Disaster Recovery - Foundation Pillars

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Abstract: *A robust business continuity plan is necessary to run our business operations smoothly. It not only protects the organization's activities in case of any natural disasters but may also come in handy in case of major service disruptions. Effective disaster recovery planning and practice need continuous efforts from different team members. It requires cross-functional effort from different technical teams and project management skills to coordinate the work as per the management's objective. Let us talk about the foundation pillars for making your Disaster Recovery strategy successful and productive.*

Keywords: Disaster Recovery, Team Collaboration, Business Continuity, Disaster Recovery Planning

1. Discussion

This article talks about the various aspects involved in the disaster recovery planning process.

2. Methods

Project Management, Disaster Recovery/ Business Continuity planning.

3. Results/Conclusion

It is not possible to document and execute an effective Disaster Recovery strategy without the valuable contribution from the different technical and project team members. It is essential to coordinate all the efforts and execute the plan as per the documented test processes.

4. Article

The Disaster Recovery planning and coordination is a reasonably complex task for an organization. It requires extensive efforts from different teams to come up with a plan that may be complicated but should have a detailed step-by-step execution process.

Once we understand the reach and range of the risks to an organization's business-critical functions, we need to evaluate its current ability to mitigate those risks. To do that, we need to break down the different aspects of the organization into multiple layers that we should review separately to see how they could be used to mitigate specific risks.

The below article provides the essential pillars like making the right choices, training, and supporting activities like raising awareness that is necessary for the planning and execution phases of disaster recovery.

5. In-house or Outsource

One of the essential decision to make is whether an organization should do In-house development or engage a partner to plan the initiative.

For many organizations, their primary area of expertise is not Disaster recovery planning. Whether to create a disaster recovery site in-house or to outsource disaster recovery is a fundamental decision that we should make when creating a disaster recovery strategy. The in-house approach may be tempting, with the assumption that the work related to DR can involve only existing staff. Unfortunately, experience shows that in-house disaster recovery is more likely to fail than outsourced DR services. Many enterprises are now outsourcing their IT disaster recovery functions, both to further protect their data centers from total failure and, in some cases, to save money and increase efficiencies. A consultant can act as a facilitator whenever it is appropriate and will encourage in house team's competence, confidence, and commitment.

Organizations serious about business continuity frequently use consultants for some or all of the business continuity project lifecycle: risk analysis, business impact analysis, business continuity strategy, plan design, implementation, testing, and plan audit. The consultant will concentrate on two-way communication, developing an attack plan, accumulating and analyzing data, solution finding, and managing his or her side of the project. The technical support consultant or skilled resource pursues the implementation while will define the project plan, constructs requirement specifications, describes the required solution, and advises on implementation.

If we choose to outsource, it is always a good idea to ensure the quality of service our business continuity/disaster recovery programs provide by establishing service-level agreements (SLAs) with the provider. SLAs are essential tools to ensure that the services you obtain are acceptable. Having an SLA is vital for the provider and the customer. It is a contract that sets clear expectations for both parties, and benefits go both ways. The parties in the SLA may cover many items a few of themare listed below:
- What is the end product
- The metrics to be satisfied (e.g., the time frame needed to provide services, the percent of successful vs. unsuccessful delivery of service).
- The method of monitoring and reporting service delivery
- Remedies for failure to satisfy SLA requirements

6. How to select a consultant

How do you pick a good consultant? Asking for references may help, but many consultancy contracts contain

confidentiality agreements and the consultant may not be able to divulge appropriate clients' names. Therefore, the best way is to make sure the consultant has relevant qualifications and profile in business continuity. Why risk your whole business at its most critical time by employing someone whose effectiveness cannot be determined until it is too late? When a consultant is shortlisted, we should scrutinize his qualifications.

We need to make sure that a disaster recovery consultant is suited for our environment. We should focus on below areas for selecting a suitable partner:
- We should choose an outside expert who has experience in developing and implementing a DRP plan for multiple organizations
- We should define our objective and what we want to achieve with this partnership
- Create a formal project and form a committee to plan, monitor, and search for a provider.
- Select qualified vendors and create a request for proposal
- Review, evaluate and compare proposals
- Make the final selection

In addition, the selection criteria mentioned above we should look for excellent references and real-world experience demonstrating successful management of a DR event. The business continuity consultant needs to be able to translate business requirements into balanced and cost-effective DR solutions. A decent vendor will have business continuity plans for the whole spread of their business. In the process of selection, we need to ask direct and specific questions like, "What pre-defined strategies do you have in place concerning the products and services we receive from you for responding to the loss of critical resources including workplace, workforce, your third-party vendors, and your application systems?"

