How To:

Business Continuity Planning Basics for Higher Ed

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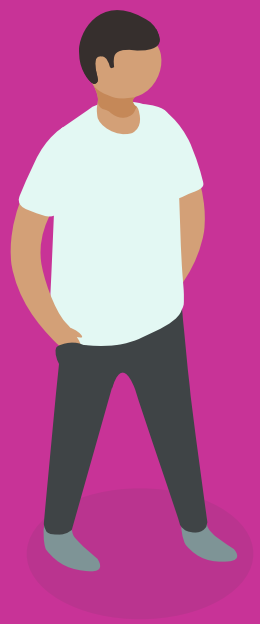

Chapter One:

What Is Continuity Planning And Why It Is Important In Higher Ed?

There are going to be events such as natural disasters, technology failures, and terrorism that cause temporary shutdowns or suspensions in business. A business continuity plan aims to anticipate those threats by creating a plan of action to help an organization prepare for and survive the event. The goal of continuity planning is to ensure that while the business operations might be suspended, customers are still being served and losses are minimized.

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Business continuity planning is different from a disaster recovery plan, or even a disaster contingency recovery plan. A recovery plan is a reactive response to disasters while continuity planning is a proactive response, focusing on eliminating or reducing the impact of potential disasters before they happen.

For example, after being hit by a tornado, a business will devise a game plan on how to open its doors again in a disaster recovery plan. In a continuity plan, the business will focus on how they can prepare for future tornado strikes and how to remain functioning after a tornado hits.

“ The goal of continuity planning in higher education is to continue or quickly resume essential functions for your administrative, educational, and research needs. ”

In higher education, there are more than just profit margins and product lines to consider as part of a continuity plan. It should also include education and research needs and how those will be continued during a crisis. The goal of continuity planning in higher education is to continue or quickly resume critical functions for your administrative, educational, and research needs.

Chapter Two:

Department-Based Approach To Continuity Planning

General continuity planning across a university or college is an important first step, but it should not be the final step. As part of a general continuity plan, a university should cover broad concerns like campus security and communication while each department should work on individual continuity plans.

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WEBINAR: Implementing Department-Driven Higher Education Continuity Planning

While some direction from the university can be helpful as a starting point, each department has very specific needs and concerns. What works for one department isn't going to be universally true for others. The English department might be fine working with textbooks and online documents, but how does the biology department provide lab credits for students who are unable to be in a lab? Professors and faculty in each department need to work together to create a continuity plan that is custom fit to their department's needs.

To start your academic business continuity plan, you should consider the main hurdles in getting continuity plans in place and how you can overcome those problems. Often, these are cultural problems within your department or university, so you might have to start helping your peers understand the importance of a continuity plan in order to reach your goal.

Chapter Three:

Basic Elements Of A Continuity Plan

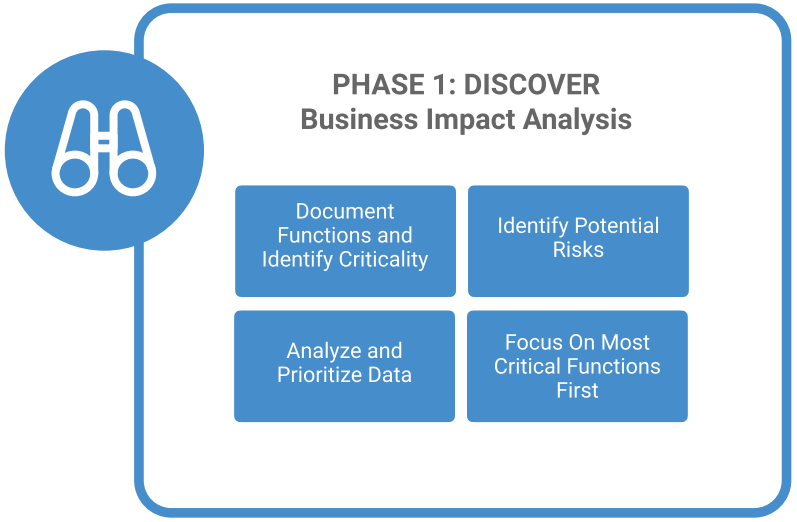
Whether you're creating a continuity plan for your university or your department, the steps are the same.

