

Service Canada - Operations Branch
BCP Table Top Exercise – 26 June 2009
Evaluation Summary by External Observer

Observer: Jean-Marc Béliveau – DND Lead BCP Planner

General Comments: I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to witness your Table Top exercise and provide you with observations. It was truly a pleasurable and worthwhile experience. The exercise was very well conducted and I've noted many positive observations. With regards to areas for improvement, I sincerely hope my observations will be of assistance in enhancing the robustness of your Business Continuity Plans as well as the Response and Recovery Strategies for your critical services. I remain available to further any observations or to discuss them with you.

Please note that my observations are influenced to a greater extent by my experience as a former officer in the Canadian Forces than as a BCP Planner. I unfortunately haven't had the opportunity to observe a BCP Table Top exercise in DND since my arrival in the position a few months ago.

Exercise Scope: Good

The scope of the exercise was appropriate, not only due to the relevance and timeliness of the scenario (AH1N1 Swine Flu) but also given the level to which your Draft Pandemic Illnesses Contingency Planning Framework is developed. In my view, your draft framework contained all the necessary elements to adequately respond to the scenario, particularly in light of the BIA and BCP elements presented by the staff. While a two-phase scenario may have been a bit ambitious for the allotted time, considering this was, to my knowledge, your first Branch level BCP exercise, the team managed well.

Exercise Process: Needs Improvement

Table Top exercises are conducted in an artificial setting in which not everyone is able to "play" the role they would in a real situation. These exercises also often suffer from the lack of an adrenaline rush experience in a real crisis. This adrenaline rush tends to favour focused, insightful and efficient decision making, issues usually become quite clear one in crisis management mode. The exercise would have benefited in having an Exercise Controller, whose role is to ensure the scenario is understood, that the exercise remains within the boundaries of the scenario and to interject elements to raise the level of realism.

The participants did not fully grasp all aspects of scenario in the beginning. While the scenario clearly stated that the Treasury Board had ordered Minimum Manning for the next business day, nearly 45 minutes elapsed before the participants realized this, making a number of assumptions and having lengthy discussions along the way. This resulted in the focus being on the wrong issues at the start. An Exercise Controller could have redressed the situation early on and save precious exercise time. Yet, to the team's credit, they did eventually cover most of the essential requirements despite this initial misunderstanding of the scenario. I noted many good practices during the exercise, namely ensuring a common understanding and validation of the strategically important issues through a round table discussion.

Effectiveness of BCP: Very Good

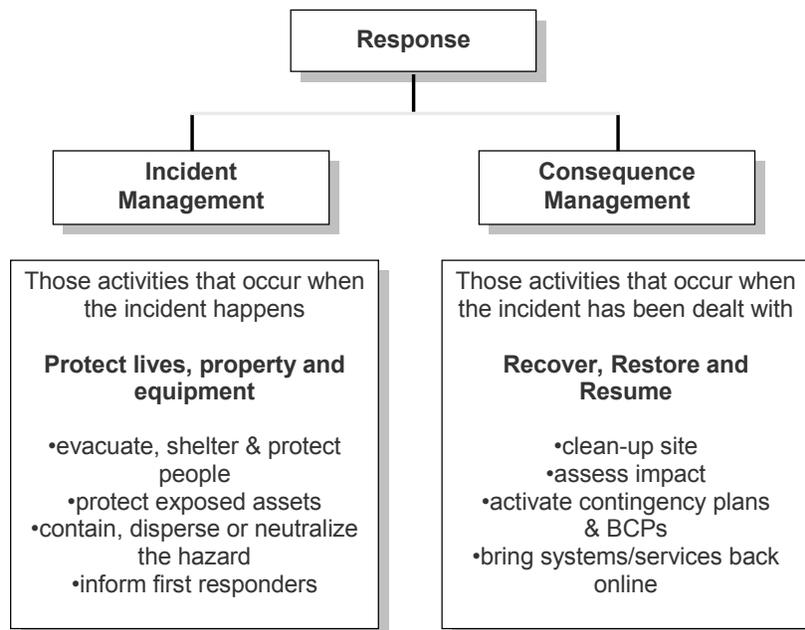
Again, your Draft Pandemic Planning Framework in my opinion contained all the elements to support effective decision making in reacting to the scenario. From an outsider’s perspective, it appears pretty comprehensive. Additionally, from the information provided by participants during the exercise, I also understood that your BCP contains a prioritized list of critical services as well as a list of essential personnel, with alternates, for each. Both of which were essential elements in reacting to the exercise scenario.

Effectiveness of BCP Team: Needs Improvement

While communication, participation and collaboration among participants was excellent, most did not appear to have sufficient knowledge of your BCP, particularly in respect to the list of critical services, as well as your Pandemic Planning Framework. While BCP Planners can fill this gap by highlighting the elements of your BCP pertinent to the event/scenario, Director Generals, and Directors in particular, should be sufficiently knowledgeable of the aspects of your BCP as it pertains their area of responsibility as to support effective, informed and timely decision making in responding to a disruption.

