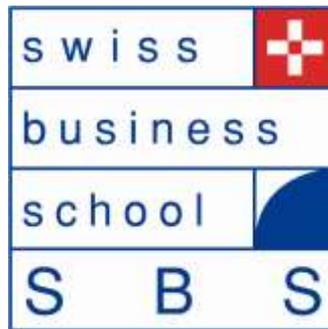


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Research methods amid chaos: Special tactics used to discover answers along the US Gulf Coast in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the B.P. Oil Spill

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Abstract

Businesses determined to rebound, as well as academics studying the business environment in the aftermath of a man-made or natural disaster must adopt techniques that might otherwise seem extraordinary. The chaos of the situation extant in the aftermath of a disaster forces managers and academics to take steps to get to the heart of the issues in minimal time. In these instances, time is not a luxury that they can enjoy; immediate situational awareness must be assessed and addressed. Moreover, as the business situation changes, and as resource availability and demand for goods and services fluctuates, business and academic monitors must have flexibility to adapt to the situation. An adaptive warfare-inspired approach to data gathering and fact-finding becomes imperative in these extraordinary situations.

Key words: Hurricane Katrina, B.P. Oil Spill, non-traditional research

1. Introduction

Businesses determined to rebound, as well as academics studying the business environment in the aftermath of a man-made or natural disaster must adopt techniques that might otherwise seem extraordinary. The chaos of the situation extant in the aftermath of a disaster forces managers and academics to take steps to get to the heart of the issues in minimal time.

In these instances, time is not a luxury that managers and interested academics can enjoy; immediate situational awareness must be assessed and addressed. In the aftermath of a disaster the business situation changes can be rapid, and the status quo changing daily. As resource availability and demand for goods and services fluctuates, business and academic monitors must have flexibility to adapt to the situation. Information or data acquisition thus must be immediate. An adaptive warfare-inspired approach to data gathering and fact-finding becomes imperative.

This manuscript examines the successful though somewhat-non-traditional data-gathering activities of businesses and academics alike along the Mississippi Gulf Coast and in southeast Louisiana in the aftermath of a natural disaster, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and the “B.P. oil spill” manmade disaster of 2010.

Approximately five years apart, these two events caused massive interruption of commerce. The same geographic footprint that was just beginning to recover after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina was now the “ground zero” impact area of the oil spill.

Hurricane Katrina and the B.P. oil spill are briefly explained. Space allotted to this manuscript cannot explain in any totality the gravity of and damage caused by these two events. These short descriptions thus do not tell the whole story, but rather serve as reminders to readers of these life-changing and life-ending events; readers are urged to more thoroughly read about these disasters in other venues.

This pedagogical manuscript briefly examines the natural disaster of Hurricane Katrina and the manmade disaster of the B.P. oil spill.

1.1 In brief, Hurricane Katrina

The U.S. National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) regard Hurricane Katrina in 2005 as the “most destructive hurricane to ever strike the U.S.” (NOAA, 2007, para. 1). Herman (2006) reported insured losses alone from Hurricane Katrina exceeded \$40US billion, which was almost double the claims from the previous record holder, Hurricane Andrew, which devastated Florida in 1992 (para. 7).

The Mississippi Gulf Coast and southeast Louisiana suffered massively from tidal flooding. The US National Weather Service (2012) reported that the “storm surge flooding of 25 to 28 feet above normal tide level occurred along portions of the Mississippi coast, with storm surge flooding of 10 to 20 feet above normal tide levels along the southeastern Louisiana coast” (Hurricane Katrina Section).

While New Orleans, Louisiana received the preponderance of media coverage in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Mississippi gulf coast received the harder impact from direct tidal inundation. The United States Geological Service’s (USGS) website states, “The mainland shoreline of Mississippi, located in the right-front quadrant of Hurricane Katrina, experienced one of the greatest storm surges in U.S. history. Most of this coastline stretching from Waveland through Pascagoula suffered extensive damage up to several kilometers inland from the coast” (USGS, 2010, para. 1).

