

CONTINUITY AMIDST CRISIS



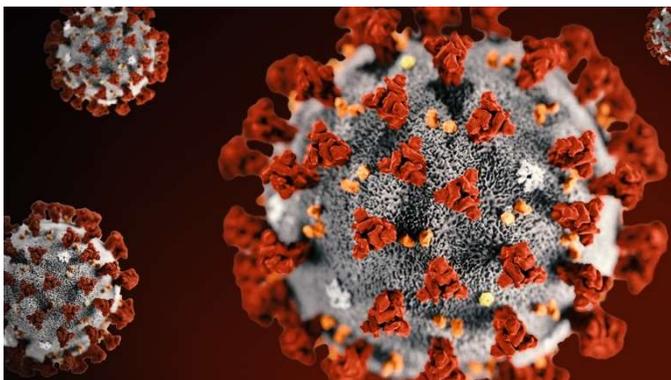
THE NORTH GROUP
SECURITY. REFINED BY INTELLIGENCE.

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The North Group is an intelligence-driven, global security firm that provides risk management services customized from inception to resolution. We deliver protective services, emergency preparedness consultation, and intelligence reporting at both the individual and organizational levels. Our success capitalizes on our 100+ combined years of military, law enforcement, and private sector experience.

PREFACE

Between 2007 and 2013, a *pandemic* seemed to be the cause du jour to prepare for around the world. From H1N1 to H5N1 to Ebola – it was coming. In that time, I developed corporate, municipal, and county-level continuity plans, wrote regional alternate care site plans, conducted exercise after exercise after exercise – including one that sent over 1,000 role players to makeshift dispensing sites to receive candy-coated antivirals while testing throughput. Terms like SNS (strategic national stockpile) and POD (point of dispensing) seemed to enter our everyday lexicon. It was coming. And it did, but with more of a whimper than a bang. Here and there cases were detected, bugs were surveilled, people got sick, and some even died – yet it always seemed to just go away. After a while, there was a feeling that everyone was tired of the subject and just wanted to plan for something else. Not that they wanted to ignore it, the hype just didn't evolve.

But not here, not now.

When we first heard the reports in late December no one gave it much thought, but for a handful of hardcore epidemiologists and a mere mention on the evening news. There was an impeachment going on, after all, don't bother us with people eating bats. Then it spread. And by early March we were out of toilet paper. Schools closed. The sports world shut down. Businesses shuttered. I can't even buy paint anymore. Everything we talked about for 6-years was now happening before our eyes – yet the perception is that no one seemed ready for it. No one seemed ready for it because, while planning for it, it gave the impression that it would require little effort to respond. If it happens, we'll see it coming and we'll do this, this, and this. Too easy, next. Yet in reality, the difference between the discussion and the actual scope of events mutated into the inconceivable.

It doesn't have to be that way. There is a lot that businesses can do to keep the lights on, even if you don't have a plan. There are more resources at your disposal than you may realize.

- Robert House, Director of Emergency Preparedness Services, The North Group, April 2020.

OVERVIEW

We are truly living in an uncertain time. Are you as tired of hearing that as I am of saying it? Probably, but sadly it's true. And because of that, uncertainty is what we are all feeling right now. Whether it's uncertainty from conflicting information, to what this situation is currently doing to ourselves, our families, our organizations – to just a general fear of the unknown – all of us are affected in one way or another.



Unfortunately, the media doesn't help quell that uncertainty. In their rush to be dramatic or more like apocalyptic, they tend to report the first little bit of information they come across – sometimes without a whole lot of research and checking the facts. While we see this time and time again, it's important to understand that a lot of reported news is an opinion and we must make our own decisions based upon how the situation is directly affecting our operational capability.

A key thing to remember through all of this is that you can still impact your operations – in a positive way – and make things better than they are, or potentially better than they were. When we look at continuity operations, we're trying to maintain the consistent application of our essential functions until we can return to normal.

The keyword here is *consistent* – because everything doesn't have to stop when the crisis starts.

Mike Tyson (yes, the boxer) once said, *"Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth."* Think about that for a minute. What does it mean after you stop chuckling? It

means that even if you're good at what you do – and you have a plan in place that helps you be good – that somewhere, sometime, something along the way is going to throw that proverbial wrench in your gears and you're going to have to deal with it.

