

THE SERENDIPITOUS EFFECTS OF DISASTER MANAGEMENT BY NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS : STUDIE CASES IN JAMAICA AND COSTA RICA

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INTRODUCTION

This article is focussed on the presentation of serendipitous effects(unforeseen positive and negative effects)in the case of disaster management by nonprofit organizations.

The following points will be reviewed : disasters as special events,the code of the nonprofit sector, a field study in Jamaica and Costa Rica and an anthropological approach of serendipity.

I.DISASTERS AS SPECIAL EVENTS

In a general sense,"*a special event recognizes a unique moment in time with ceremony and ritual to satisfy specific people*"(Goldblatt,1990:2).

A "special event" can be defined as an extraordinary item producing data which "*explain or predict pattern interruptions in the time series data of an organization's performance measures*"(Gorr,1986 : 532).

It is the case,for example, of a flood, a strike,a demographic change(rate of birth),heavy competition coming from another organization,to take as examples large or extented size special events.

A special event is generally speaking unforeseen and can create some troubles the organization.

In the global sense, a special event is the most part of the time unwanted and negative (but it can also be happy and constructive).

II.THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS OF THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

An alternative way to assess nonprofit organizations is the search for bad or good serendipitous effects (unforeseen effects) as being a part of the twilight zone of the organization profile because they are marked by a certain invisibility of evaluation they are a part of the organization life and results but

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they are not or less assessed or sometimes unknown or unperceived (a kind of phenotypic lag effect)(King,1978 221).

Each organization could be charachterized by a twilight code being in the same time a mark of the results of his own life (the effect of strategies) and the impact of contextual variables.

It is an analogy with the RNA (ribonucleic acid) code of human being Each person has his own genetic constitution but the influence of the environment creates symbiotic positive or negative results The genetic code written in the RNA is the result of the interlinkages between amino-acids(alanine, valine, cysteine..).

Let us imagine that each organization owns his "RNA code" made of different inner dynamic items . the strategies.

Serendipitous effects could be the result of an interlinkage or crash between this inner code and contextual variables(or ecofactors).

Those effects are a part of the twilight process (the unforeseen and/or the unconscious) and the "symptoms" of a grey dynamic in the organization life impacted by a serendipity process.

A.SERENDIPITY

Christoforo Armeno,in his book "Peregrinaggio di tre giovani, figliuoli del Re di Serendippo", told us the story of three princes discovering things they were not in quest for(1557).

For instance,the three princes,by use of a magic mirror,helped the Queen of India prevent further destruction by a mysterious "hand" that daily appeared in the sky and grasped a man,repeating this action day after day.When the mirror approached the Hand,a steer or a horse was grasped instead of a man.

Horace Walpole,the eighteenth-century English author,had read this story and created the word "serendipity" in a letter to Horace Mann of January.28.1754.

Other new words are also attributed as Walpole inventiveness as "triptology" (the habit of repeating the same thing thrice) and "sharawadgi" (the beauty to be found in an unintentionally picturesque arrangement of apparently irreconcilable features) (Remer,T.G.1965:25).

The definition of "serendipity" as prescribed by Walpole is : *"a gift for discovery by accident and sagacity of things not sought for"* (1965:6/29).

The definition of this term vary in dictionaries using terms as "ability","valuable","happy accident","accidental discovery".

According to Walople's definition of "serendipity", they do not cover the full meaning of the term including six items:the gift,the discovery,the accident,the sagacity,the things and the non search.

For example,Robert K.Merton's approach of the serendipity pattern is incomplete and defective,because "*new but "unwanted" inventions*" or "*new unanticipated facts*" just take in account some of the six items.He put the stress more on the results and the discovery than on the gift(1973 44).

This lack is also underlined by T.G.Remer(1965:31).

Robert K.Merton's approach is influenced in a way by Znaniecki's analysis of the potential explorer role of the researcher looking for discovering "*unexpected new facts*"(1940:172)

A good example of this meaning of serendipitous effect is Marie Curie's discovery of radium

An analysis of social research partly creates a link between the serendipity pattern (the accidental root) and the Hawthorne effect (Roethlisberger/ Dickson,1939)to give an introducing way to the awareness of the experimenter effect affecting "the results" of the research.

Roberts extends the use of the term by speaking of "*pseudoserendipity to describe accidental discoveries of ways to achieve an end sought for*"(1989:X).

In the framework of this research, I define "serendipity" as the appearance by strategies and / or ecofactors impact of unforeseen results.

B.THE SERENDIPITY PRINCIPLES

Different principles help to understand the way serendipitous effects appear All of them are linked to the impact, at least, of one of those serendipity principles or different serendipity principles, sometimes with a domino effect when one serendipity principle pushes one or various others serendipity principles impacts.

