

## Five Tips for Business Continuity During the Coronavirus Pandemic



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By now, your organization is deep into the response phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. While many of us were aware of this threat or similar from past experiences, the impact of this global emergency has come upon us rapidly and for some, it will have a catastrophic effect on business. For those who have not developed a business continuity plan (BCP), we understand it's likely too late to go back and begin the planning phase. However, it doesn't mean you can't mitigate impact during your response and focus on recovery and restoration when this threat is neutralized.

Business continuity plans are an organizational responsibility that requires the input, research, and collaboration of many stakeholders. Your BCP should be strategic and focus on maintaining core service and functions until normal operations resume. It differs from typical emergency response plans that outline a more tactical response to a situation that will be contained in a relatively shorter period of time. Because many of us are changing nomenclature with telecommuting, video chats, and virtual water cooler meetings, we are providing these five essential considerations to assist you moving forward.

### Essential Functions

Every organization is different, but the common thread is everyone has essential functions. These are the functions that enable you to maintain critical services. In many cases these are obvious, for example, with many organizations moving to telecommuting or remote learning in schools, most would identify IT capabilities as essential. However, other service providers, goods, and supply chains must keep moving and may have vastly different essential functions. For this reason, it is important to quickly identify what is essential to you and ensure appropriate resources exist and are readily available to support continuity.

### Protect Health of Staff

Many of our partners have instituted responsible recommended practices such as telecommuting and cancelling non-essential travel and in-person meetings and conferences, etc. For these employees who may be working from home for the first time or feel disconnected, it is important to maintain daily meetings and normalcy as much as possible. We also know there are a number of service industries that must maintain full operations with offices being open to the public, retail establishments, deliveries, etc. Even so, every step must be taken to provide the safest work location possible. This could include, issuing personal protective equipment (PPE), limiting exposure to other employees (social distancing), altering work schedules, providing additional break periods, and increasing sanitation efforts. Check with your local health official for industry specific guidance as recommendations are changing rapidly.

### Communication

Communicate with your employees, vendors, and customers regularly. If you have not done so, you must inform your community; you don't want to simply be responding. Timely, accurate, and verified information should be widely shared as soon as possible and outline what steps you are taking, business impact, and changes to policy or practices, and provide resources as available. As an organization, leadership teams, task forces, mission specific committees should consider meeting (virtually) and speaking at least once per day.

### Assess Impact

Organizational leadership must quickly identify and analyze what the impact of the emergency will be even when a situation is continuously unfolding. By identifying the potential duration of the event

(days, weeks, months) and the operational impact (cash flow, delayed sales, increased expenses, loss of employees) you can quantify the operational impacts into financial forecasts to inform decisions.

## Restoration

The good news is, even though times are difficult, this too shall pass. While we deal with the day-to-day challenges of maintaining business, caring for our employees, communicating, and responding, leadership must also be preparing for the hopeful restoration to normal activities. This can mean employees returning to office, business travel, conferences, sales meeting, or perhaps a new normal with altered work schedules, work locations, virtual meetings and service delivery.

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