

Project Management Report from Belo Horizonte



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PROJECTS IN THE TIME OF COVID-19 – AN INVISIBLE HERO

Covid-19 is a huge challenge not just to Health Systems, doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, pharmacists, nutritionists, and psychologists, but also to people in general, politicians, rulers, businessmen, entrepreneurs, shareholders, and, project managers.

You can think: why project managers?

Well, let's see.

Many cities have erected emergency field (or camp) hospitals. Emergency field hospitals, in general, are erected and equipped so quickly. They demand a lot of things, e.g. water and energy supply, sewage system, garbage treatment and removal, oxygen and other hospital gases, lighting, emergency lights, emergency power generator, steam, food supply for inpatients and hospital crew, toilets, locker rooms, change rooms, staff rooms, IT Systems, computers, medicines, medical devices, skilled staff and specialized medical teams, beds, ventilators, monitors, oximeters and a lot of other things.

It is certainly a tough task, to get, install and test all these systems and equipment, coordinate the efforts of the various teams in charge and have everything ready to operate in 10, 15 or 20 days.

Otherwise, I can bet that several companies are running to develop ICC ventilators and monitors, while others are adapting its lines to produce PPEs.

Meanwhile, pharmaceutical companies are rushing to develop vaccines and researchers are testing drugs, also.

Organizations and companies worldwide are trying to help, donating masks, ventilators, tests, ambulances, beds, food, hygiene and cleaning supplies, potable water, medicines, PPEs, and other items to populations, hospitals, NGOs, and governments.

Who manages and coordinates all these critical projects (Yes! They are projects!!!)?

Who cares about scope, time, schedule, cost, quality, and so on?

Who faces pressure, stress, and challenges to put all these hospitals, equipment, devices, drugs, etc., working asap?

Answer: The Project Manager.

There are a lot of anonymous heroes in pandemic times. One of them is the Project Manager. A hidden hero, an invisible hero, but also, a hero.

POST – COVID PROJECTS

Some people say that after the Covid-19 pandemic, we will live a “new normal”.

I am not sure about this and I don't know what is this “new normal”. I'm not a prophet or futurologist. But there are some clues about the day after.

First, it seems that this China dependency for some (or many) items it's not so safe. So, probably countries will start to push local industries to produce ventilators, monitors, PPEs and other stuff.

Second, Telemedicine, allowing health care professionals to evaluate, diagnose and treat patients at a distance using telecommunications technology. Probably this feature will be most used.

Third, Covid-19 made a lot of people work at home, the home office. Many companies have realized that home offices reduce costs and are more productive, sometimes improving quality and agility of the work. Probably, it will be used more, it will be more common. This is a challenge for workers, managers, and the C-Level. A challenge because we must learn how to manage effectively in a virtual way. Remember that a lot of businesses are people-intensive. Most of us are used to a face-to-face relationships. Many of us already have the experience of managing teams remotely, but that doesn't happen in most projects. Will this change? Otherwise, a home office in quarantine times could be different than a home office in “normal times”.

Home offices have two corollaries: Distance Learning and Online Courses. Ok, this already exists, and you can even graduate online. But I think that these ways to study and learn probably will be used more, they will increase a lot.

OK, I know, e-commerce was growing before Covid-19. But, after C19, probably it will increase even more. It's comfortable, practical and to some extent, cheaper. The problems before, for many people, included the fear regarding personal data, the mistrust regarding the quality of the products, the possibility of errors and the logistic delay. Many people have learned to trust in this kind of trade. So, we can speculate that e-commerce will be an important part of a New Normal.

Deliveries and takeout in the same way probably will be more in demand

Many have the opinion that masks and careful washing hands will remain as habits. At least for a significant portion of people.

All these items require new projects, like factories, systems, production lines, infrastructure, civil works, new products, new processes, and so on.

The full economic life will return sooner or later. Then, new projects as well.

BRAZIL AND MINAS GERAIS FACING COVID-19

Brazil is the second country in the world in number of Covid-19 cases and the third country in the morbid ranking of deaths caused by the new Coronavirus.