1. **Discovery**
2. **Definition**
3. **Development**
4. **Demonstration**

In each phase, your goal is to provide peace of mind for your faculty, staff, and students. With a successful plan, you can make sure everyone is informed and well-rehearsed in what actions they need to take in case of an emergency.

In this phase, your major focus is researching your department to pinpoint critical and non-critical functions. One way to do this research is through a Business Impact Analysis (BIA).

The BIA helps you discover the potential loss during an adverse event and identifies regional risks like hurricane, flooding, or earthquake. It also locates local risks like servers that are not backed up. From here, you can start to determine your objectives for your continuity plan. We'll discuss the BIA in chapter four.



After you understand which parts of your department are the most crucial, the definition phase focuses on recovery and mitigation of potential losses. These strategies help you understand what needs to be done in the case of an adverse event. This can include the loss of facilities, data, people, supplies, computing environments, and classrooms.

Continuity planning is preventive planning. You should consider strategies that will help eliminate or mitigate potential losses. You should also use this step to identify specific actions of how you will recover from any remaining risks that are not mitigated or eliminated.

In the third phase of the process, you start creating your business continuity plan. There are five steps that can break down the process to make it easier.

Respond

The emergency management phase of your plan, "respond" is focused entirely on surviving the emergency. This is about human safety and making sure your team, faculty, staff, and students are safe. Things like evacuating your building(s), initial communication, and working with first responders are included in this step.

Relocate

If your normal location is unavailable or unusable, this step focuses on determining alternate locations for you to get work done. This can include moving to an online learning environment or using alternate locations around you to use as your new place of operations. The location can be both physical and digital, but the arrangements should be made prior to any emergency situation.

Recover

In this step, you start to get back to business. Even though there is an emergency situation, the staff gets acclimated to their new locations and work environments and performs their normal functions. The computing environment is restored, and if anything is unavailable, workarounds are provided. In this step of planning, you establish how key processes and activities are prepared.

Return

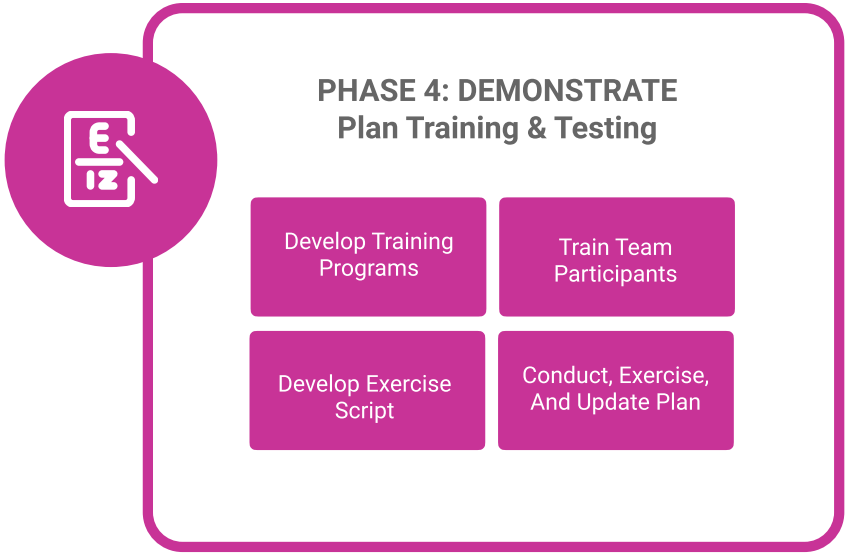
Once the emergency situation is resolved, this step is transferring your activities back to your standard location and processes. Depending on the emergency situation, this phase may take a few days or may extend to weeks or even months.

