



Business Continuity Amid COVID-19

Market Research
June 2020

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1. Business Continuity and its Importance

Organizations need a contingency plan to continue their business operations during unanticipated situations. Moreover, a dedicated team of security professionals is required to build a robust business continuity and disaster recovery plan. It would be the team’s responsibility to keep the business afloat during these tough times, i.e., unexpected events, including coronavirus (Council, 2020). Given the unknown variables surrounding the latest coronavirus outbreak, many businesses across the globe are having to evaluate their preparedness to the potential impact it may have on their operations, supply chain and employee well-being. By investing now in the development, implementation and maintenance of a viable business continuity management (BCM) program, organizations can provide the most effective approach to restoring and resuming critical functions and most importantly, provide a layer of protection for their most important assets: people, information, cash flow and reputation (Green, 2020).

2. Key Elements of Business Continuity Plan

The key elements of a business continuity plan can be divided into five categories, and these are as follows:



2.1. Risk Assessment

Risk assessment means to conduct Business Impact Analysis (BIA), which is an assessment of potential loss during a disaster. The BIA anticipates the possible repercussion of disruption on regular business operations. It analyzes and gathers details to draft a recovery strategy. Using BIA, staff identify mission-critical activities and suggest an optimal recovery time (Council, 2020).

2.2. Risk Mitigation

Risk mitigation is to eliminate the loopholes risking the safety of company assets and business operations. The professionals should draft a comprehensive module dealing with the minimization of the risks. The following elements can be incorporated into the risk mitigation plan (Council, 2020):

- Check third-party readiness
- Detailed IT backup strategies
- Maintain stock of critical equipment or tools to repair
- Split functions and resources at multiple sites
- Build preventive maintenance and testing programs
- Cross-functional training for the team

2.3. Be Ready with Business Continuity Strategies

A key element of a Business Continuity Plan (BCP) is that organizations must have the listed strategies in place, and these strategies should include the following (Council, 2020):

- Alternate practices to continue daily operations
- Outsourcing or third-party service providers
- Secondary or backup suppliers
- Prioritizing business operations and demand of customers
- Work from home strategies
- Availability of mobile offices

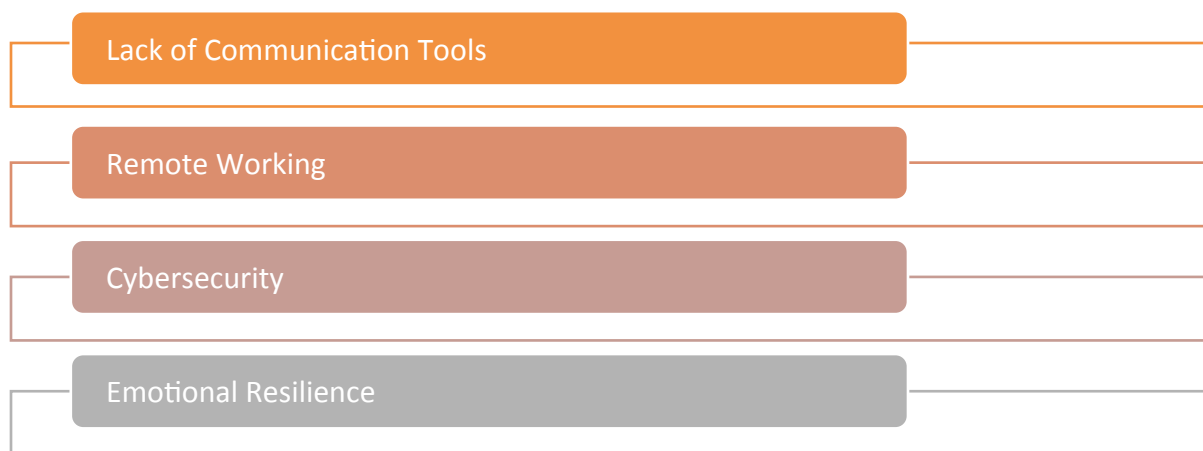
2.4. Establish Clear Roles and Responsibilities

Depending on the size of the organization, build a planning team that is clear about their roles and responsibilities. If it is a small-scale enterprise, then involving all the employees would be a great idea (Council, 2020).

2.5. Implementation and Testing

The involved professionals should undergo regular training sessions and simulation exercises. Based on the outcomes of these fire drills, organizations adopt the required changes. After this, enterprises are free to put the drafted business continuity plan in place. In conclusion, the team should consider the listed elements for prioritizing key business processes. A detailed program can spot potential cyber threats and include mitigation strategies (Council, 2020).