In case we decide to build our Disaster recovery strategy in-house, it becomes critical to train our staff. In addition to the technical training on new technologies, we should teach our team on a few aspects, which are essential to the DRP plan. Practices that we often missed during the planning process are listed below.

7. Recommended Trainings

Business Impact Analysis
Business impact analysis (BIA) is a systematic process to determine and evaluate the potential effects of an interruption to critical business operations because of a disaster, accident, or emergency. The BIA training will help the team to identify the operational and financial impacts resulting from the disruption of business functions and processes.

Risk evaluation and control
Risk evaluation training will help the team to determine the significance of risks to the university operations and then to decide whether to accept a specific threat or take action to prevent or minimize it. To evaluate risks, it is worthwhile ranking them once identified. It can be done by considering the consequence and probability of each risk.

Incident Management
Incident management is an area of IT Service Management (ITSM) that involves returning service to normal as quickly as possible after an incident, in a way that has little to no negative impact on the operations. Incident Management training will help the team to formulate an incident action plan, which is an organized course of events that addresses all phases of incident control within a specified time. An incident action plan is necessary to effect successful outcomes in any situation, especially emergency operations on time.

Developing and Implementing DRP/ECP
This training will help the team to contribute to the development and implementation of a disaster recovery plan. This training will help all team members to institute a successful program that requires stakeholders to maintain a clear understanding of post-disaster roles, responsibilities, and objectives. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities are the foundation to identify opportunities, foster partnerships, and optimize necessary resources.

Maintaining and exercising ECP
Many organizations struggle to maintain their DRP's. It is primarily because the core organizational skill is not disaster recovery. We develop our plans as a project and then neglected to become outdated and ineffective. It is essential to have a documented procedure. Still, it is equally important to keep it up to date and exercise it at regular intervals so that if the times comes, we can minimize the impact by successful execution.

Public relations and crisis communication
When an emergency occurs, the need to communicate is immediate. A vital component of the preparedness program is the crisis communications plan, and this training will help the team to prepare one. A university administration must be able to respond promptly, accurately, and confidently during an emergency in the hours and days that follow.

Soft skills
Soft skills are indicative of employee ability to problem solve, a measure of reliability, and leadership potential. This training will equip the team on skills like leadership, project management, assertive, presentation, and analytical skills, which will help them to coordinate internally and with external parties. Individual Team leads will perform a skill gap analysis to establish what additional skills are required. It helps to identify suitable internal and external training opportunities.

Team Awareness
We should develop an awareness campaign that includes information such as why we need to work on this program, the importance of business continuity planning and disaster recovery, and definitions of key terms so everyone in the organization is speaking the same language. The awareness campaign should have essential information like who is involved in business continuity planning/disaster recovery activities, what an organization is doing to protect itself from various events, and its emergency response procedures. It should also include how it affects its employees/support staff like how a DR event may affect employees, what to do

before/during/after the event, who to contact, where to go, how to communicate with internal and external teams involved.

To develop a successful awareness campaign, the DRP team should get relevant inputs from the employees as they have a lot of operational information, and they are the critical contributors for the design and implementation of a business continuity plan. We should decide on the format and content of the awareness campaign based on the data collected from the survey, not by our opinions. To ensure we get correct data, we must ask relevant questions in the study.

Once the DRP team is satisfied with the inputs received and thinks that they have relevant data, they should work with the HR (Human Resource) Department to develop an awareness campaign.

The value of a Disaster Recovery or Business Continuity Plan is the ability to react to a threat or event swiftly and efficiently. It can be done when a department has informed staff, disaster supplies, and planned procedures. The recovery plan must provide initial and ongoing employee training. Skills are required in the reconstruction and salvage phases of the recovery process. The initial training can be accomplished through professional seminars, special in-house educational programs, the wise use of consultants and vendors, and individual study tailored to the needs of your department. A minimal amount of training is necessary for employees on how to act in the event of a disaster. In the workshop and training team can use print material like Billboard, newsletter, flyers, and handbills and can also upload content on their intranet and inform all employees using department mailing lists.

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