

**Learning about organizing for intersectoral collaborative arrangements in  
managing disasters**

**Paper Proposal  
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**Abstract** of the paper – 500 words or less

The Tsunami in India (2004) and Hurricane Katrina in US (2005) were unprecedented natural disasters with sweeping impacts. Both storms produced catastrophic immediate results: high death tolls, extreme property loss and paralyzing disruption of civic systems and infrastructures. Tsunami is argued to be one of the best managed disasters in modern history (Inderfurth, Fabrycky, and Cohen, 2006); conversely, the US administration has been lambasted by critics both inside and outside of the US (Comfort, 2006; Dyson, 2006; American Psychological Association Office of Minority Affairs, 2006; May, 2006) for its inadequate disaster management during Katrina. Our data may shed light on *how* differential approaches to intersectoral disaster triage influenced how this happened and why.

We conducted content analysis on print news coverage of the two disaster events on a one week, seven-day time frame beginning on the first day of onset of Tsunami in India (Sunday, December 26, 2004 - Saturday, January 1, 2005) and Hurricane Katrina in US (Friday, August 26, 2005 - Thursday, September 1, 2005). We selected three leading national newspapers in India and the US for analysis: the Times of India, The Hindu, and the Indian Express from India and The New York Times, the Washington Post, and the Wall Street Journal from US. We also constructed comparative timelines to display how disaster organizing unfolded in both contexts.

Harrald (2006) presents a model that illustrates the Stages of a Disaster Response, across Organizational Size versus Time. In this model, the success factors in each stage are linked and Comfort (2006) terms this ‘temporal dependency’ and proposes that this sequence is critical to performance of interrelated systems (along with physical and spatial dependencies). Using this frame, we describe the T-K organizing process in a

temporal-linear fashion. Intersectoral triage is a critical feature of collective response and problem solving in the initial phase of disaster events.

Harrald (2006) also lists agility and discipline as critical success factors for disaster response. Grounded in our qualitative data, we build on Harrald's (2006) thesis and highlight the two modes of triage: centralized and decentralized, and the relationships between the two modes in the organizing of disaster management. We propose that effectiveness of disaster response management is dependent on the simultaneous presence and interplay between centralized and decentralized modes of triage. For purposes of this discussion, we define centralized modes as both government and non-government driven, intentional, planned and characterized by structures and processes existing prior to the disaster. Decentralized modes of triage, on the other hand, are citizen driven, emergent and in most cases voluntary; they also create new and perhaps temporary structures and processes as vehicles for response delivery and management. For effective large-scale disaster response management, both centralized and decentralized modes of triage need to be functioning together and in coordination with each other. We also propose that reliance on self-organizing systems, collective orientation (cross-boundary knowledge sharing, trusting others, sharing social capital) and bureaucratic agility are all essential to effective intersectoral collaboration toward collective problem solving.

**Key Words:**

Dynamics of Organizing  
Intersectoral disaster triage  
Cross-cultural comparisons  
Katrina  
Tsunami

**Rationale for this paper's inclusion in the conference**

Extreme natural disasters disrupt the basic rhythm and fabric of community life. The resulting press to protect human life, cope with death and destruction and rebuild the shared life space exposes core values and organizing principles that drive community life in times of order. These contexts also offer great learning opportunities. While numerous treatments have been written on the impacts of the Tsunami in India and Hurricane Katrina in US, there is scant research offering a comparative analysis of these historic events. This paper attempts to fill this gap by presenting findings from the first study in our longitudinal research project on collective organizing and response to the Tsunami and Katrina disasters.

Attending the MOPAN conference will permit the authors to connect with and extend the network of researchers and practitioners interested in research on intersectoral collaboration for societal problem solving.

**Possible fit with pre-themed session on**

Intersectoral Collaborative Arrangements: Effective Vehicles for Societal Problemsolving?

## References

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