RISK MANAGEMENT MONITOR

Preparing for a Pandemic: Review Business Continuity Plans Amid Coronavirus Outbreak

Posted on **March 5, 2020** by **Bob Sibik**

Organizations worldwide have been reacting to the recent coronavirus outbreak, COVID-19, in a variety of ways, from restricting nonessential employee travel to canceling large events. The possibility of a pandemic has the potential to disrupt workforces, supply chains and economic activity in the months ahead. So, it is with a sense of urgency that prudent organizations review and update their business continuity plans to insure their operational resiliency.

A healthy and available workforce is any organization's most valuable asset. A pandemic will incapacitate some employees and result in other employees being quarantined. This could result in a major disruption to normal operations, with potentially large numbers of employees working from home or remote locations.

To protect your workforce and help ensure its continued productivity, it is critical to:

- Establish a strategy that enables employees to continue to function without endangering them.
- Have a plan to isolate employees should the threat of possible infection arise.
- Ensure employees can effectively work from home.
- Verify that you have the tools, technology, capacity, and security measures in place to support a large remote workforce.
- Review your HR policies to ensure employees will not be personally impacted if they must be quarantined for an extended period and modify any policies as appropriate to give greater flexibility to normal working arrangements.
- Determine your priorities and the minimum staffing requirements to support these priorities, in case you need to function with a significantly reduced workforce.
- Identify key employees and ensure other staff members have received appropriate training to comprehensively cover their absence.
- Create a communications plan that includes providing employees and other stakeholders with regular situation updates as well as actions taken.

In a global economy, virtually every organization is connected to or dependent upon others. You may not be directly affected by a pandemic, but could be impacted if a vendor at a critical point in your supply chain is. Understanding your dependence on entities outside your organization is critical. Are your critical third parties (e.g., suppliers, vendors and service providers) prepared?

To protect your operations and ensure continuity of services or products to your customers, it is important that you:

- Map your dependencies to understand where disruptions might impact your value chains.
- Review the preparedness of your critical third parties (suppliers, vendors, service providers, etc.).
- Identify single points of failure in your ecosystem.

When assessing the impact of a disruption to your ecosystem, it is important to recognize the amount of time before the actual impact occurs. So, as you review and update your plans, you should also conduct walkthroughs and exercises. This is the best method for identifying gaps in your procedures and will give you the highest chance of successful execution. Active participants will become familiar with the goals and objectives of the plan and begin to use it as guidance rather than a prescriptive list of tasks to be followed without applying rational thought. Practicing the execution of your plan ensures all necessary parties understand their roles and responsibilities.

During preparedness reviews, you should also assess the tools used to maintain relevant information and assist in executing your plans. Old technologies and obsolete tools will put successful execution of even the best plans at risk. Identify any deficiencies in the tools available and create a comprehensive list of requirements that will enhance your ability to execute. The sooner you begin to upgrade your tool set, the sooner you will be able to reduce execution risk.

An organization's ability to effectively respond to a disruption of its workforce or a critical third-party not only depends on how effective you were in the planning process, but also how effective you were with the tools you have and the training you implemented. The tools you use to communicate, maintain situational awareness, and provide current and accurate information will also have a major impact on the execution of the plan.

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About Bob Sibik

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1 THOUGHT ON "PREPARING FOR A PANDEMIC: REVIEW BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANS AMID CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK"

Jack Hernandez on **March 30, 2020 at 9:57 am** said:

It is apparent that the writer is a data geek.
I like the way he writes and organizes facts.
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