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Weathering crisis.
Ensuring Media Viability, continuity and resilience.

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With Media Viability around the world already fraying under the combined stresses of digital disruption, authoritarian political regimes, and eroding public trust, news organizations are increasingly fragile. The Covid-19 outbreak in January 2020 showed how exposed news media have become to sudden market disruptions and sparked a global conversation about media resilience. Accurate risk assessment and committed preparation can help strengthen media against threats. DW Akademie's holistic approach to Media Viability identifies common internal practices in news organizations that decrease their financial vulnerability to crises and disasters and outlines a framework for increasing organizational resilience.

A wakeup call for global media

When the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Covid-19 a global pandemic in March 2020, international borders snapped shut, governments ordered their citizens into lockdowns, and businesses in many countries were required to either reduce operations or shut down altogether. Global supply chains and economic activity staggered under the effects of the emergency public health measures. With businesses shuttered and consumers locked in at home, consumer purchasing—and the advertising designed to encourage it—dropped immediately and dramatically worldwide. For news media organizations, it was another sudden, major blow to their viability, coming as it did after 20 years of digital disruption and declining revenues.

Commentators have called the Covid-19 pandemic "unpredictable," and a "surprise." But, in fact, it was neither. Epidemiologists, public health experts, and science journalists had been warning for decades that a devastating pandemic of some as yet unknown but highly transmissible disease was inevitable (Garrett 1994; McKenna 2008; Preston 1999), and governments had war-gamed pandemic scenarios in preparation. Nature itself had fired three full warning shots since the turn of the 21st century: The SARS "outbreak" in 2003, the WHO, declared Swine Flu pandemic in 2009, and the West African Ebola outbreak of 2014–2016. In all of those events, governments in the hardest-hit regions shut borders and ordered localized lockdowns, previewing most of the pandemic responses that caught businesses and economies around the world so completely flat-footed in 2020.

So why, despite being so clearly forewarned, were so many news organizations and other businesses and industries unprepared for a disease outbreak that would sicken employees and customers, break supply chains, and make normal business operations impossible? For news organizations, the irony is particularly acute, given the front row seat journalists had to the business, economic, social, and political impacts caused by the SARS, Swine Flu, and Ebola outbreaks in the communities hardest hit by those diseases years before Covid-19 existed.

The answer is simple: Few news organizations prepare for the very crises and disasters most likely to affect them (Wenger & Quarantelli 1989; Owilla et al. 2021). That means they routinely put at risk their ability to operate when the public needs them most, and their capacity to be strong and viable afterwards. One widely cited study of news organizations in 17 communities in the United States hit by disasters in the 1980s found:

"The majority of these organizations had no disaster plans whatsoever. They had given no consideration to either the physical problems of being directly impacted by a disaster agent, or the
difficulties of controlling and coordinating coverage of a major story in an altered physical and turbulent social environment.

Even in the minority of those outlets that had engaged in prior planning, it was generally of inadequate quality. Often plans only involved brief documents… furthermore, these plans were usually outdated, never exercised, and often could not be located by staff ". (Wenger & Quarantelli 1989)

Although there has been little systematic research of disaster preparedness among news organizations in the decades since the 1980s, what data is available suggests not much has changed. In a 2021 survey, only 53% of senior media executives in Kenya said their news organization had a disaster plan, while another 13% didn't know whether such a plan existed (Owilla et al. 2021).

Media Viability, continuity and resilience during crises and disasters

For news organizations, a crisis or disaster often means that even as the audience's demand for information soars, the resources the news organization has to produce that information shrink or vanish altogether. Advertising revenue plunges as local businesses close and the economy falters. Other revenue sources may dry up as subscribers, donors, and governments redirect funds to more immediate needs or, in the case of conflict or civil unrest, seize the news organization's assets. The media house's facilities and production equipment may be inaccessible, damaged or destroyed. In community-wide disasters, journalists and other key staff will be struggling to protect and provide for their own families and property, exactly when their newsroom most needs them out reporting from the field.

> **❝ You should know your environment and prepare ahead; a crisis should not come as a surprise.**
>
> **Soe Myint, Mizzima, Myanmar**

These challenges can make it difficult for news organizations to maintain what management experts call business "continuity". Continuity refers to an organization's ability to continue in business as usual during disruptive events. For news organizations, it means the steady production and distribution of news and the sales and revenue activities that pay for it.

Additionally, impacts from crisis often play out long-term, if the crisis destroys businesses and infrastructure in the media house's market, creates political instability, or forces an out-migration of population—the news audience. Thus, while

Experiences from Mizzima, Myanmar

Protestors set up barricades during the demonstration against the military coup in Yangon.

Top 5 recommendations for resilience while working under political restrictions

– Prepare for crises, establish clear policies, and have a plan for how to maintain operations.
– Consider whether you are prepared to face the possible consequences of working as a journalist at an independent media outlet in a difficult or hostile political environment.
– Have a financial backup plan, especially for situations like a military coup.
– Be prepared to have all your communication channels blocked—find ways to continue working and bypass the blockage.
– Team up with international organizations before the crisis occurs.

Who?

