CHAPTER 1

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

I’ve very much got this thing, the more you can depoliticize disasters, the better. You’ll get better quality decision-making; otherwise you run it all around the noisy minorities and whomever the politicians think is the swing-voter. (SEM2, interview, 2013)

This quote goes to the heart of what this book is about—that is, how politicians can demonstrate effective political leadership in disasters and crises. This book demonstrates the usefulness of academic research and the value that research can bring to those who manage and respond to disasters and crises. Through extensive interviews (listed in Appendix 1), we identify best practice for those managing the involvement of political actors in disasters and crises. These events are always political in nature, providing opportunities for politicians to capitalize on them in the hope that they will be re-elected; if an election is not looming, then they want to be seen to be helping their constituents. Our book brings to light the theoretical and practical factors that inform the management of the involvement of political actors in disasters. It addresses a largely unmapped area of disasters, which is how politicians might best engage with emergency organizations and various publics in the different stages of disasters and crises. In a

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disaster or crisis, the flow of timely and accurate information is regarded as a key factor in reducing harm to those caught up in and recovering from the event, and politicians can make an important and worthwhile contribution to this. We argue that bridging this significant gap in the disaster literature will help to build resilience across nations at all levels—local, state and federal. As we completed writing this book, the COVID-19 pandemic was in its first couple of months, and we noted with concern that some organizations had adopted an approach of business as usual. However, we argue that during a disaster or crisis such as this pandemic, a business as usual approach is not appropriate and indeed may have significant ramifications for businesses, organizations and, ultimately, people’s lives.

While we approach our book from the perspective that disasters are inherently political events, we also recognize that not all information provided during a disaster is political. For example, emergency management organizations are focused primarily on providing information that is aimed at preventing the loss of lives and, after the initial phase of a disaster, assisting with the recovery. The information provided to news media by those who witness or directly respond to disasters or crises is not driven by political concerns; however, various researchers have suggested that crises and disasters are ‘political events’ (Kelman 2012a; Liu 2007; Olson 2000; Olson and Gawronski 2010) and, as Kelman (2012b, p. 14) goes on to say, disasters are inherently political and it is ‘naïve to think otherwise’ (Kelman 2012b). Similarly, Wei et al. (2010, p. 1016) suggest that the type of information provided by official sources during a disaster is ‘always a political decision’. These researchers suggest that those managing disasters and crises are highly aware of the politicized nature of these types of events and also conscious that they can be seen as opportunities on which politicians can ‘capitalize’ if an election looms while shoring up their chances of re-election in the long term. The question that has not been explored by researchers is how those charged with managing planning and responses to disasters deal with the politicization of these types of events.

We were involved in crises and disasters management roles in our professional lives before joining academia. We have also been involved in researching and writing about disasters during our academic careers, and we have both been affected directly by natural disasters and crises, and also managed them. The project from which this book emerged involved interviews with a range of senior emergency managers in ten countries,
and was prompted by a gap we identified in the existing research into
disaster communication.

This book emerged from a research project that began in 2012 and
continues today. We undertook dozens of interviews with top level emer-
gency managers in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States, the
United Kingdom, Iceland, Mongolia, Germany, Norway and Sweden.
While many of these interviewees were happy for their names to be used,
others requested and were given anonymity for a variety of reasons, includ-
ing that their reflections were made some time after they had left their
relative positions and they did not want to appear to be speaking on behalf
of the organization for which they had previously worked. They had been
through a range of positive and sometimes negative experiences with politi-
cians. We drew on their collective wisdom to inform various parts of our
book and their combined wisdom will no doubt assist those managing
disaster and crisis responses and politicians. Their wisdom also provides
important lessons for political actors and their minders when confronted
by a major emergency.

