders continued to display effective situational awareness. Leaders reconstituted the unified command and considered the risks and impact to the various stakeholders when deciding to order a shelter in place and suspend transportation services.

Likewise, EMS services in Boston took the time to fully understand the risks and scope of the bombings before deploying resources to the scene. EMS then utilized a centralized coordination element to dispatch patients to the most appropriate and best-equipped medical facility. Trauma directors also displayed awareness as they established

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<sup>270</sup> Leonard et al., *Why Was Boston Strong*, 13.

micro-sites to provide the most comfortable and familiar environment for medical personnel as they triaged bombing victims.

***b. Experience***

Within the meta-leadership model, experience is considered a skill that enables leaders to identify gaps and the appropriate responses to those gaps.<sup>271</sup> Boin similarly found that experience is the foundation for sense-making during crisis situations.<sup>272</sup> The MPD after-action report for the Navy Yard shooting highlighted the MPD commander's extensive experience as a key factor in his effective decision making and situational awareness.<sup>273</sup> The report further stated, "Strong leadership skills are honed through exposure to a myriad of experiences, comprehensive training, and police leadership opportunities."<sup>274</sup> The MPD commander realized the need for forward leadership and established a micro-command to coordinate tactical response efforts. The MPD commander centralized communications, assembled and deployed teams, and replaced plainclothes officers with uniformed officers. The commander's actions mitigated both the confusion and chaos that often ensues when a vast number of interagency personnel converge on a scene, thereby reducing potential blue-on-blue confrontations.

A Harvard Kennedy School report on the Boston Marathon bombings stressed the importance of leaders being "carefully prepared *in advance* through training, exercises, and actual experience to assume responsibility for intra-organizational tactical management during crises."<sup>275</sup> The effective Boston Marathon bombings response resulted from a combination of careful planning and years of training.<sup>276</sup> Several years before the bombings, Boston's EMS, police, and fire departments specifically determined how they would work together to handle a terrorist bombing.<sup>277</sup> Planning for special

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<sup>271</sup> Marcus et al., "The Five Dimensions of Meta-leadership," 8, 11.

<sup>272</sup> Boin, *The Politics of Crisis Management*, 31.

<sup>273</sup> MPD, "After Action Report," 31.

<sup>274</sup> MPD, 71.

<sup>275</sup> Leonard et al., *Why Was Boston Strong*, xi.

<sup>276</sup> Leonard et al., 33.

<sup>277</sup> *Lessons Learned From the Boston Marathon Bombings*, 72.

events and engaging in interagency drills and exercises generated experience within the various disciplines that were involved in the Boston event, including law enforcement, trauma doctors, and EMS.<sup>278</sup> According to Borodzicz, “Simulation training has the potential to be a powerful tool for experimental training and assessing competency skills in incident managers.”<sup>279</sup> These cross-organization exercises also allowed responders from different agencies to form personal relationships, which further enabled formal coordination practices.<sup>280</sup>

According to Moynihan’s research on command structures in response to crises, prior crisis experience “enables individuals to use useful cognitive skills even under stress, such as framing the problem, developing mental models, and engaging in sense-making.”<sup>281</sup> Boston Governor Deval Patrick’s prior experience dealing with crisis events allowed him to understand both his role and what he could do to best serve those in charge of crisis response.<sup>282</sup> Governor Patrick ensured effective communication across agencies and, understanding that he was not a subject-matter expert, turned his efforts toward providing support to the various service agencies.

Many of the Police Foundation’s recommendations following the Christopher Dorner shootings suggest that the responding agencies and their leaders lacked experience in managing a multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional crisis. The recommendations stressed the need to collaborate, coordinate early in an event, develop trusting relationships beforehand, and anticipate potential areas of misunderstanding.<sup>283</sup> Of particular note was the recommendation to “develop a regional cadre of executive experts” who, upon request, would serve as advisors to senior leaders.<sup>284</sup> Collectively, these recommendations stress the importance of leaders having prior training or

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<sup>278</sup> Leonard et al., *Why Was Boston Strong*, 33.

