IN PLACE OF FEAR:
MANAGING ANXIETY AND PROMOTING ENGAGEMENT AMONG EMPLOYEES AMID CRISIS IN THE PHILIPPINE SETTING.
In normal times, we used to plan certain details of our activity. We anticipate future events; we try mapping out all possible outcomes and by all means try to prepare for them. Planning gives us security because it gives us a sense of command over uncertainty. But what happens when the “not-so-normal” times happen, that is, a crisis erupts? What would we do if we see our daily routines suddenly paused, offices closed, business operations halted and economic activities in a standstill? In such situations, planning becomes more important, but it must take on an expanded dimension.

In times of crisis, fear is heightened - the fear of losing jobs, of bankruptcy, to name a few. To be anxious is only natural; but succumbing to it is not. Therefore, the new dimension that planning must take into account is fear. Fear ought to be controlled in the midst of crisis; and there is a way to manage corporate anxiety.

In place of fear is the unbiased understanding of the people’s behaviors and attitudes during a crisis.

In place of fear is a clear and structured approach in formulating solutions that enhance, rather than disrupt, the status quo.

In place of fear is consultation, consensus and compassion to the organization’s members.

**Introduction**
The first step towards managing crisis anxiety is to understand the psychology and behavior behind it. To do so, we must look at human activity in terms of flow.

The principle of flow state essentially states that for one to achieve optimal performance, an activity must have a good balance between its perceived challenges and his own perceived skills (Csikszentmihályi, 1990). If the challenge is too difficult, the activity will make the person anxious. On the other hand, if the activity is too easy, then the person will feel bored.

Seeing human behavior in this way sheds light into the reason why we feel anxious in times of crisis. The flow state shows that we experience anxiety because the uncertainty brought by the crisis presents a level of challenge that is greater than our perceived skills. To ease this anxiety, the gap between the challenge and skill needs to be bridged.
Now, since the person’s behavior and attitudes follow the flow principle, then the right approach towards dealing with anxiety and crisis must likewise follow the flow principle. This means that when dealing with the crisis, there must be a balance between crisis planning and crisis action.

What happens when there is no balance between planning and acting? If there is too much planning but less acting, it may lead to burnout, neglect or what people often call “analysis paralysis”. On the other hand, if there is too much acting but less planning, the response to the crisis will be directionless and will only heighten the anxieties further.

Seeing the psychology of crisis management in this way has an important implication: this means that in times of crisis, leaders must aim for stability, rather than novelty. In other words, safety first is the best strategy in dealing with a crisis. This can be achieved by having a clear path towards coping with the difficulty - that is, a clear objective, approach and feedback that is satisfactory to everyone.
Managing a crisis requires more than just stop-gap solutions. It requires a fundamental change of approaches that is planned and measured. In other words, a leader needs to spearhead a planned change.

**Planned change** is the systematic approach of bridging the gap between the status quo order ("what is") and the aspired new order ("what we ought to be") (Lewin, 1951). Therefore, planned change is about upgrading the status quo and not totally abandoning it. In other words, planned change is not a disruption, but an upgraded continuity.

Thus, to change, you don’t need to do away with the processes and technologies that you currently have. On the contrary, you need to use them as a jump-off point towards the new order that you are aiming for. In other words, your current tools are your edge of technology, leading you to the next move forward. This means that changing is not about following the so-called “best practices” but is about understanding and taking advantage of the resources and capabilities you currently have. In simpler terms, there is no such thing as “the best” universal approach to change; your approach to change depends mainly on your current tools and how it can be continuously evolved and adapted to the current situation.

Being a gradual process, change has phases. The three phases of change are: (1) change realization, (2) consensus building and (3) consolidation. Change realization is the identification of the gap between “what is” and “what ought to be” and the setting of goals. Consensus building involves bringing the members into this chosen direction. Consolidation is the implementation of the chosen change approach. These phases, if followed, would lead to continuous growth towards the aspired new order. Otherwise, if neglected, the system would descend to a gradual decline.

The key towards maximizing the impact of planned change is the continuous iteration and improvement of the change phases. This means consistent monitoring and evaluation of the approach’s implementation. In other words, there has to be a regular momentum audit. In these audits, it is not just the implementation’s progress that matters; more importantly, it is the impact of the approach that counts. Thus, both the approach’s progress and impact must be assessed; and this should be done constantly. In short, constant act-and-assess strategy is the driver of planned change.
The Twelve Steps of Planned Change During Crisis

To implement planned change on an organization in times of crisis, it is essential to follow these twelve steps. These steps are grouped according to the change phase they pertain to.

### Phase 1: Change Realization

#### Understand Your Team

Invite your team members to have a casual talk on your work dynamics. Ask yourselves and your team members:

- a. What works best?
- b. What challenges did your team encounter?
- c. How the crisis would affect the work dynamic?

#### Define Your Goal: Stability

Recognizing how the crisis will affect you, next is define what your goal and priorities are for the team. Be realistic with your goals. In times of crisis, it is best to just aim for stability rather than novelty.

#### Identify the Existing Sources to Use

Go back to what currently works best for your team. Is that a skill? Or a technology? Or a process? Whatever it is, think of a way to take advantage of it.
Phase 2: Consensus Building

4 Listen First
Before you talk about the organization’s goal, listen to your employee’s own goals first. Remember: your employees have their own personal goals too; and these are personalized even further because of the crisis.

5 Be Human
Don’t just listen to your team members. Be genuinely concerned about them. Reach out to them. Personally ask them how they are. Make them feel that they are not alone, that you are one with them.