Those serendipity principles are the ecosystemic principle (the results of one organization activity are impacted by external factors as the time, the space, the actors, the economy .), the neguentropy principle(each event carries a lot of non expressed values sometimes in linkage with the long-term goals of the organization or meets a lot of disturbances linked to some communication dysfunctions in the association), the synergy principle(the contacts between a nonprofit organization and another association, a private firm or public services create serendipitous effects by the meeting and the crossing of complementary or opposite objectives) and the idiosyncrasic principle(each person has his own cultural patterns and free spaces translated in non expressed strategies impacting the results of the activity).

The analysis of different serendipitous effects shows the following trends : the ecosystemic principle plays the main role when external factors(contextual factors or ecofactors) are dominant, the neguentropy principle when internal factors are prevalent, the synergy principle when the action is the fact of various groups and the idiosyncrasic principle when individual behaviours and strategies are determinant

III.A FIELD STUDY IN JAMAICA AND COSTA RICA

To assess those serendipitous effects, I use a specific projective methodology of survey, the SCOT (Serendipity Code Tracing)based on a list of fifty items(hiding fifty different special effects) proposed to the leader or the key person of various organizations.

I have launched a global survey with the following destinations and topics : Jamaica,May 1992 (hurricane Gilbert) ; Costa Rica,July 1992(earthquake of April 22,1991) , Dominican republic,July 1993(refugees); Panama,1994(refugees and earthquake of April 22, 1991) ; Porto Rico,1995 (hurricane Hugo) and Honduras, July 1996(refugees).

The choice of those countries and states is linked to the social and political stability, the nonprofit organizations activity and the effect of the disaster.

The funds for this global research are partly given by the National Belgian Fund of research and partly by funds coming from my own centre of research (CRITIAS)

At the moment, studies have been made in Jamaica and Costa Rica.It would be useless to try to give a complete overview of the results because I would prefer to have finished the global survey to try to put the point on common denominators between different countries and states.

Anyhow, to illustrate the general methodology and the quest for serendipitous effects, I will give some examples coming from various case studies in Jamaica and Costa Rica.

A.JAMAICA

I will give some examples linked to the assistance developed by two nonprofit organization after the hurricane Gilbert the Salvation Army an Food for the Poor.

In Jamaica, the Salvation Army provides accomodation and board for business women or young working girls,holds a house for the blind,an hostel for working men,a counselling and referral service, a school for the blind and visually handicapped,a home for children, aresidential agricultural,dairy farming and poultry-raising training centre in Montego Bay,and a multi-purpose centre providing a comprehensive programme which includes : day nursery, a basic school,general medical,ante-natal ,nutrition and geriatrics clinics as well as nutrition programme for the elderly.

In 1968, the Salvation Army opened a creche.Let us quote the Salvation Army's Missing Persons Bureau linked with similar offices in Great Britain,Canada and the USA Over the past years many families have been reunited through the Salvation Army's network of operations sometimes with very sparsa clues,helpful to the serach.In Kingston is located the headquarter for the Caribbean.

Goals The Salvation Army created by William BOOTH,provides a number of services which have been designed to assist individuals and families with the problems of every day life

Help in times of disaster caused by accident,the act of man of natural causes such as floods,fires, storms,hurricanes or earthquake,volcanic eruption,is one of such services.

Objectives of the assistance: At the time of a disaster,the Salvation Army provides the following helps within the limts of its personnel and financial capabilities:

- 1.spiritual counselling
- 2.register and identify victims with casework study and investigation
- 3 mass feeding through existing Salvation Army facilities or temporary facilities assigned for the purpose.
- 4.mobile feeding.Hot meals or snacks for disaster victims and workers at the scene of the disaster
- 5 collection of donated goods for victims and distributing same to the most needy : food, clothing,furniture,bedding,utensils,building material,etc.
- 6.prepare and distribute packaged non-perishable food supplies to victims
- 7.render medical assistance

Food for the Poor is headquartered at Essex Exports in Pompano Beach(Florida) and all salaries for Food for the Poor are donated by the firm.

In the Caribbean,the supplies, food, gifts and funds collected by Food for the Poor are distributed, free of charge,on a non-denominational basis assisted by Catholic Relief Services.

In order to insure accountability and control,Food for the Poor maintains full-time offices and administrative staff in Pompano Beach as well as Port-Au-Prince,Haiti and Kingston(Jamaica).

The goals of this 501(c)3,non-profit corporation,is to improve the health,social and spiritual conditions of the poor throughout the Caribbean.Food for the Poor was launched in Jamaica on February 22, 1984

Objectives of the assistance process : emergency help;assistance to consumers ; to give clothes, food,basic housing;developmental work of communities(those objectives are the usual objectives of this NPO, even if there is no disaster event).

