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Anti-crisis management. What's it?

Abstract

Recently, the concept of anti-crisis management as a special type of managerial activity has gained considerable popularity in the Russian semi-scientific community. The author examines in detail the arguments put forward in favor of this doctrine by its proponents. He demonstrates its complete inadequacy. He presents quite convincing reasons why no gimmicks in the form of "anti-crisis management" can, in principle, eliminate the main flaw of the market-based organization of social functioning — crises. This requires crisis-free management that excludes both the market as the key imperative of social organization at the macro level and the crises it generates.

Keywords: anti-crisis management, market, crises.

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Introduction

He who does not think about distant difficulties will certainly face near troubles. Confucius (c. 551-479 BC)

No nation, no culture can survive if profit is the dominant motive and imperative. A.S. Panarin: A People Without an Elite. 2006, p.20

"If you find yourself next to someone advocating for a free market, know that this is a pathological case that requires immediate treatment." John Galbraith, economic adviser to F.D. Roosevelt.

Let us consider some concepts that are important for the subsequent discussion.

To begin with, let us recall how the concept of "crisis" is interpreted. The following can be gleaned from reference and encyclopedic literature.

Crisis (from the Greek krisis — decision, turning point) — 1) a sharp, abrupt turning point in something, a difficult transitional state; 2) an acute difficulty with something, in which the inadequacy of the means to achieve goals gives rise to unpredictable problems.

A crisis reveals hidden conflicts and imbalances.

In the Chinese language, the word "crisis" is written using two characters:

a. "Wei": "danger" and "fear,"

b. "Ji": "opportunity."

It is quite clear that the concept of "crisis" is interpreted predominantly in a negative way: "turning point" (not a transition, but a turning point, when something breaks), "serious condition"; "acute difficulty"; "inadequacy of means"; "unpredictable problems", "danger", "fear". And although a crisis implies some kind of "opportunity", one cannot expect any inherently positive results from this opportunity, since it is "unpredictable". Overall, it can be concluded that a crisis is an undesirable phenomenon that is best avoided, as it entails predominantly negative consequences.

The concept of "crisis," as well as the crisis process, is closely linked to the concept of "market." In the most concise terms, the market can be described as follows

The market, as a principle, is a form of mediation for economic relations between participants—producers and consumers—wherein, based on an assumed balance of supply and demand, as well as competition, these participants exchange goods and/or services for the purpose of generating profit. The market is the most archaic, primitive, inefficient, dead-end, and—in a certain sense—crude method of organizing an economy. There is no such thing as an "invisible hand" that supposedly regulates all market processes in an optimal way—a concept whose miraculous powers are tirelessly promoted to the "masses" by so-called "pro-market" advocates. The very nature of market functioning contains irreconcilable contradictions, stemming from the core principle of the market itself: the drive of its participants toward personal gain. Consequently, as any market-based system operates, these internal contradictions inevitably accumulate until they reach a certain threshold, beyond which the system begins to collapse. This phenomenon is what we call a "crisis." While a crisis may be an inevitable and "normal" occurrence for a market-based economic system, it is entirely abnormal for society as a whole; given its fundamentally anti-human, social-Darwinist essence, it corrodes and destroys the spiritual foundation of societal development. A crisis always represents, to a greater or lesser degree, a decline, a regression or a step backward, a loss of ground, and so forth.

The primary agents in a market are the "**consumer**" and the "**producer**." There is a fundamental difference between them: in principle, a consumer can get by without a producer, whereas a producer absolutely requires a consumer—without one, the producer's activity loses all purpose. As previously noted, the market is the most archaic form of economic organization, rooted in the spontaneous interaction between consumer and seller. However, as market forms have evolved and developed, the nature of this interaction has shifted significantly, strengthening the position of the producer at the expense of the consumer. While goods were once tailored to suit people's tastes and demands, in today's era of global neoliberalism, the reverse is true: people's tastes are now adapted to fit the goods. Here, the term "good" (or "commodity") is used in the broadest possible sense—encompassing physical products, services, political parties, unpopular government decisions, or even a new president. As an old advertisement once put it: "Notice the difference!" This is a profound shift. The full power of the modern "information" society—every medium of mass communication, including television, the press, radio, and the internet—is directed toward shaping the ideology, structure, scale, and other facets of a "consumer culture" that serves the interests of the producer. In short, the functioning of the modern market is predicated on large-scale manipulation.

The most obvious consequence of what has been stated above is that the market—as a principle for the functioning of society—establishes the pursuit of profit and gain at *any* cost as the primary strategic goal for both society as a whole and each individual. In

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its logical progression, this leads to the spiritual degeneration of humanity, its degradation, and the dehumanization of the individual—processes that are steadily encompassing more and more nations and countries, including Russia.

In a "market" world—where money serves as the sole yardstick and criterion for evaluating everything—there is, and can be, no stability, no prospects, and no confidence in the possibility of a better future. By embracing the values of this world, an individual—regardless of how much money they may already possess—is compelled to join a frantic race for even more, pitting themselves against others just as deranged, their minds poisoned by greed and a hatred for competitors. In such a world, it is easier to amass wealth through deception, speculation, or theft—what is commonly termed "doing business"—than through honest, productive labor. It is precisely this kind of world that has been imposed upon modern Russia for the past four decades.

It would be logical to examine the concept of "management" so that, by linking it with the concept of "crisis," we might begin to clarify the meaning of the core term: "anti-crisis management." Given the specific nature of this subject, however, it is more appropriate to first review existing perspectives on what "anti-crisis management" entails. Only then will it be possible to properly relate the concept of "management" to anti-crisis activities.

The term "anti-crisis management" emerged relatively recently. It is generally understood to have arisen from the reform—or, more accurately, the dismantling—of the Soviet planned economy, a system in which crises were, by definition, impossible. In its place, a multitude of predominantly private, small and medium-sized enterprises emerged, most of which exist in a state of perpetual teetering on the brink of bankruptcy. In countries with market-based economies—where, much like in Darwinian theory, only the fittest survive—crises affecting individual enterprises and the economy as a whole are a natural, expected phenomenon. According to this logic, a business that fails to align with its "environment", must either adapt by leveraging its strengths or cease to exist. In contemporary Russia, however, the "environment" is shaped by oligarchic, power-wielding structures—deeply criminalized and corrupt—whose members are frequently under the constant scrutiny or investigation of foreign law enforcement and intelligence agencies. This environment renders normal, healthy business activity virtually impossible. Consequently, by current standards, approximately 80% of all Russian enterprises should long ago have been classified as bankrupt. The rising number of bankruptcy cases further underscores this reality; when one accounts for the many cases that never reach the courts, the actual proportion of insolvent enterprises in Russia may be as high as 90%.

Thus, the development of a theory of anti-crisis management is, in a sense, a response to the demands of practical reality. The need for anti-crisis management arises not only in countries that have transitioned from a more efficient planned economic model to a market-based one, but also in the long-established market economies of Western nations—nations that have entered the era of the so-called "post-industrial" society (some prefer to call it an "information" society, though this changes nothing in substance). In such societies, the economy has been reduced to a level of financial-speculative schemes involving "securities" and the manipulation of currency exchange rates. For this reason, it is not difficult to see why, according to its proponents, financial management—focused on managing cash flows and identifying optimal financial solutions—is expected to play the central, primary role in anti-crisis management.

Recently, a vast number of articles and monographs on anti-crisis management have appeared in our country (see, for example, Antonov G.D.;[1] Korotkov E.M.;[2] Okhotsky E.V.;[3] and many others), alongside various textbooks and study guides (see Demchuk O.N.;[4] Larionov I.K.;[5] and others). Most authors, in focusing on the specific nature of anti-crisis management—and how it differs from the "crisis" phase that logically precedes it—argue that it should be established as a distinct field within both management theory and professional practice. Given the "informational" (i.e., speculative) character of the modern economy, the financial dimension of crisis processes serves as the core theme in virtually all publications on this subject. Some works examine anti-crisis management through the lens of *micro-level* financial issues, while others address a broader range of challenges—extending beyond the crisis of an individual enterprise to encompass crises in public finance or the *economy as a whole*. Furthermore, some authors—while claiming to write about anti-crisis management—focus exclusively on legal bankruptcy procedures (as defined by Federal Law No. 127-FZ of October 26, 2002, "On Insolvency (Bankruptcy)").

One of the most popular and typical definitions of crisis management is as follows: "*Anti-crisis management is a system of enterprise management that is comprehensive and systemic in nature; it is aimed at preventing or eliminating phenomena unfavorable to the business by leveraging the full potential of modern management, and by developing and implementing a specialized, strategic program within the enterprise. This program is designed to resolve temporary difficulties, as well as to maintain and strengthen market positions under any circumstances, relying primarily on the enterprise's own internal resources*".[6]

As can be seen, the scope of anti-crisis management, under this interpretation, is identical to that of conventional management; like conventional management, it is limited exclusively to the economic activities of an enterprise, with no mention whatsoever of the social dimension of these activities. The substance of anti-crisis management is described in rather vague terms—"*eliminating phenomena unfavorable to the business," "resolving temporary difficulties," "leveraging the full potential of modern management," "strengthening market positions*," and so on. Also noteworthy is the implicit framing of a crisis as an undesirable, negative phenomenon—as "*unfavorable events*" or "*temporary difficulties*" that must be prevented or eliminated. This professional perspective on crises stands in stark contrast to the upbeat journalistic accounts frequently found in the media, which seek to instill enthusiasm in the audience by highlighting the supposedly miraculous opportunities a crisis offers—acting as a catalyst for "innovation," the development of "breakthrough technologies," and the like.