While researchers had approached the involvement of politicians in
disasters from a political perspective—that is, by looking at whether they
were re-elected following a disaster (e.g. see Abney and Hill 1966; Bodet
et al. 2016; Healy and Malhorta 2009), we identified a major deficiency in
relation to research about how they should perform and provide leader-
sip in a disaster or crisis. We set out to address that with the help of our
study participants, who had been involved in managing responses to disas-
ters and crises for many years.

When we began our research project in 2012, we noticed that very little
attention had been paid to analyzing how politicians behaved when com-
municating with the public during the various stages of disasters. This
prompted us to begin to explore this issue, first in Australia where we are
based and then, as opportunities arose, in other countries. While our
interviews were often opportunistic, we were given access to some of the
world’s leading disaster and emergency managers, who generously pro-
vided their time, expertise and insights into the questions that began to
emerge from our research. Key among those questions was what effective
political leadership looked like in disasters from the perspective of senior
disaster and crisis managers. Our book focuses on this perspective because
these people are frequently on the receiving end of demands from politi-
cians, who are keen to capitalize on news media opportunities when disas-
ters occur. Social media has also expanded opportunities for the
aforementioned individuals to capitalize on disasters, while also presenting potential pitfalls and traps for them. The insights shared by our study participants in this book provide valuable tips and tools for those charged with managing politicians’ demands during the various phases of disasters. Conversely, their advice will be valuable for politicians who might be drawn into a disaster, regardless of whether they want to capitalize on the events or they are involved for other reasons.

We have discovered that relationships between politicians and disaster managers can be tenuous or strong. As Kuipers (2018, p. 186) explains, these relationships are symbiotic: ‘behind every great crisis leader there must be an institutional machinery that enables a decisive response’. However, sometimes the institutional machinery can break down when the desire of politicians to capitalize on a disaster overrides the need to ensure emergency managers have the space and resources to respond to the disaster and manage the aftermath. Given this, we take a pragmatic approach to our research, arguing that developing healthy and effective relationships between elected officials, emergency managers and communities when life and property are at stake during natural disasters requires more than theory: it demands practical tools and guidance.

Further, we have seen—and continue to see—that politicians often lack situational awareness when it comes to disasters and crises. At a time when disasters and crises are on the agendas of politicians and news media, and are increasingly prominent due to extremes in the intensity of natural disasters, we address a largely unmapped area of disasters. Urban and regional sprawl, coupled with sea and tree changers, has led to increasing numbers of people living in hazardous areas. Politicians have a key role to play in communicating about disasters and crises when the flow of timely and accurate information is regarded as a key factor in reducing harm to those caught up in and recovering from these events. In Australia and elsewhere in North America and the United Kingdom, there is a push from government to make individuals more resilient in relation to natural disasters. At a recent press conference, an Australian chief fire officer from Tasmania warned residents to prepare for the forthcoming bushfire season, telling them, ‘If you own the land you own the risk’ (Doyle 2018). Therefore, we take a pragmatic approach to developing healthy and effective relationships between elected officials, emergency managers and communities when life and property are at stake during natural disasters.

Drawing on our in-depth interviews, relevant research and examples, we focus on theoretical and practical factors that inform the management
of political actors’ involvement in disasters. Themes that emerged from the data form the basis of a series of recommendations and a best practice model, both of which focus on improving the relationships between political leaders and emergency management personnel. We draw on key case studies that demonstrate the positive and negative influences of political actors on disaster responses and recovery, and how these influences are managed by various agencies. Each of the chapters in this book is designed to explore the issue at the heart of the book: how politicians can be effective leaders in disasters and crises. We aim to help bridge the working relationship gap between the tactical level—that is, the operational response—and the political level. We identify the issues that inform these responses and relationships, and offer solutions.