I use that quote in every training lecture I give as it can be applied to *any* critical incident – in fact, to *anything* in general. It's how you plan for, and *react* to, the situation – not the situation itself – that determines your success or failure. When it happens – and it will happen – when that wrench flies into your gears and disrupts the status quo, there is a natural human tendency to freeze and do nothing. Most people can't handle that type of calamity. Will you react or just sit there? This question brings us to the 10-80-10 principle and how it relates to our current situation.

"Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth"

If you're not familiar with it, the 10-80-10 principle (or rule) – in its simplest form – as it applies to an emergency, 10% of the people are going to quickly step up and do what they need to do. They have planned, they have trained, they understand the concepts behind the response and can react. They are capable of making decisions under duress and the first decision they make is that they *will* survive whatever is happening by doing whatever they need to do.

The next 80% are going to be affected in a way that initially sets them back – but a good portion will eventually come around and respond/recover in some way, shape, or form. Maybe they don't react well to initial shock or maybe they played on their phones during safety lectures. Regardless, they've still absorbed some aspect of responding that will in time emerge.

Now, the last 10% are those that – for lack of a better term – will lose their collective minds and never recover in time to effectively respond. Either they've adopted the *"it's never going to happen to me"* mentality -or- they ignore every possible warning sign in front of them because their world is full of rainbows and unicorns -or- they're opposed to the very nature of the training that could have helped them. My best example for the latter is when I conduct active shooter response training. Whether the audience is from a corporate office or a school, it isn't uncommon to have 1 or 2 that

refuse to participate in the drills because of the “scary” subject matter. When this happens, I don’t force them or belittle them – life is about choice; however, I do remind them that while they can opt-out of the training, they can’t opt-out of the real thing when it happens. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t. Either way, when it comes down to it, this last group unfortunately becomes an initial write-off and we just have come back for them later, *if* they survive.

In the early stages of COVID-19 – when folks were really starting to get nervous – we were sitting around and talking about the public reaction. Out of the blue one of us said, “*Learning how to survive is technical – **surviving** is emotional.*”



As I thought about it, it really related to all the training sessions I’ve conducted, as well as the bottom 10-percenters I’ve encountered in the past. It’s very easy to physically learn how to evacuate a building or react to a shooter – those are just systematic procedures to understand. But it’s a whole new ballgame when you have to implement them in a real situation.

Naturally, our goal here is to stay out of that bottom bracket and progress towards the top 10%. We will be survivors.

So, how do we do that? How do we drive on even if our plan failed or doesn’t exist? It’s not easy, but let’s look at six areas that can help us sustain and don’t require a lot of prior planning.

- 1) Identify your limitations
- 2) Focus on what’s essential
- 3) Analyze your current efforts
- 4) Use your chain of command
- 5) Communicate with your supply chain
- 6) Check on your people

Before we go on, it’s important to note here that this isn’t a process. These things can overlap or occur in virtually any order. It depends upon priorities and what can be done when.

IDENTIFYING YOUR LIMITATIONS

There’s a letter circulating in which a high school student (and aspiring fighter pilot) asked Bob Norris, a retired Naval Aviator, whether he should attend the Naval Academy or the Air Force Academy, as he was accepted to both. In his response, the aviator tried to help the young man decide by explaining the differences between the two service branches.

He wrote about the Air Force:

“The USAF is homogenous and macro. No matter where you go, you’ll know what to expect, what is expected of you, and you’ll be given the training & tools you need to meet those expectations. You will never be put in a situation over your head.”

“When it comes to identifying your limitations look at what you can’t do first - that’s going to tell you what you can do”

He then wrote this about the Navy:

“The Navy is heterogeneous and micro. Your squadron is your home; it may be great, average, or awful... The quality of your training will vary and sometimes you will be over your head.”¹

While the aviator went on to indirectly, and quite humorously, nudge the student toward the Naval Academy (for obvious reasons), the underlying message here is that based on circumstance the Air Force tells you only what you **can** do and the Navy just tells you what you **can’t** do. After reading

¹ <https://www.serviceacademyforums.com/index.php?threads/usna-vs-usafa-for-flying.15173/>

this, your first thought might be, *“what’s the difference?”* When you examine it further the difference is huge – and I can personally verify this assumption by a previous life spent at sea. This *difference* is how it ties into identifying your limitations.

When it comes to identifying your limitations look at what you **CAN’T** do first and that’s going to tell you what you **CAN** do – which is virtually everything else. This provides a far more open-minded approach and you’re less likely to leave something on the table, something that could have helped you.

However, even if you can do something, don’t try and do too much and stretch your resources. Until this crisis is over, it’s time to preserve what you already have in place.

