

Why is it Taking So Long?

A surreal desert landscape at sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and dark blue. In the foreground, a large, ornate pocket watch is partially buried in the sand. To its right, another pocket watch is open, showing its internal mechanism. In the middle ground, a large, semi-circular clock face is partially buried in the sand. To the left, a small alarm clock sits on a sand dune. In the background, a gnarled, leafless tree stands with several pocket watches hanging from its branches. The overall scene is a metaphor for time passing slowly or being wasted.

By Garth Tucker, CBCP, CORP

Why is it Taking So Long?

Over the years, I've witnessed several failed efforts to build Resilience programs that were cancelled because the C-Suite thought it was taking too long.

Never any of mine of course... 😊

From what I've seen during the cleanup of failed program builds, one of the underlying causes of these failures is an underestimation of the time and effort required to build a solid resilience program which leads to pressure to complete the planning by cutting corners, added to this is often the lack of a Corporate Resilience policy.

In part, it's possible the time perception has been exacerbated on occasion by those who underestimate (either due to lack of experience or intentionally) the effort required to complete the build (sometimes even to reduce price to win the contract or internally to gain favour). Unfortunately, when the time is underestimated a proper delivery is not possible. In these cases, the result is more likely to be a template-based work product. It's only after this experience that the organization learns that a comprehensive solution will require double, or often far more, the number of hours originally scoped. A way to potentially avoid this scenario is to seek out DRI Certified Professionals to ensure quality work product.



Let's look at some of the factors that drive the amount of time and effort required to gather the data used to produce solid Risk Assessment (RA) and Business Impact Analysis (BIA) outcomes, which are the foundation of all Resilience Programs:

1. Lack of experience with BCDR on the part of the organization – A significant amount of training and coaching is required to get accurate data for the RA & BIA when dealing with people who have never taken part in a resilience program build. Spend the time at the start, it will save you time in the long run.

2. Corporate inertia “But we've never done this (or done it like this) before” – Takes a lot of time and effort to turn a battleship and to open people's minds to new concepts and ways of performing this process.

- a. Under this, we can cover:
 - i. Lack of executive buy in, which can equally be put at the feet of the practitioner for starting the build before the C-Suite signed off and on the executive leadership for not taking it seriously enough.
 - ii. No corporate policy. This is entirely on the practitioner, if you don't have agreement to put a corporate BC/Resilience Policy in place outlining the penalties for non-compliance by business units, you're setting yourself up for failure.

3. Extracting the data – Once you've completed all the sessions, it falls to the practitioner to 'pan for gold' in the forms. You must compile a final product that outlines all the findings from the forms and put it into a digestible product.

4. The BIA is a large, cumbersome process with many moving parts – Getting an accurate view of your business risks, business units, their functions, the processes that make up those functions, and the resources used in those processes requires a significant effort with several passes to get a clear and accurate picture. A professional project manager is highly recommended. Let your PMO build out the plan, with input from the practitioner, to keep the project on track and create an accurate view of scope/effort. The RA is also a large process, but typically involves more specialized input from experienced staff and goes more quickly and smoothly.

5. Financial implications – A key part of any BCDR program build is identifying cost of outages as this is significant part of how we rate our risks and prioritize recovery processes. This is a function that must be performed by the finance department as they are the only group that can put dollar figures beside the various data points, such as:

- a. Lost revenue
- b. Penalties
- c. One-time expense
- d. Maintaining service
- e. Recovery of lost transactions
- f. Backlog processing

Note: This process is a very large undertaking and requires coordination between finance and the business unit SMEs/Managers who completed the BIA form. Meetings and investigation of each function will add overhead to the project and must be accounted for during planning.

6. Lack of, or inability to build, strong professional relationships – This can be due to a variety of factors, but the conversations you have, the questions you propose, how you ask those questions, and even when you ask those questions will drive the practitioner’s ability to pull information from key stakeholders. Consider your meeting times throughout the day, have awareness into critical timelines for your stakeholder, create touch-point lists to have conversations with stakeholders, and consider the impact of how working remotely changes your conversations. This is probably the least understood part of the Certified Professionals role, **the soft skills required to extract data efficiently and accurately**. This skill is not something that you take a course in, it’s either natural or learned through your “apprenticeship.” Many people who try to short-circuit the learning process of becoming a practitioner lack this very key skill, and it shows in their shoddy work product. It stands out like a sore thumb to me personally, having reviewed many. Again, this drags the process out and makes people wonder what’s taking so long.

