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Pandemic Plan Revision Capstone Project

Sharon L. Haylett
Boise State University

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Sharon L. Haylett

College of Arts and Sciences, Boise State University

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Author Note

Sharon L. Haylett, College of Arts and Sciences, Boise State University,
sharonhaylett@u.boisestate.edu

Abstract

A Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) for a company “. . . ensures that primary mission essential functions continue to be performed during a wide range of emergencies . . .” (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, n.d.). The COOP includes information for reacting to natural disasters, terrorist attacks, pandemics, etc. As my capstone project, the pandemic section has been updated using an integrative process to include new information and lessons learned from the current pandemic. The revised pandemic section will provide examples of protocols designed to keep employees and the public safe and healthy.

Keywords: pandemic plan, protocols, integrative thinking, innovation

Pandemic Plan Revision Capstone Project

My capstone project revised the pandemic plan in my agency's COOP because it was outdated and did not include lessons learned since we have been living with a pandemic. Management and employees have been impacted by this project by knowing how to accomplish their work in the field or office safely, from an alternative location, and procedures for when someone is sick or exposed. The project helped me in my job as the human resource officer by providing procedures and information to assist with coordinating the response effort for a pandemic. My approach to the project was the action option. This project provided me the opportunity to revise part of our agency's COOP, when this is not a typical responsibility for my job. Through the revision process, I utilized what I learned through my degree program at Boise State University.

Section 1: Innovative Approach

Bringing Together Perspectives

Everyone has a strong and differing perspective on the current pandemic. In integrative thinking "it is also about using conflict purposefully, thereby enriching our understanding of the problem and expanding the possibilities for its resolution" (Riel & Martin, 2017). I had to navigate my teams' personal opinions and our director's values for our agency and use these to create a great plan. I was careful not to talk down about anyone's personal opinions, but to refocus the conversations when they came up. Everyone's ideas were considered and adjustments made.

Creating Innovative Approaches: Beyond Either/Or

I gathered everyone's ideas and thoughts on the pandemic plan. This was done without making any type of decision on the information. I utilized brainstorming where no idea is a bad idea which promoted creativity. I also reviewed and included some lessons learned that

employees had sent in over the current pandemic. Then I gathered all ideas and lessons learned and worked through them together with my team “genuinely seeking to understand who another person is, what she thinks, and how she feels” (Riel & Martin, 2017) to make the best plan for our agency.

My sources were state and governmental agencies that directly deal with health and safety situations. I also considered and used sources my team recommended such as the United States Homeland Security. The sources are cutting edge as the websites are constantly updated as they learn more through the current pandemic. It would have been easy and fast to rely solely on state and governmental sources, but that would not have created a plan that reflects the people who have endured the current pandemic. It took time and attention to be inclusive of others’ ideas instead of rolling out a ready made plan.

Section 2: Emotional Intelligence

Awareness of Self and Others

My project required an awareness of self and others in order to move the project along each week. This required self-awareness, “the ability to recognize and understand your moods, emotions, and drives, as well as their effect on others” (Goleman, 1998). Since I was not the regular person in charge of updating our COOP, I needed others to work with me on the project even though I was the lead. One of the individuals I needed assistance from is usually the one responsible for the COOP. I took some extra time to explain what I was doing and why to show sensitivity to how he may have been feeling. This changed some since my initial proposal as I had not thought about how it may come across to others that I am doing the project. I had gotten the permission to complete the project from the higher level management, but I do not think this was communicated to others until I reached out to some of the individuals I needed assistance from.

Consideration of the Audience: Emotional Intelligence

Prior to this project I had been involved in communications to staff about the current pandemic. It was very important to keep what I was writing in the pandemic plan neutral due to the strong feelings surrounding the subject matter. It had to consider the fear of employees who will look to the plan for what to expect. I even added in a part about watching for employees' mental health during a pandemic which is "the ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people" (Goleman, 1998). I considered the managers who would be implementing the COOP and how they may feel frustrated with some of the restrictions as they have work that needs to get done no matter what.

Value to Others: Emotional Intelligence

The pandemic plan and the research of information to go into the plan is very valuable in the future to management and employees to guide them. It will give them a place to start when facing a pandemic. The value of the plan will guide us to ". . . thoughtfully considering employees' feelings-along with other factors-in the process of making intelligent decisions" (Goleman, 1998). I believe it has set our agency up for an immediate response for the next pandemic. Hopefully it will ease employees' fears as they will have a specific idea of what is going to happen and be expected of them.

