

CRISIS ▶ RESPONSE

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Protection Prevention Preparedness Response Resilience Recovery



RIP THEM UP AND START AGAIN?

Travel industry resilience | Covid-19
debate | Cybersecurity | Online tribalism
& vigilantism | Frontline responder
wellbeing | Karachi floods | Asteroids

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Sergio Ingravalle | Ikon Images

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Anan Punyod | 123rf

Cover story: Is it time to rip up our assumptions?
Cover image: Gracie Broom

comment

This edition of the *CRJ* is about challenging assumptions, unpicking the strands of the Covid-19 pandemic and its multiple cascading consequences, all the while being mindful of how they are conflating with other disasters and emergencies, such as the storms, other extreme weather and wildfires sweeping across the world. Many cosy assumptions about emergency preparedness systems, society, security and international relations have clearly been misguided and, in part, this stems from a historical lack of emphasis on preparedness and mitigation in favour of post-crisis response. On p28 Eric McNulty notes: "The ever greater demands we place on responders are the result of design failures in our institutions and communities," asking, "How often have you seen ... honorifics bestowed on those who labour on mitigation, preparedness and recovery?" This leads us to the status of the complex horizontal and vertical relationships between governments, emergency preparedness experts, responders and, most importantly, the public. Assumptions are all too often being made about public involvement in – and experience of – emergencies, as emphasised by David Wales on p16. When systems are found wanting and citizens don't feel that their needs are being addressed or recognised by authorities, unrest and dissent can proliferate. Starting on p60, *CRJ* looks at some of the manifestations of such unrest, from lockdown tribalism to overzealous digital behaviour. These trends affect us all – business, emergency planners, responders, governments, communities and individuals – and Jennifer Hesterman provides a sobering reminder of what happens when online crime, terror and vigilantism spill over into the real world (p64). This is backed up by the heightened vulnerabilities highlighted by authors in our cyber feature (p40). *CRJ* is not for tearing down systems that work, nor does it advocate the indiscriminate ripping up of assumptions. But failure to ask questions and debate the more difficult subjects that have been skirted around for many years, can only lead to crippling atrophy.



Dancing in and with the Covid-19 crisis

The tourism sector is one of the sectors to be most seriously affected by Covid-19. **I Hakan Yilmaz** describes how a chain of resort and city hotels in Turkey responded with a focus on flexibility, proactiveness, strong leadership, remote working and change management

In August 2019, I was pondering about my cat Sapphire, who had been part of our family for three years. I looked into her mouth and saw an inflammation of the gums. I took her to the vet, as she looked anorexic and a little sluggish. Despite detailed examination and blood tests, the vet was unable to diagnose her. The following days were very difficult. Sapphire lost weight, became lethargic and didn't want to eat or drink. She started to breathe very fast and had no strength. We went to the vet several times and she was given serums. The appearance of white inside the lungs on the chest X-ray made us anxious. Later, Sapphire was diagnosed with Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP), a viral disease caused by the feline coronavirus. The absence of any treatment, medication and vaccine for this disease, and the death of almost all cats with FIP, destroyed our hopes; sadly, she passed away the following day.

However, I could not imagine that four months later, a similar disease would emerge in humans.

Barut Hotels operates four resort hotels, one city hotel and a textile laundry in Turkey as part of Barut Hospitality Management (BHM). At the end of the tourism season in October 2019, like every other year, we suspended the contracts of our seasonal employees across our hotels and our laundry washing facility, and the number of our employees fell to about one-third. In the last days of 2019, all indicators pointed to a great 2020 season ahead. While watching news about a respiratory illness in China on New Year's Day, we were getting ready for a magnificent New Year's Eve event at our Akra Hotel.

The hotel was completely full, our guests blissfully unaware that they were enjoying a New Year's Eve without the impending notions of masks, social distance, hand disinfection, contactless payment, etc. We did not realise that the flapping of the butterfly's wings would reach us as a hurricane in three months' time.

On March 11, 2020, as we recorded our first case in Turkey, the WHO declared Covid-19 to be a global pandemic and the epicentre of cases began to shift towards Europe. The roar of the upcoming storm told us that the tourism season would not open and this situation radiated danger signals for the future of both our hotels and our employees. The Group Directorate of Human Capital created three crisis scenarios – coded

Yellow, Orange and Red – as a requirement for the continuity, health and safety of our employees. Each scenario described the situation itself, the development of the crisis, the risks it brought, possible effects, measures we should take and the steps we would take in turn. While the scenarios were being evaluated in depth at executive board level, conditions were worsening. The usual start of the 2020 season had come and we knew that we could not open our hotels; we did not know when or how we could eventually reopen.