The massive flooding in the southeastern Louisiana area was due in part to the failure of levees and flood control structures to handle a tidal surge that may have exceeded their design parameters. These flood control structural failures were addressed by the NOAA National Climatic Data Center in 2006, which reported:

“At least 80% of New Orleans was under flood water on August 31st, largely as a result of levee failures from Lake Pontchartrain. The combination of strong winds, heavy rainfall and storm surge led to breaks in the earthen levee after the storm passed, leaving some parts of New Orleans under 20 feet of water. Storm surge from Mobile Bay led to inundation of Mobile, Alabama causing imposition of a dusk-to-dawn curfew for the City. Large portions of Biloxi and Gulfport, Mississippi were underwater as a result of a 20 to 30+ foot storm surge which flooded the cities (NOAA, 2006, Flooding section).

By 2011, some of the areas struck by Hurricane Katrina show signs of recovery, while others did not. Nolan (2011) described private and public sectors in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana USA that were thriving six years after Hurricane Katrina, while other areas within the same city, not far away from the areas that have recovered, are still desolate. Income, financial resources, and civic organization are the keys factors separating those individuals and businesses that have recovered, and those that have far to go.

The human death toll of Hurricane Katrina, in 2012, is not yet fully known. Olsen (2010) wrote, roughly five years after Hurricane Katrina that “the names of hundreds of dead in Louisiana are still unknown, reporting.

Of an estimated 1,464 victims officially recognized by the state of Louisiana, more than 500 names have not been publicly released. And Louisiana's once-ambitious efforts to tackle dozens of related cases of missing persons and unidentified bodies ran out of money in 2006 and has never been revived” (para. 2).

Into this same disaster-area footprint in 2010 came the B.P. Oil Spill.

1.2 In brief, the 2010 B.P. Oil Spill

NOAA (2011) states, On April 20, 2010, an explosion on the Deepwater Horizon/BP MC252 drilling platform in the Gulf of Mexico caused the rig to sink and killed 11 workers. As a result, oil began leaking into the Gulf creating the largest spill in American history to date (para. 1). Sherwell (2010) observed, the BP oil spill has turned stretches of the Gulf of Mexico into a lifeless ocean (para. 1).

In 2012, the oil spill is known by several names. These names include: The Deepwater Horizon oil spill, The P.P. Oil Spill, the B.P. Oil Disaster, the Macondo Blowout, and to those who are influenced by 2012 revisionism, it is also simply now being called the Gulf Oil Spill.

On August 10, 2010, an article in The Telegraph described the situation extant in the Gulf of Mexico and its environs shortly after the oil well was capped:

The BP spill spewed 4.1m barrels of oil into the Gulf of Mexico over 87 days, making it the biggest unintentional offshore oil spill in the history of the petroleum industry. Around 4.9m barrels leaked from the time the well ruptured a mile below sea level on April 20 following an explosion that killed 11 workers and its capping on July 15, with only some 800,000 barrels captured during containment operations, according to new US government estimates. As BP moved to shut down the Macondo well once and for all, scientist said it gushed at the rate of 62,000 barrels of oil per day initially - more than 12 times faster than BP had admitted shortly after the blowout (The Telegraph, 2010, para. 1-3).

The NOAA Fisheries Service closed massive areas of the Gulf of Mexico to fishing\ due to pollutants in the water. In October 2010, the NOAA Fisheries service issues a “Frequently asked Questions paper, which listed the following (p. 1):

Why is NOAA Fisheries Service prohibiting fishing in certain areas?

- NOAA Fisheries Service is prohibiting fishing as a precautionary measure to ensure public safety and assure consumer confidence in Gulf of Mexico seafood.
- NOAA Fisheries Service strongly advises fishermen not to fish in areas where oil or oil sheens (very thin layers of floating oil) are present, even if those areas are not currently closed to fishing.
- A process to expedite modifications to the fishing closed area in the Gulf of Mexico has been established so that boundaries of the fishing closed area can be modified daily if needed.

The B.P. oil spill created a negative economic impact to the gulf fisheries in Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. Kline (2012) wrote:

“Two-years later, experts say the coastline and the wetlands are recovering, and at rates faster than expected. On the other hand, the fishing industry is struggling to get back to where it was in the days before the spill” (para. 1).

Information gathering and the disaster environment

The information-gathering processes are different when considering a certain natural vs. manmade disasters. The general difference between the two events is that the time of the initial destruction-phase portion of the event.

A natural disaster such as a flood, earthquake, tornado, tropical cyclone or hurricane is usually relatively brief, ranging from a matter of minutes to a few hours. The impact time for a manmade disaster can be a matter of moments, such as an explosion at a factory or the crash of an airplane,

or it can be a time span with seemingly never-ending residual effects that over time reduce in intensity but nevertheless continue.

