

from crisis to recovery

organizational planning in
the time of coronavirus

In the years since the internet first came into widespread use, it became apparent that market disruption would become a fact of life for businesses everywhere.

The 21st century is littered with stories of monumental household brands crumbling to dust within months, as challenger brands broke the business model and redefined the marketplace.

Now those very same companies face new, global threats that no business is safe from. Coronavirus is the first of those.

Not many would argue that Coronavirus is the worst crisis in living memory. Analysts predict it could take a decade for the world to recover from this unprecedented economic disaster. The pandemic is also rewriting the rules for business strategy and organizational planning.

In just a few months, running a business has become about survival. Responsiveness and adaptability are suddenly the new currency, while planning seems fraught with difficulty in the face of lasting uncertainty. But still there are ways to give your organization the best chance of recovery.

This ebook brings together 4 articles that combine the latest thinking on emergency planning, scenario analysis and organizational preparedness. It also includes a 3-step plan for business continuity to help you tackle the impact of Coronavirus and come out the other side.

These articles were written as the pandemic has unfolded but they can also be read individually and in any order. We hope the ideas and new thinking presented here gives you a different perspective on how to fortify your business against future crises and protect organizational health over the long term.



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coronavirus:

emergency planning for faster business recovery

As difficult as it is, thinking ahead in the midst of panic and confusion could protect your business from the worst of the fallout from Coronavirus¹. By forward planning now, your business will be in a better position to return quickly to full performance once the crisis subsides.

We've outlined and prioritized 3 steps that organizations can take to mitigate the worst effects of the pandemic on their business operations.

¹ On naming and terminology, Coronavirus or SARS-CoV-2 is a strain of virus belonging to the group, coronaviruses. COVID-19 is a respiratory disease arising from SARS-CoV-2 that causes a persistent cough, fever and shortness of breath. We use Coronavirus when talking about the pandemic and its macro effect on business productivity, whereas we use COVID-19 when talking about the potential effect of the virus on the health of the workforce.



Step 1: monitor the health of your workforce over time

First and foremost, organizations have a duty of care to protect the health and wellbeing of their extended workforce, whether full time employees, contractors, suppliers or other associates.

Collecting information on changed personal circumstances of workers, and tracking this over time, not only actively demonstrates support for your people but supports recovery planning. It means you can identify who in your workforce is well placed to remain productive and reassess what those who are in more compromised circumstances can reasonably contribute.

Importantly, leaders need to show leadership at this time, demonstrating confidence that they have the situation under control and communicating effectively to the workforce that there's a detailed plan based on a range of scenarios (see step 2).

To monitor the health of your workforce over time, there are a series of actions to take:

- Track all cases of Covid-19 across the workforce in all locations
- Identify community contact across office locations
- Look to automate data collection and reporting to keep workforce status up to date
- Support a healthy working environment for employees working remotely
- Identify mental health and wellbeing challenges alongside physical health
- Purposefully communicate with all employees using established crisis management methods

Step 2: maintain productivity and continued provision of critical products and services

What can you be doing to keep up productivity? Begin by understanding in detail the work people can do remotely and prioritize that. By looking at the factors affecting workers' ability to carry out critical functions, you can forecast and model how to sustain your business through the pandemic.

