



DISCUSSION PAPER

Topic: Executive Command &
Control Issues



1.0 INTRODUCTION

As an organization develops continuity plans that address contingencies that could disrupt time-sensitive operations, questions usually arise about who should command an activated continuity plan and what are their responsibilities. The design and development of a Senior Activation Team (SAT), and its responsibilities for managing a continuity plan, raise many issues that each agency must resolve in the context of how it is organized. This discussion paper contemplates some of the major issues and offers guidance in their resolution. Each organization is unique, and its executives and continuity planners must develop plans that address their needs effectively.

Many organizations are not “blank sheets of paper” when it comes to management of crises and assuring continuity of government because some policies and procedures are already in place. This discussion identifies some of the similarities that link crisis management and emergency response planning to oversight and executive authority for an activated continuity plan. However, the focus is on the nature of the requirements for senior executive command and control of an activated continuity plan.

2.0 FRAMING THE SUBJECT: THE NATURE OF CRISES

Crises can and do affect organizations on a frequent basis. Fortunately, most crises are small in the sense that existing management and supervisory staff can address them in the course of routine operational duties. Some crises can be larger in scale or more seriously threatening in scope. With appropriate escalation of the situation to higher levels of management and executive authority, decisions can be made and implemented to minimize the consequential harm or damage. Again, existing management structure contains the authority, expertise, and capacity to address the situation.

There are some crises that are of sufficient magnitude that senior executives must organize themselves and focus on the situation with more energy than routine procedures permit. Some business activities may be halted and/or some executives re-assigned temporarily so that the crisis can be addressed effectively. Although this level of seriousness suggests assembling and activating a Senior Activation Team, activation of a continuity plan may not be necessary or appropriate because time-critical operations are not at risk directly or immediately.



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For example, an organization that experiences a traumatic incident of criminal violence within its facilities, or an agency that discovers major embezzlement or fraud at a senior level, will face a crisis that requires direct and focused leadership and management – but its field operations may not be affected.

There are some types of crises, however, that threaten the continued operation of time-sensitive activities that are highly valued by the agency, its customers, and the public as a whole. These crises will require the activation of a continuity plan to assure minimum disruption of those activities and operations.

The point of this discussion is to reinforce that an organization should have the ability to transform its senior executive structure from a normal day-to-day structure to a team that can effectively address a wide range of possible crises that it might encounter. The ability of this team to activate a continuity plan when appropriate and to support it with executive command and control authority while it is activated is a necessary requirement for a Senior Activation Team. Some agencies may already have an existing team that may be known as a crisis management, executive, or facility team. These existing team structures can and should be used for continuity planning if they have sufficient command and control authority.

3.0 PHASES OR STAGES OF A CRISIS

Organizations that encounter crises typically experience several different situations chronologically, each of which requires somewhat distinct knowledge, skills, training, and decision-making to minimize harm and damage. The following are stages of a crisis:

1. Observance of threatening conditions or events, becoming aware that a crisis may be commencing, and escalating awareness up the chain of command to an appropriate level of authority;
2. Emergency responses, to minimize loss of lives, injuries to humans and animals, and damage to customers, property, reputation, or public trust;
3. Assessment of damages and, if sufficiently severe, strategic decisions for significant actions to thwart long term damage;
4. Activation of alternate or temporary facility operations to minimize disruptions to valuable operations;
5. Repair or replacement of damaged capabilities; and



6. Migration or return from temporary operations to the long term “permanent” or “normal” environment.

For most crises, which are small, management can undertake these steps as needed within normal capabilities. The larger ones, however, require activation or energizing of the senior executive team or a senior activation team. In the context of a continuity of operations plan, the more valuable and time-sensitive operations will have pre-determined strategies for stage 4 above. The senior activation team will also find itself addressing all disrupted operations requiring stage 4, not just those covered by a continuity plan. Most executives on the SAT will also retain their normal responsibilities for oversight of operations that are not affected by the crisis.

Depending on the nature of the crisis, a senior executive activation team may convene and be involved in stages 1, 2, 3, or 4. This raises questions of how a senior activation team is activated, if it is in fact different from the senior executive team that is normally in charge. Criteria must be established and procedures developed and practiced so that all involved understand how executive authority is transferred or transformed as a crisis unfolds. The scenario of, I'm in charge, should be avoided.

