

People must be at the center of business continuity planning

When the unexpected hits, companies shift into recovery mode. Business processes have to be up and running again, fast. In today's technological world, that invariably involves computer systems, data, networks, and applications.

**Tiered workforce
Strategic communications
Blended solutions
Workforce resiliency
Rigorous exercises**

But to recover these, and to get back to normal business operations, you need your people. We are seeing a new direction in business continuity and disaster recovery (BC/DR): putting people at the center to ensure resiliency. This white paper examines the five distinct trends supporting this new direction:

1. Tiered workforce
2. Strategic communications
3. Blended solutions
4. Workforce resiliency
5. Rigorous exercises

These five trends in workforce continuity are steadily bringing the people portion of the business continuity equation up to the level that the technology portion has already achieved. The combined power of the two forces will provide businesses with the holistic approach necessary to meet whatever challenges they encounter with resiliency — and success.

People at the center

Your power goes out when a transformer blows. A water pipe bursts and floods three floors. A protest closes down the block where your building is located. Whether you classify them as events, incidents, or disasters, they will happen sometime, somewhere, somehow — to you. When the unexpected happens, companies shift into recovery mode. Business processes have to get up and running again, fast. In today's technological world, that invariably involves computer systems, data, networks, and applications.

But in order to recover quickly and get back to "business-as-usual," you need more than just your technology: you need your people. Therefore, people have to come first (and historically, they have come last). Stephanie Balaouras of Forrester Research, Inc., made this point when she wrote:

"[IT DR teams] very rarely include BC considerations, such as communication, as part of their test. They are simply testing their ability to recover IT systems. There is very little realism in these plans; they assume that all IT employees are available or that power, transportation, and telecommunication are available. IT DR tests should also include business users; recovering the systems is not the same as validating that users can do their jobs."¹

We are therefore seeing a new direction in business continuity and disaster recovery (BC/DR): putting people at the center to ensure true business resiliency. This paper examines the five distinct trends that support this new direction.

¹ "Stop The Insanity: If You Don't Exercise Your Business Continuity Plans, You Aren't Prepared," Stephanie Balaouras, Forrester Research, Inc., December 2011.

Trend #1 A tiered workforce

In past decades, BC/DR plans focused on the IT department with the mindset of “Get the computers running as quickly as possible.” And if the plan included business users at all, it was to get everyone back to work. That may be appropriate for a company with three people in it, but what about a company with three hundred people? Or three thousand? Or even thirty thousand?

Such a mindset is impractical. The more people affected, the more difficult (if not impossible) it is to get them all productive at the same time. It is also unnecessary. Not everyone is equally important to the recovery of the business, and they should not be treated as such. The realization of this truth has resulted in a new and positive trend in workforce continuity: the tiered workforce.

Tier 1 personnel are those who deliver immediate value. These are the people — usually your IT department – who are going to be recovering your systems, applications, and databases. Without these people, *nothing* happens.

Tier 2 personnel are those who are needed to create business value. Tier 2 people keep the most essential business processes running. For example, the traders in a stock brokerage firm or the sales personnel in a mercantile business are tier 2 personnel.

Who falls into the tier 2 category should be weighed very carefully, however. Some functions that are crucial may not be obvious. For instance, media relations qualifies as a tier 2, or perhaps even a tier 1 role. While it has nothing to do with

the day-to-day production of the business, these people protect the reputation of the business — something that can quickly deteriorate in the aftermath of a disaster if stakeholders, customers, or the press consider the business to be in jeopardy.

Tier 3 personnel, then, are those who provide delayed value. Their roles, while vital to the ongoing health of the business, are not imperative in the immediate wake of an event, i.e., billing and invoicing, or marketing and advertising. Two or three days of downtime will not permanently affect the overall health of these departments or of the business on the whole.

By building the tiered workforce concept into BC/DR planning, companies are able to focus their energies, prioritize tasks, and strengthen overall resiliency.



