



LEADING THROUGH CORONA VIRUS

As we are seeing, each day brings a new challenge for us all as citizens let alone as leaders. It is exhausting and exciting dealing with a crisis like this, unprecedented and definitely in the VUCA* space! Here are some tips on how to lead your business through this situation:

Principles: As things develop, we will become more and more reactive. Establish a set of principles about how your business will behave towards all key stakeholders and use these as the basis for all decisions. Do this as early on as possible whilst emotions are not running too high.

Avoid Bureaucracy: Often, in larger businesses, high risk situations attract senior management review. Everyone has to sign off on communications and this creates a vacuum. Assembling a small trusted team and giving them enough leeway to make rapid tactical decisions is critical. Overly managing communications can be damaging when each day brings significant new information to light. Use the clock speed of external events as a guideline for pacing the internal process, rather than starting with the latter as a given. A living digital document can enhance speed by avoiding the rigamarole of issuing and approving multiple documents, and also reduces risk, since it can easily be updated or withdrawn as necessary. Furthermore, distinguishing clearly between facts, hypotheses, and speculations can help in communicating a fuller and more nuanced picture.

Communications: Employees are likely to be exposed to conflicting information and feel anxious or confused about the best course of action. Be sure to communicate policies promptly, clearly, and in a balanced manner. Furthermore, communicate contextual information and the reasoning behind policies so that employees can deepen their own understanding and also take initiative in unanticipated situations, such as employee holidays in a restricted location or how to handle contractors. Be honest and balanced.

Employee needs: Restrictions on travel and congregation will trigger employee needs for access to education, health care, daily provisions and the like. You should anticipate and develop solutions to these and create an information hub where employees can find all the information they need. Many of these needs will be locally specific, requiring a multi-tiered approach to policy making.

Travel: Make sure that travel policies are clear in terms of where employees can travel to, for what reasons, what authorisations are required and when the policy will be reviewed.

Remote work: Be clear on your policies — where they apply, how they will work, and when they will be reviewed. Home working is rare in some geographies, like China for example, and the need for additional explanation should be anticipated. Remember things are going to be different, children may be at home, so consider how can you accommodate this to help your workforce stay productive and stress-free.

Supply-chain stabilisation: Attempt to stabilise supply chains by using safety stocks, alternative sources, and working with suppliers to solve bottlenecks. Where rapid solutions are not possible, co-develop plans, put in place interim solutions, and communicate plans to all relevant stakeholders.

Business tracking and forecasting: It's likely that the crisis will create unpredictable fluctuations. Put in place rapid-reporting cycles so that you can understand how your business is being affected, where mitigation is required, and how quickly operations are recovering. A crisis doesn't imply immunity from performance management, and sooner or later markets will judge which companies managed the challenge most effectively.

Being part of the broader solution: As a corporate citizen you should support others in your supply chain, industry, community, and local government. Consider how your business can contribute, be it in health care, communications, food, or some other domain. Focus on the intersection between acute social needs and your specific capabilities — in other words, live your purpose.

*VUCA was coined by the US Army to describe a situation that is Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous.