10 Steps to achieve Pandemic Preparedness

Keywords

About the Author

Govinda is a management consultant based in Basel, Switzerland. He has a Masters degree in Industrial Management & Engineering and over 20 years of experience in Informatics. His areas of expertise are off-shoring, Business Continuity Management, IT/IS Project Management and IT/IS Management Support. Govinda is currently engaged as Pandemic Coordinator for the IT Infrastructure of a large Pharma company in Basel.

Abstract

This article gives you an understanding of the key steps for achieving Pandemic Preparedness for your organization, be it a company or a function (say, IT) within. It is presented in ten action items that are derived from the generic concepts of Business Continuity Management. At the end, the article contains a questionnaire for those who consider their organization prepared for the pandemic, to help them identify any surprises or confirm their readiness.

Background

I hope it is hype. If it is not, it is useful to ensure that your organization can survive with 50% of your staff. It is also in your business interest to be able to assure your employees and customers in a qualified manner. Also, the very exercise of identifying what is critical to your business is useful in setting your strategic priorities in future.

Remember that the Pandemic of the 1918 (Spanish Flu) came in two waves, the first one mild and then the second one that killed about 80 million people. No need to be worried – the communications and health care have changed more dramatically for the better in the last 100 years than in the 10'000 years before. However, our acceptance to loss

Introduction

"Pandemic Preparedness (PP)" is a specific case of a generic concept "Business Continuity Management (BCM)" as described in the BS25999 standard – it is the response plan for a specific type of threat (pandemic) to your organization. Hence, the Business Impact Analysis (BIA) and the Risk Analysis (RA) can be scoped down. Also, by depending on your organization's knowledge rather than dry/technical analysis of the

1

Sadhu Informatics Services GmbH Kleinfeldweg 25d 4106 Therwil Switzerland
Tel: +41 61 721 9886 ● Mob.: +41 79 698 8356 ● Fax.: +41 61 721 8259
govinda@sadhu.ch   www.sadhu.ch

critical processes, assets, data and roles would result in a huge saving in time and cost of more-or-less the same result.

The activities are addressed to the Head of an Organization (e.g. CxO, Head of a facility - a data center, a production shop or a hospital, or someone acting on their behalf). The organization can be of any size and industry, but these aspects impact on the complexity of the exercise.

The 10 Steps to achieve Pandemic Preparedness

Step 1: Reserve about 100 hours over the next 4-8 weeks. If your organization is large, you can cut it down to about 10 hours by giving the mandate to your direct reports who already understands your organization well. If you hire consultants, ensure that they understand your industry/organization well. Kick off the initiative with all your key managers (half a day workshop to set the goals and define the approach should be sufficient if you prepare well). If possible, remain as the sponsor of the initiative in order to send a clear message on your priority.
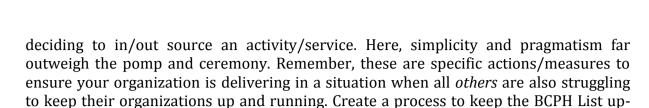
Step 2: Create a document (known as your "Policy" for BCM or PP, 3-4 pages are sufficient if you are honest) stating the high level objectives, scope, risk appetite, approach and resources that you want to dedicate for your Pandemic Preparedness. This will be the reference document for all discussions, challenges and decisions in the future with regards to your organization's Pandemic Preparedness.

Step 3: On a time scale from 1 hour to 1 month, map the activities that must NOT be interrupted. These could be full processes or specific process steps. This will give you a list of your most critical (critical here is putting more emphasis on "urgency" rather than "importance") activities. Consider what happens if the process or the service did break-down. For example, think how long your organization can endure without e-mails (or an SAP application or material supplies) or for 1 hour, for 2 hours, for 3 hours and so on (the lingo for this is "maximum tolerable downtime"). Often it's not as dramatic as "survival" but the cost (injury to humans/money/loss of image/loss of compliance/unmet promises/broken SLAs etc.) is unacceptable to your organization. For most critical items, consider who is behind them – these individuals are your Business Critical Position holders.

Step 4: Create a list of "Business Critical Position Holders" or BCPH's. It does not matter whether the person is internal employee or external employee. If the list is too long, set a cut-off threshold in terms of business impact. For each person on the BCPH List, identify and document the following details: Address, home addresses, work mobile number, whether this person uses a blackberry, whether this person can work remotely, e.g. over the VPN, whether the person is has a backup or a deputy. Think of any specific attributes that are relevant for your organization/industry.

Step 5: Fill any gaps in the above list by taking concrete actions, making specific investments to create backups (e.g. training, increasing manpower or paying more to service providers etc.). Or simply accept the risk and document it. This process is also called defining the "continuity strategies". The activities could be as simple as issuing an employee a mobile phone or a laptop with VPN connection (to enable her/him remote/home working capabilities) or as complex as redefining your sourcing strategy,

2

Sadhu Informatics Services GmbH Kleinfeldweg 25d 4106 Therwil Switzerland
Tel: +41 61 721 9886 ● Mob.: +41 79 698 8356 ● Fax.: +41 61 721 8259
govinda@sadhu.ch   www.sadhu.ch

deciding to in/out source an activity/service. Here, simplicity and pragmatism far outweigh the pomp and ceremony. Remember, these are specific actions/measures to ensure your organization is delivering in a situation when all *others* are also struggling to keep their organizations up and running. Create a process to keep the BCPH List up-to-date. Link it to your HR or other IT Processes.

Step 6: Identify critical services that you receive from other companies and ensure that they continue to provide you with the service even under a Pandemic in a given area/country or even globally. One way to do it is to define a clear SLA and include an explicit service continuity clause with pre-defined (lower) level of service in case of a pandemic. This ensures explicit obligation from the service provider to continue to serve you when their own resources are stretched due to a pandemic. When a service is existence threatening, you want to consider an alternative sourcing plan, if necessary from a different location than where the main vendor is located.

Step 7: Create a Pandemic Preparedness Plan, defining exactly what happens when your organization is faced with a Pandemic: who invokes the pandemic plan, trigger points/events, how the communication works, command chain, communication to outside your organization (consider what you want on your internet site – for example, you may want to dedicate a section to your employees or specific customers or you wish to get the content management done from a different location), specific activities to fight the spread of the pandemic or ensure employee well being, what are the priorities and finally how your organization returns normalcy (who revokes pandemic plan). If your organization is part of a larger organization, ensure clear interfaces to the larger organization's response plan and response organization.

Step 8: Ensure all pre-requisites from the response plan (i.e. Pandemic Preparedness Plan) – starting from storing the plan at pre-defined locations that are described in the plan to ensuring VPN connectivity to keeping stock of drug supplies. These activities depend on the plan itself.

Step 9: Test, rehearse, train and market the above plan thru walkthroughs (mental simulations) and training sessions with appropriate people. Ensure strict discipline while walking thru the plan – if the participants or lazy or not taking it serious, you may have wasted your resources in creating the plan in the first place. Do not share the plan in its entirety widely. When you market it to your customers, note that they only have to be convinced of the existence of the plan and not necessarily be informed of its contents.

Step 10: Keep your plan up-to-date. Revise it when there are large re-organizations, shifts in sourcing strategies, new projects implementing new services or infrastructures or M&A activity. The update cycles are typically every two years in order to take care of organic changes. If you are implementing Business Continuity, you may delegate the ownership of this aspect to your head of security but in case this is limited to pandemic preparedness, consider also your HR manager or a very senior admin assistant looking for job enrichment.

How Prepared is your organization?

1. Name the top 5 products or services produced by your organization? Who are involved in producing these products/services?

2. Name 5 most important customers and those who manage the relationship with them?
3. Do you have legally binding agreements (SLA's or other obligations) that must be continued in all circumstances? What happens if you do not?
4. Name the 5 most critical goods/services that you receive from organizations outside your own and comment on whether they will continue to keep their service levels in case of a Pandemic (i.e. are you their top customer, serving you may not be part of their business continuity).
5. What are the 10 most important processes that your organization executes? Who carries them out?
6. What are the 5 most important facilities (factories, offices, data centers, IT Systems etc.)? Who is responsible for ensuring that they are running?
7. Do you have a list of 5 most time-critical employees in each department of your organization?
8. Can your office employees work from home (or remotely)?
9. Do your employees know what to do in case of a pandemic? When is there a pandemic, when is back-to-normal and what is different during a pandemic?
10. Do your answers to above questions change in a year's time?

The answers need not be written down but trying to answer the questions or thinking about the questions should already help you see the issues, related to the Pandemic or any other emergency.