

Rethinking business continuity: Emerging trends in the profession and the manager's role

Regina Phelps

Received: 9th June, 2014

EMS Solutions, 260 Whitney Street, San Francisco, CA 94131, USA
Tel: +1 415 643 4300; E-mail: regina@ems-solutionsinc.com

Regina Phelps is an internationally recognised thought leader in the field of emergency management, pandemic and contingency planning. Since 1982 she has provided consultation, training and speaking services to clients on four continents. She is founder of *Emergency Management & Safety Solutions*, a consulting and training firm. Regina's niche includes incident management team development, pandemic planning, emergency operations centre design, and the development of emergency exercises for large global companies.

ABSTRACT

Where is business continuity going in the future? What should continuity professionals be planning for in their programmes and in their career? This paper offers an in-depth look into both of these questions and provides the reader with eight activities for reinventing their continuity programme and career.

Keywords: *reinvent continuity planning, professional development, risk management, risk forecast, business continuity planning*

INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to 'rethink' business continuity (BC)? Why is it important? There is a simple, straightforward, one-word answer: change. Change is incredibly

fast, rapid and travelling at break-neck speed. Change is happening in every corner of the globe, in business, the economy, politics and how people live their lives.

Not everyone and everything is changing. There are two diametrically opposed universes (views of the world):

- *dynamic*: entities that are indeed changing at lightning speed; and
- *status quo*: companies, colleagues and departments that have not changed much.

What this means is that although the world is changing rapidly, not all BC professionals and programmes are morphing and transforming to keep pace. Indeed, many departments and programmes are doing things just as they have always done before.

The goal of this paper is to explore the need to rethink programmes and the profession in order to stay ahead of the tsunami of change that is immediately ahead.

WHERE IS THE PROFESSION GOING?

Before the options for programmes and the profession are explored, consider



Regina Phelps

some of the disasters and emergencies that are likely to occur in the next year or so.

For several years, Allianz has issued its 'risk barometer', which reports the results of a survey of over 400 corporate insurance experts from 33 countries. The following list is the result of the 2014 risk survey of what keeps these individuals up at night:

- (1) business interruption, supply-chain risk;
- (2) natural catastrophes (storm, flood, earthquake);
- (3) fire, explosion;
- (4) changes in legislation and regulation;
- (5) market stagnation or decline;
- (6) loss of reputation or brand value (for example, from social media);
- (7) intensified competition;
- (8) cyber-crime, IT failures, espionage;
- (9) theft, fraud, corruption; and
- (10) quality deficiencies, serial defects.¹

That list makes for interesting reading; however, there is another way of viewing the future. It can be summed up in one word: 'more', for example, more:

- visible increases of the overall effects of climate change;²
- weather-related disasters of all kinds;
- cyber-security issues affecting larger audiences;³
- disease outbreaks due to population concentrations, zoonotic illnesses and free-moving populations; and
- issues related to globalisation, including outsourcing and supply-chain disruptions.

The world is shifting and disasters that have a major impact are on the rise, presenting a broad range of issues. Just think about reading a news story about a major incident. Indeed, in news stories about

major disasters, the incidents are increasingly described using terms such as:

- 'the worst...';
- 'the most significant...';
- 'the strongest (weather) ever recorded...';
- 'more/most catastrophic...';
- 'more/most deadly...'; or
- 'more/most expensive...'

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO BUSINESS CONTINUITY?

One question might be: 'If the world is rapidly changing and the disasters are getting bigger and bolder, why should BC do anything different? And furthermore, that means it must be a growth industry, right?'

If anything, the opposite would appear true. Instead of programmes expanding, there is a retrenchment and resizing of many separate programmes and departments. Senior management is starting to question the investment and the return on a traditional stand-alone BC programme or department. Comments are now being heard that BC should be a routine aspect of the business. BC departments are now a part of a larger enterprise activity (such as risk) rather than free-standing departments. In addition, there is more targeted planning, developing plans only for the most critical departments or groups, instead of broad planning covering all of the departments included in a business impact analysis (BIA). In other words, there is a migration towards enterprise risk management to include BC.