THE RESULTS OF THE SCOT (Serendipity Code Tracing)

To illustrate the serendipity process, I will give three examples :

-Al Capone effect(one or different person in the organization have used the assistance to obtain for themselves different material or immaterial advantages as e.g.leadership,self-esteem,self-reliance...)

SA-JAMA(Salvation Army-Jamaica) *Self-esteem.But how to measure that ?For example,the US aid through United Way used the Salvation Army to distribute funds to the farmers who have had their crops destroyed and to the fishermen who have had their nets and fishing equipment destroyed as a result of Hurricane Gilbert.That is a way to help people to become more self-reliant.*

FOOD-JAMA(Food for the Poor-Jamaica):*but it is a marginal effect.We work with intermediaries(churches)that are responsible for distributing help.There is some leadership in the way that church leaders do that in their communities.*

Analysis : in the case of the Salvation Army,this result is linked to the main goal of the organization.But, in the case of Food for the Poor, this effect was unforeseen.It is a serendipitous effect linked to the synergy principle and the idiosyncrasic principle.

-analyzer effect (the assistance has revealed problems in the organization and has helped to resolve them)

SA-JAMA : *We did not had a very clearly documented procedure for handling disasters. We had to go with our experience in other fields. We had to have clearly defined positions of working with other church groups in handling with disasters, and other social groups. This is a result of Gilbert that the government itself came up with a particular plan of action involving NGOs, voluntary organizations with ourselves. As a result of that plan, the Salvation Army and the Red Cross have been designated particular responsibilities in the case of a disaster. Even, our radio network has been putted in place as a result of Gilbert.*

FOOD-JAM : Our recipients have grown as a result of Hurricane Gilbert.

Analysis : *it is only a serendipitous effect in the case of the Salvation Army linked to the ecosystemic principle ,the synergy principle and the neguentropy principle.*

-Cinderella effect (the preparation of the assistance has led to the loss of certain resources but this lost resources have been not only recovered but also increased by the success of the event)

SA-JAMA : *the warehouse has been built before, but its expansion is a result of Gilbert. The government has given to us a sum of money in order to do that. Another point : some people, when the disaster and the assistance was over, were in better situation than before.*

FOOD-JAM : *We did not lost any resources. We are here to give away goods and that is what we do. It is a positive effect. The more we give the more we get because people realize our effectiveness.*

Analysis : *it is a serendipitous effect in the case of the Salvation Army linked to the ecosystemic and the synergy principles.*

B.COSTA RICA

Here are some short examples of other special effects recorded in various nonprofit organizations in Costa Rica in the assistance process after the earthquake of April 22, 1991.

-convex effect(the assistance has touched people outside of your organization an public)

CARE : *the immediate answer after the earthquake has touched a new public and new people*

Analysis : *it is a serendipitous effect linked to the ecosystemic principle.*

-Wheel of Fortune effect(your assistance has been touched by an unforeseen positive or negative fact)

CARITAS : *after the earthquake, the assistance proccss was on the run but, due to the change of way of a river, we have had landslides and floods in August. A part of the work done has been destroyed.*

Analysis : *it is a serendipitous effect due to the ecosystemic principle.*

-agressive effect(the assistance has created an aggressive reaction from the public or the media)

Methodist Church(Puerto Limon) : some people were very aggressive because of the delays in the assistance process due to public authorities slow reaction.

Analysis it is a serendipitous effect due to the synergy principle and the ecosystemic principle(public system of assistance).

-dynamic effect(the assistance process has created a better answer to new needs)

The Salvation Army . after the earthquake, a new law has been produced to foster the assistance network in the case of disasters.

Analysis it is a serendipitous effect linked to the ecosystemic principle and the synergy principle.

Those short examples about Jamaica and Costa Rica give a first idea of the way to analyze and to compare the results.

IV.AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF SERENDIPITY

This way to asses and to analyze serendipitous effects opens the door to different key questions in regards to the study of the nonprofit sector.

This topic of research takes in account fundamental and applied sides by using an innovative process (the quest for serendipitous effects) not yet fully covered by the validity an reliability marks of a well established technic of research.

But, in a sense, *"sometimes less rigorous evaluation approaches may yield equally satisfactory results as the more scientific ones"*(Sumariwalla/Taylor,1991:80).

Furthermore, a main question remains unanswered : are serendipitous effects the specific mark of nonprofit organizations ?

Certainly not but I can advance the following hypothesis : the nonprofit sector is an important producer of serendipitous effects through this innovative, alternative and experimental sides.

In regards to the nonprofit sector, the corporate sector and the public sector know serendipitous effects, but with a better potential assessment of the effects linked to the economic and political purposes to be reached.

Forever, the nonprofit sector will remain an experimental field more difficult to scan because of the social purposes(less easy to define and to assess).

The nonprofit sector is the main guardian of the civil society as an intermediary place between the "lonely crowd" and well institutionalized bodies as commercial firms or public departments.

