

Do what is necessary to remain relevant, save as many jobs as possible

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

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As part of our #LockdownLessons series, Bizcommunity is reaching out to South Africa's top industry players to share their experience of the current Covid-19 crisis, how their organisations are navigating these unusual times, where the challenges and opportunities lie, and their industry outlook for the near future.

We chatted to Paul Maitre, MD of ADA Consulting Engineers, to get his take.

■ **What was your initial response to the crisis/lockdown and has your experience of it been different to what you expected?**

Paul Maitre: Business-wise, ADA Consulting Engineers had to ensure our service to clients and projects was maintained. We set up a task team which ensured that all staff were working remotely prior to lockdown. The maintenance of daily company online meetings, programming and checking production resulted in us maintaining, if not increasing, our productivity.

■ **Comment on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on your organisation or economy as a whole.**

Maitre: We were very fortunate to have multiple projects in the design phase and so have remained 100% productive during lockdown. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on the country's economy. The lockdown was critical to flatten the curve; however, our unemployment and further loss of income will result in immeasurable suffering and hardship. The financial burden to the country with the essential financial support to the vulnerable will further compromise our junk status economy. It is estimated that it will take the large part of the next decade to recover.



Paul Maitre, MD of ADA Consulting Engineers

■ **How is your organisation responding to the crisis?**

Maitre: ADA Consulting immediately reduced all non-essential overheads and fixed all costs in the short term. It is critical that the company's future is secured to ensure all employees' jobs are retained. Further to this, we are refocusing our company strategies to ensure an adequate workload is achieved during the expected reduced economic activity during the twelve months ahead.



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■ **Comment on the challenges and opportunities.**

Maitre: The challenges for all companies are maintaining a work volume enough to minimise impact on the business and salaries.

The opportunities we at ADA Consulting have identified are adapting and optimising client support and service within the restraints of the crisis better than the opposition to increase our market penetration.

■ ***How has the lockdown affected your staff? / What temporary HR policies have you put in place regarding remote working, health & safety, etc.?***

Maitre:

- Remote working is now a recognised status/alternative for employees where possible.
- Working at the office is still critical to some employees and also required for large project deadline coordination/collaboration.
- Office behaviour excludes the use of the boardroom. Meetings are digital if more than three people are involved.
- Health monitoring, 1.5 metre spacing, individual use of kitchen and facilities is standard.



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■ ***How are you navigating 'physical distancing' while keeping your team close-knit and aligned?***

Maitre: We have daily online huddles which include social banter and work-related issues. This keeps everyone connected both on a social level as well as keeping the work identity and sense of belonging.

■ ***How have you had to change the way you operate?***

Maitre: At ADA Consulting we realise that operations will never be the same, even after a vaccine is found. We will definitely use the following lessons learnt during lockdown:

- Reduce time-wasting travel.
- Complement operations with online systems, meetings and collaboration.
- Seek opportunities for flexibility in work sites as well as worktime.

■ ***Any trends you've seen emerge as a result of the crisis?***

Maitre: The crisis has advanced the online digital solution offerings. Remote and mobility working will promote the use of laptops and companies having all systems online for ease of access.



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■ ***Your key message to those in the sector?***

Maitre: The built environment will falter in the short term but will recover to original volumes with time. We must do what is necessary to ensure we remain relevant and are able to save as many jobs as possible.

■ ***What do you predict the next six months will be like?***

Maitre: The economy has taken a blow. The next six months will involve all industries to re-establish to the new norms but volumes will be low and many companies will close doors. The building industry will not collapse, but will be operating substantially lower than pre-crisis levels.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

Sindy Peters (@sindy_hullaba_lou) is a group editor at Bizcommunity.com on the Construction & Engineering, Energy & Mining, and Property portals. She can be reached at sindy@bizcommunity.com

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