

Recovery and Beyond

including Restabilisation

Disaster Recovery is generally taken to mean restoration of the data processing facility. This is a rather restricted view of what might be a major interruption to the business process. Long-term survival of the business depends upon a large number of other possibilities.

To make the modern Disaster Recovery offering really effective, a whole range of ancilliary services needs to be incorporated. This concept of 'Total Support' implies support for the complete business enterprise: contingency plans spanning the whole of the organisation from factory floor to board room, from customer to shareholder; international networks protected by international services; technical consultancy; management consultancy; technical education; user education; disaster control software; specialist help in rebuilding after the event; specialised personnel support functions. To cope with the results of a disaster, these emergency services must be immediately identifiable, and available at short notice.

In order to provide full protection for the whole of the business it is essential that contingency planners are fully aware of what might go wrong, the impact it might have, methods and costs of prevention. To this basic information we must add an understanding of the means to recover and return to normal from whatever might have happened within a viable time frame. This nebulous area of Recovery and Beyond is where there are few skilled people with direct experience; it is an area where one is required to be fully conversant with the latest ways of working in all sorts of industries, and furthermore to know how to protect and repair all the major components of those methodologies.

Let us take a look at some of the areas which are at, or beyond, the borders of recovery as it is normally viewed.

There are four basic phases to a business disaster :-

The Emergency phase - immediate 'First Aid'

The Recovery phase - short term repair actions.

The Restoration phase - getting back to normal

The Implications phase - coping with the implications

This last phase is the most insidious and is generally ignored, BUT I do believe this is the time when the most unseen damage gets done. We are often reminded that 80% of businesses collapse

within 18 months of a disaster, yet 96% fail within 5 years. The full effect to the business can take as long as 5 years, by which time we have almost forgotten the disaster.

Another area I believe to be very important, is the recovery or Restabilisation of the people who are involved directly or indirectly in an emergency. Restabilisation is a way of preventing or alleviating the emotional disturbance which is a common result of exposure to a major disaster.

Those exposed to less dramatic emergency situations are probably going to be affected in a similar manner; perhaps to a lesser degree, but nevertheless affected.

There seem to be five common reactions to a severe crisis. I think of these as the 'Five Discoveries of Stress'. Four are, in effect, discoveries about 'self in crisis' and the fifth is a kind of discovery of what is regarded as unknowable.

They are the discovery of :-

Fear,
Excitement,
Capability,
Chaos, and
Numbness.

Each of these reactions eventually lead to the same result. The victims leave the scene to some degree, either mentally or physically.

When a person suddenly finds they are unable to control the situation around them, they experience fear of the unknown. Most of us have learned to cope with a certain amount of mystery around us and would perhaps feel uncomfortable if all of the mystery were removed from our normal environment.

When things have returned to normal the victim will seek to change to a safer place of work; one which does not retain the ghosts and shadows of bad memories, or anything which reminds them of those bad memories.

Another type of individual will find the event exciting and dramatic and enjoy all the random activity around them. When everything is back to normal these people feel let down and seek further excitement which they will either create or find. To create it, they might take direct action, such as set fire to things; or they may simply be less cautious, leaving windows and doors open or

taking risks in some other way. If they do not create the danger which leads to excitement, they will take up alternative employment, hoping to find more excitement elsewhere.

When a person is suddenly plunged into a situation where the old rules no longer apply, they are often given, or assume a higher degree of responsibility. Then they discover their capability to exercise more control, or make decisions, or make things happen or whatever. In short, they are able to discover their true worth, or at least get closer to it.

Having outgrown their position, they will be keen to move to where they may get the recognition and appreciation they need and want.

For many people, who have always led and sought a stable, comfortable lifestyle, their first experience of chaos comes as a rude shock. What they have always feared and avoided has now invaded their own personal territory. Suddenly they have been confronted by a situation in which there was very little to 'cling to' - everything seems to be mobile and insubstantial.

There is a type of person who is, literally, dumb-struck by a traumatic event. They become petrified with an apparently irrational fear - their fear is far greater than the situation seems to warrant.

