Managing through a Crisis: Managerial Implications for Business-to-Business Firms

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1. INTRODUCTION

The world is in crisis, locked in the throes of an unprecedented economic lockdown as the coronavirus, in the specific form of COVID-19, takes its toll on societies around the world. At the time of this writing, countries have shut down vital parts of their administrations, education sectors, and economic activities. Whole industries, including hospitality and air transport, have essentially stopped functioning; the closing of national borders limits free movement to a minimum anyway. The related humanitarian crisis came as a shock to many people, and new restrictions together with enormous challenges represent a discontinuity, breaking from the past reality. Furthermore, this crisis features immense volatility, making it nearly impossible for people to imagine all the potential, invisible dangers and visible changes. Simply put, we are living in truly disruptive times.

But the notion of disruption is not new; it has long appeared in business discussions. Executives have tried to understand, be prepared for, and even initiate disruption (Markides, 2006). Not every

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disruptive idea follows the trajectory predicted by Clayton Christensen (1997), but substantial energy has gone into preparing for business model disruptions along the lines that he outlined (Markides, 2006). For example, executives have tried to anticipate disruptions due to digital advances (e.g., Ritter & Pedersen, 2020), platform business models (e.g., Cusumano & Gower, 2002), or new market orientations (e.g., Kumar, Scheer, & Kotler, 2000). Yet these types of preemptive measures were made obsolete by the truly unexpected and far-reaching disruptions created by the highly contagious virus, which has already prompted a greater downturn than might have been caused by any alternative business models, innovative technologies, new forms of working, or the like.

At the same time, another important difference pertains to predicted durations. Digitalization, the Internet, and connectivity through the Internet-of-Things have prompted shifts that remain relevant. Although the immediate crisis created by COVID-19 may have mainly a temporary effect, followed by a partial return to "normal" times, its broader impact may be persistent and significant, leading to the "new normal" of a post-corona world. In this shift, health care service preparedness must be rethought, supply chain risk needs to be redefined, online meetings likely will become the norm, and virtual teaching may represent a critical channel for education. In this sense, the virus crisis represents a temporary discontinuity, after which some aspects will return to their prior status, even as others might be changed forever.

Furthermore, the crisis could have negative consequences for firms, if not managed appropriately (Coombs, 2007), while also offering an opportunity, as long as decision makers perceive it accurately (Brockner & James, 2008). For example, environmental crises often have fueled human development, throughout history, revealing how they can create opportunities if exploited and managed wisely (Bernstein, 1996). Some firms that perform well during the crisis may gain new customers, but other firms appear destined to fail. How firms respond and react during the crisis arguably will determine, at least partially, whether they thrive.

With some notable exceptions (e.g., Andersson & Mattsson, 2010; Hermes & Mainela, 2014; Naidoo, 2010), business-to-business marketing has not, remarkably, focused much on crisis management. Yet business-to-business firms have encountered a multitude of recent crises, from the dot.com bubble to the financial crisis to 9/11 to SARS to Brexit. Furthermore, the COVID-19 crisis is unprecedented, to the extent that we lack any established knowledge to comprehend its consequences fully. Similar to most sectors in society, business-to-business marketers lack relevant guidance for meeting the enormous challenges they face. Both marketing in general and *Industrial Marketing Management* in particular have a long-standing tradition of conducting research with and for practitioners, and accordingly, we believe the business-to-business academic marketing community is uniquely well qualified to address these issues and concerns, using theory-based reasoning to help support executives' efforts to manage their firms through the COVID-19 crisis and beyond.

Against this backdrop, we prepare this special issue on managing crises by establishing its strong focus on the managerial implications for business-to-business firms, as derived from business-to-business marketing research. We have two primary aims with this special issue: First, we seek to offer business-to-business marketing practitioners theory-based insights and practical implications. The business-to-business marketing community can and should bridge the rigor–relevance divide, by providing research-based, practical implications that rest on a strong foundation of theory. In accordance with this aim, the articles in this issue can be purposefully shorter than typical *Industrial Marketing Management* articles, written mainly to argue for practical implications rather than make novel theoretical contributions. Second, we emphasize the continuing need for crisis management research from a business-to-business marketing perspective. Such a research tradition should prove highly relevant for practitioners facing crises, now and in the future.

In the next section, we thus define a crisis and explicate its different phases. Following a discussion of crisis management in general, we summarize some crisis management contributions in *Industrial Marketing Management*. We also zoom in on some selected theories and their implications for business-to-business marketers during the COVID-19 era, which in turn suggest areas for further research. Thus, this editorial offers a terminology for discussing crisis and crisis management, describes the current state-of-the-art of business-to-business crisis management literature, and offers a research agenda.

