



INTERNATIONAL WEBINARS AND LIVE EVENTS

“Crisis, Recovery & Transformation

How to lead through crisis and create positive legacy afterwards”

by Geneva Centre for Security Policy, 27 May 2020

Panellists:

Mr David Horobin, Head, Crisis Management Cluster, GCSP

Mr Patrick Sweet, Co-Director, Geneva Leadership Alliance (GLA)

Mr Peter Cunningham, Co-Director GLA and Head, Leadership Cluster, GCSP

Moderator:

Ms Ingrid Gasquez Gonzalez, Leadership Portfolio Manager, GLA

The Moderator opened the panel by presenting the **three themes** it would deal with: the concept of the new normal and how it affects us; an understanding of where we stand now and what awaits; mindsets and practices for positive approach.

Patrick Sweet characterized the current crisis as representing an **acute strain**, a punctuation point in the continuum. Crisis hits the control side of organizations, including **trust, learning, resilience**. It will define leadership, culture and strategy for the next decade and for all types of organizations, be they international or multinationals, such as the UN, Apple, ICRC or Mercedes-Benz. The **function of leadership** in such crises is to address the organization’s vulnerabilities and use its strengths, in which competence has to marry agility. This is to counter a sharp increase in risk-averseness, particularly with regard to psychological safety such as jobs and health, for there is need to explore and experiment new avenues. Leaders have to look at all these aspects and come up with well-thought of strategies. This requires stamina and courage. Here, **two considerations** are essential. One is to take stock, where do we stand now, where do we want to go, and re-arrange priorities in function of this evaluation. The second is to take decisions in view of the time horizon, identify what is impending, short-term, and differentiate this from the long-term. This necessitates adaptation or innovation of the internal environment, in terms of personnel, competences, styles, organization, strategies.

A question was raised on whether **leadership depends on a vision of the future**. An organization has a defined trajectory or direction. Testing this in a crisis would provide the means to modify the vision and adapt the direction.

David Horobin underlined that to successfully negotiate such a crisis, we need to understand where we are in an ambiguous environment in order to make the team work effectively. **What really constitutes a crisis?** Among the **key, determining elements** are that it is a disruptive event that comes as a surprise, not so much as a black swan for Covid was not unknown, but in terms of its high, global impact which has posed an existential threat to companies, organizations. There is a lack of Standard Operating Procedures or rule book. Leadership has thus to revisit existing **tools and methodologies** such as risk management, business continuity, emergency procedures including legislation. These need also to take into account the different tolerance levels for people and organizations. Work in the **preparedness phase** is vital, such as risk analysis, training, requiring sufficient investment in time and resources. This was not done well enough or applied in relation to Covid. We are currently, in different regions and countries of the world, in **3 different phases** that characterize crises: Alert and Containment (Latin America, Africa); Response (many Western countries); Recovery (S. Korea, Japan). The **first phase** requires attention to staff welfare, emergency measures, evaluation of unfolding scenarios. The **Response phase** ought to include more and better reliable data, identify priorities and strategies, work on different levels and ways of decision-making, and bring in external experts in the various domains. The **Recovery phase** would include



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stabilizing and normalizing the supply chain, identifying new opportunities, self-evaluation and learning from responses of other organizations.

A question referred to the **role of foresight** as a proactive attitude. This is very useful for developing scenarios and possible responses. Learning from **previous crises** is vital. Another was how to address the time **restrictions** in a crisis. Identify the most vulnerable groups; prioritize issues in the time-scale; include the uncertainty factor; speed-up decision making.

Peter Cunningham dealt with the mindsets and practices for **positive legacy**. Leadership has a huge impact on the system as normative responses are not adequate enough. Crisis not only amplifies existing challenges, it also impacts heavily on legacies. There is thus pressure and expectations on leadership, which needs to navigate in challenging circumstances. **Leadership** is a social process and operates between people. It provides three outcomes: Direction, to offer a way forward, protection and a sense of order and predictability to reassure communities; Alignment, which includes horizontal and vertical coordination; and, Commitment, prioritizing collective efforts and success. There is need to move from 'group thinking' to 'collective intelligence'.

A question was what to do if, when the crisis hits, the organization has **the wrong leadership**. There is no 'perfect' in crisis management. One has to make efforts to influence the leadership, create space to act, build tolerance, resilience and continue to support overarching goals. It could also perhaps be that the focus areas and time-frames the leadership is looking into are not the same as of other personnel. Perceptions of right or wrong responses may differ. There is need to dialogue, harmonize. Training is crucial.

The Moderator summarized **three takeaways** of the webinar:

The legacy that crisis leadership has on yourself, others and your organization; The different phases of crisis management and the practices effective in leading crises; Mindsets and shared practices for leading that work in crisis and afterwards into a 'new normal'.