The complete guide to creating and implementing a **business recovery plan**

Business recovery plan

(noun)

Outlines the steps and actions you need to take in the event your business operations have been disrupted. A business recovery plan (BRP) directs you on how to recover the critical operations of your specifc business area.

You already know the importance of planning ahead to protect your business in times of distress. A business recovery plan is a critical component of any company's survival strategy, and the fact that you're crafting one demonstrates a high level of commitment to ensuring that your business—and all of its employees—are well-positioned to emerge from a disruption unscathed.

While many recovery plans have saved the day during stressful situations, an equally large number have been ignored or tossed aside.

Why? Neglected recovery plans typically have one thing in common: They're too unwieldy. Too much information is included upfront, and the actionable items—the most crucial elements of the plan—get buried. It's similar to a first-aid manual that puts life-saving instructions on page 37 of a 100-page report! A plan filled with industry jargon and extraneous information always gets left on the shelf. The best business recovery plans (the ones that get used) are concise and focus on clear, executable tasks. In times when clear-headedness is in short supply, a well thought-out plan effciently and seamlessly outlines the actions of key players from the moment a disruption occurs until the moment it's back to business as usual.

2 The parts of a streamlined business recovery plan

Depending on your company's size and structure, there are two ways to handle the creation of a recovery plan:

The first option is to create a separate and complete plan for each business unit. This is the most thorough option, and despite the fact that some actions will be the same in every department (a building evacuation is the same whether you're in finance or human resources), each departmental action plan will look very different.

The second option is to create an all-encompassing business recovery procedure that covers the entire organization, including individual appendices for each business unit.

Either way, you'll want to focus on your most critical departments first, as those will have the most significant impact on your business in the event of a disruption. (If you aren't sure what your most critical departments are, a Business Impact Analysis can help.)

However you decide to create your report, it will need to contain these three components:

1. **Information on how to activate your plan**

2. **Recovery checklists by type of disruption**

3. **Critical supporting information**

**Let's explore each of these areas in more detail.**
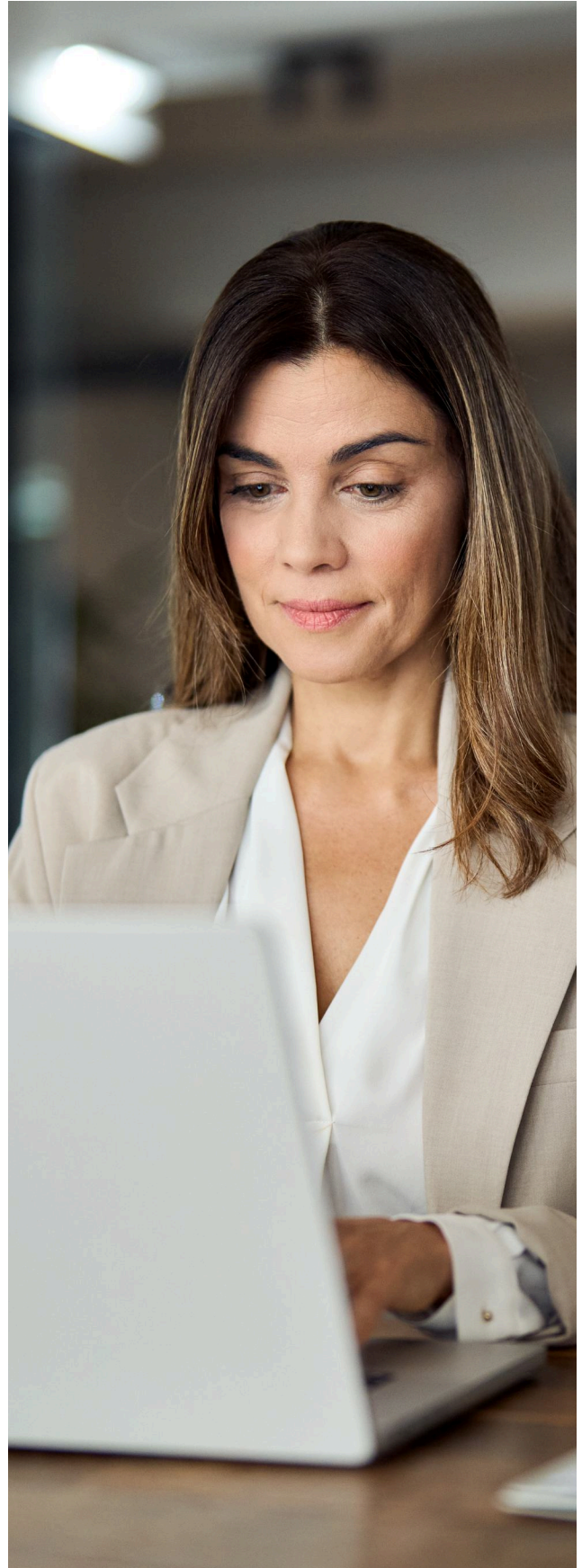
Information on how to activate your plan