Subsequently, information-gathering among intense, short-term events may be impossible. For example, business data-gathering amid a hurricane at ground-zero of the impact area would be an exercise in futility.

By contrast, information gathering during the eighty-seven days of the B.P. oil spill and after the event with ongoing impact continuing at the time of the writing of this manuscript in 2012 is a necessary and timely activity. To this day, the business, human and ecological impact of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster in the Ukraine is still studied, and the final impact of the event has not yet arrived (Turner, 2011).

The extraordinary circumstances encountered by business managers attempting to assess the post disaster business environment and its pulsating ebbs and flows of resource availabilities, experienced at the same time as critical shortages require tremendous situational awareness. Academic researchers functioning in that same arena, if they are to be successful, must set aside the lengthy ponderings of conventional theoretical research, and must compress their activities, mimicking the situational awareness strides taken by their business-world contemporaries. This leads to a logical question: So how does one manage or perform research in the unconventional post disaster environment? Much can be learned about capitalizing in about how others manage in other fields when confronting unconventional situations.

2. Literature

Military planners, leadership schools, and tacticians study the actions of shrewd men who have fought in ages past. They study and analyze not only the successes of their own armed forces, but those of their past and present adversaries. Sports teams do much the same thing, watching videos of teams with which they are about to compete, examining plays and moves of those they are about to meet in the arena. Likewise, business planners must perform an assessment of their situational awareness.

Boldly discussing the military strategies of Attila the Hun, Roberts (1999) examined the necessity for unconventional, stealthy reconnoiter of the situation (p. 4). He discussed how Attila, a captive in the Roman court in his youth, learned the ways of his future adversaries, by adopting an external appearance that disguised his information-gathering activities. Provenca (1995) showed the connection of this military mindset to that of business, applying the quotes of famous WWII US Army General George Patton to strategic and tactical business planning known to have said, "Strategy and tactics do not change. Only the means of applying them are different. Strategy is very simple. It should be used like a steamroller—make up your mind on a course and direction of action and then stick to it. It takes very little imagination and skill to conceive a workable method of strategy. Tactics must be applied by attacking weaknesses and exploiting breakthroughs" (p.75).

Expanding upon Provenca (1995), Axelrod (1999) further discussed Patton's strategic and tactical theories. Applying Patton's reasoning to this manuscript's focus to the environ of post-disaster business managers and researchers, we find this counter argument to those who are apprehensive to act in imperfect situations. Axelrod (1999) quoted Patton: "It is fatal to wait for perfection (p.130). Axelrod (1999) prodded academics and nudged managers: "Management theoreticians are business-school professors, not managers. Your job is to manage, not to theorize about perfect solutions. Perfection is too expensive. It costs too much time. If you wait for the perfect plan or for ideal circumstances, opportunity will be lost" (p. 130).

Strid & Andréasson (2008) took a tongue-in-cheek approach to their examination of Viking culture. “A thousand years ago, Vikings were making wine sniffers out of the skulls of their enemies. Today they’re selling furniture in flat packages” (Strid & Andréasson, 2008, p.5). They wrote how the Vikings would learn about their target, plan fastidiously, and yet maintain flexibility in the face of a situational change.

We learn from Attila, from General Patton, and from the Vikings, the necessity of discreetly or stealthily obtaining information, of planning, and to have enough information to make informed decisions to change direction when necessary. We further learn that waiting until everything is absolutely perfect wastes time, wastes resources, and may waste strategic advantage.

Mao Tse-tung on Guerrilla Warfare has been translated into English and published under in many venues. The United States Marine Corps reproduced it so that it could be utilized by those studying the unconventional warfare methods known as guerrilla warfare.

The translator, Brigadier General Samuel B. Griffith, USMC (Retired) remarks how the “influence of the ancient military philosopher Sun Tzu on Mao's military thought will be apparent to those who have read The Book of War. Sun Tzu wrote that speed, surprise, and deception were the primary essentials of the attack” (USMC, 1989, p. 37).

Mao identified seven fundamental steps toward achieving a revolutionary goal (USMC, 1898, p. 43):

1. Arousing and organizing the people.
2. Achieving internal unification politically.
3. Establishing bases.
4. Equipping forces.
5. Recovering national strength.
6. Destroying enemy's national strength.
7. Regaining lost territories.

