

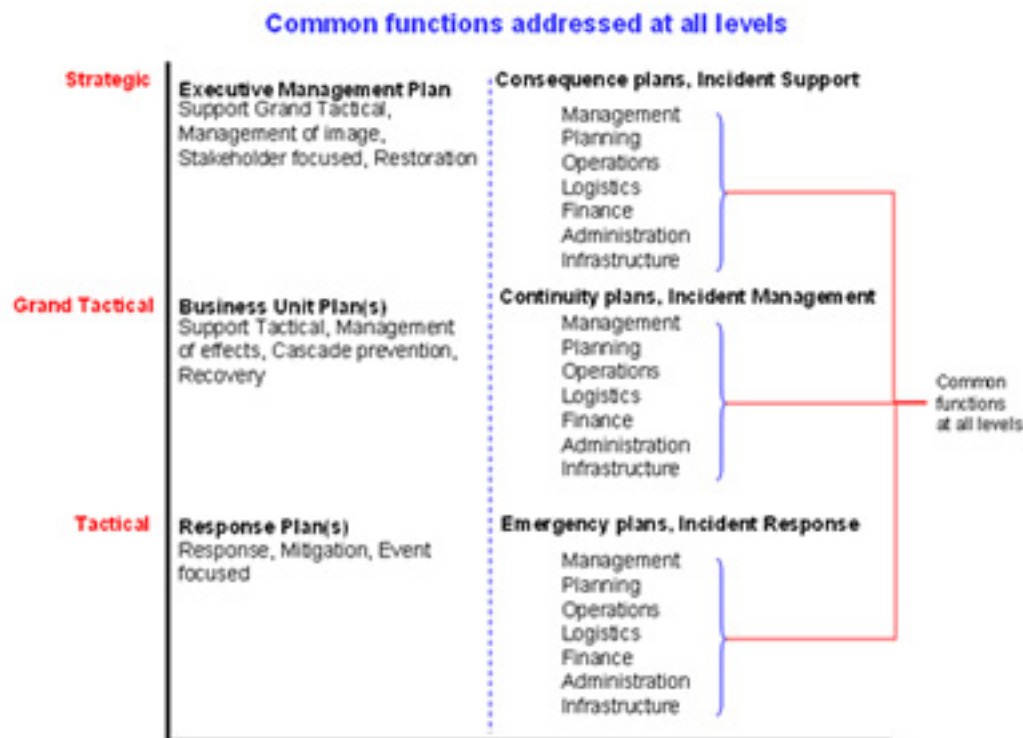
Making the case for business continuity

By seizing the initiative and getting involved in all the phases of the business, BC professionals can facilitate the development of processes that can create value for the organisation as well as mitigate risks.

By Geary Sikich

In 2003, Tower Group cited amongst its 'top of mind' for investment management executives; cost containment; the shift from strategic to tactical initiatives; and business continuity. According to the Conference Board and other market research only a small portion (5%) of businesses today have a viable business continuity plan, but virtually 100% now realize they are at risk. By seizing the initiative and getting involved in all the phases of the business, business continuity professionals can facilitate the development and implementation of processes that can, in addition to mitigating 'crises' or preventing major losses, create value for the organisation. The role of business continuity professionals in many organisations is still overshadowed by down-sizing, outsourcing, complex new regulatory initiatives and globalisation, to name just a few issues.

Traditionally, business continuity professionals have had a limited role in corporate management activities. This role has been mainly to address aspects of 'crisis' response; mainly regulatory driven or in reaction to a crisis situation. However, when we start to rethink the role that business continuity professionals can play in today's global environment we see that the role is more than developing 'bookshelf plans.' The business continuity professional's role should focus on a comprehensive structuring of initiatives designed to establish and maintain resilience between and among all the touchpoints of the enterprise. This can be executed on three levels as depicted in the graphic below:



Each organisation must develop their variations on the simple model depicted in the graphic. However, every organisation must have an intimate understanding of the integral role that

business continuity professionals can play in the development of strategic plans, competitive intelligence initiatives and continuity management. The business continuity professional, through the business impact assessment (BIA), employing 'Active Analysis' techniques can facilitate the alignment of three key executive spheres:

- Interest - where the assets and capabilities of others can affect your courses of action,
- Influence - where your assets and capabilities can affect the courses of action of others, and
- Responsibility - your organisation's mission, vision, values.

In business continuity as a way of doing business instead of an adjunct to the business of the organisation we create resilience. Simply having a plan will not provide resilience; resilience is realised only through the sustained, collective actions of an organisation's human resources — who must respond to, manage, recover from, and restore the organisation's capabilities when disruptive events threaten continuity. Below, presented in summary form, are nine practices, tools, and techniques that can be adapted to a variety of situations. Using these nine as a guide, business continuity professionals can begin to engage the entire organisation in the continuity process, establishing value and making a business case for having a continuity plan.