Also, it appeared to me that the team focused on Business Continuity Planning issues and requirements rather than on leading your Branch’s response to the disruption. This may stem from an unclear understanding of their role in that context. Most were able to highlight the vulnerabilities and risks associated to cessation of the critical services under their charge as well as the overarching issues from a Branch perspective, such as the communication strategy. However, they appeared unfamiliar with the Response and Recovery Strategies and were not immediately attuned to interdependencies affecting their ability to ensure continued availability of their critical services.

General Recommendations: Referring the diagram below on Response Management, please allow me to make a few recommendations concerning a Response Management framework by providing observations and suggestions as to how a Response and Recovery Team could have managed the disruption in your scenario.



A Response and Recovery Team is a decision making body that must focus on providing strategic direction required to ensure the continued availability of your critical services. To favour informed, timely and effective decisions making, the team requires decision support services like:

1. A situational and impact assessment briefing, preferably by someone trained in risk and/or crisis management, with a focus on assessing the disruption's current and potential future impacts on your critical services. It should not be left to the team to conduct that assessment on its own as it may likely get bogged down too-deep and potentially lose focus on the strategic issues;
2. A briefing by BCP planners on your prioritized list of critical services and existing Response and Recovery Strategies, thus allowing the team to assess any gaps in your strategies in relation to the nature and potential impact of the disruption;
3. Secretarial support to produce a Record of Discussion/Decision with action items to support implementation, monitoring, accountability, follow-on situational reports;

In the context of the scenario, the Response and Recovery Team's focus in my view should have been to:

1. Assess the nature, consequences, impacts and potential future impacts of the disruption on your critical services;
2. Activate Response and Recovery Strategies for your critical services, if not already in effect;
3. Identify any gaps in your planned Response and Recovery Strategies in relation to the impacts and potential impacts of the disruption; and
4. Provide strategic direction, making strategic decisions to address these gaps.

In this scenario, there were in my view three critical elements to the disruption, which should have guided the team's actions:

1. The already known impact of the H1N1 Pandemic on your personnel in the NCR;
2. The Minimum Manning order issued by the two cities in the NCR with closure of non-essential services and businesses, thus potentially increasing family obligations and affecting the willingness or ability of available personnel to report to work if needed; and
3. Indications that the Toronto area may also be facing an outbreak of the H1N1 flu, thus affecting options to transfer essential services to that regional center, as well as potentially increasing the demands on the other regional or local service centers should Toronto also face a similar situation.

As there was a clear potential for the manning level of qualified personnel to drop below minimum requirements to maintain your critical services in the NCR, the initial response should have addressed the need for robust succession planning and personnel management. This is to ensure there are sufficient manning levels of personnel with proper skills and knowledge able to provide the minimum service level for each critical service. This entails the following that quickly came to mind:

1. Validation of your Personnel Recall Lists,
2. Review of the qualifications required to deliver critical services;
3. Identify cross-trained, cross-qualified personnel;
4. Conduct cross-training of personnel from non-critical services if possible;
5. Rigorous personnel strength reporting, including constant monitoring or personnel readiness (i.e. availability of non-essential personnel to report to work);

6. Monitoring the cascading effects of personnel absenteeism (total number of available personnel in relation to the minimum number of personnel required to continue to provide your critical services) by implementing a Balanced Score Card type reporting to monitor the personnel level and capabilities across the Branch;
7. Review work from home arrangements and look at expanding that option in consultation with Industry Canada (remote access);
8. Implement preventive medicine measures across the Branch; and
9. Ensure more depth in the succession planning for key managers, Directors and Directors General to ensure appropriate level for decision making authority.
10. Review the prioritisation of critical services as well as trigger points and decision support requirements to transfer responsibility for critical services to regional or local offices where appropriate, or to activate/find alternative sources.

Focusing on the above would have also likely prepared the team to react to the second stage of the scenario, i.e. shut-down of facilities and loss of IM/IT and telecommunication assets, which likely would have required transferring responsibility for some/many of your critical services to regional center or local service centers or seeking GoC support in determining crisis management strategies, possibly temporarily ceasing certain services, sharing staff with other departments, etc.

Closing Remarks

I sincerely thank you and hope these observations and remarks will be of use to your Branch.

Jean-Marc Béliveau
DND BCP Lead Planner
Director General Corporate and Shared Services
Assistant Deputy Minister (Finance and Corporate Services)
National Defence
8th Floor - 60 Queen Street
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1A 0K2
JEAN-MARC.BELIVEAU@forces.gc.ca
613-944-6317