When crisis is opportunity in Chinese organizations

Dr. Mandy Cao
Board member of CHEER Foundation
CEO of CHEER China
Workshop schedule

• Brief introduction of CHEER Foundation
• What kind of crisis have we met? (case study)
• How do we handle it?
• What have we learned from it?
• Open discussions
Organizational structure of CHEER Foundation
Our operations

• Three offices (Amstelveen, Beijing, Shanghai)
• Four intl. programs in four schools (BJ No.8, No.101, WFA, XYZ)
• Over 150 intl. staff/teachers
• Over 3,000 students
What kind of crisis have we met?

• Policy change (cancel American history class)
• Change of personnel (sudden resignation of staff/teachers)
• Operational challenges (change of classrooms, broken of IT equipments, etc.)
• Cultural confrontation (staff/teacher behavior)
Case study – Visa Letters

• All students going on exchange need a visa to enter their host countries

• To apply for the visa they need a visa invitation letter; signed and stamped by their host schools and sent to China via courier

• There is only a short time frame to arrange the visas and it is a crucial part of the planning because it can keep students from travelling
The Crisis

The passports of two exchange students expired within the 6 month period after they would return to China, however they already had a visa.

The visa officers in our Beijing and Shanghai offices mentioned that, based on their previous experience, these two students could fly with their current passport and visa.

However, on the day of departure when they arrived at the airport it turned out this was not the case and they were stopped at customs.

Student A chose to refrain from taking part in the exchange.

Student B chose to fly two days later.
How did we handle it (student B)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Dutch Office</th>
<th>The Beijing Office</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Spoke with the host school</td>
<td>- Spoke with the family of the student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Arranged new airport pick-ups</td>
<td>- Re-booked the student’s flights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Checked regulations about minors travelling alone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Called the three airports the student would</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>travel through about minors travelling alone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Created a parental consent letter for the student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to take with her, explaining she would travel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Western Perspective</th>
<th>Chinese Perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Self-regulated</td>
<td>• Wait for instructions from superiors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Confident in own decisions and solutions</td>
<td>• Re-create original working procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Think outside of the box; what are the necessary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>actions for the new situation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How did we handle it (student A)?

• Refund her 100% fees
• Immediately call her parents
• Go back home with her and talk to the parents
• Faculty Dean came personally to meet the student and parents, expressed sincere apology!
• Offer her priority for the next exchange program
How could this happen?

• Visa officers rely on her previous experiences
• She did not report this either to her manager nor senior management
Three statements for discussions

• Do crisis situation require a different kind of leadership?
• Which servant-leadership qualities are most important in moments of crisis?
• Do these qualities of leadership in crisis vary across cultures?
Open discussion

Do we require a different type of leadership in time of this visa crisis (Which dilemmas do management encounter)?

Individual/group
Rules/exceptions
Long term/short term

.....
Open discussions

• Which four out of the ten characteristics are most relevant in the visa case? (listening, empathy, healing of relationships, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment, building community)
Is crisis an opportunity?

• Yes: ....
  
  What: ...

• No: ....
  
  Why ....
What have we learned from it?

• Effective and timely communication (schools/parents/students)
• Quick decision making (refund/passport/flights)
• Long-Term & Short-Term
• Rules & Exceptions
• Re-examination of internal processes
• Self reflection/review
Open discussion

Do these qualities of leadership in crisis vary across cultures?