2. CRISIS AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

2.1. Definition of Crisis

The word crisis has its etymological origins in the Greek word *krisis*, which denotes choice, decision, or judgment (Paraskevas, 2006). It often refers to a turning point or decisive moment, implying that the historical meaning of the word might presume some individualism, rather than determinism in terms of (re)acting in volatile situations—at least connoting choice at some decisive moment. However, uses of the term also vary by disciplines and contexts (see Table 1). For example, Holsti (1978, p. 41) refers to crisis as "a much overused term which has become burdened with a wide range of meanings, some of them quite imprecise," and Smith (2005, p. 319) acknowledges that "the definition of crisis has generated considerable debate within the academic literature and there is no real collective acceptance about the precise meaning of the term."

Crisis management literature in particular comprises at least two main strands, separated by their views of crisis as either an event or a process (e.g., Jaques, 2009). A crisis could be a singular, large event, but it may be more useful to conceive of sequences of sub-events over time, as in a process perspective, such that this approach synthesizes elements from both strands of research. Accordingly, we define a crisis as a sequence of events that can have substantial negative consequences if not managed appropriately. In this definition, an *event* is a delimited element, with a beginning and end, such that it happens or takes place. Internal or self-inflicted events can also be distinguished from external or other-inflicted and natural events (e.g., Faulkner, 2001), depending on whether the event has been triggered by, for example, the organization itself (e.g., misconduct, poor work safety standards, environmental damage, bribery, tax evasion) or external factors (e.g., a supplier has inappropriate safety measures, hurricane ruins production facilities). The phrase *substantial negative consequences* indicates the extent or importance of the damage caused by the event; for organizations, a crisis typically implies substantial losses, interruptions to their usual operations, or even bankruptcy. We include the notion of being *managed appropriately* to acknowledge that organizations can act during a crisis. Even if they cannot influence its course or prevent a crisis completely, they can react in more or less optimal ways to its occurrence. In this way, the substantial negative consequences might be due to the crisis, but they also could result from inappropriate management by the firm.

Alternative terms such as risk and disaster similarly appear in prior literature, also with varying definitions. From our perspective, risk refers to the probabilistic likelihood that a crisis may happen and its (often economic) impact. Therefore, we conceive of risk as preceding the crisis. Disaster generally pertains to nature-induced crises, such as storms, floods, fires, earthquakes, or major accidents. In this view, a disaster is a subcategory of crisis.

*** Insert Table 1 about here ***

2.2. Phases of a Crisis

A crisis can arise as different types (e.g., natural disaster, self-inflicted) and take different forms (e.g., immediate, sustained). Extant crisis literature features debates about how many stages constitute a crisis lifecycle (e.g., Faulkner, 2001; Fink, 1986; Roberts, 1984). Following Coombs (2007), a narrow view of crisis in its simplest form has three phases: *pre-crisis, crisis*, and *post-crisis*. However, issue management literature also suggests the need to consider the period immediately before the crisis, when it is building, to identify and proactively react to early symptoms (e.g., Ansoff, 1975), as well as immediately after the crisis, when extraordinary activities are required to handle its effects before a new "normal" stage might be achieved, which ensures that the firm learns and prepares (Madsen, 2009). We therefore suggest a model with five distinct phases for our crisis analysis: *pre-crisis normality*, *emergence*, *occurrence*, *aftermath*, and *post-crisis normality* (Table 2). Each phase differs in its content, duration, and managerial opportunities.

According to Jaques (2007), a key weakness of crisis lifecycle models is that they presume the crisis is linear, with events that take place in sequential fashion. The coronavirus pandemic appears likely to run counter to such models, considering the expert predictions that it might flare up again in intensity, after a first wave and ebb. Therefore, linear lifecycle models must be viewed as purposefully simplified, to establish a conceptual approach, rather than as natural laws. Alternatively, the process could be described in circular terms, similar to disaster management cycles, with an emphasis on reducing the impact of rather than preventing disasters, such that the management of a disaster entails continua of interrelated, interdependent activities (Jaques, 2007).

*** Insert Table 2 about here ***

2.3. Framing Crisis: Actor, Content, and Pace

Framing crisis entails specifying who (actor) experiences what kind of crisis (content) at what speed (pace). An actor might be an individual, group, organization, or network of organizations (Wilke & Ritter, 2006). These actors tend to exhibit significant differences in their perceptions and the impacts they experience. For example, the coronavirus crisis has affected countries (framed as groups of individuals and of organizations) at different times: starting in China, then hitting Italy before Denmark. The different countries accordingly have entered different crisis phases; at the moment China seemingly reached the end of crisis occurrence or beginning of crisis aftermath, Italy was in the midst of its crisis occurrence, and some Eastern European countries were in crisis emergence. There may also be within-country differences; in the United States, the coronavirus spread early in the state of Washington, then was noted in New York, before it spread to other major cities. In parallel, different business units within a company can experience the impact of a crisis differently, perhaps due to their geographical locations or work content. For example, in a single hospital, the emergency units are extremely busy, but elective surgery and dentistry units even may have closed.

