

# CRISIS MANAGEMENT REQUIRES A STRONG PROJECT MANAGEMENT DEALING WITH HIGH UNCERTAINTY

By Peter Odenwälder and Laurence Massat, Partners  
at CYLAD Consulting

April 2020



*Peter Odenwälder*  
Partner



*Laurence Massat*  
Partner

**The COVID-19 crisis in its speed and scale requires swift decisions and actions. Leaders need to navigate through immense uncertainty – socially, culturally and economically, which has never been seen before.**

Although this crisis is of course by far not “just the next project”, 3 principles of efficient project management can help you through these troubled times.

**1/ Switch to “*agile crisis mode*”: Multi-functional, centralized top management core team structured around 4 key work packages :**

- Business continuity respecting safety rules,
- HR impact and people management (e.g., communication, new ways of working remote, human link maintained),
- Financial impact monitoring (cost, cash, revenues forecast ...),
- Crisis exit and re-start preparation.

All of this accompanied by daily monitoring including:

- Reactivity for 360° impact assessment on every news,
- Fast decisions making + communication,
- Drumbeat of the execution plan.

## 2/ Stay **focused, but flexible**: leaders need to deal with uncertainties and ambiguities, now more than ever before

- **'Baseline'**: It is mandatory to switch from one mid-term baseline into two weeks horizon and evolutive scenario mode, which needs to be reconsidered, once critical information changes arise and are validated,
- **Initiative portfolio and targets**: Rigorously prioritize and revisit your current initiative/product/project portfolio based on short term impact, but without jeopardizing mid/long-term value. Avoid massive changes of these priorities, communicate and set feasible targets per initiative,
- **Risk provisions**: Increase where appropriate with regards to financial terms, time horizons and health/safety concerns.

## 3/ Tightly **coordinate all stakeholders** and apply strong communication

- **External stakeholders**: double down on understanding their current needs and special situation/capacities to act, and align them on your own priorities, i.e.,
  - **Customers**: review demand and your distribution / KAM strategy. Communicate accordingly,
  - Ensure critical **suppliers** see you as a top priority,
  - Secure means of **logistics** with your service providers,

- **Internal stakeholders**: empower your team members. i.e., limit required interfaces between teams and ensure capacity to deliver (resources, skills, tools, decision powers),
- **Communication**: ensure congruent messages externally & internally; align on few, but powerful priority channels; create online project spaces for channeling “life data” of progress and new information to team members (and also to stakeholders).

Many companies have reacted already and have installed crisis management teams. The most important guidelines and immediate actions should be out by now, e.g., enabling home office wherever possible, applying rigorous hygiene standards everywhere, banning travel.

Now is the time to tackle the next horizon: this crisis is about months, not weeks as we learned from China. Your leaders, colleagues and employees need to have a perspective for the future, now more important than ever.

**What is your vision** for your teams/company during the upcoming months and for after the crisis? Despite all negative effects, **what are the opportunities** the crisis might have for you? E.g., maintaining remote working alternatives to provide an even better and more flexible workplace for the future. And most importantly: **how will you capture these opportunities** with your teams?

On this journey, CYLAD can be your partner and support your crisis and recovery management. Let us talk about it.

