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Take the risk out of resilience:

5 ways to test better and recover faster

Whether it's a failure, outage, or a test, the last thing you need when trying to practice, demonstrate, or invoke resilience is a scramble.

And yet, varying degrees of 'scrambling' are so often what happens in this scenario, whether it's to update recovery plans, gather the data, mobilize teams, find out what's happening. and provide much-requested status updates. It's true that with considerable stress, the application of pressure, an over-reliance on key players, and a sprinkling of luck, sometimes scrambles can be successful. But it's a big risk, and it won't always pay off.

If you fail to prepare, you better prepare to fail.

Resilience is complex, which means that the activities enabling you to deliver it need to be as simple as possible. With that in mind, we made a list of the common problems we've seen, along with actionable ways to test better and recover faster, no matter what methods you use (although, we would advise Cutover's new resilience workspace).

So here they are.

Why is your test and recovery activity falling short? (and how to fix it)

1

Your plans are not ready

As Mike Butler, resilience expert, once said to us, 99% of a DR plan should be the same as the running production plan. By taking this step you can ensure that resilience is part of your BAU, accelerating your time to resolution. If you have to spend hours or days preparing ahead of a test, then it's obvious that you would not recover efficiently if you faced an outage or failure. Equally, your tests are not worthwhile if they require that much work each time.

Make sure that whenever you make a change, your recovery plans are updated to reflect it - failing to do so will lead to what we call 'the resiliency gap'. This is the discrepancy between the change you made and the (now out of date) recovery plan that's meant to adequately recover that particular asset. Your time, resources, and faith in your ability to recover will get lost in the gap if you don't close it after a change. Updating plans is time-consuming, so if you and your team struggle to dedicate the time to this, perhaps invest in a tool that enables you to dynamically update your runbooks and plans to reflect changes (Cutover's new resilience workspace makes this process incredibly simple).

2

Your planning process is too long and inconsistent

If you have a large number of applications, systems, scenarios, and services that need recovery plans, you need to ensure you are using templates wherever you can. It's not just about speed (although it will make you much faster) it's also about consistency. Templating or pre-configuring runbooks for common scenarios may seem like a lot of upfront work, but it will be worth it in the long run.

These are some examples of runbook templates you could create:

- Recovery plans for key applications and critical infrastructure
- Pre-invocation checklists
- Application/ service recovery
- Business continuity management
- Incident management
- Facility/supply chain assessments
- Cyber assessment

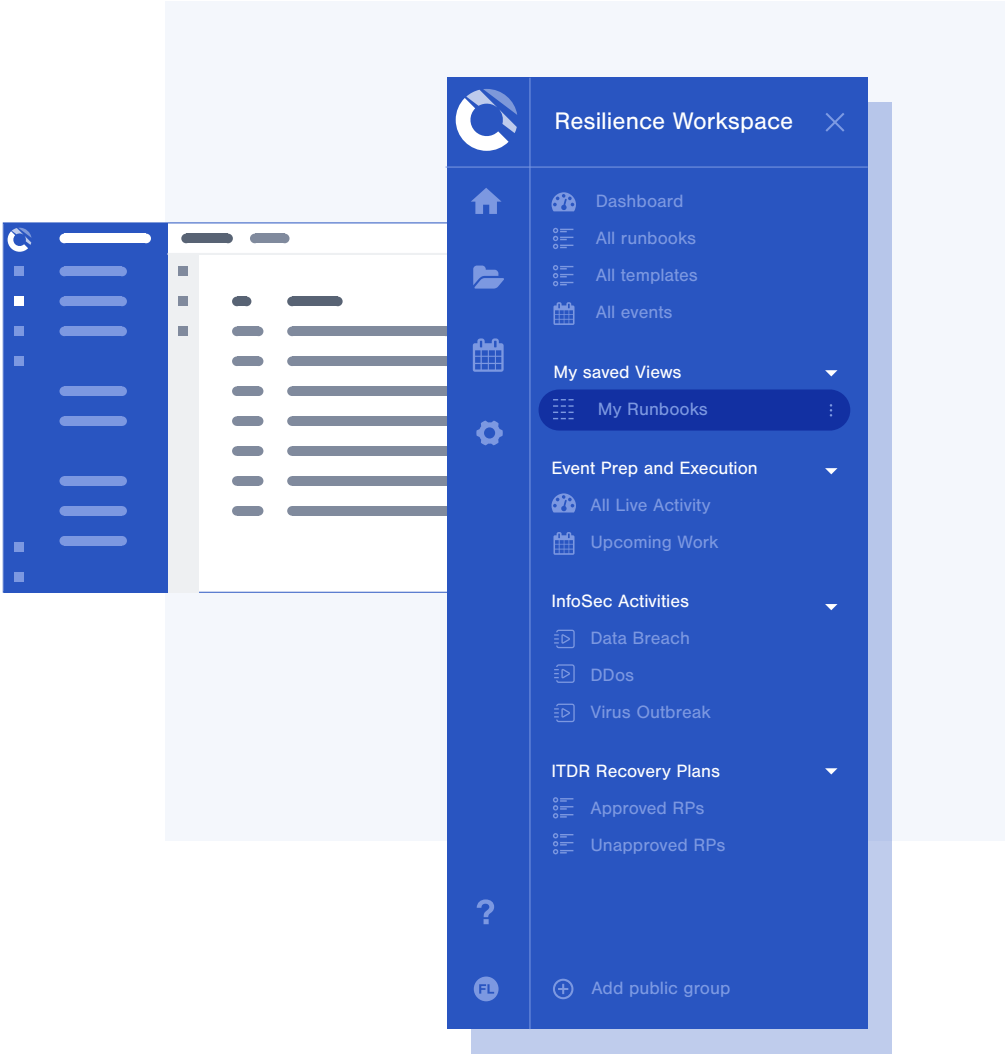
Failing that, you could consider using a platform that can provide you with templated/ pre-configured runbooks for all the above scenarios (like, you guessed it, Cutover's resilience workspace).