In Chap. 2, we discuss the politics of disasters, in particular why disasters are political events. While we know that not all people involved in a disaster find it a political event, the research has highlighted that many politicians view disasters as an opportunity to showcase their leadership and build momentum for re-election. We look at this issue for two reasons: disasters are increasingly affecting people and economies because more people are living in areas that are vulnerable to hazards; and politicians are increasingly getting involved in public communication at the critical stage—that is, when a disaster or crisis occurs. The economic costs of disasters are substantial. In 2017, for example, insurers around the world expected the cost of losses from natural disasters would be somewhere in the vicinity of A$172 billion (SMH 2018). The literature points to the increasing impact of disasters on societies and economies worldwide and the increasing involvement of political actors in disaster response, management and communication. The research has highlighted that at times of disasters and crises, when life and property are at stake, immense expectations are placed on political leaders to communicate and act. These pressures are multi-faceted and are exerted by the various publics affected by disasters, by political parties whose futures are at stake and by government agencies charged with managing responses and needing the resources to do so. There is much at stake for politicians, too. They are expected to show leadership and are held accountable for the actions they take or fail to take during and after disasters and crises. There is no doubt that the risk to their political careers if they fail to act or fail when they act is a primary motivation for their performance at these times. In other words, their political survival is under threat.
We also acknowledge that some research has demonstrated that disasters have brought political enemies together and that responses have the potential to cross both national and international borders, with politics sometimes set aside to respond to the disaster. The disappearance of borders and difficult historical, social and religious politics at this time is an interesting phenomenon. Another fascinating factor at play in the politics of disasters is that many political actors are poorly equipped to deal with a disaster. They are largely disengaged from the preparation phase, because the types of activities that are undertaken in this stage do not attract news media attention. They often fail to engage with emergency managers, so when a disaster strikes they have a poorly developed understanding of operational procedures and requirements. A politician being uninformed while under pressure to take charge and communicate can mean they quickly become a problem for responding agencies. The risk of a politician providing incorrect information prior to and during a disaster, leading to loss of life and property, rises exponentially when that politician does not have a grasp of the complexities and nuances involved in managing disaster responses. This creates a nightmare for emergency response agencies. Our interviewees identified that politicians who move their communication style from supportive to tactical can intentionally or unintentionally take over the role of providing official disaster information, including evacuation warnings, without sufficient expertise, credibility or situational knowledge. Social media can add to this pressure when political actors are well connected to followers who expect information when calamity strikes. There have been instances where politicians have effectively used social media to support the response and recovery efforts, and examples where their attempts to do so have gone awry. We examine how politicians should respond to disasters. This chapter provides the context for the remaining sections of the book. It examines key aspects of the literature, principally from the perspective of the impact of political actors’ involvement in disaster management and communication.

In Chap. 3, we provide a theoretical framework and examine operational approaches to disasters. Both of these scaffolds provide a strong foundation for the following chapters. We examine the management principles of mitigation, preparation, response and recovery. While we acknowledge that operational personnel will be very familiar with these approaches, others in allied organizations, such as non-government organizations (NGOs), journalists and volunteer groups, and political actors, may not be; they may therefore require further explanation and guidance.
in this area. Here we take a broad approach to exploring disaster theories, drawing from a variety of scholarly disciplines because no single definition provides a theoretical approach that will suit all disciplines involved in this field. Key theories that inform research into disasters include those of social trust and government performance, specifically Coleman’s (1988) study of relationships between various actors and social trust. This chapter also draws on some of the key social capital theorists, including Putnam’s (2001) finding that networks build social capital, which has been described by Lin (1999) as the ‘electricity’ that circulates in the form of cooperation and resource sharing in response to disasters. As observed by Putnam et al. (2003), social capital is built on trust, which in turn stimulates cooperation; this then builds trust. This is a key theory that informs practice and responses during the various phases of disasters. Wei et al. (2010) suggest that information provided during a disaster is ‘always a political decision’. Cole and Fellows (2008) found that confusing messaging emerged from different types of sources, and that the lack of source credibility—particularly in relation to government officials (including politicians)—was a problem during disasters. Importantly, this finding places political actors in a difficult position when communities turn to them in the expectation that they will restore normalcy and rebuild public confidence and trust in government. The problems with these interactions are heightened when the news media start the blame game in the aftermath of a disaster. A return to normalcy can take a long time, given informal and formal inquiries and investigations that may take months or years to conclude (Jong 2017), and politicians can either be part of the solution or many choose to disengage.

