



## Message Maps: Blueprints for Pandemic Preparedness

### Introduction

Natural disasters. Earthquakes, fires, floods. Pandemic flu. Terrorist attacks. In the 21st-century, effective emergency communications are an obvious must-have. Without the right, planned communication strategy, chaos abounds in an already catastrophic situation. As evidenced by 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina, the main issue regarding disasters becomes not *if* they will occur, but rather *when*. Even more importantly, *how* will organizations -- both private and public -- choose to respond? With last-minute, unplanned messages? Or with comprehensive, planned message strategies?

The threat of pandemic flu alone has businesses in the public and private sector scrambling to develop disaster plans and formalized communication solutions. Imagine a pandemic flu outbreak. Out of 100 employees, 40 are absent from work. Twenty people are ill; 10 people are caring for ill family members and 10 are absent due to fears of infection. How do you communicate quickly and efficiently when 40% of your workforce is absent? What will you do when confronted with questions about benefits, product delivery, and absentee policies?

Like earthquakes, floods, fire, and terrorist attacks, a pandemic outbreak has the potential to cause major business interruptions, not to mention confusion, fear, and panic in and out of the workplace. Disasters directly affect an organization's ability to stay in business. Sending the wrong message during a disaster can be just as harmful as—or even more than—not planning for the disaster at all.

Successfully managing major business interruptions, such as a pandemic flu outbreak, requires creating a comprehensive communication plan. The major component of effective pandemic communication is message mapping, a process of creating prepared messages that can be used in disaster or pandemic-related situations. This paper examines the role of message mapping and the Chandler Message Mapping process in disaster preparedness, especially as it relates to pandemic flu.

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### Pandemic Flu: Business Disrupted

The pandemic flu of 1918, one of the worst pandemics in recent history, had an estimated death toll of 40 to 50 million. Pandemics in 1957 and 1968 claimed a total of three million lives. Forecasts of the next pandemic event estimate a

possible 1.9 million fatalities in the United States alone (180 to 360 million fatalities worldwide).

### Communication Challenges During A Pandemic

Communication during a pandemic is hampered by absentee rates, panic, and lack of planning. During a disaster:

#### **Key personnel may be unavailable**

In a pandemic or disaster situation, key personnel may be ill or absent. Who makes decisions if the CEO is unavailable? What happens to payroll if half of the accounting team falls ill?

#### **Organizations need to communicate with varied demographics**

A workforce may vary in geographic location, languages, and economic resources. A message's effectiveness will be hampered if it is written in a language unfamiliar to employees. For example, if the workforce uses Spanish as a primary language, communication in English adds to panic and confusion.

#### **Stress negatively affects comprehension**

During a crisis, average reading levels decrease four grade levels. Negative dominance also occurs; during times of stress it takes four positive statements to balance one negative statement.

#### **Stress negatively affects the cognitive process**

Thinking of what to say and how to say it in the middle of a crisis leads to the possibility of mixed or erroneous messages. Messages may be too long, too short, or not address relevant issues. The wrong message can contribute to already existing panic and confusion. For example, during 9/11 the head of a financial company promised his employees that insurance benefits would continue uninterrupted. Several months later, the company was out of business and former employees never received the promised benefits.

#### **Business reputations may suffer**

Poorly articulated or worded answers to questions can affect an organization's survival post-disaster. The perception that an organization behaved in a competent manner during a disaster is key to recovery.

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### Communication Challenges Resolved: Message Maps

Message maps are crisis communication tools, blueprints to help simplify complex messages. Created prior to pandemic or disaster events, message

maps are clear, concise messages that speed communication during chaos. Message maps are appropriate before, during, and after an event, and allow an organization to make better use of information prior to a crisis.

Formalized, planned communication eliminates the potential for erroneous messages born of panic and chaos. In creating message maps, employees and constituents are reassured of an organization's ability to handle a disaster.

**Message maps are created prior to disasters or outbreaks.**

In creating message maps ahead of time, organizations have the time and resources to explore all possible disaster and pandemic scenarios.

