RESILIENT LEADERSHIP
LEARNING FROM CRISIS

An experiment in reflective learning during the Covid-19 pandemic
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ABOUT THE RESILIENCE SHIFT

The Resilience Shift exists to inspire and empower a global community to make the world safer through resilient infrastructure. More people than ever depend on the critical infrastructure systems that provide essential energy, water, transport and communications services, and underpin food, healthcare and education. When this infrastructure fails the consequences can be catastrophic.

Supported by Lloyd’s Register Foundation and Arup, the Resilience Shift provides knowledge and tools for those responsible for planning, financing, designing, delivering, operating and maintaining critical infrastructure systems. Our aim is to ensure infrastructure systems are able to withstand, adapt to, and recover quickly from anticipated or unexpected shocks and stresses - now and in the future.

DEFINING RESILIENCE

Resilience is the ability to withstand, adapt to changing conditions, and recover positively from shocks and stresses.

This applies to physical infrastructure assets, and to the wider system that these assets are part of including the natural environment, the organisations that own and operate these systems, and the humans who make decisions across the value chains for these systems.

This report focuses on the role of leadership for resilience – leadership that promotes and enables complex systems (in this case corporations and large cities) to function and thrive in the face of a major crisis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our deepest gratitude to the twelve participants who joined us on this four-month journey and whose invaluable insights are the bedrock of this report:

Corporate Leaders - Peter Chamley, Hany Fam, Dr. Stephen Hammer, Barbara Humpton, Tom Lewis, Elaine Roberts, and Ann Rosenberg.

Chief Resilience Officers - Dr. Adriana Campelo, Mahesh Harhare, Craig Kesson, Alexandria McBride, and Piero Pelizzaro.

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Lastly, our thanks to the project team, without whose tireless efforts this project would simply not have been possible: Peter Willis, Siddharth Nadkarny, Seth Schultz, Shivani Ghai, Femke Gubbels, Jenny Soderbergh, Helen Civil, Dave Hall and Roman Svidran.
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This project has been an experiment from the outset, conceptualised and pulled together in a somewhat incredible fourteen days as the coronavirus pandemic was gathering momentum in late March. The ideas we most wanted to test were:

- If we asked senior leaders to set aside half an hour every week for 16 weeks to have a reflective conversation about what they were facing, during possibly the most challenging professional period of their lives, would they agree to this? And would they find it valuable enough to stick with it?
- What if we mixed leaders from global corporations with leaders from major cities? Would they find each other’s experiences and insights relevant?
- Would the weekly conversations – intimate and unstructured as they were to be - yield any worthwhile lessons learned that outsiders might find helpful and actionable?

That the answer to each has been a resounding “Yes” is a tribute to the extraordinary openness of our twelve participants – each of them a willing and determined companion in the quest to find what good leadership means in a crisis. It is also a tribute to our project team’s corresponding attentiveness and dedication through an intense few months.

I hope you enjoy the riches that lie in these pages.
The ‘Resilient Leadership: Learning from Crisis’ project originated in a shared belief amongst the project partners that it will take a novel type of leadership to create genuine resilience in the face of mounting crises – in cities, corporations or societies. We believe this form of leadership cannot be assumed – it must be learned and developed. Some of the most important opportunities for learning come from failure and crisis. But there exists no tried and tested method of helping leaders learn and hone vital skills while confronting a live crisis. Given the increasing uncertainty that the world faces as a result of climate change, globalisation, urbanisation and the rapidity of technology advancements, it is imperative to find new ways of learning in the face of these pressures.
In late March 2020, as the Covid-19 pandemic spread around the world, we saw our opportunity to run a real-time, global experiment in this kind of leadership learning. In the true spirit of those early weeks of the pandemic, we were clear that the experiment should not adopt an academic research approach but should first and foremost offer high quality help and support to leaders on the front line invited into the project. The learning – if any - would arise out of this authentic engagement as a by-product. In this way a compassionate, collaborative and rigorous enquiry was embarked upon.

Twelve senior decision-makers were invited to take part – seven from the world of global corporations and five Chief Resilience Officers from major cities on different continents. Each week for sixteen weeks they were asked to attend a scheduled half-hour online conversation with the project’s facilitator, Peter Willis. During these conversations, and as the pandemic unfolded on its way around the globe, valuable insights surfaced. At the end of each week these were compiled into a 4-page weekly summary that was circulated privately amongst the participants.

On the project’s website a short selection of weekly insights was published, along with a podcast conversation between Peter Willis and Seth Schultz, reflecting on the wider implications of what had surfaced during the previous week. At the mid-way point and at the end, a substantial catalogue of key insights in the form of quotes from participants was uploaded to the site as a learning resource.
This report includes key lessons learned and insights distilled over the course of the project’s 16-week run, organised under the following sections:

**EMERGING LESSONS FOR LEADERSHIP**

A high-level summary, gleaned from the 16 weeks of conversation, suggesting where leaders should place their attention when entering a major crisis. Suggestions are divided into Leadership Strategies to foster organisational resilience (Technical on the one hand, Personal and Social on the other), and Leadership Behaviors that will not only help a leader to be personally resilient during a crisis, but also empower them in delivering the Strategies.

**HARNESSING THE POWER OF REFLECTIVE LEARNING**

Reflective learning and intimate conversations were a unique feature of this project. Our evolving methodology, designed at high speed and adapted over the weeks, provided critical value to the participants, as a type of ‘crisis diary’, as therapy during a particularly stressful period and as a direct stimulus to innovation.

**THE FUTURE OF LEADERSHIP: THREE QUESTIONS TO PURSUE**

Three large and intriguing questions about leadership behaviours emerged during the project, demanding attention and holding out the possibility of transformative change.

**IN THE PARTICIPANTS’ OWN WORDS**

A selection of over 100 of the most significant insights generated in the course of the weekly conversations, expressed in the words of the participants. These insights have been categorised under six themes that align with the Resilience Cycle – starting with reflections on ‘Underlying conditions’, moving through ‘Leadership and personal perspectives’ to end with ‘Towards a resilient future’.
Empty streets of New York at Times Square 42nd street during the Covid-19 pandemic. © tetiana.photographer, Shutterstock
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**TIMELINE**

**KEY GLOBAL EVENTS**

- **23 Jan**: Wuhan epicenter of the pandemic locks down
- **31 Dec**: China reports virus to the WHO
- **11 March**: WHO declares pandemic
- **16 March**: Several Latin American countries implement countrywide lockdowns
- **23 March**: Lockdown partially lifted in Wuhan
- **1 March**: Europe new epicenter of the pandemic
- **13 March**: Global cases exceed 1 million
- **2 April**: Global deaths exceed 100,000
- **3 May**: Italy lockdown partially lifted
- **10 May**: Global cases exceed 4 million
- **13 June**: Global cases exceed 5 million
- **7 July**: USA withdraws from the WHO

**GROWTH IN CASES**

- Total number of cases nation-wide
- **First cases**
- **Fewer cases**
- **More cases**

**PANDEMIC INTENSITY**

- Proportion of national population with a reported case
- **Less than 1 in 333 cases**
- **Between 1 in 333 to 1 in 1000 cases**
- **More than 1 in 1000 cases**

**LOCKDOWN STRINGENCY**

- Composite measure of stringency of government response in strictest sub-national region.
- Includes travel bans, school and workplace closures

**Sources:**
1. Worldometers.info.
10 May
Global cases exceed 4 million

26 May
The Americas is the new epicenter with 2.4 million cases and 143,000 deaths

1-14 May
Anti-racism protests spread around the world

29 June
Global deaths exceed 500,000

1 July
EU lifts external borders to a limited list of counties

23 April
Oxford vaccine begins human trial stage

1 May
Remdesivir is the first drug approved for treatment

13 April
Europe new epicenter of the pandemic

25 May
George Floyd death triggers BLM protests across cities of the US

1-14 May
Anti-racism protests spread around the world

7 July
USA withdraws from the WHO

23 April
Oxford vaccine begins human trial stage

15 Sept
Russia becomes the first country to approve a COVID-19 vaccine

29 June
Global deaths exceed 500,000

13 May
Global cases exceed 4 million

26 May
The Americas is the new epicenter with 2.4 million cases and 143,000 deaths

8 May
Global cases exceed 1 million

1 May
Remdesivir is the first drug approved for treatment

1-14 May
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EMERGING LESSONS FOR LEADERSHIP

Although it never occurred to us throughout the 16 weeks of conversations with our twelve participants that we might produce a simple reference list of what leaders should attend to during a crisis, when we went back through those 75 hours of recordings it became obvious that such a list was there, to be teased out and shared.

The breadth and depth of the leadership reflections offer a valuable framework for consideration for all those in decision-making roles.
Distinguishing 'resilient leadership' from 'leadership for resilience'

Only in the course of pondering the wealth of insights from the project did we realise that our project title – Resilient Leadership – was actually concealing two quite separate ideas. By separating them we hope to enrich discussion of this critical area.

'RESILIENT LEADERSHIP'

We see ‘Resilient Leadership’ as describing a quality of an individual leader. Every leader is to some degree resilient – able to handle setbacks, undaunted by physical and mental fatigue, emotionally mature, etc. But if one wants to become truly resilient and capable of leading in the most testing of crises, there are – as we learned from our participants – certain attitudes and actions that are worth paying attention to. The metrics for such resilient leadership will be personal to the leader in question – some visible to people nearby, others only privately knowable by the leader.

'LEADERSHIP FOR RESILIENCE'

On the other hand, Leadership for Resilience describes leadership work that has the effect of enhancing the resilience of the organisation, institution or society in which the leader is working. While it helps if a leader is personally resilient, it is not essential in order for her or him to do good work towards the goal of the system’s overall resilience. Here the metric would be an assessment of system-wide resilience.

Distinguishing a technical from a personal/social focus

Faced with a crisis, any serious leader will be primarily focused outward and pragmatically, aiming to keep their organisation and stakeholders safe, their operations functioning and so on. These are the leadership tasks anyone would identify as priorities in a crisis.

Our participants, however, while all referencing the critical importance of these kinds of preoccupation, and genuinely celebrating successes in any aspect of them, wanted to talk rather more about the personal and societal dimensions of the organisations and people in their care. Though they often had to work to find the language appropriate to such reflections, as they are so little part of standard leadership cultures, we collectively concluded that this personal and societal dimension is every bit as important as the technical dimension if one genuinely seeks to build resilience.
We have arranged the ‘Leadership for Resilience” strategic insights in two columns, supported from below by the behaviours that build resilient leadership and enable those strategies to be implemented effectively.

There is, of course, no table that can encompass the complexity and nuance of the realities to which our participants so generously gave us access, but these are expressed more fully through the participants’ views and insights detailed through the rest of this report.

**Leadership during a crisis begins in normal times**

An early insight that arose in participant conversations was that, just as a person who has not taken care of their health was likely to be at greater risk from the Covid-19 virus than someone who has, so an organisation that has invested in building trust and the range of qualities and capabilities referred to in the adjoining table below will find it has many more options at its disposal when a major crisis arrives. If one knows that every one of these aspects is going to be exposed to a harsh light in a major crisis, it makes sense to invest well during normal times, in oneself as a resilient leader and in one’s organisation’s resilience. Very little can be changed or improved once the crisis arrives. This is day-to-day, patient work, but it lies at the core of what leadership for resilience requires.
LEADERSHIP DURING A CRISIS - WHAT TO ATTEND TO

"LEADERSHIP FOR RESILIENCE"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES</th>
<th>LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monitor and understand the crisis</td>
<td>Demonstrate care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain operational continuity</td>
<td>Build and sustain trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage cash</td>
<td>Acknowledge others’ and one's own vulnerability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leverage data</td>
<td>Contain anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deploy skills before seniority</td>
<td>Encourage contribution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plan early for what comes after</td>
<td>Collaborate widely</td>
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"RESILIENT LEADERSHIP"

<table>
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<tr>
<th>LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOURS</th>
<th>SUPPORTING EXECUTION OF THE LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assume authority, then delegate it where it can do most good</td>
<td>Look for opportunities to innovate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen – stay in touch</td>
<td>Reflect and learn as you go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate more</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Be calm</td>
<td>Attend to culture</td>
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Leadership Strategies
Technical

These are aspects of attention that should be familiar to any leader within an organisation, since they relate to the maintenance of core functions:

**MONITOR AND UNDERSTAND THE CRISIS**

One of the primary jobs of a leader is to see and understand the landscape and context within which their organisation must thrive. Because in a crisis this landscape changes often and at times dramatically, maintaining a credible picture of the context becomes a critical task for the leader.

**MAINTAIN OPERATIONAL CONTINUITY**

It matters that one’s organisation keeps providing the services or products for which it exists and for which people pay. Failure to supply these is likely to have serious knock-on effects on many other organisations and individuals, let alone on one’s own sustainability.

**MANAGE CASH**

Major crises bring with them extreme uncertainty. For any organisation that has long-term commitments such as salaries, rental and loan repayments, etc., the availability of cash reserves becomes supremely important. Covid-19 lockdowns meant that income streams that were taken for granted by many organisations, both public and private, suddenly dried up. The management of remaining cash flows was now a matter of survival and needed leaders’ closest attention, requiring them at times to make agonizingly difficult choices.
LEVERAGE DATA

Whereas good analysis of an organisation’s financial status is commonplace and professionally well supported, the use of data and analysis to understand other critical changes within and around an organisation is still an emerging discipline. Several participants in this project observed how this pandemic, with its massive, interconnected uncertainties, accelerated their organisation’s journey toward the use of data and modelling as central elements of decision-making. Although data and models cannot provide full certainty about the future, they can be relied on to ignite the sort of pragmatic, evidence-based conversations that can help teams to reach agreement on the most sensible next steps.

“I don’t think there will be another crisis in the city where the leadership don’t start with, “What does the data tell us, where are the data?” It’s such a great sea change. I said to some colleagues, “There are things that we’ve done now with data and Covid that have probably advanced by years our change strategy for getting the organisation to be data-driven.”

DEPLOY SKILLS BEFORE SENIORITY

The skills that matter most when a crisis strikes are likely to differ from those required during ‘peacetime’. While a leader may not be able to re-draw their organisational chart to suit each new crisis as it hits, they must enable staff with the right skills and temperament to take charge of emerging parts of this crisis landscape, and be willing to move people around so that the right person is holding the right challenge at the right time.

“What kind of pandemic task team makes best sense for us? One that includes the necessary range of skills and expertise you might need in order to make good decisions for re-orienting and keeping safe a large organisation in fast-moving uncertainty. This extends beyond the health and HR experts, communicators, legal and compliance, to include the IT team and cybersecurity, etc. It doesn’t need to represent the organogram.”
PLAN EARLY FOR WHAT COMES AFTER

Although it may seem impossible to imagine this during the early phases, crises come to an end. It is a particular responsibility that sits with leadership to plan for when that the conditions of crisis will ease and eventually pass, even in the midst of the crisis. Several of our participants set up the equivalent of what has been called a ‘forward-thinking cell’ – a small group of people from across the organisation who were at least partially relieved of the obligation to focus on their normal line responsibilities so that they could devote time and energy to discussing and researching plausible and potentially generative ways out of the crisis – ways that might even add new strengths to the organisation and its relationships with the world. While recovery from the crisis has to be the most immediate focus, the pandemic caused all the project participants to explore some level of organisational re-invention in parallel, since recovery to the status quo ante was clearly not going to be optimal. Yet another level of exploration came in the form of questions about possible societal transformation, which could (or indeed should) accompany recovery.

The 15-strong team of Romanian doctors and nurses, who participated on a voluntary basis, arrived in Lecco, Italy, on 7 April 2020 for a deployment of almost three weeks, facilitated by the EU’s Civil Protection Mechanism. © European Union, 2020
The insights gained here were generally more surprising, less traditionally obvious. For this reason they are perhaps the more interesting as guides to where leaders should give their attention in a major crisis.

