

ENSURING ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE AND EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING THROUGH CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

*PRACTICAL STRATEGIES TO EDUCATE AND PROTECT
EMPLOYEES BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER CRISES*

A Report by Gerald Lewis, PhD and Varolii Corporation

While data and communications integrity is fundamental to a viable business continuity plan, in order to be truly resilient, companies also must consider how to protect the most critical component of their organizations — the workforce itself.

INFORMATION—THE LIFEBLOOD DURING A CRISIS

Whether it's a family, government agency, or place of employment, most organizations could improve their plans for communicating during a crisis.

Comparing the workplace to a living system, the information which flows within departments might be considered the blood that keeps the system functioning. And just as a patient may need multiple transfusions after surgery, a company may need to repeat their communications efforts in order to be effective. In addition, accuracy is vital, as providing the wrong information during a crisis can be as damaging as... carrying out a transfusion using the wrong blood type.

GETTING THE WORD OUT

The Information Coordinator is a critical member of the Crisis Management Team. Depending upon the situation, this role could be assigned to an employee in Human Resources, the Legal or Security Department. More important than their department affiliation is their ability to respond to questions and concerns from stakeholders with varying priorities, including employees, family members, customers, business partners, and the media.

Below are some suggestions for disseminating information during a crisis:

- **One Dial:** During the initial phase, a “one dial” system of sending messages should be utilized to keep people updated.
- **Available 800 Number Information:** An 800 number with a pre-recorded message should be set up (prior to an incident) and posted for all employees. It should be updated every 1-2 hours with a time acknowledgment (e.g. “*This report was issued at 10am on Wednesday, April 9th, 2008*”). If available, the same information should be posted on the company website.
- **FAQs:** As a pro-active step, prior to an incident, FAQs (frequently asked questions) covering crisis situations, roles, responsibilities and resources should be posted on the website.
- **Face-to-Face:** People need “face-to-face” contact, so implement as many teleconferences, videotaped messages and informational meetings as possible to keep stakeholders informed.
- **Visible Management:** Supervisors and managers should remain visible and available to employees.
- **Reference Cards:** All employees should receive a wallet-sized laminated card with the following information in the case of an evacuation:

- Return to their desk to retrieve personal belongings
- The evacuation path and outside meeting destination
- What to do once they are outside
- The number for the information hotline
- Outside support agencies, such as state emergency management, Cross, EAP, etc.
- Company website and where information is posted

IT IS NOT JUST WHAT YOU SAY, BUT HOW, WHEN, TO WHOM, HOW OFTEN AND HOW LONG YOU SAY IT

In order for information to be of significant value to any system at times of crisis, it must have the following qualities:

- **Consistency:** Information must be consistent and accurate from source to source
- **Redundancy:** A variety of sources for accessing information should be available. Emails, website postings, “800” numbers to recorded messages, face-to-face information sessions, newsletters, and texting are viable methods
- **Frequency:** During crises information changes quickly. Therefore, it is important to update messages frequently
- **Circularity:** Communication is a circular sharing of information. There must be a method of receiving people’s concerns and questions and responding back with reliable, consistent information
- **Continuity:** Oftentimes at the beginning of a crisis there is a flurry of information, which then drops off. As will be discussed in the next section, crises can tend to roll on for awhile, and people need different types of information from stage to stage. Maintaining communications continuity during all stages of a crisis is critical.

It is essential to communicate clearly and consistently with the following stakeholders and to assume that it will find its way to the media.

- Employees
- Customers
- Government/community leaders
- Families of employees
- Insurance companies/lawyers
- Media (press releases)

PHASES OF A CRISIS

A crisis doesn't begin and end with the event. The life-cycle of a crisis often starts before the incident and continues long after. Whether it's the death of a loved one, a surgical procedure, a divorce, a layoff, floods, 9/11 or warfare, victims go through stages and phases of recovery. These are not rigid parameters, but rather characteristics that may be experienced in the process.

