

Effects of a natural disaster on a selected diversified producer/organization

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History of the Babcock Ranch

Babcock Ranch Eco Tour is nestled in a preserve of more than 70,000 acres in southern Florida near Punta Gorda. It is steeped in family history and allows visitors to view Florida in a native and pristine habitat. The location allows natives and visitors to Florida to enjoy the diverse scenery of the area and understand more of the history of the area related to ranching. The McAdow family initially purchased this property and it was called the Crescent B Ranch but was then sold in the early 1900's to Edward Babcock and renamed the Babcock Ranch. This ranch stayed in that family for almost a hundred years which was then sold in 2006 to Town Maker Kitson & Partners by the heirs of Edward Babcock. The Babcock Ranch as it is still named has a diversified view of this area with swamps, alligators, deer, wild swine, and cattle to name a few of the species easily viewed while on the property. As an agri-tourism site, it is a unique experience for individuals and families to immerse themselves in a daily ride while gaining valuable insight to this area of the state.

The McAdow family had made their fortune in the gold mining industry in Montana but yearned for a more pleasant climate and in the late 1800's purchased the land that now encompasses Babcock Ranch. In this early time of the ranch formation, the family established this area with a bank and dry goods store while also enriching the area through horticulture as Mrs. McAdow was an avid horticulturist thus establishing the beauty of Punta Gorda. In 1914, the 91,000-acre Crescent B Ranch was bought by the Babcock family and served as a timber business. The ranch stayed in the family until 1997 when heirs of the estate wanted the property to be sold to the state of Florida to preserve the acreage, but this was not realized. Later the family opened to sell to private citizens and a prospective buyer with the intent to preserve most of the property was realized with Kitson & Partners. Of the original acreage, 73,000 acres was sold to the State and County for preservation and the remainder for development into an urban area with preservation of habitat in mind. The land sold to the state of Florida and the county became open for lease and use as a preservation habitat for the present ecotours and ranching operation in existence. This was the largest single land preservation purchase in Florida history.

Hurricane Irma

For those not knowledgeable about hurricanes, they encompass many weather impacts ranging from high winds and heavy rainfall to flooding. As defined by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (1999), a hurricane is the most severe category of tropical cyclones that have thunderstorm activity and rotate clockwise with winds that exceed 74 MPH. These attributes can negatively impact agriculture production. For perspective, a typical hurricane ranges about 300 miles across with outer rain bands producing heavy rainfall. In 2017, Hurricane Irma started as a category 4 on September 10 in the Florida Keys and started on a trajectory along the west side of the Florida peninsula.

The impact towards Florida's agriculture was immense consisting of property, crop, and livestock effects at an unprecedented rate (Hodges, Court, Clouser, Vansickle, and Stefanou, 2018). As a testament to the people involved with hurricane Irma stated "our farm families are extremely resilient, capable, independent people. They did everything they could to protect their animals, their properties and, of course, their families" (Texas Farm Bureau, 2017). The human element is often overlooked, and it should be more fully realized as it affects all undertakings in our society. Besides dealing with what has transpired to themselves, many agriculturalists rely on workers (humans) to undertake and accomplish many daily operations. Therefore, the impact of a disaster not only affects the operation and owners but can impact how they are able to react to the disaster (getting back to business) because of the impact it could have to the workforce involved in these operations. The effect of hurricanes also can impact terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. Estimates to Florida's agriculture sector towards impact of Hurricane Irma were reported at \$2.5 billion (FDACS, 2017). Effects of this magnitude can have lasting impacts on agriculture and people.

Beef Production

Two of the main agricultural aspects of the Babcock ranch are beef and timber production. Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Sciences estimated beef production losses to producers at nearly \$240 million with timber losses estimated at \$261 million. Florida estimates beef cattle (@1.7 million units) graze approximately 6.5 million acres of pasture and woodlands. Besides specific impacts to cattle (death and production loss) loss of forages due to flooding and increased feed costs associated negatively affected producers (increased feed costs). Further damages to structures, equipment, and fencing further encapsulated the total damage of the disaster.

Timber

Almost 50 percent of Florida land contains forests (16.9 million acres). Many producers rely on this commodity for their livelihood through timber sales, products, and commodities for the manufacturing sector in the state. Based on the level of Hurricane Irma (Category 3+), severe damage to trees was expected across the range of the impacted area and catastrophic damage was seen (wind speeds of 94 MPH). Therefore, impacts were seen broadly to many producers who own timberland whereby many livestock producers with land holdings also have large stands of marketable timberland to diversify their business.

