

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LEADERS IN MANAGING CRISIS SITUATIONS AND BUILDING RESILIENT SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

In today's educational environment, crisis management and building resilience in school communities are critical responsibilities of school leaders. This study examines the many duties that school administrators have when managing emergencies and creating strong school communities. It starts out by looking at the several crisis scenarios that schools could encounter, such as violent incidents or natural disasters. It then explores the significance of strong leadership in crisis management, emphasising the part that school administrators play in guaranteeing the security and welfare of stakeholders, employees, and students. The study also looks at methods for encouraging a supportive school climate and strengthening staff and student resilience. This study offers an overview of effective crisis management techniques and resilience-building approaches, shedding light on the critical role that school leaders play in advancing student safety, wellbeing, and academic achievement.

Keywords: School Leadership, Crisis Management, Resilient Communities, Educational Leadership, School Safety

Introduction

The educational environment of today exposes schools to a range of crisis situations, from violent crimes to natural disasters, all of which have the ability to significantly harm the staff and student well-being as well as the learning environment. According to Foerster et al. (2021) effective leadership plays a critical role in managing these crises and ensuring school communities remain resilient in the face of adversity. The purpose of this study is to examine the intricate role that school administrators play in crisis management and creating supportive school environments.

Crisis situations in schools can take many different forms, including violent crimes, natural disasters, health problems, and disturbances in the neighbourhood. Every crisis has a unique set of issues that must be handled promptly and cautiously to minimise potential harm and expedite recovery. Leaders in schools, including principals, superintendents, and other administrative staff members, are leading the charge on crisis management programmes. They are in charge of making important decisions when under pressure and providing guidance and assistance to employees, families, and kids.

School administrators have a crucial role in proactively building resilient school communities that are better equipped to withstand adversity and recover from it, rather than only reacting to crises. Resilience according to Yu et al. (2022) refers to a person's or a community's ability to overcome challenges, adapt to change, and thrive in the face of adversity. By fostering a supportive school climate, incorporating stakeholders, and providing opportunities for professional development and training, school administrators can create environments that promote resilience and well-being.

By looking at theoretical frameworks, case studies, and practical strategies, this study aims to make clear the critical role that school administrators have in managing crisis situations

and building resilient school communities. By understanding and addressing the issues related to crisis management and resilience-building, school leaders may successfully support the safety, well-being, and academic achievement of every member of the school community.

Conceptual Overview

1. Crisis Situations and Management in Schools

A wide range of occurrences, including man-made emergencies like violent crimes, terrorist threats, or health crises like pandemics, as well as natural disasters like hurricanes, earthquakes, or floods, can lead to crisis situations in schools (Barten et al., 2021). These incidents carry the risk of gravely compromising regular school operations, jeopardising the safety and well-being of teachers and staff, and posing challenging issues for school administrators. However, crisis management typically involves several phases, each with distinct objectives and challenges. In order to manage crisis circumstances and work towards recovery, school administrators must have a thorough understanding of these phases. Below is a synopsis of these phases;

Prevention Phases

In order to reduce the possibility and impact of crises, proactive steps are taken to detect potential hazards during the prevention phase. Elbedour et al. (2021) stated that by putting safety procedures into place, carrying out risk assessments, teaching staff and students, and encouraging a culture of readiness and safety throughout the school community, school administrators can avert disasters.

The primary objective of the preparation phase is to create comprehensive plans and procedures to guide the response to potential emergencies. School administrators should design crisis management plans that outline responsibilities, protocols for communication, methods of evacuation, and strategies for allocating resources. Drills and exercises are also a part of preparation to ensure that staff members are prepared for crises and to assess how well these plans work.

Reaction Phase

The reaction phase begins when an emergency arises that requires immediate attention. School administrators must start the crisis response plan, prepare supplies, and schedule the reaction in order to ensure the safety and wellbeing of students, staff, and other stakeholders (Soled et al., 2020). In order to give the school community regular updates and instructions and to interact with other agencies and authorities as needed, effective communication is essential throughout this phase.

