

THINKING BEYOND "LEARNING FROM" THE CRISIS

While many would have previously already characterised the Global Mobility sphere as “dynamic”, the rate of change since the start of 2020 has been unprecedented. Be it through borders closing at less than a moment’s notice, employees stranded in arbitrary places scrambling for flights home or learning the new digital ways of working. Some webinars have started to focus on “what have we learnt” which can lead to very productive discussions, if we ask the right questions, but what do we consider when we think about “learning from” the coronavirus pandemic crisis? The considerations below aim to broaden the questions we are asking when we think about “what have we learnt?”

Much research has indicated that organisations struggle to find ways to learn productively from crises¹. Adding to that, “learning from” a crisis may not necessarily always be relevant for what may be up next in the future. Consider if you had crisis management plans ready for SARS; to what extent did they inform your actions during the initial stages of the coronavirus pandemic? Did it make a difference to your response to the coronavirus pandemic or did your regular disaster management plans, if there is one, apply in the current situation regardless of its differences in scale or complexities? Similarly, think about what will happen if another event is around the corner that disrupts Global Mobility in a way unlike the coronavirus pandemic, will the plans you make today still stand for another different crisis?

This is not to say that we should not use the current situation to plan for the future, as this may be very productive and important even if your answers to the questions above may well have been consistently “yes”. However, if we only think about learning from crisis situations as a lessons learnt activity for future crises we could miss out on the multi-layered learning process that emerges in times of crisis. This is where it is helpful to expand our view and think about two different foci of learning;

INTER-CRISIS: LEARNING FROM A CRISIS	INTRA-CRISIS: LEARNING THAT OCCURS DURING A CRISIS:
LEARNING FROM A CRISIS FOR FUTURE CRISES ²	LEARNING DURING CRISIS, TO IMPROVE THE IN-CRISIS RESPONSE ³
LEARNING FROM A CRISIS FOR WIDER PURPOSES ⁴	LEARNING IN THROUGH CRISIS ⁵

¹ This insight was taken from Lee, Lampel et al. 2020.

² This insight was taken from Moynihan 2008, Dwyer and Hardy 2016.

³ This insight was taken from Moynihan 2008, Deverell 2009.

⁴ This insight was taken from Christianson, Farkas et al. 2009, Lampel, Shamsie et al. 2009.

⁵ This insight was taken from Antonacopoulou and Sheaffer 2014.

LEARNING THAT OCCURS DURING CRISIS SITUATIONS: LEARNING IN CRISIS

Many blogs, roundtables, webinars and websites have been shared on the topic for Global Mobility Professionals to help each other navigate through the coronavirus pandemic crisis. As for the level of knowledge sharing across the industry, this time has been unparalleled.

Yet depending on what was shared, key information may have been relevant one day, but redundant hours later. I remember sitting at a conference in the Netherlands at the start of March 2020 where we were shocked to hear that within three days the amount of known coronavirus cases had more than doubled. With even greater speed, only days and weeks later, governments around the world shut their borders with varying levels of forewarning. These events are now followed by an increasing flurry of re-openings, closing, re-openings, closing and so on.

Much of the case knowledge you obtained may already be out of date, but what was the wider learning you gained through this situation? This may have related to technical aspects around immigration or income tax compliance issues, but may have also related to the relationships you have with the business, clients or employees directly? In my own institution personal development reviews have been scrapped for the year to free up time, but I would argue that this is one of the most fruitful times to conduct them. From an employee and manager perspective think of the wealth of knowledge and skill that has been developed, what is now possible to achieve and has the company objective changed?

LEARNING FROM A CRISIS: LEARNING FOR WIDER PURPOSES

Similarly, when thinking about what you have learnt from the coronavirus pandemic crisis, drawing lessons in case similar events happen again, but what did you learn that has wider applicability to your company? For example, what do you think of the strength of your relationship with either vendors or employees before the coronavirus pandemic crisis and what light did the coronavirus pandemic crisis shine on this?

Consider the development of your team and the function and do a retrospective **SWOT** analysis:

What were the strengths or weaknesses of the way your team operated? What opportunities opened that you want to keep pursuing?

A full-blown emergency response planning update will likely be an important activity but consider what is important to know when your company gets restructured, merged or changed in other ways.

WHAT IS IMPORTANT FOR GLOBAL MOBILITY PROFESSIONALS TO KNOW IN THE FUTURE?

However, tragic the whole situation has become I hope the categories above will help you structure your reflections and discussions to see the creative and new opportunities that are part of the coronavirus pandemic crisis too.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Johannes is an academic at the University of Warwick whose research in Education Studies focuses on company learning in Global Mobility. In his PhD project he has focused on the learning and knowledge sharing practices of Global Mobility Professionals during the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic. As an educator in Foundation Studies his focus is on training students in critical and reflective learning skills through research and team based projects.

JOHANNES DE KAM

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

UNITED KINGDOM