

COMPOSURE AND PANIC IN TIME OF CATASTROPHE

**AN EMPOWERMENT APPROACH TO NEO
DISASTER MANAGEMENT**

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OBJECTIVES

- Present three faulty assumptions or *disaster stereotypes* that shape expectations about how people will respond to NEO threats and impacts.
- Discuss how these common stereotypes *work against effective planning and undercut rescue and recovery work.*
- Present a collaborative *Empowerment Model* of disaster management based on how people typically act in disaster situations.

REFERENCE DISASTERS

- Types
 - Natural Disasters
 - Technological Disasters
 - Civil Disasters
- Data
 - Comparative Studies
 - Case Histories
- Earthquakes
- Hurricanes
- Tsunami
- Floods
- Building Fires
- Airplane Crashes
- Flu Epidemics
- Terrorist Attacks

MULTIPLE DISASTERS

KATRINA

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graph TD; KATRINA[KATRINA] --- Hurricane["Hurricane (Natural Disaster)"]; KATRINA --- Flood["Flood Controls Fail (Technological Disaster)"]; KATRINA --- Mismanagement["Mismanagement Provokes Antisocial Behavior (Civil Disaster)"]
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**Hurricane
(Natural Disaster)**

**Flood Controls Fail
(Technological
Disaster)**

**Mismanagement
Provokes
Antisocial Behavior
(Civil Disaster)**

DISASTER STEREOTYPES

- 1. Panic:** A NEO impact will trigger panic reflected in psychological disintegration and irrational, ineffective behaviors.
- 2. Looting:** The thin veneer of civility will be stripped away, leading to unfettered self-indulgence as revealed in a sharp rise in antisocial behavior and crime.
- 3. Helplessness:** Stunned, childlike residents of the disaster area will wait passively for rescue from the outside.

RESPONSES TO DISASTER

- **Resignation** – failure to take any action, most likely under conditions of no hope.
- **Self Protection** – rational activities intended to extricate self from dangerous situation, likely under conditions of hope.
- **Panic** – irrational and typically counterproductive behaviors that may occur given a closing window for survival.

PANIC

- Panic refers to frenzied, irrational behavior that decreases the chances of survival.
- Panic occurs under a limited set of conditions and even then only rarely.
- Examples of panic are rushing an exit when someone yells “FIRE!” and swamping the last lifeboat.
- Under most NEO scenarios, panic is unlikely.

PANIC, THE EVIDENCE

- Typically, people do not panic in disaster situations.
- They do become fearful, which increases motivation.
- High stress may impair problem solving ability.

ORIGINS OF THE PANIC STEREOTYPE

- Early psychology's pessimistic model of mankind.
- Failure to distinguish between potentially helpful escape behavior and frantic, repetitive actions.
- Widespread knowledge of famous high profile (and often misrepresented) incidents (e.g. 1937 "Invasion from Mars" broadcast).
- "Shake and Bake" movies and other media portrayals.

