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A Marriage of Craft and Technology

The knowledge of craft and technology can, when applied in concert, further the planning efforts of businesses and enhance the effectiveness of planners.

by Don Saracco



The emergence of the Year 2000 contingency, the increasing dependency of business on information technology, and the globalization of markets and business operations, as well as the ever-increasing pace of change all provide impetus for the development of contingency planning and business continuity program development. No business is untouched by these factors today, and no business is completely sheltered from disasters of natural and human origin. As a result, there is more interest in plans and programs than ever before as well as more interest in knowing how to best accomplish planning and program development.

Creating efficient business continuity programs involves a careful assessment of resources and strategies. What knowledge, skills, and tools are best suited to support planning and program development? Who should be brought on board to manage the task? What are the core competencies that would be required of an effective business continuity practitioner given the scope of your business? Should an outside consultant be retained, and if so, who would be most appropriate?

To search out competent planning professionals, one must first understand that there are basic tenets that lie at the root of contingency planning. Ensuring that planners are equipped with this knowledge not only guarantees success for your company, but advances the whole theory behind continuity management.

The Craft

The first key to effective programming lies in the realm of knowledge. One way of understanding knowledge is to divide it into knowledge that is developed out of experience and observation and knowledge that is developed out of a rigorous research process. The former can be called “craft knowledge” and the latter can be called technology.

Craft knowledge is acquired by a process of trial and error or by studying under an accomplished craftsman. Craft knowledge is more art than science, though it may find its roots in related science and technology. Craft knowledge emerges from the pursuit of discovery, from the artful or accidental combination of things, and from the pressure to solve novel problems. This type of knowledge does not produce absolutely predictable and consistent outcomes. Sometimes, it fails to produce the effects intended at all because there are variables in a novel situation that were not addressed by the craft. Sometimes, it produces new outcomes of elegant beauty that were previously unknown.

Contingency planning and business continuity program development depend heavily on craft knowledge. The artful conduct of meetings; effective communication, collaboration, and cooperation with diverse people in complex relationships; skillful facilitation of information gathering processes—all of these and more represent the craft side of planning and program development. The really bad news is that there is currently no education or training system available that can provide a path to expertise in this side of the planning business. Only informal apprenticeship is available.

Comprehensive planning and program development includes a variety of elements that, when integrated, provide optimum support for business continuity. These elements include life safety assurance through emergency response; facilities and work area recovery or relocation, resumption of business processes; and recovery of integrated information technology systems. Each of these elements have champions in organizations and specialists among planners. Effective integration into a total program is a craft. It does not reside in software or textbooks. It emerges from the artful conduct of processes involving humans in the context of their work. It requires craft knowledge.

The Technology

Planning and program development also involves technology. The chief difference between craft knowledge and technology is that when technology is applied, it produces a predictable outcome regardless of who is using it. It seldom surprises us with unwanted outcomes or delightful discoveries. Furthermore, no knowledge about how it works is necessary for someone to apply it. A practitioner needs only to know where it can and should be applied.

Software represents technology, and there are certainly appropriate applications for software in planning and program development. Word processing and database applications have become absolutely essential tools for planners. Web-based technology is rapidly emerging as another requirement as organizations become more virtual and geographically dispersed. Technology viewed as the infrastructure of planning and program development. It is the dependable platform on which the craftsman gives form and substance to plans and programs. It is the connective tissue between common practice and special circumstance. Without it, planning and program development would be merely interesting exercises in creativity with none of the necessary guarantees of continuity for the business.

Technology is dependable and powerful when a practitioner deals with familiar problems. It is easily transferable and therefore more attractive to those who seek fast, inexpensive methods. However, when technology is allied with craft knowledge, the result is a brand of program development and maintenance that is far superior to either of the approaches alone.

The Tools

The primary technologies that are necessary for effective contingency planning are knowledge management and decision support tools. Knowledge management is an emerging phenomenon in organizations around the world. The new business economics of talent and technology that are replacing the old economics of money and markets demands that operations be knowledge based. Intellectual capital is replacing plants and equipment as the essence of value in organizations. How to manage knowledge has become the central challenge facing those accountable for organization performance.

In today's corporate setting, what is known is much more important than what is owned. This inspires new ways of viewing the relationships between employees and

employees. One might even suggest that these roles would be no longer viable in the foreseeable future, as distributed ownership among the workers in a company becomes the norm. In any event, filling a company with knowledgeable employees is still of no value if the knowledge resides only within each individual.

Knowledge management, then, may be defined as the capture and transfer of knowledge that contributes to the organization's strategic and tactical achievements. Knowledge management is crucial to business continuity program development since risk assessment and business impact analyses depend on knowing how the organization gets things done. Most of that knowledge resides in the people who do the work and at the first level of supervision.

How to capture and transfer that knowledge remains a problem to be solved in most organizations. The answers seem to reside in some sort of information technology. In truth, the answers lie in a combination of information technology and organization designs that foster effective communication among workers.

There are many paths being explored toward the development of such systems. They range from supply chain management systems to elaborate automated "help" systems coupled with cognitive analysis (a craft) to extract knowledge from experts. They include the redesign of workspace and policies that discourage knowledge hoarding.

It remains clear at this point that approaches consisting of only technology are likely to fall short of the goal of real knowledge management. A system itself will be unable to extract knowledge from a person if that person perceives the process as a security threat. Knowledge management takes the system and integrates it into the total design of the organization; as a result, people tend to value *sharing and learning* on a par with *advancement and earning*. Indeed, craft and technology lie at the very heart of optimal knowledge management in business.

Decision Support

Decision support tools are also both craft- and technology-based. Databases containing risk assessment information and loss estimation models are essential to business impact analysis in large organizations and useful in smaller ones. Risk assessment and loss estimation can involve a huge number of data points related to hazard occurrence frequencies, financial vulnerability, stakeholder

analysis, and resource inventories. For organization leaders to make informed decisions regarding priorities and the deployment of resources during response and recovery planning, they must have access to this sort of information. These tools are also of growing importance during events as well as during planning. Accurate, current information can dramatically improve the quality and efficiency in communication during the rapidly emerging reality of a crisis.

There is also a craft side to decision support. Regardless of the extent of an organization's technological decision support, there will always be a crucial role for humans. The technology does not, after all, make the decisions; humans do. And very often, they make them in concert with others who have their own sources of information. It is this human interaction and decision process that requires support from the realm of craft.

Often, organizations will secure the services of consultants to participate as facilitators or fair witnesses during planning, exercises, and events. Their more objective view of the situation and skills at facilitating effective communication can be invaluable to informed decision-makers. Consultants, like technology, don't make decisions. They provide support that helps to optimize decisions. And they do it with craft knowledge, in emergent situations and in training, imparting that wisdom to decision-makers well ahead of a full-blown disaster.

A Harmonious Blend

Fully effective and comprehensive program development and maintenance, then, is a blend of art and science—craft and technology. This, of course, implies that efficient practitioners must be comfortable in either realm. The need for such a wide range of competencies suggests that a team may ultimately be more effective than an individual. If the practitioner is strong in knowledge about technology, the necessary craft knowledge can come from partners and team members.

Organizations, people, and the communities in which they reside will continue to rely on the competence of business continuity professionals. They should be up to this increasingly important challenge by arming themselves with a well-rounded knowledge of what to do and how to do it. ■

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