Further, not all people have the same reactions or proceed at the same rate through these phases. And this not only holds true for individuals, but groups as well, **such as family, community or work organizations.**

Survival phase (1-3 days):

During this time of acute reaction the individual may be in an extreme state of emotional (and/or physical) distress. For example, a patient undergoing an operation would first be in surgery, then in recovery. They would be receiving medications and would have a limited capacity to take care of their biological needs. Another illustration would be an individual who receives word of the sudden and unexpected death of a loved one, and the emotional impact of such news may render them unable to process information and proceed with many of their daily activities. Or, as in the case with a large-scale catastrophe like an earthquake or 9/11, people are just trying to survive and connect with family and may be in a state of "shell shock."

Even the community and rescue efforts can go through a stage of disorganization before a coordinated plan of action comes into play. This phase may last (roughly) from 0 to 72 hours after an incident. During this phase, people usually focus on having their basic needs met, such as the need for food, shelter, relief from pain and connection with family and friends. It is a time for quiet consolation, a compassionate presence and caring for basic biological needs. Often, a work organization will choose to offer psychological first aid to assist their staff during this period.

Support (1-2 weeks):

During this phase, the individual or group begins to get an accurate assessment of the nature and impact of the incident. The state of shock gradually diminishes and reality begins to set in. Accurate information continues to remain a critical component to re-establishing a sense of normalcy.

In the case of the death of a loved one, funeral plans are made and family comes together. If there has been a large scale incident, rescue and recovery operations are in full swing, shelters have been set up, and emergency management departments have developed an operational strategy. In the instance of a patient who has been hospitalized, they are now being transferred from recovery or the ICU to a regular medical floor, rehabilitation center or even home. This is the phase where professional service providers (funeral directors, emergency management personnel, social service agencies, clergy, temporary shelters,

etc) are being utilized. In addition, family and social support networks become very involved. For a work organization, this period is when psychological first aid usually transitions to other support modalities.

Adjustment (2-6 months):

3-6 months after the crisis comes the period of adjustment, which is often the most difficult phase. This stage involves making the transition back to “normal” life. Whatever the event — the death of a loved one, surgery, or even a dramatic catastrophe — there comes a time when “life must go on.” Unfortunately, it is often a time when support drops away.

- Funerals are over and condolence visits and notes stop coming
- Stitches are removed and physical therapy has begun
- The layoff has taken effect, unemployment is in place and the arduous task of looking for a new job has begun
- Floods have receded, and now it is time to pick through the rubble, deal with insurance agencies and other bureaucracies
- The workplace is indicating that it is time to return to your usual and expected duties and responsibilities
- Children need their parents now more than ever
- Bills must be paid

This phase may last up to a year after the crisis as seasons, holidays, birthdays and anniversaries are celebrated; as scars form and the former patient copes with the reality of disfigurement or disability; as homes are repaired, rebuilt or relocated; as job interviews are conducted, offers are awaited and hopes are raised and lowered.

This is a time when the work organization may experience a decrease in morale, and an increase in absenteeism, along with individual disability claims and a variety of other personnel “symptoms” that may dramatically impact the total work organization.

GROUPS CAN GO THROUGH STAGES AND PHASES

Let’s take the example of a layoff in an organization. The first stage is survival; people find out who is going to survive the lay off and who is not. After that there may be a brief support phase where some efforts are made to help employees cope with the situation. Those who are laid-off certainly experience a significant crisis, but they may have access to outplacement services, can probably obtain unemployment benefits, and will likely move on to an employment search.

Survivors of layoffs often experience survivor guilt, anger at management and a feeling that they have a lack of support. Further, there is both the spoken and unspoken

expectation that the organization is to “return to business as usual.” Adjustment or reactions on the part of the remaining workers is not acknowledged, expected or managed. It is important to address the services and strategies that can help organizations manage during this critical phase.

Resolution (1-2 years):

Resolution is the phase when people begin to adjust to their new life. They are no longer bumping into the harsh realities of the trauma on a daily basis. They have begun to establish new coping strategies, and have found reliable resources and support. The event may no longer seem to be their primary focus. However, there is still a significant residual from the original event. For example, the folks who lost houses during the hurricane in New Orleans may no longer be traumatized by Katrina, but many are still dealing with the ongoing traumas of losing services from FEMA or not being able to receive insurance compensation.