<sup>279</sup> Edward P. Borodzicz, “The Missing Ingredient Is the Value of Flexibility,” *Simulation & Gaming* 35, no. 3 (September 2004): 424, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1046878104266221>.

<sup>280</sup> Leonard et al., *Why Was Boston Strong*, x.

<sup>281</sup> Moynihan, “From Intercrisis to Intracrisis Learning,” 193.

<sup>282</sup> Marcus et al., “Crisis Meta-leadership,” 31.

<sup>283</sup> Police Foundation, “Police under Attack,” 84–86.

<sup>284</sup> Police Foundation, 84.

experience with complex crisis response involving multiple agencies. Yukl concluded that the greatest means of developing and growing leadership skills is through exposure to challenging and adverse situations.<sup>285</sup>

Examining crisis leadership in a “volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous threat environment,” a Harvard Kennedy School report explored the acceptability and feasibility of crisis advisors.<sup>286</sup> The notion of the crisis advisor role was based on the premise that today’s crises require crisis leaders to have an additional support structure and having a crisis advisor could improve a crisis leader’s ability to more effectively and efficiently respond to a crisis.<sup>287</sup> As part of a survey, experienced crisis leaders were asked to rank the attributes they believed would be needed in a successful crisis advisor. “Experience” was the most highly ranked attribute.<sup>288</sup> Experience, along with knowledge, was also the most widely cited attribute in the literature on crisis response and crisis leadership.<sup>289</sup>

### **3. Lead the Silo**

Research in support of the meta-leadership model stresses that having the trust and confidence of one’s subordinates is essential to achieving influence within larger systems.<sup>290</sup> Marcus et al. also argue that a leader must have established credibility within his or her own organization in order to gain the respect and followership of those outside the organization.<sup>291</sup> Publicly available case study information did not provide sufficient data regarding subordinates’ respect, trust, and level of commitment to their superiors. Thus, an assessment of how these factors might have affected leaders’ ability to lead during a multi-agency crisis event could not be conducted. However, in leading one’s

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<sup>285</sup> Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations*, 456.

<sup>286</sup> Khaldoun Alkhalidi et al., “Are You Ready? Crisis Leadership in a Hyper-VUCA Environment (Part 2),” *Journal of Emergency Management* 15, no. 3 (June 2017): 139.

<sup>287</sup> Khaldoun Alkhalidi et al., “Are You Ready? Crisis Leadership in a Hyper-VUCA Environment (Part 1 of 2),” *Journal of Emergency Management* 15, no. 2 (April 2017): 118.

<sup>288</sup> Alkhalidi et al., “Crisis Leadership (Part 2),” 143.

<sup>289</sup> Alkhalidi et al., “Crisis Leadership (Part 1),” 127.

<sup>290</sup> Marcus et al., “Meta-leadership,” 13.

<sup>291</sup> Marcus et al., “The Five Dimensions of Meta-leadership,” 14.

organization during a crisis, the importance of crisis management skills and enabling decentralized decision making were consistently observed across the selected cases.

**a. Crisis Management**

An abundance of leadership research has determined that both technical and non-technical skills are important for crisis leaders.<sup>292</sup> However, during crises, leaders are expected to be more assertive and directive.<sup>293</sup> Studies further indicate that directive leadership is crucial to crisis response.<sup>294</sup> The poor directive leadership in response to the Watertown incidents and throughout the Dorner case may have contributed to the personnel challenges experienced during these events. Conversely, the directive leadership displayed by the MPD commander during the Navy Yard shooting contributed to a more organized and safer response.

Self-deployment, along with personnel's unwillingness to respect the authority of those outside their chain of command, was persistent during all three crisis events. Although the MPD commander's actions during the Navy Yard shooting mitigated many of the self-deployment issues at building 197, a massive number of responders engulfed other areas of the Navy Yard.<sup>295</sup> Significant self-deployment and poor discipline were present throughout the Dorner crisis and in response to the Watertown shootings in Boston. Had leaders exhibited better crisis management skills, such as designating an incident commander at the Watertown shootings and establishing a unified command structure during the Dorner shootings, these issues may have been alleviated. Leadership's ability to anticipate self-deployment could help to minimize its potential to compound crises.

