CIO'S RESPONSE POST-COVID 19 ECONOMIC CRISIS – THE ACTION PLAN

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Welcome to the third and final blog in this series. Previously we discussed the impact that COVID-19 has had on the business world and I offered strategies in five areas for CIOs to –consider:

A. Build a Work from Anywhere Platform
B. Evaluate network, security, and privacy needs
C. Use technology to improve business productivity
D. Redefine people practices
E. Improve effectiveness through insights

We covered the first three strategies in my second blog, and in this blog, I will cover the remaining two.

D. Redefine People practices

Hire often, Hire diverse
WFA opens new opportunities to attract the best talent by removing geographical proximity as a criterion. In many metros, a worker spends two to three hours every day just in commute time, thereby reducing employee productivity and impacting their energy. These tough times of forced WFA due to lockdown have shown that users can be highly productive, provided that the work assignments are properly planned. This can also help to bring more accountability in completing the assignments on time and lead to better quality.

Distributed teams have their advantages, including flexibility and the ability to pivot quickly. However, managers need to understand that remote work also requires planning to address related challenges. A growing remote workforce, in both a work-from-home and co-workspace model, will unintentionally expose the organization to vulnerabilities in data privacy and the security of confidential information.

Even though employees may not be going into offices, it does not mean companies have stopped onboarding new hires, so adjustments are necessary. Face-to-face meetings will still happen over video conferencing instead of in person. IT will continue shipping company laptops or provision virtual desktops to new hires' homes and then informing them of their login credentials securely.

If they need technical assistance getting started, support technicians need to be ready to assist them over phone, email, chat or via BOT. New employee orientations may not be happening on-site, but they will still be presented virtually for new team members around the globe.

1. Communicate often and communicate clearly

There has been an explosion of communication and productivity tools in recent years that keep employees in touch with their teammates and managers. For your WHA 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. Desktop/mobile video conferencing solutions such as Webex, Zoom, and Google Hangouts are effective tools for establishing rapport and creating the bonds that negate feelings of isolation or loneliness.

Working from anywhere can be a big change for some employees, so it is important that they understand how to best use and access your systems. Prepare and send employees FAQs, tips, and best practices to help them in the transition, and host all of the important information on an easy-to-locate internal website. Realize that it can be overwhelming to comb through it all to find specific answers, so train an automated support bot to answer frequently asked work-from-home questions. This will help ensure that employees can get instant answers.

2. Evaluate opportunities created by Gig economy

Companies frequently address digital skills gaps with contract workers and other flexible staffing strategies, but tech executives see the rise of the gig economy creating several challenges, including keeping sensitive company and personal data secure and finding the right talent. On one hand, the growth of the gig economy presents a huge opportunity by widening the pool of talent a company can access. On the other hand, having a team - especially a tech team - working on a single business goal without being distracted by other projects has its advantages. Finding the right balance of full-time and part-time talent for a company will be key to success in 2020.

3. Balance between Work from Anywhere and Work-Life

In contrast, today's remote employees may suffer from the opposite concern: Feeling overconnected, as if they must always be always "on" 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

E. Improve effectiveness through insights

1. Develop Real time insights

Now that everyone is set up to work remotely, it's important to make sure they are using and accessing resources successfully. Set up dashboards to actively monitor system health and accessibility. This valuable data tells you if your employees are active in your systems

and able to perform functions as anticipated. It also gives immediate insight into their usage and informs you if action is needed, such as providing more licenses, to ensure your workforce can stay productive.

Whether we are in the office or WFA, we must make decisions based on constantly changing information, all while reacting to factors outside our control. Traditional solutions like business intelligence and reports typically give data that can't be consumed for real time analysis. Companies should deploy solutions to democratize data and improve in-the-moment effectiveness of every employee. Recommendations and analysis should be built in every process and should be made available in every tool that employees use.

Companies should look to augment their data analytics strategies to help keep an eye on their operations, as a window into their business health, including information about customers.