They will now regard their old working environment as a place which is 'too dangerous'. They will not feel comfortable there again, unless the place is altered out of all recognition, literally.

As we have seen, almost everybody will revise their viewpoint of both the job and its surroundings after a major crisis. For many of them it will lead, in due course, to a subconscious need to move.

The end result is a high proportion of the staff resigning for all sorts of apparently unconnected reasons. Much of this subliminal thinking may take weeks to surface and further days, weeks or months to implement. Thus there is such a delay between the original cause (the crisis) and the eventual effect (job change) as to disguise the connection.

For some individuals these pressures will only cause them to depart from the scene in a mental sense, a large part of their attention will be focused elsewhere. They will while away the hours, and make themselves feel more comfortable, by day-dreaming about their ageing parents, young kids, puppy dog, fishing rod or aunt in Australia. As their mind is not fully on the job, they will be more prone to accidents and errors than 'normal'.

In effect, these day-dreamers are operating (responding and reacting) according to their fantasies almost as much as they are to the realities around them. The more fantasy-oriented they are, the

worse their interpretation and reaction in the real world in which they are operating. They have removed themselves from reality as a form of mental protection.

Our fantasies, our private mental universes, are in a different time continuum to the normal exterior physical universe. Thus our minds become attuned to the different pace, different importances, different reaction times, different values, morals, ethics, etc. of those other universes. When we need to handle the real physical universe, our reactions are inappropriate, because our mind is operating at the wrong pace, with wrong values, wrong morals etc. The end result is a wrong solution, because the mind is operating with a wrong set of 'tools'.

As a result of these two exit effects, a strong team is soon weakened by lack of numbers and/or reduced capability. Often these delayed exit effects begin to strike, just as the company seems to be on the road to recovery. This second, incipient crisis can be more harmful than the original, obvious event if the right type of counselling is not made available on time. The erosion of the work-force will inevitably cause harm to the business, especially wherever the people are a major asset to the organisation.

More and more we shall begin to see the development and use of hybrid solutions to optimise the benefit at various stages or phases of the contingency. The hybrid solution would, for example, include a hot-site disaster recovery contract combined with a cold-site and/or a mobile facility. The hot-site would be used for the emergency phase and for the interim period, whilst the cold-site was being prepared and tested. The system could then be taken across onto the cold-site or mobile facility whilst preparing for the move to the final location. That final location could be the original site re-furbished, or perhaps a replacement site built to order.

Another hybrid approach is the use of multiple systems to provide a degree of resilience, combined with a contract for a hot-site recovery service as a second line of defence. This solution often includes some form of database shadowing to further enhance availability.

The modern approach to contingency planning includes a great deal of preventive measures. This will be followed up by the installation of automated monitoring systems to provide the earliest possible warning of any abnormal condition which could develop into a significant problem.

Any significant interruption to the normal business process(es) will have a direct effect on the cash flow of the business. The normal business process is an investment of cash over a period of time, with a selling price which recovers the investment plus overheads and profit for that period of time. If the costs are inflated, the profit will obviously suffer, but if the selling point is delayed, then the investment period will have changed and profits reduced due to the cost of investing or borrowing.

The effective selling point is really the moment when the customer has paid for the goods. Thus, it is dependent upon a number of other things happening in a timely fashion, eg order entry, manufacturing, packing, delivery, billing. Delays are often caused by errors and/or queries, so quality becomes an issue, as does security at a time when the business is already rather vulnerable.

It is important we take all aspects of the business into account when considering contingency plans. Recently there have been a number of instances of intentional and accidental product contamination. A great deal of expertise has grown around the detection and prevention of such contamination. Recovery techniques for both the product and the company image have also evolved in response to a growing demand. The attackers are also getting more determined and sophisticated, so we have to keep moving to keep the target in sight.

Clearly, prevention is better than cure; medicine is better than an operation; an operation is better than long-term suffering; intensive care is better than no care. To keep our corporate patient happy and robust we need to consider all the possibilities and develop sound strategies for total health care. A comprehensive health service is more than a bottle of tonic or a box of pills.

Specialist advice and/or help may seem costly, but it is far cheaper than the alternatives.

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