Recovery Phase

Following the resolution of the immediate crisis, a recovery phase is initiated with the aim of restoring regular operations and meeting the emotional and psychological requirements of those affected. Administrators in schools must assess how the crisis has affected their children, identify problem areas, and implement strategies that will help them recover and grow more resilient. This could entail offering counselling, holding debriefings, and creating long-term strategies to deal with the crisis' residual consequences.

2. Building Resilient School Communities

In the context of school communities, Brion (2021) opined that resilience is the ability of schools to successfully adjust, bounce back, and prosper in the face of difficulties, crises, and misfortune. It includes the capacity of educational institutions to sustain a loving and encouraging atmosphere for kids, faculty, and families even during uncertain or turbulent times. In order to build the school community as a whole, resilience in schools entails not only the ability to tolerate and overcome difficulties but also the capacity to grow and learn from adversity. The essential elements of resilience in school communities are summed up in the following.

Prioritising the social and emotional health of students, faculty, and families, resilient school communities provide a welcoming environment where people feel important, connected, and empowered (Rigotti et al., 2020). In order to meet the varied requirements of the school community, this entails developing a sense of belonging, encouraging constructive connections, and granting access to resources and support services. Adaptive leaders that possess a strong sense of empathy, vision, and communication skills guide resilient school communities. Buttressing this, Ganon-Shilon et al., (2022) stated that these leaders are receptive to the needs of their society, skillful in handling difficult situations, and able to motivate and inspire people to collaborate towards shared objectives. Adaptive leaders create a culture of shared accountability and responsibility, empower stakeholders, and encourage teamwork.

Resilient school communities use collaborative problem-solving strategies with stakeholders from all backgrounds, such as parents, teachers, administrators, and community members. By fostering open communication, transparent processes, and an understanding of other points of view, educational institutions can come up with creative solutions to complex issues and reach consensus on shared goals.

Resilient school communities are agile and flexible, able to effectively deal with changing circumstances and unanticipated events (Giustiniano et al., 2020). This could mean making backup plans, partnering with external organisations, and leveraging technology to support distant learning and communication. Schools that prioritise flexibility and adaptability are better equipped to deal with crises and carry-on offering support and education to pupils.

Theoretical Framework

The study draws from the relevance of the following theoretical perspectives to guide and shed light on the role of school leaders in managing crisis situations and building resilient school communities.

Crisis Management Theory

A framework for comprehending how organisations, including schools, can successfully anticipate, address, and recover from crisis circumstances is provided by crisis management theory (Grissom, 2021). This strategy according to Elbedour et al., (2021) emphasises proactive preparation, effective communication, and strategic decision-making in order to lessen the effects of crises and encourage recovery. Using crisis management theory, school administrators may effectively manage crisis situations, guarantee the safety and well-

being of the school community, and ultimately increase the school community's resilience to future catastrophes.

Resilience Theory

Mukherjee (2016) sees Resilience Theory as a psychological paradigm that examines how individuals, communities, and organisations adapt to and thrive in the face of adversity, trauma, or significant pressures. It focuses on understanding the components that promote resilience and allow for positive results even in the face of challenging circumstances. Similarly Drew (2019) opined that resilience is not a fixed trait, but rather a dynamic process that may be improved and strengthened over time. All things considered, the notion of resilience provides a framework for understanding how individuals and communities deal with adversity and overcome obstacles. Through the identification of protective characteristics, the encouragement of adaptive coping strategies, and the creation of supportive settings, resilience can be built and nurtured to promote positive outcomes and well-being in the face of adversity.

Leadership Roles in Crisis Management

A. Pre-Crisis Preparation

When it comes to performing risk assessments and creating thorough crisis management plans, school administrators are essential. To reduce risks and successfully handle emergencies, entails detecting potential threats and vulnerabilities, evaluating their likelihood and potential impact, and creating proactive plans and protocols. To this end Ms, (2021) stated that school administrators work in conjunction with pertinent parties, such as employees, students, parents, and community partners, to guarantee that crisis management strategies are thorough, workable, and customised to the unique requirements and features of the school community.

