

THE AFTERMATH OF CHAOS

Introduction

Picture this, it's 10:30 am. You are the CEO of a new start-up company. You have managed to raise enough awareness, and most importantly the needed funds to build your company up to the point it is. You hope to attract clients of a high net worth so you rent out an office space in the World Trade Centre. You pick out the space closest to the window with a beautiful view of the city. Never in a million years did you imagine that one day as you struggle to think of a less insulting way to respond to an annoying client email, a literal aeroplane will come crashing into your office, causing a chaotic aftermath.¹

What's the point of this analogy? Well, the thing with crisis management is, no matter how small or big the issue at hand is, one thing is clear, it is not something you could have anticipated would ever happen. What are the odds of a global pandemic occurring in the 21st century after so many years since the last pandemic? Haven't there been advancements in medicine and technology to ensure the human race never faces anything as bizarre as the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918?² Yet somehow the world was brought to its knees by what one with little information would deem as a little viral infection.

Crisis management efforts are effective when operations are sustained or resumed (i.e., the organisation is able to maintain or regain the momentum of core activities necessary for transforming input to output at levels that satisfy the needs of key customers), organisational and external stakeholder losses are minimised, and learning occurs so that lessons are transferred to future incidents.³ In simple terms, a crisis is successfully managed where the

¹ Retrieved 27th May 2021 from: <https://www.history.com/topics/21st-century/9-11-attacks>

² *The Spanish Flu Pandemic* Retrieved 27th May 2021 from: <https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/1918-flu-pandemic>

³ Arjen Bojn 2008 "*Crisis Management*" *Introduction and editorial arrangement*,

impact does not in any way cause the enterprise to fold its operations but to continue to perform effectively.

A story of generational efficiency

Nyaho Medical Centre, built for posterity sake, by a man who desired to leave a legacy that far outlived him, is a hospital that has always been a pacesetter, and has always been known to make initiatives, and to always excel in new and uncharted territories. How do I know this? Well I had the honour of playing the wife, Mrs. Janet Tamaklo, in a Musical Tribute to honour Kwami Nyaho Tamaklo, M.D., the founder of this model health care facility, on the 50th anniversary of the hospital. As part of my character study, I got the opportunity to learn about the many ways in which Nyaho Medical Centre has successfully maintained a good balance in providing health care and running a viable business.

Nyaho Medical Centre became an active participant in the country's response to the yawning gap in the nation's health care system. It provided rapid testing and treatment, helped organise public health measures such as contact tracing, and adopted innovative practices such as telemedicine. Nyaho also embraced the use of digital health records to reduce waiting time, effectively coordinate patient services, and to support the effective management of hospital staff. In all these ways, Nyaho Medical Centre demonstrated the resilience and responsiveness necessary for healthcare enterprises facing new global challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴

Having garnered experience over the past 50 years in existence, the management of the hospital has always aimed to be the best in the field and often seek to be "ahead of the game". The use of new and advanced technology as well as modern practices has always been something to

⁴https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/industry_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/health/case+studies/nyaho+cases+study

note about the way the hospital is managed. And in this era of the COVID-19 pandemic, the hospital did what it has always been best known for; manage the situation well.

As at February 2020, there was no known recorded case of COVID in Ghana, however, Nyaho had initiated research into care and management of infected persons and laid out a response plan in case there was a situation that needed to be dealt with.

A series of unfortunate events

In January 2020, I started a new job at a Ghanaian IT firm as the executive assistant to the CEO. I reported on my first day at this new job on 8th January, 2020. By March 2020, my fate at this company was hanging by a thin thread. Why? There weren't enough funds to keep the company and all its staff afloat. There was an unprecedented choice of having to institute work-from-home policies that hadn't been factored into the firm's budget from the beginning of the fiscal year. Within a few weeks of implementing the work-from-home policy, tasks began to fall through the cracks. Some staff members were literally nowhere to be found on weekly zoom meetings and there was an immediate need to regroup and recreate the plan as had been laid out. There was no way of measuring productivity and this most certainly was the biggest challenge during the first few weeks. One of the most popular quotes from Mr. Drucker is that:

“The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence; it is to act with yesterday's logic.”

With this company, the main reason I think, they were unable to adjust to the “new normal” and carry on business as usual was because somehow, everything was expected to remain the same. We were simply informed of a new work-from-home schedule which was to start at a specified date. The full plan for monitoring and evaluating productivity was not included. I often see that this is the case in most institutions that fail to properly execute a well thought out

crisis management plan. The bigger plan is drawn out but somehow the nitty-gritty of how the execution would actually occur is overlooked. It's almost as if people somehow forget that a "new logic" would be required in the execution of the new plan.

