

An Interview with Ron Andrews, a Business Continuity Perspective

Ron Andrews currently serves as the Senior Business Continuity Manager with Manitoba Infrastructure - Emergency Management and Public Safety Division, and has been in this role for approximately three years.

In 1985, Ron graduated as a Social Worker and worked in direct service for twelve years before becoming a Social Work Supervisor and resource centre Manager. In 2006, while working with Emergency Social Services, the Government of Manitoba legislated the Business Continuity planning (BCP) requirement for all departments and government-funded agencies. With corporate support, Ron assumed the BCP file for Families, before moving over to Manitoba Infrastructure to re-develop their continuity program.

Ron took a short detour as the Acting Director with Manitoba Infrastructure Safety and Health Branch, before heading to Manitoba Emergency Measures Organization where, as a Special Operating Agency (and placed within Infrastructure), the work of business continuity is coordinated. Ron now leads the government initiative for continuity planning throughout departments, SOA's, municipalities and other government-funded organizations.

Recently Ron has begun business continuity consulting with public, private and non-profit organizations.

Ron also works as an Instructor with the University of Manitoba in their management development program, as a conference organizer and plenary speaker, and volunteers with numerous collegial organizations as a means to advance professional practice competencies and standards.

The diversity and breadth of Ron's career, especially in Social Services and Business Continuity, helps to highlight some of the challenges and opportunities in preparedness and planning – as evidenced in the relationship between Business Continuity and Emergency Management.

IAEM (HM): You've mentioned supporting a wide range of departments from Family Services and Housing to Infrastructure. What does supporting a wide range of departments entail from a Business Continuity perspective?

RA: From the BCP perspective, all departments offer a number of functions, services and programs that citizens rely upon. Many of these services are critical and must be sustained, at a functioning level, in the face of a compromising event.

From a personal perspective, the common thread was the ESS (Emergency Social Services) work, a natural fit for me due to my original training and background. The legislative requirement for all departments and government-funded entities to create business continuity plans came in 2006 and then extended later to municipalities. This, and the placement of Manitoba EMO within Infrastructure, became a smooth transition for me. I stay current with legislative changes,

regulations, policy improvements and supporting professional standards in furthering the work throughout the Province.

IAEM (HM): If I were new to the Business Continuity and/or the Emergency Management industry, where would you direct me to find these legislative requirements and materials?

RA: Concerning legislation and regulations, you can find these on internal and public-facing government websites. You can also find International Standards Organization (ISO) and CSA standards on their sites. Internally, we have developed a well-resourced SharePoint site for our departmental BCP Coordinators.

It may also help to describe how we are structured in the Province to create and deliver the work. Our BCP Table, comprised of departmental and SOA BCP Coordinators, meets monthly to share our successes and challenges in working through our twenty-four month BCP Cycle. Our Cycle performance measures include; a Risk Assessment, Business Impact Analysis, Plan Strategy and Development and a Plan Exercise. We have also incorporated After Action Reports (AAR) as a requirement for our BCP Coordinators and department operational leads. We stay true to these Cycle requirements, while supporting the work of the BCP Coordinators. This includes additional internal and contracted training.

IAEM (HM): Other interviews we've conducted have been more Emergency Management focused as opposed to Business Continuity. Listening to you speak and what you describe, it's quite different. One of the questions we've asked before is, 'Which of the four pillars in Emergency Management do you feel has the most value?' Our features have usually come back confirming that all pillars are important and are needed to support one another, as a result they shouldn't really be called pillars but instead be considered a cycle. Which I find interesting as that's how you've described Business Continuity planning and mentioned a two year cycle as opposed to a one year requirement.

RA: I do believe that all of the emergency management pillars are important and require attention. Like Emergency Management, as continuity professionals we understand that our planning environment is very dynamic and that risks, hazards and vulnerabilities are ever-changing and potentially impactful to citizens, organizations, and the communities in which they are located.

Concerning BCP, a one year planning cycle is ideal but, practically speaking, we realize the challenges of fulfilling BCP requirements with a fewer than ideal number of staff and resources. Business Continuity is very compatible with the pillars of Emergency Management (Mitigation, Preparedness, Response and Recovery), as well as being known as Operational Risk in a more encompassing Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) framework.

In my time, working in more than one profession, I have seen first hand the benefits of preparedness work, including: improved environmental scanning; savings in costs; strategic and

practical alignment of resources; lean programming; and the ability to generate immense value for stakeholders – whether or not you are a public, private or non-profit organization. In my opinion, preparedness is always “value-added” work and well worth the investment.