In Chap. 4 we continue to build on the lessons outlined in Chap. 3, attending to the role of political actors in disasters. We drew on data from our extensive and in-depth interviews with elite emergency managers around the world to inform this chapter. Research into the involvement of politicians in disasters and crises highlights that politicians and governments are often held accountable for how they respond. Politicians’ responses to disasters are sometimes closely interwoven with attempts by various publics and those in political opposition to lay blame for a disaster in its aftermath. Arceneaux and Stein (2006, p. 50) maintain that at such times, if members of the public believe politicians have erred in preventing a disaster, they are ‘willing to attribute blame and punish incumbents accordingly’. We argue that the way politicians communicate to various publics before, during and after disasters is crucial to shaping how those
publics respond during the recovery phase and also how they engage with the blame game.

In addition, we suggest that a key role for politicians in relation to disasters is to reduce the anxiety and uncertainty that accompanies such events for various publics, especially those directly affected. We draw on Jong’s (2017) work, which argues that society and victims turn to political actors to provide ‘meaning making’ following a calamity. This entails making sense of the situation within a broad perspective. Therefore politicians are expected to (Jong 2017, p. 1026)

interpret the situation, use rhetoric to make sense of the situation, make sure they are concerned about the emotional and physical well-being of citizens, and actively communicate what is happening and what needs to be done.

We take a new approach to examining this phenomenon, looking at it from the perspective of disaster management officials. Whereas Jong (2017) observes that the political actor becomes the ‘listening ear’ for the victims and families, we examine senior disaster managers’ takes on how this process should be managed through the lens of reality, giving due consideration to perceptions. Politicians’ involvement in the grieving process is important for two reasons, according to Ono (2017, p. 337), who asserts that it opens doors for elected officials to interact with their constituents and ‘helps them recover from the damage as they have greater access to national and local resources’.

Disasters can be highly pressured environments, and politicians who are under pressure in complex and rapidly evolving situations face major challenges in relation to how they respond and communicate because, at least in the early part of the disaster, reliable information is often lacking, and they may have poor situational awareness. The insights we provide into these issues are important, but we also attend to the ways in which disaster agencies manage the demands of their political masters, who are concerned mostly about public perceptions of their leadership and of the degree of control they appear to have over the situation. We highlight that behind the scenes, emergency managers are responding to the involvement of politicians by diverting them and managing their involvement.

We also turn our attention to the influences that traditional news media and social media have in the various phases of disasters. People facing a disaster seldom use, decide to trust or act upon information obtained from a single information source. In seeking first-hand local information, they
will ‘channel swap’ across traditional news media. They will also go online, seeking information from news websites and social media, and contact family and friends. Social media place immense pressure on political actors, many of whom use social media platforms such as Twitter to provide information to their constituents, those directly and indirectly affected by disasters and crises. Political actors who provide misleading or inaccurate information during critical times can quickly come into conflict with disaster agencies. When this happens, such as during warnings about disasters, those who potentially are affected will seize on the different messages as a reason not to act, creating difficulties for those managing responses.

