School management crisis plan: a preemptive mission in schools

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ABSTRACT

School Crisis needs a response. Leaders in schools are not trained crisis managers and to work well and achieve better results in times of crisis, needs planned actions set aside to preempt any eventual crisis in our schools. This study aim at bringing out credible plan activity as a preemptive measure ready to subside any crisis that may erupt in the school environment. Survey research design was used, specifically qualitative approach in bringing out the research findings. A uni-directional question was asked respondents. The question was: “What school crisis management plan to preempt school crisis can you propose to the minister of secondary education in Cameroon?” using purposeful and convenience sampling technique, the respondents (teachers and administrators) were selected from secondary and high schools in Benoue Division in the North Region of Cameroon and also from Secondary and High Schools from Fako Division in the Southwest region of Cameroon. A total number of 120 respondents were sought from the schools. Another category of respondents selected was five executive members of Parents’ Teachers Association from 10 (ten) schools in Fako division, south west region of Cameroon. A total of 50 (fifty) respondents emerged in this category. Findings reveal a combination of ideas ranging from creating an adhoc crisis committee in schools, the training of school leaders in crisis management, the institutionalizing a school crisis management team and the implantation of trained security operatives in the schools. The study recommends that policy makers in government and particularly the ministry of secondary education strategize through school legislation in making sure all schools in Cameroon implant a crisis committee re-enforced with professional security operatives ready to synergize at all times with the crisis committee.

Keywords: school management, crisis, plan

Introduction

It is of necessity to look at school management when there is abnormality. Specifically, during a crisis situation such as when a pupil student or teacher is killed in school, massive malaise of students leading to commotion and disorder in school, a natural disaster hit the school, an epidemic or pandemic like the recent worldwide COVID-19, drug consumption by students and staff, the bokoharam crisis in the far north region and of course the socio-political crisis in the north west and south west regions of Cameroon.

Normally, we cannot manage a school as usual when crisis hit. School leaders need special moves to handle schools when there is crisis; it will not be business as usual. “Crisis situations disrupt routinized patterns, create an atmosphere of ambiguity, and cause leadership uncertainty” (Scott Morris, 2017). Due to the fact that school leaders are not trained to handle school crisis, leaders inadvertently misstep in their crisis response hence complicating the situation and prolonging the recovery. In a Ph.D research titled: “Leading during a crisis: Are school leaders prepared?” the research student Carol Young wondered aloud if school leaders have perfect knowledge of running schools in times of crisis and propose special training for school administrators through in service training and also through pre-service training for school leaders appointed and lack the required crisis management skills.

In another outing in this domain, Lori, L. (2010) in the University of San Diego writes on: “Choices for school administration when crisis hits”. Lori, says school leaders carry great responsibility when a crisis occurs. Understanding the significance and use of school crisis teams is virtually important and often unknowing overlooked.
Literature Review

Lynn, W. (2007), discusses the concept of “frames” which refers to the different perspectives that help the leadership of an organization in times of crisis. She titled it as: “the four lenses that give a leader insight to a crisis”. They include: strategic design, organizational politics, Human resource management practices and organizational culture.

In her diagrammatic representation, it appears as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framing</th>
<th>Crisis Management Action</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic design</td>
<td>- Resolve crisis by returning organization to a steady state</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Craft future strategic plans to build resilience</td>
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<td>- Develop new strengths to compensate for weaknesses exposed during the crisis</td>
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<td>- Implement an action plan to address the concerns of stakeholders</td>
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<td>- Shift managerial paradigm to restructure processes and resources</td>
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<td>Organizational Politics</td>
<td>- Map the Organisation’s Politics terrain</td>
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<td>- Determine if the organisation’s Political system is a crisis hazard</td>
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<td>- Identify power brokers and assess their role in the crisis</td>
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<td>- Develop networks of supporters to help manage the crisis</td>
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<td>- Refocus the values of the dominant coalition</td>
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<td>Human Resource Management practices</td>
<td>- Understand the linkage between business crisis and human resource management practices</td>
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<td>- Analyse the capabilities and limitations of the organisation’s human capital</td>
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<td>- Evaluate if there is an imbalance between the organisation’s goals and its employees’ needs.</td>
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<td>- Assess if work practices, labor shortages, or disputes make the organization susceptible to a crisis.</td>
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<td>- Scan external environment for conditions that could threaten the</td>
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</tbody>
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Source: IIPM Intelligence unit publication p.77 (2007)