No matter what type of disruption occurs, there are certain steps you'll always need to take before jumping into any specific tasks listed in the recovery checklists that follow. Give some consideration to the elements that will ensure the success of any plan you hope to set into motion:

◆ **Who is responsible for business recovery actions? (Name a primary team leader and an alternate team leader.)**

◆ **Who are the members of the core recovery team?**

◆ **What are the individual responsibilities of the core recovery team members? How will the team be assembled?**

◆ **How will the disruptive event be assessed?**

◆ **Who will determine if the recovery checklist should be activated?**

◆ **If the checklist is activated, how will the plan be communicated to employees?**

◆ **For plans that may involve an evacuation, where is the designated meeting location?**

This section of your business recovery plan provides guidance from the moment a disruption takes place. It helps you and your team calmly assess the situation and mobilize the necessary people to take action. It also ensures you have a way to communicate your plan to employees, avoiding the confusion that will inevitably arise.

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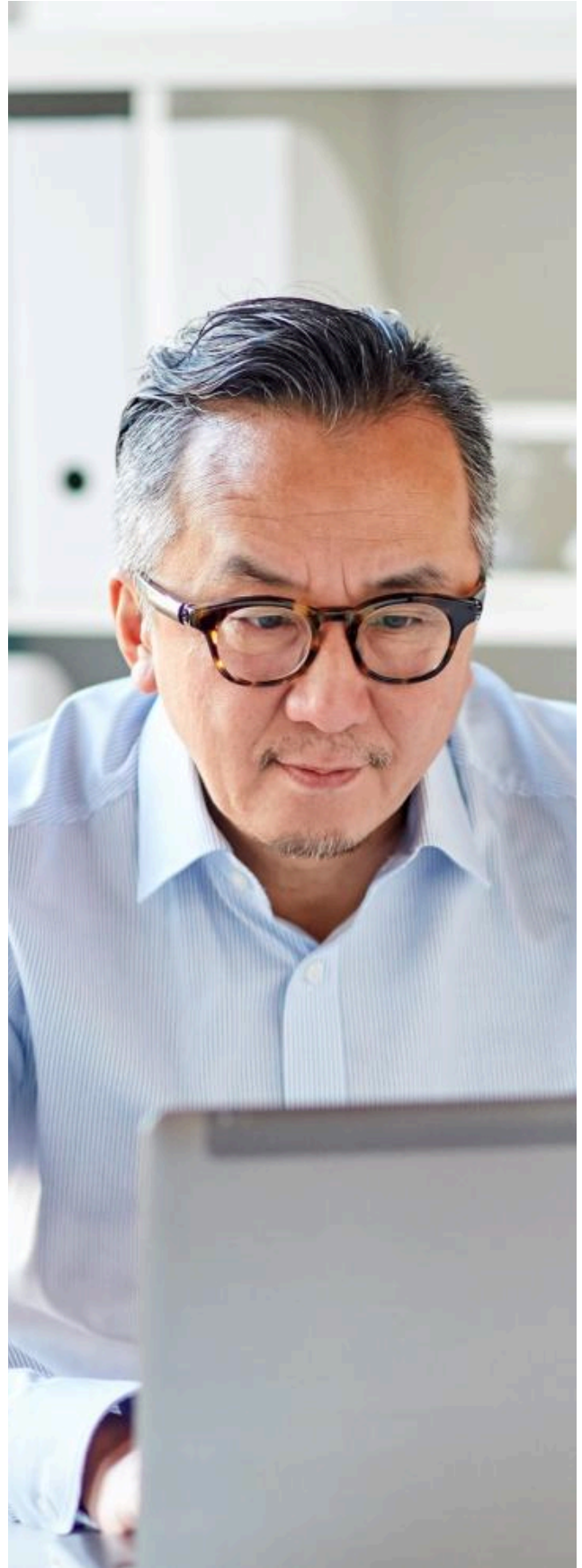
Recovery checklists by type of disruption

