

Effective Business Continuity: Addressing challenges through robust planning



About the Author

Kush Srivastava is the former Enterprise Lead – Business Continuity Planning and Disaster Recovery at Mahindra Satyam BPO. He was one among the top six BCP professionals nominated in the '**Business Continuity Manager of the Year Award**' category at the **BCI Continuity and Resilience Awards 2009**.

Overview

A trend in global business that is catalyzing the pace of transformation of organizations is **the rapidly-increasing expectations of customers**, be they of products or services. While even 20 years ago, customers would not mind 'waiting' for a product/service to be delivered to them, increased competition and the advent of technology are now encouraging customers to 'demand' for what they want...and what's better, get it.

As anywhere else, this holds true in the business process outsourcing industry as well, where the focus on providing continuous, high-quality services is immense. With Murphy's Law – "*Anything that can go wrong will go wrong.*" – omnipresent in organizations, the importance of the Business Continuity Manager cannot be over-stated.

Business Continuity Planning, or BCP, is **the activity of working out how to stay in business in the event of a disaster or calamity, whether natural or otherwise**. Effective BCP creates a framework for optimal performance and non-disruptive services at all times, and considering the importance of these aspects in process outsourcing, BCP is one aspect discussed in great detail between outsourcing organizations and service providers. On their part, service providers test and re-test their BCP practices to ensure that all glitches are ironed out before any exigency hits them.

Background

Mahindra Satyam BPO's BCP capabilities were put to test in January 2009, in light of the confessions of the Former Chairman, B Ramalinga Raju. The fraud perpetrated at the behest of a select few created unprecedented uncertainty for all stakeholders of the company - be it employees, customers or investors. Added to this was the increased attention by the media and intense speculation among various sections of society.

From a business perspective, there was the possibility of customers exiting if the incident impacted services in a manner that Mahindra Satyam BPO's performance fell below SLAs or standards set by the client. While it was important to reassure stakeholders about the fundamental strengths of Satyam, it was also important to first address all issues that could impact day-to-delivery of services. What helped the organization to successfully implement its business continuity plans was the fact that even if a customer did decide to exit, a reverse transition would take anywhere between one and three months. That gave Mahindra Satyam BPO time to control and limit the damage done.

Best Practice



Action taken

Immediately following the confessions, the company's BCP team swung into action. Led by the CEO, Vijay Rangineni, and the Enterprise Lead for BCP- Disaster Recovery, Kush Srivastava, a core team comprising senior leaders gathered at the 'Drawing Board' to reassess the risks, business impact, devise a mitigation strategy while withholding the business continuity plan and its testing mechanism to serve the basic RTOs (Recovery Time Objectives) and RPOs (Recovery Point Objectives). The foundation of sound policies and processes, availability of state of the art infrastructure and the high levels of BCP orientation among Associates helped address the situation at hand.

Some of the special initiatives taken by the BCP team were as follows:

- Assessing the various aspects of client processes covering the process RTOs, addressing specific BCP requirements at alternate BCP site and collation of contact coordinates of critical resources. Apart from this, reassessment of client processes for criticality based on end-client impact, cost and revenue parameters was also undertaken
- Revisiting the risk profiles covering people, corporate strategy, legal and financial risks and adopting an industry-specific approach for proactive support to clients
- Sustained focus on the aspect of 'Business Continuity Awareness', wherein coaching through regular communication, classroom sessions and quiz contests was imparted. Innovative campaigns with simplified image content were formulated for effective retention and recall by Associates during Contingency
- Specific coaching for all Emergency Response Teams (ERT) having specific roles and responsibilities in case of a contingency
- Special focus on identifying physically challenged employees and ladies in 'the family way' to ensure their safety at all times. This was done by identifying their disability, specific skills required to support medical needs and handling, collating contact coordinates of the employee and their manager, and specific Dos and Don'ts for assisting such personnel during contingency
- Dedicated 24X7 communication link established for the effective coordination, control and crucial decision making by management in consultation with BCP Lead during contingency
- Well established effective mechanism of IR (Incident Reporting) administered by the BCP Lead to ensure coordination among delivery and support functions during crisis or a situation warranting exercise of caution. This also enabled proliferation of 'right and timely information' to all concerned stakeholders – employees, management, customers and investors



Accomplishments

The BCP Coordinator played a pivotal role, leveraging the tenets of the BCP framework with all functions – HR, Training, IT, Administrative Services, Sales and Relationship Management, Marketing and Communication, Quality and Workforce Management teams contributing to 'unhindered operations' while ensuring that all people needs of food and medical supplies, boarding and lodging needs and transport requirements were catered to on a timely basis and safe manner. The clients were duly appraised of the 'ground realities' on a real-time or periodic basis, based on the nature of contingency.

Best Practice



The major accomplishments of this successful framework were:

- No client attrition on account of a decline in service levels
- Increase in client interest to explore other cost effective BCP options with Mahindra Satyam BPO
- BCP activities conducted within lean budgets
- No incidence of loss of revenue or life
- Appreciation received from clients, their auditors and regulators
- Alliances and partnerships with vendors/suppliers continued per the requirement

Summary

In the aftermath of incidents that took place in January 2009, effective BCP at Mahindra Satyam BPO ensured conduct of operations without impacting end-client deliverables, while meeting all client specific metrics and service levels.