



Humber Emergency
Planning Service

BUSINESS CONTINUITY STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

Part 3

Testing & Exercising your Business Continuity Plan



Humber Emergency Planning Service
Business Continuity Guidance
Part 3 –Testing & Exercising your Business Continuity Plan

Part 1 of the guidance explained how we approached Business Continuity, talked you through the forms that we produced, told you why we gathered the information we did and told you about our experiences of the process.

Part 2 explained how to use this information to write a business continuity plan.

Part 3 will advise you how to test and exercise your plan to ensure the arrangements you have put in place are resilient.

This guide is a summary of the discussions that we've held over the last couple of years, put together to help train our own staff in organising and preparing the types of exercise that we run (quick health warning, the majority of our exercises are table top – please don't expect a detailed guide on organising a live exercise!). There is also a selection of exercise material that we've use in the past as appendices.

We've made this guide available to anyone else that might organise exercises in the hope that the lessons we've learned might be applicable elsewhere. We don't claim that ours is the right way, or that it is the path to a perfect exercise, but we hope it will give you something to think about.

We put a lot of time and effort into designing our approach, and hope that you will be able to adapt it and use it for your own purposes.



Starting at the beginning - what is an exercise?

Most of us have been involved in things like fire drills where we practise what we would actually do in the event of a fire alarm. An exercise is very similar – a group of people either talk about what they'd do if an emergency happened or they take part in an actual simulation and respond as though an emergency was happening.

The people developing the exercise usually create a scenario or a story board explaining what particular disaster has happened and what the consequences would be, which the exercise participants then work through.

What are they used for?

We think that an exercise is an incredibly powerful tool. In emergency planning, exercises are usually used to test an emergency plan to make sure it works, or to test people to make sure that they know what to do in an emergency. For example, if the purpose of the exercise is to test an emergency plan, then people respond to a set scenario, following the detailed instructions in the plan, to see if it works or not.

We focus more on testing plans rather than testing people and often use exercises to train people in what they might have to do in an emergency.

People often feel more confident in their emergency role once they have taken part in an emergency.

Exercises are often associated with testing emergency plans but they are also useful events to run when actually writing plans and procedures because they help generate discussions and stimulate thinking on what the contents of the plan could be.



There is sometimes the temptation not to exercise an emergency plan because you know that it needs quite a lot of work to bring it up to scratch. Exercises can be useful in these situations to identify exactly what needs to be updated, give you some ideas about how things should work and also highlight the importance of updating the document to other stakeholders.

Can I run an exercise?

Exercises tend to be shrouded in intimidating terminology, but anyone can run one. All it really involves is a little project management and the facilitation skills that you would normally use when delivering a presentation, running a workshop or chairing a meeting. This guide should give some prompts on what to think about.

Like all things, if its your first exercise it would be a good idea to start small and build up. As we'll discuss in the guide, there is no need to make a big deal about an exercise, it doesn't need to involve every man and his dog to be useful and it can be as formal or informal as you want it to be.



We use the PRINCE2 project management methodology to help us manage some of the larger exercises. You can find more about this process [here](#)

Where should I start in planning an exercise?

The first step in planning any exercise is to be very clear about what why you are running the event. What exactly do you want to get out of it? What are you hoping to achieve? Is it to help write an emergency plan? Is it to test an emergency plan? Or test particular parts of it? Or train people?

Setting the right objectives is the most essential part of the planning process and you should spend some time thinking exactly what you want to achieve by having the exercise. Otherwise the exercise could become unmanageable, disjointed and diluted. As with all objectives they should be

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Realistic
- Targeted

The measurable aspect is an interesting one to think about, because the outcomes of emergency planning exercises are often intangible. We usually give players a separate feedback form asking whether they thought objectives had been met, and we take a view based on these returns and a personal assessment of the event. During the exercise, you might want to think about blowing the objectives up and taping them around the room so people are constantly reminded of them.



If the objective of the exercise is to test the emergency plan, you need to give careful consideration to whether you test the full document or just parts of it. Although its important to fully test the emergency plan, you don't need to test all parts at the same time. If you try to do too much there is a greater chance that something could go wrong, and also a chance that you won't have enough time to cover everything, leading to a superficial test. Instead you could draw up an exercise schedule to run exercises to test the full plan over a number of years.

