



Getting personal with business continuity

Five critical success factors in overcoming workforce disruptions






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Executive summary

An event that disrupts your business, no matter how limited or broad in scope, can undermine your ability to remain competitive—and maybe even to survive. But while disaster recovery planning for your facilities and technology is critical to your business continuity, you also need to fully consider the impact of a disruption on your most valuable asset: your employees.

What would happen to your business if your workers were unable to perform their jobs? If critical operations are broken in one area, do you have a well-tested plan to transition the work—and possibly your staff—to another, unaffected area? Severe weather could impact mobility and keep employees from getting to your facility. A power outage could prevent workers from getting online or taking critical phone calls. Pandemics, terrorism, and natural and manmade disasters can be life-threatening or hinder your workforce from its ability to continue business in multiple ways.

IBM provides both business and technical services to help organizations better prepare to respond to events that may cause a significant business disruption. This paper shares five critical areas in which IBM can help you build human factors into your continuity strategy to help ensure that your workforce, and therefore your business, remains resilient in the face of adversity.



The threat of a pandemic flu to workforce productivity, combined with reduced staffing and the risk of natural or manmade disasters, make it imperative to consider employees' needs within your business continuity plan.

The perfect storm: Are you ready?

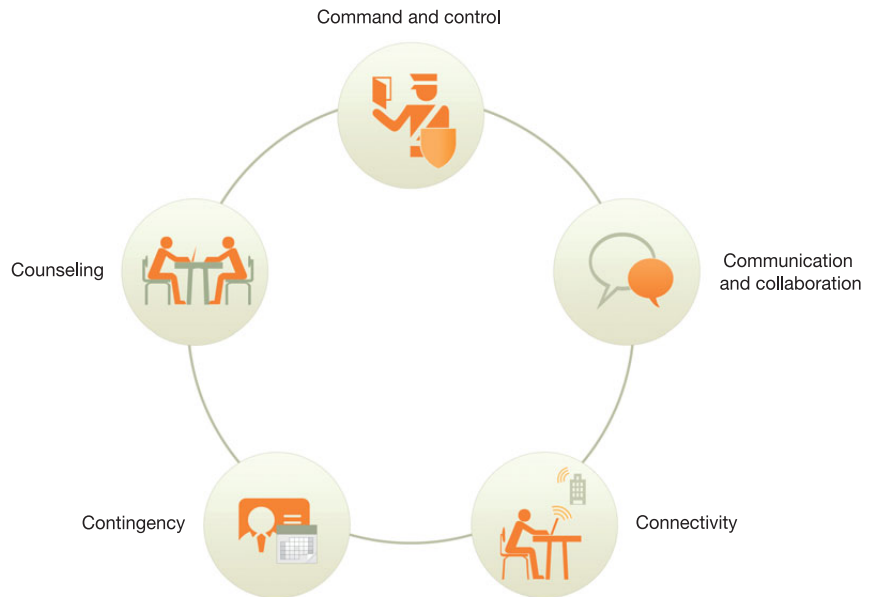
It's five o'clock on a Friday afternoon in September, the height of hurricane season, and you're finishing quarterly reports. Your organization has just experienced another huge round of layoffs, leaving you with a sparsely staffed IT department. You can't help but worry about who has the skills to assume the duties of your departing database administrator. That reminds you that you'll also need to replace your long-time human resources director who plans to retire next year. And at the same time, you're trying to write a corporate instruction that will allow employees to work from home if your area is affected by the pandemic that world health leaders have predicted. Meanwhile, local authorities have just issued a voluntary evacuation request of the county where your primary manufacturing facility is located, because a Category 5 hurricane is barreling toward it.


Companies worldwide are being compelled to revisit their business continuity strategies—in part because of the World Health Organization's declaration of a flu pandemic in June 2009, with the highest alert level for widespread human infection.* The pandemic threat to workforce productivity, mainly because of absenteeism, is compounded by workforce reductions resulting from the economic downturn. Add to that the ever present event-driven risks of natural and manmade disasters, and you have the perfect storm brewing. Your business continuity plan undoubtedly addresses how to keep your business systems running, but does it consider the needs of your workforce as well? From the obvious requirement of workers being able to resume their jobs, to their basic everyday needs of food and shelter, many components must be factored into your plan.