Re(dis)covery (2+years):

Re(dis)covery is the term that this author uses rather than *recovery*. **Recovery is synonymous** with healing, and in the case of a crisis, the term implies a return to a state prior to the incident. Unfortunately, for most people who experience significant crises or tragedies in their lives, this is usually not possible. Consider the case of an individual recovering from an event like a divorce or death, or an organization recovering from a lay-off or a community recovering from a flood or an earthquake; these types of incidents are “life changers.” As desirable as it may be, things do not “return to normal.” Rather there is a painful ordeal when the system struggles to resolve and recover.

Part of what makes the recovery process difficult is acknowledging that things are different. Things will never be the same. The acceptance of this is often a crucial step in the healing process. What we are really talking about is the formation of a new self concept or identity that incorporates the incident into the fabric of the individual’s life, the family’s life, the corporations life or as in the case with 9/11 the country’s life.

CRISIS AND TRAUMA FORGE NEW CULTURAL SHIFTS, NEW DYNAMICS, NEW EXPERIENCES AND A DISCOVERY OF A NEW IDENTITY

In much the same way, a work organization would not recover in the sense of returning to its original parameters, cultural dynamics and organizational paradigms. Instead, after a certain amount of time and the resolving of new boundaries, relationships, inter- and intra-departmental communications and conflicts, the organization rumbles and grumbles to form a new identity.

Some personnel stay while others move on. People who survive these transitions often describe it as a tumultuous time fraught with stress, disorganization, in-fighting and a sense of uncertainty. The culture becomes fragmented or diminished. It no longer provides the same sense of stability and consistency. There is usually a time of turmoil before a new

organization – a new cultural reality – is in place. During this period of cultural fragmentation and re-integration, effective communications are critical to mitigate the damage and disruption caused by these radical changes.

Note: If organizations do make an effort to respond to the human factor, it is usually a very time limited and often half-hearted endeavor with a minimal provision of HR or EAP services metered out during the first week after an organizational transition. Unfortunately, it is often a “too little, too soon” situation that provides little benefit to the individuals or the organization.

ROI=IOR: RETURN ON INVESTMENT=INVESTMENT ON RESILIENCY

Often organizations develop a “show me the money” paradigm with respect to any investment in new programs; this is a short term and myopic perspective. BC or resiliency planning should be viewed as a safety policy and as such cannot generate a return... unless there is a crisis. Even then, the focus is on damage control and mitigating the financial and emotional impact, not on making money for the organization.

With respect to viewing resiliency from a safety paradigm, most people understand the necessity for and the investment in virus protection for computers, sprinkler systems, hardhats, seatbelts for cars and an array of insurance policies. Yet organizations often blanch when faced with investing in a resiliency plan, especially with respect to the “human technology.”

Yet these investments are paltry when compared to the investment made to protect organizational data. In closing, communication is the life blood of an organization and should be viewed as being every bit as essential as any other operational component of doing business.

A ‘TRADITIONAL’ BUSINESS CONTINUITY FOCUS ON IT & INFRASTRUCTURE

It is a commonly accepted generalization that today’s definition of business continuity evolved from IT’s approach to disaster recovery or Y2K functions. As a result, the initial BC focus was placed on systems and infrastructure. Plans stipulated protective steps such as redundant data centers, telecom capabilities, and IT resources – protecting technical and data resources.

As a result, many companies were reasonably protected from an IT perspective and were prepared to keep their businesses running in the event of data center fires, system failures, power failures and the like. So from a technology and IT standpoint, they were in business.

THE EVOLUTION OF BUSINESS CONTINUITY

Over the last few years there have been some significant changes that have challenged the traditional IT systems-based approach to BC management:

Risk assessments have changed based on recently-rising threats of hurricanes, pandemic influenza, and terrorist attacks.

Executive level visibility of business continuity has increased significantly. It has risen in stature from an “IT issue” to a strategic priority with increased expectations.

Continuity-related regulations have become more numerous and more stringent.

For many organizations, the idea of operating in a global marketplace has become a reality, which has necessitated steps to ensure continuity of operations and employee accountability across a widely dispersed workforce.

When your business continuity plans are fundamentally focused on maintaining IT, network infrastructure, and systems reliability, you risk not being able to protect the people resources – your human capital – to take advantage of the highly reliable systems you’ve deployed. Yet BC plans, the business itself, and the technology are all predicated on the availability of the workforce. Nonetheless, the time, resources and investment made to protect the workforce during an emergency often pales in comparison to for the investments in technology and infrastructure protection.

A SHIFT OF BUSINESS CONTINUITY FOCUS TOWARD PEOPLE

A recent Forrester Research report¹ defines **Workforce Continuity** as: A strategy that provides for connecting a disbursed workforce to the applications, data and communications they need in instances where an event prevents them from performing a corporate function.

The report also highlighted research among BC planners and decision makers which illustrated that while almost **70%** of their organizations have plans to recover data centers and communications, less than **25%** feel that they have planned to support, connect and recover their workforces.

The fact that significantly fewer companies felt they had effectively planned to support and recover their workforces during a crisis reinforces further the critical need for organizations to shift their BC planning, tactics and infrastructure toward the needs of their people.

¹ ‘Workforce Continuity Is A Critical Strategy In Your Business Continuity Plan’. Stephanie Balaouras, with Simon Yates and Christine E. Atwood. Forrester Research, December 27, 2006

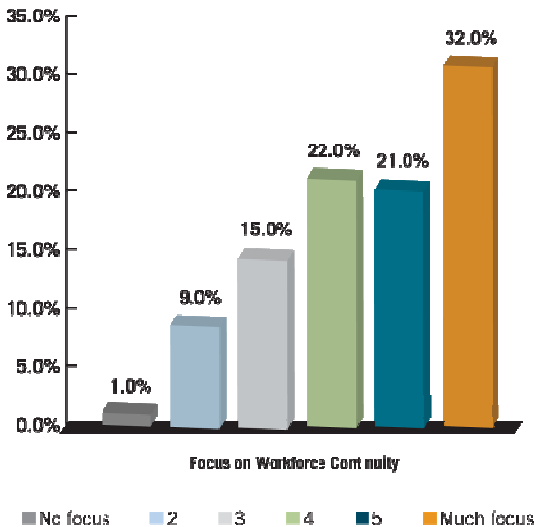
First, from a humanitarian perspective, planning for, protecting, and recovering your employees is simply the right thing to do. Employees show increased loyalty to a company that has demonstrated its concern for their safety and well being. A well-prepared, well-informed person responds more effectively during an emergency. Ironically, though the workforce is the single biggest monetary investment most companies make, the time, energy and resources allotted to ensuring its availability and protection during an emergency situation is typically low.

The Industry feedback from the recent Trends in Business Continuity and Crisis Communications Survey* shows that while most companies view workforce continuity as an important of their BC plan, most organizations are not fully prepared to execute people-focused BC tactics, nor do their BC communications target the entire workforce.

The Shift to People

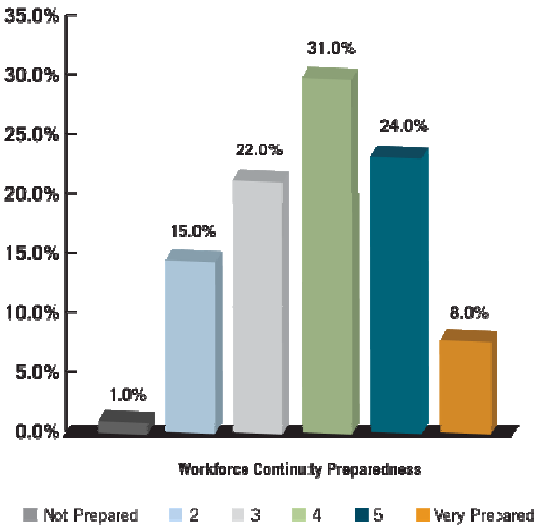
Industry feedback from the recent *Trends in Business Continuity and Crisis Communications Survey*; Responses from 106 BC practitioners from various industries. Varolii Corp., Sept. 2007

Chart A: Focus on Workforce Continuity in organization's BC plan



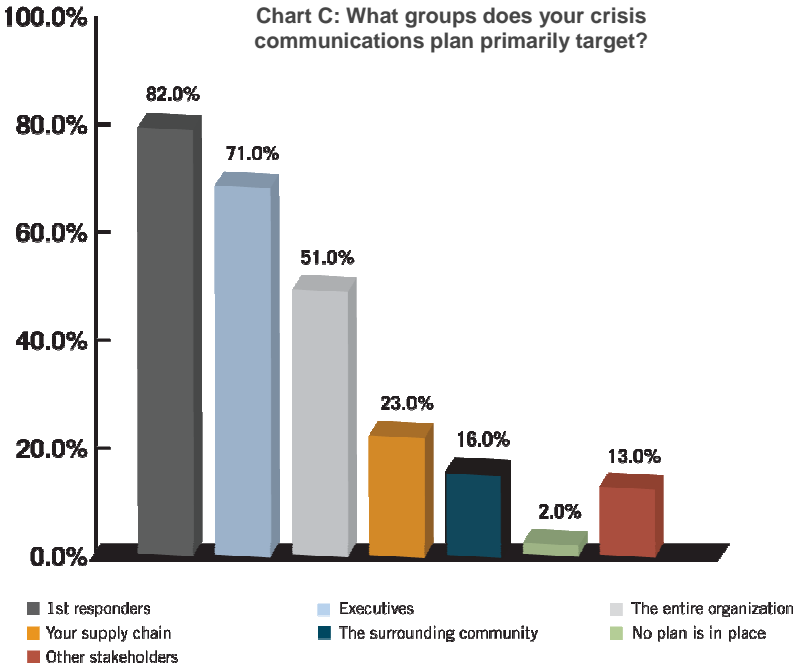
Over 50% of respondents indicated that their BC plan places a very high focus on this aspect of Business Continuity.

Chart B: Preparedness to account for, protect, manage employees in a crisis



69% indicated that they are not very prepared or are just moderately prepared to cover employees in a crisis; only 8% indicated that they were very prepared

The Shift to People

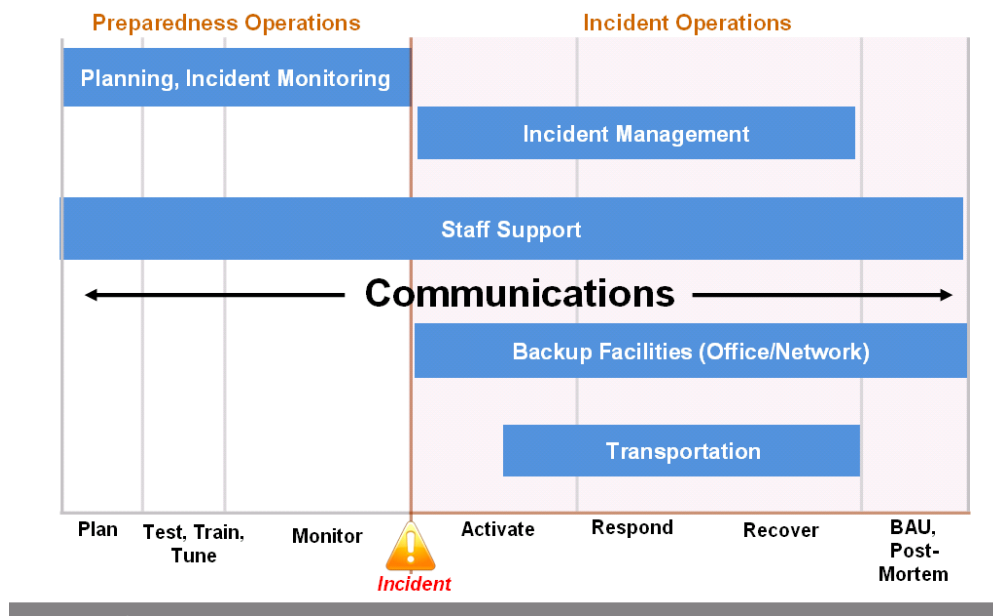


Most respondents surveyed indicated that their crisis communications plan targeted First Responders (82%) and executives (71%) – both groups are traditionally designated to be at the ‘front lines’ of managing a crisis.

THE “WHOLE” HUMAN CONTINUITY BUSINESS PROBLEM, AND WHY COMMUNICATIONS IS THE MOST CRITICAL COMPONENT

For non-business continuity professionals (e.g. the executive management team), it’s easy to confuse crisis management or incident response with BC. In other words, many think about BC only as managing through an incident. In reality, the crisis itself is just one part of the entire business problem as it applies to the workforce and involves much more than traditional first response activities.

The “Whole” Human Continuity Business Problem



As shown in the illustration, a truly human continuity-focused organization conducts business continuity activities as part of their “business as usual” activities in order to effectively prepare for an unplanned event, enable faster recovery, and generally boost organizational resiliency. “Business as usual” activities include BC planning, monitoring of potential threats, and optimizing, training, and testing of plans, procedures and tools.

Workforce continuity communications belong within the context of the entire BC effort, not only incident management. Later stage and post-crisis BC activities are critical as well. These activities include informing and instructing the entire organization about the event, gauging work availability, assessing impact of the crisis, and taking steps to bring the organization back to “business as usual.”

The element that ties all of these activities together across the entire Human Continuity spectrum is communications. To illustrate why, let’s take a look at what you need to do when an incident occurs in the context of this larger human continuity function:

Typically the first thing to do is communicate with your first responder teams, activate them, and inform the executive team.

Next, you inform and instruct the rest of the management team, and perhaps the heads of individual business units.

As the incident progresses, employees also need information – and perhaps more importantly you must account for your employees whereabouts and well being while determining their availability to help out with the situation. Clearly, communications plays a critical role in this process.

Finally, when your organization returns to business as usual you should conduct a de-brief or post-mortem to assess how effectively the organization responded, and generate “lessons learned” to help improve your processes and be better prepared in the future.

OBJECTIVES OF WORKFORCE CONTINUITY COMMUNICATIONS

Now that we’ve illustrated how communications can be a key enabler for effective business continuity management, let’s delve further into the specific objectives of Workforce Continuity Communications.

The challenges associated with achieving workforce continuity during an unplanned event are significant, and can include the following:

- **A dispersed workforce.** Employees may be located globally, traveling, or working remotely from home or elsewhere. This makes the task of delivering ongoing, timely, effective communications significantly more complex.
- **A need to support a significantly greater scope**—larger groups of people and a longer period of communications, which can last for years in some cases.
- **The variability of human behavior.** It’s difficult to determine how *people* will behave in crisis situations. For the most part, we know what’s going to happen to a server if it loses power - in fact, our knowledge of how one server will respond is generally applicable to every other server. Yet this doesn’t hold true for people — the way one person responds to a disaster or a crisis is most likely very different from how your colleague will respond, making effective communications design a non-trivial challenge.

With these issues in mind, communications designed to overcome the barriers to workforce continuity should fulfill the following objectives:

- **Inform and educate (pre-crisis):** A critical activity of workforce continuity communications actually occurs before the crisis. Informing and educating the employee base about programs, threats, expectations, accepted behaviors and actions will increase

the likelihood that the intended response to an emergency will be achieved by making these situations at least a bit more familiar and through the virtue of repetition.

- **Activate and instruct (intra-crisis):** At the time of the incident, communications are used to move employees into action, whether activating teams to manage the crisis or instructing employees to take specific action.
- **Account and adjust (post-crisis):** Post-event communications focus on accounting for losses and lets employees and others know you are operating under normal business conditions, providing updates as normal business activities resume.

Finally, there are many notable reasons why workforce continuity communications is critical to organizational resiliency—here are a few:

- **Decreases downtime** and helps mitigate loss of worker productivity
- **Helps gather information** on employee whereabouts and work availability
- **Provides useful information** during an incident, such as HR policies, employee assistance programs, and public sector updates
- **Helps to allay fears** and avoid the rumor mill internally *and* externally
- **Assists in deployment determinations** for available resources to keep key business functions running

WORKFORCE CONTINUITY COMMUNICATIONS: BEST PRACTICES

How can organizations begin to optimize their critical communications toward the human side of BC? The following sections highlight some steps to help protect, connect and account for your people in an unplanned event.

Best Practice 1:

Develop a Solid BC Communications Plan

A solid, well-publicized crisis communications plan will help keep people calm informed and connected. This can help mitigate loss during a crisis. In addition, clear policies and protocols make it easier for people to know what to do over the course of an unplanned event. A well-defined communications plan will cover:

- **Who** needs notification? Who decides notification is required? Who will be the spokesperson?
- **What** needs to be communicated? What do you want people to do? What are the triggers?
- **When** do you start calling? When do you stop? When do you update?
- **How** will you inform your people?

