Leadership and Innovation in Crisis
Unleashing Creativity in Times of Uncertainty and Change

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Today’s Discussion

Insights on leadership in times of crisis – and beyond

Innovation Drivers in a Crisis

Four conditions of crisis that help to unleash innovation in organizations

Leading innovation beyond crisis

Actions leaders can take to capitalize on those conditions to drive innovation – even after the crisis has passed

What will you do differently?

Choices you can make to foster innovation, right now, from where you are
Innovations Born During Crisis

- Hospitals
- Perfume
- Mechanical Clocks
- Eyeglasses

- Xerography
- Supermarkets
- Neoprene
- Nylon

- Penicillin
- Microwave oven
- Radar
- Duct tape

- Robotic advances
- Crowd-sourced journalism
- Advanced translation software
“The Depression-era economist Joseph Schumpeter emphasized the positive consequences of downturns:
• The destruction of underperforming companies,
• the release of capital from dying sectors to new industries, and
• the movement of high-quality, skilled workers toward stronger employers.

For companies with cash and ideas, history shows that downturns can provide enormous strategic opportunities.”

- Tom Nicholas, Harvard Business School

Innovation Lessons from the 1930’s
McKinsey Quarterly, December 2008
Innovation Drivers in Crisis
Four Conditions of Crisis Supporting Innovation

1. Uniting Around a Purpose
2. Seeing Systems Differently
3. Unfreezing the Organization
4. Creating an Action Bias

Source: *Innovation in a Time of Crisis*; Larry Clark, Harvard Business Publishing
Condition 1: Purpose

The Condition
New reality focuses all attention on single, inescapable priority

The Opportunity
Common enemy
Focus shifts off the internal
Organizational energy spike

Source: Innovation in a Time of Crisis; Larry Clark, Harvard Business Publishing
Condition 2: Seeing Systems

The Condition
Brokenness and vulnerabilities in the system are exposed

The Opportunity
- Blinders removed
- Entrenched paradigms and assumptions challenged
- Hidden aspects of systems and thinking surfaced

Source: *Innovation in a Time of Crisis*; Larry Clark, Harvard Business Publishing
Condition 3: Unfreezing the Organization

The Condition
Hardened organizational structures become barriers to the solution

The Opportunity
Window opens to break structural and policy barriers
Focus shifts from compliance to outcomes

Source: Innovation in a Time of Crisis; Larry Clark, Harvard Business Publishing
Condition 4: Bias Toward Action

The Condition

Problems to be solved require deep, immediate response

The Opportunity

Death of “intense study of the obvious”

Willingness to experiment and fail fast

Shift to emergent thinking

Source: *Innovation in a Time of Crisis*; Larry Clark, Harvard Business Publishing
Leading Innovation
Beyond the Crisis
Sustaining Innovation Beyond a Crisis

1 Sustaining Purpose

2 Test Your Assumptions

3 Assume More Collaboration

4 Focus on Inclusion

Source: Innovation in a Time of Crisis; Larry Clark, Harvard Business Publishing
Condition 1, Purpose: Sustaining Purpose

Post Crisis Strategies

- Craft your work
- Make your work a craft
- Invest in positive relationships
- Remember why you work
- Focus on building resilience

Source: John Coleman: Passion and Purpose: Stories from the Best and Brightest Young Business Leaders
Condition 2, Systems: Test Your Assumptions

Post Crisis Strategies

Don’t believe everything you think
Form and test hypotheses
Immunity to Change
5 Why’s
Condition 3, Unfreezing: More Collaboration

With innovation, the question isn’t *whether* you’ll collaborate — but how and with whom

Focus on team composition

Cultivate compassion
Condition 4, Action Bias: Focus on Inclusion

Post Crisis Strategies

Welcome   Celebrate
Safety     Cherish

The Inclusion Dial*

*Unleashed: The Unapologetic Leader’s Guide to Empowering Everyone Around You (Frei & Morris, HBP 2020)
Where do you go from here?
What is happening in your “system” that provides a window of opportunity for innovation?

Where is meaning and purpose sneaking up on you, and how can you mine it?

How might you build more diverse teams to minimize blind spots and get the most from collaboration?

How can you truly make inclusion a focus for your teams and cherish each individual?
Additional Resources

1. Passion and Purpose: Stories from the Best and Brightest Young Business Leaders (John Coleman, Daniel Gulati, W. Oliver Segovi, HBR, 2012)
2. Lead Your Team Into a Post-Pandemic World (Hubert Joly, HBR, 2020)
4. Coaching Your Team Through Uncertain Times by Francesca Gino and Dan Cable (Francesca Gino, HBR, 2020)
5. US Businesses Must Take Meaningful Action Against Racism, It’s past time (HBR, 2020)
6. Toward a Racially Just Workplace, The first step is the moral argument (HBR, 2019)
7. How US Companies Can Support Employees of Color Through the Pandemic, We’re not all in the same boat. (HBR, 2020)
9. Hiring Discrimination Against Black Americans Hasn’t Declined in 25 Years, We’ve gotten nowhere. (HBR, 2017)
11. People Suffer at Work When They Can’t Discuss The Racial Bias They Face Outside of It, Break the silence. (HBR, 2017)
12. Even at “Inclusive” Companies, Women of Color Don’t Feel Supported, Where the sisterhood fails. (HBR, 2019)
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