Why Prevention Beats Post-Mortems

17.11.2025 18:14:48 | Management Insights, Lukas Michel | 0 Comments | Crisis, Unmanaged

How CEOs and Boards Can Avert Crises with the Global Executive Survey, Organization Twins, and the Unmanaged book

In the aftermath of every public crisis—corporate, governmental, or societal—the pattern rarely changes. Something goes wrong. A scandal erupts. A failure becomes visible. And the reflex, almost ritualistic in its predictability, follows immediately: "*We must install a committee*." A task force is formed, an investigation begins, outside counsel is engaged, evidence is gathered, and months later a lengthy report emerges explaining what happened, who is responsible, and how such an event might be prevented next time.

This ritual comforts us. It shows action. It gives the impression of accountability. It anchors the narrative that we are dealing with the past responsibly, even if belatedly. Yet beneath this ritual lies an inconvenient truth: almost all these crises were preventable. The signs were visible, the vulnerabilities detectable, and the deficiencies in management practice measurable long before the crisis erupted.

What is remarkable is not that failures occur, but that organizations—large, well-resourced, professionally governed—continue to *discover* unmanaged states only once they explode into the public domain. Even more remarkable is who often leads the crisis response: legal offices, primarily tasked with limiting liability, reputational exposure, and legal consequence. They are indispensable once disaster has struck, but they are not the ones who can change the management system that made the disaster possible.

And that is the paradox:

We fix crises through lawyers, but we could have prevented them

through managers.

This article explores why organizations should shift from post-mortem crisis handling to continuous prevention—and how three tools make this possible: the Global Executive Survey, Organization Twins, and the *Unmanaged* management innovation framework.

The Crisis Reflex: Why Committees Are a Symptom of Unmanaged States

Crises do not emerge out of nowhere. They begin with small signals—frictions, blind spots, misalignments, behavioural deficits, outdated processes, cultural shortcuts, and failures to adapt to changing conditions. These early symptoms accumulate until something snaps.

Yet when the crisis becomes visible, the leadership conversation follows a predictable arc:

1. Leaders express surprise.

“We had no idea.”

2. Boards express disappointment.

“How could this happen?”

3. Regulators express pressure.

“Explain the failures.”

4. Committees express recommendations.

“Here is what must change.”

Underlying all of this is a troubling fact: most leaders consider their management to be strong—often superb—right up until the moment it collapses. This self-perception, combined with the absence of real-time evidence on how management actually works, creates a state we call unmanaged: not mismanaged, but not managed. It describes the conditions in which organizations appear to operate normally while systemic weaknesses accumulate in the background.

When unmanaged states persist, it is only a matter of time before a crisis emerges. But the moment the crisis is visible, the damage

is already done. Post-mortems serve a legal function, not a managerial one.

The real question is this:

Why don’t leaders detect unmanaged states before they cause harm?

The answer is uncomfortably simple: they do not have the tools.

Seeing Before Acting: The Role of Evidence in Crisis Prevention

The most important insight from 25 years of research with more than 500 organizations is this: leaders rarely see their own unmanaged states. They sense symptoms but lack the evidence to interpret them. They feel tensions but struggle to identify root causes. They declare confidence even when complexity overwhelms them. Most importantly, they are heavily shielded by the organization itself: information flows upward filtered, polished, aggregated, and softened.

In the absence of evidence, managers default to optimism. Boards default to trust. And organizations default to stability—right until stability disappears.

Prevention requires visibility.

Visibility requires measurement.

Measurement requires tools.

This is where the Global Executive Survey, Organization Twins, and the Unmanaged framework redefine how crises can be prevented—not after they occur, but long before.

The Global Executive Survey: Early Detection of Management Vulnerabilities

One of the most powerful realizations from two decades of diagnostic work is that leaders rarely detect flaws in their own management. They overestimate alignment, underestimate fragility, and assume coherence where none exists. The Global Executive Survey was built to shatter this illusion—not by

accusing leaders, but by illuminating their organizational reality.

It measures the fine nuances of management performance across dynamic capabilities, collaboration patterns, leadership behaviour, and organizational learning. What matters is not the absolute score, but the divergence: the gaps between how different levels, functions, and teams perceive the organization.

Those divergences *are* the early indicators of unmanaged states—precisely the blind spots that lead to crisis.
Most organizations discover these divergences only in hindsight, when a failure forces their exposure. The Global Executive Survey reveals them months, even years, before a crisis would otherwise materialize.

This is prevention at its most practical:

see the unmanaged before it becomes unmanageable.

Organization Twins: Simulating Futures Before They Become Reality

If the Global Executive Survey reveals vulnerabilities, Organization Twins show their consequences. They bring the organization to life not as it is described, but as it actually behaves. A Twin reflects dynamic interactions: capabilities, culture, decision flows, leadership patterns, and system dynamics.

This is crucial because crises rarely stem from single causes. They emerge from interactions that compound, amplify, and collide.