To adequately prepare for workforce continuity during any business disruption, incorporate these five success factors:

- **Command and control:** How will decisions be made and who will make them? What are your plans for succession? How will you interact with local authorities and adhere to possible restrictions in travel?
- **Communication:** How will you exchange accurate and timely information with your workforce and the public? How will you sustain relationships with customers, suppliers and partners needed to conduct business?
- **Connectivity:** How will your workforce regain access to information and technology to resume tasks—possibly at an alternate location?
- **Contingency:** Have you identified critical skills and provided cross-training for crucial roles? How will you ensure continuation of services to your workforce?
- **Counseling:** How will you track the well-being of your workforce during a disruption and provide resources to manage the emotional implications associated with trauma?

Five critical areas in workforce continuity planning





Succession planning and assigning backup responsibilities can help you ensure someone is available to fill key roles in a crisis situation.

Establish command and control

If a sudden disruption threatens your business continuity, who will be in charge and how will decisions be made? Assigning the key responsibility of decision making to a single person can be risky. If that person becomes unavailable, individuals at all levels may be forced to take on leadership roles or increased responsibilities. And those individuals may have little or no preparation.

The wise approach is to consider all potential scenarios and rapidly identify alternate decision makers to lead your workforce and resume operations. You want to make sure you have assigned and clearly communicated the order of succession or backup for these roles. A succession plan helps you avoid any essential skill gaps in your workforce—which is important whether in a crisis situation or conducting business as usual.


Consider dividing decision-making responsibility. Global enterprises may delegate decision making to point persons in each geographic area, each of whom can adapt the business continuity framework to localized operations and their unique situations. Incorporate flexibility to adapt to unexpected situations and the various ways these situations could affect your workforce. The lead decision maker should have the role of making adjustments as necessary and communicating these changes to the rest of the workforce.

Also consider how to provision additional access with proper security controls for your business processes, applications and data. If a key business person is unavailable, a backup will have to be authorized, and an audit trail of authority and access maintained. When possible, these authorizations should be made in conjunction with the current separation of duties matrices mandated by your regulatory requirements. There is a tendency during a crisis to bypass data-retention policies and revert to informal processes and communications, so make sure you document the decisions made and the information available at that time that led to the decision.


Enable communication and collaboration

A vital component of an effective business continuity plan, your communication strategy is closely linked to command and control. For instance, when civil authorities are involved, you have to make sure your instructions do not contradict public announcements.

A communication strategy employs different messages and channels for each of your target communities, such as your internal workforce, business partners and the public. All communications should provide clear direction and establish leadership. Once you have identified and isolated the crisis, the communications should offer assurance that you are gaining control and executing a plan to return to normal conditions. Ideally, communications should use pre-established channels to each of your target audiences and leverage existing plans for how your workforce will be notified of restrictions and expectations.



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Using a hosted communication platform to contact your workers and other stakeholders through e-mail, Short Message Service (SMS), fax and voice as well as other communication tools can enable you to collect and distribute information during the event, and potentially accelerate recovery times.

As you devise a communication strategy, consider the following:

- Does your company have a procedure for issuing instructions to workers at home?
- Are there ways for the key decision maker to communicate with your workforce? Are there backup methods in case the primary ways (for example, phone connections) are unavailable?
- Do members of your workforce have a way to reach someone in charge to inquire about the situation and provide an update of their own situations and availability?
- Have you prepared communication templates, with agreed upon language that can be configured to the actual crisis?
- Have you prepared key authorization messages in advance?

A crisis notification service may also be helpful during an emergency, when normal lines of communication fail. Using a hosted communication platform to contact your workers and other stakeholders through e-mail, Short Message Service (SMS), fax and voice and various communication tools can enable you to collect and distribute information during the event, and potentially accelerate recovery times.

Workers' family members and the media also need a way to inquire about a disruption that affects your workforce, so you'll want to consider a strategy for responding to queries, as well as an external communication strategy to proactively address media and outside questions. Your message should be clear and concise, and take into account the situation's level of severity and human emotions. Maintain a predictable schedule for updates to your workforce as well as the surrounding community.

Blogs, wikis and social sites can be effective channels to update those external to your organization about how you are handling the crisis.

Social networking tools offer another way to reconnect with your workforce, issue instructions or send an important message—perhaps even directing workers where to get help. Blogs, wikis and social sites can easily be accessed by your workers through a Web browser. These forms of communication can also be used as effective public relations channels to update those external to your organization about how you are handling the crisis—or even to dispel rumors.

Communication plays a major role in preserving relationships and collaborating with customers, suppliers and partners. Because your suppliers' ability to deliver could also be affected by a disruption, working with them is essential to making sure your workforce has what it needs to continue or restart business operations.