1 Tier 1	Immediate value	IT, media and shareholders
2 Tier 2	Business value	Revenue producers (sale, traders), HR, payroll
3 Tier 3	Delayed value	Support functions (accounting and marketing)

Table 1: The Tiered Workforce Model



Trend #2

Strategic communication

The days when phone trees passed for emergency communications vehicles are over. Experience has conclusively demonstrated that phone trees cannot be relied upon to deliver messages accurately, connect people in a timely manner, or keep contact information up to date. Today, most businesses recognize that recovery communications must include reliable ways to:

- Notify employees as to what has happened and what they are required to do
- Receive and send information in real-time
- Deliver updates as the situation changes
- Connect employees with peers, vendors, and customers

But even this process is now being refined, creating more intentional, strategic communications.

The first place this is becoming evident is in the realization that while everybody needs to be notified immediately in the event of a disaster, the notifications themselves should be

customized based upon both the tier a person is placed in and the role he or she fills in the company.

For example, tier 1 personnel need to have explicit and detailed instructions with a high degree of urgency so that recovery procedures are initiated with a minimum of delay. Tier 2 personnel also need to be placed in action, but they have a slightly longer time in which to do so. Tier 3 personnel may receive a fairly simple message recapping the nature of the emergency, assuring them that recovery plans are in process, and to wait for further instructions, which may take a given number of days.

The second part of strategic communications is a bit more daunting. As breakdown by tier, department, role, etc. is analyzed, it becomes quickly apparent that a wide range of messages will be needed for any emergency — and that depending on the nature and scope of a given situation, those messages may be very different. For instance, the messages required for a hurricane

affecting four business locations would differ significantly from the messages that would go out for a flood that disabled a single floor of a building.

Strategic communications, therefore, must take place at a granular level: something that is impossible to achieve effectively “on the fly” during a recovery event. Fortunately, given the technology now available to BC/DR planning, innumerable messages appropriate to event, tier, role, and timing can be defined, recorded, and programmed for automatic delivery at a moment’s notice. Having, in essence, individualized messages during a crisis augments business resiliency by clarifying for each person their role and expectations in the recovery process.

More interesting is the use of social media for strategic communications. While social media can be a valuable communications channel, companies must ensure that proprietary information, such as alternate locations, number of affected employees, employee contact information, and so on, does not show up on these very public platforms. Strategic communications that contain this kind of information can be trusted to robust third-party emergency and mass notification software, like Notifind or Assurance^{NM}, which are software platforms provided by Sungard Availability Services. That being said, social media is still a very good tool for communicating with customers, vendors, partners, and members of the general public who may not be on your formal notification system. For example, companies can use social media to tell employees that an incident has affected one or more locations, and that they should check the company portal for more information.



Trend #3 Blended solutions

Where do employees go when disaster strikes? Do they go to a data center? Does a mobile workstation come to them? Do they work from home? Previously, the answer would have been to send everyone to the same place. A new trend in workforce continuity is to choose the appropriate solution that meets each tier's needs, which then necessitates multiple interoperable solutions.

By shifting to a tiered personnel approach, it becomes apparent that all employees do not have to be at the same place at the same time. In fact, by requiring everybody to go to the same place at the same time, recovery can actually be delayed. For example, it takes 24–48 hours for a mobile workspace to arrive at a site. If Tier 1 personnel have to wait that long to begin recovery operations, that means that there will be 24–48 hours in which nothing is happening! Clearly, this is an unacceptable situation.

A better solution would be to fly Tier 1 personnel to a data center to get systems up and running. Meanwhile, the mobile workstation has time to get to the site, where Tier 2 personnel can begin working on their (already operational) systems. Tier 3 personnel may be asked to work from a virtual environment to ensure that there are enough workstations in the mobile workplace to accommodate all Tier 2 personnel.

Additionally, blended solutions allow for more flexibility based on the type of crisis that has occurred. For instance, if a disaster affects just one building, then working from home may be perfectly acceptable if virtual access is not disrupted or slowed. On the other hand, if a disaster affects an entire region, then working from home may not even be possible, i.e., if power is disrupted across a wide area, or multiple phone lines are down.