Recovery checklists guide you step-by-step through the process of getting your business back up and running. The steps outlined in your checklists should be written based on your knowledge of the most critical business processes and the resources each department depends on. Disruptions might occur for any number of reasons—hurricanes, blizzards, power outages, workplace violence, data breaches, fires, and more—so it's impossible to create lists based on every possible scenario. That's why a good checklist is scenario-neutral. Checklists do not distinguish between a blizzard and a hurricane. There are, however, ways to classify types of disruptions according to the impact they'll have on your business.

Your business recovery plan should include checklists for four distinct categories of disruptions:

01

Loss of building or geographic region: Typically this is the result of a natural disaster, though it may also be brought on by other events: fires, floods, severe weather, air contaminants, hazardous spills, or acts of terrorism.

02

Loss of technology or telecommunication equipment: This situation may be brought on by technical issues such as equipment and software failure, communications failure, cyber security attacks, or data breaches.

03

Loss of resources (specifically people) or a pandemic–related event: This category applies when there's a resource loss equivalent to 40% or more due to a pandemic or workplace violence incident, for instance.

04

Loss of a critical third-party channel: This could occur due to power failure, storm, malicious act, a brownout/blackout, transportation system disruption, or water system disruption, among other things. Checklists for all categories of disruption should cover tasks associated with three phases of managing the crisis. In the case of a building loss, for example, here are some sample tasks in each phase:

◆ **A response phase—the activation, notification, and assessment of the situation:** In this phase, you will need to evaluate the severity of the situation, formally activate your plan, communicate with your employees about the situation, identify any deviations from normal working procedures, and determine next steps.

◆ **A recovery phase—implementing the requirements for operating within a non-business-as-usual scenario:** Once the response phase is over, tasks in this phase might include how and where to relocate so that critical business units can continue to operate, going to the bank and getting checks (which are inaccessible inside the building), communicating with critical vendors, the specific steps to restore each critical process in the business unit, and notifying the post office to hold mail or picking mail up yourself.

◆ **A restoration phase—the tasks involved in returning to business as usual:** For example, you may need to ensure that forwarded phone lines are returned to normal settings, notify customers your site has returned to normal operations, notify vendors (like FedEx, UPS, and others) if you've been using a forwarding address, and update your business recovery plan with any learning you've gained from experiencing the situation firsthand.

Sample checklist

#	Task description & other information	By whom	Initial when complete
	Response		
1	Based on the severity of the event, assess and determine the immediate impacts to critical finance and administration activities and report findings to the Crisis Management Team (CMT) as needed.		
2	The CMT will coordinate efforts with corporate communications to ensure the appropriate notification is provided to affected internal personnel (e.g., employees, contractors) and external IT stakeholders as needed.		
	Recovery		
3	In the event of a long-term outage, the CMT leader may execute the enterprise recovery strategy that includes relocation of personnel (e.g., home) in order to continue supporting core activities.		
4	As needed, reprioritize current workloads and/or suspend nonessential (Recovery Time Objective 4) activities throughout the duration of the disruption.		
5	Obtain approval for potential exceptions to business-as- usual activities by the appropriate corporate stakeholders (e.g., risk management, information security, etc.) as applicable to the event.		
7	Identify orders that have been placed and contact vendors to request they hold and/or reroute deliveries as applicable to the event.		
8	If needed, coordinate efforts with the CMT to gain access to emergency checks and endorsement stamps that are maintained in the CMT command centers (on- and off-site).		

