

The Role of Employee Engagement in Disaster Response: Learning from Experience

The world has experienced some of its worst natural disasters in the recent past, with 2005 being declared the ‘year of disasters.’ However, following each disaster there has been a renewed recognition of the role of business in the relief, recovery and reconstruction process. In many cases this corporate response has been inspired and sometimes even led by an employee response, as companies across the world race to match their employees’ desire to become actively involved and to reward and recognise their efforts for disaster relief and recovery. But to what degree has this business response built on previous private sector experiences of responding to disasters around the world, and what programmes and structures can companies put in place to help them better engage their employees’ energy, expertise and resources in the wake of a disaster?

The day after the tsunami hit, companies around the world were already pledging their commitment to the relief, recovery and reconstruction process. Corporate leaders informed employees, customers and shareholders about the impact of the disaster on their employees, business operations, and the communities in which they operate. Corporate foundations such as the Citigroup Foundation and the Cisco Foundation, announced grants for disaster relief and offered to match employee donations. Some companies acted together through industry alliances like the construction, logistic and transport sector’s Disaster Resource Network, that had been active in disaster response and recovery since its launch at the 2001 World Economic Forum. While others tried to involve customers, e.g. Starbucks offered to donate \$2 to the relief effort for every bag of Sumatra coffee sold, United Airlines offered employees and customers 500 bonus miles if they made a donation of \$50 to the company’s relief effort and, and Visa waived its fees on all US Visa card-based donations to five globally recognised charities. Along with customers, companies also tried to involve their suppliers, e.g. Caterpillar dealers in Asia Pacific provided equipment, personnel and other resources to aid the recovery.

In their disaster response efforts, many companies leveraged their core competencies. Pharmaceutical firms like Pfizer, GlaxoSmithKline and Proctor and Gamble made large product donations as part of their relief efforts, while Turner Broadcasting set up a special website where people could try and locate and communicate with loved ones in the affected area. Realising the value of their staff’s expertise many companies also made efforts to leverage the time and talent of their employees for disaster response. The Suez Group offered its expertise in water and sanitation to NGOs on the ground, Siemens offered technical support to restore vital infrastructure such as electricity, telecommunication and water supply, while Hewlett Packard Japan and Asia Pacific offered employees a day off to volunteer for the relief effort.

“Perhaps the real lesson learned in recent years (regarding disaster response) is the paradigm shift in corporate responsibility from a strictly cash donation model to one that includes involvement and participation.”

*Bob Bellhouse
Executive Director,
Disaster Resource Network*



The Tsunami Train: Reminders of the Devastation and Loss (Photograph courtesy Barry Willis)

Thus the corporate response to the tsunami transcended simple philanthropy and drew on companies' products, their customer base, supply chains and their employees. The latter played a significant role in driving and delivering the corporate response to the tsunami. Not only did they contribute to corporate philanthropy through matched giving schemes, but also encouraged their companies to create opportunities for them to volunteer their time, talent and expertise to the relief and recovery efforts.

As a result, following the tsunami, a number of companies across the world began developing disaster response programmes that leveraged the time and expertise of their employees. Previous private sector experiences in disaster response can inform the development of these new programmes. This IN FOCUS has been designed to facilitate this process of learning from experience.

"Two days after the tsunami hit, a couple of us were on the phone with the WHO and UNICEF. They said, 'We need people – doctors, sanitation experts, engineers.' And because we had the internal policies and procedures and the infrastructure to deliver skilled people, we were able to respond very quickly with top-notch folks."

Paula Luff, Director of International Philanthropy, Pfizer

The Lessons of the Tsunami

Although the process of developing an employee engagement programme for disaster response requires significant commitment and work, companies that have invested the time and effort in doing so report that it enhances their ability to leverage their resources more effectively in the face of future disasters. There is already some evidence that work done by the business sector in responding to the tsunami disaster has informed the business response to subsequent disasters, e.g. the recent devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf coast of the USA and the South Asian Earthquake.

