Will Your Employees Be Ready To Work When You Need Them
Gerald Lewis, Ph.D.

Emergency preparedness is the watchword of our faith. All variety of work organizations from educational to healthcare settings, financial services to factories, and sales to services are preparing for the potential of a wide range of incidents that may disrupt the flow of goods and services. Often, the focus is on IT and infrastructure security and preparedness with limited regard for personnel readiness.

We have learned a great deal about crisis management in the last decade or so. We have learned that a work facility is more resilent than a worker's personal residence. Meaning, that a hospital or business in an urban area may be better prepared to sustain the impact of a storm, flood or other natural disaster than a small home. As an example, 25 nurses were fired from a hospital after Hurricane Rita for not coming to work. The hospital had back up generators and was able to continue operations. The nursing contract expected that workers would report for their shifts. However, the nurses' homes were damaged by the storm, and daycare facilities and schools were closed. Further, flooded roads and damaged autos may have made it difficult for them to get to work. While we do not know all of the reasons, the media reported that 25 were terminated from their positions. All work organizations should be as focused on the resiliency and availability of their workers as they are on IT, infrastructure security and other aspects of continuation of operations. The EPS is a place to begin. Utilizing such a survey provides the following:
- o Education to the employees about the organization's expectations
- o Education about what employees can do to be better prepared personally;
- o What services can an organization but in place that may facilitate a greater degree of resiliency for its workers
- o It indicates a level of caring and concern from the work organization
- o Similar to any business impact analysis (BIA), an EPS can serve as a PIA (personnel impact analysis) to determine areas of organizational vulnerability with respect to personnel.

The EPS is a 25-30 item survey questionnaire that is customized to the specific organization (thus, the variation in the range of items). It is a web based instrument that takes 5-10 minutes to administer. The questions are primarily multiple choice with a few open ended inquiries. The data is collected by a third party consultant and only the aggregate results (not individual) are available to the work organization. The content of the questions focus on 4 different areas:
1) Demographics:
   a. Age, gender, marital/partner status, children under age 16, other dependents, etc
2) Work responsibilities:
   a. Length of time working at organization, position, crisis responsibilities, training, etc
3) Availability issues:
   a. Distance from work, how do they commute,

Will Your Employees Be Ready to Return To Work… When You Need Them?

Gerald Lewis, Ph.D.

This paper reports the results of utilizing the Employee Preparedness Survey ©
 to 4000+ employees of the VA HCS located in NY, NY. These 4000 employees are
distributed among 3 campuses located in Manhattan, Brooklyn and St. Alban.

Regardless of what it is called: *continuity, contingency, resiliency, crisis management,
risk management*, or any of the other many labels, the best way to mitigate the likelihood
of an event from occurring or the impact should it occur is… **to be prepared**. This
certainly applies to assessing the "human technology" in order to determine where, when
and under what circumstances it, too, may be vulnerable.. The expectation is that
employees will be able to return to work whenever and wherever… and this is often not
the case.

Employees From a 'just in time" paradigm

With the nature of the work environment being as it is, employees should be viewed from
a JIT paradigm. In a similar way to product delivery, most work organizations receive
goods JIT rather than backlogging or storing them in a warehouse. If there is an
interruption to the supply chain for these goods or components, then the workplace may
not be able to deliver products and/or services to it's customers. Similarly, employees are
now being hired from a similar JIT paradigm. The workforce has been downsized
significantly and employers are often using part time workers and/or contract employees
to cut costs. So, if there were to be an incident, how does the work organization know if
their employees will come to work? Or, if the supply chain of employees will be
disrupted… and the warehouse is empty?

Culture is a critical component to crisis management

Every work place has a unique culture. Hospitals differ from retail establishments.
Financial institutions differ from manufacturing settings. And, while both are
educational settings, colleges are different from public schools. While this may seem a
simplistic notion, it is a concept that seems to be ignored when it comes to continuity
planning. What are the expectations of the workplace? If a crisis occurs, do you shut the
doors and all go home… as is the case of a restaurant or school? Or, is the expectation
that "all hands remain on deck" as is the case of a hospital.   As an example, imagine that
you are the crisis manager for a hospital and 1/3 or your nursing staff are contract
workers (nurses employed by an outside vendor who "rents" them to the hospital). Also,
your security department is also outsourced to a security vendor. This generates a
different culture from a hospital that employs all nurses and security. There most likely is
a different sense of loyalty, commitment and purpose. As another example, there may be

a work organization that has experienced a long and drawn out contract negotiation within the last several months. All has been settled, yet (as is often the case) there are disgruntled employees who feel that they did not get a "fair shake" from management. Then, they are expected to be readily available to the institution at times of a crisis. Or, a financial institution has merged with another organization and the dust has yet to settle. There is much stress and strain as some departments have been cut and others have been moved. Some employees have been laid off and others have been transferred. How do you think this organization would respond to a crisis. Culture is a critical component to crisis management.

Who Works for Us?