In many ways, this makes perfect sense. BC management was borne out of the disaster recovery planning process of the 1960s and 1970s in response to operational risk and business and technical disruptions that threaten the organisation.⁴ As any profession evolves and changes,

over time it morphs in response to the current climate and pressures.

The following questions are thus raised for consideration:

- What is happening in a specific industry/company/department?
- Are people doing things the same way they have always done them?
- How is this working?
- Can a change be sensed in the air?
- What should be done differently to remain effective?

RE = REVITALISE, REINVIGORATE, REINVENT

Just as spring comes around once per year and everything has a new light and shine on it following the dark winter months, people too should look at this opportunity as a chance to ‘RE’ departments, programmes, the profession and their own career. Consider the following definitions for inspiration:

- *Revitalise:*
 - To imbue (something) with new life and vitality.
 - To make (someone or something) active, healthy or energetic again.
- *Reinvigorate:*
 - Give new energy or strength.
 - Made or become fresh in spirit and/or vigour.
- *Reinvent:*
 - Make over completely.
 - Bring back into existence or use.

The discussion of what and how to ‘RE’ is framed around two topics: the BC programme and one’s career.

EIGHT WAYS TO ‘RE’ THE PROGRAMME

In what follows, the paper describes eight ways to ‘RE’ the programme.

Question everything

Begin by questioning everything. This might be a good place to start, but what exactly does that mean? What if someone was asked to develop a BC programme from scratch and had no knowledge or experience. How might they go about it? Key questions to consider are as follows:

- How could someone think about recovery differently? Imagine throwing out what one does now and asking the question: ‘How would I do this completely differently?’
- How could someone deliver similar results but develop and/or deliver it ‘differently?’ This is an important (and common) question: ‘I need to recover but I have lost budget (or staff or some other reason) and I need to find a different, more cost-effective way to do BCP’.
- Answer the question: ‘On a daily basis, what is the value-add of BC to the company?’ What do you contribute to the company on a daily basis? Many times when asked that question, a BC manager will say something like: ‘After a disaster, you will be really happy that we have a well-tooled BC programme’. In which case, they are saying BC is something that is only used after a disaster. Therefore, the next question is likely to be: ‘Okay, so when was your last disaster and how many times have you activated your plan?’

Location, location, location

Does it matter where the BC department is located? Is one area of the company better than another? Things to ask about ‘location’ are:

- Where is the department currently? Does it provide meaningful support for the programme?
- Is there an ideal location for it in the company? If yes, where is that?

- Should a different location be promoted now or is it better to wait for something else to happen?
- Will it exist as a free-standing department in the future or be integrated into another area?

Departments are increasingly moving around. The greatest magnet for consolidating BC departments currently appears to be risk management, often under the umbrella of enterprise risk. The second is going back to an IT department (often where it may have started years before).

Can the location be influenced? Perhaps. This is the time to bone up on how to influence decision-making.⁵ There are several tactics to consider. Anchoring is a process where the solution is thrown out and then people react to that versus some other option. Frame the question (or in this case the solution) to meet needs and desires. Present a realistic cost-benefit analysis of ideas as to why one location is better than another.⁶ Benchmarking other organisations is a classic way. For most companies, the 'perfect' location does not exist. The more important question is: where can BC be the most effective?

Benchmark ... But carefully

'We need a benchmark!' is a frequent battle cry from the corporate boardroom. It is heard so often that no one seems to think much about it anymore. Are there any downsides to benchmarking one company with another? Actually, there are a few:

- *Inappropriate imitation:* When a company decides to measure against a market leader, it can end up as a carbon copy. If that is what is required and/or it makes the best sense for the company, then it is a good decision. Often, however, the benchmarking occurs and no one ever asks whether it is the right strategy for the company.

- *Limiting innovation:* When a company only wants to be like the others, it can really limit how the world is viewed. There is no 'out of the box' thinking; it is very much status quo.
- *Encouraging complacency and arrogance:* If one is as good or very close to the benchmarked companies, then one can become complacent. This can result in failure to see opportunities and challenges for programme and process improvement.

The question that should be asked when doing a benchmark is: 'Is this right for us?'

Rethink one's plans

Years ago, BC plans started out with a combination of Word documents and Excel spreadsheets. Then they progressed to relational databases and became detailed plans with a tremendous amount of information. At present, there is a trend for programmes that go back to their roots, so to speak. How does one compare these radically different planning structures?

- *Old ways of doing things:*
 - reams of detail, lots of data;
 - held in a relational database;
 - complicated databases and dense plans;
 - special training to learn how to use and how to maintain.
- *New plans and planning:*
 - slim, easy to maintain and update;
 - what is needed and nothing more;
 - simplicity is the key with fewer training and management requirements;
 - easy administration.

If an executive sponsor says that a plan needs to be done differently, more simply, less time, how should it be done? For example, EMS Solutions has a very large retail client who needed to do a BIA. They

were not willing to do one in the traditional sense, namely, detailed questionnaires with follow-up interviews and a large detailed report. They wanted something relatively simple, understanding that indeed some issues might not adequately surface. Should EM's Solutions have told its 'if you don't do a traditional BIA then it is not worth it'? No — it opted for another way of providing something similar. It worked with the client to develop the right list of players, got them into a room, had a deep and broad conversation on financial impact, legal and reputational risk if activities were not performed and from that a list of business processes and time sensitivities was developed. That document was then vetted with the same group of players and that was the foundation of the BC planning effort.

Traditional plans note how many desk spaces, phones, laptops and other critical equipment is necessary and yet many BC plans now say: 'work from home'. If that is the plan, and indeed for 90–95 per cent of the likely incidents and risks that is indeed what will happen, does it make sense to continue to build plans for events that have a very unlikely chance of happening?

It is understood that companies that are regulated by organisations such as the Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council have less flexibility. Nevertheless even those organisations can develop more streamlined plans and approaches.

Try something new

At times of disaster, most people do not pull out their plans straight away. People fall back to their level of training, which is likely to be their last exercise. Ideally, they do not have to fall back so far that they hit the floor. What does this mean for the programme? Exercises are as important as — and perhaps even more important than — detailed plans. At a bare minimum, there should be one table-top exercise a

year; ideally, it should be one every six months.

If one does one 'big' exercise a year, the other exercise could be a simple activity that could be completed in 30–60 minutes with surprisingly little planning. A simple exercise, informally known as 'ripped from the news' that could be done every few months as follows:

- Open any newspaper (or a news reporting web page) and flip or scroll from story to story. At least half the pages will likely contain a potential narrative for the exercise.
- Select an exercise narrative that fits the location's risk profile.
- Spend 30–60 minutes with the team:
 - Review the narrative and frame it as though it happened at one's location. It could be a broken water main, cut fibre cable, workplace shooting, fire, flood, cyber-attack. A host of options awaits.
 - Conduct an incident assessment process.
 - Develop an incident action plan (think of this as a to-do list for the event).
 - Discuss the BC approach.
 - Ask the team to pull out their plans and discuss their response.
 - Note what is missing in the plans and set a time for revision.
- Exercise complete!

Manage information creatively

That most companies do not activate their plans very often is both good news and bad news. The good news is that incidents do not happen very often. The bad news is that people are not well practised and the many things that they need to do in an event have not been well considered. When people set up their command centre (physically or virtually), they often have not thought about and do not know

how to manage the information that will be presented. When the phone starts ringing and information is flowing into the team, how will that information be captured, logged, tracked and reported?

Common ways to manage information in a command centre include:

- paper forms;
- status boards (paper or white boards);
- projected information via an LCD projector; and
- purchased application tools.