In the weeks following Hurricane Katrina, companies were reporting that the programmes and policies – including employee engagement programmes - developed in response to the tsunami were allowing them to respond more effectively to the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina. For example, GE mobilized the team of 50 project engineers - with expertise in water purification, energy, health care and medical equipment - that had been convened post-tsunami and deployed them to New Orleans. Another example comes from the Business Roundtable, a Washington association of 160 corporate chief executives, that advised each of its member companies to nominate a disaster relief person after the tsunami. The presence of these personnel helped facilitate the corporate response to Katrina.

More evidence comes from a recent survey by the Committee to Encourage Corporate Philanthropy, based in New York,

Developing an Employee Engagement Approach to Disaster RESPONSE

Review your existing corporate programmes and previous experiences: By making use of previous experiences and existing programmes and policies for disaster response, companies can respond more effectively to new disasters. The Chronicle of Philanthropy (August 2005) reports that the systems and structures that companies developed to direct their response to the tsunami crisis helped some of these companies respond more quickly and effectively to the London bombings.

Engage your company's core competencies and strengths: A number of companies are structuring their employee engagement programmes for disaster response to leverage the talent and expertise of their staff. For example, after the tsunami Microsoft used its technological expertise to develop programmes for identifying disaster victims in Thailand, registering volunteers in Sri Lanka, developing early warning systems in India and tracking casualties in Indonesia.

Secure a senior-level champion: In a recent survey by the Centre for Corporate Citizenship, 34% of companies reported that their primary motivation for providing financial support for the tsunami disaster was driven by a CEO decision, reinforcing the value of having a senior level champion for your programme.

Prepare policies and systems to support your employee engagement programme: Companies can benefit by formalising policies (such as matched funding schemes, time off policies), budget and funding structures, systems for evaluating the disaster need and even partnerships for disaster response, that may be leveraged quickly and effectively in crafting a corporate response to disasters.

Organise health and safety risk assessments: Operating in the aftermath of a disaster comes with a unique set of health and safety risks. Companies need to develop systems to assess and guard against these risks, when developing an employee engagement approach to disaster response and put in place adequate risk assessment and insurance policies.

Negotiate partnership agreement(s): More and more companies are developing long-term partnerships for disaster response - such as the five year agreement between DHL and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies - to provide services and expertise in areas affected by disasters.

Structure an organisational response: By outlining roles and responsibilities by country, region and headquarter level, companies can respond more effectively at a local, national and international level. Assigning an employee at all levels for being the first point of contact in the country/region allows a company to expedite a more global approach.

Evaluate your approach and communicate experiences: One of the key challenges identified by companies following the tsunami was the need for better means to capture and report the company response. Companies need to begin to think of ways for evaluating their approach to disaster response more effectively and reporting this more strategically. Such communications not only inspires more action within the company but also add to the company's reputational capital.



Rebuilding Together: Freshfields Buckhaus Deringer Employees work with local family members to build new houses for them in Hikkaduwa, Sri Lanka (Photograph courtesy Freshfield Brukhaus Deringer)

which indicates that procedural changes implemented after the tsunami have shortened the disaster response time for companies. The survey respondents reported implementing the following procedural changes on disaster response:

- 41% of respondents formed/expanded charity partnerships to facilitate prompt crisis response
- 19% created new readiness plans to allow them to make decisions and move resources quickly
- 12% developed collaborations with peers/competitors to leverage disaster-relief strength
- 15% modified employee matching programs, vetting non-profits and putting systems in place

The tsunami disaster was a catalyst for many companies to expand these programmes and policies to an international level. According to a survey conducted by the Centre for Corporate Citizenship at Boston College, businesses reported that two of the main challenges they faced in responding to the tsunami were:

- Having a response plan with an international dimension
- Expanding matching gifts programmes to include employees around the world

This INFOCUS highlights how one company addressed these challenges and developed its first global employee engagement programme in the wake of the tsunami disaster.

Engineering a Global Employee Engagement Programme

“It began with an email from the ENGAGE Campaign,” recalled Gail Johnson, the Head of Corporate Social Responsibility at Serco Group plc who launched the company’s first global employee engagement programme in the wake of the tsunami disaster. We had been looking for a way to leverage our expertise to help with the disaster response but were having difficulty in doing so in a way that fits with our people and the business”, explained Gail. “The key to this particular project was that no specific expertise was required and therefore it was potentially accessible to the majority of our employees.”

