

CRISIS RESPONSE

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Protection Prevention Preparedness Response Resilience Recovery



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attacks on places of worship | Risk & BCM
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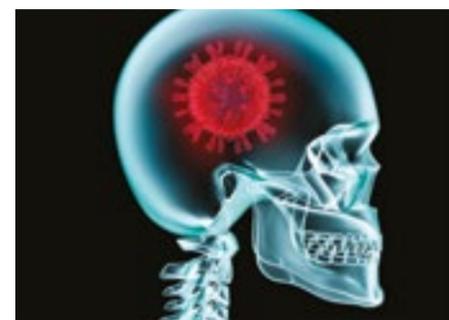
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Cover story: Solar Geoengineering, call for governance
Cover image: Daniel Mitchell

comment

On top of the millions of deaths and protracted health consequences brought about by this pandemic, Covid-19 is a particularly cruel crisis in that it isolates



and deprives people of the comfort they would normally derive from the affirming company of other human beings. As Lyndon Bird says on p8: "We are social animals. We need to get together to share thoughts, feelings, ideas, hopes, and sometimes complaints."

Of course, technology has helped with multiple ways of communicating that were unimaginable just a few years ago. But although many of today's virtual methods of communication are widely viewed as being here to stay, in some circumstances human contact is, quite simply, irreplaceable. Virtual interaction can never fully replicate the complex subtexts and nuanced cues when meeting another person face-to-face.

Words and body language are vital, as described in Jeannie Barr's exploration of communication and vocabulary used during emergencies. The choice of language and tone can be either helpful or detrimental in a crisis (p73).

On p64 Lina Kolesnikova examines how Covid-19 has disrupted working and shopping habits, as well as the ways we access healthcare and information. She says that the very essence of what we define as 'critical' infrastructure is being transformed. This brings new risks in terms of resilience and security, including in the areas of technology we have come to rely upon during Covid-19.

Design is another undervalued but essential piece in the jigsaw of humanitarian and emergency response disciplines. David Wales notes on p76: "As the meeting point between states and communities, public service agencies would greatly benefit from making design a standard approach."

The key lies in understanding people – their culture, fears, concerns, past experiences and predispositions. Michele Wucker calls this an individual's unique risk fingerprint (p44).

All of the above should be combined with a simple shift of focus onto the people dealing with – and affected by – a crisis, says Thomas Lahntaler (p50). Because, above all, we must not forget that crisis management is about people.

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Using the right words

Communication and the vocabulary used during emergencies can have a significant effect on people's behaviour. **Jeannie Barr** of the Emergency Planning Society investigates further

There is a plethora of information and guidance available on how the timing of communication, appropriateness to its audience and its content are all extremely relevant. But what is 'communication' for those of us working in disaster or emergency management and resilience? Does it simply involve 'telling' people what is needed, what to do or where to find help?

The Emergency Planning Society (EPS) has recently held a series of webinars in which communication frequently came up as a key discussion point; how are we as professionals communicating with people in our communities? How are we making sure that communication is two-way? How do we ensure we are using the right vocabulary? How do we determine our messages and make sure they are relevant?

Dissonance

Social media, for example, has been hailed as both a potential positive and negative. It is positive in terms of the possibility of engaging with a wide variety of audiences, gauging community sentiment, driving volunteering projects and community engagement.

Conversely, it can also create dissonance and be a source of disinformation, therefore requiring careful monitoring and timely action.

EPS webinars have discussed how the use of vocabulary and terminology has been concerning at times, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. Use of the word 'vulnerable' was raised as a potential barrier to those who needed help. Simply put, many of the people who could be considered 'vulnerable' in terms of being at risk of contracting Covid-19 simply did not associate themselves with the word and therefore did not seek assistance. 'Vulnerable' is, therefore, a potentially alienating word.

In our most recent webinar, the Human Aspects and Community Resilience Professional Working Group of the EPS was interested in how the use of language, including unspoken or body language, can also assist in recovery.

Delegates learned that the use of words and phrases can have both an advantageous and detrimental effect on people's well-being, and in some cases – mostly unintentionally – the damaging effect of language that is used at the front line and in public speeches can be harmful and long-lasting.

But communication can also provide a positive turning point for people's recovery. Whether it is verbal, written or translated – the fundamentally important aspects are timing, context and tone, as



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Social media has been hailed as a potential positive and negative

well as consideration of the intended audience and the potential effects on different people.

It is essential to embed empathy in all messaging, whether in a leaflet, part of an official briefing or public speech, or even when supporting someone on the front line – and this can be learned and developed. It is also important to remember that language used across command and control during collaboration – in meetings, documentation, working groups, or correspondence – should always be respectful and humanised. Mistakes can be made, which can be damaging to responders, too.

All communication in these contexts should address the humanitarian objectives in emergencies and all those working in disaster and emergency response and management should have an appreciation of the significance of appropriate communication.

Author



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