It is worth asking someone who has not been in the situation before and does not see the limitations in exploring alternative methods. The author recently discussed this with a new person from the IT department at a client company. She thought about it, took some notes and within four hours had set up a SharePoint site that included a logging tool and virtual status boards. The next day, it took just ten minutes to train the exercise teams and they were off and running with no problems or issues.

It is important to make sure that the solutions are covered in the disaster recovery plan and check on licence constraints.

Engage with the digital world

Social media channels are becoming mainstream worldwide — even in corporations. Communicating via social media is often the fastest way to find out what is going on, especially at times of crisis. BC managers must be comfortable and confident in the use of social media. Anyone who does not know much about this important communication tool needs to learn. Become social media savvy: stakeholders and the general public are; everybody in the company should be too.

Anyone unfamiliar with Twitter should start by getting themselves a personal account and following people, companies and groups. This is what contemporary

media organisations do to find breaking news stories. Simply key an appropriate keyword into Twitter's search box, for example, 'Boston' or 'Boston bombing' or 'Boston Marathon', and then follow the information. Yes, some of the information will be wrong and completely falsified; however, the majority of it will be spot-on, real-time reporting of an incident.

Does the company have a social media presence and a process and plan for pushing out information on those platforms? Twitter has become the 'go-to-place' for emergency information.⁷ It takes practice to 'speak' succinctly in 140 characters. Communication scripts including Twitter messages are essential.

Market the programme

Many people think of a BC programme as simply a programme that is used at times of disaster. When budgets tighten, how does one say that one's programme has value beyond disaster readiness? Shift one's thinking and think of BC as a product that needs to be marketed strategically within the organisation and provides value beyond what people normally think. Just like the launch of any product, the value is promoted and the reason it is there and is needed is continually reinforced. If people only talk about their programme as something great 'when bad things happen,' they are selling themselves short. If asked, 'When was our last disaster (what have you done for us lately)?', what is the reply? For many, the answer might be 'never' or 'ten years ago'.

The following list presents ten key benefits that BC managers can use to market their programme:

- regulatory compliance by meeting regulatory or audit requirements;
- improved efficiencies;
- orientation of new staff and ongoing training;

- competitive advantage by demonstrating competence to clients and customers;
- brand and reputation protection;
- risk identification;
- operational improvement;
- knowledge capture by documented business processes and critical operating procedures;
- increased robustness by strengthening the organisation; and
- cost savings.

TEN WAYS TO 'RE' A CAREER

In what follows, the paper describes eight ways to 'RE' a career.

Think of oneself as a business

Just like people need to market their continuity programme, they need to think of themselves as a business and market themselves. Professionals are often caught off guard when there is a business change and their departments are downsized or closed. Do not be caught flat-footed. Think of these questions in terms of how one views oneself:

- What is the product?
- What does one have to sell?
- How is one currently marketing oneself? Is it effective?
- Create a positive online presence. A LinkedIn page is a personal website. Make sure it is complete and really promotes all skills and abilities.
- Think of oneself as a brand to be built.

This is not about presenting oneself in a boastful manner. Rather, it is about having a clear understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses and what one has to contribute.

Gain clarity: 'Know thyself'

Knowing and being honest about strengths and weaknesses is crucial. It is

also important to understand what one personally needs to get out of one's job (besides a pay cheque). What kind of work is meaningful?

The present author started her career in the field of nursing; one of her personal drivers is making a difference in the world. She wants to feel like the work she is doing really helps people and can make a difference in their lives. BC and emergency management ensure just that on a daily basis. On days when the author feels frustrated and overwhelmed, she goes back to that very principle of what she does and what is important to her, and really helps her gain perspective.

Knowing oneself also means that one understands the best conditions to work. What is the ideal work environment? Is one an independent self-starter? Does one like to work alone? In a team? Both? Does one need to have regular contact with one's boss and peers? As work continues to evolve, and in some cases be completely remote from offices, this becomes critical for everyone to know about themselves.

