

BUILDING BACK BETTER - A CASE STUDY OF SYDENHAM BUSINESS RECOVERY

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Disclaimer – All these conference papers have been submitted as partial fulfilment for the project requirement for the BE(Hon) degree. Although they have been assessed, no errors or factual information have been corrected or checked.

Abstract

In our modern world it is an unavoidable fact disasters continue to increase in frequency and severity. As a consequence of this, research into disaster management and recovery continues to expand. The Build Back Better Framework has been developed as an holistic approach to disaster recovery that recognises recovery is more than just a physical rebuild. The principles that underlie the framework look to create more resilient communities through addressing vulnerabilities through recovery. The Canterbury region suffered a series of devastating earthquakes in 2010/2011. The community faced a long and challenging recovery with wide spread damage and disruption across the region. One suburb that showed potential in the recovery process was Sydenham, to the east of the CBD. This paper uses The Build Back Better Framework to explore the recovery of businesses in Sydenham, whilst at the same developing an understanding of how the implementation of Build Back Better principles correlates to a successful recovery. The hope is that the knowledge gained through this study can be used to help development more resilient communities and aid in effective disaster recovery in the future.

1. Introduction

In 2010/2011, Christchurch and the Canterbury region suffered a series of destructive earthquakes. The damage caused by these quakes was widespread and stretched far beyond the simple destruction of physical assets. The two quakes of note for the sake of this study are the September 4th 2010 quake, and the subsequent aftershock on February 22nd 2011.

The Christchurch Central Business District (CBD) bore the brunt of the quake's destructive forces with significant damage to the infrastructure in the central city. The CBD was cordoned off for just over two years following the initial quakes forcing, the displacement of up to 6000 businesses, and affecting nearly 50,000 jobs (Chang et al., 2014).

CBD businesses forced to relocate looked to the city's suburbs for new opportunities. One suburb that offered plenty of potential was Sydenham, which borders the Christchurch CBD to the east. Prior to the earthquakes, Sydenham was a suburb with an automotive and industrial image but a strong retail presence was growing. Sydenham suffered significant damage in the initial September quake. Therefore, with many buildings already demolished leaving vacant lots behind,

Sydenham was blank canvas for recovery following the February quake.

With disasters such as the Canterbury quakes occurring more and more frequently, research into disaster recovery and rebuild is becoming vital. The phrase 'Build Back Better' (BBB) first came to prominence following the Indian Ocean Tsunami disaster in 2004 and the subsequent recovery and rebuild. It was recognised that a successful recovery could not simply be characterised by a physical rebuild. BBB offered a more holistic approach to disaster recovery. Simply defined by Clinton (2006), BBB is a way to create more resilient communities by addressing inherent vulnerabilities during the reconstruction process. From this concept, The BBB Framework was developed as a way to help implement BBB principles for successful recovery.

This research was initially developed with the broad aim of understanding the correlation between the adoption of BBB practises, in line with The BBB Framework, and a perceived successful recovery. Due to limitations in terms of the time and resources available to complete the study, the decision was made to narrow the research to a case study of Sydenham business recovery. The BBB

Framework was used as the basis of evaluating recovery and was used to formulate the key objectives of the study.

The final four key objectives of this research were:

- Evaluate the impacts of the 2010/2011 Canterbury Earthquakes on businesses in Sydenham.
- Identify and evaluate business preparedness for future disasters.
- Investigate the post disaster experiences of businesses in Sydenham.
- Determine how the business sector can be made more resilient using BBB principles.

2. Methodology

This study was developed using a qualitative approach, with the intention of gaining insight through the experiences and knowledge of the individuals directly involved within the scope of our case study. A detailed outline of the methodology followed in completing this research is given below.

2.1. The Build Back Better Framework

As mentioned previously, The BBB Framework was used as the basis for this research.

