



# Exercising the Business Continuity Plan

## Suffolk Resilience Business Continuity Forum Event Workbook

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## Objectives

This workbook is intended as an accompaniment to the Suffolk Resilience Business Continuity Forum event 'Planning a Business Continuity Exercise'. It is meant as an overview on the subject, readers therefore should not expect it to be a workbook on 'all-there-is-to-know-about-testing-the-plan!' For a more in-depth understanding of this topic there are specialist books to read or courses you can attend, many affiliated to the Business Continuity Institute. As usual with our forum events, we encourage those organisations with more robust BC arrangements to share their knowledge with other members that may be new to the methodology.

### 1. Why run an exercise?

Ideally you will have followed the BCM methodology and produced your BCP from the outcome of the BIA and Strategy workshops which will have been attended by a cross section of your organisation. They will have produced plans which contain the solutions to any particular disruption to the business (such as loss of power). That's the theory!

However, even if you have followed all the rules, you will find that assumptions will have been made during this process and the only way to check if a chosen action will work is to test it out by running an exercise. Testing the plan will show if you have the right content, correct actions, and contact details. It will identify areas that may need correction and improvement.

There are wider benefits from running an exercise apart from testing the plan.

- It raises awareness of the BC process throughout the organisation.
- Practicing the planned solutions in a controlled environment gives managers and staff the confidence to know they can deal with an incident if it occurs for real.
- It develops team work.
- It enhances a company's reputation if they have shown due diligence by testing the BC arrangements.
- Other companies may be more willing to do business with an organisation that can prove its resilience to disruption.
- Significantly increases the likelihood of the organisation or business surviving a disaster, whatever its cause.
- Minimises the social, political, legal and financial consequences of disaster.
- Identifies an organisation's areas of vulnerability.

### 2. What sort of exercises are there?

These can vary from the simplest verification done by one person sat at their desk, to a live, multi-organisational exercise that is complex, time consuming and expensive, but may still be valid to do. Before you start any sort of exercise planning, it would be worthwhile to have a test strategy which is agreed with the management board as their 'buy-in' is essential to any exercises you will want to run. Decide on the complexity, (never test further than you need to due to time and cost), the frequency and the participants. Remember you are running an exercise to test your plan so make sure it fits with what you have. For example, don't run a 'Loss of Staff' test if you have no Loss of Staff Plan.

Depending on your expertise, you may want to run the exercise in-house but for the more complex tests, you may decide to hire in a specialist who will organise everything for you and make it as realistic and as complex as you require.

**Call Tree:**

This can be a very quick and effective way of raising the profile of exercise planning within the company as it tests the in and out-of-hours contact procedures. It is worth running fairly frequently as phone numbers soon get out of date. For a large organisation, this may prove too great a task and you may want to consider using a call tree software product and run the exercise as part of testing the Communications Plan.

**Walk Through:**

Useful as either a first stab at running an exercise or as a training event for those involved in managing an incident as it raises awareness of their responsibilities. Also useful if a plan is in draft or been written in isolation as it brings together, for a read through, those who can give the plan a sanity check before it is issued.

**Table Top:**

Probably the most popular type of exercise as it gives the plan a fairly robust test but can be done and dusted in half a day. It normally involves a scenario being presented to the assembled CMT who then work/act out, prove and record their response using the relevant BCP as a guide.

**Live Event:**

This normally requires testing out the full extent of a plan. For instance, if a solution for loss of property is to move to an alternate site, then this will be done. It involves most of the workforce therefore is costly and time consuming and not often done unless there is a business requirement. It is not easy to get senior management buy-in for this type of test.

As a rule of thumb, you will test according to your business need. The more critical functions you have with short recovery timescales, the more you will need robust plans that have been rigorously tested in order to make recovery from any real incident sleek and swift. As always, practice makes perfect.

**ITC**

You will notice that IT is not mentioned. Testing any disaster recovery (DR) plans as they are commonly referred to would be the responsibility of the IT manager. Although you probably wouldn't be directly involved in IT recovery solutions, if BCM is your responsibility, you may want to have a chat to the IT manager about the company's IT recovery capabilities. You could run a loss of IT and telephony exercise to see how the organisation would cope without IT and this could be run in tandem with a technical DR test.

As more of a check than a test, find out what the IT recovery timescales are for the applications that support the critical functions and see if the reality of recovery time matches staff expectations. People will often state the need for certain IT functions to be back up within 24 hours but the reality might be a couple of weeks or more.



## Exercise Types

The table below gives a list of the different types of exercise.

