Absa improves resilience with the IsoMetrix BCM Solution

Solutions being used

IsoMetrix Business Continuity Management

Go live date

24 October 2018

Number of Employees

30 000

Industry

Financial Services

Introduction

Absa previously used the PLC System called BRES (Barclays Regulatory Engagement System) to record and manage the organization's engagements with its regulators globally. As a result of the separation between Absa and Barclays, there was a need for Absa to replace BRES with their own regulatory system. The system would be centrally managed in RSA by the system custodians, the Regulatory Relations team, but utilized by all the bank's entities.

Meeting challenges head on

Jaun Harmse, Resilience Strategy and Engagement Head: Absa Group explains how choosing IsoMetrix for the Absa OneWorld Resilience initiative played a significant role in the bank winning the BCI Africa Continuity and Resilience Innovation Award.

The Resilience Strategy and Engagement division in Barclays Africa is responsible for the analysis, design, implementation and validation of resilience controls, processes and strategies. The division's focus is to ensure the business can anticipate, avoid, respond and recover from business disruptions. The mandate of the division spans people, premises, supplier, building and technology resilience. There are two teams within the Resilience Strategy and Engagement division namely Crisis Management and Resilience Partners. These two teams form the primary point of engagement with business for all resilience related work, including strategic, tactical and operational response to business disruptions.

Jaun was heavily involved in the design of a new Resilience and Recovery toolset which takes his collective risk management experience and bundles it into a single toolset, which has now become the largest information system within the bank, based on information integration alone. This toolset facilitates the entire Business Continuity Management lifecycle throughout the group. It integrates with the various Enterprise Resource Management systems within the bank to provide real-time views of Resilience and Recovery risks to the operation, tactical and strategic forums within the bank.

Achieving the "impossible"

Jaun explains that Absa needed to find the balance between an off the shelf solution that would not have the flexibility they required and a fully bespoke solution that would take too long to implement. IsoMetrix stood out because the software is flexible and provided the necessary dashboards for reports. "More than that," says Jaun, "the most important thing was the people." He stresses that it was important for Absa to find a team they could partner with, "We are people's people and trustworthy. People who you know you can rely on and partner with, are worth their weight in gold."

"In the RFP stage, we asked for a proof of concept, and IsoMetrix demonstrated to us that nothing was impossible," says Jaun. "It was a challenging proof of concept and IsoMetrix was the only software provider that could do what we wanted, everyone else said that it was impossible to do in such a short space of time." IsoMetrix could meet Absa's scope and timelines and were willing to work according to their agile methodology.

Jaun Harmse from Absa and CJ Joost from IsoMetrix accepting the BCI Innovation Award

Award winning project

One of the project success factors was to win at the annual Business Continuity Institute (BCI) Africa Awards. Right from the start Absa was willing to push the boundaries and do something that really stood out.

Jaun explains that while the project met challenges as all projects do, the IsoMetrix team was always ready and willing to meet the challenges.

The project did not just build new software to match an existing process and automate it, it created efficiencies within the business processes themselves. "We understand our processes and how we do things internally. During the scoping phase of the project, we drew lots of pictures and process flows. At every point where we said do things this way, the IsoMetrix team suggested potential efficiencies."

The best example of this is the drastic improvement in the time it takes to create reports. Jaun explains, "Where it previously took me three months to do one front-to-back process in Excel, it now takes me four hours."

Building efficiencies by automating reports

IsoMetrix is an integrated system that connects various data sources and overcomes the complexity and limited usability of Excel spreadsheets. To illustrate this cumbersome complexity, Jaun says, "My Excel had a million lines of macro code. It consisted of 14 sheets that you must complete to generate a report. This spreadsheet took me six months to develop. It took the IsoMetrix team less than a day to recreate it."

The efficiencies created by the IsoMetrix system has had a significant impact on time saved within the organization. "We have freed up two entire job roles from just compiling reports to be able to focus on bigger and better things, and work on innovating" he says.

Going above and beyond

"I am convinced that this is the first of its kind in the world, and this is what won us the BCI Innovation award. With IsoMetrix, we have created a dynamic planning model," says Jaun. Where before, he could only create static plans to be reviewed once a year, the integration of the IsoMetrix Software allows him to create a plan for every team, and he is not limited to existing plans, he is able to simulate to a great degree, every potential negative impact to the business's resilience and continuity and see within the software where any issues might occur.

Absa's continuity strategy accounts for every employee on an individual basis. "By creating hypothetical scenarios. I have a plan for every team with specific parameters built in, but we've created a module called Functional Planning which allows us to create a scenario on the fly. This scenario could be likely or purely hypothetical. Previously if an incident occurred, I would have to pull out all of the existing plans and try to coordinate where various teams would go and what steps would be taken to ensure continuity.

The Functional Planning module can summarize for us, by recovery strategy, who goes where. This means that if staff need to move location, we know exactly who is going where, and are able to anticipate issues that may crop up within those logistics. It creates small efficiencies that most people do not see, but that make a distinct impact in our ability to manage unwanted events."

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