Section 3: Creative Thinking**The Creative Framework**

The creative framework I used for my capstone project was to adjust my approach on who I had to review the draft pandemic plan. We have a large senior management team of about 15 professionals. Typically I would send the draft document to all of them for review, which would create weeks of work to sort through all of their comments. I decided to be creative with my approach by sending the draft to a sampling of the senior management team. Being

creative took “believing you can be creative and giving yourself permission to try” (Riel & Martin, 2017).

Another task I accomplished during this project was to get out of my office and comfort zone and talk to the safety officer who would have normally been the lead in this effort. His initial email to me was defensive and dismissive of my approach to the plan revision. Talking to him face to face made it easier to break down those walls and understand his ideas on the plan. He was still somewhat resistant to my approach, but willing to see what his supervisor thought about it.

Unique Approach/es to Project

My creative approach of sending the draft plan to a sampling of the senior management team is unique as we always run everything through all of them for feedback. This approach deviated from the standard process and gave credence to thinking outside of the box.

Talking to the safety officer in person is unique as we are all comfortable in our offices. We tend to use email as a crutch to interactive conversations. This approach pushed me to a new level by thoroughly seeking another opinion on the project that may be counter to my approach.

Section 4: Your Innovative Solution

Accomplishment of Capstone

Our agency pandemic plan, as part of the COOP, was outdated. It did not include any of the lessons learned and information from the current pandemic. For my capstone project, I revised the pandemic plan. The process I used was considering feedback from employees on lessons learned, safety officer input on the field inspections portion, human resource input on contact tracing, and review by a sampling of our senior management team. The outcome is a pandemic plan with possible approaches for keeping our workforce safe and healthy versus just

having a definition of a pandemic.

Innovative Approach to the Problem/Project

It was my understanding that COOPs do not necessarily include the level of detail I included in the pandemic plan revision. Some have thought the details should be separate, but the majority thought it would be helpful to have them in the COOP. I believe this approach was innovative because it provides the information needed to have an initial response when a pandemic hits. This approach highlights integrative thinking “for creating new answers and designing great choices” (Riel & Martin, 2017). I also will keep this information updated since it is part of the overall agency COOP. Another innovative part of this project was considering employee experiences and input in the COOP. The revised plan takes into consideration how the pandemic impacted the employees in the field, other regional areas, and in our main office.

If I were starting over on this project, I would also create a separate more specific guidance document that would be updated more frequently. This would provide a place for specific information on certain types of pandemics. One thing I have learned through COVID-19 is that the situation is dynamic and changes often. As a business, we have to adjust to these changes without much time to go through a formal process of updating the COOP. The guidance document would provide the ability to do this.

Section 5: Results

Benefits to Stakeholders

The revised pandemic plan for the COOP will benefit employees by providing them with information to keep themselves safe and healthy in their work environment. The benefit for supervisors and management is the plan provides information on how to guide employees through a pandemic in the workplace. For human resources, the benefit of the plan is to provide steps for assisting employees and supervisors with questions and processes when they are sick

or exposed. These stakeholders are “who matter most to the solution and who are most impacted by the problem” (Riel & Martin, 2017).

Impact on Stakeholders

The overall impact of the revised pandemic plan on our agency is to make management and employees aware of the potential steps needed to deal with a pandemic. It also provides information on what our employees are required to do during a pandemic for the companies our agency regulates. Anyone from the public visiting our offices will be aware of our protocols. By taking the needed steps, the agency can continue to provide the essential services of protecting the environment to the citizens and businesses in our community.

Section 6: Conclusion

I chose the action method for my capstone project because I wanted to complete something that would improve my work environment. Updating the pandemic plan is not a task I would normally be responsible for, but it impacts me due to the heavy responsibility associated with the pandemic and human resources. The benefits of the pandemic plan are intangible as the plan ensures management and employees are knowledgeable about the protocols that may be required during a pandemic. Being knowledgeable about the protocols will provide the additional benefit of keeping everyone safe and healthy in the work environment. This project helped me acquire the skills of writing an emergency response plan which requires anticipating the needs of management and employees during a pandemic. I used my skills for integrative thinking by being innovative in my approach to revising the plan when asking for feedback. I was creative in adding more detail of potential protocols than would normally be included in a COOP. The approach I selected for my final capstone requirement is this professional action paper. I chose this approach as I have written most of the content through the module activities in class.

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