

## Summary

As CIO you have prepared for this year after year – successful Disaster Recovery exercises and Continuity of Business planning. CEO’s and Corporate Boards expect these tests, the business counts on it, and the technology organization is rallied to make it all happen. Infrastructure is supposed to flip over seamlessly, systems are expected to run without a hitch, and heavy loads are put on your technology ecosystem given the higher than normal remote working strategy.

With the Coronavirus (COVID-19), it’s all for real, and the bright spotlight is on YOU. But the critical question for the CIO is, **how are you handling the spotlight?** Are you behind the scenes making the technology work, or are you a business executive leading the charge as the expert? At Mantissa, we coach our CIO’s to aggressively lead the way; it’s an important part of your executive brand and we encourage the CIO and leadership teams to lead with confidence. Our advice? **Get out in front, communicate, give the business team comfort**, resist your temptation to get technical, and give your business the confidence of knowing you have risen to the occasion.

## Our Report

This report discusses the leadership lesson that comes from a very serious technical challenge. While others are commenting on the technical issues associated with this challenge (e.g. remote workers, technology, productivity), we approach it from a leadership perspective, mainly because we understand that the CIO and leadership teams will be ultimately judged by how they conduct themselves both **during** this time and **after** we return to “normal”.

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### In the Moment

We are all in the middle of a pandemic situation, and the technology organization will be tested. This is the moment where the strength of the *extended leadership team* matters the most. If the CIO has invested in the extended team, empowered them, and built a culture of trust, then the technical aspects of the crisis will be much easier to manage. This is an important concept, because the CIO must serve as a business executive first and provide their colleagues with confidence that business will run, uninterrupted, with a work force that is probably remote in many ways. If the CIO is managing the *communication* and working with business leadership on crisis management, then it is imperative that the extended leadership team work together to ensure that there is *stability* in the environment.

### The CIO

At this stage, the CIO must be the one asking critical questions – it's a leadership exercise.

Certainly, the obvious ones are ensuring infrastructure can handle the load of remote workers and that peak times of the day and night are being addressed. They must also be extending their questioning to performance of strategic partners as part of the business value chain. If a Life Insurance company, for example, are your CRM, eApp, illustrations, and underwriting partners on the same solid footing as you? Is your print vendor and all other back end service providers on the same solid footing? What about your strategic sourcing partners? Are they equipped to work from home, or is there a similar pandemic crisis brewing in the country they are working from (e.g. India)?

This is the time for the CIO to ask questions, and for the extended leadership team to execute with authority and empowerment.

### The Technology Leadership Team

Now is the time for broad and forward-thinking actions. The primary objective is for stability and calm actions. Now is not the time to discuss how hard it may be, or how technically difficult it is to keep the operation running. This is the time for steady leadership, teamwork, and a calm executive-like demeanor. In addition, you should be preparing for life after the crisis.

Inevitably, the business team will want statistics and metrics. They will want to know how many people accessed the network, time frames, issues reported (compared to the norm), trends, a point of view on security vulnerabilities, and observations. Get started on that immediately – prepare a report that can be consumed by your boss, the CIO, and business executives for immediately after the crisis, but certainly sharing information in the moment can be prudent as well.

In addition to metrics, a report card on your strategic partners will be critical to measure. Were there any failures in the value chain or was it business as usual? These are all important facts to share. Finally, did



your strategic sourcing partners simply perform well, or did they bring value during times of crisis? This is quite important since your strategic sourcing partners are large organizations with significant resources and intelligence. They should be pro-actively offering advice, resources and guidance along the way. If they fail the test, why is that?

### Looking Forward

There will most certainly be a post event discussions and critique. Clearly, a look at the state of enterprise collaboration tools should be done. For example, direct advice from AT&T Business, from a publication in July 2019:

Three ways to get your workforce on the same page:

#### Adopt a single, cloud-based solution.

Using one provider for services like Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), instant messaging, video conferencing, and file-sharing means simplified, centralized management. When these services are housed in the cloud, the user experience is virtually seamless, scalable, and cost-effective, regardless of physical location.

#### Minimize security risks via VPNs.

Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) mitigate the risk of security incidents. Urging remote workers to use a VPN adds an extra layer of protection for those overseas or who frequently use unsecured connections (in a coffee shop or in the airport, for instance).

#### Ensure your collaboration platform supports all devices.

Prioritize a system that lets workers switch devices easily so that they almost never lose track of projects or drop calls when jumping from one device to another. Flexibility is another consideration—opt for tools that will be adaptable to new mobile technologies as they emerge and evolve

### Concluding Thoughts

We believe that despite the technical challenges, there are bigger lessons in leadership. As CIO, did you have the freedom to be a business executive, or were you forced to stay in the back room to manage the technology challenge? We hope that you were able to lead. For the technology leadership team, did you rise to the occasion, work as a team with your colleagues, and support your CIO? We hope the answer to that question is yes. These are important leadership lessons, and *we strongly believe that the success of technology organizations at this time of crisis is driven by the collective leadership strength of the CIO and their leadership teams.*



### About the Author



**Don Desiderato** is a former Fortune 100 Executive and Founder of Mantissa Group LLC, a strategy consulting firm serving the CIO executive and their extended leadership teams. Don is a recognized industry expert, and a deeply experienced senior technology executive helping leaders with their **technology strategic plans**, as well as simultaneously focusing on **leadership development and culture**.

### About Mantissa



**Mantissa Group** provides business and technology strategic consulting services. Mantissa supports the Chief Information Officer executive and their leadership teams, with a focus on CIO engagement as a business leader. Mantissa has practical experiences supporting leaders with **technology strategy, executive coaching, leadership development**, and relevant **research** for technology organizations.