It is the duty of school administrators to guarantee that personnel are sufficiently taught and equipped to handle emergencies. Training on emergency protocols, crisis communication techniques, and other crucial abilities and information required to handle crises successfully are all included in this. In order to practise and reinforce emergency response protocols, pinpoint areas for improvement, and enhance staff confidence and competency in crisis circumstances, school administrators also organise frequent drills, simulations, and exercises (Croke, 2019).

School administrators assign staff, supplies, and technology to help with crisis response and preparedness. To manage resources and guarantee a cohesive and well-coordinated response to crises, they work in conjunction with pertinent stakeholders such as district administrators, emergency responders, and community agencies. In order to obtain more resources and assistance when needed during catastrophes, school administrators also form alliances and agreements with other groups and agencies.

Additionally, Omilion-Hodges (2015) asserts that during emergencies, school administrators are in charge of creating clear channels of communication and procedures to provide stakeholders with information, updates, and directives. This comprises developing communication plans, putting up technology and communication systems, designating spokespersons and liaisons, and facilitating communication with internal and external stakeholders. In addition to interacting with stakeholders, school administrators also

communicate with parents, students, staff, and community members to learn about their perspectives, resolve concerns, and foster trust in crisis management programmes.

School administrators according to Doll et al. (2021) should regularly review and update crisis management plans and procedures to ensure that they are effective, up to date, and consistent with best practices and changing circumstances. Post-crisis debriefings and assessments are necessary to identify lessons learned, strengths, and areas for improvement. Then, recommendations and feedback must be taken into account for next planning and readiness projects. In order to enhance the community's readiness and adaptability, school administrators also monitor emerging patterns and hazards, revise risk assessments, and adjust crisis management strategies as necessary.

B. Crisis Response and Communication

School administrators try to confront and contain crises as soon as they occur. This may require starting emergency response processes, ensuring the safety and wellbeing of students and staff, and collaborating with emergency responders and authorities in order to mitigate the crisis' consequences and protect people and property.

In the event of an emergency, school administrators act quickly and intelligently by considering the information at hand, risk assessments, and established protocols (Lucija et al., 2022). To protect the safety and security of the school community, decisions on evacuation, lockdown, sheltering, medical response, and other emergency measures may need to be made.

When faced with hardship, school leaders exhibit composure, self-assurance, and perseverance by exercising visible and decisive leadership. They maintain order and confidence in crisis management efforts by effectively communicating with staff, students, parents, and other stakeholders. They do this by offering comfort, advice, and assistance as needed.

School administrators work with a variety of agencies and stakeholders to organise crisis response activities, such as government agencies, emergency responders, community organisations, and school personnel. In order to enable efficient crisis response and recovery, Wu et al. (2020) stated that school leaders set up command structures, liaison positions, and communication channels to promote cooperation, information sharing, and resource allocation.

School administrators place a great value on promptly and openly communicating with stakeholders during emergencies. They accomplish this by providing them with up-to-date, factual information regarding the issue, the steps being taken to address it, and safety guidelines. They use a range of communication platforms, including as phone notifications, social media, email, and website updates, to stay in touch with the school community and quickly address any concerns or questions.

School administrators convey important information and directions to relevant parties in an orderly, concise, and consistent manner during emergencies. They avoid using jargon, keep to plain English, and focus on crucial messages like safety, instructions, and support resources to ensure that messages are clearly understood and actionable by receivers. In order to address concerns, solicit feedback, and offer updates, school administrators regularly engage with parents, students, staff, and community members during times of crisis. To facilitate bidirectional communication and promote transparency, self-assurance, and collaboration

during crisis situations, school administrators establish avenues of communication such as chat rooms, hotlines, and online discussion boards (Dent, 2021).

School administrators coordinate with stakeholders regarding post-crisis recovery and aftercare programmes in order to assist the school community in addressing the psychological, emotional, and physical aftermath of the crisis. They accomplish this by providing details on resources for counselling, support services, and restoration projects. They follow up and maintain continuous communication with stakeholders to ensure that their needs are satisfied and recovery efforts are executed effectively.

