

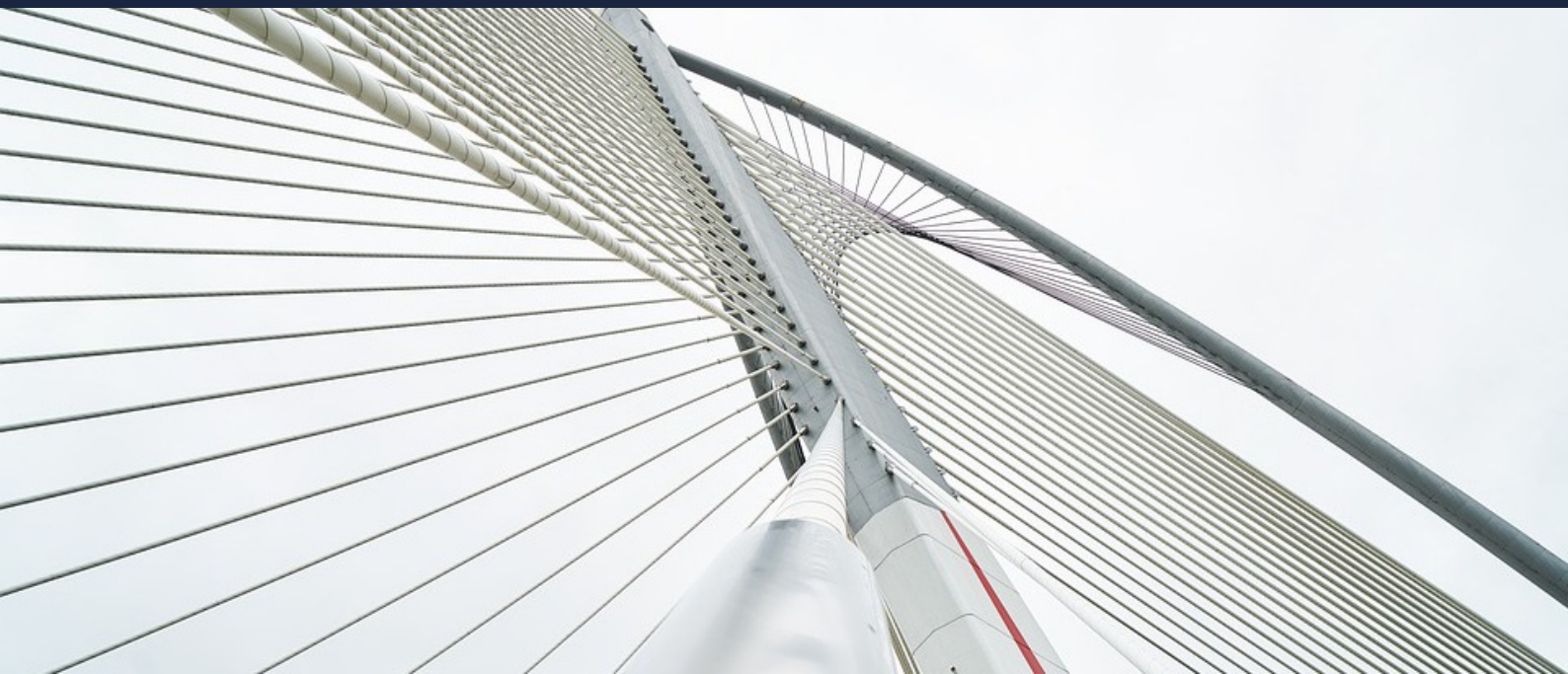
BEYOND CRISIS SPEED

The Emergency Governance That Worked — And Was Immediately Dismantled

Why the Return to Committees Was a Choice, Not a Drift

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The Quiet Restoration

Eighteen months ago, when the first lockdowns hit, something unexpected happened to corporate governance. It got better. Not marginally — structurally. Boards of twelve became rooms of four. Weekly steering committees became daily check-ins. The person accountable for a decision had a name, and the name was known. Reports shortened. Approval chains collapsed. Decisions that had taken weeks took hours — and they were, on the whole, no worse for it.

This is not nostalgia for the crisis. But it is worth being precise about what happened next. As the immediate emergency receded, organisations did not evolve the faster model. They did not refine it, or retain the parts that worked, or ask why it had worked at all. They reinstalled the old machinery — the same committees, the same layered approvals, the same consensus choreography — with remarkably little debate.

The conventional explanation is drift: people reverted to habit. That explanation is comfortable and almost certainly wrong. What happened was not drift. It was choice. And the choice was rational — for the individuals making it.

The Incentive Nobody Names

Crisis governance has an uncomfortable property: it exposes the decision-maker. When a small group meets daily and each decision carries a name, accountability is not an abstraction documented in a RACI chart. It is a lived experience. The person who calls it wrong is visible. The person who hesitates is visible. The person who was absent when it mattered is visible.

This is precisely what made it effective. And it is precisely what makes it intolerable once survival is no longer at stake.

Committee governance works differently — not as a decision-making mechanism, but as a decision-dispersal mechanism. When twelve people approve something, no single person approved it. When a recommendation passes through three layers of review, the original

recommender is insulated from the outcome. The minutes record consensus; they rarely record who drove it or who quietly dissented and was overruled.

This is not a design flaw. It is the design. Distributed accountability protects individuals in ways that decisive governance does not. A senior executive whose name is personally attached to a failed initiative faces a different career calculus from one who sat on the board that collectively endorsed it. The latter can say — and routinely does — "we all agreed at the time that it was the right thing to do."

The crisis suspended this protection. The return to normal restored it.

The Organisational Cost of Individual Safety

The result is a governance structure optimised for the wrong objective. The organisation needs decisions that are timely, clear, and owned. The individuals inside it need decisions that are diffuse, documented, and deniable. These are not the same thing, and where they conflict, the individual's interest wins — because the individuals are the ones who design the governance model.

Organisations did not dismantle crisis governance because it failed. They dismantled it because it worked — and working meant exposure.

This is visible in the specific choices being made right now. The daily check-in, which collapsed decision latency from weeks to hours, has been replaced by the fortnightly steering committee — not because fortnightly is the right rhythm for the decisions in question, but because it is the rhythm that allows sufficient preparation, consultation, and diffusion of responsibility between meetings. The war-room model, where the three people who understood the problem sat together until it was resolved, has been replaced by the cross-functional working group — not because breadth of input improved the outcome, but because breadth of involvement distributes the accountability.

The language tells the story. "We need to be more inclusive in our decision-making." "We should ensure broader stakeholder engagement." "We need to return to proper governance." Each of these sentences contains a defensible principle. Each also serves as cover for the restoration of a system in which no individual is personally exposed.

The Design Problem

None of this is cynical. The executives reinstalling the committee model are not, for the most part, consciously choosing self-protection over organisational speed. They are responding to an incentive structure that punishes individual visibility and rewards collective cover. They are being rational within a system that does not reward the behaviour the organisation actually needs.

Which makes this a design problem, not a character problem. And design problems have a specific property: they do not resolve themselves through exhortation. Telling people to

be braver, to own decisions, to maintain the urgency of the crisis — all of this is beside the point if the underlying incentive structure has not changed.

The organisations that will carry something forward from the crisis are not the ones with the most courageous leaders. They are the ones that noticed what happened to their governance when survival was at stake, asked why it worked, and redesigned the incentive structure so that decisive governance is safe for the individuals practising it — not only when the building is burning, but afterwards, when the committees are ready to reconvene and everyone can feel the pull of the comfortable, the familiar, and the protected.

That redesign is the work. Almost nobody is doing it.