

Potential Avian Flu Pandemic ***Maintaining Business Continuity after 'Denial of People'***

Pandemics of all types should be part of the risk scan of business issues but any plan to cope with these sort of nebulous issues need to be **proactive**. It is too reactive to start action in your business once the pandemic gets out of Public Health Authority control.

We have seen many Business Continuity Plans for pandemics across Australasia. They are almost exclusively focused on **denial of facilities**, whereas as the proactive measure for a pandemic necessitates a **denial of people** approach.

Every business enterprise must understand the business breaking point with respect to levels of absenteeism. Is it 10%, 20%, 30%, 40% or 50%? Note that absentees include those who are at home because they are either dead or sick, or looking after sick kids, or because schools are closed, or are looking after extended family who are sick, or because they are simply too scared to go to work.

How senior management reallocates their available manpower at work each day needs to be carefully thought through so that it can minimise risk to healthy employees but still meet the commercial imperative of staying in business.

The **denial of people** plan must also be extended to key third parties that are critical to business operations. Can your business survive with fewer customers? – If so, how much reduction and for how long before it really hits home?

Can your business survive with, say, a 30% reduction in all of your service providers? These will range from cleaners, couriers, trades, IT support, consultants, security officers, Police etc.

For those with a bent for numbers – run the impact on a cumulative daily basis of 30% reduction in staff numbers, customers, and service providers and watch your profit at EBITA level. That will tell you where you need to be taking action.

The ability for senior management and, indeed, everyone to look at the practicality of working from home must be considered now. Additional computers and bandwidth maybe required for this to occur.

As a responsible employer, all businesses must safeguard their employees until the public health authorities regain control over the pandemic. Employers must impose stringent limitations on normal business transactions and these have to be accepted. Flexible hours of work (social distancing) must also be considered on a 24/7 basis to accommodate employees' concerns and family demands.

Your plan will provide far more meaning if it follows governments' likely strategies of containment followed by maintenance of essential services should containment fail.