



HOW TO PREPARE YOUR WORKFORCE TO WORK REMOTELY IN THE EVENT OF A CATASTROPHE

White paper by
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ABSTRACT

As the saying goes, we live in interesting times. The same global forces that drive international commerce and innovation can also drive the lightning-fast spread of humankind's oldest nemesis, pathogenic organisms. In addition, today's global business community has to deal with newer concerns like widespread disruption from extreme weather events.

It seems clear that if your business doesn't have an enterprise-wide crisis management plan, it's past time to build one. Thanks to digital transformation, the technological infrastructure that will enable your workforce to remain productive is already available. In preparation for any possible event where employees' physical presence is not critical to performing their duties yet your business productivity remains paramount, this document serves as a how-to guide to ensure your company is ready to implement a remote workforce.

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THE CONTINGENCY PLAN

The goal is to develop a contingency plan that will not only keep your business running during times of unforeseen catastrophe, but will also reduce risk by encouraging your employees to stay out of harm's way by working from home. This plan should be ready to serve any subset of employees or even individuals, as we've recently seen with self-imposed or informal quarantine situations in response to COVID-19. Briefly, here are the three main steps to developing a remote-work contingency plan:

1. Determine what work within your operations can be done remotely by analyzing responsibilities, tasks, and the employee roles that perform them. One generalized rule of thumb is that any job that does not require physical activity within the office (which could be anything from sorting the mail to operating heavy machinery) may be a candidate for remote working.

2. Prepare both employees and managers to be effective by setting accurate expectations, developing outcome-based performance measures, and establishing accountability.
3. Ensure availability of the technology and tools that will enable the remote workforce to communicate, collaborate, and maintain supportive, meaningful interactions. These tools include infrastructure requirements like reliable Internet connections, instant messaging, screen sharing, even mobile phone connections and devices.

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STRUCTURING COMPLIANCE

Many companies find that establishing a remote workforce involves undergoing a cultural shift from oversight and rewards based on time (such as attendance and work anniversaries) to evaluation of performance based on goal-setting, project milestones, and other concretely definable accomplishments. Employees and managers must agree to comply with objective measures such as enterprise-wide work standards, meeting deadlines, preparing work for use by others, etc.

The plan must include actionable steps to identify and solve problems early in the work cycle, including reallocating responsibilities if necessary. It must also include training your managers to efficiently use real-time digital project management tool-sand to conduct objective performance reviews.

3

SUPPORTING EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY

The next step beyond compliance is to foster an environment that allows for true employee productivity. Understanding work-related activities so management can have a clearer picture of employee productivity and objectively measured productivity levels will help keep the company running even without workers being physically present.

Developing this framework during standard operations helps establish productivity benchmarks that are critical to implementing successful work-from-home programs.

These benchmarks should include actual time spent completing work (including each's team core responsibilities), attending meetings, etc. Then goals can be set as necessary to minimize distractions, eliminate unproductive habits, and increase actual productivity levels wherever needed.

Once these benchmarks and goals are established, they hold constant no matter where any employee works from. They become the objective standards against which any employee's efforts can be judged, instead of relying on "the time put in at the office." Your managers should have a built-in platform for determining the success of any project or team, as well as mentoring and managing employee effort and output.

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FACILITATING COLLABORATION

Encouraging innovation and collaboration is an area of such heavy concern that some early adopters of work-from-home programs scaled back or eliminated their programs for fear of damaging it. The intervening years, however, have seen an explosion of communication and productivity tools that means your employees never have to feel isolated or out of touch with their teammates or managers.

For your contingency plan to be effective, continuous and two-way, feedback is a must. Support communication and collaboration through project management tools, task and transaction systems, and rewards and recognition solutions. Videoconferencing is an effective tool for establishing rapport and creating the bonds that negate feelings of isolation or loneliness.

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ENABLING EMPLOYEES' WORK-LIFE BALANCE

In contrast, today's remote employees may suffer from the opposite concern: Feeling overconnected, as if they must always be "on" in order to justify their remote status. Your remote plan should include educating employees about this phenomenon and offering tips to combat it, such as creating a posted schedule and a consistent location for work just as they'd have in the office, quieting distractions like texts and emails at certain times, and developing routines or rituals that formalize the beginning and end of each workday.

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WHY WAIT FOR A CRISIS?

As you develop this enterprise-wide contingency plan, you may become more familiar with the organizational benefits of having a flexible workforce – such as reduced operational costs, less geographic hiring restraints, and a more satisfied workforce with less absenteeism -- and consider giving it a try through a non-crisis pilot program. Inform this decision with the latest data around remote productivity, including Sapience Analytics' own findings.

For example, after analyzing some 500,000 hours of data around work trends and patterns, we have found that work-from-home employees spend two more hours per day (on average) on computer projects than their in-office counterparts, and 1.8 more hours a day engaged in more focused core work activities as compared to their in-office colleagues.

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HOW SAPIENCE ANALYTICS SUPPORTS YOUR PLAN

As the market leader in the rapidly growing people analytics segment, Sapience Analytics is uniquely positioned to support the establishment and success of your remote workforce contingency plan. Our data-driven approach provides unprecedented visibility into work patterns and behavior within your organization, allowing you to automate the reporting of work patterns, time and activity; create baselines of expected work output and set team goals; and automatically gather the data and visibility you need to measure team engagement and productivity.

TO LEARN MORE ON HOW SAPIENCE ANALYTICS CAN SUPPORT YOUR REMOTE WORKFORCE CONTINGENCY PLAN AND ENSURE A HIGH LEVEL OF EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY, PLEASE [CONTACT US](#).