The better one knows what one likes and needs, the more one will recognise a trend, realise an opportunity or identify the right job when one sees it.

Connect

People know each other (and by dint, their work) through connections. It is worth taking time to make real connections. It is easy to have 500 friends on Facebook or 1,000 connections on LinkedIn, but how many of those do you really know? Take time to listen and acknowledge colleagues and build a real relationship.

Having said that, it is important to use social media to stay connected and to help build a personal brand. For example, it is worth spending time building a solid, thoughtful LinkedIn page. It should be viewed as a personal website because that is what it is. One's profile should include

slides from recent talks, links to articles one has written. Join groups and participate in conversations, especially when one can offer helpful information.

Join and participate in professional associations, local planning groups and also national and international ones with local chapters in one's location and area of expertise. Join a committee, contribute at meetings, offer to speak or write for their newsletter. Attend conferences in order to build knowledge and connections. There are many excellent ones to choose from, including groups such as DRJ, WCDM, CI, CPM and RIMS.

Be generous with time and knowledge

What goes around comes around. People are rewarded when they create and participate.

What can one do? Write, speak, help, and volunteer whenever possible. This can be done in person or even in the virtual world. For example, if it is possible to respond to a question posed on LinkedIn, then do.

Be creative; be willing to fail

Emergency management and BC are incredibly creative fields. Professionals get to do such interesting things and learn about so many fascinating topics. Do things to get the creative juices flowing and do things for fun. If one's dream is not out there, then consider the options. Can it be made at the company one is at? Maybe, one needs to start one's own business. Maybe the solution is to start a new project or venture. Be creative and think outside of that old box.

Failure has a bad rap and fear of it can often lead people to freeze. Failure is simply when one tries something and it does not work out. No blame, no guilt. Imagine life if nobody ever tried anything new. People would have never taken their first steps.

What if something is tried and it does not work out this time? Take a moment and reflect on the effort, what was done and what did not work. Then take another moment to do the most important part: take a deep breath, get up and keep going. Determination is what separates winners from everyone else. History is full of great 'failures' — consider Babe Ruth, Thomas Edison, Abe Lincoln, Albert Einstein and Steve Jobs just to name a few.⁸ They tried, they failed and they tried again.

Learn

This rapidly changing world means that people have to be constantly learning. Formal and informal education is critical for professional and personal life. There are many free learning opportunities on the internet; for example, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has a great library of independent study classes that anyone can take and receive a certificate of attendance.⁹ There are also major universities providing high-quality and free education online through massive open online courses (MOOCs)¹⁰ as well as through Apple's iTunes U service.

People have an opportunity to do things differently every day. Some great advice is to:

- Revisit what one think one knows. It might be a surprise to find that it has changed.
- Learn something new every single day. It can be a word, a concept, a skill or a piece of information, a language or a game. Learning is the staff of life.

Deliver

The present author grew up in a restaurant family. She worked hard and played hard and she was taught many skills that have helped her professionally to this day. One of the most important things she learned is

to deliver. If one says one is going to do something, do it. There are no excuses.

Delivering can help to get people to seek out one's work and skills:

- Be known as a person who gets things done.
- Make things happen. Look at things differently and try another way.
- Create outcomes that people seek.

Be proactive

Finally, it is critically important to be proactive as no one else will do any of this. Actively pursue interests. Make it part of the daily goals. To that end, have clear written goals and personal plans and look at them regularly. Years ago, that advice was given to the author when she started her business. She has kept her annual goals in writing going back to 1982 and occasionally goes back and takes a look at them. It is great for her to see where she was, what she wanted to do and where she is now.

Sit down and create a strategic plan for life and act with a sense of urgency. One of the things the author learned when she was a nurse is that time goes by very quickly. Years speed by and at the end of their life people often wonder what happened.¹¹ It is gone in the blink of an eye.

