



White Paper

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## **Information Sharing Planning (ISP)**

for Strengthening Security, Resilience, and Business Continuity

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This paper explains how Information Sharing Planning enhances security, resilience, business continuity, and crisis preparedness by ensuring that both internal and external stakeholders understand what information they need to communicate with each other before, during, and after critical incidents. It provides a brief overview of the Information Sharing Planning process and CHANNELS software offered by Mind-Alliance, and describes how they are used to identify vulnerabilities and produce actionable information sharing procedures for people with roles in business continuity and crisis management plans. Information sharing planning and the procedures produced by this process help stakeholders understand the interdependence between their roles and how to share information and coordinate their activities and actions when dynamically adapting to risk-causing events.

A video related to this paper is available at:

<http://www.mind-alliance.com/solutions/business-continuity>

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# **Planning the Flow of Information is Essential to Security, Resilience, and Business Continuity**

Few would argue with the premise that preventing and resolving crisis situations requires that relevant information flow quickly and reliably to decision-makers. Determining precisely what information needs to reliably flow to whom, when, and how can be a challenging undertaking, but is essential to strengthening the resilience of a corporation, achieving effective business continuity, and protecting the corporate brand or agency reputation in times of crisis. This aspect of business continuity and emergency preparedness planning is increasingly challenging because of interconnectedness. When operations and business processes depend on employees, facilities, suppliers, customers, and computer resources spread around the globe, events and actions in one part of the world can impact far across space and time. Inter-linkages and interaction of risks increase uncertainty and the difficulty of decision making.

How can security, emergency preparedness and business continuity management adapt to this era of interdependence and evolve from traditional top-down emergency preparedness planning to a more collaborative approach to risk management, one based on information sharing and coordination between stakeholders?

How can managers foster a resilience culture and engage the whole organization in the resilience effort? Clearly, this is not just about scripting rigid sequential response tasks or merely compiling distribution lists and protocols for automated notification systems. While there

are a number of excellent business continuity and automatic notification software solutions, the critical element missing from these solutions is the ability to plan the flow of information, to identify where information sharing capabilities and procedures are needed in order to execute the plans, and to spot where plans are vulnerable to breakdown.

The individuals who originate risk-related information bulletins, issue alerts and respond to them, must clearly understand what information to send to or receive from colleagues as they execute their assigned tasks. Stakeholders need to understand the interdependence between their roles and how to share information and coordinate their activities when dynamically adapting to potential or actual risk-causing events.

The way large government agencies and global enterprises engage in emergency preparedness and business continuity planning contributes to the challenge. Typically, different people author different plans -- crisis management plans, site-based crisis management plans (for each physical location), business continuity plans (for specific business units), and application-specific disaster recovery plans. These various plans often lack information sharing procedures that specify precisely how the people expected to put the plans into action need to communicate. The different plans are rarely produced, exercised, and trained under a central leadership using a coordinated thinking process. This makes it even more difficult for individuals to attain a clear understanding of how business continuity, crisis management, and disaster recovery capabilities come together and what information to communicate to a range of demanding stakeholders. Despite years dedicated to building business continuity capabilities, managers sometimes look at business continuity, crisis management, and disaster recovery areas in a programmatic and

isolated way and lack a straightforward understanding of who has to communicate what, to whom, and when throughout the crisis response. This puts the company at risk, because without actionable information sharing procedures and an understanding of how information must flow, the probability of business disruption is magnified, particularly when one event activates multiple plans simultaneously.

## Information Sharing Planning

Information Sharing Planning (ISP) is a systematic process developed by Mind-Alliance Systems that addresses the key challenges outlined above by ensuring that information sharing procedures govern the flow of information between everyone with a role in emergency plans.



**Figure 1. The Mind-Alliance Information Sharing Planning Process**

Security , emergency management and business continuity professionals (and consulting firms and the systems engineers that support them) use the ISP process and web-based CHANNELS planning software to produce robust information sharing procedures. Planners or consultants populate CHANNELS with content from existing plans and procedure documents. The software then automatically creates a concise and interactive visual flow map of information that specifies the details executives need to understand, namely