Principles for crisis management are also proposed (ibid.). Key principles include:

a. **Early diagnosis of crisis phenomena within a company's financial operations**. The rationale for this principle is the intuitive notion that the emergence of a crisis poses an existential threat to the company and entails significant capital losses for its owners. Consequently, the potential for a crisis must be identified at the earliest possible stage to allow for timely intervention and neutralization. It should be noted that the focus is exclusively on the company's *financial* activities.

b. **Urgency in responding to crisis phenomena**. The authors quite rightly argue that any crisis-related issue not only tends to escalate with each subsequent business cycle but also gives rise to further, associated problems. Therefore, the sooner anti-crisis-management mechanisms are activated, the greater the company's chances of recovery. Notably, the task of identifying

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the *root causes* of a crisis—essentially conducting a "post-mortem" analysis—is not even included as an objective of this approach.

c. Appropriateness of the enterprise's response to the actual level of threat to its financial equilibrium. It is argued that the mechanisms employed to neutralize the threat of bankruptcy almost invariably entail financial costs or losses. The scale of these costs and losses must be commensurate with the severity of the bankruptcy threat. Otherwise, either the desired effect will not be achieved (if the mechanisms are insufficient), or the enterprise will incur unjustifiably high expenses (if the mechanisms are excessive). We shall leave this principle without further comment.

d. Full utilization of an enterprise's internal capacity to emerge from a crisis. In confronting the threat of bankruptcy, an enterprise must rely exclusively on its own internal financial resources. This premise is entirely valid within a market economy—a system in which (by definition!) every entity is compelled to continuously fight to secure and defend its "place in the sun," with no hope for any concessions from its competitors.

It is easy to see that this is a rather simplified, limited, eclectic, and not particularly consistent list of the stages of a standard management cycle—a list that boils down to recommendations little better than platitudes.

Proposals from other authors are virtually identical to those mentioned above: early diagnosis of crisis phenomena in a company's financial operations; the need for an urgent response to such crises; ensuring that the company's response is commensurate with the actual threat to its financial well-being; and the full mobilization of internal potential to overcome the crisis.

Within the vast body of literature on anti-crisis management, there are several works that examine the root causes of corporate crises. These texts posit that a crisis arises when a company's financial and operational parameters fall out of alignment with its "external environment." In other words, out of the entire spectrum of economic activity, only one dimension—the financial—is singled out, and this is done without any supporting rationale. Meanwhile, the "external environment" is portrayed as an alien, hostile entity—a "sacred cow" that follows its own unpredictable rules, entirely beyond anyone's ability to influence.

In keeping with established practice, the factors that led to the onset of a crisis are also examined. These are typically divided into two main groups:

i. External (independent of the enterprise's operations);

ii. Internal (dependent on the enterprise's operations).

External factors that can trigger a crisis are categorized as follows:

1. Socio-economic factors related to the country's overall development:

a. Rising inflation;

b. Instability of the tax system;

c. Instability of the regulatory framework;

d. A decline in the population's real income;

e. Rising unemployment.

2. Market factors:

a. A contraction in the capacity of the domestic market;

b. Increased monopolization within the market;

c. Instability in the currency market;

d. An increase in the supply of substitute goods.

3. Other external factors:

a. Political instability;

b. Natural disasters;

c. A worsening crime situation.

Internal factors contributing to a crisis:

1. Managerial:

a. High level of commercial risk;

b. Insufficient knowledge of market conditions;

c. Ineffective financial management;

d. Poor management of production costs;

e. Lack of management flexibility;

f. Inadequate accounting and reporting system.

2. Operational/Production-related:

a. Lack of cohesion within the enterprise as an integrated property complex;

b. Outdated and worn-out fixed assets;

c. Low labor productivity;

d. High energy consumption;

e. Excessive burden of social infrastructure/facilities.

3. Market-related;

a. Low product competitiveness;

b. Dependence on a limited range of suppliers and customers.