3. Business Continuity Challenges Amid COVID-19



There are four main challenges to Business Continuity amid COVID-19, and these are as follows:

3.1. Lack of Communication Tools

Lack of communication tools could spell trouble in a crisis. Clarity is the key to good communication. Having the right tools in place to keep lines of communication open with your stakeholders, especially your people and customers, is vital in times of global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. A high percentage of organizations don't have an emergency mass notification system (EMNS). This could cause critical delays when notifying employees or clients of emergencies such as announcements, policy & procedure updates and breaking news. One problem that you don't want to face in the middle of crisis response is inaccurate or siloed contact information for the audiences you need to reach. If you don't have an EMNS or tried-and-tested communication tool, you may not be communicating effectively with all your employees, customers and partners. Key points to

consider in communication strategy includes the following (COVID-19: How to Tackle the Crisis Response Challenge, 2020):

- Ensure you have up-to-date and accurate employee contact information
- Develop concrete methods for communicating with employees and clients
- Best practices are to test your system and ensure that your users are well trained

3.2. Remote Working

With most employees now working from home with an indefinite timeline of when they'll be returning to the office, many questions arise around how organizations can not only empower their people to be productive but to ensure their mental well-being. Adding to that is how we balance our working lives when our family members and children are home with us. Organizations need to acknowledge and alleviate the pressures and anxiety levels of their people. The idea should be to nurture a dynamic workforce, and the following aspects should be kept in mind by employees while working remotely (COVID-19: How to Tackle the Crisis Response Challenge, 2020):

- Separate your workspace from your home space
- Stay connected to co-workers and use video conferencing
- Factor in your non-commute and don't overwork yourself

3.3. Cybersecurity

The direct impact of the coronavirus pandemic is a wide quarantine policy that has compelled organizations to allow their workforce to work from home in order to maintain business continuity. This inevitably entails shifting a significant portion of the workload to be carried out remotely, introducing an exploitable opportunity for attackers. Most organizations are using virtual private networks (VPNs) to help secure their vital data. But in addition to using protective VPNs, home workers should stay vigilant for malicious emails regarding remote access and fake websites aimed at trapping unsuspecting remote workers. Ensuring data privacy and compliance for remote workers is achievable by updating your workplace policy, providing security training, discarding physical material and ensuring employees know who to call. For full data privacy and compliance for

remote workers, make sure employees have adequate bandwidth and IT department contact information (COVID-19: How to Tackle the Crisis Response Challenge, 2020).

3.4. Emotional Resilience

Emotional resilience is a top concern as everyone is working around the clock in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Resilience is not just your ability to bounce back, but also your capacity to adapt in the face of challenging circumstances, while maintaining a stable mental wellbeing. Social distancing, therefore, does not mean social isolation. The following strategies can assist in this regard (COVID-19: How to Tackle the Crisis Response Challenge, 2020):

- Make time to talk with family, friends, colleagues and co-workers.
- Take regular breaks and use downtime to de-stress and relax
- Don't be afraid to ask for help or utilize your company's Employee Assistance Program.

4. Business Continuity Planning in Qatar

In this time, some enterprises may experience softening demand while some may face supply challenges. Enterprises are encouraged to plan and implement business continuity measures to minimize disruption to their operations and ensure that their businesses remain viable during the virus outbreak. This report will discuss two companies, which have implemented business continuity amid COVID-19 in Qatar. The two companies are Ooredoo and Meeza.

4.1. Ooredoo

Ooredoo (telecommunications company) is managing to successfully continue its operations despite the majority of its staff working from home and several shops being temporarily closed. The company had already prepared detailed, comprehensive business continuity management plans, which were then implemented from the first week of March 2020. Plans included at least 50% of contact center staff being asked to work remotely from home, which later became 100% in the second week of March as the situation progressed. A number of steps have been taken to ensure cybersecurity while working from home to protect Ooredoo data and systems. Staff are using secure VPN technology to access Ooredoo systems from home, with laptops or PCs and headsets enabling them to quickly and easily take calls from customers in the same way as if they were still in

the office. Ooredoo ONE Wi-Fi, mobile broadband, and Orbi devices are being used to ensure high-speed, reliable internet, while team supervisors and management are on hand, both online and on the phone, to provide full support to their staff. Deliveries of purchases made online via the e-Shop are continuing, with warehouse and delivery staff following all official safety guidelines issued by the Qatar government (Ooredoo announces success of Covid-19 business continuity plans, 2020).

4.2. Meeza

Meeza is an established end-to-end managed IT services and solutions provider based in Qatar. The company has implemented precautionary measures to safeguard its staff against the COVID-19 outbreak. It assigned 80% of its staff to work from home, in consideration of the safety of on-site engineers, as well as distributed protective materials, including hand sanitizers and masks to all staff. Meeza is sending regular awareness emails, keeping them updated on the situation. Moreover, the company is supporting its clients run uninterrupted and securely during the COVID-19 pandemic thanks to its IT solutions and business continuity services. Partnering with Meeza helps businesses focus on their core mission during these stressful times without the added pressures of keeping the IT infrastructure operational, regardless of where the systems might reside; locally, publicly in the cloud or hosted in secure data centers. The ongoing health crisis has caused disruption to businesses around the world as private and governmental entities turn to online and distant working solutions to manage operations. With a network of interconnected, highly-resilient, and geographically diverse data centers, Meeza offers managed IT services, disaster recovery and business continuity services to its clients. Disaster recovery services ranging from continuity workshops, Business Impact Analysis, Continuity Programme Management, all as part of its Business Continuity Management Services help sustain business activity in times of crisis. (Meeza supports clients with IT solutions, business continuity amid Covid-19, 2020).

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