**b. Decentralized Decision Making**

Closely related to organizational intelligence, leaders must also empower decentralized decision-making during crises. The Navy Yard MPD after-action report

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<sup>292</sup> Devitt and Borodzicz, "Interwoven Leadership," 211.

<sup>293</sup> Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations*, 40.

<sup>294</sup> Alison and Crego, *Policing Critical Incident*, 112.

<sup>295</sup> MPD, "After Action Report," 42.

underscored the need to equip “personnel with strong leadership skills and the ability to make difficult decisions in the midst of a crisis.”<sup>296</sup> During the Navy Yard incident, a veteran MPD commander, on his own accord, took control of coordinating the response to building 197. His actions not only provided an organized and safer response, but helped mitigate the substantial convergence of resources that descended upon the event.<sup>297</sup> This reflects research that suggests crisis response starts at the lower levels and leaders are often not positioned to make all the important decisions.<sup>298</sup> Donald Moynihan’s study of incident command systems led him to conclude that “decentralized flexibility is needed to deal with ambiguity and turbulence of crisis situations.”<sup>299</sup>

The effective Boston Marathon bombing response has been attributed not only to prior preparations, but also to centralized and decentralized actions taken in the moments following the attacks.<sup>300</sup> During the bombings, the unified command empowered decentralized decision making as they delegated the tactical decisions and shifted their attention to strategic issues. The unified command established a dispersed structure, using task forces and sub-command elements to handle evidence collection, as well as tactical and EOD responses.

Similarly, interviews with trauma directors and emergency room physicians who provided medical care to the victims of the Boston bombings articulated that “autonomy in decision-making at various leadership levels” allowed operations to run smoothly.<sup>301</sup> Flexible thinking and decision making were credited with enabling medical providers to provide a high level of care.<sup>302</sup> These examples further support the notion that, in order to remain adaptable as events unfold during a crisis, leaders must allow for decision making at lower organizational levels.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> MPD, 31.

<sup>297</sup> MPD, 50.

<sup>298</sup> Boin and t’ Hart, “Aligning Executive Action in Times of Adversity,” 181.

<sup>299</sup> Moynihan, “The Network Governance of Crisis Response,” 898.

<sup>300</sup> Leonard et al., *Why Was Boston Strong*, 30.

<sup>301</sup> Goralnick et al., “Leadership during the Boston Marathon Bombings,” 5.

<sup>302</sup> Goralnick et al., 5.

<sup>303</sup> Lester and Krejci, “Business ‘Not’ as Usual,” 87, 88.

When leaders exert control and centralize decision making during crises, they prohibit the formation of adaptable organizational structures.<sup>304</sup> Crisis leadership research suggests that relaxing rather than restricting decision making structures during crisis may be more appropriate.<sup>305</sup> In the same manner, Arjen Boin’s research led him to conclude that “centralization in times of crisis can be a potential liability.”<sup>306</sup> Boin further argues that “crises make it difficult for leaders to truly be in charge and therefore leaders should strive to identify the critical decisions that only they can make.”<sup>307</sup>

#### **4. Lead Up**

The meta-leadership model suggests that being able to influence one’s superior is important to leading in an expansive environment.<sup>308</sup> The effect a subordinate can have on his or her superior is shaped by being a good subordinate, along with educating and keeping his or her superior informed.<sup>309</sup> The literature available on the Navy Yard shooting, the Dorner incident, and the Boston Marathon bombings does not provide sufficient data to examine the relationships between the law enforcement leaders and their superiors. Thus, how one’s influence on his or his superior impacts a leader’s ability to specifically lead during crises could not be assessed.

#### **5. Lead Across**

##### ***a. Collaboration***

Across all three case studies, leaders’ ability to create connectivity among peers and across agencies was crucial. In multi-agency events, responsibility and decision-making authority are rarely the responsibility of one leader. Some studies suggest that it may be impossible for one agency or person to effectively control a crisis event and that a

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<sup>304</sup> James and Wooten, *Leading under Pressure*, 147.

