PROTECTING PEOPLE. POWERING PRODUCTIVITY.

Adapting ways of working in public service to outmaneuver uncertainty
Rainer Binder
Managing Director - Social Services, Global Industry
rainer.binder@accenture.com

Rainer is the global social services lead for Accenture's public service industry network. Drawing on insights from nearly two decades of experience, he leads teams in delivering large transformation programs that change how public service organizations work—and how they serve citizens and businesses. Rainer sees both the big picture and the fine details, and has a unique ability to problem solve by simplifying complexity. He is passionate about the employment and social services market, having led several employment agency transformations.

Himanshu Tambe
Managing Director, Talent & Organization
himanshu.tambe@accenture.com

Himanshu is the talent & organization lead for Accenture’s strategy & consulting business in South East Asia. Throughout his 25-year career, he has helped public agencies and private companies evolve by designing and implementing transformations that improve the performance of their people and their organizations. Himanshu’s approach to problem solving is special. He blends the sensibilities of a strong engineering and business mind, never forgetting the human element. He is passionate about working with public sector leaders to help them unleash human potential.
Public service organizations evolved ways of working in the early weeks of the COVID-19 crisis with impressive speed and responsiveness. You moved staff to remote working arrangements. You launched virtual service delivery models. You turned to human-machine collaboration. It was all done to safely deliver vital services to citizens and businesses—to keep the extraordinary work of government going at an extraordinary time.
Striking a delicate balance

Now we have entered a new period of co-existence with the virus. This is a time to build on your COVID-19 responses to transform ways of working for the longer term. You can improve how your agency serves the public while helping to protect your people’s safety and build their human resilience for adapting to difficult times.¹

Transforming ways of working means balancing productivity and safety. Remote working will continue, and agencies are investing in new technology to provide more services virtually. But they are concerned that remote work and light-touch service delivery could lead to data privacy, security and productivity issues, and poor customer experience.

In addition, not all staff can work remotely, and not all services can be delivered virtually. It is easier to provide many public services in person, and ensuring equitable access depends on offering both digital and physical service channels. And by offering services in the multiple ways that citizens want and need them, it also helps to build trust.

Even before the pandemic, 62% of government executives expected improvements in productivity and workplace performance due to investments in new technologies and sources of workplace data.²

There was a productivity drop of 7.2% in North America and 8.2% in Europe across sectors in late February through March 2020.³

66% of workers are more worried about contact risk when lockdown measures are lifted, than the financial risks of delaying returning to work.⁴
There’s no single blueprint to transform how you work

Achieving the right balance is complex. The extent of the challenge varies, depending on if a role is public facing or in the back office. But here’s the silver lining. Navigating the issues that arise is an opportunity to use the pandemic as a springboard to meaningful change in how you deliver services and outmaneuver uncertainty.

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- **Very high challenge**
- **Medium to high challenge**
- **Medium challenge**
- **Low challenge**
**Cultivate new ways of working that protect your people and your productivity**

There are four interconnected areas that can help you drive change. These areas build on and reinforce each other. They are grounded in data, analytics and technology and should be executed through a customer-first lens—a “truly human” focus. With new capabilities across people, organization, culture and leadership, you can create a more resilient and elastic workforce\(^5\), providing better outcomes to your clients.

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Build digital “contact-light” services

Since the crisis began, agencies have stood up new digital services, such as virtual agents, to provide everyday and pandemic-related assistance while minimizing contact risk. Many of these “contact-light” digital services are success stories in balancing safety and productivity.

The next evolution is to make these services smarter. To do this, use predictive analytics to proactively complete services for people—everything from license renewals to setting up and conducting appointments with the government. By feeding data from digital interactions into machine learning algorithms, you can make your agency’s service delivery model so aware of customers’ needs that it actually anticipates them for people. Remember too that citizens have had a taste of what’s possible with these digital interactions during the pandemic. From now on, they will expect flexible public services delivered through their physical and digital channels of choice.

Where it’s working now

Estonia is one of several countries that has changed its tax filing process with auto inclusion of data. Taxpayers log into a secure site and simply review their pre-populated forms, make any updates and approve the declaration. It takes about three minutes to file taxes online.6
What to do to outmaneuver uncertainty

**People**

Build your people’s skills in the areas needed to support this digital service model.

