OFFICE OF THE SERVICES COMMISSIONS

HR QUARTERLY
N E W S L E T T E R
HUMAN RESOURCE OFFICERS & STAFF IN GOVERNMENT

J U N E   2 0 2 0

TOP NEWS INSIDE

THE NEW NORMAL

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has necessitated sweeping changes that have created a new normal as we know it, and experts say that many of the changes will remain in place even after the outbreak recedes.

One of the major lessons learnt from COVID-19 is that we are all threads closely knitted together in the fabric of humanity and each thread is important. Other important lessons learnt are:

1. Business Continuity Planning is a must;
2. Flexible working arrangements may become the new normal;
3. Telecommuting/work from home is possible;
4. COVID19 has pushed many organisations into a digitization curve.

The changes wrought by the pandemic will likely not fade soon, if ever, forcing organisations and individuals across to contend with what the "*new normal*" means now and in the future.

This newsletter will provide information on the important lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic as well as provide recommendations for tips and tools to operate in the new paradigm. Happy Reading!!

DODGING DISASTER WITH A BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLAN

Rarely do we get advance notice that a disaster is ready to strike and even with some lead time, multiple things can still go wrong.

This statement has never been truer, especially since we are experiencing the global effects of the COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic. While every incident is unique and can unfold in unexpected ways, the organisation must engage in processes that will give it the best chance of surviving during and after a disaster.

The lack of a plan could result in the organisation failing to recover from the event or incident and could ultimately result in its demise. This is where Business Continuity (BC) comes into play.

Business Continuity refers to maintaining business functions or quickly resuming them in the event of a major disruption.

A Business Continuity Plan (BCP) outlines procedures and instructions an organisation must follow in the face of disaster. A BCP has four (4) major phases:

1. **Business impact analysis,** this looks at the risks that are most likely to affect the organisation;

2. **Recovery strategies** for each of the risks identified;

3. **Plan development** which outlines the procedures and instructions necessary to recover from the negative event and;

4. **Testing and on-going maintenance** of the BCP.

> " PLANNING
> is simply the result of experience read backward
> and projected into the future.
>
> **William King Gregory**
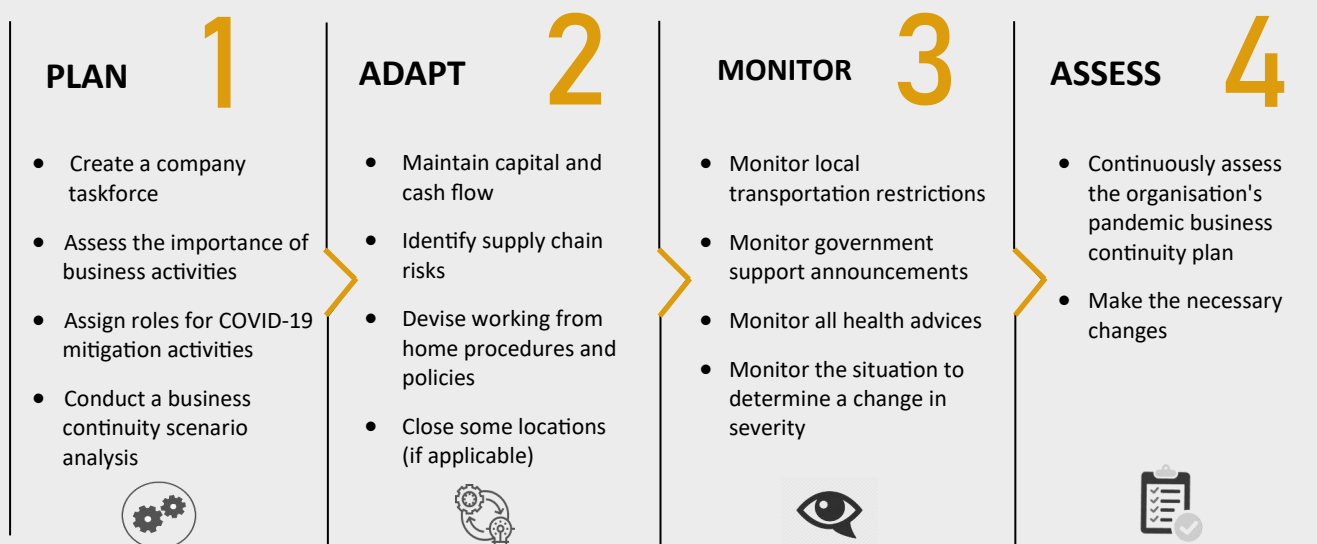
Here are **seven (7)** critical elements to be included in the BCP:

i.   Business Continuity Team
ii. A Detailed Plan
iii. Testing Plan
iv. Crisis Communication Toolkit
v.   Protocols for Employee Well-Being/Safety
vi. Business Resources
vii. Safeguards for Information Technology Operations

