

HR should negotiate “crisis” terms with unions, says Abbey



Bank can vary staff terms and conditions if terrorist attack or flu pandemic hits operations
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HR should negotiate with unions over how employees’ working conditions could be varied during a crisis, delegates at a business continuity seminar heard.

Richard Bridgford, corporate business continuity manager at Abbey, said the bank’s policy on emergency situations made provision for how terms and conditions could be varied, which had been agreed after dialogue with union reps.

This meant that HR could switch from “business as usual” to “crisis” conditions at short notice if the situation demanded.

The variation provides for events such as a flu pandemic, when staff might have to bear a heavier workload to cover for large numbers of absent colleagues, or a terrorist attack on the transport network, when remote working arrangements might have to be varied at short notice.

“Your existing policies may not hold true or be the policies you want to adopt in a crisis,” Bridgford explained. “So it’s important to discuss with unions what can be varied in a crisis. You won’t be able to go into any sort of negotiating process once a crisis has happened.”

If a back-up set of conditions are agreed, then the only judgment required is whether a situation – such a heavy snowfall – qualifies a crisis, said Bridgford.

Engaging with unions beforehand helps to ensure employee buy-in when something unexpected occurs, he added.

Bridgford was speaking at a seminar in London yesterday entitled “The Human Dimension of BCM”, organised by the Business Continuity Institute.

In a recent BCI survey of HR professionals, 93 per cent of respondents said the function should have a role in business continuity but barely half – 52 per cent – had reviewed their policies with this in mind.

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