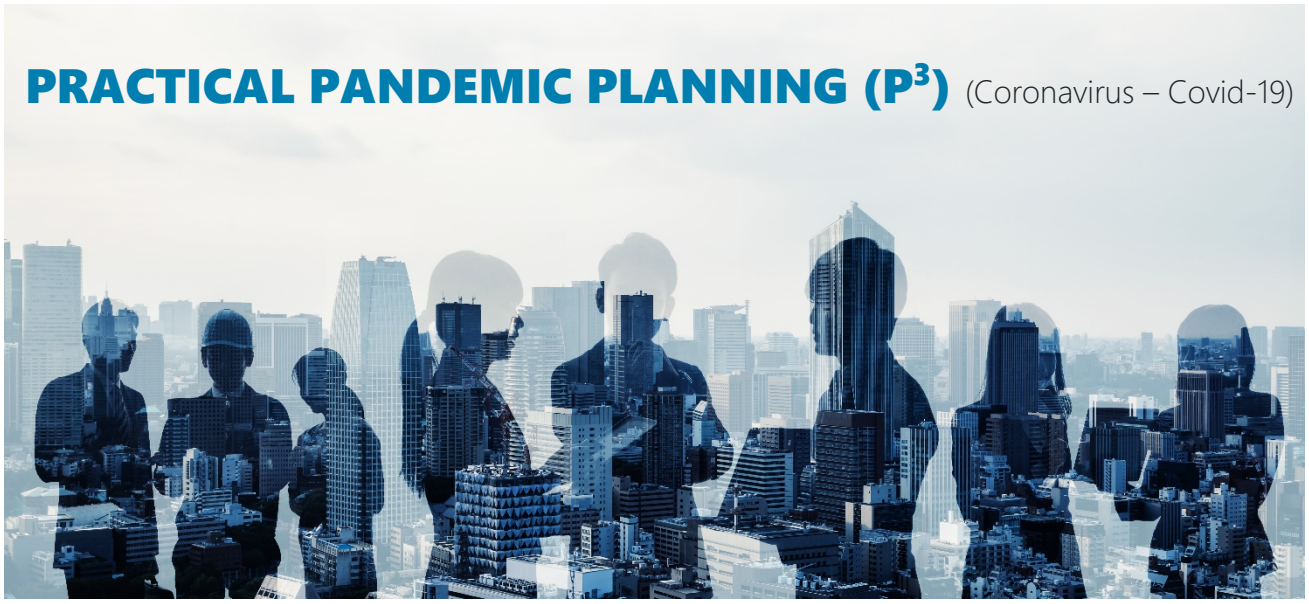

INTRODUCTION

Firstly, don't add a fourth 'P' for Panic, but do take the current outbreak and associated risks seriously.

We are at the start of something that could impact us in many ways for an indeterminate period of time. A pandemic (we are not quite there just yet) falls under one of the four categories of '*operational risk*'.

This is NOT a drill or an exercise, nor does this completely align with typical Business Continuity (BC) exercises or thought processes. However BC, Incident Response (IR) plans provide elements that will help along the way. Similar to an adverse event a pandemic will evolve in its own way and at its own speed, it is as much about how we prepare and respond that will aid our ability to reduce risks and in this instance potentially survive.

Few people in the UK have actually experienced or been directly impacted by a pandemic; we may have to think outside the box! We see quarantines enforced around the world – this may eventually be something that we will also experience. (A risk that ALL people with flu like symptoms may need to self-isolate for seven days.)

A pandemic directly impacts PEOPLE rather than our business infrastructure and technology - although over time technology may be impacted because there are insufficient people with the skills available to maintain them (perhaps for short periods of time whilst they are recovering from an infection). There is also a chance of a pandemic 'bounce' where we believe the risks and danger have decreased because the numbers being infected have dropped and slowed, only for there to be a second, or subsequent waves that are potentially more virulent than the initial outbreak.

Established and respected disciplines, conventions and behaviours may be ignored as individuals strive to protect themselves and their loved ones no matter how irrational their actions may seem – it's called Self-Preservation!

ACTIONS FOR THE ORGANISATION

The following are suggestions for 'jump-starting' a plan specifically designed to mitigate the impact of a possible COVID-19 pandemic.

This paper does not aim to provide all the answers, it cannot, but it may promote thought and discussion points for your organisation to consider if you have not done so already.

MANAGEMENT

- Delegate a senior executive (Leader) to take ownership and control of pandemic planning and coordination activities. (Without calm leadership and clear direction, individuals will adopt a '*me first*' approach. Pandemics start slowly but the spread and impact can increase quickly causing potential panic and hysteria which lead to a pack mentality and eventually localised or widespread breakdown of law and order. This this already been evidenced with minor skirmishes following shortages of commodities (panic buying).

- Establish a Pandemic Planning Team (PPT); ideally within existing operational (enterprise) risk, BCP and IR frameworks.

- Ensure the PPT obtains up-to-date (relevant) information with which to discuss risk mitigation options and to record adjustments to the risk appetite as appropriate to the evolving situation.

- Identify single points of failure (SPOF) in terms of knowledge management; business resilience planning to keep key functions running. (In case the SPOF become infected and unable to function.)

- Demonstrate commitment to pandemic planning and ensure that supporting technologies work satisfactorily:

    - Hold meetings entirely by teleconference, i.e. with all participants working from home or other remote locations – specifically necessary if travel restrictions are imposed.

    - Ensure individuals have the technology and tools to facilitate this, do they require additional training in their use.

    - Verify that sufficient licenses are available.

- Consider the needs for changes to business routines, travel, meetings, etc. (many conferences and large meetings are already being cancelled).

- Set rules and expectations regarding work patterns, schedules, changes to working practices, reporting sickness (including self-isolation, etc.) but not in a way that promotes fear or greater concern than is perhaps necessary.

- Assess and estimate the (potential) impact of a pandemic on the organisations financial status. Consider: (i) revenue losses; (ii) requirements for emergency cash; (iii) support needs for staff; (iv) company credit cards and associated limits for supplies and services that might be required during and immediately after a pandemic; (v) cash / payment flows from / with suppliers.

- Consider metrics for triggering planned escalations; percentage of workforce non-availability that may trigger site closures, changing work patterns, etc.
- Consider if changes to office layout and work areas are necessary to facilitate individuals continued working whilst minimising physical / close proximity contact.
- Consider the following participant skills within the PPT:
  - HR
    - Establish an internal business 'help-line' for employees – facilitating the latest information regarding the company's response and key information for individuals – update periodically as the situation evolves.
    - Ensure that HR contact numbers (other channels as appropriate) for reporting sickness by employees are available, calls responded to quickly and any messages left by individuals are responded to in a timely manner.
    - Review business 'rules' and conventions, individuals' rights, working hours, and other aspects of HR policy which may be impacted. (The government has already changed rules re sick pay). Communicate changes under control, also ensure to note the return to "current rules" once the situation normalises.
    - Some business policies and working practices may need to be relaxed or suspended for a period of time. This requires clear communication to avoid confusion.
    - It is crucial, in the current situation, not to discriminate (comments or behaviours) towards people from certain countries, backgrounds or communities that may be perceived to be a higher risk or that have become infected.
    - Encouraging respect and tolerance for our fellow humans is especially critical during a pandemic scenario.
    - Review and perhaps revise any bereavement counselling / management processes.
  - FINANCE
    - Consider and calculate direct financial costs of sick time, sick pay and isolation of the workforce both over time and over a percentage.
    - Consider productivity impact costs, in terms of sustainability should there be a reduction in personnel and functionality.
    - Review the organisations death in service policy.
  - COMMUNICATIONS
    - Evolve a strategy, plan and processes for distributing both internal and where appropriate external communications; including supply chain and external providers.
    - Conduct regular PPT updates (conference calls) even for 5 minutes daily (every other day) as the situation evolves. If nothing more it gives staff the impression you are thinking about

them and planning. It is also easier to think and adjust plans as the situation evolves, than to have nothing and then make irrational and ill-conceived decisions when under personal / emotional stress.

- Communicate any service provisions or potential disruptions or changes to services, customers (business partners, clients and staff). Remember that during planning (risk assessments, such discussions will be highly sensitive and must be tightly controlled.

- Rules and interactions with business partners and service providers may need to evolve (either as an impact upon your team or theirs) are there established lines of communication (part of current BCP) – how will this be approved and what methods used to disseminate to the target audience.

- IT

  - Validate the current resilience of the IT team (personnel)

  - Make it mandatory for IT personnel to take portable devices and necessary equipment (i.e. laptops, remote access tokens etc.) home with them with immediate effect.

  - Ensure individuals have the appropriate access rights, permissions, licenses and tools to provide remote support.

  - Ensure core business data is backed up and regularly verified.

  - Enforce strict change controls - this takes on a different meaning when individuals are working in isolation / remotely.

  - Develop continuity and strategy plans to operate public/private web sites, facilitate remote and distributed working.

- TELECOMMUNICATIONS & UTILITIES

  - Provision sufficient, efficient, secure and robust access to corporate information (for staff working remotely).

  - Develop and promote the effective use of voice, video conferencing and distributed working where possible.

  - Bandwidth and availability may be degraded, to prioritise the Critical National Infrastructure (CNI) and key services. There will likely be an extensive load on wireless / broadband systems as everyone will be on them.

  - Consider turning off air conditioning units, which have a high propensity to facilitate the spread of germs / virus spoors.

  - Utilities may become disrupted or cease to function at current levels.