Importance of Effective Leadership in Crisis Management

Effective leadership is crucial for managing crisis circumstances in educational institutions. School administrators, including principals, superintendents, and other administrative personnel, have an obligation to ensure the safety of students, faculty, and the entire school community by making critical decisions, organising responses, and providing guidance and support. The ability to maintain composure under pressure, communicate effectively, and manage resources are essential for effectively managing emergencies and mitigating their impact on the school community. In line with this Bishop et al. (2015) opined that in times of crisis, school administrators must demonstrate strong leadership qualities like empathy, resilience, and decisiveness. They must respond quickly to assess the situation, rank the requirements of the school community in order of importance, and provide stakeholders with accurate and understandable information. In order to provide a coherent and effective crisis response, effective leadership also requires coordinating response efforts and working with local authorities, emergency responders, and community partners.

Role of Leaders in Building Resilient School Communities

A. Cultivating a Growth Mindset

School leaders place a strong focus on the importance of perseverance, flexibility, and resilience in overcoming challenges in order to assist stakeholders, staff, and students in adopting a growth mindset. With a focus on learning and personal growth, they empower individuals to take on challenges, grow from their errors, and acquire the resilience needed to overcome adversity.

School administrators place a high value on the development of social-emotional skills including self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and problem-solving since these skills are essential to building resilience and successfully handling stress and adversity (Taylor et al., 2020).

They provide opportunities for children to practise these skills in real-world situations, integrate social-emotional learning into the curriculum, and offer guidance and support to help children overcome challenges and build resilience.

B. Strengthening Support Systems

According to Mitchell et al. (2021) school administrators create and fortify peer support programmes, psychologists, counsellors, and social workers as well as other support networks inside the school community to give staff and students the emotional and social support they require in times of crisis or adversity. They promote open communication, create safe spaces

for people to express their feelings and anxieties, and offer conveniently accessible, private services to satisfy their needs.

School administrators foster a culture of compassion and caring among the student body, encouraging people to look out for one another and lend a hand to those in need. They exhort stakeholders, educators, and students to seek out and support anyone who might be having difficulties or facing barriers. They also promote respect for one another, kindness, and understanding.

C. Promoting Resilience Through Education

School administrators integrate resilience-building projects and activities into the curriculum and school programming to help children develop the skills and coping mechanisms needed to handle stress, adversity, and change. School leaders according to Papaioannou, (2022), should teach students the importance of resilience, provide opportunities for them to practise resilience-building skills like goal-setting, problem-solving, and stress management, and offer guidance and support in order to help them develop resilience in their daily lives.

School administrators use trauma-informed approaches and solutions to serve children who have experienced trauma or adverse childhood situations. Apart from providing professional assistance and materials, they also create trauma-aware settings that prioritise security, credibility, and self-determination. This aids in children's trauma recovery, resilience building, and social and academic success.

D. Engaging Families and Communities

In order to create resilient school communities, school administrators collaborate with families, carers, and community organisations. In order to give more resources and support to students and families in need, they work with community organisations, cultivate strong connections, keep lines of communication open, and include families in decision-making processes.

School leaders interact and work together with families, community groups, and other schools to create a support system that extends beyond the school (Stone-Johnson et al., 2023). To promote interpersonal relationships and a sense of belonging, they organise gatherings, seminars, and additional events that unite individuals and assist them in overcoming challenges collectively.

Strategies for Effective Crisis Management

A. Proactive Planning

To find possible risks and weak points in the school community, do thorough risk assessments. Creating precise emergency preparedness plans that specify the steps to take in case of certain emergencies is also essential.

B. Effective Communication

Create a variety of routes for communication to guarantee that information is shared with all parties in a timely manner. Furthermore, furnish precise and lucid details regarding the circumstances, answering worries and inquiries from interested parties in a timely and truthful manner.

C. Collaborative Response

Create connections and procedures with outside partners, such as law enforcement, healthcare providers, and local government organisations, to ensure efficient coordination. In order to evaluate risks and organise support services, interdisciplinary crisis response teams made up of employees with a range of tasks and specialties should be formed.

