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Coronavirus: Is Your Firm Prepared for a Pandemic?

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Roman Kepczyk • Mar. 12, 2020



Natural disasters and cybersecurity concerns have pushed most firms to develop a disaster response plan in the event of a catastrophic office or systems loss, but few have considered the potential impact of a massive influenza (flu) outbreak, such as the current Coronavirus epidemic.

Imagine how life would change if a significant portion of the workforce had to stay home either because they were sick or were caring for loved ones that were ill. Think about the impacts on public services such as transportation, schools, restaurants and the simple delivery of products to grocery stores and gas stations if the virus spread to epidemic levels, particularly if it was suggested by city governments that people stay home and avoid public places.

To minimize the potential impact of such an event, it is recommended that firms include preparations for a pandemic within their business continuation plan comprising of annual awareness training, “pre-packaging” useful information

resources, and implementing technologies to communicate and collaborate with those physically unable to come to the office.

It has been said that prevention is the first and best defense, so firms should include educating personnel (preferably before the flu season starts) on good health habits to bolster immune systems and ways to minimize the spread of any virus (proper hand washing and covering up sneezes and coughs). The American Red Cross provides resources on traditional flu safety including a checklist that can be stored on the firm's intranet and provided to firm personnel (link below). In the event the level of the flu reaches catastrophic levels akin to a natural disaster, the Red Cross also has a Family Preparedness Fact Sheet which can also be provided to firm members, so they are better prepared for ANY disaster (link below).

The next level of preparation that all firms should implement is remote access technology that allows firm personnel to continue to communicate and collaborate if they must stay home. This can mean utilizing remote access tools such as GoToMyPC or LogMeIn for a small firm/sole practitioner or tools such as Windows Remote Desktop, Citrix, Virtual Private Networks, and/or cloud applications for medium and larger firms. The 2020 CPAFMA Technology Survey found that most medium and larger firms had already moved the majority of their applications to the cloud to not only allow firm personnel to work from any Internet-enabled device but also provided more stable remote access, security and disaster recovery capabilities. Moving all applications to the cloud allows for a standardized remote access platform that minimizes internal IT requirements, system updates and support which could be impacted if the firm's IT personnel were sick.

Finally, in the event that a serious pandemic occurred, people could be asked to stay home for an extended period of time which may impact administrative and human resources policies such as PTO and flex time. In these situations, it is important that the firm's human resources personnel have already determined firm policies on working part time, for handling payroll, and thoroughly understanding health insurance benefits and Family Medical Leave Act requirements. If there is a region wide slow-down in business, firms may have to draw upon credit lines to cover ongoing operating expenses, so an adequate amount of financial coverage should be discussed amongst owners

By planning properly now, firms can minimize the concerns of personnel and their families, as well as implement the right resources to ensure that the firm makes it through virtually any situation including a pandemic.

Firm Pandemic Resources: American Red Cross Flu Safety Overview:

<https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies/flu-safety.html> American Red Cross Flu Safety Checklist:

https://www.redcross.org/content/dam/redcross/atg/PDF_s/Preparedness__Disaster

American Red Cross Disaster Preparedness:

https://www.redcross.org/content/dam/redcross/atg/PDF_s/Preparedness__Disaster

[Red-Cross-Ready-Preparedness-Factsheet.pdf](#) World Health Organization

<https://www.who.int/influenza/preparedness/pandemic/en/> with 44pg checklist:

https://www.who.int/influenza/preparedness/pandemic/influenza_risk_managemen

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