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Plague Year**

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Crisis as a plague on organization: Defoe and A Journal of the Plague Year

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Crisis as a plague on organization: Defoe and *A Journal of the Plague Year*

Introduction

‘it was never to be said of *London* that the living were not able to bury the Dead.’

(Defoe, 1722/ 2003, p. 100)

Is a crisis that can be managed through an organized response a true crisis? What of those crises that exceed the resources required to ‘bury the dead’? Does a plague – a pandemic, an economic depression, an act of terrorism, the effects of climate change – effectively mean the end of management as we know it? In other words, is a crisis a plague on organizational management? Does Defoe help us discern what might be done?

Daniel Defoe’s *A Journal of the Plague Year* (hereinafter *Journal*) is regarded as one of the earliest novels in the English language, part of the naissance of modern literature and therefore of the development of social thought. Published in 1722, it is strangely contemporary. It is not all that it seems. It purports to be a journal; the heading on the first page styles it ‘Memoirs of the Plague’ (*Journal*, p. 3). Indeed, the novel was assumed to be a rather derivative factual report rather than a considerable work of fiction until the 1930s (Schonhorn, 1968). Yet its author was born only five years before the calamitous events of 1665 that are described; he was not the adult narrator, that being ‘H. F.’, a saddler who lived in the parish of St Botolph’s, Aldgate. Defoe was addressing his own contemporary audience of the early 1720s who feared a repetition of the events of 1665 as well as ‘economic collapse’ following the South Bubble scandal of 1720 (Flanders, 1972, p. 337). The novel plays with the boundaries of fact and fiction and in so doing provokes thought on contemporary concerns about the representation and management of crises.

1
2
3 In the light of modern-day pandemics (AIDS, Ebola, SARS and Zika) and
4
5 catastrophes such as Bhopal (1984), 9/11 (2001), the Indian Ocean tsunami (2004), Hurricane
6
7 Katrina (2005) and the Victoria (Australia) bushfires (2009) the *Journal* contributes to
8
9 hermeneutic frameworks appropriate to organizational responses to crises. Read in the light
10
11 of cities now being the prime sites of terror – New York in 2001, London in 2005, Mumbai in
12
13 2008; Paris in 2015, and Brussels in 2016 – it also provides an opportunity to examine the
14
15 interplay between the London of 1665 and the twenty-first century city that presents a
16
17 challenge to our current managerial and organizational capacities. We are approaching the
18
19 age of mega-cities (London is one of them) ([https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-](https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-connections/ng-interactive/2016/mar/24/prepare-for-the-rise-of-the-megacity)
20
21 [connections/ng-interactive/2016/mar/24/prepare-for-the-rise-of-the-megacity](https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-connections/ng-interactive/2016/mar/24/prepare-for-the-rise-of-the-megacity)) and although
22
23 they present advantages such as efficiencies of scale they also present major challenges,
24
25 especially those at the lower end of the wealth scale like Lagos and Karachi with
26
27 infrastructure not always suitable for growth. In a crisis they are more likely to resemble the
28
29 London of the 1720s than of the 2010s.
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34
35 Our judgement of whether a crisis can indeed be managed according to an analysis of
36
37 the *Journal* is informed by an evaluation of the crisis management activities seen in the novel
38
39 with the ‘Success-Failure Continuum’ of Pearson & Clair (1998, p. 68).
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41
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43

44 **Use of fiction in organizational learning**

45
46 It is reasonable to assume that organizations may weather change through adaptation and
47
48 resilience, and certainly resilience is an important factor (Barasa, Mbau & Gilson, 2018).
49

50
51 This assumption however entails another – a continuity of cultural norms and value
52
53 judgements. But what happens when change ‘utterly confounds our notions of what is good
54
55 or great, what is natural or just’ (Gosling, 2017, p. 35). Like Gosling we turn to fiction to
56
57 explore this situation and for the same reasons as Gosling: ‘not because of the lack of
58
59
60