Resume

This step works on getting back to business during an emergency situation. Essential employees conduct their functions, gain access to computing environments, data is current, and your planned critical business activities are occurring. The most important part of this step is to make it happen as quickly as possible with little interruption.

Your plan shouldn't only be theoretical. You need to see your continuity plan in practice. One of the biggest parts of practicing and reviewing your plan is revising and improving it. No plan is perfect, and through this step you're able to find those errors to be addressed and fixed.

This entire process should be cyclical because your department needs are continually growing and changing. With each iteration of the process, you don't have to start fresh and work from nothing. Instead, you can use your existing plan and start to add and modify as needed to fit your needs.



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Continuity Program Methodology for Higher Ed

Chapter Four:

Identifying And Prioritizing Critical Functions And Applications

As part of your discovery phase, you should identify and prioritize critical functions and applications. Without a firm grasp of what is most important and critical, there will be issues in developing your continuity plan.

At most campuses, there is already an expert on-site who knows and understands what is happening and can quickly help identify the key aspects that are critical.

By including key players on campus with the identification and discovery process of continuity planning, you also give them a setting where they can buy into the program and start building a community of support for your project. By doing this, you're giving them a voice of input about what is necessary or critical, which helps them feel more invested in establishing the full plan.

If you are unable to locate key figures in your department or university, you can also choose to use a business impact analysis (BIA). This is a systematic process of interviews, forms, and questionnaires that are used to determine and evaluate the potential effects of a disaster, accident, or emergency.

While using a BIA is a potential solution, it's not always the best answer. Most organizations can not provide the information required for a BIA, and it often only confirms (or falsifies) critical functions rather than identifying those functions.

The BIA process is very thorough and time-consuming. If done correctly, it'll include research and interviews throughout your entire department and college. Not only does it take a lot of time and resources to finish the BIA process, but it should be done by a third party or guided software. The third-party provides an unbiased view of your system to show the truth behind the most critical functions. When you do your own BIA, there is potential for implicit biases and leading questions to be included in your BIA which can significantly modify the results.

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WEBINAR: Critical Functions: A fast-track approach

If you are dealing with just the basics, a BIA will provide you with information that you might not need. While BIA's are powerful tools that can help you build a continuity plan, they are not necessary in all cases.

The best way to identify critical functions is through research and interviews. An important part of this identification process is making sure those you speak to understand the difference between a function being necessary and critical. All functions are necessary on your campus; however, only some of them are critical. Having a cafeteria or food court is necessary for when the campus is open so faculty, staff, and students are able to eat, but in an emergency those same services might not be critical.

" All functions are necessary on your campus; however, only some of them are critical. "

Chapter Five:
Developing Recovery Strategies

Creating a recovery strategy as part of your continuity plan can be difficult, because it's not always easy to generalize your response. With each prospective threat, it can feel like you have to create a unique response, but it doesn't have to be that complicated. Here are a few ideas you can consider when developing your own strategy.

Think Outside the Box

Traditional or typical solutions aren't always the best solutions. Just because they work for other departments or universities, does not mean they'll work for you. Often, you need to craft your own solution. This requires a mix of creativity and common sense. Sometimes the simplest solution is the best, even if it's not the most common.

Infrastructure and Support

While it can be important to consider research and education as part of your plan, don't forget about what makes it all happen. These things can often be overlooked in your daily work, but are so important that they should be some of the first critical aspects you should look into when developing your continuity plan.