<sup>305</sup> James and Wooten, 205.

<sup>306</sup> Boin, *The Politics of Crisis Management*, 54.

<sup>307</sup> Boin, 64.

<sup>308</sup> Marcus et al., “The Five Dimensions of Meta-leadership,” 17.

<sup>309</sup> Marcus et al., 18.

single-entity leadership model may not be the best one to follow.<sup>310</sup> Meta-leaders understand that, by leveraging other agencies' efforts and resources, they can accomplish more than any one agency can on its own.<sup>311</sup> Through collaboration and building personal relationships, meta-leaders strive to align the interests of multiple agencies in pursuing a common goal.<sup>312</sup>

During the Boston Marathon bombings, senior leaders set a tone of teamwork and collaboration at the highest levels. Building relationships prior to the event played an instrumental role in building the trust and familiarity to unify leadership actions following the attacks. Unity of effort was seen throughout the event as leaders formed interagency teams to address initial response efforts and the subsequent investigation. Through repeated planning meetings for special events and exercises, leaders established partnerships and built connectivity across agencies. These leaders understood the value and importance of building rapport prior to a crisis incident.

The Boston example is consistent with Waugh and Streib's research in the area of effective emergency management; they determined that, "in situations where authority is shared, responsibility is dispersed and resources are scattered, a collaborative, flexible leadership style is needed."<sup>313</sup> During the Boston Marathon crisis, a unified team, as opposed to one ultimate decision maker, came together and took command and control of the incident. Leaders stressed coordination over control, which has been proven to be more effective at integrating agencies during crisis response.<sup>314</sup>

In contrast to the collaborative response in Boston, the inability to build interagency relationships before the Navy Yard shooting hampered response efforts. MPD and the Navy Yard's lack of prior coordination and minimal interagency training led to a poor understanding as to each other's resources and capabilities. This delayed MPD officers' response to the scene and created confusion over who was in charge of the

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<sup>310</sup> Quarantelli, "Evaluating Disaster Planning and Managing," 26.

<sup>311</sup> Marcus et al., "The Five Dimensions of Meta-leadership," 21.

<sup>312</sup> Marcus et al., 22.

<sup>313</sup> Waugh and Streib, "Collaboration and Leadership," 131, 136.

<sup>314</sup> Quarantelli, "Evaluating Disaster Planning and Managing," 27.



event. The lack of prior coordination may have led to the Navy Yard's leadership remaining in their command post and failing to integrate into the unified command. This failure resulted in key pieces of intelligence remaining with individual agencies.

Similarly, without a prior relationship or connectivity, agencies that responded to the Dorner events compounded the crisis, leading to competition, distrust, and poor information sharing. Organizations remained independent and leaders fell short in coalescing their resources and efforts. Although some prior interactions existed between agencies, more intense relationships beyond simple coordination are necessary to achieve collaboration during crises.<sup>315</sup> Leaders in this case failed to set aside their hierarchical and jurisdictional boundaries, which hindered their ability to establish horizontal partnerships.<sup>316</sup> The lack of established relationships and trust led to a divided effort where the synergy of unifying knowledge and resources could not be achieved.

***b. Anticipation***

Being able to anticipate and mitigate impediments to collaboration and cooperation was an important crisis leadership skill across the case studies. Obstacles to interagency cooperation, such as jealousy and competition, are often seen when agencies with overlapping jurisdictions come together to respond to a common problem.<sup>317</sup> Establishing relationships and building trust can foster cooperation and reduce conflicts.<sup>318</sup> Both the Dorner crisis and Watertown incidents faced competing interests and a struggle for control. Establishing unity, building relationships prior to an event, and instilling a tone of cooperation throughout the leadership ranks are elements that can increase interagency collaboration.<sup>319</sup> During pre-event planning and exercises, leaders and other agency personnel have the opportunity to develop important relationships and build trust. As observed during the Boston Marathon bombing and the Dorner shooting

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<sup>315</sup> Lester and Krejci, "Business 'Not' as Usual," 88.

<sup>316</sup> Bolton and Stolcis, "Overcoming Failure," 3.

