



Business Continuity is not a luxury, it's a necessity

The floods of 2007 caused significant disruption for many organisations in several parts of the UK. As a result of this, effects were felt way beyond the organisations whose workplaces were actually flooded; they included staff being unavailable for work, loss of power and water supplies, suppliers disrupted and an increase in demand for certain services.

What the floods actually highlighted was a reported lack of any kind of business continuity planning amongst the organisations affected. In fact, the recent Business Continuity Management Survey by the Cabinet Office reported that as few as 47 per cent of UK managers claim that their organisation has a specific business continuity plan in place. This is despite the fact that 76 per cent report that continuity is regarded as 'important' within their organisation. The fact of the matter is that many organisations simply don't know where to start, or those who think they have robust systems in place may not have had their plans tested and reviewed to ensure that if called upon they actually work!

Business Continuity Management (BCM) is based on the principle that an organisation can continue its normal business operations at all times. It is an established part of the UK's preparations for possible threats posed to business - this does not include only natural disasters such as floods and fire, but also specific incidents such as postal strikes, an influenza pandemic or a school closure causing staff absence. There are also factors more commonly experienced, such as the loss of IT, people and supply chain disruption.

Following the flooding of last year, the Government commissioned the Pitt Review to consider what was learnt from the flooding and recommend what steps should be put into place to limit the impact of future disaster and emergencies. One of the key recommendations that the report highlighted is to insist that organisations undertake business continuity planning to a standard equivalent to BS 25999.

Any organisation providing the public with an essential service (which may include local government, telecoms providers and banks) comes under the critical national infrastructure bracket. Under the Civil Contingencies Act these organisations have a legal obligation to maintain an adequate business continuity plan to ensure that the services they provide are not disrupted by either minor or major disasters.

Currently private organisations do not legally have to have a business continuity plan in place, however following the Pitt Review, one of the key recommendations to the Government in the report is to insist that many organisations undertake business continuity planning.

However, it is not just enough to simply buy the standard and comply. Businesses may have business continuity plans in place, but until they have been certified, how can they prove to the outside world that they are fully prepared for any eventuality? Similar to driving, you could have all the driving lessons in the world but until you've passed your test, would anyone trust you to drive a car alone, as there is simply no proof that you are capable?

Certification to BS 25999 can help build a strong reputation by providing confidence in business-to-business and business-to-customer dealings and prove to your audience that you are meeting the requirements of the standard. To achieve certification, BSI Management Systems provides an independent assessor to ensure your business processes truly meet the specified requirements.

Other benefits certification to BS 25999 can bring include gaining a competitive advantage by demonstrating a proactive approach to business continuity to new customers. It can also help the process of due diligence checks by investors. Finally, if the organisation is trying to sell its services to others, it can speed up and reduce the cost of tendering as the proof of certification shows that it has already been audited; this could make all the difference in securing a deal.

The significant advantage of being certified to BS 25999 is that it applies the "Plan-Do-Check-Act" (PDCA) model, a popular methodology for the effective management of business activities and processes used in other management system standards including the well known management system ISO 9001. The PDCA model includes planning, testing, training and constant evaluation of the people, processes, facilities,

and technologies involved in an organisation. BCM planning involves a number of steps:

Understanding the organisation: identifying its key products and services and the critical activities and resources that support them as well as setting objective for business continuity based upon the organization's own business objectives. You must also determine a range of factors including; the maximum tolerable period of disruption, and your recovery time objectives.

Determining your business continuity strategy: there has to be a strategy determined by the senior management team which will deal with the immediate actions taken in the event of an incident occurring including the consequences of inaction.

Developing and implementing a response: the development and implementation of appropriate plans and arrangements to ensure the continuity of critical activities and the management of an incidence.

Performing exercises: you wont know if the strategy and planning works unless you test your plans through carrying out exercises.

The BCM plan may vary from small to large organisations; small organisations may require a single plan that encompasses their entire operation, whilst a large organisation may have multiple plans that cover different parts of the business.

Without certification to a management system standard, many organisations overlook the exercising, maintaining and reviewing stage of the BCM plan. The Chartered Management Institute report (March 2008) found that just under half of organisations with business continuity plans carry out regular and thorough rehearsals/exercises, despite strong evidence that rehearsals are vital to ensure the effectiveness of planning. 78 per cent of those who exercised their plans said that the exercises had revealed shortcomings.

As part of the BSI Management Systems assessment and certification process, business continuity plans are exercised in order to be fully prepared for any eventuality. Businesses can then be sure that any potential problems are experienced at the rehearsal stage and not in the event of a real disaster.

It is a fact that in the current century the world at large has experienced uncertainty as a result of climate changes, epidemics, terrorist threats, technology failures, and an increasing amount of economic upheaval. These uncertainties create risks for the proper functioning of organisations. Business Continuity should no longer be viewed as a luxury for selecting organisations and should be seen with certification as a necessity in order to ensure they are fully compliant to the standard and fully equipped to deal with any disaster.

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- Food safety
- Health & safety
- Information security
- Integrated management
- Quality
- Social accountability
- Sustainable development
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- Second and third-party management systems assessment and certification
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