

Designing a business continuity training program to maximize value and minimize cost

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Introduction

Employees are often unaware of the existence of a business continuity management program within their organization and if they are aware of it, they may not be aware of their specific role within the business continuity effort. Can management rely on a business continuity program if employees are unaware of their response and recovery strategies? No – and as a result, the time and resources invested in the planning effort are often wasted. So why do organizations continue to place business continuity training and awareness raising at the end of a long list of priorities? Managers often believe that the costs associated with training development and delivery exceeds the benefit. The two most common objections include:

1. We don't have the resources to develop and deliver custom training and awareness content because:
 - a) Business continuity personnel have competing responsibilities and requirements, and
 - b) The expense of outsourcing the development and delivery of training exceeds budgetary constraints.
2. The business areas have 'a business to run.' Participating in a training event is too time-consuming and is therefore a low priority.

Although these objections are common, they can be proven to be incorrect with advanced planning and the introduction of creative solutions.

In general, business decisions are evaluated using a simple equation – value minus cost equals benefit. When you create and communicate strong value statements, deliver compelling content efficiently and control costs through standardized curriculum development methodologies, the organization will realize significant benefits – specifically, increasing risk management confidence through higher levels of recoverability. This whitepaper explores the value of business continuity training and awareness programs, offers solutions to control development and delivery costs and introduces solutions to deliver content to key business continuity stakeholders.

Where is the value

Business continuity training and awareness programs have the potential to deliver significant value across the entire organization. An effective training and awareness program directly correlates to the ability to recover effectively and in a timely manner. But how can an organization realize this significant value?

1. Create response and recovery personnel knowledge

To ensure plans will be implemented efficiently and effectively, it is critical that response and recovery team members understand their responsibilities, as well the objectives and assumptions that drove the development of business continuity strategies. Imagine putting an executive in front of the media with no training. Imagine a crisis management team leader managing a response effort and it's the first time she / he's ever seen the plan. And imagine a business manager asking a very simple question after a flood made his/her office unusable: "Where are we supposed to go to work?" Each of these occurs all too often in organizations where training and awareness raising activities have been neglected. Such programs are designed to close these knowledge and performance gaps at all levels in the organization.

2. Develop general employee awareness

Response and recovery personnel must be knowledgeable of business continuity plans and processes. However, it's equally important for all employees to be aware of the program elements applicable to them. For example, building evacuation, employee accountability and crisis communications are all important topics that all employees should understand. In order to implement a coordinated business continuity effort during a crisis, everyone must be aware of these processes prior to the event occurring.

3. Increase plan development efficiency and effectiveness

More and more organizations place business personnel in a plan developer role in order to develop and document business continuity plans. This is effective because they tend to understand the business better than a person brought in to the company to undertake the task. However, a common mistake with this model is providing a template or a sample plan instead of hands-on training regarding expectations and content requirements. Business continuity planners need to have a deeper knowledge of business continuity theory, organizational recovery capabilities and plan development methodologies if they are going to be expected to develop the key steps to recover a business function following a disaster.

4. Integrate risk management efforts

A direct correlation exists between the existence of awareness programs and risk management program integration. Business continuity professionals appreciate the need for strong relationships between physical and IT security, facilities-based emergency response, health programs and crisis management / business continuity. In many organizations, these programs operate independently; however, organization-wide awareness programs highlight interdependencies and push these independent processes toward tighter integration and a common business-facing approach to managing safety, security and availability. Integration often translates into cost savings and improved response times.

5. Grow program maturity

An indirect output of developing training is the in-depth review and revision of the content being taught. Many organizations find that as they breakdown a process so their employee base can understand it fully, they find holes, inefficiencies and redundancies. This level of review is often passed over because time constraints are inevitable when creating training and introducing a new level of business continuity program maturity.

How can we control costs?

