Business as Usual?

Planning for fire, floods, IT and power failures, and increasingly the threat of terrorist activity, are now an established part of Disaster Management and Recovery Planning for any organization. Boards of Directors recognise a need understand (and mitigate) the risks to business, and their obligations to shareholders.

Business Continuity Planning places great emphasis upon assurances that, in the event of an unprecedented threat or disaster, systems will continue to deliver the services required. Incident Management Programmes develop and set in place contingencies to militate against the failure of one piece of the complex network of dependencies – customer/supplier/compliance – regardless of the impact.

Those responsible for ascertaining technical vulnerabilities carry out rigorous assessments to evaluate risk to key assets, implement avoidance procedures and identify the threshold for recovery.

Comprehensive asset management systems will include inventories as one tool to identify the business impact (capital, revenue and consequential losses) in the event of a crisis; critical dependency analysis can inform which assets should be insured.

Those responsible for implementing strategies for protecting against risk are facing increasing workloads developing contingency plans for IT, suppliers and customers. However, whilst, for example, the terrorist threat is defined as 'High Threat/Low Likelihood', empirical evidence indicates that Workplace Stress carries 'High Threat/High Likelihood'.

To strive for 'Business as Usual', therefore also requires an understanding of how a disaster will impact upon employees and affect their abilities to function effectively in a crisis situation. The inventory of hardware should be complemented by a stress audit; employees who are already not coping with workplace pressures are not only at risk of developing stress-related disorders, but could present a serious business liability in the event of a disaster. The business impact of loss of investment in staff is often overlooked and frequently under-rated.

Since the publication of the **'Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations'** (1999), all organisations with five or more employees have had a legal duty to conduct regular risk assessments of workplace hazards, including psychosocial hazards such as stress; these assessments should be used to address such hazards.

In November 2004, The Health and Safety Executive are due to publish the new Management Standards for work-related stress. Henceforth, employers will increasingly face legal action if they fail to address key aspects of stress in the workplace.

It therefore stands to reason that risk assessments for workplace stress need to be incorporated into 'Business as Usual' planning to ensure legal compliance, particularly if Workplace Recovery requires the movement of employees to an alternative work setting.