FEEDBACK FROM THE FIELD

After the Oklahoma City Bombing: A Case Study of the
Resource Coordination Committee

Kenneth R. Wedel
and
Donald R. Baker
School of Social Work
University of Oklahoma
Norman, Oklahoma 73019
USA
Wedel (e-mail): kwedel@ou.edu

The Resource Coordination Committee (RCC) was established to address unmet needs in the wake of the Oklahoma City bombing on April 19, 1995. The purpose of the RCC was to bring together people who could contribute money, workers, or materials to serve unmet needs of disaster survivors. Initially composed of a working group of representatives from over 40 organizations, the RCC provided services or resources to individuals and families recovering from the disaster. We explored the organizational dynamics that emerged as the committee came together to address the unmet needs of victims. Particular attention was given to the leadership processes of the committee, its approach to decision-making, its control of confidentiality, and how it addressed accountability. Also, we conducted an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the RCC as identified by the members. In this report, we conclude with considerations based on case study findings for addressing unmet needs in future disaster situations.

The concept of unmet needs is central to U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) efforts to organize a community in the aftermath of a disaster. In many situations, an “unmet needs committee” is implemented to address follow-up on victim needs that are beyond the capability

*We would like to thank the following student research assistants for their assistance in the case study: Shawn Carberry, Richard Dimonos, James Dentz, Amin Hall, and Kathleen Hall.
of any one or several individual community organizations to handle. The purpose of an "unmet needs committee" is stated as follows:

To work with families who have been affected by disaster; to develop a plan for their recovery; to identify and help resolve emergency and long-range disaster-related needs that have not been met by local, state, federal and voluntary agency assistance. (National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster 1985)

When large amounts of money flow into a community and long-range needs are extensive, the term "resource coordination committee" is used to identify the committee structured to deal with unmet needs. Linking disaster victims to needed resources, resource coordination committees bring together organizations with money, workers, and materials to work cooperatively with social service relief agencies in disaster recovery.

Shortly after thebombing in Oklahoma City, the Resource Coordination Committee (RCC) was formed to carry out the recovery functions identified above. We report on a case study which explored the organizational dynamics that emerged as the RCC came together to process identified unmet needs. The specific focus of the study was on the leadership processes of the RCC, its approach to decision-making, networking among members of organizations, its control of confidentiality, and how it addressed accountability.

Our study follows the line of research directed toward understanding the role and function of community organizations during disaster and recovery. Studies of organizational and interorganizational response to disaster have primary utility in assisting communities in disaster planning, and offer promise for current and future research (Drahe 1991; Drahe 1997). Based on the extensive qualitative research conducted by the Disaster Research Center, Dynes (1970) developed an influential model of organized response to disaster that contained four subtypes based on a cross-classification of task and structure dimensions. Tasks are either regular, relating to the performance of the usual tasks carried out by the organization, or non-regular, relating to new or innovative tasks required of the organization in the face of the disaster. Structure can be either the old or existing structure of the organization or a new structural arrangement. The four-fold table produced by this arrangement is given in Table 1.

Stallings (1978) drew on this typology to develop a set of hypotheses related to the functioning of emergent organizations in the aftermath of a disaster. He proposed hypotheses that emergent groups tend to arise when people are isolated from emergency organizations and where there is a lack of information, control and coordination. Operations groups emerge at the intersection of lines
of communication between groups involved in the disaster while coordination groups emerge as a result of the perceived need for overall coordination and where information is problematic. Forrest (1978) proposed a relationship between the growth of emergent organizations and their structural expansion and the relationship between prior interaction patterns and the recruitment of specific actors for emergent group participation. Forrest also suggested that previous structural and procedural patterns were utilized to establish a set of functional interdependencies in emergent groups.

**Table 1. Task and Structure in Disaster Organizations**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Regular Task</th>
<th>Non-Regular Task</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Existing Structure</td>
<td>Established</td>
<td>Expanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Structure</td>
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The establishment of cooperative relationships between organizations is a typical post-disaster response of communities. The need for a community to quickly organize itself to address the aftermath of disaster has previously been identified (Gillespie and Colington 1993). Coordination of resource distribution following a disaster is a particularly problematic aspect of inter-organizational cooperation (Drabek 1986; Gillespie 1991) and can result in competitive interaction patterns when resources are scarce (Britton 1988). Inter-organizational mechanisms often emerge to increase the cooperative pattern of exchange and to minimize the competitive strains placed on organizations in the post-disaster period.

The study of emergent organizations is relatively new within the field of disaster research. It appears that many communities establish temporary inter-organizational mechanisms to address emergent community needs in the aftermath of a disaster. Gillespie and associates (Gillespie, Perry, and Mikes 1974) conducted a longitudinal study of emergent community organizations in response to a gradual-onset, long-term economic disaster in Seattle. The results of their study indicate that emergent organizations arise during periods of collective stress, serve as transitory social systems providing neglected community inputs, and then dissolve after the troublesome period has passed. However, little is known about the dynamics of the groups that emerge in the wake of a disaster to assist with community rehabilitation (Drabek 1986, p. 161). An assessment of the dynamics of the Oklahoma City RCC from the view of the members of the emergent organization will be the primary focus of our case study report.
Background

After the Oklahoma City bombing, there was a myriad of victims. Individuals and families experiencing the loss of a loved one or those with injured family members required assistance with medical bills and funeral expenses. Many persons in buildings close to the disaster site experienced the loss of a business, their employment, shelter, or personal property. All of these needs required the coordination of resources that were flooding into the community in the wake of the disaster. The flow of information necessary to coordinate disaster relief was also a problem. Many social service workers did not know which victims were eligible for what services or resources from the various sources of relief. The need for a mechanism to coordinate information and resources became apparent—a new task for which none of the social service agencies in the city were prepared. This situation led to the development of an emergent organization to address requests for assistance and to link affected persons to the many and varied sources of assistance that began to cascade almost immediately after the bombing.

Prior to the formation of a committee to address unmet needs (ultimately the RCC), informal networking among human service organizations in the greater Oklahoma City metropolitan area occurred at several levels. Agency executives served on the boards of other organizations, executives interacted through informal gatherings and case managers interacted with counterparts from other agencies on an as-needed basis. For some human service agencies more structured networking took place through an informal Urban Advisory Group which had evolved into Leadership Eighteen, an informal grouping of eighteen larger human service agencies in metropolitan Oklahoma City and the Prayer Breakfast sponsored by the Mayor. Other structured, but more or less informal interactions, took place among United Way agency members and the companion planning body, the National Voluntary Organization Active in Disasters.

Specific to disaster planning, the American Red Cross of Oklahoma City, the Oklahoma Department of Human Services Emergency Welfare Services, and the Oklahoma Department of Civil Emergency Management maintained early response duties for networking with other human services through their leadership responsibilities. However, no evidence has been uncovered to indicate a demonstration of formal coordination among the human service agencies of Oklahoma City, particularly toward emergency disaster planning.

The Bombing

On April 19, 1995, a bomb blast destroyed the nine-story Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. This was the
wounding 674 people. Twenty-five buildings were severely damaged or destroyed and another 300 received some damage (City of Oklahoma City 1996). Within minutes following the bombing, individual volunteers from buildings near the bombsite and formal emergency rescue organizations assisted the injured to available medical care. Within hours, a massive rescue operation was underway involving city, county, state, and federal security and rescue organizations.

First response included mobilization of the American Red Cross Disaster Action Team to provide mass care duties, including food and water for rescue workers and survivors. Sending teams to support workers, victims, and families were Feed the Children and the Salvation Army. By mid-day, clergy and mental health workers were organized to assist victims and families in coping with the tragedy.

Throughout the day of the bombing, the governor’s office and the Oklahoma Department of Civil Emergency Management (DCEM) continued to organize state support for the rescue operations and to coordinate the evolving federal response. A Red Cross Damage Assessment Team surveyed the area, assessed the damage to buildings, and prepared the report required for requesting federal assistance through FEMA. The Red Cross also carried out a primary role in caring for families evacuated from the damaged Regency Towers, a high-rise apartment near the Murrah Building.

