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Enhancing Business Continuity Plans and Records Management in Selangor SMEs

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ABSTRACT

Objective - This study assesses the effectiveness of Business Continuity Plans (BCPs) and records management practices within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Selangor. The primary objective is to determine the integration of records management into BCPs and identify the current development stage in SMEs' processes.

Methodology/Technique – The research comprehensively examines Selangor SMEs' BCPs and records management practices. This multiple case study investigated the extent to which Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Selangor implemented business continuity management. Through document reviews and interviews with business owners and continuity managers, the study examined the integration of records management within continuity plans and assessed the impact on overall organizational resilience.

Finding – The research excluded SMEs outside Selangor, focusing on managerial-level respondents from the records and information system department. The findings reveal a varied landscape, with some SMEs having well-established processes while others are still in the developmental stage. Notably, the research emphasizes the importance of identifying vital records within organizations to maintain essential operations and comply with regulatory requirements.

Novelty – The study also underscores the need for regular BCP revisions and effective communication strategies to disseminate plans to employees. Moreover, it highlights the significance of including expertise in BCPs to enhance disaster preparedness and mitigation efforts.

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1. Introduction

In the face of an ever-changing and unpredictable business landscape, the need for effective Business Continuity Management (BCM) has become paramount. The aim of identifying potential risks and the efforts to avoid, minimize, or prepare for them to sustain the business's processes and services without interruption is emphasized by Business Continuity Management (BCM) (Gibb & Buchanan, 2006).

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The Business Continuity Management (BCM) requires a comprehensive, holistic, and integrated approach (Herbane, 2010). The Information Technology (IT) dimensions in an organisation are not the only components and factors for business continuity's success. Other non-IT factors are involved that may be crucial for business continuity, such as people, physical premises, the supply chain, etc. (Akashah et al., 2020). In other words, we consider the role of records management in achieving the greater availability of vital records, hence enhancing business continuity. A documented and established vital records programme in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) is crucial for safeguarding and the recovery of business records. To be successful, BCM must fully incorporated across the entire organisation as a crucial management process.

Records whether in printed or electronic are vital assets for ensuring that an institution is governed effectively, efficiently and is responsible to the community that it serves (Oladejo & Hadžidedić, 2021). Records management standard requirements highlighted that records should be kept in a safe and secure environment (Touray, 2021). National and international standards have been developed that aid in determining the best methods, rationale, environment, and housing for protecting valuable records. One of the key competencies of the records and information management profession is the appropriate management of inactive and vital records (Jones, 2011). Efficient and protective storage procedures, tasks, and processes are important to the success of any records and information management programme. Records should be available for access throughout their complete life cycle, regardless of the retention value assigned.

The ISO15489 clearly states the importance of managing records, making them accessible to meet business requirements and protecting them from danger and harm. Guidelines have been developed on how to preserve records and how to handle records in a disaster. The main question is whether these records management elements are included in the business continuity plans developed by the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)?

SMEs employ almost two-thirds of the labour force in the nation, provide income for the government through income taxation, and provide income for households through taxes, profits, and salaries. According to the World Bank's classification of countries, Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines are examples of emerging countries that rely on SMEs for economic development (Mintah et al., 2022). These nations are also subject to a variety of natural catastrophes, which have an impact on all businesses, including SMEs. In December 2021, approximately 50,000 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in several districts in Selangor were affected by the worst flood disaster. The losses include damage to the premises, machinery, business records and information, destruction of raw materials and final products due to water inundation, and the expected closure of operations (Auzzir et al., 2018). As a result, SMEs must be encouraged to keep accurate records for them to survive and expand.

According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia's latest report on business establishments, Selangor takes the lead among all states in Malaysia with the highest number of establishments as of 2019. This clearly indicates the state's thriving economic landscape, buoyed mainly by small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Most of these businesses are SMEs, which significantly drive the state's economy forward. One of the critical reasons for Selangor's success in attracting SMEs is its strategic location. Selangor is a natural gateway to the rest of the country in the heart of Peninsular Malaysia.

The state's robust infrastructure, including modern highways, airports, and seaports, has made it an attractive hub for businesses to establish their operations. Moreover, Selangor's supportive business environment is another vital factor in its success. The state government has implemented various initiatives and policies to promote SME development and encourage entrepreneurship. This includes programs that provide financial assistance, training, and business advisory services. All these efforts have contributed significantly to the state's economic growth and have helped SMEs thrive in Selangor.

