

The recently launched British Standard for business continuity, BS 25999, has enjoyed considerable success since its November 2007 introduction, having been widely adopted worldwide, including many Japanese and American organisations gaining certification. And while not all are certifying against it, many UK government bodies in particular are adopting the Standard as a framework for best practice in business continuity.

Some 3,000 individuals took the time to comment on the draft version of the BS 25999, and it has since been among the fastest selling British Standards - which shows it is fulfilling a widely felt demand. Useful as it may be, the standard has been found to fall short within a number of key areas, one of which has since been addressed by an expert committee responsible for preparing the new Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Standard, or BS 25777.

John Sharp, principal consultant at Kiln House Associates, says that it would be wrong to see the new standard as completely separate as it grew out of BS 25999 and should rather be seen as complementary to it. Sharp helped to draft BS 25999, and says that during that process, continuity arrangements behind IT and telecoms were at issue. It was not really part of the remit of BS 25999, which focuses on continuity for the business as a whole, to go into the greatest detail. "We were concerned, but it stopped there."



## Ill communication?

Where will the new British Standard for ICT, currently out for public consultation, fit with the popular standard for business continuity? And how can organisations avoid implementation issues? Andrea Kirkby discusses the new draft standard

## “ICT is critical for most organisations and a growing tendency to outsource makes it vital to have standards against which outsourcing providers can be measured”

### Moving forward

Sharp believes it was Singapore's TR19 standard which put ICT continuity on the map - producing a standard for resilience, rather than the traditional focus on disaster recovery. ICT is critical for most organisations, and a growing tendency to outsource makes it vital to have standards against which outsourcing providers can be measured.

“You want to be certain that their IT infrastructure is resilient, but against what do you judge it?” asks Sharp. This question led the BS 25999 committee to form a small group which was tasked with producing an IT continuity standard. The two plans are intended to interlock; Sharp says: “The organisation should have developed its continuity plan for the overall business, then it can start on the ICT requirements.”

Rather than - as quite often happens - the IT department leading the business continuity role, the two linked standards see the identification of critical services and required recovery times as being driven by the needs of the business (BS 25999). Once that has been decided, the IT department needs to ensure resilience to those requirements (though IT outsourcers will be given time requirements from their clients). That's one reason that BS 25999 talks about business impact analysis, while BS 25777 does not require it.

Sharp says that in many businesses, “because they've been driven by disaster recovery, it's ICT that sets the priorities. That is wrong. The business needs to have clarity about priorities.” The two standards aim to deliver this clarity, by focusing senior management on the continuity needs of the organisation as a whole, while

IT is clearly concentrated on a subset of issues.” BS 25777 clearly moves IT departments forward from pure disaster recovery mode, though.

“There's as much about prevention and monitoring as there is about disaster recovery,” Sharp asserts. It's also a standard which focuses, like BS 25999, on making continuity part of the corporate culture, building in regular reviews and monitoring of progress.

BS 25777 is still in draft; the consultation period ends in mid-October this year. But it is hoped that a formal standard can be issued by the end of 2008. Work is also proceeding on a related ISO standard, and the BS25777 committee is participating in this.

Sharp believes that demand for the new standard is coming from all sides of the business continuity community. Mike Osborne, managing director, ICM Continuity Services, is less certain of this. He notes that the quality control organisations, and firms supplying business continuity software such as SunGard Availability Services, are the main sponsors of the new standard. “I'm a bit of a sceptic I'm afraid,” he says, and doesn't believe the demand for the standard is coming from the potential user base.

He's not against standards per se - indeed, he believes BS 25999 has been useful in helping companies become confident of their own preparedness and resilience, and that of their supply chain. Companies which used to have to carry out or commission their own audits of suppliers can now simply ask for certification. That has enabled them to remove cost from the process.

But he doesn't believe the new standard will have the same effect. “I'm trying to think which organisations

want '777' compliance,” he ruminates, “except for IT-only outsourcing.” Pure IT outsourcing nowadays has become less commonplace, resulting in more complex business processes. That, he argues, means that most outsourcing customers will still want their outsource providers to be certified for the wider BS 25999 standard.

Osborne also worries about the multiplication of standards - if there are a number of different standards in the same area, companies will tend to cherry-pick which one they want to comply with, he believes. “In the pecking order of British Standards, where does it fall?”

And although the standards are supposed to interlock, with BS 25999 leading on to BS 25777, he believes that in practice, firms will probably take the standards in the reverse order. Most organisations are still very IT concentrated when it comes to business continuity, and that is likely to lead to them tackling BS 25777 first. “But how do you then transition to BS 25999 once your organisation has done the IT bit?” Osborne asks.

Indeed for pure IT purposes, ITIL (Information Technology Infrastructure Library) already provides a comprehensive set of best practices which has become a de facto international standard. While it's not focused on business continuity, Mike Osborne asserts that “ITIL has business continuity practices and processes embedded in it” - and it has the advantage of being well understood by IT professionals.

Perhaps the divergence of views between Sharp and Osborne reflects a fact of life in the current corporate environment - that business continuity managers and IT professionals often come from different backgrounds, and don't share the same experience and expertise.

Sharp says of BS 25999 that it was motivated by the need to achieve a common approach to continuity between different organisations. Perhaps BS 25777 needs to help achieve a common approach to continuity within organisations. If it can do that, then whatever the details of its adoption and implementation, it, too, will have been worthwhile.