

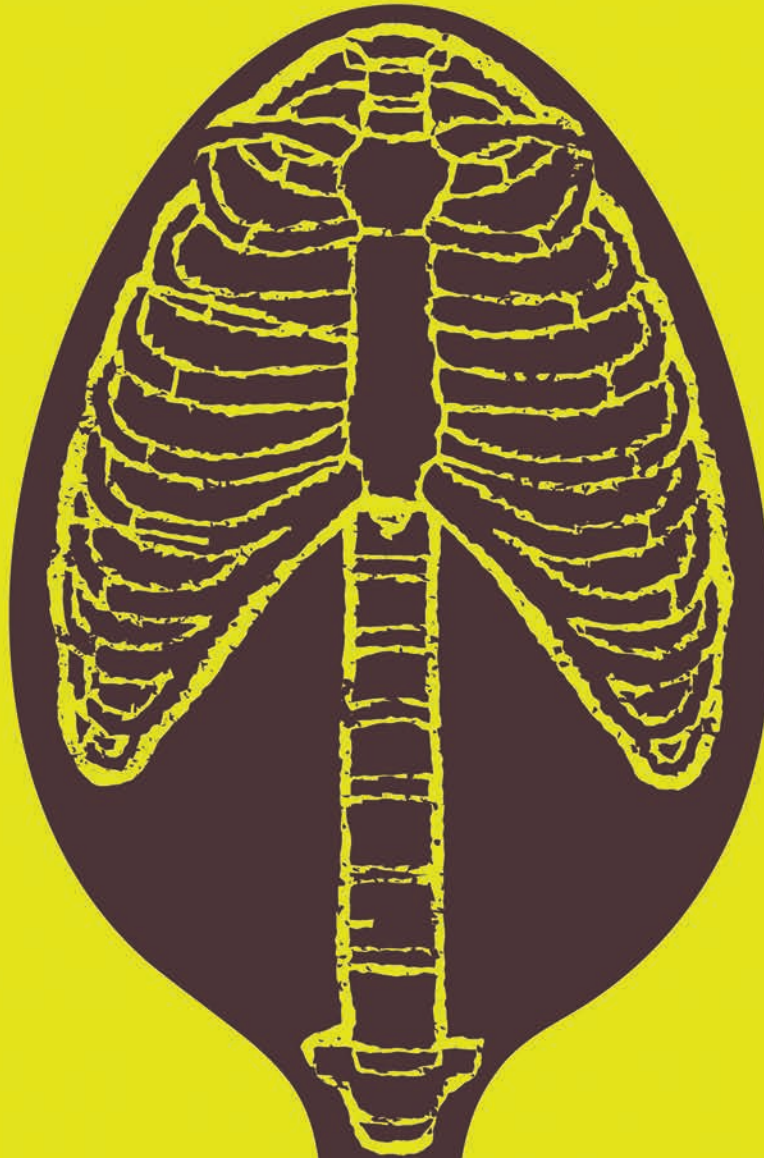
CRISIS ▶ RESPONSE

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Protection Prevention Preparedness Response Resilience Recovery



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contents

News & Comment

- News** 4
- Opportunity knocks** 8
Andy Marshall discusses how change is inevitable and why we must find opportunities from crises instead of fearing them

- Climate reparations for everybody**..... 12
Tamara Toles O’Laughlin explains the need for corporate entities to take climate action seriously and how we must revisit how we look at climate change and its side effects

Book review

- Tech or freedom of thought?**14
Emily Hough reviews Susie Allegre’s *Freedom to Think, the Long Struggle to Liberate our Minds*, providing a unique look on digital privacy, influence and mental freedom

- Crises and beyond**..... 17
Emily Hough reports on *Navigating Beyond Crises*, which explores the human side of leadership and the way we view crises

Crisis leadership

- Three questions for 2023** 20
Eric McNulty dives into how leaders can shape success in the coming year, looking at a post-pandemic world

- Future-ready crisis response** 22
David Wales takes on the question: How can we develop future-ready approaches to crises and disasters?

- A living framework of ethics** 24
Beverley Griffiths explores the implementation of an emergency management framework for real-life practice.

Resilience & reputation

- Migration towards resilience** 28
Lyndon Bird takes a look at the findings from DRI International’s 2022 Trends Report

Business continuity p28



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- Human touch for disaster management** 31
Emma Dodgson tackles the subject of resilience in the context of emergencies and their effects on individuals, families and communities

- Mobilising a nation**..... 32
Robert Hall explores the idea of a ‘permacrisis’, which has entered the popular lexicon, and asks what it means for mobilising for change

- Reputational crisis**..... 36
Tony Jaques dissects the Australian Bureau of Meteorology’s PR nightmare and offers some insights to institutions on what not to do

- Innovative disaster management**..39
Andrian Cader discusses key elements that can help ensure sustainable resilience, while focusing on the upcoming Adexco event

Manchester attack

- Managing risk and reputation**.....40
A lack of learning that becomes a risk for many says Andy Blackwell as he examines how organisations that refuse to learn from their mistakes continue to flounder