Survey results outlined by (Jalil, 2009), found that any organisation will face difficulties when resuming normal operations in the event that they are hit with a crisis or disaster if they do not plan and manage their business continuity plan. Disasters can strike an organisation at any time, but if an institution takes time to plan ahead, the damage can be decreased or avoided. Records protection is also an integral part of a vital records and disaster prevention programme. Records are vulnerable to a variety of disasters. When archivists, librarians, curators and other information professionals accept items into their repositories, they are taking responsibility for the custody and safety of those items. They should protect them from disaster. All their efforts in relation to the acquisition, arrangement, description and preserving of archival materials may come to naught if valuable materials are lost as the result of a disaster.

Evidently few research has been conducted to investigate the records management aspects in the business continuity management practices of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). This study intends to investigate how business continuity management is practiced in selected Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) organisation. This study will also discover whether records management is integrated into a business continuity plan or does it work in isolation.

Following this introduction, the paper proceeds with a brief overview of the theoretical foundation, a detailed exploration of the literature on the impact of disasters on SMEs, and a discussion of the Records Continuum Model as the theoretical underpinning. The subsequent section delves into the research methodology, presenting the cases, participants, and industry segments. The results and discussion section offers a comprehensive analysis of the findings, while the conclusion summarizes key insights and acknowledges the study’s limitations.

2. Literature Review

Disasters significantly impact various industries, including those in developing countries. Both direct and indirect natural disasters can severely affect business operations, especially in the aftermath of an event. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are particularly vulnerable to these catastrophic events, as they are often located in less desirable areas. The impact of natural disasters on SMEs can be a turning point, either leading to recovery or failure. Despite some studies on the effects of natural disasters on small businesses, there still needs to be a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to post-disaster losses. While there is no available data on post-disaster mortality rates, it is estimated that 40% of businesses affected by a natural catastrophe may not survive, according to SBA's Herbert Mitchell (Dennis, 2004). Research has indicated that many small businesses cannot resume operations after encountering a disaster. This inability to recover may persist for at least two years as businesses gradually cease operations due to a lack of revenue generation. (Siddique et al., 2023) propose that small and medium-sized entrepreneurial businesses should maintain comprehensive records.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are categorized primarily based on employee numbers, fixed asset value, yearly turnover, and balance sheets. However, different organizations and countries have their definitions of SMEs. SMEs contribute significantly to the economy by providing employment, goods, and services. In developing countries, SMEs are expected to become even more essential. While developed countries currently have more SMEs, this trend may shift as low-income countries experience a faster increase in SMEs per thousand, growing at 6% per year compared to 2% per year in high-income countries (Kushnir, 2010). Business continuity planning and records management are closely interconnected and mutually beneficial. There is a lack of sufficient research conducted to investigate the combined use of business continuity management and records management (An & Wang, 2010). By integrating records management into the business continuity planning process, organizations can ensure that vital records are appropriately managed and available when needed, enhancing their ability to respond to and recover from disruptions while maintaining compliance and good governance.

The Records Continuum Model (see Figure 1) serves as the theoretical foundation for this research, guiding the exploration of the research objectives. The development of the records continuum model marked a novel approach to records management, considering four interlinked processing dimensions: creation, capture, organization, and pluralization. Initially introduced in 1996, Frank Upward crafted this model, incorporating insights from Sue McKemmish, Livia Iacovino, and Barbara Reed. Published as a theoretical foundation for records and archives management, the model has been influential in the field (Oliver, 2018). This model was used to explore business continuity and records management development in selected organizations. In this study, the interview questions were developed based on the dimensions in the records continuum model. By employing this model, this study aims to map business continuity and records management elements, examining their interplay and alignment within organizations. The Records Continuum Model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the lifecycle of records and their relationship to business continuity, enabling a holistic analysis of their integration and effectiveness.

