



# Returning to Work

Critical Communications Strategies to Consider

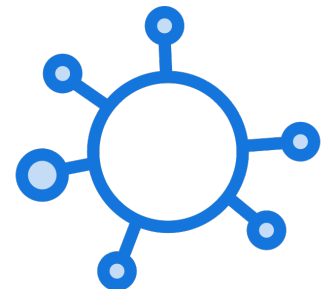
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In recent years, we've witnessed an increase in the severity of catastrophic weather events, the largest observed cybercrime in our history, and are now living through a once-in-a-century global pandemic. While each event is unique in its manifestation, collectively they represent prime examples of unpredictable and significant disruptions to businesses continuity and government operability as we've ever witnessed.

While many organizations had what were deemed to be adequate business continuity plans in place, even the most diligently prepared organizations were likely to have recognized where mitigation planning could be significantly improved once tested by these extremes.

As we now look towards transitioning from the abrupt shift to social distancing and remote work back to the familiarity of our offices and communal spaces, it will be important to have the structures in place to successfully negotiate the complexities of diverse and evolving guidelines from hundreds of regional authorities. It will also require a high level of situational awareness to manage it effectively.

Delivering information efficiently in order to facilitate the necessary collaboration and coordination among stakeholders will make all the difference in navigating this next stage of the crisis while diminishing the impact of the additional disruption.



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## Duty of Care in Critical Communications

With the responsibility of caring for their most valuable assets (employees and people) and maintaining business operations, business leaders and public officials now need to challenge their business continuity plans by revisiting their communication strategy and communication process that will enable the next phase.

Below are five essential considerations to aid a successful transition back to work through an effective communication strategy:

### 1 | Have an established process and secure mechanism to communicate with your stakeholders.

Employees are working from home. People are mobile. While this is not a new trend, the current situation has accelerated it and the nature of how people work and their day-to-day routine will take many months to return to what it was prior. Managing the different demands of individuals and a workforce who are disparate and diverse, coupled with security challenges of remote access threatening corporate assets and people, can be difficult. Can you confidently reach all your stakeholders in this environment?

While an effective response structure includes having the ability to communicate effectively, simply communicating is not enough. Clear and timely communication is necessary in all situations and ensuring your stakeholders get the message is imperative. Consider needing to know where your people are, and which information is relevant to them, and have a mechanism to deliver facts and instruction securely based on their situation. A platform that enables communication, connectivity and collaboration, backed up by the highest level of security standards to sustain business, will enable your success.

## Five essentials for a successful transition back to work



- 1 | Have an established process and secure mechanism to communicate with your stakeholders.



- 2 | Communicate with your stakeholders through multiple channels.



- 3 | Account for your stakeholders during any situation.



- 4 | Collect Information from your stakeholders.



- 5 | Network with trusted community organizations.

## 2 | Communicate with your stakeholders through multiple channels.

Effective communication means being able to communicate through reliable channels. People consume information in different ways. In your strategy, consider your role as the established source of truth in the process, and leverage the most popular tools and channels as part of your plan - and don't assume that only one method is reliable.

While email is the most common form of communication, this assumes that everyone has access to broadband or corporate email. And what if there is a network or email outage? What if mass communication systems like phone towers and electricity are down? Consider other channels in your strategy like SMS/text messaging, radio, cameras (IoT) and social media. These can be effective tools in your strategy.

## 3 | Account for your stakeholders during any situation.

You know how to reach your stakeholders and provide them with accurate information in time of need as part of the communication process. Now what? Can you account for them and know they are safe? Can you coordinate a response if they need help?

An effective communication strategy should include two-way communication channels. Informing people of a serious event and providing them with relevant information is critical to the process. Having the ability to see where people are, and if they are safe, allows you to make decisions and take action, which can mean the difference between life and death in extreme cases.

As we return to work, consider introducing employee surveys or health checks, or send out daily safety reminders to capture employee sentiment and get staff what they need to help with the transition or manage a critical illness outbreak.

Having an established communication process and tools to automate the tracking of replies with your stakeholders will speed up your ability to respond to those who need help, reducing your administrative efforts in the process. This will help you stay apprised of stakeholder status and allow you take necessary steps to prevent a bad situation from getting worse, such as preventing the spread of illness and avoiding further loss of productivity.

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## 4 | Collect Information from your stakeholders.

Situations are often managed from one centralized location. The biggest challenges are often gathering information given how dispersed workforces and communities are, and validating information if a two-way communication process isn't enabled.

During a return to work phase, your stakeholders will expect to hear more from you and be supported as they ease back into daily work and life routine. The same can be true post any critical event. Having the ability to collaborate, answer questions and gain feedback through your communication process will be important.

As part of your strategy, consider the effectiveness of your response to situations like managing additional outbreaks through automated contact tracing in a workplace. If you are able to collect critical information, gain real-time situational awareness from stakeholders (through reports, pictures and videos), you can make quick and effective decisions to keep people safe and business operations running.

## 5 | Network with trusted community organizations.

As we navigate the different regional health guidelines and plan for back to work, establishing your network of trusted community organizations (local fire, ambulance, police and health authorities) will be strategically important to include in your communication process. This is true in managing and coordinating response to any critical event should an unexpected situation arise.

How do you manage these external organizations' relevant contacts? How can you be confident that your communications (and theirs) are reaching the right individuals within the network of organizations you have established?

Leverage the same best practices you have considered for your internal communications and ensure you can communicate, connect and collaborate with these external stakeholders as well. Emergencies don't occur in silos, and this trusted network will be a source of factual data that can influence your ability to respond to a situation, like an illness outbreak, or other threat that puts your people or other assets at risk. This real-time interoperable communication is essential for any event resolution.

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## Prepare to be Prepared

The time to review your communication strategy as part of your Business Continuity and Emergency Management and Response efforts is now.

Whether it's an unexpected weather event, cyber security breach, or a global pandemic, review you have the right communication strategies, processes and tools that can help you scale to manage and respond quickly to evolving situations. Spend less time administrating and worrying about security, and more time gathering real-time, relevant information to coordinate an effective response when it's needed.



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