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DISASTER PLANNING: AN ONGOING ACTIVITY\*

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Disaster planning is an ongoing activity. This is the message of my topic today.

What does disaster planning mean to you as a computer center manager? Does it mean hiring a consultant to produce a written disaster plan per se? Does it bring to mind the drafting of standard operating procedure manuals to handle service interruptions? Is it a booklet put together to satisfy a regulation or to convince your insurance company that you deserve a lower rate? Is it simply a phone list? If you are thinking along these lines, you may be in for a surprise. Disaster planning involves much more than this.

As a start, consider the following scenario. A strong earthquake hits your city. A news report seems to show that your university has turned to rubble; your computing center must surely be severely damaged, or so you think. You can't get in to make a damage assessment. Even if you could, authorities have orders to keep you out.

You received no warning. If you had received a warning you may have scrambled around trying to arrange for removal of certain pieces of equipment in order to protect individual items. You may have tried to shut down parts of your system or started to isolate it as best you could.

You are suddenly operating in an unfamiliar physical environment as well as an unfamiliar management environment. You try to establish rough priorities. Who can you call for help?

At this point you may be saying, "earthquake, ha!" There's no chance of an earthquake happening around here. Choose your own nightmare then. A flood accompanying a hurricane, a passenger jet crashing into your facility, a hazardous material incident perhaps? The choice is yours. The disaster has hit and it's too big for you to handle. Your presence is needed in multiple places at once. The contractors you normally call are busy helping someone else - you hadn't thought to keep them on a retainer. The Hollywood image of crazed maniacs running around in shock, looting and smashing things enters your mind - - if only for a moment

Stop.

Take a deep breath.

You are a manager with a broad vision. You need to know what really happens during times of disaster. There are, believe it

or not, predictable elements to disaster situations. Disaster planning is an ongoing activity. First you need to know what people actually do during times of disaster. Forget your precious equipment for a minute. You need to adjust your plans to people.

Think of your spouse for a minute, or your kids. People. Think of your neighbor. People. Think of the people you work for, the people who work for you. Think of yourself. Ok, You're on the right track.

Why are people so important? Maybe because none of them care if your computer center is smashed all to hell. Why, you gasp? Maybe because they are rooting through the rubble of their offices trying to find photographs, memories keepsakes.

Why are people so important? Maybe because police officials are funny about recognizing only one type of pass when letting people into a disaster area. Maybe because a pass recognized by one authority might not be recognized by another.

Why are people so important? Maybe because people leave disaster plans sitting on a shelf when the big one hits.

Disaster planning is an ongoing activity.

Ok, you say, people are important. Give me a concrete example of what I can do. Exactly what is predictable about a disaster?

First, a disaster can become very costly if you haven't planned ahead. You may have to make quick decisions on an ad hoc basis. Furthermore, if you are unaccustomed to planning, an emergent group may develop to handle recovery activities, causing you to lose control of the situation. So what do you do?

Start to engage in convergence management. What, you ask? Convergence management. Simply put, following a disaster you will be faced with the sudden push of people, information, and supplies coming into your disaster area. Fritz and Mathewson's 1957 study, Convergence Behavior in Disasters: A problem in Social Control points out that you can expect calls and visits from helpers, retirees, the anxious, the curious, and even the occasional explorer. Add to this truckloads full of unsolicited old clothes, medicine, and canned goods and you start to get the picture. You're trying to patch up a computing center and people are trying to make such demands. IBM is sending people, other computer center managers fly in and gawk at your mess, area corporations are calling on you to help them. Somewhere you have to draw the line. Television helicopters are now hovering over your now roofless computer center stirring up debris, you

haven't gotten any sleep, and you've long since shed your business suit - you're dressed down to jeans and a sweatshirt. You think you're losing control.

Disaster planning is an ongoing activity.

If you had planned ahead you may have already thought about some of the questions that now confront you.

Will you allow visitors to help? Husbands or wives? Family?

Do you know where to put the media? Do you need a public information officer? Can you get phones put in for them? Power outlets?

