

Best Practices

Communicating, Convening, and Coordinating the Efforts During the Uncertain Times

1. Communicating

- Frequent, consistent, and transparent communication to control the message and mitigate the impact of potential misinformation
- Messages must get out quickly from a reliable and trusted source
- Utilize a variety of communication modes (written, verbal, visual) and channels (social media, print, radio, email, etc.)
- Adjust timing of your communication according to nature of communication (tactical, operational, or strategic); in other words, do not share strategic information when people need to know when and how to evacuate
- Use simple terms, be brief, direct, and clear; attention span is short and hyper alertness creates a potential for misinterpreting the message

2. Convening

- Hosting live discussions is important in building trust and relationships among people who are now depending on each other for survival
- Sharing information, knowledge, and expertise or experiences helps find better solutions
- Be intentional about who you invite to the meetings, when you invite new members, and how you structure and facilitate the meeting to accomplish what is needed at that time
- When you convene different stakeholders, the format of the meeting needs to meet the purpose (information sharing, problem solving, decision making, feedback, input, collaboration, etc.).
- Establish meeting ritual (cadence) early on, this provides some sense of normalcy and structure that is lacking in people's lives at this time

3. Coordinating

- Establish a "core team" (or a steering team) – a small group of trusted individuals who can operate, guide, lead interchangeably, sustaining momentum and consistency
- Use action teams (or task forces) to execute focused, specific, and immediate tasks
- Develop limited number of strategic directions to manage scope and optimize resources
- Make decisions and focus on action using more agile or rapid planning techniques
- Fail fast, learn, and adjust.

Best Practices in Business and in Mobilizing a Civilian War Response: Lessons from Ukraine – June 2022

There are a million topics I could have chosen to explore this month. But as we approach the Fourth of July and our country's annual reflection on what it means to be a democratic republic, I'd like to share some insights from another republic, Ukraine – one that is entering its fifth month of war to try to preserve its very sovereignty.



A few weeks ago, PEN hosted a webinar that featured two speakers: PEN member and the co-founder of HueLife, Dr. Irina Fursman and Oleg Shapovalov, a learning & organizational development expert. Irina lives in the Twin Cities but is originally from Crimea (and many of her family still lives in Ukraine); Oleg lives in Kyiv. In their talk, "From Chaos to Systems of Support," both shared lessons from their efforts to mobilize a response to the war, focusing on insights that can translate to more normal, everyday situations – insights on communication, project management and logistics coordination, managing change, navigating complex systems, setting strategy.

I found the discussion fascinating and tremendously valuable. In many ways, it put our day-to-day struggles into proper context: though we're all dealing with professional and personal challenges these days (more now than maybe a few years ago, for sure), not many of us are navigating the challenges of a hot war, where quite literally any day could destroy our homes, businesses, families, and quality of life (or life itself). But what I found most interesting is that when you neutralize the context, the insights are similar. In other words, the best practices in navigating a response to a war are similar to navigating a "normal" day for many of us.

