

## Chapter 6 Crises and Crisis Management

Whether your NOC is in an unexpected crisis or in a situation of multiple crises that could have been anticipated, it is good to perform a risk assessment (see subchapter 3.5). If the crisis is acute, there is rarely time for a good and well thought through preparation. In cases where you know that a crisis is under way, you have the opportunity to be a little more prepared, and risk assessments help to identify crises quicker. Some organisations have templates for managing crises, including a template for crisis communication.

### **Illustration: Belgian Olympic and Interfederal Committee (BOIC) Crisis Communication**

The BOIC works together with a communication consultancy (Akkanto) to conduct a risk assessment and to prepare its crisis communication in relation to the Olympic Games. This cooperation includes:

1. a handbook with specific guidelines and procedures for crisis management for the specific situations in relation to the Games and Team Belgium
2. an exercise with the staff/delegation
3. a prepared Q&A form for different subjects for crisis communication (including facts and figures, statements, etc.)
4. the appointment of a responsible crisis communication manager.

The information on crisis management and communication is also included in the Code of Conduct for Athletes and for other members of the delegation. See <https://www.akkanto.com/en/>

In any case, it is a strategically important move to consider which situations are particularly critical for an NOC.

### *6.1 Types of Crises*

A crisis is an imbalance of an organisation, resulting from serious failure to achieve the organisational goal (effectiveness failure), or an external threat which negatively affects the NOC's image, its finances, or performance. Unlike risks, crises refer to unexpected and unplanned threats. The process

by which such events or threats are effectively managed and dealt with is called crisis management.

According to Coombs and Holladay (2002, 167), there are different types of crises. A crisis type can be defined as “the frame that publics use to interpret an event”. Those authors note that an organisation’s reputation is a valuable asset among stakeholders. Therefore, reputational threats must be avoided, and also because a bad reputation makes it much more difficult to get stakeholders aligned and working with your NOC in projects. When crises do befall an NOC, stakeholders typically re-evaluate the favourability of that NOC’s reputation, prompting the NOC to strategically engage in reputation repair (Coombs & Holladay, 2005).

Since the perception of being in or facing a crisis is based on the interpretation of an incident, crises “are in the eye of the beholder” (Boin et al., 2018, 35), which means that the event can be perceived differently by different observers. For example, some would see an “Olympic crisis” (Hoberman, 1986), while others would see a promising future for Olympism (Chappelet & Kübler-Mabbott, 2008).

Before looking at how to react to or handle a crisis, we must become aware of the fact that crises are categorised into different types. Brown-Devlin and Brown (2020) created a list of distinct clusters of crises, to which we added another cluster:

1. **Outside forces crisis:** This cluster describes external events that affect the NOC, but which are not caused by it. Thus, in this case, there is no crisis responsibility for the NOC. However, since the crisis affects the NOC, a reaction is needed to safeguard the NOC and avoid any damage. Examples of outside forces crises are the Covid-19 pandemic, severe decrease in the financial support from the government (e.g., CONI), or the challenges that are driven by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
2. **Stakeholder/individual crisis:** This cluster refers to actions of an individual who is associated with the NOC, or an event that the NOC is linked to (e.g., the Olympic Games or national trials). In a stakeholder/individual crisis (which is not the NOC itself), there is a low level of crisis responsibility for the NOC. Thus, it can be considered that the audience does not hold the NOC largely responsible for the actions of each individual or stakeholder. The low level of NOC blame that is associated with this cluster, suggests that the NOC’s reputation does not face a strong threat from such a crisis. However, the reputational threat may increase when assessing the crisis history and prior reputation (Coombs, 2007). For example, despite the USOPC Olympic successes

in Gymnastics, the scandal of sexual abuse has forced the media to question the responsibility of the USOPC's good governance guidance. This example shows how the acts of individual coaches harmed the USOPC's reputation by boosting this crisis to the next level of organisational responsibility.

