Business Continuity Planning for all by Nazhalina Nazri

Organization in Malaysia are suceptible to unpredictable events which disrupt their operations, resulting in a loss of productivity, a loss of revenue, and potentially a loss of professional reputation. Any number of unforeseen circumstances can have the potential to impact massively upon business.

The recent earthquake in Taiwan, have disrupted internet connections in several countries in Asia, Malaysia included. People were bewildered on the inability to access the internet. Announcement by local ISPs and NISER then, confirmed that the earthquake off Taiwan's southern coast had damaged undersea cables, cutting off phone and Internet service on Wednesday to parts of China, South Korea, Japan, Southeast Asia and the United States.

When information exchanges are halted, users will realise how dependent their work and lives are to internet connections. We also realized how dependent Malaysian internet connections are, to the undersea cables in Taiwan. Although internet connection speed has improved gradually, other backup solutions should be put in place to minimize the impact of such event to ensure business continuity.

Our dependencies to technology are fast turning into our single point of failure. Without any proper and tested business continuity plan we are putting our business and even our lives at risk.

All threats be it internal, or external, should be considered when drafting a business continuity plan. No threat is too big or too small or too outrageous to be considered. During risk assessment exercise, all probable threat, vulnerabilities and risk should be taken into account. Then, only we can determine the magnitude of the impacts of such incidents. Is it just a disruptions, or has it escalated into a crisis?

Threat probability can be divided into 2 categories which are natural threat and man made threat. Earthquake, tsunami, epidemics, lightning, blizzard, wildfire and haze are all examples of natural threat. While, collapse of building, fire, supply chain problems, act of terrorism, riots, communication satellite failure and power failures are all man made threat,

Business continuity plans are not just for service providers, although these companies are the one, who should already have one plan installed. It is not just for big companies, with millions of revenues (read: millions to loose?). It is for every business out there. Every business should have their own business continuity plan. The only difference is the depth of the plan. Some may have much simpler plan such as evacuation plan during fire while some may have extensive and more complicated plan which may comprises of having a recovery site which include SLAs with vendors.

Business continuity planning comprises, of several process in order to have a holistic plan. The most important part in Business Continuity Planning is getting the top management support.   Business continuity planners must obtain the support by highlighting the importance of Business Continuity Planning, and the risk that the organization will face, if no such plan is in place. This step is crucial in order to ensure that enough resources are allocated for business continuity planning activities.

Business continuity policy must be established in all organization. The policy will encompass the role and responsibility of all employees regarding business continuity. All employees must be aware of the policy.

This will be followed by Risk Assessment and Analysis and Business Impact Analysis. These 2 activities will determine all important business functions in an organizations, what are the risk that they face, and how will it effect the organizations if one of the main business functions fail.

Developing business continuity strategies is also an integral part of business continuity plan. This is where business continuity planners will select appropriate strategies for continuity and recovery of business processes, critical functions and operations. The strategies will cover steps that will be invoked in time of crisis and how to reduce and mitigate the risk. It will also outline the role and responsibilities of all employees in the strategy.

No strategies are useful if they were not tested. Business continuity plan has to be tested in order to gauge how effective are the strategies implemented. Near real life simulation exercise must be done in order to see how the employee react during crisis, and how well all the continuity and recovery steps works. In order to meet the dynamics of change in business, the BC plan has to be updated, tested and employee are to be informed and make aware of the updates. Any new threat must be included along with their mitigation and recovery steps.

However, it seems that a lot of companies are under the impression that if they successfully design and implement a business continuity plan, they have done their duty in protecting their stakeholders' interests. Business continuity is not just a one time activity. It is an ongoing program; in fact it is a continuous way of life especially in our workplace.