

The Importance of Business Continuity

THE unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly turned the world on its ear and has created disruptive shifts across the globe. The exponentially rapid spread of the virus has had impact on the macro scale with presumably long-lasting effects on global economies, as well as the micro level, changing how people now experience their everyday lives. While it would have been near impossible to predict the exact circumstances of the current situation, NGC had long been cognisant that Business Continuity Planning (BCP) is an essential tenet that is ingrained in the Company's business processes.

Why a BCP?

Since the outbreak, the term 'essential services' has become a buzzword of sorts. Normally, these services include the utilities that are used on a daily basis – water, electricity, and telecommunications – as well as the protective and health services. The work and benefits provided by the energy sector does not always first come to mind as being essential. The energy sector, particularly the natural gas industry is crucial to the infrastructure of the nation as zero downtime is expected and required. This is because Trinidad and Tobago inarguably has an economy that is buttressed by the revenues generated from natural gas and it is a main driver for national development. On a more fundamental level, natural gas is the affordable and clean fuel used to generate electricity in Trinidad and Tobago.

As the distributor and aggregator of natural gas, the importance of the service NGC delivers is not lost on its leadership. Any major disruption that affects the safe and reliable supply of natural gas will have a domino effect of repercussions for customers whose business operations are in turn reliant on the delivery of NGC's product. To this end, NGC has made BCP an integral part of its overall strategy management as a measure to maintain critical operations and ensure survival in the event of any type of incident or crisis. In August 2019, NGC created a cross-functional team to review its BCP and perform a business impact analysis (BIA) for all functional groups within the Company. The team was charged with determining the critical activities that can be impacted by an interruption to normal business operations and identifying the resources required to support those activities. The incidence of COVID-19 created an opportunity to implement and test the effectiveness of the Plan. Even before there was an absolute need for a 'Work from Home' arrangement, NGC tested it with critical staff to ensure effectiveness and fidelity to the work tasks to be performed. The BCP was developed with a certain degree of agility and flexibility which allowed for adapting general procedures and actions to quickly respond to circumstances specific to the COVID-19 crisis.

A culture of safety

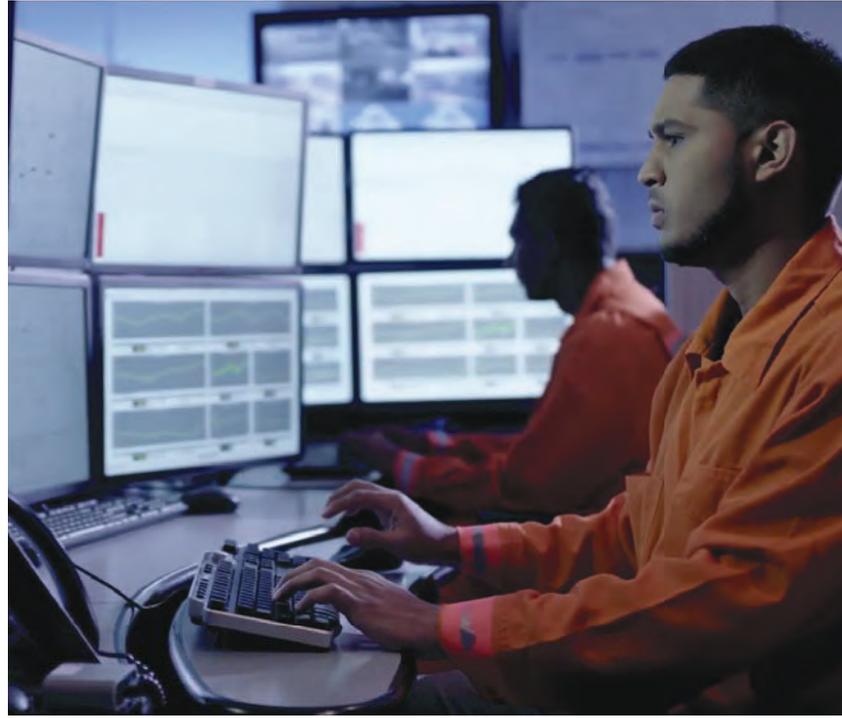
The BCP can be thought of as an insurance policy. It is absolutely vital that NGC has one in the hopes that it never has to be used. Therefore, a BCP cannot be the only strategy used to ensure business continuity. The principles behind business continuity must in fact be intrinsically built into the normal functions and processes in every aspect of business operations. NGC has given particular emphasis to developing a strong and rigorous culture of safety amongst its employee body.