Another aspect of collaboration includes how you will interface with civil authorities. Your plan should include the flexibility to work with local authorities and adhere to possible restrictions they mandate, including building access, travel restrictions and curfews. Collaborating with civil authorities may also involve participation in their drills and exercises that test responses to emergencies. Along these lines, you should test all facets of your workforce continuity plan—including your internal and external crisis communication methods as well as how you collaborate with vendors and suppliers—to make sure your plan is current and reliable.


Questions to consider when developing a workforce continuity strategy:

- Can you access key decision makers?
- Are there safe, alternate locations that workers may report to?
- Will your workforce be available, and will workers be focused?
- If workers are unable to reach corporate facilities, can they work from home?
- How can you help workers make sure their families are safe and well?
- Will concerned parties be able to contact the company to confirm workers' safety? Is there a system to handle these inquiries?
- How will you disseminate information to your workforce, customers, suppliers and the public?
- How will you interact with the media and public agencies?
- Will cell phone and other communication networks function adequately in a power outage and if so, for how long?
- How will transportation restrictions affect workers' ability to perform?
- Will government-imposed curfews affect nightly shift workers?

Maintain connectivity

A return to normal communication channels is aided by re-establishing connectivity. After workers' immediate needs have been met in the wake of a disruption, you can then focus on what they require in order to continue working.

Remote, secure access to necessary systems can help keep your workers productive, especially if they have to remain home for long periods of time due to illness in the family, a pandemic threat or if they have been displaced from their normal place of work for another reason. If your workers simply can't be at a corporate facility but aren't hampered in any other way, remote access should be a significant component of your business continuity plan.



Cloud computing and virtualization technologies are cost-effective tools to incorporate into your remote-access plan.

For those working from home, make sure you provide high-speed Internet access, voice lines and the ability to cross a secure gateway. Cloud computing can further support connectivity objectives by delivering applications independently from the underlying infrastructure, so you can put resources where they need to be in order for your workforce to access them and continue business operations.

Virtualization is another solution to making your organization more resilient and productive in the face of short-term or small-scale disruptions. By storing a virtual copy of a worker's desktop on a remote server rather than on the worker's hard drive, you can allow access to that desktop from any location. Desktop virtualization can increase the effectiveness of your remote-access plan by enabling your workforce to access business-critical applications from home or an alternate work location.

A virtualized infrastructure can ease worker access and hasten disaster recovery

When a large European bank acquired several new branches, it needed a solution for employees at various locations across Eastern Europe to access its trading systems headquartered in Austria. At the same time, the bank needed to implement a disaster recovery plan for its dispersed back-office PCs, which traders use to buy and sell securities—a critical part of the bank's business. It had been operating without a disaster recovery plan, so in the event of a catastrophic event such as a fire, the bank might have to suspend trading and customer services for days. A contingency plan that would have the bank operational again in a matter of hours was needed, along with remote access for workers. By implementing an IBM Virtual Infrastructure Access Services solution with no fixed connection between the workplace and client images, the bank can now allow workers to process trades around the clock and from wherever they choose. While consolidating processes and improving utilization of existing IT resources, the solution also enables rapid disaster recovery without incurring the cost of additional workstations that would sit idle except in the case of an emergency.

For workers who must report to a physical location, you might need to engage work area recovery services or mobile work units. Evaluate options for your work area recovery solution based on your required level of risk avoidance and budget. The solution could include dedicated or shared work seats, virtual workplaces, mobile work areas or a combination.

An alternate worksite helps keep workers safe and productive

When it comes to a thorough contingency plan for business continuity, some organizations have more at stake than others. Having realized that its current plan was inadequate in the event that workers were unable to access its building, commodity trader London Metal Exchange found itself at risk of noncompliance with governing regulations—and the heavy penalties associated with it—not to mention loss of revenue during downtime.

Working with IBM Global Technology Services, the company designed and built a recovery site at a separate location. The recovery site is protected by an IBM-built, client-furnished security room and includes all the capabilities employees would need to maintain operations in the event of a disruption to its primary site. As a result, London Metal Exchange now has around-the-clock access to the recovery site and a solid contingency plan in place.

Prepare for contingency

To be adequately prepared for any situation, your workforce continuity plan needs to be flexible and extensible to address specific disruptions. During a pandemic, health officials may recommend that those infected or at risk stay home, while day cares and schools may close as well—often for extended periods of time, depending on the severity of the outbreak.

In an unexpected disaster, the ability of your workforce to maintain business operations can hinge on your ability to account for their safety.


