



What does it take to survive a crisis situation?

Sure, we don't have hurricanes in Singapore, in the likes of **Hurricane Katrina**. But when one gets into a major crisis situation in Singapore, one can expect to experience conditions almost exactly like that of a Category 3, 4 or 5 storm – i.e. relentless destructive forces.

Sure, we say to comfort ourselves while holding up in our hands thick stacks of business continuity plans (BC Plans). Surely these plans would help us deal with the situation, in fact, any situation. But wait, how sure are we that we will survive any storm with BC Plans alone?

29th August 2005. Hurricane Katrina made its second landfall, this time as a weakened Category 3 hurricane in southeast Louisiana, USA. The City of New Orleans, the FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency), and the scores of local organisations were armed with BC Plans. But still..... the buses could not arrive in time to evacuate residents of New Orleans - they were one day late. The levies broke their banks, sending torrents of seawater into downtown. The Charity Hospital's power generator (installed in the hospital basement) was flooded, and health-care workers were frantic to save patients as they died one by one waiting for aero-lifts to bring them to safety. In the words of the Charity Hospital's Emergency Management Director: "*there are things you can plan on, and some things you can't; emh.... but what did happen in Hurricane Katrina,well... was not part of the plan*".

The outcome. 1,833 people confirmed dead; USD 108 billion in damages; FEMA's director Michael D Brown resigned; New Orleans Police chief Eddie Compass resigned; New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco, and President George W. Bush were criticized for their poor handling of the crisis. And superpower USA was made ashamed.

How could it be? USA - the world's economic and military superpower, with emergency management organisations and BC plans, even after knowing more than one week prior of the potentially destructive hurricane forces, **failed!** Why wasn't the BC Plan activated to send buses? Why was the power generator, literally the lifeline for ICU patients in Charity Hospital installed in the basement - surely it was obvious that it will fail in flood water? There was an avalanche of *why, why* and *whys* asked. Answer: there was no crisis management capability.

So, let's ask ourselves some very pertinent questions:

1. Can we really trust in BC Plans to save us from calamity, as FEMA thought they could?
2. Haven't we heard of possible crisis situations in our business operations, like the City of New Orleans heard of the coming Hurricane Katrina threat?
3. Can we trust human capability to manage crisis situations, as leaders in FEMA and the other US agencies thought they could, even such as a simple thing to activate BC Plans?

Now, the question: what does it take to survive a crisis situation?

Answer: the J^aBA Crisis Management System 4A

To survive crises, we must build and maintain a crisis management capability. Additionally, we must fortify our protection systems against all threats, and finally, we must build a capability to respond to any untoward situation.

The **J^aBA System** combines three pivots: **Leadership, Plan & Action** as the crisis management corner-stones. These require *people* readiness, *planning* methodology and *support* structures - these are solutions based on BCM (business continuity management) and ERM (enterprise risk management).



Like the City of New Orleans, there will be times we cannot avoid a hurricane coming our way. But sure, we can get ourselves prepared. And, unless we prepare ourselves, we could be like those in Hurricane Katrina – stand fallen, after the destructive winds have blown over.