The grouping of both external and internal factors is clearly loose, artificial, and speculative. The fundamental requirement for any classification—the independence of the criteria used—has been violated. Indeed, a decline in the population's real income (categorized under "socio-economic factors") quite naturally leads to a contraction in the capacity of the domestic market (categorized under "market factors"), while instability in regulatory legislation (another "socio-economic factor") results in instability within the currency market (a "market factor"), and so on. However, the primary flaw in this classification is the complete absence of social factors—the human dimension.

It is asserted that "the work of a anti-crisis manager must be based on a thorough analysis of an enterprise's financial condition, its operations, and its market position. Only after such an analysis should the anti-crisis manager develop a detailed crisis management plan" (Ibid.). Yes, that is precisely how the role of a anti-crisis manager is envisioned—in a one-sided manner, focusing exclusively on the financial component. It is hardly surprising, then, that the anti-crisis management programs proposed are equally narrow in scope:

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i. Resolution of insolvency;

ii. Restoring financial stability;

iii. Ensuring financial balance in a long period.

As you can see, the content of all recommendations is focused exclusively on the financial sector.

In general, the analysis of the literature, which examines the problems of anti-crisis management, allows us to draw the following conclusions.

a. Anti-crisis management is positioned as a special scientific and practical activity, fundamentally different from the forms of pre-crisis (crisis) management. The presence of two different types of control is implicitly postulated. In this case, the characteristics of the difference are not highlighted or considered;

b. The purpose of anti-crisis management is to prevent or eliminate adverse business manifestations and consequences of the crisis. The task of eliminating the underlying causes of the crisis is not set;

c. The area of anti-crisis management is limited only by the enterprise. Everything beyond the enterprise is considered as an "environment," that is, as an uncontrollable and, as a rule, hostile space;

d. Due to the speculative nature of the modern economy, the object-subject content of the theoretical foundations of anti-crisis management is almost completely focused on the financial sector.

e. The inconsistency of these provisions in terms of activities aimed at eliminating the crisis as a phenomenon is as follows.

No two or more forms of control exist. Any control is based on a single, invariant algorithm. Any attempts to detect differences between crisis (as a previous crisis) and anti-crisis management in terms of the role, goals, and mechanisms for their implementation are doomed to failure due to the absence of any differences.

The nomenclature of tasks of *any* management always includes the task of predicting possible risks and working out measures to prevent them and/or eliminate adverse consequences if risk situations have not been avoided. Thus, even for this parameter, no specifics are found in anti-crisis management.

In normal (crisis-free) management, the external environment is always included in the space of management activities: the management system is always considered together with the external structures associated with it as a single entity (metasystem). The fact that the theorists of anti-crisis management in their recommendations break the said unity is 1) a gross violation of the most important principles of social management and 2) entails the fundamental unattainability of the declared goals.

The focus of anti-crisis management theorists on one - financial - component of economic activity predetermines the essential limitations of the proposed measures and also does not contribute to the achievement of anti-crisis management goals.

In addition to these, there are deeper methodological grounds to consider the idea of anti-crisis management as fundamentally untenable. They are as follows.

Based on the essence of the market organization of economic activity, the concepts of "management" and "market" are fundamentally incompatible. The fact is that the basis of market forms of interaction between market entities is free competition, that is, these entities have initially equal rights and opportunities. The high level of monopolization of the modern economy does not change the essence of the matter: just competition takes on other forms and scales. The market is a fundamentally anti-system entity. It is fundamentally impossible to ensure the laws of stability of systems formulated in the 50s of the twentieth century by L. von Bertalanfi[7] and due to the fact that management is possible only in systems, in a market environment, management is fundamentally impossible!

The subjects of management activities are always in strictly defined relations with each other and, unlike the market, have far unequal opportunities. This follows from the definition of social management.

Social management refers to the systematic influence of a management entity (management subsystem) based on reliable knowledge on a management object (managed subsystem), which can be a society as a whole or its individual spheres - economy, politics, culture, science, social, spiritual sphere or links (enterprises, institutions, organizations, etc.). The content of social management is the preservation of the qualitative specifics and integrity of the managed system and the whole society as a whole, ensuring their normal functioning, improvement and development, and achieving goals. Delivered by the management entity. Social management covers all areas of public life: political, economic and spiritual. Social management is carried out through a specific impact on the living conditions of people, their value orientations and activities, on their behavior.[8]

The subject of social management is an element of the structure of the social management system, which is the carrier of managerial influence on the object of social management (managed subsystem), carrying out activities aimed at maintaining quality specifics, ensuring its normal functioning and successful movement towards a given goal. In modern conditions, tending to global management technologies, social institutions, organizations (including public ones), production teams and individuals act as subjects of social management. But even in this case, managerial decisions are actually made by real personalities who are vested with appropriate power, which implies a high measure of responsibility. The subject of social management performs a number of basic social roles, the main of which are the development of a management concept, the generation of ideas and targets, and the organization of their achievement.