A Plan That Can Bend

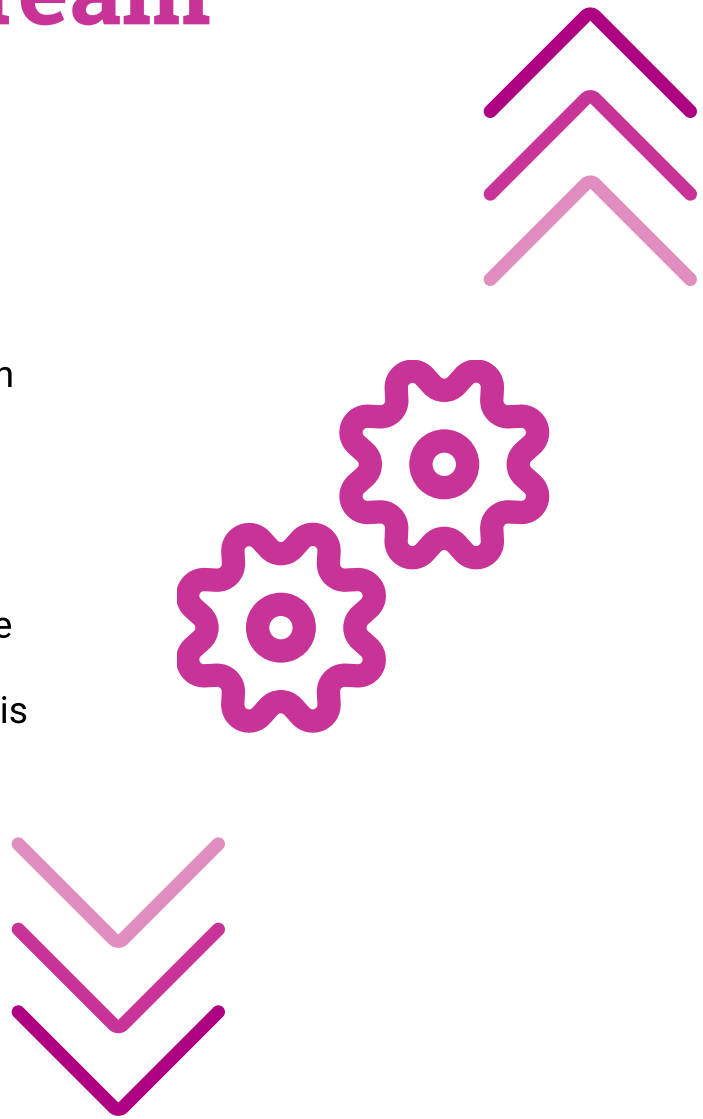
You should always have a plan of attack you can follow when times get hard. Your plan is a trusted place of comfort, but it does require some malleability to meet the problem at hand. Your plan should provide direction, but not be too restrictive that you are unable to adapt as needed.

