Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery

Disruptions such as tornadoes and other natural disasters, violence in the workplace, pandemic, terrorist acts, cyber-attacks and many other threats to "business as usual" are becoming more commonplace. If not anticipated prudently, these disruptions can and will be much more costly than necessary. Preplanning for the continuity and recovery of your business is critically necessary and requires the involvement of "all staff at all levels." The key to successful adoption and execution in these two areas of discipline are executive sponsorship and buy-in. These two executive practices should permeate throughout the entire organization.

There is a general misunderstanding in the State today behind what the real difference is between Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery. We have a tendency to lump both of these disciplines into the same bucket. By doing so this creates the assumption that if Disaster Recovery planning is satisfied this satisfies the need for Business Continuity; not the case. Disaster Recovery focuses on the "IT" piece (Networks, Systems, Applications) of the business, whereas Business Continuity focuses on the "Business" side (People, Processes, Property, Vital Records, Perception). Mission Essential Functions (MEF's) of an agency is the core behind why an agency exists. It's great to be able to stand up systems and applications, but if those systems\applications aren't in alignment to those prioritized mission critical essential functions that they support, standing up those systems\applications accomplish very little. The paradigm shift in State government needs to occur where the business drives IT and both entities are at the table together "planning."

Given the human tendency to look on the bright side, many executives are prone to ignoring "disaster recovery" because disaster seems an unlikely event. "Business continuity planning" suggests a more comprehensive approach to making sure you can keep providing services, not only during a natural calamity but also after as well with smaller disruptions including; illness or departure of key staffers, supply chain and vendor partner problems or other challenges that agencies face from time to time.

What would you do if. . .

- your facility's roof is damaged or destroyed during a storm?
- 50% of your staff fails to show up for work due to the flu?
- a water pipe bursts and floods your facility?
- a domestic or international cyber-attack attacks your network?
- an armed individual enters your facility and threatens your staff?
- a vendor who supplies goods and services on your behalf is unable to perform?
- mission critical IT systems and applications fail?

During emergency situations, each agency must first recover its own business operations before it can respond effectively to a wider disaster in the city, county, state, or region. The successful and timely recovery of agency operations is greatly enhanced by business continuity planning.

How prepared are you.....really?

What is at stake?

People: Above all else, remember that safety of life is paramount. Following this, the recovery of the agency and the services it provides to its customers becomes a priority. Your people are your greatest asset; protect them.

Property: Proper planning and remediation can reduce the damage caused by potential sources of business disruptions. However, if your primary facility is damaged or destroyed do you have an alternate work site?

Functions / Processes: What are the costs and liabilities if your critical business functions / processes and/or systems that support those processes go down – e.g. how will invoices be paid? How will citizen services be performed? How will eligibility be verified for social services? Do you have documented "manual workaround's" in place? Have you tested those manual workaround's?

Public Perception: What are the impacts if agencies cannot perform their main functions? Beyond the issues of budget, how will your agency's image to the citizens be damaged by an inability to act?

How ready are the agencies?
Can each employee of your agency answer the following questions?

1. What do I do during a disaster situation?
2. Why do I do it?
3. When do I do it?
4. Where do I do it?
5. How do I do it?
6. Who does it if I'm unavailable?

The Role of Agency Level Planning…
Agency level policy and procedures establish a [2]'chain of command and action':

- What are the agency's business processes?
- What systems/applications support these processes?
- Who 'owns' these processes?
- Who is responsible to act (not react)?
- What actions must be taken to recover?
- Is there a business continuity plan in place? Disaster Recovery plan?

[1] P-08-225.01 – "Requires agencies to develop a plan to maintain continuity (recovery and restoration) of essential state government operations and services during or following an emergency."

[2] O.C.G.A. 38-3-50 – Orders of Succession

How prepared are you.....really?

A plan is not enough. There must be a business continuity program with strong executive sponsorship in place to ensure that staff training, disaster simulations, evacuation and recovery exercises, and communications are in place. The time to discover and address issues is before a disruption occurs. Timeliness is critical in the aftermath of an event. Business Continuity planning and program development may seem to be added costs at the moment, but during the 72 hours after the disaster, on who will you rely?

So . . . How ready are we as a State?

Business Continuity (BC) is about many things but boils down to our ability to recover from a disaster. Business Continuity planning is everybody's business….and is just good plain business practice! Focusing on Business Continuity without the proper Disaster Recovery planning and vice versa is not a recipe for success should a disruptive event take place...so how prepared are we….really?

In summary:

[i]*"Continuity planning is simply the good business practice of ensuring the execution of essential functions through all circumstances, and it is a fundamental responsibility of public and private entities responsible to their stakeholders."*

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