THREE QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

In closing, consider the appropriate response to the following situations, were they to happen tomorrow:

- (1) The CEO says: 'I want you to do recovery "differently"' (this can mean less expensive, less complicated, more options). 'Come back in a week with suggestions on how it can be done'. How would one do that? What would be the response?

- (2) She then asks: 'How could BC be "routine business", not a stand-alone plan or function?' How would one do that?

- (3) As she leaves, she says: 'And be prepared to discuss the ways your programme adds value to the business, not just at time of disaster'. What should one say?

Now, it could be said that she is asking to cut corners in the programme. But this is not the case. The challenge of management is allocating and prioritising constrained resources in an organisation and funding the programme means not funding something else. The task is to demonstrate that one's own projects are more important than something else.

So what does one do? Focus on priorities and results. Be results oriented. If people think in results, the way to get the result is not that important.¹² What are the creative and non-traditional ways to achieve the required outcomes? A measure of success is the ability to recover after an incident. Focus on those incidents that are likely to happen. 'We don't plan for the "worst-case scenario" ... 'there isn't enough money or time in the world for that'. Focus one's time on the things that are likely to happen and do those well ... and if the unthinkable occurs, those plans will be modified and revised in real time.

CHANGE IS COMING

This industry, the world, everyone; everything is changing. One theory is that it is always best to reinvent oneself or one's programme before someone else does it. Embrace change and learn to be a change master. Time is a-wasting. This is the time to think differently!

'If we did all the things we are capable

of doing, we would literally astound ourselves.’ (Thomas Edison)

REFERENCES

- (1) Allianz (2014) ‘Risk barometer survey’, available at: <http://www.agcs.allianz.com/about-us/news/press-riskbarometer-2014/> (accessed 9th June, 2014).
- (2) GlobalChange.gov (undated) ‘Climate change impacts in the United States — highlights’, US National Climate Assessment, US Global Change Research Program, available at: <http://www.globalchange.gov/> (accessed 9th June, 2014).
- (3) Symantec Corporation (2014) ‘Symantec Corporation internet security threat report 2014’, Volume 19, available at: http://www.symantec.com/content/en/us/enterprise/other_resources/b-istr_main_report_v19_21291018.en-us.pdf (accessed 9th June, 2014).
- (4) Herbane, B. (2010) ‘The evolution of business continuity management: A historical review of practices and drivers’, *Business History*, Vol. 52, No. 6, pp. 978–1002.
- (5) Owen, J. (2010) ‘How to influence decisions’, available at: <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/how-to-influence-decisions/> (accessed 9th June, 2014).
- (7) Goldsmith, M. (2007) ‘How to influence decision makers’, available at: <http://blogs.hbr.org/2007/11/how-to-influence-decision-make/> (accessed 9th June, 2014).
- (7) Kleinberg, E. (2014) ‘Emergency managers stress need for social media hurricane volunteers’, available at: <http://www.mypalmbeachpost.com/news/weather/hurricanes/emergency-managers-stress-need-for-social-media-hu/nfxZw/> (accessed 9th June, 2014).
- (8) Michalko, M. (2013) ‘Famous failures’, available at: http://www.creativitypost.com/psychology/famous_failures (accessed 9th June, 2014).
- (9) FEMA (2012) FEMA Independent Study Program’, available at: <http://training.fema.gov/is/> (accessed 9th June, 2014).
- (10) Pappano, L. (2012) ‘The year of the MOOC’, *New York Times*, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/m2qdtw6>; see also <http://www.mooc-list.com/> (accessed 9th June, 2014).
- (11) Digital News Aggregate (2014) ‘Nurse reveals the top 5 regrets people make on their deathbed’, available at: <http://www.topinfopost.com/2014/05/12/top-5-regrets-people-make-on-their-deathbed> (accessed 9th June, 2014).
- (12) Thum, M. (undated) ‘The mindset to getting things done: think result-oriented’, available at: <http://www.myrkothum.com/the-mindset-to-getting-things-done-think-result-oriented/> (accessed 9th June, 2014).