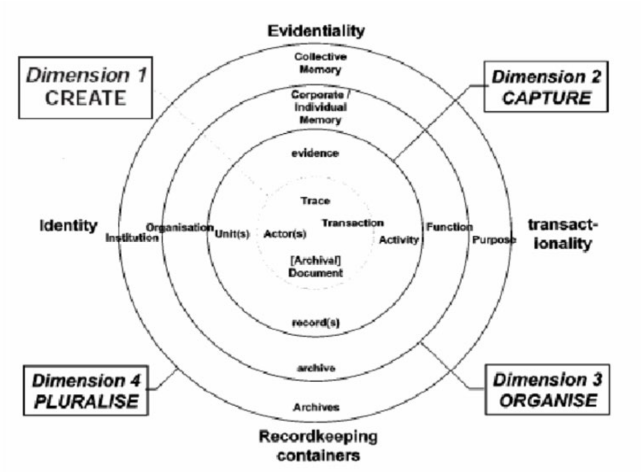

Figure 1: The Records Continuum Model

3. Research Methodology

This research was based on a qualitative approach with multiple case study designs. The methodology developed in this study could be replicated for a different research setting focusing on different institutions. belonging to a qualitative study. Therefore, this research was based on a qualitative approach with multiple case study designs.

(Creswell, 1998) suggested that a research question with 'how' or 'what' could be classified as Yin (2003) stated that single case designs were vulnerable, as they risked putting all the eggs in one basket, or in other words; we created a very limited scope for our research. Yin also highlighted that the analytical conclusions independently arising from two cases, as with two experiments, would be more powerful than those coming from a single case or single experiment alone. With a multiple case study approach, a rich and maximized depth of information was provided to increase the transferability of the findings.

This multiple case study investigated how comprehensively business continuity management was practiced in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Data was collected through document reviews and interviews with the SMEs' business owners and business continuity managers. This study also discovered whether records management was integrated into a business continuity plan or if it worked in isolation, and how far the implementation of a business continuity plan could benefit the business organizations. The findings from these cases led the researcher to generate a comprehensive framework for business continuity planning with a records management aspect. This study involved Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) Companies in Selangor. Respondents involved in data collection were at the managerial level from the records and information system department. SMEs companies outside the Selangor area were excluded, and respondents below the managerial level were not selected for an interview.

3.1 Research participants

Sampling is a crucial process in research, as it involves selecting suitable elements from a total population to be researched. According to Williamson (2013, p. 333), this process needs to be systematic and organized. For this study, the participants consisted of 5 representatives from 5 selected SMEs companies involved in records and information system management. Participants were invited to participate through emails and phone calls and were selected through voluntary participation. The SME sectors for this study were management and support services and wholesale and retail.

3.2 Industry segment

C1 is a highly regarded auto parts manufacturer that has made a name for itself in both regional and international markets. With a founding date of 1997 and headquarters located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, the company has built a reputation for quality and reliability. C1's offerings are divided into various segments, including the Suspension Division, which specializes in a wide range of products like leaf springs, parabolic springs, coil springs, shock absorbers, and metal parts.

C2 is a reputable solar energy service provider company that was established in Malaysia in 2009. The company specializes in solar photovoltaics (PV) system integrations for small to large scale deployment. It is crucial for companies like C2 to be prepared for potential crises that may arise due to the nature of their business operations.

C3 is a document scanning specialist company which covers digitising services, supply of document scanners and document management software. In 1994, they started as a photocopier vendor that supplies and rent photocopiers, office printers, production printers and office equipment in Malaysia. But as time moves forward, they transform into a paperless digitised workflow. By early 2015, C3 had evolved, becoming the market leader in document scanning.

C4 was established in 2014, and it is a subsidiary of a telecommunications company that exclusively brings products which are Prepaid and have a unique and distinctive call, SMS & data plan. C4's goal is to become a major player in the telecommunications industry by implementing a distinct marketing approach that provides distributors with a share in the company's financial achievements.

C5 is also well-known in Malaysia’s information management industry. C5 has achieved numerous worldwide recognitions and certifications for bringing innovation to the local scene. C5 provides a full range of information management services to assist their clients in better understanding the importance and concepts of managing business information.

4. Results and discussion

It is important for each SME in Selangor to assess its own business continuity plans and records management practices to determine the level of integration. Some SMEs may have well-established processes in place, while others may still be developing their plans. Consulting with professionals in the fields of records management or business continuity planning can provide specific guidance tailored to an individual SME's needs.

4.1 Identification of vital records in organization

Identifying essential documents is a critical task that any enterprise should pay attention to. This entails determining the records vital for the enterprise's smooth functioning. Identifying vital records helps prioritise their management, storage, and protection. It also ensures that the organisation complies with regulatory requirements and that the documents are readily accessible to authorised personnel.

