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Organizational Resilience: 7 Phases That Move You From Crisis Through Recovery

In analyzing numerous crises over 30 years we have found that while each event is unique, typically all exhibit 7 common phases. This constitutes an essential roadmap for organizations in assessing their preparedness and determining necessary steps to effectively and expediently respond should a large-scale event affect their operations.

In this white paper, we will walk you through a detailed account of each phase and provide areas to address in responding to the needs of human assets, such as employees, families and visitors, within an organization.

Phase 1: Crisis

The key need during the crisis phase is safety. Components include:

Evacuating the Facility:

The first thing we want employees and persons on premise to do in a crisis is attempt to evacuate. However, only 20% of people will step up to take action. The other 20% will become paralyzed and 60% will wait for leadership from someone else. For those that do attempt to evacuate, if they have not had practice, most will gravitate toward the exit they are most familiar with even when it is not the closest or safest for their location. To reduce human loss we want to ensure that employees take action when the bell rings and are familiar with alternate exits. We can do this by regularly performing drills, helping staff create new muscle memory, a critical skill when the rational mind is under duress.

Accounting for People:

Accounting for people is important for first responders and rescue operations, as well as for providing information to concerned loved ones. Not everyone will go to a pre-identified location – some will flee, making it difficult to account for them. Having a process established for each employee to communicate their status and location is important. Organizations such as Black Swan Solutions and others can provide resources to help track and account for people in a crisis situation.

Leadership Response:

Leaders can be traumatized during a crisis but will still be expected to make decisions and act quickly to assist others. They will also be looked upon, along with Human Resources, to provide outreach to affected families and individuals. It will be important to work with an outside organization in setting up an assistance center for family members of those who are injured/deceased, to provide emotional support assist with funeral arrangements, and help with claiming personal belongings. It is particularly important to have a backup plan and resources should leaders be unable or unwilling to manage the incident.

Providing Access to Accurate Information:

Organizations will be expected to provide information on the situation and to report on the missing, injured and deceased to affected family members. It is important that the information be provided quickly but also accurately. Families and individuals who know someone possibly affected by the crisis will look to the media for information if they are not receiving it promptly or directly from the

organization. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for incorrect information to be released via the media, which can be detrimental to perceptions of the organization and its ability to respond. Ideally a reliable way for individuals to communicate with the organization will be provided, possibly via a contracted crisis call center that will serve as a point of contact and update concerned family and loved ones as information is available. Some organizations attempt to staff an information hotline themselves but often become quickly overwhelmed by the volume of calls.

Coordinating First Responders:

First responders include not only local law enforcement, the fire department and emergency medical personnel, but many others, including the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, local pastors, layperson groups, etc. The organization will need to manage who has access to affected employees and individuals, as well as who may need mental health support. A designated individual from the organization should be in charge of setting up a place for first responders to mobilize to coordinate the response.

Phase 2:

Aftermath

The key needs during the aftermath phase are ensuring medical care and emotional support to all impacted parties. Responding to ongoing media requests will also be important, as well as providing psychological first aid to affected individuals and families. In addition, the following components are typically completed within the first week following an incident and include:

Assessing Damage to the Site:

Questions that will need to be answered include:

- What type of cleanup is needed?
- Can the facility re-open and if so, what needs to occur?
- How long will re-opening take?

Depending on the crisis, the cleanup process will be different. Even if employees are willing to do the cleanup for additional work, it is often better to rely upon specialized providers. Although not intentional, using employees for this work can result in post-secondary trauma.

Assessing Impact on the Workplace:

Recognize that a crisis has ripple effects, so determining who needs assistance within the organization will be important and could be widespread. Determine the

individual needs and how to meet them. Also, assess who was immediately impacted, such as those injured, witnesses, families, etc.

Coordinating Family Assistance:

Unless contracted through an outside vendor, coordinating family assistance often falls upon Human Resources. This includes setting up a family assistance center, coordinating family travel, making funeral arrangements, arranging meals, and memorial services.

Conducting Hospital Visits:

Organizations will need a coordinator and liaison to help determine employee needs and conduct visits to the hospital for injured employees. Expect that families and employees will have questions about benefits.

Returning Personal Items:

Personal items of deceased or injured employees, as well as items left abruptly from evacuating the facility, such as keys, purses, cars, etc., will need to be returned. Determine who will return the items and how or where this will occur.

Ongoing Communication:

Employees will need regular updates on when the facility will re-open, logistics for returning to work and the benefits available to them. Leaders will need to understand how the investigation is unfolding and how to manage media requests.

