

Business Continuity Planning for an Influenza Pandemic: Case Study from an IFSC Financial Services Company

Introduction

This case study is one of ten written as a part of a study undertaken on *Business Continuity Planning for an Influenza Pandemic*. The objective is to raise awareness among business enterprises in Ireland of the need for business continuity planning (BCP) for the possible arrival of a 'flu pandemic in Ireland.

The case study is based on a real company, but is fictionalised in some respects. Key details have been altered to protect its identity.

Background

1. The business is a financial services operation based in the IFSC in Dublin. It is part of an international group. The majority of its work is back office, although there is some customer service and sales activity.
2. The international group of which the business forms a part places a heavy emphasis on business continuity, and there has planned for the possibility of an influenza pandemic at corporate level as one of a number of scenarios for emergencies.
3. The Dublin operation has its own "Continuity of Business" capability. This focuses on two main types of emergency – one in which the building becomes unavailable, and one in which an extreme event such as a pandemic makes substantial parts of the workforce unavailable.
4. The business has a "warm" back-up recovery site in Dublin, so as to allow key staff to continue working if the main building becomes inaccessible. There are regular exercises to test this facility.

1: Planning Activities

1. The business has well established Continuity of Business structures and capabilities internationally at corporate level, and in Ireland. Much of the planning for an influenza pandemic has taken place at corporate level.
2. Planning for continuity of business in the event of an influenza pandemic locally in Ireland takes place as a part of the wider Continuity of Business programme of activity. Many of the elements of preparedness for an influenza pandemic are already in place as a part of the organisation's established approach to Continuity of Business.
3. The staff responsible for Continuity of Business within Ireland have studied the likely implications of a pandemic for the Dublin operation, and plans have been adopted on the basis of their findings. They have consulted with their suppliers through a committee of support service vendors, including health insurers, canteen operators, the agency providing cleaning services and others. They have discussed continuity of service with telecommunications providers.
4. The business regularly undertakes exercises to test its preparedness plans. It will conduct a simulation exercise to test its preparedness for an influenza pandemic in the near future.
5. Plans for an influenza pandemic will be triggered by the convening of a crisis management meeting, which is likely (at latest) to follow from the identification of cases of pandemic influenza in Ireland or the UK.

2: Issues to be Addressed

1. The business has systematically attached priorities to different parts of the work that it does, and will be able to apply these priorities in the event of a pandemic.
2. As its work is people-intensive, any substantial level of absences will impact on its capability to operate. The level of absences likely at the peak of a severe pandemic would be likely to prevent the Dublin operation from carrying out its role effectively.
3. Aside from telecommunications and electricity, the business is not highly dependent on supplies from other organisations for continuity of business. Its operations are primarily concerned with back office processing of information from elsewhere in its group of companies. It would be vulnerable to a loss of power.
4. Consideration has been given to the impact of a pandemic on the volume of business. The conclusion is that some areas will probably slow down in the event of a pandemic, but that the volume of activity in other areas could be much higher. For example, a crisis such as a pandemic could trigger higher volumes of share trading, driving more back office activity.

3: Measures to Underpin Continuity

1. In the event that a pandemic seriously compromises the organisation's capability to operate in Dublin, there are plans to move work usually carried out in Dublin to another location within the group. It is expected that waves of infection will not hit all countries in which the group has back office operations at the same time, and that it will be possible to concentrate work in locations where the pandemic is relatively inactive.
2. The business has consulted with its telecommunications provider on continuity of service, and is considering whether there is anything it can do to further limit its exposure to an interruption in telecommunications.
3. The business has an established system of nominated deputies, which will continue to operate if key people are unavailable.
4. The business places a heavy emphasis on cross-training, making it straightforward to allocate staff to the highest priority work.
5. There are plans in place for emergency communications internally, including a call tree system that allows all employees to be contacted efficiently. There are plans to open up telephone lines for clients to call, and a line for family members to call in the event of a pandemic.
6. Policies for sick leave and compassionate leave specific to a pandemic have been put in place.
7. The business has involved suppliers in its planning, and has made agreements regarding continuity of service.
8. To the extent that the Dublin operation has staff temporarily located at other offices overseas, taking care of them in the event of a pandemic will be the responsibility of the office where they are currently based.
9. There are plans in place to cater for increased take-up of employee welfare services, made in consultation with health insurers. There are arrangements for counselling to be provided by a psychologist if required.

4: Response to Workplace Risk

1. The business will introduce guidelines on hygienic behaviour for employees in the event of a pandemic, following the guidelines similar to those published by the Department of Health and Children.
2. A substantial stockpile of materials has been established for cleaning and hand hygiene (including alcohol-based washes) in the event of a pandemic.
3. The business has acquired disposable face masks to be available for use by employees in the event of a pandemic. The quantity acquired was calculated at three per employee per day for three months.
4. Staff responsible for business continuity have obtained advice on what to do with air conditioning in the event of a pandemic. They are considering the possibility of turning it off to reduce air circulation provided that it this does not have too severe an impact on working conditions.
5. Arrangements have been made to change the pattern of cleaning in the workplace in the event of a pandemic. This will involve changes in what is cleaned, changes in the cleaning materials used (drawing on the stockpile), changes in cleaning methods and an increase in the total amount of cleaning activity.
6. There is scope to restrict access to different areas within the operation, and this may be used to reduce mixing between different teams.
7. There is only limited scope for increased teleworking. It would not be practical for back office work to be done offsite.
8. The business has considered the possibility of establishing a stock of antiviral pharmaceuticals for use by staff in the event of a pandemic. So far, the organisation's view has that the issues this would raise outweigh the benefits.

Challenges of Planning for a 'Flu Pandemic

Planning for business continuity is a regular part of this organisation's approach to business. Planning for an influenza pandemic broadens the range of challenges, because the main focus is on people rather than buildings and systems, but this is an incremental change. It has been possible to build plans for a response to the threat of an influenza pandemic on the base of existing plans for business continuity.

Conclusion

This business has placed a high priority on preparedness for an influenza pandemic, and has made a significant and well planned investment in time and resources to underpin continuity of business.