It’s tragic that the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) continues in West Africa with little change in the trajectory of this communicable disease. Events such as Eric Duncan’s hospitalization and death in Dallas, plus infection of two of his nurses catapulted the reality of EVD outside West Africa into the mainstream US media, and thus into the thoughts of most observant Americans.

The reactions to EVD have understandably varied from heightened anxiety to calmly understated aplomb. What has become clear is that fear of Ebola has affected far more people in the United States than the disease ever will. More information about the virus is available on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website.

**Unknown = Anxiety**

This state of anxiety is not unexpected given the newness and poor understanding of the lethal yet hard-to-transmit disease. It is thus not surprising that the potential impact of EVD, aside from actually being infected by it, is compelling many business leaders and managers to address EVD issues whether they do business globally or just domestically.

As this situation progresses, it has drawn the attention of many businesses to evaluate their own preparedness to the potential impact Ebola may have on their operations and supply chain. This recognition has reminded many organizations that they must be prepared for Ebola and whatever else may come along.

**Be Prepared With a Continuity Management Program**

Organizations today, more than ever, should make the wise investment in developing, implementing, and maintaining a viable Continuity Management Program. When developed correctly, a Continuity Management Program takes an “all hazards” approach to providing a layer of protection for your most important assets: people, information, cash flow, and reputation.
Pandemic planning is one aspect of a Continuity Management Program, just as continuity management is one aspect of enterprise risk management. To be effective, it relies upon the creation and maintenance of:

**A business continuity plan**

**A technology/disaster recovery plan**

**A crisis communications plan**

Continuity Management creates the highest levels of preparedness for Ebola or whatever risk may come along. Given the current World Health Organization Stage for the Ebola outbreak, current actions should include, but are not limited to, the following:

**Educate**
- Provide current information and training on prevention of pandemic infectious disease outbreak to your employees.
- Provide a summary or review of your current pandemic preparedness plan.

**Review**
- Review and prepare the work-at-home strategy for those areas of your business that can telecommute. This includes access to essential technology components and communications among employees.
- Review and prepare a work transfer strategy for functions and processes that can be transferred to other office locations or external entities outside the geographical region.
- Technology review of bandwidth, security, and connectivity to support increased traffic associated with telecommuting and work-from-home strategies.
- Business continuity plans for process and functional priorities and recovery time objectives, work instructions, and resource requirements.
- Review current insurance coverages with brokers and carriers to ensure adequate coverage along with what may be covered and what is not.
- Reach out to supply chain (critical vendors and suppliers) to understand their preparedness capabilities.

**Monitor**
- Monitor World Health Organization, US Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and local health official’s reports and status updates.
- Monitor current staff absenteeism levels; provide regular reporting to management and executive teams.

Organizational preparedness starts with an executive commitment, communicated throughout the organization.
The next step is ensuring the appropriate process or methodology (e.g. best practices) are followed to leave no stone left unturned.

This starts with the Business Impact Analysis or BIA. The BIA provides a wealth of information and is the foundation of an effective enterprise Continuity Management Program.

However, it is not a standalone solution and shouldn’t be confused as an alternative to either a business continuity plan (BCP) or technology disaster recovery plan (DRP). Without full support, approval, and backing from the highest levels of management, a BIA, or DRP/BCP for that matter, will not achieve its full potential or benefit to your organization. A well-executed Business Impact Analysis can make the difference between a fully developed, robust Continuity Management Program and a mediocre one.

A risk assessment is another key component to developing a continuity management program. This process involves identifying the most probable threats to an organization which could result in a loss of ability to perform critical and essential processes identified in the BIA. The risk assessment involves evaluating existing physical and environmental security and controls and assessing their adequacy relative to the potential threats to the organization.

When examined together, these two components will give an organization a picture of what it does, what it needs, the cost of not being able to perform and the threats which, if materialized, would cause an operational interruption. Once the information from the BIA and Risk Assessment are available, then the process of developing high-level recovery strategy options for the restoration of people, technology, and information/data can begin.

CONTINUITY PROGRAM PLAN

ACTIVATION TIMELINE

Interrupting Event

- Business Continuity Plan (People)
- Crisis Communication Plan
- Disaster Recovery Plan (Technology)
- Emergency Action Plan
- Pandemic Preparedness Plan
SAMPLE CONTINUITY PROGRAM: RESPOND THROUGH RESUMPTION

Tying the Pieces Together

With this information gathered, then the business continuity plan, technology disaster recovery plan, crisis communications plan, emergency action plan, and pandemic preparedness plans can be crafted to provide the most effective approach to restoring and resuming critical and essential functions and processes based upon appropriate strategies whatever threat facing the success of your business is lurking around the corner.

About FDI Consulting

FDI Consulting is a premier provider of continuity management and technology consulting solutions. We understand the challenges and obstacles facing organizations in today’s fast-paced, ‘do more with less,’ regulatory driven world. That is what has allowed us to continually delight our clients. With this understanding we are constantly evaluating and enhancing our approach, along with expanding our knowledge to provide the most cost-effective solutions for our clients.

What Makes Us Different?

Our management team believes that you deserve solutions, whether for your continuity management or toughest technology challenges, tailored specifically to the needs of your organization. Every one of our clients are treated as if they were our only client, meaning they will get the utmost care throughout our relationship with them. As a result, our analysis, recommendations, plans, exercises, and other work products are never justified by generic “best practices” alone—instead, we combine our experience and knowledge with a deep understanding of your organization to create a solution that best meets your unique needs.

Should you have any questions about FDI Consulting, or wish to learn more about our firm, please email us at info@FDIconsultinginc.com.

About Lockton

More than 5,300 professionals at Lockton provide 41,000 clients around the world with risk management, insurance, and employee benefits consulting services that improve their businesses. From its founding in 1966 in Kansas City, Missouri, Lockton has attracted entrepreneurial professionals who have driven its growth to become the largest privately held, independent insurance broker in the world and 10th largest overall. Independent researcher Greenwich Associates has awarded Lockton its Service Excellence Award for risk management for large companies. For six consecutive years, Business Insurance has recognized Lockton as a “Best Place to Work in Insurance.” To see the latest insights from Lockton’s experts, check the Lockton Market Update, the Lockton Health Reform Blog, the Lockton Health Risk Solutions Blog, or the Lockton HR Technology Blog.