**Message maps are written at or below a sixth-grade reading level**

Reading ability and comprehension drops approximately four grade levels during times of stress. Planned communication ensures messages are understood by the widest possible audience. Message maps are created by distilling information down to easily understood messages written at or below a sixth-grade reading level.

**Message maps are specific to one organization.**

Message maps convey information specific to an organization, e.g. work resumption, post-disaster insurance availability, and bereavement policies.

**Message maps consist of three short sentences that convey three key messages in 30 words or less.**

The best chance of getting an audience's attention occurs within the first 9 seconds of a broadcast or during the first 30 words of written material.

**Message maps take into account the needs of varied demographic groups.**

Organizations may need multiple messages for various demographic groups. Creating message maps ahead of time allows organizations to take into account knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs that suggest how target audiences will react to messages. Messages can also be translated into multiple languages.

**Message maps are:**

- crisis communication tools.
- ways to organize complex information.
- distillations of complicated messages.

**Message maps are not:**

- long, convoluted dissertations on what to do in a crisis.
- written with lots of technical jargon and high-level reading words.
- hard to understand.
- created during a crisis.

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### Benefits of Message Mapping

Planned message maps deliver clear, consistent communication throughout a pandemic. Creating message maps prior to an outbreak ensures messages will be specific and appropriate. Planning ahead also allows consideration of how the message will affect and motivate all constituencies.

#### Planned message maps:

- eliminate the potential for dissemination of incorrect information.
- reduce rumors.
- meet elevated media demands.
- can be written in multiple languages.
- ensure the right message reaches the public

### Creating Effective Message Maps

If message maps are essential to disaster and pandemic preparedness, why don't more organizations have them in place? Creating a message mapping strategy takes time, energy, and resources. The process involves input from many members of an organization. Although time-intensive, disaster and pandemic planning can save lives, company assets, and organizational reputations. In the long run, it is economically more effective to take the time and resources to ensure excellent preparation. To create a message mapping strategy:

#### Determine your core constituent audiences

Who is involved in or affected by your organization? List all possible audiences, e.g. employees, customers, vendors, suppliers, government regulators, investors. Employees can also be divided into subcategories such as managers, field workers, clerical staff, and more.

#### Walk through every possible outbreak or disaster scenario

What do you want to communicate to employees? What health information will you use? What if a quarantine is declared? Will benefit plans remain the same? Will paychecks continue? Scenarios regarding alternative work sites, telecommuting, health information, and more need to be considered.

#### Make choices about types of messages

In determining types of messages, consider:

- legal implications.
- public relations implications.
- financial implications.
- business operations.

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### **Determine channels of communication**

How will these messages be communicated? Email, phone, media, other? How will your organization know the message was sent? Is there a confirmation process? Is there an automated system in place or will your organization need to set up a phone bank to contact others?

### **Hone and refine actual message maps**

Traditional message maps reduce important, emergency-relevant concepts to no more than three short sentences that convey three key messages in thirty words or less. Each primary message should have no more than three message points.

### **Example of a traditional message map**

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services released pandemic-related message maps in January and February of 2006. In response to the question "What should people do if there is an outbreak of pandemic influenza?" the USDHHS suggested:

#### **Message 1:**

##### **People should stay informed about prevention and control actions.**

1. Public health officials will share information about prevention and control actions.
2. Information about prevention and control actions will be shared in a variety of ways including through the CDC hotline and [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov).
3. Informed public participation and cooperation will be needed for public health efforts.

#### **Message 2:**

##### **People should use information about prevention and control actions to care for themselves and their loved ones.**

1. Public health officials will provide information on the science and symptoms of the specific disease.
2. People should practice good health habits including eating a balanced diet and getting sufficient rest.
3. People should discuss individual health concerns with their health care provider, health department, or other trusted source.

#### **Message 3:**

##### **People should take common sense actions to keep from spreading germs.**

1. People should cover their coughs and sneezes and wash their hands frequently.
2. People should stay away from sick people as much as possible.
3. If you are sick, you should stay away from others as much as possible.