To understand the content factor, it is helpful to consider sub-crises; for the coronavirus for example, we might distinguish five different sub-crises:

1 Contagion: Because of the highly contagious character of the virus, many people may be infected. This sub-crisis may entail several solutions, such as (a) developing a vaccine, so that spreading is irrelevant; (b) eliminating the virus, so there is no virus to spread; (c) allowing the virus to spread and let humans develop immunity through infection (e.g., 60% of the population is infected), which may result in "flock immunity"; and (d) social distancing. The first two options are not immediately available; the third option would evoke a different sub-crisis with devastating implications. Therefore, governments mainly are implementing social distancing at large scales to limit spreading.

2 COVID-19: Severe respiratory problems threaten people's lives and require intensive health care. Thus, this sub-crisis is concentrated among the approximately 5–10 percent of infected people. Its solution requires finding a treatment that can mitigate the most severe health problems, to help patients survive and retain their health. The current solution admits patients with severe symptoms to intensive care, which leads to the next sub-crisis.

3 Healthcare: The capacity of health care systems may be insufficient. Patients with severe respiratory problems need intensive care, including respiratory support, but the equipment to provide it is limited. This limitation drives many political decisions. Without any

alternative solutions to the contagion or COVID-19 sub-crises, many countries are stuck with social distancing measures, which leads to another sub-crisis.

4 Business models: Social distancing has led to closures of multiple industries: travel (e.g., airlines, airports, cruise lines, holiday destinations, train and bus operators), hospitality (hotels, restaurants, bars, theme parks, concert and event operators), sports (professional leagues, sports clubs, Olympic Games, betting firms, fitness clubs), brick-and-mortar retail (retail outlets, shopping centers, consumer goods producers), and service providers (hair salons, barbers, theaters, concert halls, pet groomers). Even if they remain in operation, many businesses have had to change their business models significantly, such as letting employees work from home (nearly all firms) and adopting online solutions (e.g., schools and universities, counseling and therapists, public administration). For firms that are experiencing growth due to social distancing measures, other elements of the business model sub-crisis become relevant, such as capacity limitations for online retailers or the network capacity of Internet providers.

5 Economic: The massive lockdown of businesses and countries threatens a recession, including high levels of unemployment, long-term spending decreases in consumer investment markets, more bankruptcies, and so forth.

The distinctions among different sub-crises are important, in that each one might have entered a different phase, and they also are perceived differently by the various actors. For example, people with mild symptoms might be primarily affected by the contagion sub-crisis. At an industry level, the short- and long-term impacts of the business model sub-crisis vary by sector, such that many universities managed to complete the spring 2020 semester by moving to an all-online format, but the curtailment of campus visits by graduating high school students seems likely to affect their future enrollments. Different countries also might suffer distinct impacts of a potential recession.

Finally, the pace of a crisis captures elapsed time in different phases. Ritchie (2004) and Parsons (1996) distinguish *immediate crises* (little or no warning, so the crisis emergence phase is very short), *emerging crises* (slower to develop, with a long emergence phase), and *sustained crises* (which may last for months or years, over a very long crisis existence phase). Each phase can vary from shorter or longer, as illustrated in Figure 1 (steeper gradients indicate higher pace).

The current coronavirus crisis (or rather, the five related sub-crises) should be viewed through all of these lenses: It originated with little or no warning (*immediate crisis, short emergence*) in China (*actor*). It followed a gradual pattern with regard to contagion and healthcare, across the world (*emerging crisis, longer emergence*), and it seems likely to result in a subsequent economic crisis (possibly *sustained crisis*), as well as possibly recurring in waves of continued contagion (*cyclical crisis*, phases start over again).

*** Insert Figure 1 about here ***

3. CRISIS MANAGEMENT

3.1. Five Phases of Crisis Management

As noted by Jaques (2009), crisis management emerged after World War II, gaining prominence in the wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis, as well as legitimacy as a formal management discipline after the 1982 Tylenol poisoning scandal and the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. Tylenol sales rebounded to pre-crisis levels due to the swift and effective handling of this product harm crisis by the manufacturer, Johnson & Johnson; to this day, it offers an excellent, teachable example of effective crisis management (Latson, 2014). Some authors delimit crisis management to efforts after a crisis happens (e.g., Bundy, Pfarrer, Short, & Coombs, 2017), whereas others regard the pre-crisis phases as important (Jaques, 2009) or else highlight post-crisis learning as essential (Madsen, 2009). We define crisis management as the intentional handling of a crisis in all five phases (see Table 3).

