

# COVID “BLINDNESS” and the PROVERBIAL PENDULUM



We've all heard the phrase, “don't let a good crisis go to waste.” It is equally important that we “don't let a crisis waste the good.”

Short-term thinking is vital when faced with an unpredictable crisis. We learn at an exponentially faster rate during crises and, in most cases, can execute with greater proficiency. Witness many organizations' successful response to the pandemic. Crises also provide great learning opportunities; they produce outcomes and ideas that warrant analysis. Yet we need to consider what we learn within a broader time horizon to determine which of our learnings are relevant and applicable to our organizational visions and long-term goals.

The brilliant and heroic tactics employed during a crisis and the results achieved can lead to dangerous assumptions that risk the future, or they can present excellent opportunities to strengthen the performance, sustainability, and success of our enterprises.



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## **NOT ALL CRISIS MANAGEMENT ACTIONS ARE WORTH PRESERVING WHEN THE IMPOSED CONDITION OR THREAT IS REMOVED**

In the case of the pandemic challenges, we made many changes and adopted new practices and behaviors essential to defeat COVID and sustain our economy. We have seen and applied new technologies enabling our organizations to continue to operate. Some of the technologies, practices, and policy changes may be worth adopting in full or in part, others not. Prudent critique and judgment,

and a long-term perspective are required to determine which are most appropriate to adopt, and to what degree. Short-sighted perspectives, goals, and gratification, often alluring, may over-influence us, leading to greater problems in the future.

For example, many businesses have benefited financially as a result of transitioning to a virtual operation. Canceling business travel, in-person meetings with customers and colleagues, social events, conferences, and other value-added activities has reduced costs and increased margins. Some organizations have been able to sustain and even improve productivity. Citing near term positive results and increased profits, some of these companies have elected to remain virtual, shed offices, allow employees to continue to work from home, and modify existing practices and policies. At first glance, these seem to be prudent, informed business decisions. But are they?

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Adopting a virtual model and some of the hybrid options will likely reduce near-term operating costs. However, there are other considerations: How will these changes impact the culture? How do they impact the physical and emotional health of employees? How will they impact employee development, affiliation, and retention? What impact will they have on assessing leadership potential and succession? These are only a few considerations; there are many.



**WE RELY ON ANALYTICAL DATA AND INFORMATION TO HELP US MAKE DECISIONS, ESPECIALLY THOSE RELATED TO CHANGING OUR BUSINESS MODELS, POLICIES, AND OF COURSE STRATEGY.**

Trend analyses are particularly useful. And of these, the ones that should influence our strategies represent multi-

year experiences and results. The longer period lessens the probability of reacting to an anomaly. It would be unwise for a leadership team to use limited information, especially that generated during extraordinary conditions, to make major permanent changes in a business model, processes, practices, or policies. To do so would be short-sighted, over-reacting, and "pendulum swinging."

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This is the very challenge many business leaders face today. The pandemic experience and our emergency responses require careful deliberation, discernment, discipline, and prudence to resist adopting changes, especially the more dramatic ones, that may serve the short-term but compromise the long-term health and sustainability of the organization.

The pandemic is diminishing and will ultimately have minimal impact on daily lives. However, there will always be new challenges, some much more aggravated than others. Each day brings a new reality; conditions are not static. We are (or should be) continually evolving and adapting to new conditions influenced by technology, a smaller more interconnected world, and a multitude of socioeconomic, political, environmental, and other factors. To ignore or reject the existence of these influences and our need to adapt would ultimately impact our "survival," be it economic or otherwise.



**POSITIONING OUR ORGANIZATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS REQUIRES BOTH WISDOM AND DATA.**

Wisdom considers and incorporates experience, failures and successes, and a respect for what history has taught

us, especially about human nature. When we fail to consider things that influence the human experience, our decisions become disproportionately transactional and contractual, and our organizational cultures become sterile and devoid of the positive emotion that inspires participation, affiliation, and sustained high performance. While some leaders and employees may be drawn to the shiny objects that represent immediate and short-term advantages or opportunities, it is critically important the pendulum doesn't swing toward models and practices that deteriorate or destroy good enabling cultures that nurture relationships and foster ongoing employee growth and development in favor of transactions. As leaders, we decide; the results and history will determine whether we acted wisely or imprudently.

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Leaders who hold themselves accountable to the long-term sustainability of an organization and establish a positive, values-based, and caring culture will undoubtedly reap greater employee loyalty and reasonable and sustainable returns for shareholders. These organizations will have a discernible competitive advantage in good times and in crises.



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