FOCUSING ON THE ESSENTIAL

After conducting a Business Impact Analysis (or BIA), identifying your essential functions is the next step in continuity planning. Every other aspect of scaled-down operations will revolve around these functions.

When we talk essential functions, we’re talking about the absolute **MINIMUM** you need to do to keep the lights on. Whether it’s your core business activities, critical staffing requirements, or bare essential resources, these are the things that will help maintain your activities in times of emergency.

Identifying these functions is where being realistic in your expectations is most important – because unfortunately in a time like this not everything or everyone is essential. The choice is never easy, but it must be made for the sake of your business.

“When we talk essential functions, we’re talking the absolute MINIMUM you need to do to keep the lights on.”

If all else fails, you may have to completely reorganize, or even devolve, to sustain operational capability during the crisis. If you’re not familiar with the term devolve or devolution as it applies to continuity operations – it basically means to bring in another entity, whether an organization,

contractors, etc, to assist you in, or even take over, executing your essential functions.

For example, many large manufacturers have begun shifting their traditional production efforts to fabricating medical supplies.

When it comes to identifying essential and non-essential tasks, staff, and resources, remember that this is not permanent. You’re just trying to keep swimming. When we create continuity plans, we try and develop an operational strategy for a 30-day period. That’s going to give you the time you need to re-assess and make changes as you need them.

ANALYZING CURRENT EFFORTS

Analyzing efforts is a continual process that can be implemented and sustained at any time. This situation is no longer theoretical – it’s happening – and capturing how our actions are relating to our strategies will allow us to improve



our decision-making at critical junctures.

This is a great opportunity to use staff members that are idle or have reduced workloads. Let them dissect everything that’s going on with your business. Let them tell you what’s working and what’s not. Let them help you make decisions that can mean the difference.

If you’re paying attention, lessons learned will arise every day. The sooner you can implement change, the sooner you can make improvements to your process. If it’s not working, don’t be afraid to improve it.

USING YOUR CHAIN OF COMMAND

I'm sure most of you have a robust and effective organizational structure – it's an important aspect of running an efficient operation. If you don't have one, an effective chain of command provides for consistent guidance, direction, and communication. While always important, our current state of decentralization can hinder this – especially if you've never operated this way before.

If you haven't already, I encourage you to immediately incorporate these two things into your chain of command – delegations of authority and orders of succession.

Delegations of authority provide consent to peers or subordinates to act on behalf of a primary position holder, should they become temporarily unavailable to perform their assigned duties. Typically, primary position holders will identify persons given this authority based on experience and capability, as well as identify specific limitations to what the delegee can or cannot do in their absence.

Orders of succession provide permanent power and authority, to the designated successor when the primary position holder is no longer unavailable to perform their assigned duties. Given that these orders are permanent, there may be legal requirements for the approval of successors.

“Always remember, when it comes to delegation, you can delegate authority, but you cannot delegate responsibility.”

You can create these delegations and orders for as many positions as you see fit. A good rule of thumb is to go 3-deep for each position, as this can provide a layer of backup if needed.

Always remember, when it comes to delegation, you can delegate authority, but you cannot delegate responsibility.

COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR SUPPLY CHAIN

We all need resources and more than likely depend on other organizations for them. It's critical that you stay in contact with your suppliers and understand their current capabilities.

² Name changed to protect the innocent.

The #1 question to ask is – can your suppliers continue to provide you the materials and services that you need?



Quite a few years ago I was conducting a multi-agency tabletop exercise where the scenario revolved around a long-term power outage and the discussion eventually led to fuel resources for diesel generators. When I asked the first group where they get their fuel, they said, *“We have an agreement with Big Jim’s Fuel and Gas².”* I said “great” and asked the next group the same question. *“We have an agreement with Big Jim’s Fuel and Gas, too.”* Ok, next group. *“Umm...we have an agreement with Big Jim’s Fuel and Gas.”* They all kind of laughed at first and then patted themselves on the back for being resourceful by having an agreement in place. But what they didn't realize was that “Big Jim” wasn't that big. In reality, he only had one small truck and would never be able to provide the fuel quantity that each of these organizations would need at the same time, thus leaving someone literally in the dark.

Now the moral of that story is that not only do you need to understand your supplier's capabilities, you also need to know where you are on their priority list. The last thing you need in an emergency is to get left without a chair when the music stops.

Of course, one of the first recommendations in the after-action report, from this exercise, was that everyone needed to identify multiple resource options.