3.1.1. Pre-crisis. In the pre-crisis phase, organizations can seek to *prevent* (if possible), *predict*, or *prepare* for it. The differences among these three options are not trivial. In some cases, organizations have sufficient agency to prevent a crisis proactively; Bundy *et al.* (2017) even propose that a pre-crisis, prevention phase includes organizational preparedness (changes to the culture, design, or structure can prevent system breakdowns) and stakeholder relationships (good relationships with stakeholders may reduce crisis likelihood). These options are available prior to the crisis; in the coronavirus setting, they would have involved prevention through improved health standards or immediate containment of the first patients, and preparation in the form of increased precautionary measures and health care capacity.

The prediction phase also can be informed by Knight's (1921) definition of *risk* as events for which the outcome can be assessed using probabilistic outcomes, but *uncertainty* as hard to quantify, such that its assessment cannot rely on any probabilistic foundation. For example, we know that pandemics arise with some regularity (risk), but the current version is exerting many unknown impacts on businesses, for which we have no historical basis (uncertainty). Nor does statistical regularity necessarily imply predictability; Makridakis, Hogarth, and Gaba (2010) use the analogy of earthquakes to establish this distinction. We can predict that in the next 35 years, the Earth will experience about 44 earthquakes with intensities of around 7.5 on the Richter scale, but seismologists cannot say when or where they will hit, beyond noting earthquake-prone zones. In such cases, it may be a better approach to prepare for different contingencies, like firefighters who cannot predict when or where a fire will be but can train for different contingencies and stay ready.

3.1.2. Crisis emergence. In the emergence phase, a crisis has not yet started, but its signs become clearer. Depending on the pace, actors still have a chance to prepare and potentially postpone the occurrence of the crisis. With respect to the healthcare sub-crisis, some countries increased their health care capacity as much as possible, just before the crisis started there, after having noted the developments in other countries where COVID-19 had struck earlier. Other actors took other measures to postpone the crisis, such as lockdowns; once COVID-19 began to spread, health officials recommended such measures to "flatten the curve" and minimize its expansion, noting that otherwise, the health care system would be inundated and ultimately result in higher mortality rates.

3.1.3. Crisis occurrence. Once the crisis hits, the organization must initiate crisis responses, which usually are tactical in nature, involving communication (see Coombs, 2007), actions, and behaviors (consider actions by British Petroleum after its Texas City refinery explosion in 2005 or Deepwater Horizon explosion in 2010; Andersen & Andersen, 2014). Depending on the type of crisis, the organization might take different forms of action. Even if the crisis is unpredictable and evolving, decision makers must follow logical patterns, which can be especially difficult with insufficient or conflicting data. Furthermore, decision-making speed is often of paramount importance, suggesting that many decisions must be made on an ad hoc basis during the crisis. This point is not to suggest that decisions are not thought through though. Simple cost–benefit analyses, effect models, stakeholder analyses, and trade-off models are often involved. Yet decision making also cannot fall victim to "analysis paralysis," and accordingly, the need for strong leadership tends to be pronounced in this phase of a crisis. Bundy *et al.* (2017) emphasize the importance of crisis leadership (characteristics of leaders and how they frame the crisis) and stakeholder perceptions (how organizations influence how stakeholders perceive and react to crises).

3.1.4. Crisis aftermath. Once the crisis is over, there is a time immediately afterward, focused mainly on rebuilding destroyed property (e.g., after natural disasters), giving overworked response units some time off (e.g., fire brigades, health care professionals), and catching up on postponed or disrupted work flows (e.g., replenishment of warehouses). In this phase, extraordinary activities precede the new normality. The main managerial activities include recovery and remedy.

3.1.5. Post-crisis. After the crisis, the organization tries to revert to "business as usual" (Coombs, 2007). In a simple categorization of outcomes after a crisis, the organization may be worse off (unable to revert to its original position), might revert to its original position, or it could be better off (come out of the crisis strengthened in some way). The outcome likely depends on different systems, such organizations, networks, or countries. Systems that worsen after a crisis are *vulnerable*, those that bounce back are *resilient*, and systems that grow stronger due to adversity are *antifragile* (Manyena, 2006; Taleb, 2012). These systemic outcomes also relate to how well-prepared organizations were in the pre-crisis phase and their actions during the three central crisis phases (Pedersen & Ritter, 2020). Finally, the post-crisis phase offers opportunities to learn and prepare for future crises, resulting in a circular process of crisis management in which the post-crisis becomes the pre-crisis. Bundy *et al.* (2017) accentuate the importance of organizational learning from a crisis to identify new competitive opportunities, as well as social evaluations of how stakeholders perceive the organization's responses to the crisis.

