



A Monthly e-Newsletter From:

 Institute for Alternative Futures

May 2009

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Forward Perspectives

Pandemic Flu Contingency Planning Simulations

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While many governments may be well prepared for a pandemic through running a series of simulations over the past few years, the private sector is probably less so. An estimated 30% of the workforce could be incapacitated through illness or looking after sick relatives during the pandemic.

Organizations need to review and test the robustness of their contingency plans. The World Health Organization (WHO) recently raised the pandemic alert level to five (out of a total of six) and instructing countries to implement their pandemic flu plans. The director general of the WHO warned that "the time to finalize . . . planned mitigation measures is short". Although the current strain is mild, a second wave starting in the autumn could be more virulent, following a similar pattern to the 1918-19 Spanish flu pandemic.

Given the urgency surrounding final preparations for a pandemic and uncertainty surrounding H1N1's course, IAF is providing organizations a pandemic flu simulation model to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of their response strategy. Simulations have been used with great success for several IAF clients including the UK government, pharmaceutical industry and regulatory bodies.

IAF believes that no matter how good a contingency plan may look, the human interactions and awareness across critical sectors are fundamental to its success. IAF's simulations, therefore, combine both systems change and the interplay between people in response to the challenges. IAF simulations improve the planning process by taking participants through an array of scenarios to explore potential challenges and outcomes.

Based on the methodology of war gaming, IAF's simulations allow participants to:

- Rehearse the individual roles and responsibilities of nominated contingency team

members.

- Explore new partnerships and solutions and possibly new strategies with their attendant challenges.
- Test designated participants' abilities to take appropriate communication decisions and to communicate under pressure to minimize the concerns of their employees and the public.

Simulations can focus on an array of critical issues from supply chain management, maintaining the provision of core operations, through to employee management. Contingency plans need to prepare for the subjective responses in workplace cultures as well as procedures for systemic functions. Contingency plans can be applied to variety of sectors including private companies, public health care, and government agencies.

IAF's experience in pandemic flu simulations includes an event run in 2006 for the Bioscience Futures Forum, part of the then UK Department of Trade and Industry, along with proprietary events for businesses. The aim of the public simulation was to enable the biotech and pharmaceutical industry to test the robustness of their existing strategies and explore new stakeholder engagement solutions in preparing for and responding to an influenza pandemic.

Representatives from a London Strategic Health Authority, the Health Protection Agency, EMEA, seven pharmaceutical companies, pharmaceutical wholesalers, and physicians were brought together for the two day event. The Department of Health observed. The scenario took participants through nine months starting at the pre pandemic stage (level 3), followed by wave one, and finished just before the second wave. The simulation teams were presented with an evolving environment which they responded to and interacted with, in order to assess and improve plans.

Key findings from the 2006 flu simulation include:

1. Inconsistencies in national and local public health contingency plans. For example, strengthening the distribution channels for disseminating antivirals and vaccines.
2. Clearer government leadership for the pharma industry in the pre-pandemic phase.
3. Effective pharmacovigilance to accelerate regulatory approval and ensure safety of new vaccines.
4. Prioritization within the supply chain and list 'non-essential' drugs to be dropped to ease the burden on staff shortage.

While the event focused on the UK, the simulation took an international perspective on vaccine development, drug supplies, regulatory issues and overseas national developments.

The H1N1 flu could have a number of secondary effects that critical to understand so organizations can minimize the disruption caused by a pandemic. While the number of deaths is likely to be low, the numbers becoming ill and having to care for close family or friends could amount to a third of the workforce. Plans should be in place before the pandemic hits.

Coming at the back of the financial crisis, this new crisis threatens to place further strain on the fragile economy. The uncertain economic environment many companies currently face is now compounded by the new uncertainty of workforce availability, ability to maintain their essential operations, and demand for their goods and services as the H1N1 hits consumer habits. This presents a series of complex scenarios organizations have to prepare for that need a dynamic solution.

Our economy relies on just in time delivery of goods and services. Disruptions caused by the H1N1 flu can have severe impacts on organizations. We have already seen school closures and advice for children to stay at home. But how should organizations cope with employees being absent from work having to look after family members? Caregivers could themselves become ill and unable to work from home. Furthermore, as employees are unable to turn up to work, companies may discover that critical suppliers may be unable to fulfill their contractual obligations. The ripple effects could extend to disruptions to core services and goods including public transportation and shortages of fresh produce at grocery stores.

The world may be better prepared than ever before to deal with the medical challenges since the 20th century pandemics, but globalization and greater interdependency has increased our vulnerability to disruptions. IAF believes that society is resilient to major natural and man-made crises. Even if we experience a severe pandemic, public panic is unlikely to ensue. However, breakdown in key linkages is likely and could cause needless disruption and financial loss. Developing a flexible model through a simulation can identify the broken linkages and the possibility of creating new linkages to minimize the disruption from a pandemic.

News & Events

IAF Contributes Chapter on Using Vision in Futures

IAF has recently contributed a chapter on Using Vision in Futures for the Millennium Project's Futures Research Methodology (FRM) Version 3.0. This peer-reviewed handbook contains 39 chapters on futures tools and methods. The series begins with an introductory chapter to futures research and concludes with a synthesis of methods and speculation about the future of futures research methods. The remaining 27 chapters cover one specific method (Futures Wheel, Scenarios) or category of methods (e.g. Systems Perspectives, Normative Forecasting).

Each of these 37 chapters gives an executive overview of each method's history, description, primary and alternative usages, strengths and weaknesses, uses in combination with other methods, and speculation about future evolution of the method. Some also contain appendixes with applications, links to software, and sources for further information. You can review a list of chapters and order a copy at the [Millennium Project](#).

Upcoming Events

American Society for Dermatologic Surgery (ASDS), Industry Advisory Council Retreat, IAF President Jonathan Peck, May 15th, 2009, Cambridge, Maryland.

Leadership & Managing Change for the US Army Medical Dept. Center and School at Ft. Sam Houston, IAF President Jonathan Peck, May 21st, 2009, San Antonio, TX.

Evolution's Next Phase, [World Future Society, National Capitol Region Chapter](#), IAF V.P. for Business Development Eric Meade, May 21st, 2009, Washington, D.C.

Wiser Futures Workshop, [WorldFuture 2009: Innovation and Creativity in a Complex World](#), IAF Futurists Clem Bezold, Craig Bettles and Eric Meade, July 17th, Chicago, IL.

Health For All and a Health Care System Worth Creating, [WorldFuture 2009: Innovation and](#)

[Creativity in a Complex World](#), IAF Futurists Clem Bezold and Craig Bettles, July 18th-19th, Chicago, IL.

The Futures of China, [WorldFuture 2009: Innovation and Creativity in a Complex World](#), IAF Futurist Eric Meade and Social Technologies Futurist John Cashman, July 18th-19th, Chicago, IL.

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