



CONTINUITY THROUGH THE PANDEMIC:

LEADERSHIP BEYOND DISRUPTION

ALLISON+
PARTNERS

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, we all moved first to ensure the safety of our people and our families. The next step we face is the challenge that occupies everyone from the C-suite to the world's capitals: how do we ensure our organizations are prepared to survive the pandemic and come through ready to drive recovery? And how do we retain and build our customers' loyalty and trust even as they are distracted by their own personal and business challenges?

The effort begins in each organization with the executive team executing as leaders. To help executives lay the groundwork for continuity, it is essential to have a framework to understand what lies ahead and a clear starting point from which to begin.

BEST-IN-CLASS COMMUNICATIONS DURING COVID-19

- + Tone is critical: Caring, health of stakeholders is most important, informed, deliberate (in decision making), calm, understanding, concern
- + Play the right role: Company leadership needs to play a role, determine what this should be based on the organization's industry and direct role in providing critical services during the crisis, relationship with the broader consumer population, size of employee base, community involvement, etc.
- + CDC, WHO, NHS, etc. is your foundation: Their information should be used as the guiding directive for U.S. organizations – you are not expected to be the experts



CUSTOMERS, DISRUPTION AND THE NEW NORMAL

Even as we adjust to a dynamic environment that seems to change by the hour, as leaders we also need to look ahead to the future. Our nations, companies and peoples have faced major, existential crises before and have persevered, just as we will with this crisis. When we do, companies will return to growth and continue to provide the most value to their key stakeholders.

This crisis will change us all. Your employees, customers and partners are no exception. Their priorities, their businesses and their worldviews will alter the way they see you and the value you offer. They will look to you for leadership. You need to let them know how important they are and how they will benefit from their continued loyalty.

LEADERSHIP IS CRITICAL

Every situation is different, and how business executives lead through this is critical for future success. Companies and executives who lead their businesses and industries are expected to offer clear perspectives while also advocating for those who cannot advocate for themselves. On

top of this, they must focus on finding innovative solutions, establishing a way both to support and to motivate their workforce and overseeing impactful communications.

Communication to all stakeholders must be a corporate priority. Leaders need to be visible, authentic and have a guiding purpose to drive forward their business and the communities in which they live and work. It begins with being focused on your mission, vision and values, then tapping into data and analytics to inform the continuous evolution of corporate actions, behavior and communications in real time. They need to measure their efforts and link to stakeholder feedback, reputation, marketing and sales. And business continuity planning is paramount.

Tone is always important. And in situations like this, when people's lives and well-being are paramount, maintaining an appropriate tone is essential to a leader's credibility. Empathy for all who are affected – in what is said, how it is framed and the means by which it is delivered – all contribute to impress upon stakeholders the degree to which the entire organization is in tune with the challenges ahead.

Keep in mind the role the organization plays in situations like this extend beyond its core charter. The company is a social and economic actor, and it will be judged more than ever on the degree to which it serves as a social contributor beyond its commercial mission.

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change us all.”**

BUSINESS CONTINUITY BEGINS WITH A CYCLE

We know there will be a cyclical evolution of the COVID situation. Understanding where your organization currently sits on that cycle is critical for establishing a foundation for your continuity efforts.

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THE DISRUPTION LIFE CYCLE



- + Disruptions begin with **Shock**, an initial disorientation driven by an escalating stream of events and a lack of reliable information. Companies spend the **Orientation** phase getting their mental feet under them, understanding what they face and starting to formulate a coherent response as events play out. This is a profoundly difficult phase to master, and we provide a series of questions to help guide that process below.
- + You move into the **Command** phase as you take control of your company's day-to-day response and adaptation to the environment. In the case of the Coronavirus pandemic, this phase will outlast the spread of the virus for 4-6 weeks. It will officially end when the rate of new infections drops to zero.
- + The **Recovery** phase is the period during which the actual emergency has passed but your customers are still trying to return to work

and the normal rhythms of a daily life. This will vary based on your organization and your key stakeholders. Some sectors will see this phase go quickly, while others will find it takes far longer. Managing in this phase will be essential to ensure you are prepared for what comes next.

- + A **Bump** in business follows recovery, a brief boom where pent-up demand is released causing a temporary surge in business above pre-crisis levels. Being ready for this bump will challenge all businesses and will require capable communications and operations management and careful coordination of both.
- + Finally, **Equilibrium as "The New Normal"** is when we reach a sustainable level of business. This is not a return to the way things were before, but a new normal requiring agility and an acute ear turned toward all stakeholders to be successful.