As a leading international service company with 40,000+ employees across 32 countries, Serco operates in a broad range of sectors including science, education, IT and IT-managed services, local government, transport, health, home affairs, defence and aerospace. This means the company employs people with a wide-ranging set of skills, capabilities and experience.

Following the tsunami disaster Serco pledged £100,000 for relief efforts and challenged its employees across the world to match this donation. Not only did Serco staff match the amount pledged in a record 6 weeks but they seemed to be eager for an opportunity to do more. It was at this time that Gail, who is part of the ENGAGE Campaign’s Practitioner Network, received an email from the Campaign informing her about the work of Charity Challenge, a UK based broker

which had partnered with Habitat for Humanity (HfH) to organise a series of house builds for companies interested in developing employee engagement programmes to support the reconstruction of the tsunami torn region of Sri Lanka.

To Kevin Beeston, Serco's Executive Chairman this seemed like the perfect opportunity to harness the energy and enthusiasm of staff. He communicated the company's commitment to the programme to all Serco's Chief Executives and requested their support in sponsoring employee volunteers. Serco provided the full sponsorship money, but the volunteers had to raise the minimum of £500 each. To date the amount raised by them has reached £100,000.

Gail reported, that recruiting employees for the programme was not difficult. It was agreed that the programme would be open to all Serco employees and joint venture partners. The company informed its employees across the globe about the programme through a series of presentations – some in-person and some through teleconferencing. Charity Challenge helped prepare and deliver the presentations to Serco employees outlining the programme and conditions for participation. In line with Serco's devolved management style, each of the divisions was responsible for selecting its own volunteers, but all used a common selection criteria process. Once the volunteers had been selected, they were then managed centrally. Although Serco did not have an official time-off policy for volunteering, the company committed to

donating 2.5 days of work time for the employee volunteers participating in the house build, who would match this with 2.5 days from their holiday allowance.

The 80 employees selected by Serco represented all business divisions, and regions, including staff from the Company's Middle East, Europe, US, Ascension Islands and UK offices making this the first global employee engagement programme initiated by Serco. Volunteers included directors, bus drivers, railway engineers, administrators and IT specialists

However, Gail was keen for Serco to contribute more than their staff time. She believed that Serco had specific expertise that could be of use in developing a programme in a disaster zone. Therefore, as part of the project, Serco health and safety specialists consulted with Charity Challenge and HfH to review the health and safety requirements for the programme, donated additional tools and equipments for the volunteer builders and helped HfH and Charity Challenge enhance their risk assessment schemes for working in a disaster area.

"The outcomes of the project have far exceeded our expectations," says Gail, "The project has unlocked a huge amount of enthusiasm and goodwill amongst our employees; been deemed both a success and proven a worthwhile experience for all those involved; provided tangible evidence of what a structured employee volunteering programme can achieve; and created new thinking about how the company can harness employee volunteering in a more positive way



Communicating Across Cultures; Serco Employees working with local staff to rebuild houses in Sri Lanka (Photograph courtesy Barry Willis)

Translating Policy into Practice:

Gail Johnson's Advice to CSR Managers Planning an Employee Engagement Programme following a disaster

- Gain senior management buy-in at the very beginning
- Ensure you plan and record the project properly from the beginning – it will pay dividends later and for the future
- Find a reliable partner who can provide the support you need and is able to share the workload
- Apply your normal company management processes to manage the project as you would any other business initiative, i.e. undertaking a rigorous health and safety risk assessment and involving occupational health people in the process, if you are able
- Allow extra time for visa arrangements and ensure comprehensive travel and health insurance is in place
- Decide who would be eligible; will the programme be open to full-time employees around the world, will contractual staff be eligible, and will retirees be included?
- Keep a close eye on your budget. Decide how the costs will be shared between the employee volunteer and the company. Don't forget to explore potential tax implications
- If you don't have a time-off policy for employee engagement consider how much time-off employees will be given for volunteering
- Prepare employees for the assignment. Create opportunities for volunteers to learn more about the requirements and what to expect. Volunteering in a disaster area can be an emotionally difficult experience
- Offer advice on what to pack, tips on any special equipment required and health and travel issues
- Consider building volunteer teams with employees from different business divisions, regions and seniority levels
- Consider assigning a diary keeper/reporter for each volunteer group to record their experiences
- Create opportunities for volunteers to give feedback on their experiences to other employees, the organisers and the business leadership

around people development generally. The project enabled employees to work across divisions and geographic locations which is something that is difficult to replicate on a training course or in day-to-day operations.”

