

Reviewing the Multidisciplinary Lessons of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Francisca Oladipo

Directorate of Research, Innovations, Consultancy and Extension,
Kampala International University, Kampala, Uganda

ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has affected most areas of people's lives, including human relationships and ways of doing business. Governments, organizations, and individuals had to make changes to accept the new reality of life with no end in sight. Governments have adopted the multi-agency approach to address the problems arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. In every sector of the economy, the covid-19 crisis has provided leaders with important lessons that should act as guidelines for planning during the remaining time of the current crisis.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19, Lessons, Living

How to cite this paper: Francisca Oladipo "Reviewing the Multidisciplinary Lessons of the Covid-19 Pandemic" Published in International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (ijtsrd), ISSN: 2456-6470, Volume-4 | Issue-5, August 2020, pp.510-513, URL: www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd31861.pdf



IJTSRD31861

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STATEWIDE COORDINATION, LEARNING AND STANDARDIZATION

In the healthcare sector, healthcare leaders learned the need for statewide coordination, learning and standardization of their activities to achieve a uniform outcome. Healthcare providers undertook interdisciplinary coordination of efforts to eradicate the disease became prominent across various sectors, and political jurisdictions. Various departments coordinated efforts to disseminate information, carry out testing, and take care of critical patients. Testing procedures and education of staff were standardized to ensure a unified approach. Governments and healthcare providers learnt that addressing the problem as a unit was more successful than having scattered efforts that are more difficult to manage and evaluate.

The Need and Role of Communication

Communication became an essential activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Governments and organizations spent time explaining policies, giving instructions, and collecting feedback. One crucial lesson learnt during the communication process is that the exchange of information between officers is more effective when the communicating officers know each other and occupy closely related roles (Nowell & Steelman, 2014). The researchers found that differences in hierarchies could lead to differing expectations and outcomes.

COVID-19 pandemic also taught us that public complacency is reduced when citizens have timely information.

Government communication increases self-efficacy while enhancing collective benefit, which allows groups of people to cooperate in tackling emergencies such as COVID-19 (Alon-Barkat, 2019). It also helps increase trust in government policies. Trusting the government allows citizens to respond positively to the government's instructions which in turn helps in the fight against the emergency.

Administrators learned that local governments dealing with the emergency response should pay close attention to the perception of the public not to kill the public trust (Thomsen et al., 2020). Public trust is the currency that governments use to buy public cooperation and support for their initiatives.

The need for the use of symbols also became apparent during the COVID-19 crisis. Alon-Barkat (2020) says that the government should use symbols in communication to help citizens visualize the information. Many governments have done so by using pictures showing residents how to wash hands, how to wear masks, how to maintain a safe distance, as well as explain various symptoms. Similarly, public officials have been appearing in public adorned in masks to convey the message that everybody was at risk, including high-ranking officials.

The crisis also taught administrators that various agencies are more likely to be trusted by various subpopulations compared to others (Robinson et al., 2012). For example, some sections of the population trust the police while others trust administrative officers, such as regional administrators. Consequently, conveying the same message by using various agencies helps cover the majority of the population.

Organizations learnt that they should also keep tabs with their employees to keep them aware of what the businesses were planning to do and why. Organizations also learned that communicating with staff regularly helps to remind them that their efforts were highly appreciated, which keeps them motivated. During the COVID-19 pandemic, most employees have to work extra hours risking their lives while also neglecting their families. Employees had to take extra shifts to cover for their colleagues who failed to show up. Constantly reminding them of the importance of their efforts helps them remain in good spirits, thus preventing them from becoming disillusioned and giving up.

Consensus-Based Management Decision-Making

With most governments using all means to stop the spread of the virus, a multi-agency approach based on consensus decision-making has been critical. Leaders in all sectors had to accommodate input from various quarters to come up with a workable solution. One important lesson learnt from the sphere of public administration is that countries that tackled the disease are those with good leadership. Countries like Germany and New Zealand appear on top of the list of countries that averted an otherwise expected catastrophe.

The Need for Information Security and Training

COVID-19 forced many organizations to adopt remote working to reduce the chances of workplace transmission of the virus. However, this new development created a new attack vector for cybercriminals. Cybercriminals used coronavirus-themed phishing emails to steal personal information, using COVID-19 fake distribution maps to spread malware, targeting healthcare systems with ransomware, and creating domains containing the word coronavirus to trick unsuspecting people (*COVID-19 Exploited by Malicious Cyber Actors* | CISA, n.d.). Other malware operators sent messages claiming to be government entities requesting personal information for the distribution of bailout funds for the affected businesses and unemployment benefits for the affected workers. More experienced criminals exploited vulnerabilities in various IT infrastructures such as VPNs and remote working tools to gain unauthorized access to corporate networks. Governments and organizations were not prepared to handle such attacks.

Similarly, most workers were not trained on cybersecurity. The culmination of these factors posed a huge risk for organizations, some of which suffered cyberattacks. In future, governments and organizations have learned that cybersecurity is part of response towards disease outbreaks.

The Nature of Human Connections

COVID-19 has forced businesses to adapt to the new reality. The inability of people to travel and interact with each other to stop the spread of the disease has put a strain on individuals. Businesses have learnt the level of interconnectedness of humans and how such links are a

great asset. The interdependence does not only exist in humans but enterprises as well. Many businesses had their operations disrupted because their suppliers could not complete their delivery because of the prevailing conditions. Others have to halt operations because related businesses have downsized and reduced operations during the crisis. Businesses learnt that the interdependence of entities could not be overlooked.