Initial Response of the Social Service System. In the days following the bombing, human service agencies, service organizations, religious groups, business organizations, governmental units, and individual citizens helped through provision of goods and services. As the days and weeks went by, concerns began to shift from the initial immediate crisis needs due to the impact of the bombing to the longer-term effort to address the unmet needs of those affected by the disaster. The needs of rescuers, victims, family members, school children, and others vulnerable to the aftermath of the disaster would now be considered.

On May 5, 1995, the United Way of Metro Oklahoma City was requested by the governor’s office to establish a Computer Network Database to track and provide information on victims, survivors, and family members affected by the bombing. The information system was designed to link federal, state, and non-profit agencies together through a central network which included a Fund Registry. International Business Machines (IBM) donated 45 computers to key organizations throughout the metro area to implement the system. By April 15 1996, there were over 6,681 entries in the Community Network Database, including information on 6,445 individuals, 157 businesses and 79 funds. Augmenting data collection was a needs survey sent to approximately 2,200 individuals affected by the bombing (United Way of Metro Oklahoma City 1996).
Formation of the Resource Coordination Committee. To address the myriad of human needs occurring in the wake of the bombing, a committee to address unmet needs was formed in accordance with FEMA practice. The principal organizers represented disaster relief and government agencies, including local administrative representatives of Salvation Army, Feed the Children, American Red Cross, United Way, the Community Foundation, the governor’s office, the mayor’s office, and FEMA. In late May 1995, a permanent chair was named to the committee and shortly thereafter the committee’s name was established as the Resource Coordination Committee. Initially, the RCC held meetings each Friday. By August of 1996, the volume of activity had slowed to the point where the Committee met every other Friday. A subcommittee of case managers met regularly on the week in between RCC meetings. Within the first year of operation the RCC had spent over $1.66 million on unmet needs following a review of 372 cases (266 unduplicated). After two years of operation the proportion of cases involved: 31 percent medical needs; 15 percent transportation; 23 percent miscellaneous; and 32 percent other (vehicle, lost wages, mortgage, education, etc.). And after three years the RCC was still meeting every other week and processing new cases (personal communication from Dan Kurtenbach, June 5, 1998).

Methodology

Yin (1994) identifies three conditions that address the appropriateness of research design: the form of the research question; whether the study requires control over behavioral events; and whether the study focuses on contemporary events. We determined that a case study would be an appropriate research approach based on the conditions existent; the research questions were of a how, why nature; there were no requirements for control over behavioral events; and the focus was on a contemporary situation. Given the uniqueness of the disaster event and the resource limits imposed on the study, we decided to conduct a single case study. The research design represents the study of a unique case affording the opportunity for both intrinsic and instrumental understanding (Stake 1995). Finally, the design may be characterized as descriptive/exploratory in nature.

Data Collection Protocol

In keeping with the design and methodology of case study research, we planned on a rich descriptive database using a combination of survey, interview, and non-participant observation. Initial activities involved an interview with Dan Kurtenbach, chair of the RCC, and collection of interim reports available from different sources to establish a background understanding of the
RCC's origins. Following the interview with the RCC chair, a brief survey of the RCC membership was conducted followed by in-depth interviews with a sample of the membership representing a wide variety of agencies. Observations of a single meeting of the RCC and a meeting of the case-managers subcommittee, a structural feature that evolved out of the larger committee, were also included as part of the study protocol.

The Member Survey. A one-page survey was administered to all individuals identified by the RCC as members. The survey addressed how each agency was involved with the RCC, as a case manager, funding source, or combination of roles, and their experience and satisfaction with the RCC. This questionnaire was also used to screen individual members of the RCC for future in-depth interviews.

The sampling frame employed for the survey was based on a listing of 38 members who were considered to be regular attendees at the RCC meetings. Members from this list were faxed a copy of our cover letter and survey questionnaire. A total of 21 survey forms were returned, representing a response rate of 71 percent. The role distribution of survey respondents is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Role of Participating Agencies in the Resource Coordinating Committee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency Role</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case Management</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding Agency</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>52.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conducting the In-depth Interviews and the Content Analysis. Care was taken to select a sample of both case-managers and representatives of funding agencies. A structured interview guide was prepared for these interviews and was piloted on a member of the RCC. This pilot interview was video recorded for the purpose of training student research associates to perform the interviews. Based on this initial pilot, interview questions were modified and interviewers were trained. A total of 21 interviews were completed between March and June 1996. All interviews were audio tape recorded and transcribed. Transcribed interviews were examined and edited for consistency prior to analysis.

Data analysis was performed with the assistance of the QSR NUDIST software package version 3.0 (Sage Publications Software). A list of key words and phrases expressing concepts of interest were first developed and used to search the database. The search began with broad concepts such as 'strength' and...
"weakness," both foci of questions within the interview guide. Based on the outcomes of the initial searches with broader concepts, more specific searches of the database were initiated with a refined list of terms representing the concepts of leadership, decision-making, confidentiality, and accountability.

**Observing the RCC in Operation.** Two meetings were observed. We attended a meeting of the RCC as non-participants in August 1996. One of us also attended a meeting of the case managers subcommittee in September 1996. The same protocol of non-participant observation was followed at this meeting. Extensive notes were taken on the actual operation of both meetings and were added to the database.

**Results**

Bringing a variety of public and private agencies together to accomplish a time-limited task imposes unique problems related to group dynamics. Given the task facing the RCC, issues related to leadership, decision-making, confidentiality, and accountability needed to be worked out by member agencies. The mechanisms developed by the RCC membership in addressing these issues provide an interesting textbook example of community organization practice in the aftermath of a disaster.

**Leadership**

Effective leadership is an important variable in group dynamics research. Research on grassroots organizations shows that a lack of effective leadership may have dire consequences for grassroots groups' attempts to achieve change. An effective leader organizes the group to achieve its goals as well as inspires the members of the group to continue their work (Kahn 1991). Other theorists (Forsyth 1985; Ludwig 1985) argue that effective leaders within grassroots organizations are those who foster sharing and inclusive atmospheres.

For a group of diverse agencies to work well, there must be coherent leadership. Initially, it appears that the RCC had begun to form as a leaderless group. As one respondent put it, "At first it seemed like everyone was lost, we needed a structured way to handle things and to coordinate the services." With the perception of a need for a leader, the question arose as to who could best fill this role. To quote another member of the RCC, "There was a "brain storming" session to identify a leader during the initial meeting of the RCC." The members present at this session decided that the leader should be outside the existing system of agencies that had formed the RCC, or "outside the loop" as it was phrased. This leader should also be from an organization that would not now or in the future be directly involved in disaster relief work within the community. It appears that these considerations reflected the view that it would be easier to
raly a variety of agency members behind a "disinterested party" that would represent no perceived conflict of interest over the course of the RCC's existence.

The selection of a leader appeared to be an outgrowth of extensive informal social ties between executive directors of the core group of social agencies involved in the initial disaster relief effort. While Oklahoma City did not have an executive council or similar formal vehicle for bringing social service agency executives into contact with one another, there were informal mechanisms in place that established working ties among many of the human service agencies, as mentioned above. Participation in community partnering efforts produced a loose coalition among the agency executive directors. Based on the informal ties in place at the time of the bombing and the perceived need for leadership that was grounded in genuine disinterest, the executive director of Goodwill Industries, Dan Kurtenbach, was suggested. A key factor in the selection of this individual may have been his earlier selection as chair of Leadership Eighteen, an informal group of human service agency directors. This observation reinforces the view that extensive informal ties contributed to the success of the RCC's leadership. Dan Kurtenbach described this initial contact:

Four people came to the office and interviewed me. It was not like an interview for a job... it kind of let me know where the committee was up until that point. And this committee was not real structured at this point. It was only about 4 weeks after the bomb went off. When they came to interview me I asked 'what are some things I need to be concerned about?' 'Well, we need to have structure.' I said 'Why?' 'Well, we have about 55 or 60 people there and everybody wants to talk and everybody wants to get their opinions or their point of view heard and we just need to have some structure.' 'OK.' I said, 'Is there anything else?' 'Yeah, we need to have focus.' I said, 'Well, what do you mean by focus?' 'Well, we ought to have a code of conduct.' I said, 'Why a code of conduct?' 'Well, something to inspire us.' I said, 'Is that really a code of conduct?' 'Well, we want something to guide us through the process.' 'We want something to put in a frame and look at occasionally and think about that is why we are around.'