3. **Rules violation crisis:** This cluster involves rules that the NOC either violated or overlooked. It results in a moderate level of crisis responsibility being attributed to the NOC. As the population expects the NOC to protect the integrity and fairness of sport, any violation also hits the NOC. This type of crisis possesses a strong dependence upon the factors of crisis history and prior reputation, when determining the resulting crisis responsibility level. Audiences might forgive a first-time offender when rules are violated, as NOCs can claim ignorance. However, if an NOC does not react properly or, even worse, is a repeat offender, the current crisis would present a much larger reputational threat (Coombs & Holladay, 2005). Repeat offences are likely to increase the perceived crisis responsibility from the moderate level that is typically associated with this cluster, to the strong level of crisis responsibility that is typically associated with the organisational mismanagement cluster. Vivid examples are corruption cases, whereas repeated corruption is seen differently, as is a one-time offence.
4. **Organisational mismanagement crisis:** This cluster is associated with the highest crisis responsibility of an NOC. Typical crises that are classified into this cluster arise from the NOC's own mismanagement. The public is unforgiving of crises that are preventable through proper management techniques. NOCs that face crises in this cluster also face a strong reputational threat, and must select crisis response strategies accordingly. Examples are mismanagement in preparing Olympic Games participation, operational mismanagement during the Covid-19 pandemic, or misleading internal information. These crises all involve an issue that should be located within the NOC's realm of control; yet, the NOC's mismanagement of that issue led to the particular crisis. A good example is the provision of misleading internal information. That involves information/statements provided by an NOC official that is/are related to internal operations, with the result that there is some general controversy, or compromise of his/her own position within the team.

Crisis management is a rather small topic in the management literature, and even smaller in the subcategory of strategic management. However, the economic and social dislocations caused by the Covid-19 pandemic

have made crisis management extraordinarily relevant. Overall, the (sport) world currently experiences major disruptions. This world and many stakeholders are in a constant change process. This means that NOCs must act in a highly-unsecured field, under constant pressure of necessary changes and adoptions which can lead to sudden crises (see also Winter & Steger, 1998).

## 6.2 Prediction and Prevention of Crises

Crises can have different causes and take different forms. To be prepared for a potential crisis, an important distinction is made between predictable and unpredictable crises. Even though nobody knows what the future holds, or which crises may occur, for some crises it is possible to anticipate and read early developments, in order to predict the probability of a crisis occurring (related to this is risk management, discussed in subchapter 3.5). One idea of strategic management is to anticipate crises and avoid them by taking appropriate measures. For example, the product/project life cycle tool, stakeholder analysis (subchapter 3.3), the balanced scorecard (subchapter 5.2), or portfolio analysis (subchapter 3.2.3), all provide indicators of when the NOC needs to work on any potential switch to new projects, work with stakeholders, etc., because the previous project targets are reaching their end or they become outdated.

Regarding the preparation for a crisis, we can differentiate three types of crises:

1. **Predictable and likely crises:** These types of crises activate preventive action, because imminent crises are foreseeable and highly probable, which is the typical case regarding strategic management utilisation, and measures should be taken to reduce their occurrence. A potential activity an NOC can strive for is diversification. If the NOC is diversified in its projects, it can offset the crisis in one field with the successes in another field.
2. **Predictable but unlikely crises:** These types of crises are not taken seriously. Their occurrence is so unlikely that prevention is usually considered to be a waste of time and other resources. Here, commonly, a crisis management unit could be installed, in order to act in the proper manner should the crisis occur.
3. **Unpredictable crises:** These types of crises are unforeseeable and occur unexpectedly. In such cases, there are no chances of implementing any preventative activity.

Figure 43 roughly illustrates what an NOC should do in relation to the responsibilities it may have in any crises.

**Predictability of crises**

	predictable	predictable but unlikely	unpredictable	
Crisis responsibility of the NOC	non (external)	intermediate	secure goals	secure goals
	low (environmental/ individual)	damage reduction	intermediate	secure goals
	moderate (rule violation)	damage reduction	damage reduction	intermediate
	high (mismanagement)	damage reduction	damage reduction	damage reduction

Fig. 43: Crisis Responsibility Related to Crises Predictability

When it comes to a crisis that is highlighted by red fields (Fig. 43), the NOC faces severe damage to its reputation and may lose stakeholder support, their alignment to projects, or the project finances. It is absolutely necessary to start crisis management.

