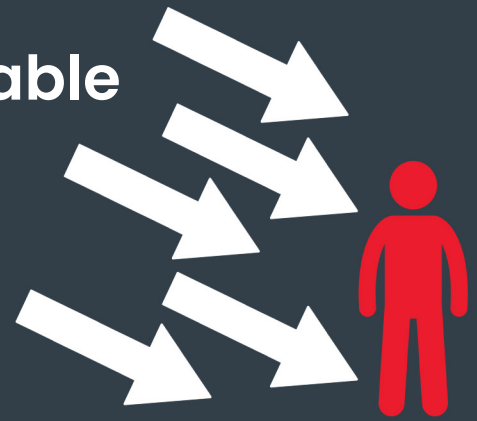


## Foresee the unforeseeable

*Meredith Gironta, Director, Operations*



In the aftermath of the COVID -19 pandemic, you may have heard reference to it being a Black Swan event. But what is a Black Swan event? It is an unpredictable event with extreme ramifications that people are unable to plan for (Drake, 2021). There has been a significant amount of healthy academic debate regarding Whether COVID-19 was truly a Black Swan event. However, after working in operations for so long, I come down on the ‘was not’ side of the argument. Given the historical evidence of previous pandemics, I hesitate to think of many events that good contingency planning cannot account for. I’m also not naïve enough to think that a pandemic like this will not occur again. As a result, I’ve been spending time thinking about how Operations teams got through COVID and how to apply those best practices to improve our own business continuity planning.

I worked on site throughout the pandemic, ensuring warehouse operations continued to meet our clients’, and their patients’, expectations. I had to split my team in two (one team to run the facility and the other to jump in if the onsite team tested positive for COVID). During this time, the best practices that I identified as critical to business continuity were cross-training, robust plans, frequent customer communication, strong supplier relationships, and the ability to wear many hats.



### Cross Training

Most, if not all companies, tout cross-training as an absolute necessity in businesses. With increased turnover, hiring challenges, and increased amounts of time off, there are too many benefits to cross-training to count. Despite its obvious benefits, cross-training in many organizations continues to be pushed off to a less busy time...which never happens. Cross-training is an investment for the future and is analogous to an insurance policy. You hope that you don’t have to use it, but it gives you peace of mind knowing that it is there. I have always led departments that share knowledge and cross-train early and often. Not only does this give additional trained resources in the event of a pandemic, but it gives employees insights into other areas of work that either prompt recommendations for improvement, increase communication and empathy across departments, or expose the employee to an area of the business they find a passion for. Without cross-training and knowledge sharing, it stifles employee growth and drive and decreases the ability of competent responses in emergency events. If you don’t cross-train employees and expose them to other areas, you risk these employees leaving for your competition.

## Robust Continuity Plans...that you ACTUALLY practice.

Continuity plans are another aspect of planning that is sometimes pushed to an unknown date in the future. I suspect it is because people think that disasters won't happen, or current works takes priority, or a combination of the two. However, I challenge you to think of your favorite sports team and remember the best game you ever saw them play (I'm thinking about Manchester City, English Premier League, in case you are wondering). I'm willing to bet that the things that impressed you during whatever match you are thinking of was a combination of good communication, general team readiness, their ability to make quick decisions, and execution of tactics rehearsed for hours on the training ground. The way any team succeeds is through understanding the expectations and practicing what they want to accomplish. Continuity planning is very similar. For any team to perform in an emergency, they need a playbook of what the expected response is, to be empowered to make decisions and execute on these, and a pre-defined process for communication with stakeholders. The team needs to practice these plans in a controlled situation, not only for their own development, but to test the process itself and make sure it works. If it doesn't (and there is always something that doesn't work as expected) it can be fixed before the real issue occurs, instead of during a crisis, where time is of the essence.



## Customer Communication

Nobody likes to be left in the dark during an emergency, especially customers. Proactive communication and a single point of contact are the best ways to handle this. Members of a team that are at the sharp end, addressing the issues, need to be left alone to do just that. A member of a team that is remote but wants to contribute is a great choice to manage customer communication. Letting customers know what the team is seeing can provide a great opportunity for cooperative planning and input from the customer on the challenges being seen.

## Strong Supplier Relationships

COVID provided a magnifying glass on Supply Chain as a whole, and one of the trends that are continuing to be seen in the post-COVID world is the focus on strengthening supplier relationships. The frame of the relationship has also been changing in the industry from more of an authoritarian master-servant relationship to a more collaborative partnership with suppliers. To successfully navigate an event like COVID, not only do you need one strong

supplier for high demand/high use items, but in practice, at least one backup to that primary provider will be required. Having these conversations before the event occurs is critical, and the more information that can be shared between parties, the more robust a partnership can be developed.

## Final Words

One of my mentors gave me valuable advice as a young manager: "You always need an heir and a spare." Not only is this useful in training, but it's incredibly useful in contingency planning. Not only does this help expand knowledge, but it also decreases risk and provides more tools for use in an emergency.

### References

Drake, J. (2021, November 11). Was Covid-19 A Black Swan Event? Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johndrake/2021/11/11/was-covid-19-a-black-swan-event/?sh=6f498834bd36>



## Meredith Gironta, Director, Operations

20 years+  
Industry  
Experience

1 year  
with  
RxSource



meredith.gironta@rxsource.com



Contact us



[www.rxsource.com](http://www.rxsource.com)



[solutions@rxsource.com](mailto:solutions@rxsource.com)



Canada | USA | Ireland