6 Lower the Barriers
Create a safe space where everyone, regardless of his position, can contribute equally to the solution.

7 Use the Power of Persuasion, Not of Position
Don’t impose your approach on your team. Explain to the team your goal and priorities. Proactively solicit their thoughts. Refine your goal based on their thoughts.

8 Agree on an Approach and Timeline
Consult your team members on the approaches that you would take for each of the priorities you agreed on. Then set a clear timeline for it. To set the timeline, you may divide it into three time frames:

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<td>REGROUP</td>
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<td>(preparation, stabilization)</td>
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<td>CONTINUE</td>
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9 Assign The Persons Accountable To Each Approach
Just like in number 7, when assigning, don’t just impose. Consult your team members first whether they are capable of doing the approach that you’re about to assign to them.

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<tr>
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Phase 3: Consolidation

10 Implement Right Away

In crisis, decisiveness is crucial. Thus, act on the approaches you decided right away. Don’t seek perfection. No policy is perfect. Always remember that you can fine-tune your approaches along the way, depending on circumstances.

11 Set a Continuous Feedback Mechanism

Together with your team members, regularly monitor and assess your approaches. Ask your team these three questions:

a. How are the approaches progressing?
b. Are we making an impact on our objective?
c. How else can we make / improve our impact?

12 Be Cautiously Optimistic

Think positive, but be reasonable. Beware of fake optimism. Genuine optimism is grounded on facts, fake optimism is not. Always equip yourself and your team with factual information to keep yourself grounded on reality - that is, research even more.
In a Nutshell: The Six Guiding Principles

**At Work**

1. **Plan Out Your Alternative Work Arrangement**
   Prepare a back-up plan on work arrangement such as task assignments, tasks to do, work-from-home set-ups.

2. **Prioritize**
   Identify which of your team’s activities and projects are urgent and which can be shelved temporarily while dealing with the crisis.

**The Workforce**

1. **Consult Your Employees**
   Devise strategies that would best support your employees during the crisis. But in doing so, always make sure to communicate and consult them.

2. **Be Human**
   Revisit the employee policies that may be deemed difficult to follow during the crisis. Extend some consideration by putting temporary measures that would make the implementation of the policies less stringent. Remember to be clear.

**The Workplace**

1. **Comply To The Company Safety Protocols And Policies**
   Devise strategies that would best support your employees during the crisis. But in doing so, always make sure to communicate and consult them.

2. **Be Informed**
   Keep your company updated on the latest news about the crisis. Ensure that you have access to accurate, timely and appropriate sources of information.

If you have questions or want more information, please email dae@fourthwallglobal.com
SHAPING THE NEW NORMAL:

QUICK DECISION-MAKING TOOLS FOR ACHIEVING IMPACT AMIDST CRISIS
In times of crisis, it is easy to overemphasize the need to act quickly - to achieve some progress. We are prepared to believe that acting quickly means being decisive, that progressing is a sign of being in control of the situation. As a result, we tend to overlook the need for a definite direction, a concreteness of purpose - in other words, impact.

But in times of crisis, the action’s depth is more important than the action’s scope. Quality of actions is more important than quantity of actions. In other words, making an impact is more important than making progress. Therefore, in prioritizing and deciding our next moves forward, we need to assess our approach in terms of impact and practicality.

One way to do this is by using the impact-feasibility matrix.

This tool has two parameters: (1) impact and (2) feasibility.

Impact is the level of effect that the action brings to the main objective. Feasibility refers to how easy or difficult the action can be implemented given the resources and tools available. In other words, impact is objective-based while feasibility is resource-based.

When using this grid, one should start with understanding the impact first and then the feasibility in that order. Between the two, therefore, it is the impact that needs to be prioritized. Actions that have enough resources but no impact to the objective must then be immediately discarded.
These two key parameters result in four priority fields, each according to level of impact and feasibility:

1. **High Impact, High Feasibility**
   These are actions that are highly important to your goal and are doable with the available resources. These must be done now.

2. **High Impact, Low Feasibility**
   These are actions that are highly relevant to your goals but are more difficult to do given your resources and tools. These actions must be shelved during the crisis recovery and/or after the crisis.

3. **Low Impact, High Feasibility**
   These are actions that are easy to do but have little to low relevance to your objectives. These activities must be set as tasks.

4. **Low Impact, Low Feasibility**
   These are actions that would need a lot of resources but have minimal effect to your goals. These actions must be forgotten and can be revisited after the crisis.
Once you have identified which actions have impact and, thus, must be prioritized, the next step is to break them up into different actionable steps and map them over time. To set the actions’ respective timeframe, we need to use the crisis cone. In this tool, we map the priority actions in terms of the certainty and amount of information available about that action.

Actions which have greater certainty or have more information are more urgent, and thus, must be done immediately. They must be done within days or within weeks.

Actions with medium level of certainty or medium level of information are slightly urgent and may be accomplished within months.

Actions with the lowest level of certainty with little amount of information available have the lowest level of urgency and must be shelved to be done within a quarter.

Of course, the timeframes set in the crisis cone are not static. Things change; during a crisis, things change more suddenly and unpredictably. A team ought to be flexible in accommodating such drastic turns of events. Thus, the actions’ timeframes need to be constantly reviewed and assessed through momentum audits. In these audits, both the progress and the impact of the actions must be continuously evaluated. But more importantly, the effect of new information, policies and environment on the team’s approach in making impact need to be assessed.