

Project management strategies implemented by fema management essay

[Engineering](#), [Project Management](#)



This case study has the purpose of illustrating and analyzing the contrasting project management strategies and reactions from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to Katrina and Sandy storms. It will underline and compare the preparedness of both cities in order to mitigate the hurricane damages, as well as the effectiveness of this process, the methodology used and the executed emergency plan. The objective of this case study is to analyze FEMA's responses in terms of planning, organizing, and post-hurricane management in New Orleans due to Katrina hurricane in 2005, and in Long Island due to Sandy hurricane in 2012. A concise description of the causes of these deficiencies will be evaluated and explained. Finally, a list of lessons learned of project management approaches from these experiences will be displayed.

On August 29, 2005 hurricane Katrina made landfall in New Orleans, Louisiana. It was a Category-5 storm that flooded nearly 80% of the city and killed approximately 1, 800 people and the overall cost of destruction was amounted to USD 123 billion (Kaleem), which made Hurricane Katrina the worst natural disaster in the history of US (RMS). Seven years later, superstorm Sandy hit the northeastern states of US on October 29, 2012 and it was categorized as Category-2 storm and it became the largest Atlantic hurricane so far, with winds spanning nearly 1, 100 miles (Kaleem). Hurricane Sandy became the second costliest hurricane in US history after Hurricane Katrina and the damages due to Sandy had been estimated at USD 65 billion (NY Post). The comparative infograph (Kaleem) of both hurricanes is shown in Appendix A. hurricane Sandy affected nearly 24 states but the major damage was done in New Jersey and New York there it made

landfall. Long Island and the surrounding boroughs were severely affected by this hurricane as it flooded streets, tunnels, and subway lines and cut the power across the entire city. Severity of this storm can be analyzed by the fact that Wall Street remained closed for two days and it is only the second time after the incident of 9/11 that Wall Street did not trade on a business day (Vlastelica).

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) acts as the primary responder to all natural and man-made disasters in US. FEMA was established in 1979 after merging various disaster response committees. According to FEMA (About FEMA) " The primary mission of the Federal Emergency Management Agency is to reduce the loss of life and property and protect the Nation from all hazards, including natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and other man-made disasters, by leading and supporting the Nation in a risk-based, comprehensive emergency management system of preparedness, protection, response, recovery, and mitigation." This agency has 10 regional offices across the country and two area offices which are responsible for interacting with state officials to plan and manage disaster response efforts (About FEMA). Since March 2003 FEMA has been made an integral part of homeland security and now it acts as a division within homeland department.

The key aspect to understand the disaster planning by FEMA is to know that FEMA acts as the primary coordinator of emergency efforts and it is not the sole organizational body dedicated for tackling all disasters (About FEMA). FEMA supervises and coordinates the response of various disaster response

teams and thus the communication is vital to efficient and effective function of FEMA. FEMA is comprised of strong disaster recovery teams from local, regional, and federal levels such as The Urban Search and Rescue Response Team which is a team within FEMA comprised of a state and local respondents. These teams operate under Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Act (Stafford Act 1) which dictates that " response efforts should first utilize State and local resources before requesting Federal aid". Furthermore, according to this act the order of responsibility first starts at the city level, then a state and finally it goes up to federal level once the previous organizational bodies have been found incapable of handling the situation and their own. However, in extreme natural disasters such as Katrina and Sandy, federal government that he takes control of the situation and FEMA is involved before, during, and after the catastrophic incident occurs.

FEMA Preparedness For Katrina

During and after Hurricane Katrina, FEMA was heavily criticized for its languished disaster management, disorganized response, lack of action, and finally absence of contingency plans. The natural disaster exposed the agency's lack of credibility as the communication, which is vital to the working of FEMA during disaster, crippled in some cases are completely destroyed and others. As a result of communication failure on response actions were prolonged resulting in heavy devastation caused by Katrina (Miller 4). Management of Katrina was a project failure of huge proportions. It failed in planning, execution, and in meeting the most basic needs of the

victims of this disaster. The circumstances surrounding the failed management of Katrina are certainly different from those of conventional projects; however, there is an opportunity to analyze Katrina as a project and to assess that how the lessons learnt from this disaster helped the restructuring of FEMA and assisted in minimizing the losses that occurred during hurricane Sandy (Naylor).

In the opinion of the writer, four project management failures were prominent during FEMA's handling of hurricane Katrina, namely - communication failure, project planning failure, project execution failure and leadership failure.