1
2
3 empirical evidence for economic, judicial and governmental disruption ... but because
4 [fiction] exercises a kind of truth-seeking and hermeneutic imagination'. Defoe, like Lear to
5 whom Gosling refers, asks 'what we might legitimately hope at a time when the sense of
6 purpose and meaning that has been bequeathed to us by our culture has collapsed (Lear,
7 2006, p. 104, in Gosling, 2016, p. 37). The *Journal* reveals the struggle to maintain norms,
8 value judgements and structures of evaluation in a situation that no longer makes sense.
9
10 Organization studies increasingly includes the study of fiction to understand real-life
11 phenomena (De Cock, 2010; Rhodes and Brown, 2005; Holley, 2016; Buchanan and
12 Huczynski, 2017; De Cock and Land, 2005; Watt, 2000; Phillips and Knowles, 2012). What
13 Land and Sliwa (2009, p. 350) claim for *Robinson Crusoe* may be claimed for *Journal*.

29 **Definitions of crisis**

30
31 A crisis situation is when usual procedures are not able to handle the situation, experience is
32 lacking and resources are insufficient (Janes, 2010, p. 89). A 'crisis' is an 'extraordinary',
33 'unpredictable' and 'disruptive' event. Some organizational repercussions for failure are
34 obvious, such as loss of reputation, financial loss, or even loss of life.

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39
40 The population of London faced these issues in the plague year in the *Journal*.
41
42 Pearson and Clair (1998, p. 62) provide a definition of organizational crisis which includes
43 that it is a 'low-probability, high-impact situation' where 'critical stakeholders' find it
44 threatening to the 'viability of the organization' as well as 'personally and socially
45 threatening'. There is 'ambiguity in cause, effect and means of resolution'.

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51
52 However, 'low probability' may apply readily to environmental disasters such as a
53 tsunami or an earthquake but less so where human agency is involved. For example, the
54 Bhopal explosion of 1984 was preceded by signs for those who were prepared to read them
55 for some time. Gauges were broken, indicators were faulty and instruments were missing

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2
3 (Weick, 2010) – an accident waiting to happen. Certainly with 40 tons of toxic gas escaping
4
5 and the immediate deaths of 3,800 people followed by many more thousands, ‘high impact’
6
7 (Weick, 1988) cannot be argued with.
8
9

10 Was London’s Great Plague of 1665 ‘low probability’? Not really. There had been
11
12 recent plagues in Amsterdam and Naples (*Journal*, p. 31). There had, moreover, been plagues
13
14 in London throughout the previous three hundred years, ‘recurring with deadly frequency’.
15
16 The plague of 1603 had killed 25,000 people, some 18 per cent of the population (Beaumont,
17
18 2015, p. 99; Schonhorn, 1968, p. 387). London’s ‘preceeding Visitation’ had been in 1656
19
20 (*Journal*, p. 6). The signs of the 1665 plague coming to London were clear from the end of
21
22 1664.
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24
25

26 In the modern age, overwhelming evidence indicates that climate change brought
27
28 about by human activity will increasingly lead to global warming, changes in the atmosphere,
29
30 destruction of habitat, mass extinctions, and reduction in food crop yields and therefore can
31
32 be considered a looming crisis with a human cause, not at all ‘low-probability’. Nevertheless
33
34 greenhouse gas emissions continue to increase (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change,
35
36 2017).
37
38
39

40 Defoe records, obviously not in contemporary language, what Pearson and Clair
41
42 identify as psychological trauma as playing a large part in establishing modes of behaviour
43
44 during a crisis. Victims are psychologically destabilised to such an extent that, as suggested
45
46 by Janoff-Bulman and Freize (1983), ‘they lose their sense of worth and control, seeing
47
48 themselves instead as weak, helpless, and needy’; and two ‘assumptions’ that are ordinarily
49
50 held are challenged: that ‘bad things can’t happen to me’; that ‘doing the right thing will
51
52 yield good things’ (Pearson & Clair, 1998, p. 63). Defoe describes ‘Infected’ and ‘dilirious’
53
54 people who ‘would run to the Pits [...] and throw themselves in, and [...] bury themselves’
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1
2
3 (*Journal*, p. 59) – a shocking resonance with those who jumped out of the World Trade
4 Tower in the 9/11 attack.
5

