

Chapter 28

Communication in the Age of a Global Pandemic: Qualitative Remediation at the Community Level

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting communities worldwide today in many novel ways. The rapidity at which the disease is transmitted and the amount of information available in real-time creates a unique situation. This research, based on qualitative remediation at the community level, provides a fertile ground from which significant patterns are emerging. The authors reviewed the literature available as well as over 100 individual sites of local administrations, faith-based, NGOs, local charitable and community initiatives. It is premature to project an accurate picture of how to alleviate best the distress caused by a pandemic. However, some significant and credible patterns have emerged that lead to conclude that, next to transparency, initiatives based on proactive use of peer to peer e.communication, direct e.outreach, and e.collaboration between parties lead to constructive and successful initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

I recently was tasked by a Non-Profit organization to review effective remediation programs conducted at the community level. I am not a behavior analyst nor a trained scientist in Anthropology and Social Sciences. My field of expertise is Electronic Communication, and more specifically Visual Communication. It may seem odd to use my skills to find patterns and trends in a discipline I am not directly

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associated with. However, it is not uncommon to integrate communication and visual communication researchers in teams analyzing data in finance and economy, statistics, health, and even meteorology.

Dr. De La Torre Pacheco, who coordinated our effort, had the foresight to introduce her team to the Agile methodology. This multidisciplinary and collaborative approach is very similar to the Knowledge Visualization framework I currently use in my research projects. Agile is an umbrella term for several iterative, and incremental software development approaches, including Scrum, Crystal, Dynamic Systems Development Method, and Feature-Driven Development (Mendix, 2020). Its focus falls on empowering developers of all kinds to collaborate and make decisions together quickly and effectively. Knowledge visualization is information that has been made part of a specific context. In order for information to transform into knowledge, one must share some context, some meaning, in order to become encoded and connected to the pre-existing experience. In that sense, Knowledge Visualization can be considered as data visualization “in context” (Meyer, 2007)

BACKGROUND

The COVID 19 pandemic is unique in several ways. While pandemics have afflicted humanity since the beginning of time, this particular virus exploded in a manner never experienced before. The pandemic took less than two months to affect the whole planet. No place on earth has been immune to the virus’s effect, from Iceland to the smallest atoll in the Pacific. Many reasons explain the speed and extent of the virus impact.

Transport

The 1918 Influenza (H1N1 virus) was a forewarner of things to come. It lasted for almost three years. The industrial age brought us trains and auto transportation. Today, all over the world, every day, millions travel every day across countries by air, ship, train, automobile, and other mechanical means of transportation. Over 500 million people, or one-third of the world’s population, became infected with this virus. From Chicago to Mongolia’s smallest community, all cities have in common an airport. According to ACI World’s latest World Airport, Traffic Report passenger numbers are estimated to have reached 8.8 billion in 2018, growing by 6.4 percent compared to the previous year (ACI, 2019)

Economy

It is the first time in recorded history that the world economy is going through a global standstill for such an extended period. Except for food and utility services, all non-vital industries, such as manufacturing, services, and retail, had to close their doors. Workers were sent home to wait out the pandemic. This situation has created urgent financial, psychological needs. In many cases, it has affected household and individual properties as well. Millions of people have started to rely more and more on their network, family, friends, colleagues, support groups to find support and answers to their needs. This new situation affects everyone and, in particular, all the providers of services dedicated to helping and remediating individual needs. Staying relevant and continuing to grow in this unchartered new environment will require a thorough re-evaluation of the traditional methods and practices used to provide help and support, grow membership, and access funding.

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