As we know, the nature of risk and incident management is such that most rarely pay attention to it – until something happens that adversely affects them. In response, resources are sometimes thrown at something in a hap-hazard way. We are very mindful of the value of preparedness and we work diligently with stakeholders to help them realize, and action, the principles and practice of preparedness. Many of our stakeholders understand, through managing adverse events, the real value of a current business continuity plan.

IAEM (HM): One thing you highlighted was that Business Continuity is holistic and reaches out to other areas of an organization. A lot of this work requires people to ‘buy-in’ and support the program. What have you found the best method to obtain support and how do you deal with the circumstances where you’re not able to get the support?

RA: By holistic, I mean that continuity practitioners need to develop a detailed understanding of how their organization works, how it really works – not just the organizational structure and reporting authorities, but the informal norms, values and behaviours that comprise the culture of the organization. Often, cultural norms define how business gets done.

Our professional practices cite the importance a governing framework for continuity (continuity management), as well as senior leadership support of both business continuity management and how planning is delivered throughout the organization. So, from an operational perspective, we need senior leadership and our stakeholders to support the planning cycle and the resources that help BCP Coordinators fulfill their planning requirements.

We derive tremendous value from realistic activities, including hands-on training workshops for operational leads, BCP exercises and peer-to-peer support among continuity practitioners. We offer briefings and status reports to senior leadership and other stakeholders, to demonstrate progress and the value of planning. We offer workshops throughout the year and, through feedback, continually improve the content. Plus, there is always the reality of events that do occur from time to time, that sharply remind us all of the necessity of preparedness and having an actionable incident response plan.

IAEM (HM): How do you get people more engaged and involved in your courses/workshops?

RA: We create our internal courses and workshop to be as participative and interactive as possible. Moreover, we use examples and real life scenarios that are directly relevant to the workshop participants. We leverage these incidents to help build a “culture of preparedness”. Also, we create content that anticipates emerging regulations and policies. It is not uncommon for several staff to travel to service units, other agencies and to municipalities for hands-on awareness and end-user training. We derive a lot of value from this approach.

IAEM (HM): How do you build relationships internally and externally, how have relationships supported you and what's the importance of building relationships?

RA: In my experience, it helps to build on commonalities and to develop trust with one another. As stakeholders, we may have different perceptions of planning needs and expected resources, but we may share a commonality of purpose and can work from there. Where there is no common ground, it is important to clearly understand why, and to remain open for discussion and to discover ways that may meet our planning needs.

We all work in an environment with limited resources, and limited staff time, so we rely on one another to get the job done. It is critical to develop sound and supportive working relationships with peers and stakeholders. Everyone has something valuable to contribute and I strongly encourage staff to use their voice. This builds trust and a belief that we can collaborate for progress. So, building on commonalities, jointly collaborating and finding viable ways to support one another really help to further our work.

What's that saying, "If you want to go faster, go alone, but if you want to go further, then go together?"

IAEM (HM): How do you define a good team? What does it take to build a good team, and how do you sustain them?

RA: Good team members share similar values and beliefs, find ways to work well with one another, build on commonalities, and freely share their successes, challenges and differences. Sometimes our Coordinators use different approaches in meeting the same outcome – that is fine with me. If anything, I applaud innovative approaches that can improve the work that we do.

Achieving sustainability in this work can be a challenge. I need to know how Coordinators are working through the planning cycle, as I need to report on progress and outcomes. However, it is critical that Coordinators know that peer support is always available. Plus, we take the time to thank staff for their contributions and to celebrate their successes. Affirmation and personal support are vital to the success of this work.

IAEM (HM): What do you find is the most valuable way to stay connected to maintain these relationships over time? Is it emails, phone calls, attending conferences, taking courses, visiting professional websites, getting designations, and/or joining memberships?

RA: Locally, staying connected means monthly Business Coordinators meetings, work group sessions, one-to-one coffee conversations, and regular phone calls on items of mutual concern. Plus, we also have several local chapters of professional groups that meet regularly throughout the year.

Workshops and conferences are ideal events at which you can maintain professional connections, develop friendships and learn from each other's experience. I've been fortunate to

attend and speak at conferences throughout the years. By doing this I've found the experiences are always helpful in maintaining professional relationships and in learning from others. Where possible, I try to offer these same opportunities to our staff.

