

NTT Data

素晴らしいガイド

Coronavirus: lessons from the future

Clients first, Teamwork, Foresight

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GUIDING GREATNESS

New realities

The sudden shock of the changes brought about as a result of coronavirus has passed, and we are now settling into what is likely to be a long period of working from home.

Our sister companies, particularly NTT DATA Italia, have been coping with this situation for some time already, and we have benefitted from their experience. We would like to share some of what they have discovered with you in the hope that it will stimulate ideas and guide you through the next few weeks.



Over-communicate

The clearest message to us from Italy has been the importance of over-communicating.

At a corporate level, staff will want clarity on how your organisation is responding to the recent changes, whether that is making the transition to working from home, adapting to more flexible working as schools close or implementing policies such as Government furlough. Increase the frequency of your corporate communications so that you are providing guidance on matters as they occur.

In Italy, our CEO is holding project level Q&A sessions and is also putting out a weekly podcast. In the UK we issue company-wide communications every other day, with a light-hearted look back at the week on Friday so that we enter the weekend on an upbeat note.

At an operational level, people will need to establish new patterns of working and this is likely to require close coordination. Following the lead of our sister companies, we have increased the frequency of our meetings to make sure that everyone understands the changes as they are happening and so that we are identifying and addressing issues quickly.

We have reduced the length of our meetings as well, for example scheduling them for 50 minutes instead of an hour, making sure that we leave time at the end so that people can stretch their legs or get a cup of coffee without feeling that they are keeping

others waiting. It is too easy for people to spend a whole day sitting at their desk unless you take definite steps to prevent it.

We were also given the great advice that keeping your camera on during video conferences brings people closer together because you are inviting colleagues into your homes and getting some insight into their lives outside work. We have found that this has had a great positive impact. It is almost inevitable that you will meet your colleagues' children and their partners; they are part of the team too so take the opportunity to say hello.

Whatever approach you adopt, you will need to take steps to maintain team-spirit. Bring your work-related social activities online and meet up for a yoga session before work or a drink at the end of the day. We have a tradition of "First Fridays" –

meeting on the first Friday of every month to update our organisation on business news followed by a chance to catch up with colleagues over drinks and nibbles. It is an important part of our culture and we have kept that going virtually.

The need to keep in touch extends to your customers. The goal is not to sell, but to share ideas and experience because this is a challenging time for us all, and we will need to work together to bring the country through it. This is particularly important if your customers are small businesses, because things will be changing quickly for them and a lot of them will need help. You might be able to offer technical assistance based on your experience, or you might be able to take steps such as extending more generous payment terms to help them cope with short-term challenges.

Prepare for the long-haul

Most of your staff will have overcome the initial shock and will be starting to settle into a routine, but it is likely that they are still riding a wave of adrenaline which will begin to wear off in the next few days.

Some of your team will have been working heroically to help you make the change. That can be sustained for a short period, but they must rest because you will continue to rely on them over the coming weeks. Think about what work you can reallocate in order to lighten their load.

We've made sure that all worries, big or small, which are not directly related to the day job should be passed to the Business Continuity team to manage so that our staff can focus on their core roles. It's one less thing to worry about.

As well as addressing the immediate challenges of working from home, you will need to think about the wider implications of running teams remotely, such as managing people and maintaining productivity.

Our Italian colleagues noticed that new staff joining the company during this period found it harder to put down roots, so making sure that they are buddied with existing staff members is critical. Getting induction for new staff right is also more important than ever. We have also taken steps to re-work our induction sessions so that they work better remotely, and we are looking to extend our induction checkpoints over several weeks so that we can identify and resolve any challenges that arise.

We are also thinking about other important people management processes. For example, we like to hold performance reviews face-to-face. That is no longer possible, so we are running lunchtime courses for our staff to make sure that we are equipped to conduct performance reviews online and, if necessary, are prepared to have difficult conversations with team members.

Some of your staff will be used to working with nearshore or offshore teams and will have these skills already, but it will be new to others, so consider using your experienced staff to run internal training sessions.



Try new things

We've noticed some benefits from working at home such as increases in productivity in certain areas as the number of distractions has reduced.

Even so, you may experience a slow-down in the coming months, with some staff under-utilised. This is a unique opportunity to clear backlogs and reduce technical debt while there is reduced demand from your customers (internal or external). Maintain a prioritised list of internal projects and assign staff to them as they become available.

This is also a good opportunity to try new things. Pick a problem, it could be related to the current crisis or perhaps it is a long-standing business challenge and run a competition amongst your staff to find the best solution to it. We have run coronavirus hackathons and found them to be a useful way of solving business challenges, supporting our society and keeping our staff engaged and creative.

You may also find that new solutions are forced on you. One of our clients closed their sales call centres and we were able to support them in achieving 90% of their sales through their digital channels. It has changed their way of thinking and is likely to lead to a different way of doing business when the current crisis has passed.



Plan for the exit

Although you might be experiencing a lull as demand drops, prepare for a storm when people start using your services again.

There will be a bow wave of demand and you should be prepared to support this surge whether it is an increase in sales, or a jump in maintenance requests as mothballed equipment is suddenly brought back into use. You will need your staff to be available to support this.

Provide your staff with guidance on when to take holidays so that you are not having to manage an increase in staff holidays while business is picking up. Understandably, many of your staff won't want to take holidays now, but it is important for their wellbeing that they continue to take breaks. Others will make incredible gestures, offering to return holiday to the company. They understand the immediate challenges and how critical it is for the business to survive.

This is likely to be a challenging time, but over the coming weeks, you will become used to working remotely. You will make more use of collaboration tools such as Microsoft Teams and you will experiment and find new ways of doing things.

Some of these changes will become the new normal and they will make your business better - including, perhaps, working from home. So, the final piece of advice we were given is, when we get through this, be prepared to answer the question "what are offices for?". After all, you will have spent a couple of months showing that your business can operate successfully when most of your staff are not there.

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