The Need for Effective Decision-Making Processes

Businesses that adapted quickly to the changing reality of doing businesses were able to weather the pandemic more gracefully compared to the rigid ones. Businesses with bureaucratic or lengthy decision-making processes found themselves stuck in deciding the steps to take in the wake of a new reality. Some businesses were forced to undertake video conference meetings without the usual bureaucracy of boardroom meetings. Businesses learned that having emergency decision-making channels is crucial in surviving a health emergency.

Long-Term Planning and Business Impact Analysis

Businesses have learnt the need for long-term business impact planning as a safeguard against unexpected events. Most businesses have been suffered from reduced staff levels to lower the risk of transmission. Others faced high absenteeism due to the disruption of means of transport, while some workers contracted the disease, or lost their lives. Similarly, businesses have been forced to fire employees or reduce their hours because of the reduction in profits. Some employees have been forced to remain at home at taking care of their sick relatives, and children after schools closed abruptly. All these situations have led to a reduction in the number of workers available at any moment.

Consequently, most businesses have realized the need to reduce the number of services available to match staff levels. To survive in such an environment, businesses have learnt to prioritize essential services or those with the highest returns. Because it is difficult to predict how long the pandemic will last, businesses have been forced to plan on how to conduct their operations adversity for the long-term. Businesses can only survive if they carry out business impact analysis and decide on which survives to cut back and which areas to prioritize.

The Importance of Supply Chain Resiliency

Most businesses have long-term service level agreements (SLA) with suppliers often without including unpredictable events such as the current COVID-19 pandemic. Most suppliers have also faced challenges during the emergency, making them unable to fulfil their obligations to their clients. Consequently, businesses found themselves without any suppliers while essential goods have been wiped off the shelves in panic buying. Businesses have therefore learnt to diversify their supply chains as well as a source for unusual sources of stock. Even governments found themselves ordering from companies not registered as mask manufacturers to cater for the increased demand after official producers such as 3M became overwhelmed by demand. Most businesses prefer suppliers who can deliver their orders quickly and at reduced prices, while not considering the resiliency of such suppliers. However, the current COVID-19 crisis has forced businesses to the

resiliency of their suppliers. These lessons will be valuable when making future supply agreements.

The Role of Digital Technology

Businesses have learnt to adopt digital technologies as part of their primary operations. Because of the COVID-19 lockdown and government restrictions, some businesses are unable to open their physical stores. Remote working has become the new reality of the modern workplace. Companies that did not include technology as part of their service delivery found themselves overwhelmed by the need for technology. For example, businesses that relied on submission of hard copies of reports found it harder to transition to electronic reporting tools.

Similarly, companies that did not have the skills or tools of supervising remote workers could have their productivity effected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees working in non-digitized workplaces were also not prepared or did not have the required knowledge to harness technology. On the contrary, businesses that frequently relied on digital technologies did not have to make any significant adjustments or investments. The current pandemic taught businesses that technology is crucial for the businesses, and ignoring it could affect productivity in the future. Organizations also learnt that the ability to adopt new technology should be part of disaster preparedness.

The Need for A Proper Staffing Plan

Many organizations lacked a well-developed staffing plan for a crisis of similar proportion. Regardless of the nature of the organization, whether a healthcare provider or a commercial entity, the lack of a proper staff plan was responsible for the massive disruption of service delivery experienced during the pandemic. Consequently, organizations learned the importance of having a predictable staffing plan in advance. For example, organizations had to confirm in advance whether employees would show up and have alternatives in case the worst happened. In healthcare settings, the shortage of staff was more rampant than in other sectors. Medical students had to graduate early and got assignments into areas not related to COVID-19. This strategy freed the more experienced staff to take part in the management of coronavirus-related emergencies (Institute for Healthcare Improvement, 2020). Health workers without nursing training also took part in caring for patients under the instruction of registered nurses. The inexperienced caregivers receive patient care skills while hospitals benefit by increasing the capacity to handle critically-ill patients. Consequently, organizations learnt that having a staffing plan should be crucial in preparing for a health emergency.

The Need for Staff Welfare

COVID-19 exerted physical and emotional pressure on workers who were forced to neglect their wellbeing to meet their obligations under pressure. Most of the workers, especially in the healthcare sector, witnessed many patients' deaths. Such incidents caused trauma to many healthcare workers who were already stressed by overworking and lack of adequate resources. Consequently, organizations discovered that having staff assistance programs was necessary to prevent them from crumbling into depression (Institute for Healthcare Improvement, 2020). The health departments also realized that having employee emotional support programs should be part of disaster preparedness.

Although many healthcare institutions already understand the necessity of such programs, they have never implemented them fully.

Education Inequality, Accessibility, and Funding

COVID-19 exposed pressing issues that affect education systems across the world. Key among them are education funding, inequalities, quality of education, and emotional wellbeing of educators and students (Hughes, 2020). Many students have been left behind because of lack of the necessary tools to adopt the online method of learning. Poor households had to choose between paying for internet connectivity and meeting their daily needs. Students from higher institutions of learning were forced to defer their studies because of the lack of means to pay for their degrees. Teachers and students have also been forced to spend most of their time in front of computer screens with little time for interaction. Because online sessions are demanding, and teachers could only serve a certain number of students at a time, teachers found themselves forced to work longer hours in confinement.

Similarly, governments gave guidelines for the reopening of schools, which includes limiting the number of students per class. However, most of the schools are overcrowded and cannot afford to abide by the reopening guidelines because of the lack of enough classrooms and teachers. All these issues have highlighted the need for better educational policies to address inequalities, funding, and accessibility of education.

COVID-19 has affected every area of life and created a new reality that organizations must adapt. The crisis has also exposed various issues related to administration, business, healthcare, and education. By doing so, the crisis has enabled individuals and organizations to learn important lessons regarding emergencies. The critical lessons learnt in every area should serve an important role in the government, organizational, and individual efforts in preparation for emergencies.

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