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What is a Business Continuity Exercise?
A BC exercise is a focused, practice activity within the ‘Exercise, Maintain and Review’ 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.

**Figure 1: BCM Lifecycle, Business Continuity Institute**

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**Why Exercise?**
The purpose is two-fold:

1. **Strategic**: To demonstrate to department leadership and entities with vested interest your business 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.

**Remember**: 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.

**Why use a Tabletop Exercise?**
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.
**Business Continuity Exercise Tips**

The Griffith University BCP toolkit sets out when a BCP should be tested. See the following tips to help you set up and run a desktop business continuity exercise.

1. **Exercise Design: Establish scope and objectives of the exercise**

The scenario comes last unless there is a specific new, emerging or rare threat scenario management want to test their arrangements against.

**Top Tips:**
- 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;
- Work with management to find out what they want to achieve;
- Identify who needs to be involved in the exercise;
- Work out how you will capture learning as a baseline for ongoing exercises;
- Base the scope and duration of the exercise on exercise objectives;
- Select a realistic story (scenario) – start simple and then raise the bar.

ガイダンス: You are testing the PLAN is fit-for-purpose, so the outcome of an exercise is always POSITIVE. 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, and which areas need improving (e.g. plans, policies, procedures, arrangements, resources). Aim for progressive maturity.
2. Exercise Preparation: Stage your exercise environment
Get everyone on-board and have everything you need ready prior to the exercise.

Top Tips:
- Assign roles (e.g. facilitator, participants, scribe, observers, evaluator, stakeholders);
- Alert and schedule participants and exercise in an appropriate facility;
- Obtain resources needed to run the exercise;
- Prepare exercise agenda
  - Introductions
  - Objectives
  - Scenario
  - Evaluation
- 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, any gaps;
  - Accept the scenario and take part as if it’s real;
  - Ask questions – facilitator and participants;
  - Everyone join in – your input is valuable for group discussion and learning;
  - Constructive feedback of the BCP, arrangements and exercise is expected;
  - Notes will be taken by exercise scribe;
  - Additional participant feedback may be sought via a follow-up survey.

⚠️ Remember: It’s vital you stage the exercise appropriately and prepare all those involved. An example exercise invitation is included in the Tools section of this guide.
3. Exercise Facilitation: Run the exercise
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.

Examples of facilitator questions:
Focus participant thinking and discussion on important elements of the BCP and arrangements.

Introduction

- Are all the right people here?
- Have you all read the relevant BCP information for your area?
- Do you all understand your role in the continuity process?

Scenario Presentation

- Do you all understand the disruption scenario?
- Do we agree;
  - All people are in contact as you are now
  - You are the first to respond
  - No assumptions to be made about any actions that might have taken place already in response to the scenario
- If you need to leave your role as an exercise participant you should indicate this by using the phrase: I'm out, I'm out, I'm out [or other code phrase not connected to the exercise].

Exercise

It’s important the facilitator avoid leading questions. Ask open questions to tease out 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, 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?

In closing, use these types of questions to drive participant discussion

Closing

- Have we captured all issues / concerns / questions / suggested changes?
- Who is responsible for updating the BCP?
4. Exercise Analysis: Debrief and assign action items

It is important for the facilitator to defuse the situation immediately post-exercise. Thank participants for their input and check they’re ok. You might find it useful to direct participants to move around the room for a minute, stretch, do some breathing exercises or other activity. This is useful to help participants de-stress, re-focus and prepare to evaluate their findings.

The facilitator will then give a brief overview of the exercise (what we just did) and objectives to be achieved to set the scene for the debrief and evaluation.

It is important the facilitator use open-ended questions for the debrief and evaluation.

Examples of simple debrief questions:

- What did we set out to do and did we achieve it?
- What key areas went well?
- What key areas would we do differently?
- What did we learn – the observed learning we will take forward as recommendations
  - Governance arrangements
  - Policy, procedures
  - Clarity of roles and responsibilities
  - Communications, reporting and information management
  - Logistics support – critical resources / alternatives
  - WH&S
  - Risk and contingency management / workarounds
  - Training and exercise management
  - Education
- Who will do what?

⚠️ Remember: A debrief is a forum for objective, constructive feedback and learning. Some participants may prefer to reflect on their experience and give their feedback later or there may not be enough time to complete a debrief and evaluation. A survey or questionnaire may be useful to collect feedback and ideas.
5. Continuity Improvement: Report and update BCP toolkits (tab 5)

The BCP must be updated post-exercise to:

- Provide details of identified actions to improve business continuity, who is responsible and date for follow-up;
- Update information and correct any errors in the BCP;
- Provide evidence you are using a good practice approach to your business continuity planning;
- Provide a record year on year of how the BCP has been tested;
- Raise awareness of the BCP throughout your organisation.

You may wish to provide a report to circulate to management or use in your business planning. See example in Tools section.

![Example of BCP Registration Form](image-url)
Tools

1. Example Email invite to continuity exercise

We will be running an exercise to see how we would cope during a disruption. This is to see whether the Business Continuity Plan (BCP) and arrangements we have developed will meet our needs.

We will be testing the BCP NOT individuals. All staff should update themselves on the BCP contents and arrangement, their roles and responsibilities.

The exercise will take place at…………………………

The exercise will run from……………… To…………………

Please bring to the exercise…………………………

This will be a facilitated discussion exercise and an open dialogue forum. Please come prepared to contribute to the continuity discussion.

OR

Dear name/group,

Date: […]

Time: […]

Location: […]

Please find attached a calendar request asking you to attend the business continuity exercise for [Plan X/Process Y.] It’s been a year since your last exercise and [Name of Senior Manager] has asked me to ensure this gets in your diaries as soon as possible.

The exercise will last no more than […] hours. Please could you bring an up-to-date copy of your plan to the exercise.

Please let me know if you have any queries.
## 2. Example Exercise Set Up Checklist

### Exercise Brief

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plan(s) being rehearsed</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exercise aim</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise objectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants / stakeholders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of exercise</td>
<td>Table Top discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of scenario</td>
<td>Loss of / availability of……</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Obtain copy of plan(s)

| Previous issues with this plan |  |
|--------------------------------|  |
| Last update                    |  |
| Potential issues with plan     |  |

### Exercise logistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date / time</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location / venue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content creator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise facilitator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise scribe(s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise evaluator(s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-exercise report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Example Evaluator Checklist

**Communication during a disruption**  
**Tabletop Exercise**  
**Evaluator Checklist**

Evaluator: | Location: | Date: |
---|---|---|

**Objective 1**  
Capability Being Evaluated: Communication

*Determine effectiveness of current protocols for communicating during a disruption.*

**PERFORMANCE CRITERION**

Points of Review: Please answer the following: Y = YES, N = NO, P=Partial, NO = Not Observed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Y</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Did participants identify process for developing and delivering messages during a disruptive event?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Did players prioritise key goal of messages issued during a disruptive event</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Did participants identify multiple methods for communicating with employees and students during a disruptive event, including methods which do not depend on the availability of power?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Was objective met?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments:
## 4. Example Post-Exercise Report Template

### Outline of Exercise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plan(s) tested</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exercise objectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants / stakeholders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario type</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario outline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Were the objectives of the exercise met?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective 1 [describe]</th>
<th>[finding]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objective 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Other issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Action Generated?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[describe]</td>
<td>[y/n]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Action List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Responsible person</th>
<th>Due by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[describe]</td>
<td>[who]</td>
<td>[date]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Example Exercise Schedule

Example of BCP(s) annual review schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Review risk register and business impact analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>Hold business continuity exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>Issue updated BCP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>Review contact details &amp; update BCP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>