



Adaptive, fact-based and humane

Leadership in the face of COVID-19

Board Leadership Center (India)



Effective crisis management plans, place an emphasis on timely, decisive, well-informed action. While some threats envisaged in these plans are more-easily anticipated, assessed and mitigated, the current COVID-19 health crisis is uniquely challenging in terms of its speed, scope and impact.

That said, amidst the turmoil, it is believed strongly that by demonstrating a composed, agile and humane approach – and faithfully following proven best practices for crisis management – leaders can feel confident in their ability to limit disruption, safeguard employees and continue managing client assets in the troubled days ahead.

Communicate, communicate, communicate

Communication is step one on the journey to successfully managing today's crisis. That may sound trite but amidst the current tumult in the markets, it has never been more true. The COVID-19 story dominates the news in every country and across every channel. Clients and staff need, however, to hear what leadership is doing to manage the impact on their portfolios and their working lives, respectively.

Clients, staff and regulators need to hear from their management regularly

Many investors will no doubt have urgent questions about their investments. As clients turn to their relationship managers and client service teams for guidance, their ability to project an air of calm, as well as being well informed about market conditions and clients' portfolios, will be critical to retaining those assets and protecting value. It's crucial to provide reassurance that the organisation has experienced and effectively managed volatility before and is taking the right steps to stay on course amidst the current headwinds.

Staff will also have urgent questions about working arrangements and many will have fears about the potential for job losses. Authentic, timely and fact-based communication will be the sine qua non to retain their trust and loyalty. Be accessible to employees. Avoid speculation amidst the likely rumours, predictions and social media hysteria. The COVID-19 outbreak is an unusual crisis posing an array of critical uncertainties – don't pour fuel on the bonfire of

speculation. Be honest and simply stick with the facts as you know them today – you will be remembered for how you effectively managed the firm in the face of COVID-19.

Given the recent market gyrations, regulators may also have questions and concerns. Encourage an open dialogue with your regulators; inform them of instances where you are seeing stresses and use that as a platform to explore where they may be able to ameliorate – now or in the future – the impact on client assets.

Surround yourself with your best leaders

Every member of your crisis management team must be able to provide guidance and information that will help to maintain business stability and client confidence. Any weak links in the leadership chain will be ruthlessly exposed through this crisis.



Resiliency plans will need to evolve...

Leaders are working on a daily basis, for example, to ensure that their resiliency plan is functioning as it should, including consideration of risks posed by outages or disruptions affecting critical service providers such as fund accountants and custodians. Resiliency plans also help in maintaining a sharp focus on the well-being and needs of staff.

As the crisis spreads across the globe and more employees begin working remotely, leaders will need to rapidly assess the ability to support 'mass working from home,' e.g. scaling up VPN capacity and modifying data security policies.

...so will 2020 budgets

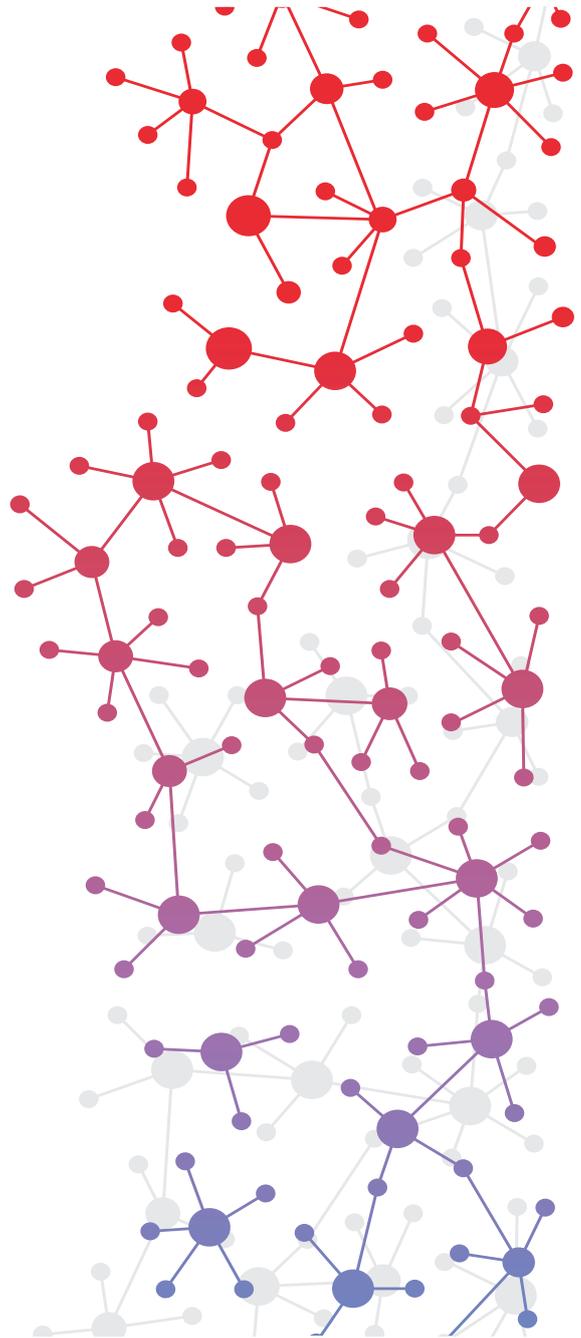
This crisis is a moving target and markets are highly volatile, but leaders need to consider the implications that current – or even lower – market levels will have on their 2020 revenues. Budgets for the remainder of 2020 need to be reviewed. Advice in this regard is simple: Don't hesitate to eliminate all discretionary spending until further notice.

Be a force for good

It is at times like these when we as leaders come to realize just how fortunate we are in terms of the talent that we have at our disposal and the resources we have available to 'do good'. Leaders are urged to use this time to reach out into their communities and find a way to help those less fortunate than ourselves.

To close . . .

The COVID-19 crisis is a truly dreadful situation. Leaders who not only adapt their plans quickly but also communicate in calm, authoritative, sympathetic tones will steer their firms through the crisis and emerge with a renewed vigour and passion for managing their clients' assets.



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