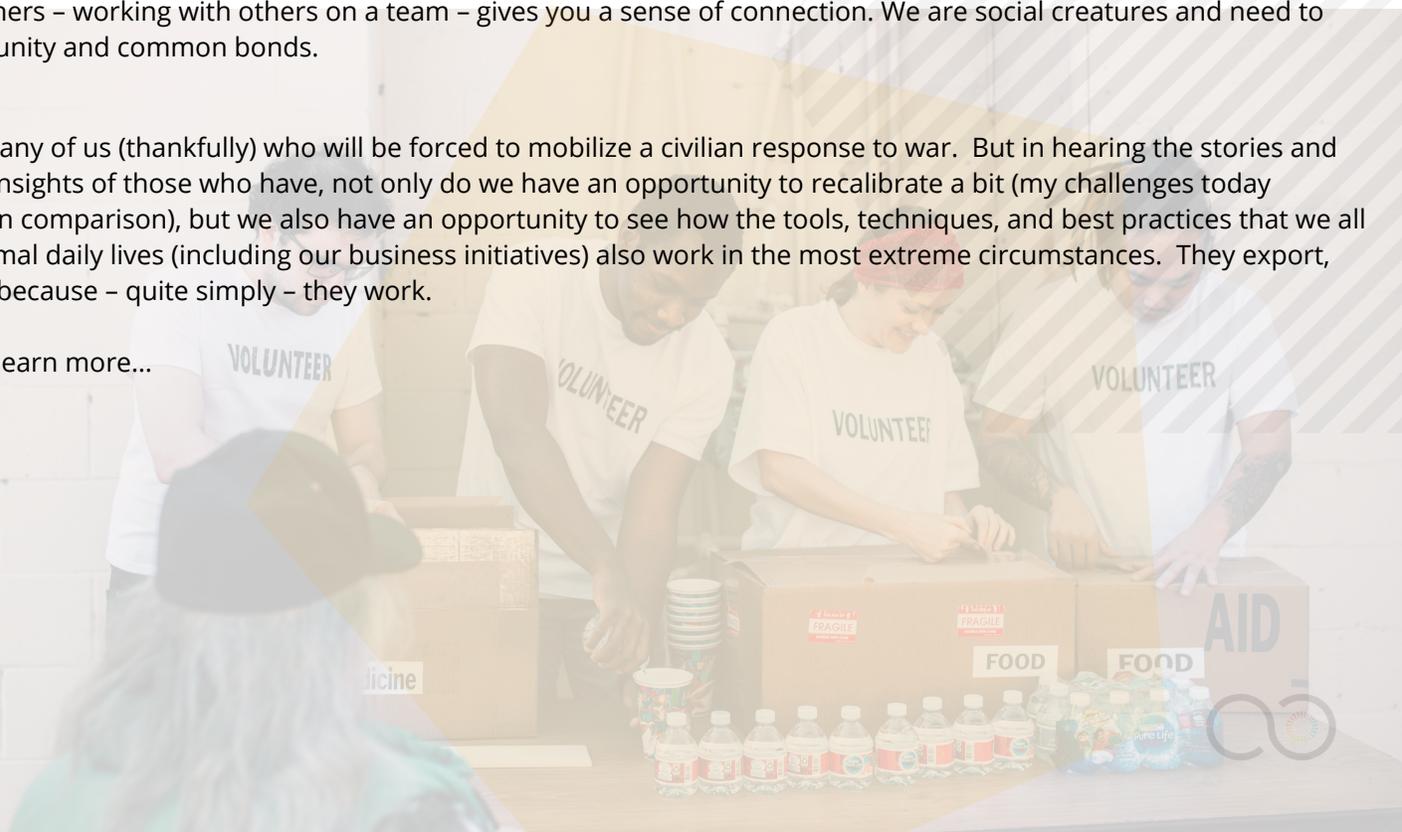
I thought I'd share the most interesting insights, starting first with best practices in communication but then moving to best practices in convening, coordination, and managing change:

- In times of war, effective communications is critical and speed is crucial – messages must get out quickly, reliably, accurately, and efficiently.
- You need multiple communication channels: written, but also frequent and regular live discussions. Hosting live discussions is important in building trust and relationships, especially among people who don't have a previous history.
- In any change effort, you need a communications strategy – a plan that is thoughtful and systematic. Otherwise, you are always reacting and responding to whatever seems urgent at the time.
- Key messages needed to be delivered in all languages. In this case, that means Ukrainian, English, and Russian. But the principle is the same in an organizational setting with diversity of stakeholders – some with different actual language needs (non-English speaking workers), but many with different communication preferences and requirements. One size doesn't fit all.
- Use social media for mass communication when you need concise, broad messaging. Given the constant Russian propaganda (not unlike active resisters to change in an organizational setting), social media messaging needs to come from a trusted source.
- In war (and in organizational change efforts), there is always propaganda and misinformation. Therefore, messages constantly need to be analyzed, vetted, and revised to reflect the current situation. Accuracy, relevance, and currency in messaging is critically important – often the difference between life and death.
- You need communication on the tactical level (local community channels for immediate information about a street, a neighborhood, or a city), operational channels (information from the president, mayors, and other official sources), and strategic channels (trusted third party resources that provide context and analysis).
- Schedule live meetings during times to maximize participation, paying attention to time zone differences.
- For communication to be effective, you need trust. So be careful who you invite to meetings and how you structure and facilitate them to maximize productivity and to accomplish your objectives.
- For effective communication, language is also critically important. Choose your words carefully to convey the message you're trying to convey. During times of chaos, it's easy to misinterpret messages.