All four military strategies by Attila, General Patton, the Vikings and Mao, along with their unique characteristics and stratagems, pose unique insight if adapted by the manager or academic in a post-disaster environment.

2.1 Discussion of observations in the field and of experience

Stealth, planning, informed situational awareness, and tactical flexibility; four characteristics important to military planners. These same four are important to business and academics gathering information in the post disaster/ongoing disaster environment. They are discussed and examples provided of their application:

One may wonder why anyone in business or academia would not want to tell everyone that they are on the scene and gathering information. Experience shows that people (victims) in disaster impact areas may be very reluctant to share information with those who they perceive are outsiders. Subsequently, if one’s objective is to build a business or to obtain data, one must utilize those four characteristics mentioned above.

Walt Disney employed the when acquiring the properties that would he would assemble into what became the Walt Disney World Resort in Florida. Emerson (2010) discussed Disney’s method:

“From obscure legal strategies to spy-like maneuvers, Disney’s eastern plans, code named Project Future, were built upon a brilliant mix of fantasy and reality. The complexity of the final result, the Walt Disney World Resort, was rivaled only by the complexity of the method used to achieve it. Throughout the entire effort, two restrictions repeated themselves at every stage: Disney’s insistence on secrecy in the process and Disney’s desire for control of the product (p. 2)

Perhaps without specifically identifying his management style as such, Disney relied upon the four principles to outsmart speculators who would drive land prices up.

Stealth, planning, informed situational awareness, and tactical flexibility allowed Disney to obtain what he wanted: land to expand his business empire. Likewise, stealth is crucial to business managers and academics conducting research under certain circumstances.

Demonstrating mastery of the four principles of stealth, planning, informed situational awareness, and tactical flexibility, along the Mississippi gulf coast after Hurricane Katrina, Wal-Mart assessed the situation and reopened their operations in tents.

The temporary Wal-Mart in Waveland, Mississippi, was “a 16,000 square-foot industrial strength A-frame, complete with electricity and six 30-ton air conditioners” (Ray, 2006, Para. 2). Employing advanced technology to communicate with suppliers and warehouses, in the earliest stages of post-Hurricane Katrina operations, Wal-Mart’s collection of data of their customer’s most-wanted or demanded items employed simple technology: a pad of paper and a pen, where customers listed their wants.

Gross (2005) eyeing the efficiency and successes of private enterprise in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, compared to inefficiencies of the public sector, questioned if the “public should really plan to rely on the private sector rather than the government for disaster-relief “(para 2). Attempting a counter-argument to a Fortune article, Gross (2005) wrote:

Government broke down. Business stepped up," blares Fortune's cover story. Wal-Mart relief trucks reached stricken Gulf Coast areas before the Federal Emergency Management Administration did. Federal Express continued to deliver when the National Guard couldn't. As Kenner, La., Mayor Philip Capitano put it: "The Red Cross and FEMA need to take a master class in logistics and mobilization from Wal-Mart. (para. 1)

While Gross apparently intended a counterargument to private-sector success, he inadvertently reinforces the notion that Wal-Mart’s post-disaster management style was aggressively effective.

Academics in post-disaster environments demonstrate equal dexterity in the face of adverse conditions. The doctoral thesis of Adrine Harrell (2009) discussed the mixed approach to data gathering that she used after Hurricane Katrina (p. 69).

While she was able to survey many of those who stayed in business after Hurricane Katrina during a Louisiana Assisted Living Association (LALA) meeting, she had to use other methods to coax or encourage some from closed firms to participate, who were reluctant to do so. “For example, I was introduced to some by the director of LALA; once they were comfortable they would talk to me” (A. Harrell, personal communication, July 13, 2012).

Amid researching her 2010 doctoral thesis, Audrey Price (2010) encountered a different kind of environmental upset; a political upset.

On March 23, 2010, U.S. President Barack Hussein Obama signed into law The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, which is informally referred to as Obamacare. At the start of her doctoral

research, Price examined the willingness of physicians to use electronic medical record (EMR) technology.

Well into her data collection the “regulatory climate in which medical practices and medical practitioners (physicians) operate began a metamorphosis...[that began] shifting the decision-making process regarding the adoption of EMR technology away from being a purely management decision and morphing it into a matter of business and to some degree regulatory compliance” (p. 124).