Founded in India in 1998 by Soe Myint and Thin Thin Aung, who fled to New Delhi after participating in the Burmese movement for democracy. The multimedia news organization Mizzima operated for nearly 15 years as an exile-based media organization. In the wake of democratic reforms in Myanmar, the Mizzima team moved back, and, in 2012, became the first former exile media organization to gain incorporation as a local media entity by registering in Myanmar. Mizzima's goal is to provide high quality news about Myanmar while contributing to freedom of expression and the realization of an inclusive and democratic Myanmar—a country with over 135 ethnic groups. After the military regained power in early 2021 and their offices were shuttered, bank accounts frozen and employees arrested, Mizzima has continued to work underground.

Resilience Strategy

To maintain operations, Mizzima prepared in advance for the possibility of a military coup. They followed a detailed crisis plan, organized hide-outs, established contacts with lawyers, and bypassed the blocking of their programs by using a satellite broker stream. They had a financial emergency plan and teamed up with international organizations to stay afloat after their accounts were frozen. Mizzima discussed their needs with their audience and made sure all employees who continued to work knew and understood their policies, including a commitment that, as journalists, they would continue reporting no matter the situation. Mizzima identified their weak points and began to improve their digital security. Overall, the safety of their staff, freelancers and informants remains the most serious challenge.

"*You should know your environment and prepare ahead; a crisis should not come as a surprise. You should know the political temperature; you should understand what the people (audience) want you to do. You cannot deal with this kind of situation without preparation.*"

Soe Myint, Mizzima, Myanmar

news professionals tend to view the eruption of chaos and danger as a normal occurrence in their work, in fact, in an economically stressed industry, crises have the potential to threaten news organizations' very survival.

Media Viability in a threat-filled world

In an era when media around the world are under growing economic stress, many are also under pressure from authoritarian governments, political instability, and climate change. The combination of these forces puts Media Viability at risk.

So what is Media Viability? It is the ability of media outlets and media landscapes to produce high-quality journalism in a sustainable way. Supporting Media Viability around the world is a primary field of action for DW Akademie, with a particular focus on supporting the viability of small and independent news organizations. Through its work on Media Viability, DW Akademie seeks to encourage the independent perspectives and reliable content necessary for democracy, economic development, and the protection of human rights.

Strengthening Media Viability requires a holistic approach to news organization management. Among the dynamic capabilities required to achieve viable media in the digital age are flexible

business models, audience engagement with the media house and its content, collaborative networks with other news organizations, and strong ties with outside support systems such as donor organizations and international organizations that support human rights. Finally, of course, news organizations must have the capacity to produce high-quality, ethical journalism.

Said another way, media must have the resources—money, time, and expertise—to produce news and information that is balanced, factual, accurate, and serves society in times of need. There are few times when the public's need for factual, accurate information—and governments' need to get such information to the public—is as critical as when a crisis or disaster strikes. Lives depend on it.

But in the 21st century, maintaining Media Viability increasingly means finding ways to harden media organizations against the range of threats they face, and make them more resilient when threats become crises or disasters. Resilience is the ability of a news organization to withstand long-term market disruptions, remain financially strong and continue operating. Equally important, being resilient means anticipating and adapting to the full range of residual risks that inevitably follow in the wake of crises and disasters and can threaten viability on multiple fronts.

What constitutes a threat?

Because of its sudden and near-simultaneous global impact, Covid-19 dramatized the challenges news organizations face during disasters as few previous events have. But pandemic disease is obviously neither the most common, nor the most threatening, of the risks and crises affecting the viability of the world's news organizations.

In many countries, media houses operate under constant pressure from authorities or criminal cartels, with organizational

Experiences from KirkukNow, Iraq, disputed territories

A car bomb attack in Kirkuk.

Top 5 recommendations for resilience when working in a hostile environment

- Study and know the environment you are working in.
- Avoid being labeled.
- Implement objective reporting and gender policies.
- Recruit a diverse and not politically biased team.
- Set aside financial resources and broaden your revenue streams.

Who?

The independent news website KirkukNow operates in a religiously, ethnically, and politically highly diverse region, which is characterized by an environment of permanent violence and threat. Reporters are repeatedly arrested; the media outlet regularly has to deal with charges and court cases; female journalists face harsh conditions when reporting in the field.

Resilience Strategy

To survive in this conservative and fragile context, it is important for KirkukNow's reporting to be unbiased, impartial, and free from any political, ideological, religious and ethnic agenda. To avoid being labeled, the media outlet established a diverse team of journalists. The newsroom policy is to respect ethnic, religious and cultural diversity, and to consistently publish articles which further coexistence in the disputed territories. To reach as many people as possible, KirkukNow publishes in the three main languages of the area—Arabic, Kurdish, and Turkmen—as well as in English, with the aim of promoting coexistence and providing easy access to information.

"*We have a very diverse team. We do not have boundaries for women, for men or for being from a different religious and ethnic background. Like this it is very comfortable for interview partners from different backgrounds to get in contact with us and for journalists to be a freelancer for us.*"

Salam Omer, editor-in-chief, KirkukNow, Iraq

survival and access to resources under severe pressure, and journalists subject to continuous surveillance and threats of imprisonment or violence. Other news organizations struggle to remain viable in countries where wars or other types of violent conflict are raging.
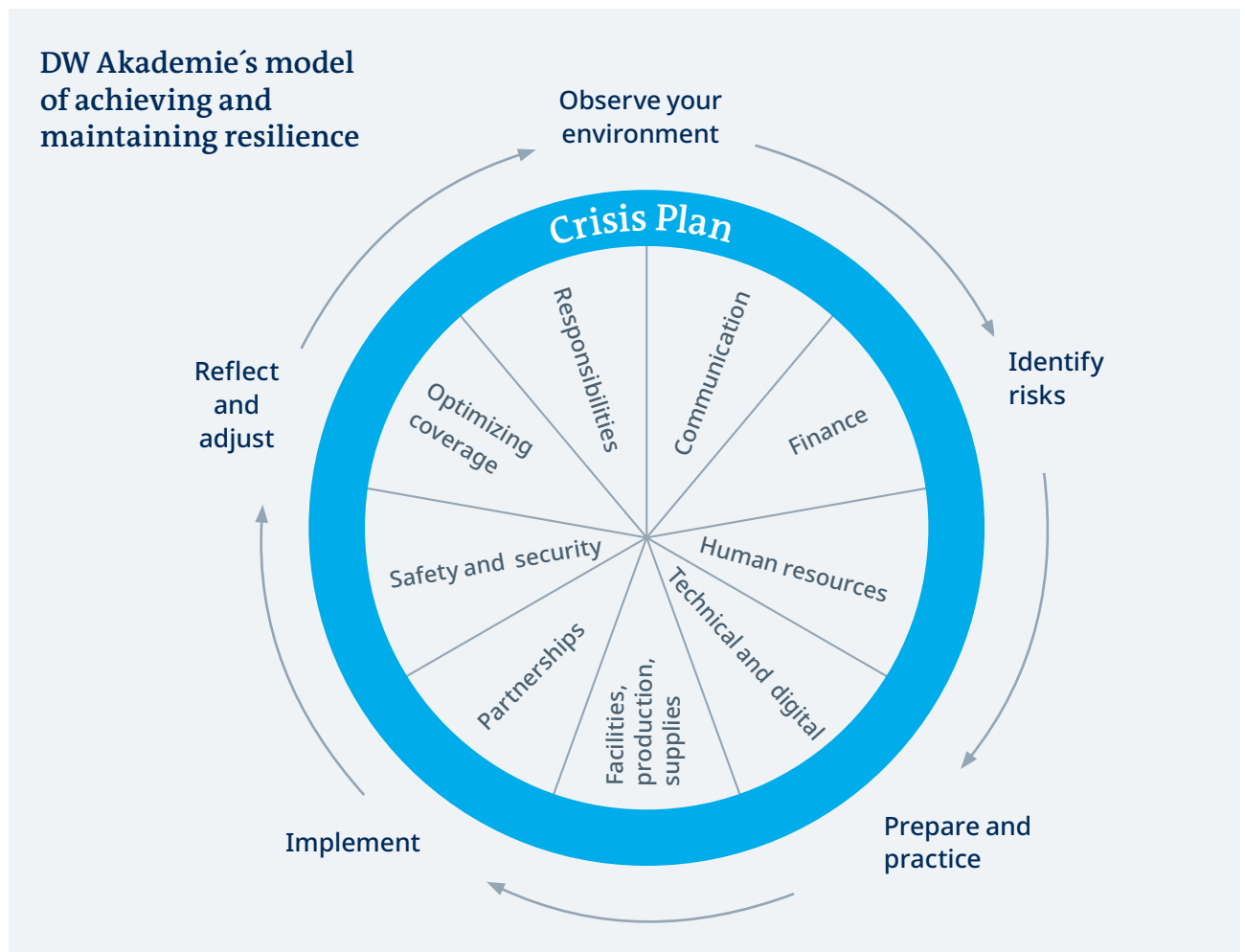
In general, "crises" can be defined as a series of conditions—whether sudden or gradual—that disrupt the economic and political stability of the communities a news organization serves or the news organization itself. Many news organizations operate under nearly impossible political and economic conditions, effectively working in a constant, long-term state of crisis.

A "disaster," in contrast, is a sudden, often unpredicted event caused by either natural or man-made forces that causes physical damage to facilities and infrastructure or loss of life in the community or news organization. Any city might be hit at any moment by a man-made disaster such as a terrorist attack or industrial accident. Around the world, the climate crisis

is dramatically increasing the likelihood that the market almost every news organization serves will be hit by a climate-related disaster in the near future: flooding, wildfires, drought, more powerful and more frequent storms, coastal flooding from sea level rise, to name just a few. Additionally, thousands of news organizations are located in areas with severe and unpredictable geological threats–earthquakes, tsunamis, landslides, volcanos—capable of leveling an entire region.

While most disasters can't be prevented, careful thought, preparation and training make it more likely a news organization will be able to keep its audiences informed during a disaster—and remain viable through the recovery period afterwards.

Some crises and disasters that threaten a news organization's viability may be strictly internal. In the digital era, severe threats to a news organization's financial and journalistic viability can arrive from half a world away via a single careless click—or no click at all. The digital technologies that form the

Approach and core elements to stay viable amid crises.