DEMONSTRATE CARE

Amid the enormous operational and financial challenges any major crisis throws at a leader, it can be easy to overlook the intensely human dimension that arrives at the same time. Humans are genetically coded both to need care when under extreme stress or shock, and to want to give it to those around them. While good leaders care for the people in their organisations anyway, that care needs to be amplified during a crisis, sustained over time despite exhaustion, and channeled to ensure it reaches those most in need. At the same time leaders must be aware that many of their colleagues will be looking for ways to care for others, inside and outside the formal structures of the organisation. This spontaneous movement of care should be applauded, encouraged and at times actively supported with resources.

BUILD AND SUSTAIN TRUST

Trust is any leader’s currency during a crisis. The more your people trust you and the more you trust them, the more options you have for swift, concerted action and the more likely you are to survive the crisis together. But it takes time to develop that trust, so the levels of trust that exist within your organisation when the crisis breaks will largely determine how much you will have to work with. When the stakes are abnormally high, as in a major crisis, people become automatically more closely attuned to issues of trust. If a leader acts with consistent integrity during a crisis – staying open, communicative, honest and vulnerable – they can add disproportionately to their own and their organisation’s reserves of this most precious substance.
"Our Mayor has always said “We need to work at what we say. We cannot promise something that we are not able to do.” He says in our meetings, “I cannot say something that I cannot deliver, I need to deliver everything, every single word that I say.” So I think it’s a commitment of honesty. There is a sense that the administration is serious and strong, and sometimes makes decisions that the public doesn’t like, but people know they’ll go ahead with it.

ACKNOWLEDGE OTHERS’ AND ONE’S OWN VULNERABILITY

Working within a large organisation, especially in a leadership role, one is expected to wear an invisible suit of armour, such that one need not feel wounded or knocked off balance by the many technical, professional and at times personal challenges that come one’s way in the course of work. It only takes a little self-reflection to realise that everyone has weak spots in their ‘armour’. They may relate to a deep-seated worry about one’s capability in some settings, a troubling problem at home or some difficulty with one’s identity.

What matters from a leadership perspective is that this is a universal reality. A colleague with no vulnerabilities is a rare and possibly problematic individual. A leader does not need to know the details, but letting colleagues know they are accepted for who they are, vulnerabilities included, can greatly reduce the tension and anxiety that – especially in a crisis – will interfere with performance, trust and general well-being.

“I think there’s no doubt my team is under pressure. I’m trying to do as much pastoral work as I can to motivate people, to not be hard on them. To push and to drive, but not to break. And trying to pull out all of the leadership qualities that I may have got over the past few years. It’s interesting for me just to know how the people close to me are observing me emotionally during this time. And these people, who’ve been with me through several crises, if I express a frustration I can see they think, “Is he asking me to come in and support him?” So I’m very clear to say, “This is not making me fall apart. I just need to express this, and you need to hear it. And now I’ve got it off my chest and I’ve let it go.”
CONTAIN ANXIETY

It is normal that every crisis generates anxiety. Yet fear can easily disable individuals and whole groups if it is allowed to get a hold over the collective narrative. A key part of the leader’s role is to supply and maintain a supportive narrative, one that enables people to feel, for instance, that they are not lost, not doomed, but simply facing great difficulties together. It may be as simple as assuring them that “We will come through this together”. This requirement to contain fear is a cornerstone of any successful leadership in crisis, in that, if well done, it can release enormous positive energy amongst colleagues and their communities. But it demands in the leader an inner resolution and calm that cannot be faked (see ‘Be Calm’ p.26 below).

ENCOURAGE CONTRIBUTION

While the survival of one’s own organisation is the priority for any responsible leader, the pandemic made it starkly clear that bigger things may be at stake. Our participants saw that throughout their organisations there were many who wanted to step up and help run the organisation in such challenging circumstances, as well as many who wanted to contribute to their wider community in some way, whether during their private time or by leveraging the strengths of the organisation. Leaders do well to support these inclinations as far as possible. Giving people meaningful ways to contribute typically releases energy, goodwill and innovation.

COLLABORATE WIDELY

One of the most striking outcomes of the early phase of the Covid-19 pandemic was the widespread sense that ‘we’re all in this together’. With that perspective, many individuals and organisations realised that, to respond well, they needed to break down or reach across traditional boundaries and barriers and form alliances of action with others with whom they might have no previous relationship and might even normally be competitors. This assumption that the larger ‘we’ is what matters is a precious manifestation in times of crisis. Though the urge to collaborate does not usually last in this vibrant form, relationships and alliances formed in the heat of a crisis response can endure far past the crisis itself.
There has been a lot of collaboration across sectors. For instance, in lockdown large numbers of migrant workers needed food in the early stage of lockdown. Most businesses helped take care of them, but also the strong network of Pune NGOs stepped in, along with other civic groups. These groups worked well with the City. It was the same with health facilities, where private schools and private hospitals have made 2,000 beds available to the City.
These are insights that surfaced when conversation turned to participants’ own behaviours and intentions as the crisis unfolded. They speak to the subtle art of being a leader under pressure and can be seen as supporting the execution of their Technical and Personal and Social strategies.

ASSUME AUTHORITY, THEN DELEGATE WHERE IT CAN DO MOST GOOD

When a crisis breaks, leaders must lead. People need, and typically respond to, leaders who assume the authority that is theirs. Our participants found this simple fact occupied a good portion of their reflections on their response to the pandemic. Paradoxically, it also became abundantly clear, as the crisis deepened, that keeping decision-making power too close to the centre was sub-optimal and could even prove dangerous.

Two levels of delegation became critical. The first was within leadership teams themselves. With a heightened need to monitor, analyse, change plans and communicate, it became obvious that leadership teams needed all hands on deck and a high level of collaboration and trust as tasks were shared out and responsibility delegated from the centre. The second, equally essential in a crisis, was the need to delegate more-than-usual responsibility out to the parts of the organisation closest to where the challenges were currently manifesting. Decision-making may be much too slow if it has to refer back up to the centre all the time. There is an art to delegation in such circumstances and it appears to hinge on the accurate allocation of trust and the streamlining of accountability.

What’s been really crystallised for me is that the most important thing I’ve learned to do - and I enjoy doing it - is to let others lead, to recognise that, especially at times like this, people want to step up, they want to be given more to do - so let it go.

LISTEN – STAY IN TOUCH

The Covid-19 lockdowns meant many organisations re-oriented to having their employees work from home. In suddenly losing physical proximity, all the leaders we spoke with found they needed to – and indeed were drawn to – spend more time making sure they were in touch with their team members. Because being in touch could no longer be taken for granted, connecting with them and listening to how they were and what was preoccupying them became a priority. This is good practice anyway in a crisis, as new kinds of pressure and challenge will be experienced all over one’s organisation, and one’s most reliable eyes and ears are one’s people.
COMMUNICATE MORE

People want to hear from their leadership in a crisis. As one project participant put it, “The people we lead want to be led.” Communication begins as the lifeline of the organisation, reminding everyone there is someone at the wheel as the organisation collectively stabilises in the earliest phases of a crisis. As the crisis unfolds and moves to subsequent stages, the value of regular communication from leadership remains high, though its purpose may shift from calming fears to preparing people for a longer-than-expected haul.

“I think the people we are leading are looking for leadership, they want to follow. The work of leadership isn’t the work of management.”

BE CALM

During a crisis it seems that all members of a group or organisation become increasingly alert for signals from each other – and particularly from their leaders – that things may be worse than they thought and that perhaps they should raise their own levels of anxiety and adrenalin. It thus becomes critical that leaders manage their own emotional responses to the crisis (without suppressing their authentic feelings and losing touch with them), and then communicate as calmly as they genuinely can with their colleagues. Calm seems to spread along the same channels, and almost as fast, as panic. It also has a health-giving effect on one’s body chemistry and well-being.

“Make sure everybody has as much information as you can give them, even if you and they know that the information is incomplete for now. I’m able to just step back and be objective and not get sucked into the drama and the panic. I don’t panic. I tend to find a way to be detached, look at a problem and say, “Right. We’re going to calmly figure this out.”"
ATTEND TO CULTURE

A leadership team’s response to their employees and other stakeholders during a crisis is best underpinned by their understanding of the organisation’s culture. Under the stress that a crisis brings, the healthy elements of culture will act as vital nourishment and reassurance, while any rifts or toxicities that have been left unresolved will eat away at trust and make concerted action that much harder. Addressing their colleagues, a leader can speak directly to the best elements of an existing culture, reminding employees of the shared stories and values that bind them and give them meaning as they face this challenge.

LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO INNOVATE

Every complex organisation, large or small, develops inefficiencies and strays from its optimal purposes during the normal course of events. It is a form of normal organisational entropy. Crises offer the opportunity to re-tune all manner of systems, since change is suddenly top of the agenda. The wise leader knows to seize this moment, bringing to the fore their and their team’s best vision for the future of the organisation, given new circumstances, removing – or side-stepping - barriers to change, and encouraging innovation at all levels.

REFLECT AND LEARN AS YOU GO

The sheer pressure of non-stop events can leave even the most experienced leader with a sense of blurred recollection, and it can easily seem that there is not a moment to spare for slowing down and reflecting on ‘What happened? Why did it happen?’ and ‘How did I respond?’ But everything we know about learning and performance says that even a short few minutes of protected time can be invaluable as an aid to digesting and learning critical lessons from one’s experiences. The flip-side of the blur of events is that crises provide more opportunities for learning per day than are on offer in a year of normal problem-solving.

What I would want us to remember as we come out of this pandemic is, “Remember when we could? Remember when we did? How could we hang on to that? Because that was good, wasn’t it?” I think an appreciative inquiry of what has happened in these times would be good to do - that process that encourages you to say, “It really works well when...” Just by the nature of its positivity, I think it would be a great way for us to come out of this.
HARNESSING THE POWER OF REFLECTIVE LEARNING

As the project unfolded, it became clear that we needed a process that could build a credible bridge between the intimacy of Peter’s weekly conversations with each participant, where the search for ‘insights’ played no overt role, and a representation to the wider public of the resulting wisdom. Over the course of the first month of the project, this process was fine-tuned into a reliable and repeatable two-week cycle: insights were distilled from transcripts of weekly conversations in the first week; followed by the presentation of these insights as different outputs targeting different audiences. Each cycle of dialogue, distillation and dissemination overlapped its preceding and succeeding cycle, as illustrated in the diagram below.

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<tr>
<td>30-min weekly interviews x 12</td>
<td>Interviews conducted</td>
<td>Audio transcribed</td>
<td>Preliminary insights distilled</td>
<td>Insights finalised, draft developed</td>
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<tr>
<td>4-page weekly summary for participants</td>
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<td>Blog post and graphic summary</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Publication</td>
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<td>Podcast episode</td>
<td>Scripting</td>
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- Interviews conducted
- Audio transcribed
- Preliminary insights distilled
- Insights finalised, draft developed
- Email to participants
- Development
- Scripting
- Recording
- Editing
- Publication
- Publication
- Development
For the participants only, a 4-page ‘weekly summary’ was circulated over the weekend, with insights extracted from the 12 conversations of the preceding week by the project team.

A weekly podcast was recorded on a Tuesday and uploaded on the Friday. This featured a conversation between Seth Schultz and Peter Willis about the previous week’s insights, produced by Siddharth Nadkarny and Roman Svidran.

A roughly 1-page ‘weekly insights’ piece, written by Femke Gubbels was uploaded to the website on a Tuesday, picking out one or two of the most interesting insights from the ‘weekly summary’, but without accrediting an individual participant.

A lively graphic summary by Jenny Soderbergh accompanied the Weekly Insights piece, drawing on the weekly summary’s insights.

At the mid-term break, a substantial collection of insights was published on our website as ‘Emerging Insights’ with the participants duly credited.

Ultimately, roughly six hours of dialogue each week was distilled down to a handful of key insights shared variously - in text, a colourful graphic summary and a roughly 30-minute podcast conversation.
Our minds take in information through various channels, amongst them reading text and engaging in conversation. In our text and image-driven electronic age, the balance has been heavily tilted away from conversation. It is easy for us to underestimate the potential of extensive conversation – which is by nature slow - to yield subtle understandings that are simply not available through reading text or watching someone talking on TV. In this project we prioritized the intimacy of conversation, while still producing text, so as to share some of the emerging wisdom with those not privy to the conversations.

The intimate weekly conversations were essentially ephemeral in nature. They were neither scripted nor directed and they were not for sharing. Although the audio recordings were faithfully transcribed, already in that transition one lost some of the original freshness and spontaneous human quality of the original. As the transcripts were distilled and further distilled to produce the textual outputs that ended up on the project website, more and more of that ephemeral nature was necessarily lost.

Yet, as was confirmed by several people within and outside the project, some of that freshness and spontaneity returned in the podcasts, where Seth, who had played no part in the weekly conversations, asked Peter about them and, as their discussion unfolded, that conversational quality was in part restored.

*Hearing Peter and Seth in the podcasts reflecting on our insights got you this really lovely way of learning in layers – your own experience via the interviews, the broader experience via the weekly summaries, and then the macro via the podcasts.*

*I love the fact that the podcasts were on a weekly tempo. Here we had an unfolding crisis that played out over months, but the conditions were changing so rapidly each week that the timeliness and getting quickly to the top-level messages was important.*
SPEED, AGILITY, SIMPLICITY AND ORGANIC DEVELOPMENT

In a curious parallel process, the formation and evolution of this project mirrored what several of our participants told us they were discovering as they came to grips with the pandemic – that they had to adopt a ‘start-up culture’. No matter how large and established their corporation or city administration might be, they realised that their only way to respond effectively, at the scale and pace the crisis required, was to think and act as though they were starting a new business, with all the rapid deployment, frequent changes of direction and absurdly high levels of energy and commitment that normally accompany such processes.

It took a mere 14 days for the project to go from an original concept being floated, to a team being assembled and the first participant being interviewed on 6th April. The core ideas underpinning the project design were immediately deemed good enough to warrant moving ahead and, with the pre-existing trust between all the key players allowing swift and easy decision-making, it is clear in retrospect that the team was seized with the widely-felt urgency of the times.

The original central elements of the project design survived intact, although some additions were made as it got underway. The table (see following page) compares the expectations for participants as set out in their emailed invitations, and what actually happened during the course of the project.

Organic extensions to the original design included:

- Deciding early on to do a weekly podcast, where The Resilience Shift’s Executive Director, Seth Schultz, engaged Peter Willis in a discussion about the previous week’s emerging insights. It was felt this added a helpful alternative way for the public to gain access to some of the participants’ reflections in near-real time.

- Choosing to take a mid-term break for a week in early June. This afforded the project team the time to assemble and upload to the website an extensive sampling of ‘Emerging Insights’, which in turn gave participants an opportunity (which all of them took) to step out of anonymity and put their names to their insights on the website.

Another organic quality of the project emerged in the weekly conversations themselves. As referred to above, the project team held back from establishing a list of research objectives, to which specific questions for the interviewees would normally have been attached. Although starting the first week of interviews with a list of questions to hand, Peter Willis quickly decided to allow the participants the space to determine what they wanted to focus on in each session. Then, at the end of each week, the editorial team would sift out patterns and themes, which in turn would often inform Peter’s contributions to conversations in the following week.
Expectations for participants as set out in their emailed invitations, compared with what actually happened during the course of the project.