<sup>317</sup> Marcus et al., "Meta-leadership," 16.

<sup>318</sup> Moynihan, "The Network Governance of Crisis Response," 907, 908.

<sup>319</sup> Marcus et al., "The Five Dimensions of Meta-leadership," 27.

responses, it is important that trust and relationships are established across all levels of the organization.

## **B. CONCLUSION**

An analysis of leadership's actions within the examined crisis events further highlights the important role leaders play in preparing for and responding to crises. Demiorz and Kapucau's research on leadership in emergencies concluded, "Leadership can minimize the damage inflicted by an event, while a lack of leadership can exacerbate the impact."<sup>320</sup> Existing research also conveys that crises' complex and varying natures do not facilitate creation of a precise framework or consistent theory for evaluating effective crisis leadership.<sup>321</sup> Similar challenges were realized in applying the meta-leadership model to the Navy Yard, Dornier, and Boston Marathon incidents. While some leaders and, in some situations organizations, exhibited many meta-leadership skills, they did not exhibit others. This echoes Devitt and Borodzicz's research, which determined that "effective crisis management behaviors vary from incident to incident."<sup>322</sup>

Statistician George Box was famous for stating, "All models are wrong, but some are useful."<sup>323</sup> Many of the meta-leadership competencies, as highlighted previously, are applicable to effective crisis leadership; all the model's dimensions, however, could not be supported by these case studies. The model also fell short in stressing the importance of key leadership effectiveness elements such as experience, technical skills, and training.

Across all three case studies, there was insufficient data to evaluate the influence of trust, credibility, and respect between leaders and their subordinates. This was similarly true regarding the nature of the relationships between leaders and their superiors. The insufficient data limited my ability to assess the meta-leadership model's "lead the silo" and "lead up" dimensions. While this could be a limitation of the case

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<sup>320</sup> Demiroz and Kapucu, "The Role of Leadership," 91.

<sup>321</sup> Lagadec and Topper, "How Crises Model the Modern World," 2; Devitt and Borodzicz, "Interwoven Leadership," 208.

<sup>322</sup> Devitt and Borodzicz, "Interwoven Leadership," 212.

<sup>323</sup> Wikipedia, s.v. "All Models Are Wrong," accessed October 9, 2017, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All\\_models\\_are\\_wrong](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_models_are_wrong).

study methodology, meta-leadership literature lacked empirical data to support these dimensions. While literature does support that these are characteristics of an effective leader, additional data is needed to understand how subordinates' perception of their leaders during normative times affects those leaders' ability to specifically lead during crises. Similarly, keeping one's superior informed, especially during crises, is important to maintaining a good subordinate-leader relationship; however, more evidence is needed to illuminate the importance this plays in a leader's ability to lead during a crisis.

Marcus et al. describe the ability to achieve "strategic connectivity of coordinated effort" as the focal outcome of meta-leadership.<sup>324</sup> Within the case studies, the ability to collaborate and build connectivity was similarly seen as one of the most crucial elements affecting leadership in a multi-agency environment. As previously stated, no single leader in the three studies possessed all the meta-leader skills and attributes. Leaders' response to the Boston Marathon bombings has been praised, and has been the subject of several studies. In response to the marathon bombings, a collective team of leaders unified and effectively directed the incident response. No single leader was in charge of the response, and some researchers suggest that swarm intelligence was the factor that most significantly led to the effective response.<sup>325</sup> The collaborative leadership approach in Boston and the swarm intelligence concept may offer alternative approaches to leading during multi-agency crisis events; further research should consider these applications.

The literature provides little consensus about the definition of leadership and what constitutes effective leadership.<sup>326</sup> The persistent challenges in defining leadership also make it difficult to identify effective crisis leadership.<sup>327</sup> Therefore, in lieu of attempting to compose a rigid crisis leadership framework based on what leaders should or should not do, it may prove more useful to identify the common leadership attributes that have had the greatest impact during actual crisis events. Devitt and Borodzicz's research on crisis leadership similarly led them to conclude that an integrative leadership approach is

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<sup>324</sup> Marcus et al., "The Five Dimensions of Meta-leadership," 24.