#	Task description & other information	By whom	Initial when complete
9	Upon receipt of the appropriate building permits, engineering certificates, and/or building inspections, re occupancy to the affected site can be granted. The CMT will work with the required stakeholders (e.g., facility management) to implement the applicable measures in order to establish re occupancy.		
10	12 Upon resuming business-as-usual operations at the primary work site: ◆ Ensure validation of all required systems, applications, and other IT-related components. Direct staff to report exceptions to the help desk. ◆ Implement a process to ensure that any manually tracked data is keyed online and brought current.		
11	The phone system administrator will complete the task of rerouting phone lines back to the primary facility, a process that will be transparent to customers.		

Checklists are written for people who are already subject matter experts in their area, which means there's no need to include "extra" information. As the book Checklist Manifesto suggests, checklists should identify the steps that a trained person might forget. In other words, you shouldn't have to list every step. For instance, if an item on your checklist indicates to notify a vendor, don't include everything that vendor is responsible for on the checklist. Or, if another checklist says to evacuate the building,   account for employees, and report any discrepancies, don't include the details of how to   do that; the subject-matter expert should already know.

Also, checklists are task-oriented. Every line item in a checklist should be written as an actionable directive—activate, call, update, assemble, notify—not an informational account. Doing so keeps the checklist a reasonable length and makes it easy for the relevant parties to review the document and implement necessary actions. Ideally, there should be no more than 15-20 tasks associated with a single checklist.

Critical supporting information

Your checklists should be void of contact, process, and resource information, but that doesn't mean such information isn't valuable. During a disruption, stress levels are high and confusion abounds, so it's key to have this type of intelligence—what we call critical supporting information—at your fingertips. All critical supporting information should be relevant to specific business units. This includes everything that would be useful in assisting the relevant parties to complete checklist items, such as:

- **Vendor contact information. Employee contact information. Recovery team contact information. Alternate work site information.**

- **Necessary computer systems and applications for critical business operations. Vital records essential to operations.**

- **Business processes in priority order, according to how quickly each process must be restored following a disruption.**

- **Resource prioritization, including how many people you'll need and when.**

Additional audit requirements

The above elements represent the crux of a solid business recovery plan. If you're completing this plan to meet the requirements of an audit, however, there are a few additional things you should include:

A plan approval section: Audit or no audit, it's smart to include a single page at the front of the document where stakeholders—including recovery team leaders in all relevant business units—sign off on the plan. The inclusion of this plan approval indicates that the personnel involved understand and accept the assignments as noted.

A plan introduction section: Include brief paragraphs about the following:

- **The purpose of the plan**

- **The objectives**

- **The applicability and scope (the threat categories covered by the plan)**

- **Planning considerations and assumptions (e.g., it's assumed that the plan will be implemented by people familiar with the business units, that it will be fully operational no later than 48 hours after its activation, and that it was developed using a worst-case scenario specific to that event, which is assumed to occur during a peak time.**

A concept of operations section: Include any guidelines for dealing with the media, names of essential staff responsible for activating the plan, roles and responsibilities of the recovery team, and the criteria used to determine whether certain aspects of managing an event should be escalated to executive management.

With these basic components prepared, your business has the necessary framework in place to continue its mission-critical operations in the event of an emergency or catastrophic scenario.

Help your business weather the storm

Crafting a business recovery plan is a significant step in the right direction when it comes to weathering unexpected disruptions. It's also a key part of a larger effort known as business continuity management—the development of strategies, plans, and actions that provide protection for your business in the face of what could be seriously damaging or potentially fatal disruptive incidents.

BCMMetrics™ is a set of online tools that can improve your company's business continuity program or get it off the ground if need be. Flexible enough to be tailored to the needs of your organization, BCMMetrics™ helps you identify your most critical business processes. It also guides you in assessing your levels of compliance with

business continuity standards and helps pinpoint your areas of risk. Creating a resilient business is a smart move; we can help you get started.

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Still have questions? We're happy to get the information you need. Contact us via our website at www.mha-it.com/contact-us, or call 888-689-2290.

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