Providing Counseling Support:

Continual counseling will be needed for families, employees and leaders. This typically consists of listening, determining needs and then connecting them with local resources.

Phase 3:

Recovery

The key need during the recovery phase is providing timely and accurate information for management and employees to help them re-engage. These components are typically completed the first week following the crisis through re-entry and include:

Investigation:

Determining what happened and/or what caused the crisis will be part of the investigation process. The organization will need to determine who should be

involved in the investigation and what changes need to be made to ensure safety. This will be particularly important for helping employees feel comfortable returning to work.

Return to work planning:

Planning for return to work involves determining what needs to be fixed at the facility for employees to come back safely. This involves establishing a timeline, determining what is still operable and planning for the reopening event. Some organizations hold a memorial service onsite prior to reopening. They may also allow employees to walk through the facility prior to its official opening to help them feel more comfortable upon their return. Some organizations also allow employees additional time off prior to returning if needed. Remember that each employee will respond differently to the crisis; some employees may want to resume work the next day where others may need additional time off.

Information and support:

Continuing to provide information remains important. At this stage, provide information about return to work status, available support, employee benefits and pay. Consider providing a leadership debriefing on managing stress and how to be supportive while also holding employees accountable.

Determining return to work status:

Many issues can affect employees returning to work. Some may not return following a crisis. Also, be aware that some employees who are initially out on workers compensation due to physical injuries may also experience mental health issues from the incident resulting in a longer leave of absence than initially anticipated.

Phase 4:

Re-engagement

The key requirement during the re-engagement phase is establishing a safe workplace and providing support and information. The main components include:

Determine and implement new safety measures:

Assess the crisis to determine where safety can be improved. Be sure to let employees know of additional measures being taken as this will help reduce their anxiety and assure them that their safety and security is paramount. Don't forget to listen to employee concerns and address any issues they share.

Re-engage management and employees:

Provide frequent communication and visits by leadership. Management can benefit from special training on how to deal with employee concerns, as well as handling their own emotions. Areas to focus on during a manager training include:

- How to deal with different employee reactions
- What to do if employees have safety concerns
- How to best support employees while managing your own emotions
- How to stay connected to employees while the facility is closed. Emphasize the importance of maintaining a relationship with employees during this time.
- Remind managers not to overpromise. If managers don't have the answers to questions, tell them it's okay to look into it and get back to employees.
- Ensure that managers are aware that some employees may not return to work.

Employee training following a crisis should focus on the following:

- Provide employees with an overview of new safety measures taken and any workplace changes they can expect.
- Take employees to the new or remodeled facility before it opens to improve their comfort level in returning to work. Educate them on the changes made to the facility.
- Provide ongoing communication regarding changes to the facility and any safety enhancements, if applicable.

Phase 5:

Re-entry

The key need during the re-entry phase is ensuring safety and providing emotional support and ongoing information. Components include:

Resuming operations:

Depending on the incident, operations can resume within days or months. Be sure to keep employees and managers apprised regularly so they know the anticipated timeline for resuming operations.

Ensuring a secure work environment:

Thoroughly assess the work environment for security and review any changes made with employees.

Regular communication from leadership:

This is a common thread throughout all phases. Communicate, communicate, communicate.

Providing emotional support to employees:

During the initial days of re-entry, consider having counselors on-site to provide emotional support to employees. Unexpected emotional responses may happen as employees return to work. If having on-site counselors is not possible, be sure to alert managers to possible emotional responses and have resources, such as EAP services, readily available for employees who need them.

Acknowledge milestones with memorial services, etc:

Consider conducting a memorial service. There are many options for providing a memorial depending on the incident and your workplace culture. Some organizations have coordinated a social event before re-opening, while others have done a memorial service the day before reopening.

Phase 6:

Stabilization

The key need during the stabilization phase is ensuring safety, providing support and memorializing the event and people affected. Key components include:

Adapting to a new normal:

Adapting to a new normal takes time. During this transition phase, it is important to help managers stay on top of employee concerns and also to manage performance concerns. Some managers may feel uncomfortable addressing performance issues with employees that were affected by the crisis, but it is an important task for both them and the company. Help managers to improve their emotional intelligence and their ability to communicate on sensitive topics with specialized training and coaching.

Provide ongoing information about changes resulting from the incident to both employees and managers.

Giving employees and managers information and prior notice about changes will help them to cope with the adjustments more easily. When possible, seek input from them as well.

Testing safety measures:

This can vary depending on the incident. For instance, if the incident involved an employee or relative of an employee who was an active shooter at a facility, this

might include training on how to identify someone who is at risk early on. For a safety issue that involved a fire or explosion, it might include a daily review of safety measures.