The Health, Safety, Security and Environment (HSSE) management



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NGC employees at work

approach of NGC is one where leadership, management and staff all champion excellent HSSE practice. The function is not siloed to any single Division and does not reside solely with the group of HSSE professionals at NGC. NGC's ultimate safety goal is one of 'zero unsafe behaviours' resulting in zero harm to people, loss of assets, damage to the natural environment and loss of business continuity. This approach means that safety pervades all work processes and people behaviours at NGC. As a result, the Company was able to make an almost seamless transition to BCP mode in response to the challenges presented by COVID-19 and staff adapted to all measures put in place.

Leadership continues to actively demonstrate an appreciation that the Company's employees must be protected in order to preserve the business. Before the announcement of the first confirmed COVID case in Trinidad, the Company began a process to screen staff and visitors entering all locations, all non-essential business-related travel was suspended and face to face meetings were discouraged in preference for virtual meetings using technology facilitated by NGC. Within each functional area there was an immediate acceptance that NGC currently could no longer operate as 'business as usual' and all groups exhibited an adeptness to managing the change necessary to effectively execute their respective critical activities.

Maintaining Process Safety & Asset Integrity

Maintaining and focusing on process safety and asset integrity is a key strategy in delivering a safe and reliable supply of natural gas to our critical customers. Prior to and during the current crisis

are making adjustments to its manning configuration and coupled with COVID-19, focus on process safety is critical to ensure the frontline workers are provided with the required support, tools and systems to maintain process safety. This pandemic response is new to many companies and everyone is learning and, in this regard, NGC has proactively consulted with the Centre for Chemical Process Safety (CCPS) who has agreed to develop a comprehensive guiding document that can be shared with similar energy companies.

A comprehensive gap analysis of NGC's HSSE and Asset Integrity Management System (AIMS) was completed and NGC has established a comprehensive AIM framework aligned with best practices including ISO55000 Asset Management elements to close the gaps identified.

The systems are in place to manage NGC's process safety and asset integrity work in tandem with the BCP. A disciplined approach to enforcing and regular and stringent maintenance schedules, constant monitoring and applying 'best in practice' safety procedures during normal operations, mean that there is greater reliability to NGC's systems and infrastructure during periods of disruption. Most importantly, our Operational line leadership is committed and has taken deliberate actions with their respective teams to create and sustain a culture of "collective mindfulness" even in such a stressful environment, working remotely with limited frontline staffing levels and establishing new ways of working to ensure NGC's assets are maintained and gas supply/distribution is maintained during this very fluid situation.

NGC is also working closely with all the PLEA companies and has taken the lead to ensure critical daily updates are shared on utilities and services that support the downstream consumers all in an effort to sustain safe, successful Operations of the sector under the current constraints while simultaneously supporting the GORTT pandemic response recommendations.

A state of planning and readiness

NGC has approached the BCP as a continuous process that must constantly be reassessed and re-evaluated especially in an instance such as the COVID-19 pandemic for which the local context is evolving on an almost daily basis. To mitigate against any new developments that can potentially have further impact on operations, NGC has developed an integrated critical activity plan that gives a six-week outlook. The plan will be reviewed every week so that there is continuous updating and the six-week look ahead is maintained. It is envisaged that this tool can be extrapolated for use when there is a return to normal business operations and critical activities can even be mapped on a quarterly basis. This puts NGC in a proactive position should there be any future disruptions.

The Company continues to plan for all possible scenarios in order to stay in a state of readiness and we are actively monitoring the scope and impact of this pandemic on an international, regional and local scale.

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