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What have we learned?

It may be tempting to draw a line under the Covid-19 pandemic as the world slowly returns to pre-pandemic life, but this would be a mistake for resilience professionals, says **Chloe Demrovsky**

Late last year, DRI International released two reports that deployed different means to identify key themes and lessons learned. One of the reports shared the results of a survey-based study to quantify the trends at global level. The other, which was produced jointly with CRJ Key Network Partner the National Preparedness Leadership Initiative (NPLI), showcased a focus group of industry leaders (see p32 for more details).

The *DRI Trends* report aimed to obtain an understanding of the ongoing pandemic response given the development of effective vaccines, improved medication and a wider understanding of the spread of the virus.

When asked about the best decision made by their organisation during the pandemic, remote work was the top reply (61.6 per cent of respondents). Crisis management was a distant second at 17.6 per cent, but still dominated the other responses of health and safety, consistency of messaging and compliance with expert guidance.

A badly organised return to work topped the worst decision response at 19.9 per cent, followed by inappropriate decisions made by human resources at 17 per cent.

Soft skills versus technical know-how

At the start of 2022, shaping a new, hybrid workforce and culture is a major challenge and will be a top priority. It is important to hear from leaders about how they are going about it and whether the experiences of the last two years are informing that approach.

The DRI/NPLI report sought to uncover more of that leadership perspective. It deployed a team of researchers to interview business continuity leaders from various industries and came away with a wealth of information, including lessons learned that span critical sectors.

The conclusions of this report are more about the soft skills of resilience leaders than about technical know-how. Even in a remote world, the ability to unite people and drive results by working together is invaluable.

What can be learned from these two reports?

Clearly, business continuity must first and foremost be about the wellbeing of people. Business continuity and human resources must work together closely, including joint strategies to support employees and other stakeholders affected by a crisis. This is even truer during a prolonged disruption, but would also prove valuable in short-term responses.

The *DRI Trends* report showed that, for most sectors, the pandemic response had more of a business impact than the



public health crisis itself, not including government and healthcare for which public health was the top challenge.

Top business interruption concerns included the closure of national borders and disruption of domestic travel, as well as government-induced work restrictions and lockdowns. Much of this was missed in the lessons from previous pandemics, which were overwhelmingly focused on health and safety, but should have taken a broader view. Response measures may need to change in some ways, but in others the playbook will remain the same, so companies should plan accordingly.

When the movement of goods and people was severely restricted during lockdowns, business continuity demonstrated its value by identifying workarounds for critical processes. Business continuity professionals helped to keep businesses functioning by co-ordinating with technical players, such as cybersecurity and supply chain management, in order to address the pandemic's cascading effects. The ability to do this relies on the right combination of technical understanding, paired with the soft skills identified in the leadership report.

The pandemic is a reminder that bringing vulnerability and compassion into the workplace can improve it and that there is value in reflection. It is imperative to learn from these lessons and use them to build a more resilient future.

Author



CHLOE DEMROVSKY is the President and Chief Executive Officer of DRI International and a Member of CRJ's Advisory Panel. Chloe will be speaking at Risk-In, May 19-20, 2022. See p96 for more details