BCP offers a number of benefits. It:

1. Creates resilient systems and networks that can lessen financial losses;

2. Allows the organisation to respond, recover, and resume business operations quickly;

3. Helps to safeguard the organisation's reputation;

4. Assists in making the organisation more attractive to potential business partners and investors,

5. Builds confidence among internal and external customers.

Here are 4 principles for COVID-19 Pandemic Preparation proposed by the **International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)**

PLAN 1

- Create a company taskforce
- Assess the importance of business activities
- Assign roles for COVID-19 mitigation activities
- Conduct a business continuity scenario analysis

ADAPT 2

- Maintain capital and cash flow
- Identify supply chain risks
- Devise working from home procedures and policies
- Close some locations (if applicable)

MONITOR 3

- Monitor local transportation restrictions
- Monitor government support announcements
- Monitor all health advices
- Monitor the situation to determine a change in severity

ASSESS 4

- Continuously assess the organisation's pandemic business continuity plan
- Make the necessary changes

ORGANISATIONS are **EXPERIENCING** several rapid response challenges both from an employee health and welfare standpoint and from the disruption in supply chains due to the **COVID-19 PANDEMIC.** These things are having a huge impact on the well-being of the organisation and on the economy at large. Therefore, organisations should have a **PANDEMIC CHECKLIST** to help them cope and to **ASSIST IN MINIMIZING RISK.**

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The Organisation's Pandemic Checklist should include the following items:

1. Identify Key Personnel

The organisation should appoint someone or a group of persons who will be responsible for coordinating the activities and communication strategies that will be employed during the pandemic.

2. Be Remote Ready

Organisation should review the technology needed to support employees working from home and the staff should be trained to use remote tools such as video conferencing platforms.

3. Keep Employees Well Informed

During a pandemic the organisation must ensure all employees know what they are to do so as to avoid hysteria and panic. Employees should also be advised of who to contact, in the event of an emergency.

4. Communicate with Partners

The organisation should reach out to their supply chain (critical vendors and suppliers) to understand where they are at, identify their operational and revenue impacts and consider alternative suppliers before the need arises.

FLEXIBLE WORKING ESSENTIALS In COVID Context

WHAT IS FLEXI-WORK?

Flexi work programmes are working arrangements wherein employees are given greater scheduling freedom in how they fulfil the obligations of their positions. This means that instead of working the traditional Monday to Thursday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. the worker could negotiate with the employer as it relates to:

1. **The start and end time of the workday**
2. **The number of hours worked each day**
3. **The number of days worked each week**
4. **The days of the week on which he/she works**

JAMAICA'S FLEXIWORK ARRANGEMENT

Flexible work arrangements was initially introduced in Jamaica by way of the employment (Flexible Work Arrangements) Act (Miscellaneous Provisions), 2014. The legislation was designed primarily to facilitate the increase of public sector efficiency and lessen the likelihood of redundancies in Jamaica.

The most common type of flexible work arrangements that can be applied to the public service context are flexi-time, compressed work week and telecommuting.

1	Flexi-time	Traditional 40 hour work week. The start time and end time for work is altered. For example from 7:30 am to 4:00 pm, 8:30 am to 5:00 pm and 9:30 am to 6:00 pm
2	Compressed work week	Completion of a 40 hour work week in fewer days. Employees have a 10-hour work day for 4 days Bi-weekly pay period= 9 hours. * 8 days + 8 hours. * 1 day
3	Telecommuting	Allows for employees to work from location outside of the workplace (Also known as work from home)

BENEFITS OF FLEXIWORK

Flexi work arrangement allows employees to:

1. Have more time for family and personal interests in some instances;

2. Have increased employment opportunities;

3. Lessen traffic congestion during the normal peak hours as persons may start and end work at different times.

During this pandemic, flexible work arrangements can support business continuity and protect the employers, as well as:

- Encourage official measures to curb the outbreak;

- Increase productivity;

- Reduce labour costs especially in instances where weekend would be treated as normal working days payable at normal work rates;

- Provide greater availability of service to customers due to varied opening hours and more business days.

Even though flexi work arrangements allow for benefits, it is not without its negative effects which includes a feeling of isolation and alienation which could affect the team work and social networking in the event of telecommuting.