Political leadership at times of disaster often occurs within high-pressure environments. In Chap. 5, we turn to one of the most problematic aspects of the relationship between those charged with managing responses to disasters and crises: the demands of political actors for tours of the front line and the associated publicity that accompanies such visits. Politicians are driven by a desire to be seen to be responding to the disaster, and they are motivated by the possibility of various publics recognizing and potentially rewarding that response. As we note in this chapter, some researchers have recognized that when the response and recovery processes associated with disasters are going well, it brings credibility to those political leaders who have been visibly associated with these events. The dilemma faced by emergency managers is that where responses are working well, that means ‘natural disasters and crises affect public opinion and even create opportunities for local politicians to claim credit for services provided to constituents’ (Ono 2017, p. 340). We draw on key examples of news media coverage of politicians’ actions during disasters to demonstrate the importance of timing and public perceptions. These examples include President George W. Bush, who faced extensive criticism when he flew over flooded New Orleans to inspect the damage from Hurricane Katrina. The perception that his actions created was that he did not care about the people affected by the disaster because he was not on the ground with them. On the other hand, there are political leaders who enter the disaster zone far too early, bringing with them journalists to record their activities while those who have been evacuated from the affected area are kept away by authorities. We look at some examples of where this has occurred and the problems that these actions have caused. We draw on key theorist Jong (2017, p. 9), who sums this problem up neatly: ‘societal perceptions define when public leadership is required.’ To that end, we explore the vexed question of when and how politicians should visit the scene of a disaster.
Apart from the literature and examples of news media coverage, we explore this question from the perspectives of those we interviewed. Our interviewees highlight the delicate balance they have to navigate between meeting political demands, safeguarding those visiting the scene and ensuring that resources are used where they are most urgently needed and not diverted for unnecessary reasons.

Our findings highlight the somewhat formulaic response by emergency managers to politicians’ requests for tours of disaster sites at inappropriate times. This chapter also examines the problems politicians create for themselves when they act inappropriately in the midst of a disaster or its aftermath, and how their actions sometimes draw the news media’s attention away from those affected by the disaster. Inappropriate actions and poor communication can extend to the way they use social media during disasters. We explore key examples that highlight the errors politicians make at these times and their consequences. In addition, we set these mistakes against the key findings of the literature that tease out the tightrope political actors walk in relation to how various publics perceive them and their actions. Ingham (2014) aptly summarizes the situation politicians face: if they do not go to the disaster scene, they are lambasted for failing to care, while those who do are criticized for exploiting a media opportunity rather than genuinely helping with the relief effort. In order to help those charged with managing the expectations of politicians, this chapter will detail the strategies and tactics our interviewees use to deal with the frontline demands of political actors. These vary according to the intensity and phase of the disaster or crisis, and the type of demand being made. We also explore the potential ramifications for those managing a disaster if they fail to manage a politician’s expectations.

Chapter 6 deals with a difficult and complex topic: the relationships between those who are responsible for managing disasters and their political masters. Drawing primarily on our interview data, we identify the rules that govern these relationships and the management and exchange of information between these parties during a disaster. This is important because, as we discovered, there are very few written rules and so a series of unwritten rules are used to guide the interactions and relationships between these groups. Our elite interviewees explain that the relationship between them and their political masters, across all phases of disaster management—mitigation, preparation, response and recovery—is based largely on cooperation grounded in mutual acceptance of one another’s roles. Emergency managers also engage with politicians through ongoing
verbal discussion or email correspondence, with communication intensifying during the response phase. We also point to some challenges that arise in the course of these relationships—for example, while a senior emergency manager may have a strong relationship with the minister directly responsible for a response agency, the involvement of other politicians less familiar with operational activities and resources can be challenging. While communication between these parties increases exponentially during the response phase of a disaster, the most productive period for communication and relationship formation is in between disasters. At these times, emergency managers welcome the interest of politicians in their activities and they note that engaging with politicians at these times can result in increased funding and a better understanding of operational procedures and limitations among political actors. Relationships are built and cemented during these periods, free of the constraints and demands involved when they are preoccupied with responding to disasters. Such understandings can only serve to improve the relationship and engagement with politicians when a disaster occurs.