<sup>325</sup> Marcus et al., "Crisis Meta-leadership," 27.

<sup>326</sup> Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations*, 3-5.

<sup>327</sup> Devitt and Borodzicz, "Interwoven Leadership," 208.

needed to address the complexities involved in multi-agency crisis response.<sup>328</sup> Devitt and Borodzicz interviewed experienced strategic crisis leaders in the United Kingdom to identify effective crisis leadership competencies. The interview responses fell into four categories: task skills, interpersonal skills, personal attributes, and stakeholder savvy (see Figure 2).<sup>329</sup> However, within the model the areas of focus are interwoven; it is the combination of these skills and attributes that can positively affect leadership effectiveness.<sup>330</sup>

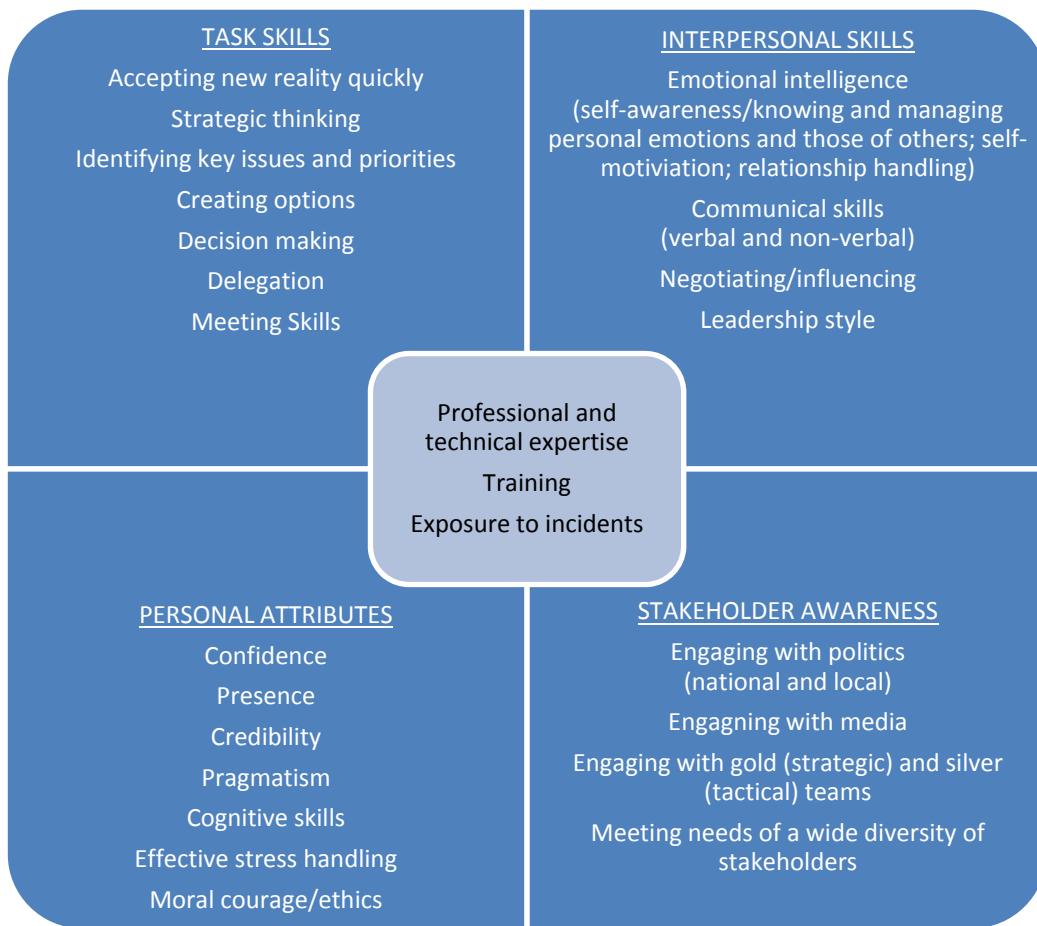


Figure 2. Interwoven Leadership Model<sup>331</sup>

<sup>328</sup> Devitt and Borodzicz, 213.