3

Finding what you need takes too long

Scouring email attachments or shared drives, or digging through files uploaded to Slack or Teams only to find that your ten variations on the file name you thought it had all come back with nothing.

We all know the specific frustration of being unable to find the one document you need when you need it, so our next piece of advice is to keep your resilience assets, documents, and details in a logical place that is accessible for everyone who might need them. It might seem melodramatic to say ‘keep them at your fingertips’ but fast, simple access should be the goal, and this accessibility will also help with ensuring readiness (as per tip #1).



Cutover's resilience workspace enables you to move between different areas of your resilience activity quickly and access what you need in a couple of clicks. The workspace also allows you to apply the filters you need, and create saved views, so you can quickly get to the assets, plans, and event views that you use the most.

4

There's no way to see what's happening

'How's it going?', 'Are we on track?', 'Why hasn't X happened yet?', 'Can you send me a status update'?

When critical events happen, it's natural that everyone involved and accountable wants to know exactly what's happening. It's important to keep people 'in the loop', sure, but that doesn't mean that it isn't mildly irritating. It can feel distracting, and time-consuming to prepare this information for key stakeholders, taking you away from the task at hand. Sometimes, it's not even clear what is happening, adding another layer of complexity to progress reporting.

Our next piece of advice would be to find a way to share updates that are as automated, self-served, and up to date as possible. The way you do this will depend on the tooling your using, but any time you spend figuring out a process for this ahead of a test, or an event will be well spent. Are there notifications, dashboards, or shareable views you could leverage? Could you schedule and communicate key check-in points, to minimize the influx of ad-hoc requests?

You probably know what we're going to say next. Notifications, integrations with your communication and collaboration tools, real-time dashboards that are shareable are all key elements that ensure full visibility of any resilience event or activity in the Cutover Resilience Workspace. If full visibility, low-effort status updates (that stop incessant questions), and the ability to get on with what you're doing isn't a reason to make the move from excel then we don't know what is...

5

'So, how did it go?' - take the time to find out

Post-event evaluation is one of the only ways to review and refine processes. That statement may seem really obvious, and yet one of the most common pitfalls is ignoring or skipping this step, leaving you doomed to repeat your mistakes and missteps.

Our final tip is **don't neglect your post-implementation review**. Here are some elements you should include during this process.

- **Comparison of the planned timeline vs. actual performance**
  This is a good comparison to kick off with because not only does it start the evaluation into your performance, but also highlights any issues in your planning capabilities.

- **Focus on quantitative data and qualitative data**
  It's important to ensure that your review includes both 'the numbers' and the context around them. Make sure that your team has a means of recording 'free form' answers to PIR questions in order to capture this. For example, your data might show that your performance was excellent, and you hit all your goals,

but anecdotally you might find that your team felt hugely understaffed and were working long hours and over-exerting to achieve this result. This is not sustainable, so by gathering this information now, you can allocate resources more accurately, and avoid a future disaster!

The PIR process can be time-consuming and isn't the most exciting part of executing resilience - so Cutover have made viewing, inputting, and sharing these insights as automated and simple as possible.

After a runbook finishes, Cutover's PIR dashboard provides:

- A runbook summary: (what the activity/event was
- Execution summary: (what went well, what didn't, providing a high-level view to indicate possible improvements)
- What kinds of resources you used (resource allocation)
- An option to add qualitative feedback with text fields: (space for details about what happened, any relevant information, for example, performance was increased by 20%)

Driving optimized performance and continuous improvements across your programs of work is extremely important, but that doesn't mean that it needs to be laborious and manual. PIR dashboards enable you to evaluate quickly and move on to the next 'big' thing.

Are you ready to test better and recover faster?

You may have noticed by this point that while the advice and learnings that we have outlined are more general, the specific challenges, obstacles, and time-consuming elements of enacting resilience have fully informed our delivery of a dedicated resilience workspace. After seeing common frustrations, like speed, readiness, time to test/invoke a plan, no time for evaluation, and the 'everything is everywhere' scramble, we knew that teams would immediately see the benefits in a dynamic, responsive, highly visual, integrated place for all things resilience.

Want to bring your resilience activities together in a dedicated workspace, built and supported by experts, with pre-configured templates, saved views, real-time visibility, performance insights, in a fast and accessible environment?

Why not schedule a demo to see the new resilience workspace for yourself?

Get all the facts about Cutover's Resilience Workspace here.

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