Yet your workforce continuity plan for a pandemic may be very different from the plan you activate for a sudden disaster. In an unexpected disaster, the ability of your workforce to maintain business operations can hinge on your ability to account for their safety. For some industrial enterprises, such as power and manufacturing plants, contingencies for safe evacuation are essential. Innovative use of technologies such as radio frequency identification (RFID) can help track workers and visitors, and account for their safety—even easing collaboration with first responders from local authorities. Your lead decision maker should determine contingencies based on the local effect and adjust the plan accordingly.

An RFID solution helps track workers and monitor their safety

A multinational petroleum refiner engaged IBM to develop a first-of-a-kind emergency mustering solution that translates RFID data into actionable, visual information that serves as the cornerstone of new safety procedures. By integrating active RFID technology with its business processes, the refinery gains a graphical, real-time view of all employees—wherever they are. Flexible business rules developed for the solution enable the refinery to extend the benefits of real-time RFID into major improvements in emergency evacuation preparedness and employee safety.

Contingency plans for your workers' safety and return to normalcy may include:

- Transporting personnel out of harm's way or to a shelter.
- Providing alternate accommodations for those displaced from their homes, including pets.
- Arranging child care or schooling for workers' children if the effects of the disruption are long term.



Help workers help themselves by offering guidance on how to create a personal disaster recovery plan.


Maintaining key services to your workforce may also be a challenge and should be considered as part of your contingency planning. In the case of payroll services, for example, either direct deposit or mail delivery service—or both—could be disrupted. A contingency plan can help make sure workers are compensated if funds, payroll systems or administrators are inaccessible.

In addition to these immediate contingencies, your business continuity strategy should incorporate cross-training of your workers in emergency and business-critical processes. If you form a team of workers to be your first line of recovery following a disruption, you must plan for members of that team to operate in shifts to allow them to recuperate, ensuring a steady stream of alert minds. It is imperative to build flexibility into your plan for maintaining continuity of critical skills because the makeup of your workforce can change rapidly.

Incorporate counseling

While the initial focus of the strategy is getting your workforce back online and being productive, the effects of some events are often personal, involving general shock, school or day care closings, loss of a loved one or a home being destroyed. Especially during a calamitous event, your business continuity strategy needs to factor in the emotional and physical impacts on your workforce.

In general, you should plan to provide critical support services, or at least have resources at your fingertips, ranging from healthcare and psychological services to repair services and temporary housing. Be prepared to track the well-being of workers during a disruption, including longer-term situations like a pandemic, and provide resources to manage the emotional implications associated with trauma.



Combining our business continuity and resiliency services with IBM Human Capital Management solutions that help you nurture and grow talent, track skills and improve collaboration, IBM can help create or even manage an enterprisewide risk, crisis management and business continuity program that includes plans for your workforce.

How IBM can help

Figuring your workforce into a business continuity strategy requires expertise in a variety of areas—such as disaster recovery, human resources and organizational culture and psychology. It may also require the deployment of remote-access technologies, communications tools, cloud computing and dynamic provisioning of resources. As a global leader in business continuity and resiliency services and human capital management, IBM has the experience to help you incorporate critical success factors for workforce continuity into your overall business continuity strategy.

As part of our portfolio of business continuity and resiliency services, IBM can provide the facilities, technology, application and data recovery, and network connectivity you need for workers to continue their jobs after a sudden disruption. By assisting you in deploying cloud computing and virtualization solutions, IBM can help you keep your workforce productive regardless of circumstances or location. IBM Resiliency Consulting Services can help you assess your current plans for business continuity and augment them to include the workforce recovery components needed for your business, while IBM Information Protection Services include both onsite and remote data protection for your data center servers, applications and databases as well as e-mail, laptops and desktops—enabling you to quickly back up, restore, archive and maintain access to critical data.

Combining our business continuity and resiliency services with IBM Human Capital Management solutions that help you nurture and grow talent, track skills and improve collaboration, we can help create or even manage an enterprisewide risk, crisis management and business continuity program that includes plans for your workforce. From the initial step of performing a risk analysis through the important

phases of validation and testing, our services are designed to help increase the resilience of your workforce and their ability to continue business activities when an event disrupts your operations. Our consultants can help develop and implement a strategy to balance your risk level with the cost of continuous availability—for maximum productivity.

For more information

To learn more about implementing a world-class workforce continuity and recovery solution through IBM Business Continuity and Resiliency Services, contact your IBM representative, or visit the following Web site: ibm.com/services/continuity





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