- Emergency Response** 44
Roger Gomm dissects the *Manchester Arena Inquiry Volume 2*, to offer insights into the attacks and what caused the massive security failure

Resource insecurity

- When food insecurity turns critical** 47
Luavut Zahid interviews Raouf Mazou, Assistant High Commissioner for Operation at UNHCR, about global food insecurity, and how the situation has never been as bad

- Food insecurity in the US**..... 50
Despite being a developed nation, food availability is deteriorating in the US. People are one tragedy short of a crisis writes Omanjana Goswami

Food insecurity p50



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Cover story: Food Insecurity
Cover image: Gillian Blease | Ikon Images

Beneficiaries of solutions to food insecurity..... 52

Dr Christine Jessup explores the human influence on food supplies, and what people need to do to be better caretakers of the planet

Afghanistan's food insecurity and economic downfall 56

Jacob Kurtzer and Sana Vaidya investigate the current food crisis in Afghanistan and what it would take for the country to return to normalcy

Taliban ban on women 60

Luavut Zahid investigates how the ban on women aid workers has worsened food insecurity and other quality of life indicators in Afghanistan

Continuity or corruption? 64

Will space be the next place humanity turns to for resources? To improve the future, people must learn from the past and act in the present according to Ekaterina Kostioukhina

Road paved with reparations..... 68

Kalrav Joshi reports on COP27 and the developments that came out of the event. Climate disasters are not slowing down, and efforts for climate finance have no option but to speed up

Environment and hazards

Record-setting turbulence 70

Bill Peterson takes a look at the anatomy of the country hurricane season and why extreme weather events are starting to batter the US harder each year

Bangladesh's industrial tragedies 74

Haseeb Md Irfanullah probes the response to Industrial tragedies in the country as he examines the 2013 Savar plaza accident and reviews the 2022 Sitakunda chemical explosion that rocked the country

Taliban ban p60



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Long-term societal disruption.....76

Covid-19 seems like it's over, but it continues to mutate and survive, like many pandemics before it have done throughout history, says Regina Phelp

The worth of water 80

Matt Minshall runs through the cost of mismanaging water, attributing this to greed that plagues certain sectors of the water industry, exploring steps for better conservation

Solutions

Sowing seeds for change 83

Arlene Barclay looks at regenerative agriculture as a solution to climate change and how this can prove to be a genuine solution to the food insecurity crisis

Floods for food?..... 86

Jean-Michel Grand highlights how floods, which have been causing food insecurity and famine, can actually be used to grow crops, making climate threats treatable issues

Vertical farming 88

Bryan Fried explores the future of food security and how vertical farming using Controlled Environment Agricultural (CEA) techniques may be the solution

Conflict and climate change 90

Our response to territorial and resource disputes decides whether peace may prevail writes Laura Aumeer

Decoding regulations..... 94

Amy Leete explains everything you need to know about the EECC, the delegated regulation that supplements it, and the implications for emergency communication

Plus

Events 97

Conference preview..... 98

Water's worth p80



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comment

This edition will always be special for me, given



that it's my first as the publishing editor. I have spent a good chunk of the previous decade being in awe of Emily Hough. She is an impeccable editor and mentor, and it is both thrilling and overwhelming to step into her shoes. While this issue was delayed slightly because the new team was still coming up to speed with how things are done, future issues will be landing at your doorsteps on time and will continue in the same spirit as *CRJ* always has. I want to acknowledge the excellent team of advisors that *CRJ* has cultivated over the years and also write a note about our many stellar authors. This edition, like its predecessors, has the advantage of being produced by and with people whose thoughts can change the world. The issue's main focus has been on food insecurity and famine around the world.

On p47, I speak to Raouf Mazou, Assistant High Commissioner for Operations at UNHCR. He helps me explore food insecurity around the world, what the humanitarian sector needs to do to help, and how the situation can become even worse if appropriate steps are not taken. On p60, I look into the Taliban ban on women aid workers and how it can aggravate food insecurity a lot worse for Afghanistan, in addition to affecting many other quality of life indicators. This edition includes some extremely needed insights into resource insecurity. For instance, p50 looks at how the issue presents in a developed country like the US, while p64 examines whether space is the next frontier if humankind is unable to sustain itself on just this planet. There are several pieces in this edition that focus on solutions, both those that are currently in practice and those that are theoretical. There are stories of resilience and of communities fighting back against drivers of food insecurity, such as conflict and climate change. Humanity continues to struggle against itself and uplift itself in different proportions, and this edition provides a look at both ends of the spectrum.

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Future-ready crisis response requires community input

How can we develop future-ready approaches to crises and disasters? Emergency professionals must examine their own attitudes and policies at every level, explains **David Wales**

Resilience and integration are rightly recognised as being two critical factors required to develop future-ready approaches to crises and disasters. But progressing or achieving these effectively rests heavily upon the way in which the issues and requirements are framed. This article briefly considers the need for, and impediments to, giving greater attention to the citizen and community perspective.

