

Business Continuity Plan Testing

Introduction

A Business Continuity Plan (BCP) must be tested and updated on a regular basis to ensure its effectiveness in the event of a disaster and its continuing relevance to the Business.

To be successful, BCP testing requires careful planning with consideration given to the following aspects:

- The objective(s) of the test – what is to be determined from it?
- The type of test to be undertaken – see below.
- Who the test participants will be (whole/part of crisis management team).
- The part(s) of the BCP to be tested.
- Who the facilitator(s) of the test will be.

The type of test undertaken should be commensurate with the BCP's maturity, the needs of the business and be economically viable. It is essential however, that the full BCP is tested at least once a year.

The types of test that can be undertaken can be defined as:-

1. Plan Review

A plan review is similar to an audit of the BCP and involves the BCP team discussing/reviewing the plan, to determine if any elements are missing or inconsistent. This type of test is also very useful for training new members of the BCP team.

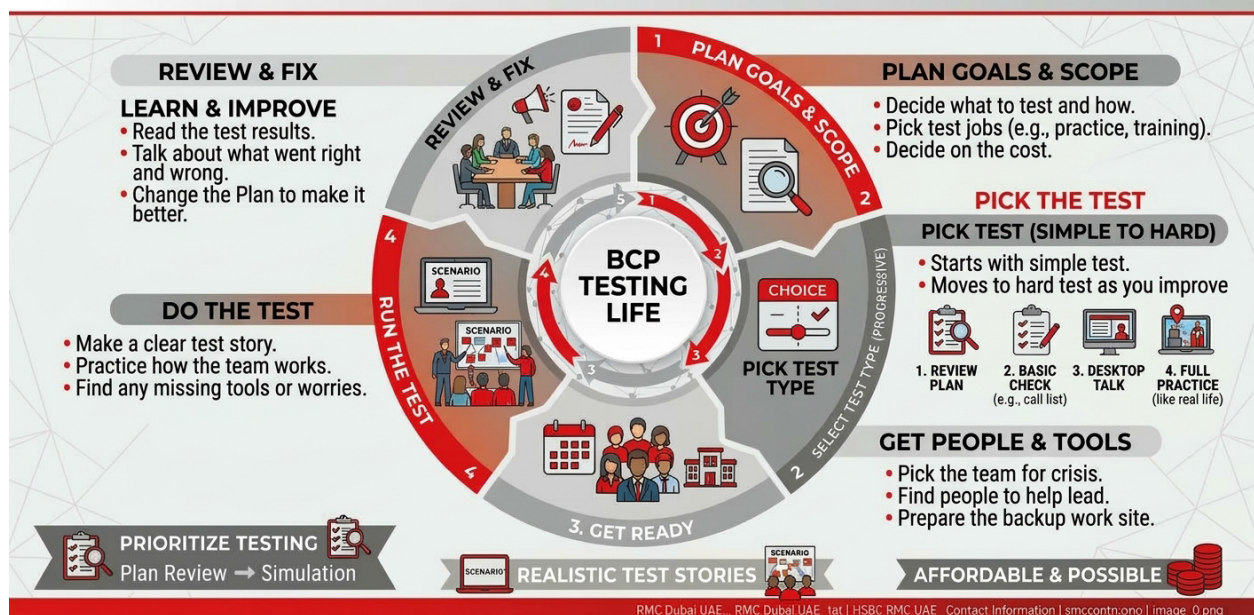
2. Start Simple

A simple test would include testing the activation of the staff call tree, checking of suppliers/customers details and other contacts etc. This ensures all relevant details are kept up to date. Whilst this is a practical test it is limited in its extent.

3. Desk-Top

Desktop exercises involve all the crisis management team plus an observer(s) being gathered together in a meeting room, where they are presented with a specific disaster scenario and asked to use the BCP to simulate dealing with it. The circumstances of the scenario can be

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randomly changed, during the test as the team's responses develop, to assess how they react and adapt to a changing situation. Desktop tests enable the company to determine if the BCP team members know their duties or whether further training is required. It also enables the effectiveness of the BCP to be assessed and helps identify any errors or inconsistencies.

4.Simulation

Simulation tests are the closest thing to actual invocation of the BCP and are therefore the most effective in determining if it will work as expected in a realistic situation. In simulation tests the team is provided with a scenario and they actually follow the procedures developed in the BCP and use the resources allocated to deal with it e.g. use of a separate disaster recovery site, use of alternative equipment, use of services from a third party or buddy site. These tests can involve sending teams to other locations e.g. to restart technology or business functions. This type of test should identify any staff concerns with regard to their role/nature of their role, any missing or insufficient resources and any errors or omissions in the BCP.

Testing should be prioritised by starting with the plan review then moving on to the very simple and desk top testing. The final more complex simulation testing should only be undertaken, when the other tests have all been completed successfully.

Regardless of the type of test undertaken it is important to keep the scenario plausible and relevant and small scale issues are often just as useful, when testing the BCP as large scale disasters.

Also as the primary purpose of testing is to identify the effectiveness and possible limitations of the BCP it is essential that a full debrief is undertaken after each test, to discuss the outcome(s) e.g. what worked well, what was missing and any participant concerns identified. The BCP should then be updated to reflect these findings.

Reference.

RMC Insight document "Business Continuity Planning"

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