D. Post-Crisis Recovery

Give affected people's mental health and psychological support including students, employees, and family's priority (Wu et al., 2020). Encouraging candid conversations, introspection, and group healing within the school community is also crucial. McLeod (2021) suggested that external resources and community partners should be enlisted for long-term recovery.

Leadership Strategies for Building Resilience

Establishing a trusting, cooperative, and supportive environment within the school community is one way that administrators may support kids in developing greater resilience. This means listening to stakeholders' concerns and perspectives, promoting open communication, and involving them in the decision-making process. Leaders may build a strong and resilient school community by encouraging a sense of shared ownership and belonging.

In the same vein, Gimbert et al. (2021) asserts that school administrators should place a high premium on social-emotional learning (SEL) programmes that foster the development of important skills like self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, interpersonal skills, and responsible decision-making. SEL courses help both students and staff develop resilience by providing them with the tools and resources they need to overcome challenges, manage their stress, and build healthy relationships.

By providing targeted support services, school administrators may effectively serve the diverse needs of students, staff, and families. Family outreach programmes, academic tutoring, mental health therapy, and other wraparound programmes aimed at enhancing the general wellbeing of the school community may fall under this category. By addressing the underlying factors that contribute to vulnerability and risk, teachers may promote flexibility and positive outcomes for all members of the learning community.

School administrators can strengthen their ability to respond to emergencies and meet the needs of their community by forming alliances and networks with outside groups, neighbourhood organisations, and other educational institutions (Kemp, 2023). Through the utilisation of outside resources, knowledge, and assistance, educators can enhance resilience and construct a more comprehensive and cohesive network of support for their school community.

School administrators may foster introspection and continual development by supporting ongoing assessments and learning from both achievements and setbacks. Leaders may find areas for improvement, hone their techniques, and gradually develop organisational resilience by routinely evaluating the success of their plans and projects. This entails cultivating an environment that values learning and development as crucial elements of resilience-building initiatives and that encourages experimentation, inquiry, and innovation.

Challenges and Considerations

A. Resource Limitations

Budgetary constraints may affect school administrators' capacity to carry out extensive resilience-building projects and programmes. Access to professional development opportunities, support services, and other resources required to successfully foster resilience within the school community may be hampered by a lack of financing.

According to Zabek et al. (2022), staffing shortages or turnover are a possibility in schools, especially in positions like social workers, psychologists, and counsellors, which are vital for offering pupils social and emotional assistance. Insufficient staffing numbers can put a strain on available resources and raise the job expectations on the staff members who are left, which can hinder their ability to help kids and help them develop resilience.

B. Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

Ganon-Shilon et al. (2022) opined that, to make sure that initiatives to build resilience are inclusive and culturally sensitive, school administrators must negotiate the language and cultural variety within their school community. They must recognise and respect the many histories, beliefs, and values of students and families in order to offer support services and interventions that are customised to each student's unique needs and preferences.

To ensure equitable access to resources and support services for all children and families, schools serving linguistically diverse populations must address language obstacles. School administrators may need to involve bilingual staff and community members, provide multilingual communication channels and resources, and offer translation and interpretation services in order to facilitate meaningful engagement and participation.

C. Trauma-Informed Practice

In order to effectively serve kids who have suffered trauma or unfavourable childhood events, school administrators must use a trauma-informed approach. In addition to offering opportunities for healing and rehabilitation, they must establish safe and encouraging environments that reduce triggers and traumatization and provide trauma-specific therapies and supports.

For staff members and teachers to become more adept at identifying trauma and providing appropriate care, school administrators must make continuous investments in their professional development. To guarantee that staff members feel prepared and secure in helping kids who have experienced trauma, they must offer training on trauma-informed practices, trauma-sensitive classroom management tools, and self-care skills.

D. Community Collaboration

In order to guarantee the relevance, efficacy, and durability of resilience-building initiatives, school administrators must involve stakeholders with varying backgrounds and viewpoints. They have to encourage collaborations with families, carers, community organisations, and other interested parties in order to jointly plan and carry out programmes that cater to the particular requirements and goals of the school community.