*** Insert Table 3 about here ***

3.2. Crisis Management Research in *Industrial Marketing Management*

Industrial Marketing Management has featured articles on crisis from its very beginning—the first article on "the environmental crisis" was published in Volume 1, Issue 2 (May 1972). A search produced a list of 260 papers that include the word "crisis." After clearing the list of articles that do not address crisis management and instead refer to unrelated forms of crisis (e.g., Laari-Salmela, Mainela, & Puhakka, 2019, which pertains to "identity crisis"), we are left with eight articles that offer theoretical contributions and managerial implications regarding how organizations can deal with a crisis (Table 4). This lack of research on crisis management is surprising, particularly in light of the opportunities to study it following events such as 9/11, the 2008 financial crisis, or the opening of the Berlin Wall. Overall, business-to-business marketing research has paid little attention to crisis management and accordingly has offered few insights for marketing practice. This situation needs to change; we need a better understanding of how business marketing, business relationships and networks, marketing orientation, and so forth can contribute to managing ongoing crises and post-crisis realities.

*** Insert Table 4 about here ***

Overall, the treatment of crisis and crisis management in *Industrial Marketing Management* has been eclectic, fragmented, and partial. There is no established stream of literature in the journal though—despite the importance and regular occurrence of crises and the potential impact of the marketing field on crisis management by leveraging market intelligence (to predict and prepare) and relationship management (of particular interest for crisis occurrence), for example.

4. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RESEARCH ISSUES

Considering the lack of meaningful contributions in marketing literature, we might speculate that each crisis is unique and unpredictable, such that findings from one cannot transfer to another. But we do not subscribe to this view; existing theories, based on studies of previous crises, can help organizations navigate through and after any crisis. We thus outline some theoretical insights and managerial implications pertaining to the current coronavirus crisis. As noted, the aim of this special issue is to develop more detailed, qualified managerial implications from theories, to inform practitioners. The field of business-to-business marketing contains theories relevant to the current crisis, especially if applied to adapt some established constructs or models. In addition, we need established constructs to cross-pollinate these insights with evidence from crisis management fields.

4.1. Crisis Phases Model

We propose that managers should divide each crisis into relevant sub-crises, analyze and include all five phases in their decision making (in particular, by thinking of the aftermath and post-crisis phases in their early decision making, e.g. Pedersen & Ritter, 2020), ensure their future preparedness, and learn how to prepare for and predict potential future crises.

4.2. Business-to-Business Theories and Resilience

The long tradition of studying value propositions in industrial marketing (Eggert, Ulaga, Frow, & Payne, 2018) offers pertinent opportunities for combined considerations of resilience. Such a cohesive view might address whether a firm's value propositions can remain resilient during a crisis. In some industries, the value propositions have been virtually unaffected; in others, existing value propositions have mostly disappeared. Similarly, resilience notions could inform business network models to consider, for example, how business networks might increase or decrease resilience to a crisis. Networks can impose rigidity but also enhance responsiveness to external shocks for example (Håkansson & Ford, 2002).

> RQ1: *Can value propositions and business networks help organizations be resilient during a crisis?*

4.3. Relationship Management

A key focus of business-to-business marketing is on salespeople and the management of boundary-spanning personnel (Walter, 1999). Industrial marketing has a plethora of insights to provide. Moreover, the role of salespeople is likely to change substantially during a crisis; personal meetings once seemed critical to maintaining business relationships, but digital sales channels take priority during the COVID-19 crisis. How does such a shift affect business relationships and the quality of sales encounters? Organizations also need to provide new training to ensure their representatives' online sales skills. Although we lack detailed insights into the specifics, established literature and anecdotal examples may provide some tentative guidelines for these efforts.

> RQ2: *How do relationships and relationship management change during a crisis, and what impacts do they have on relationship outcomes during and after the crisis?*

4.4. Salespeople's Autonomy

The empowerment of salespeople is critical to customer relationships, and job autonomy enhances both employee and customer satisfaction (Anderson & Huang, 2006). Employee autonomy also increases agility and creativity, to help the firm be responsive and innovative in uncertain and dynamic environments (Pedersen, 2019). The pandemic has created a completely uncertain environment, so employees may need to take unconventional measures to manage their business relationships. It is not unreasonable to anticipate that decentralizing decision power to salespeople (salesperson autonomy) will provide a more appropriate management model for sales channels in this era. Early evidence has shown that the Haier Group reached full-scale operations soon after the start of the pandemic, when most manufacturers were just starting to open again, partly due to its very decentralized set-up.[4] For Haier, autonomy created resilience.