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7
8 Pearson and Clair's (1998) 'high impact' holds true of the Great Plague of 1665 as the
9 weekly Bills of Mortality show. Contextualising his narrative in the Great Plague of 1665,
10 Defoe's subject matter appears to be solely a pandemic, not applicable to organizational
11 interests. However, Defoe's London is a 'market-place'. His 1722 account of the events of
12 1665 is rooted within social, economic, and psychological aspects of his own contemporary
13 eighteenth-century world, which we also recognise (Flanders, 1972). With an understanding
14 of what endures in human nature (Woolf, 1925), he addresses the elements of the economic
15 depression caused by a disaster: business owners leaving the vicinity, structural
16 unemployment, unequal consequences to rich and poor, alienation, and uncertainty (Flanders,
17 1972). He describes the dilemma of the vulnerable to stay and protect economic interests
18 while risking life, or 'shut up [their] house and flee' (*Journal*, p. 10) – the need to balance the
19 private and the public good, the loss of faith and the maintenance of superstition, and the
20 overriding need for community.
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38 Despite the warnings, management of the plague years was reactive rather than
39 preventative. The expectation that those already in authority can and will lead seems as
40 prevalent now as it was then. We still presume that the people most appropriate to deal with a
41 crisis are the everyday civic or business leaders. Should we then require that competent
42 management skills encompass competence in 'crisis management'? Management of
43 organizations involves dealing with unexpected disruptions to 'normal' operations. However,
44 examining events which can be termed 'crises' shows that significant changes take place in
45 organizations both during and after a crisis. Janes (2010) suggests that the process of
46 practical, real world crisis management takes place in three distinct stages. This seems to be a
47 version of Mitroff's (1988) influential five-stage process. A pre-crisis management stage of
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3 'emergency response' focuses on safety. Pre-planned actions to ensure the safety of
4
5 individuals and property and to 'address the hazard' (such as containing a fire) are set in
6
7 motion. The actual 'crisis management' stage focuses on 'strategic assessment and decision-
8
9 making'. Priorities need to be set, resources allocated, communication established and
10
11 stakeholders managed. The final, post-crisis stage, 'business continuity' focuses on
12
13 'stabilisation and restoration' of the disrupted routine.
14
15

16
17 In assessing the management of such an event, Leonard and Howitt (2010) indicate
18
19 that the important dimensions of crisis management are 'command, coordination and
20
21 communication'. The decision-making aspect includes prioritising resources and deciding
22
23 how to coordinate different governmental actors. Hierarchical structures may change as
24
25 leaders opt to decentralise or delegate authority.
26
27

28
29 In evaluating the effectiveness of crisis management, Pearson and Clair (1998)
30
31 dismiss extreme categories of success/failure and point that it is not uncommon for the
32
33 management of a crisis to result in a complex mixture. They propose a 'Success – Failure
34
35 Continuum' which includes 'midground outcomes' as well as success and failure in a number
36
37 of dimensions such as 'signal detection' 'incident containment' and 'decision making'
38
39 (Pearson & Clair, 1998, p. 68). This insight, and others in current work on the management of
40
41 particular modern-day disasters (Kahn, Barton, & Fellows, 2013; Leonard & Howitt, 2010;
42
43 Takada, 2000; Farazmand, 2007; and Christensen, Johannessen, & Laegreid, 2012) emerge in
44
45 the *Journal*.
46
47

48
49 We now turn to Janes' (2010, p. 89) three stages of 'emergency response', 'crisis
50
51 management', and 'business continuity' for a systematic, chronological approach to the crisis.
52
53 Our headings are The First Phase, The Main Phase and The Final Phase. In The Main Phase
54
55 we consider priorities, allocation of resources, communication and stakeholders. We assess
56
57 the success of the management of the plague using Pearson and Clair's (1998) examples of
58
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1
2
3 crisis management success and failure. The structure of our assessment helps us cope with
4 the chaos of Defoe's *Journal*. The entire novel is one undivided whole which follows a clear
5 time-line, yet jumps from one consideration to another. This meandering reflects H. F.'s
6 mood and the uncontrolled situation. He begins an anecdote then gets side tracked
7 distractions, dramas that he witnesses, and events that he hears about, and pauses at intervals
8 to reflect on the Bills of Mortality and digresses on the good job being done by the municipal
9 authorities despite everything.