1. Focus on human factors systematically. Any crisis that an organisation faces creates 'people issues.' Dealing with these issues on a reactive basis puts the organisation at risk. In order to be successful, communications channels must be responsive. This requires data collection, analysis, collation, and effective distribution of information, to inform and enable strategic decision-making.

2. Top down – bottom up. Because crises are inherently unsettling at all levels of an organisation, CEO's and their leadership teams must speak with one voice. The executive team also needs to understand that communication also comes up through the organisation and this chain consists of individuals who are going through stressful times and need to be supported. Seamless vertical and horizontal communications consisting of common terminology and clearly defined goals is critical for business continuity initiatives to succeed.

3. Engage every level. As a crisis progresses, it affects different levels of the organisation and the organisation's 'value chain'. Business continuity professionals can be instrumental in assisting management identify leaders throughout the company to ensure that appropriate crisis response is implemented to prevent 'crisis cascades' through the organisation. Additionally, business continuity professionals can provide criteria for assurance of supplier continuity capabilities through development of assessment tools, contract specifications and assisting procurement professionals as they screen suppliers.

4. Establish a 'Value Proposition'. Despite the acknowledgement of corporate management that having a comprehensive business continuity program is a worthwhile expense most organisations have not dedicated the resources to developing and maintaining such a program. Articulating a formal case for a comprehensive program provides valuable opportunities to create alignment at all levels in the organisation and with external partners. Three steps should be followed: First, confront reality. Second, provide a road map to guide behaviour and decision making. Third, communicate to internal and external audiences, in terms that matter to the individuals.

5. Make it a way of doing business not an adjunct to the business. Creating ownership and internalising the processes for continuity must become a way of doing business instead of an addition to the business. This requires creating a critical mass among the work force; more than mere buy-in or passive agreement. Ownership by leaders willing to accept responsibility for making continuity an integral element of their sphere of influence is often best created by involving them in business continuity efforts such as business impact analysis (BIA), identifying problems and crafting solutions.

6. Communicate commitment. Top down and bottom up, means that business continuity professionals must get leaders to make firm commitments to ensure that others understand the issues and see the direction as clearly as they do. Business continuity professionals can reinforce core messages through regular, timely communications targeted to provide employees at all levels the right information at the right time and to solicit their input and feedback.

7. Assess the cultural landscape. It is critically important to understand culture at each level of the organisation. Assessing organisational culture can have major benefits in internalising continuity processes and reducing resistance to change. The sphere of responsibility; your corporate mission, vision, and value statement can be an effective driver for the business continuity professional, defining an explicit desired culture that the organisation seeks to achieve.

8. Prepare for the unexpected. No business continuity program can ever anticipate all the things that can befall an organisation. The variables are too many and too complex in their relationship to one another. In a crisis people react in unexpected ways. Business continuity professionals need to communicate to the organisation that we are no longer able to merely think about the plannable or plan for the unthinkable, but we must learn to think about the unplannable. Whether a natural or human induced disaster, surprise is the key element in an organisation's failure to anticipate effectively; effective communications through your organisation's public relations and/or human resource departments can facilitate the organisation's willingness and ability to respond to crisis situations supported by solid decision-making processes.

9. Personalise the message. Crises affect both the organisation as a whole and individuals on a very personal level. People will react to what they see and hear around them, and need to be involved in the business continuity process. People matter; people are the key factor in an organisation's success or failure in a crisis situation. It can be very tempting to focus on the planning process, rather than address critical human issues. But, involving all elements of the organisation as an integral element of the business continuity program can facilitate successful internalization of the program; making it more responsive and less reactive.

Conclusion

Enabling effective business continuity processes across geographically dispersed operations and myriad value chain touchpoints requires that business continuity professionals become an integral part of the process and implement formal performance measures needed to assure internalisation of continuity plans and processes often distributed across diverse organisations, lines of business, groups, departments, geographies, and value chain touchpoints. This requires extracting, analysing and communicating information, internalising processes, and exercising controls to enable a 360-degree, three-dimensional view of organisational performance when crisis strikes.

About the author

Geary Sikich is the author of 'It Can't Happen Here: All Hazards Crisis Management Planning,' 'Emergency Management Planning Handbook' available in English and Spanish-language versions and, 'Integrated Business Continuity: Maintaining Resilience in Uncertain Times,' www.Amazon.com. Mr. Sikich is the founder and a principal with Logical Management Systems, Corp. (www.logicalmanagement.com). He has extensive experience in management consulting in a variety of fields and consults on a regular basis with companies worldwide on business-continuity and crisis management issues. He has a Bachelor of Science degree in criminology from Indiana State University and Master of Education in counselling and guidance from the University of Texas, El Paso.

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