Experiences from L'Orient le Jour, Lebanon

A drone picture shows the destruction after the explosion at the seaport of Beirut.

Top 5 recommendations for resilience in the face of human-made disasters

– Be transparent with your Board of Directors and funders about the financial situation and ask them to be your allies.
– Keep cash on hand for emergencies.
– Diversify your revenue streams. The more diversified you are, the better off you will be.
– Focus on and support your staff. Remind your staff that what they are doing is unique, important and a form of resistance.
– Show empathy for your audience and take steps to actively help community resilience and recovery through fundraisers and volunteering. That also improves staff morale.

Who?

L'Orient le Jour is a bilingual publication in Beirut, Lebanon. It publishes both print and digital versions and serves both local and diasporic Lebanese audiences. The publication is more than 100 years old and has operated throughout political upheavals, the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990), the Beirut port explosion and, most recently, the devaluation of the Lebanese pound and the resulting economic turmoil.

Resilience Strategy

Resilience requires focusing simultaneously on short-, medium- and long-term challenges. Management focuses first on immediate operational needs: staff housing, transportation, batteries, laptops, and mobile phones. Medium-term issues include engaging the Board of Directors and audience to ensure their continuing support. Long-term priorities include retaining staff by securing their income-levels, security and living conditions.

"Periods of crisis are not the moment to be stingy or reduce our ambitions. Crisis is a time when you have to be aware of costs and cut costs where you can. But it's also a moment when you need to invest."

Michel Helou, executive director, *L'Orient le Jour.*

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backbone of 21st century news production, distribution, and payment make news organizations deeply vulnerable to cyber-attacks. Hacking, ransomware, denial of service attacks, spyware, insecure payment systems, are just a few of the major technological threats to a news organization's finances, operations, staff safety, and public trust. Moreover, digital risks and vulnerabilities are often unknown and constantly changing. Continuous planning, vigilance, and skilled intervention are required to avert digital disasters.

Finally, journalism is an industry where demand for a news organization's products depends heavily on whether audiences and advertisers view the media house—and its journalists—as credible, trusted sources of information. News and information are what economists call "credence goods" and "experience goods" (Reca 2006). Credence goods are products whose quality the consumer has to take on trust. A news consumer can't judge the quality and accuracy of a news story, unless they personally witnessed the events. With experience goods, consumers must pay the full cost of consumption in time and money before they can

know whether they like the news product or whether the news and information they get from the media house is useful to them.

Given these economic characteristics of news products, a news organization's reputation is critical to attracting and keeping audiences because the audience is buying strictly on the basis of trust. Reputation also affects revenue potential in other ways. Advertisers, investors and donors may end their association with a news organization that becomes mired in public controversy to avoid being tarnished by association.

Internal organizational crises that raise questions about the accuracy, honesty, ethics or competence of the media house, its managers or its journalists pose significant reputational and, therefore, financial and other risks. As numerous high-profile media scandals have demonstrated in recent years, few internal misdeeds in the social media era will go unpublicized. In places where news organizations operate under government scrutiny and pressure, an internal crisis may be the only pretext authorities need to shutter a newsroom

Experiences from Times-Picayune/ Advocate, New Orleans

Rescue of a Hurricane evacuee.

Top 5 recommendations for resilience in the face of natural disasters

– Assess the forces your building can withstand—if it won't be safe in some types of likely disasters, identify a safe place where news operations can be moved and have access to that alternative location set up in advance.
– Require your staff to have a plan that they update annually for what they will do to protect their families and their homes, if a natural disaster threatens.
– Know which mobile provider has the best disaster-hardened facilities and require staff to move their mobile accounts to that provider.
– Train staff to be physically prepared for likely natural disasters. They should: Know their vehicle and what it can take. Keep emergency supplies in their cars, including water/dust/smoke-proof bags to protect equipment. Train for local hazards that are likely to follow disasters such as insect, wildlife and pollution hazards.
– Make sure every staff member has paper road maps of the area, and detailed contact lists on laminated paper for key news organization staff and key community leaders and resources.

Who?

The Times-Picayune began publishing in New Orleans, Louisiana, in the United States in 1837. In 2006, the newspaper won the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service for its coverage of Hurricane Katrina, which devastated New Orleans and much of the surrounding region in 2005, killing more than 1,800 people. Volunteers on staff reported from a "hurricane bunker" in the newspapers' offices until forced to evacuate two days after the hurricane when the city's levees failed, and the security situation deteriorated. Experts credit the Times-Picayune's journalists with saving lives during the disaster.

Resilience Strategy

Since 2005, New Orleans and southern Louisiana have experienced numerous disasters, including four major hurricanes in 2020 and 2021 alone. In the years following Katrina, New Orleans' population and advertising revenue shrank, and the newspaper tried multiple viability strategies. Those included building up its digital edition, cutting the number of times per week it distributed a print edition, experimenting with a tabloid product, and cutting production costs through staff reductions and moving to new offices. Eventually the paper was sold twice, most recently in 2019, when it combined with the Advocate, Baton Rouge's daily. Today the New Orleans edition of the paper is the New Orleans Advocate. The new owner is expanding the combined operations with support from a non-profit foundation.