One of the first steps taken by the new chair was the preparation of a statement, "Principles of Guarding the Public Trust." This document, presented verbatim in Table 3, outlined a set of values and principles for guiding the operation of the committee. The document was described as focusing the committee and was read periodically, as when issues related to group dynamics arose. Interviews with other RCC participants indicated that this document served the periodic function of refocusing the committee and ensuring a commitment to
Table 3. Principles of Guarding The Public Trust

As members of the Oklahoma City Resource Coordinating Committee, we assume a public trust and recognize the importance of high ethical standards within the deliberations we conduct. Essential values and ethical behaviors we will exemplify include:

Commitment beyond self
Obedience of and commitment beyond the law
Commitment to the public good
Respect for the value and dignity of all individuals
Accountability to the public
Truthfulness
Fairness
Responsible application of resources

In keeping with these values and to assist us in fulfilling our responsibilities to the individuals and community we serve, we subscribe to the following principles:

- We will conduct ourselves and operate the Resource Coordinating Committee in a manner that upholds the integrity of both and merits the trust and support of the public;
- We will uphold all applicable laws and regulations, going beyond the letter of the law to protect and/or enhance the Resource Coordinating Committee’s ability to accomplish this mission;
- We will treat others with respect, doing for and to others what we would have done for and to us in a similar circumstance;
- We will be responsible stewards of all representative agencies;
- We will take no actions that could benefit an agency personally at the unwarranted expense of the Resource Coordinating Committee’s efforts as a whole, avoiding even the appearance of a conflict of interest. We will exercise prudence in the expenditure of all funds;
- We will carefully consider the public perception of our actions and the effect that action could have positively or negatively on member agencies.

June 9, 1995

(Signature)
Early on it was determined that membership on the RCC would be open to any agency or organization if they brought "money, manpower, or material." While membership was open, the application of a strict adherence to confidentiality dissuaded the media and observers from attending. Agency executives were also discouraged from attending meetings of the committee. The RCC chair explained the code followed by the RCC in the following:

If they did not bring money, manpower, or material and if they just wanted to sit there and observe . . . it is possible that you could do that maybe once or twice, but it is not a place where you sit and observe, because, what it really is the community staffing on their needs. And if you come together and say, case ABC they need a vehicle because it was burned up or they need utilities paid and you start talking about have you tried that or have you done that well I do not think this should happen and I do not think that should happen . . . . that is real sad. I mean you have got all of these different people coming together and saying that. I mean if you are not bringing money, manpower or material then you are not contributing to staffing.

In summary, the initial impetus to establish the RCC came from a group of core human service agencies lead by FEMA. The initial perception of need for structure among the committee membership led to the selection of a chairperson enmeshed in the web of informal ties existing between agency directors before the disaster. As suggested by Forrest (1978), this selection represented a neutral position within the network of diverse agencies involved in disaster relief. The initial structure provided by the chairperson allowed the membership to focus its efforts on its principle task of disaster relief.

The Decision-Making Process of the RCC

The decision making process within the RCC may be viewed as an example of bounded rationality (March and Simon 1958). Within this model group decision-making is limited by the constraints of individual member characteristics and the inability to know all of the variables that might influence the decision. The final decision represents the outcome of a process of bargaining among individuals representing different views and goals and operating within different levels of uncertainty regarding the variables in the decision-making situation (Cyert and March 1963). Within the RCC, all members from funding organizations and case management agencies represented constituencies with different views of the relief effort, sometimes divergent goals, and different levels of uncertainty regarding case characteristics and funding availability.
The purpose of the RCC was to distribute resources to victims of the bombing to meet needs that were not clearly the responsibility of any social service agency. As indicated above, the resources came from a number of private, public, and philanthropic sources and went to clients from public and private (many religiously affiliated) agencies. The committee, therefore, had two difficult decisions to make, which clients would be presented to the committee as requiring assistance beyond the usual mechanisms of support, and which organizations would provide the needed resources.

In the first few months of operation, case managers from the various public and private non-profit agencies would come to the RCC and present their cases individually. This appears to have created several problems. At first, the various resource organizations that had brought money, workers, or materials to the RCC were motivated to give generously and with little attention to standards of need. Another problem involved the level of prior work and preparation that had gone into the case-management process. This problem is highlighted in the following quote:

"Not all the case managers from the various agencies had done their homework and they asked a lot of questions during the meeting that should have been part of their homework. They should have been doing their job of researching the case before they brought it to the group. The time spent during Committee meetings would have been spent a lot more efficiently on behalf of the client."

We have learned to be more organized. A lot of the money that was given out in the beginning was because people didn’t know what they were doing. They really did not and somebody can say, ‘Yes, I am a case manager’ or ‘Yes, I am a social worker’ and that’s like saying Whoopi Goldberg is, because they know nothing about it and that’s why a lot of the people, actually I’d say a few people, got funding that really shouldn’t have. I can’t give you any specifics, but it happens and in the aftermath of a disaster when there is no organization, per se, that can take care of something that happens that quick unless you’ve got people trained for it.

The distinction between problems and dilemmas in group decision-making helps to understand the emergence of the decision-making structure within the RCC, given the initial difficulties encountered (Katz and Kahn 1978). Problems can typically be solved within the existing policy structure of the group. When existing policy cannot resolve the problem, the committee is faced with a dilemma requiring reformation of group policy and procedure.
The combination of unprofessional case management combined with overzealous giving threatened initially to drain off vital resources and produced, in effect, a dilemma. Many unmet needs committees established in the aftermath of natural disasters do their job and go away in a few months. The nature of the Oklahoma City bombing was such that unmet needs could be many months, years, or even decades into the future. The need for a more rational approach to decision-making required that a new mechanism be innovated in the traditional unmet need concept. The mechanism evolved was designated as the case managers subcommittee.

The case managers subcommittee was comprised of single representatives from a core group of four social services agencies, the American Red Cross, Catholic Charities, Salvation Army, and Community Counseling Center. These core case management agencies took responsibility for case triage and presentation at the larger RCC meetings. The role and function of the case managers subcommittee is addressed in the following statement:

The case manager meetings have helped us to talk about a client we plan to present. We find out if any other agencies have dealt with this client, or if we don’t know what to do with this client we can at least throw ideas around and then present it at the RCC.

The development of the case managers subcommittee allowed an element of rationality to be introduced into the decision of which cases most deserved the attention of the RCC. As interpreted within the model of bounded rationality the uncertainty of the larger committee had to do with who best met criteria of need and deserved consideration. This was a point of much initial confusion and disagreement, and was reduced by the professional case management activities that took place within the subcommittee.

The second decision-making problem was to determine which agencies would commit organizational resources to meet identified victim needs. To address the problem it was necessary that agency organizational representatives have the authority to make the needed commitments. The importance of this authority is addressed in the following quote:

And I can go to the table at the RCC and commit funds without having to go back through a formally structured process and get permission. I got my permission up front from my committee, and I was given very broad parameters. And it was just absolutely wonderful! I mean it’s worked out very well and it’s been a very good experience.

In essence, this member sought and was given permission by the organization’s citywide board to give funds. This exemplifies the need to integrate the decision-making authority granted to the RCC member with the agency's
decision-making structure. This structure may involve both internal and external committees and boards that must be reported to at the local and, for some agencies like Salvation Army and the American Red Cross, at the national level.