The Broker's Story

“The corporate interest in this programme has been overwhelming”, reported Rufus Bullough, from Charity Challenge, as he listed the number of companies participating in HfH house build in Sri Lanka.

The participating companies included: Credit Suisse First Boston, Diageo, Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, HBOS, Reuters, Saatchi & Saatchi, Serco and Schroders.

Charity Challenge chose to arrange week-long employee engagement assignments because most companies felt that these were “the perfect bite-sized opportunities for their staff as they would only be away from their desks for five working days”. The companies were charged £1,150/employee. This participation fee covered the entire costs; including all flights, accommodation, in-country transport, meals, a Community Challenge Leader and all medical back-up.

As the broker Charity Challenge:

- *Worked closely with HfH to identify an appropriate location*
- *Spent three months completing the due diligence to assure the companies about the health and safety requirements*
- *Finalised the logistical arrangements*
- *Confirmed insurance details*
- *Facilitated travel and visa requirements*
- *Developed tools for companies to use in recruiting employees for the programme*
- *Created an evaluation tool to capture and communicate the employee volunteers' experiences to their companies*
- *Organised regular meetings to bring together the community affairs managers from participating companies to share their experiences and to give feedback on ways of improving the management of the programme and the actual volunteering experience*

Before the programme structure was finalised it was almost fully booked. “We had to do no marketing for this” said Rufus, “we have had a steady stream of companies wanting to engage their employees through this programme all year.”

A Life Changing Experience

“The response has been overwhelmingly positive” reported Lois Duguid Head of Community Affairs at Freshfields

Bruckhaus Deringer, the international law firm that sent 30 employees on the house build in Sri Lanka. The firm had been participating in HfH house-builds around the world for four years but this was their first experience in the wake of a disaster, and the volunteers found it “life changing, because of the desperate circumstances and the obvious need”.

Freshfields sent 2 teams from their Asia offices, two from London, and one team each from Brussels and Paris. Each team reported that this experience helped them ‘create a special bond’ which no amount of training in team building could have achieved. Gail had similar experiences to report. She added that having a multi-cultural team of Serco employees from different businesses and at all levels of seniority made the experience even more special for the volunteers who “truly felt part of the Serco family”.

For some companies the most challenging aspect of the exercise was dealing with the energy of the returning employees “who are full of ideas and eager to do more... they have been talking about the experience non-stop”.

The impact on the local community was no less. Charity Challenge explained that not only were volunteers building homes for devastated families but their very presence was boosting the Sri Lankan economy. Charity Challenge ensured that all volunteers travelled on Sri Lankan Airways, stayed at a locally owned hotel, and had ample opportunities to support local businesses and restaurants. Charity Challenge also arranged for volunteers to visit local community projects and schools. With the result that volunteers returned to their offices with a deep commitment to the country and the people they had visited, Julia Fuller, Community Affairs Manager of Reuters reported that many of their returning employees were already booking vacations to Sri Lanka and expecting to take their families and friends with them.

Recognising the impact of this experience, HfH launched a similar tsunami house build designed specifically for corporate leaders. Scheduled to take place on the first anniversary of

the tsunami, the house build attracted senior business leaders from companies such as Citigroup, Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer and Serco.

Julian Burt at HfH explained that “The main aim of taking this team of business leaders is to encourage them to become personally involved.” He added, that once the business leaders were convinced, it was more likely that they would prioritise the development of programmes and policies that could encourage more employee participation in future disaster responses.

Learning from Experience

There is growing evidence that companies are building on previous structures and systems for disaster response and learning from their and others’ experience to create more effective responses to disasters around the world.