The framework was developed by Mannakkara (2014), and arose from identifying numerous similarities between Clinton's "Key Propositions for Building Back Better" and various other documents proposing guidelines for BBB based recovery. Mannakkara identified that an ineffective recovery was most often the result of failing to consider the wider implications of recovery decisions. Providing a strong framework to aid in decision making looks to mitigate this.

The BBB Framework is made up of three key phases. These are: disaster risk reduction, community recovery, and effective implementation. Each of these phases is made up of underlying principles, as can be seen in Figure 1.

The BBB Framework was the foundation on which the study was built. Therefore, developing a strong understanding of this framework, the key phases, and their underlying principles was a vital first step in the research methodology.



Figure 1 The Build Back Better Framework

This allowed for a well-directed and cohesive approach going forward throughout the study. Understanding of the framework was developed as part of a comprehensive literature review completed early in the research process.

Using The BBB Framework as a platform, the key objective of the research were established.

2.2. Interview Question Development

Having identified the key objectives of the study, along with the research approach, the next step was to decide how data was to be collected. It was decided a series of semi-structure interviews would be used. This allowed for interaction on a personal level with participants, which would ideally encourage the most genuine response.

Interview questions needed to be developed to ensure the research's key objectives were being addressed and the most relevant data was collected. The BBB Framework, along with the research objectives, was used as the basis for developing questions.

Questions were written to target each of the key pillars of the framework by addressing the underlying principals identified. This was done with the intention of gathering an insight into the broader recovery process, allowing for areas of strength or weakness to be identified.

2.3. Business Selection

The initial approach to finding businesses for interviews was to cast the net as wide as possible. A database of businesses located in Sydenham was compiled using available resources. Businesses were then contacted by email explaining briefly about the research and asking for a reply if they may be willing to participate.

The response to this was not as good as had been hoped, so a more targeted approach was used. Businesses were categorised and shortlisted to reflect a diverse cross section of the Sydenham business landscape. These

businesses were then targeted more directly by email and followed up by phone. In cases where no contact could be established by phone or email, businesses were approached in person whilst on site in Christchurch.

Persistence in approaching businesses resulted in a good range of businesses agreeing to participate. Whilst the volume of participants was not as initially hoped, a wide variety of businesses with differing experiences and perspectives was able to be achieved.

2.4. Time In Christchurch

Researchers spent a week in Christchurch in July 2017. The largest part of this time was spent conducting interviews with previously confirmed businesses. Businesses that had not been able to be contacted were also approached in person to increase participation.

Interviews were conducted on site at each business's premises. Participants were given more information about the study and asked to sign a consent form. This allowed the researchers to record the interviews for the purpose of in-depth analysis at a later date. The structure of the interviews was guided by the previously written interview questions. However, it was found that for the most part discussion flowed very naturally.

Time was also spent becoming familiar with both Sydenham and the Christchurch CBD in order to better understand the environment in which businesses were operating.

2.5. Processing & Analysis

Before beginning analysis, the interview recordings were transcribed to make the data easier to work with.

A qualitative analysis programme 'Nvivo 11' was used to analyse the data. The transcriptions were input into the programme and were then analysed using The BBB Framework. This was done by coding, or categorising, the information from the transcripts under each of the three BBB pillars. The information was further coded as to whether it showed positive, neutral, or negative feeling.

The coding process allowed the researchers to identify the areas of overlap within the data collected. From this trends could be established.

To supplement the data collected in interviews a variety of plans and crown documents were also analysed using Nvivo. This gave an indication of how businesses' experiences aligned with planning and strategic goals.

2.6. Questionnaire

To further supplement the data collected in interviews, a brief questionnaire was developed to collect some quantitative data. The questionnaire asked businesses to reflect on their recovery experience with simple multi-choice questions. The questions were worded as to reflect the three pillars of The BBB Framework. The simple quantitative data collected through could be used to verify the trends identified in the qualitative analysis.