21 **The first phase of the plague November 1664 to April 1665**

22
23
24 In this six-month period the plague goes from 'two Men, said to be French-men, died
25 of the Plague in *Long Acre*' (*Journal*, p. 3) to a period of 'great Uneasiness' (*Journal*, p. 6)
26 when the Bills of Mortality are showing fluctuating death tolls. The Bill for the month of
27 January shows the highest number of deaths in a month since the previous plague of 1656. In
28 February, however, the Bills decrease and 'every body began to look upon the Danger as
29 good as over' (*Journal*, p. 6). This is followed by various alarms and 'terrible Apprehensions'
30 (*Journal*, p. 7) but relatively low numbers of deaths. Echoing the belief held by many in the
31 early years of the AIDS pandemic that it affected only the gay community (Herek & Glunt,
32 1988), people (and H. F. includes himself in this) seem to believe that a particular group
33 should be blamed. It was said to have been brought with a consignment of goods originally
34 from the Levant and brought from (the recent enemy) Holland. They cling to the illusion that
35 it is other types of people who are likely to die of the plague rather than themselves – 'it was
36 [...] found that this Frenchman who died [...]' – and they are encouraged to see that deaths
37 occur in another part of the city than their own: '[W]e began to hope, that as it was chiefly
38 among the People at the End of the Town, it might go no further' (*Journal*, p. 7). H. F.
39 makes no mention at all of the intervention of the civic authorities or any kind of leadership
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3 or communication of a civil plan. There is no direction despite the mounting death toll at this
4
5 time and the 'true Account' in the possession of the Government. 'Several Counsels were
6
7 held about Ways to prevent its coming over [...]' (*Journal*, p. 3) but nothing of that seems to
8
9 be communicated to the people. There is no sign of Leonard and Howitt's (2010) command
10
11 or coordination. What is seen, however, is an individualised sensemaking. Unfortunately
12
13 such attempts to simplify a situation usually contribute to its complexity (Weick, 2010).
14
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19 **The main phase of the plague May to end of September 1665**

20
21 The high death tolls begin in May. From abiding hopes that the disease would be
22
23 confined to a few deaths at one end of the city, '[they found that] the Plague was really
24
25 spread every way, and that many died of it every Day' (*Journal*, p. 7). Defoe depicts a great
26
27 bustle of people leaving the city, primarily those who could afford to, that is, 'the richer sort
28
29 of people, especially the Nobility and Gentry', 'people of the better Sort', with the streets full
30
31 of people and 'Waggons and Carts [...] Coaches [...] Men on Horseback' (*Journal*, p. 9). His
32
33 brother leaves with his family, telling H. F. that he has heard that 'the best preparation for the
34
35 Plague was to run away from it' (*Journal*, p. 11). H. F. finds this 'Hurry' very sad, it
36
37 continues all through May and June and even after that. He himself is in a quandary: he
38
39 cannot decide whether to stay or flee, to prioritise his 'Business and Shop' and 'all [his]
40
41 Effects in the World' or 'the Preservation of [his] Life' (*Journal*, p.10). H.F. - after six pages
42
43 of cogitation - decides to stay.
44
45
46
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49 At this point, the 'Emergency Response' stage of crisis management has finally been
50
51 reached, with the safety of people and property very much the focus. We see many features of
52
53 Janes' first stage of 'Emergency response' (2010, p. 90), where personal safety is key, with
54
55 'site evacuation and security' being available to the wealthier members of the population.
56
57 There is still none of Leonard and Howitt's (2010) 'Command and Coordination'. Even the
58
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2
3 'Hurry' (*Journal*, p. 9) is not directed by any authority figure. As Leonard and Howitt (2010)
4
5 observe, authority hierarchies are disrupted in a time of crisis.
6