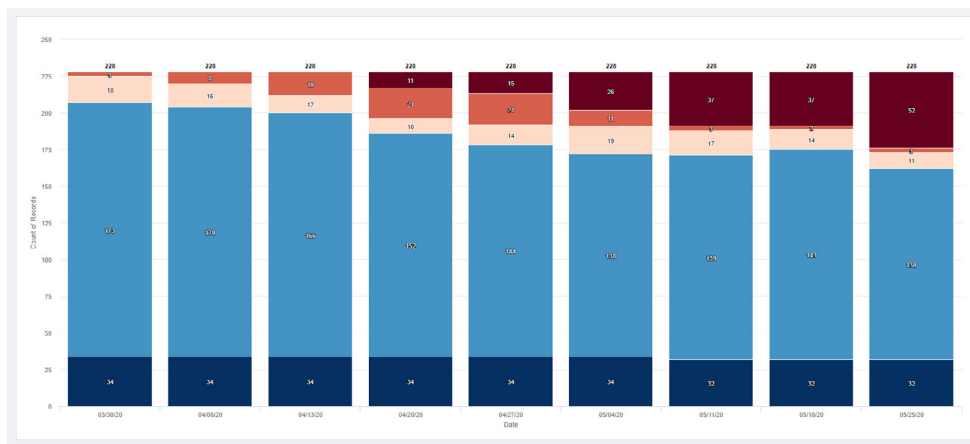
To help you do this, we've identified 3 scenarios that describe the potential business impact of Coronavirus and what recovery might look like. Consider how your business might respond to each scenario, asking yourself "what would be the key points of impact in each case?" and "what are the signals that will tell me which scenario is in effect?"

Scenario V: rapid return to previous market conditions

As quickly as the economic downturn has occurred, it's quite possible that we'll see a rapid market recovery in many countries following the crisis. If this happens, will you be ready to quick start your business? What will you do to mitigate volatility in the workforce?

In this scenario, precautionary measures and economic stimulus provided by governments prove to be successful.

We would expect to see workforce supply and demand balance out by late summer 2020. Essentially, we would be back to normal and business will be back up and running quickly, provided they've planned for this, by September 2020.



S1.Q1a: What is your health status with regard to COVID-19?

- No Response
- I have not displayed any Covid-19 symptoms
- I have displayed symptoms of COVID-19 and am currently self-isolating
- I am currently unwell and I have had a positive diagnosis of Covid-19
- I have recovered after displaying symptoms of COVID-19

Monitor how the health of your people changes over time



Scenario U: slow return to previous market conditions

Instead of a quick recovery, we could face an extended downturn as people continue to fall ill with COVID-19 and the economic damage bottoms out. This would result in a much slower return to previous market conditions as the workforce takes longer to recover.

For this scenario to arise, government measures to stimulate the economy would be slower to take effect, which in turn would continue to affect market confidence. So, although the workforce would be back by the end of summer 2020, demand would lag behind and slow down a return to productivity.

Scenario W: volatile return to previous market conditions

Potentially the most difficult scenario to manage, there could be a second wave of infection and economic damage after an initial bounceback, delaying long-term recovery for 12 to 24 months. In this scenario, we see an apparent recovery from the economic impact of Coronavirus but this proves to be short-lived.

We may instead see an extended lockdown period, leading to deep structural economic damage. Businesses will need to consider the possibility of moving certain tasks to different locations to hedge against a prolonged downturn and outlast the situation.

So, continuing with step 2, you can get on top of what your workforce do productively by:

- Identifying mission-critical roles and activities
- Resourcing critical roles by planning hourly and daily at the level of individual employees
- Scenario planning for the continuity of critical roles in the short term (taking into account household contexts and potential inability to work)
- Ensuring remote workers have the infrastructure to work
- Rapid building of operational contingencies, such as redeploying team members to fulfil critical roles and activating an extended workforce

You should also consider reviewing and adapting your business objectives in line with the work that can be done.

Decide what your main goals are in the short term and which projects you can accelerate by redeploying your workforce and resources.

Step 3: accelerate your post-crisis business recovery

Although nobody knows how long it will take to come out of this situation, if you focus on productivity now, you'll be on the road to recovery more quickly. You can do this by:

- Keeping basic organizational planning tasks going
- Investing time in priority initiatives now to optimize performance post-crisis
- Planning against all 3 scenarios outlined in this article
- Anticipating which scenario you think will most likely play out
- Developing a plan for regaining performance
- Adapting work policies to manage workforce recovery

On top of this, think about the work you've always wanted to do and the measures you've been meaning to put in place but are usually too busy to do so, and consider giving time to these now as other projects are postponed. This course of action is particularly appropriate in the event of scenario W, where longer-term business plans may be side-tracked for some time.

