



A Business Continuity Plan (BCP) without Telework is not a BCP

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Whether you call it telework or distributed work, you need it if you want to have a comprehensive BCP. Dealing with the inability of personnel to access the workplace is an often neglected part of BCPs. A recent study found that less than half of the organizations polled had incorporated telework into their plans. Employers go to great lengths to back up their data and infrastructure, but the inability of workers to get to either their offices or other assigned alternate work locations whether they are destroyed, quarantined, or the staff itself is quarantined, will have a devastating impact on an organization's ability to survive.

Attitudes towards telework need to change from regarding it as a take it or leave it employee flexible work type benefit to embracing telework as a survival tool. Telework must no longer be used for employees and activities that have satisfied a lengthy laundry list of criteria, but it must be assumed that all employees and activities can be teleworked unless reasons are provided as to why not. In other words, turn present commonly followed methodology on its head.

We need to follow the lead of employers who have established a policy that requires personnel from every department to regularly work from an alternate location, whether from home, a supplier's office, a library, or a telework center as practice in case some event makes their traditional offices unusable or inaccessible.

While telework is only a part of a BCP, it is invaluable on an ongoing basis and has a positive affect on an organization's bottom line. A telework program pays for itself in reduced real estate needs, increased employee productivity, improved employee retention, reduced absenteeism, and the opportunity to recruit from a larger talent pool. In 2004 at AT&T, for example, almost one third (30%) of all their management employees worked full time outside of the traditional office. The company realized an estimated \$180 million in bottom line benefits.

Suggested Guidelines

Buy in from senior management is critical. They should take the lead by appointing a working group to plan your telework program and put it into action, develop policies and procedures for implementation, monitor and evaluate progress, and assess the need for refinements that will make the strategy more effective. Representatives from HR, IT, your BC team, legal, real estate, senior management, and the employees themselves should be included. The working group will then:

- Appoint a telework program manager.
- Develop a written list of policies and procedures.

- Put together a written contract outlining the responsibilities of both the organization and the employees.
- Establish a training program to help managers understand how to manage a remote workforce.
- Determine what, if any, equipment will be provided by the organization and what recurring expenses will be covered by the employer or the employee such as broadband access, a second phone line for business calls, ergonomic furniture, lighting etc.
- Establish security levels that must be maintained such as virus protection, firewalls, backup, lockable file drawers, etc.
- With IT taking the lead, evaluate remote access systems and/or software. Make sure you have capacity and/or licenses to accommodate all of the users that might need to have simultaneous access to your network.
- Determine how voice communications will be handled. Calls to your office may need to be rerouted in the event of a total system outage.
- Review other collaboration technologies such as web based file access, spread sheet and word document sharing, and web based video conferencing.
- Establish protocols on when and how to advise employees not to come to the office and what alternative measures to take.
- Establish contact directories and systems, between colleagues and with family members to ensure on-going communication between them, wherever they are.
- Establish practice and simulation programs for both managers and employees, and then practice, simulate, practice, simulate and practice again.
- Put together a home office health and safety checklist. Issues to address should include proper seating, lighting, electrical capacities, smoke detectors, etc. Include FEMA's survival kit guidelines that include supplies of water, canned and dried foods, prescription medicines, radios, batteries etc. (<http://www.fema.gov/library/emfdwtr.shtm>).
- Establish goals and objectives for both the program and its participants.

We recommend the use of laptop computers for teleworkers. Although they cost more than a desktop, they eliminate the need to have a separate computer at home and the office. When replacing desktop computers, do so with laptops.

With the flu season quickly approaching, the capability to telework can eliminate another cause of disruption within an organization - the rapid spread of infection throughout the workforce. There is a term called 'presenteeism'. It is, in a sense, the opposite of absenteeism, where an employee does not come to work. With presenteeism, an employee with an ailment such as the flu goes to the office and spreads his or her infection among coworkers. Such employees should be counseled to take advantage of the telework option and remain home. And, let them know that they will not be charged sick leave when working from home in this situation.

We can not emphasize enough the need to practice through use. This is a key factor to having a successful telework program available when needed. There is no better way to do this than to have a program in place and use it regularly.