

THE POST-IMPACT FIELD STUDY AND THEORY CONSTRUCTION: CONCLUSIONS

So what is to be done? Post-impact field studies of disasters such as encouraged and supported by the Quick Response program should continue since they provide unique opportunities for detailed explorations of society with its hidden assumptions exposed. The process of theory construction should also continue since the aim of theory is better explanation of the world around us. However, a better "fit" between theory and disaster studies will be necessary if the process of theory construction is to advance to a new stage.

The post-impact field study will never provide the conditions under which theory of the social factist variety will be satisfactorily tested in the positivistic tradition. The methodological limitations of this type of study are inherent in the unpredictability of disasters as unscheduled events. Quasi-experimental designs will need to be implemented. These are best supported by conventional research grants and conducted under everyday rather than disaster conditions.

On the other hand, post-impact field studies provide an excellent way to advance organizational theory following a social definitionist approach. The cliché about disasters being a natural laboratory is appropriate. The disaster creates a large-scale breaching experiment in which phenomena not available for examination under ordinary conditions present themselves in abundance. Studies such as those supported by the Quick Response Program are ideally suited to the radical empiricism of the social definitionist tradition, whether applied to the study of organizations or some other topic.

How does this help the process of theory construction? It will not help unless the two theoretical traditions can be merged. Otherwise they will continue on separate, parallel paths. Required to bridge the gap between these

theories--and what holds the most promise of increasing the contribution of post-impact field studies to the theory construction process--is the development of a protocol with which the verbal descriptions containing respondents' typifications of organizational phenomena can be translated into the "typifications" represented by the constructs of positivistic organizational theory.

The reverse needs to be done as well. That is, the constructs of organizational and interorganizational theory need to be translated into verbal descriptions using the typifications of actors in disaster-response organizations. Perhaps later this can be extended to the construction of fixed-choice questions for producing quantifiable responses suitable for statistical analysis. For the moment, however, if the "buzz words" of the occupational and organizational cultures within which respondents work can be isolated, then these may be used to structure the probing of in-depth interviews.

Fortunately, several social scientists are at work on tasks involved in synthesizing the microlevel descriptions of the social definitionist tradition with the macrolevel theories of the social factists (see, for example, the collection of papers edited by Knorr-Cetina and Cicourel, 1981). A theoretical framework is provided by Giddens in his theory of structuration (for example, Giddens, 1979) which deals with the use and perpetuation of structural forms by actors in specific space-time settings. An exemplar for the necessary synthesis is provided by the work of Collins (1975), especially in his propositions focusing on talk as a basic process wherein typifications of social structure are both used and reconstituted in their use. Theoretical advancement in the study of disasters will come from thinking of creative ways to use these emergency settings theoretically, rather than from trying to apply methods of research that do not fit them.

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APPENDIX

Interview Schedule

1. Why don't you begin by telling me what your organization did from the time you first learned of the threat of a _____ until now (or until the emergency was over).

(RECORD UP TO FIVE TASKS ON FORM A)

- 1a. Which of the activities you just mentioned would you normally expect to perform in an emergency of this type?

(CIRCLE EXPECTED TASKS ON FORM A)

(HAND RESPONDENT THE LIST OF EMERGENCY ORGANIZATIONS)

2. Here is a list of some organizations often involved in an emergency of this type. Some of them you may already have mentioned. Would you go down this list and tell me which of these your organization had contact with during the emergency?

(CHECK THE ORGANIZATIONS MENTIONED ON FORM B)

- 2a. Are there any other organizations you were in contact with that are not on this list? Is so, what were they?

(ADD THE NAMES OF THESE ORGANIZATIONS TO FORM B)

(LET ME BE SURE THAT I UNDERSTAND WHICH OF THESE ARE IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND, FOR PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS, WHICH ARE CITY, COUNTY, STATE, ETC.)

- 2b. For public or private:

0 - public

1 - private and/or mixed public-private

- 2c. For public organizations:

1 - city

2 - county

3 - joint city/county

4 - special district

5 - regional

6 - state

7 - federal

8 - other _____

9 - not applicable (i.e., private sector)

3. For each of the organizations you have just mentioned, how frequent was your contact with them during the emergency?
- 1 - continuously
 - 2 - about once an hour
 - 3 - every few hours
 - 4 - about once a day
 - 5 - less than once a day

(RECORD ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS 3 THROUGH 8 ON FORM B)

4. At what level of organization did this contact take place?
- 1 - administrative level
 - 2 - operations level
 - 3 - both
5. How did this contact take place?
- 1 - in person (i.e., face-to-face)
 - 2 - directly, by telephone or radio
 - 3 - by messenger
 - 4 - through a third organization
 - 5 - other _____

(CAN RECORD MORE THAN ONE ANSWER TO QUESTION 5.)

