How do you handle a current crisis you didn't plan for?

Preparing and deploying a turnaround strategy in a crisis on short notice

Most crisis, disaster and emergency management plans and systems are created around the concept of catastrophic failure. Although the current epidemic still represents a very real risk of catastrophe, current measures being implemented globally to mitigate its spread are causing crisis throughout most organizations with sharp fluctuations in availability of human capital, supplies as well as demand.

If you don't have a plan that covers this very particular situation, what can you do now to mitigate and turnaround the impact in your organization?

How to deal with a crisis when there is no adequate plan in place for the current situation?

Speed of implementation is always critical in a crisis. Your reaction times and flexibility need to be as high as possible.
For that you need to gather 3 pieces of information:
1 - What is the **root cause** of the crisis in the organization? **The virus is not your crisis**. It's an **environmental factor** that created the crisis. You need to understand the root causes within the organization that allowed for this virus to create a crisis.
2 - What is the **impact**? What is the short and long term impact of the crisis on your core operations? Define a list and prioritize by impact to operations and then to supporting services.
3 - **Where** is the impact? Where in the value stream is your organization most affected? Here is where it is crucial to have a clear understanding the root cause of the crisis, so you don't fix a symptom, potentially compounding the crisis by further unbalancing the flow of the value creation.

Countermeasures

For you to apply effective and on time countermeasures, you need to have **current, relevant** information and metrics from **critical processes** and their impact on the value stream and how they're being affected by current **resource constraints**, whether they're in the form of human capital availability and readiness or materials and supplies shortages and availability (shortages refer to supplies you do not have in stock. Availability refers to supplies you cannot use for some reason).
If these don't exist you need to decide:
1 - Which are the critical processes and how they are affected by the rest of the value stream and resource chain.
2 - Which are the metrics that reflect the processes performance against the value stream, how to update them and how often, so you can react in time to the information you're receiving for your decision making in implementing countermeasures and running your operation (don't forget, you want to deliver something in the end of your stream. Optimizing one process in isolation can reduce resources elsewhere and worsen the crisis.).
3 - Resource constraints are impacted by the crisis, so they can, by nature be unpredictable. Here you have to be able and ready to optimize what resources you have to maximize availability and reliability to critical operations. To do that you need to reduce as much waste of time (in the form of setup, rework, redundancy, other forms of back flows and wait times) as possible. Redesign critical process to be ready to operate immediately, to be error proof and to not be stopped while waiting for a less critical process.
You will find several possible countermeasures. Before implementing, take into consideration, which have the biggest impact and fastest implementation times towards elimination of the crisis and when not possible to eliminate, mitigate.

Dealing with a crisis and the uncertainty it creates in the short term.

One of the problems we're currently facing is the fast changing environment around us. Not just due to the spread of the disease, but also due to the new decisions and policies being issued almost on a daily basis around the world in order to react and prevent further spread. These measures, although necessary, need to be taken into account in how they affect the organization, and although some impact is to be expected, we have to do our best to mitigate it as much as possible.

But how to handle uncertainty in a fast changing environment?
We have to take the following into account:
- Fast changing environment itself, which means that we have to be able to react as quick and accurately as possible.
  - Clear lines of communication to critical processes
  - Clarity of impact using metrics & schedules appropriate to reaction times required
- Clarity of value stream. It is crucial to have a clear and simplified view of the essential processes and stream of value the organization is creating, so countermeasures can be implemented by priority of impact to eliminate or mitigate the effects of the current crisis.
- Human capital availability and readiness is currently reduced due to the quarantine and social distancing policies that are in place. You can mitigate this largely by defining critical value roles, tasks and responsibilities within your process value stream to prioritize speed of information flow and value creation with as little work in process as possible. The vast majority of jobs don't have these defined, and doing so, can free substantial resources and time which can be used to compensate for the availability and readiness constraints.
- Supplies / inventories. One important tenet of Lean is that of Just In Time supplies and delivery systems. But how do you manage a sudden shortage of supplies? Sudden supplies unavailability, can be addressed by managing Work In Progress, but more importantly by redesigning current processes and priorities, to eliminate as much need for Work In Progress as possible, while trying to mitigate unavailability by building larger short term buffers. Both of these solutions used combined can solve unavailability problems in the short term, if properly managed.