- Events that trigger a planned response

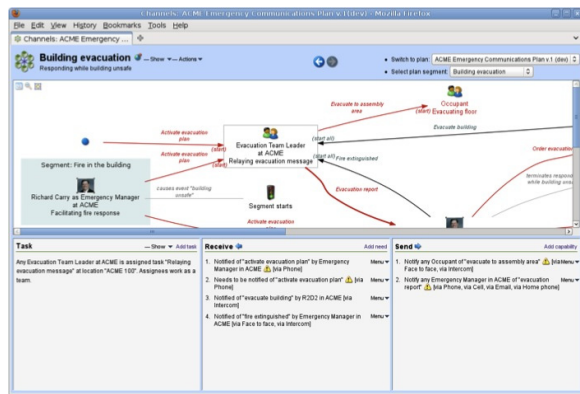
- Assigned tasks people need to execute
- Information they should receive and send
- Primary and secondary means of communication

Information flow maps show tasks and flows with issues that have the potential to impact operations, such as

Issue Types	Example
Delays....	Your site security officer is unable to report damage assessments in a timely manner
Information overload	Your Chief Security Officer would be overwhelmed by dozens of reports from business units
Single points of failure	Your managers are unable to approve transactions because of missing information
Bottlenecks	Too much information flow through one executive.
Missing procedures	The people who need to execute a task have no communication procedures defined at all
Unapproved or non-compliant information sharing	A business unit is not clear as to what information it can legally share with the press or other business units.

CHANNELS automatically analyzes the modeled flows of information between people and people, people and systems, or systems and systems. CHANNELS produces visual analytics and recommendations that help troubleshoot potential issues in information sharing. For

example, CHANNELS identifies informational dependencies between response tasks and produces a Failure Impact Analysis Report that highlights the cascading impact a potential failure in information sharing will have on the corporation's goals and business continuity. These reports, and others produced by CHANNELS help frame conversations with suppliers and other types of stakeholders about how to join forces in enhancing resilience.



**Figure 2. The Channels Information Sharing Planning Software (Web Applications)**

All issues are aggregated into sortable table reports so they can be prioritized and addressed by the project teams and planners. CHANNELS suggests specific steps business continuity planners can take to update plans and procedures to ensure that information can flow between designated sources in a timely manner.

Information dissemination is also analyzed to determine where an element of information would come from and go to, what task or person would require this information, how it would be transformed along the way, and whether it could arrive in time where it is needed.

CHANNELS enables business continuity managers to discover and understand where new information sharing procedures are crucial in order to ensure that decision makers are quickly notified about potential threats or

unfolding events. CHANNELS also helps evaluate the robustness of plans, for example, by showing all the communication flows that rely on mobile networks and need to have a backup means of transmission for both parties to the communication.

Once planners have either fixed issues or waived them as inconsequential for the plan, they can publish a set of information sharing procedures with current contact information. Everyone in the value network or supply chain with assigned roles in the Business Continuity, Crisis Management, Site Security, or Disaster Recovery Plans can log in to a password-protected website to review them. Now, when they notice potential disrupting events they will know whom to notify, and what type of information they are expected to transmit as they prevent disruption and restart or recover operations after an incident.

Having stakeholders review and exercise information sharing procedures is essential, and smart companies include training on these procedures as part of the staff induction process.

CHANNELS identifies the communication and information flows needed to harmonize and integrate plans from interdependent business units and suppliers. CHANNELS helps audit plans and procedures to ensure that all levels of the organization will find out about events like service disruptions as early as possible to keep critical business functions intact. This also enhances compliance with regulations and standards, such as the BS25999 standard, which requires organizations to assess the quality of existing plans by auditing the communication procedures.

Without ISP and CHANNELS, managers would lack a detailed understanding about how a delay in learning about a threat or a failure to communicate would impact the execution of

the company's Business Continuity, Disaster Recovery, and Crisis Management Plans—especially when multiple plans were activated simultaneously. Information flow maps help business continuity professionals show their company's top management how their projects improve the planned flow of information so the company is better able to achieve its recovery time objectives.

As a result of ISP, organizations become more resilient, better able to synchronize all available resources for managing risk to business operations, and more competent in their ability to maintain critical operations.

Information Sharing Planning with Channels software is now an important part of a consulting firm system integrator's tool chest. They can leverage Channels to:

- Identify customer needs for systems integration
- Build new relationships with a customer's information sharing partners
- Support the design of situational awareness solutions
- Prioritize system integration services offered to customers based on mission-driven needs and capability gaps.

## Mind-Alliance Systems

Visit [www.mind-alliance.com](http://www.mind-alliance.com) to view videos or call us today at **1-888-731-6018** to learn how ISP and CHANNELS can help you strengthen your corporation's resilience, business continuity, and emergency preparedness efforts.