4.0 CRISIS MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS – FOR CONTINUITY PLANS

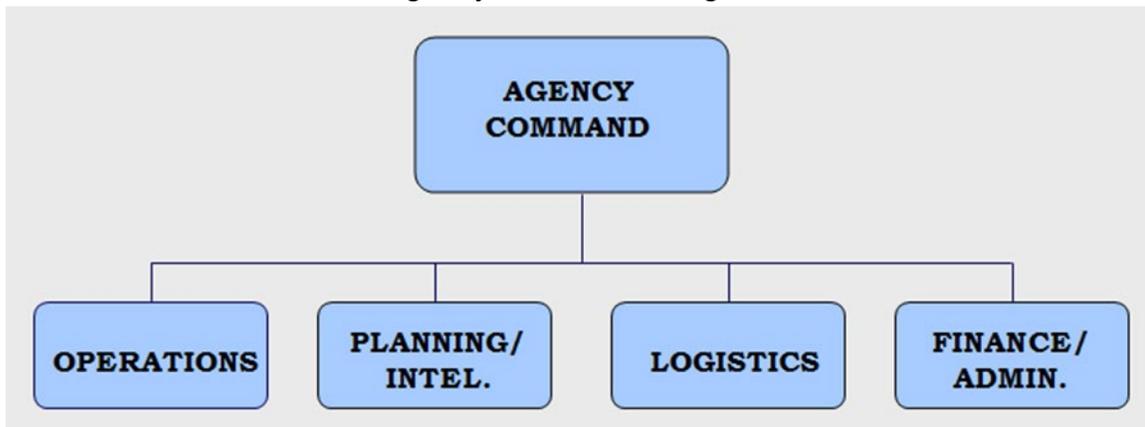
The context in which these requirements are listed is to identify senior level support requirements for those at the field level that are directly responsible for assuring continuity of highly valuable and time-sensitive operations. Further, the normal capability of responsible managers is not always sufficient to address the crisis at hand: the disruptions, or threatened disruptions, require exceptional management and executive decision-making to prioritize resources and re-organize, if necessary, to assure minimum disruptions.

Presumably, a continuity plan for the critical operations is in place that prioritizes resumption efforts, identifies how operations are to be recovered, and anticipates that some resource capabilities may be pre-positioned in anticipation of a disruption. When the continuity plan must be activated, the circumstances at hand do not always match the scenarios employed in planning. Improvisation is required. The plan contemplates the need for changes in command and control structure (delegation of authority). Additionally, senior executive team will want “hands on” management of the situation.

With these circumstances in mind, the following tasks are identified. These tasks are grouped according to the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS)/National Incident

Management System (NIMS) which are based on the Incident Command System (ICS), the type and level of response will ultimately be determined by the type and scope of the disruption.

Agency Command Diagram



Senior Executive Oversight of Crisis Resolution:

1. Provide the overall leadership of the recovery effort, and may chair the SAT;
2. Ensure that higher level authorities, such as a governor or legislative committees, or independently elected boards, are kept appropriately informed;
3. Exercise final oversight over all the activities and decisions taken by subordinate Groups and Teams that carry out the various recovery actions; and
4. May hold or share the final decision authority for declaring a disaster to internal operations (not public disasters) and mobilizing the internal continuity organization as appropriate.

Agency Command: (Operations Chief, or other executive as designated by the leader of the SAT, often reflecting the nature of the crisis; command assignments may shift as a crisis evolves)

1. Accountable for command and control of the incident;
2. Identify and implement strategies for immediate protective measures of all personnel in coordination with the Safety Officer;
3. Confer with external or internal executive management and provide decision support;



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4. Cooperate and coordinate with all first responder agencies (e.g., fire, police, emergency medical);
5. Manage incident resources and allocation of budgetary resources;
6. Authorize release of information to the media;
7. Maintain situational awareness and communications with the recovery team(s);
8. Collaborate with internal or external organizations, both public and private; and
9. Liaison and primary representative for the office of the chief executive on the SAT, in the absence of the senior executive for the agency.

Deputy Agency Command:

1. Serve as the IC in the absence of the Agency Commander (who must sleep some time);
2. Provide oversight of strategies for immediate protective measures of all personnel;
3. Coordinate overall emergency preparedness activities;
4. Coordinate operational activities of the team (In absence of Operations Chief);
5. Provide liaison activities with all members of the SAT and recovery team(s);
6. Support the SAT in all management activities; and
7. Ensure adequate security is implemented.

Liaison:

1. Serves as the liaison between the senior managers of the affected field operations and their recovery teams and the SAT; and
2. Provides status briefings and input to situation reports to the SAT, and conveys resource requests from the field operations.

