Building Resiliency Into Disaster Recovery

Today, disaster recovery readiness requires planning, practice and the right partner

Nobody likes to ask doomsday questions. But working through a worst-case scenario is the only way to truly understand how much resiliency a business needs —not only for disaster recovery but for any business continuity or crisis scenario, says Diane Schwarz, CIO of Textron, a multi-industry company headquartered in Providence, Rhode Island, known for such brands as Beechcraft, Bell Helicopter, Cessna, E-Z-GO and Jacobsen. This can mean some awkward conversations, she warns. But if you don't ask the questions, conducting a business impact analysis or categorizing critical apps can too easily devolve into an exercise of filling out forms and checklists that never touch on the really scary possibilities.

"You have to engage your business leaders," she says, "and ask, 'If a hundred-year event were to happen, do you know that it could be three hours or five days that you will not be able to operate with your applications? How would you respond? How would you keep the business operating, and what is the financial impact? Do we need to think differently about how we architect our solutions and our resiliency?'"

Textron relies on IBM as a partner in resiliency planning to provide contingencies for a multitude of interruptions in business operations. The partnership with IBM gives Textron the flexibility to adjust resiliency strategies as business needs change. Architectural alternatives include cloud, shared floor space, dedicated recovery techniques and hybrid availability solutions. Partnering with IBM also allows Textron to support a diversified manufacturing enterprise with an efficient business continuity shared services model for its autonomous operating divisions—a far more economical plan than each division maintaining its own hardware and a team ready to step in and help manage in a real disaster.

Optimizing Resiliency Options

- **Lower investments and expenses:** Utilizing IBM's resiliency services means Textron can maintain readiness without capital outlays for physical space and stand-by hardware.

- **Scalable and flexible infrastructure:** IBM can provide leased hardware or support Textron-owned hardware, allowing Textron to optimize its options for disaster recovery.

- **Focus on the core:** By relying on IBM's resiliency experts, Textron can focus talent on higher value-added activities.

That holistic approach extends to assessing all aspects of recovery at Textron, beginning with a roadmap of critical assets and obscure dependencies. "Previously you would ask, 'What applications are necessary to keep your business running?'" says Schwarz. "You evaluated ERP, manufacturing and inventory systems. But you may not have considered some of the broader systems required to support the operations. Enterprises need to take into account the critical assets in a network, not just the financially significant ones.

"Once you have assessed your critical assets, you should consider which dependencies exist," she adds. "Then, based on understanding everything required for recovery, you can better sequence your restoration efforts." Disaster recovery approaches at some enterprises haven't always included critical infrastructure and security services and may not have factored in broader dependencies to drive recovery order.

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Q&A
Blueprint for Resiliency: You Need to Have a Plan

Q&A With Linda Laun, IBM Global Business Continuity, Chief Continuity Architect

In your decades of experience with business continuity, how has the conversation around resiliency changed?

Resiliency has moved from an insurance discussion with IT executives to a business discussion about enterprise risk. Managing risk allows the business to innovate better and faster. And the world's growing dependency on "always on" applications and services means that today you have to be resilient—otherwise, you will not remain in business. The sheer complexity both within the business and with the advent of multi-tiered supply chains will continue to provide more challenges. In the future, more cooperative and transparent sharing and testing will be the norm.

Have resiliency solutions evolved to meet the growing inter-dependency of enterprise systems?

Yes, they have. They are trending towards a blending of more aggressive, complex solutions for critical applications while leveraging more mature shared-services capabilities for lower-tier applications to take advantage of lower costs. Cloud-based solutions are being rapidly adopted for their operational ease and flexibility.

What is the most significant risk to resiliency today?

Deciding what to protect and how is more important than designing a resiliency plan around a specific risk. You need a holistic approach and a good alignment with the business strategy and priorities. Resiliency practices such as business impact analysis and risk assessment help to determine that you're protecting the right things at the right level—especially data and applications needed to run the business. With skilled, rehearsed business continuity teams in place, the incident response time is reduced. Since most risks are unpredictable, impact-based planning makes more sense than focusing on any specific threat. Planning for loss of IT prepares the business for working around critical applications regardless of the reason why.

Practice makes perfect

The planning begins with an impact assessment on each application. "We determine how long we could operate without access to an application," says Schwarz. Her teams then assess the hardware and software required to restore those applications and tests recovery plans to validate that recovery goals can be met. IBM provides replication on an enterprise-wide basis, offering geographic redundancy and resiliency to the local backups completed in each of its business regions. If recovery were ever necessary, Textron could switch over to IBM hardware to run any part of its enterprise. Three times a year, the company does a practice run at IBM's fully hardened recovery site in Boulder, Colorado.

Most organizations never have to put their hundred-year disaster plans to the test. But every firm faces smaller incidents all the time. "Enterprises deal with incidents every day before they escalate to the point of disruption," says Schwarz. "Those who follow their incident response plan every day when reacting to events or threats in the network are better equipped to respond."

This is where resiliency planning should complement everyday operations. There has to be a well-documented and well-rehearsed incident management plan, explains Schwarz. "Who is going to respond? How are they going to respond? What tools are they going to respond with? A documented plan isn't worth anything if people haven't developed the necessary skills and practiced them on a regular basis."

It's not enough, however, to put everything in a facility out of town and know that it will be there when you need it. "One aspect that is often overlooked is the talent perspective," says Schwarz. Testing at Textron includes people from business units, application support, infrastructure support, project managers and power users, along with a support team from IBM and other service providers. "You need resiliency not just in your tactical architecture, you need it in your teams," she states. "Enterprises need to have depth and breadth, always bringing the next talent pipeline into those exercises." Teams should be composed in such a way that they can operate even if someone is on vacation or has moved into a new role or, in the case of a natural disaster, may not be available.

Ultimately, the goal is to extend the practice of recovery from restoring tactical architecture to understanding hidden dependencies and training talent in the art of maintaining a resilient enterprise through every situation—even the doomsday scenarios.

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