Tabletop Exercises for Executives

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Agenda

Defining the Tabletop Exercise
Types of Tabletop Exercises
Advantages to conducting Exercises
12 Step Approach to a Successful Exercise
Other uses for Tabletop Exercises
Summary

What is an Exercise?

An Exercise is:

- The performance of duties, tasks and operations in a way similar to the way they would be performed in a real emergency.
- Used to promote emergency and business preparedness. Can be conducted within your own facility.*

*Emergency Management Exercises, Regina Phelps, RN, BSN, MPA, CEM

Types of Exercises

Orientation (including workshops and training)
Drill
Tabletop (including Basic and Advanced)
Functional
Full-scale
Multi-Site
Reasons for Performing Tabletop Exercises

To increase training and awareness of your BC and DR Programs
To increase awareness of Executives and encourage increased support
To enhance your incident response and escalation procedures
To train your Teams on Incident Command Structure
To train key staff on their roles during a disaster
To train IT staff and Business Staff of how to respond together
To include vendors, end-users, or local emergency personnel (i.e., fire department, hazmat experts, county and medical personnel)
To learn your organization’s strengths and weaknesses in crisis response.
To use Lessons Learned to prepare your organization for disasters.

Before you begin designing the Exercise, ask yourself:

Why are we doing this exercise?

What do you want to accomplish?
- What is it that Executives need to hear and know?
- Do they understand the Incident Command Structure?
- Do they understand the ICS Teams?
- Do we know how to use the escalation procedures?
- Do we need to walk though documentation such as Business Continuity Plans?
- Do we have weaknesses that could be explored with a Tabletop Exercise?
- Do we have Federal Regulations that mandate training?

Objectives

Identifies a short-term, measurable step that contributes to achievement of overall exercise goal
- What do you want to get out of the exercise?
- Why are you doing this exercise?

Normally plan to have 3-5 objectives

Characteristics of effective objectives:
- Simple, concise, measurable, achievable
- Realistic & challenging

Overall Goal of your exercise is:
- Find out what doesn’t work or needs fixing or requires practice!

How will Executives Benefit from a Tabletop Exercise?

Executives and management will better understand their roles during a crisis response
Executives and management will better understand participant crisis response
Some Executives will demonstrate a stronger understanding of disaster response and leadership during an event (or disaster)
Participants will benefit from hearing the Executives point of view during the exercise
You will benefit from learning tidbits of information from the business leaders and event participants
How Often to Exercise?

BCP Industry standard is 1-2 times per year

Executive participation should be included with all exercises

Totally depends on the maturity and goals of your organization

Recommend larger exercises take place 1-2 times per year

Small exercises with specific goals can be conducted more frequently

Different types of Tabletops can be performed throughout the year.

So, how do I get started?

Coordinating a large Tabletop Exercise with Executives to exercise incident response can seem like a daunting task.

I usually plan for 35-45 people to attend.

Let’s break it down into 12 easy to follow steps

List of Steps for your Event

Step 1: Initial Planning – Several Months Out
- Obtain Senior Management Commitment & Support
- In order to get Executive support, does it need to be a Project in your Organization?
- Establish which Executives will participate in this exercise
- Establish the roles of the Executives: Observers or participants in response?
- Determine Budget – do you have one?
- Decide upon a basic scenario based upon vulnerabilities or gaps in preparedness (having this will help you know who needs to participate)
- Pick a time frame of when you want the scenario to take place – winter, summer, etc.
- Determine the length of time for the exercise event
- As you are building, keep the scenario as confidential as you can (design team of experts will need to be used to fine tune the scenario, but make sure you advise them to keep it confidential)

Step 2: Scenario
- Scenario

Step 3: Participants & Date
- Participants & Date

Step 4: Countdown: Eight Weeks Prior to the Event
- Countdown: Eight Weeks Prior to the Event

Step 5: Six Weeks Prior to the Event
- Six Weeks Prior to the Event

Step 6: Four Weeks Prior to the Event
- Four Weeks Prior to the Event

Step 7: Two Weeks Prior to the Event
- Two Weeks Prior to the Event

Step 8: One Week Prior to the Event
- One Week Prior to the Event

Step 9: Day Before the Event
- Day Before the Event

Step 10: Day of the Event
- Day of the Event

Step 11: Conclude Exercise
- Conclude Exercise

Step 12: After Event Report and Follow Up
- After Event Report and Follow Up
Step 2: Scenario – How to select a Scenario for your Exercise?