7
8 At last, 'about June', 'the Lord Mayor of London, and the Court of Aldermen' begin
9
10 to coordinate activities (*Journal*, p. 37). From the first decision made, H. F. rarely fails to
11
12 flatteringly commend them, for his audience in 1722 were aware of the Great Plague of
13
14 Marseilles in the previous year and there were fears of a repetition of 1665 (Schonhorn,
15
16 1968). 'I shall have frequent Occasion to speak of the Prudence of the Magistrates, their
17
18 Charity, their Vigilance for the Poor, and for preserving good Order; furnishing Provisions,
19
20 and the like [...]' (*Journal*, p. 37). An early decision made is for the municipal authorities to
21
22 remain in the city to keep order (*Journal*, p. 177). 'Constables and Church-wardens' are also
23
24 required to stay in the city.
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26
27

28 We now consider themes in The Main Phase.
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33 **Priorities**

34
35 Priorities of management in 'wartime' are not always the same as those of
36
37 'peacetime' (Janes, 2010, p. 92). In London 1665, limiting the progress of the plague is the
38
39 most important priority. Yet the formal 'Orders of my Lord Mayor's' are effective from 1
40
41 July – rather belated considering the first deaths had occurred in November. 'An Act for the
42
43 charitable Relief and ordering of Persons infected with the Plague', passed in the plague of
44
45 1603, is invoked to 'shut up Houses'. H. F. initially says, 'it was with good Success, for [...]
46
47 the Plague ceased in those Streets' (*Journal*, p. 37). Despite the success 'this Part of the
48
49 History of the Plague is very melancholy' (*Journal*, p. 37) with those who are shut up with
50
51 the sick committing 'Violences' to the watchmen who act as their 'Jaylor', even killing 'not
52
53 less than eighteen or twenty of them'. H. F. excuses the law with the pre-Utilitarian ethic that
54
55 'it was a publick Good that justified the private Mischief' (*Journal*, pp. 48 & 52). The
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1
2
3 subversion of the usual hierarchies in a time of crisis, as noted by Leonard and Howitt (2010),
4
5 is again seen here as people make their own strategic decisions. There were families who,
6
7 ‘foreseeing the Approach of the Distemper’, gathered sufficient provisions and shut
8
9 themselves up of their own volition, with some success (*Journal*, pp. 54-5).
10
11

12 An important priority which becomes a leitmotif, is to bury the dead every night
13
14 (*Journal*, p. 23). It is taken up by H. F. as a principle of successful crisis management:
15
16 ‘[N]otwithstanding the infinite Number of People which dy’d’ they were always buried every
17
18 night ‘so that it was never to be said of *London*, that the living were not able to bury the dead’
19
20 (*Journal*, p. 100). Sadly for H. F.’s project of reassuring his contemporary audience the living
21
22 were not always able to bury the dead.
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27

28 *Allocation of Resources*

29
30 In times of crisis ‘strategic assessment and decision-making’ includes the innovative
31
32 allocation of scarce resources (Janes, 2010, p. 90). The first seven of the July Orders of the
33
34 municipal authorities concern the appointing of newly devised types of worker in a sort of
35
36 plague industry. The evacuation of people of ‘the better Sort’ (*Journal*, p. 9) led to
37
38 widespread unemployment among the poor. It also created a workforce to fill posts such as
39
40 ‘Examiners’ to monitor and report the whereabouts of the sick in each parish, pairs of
41
42 ‘Watchmen’ to guard each ‘sick House’ on day and night shifts (*Journal*, p. 39) and of the
43
44 posts of burier.
45
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49 It was also important to ensure that people had enough to eat. The maintenance of the
50
51 price of bread, H. F. says, is unheard of in a plague-stricken city, yet it is achieved in London
52
53 in 1665. The *Journal* shows people working together sharing both money and resources
54
55 (*Journal*, p. 122). “It happened that they had not an equal share of Money (...) he was content
56
57 that what Money they had should all go into one publick Stock, on Condition that whatever
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1
2
3 any one of them could gain more than another, it should, without any grudging, be all added
4
5 to the same publick Stock.” (*Journal*, p.122).
6
7