Operations Section Chief:

1. Cooperate and coordinate with all first responder agencies (e.g., fire, police, emergency medical);
2. Track and monitor employees; establish headcount; assess extent of harm or damage to employees;
3. Provide strategies for internal communications within the organization;



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4. Request contract personnel if necessary to avoid burnout of regular staff;
5. Ensure employees are provided with psychological support and counseling services;
and
6. Coordinate with Legal for Emergency Contact/Next of Kin notification if employees are injured or killed;

Logistics Section Chief:

1. Maintain status information telecommunications line(s) for facilities or other emergency information for staff;
2. Ensure availability of portable cell phones and equipment necessary for use during emergencies;
3. Responsible for initial physical damage assessment and repair mobilization for facilities and internal communications systems;
4. Contact insurance representatives and initiate and manage documentation;
5. Advise on transportation and logistics issues, particularly on shipment of goods or staff movements;
6. Work with business units to coordinate vendor service delivery to backup sites;
7. Make arrangements for meals, refreshments, accommodation, and transportation for key staff *other than* members of the SAT; and
8. Liaison and primary representative for the Administrative/Business Services Division.

Finance Section Chief:

1. Advise on agency's financial and insurance issues;\
2. Establish temporary procedures for purchasing authorization process;
3. Maintain log of all purchases;
4. Track/monitor disaster-related expenses;
5. Provide updates to IC on expenditures and finance issues regarding disruptions;
6. Ensure continuance of salaries and benefits; coordinate crisis-related compensation;
and
7. Liaison and primary representative for the Administration/Finance Division.



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Command Staff – Legal Counsel:

1. Advise on agency's legal issues and interface with external agencies;
2. Review and evaluate disruption/event on issues of liability, regulatory requirements, and contractual obligations;
3. Review and advise regarding responses to media inquiries as needed by public relations team;
4. Coordinate with HR for notification of next-of-kin; and
5. Liaison and primary representative for outside counsel.

Command Staff - Public Information:

1. Protect the image and reputation of the agency following an event;
2. Coordinate local Public Relations activities and determine strategies for communicating with the public;
3. Advise on issues related to members, public, and public relations;
4. Develop media releases and responses;
5. Serve as incident spokesperson, in absence of senior recovery executive;
6. Coordinate with internal/external authorities and spokespersons; and
7. Serve as liaison and primary representative for the Public Affairs/Information Office.

Logistics Section - Information Technology Branch:

1. Advise on issues related to data center operations, e.g., network devices, firewall status, backup capability;
2. Assess damage to computing and networking systems, if any, and coordinate recovery activities;
3. Address all computing security concerns including monitoring of electronic mail and systems;
4. Validate that security software is installed and assess firewall status;
5. Establish Help Desk or Call Center operation as needed;
6. Establish Web-based crisis information site as needed;



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7. Direct emergency switchover process for computing operations; and
8. Serve as liaison and primary representative for the Information Technology Division.

Planning/Intelligence Section Chief:

1. Provide advice and counsel regarding the continuity of operations plan capabilities, readiness levels, strengths and weaknesses with respect to the crisis at hand;
2. Facilitate intelligence gathering and information flow for status briefings and planning vis-à-vis the COOP/COG plan's operations;
3. Serve as liaison between the SAT and the point of contacts (POCs) for plan elements in agency divisions, sections, or branches;
4. Oversee recording secretary and documenting of SAT decisions and actions;
5. Oversee provisioning of the SAT's command center and related operations; and
6. Document and initiate follow-up to after-action recommendations.

Having listed many of the tasks and activities that must be supported to assure that operational efforts to restore resources and resume operations are successful, who assumes responsibility for each task? Several observations may be helpful for answering this question:

- A continuity plan, when it is activated, is rarely in effect for more than a few days, weeks, or possibly months, and it rarely will dominate an entire organization's executive energies when it is activated, so the existing organization structure will remain in place;
- The tasks therefore should be assigned to the executives overseeing the divisions or branches that normally perform these tasks¹;
- In smaller organizations:

¹ The shape or form of the SAT typically reflects the organization structure of the agency itself, at least at the higher levels. This should not be surprising, for the reasons given and recognizing that a single executive heads the agency and ultimately controls all the agency's resources for addressing an internal crisis. When multiple governmental agencies with no constitutional framework for prioritizing themselves (e.g., a public works authority, a municipal fire department, a county department, state agencies, and multiple federal agencies) must coordinate to confront a public disaster, a different but consistent organization structure is necessary. Several protocols have been developed and implemented in various governments throughout the United States for this purpose: *Incident Command System (ICS)*, *Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS)*, and *National Incident Management System (NIMS)*.



