



Prioritizing work when everything is a priority

From triage to the new reality



Real insights

Tolerances for risk, uncertainty, and ambiguity are typically factored into the enterprise's strategy and plans. How do you react when a situation surpasses tolerances and the entire enterprise must operate differently during a global event such as COVID-19?

With unstable market conditions, leaders must ensure they are driving value from their portfolio by doing the right work, at the right time, with the right resources. Only a thoughtful integrated business strategy can adapt rapidly enough to changing market conditions and customer demands to remain relevant. It is paramount to be able to quickly reprioritize work to drive maximum value with limited resources.

As technology leaders, it is critically important to focus on how to set priorities and make trade-offs while keeping in mind the effects on people, process, and technology.



Triggers and pain points

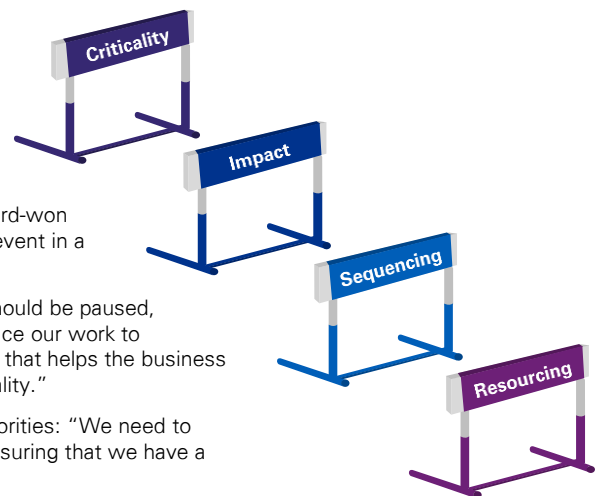
- Priorities have suddenly changed due to COVID-19 and many companies and industries may be making decisions that affect the ongoing concerns, including financial liquidity.
- Discretionary spend for technology portfolios has been drastically cut (or is threatened to be).
- Business strategies have changed and hence portfolio prioritization criteria need to change.
- Demand related to COVID-19 is coming from multiple internal customers across multiple channels.
- Applications and infrastructure supporting critical business capabilities are unclear.
- Resource capacity has been upended by shelter-in-place policies for in-house staff or service providers.



Our perspective

IT leaders deal with major disruptions for a living, and they employ a variety of tactics and frameworks to assess, prioritize, and manage complex problems. In our experience, leaders who successfully steer their organization this time can move progressively through the phases of reset, recovery, and emergence into the new reality. Our recent client discussions have validated these gates as important to prioritizing work during times of uncertainty:

1. **Criticality** – Focus on the truly urgent versus the important areas of the business: "I'm trying to deal with exploding online loads, people working remotely, and new cyber threats. Every day it's something new, and I need to prioritize."
2. **Impact** – Get a holistic view of the work based on outcomes or business capabilities across the impacted IT estate: "Many of our hard-won digital business transformation initiatives need to emerge from this event in a more competitive and adaptive stance."
3. **Sequencing** – Prioritize what is truly urgent for today, what efforts should be paused, and where investments should be accelerated: "We need to sequence our work to immediately reset the core operations and then seek to launch work that helps the business recover and kick off longer tail work to deliver results on the new reality."
4. **Resourcing** – Mobilize and activate your resources to support the priorities: "We need to constantly reinvest in our resources and capital for winning ideas, ensuring that we have a model that is scalable, flexible, and agile."