Communication Failure

Despite the crisis management experience of FEMA representatives, unseen issues can always render the plans ineffective, so, efficient planning needs to incorporate contingency plans that should kick in due to failure of main plan. However, during Hurricane Katrina it was evident that unexpected problems and unforeseen events left the FEMA officials without alternative plans, especially the plans involving effective communication and alternative modes of communication in case the main infrastructure gets destroyed and hampers the coordinating efforts of FEMA.

In New Orleans, the communications infrastructure was completely disrupted and the mayor of New Orleans retreated to Hyatt hotel where he remained unable to contact anyone for two days after the landfall (Miller 8). 911 and the public safety radio went down and remained inoperable until late during

hurricane, and when the systems came online they were overburdened by an outpour of emergency calls which further disrupted the rescue efforts and communication. Response teams and volunteer emergency aid organizations remained unable to receive coordination information and orders from FEMA or any other level of disaster management agency and as a response, the governor of Louisiana requested assistance from National Guard in this calamity (National Guard).

Additionally the disability of damage to communication infrastructure, FEMA failed to coordinate the efforts required to effectively distribute basic supplies to hurricane victims. The situation was further aggravated by the fact that other federal agencies were not familiar with the disaster recovery procedures and additionally they were not familiar with protocols and procedures of other agencies, resulting in the breakdown of interagency communication. For instance, National Guard was not aware of the procedures of United States Department of Agriculture which prevents certain products from being distributed during hurricane (National Guard).

Planning Failure

Project Management Institute (PMI 88) place high emphasis on developing project plans to define how the project should be executed, monitored, controlled and closed. Planning failure was a major drawback in carrying out rescue and restoration efforts pre and post-Katrina. A year before Katrina, FEMA developed an action plan, under the name of Southeast Louisiana Catastrophic Hurricane Planning, to manage this area in the event of natural disaster (IEM 6). The purpose of this plan was to bring together all levels of

government and American Red Cross to explore, identify, analyze, and address the complex and overwhelming operational responsibilities that will be performed in case a hurricane strikes Louisiana. This planning involved nearly 300 representatives from all over the government, but unfortunately the planning committee did not meet again until late July 2005—just a couple of weeks before hurricane Katrina (Nagin).

The planning failure is apparent from the fact that before the storm FEMA started working with The Hurricane Center and send out advisories and emergency planning to all the states that were forecasted to be affected by Katrina. Temporary shelters were created and the state of emergency was declared in the influenced regions, but as the storm approached it became evident that the intensity of the storm was wrongly forecasted and insufficient preventive measures were taken. Indeed, the first news release about the storm preparation was issued on August 25, 2005 which is the same day Katrina touched Florida (Nagin). Additionally, hours before Katrina made landfall, technical experts assessed that the levees and the flood barriers in their current state will not withstand the impact of the storm (Miller 15), and despite the similar evaluations were made before Katrina; no action was taken to avoid such a situation that resulted in flooding of nearly 80% of the city.

Project Execution Failure

Project Management Institute (2008, p. 91) dictates to perform required activities to accomplish project objectives. These execution steps span across broad areas of arranging necessary funds, staffing and training right

people, adapt changes in the project, deliver the planned outcomes and collect project relevant data. As discussed in the last section that FEMA's Katrina project suffered project planning failure, which is a vital input to project execution, so consequently FEMA's project execution also met the same fate.

A number of meteorologists forecasted the impact of Hurricane Katrina, yet FEMA failed to handle the situation appropriately. A number of the cautionary measures such as earlier evacuation time and publicly provided transportation to safety would have minimized the losses caused by the hurricane (FFIEC). The governor of Louisiana, Blanco, admitted that she should have called the public transportation sooner because they were rendered unusable due to flooding, which also made navigation a big hurdle as street signs became invisible. Also, the emergency response did not deeply involved Federal assistance until the very last minute before the hurricane and some important needs were not met, for instance, Louisiana asked the government for 180, 000 liters of water and 109, 440 MREs (Meals Ready to Eat) for the Superdome refugees however, they were only able to receive 90, 000 liters of water and 43, 776 MREs before Katrina made landfall (The Whitehouse).

The major criticisms of FEMA's response to Katrina came from the lack of action taken during the hurricane, especially from its unawareness about the victims of convention center until day 4 of the disaster (CNN). The flooding due to the storm made it impossible to send supplies to the storm victims in convention center and there were no supplies already available within the

convention center as it was not originally designated as a sheltered location (Treater). This site was originally categorized as a refuge center on demand for people in need of medical attention, but its purpose was later expanded to general public as well which resulted in demand surge that forced the American Red Cross not to send any staff members to this site as it was short of the standards for safe environment. The government agencies were unable to evacuate the victims of convention center until September 3, but by this time these are the parents have already been rescued by nongovernmental organizations.