RQ3: How does salespeople autonomy relate to crisis resilience?

4.5. Omnichannel, Digitalization, and Business Model Resilience

Other key topics in recent business-to-business marketing have involved omnichannel efforts and digitalization (Ritter & Pedersen, 2020). Omnichannel capabilities and the digitalization of business models arguably increase resilience in business models; if an organization's business model and communication channels already had gone digital and been integrated prior to the crisis, it is reasonable to hypothesize that this organization has shown greater resilience than its competitors without such expanded capabilities. The coronavirus crisis provides verisimilitude for these popular topics in industrial marketing, as well as a natural experiment for investigating these topics further.

RQ4: How do business models (e.g., digitalization, omnichannel) change during a crisis, and what are the long-term effects of such changes?

4.6. Disruption

[4] https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/how-autonomy-creates-resilience-in-the-face-of-crisis/

The theory of disruption (Christensen, 1997) cites three fundamental conditions: First, a new offering must initially perform worse than existing market offerings from incumbents, in terms of performance. Second, incumbents improve their market offerings, to meet the most demanding customers' needs along a sustaining trajectory, and thus overshoot the needs of mainstream and low-end customers. Third, the disruptive offering develops over time to meet the needs of mainstream customers better than an "over-engineered" incumbent offering and takes over major market share, if not the whole market.

Although the coronavirus pandemic is not disruptive in the sense of Christensen's (1997) theory, it can help accentuate disruptive processes in established business markets. In particular, it certainly has put pressure on several established, "high-end" solutions. For example, personal business meetings with customers have been replaced by video conferences (typically seen as low-end, low quality interaction modes). Even if the high-end option is not being disrupted per se by the low-end option, the unavailability of high-end meetings provides a foothold for the online meetings to disrupt customer relationships, as exemplified by the rapid growth in the use of Zoom and other online meeting platforms. After the crisis, we anticipate that video conferences may retain a significant market share, even if they seem unlikely to fully replace personal meetings. As such, the situation is not a "true" disruption in the Christensen (1997) sense, but it certainly is a troubling outcome for certain industries (e.g., travel, hospitality), during and after the crisis.

RQ5: To which extent does a crisis infuse disruption into a market?

5. THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

The current coronavirus crisis is unique, in terms of the number of fatalities, its global reach, and its economic impact. However, crises in general are not special; they are a regular part of business. As Kash and Darling (1998, p. 179) note, "it is no longer a case of 'if' an organization will face a crisis; it is rather a question of 'when', 'what type' and 'how prepared' the organization is to deal with it."

Likewise, “anytime you (i.e. managers) are not in crisis, you are instead in pre-crisis” (Fink, 1986, p. 7). It is therefore of paramount importance that the business-to-business marketing community develops a better understanding of crisis management in industrial firms and business-to-business markets. We have outlined some promising research avenues, which is not meant to imply that the list is exhaustive or covers all of the many interesting aspects of crisis management for business-to-business marketing. It merely highlights that there are ample research opportunities—and that *Industrial Marketing Management* hopefully will be a platform for sharing and debating such contributions.

For here and now, this special issue comprises 19 contributions of what executives should consider based on business-to-business marketing theories. While we were astonished by the small number of crisis management studies already published in *Industrial Marketing Management,* we were evenly overwhelmed by the many submissions offered by authors from around the world. In total, we received 73 submissions on a call-for-papers that only offered about six weeks for preparing a contribution.

In order to offer a timely special issue, we created a high-speed reviewing process with two reviewers and co-editor approval with an average turn-around time of only six days. Only papers with requests for minor revisions were invited to the next round to keep our set deadline targets. This meant that a number of papers with potentially great contributions had to be referred to resubmitting a developed paper at a later point in time—thus, there are great papers under development and there is a promising pipeline for developing a crisis management stream in the business-to-business marketing literature.