Testing smaller parts of the plan has some real benefits. It allows you to involve experts whose role in a bigger exercise might be so small that you couldn't justify bringing them along. We recently ran a media specific exercise where we were able

to involve media officers and spent two hours talking about details we would have brushed over in 10 minutes in previous exercises.

Some example objectives

- To check the consistency and accuracy of the following sections of the Emergency Plan:
 - Activation process
 - Initial actions
- To provide an opportunity to increase the knowledge of playing staff on the Emergency Plan and related emergency procedures.
- To ensure that representatives of responding agencies involved in communicating information to the public have an understanding of target audiences and the communication channels used during an emergency.

The rest of the decisions that you need to take on running the exercise should be based on achieving your objectives.



Exercise Design Team

If there is more than one organisation taking part in the exercise you should consider inviting a representative from each to help you plan and deliver it. This is usually better than you trying to second guess how they'd want to be involved and how the fictitious emergency might impact on them. The same approach is also useful if your exercise is internal, but you don't think you can adequately represent the interests of all the areas playing. The people that plan the exercise usually help deliver it and so don't play, but that really is down to you, and depends on your objectives.

The step when planning your exercise, either by yourself or with a team, is to work through the following points.

- Type of Exercise
- Scenario
- Venue
- Timetable
- Who will be involved in the exercise
- Facilitating the exercise

- Record keeping
- Resources
- Debrief

The rest of this guide will look at each these different elements.



What are the different types of exercise, and what are their pro's and cons?

There are three main types of exercise. It is useful to know about all three so that you can choose which format to use, or perhaps choose to combine different elements of each. Exercises are generally classified as:

- Seminar / Discussion events
- Tabletop events
- Live events

A brief explanation of the types of exercise and the pros and cons of each are listed below.

Seminar / Discussion Exercises

In these types of exercise, the people that are likely to be involved in the response to an emergency are brought together to simply talk step by step through the actions that are outlined in the emergency plan, to consider whether or not they are feasible, and whether they would work in principle. These exercises usually take place with a very basic scenario, or with no scenario at all. The discussions tend to focus on problem identification and solution finding and exercise organisers usually go to some lengths to create a relaxed environment to promote open and honest discussions.



The “pro’s” for this type of exercise are:

- An excellent process to follow at the policy formulation stage of the plan
- It provides a safe environment where delegates can discuss and debate issues
- A good format to raise awareness and train participants on all areas of the emergency response
- Easy to organise and control
- Very cheap to organise



The “con’s” for this type of exercise are:

- If discussions are limited to a general overview and not detailed discussions on the plan, there could be a relatively low level of learning
- The plan is not subject to the same rigorous assessment presented by other types of exercise

Tabletop Exercises

Table top exercises are a more detailed and more involved than discussion / seminar exercises. In particular, they are based on a simulated event with a realistic scenario and time line. Their emphasis is on validating the contents of a plan rather than developing the policy. As the name suggests, these exercises usually run with all the players sat around a table, although this can be varied, perhaps with players sat at their desks communicating over the phone, or by adding reality by contacting other people to see what resources might be available on that day. It is usually a theoretical exercise with no resources deployed.



The “pro’s” for this type of exercise are:

- Provides an excellent test of the procedures contained within the emergency plan
- Relatively easy to organise
- A potentially safe environment where delegates can openly discuss issues and critically evaluate the emergency plan
- A good format to raise awareness and train participants on all areas of the emergency response
- Very cheap to organise



The “con’s” for this type of exercise are:

- Assumptions are made about an organisation’s operational capabilities that aren’t tested. It is often easy to over estimate how easy it would be to respond.
- Allowances must be made for “exercise falseness”. Players are asked to operate without their usual emergency support infrastructure and sources of information, often at accelerated times frames.

Live Exercises

A live exercise involves actually rehearsing the actions contained in a plan. Participants respond as though the scenario was real, deploying the resources that would normally be used. For example, if it says to send a vehicle to the scene of an emergency, you would actually send the vehicle to a fictional incident scene.



The “pro’s” for this type of exercise are:

- A true test of logistics and physical capabilities.
- Excellent training events.
- As close a simulation to real life as is possible
- High profile
- Provides site familiarisation opportunities



The “con’s” for this type of exercise are:

- Usually tests people more than plans.
- The operational focus is not appropriate to all plans.

