

Do you know how your organisation runs? If so BS25999 should be straightforward for you.

Martin Haines, LINK Associates International

BS25999, the new British standard for business continuity management, is about good business stewardship and is fast becoming acknowledged as a key business differentiator. In March 2008, LINK Associates, the risk and business continuity consultancy and training organisation, were awarded the first certificate for BS25999-2 by LRQA (Lloyds Register). So what are the benefits of certification? How can our experience help other organisations make up their own mind about the new standard?

LINK Associates decided to gain certification against BS25999 because it made sense in terms of business stewardship and best practice. They also wanted to 'walk the walk' and help share the lessons with industries and their own consultancy clients.

"It's only right to put into practice the principles and programmes that we offer our clients. By supporting the pilot programme and becoming certificated to BS25999-Part 2, LINK can share the lessons with our clients, ensuring they get the best possible advice." David Evans, Managing Director, LINK Associates

Many companies already have business continuity (BC) plans and these can form the basis for an assessable system. The starting point needs to be the scope of the BS25999 certificate. What do you want it to include? Which organisational areas or functions are to be covered? You choose the parameter of the BS25999 certificate for your organisation.

The management system is then tailored to the choices you make in the scope of BS25999 and this is emphasised by the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle (PDCA) that is consistently found in other management system standards.

Once the envelope for the scope has been agreed tools such as a gap analysis can be used to apportion resources.

A good approach is to treat the process of certification as a project. By taking a project approach, timescales, resources and plans can be brought to bear to manage the certification process.

Timescales for certification were not entirely clear before we set out. BS25999 is a new standard and there were no examples to follow. The time it takes to gain certification is dependant upon the envelope put around the areas to which the standard will apply. The project can also be very resource intensive. In the case of LINK, the estimated resources for the project were exceeded. And so being very clear about the scope is extremely important from the outset.

The following suggestions formed elements of the project approach at LINK and have helped to maintain the system beyond initial certification.

- A Project Leader
- An Executive Sponsor
- An internal Project Team
- Third Party support and advice

The relationships and communication between these elements bring together the necessary skills and knowledge. Detailed organisational knowledge and authority overlaid onto the best practice offered by BS25999 creates an ongoing, sustainable management system.

So once we got started, what else did we encounter? Well, subtle differences in terminology can hold up the audit process. A good example is the difference in terminology between documentation and records. As a consultancy we encourage firms to keep things simple. We thought that the word documentation would cover all relevant documents. But the wording in the standard asked for documentation and records. What we thought was a logical simplification actually needed to be changed to separate documents and records and satisfy the standard.

Occasionally organisations struggle to embed BC arrangements despite having great plans. LINK found that the need to demonstrate how BC was to be embedded pushed the processes beyond being just about the plans. Weekly agenda items in staff meetings and dedicated space within the internal newsletters meant that BC communication was sustainable especially given the checks and balances offered by the control documentation to satisfy the standard.

Another observation related to the business impact analysis (BIA). This is regarded as a powerful tool in the business continuity toolkit. But again the process of refreshing BIAs, like plans, can slip without the proper checks and controls. The approach to BIAs in the standard is that they should be undertaken whenever there is a sufficient change in the organisation and not just on an annual basis. This means that BC can be better aligned to business strategy and allow proactive management of new threats and vulnerabilities.

So what were the benefits to certification? Well we feel that the process cements your knowledge of your own organisation into a system which often defines the way you already do things, but presents it according to the choices you make.

BS25999 is very much your system according to your choices. Organisations have never had so many opportunities.