Demographic dynamics such as gender, age, race, marital status are extremely relevant when it comes to planning. Taking it even a step further, questions such as the following may often provide relevant information regarding the resiliency of a workforce.

> By what mode do you commute to work?
> Do you have children under the age of 16?
> Do you have other dependents that require your care?
> Do you have pets?

You may ask, 'Why is this information relevant to BC planning? Perhaps an example will suffice. Prior to hurricane Katrina, there was hurricane Rita. In a Florida hospital, 25 nurses were terminated because they did not report to work as their contract delineated. (This author spoke to the director of Human Resources who indicated that there were a number of issues involved and that it was not just as a result of the breach of the contract.) It should not come as a surprise that at times of natural disaster, a certain percentage of the workforce will not be able to return to work for some time, regardless of job description or contractual negotiations. In this case, the hospital was resilient and was fully functional during the hurricane. However, the homes, schools, and daycare centers were not. Public and private transportation was impacted, as were many automobiles. So, many employees theoretically experienced the worst kind of stress, "role conflict," whereby they must decide which of their obligations takes priority. For most people it is a choice of family duties and responsibilities over those of work. Nonetheless, it is a difficult "lose/lose" proposition that should never have to be the case. Further, a work organization does not want to find out about the availability factor of its workforce during an actual event.

Survey The Workforce

At times of natural disasters, terrorist activities, infrastructure disruptions, knowing about an organization's workforce availability provides a head start to organizational preparedness, protection, and provision of services. It is understood that taking care of people is a primary component of any contingency plan and an effort to improve resiliency of the total organization.   While it is not possible to plan for every contingency, there is a simple component that may be added to any impact planning that would facilitate a more comprehensive level of awareness and mitigation. As part of

preparing to be responsive to an array of incidents that may impact the organization, it is necessary to gather information about the employees. To that end, it is recommended that either the workplace design a questionnaire or that an outside consultant be contracted with to provide such an instrument. As people often have concerns about "giving up" personal information to their workplace, it is recommended that this survey be conducted via a web-based survey site and gathered anonymously by a third party consultant. Individual results are not seen and only the aggregate data is furnished to a work organization.

Besides demographic questions, the following are examples of other questions that are helpful with planning:

1. Do you know your responsibilities in a crisis situation?
   Yes   No   Not sure

2. If your immediate supervisor were unavailable, do you know to whom to report?
   Yes   No   Not sure

3. If job descriptions are assigned on the following availability factors, how would you rate the availability factor for your current position?
   ___Critical- need to be immediately available
   ___Essential- need to be available within 24 hours
   ___Significant- need to be available within 48- 72 hours

4. If you were given 12-24 hours to return home and settle your personal situation, would you then be able to return to work for:
   24 hours   48 hours   72 hours   not return until crisis settled

5. Do you have a spouse/significant other, neighbor, family member who would be able to care for your dependents if you were required to be at work for an extended period of time?
   Yes   no   not sure

6. If your employer had a SIP facility for your dependents, would this make it easier for you to stay at/return to work?
   a. Yes   no   not sure

A final question asked how comfortable they felt providing this information.

The VA Hospital administered this survey to its employees with an almost 90% compliance. This is the highest level of compliance that they have received on any survey of its employees. There are several components to building compliance:

Education- Through a variety of methods, employees were provided with education and explanation as to the purpose of the survey. They were also told that the results would be made available to them.

Supervisory involvement- Supervisors were told to urge their employees to complete the anonymous survey, on "company time."

Incentives- Each individual who completed the survey received an emergency "go bag." This type of "give-away" seemed to provide both a useful emergency oriented item as well as a reinforcement for completing the survey.

Anonymity and transparency- Rather than an internal survey that goes back to HR, this survey went to a third party consultant and only the aggregate results were given to the workplace.

Results:
The following are the results from the biggest campus (1500+)

Looking at the nursing staff, 316 completed the survey. Of this, the majority are female (82%) and between 40-60 years of age (70%). Sixty three percent were married or living with another responsible adult. Most knew their job responsibilities during a crisis and to whom to report. (88%). Sixty five percent understood that they need to be at work and be immediately available. Yet, 67% had children under the age of 16 or other dependents for whom they were responsible. In addition, twenty nine % had a medical condition that would make it difficult for them to stay at work during a crisis. Three quarters of this group used public transportation to commute to work which on a good day 80% indicated that it takes more than 30 minutes. One third indicated that they could not remain at work for 24 hours, if required to so. The majority indicated that if there were a shelter in place facility for dependents, that this would make it easier for them to return/remain at work. 42% of this group indicated that their family did not have a family crisis/preparedness plan. 43% indicated that they were "somewhat comfortable" or "very comfortable" providing this information while 24% indicated that they were "very uncomfortable" or "somewhat uncomfortable" (33% were neutral).

The open ended questions provided some interesting input from employees to improve their availability. Examples are: transportation services, passes to get through police/emergency lines, SIP, pet arrangements, free food, etc.