- Establish a “core team” (or a steering team) – a small group of trusted individuals who can operate, guide, lead fairly interchangeably, bringing momentum and consistency in leadership and coordination.
- Use action teams (or task forces) to execute focused, strategically aligned action plans against a master strategy. This builds momentum, focus, and alignment and also helps manage scope and optimize resources.
- In building these teams, make sure to invite the “right” people to ensure diversity and balance of perspectives and breadth of needed skillsets.
- When you convene different stakeholders, the format (of the meeting) needs to meet the purpose (information sharing, problem solving, decision making, and so forth).
- There will always be more ideas than resources to accomplish those ideas. So it’s important to prioritize, selecting action plans that match available resources.
- Use information sharing platforms (like GoogleDocs) to keep teams up to date on the current situation.
- To manage the complexity of coordination, use a standard meeting structure and format. Get into a rhythm and cadence in your meetings.
- In periods of unpredictable and constant change, setting goals may not be a productive exercise (think about goal setting in the early days of COVID, when no one really knew what would happen next). Instead, set a general direction, take some action and try to accomplish something, and adjust as needed. Just make progress. Once things stabilize and become more predictable, then set goals.
- When you do plan in a constantly changing environment, use more agile or rapid planning tools. Plan for shorter time horizons when variables can be a little more predictable – 30 or 60 day increments instead of one, three, or five years.
- Fail fast, learn, adjust. But have a focus on action.
- Scenario planning is only helpful if you know the range of possible scenarios. During chaotic times, the value of scenario planning is more in thinking through different situations and preparing for rapid response, rather than in getting the scenarios exactly right.
- When you find the right resources, work to keep them engaged. During times of rapid and significant change, focus on morale, mental health, stress and burnout – the human and psychological aspects of change.
- Quality and facilitation tools work in a variety of circumstances, from simple continuous improvement projects to more significant organization change initiatives to mobilizing a civilian war response. They’ve been used and refined over decades because they work.
- There are many opportunities in life to connect with something bigger than yourself. Keep perspective. Find purpose, whether it’s a professional mission, something related to family, something that improves your community, or even an effort to save your country. Purpose sustains.
- During times of uncertainty – times when you’re experiencing intense pressure and fear – it helps to take action. Do something. It’ll help you make forward progress, even if only a small step. And it gives you a sense of control.
- Helping others – working with others on a team – gives you a sense of connection. We are social creatures and need to feel community and common bonds.

There aren’t many of us (thankfully) who will be forced to mobilize a civilian response to war. But in hearing the stories and exploring the insights of those who have, not only do we have an opportunity to recalibrate a bit (my challenges today certainly pale in comparison), but we also have an opportunity to see how the tools, techniques, and best practices that we all use in our normal daily lives (including our business initiatives) also work in the most extreme circumstances. They export, they translate because – quite simply – they work.

If you want to learn more...



- If you're interested in viewing the full video on demand, visit [here](#).
- If you're interested in attending a quick Virtual Engagement Workshop to learn more, visit [here](#). These workshops are for facilitators, project managers, consultants, and leaders to sharpen their skills and make virtual experiences as impactful and meaningful as possible. They are a "learning playground," with minimal content and maximum practice where participants can learn and perfect skills and tools in a safe, non-judgmental environment (and also connect with Ukrainian colleagues who are on the front line of this war).
- And if you're interested in learning more about the Ukraine war response effort (or to donate funds, volunteer, or help with advocacy), visit [here](#).

What other insights/tips do you have regarding the lessons from the Ukraine war and how they apply to "normal" business? Participate in a discussion on this topic: visit our LinkedIn group to post a comment. And follow me on Twitter @LassiterBrian!

Stay healthy and never stop improving!



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