

## “Human Resources: An important ally in dealing with serious unexpected events”

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The overwhelming majority of employees in Greece list having a sense security at work as a top priority. This helps them not only to maintain their effective performance but also, most importantly, to keep functioning with a clear head under the current adverse circumstances, without being overcome by fear and uncertainty for the future, and of course to support Business Continuity, the job itself and, finally, their own survival within the organization. Employers are now expressing concern for the fact that some employees are beginning to exhibit lower productivity, even a lack of interest for the job itself, perhaps due to lower wages and job insecurity. Employees that feel alienated might function mechanically, feel uninspired, and be inattentive and prone to mistakes and oversights that might cost dearly both to themselves and the business. Cultivating a sense of personal responsibility and commitment in employees is of paramount importance for an organization's smooth operation.

Even though they haven't been through the dramatic situations Greece experiences today, many businesses abroad place particular emphasis on the systematic training of both employees and management so that they will be ready, practically and psychologically, to face future emergencies of all kinds. It is a fact that the systematic instruction and training of employees in early risk recognition and management develops a prevention culture that gradually becomes instilled into the organization's DNA. Its value becomes apparent mainly under adverse circumstances. It is then that the ability to adapt to the new circumstances usually becomes evident, along with the organization's ability to weather a storm. One might argue that all this is fine for other countries but not for Greece, or that in the current situation all this is a luxury - but if not today, then when? In this unpredictable environment, we must at least make sure to identify our weaknesses and take the necessary precautions so as not to sink with all hands. A stitch in time saves nine, as they say; otherwise, we might become front page news or, if the worst comes to the worst, history. We've only to recall recent incidents whose impact ranged from major to fatal for some employees but also for the recovery of the businesses themselves. In other words, it all depends on the business, regardless of size or weight. A smaller business is definitely more exposed to risks compared to a large and healthy one, because it can be a single point of failure. Such a business, therefore, should be even more mindful of these issues: With its own means and the existing organizational infrastructure it can plan, develop and gradually put in place a Business Continuity Management (BCM) system, including ways to inform and train personnel in order to deal with emergencies in terms of crisis management and business continuity.

**The key to the success or failure of the BCM system is workforce: employees are the organization's army. When properly trained, they will march successfully into battle.** At the onset of such a programme, several organizational issues arise. The choice of the right people for key positions, their replacements, as well as the distribution of operational roles concerning the ways to deal with events, crisis management, and the recovery of critical operations are at the top of the list of issues that must be addressed; therefore, relevant policies and processes should be defined. Experience shows that most employees should - and would like to - know their roles early, as well as the level of their involvement in the programme's planning or realization.

Employees and/or teams participating in the development and realization of a Business Continuity plan could also provide excellent ideas and effective solutions. The question of who should be leader has a simple answer: someone who has an overall view of the company, good communication skills and a good relationship with the employees, is influential and a decision-maker, and can operate effectively under pressure. That's asking for Superman/Superwoman, some might say. But we must not forget that 99% is training and hard work and only 1% is talent.

Business Continuity does not deal with contingency plans; these are considered business as usual. Instead, it deals with events with an unpredictable outcome. This is the uncertainty we have to face. Our goal is to be able to take charge of the situation as soon as possible. This is expected from us by all interested parties: clients, shareholders, suppliers, and the public; this is where we're judged. Therefore, **it is necessary for all people within the company to be trained for methodical and coordinated action when crisis strikes.**

In the recovery phase after a major incident or disaster, the organization might have to operate for a long period under unprecedented circumstances. For example, when a fire broke out in the main buildings of an organization, management, Business Continuity teams and employees had to work in different facilities for a while. Their work schedules were modified and their routine changed dramatically. Those involved in critical operations had to work overtime. In extreme cases, this could lead to employees experiencing burnout. Fortunately, the company had already included every eventuality in its recovery plans and had studied and developed practical solutions. If that hadn't been the case, it is doubtful whether the company would have been able to recover and return quickly to its regular workflow.

In the recovery phase, one of the most important issues that the Business Continuity team and the management might have to face is the possibility that some employees might refuse to be actively involved, even if their role is very specific and significant. For example, in the case of a big earthquake, how sure can the management be that employees, or even the members of the Business Continuity team, will stay and support the business instead of rushing to their families? All this clearly demonstrates that one should predict all the human parameters involved in the smooth implementation of the recovery plan after a major disaster. Examples include alternative workplaces, work methods and means of communication; specific team roles and responsibilities, as well as possible replacements; recovery plan testing (simulation exercises); specific budget for overtime work and food; economic change processes (to be implemented in case of an unexpected occurrence); continuous education on Business Continuity issues; and social responsibility actions for staff that might be affected by the occurrence. The preparation of employees for an unpredictable event so that they will be able to cope and continue working under extraordinary circumstances entails training as well as raising awareness. **The more the value and importance of Business Continuity are understood the more likely it is to succeed in the organization.**

Specific needs and demands will dictate the ways and channels through which employees and teams will be approached in order to get the right messages and give feedback. Results should be expected only if a comprehensive plan is prepared and consistently put into effect.

This can include actions such as regularly instructing all employees on matters of Business Continuity preparation both in the organization and at home; regular training of Business Continuity teams in incident management; deciding who should be informed and what plans will be put into effect and in what order, with the participation of the management and testing team, and even critical suppliers; info days with guest speakers including (mainly foreign) company representatives who have managed incidents in their own organizations; and e-learning programmes, newsletters, teasers, and flashes through the organization's intranet concerning Business Continuity issues and instructions.

It should be pointed out that each completed phase in the Business Continuity life cycle contributes to the development and consolidation of a Business Continuity culture. A major factor in this is the phase of the organization's preparation for certification: Each action and process leading the organization towards certification brings involved units closer together, with the common goal of successfully completing the audit and acquiring the certification.

**The closer the organization's different units work together to realize an effective Business Continuity plan, tearing down existing silos, the greater the awareness and consolidation of the Business Continuity culture within the organization.**