A Blueprint for Organisations to Respond to Coronavirus

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Introduction

We are in the midst of a COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic with no foreseeable end. Fear and uncertainty are evident in global financial market volatility and in the public sphere.

This chaotic situation is being driven by our inability to say how this will all play out in the short, medium or long term.

With government in the lead wielding the force of law for preservation of the public's health, private sector organisations are especially vulnerable to both supply-side and demand-side shocks. Those of us who depend on employment to maintain our incomes and protect our loved ones begin to feel particularly vulnerable, while businesses recognize the need to update their continuity plans, do proper risk analysis, and advise staff, but struggle with how to do so.

In the face of this uncertainty, a blueprint for how organisations should respond can already be found in a best practice public health concept called "One Health". Under this approach, multiple sectors communicate and work together to achieve public health outcomes, assessing risk based on available data, coupled with a risk communication strategy that drives sensible and evidence-based actions for containment and mitigation.

Palladium has helped governments worldwide implement this approach, and has worked with a team internally to adapt it to our organisational response to the Coronavirus threat.

Here are seven proactive steps Palladium has taken, and from which other businesses can benefit.

7 Proactive Steps for Organisations

1. **Activate an emergency committee**
   Many companies already have a group in place, but organising one is relatively simple. Your committee should represent all functions of the organisation (in Palladium's case, this includes Safety & Security, Human Resources, Communications, Global Health, etc.) and must be a decision-making body with full authority to act quickly and effectively.

2. **Review policies and protocols**
   Operational protocols are key to organisational efficiency, and this process rapidly updates and aligns all relevant protocols with current information. Think about your business continuation, evacuation, teleworking, social distancing, communications, and other existing policies, through the lens of protecting staff and your business.

3. **Vet information sources**
   With so much information of variable quality accumulating, separating fact from conjecture becomes crucial. Identify the most trusted and authoritative sources (such as WHO and CDC), as well as representative bodies for your sector.

4. **Conduct drills**
   What if we all had to close our main offices? How would that work in practice to maintain essential organisational functions? Practice drills make for smoother implementation and for identification of key enablers and barriers.

5. **Communicate constantly**
   Engagement with your workforce is essential, as it takes all employees working together to mitigate risks and prevent panic and confusion. Communications should be ongoing and transparent, using both "push" and "pull" channels. Equip leaders to step up and maintain a dialogue.

6. **Apply the precautionary principle**
   Risk assessment and contingency planning are both art and science, and core to organisational philosophy and strategy. Take an evidence-based approach to assessing and mitigating risks using the precautionary principle (i.e., imagine the worst-case outcome of a decision – particularly when it comes to human lives – and plan accordingly).

7. **Review and adjust**
   Implement a review cycle for all activities. At the present rate of new developments, daily interactions and adjustments are necessary.

Is Your Organisation Prepared?

There seems to be a lot of confusion about both the extent and impact of coronavirus infection. What is clear is that global epidemics are not going away or becoming less frequent. This is no longer an exception, but a predictable occurrence due to a combination of factors, including exploitation and control of the natural environment, enhanced opportunities for exposure in dense human settlements, and the "shrinking" of the world through travel.

We know that businesses have plans in place to protect their supply chains. Are they similarly prepared to protect their workforce in an escalating scenario? Drawing on first-hand experiencing helping governments globally to prevent, prepare, and respond to emerging infectious disease threats, these steps represent a best practice approach for organisations. By implementing this approach, fear and normative confusion can be replaced with informed leadership and an effective plan of action.

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