What if your organization could implement a robust and effective training program without increasing your overall business continuity program spending? More and more organizations are doing just this by utilizing a formal program development methodology and employing creative techniques to deliver content to stakeholders. One example of a training program development methodology is depicted in figure one.



Figure one – Curriculum Development Methodology

This methodology incorporates key standards and development processes that keep costs low and business value high. Each phase of the methodology builds upon the previous phase, resulting in an efficient repeatable training and awareness delivery process.

Standards and program objectives

Developing program standards is a foundational activity because it enables long-term order and direction for the entire training and awareness program. Standards include a content development process that outlines key roles, requirement definition activities and review cycles. Regarding roles, consider outlining responsibilities for the business continuity team, the training department, internal audit, business representatives and the information technology department. Defining roles

and responsibilities ensures that all groups are in agreement regarding both content and the delivery mechanism. Standards are enduring and should guide the long-term execution of the training and awareness process. Unlike standards, program objectives may change periodically as your participants' knowledge grows and processes change and mature. Program objectives should be audience specific, and should address key personnel serving in a business continuity role and the general employee population, as well as key business partners and customers.

Curriculum development

Curriculum development addresses the identification of key audiences (and the characteristics of these audiences), audience-specific learning objectives, the optimal organization of the training content and the method of delivery. The key to ensuring learning efficiencies and lower development / implementation costs is completing a formal requirements identification process that aligns the objectives, content and a delivery mechanism. In order to determine this 'golden mix', the use of a decision matrix should be considered. A decision matrix summarizes key curriculum decisions, to include answers to the following critical questions:

1. Who are we trying to reach?
2. What is the priority of these audiences, and the impact of a lack of knowledge associated with this priority?
3. What do we want each audience to know?
4. How complex is the content?
5. How often is the content likely to change?
6. How much time do these audiences have, and where are they located?
7. How often do we need to provide training – initial and refresher?
8. What methods of delivery are available for this content?
9. What methods of training are optimal?

Content development

Utilizing the standards and curriculum development process outlined in previous phases, the content development phase can begin in a more streamlined, efficient manner. Leverage program documentation, document repositories, management presentations and common images / graphics to avoid spending time reinventing effective content. If third-party consultants are used, take the time to organize information in a repository and introduce them to source files right away.

Implementation

Implementation can be tricky. Consider beta testing content on a group that traditionally offers constructive feedback. Once comfortable with the content and delivery mechanism, provide an announcement to participants that emphasizes the value of the awareness program along with an estimate of the time it will take to complete the training. 'Sell' participants on the need to learn, and

describe the benefits of participation and how it can personally create value. This will provide a much more open and 'ready to learn' group of individuals.

Content management

An important consideration when selecting a delivery mechanism and creating content is maintainability. Content that may change frequently should be delivered utilizing methods such as live training or written instructions that are read from a central location. Because technology driven delivery mechanisms often take more time to create (e.g. computer-based multi-media training), this delivery process is best suited for content that changes less frequently. Another key consideration impacting cost is source file management. Knowing where source files are located enables content developers to make changes in a timely, cost-effective manner, and eliminates the need to recreate content from scratch.

The delivery mechanism

Organizing training and awareness requirements early in the process is a cost-savings driver. As discussed, one of those requirements is the delivery mechanism. Table one summarizes considerations driving the selection of a delivery mechanism based on four characteristics – content complexity, size of the audience / audience dispersion, frequency of instruction and frequency of content change.