When it comes to a crisis highlighted by yellow fields (Fig. 43), the NOC should aim to keep achieving its goals, and also aim at regaining its reputation.

When it comes to a crisis highlighted by green fields (Fig. 43), the NOC would be in danger of not meeting its goals anymore; however, its reputation would not be affected.

### Case Study: IOC Crisis due to Mismanagement

#### Background information:

Due to the increasing number of candidatures during the mid-1980s, the cities in question attempted to influence the IOC members, in ways that were ethically questionable. A fairly significant number of IOC members accepted favours from the cities, or even made demands for such favours, in their own interests or those of their entourage, regarding valuable gifts of all kinds, study grants, free package holidays, airline tickets, paid

internships and jobs, or even direct cash payments, etc. These practices were revealed and made public in the media as of 1986, on the occasion of the election of the 1992 Olympic cities.

The battle for the 1992 Games provided an almost virgin terrain for lobbying groups of all kinds, and led to a significant waste of resources. During this period, invitations to visit the cities began to be issued to IOC members. Such invitations often involved lavish expenditure. As a result, the IOC decided to impose the first rules for candidate cities and its own members as of 1987; the possibility of holding receptions was restricted and the value of gifts was limited to US\$200 (i.e., the so-called “Hodler rules”). Some bid cities reported violations, either confidentially or publicly (by means of press articles or publications). The IOC bore the revelations in mind to a limited extent, and progressively reinforced the “Hodler rules”, while never penalising a city or a member, despite several debates on the subject within the IOC Executive Board. Finally, in December 1998, the practices were suddenly, and widely, exposed in the media, and they became the subject of a worldwide scandal that led to a major crisis within the IOC.

#### **The IOC crisis**

The cause of the IOC crisis, was the publication of the fact that, those in charge of the 2002 Salt Lake City candidature had given a study grant to the daughter of an IOC member. Marc Hodler (1918-2006), an IOC member, seized the opportunity to make astounding statements to the international media. Beyond the ethical aspect, the deeply held reasons that led to Hodler’s statements were linked to his multiple functions within world sport: he was in charge of ensuring that the candidate cities applied the relevant rules, and was also the head coordinator within the IOC for the Salt Lake City Games, and a member of the Sion (Swiss) candidature for the 2006 Winter Games, to be attributed seven months later in June 1999. Hodler’s words led to the creation of no less than four enquiry commissions regarding the attribution of the 2002 Winter Games, that were created by the IOC, the Salt Lake City OCOG, the United States Olympic Committee, and the United States Congress, respectively. Investigation procedures were also engaged in relation to Sydney 2000, Nagano 1998, and, following a battle over the ownership of the archives, to Atlanta 1996.

#### **The meaningful decisions taken**

The various enquiry commissions reached the conclusion that the “Hodler Rules” had been infringed regularly. Around 30 IOC members in office (out of 104 in 1998), were implicated to varying degrees. Four of

them resigned of their own accord, six were dismissed following a special IOC Session in March 1999, ten were officially reprimanded with varying degrees of severity, and around ten were placed in question by the media but escaped any form of action by the IOC.

In parallel, the IOC began to study structural reforms, that led to new rules being issued in December 1999. It was decided that the pre-selection would be carried out by the IOC Executive Board, on the basis of a technical report that was drawn up by a working group from the IOC Administration and its experts. Moreover, the NOCs of cities wishing to put forward a candidate were required to ensure that the mentioned cities had genuine potential for organising the Olympic Games. Visits by IOC members to the candidate cities, and visits by representatives of the said cities to the members, have been no longer permitted. Contacts between cities and members during meetings on neutral territory are subjected to tight controls. International communication activities are strictly curtailed. The new procedure for attributing Games is better than those procedures that preceded it but, nevertheless, does not guarantee an end to corruption or methods used to influence votes.

Questions to discuss:

1. What kind of crisis is illustrated here? How large was the crisis responsibility of the IOC?
2. How predictable was the crisis? Were “red flags” visible?
3. Which measures had the IOC taken, and had they been sufficient to pre-empt similar crises of a similar nature in the future?
4. How is your NOC awarding any kind of resources to your stakeholders? Reflect upon good governance.

