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Introduction

The following examples outline a methodology that I have used to ensure successfully DR testing on a monthly basis for individual Business Areas, and a particular difficult decision that had to be made when there was a need to carryout DR testing in the live service environment.

Example of a Successful DR Test

Preparation

Regular Disaster Recovery (DR) testing can be successful, as my experience has found when specific processes are in place to monitor:

- Organisational criticality and associated operational processes;
- Relevant DR applications, servers and support to achieve “business-as-usual”;
- Changing organisational needs, impacting on DR requirements;

Planning

Success can only then happen if stakeholders also become engaged, and a pre-test meeting is held to agree:

- Test deliverables;
- Systems requirements, and specific issues or concerns;
- Support staff, internal & external, third party involvement, and users who should be in attendance;

- Then follows issuing of a Test Plan, detailing the applications/systems that will be tested, logistics for the test and specific roles & responsibilities.

Performance

And, from my experience, a post test report, normally known as a “RAG” (Red, Amber, Green), delivers to all interested stakeholders a visual summary of the organisations operational risk levels and DR Preparedness, supported by follow-up actions.

Example of a Less Successful Test

One test that I was involved with that was less successful didn't originally start off as a test!

In this particular case involving equipment delivering service to some 1.4 million customers - although there had been investment in standby DR, it had been decided that the risk was too high to carry-out testing in a live environment.

However, when the live environment became affected by water flooding into the equipment room, leading to total loss of service, standby DR was invoked and found to be wanting. Fortunately, due to the time of day and month it became possible to recover the live environment in an acceptable period of time.

Following a review of the risk, the standby DR was fixed, all stakeholders were subsequently engaged, involving some 200+ members of staff, and a plan was developed to deliver a full DR test in the live environment. And yes, this test did work, leading to various service improvements and insurance savings for the Company

The Challenges Involved

ICT operations would always seem to be in a "state-of-flux", changing to meet business priorities, developments and day-to-day activities, mostly driven by an organisations accepted level of risk.

In most cases this level of risk can impact on ongoing investment in DR and the scale of support provided, either at a strategic, tactical or operational level.

So, integration of a reporting process through to all levels of management, associated with agreed deliverables, aligned with organisational priorities, is necessary to meet this challenge.

Measurable Benefits

Knowledge is power, and knowing the value of the products being delivered by IT and the service criticality to that organisation provides the basis, in-part, for a "Business Impact Analysis (BIA)".

With the BIA results, it should then possible to measure the value of "down-time" in lost revenue and/or production, placing a value against system recovery time, supporting ongoing DR investment and in "Resilience".