- Time and logistical constraints make it difficult to test all aspects of a plan
- Often simply replicates other tried and tested live exercises such as fire drills
- Usually staged managed to a certain extent to make sure that the exercise doesn't fall flat on its face.
- The test of capabilities is a snapshot in time and may not be comparable to any other day or time.
- Very expensive and resource intensive to organise, manage and control
- Disruptive to the normal operations of the organisation involved
- High pressure, stressful environment for the participants
- Doesn't provide participants with an awareness of complete emergency response

We find that live exercises are not necessarily the best test for our emergency plans, and that usually the outcomes don't justify the cost. However, we do combine elements of live play exercises and incorporate them into desktop exercises. Physically making the telephone calls to trigger emergency plans and physically setting up emergency control rooms are useful live elements that can be easily incorporated.



Choosing the type of exercise to run

You need to decide the type of exercise that would best meet your objectives. The availability of resources is also likely to have major bearing on how you plan your exercise. As with most things, the more complex an exercise is, the more it will cost to run, and the longer it will take to plan and deliver. You should think about:

- the amount of money you have to spend and the likely cost of the exercise
- the amount of your time you and others involved in the exercise can afford to commit to the planning
- the amount of time exercise participants are able to spend on the exercise

If you are holding the exercise to test or develop an emergency plan, you might find the table below useful.

Type of plan to be tested	Type of exercise to be considered	Complexity of scenario needed
Plan in preparation (unpublished)	Discussion / Seminar	No scenario/ basic scenario
New plan (untested)	All above + tabletop	All above + detailed injects
Established plan (trained tried and tested a couple of times)	All above + small scale live elements	All above + much more detailed scenario + live element

Well established plan (trained, tried and tested many times)	All above + large scale live elements	All above + meticulously planned and scripted
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Writing the Scenario

Usually a plan is tested against a fictitious emergency situation known as a scenario. A scenario can be a really useful device to encourage discussion and focus player's minds on how they would respond to an emergency. However it is very important to choose the right type of scenario for the exercise. If it is too narrow or too focused then it will potentially restrict the players and limit discussion.

These are the various different types of scenario that we use:

No scenario

Although it is usual for an exercise to have a scenario, you might find that you get better results without any at all. Sometimes players get too hung up on the specifics of even the most basic scenario, when the aim of the exercise is to have more of a general discussion. We've run some really successful events just by looking at an emergency plan and asking "would this work?". Without a "distracting" scenario, players tend to focus more on the processes that sit behind the actions in the emergency plan.

Basic scenario

An example of a basic scenario.....

16:15 hours, Wednesday 16th February 2005.

It's a cold and dry afternoon, with a temperature of 7 °C. There's a light east, south-easterly breeze of about 5mph.

At ABC Chemicals, a road tanker carrying 23 tonnes of sulphur dioxide (SO₂) has just started off-loading. Suddenly, there's a rupture in the delivery hose resulting in a very serious leak.

Question: What happens now?

A basic scenario can be very straightforward to write. The scenario shown above was prepared to provide exercise players with some focus for their discussions but without being overly restricted by too much detail.

In our experience, the most basic scenarios potentially generate much more discussion because they allow the players to ask ‘what if?’ questions and challenge the contents of the plan. We think that this feature makes the use of basic scenarios suitable for even the most established plans. An additional benefit is that if you are running the exercise, and have prepared a basic scenario, you can make up further incident developments to steer the exercise in the direction that you want it to go.

Detailed Scenario

You can run an exercise with a more detailed scenario by presenting the players with a series of statements letting them know what has happened and when, and allowing them to respond accordingly. For example:

- An emergency has happened – *these are the details.*
- It’s 10 minutes later. A member of staff tell you that X, Y and Z has happened. What do you do as a result?
- It’s 30 minutes later. A contractor ring to says *that this has happened.* What happens next?
- It’s 50 minutes later. You have still been unable to make contact with the Managing Director. How does that impact on your response?



Some exercises, particularly live exercises, run in “real time”. If you were running your exercise using real time, and you had a piece of information to deliver after 30 minutes, you would wait until thirty minutes had passed and then inform the players.

If you weren’t running in real time you would wait until a suitable moment in the proceedings to deliver the 30 minute update. For example, the players might spend an hour discussing what would happen in the first twenty minutes of the response. The thirty minute update might therefore be delivered when conversations had finished 1 hr in.

Real time is, of course, closer to what would happen in real life, but usually isn’t appropriate if the objective of the exercise is to stimulate discussion.

You might choose to deliver a detailed scenario to:

- Force players to address a specific issue
- Have prepared additional material ready if discussion begins to dry up.