It may be helpful to start by considering why that is required, given that all the professional and organised emergency services in some way exist for the purpose of helping citizens. While this is clearly a genuine intention, over time and as these institutions and their ecosystems mature, they tend to become organised to be responsive to formal drivers (such as legislative, funding, or governance requirements) or towards those having some form of proximity (such as employees, accredited representatives, and partner agencies). Unfortunately, citizens do not meet either criterion, so most organisations have not invested as heavily in this area. Engagement with citizens is often undertaken only when the organisations determine they have a specific need to do so.

Who cares about emergencies?

In general, as citizens tend not to spend much time thinking about emergencies, they trust that the relevant agencies will do what is needed. It is perhaps only when some form of personal exposure to an incident gives them reason to question this belief that they may seek to ask questions or make their views known.

As a result of these and other factors, we have perhaps unwittingly created a significant and growing gap between emergency institutions and the communities they serve.

For a long time, neither side saw a reason to challenge the status quo, which, while not perfect, seemed to work well enough for both. However, with professionals needing to prepare for a very different future and citizens displaying heightened interest in the effectiveness of responses following a number of recent high-profile emergencies, that may be changing.

The potential to become overly focused on internal matters at the expense of tracking customers' requirements and expectations is a risk appreciated by commercial companies. They counter this by actively investing in appropriate ways to make sure they know their customers and remain responsive to their needs. In comparison, this capability seems poorly recognised and developed in the emergency sector. To rectify this will take time, but in the interim, it must be identified as a potential risk and actively considered if there is to be meaningful progress towards enhancing integration and resilience. Otherwise, current strategies and investments may fall short of what is required and achievable.

One of the obvious effects of the current system and approach is that the role of citizens and communities tends to be seen primarily through the lens of their utility to, or effect upon, the professional and organised emergency services. As a result, the role of the community outside of its interaction with professional or organised services





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is relatively poorly known. Or worse, it is often actively discounted or portrayed negatively. And yet, communities are the essential foundation and a very capable component of any emergency. Their role begins before, continues during, and can extend long after the involvement of professionals. And in many cases, they resolve incidents without them.

For example, in England, over 70 per cent of home fires are dealt with by citizens without calling for the fire and rescue service (FRS). This data is not collected by the FRS but is only known from other sources. Neither does the FRS use this data to learn more about the resilience that is inherent within the community and how it can be enhanced. In fact, the message to citizens stubbornly remains: “Leave it to the professionals.”

This mindset and policy that create a cultural refusal or reluctance to help anyone undertake actions that fall outside of their advice. This is because they do not recognise even the potential for anyone other than trained professionals to be competent to carry out tasks safely and effectively. And yet, it clearly does not reflect the available evidence or acknowledge that the trade-off for adopting a generic and risk-averse message is that many people, who could potentially be safely helped to achieve better outcomes, are effectively left to their own devices. The fact that they often do so is rarely recognised but should be a source of great interest and learning.

But paternalistic and risk-averse policies are still very common. Their use gives the impression that organisations are content to encourage a continued dependency on professional bodies rather than exhibiting a desire to actively nurture community resilience. And it further implies a willingness to accept an approach that oversimplifies risk and not seek the evidence that could inform a more sophisticated model. Within this context, services and communities will continue to develop in parallel rather than moving towards the required integration,

In fact, the view that citizens should be educated or directed to act solely in accordance with the beliefs and requirements of more knowledgeable professionals remains persistent. But despite decades of trying, this is still not the case. In part, it is because it is the wrong strategy. And as a consequence of this approach, there are important but unresolved differences in priorities, experience, terminology, risk perceptions, and risk awareness. If progress is to be made, these must be reconciled, and the findings must be used to inform strategies.

This must be accompanied by a willingness within professional emergency services to recognise how their current policies may impede, rather than enable, the

Genuine progress hinges on a willingness by emergency professionals to examine their own attitudes and policies at every level

advancement of resilience and integration. A key step is for the emergency sector to identify and reflect on where organisational distrust of the citizen is present or suggested in its policies or activities. Trust in organisations by citizens is often discussed and surveyed as its influence is increasingly understood. However, the trust that organisations have in their citizens is equally important, but it is rarely measured or considered.

Citizens and communities have a natural desire to be able to look out for each other and be self-sufficient. The physical or intellectual assets they create to do so will vary to reflect the local context of everyday life. And, in an emergency, they will understandably look to use or adapt what is familiar, trusted, and available.

For emergency professionals, the challenge is to improve their understanding of communities on their own terms and not just through the limited interaction that the professionals have with these communities. By investing more in learning and working together on an equitable basis, the requirements for authentic integration and resilience will emerge more naturally.

But genuine progress hinges on a willingness by emergency professionals to examine their own attitudes and policies at every level. Whether they are prepared to identify where paternalism or organisational risk aversion means they provide the services they are comfortable with or organised for rather than the ones citizens and communities need. **CRJ**

Author



DAVID WALES is Founder of SharedAim and advises on Customer Experience and service design. He is also a Member of the CRJ's Advisory Panel

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