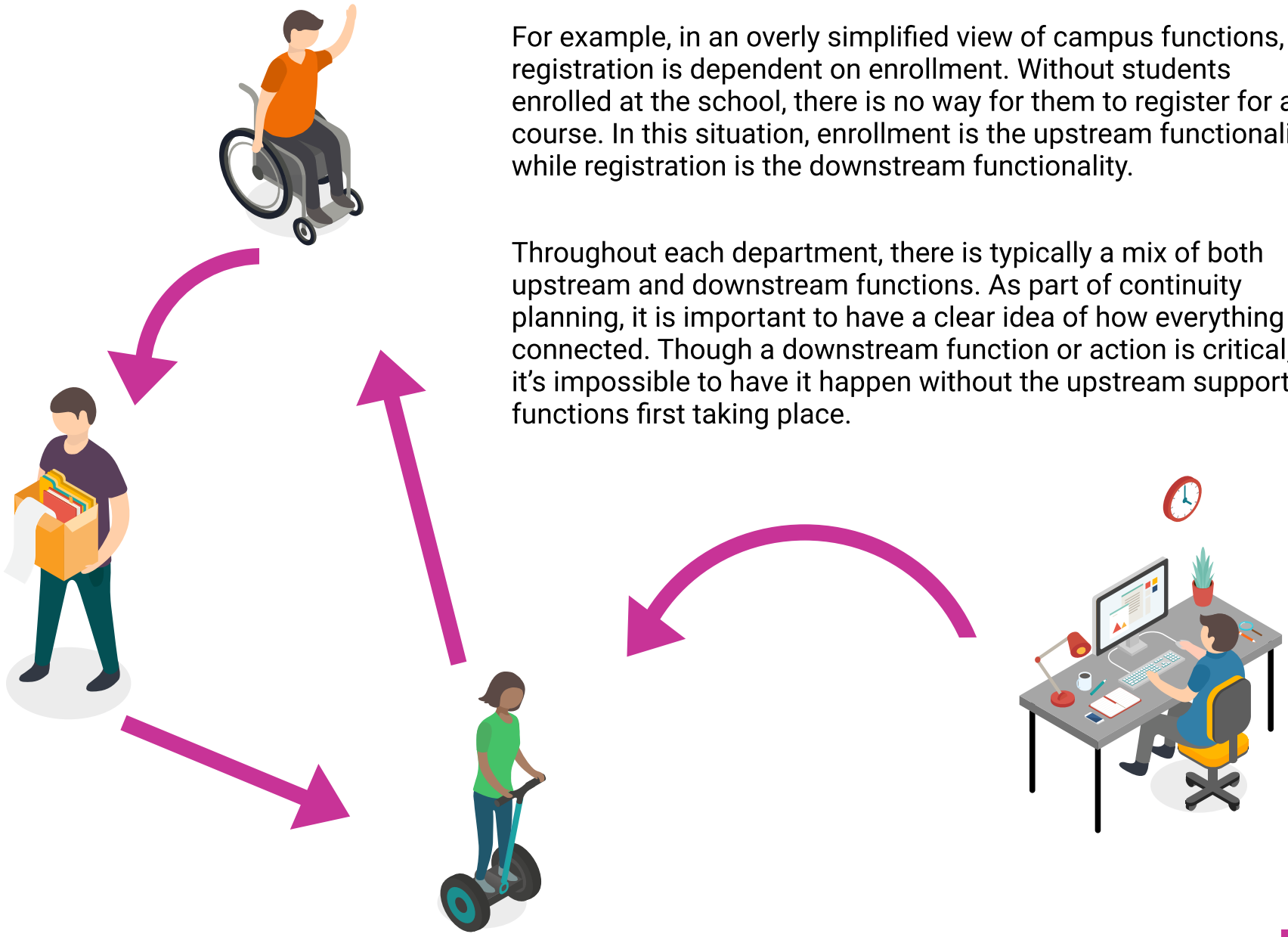
Chapter Six:

Upstream And Downstream Dependencies

When working on your continuity plan, you have to consider upstream and downstream dependencies of functions. This might be limited to your department, but it happens frequently in higher education that upstream and downstream are shared across departments.

Very rarely in higher education are functions or applications isolated or independent. At times, it can be tricky to navigate the web of bureaucracy to see how everything is connected, but in continuity planning, it is essential to identify how each function is related.





For example, in an overly simplified view of campus functions, registration is dependent on enrollment. Without students enrolled at the school, there is no way for them to register for a course. In this situation, enrollment is the upstream functionality, while registration is the downstream functionality.

Throughout each department, there is typically a mix of both upstream and downstream functions. As part of continuity planning, it is important to have a clear idea of how everything is connected. Though a downstream function or action is critical, it's impossible to have it happen without the upstream support functions first taking place.

Chapter Seven:
Training Department Staff

Faculty and staff should be made aware of your finished continuity plan and the key role they play. The only way they're going to learn is through training, and you're responsible for that training. While your training might be mandatory to attend, it is not mandatory for them to listen or learn.

Professional developments are renowned for being dull and boring, an accepted form of torture to work in higher education. Because of disengaging activities, long monotone lectures, and mismanaged breakout groups, professional development shows how teachers can be the worst students.

Here are a few ways you can make your training better, so your hard work in developing a continuity plan can be accepted and implemented.