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<th><strong>YOU WILL...</strong></th>
<th><strong>WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Be interviewed confidentially, once a week for 20 minutes by a highly experienced listener, who is supported in turn by a small, expert team. In this interview you will reflect on some of the critical decisions you have confronted in the past days.</td>
<td>The cautious request for 20 minutes of participants’ time in practice quickly became a standard 30 minutes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Receive a weekly short summary of what your various peer participants have shared (duly anonymized so no statement is directly attributable).</td>
<td>This was done, although even from the second week onwards, participants agreed to be named.</td>
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<td>Get an invitation to engage with fellow participants in an online reflective discussion of common challenges and approaches (likely in June).</td>
<td>This did not happen. Instead a few ‘pairs’ conversations took place in the latter stages, and the whole group met online at the end for an ‘After Party’</td>
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<td>Be interviewed after the 16 weeks, to reflect on the process. There is an option for this interview to be podcast, subject entirely to your agreement.</td>
<td>This was done.</td>
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<td>Know that, through your real-time reflections, you will be contributing to the future resilience of senior decision-makers like yourself around the world.</td>
<td>A variety of learning-oriented outputs – text, graphic and podcast - was posted to the project’s website throughout the 16 weeks; others followed afterwards.</td>
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<td>Be left with a rich record of your personal reflections during one of the most demanding periods of your career.</td>
<td>At the end of the project participants were given their complete interview transcripts – effectively a detailed diary of their reflections over the period.</td>
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Sometimes you look back on an experience and say, “I wish I’d kept a diary”, so I thought this would be the diary. But what I hadn’t appreciated was that the effect of doing it would actually change the way I responded. Knowing that there’d be a phone call the following Monday with Peter, I was constantly thinking, “We’re in the midst of something and I want to share this with Peter”. Or I get to the end of a week and think, “What just happened here? It’s OK, I’m going to have a call with Peter on Monday.”

There was a great deal of personal reflection that I did the moment Peter sent me the transcripts of my interviews going back over nearly four months previously. That was really powerful for me because it put me back in those moments and forced me to reflect on that personal journey that I’ve been on, which still feels pretty incredible.
A SENSE OF BEING PART OF A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

None of the 12 participants knew each other and they were deliberately selected with diversity in mind, not only in geography but also in sector, age, gender and culture. While some carried the burden of directly leading very large numbers of people, others had few people reporting to them but were charged with using their influence to impact critical cross-cutting systems during the crisis.

As the pattern of the 4-page weekly summaries settled in, participants revealed that they became fascinated by this diversity of experience as it was filtering through to them – as well as by the commonality of experience, despite the great diversity. Perhaps in part because of the privacy that was offered from the start and in part because of the momentous times we were all living through, all the participants reported that they felt they were part of a valued community. At the end they all expressed an interest to stay in touch in some way.

“\nIt was an interesting group with very different vantage points, public, private, civil society - and all helping each other.

“\nIt was clear that everybody was facing slightly different versions of adversity and having different issues to deal with. And there was a bunch of common things – like the wellness and care for our colleagues and making sure they’re all in the right place. Just about all of us were showing a bit of vulnerability."
THE HUMAN DIMENSION OF LEADERSHIP
REVEALED AND ATTENDED TO

Both the participants and the project team remarked upon the high level of honesty, openness and vulnerability displayed by the 12 participants in their conversations week-on-week. This was recognised as a rare experience, since normally leaders and aspiring leaders are schooled – consciously or not – to present themselves and their organisations in a good light in any discussion with an outsider. In this case it seemed that the personal, reflective nature of the weekly conversations, coupled with the knowledge that their insights might be picked up in the weekly summary and shared with their peers within the small group, inclined all participants to think deeply and speak freely about their ongoing experiences.

Underpinning this refreshing sense of openness were the following:

CANDIDNESS

Although selected primarily for occupying leadership roles in significant corporations and cities, the participants were invited in their personal capacity, not as representatives or spokespeople.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The confidentiality of their recorded and transcribed weekly conversations with Peter Willis was stressed at the outset and the project team checked with a participant before putting out any direct reference to them on the project website.

CONVERSATION

Peter Willis’ approach in the weekly interviews was informal and conversational rather than research driven. He never introduced a list of prepared questions, rather allowing the conversation to evolve, both during each half hour and over the weeks, according to what he and the participant found most interesting and relevant to discuss.

CONNECTION

There was a sense that the project team, through Peter Willis’ weekly connection with the 12 participants, was offering to walk hand-in-hand with each leader into the great unknown that the pandemic represented for each of them in those early months. The absolute uncertainty of how the crisis would unfold was understood by all parties and there is no doubt that the heightened intensity of those early weeks of the pandemic informed the sense of mutual adventure that all appeared to feel.
“Having those conversations, going through this process, helped you go through this very difficult time. You became very vulnerable, because it's not like you get up there, and say ‘Let me show you my professional secret for dealing with this.’ Peter had a way to help you feel that you could do that. I've never been through anything like this before. I've never been so open before. I thought it was a very beautiful process.”

“Ann”

“It was half an hour a week just to shut everything else off. It was a good time, a bit of self-reflection, which otherwise you don't really get.”

“Peter”

“It was very good that we were talking on behalf of ourselves and not putting on an institutional face. So that really made me feel comfortable - that I could say whatever I felt or would like to say; my real thoughts about what was going on. I felt really present when I was doing the interviews.”

“Adriana”

“I've never been one to do a diary, and this is like an oral diary where it's a structured process and it is asking you to think specifically about where your head is at and what you're doing and why, and being able to go back and reflect on that is something that I think few of us ever do.”

“Steve”

“You actually gave us a gift. It was a little bit of shelter in the storm. It was a bit like having a personal therapist that made us feel safer. It was just a valuable experience.”

“Barbara”
IMPACT ON THE PARTICIPANTS’ LEADERSHIP DECISIONS AND BEHAVIOURS

While it quickly became clear that the weekly conversations were appreciated by all the participants, it was not immediately obvious whether they would contribute to the participants changing their behaviour in ways that enhanced their and their organisations’ resilience. Gradually, however, evidence of such impact started emerging.

“Peter had a way of prompting a higher order of thinking in the moment, which turned out to be phenomenal because I can’t tell you after how many of those conversations on a Monday I would say, “Okay, I’m on this now. The next step is let’s pull this thread and see how this next action could really lead to a phenomenal different result that I never would have thought of had I not had that conversation with Peter.”

“Reading the weekly summaries, I almost got a sense of some of the personalities - I could tell that I’m more optimistic than some of the other participants. Some of the other participants had what I would call a much higher worry factor. But they put it into words so that you understood why they were so worried. I realised I had members of my team who were feeling this way too, so I think it helped my empathy in the moment.

“After the first or second session it was therapy for me to talk. I just feel better when I talk about these things and it always spawns ideas from the person I’m talking to, and even triggers ideas in myself that I probably wouldn’t have had if we didn’t have the conversation.”
Professionally, the next thing I did was I shared my transcripts with our own resilience team, who are doing a reflective learning exercise internally for us. It was a means of sharing notes. We are constructing our ‘lessons learned’ program through all of this, which we haven't completed yet. It made me far more reflective about the phases that I've been through now, and it felt to me both personally and professionally like I'm very much in a different phase.
standing back after the project had come to an end, and looking past its many leadership insights, it struck us that, along the way, three profound, transformative questions had become visible in the fabric woven from the many hours of reflective conversation with our front-line leaders. Each suggests a significant shift away from current practice. And each holds out the tantalising prospect of a more satisfying and resilient future.
ONE: What might be missing from our senior leadership that youth could supply, and from the aspiring leaders of the future that experienced leaders could provide?

Leadership matters, particularly in a major crisis. Yet the pandemic has made it transparently clear that the conventional models of leadership are, at best, not fully fit for purpose. Younger members of the project team often remarked on how frank and vulnerable some of the senior leaders were being – something of which they had no experience in their own careers. Senior leaders seldom reveal their own inner doubts, and yet for these young professionals – aspiring leaders themselves – the opportunity to witness top leaders opening up in this way was surprising and empowering.

A lot of these people are faces of their organisations or cities. They always want to put their best foot forward when it comes to official communication, but in this setting they were able to be more vulnerable and honest in sharing their experiences. That was very beautiful. As a young aspiring leader, reading their interviews was very inspirational and helped me find more faith in myself. It would be amazing if we could share that more with young people around the world. Just to learn that everybody, even leaders at the peak of their career, are making mistakes but learning from them every day.

Is there a bridge of transparency we can construct between, on the one side, the deep experience of senior leaders in the public and private sectors, and on the other side the vision, ambition and energy of the young? There seems to be a hunger for this coming together, from both sides of the river, but as yet too few weight-bearing structures. Perhaps the bridge can only be designed and engineered by the two sides together?
TWO: What might happen if the leaders of cities and corporations stood in each other’s shoes from time to time, in between facing crises together?

Big cities, and the corporations that invariably inhabit cities and rely on them functioning well, are powerfully drawn together during a major crisis. Their interests become aligned in ways that sit in stark contrast to their typically transactional, even competitive relationships. In a crisis, as we found, public-private collaboration becomes attractive – at times even essential - and barriers to it happening can be easily removed. We had corporate executives reflecting on how to increase the value to society of their company at the same time as Chief Resilience Officers were realising they could learn from the world of start-ups as models for how to re-organise rapidly to face the crisis.

By having both Chief Resilience Officers and senior corporate executives around a virtual table during the Covid-19 pandemic it became clear that these two sub-species of the genus ‘leader’ have much more to learn from each other and to co-create between them than is commonly understood. What will it take to increase the mutual understanding and resilience of these two critical forms of social organisation?
THREE: What if our big, influential organisations were to give strategic importance to the subtle, transformative art of conversation?

Our major cities and corporations will be critical determinants of our success in dealing with the waves of crisis that are set to come our way in the years ahead. How they position themselves to cope with shocks on behalf of their citizens, customers, employees and stakeholders will matter disproportionately. And yet, we would be wrong to assume that, because scale counts, our arsenal of tools and approaches should be only organisational in size.

This project made it abundantly clear that the scale of the very personal is just as critical. How these twelve leaders reflected, thought and intuited into the future was – according to them – much enhanced by the surprisingly simple process of being in a weekly half hour of conversation with a trusted stranger. These days most ideas and narratives come to us through electronic media or text of some kind. An unmediated, person-to-person dialogue (even, ironically, online) can have a beguilingly fresh impact on both parties, and quite likely beyond.

How can the humble yet transformative conversation be reintroduced as a core part of any strategies for making our key organisations and infrastructure systems more resilient for the future?
Over the first few weeks of the project, a pattern began to emerge from the weekly conversations with the twelve participants. Some insights reflected on the state of participants’ organisations or cities prior to the pandemic, most touched on attitudes adopted and actions taken during the heat of the response to rapidly-changing circumstances once the pandemic hit, while a few looked to the horizon for clues as to how they and their organisations will emerge from this upheaval and how they might influence that emergence for the better.

Keeping with this organic pattern, some key reflections and observations distilled from these weekly interviews have been curated as insights in this section. These insights are grouped under six themes, roughly aligned to the Resilience Cycle – beginning with Preparedness, moving through Response to the crisis, and looking ahead to Recovery and Transformation.
“One day this will be over and we will be grateful for life in ways we never felt possible before.” © Saket Sarupria, Arup
OVERVIEW OF INSIGHTS

Click on each topic to read participant insights. Depending on their content, they have been arranged to align with the accepted stages of the Resilience Cycle (Preparedness, Response, Recovery and Transformation). Each insight is dated to the week in which the conversation took place and where the insight surfaced.

UNDERLYING CONDITIONS

Leveraging strengths and addressing weaknesses
Improving access to ICT infrastructure
Using data to understand ourselves better
Taking care of critical supply chains in advance
Learning from the last crisis

AS THE WAVE STARTS TO BREAK

Pay attention to weak, early signals
Re-set your strategic priorities and free yourself from the constraints of the existing organogram
All you can deploy at the outset is what you already have
Adopt a ‘start-up’ mentality

LEADERSHIP AND THE PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Remember who we are!
Create a narrative and a sense of being in this together
Communicate honestly. Be calm.
Deal honestly with loss and grief: it can bring surprising gifts
Leading from a position of not knowing
Letting staff go
Consciously letting go, and empowering others to step up
Influence, diplomacy, dialogue
The strange satisfactions of being severely challenged
THE TURBULENCE OF THE BREAKING WAVE

Dealing with uncertainty

On the horns of the ‘re-opening’ dilemma

The power of good data

Leadership from a rollercoaster

If the mould no longer fits, break it, innovate and move on

Lift your head and collaborate, collaborate

Where must authority be situated in a crisis? The challenges of multi-level governance

In the middle of one crisis, another arrives

Organising for the longer-haul crisis

The emotional and psychological pressure of the longer-haul crisis

RECOVERING BETTER

Green stimulus? Green recovery?

Inequality: seize the opportunity to move the dial

Identifying and supporting leaders for the next crisis

Planning cities and infrastructure for resilience

TOWARDS A RESILIENT FUTURE

The emerging ‘Con-Covid’ landscape and its implications

We’ve been challenged to think differently for our future

A new role for data-led decision-making

Where will future leadership come from?

Only radical approaches need apply
UNDERLYING CONDITIONS

We should perhaps not be surprised to discover that the way an organisation or city copes when a pandemic arrives is mirrored in the way the individual human body copes when a novel virus arrives and infects it. Simply put, the body’s chances of seeing off the virus with limited symptoms are enhanced if the body is in overall good health to start with. We’ve heard much about underlying conditions and co-morbidities as indicators of vulnerability to the coronavirus – it is clearly similar for companies and cities.
Leveraging strengths and addressing weaknesses

A major crisis will inevitably shine a sharp spotlight on their pre-existing culture, internal and external relationships and financial health. None of these can be fixed in short order when the crisis is on the doorstep, so the clear lesson from our participants is “Get your house in order! The next crisis will, just like this one, expose and exploit your systemic weaknesses.” By the very same token the pandemic has revealed some real strengths, which have been cause for relief and even celebration by our participants. Patient building of healthy relationships and systems during ‘peacetime’ has been witnessed paying rich dividends under pressure.

The Italian government’s rules about who you can lock down with and who you can’t, and who can visit you in hospital and who can’t, reveal long-embedded official views about the nature of the family unit and people’s sexual preferences that are surely no longer relevant, especially for a modern, global city like Milan. They have been the cause of much unnecessary suffering during lockdown. It’s clear there is a need for new rights and the recognition of additional types of relationships. This is obvious to us at the city level, maybe less obvious at the national.

Why has Denmark done so well? First of all, Denmark has a healthcare system which is for free for everybody. And that make you feel safe. Because I normally live in US I can just see the huge difference. I’ve felt so safe being in Denmark during the pandemic. It also has a very strong social system. From very early on the government began to email Danes around the world daily saying, “You should come home, and if not, you need to let us know why.” That was as an eye-opener. I felt, “This country takes care of their citizens!” Denmark is also a country where, compared to US, it’s very fact-based. When you get information, there’s absolutely no drama. It’s fact-based, so it’s trustworthy.

I think this disease has disclosed our vulnerability as a society. We are now required to wear masks to protect ourselves and others, but at the same time, this disease is forcing the invisible masks that as a society we have been wearing for centuries to fall away. We are able to see lots of things that we weren’t seeing, or pretending not to see. Our vulnerabilities were hidden somehow. You are now able to see them. It’s particularly true when we talk about the ‘invisible people’. Domestic violence is becoming so obvious now, too, it’s something that people have been ashamed to talk about. There is a campaign that says, if you hear someone screaming, don’t be afraid to invade privacy, because it might be saving someone. A major retail magazine for lower income women consumers has put a button on its site, so you can pretend that you are buying something, and then you click there, ask for help and the police will contact you.
Improving access to ICT infrastructure

Nobody could have foreseen the way a tiny virus would drive us all back into our homes, making us and our organisations profoundly dependent upon the internet and a handful of key communication technologies. But several participants have reflected on how, in the years preceding the pandemic, and often in the teeth of institutional indifference and a reluctance to spend, their organisations had secured new levels of IT infrastructure, either for their own internal use or for solving client problems.

The lesson here is so obvious as to appear banal: since in a crisis communication is the most important leadership tool and often where things break down fastest, make sure your ability to keep talking with your staff and key stakeholders is up to the task. Of course, the question ‘What happens when the internet goes down or is hacked?’ should from now on be getting the serious attention it deserves.