Preparing for life after coronavirus

Leadership and being one step ahead during this strangest of times will help you get back on your feet once the wildfire of the pandemic is under control. As well as what you need to do right now, being ready for whatever this situation may throw at you in the longer term will be fundamental to weathering its economic impact.

Importantly, leaders need to show leadership at this time, demonstrating confidence that they have the situation under control and communicating effectively to the workforce that there's a detailed plan based on a range of scenarios.



coronavirus:

an action plan for business continuity

Like all businesses, we're concerned for the wellbeing of our people during this unprecedented time. It's more important than anything that we get through this together – but there's also the longer-term picture. By understanding the health and wellbeing of your workforce from an organizational point of view, you can plan how to bring people back to work in a timely, respectful and purposeful way.

Planning around critical roles, activities and resources based on up-to-date information is how organizations can keep their business going for as long as the pandemic and its effects last. You can start by documenting individual circumstances and agreeing reasonable workloads case by case, without putting people under unnecessary pressure.

Adaptable workforce planning for better crisis response

To give a few examples of how organizations are having to adapt their workforce to rapidly changing circumstances, consider the NHS having added 150,000 volunteers in a few hours or the 10,000 recently retired medics who are being reintegrated into the workforce at breakneck speed.

And think about supermarkets that have stripped back their recruitment process in response to soaring demand. Now candidates start work the same day as being interviewed. And there's the question of delivery drivers that have recently left the industry but whose licences may still be valid and could be reintegrated to increase capacity.



Assessing the condition of your workforce

As the crisis subsides and the panic passes, what can your business do to plan the return to work with sensitivity and understanding for employees' individual circumstances?

You can begin by assessing the condition of your workforce on a continuing basis and using that understanding to adapt your resourcing plans.

As a minimum, you need to know if people:

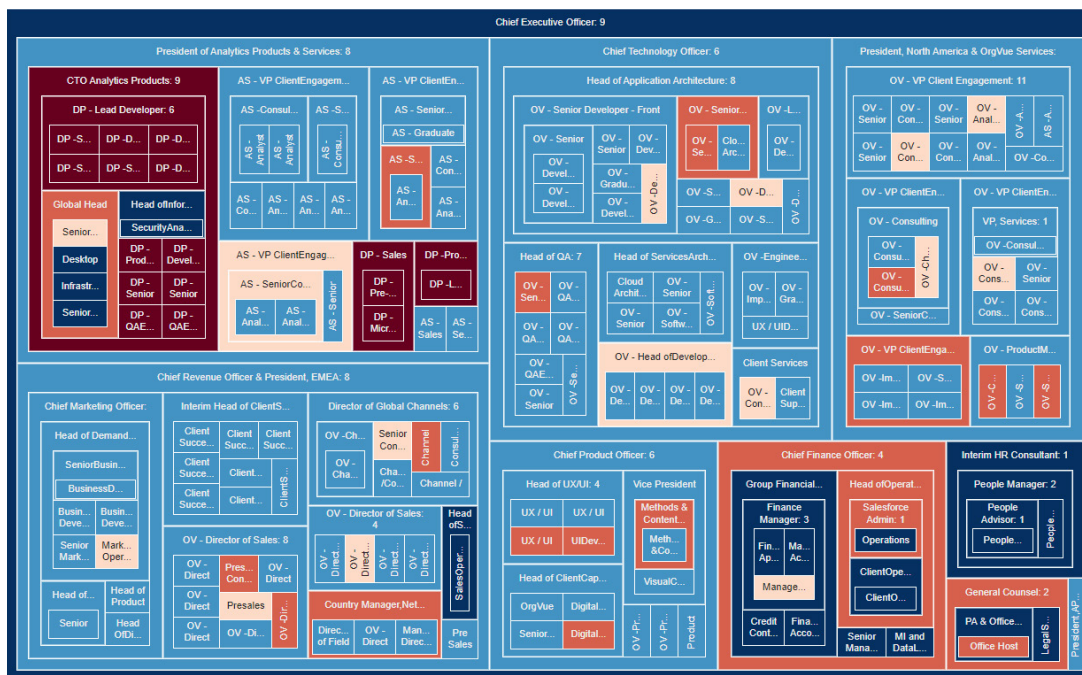
- Are unwell with COVID-19 and when they became unwell
- Are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 or have underlying health conditions
- Are at higher risk of exposure than others
- Have dependent care for children or elderly relatives
- Have a working environment that allows them to be productive (or less so)