6. Which of these contacts, if any, was the result of a previous disaster plan?
- 0 - not planned
 - 1 - planned
7. Have you ever worked with any of these organizations in a previous disaster, say within the past five years?
- 0 - no previous working experience in a disaster
 - 1 - previous working experience in a disaster
8. From the standpoint of your own organization, how satisfactory were the working relationships with each of these other organizations during the emergency?
- 1 - very satisfactory
 - 2 - somewhat satisfactory
 - 3 - neither/don't know/can't say
 - 4 - somewhat unsatisfactory
 - 5 - very unsatisfactory
9. Now let's compare your recent experiences in the emergency with a typical period, say six months before the disaster. Looking at this list of organizations, which of these do you normally have contact with?

(CHECK THOSE LISTED ON FORM B)

- 9a. Are there any organizations you normally have contact with that are not listed there?

(ADD THESE TO FORM B)

(LET ME BE SURE THAT I UNDERSTAND WHICH OF THESE NEW ORGANIZATIONS YOU MENTIONED ARE IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND, FOR PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS, WHICH ARE CITY, COUNTY, STATE, ETC.)

- 9b. For public or private:

- 0 - public
- 1 - private and/or mixed public-private

- 9c. For public organizations:

- 1 - city
- 2 - county
- 3 - joint city/county
- 4 - special district
- 5 - regional
- 6 - state
- 7 - federal
- 8 - other _____
- 9 - not applicable (i.e., private sector)

10. For each of the organizations you just mentioned, how frequent was your contact, say six months before the emergency?

- 1 - almost daily
- 2 - about once a week
- 3 - about once or twice a month
- 4 - every few months
- 5 - annually
- 6 - less than once a year

(RECORD ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS 10 THROUGH 16 ON FORM B.)

11. Before the disaster, at what level did contact normally take place with each of these organizations?

- 1 - administrative level
- 2 - operations level
- 3 - both

12. Before the disaster, how did you usually maintain contact with each of these organizations?

- 1 - in person
- 2 - by telephone, or other media
- 3 - through correspondence
- 4 - through a third organization
- 5 - through joint programs
- 6 - other _____

13. During the months before the disaster, how satisfactory were your organization's relations with each of these other organizations?
- 1 - very satisfactory
 - 2 - somewhat satisfactory
 - 3 - neither/don't know/can't say
 - 4 - somewhat unsatisfactory
 - 5 - very unsatisfactory
14. How do each of these organizations we have been talking about compare in size to your own organization?
- 1 - other organization is larger
 - 2 - other organization is smaller
 - 3 - both are about the same size
 - 4 - don't know
15. Which of them seem to be made up largely of volunteers?
- 0 - no or few volunteers
 - 1 - large numbers of volunteers
16. Are any of these organizations that came into being as a result of the emergency?
- 0 - existing organizations
 - 1 - emergent organizations

(FINALLY, A FEW QUESTIONS TO HELP ME GET A BETTER PICTURE OF YOUR OWN ORGANIZATION.)

17. Approximately how many paid employees does your organization have?

(RECORD ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS 17 THROUGH 23 ON FORM C.)

18. Approximately how many volunteers does your organization use?
19. Does your organization have an internal written disaster plan?
- 0 - no
 - 1 - yes
20. Is your organization part of a multi-organization disaster plan?
- 0 - no
 - 1 - yes
21. To what extent are your organization's work rules, procedures, and policies in written form?
- 1 - to a great extent
 - 2 - to some extent
 - 3 - to a small extent
 - 4 - not at all
 - 5 - don't know

22. Approximately how many distinct departments or divisions does your organization have?
23. What is the approximate annual budget of your organization?

(THAT'S ALL THE QUESTIONS I HAVE. THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME AND ASSISTANCE. IF YOU NEED TO CONTACT ME FOR ANY REASON, MY MAILING ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE NUMBER ARE ON MY CARD.)

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