

Getting to grips with business continuity

Piper-Anna Shields of Guardian iT Group reveals how to structure, implement and maintain a business continuity management strategy.

The need to have a business continuity strategy in place that encompasses prevention, containment and recovery strategies has never been greater. In an age of e-commerce, globalisation, the data storage explosion and round-the-clock operations, demands for data and business continuity is rising constantly. If there is one industry that drives developments and requirements in this area, it is the financial community – for about 55% of business continuity services provision.

However, identifying the need to have business continuity plan (BCP) in place is one thing. But how do you go about achieving a solution that is in keeping with the requirements of the business today, and remains viable as the organisation changes and develops?

Below are some guidelines and action points – summarised from the recently launched Business Guide to Continuity Management (BGCN) guidance – to help guide you through the maze.

Getting off to a good start

BCP has evolved into business continuity management (BCM), a process that is driven from the top of the organisation. A board member should be made responsible for overseeing the BCM process to ensure it is given the correct level of importance within the business and a greater chance of effective implementation.

Next, an overall BCM co-ordinator should be appointed, who reports directly to the board. This person should understand the business structures and people, have good programme management, communication and interpersonal skills, and be a good team leader. A budget must also be allocated for the initial stages of the process. According to the size of the business, the BCM co-ordina-

tor may need the support of analysts, lower level/regional teams and appropriate administrative staff.

For example, larger companies would benefit more from a matrix team management approach, with the team drawn from existing managers in key areas.

The aim is to make BCM a part of every manager's normal responsibilities. Therefore, the BCM co-ordinator must ensure that all senior management within the company understand the importance of BCM and why it is being established.

Understanding your business

Business analysis is critical to the BCM process, providing a basis upon which all subsequent policies and practices are based. The initial stage is to understand the business, establishing what is vital for its survival. BCM has to focus on mission-critical activities, hence four basic questions must be asked:

- what is this business about;
- when are we to achieve our goals;
- who is involved, both internally and externally; and
- how are the goals to be achieved?



Piper-Anna Shields

Firms have a number of internal and external dependencies that support mission-critical processes and functions. These can include suppliers, clients, shareholders, IT systems and manufacturing processes, which must all be identified at the outset of a BCM programme. Government departments, regulators, competitors, trade bodies and pressure groups can also exert influence, and so must also be considered.

Actions:

- identify mission-critical processes and functions;
- identify key internal and external dependencies upon which these rely; and
- identify external influences that may impact upon critical processes and functions.

Business impact assessment

Next, a risk assessment should be conducted to identify the many threats to the processes identified previously. Whichever risks a company faces, there are a few effects, namely: loss of critical system(s), site or personnel, or denial of access to systems and premises, all of which produce similar disruption.

To this end, the business impact assessment (BIA) enables the firm to focus risk assessments on essential business elements rather than conduct a global risk-specific analysis. The process should also take into account the time sensitivity of each business function/process to disruption, as this information will determine the recovery objectives.

It is essential to rate the impact of these upon the business, including financial impact. Everyone involved in the mission-critical processes and functions should input into the BIA. Once again board approval to the output of the BIA should be obtained before proceeding further.

- determine impact on business of loss of mission-critical processes/functions;
- ensure involvement of appropriate functions;
- apply rating, including time dependencies; and
- obtain sponsor's approval to BIA output.

Risk assessment

Risk assessment (RA) is the process of determining the internal and external threats that could cause loss or disruption, and their likelihood of occurrence. By combining findings from the BIA and RA, a ranking system identifying priority areas for the BCM process will be achieved.

Actions:

- determine the threats to critical processes/functions;
- examine existing risk strategies/analysis;
- apply scoring system to risks identified;
- produce combined BIA and RA ranking to identify key focus for BCM;
- obtain Board approval to BIA and risk assessment output.

Continuity strategies

Having identified the areas where the organisation is most at risk, a strategy to protect it must be constructed. A number of possibilities exist, from doing nothing through to BCP. Whichever approach is taken, it should seek to improve organisational resilience to interruption, allowing for the recovery of key business and systems processes within the recovery timeframe objective, while maintaining the company's critical functions.

Any proposed strategy must appreciate both internal and external interdependencies, and should have the support of those management functions involved.

Actions:

- identify possible business continuity strategies;
- assess suitability of alternative strategies against the output of the BIA;
- prepare cost/benefit analysis of various strategies; and
- present recommendations to sponsors for approval.

Developing the response

Emergency response/operations

This involves developing and implementing procedures for responding to and stabilising disaster situations, including establishing and managing an emergency (or crisis) operations centre. It is worthwhile involving emergency services at this stage to understand their scope and remit at the time they become involved in any incident. Also, establish what the potential types of emergency are and the responses needed to deal with them. These will cover the initial actions that will be taken to protect life and property and follow through to salvage and restoration.

The components of the emergency response procedure will cover internal and external communications, pre-incident preparation based upon the expected types of incident, and the immediate actions to be taken in a situation. Keep key managers involved of their responsibilities at all times.

Next, formulate procedures for incident managing and controlling. It is vital to develop, implement and exercise emergency response and prioritisation procedures, including determining priorities for actions in an emergency, for example, including first aid and medical procedures.

The final stage of emergency response and operations will be those of salvage and restoration. A reaction team will need to be deployed to report the extent of the incident (applicable to both tangible and intangible assets).

