

HOW TO MAKE YOUR BUSINESS CONTINUITY MANAGEMENT PLAN MORE EFFECTIVE

There are many different ways to develop a Business Continuity Management (BCM) Plan. While business continuity objectives may differ from one organization to another, they are almost always directed toward protection of people, protection of property, and preparation for the organization to resume productive operations as soon as possible. With that, the question many companies face is how can I develop a plan that will be effective at the time of a crisis? Planning for business interruptions is no easy task, but this paper includes some well-known mistakes that should be avoided to ensure your business is as prepared as possible.

Information Technology Focused

BCM Plans that solely focus on IT and do not address all the other critical operations within your business will not be effective if a disaster strikes that does not impact your technology, such as a pandemic flu or an act of violence. Effective planning protects all processes, not just technology and data centers.

Planning for Specific Events

Planning specific resolutions for specific business interruptions, such as fire, earthquake, power failure, etc. probably won't be very effective unless the actual interruption exactly matches what you've planned for. Your business will still be unprepared if something occurs that was never anticipated. BCM Plans need to concentrate on processes and generic scenarios (such as a lack of power, staff shortage, facility closed, or critical supplier not available). What caused the interruption is not as important as the impact the interruption may have on your business.

Shortsighted Planning

BCM planning needs to be comprehensive and consider the risks to all aspects of your operations. Developing plans that are too operational, such as only concentrating on a specific location or project or plans that only include the processes in functions, such as IT, HR and Facilities will not be effective.

It is important for planning to consider beyond just the internal risks at the organizational level. Consider your specific supply chain, critical vendors and suppliers, customers, and your community. These all need to be considered in terms of the consequences of the incident itself, but also as a resource in your planning. Consider engaging your critical vendors and suppliers in your plan development and ensure they know how critical they are to your operation and have them develop their own BCM Plans.

Not Considering Individuals in Need of Assistance

During the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, two men carried a woman who uses a wheelchair down 68 flights to safety moments before the tower collapsed. Other stories have shed light on hardships people with disabilities faced in the aftermath of the crisis, including difficulties they encountered in accessing various relief services. The tragic events of last September have brought into focus the importance of taking into account the needs of all persons, including those with disabilities, in preparing for, and responding to, disasters and emergencies. They have also served to renew interest in how building requirements address accessible egress. (1)



Special needs may exist for those persons affected by mobility, visual, or hearing impairment, such as those who cannot walk at a reasonable pace and those who may not see or hear an alarm. Additionally, there are many who may not appear to have a disability but may require special assistance. Permanent conditions such as arthritis, or temporary conditions such as an sprained ankle, may limit one's ability to evacuate quickly and safely. Heart disease, emphysema, asthma, or pregnancy may reduce stamina. Identifying individuals in need of assistance is appropriate under the guidelines of the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Gathering information in order to assist during an evacuation should be limited to:

- Name of the individual
- Work location
- Type of assistance the individual requires

Too Complex

Plans with so much detail that you can't find anything salient until page 73, will not be useful when you really need to use the plan. At the time of crisis, a team member should not be confused as to when to decide on disaster level 1, 2 or 3. Instructions should be clearly defined in the plan and very useable, or don't put it in the plan. You should include what tasks should be completed; when, by whom and the desired result.

Inaccessible Documentation

If your only copy of your company plan is in your office or stored on your computer without remote access, all your planning can't be applied if an interruption causes a shut down of your IT system or your building was not accessible. Do not allow for a single point of failure in your planning process. All team members with responsibilities for BCM planning should have extra copies of your plans stored remotely and readily accessible in the event of a crisis.

Obsolete Records & Documents

During an actual crisis is not the time to discover that your plans are not current. Time is critical and if

components of your plans are out of date, such as contact information, or major changes to business processes, you will have difficulty conducting an effective recovery during an interruption. An effective BCM plan a living, breathing document that is constantly being enhanced and revised as your business evolves. Your plan is more of a process that a document. A BCM Plan should be reviewed, audited, evaluated, revised and tested regularly to be sure it keeps pace with changes at your facility. Consider a formal of the entire plan at least once a year.

Lack of Testing

Without a comprehensive testing program, how will your business know if the plan will actually be effective at the time of crisis? Many companies will put the time and resources toward developing BCM teams, conducting Business Impact Analysis and Risk Assessments, writing the plans and training individuals on the plans, but don't ever verify that the plans are effective.

A successful BCM Plan must have a testing program which begins simply and escalates progressively. This consists of rehearsing procedures with team members and staff. Your testing program can begin with a simple tabletop exercise with team members meeting in a room to discuss their responsibilities and how they would react to various crisis situations and build up to a full-scale exercise that consists of a real-life crisis situation that is simulated as closely as possible.

By avoiding these common mistakes during the development of your BCM Plan you will be well on your way to an effective plan that will assist your organization in the event of a business interruption.

For more information, contact your local Hartford agent or your Hartford Loss Control Consultant. Visit The Hartford's Loss Control web site at: www.thehartford.com/losscontrol

References

- (1) **United States Access Board**, Resources on Emergency Evacuation and Disaster Preparedness

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