



# 7 REASONS WHY WORK FROM HOME ISN'T ALWAYS THE BEST OPTION

With the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic there has been much speculation about the “new normal” of work patterns and the relevance of the office working environment once lockdowns end and social distancing measures are relaxed. Some organizations may be thinking that their alternate workplace recovery arrangements don't have the importance that they were once afforded or that they're now redundant. That reasoning is not only premature, it is also misplaced.

## 7 considerations for your workforce recovery plan:

### ① **The office environment is inherently efficient for collaborative functions**

Many business activities hinge on what might be called “collaborative efficiency”—the speed at which a group successfully solves a problem. So, **why does distance seem to drag collaborative efficiency down?** The short answer is that collaboration requires communication, and the communications technology offering the fastest, cheapest, and highest-bandwidth connection is—for most—still the office.

While we have many communications tools at our disposal (such as phones, virtual meeting rooms, video conferencing etc.) they don't even come close to providing the speed and collaborative efficiencies of **face-to-face interactions with colleagues in the office.**

For many business functions whether they are in the creative, finance, customer contact center, legal or other sectors where a shared working environment is essential, **the absolute wrong time to be introducing obstacles to collaboration in the workplace is in the immediate aftermath of a disruption.**

## ② The remote work strategy makes a lot of assumptions

While many businesses have abandoned the desktop computer in favor of mobile devices to enable workers to be more flexible and more efficient, the belief that this automatically makes a business more resilient and capable of rapid recovery is often a false one.

### Assumptions are predicated on:

- **Availability:** Backup laptops being available and properly configured to each business role — even after an intra-day incident which has resulted in an office evacuation with laptops being left behind.
- **Prioritization of Resources:** A displacement strategy where staff involved in less critical business activities surrender their laptops to more critical business end-users.
- **Functional Remote Workspace:** Awareness that some employees may not have a safe, quiet and functional place to work from outside of the office (laptop power cords and adapters, printers, suitable chair and desk space, disruptive family members).
- **Sufficient Network Infrastructure:** The right infrastructure in place to support a sudden jump in demand for remote network access.
- **Security:** Effective remote information security measures in place and adhered to outside of the office.

Those are some fundamental assumptions which require that you've undertaken a **comprehensive Business Impact Analysis and have factored in not only the right strategies for your team but have actually implemented them.**

## ③ Most disruptive incidents don't give you plenty of warning

Hindsight is a wonderful thing and while there will be many lessons learned from the experiences of many businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic, a few things are blindingly obvious:

- **We all saw it coming and had a limited time to put a number of contingency measures in place**
- **Industry specific businesses were affected simultaneously and with broadly equal impacts**

It's also fair to say that most highly disruptive events don't feature such advance warning or simultaneously disrupt your competitors equally. Sudden and unforeseen disruptive incidents that affect only your organization are likely to mean that contingency measures that take time to deploy are unlikely to provide the required levels of continuity for your most urgent priority activities. Customers are unlikely to be forgiving when you are perceived as having inadequate resilience and your brand reputation, that has been carefully built up over many years, can be destroyed in mere hours. Service level agreements (SLA's), as well as obligations contained in contractual agreements are likely to be broken. Competitors are also likely to take advantage of your inability to provide for your customers and will fill the void you left with the products/services that they can offer.

So in the far more likely scenario — in the Business-as-Usual environment — of an **individual** company being disrupted by an **unanticipated** incident there is an absolute and acute need to continue to provide customers with products and services and to remain competitive. It's at times like this that the ability to fail back to a highly available, resilient workplace environment with a telephony solution and access to corporate networks is profoundly important.

**The “lifeboat” (workplace recovery) that is fully equipped and can be launched on short notice, whatever the weather, is going to be far more effective than the boat that you have to assemble from a kit (the remote working recovery solution) on a rolling deck in the middle of a storm.**



#### ④ **Managing and coordinating recovery activities**

Some of the biggest challenges faced by management teams are in monitoring recovery activities and co-ordinating responses across a number of business functions. Effective communication during a crisis is key — not only in obtaining information on how the disruption is affecting the business but in providing staff with instructions about what they should be doing in terms of their recovery activities as well as ensuring that their welfare concerns are addressed.

We've already seen that creating obstacles to communication and collaboration can significantly impede the resumption of priority activities and the same is true for managing a recovery when the spotlight is firmly fixed on the management team.

The case for having an alternate workplace recovery location, **where recovery activities are tangible and visible, communications are instantaneous and decisions can be rapidly implemented**, is a strong one.

#### ⑤ **Recovery or just treading water?**

During the COVID-19 pandemic many companies have provided technology to staff to enable them to work from home, but are these businesses continuing to innovate and grow or are they simply treading water and 'keeping the lights on'? For example, merely implementing remote call centres using a WFH model to deal with customer queries, that may well be at lower levels due to suppressed economic demand, is not a model that is going to be viable in a competitive marketplace where customer demands are at "normal" levels.

Evidence further suggests that many companies are encouraging customers to use 'chat' rooms and mobile apps which would indicate the actual number of functional call centre operatives is lower. While this may be a workable short-term route to keeping your head above water during COVID-19, it is not a viable route to recovery when "normality" returns.

**Again, the fact that most disruptions are NOT global pandemics points to the "treading water" option not being a viable or even a vaguely acceptable recovery strategy.**

#### ⑥ **Information management & security challenges**

In the run-up to the anticipated lockdowns associated with COVID-19 many organizations purchased laptops for staff to work from home. While these are — for now — new and therefore less likely to fail, this increases the number of devices within a company's IT estate. Remember, most of these staff would already have had workstations with desktop PCs etc. so the new equipment is additional to the existing IT assets. In the longer term, is this sustainable? Are there maintenance arrangements in place as laptops begin to fail? The overhead on an IT department could be significant, particularly as time progresses. This is not the case with an established alternate workplace contract where the workplace recovery provider (Sungard AS) supplies **well managed IT assets and skilled staff at transparent and predictable cost to its customers.**

#### ⑦ **What if the "H"- component" of WFH is affected by the same disruption as your business?**

The remote-working recovery strategy is dependent on a number of things, but a **fundamental assumption where WFH has been deployed by businesses is that staff have a functioning, connected home to work from.**

Even relatively "minor" incidents can prove challenging for staff to deal with if they themselves are victims of the event. The assumption that they will "rise to the occasion" and put the business they work for ahead of their own and their family's welfare, is a non-starter.

Events in the North America such as Hurricane Sandy of 2012 where six million homes were without power in 15 states and the District of Columbia or Hurricane Katrina where an estimated three million people were without power are just two instances where remote working is unlikely to have been a viable recovery strategy and where Sungard AS' Workplace Recovery locations proved vital for disrupted businesses.



Whether it's hurricanes, terrorist attacks, global pandemics or IT outages – Workplace Recovery Services from Sungard AS protects not just your highest priority business activities, but also provides an environment in which to collaborate and innovate. In short, we allow your organization to not just survive, but thrive – the very definition of resilience.

### **What does your Business Continuity Workplace Plan look like?**

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