- Help “stage manage” a complicated exercise – for example, ensuring that 10 minutes in a call is made that triggers the involvement of one of the players

When writing a detailed scenario it is often helpful to write a story board and map out what the effects of the emergency are going to be, how quickly they are likely to happen, and who is likely to be effected. You can then have fun developing a scenario around these consequences!

But.....

- Be prepared for the players to respond differently to a scenario than expected! It may be necessary to amend your script!
- Too many requests, too much information and too many twists and turns could overwhelm the players and bring the exercise to its knees. Don't forget that in real life players are likely to have a lot of support as well as additional information and resources to help them manage the incident.



You might want to run some smaller scale desktop exercises to help generate a more detailed scenario. Bringing together a group of people and running a discussion or table top exercise using a basic scenario and capturing the “what if” questions, or the “what might go wrong” points is likely to generate a more detailed and credible scenario than you could come up with on your own. You might want to think about this if you are preparing for a live exercise.

Considerations when writing the scenario

- Is it realistic / credible? There's little point testing a plan against a scenario that will never happen. If you have operational and strategic risk assessments it would be useful to consider them in the process. The Humber's main risks can be found here <http://www.humberlrf.gov.uk/>
- Will the scenario steer the response to meet the exercise objectives?
- Is there enough in the scenario to keep all of the players involved?
- Is the scenario likely to keep discussions going for the entire exercise time period?
- Are you sure you want to go there? There are usually areas in most organisations that are just so complicated and muddy that it is best to avoid in all but exercises specifically designed to test that element.



Delivering the Scenario

There are a few different ways that a scenario can be delivered to the players. Probably the most straightforward is to have all the elements of the scenario ready on a PowerPoint presentation, revealed at the appropriate time to the players.

You will probably be able to think of many different ways to let the players know what's happening in the exercise time line. Here are some ways that we've delivered scenario updates in the past:

- By phone – giving players access to a phone and having someone or some people sat in a separate room ringing through with updates, reading from a pre-prepared script and acting out particular roles. Players can also ring their own organisations, or people that they would usually contact in an emergency, to get some real life information. Any phone calls going outside of the exercise room should be prefixed with the exercise name, so that resources are not accidentally deployed thinking that it was a real life incident.
- By e-mail – giving players access to their e-mail system and sending through pre-prepared messages
- By person – in situations where people would usually have face to face briefings, sending exercise staff to give a face to face update
- By paper – physically giving players scenario updates written down on cards. We've also given players instructions in sealed envelopes to be opened at a set time or location, and instructions taped onto a piece of equipment ready for the player to read when they arrive.
- By video – by mocking up a news programme, or face to face briefing and playing it in the exercise room.
- By table – having a number of different tables, each with a facilitator and a stand alone scenario, and asking groups of players to move round each in a “speed dating” style.
- By pictures – using maps, photos and aerial photos are an effective way of showing what's happening, particularly things like flooding and smoke plumes that can be easily drawn. We sometimes use maps and models to show where we've stationed our vehicles, where we're meeting and so on.

The more complicated your delivery method, the more people you will need to help run the exercise. Your choice of delivery message will ultimately depend on the

resources you have available, and on the decision about whether it is appropriate to meet the exercise objectives.



Keeping the Scenario Secret?

There are times when it is important to keep the scenario a secret from the players. For example, if you were trying to keep the exercise as close to real life as possible then the players wouldn't expect to know what was going to happen in advance.

However, if the objective of your exercise was to promote discussion rather than test people, you might want to think about making the scenario available in advance to give the players a chance to think through what their response would be and to give them the opportunity to be better prepared for the event.

Exercises can sometimes be seen as being pretty intimidating by players, particularly if they feel they are going to be put on the spot and tested. Letting them know the scenario, and briefing them in advance, is a good way to calm nerves and give them every opportunity to perform to the best of their abilities on the day.

You might even want to proactively ask the players to think through some questions or issues before the exercise, or set them some other pre-exercise work to get them thinking about the process.

How do you actually run the exercise?

The way that an exercise actually runs really depends on the type of exercise and the scenario that you've chosen.