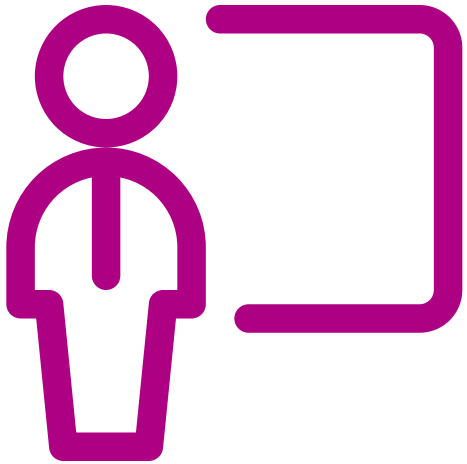
Faculty and Staff Are Experienced Professionals

You are presenting to a group of highly educated individuals with advanced degrees in their fields. Just by their degrees alone, the people in your room have spent thousands of hours in classrooms as students, not to mention the thousands of hours they have spent in front of a classroom. They know education, training, and teaching, and they can smell a boring, ill-prepared, unimportant training within the first minutes of you starting.

Keep your message succinct and to the point. If you don't need to use an entire hour of training, don't use it. Very few people will ever get upset by a meeting ending early.

Don't use PowerPoint karaoke. While it is great to use multimedia as part of any training or class, you should never read your slides word for word. Your audience is literate and can read the slides themselves. Use your slide deck to accent or emphasize what you are saying. Slides are a great place to put outlined bullet points to organize your discussion.

Remember that while your audience is highly educated and has years of experience, they have a much different experience than you do when it comes to continuity planning. For most of them, this will be the first time they have heard of it, and they have no foundational knowledge to build from. You will have to consider how to teach the new concept without making them feel stupid or overwhelmed.



Express Importance

Chances are, your training will be held a few days before the first day of class. People attending your training are worried and concerned about setting up their syllabi, classroom enrollment, lesson plans, rubrics, and other start of the semester stresses. They are worried about making sure the first day of school goes smoothly. Continuity planning isn't on their radar and is not something they consider important.

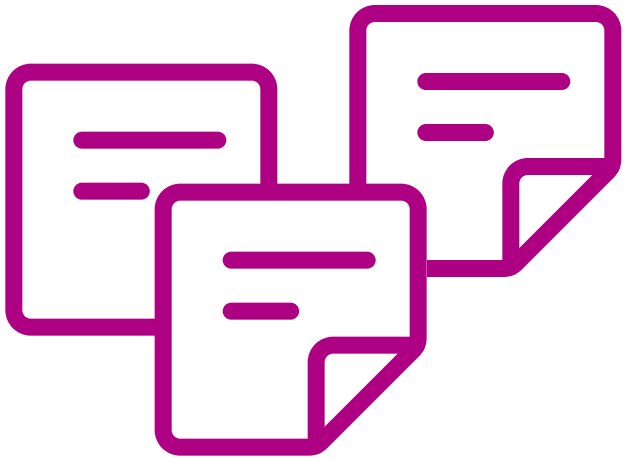
If you want your class to be invested, you have to show them first why it is important. They might not say it to your face when you're talking, but inside they're asking, "Why does this even matter? When are we ever going to use this?"

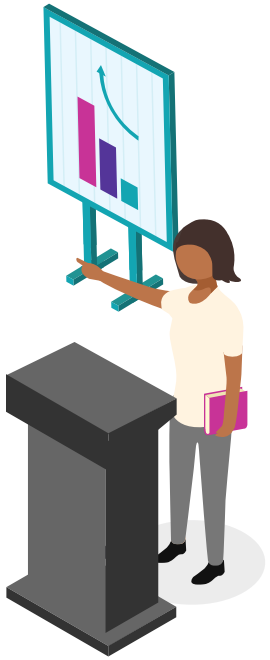
A major part of your training should not only be the responsibilities and actions that are part of your plan, but also the importance of a continuity plan and the risks of not having one. Using straightforward terms like, "You can still receive a paycheck and continue to accomplish the mission of education and research" will help grab your audience's attention and increase their investment in your training.

