

In this issue Southeast Corporate's Vice President of Business Continuity Ken Schroeder asks...

Is Your Business Continuity Plan Workable?

I have the unique privilege of assisting our member credit unions in reviewing their Business Continuity Plans. There is one characteristic I find many plans have in common—they aren't executable. When the disaster strikes, there is no starting point in "The Plan". Most plans don't have a "Start Here" point, or a "ReadMe.1st" page.

Don't get me wrong, a lot of hard work goes into each plan, from evaluating risks to exercising what is written. Usually the end result is a nice thick document that fits nicely into a 3-ring binder that goes on the top shelf of the bookcase. That said, when things go south, the last thing that happens is to remember to pick up the binder. Most staff work from memory and with a bit of serendipity, they usually get it right if they've exercised enough.

From my perspective, everyone really needs two kinds of plans: A **Bookshelf Plan** similar to what you already have; and a **Checklist Plan** that is the equivalent of that "ReadMe.1st" page.

The Bookshelf Plan. Everyone has a neatly bound document in a binder with some 850 pages. It includes everything anyone ever thought anyone else would ever need, most of which is useless. It does, however, contain descriptive prose that outlines risks, strategies, concepts, relationships. All of these are absolutely critical to your planning process. Besides documenting the planning process you've worked so hard at, it is something to hand your examiners.

The Checklist Plan. Pilots fly airplanes using checklists. NASA launches the space shuttle using checklists. It only makes sense that you should also use checklists to guide you through what is probably the most critical event your credit union will ever see—a major catastrophe. Your checklist plan should be a series of short, efficient bullet lists that guide each business unit through the transition of operating in normal facilities, with regular staff and using primary systems, to operating in backup facilities, with backup staff and backup systems. The second part of each checklist is a series of short, efficient bullet lists that guide each business unit in the reverse transition, namely back to normal operations.

Each checklist is a series of short, simple executable statements that are marked with action verbs: *Go! Do! Verify! Locate! Contact! Open!* In addition, they assign responsibility for the activities. If the responsibility lies with a specific section of the business unit, it should say so. For example, checklist items might look something like:

- *Open the emergency teller kit located in the emergency closet. (Head teller)*
- *Distribute the contents of the kit to the available tellers at the emergency location. (Head teller).*

Notice that these are all written in the active voice, rather than passive voice, which would look something like "The emergency teller kit will be opened...."

More important, however, is that the checklist doesn't tell anyone how to do their normal job, just how to transition to emergency operations. In my experience, these checklists are usually less than two pages in length. *[Hint: Reduce them to print on a wallet card to give to key staff.]*

OK, you've now organized your Business Continuity Plan. However, the starting point is still missing. Let me wave my magic wand and introduce you to a new concept nobody talks about; "Abracadabra! The Crisis Management Team!"

The Crisis Management Team, Incident Response, Crisis Reaction, and Emergency Management, they all refer to the same thing: a mechanism for implementing plans in the event of a crisis event. Whatever you call it, somewhere you need a mechanism for managing your crisis and implementing your Business Continuity plan. It has two parts as well: A Bookshelf plan, and a Checklist plan.

The bookshelf plan is, once again the verbal description of all the planning factors that helped you decide: Who is on your Crisis Management Team? How are they organized? What do they actually do? Where do they meet? When do they convene?

The checklist plan is a series of checklists for the crisis team. These checklists should lead the team through the decision making process to determine what parts of your Business Continuity plan to activate, to determine how the CU is impacted, and to determine what else needs to be done. These checklists guide your crisis team through the information gathering and decision making processes.

The checklists for the crisis team are still action verbs, but are geared toward facilitating the implementation of your Business Continuity plan. A typical Crisis Management Team checklist might start out with entries that look like: Gather information about the incident. Appoint a communications officer for the incident. Identify what business functions of the CU have been affected by the incident. Determine what portions of the Business Continuity plan to activate.

That's it. You are well on your way. Once you think about and organize your Business Continuity Plan from this perspective, you should have all the pieces you need. More importantly, you now have an executable plan! We'll talk about exercising your plan on another day.



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