

## **EMBRACE THE VIRUS!**

*“Never needed to swim ‘till I fell in” – ‘Open Water’, Jack the Fox*

As the world progresses rapidly towards what now appears to be an inevitable ‘new normal’, the organisations that will fare best have already demonstrated accelerating thinking about approaches to the coronavirus pandemic. While response to ensure containment is critical, we also advocate that *there is no crisis without opportunity*. Here’s five things we know:

### **1. ‘Plans are nothing, planning is everything’ – Dwight D Eisenhower**

This line is in a state government human biosecurity hazard plan: *‘The health system routinely manages minor epidemics... These epidemics and outbreaks are not considered emergencies...’*

This is an unprecedented event. There is no plan or procedure that you can follow verbatim to navigate your organisation’s way out of this. As ‘Ike’ Eisenhower suggests, now is the time for teamwork. This is where highly collaborative planning is more important than the plan itself. Planning develops shared mental models, a common operating picture and provides a mechanism to fuse the unique experiences and ideas of all team members; these are all things that can never be written in a plan.

Think both fast and slow. Fast(er) to immediately ensure staff safety alongside the wide range of advice from our health departments. But slow(er) to subsequently ensure business continuity, reduce liability (both financial and legal) and preserve (or enhance) your image and reputation.

### **2. Plans are merely a common basis for change**

Prepare to be versatile. Great companies demonstrate flexibility (the ability to do a whole heap of different things), agility (being able to transition rapidly between those things) and adaptability. Of these, the latter will be most important; adaptability is the ability to leverage existing skillsets to form the basis for a solution to a novel problem. Adaptability is the only defence against a Black Swan! This is no time to pull plans off the shelf and try to follow them to the letter – instead, we must view them as a start point – a common basis for change.

To be adaptable you must apply contingency thinking and stay open to what the environment is throwing at us – we must guard against confirmation bias and avoid ‘falling in love’ with our plans and ideas. Instead, we should be thinking about branches and sequels and asking ourselves questions like ‘how could this get worse?’ and ‘how would I know I was wrong about this?’ Model against worst-case, mid-case and best-case scenarios.

But correctly contextualise the problem to your organization and stay open to what is actually happening – not what you expect (or hope!) to happen.

### 3. You don't fall to your lowest level of supervision- you rise to your best levels of leadership

Trust is a dividend for any leader. It is slow to build but quick to lose. However, it can be built with rapidity when teams are under stress, anxiety or pressure. Volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) environments offer us an incredible opportunity as leaders. Seize it, step up, lead!

As anyone who has fought through a tough sporting event, worked a difficult problem with a team or completed a specialist course will tell you, shared and common hardship is the best team building activity that we can have.

Apply our best practice **LEAD!** model

- **LEARNING-** This is a unique problem. Understand how it can affect your organisation. Confirm any critical vulnerabilities that exist. Insulate these through planning and stay open to what is actually happening - work to identify and register 'weak signals' and disconfirming evidence.
- **EMPATHY-** Recognise that our people are worried and that will breed pressure. It is also a time where we, as a community, support each other. This is a time for courageous and inspirational leadership, as well as logical management.
- **AUTHENTICITY-** Be your authentic self. Rise to the occasion but don't try to be someone you are not. Without oversharing, do not be afraid to be vulnerable. It is fine for a leader to say they are concerned about this situation; it is not OK for a leader to communicate hopelessness, despair or indecisiveness. Understand the principle of 'emotional contagion'.
- **DELIVERY-** Management happens in your office. Leadership happens outside your office. Give reassurance at all levels of your business. Do more than send emails. Deliver *management by walking around* (MBWA) solutions; or *management by phoning around* (MBPA). Take the metaphoric temperature of staff and their concerns. They will have great ideas, perspectives and opinions that can be fused into planning.

### 4. Empower decentralised execution

The most versatile, agile and adaptive businesses have *centralised intent* – often expressed through purpose statements - **BUT** they resource and empower *decentralised execution*. This is the exclusive domain of high-performance teams.

*Centralised intent/ decentralized execution* will become critical if (or more likely, when) you transition to unsupervised remote work. Be clear with your vision and tasking. Articulate through phased priorities. Focus on explaining the 'why' not the 'how'. Allow subordinates the latitude to decide on the 'how'. But remember – this is not a 'fire and forget' system. Monitor decentralised planning through constant backbriefs and discussions. These serve as the most effective method of confirming that shared mental model and ensuring the enterprise is progressing towards the common goal.

Make remote collaboration tools your daily tools. Use this as a chance to prove decentralised execution alongside virtual collaboration.

For crisis management teams. Your workflow must be effective in a Virtual Crisis Management Environment (VCME), when your team members are dispersed. It is as relevant for COVID-19 as

it is for business as usual (BAU) mode. We are two-thirds more likely to have a critical incident after hours. It's even more likely that some members of the management team will be absent.

Your selection as a member of a crisis management team should never be dependent on geography.

### **5. There is no crisis without opportunity**

Look for the fleeting opportunities that are presenting now. Use this as a vehicle to change thinking, structures and processes. Change can be affected rapidly during critical incidents.

Prepare to recover fastest on the other side of the crisis and meet market demands.

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## **Sink or swim?**

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### **Need More?**

Get in touch with us, including for our information on Virtual Crisis Management Environments (VCME) at [info@mettle.global](mailto:info@mettle.global)

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### **About Us**

Since 2001, Mettle Crisis Leaders have been a specialist crisis and emergency management, business continuity, risk and leadership consultancy. We are recognized market leaders in the delivery of risk and resilience solutions.

Our Partners are ex Special Air Service (SAS) Officers, now armed with MBAs. We understand risk and can correctly contextualise it to the contemporary stressors in your operating environment.

In 2019 we delivered 175 projects in 23 countries. We assist clients to achieve increased resilience, from the Control Room to the Boardroom.

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