Over the past five years we’ve made a lot of investments in various IT systems, despite some of those being tough investment choices. This included investing in some digital products and services, which lead to remote solutions for clients, and upgrading our whole IT stack and everybody’s laptops. On the digital remote services what we’ve found is that some clients are saying, “Yeah, I’m ready for this,” even though one of our colleagues was saying “I thought it might take three years to persuade them this was a good way of working!” Meanwhile with all our back-office processes now cloud-based, we’ve been able to work from home, supporting clients and staff. So overall, although we’d never really tested it, and culturally we may not have thought we were ready for it, our business resilience and remote working has been excellent. And we’re recognising that everything doesn’t need to go back to how it was. We’ve identified a target that says that at least 30% of our future operations will run remotely.

We learned that everyone in the community needs a basic level of internet access, and the internet cannot be a purely privately run commodity. And then there’s hardware - what about families of four locked down with only one laptop?
Using data to understand ourselves better

One might be tempted to think that, in a crisis, what matters is how leaders and their people function at a psychological and emotional level. But running a city or a corporation implies responsibility for complex systems of infrastructure, assets and flows of energy, resources and money. The ability to know where these are and how they are moving has proven once again to be invaluable to some of our participants, in particular those whose organisations had invested in smart data systems and the skills to manage them. Simply the act of collecting data may reveal previously hidden facets of your city or organisation.

In any emergency, but especially if you’ve got COVID on top of a hurricane, you’ve got so many moving parts. You can’t manage if you don’t know where they all are: equipment, supplies, your workers and also evacuees, etc. You need a tracking and asset management system. Florida apparently has an antiquated one that’s not being used because it’s not helpful. We’ve developed a system for our own use in emergencies. For example, when we deploy hundreds of generators and people to service those generators, parts and fuel trucks, we barcode everything and you can scan it with your smartphone and then once you do that it geo references and you can see where everything is on a map in real time. All this at your fingertips. So when you’re doing briefings as a government official, or you just want to have meetings with your team and figure out what to do next, you have all this real time information. It’s a real communication tool to reassure people that you’re on top of this and say, “Here’s what we’re offering to you as citizens. Here’s where you need to go and here’s where other people are”, and you can show it all on maps.

One of the biggest missions that we had over the past five weeks was setting up a data led approach to this. It now has an automated component which allows us to work with new data as it comes in, to automatically update our models of city systems and finances, SCM, HR – e.g. ‘Where are the service overlays compared to outbreaks of the disease?’ It’s actually incredible. And that doesn’t just emerge. It’s on the back of two and a half years of dedicated investment in data science. A corporate data strategy for the City that everyone thought was completely boring at the time has now had to be activated. All of that infrastructure is in place and we are reaping the benefits of it in ways that are just amazing.
Normally Brazil is very bureaucratic and to access official systems you have to be registered to vote, etc. But in order to deliver its emergency cash benefits to the poor, the federal government decided to create a digital ID, which would be given to anyone with a cell phone. The big surprise has been the amount of people that actually emerged to claim this digital ID, people who have been living in informality all this time. There was a layer of invisible citizens who were not in any kind of statistics. They didn’t have any social security. Last week people started to say the country needs to have a plan for these people, needs to be accountable for these people.
Taking of critical supply chains in advance

Any competent corporate or city executive knows the importance of properly functioning supply chains that allow one’s core functions to continue smoothly year-round. But one has to be familiar with the dynamics of disaster to understand the critical role that certain key supplies suddenly take on. In the case of this pandemic, every health ministry in the world suddenly needed large stocks of PPE, then ventilators, testing equipment, and so on. While no government or supporting company can be expected to have every possible emergency fully catered for in its stores, we have learned the value of being quick out of the blocks – and that does require preparation.

In Italy before the pandemic nobody was producing masks. Now we produce millions, but it took weeks to convert production. If we were planning resiliently, we would make agreements with a few producers that, in time of need, they would switch production very quickly.

I think there will be a fresh focus on supply chains. People will ask, ‘Where does that product or service actually come from? How much do I trust it? How secure is that supply chain? What happens if it’s cut off?’ Our work is about keeping critical infrastructure and global supply chains working. We recognise that if we can’t work then that means our customers can’t work. With Covid-19, we’re working across the business to look at how we can accelerate what are very early days in product life cycle services to clients to test and improve them and then how we can continue to grow that. We see that being not just a one-off for this situation, but actually becoming part of our portfolio and way of working.

The thing we now realise we need to have, which we didn’t before, is someone to keep a sharp eye on our large networks of suppliers, keep them updated and appropriate for likely emergencies. We used to think that if we handled one disaster, the companies we turned to then would stay on our books and we’d use them in a similar situation. But this crisis put stress on that system and we could do with managing the networks more proactively. ‘Just in time’ isn’t enough anymore.
There is a larger question about who takes responsibility for making sure the most vital supplies and their supply chains are in an adequate state of readiness. In a market-driven economy they can quickly become prey to short-term competitive behaviour – we saw this in contractors to US States having to fight one another for PPE.

Worldwide, supply chains have been so severely disrupted, I think there is going to be a global re-think about what constitutes supply chain resilience and how much it matters going forward. Fundamental to that will be the distinction between supply chains that enable critical national infrastructure and those that enable normal commerce. How do cities and national governments ensure that they have the supplies they absolutely need to manage crises? Local manufacture and local supply chains may well emerge as critical once again.

In response to the ‘Milan 2020 - Adaptation Plan’ that we launched two weeks back, we got over 1,000 emails with suggestions and requests from the public. Many are asking how they can get more goods, services and municipal service and permits more locally in future, having to travel less from their homes. It’s clear that, as global supply chains are impacted, there will be pressure to make food supply chains more local.
Learning from the last crisis

Of course, if your city has recently endured and survived a major crisis – the case with Cape Town and its 2016-18 drought – you will find that there is some very helpful ‘muscle memory’ within the organisation, and less likelihood of natural anxiety leading to paralysis. Although one wouldn’t wish a succession of crises upon any city or company simply because they train their people to be good crisis managers, the background realisation is that crises are coming thicker and faster than before, so it makes sense to build these strengths consciously. It is essential that systems enable people to process crises in a constructive and positive manner - the last crisis may inspire you to do better the next time around, but it might also leave you with lingering trauma as the next one hits.

I think the city’s going through a bit of PTSD here, you feel it. Back in 2008, the city let go about 50% of their workforce. No one wants to be at the wheel when you’re literally firing half of the team.

In the swine flu outbreak around 2009-10 Pune had a comparatively large number of patients and casualties. In fact, it has not completely gone down, so there are few cases every year. The city government got a lot of criticism then because it was responsive rather than proactive. The government has since been rigorous, providing medicine and vaccines, especially in slum areas, to keep the numbers contained. So they learned from that. Now, with Covid, the city administration started using technology early on, using mobile vans, testing and mapping all the patients and disseminating that information. That’s been highly appreciated by both citizens and the Government of India, who sent a delegation from to Pune to see what kind of measures we are taking and how we are doing the mapping, both relating to containment and micro-containment. That was a major boost for the city administration.

Having so recently come through the drought crisis, we are now constructing our learning and self-reflection, so that we’re documenting how we learn as we go through this crisis, and what we learned from the last one.

It’s interesting looking at where lockdown protests have been most vocal. There seems to be a sharp contrast with countries that went through wars or other serious hardships within living memory. Perhaps the people there are more resilient and more accustomed to, “This is just what I have to do. I have to wear a mask. I have to stay home for a period of time,” because that was their reality in the recent past?
AS THE WAVE STARTS TO BREAK

This theme of being quick out of the blocks has come to loom large in the global public understanding of the difference between successful and not-so-successful responses to the coronavirus pandemic. In any disaster it is the case that, in the beginning, minutes and hours matter. They can make the difference between life and death. What is leadership’s role at this point?
Pay attention to weak, early signals

All our corporate participants pointed to the benefit their organisations derived in the early days of the pandemic from having offices and active businesses in China. These automatically gave them a sense of the pace and scale of the danger – but they still had to pay attention and act.

"It’s a critical leadership task to pick up weak signals early on and assess potential risk. ‘Should we act on this or watch closely as others act on it?’ At the end of January, with so many staff members travelling for Chinese New Year, we saw considerable risk of them bringing the virus back to Australia, so we insisted on quarantine once they got back and then banned international travel. We have a cultural bias toward caution and care within Arup. At that same time our Global Board was briefed by an eminent epidemiologist, who told us “This is out. It will spread round the world.” That made us sit up and we started planning to limit travel, etc.

We need to improve the City’s capacity for risk management. We have a lot of risk management for internal procedures, but not an appropriate risk management approach for the cascade effect of the failure of key infrastructures. My own learning is that I have to push more in advance, for the City to be prepared for a crisis. Because risk management is not what you do after the crisis has happened, it is what you have done before, to be ready for the crisis. I need to argue harder for this, saying “Look, this could come, not in 20 years, but tomorrow.” - and be more strict about it."
Re-set your strategic priorities and free yourself from the constraints of the existing organogram

Once it was clear that a life-threatening crisis was emerging, at large scale and likely to be around for many months, those of our participants at the head of their organisations took swift steps to re-conceptualise the most appropriate management structure for what was clearly going to be business abnormal.

What kind of pandemic task team makes best sense for us? One that includes the necessary range of skills and expertise you might need in order to make good decisions for re-orienting and keeping safe a large organisation in fast-moving uncertainty. This extends beyond the health and HR experts, communicators, legal and compliance, to include the IT team and cybersecurity, etc. It doesn’t need to represent the organogram. Our task team adopted four priorities: (1) Take care of our people. (2) Take care of our business. (3) We’re Siemens - what do we bring to the fight? (We are a Business to Society company, solving for megatrends). (4) What do we need to be doing right now to help set up a future that’s more resilient?

We cannot regard this as we would a normal portfolio or normal project, where you have a budget, a definite outcome, and your objective is to reach that outcome and spend your budget. Across all of these different planned interventions, what we’ve done is designed a plan and secured resources from Council at the outer limit of what we think is required, which is like creating a portfolio of interventions in a typical budget. Within that, though, we are using a toolbox of interventions, a variable structure that responds to changes across the systems as they are required. It’s not a typical structure and it’s not a typical project and we need to embrace that level of complexity.
All you can deploy at the outset is what you already have

Once a crisis hits, the rapidly increasing drumbeat of demands on your organisation and leadership team emphasise the need for setting up robust crisis response mechanisms and relationships during ‘normal’ times.

“There is no time, when you’re in an emergency, for people to try to build the dialogue that would enable a new way of working. It’s not possible to build a Resilience team just when the emergency arrives. I think it’s pretty clear, you cannot create something from scratch at the beginning of a crisis.”

“The best preparation for a management team going into a crisis is for them to have already developed a high level of mutual trust. It takes specific interventions within the leadership team to get them past politeness and self-interest to an efficient place of frankly expressing their own needs and listening to the concerns and needs of other parts of the business.”

“The 2016-18 Cape Town drought experience allowed us to rapidly spin up an approach and a response in a matter of days and weeks that we would not have been able to do without that previous experience, which was very hard gained. At an emotional level, it has helped to know that, when there’s cause for great apprehension or trepidation, these are not unusual feelings to experience. I have a wellspring of experiences to draw from, not just mentally and managerially, but also emotionally, of what it’s like to be in charge in a crisis. The same is true for my team.”
Adopt a ‘start-up’ mentality

This ability to free oneself from the constraints of the existing organisational chart or organogram may turn out to be a game-changer, in that it helps place the best people and most needed resources where they can do the most good in an uncommonly fast-changing landscape. Traditional seniority may be a poor guide to who will function most effectively in a crisis – in fact several participants likened the atmosphere of those early weeks to being in a start-up.

The past five weeks has been such a fast-moving journey of almost developing a start-up within government to respond and mutate with the requirements of the pandemic as they become understood and manifest in South African local conditions. What did we learn?

(1) In a crisis don’t retreat to silos or hierarchical positions, think about who can get what done in the best way and give them as much space and scope to get it done.

(2) Don’t retreat into strict sector responses but think about thematic issues and how these cut across sectors, and what are the best ways to activate them. Don’t think of the problem structurally or in terms of organograms or flow diagrams. Think about it as ‘here’s the issue and what’s the best way to manage that issue’.

In a time of crisis, I think a lot of us default to your classic command and control model of management. But by the middle of March, my team had put together a network and had thought about all of the different types of expertise you might need in order to make good decisions for a 50,000-person organisation. This extended beyond health and the HR experts to include communications, legal and compliance, IT and cybersecurity and so on. Pretty soon there was a nice big virtual staff table full of all of those experts, basically getting situational downloads on a daily basis and then raising their hands and saying, "Okay, now it’s time to engage the business leaders."

CRAIG
Week of 27 April

BARBARA
Week of 13 April
LEADERSHIP AND THE PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

As one of our participants reflected early in the pandemic, any crisis sorts the good managers from the not-so-good. The call is to step up, manage one’s own fear in the service of helping one’s people manage theirs, and give them a sense of focused purpose as events churn around them.
Remember who we are!

Part of a leader’s toolkit in difficult times is an appeal to a team identity and culture that has some empowering stories attached. As the late Peter Drucker said, “Culture eats strategy for lunch”.

We’ve all felt anxious, angry, sad, but we’re Siemens, we have all these capabilities that the world needs right now. We have a responsibility to actually drive through and bring value. This isn’t a moment to feel sorry for ourselves. The future is not to be feared. The future is ours to shape. What can I put in place so that the organisation can’t slide backward? It can only go forward because, like a ratchet, we’ve now moved the baseline. One of my biggest worries is that people will reach a point where they think “I’ve got to enhance business results in any way possible, at any cost.” That breaks the ratchet. We get more accomplished together than we would as individuals. This entity called a corporation can do things that no individual or small business, or even a small government can do. The power of Siemens is unique. So how are we going to channel that energy right now?

We are Italians, that is what gives me hope! We are not good in normal times, we are good in a crisis, so I think we will be dealing better than other countries. When they have chaos, they go crazy. When we have chaos, we have fun.

Our CEO wrote to all staff with an interesting approach to the issue of the social protests. “How can you be a good advocate if you’re not thinking into the future? If you’re only designing a bridge for today, you’re not really doing your client a good service. You need to design a bridge for four decades from today.” And so his social message was basically likewise, “How can we say we’re inspired by the future and we’re future-ready as a company, if we’re not looking at this societal issue and what needs to change? Let’s design the future together, not just in terms of infrastructure, but in terms of culture. We need to be part of this.”
Create a narrative and a sense of being in this together

In many conversations we heard that people at all levels were moved to lean in towards the danger and its essential tasks. What leadership can provide these individuals is a framing vision or story, or an igniting experience of high-octane camaraderie.

One of the highest tasks of leadership may be to provide a narrative that describes where we are on this uncertain journey and where we must now focus our attention. e.g. ‘We’re digging in for the long haul.’ Barbara recalls the story of Captain Shackleton’s ice-bound crew in Antarctica. We realise we face a long period of danger and uncertainty. We must take what we really need from the sinking ship and leave behind a lot that once seemed important. We’ve sent some scouts out to find a vaccine but they could be gone for a year or more. We must figure out how to survive in the meantime, work out what our daily tasks, challenges and routines are going to be so that we keep our morale up and ultimately achieve our objectives.

A new member of the team joined last week – Greg, who’s normally the Oakland Tennis Centre manager but put his hand up for re-assignment in the disaster. On his first day I invited him to sit in with me on some in-person meetings in the Emergency Ops Centre. How we operate normally in the city can be a bit slow and bureaucratic, but then you get thrown into this crisis and it shakes up and accelerates bonds or emotions. Greg said, “In the one day I’ve been here, seeing everyone and how they operate and the level of sophistication and intelligence - I really want to be that. I want to live up to that.” I think it is a hyper-efficient atmosphere and for the right person who wants to help, it makes you want to be better. It did it for me! You have to step up. It is a privilege to find a way to genuinely help. I can tell that Greg just really wants to do the best work he can in this.

