Enterprise Continuity Commitment: Do We Really Have a Problem?

Business continuity practitioners have debated "leadership commitment" for decades. It shows up in every survey, every conference panel, every ISO guidance document, and every BCM maturity model. The question keeps resurfacing: Do organizations actually struggle with senior management commitment, or is the issue more nuanced than it appears?

The answer is more interesting than a simple yes or no.

Most practitioners frame leadership commitment as something fragile, inconsistent, or missing. But when you examine how BCM programs actually come into existence — and how they survive — a different picture emerges. BCM does not appear spontaneously inside an organization. It only emerges after leadership has already made a series of foundational decisions that require commitment, even if that commitment is not always visible to practitioners.

And yes, you can back this argument with data — as long as you use indirect evidence, because no dataset literally says: "BCM exists → therefore leadership commitment exists." What the data does show is that BCM programs only appear and persist in environments where leadership has already taken actions that require commitment.

Below are the strongest industry-recognized indicators.

1. Program Existence (70–85% Governance Coverage)

Across major surveys — DRI, BCI, Gartner — 70–85% of organizations with a BCM function report having formal governance or executive sponsorship.

This is indirect proof: A BCM program cannot exist without leadership approving structure, reporting lines, and authority. Even a minimal program requires a leadership decision.

2. Budget Allocation (60%+ Dedicated Funding)

BCI's State of BCM reports consistently show that over 60% of BCM teams receive dedicated annual budget.

A budget line is not created by practitioners. It is a leadership act. Budget allocation is commitment in its most literal form.

3. Policy Adoption (ISO 22301 Evidence)

ISO 22301 certification data shows that organizations with BCM programs almost always have executive-signed continuity policies.

A signed policy is a leadership action. BCM cannot operate without it. Even compliance-driven programs require leadership endorsement.

4. Program Longevity (5–12 Years)

Gartner trend data shows that BCM programs typically persist 5–12 years once established.

Anything that survives multiple budget cycles, reorganizations, and leadership changes is not accidental. Longevity signals sustained commitment — even if practitioners don't always see it.

5. Regulatory Response (90%+ in Regulated Sectors)

In regulated industries — finance, healthcare, utilities — over 90% of organizations maintain BCM programs because leadership must demonstrate compliance.

Compliance requires:

- leadership signoff
- resource allocation
- reporting
- accountability

Again, commitment is embedded in the act of compliance itself.

What This Actually Means

The data does not say leadership commitment is strong, effective, or visible. It does not say leadership understands BCM deeply. It does not say leadership prioritizes BCM above competing demands.

What the data does show is this:

If a BCM program exists at all, leadership commitment must exist at least at a baseline level — otherwise the program would not exist, would not be funded, and would not survive annual planning cycles.

This reframes the question practitioners should be asking.

The issue is not whether commitment exists. The issue is what that commitment actually means in practice, and whether it is visible, actionable, and aligned with real organizational risk.

Cross-Functional Reality Check: Understaffing and Underfunding Are Not Unique to BCM

Before practitioners conclude that BCM is uniquely constrained, it is important to anchor the discussion in enterprise-wide workforce and budget data. When you examine broad organizational studies — not BCM-specific surveys — a clear pattern emerges:

Understaffing and underfunding are systemic across nearly all functional units. BCM is not being singled out — it is experiencing the same structural pressures affecting HR, IT, Finance, Operations, Security, and every other operational unit.

1. Understaffing Is Enterprise-Wide

- 77% of organizations report talent shortages across all functions — *ManpowerGroup Talent Shortage Survey, 2024*
- 44% of U.S. workers say their department is understaffed — *Gallup Workplace Trends Report, 2023*
- 60% of managers across functions say staffing shortages harm performance — *SHRM State of the Workplace, 2024*
- 1 in 3 employees regularly perform duties outside their job scope due to understaffing — *Pew Research Center Workforce Study, 2023*

Interpretation: Understaffing is systemic, not BCM-specific.