  - Waste may build up because the utility companies are unable to sustain current service levels – where and how will your premises (business or home) accommodate this. Over time this could present a fire and H&S risk.

- PHYSICAL SECURITY
  - Ensure premises and the staff working in them are appropriately secured and controlled.
  - Ensure compliance with changing (localised) regulations and restrictions.
  - Obtain a contact number for ALL visitors, to facilitate tracing contacts in the event of an infected person within the premises at any time.
  - If in a shared tenancy site ensure there are effective communications channels and mandatory notifications regarding any infections between the entities.
  - Conduct a risk assessment regarding physical security measures and needs if the premises is in any exclusion zone or personnel are not available.
- SUPPLY CHAIN
  - How could impacted suppliers cause a detriment to your business operations (hopefully already covered in part in current BCP, but again consider the longer term implications)
  - Validate communications pathways with key suppliers.
  - Establish periodic communications / updates to gauge potential impacts to services.
- MEDICAL
  - Read and follow Government, local authority advice, which may change over time and in specific areas/ regions.
  - Promote openness and honesty throughout the workforce at all levels and take appropriate precautions and steps in the event an individual takes ill whilst on or who has recently been on corporate premises.
  - Use professional knowledge and expertise where possible – someone who can provide objective information and advice. They may also provide local advice and guidance regarding treatment/testing centers and requirements.
- MEDIA
  - Establish routines to monitor local, national and international news and information relevant to the spread and impacts. (This in turn could impact your personnel who are concerned about family and friends in other territories).
  - Only pay attention to information from trusted official sources that have been verified.
  - Establish specific social media groups / teams to interact with and provide staff updates regarding purely pandemic information (separate from any work related activities).

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- As with any BCP / Incident Response Incident Response activity record your decisions and actions.

- Ensure senior executives have and up-to-date (relevant) information with which to discuss options for mitigating the risks, to articulate the 'risk appetite' upon which decisions are based.
- Develop policies specifically for operating the business during and in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic. These might include: priorities for reducing risks and slowing down business activities; changes to delegated authorities within the business (identifying and reducing single points of failure; changes to staff entitlements and remuneration; interacting business partners and service providers. This could be quite long list depending on business model and dependencies.
- Traditional BCP considers events over shorter time periods while a full blown pandemic could last many weeks / months, and may include 'waves' of impacts and disruption.
- Food and essential items could become scarce (already toilet paper and cleaning products are in short supply) (Rationing of certain goods are being put in place – contingency plans are already being considered for this eventuality). Consider onsite staff needs and plan accordingly.
- Large gatherings should be considered a high risk and be discouraged (organisations in some areas have already issued guidance and instructions to their staff. National and international sporting events, concerts and travel restrictions are review and restrictions and advice being applied daily.

PANDEMIC RISKS

Risk consideration in a pandemic scenario primarily focus on five key areas:

- PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONAL RISKS
  - Map key responsibilities, the linkages and dependencies between critical business functions.
  - For each function, develop a list of key roles and individuals holding (or capable of holding) and evaluate the degree of actual and potential 'operational autonomy'.
  - This will identify "key people" (risks) in the current organisation and highlight where mitigating actions, such as staff transfers and increased decision-making delegation would be beneficial.
  - If the situation escalates to a full blown pandemic the organisation may suffer the loss of colleagues, who may have key roles and responsibilities. Ensuring human functionality resilience has been talked about for years but is not often well practiced.
  - It is highly likely there will reduction in the availability of temporary staff, contractors, bank workers, or anyone else available to bolster or replace the current workforce at the height of a pandemic – therefore available resources will only go down – Identify the functions / processes can you live without, how can you streamline / cross train personnel.
- PROCESS RISKS
  - Map 'end-to-end business processes' to identify potential bottlenecks, internal and external dependencies.

- Identify "critical processes" and their associated risks where increased volumes might overwhelm a depleted workforce and highlight where mitigating actions or decisions need to be taken and the criteria for determining any thresholds in that process.
- Ascertain if certain operational activities take place at different times, to reduce reliance at peak periods?

▪ SYSTEMS RISKS

- Not merely key technical attributes but dependencies on human intervention, especially IT Operations / support. Consider if / how IT will be able to support a dispersed workforce

▪ TELECOMMUNICATIONS RISKS

- Review the network topology and identify capacity bottlenecks and single points of failure.
- Consider any additional requirements, bandwidth that may be necessary.

▪ OUTSOURCED AND SUPPLY CHAIN RISKS (Value chain)

- Evaluate outsourced and supply chain dependencies from an operational risk perspective, consider exposures to non-performance or degradation of service by the supplier (over time).
- Identify any potential mitigating actions, reduce dependencies where possible and practical.