- Develop data mining capabilities to segment customers.
- Build skills to analyze recommendations from AI engines for next-best actions.
- Use design thinking to create service experiences that truly reflect people’s needs.

**Organization**

Replace organizational silos with a “product-based” service delivery model.

- Combine front and back office functions around the service—not your organizational chart or existing processes.
- Use case management to follow the customer journey.
- Collaborate across roles so the experience is seamless for citizens and staff.

**Culture**

Develop new mindsets across your team that support this service model.

- Support your people in a strategic shift from reactively processing transactions to proactively delivering services.
- Create a strong customer-first spirit.
- Have everyone commit to deliver highly personalized services.

**Leadership**

Give your frontline staff the tools they need to be key decision-makers.

- Augment your staff with AI tools that give them insights into citizens’ unique needs.
- Eliminate complex chains of approval that delay services and trust staff to make smart, fast and consistent service decisions.

Build digital “contact-light” services
Empower a distributed workforce

Before COVID-19, most public service work was done from physical offices with remote working in pockets. Agencies had to quickly create structures to support remote working during lockdown. Processes are still not fully digitized. Not all employees have the infrastructure to work well from home. Without the luxury of planning, there has not been sufficient training on remote collaboration tools. Yet remote workers like this way of working once they try it. In a pre-pandemic survey, 98% of remote workers wanted to keep working this way in the future.

Now you can perfect these workforce structures. Plan for a reversal of the traditional model—a shift to more remote work with occasional visits to the physical office. Sources suggest that this is likely a permanent change, not a temporary one. In this new way of working, be aware of what your people need—and how they feel about where and how they work. The environment created by the pandemic has amplified the importance of checking in with your people’s wellbeing. Equip employees with digital collaboration tools so they can work anywhere while staying connected and productive. And develop the flexibility to source new talent from where it is available.

Where it’s working now

Accenture is helping federal and local governments worldwide by leveraging cloud and AI technologies to stand up virtual assistants and call centers—like in support of unemployment applications with the Texas Workforce Commission—and COVID-19 command operations and contact tracing initiatives.
People

Provide the support that people need to be successful working in this new model.

- Develop skills in visualization tools that help people succeed as remote workers.
- Shift mindsets from task-based to role-based work.
- Train people in agile ways of working so they can adjust easily to new circumstances.

Organization

Eliminate organizational structures that block flexible ways of working.

- Develop a new discipline for working in cross-functional teams without silos.
- Create a flatter organization that empowers employees and teams and promotes shared decision-making responsibilities.

Culture

Engage your people wherever they are in a community of trust.

- Create an inclusive community based on trust in remote teams.
- Encourage everyone in the organization to value adaptability.
- Give people “permission” to adjust procedures as needs change.

Leadership

Lead the distributed workforce with a truly human approach.

- Excel at the fundamentals of good leadership with clear goals and communication.
- Make decisions that consider the human impact.
- Create two-way feedback loops to understand and celebrate employee perspectives.

Empower a distributed workforce
Unleash human + machine collaboration

Human and machine collaboration is not new to public service. Before COVID-19, 76% of public service leaders agreed that it would be critical to innovation in the future. However, the virus accelerated its importance. Not only do machines fill the distance gap when people cannot be face to face, intelligent automation and AI can support human workers to perform routine tasks faster, reduce workload, make better decisions and do more meaningful, mission-focused work.

Decide which tasks require human judgement and cannot be done by machines. Identify interactions where humans can train AI to perform better, making it explainable and sustainable. Look for opportunities for machines to augment humans with real-time insights. Finally, create efficiencies by allocating manual and repetitive work to machines. Outside of automation, consider how you might apply technology to improve the experience of work. For example, extended reality for immersive training, machine learning for knowledge management and AI for career mapping. Through it all, prioritize trust and transparency—with employees and citizens—so they are not threatened and understand the benefits.

Where it’s working now

The city of Riihimäki, Finland developed a virtual assistant to help citizens with 1,200 topics. The chat bot uses natural language processing to understand citizens’ questions and is available 24/7. It frees up human staff to help people with more complex inquiries.
What to do to outmaneuver uncertainty

People
Prepare your people to work confidently with machines as coworkers.
- Help your people work and train collaboratively with AI.
- Simultaneously build “core mission” skills so that employees can devote more time to service delivery.