There are some things that you would expect to see as part of most exercises though. There is usually somebody in charge of the event, although an exercise team could own this role. The people leading the exercise would usually be expected to:

- introduce the day, brief the players on how the exercise is going to work, explain the rules and give them any additional information that they might need
- make sure that the exercise runs to time
- make sure that the exercise is meeting its objectives and alter the scenario and programme for the day if they are not
- move forward discussions if they seem to be sticking

Sometimes the exercise delivery team includes a set of people called “umpires” who have been involved in the planning, or who have received a thorough briefing about the scenario. Their role is to keep players on track by responding to requests for information that have not been supplied in the scenario. Umpires might have been provided with supplementary information and told only to issue it to the players when asked, or they might simply make up an answer based on their best assessment of the situation and the future direction of the scenario. If Umpires have a detailed knowledge of a player’s organisation they can sometimes help players by letting them know if they are suggesting something that is unrealistic or unfeasible.

Players are likely to need at least some direction and facilitation in exercises using a less detailed scenario. You might decide to actively facilitate a group by sitting with them and asking them probing questions based on the answers that they give to the initial scenario. The facilitator can usually prompt some good discussion when necessary by asking things like – “Would that work?” “What if this happened?” “What else could go wrong?”. The list below gives some suggestions about the type of questions the facilitator might ask:

- What would you do to respond to the incident?
- Where would you actually be?
- How would the incident impact on your organisation?
- How might it develop?
- What are your information needs?
- Please ask the questions you would normally ask in a real incident
- Is the plan realistic?
- Would the plan work?
- It in the right order?
- Does it make sense?
- Can you pick it off the shelf and use it?
- Are the key actions for your organisation correct?
- Is the information in it useful?
- What else do you need to know?
- What else can be planned in advance?
- What else could be added?
- What should be removed?
- Are there any gaps in your own internal emergency plans

Using a facilitator can be a useful tool, but it also has some significant drawbacks:

- Facilitators inadvertently encourage the discussions to move in an area that they are interested in, rather than let the players determine the direction.
- Players can sometimes look to the facilitator to have the right answers, or to tell them what to do next, when the exercise is likely to be more interested in what the players think and what they want to do next.
- Players might be encouraged to give an answer that they think the facilitator wants to hear, rather than what they actually think.

You might want to consider allowing a group to facilitate itself by appointing its own chairperson to lead discussions. This can be particularly effective if there is a natural leader present – for example, someone that has been pre-identified to lead the response to an emergency. You could leave the group with a set of questions to answer within a set time period.

Information sent out before the exercise to tell the players where to go, what to expect and what they will be doing. The information should also tell them if they need to bring anything to the exercise, such as their laptops, personal protective equipment or any emergency plans and documentation

Where should I hold the exercise?

If you are holding a live exercise this is relatively straightforward, because it should be held in the location that would usually be used during an incident, although, you might need to be creative over the “incident scene”. If there are multiple venues available you are likely to be guided by the specifics of your objectives, cost and availability, and achieving a minimum amount of disruption.

For desktop exercises you tend to have much more freedom about where you host them, because it shouldn't really impact on the exercise. You might want to hold an “away day” and take exercise away from the office and away from the e-mails, phones and other distractions. Cost is again likely to be a determining factor and you may be required to use an internal venue.

It is worth spending some time looking for suitable venues though, and perhaps keeping a record of those that have been successful. Using a large, echoing, room for a small exercise can have a notable impact on the dynamics of the event, simply by making it difficult to hear what other people are saying. We've found that smaller, cosier rooms tend to be the best, even if people have to be crammed in.

We've discussed the idea of buying a speaker system for the larger rooms that we have, but have so far shied away because we think that it would put added pressure on the players.



When should I start the exercise?

As with any other meeting or event, you will need to think about the logistics of the day, such as how early you should start, whether people can get through traffic in time for the beginning of the exercise, or how late you can reasonably ask people to stay. We try to limit our exercises to half a day as a maximum. We find that they can be really intense and really focussed, and that people begin to flag if it goes on for any longer. Larger exercises will obviously demand a longer playing period.

Inviting players to the exercise

Players are the most important part of the exercise and you will need to give them plenty of notice to make sure they are free to come. You might need to exert a little pressure to get everyone there that you need!

The type and numbers of players should be determined by the objectives and by the type of exercise. The number of players that you are going to invite will have a huge bearing on how the exercise runs, particularly for desktop and discussion exercises. In these, if the number is too big, it could start to become hard to facilitate and players might not be able to get enough air time to fully contribute or might become intimidated by the crowd and not want to speak.

Again, you should go back to your objectives and see what you need to achieve. If you need to get a lot of people together you might want to think about splitting people up into different groups.

