

Glen Woodbury reflects on the impact of John Flynn's CHDS thesis "Mindfulness Training: Worthwhile As A Means to Enhance First-Responder Crisis Decision Making?"

By Glen Woodbury

There continues to be a critical skill that we are failing to learn, failing to teach, homeland security leaders. We often hear that the increasingly complex global, strategic, and operational environments demand "thinking differently" as if the mandate itself will produce the solution. In his CHDS thesis, "Mindfulness Training: Worthwhile As A Means To Enhance First-Responder Crisis Decision Making?" John Flynn not only proposes one path towards promulgating this essential, cognitive capability, his analysis of the larger challenge and potential approaches illuminates both the inherent barriers and the promising approaches.

Flynn begins his work looking at the current state of crisis decision making, asking "what do the predominant paradigms, frameworks, models, and systems reveal about how first responders make decisions during crises?"¹ His examination of decision making in traditional as well as novel events reveals much about some of the larger institutional, doctrinal, and physiological realities of crisis management that are no longer as effective now as they used to be in a less complex disaster response world. The influences of "confusion, time pressure, emotional and psychological stress, and inadequate information on which to base a decision"² will increase in the crisis environment over time while taking advantage of the strong correlation of situational awareness and sensemaking will produce more successful outcomes. The professions have worked hard at the former, not nearly enough at the latter.

Flynn's work puts forth very reasonable, practical, and achievable paths towards implementing elements of sensemaking for the education and training of first responders at all levels and acknowledges the barriers to this effort as well as suggestive remedies to those hurdles. Abraham Lincoln also had a call for transformative action, "As our case is new, we must think anew and act anew."³ But then as now, a concerted effort to teach and learn "thinking differently," at scale, is an urgent, and increasingly essential, homeland security endeavor.

About the Author

Glen Woodbury is the director of the Naval Postgraduate School's Center for Homeland Defense and Security and is responsible for leading the Center's strategic commitment to servicing the homeland security priorities of the U.S. Departments of Homeland Security and Defense, as well as local, state, tribal, and federal agencies. His previous responsibilities as an associate director (2004-2007) included the development of executive education workshops, seminars, and training for senior state and local officials as well as military leaders. Mr. Woodbury served as the director of the Emergency Management Division for the State of Washington from 1998 through 2004. In this capacity, he directed the state's response to numerous emergencies, disasters, and heightened security threat levels, including the World Trade Organization disturbance in Seattle in 1999, the Nisqually Earthquake in February 2001, the TOPOFF II Exercise in 2003, and the national response to the attacks of September 11th. Mr. Woodbury holds a bachelor degree in engineering sciences from Lafayette College and a master's degree in security studies from the Naval Postgraduate School. He may be reached at gwoodbu@nps.edu.

Notes

1. John Flynn, "Mindfulness Training: Worthwhile As A Means To Enhance First-Responder Crisis Decision Making?" (master's thesis, Center for Homeland Defense and Security, Naval Postgraduate School, September 2016): 17.
 2. Ibid.
 3. President Abraham Lincoln Annual Message to Congress, December 1862, *Abraham Lincoln Online*, <http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/congress.htm>.
-

Copyright

Copyright © 2021 by the author(s). Homeland Security Affairs is an academic journal available free of charge to individuals and institutions. Because the purpose of this publication is the widest possible dissemination of knowledge, copies of this journal and the articles contained herein may be printed or downloaded and redistributed for personal, research or educational purposes free of charge and without permission. Any commercial use of Homeland Security Affairs or the articles published herein is expressly prohibited without the written consent of the copyright holder. The copyright of all articles published in Homeland Security Affairs rests with the author(s) of the article. Homeland Security Affairs is the online journal of the Naval Postgraduate School Center for Homeland Defense and Security (CHDS).