



Summary Insights: Building a Culture of Preparedness and High Reliability

RFG Perspective: In the New Normal environment of 2021, digital transactions will be critical to an enterprise's survival, and outages will be more damaging than at any time in the past. But the New Normal work from home (WFH) environment has increased the cultural challenge of getting all employees to be highly responsive to alerts, architectural issues, disruptions, outages and production issues that can greatly impair the ability of customers, employees and suppliers to conduct business.

Consequently, IT executives are adjusting to a workplace that is being transformed by WFH. But most do not yet have processes and procedures in place to build a culture of preparedness and high reliability for the WFH environment. That is especially true for new hires, who must get their on-the-job training far from the familiar, centralized office environment.

Culture and employee attitudes, even more than processes, drive high availability and high reliability in the enterprise – and it is up to management to ensure these challenges are addressed. Business and IT executives need to collaborate and develop procedures and training exercises that create a culture of preparedness and urgency in those managers and their staffs responsible for supporting the organization's mission-critical daily business operations.

INTRODUCTION

Whenever there is a major disaster, including a pandemic, the process of triaging the patients demands that the attending doctors know – and acknowledge – their expected roles before treating the ill or injured. There is no room for lack of preparedness for a disaster – even though disasters happen infrequently. There is no room for a lack of command, a plan for the work, and preparedness.

Clearly, when the stakes are high – as in life-or-death situations – the strategy, the objectives and the tactics must be crystal-clear. This is the case for combat zones, hospitals, submarine crews, or operators at nuclear power plants or oil refineries – all of which face life-or-death issues on a daily basis.

Far from the battlefield, mission-criticality affects many types of organizations, including financial institutions, transportation companies (planes, trains and automobiles) and utilities. The ever-present priorities associated with mission-critical workloads must continue, even in the WFH world.

Traditionally in the office, the physical aspects of the place – including walls and conference rooms – define the way employees communicate and interact. Now that



WFH workstyles are widely adopted in the Americas, in EMEA and Asia/Pacific, all of that is evolving as we move into rebuilding our businesses in 2021.

Although the COVID-19 crisis has been with us since March 2020, many organizations are still grappling with the effects of WFH work-styles – particularly how it affects previous patterns of communication, management and executive oversight of teamwork and organizational activities. This is especially true when it comes to emergencies and irregular operations.

Insights from RFG100 Executives

Corporate culture is an important – if often overlooked – factor when it comes to responding to corporate and financial risks. The risk of noncompliance can be catastrophic. Think of nuclear submarines, power plants, oil rigs, factories and other places where industrial accidents can literally lead to death and destruction. But, for most of us, catastrophe can arise very differently – discovery of a cyber-security failure, sudden drop in top-line revenue, or inability to respond to sudden environmental or business changes.

Cooperation and productivity in our work environment must continue – but they cannot do so without a common set of understandings, processes, procedures and dialogs between the key groups inside most businesses and organizations. In a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, these metrics will affect: prioritization of business goals and IT goals; communications; project management; and key roles for production staff.

RFG100 Discussion and Analysis

On Dec. 16, 2020, RFG facilitated a videoconference on “*Building a Culture of Preparedness and High Reliability*.” One panelist recalled the statement by former IBM CEO Lou Gerstner, who famously said in his 2002 book *Who Says Elephants Can't Dance?* “Culture isn’t just one aspect of the game. *It is the game.*” Another quoted the late management consultant, Peter Drucker, who once observed: “Culture eats process for lunch or dinner every day” – highlighting the importance of corporate culture for achieving business success.

Looking at the emerging challenges inherent in the WFH paradigm, RFG100 executives examined the key traits needed to ensure that business cultures support high performance, high reliability, high-availability, security, and regulatory-compliant business cultures. This is especially important in the New Normal, with its rapid shift to WFH and accelerated migrations to hybrid cloud and multi-clouds.

The panelists on the call were:



- Dr. Dave Chatterjee, author of the forthcoming book “*Cybersecurity Readiness: A Holistic and High Performance Approach.*” Chatterjee is an MIS professor at the University of Georgia, and a visiting professor at Duke University in Durham, N.C.
- Pat Bodin: Author of “Get in the Boat: A Journey to Relevance”
- Gary Oliver, CEO of Excelerate
- Kika von Kluck: VP, Branding at BNS UEP
- Jean S. Bozman, President, Cloud Architects llc

In this research document, we include their key findings about the challenges that are associated with corporate culture, work attitudes and forging new ways to work together productively.