To make sure that initiatives to develop resilience are coordinated, coherent, and mutually reinforcing, school leaders must help stakeholders coordinate and communicate

(Openshaw, 2011). Establishing consistent routes for feedback, cooperation, and information sharing is necessary to encourage openness, accountability, and trust among all stakeholders.

Implications for School Leaders

Prioritising proactive planning and preparedness measures can help school administrators effectively predict, prevent, and minimise possible emergencies. This entails carrying out frequent risk assessments, creating thorough crisis management strategies, and giving employees and stakeholders continual training.

In times of crisis, effective communication is crucial. To offer accurate information, address concerns, and coordinate response activities, school leaders must place a high priority on having clear, timely, and transparent communication with all stakeholders, including students, families, staff, and the larger community.

When it comes to helping kids, staff, and families become resilient both during and after a crisis, school leaders are essential. Prioritising the school community's well-being, putting trauma-informed strategies into practice, and guaranteeing access to mental health and counselling services are all important.

For crisis management and recovery to be successful, cooperative collaborations with government agencies, emergency responders, and community organisations must be established. In order to maximise resources, exchange knowledge, and coordinate response activities, school administrators should build and sustain these relationships.

School administrators can assess their reaction tactics, pinpoint areas for development, and make the required adjustments during crises, which provide invaluable learning opportunities. Over time, school administrators can improve their crisis management skills by conducting debriefings, asking stakeholders for input, and engaging in reflective practice.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is imperative that school administrators cultivate resilient school communities and skilfully handle emergencies. By implementing proactive planning, transparent communication, and prioritising the well-being of their school communities, leaders may effectively manage crises and foster resilience among students, staff, and families. Cooperative partnerships and a commitment to continuous learning and improvement are also necessary for effective crisis management. As they continue to adapt to evolving challenges and new threats, school leaders' proactive and strategic approach to crisis management will be crucial in helping to create safer, stronger, and more resilient school communities.

Recommendations

1. For school administrators, developing and continuously assessing comprehensive crisis management strategies that address a range of potential disasters should be of utmost importance. Plans should cover staff and student support services, communication, and evacuation.
2. Ensure that employees receive frequent training and opportunities for professional development so they are equipped to handle emergency situations. Training should cover crisis intervention techniques, trauma-informed practices, and first aid.

3. There must be open lines of communication in order to ensure that everyone in the school community is aware of and taking part in crisis response actions. Encourage communication, active listening, empathy, and compassion to build trust and cooperation between kids, teachers, parents, and neighbours.
4. Collaborate with local emergency response agencies, mental health professionals, and community organisations to develop coordinated response plans and obtain increased access to resources and support services during emergencies.
4. Prioritise the mental and emotional well-being of employees and students by implementing wellness initiatives and ongoing support. Offer peer support groups, counselling, and mindfulness exercises to help individuals cope with the stress and trauma that come with being in a crisis.
5. A crisis management plan and procedure should be regularly reviewed and revised in light of emerging best practices and lessons learned from the past. Regular exercises and simulations are necessary to evaluate response protocols' effectiveness and identify areas that need improvement.
6. Engage students in the planning and implementation of disaster preparedness initiatives to give them a sense of empowerment and help them take charge of the situation. Give them the opportunity to participate in safety committees, peer support groups, and leadership roles within the school community.
7. Include resilience-building exercises and social-emotional learning curriculum in the regular school routine to help kids develop coping skills, problem-solving strategies, and positive interpersonal connections. Encourage the participation in resilience-building activities such as volunteer work, team-building activities, and mindfulness training.
8. Provide an inviting and inclusive learning atmosphere where all students feel respected and have a sense of belonging. Establish a culture of kindness, empathy, and mutual support among students and staff in order to foster a feeling of community and strong relationships.
9. Stay up to date on the most recent advancements in school safety and crisis management, including emerging trends and dangers. In the face of shifting conditions and advancements in technology, maintain your adaptability and flexibility and take the initiative to address any risks or vulnerabilities that might affect the school community.

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