

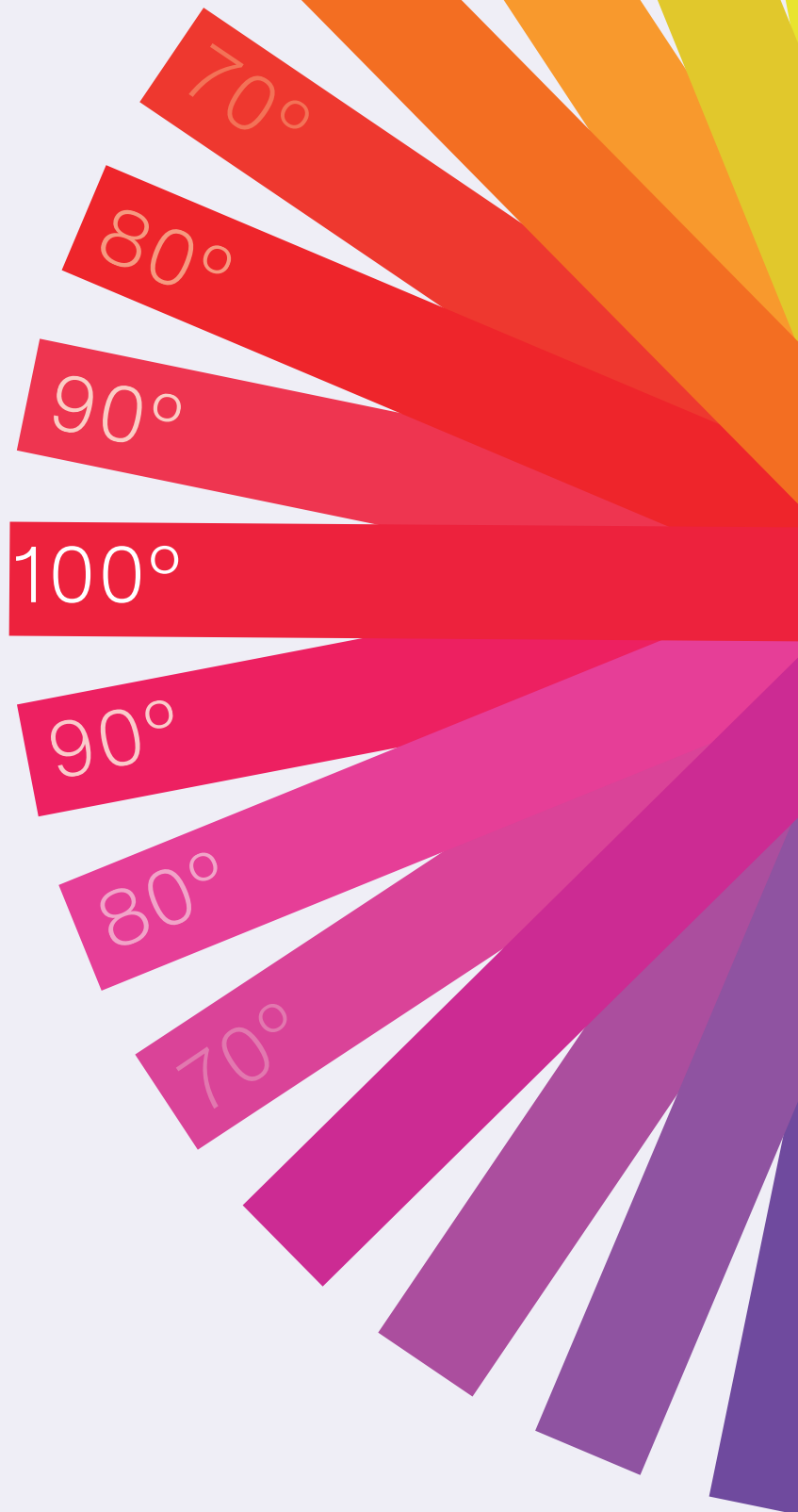
# CRISIS▶RESPONSE

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JOURNAL

Protection Prevention Preparedness Response Resilience Recovery



## FLASHPOINTS

Volatility in Trust, Climate, Society

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Otto Detmer | Ikon Images

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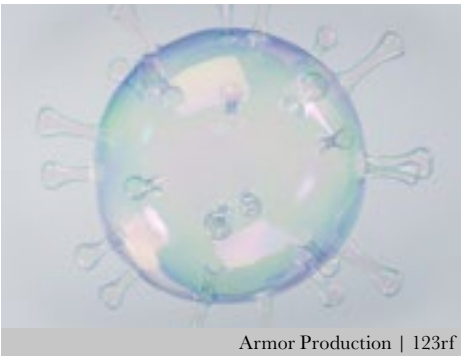
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Plight of the humble bee: p62



RTN Studio | 123rf

The disinformation bubble: p84



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comment

**T**his edition's cover is a representation of the increasing volatility and temperature of opinions, discourse and beliefs. An 'addiction to outrage' is heating up (p76) and red hot rhetoric is dwarfing calmer, pragmatic and measured reasoning, like a rampant infection burning through communities and the world.

Our feature on society and polarisation unpicks this phenomenon, because to treat the symptoms, we must first understand the causes, recognising how a complex online ecosystem inflames predispositions to the point where they boil over into real world consequences.

But the cover is also a more literal depiction of climbing temperatures and a far less stable world environment. *CRJ* has covered climate issues for many years, homing in on how they affect frontline responders, societies and individuals. More than climate and rising temperatures – the tipping points to calamity are manifold and include biodiversity and ecosystems. Humanity's complex interaction with nature means we treat the world's resources as if they are an infinite commodity, squandering and polluting without considering the repercussions (p54 and p58).

The Covid-19 pandemic is far from over, but the small glimmers of hope have become more concrete. As Mami Mizutori of the UNDRR says on p50, we must seize the opportunity of crisis and: "Use it to understand better what is going on around us. We mustn't see a disaster or crisis purely as a threat... If we prevent better, the recovery process can be a wonderful opportunity, or it can be a catastrophe." Governments, the public, private and third sectors can apply valuable lessons and build back better. Part of this lies in succession planning, diversity, proactive leadership resilience and continuous improvement, as covered by our feature (from p14 onwards).

