

PART II: ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR

In this part of the report, we discuss what we found about organizational behavior in the immediate aftermath of the Mexico City earthquake, and also make some observations about longer run group changes. In particular, we describe the following activities.

First, in chapter 4, we note what was in place prior to the disaster. Thus, in this chapter we briefly describe the structure of government at the level of the Federal District and the kind of emergency preparedness planning that existed before the earthquake.

Then in the following chapter we indicate the basic organizational response patterns, both public and private, that occurred during the first three days of the emergency period. In particular after indicating initial governmental actions, there is a presentation of the general organized response at the level of the delegaciones as well as the response of several key groups. We conclude with some observations about the role behavior of organizational personnel and address the question of their possible role conflict.

Next in chapter 6 we depict the various problems and difficulties that emerged as organizations attempted to cope with the demands of the earthquake after the third day but still during the emergency period (which end approximately two weeks after the initial earthquake). In particular, we indicate the organizational response to 12 disaster related problems, namely: distributing information, doing damage assessment, undertaking search and rescue, providing emergency medical care, maintaining security and access control, drawing up lists of missing persons and victims, handling the dead, restoring public utility services, sheltering and feeding victims, requesting and handling aid, integrating volunteers into organizational activities, and coordinating the response. We conclude this chapter with a presentation of the retrospective view about disaster planning that emerged among agency officials and bureaucrats and note certain organizational changes that were instituted.

Before indicating our research findings, we should note the following regarding our approach and methodology. Because primary responsibility for responding to the earthquake within Mexico City was placed within the Mayor's Office or the Department of the Federal District (DDF), DRC originally thought it best to focus descriptively and analytically upon this institution and to treat it as an entity of local government that might be similar to local governments in the United States. Therefore, we initially

concentrated upon the response of the Mayor's Office (DDF) and looked at other responding agencies, such as federal agencies and private institutions, as ancillary and of secondary importance in the governmental effort to cope with the earthquake. While this research focus had a number of benefits, it proved to be problematical due to the complexity of the DDF and the massive, decentralized response by Mexican organizations to the disaster. It was simply impossible to concentrate mostly and primarily upon the DDF. Therefore, in what is presented below, we also note the important role of others such as key organizations in the lifeline sector, PEMEX (the Mexican national petroleum company), as well as other public and private groups.

CHAPTER 4.

PREDISASTER GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE AND DISASTER PLANNING IN MEXICO CITY

Governmental Structure. The sprawling, urban area of Mexico City is probably the largest community or metropolis in the world, having a population estimated at between 18 to 20 million. Not only is it the political center of the nation, but it is also the economic, cultural, educational, medical and social hub of the country. Within the metropolitan area are concentrated the major financial institutions, scientific and educational complexes, mass media outlets, industrial and commercial establishments, and hospitals and medical schools of the country.

Being the national capital, the governmental structure of Mexico City is not a part of any of the states of Mexico and maintains its own political autonomy as a federal district. The Department of the Federal District is the governmental body that oversees the provision of public services for the city. The DDF, however, does not have the degree of political independence from the federal government that is associated with most American cities, nor even that which is associated with Washington D.C. The Regent or "Mayor" of Mexico City, for example, is appointed by the President and is not elected by the citizens. Also, the DDF itself is part of the federal organizational structure.

Furthermore, the organization of the DDF is very complex, both with regard to the variety of functions that are performed and the structure of intraorganizational relationships. In addition to police and fire organizations, the DDF is composed of many subdepartments for such services as water, medical and health provisions, transportation, electricity, planning, housing, welfare, streets, and sewer. Furthermore, within these subunits there are additional specialized divisions; for example, the provision of public bus transportation and subway transportation are handled by separate administrative units within a larger subdepartment. (Although the DDF has sometimes been referred to as the "Mayor's Office," and there is a "Mayor" it should not be equated with a single, political or governmental post. It is more properly viewed as the totality of local governmental structures and activities.)

The complexity of the DDF is further indicated, as we have already noted, by the fact that within the federal district there are 16 subgovernmental units called delegaciones. These 16 units exercise governmental authority within limited geographical areas of the

city. They are not similar to wards or precincts within American cities. They are not simply political units. They are in fact somewhat autonomous, local governmental units that provide their own services to their surrounding areas. (From the perspective of someone from the United States, Mexico City might be said to have 16 sub-City Halls.) For example, the delegaciones have their own public works, water, housing, and other departments that are controlled by them. As a result of this structure, the daily governmental activity of Mexico City is highlighted by significant decentralization at least operationally, if not formally. There was "a loosely coupled organizational system", that is, one in which authority at each level had a degree of autonomy as Weick (1976) has characterized such situations.

In understanding the organizational response to the earthquake, it must also be noted that the resources and organizational structure of the federal government itself are located within the boundaries of the DDF. The federal government also has many secretariats that functionally duplicate those at the DDF and delegaciones levels. For example, there are secretariats of health, urban development and ecology, communications and transportation, agriculture and water resources and others. As will be noted later, although the divisions between federal and district agencies with similar responsibilities may be fairly formally delineated during normal times, this independence and autonomy was considerably less during the emergency period of the disaster as tasks overlapped and resources from the federal level were also utilized to respond to the massive earthquake generated problems within the city.