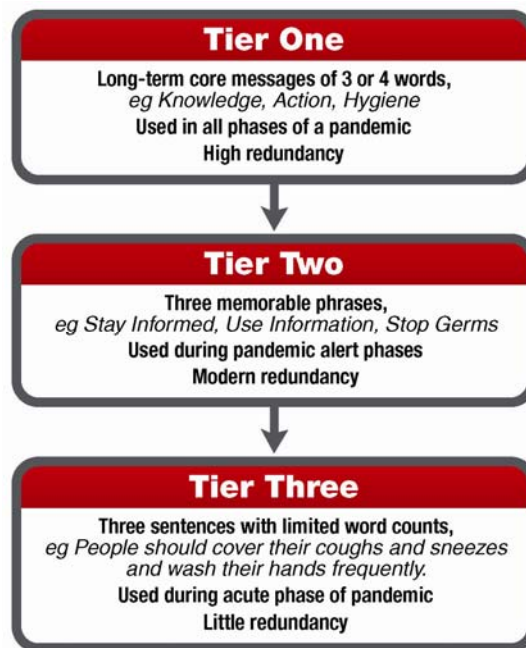
*Traditional message maps, such as those used by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, reduce important, emergency-relevant concepts to no more than three short sentences that convey three key messages in thirty words or less.*

## The Chandler Message Mapping Model

The Chandler Message Mapping Model (Chandler Methodology)—named for its originator, organizational communication expert Robert C. Chandler, Ph.D.—is a more sophisticated version of traditional message mapping. This model of emergency communication makes use of three different levels of mapping, capitalizing on the idea that *pre-disaster* information needs are quite different from actual *mid-disaster* needs. In the pre-pandemic phase, audiences may not find traditional messages relevant or compelling. Pre-pandemic audiences are unlikely to remember even distilled messages, while mid-pandemic audiences have needs for more specific information. Messages created using this system are intended to develop and hold audience attention over time.

The Chandler Methodology uses three types of messages that work together for pre-pandemic issues, pandemic alert communication, acute pandemic, and post-pandemic applications. These three types of messages are best represented as three tiers:

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### Tier 1 - Long-term basic core messages

Core messages intended for long-term use should be reduced to phrases of no more than three or four words, e.g. “Duck and Cover” and “Click It or Ticket.” Core messages can be used in all phases of a pandemic and as such must be extremely simple and redundant. If the pre-pandemic question is “What should I do in an outbreak?” the first-tier message might be “Knowledge, Action, Hygiene.”

### **Tier 2 - Three easy-to-remember phrases**

Second-tier messages are only moderately repetitive and are used to convey information during pandemic alert phases. Rhythm and rhyming are important in tier-two messages. For example, law enforcement uses "Click It or Ticket" as a tier-one long-term core message. A tier-two message would be "Stay Alert, Stay Awake, Stay Alive." A pandemic flu-appropriate tier-two message would be "Stay Informed, Use Information, Stop Germs."

### **Tier 3 - Three sentences with limited word counts**

Third-tier messaging is appropriate for the acute phase of a disaster or a pandemic and is very similar to traditional message mapping. Third-tier messaging uses three sentences with limited word counts to provide detailed, specific instructions or information. Third-tier messages are more personally relevant to specific audiences, e.g. those in danger of flu infection. These messages have the lowest amount of redundancy and contain the greatest amount of specific information.

### **Redundancy**

Each phase of the Chandler Methodology makes use of different levels of redundancy. High redundancy is only appropriate at tier-one messaging; moderate redundancy is appropriate at tier-two. Third-level messaging needs to have the lowest amount of redundancy.

## **Creating Chandler Message Maps: Working Backwards**

The creation of Chandler Message Maps is very similar to that of traditional maps. However, the reductive nature of Chandler Message Maps means that messages are created from most complicated to least complicated.

- Begin with the overall goal in mind.
- Determine the three sub-points that relate to the goal.
- Create three sentences for each message goal (Tier 3).
- Reduce sentences to three short phrases (Tier 2).
- Reduce phrases to three or four words (Tier 1).