The Corporate Network for National Disaster Response, set up after the Luzon earthquake, was instrumental in organising the corporate response to the SARS virus. Recognising the vital role of volunteers following the September 11th terrorist attacks, The Leadership Forum on Disaster Volunteerism was set up by UPS in partnership with Federal Emergency Management Agency and Points of Light Foundation, to ensure that volunteers were deployed more effectively in the wake of future disasters.

Since the tsunami there has been much evidence that the corporate response to that disaster built programmes and structures which could be deployed in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, and the experiences of Katrina have already had a bearing on some corporate responses to the South Asian earthquake. Microsoft, for example will be using the same technology used to assist victims of Hurricane Katrina to help Pakistanis affected by the South Asian earthquake. Microsoft’s Director of Humanitarian Disaster Management, David Roberts, visited Pakistan days after the South Asian earthquake to offer technological assistance and expertise in

Benefits of an Employee Engagement Approach to Disaster Response

Benefits for Companies	Benefits for Employees
Better corporate image as companies respond as globally concerned citizens	Personal development as employees gain valuable life experiences
Staff Development	Professional Development
Team-building opportunity	Teambuilding opportunity
Enhanced employee loyalty as companies empower employees to act on the issues that concern them	Satisfaction of a job well done as employees realise the value of their skills and time in the community
Connecting with stakeholders – both in the field and in the office	Connecting with stakeholders – both in the field and in the office
Enhanced licence to operate	Enhanced company pride

setting up crucial data management systems which would be used for disaster planning and preparedness efforts

As for the companies participating in the Charity Challenge-HfH house build, Rufus reported that, having developed the structures and policies needed to support an international employee engagement programme and responding to employee requests, many of these companies are considering a similar house build to address the HIV/AIDs epidemic in South Africa, starting Spring 2006. Others like Serco are also considering innovative ways of leveraging their employees' expertise to contribute to disaster relief, recovery and reconstruction

It is hoped that this process of learning from experiences will continue building the confidence and capacity of the corporate sector to respond – effectively and systematically - to disasters, and allow companies to leverage the time, talent and expertise of their employees to expand the role of business in development.

LEARNING THROUGH SEEING

- In July 2005, the International Business Leaders Forum convened a Tsunami Task Force, comprising international business executives nominated by their CEOs who would visit tsunami-afflicted communities in India, Thailand and Sri Lanka. The rationale for the visit was to provide the opportunity for these business leaders to see first-hand the devastation and impact of the relief and recovery efforts. Based on their observations the Task Force will issue a report offering advice to international businesses seeking to engage in disaster relief, recovery and reconstruction.



Nestlé's Mike Garrett, leads the tsunami task force

- Following the 2005 South Asian Earthquake, President Bush appointed the following 5 CEOs to direct his Earthquake Relief Fund, set up to raise awareness, funds and supplies for the survivors of the earthquake:
 - Jeff Immelt, chairman and CEO, General Electric;
 - Hank McKinnell Jr., PhD., chairman and CEO, Pfizer;
 - Anne Mulcahy, chairman and CEO, Xerox;
 - Jim Kelly, former chairman and CEO, UPS; and
 - Sanford Weill, chairman, Citigroup.

Three of these CEOs visited Pakistan in November 2005, and their first hand testimony inspired more action on part of their companies and added more credibility to the disaster needs.

After his visit Hank McKinnell the CEO of Pfizer told the Prime Minister of Pakistan: *"based on the need I saw today, I am pleased to announce we are increasing our cash contribution to \$2 million and Pfizer medicines to \$10 million. If you use the \$10 million, talk to me again."*



IBLF
THE PRINCE OF WALES
INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS
LEADERS FORUM

ENGAGE is a business led campaign that aims to increase the quality and extent of employee engagement in the development of healthy and sustainable communities. ENGAGE is a partnership between Business in the Community and the International Business Leaders Forum. ENGAGE is managed by Business in the Community.

For more information on employee engagement, please contact Amanda Bowman (E: amanda.bowman@iblf.org). For more information on ENGAGE campaign activities, please contact Joanna Pyres (E: joanna.pyres@bitc.org.uk) or go to www.engage-online.org

IBLF, 15 – 16 Cornwall Terrace, Regent's Park, London, NW1 4QP, UK. Registered Charity
Number: 1024119