Source: Modified from Chappelet and Kübler-Mabbott (2008, 87-90)

In practice, it is challenging to categorise one crisis into a particular field, as shown in Fig. 43, because the level of crisis responsibility is determined by the crisis history and the prior reputation of the NOC. Additionally, it is not easy to determine the predictability of a crisis, as that also depends on the activities of monitoring the environment/stakeholders of all NOCs.

### 6.3 Crisis Management

Crisis management is nothing other than management in a severe threat. Ansell and Boin (2019, 1082) define crisis management as “the set of preparatory and response activities aimed at the containment of the threat

and its consequences”. To manage a crisis, the same rules as in “normal” times apply, and the same methods and tools can be used. However, the crisis situation has special features that management must address (Schütte, 2021). This implies that crisis management does not begin with improvised spontaneous actions, that are reminiscent of “driving on sight” which means to (dangerously) check for obstacles on a random basis with no proper forward planning, or “muddling through” (i.e., flexible negotiation practices).

In the following, we distinguish between the crisis management of moderate and high NOC responsibility (subchapter 6.3.1), and the crisis management of no NOC responsibility (subchapter 6.3.2).

Ansell and Boin (2019) note that nearly every crisis response has both, an operational and a strategic dimension. On the operational dimension, there are a) first responders, b) operators to control the crisis, and c) system experts (they may come from outside the NOC). System experts are professionals who are trained to deal with accidents, and emergencies. On the strategic dimension, there is the NOC board with the president as political leader, who carries the ultimate responsibility for the outcome of the crisis.

### 6.3.1 Management for Crises with NOC Responsibility

According to Pearson and Mitroff (1993) and Mitroff (2005), crises management has five phases, and each of them suggests activities, which the NOC can undertake, in order to be better prepared.

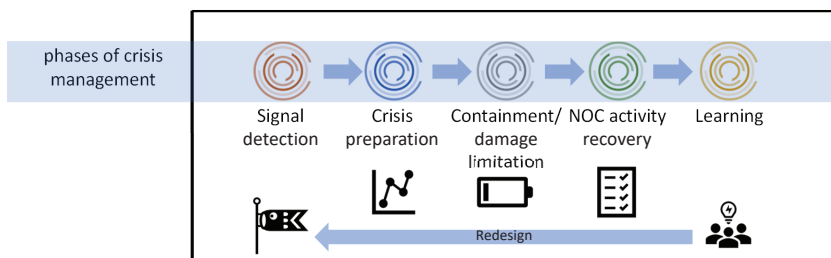


Fig. 44: Crisis Management Model

Source: Adopted from Pearson and Mitroff (1993)



**Phase 1 – Signal detection:** In this phase, small but significant indicators of an impending crisis begin to appear in an NOC setting. For example, employees complain about the management style at the NOC executive board, or their concerns regarding the integrity of human rights at hosts of the Olympic Games. The recommendation here is that each NOC should regularly look out for “red flags” in its team, organisation, member federations, stakeholders, and environment.

**Phase 2 – Crises preparation:** This means a systematic planning to prepare the NOC to manage a crisis event. To do so, the NOC must answer the question: What is the crisis? What exactly threatens (the existence of) the NOC? Did we see already, and can we still see, “red flags”? As inferred above, crises can depend upon personal perception regarding their degree of severity, hence the answers to the questions may be disputed. In this phase, it is wise to plan steps which the NOC can take if any crises should occur. Contingency plans typically include formal written statements of critical personnel, resources, and actions to be allocated during a crisis situation.

In each crisis (or put in a better way: Before any crisis at all), the NOC needs to think about certain questions: What must be changed? What options do we have? This is not yet about evaluating solutions, but rather it is about exploring possible solutions. As shown in the SWOT analysis (subchapter 3.4), NOCs should work on their WT-strategy, which is likely the most vulnerable part of an NOC, and here crises can easily occur. To recall, when a weakness of an NOC meets threats caused by a change of the environment, then, that is a WT.