Model Effective Instruction

Everyone knows relevance, engagement, and student-centered instruction are more effective. So why are you lecturing for an hour straight with boring generic PowerPoint slides? Gamification and other methods to make interactive and engaging education are a great place to start.

A lesson plan that addresses the strengths of different learning styles is imperative to keep the attention and focus of your course, as there is always a wide variety of students and learning styles in any group of people. Catering to all types of learning styles can better help your message be understood and implemented.





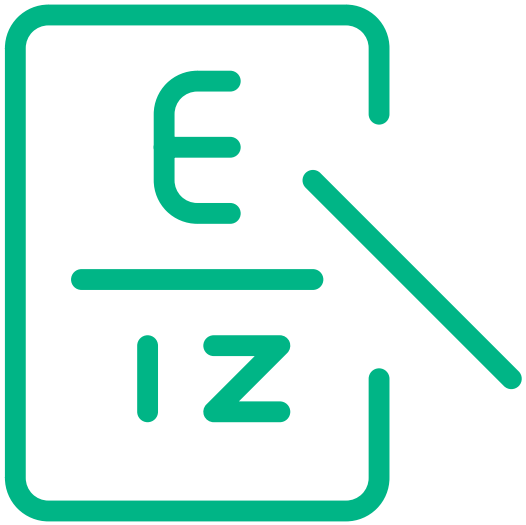
Differentiate

Your first training should never be your last. Continuity plans are growing and living documents that change as the needs of your university and/or department grow. As you guide the professional development, be aware that people attending come with a wide variety of experience. Some might have been with you in your first year when you debuted continuity planning, while others might be new and uninitiated. You should always allow for ways to acknowledge the expertise in the room and build time into your presentation to integrate and use that expertise.

Include Assessment

A common question in higher education from students is, “Will this be on the test?” They know that if they aren’t going to be tested on it and don’t have to prove they were listening, they don’t have to listen. The same thing happens in professional development.

Not only does assessment hold the student accountable for what they should have learned, but it is also useful for teaching them the important information they need to know. Assessment determines whether or not the goals of your training are being met and if the training was successful.



Chapter Eight:

Exercising And Maintaining Continuity Plans

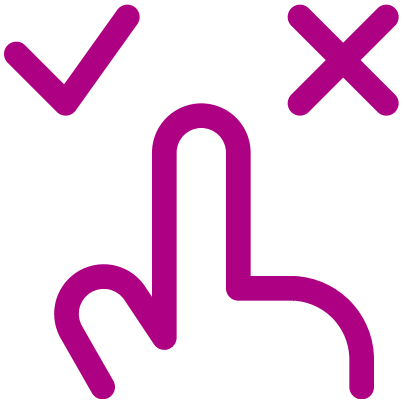
The final goal of continuity planning is to make sure critical functions continue during and after a significant event. To make sure the plan is viable once created, you should also work to maintain, conduct, and document a continuity testing, training, and exercise program. No matter how nice your continuity plan looks, you won't know how effective it is until you test it.

One of the best ways to exercise and maintain your continuity plan is through tabletop exercises. As part of the exercise, your team runs through a potential scenario to determine how well your plan helps you respond to the event.

When you hold your tabletop exercise, here are eight steps you should follow to get the most out of the exercise.

1. Set Goals

There's a lot to do before you hold the exercise. The first step is to establish what you want to achieve in your test. You might want to evaluate the overall viability of your plan or focus on specific aspects like testing the built-in redundancies. This gives you direction to work towards in your exercise and helps determine the rest of the steps.



2. Select Functions of Your Plan

A key part of the exercises is testing smaller sections of your plan more often, rather than trying to do expansive testing. Keep it simple in your first few exercises and focus on smaller functions. When you select a function of your plan, keep in mind other services it is interconnected with. Sometimes what appears initially to be a simple task can become very complex.

