

# CRISIS RESPONSE

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Protection Prevention Preparedness Response Resilience Recovery



## CLIMATE FIXES? CALLS FOR GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

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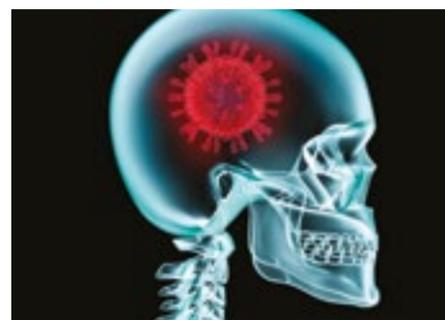
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Cover story: Solar Geoengineering, call for governance  
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comment

**O**n 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.

# Design to the rescue

The design process is an important, but often overlooked tool for humanitarian agencies and emergency services, says **David Wales**. It should be used wisely to encourage both innovation and creativity

“If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses.” This famous quote attributed to Henry Ford is frequently used to demonstrate the limitation of asking the public to inform the process of design. The suggestion is that the public would have had insufficient imagination to think of anything other than how to improve what it was already familiar with, namely the horse, on this occasion. Instead, it is suggested, the progress of mass transportation relied on the singular genius of Henry Ford. There are many reasons I dislike this quote, the main one being that it encourages an insular approach, which in most cases will be detrimental to the intended outcome.

The image of the lone inventor having a moment of profound inspiration contrasts with the evolutionary and inclusive ethos that is the foundation of academia. Here, research process and referencing protocol ensure that all progress, whether great or small, is recognised as having been informed by the work of others.

How things come to be is so important because design influences almost every part of our lives, from products to services to environments. Done well, it can transform and delight, but done poorly, it can frustrate or cause harm. Nothing exists in a vacuum and so understanding how things interact with their wider environment or systems must also be considered to understand the potential for unintended consequences. The regulating effect of consumer choice in commercial markets will generally ensure that poor design does not flourish for long. But public services, and those provided to individuals or communities in relation to crises and disasters, do not have this moderating factor.

My own realisation of the importance of intentional design came through the process of looking at the burn survivor journey. We quickly realised that the only person to ever see the end-to-end process was the person who had experienced the burns. As a result, the survivor experienced a ‘sum of the parts’ process in which most agencies delivered their part with limited knowledge of care elsewhere. Changes made by one agency, whether in general practice or specific to burn care, were unlikely to be known to other agencies, leaving survivors vulnerable to the risks inherent within an un-coordinated process. Even the base expectation of ‘do no harm’ could not be confirmed, as the organisations did not have a common map to work to. And with the absence of a single agency or forum owning the end-to-end care pathway, there was effectively no governance or accountability.

Given the considerable resources and good intentions of care providers, why is the result falling short of the mark? There are many reasons, but two that are of interest in relation to design are purpose and diversity. In the current environment these struggle to find a place in the process of service development and delivery.

Organisations that provide core emergency services, whether

for day-to-day incidents or in the event of a crisis or disaster, are typically established by a government by proxy on behalf of its citizens. In doing so, their purpose, remit and legitimate functions are developed and enshrined in top-down legislation and other forms of guidance. As a result, government also assumes a responsibility for making sure that they operate in a way that meets these explicit requirements, providing some degree of clarity and stability to these important public services.

Government can exert considerable influence on these organisations, using various means to punish or create positive incentives. These include the control of funding or the use of audits, reviews and inspection regimes. Whatever form they take, satisfying these requirements will be seen as a priority and will be foremost in the organisation’s mind, to the extent that considerable resources and senior management time can be devoted to this activity.

## Compliance and conformity are more prized than creativity

Unsurprisingly, given their different functions, services are typically assessed in isolation of each other, using sector-specific criteria. Historically, governments tend to favour quantitative assessments that relate to efficiency, effectiveness as measured against their statutory responsibilities, and standardisation. In this environment, compliance and conformity are more prized than creativity.

Interoperability reviews or the testing of mass casualty events provide opportunities for inter-service working to be assessed. However, these tend to be with a view to improving the delivery mechanism, that is the services, rather than to evaluate their combined performance against the end-to-end citizen experience and outcomes.

Given this influence, it is not surprising that over time, it is easy for the emergency services to see government – national, or in its regional or local guises – as their principal and most important stakeholder.

## Functional or transactional

It can be argued that certain features of the top-down model are necessary and beneficial to some extent. But they are certainly not sufficient on their own, as they represent a very narrow and often functional or transactional perspective.

Ideally, they should be balanced by an equally strong bottom-up mechanism that provides a direct route for citizens to share their lived experience and ideas for improving the services delivered in their name. Of course, emergency services do consult. However, in almost every case, the service decides if, how and when. Communities certainly do not enjoy the same ability to be heard by the services that government does.

Without this, services are limited in their ability to understand the citizen perspective on: Purpose – what is the problem to be solved; capability – what communities can do and how they could be better

empowered; and solutions – how to access the vast range of experience and skills that reside in communities.

This disconnect is not confined to emergency services, as evidenced by the growing number of thinktanks and public policy bodies that argue for the need to change the relationship between government and the communities it serves. Why? Because otherwise services will inevitably grow apart from their communities and this can create inequalities, social unrest and a failure to support community wellbeing. And the ensuing consequences create further work for other agencies.

It is also not surprising that many of these organisations see design in all its forms as the means to bridge the gap.

As the meeting point between the state and communities, public service agencies would greatly benefit from making design a standard approach. This would provide a framework in which embracing diverse perspectives and creativity are much more likely to ensure alignment on purpose and the appropriate solution.

In its 2020 to 2024 strategy, the UK’s Design Council states: “Our world is changing rapidly, bringing to the fore national and global issues that we all must urgently address. The need for us to innovate and find new solutions is critical. Design has a key role to play.”

There are many design frameworks to choose from and each will have its own benefits or be suited to specific problems. All of them provide an iterative process and encourage creativity and the exploration of multiple options, however unlikely these may seem at first. Filtering narrows down the options to those most suited to the requirement. It is often noted that good design is inclusive, and the time taken to explore the needs of all users can often unlock features that benefit everyone. This is as true for designing environments and services as it is for products.

For all those involved in emergency and humanitarian roles, design is rapidly becoming an essential tool. It is a tried and tested means to explore some of the most challenging and complex issues. But this will not be achieved unless a way is found to ensure that the



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widest range of perspectives are utilised. Design may be the key to doing that; not as an act of individual genius as suggested by Henry Ford – although it is possible he may never have said that after all – but as an inclusive, collaborative and structured process. In doing so, it may just align and balance the top-down and bottom-up requirements in a way that current processes are failing to do. **CRJ**

## Author



DAVID WALES, is Founder of SharedAim and Customer Experience and organisational improvement consultant. He is also a Member of the CRJ’s Advisory Panel (see this edition’s news pages for full announcement)

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