In Chap. 7, we explore the role played by politicians in communicating with various publics in the different phases of disasters to tease out what represents best practice in this area. Importantly, everyone we interviewed agreed that political actors have a role to play in communication with communities at times of disasters, particularly because individuals and communities affected by disasters have an urgent need for accurate and timely information. While there was consensus among our interviewees, we discovered that in different countries, and across agencies, this was managed with varying degrees of success. Some of our interviewees argued that the communication abilities, personalities and leadership styles of politicians are central to helping emergency managers deal with managing the disaster and obtaining as effective a response as possible. We drill down to what politicians should say, when they should say it and how they should deliver their messages. This is important because timing is crucial in relation to whether it is a politician or an operational leader who speaks in the different phases of disasters. In addition, we explore some of the issues associated with interactions between political leaders and mainstream news media because the more local a disaster is, the more news media attention it will attract. We explore examples—both good and poor—of how politicians interact with news media, including two high-profile examples of how politicians engaged with news media, including the then Queensland Premier Anna Bligh during the South-East
Queensland floods of 2010–11. These were massive floods, with almost two-thirds of the state flooded. Bligh was lauded for her strong leadership under incredibly difficult circumstances (de Bussy and Paterson 2012). Bligh’s leadership was also the focus of significant social media posts with the Twitter users praising her actions, while criticizing the poor leadership displayed by the then Prime Minister Julia Gillard. We contrast her leadership and communication style with that of former US President George W. Bush, who was roundly condemned for his poor performance during Hurricane Katrina (Gasper and Reeves 2011; Harris 2011; Liu 2007). We delve into what constitutes effective political communication and leadership both before and after disasters, in order to give politicians and their minders some useful strategies and practical tips to ensure they are helping, not hindering, response and recovery efforts.

Chapter 8 focuses on another group of important, but often unnoticed, people: the political minders. They are often unseen by the public but often perform a critical go-between role, liaising on behalf of their minister or local member of parliament to gain access to the disaster area and capitalize on news media opportunities. We draw on our interviews and examples to demonstrate what goes on behind the scenes. Political minders are under enormous pressure to ensure their politicians receive news media coverage, particularly broadcast coverage. The demands are intense for politicians, but even more so for emergency managers, who have to consider their medium- to long-term career goals after the disaster passes. To that effect, we examine how emergency managers juggle the competing demands from local, state and federal politicians and how they prioritize the various requests made by these political actors. This is an area that has received surprisingly little attention despite the significant role politicians can play, and have played, in providing a leadership role and officiating as spokespeople during disasters. One useful article explored the separation between ministerial and departmental media advisers in the context of public relations and the notion of ‘spin doctoring’. Stockwell (2005) proposes the idea of a Chinese wall, suggesting that departmental advisers could be drawn into the ministerial and political environment, contributing extensive resources in order to distribute the political message to various publics. In the context of a disaster response, Alistair Wilson, senior disaster communications officer for the Australian federal government (interview, 2010), argues that there are two ‘separate’ approaches in disaster response management: the ‘political’ and the ‘program’ levels. As with Stockwell’s Chinese wall analogy, Wilson contends
that the lines are becoming blurred, with ministerial staffers having increasing control over departmental media teams. This presents problems for those charged with emergency management, as Wilson explains:

Now that means that the ministerial advisers, the media advisers in particular, have a good deal of power. The days of an individual department or agency or division’s spokesperson talking (to the media) are being a little bit diminished and that’s perhaps a sad trend in that the people in the media want an operational person to talk to.

Emergency managers are acutely aware that perceptions and timing are key when it comes to managing political interests during the response phase of a disaster. Sometimes the pressure to go to the scene of the disaster is driven by political staffers rather than the politician, with one disaster response manager (MEM1) noting that ‘99 per cent of the time it’s their staff’ who want media exposure of their political leader on the ground.

