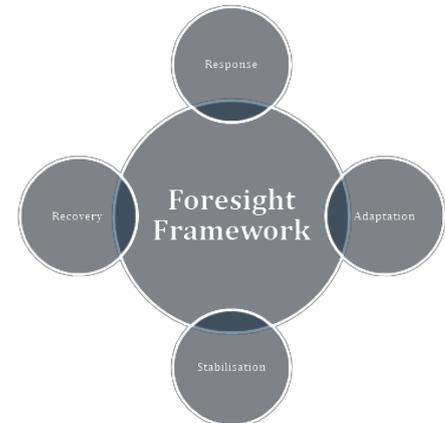


A new framework for complex emergency and disaster management in light of COVID-19 (Response, Adaptation, Stabilisation, Recovery): Working Paper

Covid-19 was a pandemic that was reasonably foreseeable and has been in the top tier of national risk and threat assessments for over 20 years. UK Government planning assumptions have not matched the impact or the response to this crisis. COVID-19 is a novel coronavirus but the approach to the crisis is being dealt with in terms of a clear response and recovery approach.

However, the high infection spread crossed with the risk to certain groups and the consequences on health care provision has necessitated behaviour changes causing society wide impacts and a global wide management. These factors combined with the pandemic lifecycle necessitates the adoption of three clear assumptions:



- This experience cannot be thought of in the two traditional emergency management phases of 'response' and 'recovery': adding in new gears to compliment this will enable a closer mapping to the pandemic lifecycle. The longer-term view of our COVID-19 experience is discussed in four phases which are neither linear or sequential.
- COVID-19 has caused a qualitative shift in life experience and circumstance at every level from individual, family, community, society through to global, such that recovery to 'before' is no longer possible. The educational, financial, economic, social and psychological implications are so wide ranging that a fracture point will be traceable in the future of 'before' and 'after' necessitating the need to establish a 'new normal' as recovering to previous is not possible.
 - Our 'new normal' will be about establishing the way we will live in the future
- Our reactions and actions to COVID-19 cannot be restricted to territories or nations; even if a nation controls the rate down to manageable levels, if COVID-19 is in the world, then we are all, by necessity, still managing it.
 - The longer-term view of our collective COVID-19 experience is discussed and framed as a global experience requiring a global effort

Response, Adaptation, Stabilisation, Recovery to New Normal

The traditional doctrine of emergency management has framed the management activities and structures of an incident as response and recovery.

Academics and practitioners have previously proposed an intermediary stage of stabilisation, a phase which helps to communicate to the public that the situation is being dealt with but has yet to move to recovery. We can see this in flooding examples where an interim solution is put in place (for example a temporary bridge) to allow society to fully function again, but where the interim solution is not yet permanent (not a permanent bridge replacement).

Additionally, other arguments highlight there may never be a 'full' recovery but rather acceptance of a new normality. For appropriate frameworks to guide public communications, public policy, academic endeavour and life planning, we assert that a simple dichotomous model of response and recovery is no longer sufficient.

Furthermore, the likely trajectory of the pandemic lifecycle, and the interventions available to governments to manage these situations, means that the four phases will be operating simultaneously, and regions and nations are likely to move around these phases as they exit and re-enter interventions.

By providing clear labels for our future actions in combatting Covid19 we can begin to accept the length of time that the process of recovery will take. We can also start to horizon scan and identify what is likely to come to the fore at different stages of that process, or as a consequence of moving through, or backwards, within that process.

We can start to use our foresight to mitigate further consequences, or to prepare for future changes. So is there a different way to look at this long-term process as we seek community immunity?

Response

This phase is primarily focussed on the initial activity to address threat to life and society. In relation to COVID-19, this is the initial public and social policy changes, and the establishing or changing of social and civic management structures to respond to the initial need to protect life.

Adaptation

Coronavirus adapted to us and we have quickly adapted to it. Our society has effected enormous adaptation so that each of us protects the other. We will continue to have to do this, in full or in part, for months or even years to come. As we develop public policy thinking about what we do in terms of social adaptation it is useful to think about our COVID-19 management as a framework where we are learning to live with the virus, as opposed to on/off interventions providing a 'one event fix'. The longer-term collective effort moving in and out of a range of interventions is the most likely journey we are embarking on around the globe. Adapting our social behaviours, and the way in which we live within our communities, in order to protect our communities will need to be responsive and flexible in managing the virus going forward.

Stabilisation

In order to protect each other we are harming our economy. The consequences of our actions will have unknowable future consequences and are likely to be felt across our society generationally through experiencing the current economic packages that have enabled our actions to save members of our communities. It will not be possible to quickly rebuild our economy; instead we will need to move to a new normal of both national economic trajectory and climate, and also within our own economic contributions and our changed approaches to how we go about our daily work lives. We will have to go through a period of stabilisation where economic policy will have to be agile in responding to social need and management of the pandemic through the lifecycle.

Recovery

Recovery being the process by which the management structures help societies (re)establish life after the incident. Recovery is framed as a process that returns communities to normality, in this case a new normal. We may also have to consider terms that drive our thinking for that too as we have left our old world behind and no one can quite know what the future shape of our lives will be.

Benefits of the new Framework

Using this new framework will give us the ability to conceptualise what our journey might look and feel like in relation to COVID-19. It gives us language to use to arrange our policies and communicate with the public. It also provides structures to arrange the efforts needed by different sectors to help with the wider effort and gives academics a framework to think and research within.

This working paper has been written to support the C-19 Foresight Working Group. It aims to inform current and future planning and foresight assumptions relating to long term and complex disasters and emergency events.

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