Dedicated Workspace	IT recovery staff, traders	Zero RTO with custom terminals and phone systems. Physical access to compute hardware at the same site.
Shared Workspace	IT operations, call center	Low RTO with standardized PCs and phones at every station. Physical access to compute hardware at the same site.
Mobile Workspace	IT operations, traders, call center, move home transition	Standardized PCs and phones at every station, standalone power, voice, and data, or can connect to your building infrastructure.

Table 2: Options for a blended solution





Gartner defines Workforce Resilience as:

“A subset of business recovery discipline — addresses the protection and productivity of the critical workforce during a disaster. Without your workforce, there is no business. A workforce resilience program delivers solutions for these critical recovery areas: life and safety; immediate availability to cash, food and shelter; workforce personal preparedness; workforce event preparedness; workforce crisis communications; recovery staffing, housing and travel; workspace/ work area recovery; and application access.”

Source: “Hype Cycle for Business Continuity Management and IT Disaster Recovery Management,” John Morency and Roberta Witty, Gartner Inc., July 2012.

Trend #4 Workforce resilience

Another trend in workforce continuity relates to an increased understanding of and sensitivity to people’s emotional needs. When disaster strikes — particularly a disaster of a regional nature — businesses cannot expect their employees to concentrate on recovery and productivity unless and until they know their families are safe. Employees need to have basic needs (food, water, shelter, money) met for themselves and for their families. In their Hype Cycle for Business Continuity Management and IT Disaster Recovery Management (July 23, 2012), Gartner calls this trend “workforce resilience.”

To better take care of people, businesses are engaging in activities such as providing preparedness training for the whole family or subsidizing disaster kits for employees to take home. But there is even more on the horizon.

Sungard AS is spearheading this new concept of workforce resiliency: an alternative location that can house and feed employees and their families during the recovery phase of a major crisis event. This inclusive planning assumes that there will be times when disasters are of such nature that evacuation is either necessary or preferable. These types of facilities contain the technology, workstations, offices, and conference rooms to get employees back online, and adds guest accommodations, eating establishments, and recreational facilities. Employees can focus on recovery while knowing their families are safe and securely onsite with them.

Trend #5 Rigorous exercises

Tiered personnel, strategic communications, blended solutions, workforce resiliency... all of these are drawn together in one additional trend: that of engaging in rigorous exercises. Not tests, which can be failed, but exercises that can be improved upon each time they are run.

Systems are programmable and predictable. People are not. For that reason, disaster recovery exercises are essential to give employees the level of understanding and confidence they need to efficiently recover the business. Exercises should:

- Test recovery communication capabilities and messages.
- Cover transportation and logistical requirements.
- Introduce employees to offsite work environments, such as data centers or mobile workstations.
- Review online access and virtual workstations.
- Ensure that family members understand recovery communications and procedures.
- Walk through the entire BC/DR plan, in whole and in part.

Due to constant personnel turnover, shifting roles and responsibilities, technology and process updates, and the vagaries of memory and human nature, personnel exercises should become a regular part of the overall BC/DR validation process. As this trend grows, business resiliency will increase manifold.



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“I have seen companies try to run what I call ‘PowerPoint drills.’ Someone comes into a staff meeting, puts a scenario up on a PowerPoint presentation, asks questions about response, and then gives the answers. That may be useful for an initial training session, but as an exercise? No way!”

DR. STEVE GOLDMAN
Internationally recognized expert and consultant in BC/DR and crisis management

Source: “Stop The Insanity: If You Don’t Exercise Your Business Continuity Plans, You Aren’t Prepared,” Stephanie Balaouras, Forrester Research, Inc., December 2011.

Additional reading



[Workforce Continuity Services Solution Brief](#)

Conclusion

Resiliency through holistic business continuity planning

People have always been at the core and center of business: it makes sense that they should be at the core and center of planning for business continuity as well. These five trends in business continuity planning are steadily bringing the people portion of the business continuity equation up to the level the technology portion has already achieved. The combined power of the two forces will provide businesses with the holistic approach necessary to meet whatever challenges they encounter with resiliency — and success.

For additional information
Please visit the [Sungard AS' workforce continuity solutions page](#) for more information.

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