"We are owned by a billionaire who is turning his head on profits for the time being... Unfortunately, there aren't enough billionaires to go around."

Mark Schleifstein, environment reporter, The Times-Picayune/ The New Orleans Advocate

permanently. Avoiding internal crises and mitigating their effects when they happen requires forethought, planning, and preparation.

The effect of being unprepared for crisis

When crises and disasters strike, the impact on news organization finances is often immediate and significant. A representative national media industry survey by DW Akademie and Aga Khan University, based in Nairobi, found 82% of Kenyan news organizations reported a drop in demand for advertising because of Covid-19, with 73% reporting that their overall revenues had fallen during the pandemic (Owilla et al. 2021). For many media already struggling for viability in the age of digital disruption, the costs of being

Experiences from El Faro, El Salvador

A memorial for victims of gender–based violence in El Salvador.

Top 5 recommendations for resilience while working under political pressure and in an environment marred by violence

– Don't fall in love with the ethos and glamour of being in crisis.
– Foster leaders, delegate, and share visibility.
– Make sure the newsroom understands the value of administrative, financial, and legal work within the organization.
– Have clear protocols and communication channels, and care about the members of the team.
– Build a diverse team relevant to your organization in terms of gender, ethnicity, geography, class, and skills.

Who?

El Faro, reportedly the first digital-only outlet in Latin America, operates in a highly complex context in Central America, mainly El Salvador. The region, with a recent history of authoritarianism, revolutions and civil wars, is among the most violent in the world. Civic space is shrinking and journalists are targeted by organized crime groups as well as judges and government representatives. For years, El Faro has experienced security threats, and now it is dealing with government investigations intended to charge it with money laundering and tax evasion.

Resilience Strategy

According to El Faro's Washington correspondent and former editor-in-chief of the digital outlet, José Luis Sanz, though El Faro lives in a permanent crisis context, four major crises can be singled out since it was founded in 1998: a financial crisis, a growth crisis and two internal crises. Stemming from a very clear editorial stance and a potent and visible newsroom, El Faro has developed international networks and strong managerial and administrative areas that have enabled it to not only survive these crises but to learn how to deal with them and be prepared for the next one. The crises made the organization stronger in its identity and resilience.

"For us it is clear that our personal networks are at the service of the project, not of the people. For many years this has kept us alive. It is a mistake to think that this is built on its own: it is built on consistency, credibility."

José Luis Sanz, former editor-in-chief and current Washington correspondent, El Faro, El Salvador

unprepared for such a financial shock have been high. Media managers and journalists around the world have reported pay cuts, pay freezes, pay cuts and layoffs because of Covid-19's financial impact on their news organizations (Owilla et al. 2021; Posetti, Bell, & Brown 2021). A study of the impact of Covid-19 on news organizations in the United States estimated that more than 37,000 American journalists had been laid off during the pandemic (Tracy 2021) and more than 100 local news organizations had failed completely (Hare 2021).

Nor have the negative effects of Covid-19 on Media Viability been limited to finances. A recent DW Akademie report noted that governments around the world have used the pandemic as an excuse to crack down on media freedoms and engage in digital surveillance and shutdowns (Matschke et al. 2021). At the same time, threats and acts of violence against journalists

from both governments and members of the public have risen sharply, as has the arbitrary detainment of journalists by officials.

> **❝ The most important thing about a newspaper is its newsroom, but it is not only its newsroom. It must be understood that the administrative, financial and legal are not accessory. That a stronger team requires people with very diverse skills.**

José Luis Sanz, El Faro, El Salvador

Experiences from Rappler, Philippines

Maria Ressa, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, talks to the media after posting bail.

Top 5 recommendations for resilience when working under intense political pressure

– Prepare for the worst and hope for the best.
– Build a strong international support network.
– Have a clear understanding of where the threats are coming from—and react accordingly.
– Build strong and resilient partnerships with equally courageous local groups that share the same fundamental values.
– Don't lose sight of the vision and the goals; be clear among core leaders what the non-negotiables are.

Who?

Rappler is today's leading and first online-only news website in the Philippines. Rappler stories aim to provide perspective and inspire community engagement. It was founded by four female journalists, who wanted to use the advantages of the internet to encourage smart conversations and action for social change, especially among a young audience. Since 2017, several judicial charges have been filed against Rappler and the organization's perseverance in upholding its right to freedom of expression has gained international attention. One of the co-founders, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Maria Ressa, has been personally targeted by President Duterte and his government since he gained power in 2016. The attacks—online and offline—culminated in 2019 when Maria Ressa was arrested for "cyberlibel" and later found guilty by a court in Manila. That decision is under appeal. Her arrest was perceived as a politically motivated attempt to silence her, as she is an outspoken critic of the current Philippine administration. In 2020, she was charged with cyberlibel again, this time for re-tweeting a screenshot of an article.