3. Select Participants

Start by deciding who is going to be the facilitator. While it might be tempting to always use the plan administrator, it can be useful to consider alternates. You can also consider team leaders, their backups, other team members, and even senior and executive management members as part of the exercise.

4. Establish Ground Rules

Before the exercise begins, ground rules are necessary to create a solid testing environment. Make sure the rules place no fault or blame. The purpose of the exercise is to focus on problem-solving. Once the rules are put in place, it should be clear to all participants there will be no further instructions given. If there are any unanswered questions throughout the exercise, those should be addressed and documented later in the plan in step eight.

5. Develop The Scenario

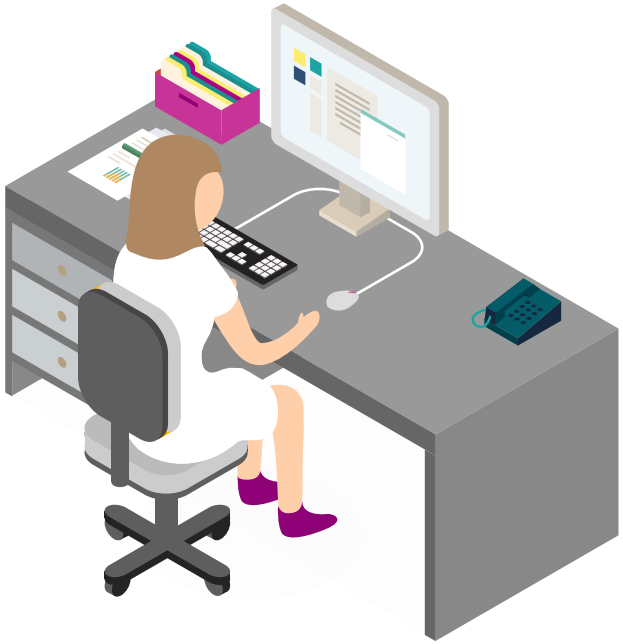
The most important part of the exercise is the fictional event. Think about your environment, location, region, and past disasters that have hit the area. The scenario should be feasible as well as something that can be recovered from. Extreme things like a nuclear attack aren't a reasonable option.

6. Confirm Assumptions

As part of your rules and scenario, you have to make certain assumptions. These are typically associated with the availability of items like cellular networks, facilities, and the internet. To make the most of your exercise, and to make sure it is realistic, you need to double-check and confirm the assumptions you have made. If during your research you discover your assumptions were wrong, adjust the exercise to match your discovery.

7. Conduct the Exercise

After preparing and building the tabletop exercise, it's time to make it happen. Start by assembling the group and introducing the facilitator, monitors, and record keepers. Go over the ground rules, scenario, and assumptions and answer any questions the group might have.



8. Document Post Mortem

Once the exercise is finished, stop the event and have the recordkeepers share any information they've recorded. Add in any missing details, but do not remove or edit any information. Once the records are correct, discuss what went well and what didn't with your participants. Documenting successes as well as failures gives you an important starting point for how you can maintain and improve your continuity plan in the future.

Next Steps:

Implementing What You've Learned

Get started by gathering resources to support your efforts, identifying the most critical departments to begin with, and locate a centralized, cloud-accessible location to store your continuity plans as you begin working on them.

Train department leaders on continuity planning and help them begin their department plans starting with critical functions and applications, continuing on to upstream and downstream dependencies, and on through recovery strategies, training, and exercising.

A Tool Tailored To Help You

Kuali Ready is a continuity planning suite designed specifically for the needs and operations of higher ed including academic and research continuity planning.

Kuali Ready provides an easy way to create and manage a robust set of continuity plans tailored for higher ed in one place with minimal training required from the continuity plan manager. While also providing robust reporting and communication tools in the same place. To learn more about how Kuali Ready can help your institution's continuity planning efforts contact us at resilience@kuali.co.

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