Furthermore, insufficient transportation was provided for people with special needs and the state did not issue an official evacuation decree until 19 hours before hurricane made landfall in New Orleans. Post-Katrina financial support from the government also faced several scans such as false claims, which hindered the help from reaching those who truly needed the support to recover from this disaster. Even there was an incident in which a convict was successfully granted damage compensation while being imprisoned (US DoJ 10). And there was another case involving a woman from Queens, New York who successfully obtained funding from government in the wake of hurricane recovery (US DoJ 12)

Failure of Leadership

Louisiana Congressman, Charlie Melancon, testifying before a US House Committee said that e-mails written by the government's emergency response chief Michael Brown, showed a " failure in leadership." Two days after Katrina hit, Marty Bahamonde, one of the only FEMA employees in New

Orleans, wrote to Brown that " the situation is past critical" and listed problems including many people near death and food and water running out at the Superdome. Brown's entire response was: " Thanks for the update. Anything specific I need to do or tweak?" (Melancon)

On September 12 Brown resigned, 10 days after President Bush told him, " Brownie, you're doing a heck of a job." Brown took over FEMA in 2003 with little experience in emergency management (Melancon). He joined the agency in 2001 as legal counsel to his friend, then-FEMA director Joe Allbaugh, who was Bush's 2000 campaign manager. When Allbaugh left FEMA in 2003 Brown assumed the top job being a close aide of the then President Bush and before joining the Bush administration, Brown spent a decade as the stewards and judges commissioner of the International Arabian Horse Association.

Project management Successes During Katrina

Despite the staunch criticism of FEMA's handling of Hurricane Katrina, there have been certain areas in which FEMA met or exceeded public expectations. During the days that led up to Katrina's landfall, FEMA officials continued to remain in touch with state and local representatives of New Orleans, Louisiana to determine if any kind of federal assistance is needed (Tidwell 95). National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Radio, NOAA Internet, and the Emergency Alert System (EAS) remained vital to publicize safety messages to the public, and FEMA director Michael Brown had daily press conferences with media to keep the public aware of the recovery

process and rescue efforts. FEMA also designed special press releases to keep the public aware of happenings within their communities (Miller 23).

FEMA personnel went above and beyond their duties to assist in the relief program, for instance a press release from FEMA highlighted a couple of its employees who jointly created a donation collection center that assisted in routing the contributions to places in critical need of aid (National Guard). Despite the disruptions in the traditional method of communication, FEMA remained in continuous touch with local communities by the simulating messages, status updates and application policies at regular intervals. With the passage of time relations and communication structure improved and FEMA work with the local community to rebuild the flooded regions (National Guard). Additionally, despite the project failures mentioned above, FEMA and Urban Search and Rescue teams were successful in rescuing nearly 6, 500 people (Tidwell 56).

FEMA Preparedness For Sandy

After hurricane Sandy, FEMA has received praise equally from politicians and victims of the storm, because of the lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina seven years ago. The successful national response to hurricane Sandy is evidence of FEMA's turnaround, as at one point in time after Katrina there were debates about dissolving FEMA altogether (Schmidt and Lipton).

Despite the heavy monetary losses in Long Island and New Jersey, which amounted to nearly \$71 billion, the death toll was kept to its minimum and only 121 deaths were reported during hurricane Sandy as compared to 1, 833 casualties during Katrina (Daily Mail). Additionally, Sandy has proven to

be more destructive than Katrina, especially due to the fact that it made landfall in more densely populated areas of New Jersey and Long Island. This can be corroborated from the facts that Sandy is cited for the destruction of 305, 000 versus the 214, 700 caused by Katrina and Rita, Sandy resulted in 265, 300 businesses being affected as compared to 18, 700 in 2005, and there were 2, 190, 000 reported outages due to Sandy as compared to the 18, 700 from Katrina and Rita (Daily Mail).

For Long Island resident Deb Smith, whose house was flooded by the storm surge from Sandy, FEMA has been a savior. According to him " What a hell of an organization. I got on the phone with them yesterday, I got my claim number in already, the guy said he's going to call me in a couple of days, and they said, listen, whatever doesn't work, they're going to help us put stuff in storage." (NPR). Similar praises came from New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie and other local officials in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast. They've praised FEMA for being prepared before the storm and responsive immediately afterward - which did not happen when Hurricane Katrina slammed into the Gulf Coast in 2005.

In my opinion there are 3major factors that lead to successful project management by FEMA during Sandy, namely - agency restructuring and pre-planning, swift bureaucratic response, and change in leadership.

