



Keeping an eye on non-profit

GOVERNING THROUGH A CRISIS

By Ricardo Wyngaard

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RICARDO WYNGAARD ATTORNEYS which is aimed at updating the non-profit sector on relevant legal issues.

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RICARDO WYNGAARD ATTORNEYS is a law practice that specialises in rendering advice and assistance on non-profit law and governance.

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The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), in their Strategy 2020 document, states that: “A disaster or crisis may arise as a sudden emergency or it may be slow onset. In either case, it is our basic obligation to be well prepared to use all effective means to help, according to the different needs of men, women and children – wherever and whenever this is needed.”

Boards should lead the way in equipping well prepared organisations to navigate crises. The aviation industry offers some notable metaphoric lessons.

The following concepts are extracted from the [Aviation Investigation Report A11H0002](#), as published by The Transportation Safety Board of Canada, where the unfortunate late start of an aircraft’s descent has escalated the pilot’s workload and reduced the crew’s capacity to resolve navigational issues at a very critical phase.

C-R-I-S-I-S

CONTEXT

Situational Awareness - A proper understanding of the internal and external organisational context is paramount in deciding on an appropriate organisational strategy. In aviation, situational awareness is defined as ‘the continuous extraction of environmental information, the integration of this information with previous knowledge to form a coherent mental picture, and the use of that picture in directing further perception and anticipating future events’. Governing boards should adopt a similar approach during a crisis. Having appropriate situational awareness is crucial during a time of crisis.

RESOURCES

Crew Resource Management - Organisational resources must be optimised, the most valuable being its human resources. The aviation industry introduced Crew Resource Management which is widely defined as ‘the effective use of all human, hardware, and information resources available to the flight crew to ensure safe and efficient flight operations.’ Pilots are naturally unable to identify all risks associated with air travel and, similarly, Boards have blind spots and should explore innovative ways to galvanise internal resources whilst traversing uncertain times.

INTERACT

Shared Situational Awareness - External and internal interaction are vital. The successful interaction between pilots, the aircraft and environment are referred to as shared situational awareness, which is accomplished through, amongst other, briefing and planning. It builds on individual situational awareness with the intention to ensure coordination through a collective approach.

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SAFETY

Safety Management System - The safety of people must be a key prerogative. The objective of crew resource management is to ensure safe and efficient flight operations. The Board should, where applicable, prioritise the adoption and implementation of suitable safety protocols and facilitate appropriate compliance.

INCAPACITATION

Crew Incapacitation - The Board should avoid abdication of their governance mandate in a time of crisis. In aviation, incapacitation of an individual can either be obvious or subtle. The latter is described as 'particularly insidious in that the non-functioning pilot can enter this state and may appear perfectly normal with eyes open and hands on the controls.' In a crisis, the Board must be proactive in dealing with self-inflicted incapacitation.

STORY-TELLING

Incident Reporting – The Board must make a concerted effort to capture reports/stories during a crisis that may not ordinarily make it into the official annual or integrated report. In aviation, an aircraft's black box will record critical data. However, it does not, for example, record the emotion and trauma that passengers experience on a flight in crisis. Incident reporting caters for additional reports. In his thesis entitled: 'There was simply too much water': Exploring the Laingsburg Flood of 1981, Ashrick Pietersen, sets out to provide an 'integrated and comprehensive account of the Laingsburg flood of 1981, one of the most devastating natural disasters in South African history' and commented that for more than two decades, a 'very one-sided account of the disaster existed'. The Board must ensure that the crisis narrative is not limited to the black box recordings and should create a platform to facilitate expression by those traumatised through crisis. These reports may offer significant opportunities for organisational learning and reshaping.

The IFRC also points out that "we know that major disasters and crises can sometimes overwhelm even those who are best prepared." In a similar vein, the Institute of Risk Management's Charity Special Interest Group warns that: "Sadly, some charities will not survive Covid-19, and others may need to make significant changes, so the future sector landscape may well look very different." Where applicable, an organisation's legacy must, through story-telling, rise above the burial grounds of an overwhelming crisis.

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