With the authority to commit resources established and with a case before the committee, the decision of who would provide the needed resources exemplifies the interaction of bargaining identified as an important component of group decision-making within bounded rationality. Based on observations of the RCC meeting we attended, elements of bargaining between case managers and funding representatives were noted for almost every case presented. For example, one case was presented in which a case manager requested the purchase of a van. When attention shifted to who would provide the resources needed for this particular case, several alternative funding sources were suggested by committee members followed by considerable negotiation between the representatives of the funding organizations that were singled out. With some joking and cajoling by other members of the RCC, a representative of a large business-oriented philanthropic organization made an offer which was deemed appropriate by other members of the committee. This negotiation process was noted for the majority of the twelve cases that were staffed at this particular meeting.

A newspaper reporter who represented a funding organization on the RCC further documents this process:

So how is this group making the how-to-spend-money decisions? Example: A woman with small children of her own has taken in the children of a relative killed in the bombing. The woman has legal custody and will raise the children as her own. Various funds are helping her with food, shelter, clothing, etc., but one need doesn’t fit the guidelines of the usual agencies (FEMA, Red Cross, Salvation Army, etc.). The woman’s car is far too small for her new enlarged family. One fund’s administrator reports he has researched the case, has the promise of a very good price on a mini-van and needs $14,000 plus to buy it. Many agencies have two or more representatives at the meeting. They talk among themselves and one says, ‘Our fund can give $3,000.’ Another adds, ‘OK, if you’ll do that, we’ll go $3,000.’ It’s a tense, concerned moment. A silence hangs over the group, until chairman Dan Kurtenbach says, in an auctioneer’s chant, ‘OK, I’ve got $3,000. Who’ll give me $3,000?’ That breaks the tension, and another fund leader says, ‘we can go $3,000, too.’ And soon the money is pledged. (Lee 1995)
In summary on the decision-making policy and procedure innovated by the RCC, it appears to reflect the outgrowth of a dilemma between the need for professional case management and the urge to give to the disaster relief effort. This dilemma was recognized in the initial phases of the development of the RCC and tied to the innovation of the case managers' subgroup. The case managers subgroup provided the needed niche of needy cases and an organized presentation of factual information related to the case to the larger committee. The process of linking a source of relief to a specific case reflects an interaction process between case managers and representatives of funding agencies which exemplifies the less rational aspects of bounded rationality. Left strictly to the outcomes of the larger group process, the decisions made by the RCC may have been more chaotic and generally less rational in relation to the needs of individuals and families seeking relief.

Confidentiality Within the RCC

Within human services, the issue of confidentiality of client information is sacrosanct. Information about clients can only be shared with others when the client or the client's legal representative has provided appropriate consent. The social worker is expected to only share the minimum of information that is needed to make a decision or to render services, to disclose to clients what information has been shared, and to disclose client information only when privacy has been ensured. These safeguards extend to sharing information with the media (National Association of Social Workers 1997).

One of the problems in maintaining confidentiality encountered by the RCC involved the diversity of participants, both agencies and individuals. Within the RCC, laypersons were combined with agency workers, many of whom were not trained as professional social workers, to present and discuss cases of need. Those from more traditional case management or social work agencies generally appeared to have little problem in the maintenance of confidentiality. Individuals from outside of the social work/human services community appeared to have a problem with the concept, as illustrated in the following statement:

The only problem we'd had with confidentiality has been that a lot of these people out of the goodness of their heart have come forward representing their organization and have been providing case management type services without case management training. They were laymen. So the confidentiality issue at times has been breached by certain individuals. The Chair talked to us as case managers to try and say that's inappropriate, let's not do that. This is the criteria for it. And we
little excited about this is great and this is what happened and they want to tell. They want to say, "God, this was so neat." And when we say the confidentiality has been broken, we don't mean going to the media. But we mean it was told to someone it shouldn't have been told to.

Problems in maintaining confidentiality with "laypersons" or those who were doing case management but did not have professional training or background was mentioned by several of those interviewed. From one interview it appeared that client confidentiality issues may have arisen several times over the course of the early meetings. Most of the breaches in confidentiality were handled through informal means with the professional case managers taking the lead. Over time, however, sets of formal controls on confidentiality were established. These controls included having all RCC members sign a confidentiality statement, having the chair of the RCC emphasize confidentiality repeatedly over the course of the committes meetings, having only professional case managers present information on victim needs, having clients at agencies represented in the RCC sign a release of confidential information specifically for the RCC, and using waivers of confidential information where appropriate.

The role of the RCC leadership in reinforcing these formal controls on confidentiality is apparent in the following member's statement:

I think it was probably Dan's and ______'s influence that they developed some good social work principals, like confidentiality of the meeting. No one would be allowed to come except people who brought manpower, materials or money. No one needing assistance would be brought in, so that the funders were free to talk about and evaluate from whatever their perspectives were, what people needed.

The stress on confidentiality also created some problems for the RCC. The emphasis on confidentiality inhibited the need to inform the public about the good works of the RCC.

The fault with it is we don't have a chance to really ring the bell of the RCC and tell people how much help is being done. And the media has a tendency to pick up on, 'Well, my case didn't get handled' or 'I don't think I've gotten enough money.' And nobody has said, 'But we gave this and so to thus and so.' So I would say in that regard confidentiality is kind of a problem in itself. We are so confidential that nobody knows the good that is happening.

In summary, confidentiality became a key concern in the early phases of the committee's work. Initially, informal mechanisms of control developed...
which were supplemented by more formal mechanisms such as interagency agreements and having all members and attendees sign a formal statement of confidentiality. The committee’s leadership reinforced these formal mechanisms repeatedly over the course of the RCC.

The Accountability of the RCC

Troppman, Johnson, and Troppman (1992) have observed that, within social services systems, committees tend to have very limited accountability. This is due to the fact that many committees are not public but operate in a private arena, are constructed in ways that give them real but not formal power, and engage in relatively complex forms of decision-making, all of which make accountability difficult. The nature of the RCC, including the participation of many diverse organizations and the stress on confidentiality of the committee’s proceedings and activities, made the problem of accountability even more pronounced and created some problems for the committee in the justification of its expenditures.

Given these constraints, an emphasis on individual rather than group or committee accountability emerged over the course of the committee’s development, as exemplified in the following member’s statement:

My sense is that each agency certainly has its own structure of accountability within it. I assume that if there’s been any problems or delays on getting money from an agency that’s committed money, that they would probably be weeded out. Well, that’s not true either. I was going to say they were going to be weeded out because the case managers would know that’s a difficult agency to work with and so they wouldn’t contact them.

But if they are at that table and they offer to pay for something, then it’s accepted—so I think it seems to be individual accountability more than group accountability.

As indicated in the above quote, the need for individual RCC members to relate their decision-making authority to existing agency decision-making mechanisms evolved as the primary means for making the committee decisions accountable. This arrangement was viewed as providing a simple and elegant arrangement for accountability, as exemplified in the following quote:

As far as RCC goes it is the simplest structure there is. You’ve got all of the agencies coming together. Each one [agency] with their own criteria. A person is presented to you. You make sure the person is legitimate—the need is legitimate and you take care of it. That’s all that there is—this kind of sums up the RCC.

It appears that accountability can be tied directly to the decision-making authority described above, providing an interlocked set of structural concepts.
for the operation of the RCC. The implications of this approach for the case managers attending the RCC is brought out in the following statement:

I know about my accountability to my agency and organization and I feel extremely comfortable—I know where every penny was spent and I feel very comfortable where I spent every penny. I would think they would all have to be accountable to their own boards, like we are to ours.

In summary, on the RCC's accountability, it was primarily lodged at the level of the individual decisions made during the course of the committee's work. If a representative of a funding agency committed money, workers or materials for a particular case that had been presented to the RCC they, and not the RCC, were accountable to their organization for the decision. However, minutes of each RCC meeting were recorded and kept in strict confidence.