You want to be part of this. And I think a part of this is also your own personal journey into the unknown. I would say having those conversations every single day with my team, we have never been a stronger team together. We have never been more thankful because it helps you as a person to go through this, and you know it will take a long time.
Communicate honestly. Be calm.

Given the rolling uncertainty, with staff facing real threats of both sickness and loss of their jobs, while having to retreat to work from home, many of our participants spoke about the efforts they and their fellow leaders were putting in to communicating with their teams. One had the impression that what was showing up here was not only the personal approach and character of the individual leaders but the long-established culture of their organisation – something that underwrites how people will behave with each other under stress, and that cannot be faked.

Over the years I’ve learned that remaining calm in a crisis and being honest and transparent with my team works best. This is my way of handling uncertainty and modelling it for my people. Treating people like grownups, able to handle uncertainty, yet needing honest interaction with their leaders.

This crisis reminds us that good leaders have experience of making tough decisions and living with the consequences. They have developed some humility about what they know and what they don’t know. I think we’ve tried to be honest and we haven’t shied away from some tough stuff that we’re having to do. We’re explaining the logic and rationale where appropriate. While people might not appreciate the message, they recognise they’re not being excluded and things are being shared with them.

In a crisis, when one’s people are likely to be feeling threatened and anxious, a leader’s fundamental character – formed and tested long before - steps into the spotlight. How one holds oneself and how one holds one’s people in this moment is of the greatest consequence.

My style is to be open, to be able to display vulnerability, to be human. And to say when you don’t know and don’t have the answer. Make sure everybody has as much information as you can give them, even if you and they know that the information is incomplete for now. I’m able to just step back and be objective and not get sucked into the drama and the panic. I don’t panic. I tend to find a way to be detached, look at a problem and say, “Right. We’re going to calmly figure this out.

Our Mayor has always said “We need to work at what we say. We cannot promise something that we are not able to do.” He says in our meetings, “I cannot say something that I cannot deliver, I need to deliver everything, every single word that I say.” So I think it’s a commitment of honesty. There is a sense that the administration is serious and strong, and sometimes makes decisions that the public doesn’t like, but people know they’ll go ahead with it.
Deal honestly with loss and grief: it can bring surprising gifts

The early stages of the pandemic response were marked by an adrenalin-filled sense of collective action, but sooner or later there comes an encounter with death, a very personal experience. Good leaders make space for this reality, both in their teams and personally.

Loss and real sorrow are just getting closer and closer. I think we’re going to need to find ways to grieve and support one another as we go through… We aren’t living in a bubble. It’s a big semi-permeable membrane that surrounds all of us and we’ve got to acknowledge that these very human things are happening to our employees, in the midst of us keeping our business enterprise healthy and going strong.

We had a very sad milestone yesterday with our first staff member who died from Covid-19 in the city administration. They worked in one of the departments that I’m responsible for. We’ve taken all the steps that we tell everyone to follow in the public, from not just a health and safety perspective, but also an employee wellness perspective, the mental engagements, etc. But some staff have suggested we must close the entire Civic Centre. I said now is not the time to panic. There’s a person, they had a name, they had a life, people knew them and there’s where they worked…and now they’re gone. It focuses the mind. But our job as leaders is to maintain our cool, in as much as we can. The possibility of trauma has been real for me for weeks, but it’s very difficult to get everyone focused on the crisis when you are discussing theoretically what is going to happen in the future…until that day arrives, and you realise, heck, it’s here!

I had a sudden serious illness at the start of the year and had to stop everything, take time out. Then, as I was starting to come back, coronavirus arrived. It’s been an interesting journey, dealing with crisis both on an internal, personal level and now also on an external, societal level. I’ve been left with the question “What matters?” What I’ve discovered is that I needed to slow down a lot personally, and in that process my perceptions of some things have changed. For instance, coming back into my department I’ve wanted to allow my team to keep a lot of the responsibility they took on when I had to be away. I’m listening a lot more to them, letting them lead.
A small but fascinating insight into the way that, in times of great stress, the principle of skirting around a taboo subject – in this case death – may conflict with the principle of valuing one’s employees’ exceptional efforts.

I was receiving photos of staff on-site who are working almost 24/7, breaking down and extending the cremation facilities. I was excited about the fact that there is really visible progress, with people in their hazmat suits working on a public holiday so that we could be ready. So I shared these photos with my Executive Management Team, highlighting great teamwork and action. Some of them wrote back to say, "We feel a bit awkward about celebrating this, because of the connection with fatalities." And I said, "It’s not the celebration of cremation facilities. It’s the fact that these are our colleagues, working around the clock to make sure the City of Cape Town is ready, and they deserve to be celebrated for the immense work they are doing."
Leading from a position of not knowing

Most of us have grown up assuming that leaders know more than the rest of us. A crisis teaches leaders that, while they must do their utmost to understand what is going on and why, there are always things they cannot know – that perhaps nobody can know. Good leaders don’t feel threatened by not knowing and realise they must press on anyway, always prepared to change direction as new information arrives.

“We had a board meeting yesterday and we set aside three quarters of an hour, and all we did was discuss racism. I said, “I’m not making a proposal, I’m not asking anything of you. My personal position is that I probably don’t understand much as I would like to. I’m a privileged, middle-aged white bloke brought up in a rural part of the U.K., so I haven’t got any of this experience.” We had a very good debate. A colleague from Malaysia, who’s Chinese Malaysian, said, “There’s racism in all places”. We’ve been very clear in saying, “Racism has no place within this firm.” We’re just wondering what do we do about it? If I launched something, would I actually be doing the right thing? Or am I actually making the situation worse?”

“Sometimes I would like a politician to say, “This is a really complex problem and we are going to get these people together to answer these three questions. We commit to coming back to you in a week’s time, not necessarily with all the answers, and then we’ll go from there.”

And there are some types of ‘not knowing’ that feel existential. How does a good leader deal with the sense that the path ahead may not actually exist?

“This week I have a feeling, more than before, of “Where are we going, actually?” I don’t know if you feel that, where are you going? Kind of more lost, at least here. I can’t see a horizon right now. I can’t see a pathway.”
Letting staff go

There seems an inevitable conflict between the economic needs of a business (which from time to time require staff numbers to be reduced) and the good leader’s sense of empathy with employees. Covid-19 brought this conflict into sharp focus for some of our business executives.

We just did a round of reductions, most of them furloughs. We’re hoping we can bring the people back once we get more work, but truth be told, my guess is at least 20% of that team will be permanently reduced because I just don’t see the likelihood of enough work coming to bring them all back, which isn’t necessarily a bad thing. As a manager, some turnover from the lower end of the performers is naturally healthy, actually. 20 years ago, I wouldn’t talk about it that way, but now I see it for what it is and it’s true. We become stronger when these kinds of things happen and I view this the same way.

Nobody on my Executive Committee is arguing that we don’t need to let anybody go, even though there are some parts of the business that are quite busy at the moment, but we want to take the opportunity to just deal with one or two past mistakes. We’ve grown very quickly and maybe some of the hires haven’t quite worked out the way that we wanted them to. There are some people with performance issues, so we have an opportunity to deal with that.

Before, the conversation about reducing staff numbers has been a bit more esoteric, because we’ve been talking about broad numbers and percentages and what does that do to the salary bill. We’re now into the nitty gritty of names, where it starts to get more difficult. That’s when the advocacy begins and the, “Well, I know we agreed to 10%, but I didn’t really mean it,” conversation. It’s one of these times in the economic cycle that I find difficult. I don’t think there are many people who would relish doing what we’re doing at the moment. But we’ll just work through it.

In these times it feels important as a leader to remember that everybody is a human being. Connecting with people at a personal level is so important and can actually make difficult conversations easier, rather than harder. When you have to have a difficult conversation with someone I believe its important that people feel “seen” as an individual. No one gets up in the morning looking forward to difficult conversations, all you can do is your best. So, you might be saying, “We’re going to have to make some redundancies.” If I’ve really seen you beforehand, then people might not feel they’re just a name on a spreadsheet and you don’t care about them as a person.
Consciously letting go, and empowering others to step up

Just as our leaders have generally relished the leadership tasks that fell into their lap with this pandemic, several of them have spoken of realising that others around them would equally thrive on being asked to shoulder more leadership.

“What’s been really crystallized for me is that the most important thing I’ve learned to do - and I enjoy doing it - is to let others lead, to recognise that, especially at times like this, people want to step up, they want to be given more to do - so let it go.”

“...If you’re really about getting work done, you don’t have to get the praise. We want people to get tested but it doesn’t have to be the City that’s leading the charge. We’re not the experts. So we’ve said to the County, “You either need to give us some money to operate and expand these test sites or you need to help us understand what your long term strategy is. Because if the City sites shut down, we are going to rely fully on you, the County, to help us meet the goals for testing per population.” It’s going to be an interesting shift for us, as the City, because I know I’m ready, and I’m hoping our political leadership is ready to hand to County what’s been an excellent City story of setting up and operating test sites, without knowing for sure the County will take a lead.”

Coincident with the Black Lives Matter surge came a realisation that the voice of younger generations isn’t adequately represented in societal decision-making. There are things that can be done about this.

“Transformation isn’t really about you and me in our age group. It’s about how proactive the middle and the younger generation is going to be. Yes, I’m in power, I can yield a lot of influence and that’s nice. But we who are in those positions can actually have a better impact by stepping aside and empowering other people that come behind us. I need to figure out who in that middle and younger generation in the company I need to focus on, doing everything I can to give them some power. I need to set up the right people in the right positions and help them, so they’re effective; and then move aside and let them do it.”
Influence, diplomacy, dialogue

Getting the decisions you think are best out of a large organisation – even when your role has seniority – usually entails personal persuasion and patiently building the requisite support. Even in a crisis, this may be the only way to get things done.

Early in my career, I had to get out of government because I just couldn’t tolerate the bureaucracy. I just wanted to do the good stuff and get it done and not have to deal with all the internal politics. Now, I’m in a position where I’m a bit more patient, still have little tolerance for it, but actually know how to manoeuvre more too. I’m senior enough that I actually can influence things a fair amount.

It always has been difficult for me personally to recognise someone whose authority over me is just because they got a political position. Sometimes they don’t have the same qualifications that I have – and they are normally men. I started to train myself to be more humble and to try to identify what are the qualities that that person might have, understand why that person is there and work out how I could manage down my ego, my intellectual ego, so that I can connect with that person.

I have faith in my leadership that we can get there. I know it’s just going to take some massaging and conversation. And it’s harder to do on email or in these quick online meetings. So I am trying to figure out how to write it out and really gel it into a way that folks are getting the message.

…and then there are times when playing the diplomatic game has become a habit and a screen to hide behind…

We read a lot of tea leaves: “The board won’t approve if…” or “The board won’t do this if…” or “Our clients won’t borrow if we do that.” So we always pull up short by ourselves. Shouldn’t we in some cases try and fail? And see exactly how far we can get? And learn by doing?
The strange satisfactions of being severely challenged

In the early weeks several of our participants spoke of the exhilaration of responding to danger. As the crisis wore on, the exhilaration gave way to more complex emotions.

I’m convinced that everything is going to keep changing, day in, day out, week in, week out for the foreseeable future. So I’ve coined the phrase ‘the now normal’. It’s very much like the things I’ve learned in yoga, just to be present. Keep yourself on your mat and recognise that the past is gone and you don’t know what’s coming. Everything you need is right here on this mat. What I’m finding is that I just have this deep-seated joy. I don’t know how else to describe it, but this deep-seated joy. People want to be useful, and I’m people, I want to be useful.

It’s been incredibly taxing on me personally, physically, but it’s been the most fulfilling eight weeks of my life. I do consider it a privilege, but I also am also trying to make sure I don’t burn myself out. I want to make sure I’m still able to do the work for as long as I can.

You have to be relentless. Crises of this nature are long and hard, and no one else is going to pick up the slack for you. If you neglect it for a couple of days, or a week or two, it’s not like the universe has said, "Right. You as a leader need a break, or to focus elsewhere, so we’ll just keep everything in stasis for you." You have to be driving it, day in and day out, and it’s very hard to delegate that. You can figure out who your drivers are, but it’s really for you to keep up your understanding and your pressure. And there’s no second act in this picture. You’re either going to get it right or wrong. That’s up to me, and that is the trust that has been given to me. I can recognise, at the human level: “Yes, I’m tired. Yes, a break would be nice.” Firstly, I know I couldn’t take a break. It’s just not possible, because even when I have my day off, my mind starts spinning. But second, it’s just not in my personality. This was given to me, and I’m going to do it. That is what I mean by ‘it’s relentless’.
THE TURBULENCE OF THE BREAKING WAVE

In a crisis such as this one, with no certain end in sight for most countries, the initial high-octane response phase gave way after a few weeks to something much more complex for all our participants, taxing their leadership skills in new ways.
Dealing with uncertainty

All our participants have commented on the challenge of working with so little certainty and so few stable landmarks to navigate by. Not only is the behaviour of the coronavirus still not fully understood, but most national economies have entered freefall. Add to this having to work remotely from home and the job of keeping one’s organisation or city functioning simply magnifies.

Happily, in all our participants’ cases we got the sense that the people who needed to show up and be present to all this difficulty did exactly that. Stories abound of individuals and teams leaning in energetically to solve new problems and stabilise the chaos.

In a crisis, paradoxically, many people will respond best if you give them really hard problems to solve. This may be particularly true of engineers and technically minded people, but possibly many others. It can channel adrenalin, provide a sense of clear purpose and reduce anxiety. Crises can draw out inspiring responses from one’s people. Devote resources to harvesting and sharing these in real time, particularly internally.

We are doing everything we can to process and broadcast messages of support, messages of appreciation for all of our staff members, and amplifying their stories and interactions and trying as much as we can to make sure that they get what they need.

Our hardest challenge currently is future planning – it’s like the ‘Phoney War’ in 1939, when we were at war but not much was happening. We’ve just had a really good month, revenue-wise, but there are clearly some sectors that are completely flat. And we’re sure it’s going to get tougher generally, but it’s so hard to plan with confidence. In normal times this kind of buoyant revenue picture would have us wondering about recruiting more staff – but we’re absolutely not there yet.

One of leadership’s toughest tasks in an existential crisis is to reckon with the inevitability of failure and loss, and to proceed purposefully anyway. Craig is charged with running the City of Cape Town’s Covid-19 response. After weeks of preparation he arrived at this reckoning.
I don’t doubt that our systems are going to come under strain, they will. But in as much as we can be prepared for dealing with the pandemic at the operational and health level, I think we are there now, and it’s going to come. Whether we are in hard lockdown or not, that moment will arrive. The consequences of the lockdown in terms of food security, in terms of economic and social security are so dire that they create compound problems that just make our response that much harder. From my engagement with the leadership, my sense is that we need to get into it and deal with what comes, without pretending that we can defer this pain, because it’s just not possible. Those are very harsh calculations to make, but it would seem to me that they are responsible and mature leadership responses.
On the horns of the ‘re-opening’ dilemma

Locking down whole countries was, in retrospect, a relatively simple process, helped by the copy-cat effect that Wuhan went first and thereafter governments around the world had a template to work from. Also national governments tend to thrive on actions that involve central control, so the simplicity of ‘Stay at home!’ worked well in most cases for the first few weeks. But as our conversations started to reveal from mid-April onwards, the process of returning to work was going to be orders of magnitude more complex.

How to manage the gradual reopening of our offices? There is a lot of sophistication in reopening successfully. We’re polling our staff for their feelings and expectations. The added complexity of the patchwork of different states’ approaches to the reopening. And of the various landlords whose office space we rent - what will their approach be? It really matters to staff to be communicated with often by management, and with a caring approach to their needs. Our plan is to provide guidelines to staff but then allow them to respond to specific circumstances as they see fit - e.g. getting on public transport may be challenging. And it’s tough when we can’t provide them with the right PPE in all cases, yet clients want them to go to site, etc.