Agritourism

For the state of Florida, combining tourism and agriculture, its two largest industries, allows producers the ability to diversify their income stream and educate others about agriculture (Florida Farm Bureau, 2015). Many agriculture enterprises rely on outside income to be economically productive and viable. Ecotourism is related to agritourism because it

encompasses large tracts of uncultivated or natural areas for individuals to view. Therefore, Florida holds many agricultural related experiences ranging from farm or nursery visits to aquaculture, u-picks, wildlife viewing and other opportunities. For visitors to the state who visit more well-known attractions (beaches and entertainment) during their stay, the opportunity to trek inland and experience diversified experiences in the agriculture sector is a great opportunity to enrich their time in the state.

Initial Response

Many persons in Florida decided to “ride out” the storm and not leave their homes and employment. The Babcock Ranch does not employ a huge staff of full-time employees, but all day-to-day workers chose to stay at their homes during the storm. The manager of the ecotours and farm operations, having a young family did choose to leave the possible danger of what hurricane Irma might impact and was not able to get back to the area immediately. On rural areas affected by natural disasters of this type three of the major impacts are normally apparent such as effects of the water supply, loss of electricity, and access to fuel (used in power generators and vehicles). Although these items are taken for granted today as being readily available, after a major hurricane, electricity is not normally available due to downed power lines which also does not allow water to be pumped and fuel to be dispensed.

Operations manager of the Babcock Ranch worked diligently from afar to get fuel, food and water on sight so that employees had the means to feed themselves and their families. Also, these items, including the people were needed for recovery events to get the ranch operational as soon as possible. This involved getting fuel and generators working for electricity and potable water then food available. “Having food, fresh water, electricity, and a warm shower is imperative for those that are getting their lives and the company’s business back on track after something like this” (personal communication, 2019).

Management/Leadership Considerations

Managing the operations at Babcock Ranch can be daunting at times, especially when a disaster looms or has occurred. The major operations undertaken are the ecotours which employs persons who work daily with the public through tours, restaurant, and facilities. Additionally, the beef cattle production aspect of this organization does not warrant numerous full-time employees with only 3 full time employees being presently in the operation. The ranching operation employs one ranch manager, one cowboy and one equipment operator. Numerous seasonal workers are employed that are heavily relied on, sometimes daily but who work between many ranches in the area. Additionally, due to the size and location of the ranch, having a restaurant and getting access to food can also pose managerial problems especially during or after an event such as Hurricane Irma. Although Babcock Ranch was setup as a preserve based on the intent of the Babcock family, the operation must be profitable.

Immediate and future decisions must be made towards solvency of the business with an understanding of the directives involved with its roots, mission, and values.

Leaders must ensure that decisions made positively impact the trajectory of an organization. Bolman and Deal (2013) posited four leadership frames towards an organization that can guide decisions that leaders should make. The first frame is the *structural frame*. This frame focuses on the organizational structure and reflects on the environment under which it operates. The second frame is the *human resources* frame. The human resources frame considers the people working in the organization and their positions based on the needed skills and knowledge to properly accomplish the directives of the organization. The next frame posited by Bolman and Deal (2013) is the *political frame*. This frame considers the contextual nature of organizational hierarchy based on people involved in the organization and how they relate to outside levels of power and networks associated with the organization. The final leadership frame posited by Bolman and Deal (2013) is the symbolic frame which looks at evaluating the culture of the organization.

Structural & Strategic Opportunities

Babcock Ranch encompasses multiple businesses (ecotour, cattle, and timber) with numerous opportunities but has potential limitations that may need to be acknowledged. As a business, the ecotours rely on daily visitors to generate profits through admission and retail sales. The ranching operation provides a stable income stream and adds value to the ecotours by displaying a long-held cattle operation. Additionally, natural resources including timber add value to the business venture of the ranch but does have limitations put forth by the state of Florida. Before the previous management, the eco tour operated only two tours per day on average. Presently (after Hurricane Irma) they operate tours every 30 minutes daily seeing more than 42,000 visitors per year and is steadily increasing. Due to the immense impact that the ecotours has for Babcock Ranch, the continued existence and ability to respond after a disaster is important. A plan on how to evolve and increase operational readiness after a disaster might be an added factor towards continued success.