Figure 1: Four lenses to solve school crisis
organisation’s human resource management needs.  
-Develop training programs that develop crisis leadership competencies

| Organizational Culture | -Develop a culture prepared to manage crisis  
-Remove cultural barriers that contribute to the organizational crisis  
-Craft a mission and symbolic behavior to lead organizational members through the crisis  
-leverage crisis situations to renew organizational culture. |

Table 1: Framing management in terms of the four lenses. Source: IIPM int. unit publ. p.77 (2007)

A model school crisis management plan put up by Virginia Department of education, division of special education and student services in 2002 in their intent and definition of crisis management express intent as "crisis management is a central component of comprehensive school safety. The most important consideration in both crisis management and safe schools efforts is the health, safety and welfare of the students and staff. plan put by Education and student services, Division of special intent and definition of crisis management express of comprehensive school safety. A comprehensive safe schools plan places a strong emphasis on prevention using strategies which range from building design to discipline policies and programs which improve school climate. Regarding definition, crisis management is that part of a school division’s approach to school safety which focuses more narrowly on a time-limited, problem-focused intervention to identify, confront and resolves the crisis, restore equilibrium, and support appropriate adaptive responses.

School Board Policy Statement (Jefferson Country (U.S.A) School Board Policy crisis management planning)

Crisis Management Planning

A. Definitions
1. “Crisis” shall include but not be limited situations involving the death of a student, staff member, or a member of a situation’s immediate family by suicide, substance abuse, illness, or accident. The principals shall have the authority to determine what is a crisis incident and to convene the crisis management team.
2. “Critical incidents” shall include situations involving threats of harm to students, personnel, or facilities. Critical incidents include but are not limited to natural disasters, fire, use of weapons/explosives, and the taking of hostages. Such incidents require an interagency response involving law enforcement and/or emergency agencies.
3. The individual school “crisis management plan” shall be a written plan with explicit intent to protect and sustain life, reduce emotional trauma, assist in emotional recovery from trauma, and minimize personal injury and/or damage to the facility.

B. Crisis management Team
An individual school crisis management team shall be established at each school to meet the demands of crisis incidents.
1. Membership: The crisis team shall consist of an immediately accessible core group who have the knowledge and skills to act in any emergency and shall include the principal, assistant principal, one or more guidance counselors, nurse/clinic attendant, school Psychologist, school social worker, one or more selected teachers, and a person to record events/minutes of meetings. Additionally, the police Department (school resource officer) mental health services, fire department shall be asked to consult with the school team. A roster of team members will be posted in each school administration office.
2. Purposes: The crisis team shall implement and adapt appropriate action from the crisis management plan to address the specific events of the crisis. Roles and responsibilities of team members and consultants will be established in the school’s written crisis management plan.

C. Crisis Management Plan
Each school crisis management plan will include provisions for pre-planning, intervention/Response, and
post-emergency activities, including the establishment or designation of the following:
1. Explicit procedure for each crisis incident.
2. Crisis headquarters and command post outside the school facility in the event evacuation is necessary.
3. Chain of command in the event a key administrator is not available.
4. Spokesperson to the media. This person will be the principal or designee and is responsible for gathering and confirming all pertinent information about the incident and for informing the school division’s public information officer prior to any media release.

D. Crisis Management Inservice
The crisis management plan shall be reviewed annually with the full school staff and shared with all transient staff, nurse/clinic attendants, secretaries, cafeteria staff, custodians, and busdrivers.

It is imperative for schools to provide in service on specific crisis related topics such as substance abuse code violations, neglect and abuse and suicide prevention.

Contextual background (the case of Cameroon)
Amos Fofung on the 14th May 2019 writing for Africa Argument acknowledge the fact that for years now, students and teachers in the Anglophone regions have been prevented from going to school as a result of the deadly socio-political crisis hitting the north-west and south west regions of Cameroon. “Things were not always this way. The streets around Ayaba Hotel used to be flooded with school children at this time of the day, but things have changed since the Anglophone crisis escalated into an armed conflict a couple of years ago. Now, every Monday is a “ghost town” in Cameroon’s two English-speaking region of North-west and south-west. Schools all remain closed for the day. Moreover, education facilities are under a permanent boycott with teachers and students barred from going to class”.

