

Build your own role-playing game: the business continuity drill

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Business continuity? Plan? Drill?

Business continuity is an organization's ability to maintain essential functions and services during and after a crisis or disaster.

A **business continuity plan** captures procedures for such events. In turn, this plan can be tested with a **business continuity drill**.

purpose

roles and responsibilities

activation criteria

scenarios



Business Continuity Plan?

updating

procedures

contacts

testing



Why run a BCP drill?

Disasters that threaten a business' ability to operate core functions don't occur that often, preferably never. If they do, we want to be prepared somewhat.

Chaos engineering a disaster on production is risky: simulation and/or table top drills it is.

How to torture senior management

~~How to torture senior management~~
How to build your BCP drill

10 Steps to ✨BCP drill greatness ✨

1. Define what you want to test
2. Pick a scenario
3. Choose your environment
4. Choose your players
5. Write a script and prepare materials
6. Do a test run
7. Run the actual drill
8. Debrief
9. Evaluate, follow up and update
10. Repeat



Define what you want to test

Before you start crafting your drill, brainstorm what you would like to assess. For inspiration you can

- Read your Business Continuity Plan
- Identify flaws in your systems
- Identify gaps in your processes
- Identify superhero engineers/single points of failure
- Read up on past incidents or drills



Pick a scenario

A BCP contains scenarios that would trigger activation, e.g. infrastructure failure, loss of core functionality or a security breach.

Feel free to take such a scenario and expand. Don't be afraid to go big for the sake of learning 😈



Choose your environment

Your drill environment can vary depending on your organization's way of working, participants and drill experience. You can choose to run your drill

- on-site or remotely
- in a meeting room, call or chat workspace (or combination)
- asynchronous or all at the same time
- with participation from different time zones



Choose your players

- Define roles and responsibilities among the organizing team
- Invite participants with roles and responsibilities listed in BCP
- Identify which other participants you would like to include

Depending on the player and their role, you can brief them or ask them to join the drill without prior knowledge.



Write a script and prepare materials

Don't forget

- Participant briefing including rules of the game
- Timeline, either based on milestones or minutes (or mix)
- Prompts to get participants unblocked, either in the form of game master or other actor interaction, or customer complaints
- Screen captures of dashboards, status pages, anything that could be requested

Don't forget to prepare an evaluation form for scoring participants



Script demo time

Participant briefing (all)

This year, we try to mimic our daily way of working in our drill. As such, all participants are joining remotely and you are requested to use Slack, Google Meet or e-mail for your commands and actions part of the drill (more on how you can do this to follow). As part of the drill, you are also free to browse Notion and the web, but if you want to check a website or tool we rely on for incident response, please ask the game master to tell you what you will find there.

To communicate during the the exercise, please use one of the following means:

- join this dedicated Google Meet call
- read and write messages in this Slack workspace. This workspace is intended to mirror (part of) the WeTransfer Slack workspace and contains some of our channels and colleagues. If you want to reach out to someone that is not present in our mirrored Slack workspace, please let us know. Please ignore the time stamps associated with messages, if time is critical for the drill, we will tell you.
- send e-mails to drill participants or (imaginary) colleagues but don't forget to address or cc the email group bcp-drill-2024@wetransfer.com
- make phone calls - please notify the game master who you want to call and why, they will inform you whether this person can be reached and what their reply will be.

Participant briefing (individual)

- ▼ From Game Master to CPO/Damon in Google Meet, copy to be shared in Slack

It's 22:00 CET April 26th. US employees are working, NL employees are gone for the day and celebrating King's Night. Tomorrow is King's Day meaning all NL employees will have a day off. Dan has told you yesterday that he won't be available for part of the day due to personal reasons, he will log on later. Please check your Slack workspace for an incoming DM.

Participant briefing (individual)

▼ VP/Matt joins the drill. From Game Master to VP/Matt in DM in Slack

Hey Matt, game master speaking, a couple of minutes ago you saw in DataDog that amount of errors related to card payments is growing. We think Damon is aware something is wrong, but we think he needs help with incident response. He should be active in #prd-transfer-support.

Timeline

- ☐ **KEY MILESTONE - NEEDS TO HAPPEN BEFORE MIN 20:** Raise an S1 incident in `#x-incident-discuss`
- ☐ Communicate about that S1 incident in `#x-incident-status`
- ☐ Update WeTransfer StatusPage and/or banner - this can only be done by Dan, Matt, Platform Engineer or Support. Log-in method varies per user.

Prompts to unblock

☐ Participants update our Twitter account.

▼ If they fail to do this, Support can remind them by sharing this tweet.



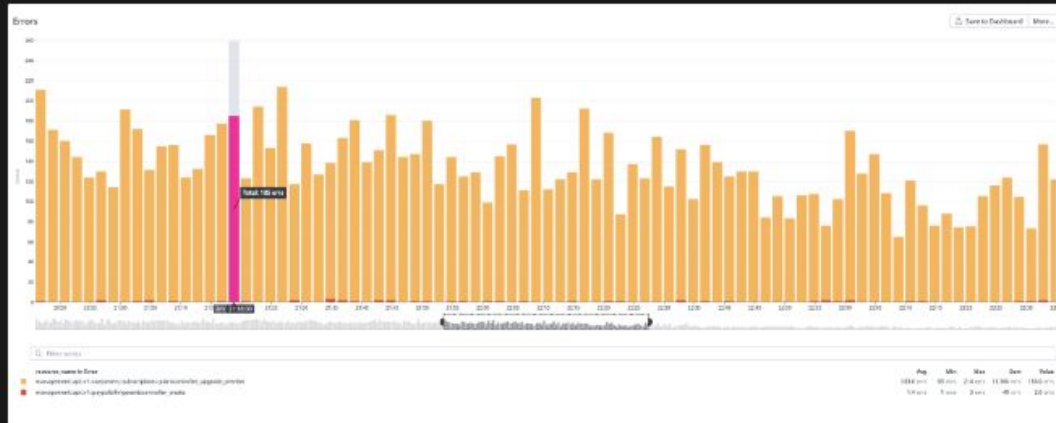
☐ Participants update our StatusPage

+ :: ▼ If they fail to do this, Support can remind them by sharing this tweet.



Screen captures

▼ When asked about DataDog graphs, we can share these graphs





Do a test run

Running a drill is not easy: people are unpredictable and getting them back on your track can be a challenge.

Doing a test run with a group of engineers (who doesn't want to play CTO?) will improve your drill, trust me.



Run the actual drill

- Be prepared: show up early and save all resources on your device
- Bring focus by muting notifications and getting rid of distractions
- Ensure all participants know rules of the game
- Record your drill meeting (when applicable) for easier scoring
- Keep track of drill progress as you run
- Communicate with your co-organizers throughout the drill
- Intervene or improvise when the unexpected happens



Debrief

Allow for some time to debrief before moving on to your next meeting. During this time, collect feedback and learnings while they're still fresh.

Evaluate, follow up and update

- Use the evaluation form you created to score your participants and share how and where they can improve
- Take note of potential follow up expressed during or after the drill and ensure it's placed on the appropriate backlogs
- Update your BCP: do we need to add/edit scenarios or any other instructions?

Repeat

Learn from failure in order to improve, SREs, you know the drill 🥁



What I learned about creating/running drills

- Don't turn a BCP drill into a test of technical ability: it's about process and collaboration. Keep the drill going at all times
- Even a fake crisis can make people nervous
- You don't need fancy chaos engineering capabilities to run a meaningful drill
- BCP drill can be a great tool to get senior management buy-in for reliability and security

Are you ready?