We are proud to present 19 contributions in this special issue—from many different corners of the business-to-business marketing literature—and with four clear overarching managerial imperatives for executives in business-to-business firms (Figure 2):

1 Understand fast: a crisis forces executives to think fast, to analyze quickly, and to keep an overview. Panic is not a good approach in a crisis. While high levels of uncertainty prevent exact planning, comprehending the situation is of paramount importance: what kind of risks are we facing (McNulty et al.; Oehmen, Locatelli, Willumsen, & Wied), how is our organizational preparedness (Hughes, Morgan, Hodgkinson, Kouropalatis, & Lindgreen), what can we learn from former crisis exposures (Kottika, Ozsomer, Rydén, Theodorakis, Kaminakis, Kottikas, & Stathakopoulos), and what is the impact of the crisis on our business model (Ritter & Pedersen).

2 Think allocentric: a crisis should not lead to egocentric thinking, as this will not only destroy opportunities during the crisis but also in the aftermath and post-crisis era. Businesses can only thrive in a society, if they take an active part in developing it (Sheth), big challenges can be best solved together and openly (Chesbrough), competitors can be collaborators (Crick & Crick), and differences in relationships need to be understood and utilized (Cortez & Johnston; Obel & Gau; Zafari, Biggemann, & Garry).

3 Change proactively: a crisis can barely be handled by continuing current operations, or pausing activities and waiting for the past to return. Change is often needed. Changes can relate to shaping markets (Nenonen & Storbacka), designing innovative solutions (Cankurtaran & Beverland), or using middle managers as change agents (Heyden, Wilden, & Wise). Change must be seen as an interconnected process encompassing various elements (Hartmann & Lussier).

4 Sell intelligently: Instead of cutting prices and adjusting budgets downwards, sales enablement can drive positive results, or at least minimize negative impacts of the crisis. Sales focus can be moved to specific customers (Habel, Jarotschkin, Schmitz, Eggert, & Plötner), to new offerings (e.g., services; Rapaccini, Saccani, Kowalkowski, Paiola, &

Adrodegari), or to new ways of selling (e.g., value selling; Keränen, Salonen, & Terho). This may also involve adapting the sales force (Sharma, Rangarajan, & Paesbrugghe).

We are very thankful to all authors who have contributed in such fast and dedicated fashion. We do hope that this special issue is of inspiration to fight the impact of the coronavirus on businesses and markets. And we know that there are more insights on their way. The coronavirus crisis presents enormous challenges to research and practice of business-to-business marketing -- but also offers huge opportunities that we can and should explore and exploit together.

**** Insert Figure 2 about here ****

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Table 1: Definitions of a crisis

Author(s)	**Definition of a crisis**
Pauchant & Mitroff (1992, p. 15)	"disruption that physically affects a system as a whole and threatens its basic assumptions, its subjective sense of self, its existential core."
Selbst (1978, in Faulkner 2001, p. 136)	"any action or failure to act that interferes with an organization's ongoing functions, the acceptable attainment of its objectives, its viability or survival, or that has a detrimental personal effect as perceived by the majority of its employees, clients or constituents."

Table 2: Phases of crisis

Phases (our suggestion)	**Pre-crisis normality**	**Crisis emergence**	**Crisis occurrence**	**Crisis aftermath**	**Post-crisis normality**
Narrow perspective	Pre-crisis		Crisis		Post-crisis
Wide perspective	Pre-crisis		Crisis		Post-crisis
Faulkner (2001) stages	Pre-event	Prodominal	Emergency & Intermediate	Long-term recovery	Resolution
Roberts (1994) stages	Pre-event	-	Emergency & Intermediate	Long-term	-
Fink (1986) stages	-	Prodominal	Acute	Chronic	Resolution
Timing	Before the crisis and possible early signs	Right before the crisis	The period of the crisis	Right after the crisis is over	After the crisis and its immediate past
Description	The crisis is at best a scenario, a theoretical discussion	The build-up toward a crisis, when potential first indicators can be observed	The crisis hits the organization and requires action	The crisis slows down in intensity, and the end can be seen	The crisis is over, and the organization is now in a state of normality
Examples related to the coronavirus crisis	Bill Gates's Ted Talk in 2015	First patients reported; early warnings by WHO; experiences from other countries	Lockdown of countries, restrictions of movement, health care stress levels, fatalities	Loosening of restrictions, partially opening up society and the economy	Not yet reached, but must be prepared for

Table 3: Example studies in crisis management

Crisis phase	Managerial tasks	Methodology	Study
Pre-crisis	- Predict - Prevent - Prepare - Postpone	Conceptual	Greve, Palmer, & Pozner (2010); Knight (1921); Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld (1999)
		Empirical	Makridakis, Hogarth, & Gaba (2010); O'Connor, Priem, Coombs, & Gilley (2006); Wowak, Mannor, & Wowak (2015)
Crisis emergence *Crisis occurrence*	- (Prepare) - (Postpone) - React - Respond - (Recover) - (Rebound)	Conceptual	Ansoff (1975); Dane & Pratt (2007); Mitroff (2007)
		Empirical	Andersen & Andersen (2014); Johansen, Aggerholm, & Frandsen (2012); Mazzei & Ravazzani (2015)
Crisis aftermath *Post-crisis*	- Recover - Rebound - Remember - Retain	Conceptual	Manyena (2006); Veil (2011); Taleb (2012); Zahra & George (2002);
		Empirical	Madsen (2009); Maguire & Hardy (2013)