2.7. Limitations

Generating participation proved to be a significant limitation in the methodology. Many businesses were simply not interested in participating in the study, and there was very little that could be done about this. The result was a relatively small pool of only six interviewees. Whilst these still rendered valuable data, it is difficult to guarantee the validity of the trends identified. For this reason a significant effort was made to supplement data with other sources, as has been detailed previously in sections 2.5 and 2.6.

Another limitation that is difficult to quantify is the bias of the businesses that did participate. For many the Canterbury earthquakes and subsequent recovery have been a difficult and emotional experience. It is likely those with a more emotional connection to their recovery experience, be it positive or negative, would be more motivated to participate in this study. It must therefore be considered whether the data collected is more reflective of the extremes of business experiences, rather than the general business experience.

A final limitation to consider is a lack of government or council participation in the study. Whilst a number of official organisations were engaged, the nature of the organisations along with the nature of the study limited the capacity in which they were able to participate. Researchers were directed back to the publicly available documentation which had already been considered, and were therefore unable to gain any additional insight.

3. Results

The analysis carried out identified key trends in recovery in terms of each of the three BBB pillars. These trends are seen below.

3.1. Disaster Risk Reduction

- Businesses had little to no engagement in managing the potential risk of disaster to their operations. This was largely unchanged from before to after the earthquake.
- Most small businesses saw insurance as their main disaster risk management plan.

- When asked how they have, or could, become more prepared for disaster most businesses struggled to identify possible disaster management strategies.

3.2. Community & Business Recovery

- Factors driving positive business recovery in Sydenham were identified as cheaper rent, good parking and accessibility, and a perceived positive atmosphere.
- The Colombo mall was seen as a strong draw card for the area and provided a point of interest.
- A volatile, ever changing environment was seen as the most significant barrier to recovery. This included factors in the physical environment, specifically continued construction and roadworks.
- Whilst community and business recovery was largely perceived positively within Sydenham, there was a feeling the suburb had not quite met the initial expectations of those businesses which had relocated.

3.3. Implementation & Monitoring

- This was the most difficult phase for business and was the most significant block in the recovery process.
- Businesses felt frustrated with communication from governing organisations and felt their concerns were not being addressed.
- Whilst businesses could see action occurring toward recovery, they for the most part felt it was misdirected action and were frustrated with a lack of accountability.

4. Discussion

The following is a discussion of the identified trends and their implications for the recovery of Sydenham businesses.

4.1. Disaster Risk Reduction

The trends identified showed that disaster management planning was largely misunderstood and underutilised. When asked about their disaster plans, businesses responded with answers such as “run fast” and “I guess we will be ok”. Quotations like this are reflective of the nonchalant attitude towards disaster planning from businesses in Sydenham.

When asked about disaster risk reduction education, all interviewed businesses said there had been no formal or informal effort made to promote this. When asked if they felt this would be beneficial the general feeling was yes, but most businesses had little intention of pursuing this.

As previously mentioned, most small businesses identified insurance as their disaster management plan. Retrospectively it was recognised by businesses that this was not as simple of a solution as it seemed. Whilst insurance addressed physical and financial losses, it could not address the disruption caused to business operations that occurred following disaster.

In contrast to smaller businesses, larger organisations interviewed showed evidence of having more robust plans and processes in place for disaster management. When considering why this was the case it was evident that the larger the organisation the greater the resources, funding, and support available to draw on. Larger businesses could work with their larger network to assist both in disaster planning and response. Smaller businesses, often owner operated, were entirely self-reliant and had to weigh up the benefits of investing in disaster planning against investing in other areas of their business.

A final point of interest was that there was little to no change in any businesses’ disaster plans from pre- to post-earthquake. Again, this brings in to question the value businesses place on investing in disaster planning rather than other areas of the business.

4.2. Community & Business Recovery

Those interviewed felt community and business recovery in Sydenham was strong. Sydenham had managed to create its own atmosphere and perceived positive vibe through its recovery process. Council initiatives, as part of the Sydenham Master Plan (Christchurch City Council, 2012), were identified as a contributing factor to building the positive perception of Sydenham.