*A pandemic is not about **Business as Usual** but **Business (and individual) Survival**.*

IMPACT TO PEOPLE & BUSINESS

At some point in time a number of people (your greatest asset) from your workforce may be isolated at home (either by choice or mandate). It makes sense to plan for staff to be able to work from home where possible.

We are currently witnessing enforced quarantine (lockdown) in large parts of Italy – it is an opportunity to consider our actions and preparations (professionally and perhaps personally).

People in a wide variety of roles already work from home some of the time; equally there are many who have not experienced this. It can require a different mindset and disciplines from the individual, there may be numerous distractions – children and family members to look after especially if they are affected.

Even with the best of technologies/equipment provided to them, the individual they may be unable to work from home because the supporting telecommunications infrastructure, whether locally or more widely will likely struggle to meet the sheer demand.

There may be roles / functions that cannot be fulfilled remotely yet without them the business will struggle to operate effectively and efficiently, if at all.

People may have to step into unusual roles; even to help clean the premises. Having said that, it is surprising how far some individuals will extend themselves and the lengths they will go to – just don't rely upon or

expect it but be ready to embrace and use it widely when offered. The "pulling together" of staff in the face of adversity is a product of strong leadership and may benefit the organisation in the longer term.

Direct resources towards ensuring critical operations keep running - albeit perhaps at a reduced capacity.

'Resilience' evolves from identifying suppliers, functions and functionalities essential to operating and sustaining a level of business essential for the organisations survival. This may not mean keeping everything functioning 'as is' but what is necessary to keep the business functioning beyond the pandemic.

It also requires consideration as to what business activities can be 'parked' or perhaps done without for periods of time, focusing resources and effort upon essential services and what really matters. It will not be a priority for most organisations to target new customers but rather to concentrate support and retention of those likely to need your products and services.

Payments and settlements are likely to take much longer, where penalties are incurred for late payments new criteria may need to be considered, or the penalties waived completely until there is a return to BAU (albeit some weeks or months hence). Who will make such decisions, how will they be effected? This may also require interactions with business partners and service providers.

Supply lines are likely to be extend and may cease for a period of time. This will be outside your direct control but may further impact your ability to continue BAU.

CONTACT RISK

One of the most vital areas during a pandemic, is to reduce and/or prevent physical contact, whilst ensuring there are protective equipment and adequate cleaning facilities for the individuals and their environments.

Staff who must be on-site will be at most risk travelling to and from the workplace, whilst at their desks/workstations and when working in close proximity to others.

Customer service centers (call centers) and trading floors tend to be large rooms packed with people constantly coming and going, under flexible working practices. "*Call centers are a petri dish for the efficient transmission of viruses*". *(Dr. P. McConnell, A Standards Approach to Operational Risk Management, 2005).*

Technology can (partially) help to solve this problem, through increased usage of websites, email, and direct messaging outgoing call technology. However, during a pandemic, call center traffic may increase dramatically because alternative information channels may not be accessible for various reasons, not least due to an absence of personnel.

Websites and social media channels will more than ever become the window to the world and staff must be allocated and trained to communicate via them – under control and management of course to ensure effective and appropriate communications.

SUMMARY

Business survival from a pandemic requires establishing an organisational infrastructure at its onset and planning for continued operations at potentially significantly degraded levels over a protracted period of time.

IT, but especially telecommunications are vital to the organisations capacity and resilience to survive a pandemic and planning how this technology will be used effectively is critical.

Providing capabilities to work remotely should be a high priority and focus however sending all staff home to operate business as usual will not work, not least because some of the most critical staff will not have remote access capabilities to access the systems or data.

As with any BCP exercise, planning must be completed in advance and people educated on the potential changes to their working practices and organisational structures in the event of a disruption. The emergence of a (potential) pandemic is not the time to begin installing hardware and systems to support remote working.

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Whilst I not a pandemic expert, I am a business continuity practitioner.

I also have experience having served in highly stressful military situations (conflicts) necessitating contingency plans for a wide variety of unpleasant and frequently evolving scenarios.

As importantly, I have seen how humans react when faced with seemingly unreal, challenging and life threatening situations. The meekest, mildest person can attain phenomenal strength and courage, whilst conversely a supposedly tough person can become a bubbling wreck. We cannot easily predict human behaviours until certain events and situations arise, particularly if they feel overly exposed or actually become victims.

In the military we prepared for the worst, conducted drills and considered various scenarios and potential outcomes in order that we could display confidence and support to each other along the way. We were as prepared as we could be for certain events to materialise; we could then deal with them more rationally because we had a plan – a starting point at least. Businesses would benefit from considering a similar approach.

There are three core elements that are working against us, and which we cannot control (i) time, (ii) spread and (iii) evolution of the virus. If we are starting to plan now we may already be a little late.

This paper could form the foundation for a science fiction movie; it is however todays' reality.

So, how well prepared are you?