The **Ultimate Resilience Test**
Assuring Business and Communities Continuity During Pandemics

Introduction to Organizational Resilience (OR) and Business Continuity Management (BCM)

Over the last four decades, business continuity management awareness has increasingly been added to the agenda of many organizations, helping to shape their culture and governance. Normally the discussion of business continuity is motivated by the business impacts caused by disruptive events such as technological changes, climate change, attacks on people and assets, as well as changes to resource and service availability.

And also, pandemics, like the one causing so much disruption around the world today. Organizations were seeking a solution to better organize their business continuity initiatives into a structured framework based on accepted and acknowledged best practices. One that could be systematically implemented, and its effectiveness reviewed, tested and improved from time to time. As a result, different institutes were created to cover specific aspects of today's business continuity management systems; notably the Disaster Recovery Institute International (DRII), created in 1988 in the US, and the Business Continuity Institute (BCI), created in 1994 in the UK, both of which are focused on professional training, qualification, and certification.

The September 11, 2001 attacks on the Twin Towers in New York City, and on the Pentagon near Washington, D.C., resulted in the business continuity discipline becoming a nation-wide concern in the UK; a potential next target. In 2003, the British Standards Institution (BSI), in its capacity as the UK's National Standards Body, responded to societal needs and developed the Publicly Available Specification (PAS) 56; the first nationally recognized framework to support all types and sizes of organizations to better understand, prepare for, and manage business disruptions.

PAS 56 was the beginning of a standards driven response to help organizations embed and consolidate business continuity initiatives. Following the July 2005 terrorists' attacks in London, BSI elevated this framework to two UK national standards, formally known as British Standards (BS):

- BS 25999-1 Business Continuity Management – Code of Practice, published in 2006, which provides a basis for understanding, developing, and implementing business continuity within an organization based on best practices, and

- BS 25999-2 Business Continuity Management – Specification, published in 2007; the first certifiable recognized business continuity management systems specification.

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The interest to implement and certify business continuity management systems found innovative and visionary global early adopters in essential industries, including the technology sector and those organizations such as financial and professional service, telecommunications, and defense who, by virtue of their geographical locations and complex supply chains were more vulnerable to business disruptions. Increasing global adoption of the British Standards, and evolving global needs, culminated in the launch in 2012 by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) of ISO 22301:2012, Societal security — Business continuity management systems.

ISO updated the standard in October 2019, as well as its guidance for use, ISO 22313, in March 2020, to maintain its relevance and address new market needs. Perceiving the evolution of the market and addressing a need for a more holistic approach towards business continuity, BSI launched an initiative for guidance on Organizational Resilience (OR). OR is the start of a second generation of standards intended to help organizations to survive and prosper, enhancing their capacity to be more adaptive, competitive, agile, and robust. Organization Resilience is the ability to anticipate, prepare for, and respond and adapt to incremental changes and sudden disruptions to survive and prosper in dynamic and interconnected market conditions.

Organizational resilience and business continuity during pandemics

Since their introduction, business continuity standards have identified pandemics as a risk to businesses under "gradual disruptive events." The magnitude of the pandemic and how it will impact an organization is dependent of its context, but the business continuity management system applied during a pandemic is expected to result in protection of life, operational enablement during contingency, managing costs during disruption, reducing financial and legal exposure, as well as enhancing reputation and confidence from different stakeholders.

How business continuity framework works

Business continuity contains several components, some of which are more relevant when dealing with pandemic risks. More important than the list of its components is how an organization can increase its business continuity awareness and act objectively, pragmatically, assertively, and in a timely way. Timing is critical; business knowledge combined with a sense of urgency and using components of business continuity to drive calls to action will be more decisive than the development of formal and validated processes. Exercising thought leadership is key and will be a critical path to succeed as will the ability to anticipate situations and solutions, as opposed to reacting moment to moment.

In short, a business continuity management system provides a framework to:

- ### Understand organizational context:
  This portion provides recommendations for understanding external and internal organizational context. External context includes the political, financial, economic, technological, legal, and regulatory environments; critical supply chain relationships; and communication with external interested parties.