Conclusion

Digital transformation requires much more than technological changes—it also requires an ongoing commitment that evolves over time and a change in mindset. In the coming year, business leaders will need to understand that the digital transformation doesn't end, but instead becomes part of how business leaders solve challenges. Specifically, they'll need to understand how businesses can drive the level of organizational alignment necessary to deliver meaningful results quickly enough to impact the business. It's easy to throw new technologies at a problem, but the deep shift that has to occur requires a level of cultural and organizational support that can be challenging to drive and maintain over the long run.

While companies build strategy for work from anywhere, it's all about digital empowerment, and it is customer-led. IT can no longer push products and services to its internal customers, but it still needs to know what they're consuming and shape its deliveries to match those needs. The IT manager's job has shifted from controlling what technology employees use to offering guidance on the services they should procure. The issue isn't control. IT lost control years ago and cannot get it back. The issue is strategic relevance using the IT team's knowledge to help the business make better decisions about third-party apps and services.

CIOs need to develop their IT team to be more reliant on soft skills and emotional intelligence so that they can guide complex conversations about the collision of digital transformation with legacy eco systems. The upsurge in automation and self-service also means IT professionals need to be more committed than ever to life-long learning. AI-driven automation will change tech delivery in significant ways, eliminating low-level and repetitive jobs, while enhancing a tech professional's ability to pull meaning from vast quantities of data.

Automation can help IT teams can focus on the things that matter most. Still, the onus is on CIOs to overcome the stigma of IT being seen as a cost center, and technology professionals as order takers. If IT wants to be treated as a strategic partner, it will have to act like a strategic partner. This may make for some uncomfortable conversations, but only by inserting IT into upstream strategic thinking can it have impact and change the perception of others towards the IT organization.

As you develop this enterprise-wide WFA 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.

Such measures, most of which are pivots to ongoing digital transformations, will leave companies well positioned for the new normal. The Covid-19 crisis will come to an end and a lot of companies will leave a massive amount of money parked on the sidelines. Organizations who drive technology-led transformation to create competitive differentiators will emerge as winners.

Next steps for CIOs...

1. Work closely with Business and Finance teams to identify long-term and short-term business goals and existing costs.
2. Focus on enabling business goals through the effective use of technology. You may find some new areas where you can use digital technology to accelerate business initiatives by doing things differently.
3. Though there will be pressure to reduce IT costs, CIOs should start working on identifying opportunities to reduce business costs, rather than only IT costs, via task automation and process augmentation with the help of cognitive technologies.
4. Create a plan with quantifiable numbers for business cost reduction via technology, not only over the short term, but over a period of 3 to 5 years.
5. Share your long-term vision, bolstered by data, of how technology can help accelerate long-term business growth.
6. Collaborate with the HR team and come up with best practices for WHA and its long-term benefits on people productivity, employee retention, and better hiring.
7. Partner with every function to identify the policy and process changes required for enabling effective WFA.
8. Envision insights required for the business to improve, and measure productivity of the organization with new ways of WFA.

9. Identify partners who can help in designing, implementing, and operationalizing an effective WFA strategy.

10. Create a comprehensive project plan showing investment over the next 3 years and quantitative and qualitative benefits on quarterly basis.

11. CIOs should believe in the plan and numbers first, and then convince the board with conviction and take ownership for driving the change across the organization.

12. Understand that technology is only one aspect of WFA initiative; it requires collaboration with all the business units for changing the culture in the organization. Help create the task force and convince the leadership team to make it one of the key goals for the CIO function, as well as for other business units.

13. Acknowledge that your previous experience, including your past success, may stop you from thinking differently. You and your team may need unlearning. You will have to empower your team to explore new technologies and new partners and take some calculated risks to drive through this change.

14. Understand that though this is huge change for the organization, the benefits are also huge. Experiment often, fail fast, learn quickly, communicate often, and remain patient.

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Mandar is a Customer Success Director at Nutanix, a leading Enterprise cloud technology provider. Before joining Nutanix, Mandar was Chief Digital officer at KPIT Technologies. In that role, he was responsible for creating digital offerings for customers, driving digital transformation for KPIT, building Think Digital culture, setting up Digital infrastructure and alliance ecosystem. Mandar has over 25 years of experience and played roles of Chief Information Officer, Chief Information Security officer and Head, Infrastructure Management Services business in the past.

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