

CONTINUITY TRAINING & EXERCISES

Purpose:

A Table Top Exercise (TTX) is a focused, practice activity within the 'Test, Train & Maintain' stage of the business continuity management system lifecycle (Figure 1). The aim is to ensure your Business Continuity Plan (BCP) and arrangements are continually maintained, reviewed and quality-assured so you can keep your promise of service reliability to those who depend on it. You are testing that the PLAN is fit-for-purpose. The tabletop exercising is to demonstrate the ability of one or more critical business processes to continue functionality, within the required time frame, following an interruption. The exercise will enable you to assess, evaluate and enhance your business continuity preparedness as it will provide information on what you're doing well so this can be maintained and built on, as well as which areas need improving (e.g. plans, policies, procedures, arrangements, resources). Aim for progressive maturity.

Why Exercise:

The purpose is two-fold:

1. Strategic: To demonstrate department leadership, show that your department is well prepared to manage any interruption, and can be relied on to continually support the University's core teaching and research function.
2. Operational: To assess how effective the BCP and arrangements are in helping your team make decisions to provide for an acceptable level of service in a simulated disruptive situation, and identify where these can be improved.

Why TTX:

It's low stress, low cost and doesn't need a lot of stuff or time to set up and run! Emphasis is on guided group discussion, problem-solving and learning. The findings are recorded and used to raise risk awareness and improve your business continuity preparedness and recovery capability. Whilst exercising is serious business it can and should be fun too! It connects people in the business continuity process, supports team-building and learning, helps to bridge business silos and provides structured, 'safe' opportunities to validate, challenge, maintain and review your BC arrangements in a 'no judge - no impact' environment.

Objectives:

The objectives of the tabletop exercise are as follows:

- Demonstrate **viability** of the Business Continuity Plan by applying well defined and relevant disruption scenarios that may highlight discrepancies or inconsistencies.
- Use the results of the tabletop exercise to **update and improve** the plan.
- **Educate** the responsible persons on the workings of the plan.

Roles

- **Facilitator:** The key role of the facilitator is to drive discussion through questioning, keep the exercise on time, achieve exercise objectives and assign responsibility for improvement action items. It's important the facilitator avoid leading questions. Ask open questions to encourage a response:
 - What decisions need to be made and by whom?
 - What are the implications of those decisions
 - What issues concern you at this stage?
 - What actions would you take at this stage?
 - What information do you need and how will you get it?
 - Are there any risks?
 - What could prevent activity from occurring?
 - Are there any possible accelerators?
 - Who needs to be involved – are they in the BCP?
 - Is contact information complete, current, and accurate?
 - Who needs to know what, when – how will you communicate this?
 - What if a key person / resource is not available?
 - Are listed documents and back-ups available and who has access?
 - Is there any other detail that needs to be in the BCP?
 - Have staff been trained in alternate procedures?

- **BCP Team Members:** Individuals with assigned tasks and responsibilities within the Business Continuity Plan to be exercised within the selected scenario. Their responsibilities are to:
 - Review the business continuity plan prior to the exercise
 - Describe, during the exercise, the actions to be taken based on: the disruption scenario; time frames following the disruption; and, the documented BCP instructions (i.e., who does what, and when following an interruption).
 - Suggest responsible groups or individuals for action items identified during the exercise.

- **Recorder or Scribe:** This individual documents the proceedings of the tabletop exercise. They are asked to:
 - Record tabletop exercise proceedings
 - Capture issues as they arise
 - Record corrective actions and responsible group/department
 - Create Exercise Report

Preparation:

- Review BCP and clarify which plan(s) is being tested, and when it was last tested
- Review weak points or risks highlighted for the plan(s) being tested
- Determination of BCPs or BCP sections to be tested
- Identification of all participants
- Selection of simulation exercise scenario(s)
- Scheduling of tabletop exercise, and all participants, in an appropriate facility
- A table top exercise generally takes 1-4 hours to conduct
- Obtain resources needed to run the exercise (see ttx tool kit for help)
 - Prepare exercise agenda
 - Introductions
 - Objectives
 - Scenario
 - Evaluation
- Work with management to find out what they want to achieve
- Prior to the day of the exercise, to prepare those invited, you should stage the exercise, communicate and define roles and expectations to all participants

Choosing a Scenario

The business process management team should select one or two disruption scenarios for discussion during the simulation exercise. Example scenarios are presented below. The team should select or create an appropriate tabletop exercise scenario(s) using criteria such as those listed here:

- The ability to concurrently exercise multiple elements of the BCP
- The contingency plans and strategies require significant communication and coordination
- The scenario may be unlikely or severe, but not beyond possibility

EXAMPLE SCENARIOS:

- Support Services
 - Reduced electrical power
 - Power failure
 - Loss of heating or cooling facilities
 - Facilities access disruptions (Access doors, elevators, etc.)
 - Fuel supply failure
 - Government services failures (Import/Export etc.)
- IT Infrastructure
 - File servers fail
 - PCs fail
 - Telecommunications lines disrupted
 - Essential peripherals (printers, etc.) fail
- Application
 - Software application fails
 - Data corruption issues arise

- Automation Device
 - Production line equipment fails
 - R&D equipment failure
 - Warehouse equipment failure
- Supply Chain Disruption
 - Key vendor product or service disrupted
 - Distribution channel failure

Select a realistic story (scenario) – start simple and then raise the bar

Before you begin:

- Review assigned roles and their responsibilities (e.g. facilitator, participants, scribe, observers, evaluator, stakeholders)
- Communicate standards and expectations to all participants; e.g.
 - It's a safe environment – participants are not on trial, no wrong answers
 - It's a learning experience – opportunity to see what works and identify gaps
 - Don't fight the scenario. Accept the scenario and take part as if it's real
 - Ask questions
 - Everyone join in – your input is valuable for group discussion and learning
 - Constructive feedback of the BCP is expected
 - Notes will be taken by exercise scribe
 - Additional participant feedback may be sought via a follow-up survey
- Base the scope and duration of the exercise on exercise objectives

Common Facilitator Challenges

Facilitators may need to address exercise play that is disruptive or that leads participants away from the objectives of the exercise. Exercises should be a safe forum where all participants can freely discuss or demonstrate the actions they would take in response to a scenario. Examples of participant behavior that exercise participants should be prepared for are listed on the next three pages.

Issue #1: Aggressive Participants

An aggressive participant who dominates the discussion or does not allow exercise players to act as they would normally will keep the entire exercise from reaching the exercise objectives in a meaningful way

Solution

Facilitators should recognize the contribution that the disruptive participants is making in a positive light, but afford other participants the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and abilities. It is best to set ground rules before initiating the exercise so that all participants know what to expect. Some participants will be more active during an exercise, but it is important to involve all players to thoroughly evaluate how capable agencies and not individuals are at response.

Issue #2: Reticent or Reluctant Participants

Participants who are not actively involved or contributing to an exercise are not disruptive, but do detract from the overall quality of the exercise. Participants should expect to participate and contribute to an exercise they are asked to attend. Reticent participants may miss taking expected actions that are crucial for moving the exercise forward.

Solution

Give extra encouragement to those who are a little reticent. It is important that everyone participates and that no one person or organization dominates the discussion. Use of an internal ICS structure within the group or discipline role may help, but it can also lead to only a few participants “running the show.” Active engagement of all may require the Controller asking targeted questions of participants who are less involved in discussion, or gently requesting that the more talkative participants give others a chance to contribute their ideas.

Issue #3: Keeping the Exercise on Track

Participants who are actively involved in the exercise, but may be overly eager to share irrelevant information can be the most difficult for facilitators to address. Participants may begin discussing a relevant topic or capability, but then go into details that are only relevant for their department or agency.

Solution

Facilitators have to be comfortable with determining when a capability has been demonstrated and when it is acceptable to move exercise participants forward in the exercise. Participants should be reassured that they have done a good job demonstrating the capability and the facilitator should move the discussion to the next item in order to keep the exercise on track.

Issue #4: Disagreements

Exercises can be stressful for participants and disagreements may occur where agencies, departments, or individual’s priorities come into conflict. Participants may see the exercise as an opportunity to reach out to stakeholders who they need to plan or coordinate with and to improve their plans.

Solution

Each exercise is an opportunity to evaluate plans and capabilities, not to conduct planning. Facilitators should remind exercise participants that conflict and disagreements are normal and expected. Issues will be recorded by exercise evaluators and included in the after action report and improvement plan that will be written after the exercise. Participants should be told that they have done a good job identifying a challenge for both sides and the facilitator should have both parties agree to table the issue until after the exercise is complete if a resolution is not immediately found.

Issue #5: Multiple Conversations

Evaluators will find it very difficult to keep track of more than one conversation at a time. Important exercise data might be lost or participants might not hear important prompts that will continue exercise play. Side discussions should normally be discouraged, but it is important that facilitators recognize that side discussions potentially represent important issues.

Side discussions may start up:

- when participants do not feel engaged in the discussion or exercise
- when exercise participants recognize important issues,
- but are unwilling to share the information with the group
- but are unable to share the information with the group

Solution

Facilitators should try to identify why the side discussions are occurring and engage or address participants while addressing the root cause. Facilitators should pause all discussion and explain the order that the exercise follow. Facilitators can check in with all participants or with participants who have been involved in side conversations to encourage their participation in the main discussion. Participants should know that if they feel they have something valuable to add to the discussion that this is an open conversation and they should feel free to contribute. Facilitators should thank and encourage participants who engage in thoughtful discussion so they know that their contributions are appreciated.

Figure 1:

