

# HR's Role in Business Continuity

COVID-19 and Beyond



# Times of Uncertainty Can Be Overwhelming for Organizations.

As an HR professional, you play a key role in policy creation and employee communication. That's why it's critical to effectively coordinate response plans, take extra safety measures, and help employees feel secure during major business disruptions such as public health emergencies, natural disasters, and cybersecurity threats.



## Rising to the Challenges of Business Continuity

In light of recent events like COVID-19, many HR professionals have been thinking long and hard about different ways to support their employees through a public health emergency and build effective response plans — especially when events force employees to work remotely.

While these are important steps to take, a truly proactive approach to business continuity also must include ways to tackle a variety of potential crises.

Public health emergencies, natural disasters, and cybersecurity threats — and the impacts of contingent business interruption — all are growing concerns for employees, HR teams, and business leaders everywhere as our organizations become more global in nature.

## THE ROLE OF HR IS CRITICAL

When putting strategies into place for business continuity, HR should consider how to effectively use technology to help with publicizing safety measures, extending employee training for work-at-home scenarios, ensuring employee well-being, and creating virtual watercoolers to battle the isolation employees can experience by working from home.



# How Technology Supports Business Continuity — The Public Health Emergency

Public health emergencies are on everyone's mind right now, so we thought we'd use this issue as our core example of what HR should think about when creating business continuity plans. Later in this eBook, we'll tackle some other common disruption scenarios.



# First Things First: Manage Internal Communications

In any crisis, frequent communication is essential, and HR is often relied upon to manage it. Having the ability to implement mass communication technologies that support multiple forms of communication with employees and other critical contacts — such as vendors and contract and temporary employees — is imperative. These communications could include:

- Mobile application alerts
- Email
- Short message services (SMS)
- Secure messaging

## Move beyond email

Besides the standard email blast, there are other options for quickly getting the word out to employees and bringing key messages into common workstreams:

- **Push notifications, newsfeeds, and SMS integration** rapidly deliver the latest updates, guidance, and information to employees. Communications can also be specialized into separate tracks for roles with more responsibilities, like managers.
- **Embedded instructions and resources** can be added as standard, required steps in different HR processes, like putting public health emergency policies into new-hire onboarding checklists or assigned to-do lists for regular employees. This provides business continuity education in the flow of regular tasks.
- **Mobile-first technologies** that support polling, geolocating, and messaging/alerting.

## Some recent business continuity survey findings

More than **60%** of businesses say they have a business continuity plan in place<sup>1</sup>

Only **37%** of businesses have the technology needed to let employees work remotely<sup>2</sup>

More than **40%** of businesses would make at least some late payments if all finance staff were forced to work remotely<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> AvidXchange, Critical Gaps in Business Continuity Plans, March 18, 2020, found at [http://automate.avidxchange.com/rs/598-WVB-246/images/Critical\\_Gaps\\_in\\_Business\\_Continuity\\_Plan.pdf?\\_ga=2.86440413.499814782.1585243501-1998637834.1585243501](http://automate.avidxchange.com/rs/598-WVB-246/images/Critical_Gaps_in_Business_Continuity_Plan.pdf?_ga=2.86440413.499814782.1585243501-1998637834.1585243501).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

# Track Employee Awareness and Identify Risks

Have you considered where in your daily operations you can track whether or not employees are taking proper precautions, what health risks may exist for your organization, and what incidents have occurred?

By adding a few strategic touch points into the flow of regular activities, HR can help better protect employees, identify where potential vulnerabilities exist, and boost visibility into reporting and compliance.

**“HR plays a key role in business continuity planning because it focuses on the critical ‘people’ domain in operational recovery.”**

Scott Corzine  
Senior Managing Director  
Ankura

## Here are some steps you can take to boost risk prevention and identification:

- **Enable mobile punch options for hourly workers**

Work with Operations to reduce physical exposure by eliminating a central clock-in location and maintaining governance with options like geofencing to ensure employees still punch only at authorized locations.

- **Insert health reminders into attestation processes**

Instead of just covering normal compliance concerns, add a health-related attestation question — such as “Did you wash your hands?” — into the mix when employees start a shift or come back from a break, to increase the odds of a sanitary environment.

- **Identify essential and at-risk roles**

Indicate whether employees working in specific roles or shifts are considered either essential—meaning they should be physically present even during a remote work mandate—or are high-risk for a health concern due to the nature of their position. Those at high risk might include sales reps, nurses, or customer service professionals, since they frequently come in contact with other people or those who may already be ill.

