

Keep Calm, And Carry On: Business Continuity Planning In Parliaments

For several years a group of legislatures have been working together to create guidance that will help similar organisations in considering business continuity planning necessary to maintain operations in the event of unexpected events or a crisis. In this article, the author outlines the progress of the work and explains how interested parties can get hold of the resulting guide which will be available from January 2019.

Tommy Lynch

In May 2014, the Clerk of the Scottish Parliament, Sir Paul Grice, met with his counterparts in Ottawa where the topic of business continuity cropped up. It became clear during the discussion that there would be mutual benefit if the House of Commons and the Scottish Parliament began sharing information on strategic plans, resources and approaches to business continuity.

Over the following months there were conference calls, regular email correspondence and the bilateral sharing of information between Ottawa and Edinburgh soon expanded to include representatives from the Canadian Senate, the UK Houses of Parliament in London, Provincial Legislative Assemblies based in Toronto and Victoria and, most recently, the House of Representatives in Wellington, New Zealand.

As we shared information, there were clearly areas of overlap. Moreover, some legislatures had particular areas of strength that other participants could learn and benefit from. Representatives from most of these organisations agreed to meet in Toronto in June 2015 to continue our discussion and gave our group a name – Legislative Assemblies Business Continuity Network or LABCOn.

Our first set of meetings focussed on direct comparison of our approaches to business continuity. We shared stories, noted our successes, and also lessons learned from work that could have gone better. The group created a questionnaire based on the international standard for business continuity, ISO 22301.

The Toronto meetings were very positive and the group, as well as sharing expertise and enthusiasm for business continuity, also hit it off personally. The extent of what we learned over those two days drove home the value of this information exchange to the group – there are undoubtedly other legislatures that could benefit from the knowledge and experience of participants if it could be captured and shared in some fashion.

Over the following months we agreed that creating a business continuity guide specifically for legislatures was the way forward. The guide would be based on sound business continuity planning processes. We believed real value could be gained from exploring legislature-specific aspects of what has worked well and instances where things haven't quite turned out as planned.

Martin Fenlon formally of the UK Houses of Parliament and now working as a consultant, created our technical guide. His draft was reviewed by the group at a three-day meeting in Edinburgh in August 2016 where we also discussed what other areas could and should be included in our guide. Training on

Tommy Lynch is Business Continuity Manager at the Scottish Parliament



During a meeting on Parliament Hill in 2018, LABCoN participants toured the Library of Parliament.

incident communications and incident management occurred during this gathering as well sessions where we explored how to look after the welfare of Members, staff and visitors at a Parliament after a disruptive event.

One of the main outputs from the Edinburgh meetings, in addition to the technical element of the guide, was a determination that each of us to concentrate on capturing “case study” information to help show the resources, approaches, challenges and benefits that business continuity thinking and planning could bring to a legislature.

When meeting in Victoria, British Columbia in August 2017, the group reviewed this material and also had the opportunity to explore the planning and resources that BC’s Legislative Assembly use in its earthquake planning. Moreover, we discussed the impact of the 2001 Nisqually earthquake with colleagues from the Washington State Legislature

in Olympia; these staff had to carry out extensive repair work to their capitol building and decant their Chambers during that time.

The most recent LABCoN conference, in Ottawa during July 2018, focussed on completing content for the guide. In addition to the technical BC chapter, it includes also includes chapters on:

- Governance & Resources
- Planning Approach
- Assessing Business Continuity plans

With the content of the guide now complete, we are applying the finishing touches to give it a bit of style, translating it into French and creating a hub website for the work we have been doing. The website will also have information to allow people interested in LABCoN to contact the authors and ask questions about what has been set out. We are aiming to “publish” this guide in early 2019 and LABCoN

members will be using contacts established by their own organisations to advertise the availability of the guide.

All participants in LABCoN have benefitted from our discussions, sharing information and the opportunity to work across legislatures with colleagues in a very specialized area. As Michelle Hegarty, Assistant Chief Executive for the Scottish Parliament, offered: “I hope that the information in our guide can help other legislatures plan for the delivery of their services and make their overall operations more robust, not just for their benefit but to also demonstrate that to politicians and to the public. I think all of us who have been involved with the work have learnt a lot and we look forward to making that available to others”

Next Steps

LABCoN members would love to hear from other legislatures if this guide interests them and for feedback on how the guide can be improved over time. LABCoN is also keen to continually improve the

quantity and quality of knowledge and information available on legislature-specific aspects of business continuity, resilience and other related topics. Depending upon interest and feedback, LABCoN may schedule a conference focussed on education for interested legislatures, later in 2019.

Contact Information

Since its creation, LABCON has been supported by the following legislatures:

- Canadian House of Commons – labcon@parl.gc.ca
- Canadian Senate – labcon@sen.parl.gc.ca
- Legislative Assembly of British Columbia – labcon@leg.bc.ca
- New Zealand House of Representatives – labcon@parliament.govt.nz
- Legislative Assembly of Ontario – labcon@ola.org
- The Scottish Parliament – labcon@parliament.scot

Visit our website at: www.labcon.network