Representative from C1 mentioned that:
"In C1, vital records are not necessarily permanent records or records with archival value. Vital records may be vital for only a part of their total retention. Common vital records are active contracts and agreements, with all amendments and supporting documentation, financial records, accounts receivable (vendors will provide copies of lost or damaged accounts payable, records proving payment, employee records, payroll, research and development notes, reports, plans, formulae, production/design specifications, licenses and insurance policy information. A record is 'vital' if the organization – or a particular office within the organization cannot function without it. For instance, the payroll department may hold copies of employee records; these records may not be vital to the payroll department since they are just reference copies and could be replaced by originals from the personnel department as long as the personnel records have not been lost or damaged. The personnel department may consider its employee files vital because all critical data about each employee is recorded in one central location".

During the interview session, it was noted by participants from C2 and C5 that identifying vital records is done by taking into account the function and value attributed to each record. They further pointed out that documents containing personal and confidential customer information are classified as vital records. Interestingly, C3 highlighted that documents related to clients are also deemed critical for their organization.

C4 identify vital records by updating the existing inventory from time to time and prioritise records that being referred by staff:
"At C4, we ensure that vital records are properly identified by regularly updating our inventory and prioritizing those that are requested by our staff. We ask the person in charge of the records to provide us with information about their level and intended usage".

This is in line with a study conducted by (Aziz & Jambari, 2019). Organizations need to update their business continuity plans regularly to keep up with changes in technology, staff, and facilities.

4.2 Vital records custodian and the full ranges of stakeholders in developing business continuity plan

Organizations must have a clear and well-defined set of roles and responsibilities when preserving vital records. This includes ensuring effective communication and coordination among the individuals or departments tasked with this essential duty. Organizations can ensure the safety and security of their most valuable information by establishing a structured approach to record preservation.

In C1 and C4, the company has policies to ensure that records are adequately maintained and protected. The custodians responsible for these records may differ from the record owners, but they are given the same responsibility. Usually, the division manager is the custodian. For C2, management, managers, and the records committee are responsible for preserving vital records. C3 emphasizes the importance of having an imaging specialist to safeguard essential records. On the other hand, C5 agrees that the Record management and operation departments play a crucial role in preserving vital records for the organization.

The person responsible for protecting essential records in an organization plays a critical role. This requires great attention to detail and organization to ensure important information is appropriately managed for future use. It is crucial that this individual takes their responsibility seriously and implements adequate measures to safeguard the confidentiality and integrity of these records.

Engaging stakeholders from various departments across the organization is crucial to establishing a comprehensive and effective business continuity plan (Sapapthai et al., 2020). The involvement of specific individuals may vary depending on factors such as company size, structure, and industry. By incorporating diverse perspectives and expertise, the plan can be tailored to address all potential risks and threats, ensuring the continuity of business operations even in the face of unforeseen challenges.

For C1, the most critical stakeholders are providers of essential services such as gas, electricity, telecommunications, water, and sewage infrastructure. These service providers play a vital role in ensuring the resupply of utilities, mainly drinking water and electricity, both during and after a crisis. Alternate sources of supply, such as bottled water, tank trucks, and power generators, should be considered if necessary. C2 engage with, managers, employees, the safety and health, records, projects, and communication department in developing business continuity plan.

Research participants from C3 and C4 agreed on involving all relevant stakeholders in creating an effective business continuity plan. This includes individuals and groups the disaster may impact and those with expertise or resources that can contribute to the plan's development. By engaging a comprehensive range of stakeholders, the plan can be tailored to meet the unique needs and challenges of the community, ensuring that everyone has a role to play in mitigating the effects of a disaster. The results were consistent with a study conducted by (Kato & Charoenrat, 2018), highlighting that the primary challenge for organisational stakeholders lay in their comprehension of how to implement business continuity management rather than financial constraints.

C5 emphasizes the vast array of stakeholders required to develop the business continuity plan, including the infrastructure (IT department), individual business unit heads, senior management, human resources, public relations officers, customers or owners of records, and external vendors.

4.3 Records registered in business continuity plan

The business continuity plan is a comprehensive set of documented procedures and protocols that outline the measures necessary to ensure essential operations are maintained during a disruption or crisis. This plan encompasses critical infrastructure and systems, recovery strategies, emergency contacts, and other pertinent information that guarantees the continuity and safety of the organization. C2 mentioned that

"No records registered for the time being. We do not have a specific business continuity plan for records".

