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COVID-19

The Recovery and Resilience Command Center

Government & Public Sector perspective

A typical crisis plays out over <u>three phases</u>: **Respond**, in which an organization deals with the present situation and manages continuity; **Recover**, during which an organization learns and emerges stronger; and **Thrive**, where an organization prepares for and shapes the "next normal."

Command Centers can help guide the work of recovering and building resiliency

The COVID-19 pandemic caused global upheaval that may continue to endure for months—or longer. Governments are taking measures to limit the human cost and economic disruption. As government organizations move from response to recovery and organizational resilience, leaders should consider centralizing and empowering a command center to direct action on the process of rebuilding, restoring, and recovering. Command centers evaluate organizational, community, and social changes that create opportunities to grow throughout a crisis. A command center can be a powerful engine during the recovery phase. It can set the tone for what helps the organization thrive in the months and years to come, when departments and agencies prepare for and shape the "next normal."

Command Center activation triggers

When a swift-moving crisis like COVID-19 strikes, information swarms in from every direction. Citizens look to their governments for information, guidance, and leadership. Public officials are pressured to act quickly to gain clarity through the chaos. These activation triggers may vary, but governments should stand up their command centers as soon as issues arise.

Because disaster impacts happen across a continuum, departments and agencies will likely experience these impacts unique to their operations and within localized conditions. Leaders can expect a mix of signals and indicators to review, business conditions to observe, regulatory and legal actions to consider community and stakeholder impact, as well as leadership expectations.

Command Center structure

The Command Center structure is built around a department or agency's primary challenges of a crisis—and only those challenges. This structure promotes leadership's full confidence to make decisions. It must have clarity of purpose and be led by those empowered to push all other priorities aside and are mandated to respond to whatever the crisis demands. Ideally, a command center is led by one person or a very small team, who are supported by a chief of staff, a project manager or managers, executive administrators, schedulers, and anyone else necessary to meet the responsibilities of a command center until the crisis has passed. A command center team includes leaders with specialized understanding of public services' capabilities. It may enlist subcommittees or specialized teams to handle specific tasks or workstreams.

The command center is expected to sort through recovery issues as a cross-functional leadership hub, helping manage the organization by performing the following actions and priorities:

- Creating situational awareness of the most urgent issues and quickly directing them to key decision-makers

- Setting clear strategic objectives and indicators to monitor progress and measure success so the department or agency moves from crisis management and response to project management and recovery

- Supporting strategic trust and transparency necessary for the department leadership and community stakeholders

- Analyzing and assessing incoming information and communicating accurate, reassuring, and helpful information to stakeholders

- Building organizational resilience as a long-term sustainability practice

- Balancing near-term health, safety, and continuity goals with long-term planning and consideration of tactical and strategic consequences of crisis

- Making recommendations and escalating strategic challenges to top leadership

- Capturing key lessons

- ·Performing ongoing scenario planning, and planning alternate responses

- Enhancing response capabilities

Key Principles & Tasks

Capturing insights

Command centers play a crucial role in collecting, recording, and implementing lessons learned and leading practices during a crisis. A command center maintains records of the decisions, actions, errors, and their reasoning, outcomes, and impacts to better prepare for a future crisis or disaster. For example, organizations should consider their physical and digital preparedness. Were they able to easily shift operations to alternative locations and virtual workspaces? Were centralized resources too heavily impacted? Were employees or facilities too geographically centered in one place and therefore more exposed to regional crises? The answers to these questions are knowable, but the impact they have may be forgotten—and it is the command center's responsibility to make sure they're not.

Maintaining energy and staying focused

The command center has a special emotional purpose: to build a spirit of collaboration, shared purpose, and direction so that an entire organization works together and perseveres through challenges. A command center should strike the right balance between realism and optimism, and explain to its stakeholders what they can expect and what is expected of them. This is in the interest of creating positive energy, an essential part of building trust and maintaining focus.

Restoring confidence and build trust

A command center can restore confidence, instill trust, and support a positive and optimistic spirit by being transparent, stressing the need to persevere through any challenge, and apply whatever effort and thinking is necessary to reach a specific goal. Community trust is not an amorphous and abstract goal but rather a tangible and measurable foundation essential to successfully reaffirming a strong relationship with stakeholders through the recovery phase. A command center should communicate its vision and establish a sense of shared purpose, trust, and direction.

Clear communication

From the outset of the crisis, a command center should evaluate the accuracy, credibility, and applicability of incoming information. Command centers should monopolize information dissemination for mission-critical work, guarding against duplication and misinformation, and ensuring the organization speaks with a unified voice. Providing information in plain, straightforward language reduces the risk of miscommunication while providing clear guidance on appropriate actions or next steps. In a large government organizations, it is vital that everyone understands the greatest priorities, and where resources are most needed.

People and talent issues

The command center invests attention to major dimensions of how a crisis is experienced by the workforce and related stakeholders. Questions around virtual work and suspended services require the involvement of talent and human resource leaders. Command centers should understand and address people and talent issues as they occur. Importantly, as the response phase turns into the recovery phase, the command center faces critical questions about when and how to return staff to offices, factories, and other shared workspaces. These are not merely operational decisions and they should consider talent management and workforce strategies and support trust-building, especially around physical and emotional aspects.

Driving strategic conversations

While the command center will seek to make decisions quickly, it should not supplant or disrupt existing strategic thinking. Rather, it should troubleshoot problems in real time, get information to key leaders quickly, prevent misinformation, and focus most of all on stabilizing the situation. Achieving these goals can help leaders focus on strategic questions such as:

- How will this crisis reshape our operating environment and community?

- What changes should we make to account for this risk going forward?

- What does resilience look like for our organization?

Building organizational resilience

The organization should enhance its resilience so that future command center leaders are able to better anticipate, respond to, and resolve potential challenges. The most successful organizations in any crisis are usually those that have a built-in understanding of what's needed, a process and a plan to set up necessary structures, and an awareness of external resources that can assist them in the future. Because it has so many impacts and such a large reach, it may create many opportunities for long-term resilience.

COVID-19 tested organizational plans beyond what anyone ever thought possible. The command center's role in building resilience is to capture the collective experience from all departments and functions in order to better understand and address how these operations can be better structured to meet an uncertain future.

Government organizations that have gone through the fire of an existential crisis may also become more agile and more open to preparing for unseen or unknown future crises. Organizational resilience is not ancillary to effective operations and growth; it is essential to achieving them. It is the command center's responsibility to ensure that opportunities to improve organizational resilience are documented and begin the work of taking action to seize those opportunities.

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