Networking Among RCC Members

Networking, or the establishment of ties between agency representatives, is an important dynamic of committee work. We were interested to know what kind of networking occurred among the RCC members and how this networking was carried out among the organizations involved. One of the members gave a detailed account of the process of networking:

I think that it has taught us that the whole is greater than the parts. What I can contribute might not be enough, but the whole, somebody else can contribute what I am short of and I think that’s what I think the social service community and the agency has learned—that there is somewhere besides just my organization. Most organizations are very jealous and very passionate about their system and their agency. And I think this has been broken down some of those barriers. Nobody has lost their passion for their individual calling. But I think the fact that everybody sees the other agencies not as competitors but as agencies that can help a certain situation and I think that has been the broadest thing from a community standpoint in terms of the agency’s ability to deal with this disaster. I don’t know this for fact, but I’m going to guess there have been some case needs brought to individual agencies that aren’t bombarding related, but still involved contacting another agency and saying, ‘I have this situation, it’s not bombarding related, but can you help me with it?’ I don’t think this would have happened before.

Another interviewee brought up a significant point about a new kind of networking that developed out of the RCC process. It is the involvement of
new sets of community organizations, namely the interactions between civic
groups (service organizations) and traditional human service organizations.
The specifics of this networking are given in the following statement:
One of the things you don’t see in terms of regular traditional
social services is the direct involvement of civic groups. Civic
groups tend to donate money and to give to causes, but you couldn’t
associate faces and names with those people and go to their
clubs and talk to their luncheons and really increase support for
the effort and what you’re doing. Plus we’ve had some national
civic groups—national officers wanting to come and see
where their donations went. For instance, we had a national pres-
ident come to see where it went, and, of course, that information
then becomes available to the community’s that donated.
Also mentioned across several of the interviews was a more direct
interaction among cooperating organizations. An example is expressed in the
following quote:
Many of the organizations that we work with through the RCC,
we work with direct. I mean we work with the CEO’s direct
and we have a hotline to their office and in terms of future reg-
ular kinds of traditional social services that might be a benefit
to us. Now we know those people, and we can call and say,
“We have an indigent client that needs this, can you help us?”
They have seen they can trust us, and I’m sure that will bene-
fit regular social services in the future.
Another example illustrates how networking in the RCC can have an effect
on working with other organizations in distribution of scarce resources:
Each year agencies vie for United Way funds for their agency.
People now say “If I don’t have enough funds to handle this
activity.” Now I know who does have funds and I’ve put a face
on the agency so that I know the person to call to get some help.
I think this will have lasting effects on the community.
A final example on networking cites how the structure of the RCC led to
the creation of an ongoing problem-solving process based on relationships
among RCC participants:
Friendships have developed out of the committee structure—not
everything has to wait till Friday’s meeting. The casework agen-
cies know, well, that is something Feed the Children can fund right
now. In fact, prior to the committee meeting there’s often little
knots of people meeting and things are getting funded before they
ever come to the formal agenda. There has been a real synergy.
In summary on networking, some members perceived that while the RCC represented a degree of equality in structure and process, there was nevertheless a "core group" of agencies. The perception was that there was a "core group" in existence before the RCC was formed and there would be a "core group" to get together if another disaster called for it.

Assessment of the RCC

We believed that interviewees would provide important information about how the RCC operates through inquiry into the strengths and weaknesses they perceived. RCC members were asked directly about their perceptions of strengths and weaknesses of the RCC. Responses to the question about strengths were classified into different areas of strengths: confidentiality, focus on a goal, and participation in a larger group effort. These should not be viewed as mutually exclusive patterns, but simply as a means by which we chose to organize the responses received.

The RCC as a Confidential Arena for the Discussion of Each Case.

Several RCC members noted that having an environment in which confidentiality is honored lends an atmosphere in which participants are encouraged to freely engage in information exchange on the cases presented. Illustrative responses to strength in confidentiality are given in the following:

I think one of the unique strengths is that everyone is free to discuss whatever they’d like in a particular case. Knowing that it is a confidential arena for discussion has been very helpful. Sometimes we are discussing questionable needs and that can be really tough. Not contributing to somebody’s needs doesn’t reflect one way or another on that particular agency.

I think the strength has been it’s confidentiality, quite frankly. We work very closely with the agencies that are actually dealing directly with the victims. We scrutinize each application or each victim that comes in. And I don’t say that in a bad light at all, it’s just that you find out very quickly if the claims are legitimate or not and sometimes there has to be a lot of research as to whether they are valid claims or not. So the process is confidential. The rights of the victim are definitely protected and it’s handled in a very discrete manner.

The Goal Focus of the RCC. The broader goal of helping disaster victims/families with unmet needs appears to have brought cohesion to the RCC. Below are illustrative quotes from RCC members that highlight this strength:

A strength is that everybody has one goal in mind and that’s the client—the person that is affected. And everybody pulls
together. We may not always agree on something, but it’s discussed and there’s never, I don’t think I have ever heard a cross word, and you know, there were 5060 people at a time at these meetings in the beginning.

***

All sharing the common goal is a real strength.

***

I think the strengths of the RCC approach would be that you’re working with other community organizations who are set up to assist the victims of disaster and you have the same goal. You’re all on the same page as far as what you are doing and why you’re doing it.

The RCC as a Larger Group Effort in the Face of Disaster. The RCC’s membership included the large and, in some cases, international human service agencies down to small religious denominational organizations. In particular, the smaller organizations in RCC recognized the strength in becoming a part of a larger concerted effort. The response below makes that point:

I think the strong point is that it is a combination of social effort. That every agency participated without their by-laws getting in the way or what have you. And that’s the strength of it. I think it brings together needs and funding at a very unusual level and I think that is the strong point. As a small church, we would never hear of the case needs if it weren’t for the RCC. So I think it allows us to participate in a much broader Oklahoma City effort. It is a real strength of the RCC that we have a chance to be involved with the community on the whole regardless of how small we are.

Problem with Media and Public Perceptions. A perceived weakness appeared as the flip side of a strength, confidentiality. RCC members expressed concerns about the media and perceptions about the RCC and its work. The following statements highlight this concern:

I think the weaknesses are more the result of the media and public perceptions, than they are about intentional efforts or even oversights of the committee members.

***

In some cases the victim’s family think we (funders) should be able to cover everything that comes up and costs money. Then, if they don’t immediately get what they ask for, they see a large sum of money that went to another victim’s family.
The RCC is a large group of people and it is hard for everyone to understand or to hear what’s being said. But, that’s kind of a minor problem, I think.

* * *

Probably the only weakness that I could detect is that from time to time each funding group that comes to the table may have their own agenda in mind. Sometimes they are less focused on the problem and tend to be more narrowly focused on a set of individuals or whatever.

* * *

It is a big responsibility and commitment to be on the committee—a big commitment for an agency to make in serving on the RCC. We didn’t plan on three to four years of meeting every Friday.

* * *

Some agencies are a ‘little bit too lenient.’ The RCC was viewed by many members as being very successful in identifying weaknesses and making adjustments as needed to overcome weaknesses as exemplified in this statement:

Early on a weakness was that in cases where a victim/family got help on the same day from several different agencies it wouldn’t show up in reporting until much later. This weakness became pretty obvious early on, and the more the committee met the more it fine-tuned itself.

The Future of the RCC

Respondents were asked to speculate on the future of the RCC. Responses were categorized in the following manner: as tied to the exclusive needs of the Oklahoma City bombing victims/families; as depending on the changing needs and focus of RCC; and as a broader need for community.

The Future as Tied to Exclusive Needs of Bombing Victims/Families

An example of responses fitting this pattern is the following:

This RCC in place right now will continue to meet exclusively for the purpose of the disaster. Over time we had different members come and go, as one organization pays us with money and then they run out of money they leave. I think the RCC that is actually in place right now will continue to be in place and work exclusively with or for disaster victims and survivors and to meet their need. But that is not to say that there might
be the rebirth of another similar organization, like this, that continues to meet on a regular basis, semipermanent basis, that tries to meet the needs of traditional clients.

