

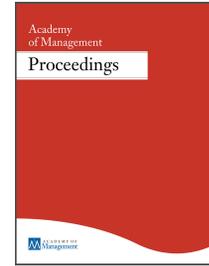
## In Extremis Leadership: Full Mental Jacket

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### Abstract

Under in extremis conditions, when lives are at stake, astutely reading a situation (situation awareness) and belief in one's ability to manage it (self-efficacy) are crucial leader skills (Sweeney, Matthews, & Lester, 2011). We report on a survey of 514 military, firefighting, and law enforcement leaders and their experiences during in extremis conditions. Our earlier qualitative study identified several characteristics that helped leaders during these tense times. This study examines the moderating effect of four human qualities identified in the qualitative study (self-esteem, self-sacrifice, mental flexibility and altruism) on situation awareness and self-efficacy as they relate to survival criteria in life threatening situations. This study also examined the similarities and differences among the three groups of hazardous occupations, and discovered when taken as a whole, each of the factors were significant, but the specific details for each group diverged. We theorize that differing priorities among the organizational missions give rise to these disparities. Even though all three are often grouped as one in most in extremis research (Sweeney, Matthews, Lester, 2011), we interpreted the results as indicating two distinct kinds of in extremis situations and classified the fire fighters and law enforcement as being in a "protectors" role, and the military being in a "vanquisher" role. Instead of routinely looking at all in extremis occupations as one population with identical roles, research into these differences needs to be explored further. Results thus seem relevant to all professional first-responders facing life-threatening situations, because each group may benefit from different criteria for hiring, recruiting and training of personnel. The results may also be of interest to individuals facing tense, ambiguous, albeit less acute, circumstances.



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