Explore the different types of Scenarios

Develop a list of Exercise Design Team Members - 3-5 people who are experts in the field relating to the scenario (they can be Simulators or Evaluators the day of the Exercise)

Select the dates for the Exercise Design Team to meet (usually 2-3 meetings); send out invites to design team

Decide upon a scenario that will exercise aspects where you know there are weaknesses

Develop the initial Goal and Objectives

Types of Disasters

NATURAL DISASTERS
- Ice & Snow Storms
- Earthquake
- Floods
- Hurricane
- Tornado
- Fire, External
- Wildfire
- Severe Temperatures
- Drought
- Pandemic

TECHNICAL DISASTERS
- Telephony Disaster
- Technology Disaster
- Power Failure
- Data Corruption
- Fire Alarm Failure
- HVAC Failure
- Fire, Internal

MANMADE DISASTERS
- Terrorist Attack
- Suicide Bomb
- Active Shooter
- Industrial Accident
- Plane Crash in Building
- Riot/Civil Unrest
- Plane Crash
- Helicopter Crash

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS DISASTERS
- Nuclear Accident
- Chemical Exposure, External
- Internal Spill
- Radiologic Exposure, External
- Terrorism, Chemical or Radiologic

Step 2: Scenario – Continued

How to select a Scenario for your Exercise?

Identify several scenarios that “hit home” with your organization

Examples: Earthquake, power outage, fire, active shooter

Design slides to give narrative, but not solutions

Use injects (with envelopes or other means) to steer the scenario where it needs to be (less mature group will need more guidance)

The scenario does not need to be solved by the end of the Tabletop event.

Step 3: Participants & Date

Once you have an idea of the scenario, make a list of the Executives and other important participants

If you are in charge of a particular group (the Crisis Management Team), then you may have an established list of participants

Reserve the date and time with Executive Leadership before inviting the participants* or scheduling the room (Plan for last minutes cancellations)

Invite the participants early – ask them to “hold” the date with a calendar invite

Depending upon your scenario, invite public authorities or other outside experts (fire, police, news, etc.)

Obtain the conference room or other area for the exercise (Reserve room at least 1 hour before & after the exercise)

Note: Steps 2 & 3 can be interchanged depending upon your responsibilities and goals. (Example – if you are in IT, you might want to invite different people each time to cross train for incident response.)

*Before you confirm the date and time, check with all required Executives (or Executive Assistants) for availability
Step 4: Eight Weeks Prior to the Event

Explore the question:
Why are we doing this Exercise?

Finalize goals and objectives of the Exercise

Begin to Develop the Slide Presentation for your event

Define the table layout that you want for the exercise – this might help determine which conference room to use

Design Team: Conduct meetings - Use key expert judgment to design and manipulate your scenario

Develop exercise narrative and develop complete exercise plan

Decide on what aspects will be “real” and which will be “artificial”

If using external experts (Fire Chief, Police, etc.), make arrangements for their participation

Step 5: Six Weeks Prior to the Event

Validate goals and objectives with appropriate individuals; modify accordingly

Finish up meetings with Design Team

Develop all Injects to scenario

Make revisions to exercise plan

If using a Radio Broadcast, write a script for broadcast

Place injects within the slide presentation

Step 6: Four Weeks Prior to the Event

Send exercise agenda email to Executives and other participants, include goal, objectives, agenda and timeline - (Drive bys might be necessary)

Develop evaluation forms and other materials you want to use

Define exercise participant assignments and seating arrangements, including seating for Executives and Experts

Determine who is going to facilitate the event

Assign assistants to help you with logistics and train them

Step 6 – Continued -- 4 Weeks - Supplies and Equipment to Consider

Crisis Management Plan (or IT Incident Response Plan)

Laptop and projector large enough for room

Order equipment for room: polycom, projector, etc.

Depending upon budget, order promotional items and/or certificates for participants

Teleconference Lines & multiple phones (if this is part of your scenario)

Name tents for Teams/Groups

Notepads/pens/pencils/flip chart/ markers

Props (envelops or a box containing slips; colored vests, etc.)
Step 7: Two Weeks Prior to Event
Fine tune the scenario and slide presentation with injects with Design Team
Review scenario with your immediate leadership for any changes or enhancements (request confidentiality)
Request Executives (assistants) and participants update their contact information (especially if using a notification system for event)
Finalize and distribute updated crisis management plan (or other plan you are using for your event)
Talk to Communications Group about poster or Intranet advertisement (depending on your culture).
Order catering for exercise (if between 11 am and 2:00 pm – usually provide lunch – remember your vegetarians and Kosher folks!)

