

Unleashing the potential of your technology investments: lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic

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The need of the hour is to rethink delivery models, taking advantage of the increasing maturity of technology platforms.

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The COVID-19 pandemic is fundamentally disrupting and rewriting the rules of how we live, work and use technology. While the virus outbreak has swept across the world prompting lockdowns and a sharp drop in economic activity, some companies have better adjusted to and even embraced the 'new normal'.

For Global Capability Centres (GCCs) and Information Technology/Information Technology enabled Services (IT/ITeS) delivery models, the current situation poses something of an existential quandary. These models have traditionally focused on concentrated workspaces, with companies mostly operating from a single large office in a city. Even before the pandemic hit, these models faced challenges, as the creaking infrastructure of Indian cities made commuting arduous while the millennial workforce aspired for a better quality of life.

The COVID-19 outbreak has now disrupted supply chains globally across diverse industries. Organisations across the world need to identify offices/sites in multiple locations and decentralise as much as possible while forging partnership agreements with local companies to ensure business continuity. A distributed location strategy has advantages in dealing with disruptions typically accounted for in Business Continuity Planning (BCP). Adopting a satellite location strategy helps build resilience and future-readiness. The COVID-19 lockdown, however, has demonstrated that even this model cannot withstand a pandemic-enforced disruption which cuts across cities, states and countries.

These realities are forcing a rethink of the delivery model, that can take advantage of the increasing maturity of technology platforms as well as the availability of robust cloud, mobility and collaboration applications. Companies can now empower employees to be location-agnostic and perform to potential in a plug-and-play environment. This creates the potential for a more engaged workforce and a better work-life balance. It also allows companies to withstand unforeseen disruptions of the kind we are currently witnessing. Companies need to however review privacy, security and compliance requirements to support this model.

In these difficult times, the well-being of an enterprise's people should be most important while continuing operations and services. With this priority, KPMG in India leveraged its investments in technology to rapidly respond to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 outbreak. The Microsoft Platform was a key pillar in transforming our business. The firm adopted Microsoft's cloud platform (Azure) and deployed the Office 365 suite to ensure employees have access to a modern, feature-rich collaboration platform that enables them to work together from anywhere, on any device. Microsoft Teams and other tools have helped KPMG teams stay connected face-to-face – enhancing productivity and collaboration. Cyber protection

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technologies, including Virtual Private Network (VPN) as well as Microsoft Intune, have been deployed to secure and efficiently manage endpoint devices.

The virus outbreak has given the firm the opportunity to swiftly scale up its digital infrastructure, as the remote workforce swelled from a few hundred employees to thousands of colleagues across the country! Several GCCs have also activated similar BCP strategies to rapidly achieve their Recovery Point Objectives (RPOs). The current lockdown and mobility restrictions have highlighted that technologies such as cloud, mobility, communications and collaboration platforms have not always been used optimally. Several companies have invested in a variety of technologies across the value chain – including core Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP)/ cloud storage and computing platforms, Customer Relationship Management (CRM)/ salesforce effectiveness applications, Internet of Things (IoT)/ predictive maintenance tools for manufacturing, customer engagements for sales and marketing, planning/analytics/insights tools for finance and supply chain. These modern applications have rich mobility and collaboration capabilities but have often not been used to their full potential. KPMG in India's learning was that two actions are required to unleash the next level of collaboration and boost business outcomes:

1. Adoption of collaboration platforms such as Office 365 and Microsoft Teams
2. Enabling access to business applications across multiple devices

During the current crisis, KPMG in India noted that its clients who adopted Microsoft Azure and other cloud platforms have not been hindered by a lack of computing and storage infrastructure. Top quartile companies are also integrating signals from sensors, data from customer engagements, and information from a range of business applications to provide actionable insights to business leaders on the go. It is clear that companies across sectors and functions, ranging from supply chain to finance, can harness the power of their technology investments to rapidly recover from the current business situation and gear up to win in their target markets!

It is still early days as we monitor the social and economic costs of the COVID-19 pandemic. There are several lessons to be learnt as we build a robust delivery model that is resilient in the face of future challenges. One critical takeaway is that the goalposts have been irrevocably moved in terms of delivery models and technology enablement, and companies that adapt will thrive.

SIDEBAR:

“As the world responds to the COVID-19 outbreak, Microsoft is committed to enabling organisations of all sizes to build the digital capability required to address such challenges. In these difficult times, technology has a huge role to play across every industry everywhere. With many people now working remotely, there is increased usage of new technologies. And we are supporting every customer by reducing the friction of adopting new tools and helping them get the most out of the tools.” – Sashi Sreedharan, Managing Director, Enterprise Commercial, Microsoft India

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