**Phase 3 – Containment:** This phase involves the attempt at limiting the impact of the crisis event to prevent further escalation and losses, both financial and reputational. To do this, it will be necessary to clarify a number of aspects:

- Current capabilities: What resources are currently and potentially available? In addition to the financial means, the NOC should aim to first use the skills and knowledge of its employees before considering to hire expensive external consultants.
- Stakeholders: Which stakeholders are important for your NOC in a crisis? Which political support can your NOC obtain (e.g., from public authorities, politicians, IOC, EOC, etc.)? A stakeholder analysis (subchapter 3.3) can be used here, but it should have a different focus, and other questions: Who can help my NOC in a crisis? Who is also affected? Who or what might attack the NOC?

The alignment with your position is important, as well as the power a stakeholder has on those causing the crises.

Communicating with internal and external stakeholders on how the NOC is handling the crisis event, and how resources or the network of stakeholders are secured, are important factors in this phase.

The main questions here are: Which ways out of the crises are suitable? Which of those ways would bring the greatest advantages? Which of those ways would bring the least amount of damage? There is certainly no single and simple answer, but it proved to be good to separate the generation of ideas, and allow the widest possible collection of solutions. Thus, even “crazy” and uncommon ideas should be reflected upon, and not quickly eliminated (Gordon, 1979). In times of crises, there are often no easy and pleasant solutions, and in reality, the solutions could well be painful and difficult. Decisions often have to be made through choosing between “plague and cholera” (in that, neither of your two options are really better), and the idea is to limit the damage as much as possible.

However, effective execution of the following recommendation may help a “response network” to produce the best possible actions, that could limit the impacts of crises. Such networks are stakeholders that are interdependent, and are all affected by the crises. Their outcomes of joint emergency response can be seen as “a product of the attributes of the network” (Hossain & Kuti, 2010, 764).

### **Recommendation: Actions to Limit the Impact of a Crisis**

According to Ansell and Boin (2019), strategic crisis management means orchestrating and facilitating a joint response to an urgent threat. Their recommendations to limit the impacts of crises are:

1. Sense-making: Organising the process through which the NOC board (strategic crisis managers) arrive at a shared understanding of the evolving threat and its consequences. This requires the collection, analysis, and dissemination of information about the unfolding threat and its consequences.
2. Critical decision-making: Making strategic decisions that are effective and legitimate (while avoiding those that are operational), both in the short and the long run. A crisis does not allow for unethical behaviour.
3. Coordinating inside the NOC: Facilitating the implementation of planned actions and strategic decisions, by motivating actors in the

“response networks” to work together and perform their tasks (in an effective and legitimate way). An emergency response network involves the interdependent relations among organisations. Here, the information flow (reflecting the truth), its intensity, and the network density (not too great in number, but mainly all those affected are included), are all important factors to be considered.

4. Meaning-making: Explaining to all involved
  - a) what is going on,
  - b) what is being done to remedy the situation,
  - c) what is being done to limit the consequences; and then
  - d) offering actionable advice to move forward.

Sources: adopted but transformed from Ansell and Boin (2019, 1082); Pan et al. (2012)

**Phase 4 – Recovery:** The NOC begins to enact procedures to resume normal business activity in the recovery phase. Such efforts include long- and short-term recovery plans to bring the NOC back to its “business-as-usual” (BAU) mode.

**Phase 5 – Learning:** Here, it is important to take the lessons learned from any experiences of a crisis. NOC must critically review and reflect upon its own compliance and response processes that are applied, in order to avoid similar crises in the future. In any case, if any crises should occur again, then the NOC should supervise that they are handled appropriately. Hutchins et al. (2008) state that this phase requires the NOC to engage in critical reflection on the crisis experience. The NOC should analyse the crisis impact on central and ancillary system processes, and then adapt behaviours and systems to improve crisis management practices. It may be recommended, that a third-party or investigative entity, which can see the entire situation from an unbiased and global perspective, should provide a report on the crises and the actions of the NOC. Mitroff (2005) advises organisations to engage in “no-fault learning” (that is, not blaming any particular individual(s) for the crisis event), except in the case(s) of criminal behaviour and liability, but rather organisations should use systemic factors to analyse the cause of the crisis event.