8 Despite H. F.’s protestations that the crisis is well managed by the authorities, its
9
10 successes seem to derive equally from the suspension of normal hierarchies (Janes, 2010;
11
12 Leonard & Howitt, 2010) and the popular interpretation of the necessary allocation of
13
14 resources.
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19 **Communication**

20
21 Janes (2010, p. 90) advocates the provision of information to achieve awareness, confidence
22
23 and desired outcomes. However, just as in 2005 in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina,
24
25 ‘Under crisis conditions, good information is often in short supply and rumour is freely
26
27 available’ (Janes, 2010, p. 92). Communication reported by H. F. is not confined to what
28
29 might aid management of the crisis within London but extends to the rumours about the city’s
30
31 predicament that spread to overseas trading partners and competitors. The rumours contained
32
33 in Defoe’s leitmotif that in London the living are unable to bury the dead are very difficult to
34
35 scotch. Rumour turns the small group of people carrying one gun and with one horse into a
36
37 large group of armed horsemen (*Journal*, p.76).
38
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42 The clearest communication reported and reproduced by H. F. is the regular Bills of
43
44 Mortality which punctuate his chaotic narrative structure. He uses them as objective measures
45
46 of the progress of the plague – and yet he is unsure whether or not they are true. In May, nine
47
48 out of 53 burials in one parish are recorded as plague victims but further enquiry reveals
49
50 twenty more (*Journal*, p. 8). At the beginning of September, during the ‘worst Days’, H. F.’s
51
52 opinion is that over a thousand a week were buried, yet the Bills claimed fewer (*Journal*, p.
53
54 99).
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2
3 Leonard and Howitt (2010) report that improved communication technologies since
4 the 1980s led to increased centralisation of fire-fighting control but they contend that
5 decentralisation of control has a great deal to recommend it. Comparing with his own
6 contemporary world of the 1720s, Defoe's narrator points out that, 'We had no such thing as
7 printed News Papers in those Days' (*Journal*, p. 3). The only knowledge worth having is
8 what neighbours tell you as everything else becomes difficult to differentiate between
9 anecdotal evidence and fact (*Journal*, p. 161). What is clear in our world is that
10 communication technologies do not secure accurate reporting or protect against vested
11 interests – one need only google 'democracy hacked'.
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26 ***Stakeholder management***

27 Identifying key stakeholder interests influences decisions made and action taken (Janes,
28 2010). Who are the stakeholders in a crisis? The range of stakeholders in the plague indicates
29 the complex of competing interests which are impossible to align to the satisfaction of all.
30 These include victims and their families, those who fear becoming victims, doctors, 'the
31 authorities' (in whatever form), those who fear the next 'outbreak', and those on the
32 periphery whose lives are affected by for example being unable to enter a stricken city to
33 carry out their everyday business. The poor become stakeholders by, as already noted, being
34 given new jobs.
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46 We might also add to the stakeholders those who benefit through opportunistic crime.
47 H. F. sadly reports that after his brother has left London he is in the habit of checking his
48 house, although he would be surprised (it would be 'something wonderful to tell') if anyone
49 would have 'Hearts so hardened in the midst of such a Calamity, as to rob and steal (*Journal*,
50 p. 17). As this is a work of fiction, of course the foreshadowed event does happen. H. F.
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3 meets a group of women leaving his brother's warehouse wearing and carrying hats from his
4
5 stock.
6

7 Defoe also records 'disaster capitalism' (Klein, 2008, p. 6). In the early days of the
8 plague, quacks and astrologers flourish with remedies and promising predictions. However,
9
10 they also faced the risk of exposure and ensuing flight or ruin, as well as the same risks as the
11
12 'patients'. This is evident as the quacks and astrologers rapidly disappear.
13
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15

