

Human Capital Concerns of Continuity Planning

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Introduction

Tropical Storm Debby is slowly meandering towards your major production facility. You dust off your continuity plan that you assisted in developing a few years back. It looks like you have everything in order and the storm looks like it will likely produce some large scale flooding, but major winds are not expected. You sit at your desk and think that you have it all covered. The phone rings and the corporate Vice President states that they have a major production concern and your facility is to maintain production during the storm. After all, it is just a heavy slow moving rain storm.

How are you going to ensure that you still have the work force to maintain the expectations of the corporate officers? Without manpower you can't maintain production. When you look at your continuity plan it covers all aspects of operations but is missing one major section "employee resilience". We went to all of the expense and time to develop plans for every foreseeable catastrophe, but we forgot the most important aspect of our business, OUR EMPLOYEES.

During this discussion the need, benefit of planning for, and developing employee addendums to our continuity plans will be stressed. Case histories of Public Service employees leaving their jobs during Hurricanes Andrew and Katrina will highlight the need of this critical phase of business continuity. Tweaking current plans to integrate corporate social responsibility will greatly enhance our employee/organizational relationships. Lastly, our employees have many concerns during catastrophic events. One of the major ones is, "Will I still have a job when this is over?" What better way to negate this fear than by actively utilizing your employees when it is safe and available.

Historical Perspective

Throughout the past 30 years the United States has been impacted by several natural and man-made disasters impacting business continuity. As a result of these disasters business and emergency responders have become more knowledgeable of potential impacts to business along with proactive actions that can be taken to limit adverse impact.

During recent history we can identify disasters that have interrupted business continuity. This list is not all-inclusive and is used as an example of the varied types of disasters that can and may impact business. There are many more incidents that have occurred within this timeframe that have directly and indirectly affected business continuity. The purpose of this listing is to begin conversation and consideration of potential hazards to our business's and employees.

Year	Hazard Type	Locale
1989	Loma Prieta Earthquake	San Fransisco Bay Area, Ca
1992	Hurricane Andrew	Florida, Louisiana
1993	Flooding	Mississippi River Basin
1998	North American Ice Storm	Eastern Canada, New England
2001	Terrorism	NYC, United States
2009	Biological	H1N1 (Swine Flu)
2005	Hurricane Katrina	Louisiana
2011	Drought/Wildfires	Texas
2011	Joplin Tornado	Joplin, Missouri
2012	Hurricane/TS Sandy	New England

Successes

During Hurricane Andrew, Burger King effectively met the challenges of effective and efficient continuity planning. Prior to land fall, the organization transferred business operations to Seattle, Washington. This movement assured that continued business operations could be conducted while corporate headquarters was inoperable. (Gustin 62)

Furthermore, Burger King had planned for the needs of their South Florida employees. Those employees impacted by the storm were provided basic needs ensuring recovery operations at headquarters could proceed. This proactive step by Burger King highlighted the principles of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Failures

During Hurricane Ike in 2008, personnel within oil and gas refining were impacted by uncooperative management. Prior to landfall mission essential personnel were not afforded the opportunity to secure their households or assist their families in preparing for evacuation. In one case a worker was instructed to remain within the refinery leading up to landfall and thru the recovery phase of the disaster.

Due to this decision communication with family members was lost for a three-day period. Employee assurance that family members had evacuated to safety was not communicated to the worker for several days. The affected employee lost a newly constructed home during this event. While the house may have been lost regardless of preventative measures that could have been taken prior to landfall, a sense of "what if" will always be questioned by this employee. (Smith)

Over 65 New Orleans Police Officers have been dismissed for abandoning their post during the 2005 Hurricane Katrina disaster. While public service has a higher standard of employment expectations, it appears that New Orleans Police Department was not effectively prepared to meet the needs of their staff. (USA Today 2006)

Planning

Hazard and Vulnerability Assessment

In order to begin planning for the potential impact to our business continuity we must determine the hazards that may affect our operations. Today with the power of the Internet, electronic databases and emergency management experts we can efficiently identify our most likely hazards.