Organization
Evolve the structure to align with the dynamics of human and machine collaboration.
- Create an organizational model with human and machine collaboration at the center.
- Make a plan to break down organizational silos that stand in the way of seamless data flow within and across departments and agencies.

Culture
Create a culture that values evidence-based decision making.
- Build trust and transparency into your technology strategy.
- Ensure your people understand the critical place for human experience and knowledge in working with AI and technology.

Leadership
Ensure that leaders are visible and vocal champions of new ways of working.
- Cultivate and support leaders who understand that bringing machines into the workplace is more than simply applying AI to old ways of working.
- Optimize the work first, then apply machines to get the best possible outcomes.

Unleash human + machine collaboration
Become an ecosystem orchestrator

Citizens expect seamless services across government agencies and the private sector. COVID-19 has crystallized this expectation. Meeting it is only possible through ecosystem collaboration. It all starts with cross-agency data sharing, not just in times of crisis, but all the time. With a platform that integrates data from multiple agencies across government and the private sector, you can deliver public services in a more integrated, smart and customer-centered way. In addition to a data-exchange platform, you must change the way you work and collaborate, building in new flexibility and processes for working together toward common outcomes. This is how to finally tackle challenges that cannot be solved with a single agency view.

When you work as an ecosystem collaborator, your people have access to information and capabilities to be more effective and satisfied in their roles. The people you serve benefit because your agency better understands their needs through shared data. For the greatest impact, apply machine learning and AI to derive insights on complex social issues like domestic violence or economic outcomes like business-to-business risk. Work across the ecosystem to develop personalized outreach and educational campaigns for citizens based on behavioral insights.

Where it’s working now

Recognizing the benefit of collaborating with the private sector, the South Korean government is sharing mask sales data using an open Application Programming Interface (API). With access to this data, developers can create apps that alert the public about which pharmacies have available stock of masks.
What to do to outmaneuver uncertainty

**People**

Give your people the foundation they need to derive insights from data.

- Ensure that your people can use machine learning and AI-based analytics to model risk and get behavioral insights from data.
- Build skills so that staff are data-led in their approach to making decisions.
- Use benchmarking to understand trends.

**Organization**

Organize ways of working to support cross-functional teams that deliver outcomes.

- Break through silos and create “product-based” teams that are effective because they take a cross-disciplinary approach.
- Use a centralized “hub and spoke” design to share analytics insights across the organization for more informed decision making for all staff.

**Culture**

Cultivate a shared appreciation of the power of the network.

- Evolve internally-focused cultures to celebrate the value of networks and alliances.
- Shift focus from the importance of one leader or a small group of leaders to the importance of cross-disciplinary teams.

**Leadership**

Strengthen the ecosystem by leading inside and outside of the agency.

- Make it a priority to manage cross-agency and cross-sector partnerships.
- Put structures in place to be able to act with speed and transparency, uniting everyone around delivering outcomes.

Become an ecosystem orchestrator
Creating the foundation now to be ready for the never normal

By evolving the changes you had to make out of necessity during the pandemic, you are driving a fundamental transformation of how public services will work in the future. Providing lasting benefits to your people and those you serve is not a one-time exercise. To stay ahead in such a dynamic environment, continually assess where your agency is, blueprint any changes you want to make, and execute against your plan.

By committing to a virtuous circle of discovery, blueprinting and transformation—and being prepared to make refinements fast as needs change—you can elevate both your workforce’s day-to-day experiences and citizens’ service experiences. It’s all about being agile and adaptive. That’s how you can make your agency more resilient for the challenges and opportunities ahead. That’s how you can outmaneuver uncertainty.
HOW ACCENTURE CAN HELP

We are providing COVID-related support to public sector organizations across North America, Europe and in Asia-Pacific and the Middle East. We are using repeatable assets such as ACE+ (stands for: Applied Customer Engagement) and AI capabilities to enhance call center surge capacity, supporting scenario planning and priorities for remote working and operational continuity, and leveraging our ecosystem partners to help implement contact tracing initiatives.
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