<sup>329</sup> Devitt and Borodzicz.

<sup>330</sup> Devitt and Borodzicz.

<sup>331</sup> Adapted from Devitt and Borodzicz, "Interwoven Leadership."

The interwoven leadership and meta-leadership models have several overlapping attributes, including decision making, delegation, self-awareness, communication, strategic thinking, courage, and the importance of stakeholders. However, a significant difference between the models is the interwoven model's emphasis on the "quintessential factors" of professional and technical expertise, training, and exposure to incidents (found at the center of the model).<sup>332</sup> The meta-leadership model does not elevate one skill or attribute over another, nor does it identify specific traits that may have a more significant impact on leadership effectiveness.

Similar to Devitt and Borodzicz's prior research, this thesis aimed to identify and assess crisis leadership skills and attributes that leaders display during actual crisis events. Utilizing the meta-leadership model, the skills and attributes affecting leaders' ability to lead crisis response across all three studies were: experience, collaboration, flexibility/adaptability, organizational intelligence, crisis management, situational awareness/problem solving, ability to see the big picture, anticipation, and decentralized decision making. Preparation and planning, along with the development of trusting relationships prior to an incident, were also crucial to a leader's ability to effectively lead during a crisis.

These findings closely align with those of Chiefs Deane, Moose, Ramsey, and Sheriff Cook, who, during interviews following the October 2002 Washington, DC, sniper case, identified the following key responsibilities for leaders:

- Make order out of chaos,
- Remain flexible and help others be flexible,
- Focus on the entire agency,
- Let a competent workforce do its job,
- Get personnel the resources they need, and
- Work with external stakeholders.<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> Devitt and Borodzicz, 214.

<sup>333</sup> Gerard R. Murphy and Chuck Wexler, *Managing and Multijurisdictional Case—Identifying the Lessons Learned from the Sniper Investigation* (Washington, DC: Police Executive Research Forum, 2004), 29.

My personal crisis response experience over the past twenty-four years, as well as the conclusions in this thesis, support Devitt and Borodzicz's notion that crisis leadership does not necessarily resolve to a particular model, but comprises interwoven competencies. This research also supports that a leader's experience, exposure to simulation exercises, and preparation can have a positive impact on his or her ability to lead during crises.

As leadership expert Warren Bennis states, "One thing we know is that a more dangerous world makes the need for leadership, in every organization, in every institution, more pressing than ever."<sup>334</sup> As seen in the case studies, crisis response starts at an organization's lower levels. This illuminates the need for decentralized decision making, and for leaders with crisis training and crisis experience to be strategically placed across all levels of an organization.

Within the literature on crisis leadership, and as observed in the Christopher Dorner and Navy Yard case studies, leaders tend to fall into learned responses and routines during chaotic times.<sup>335</sup> This again shows the importance of leadership's flexibility and preparation for such events through training and prior exposure. Crisis expert Steven Fink also concluded that "without crisis decision making training, leaders risk falling into maladaptive coping strategies."<sup>336</sup> Additional research on the depth of leaders' prior crisis-related training and experience, and their actions during crisis events, is a possible area for further research.

Today's crises tend to involve multiple agencies; during such events, power and authority are shared across agencies. As seen within the case studies, leaders' ability to build connectivity and collaborate across agencies is a vital element to effective crisis response. In the Dorner case, agencies struggled to collaborate due to leadership's inability to see the big picture and the differing organizational structures and cultures. According to Boin, "People tend to respond in a rigid and inflexible manner to threats

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<sup>334</sup> Warren Bennis, *On Becoming a Leader*, Rev ed. (Cambridge, MA: Perseus, 2003), xx.

<sup>335</sup> Lagadec and Topper, "How Crises Model the Modern World," 27.

<sup>336</sup> Fink, *Crisis Management*, 139.

and uncertainty.”<sup>337</sup> However, crises’ fluid and uncertain nature require leaders and organizations who are adaptable. Leadership’s inflexibility in response to the Dorner and Navy Yard cases hindered information sharing.