Because as we keep our feet firmly planted in the present, while remembering and drawing upon what has been learnt from the past, we have to keep both eyes firmly fixed on the horizon to anticipate the future, and make sure that in solving current problems, we do not unintentionally create new risks, or exacerbate latent threats.





# Proactive resilience for innovative leadership

The concept of resilience is widely used in crisis research to explore the capacities that citizens and organisations have nurtured in order to be stronger, stay alive and rebound after shocks. But these efforts must be developed further in the light of the mega-shocks that are increasingly threatening our societies, say **Patrick Lagadec** and **Matthieu Langlois**



Another kind of 'resilience' applies to leaders, units and organisations responding to the present surge of hypercomplex crises, which are leaving everyone overwhelmed by threats that are too large, are coming too fast and are too unreadable. The challenge is not only to stay alive and rebound, but to lead with vision, creativity and coherence, and to navigate a complex human system through the unknown.

It is crucial to strengthen our clairvoyance and capacity to confront new challenges, and to snatch some inspiring victories from the jaws of conventional quagmires.

Those in charge, at every level and across the board, must be prepared to dance together with the new impetus of emerging crises and their dark matter of intractable unknowns, rapid successions of risky precipices, and acute communication challenges.

Leaders must be prepared to rebound during the crisis itself, which is not played out in a linear dynamic, but in a timeline comprising ups and downs, surprises and counterintuitive facts. And failures along the bumpy roads must be anticipated. As long as the leadership thinks and acts as if perfect navigation were possible, and assures everyone that linear perfection can be delivered, failure will lurk at every corner, as well as at the end of the journey.

Shaping new visions that feed systemic coherence, as well as combining large arrays of emerging dynamics, are the new frontiers in crisis management.

We will clarify two maps: The critical failures that you will face, even if you think you are well prepared; and the impetus to provide improved 'resilience in action'. Some common pitfalls are outlined below.