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	Resilience	Recovery	New reality
Identify and assess	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Identify critical items that impact the health, safety, security, and integrity of the company, your employees, and customers – Partner with your colleagues in critical business functions to evaluate changes in business needs and supporting technology required – Engage with business partners to determine what new skills are required, when, and for how long while recalibrating current temporary/contractor resources – Consolidate demand planning for all work types (strategic projects, enhancements, and operations) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Anticipate changes in customer behavior and proactively incorporate this into your initial intake refinement activities – Build improved routines around work intake and demand management to pivot toward only the most essential and valuable work in a time of uncertainty – Revise estimates and business cases based on similar efforts, adjust estimates based on historical accuracy, and identify solution alternatives to business outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Support business leaders to design new business operating models with underlying technologies – Realign integrated business and IT strategies with operational performance and resynchronize strategies, resources, and schedules – Accelerate your intake processes to be dynamic and frequent to mitigate unplanned risks and capitalize on unforeseen opportunities
Prioritize and sequence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Use the lens of ‘inaction’ to rank the remaining work into what is most impactful and most urgent both internally and externally – Develop a list of critical systems and applications and link those to core organizational outcomes and values – Prioritize safe remote-working protocols, threat-identification and escalation procedures during times of uncertainty – Assess the health and status of existing projects or teams to identify areas that need extra assistance or deprioritization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Refine scenario models by systematically drawing from available data on capacity, capability and other inputs – Update portfolio roadmap and continuously review the backlog to align to evolving priorities and constraints – Use the current situation as an opportunity to develop a mindset of prune & invest vs. slash & hold and double-down on innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Adapt to changing customer and stakeholder needs while aligning the skilled workforce to delivering work that provides the most value – Use predictive and other advanced analytics to add sophistication to prioritization, rationalization, and ranking – Revise standards and policies around governance, financial management, resource and capacity management, and risk management
Resource and execute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evaluate discretionary/variable spend that is not critical and pause in order to lower cost – Execute detailed what-if analysis and use elements of feature and story details to accurately report on CapEx versus OpEx expenditures – Recognize a temporary decrease in people’s capacity for new initiatives as the workforce adapts to the current environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Track, mitigate, and prioritize portfolio dependencies to reduce delays and eliminate impediments that decrease throughput – Adopt a flexible resource capacity model for employees and key external partners to meet unplanned surges in demand – Map applications, infrastructure, services, data, and resources to business processes and customer journeys to drive better value with technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Execute initiatives related to emerging technologies (cloud, data, automation) to create competitive advantage – Extend systems and keep valuable customer feedback flowing back to strategy and intake – Continue to evaluate approved initiatives against your enterprise objectives, financial value, alignment to business plan and risk

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Where am I now? - Qualifying questions

Resilience

- How will you allocate project investments differently, optimally, and efficiently during the downtime?
- Are you reconsidering previous selection criteria to prioritize business cases in today's environment?
- How are you maximizing the value of existing projects while balancing risk?
- Is there a clear understanding of the new constraints caused by the COVID-19 (e.g., resource, finance, technical, and supplier)?
- Are you taking stock of your pipeline of project/program contenders to address deficiencies in the current portfolio?
- How are you handling new discrepancies between planned and realized benefits?
- How do you quantify, compare, and reprioritize projects in your portfolio to ensure that the right resources with the right skills are allocated to the most valuable projects?

Recovery

- Are you making necessary changes to address the effectiveness and efficiency of the demand intake process?
- Are you considering special factors besides historical budget and existing forecasts to determine overall budget for new transformation projects?
- Are your projects prioritized based on strategic realignment caused by the current global situation?
- How do you reprioritize your available assets and resources to achieve the right balance between business continuity and cost reduction?
- Do you have the right resources, skills, and mix to support changing priorities?

New reality

- How are you identifying technology asset impacts with shifts in priorities?
- How do you reinvest in your resources and capital to ensure that winning ideas are continuously generated even during downturn?
- Are you making data-driven decisions for selecting projects to ensure that strategic objectives are met?
- Do you have a clear, concise governance procedure that balances the trade-offs between cost, risk, and value?
- How do you optimize the returns of your entire portfolio by ensuring that funds are redirected towards most value-producing projects?
- How do you continuously align your teams on changing priorities?



Getting started

As with any journey, the biggest challenge can be taking that first step. Organizations can take the following actions to get started:

- Create and validate a consolidated list of all active work and demands
- Identify complex interdependencies across the portfolio by leveraging a formal prioritization framework and governance process
- Develop OKRs and reprioritize list of new and inflight work items
- Define a comprehensive schedule and align your resources to deliver against it
- Begin to track and manage key inputs such as changes in existing demands, new demands, and capacity
- Assess the health of your portfolio through monitoring inflight work and identify where additional overall investment is needed
- Look for ways to enhance your systems of reference such as the CMDB, application, and portfolio management systems to increase data quality and overall understanding of the portfolio

Contact us

If at any time you need help, please use the information below to get connected to a specialist for more advice and support:



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