Organization Twins allow CEOs and Boards to:

- simulate stress scenarios before stress emerges,
- see how small weaknesses propagate into big failures,
- understand how leadership behaviour shapes system performance,
- test interventions without risking operations, and
- foresee crises long before they become visible.

Legal offices excel at telling you what went wrong.

Organization Twins excel at showing you what will go wrong if nothing changes.

They shift the conversation from repair to foresight, from narrative to evidence, and from blame to capability.

In a world where complexity accelerates, foresight is the most valuable form of risk management.

Unmanaged: A Framework for Prevention, Not Post-Mortem

The book *Unmanaged* provides the conceptual and methodological foundation for preventing crises. It shows that unmanaged states arise from two root causes:

- Faulty leaders—leaders who, despite good intentions, operate with outdated assumptions, blind spots, and heroic leadership models rooted in the industrial era.
- Traditional management—systems built for stability, predictability, and control, now applied to environments defined by uncertainty, speed, and disruption.

Unmanaged introduces nine attributes of mastery in management—diagnostic, systemic, human, holistic, regenerative, integrated, distributed, unique, and interactive—that enable organizations to evolve their management in line with their environment.

In practice, this provides Boards and CEOs with a playbook for prevention:

- not waiting for crisis symptoms,
- not relying on intuition,
- not hoping that “good leadership” is enough,
- but continuously monitoring, diagnosing, and evolving management.

Crises thrive where management is outdated, isolated, and unexamined.

Prevention thrives where management is evidence-based, dynamic, and developmental.

Why Managers—Not Lawyers—Should Lead Crisis Prevention

One striking pattern in public crises is how quickly responsibility shifts from management to legal. This is understandable—legal teams are experts in risk containment. But legal containment is fundamentally different from management prevention.

Legal work begins when damage is done.

Management work begins when vulnerabilities arise.

Lawyers examine documents.

Managers examine systems.

Lawyers determine accountability.

Managers determine capability.

Lawyers reconstruct events.

Managers redesign the future.

Prevention is not a legal discipline. It is a managerial one.

And yet, when organizations fail, the managerial voice is often absent from the analysis.

It is time for CEOs and Boards to reclaim this responsibility.

A Prevention-Oriented CEO: What It Looks Like

Organizations that avoid crises are not lucky. They are managed. Their CEOs demonstrate four behaviours that stand out in our research:

1. They seek evidence, not reassurance.

They regularly use diagnostics, not only annual surveys.

2. They confront reality early.

They do not wait for symptoms to accumulate.

3. They invite uncomfortable conversations.

They use Organization Twins to surface invisible issues safely, especially in executive teams.

4. They evolve management as a dynamic capability.

They see management not as a structure, but as a system that needs continuous upgrading.

Prevention-oriented CEOs spend less time in post-crisis committees and more time investing in foresight.

What Boards Gain from a Prevention-Based Approach

Boards are the ultimate guardians of organizational reliability and integrity. Yet they often receive information only after management has filtered it. A prevention-based approach changes this fundamentally.

With the Global Executive Survey and Organization Twins, Boards gain:

- independent evidence,
- direct visibility into leadership effectiveness,
- early signals of misalignment,
- clarity on cultural gaps,
- insight into system dynamics, and
- foresight into emerging risks.

Boards no longer need to rely exclusively on management’s interpretation of reality. They can see reality themselves.
This fundamentally shifts governance from oversight to insight.

Why Prevention Matters More Today Than at Any Time Before

The world is becoming more interconnected, volatile, and exposed. Failures propagate faster. Individual misjudgments create systemic consequences. Social media amplifies every mistake. Regulators intervene more aggressively.

Stakeholders demand transparency.

Crises today do not unfold over months—they unfold in hours.

The question for CEOs and Boards is no longer whether they will face unmanaged states. They will. The real question is whether they detect and address them early enough.

The traditional committee-based post-mortem approach is simply too slow, too reactive, and too limited to serve as a viable governance model for the future.

The new governance paradigm requires organizations to:

- detect weak signals,
- build dynamic capabilities,
- evolve management continuously,
- simulate risk scenarios, and
- act before visibility becomes necessity.

This is the essence of prevention.

From Post-Mortem to Prevention: A Call to CEOs and Boards

The tools exist. The evidence is clear. The methodology is tested across 500 organizations and 4,000 executives.

Prevention is no longer a philosophical ideal—it is an operational possibility.

The choice is not between post-mortem committees and prevention.

The choice is between reactive governance and responsible leadership.

The Global Executive Survey provides the early signals.

Organization Twins provide the foresight.

Unmanaged provides the roadmap.

Together, they create a management system that limits risk, foresees crises, and mitigates unmanaged states before they escalate—protecting leaders, Boards, organizations, and society.

In an age where the cost of failure is rising, the only sustainable strategy is to be better managed before it matters.

About Management Insights

Founded by Lukas Michel, Management Insights draws on more than 25 years of research and practice to help people understand how their organizations work. The Organization Twin brings organizational patterns into view for reflection, dialogue, and informed choice.

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