■ **Tetanic Freezing:** Even before the surge of difficulties, the battle is often lost. Signals lie undetected, go unmapped, or their existence is denied. The conventional impetus to provide reassurance is understandable, and therein lies the seductive

Crises do not follow a linear dynamic, but a timeline of ups and downs, surprises and counterintuitive facts

danger. Reassurances such as, 'Nothing is going to happen,' 'We are fully prepared,' and 'Everything's under control,' create an instant communication disaster. Citizens and personnel immediately feel that those in charge are not only making mistakes, but are poorly prepared to lead. Distrust is on its way.

■ **Tactical levels are lost and can become orphans in the middle of nowhere:** Operational people on the frontline are fighting courageously but, however smart they are, they can be overwhelmed by a wild situation that is too much, too rapid and too unfamiliar. In such scenarios, plans provide limited or no support; toolboxes don't work well, if at all. What is worse, strategic levels appear to be absent, not listening, and in their own and even deeper void.

When key goals and sense-making capacities shrink,

the whole operational system teeters on the brink. Links disintegrate, confidence drowns, conflicts multiply, information stops flowing, operational forces tend to insulate themselves from one another and hide in what has been termed the 'big red truck' syndrome.

■ **Experts in between old models and unknown realities raise their heads:** Too many people rush onto TV and social media, propounding definite facts and certainties – which might be correct if the situation were conventional, but this is not the case. They would be nervous if anyone were to question their expertise. This ego trip is as tempting as it is dangerous.

■ **Strategic levels become lost, with no visions or options:** Senior leaders at national and international levels are generally poorly prepared to confront deep and wild surprises made of systemic, hybrid and unknown difficulties. They struggle to find any vision or convincing goal. At the same time, tactical levels become overburdened, leaving them no time to report. And, when they do provide formal updates, they cannot offer off-the-shelf solutions to those in charge – there are no ready-made answers, there is nothing to tell, the wait-and-see attitude prevails.

■ **Fragmentation:** The threat is systemic, the response capacity is threatened by schisms. Every single cell tends to bunker down, as fast as possible, to secure some specific protection. It is hard to co-ordinate when the primary and dominant dynamic is that of blowing up bridges. Or even worse, when the bridges do not exist in the first place.

■ **Frenzied confusion:** While drowning in their own intractable difficulties, people tend to deal with the business of others. Strategic officials give tactical orders, experts set out strong policy demands, operational officials impose strategic views. The result is terrible communication with the public, which becomes another battlefield for, and between, those in charge.

■ **Conflicts and dislocations:** Each and every layer, silo, cell and stakeholder tends towards aggressive moves. Rather than battling against the threat, everyone fights for their own territory, their 'honour', and self-preservation in the 'crisis after the crisis'. The system rapidly loses speed, rhythm, flexibility, trust and inventiveness. Everyone demands more technical assets and more personnel, when the challenge is to think and act differently.

■ **Deleterious armistice:** Ultimately, key stakeholders strive to build narratives to protect themselves in the aftermath. No genuine post-mortems should threaten anyone; no real lessons will be learnt. Perhaps some marginal operational and organisational changes will be called for, such as 'better co-ordination, better communication', but no more than that. The 'system' is ready to lose the next battle.

■ **Citizen resilience – the escape lane:** The ultimate conclusion is to stress that citizens must develop the ability to cope with the situation.

There is no easy way to avoid these common pitfalls. It is essential to know that you will be on the edge in all of today's crises and you will be severely and repeatedly wrong-footed from the very start, confronted with unknown threats of which you have no understanding.

A new mindset has to be developed. A decisive impetus is needed to inspire and develop new attitudes and abilities to grasp the challenges:

Otto Dettmer |  
Ikon Images

■ **Paradigm shift and leadership:** The starting leap is to share with everyone, from top to bottom, the understanding of the mutating reality of today's crises, which have expanded from the territory of pure emergencies. Visions, analyses, goals, even difficulties and errors, must be shared.

■ **Ad hoc preparation and training:** Everyone must be prepared to deal with wild scenarios and to be surprised, trained to be creative in the unknown, including with people and groups that emerge from nowhere. This is crucial to escape from the instant run, hide and deflect reflex. This is far removed from the conventional tendency that involves injecting marginally unusual scenarios into planning that is already in place. And it demands courage – which is far from recklessness or feebleness. Courage must be searched for, anchored and constantly reinforced. It cannot flourish without a strong and wise sense of prudence.