Type	Process	Participants	Frequency	Complexity
Desk Check	Review and challenge the contents of the plan in a read through	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Author of plan</li> <li>• Independent checker</li> </ul>	High	Low
Walkthrough	Extended Desk Check to check interaction and the roles of participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Author of plan</li> <li>• Main participants</li> </ul>		
Simulation (table top)	Incorporates associated plans: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business</li> <li>• Site/ Buildings</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Public Relations</li> <li>• IT Disaster Recovery</li> <li>• BCM Resource Recovery Supplies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main participants</li> <li>• Facilitator</li> <li>• Observers</li> <li>• Co-ordinators</li> <li>• Umpires</li> </ul>	↑	↓
Functions	Moves to and recreates one or a number of business functions at an alternative pre-planned site.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees and staff in specific business area</li> <li>• Facilitator</li> <li>• Co-ordinators</li> <li>• Observers</li> <li>• BC resource recovery providers</li> </ul>	↑	↓
Full Plan	Close down of entire site/ building and relocation of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All employees and staff</li> <li>• Facilitator</li> <li>• Co-ordinators</li> <li>• Umpires</li> <li>• Observers</li> <li>• BC resource recovery providers</li> </ul>	Low	High

Source: Business Continuity Management – Good Practice Guide” The Business Continuity Institute 2002 (Adapted from Source: Elliot, Swartz and Herbane 1999)

### **3. Who should participate?**

Make sure there is a distinction between planners and players so the scenario is not revealed beforehand. If you are the person responsible for the company's business continuity management, it would be reasonable to expect you to be involved should an incident happen for real. It may be worth considering hiring the services of an exercise consultant if doing a major exercise so you may take part as a player not a planner. For smaller exercises it is fine for the business continuity manager to be the lead planner. Consider a joint exercise with key suppliers or partners or ask a fire service person for some input if using fire as a scenario.

#### **Players**

It will depend on which plan you are testing (supposing you have more than one that is). If it is loss of staff, then you may need HR and union involvement. If it is loss of building, you may need some facilities people. You will always need the people named in the plan to participate; typically this will be the team that manages the incident. They go by various names such as the Crisis, Tactical, Emergency or Incident Management Team.

You will need senior management involvement; you may find it difficult to get the test off the ground if you don't. They could be the team leading the exercise, but they will also be useful to report progress and give a final report to. Include anyone else that has a responsibility in the plan, such as admin staff if an office move is indicated or machine operators if you are testing out a loss of factory function. So, think what you are testing and work out who would be the right people to make it run smoothly.

#### **Planners**

Planners help develop the plot with the exercise leader. They will be people who will not take part in the exercise as they know the plot so make sure they are not deemed essential. Typically they will have an understanding of the area to be tested. They may later take part as observers.

#### **Observers**

Need to keep in the background and take notes during the exercise. They will be expected to know the plan and scenario therefore the expected behaviour of players. They will take part in the hot debrief after the exercise and type up a report for ongoing actions and lessons identified.

#### **Facilitator**

This may be the person who has developed the exercise but could also be a senior person within the organisation. Their role is to introduce the scenario to the players and set the scene for the exercise. They should explain any rules, exceptions and limitations, also the objectives. Their job during the exercise is to keep it on track, but let a certain amount of freedom within the scenario. They can guide, but not take part, can call for a time out if things start to go wrong and step back again once steered in the right direction. They should explain that it is the plan that is being tested and not the players. They will start and finish the exercise.

## **4. What should you test?**

As mentioned earlier, ideally you should have a signed-off test strategy which will state what you test and the frequency. It will make it easier to engage people's commitment to an exercise if it has already been agreed as company policy. A test schedule will allow people to see in advance when an exercise is scheduled so getting it in people's diaries should be easier. An auditor will always like to see a test schedule especially if you record that plans have been updated as a result of lessons identified from the post exercise debriefs. But, like anything done for auditing purposes, if you say you are going to do something then you must do it and within the timescale stated.

If you are part of a large organisation, you may have multiple plans which may cover the key threats such as loss of staff or utilities or they may cover the critical functions such as loss of production line. It might not be realistic to schedule a test on each and every one every year so a rolling test schedule will be needed. A smaller company may have fewer plans such as loss of building, loss of staff and loss of ITC only, but may still only want to run one test per year.

A test should be run if any significant changes have occurred to the plan from events such as a company re-organisation, new processes or production or a move to new premises.

If your plans are complex, you can take a component from the plan and test that part of it rather than the whole thing. If you have a major supplier or key partner, ask them to join in a joint exercise.

## **5. Writing a test scenario**

Here are a few rules and tips rather than a complete guide. Before you start, have an objective and scope. For instance, if you are testing your loss of IT, you may not want to include loss of telephony so state that at the beginning. Players will then know they can still use the land lines to make calls during the exercise, but not use their networked PCs. State that players must within reason show that their chosen actions will work, but without causing a real reaction. The best way to avoid this is to inform all contacts included in the plan that you are running an exercise on a given day. Give the exercise a name (such as Rainstorm) and say that any contact made during the exercise timescale will be prefixed with the announcement 'This is exercise Rainstorm' before any request for help is made.