What the community want, I think, is not really to go back to normal life, but to get back some meaning, to ‘let the puppies play together’. But I think that people want to know the rules in advance. So what is important is that we get the rules for the Phase Two, not the day before, but some days in advance, so people can be prepared. At the same time some are asking “Must I go back to work for my boss’s profit or can I take care of my health?”

It’s an issue that tests an organisation’s claim that ‘our people are our greatest asset’. Will staff experience the organisation as truly having their best interests at heart? The answer seems to lie partly in the levels of trust that have been built over years and partly in the leadership’s willingness to communicate frequently and honestly as tough decisions approach, while listening thoroughly to staff concerns… all of it remotely through a computer screen.

We’re working out when and how we will re-open our own offices and helping clients with re-starting their operations in large buildings. It’s a complex challenge and pivots around the issue of trust. Staff need to trust that coming back to the office won’t put them in harm’s way, either using public transport or when they get to the building or a client’s site. In all cases, we’re finding that communicating openly with staff and asking their views is both much welcomed and yields useful information.
A common thread in conversations has been to ponder the implications of the pandemic for office-based working in future. Suddenly our assumptions about our head office as the body that naturally houses the mind and soul of an organisation have been thrown into doubt. Do we need big, expensive offices? The other side of that coin has been a realisation that, while we still have head offices, re-opening them well calls for skill and judgment beyond that normally required of the office administrator.

"We’re making sure that office re-opening is not being handled as just any other office related activity that the office administrator would do, like ordering paper, or taking care of the copiers. This is more important, so the operational managers resident in the offices will take the lead as to who comes into the office, when they come into the office, tracking how they’re doing in the office, etc."
The power of good data

Perhaps more than any other kind of crisis, the global spread of an invisible virus places the value of data front and centre. Our Chief Resilience Officers frequently referred to the importance of decision-makers being data literate in order to make sound, defensible decisions for their city.

As we move into the peak fatalities period, I’m comforted that we’ve now got our temporary morgue and the city's 48 funeral businesses have started using the WhatsApp group we set up, sending us daily data about bodies they are handling. This is giving us a layer of more timely and reliable data than what we’re getting from the clinically-driven Provincial Government models, where a chronic delay in test results renders much of the data meaningless. It’s that test delay that stops funeral businesses from processing bodies as they must await a Covid result, and hence the need for the temporary morgue to provide that additional storage.

Something I thought was very obvious turned out not to be so to government officials. We regularly do digital mapping, but for them that was a game changer. The moment city officials started looking at the mapping exercise and saw they could update details into that in real time, they realised it would actually help them in terms of communicating better to stakeholders, doing proper analysis and managing resources.

…and often the quest for simple headline statistics overlooks critical nuances that lie beneath such numbers and suggest a different course of action.

Everyone’s obsessed with the numbers of people getting tested, and I get it, but zeroing in on the number and not on the ‘who’ is how you get people left behind. We have a huge screen in the Emergency Operations Center and our leadership want to see numbers every day of who’s been tested. But it’s not just the numbers of people being tested, it’s also figuring out where they’re coming from or what their race ethnicity is, given that the highest vulnerability is in the poorest areas of the city.
Leadership from a rollercoaster

We all experienced that trap of thinking, “Once this is over…”. But by early July it was becoming obvious to our participants that expecting an end to the crisis any time soon was more than just wishful thinking – at a psychological level it was positively unhelpful.

“The thing we’ve gotten right is this idea that we’re in a period of rapid change. Stop thinking about change as something we’re going to get through, but something that we have to master, that we have to be good at. I’m beginning to hear a couple people go, “I’m tired.” I’m thinking, “if you’re not exhilarated by this kind of change, then you may not be the right person for the role that we’ve got you in. Maybe we need to look at a different role if you find this exhausting.” My feeling is, get yourself in the mindset that, “This is normal. This isn’t strenuous. It’s not exhausting.” I think differently now. My imagination is a lot more lively at moments like this.

When Covid hit the world there was a lot of unknowing, but because it’s now been hitting so many parts of the world there’s a trend that you kind of know how to deal with it. But how do we now go from being more or less paralyzed with Covid, to knowing how we navigate it, in an environment where our partners’ economies are continually opening up, closing down, opening up, closing down? I’m a person who loves planning. I love to know what we are doing in the next half year. This is now super difficult. You can’t plan anything. You can only take one day at a time.

The renewed lockdown of Melbourne affects a lot of our staff. The general view is quite dispiriting. People feel very deflated. I think there’s a lot of the people who have been doing it tough and they were just sensing some relaxation, kids going back to school, thank goodness for that. And now they are having to do it all over again. I think that’s hitting some people quite hard. So the work that we’ve been doing over the last several months around people’s wellbeing and personal comfort, we’re going to have to redouble all those efforts.
If the mould no longer fits, break it, innovate and move on

Any crisis entails a dramatic change in circumstances. Systems originally set up in circumstances that no longer exist may need to be suspended or changed - all at speed.

“We’re still at low infection numbers for Siemens but we’re seeing an uptick and we’re seeing more frequent closure of facilities. So every time we’ve got to take a factory down for a shift or a day, that’s an impact to the business. I’m saying, “Let’s start managing the whole picture, not just focusing on how many sick days our staff are allowed and thinking, ‘That’s all we can afford.’ Could you pay somebody to stay home if you knew that otherwise you’d have to shut down the site?” Simple math.

We have a contingency plan to help the private funeral home industry to cope. It relies on a number of drivers to drive repurposed City vehicles to take bodies to where they need to go. We have the vehicles, we have the drivers, who are currently under-utilised because of our working practices at the moment. The problem is getting the drivers to agree to take the bodies, because it’s one thing to be moving documents from one city building to another but it’s another thing to deal psychologically with taking a body. We always knew we would hit this constraint, but we’re trying to work through it. I think we have a viable incentive scheme, which is basically a form of risk pay that we will be willing to give the drivers. I fully believe in asking people to go above and beyond, but I do understand that asking someone to go somewhere to pick up a dead body who has never done it before, that is a bit more than saying, “Can you work a few more hours after five o’clock each day?”
Lift your head and collaborate, collaborate

In ‘normal times’, competition seems an unavoidable characteristic of both politics and business. In an existential crisis the stakes alter dramatically. People quickly become intolerant of such behaviour from prominent institutions when life-or-death decisions are to be taken. Indeed, there may never be better conditions for collaborating across boundaries than in a meta-crisis where everyone is affected and involved.

I think Brazilian society is very competitive, even though some people assume we’re more ‘collective’ because we like to live and gather in large groups. But then in the very first moment of this crisis people were very afraid because they didn’t know what was going on, yet there was a willingness to help, to collaborate somehow. It was very positive. We could also see this in big companies, even though philanthropy is not as strong in Brazil as in other countries. It was quite powerful. Some very rich people start to organise a movement, organising big companies and wealthy individuals to get together to donate.

To address some historic difficulties in collaborating with Alameda County my team and I have been actively seeking their involvement and showing appreciation for everything they do of a collaborative nature. Even in the just last week the synergy has been different...they’re coming to the table more.

I’ve been working deeply with provincial colleagues and city colleagues on what our approach is to the ‘hot-spot’ areas, which are now our strategic focus. You could boil it down to an intensification of our public health measures in those areas and our resource allocation. But it was quite gratifying to see that, given the time we had spent to get the planning parameters right for general service responses, we are now able to activate them to say, “Deploy in this area.” What the payoffs will be remains to be seen, but at least there is good coordination within government and we’re leading thematically and not just across sectors.

What we’ve learned in the first phase is that people were willing to collaborate. For this city and this state, this is very important because politics always gets in the way of things. Politicians are always putting their own before the public’s interest. But this time was totally different. What we saw here was a civics lesson. I hope that the collaboration continues as we reinvent how we manage the city, manage business and manage our lives.
I think during these months, a lot of trust building has happened between governments, citizens, and the corporates. I think the way corporates are functioning will drastically change over time. Since a lot of these corporates and other entities, like educational institutes, were involved in supporting the city, they will play a very active role once the entire curve is flattened and the situation is completely under control. They will actively get involved, especially in aspects related to public health and sanitation. I think the next time something like this unfortunately happens, the government will know the players, and which ones were active.

One change that I hope will last is the state government and the municipalities collaborating a lot. The municipalities are creating lots of protocols for each sector and each activity. But then the governor and the mayor put together the teams to work on this, so the city and the state will announce one single protocol, so as not to confuse people. And both teams are working on the economy as well, to reduce the number of different taxes and make things easier for business. And that’s more than collaborating, it’s actually working together. So I think this is very radical.
Where must authority be situated in a crisis?

The appropriate location of decision-making is rarely a question that captures the public’s attention, yet it can make all the difference as to whether governance can be effective in a crisis. In the pandemic we quickly learned the value of top-down, nationwide lockdowns. But as time wore on it became more and more obvious that many crucial tasks are better handled locally than centrally. Indeed, this is a well understood principle of disaster management: delegate authority and resources to the most local level that can handle them. However, that requires central authorities to let go…

Crisis are best managed by the people who are closest to the action. In the US we have actually gone for hyper-local empowerment. You heard the President say, “Hey, governors, this is yours to go solve.” And then of course governors were dealing with city managers. Often the true nature of a crisis is hyper-local, so people close to it solve it, but this is more, “Who am I going to blame for the health crisis and the economic crisis?” It makes you wonder what the appropriate response would be.

When we present to the Provincial government on certain initiatives, it’s almost as if they can’t comprehend that the City would be thinking innovatively about something – it doesn’t compute. It’s like a cognitive bias, perhaps an institutional one. I’ve certainly believed for so long that cities are where so much attention, public policy, and effort happens. But the Provincial and National government just have no way to register an innovation that comes from the City, to understand that this is something that a local government could do or think about. I do have a very rich working relationship with many provincial colleagues, and it does not impede my relationships or my work, but this is a deeper reflection about the manner of cooperative governance.

Right now there is a lot of autonomy given to the state and the city to decide what to do. But a lot of health facilities are with the private sector, and it’s really difficult for the city to have the kind of control where you can really serve society. State and city must work together with those hospitals to basically tell them that this is a critical situation, where we want maximum control of facilities, so that we can respond dynamically, based on real-time changes in the situation.
In the middle of one crisis, another arrives

For the first few weeks, Covid-19 was pretty much the sole object of our participants’ attention. This was remarkable but could not last, and soon they were faced with additional layers of complexity and challenge.

HURRICANES

Hurricane season is coming to the East and Gulf Coasts. We’re preparing for a call with the leadership of one of our most important state government clients to talk about not just getting ready for a second wave of Covid cases, but for that to happen at the same time as hurricanes, which peak from August through October. This raises all kinds of difficult questions. For example, they ordinarily have very prescribed evacuation procedures and routes and systems with buses or other mass transport. And then sheltering and what they call ‘mass care’, such as where you put people in a school gymnasium or an auditorium or sports arena. So now what are you going to do? Maybe there’s more sheltering in place. Maybe you’re using things like Uber and Lyft instead of buses. Maybe you’re using hotels or college dormitories that are sitting empty instead of large gymnasiums to mass shelter people with more individual separation.

THE BLACK LIVES MATTER PROTESTS

When the BLM protests broke out at the end of May, our participants in the US (and shortly after, the others) immediately recognised it as something they needed to turn and face, a crisis demanding their attention just as Covid-19 had.

I’m still in charge of test site operations and getting test numbers up. City resources are all strained, trying to deal with these protests. Staffing the test sites has been hard, including security, as police are preoccupied with the protests, and now we’re dealing with a potential surge in cases. But then there’s the matter of getting a test operator who’s comfortable being in those spaces where I can’t control the police. How can I get someone to commit to showing up at a testing site if we have, over the last few nights, teargassing and flash bang bombs?
Because we started with a healthcare crisis that precipitated a financial crisis, you could almost predict from the very beginning that we now have ourselves a political crisis as well. These things are inexorably linked. At Siemens we were getting ready to ramp down our formal global crisis team. The idea is that we've put new approaches in place, we've empowered individuals on the local level, we have escalation paths set up for them in the normal course of doing business. So we don’t need a crisis team to help us with that. But now add on a layer of civil disruption, and yes, we in the US will need to deal with that. On top of that, we’ve got a storm season that’s about to start, so we’re prepared for that. And so having a team of colleagues that are constantly acknowledging and managing, I think we’re in good shape.

The George Floyd saga has opened the eyes of multiple departments, not just police, to their role in structural racism and perhaps even contributing to police brutality. For example, the Department of Transportation is now thinking about parking tickets, which are a big revenue producer. There's literally a pipeline from parking ticket to unpaid parking ticket, to people driving after their license has been revoked because they have to get to work, to - in certain cases – incarceration, mostly of low income black and brown people. So how can we create a parking ticket solution that is more equitable? This is not just police, it’s structural racism. It’s our economy. It’s everything. So it's everybody's responsibility. Hearing department directors ask those questions has been heartening, it’s been nice to see.

As the BLM issue has gained prominence, some colleagues have been saying, “We’ve got to do something!” I think we must find proportionality within that. I’ve asked, “Well, you say we need to do something, but what is the why? Let’s understand the issue and the facts of our relationship to it, historically and now, and let’s think through what are the points we really need to be making and the actions we need to be taking?”
THESE PROTESTS REMIND US OF OLD HURTS, OLD PREJUDICES

[The technology for Covid-19 testing] has been developed by tech companies that were around before all this started, they based their business model on genome mapping. Now they are getting big contracts with the County to set up testing, since they are coming up with solutions that are “quick and efficient”. But they’re saying that they still have the right to sell that data, which is coming out of these swabs [for testing for Covid-19]. It’ll be anonymised, but they still have a right to sell data. In the States, it reminds a lot of us about the syphilis study done in the fifties or sixties, to test a cure for syphilis. They specifically went to black populations to do that testing, and it was government sanctioned. They were essentially testing it on black people and not giving them the cure. Many black people died at a time when there was a cure for it.

Sometimes, when you say something in a meeting, and then later you hear the same thing said by somebody else who’s maybe a little louder, or a little more of the mainstream. Then all of a sudden, it’s a great idea, and it’s their idea. This happened often with me and my boss and mentor at my previous company, and I used to let it go. At first, it bothered me, but after a while, I just said, “It’s not worth it. I’ll just let it go.” It’s interesting, because it was maybe another category of white privilege that doesn’t bother me as much, because I’m not a woman, I’m not of color, so I can’t ascribe it to that when it happens to me…and it did. I look back at it now, especially through the lens of the current inequality issue, and see I was basically contributing to the problem by letting that behavior go.

We have a number of Aboriginal employees within the organisation. I know that some of them have found the recent events quite disturbing and personally very stressful, because it brings into the open for some of them how they were treated themselves. Arup has a range of initiatives aimed at integrating Aboriginal students and professionals into the organisation, and several field programmes using our engineering skills. But in a way, the more ways you find to contribute, the more you realise there are some problems you can’t fix - but you also can’t walk away from them.
Organising for the longer-haul crisis

Time plays a crucial role in any crisis. Our participants’ organisations all made rapid adaptive changes to their operations once the pandemic became clear, but the mainstream assumption was that this was a storm that could be persuaded to pass within a few weeks, or at worst months. Once that assumption fell away, strategies had to be revised.

I’ve gone through two structural iterations with my team in dealing with this crisis, a planning phase which was frenetic and then a highly structured execution phase, which has now been going for about six weeks. What is concerning me is that back in the day, we thought the peak would be a sharp curve that lasted two or three weeks, but now it looks longer and flatter, projected to last from late July to early October. So what I’m wrestling with in my mind is whether there’s another structural change that I need to go through in order to manage that longer, harder slog, which I also think is going to amplify the economic effects of Covid. If I recalibrate the structure, we’ll lessen the pace and the load for those who’ve just been doing this and nothing else for three or four months. But there’s a level of depth and strain on a system, whether it’s depot closures or service disruptions that you are dealing with for a longer time period, because all of this has been set up to deal with a certain expected level and duration of crisis management. I think there may be a different language we need to use, or at least adapt. Where do we start to make the transition from crisis leadership to - I don’t know what that would be – ‘pressurised operations, sustained over time’?

