

The importance of staff welfare during a disaster

2017 marks the 16th anniversary of the 9/11 terror attack. On the 11th September, 2001, two planes flew into the Twin Towers in the centre of New York, a third targeted the Pentagon in Washington DC and a fourth plane crashed in a field in Pennsylvania. The ongoing impact of the attacks is still widely spoken about today, and they brought to light the importance of planning and business continuity.

We focus, as business continuity professionals, on the importance of a variety of factors and one of the keys to embedding business continuity in your organization is staff welfare.

Staff welfare is ensuring that your staff not only feel supported during a disruption, but that they understand their roles and responsibilities during a disaster. If employees and stakeholders aren't supported and their needs not met, can an organization guarantee that they will respond proactively to a disaster? Following the 9/11 attacks, major organizations affected have incorporated welfare plans into their BC plans.

Morgan Stanley was one of the organization's affected by the 9/11 attacks and in the years following, talked about how their staff welfare took precedence. Within 20 minutes of the attack, most members of staff had been evacuated and within one hour of the attack, staff were relocated and backup systems were operational.

Robert Scott, COO of Morgan Stanley at the time, credits this success to their plans, exercising programmes, and personnel. By training senior managers and staff to respond to disasters, they were indeed prepared. They put the welfare of their staff above financial security and as a result, were able to resume business as soon as possible.

In an interview with the Harvard Business School, the COO stated "I am most proud that the clear, collective, first priority of senior management was the well-being of the people who work for Morgan Stanley." The resumption of their business is testimony to this approach.

Although each organization works differently and prepares for disruption in different ways, many can learn from this approach. The responsibilities of preparedness lie not only with management, but with every stakeholder associated with an organization and it is vital that business continuity and resilience professionals continue to endorse the importance of planning by demonstrating improvement through lessons learned and vigilance during times of uncertainty.