Human Resources Needs

The human resource frame is extremely important to Babcock Ranch ecotours. The ability to take into consideration its employees is critical to its day-to-day operations. The response of the management, after Hurricane Irma, to their employees was centered on staff needs (wages, health, well-being). Further, there was a need for the business to get viable as quickly as possible. Because a disaster of this magnitude had not been experienced by the current management, a closer inspection of the needs of individuals involved and how that will affect future operations might be a valued endeavor. People involved in this operation from the tours, restaurant, and cattle allow the successful operation of its entities. Understanding the needs and roles of all individuals, once an event such as Hurricane Irma is experienced, might be

further evaluated. This would ensure that employees and their families were safe, needs were provided for, and able to return to work. If employees are not able to get to the job sight, perform needed duties and further must worry about their own families, successful operation may not occur. It is imperative that an understanding of how people and organizations need each other is firmly understood. Communication between key individuals before and after events towards needs of the operation and people involved must be clearly delineated and someone must ensure that it is being administered.

Political Impacts

There are many involved individuals and groups with this enterprise. The owners/managers, workers, visitors, community, and local/state government all come together to support the operation of the ranch. Although the corporation oversees the organization, it is limited on what it can and cannot do based on regulations put in place for all businesses and state laws. Because it deals mainly with the public, perceptions and acceptance is vital to its ongoing success. Continued alignment with regulations and providing the experience as viewed by future visitors is vital to its continued growth. Although the organization and the human capital involved are aligned towards their interests (or it is assumed), how goals and decisions emerge based on the effects of the disaster could cause tension and should be evaluated.

Symbolic Markers

Ensuring previously held concepts, i.e. traditions and identity survive or are identified post disaster is imperative to the continued existence of this enterprise. How this might affect the human capital aspect of the organization will be imperative. Due to the positive impact of the ecotours, should this aspect of the business continue as previously constituted or should changes occur to meet the needs of future consumers? Because humans use meaning and belief to create a culture and the ecotours aims to impact their understanding and explore values tied towards this understanding, added meaning influenced by this can be impactful. Although guided by the confines of the agreement for which the property is now operated, could there be other ventures that should be explored to expand its opportunities or increase what is presently being done through other avenues or ventures to ensure its ability to operate when facing extreme challenges? It seems that the traditional production agriculture venture of cattle and timber are solvent to its existence but are there unexplored changes that could possibly be enacted to ensure their vitality and growth to the business?

The Problem

Babcock Ranch ecotours is a viable business that relies heavily on its employees and the ability of visitors to enjoy their services provided (tours, merchandise, and restaurant). The impact of a natural disaster causes operation to immediately shut down and can take months to become operational again. How can this venture overcome the obstacle of down time due to a

disastrous event and ensure that the persons involved have continued resiliency and consumers are able to gain a valuable experience? Use the following questions as a guide for thinking through this situation:

Babcock Ranch

1. What productive areas encompass this agricultural ranch?
2. Were adequate preparations in place in case of a disastrous event?
3. What effects were caused by a disastrous event towards the human capital involved in this organization?

Leadership Frame(s)

1. Structural: Is the organizational leadership capable of leading through a disastrous event, i.e. are they prepared for this type of event? What risks are identified to the production and human areas of this organization? Are there communication strategies in place in the event of a disaster impacting this producer (in all areas the organization is involved)? Are there hierarchy models in place so that anyone knows/understands who is in charge when they are in need?
2. Human Resources: As the organization grows as expected on the ecotour venture, are there specific employment areas needed if the business stay similar? Changes direction? Would additional human resources benefit the organization as now presently constituted or should realignment be explored based on needed changes?
3. Political: Is proper alignment with the community and local leaders important or should this be further explored? Should there be an identified person in the organization who works specifically on this frame and ensures compliance across the organization?
4. Symbolic: Is alignment with the goals and mission of the previous owners aligned with the present operation of this organization? Is it needed? If alignment is perceived as needed, could further alignment be utilized? How can the alignment and the needs of potential consumers be understood and integrated into the organization? Are there other ventures not currently present that should be further explored to increase alignment?
5. Integrated: If changes in the organization are enacted, how do they affect the organization involved, human capital and community?

Objective

You have been hired as an outside evaluator to enact change to this organization if a perceived need is seen. Determine if there is a need for change in this organization. Outline a plan for change guided by the innovation development process. Ensure that as the change agent, you understand and delineate your role throughout the process as an outsider.

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