  While internal context includes the review of the organizational purpose and objectives, including the identification of key clients and the list of products and services that are critical to maintain during a disruption, and how to support the maintenance of these products and services taking into consideration the resourcing of assets, supplies, and people). A business impact analysis and risk assessment are relevant supporting tools to organize and summarize the findings and to outline the organization's continuity objectives.

- **Defining business continuity strategies and solutions:**
  This phase is to review possible strategies to drive solutions to; **(1)** avoid a disruption; and **(2)** to mitigate its impact to business, increasing the organization's resilience to disruptions. Business impact mitigation considers a bidimensional paradigm: reduce the impact (how deep) as well as shorten the period of disruption (for how long).

  An adequate review of critical resources that must be protected should be conducted including people, information and communication technology systems, infrastructure, equipment, transportation, logistics, finance, and how the organization interacts with clients, distributors, partners, and suppliers. Ideally business continuity strategies and solutions are discussed prior disruptive events in an effort to build a more resilient organization capable of anticipating disruptions, understanding the key business risks and the strategies to eliminate, transfer or minimize them.

- **Recovery from a disruption:**
  Returning to the new "business as usual" following a disruption needs to be well planned. Dependent on the disruption type, several actions may be required to be implemented, including, but not limited to: assessing new delivery capacities and market demands; reviewing of financial resources; repairing of damaged assets; moving back to primary locations of business from any temporary facilities that may have been used; filing insurance claims; recovering lost information; communicating with all stakeholders; and auditing potential government and legal requirements.

- **Learning:**
  After each disruption, the organization should do a self-evaluation to collect and review lessons learned, and update and improve, as needed, its business continuity arrangements.

- **Call to acion:**
  Applying business continuity management in anticipation of a disruptive event is the best way to realize its full benefits, however, it is still relevant and feasible to extract benefits even if a system is initiated during a disruption, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic. This is especially true when assessing and organizing a response structure and planning for the resumption phase.

  In addition, the concepts prescribed to organizations are fully applicable to communities and governments (cities, counties, states, and countries) helping to ensure survivability and future prosperity. The COVID-19 pandemic is the ultimate resilience test; it is a massive and life-changing disruptive and transformational event. Those who are leading the situation, protecting their people, community, and businesses, by mitigating and shortening impacts, will be able to resume normal functionality earlier.

Key elements for Organizational Resilience/ Business Continuity

- Comply with all government/health/regulatory agency requirements and guidelines.

- Evaluate organizational context; maintain operations as feasible, practicable, and safe.

- Conduct a business impact analysis, and as applicable, a risk review.

- Evaluate alternatives to improve resilience; eliminating, mitigating, or transferring risks.

- Select the products and services that critical to continue to operate.

- Identify clients, sectors, and markets that are essential to serve.

- Improve your site hygiene processes for staff and customers.

- Identify and protect your high-risk people; provide support to them as needed.

- Review your human resources policies and benefits associated with the disruptions risks and consequences, including but not limited to: work from home policies and logistical requirements, sick, care of others, and personal leave, health and life insurance plans coverage.

- Identify essential and strategic employees; identify short-term successors in case of unavailability.

- Review travel and visiting policies; to client offices and for clients visiting company facilities.

- Prepare and test your team to lead the situation. Consider your team's mental health and well-being and their capacity to think objectively and pragmatically, under pressure and in uncertain scenarios.

- Activate business continuity plans accordingly; maintain flexibility, avoid seeking perfection, define when and how contingency plans will be implemented.

- Review the organization's supply chain; check their capacity to continue serving and, analyze and plan for alternative suppliers as a back-up plan; reevaluate your supply chain cost, and identify critical/essential suppliers.

- Consider your organizational context and your government, health, and regulatory agencies' requirements and guidelines to define when and how resume normal activities. Resumption needs to be well planned to avoid unnecessary risk exposure, creating possible additional impacts to the organization.

About the author:

Carlos Pitanga is the Americas Assurance Managing Director of BSI. Carlos is a Mechanical Engineer and MBA with over 25 years of international experience in professional services dedicated to governance, risk, and compliance. Since the publication of the first National Business Continuity Standard in 2006, Carlos has been a great advocate and evangelist of business continuity as a way to improve organizational competitiveness and resilience.

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