IAEM (HM): Previously you mentioned when you're building relationships you identify challenges head-on. What would you identify as being some of those challenges and how have you surpassed them?

RA: There are challenges. Many of our Coordinators do not have sufficient training, and many departments have difficulty dedicating time to get the work done. Sometimes, we have to be creative in finding ways to support our Coordinators. Plus, as we do not yet have dedicated BCP software, our processes are, in many ways, inefficient. I am upfront with these challenges and do not shy from difficult discussions, especially concerning resource or staffing constraints.

That said, I plan for improvements and do not dwell on the negatives. Small improvements are celebrated and can be leveraged for larger gains in the end.

IAEM (HM): So taking the spin on the negative and switching to positive, what is one thing or many things you're proud of or have accomplished that you would like to speak too?

RA: In thinking about this, I find it very gratifying to see the value of our work, and our tangible results, being acknowledged and supported by our stakeholders. I also find immense pleasure in seeing, first hand, the professional growth and development of staff. Our work may be challenging, but we have skilled staff ready for this challenge.

IAEM (HM): What tidbit of advice would you give those entering the Business Continuity and/or Emergency Management industry?

RA: Get involved and explore the wide range of opportunities within the professions. Emergency Management, Risk Management and Business Continuity are large, inter-sectoral, diverse and growing fields, with many opportunities for innovative practice and specializations. Volunteer, join professional organizations, and take on the challenge of learning something completely unfamiliar to you.

IAEM (HM): Where would you direct people to if they don't know where to go for more information or to get involved?

RA: There are many professional organizations, including Disaster Recovery Institute (DRI International and DRI Canada), Business Continuity Institute (BCI), and IAEM and its Canadian chapters, and even Risk and Insurance Management Society (RIMS and RIMS Canada). These, and a number of partner training organizations, are always a good place to start.

IAEM (HM): Do you think having designations is valuable for those entering the industry or do you think they should take another route?

RA: My continuity designation signifies a level of skill, competency and credibility that assures my organization, stakeholders and clients that I am capable to perform this work to a required professional standard. In DRI, these are called the “Professional Practices”. In BCI, these are called the “Good Practice Guidelines”. These professional practices are aligned to both ISO and CSA standards.

There is no doubt that many practitioners come from diverse backgrounds and experiences. This diversity brings new, unique and sometimes innovative perspectives that can improve professional outcomes. Diversity in experience should never be undervalued.

IAEM (HM): Is there anything such as technology advancements and climate change that have impacted the industry. What are the benefits and challenges that they bring?

RA: Significant climate events are getting a lot of attention. So is social media messaging that moves at the speed of a text. This means that we must be proactive, get ahead of the messaging and correct any misinformation that is being circulated. This forces us to communicate effectively for the benefit of our citizens and stakeholders.

From the perspective of Business Continuity as a discipline, I am encouraged to see some convergence between BCP, Emergency Management and Enterprise Risk Management. Technological advancements in software, for example, are helping to further convergence possibilities.

IAEM (HM): What piece of advice would you give yourself if you were starting in the Business Continuity/ Emergency Management industry?

RA: More coffee on Monday morning is a good start (he says laughing out loud). That is a very good question. I would suggest to stay curious, stay focused and stay strong. Never stop exploring, never stop learning, never stop doing - and you will be fine.

IAEM (HM): Because this field can be demanding and stressful, at the end of the day, how do you ground yourself or unwind to have that work/life, life/work balance?

RA: First of all, you must leave it at the office. Whatever the day, the work will always be there. Personal and family time are both very important to me. I like family get-togethers, outdoor activities such as golf, bike-riding, picnics and going to the lake. We've been going to the gym regularly, and when I start to become sloth-like, my wife will motivate me.

In closing, Ron and I spoke about the review cycle of this article and requested the opportunity to do a shout out and send a ‘Thank You’ to Sharf Chowdhury for nominating him as a feature and noted how exciting it is to see these types of features being done, how much of an honour it is and how valuable they can be to those in or entering the industry. It's important to hear from a

variety of people with a wide-range of experiences, perspectives and is a great opportunity to learn more.

We'd like to take this opportunity to thank Ron Andrews for his time and efforts in the interview process, being part of the IAEM Features and for his contributions to the Business Continuity field. Our fingers are crossed and hope that Ron gets the resources he's asking for!

If you have any comments or would like to recommend someone as an Emergency Management/ Business Continuity Feature, please contact IAEMCdnComms@gmail.com.