



▶ *E-Guide*

Business Continuity in the Wake of the Pandemic

In this E-Guide:

The ongoing pandemic is leaving organizations on uneven footing as they try to pick up all the pieces, recover, and move on.

And although recovery is obviously possible, it is going to heavily rely on whether organizations can successfully update their business continuity plans to adjust in times of crisis.

In this e-guide, get advice from experts on what it will take to kick off your pandemic recovery plan, including a framework for recovery to ensure your organization can see this pandemic through.

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Strategies for kicking off your pandemic recovery plan

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Forrester

Forrester Research analysts Stephanie Balaouras, James McQuivey and Andrew Bartels talk about the early days of the pandemic and how companies need to implement a viable business continuity plan. This three-part panel discussion covers an employee experience survey about the pandemic and businesses, the need for companies to dust off and update their continuity plans and the effects of a pandemic on continuity planning.

Podcast highlights

Do businesses need to be communicating with their employees during a crisis?

Stephanie Balaouras: We always ask this question, which is, 'What is the biggest lesson learned from one of your prior invocations?' And this is across all types of scenarios, IT outages, extreme weather. And one of the biggest lessons is that there hadn't been enough communication throughout the event. And I think that's one of the cases here, which is, companies sometimes err on caution of not communicating a lot because we're worried about inciting panic. They don't exactly know what to communicate.

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You actually need to communicate before, during and after, and you can't over-communicate in this scenario. I think people need a lot of, like you said, like confidence and reassurance, because travel restrictions and other policies will change frequently. You need to continuously communicate that.

What should businesses have been doing to prepare for the pandemic now and for future incidents?

Balaouras: Step one was putting that executive response team together with those individuals that I mentioned, and that team should meet daily, not just like, once, write the plan. They should meet daily because you're gonna continuously update the plan and those policies, and that team should have virtual capabilities itself. ... Step number two is just doing a business impact analysis again, [a] company should have one.

But back to our earlier point, when was the last time they refreshed it? ... The third step after you know [when it was refreshed], you pull the response team together, you do a rapid business impact analysis to get that contextual information that you need. Now you can actually write down the plan. So, the key things you need is the communication strategy.

Where might we see budgets affected during the pandemic?

Andrew Bartels: I think that we'll see the impact primarily in three major areas that any CIO looks to cut costs when faced with a need to do so. First of all, computer equipment, communications equipment. In addition, having supply chain disruptions will also face

increased demand, though we can wait on upgrading those PCs, we can delay upgrading those servers, we can delay that.

The second area is going to be on tech consulting services. As firms turn more cautious about the business outlook in this environment, they're likely to put on the shelf a lot of new projects. New projects would normally require tech consulting, services. Those projects may likely be late, possibly canceled. And a third area, which is probably relatively small today, is unlicensed software.

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Paul Kirvan, Independent IT consultant/auditor

Looking at the pandemic from a business continuity perspective, many of us are still in the response phase, where we are coming to grips with the severity and scale of the pandemic. Several states in the U.S. have begun reopening certain businesses, such as retail stores and dine-in restaurants, to see how things progress.

While this works for some, it is not the optimum pandemic recovery plan for every organization. If organizations are to be properly prepared for a return to business, it's essential to establish a recovery framework.

The current pandemic is largely unprecedented. Many companies are already well into developing their return-to-work plans. Much of this process is likely to be influenced by federal and state government rulings, so, at this time, the key goal is to have a pandemic recovery plan framework in place and ready to launch.

Below are some of the issues and strategies associated with the next phase of getting back to business and guidance on how to prepare for recovery.

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Lean on your business impact analysis

If your organization previously conducted and documented a business impact analysis (BIA), it can be a good starting point for your pandemic recovery plan. Key attributes of a BIA include identifying a series of activities and resources that will inform your recovery plan.

First, a BIA should identify the processes and activities that an organization must perform to properly conduct its business. This may include policies, procedures, standards, methods and other guidance. You should also make a note of technologies that support the operation of business processes, such as systems, local and wide area networks, internet access, applications, data and databases, data protection and privacy, cybersecurity, and access management.

Employees are an important part of a BIA, so make sure to include which employees at all levels are essential to performing business processes. Depending on how a particular pandemic spreads, social distancing requirements may limit the number of on-site staff, so you should know the minimum number of employees your business needs to continue running in a crisis. Include in your analysis all resources that the organization needs to run the business, such as raw materials, manufactured goods, office supplies, furniture and desktop equipment. Document any external facilities such as office spaces, manufacturing

facilities, storage areas and parking garages. Utilities should be identified in a BIA, which may include electric power, water, gas, sewer and telecommunications.

Identify healthcare and financial resources that the organization needs to take care of employees and fund the business, as well as any funding that you could potentially invest in new resources during the recovery process. If company reputation is a concern, identify any scenarios that you may need to address to the public, stakeholders or competitors.

If a BIA is not available, the recovery team will need to rely on their knowledge of company operations to create a plan for recovering the business.

Preparing a framework for recovery

Armed with knowledge from the BIA, plus senior management support and funding, you can begin preparing a framework for relaunching your organization. Assuming you are authorized to do this, chances are you'll probably be part of a larger team charged with preparing to reopen the business. Hopefully you have technology such as teleconferencing that facilitates frequent planning sessions, which probably cannot be conducted face-to-face.

A thorough pandemic recovery framework should include the following:

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- business processes that can be quickly relaunched and a schedule to relaunch other processes;
- employees and teams taking the lead on critical business activities and those who can take over if the designated staff are unable;
- systems, data, databases and network resources that will support the relaunch of critical processes;
- facilities and utilities that support the business;
- healthcare supplies for the office, such as face masks, gloves, hand sanitizer and cleaning supplies;
- required social distancing procedures and policies for on-site and remote workers; and
- a master project plan with a timeline of specific dates, activities, goals, performance metrics and other items that will be used throughout the recovery.

Depending on your organization, following social distancing guidelines, other services may include those provided by an outside contractor or landlord, such as cleaning and food services. If your organization has conference rooms, you will need to establish how those are used moving forward, as well as cafeterias and other social areas. Include internal and external messaging in the master project plan, leading up to and throughout the process of reopening or relaunching the organization.

Progressing from recovery to resumption

Despite the activities we have suggested, much of a company's success in recovering will depend heavily on the energy and determination of employees involved. The amount of time a pandemic recovery plan takes is difficult to estimate, because for most organizations, a pandemic such as the coronavirus is an entirely new experience. The transition from business recovery to resumption can take many forms, depending on the company, its employees, its customers and the resources available to facilitate the resumption.

Resumption, or reconstitution, is usually the final step in a business continuity and recovery initiative and represents the successful return to business as usual, or as close to that as possible. Criteria that define a successful return to "normal" must be determined by the company, its employees and customers. As many of us are aware, a "new normal" is likely to result from these activities, and we must all be prepared accordingly.

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