Step 8: One Week Prior
Send a follow-up reminder to all Executives, their assistants and other participants
If they are unable to attend, request that they send an alternate (also a good time for drive bys)
Verify the set-up of the conference room
Order printed materials: Certificates, Sign-in Sheets, Participant Evaluation forms, etc.
Ensure all equipment is available and in working condition (You might want to request a technician arrive prior to event for assistance)
Request that simulators, evaluators and external participants show up an hour before the event
Practice the presentation out loud in conference room setting

Personal Note: Don’t plan any meetings for yourself after the event – block your calendar!

Step 9: Day Before
Confirm all equipment for event is available and working (slides too), including seating arrangements
Create name tents and/or name badges, as well as confirm you have all handouts
Confirm you have materials (flip charts and markers) for “Parking Lots” and “Issues”
If using a radio broadcast, ensure it plays with no issues and is loud enough for an occupied room.
Assign someone as Scribe to write down “Parking Lot” and “Issues” on separate flip boards

Step 10: Day of the Event
One Hour Before Event: Show up to exercise room at least one hour early to set up
Hold a short meeting with evaluators to ensure they know what is expected of them
Ensure that tables are set up as you want them to be – if not, re-arrange!
Set up slide presentation, test functionality
Verify proper functionality of all audio-visual equipment
Set up sign-in tables & refreshment table(s)
Set up polycoms (if using them)
Set up table for handouts, envelopes, promotional items, etc.
Step 10 – Continued --
The Event – moments before

**Breathe and Relax**, you have done a huge amount of work and you will soon see your work come to life

Ensure that designated Scribe will write down “Parking Lot” and “Issues” on separate flip boards

Review seating arrangements as participants arrive

If participants arrive with their laptops, ask them to put them away for the exercise

Ensure that sign in sheets are being used

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Step 10 – Continued --
The Disaster Event

Remind Executives and other participants to silence cell phones (This is a good time to have your direct-line Executive help out with introductions and rules)

Restrict the use of other computer devices

Review your “Guidelines” for conducting an exercise

Keep an eye on the time

Ask everyone to use sign in sheets

Be flexible - some things you are going to have to roll with

Be patient – allow participants time to think out what you are giving them

Be in charge - if someone tries to sabotage the scenario with a perfect quick fix, ending the event – interject and get the scenario back on course

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Step 10 – Continued --
General Guidelines

Reassure the group not to worry about making mistakes

Reassure them that making mistakes is a healthy outcome

Exercises are not “fault-finding activities”

They will not be graded

Decisions during this exercise are not precedent setting

Request that they not leave the room until the event is finished

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Step 11 -- Conclude Exercise

Thank everyone for their participation

Specify that completed evaluation forms must be turned in before leaving the room

Delegate the collection of the Participant Evaluations, Parking Lot and Issues items recorded during event

Make yourself available for those who have questions or want to talk to you directly

Ask for assistance in cleaning up the room and putting tables back if you moved them

Ensure that equipment is turned off and returned

Arrange for refreshments to be cleaned up – take any items you can for others
Step 12 -- After Event Report

There is tremendous power in conducting exercises, but their value is limited without documentation that they were conducted and what could have been done better.

Your Report can include:
- Executive Overview
- Objectives and Scope
- Scenario Description
- Participant List
- Parking Lot, Issues, and Lessons Learned sections
- Evaluation form comments from Executives and participants
- Recommendations

Report should be drafted within a few days after event

Step 12 – Continued -- Follow Up

If there were issues presented, you will need to figure out how to address the issues

Send a “thank you” email to Executives and participants

Create an Issues Log to track the issues

Develop a plan to remedy the issues that can be resolved

Develop task forces or other groups to address outstanding issues

Note: It is important to show progress on fixing issues – otherwise your program may lose credibility.

Other Uses for Tabletops

Exercises
Small exercises designed to review BC Plans with Departments
Workshop type exercise to document flow and issues
Tabletop to walk through an implementation plan prior to a disaster recovery exercise
Tabletop exercise to practice response and activation of the Command Center

Summary

Exercises remain one of your most powerful tools to improve your program, your plans, your leadership support and your response

Tabletop exercises are highly flexible and can be modified to achieve the results you are seeking to accomplish

Remember:
- If you tell someone they need to improve their processes, it might not be well received
- If you allow someone to see it for themselves during a Tabletop Exercise, they most likely will make the necessary changes.
Thank you!

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