C1 emphasizes the importance of records in the business continuity plan:

"Business continuity plan contains records of corporate events and audit trails that detail who did what, when, and why. Financial activities are also recorded in these documents. Without proper records, it is impossible to maintain significant audit trails for financial management, making it challenging to trace financial fraud and hold those responsible accountable. With records, those supervising the organization's financial management can be held responsible for their actions. Electronic records are vulnerable to various risks, so they should be stored in a secure location to ensure easy retrieval and protection from potential hazards".

C2 indicates that there is currently no specific business continuity plan for records in place. On the other hand, C3 and C5 mentioned that document and personal files are included as records in the business continuity plan.C4 states that records are primarily under the sales and marketing department, but there are plans to include records from other departments as well.

Overall, the findings highlight the significance of records in the business continuity plan for maintaining accountability, facilitating financial management, and ensuring the organization's resilience during disruptions. The need for a specific business continuity plan for records should be considered to enhance the organization's preparedness and continuity efforts.

4.4 Organisation of business continuity plan

The smooth functioning of business operations is crucial during unexpected events. To ensure this, an organised business continuity plan should be in place. This plan is a reliable measure to protect a business from potential threats to its ongoing success. To be successful, companies must have a proper recovery plan in place, which involves identifying vital records and setting up recovery sites. The plan should be approved by management and clearly communicated to all employees. The importance of implementing an integration management system to handle business continuity and records was emphasized by (An et al., 2010) as well as (Touray, 2021). The goal is to ensure proper record-keeping for business actions, decision-making, accountability, and transparency.

Regular audits should be conducted to ensure the plan remains valid. The management team and the business recovery plan team should regularly discuss and revise the plan to ensure workflow progress and prevent disasters. The business recovery plan team is responsible for administrative functions, facilities, logistics, user support, computer backup, restoration, and other critical areas.

According to C1, establishing a proper recovery plan in the company, such as identifying vital records and setting up disaster recovery sites, is the best way for the recovery plan to be organised and function. C2, C3, C4, and C5 all agree that it is essential for companies to establish a proper procedure to ensure a successful recovery plan. This includes identifying vital records and setting up disaster recovery sites. The program should be approved by management, the Safety and Health Department, Records, Projects & Communication Team, and effectively communicated to all employees. The assigned team should conduct regular audits to ensure the plan remains valid. C3 and C4 emphasise the importance of discussing the business continuity plans with top management to ensure they are well-organised and function correctly. At C5, the business recovery plan team should be responsible for administrative functions, facilities, logistics, user support, computer backup, restoration, and other vital areas in the organisation. The management team is essential because it coordinates the recovery process. Entrepreneurs should be aware that effective management of business records is essential for the growth and success of their small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). As per the recommendation of (Mintah et al., 2022), it is crucial to have policies for business records management and provide adequate training to manage business records efficiently.

5. Conclusion

Effective records management is a critical element for the success of any organization. Records and information serve as the fundamental basis for decision-making and are essential for the overall functioning of a business. This study has highlighted the importance of integrating records management into the business continuity plans of Selangor SMEs. In general, SMEs face challenges in determining vital records within their companies. This study has underscored the significance of identifying vital records, establishing roles and responsibilities for their preservation, and engaging a diverse range of stakeholders in plan development. Moreover, this study has emphasized the value of incorporating records into the business continuity plan to enhance accountability, financial management, and the overall resilience of the organization. Lastly, it has stressed the need for an organized and well-communicated plan to ensure the smooth functioning of business operations during disruptions.

The study is limited by the participation of only five SMEs in Selangor, which may only partially represent some SMEs in the region. The findings may need to capture the diversity of practices in a broader context. The study exclusively interviewed respondents at the managerial level from the records and information system department. Perspectives from other levels of the organization may provide additional insights and perspectives on business continuity management practices. The exclusion of SMEs outside Selangor may omit valuable data from regions with different economic, cultural, or regulatory environments, impacting the completeness of the findings. Participants were selected through voluntary participation, which may introduce a bias toward organizations with a pre-existing interest or proficiency in business continuity management, potentially skewing the results. The study focused on specific industries (management and support services, wholesale, and retail), limiting the scope of the findings to these sectors and potentially overlooking unique practices in other industries. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into integrating records management within business continuity planning for SMEs in Selangor, contributing to the existing body of knowledge in this field.

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