LEADING THROUGH AND BEYOND COVID-19

Sustaining business through that cycle and setting up the company to drive momentum in the aftermath demands clear leadership in three key forms:

1. Delivering innovative or improved offerings that will speed your customers' recovery, leave them more prosperous and prepare them to be more resilient
2. Demonstrating you understand why and how their world has changed, and how you are changing to adjust to their new reality
3. Framing a vision of a promising future and a pathway to this future you will forge together

No two organizations are alike, so there is no one-size-fits-all response. The path to a strong recovery starts with a series of questions for you and your team that take on the challenges of immediate continuity, the role communications plays, the use of data and analytics, and sustaining momentum to prepare for the inevitable bump and the return to equilibrium “the new normal.”



ESTABLISHING BUSINESS CONTINUITY

Establishing continuity begins with understanding the business' challenges. The following is a list of questions to help begin to understand the potential impact, as well as opportunities to address.

- + How are conversations shifting around your company and your industry?
- + How has the industry responded?
- + What's the impact to the business?
- + What's the expected impact to sales?
- + What are the geographical area risks?
- + What new tools can you use? How can you collaborate? What are some best practices?
- + How can you engage customers?
- + Should you provide special offers or discounts to maintain and attract customers?
- + How are you now going to launch products?
- + Will your production change? How are you going to communicate this to customers?
- + How the supply chain impacted? Can you distribute products or services?
- + What are your risks for extended travel reductions?
- + What is the recovery time to get back to normal operation?
- + Besides remote working, what else can you do? What technologies and emerging technologies can help make your business and people more resilient?
- + Can you be a part of the greater solution? If not, why not?
- + Have you conducted scenario planning to identify stakeholder needs to identify the right strategy and inform communications?

CREATING A FOUNDATION BASED ON DATA

Many of these questions will quickly require good data to be actionable and effective. Determine this early in the process.

- + What data do you need to make smart decisions, inform your business continuity and, in turn, your communications?
- + What data is already out there and available for you to use?
- + What can you use as a substitute to ensure you are not off the mark in your actions?
- + What other internal groups can you tap for data?
- + Do you need outside help filling in the blanks on data you can't acquire yourself?



COMMUNICATING CONTINUITY

As we assess all the above, stakeholders are waiting to hear from you and will expect regular updates across a range of platforms and channels. Begin framing this right away, using the following questions to lay out how to start.

- + When and where is the appropriate place to insert yourself into the conversation in your industry?
- + How do you communicate how you support your people and demonstrate your commitment to your community?
- + How can your brand demonstrate authenticity and play the right leadership role with the right tone?
- + How should you handle trade show or event disruptions?
- + How do we communicate how we support our people?
- + How do we demonstrate our commitment to our community?
- + Are we a part of the greater solution? If not, why not? How do we prove our continued relevance in a post-virus world?
- + How should we pivot our marketing at each phase of the crisis lifecycle?
- + Since people may avoid going out due to COVID-19, what is our digital channels strategy? Are we seeing an uptick? Where?
- + How do we continue to prove our relevance in a post-virus world?
- + How will our key stakeholders change in the New Normal?

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**Are we part of the
greater solution?**



BUILDING AND SUSTAINING MOMENTUM

Beyond addressing these immediate questions, companies need to focus on building momentum to carry them into and through the Recovery and Bump phases and into the New Normal. The questions above will provide a starting point, and momentum will be key. In addition to the above, start thinking about:

1. Examining all communications and marketing activities and terminate any that are out-of-step with the times.
2. Forming a longer-term plan of action even as you work through the process above.
3. Framing out your communications plan and starting to execute immediately – communications should anticipate action, and doing so will allow you to start getting ahead of the news cycles.
4. Keeping the CEO front-and-center. All stakeholders look for strong leadership.
5. Asking: what should we keep doing that is still worthwhile? What should we stop doing in the wake of COVID-19? And what should we start doing to either enhance our resilience or position ourselves for the world A.C. (After Coronavirus?)

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The company will be judged more than ever on the degree to which it serves as a social contributor beyond its commercial mission.



In times of crisis, leadership is a responsibility. Effective continuity planning, supported by effective communications, is critical.

We know we will come out of this situation, and we have an opportunity as a global community to come out of it stronger. Each organization has an opportunity to play a role in this effort, and the world looks to its institutions for the leadership to give them hope for the soonest possible conclusion to the disruption and a successful recovery thereafter.



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