No Building. No People. No Systems. No Suppliers. Building a Strategic (and Simple and Straightforward) Business Continuity Plan.

We get asked a lot of questions about how any one company can possibly plan for all of the different incidents they could experience. And it's a good question. There are many variations and scales of complexity to incidents that can make the task of planning for them all feel overwhelming. Fires start small and can grow and spread. Tornadoes might cause minor damage to the warehouse or take out its entire structure. One employee gets sick with the flu, and suddenly a third of the workforce is unable to come to work.

While discussing this problem with a friend of KingsBridgeBCP, they had the perfect example to illustrate this point. This person works for a natural gas company, and their story goes like this:

> There was a bad thunderstorm happening in an urban area adjacent to an electrical tower. Lightning from the storm struck the tower. The good news is that the tower was grounded. The bad news is that the grounding wire ran down into the ground next to the end of a metal corrugated sewer pipe. The surge from the lightning strike ran down into the ground wire, hit the sewer pipe, and was conducted along its length until it hit a natural gas pipeline at the other end. This caused a minor explosion that set off a chain reaction to all of the natural gas feeds into the homes and businesses in the nearby vicinity.

Luckily, the natural gas company was able to respond quickly and effectively. No further damage was caused, and no one was hurt. But just take a moment to think about that chain of events; who could possibly have predicted that scenario?!

Instead of focusing on all of the possible ways an incident might occur, try thinking about what the incident will actually affect. We like to call this the "No building, no people, no systems, no suppliers" model. At the end of the day, no matter what type of incident you experience, it will have an impact on one (or a combination) of these four things.

No Building

An impact to your building could mean that some or all of your operations will need to relocate to another facility. This relocation could be temporary or long term. So what will you do if you can't access your building? Is there anything physically in the space that is needed to continue operations? If so, what strategies can you incorporate into your Business Continuity Plan (BCP) to help you recover from the loss of one or more facilities?

No People

When it comes to your people, there are two main ways your organization might experience an impact. The first is when one key individual that has critical information

in their head is unavailable (for whatever reason). This person might be the only one who knows the passwords to properly recover your systems, or they could be the only one that knows how to run payroll. Do you have any of these people at your business? Can you cross train or build in backups/succession planning? The second type of impact is when a large number of people in one department are not available. Can your operations survive if 35% of your customer service group has the flu?

No Systems

Reliance on technology is both a blessing and a curse. When it works well, things go smoothly. When it doesn't, major problems can occur. How much does your business rely on technology? Is it integral to operations? Can you continue to function with manual procedures if all, or part, of your system access is gone? And how long can you be down before it becomes a major issue? Having a solid disaster recovery plan to work in conjunction with your BCP is absolutely critical to an efficient and effective recovery from technological incidents.

No Suppliers

Regardless of the type of work you do, you will rely on suppliers. Some of them might provide office supplies, others may host your software applications, and still others might deliver parts so that you can manufacture your own goods. So what happens to your business if one of your suppliers experiences an incident? How important is the service they provide? Can you obtain those supplies from anyone else? Incorporate suppliers into your BCP so that your operations don't suffer from someone else's outage.

Summary

If you are building a brand new BCP, including strategies to address these four impacts will give you a solid foundation for your plan. If you have a mature BCP, try taking a step back and reviewing it from the "No building, no people, no systems, no suppliers" lens. Does your current plan allow you to recover from any (or all) of these impacts? Ultimately, your BCP should be designed to support the decisions and strategies your organization will implement given an interruption. Taking a broader approach and assessing how these key impacts will be addressed throughout recovery can lessen the burden of planning and instill confidence in your plan.

If you found the "No building, no people, no systems, no suppliers" model compelling, go to the KingsBridge Academy to access more classes, tools and resources that are optimized to make your BCP Simple & Straightforward.