As a result of the ineffective management of the work-from-home plan among other pending issues, things started to slowly get worse for the company. Operational costs somehow increased and salaries had to be delayed. Eventually some workers were laid off and others reached a mutual agreement to sever their engagement. Frankly it is uncertain whether or not operations continue presently.

Is it a matter of traits or training?

Where I come from, typically much is left to chance and well, the grace of God. Little to no research is often conducted to anticipate all probable outcomes regarding any phenomena. We often just jump into decisions. Students' theses are often just for the show of it and barely taken seriously. Research on any given topic would yield very little credible information. This often barely leaves room for proper strategizing and planning. Bear in mind that this is not meant to taint my country or to insinuate that every single person or institution in this country does not often strategize properly. But the truth is that, majority of the Ghanaian populace, often leave things to chance and well, the grace of God. Given as this is far from a religious dissertation, I will avoid discussing whether or not a complete dependence on the grace of God is an issue.

Having said that, the main issue, in my opinion is really the nonchalant approach to dealing with things. It has slowly become a cultural approach and often things that should ideally be taken seriously are trivialised. As a people, we tend to often make jokes about things that happen. While this may be good for diffusing tension if it is the only approach that is typically adopted, it rather becomes a counter-productive approach to problem solving and does little to help the situation at hand.

How could managers be better developed in normal times to be more capable of dealing with the next trauma?

The reality is, one can never truly be fully prepared for unforeseen circumstances. However, one notable and distinct characteristic of Peter Drucker's theories is the fact that somehow, they seem to be way ahead of the times. Good management involves being able to keep an enterprise performing at present in order to ensure it is capable of performing in the future.⁵

Essentially knowing the ins-and-outs of the business processes as they are will lead to a better understanding of potential curveballs while there may be some blindsides regarding future unforeseen circumstances, perhaps it would be useful in making sure any future crisis is managed better.

How could the younger generation be better (uniquely) equipped to move us through this crisis and its aftermath?

“Once you know better, do better”! One of the simplest ways to ensure that the younger generation, particularly in my country, are better equipped to uniquely steer through the aftermath of this pandemic, or any other trauma for that matter, is to basically rethink the way knowledge is imparted in this country. The notion that the university thesis is simply an unnecessary formality, that one has to fulfil to graduate a tertiary programme, should perhaps be rethought of, in terms of the relevance placed on the quality of work, and the real-world applications of these thesis. An effort on both the university authorities and industry on one hand, and the students themselves on the other. One of the ways in which a person can be better prepared even in their personal lives is to better informed. What better way is there to be well-informed than to conduct a study or research?

⁵ Peter F. Drucker 1977 *People and Performance: The Best of Drucker on Management*, Routledge

Pick any Ghanaian youth between the ages of 18-25 at random and ask them if they think their research work in school can contribute to national development, and you will be met with nothing less than a chuckle or dismissive smirk. How do I know this? Not too long ago, I was one of those young people, and I had hoped things would have changed by now. However, a recent meme that trended on social media, showing a bunch of academic thesis heaped in a pile of garbage, will validate my assumption that, most Ghanaian youth share in the sentiment that, research work done in school, is of little importance.

In the words of Dr. Elikem Tamaklo, Managing Director of the Nyaho Medical Centre, “We live in complex and uncertain times where requirements to overcome the significant challenge of COVID-19 in our communities requires innovation, speed and discipline”. As a second-generation manager of a business that was built from scratch by his father, Dr. Elikem Tamaklo has done a stellar job at keeping the legacy alive by adhering to the vision as laid out by his late father. He has also carved a new path for himself through the use of modern technology such as initiating a collaboration with a leading Artificial Intelligence Research and Development Lab to launch a COVID-19 assessment tool to help the general public assess their COVID-19 risk, in order to be connected with appropriate health facilities and enable follow up.⁶ A few years ago, it would have seemed strange to think that a mobile app can be a useful tool in assessing medical risk, however, one beautiful thing about crisis is the fact that innovation and ingenuity, are often birthed as a result of the most bizarre circumstances. This is because, human beings have an inherent ability to rise above situations when the need arises. Essentially, with adequate research and the positive use of modern technology, the younger generation is very capable of managing situations that may arise just as is seen in the case of the Nyaho Medical Centre.

⁶ <https://www.nyahomedical.com/about/updates/know-your-covid19-risk-status>