The first step in identifying our vulnerability will be to determine what specific disasters are likely to occur. Due to recent changes in our environment, I would recommend that a 30-50 year window be evaluated. 100 year historical data can provide empirical data; however, population, land use, hydrological usage, and atmospheric changes over the past quarter century have all impacted the types and severity of disasters in our recent history. Earthquakes are not common within the Gulf Coast of the United States, however Hurricanes are frequent. However, there has been a marked change in Tornado activity within the South East United States in the past 10 years.

Upon disaster type determination probability calculations will need to be assessed. When considering natural disasters, professional advice is readily available from local meteorologist, flood insurance professionals, emergency managers, and university staff. These professionals will assist you and your team in calculating the risk posed by these hazards. Each organization will need to determine their acceptable risk profile.

We must remember that a similar evaluation should be completed by our employees for their homes and families. The key to this paper is how we can better prepare our organizations and employees gaining synergies for both entities.

Building Momentum

As with any Emergency Plan, upon determination of the hazards and vulnerabilities a team will be assembled to collaborate on the development of this plan. Organizational leadership should have oversight but may not need direct involvement. This team does not necessarily need to have direct input by line employees. Union representation along with human resource management is highly recommended.

Decisions made within this team will have a direct impact on both the organization and employees. This team will develop plans and policies that may identify particular members of the organization as mission essential due to business needs. Changes to job capsules and/or job descriptions and working relationships may require management, union and HR guidance and agreement.

Allow this team to utilize plans and outlines that have previously been developed and utilized. Open discussion with similar businesses in the immediate area can quickly identify organizations that have previously developed similar plans. Surveys are rather quick and easily utilized via the internet, garnering a data pool from your employees. These data points provide information on both employee facts and views.

Bringing it Together

Organizational leadership will need to outline specific goals and boundaries for this team. As with any continuity plan the goal will be to maintain business operations leading up to, during the incident and thru the recovery phase. Hopefully, the majority of the plan has already been established. However, was there efficient or effective identification of our most valuable assets?

What are we doing with our employees? Is it the organization's plan to temporarily close business either in anticipation to or right after the incident occurs? Has this been communicated to your employees? Who will be expected to temporarily transfer to a remote business location? Will there be a critical systems work force left behind? How will that critical work force be compensated?

These questions will need to be answered by your assembled planning team. While the decisions that are made during this exercise may not be palatable by all employees the purpose is to maintain business survivability while also attempting to maintain our workforce.

Considerations

Maslow's hierarchy of needs has been utilized for decades along with McGregor's Theory Y principles highlight the assumptions that employee's willingness to work. Based on these presumptions our employees have a basic need of security. By providing a mechanism that will assist them in maintaining their security during a catastrophic event we may utilize this energy for business continuity.

Some key issues of employee security can be identified below:

1. Family
2. Possessions
3. Job Security
4. Safety
5. Accommodations
6. Food and water
7. Pets

This list is not all inclusive and may not be representative of every employee. However, it is a starting point for discussion and planning. Utilizing this list the team can utilize these topics to better plan for business continuity. Some planning issues that I have personally utilized in the past have been sending mission essential personnel home to fulfill these security needs prior to disaster impact.

During the Wildcat fire in West Texas in 2011, as Incident Commander, I sent local volunteer fire fighters back to their homes to assist family members in securing and evacuating household prior to fire encroachment. This decision resulted in firefighters that remained on the fire lines, with appropriate rest, for one week.

Wrapping it up

As we have moved into the 21st Century the business/employee relationship has changed. In many situations business has found that employees do have a vested interest in ensuring the business thrives. Business continuity is similar; if we take the time to effectively plan and communicate business needs to our employees they are more receptive to assist us in meeting a common goal. If the business fails the employee is faced with a similar dilemma, they must meet that basic security need again. However, we still have work to do. During hurricane Sandy, I spoke to several employees that were directed to work within call centers along the Eastern Seaboard. When asked these employees mentioned that they were worried about their families and homes.

Our employees have a vested interest in ensuring operational continuity. If we approach them and encourage them to become involved in meeting a common goal they will respond favorably. A key point must remain in the forefront; our employees are people and need to be treated as such. If we provide them with training, assistance, and the tools needed to ensure family continuity they are more likely to reciprocate and provide our organizations with their expertise to maintain our business continuity.

Bibliography

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