The Changing Needs and Focus of RCC

Examples of perceptions fitting this pattern are the following responses:

Recently we've had some success in getting people to think about the critically injured. Because the critically injured they haven't been mistreated, but they haven't had the press and so people don't think about them and their longterm recovery needs and it's been hard to get people to understand that. When people call in and they want to give money, whether they want to hear it or not we can kind of try to direct them to those longterm recovery needs, instead of education. The first redirection we did was to get them to think in terms of current educational needs as opposed to the future, so we would have something to help kids with things like taking the SAT or tutoring or educational enrichment. We got that pretty well funded up. And that's probably enough for that. So then we started in on the critically injured's needs. But even there we don't have a clear idea of how much money we are talking about and when is it time to say go take care of your own nonprofits and go on home.

The funding needs will not be as great in the future because most of the physical needs will be taken care of. Buildings and things like that, but the emotional needs will continue for a long period of time. So I think there will be a continuing need for caseworkers to say we need some help here and some cases, medical bills. Some of the people will need to have medical attention way out into the future.

The Future as a Broader Need for Community Disaster Preparedness

A focus on the broader needs of the community is illustrated in the responses that follow:

I think it will always have a life. Frankly, I think the needs from the bombing victims themselves may go on for as long as four to five years.

I truly hope that maybe we'll never see the end of need from the bombing, but even if we do there will be the need for a
structure like this to function in the future for disaster, whether it's tornadoes or else other activities. There will always be a core group that will support this kind of activity. If there is a tornado or some kind of natural disaster, I think this committee will spring back into action and cover that need. I just can't imagine that if there were a local disaster that I wouldn't be immediately sending a letter to people who have donated and say, 'You know, we have got another problem in Oklahoma City, could you send us some money and we will make sure it gets handled as the bombing problems were handled.' So I think it has a life maybe forever. It may only meet when there is a disaster, but when there is one I think this group is solidified enough that everybody would be on the phone saying, 'Should we get back together and deal with this issue?' I just think it's and people who have participated now ten years from now I think there will be somebody in each of those agencies who will kind of be left with the file to say, 'If I'm gone from [my organization], somebody else will be the responsible person.'

***

I think what's probably going to need to happen is the RCC will decide to set up some endowments for future needs... like educational endowments (for children who lost parents) and things that may be ongoing or some mental health issues. But, I think that once that is set up, RCC will probably be turned over to someone like Red Cross or Salvation Army or Community Foundation or someone like that.

The time frame for existence of a committee to address unmet needs does not fit into an easily stated formula. Advice is given that, as a recovery organization begins to run out of cases or resources, its members need to prepare for a clear process of closure (National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster 1995). However, the issue of longevity for such committees following disasters has not been a subject of systematic research. The future of the RCC, according to respondents in this study, suggests that there will be a role for the Committee as long as unmet needs are presented and funds are available to meet these needs. For the longer run, there is some speculation (perhaps hope) that the RCC will evolve into a more permanent structure for human services in Oklahoma City. In a letter to the Resource Coordination Committee Formation Team dated two and a half years after the bombing, RCC chair Dan Kurtenbach stated the following:
I asked the case managers how long they expected their organizations to remain involved with the issues and cases related to the bombing. American Red Cross, Catholic Charities, Salvation Army, United Way and Community Counseling expressed varying lengths of commitment, however, most stated they assess the need annually. It therefore is apparent there is no immediate need to suspend the RCC function. There are a number of secondary victims now for the first time being brought to the attention of the committee. While the dollar need is not at the level of two years ago, it is nonetheless considered a necessary need for victims. (Kurtenbach 1997)

Summary and Conclusions

The dynamics of the Resource Coordination Committee was the focus of this case study. The processes of leadership, decision-making, confidentiality, accountability, and interagency networking were examined through the analysis of qualitative interviews conducted approximately one year after the committee was established to address unmet needs in the wake of the Oklahoma City bombing.

Leadership

Leadership appears to have emerged as an issue in the early phase of committee formation with a perceived need to focus the committee’s actions. Existing ties between agency executives formed the basis for the selection of the committee’s leadership with the additional requirement of neutrality and distance from the actual impact of the bombing. While essentially uninvolved in the actual decision-making process, the leader did manage to keep the committee focused and established an adherence to principles of good social work, reinforcing a process of rational decision-making and confidentiality of information. Based on this analysis, the following considerations for leadership were derived:

- The leader should be enmeshed within the existing network of social agencies.
- The leader should be neutral and not a member of the core group of agencies involved in disaster relief or any agency directly effected by the disaster.
- The leader should strive to encourage an inclusive atmosphere where information can be shared.
- The leader should keep the committee focused on its task through periodic reminders and prompts.
The leader should encourage good social work principles with an emphasis on rational decision-making and confidentiality.

Decision-making
Decision-making within the committee involved two interrelated tasks: deciding whom the committee would serve, and who would provide funds or services. Decision-making related to the first decision task was enhanced by the development of a case-managers subcommittee to provide a more detailed assessment and triage of cases prior to their presentation to the full committee. The decision as to who would provide support for any given case reflected the operation of negotiation and collective social pressure as appropriate funding sources came forward or were identified. Based on this analysis, the following considerations for collective decision-making were derived:

- Deciding whom to serve and who should provide services or resources require separate decision-making structures.
- Assessment of victim need and case triage should be done outside of other committee tasks.
- Assessment of need and case triage should be the responsibility of professional social workers representing the core social service agencies of the community.
- A focus on negotiation and bargaining should be emphasized in the selection of funding sources.

Confidentiality
Always a concern in situations where professional social workers and laypersons come into contact to make decisions concerning services to individuals and families, confidentiality was addressed by a number of formal and informal mechanisms. The use of signed confidentiality statements by committee members, signed releases of information by clients that were common to all member agencies, and frequent focusing of the committee membership on confidentiality concerns by the committee leadership constituted the formal mechanisms for addressing confidentiality concerns. When confidentiality was breached, informal pressure by the social workers within the committee was used to address concerns. Based on this analysis, the following considerations for the maintenance of confidentiality were derived:

- Formal mechanisms to promote confidentiality should be developed at the beginning of the committee’s work.
- All committee members should be required to sign statements of confidentiality before being allowed to participate in the committee’s activities.
- All victims or victim families desiring assistance should be required to sign a common release of information.
- The need for maintenance of confidentiality should be repeatedly addressed by the committee's leadership.
- Informal mechanisms of social control should be utilized to address specific breaches in confidentiality.

**Accountability**

Accountability was not perceived as an essential concern of the committee. Instead, individual case management and funding agencies addressed accountability within the context of the decision-making mechanisms and authority that had previously been established by the agency. At a broader level, the RCC did issue periodic reports detailing the amount of money that had been spent and the general nature of the expenditures. Based on this analysis, the following considerations for addressing accountability were derived:
- Accountability should be placed at the level of the participating agencies and organizations.
- Periodic reports detailing committee expenditures, the number and types of victims served, and the types of needs addressed should be made available to the public via news media and appropriate governmental bodies.

**Networking**

Networking was a central feature of the committee structure, particularly in emphasis on equality of membership. The interaction between civic groups and social service agencies led to a clearer understanding of what could and could not be done by the individual organizations and the development of direct contacts. This increase in understanding and connection had implications for work outside the specific concerns with disaster relief, enabling workers to address unrelated client concerns. Even with the networking that did occur, there was an enduring perception that a core group of agencies was primarily responsible for driving disaster recovery and that this set of core agencies would be the major players the next time that a disaster situation was encountered. Based on this analysis, the following considerations for networking were derived:
- Equality of membership should be emphasized at the beginning of committee formation.
- Differences in the role and function of social service agencies and civic groups should be emphasized at periodic intervals.
- Direct contacts between committee members should be encouraged by the exchange of names, mail and e-mail.
addresses, and telephone numbers through a master listing. Committee members should be encouraged to share resources and personnel for non-disaster needs outside of the formal committee structure.

**Study Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

Our study is based exclusively on qualitative case study methodology. Caution should be exercised in generalizing findings to other disaster-related unmet needs committees under other circumstances. However, efforts were made to include what Phillips (1997) has identified as important features of qualitative research, trustworthiness, credibility, authenticity, and dependability. Our use of a semi-structured interview protocol and stratified random sampling of respondents also strengthened the internal and external validity of the study design. Validity of the analysis and interpretation of data were enhanced by the use of knowledgeable informants from the RCC. Members of the committee leadership and the core agencies involved in forming the committee were used in the review of the finished product. While a statistical analysis of responses was prevented by the small sample size and the lack of quantitative measures, the use of sophisticated text-based computer analysis of verbatim transcripts increased our confidence that personal biases were controlled as much as circumstances would allow.

To our knowledge this is the first systematic study of the implementation of the resource coordination committee concept. Future research should be focused on establishing the differences in the implementation of this concept as a function of variations in the disaster setting. The Oklahoma City bombing was an acute localized disaster with a finite number of victims with very similar unmet needs. Whether the configuration and operation of an unmet needs committee will be similar in disaster situations that are broader in geographic coverage and time frame will need to be established. It is likely that disasters of larger scale will require decentralized mechanisms for addressing unmet needs with variations in coordination and control between sites.

From a methodological perspective, the incorporation of systematic surveys addressing past, present, and future connections or linkages between community organizations involved in an ad hoc unmet needs committee and its operation would allow the use of concepts from social network theory. Concepts such as centrality, prominence, network structure, and density may prove useful in understanding the preconditions necessary for the effective implementation of the unmet needs committee concept. Combining the deep understanding that comes from a qualitative analysis of social phenomena
with the additional insight and rigorous quantification available within social network theory and analysis would appear to be a logical step forward (Gillespie and Colignon 1993).

A final question of interest to us addresses the relationship between the existing network of social service agencies and civic organizations before a disaster and the subsequent formation and operation of the immediate needs committee. Given the essentially loose and informal structure of social service agencies and civic groups within Oklahoma City, the requirement of initial leadership by core agencies was paramount. It is likely that the initiation and formation of a resource coordination committee would vary in a more tightly structured community network.

Note
1. The interview guide is available from the authors.

References


Crisis Intervention by Community Participation

Jeyanth K. Newport
and
Godfrey G. P. Jawahar
Society for National Integration Through Rural Development
Railpet
Ongole-523 001
Prakasam District
Andhra Pradesh
INDIA

Every year some or other part of Andhra Pradesh’s vast sea coast is affected by violent storms and catastrophic floods. The southeast coast of India is a disaster-prone area due to its geographical position as well as its topographic conditions. The rural fisherfolk in the area are regular victims of natural calamities. The economic consequences of cyclones and floods include the loss of human life as well as that of livestock, loss of crops, and damage to houses as well as damage to fishing equipment and other durable assets of the households. Disaster prevention is not always possible, whereas the effects of disaster can always be mitigated. The lack of capability and disaster management techniques within the community are the main reasons. This adds to the magnitude of losses during the time of natural calamities. As there is no well-coordinated national plan extending to the micro-level, disaster management remains ineffective.

Even though the government at different levels is set up to handle disaster management in terms of disaster preparedness and relief, it has failed to institute long-term measures involving the people who are the regular victims of disasters. Due to the hierarchical pattern of the government, the relief and rehabilitation measures are not reaching the people at the grassroots level. Various government and non-governmental agencies play a vital role in terms of immediate response, but the individual families within the community play important roles in terms of long-term recovery. It is evident that no measures so far have been initiated to learn about the coping strategies of the families to survive during natural calamities or about the role of the non-governmental organizations in the social setting of these rural communities. The result is often duplication with government relief and rehabilitation measures.
NGO Intervention and Community Participation

The Society for National Integration Through Rural Development (SNIRD) has initiated a program called "Organization of Marine Fisherfolk" in 16 villages from 1989 onwards to impart leadership skills and better bargaining power for the socioeconomic betterment of the marine fisherfolk. The fisherfolk community migrated and settled in Prakasam District a few decades back. Lack of any recognition by the government and exploitation at various levels have kept them in the lowest ebb of life. Hence, village-level institutions were formed and trained to tap government resources for the development of the village and to tackle issues which pose a threat to their survival.

During the 1992 "killer cyclone," SNIRD observed that the lives of the fisherfolk in these villages were worst affected. In parallel with government services to victims, SNIRD initiated relief and rehabilitation efforts in various fisherfolk villages in the Prakasam District. After seeing the plight of the fisherfolk due to lack of mitigation plans, SNIRD made plans to educate and involve the community in disaster management in the 16 villages and in the other fisherfolk villages where there is no NGO involvement. Hence, from 1992 onwards SNIRD has conducted the program "Community Preparedness and Disaster Management" directly in 44 fisherfolk communities and, through NGO networks, in another 24 villages in the Prakasam District of Andhra Pradesh.

Cause and Effect

The details of natural disasters and the notable casualties and the stress that are recorded in the past five years in our target villages are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Deaths and Property Loss in Four Recent Disasters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Type of Natural Disaster</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
<th>Loss of property (in U.S. dollars)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Killer cyclone</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>38,000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Devastating flood</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33,000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Flood</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>62,300+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Flood</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>34,500+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Disaster Management Strategies

It is inevitable that a great proportion of the national budget is spent every year for disaster relief and rehabilitation purposes. As the cyclones and floods that occur in the Bay of Bengal are natural disasters, the frequency of their occurrence is unpredictable. Also, government preparatory measures are lacking.
The officials take measures based on superficial information without consulting the target people in need. The official distribution system also takes time and creates immense logistical problems. During the recent cyclones of October 1996, the state government gave orders to survey the loss and to estimate the value of damage. Due to lack of transportation facilities for remote villages, the district officials in charge avoided onsite assessment and depended on secondary sources of information to prepare the loss estimates. The cost of delays, lack of coordination, and inefficiency ends up in duplication and high expense and also is not targeted to the victims.

SNIRD felt that the disaster should not be viewed in terms of relief operations but that it should be linked up with disaster preparedness in terms of long-term strategy. Hence, SNIRD has formulated a twofold strategy to involve the fisherfolk communities to cope with natural disaster. They are: (a) disaster preparedness, including imparting knowledge, attitude change, and capacity building which comprises community preparedness (awareness and training) and an institutional approach (creation of task forces and disaster plans); and (b) crisis intervention, including the reinforcement of awareness and training during disaster times.

As a measure towards disaster preparedness at the macro-level, SNIRD has adopted the following four-step method.

**Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)**

PRA exercises have been conducted in the target fisherfolk villages to identify the availability of resources (cyclone shelters, warning systems, etc.) and the traditional knowledge to cope with the disasters. Also, information regarding the occurrence of disasters and their impact on the villages is analyzed from time trend, and the entire information was documented.

Social mapping exercises were done, and the distribution of houses, streets, schools, temples, and health centers were drawn by involving insiders from the village. In short, the village layout was drawn and documented. It clearly revealed the availability of government infrastructures including the cyclone shelters and schools which will provide shelter during natural calamities.

Resource maps were drawn, and information regarding land patterns and ownership (private and government) was documented. Also, the availability of resources like trees, mangrove vegetation, and the course of drains were noted on the resource maps, and the information was consolidated and documented.

Through seasonality, the rainy seasons and the seasons for fishing were gathered. Also, the people clearly pictured the months of May and November as disaster-prone due to monsoons.

Time trends were conducted, and the fisherfolk in our 44 target villages
explained the course in occurrence of cyclones for the past 25 years in Prakasam District. It also came out that the loss due to recent floods and cyclones was really high due to the destruction of green cover and mangroves for the sake of the shrimp farming along the coastal belts. A few village elders have the ability to interpret cyclones by observing the sea surf. Even though no hard scientific evidence is available, we believe that the traditional way of predicting cyclones and floods are instilled within the fisherfolk communities.