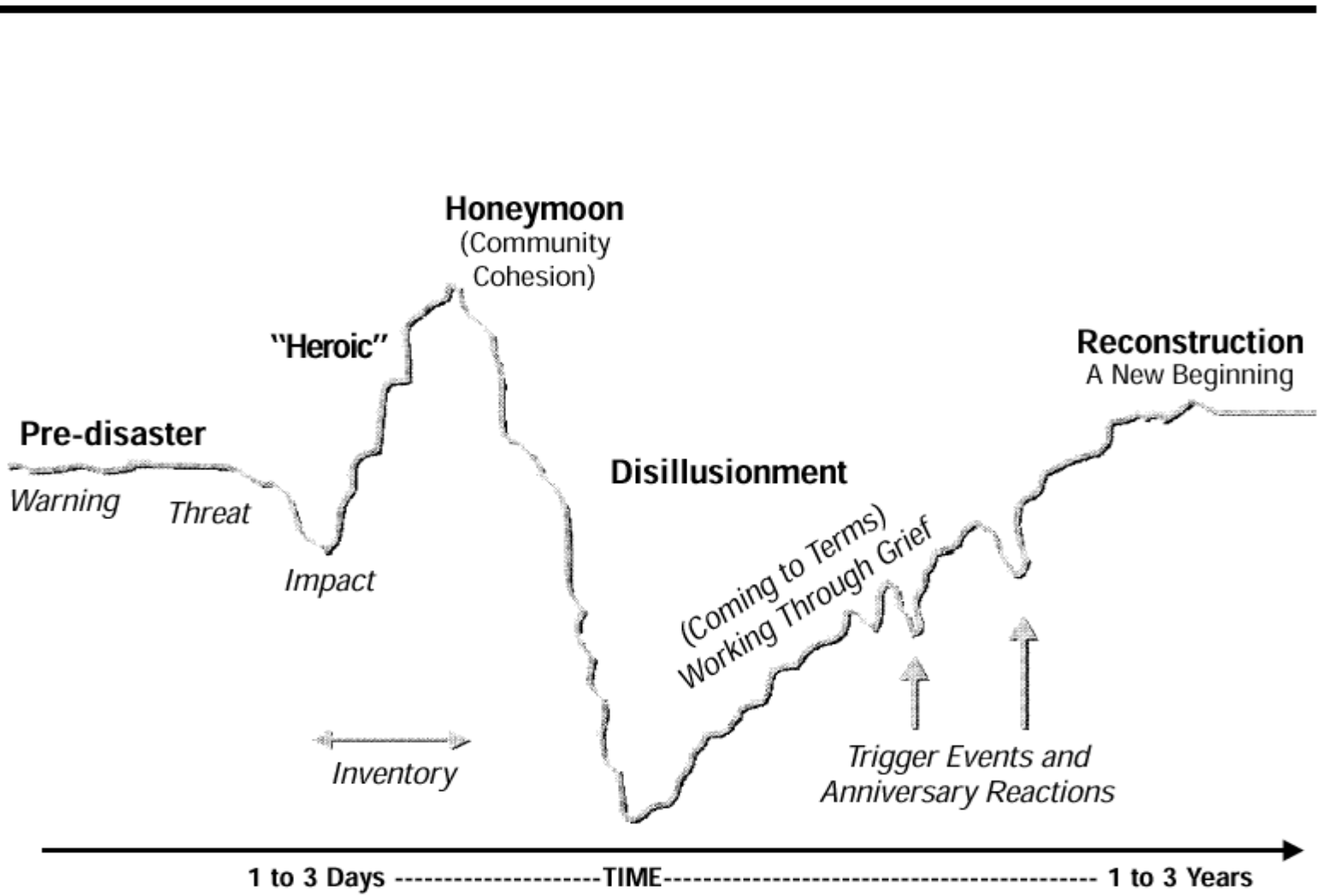
LOOTING, THE EVIDENCE

- Many people show enhanced levels of civility and concern.
- There is considerable heroic and altruistic behavior.
- In some cases crime and delinquency decrease.
- Some (not all) looting is survival oriented.
- Civil disasters can be unlawful and violent.
- Disaster mismanagement may provoke destructive behavior.
- Media exaggerate crime and violence.

HELPLESSNESS, THE EVIDENCE

- People within disaster areas are the true "first responders."
- Despite "diminished capacities" they solve problems of survival.
- They get to field stations and hospitals by automobile and foot.
- The majority of people who are rescued are rescued by "ordinary folk."

REACTION PHASES



Source: Zunin/Meyers

EMPOWERMENT MODEL

This model views residents of an afflicted area as part of the solution, as well as part of the problem. It fosters a collaborative, rather than authoritarian approach to disaster planning and management and is built on trust and communication. There are important roles for higher level agencies that prepare, support and provide back-up for local agencies and grass-roots efforts.

COMPETING VIEWS OF PEOPLE

Stereotypical

- Irrational and ineffective.
- Typically selfish, hedonistic, lawless
- Passively awaits outside rescue.

Empowerment

- Reasoned and effective.
- Typically civil and lawful.
- Motivated, proactive, effective.

MANAGEMENT BASED ON STEREOTYPES

- Withholding information to avoid panic reduces time for effective action.
- Discounting reports from “wild eyed crazies” within the disaster area blocks important information.
- Preparing for antisocial behavior creates self-fulfilling prophecies.
- Expecting helplessness prompts overlooking or misusing local resources.

MANAGEMENT BASED ON EVIDENCE

- Give early, carefully crafted warning. Allow plenty of time for effective action.
- Attend to information provided by the victims.
- Minimize gratuitous displays of authority, power and force, leave area residents' dignity in tact.
- Empower people within the area to save themselves.

