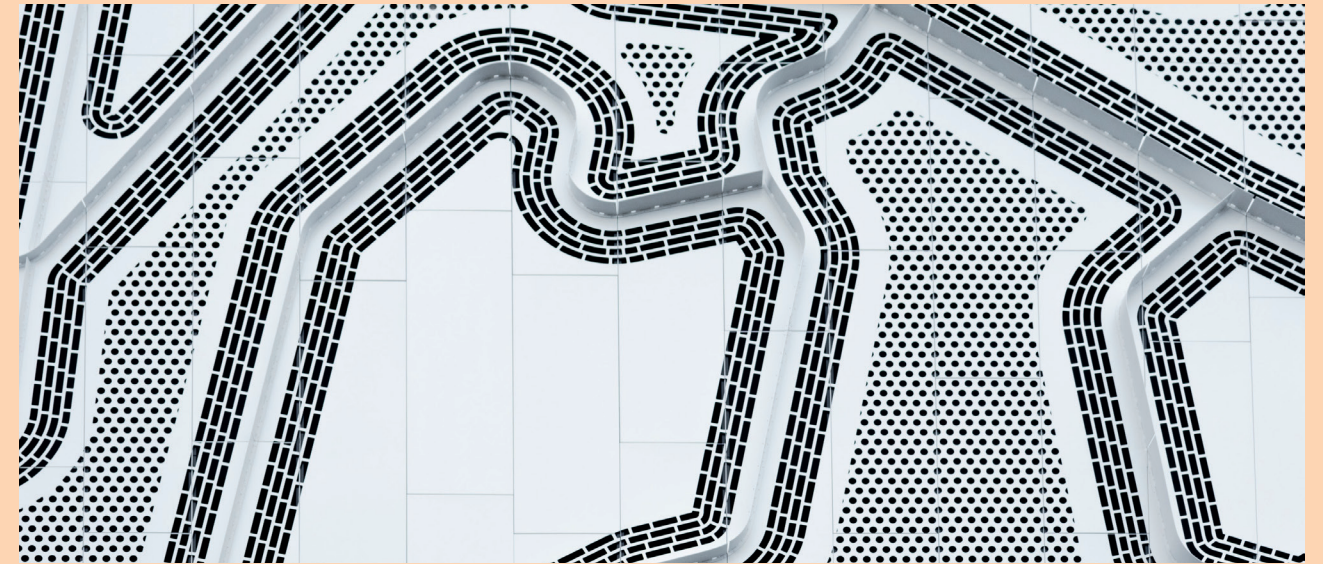


# How to Respond to Disruption

For IAPCO, **Alain Pittet**, from Ega worldwide congresses & events, Italy and Switzerland, reflects on how to manage business continuity, communication and collaboration, HR through change.



It seems most of us were completely unprepared for the COVID-19 pandemic. Few of us have ever expected that, in stages, one continent after the other will stand still for months, that we will no longer be allowed to leave our homes for weeks, that factories will fall silent, and that we will see our boss, our work colleagues, customers and members only through video conferencing.

And we do not know – at least at the time of writing this article – when it will end, whether a second wave will come or not.

One very important lesson to be learnt is that we have to be prepared for all possible and impossible future scenarios. Many of us had already prepared and practiced emergency plans for congresses and events for terrorist attacks, fires, strikes, accidents and earthquakes. All of these potential risks usually occur locally, if at all, and detailed process scenarios had been written for them all, and perhaps in some case even insured. At a company level, we certainly did an annual business risk assessment, but

let's face it, who of us ever considered a global pandemic as such a risk?

We therefore certainly need to review our processes and documents and we all need a business continuity plan. It will ensure that we can continue to function with as little disruption as possible when an unexpected situation occurs.

## BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLAN

During my research for this piece, I found an interesting document from ILO- the International Labour Organisation, called *The six-step COVID-19 business continuity plan for SMEs*.

The tool consisted of a risk assessment facility to be able to establish the risk profile of an association or company and the level of vulnerability to COVID-19 in term of its impact on People (your employees), Processes (your operations), Profits (your revenue generation) and Partnerships – the “4Ps”. The tool is mostly targeted at smaller and medium sized manufacturing companies with limited resources, but it can

give service companies and associations some good tips. It is structured in two parts:

1. The first part is a risk assessment that can be quickly done. It establishes the level of risk/vulnerability to our enterprises.
2. The second part of the tool is a six-step process – using an illustrative example of a fictitious SME to assist developing a Business Continuity Plan.

Upon reading this document, one can wonder: what does our industry's future look like and what do we have to do to emerge stronger from such a crisis? Which strategy do we have to develop as a PCO or an association? Can we consider that the current crisis as an opportunity?

Beyond that, additional questions arise, especially if one looks within one's own company: How are my income and my liquidity affected? Can I pay my employees and meet my contractual obligations? What new services do I have to provide that, even with financial difficulties, my clients, sponsors, partners

or members will be ready to pay for? What are the main needs of my clients, sponsors, partners and members during such a crisis?

It is with no doubt that such a business continuity strategy will reflect the fact that our services have to become more digital, sustainable and agile. Accordingly, various initiatives in critical areas have to be identified, not only related to our products and services, but also, very importantly, related to our employees.

In a world driven by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambivalence, COVID-19 acts as a digitization accelerator. In companies and associations new competencies and employee profiles are in demand. This needs intensive training in the area of digitization to enable our older, highly qualified employees to cope with a rapidly changing industry and to attract well-trained young innovative specialists.

## THIS CRISIS IS A TEST

The crisis will also test this generation of executives as never before. Those

who can think clearly and laterally, prioritize rapidly, and have the leadership skills for the management of agile companies and associations are most likely to pass that test. The leadership qualities for the future therefore include flexibility, confidence, courage, enthusiasm and the feeling of being able to change together. People do not have to endure this change, but can help shape it, and it motivates, makes them more aware and releases energy for transformation.

Two other important skills are mindfulness and resilience. Mindfulness is much more than a meditation practice or breathing exercise. Mindfulness is a way of life. It teaches us to ask ourselves: Where do I actually want to go? What have I learned from this experience about myself and what constitutes a good life for me? What do I want to keep in my life? What do I want to change and where do I have influence, where not? Mindfulness also includes treating people with appreciation, patience and compassion and accepting things as they are.

Stress-resistant executives impress with their inner strength, stability and strong resilience. They act decisively in turbulent times and crises and understand how to deal in a more relaxed way with pressure and setbacks. This enables them to save, and use, their energy for solutions.

We do not yet know what the post-pandemic era will be like, but we do know that there will be no going back to normal. COVID-19 is shaping our future. We are all in the process of continuously creating new ideas for unprecedented challenges. Getting people excited about change, empowering them and providing them with valuable support in the transformation process is essential.

This article was provided by the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers, author Alain Pittet, IAPCO Council member and Executive Director, Ega worldwide congresses & events, Italy and Switzerland, a PCO with over 50 years of experience in the field of international association conferences, institutional and governmental meetings and corporate as well as public events [www.ega.it](http://www.ega.it) IAPCO represents today 140 companies comprised of over 9,900 professionals from 40 countries. [info@iapco.org](mailto:info@iapco.org) \ [www.iapco.org](http://www.iapco.org)

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