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HOW-TO GUIDE

5 steps to recovery and continuity in the next normal

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Surmount evolving complexities

Present-day business continuity is being threatened at unprecedented levels. On top of the current complexities organizations face, maintaining business **continuity requires novel approaches to common problems.**[1] In order to deliver differentiated services, professional services organizations must consider methods that may challenge conventional existing systems and operations. Here are five ways that professional services organizations can improve their recovery efforts and sustain business continuity.

1. Develop and implement agile operating models

While digital transformation was underway for many, few saw the most recent health pandemic coming. The health crisis and related economic downturn has **shifted priorities and thrust digital capability and agility into the spotlight.**[2] Organizations that did not have some form of agile strategies and digital technologies in place were at a disadvantage compared to those that were prepared and started down the transformational path. Now, as productivity, client engagement, and profitability are challenged more than ever, it's crucial to find new ways of accomplishing familiar tasks amidst the complexities of the current business ecosystem.

The complexities now include empowering a fully remote workforce, better understanding ever-evolving client challenges, and reacting with appropriate support and experiences—and of course, remaining profitable as business models are disturbed. Professional services organizations must adapt and expand digital agility to thrive in the new digital economy and post-pandemic environment. A digital infrastructure that's fully operational will be the key to continuity and competitiveness.

2. Empower a growing remote workforce

While the option of flexible work arrangements has been gaining momentum for years, **the pandemic accelerated the need to embrace innovative strategies to preserve productivity**[3] while preparing for worst-case scenarios—even within the professional services industry. The problem is that most organizations do not possess a well-established, thoughtfully developed remote workforce strategy. Antiquated organizational structures and closed-minded perspectives prevent many organizations from embracing what may be the largest workplace shift since the start of the Information Age.

Meanwhile, the need for a sophisticated remote workforce strategy has never been greater. Leaders in the professional services industry must reconsider organizational culture and values, identify realistic roles for functioning remotely, select the right people based on behaviors. Leaders should also tap leading-edge technology. While the impact of the pandemic will eventually decline and there will be some return to the old normal, other aspects of our work, the workforce, and the workplace may never be the same again.

3. Rethink client needs and priorities

The success of a professional services organization is dependent on the success of its clients. As clients suddenly face the disruption of normal business operations, their priorities and expectations have changed—drastically. With added pressure on the client experience, engagement and service delivery must be reevaluated. Services providers are in the same boat as their clients and both are attempting to navigate unfamiliar, choppy waters and maintain continuity. Ultimately, organizations have to understand and respond to shifting client expectations because those experiences impact the bottom line. To stabilize and thrive, professional services organizations must avoid client inconvenience, lack of trust, and poor service—even in times of unprecedented uncertainty. **The winners during this time will look to digital engagement models while accepting technology as a driver of the business, not merely a cost**.[4]

4. Drive efficiency in the back office

The growing complexity of the current business environment challenges back office operations across numerous areas. All the new scenarios we're encountering require new approaches. However, it's **important to prioritize back-office performance because it directly influences financial results**. Managing a newly remote workforce, evolving client needs, and evolving government mandates and regulations are all examples of issues impacting organizations. To meet these challenges— and achieve success in a chaotic environment—professional services organizations must operate more efficiently—and think more innovatively. With the right planning, automation, and technology, organizations can integrate all their tools and processes together to improve work and optimize the new practices that'll help sustain the business.

5. Prioritize cybersecurity

Much of the professional services industry is accustomed to working regularly with proprietary internal strategies and interacting with the intellectual property of clients. Yet, just as the need for superior **cybersecurity was reaching epidemic proportions**,[5] new complexities borne from the health and economic crisis are elevating the critical nature of managing digital assets and alleviating cyber threats. Building corporate cultural awareness in an organization around data security and the nature of cybercrime is a vital mandate to ensuring the integrity of organizational data and the reputation of the brand. Other initiatives to consider include incorporating security discussions in onboarding processes and regular communication with staff. Organizations should also work closely with security vendors, test staff knowledge regularly, and foster an open-door policy around data security.

To discover more about this topic and learn best-practice steps your organization can take to improve business continuity and disruption readiness, read the full guide, **Crisis recovery and business continuity in the next normal**.

[1] Accenture, "COVID-19: 5 priorities to help reopen and reinvent your business What you can do now and next to outmaneuver uncertainty" (www.accenture.com), May 6, 2020
[2] Brian Peccarelli, "Three Ways COVID-19 is Accelerating Digital Transformation in Professional Services" CFO, (www.cfo.com), June 29, 2020
[3] Kevin Sneader and Bob Sternfels, "From surviving to thriving: Reimagining the post-COVID-19 return" McKinsey, (www.mckinsey.com), May 1, 2020
[4] Sebastian Hartmann "The COVID-19 aftermath for Professional Services: Three Hypotheses" Legal Business World (www.legalbusinessworld.com), March 17, 2020
[5] Aberdeen, "Post-economic downturn: Professional services back-office improvements" (www.aberdeen.com), July 2020
[6] Steve Morgan "2019 Official Annual Cybercrime Report" (www.herjavecgroup.com)

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