



How to Exercise a Business Continuity Plan (BCP)

This document provides a step by step guide to exercising a Business Continuity Plan (BCP).

The exercise of a BCP should not be undertaken in isolation, but should be in the context of a structured Business Continuity Management (BCM) programme, as described in the Business Continuity Institute's Good Practice Guidelines (GPG). The GPG recommends that an Exercise Programme be developed to ensure that over a period of time:

- *All information in plans is verified*
- *All plans are rehearsed*
- *All relevant personnel (including deputies) are exercised*

There are three basic types of BCP exercise:

- **Simulations** – *Using the BCP to undertake a response to a theoretical incident*
- **Tests** – *Confirming that the recovery of an activity, piece of equipment or technology, a complete area of the organisation, or a set of inter-connected equipment or technologies, works*
- **Rehearsals** – *Practicing the recovery of an activity, piece of equipment or technology, a complete area of the organisation, or a set of inter-connected equipment or technologies, following a script*

An individual exercise can be made up of any combination of these three basic types.

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1. MAKE SOMEONE RESPONSIBLE

The starting point is to make someone responsible for exercising the BCP. This individual needs to be:

- Given the time and access to the information and people required to enable the BCP to be exercised
- Trained in how to exercise a BCP, or provided with assistance by someone who is trained in how to exercise a BCP

2. DECIDE ON THE BCP TO BE EXERCISED

Decide on the BCP that is going to be exercised.

3. DECIDE ON THE OBJECTIVES

Decide on the objectives of the exercise. In other words, decide on what the exercise will achieve (there is a world of difference between trying to familiarise a group of people with a plan and attempting a test recovery of a complex computer system at a third party recovery site).

4. DECIDE ON THE TYPE OF EXERCISE

Decide on the type of exercise to be used, which should be the one most suited to achieving the objectives. The basic types are:

- Simulation
- Test
- Rehearsal

The types can be combined in order to achieve the objectives (e.g. a Simulation that includes a Test and a Rehearsal).

5. DECIDE ON PARTICIPANTS

Decide on who will be required to participate in the exercise.

6. ESTIMATE THE COSTS, RISKS, DISRUPTION

Estimate the:

- Costs of the exercise, both in terms of internal resources to be used and external expenditure
- Risks to the organisation in undertaking the exercise
- Disruption to normal operations that might be caused by the exercise

7. OBTAIN APPROVAL

Obtain approval to run the exercise, including obtaining a budget and a commitment to allocate the people, their time, and other resources.

8. PLAN THE EXERCISE

Develop a plan for the exercise, to include the:

- Objectives
- Type of exercise
- Participants
- Date
- Location
- Resources required
- Work needed to be undertaken before the exercise

9. AGREE THE EXERCISE PLAN

Obtain agreement to the plan for the exercise. In particular, ensure that the participants are available on the date and can attend the location.

10. CONFIRM THE EXERCISE PLAN

Confirm the plan for the exercise. Unless the exercise is to be unannounced, obtain confirmation from the participants that they are available on the date and can attend the location.

11. PREPARE FOR THE EXERCISE

Undertake the work that is required to be done prior to the exercise. This may include, amongst other things:

- Identifying a scenario
- Developing a script
- Booking rooms
- Hiring equipment
- Arranging catering and accommodation
- Preparing materials
- Producing documentation
- Commissioning third parties
- Inviting observers
- Arranging for appropriate technical support
- Training staff
- Rehearsing the exercise

12. UNDERTAKE A RISK ASSESSMENT

Undertake a risk assessment for the exercise by:

- Identifying what can go wrong (the threats)
- Deciding on a risk assessment method
- Estimating the likelihood and impact of each threat
- Calculating the risk of each threat using the risk assessment method
- Identifying things that can be done to reduce or eliminate the risks (mitigation measures)
- Documenting the residual risks

13. OBTAIN CONFIRMATION TO PROCEED

Present the output of the risk assessment to whoever originally approved the exercise, and obtain confirmation that it is OK to proceed with the exercise.

14. PREPARE AND ISSUE A BRIEFING DOCUMENT

Unless the exercise is to be unannounced, prepare and issue a briefing document to the participants.

15. RUN THE EXERCISE

Run the exercise.

16. CONDUCT A HOT DE-BRIEF

Run a short de-briefing session for the participants and observers immediately after running the exercise. This should cover:

- Their immediate reactions to the exercise
- What went right
- What went wrong
- What could be improved
- Suggestions for improving the BCP

17. PREPARE A DRAFT REPORT

Prepare a draft report on the exercise. This should include:

- The outcome of the exercise
- Whether or not the objectives were achieved, and if not, why
- Details of any suggested changes to the BCP
- Any actions that need to be taken to improve resilience
- Any suggested improvements to the implementation of BCM
- Recommendations for future exercises

18. CIRCULATE THE DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMENT

Circulate the draft report to all those with a stake in the BCP and the exercise, and ask for comments. As part of this, determine who should be on the distribution list for the final report.

19. UPDATE, FINALISE, AND CIRCULATE THE REPORT

Update the draft report taking into account the comments to produce a final version, and circulate it to the agreed distribution list.