We anticipated that mass tourism would be quite different from the past, and decided to take steps to adapt to the new facts and realities in accordance with the imminent Orange scenario. As these conditions were disrupting our business, we immediately started redesigning all hotel operations within the framework of our new Covid-19 procedure to include quarantine scenarios and practice. The list, which covered more than 30 pages, included: Converting all food and beverage operations to à la carte service; disinfectant and chemical dosage arrangements for hygiene in housekeeping services; contactless check-in at the front office; and masks and visors for all of our employees.

Travel bans

Meanwhile, conditions were worsening and a travel ban was imposed on 20 countries. The Turkish Ministry of Tourism recommended a reduction in the number of tourists coming to our country and advocated the postponement of hotel openings. Europe's largest tour operator, TUI, stopped the vast majority of its operations until further notice.

Now we were in the Orange scenario. Flights from abroad stopped completely, guests announced that they had cancelled or postponed their reservations one after another; open hotels were closing and those that hadn't yet opened were postponing their reopening. Many of those hotels decided to lay off, suspend or send their employees on unpaid leave.

When the season did eventually begin, we predicted that we would not be able to serve our guests as before, that our cashflow would slow down, costs would significantly increase and that the tourism sector would experience



Photos taken at Barut Hotels resorts showing Covid-19 measures in place. **Top:** A guest during check-in handing passport to a receptionist, who is wearing gloves, mask and face visor **Middle:** A couple being served at restaurant; guests follow a link through a QR code to read the menu **Bottom:** Sun loungers and parasols being disinfected

Barut Hotels

the losses of qualified employees. As the hotels were closed, our employees became concerned about the continuity of their jobs, but we knew very well that only with happy employees could we fulfil our promise of satisfaction to our guests. For this reason, the Chairman issued our decisions through an in-house memorandum on March 20, 2020, saying we would not lay off, suspend or send any of our employees on unpaid leave. We would continue to pay full salaries to all employees and, for their health and safety, they could spend their time at home with paid leave plans during this period. We informed them that on May 15, 2020, we would reconsider our decisions in accordance with the circumstances.



We realised that in this new Covid-19 world with a rapidly changing landscape, we would have to change faster and be more agile than anyone else if our success was to continue. Since everything was changing daily, both globally and in Turkey, flexibility, proactiveness, strong leadership, remote working and change management became more prominent. In order to show strong leadership and take proactive steps with the right insights, we started to hold our Executive Board and Board of Directors meetings on a weekly basis. The Executive Board based its decisions on the work, opinions and suggestions prepared by empowered teams and committees. The Board of Directors continued to support the process with fast decision-making when necessary.

The pace of change felt like it was increasingly about the need to dance step-by-step with and within the crisis. At this stage, at the initiative of Group Director of Human Capital, we decided to implement the eight-stage change leadership process by Dr John Kotter, Konosuke Matsushita Professor of Leadership, Emeritus, at the Harvard Business School, as outlined below.





Top: For hygiene purposes, executive chefs would serve guests from the buffet directly, to avoid guests all touching the same cutlery

Bottom: Regular disinfection of elevator buttons
Barut Hotels

■ **Create a sense of urgency:** We adapted the story of Dr John Kotter and Holger Rathgeber’s book *Our Iceberg is Melting* to our own situation and achieved alignment at the Executive Board about what constituted our iceberg. We then mobilised all our employees to take advantage of the opportunity to pioneer rapid adaptation to changing guest requests and expectations.

■ **Build a guiding coalition:** Fourteen separate committees, consisting of all department managers of our hotels, started to play an active role in the Covid-19 process, contributing innovative ideas and creative solutions for change management. Each General Manager, who personally served on the Executive Board, chaired and mentored the committees, which acted as a very effective and efficient bridge between employees and the Executive Board. We also increased our communication and co-operation with tour operators, consultants, the tourism ministry, public authorities, NGOs and suppliers.

■ **Form a strategic vision and initiatives:** Our strategic vision was set to complete the sustainability work to adapt to the innovations and conditions required by Covid-19. Within this framework, we defined our work as: Acceleration in digital

transformation; brand – reputation management; advanced hygiene safety practices; and product diversification suitable for the target audience.

We also faced the need to continue our work towards the quality disciplines (ie several relevant ISO Standards) that we had frozen owing to Covid-19, taking steps to speed up these studies.

■ **Enlist a volunteer army:** We prepared our communications plan to mobilise all parties, identifying concrete steps with which to target various audiences

(employees, guests, suppliers, tour operators and agencies, creditors, public authorities and NGOs), establishing who would contact them and how often, and through which communication channels.

■ **Enable action by removing barriers:** In the Covid-19 period, we clearly defined our solutions to eliminate the mental, systemic and managerial barriers to change leadership. We initiated the process to delegate the steps we needed to take to the relevant committees and managers.

■ **Generate short-term wins:** Because we closely followed the standards set by the Ministry of Tourism for the Covid-19 safe facility certificate, we were among the first in the industry to have passed the TÜV-SÜD audits successfully. This success, which was picked up by the press, reflected positively on the perception and preferences of our guests.

In addition to releasing the savings accumulated in BHM voluntary individual pension accounts of our employees who we were unable to call upon, we supported their families by gifting vouchers to each of them during Ramadan.

We continue to review the decisions we published on March 20, 2020, every month, starting from May 15, 2020. As of April 1, 2020, we have been taking advantage of the valuable contributions of short-term working grant and cash wage support provided by the Government of the Republic of Turkey. At the same time, thanks to our BHM human resources policies, we are able to provide job security to our employees and sustain their rights. Also as a result of the safe working environment, development opportunities and online training we provide, we measured increases of eight to 15 per cent in employee loyalty and satisfaction in the last six months.

■ **Sustain acceleration:** The following priorities and actions were set in our leadership of change: We will keep sustainability on the agenda; being able to establish trust for our guests to choose us will continue to be our focus; we will continue to develop innovative applications for our guests for unforgettable experiences; we will continue to train our employees on Covid-19 awareness and information; and we will continue our strong co-operation with suppliers and public institutions; and

■ **Institute change:** While uncertainty about Covid-19 continues, we are starting preparations for transition from stage seven to stage eight. At this stage, we will focus on our efforts to not only make change permanent, but also to draw a strong vision and continue to take strong steps in BHM with our employees.

Author



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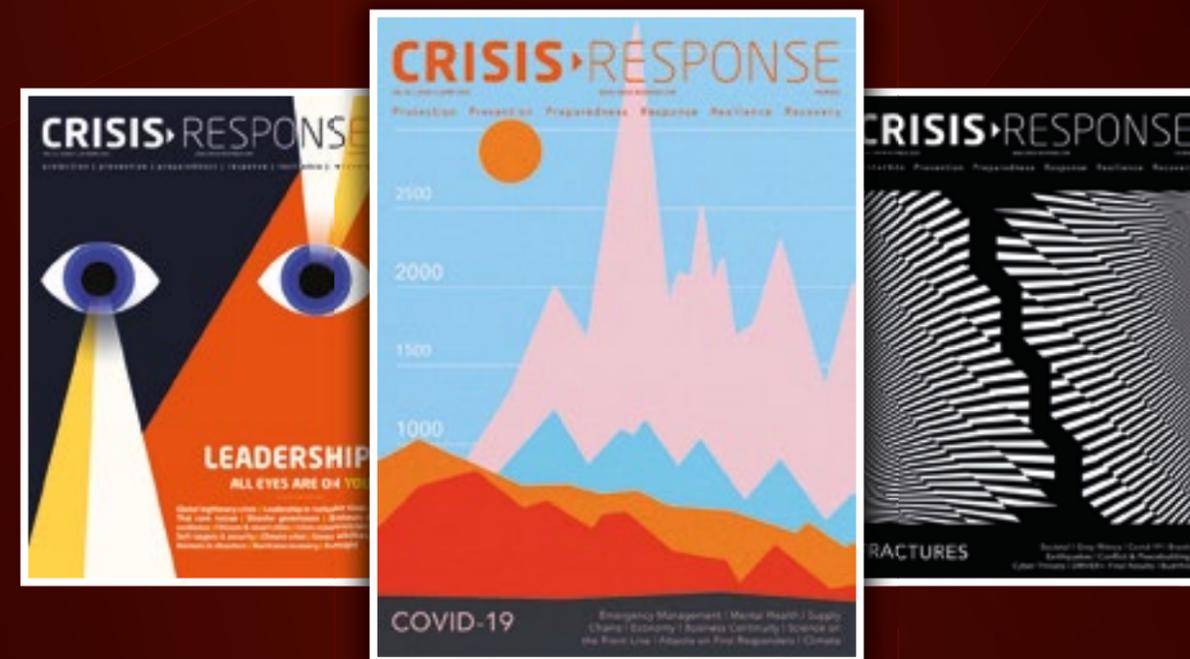
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