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## The 3n Solution: Rapid Dissemination of Message Maps

Message mapping is an essential communication tool in pandemic preparedness and recovery. Message maps allow organizations to successfully manage major business interruptions, thus limiting damage to personnel, property, and business viability.

Automated mass communication systems are particularly appropriate for sharing message maps. A mass notification system can deliver voice and text messages to one, ten, or thousands of people within minutes. **3n (National Notification Network)** is a proven vendor of mass notification services that are effective in both emergency and non-emergency situations.

3n enables corporations, government agencies, and schools to achieve considerable bottom-line savings through rapid and efficient communication in routine, urgent, and emergency situations. Whether organizations are concerned with implementing cost savings in daily communications, minimizing financial impact from disasters or other crises, or ensuring a quick return to normalcy, the 3n mass notification system provides the most rapid return on investment of any notification system on the market.

**Focus matters—and it shows in the 3n system.** 3n maintains complete focus on mass notification to provide you with an effective, reliable solution you can depend on every time. 3n's experience shows with the maturity and robustness of features and functionality— 97% of 3n's customers recommend the 3n system for ease-of-use, flexibility and functionality.

**3n takes a mission-critical approach to your data security.** 3n's system is built to the most rigorous of security standards to ensure the unparalleled privacy and security of our most important data—yours.

**The 3n system operates the way you do.** 3n provides integration and data synchronization with other systems without sacrificing the robust and flexible functionality you need to operate independently in critical times when other systems aren't an option.

**3n helps you make quick, informed decisions.** The 3n system offers comprehensive reporting and management tools that give you the ability to manage all your notification in a powerful, yet simple-to-use, reporting interface.

**You can send your first message today.** 3n delivers unparalleled ease and time of implementation. Implementation and training are measured in days, not months. The 3n mass notification system is as effective for daily use as for emergencies and provides immediate operational benefits and significant ROI

proven through customer experience and the 3n-Osterman Research ROI model, the only in the industry. The 3n system works optimally in any situation—including during high-stress, time-sensitive circumstances—so even non-technical users can get a message out. In rigorous usability tests, untrained users are able to send a notification in just over a minute after running through the system one time.

**3n partners with customers for ongoing support and success.** 3n recognizes that the company only succeeds when you do. To show commitment to your ongoing success, 3n provides best-of-class customer support and has live operators standing by to help you 24/7/365.

**3n is trusted by the world's most sophisticated global organizations** and the country's most security-conscious government agencies. Hundreds of corporations, schools, and government organizations—such as Thrivent Financial, Park Water Company, Fluor Corporation, and Kenyon International—rely on 3n for proven performance.

### 3n Pandemic Communication Solution

The 3n Pandemic Communication Solution, which leverages decades of research by internationally recognized crisis communication expert, Dr. Robert Chandler, includes all of the following:

**Pandemic readiness self-audit worksheet** to assess your organization's pandemic readiness and pinpoint gaps in your plan

**Chandler Methodology™ pandemic message maps**, licensed *exclusively* to 3n, that tell you what to say to employees, customers, suppliers, investors, partners, and the media before, during, and after a pandemic

**Pandemic preparedness presentations** to help you justify the importance of pandemic planning when talking to senior management

**Two-hour executive audio briefing** featuring Dr. Chandler talking about the key business issues executives need to be aware of during a pandemic

**Pandemic communication plan testing and validation tool** for your key 100 contacts to ensure that your pandemic communication response will work when it's needed most

**About Robert C. Chandler, Ph.D.**

Dr. Robert Chandler is a recognized expert on organizational behavior and communication with research expertise focusing on issues such as pandemic communications, crisis leadership, crisis teams, crisis decision-making and behavior, human factors during organizational crises, and organizational communication assessment in a wide variety of business and corporate contexts. He has written more than 75 papers and published articles and authored three books. Dr. Chandler is the Blanche E. Seaver Professor and Chair of the Communication Division in the Center for Communication and Business at Pepperdine University. He is also a member of the American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress, the International Communication Association, the American Forensic Association, and the National Communication Association.

***For more information about 3n (National Notification Network), please visit our website at [3nonline.com](http://3nonline.com), or contact us at 888-366-4911.***