Table one:

Delivery Method	Content Complexity	Size and Distribution of Audience	Frequency of Instruction	Frequency of Content Change
Hard Copy Documentation	Detailed content that's not too complex	Medium to large audience – geography independent	High	Low
Web-based Documentation	Detailed content that's not too complex	Medium to large audiences that are dispersed	High	High
Physical Reminders (e.g., stickers and magnets)	Not complex	Medium to large audience – geography independent	High	Low
Live (In-Person) Training	Highly complex content	Small audiences located in a similar geography	Low	High
Web-based Live Training	Highly complex content	Smaller audiences that are dispersed	Low	High
Self-led Computer Based Training	Complex content	Large audiences that are dispersed	High	Low
Interactive Group Training	Complex content	Small audiences located in a similar geography	Low	High

Strategies to deliver training and awareness programs

So far, this paper has addressed the value offered by implementing business continuity training and awareness processes and a development methodology that provides efficiency and lower costs. Table two introduces a number of solutions (some strategic, some very simple and tactical) that your organization can consider when looking to generate knowledge and awareness amongst all program stakeholders. Some of these solutions are time-intensive to implement and can be expensive, where others require very little work or cost. Training and awareness often implies a curriculum including presentations, classes and hands-on learning. This is true, but passive learning mechanisms and reminders are important as well. Together, anything that increases knowledge and readiness is a form of training and awareness.

Table two:

Solution Name	Solution Description	Cost Estimate: (\$ to \$\$\$\$\$)	Time Investment Estimate (T to TTTTT)
Exercises	Although business continuity professionals may not categorize exercises (or tests) as a training and awareness tool, nothing's better when looking to expose response and recovery personnel to business continuity processes and strategies in a sterile environment.	\$\$	TTTT
Drills / Walkthroughs	Building evacuations and shelter-in-place drills are important life safety processes (and are often mandated by local regulations). Integrate these drills with other business continuity training and utilize the downtime and heightened awareness of need during these drills. Some business continuity teams take the opportunity to provide hand outs and other information to employees while they wait to return to the building during evacuation drill.	\$	TT
Skill Based Training (hands on)	Organize hands-on training to address more complex skills, to include BIA participation, plan documentation, first aid performance, call tree execution and crisis communication execution.	\$\$	TTTT
HR Orientation Participation	Deliver a 15 minute presentation during new hire orientation. Alternatively, ask Human Resources to ensure new employees access a computer-based new hire orientation presentation.	\$\$-\$\$\$	TTT-TTTT
On-line Awareness Courses	The business continuity professional's time is limited. Consider building computer-based, multi-media awareness presentations covering key business continuity topics. Post a link on the business continuity team's intranet site and encourage employees to visit. This is particularly useful for annual "refresher" awareness presentations and new hire orientation programs.	\$\$\$	TTTT

“Multiple Choice Tests” and Surveys	Measure knowledge and awareness using an on-line survey. Demand 100% participation and provide links to additional sources of information so that participants who “miss” a question know where to find information on the subject. When paired together, surveys and computer-based training are very effective awareness tools.	\$\$\$	TTT
Intranet Site	Invest some time in developing and updating an intranet site, and post content regarding upcoming events, business continuity strategies and management testimonials. Some organizations create and maintain an externally-facing web site that employees can access during a crisis to obtain situation updates.	\$\$	TTTT
Plan Documentation	A simple form of awareness is disseminating (or providing access to) business continuity plan documentation to response and recovery team members in an easy to access manner. This also familiarizes team members with where to locate plans in the event of a disaster.	\$	T
User Guides	Business continuity planning tools and software are used pervasively in medium to large organizations. Hands-on training is great, but user guides are an important component of the training and awareness process. Make sure end users know where to find them and that they are easy to understand. Store and disseminate in an electronic form so that they are easy to update and re-distribute.	\$\$\$	TTTT
Magnets	Create and distribute “refrigerator” magnets to employees. Include information that an employee may need when they are at home – how to get situation updates (crisis phone numbers and ghost web sites) and general business continuity strategy information.	\$\$	T
Media Handling Training	Organize and provide media handling training to business executives, particularly members of the crisis management team. Familiarize them with the tools available during a crisis and how to access them (e.g. contracted external PR firms, template situation updates, and local media contact information).	\$\$	TTT
Effectiveness Reporting	Effectiveness measurement and reporting processes are a form of awareness? They are a form of awareness geared toward executive management. Develop an effectiveness measurement process and post the results on your intranet. Present the results to executive management on a quarterly or semi-annual basis.	\$	TTTT