At Siemens globally we’ve declared that we are no longer in a crisis. A crisis happens when we have a disruption, when we realise that the tools we have that we’re using today are not sufficient to help us successfully weather what’s happening, in this case pandemic. First with the health crisis, then with the risk of a financial crisis, then with the BLM societal crisis, we have in each case gone into crisis mode, but then, as soon as we’d put in place reliable systems to manage down the elements of disruption and turn them into tasks, we agreed, “The things we can control, we now have under control”, and we moved out of crisis mode on that issue.
The emotional and psychological pressure of the longer-haul crisis

We humans are genetically programmed to move swiftly into a high-adrenalin response to danger, and all our participants referenced the intensity and astonishing speed of adaptation they achieved in the early days and weeks of the pandemic. What followed, when the danger stubbornly refused to go away, was an inevitable deflation. Our participants and their teams confronted the real possibility of becoming stuck in a very drawn-out, low-adrenalin crisis.

I just went for three days to the Lake and took a moment. You start to recall what you have done during the last three or four months and you recognise what really happened, because during the last three months, you were in a kind of bubble. I had a chance to reflect on what should have been done better, to give me a chance to act differently. And it’s quite shocking, because you didn’t realise. It’s like downhill skiing. You go for three months on a roll without stopping. And then you realise that maybe we should have more time to think and to take a break, even if you don’t have the time, because you need to have this break.

I think there’s no doubt my team is under pressure. The people dealing with fatalities management are under a lot of pressure. And I’m trying to do as much pastoral work as I can to motivate people, to not be hard on them. To push and to drive, but not to break. And trying to pull out all of the leadership qualities that I may have got over the past few years. It’s interesting for me just to know how the people close to me are observing me emotionally during this time. And these people, who’ve been with me through several crises, if I express a frustration I can see they think, “Is he asking me to come in and support him?” So I’m very clear to say, “This is not making me fall apart. I just need to express this, and you need to hear it. And now I’ve got it off my chest and I’ve let it go.

I think there is a bit of anger around, in my opinion because a lot of people are tired and they need a break. It seems that a lot of people are working too much. And there isn’t even certainty about a holiday because you don’t know where you will be allowed to go.
I had a conversation with a friend - she left here and went back home to the South. And she said, “Why did you not answer my calls?” “Because you left the city. It’s easy to stay in a city like Milan when everything’s going well. But it’s too easy to leave the city and then come back in September, when we have gone through all the difficulties. And then you come back and you’ll find everything fine. We needed all the support we could get.” Somehow my reaction was too strong on this. I called a psychologist friend, who said, “This is completely normal. Because you were more exposed to the reality than the other people, and then when you speak with someone who was not, it’s quite easy to have this kind of reaction.” There is no one who was not exposed from a psychological point of view. When you’re exposed to death, different people have completely different reactions. And we don’t know, we can’t judge, we can’t play the policeman - we need to reflect on the other person’s situation.

I think people are getting tired. I can see it in my family, we are getting tired of not having any kind of light ahead. Where are we going? And I’m scared that we will lose the opportunity to learn a lesson. We know there is another crisis that has been announced for quite a while, the climate crisis. We are not doing enough to avoid that next crisis. For what are we going through this crisis, then? What do we have to learn here?

Personally, I found it hard stopping and then having to start again, after taking a few days off. Stepping away allowed me to observe how much and how intensely I’d been working. So on Monday morning, I was like, “You’ve already lifted a hundred weights, you took a break, and now you have to do it all again - only this time you know how heavy and awful it was.” It was a surprising challenge. But then, I’d do it all again in a minute, so that was nice.

I’ve been doing public consultations for our very democratic climate action plan, and I thought it would be a great opportunity. But actually people were dumping, they were angry for everything and not turning on their cameras. I think it’s nothing to do with climate change. I think it’s to do with the fact that they don’t know what to do and they are losing jobs, having their incomes reduced. They have to deal with the children doing home schooling and they have to cook, clean, and stay in the same space.
RECOVERING BETTER

Our participants are, both by nature and by choice of role, people who work to improve the future. This has meant that, even while spending most of their daily energy focusing on solving the immediate problems posed by the pandemic, their gaze would inevitably shift from time to time to consider the future and how it would be altered by current events.
Green stimulus? Green recovery?

What will it take to tilt the way governments, particularly in the developing world, spend their stimulus billions? Our participant from the world of development finance sees the post-Covid stimulus and recovery period as a unique opportunity to influence a green recovery, simply because of the unprecedented scale of the money being borrowed and granted. But it’s a hard sell to conventionally minded finance departments and their political masters.

The real risk is, 10 years from now - or even two years from now - they’re going to be writing the same obituary of the billions of dollars that went out the door. ‘We would have, should have, etc. Just like 2008 and 2009.’ Well we didn’t get it done, and therefore we lost the decade. And given that this is the final decade in which we’re able to do things in a cost effective manner to address climate, it comes back to, ‘Can’t we get out of our box and really push very hard or think a bit more creatively?’ It’s widely recognised in our C-suite that we should seize this window, but the conversations with client governments are naturally highly complex given the many needs in these countries. It’s a real dance. And it’s a bit of a time crunch that we’re facing. I think it is weeks that we have.

Of all the things in the world that we could do to move the climate needle or the climate finance needle, how do we figure out which we want to do in the coming six months? We’re dealing with countries that have so many development challenges that I don’t envy the ministers who have to make the call in terms of what goes into the package, because there’s so many things that they could spend it on. If this is your one bite at the apple, you’re making some judgment on what’s really going to do the most for your country over the long-term or short-term. Are you going to argue that if you’re going to be spending a lot of money, that you should not address those issues and only go do the green stuff?

Government tend to focus on shovel-ready projects, of which there are relatively few. Don’t just think about something that’s shovel-ready, which has been on the cards for years, think about something that is truly new, that won’t be shovel ready but rather pencil ready or mouse-ready. For example there is a lot of investment going into solar and wind. That’s making the grid a bit unstable, so invest in the grid to handle an increased level of renewables. Or skip electric and go straight to the next generation with hydrogen-powered rail. Leapfrog rather than just doing a bit more of the same. A lot of stimulus going on is business as usual, not using the chance for a future investment.
The message is conditionality: “You can have our money, but you have to do the following…” If we’re not thinking about conditionality and a long-term development trajectory strategy, then we’re missing the boat. We have certain governments approaching us and saying the right things but operationally there’s no accountability mechanism. There’s nothing that says we will be monitoring and reporting on a monthly basis. There’s no incentive structure for country managers to do this. So again it comes back to how serious are we and if we are trying to really do all these things that we’ve now claimed we want to in terms of rebuilding better.
Inequality: seize the opportunity to move the dial

Crises usually shine a spotlight on inequality, as it is the poorest who have the fewest options to escape disaster or recover afterwards. Covid-19 has done so on a breathtaking scale, both as a virus that seems to affect certain minority groups disproportionately, and through the mass-scale shutting down of economies, cutting off livelihoods. But in amongst the losses and misery there are some signs that the scale of inequality has become too glaring to ignore, and it may be harder to go back to the ‘old normal’.

Normally Brazil is very bureaucratic and to access official systems you have to be registered to vote, etc. But in order to deliver its emergency Covid cash benefits to the poor, the federal government decided to create a digital ID, which would be given to anyone with a cell phone. The big surprise has been the amount of people that actually emerged to claim this digital ID, people who have been living in informality all this time. There was a layer of invisible citizens who were not in any kind of statistics. They didn’t have any social security. Last week people started to say that the country needs to have a plan for these people, needs to be accountable for these people.

I’m part of the newly formed Racial Health Disparities Task Force, started in the wake of Covid-19. It’s a broad group of City and County staff plus other stakeholders. Its big ambition is to eliminate disparities related to Covid-19 in the city of Oakland. To do that we need to understand, amongst other things, why blacks and Latinx folks are suffering a higher death rate from Covid-19, and the link to higher air quality burdens in their communities.

You can say Denmark is now becoming a safe zone. Finland a safe zone. New Zealand a safe zone. Okay, so what are we now going to do to help? How are we going to help other countries? You can say, “Denmark is okay, so now we’re fine.” No. We are learning the hard way. You cannot leave anybody behind, because if it is true that there was one person that activated this whole chain reaction, that exactly underlines how that one person you leave behind somewhere in the world can start the whole thing all over again.
Identifying and supporting leaders for the next crisis

A crisis can be understood as an audition for the next generation of leadership, and of leadership ideas. But the learning must be conscious, and time must be allocated to do the necessary collective reflection. As a crisis winds down, people in the thick of responding to it are usually tired and have to move on, so valuable lessons get buried and forgotten.

In September or October, when we’re starting to get out of this mess, I think the mayor or the city manager should call all the departmental directors together and say, “Look, this is what we did together. And now we should do an exercise to say ‘This was fine. That was a good choice. But what could we do better next time?’ So we’ll use this to improve our decision-making in future crises.

Some of my leaders on the leadership team stepped up and really shone, because everybody had to do more and more. Others didn’t. Something we don’t have within my senior leadership team – but it would be good to develop - is leading indicators that reveal manager performance. What leading indicators might have given us some warning that these one or two individuals really were struggling?

When we bring new managers into the organisation we’ve understood for several years that we need to focus on transversal management skills, leadership, resilience and working under pressure in crisis and uncertainty. As that extends to executive management, I think we’re going to have to look at that very quickly. We have done quite a lot of work in the executive team in the past year, focusing on leadership development as a team. Has that extended to what it means to work in crisis? Not necessarily, but absolutely it is on the agenda for when we emerge, whenever that may be.
Planning cities and infrastructure for resilience

Chief Resilience Officers, as their name suggests, cannot help but see opportunities for improving their cities’ resilience, even in the midst of an existential crisis.

I see more de-centralisation coming. There is a large fruit and vegetable market in the city centre, but it’s inside the containment (Red) zone, so very restricted at the moment. I expect the City to develop several smaller markets in different parts of the city, to be more flexible in a crisis. Similarly, we have a big central train station. We could develop satellite stations around the city to be more resilient.

We’re looking for dual use of infrastructure all the time. We want to revive the local cultural scene (Milan is known globally for its rich cultural calendar), so we’re looking at New York’s idea of closing down one street (or portion of a street) in each district, so pedestrians can socially distance more easily, restaurants can spill out onto the street and we can host cultural events. We have 88 small districts in the city. We plan to close particularly streets that have e-vehicle charging stations, so that sound equipment can be run off them for pop-up concerts and other cultural events.
TOWARDS A RESILIENT FUTURE

Since early in the pandemic, there has been a palpable sense that it represents an existential crisis at all levels - individual, organisational, urban and national. Several of our participants shared their reflections on new approaches and principles that could form the bedrock of a more resilient future for our organisations and cities.
The emerging ‘Con-Covid’ landscape and its implications

The contours of this future, living with Covid-19, are only gradually forming. But that hasn’t stopped our participants thinking about both its implications and its creative possibilities.

Everybody says “Post-Covid,” but I’m going to say, “Con-Covid “...that there’s a different way of being in the company of this virus, and so start to get that positive sense of, “OK, once we accept that, we can get creative.” Late last year we created a strategy framework we called the US Agenda 2030 - here’s what we think our US markets are going to look like for our five main areas of business. We’ve engaged internal consultants to help us think through the question, ‘How does Covid affect these? And what other opportunities should we be considering since things are changing everywhere?’ The real trick is how to set up an exercise like this without constraining ourselves. Incremental thinking isn’t what we’re interested in. We’re interested in the really big thoughts.

Our CFO said, “Isn’t it too early to be doing this? Who has a crystal ball? Who has certainty?” So we all agreed the objective here is not to create a prescriptive plan, but to hypothesise a set of possibilities and then to set up a sensor network with specific things to be watching for. “Hey, we’re getting indications that what we thought is in fact happening – or not,” and be able to feed that back into the businesses by way of guidance as they respond to the market. And in the spirit of killing as many birds with one stone as possible, we’re thinking through what university relationships we have where students may not have things to do this summer, so can we tap into some brain power that would otherwise be idle. And then what about the talents in our own organisation? Is there anyone we can draw into the network of the team that’s doing this, in order to keep people’s hearts and minds fully engaged?

We’re having a philosophical debate at work around the future of the commercial office world. A lot of our building and design work is for commercial office clients, and right now they have no clue what the future looks like. Firstly, they depend upon organisations growing and moving into new space. I can’t see any organisation right now being able to take a decision about this. And if you are going to move, how much space do you need? At the moment, all I hear is that nobody is looking for new space.
Right now there is a lot of autonomy given to the state and the city to decide what to do. But a lot of health facilities are with the private sector, and it’s really difficult for the city to have the kind of control where you can really serve society. State and city must work together with those hospitals to tell them this is a critical situation, where we want maximum control of facilities, so that we can respond dynamically, based on real-time changes in the situation. And it’s critical to ensure that the relationship is not spoiled because otherwise it gives a very bad signal to the citizens that the state and the city is not prepared for the second phase of the outbreak, and then there’ll be a lot of anger.

I’m worried that we’re going to repeat old mistakes with critical urban infrastructure in the response to this crisis: “Let’s get this stimulus package out the door, let someone else figure out later how we’re going to pay for it.” It’s the hamster wheel of “How do I get re-elected?” rather than asking “Where are we really going as a city? There’s a measure of pain that we all need to go through together in this process, but we’ll come out better and stronger. And here are the different scenarios that could play out and here’s how we could think about them.” That sort of leadership is very rare. A crisis like this is the absolute best time for leadership to come forth and say, “No, we’re going to do it differently. What’s it going to take for us to be stronger, better, safer?”

Denmark competes with other Nordic countries to attract talent and investment. We now are getting investment enquiries into Denmark that we didn’t get before, because we have done much better with the pandemic. I think that’s interesting. What were the winning countries before? And what are the winning countries afterwards, and why? Some factors that are becoming important used not to be factors before.
We’ve been challenged to think differently for our future

Our collective unpreparedness for the pandemic has raised the obvious question, ‘What would it be like if we were well prepared for future crises?’ Which in turn begs the question, ‘What would that require us to have done?’ Answering these, one quickly realises that our normal methods and institutions for designing and planning our future are simply not up to the task. So what if we began improving these, starting right where we are?

Now these issues are sort of merged. We’re thinking about recovery, not just from the pandemic, but also from historic, structural racism and other policies. I see us now turning the page to what I imagine to be a new world, or at least thinking about it. And I’m seeing it as an opportunity. I know I’ve been more open-minded, and so has my mayor. She’s been more willing to listen and try new things than I’ve ever seen. I think there’s an opportunity to leverage that excitement.

How many major cities are doing any form of credible, thoughtful scenario planning and then going and applying that to the market or to the sectors and players in their city, to understand which ones they should be bolstering? Not in the midst of crisis, but in anticipation. Are there scenarios informing thinking that say, “We should have at least a critical mass of X type of businesses or Y type of assets. Or how much of our local supply chain should be on soil versus foreign? Because we’ve done seven scenarios and under four of the seven, these things become critical and we don’t have enough of them.” The scenarios could be climatic, business, a pandemic, whatever it is. I don’t know the answer to this at all, but I think it’s a mission critical question to the topic that we’re tackling here. It’s almost crying out in the public sector for a Citizen Assembly, thinking about different scenarios, where people are exposed to the potential of different things happening and they really participate to think through those different eventualities.

This is a moment where Arup could help get thinkers together - I was going to say ‘like-minded thinkers’ but I actually think you need people with disparate views to get together to think through these topics. For example, is this a time for a radical change in how we make our cities work?
A new role for data-led decision-making

The reliance on often complex health data for decision-making during the pandemic has helped warm up the political class to the value of data in decision-making, bringing us close to a future where data-led decision-making is the norm, not the exception.