Automating data collection: 'pull' versus 'push'

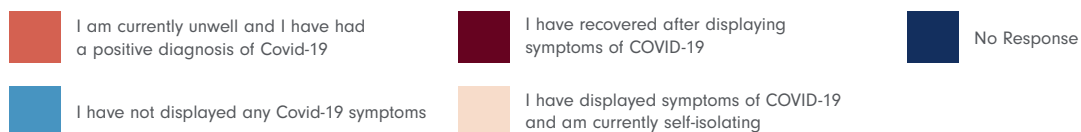
Anecdotal evidence suggests that many businesses are scrambling to gather workforce data to inform their planning in response to Coronavirus. But they're doing this by patching together Excel workbooks across locations and organizational boundaries, based on phone calls. While this is resourceful, it is also time consuming and imprecise.

Using automated online forms to gather this data can reduce cumbersome workloads associated with manual collection. It also changes collection from 'push' to 'pull' and enables businesses to bring together information that's scattered throughout the organization in different formats and locations - some of which may not be accessible.

At orgvue, instead of quizzing our people on productivity, we ask them to self-report their personal effectiveness given their unique circumstances. This gives us a contextual understanding of employee wellbeing that we can use to plan workloads considerably.



Where in the organization do we have colleagues with cases or symptoms?



What we've learned so far and how we've responded

From the online surveys we've conducted so far, we see key elements affecting business continuity and the welfare of our people. These are isolation for those living alone, household conditions for those with families, care responsibilities for children, elderly relatives, and those highly vulnerable to COVID-19, and support for mental wellbeing.

Layered into these elements is the changing nature of circumstances relating to health and work environment. While in most cases, data on work environment is relatively stable for now, health status is volatile and susceptible to sudden change.

Our survey data uncovered concerns for psychological wellbeing among some employees, such that we quickly introduced confidential counselling services for those affected and their families.

We also found that a proportion of our workforce are the sole providers of dependent care. With this knowledge, we were able to introduce measures to ensure work commitments are balanced with these responsibilities. And we've been able to provide additional equipment and support to those working in a challenging home environment.

Be sensitive to individual circumstances

As well as being good for recovery planning, collecting information on the condition and productivity outlook of your workforce is good for morale and sense of security. Knowing that the organization has a clear plan for navigating the Coronavirus crisis gives employees faith that the business will survive its worst effects.

But apart from the financial considerations, we must remember that this crisis is about people's lives and livelihoods being taken out of their control. It's not appropriate to respond purely from an intellectual, economic point of view. We must have empathy and sensitivity for how this situation affects every employee and their family differently.

A brutal assessment of productivity at this time is misplaced, whereas asking people to assess their own effectiveness brings a much more contextual perspective. Time saved on commuting should not be overlooked as a counterweight to added parental responsibilities. At the same time, it's important to bear in mind that the Coronavirus pandemic has increased workloads for many people.

Don't bury your head in the sand

Taking all these factors into account is essential to understanding who is most able to work and how this might change what your business is able to achieve in the coming months. It's also vital to establish a return to work that is realistic, reasonable and respectful for everyone.

If you just ignore the situation and expect people to continue as normal, eventually you're going to be disappointed and your business is more likely to suffer. So, rather than delude yourself, plan around what's happening on the ground and where that's going to take you as this crisis subsides.

Knowing that the organization has a clear plan for navigating the Coronavirus crisis gives employees faith that the business will survive its worst effects.



coronavirus:

3 ways to sustain your business

Early on, businesses were optimistic of a fast recovery from the pandemic, but it's now clear the situation is likely to continue for many months. So, what can businesses do to give themselves the best chance of weathering this mightiest of storms?

Well, it comes down to 3 things: priorities, planning and creative thinking. Below we've outlined a mitigation strategy for how businesses can respond to the financial impact of the pandemic, depending on their circumstances.

Which critical activities will sustain your business?

To keep your business going, you need to be unequivocal about what's essential and what's not. When making decisions, it's important to focus on critical activities rather than roles, so you're clear on what needs to be done. Then it's easier to identify who can do the job, who you could retrain to build capacity, or who you might need to hire.

For supermarkets, the most critical tasks are keeping the shelves stocked and meeting increased demand for home deliveries. Making more space available for popular items, adjusting supply chain to meet demand for those products, and reducing lines that are now less in demand are all essential activities that support the primary goal of serving customers.



Spotting opportunities for process change

If accomplishing critical tasks in the usual way becomes difficult, businesses may have to bring in process changes to achieve the same ends. Before the pandemic, changing established ways of working involved extensive planning, piloting, communication, and engagement of team members. Now such changes need to be brought in quickly and iterated on the fly.

Take B&Q, a UK-based home improvement retailer, which has reimagined its 'click and collect' service by repurposing customer car parks to offer drive-through style collections that meet social distancing guidelines. At first, they underestimated demand, which led to cars queuing out onto main roads. It responded quickly by introducing a 2-step control system using email and phone to manage customer visits.

Making process changes like these requires ready access to integrated data to ensure the changes can be resourced. Retail outlets are making such decisions by combining information on geographic coverage, supply chain logistics and resource availability.

Making operational changes to keep the lights on

If trying to sustain your current business is too high risk, you may have to consider repurposing your organization to bring in a new revenue stream that keeps the business going. For example, Tesco, one of the giants in the UK supermarket sector, is using refrigerated lorries in its car parks to give customers the option of collecting their groceries. This operational change to the supermarket's online ordering service speeds up the service and relieves pressure on home deliveries.

Since the pandemic's impact on business operations first became apparent, we've seen many other examples of operational change. A number of small gin distilleries have been making and selling hand sanitizer to keep money coming in. Also, many food wholesalers began selling produce directly to consumers in the wake of restaurant closures to prevent stock from going to waste. Similarly, bakeries have begun selling flour direct to supermarket consumers to make up for shortfalls in supply.

When life returns to a 'new normal', operational changes like these may become necessary as customer preferences shift; they could also form a valuable part of your business recovery strategy. Understanding what customers are asking for now and anticipating trends that may continue long term could give your business a quick restart following the pandemic.

A move to 'incremental planning'

Whatever happens, we know business won't be the same after Coronavirus and neither will business planning. The world is increasingly volatile and disruptive even without a pandemic. In its research, the Corporate Research Forum found even the best business forecasters are unable to plan reliably more than 400 days out.

And in the context of Coronavirus, circumstances change weekly, if not daily. You have to be flexible and expect to incrementally adjust your planning on a continuous basis.

Learning from experience in small steps is likely to become best practice for business planning in the future, rather than grand plans based on theory and forecasts. Gone are the days of the 3-year plan; say "hello" to incremental planning.

Readily available data is the key to responsive decision making

As we said, to plan quickly and make fast decisions, you need readily available data that's gathered from across the organization, then synthesized and integrated. Having accurate data enables business planning at the pace necessary to respond in situations like the Coronavirus pandemic.

Bringing data together quickly enables you to move at speed while strengthening processes and building organizational resilience. Going back to supermarkets, although some may have fared better than others during the pandemic, those with reliable data and solid design principles will inevitably result in faster business recovery following the crisis.



coronavirus:

accelerating post-crisis business recovery

As nations around the world begin putting their Coronavirus exit strategies to the test, businesses are waking up to the fact that ways of working will never be quite the same again. What's important now is how you plan your business recovery against this backdrop of lasting uncertainty.

Every organization will need a recovery plan that's specific to its own business objectives. You'll need plans for different scenarios, including the worst case, so you can formulate policies and practices that will get you up and running again

Flex up and down and follow demand

Nobody knows how long it will take to come out of the Coronavirus crisis. In the business world, some leaders are unapologetic about this fact. Take Dave Lewis, chief executive of British supermarket, Tesco. Asked whether he thought customers would be ready to return to store shopping once the crisis subsides, he simply said, "I don't know."

What Lewis does know in detail is the scale of demand and the company's capacity to meet it. Using data, Tesco has adapted by adding 47,000 more staff, changing store opening hours to allow more online orders to be picked overnight and increasing home delivery slots to a massive 1.2 million a week.²

This responsiveness, coupled with being comfortable with uncertainty, shows Tesco is taking a new approach to business planning that others can learn from. When you don't know what the future holds, even a few months out, how do you plan? Lewis knows it's all in the data and how quickly you respond to market changes.

² The Guardian (2020) How Tesco's 'doomsday exercise' helped it cope with the coronavirus, 3 May, https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/may/03/how-tesco-doomsday-exercise-helped-it-cope-with-the-coronavirus?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other



Efficiency at any cost could put you out of business

Academic or intellectual knowledge of impending crises has not in the past prepared organizations to cope any better with them. The financial crisis was long foreseen but still it caused the worst downturn in decades and led to well-respected institutions going out of business.

Coronavirus is no different. Experts have been warning us for years. SARS and MERS rang clear alarm bells. Yet the warnings were ignored. With the exception of disaster recovery for technology systems and office sites, having contingency measures in place for people and processes is often overlooked because it's not efficient.

There's no doubt that businesses will continue to operate through the lens of efficiency, productivity and cost management, but it will be more about having a flexible plan that aims to protect the health of the organization long term in the face of different scenarios.

Prepare for the future, plan for now

Planning has been relatively easy in the past. Organizations have been able to plan for 3 to 5 years and break that down into 1-year progress reviews. Now planning is about survival. 60% of chief executives are preparing for a long recession before they expect an upturn in the economy³. All you can do is to plan and re-plan repeatedly in short cycles, using data to guide you. The companies that do this well are likely to be the ones that last.

Business strategy, objectives and strategic planning work well when there's economic stability and market certainty. But that has all gone. When all's said and done, there's little doubt that organizational preparedness will rise rapidly up the corporate agenda in the aftermath of Coronavirus.

In future, it's likely there won't be a board of any organization that doesn't hold their CEO to account for organizational preparedness. Previously it would have been the last item on the committee's standing agenda. Now it will become a matter for serious scrutiny. While planning will undoubtedly change, preparedness will take on a new significance altogether.

Organizations that are most adaptable survive

"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change." Incorrectly ascribed to Charles Darwin, this maxim comes from a 1960s quote by America professor of business management, Leon C. Megginson.⁴

Evolution is adaptation to changes of context. It's about who can react the fastest to the current circumstances. The job for all businesses now is to become adept at adapting as a means of survival. And that's not going away any time soon.

It all comes back to data

Businesses are beginning to realize that it will be near impossible to know what the future holds in this new normal. What, then, does planning a path to business recovery look like? As companies try to anticipate what's coming down the line, scenario planning will become increasingly important.

This brings us back to data. For scenario plans to be of any use, you need good data to build your models with. This is not negotiable. Simply having data is not enough. It has to be clean, well-organized data, often synthesized from many sources. But done right, scenario plans will help to better prepare you for the coming weeks and months.

As South Korea goes back into partial lockdown, it's clear we're not out of the woods with Coronavirus. It's going to take agility and resilience to forge a way to business recovery. But with a better understanding of your organization through data, it can be done effectively and more quickly than it would otherwise.

³ The Guardian (2020) Fears of prolonged coronavirus downturn and second wave of US cases, 22 April, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/22/fears-of-prolonged-coronavirus-downturn-amid-second-wave-of-us-cases>

⁴ Megginson (1963) Lessons from Europe for American Business, *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly* (1963) 44(1): 3-13, p. 4 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42866937?seq=1>



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www.orgvue.com
info@orgvue.com