Key discussion topics, and suggested solutions (*shown in italics*), included:

- Best practices and critical success factors for a corporate-wide culture of preparedness. *These must be adapted to meet New Normal requirements. Commitment, preparedness and discipline will be key priorities for achieving high reliability goals. Tabletop exercises need to be adapted to the new work environment and CxOs need to ensure they are executed periodically so that the people and teams are able to perform as expected during normal and irregular operations.*
- Changes necessary to enable shifts to WFH (work from home) and hybrid, multi-cloud environments. *Many organizations look to technical solutions, such as conferencing and communications software. However, it is the way that person-to-person communications are changing that will determine how we set business policies and data-management policies from now on. CxOs must ensure that new hires get the proper training on the processes and procedures and materials so that they can perform their expected roles in times of crisis. Things cannot be left to chance.*
- Priorities for key business executives who must assume stakeholder roles — along with their roles and responsibilities. *No longer strictly a command-and-control hierarchy, New Normal communications will become more collaborative, with more feedback to top managers and more cooperation between business units. Nonetheless, there needs to be an individual in charge and a clearly defined set of action and escalation plans.*
- The emergence of newly defined roles, like Site Reliability Engineers (SREs) *Achieving increased reliability in organizations will demand creation of new titles for employees who understand how to keep reliability levels high – and how to maintain them in the face of cybersecurity issues and unpredictable outages.*
- The need to update metrics, including KPIs (key performance indicators), and KRIs (key risk indicators) —and now KBIs (key behavior indicators)—to



- support business operations over the long term. *CxOs must leverage, constantly monitor, and manage to key metrics in their efforts to gain improved high-reliability results.*
- In the WFH environment, there is a pressing need for top-of-mind high-reliability organizational principles that span the entire enterprise or organization. *Top executives must install the urgency of high-reliability and facilitate learning skill sets that support and promote high-reliability technologies and principles.*

Corporate Culture: A Key Factor in Crisis Response

The realities of the work-from-home (WFH) environment are very different from those found in conventional offices. In a WFH environment, communication via videoconferences, Zoom or Slack is not as immediate and compelling as 1:1 communication within the four walls of an office conference-room. Creating a sense of urgency is much harder.

We polled RFG100 executives about their views on corporate culture in the WFH environment. The poll results show that many of the traditional metrics simply aren't working well anymore – and that they have to change to reflect the New Normal realities of the workplace.

The **RFG100 poll** turned up the following results:

- **Regarding cultural assessments**, 43% of respondents said they do those kinds of assessments annually—but an equal percentage said they did not. This reflects a wide variation in approach to managing in a WFH environment. For this polling question, 14% of respondents reported that they do quarterly cultural assessments.
- **Regarding high reliability training** – More than 40% reported they do that training annually, while nearly 15% said they do that training weekly. Nearly 30% said they do not offer training aimed specifically at high reliability.
- **Reliability training for new hires** – However, 30% of respondents noted that New Hires in their organization get reliability training upon joining the company.

Clearly, the range of cultures seen in business is quite broad – but key organizing principles did emerge from the RFG100 panel discussion. First, establishing role-models for consistent communications between business and IT staffs is a top priority. Now more than ever, business and IT executives must leverage new modes of communication to bridge the gaps – and to help business and IT roles “sync up” on preparedness and reliability. In a WFH world, business behavior is just as important as business productivity (to which it is related) – thus influencing business outcomes.



After all, this is a new, and novel, world-of-work – so there are no traditions for working in a WFH work world. However, leadership, as modeled by executives across business units and IT organizations will go a long way toward supporting environments that value preparedness and high reliability.

SUMMARY/LOOKING AHEAD

Business metrics are evolving in the New Normal world, giving rise to new ones that that will set “ground rules” for the behavior of employees, business managers and IT managers – all working from home or in remote offices. It is all part of the process of rebuilding a unified organizational culture that allows all employees and managers to work together effectively and productively, even though most are working in a highly distributed way – and not face-to-face.

Looking ahead, there will likely be an evolving series of metric types, including KPIs, KRIs and now, KBIs, according to top IT executives in the RFG100 panel. Why? There has been substantial change in the interactions between the multiple work “cultures” within our organizations.

Building a high-performance culture will take on greater importance in 2021, as we begin to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. Designing a culture that supports high-performance, high-reliability, security and governmental compliance is never easy. This time around, it will be critical for business success in 2021 and beyond.

RFG POV: As we enter 2021, CxOs know that a new culture of readiness and preparedness must grow up alongside the new WFH realities. Cybersecurity and enterprise high reliability issues have the capacity to create lengthy outages – and to damage – or even destroy – an enterprise. Business and IT executives must consider and plan for the full range of possible outages and scenarios. To do so, they must monitor and measure reliability levels; find ways to minimize the impacts of security breaches – and devise new methods to avoid downtime in an unfamiliar brave new world.

Additional relevant research and consulting services are available. Interested readers should contact Client Services to arrange further discussion or interview with Mr. Cal Braunstein, CEO and Executive Director of Research. Jean S. Bozman, President of Cloud Architects Advisors LLC, co-authored this report.