

COVID CRISIS: IMPACTS, LEARNINGS & PERSPECTIVES

Survey conducted from May to September 2019 with 23 EMEA C-suite level managers

Functions: Sales, Human Resources, International Marketing, Internal Communication, Finance, Legal, Operations, Regional Management, General Management

Industries: Asset Management, Banking and Insurance, Construction, Digital Transformation, Energy, Engineering and Design, Information Technology, IT, NGOs, Pharmaceuticals, Real Estate, Retail, Sport and Recreation

“They didn’t know it was impossible, so they did it”

Marc Twain

IMMEDIATE IMPACTS

- **An impact on personal life**
 - An immediate shift to work from home: *“we were catapulted in WFH overnight!”*
 - A huge impact on workload: *“the first weeks were extremely violent; we worked our guts out”*
 - An unprecedented work life integration: *“I’ve never seen so many kids and pets, it’s cool to see the human side of our colleagues’ life”*
- **A transformation in leadership**
 - An increased level of autonomy and responsibility: *“there was no choice but empowerment”*
 - A case for common sense: *“We did it on trust and the desire to do well together rather than on patterns and matrices of responsibility”*
- **A new direction for the business**
 - Priority on securing business continuity, job safety and cash flow: *“the leadership team provided strong guidelines: 1/ spend as little as possible and produce, 2/ save the year, 3/ organize the after-crisis”*
 - An acceleration in decision-making and change processes: *“The context and the case for change was so obvious that we went much faster on the why: no need to convince a lot of people that we need to change”*

KEY LEARNINGS

- **Men and women made the difference**
 - People rose to the challenge: *“employee engagement has exploded”*
 - Managers at the heart of the fire: *“the biggest leadership challenge I’ve been through, there is no playbook”*
 - The emergence of new talents: *“some people revealed themselves”*
 - A strong magnifying effect: *“Hard workers worked even harder, and shirkers even less”*

- **Companies have adapted**
 - From 1:1 to global, communication as the cornerstone of crisis management: “it was critical to nurture communication”
 - Simplification as a survival tool: “We did a lot of things we didn’t know we could do”
 - A vital need of connection, of social and informal interactions: “ad hoc and spontaneity create soul and dream”

PERSPECTIVES

- **In terms of business:**
 - A chance to learn from the crisis that cannot be missed: “It’s like a reset. What do we keep, what do we throw?”
 - A readiness to challenge old perceptions and beliefs: “I was never a big fan, I had it all wrong”
 - An opportunity to reinvent the business (change in jobs, digitalization, simplification and agility development, implementation of hybrid work, evolution of workspaces, streamlining the organization, etc.): “this can be the biggest technology driven organizational change in a century, this is propelling us into the future of the world of work”
 - A necessity to innovate in terms of innovation: “If we really had had a need to invent, to design, to be innovative, it would have been more complicated”
 - A steppingstone to rethink human resources management (hybrid work agreement, management of psychosocial risks, learning and development, social dialogue, newcomers’ onboarding, management of international mobility): “take care of your people, they will take care of the business”
- **In terms of management:**
 - A concrete challenge to restore safety and trust: “we will need to regain people’s trust and bring them back in a positive way, without putting pressure on them”
 - A compelling need to work on alignment. “Dysfunction and misalignment that was inconspicuous in office setting has now clearly surfaced”
 - A new culture of leadership to develop: “We will need to redefine what makes a team a team, the backbone around which you can navigate, a minimum code of conduct, an anchor: what is common? What is necessary?”
 - A growing necessity to closely watch the impact of the crisis on people’s mental health (loss of meaning, lack of emotional connection, need to organize resilience, absence of perspective...): “The teams are exhausted and have experienced a kind of trauma, some are afraid: the crisis and always there and weighs on”