Disaster Planning. With regard to the nature of disaster planning that existed prior to the earthquake, it is also necessary to make a distinction between federal level plans and those within the city. The federal government did have a plan for disasters. This was encompassed in a document known as DN-3. This plan assigned responsibility for coordination of emergency response to the Mexican Army. (There was also a parallel plan for the Navy, titled SME-3). Upon declaration of a disaster by the President, the army is to assume control of all major response actions. As indicated earlier, within the Mexican context, the army has greater involvement in Mexican civil life than is found in the United States. It is a resource of the national political system, and its control of human and material resources was a cornerstone of the federal response to earlier disasters outside of the capital city. For example, the military played a major and lead role in the federal governmental response to the volcanic eruption of El Chichonal in 1982.

Within the federal district there had been virtually no formal planning for disasters, particularly for one of the magnitude encountered in September, 1985. Certain departments and subunits, such as those within public works and the subway system, had standard operating procedures and some plans for handling

emergencies and disruption to their own operations. However, there was no overall, system wide planning for or by the DDF.

A Civil Protection Office (SIPROR) had been discussed in 1980 and was created in 1984 within the General Office of Protection and Highway Protection under the Mayor's Office. Although this unit had conducted one earthquake drill about a year before the 1985 disaster, it was a very small unit with few resources. According to one official:

at that time [the] organization did not have
an executive, a coordinating role, and no
judicial base...to operate.

Also, in 1983 a draft plan for dealing with and recovering from a major earthquake disaster in Mexico City had been prepared by a group at UNAM (the Mexican Autonomous National University), but it was never implemented by any government agency.

In sum, prior to the 1985 earthquake the situation in Mexico City could be described as one of extreme organizational complexity, a relatively decentralized metropolitan government, and limited national and very limited disaster planning at the metropolitan level. But that was alongside a massive pool of human and material resources that could be potentially employed or used in mass emergencies. Moreover, the proximate location of various federal agencies to earthquake impacted sites was vitally important, because these units were an important source of such latent resources. As we shall describe in the following pages, all of these just noted aspects would play a major role in the organizational response that was to begin on the morning of September 19, 1985.

But first so as to provide some background context we will give a very brief and selective chronology of happenings in the first two weeks after the earthquake. Our short composite listing has been primarily derived through a translation of the Spanish from two Mexican documents: (1) a chronological time listing of events in a report issued by the federal level Emergency National Commission (see the next chapter for a discussion of this ad hoc group), and (2) a chronology of social aspects of the earthquake given in the Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Politicas y Sociales 32 (1986): 149-170. The times, statistics, and statements given are those that appeared in public announcements at the time, but some as we shall see are not consistent with what we found. Nevertheless, the listing should convey a general picture of the varied events that were occurring, the multiple social actors that were involved, and the public impressions that citizens and officials were getting about post impact happenings and reactions.

Brief Chronology of Selective Happenings:

September 19

7:19am An earthquake shakes Mexico City.

7:45am The President of Mexico gives instructions that emergency measures be undertaken.

The military disaster Plan DN-3 and SME-3 was formally activated.

The President takes a helicopter tour over the city.

10:30am The President with the Mayor of Mexico City travels for about an hour and half through affected areas stopping at some of the more damaged areas in the downtown area, including hospitals and federal buildings.

The President makes his first public announcement and states that priority ought to be given to rescuing survivors and sheltering the homeless, and assures the citizenry that the government has everything under control.

2 pm There is an emergency meeting of the Mexican Federal Cabinet with all members reporting on damages and destruction within their areas of responsibility.

The President creates a Metropolitan Emergency Committee headed by the Mayor of Mexico City and a National Emergency Committee headed by the federal Secretary of Government.

An announcement from the Mayor's Office states that the number of injured is 5,000, that 250 buildings have collapsed, and that about 1,000 people are trapped under debris.

The federal government reports 373 deaths and that major damages or destruction have occurred in buildings used by the Ministries of Commerce, Communication, Labor, Transportation, Agriculture, and others as well as the Attorney General's Office, the General Hospital, the Medical Center, Juarez Hospital and two telephone central offices.

School classes in Mexico City are temporarily suspended.

Free transportation services are provided in the center of the city.

Three days of national mourning are declared.

Public authorities state that autopsies of victims will be dispensed with and that identified corpses will be immediately delivered to relatives.

September 20

A report from the Mayor's Office states that deaths have reached 1,300 and that a thousand buildings have been damaged. A federal report estimates that 500 people are still trapped in debris.

A federal level National Reconstruction Fund is established which will accept contributions to be used for rebuilding.

A special federal Multidepartmental Commission to investigate the consequences of the earthquake is established.

The Department of Works estimates that the number of severely damaged buildings in the Federal District is about 400.

7:38pm A second earthquake impacts Mexico City.