The subject of social management can effectively fulfill his duties if he is given the necessary powers:

a. availability of rights and obligations;

b. Presence of relevant subjective qualities (education, knowledge, experience, etc.);

c. Availability of material and technical means and sufficient time.

The object of social management is that part of the social management system that perceives management impacts and ultimately ensures their implementation. The object of social management is essentially people.

As you can see, both the object and the subject of social management are far from equal conditions and opportunities, as well as their roles and functions in the management process are very different. The forms of interaction between the object and the subject of social management also have significant differences. The most important of these forms are subordination (the subject has the ability to influence the object), coordination (interaction on an equal footing)

and reordination (the effect of the object on the subject. For example, with the help of various protests).

Social management is the most rational way to organize socially useful work. In short, it can be defined as a purposeful, planned, coordinated, consciously organized process that contributes to achieving maximum effect with a conditionally minimal expenditure of resources, effort and time. This is absolutely different from the functioning of the market, the fundamental basis of which is the element.

It is easy to understand that the mechanisms, goals, logic and almost all other characteristics of interaction between market entities and participants in management activities are *radically* different.

The preliminary conclusion is that anti-crisis activity as management in the market is fundamentally impossible. This is a meaningless, fruitless and largely harmful (due to its inefficiency) occupation, since it gives its participants the illusion of the opportunity to overcome the problems and difficulties of the crisis with its help. As it is presented by theorists and implemented by practitioners, anti-crisis management is at best aimed at eliminating the consequences of the crisis, in no way affecting the causes that give rise to them. Thus, there is no reason to consider anti-crisis management as a specific way to overcome the problems and difficulties arising from the crisis. Successful (i.e. crisis-free) management activities by definition exclude the very possibility of a crisis and can only be carried out if a more or less significant departure from market principles of interaction between its participants is ensured and fundamental and necessary general principles of social management are observed.

Justification and development of directions, forms, mechanisms for the practical implementation of this particular opportunity is an urgent scientific problem. To solve it, it is necessary, first of all, to have a fairly clear idea of the essence of control, its forms, types, principles. Ultimately, we should not talk about anti-crisis, but about crisis-free management. Consideration of the conditions for this type of management is the subject of a separate statement.

So:

a. The market excludes any effective management;

b. Organizations operating on the principle of the market are inevitably faced with a crisis;

c. Anti-crisis management is impossible by definition. Only anti-crisis activities are possible, which in no way implies the elimination of the causes of the crisis and is aimed exclusively at eliminating its consequences, focusing mainly on the financial side of the problem.

The general conclusion is that "anti-crisis management" as a scientific concept is incorrect due to the fundamental incompatibility of the anti-system environment of the market, which inevitably generates crises, on the one hand, structures and organizations formed and functioning according to the system principle, in which only effective management is possible, on the other hand. It is for this reason that the market, as the fundamental basis of society, consistently implemented in all links that ensure its functioning (economy, education, health care, science, culture, etc.), is an extremely destructive, unprecedented in its destructive "efficiency" principle.

The tragic paradox of our time is that the program and principles of the so-called "Chicago School of Economics," focused on the complete (total!) Exclusion from the subject area of the state of all activities that are purely "market," that is, the economy not burdened with any social obligations does not recognize as profitable, turned out to be completely unfulfilled even in the West itself. The only country in the world in which they are consistently and steadily implemented with perseverance worthy of better use is modern Russia. The catastrophic "achievements" of Russia on the way to the implementation of this program are well known: the loss of 48 million population, the collapse of industry, agriculture, the almost complete destruction of most high-tech industries, a multiple decline in the standard of living of the overwhelming majority of the population, the collapse of state-forming structures, the loss of defense capability, food, commodity, political independence, etc.[9]

However, it should be noted that the market is precisely due to the fundamental rejection of forms and directions, the results of which are not subject to direct economic utilization, indispensable in the selection of cost-effective, promising concrete returns forms of activity. Therefore, it is fully justified at the lower (and only at the lower, where the consequences of the general social and cultural nihilism characteristic of the market are practically not manifested) economic micro level, the level of relations between individual organizations, enterprises, specific manufacturers of goods and services, etc.

The market, elevated to the rank of state ideology, due to its fundamental social Darwinist essence inevitably leads to a social catastrophe, which cannot be excluded or overcome by any "anti-crisis" measures.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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