- **Set up specific leave and incident definitions that meet compliance standards**

Use these to accurately categorize data and better understand actual disease-related events in your organization, and make sure they’re compliant with workplace reporting standards such as those required by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. This will allow you to provide the right options for employees and managers to handle emergencies and track any direct effect on your people and organization.

# Set Up a Virtual Workplace

Many types of events can render your company's workplace inaccessible or prevent employees and other types of staff from coming into the office. In these circumstances, employees may have to work from home, which comes with a number of challenges. As an HR professional, your role will be to help manage your leadership's expectations for productivity and provide opportunities for team members to share their concerns.

## Before an emergency happens

Work with leaders to assess employees and learn who is able to work from home or already does so, who is capable of working from home with the proper equipment and technology, and who is not able to work from home and should be either put on standby status or marked as essential.

## As an emergency unfolds

HR is responsible for ensuring employees have a proper workspace and the resources required to effectively do their jobs when they're working remotely just as when they're in the office. As soon as a health emergency occurs and it's clear that employees will need to work remotely, your next steps should include:

- ❑ Confirm which employees can work from home, and modify existing work schedules to accommodate family care and home workspace availability
- ❑ Coordinate the assignment and delivery of equipment and resources needed for employees to work remotely
- ❑ Work with IT departments to provide online training resources for the use of virtual technologies like conferencing or team communication applications
- ❑ Ensure employees have access to important information and records they need, such as employee and company contact information
- ❑ Monitor and support the virtual workplace during the course of the emergency shutdown



**When defining response plans to emergencies, you'll want to consider how best to manage home office protocols that include:**

- Helping employees maintain good habits consistent with their job responsibilities
- Any required business practices they should follow
- Guidelines for dressing and general behavior
- Guidelines for handling videoconferencing from a family environment

# Prioritize Employee Support and Well-Being

As an HR professional, you take your mission seriously. You care deeply about making sure employees feel supported, have opportunities to learn and grow, and continue to thrive and be productive at work.

That's why during emergency situations, it's important to have concrete options available to reassure employees and make them feel safe.

## Here are several ways to weave employee support efforts into your processes:

- Think about what would happen for different types of employees if they had to take part in a mandatory quarantine. Implement additional compensation structures as appropriate to ensure they can remain financially stable during this stressful time.
- Create training and track certifications for disaster response. This will help you know which employees are prepared, give employees the security of having a plan of action, and reduce risk in the workplace.
- Review short-term disability policies. This can be another avenue for compensating employees who are forced to take time off that they normally wouldn't be able to afford.

**“Making employees feel safe and supported is crucial, especially in stressful work-at-home situations when there is usually not a ‘playbook’ to follow.”**

Duane Lohn  
Senior Managing Director  
Ankura



# Ask Questions. Be Proactive.

One of the best things you can do in response to a health emergency is understand the latest local, state, and federal regulations and standards as well as which of your vendors are critical to employee well-being.

## Here are some immediate steps you can take:

- ❑ Reach out to public health officials to understand disaster response plans, relief funding available, and any recommended procedures.
- ❑ Keep track of the latest Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notifications, emergency declarations, and at-risk locations.
- ❑ Contact your health insurance vendors and other health-related benefits providers to understand their standards of coverage for COVID-19 and other public health emergencies.
- ❑ Ask internal stakeholders, such as your executive board or PR department, if there are official responses you should be giving to employees. You also should help recommend these responses.

**“Employees rely on HR for timely, accurate information.** HR keeps employees informed with fact-based information that supports their job responsibilities and the remote workplace.”

Scott Corzine  
Senior Managing Director  
Ankura

# Extend Your Business Continuity Strategy

Let's reapply some of the steps suggested for a public health emergency to other business continuity challenges, including natural disasters and cyberattacks.



# Example 1: Natural Disasters

## **Communicate. Communicate. Communicate.**

If a natural disaster strikes, communication remains your key resource. You'll want to be sure you have the same level of flexibility mentioned earlier for modes of communication and clear steps for embedding emergency/business continuity policies in daily processes, development opportunities, assigned actions, and onboarding checklists for employees.

## **Ensure financial support for employees**

Natural disasters can cause rapid risk of injury as well as breakdowns in infrastructure, so finding ways to quickly deliver support in the form of emergency compensation is key. If your organization tends to cut a lot of paper checks, you may need to reevaluate how employees get paid in a crisis situation. Investigate reliable electronic pay methods that the majority of your employees can access, including same-day pay options, direct deposit, and alternative distribution strategies. Also think about what the proper forms of workers' compensation would be in the event of employee injuries.