The President for the first time directly addresses the nation with a public message indicating the affected areas and that there were no precise figures concerning material and human losses. He states that "unfortunately I must admit such a tragedy has overwhelmed us in many cases. We cannot do what we would wish to do as quickly as we would wish, especially to save lives...the truth is that we do not have the necessary resources to face such a quake to respond effectively and promptly."

It is announced that unidentified bodies will be given mass burial and that 880 death certificates have so far been issued.

September 21

The Mayor's Office announces that 760 buildings have been damaged with 411 suffering total destruction of which 112 were government ones.

A federal agency states that there have been 2,250 deaths.

The Seguro Social Park in Mexico City is prepared for use as a morgue, especially for unidentified bodies.

The President cancels his scheduled trip to the United Nations in New York, and in a message states that "the activity going on now is immense, we have many fronts to cover and I realize that there is a lack of adequate coordination."

The telephone company announces that it will provide free service at 12,000 telephone call booths in the city.

The service established to locate missing persons, LOCATEL, declares that it has received 32,000 inquiries up to that time.

A report given to the President and the Cabinet states that earthquake affected areas outside of metropolitan Mexico City had enough local resources to handle their problems.

September 22

The Metropolitan Emergency Commission establishes 13 subcommittees and gets an executive coordinator.

It is announced that there are 26 public shelters housing 3,300 homeless.

The Red Cross declares that it has received 2,600 bodies in Seguro Social Park of which 96 percent are unidentified.

The Multidepartmental Commission prepares a document proposing the freezing of rents, locating housing not being used and giving them to victims, and suspending eviction cases.

Delegates of the Unified Socialist parties of Mexico at a meeting demand legislation concerning an urban reconstruction plan.

The 34 organizations in the Congress of Labor propose that union members donate one day's salary for earthquake victims.

September 23

A federal agency states that there have been over 3,000 deaths, 6,500 injured and that 1,500 victims are still thought to be trapped in debris.

It is announced that classes have been indefinitely suspended in 152 schools.

A Cabinet Minister declares before the federal Multidepartmental Commission that the national government of Mexico is developing a program of urban reconstruction.

September 24

A labor union leader denounces the existence of corruption in the granting of construction licenses.

Employees of UNAM (the University in Mexico City) give three days of their pay to the Fund for National Reconstruction.

The President states that the earthquake will complicate the management of Mexico's foreign debt. He meets with the Mayor of Mexico City to study the plans for reconstruction of the capital city.

There is an official and public denial by federal agencies that there is any danger of epidemics as a result of the earthquake.

September 25

The Metropolitan Emergency Commission states that 3,286 have died but that 80 percent of the recovered bodies have not been identified.

The Ambassador of the United States to Mexico publically estimates that 10,000 people have been killed and that reconstruction costs will be more than a billion dollars.

September 26

The Metropolitan Emergency Commission states that there is no possibility of finding further survivors in the debris.

A group of victims demonstrate in front of the National Palace.

The Confederation of Workers of Mexico indicate that each member will work one hour each day without compensation with the effort being contributed to the Reconstruction Fund.

September 27

About 4,000 demonstrators in the center of Mexico City complain about lack of governmental help for victims of the earthquake.

Federal agencies indicate that 200,000 workers in the metropolitan area are still unemployed because of damages to their work places.

The Metropolitan Emergency Commission denies that industrial plants have been seriously damaged by the earthquake.

September 28

Almost all search and rescue teams from foreign countries return home.

September 29

The President prohibits the use of explosives in building demolitions so that the search for buried survivors can continue.

The National Emergency Commission present a general report about recovery activities undertaken since the earthquake. It states that highways, railroads and telegraph offices in the metropolitan area are functioning normally, and that the electric and telephone services are being restored.

It is reported that international help has been received from 43 countries.

September 30

The Metropolitan Emergency Commission announces that the grounds of many destroyed buildings will be converted into parks and gardens.

An Evaluation Committee is established at the national level to ascertain the causes and effects of the earthquake.

Some suspended elementary school classes in Mexico City are resumed.

October 1

A Popular Committee of Solidarity and Reconstruction made up of more than 68 political organizations, labor unions, student groups, etc. is created to provide aid for victims.

An official Technical Committee for managing the federal National Reconstruction Fund is established.

A formal plan for an Emergency Housing Program for displaced earthquake victims is presented to the President of Mexico.

October 2

Workers of more than nine textile factories organize themselves in a group to claim compensation for losses they have suffered from the earthquake.

A march involving thousands of citizens in Mexico City held to commemorate the student movement of 1968 which was suppressed by the national government also takes up the question of help for earthquake victims.

October 3

The President directs a message to the nation thanking citizens for their help after the earthquake and calls for continuing participation in the National Reconstruction Program.

The Metropolitan Emergency Commission states that 2,381 buildings had been affected, including 123 government buildings, 49 health centers, and 1,133 private residences.

A National Reconstruction Commission is established.

The President established a Supervisory Committee of Donations to monitor the providing of help given to victims.