You might want to invite some people to the exercise to sit and observe what happens, but not to take an active part. This can be useful if you have people that would benefit from seeing the outcomes of the exercise, such as people that are being trained, or people that need to understand how the emergency response would work. As with players, you need to manage the numbers of observers carefully – too many can swamp the exercise and might even need their own facilitator to look after them.

You might want to think about whether how active you want observers to be in the exercise. You can ask them not to take part, but we often value their input, and the questions that they ask. Observers are also in a wonderful position to make recommendations about plan development, because they are not distracted by having to think about their playing response.

What should I give players on the day?

If the objective of the exercise is to test an emergency plan, it is important that all players have access to the emergency plan that is to be tested. If players don't have ready access to the plan, for whatever reason, it might be helpful to print copies or extract for people to use on the day.

We try only to provide players with the materials that they might expect to have to hand during an actual incident, such as maps, telephone directories and so on. We often ask players to bring along any internal documents or any other material that they themselves would usually have available.

If the players identify that they need anything else, then it should be added to the emergency plan, or kept in the emergency control room or some other suitable location.



How should I learn lessons from the exercise?

If one of the objectives of the exercise was to test or improve the emergency plan, then capturing the feedback from those involved is absolutely critical.

The key principle is that lessons learned should be captured as soon as possible before they are forgotten or dwarfed by bigger issues. There are three main time periods in which you can capture feedback.

During an Exercise

Ideally you should capture feedback at the very moment it is being discussed by players. Seminar and table top exercises are perfectly suited for this because there is time to pause, think and write things down. This is particularly the case if you have factored in natural breaks and intervals where players could be asked to capture their feedback.

We use a selection of ways to capture feedback during our tabletop exercises:

- Ask each player to record their own feedback during the exercise in booklets or actually on exercise copies of plans which are then collected at the end
- Identify facilitators with a single role of capturing discussions
- Set the players actual questions and get them to right down their responses
- Asked groups of people to write feedback on a flip chart and present back
- Used a video camera or a digital voice recorder connected to a couple of PC speakers to record discussions which are later turned into a detailed record of the events and discussions

It is vitally important to tell the players about the chosen form(s) of capture, and to stress to them the importance of recording ideas if players are required to assist. We usually cover these points in our opening presentation, as well as stressing the point that we are not defensive about our emergency plans and we are openly seeking constructive criticism.

We prefer to use a mix of these approaches wherever possible. If players are particularly busy, their own notes can be a little limited. We are particularly pleased with the results of recording discussions to pull out the key points at a later date.

Immediately after an exercise

It is usual after an exercise to hold a “hot debrief” or a “hot wash up”, to capture peoples feedback. In this meeting all the players are brought together and given an opportunity to comment on key issues during the exercise

These meetings are ideal if you have been running a live exercise, or frantic desktop exercise where it would be unreasonable to expect the players to carry out their response as well as keeping a record of feedback and potential improvements. If you have had the opportunity to capture lessons during the exercise you might not want to hold this meeting as it could simply lead to a regurgitation of the discussions that have already been held.

It is important to know what you want to achieve from the meeting and to know how you want it to run in order to avoid a free for all. You might want to think about the key areas of the emergency plan, or the incident response and just ask – what worked well here? What didn't work well?

Another effective method is to look at what should of happened (what is written in the plan), look at what did happen and look at the reasons for the differences.

Playing in an exercise is usually hard work. At the end players are usually ready to get off and often not in the right frame of mind for detailed discussions. Meetings held straight after an exercise are usually best kept short and sweet and straight to the point. If you take this approach it is important to acknowledge that you are not going to capture all of the issues because players are only going to get a limited amount of air space. Further feedback capture is likely to be needed.

You should make every effort to maintain the constructive atmosphere – group feedback straight after major, stressful exercises can sometimes become a little tense!

Some time after the exercise

Whilst the players are at the exercise location you have a certain amount of control over them. Once they've gone, it is likely to take a lot more effort on your part to get any more feedback from them!

It is traditional to hold a “Cold Debrief” meeting a couple of weeks after the exercise. Here, the players are brought back together (or representatives of the players) to hold a more in-depth version of the “hot debrief” held just after the incident. Again, it is important that this meeting is structure to make sure that you hit all of the key points and avoid just focussing on “hot topic issues”.