They will be required to gather and assemble information as quickly as possible so that the initial actions can be taken. They will then need to maintain a flow of information as the incident develops.

Developing a BCP

At the heart of the BCM process is the BCP. This document brings together the actions to be taken at the time of an incident, details who is involved and how they can be contacted. The BCP(s) must reflect the current position of the organisation and its stakeholders. It should provide recovery of the organisation within time objectives established during the BIA process. In plan develop-

- the use of planning aids, plan development and maintenance tools;
- inclusion of job descriptions for those involved in delivering the plan;
- what action plans and check lists should be provided; and
- what information databases and other supporting documentation are required.

An agreed definition of what constitutes a 'disaster' for the company should be included, differentiating between an interruption and a disaster. There should be a clear escalation procedure which sets out how disaster is declared. The key phases of the recovery should be clearly identified, agreed and documented within the plan. It should also include the following:

- the recovery team description, responsibilities and organisation;
- support staff required including recovery and group co-ordinators; and
- the location and equipping of the emergency (or crisis) control centre.

A BCP appropriate to the firm can now be produced, which incorporates departmental plans as required and mechanisms that will allow it to be easily updated and maintained in the future. The plan should seek to allocate tasks and responsibilities, and:

- differentiate between recovery and departmental teams;
- identify tasks to be undertaken;
- the teams required to perform certain tasks and their responsibilities;
- identify and list key contacts, suppliers and resources; and
- the communications required to inform stakeholders and media.

The BCP should define the business continuity procedures, covering the mission-critical process and functions of the firm. Key resources and processes required for business recovery and continuity should include:

- the use, location and protection of critical data and documentation;

- cal functions;
- the telecommunication needs; and
- the essential personnel requirements to deliver agreed levels of service.

The plan should also integrate into other key plans, namely:

- crisis communications and PR;
- safety and emergency plans;
- IT and communications recovery;
- security;
- departmental operating plans;
- supply chain logistics; and
- operational risk management.

The BCP may include the following:

- *General introduction and overview* objectives, responsibilities, exercising and maintenance;
- *Plan invocation, including* disaster declaration, damage assessment, continuity actions/procedures, team organisation and responsibilities, emergency operations centre;
- *Communications, including* who should be informed, contacts and key messages; and
- *Suppliers, including* a list of recovery suppliers, and details of contract provision,

Full document management procedures should be associate with the BCP in order to maintain its currency. A list of all planholders should be maintained, together with a distribution and change control process.

Implementing the culture

The success of BCP and a BCM strategy depends upon the following:

- implementation of the recommendations made across the entire business culture;
- a training programme for all those directly involved in the execution of the plan; and
- an education and awareness scheme to ensure company-wide understanding and adoption of the plan, covering internal and external stakeholders such as staff, customers, suppliers and shareholders.

ing all recommendations and strategies identified in the BCP, otherwise its investment will be redundant.

Similarly, training and awareness must be carried out to ensure the entire company is confident and competent concerning the plan.

All internal and external parties must appreciate both the importance of BCM to the operation's survival and their role within this process, establishing confidence in the company's ability to manage in a crisis. Thus starts the embedding of the continuity culture.

Actions:

- assemble emergency management/BCM/crisis and recovery teams;
- implement relevant training schemes dependent upon task, including crisis communications/media training as appropriate;
- establish/equip emergency centres;
- establish internal and external contractual service level agreements;
- implement backup and offsite storage arrangements;
- distribute plan documentation as appropriate;
- conduct internal and external awareness programmes; and
- prepare crisis communication statements.

Maintenance and auditing

Exercising the plan

BCPs are unreliable unless exercised to prove they are viable and workable. The objective of exercising is twofold, to verify that the plan is practically workable by modelling recovery from disaster conditions and to familiarise staff with the operation of the plan. This process should happen at least once a year.

Actions:

- establish a meeting of key recovery staff;
- prepare a representative and suitably detailed disaster scenario. Include aspects such as date, time, workload, political and economic conditions, accounting period end and concurrent activities;
- initiate the exercise as a walk-through or a full system test by summarising

- document and evaluate exercise results, amending the plan where necessary.

Plan maintenance

Firms will always be subject to change – in people, process, market, risk, environment, geography, even business mission – and the BCP must reflect these changes to remain valid.

Actions:

- define plan maintenance scheme and schedule;
- monitor activities;
- update plans; and
- distribute under formal change control procedures.

Plan audit

Auditing ensures the BCM process is up to date and viable in line with organisational change and current BCM practice and should happen annually.

Actions:

- set audit objectives and scope;
- assess and select the audit method;
- audit the administrative aspects of the BCM process;
- audit the plan's structure, contents and actions sections;
- audit the plan's documentation control procedures;
- submit to the sponsor. ■

Piper-Anna Shields is Group Public Relations Manager of Guardian iT Group.

This article is based upon the Business Guide to Continuity Management, initiated by Safetynet, now Guardian iT Group, and developed in conjunction with: AIRMIC, BAE SYSTEMS Plc, BRE/LPC, BCI, CSSA, DMF, FM Global, Marsh, Royal & SunAlliance, Survive and Zurich Insurance.

For further information on the BCGM, please contact Piper-Anna Shields on 01344 869933 or email at piper.shields@guardianit.com, or visit www.bgcm.co.uk or www.thebcl.org.