

NextGen TableTops - automating and improving tabletop exercises

Objective

Table-top exercises are an invaluable way to train your team members on the disaster recovery timeline and their responsibilities at time of disaster. They are also the best way to orient your teams on the structure and flow of your recovery plans, the complexities of impact assessment, the uncertainties of plan activation, the distinctions between their responsibilities and those of the operational business units, and their ongoing maintenance responsibilities.

Table-top exercises are also the best way to explore the nuances of different events, to prepare your teams to understand how varying impact scenarios change their recovery duties and capabilities, and to explore how different decisions impact a recovery.

Unfortunately, most tabletop exercises share common failings that ultimately limit their usefulness.

The first failing is that tabletop exercises require extensive scripting to a specific scenario to ensure that the participants follow the same path through the plan that the instructor is prepared to illustrate. However, too often scripted exercises are synonymous with stifled exercises.

Secondly, to produce a realistic exercise that is more than a moderator droning over a PowerPoint slideshow requires a cast of "actors" that significantly increases complexity of preparation and execution...and significantly increases the cost of the exercise.

Next, scripted exercises, that by definition follow a more or less predefined, linear path through the plan, cannot accommodate session variables (such as location, audience, time of impact, different loss scenarios, etc.). Nor can they allow the participants complete flexibility in their simulated responses. Unfortunately, free-form exercises that attempt to accommodate such flexibility sacrifice control, predictability and repeatability.

Finally, tabletop exercises are far too difficult to prepare. Each exercise can take weeks or even months of prep time. The result is that fewer exercises are conducted or the same exercise is used over and over with only slight variations. Audiences become bored, learning is sub-optimal, actual recovery skills are less than they should be and future participation is threatened.

Clearly, a better approach is needed.

Applicability

- DR/BC Managers who need to increase participation in training
- Senior Managers who need to better understand their role in recovery
- IT managers who want to test their capability without the cost and preparation overhead of a physical test
- Business Unit Managers who need to better understand the recovery process and their role in it
- Auditors who need a quick but thorough way to assess a recovery capability

Format

WTG's NextGen TableTop Services are structured around our revolutionary TableTop Exercise Console. The Console is a new, automated tool that helps companies eliminate all of the historical challenges associated with developing and executing tabletop exercises. The Console enables one person to deliver literally over 1,000,000 unique exercises in real-time without any advanced preparation. An endless number of different scenarios can be explored quickly, easily and cost-effectively. In a matter of hours, your team's practical experience can be increased dramatically and the breadth of their experience can be extended over a large number of possible disaster variants.

Participant's are free to take any path through the plan and to make their own decisions—good or bad. The Console automatically responds to those decisions and dynamically adjusts the exercise flow accordingly. If the decision results in a "recovery problem", the exercise can be set back, a different decision made, and a new path will be modeled to explore a new outcome...all in uninterrupted real time.

The Console enhances the participant's experience with audio, video, real-time e-mail (messages automatically sent live to participants as dynamically required by the exercise), non-linear Powerpoint slides (selective slides automatically displayed based on the dynamics of the exercise), multiple projectors, live RSS feeds, SMS text and more to immerse the participants in a realistic, albeit simulated, disaster environment.

The Console also simplifies the logistics of the exercise so that one person can moderate the entire exercise. Up to four monitors are supported so that the moderator can concurrently view the Console, the plan document, the automated script, or any other document or tool. The Console can also be run via web conference so that if desired, additional "actors" can participate in the role playing. With this approach, the actors watch the Console on their notebooks and are automatically prompted with their parts so that absolute minimum rehearsal is required.

WTG offers a full range of TableTop Exercise Services ranging from development of master scripts, to loading your plan into the Console tool (requires an action-oriented plan with teams), to turn-key exercise execution. WTG prepares and facilitates all aspects of the exercise including: scenario definition, documentation, monitoring and recap. Each exercise is completely orchestrated to specific timelines, a detailed narrator background, pre-defined scenario pivot points, appropriate props and supporting "actors".

Typically, each exercise consists of four sub-exercises that encompass the full range of responses to any given event. The general notification test (approximately 1 hour to execute) will exercise the ability to effectively use the call procedures to contact and mobilize the recovery teams in a timely manner. The executive response

test (approximately 1 hour to execute) will simulate the executive incident response team's ability to quickly evaluate an obscure impending disaster event and to place the appropriate areas of the company on standby or plan activation. The team leader/alternate test will simulate full execution of a complete stage 1 response (approximately 3 hours to execute) to a simulated disaster event. The final team member test will require approximately four hours of real-time execution to simulate a full recovery effort.

Deliverables

- Fully articulated disaster scenario
- Fully defined detailed scenario timeline
- Fully documented narrators background script
- Predefined scenario pivot points with alternative timelines and narratives
- All necessary props (i.e. wallet cards, plan copies, "news

- reports", "radio broadcasts", etc.)
- Additional "actors" as necessary
- Post exercise plan updates as required
- Post exercise recap of follow-up action items as required
- Plans loaded into NextGen Tabletop console
- NextGen Tabletop Console License - optional
- Final recap presentation to senior management

Benefits

- Better and more cost-effective exercises
- A more enjoyable and realistic experience for participants
- Better learning through free-form execution
- Improved decision making through scenario modeling
- Unlimited scenario variations
- Less preparation time and more scheduling flexibility
- Realistic plan improvements and measurable improved recovery skills
- Moderator independence with minimal training
- Increased management support



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When it comes to highly-resilient, highly-available and highly-recoverable solutions for systems, data and people, WTG are the experts of choice. We design, implement and maintain cost-effective, leading-edge solutions within the framework of our holistic NextGen 360° ABC™ methodology so you can respond to any incident-any time. Our 360° NextGen ABC methodology can improve recovery and continuity planning results for "new players" or "old pros" alike and our continuity architectures are specifically designed to provide proportionate solutions that cost less.