Since crises decisions are often accompanied by major changes (i.e., re-design of NOC crises management), the knowledge and methods of implementation management should be used. In addition, leadership should address the special psychological challenges in times of crises (Kirchler et al., 2020; Seitz, 2020). Both the crisis itself and its

defensive measures often frighten stakeholders and staff. For example, regarding Covid-19, people have as much fear of the disease, as they do of vaccination against it. Therefore, communicating the exact situation of the organisation in the crisis, is as important as explaining the measures to be adopted against the crisis, in an understandable way. This is not only about rationality because, above all, it really is all about people's sensitivities and emotions.

### 6.3.2 Management for Crises without NOC Responsibility

Some crises are unpredictable and come as a shock to the NOC, out of nowhere. They are also called "ad hoc crises" (Burmam et al., 2005, 5ff.). Unpredictable crises from outside the NOC are manifold, e.g., severe financial cuts from government, lottery funding stops, the Olympic Games get postponed, global financial crises (see illustration below), (civil) wars, or the Covid-19 pandemic (see the case study below).

Within its Covid-19 report, the global leading Irish-American consultancy company Accenture, described outcomes with a simple statement, as follows: "We're all in this together [...] Covid-19 has turned into a global crisis, evolving at unprecedented speed and scale. It is creating a universal imperative for governments and organisations to take immediate action to protect their people. It is now the biggest global event — and challenge — of our lifetimes. As such, it is changing human attitudes and behaviours today and forcing organisations to respond." (Accenture, 2020)

This unpredictable crisis from outside the NOC has called for an urgent need to think about new business models and new processes, and to then to start a major change management, in order to cope with the forced changes (for change management, refer to Chapter 4).

The Covid-19 pandemic was a massive shock to everyone in the beginning of 2020. Suddenly, yesterday's rules and regulations, projects and plans were no longer applicable. All NOCs and many IFs and NFs have been seriously affected. Sources of revenue from sporting events, that were thought to be secure, collapsed. The postponement of Olympic Games made an Olympiad of five years duration (due to rescheduling, an extra year was added), and thus caused shortfalls of revenues. Additionally, due to financial problems it also was no longer possible to train in sport clubs or (Olympic) training centres. Thus, athletes could not train for competitions and, consequently, could not properly qualify for the Olympic Games. As the situation was different in each country, the con-

ditions were not equal for the athletes to train, travel, and participate. Furthermore, children could not participate in grassroots and high-performance sports anymore, as facilities were closed, and also local and minor leagues stopped their competitions. Many lockdowns prevented international meetings to coordinate sports. Due to the postponement of the Olympic Games in Tokyo, many other major and smaller events were also postponed. This affected, not only the NOCs, but also the majority of its members.

The following longer case study looks into the crises management of 19 European NOCs and how they coped with Covid-19.

### Case Study: Covid-19 Crisis and the Management of NOCs

After a large number of sports venues were closed worldwide, during the first wave of the pandemic in the spring of 2020 (DOSB 2020; LNOC 2020; NSF 2020), and training operations came to a standstill, competitive events – the foremost being the Tokyo Olympic Games – were postponed and also many other events were cancelled. Consequently, the corona pandemic also had a major impact on sports organisations (Parnell et al., 2020), whose employees were required to make decisions in times of great uncertainty, and fundamentally changed conditions, that could be decisive for the existence of their organisation. This also included the European NOCs, whose achievement of goals was hindered by the changed framework conditions of the organisational environment. So that, goals such as the promotion of sport, the transmission of values, the dissemination of the Olympic Idea and Olympic Values, the promotion of sports' societal development, or the promotion of social exchange through sport, could not be realised, due to the strong measures in force to protect against infection, and the associated closure of sports venues and prohibitions on assemblies (DOSB, 2018). In addition, the postponement of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games resulted in a lack of financial resources, which are highly relevant for achieving the goals and securing the existence of many NOCs.