16
17 More distant beneficiaries of the Plague are the 'the *Flemings*' and the Dutch who are
18
19 able to take advantage of the country's weak trade position during the disaster. They take
20
21 over Britain's overseas markets and buy goods in parts of England which are untouched by
22
23 the plague and sell them in Spain and Italy as their own.
24
25

26 We now turn to the last months of the plague in accordance with Janes' (2010) final
27
28 crisis management stage of 'business continuity' (p. 90).
29
30
31

32 33 **The final days of the plague** 34

35 'The last week in *September*, the plague being come to its crisis, its fury began to
36
37 assuage' (*Journal*, p. 215). Although there was a decrease in deaths, 'the Plague was still at a
38
39 frightful Height' (*Journal*, p. 215). Nevertheless, people threw caution to the wind and 'not
40
41 only went boldly into Company with those who had Tumours and Carbuncles upon them
42
43 (...), but eat and drink with them, nay into their Houses to visit them' (*Journal*, p. 216). This
44
45 recklessness of the people is heavily criticised by H. F. 'The Physicians oppos'd this
46
47 thoughtless Humour of the People with all their Might' (*Journal*, p. 217). He shows great
48
49 frustration at the people's refusal to restrain their behaviour. The general population is clearly
50
51 reverting to 'business as usual': 'they open'd Shops, went about Streets, did Business'
52
53 (*Journal*, p. 218) but the tone of the novel lifts as 'in a short while, Things began to return to
54
55 their own Channel' (*Journal*, p. 219). Jane's (2010, p. 89) 'business as usual' is evident: 'It
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3 must be acknowledg'd that the general Practice of the People was just as it was before, and
4 very little Difference was to be seen' (*Journal*, p. 220). H. F. reports that many claimed the
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6 morals of the people declined, but he is quick to point out that he would not claim so much.
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10 The rules set up in London are described in detail as attempts were made to control
11 the plague. But when London begins to recover, the plague spreads elsewhere. The overall
12 picture we gain of the regulations is that they were neither effective at the height of the
13 plague nor in the immediate aftermath. Poverty continued and yet people became less
14 generous after having survived such an ordeal and concerned themselves with their own and
15 their family's well-being 'after all was over' (*Journal*, p. 221), although need was in many
16 cases greater. As then so now - donations during times of crisis such as hurricanes and
17 tsunamis soon dwindle once the catastrophe is over. The land given over to burial pits was
18 naturally extensive and H. F. recounts how these sites were built on, converted to gardens and
19 cemeteries, and generally put to everyday use. The extent and quantity rule out making any
20 memorial of them. The doctors and clergy who returned having left during the plague now
21 faced abusive accusation notices on their doors. (*Journal*, pp. 224 - 225).
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37 Despite H. F.'s well-intentioned critique of the management of the plague, in Defoe's
38 account the inevitability of the outbreak and its death toll is emphasised. The hand of God is
39 held responsible for the plague and also for deciding to lift the affliction (*Journal*, p. 234).
40 This is used as an explanation for the ineffectiveness of medicine and management and H. F.
41 finishes the novel with various references to the good of God. We return to our opening
42 questions.
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54 **Conclusion**

55 Defoe challenges the very idea of managing a crisis: 'The best Physick against the Plague is
56 to run away from it' (*Journal*, p. 190).
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3 Pearson and Clair (1998, p. 68) offer a tool for assessing levels of success or failure in
4
5 organizational crisis management from the perspectives of various stakeholders. They reject a
6
7 black and white success or failure stance and advocate a continuum which includes 'Failure
8
9 Outcomes', 'Midground Outcomes', and 'Success'. The tool measures criteria in seven
10
11 'Crisis Concerns' which are all relevant to the management of the Great Plague:
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14 'Signal detection.' In the early days of the plague, there is plenty of rumour but no
15
16 indication of the authorities providing direction with an 'Emergency Response' (Janes, 2010,
17
18 p. 90). All the warning signs are ignored. This is a 'Failure Outcome' category.
19
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21 'Incident containment.' Confining the plague to London is never stated as an aim in
22
23 *Journal*. However, as the plague spreads Magistrates seek to restrict contact between the
24
25 London population and incomers from towns that were known to be infected. Again, a
26
27 'Failure Outcome' since 'the crisis escapes beyond the boundaries [...]'.
28
29