This postulate reinforces the view of the nonprofit sector as the owner of a Poseidon pattern, not only to regulate the arrival and the distribution of money and services (in a way, this activity and the total amount of money collected is very weak in comparison to the profit and the public sectors) but mainly to regulate the socialization of citizens. The nonprofit sector offers "*crossing rituals*" through different activities and special events as quoted by Van Gennep (De Heusch, 1979:246).

Those "crossing rituals" are a path between the unorganized society (the loneliness or the unformal convivial networks, for example, between neighbors) and the formal society (the corporate and the public sectors).

An undirect question appears : is really the nonprofit sector and "intermediary social laboratory" or a potential alternative to the public or the corporate sectors ?

In a sense, the ideological option aiming to defend the role of the nonprofit sector as a "potential alternative" is really linked to the decreasing of negative serendipitous effects and to the translation in objectives of positive happy and unforeseen serendipitous effects.

This view opens a tremendous issue concerning the nonprofit sector : to become a potential alternative, the nonprofit sector would have to build a better control on the serendipitous effects (impossible task because the management of serendipitous effects creates objectives and purposes. By definition, a serendipitous effect is unforeseen). But I can suppose that those serendipitous effects are mainly linked to the innovative, alternative and experimental side of those groups. The best way would be to quit this specificity. But, in that process, the nonprofit sector would lose his mark of specificity and positive originality by acquiring an institutional behaviour and management closer, for example, to the corporate sector.

A better management of serendipitous effects would not be the disappearance or a way to fully escape to serendipitous effects because maybe the main function of nonprofit organizations is to create (unconsciously) serendipitous effects to explore new ways through the looking glass of society

It is even now possible to distinguish in the nonprofit sector organizations linked to one of the following patterns:

-the Poseidon pattern : it is the case of organizations focussed on the socialization of citizens with different social welfare objectives concerning non members (the unemployed, the poor, the homeless, the inhabitant, the neighbor...). Those organizations are "social laboratories" open to innovative, alternative and experimental paths with the production of a large number of happy or unhappy serendipitous effects. But, in a way, they are trying (unconsciously) to foster the appearance

of happy serendipitous effects to the non members(mainly if they are marginalized or underprivileged);

-the Dionysiac pattern : it is the case of organizations focussed on material or unmaterial advantages for their members only without any social welfare objectives for non members.It is the case, for example, of various sportive, leisure and recreative associations.They are "closed laboratories" (inner innovation and experimentation) trying to manage happy serendipitous effects when they touched their members but not interested at all by negative serendipitous effects touching people outside of their organization(even if those bad effects have been produced by their own activities);

-the Apollonian pattern : it is the case of organizations focussed on a (conscious or unconscious) monopolistic and/or imperialistic coverage of a certain range of activities or people.They can become old-fashion (closed to innovation and experimentation) and touched by ultra-conservatist behaviours. They are "institutionalized laboratories" and they see negative or positive serendipitous effects as a mean to foster their role.

For example, they may use negative serendipitous effects as a reason for expelling too dynamic members or for cutting their relations with one of their branches moving too fast or too far.In the case of happy and positive serendipitous effects, even produced by a branche, by another association receiving subsidiaries or resources from them or by a partner(but smaller) organization, they always try to capture the social and economic benefits of those effects to foster their power and leadership.

Those basics patterns could charachterized many nonprofit organizations, but it could be also possible to find nonprofit organizations touched by two mixed patterns or trends(a Poseidon-Apollonian association or a Dionysiac-Apollonian association) or even to define other secondary patterns as the Hades pattern(nonprofit organizations focussed on lucre despite of the legal requirements), the Athena pattern(nonprofit organizations focussed on cultural or scientific activities), the Hermes pattern(nonprofit organizations focussed on information),etc.

Each of those secondary patterns is linked to the production of specific serendipitous effects.

Without any inferences coming from field surveys trying to demonstrate and/or to reinforce this new anthropological ranking and scanning of nonprofit organizations, I prefer not to quote examples for each pattern but I am sure that the reader aware of the every day life of the nonprofit sector will put very precise names under those different patterns.

CONCLUSION

This anthropological approach has tried to create a link between evaluation research, impact assessment and the nonprofit sector through applied anthropology(J.Van Willigen,1986).

The associative answer qualifies nonprofit organizations such as charities and support networks sharing a common denominator appearing as a watermark : the will to replace man in the center of society, to sustain or to give him back his role of social actor within a democratic context and, especially, to enable everyone to exert one's skills within more inter-dependent community.

In this landscape, the anthropological approach of disaster management could help to understand that the nonprofit sector is not a "*social immutable framework but well a never-ending renewal*" as quoted by Martin Buber in his Paths of Utopia(Misrahi,1968:179).

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