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November, 2020

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A Strategic Pandemic Response as a Model for the Future

Thrill. Often this is what moves researchers and explorers to set off into unknown terrain. To know what lies behind the horizon – literally or sometimes on a microscopic level – creates a magical fascination for many of us. As a child, many people dreamed of changing the world with their discoveries.

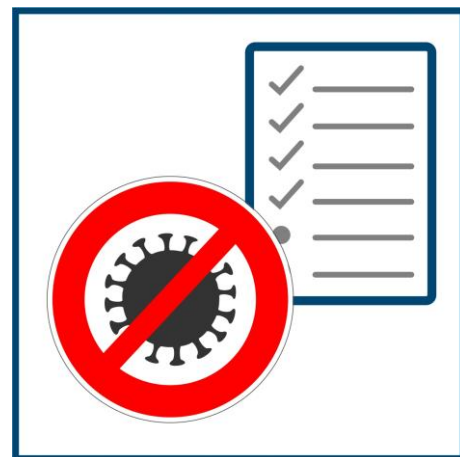
It also feels good because we decide for ourselves what we do and what we do not do. We are in control.

In a pandemic, it is very different. Here we do not pull the strings, but an organism does. It forces us to take actions that we have not chosen, changes our habits, and may end up leading to a new normal that none of us would have wished for.

And one thing must be very clear to us: after the pandemic is before the pandemic. We now know that we need to prepare very well and precisely for the further course of the current pandemic. At the same time, we need to create structures that provide a reliable framework for action when the next virus comes along.

This is not easy. We need to cover many different priorities and create uniform, consistent rules on which we can all orientate ourselves. Local and regional patchwork is not a viable solution here. What is needed is a "pandemic strategy".

The only question is: what can such a pandemic strategy look like?



A "Pandemic Strategy"

Such a project must be very well prepared. This includes first defining the parameters for the action framework, i.e., determining the starting position and then defining the next course of action. We suggest the following steps:

1 Formulate a vision

A vision is a formulated, sometimes idealized vision. It can be as follows:

Develop and maintain a consistent set of measures to effectively combat a pandemic from the very beginning.

2 Define challenges and turn them into goals

The challenges and target formulations need to be analyzed particularly carefully. The quality of this step determines the quality of the resulting measures. Here is an extract:

- Find simple and comprehensible metrics that can effectively communicate the current intensity of the pandemic to the population and the economy.
- Develop a single approach to contain the pandemics, which is easy to understand and comprehensible for all sectors of the economy and the population.
- Always activate the appropriate measures, which unfold the necessary degree of effectiveness without "overdrawing".

In this way, the framework for the next step is already being created.

3 Develop concrete, effective measures

The target formulation provides the framework conditions for concrete measures. These might look like this:

- Establish a *Pandemic Control Task Force* with all the necessary powers to carry out effective work across the country.
- The tasks of the unit are divided into three areas:
 - The collection and evaluation of worldwide scientific findings from medicine and pandemic research,
 - the assessment and evaluation of the effectiveness of measures in the current pandemic and the consideration of further secondary impacts of the measures on economic sectors (with a particular focus on systemically important sectors) and population, and
 - communication with downstream and other units (also international) and regular exchanges with policy leaders who decide within the framework of democratic legitimacy on the results of the Task Force and their application.

In terms of content, it is a question of determining when which measures are appropriate and effective. Here, the following comparatively simple questions must be answered: What worked well, what is sub-optimal? Which measures were easy to implement (= strengths), which caused problems or additional challenges (= weaknesses). Where are the gaps that require further or different regulations? Where did the costs come from?

This simple presentation must not obscure the fact that this is a highly complex detail work that requires special attention and regular scrutiny. However, the result can then look like step 4.

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A unified strategy to combat pandemics

What could be the result of the work of the Task Force?

With the aim of effectively containing a pandemic and comprehensible actions for all sectors of the economy and population, the following could be envisioned:

- There is a three- to a maximum five-stage pandemic plan that describes in detail the exact procedures in the event of a pandemic. This approach is uniform across Germany or even throughout Europe. There are additional explanations in plain language as well as in the most important other languages spoken in Germany (or Europe). The individual stages are based on parameters that are publicly communicated and easily traceable.
- There are checklists for each level that describe concrete actions and behaviors. This includes sanctions for infringements.
- The checklists are individually adapted to the economic sectors and supply sectors and also include offers of support from the public administration.
- All checklists and supplementary information are accessible on servers of the task force and can be accessed via the Internet and an app. Deploying in a single location makes it easier to update.
- The respective stage of the pandemic plan will be publicly proclaimed, regionally differentiated, and the measures for the stage will then be effective and mandatory to implement.

Example:

How does the retail trade have to behave when a pandemic has just broken out (level 1)? Content: Uniform hygiene concepts, staffing (grouping, avoid meetings, rosters, ...), coordination with suppliers, ensuring supply (opening hours, access regulations), preventing panic purchases, and much more.

All measures and regulations are compared with the current state of knowledge and regularly reviewed in defined cycles, for example once a month. If necessary, the checklists are updated. This also involves regular information to the public, for example on upcoming changes.

The effective implementation of this strategy does not have to be a “bureaucracy monster”. Many measures involve a wide range of actors. In addition, the scope of the measures must be designed in such a way that it can be easily understood and implemented by everyone concerned.

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Conclusion

Overall, this strategy would minimize a significant potential for conflict between existing solutions and practices, namely the patchwork of regionally and sectorally different regulations and measures. Acceptance would be strengthened, and population, economy and culture would benefit.

Effective protection of population and economy from the effects of a pandemic would be optimally implemented through the strategic fight against pandemics.

Because the next pandemic is definitely coming.

Editorial Notes

About the Authors

Wiebke Brüssel and Dr. Heiko Heinrich Stutzke are managing partners of Das Strategiebüro.

We structure and moderate planning processes - including preparation and documentation. From a single question to strategic corporate planning. Our clients are companies and organizations in the private, social, and public sectors, companies at the beginning of their development, and founders.

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