



LINK Associates International - Our BS25999 Experience

What was your motivation for being assessed to BS25999?

We already had a business continuity programme in the organisation based on previous industry best practice. We wanted to ensure we fully understood BS25999 so we were in the best shape to advise our clients. We wanted to know what it was like to develop and implement a business continuity management system (BCMS) against the new British Standard and end up with a template for implementation. We therefore committed to the pilot programme.

What were your initial expectations?

We felt that the process would be straightforward – taking existing plans and procedures and getting them into shape for internal and external audit.

We were also aware that implementing the management system would be a challenge. We decided not to align BS25999 with our existing quality management system. We wanted to fully understand all the aspects of BS25999, including the timescales to implement a management system from scratch.

How did you set about it and what was your game plan?

Resources

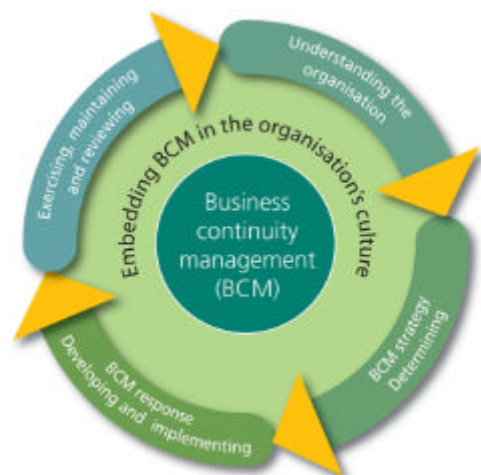
At LINK, we were able to assign a business continuity consultant to lead the project. Because of our size there was no need for extra dedicated resources. Our consultant then worked with the senior management sponsor and the members of the incident recovery team.

GAP Analysis

We set about using the stages of the Business Continuity Management (BCM) Lifecycle to create a GAP Analysis. The output was an action plan with a priority sequence to the actions. Quick wins and deficiencies were identified and we achieved a clear understanding of the resources required to meet BS25999 requirements.

It is worth mentioning something about the time needed for a GAP Analysis. A GAP Analysis is the best starting point to structure the process of certification without one. It may seem obvious, but a GAP Analysis will take considerably longer if the person undertaking the task does not have prior knowledge of the business or is new to Business Continuity (BC).

Talking to our clients since certification, some are worried about conducting a GAP Analysis. The great thing about it is you can often surprise yourself – you might not be in as bad a shape as you thought!



The BCM Lifecycle (BS25999:1)



How did you tackle the scope?

We decided to cover all of our activities. And we got the scope signed off by the senior management sponsor.

Senior Management sign-off of scope is important. They need to understand what parts of the organisation are covered and the contribution those parts make to the business objectives.

It is a very complex task to separate out the systems that support an organisation from the products and services an organisation sells to customers. A company still needs to sell its output to meet objectives.

A good question to ask is “What is the advantage of a business continuity process if it doesn’t cover the whole organisation?” There is no right and wrong answer here. There is only justification. As long as you can justify your decisions in a repeatable and auditable management system, the standard is flexible enough to cope with the scope you set.

What was your experience of the formal assessment process?

Our experience of the audit process was unique as we were involved with the BS25999 certification pilot. However the principles and the learning are extremely relevant.

Stage 1

Here we presented all of our documentation to show: how we recover; how we manage and maintain our BCMS; and how our processes align to the standard. We provided documented proof of the processes for each stage of the BCM lifecycle.

Stage 2

This involved a more searching review looking at all stages of the BCM lifecycle. Here we demonstrated proof that we do what we say, our exercise reports and delivery against identified actions. Our business impact analysis (BIA), risk assessments and the auditing of the management system were all reviewed.

We experienced a need for a greater breakdown of each maximum tolerable period of disruption (MTPD) identified within the BIA. Again there is no right and wrong. Justification is the key. BS25999 can provide an organisation with the opportunity to challenge assumptions about risk and not become a recording exercise. Any exploration of risk should be viewed as a good thing.

We experienced an initial difficulty understanding the development of a management system from scratch. We understood management systems but we were not standards specialists. We had to find a balance which satisfied our practitioner need for a risk based BC response and the need of the system to demonstrate compliance to the standard. Once in place, it was difficult to imagine life without the management system! So, if you have a existing management system, this part of the standard will be significantly easier. If not, the best advice is to get help.



Why did you choose LRQA to work with?

We chose LRQA because of their openness to learn and explore the standard during the pilot participation. They also provided a professional approach to putting business continuity into a management system framework.

What were the challenges from the implementation/certification process?

The challenges for us were to do with:

- Timescales: signoff, third party information and overall certification – in any organisation getting hold of the right people at the right time can be difficult. Add to this the complexity of understanding fully the service levels of third party providers and then demonstrating an auditable system to external auditors – expectations over timescales require careful management. We recognised the importance of the scope in ensuring the boundary is clearly defined.
- Development of the management system element. It needs to be appropriate to the size of the organisation and will be a waste of time if not done properly.
- Interpretations of the standard do exist and so the need for justification is essential.

Benefits

Internal

- Provided a clear, coherent structure.
- Empowered the Incident Recovery Team. BS25999 cements BC into the core of the business.
- Increased staff communications have resulted in new ideas and innovations being generated.

External

- Increased knowledge and experience to offer to clients
- Competitive advantage
- Use of logo in marketing materials
- Ease of demonstrating business continuity arrangements during tendering process



Learning Points - What did LINK learn?

- We learnt there is a difference between the planned and actual timescales to certification.
- The road to certification provided senior management with an opportunity to explore risk and the scope of business continuity aligned with business objectives.
- BS25999 is complementary to existing management systems and can be integrated with other standards.
- We did not have enough knowledge of management systems and so needed to get help. If possible, organisations should use existing management systems to ease implementation of BS25999.
- The resources needed to achieve your certification goals will vary according to the size of your organisation. For a larger organisation additional resources will be needed, especially if there are multiple incident recovery teams and complex business operations.
- If an organisation is new to BC, BS25999 offers a great starting point. For organisations with existing BC arrangements it provides an externally auditable check and balance.