If you would like to go down this route we would recommend that you agree this date diary during the planning process. Holding the debrief a couple of weeks later gives players the chance to reflect, and for you to collate any of the feedback captured during the exercise. These materials are useful for stimulating discussion.

If you have captured a lot of feedback during the exercise we would recommend that you think carefully about the benefit of having a cold debrief. The meeting will take up another chunk of the player's time, often just to get the players to tell us again what they've told us already during the exercise.

Two other really good ways of capture feedback after an event are one to one discussions with the players, umpires and facilitators, and questionnaires. Discussions are likely to be the most productive approach, but more time consuming for you and for the player. Questionnaires are a quicker option, but you are likely to get less feedback as a result. It is also likely that you will need to send out a few reminders.

The amount of time you spend capturing feedback should be proportionate to the amount of time you spent planning the exercise. If it was worth spending weeks preparing, it must be worth going to town afterwards to capture every possible piece of feedback. If you have a team helping design and run the exercise, you should think about getting them involved in capturing feedback.



Evaluating and Acting on the feedback

Once you have captured your feedback it is important to evaluate the comments made because you will not necessarily want to take all of the suggestions on board – for example, they might not be feasible, or made based on a misunderstanding of arrangements. To help us with this we often group the feedback into the different sections of the plan that was being tested. You should then try and agree a way forward with the comments that you have agreed to action. With any luck, you will be able to use this paperwork and documentation to form an action plan for future plan development!

It is sometimes easier to keep this evaluation process separate from the capturing lessons process – it is often difficult enough to have time to capture all the feedback, let alone try and think through the solutions.

We often combine a cold debrief with this evaluating and acting process. We ask the exercise design team to represent their players and to add any post-exercise feedback that has been put forward, and then at the same meeting work through the feedback captured during the exercise deciding if we should amend the plan as a result.

You should give some thought on how to best manage this process based on size and scale of the exercise.

Finally - writing the exercise report!

Players usually get tired after the exercise and ready to move on to new things, and the same can usually be said about the people that put the exercise together! It is important, though, to produce a final exercise report that pulls together all of the work and all of the learning of the event. Without this important piece of work there will be little documentary evidence that the exercise has taken place, and could be a good chance that the action plan will remain undelivered.

Our exercise reports usually cover:

- A summary of the planning process, including agreed objectives, projects plans, meeting minutes, detailed scenario information and so on
- A summary of the discussions at the exercise and a copy of the exercise attendance list
- A summary of all the lessons and feedback that has been captured
- A summary of the evaluation process on each piece of feedback and a copy of the attendance list of the evaluation meeting
- The future action plan

We usually distribute a copy of the report to all the plan holders of the document being tested, and make the report available to any players, umpires or observers if they want a copy.



Some final things to think about.....

- Think about the terminology you use carefully. Much of the language connected with exercises is simply replicated from military practise. They make sense to the people that know about them, but for those that don't they can make an event sound more stressful and complicated than they need to be. For example – what does exercise actually mean? Can you words that are more recognisable by your organisation like “practise” “game” “health check” or “workshop” instead? Could you use “helper” instead of “umpire”? Small things like this could make a real difference to the way that you event is perceived.
- If you have time, you might want to think about having a little ice breaker game to introduce people to each other and make them feel more relaxed in their environment
- Telling people to dress down at an exercise can make a bold statement and underline the tone that you are trying to achieve.

Best of Luck with your Exercise!!!

We really hope that you find this process useful, and that it saves you some time in your own business continuity planning. We would be really interested to receive any feedback that you have on this guidance or on the process – please send any comments to heps@eastriding.gov.uk. If you contact us on this address we will also send you the next set of guidance notes when they're published. We would also be interested to hear your experiences of business continuity, and to have a copy of any forms that you put together so that we can post them on the website and so that we can all learn from each other.

All the best in your business continuity planning!

Regards

All from Humber Emergency Planning Service

Watch out on our website for the next instalment of the guidance:

- Gathering additional information from the “Very High Risk” critical functions
- Using the information gathered during the business impact analysis
- Considering the wider business continuity processes

Please Remember! The above approach to business continuity is set out as a suggested approach only. Whilst East Riding of Yorkshire Council, Hull City Council, North East Lincolnshire Council and North Lincolnshire Council are satisfied with the effectiveness of the approach for the purposes of their own business they can offer no guarantees as to its effectiveness when applied to other businesses and cannot accept any liability for any losses arising from its use.