Marking the anniversary event of the crisis with services or memorial events

Marking an anniversary is symbolic for remembering the event, those affected and the progress made. Providing a dedication memorial in a park, planting trees on the grounds at the facility, or simply having a dedicated time on-site at the facility for people to gather are all ways to mark the anniversary of the event. Providing counseling support during an anniversary event can help employees manage emotions they might experience during the event.

Acknowledge success

Acknowledge staff commitments by celebrating successes and appreciation for their dedication and hard work. The importance of highlighting the achievements made is crucial for morale and workplace culture.

Phase 7:

Preparation

The seventh phase, and arguably one of the most critical phases, is preparation. Prepare before an event occurs and assess preparation after any incident to determine changes that could positively impact your response. When assessing your ability to respond in a crisis, we recommend you consider the following:

A remote command center:

If your facility is impacted by an incident, you will need a remote command center from which to run your response effort. Many organizations are aware of this need but never establish one. Some organizations have a remote command center but fail to communicate it to those that would be operating out of it well enough for it to be used effectively. For this reason, be sure to identify who needs to report to the remote command center and then train those individuals on how to respond in a crisis. Also, be sure that the command center is equipped with appropriate technology – laptops, printers, phones, internet, etc. – and that you test that technology to be sure it works correctly.

Accounting for people:

Accounting for people during a crisis can be extremely challenging. It is imperative to have a system in place prior to an incident occurring. This could be as simple as using a notification system to push a message out to employees and then requesting

a response back on their status. For those employees who don't respond, have a system in place to conduct outreach calls to determine their status.

A toll-free information number:

Have a pre-established toll-free number available – either through a 3rd party or established internally – that is dedicated to providing information during a crisis. This can provide a much needed communication conduit for family members or loved ones to inquire about employees and their status and provide updates to affected persons. Whether you staff the hotline or hire an outside agency, ensure it is staffed with professionals who are able to handle people in crisis. Information should be provided per agreed upon protocols and follow up should be conducted with callers to update them with additional information as it becomes available. After the incident, the line can also serve as a means for employees to obtain information on returning to work, benefits, pay, etc.

Family Assistance Center:

It is best practice for organizations to establish a Family Assistance Center if there are multiple injuries or fatalities in a crisis. This is typically set up at a hotel where families of those who are deceased or injured can stay and be protected from curiosity seekers and the media while they wait for information about their loved one and the crisis. Families and affected individuals will typically stay at the Family Assistance Center and receive updates regarding the investigation from authorities, as well as the medical examiner/coroner. If possible, it is helpful to pre-determine where a Family Assistance Center(s) would be located. Remember not to multi-purpose the location by using it for families to connect with loved ones who are okay. To avoid additional emotional distress, it is better to have a separate reunification location for connecting family members with affected persons.

Returning personal effects:

How will you retrieve and return personal effects to families? If lives are lost, families will expect these items to be returned to them. Determine who will return the items and how they will handle the emotional nature of the situation.

Business continuity:

Revisit key business continuity issues. Assess redundancy in key roles and ensure you have a bench at least three deep. If your facility is impacted and employees are unable to return to work, how will you continue to provide pay, benefits, etc.?

Media:

The media will be on scene and attempting to contact the organization immediately following a crisis. In some cases, they may even arrive prior to law enforcement. It

is important to have a designated PR person available on-site relatively quickly to serve as the primary liaison for media communications. This will help ensure that information shared with the media is approved by the organization, accurate and factual. Ensure that whoever is identified for this role is trained ahead of time and has practiced making statements so they are prepared in an actual incident.

In Conclusion

Crises can take many forms, from violent workplace incidents to natural disasters to active shooters, and may even include cyber-attacks or product recalls. Each disaster is unique, and we can never completely prepare for every possible situation. However, by preparing for Organizational Resilience and the Seven Phases, your organization can establish a roadmap for preparedness, response and recovery.

Black Swan Solutions® assists organizations in preparing for, responding to and recovering from the human impact of crises. Our turnkey approach integrates the expertise of experienced, masters-prepared professionals with state of the art technology. We mitigate organizational risk by ensuring that people get timely and accurate information, as well as the human support they need during and after a crisis. In responding to crises ranging from data breaches to mass casualty events, our client organizations, among the most recognized brands in the world, rapidly communicate with stakeholders, demonstrate compassion for victims, and protect their reputation. For more information, call us at 888-723-2466 or visit www.blackswancrisissolutions.com.