

Episode One: Executive Summary

An Aptitude for Disaster - Why are some people drawn to business continuity?



POWERED BY:
 **Databarracks**

People come at Business Continuity from a lot of different angles. But something we weren't expecting from our conversations is how clearly people remember why they got into the business in the first place.

There was a penny-dropping moment for almost everyone we spoke to. For some it was an epiphany that continuity and recovery existed, for some it was first-hand experience of a disastrous event, and for some it was just a sincere human urge to help people.

For John Robinson of Inoni, it was simply realising that continuity existed:

"As with most people, you fall into BC. It's not something you know about instinctively when you come to it. I was working at Citycorp back in 1987, and I'd just finished a piece of IT work for them, and the CEO came and said 'Are you off then? Before you go can you do this?' And he handed me their global standard for disaster recovery as it was then, and naturally you say yes. So I did. And I read it, and I thought 'I can do better than that.' So I did."

John came to continuity in relatively comfortable circumstances. For some people, like Vicky Gavin, Head of Business Continuity and Information Security at The Economist, that realisation arrived under more stressful circumstances:

"How did I get started? 9/11. I was working in Security Operations at a big investment bank, and the Business Continuity team sat beside me and my team. And when the plane hit the building, they all panicked. It was clear things could be done better. There were a lot of opportunities for improvement, particularly around automation. Everything they were doing was very paper-based. And for me the overriding memory is someone standing at the photo-copier for 4 hours, making copies of business continuity plans, which seemed to me the wrong way to approach it. And so in the wake of 9/11, I was asked to become acting Head of Security in New York and that involved also looking at the Business Continuity function and managing that, and that was really my first taster."

"In my opinion Business Continuity is a very practical area of study. So many people - and especially the consultants - will make it sound very, very complicated. But it's really simple. It's all about making sure that the business have plans in place so that if something bad happens, they don't go out of business. It's really, really straightforward. There's a huge amount of organisation required, and looking at details and analysis, but these are not insurmountable tasks. People do them all day, every day. And I think that's what I saw - I saw people that were dealing with huge numbers of details, but in a very manual way. And that's what I looked at and thought a little bit of automation would make this a lot simpler."

"The amount of downtime that the equipment suffered, it just wasn't reliable. In those days you'd have an engineer basically permanently on-site in his own little room with his workshop, and if you had a disk drive go down or tape drive not working, or paper tape reader (if you remember that far back) fail, then of course you can't get the data into the system and process it. And the company I worked for, it was a construction company, so we had to turn around payroll on a weekly basis. If we didn't then obviously the guys didn't get paid, and they'd down tools. That began to resonate with me. If we were down and we've got workers out there that are relying on a pay packet, that if they don't, they stop, which means that we don't

build whatever it is we're building, which again, could potentially have an impact on the company, maybe there's penalty payments, so it escalates."

A lot of people referenced huge public events like 9/11 as a kind of catalyst that brought continuity and disaster recovery to their attention.

But for some people like Paul Butcher, a Business Continuity consultant at Fujitsu, it was the limitations of business IT in its infancy that revealed the need for continuity at a technology level:

On the other hand, Stewart Duguid, EMEA Continuity Manager at BP, came to continuity from a more human perspective.

"My first foray into the continuity world was 1996, when I worked for a small visitor attraction in Newcastle. Basically I was reviewing the fire evacuation plan and that's when I realised, 'well, that's actually only just the first stage, getting people out, getting people safe. The next stage is then, what is it you do as far as keeping the business going and the business running, or what if somebody became injured during the evacuation.' And just really going through and thinking about what the next stage from the evacuation drill is, was my introduction."

Matt Hogan,
Resiliency Officer
at the London Fire
Brigade and former
Emergency Planning
Officer for the
Ambulance Service,
unsurprisingly also takes
a people-centric approach:

"It's been a bit of a crazy route to be honest, but I think my first exposure to the Business Continuity/ Emergency Planning industry was actually through my Dad.

"He was working as an engineer in a hospital, and particularly focused at the time on the arrangements that they needed to take for the Millennium bug and what the impact of that potentially could be in hospital equipment. So that was my first view into the world really.

"And although it didn't really amount to anything, there was all those docu-dramas about planes falling out of the sky and financial institutions crumbling and people's washing machines going haywire, and I thought, 'Oh, that's quite exciting', and then a year later I was in New York, flew back from New York on the 10th September, and the following day was watching the news obviously, and I was sort of captivated by it.

"It was a horrendous situation, but I was really taken by the response to it."

"I was amazed that both the public sector had got this really well worked out response, but also seeing businesses and communities coming together and supporting each other, it was really cool. There was an example of AT&T, the phone provider, out there just dishing out loads of mobiles to people that wanted to call their families or whatever, and I thought 'There's something in that that I find really interesting'".

We also spoke to Paul Kudray, who founded KCL Consulting after years of working in the Ambulance Service, about the disasters that shaped his understanding of recovery, and the emphasis he places on human safety:

"I'd been in the Ambulance Service since I was 16. I'd been in for 32 years. I started as a cadet and I worked my way through. Operationally, pre the days when there were paramedics, through to being a paramedic and an operational manager and an emergency control centre manager and a trainer.

"I always look back and think, 'Was that really the first starting point of my experience?'

"Or should I just say I've just got a bit of an aptitude towards disaster management? I know that might sound a bit bad, but actually it's something in terms of Resilience Emergency Management, Business Continuity Management that people either get or they don't get, or they like or they don't like. I think that was really the starting point."

"My first real experience of any sort of major incident goes back to the 1985 Manchester Airport fire."

"But what that actually gave me was my first real taste of multi-casualty type incidents. That was closer to home, even though I'd seen, and obviously been aware of, disasters that had happened around the world, I hadn't really paid a great deal of attention to it, until it actually happened nearer to where I worked.