Agency Restructuring and Pre-planning

Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 was created to restructure FEMA and expand upon the previous mission statement of the

agency. Director Brown was "stripped" of his role and replaced by Vice Admiral Thad W. Allen of the Coast Guard who has a vast experience of disaster management (Fugate). Change of leadership made FEMA proactive and it didn't wait for the storm to hit; it pre-positions personnel, equipment, food supplies, water, etc. FEMA had stored in the region 600, 000 liters of water, 490, 000 meals, and thousands of blankets and cots, more than 1, 500 FEMA staffers, and 294 FEMA Corps volunteers were placed along the East Coast before the storm (Bliss). After the superstorm moved northward, FEMA began trucking in supplies and agency adapted the transportation system pioneered by retailers such as Wal-Mart Stores Inc. to track the commodities en route.

Swift Bureaucratic Response

President Obama signed the disaster management plan before the entire details of the disaster were known and it resulted in fast flow of rescue money from federal reserve to local governments. Federal officials say FEMA has some \$3. 6 billion in its Disaster Relief Fund and billions more available in other accounts, if needed. It has already begun spending that money. Some \$19 million has gone out to storm victims to pay for temporary housing during and after Sandy. The president came out strongly during the hurricane and said that 'I do not want any red tape, I don't want any bureaucracy, and hopefully that spirit of partnership and people working together quickly will stay through the recovery phase" (Bliss).

Change in Leadership

" The primary difference with FEMA after Katrina is leadership. Not only are storm victims getting assistance quicker, the survivors are better engaged. Fugate made his job easier by moving equipment and workers to the region before Sandy whipped onto the Jersey shore on Oct. 29" said Stewart Baker, former assistant secretary for policy at the Department of Homeland Security under President George W. Bush (Bliss and Mike). Such high reviews were extended to FEMA's newly appointed leader Craig Fugate who was appointed by Obama from Florida Division of Emergency Management. FEMA highly benefited from having an administrator who himself came from fire and first response background and was very well-versed in the science of disaster, and he had very high regard for first responders and local level initiatives (Wood).

Recommendations for Managing Future Hurricanes

Though FEMA has turned itself around through organizational restructuring and it has been given right tools and leadership for meeting the challenges of Hurricane Sandy, still some of its weaknesses were exposed during this storm. But FEMA has overall being praised for much better preparation this time as compared to that of Katrina. So, to further enhance the response to future catastrophic incidents, it is recommended that:

Coordinated warnings from elected state and local officials, such as mandatory evacuations, could minimize the extent of the disaster and loss of life. Even during Sandy, a number of Long Island and New Jersey residents remained back at their homes along the coastal line because they perceived

that the intensity of Sandy would be similar to Hurricane Irene that made a landfall in Long Island in Sept 2011, but unfortunately the intensity of Sandy was much higher than that of Irene. So, it can be interpreted that the official messages failed to highlight the gravity of the situation and resulted in loss of lives and suffering for hurricane victims.

The more constituents involved (i. e. city, state and federal institutes), the higher will be the challenge to communicate and get an agreement. Unless managed effectively, far too much time is spent on removing the bureaucratic red tape and the political bickering between democratic and republican parties. So, it is advised that political differences should be put aside before and during such catastrophic events and government and media should focus on rescue and recovery efforts rather than promoting political agenda.

Clear and competent leadership must be established and a collaborative environment should be promoted that result in high performance teams. Leadership was the major difference between FEMA's response to Katrina and Sandy, as in the latter case an experienced person from the field of disaster management was appointed as the head of FEMA.

In Long Island and Connecticut the locations for evacuees to seek temporary refuge were not communicated until late before Sandy. As soon as a state has been notified of a potential disaster, they should enter into negotiations with surrounding regions to discuss the possibility of housing victims in that

area. There should be " post-landfall evacuation" plans to evacuate people after the impact. Such plans were missing during both Katrina and Sandy.

During and after Sandy a huge population was without power for almost a week, so, local administration should setup at least cell phone charging stations in the malls where people can charge their mobile phones and remain able to communicate and connect to their friends or families.

Government can also coordinate with big corporations such as Apple and Energizer to deploy wireless cell phone charging stations at disaster hit areas as a part of corporate social responsibility to benefit masses of people.

Conclusion

In conclusion, hurricane Katrina was a project failure of major proportions as FEMA lacked proper project planning, execution, communication and leadership as these aspects are vital to any successful project. However, under the new leadership during hurricane Sandy, FEMA capitalized on the lessons learnt during Katrina and compensated for its past weaknesses.

Appendix A: Comparison between Katrina and Sandy

sandy-v-katrina-chartssandy-v-katrina-charts

sandy-v-katrina-chartssandy-v-katrina-charts

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