Reminder Placards	Place business continuity reminders on employee bulletin boards. "Tips of the Month" can be effective and remind people that business continuity is a 24/7/365 program.	\$	TT
"Booths"	A number of organizations provide awareness exhibits during company wide meetings (or even in the cafeteria). Provide hand-outs and "give-aways", place stickers on the back of employee ID cards and discuss the business continuity program with interested parties.	\$	TT
Wallet Cards	A small laminated card summarizing key responsibilities and contact information needed during a crisis is a common awareness tool. This "tool" is often limited to members of an executive management team, but can be provided to all employees in a scoped down manner.	\$	TT
"Evacuation Bags"	Business continuity teams are beginning to outfit employees with a small emergency response bag containing key supplies that may prove useful during a building evacuation or a shelter-in-place situation.	\$\$\$\$\$	TT
Stickers on the Back of Badges	A very simple concept – most organizations have building access badges or company identification cards. Place a sticker or print business continuity-related information on the back, to include crisis phone numbers, ghost web sites and building evacuation rendezvous points.	\$\$	T
Conference Participation	Conferences (and local business continuity associations like the Association of Contingency Planners) are excellent sources of information on new and emerging business continuity trends. Unfortunately, the content is tailored to business continuity and other risk management professionals; therefore the applicability of this "tool" is limited to your business continuity team.	\$\$\$	TTTT
Certification Exam Prep Classes	Business and technology professionals that are new to business continuity can get a "crash course" in standards, best practices and theory by participating in a certification prep course.	\$\$\$	TTTT
Planning Tool Classes	When you purchase a planning tool, it's critical that you include training for your business continuity team personnel. The values of tools are only gained when they are used appropriately and effectively. However, it is possible to share this information once it is	\$\$\$	TTTT

Meeting objections and overcoming obstacles

This paper has summarized the value of a robust training and awareness process implemented using an organized curriculum development process and the correct delivery mechanism. Let's revisit the original set of objections:

Original Objection

1. There are not enough resources to develop and deliver custom training and awareness content because a) business continuity personnel have competing responsibilities and requirements, and b) the expense of outsourcing the development and delivery of training exceeds budgetary constraints.

2. The business community has "a business to run." Participating in a training event is too time-consuming and this therefore a low priority.

Objecting to the Objection

Organize the training and awareness development effort. Understand that formal training courses are not the only method of increasing knowledge and readiness. Recognize that technologies and passive reminder mechanisms can deliver on demand awareness without taking the business continuity professional away from his or her most important task – developing and maintaining business continuity strategies.

Developing training and awareness content and tools does not have to be a time intensive process. Participating in training doesn't either. Create delivery mechanisms that deliver training on demand, and remain clear and concise when delivering content to business stakeholders.

Considerable resources are invested in business continuity readiness. However, training and awareness program development and execution is often very limited. A select group of executives and response/recovery team members are often the only people aware that the program exists. This lack of awareness drives an increased availability risk, and directly impacts the efficiency and effectiveness of the recovery effort. Take the time to measure awareness across your entire organization. Take inventory of the methods used and the frequency of instruction. If you are one of the majority of organizations that could improve your training and awareness effort, take the time to formally organize and develop a training and awareness curriculum that makes all stakeholders aware of their roles and responsibilities during a crisis.

Key points

- Business continuity training and awareness can offer core value to your program including creating response and recovery knowledge, increased employee awareness of emergency response and crisis management processes, increasing plan development efficiency and effectiveness, integrating risk management with your business continuity program and growing the maturity of your program.
- Utilizing a well developed development methodology can enable your organization to provide time efficient yet effective learning experiences across your entire organization. You can minimize both the development time and costs for your team as well as the delivery time and costs for the participants.
- There are many ways to deliver knowledge and awareness. Taking advantage of creative delivery methods will provide cost effective and enticing learning opportunities.

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