

FLIRTING WITH DISASTER: PUBLIC MANAGEMENT IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most telling applications of the fundamental values of a society can be found in how that society responds to crisis events.

How a society prepares for and invests in policies to prevent or lessen the effects of such events:

- **Demonstrates the values placed on safety, security, human lives, and physical property**
- **Demonstrates the capacity of its political and economic interests in decisionmaking**
- **Demonstrates the priorities of governmental institutions and administrators to channel their technical expertise to bear on these problems**
- **Demonstrates the relationship between citizens and government institutions**

THE NATURE OF CRISIS SITUATIONS

- **What exactly is a crisis?**
 - **How do we differentiate between a problem, emergency, crisis, disaster, catastrophe?**
- **Is a crisis objectively determined?**
- **Is a crisis subjectively determined?**

CRISIS CONDITIONS IN POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Defining Crises as Important Policy Issues:

- **Objective Dimensions**
 - **Triggering Mechanisms**
 - **Spillover/Interconnectedness of issues**
- **Symbolic Dimensions**
- **Political Dimensions – Legitimate Governmental Involvement**

CRISIS CONDITIONS IN POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

General Perspectives on Agenda-Building and Public Policymaking

- **How do crises get on policy agendas?**
- **Why is it important to consider the agenda setting of crises?**

CRISIS CONDITIONS IN POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Broader Context of Crisis Situations

- **The Life Cycle of Policy Issues**
- **The Two Worlds of Crisis Issues**

GOVERNMENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

Parallels Between Governmental Involvement in Disasters/Crises and Other Policy Issues

- **Tremendous increase in the size and scope of Governmental Involvement**
- **Greater involvement by national governments (relative to state and local levels)**
- **Highly reactive nature of public policymaking**

GOVERNMENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

Parallels Between Governmental Involvement in Disasters/Crises and Other Policy Issues (continued)

- **High levels of attention, followed by diminishing interest**
- **Incrementalist pressures**
- **Efforts to move toward more proactive measures and emphases**

BASIC RATIONALE OF GOVERNMENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

Need to deal with situations beyond the control of citizens

Need for protection and security

Need to redistribute resources in society

Need to "insure" people against individual and collective risk

Need to provide economic stabilization

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF U.S. RESPONSE SYSTEM

- **Objectives**
- **Division of labor**
- **Coordinated behavior and activities**
- **"Formal" structure**
- **Established policies and clearly-designed procedures**

BASIC PROBLEMS OF GOVERNMENTAL RESPONSE SYSTEMS

- **Survival concerns**
- **Coordination and consolidation**
- **Communication**
- **Disjointed activities**
- **Redundancy**
- **Red tape**
- **Responsiveness and Accountability**

CITIZEN BEHAVIOR IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

- **Individual level responses**
- **Community response**
- **Societal response**

CITIZEN BEHAVIOR IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

- **Traditional, conventional forms of human behavior**
- **Unconventional forms of human behavior**
 - **Milling**
 - **Rumors**
 - **Keynoting**

CITIZEN BEHAVIOR IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

- **Emergent norms**
- **Situation-specific development of emergent norms**

POTENTIAL CONFLICT!

GOVERNMENTAL POLICY VS HUMAN BEHAVIOR DURING CRISIS SITUATIONS

- **Sources of governmental and citizen norms**
- **Evolution of norms**
- **Gap between bureaucratic and emergent norms**

FACTORS WHICH AFFECT THE SIZE OF THE GAP

- **Magnitude of the disaster**
- **Degree of governmental preparation**
- **Prevailing orientations of the affected population**
- **Media Framing**
- **Political Scapegoating**
- **Bureaucratic breakdowns**

IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES OF THE GAP

Produces different patterns of program implementation

Top-down Pattern

Bottom-up Pattern

Confusion Pattern

LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF THE GAP

Shapes overall assessments of governmental performance—

Success

v.

Failure

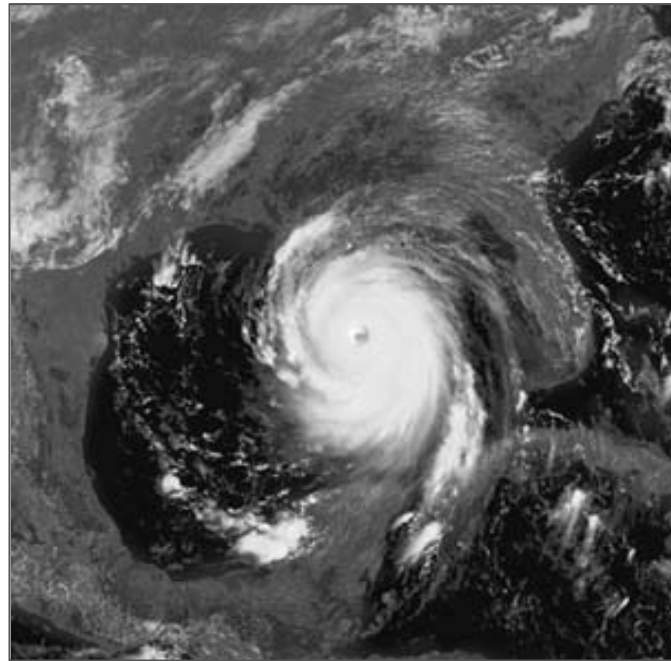
THE CONFLICT BETWEEN GOVERNMENTAL POLICY AND HUMAN BEHAVIOR DURING CRISIS SITUATIONS

Past governmental policy successes

Past governmental policy failures

HURRICANE KATRINA AS A NATURAL DISASTER

Hit Gulf Coast of U.S. in August 2005



Affected 93,000 square miles across 138 parishes and counties

3000 people died (thousands missing)

Over 1 million displaced by the storm

Devastated homes, buildings, forests, vegetation





GOVERNMENTAL RESPONSE TO HURRICANE KATRINA

What went right?