Resilience Strategy

Rappler has a diverse strategy that has allowed it to continue operating even in the face of arrest threats, cyberlibel charges, social media attacks, doxxing, and defamation. The media organization's business strategies have evolved over time and adapted to these threats. Rappler has put in place the necessary security measures both online and offline, and it has continued to innovate. It built Sharktank, a database of public Facebook posts and pages, and discovered that the exponential attacks on social media aimed at Rappler originated from an organized propaganda machine of the Duterte administration. Government officials and government accounts were found to be attacking administration critics and were behind the creation of fake accounts to manipulate the public. Nevertheless, Rappler succeeded in establishing a strong bond with its audience in a country with one of the lowest levels of audience trust in news worldwide. This was also fostered by a strong international support network, which has led to expanding global awareness of Maria Ressa's situation.

"Embrace your fear. Shine the light and tell the world. We prioritize three existential battles: truth, climate, health."

Maria Ressa, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, co-founder, and CEO, Rappler, Philippines.

Media Viability, continuity and resilience in crises

In recent years, management researchers have devoted considerable effort to understanding why some industries and organizations are more resilient to crises than others. They've found that an organization's resilience depends on its dynamic capabilities (Şengül, Dilem, & Gün 2019). Dynamic capabilities include the organization's ability to anticipate risks, adapt quickly as conditions change, network effectively to get access to external resources, manage the uncertainty of both internal staff and external stakeholders, and learn quickly as events unfold.

An organization's ability to quickly transform its business model in the face of changing market conditions is one of the most important aspects of resilience (Şengül, Dilem, & Gün 2019). Also important is the ability of the organization to maintain its supply chain, labor supply, product quality and consumer demand for those products, public reputation, revenue streams, and its employees' physical and emotional well-being throughout the crisis (Kumar, 2012).

Specific organizational characteristics are related to stronger dynamic capabilities and, therefore, business continuity and resilience. Businesses in service industries such as the media are generally more resilient to crises and disasters than manufacturing firms (Halkos & Skouloudis 2019). Organizational size plays a role, with large firms being more resilient to sudden external shocks than small and medium-sized firms, while middle-aged firms tend to be more resilient than either very young or older, firmly established companies (Halkos & Skouloudis 2019).

> ❝ **Writing a crisis plan while the crisis is happening is a little bit like trying to put your seatbelt on in the middle of the crash. It's not going to go well.**

Mark R. Weaver, Esq., Communications Counsel, Inc., USA

An organization's internal culture and staff play key roles in the ability to maintain continuity and resilience. The more open and flexible an organization's internal culture and the higher its innovation capacities, the more likely it is to prove resilient. Organizational flexibility and innovativeness are characteristics linked to having younger, more diverse staffs who are highly engaged with their work and committed to the organization (Lengnick-Hall, Beck, & Lengnick-Hall 2011).

Not surprisingly, firms with higher profitability and more resource slack have been found to better weather crises than those with fewer resources (Meyer 1982; Sahebjamnia, Torabi, & Mansouri 2018). Also important, however, is the degree to which an organization is networked with other organizations (Classen et al. 2012; Doerfel, Chewning, & Lai 2013), gaining access to learning and resource-sharing opportunities that contribute to an organization's dynamic capabilities and innovation capacities (Granovetter 1973).

Preparing networks of cooperative relationships with other media firms is particularly critical for news organizations. When offices, broadcast towers, printing presses and servers have been destroyed, shared access to the nearest surviving newsroom is the difference between journalistic continuity and not being there when your audience needs you most. In the face of a government crackdown, having networks ready to help journalists hide and escape may be a matter of life and death. Being able to relocate operations to a ready offshore facility or activate agreements with media in other countries to feed your content back to your audience from over the border, may be the difference between continuing to exist and not.

News media and disaster preparedness

If news organizations are regularly exposed in the course of their reporting to the costs and risks of disasters, why then do so many underestimate the likelihood that some crisis will strike their own organization? And why do so few take steps to protect against those risks?

The answers to the question of why organizations and people underestimate the risks they face and avoid preparing for them are complex. Research shows organizational responses to risks and crises are rooted in economics, human psychology, and organizational culture, including, in the case of news organizations, the professional culture of journalism.

In many newsrooms, economics plays a major role. Organizations struggling to pay salaries have neither the money nor staff to handle detailed disaster planning, preparation, and training. In the absence of an existing crisis, there is uncertainty about whether investing resources in planning and preparation will ever pay off. Few staff are likely to know much about disaster planning, meaning resources must be devoted to staff learning, if the process is to be effective. Technical expertise about even the most obvious threats in the local market is frequently limited or non-existent inside a news organization. If the people with that expertise are journalists back in the newsroom, they may not have the organizational status to get senior managers' attention.

Research on the psychology of risk perception has found it to be complex, varying greatly across individuals. Lay people rarely perceive risks in the same way experts do, so lack of internal expertise about the nature of local threats is likely to produce an underestimation of the organization's risk exposure. Many people also have a strong "optimism bias" or "unwarranted optimism" when assessing risks. Unwarranted optimism is the unconscious and unexamined belief that others might become the victim of some disaster or risk — getting cancer from smoking, for example — but not oneself. The risk perception of individuals, particularly senior management, influences the risk preparedness of the company.

