Crisis as an Opportunity for Reinvention

How the COVID-19 crisis has shaped the opportunity to reinvent the role that security teams play within organizations

During challenging times, it's easy to reflect on what was once familiar. With a growing list of things to worry about and unclear paths for how to solve them, stress can overcome even the best intentions for change.

But a crisis doesn't wait for your worries to subside — it charges forward. As corporate security professionals working in the COVID era, there is undeniable value and recognition for the work being done to keep organizations and their employees safe. However, as the needs and challenges of security teams are evolving, this shift opens the door for reinvention.

This reinvention spans several categories — from increasing resources to address a newly remote work-force, to documenting scenarios for what to do when confronted with civil unrest on the way into work.

In this whitepaper, you'll get more in-depth information on this concept, including:

1

Core challenges resulting from COVID

2

Opportunities to plan for an increase in security resources

3

Elevated standards for executive's personal security in home environments

4

Expanded reach and influence of security professionals within an organization

Background: Challenges Posed by COVID

Before diving into the topic of reinvention, it's important to be objective and not present the current situation from a rose-tinted view. The COVID crisis has been challenging for many reasons, some of which include:

Reduced executive travel and decreased need for event security - What do you do with an event security team or a travel security team when there is no travel or events? As one can only imagine, this has significantly impacted executive protection and corporate security teams in terms of fewer hours and employment opportunities.

Civil unrest - The security situation in population centers has been volatile. This impacts executives at their homes, corporate employees, and security team members. It even has employees considering how safe their cities are and pondering relocations to more secure areas.

Layoffs and employment uncertainty - Since March, many organizations have experienced layoffs and employment uncertainty as organizations project poor growth numbers for the coming quarters. Both elements directly impact security teams and the need for security resources.

On the brightside, these challenges give security professionals the freedom to reinvent. There's no good in referring back to "the ways things have always been done" because this is new territory for everyone.

Those who take this as an opportunity to modernize outdated practices and leverage the value that security teams bring to an organization will come out of 2020 better prepared for nearly anything that comes their way.

Opportunities Behind the Challenge

Increased Security Spending

For the most part, the COVID crisis has resulted in more attention being given to security programs. In a July 21, 2020 report from McKinsey, more than 250 global CISOs and security professionals surveyed shared that information security spending is expected to increase over the next nine months.

This change is playing out because security teams are faced with new challenges that they weren't anticipating, including:

- A remote workforce
- A 7X increase in phishing attacks against their employees
- Newly tested business continuity plans

McKinsey also found that more than 70% of CISOs and security buyers believe budgets will shrink by the end of 2020 but plan to ask for significant increases in 2021. While there is more attention being driven toward security, it will not be indefinite. Security leaders must make the best of the situation they are in, improving their effectiveness in protecting assets of all types.

Elevated Personal Security for Executives

Since COVID has pushed many executives to work from home rather than coming to the office, it's given security teams strong support for taking action to better protect executives in their home environments. This has encouraged teams to reassess the security measures in place at the residences of their top and mid-level executives. Violence and activism has brought threats to the neighborhoods and even the doorsteps of executives and government employees. The recipients of these threats are more receptive than usual when it comes to trading some convenience for added security.

Outside of residential security, COVID is also an opportunity for security teams to reassess the everyday security practices of their executives and provide tools (mentally and physically) to stay safe. How many videos have you seen over the last 90-days of normal, non-violent, blue collar workers driving to/from their jobs when they suddenly find themselves in the middle of a violent protest? It's critical that security leaders provide executives tips for how to handle and how to avoid dangerous situations.

Taking advantage of these opportunities to educate our executives gives us more confidence that they are using safe practices going forward when they are on campus, commuting, and even traveling on business outside of their home city.

Expanded Influence and Reach for Security Professionals

In today's environment, companies need to think about the role security plays holistically, reaching far beyond any boundaries previously defined.

In discussions with executive protection professionals, many have observed that they may have unknowingly "pigeonholed" their career opportunities because they've placed so much emphasis on the narrow specializations of their role. This also affects the security team's organizational influence, as more strategic skill development is often pushed aside in times of crisis. This deferral minimizes the protection they can provide across business units and contexts. For example, if you attend executive protection training or conferences, the material and the focus tends to be on things that are directly applicable to the job (e.g. "immediate action" type skills).

However there is much less emphasis on skills that apply more broadly, such as:

- Leadership
- Risk assessment
- Design thinking
- Psychology
- Awareness around geopolitical threats
- Investigative research
- Presenting information

The COVID crisis is an excellent opportunity for many in the security space to consider this question, *"If my role became obsolete today (even if only for a six-month period), in what other ways could I be a valuable contributor to the organization?"* Being able to answer this objectively is critical. It will not only bring longevity and reward for your personal career in the space, but also add value and impact to the versatile role that corporate security plays within an organization.

A PERSPECTIVE FROM A SECURITY PRACTITIONER

Back in 2016, I started to do less field executive protection work and more research-focused work. This was partly because of luck and circumstance, and partly because I wasn't thrilled about working 3,000 hours per year in extremely stressful circumstances from always being on the spot.

Being responsible for an entire family's immediate life safety as soon as you clock in every day can take a toll on even the strongest security professionals.

Today, I realize how fortunate I am that my conditions guided me toward expanding my development outside of the typical executive protection skills that are traditionally taught.

Travis Lishok

Senior Manager of Security Intelligence, Ontic

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Final Thoughts

While many executives placed less emphasis on security pre-COVID, they have now found themselves with a new-found interest in protecting assets — whether that's information, campuses, or their families. It has also been a call-to-action for security professionals to widen their knowledge base, and keep up with the expanding reach of their role and influence within their organization.

The COVID crisis has presented an unlimited number of challenges for individuals, organizations, and governments. However, it has also been a blessing in disguise in many ways from both a corporate and personal angle. It has made us more grateful for many of the things we often take for granted such as our health, time with our loved ones, and even gainful employment — if we are lucky enough to have all three.

Written by **Travis Lishok**
Senior Manager of Security Intelligence, Ontic

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