Given the possibility that resources may begin to deplete – as manufacturers continue to shut down – staying in regular

contact with your supply chain is something you can (and should) be doing right now.

CHECKING ON YOUR PEOPLE

Last, but certainly not least, we come to our most important resource – our people. Duty of care is something we've all probably heard about but may tend to just think about it in the travel sense. It goes far beyond that.

Employers have a moral – as well as legal – responsibility and obligation for the health, safety, and security of their employees whether they're at home or abroad. As leaders, duty of care starts with setting the standard and doing the right thing. This means openly following guidance, direction, and control initiatives put in place by authorities. We may not like them or think they don't apply to us, but the buy-in needs to start from the top. Be the standard and your staff will follow.

If you have employees telecommuting – which most of us probably do now – ensure that you're providing them with realistic expectations. It's hard working from home – I've done it a lot and there are distractions galore. Establishing a consistent communication and reporting process can help keep everyone focused. Maintain the team connection with online meetings and conference calls. Just don't overwhelm them or make them constantly check-in. Trust that they will do what's needed and allow them to do it.

As leaders – regardless of level – we have to continually check on both their physical and emotional states and needs.



Talk to them regularly and listen to their concerns. No one is used to something like this and everyone is affected.

This is something that I personally tend to have a hard time with. Having deployed to combat zones and working under very stressful conditions – for extended periods of time – I've developed a thicker skin when it comes to situations like this and don't always empathize when I should. I'm getting better though. The bottom line here is that everyone is going to react differently, and you should be prepared to address that.

RECOVERING

Over the years, I've heard many of my peers say something along the lines of *you have to fight the war you got* – and we've got one. Although believe it or not, there are advantages here over other types of situations when it comes to recovering. Now, I am in no way stating that this situation is of any advantage to anyone, but let's look at what's still available:

“Most of the workforce reduction is precautionary.”

Infrastructure is intact. There is no physical damage as if there were a tornado, earthquake, or fire. The worst we'll have to do is decontaminate.

Communication and network systems are operational, for the same reason as above.

Most of the workforce reduction is precautionary. Regardless of what the media tells you, look at the numbers. Our staff will be ready to return.

While the situation is ever-changing, we can see it happen and, above all, there is time to affect our own change.

Remember, this crisis will end. We don't know when, but hopefully sooner than later. But when it happens, there probably won't be an ALL CLEAR signal and everyone will fly out of the cave at the same time – recovery will occur at different intervals depending upon circumstances. Returning to normal, or at least to as normal as we can get, is what will eventually happen.

Depending on how long this crisis lasts, you may have to stagger your resumption. Meaning, if it happens to end tomorrow, we can probably go back to work with little effort – but if it protracts, it will be harder. Supplies will become

more depleted and staff may be reluctant to quickly return. This is where your constant analysis comes into play again – as the time to plan for your recovery is now.

ANALYZING WHAT HAPPENED

Following every incident, event, or even exercise it's extremely important to identify our strengths and areas for improvement. We can't learn unless we evaluate. Everything during an emergency is a teaching moment.

Upon resuming normal operations, you MUST debrief and evaluate what happened. While I stated earlier that you can learn and implement lessons while responding, this is now the time to look back at everything.

“In conducting your evaluation, look at absolutely everything and reverse engineer how this crisis affected your business.”

A good after-action analysis will reveal overall gaps and weaknesses in the following:

- Planning and training
- Supply chain flexibility
- Communication issues
- Critical staffing requirements
- Essential and non-essential tasks

This should be an *all-hands* effort from top to bottom, as everyone was affected and undoubtedly learned something.

In conducting your evaluation, look at absolutely everything and reverse engineer how this crisis affected your business. This will reveal facts, new information, and validate any assumptions made regarding previous planning and how you responded during the crisis.

Take this data and use it – don't stick it on a shelf. Use it to improve your plans, procedures, and protocols. Use it to improve your processes, communications, and training. Use it to make sure that if this ever happens again – you'll be better prepared as an organization and as individuals.

CONCLUSION

PUSH BACK AGAINST THE CRISIS! Don't let this overcome your *RESOLVE* to remain operational.

When it comes down to continuing your critical business functions, you need to do whatever you can – legally of course – to remain operational. Don't let setbacks overcome you. Remember, there's a lot more that you can do, than can't. The more you analyze, assess, and make decisions, the better chance you will have to come out of this crisis intact.



To find out more about how The North Group can help your organization during, and after, the crisis, visit our website at www.TNGdefense.com or email us at info@TNGdefense.com.