Best Practice 2: Employ Blended Communications

Communications associated with workforce continuity planning must blend both inbound and outbound communications capabilities to link the organization together. Blending ensures more resilient business communications by providing a “social” infrastructure that offers a soft landing in hard times.

This blended form of communications is particularly critical during a large scale event. During these events, it’s imperative to close the loop – to obtain reports back from outlying staff and other stakeholders, as well as provide information back to those individuals.

- **Outbound communications** are critical for notifying workers of an unplanned event, providing accurate, tension-defusing information, and delivering critical status information.
- **Inbound communications** enable workers to report on status and well being from the field, let others know of urgent needs, and provide on the spot assessments of work-readiness in the field – in short, inbound communications aid organizations in developing a real-time “picture” of what’s happening with employees. This provides a further safety net for workers, both from an organizational and psychological standpoint.

Best Practice 3: Message Management - Content and Channel Selections, Validation, Interaction

During an emergency, people may be confused and distracted. Precisely what you say and how you deliver your message is critical to ensure clarity during an emergency. Best practice recommendations in these areas include:

- Provide regular update and status information
- Avoid over-communicating — it dilutes important information
- Use multiple communications channels to enable message prioritization
- Send time-critical messages by phone
- Send follow up messages or non-critical status messages via e-mail or bulletins
- Reference other available device channels in all communications to ensure employees have these in mind during a very stressful time
- Pay specific attention to tone of voice and pace. During an emergency, the simple sound of a known voice speaking calmly and deliberately can reduce uncertainty and stress.

Finally, a key factor in the success of the communications plan is engaging the executive team for collaboration and decision-making. For example, since it’s critical to determine exactly when certain notifications are necessary, it’s important to work with the executive

team – even engaging them in test exercises and run-throughs – to ensure that they are familiar with the plan, and are clear about its objectives and their role.

Best Practice 4:

Testing—and Testing Again!

Consistent, regular testing is essential to the success of any communications plan, regardless of design. During testing, you will test the plan itself, the physical infrastructure, as well as familiarizing employees and other potential (external) notification recipients.

When you test, it's important to simulate real conditions. It's critical to find a balance between having people accustomed to the system and having them ignore it because it's so routine. For this reason, raising awareness of what a test vs. an actual event sounds and looks like is key. Finally, it's extremely valuable to create venues for participant feedback. By giving participants input into the actual deployment, it invests them and makes them more committed to the plan's overall success.

Best Practice 5:

Technology Best Practices

Above, we described best practices in communications. Similarly, there are a wide range of best practices for enabling technologies. These include:

- Automation to ensure timely delivery of communications with verifiable audit trails
- Verifying delivery and reliability metrics
- Using a blend of both inbound and outbound multi-channel interactive communications

Using an automated communications system, senior management can stay abreast of a developing situation in real time, perhaps automatically bridging key executives into a conference call for live real-time collaboration and decision making. The fast, flexible decision-making this system enables can prove invaluable during the fluid, shifting nature of most emergency situations.

Workforce Continuity Communications Testing Steps

- Internally market the communications capability
- Measure results
- Responsiveness
- Effectiveness
- Test expected/unexpected scenarios: weather incidents, IT/network outages, transit strikes, pandemic flu, power outages, etc.
- Test activation methods
- Contact data accuracy
- Solicit feedback from recipients, incorporate it back into your BC plan
- Planned tests to raise participation rates

Additionally, interactive capabilities provide the ability to create an audit trail of their decisions, e.g. “press one to confirm that this message should be sent to all employees”. This will require that executives are included in the training and testing of the service, and perhaps more importantly, are bought into the communications plan.

Another key capability of an automated outbound and inbound communications system is that it can act as a message center or “virtual rally point” that can be accessed through a range of channels. Multi-channel access helps manage the typical spikes in traffic as employees, customers, partners and others attempt to learn what’s happening and understand what they need to do.

To provide for this capability, organizations are turning to fully managed communications services that offer both the bandwidth and the communications expertise necessary for successful deployment. Some services are offered in a managed, hosted environment, sometimes called Software as a Service (SaaS). Unlike premise-based systems, SaaS services do not require significant capital outlays. With the improvement in network capabilities, reliability and features that has occurred over the past few years, SaaS deployments are now recognized as a viable, highly reliable and more cost-effective alternative to premise-based systems.