We address the question of how the European NOCs can continue to act in a purposeful and functional manner, while taking into account the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the world of sport, as well as on the organisation itself, and its individual organisational environment. Therefore, we show how strategies are developed in the European NOCs, and which actions prove to be most helpful in their development. As a result, we present our model for an ideal strategy development process, with concrete strategy development steps and recommended measures

within the steps, that can be used as a guideline for all European NOCs. The knowledge gained can now be used by the NOCs to act better, more quickly, and more efficiently in crises situations.

Of the total of 50 European NOCs, 19 participated in the survey. Figures in brackets in the ideal strategy process which follows, indicate the percentages of NOCs that have implemented that particular step.

**Ideal strategy development process (based on Lanzer et al., 2020)**

*Prerequisite: Having good internal and external relationships*

The research findings have outlined, that internal and external relationships are the basic prerequisite for being able to act quickly and effectively in crisis situations, as an NOC. This is what all of the 19 NOCs have indicated. Good external relationships with all Olympic stakeholders, including clear communication, and a regulated exchange of information with fixed contacts, is of elementary importance to remain capable of acting in acute crises situations. It is imperative that respect is paid to the growing pressure for interaction and cooperation between institutions. This includes, for example, the relationship with the government, member organisations, athletes, sponsors, or the media. In particular, the NOC's relationship with state authorities can be of outstanding importance. NOCs that usually maintain a good relationship with their particular government, were considered in the corona-related restrictions, and informed at an early stage. Since there have been enormous differences in terms of the national relevance and value of an NOC, and its integration into the state system, the values of sport and the benefits of the organisation should always be manifested to the government, in order to secure sufficient responsibility and authority. Such a relationship of trust must be built over the long-term and regardless of the crisis scenario, and NOCs would be well advised to cultivate their contacts and strengthen relationships early on. When it comes to internal relationships, it has become clear that cross-departmental collaboration within the NOC is imperative to act quickly, efficiently, and effectively as an overall organisation. The fundamental strategic direction of the NOC must come from the NOC board, and not from individual departments. Strategies must be developed holistically and across departments. Accordingly, establishing clear and stringent communication and collaboration within the Committee's departments, is essential to surviving an acute crisis situation. This includes ensuring that the organisational plans, such as the roadmap of the organisation, which will be mentioned later, are accessible to all employees, so that they can be internalised.

### 1. *Reviewing & reprioritising of goals*

In the first step, the organisation's goals are reviewed (84%) and, if necessary, they are adapted to the organisational environment that has changed due to the crisis, so that they can be used as a basis for decisions on how to proceed strategically. The fundamental goals of the organisation are not changed (74%), but rather they are reprioritised (79%). The reprioritisation of goals was focused on supporting the top athletes, supporting children and youth, and teaching the Olympic Values. In addition, the public was encouraged to exercise.

### 2. *Adaptation of projects & activities*

This is followed by an adaptation of projects and activities to the context of the crisis (95%), in the second step. Consequently, projects and events that could not take place due to contact restrictions had to be cancelled, rescheduled, or modified. In addition, new gaps for action(s) have been identified. In this regard, it was very useful to have an overview of all ongoing projects and activities, which is accessible for any employee (84%).

### 3. *Renewing strategies*

In the third step, the environment that has been changed by the crisis, is captured and evaluated in detail. Here, the corona pandemic and its financial and structural impacts, must be identified as an acute risk factor. An institutionalised meeting in which moods, tendencies, developments, and trends are observed, has proven its worth in capturing and evaluating the effects of the pandemic for 63% of the NOCs. This should take place at regular intervals, and it is important that all key decision-makers in the NOC should attend the meeting or, at least, be informed of its findings. This is followed by a SWOT-Analysis (53%), to renew the strategic planning and identify new strategic fields of action. The strategic fields of action of the organisation are derived by combining relevant influencing factors from the opportunities/risks and strengths/weaknesses matrix, and then they are evaluated in terms of their relevance (68%). The third step of the process ends with the selection of those strategic fields of action, that are decisive for the goals that were set up in the first step, in the context of the current crisis situation. In all significant decisions, the organisation should act in a holistic and cross-departmental manner, and always seek the advice of scientific researchers to assess pandemic impacts, and then base decisions on the findings. Of all the NOCs, 84% found it helpful to seek advice from experts for certain decision-making processes. During the Covid-19 crisis, all

NOCs (100%) found it useful to consult the advice of the scientific community, especially medical experts and virologists, before taking significant decisions. Decisions are, therefore, made in a participatory and systematic manner, by considering all consequences.