In another outing relief web. Int (2018) posted an article titled “Teachers murdered and schools attacked by rebels in Cameroon”. Developing the story, it emphasise that three teachers were killed in a week and at least 30 schools have been targeted this year (2018) by armed separatists in the country’s English-speaking regions. “A school principal is also missing and at least 30 schools have been the target of violence by separatist rebels” quoted relief web.int.

On the 13th January 2020 a 4eme (Form 3) student (15 years old) at Government High School Nkolbison in Yaounde stab his Mathematics teacher by name Tchakounte Maurice to death during his lesson as the teacher tried sending out the student from his class because of previous acts of disrespect. After attempts of hitting the teacher was not very successful, the student pulled out a weapon which the mates say was a knife and stabbed his Mathematics teacher with. Panic and fear gripped the classroom, students screamed in fright calling the attention of other teachers from their classrooms. In an attempt to rescue the situation, the teacher was quickly transported to the Yaounde Teaching Hospital (CHU) but it was too late. The teacher, NjoniTachakounte Maurice died from the stabbed wounds inflicted on him by his own student.

In yet another scandal on the 29th of March 2019, students and teachers at the Government Bilingual High School Deido Douala were in total consternation following the stabbing to death of Rochman Bleriot a form five student. According to Bruno Ndonwie reporting, students who witnessed the incident recount that on this last day of the second term, a squabble amongst a group of students broke out, the scene suddenly turned violent as some students resisted handing their phones to the bullies who forcefully requested them. Bleriot, the victim, came in to protect his friend and got stabbed by one of the bullies. The victim Bleriot was rushed to the Deido District Hospital where he died soon after.

Evidently, we see school crisis in practice in Cameroon. There is therefore the need for the Cameroonian schools to walk in the buildup of managing school crisis. In recent years the phenomenon has been prominent in our schools. A comprehensive school crisis management plan is received as a prerequisite in the school environment.
Methodology in bringing out findings

This research used survey design were respondents were sorted from secondary and high schools in the Benoue division of the North Region and Fako Division in the South-west Region of Cameroon. Purposive and Convenience sampling technique gave a total of 120 respondents (teachers and administrators). To complement the findings 50 (fifty) respondents were sort from five executive members of parents teachers association (P.T.A) of 10 schools in Fako-Division, south west region of Cameroon.

Qualitative Uni-directional question was used to come out with the findings of this study. The question was “what school crisis management plan to preempt school crisis can you propose to the Minister of Secondary Education in Cameroon”.

Objective of the study

The Objective of this study was to bring out useful information regarding school crisis management and extending to “school crisis management plan” as a preemptive mechanism to protect or prevent any crisis in the school environment.

Findings and discussions

Content analysis was used to analyse the responses from the respondents.

Findings from teaching and administrative respondents from schools in the Benuoe division of the North region of Cameroon on the qualitative Uni-directional question titled: “what school crisis management plan to preempt school crisis can you propose to the minister of secondary education in Cameroon”?

The respondents from the schools in the north of Cameroon saw the topic of school crisis management as realistic in the contemporary school system in Cameroon. Majority of their responses centered on variables that all mean the same thing like “putting in place a committee to watch over the school”, “organizing a monitoring group of teachers”, “putting in place a team constituting representative of all personnel of the school”, “forming an adhoc crisis management team of the school”.

Others simply advocated for the use of legislation to the important school crisis management team in all the schools from basic to university institutions. Well trained security operatives to synergize with crisis committee were another proposal from the respondents. Many of the respondents indicated that management of school crisis be included in the curriculum of teacher training institutions.

Findings from teaching and administrative respondents from schools in the Fako division of the south-west region of Cameroon on the qualitative Uni-directional question titled: “What school crisis management plan to preempt school crisis can you propose to the minister of secondary education in Cameroon”?

Many of the respondents from schools in Fako division talked of creating “a special team”, “crisis working group”, “crisis committee”, all similar to responses from respondents in north Cameroon.

Respondents also said school leaders in Cameroon are mostly experienced teachers who are not trained and therefore proposed that when experienced teachers are appointed as school heads they should go through in-service training in school management crisis as well as in-service training in principalship.

Findings from the executive bureau of parents teachers Association (P.T.A) often (10) secondary schools in Fako division, south west region of Cameroon on the quantitativeuni-directional question titled: “What school crisis management plan to preempt school crisis can you propose to the minister of secondary education in Cameroon”?