We conclude the book by focusing on the lessons learned in the course of our ten-country research project. We present, describe and discuss our unique best practice model for emergency managers engaging with politicians before, during and after disasters. This model offers the potential to improve the relationships between political actors and emergency officials. We provide a series of tips and suggestions distilled from the interviews we undertook, the international literature and our analysis of examples of disasters in which politicians have been involved. This chapter draws together the key themes from each of the preceding chapters to provide a practical, easy-to-apply best practice guide that is based firmly in the real-world experiences of our elite interviewees, the existing scholarship in relevant areas and our analysis of the examples of politicians’ behavior at times of crisis and disaster that has been woven through this book. Inspired by a real example, where a political leader, emergency managers and response agencies combined their efforts to address the various publics affected by and interested in a major disaster, we have called our guide the ‘tandem information model’.

This model has been designed specifically for media conferences delivered by a range of participants, including elected officials. We focus on news media conferences because they are regarded as one of the best practice approaches to delivering information during a disaster or crisis. These occasions provide an opportunity to provide information simultaneously to various publics—those directly affected by a disaster, those who might
have relatives involved, communities surrounding the immediate disaster and those at a distance—via a variety of traditional, online and social media platforms. They also provide opportunities to ensure that the management of disasters and crises is transparent and responsive because they present the public face of attempts to respond and allow journalists to ask questions that should go to the heart of the information sought by the public. We were inspired by this example because it demonstrated best practice in disaster communication and management, but we also note that often joint media conferences present a danger where a motivated politician seeking re-election might attempt to capitalize on the event by taking over and talking about matters outside the disaster or crisis that could potentially be damaging to the response. We explain how the model works, how emergency managers and politicians can work together in media conferences and what information each should present. Because the focus of our model is on sharing public information at one event, it thereby reduces the risk of mixed or confusing messaging. This approach enhances source credibility, and accommodates the political aspects of disasters and the authority of the messaging. Three essential disaster-messaging criteria also flow from this approach: leadership (operational and political), empathy (political) and directions for action (operational). These messages are critical to the good management of disasters and to outcomes for those affected. Our model involves the politician and the senior uniformed emergency officer co-hosting a media conference, public meeting or other activity. Based on the findings we have presented in this book, we suggest the following model for best practice in political involvement in public information provision during a disaster:

- Non-disaster periods offer the best, and most productive, opportunity to build relationships between political actors and disaster agencies.
- Political actors should be actively involved in the pre-impact and recovery phases, but should take a step back during the response phase. Those communicating in the various phases of a disaster need to be seen by the public as a credible sources of information.
- Political messaging should be about empathy, support and reassurance. The focus should be on the right source providing the right message at the right time.
- Operational messaging should contain warnings, operational data and instructions for people about how to help themselves.
• Emergency agencies should manage political demands according to how they would be perceived by various publics by asking the question, ‘How would this look?’
• Our model for the tandem delivery of disaster information provides a workable, mutually beneficial platform for both operational and political communication.

This book is designed to facilitate a transformation in the way researchers think about and approach disaster research that focuses on communication or examines the role of politicians in these types of events. In this respect, it opens up the terrain of disaster research by providing new perspectives on politicians’ involvement in disasters from the viewpoint of senior leaders in disaster and crisis management. The research findings explained in this book will also be of interest to scholars in a variety of disciplines, including journalism practice and studies, because they examine some news media coverage of disasters. Communication scholars will find the issues at the heart of this book—such as how emergency managers and politicians communicate with each other and with the various publics affected by disasters—relevant to their work. Public relations scholars will also be interested because interactions between politicians and the public are inherently about image and relationship management. In particular, we hope this book will be transformative for those working in the disaster management field because those we interviewed in the course of our research have shared important insights that will assist those working in this field when confronted with demands from politicians. Community and non-government organizations involved in the various phases of disasters will also learn much from the book because they too come into contact with politicians in the course of their work. Finally, we hope that politicians and those working in their offices, including political, policy and media advisers and speech writers, will respond positively to our research findings because they can either help or hinder disaster and crisis preparations, responses and recovery.

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