7. In many medium (and sadly, large) sized organizations, they have a 1 person BCDR “group” –

This one person can only accomplish X amount and attend X number of meetings in a day.

Let’s do the math...

Conservatively, 40 hours per business unit multiplied by X number of business units, doing nothing else but BIA forms, and assuming that the SMEs or Managers are available at your beck & call (good luck with that...) The chances of being able to schedule that easily, and assuming your practitioner is a superhero who can sustain that schedule, it can be multiple months of effort just to complete the BIA forms, then sifting through them and creating the output used to base the program on...

Nothing to it right?

While some BIA forms are less complex, and can be completed in a session or two, some business units have 20 or more functions, consisting of many processes, and require significantly more effort (meetings/reviews) to complete. Added to these individual sessions are group educational sessions to provide an overview of the process and the goals to be accomplished by the BIA process.

There is no way to accurately complete a BIA in a large organization in a week, or often, even a month. I’ve found that remote meetings via Zoom or Teams often draws this process out even further, as it’s easier for the attendees to get distracted and miss key pieces of information they need to accurately complete their form. You must then send it back and walk them through the form again, requiring another meeting. In person meetings where the practitioner leads the discussion with prompts and push backs to SME’s answers can be more effective, but since Covid this is not always possible and doubly so if you’re dealing with a geographically dispersed corporate structure.

All this on a single practitioner’s calendar means a lengthy BIA process...

Further to these seven points, stop and consider the vast amount of data to be gathered when you’re tasked with identifying the following for the BIA:

- ✓ The organization’s business units.
 - o Their functions:
 - The processes that make up those functions
 - The resources (people, places, things) required to perform those functions
 - Classifying those functions, processes, and resources
- ✓ Identifying Recovery Time Objectives, Recovery Point Objectives, and Maximum Allowable Outages (RTOs, RPOs, and MAO’s) for the DR component of your program.

This data must be accurate and detailed so that reliable plans; both BC and



its subset, DR, can be developed and integrated into your overall resilience posture. Also, keep in mind that all this effort doesn't include the additional hours required to complete the RA process, which will be used to weight the BIA data and identify the events that are most likely to cause a crisis to your organization.

So how can we simplify this process?

We can't.

Sorry folks, there is no silver bullet that will provide this data, but the good news is, once it's completed, it only requires a review yearly that typically involves a short meeting or two to identify any changes / updates needed.

As you can see, a BCDR/Resilience Program is not something that can be accurately accomplished in a short timeframe, and further, the RA & BIA are only two pieces of the program. After we've gathered RA & BIA data, analyzed it, and created our targets for recovery, we must build out the remaining blocks of the program such as:

1. Business Resumption Plans (BRPs) – or some call them Playbooks
2. IT Runbooks (a huge project by itself)
3. Crisis Management / Incident Response (processes and teams)
4. Maintenance / Exercise / Testing (training program)
5. Crisis Communications (internal & external)



We have not even touched on the integration with other practice areas such as Enterprise & Operational Risk Management (ERM & ORM), Occupational Health & Safety (OH&S), Security, Human Resources, and Emergency Management (external public sector) to build Facility Emergency Response plans. All of which require a lot of teamwork and meetings of minds to agree on a division of responsibilities.

These steps are crucial to building an accurate and reliable resilience program. If you skimp on any of these steps, it will cause you heartache when the response fails.



Regardless of our own personal processes to extract the data or project management paradigm, we must still complete BIA forms with the business unit SMEs to drill down into the functions/processes that make up each service because it's hard to build mitigation or recovery plans around functions and processes that you have not identified.

So don't let anyone fool you into believing these processes can be accomplished in an unrealistically short period of time, or even worse, that they aren't required.

If you think you're being led down the garden path by a consultant reach out to a DRI Certified Professional, and in the vernacular of my Newfoundland youth, "We'll learn ya." 😊



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Garth Tucker is the Director, Business Continuity for ESO, Editor-in-Chief of the True North Resilience magazine, a member of the DRI Canada (dri.ca) Board of Directors, and a Certified Business Continuity Professional (CBCP). His career focus is on the development and management of holistic resiliency programs as well as effective management of crisis events. The path to his current position began with software development, project and program management, and as an IT technology educator worldwide for IBM in the late 1990s and early 2000s. He transitioned to disaster recovery, business continuity, and crisis management beginning in 2002. Significant formal, and self-education throughout his career has ensured he remains relevant and effective.