Properly designed, the outbound component provides clear, useful information immediately as necessary. This information not only informs — it helps minimize abrupt spikes in inbound calls, primarily from employees, vendors or customers calling for general information or status. In parallel, the inbound component offers customized information to callers, the ability to leave messages, or requests for assistance, all supported by a robust reporting capability that enables the organization to more effectively manage resources, more clearly understand where help is most required, and focus closely on the people and assets most in need of assistance.

Fully managed SaaS solutions, with their built-in redundant infrastructure, geographically redundant data centers and multiple communications providers, are considered high availability, and are explicitly designed to manage not only the delivery of outbound, “informational” communications, but to cope with extreme bursts of inbound calls, such as from worried, isolated staff attempting to establish communications.

And, by automating key communication tasks using existing data driven, interactive technologies, these “rally points” can be employed as a cost effective strategy that both complements and augments other elements of your business continuity plan.

CONCLUSION: PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST ENSURES WORKFORCE CONTINUITY- AND IS GOOD BUSINESS

Placing your people and their needs first is not just the right thing to do – it's a critical enabler of organizational resilience during an emergency. Developing an effective, blended communications strategy is a critical component in protecting and helping manage your workforce – and keeping your business running. It also can help with efforts to maintain supply chain relationships and ensure that all stakeholders are kept informed of developments in a timely fashion.

Effective communications programs can further assist organizations in overcoming the challenges of prolonged absenteeism, degradation of public infrastructure across both the organization and supply chain, as well as the challenge of working with customers who themselves are likely to be out of touch.

These plans enable stakeholders to be in a better position to manage the communications, collaboration and efforts that will help maintain the organization in the face of such an event.

While high reliability, high availability automation is critical to developing a plan that enables rapid, interactive communications, equally critical are such elements as developing a best practice based plan, a rigorous test methodology, and ensuring a high level of visibility at both the staff and executive planning level.

Nobody – not even business continuity professionals – enjoys thinking about the difficulties that emergency situations can cause. It's more useful to focus on the positive aspects of what can be done to protect and connect your people, retain organizational resilience, and mitigate loss.

Some Advantages Brought About by Automated Critical Communications

- Employees who have identified themselves by accessing an automated inbound system can later be contacted to help co-workers who live nearby
- Members of response teams can be directed to begin, refocus or suspend their efforts based on the data received from the field via automated inbound communications
- Organizations can upload maps to a Web-based inbound service to provide evacuation plans or directions to new employee work sites
- Employees can call in to update their contact for more accurate outbound messaging
- Organizations can contact authorities and mobilize appropriate resources for employees who need help
- Employees can call in for corporate network status information. If the network is down, the company can let employees know when it is restored so that they can resume their responsibilities

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Dr. Lewis is an international consultant, trainer, and author who works with public agencies and private businesses on behavioral health, work, and organizational issues. His focus is on facilitating organizational recovery and resiliency, with an emphasis on "people-recovery". He is also a licensed Clinical Psychologist and has been practicing in the Boston area since 1977.

Dr. Lewis has addressed government agencies, treatment facilities, schools and private businesses on a wide range of work, behavioral health and organizational issues. He provides litigation consultation/expert testimony in the areas of: Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sexual harassment, workplace violence, fitness for duty, negligent retention/termination, Americans with Disabilities, malpractice, depression, drugs and alcohol issues, etc.

Dr. Lewis is a prolific writer and has authored numerous articles and three books: Critical Incident Stress and Trauma in the Workplace (1994) and Workplace Hostility: Myth & Reality (co-author, 1998). Organizational Crisis Management: The Human Factor (March 2006).

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Varolii's business continuity clients include leading companies in financial services, healthcare, utilities, communications, and airline and travel sectors. We partner with our clients to provide an assurance that they can reliably communicate before, during and after any planned or unplanned event.

Varolii's timely, urgent communications facilitate incident collaboration and response, and include calls to action and prescriptive next steps, ensuring all stakeholders are informed, and managing workforce continuity. During emergency situations, we help companies communicate with the right people at the right time, with the right information.

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