

The Role of Organizational Identity in Disaster Response, Recovery and Prevention: A Case Study of an Italian Multi-Utility Company

Authors : Shanshan Zhou, Massimo Battaglia

Abstract : Identity plays a critical role when an organization faces disasters. Individuals reflect on their working identities and identify themselves with the group and the organization, which facilitate collective sensemaking under crisis situations and enable coordinated actions to respond to and recover from disasters. In addition, an organization's identity links it to its regional community, which fosters the mobilization of resources and contributes to rapid recovery. However, identity is also problematic for disaster prevention because of its persistence. An organization's ego-defenses system prohibits the rethink of its identity and a rigid identity obstructs disaster prevention. This research aims to tackle the 'problem' of identity by study in-depth a case of an Italian multi-utility which experienced the 2012 Northern Italy earthquakes. Collecting data from 11 interviews with top managers and key players in the local community and archived materials, we find that the earthquakes triggered the rethink of the organization's identity, which got reinforced afterward. This research highlighted the importance of identity in disaster response and recovery. More importantly, it explored the solution of overcoming the barrier of ego-defense that is to transform the organization into a learning organization which constantly rethinks its identity.

Keywords : community identity, disaster, identity, organizational learning

Conference Title : ICDEM 2018 : International Conference on Disaster and Emergency Management

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : March 15-16, 2018