So far, June 4th, 2020, in the tables shown below you can see Brazil and Minas Gerais State - MG, Covid-19 status.

Table 1. COVID-19 Status - Brazil and Minas Gerais (MG)

	BRAZIL	MG	MG/BRAZIL (%)
Population	211,605,000 ⁽¹⁾	21,282,000 ⁽¹⁾	10,06%
COVID-19 Cases	614,941	13,034	2,06%
COVID-19 Deaths	34,021	323 ⁽²⁾	0,94%
Recovered	238,617	5,336	2,24%

Sources: www.covid.saude.gov.br and www.saude.mg.gov.br

(1) Source: IBGE – Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics. It's a projection (estimation) to June 4th, 2020

(2) There are more 176 deaths being investigated.

Table 2. COVID-19 Ratios - Brazil and Minas Gerais (MG)

	BRAZIL	MG
Total Cases / 100 k inhabitants	292.6	61.6
Total Deaths / 100 k inhabitants	16.2	1.5

Sources: www.covid.saude.gov.br and www.saude.mg.gov.br

The Health Ministry, since June 5th, 2020, has modified its daily bulletin. Now they don't inform about accumulated total of cases and deaths, but only cases and deaths

of the day. This triggered a wave of criticism and mistrust. There are no explanations about this change, so far.

It's also especially important to note that the Health Ministry doesn't inform how many tests have been taken so far. But Minas Gerais State just informed us how many tests have been taken by Health Public System, only 23,461, which is a very modest number considering state total population. In fact, this issue about tests, is a complaint against Minas Gerais Health authorities. Officially, the State option was to build and equip ICU beds, claiming that there is no money for ICUs and tests. These have been taken just by people who come to a public hospital or clinic. So, Minas Gerais is the second state that does less testing.

On the other hand, President Bolsonaro has a position against social distancing, isolation and quarantine. He thinks that only people from the risk group (senior citizens, obese, cardiac, diabetic, patients with chronic respiratory problems or with immunosuppression) must be in isolation or quarantine. He says that 70% of population will be contaminated anyway, and a lot will die, and complains that the economic consequences from quarantine will be severe, and unemployment and starvation will increase enormously.

In fact, unemployment had increased already. Last April, more than 860,000 workers lost their jobs. It's important to observe that according to Brazilian laws, firing someone is awfully expensive.

The Supreme Court has decided that, isolation, restrictions, quarantines, and lockdowns are responsibility of mayors and governors. So, President Bolsonaro, in spite his position, has no power to block restrictions.

The problem is Bolsonaro's behavior and speeches. To show his disagreement with restrictive measures, Bolsonaro every weekend goes to bakeries, supermarkets and pharmacies, where he obviously provokes crowds, talks with supporters, takes selfies, thus confronting governors and mayors and the recommendations of his own health authorities and the WHO.

Otherwise, President Bolsonaro, fired two Health ministers in less than a month, not only because their restrictions position, but mainly because of Hydroxychloroquine, that Bolsonaro considers good medicine to prevent and fight against Covid-19. So far, since May 15th, Health Ministry is directed on an interim basis by an Army General who is neither a doctor nor has health knowledge or experience.

By the way, Minas Gerais State Governor recommends quarantine and social distancing. Mayors of the most important Minas Gerais cities have decreed quarantine, although some of them are starting to relax these measures.

Let's see what will happen.

This report's author is at home since March 17th, 2020 and intends to stay there until the situation improves and it will be safe to attend public spaces.

About the Author



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Manuel Carvalho da Silva Neto, MSc, Mech. Engineer and PMP is a Consultant and Fundação Dom Cabral Invited Professor. He is a seasoned professional with over 45 years of experience in Project Management, Process Management and Strategy. Manuel has managed or participated in hundreds of projects across different fields including Steel, Mining, IT, Telecom, Food Processing, Construction and Government, to mention a few. He worked also in projects to implement PMO (Project Management Office) and Project Management Methodology. He has also strong skills in Leading People and Finance. He served as Minas Gerais State Undersecretary for Planning and Budget, from 2007 to 2008. Manuel can be contacted at carvalhoneto.manuel@gmail.com.