In organizations, other factors come into play. If an organization or team deviates from its own quality or safety standards, and nothing major goes wrong, people stop seeing the carelessness as deviations and start accepting them as the new standards. As shortcuts become normalized, the organization is increasingly unable to accurately assess the risks it is taking. It also is increasingly likely to engage in "groupthink," aggressively silencing anyone who calls attention to the risk of letting safety standards slide (Wilcutt & Bell 2014). The dangers of this "Normalization of Deviance" (Vaughan 1997) were highlighted among risk experts after the U.S. National Aeronautical and Space Administration found it played a critical role in both space shuttle disasters.

Experiences from Aga Khan University, Kenya

Kenyans have to cope with many crises.

Top 5 recommendation for resilience in the face of recurrent crises

– Retain your senior journalists to maintain the quality of news content.
– Buy the basic equipment—such as generators—needed to keep functioning through crises, disruptions and disasters.
– Encourage solidarity among journalists and news organizations; provide support and legal assistance to fellow journalists no matter the size of their organization or their location in the country.
– Train staff on safety and security in different situations and provide them with the necessary equipment (bulletproof helmets and vests, etc.).
– Make sure counseling is available immediately to journalists exposed to traumatic events.

Who?

In recent years, news organizations in Kenya have dealt with multiple crises. In January 2008, post-election ethnic violence left more than 1,000 people dead and around 350,000 displaced. Violence erupted again after the 2017 elections, at least some of which was perpetrated by the police and other authorities. During the last two decades, the country has also experienced a number of terrorist attacks. Moreover, Kenya is host to more than half a million refugees from across Africa, leading to violence in some parts of the country. Most recently, the country was gripped by the worst drought in decades, causing widespread economic devastation and sparking a humanitarian crisis.

Resilience Strategy

Kenyan news organizations have responded to periodic crises and financial uncertainty by focusing on innovation and content excellence. Dubbed Africa's "Silicon Savannah," Kenya has invested heavily in digital infrastructure, creating new opportunities for news production and distribution. Kenya's news industry also has strong ties to the global media development community—a source of both financial support and opportunities for collaboration in terms of media viability. Furthermore, the industry is also able to tap into a vibrant pipeline of journalistic talent and expertise coming out of Kenya's strong university system. Finally, the industry has established several influential professional associations that play an important role in protecting journalists and news organizations.

"You have to look at journalism as a calling, to see it as part of the change you want to see in your country."

Prof. George Nyabuga, Associate Professor and coordinator of the Executive Masters in Media Leadership and Innovation Programme, Aga Khan University, Kenya

A further factor in organizations is that responsibility for risk assessment is often diffused across managers and departments. Studies show that even when a crisis is imminent, managers often wait for someone else to make the expensive decision to shut down operations and activate the company's disaster plan—sometimes with deadly consequences for employees. Even when companies clearly assign responsibilities for disaster preparedness, it's necessary to regularly review and update those preparations. Otherwise, as Wenger and Quarantelli (1989) found, crisis plans will be quickly outdated and forgotten.

Probably even more importantly in news organizations, systematic exposure to stories about crises and disasters desensitizes

people to danger (Grant 2021). In the human brain, the amygdala plays a key role in threat detection, firing into high gear when triggered and generating the fight/flight reaction. But as psychologists who treat phobias have learned, repeated exposure to threats dulls the amygdala's response, numbing people's perception of danger. As a result, the individual—or organization—may stop responding appropriately even when the danger is real.

News organizations cover stories about crises and disasters on a daily basis. That constant exposure, coupled with the "can do" culture of professional journalism, leaves many news professionals with an unrealistic sense of personal and organizational invulnerability. Some media professionals

interviewed for this research said the only threats they saw their organization facing were from declining revenues and audiences. Others responded that crises are stories, not threats.

But others interviewed for this project had a very different perspective. They had watched their news organizations upended by the outbreak of war and the crackdown of governments. They were struggling to produce news as their communities were ravaged by industrial accidents, civil unrest and economic collapse. They told of being blocked and endangered by digital attacks on their systems and spyware on their phones. They described being evacuated again and again, year after year by climate-fueled natural disasters, each time returning yet again to rebuild their newsrooms and their lives.

DW Akademie's framework for building media resilience and viability

DW Akademie's newly developed framework for building media resilience draws upon a variety of sources. Over thirty interviews were conducted with journalists, senior media house managers, and media development experts in 15 countries. They had led their organizations through a wide range of crises, threats, and disasters, or were leaders of professional associations engaged with such issues. Interviewees were asked to share their personal experiences, tips, best practices, and lessons learned. The project also drew upon management research on organizational continuity and resilience, research on the media's role in disaster response, and research on the psychology and communication of risk. Additional information was drawn from conferences, webinars, news stories and books about media experiences covering crises and disasters.

Preparation

The resilience framework focuses heavily on preparation — taking action to harden the news organization before a crisis or disaster begins. News professionals counsel that once journalists find themselves in the midst of crisis and chaos, their ability to continue safely doing their jobs depends on how much forethought they and their managers have invested in preparing for the conditions they face, and whether they have the resources and training they need in the moment.