Is your presence required at an Emergency Operations Center or at a Command Post? Can you send a communications liaison? How long can she or he stay? What kinds of demands is your university putting on you?

What are the consequences of a major computer center failure? Will there be a problem re-starting after a two week shutdown? Can you activate your off-site location? Do you have one? Can you lease computing resources from someone in another city? Can you hook them in?

There are lots of questions like these that you will be in a much better position to answer one you start planning.

Remember, though, planning means people.

If you have disaster drills, exercise with real managers...not with their gophers.

If you organize operations into districts, divisions, planning zones, or regions think about them. Familiarize yourself with how your resources are concentrated. Think about your organizational positions, then forget them.

In an earthquake, the News Director or the Chief Engineer of your local broadcast station puts on his or her disaster operations hat. The lowly fire lieutenant becomes a communications officer, the paramedic a triage officer. Do your employees have special skills? Isn't one of your technicians an amateur radio operator? Did you know that she has an emergency packet switching network at her disposal? Most likely there already are organized groups in your community that can help you. Your university may even have special resources available beyond your wildest hopes. Start asking questions. Start making contacts. Keep thinking people.

Disaster planning is an ongoing activity.

In this short talk, you have heard me say some things about disaster planning. Now it is time for you to ask yourself some important questions. Disaster planning can happen before, during, and after a disaster. Will it happen for you?

Quarantelli in his 1989 study on community "lifeline" organizations (forthcoming) ask the following questions, which should prove instructive in any self-examination of prior planning readiness.

Does planning (for you) include . . . Risk and hazard assessment?

... Educating the public about risks?

... Conducting training programs?

... Informing the public about planning?

... Conducting training programs relevant to disaster planning?

... Convening meetings to share relevant to disaster planning?

... Holding drills, rehearsals, exercises, etc.?

... Maintaining standby emergency and or disaster resources?

... Formulating memos of understanding and/or mutual aid pacts?

... Helping and or being helped by other groups with emergency and/or disaster planning?

In short, ask yourself:

What kind of emergency and/or disaster planning exists in this organization?

What kind of written plan (s) does your organization have? Who has copies of the plan?

What was the last time there was a major revision, review or updating of the planning (not just your plans)? What exactly was done? What changes were made if any?

When was the last time there was an exercise, drill or rehearsal? What was done? On what scale was the exercise carried out? What changes were made or lessons learned?

Quarantelli also suggests that we examine what kinds of organizational contacts are available to use on a regular, everyday basis.

By contrast, with whom do we engage in disaster planning? Either before, during or after the big one? What is the nature of this contract? How often do you meet? Do the meetings follow a regular or irregular schedule?

If you do plan actively with other organization what exactly is the nature of the planning activities? Do you engage in formal or informal agreements? Do others in your organization know of these arrangements? Do other groups hold copies of any formal written plan that you might have? Do you have a copies of theirs?

One other point is worthy of mention. At the beginning of this talk, I used the illustration of an earthquake directly impacting both your community and your computing center. Disasters today can have consequences far removed in terms of space and time. This, however, is not the worst of it. You may be so accustomed to thinking in terms of "just an earthquake" or "just a hurricane" that you fail to adjust your planning activities to human needs arising in other types of events completely. Are you prepared to deal with a ... Major chemical spill?

- ...Dam break?
- ...Earthquake?
- ...Flood?
- ...Hurricane?
- ...Industrial explosion?
- ...Extensive power outage?
- ...Mud or landslide?
- ...Large scale forest or brush fire?
- ...Plane crash in the area?
- ...Radiation hazard?
- ...Ship disaster?
- ...Tornado?
- ...Toxic waste contamination?
- ...Train wreck in the area?
- ...Volcanic eruption or fallout?

...Extensive winter blizzard?  
...Large Scale building fire?  
...Bridge or tunnel collapse?  
...Something else? .....What?

The idea is to get you thinking. No one expects you to have answers to how to handle every potentially disruptive situation that comes along. You can learn from others, though. You can learn from your own mistakes. And you can learn that disaster planning is an ongoing activity.

Thank you.

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