State of emergency was declared

Response plans went into effect

Personnel deployed to affected areas

Mandatory evacuations ordered

Temporary shelters opened

Declared as an “Incident of National Significance”

GOVERNMENTAL RESPONSE TO HURRICANE KATRINA

What went wrong?

Lack of local preparation

Eruption of social unrest

Faltering mobilization

Failed leadership

Personnel problems

Lackadaisical, uncaring response

Widespread public dissatisfaction and outrage with response

WHY DID THE GOVERNMENTAL RESPONSE TO HURRICANE KATRINA BREAKDOWN?

A large gap developed between public expectations and governmental policy

Why did this occur?

Scope of the disaster

Citizen preparation/expectations

Media's framing of the problems

BREAKDOWNS IN GOVERNMENTAL SYSTEM



MAJOR GOVERNMENTAL BREAKDOWNS IN THE RESPONSE TO HURRICANE KATRINA

Cloudy Mission and Lack of Focus

**Since 9/11, the Governmental Response System Has
Been Directed Away from Natural Disasters Toward
Dealing with Terrorist Attacks**

MAJOR GOVERNMENTAL BREAKDOWNS IN THE RESPONSE TO HURRICANE KATRINA

Faltering Mobilization

**The Response Began Slowly, with a General Feeling
of Uncertainty and Inconsistency**

**Actions Were Uncertain, Contradictory, and Counter-
productive**



MAJOR GOVERNMENTAL BREAKDOWNS IN THE RESPONSE TO HURRICANE KATRINA

Garbled Communication

**Government Personnel Did Not Communicate with
Others Who Were Involved in the Process**

No One Seemed to Know “Who Was Doing What”



GOVERNMENTAL BREAKDOWNS IN THE RESPONSE TO HURRICANE KATRINA

Personnel Problems in Public Sector

Timid Leadership– Public Officials at All Levels of Government Were Unwilling to Take Charge of the Situation

Untrained, Unprepared, and Understaffed Public Workforce Involved in Emergency Management

Privatization of Operations and Personnel Retirements and Demoralization of Emergency Management Staff





(CNN)

MAJOR GOVERNMENTAL BREAKDOWNS IN THE RESPONSE TO HURRICANE KATRINA

Inattention to Administrative Procedures

**Nobody Followed the Response Plan, Including the
Mayor and the City Government in New Orleans and
the Louisiana's Governor's Office**

Inappropriateness of Plans



MAJOR GOVERNMENTAL BREAKDOWNS IN THE RESPONSE TO HURRICANE KATRINA

Inability to Invoke Bureaucratic Flexibility (Effectively)

WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THESE BREAKDOWNS?

**Mismatch Between Governmental Policy and Disaster
Situation– Led to Sizable Gap**

Opened Up Other Societal Problems

**Produced Public Dissatisfaction with Governmental
Response**

**Opened Up *Other* Concerns About Governmental
Performance**

**Created Widespread Perceptions of Governmental
Incompetency and Ineptitude**

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

Adjust the current organizational framework

Improve preparation and training

Give greater responsibility to state and local authorities

Change existing policies and procedures

Provide greater oversight– legislative, citizen, etc.

Place the military in charge

OBSTACLES TO EFFECTIVE CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- **Crisis Management is a low-salience issue– until a disaster strikes**
- **Emergency managers and emergency service units may not have strong political constituencies**
- **Resistance to preparation, mitigation is tough to overcome**
- **Difficult to measure the effectiveness of emergency management policies and emergency service operations– unless there is a disaster**

OBSTACLES TO EFFECTIVE CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- **Money for emergency management programs is limited
(drive to connect financial appropriations to tangible outcomes and specific indicators of success)**
- **Diversity of hazards complicates the assessment of risk and the design of comprehensive emergency service operations**
- **Misunderstanding about the cause, duration, and frequency of crises**
- **“Crises are rare events/crises are inevitable”**

OBSTACLES TO EFFECTIVE CRISIS MANAGEMENT

**Bureaucratization
(Development of Bureaucratic Pathologies)**

Public Dissatisfaction

Loss of Trust and Confidence

Politicalization

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

**THE LINKAGE BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND THE
PUBLIC IS FRAGILE**

**MAJOR EFFORTS WILL HAVE TO BE TAKEN TO RE-
STORE THIS LINKAGE**

**IT IS POSSIBLE FOR THIS HAPPEN, BUT IT WILL TAKE
POLITICAL WILL, BUREAUCRATIC CHANGES, AND
CITIZEN SUPPORT**