## **Have an evacuation plan**

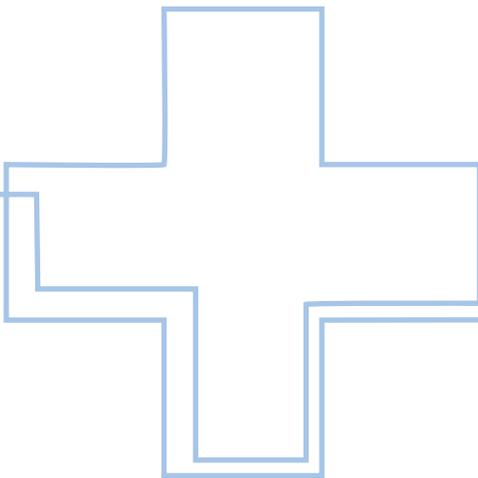
Be ready to rapidly get employees out of any of your locations, and have a designated place of safety where everyone can regroup. Employees should be trained and certified in these plans and should regularly complete drills to test how quickly they can evacuate.

## **Connect with disaster-relief efforts**

Reach out to government disaster relief efforts at the appropriate levels based on the nature of the crisis. You'll also want to connect with nongovernmental organizations providing disaster relief and communicate the availability of specific resources to affected employees.

## **Ensure mobile applications are available**

Make sure your mobile applications have features that can geolocate workers, provide voice/text emergency connection, push role-based checklists to employees, enable photos of disaster sites to be uploaded, and poll staff to ensure they are safe or at the evacuation point.



# A NEW FACTOR TO CONSIDER

One significant challenge in a natural disaster is having access to your HR technology. Here's what you can do to secure your system:

- Ensure your cloud-based solutions, such as your human capital management (HCM) platform, back up your records at different sites. This will allow you to maintain connectivity and prevent data loss in the event that a data storage site is impacted in a natural disaster.
- Ask vendors you work with about their disaster recovery policies and plans. You'll need all critical systems functioning to effectively address a crisis situation.



# Example 2: Cyberattacks

Preventive measures and proactive actions already should be in place at your organization to help ward off cyberattacks. Use notifications and embedded training in your HR technology to make sure employees know how a cyberattack could affect the company and clearly understand the steps that must be taken to protect your organization.

## Track and keep records

In the wake of a cyberattack, communication and awareness matter most. Tracking is key when an incident occurs — you should be able to clearly record where any vulnerabilities originate. This will help you and your vendors find and neutralize threats.

- Be sure to keep accurate records of employee assets like computers and mobile devices as well, as this information will be critical when generating an incident report

## Provide employee support

This type of crisis can potentially affect the personal and financial data of your employees. Here are some things you can do to ensure your employees feel secure and protected in multiple ways:

- Implement effective virtual on/offboarding processes and controls in place
- Investigate your cloud vendors' security standards and what they do to protect sensitive employee data.
- If the vulnerability impacts your financial systems, have in place a backup plan for compensating employees.
- Help your employees complete routine tasks, even when there's no connectivity to electronic systems. For example, having mobile punch options that cache punch data when disconnected from a network allows employees to record their shifts accurately when systems are down.
- Make sure employees feel comfortable raising attention to system vulnerabilities or suspected cyberattacks to the right people at your organization. There should be no fear of punishment in these situations because that will only make employees nervous about sharing information and make it harder to track down where the vulnerability originated.

## A cyberattack can have devastating and long-lasting consequences for your entire organization.

Architecting for a remote workforce is a key theme going forward in many industries. If an attack takes place, IT will be required to architect the network to accommodate remote/VPN workers while still enforcing security rules. This is especially true if employees are allowed to use their own devices at home for company/client business, as those devices might lack encryption, access controls, etc.



## Get Ahead of Your Business Continuity Concerns Today

HR is a source of trust and comfort to employees during times of crisis, such as a public health emergency, natural disaster, or cyberattack. That's why HR software always should be a "Tier 1" application in your business continuity plan, meaning it has a high-recovery priority. The fastest way to make your people stop showing up for work is to stop paying them — and payroll is one of the functions HR technology typically manages.

You also want to make sure you're taking all the right steps to get ahead of business continuity challenges. The plans outlined in this ebook will serve you well in this moment and in the future whenever emergencies strike. TruPay is here to support you in any way we can as we all collectively work to keep our organizations running and our employees safe.

**Want to take a proactive approach to business continuity? Visit [TruPay.com](https://www.trupay.com) or call 866-674-7300**





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