Table 4: Articles on Crisis Published in *Industrial Marketing Management*

Authors	Research	Managerial implications
Groeger, Bruce, & Rolfe (2019)	Case study of Cisco Systems to uncover the role of multiplicity in decision making to address rapid change	Decentralize decision making to be responsive
Felzensztein, Gimmon, & Deans (2018)	Longitudinal 10-year study of the Chilean salmon industry cluster	Be prepared for individual actions despite cluster building and collaborations
Hermes & Mainela (2014)	Case-based study on the mobilization process of humanitarian peace-building communities Main focus is on operating in a humanitarian crisis environment No definition of crisis or crisis management	Importance of managing network partners to achieve desired outcomes
Szczepański & Światowiec-Szczepańska (2012)	Polish case study on five business relationships and risk management	Firms tend to discard business relationships and turn towards arms-length or full integration to handle risk
Naidoo (2010)	Analysis of Chinese SMEs after the financial crisis No definition of crisis or crisis management	Marketing innovations and differentiation improve firm survival
Andersson & Mattsson (2010)	Conceptual model on the role of temporality for handling a severe economic recession No definition of crisis or crisis management	Thinking temporality into strategic decision making
Wagner (1994)	Establishing supply service strategy for shortage situations	Important to realize that crisis will happen—and a strategic approach is needed for being successful
Van Dam (1976)	Marketing in times of global scarcities	"Think the unthinkable and to expect the unexpected"
May (1972)	Describing the dimensions of the environmental crisis No definition of crisis or crisis management	Crisis needs holistic solutions "eventually to solve any one of these facets, we must solve the whole problem" (p. 220)

Figure 1: Crisis Framing Chart

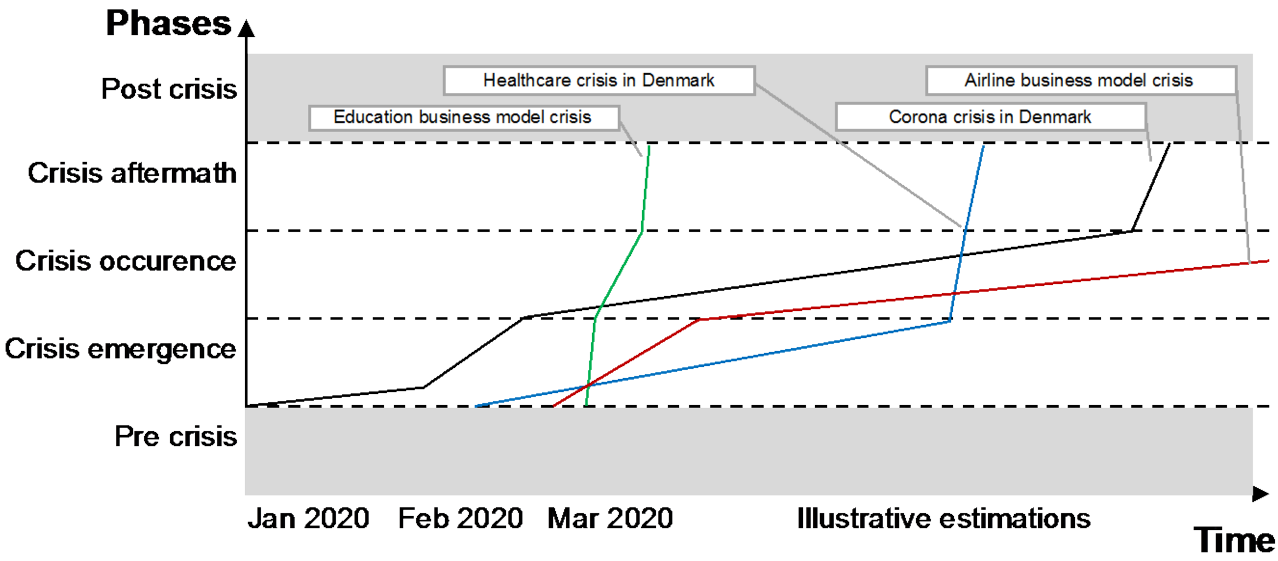

Figure 2: Four managerial imperatives for crisis management