Transect Walk is a part of the PRA exercise in which the village-level worker along with interested villagers inspect the village situation and resources through direct observation. Transect Walks have been done around the villages, and we could observe that major portions of the land have been turned into shrimp farms and that drains have been diverted to pump water to the shrimp farms. The entire information revealed that man-made reasons are the main cause for the survival of the traditional fisherfolk who thrive near the sea for a living. Cyclone shelters constructed by the government as preparedness measures are more or less in a withering condition due to lack of maintenance.

Community Preparedness

Meetings are conducted at the village level, and the types of natural disasters that have occurred in different parts of the state are discussed and analyzed. This gives villagers a clearer picture regarding the magnitude of the problem, and the concept of preparedness has been kindled. As a measure to involve a strategic plan at the village level, members of the Youth Associations (a village-level institution) responded positively to the adoption of group planning towards preparedness measures.

As pre-disaster management, they have adopted the construction of houses in a round manner which will reduce the effects of the velocity of the wind. Also, they have grown "creepers" (a bitter gourd) over the thatched roof houses which will keep the roofs intact in high velocity winds.

Task Force

Active youth members in a ratio of one youth for each 10 families are being selected by the Youth Associations at the village level to form task forces. The task force members will be between the ages of 18 and 32 and will select a leader from within the group. Task force members at the village level will be given frequent training in disaster management techniques. If any member of a task force leaves a village or acquires health-related problems, then a new member will be selected by the members themselves. Task force members procured community-based transistor radios from the government as a measure to learn of warnings from the government's Meteorological Department. They have taken the responsibility for disseminating the warning and for evacuating the
people addressed to safer places. In times of emergency they have mobilized medical relief and food provision to victims. It is noteworthy to mention that the task force members maintained community kitchens to feed the victims during floods. Also they played a key role in de-silting the potable water systems in the village, in removing carcasses, and in rebuilding the entire village.

Task force members have taken responsibility for promoting "green belts" along the coast with the help of the Forest Department to minimize the velocity of wind and soil erosion. The Youth Associations and Mahila Associations (People's Organizations promoted by SNIRD) in the village procured saplings from the government nursery and planted species such as acacia to reduce the velocity of winds. The Mahila Associations have taken responsibility for monitoring and for the survival of the saplings. It is noteworthy that the survival rate for these plantings is 80 percent. Now the Youth and Mahila Associations are involved in protecting almost 75 acres of existing mangroves to minimize the effects of cyclones and floods. These People's Organizations have given representations to government officials to declare the mangrove zone a protected area and also to ban shrimp farming in the district.

Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation

During times of natural calamities, government and voluntary agencies play a key role in providing emergency relief. Due to lack of transportation, emergency intervention by government and voluntary agencies is often delayed which adds to the magnitude of the crisis situation. During the recent floods the remuneration given by the government did not cover the losses suffered by the victims. SNIRD was able to provide relief measures with the assistance of CARE-India. CARE-India gave 50 kilograms of flour and 10 liters of oil for each family. SNIRD involved task force members in preparing a remuneration list which was accurate since the community was involved.

We also were able to save a lot of time and energy. The task force members also provided support in transporting the materials. They issued a slip for each family to procure the materials so that distribution minimized duplication. In our target villages, the task force members were able to tap the relief measures and distributed materials with least time and in a systematic manner.

Also in our target villages the concept of savings has been introduced. So far round 2,000 women members have been able to save 1 million Rupees (Ed.: currently about $24,000 US). In times of disasters, the families who have made savings can make available need-based loans with minimum interest, thereby avoiding exploitation by money-lenders. In the floods, the houses of the fisherfolk were damaged; also destroyed were the fishing crafts and gear. Provisions and food grains were more or less destroyed due to flood.
waters. Hence, for immediate recovery the womenfolk made available a loan of 2,000 Rupees (Ed.: about $47 US) from their savings which was seed money for rehabilitation at the household level.

SNIRD has started a “People’s Bank” with the savings of women members and also tapped a matching loan and into a Thrift and Credit Scheme. Through the bank, the women have made available loans for dry fish businesses, fish and vegetable vending, and also for procuring milch animals. Repayment is found to be noteworthy as the program is implemented and monitored by the fisherwomen. This has increased family income also.

Training

Training at regular frequencies is organized to build capacities and skills among the task force members in order to cope with natural calamities. The main objectives of the training are: to impart knowledge of preparedness measures; to make task force members understand pre- and post-disaster consequences; and to impart skills to cope with natural disasters. Training and the motivation of the task force members make it possible for them to undertake practical measures to save their lives and property. The important subjects in disaster management dealt with are: prevention and preparedness, warning systems, evacuation measures, relief operations, rehabilitation, disaster impact assessment, and financial arrangements.

Program Impact Assessment

The tropical depressions that occurred in the Bay of Bengal on 20 November 1996 had their own effects in the form of continuous downpour for five days in the Prakasam District. This resulted in severe floods as a result of which many villages were marooned. This in turn affected the normal life of the rural marine fisherfolk and also paved the way for casualties and loss of property. One of the main reasons for the floods is intensive prawn culture which is practiced in the district. For these shrimp farms, many hectares of social forestry lands have been wiped out. This made the villages directly exposed to the high velocity winds. Also because of deforestation, soil erosion has occurred in many places near the coastal villages. For the sake of shrimp farms, brackish water canals have been narrowed and diverted in many places, resulting in the blockage of drain canals. The banks of major reservoirs were not strengthened due to miss management which has resulted in breaches and many more villages being marooned.

In this situation, task force members played an active role in moving the women and children to places of safety and also in relief and rehabilitation.
measures. Task force members from two of our villages with the help of caça-
manants rescued 378 agricultural farmers from the nearby village where 2,700
livestock were killed when the village was marooned. Also, task force mem-
bers of another village along with government officials were involved in re-
scue operations near a bridge on the highway as flood waters washed away the
land links. Further, in our villages where the relief operations were initiated,
task force members unloaded food materials and prepared the list of affected
victims. They voluntarily prepared the list, gave out identification, and distrib-
uted the provisions. This in turn saved a lot of time, energy, and money. Also
they procured materials according to need from governmental and non-gov-
ernmental agencies which reduced duplication of effort and mismanagement.

The activities of SNIRD were evaluated in July 1995 by external evaluators.
The results of the evaluation were the observations that: the formation of task
forces within the villages was fruitful as the communities are involved in pre-
and post-disaster management; the capacity of the task force members was in
line and was a great achievement as the communities can minimize the effects
of disasters to a greater extent; and promotion of coastal green cover was effective
by the way the communities have participated in planting and in growth
monitoring as a result of which the effects of future disaster will be mini-

Conclusion

SNIRD strongly feels that this four-fold strategy is quite effective as the
community has participated in disaster management which reduce dupli-
cation of effort and inequity in relief measures. The four-step method with
emphasis on the PRA exercise has helped in strengthening the community
structures, in assessing the frequency of cyclones and floods, and in strength-
ening the community response during times of disaster. The strategy enables
the build-up of capacities within the fisherfolk communities to cope with nat-
ural disasters.

As SNIRD is having ongoing programs in 44 fisherfolk villages, we will
be able to build up the capacities among the homogeneous community only
in a limited area. We feel the following recommendations should be consid-
ered in evolving a national plan: effective disaster preparedness plans evolved
from the micro-level should be included in a national plan; national, state, and
district-level disaster coordinating committees should be formed by involv-
ing governmental, non-governmental, and academic personnel; review meet-
ings should be held at regular frequencies to analyze the preparedness
measures and to control the duplication of relief measures during calamities;
details of disasters, their effects, and the villages prone to disasters should be
identified at the district level and should be documented; voluntary action plans should be developed by involving the people and officials in preparedness programs; there should be information dissemination units at the village level; training of officials and target groups should be conducted at various levels; district-level storage facilities for emergency relief supplies should be created; and promotion of "green belts" by community participation should be encouraged.