While the data that she obtained early in the data collection process clearly demonstrated the pre-Obamacare liberty of physicians to use or not use EMR, the end of her data-collection process was a snapshot showing the change from choice to compliance.

In 2010 while researching the B.P. oil spill effects upon shrimp fishermen in Louisiana and in Mississippi, Lambert, Duhon and Peyrefitte (2012) learned quickly that they had to use non-traditional methods to gather data: “Louisiana and Mississippi fishing communities are fairly cloistered, and resist inquiries from those whom they consider to be outsiders.

Researchers used local contacts to provide introductions, dressed in work clothes similar to those worn by shrimpers, and drove pickup trucks when in the field” (p. 230). Lambert, et. al (2012) also conducted convenience-sample surveys that added to their dataset (p. 230).

Demonstrating again the necessity for military-like elements of stealth, planning, informed situational awareness, and tactical flexibility to unveil the unique characteristics of the Gulf Shrimp supply chain and the impact of the B.P. oil spill upon that supply chain, Lambert et. al (2012) utilized “a unique mixed approach of interview, survey, and review of news and government information sources in order to construct a complete picture of the supply chain. This approach demonstrates that a systems approach is a useful tool to assess a supply chain amid a business crisis, and not only in a more sterile and less chaotic business setting (p. 224).

Chairman Mao’s tactics adapted for post disaster business and academic research
Mao Tse-tung’s revolutionary guerrilla warfare approach to overcoming capitalism and western influence may be indeed revolutionary when considering adopting them in order to advance capitalism and the western way of life.

While it may be repugnant for some stalwart communists and some ardent capitalists with headstrong predispositions, that none of their tactics might be of value to the “other” side, an examination of Mao’s guerrilla warfare approach to combat, we determine that in a rapidly changing post disaster environment, both the business manager and the academic must adopt the informed, arousing, motivated, and dedicated yet flexible style of the revolutionary.

Table 1 lists Mao’s tactics, and the business manager and the academic researcher’s approaches that are in practice seemingly styled after Mao’s tactics. Each of Mao’s tactics has applications to business recovery as well as academic research in a post-disaster environment.

Mao’s guerrilla warfare approach to combat*	A business manager’s approach to rapid recovery after a disaster	An academic researcher’s approach to data collection after a disaster
1. Arousing and organizing the people.	Inspiring and organizing available employees and other stakeholders.	Persuade cooperation by unconventional resources to support research activity
2. Achieving internal unification politically.	Get employees situated to work with minimal distraction, to the extent of assisting with the wel-	Have institutional research approval, and buy-in to support unconventional research.

	fare of their families, so that all are pulling together	
3. Establishing bases.	Establish new temporary business settings, i.e. temporary office trailers, tents, etc., situated to allow commerce under post-disaster conditions	Establish a post-disaster research environment, which may be a remote office, or even an automobile.
4. Equipping forces.	Establish communications with suppliers, customers and other stakeholders. Acquire or coordinate sellable items or services. Establish flexible supply chain.	Mobilize researchers with data-collection resources that suit the changing post-disaster environment.
5. Recovering national strength.	Encounter objections, supply chain interruptions, increasing irregular regulatory disruptions.	Encounter objections and possibly jealousies by peers or by competing academic units.
6. Destroying enemy's national strength.	Competitively overcome the activities of lesser-organized business competitors.	Gather datasets that others are not mobilized to obtain due to lack of critical thinking, creativity, or resources.
7. Regaining lost territories.	Turn stakeholder activity into post disaster customer loyalty	PUBLISH!
* USMC, 1898, p. 43		

3. Discussion

Non-traditional approaches to business and research may seem to break new ground, yet as we can see, the techniques are as old as those employed by the ancient Vikings, by Attila the Hun, or more recently by General George Patton and Mao Tse-tung.

The timeless strategies and tactics employed for battlefield conquest are now almost seamlessly adaptable to bloodless conquest in commerce and academic research.

Just as military strategists debate the advantages and disadvantages of strategy, tactics and employment of forces, business executives admire or admonish their peers and contemporaries in like manner.

Academics fare no better escape from the debate, as diehard statisticians lost in the swirl of hard quantitative analysis, argue the validity of hard-won information obtained in the field from researchers donning white rubber boots, while those whom they scorn for the use of non-traditional methods obtain data that those less creative can never access.

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