Preexisting relationships, preparation, and training were keys to the collaborative response to the Boston Marathon bombings. As Mitroff stresses, “Preparation is the best form of crisis management.”<sup>338</sup> Boston demonstrated that establishing trusting relationship prior to an incident can help to mitigate many of the obstacles to interagency collaboration. These leaders effectively delegated responsibilities, which enabled them to see the larger impact of the crisis and view the crisis from multiple perspectives. As Boston experienced, studies show that crisis team performance can be enhanced when preexisting relationships are marked by mutual trust.<sup>339</sup> However, conflict still persisted during the responses to the two incidents in Watertown. A challenge for leaders remains how to embody collaboration, teamwork, and cooperation at the lowest levels of interagency crisis response.

While there remains no formula or specific model to ensure effective crisis leadership, this thesis has discovered common leadership competencies that affect crisis leadership. Through a better awareness and deeper understanding of these competencies, agencies and leaders can better prepare themselves to lead during such events.

## **C. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the results of this study, I make the following recommendations.

- (1) Agencies should ensure that leaders have crisis response experience.

Among the many important crisis leadership competencies, the literature consistently identifies experience as being a key contributor to effective crisis leadership. The research also highlighted responders’ tendency to resort to normal ways of thinking when confronted with chaos and uncertainty. Thus, agencies should ensure that leaders in

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<sup>337</sup> Boin, *The Politics of Crisis Management*, 11.

<sup>338</sup> Mitroff, *Crisis Leadership*, 82.

<sup>339</sup> Boin, *The Politics of Crisis Management*, 49.

key decision-making positions have crisis response training and experience. This experience should occur through prior exposure to crisis situations or simulation exercises. As crisis response starts at the lower chain-of-command levels, leaders in key positions throughout the organization should have sufficient crisis response experience. Agencies should consider implementing crisis observer or deputy incident commander programs to provide personnel with opportunities to obtain exposure to crisis incidents. This exposure will allow personnel to hone crisis leadership competencies such as problem assessment, situational awareness, ability to see the big picture, ability to remain flexible/adaptable, and decision making.

- (2) Agencies should have experienced crisis mentors available to assist leadership during crises.

Organizations should consider having experienced crisis advisors available to assist decision makers during crisis situations. A recent study by the Harvard National Preparedness Leadership Initiative indicated that experienced crisis leaders support the idea of having crisis mentors available during crises. Following the Dorner crisis, the Police Foundation recommended having regional crisis experts available to assist leaders during multi-jurisdictional crises. Similarly, Lagadec proposed rapid reflection forces (RRFs) in the business environment to assist leaders during unconventional situations. RRFs are groups of diverse individuals who take a broader look at the crisis in an effort to assist leaders and to complement tactical response teams.<sup>340</sup>

- (3) Agencies should vigorously train and prepare in interagency environments.

Agencies must vigilantly prepare and train for complex crises. Simulation exercises have been shown to improve numerous crisis leadership skills, including situational awareness, problem solving, and strategic thinking. Through this training, leaders can begin to mentally prepare themselves for a real event and anticipate the potential obstacles they may face in an interagency environment. Leaders at all levels of

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<sup>340</sup> Lagadec and Topper, "How Crises Model the Modern World," 28.



the organization must engage in these exercises. During these events, executive leaders can furthermore set a tone of teamwork and collaboration.

- (4) Leaders should establish trusting relationships with key partners in advance of a crisis event.

During exercises and planned events, agencies can not only test crisis response plans, but also develop familiarity, establish relationships, and build trust with other important stakeholders. Trusting relationships built before a crisis occurs have been crucial to leaders developing the connectivity needed to address multi-jurisdictional, multi-discipline responses.

- (5) Agencies should build flexible, decentralized response structures.

Remaining flexible and adaptable during crises is important for both leaders and their agencies. By training rigorously and strategically placing experienced crisis leaders throughout an organization, leaders can empower decentralized decision making during a crisis. This allows leaders at the higher levels to focus on the strategic issues and the critical decisions that only they can make.

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