Sydenham also showed strengths over other suburbs that helped draw businesses to the area. Post-earthquake Christchurch had seen rent for retail and office space skyrocket. Construction and roadworks also hindered accessibility and connectivity across the city. Businesses repeatedly identified that Sydenham offered far cheaper rent than similar suburbs, along with a high level of accessibility. This was likely due to the significant damage Sydenham suffered in September 2010 quakes, allowing the suburb to get slightly ahead of the curve in terms of rebuild and recovery.

Despite positive growth and development in Sydenham, many businesses felt it had not quite met initial expectations. One factor identified as influencing this was the inability of physical recovery to match the pace of business recovery. Whilst businesses had long returned to business as usual, the physical environment still showed a lagging recovery. Construction, roadworks and empty overgrown sections still dominate Colombo Street.

This creates a significant deterrent to the foot traffic vital to the success of retail and hospitality businesses.

4.3. Implementation & Monitoring

Implementation and monitoring was the phase that created the most frustration for businesses. Businesses saw the official response and recovery as “dysfunctional” with a very “head in the sand” response. Businesses who had approached council or other organisation asking for help or expressing their concerns felt they had not been listened to. At a governing level there was a heavy emphasis on strategy, planning and leadership. Businesses however, felt there was a lack of accountability.

Many businesses felt the regulatory response had also been too slow. This in turn slowed their own recovery. Immediately following the earthquakes, businesses were faced with numerous unknown factors. The availability of information and openness of communication was felt to be lacking in terms of how the situation was developing.

Businesses did recognise significant recovery and rebuild work was occurring across the city. However, from a business perspective it was felt to be misdirected. A major focus on developing central city infrastructure was not perceived to be addressing the most vital issues of accessibility and re-establishing a strong commercial economy.

Researchers discussed initial findings along with details of the Sydenham Master Plan with a Christchurch City Council representative. It was interesting to observe the difference in perception between business and governance. The council representative detailed numerous plans and processes in place to implement their strategic plan in conjunction with community consultation. From their perspective, this had been a success. This significant difference in perception between the two parties indicates the issues under this pillar largely lie in a communication breakdown, rather than in the action taken.

5. Conclusions

Considering the data collected and the analysis undertaken, the following final conclusions have been drawn. These are reflective of both the research objectives and The BBB Framework.

5.1. Disaster Risk Reduction

- Small businesses do not have the resources or internal infrastructure to develop or maintain their own disaster plans. External support from

governing bodies could provide a platform that allows small businesses to invest in disaster management.

- Disaster risk reduction education, one of the underlying principles of this BBB pillar, is a significant area of weakness. Investment in education from all sectors will be a significant factor in increasing resilience in the future.

5.2. Community & Business Recovery

- The success of the Colombo mall showed how a centralised business hub can drive recovery. The mall enhanced Sydenham’s image and generated vital foot traffic. Further research to better understand how the Colombo’s success can inform successful recovery in the future could prove valuable.
- The nature of Sydenham’s recovery reinforced the holistic approach of BBB principles. It was evident that community and business recovery could not occur in isolation of the physical recovery. It was clear that a slow physical recovery was hindering business and community recovery. This effect should be considered by recovery agencies for future disaster planning to try maximise positive growth following disaster.

5.3. Implementation & Monitoring

- There was significant disconnect between businesses and governing bodies. This resulted in frustration and a communication breakdown. Despite numerous plans and processes in place to encourage community, including business, engagement in recovery, evidence suggested these were not perceived as successful. For improving future recovery and resilience it is important to understand why engagement with businesses was not as successful as it could have been. It is beneficial to both parties to work together towards recovery together.
- Communication proved to be the most significant hurdle under this pillar. Exploring how communication can be enhanced by a more unified and streamlined approach from governing bodies will likely aid in future recovery.

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