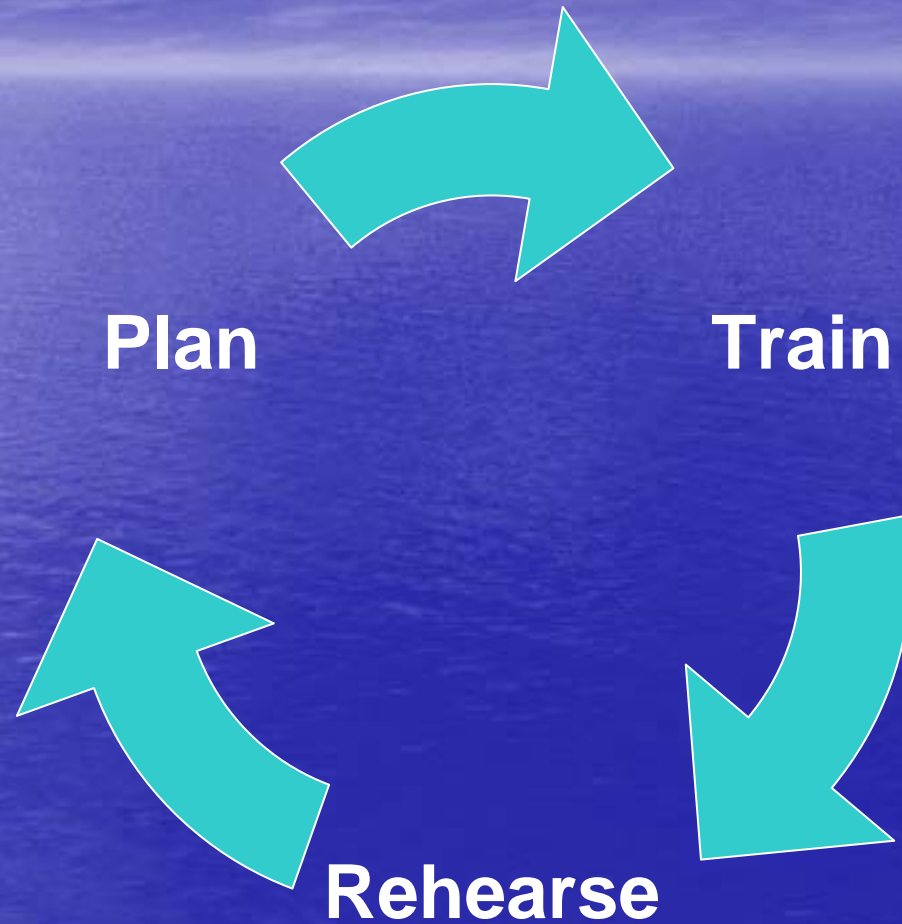
CRITICAL VALUES

- **Empathy** – genuine and communicated concern for welfare of people in the disaster area.
- **Trust** – receptiveness to community ideas and interests.
- **Sensitivity to Differences** – race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion.
- **Openness** – continual review, re-evaluation and revision of plans.
- **Flexibility** – capacity to improvise and change.

PREPARATION PHASE

- Network, collaborate, build trust.
- Develop effective working relations with media.
- Devise and implement an effective warning system.
- Establish effective communications systems (common frequencies etc.).
- Position facilities, people, equipment, and supplies.

PLANNING / FEEDBACK CYCLE



IMPACT PHASE

- Provide intergovernmental and interagency coordination.
- Facilitate rescue efforts by locals.
- Manage self-dispatched emergency workers.
- Regulate hordes of untrained volunteers.
- Conduct realistic needs assessments and avoid needless donations.

POST-IMPACT PHASE

- Provide a “sack of grain” (safety net) *and* a plow (materials for long term recovery).
- Minimize politics and scapegoating.
- Prepare for varied needs.
- Capitalize on local resources.
- In the process of rebuilding, move beyond the former “status quo.”

COMPLEMENTARITIES

- **Outsiders**

- Greater scientific and political expertise.
- Can coordinate governments and agencies.
- Can marshal greater resources.
- Better equipped for the long haul.

- **Locals**

- Already “there” and know their way around.
- Understand local culture and speak common tongue.
- Have pre-existing social ties.
- Are highly motivated to survive.

CONCLUSION

- Our images of people will influence our approach to NEO disaster planning and management.
- Mistaken views of people will undercut our efforts.
- Residents of disaster areas likely to retain rationality, civility, and personal effectiveness.
- Above all, residents are part of the solution, not just part of the problem.

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