30 'Business resumption.' Here is a 'Midground Outcome' with 'Areas of operation
31
32 most affected by crisis are closed temporarily'. Once the danger is confirmed, business
33
34 owners leave London and return when it is over.
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37 'Effects on learning.' This appears to be a 'Failure Outcome', as the 'organization' is
38
39 set to make the same mistakes again. That 1665 was London's last plague of note is due more
40
41 to the Great Fire of 1666 destroying rodents' habitats than to the judgement of any revised
42
43 policies and procedures as a result of lessons learnt.
44
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46 'Effects on reputation.' This may be counted a 'Midground Outcome'. People fear a
47
48 repetition but they do not seem to alter their habits to prevent it. Defoe promotes skilful
49
50 management to encourage his contemporaries but does not make any particular mention of
51
52 their loss of reputation in 1665.
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55 'Resource availability.' This is another 'Midground Outcome' as the 'Organization
56
57 scrambles by on own and others' ad hoc assistance'. Those left jobless by departed employers
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1
2
3 get recruited into new plague-industry jobs. During the crisis, people shared money and
4
5 resources but on their own initiative.
6

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8 'Decision making.' This falls under a 'Failure Outcome' as decisions are 'Slow in
9
10 coming because of the internal conflicts' of the authorities trying to keep the population in
11
12 ignorance for the first few months.
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17 According to Pearson and Clair's (1998) model crisis management in the Great
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19 Plague is shown as mostly in the category of 'Failure Outcomes'. Despite Defoe's wish to
20
21 maintain calm in the face of a possible new plague in the 1720s, the *Journal* presents a
22
23 depressing picture of the human ability to manage a crisis. It shows the poor as unable to
24
25 learn a lesson and avoid contact (*Journal*, p. 201) and criticizes people for not making
26
27 provisions despite plenty of warning (*Journal*, p. 74). The narrator recommends more
28
29 planning, hoarding and preparation (*Journal*, p. 72), but then comments that this would not
30
31 have helped anyway and in general he blames the victims (*Journal*, pp. 99 & 234). Defoe
32
33 shows the errors made by the civic authorities in not being sufficiently aware of the coming
34
35 plague and in persisting with the implementation of regulations that were seen to be
36
37 ineffective.
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42 Viewing the Great Plague of 1665 through Janes' (2010) three-stage crisis
43
44 management process illuminates gaps in some of these models and illustrates some of the
45
46 claims. We would argue in contradistinction to Janes' timeline that Defoe's account of the
47
48 plague demonstrates that establishment and maintenance of priorities, of allocation of
49
50 resources, communication and managing *all* stakeholders are paramount in *all* stages of crisis
51
52 management from the first indications to the re-establishment of 'normal' procedures. Both
53
54 Janes (2010) and Leonard and Howitt (2010) emphasise the importance of 'coordination and
55
56 communication' as overarching interdependencies. In the plague, the effectiveness of the
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3 various levels of coordination including individuals, neighbourhoods, and the civic
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5 authorities are a crucial factor in the management of the crisis. Leonard and Howitt's (2010)
6
7 subversion of usual hierarchies is often seen as individuals are managing the crisis
8
9 themselves.
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12 We may conclude that not only does an analysis of Defoe's *Journal* enrich our
13
14 understanding of selected crisis management models but these models enhance our
15
16 appreciation of the novel and its un-managed crisis. The study illustrates Gosling's 'truth-
17
18 telling and hermeneutic imagination'.
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26 Notes

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28 All quotations from the *Journal* are from the Penguin 2003 edition. They are all 'sic' as to
29
30 spelling, capitalisation, punctuation and italicisation.
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