EFFECTIVENESS OF FLEXIWORK

Employers in Jamaica are being encouraged to utilise the Employment (Flexible Work Arrangements) (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act due to the fact that the country continues to observe the social distancing protocols in order to contain the spread of the coronavirus (JIS, 2020).

Since March 18, 2020, all non-essential employees were advised to work from home and as a result, both public and private entities have been mandated to adjust their work schedule to accommodate this change. The effectiveness of this move will not be seen until after this crisis is over. Extensive research will have to be done in order to determine if more Jamaican organisations will buy into the flexi work arrangements and if this will be a welcomed change for the future of the business sector.

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> "Flexi work arrangement is a welcome structure to public sector management as it is purposed to improve employee morale, commitment of customer service and also reduce the likelihood of absenteeism.

STAYING CONNECTED, TOGETHER

WORKING FROM HOME, THE "NEW COMMUTE"

Never before has the world of work changed so fast for so many people. The *work-from-home* job force instantly increased because of the social distancing guidelines instituted from the pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus. Even before COVID-19 became a factor, increasing numbers of employees had been saying goodbye to their arduous commute to work.

Now the new office chair is the couch or dining room table and chair and the daily commute is from the bedroom to the home office, or from the bedroom to the living room and the work cafeteria is now the kitchen at home.

WORKING FROM HOME, THE "NEW TEAM"

To work effectively from home, employees will need to have the requisite technology and equipment, a separate workspace, internet service that meets their needs, a workable schedule they can stick to, and ways to connect with others.

With technologies like Zoom, Facetime, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, Skype, it is no longer necessary for employees to be in an office full-time in order for them to be productive members of a team.

WORKING FROM HOME, THE "NEW REALITY"

Work from home jobs are no longer dreams; they are very much a reality and are here to stay. In fact, there has been several studies that indicate that many tasks can be completed just as effectively, if not more so from a home office/work space.

Working from home has its merits and limitations. Ministries, Departments and Executive Agencies should endeavour to reduce the limitations and manage the arrangements in order to determine the areas where this can be best facilitated.

10 PROS TO WORKING FROM HOME

1. Increased Independence
2. Enhanced Time Management
3. Greater Productivity
4. No Office Distractions
5. Increased Versatility in the use of Communication Tools
6. Wearing Cozy Clothes
7. Saving Money
8. Spending Time with Family Members
9. Better Work/Life Balance
10. No Crowds/Traffic

10 CONS TO WORKING FROM HOME

1. Work Overload
2. Data Security
3. Loneliness
4. Difficulty Sticking to Routine
5. Boredom
6. Loss of Productivity
7. Household Noise & Distractions
8. Difficulty in Maintaining Accountability
9. Lack of Office Equipment
10. Lack of Access to Work Resources

WORKING FROM HOME, THE "NEW NORMAL"

In recent years, employees have increasingly sought out positions that allow them greater flexibility and the opportunity to work remotely, so that they may achieve a better work-life balance. A major take away from this pandemic will be more people recognizing the value in remote work.

Even when the coronavirus restrictions are eased, many expect the proportion of employees working remotely and engaging in work from home to grow exponentially. There are predictions that it may become standard for jobs that can be performed at home. Remote working may in fact be the "*new normal*."

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FORGING AHEAD TO A DIGITAL SOCIETY

The ideology of having a digital society imitates the outcomes of a modernised society in which information and communication technologies at home, work, school and play are integrated and adapted into the world.

Digital modernisations are reshaping our economies, industries and cultures on a global level.

In light of the impact of the novel corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic, Jamaica's digital infrastructure has been undergoing a solidifying transformation. Jamaicans and millions across the globe were quarantined inside their homes as a preventative measure in combating this health crisis.

This necessitated an integrated and streamlined approach to the digital infrastructure at various stages of governments' and private sectors' response, particularly in the context of business, education and decision-making continuity.

The Jamaican government is now heavily relying on digital and internet platforms to shape the culture of work and interconnectivity.

Public Sector entities, such as the Tax Administration of Jamaica, which has transferred most of its business enterprise onto an online portal, have been capitalizing on the new integrative approach to a digitalised era.

The Education Sector is not expected to open until the new school year September 2020, hence, the need for an integrated digitised approach to online learning, in order for Jamaica's education system to function as normal.

During the early stage of the pandemic, most of Jamaica's business employees were working from home. From bankers, HR practitioners, to almost every teacher in Jamaica is operating with a changed work life and are now learning to adapt and co-exist in a functioning digitalised world.

