

**MAXIMISE YOUR POTENTIAL**

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Does your business have a continuity plan?

NATURAL DISASTERS are on the rise all over the world. Political unrest, economic dips, hackers, power failures — any number of events can disrupt the functioning of your business and cost you enormous amounts of money, possibly ending it altogether. Are you prepared for such disruptions? Have you put a contingency plan in place for your business operation in the event of any or all of these?

Arwa Aburawa of the Green Prophet reports that 276 disasters have struck the Middle East over the last 25 years, affecting 10 million people. Drought, earthquakes, floods, landslides and sandstorms threaten the Arab region. These can all disrupt networks and threaten food and water supplies. Earthquake threat is something Jordan, Lebanon and Syria must contend with; Saudi Arabia must contend with flooding and Syria has already encountered drought.

The IT firm eHosting DataFort and the Business Continuity Management Institute (BCM) have surveyed the Arab states to determine the impact of such unpredictable events on businesses and to determine how many businesses have contingency plans in place.

The survey found that in just the past year businesses were disrupted a number of times in a variety of ways: network failures caused

business interruptions 45 per cent of the time; power failures 20 per cent of the time; hacking attempts, poor decisions, sabotage and theft cost business owners 11 per cent of the time; and natural disasters affected businesses eight per cent of the time. The recession has also contributed to unforeseen turns in a businesses' operation.

CEO of eHosting DataFort Yasser Zeineldin points to Cyclone Gonu in Oman and the power outage in Sharjah when an undersea cable was cut as examples of the unforeseen events that can affect your organisation at any time. BCM Country Manager Dhiraj Lal was distressed to learn how many companies don't have good planning in place when recent events have caused losses numbering into the many millions.

Close to 70 per cent of organisations in Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, in industries including banking and finance, IT, entertainment and media, gas and oil, manufacturing and retail, don't have a strong continuity plan in place. Executive Insights re-

ports that only 20 per cent of these companies have a robust plan even though over 15 per cent admitted to suffering a business disruption in the past year. IT failures, power failures, application infrastructure failures and site outages were the leading reasons for these disruptions. Twenty-one per cent of the executives surveyed were concerned about natural disasters. Aburawa explains that disaster risk reduction has only recently become a priority in the Middle East. Several countries have begun to form national databases to assess risk during natural disasters and formulate responses. The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) began in 2011 to connect government agencies, civil society organisations and businesses in order to come up with policy and plans.

What are some of the things you should be thinking about?

Alternative work sites and automatic communication with a continuity management team are important reports eHosting DataFort. So is establishing a plan with fire stations, hospitals and police.

Executive Insights gives a complete list of situations that you need to create contingency or business continuity plans for: IT, data, communication and network failures; power failures; human causes such as bad judgment/decisions, hacking, sabotage and theft; natural disasters; denial of access to your physical infrastructure; economic turns; fire; an attack that denies you services; and logistics.

BCM programmes are based on the British standard of best practices for business continuity. Business Continuity International offers a 10-unit learning framework for contingency planning on its website. These 10 learning units include: project initiation and management, risk evaluation and control, business impact analysis, developing business continuity strategies, emergency response and operations, developing and implementing business continuity plans, awareness and training programs, maintaining and exercising business continuity plans, public relations and crisis coordination and coordination with public authorities.

The UNISDR offers the Hyogo Framework for Action on its website. This 10-year plan came out of a 2005 world conference of experts from the member states of the UN. It consists of five priorities: 1) ensuring that disaster risk reduction

45%

of businesses interrupted by network failures

is a national and local priority and that frameworks are developed across all sectors to create engagement and track progress of disaster plans; 2) identifying and monitoring disaster risks and creating early warning plans; 3) disseminating information to the public and educating them in terms of what to do during a disaster; 4) identifying and reducing risk factors that can contribute to disasters and those factors that are would be hazardous after a disaster; 5) strengthening responsiveness among authorities, communities and individuals.

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