■ **Strengthen the design and work on interfaces:** As everyone is better prepared to meet the unknown, more confident in their own capacities and humbler about their own limitations, it becomes easier to make the crisis architecture work and respond effectively. Operational, tactical, strategic and expertise levels will become clearer, stronger and function better through the storm. It is then much easier to cultivate the richness of interfaces between all actors, with each level respecting the other's relative autonomy and prompting the spread of confidence rather than distrust and fear. Bridges can be built to sustain the constant flow of information, advice and the need for trust.

■ **Developing personal and collective invention capacities:** The goal is to prepare everyone to imagine, construct and deliver real-time combinations of new visions and actions. This is crucial to avoiding instant collective freezing, powerlessness and conflict. At each level, and especially at the top, leaders must be prepared to become 'future shapers', practising humility and inspiring collective intelligence, trust and even humour. When difficulties threaten to overwhelm, humour is a subtle and inspiring way to demonstrate the ability to step back, grasp difficulties from another angle and smile at the rogue wave while engaging decisive collective moves. The goal is not to become a proud warrior, but a forward looking and inspiring agent of trust and confidence, who enables everyone to bring their best to the navigation through difficult passages. Such a dynamic will convey the essential common asset of personal and collective confidence.

■ **Fixing new and temporary frameworks:** At every level, it is imperative to do one's best to stabilise a fuzzy situation, to hold steady specific territories where everyone can act towards a common goal. A giant challenge, however, lies in navigating non-linear dimensions, particularly that of time. In many instances, flash responses are vital; in others, the timeframe must be totally reconsidered, and the long haul is the crucial perspective – even if the whole context ensnares everyone with the demands of media timescales. Actors may have to operate in different and even opposite timeframes, but global coherence must be maintained at the leadership level. A continuous effort to clarify and stabilise is crucial to consolidate common efforts, even if that endeavour must remain constant during the whole crisis, which must be understood as a dynamic and mutating challenge. It is certainly essential that

everyone, including citizens and the media, accepts the idea that rushing in, promising miracles and playing the hero are not the ultimate qualities in an unknown context – prudence, wisdom, judgement must prevail, even if at some turning points, speed is of the essence.

■ **Opening a granular vision, inventing deep security dynamics:** Our chaotic world demands the ability to transcend our normal vision of leadership. People in charge certainly have to lead. But at the same time, they must navigate in a vast environment where visions, forces and energy are widely distributed.

In other words, the conditions of active resilience demand in-depth preparation, far beyond mere 'how to' toolboxes. Linking, pollinating and bridging are the new collective game and are vital to citizen empowerment and public communication.

Leaders must be prepared to become 'future shapers', practising humility and inspiring collective intelligence, trust and even humour

Seeing that those in charge are capable of self-questioning and are open to in-depth learning from inevitable errors is certainly essential to the collective capacity to deal with, and make the most, of chaotic world conditions.

When leaders and officials in general are better aligned with today's wild challenges, they will be able to listen and communicate, consolidate and inspire societies. 'Communication' is not a question of words, it must be a shared ability, based on competence and respect.

This resilience in action is essential for those in charge to weave the best democratic links with citizens, and for citizens to do their part. We suggest that such array of transformational dynamics should be named 'Proactive resilience'.

Let's take an example of this proactive resilience in action. Admiral Thad Allen, appointed as Commander-in-chief to respond to Hurricane Katrina ten days after its landfall, clarified and reorganised the whole response with a fresh and critical view: "This is not a hurricane. This is a weapon of mass effect without criminality."

And from the ground comes another story of a low-level employee at the international airport who informed his director that there was an ancient well that could be utilised. The water was not of drinking quality, but the input was key: it could be used in toilets, and without toilets you cannot run airport terminals with 10,000 people stranded inside. The director welcomed this idea, and many others.

Such clarity of responsibility design, and the demonstration of confidence and listening were the best ecosystems, enabling the best to be taken from everyone's input.

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