

Corona, thoughts on the crisis

*In Chinese, the word
crisis is made up of
two characters - one
meaning danger and
the other
opportunity.*

(John F. Kennedy)

First of all, I must praise those currently acting in our country. In my opinion, they have so far responded to the current challenges in line with the situation and developed a catalogue of measures within a relatively short space of time, which I believe inspires confidence.

The extent to which the measures are effective and whether everything is being used in a targeted manner must be determined in subsequent analyses.

But what do initial restrictions, operational restrictions and changes to the work situation mean in concrete terms?

The fact that the measures will lead to unprecedented economic changes is certainly clear to anyone who participates in an economic process. Incomes will fall, purchasing power will be reduced, assets will shrink, income will be reduced or cancelled completely, economic developments will be slowed down or postponed completely.

Furthermore, this development will also have an impact on our society, which is currently still in a kind of comfortable resting mode.

In particular, the chaining together of the measures required to slow the spread of the coronavirus by reducing social contacts (shutdown) and their periodic relaxation will result in a movement similar to sawtooth waves over a relatively long period of time.

How long this period will be is almost impossible to estimate seriously without causing feelings of panic. As I understand it, it will be several months, if only for the reason that capacities need to be created in healthcare facilities, current supply bottlenecks need to be reduced and our good healthcare system needs to be prevented from collapsing due to a sudden increase in the number of cases.

What does this mean for our working lives and our dealings with each other?

In terms of working life, we must learn to work more independently, at least where possible, and limit direct contact with our colleagues, employees and customers. This means that shifting the workplace to the home office will become more important. Communication behaviour will also change, as we will have to adapt the acquisition of new orders, the coordination of tasks and the presentation of results to these new ways of working.

Many companies are already practising this, but in a rather unplanned and improvised way. The structures required for this type of collaborative working are only rudimentarily established.

In addition to the structural aspects based on technology and infrastructure, a change in behaviour is also required for smooth operational workflows. This change is far more serious and much more complex to achieve than the creation of infrastructural factors.

This form of organisational development focuses on the socio-psychological and behavioural-psychological aspects of how we live together at work and in our private lives.

Broken down to a company, this has an impact on the mutual trust between employer, manager and employee. All parties involved must reduce their justified but also irrational fears. Employers and managers will learn to deal with the fear of losing power and control. Employees will learn to bear the risks of decisions better, as personal responsibility increases due to the changed work situation and assumption of tasks.

Another aspect will be working time models based on physical separation. The focus will shift to completing a task at a specific time rather than being present in the company within a specified time window. This will give rise to fears of being overworked or underworked, depending on how you look at it. Mutual trust and the will to fulfil tasks positively will be the key to success here.

However, everyone involved should also be aware that the change in communication behaviour currently caused by the coronavirus will initially tend to promote mistrust among each other, as there is no direct contact and facial expressions and gestures are no longer a feature of our communication, or at least are severely restricted.

Furthermore, the shift in the focus of activities from the workplace to the home environment can also lead to a sensory overload due to the excessive use of communication media, especially the internet. In particular, the increase in the spread of irrational "fake news" and the resulting uncertainty among employees must be addressed in the context of company communication and interaction.

There are still many aspects that need to be considered when dealing with the consequences of the corona pandemic, but this would go beyond the scope of my approach to "Corona, thoughts on the crisis".

I have also deliberately left out the fears of economic collapse that affect all social groups.

There are two reasons for this:

- The measures currently being considered must first take effect and, more importantly, be transparent for all those involved - companies, SMEs, small and micro enterprises and the self-employed.
- Without a well-founded analysis of the options based on the emerging framework conditions and the necessary organisational adjustments based on this serious debate, unreflected statements only serve to create uncertainty.

Why am I sketching these thoughts?

As a member of the management consultancy profession, I believe it is essential to demonstrate on behalf of this professional group that decentralised work in projects is possible without a specific "on-site activity".

In my opinion, a well-planned and structured distribution of tasks among the project participants and close, trust-based cooperation leads to the desired project goals.

The available communication channels and the willingness of those involved to take responsibility for the tasks and process them in a targeted manner play a central role here.

Despite all the adversities, companies of all sizes should now work on the organisational framework conditions and use structural and organisational development measures to lay the foundations for overcoming the prolonged challenges posed by this crisis.

As a person affected, I have noticed that in the consulting segments I serve professionally and technically (banks, savings banks, financial service providers), it is precisely the behaviour-oriented aspects of organisational development and process optimisation and their economic necessity that are currently taking a back seat due to the financial losses.

As an optimist, I believe in the ability of people and organisations to develop and am firmly convinced that the use of organisational development measures based on social and organisational psychology in conjunction with structural adjustments as well as financial aid and relief will show a way out of the crisis situation.

Stay healthy!

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