

# Chapter 14

## A Methodology for Inter–Organizational Emergency Management Continuity Planning

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper extends emergency management literature by developing a methodology for emergency management continuity planning (EmCP). In particular, the methodology focuses on inter-organizational continuous and coordinated planning among emergency management organizations. The authors draw on Soft Systems Methodology (Checkland & Scholes, 1999; Checkland, 2000), using it as a base for better understanding of EmCP. Barriers that must be overcome before the methodology can be introduced and established, as well as potential benefits, are also discussed.*

### INTRODUCTION

This paper introduces a methodology for achieving continuous and coordinated inter-organizational planning among emergency management organizations. How such planning arrangements can

work in inter-organizational settings is far from clear, since networked organizations often lack a single authority coordinating common activities (Capaldo, 2007). Comfort (2005) concludes that there is a need to change the standard practice of today towards building networks of emergency

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management organizations committed to a continuous process of improvement and learning, and Dynes (2000) further proposes that in the future there should be a concern for all types of hazards and that this concern needs to be built into organizations. Harrald (2006) adds that critical success factors are pre-planned inter-organizational planning and organizational learning. As observed by Harrald (2006), what is not addressed in emergency management literature is how planning in between organizations involved in emergency management can be accomplished. In addition, the planning in between organizations involved in emergency management is often kept on too low a level of intensity and is also most likely to occur after an emergency to evaluate the past event, instead of being proactive and continuous. The key issue addressed in the paper is how to achieve a continuous and coordinated planning among emergency management organizations working together at the regional and local level. As a possible way to address this, the paper introduces a methodology for inter-organizational emergency management planning on a strategic level, also taking into account the continuity aspect.

The Soft Systems Methodology developed by Peter Checkland and his colleagues is used in the paper to conceptualize EmCP and bridge business continuity planning and emergency management adapting the methodology to the emergency management context. In addition, the potential use of the proposed methodology is discussed in the light of research on Hurricane Katrina by Comfort (2007) and Comfort *et al.* (2010).

The rest of this conceptual paper is structured according to, firstly, a literature review of selected contributions within business continuity planning, soft systems methodology and emergency management (including a synthesis of ideas into a concept where the methodology is needed). This is followed by a section on the methodology for inter-organizational emergency management continuity planning and, finally, a discussion and conclusions.

## **BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANNING CHALLENGES**

Butler and Gray (2006) state that the theoretical aspects of business continuity planning are underdeveloped in IS literature and influenced by professionals articulating how and why organizations should prepare for unexpected events. Further, Tierney (2006) adds that businesses have only recently begun to be studied as units of analysis in disaster research, and systematic research on different business continuity matters is lacking, despite the importance of businesses for society. Influenced by related research from, for instance, disruption risk management, supply chain management and disruptive events like 9/11, a more networked focus is emerging involving parts of the network (or eco-system) around the organization and its processes (Verstraete, 2004; Hiles, 2007; Bajgoric, 2008). Having both an organizational and inter-organizational focus is for many organizations important, as their processes often are not just dependent on what the own organization does but also on what the other organizations, i.e. business partners, part of the processes, do or do not do. Thus, an organization's business continuity planning activities are commonly also to a varying degree involved in their business partners' ditto activities.

Efforts with business continuity planning in dynamic environments commonly need to have both an organizational and networked focus. Business continuity planning seeks to reduce or eliminate impacts of serious events or disaster conditions before they occur (Cerullo & Cerullo, 2004). As stipulated by regulatory or legal requirements, many organizations must develop a business continuity plan based on their unique situation. A business continuity plan should be dynamic and evolve as the business environment changes and as dependencies on technology, suppliers/business partners, etc. change (Cerullo & Cerullo, 2004). This allows an organization to cope with events or conditions that are inflicted by internal or external

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