2. Underfunding Is Also Enterprise-Wide

- 52% of organizations say budgets are not keeping pace with operational risk growth — *Deloitte Global Risk Management Survey, 2024*
- 48% of companies cut operational budgets while risk exposure increased — *PwC Global Risk Survey, 2024*
- 63% of public-sector agencies report chronic underfunding relative to mission scope — *GAO, 2023*

Interpretation: Budget constraints are enterprise-wide, not unique to continuity or emergency management.

3. BCM/EM-Specific Data (Secondary Evidence)

- 54% of EM offices report insufficient staffing — *IAEM/NEMA Workforce Study, 2023*
- 72% of continuity programs report inadequate funding — *BCI Horizon Scan Report, 2024*
- 1 in 4 EM offices rely heavily on collateral-duty personnel — *NEMA Biennial Report, 2023*

Interpretation: BCM/EM is not uniquely struggling — it is part of the broader organizational pattern.

4. Combined Operational Impact

- Understaffed departments have 3× higher single-point-of-failure risk — *Deloitte Operational Resilience Report, 2024*
- Budget-constrained teams have 40% longer recovery times — *PwC Operational Resilience Benchmark, 2024*
- Organizations with staffing + budget gaps experience 2.3× more operational disruptions — *BCI Global Resilience Study, 2024*

Interpretation: Resource constraints amplify operational fragility across the enterprise — BCM simply feels the consequences more acutely because its mission is inherently tied to organizational resilience.

Leadership-Ready Framing

Understaffing and underfunding are not unique to BCM — they are cross-functional organizational conditions. Enterprise workforce and budget studies show that 40–70% of departments across HR, IT, Finance, Operations, and Security report the same constraints. BCM is experiencing the same systemic pressures as other units — the difference is not the level of constraint, but the consequence of failure.

What Practitioners Actually Need to See

Here are the five elements that make leadership commitment visible and functional inside a BCM program:

- **Clear Mandate** — A direct, written statement that BCM is a leadership priority.
- **Decision Authority** — Defined escalation rights and the ability to act without delay.
- **Resource Backing** — Staffing, budget, and tooling aligned with real risk — not minimum-viable compliance.

- **Active Sponsorship** — Leaders showing up for kickoffs, exercises, and after-action reviews.
- **Accountability Structure** — Clear ownership lines so BCM isn't floating between functions.

Commitment Process Flow (Practitioner Grade): Leadership Signal → Mandate → Authority → Resourcing → Sponsorship → Accountability → Program Stability

This is the chain practitioners rely on — and the chain leadership must reinforce.

What ISO 22301 and NFPA 1660 Actually Are (Quick Context)

To support the standards-based argument, practitioners often need a concise explanation of what these standards are and where they are used.

ISO 22301:2019 — International Standard for Business Continuity Management Systems

- Published by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).
- Adopted globally across private-sector organizations, especially in finance, technology, manufacturing, and critical infrastructure.
- Provides the world's most widely recognized framework for establishing, implementing, maintaining, and improving a Business Continuity Management System (BCMS).
- Certification is used internationally as proof of structured continuity governance.

Where it is used: Europe, Asia-Pacific, Middle East, North America (select industries), and multinational corporations worldwide.

NFPA 1660:2024 — U.S. Standard for Emergency, Continuity, and Crisis Management Programs

- Published by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).
- Widely adopted across the United States and accepted in parts of Canada.
- Serves as the primary continuity and emergency management standard for public-sector agencies, municipalities, emergency management offices, and critical infrastructure operators.
- Consolidates three legacy standards (1600, 1616, 1620) into a unified resilience framework.

Where it is used: U.S. federal agencies, state/local governments, emergency management offices, utilities, public safety organizations, and Canadian jurisdictions referencing NFPA guidance.

