

Three P's of Business Contingency Planning

By: James M. Myers

You see it on the company scorecard, you're asked to become part of the project team, content is ubiquitous throughout the world wide web, yes it's all about business contingency planning. In reality, it's about how to efficiently mitigate business risk while effectively preparing for and managing a business interruption event.

Business interruption events are caused by a plethora of unknown and unplanned actions. These actions can be internal or external to any business. An internal event is an event that occurs within the confines of the business's operations. An external event is an event that is placed upon the business by an outside force. Examples of internal and external business interruption events are:

Internal	External
Loss of internal personnel	Terrorist activities
Operational breach in security	Hackers, Trojan horses, viruses
Server, component or system failure	Loss of facility power, telecom failure
Operator error/misuse of information	Inadequate vendor support, supply chain

The most costly yet the most valued asset to any business is its people. This is followed by property, and then by priorities. Hence, the "three P's" of business interruption planning are ***people, property*** and ***priorities***.

People

Simply stated, without people you have no business. Yet, too many business owners and enterprise executives focus their business contingency planning work efforts on the technology side of the business. To perceive that the Information Technology (IT) department is responsible for ensuring the ongoing operations of your business is a recipe for disaster. Yes, it's true that varying degrees of technology enables most companies. However, it's the entirety of the employee body that keeps the doors open. A well-built business contingency plan will define who, what, when, where and how to manage through a business interruption event. The people directly involved should be trained and thus knowledgeable of who to contact for what information, what should be done first to last, when the action should be performed, and the where and how to sequester the resources to perform vital functions.

Property

Within the confines of business interruption, property is any and all physical assets owned, operated, or managed by the company. If key assets become unavailable, they have a negative impact on business revenue. The property side of the business could be information servers, telecommunications

equipment, telecommunications infrastructure, software databases, applications, or the building itself. Think of your property from an outside to inside approach. The telecommunications infrastructure is the umbilical cord to communicating with the outside world. The building is the brick and mortar that houses the company's equipment and people. And finally, the operating hardware, software and data/information that encapsulates the entirety of the operating environment. As the second order of importance, the unavailability of your key property will have a detrimental effect on the ability to maintain business operations and ultimately support your ongoing revenue stream.

Priorities

Safety of all employees must be the first priority of any business contingency plan. This includes everyone from top executives to employees performing tactical functions. The number one threat to personnel safety in the workplace today is internally motivated – not externally motivated such as terrorism. Unwarranted actions of a single employee, or employees could have negative effects on the ability of the company to effectively maintain its short or long-term operational viability. Once personnel safety issues have been effectively and appropriately minimized and managed, then the company can focus on technology infrastructure.

Applying the three P's within your enterprise is a good rule of thumb when deciding to develop and maintain a business contingency action plan. This action plan must be considered as a perpetual living document that requires timely updates with exercises and ongoing maintenance. Not to be taken lightly, your business contingency plan should become an integral component to the strategic and tactical operating environment of your enterprise. Once integrated, your action plan will help ensure on-going operational viability in the face of human, natural or technical business interruption events.

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