There was a brainstorming session involving senior people from all levels of government, where a lot of data and insights were discussed on a dashboard. That is a change because that kind of visualisation gave them an opportunity to dispel certain notions or assumptions. I think that the working style has changed towards well-informed, data-based decision making, and I think that will be embedded over a period of time, even for crucial infrastructure projects, not only for disasters. Pune is known as ‘the Oxford of the East’, with many educational institutes, researchers, intellectuals. They can actually help the City in our decision-making, building on whatever raw data or information we have between us.

Something I’m quite proud of is that in my weekly briefing to the Mayoral Committee, we had a really rich discussion about what is publicly communicated by both National Government and ourselves on Covid related death numbers, going through why - after some very deep data analysis - we believe that there’s a lag in their numbers. It was such a great conversation to have with leaders, where we were actively remembering what we learned from the Day Zero drought crisis, where we used the most conservative approach to when we thought water would run out. I don’t think there will be another crisis in the city where the leadership don’t start with, “What does the data tell us, where are the data?” It’s such a great sea change. I said to some colleagues yesterday on the Data Coordinating Committee I chair, “There are things that we’ve done now with data and Covid that have probably advanced by years our change strategy for getting the organisation to be data-driven.”
Where will future leadership come from?

Covid-19 has caused us to ask some big and necessary questions about inclusion – not simply because inclusion is morally better but also because perhaps these kinds of existential crises demand a diversity of leadership that our institutions are not accustomed to producing. Might we be better led in future by configurations of capability that are hard to imagine right now?

I think there will be an evolution of what it means to be a good CEO – that its much more than delivering financial returns. There'll be other values that will come into play, not just in the sense of a balanced scorecard but much more about purpose and connectedness to the global issues. Business transcends national and political boundaries. It connects and employs people across the world and it serves those people. And business leaders are emerging as the voice of reason in these times of change. In the future as communities look for somebody to provide good leadership, they may find that more readily amongst business leaders than amongst politicians.

I have 5-10 years, max 15 years left in my career. I need to start figuring out now who I can help. Who are those young people I can help? If we could say to leaders like me, “Okay, one of your leading KPI's that you’re going to be judged on, Tom, is that you need to have five touchpoints per month with the youth.” I think that’s what it’s going to take. I might do it anyway if I decide to personally, but if you really want the broad-based leadership to buy in, build it into the KPI's that all the leaders are judged on. Now you’re walking the walk, not just talking the talk. It’s got to be measured, it’s got to be incentivised. Otherwise it’ll continue to just be small islands of time we devote to it.

I think there are a lot of companies that need to hire people for different kinds of jobs and practices that require sustainability as a skill. Many companies are looking into these skills and ramping up that skillset now. It’s the same thing if you look at Black Lives Matters. You can see it when you’re looking at job postings now - there’s a lot of people recruiting people with a sustainability skillset, a lot with diversity inclusion skills. So I think companies are taking this very seriously. They know they need more skills and more focus on this.
One change that I hope will last is the state government and the municipalities collaborating a lot. The municipalities are creating lots of protocols for each sector and each activity. But then the governor and the mayor put together the teams to work on this, so the city and the state will announce one single protocol, so as not to confuse people. And both teams are working on the economy as well, to reduce the number of different taxes and make things easier for business. And that’s more than collaborating, it’s actually working together. So I think this is very radical.
Only radical approaches need apply

As the weeks wore on and the limitations of our standard responses to danger became more apparent, it was intriguing to note how some of our participants started speculating about more fundamental change.

I think this is a time for extreme and aggressive scenario planning and radical thinking to come up with different ways to address critical structural inefficiencies that we’ve tolerated in the past. I think you need to involve two different thought processes: the radical thinkers that can come in and challenge the status quo, and the people who understand what’s there in the city and who are open to changing it. Absolutely not the people who are there to preserve what’s already there. You need change agents, and you need to embed the change agents pervasively across the system and empower them in every aspect of this process. The Chief Resilience Officers are great examples of this. They could be good advocates for those change agents if we empower them more. But you need the radical thinkers in the room who are going to come up with the crazy ideas and say, “What if? What if we could do this? What if we could do that?” I think cities can be nimble, agile, effective if they go back and tear down some of the blockers and obstacles that they’ve had the luxury of living with in the past.

I’d say at the moment we believe money is an individual right, not a universal right, and what if you move to a world that said, there’s enough to go around for everybody, but some of you will have to have a bit less. But who’s going to give it up? Who’s going to persuade somebody that the poor need more and the rich need less, when the people who are making all the decisions are pretty rich?

We are in a world that has just taken a quantum jump forward to mass unemployment, and we need a different mechanism, a different social exchange for providing minimum benefits to individuals in society. We need to think about a very different way of people micro working, even highly skilled people, at different points in their life. A different redistribution model of wealth has got to come into play, something that creates an incentive for people to do their part in society and help out however they can. Today, the model is unless you have full time, gainful employment, or you’re semi-retired and not reliant on income, then you’re a nobody. You don’t exist. That model needs to change.
Doctors, nurses, cashiers, drivers, volunteers and many other key workers, put their lives at risk and play a critical role in getting us all through the coronavirus pandemic. Top: Temperature Checks During COVID-19 Pandemic - Laoag Int Airport, Philippines, © Wikimedia Public Domain
Bottom: cashier in protective mask, Thailand. © pixfly, Shutterstock
APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT PROFILES

ALEXANDRIA MCBRIDE  
Chief Resilience Officer, City of Oakland  
OAKLAND, CA

Alex was appointed Chief Resilience Officer for the City of Oakland in 2018. She leads resilience building efforts for a city of approximately 430,000 residents across 201 square kilometers, that faces shocks such as earthquakes, wildfires and stresses like income inequality, homelessness and sea level rise.

Alex is an environmental professional with experience in policy, advocacy, operations, finance and community-based initiatives. Her passion is developing equitable and socially just solutions to pressing environmental issues. She has BSc in Civil Engineering from Howard University and an MSc in Environmental Policy and Sustainable Management at the New School.

Before her present job she was in a policy advocacy role as Director, Environment and Sustainability at the Information Technology Industry (ITI) Council, working in Washington DC. Alex serves on the board of the Center for Diversity & the Environment (CDE) and is the Chair of NAACP’s Environmental and Climate Justice committee. She is an evangelist for Diversity and Inclusion.

ANN ROSENBERG  
Senior Vice President for UN Partnerships at SAP  
COPENHAGEN, DENMARK / NEW YORK, NY

Ann is the Senior Vice President for UN partnerships at SAP and Global Head of SAP Next-Gen and University Alliances. Ann has been with SAP for over 15 years and has served in her current role for almost 3 years. She is also a Founding Patron Partner of the UN Global Compact SDG Ambition and the UN Women Global Program Lead for #sheinnovates. She is the author and co-author of several leading publications including ‘Business Process Management: The SAP Roadmap’, ‘SAP Next-Gen Innovation with Purpose’ and ‘Science Fiction: A Starship for Enterprise Innovation’. Ann is a gender equality evangelist, engaged in a number of public roles. Recently, Ann has also launched SAP Purpose Network Live, connecting a community of changemakers committed to addressing the complexity caused by COVID-19. Ann has a Masters in HD Informatics and Management Accounting and an Executive MBA from CBS.

SAP is a European multinational enterprise software corporation that specialises in software to manage business operations and customer relations. As of 2019, SAP has over 100,000 employees serving 430,000+ customers in over 180 different countries.
Prior to becoming CEO for Siemens USA in June 2018, Barbara worked extensively with the U.S. Federal Government through her positions with Siemens Government Technology, Booz Allen Hamilton, and Lockheed Martin, primarily with national security agencies. A mathematician by training, she has served on several boards and is passionate about technology “expanding what’s humanly possible”, STEM education, diversity, and her work-life blend as a CEO and a grandmother.

Siemens USA is the company’s largest market, doing a quarter of its global business with a workforce of over 50,000 employees across 15 states, D.C., and Puerto Rico. Siemens’ businesses in the US span infrastructure, power generation and management, mobility, industrial modernisation and medical solutions.

Craig has served the City of Cape Town (CoCT) in various roles for almost a decade. He was made an executive director in 2017, the same year he was appointed as the City’s first Chief Resilience Officer (CRO). Since then he has also taken on the role of Chief Data Officer (CDO), where he is leading the city’s attempts to use data-driven tools to help the metropolitan government make better decisions. In 2017, he led the City’s Water Resilience Task Team in responding to Cape Town’s historic drought.

He has co-authored a book, “View from City Hall - reflections on governing Cape Town,” and was listed as one of the world’s 100 Most Influential Young People in Government by Apolitical in 2018. Craig is a graduate of the University of KwaZulu Natal; the University of Stellenbosch Business School; the University of Liverpool; and the University of Oxford, where he was a Rhodes Scholar.

The City of Cape Town is the metropolitan authority governing Cape Town, its 32,000 staff serving almost 5 million residents across 2500 square kilometers.
Adriana holds a PhD in Marketing Management from University of Otago in New Zealand, a Masters in Management from Federal University of Bahia in Brazil, a Specialization in Economics from University Unifacs in Brazil, and a Law Degree from the Catholic University of Salvador in Brazil. Prior to her current role, Adriana worked for the State Government of Bahia as Coordinator of the Automotive Industry, and for the City of Salvador, as Director of Labour and Professional Qualification; Deputy Secretary for Economic Development, Labour and Employability; and Senior Advisor for the Secretariat of Sustainable City and Innovation. She lived and worked between New Zealand and the UK for ten years and was a lecturer and researcher in marketing at Cardiff Business School in the UK from 2012 to 2015. She has published in international peer reviewed journals and edited the ‘Handbook on Place Branding and Marketing’.

Salvador, the capital of Brazil’s northeastern state of Bahia, has a population of ~2.7 million people. Salvador’s resilience challenges have been categorised as Crime/Violence, Disease Outbreak, Inadequate Educational Systems, Landslides, Population Growth, Poverty and Rainfall Flooding. Community organisers across several of Brazil’s major cities, including Salvador, are concerned about how COVID-19 will impact favela neighborhoods, which are also severely impacted by the food insecurity and income loss created by the lockdown.

Stephen leads the World Bank’s engagement on climate change issues with development partners (United Nations, the G7, and the G20 etc.) and serves as an advisor to the Vice President for Sustainable Development. He previously served as the Bank’s Manager of Climate Policy, and led the Bank’s global work on cities and climate change issues, working extensively in Vietnam, Ethiopia, Romania, and Egypt. Prior to that (2005 to 2013) he taught at MIT and Columbia University, his courses/research focused on urban energy systems policy and technology and how climate change will affect different urban systems. He holds a Ph.D. from the London School of Economics, and an M.P.P. from Harvard University.

The World Bank Group works in 189 member countries, with staff from more than 170 countries, and offices in over 130 locations. Stephen operates within the World Bank Group topic of climate change.

**DR. ADRIANA CAMPELO**

Director of Resilience, City of Salvador

SAVADOR, BRAZIL

**DR. STEPHEN HAMMER**

Advisor, Global Partnerships and Strategy (Climate Change), World Bank

WASHINGTON, D.C.
For the past 20 years Elaine has held a diverse range of commercial and transformation roles at BCA, Centrica, Vodafone and Motorola before joining Lloyd’s Register in 2016, as the Chief Marketing Officer, a role newly created to drive commercial and customer-centricity as part of digital transformation. She is a mechanical engineer by training and for 12 years was an officer in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers including a posting as Programme Manager for the Defence Procurement Agency.

Elaine serves on Lloyd’s Register Foundation’s Resilience Shift Programme as a board member and also on the Programme Board of the EngineeringX: engineering skills where they are needed most. A Fellow of the Institute of Engineering and Technology, she is also a Trustee for EngineeringUK, a not-for-profit organisation, which works to inspire tomorrow’s engineers and represents LR as a member of the UN Global Compact’s Sustainable Ocean Business Action Platform.

Elaine is a Certified Graduate Coach and Neuro-Linguistic Programming Master Practitioner and, in her own words, is “fascinated with how technology transforms businesses and our lives; how art and science collaborate and how people make sense of the world”.

Hany is a recognised leader in the global finance and tech space, having been the Chief Executive Officer of AXA Global Enterprise and Partnerships and, before that, Founder and President of Mastercard Enterprise Partnerships. Over the past several months, and in consultation with key industry partners, Hany and his team have identified a significant global opportunity, across a number of industries, for an ‘all-in-one’ exchange to address structural inefficiencies. They are now setting up Optima, a standalone business headquartered in New York City that will address these significant opportunities. The first of the exchanges will be for small businesses. The Optima team has produced significant research in the small business landscape and, despite the coronavirus, developed the value proposition, created a launch platform and a thorough go-to-market plan, and are currently working on the first release of the platform in June in New York City. This will be followed by a US national rollout and thereafter in several other markets.
Mahesh is Pune’s CRO, which places him in a strategic advisory role advising Pune Municipal Corporation’s Commissioner (Chief Executive). Originally from Pune, Mahesh has over 15 years of experience working in various Indian cities in the fields of urban management and governance, including policy and strategy, city infrastructure and investment assessment, institutional assessment, project feasibility and development, and transaction advisory. His assignments in the urban water and sanitation sectors include developing City Sanitation Plans, developing PPP projects in the urban water and wastewater recycling sector, and creating City Development Plans for 25 cities. Mahesh received an MTech in Urban Planning after studying civil engineering and a master’s degree through the Executive Program in Management at IIM Calcutta, India.

A Civil Engineer by training, Peter has had a 39 year career with Arup. Peter’s crown jewels include London’s Crossrail and New York’s 2nd Avenue Subway. More recently, in April 2018, Peter took on the role of Arup’s Australasia Region Chair, which includes their offices in Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore. Although his new role has taken him to Melbourne, Peter is a London native.

Arup is a multinational group focused on providing a vast suite of professional services from architecture, design and engineering to advisory, project management and planning. Arup has over 90 offices located in 34 countries, staffed by approximately 14,000 employees. Thirteen of these offices fall within the Australasia region and Peter’s portfolio.
PIERO PELIZZARO
Chief Resilience Officer, City of Milan
MILAN, ITALY

Piero has 10 years of experience in climate change policies and urban resilience planning, and for the past two and half years has been Milan’s Chief Resilience Officer, reporting to the Mayor. He also leads the city’s work within the European Commission’s Sharing Cities programme. He is an advisor to the Italian Ministry of Environment Land and Sea on Urban Adaptation Policy to Climate Change. Piero has Bachelors and Masters degrees in International Relations from the University of Bologna and a Professional Masters in Green & Blue Infrastructure.

Milan is home to 1.3M+ people and has been part of the 100 Resilient Cities Program (now Global Resilient Cities Network) since inception. Its resilience challenges have been categorised as Environmental Degradation, Extreme Heat, Lack of Affordable Housing, Rainfall Flooding, Civil Riot/Unrest. Milan was one of the original epicenters for COVID-19 outside of Asia and went into lockdown March 8th, a strategy that has been copied by many nations since then.

TOM LEWIS
President, Federal Programs and Logistics, USA, WSP
MORRISTOWN, NJ

Tom has a BSc and MSc in Civil Engineering from University of Connecticut and a Doctorate of Jurisprudence (JD) with focus on environmental law/regulation. He is a licensed Professional Engineer (PE) and has passed the bar in a number of states in the US.

He has 34 years of technical and management experience, with the Connecticut Department of Transport, Dewberry and most recently, 27 years with Louis Berger, where he was the founding president of Louis Berger U.S. There he led the company’s environmental practice and founded the emergency and disaster management, recovery, and resiliency practice. In December 2018, after WSP acquired Louis Berger, Tom was asked to create and lead WSP USA’s new Federal Programs & Logistics (FP&L) group, with the intention of expanding the company’s emergency and disaster management offering in the federal market.

WSP is a Canadian professional services firm providing management and consulting for sustainable engineering solutions. One of the world’s largest professional services firms, WSP has nearly 44,000 employees in over 500 offices scattered around 40 countries.