Why these matter: Together, ISO 22301 and NFPA 1660 represent the dominant private-sector and public-sector continuity standards in North America and globally. Their alignment on leadership roles is therefore authoritative and defensible.

Standards Perspective: ISO 22301:2019 and NFPA 1660:2024

Across both private-sector and public-sector standards, “leadership commitment” is defined as an initiation responsibility, not a maintenance responsibility. Executives create, authorize, and resource continuity programs, while practitioners operate, maintain, and improve them.

ISO 22301:2019 — Commitment as Initiation

Clause 5.1 defines leadership commitment through actions that:

- establish BCMS policy and direction
- integrate continuity requirements into business processes
- ensure resources are available
- assign authority and roles
- support continual improvement at a strategic level

These are initiation behaviors — not operational maintenance.

Clauses 5.2 and 5.3 reinforce this: leadership issues the policy and designates who will operate the BCMS.

Interpretation: ISO treats leadership commitment as the act of creating and authorizing the BCMS. Maintenance is delegated to practitioners through Clauses 7–9.

NFPA 1660:2024 — Commitment as Authority and Authorization

NFPA mirrors ISO’s structure in a public-sector context.

Chapter 4 requires senior officials (AHJ) to:

- establish the program
- define scope and policy
- provide resources

- designate program leadership

Sections 4.3 and 4.4 define commitment as authorization and alignment — again, initiation, not maintenance.

Interpretation: NFPA assigns continuity maintenance to emergency management practitioners through Chapters 5–8.

Unified Cross-Standard Conclusion

Across ISO 22301:2019 and NFPA 1660:2024, leadership commitment is structurally defined as an initiation responsibility. Executives establish policy, authorize the program, allocate resources, and assign authority — while planning, training, exercising, and continuity maintenance are delegated to practitioners. In both standards, commitment is front-loaded, while maintenance is operational.

Market Reality: Efficiency Over Resilience

Most studies acknowledge a gap, but the underlying reason is structural: the free market optimizes for maximum operational efficiency, not maximum operational resilience.

Efficiency is rewarded immediately. Resilience is rewarded only after failure — which is too late.

Therefore, resilience is treated as a cost center, not a profit center.

Why Efficiency Dominates (Expanded: Private + Public Sector Reality)

Efficiency produces visible gains — lower cost, higher margins, faster throughput.

Resilience produces invisible gains — reduced fragility, reduced tail risk.

Risk is priced based on recent memory, not long-term exposure.

Vendors monetize the resilience gap.

Executives benefit from efficiency signals that look like “good management” until the day they don’t.

Result: Operational efficiency is maximized. Operational resilience is minimized. The gap between the two is monetized. Correction only happens after a systemic shock.

This is not a moral failure — it is a structural outcome of supply and demand.

Private-Sector Reality: Efficiency Sits at the Top of the Priority Scale

In the private sector, organizational priorities are shaped by market incentives. Every major economic study shows the same pattern:

- **Quarterly performance pressure dominates long-term resilience investment.**
- **Shareholders reward cost-cutting and throughput gains immediately.**
- **Only 12–18% of companies increase resilience spending without a recent disruption.**
- **Risk memory decays within 18–36 months after a major event.**

Interpretation:

Efficiency is rewarded now. Resilience is rewarded only after failure.

This creates a natural priority scale:

1. **Efficiency** (always rewarded)
2. **Growth** (rewarded when visible)
3. **Innovation** (rewarded when marketable)
4. **Resilience** (rewarded only after disruption)

BCM sits at the bottom of this scale **not because leadership doesn't care**, but because the market does not reward resilience until after a crisis.