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- One executive may hold responsibility for tasks spanning multiple categories, and multi-tasking will be required;
- Some tasks may not be performed routinely at all, and someone must be trained, as part of continuity plan exercises, to do the tasks; and
- “Bench strength” may be short. For example, one person may handle public relations on a quarter-time basis. Members of the senior activation team should identify who must be prepared to “back-fill” the position;
- For any given crisis, one or more substantive areas may be missing their leaders altogether, so every continuity plan should: a) list the tasks above, and b) identify fall-back positions for who should cover each one in the absence of the primary team member.

The scale of the operation will affect the size and scope of the SAT. For example, in a very large organization, the executive director may assemble a stand-alone SAT based on the nature of the crisis. Individuals may be assigned from many divisions to staff the needed tasks. Alternatively, in a small organization, the entire executive team may become the SAT. In such situation, the executive team will then decide who works each 24X7 shift until the crisis becomes less demanding.

5.0 ROLE OF THE CONTINUITY PLANNING OFFICE

When a continuity plan is activated, the responsibility for its execution must reside with the senior level executives who hold the authority to decide issues quickly and act on them expeditiously. On a day-to-day basis, however, the training, testing, and maintenance of a continuity plan will not reside at this level of authority, except perhaps under one senior executive (who holds other responsibilities as well). One or two individuals typically “own” the plan during normal operations. The individuals who participate on the SAT on behalf of the plan thus represent the “owner’s” knowledge about the continuity plan’s operational details.

During a crisis, the inclination of most senior executives is to become involved in the aggressive resolution of the crisis. The desire to know the facts and circumstances facing the staff at the operational level is strong. In an organization that is primarily responsible for business operations involving data processing, however, the amount of detail and complexity of resumption operations can be mind-boggling. The operation of transferring sometimes millions of lines of computer code from one location to another can be exceptionally daunting.



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The technical language and acronyms used by operational level IT staff may be completely foreign to the SAT members, and the opportunity for poor communication is high. The plan representative(s) must strive to balance the information needs in both directions (operations to SAT and vice versa) to assure adequate and appropriate levels of communication (information flow) and trust.

6.0 SCALE OF OPERATION, AND ORGANIZATION CONTEXT

The list of responsibilities just described presumes a particular organization structure that may not be accurate. Every organization is unique, and some responsibilities may be assigned more effectively to different coordinators.

A persistent challenge in delineating responsibilities is to match the “small, independent parts” of the tasks with the scale of the organization. An agency with 300 employees in one location will require a different SAT organization structure than will an agency with 3,000 employees in half a dozen or dozens of locations. To some degree, the scale of the organization may affect how a continuity plan is constructed. If a single, large field office is disrupted, for example, should the executive support for oversight of continuity plan activation and execution be comprised primarily of executives from the field office or from the headquarters? If the team consists of individuals from the field office, it may be lacking in executives with particular skill sets (such as public relations). If the team consists primarily of individuals from headquarters, then the SAT may have little direct and detailed understanding of the operational requirements to restore a field office's disrupted operations.

In many situations, when a crisis occurs that requires activation of a continuity plan, one or more key resource areas have been disrupted – human resources, communication systems, computing systems, access to facilities, or vendor performance failures. Indeed, one formal definition of a disruption to operations is the failure of one or more key resources. Under these circumstances, the executives and managers who are most burdened with addressing the disruptions are those responsible for resources. They are not only needed in the field to restore resources, but also in the command center with the SAT to assess needs and prioritize efforts.

One challenge in staffing a SAT is covering those areas of responsibility where the most detailed knowledge is with the people leading the efforts to resume operations and sustain them under emergency circumstances.



7.0 CONCLUSION

Many of the tasks listed as responsibilities for the senior activation or senior executive team to support a continuity plan are not unique to continuity planning. They are necessary for leading and managing an organization through many types of crises. In fact, if a continuity plan is developed, exercised, and well-maintained, the SAT, during a crisis, can dedicate much of its energy to the functions and operations that are not covered by a continuity plan. If a SAT exists now, and the task lists above are already addressed, then the continuity plan can simply become an additional element of the organization's operations risk management structure. If the SAT does not exist then developing a continuity plan provides an excellent justification for creating a senior activation team.