Parents reacted specially for the interest of their children, teachers and school property. Majority of the executive members called on the creation of vigilante groups made up of community stakeholders. A P.T.A executive member from a school in Limbe said: “Crisis can occur at any time so the vigilante group
must be ready at all times”. The parents were very critical of the laxity in our schools and said there should be a budget head specifically for any crisis committee formed. Some parents talked of a permanent school crisis committee thereby corroborating the responses given by teachers and administrators in the North Region and South west region of Cameroon.

**Discussions of Findings**

“Critical incidents in or involving schools include shootings, stableng, other forms of homicide, terrorist activity, suicide, road traffic accidents, major fires and natural disasters which results or might result in death and/ or serious injury to students and staff. Where crisis management plan exist, they might bebased on “common sense” or clinical judgment” (Wilson, M. and Keith, T. 200); Owaduge, S.(2005) in his work titled: “Crisis management in secondary school: the role of stakeholders” brought out in his introductory statement that crisis is part of life and that there is simply no setting away from this fact. As a school administration, as a human being you can be that sure to face crisis. According to Owaduge (2005), no leadership model exists that totally eliminate disagreements or clash that comes from crisis.

William, A., and Cheantel, M.(2006). Wrote on: “An Analysis of Secondary Schools’ crisis management preparedness; National Implication”. In their presentation, they said failure to prepare for a crisis situation lead to failure to effectively manage the immediate response. According to them, crisis management is a continuous process in which all phases of the plan are being reviewed and revised. Good plans are never finished they said. They can always be updated based on experience, research, and changing vulnerabilities (Kennedy, 2004).

According to Fullen (1991), “There are at least two major purposes to schooling” These purposes include facilitating the development of both cognitive/academic and personal/social skills. Crisis situations have the ability to interfere with both of these goals (Cowen and Hightower, 1986). Crisis intervention is not only in line with the purposes of schooling, but is essential to continued learning (Brock, Sandoval, and Lewis, 1986, p.xi) Experience has shown that a crisis may occur at any time and strike with varying degrees of severity. In the event of a crisis situation, calm, responsible personnel and reactions are essential to the effective management of the emergency (Decker, 1997,p.3)

For the interest of a school, it is imperative for the management of the school to always be proactive and put in place a body that will always be at standing to handle a school crisis. Such a body could be titled “crisis management Team”. According to the Jefferson country school board policy, the purpose of crisis management team shall be to implement and adapt appropriate action from the crisis management plan to address the specific event of the crisis.

Several tragic school violence incidents have occurred in Cameroon schools particularly the secondary school sector and it will serve a great deal if the policy makers start thinking out of the box. Legislation in crisis management teams and plans has to be inserted in our educational policy documents. Same scenario have occurred in the United States in the 1990’s and sent Americans in a search for answers as to why these events occurred, how to better manage such incidents which are unpreventable (Trump, 2000, p.1). In acknowledging this, schools are faced with the urgency to prepare, plan, and evaluate their state of readiness to effectively manage a crisis situation.

**Conclusion**

School crisis management and school crisis management plan are new concepts in Education in Cameroon. Evidently, it is imperative to review this domain in our school system as crisis in our schools specifically secondary schools are recurrent. William, A. and Cheantel, M. (2006), wrote: failure to prepare for a crisis situation leads to failure to effectively manage the unpredictability of such situations requiring immediate response.
Recommendations

1. Legislation regarding schools in Cameroon be revisited and school crisis management be part and parcel of the legal framework of Cameroon school system.

2. Well trained school administrators be posted in schools. However, if not trained in the domain of school crisis management, in-service should be a regular practice when appointments of school leaders are made.

3. Security operatives implanted in schools must synergize with crisis management teams for better results when crisis hit.

4. Policy makers should place a budget head to take care of school crisis management teams. It will be of interest if school crisis management team are mobilized and motivated to produce better results in times of crisis.

5. School crisis management course be structured with a well-defined syllabus and introduced in all schools of pedagogy. Also, regular seminars be organized in schools on school crisis so as to implant useful information in the minds of our school personnel.

6. Parents teachers Association meetings have to intervene in the sense that during such meetings parents have to be reminded that some crisis in schools are caused by children who are not well handled by parents. Reminding them that the school cannot do the magic without the effort of home upbringing. That parents informally must continue to educate their children especially on the part of moral uprightness.

References


10. Africa Argument, 2019

11. Relief web.int, 2008