Digital transformation is an ongoing process, which requires constant working. Due to the new age of the COVID-19 outbreak, forced changes may be viewed as difficult in creating forward-thinking, customer-focused, digitally organised entities that are lasting.
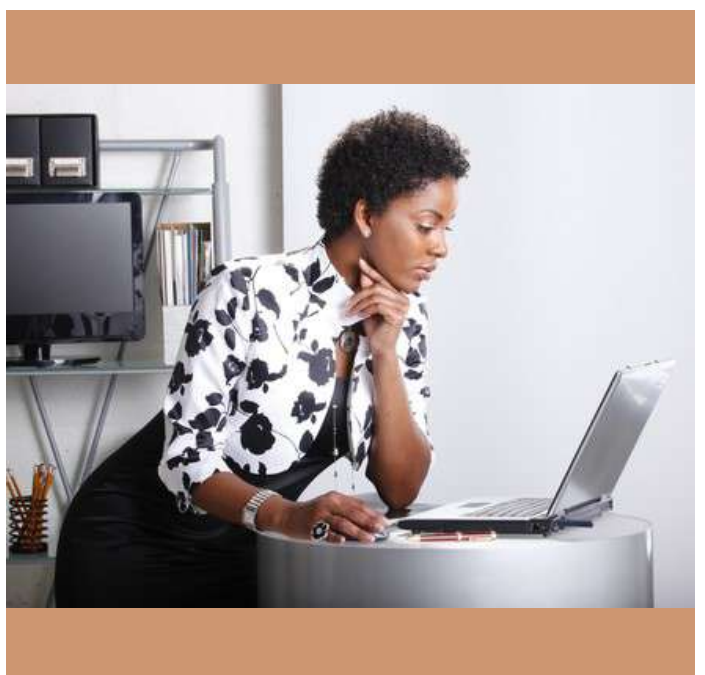
ENCOURAGING BUSINESS CONTINUITY

The following are tips that MDEAs can use to introduce digital transformation in order to encourage business continuity.

1. Leverage effective digital technologies that people really want

2. Improve cybersecurity of E-commerce systems and financial technologies

3. Increase budget for research and development of digital transformation systems

4. Develop user friendly digital systems

5. Use data analytics to improve current systems implemented

6. Sensitize members of the organisation to be open to a digital transformation

7. Create company policies that encourage digital transformation

8. Form a research and development team for digitized systems

9. Develop the ability to diagnose and conceptualise digital transformation strategies

10. Conduct pilot testing

11. Be a flexible leader in order to get support from employees

12. Keep communication open between IT and other departments

13. Equip team with technology and productivity tools

14. Establish daily check-ins

15. Encourage dedicated workspaces

16. Provide emotional and steady support

17. Use shared access points for access to files to information

Sources:
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OPERATING IN THE NEW PARADIGM

With the need to be socially distant yet connected, HR will have to engage in more aggressive efforts to connect virtually and continue operations by offering new or additional online services using digital platforms and by engaging in virtual:

i.   meetings

ii. interviews

iii. training

iv. onboarding exercises

Managers and team leaders will have to find creative ways to manage team members using accountability systems as well as motivate and engage them to ensure that performance targets are met in keeping with the strategic plan of the organisation. Also, due to the wide-reaching economic impacts of the pandemic, organisations will now have to operate efficiently despite budget cuts.

Thankfully, the Government of Jamaica has equipped the MDEAs to deal with the new realities by providing the following tools to **#WorkSmart and #WorkSafe**:

1. Disaster Risk Management (Enforcement Measures) (No. 8) Order
2. COVID-19 Workplace Protocols

The Office of the Services Commissions has also sought to equip HRM&D practitioners with Virtual Interview Protocols to guide their operations in the new paradigm.

Experts on organisational change postulate that an organisation can change only if the people in it share a sense of crisis and can mobilize themselves to respond to it. The transition to life after COVID-19 may be harder for some than others, however, HR plays a key role in sensitising employees about what the "new normal" will look like in their organisation.

Congratulations

To All Public Servants:

- Who were appointed/promoted during the financial year 2019/2020 and the first quarter of the financial year 2020/2021

- Who successfully completed their academic studies

- Who were accepted to purse tertiary studies

- Whose children transitioned from primary to secondary level education

REMINDER: The hurricane season has officially began and the Meteorological Service of Jamaica (MET Office) is urging Jamaicans to prepare for higher-than-normal temperatures during the summer period which runs from _June 20 to September 22, 2020._

Join us in the next issue

as we discuss Career Advancement in the Public Service.

See you in September

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