4. *Capturing the digital space as a strategic field of action*

When it comes to the strategic field of actions, in the context of the corona crisis, the digital space and its management have proven particularly effective for 95% of the NOCs. Here, concrete options for action can be digitally reproduced, such as the mapping of the physical events and projects that have been eliminated, to continue to be able to guarantee the achievement of the organisational goals. Digital communication tools and platforms are particularly suitable for maintaining the exchange of information with all relevant stakeholders, such as employees, athletes, member associations, and politicians. In terms of communication, NOCs are increasingly interacting with their target groups via digital channels. Internal and external communication (with member organisations) took place in digital meetings. Above all, the installation of digital communication platforms (that are legally acceptable considering Covid-19 movement and contact restrictions) has been particularly successful in achieving the organisational goals, such as taking care of the top athletes and teaching the Olympic Values, despite Covid-19-related contact restrictions. Over the course of the crisis, various NOCs modernised their digital infrastructure so that, in some cases, all essential work processes could be fully mapped digitally. Those organisations that already had sufficient digital infrastructure in place at the outbreak of the crisis, were able to more rapidly complete the quicker to their working from home office, and everything was immediately functional under the new circumstances of the pandemic. Digitalisation of the overall organisation is helpful in surviving a crisis situation, and reaching its target groups during that period. It is imperative to take into account the current technological change. In this case, the crisis even acts as a catalyst for the technological change, in an ever-changing technological modernity.

5. *Drawing up a strategic roadmap*

In the fifth step, the fields of action and options should be presented in a strategic roadmap, which is designed for a four-year period, and can also be accessed by all employees (58%). Each measure includes a fixed point in time, or a period of time, and the corresponding availability of resources. The roadmap is to be understood as a dynamic



process, and it will be constantly reviewed and adapted to cope with the dynamics of the corona pandemic (84%).

6. *Constantly adjusting strategies*

Of course, this type of strategic management should also be exercised independently of the crisis scenario. Due to the continuously changing organisational environment, organisations should constantly, and proactively, adapt to changing conditions, in order to remain competitive, even when confronted by potential crisis scenarios. As aforementioned, crises can accelerate change; hence, acting strategically was helpful for 58% of NOCs in the study.

Source: Schu and Preuss (2022)

Questions to discuss:

1. What measures did your NOC take to overcome the Covid-19 challenges?
2. Which of these ideal strategy processes did your NOC implement; and for those not implemented, then why was this the case?
3. To what extent was your NOC able to use the Covid-19 crisis to change the NOC?

Research on Covid-19 by Accenture (2020), had results which showed that 88% of CEOs of major (non-sport) organisations believe global economic systems need to refocus on equitable growth, and 94% say that sustainability issues are important for the future success of their business. This illustrates that strategic management is an essential tool after a severe crisis, and adjustments to the previous focus (a revised mission and vision, see subchapter 2.3) are what must follow.

Christophe Dubi, the Olympic Games executive director at the IOC, worked on one of the biggest change-management cases in history, which is the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games postponement due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In August 2022, Dubi reflects on the events and identifies the main lessons learned (Klaue, 2022):

*In Crisis, Leadership Is Making Tough Decisions*

Strong decisions, especially when they are taken in challenging circumstances, inspire trust and a spirit of collaboration all the way through the ecosystem. This “stronger together” spirit was essential to our success, as was Japan’s commitment to and vision for the Games.

*Communication Is an Act of Management*

Projects such as ours demand the highest transparency and a constant cadence of communication and engagement across all audiences. If you

do not constantly explain what you are doing and how you address issues and what the public benefit of the project is, then you can get in serious trouble.

*Constraint Allows You to Prioritise Your True Needs*

In Tokyo, we had to be forensic in our search for efficiencies. We learned that when you have to find ways and means to make things simpler, then you will find them.