Preparation begins with a *detailed and realistic annual assessment of all of the potential risks* a news organization might face in the near future, including political and economic risks; civil or social unrest; pandemic risks; natural disasters such as weather, climate or regional geological risks, and man-made disasters. A thorough assessment includes internal risks such

as organizational safety issues, digital security, and the potential for ethical or criminal lapses by managers or staff that pose reputational harm. There is no place for unwarranted optimism in the risk assessment process.

66 Prepare for the worst and hope for the best.

Maria Ressa, Rappler, Philippines

The second step in a media resilience strategy is *disaster planning*. An organization disaster plan includes specific detailed plans for management, finance, human resources, facilities, news coverage, production and distribution, and digital security. Explicit responsibility for preparing, updating, and executing each plan when needed is assigned to specific people, and they are held accountable. As part of the planning process, senior managers develop strong cooperative networks with other news organizations and external stakeholders, and then nourish those networks afterwards.

Disaster planning includes creating a *crisis communication plan*. The first step in crisis communication planning is to appoint and train a small team of people who will develop the organization's specific communication strategy for whatever crisis strikes. A good crisis communications strategy targets the public, other media, internal staff, and key external stakeholders.

A critical aspect of preparation is *identifying, acquiring, and safely storing the emergency equipment and supplies* most necessary to operational continuity and resilience during the types of crises identified during risk assessment. Preparation includes securing the supply chain for mission-critical items and finding alternative suppliers.

Training is a key part of preparation. Recommended training for all staff includes the organization's disaster plans, safety procedures for different types of crises and disasters, and first-aid. First-aid training is important for all staff because journalists are first-responders and news organizations are increasingly targets. Recommended additional training for journalists includes reporting strategies and tips for covering disasters and crises, with emphasis on personal safety and on what research shows about how news coverage affects public safety, government and emergency responses, and community recovery. Finally, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) training is critical for both managers and journalists. Journalists often suffer PTSD from covering crises and disasters, and news managers can unwittingly intensify that trauma, if they are unfamiliar with the problem.

Training is also key to avoiding internal crises: Management and staff training on workplace behavior such as sexual harassment and bullying, professional ethics, conflicts of interest and digital security are a few examples.

Media Resilience Scanner: A digital DW Akademie planning tool

As part of its commitment to supporting Media Viability, DW Akademie has developed the Media Resilience Scanner, a comprehensive online crisis preparation, management, and recovery tool for news organizations. It guides media professionals step by step through the process of realistically evaluating and planning for the risks they face, managing crises as they occur, and assessing and addressing the residual risks to news media viability that follow major disruptions. These include external threats—authoritarian crackdowns, conflict, natural disasters, digital attacks—as well as internal crises.

The Media Resilience Scanner allows media managers and others in charge of crisis preparation and continuity to identify the key measures needed to withstand possible economic and operational shocks to their organizations. By answering key questions about financial management, news operations, human resources, crisis communication and digital security, users can build their own individual crisis plan, including allocating responsibilities and creating deadlines for their staff. At the end, the Scanner generates a customized crisis preparation and management plan as a downloadable PDF.

The Media Resilience Scanner draws upon lessons learned by over 30 media organizations in 15 countries, including El Salvador, Iraq, Kenya, Lebanon, Myanmar, the Philippines and the United States. The contributors had experienced internal and external, conflicts, and natural disasters, and many continue to negotiate those conditions today.

DW Akademie's Media Resilience scanner can be accessed at
https://akademie.dw.com/resilience-scanner/

Managing through a crisis

If a media organization has invested in preparation, then the pieces needed to maintain operational continuity through a crisis will be in place. Management can focus on *activating the existing disaster plans as needed*. News professionals who have weathered disasters stress the importance of putting staff safety first, and of recognizing the need to motivate the team through chaos and exhaustion by focusing on their mission of public service and safety.

The aftermath

News organization resilience requires assessing and addressing the residual risks that follow the initial crisis. These may include government crackdowns, economic downturns, population loss, regional infrastructure collapse, or physical risks, such as violence against journalists or the structural failure of the news organization's office weeks or months after the crisis has seemingly passed. Residual risks include the potential loss of key staff members, if working conditions or local living conditions deteriorate.

Crisis veterans recommend involving staff in the resilience process, setting up employee committees to strategize solutions. Employee involvement is particularly critical for problems directly affecting the staff and their families, such as salary, living and working conditions, and personal safety.

Prepare to weather the storms

The 21st century is an era when threats against the independence and viability of news media are rising around the world, even as the media's economic resources decline. The Covid-19 pandemic made clear the industry's vulnerabilities as news organizations the world over cut salaries, laid off staff and struggled to stay viable. The pandemic, long predicted by experts, also highlighted how difficult it is for organizations to accurately assess their own risk exposure.

In-depth interviews with news professionals who have successfully managed their news organizations through crises and disasters of all kinds shows forethought and effective planning can strengthen Media Viability. Careful risk assessment, planning, preparation and training are the key elements in a strategy that keeps staff safe, the newsroom operating, and the media house in business through the aftermath of disruptive events.

No region of the world, and no news organization, is immune to the potential impacts of climate change, pandemic disease, political instability, digital attack, or internal crises. News managers cannot afford to be either naïve or complacent about their risk exposures. The media's ability to remain strong and independent—and to continue to serve the public through the next crisis, disaster, or pandemic—depends on it.

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