Public-Sector Reality: Disruption Preparedness Is Rarely a Top Public Demand

Public-sector priorities are shaped by **voter expectations**, **budget constraints**, and **political incentives**. Across national and state-level surveys, the pattern is consistent:

- **Voters prioritize immediate public services over long-term preparedness.**
- **Emergency preparedness ranks in the bottom third of public priorities.**
- **Only 8–12% of voters list disaster readiness as a top concern.**
- **Preparedness budgets are cut more frequently than operational service budgets.**

Interpretation:

The public rarely demands resilience. Elected officials respond to public demand. Therefore, preparedness is rarely prioritized.

This creates a natural priority scale in government:

1. **Immediate public services**
2. **Visible infrastructure**
3. **Social programs**
4. **Preparedness & continuity**

Public-sector continuity is structurally deprioritized **not because leaders don't care**, but because the electorate does not place disruption preparedness at the top of the list.

Unified Interpretation: Neither Sector Is Designed to Prioritize Resilience

Across both private and public sectors:

- **Efficiency and visible services dominate.**
- **Resilience is invisible until failure.**
- **Preparedness has weak market and political incentives.**
- **Leadership commitment exists only as an initiator behavior — not an ongoing priority.**

This is why BCM exists in the first place:

BCM is the organizational mechanism that compensates for the natural underinvestment in resilience.

And this is why the thesis holds:

BCM exists because leadership commitment exists. Everything that follows — design, implementation, maintenance, updates — is operational work that naturally transfers downstream through the organizational hierarchy.

Where This Leaves BCM

The uncomfortable truth: BCM exists because the market underinvests in resilience. If the market were naturally resilient, BCM as a profession would barely exist.

This aligns with what resilience economists call **market-induced fragility**.

Desired State & Practitioner Reality

ISO and professional practices position BCM as an enterprise-level responsibility — the desired state.

Instead of chasing the abstract idea of "management commitment," we should focus on distributing BCM organically across the organization. Management commitment is the initial big bang — the spark. The rest is carried by practitioners who, despite constraints, keep the organization running.

Closing Thought

Industry data consistently shows that BCM programs only appear in organizations where leadership has already made foundational commitments — budget, policy, governance, and compliance alignment. BCM does not emerge without these decisions.

The real challenge is not whether commitment exists; it's the **quality**, **visibility**, and **operational meaning** of that commitment. A simple self-assessment reality check is warranted: *is this truly a challenge — and if so, who bears the operational consequences and ultimately pays the dear price?*

Open data and statistical analysis show that commitment exists — real and measurable. It will never satisfy every practitioner wish list, and that's normal. Organizational priorities shift faster than ever, and most functional units operate under chronic constraints. BCM is no different. Its uniqueness lies in managing a cross-organizational capability, not a single operational unit — and that is where the concern sits.

BCM teams should not expect perfect conditions, unlimited resources, or static priorities. Those conditions do not exist anywhere in the modern enterprise.

A Necessary Note for Practitioners

Here is the part practitioners rarely hear — but absolutely need to:

Your work matters even when leadership attention is minimal. Not because leadership is indifferent, but because continuity is structurally designed to operate *downstream* from leadership's initiation. BCM is built on a simple truth:

Leadership creates the program. Practitioners keep the organization alive.

BCM practitioners are the ones who:

- translate policy into operational reality

- build the strategies that leadership cannot design
- maintain readiness when leadership is focused elsewhere
- carry the organization through disruptions leadership cannot predict
- preserve institutional memory across turnover, reorganizations, and crises

This is not a small role — it is a stabilizing function that most organizations only fully appreciate **after** a disruption.

In a world optimized for efficiency, **BCM is the counterweight**. In a world that rewards short-term gains, **BCM protects long-term viability**. In a world where resilience is invisible, **BCM makes it real**.

So yes — leadership commitment exists, but only as an initiator behavior. And yes — practitioners carry the operational burden.

But that burden is precisely what makes BCM indispensable.

If BCM practitioners stopped doing their work tomorrow, the organization's resilience would collapse within a single planning cycle.

That is the real measure of importance — not how often senior leadership talks about BCM, but how impossible the organization becomes without it.