

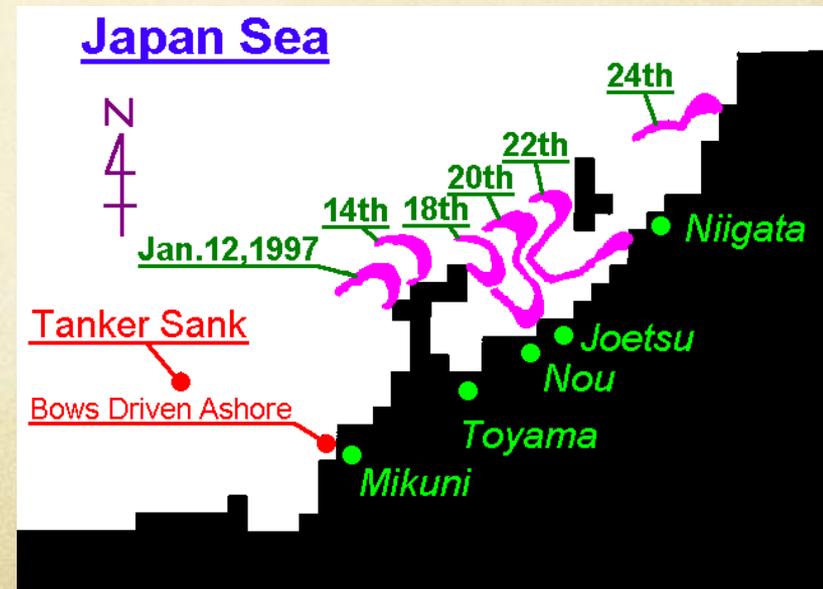
Building Trust Among Volunteers in Crisis: The Case of the Mikuni Oil Spill



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Mikuni Oil Spill

- Jan. 2, 1997: Russian tanker NAKHODKA, en route from Shanghai to Petropavlovsk, broke up in stormy weather in Sea of Japan. 31 crew members rescued. Ship's master drowned.
- 1.6 million gallons (6,200 kiloliters) of oil spilled and swept to Japanese coast, along with ship's bow. Village of Mikuni hit hardest. About 1,000 kiloliters of oil washed ashore.



Crisis Management

- Local fishery association mobilized about 30 local volunteers, following crisis response strategy formulated in communities after the Kobe earthquake, 1995.
- Volunteers came from all over Japan, organized manual cleanup.
- Despite treacherous weather, volunteers of all ages and all walks scooped oil by ladle or by hand and polished rocks one by one. Surfers braved icy cold waters to scrape oil off cliff walls.
- Mikuni citizens and municipal authorities were overwhelmed handling this many volunteers.
- Locals were skeptical of outsiders.
- Difficult work because of cold weather, foul smell, long hard work.



- Outsider volunteers, ex-Kobe volunteers, took leadership. Some local volunteers unable to go home for first 5 days.
- Force grew from 3,500 on Jan. 14 to 300,000 by Jan. 21. Five volunteers died from fatigue and stroke. Cleanup suspended at end of January due to snowstorm.
- Tensions rose. Outsider volunteers became impatient. Some young volunteers drank, which disturbed locals.
- Mr. Hirata of Chiba, oldest volunteer, counseled young volunteers. Mr. Hasegawa of Kobe posted poem used at earthquake:
If you hear anything bad, wash your ears. If you see anything bad, wash your eyes. If you get bad thoughts, wash your heart. And, keep your muddy feet as they are. Go with muddy feet.
- Snowstorm stopped Feb. 9. Cleanup resumed. Volunteers moved at sight of 30 volunteer surfers cleaning up in sea.

- Three months later, Japan Sea, once called “dead sea,” restored.
- Volunteers returned home, saying, “See you again,” “Stay healthy!” without saying, “*Sayonara*,” to one another.

BP Oil Spill in Gulf of Mexico in 2010

- April 20: Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded, killing 11 workers. Efforts to manage spill unsuccessful. BP temporarily capped well in mid-July. Well plugged, declared “effectively dead” Sept. 19.
- 205 million gallons: worst oil spill in U.S. history, surpassing damage by Exxon Valdez tanker spill (11 million gallons)
- BP Cleanup Operation
- Spent \$14 billion, used 47,000 paid workers, 66.5 million man-hours, 6,500 vessels, 125 aircraft. Donated \$1.2 billion to research.

Comparative Analysis

- More experience: Historically, Japanese have experienced natural disaster more often than Americans. earthquake, famine, tsunami, typhoon, volcano eruptions, etc.
- Attachment to nature: Japanese more attuned to nature. Holistic view. Environmentalist. More enthusiasm to protect nature. One is part of nature. In U.S., humans attempt to control nature (capitalist commodity; money should take care of it. Pay someone else to clean up mess.)
- Tetsuro Watsuji's idea (1937): Japanese construction of self and idea of human relationship different from those in U.S. In Japan, *ningen* (humans) exist based on communal connections: “betweenness” with other persons is premise; **trust = starting point** in relationship. In U.S., individual is supreme and separate from others. **Trust achieved through process.** Result: Japanese tend to trust, have affinity for, strangers from beginning.

Action Research (AR)

- Kurt Lewin (1890-1947) coined term.
- AR applicable to Crisis Management/Communication.
- AR is both theory and practice, though also appears to be method. Used not only by researchers, but by practitioners. AR consists of *action, research, participation*. Under limited resources and circumstances, AR expects people to participate equally in project regardless of various social statuses. Through trial and error in field (actual **social context**), participants share knowledge and skills openly to tackle project. May develop new theory in process.
- AR used in Mikuni case. Instead of compartmentalization, each individual does utmost work, so more work jointly, may overlap.
- Participants' social status may reverse during project. Everyone learns/gets inspired by another.
- AR accepts compromise, incompleteness. Despite limited resources, creativity, courage, new knowledge/skills may emerge.