Think through the scenario using the plan to avoid glaring errors in the storyline. Keep the scenarios realistic. Don't say a volcano has erupted or meteorite has hit your building. You can make it real time or elapsed time or a different time of the year especially if this is relevant to the processes of your company. For example, certain things only happen at a particular time of year, but because it means everyone is very busy then, it is not convenient to run the exercise. Be careful where you expect the incident team to meet. They will not be able to use a meeting room in the building you have just told them is burnt down. Running a loss of building exercise combined with a fire drill adds a bit of realism. You can let the staff back in, but present the scenario to the incident team at the evacuation point.

Once you have decided on the plan to be tested you need to decide on the cause for the failure. For instance, loss of staff could be caused by a variety of reasons; sickness, industrial action or bad weather causing access difficulties (you can also use this for loss of premises). You can develop your scenario depending on whether you want a sudden

impact (strike, bad weather) or a slow build, (pandemic flu). Write some injects which can be introduced throughout the exercise for a number of outcomes. They can be used to create realism or to make sure certain areas of the plan are tested. If the incident team look like they are romping through the actions, an inject can slow them down a bit. And they can be used to bring the exercise back on track if it seems to be slipping. Have a few up your sleeve and use as necessary.

For realism, ask some staff to role play either appearing in person or phoning in with a made-up problem. Make sure the observers note down any response. Make sure the 'actors' always prefix injects with 'This is exercise Rainstorm'

**Notes from Discussion:**

- What sort of scenarios could you use for an exercise to test for loss of building?

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- What sort of injects could you use?

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- What other props could be used?

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- What else could you do to make it more real?

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## **6. Debrief**

A vital part of the exercise process which must be given a time slot at the end of the test. It is normally held in two parts.

### **Hot debrief**

Give the participants a short break at the end of the exercise (lunch perhaps) and ask them back to give a few sentences on what went well, what not so well. Observers can present their initial report as can the facilitator. The lead of the CMT can say what they thought of the construction of the scenario and presentation of the exercise in general. Keep the feedback constructive. Don't make anyone look at fault if it didn't go very well, reminding them it was the plan not them that was being tested. Ask for typed-up notes from observers. Make time to thank all participants.

### **Cold debrief**

A more formal meeting held some weeks later using the typed up reports. Not all participants in the exercise need to be there, but a good idea to have some senior managers attend. The outcome should be lessons identified to improve the plan, amend any errors (contact numbers out of date etc) or to improve the running of future exercises. The plan should be updated as a result. There may also be ongoing actions which will require managing.

## Glossary

BCP	Business Continuity Plan	
BCM	Business Continuity Management	
BIA	Business Impact Assessment	
BCI	Business Continuity Institute	
CMT	Crisis Management Team	} same or similar teams
TMT	Tactical Management Team	
IMT	Incident Management team	
SCC	Suffolk County Council	
DR	Disaster Recovery (for IT)	
ITC	Information Technology and Communications	
Ex hold	Used to bring a temporary time out usually to sort out any misunderstandings	
End ex	Exercise has completed.	

## Further Reading.

The following links provide further information to help plan a successful exercise. Some of this material has been used in producing this work book.

<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/ukresilience/preparedness/exercises/whyexercise.aspx>

UK resilience offers advice for emergency planners but the information is also relevant for business continuity planners

<http://www.thebci.org/gpg.htm>

The Good Practice Guide is available by filling in and submitting a form on the BCI web site. Section 5 contains information on exercising the plan.

<https://scords.gov.uk/content/resources/ExerciseGuidanceJuly2009.pdf>

Fifty nine pages of expert advice on running an exercise from The Scottish Resilience Development Service. Based on response to an external emergency rather than testing a BCP but still very useful including some templates.

[http://www.manchester.gov.uk/download/5593/hints\\_for\\_running\\_business\\_continuity\\_tests\\_and\\_exercises](http://www.manchester.gov.uk/download/5593/hints_for_running_business_continuity_tests_and_exercises)

Manchester Business Continuity Forum, similar to ours so I am sure they won't mind you using their hints and tips. If the url is too long, just type in <http://www.manchester.gov.uk> and search on 'hints and tips' and you will find it.

# Appendix 1

Example of a test schedule

<u>Threat</u>	Exercise	Real event	Date	Post Exercise		
				Reports in	Post exercise/ incident review meeting held	Plans Updated
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Loss of staff				Y	Y	Y
Loss of key partner or supplier						
Loss of access to main office						
Loss of utilities						
Loss of IT						
Loss of depot						
Loss of fuel						