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PUBLIC SERVICE FOR A NEW ERA

A practical action guide for outmaneuvering uncertainty

OUTMANEUVER UNCERTAINTY

NOW NEXT

LEADING OUR NORTH AMERICA TEAM

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Ryan leads Accenture's global and North America public sector business serving government agencies, educational institutions and non-profit organizations. Over more than two decades, he's played key roles in transforming state, county and city governments as well as reshaping operations at some of America's largest and most prestigious universities. While the depth and breadth of his expertise has continually evolved, one thing has stayed the same: Ryan's commitment to helping clients reshape what they do and how they do it for the benefit of the people they serve.

THE NEVER NORMAL

Many public service organizations took on the COVID-19 pandemic with effective leadership and extraordinary sacrifices from frontline workers. After months of managing the crisis while continuing the everyday work of government, nations are opening up again. They are navigating a complex tension—balancing protecting citizens' physical health and mental well-being with kickstarting operations and economies.

Yet uncertainty remains. Economic shifts over this period could be more extreme than previous recessions, and unemployment is projected to be worse than during the Great Recession. The pandemic has shed light on weaknesses, inequalities and challenges in our society. In addition, scientists report that more infectious disease outbreaks are inevitable and expect them to happen more regularly in the future.[1]

The world looks very different

No one knows how long this period of co-existence with the virus will last—but the world after lockdown and before antivirals and a vaccine is vastly different. Things that were aspirations before, such as widespread touchless service, remote working and telemedicine have become reality out of necessity. For better or worse, such shifts will profoundly change how we live and work for the foreseeable future.

The public sector is at the center of this period of community and economic life. People and businesses are depending on you to guide them through the next several months, possibly years, of uncertainty. There is much to think through, and the social, political and economic fallout is unknown. **This era of uncertainty will force you to build more flexibility and adaptability into how you deliver outcomes to citizens, businesses and your workforce.**

THE NOW: Take Stock. Take Action.

Public service organizations stood up new policies and service delivery models at an astounding pace to respond to this crisis. Now it's time to capitalize on what's been achieved. By evolving the best of this innovation, you can create more flexible governance, ways of working, service delivery approaches and ecosystem relationships.

Think through three dimensions to determine which solutions to end, which to evolve and which to expand as standard practice.

Resilience: Do things differently

You became more resilient to confront the virus and provide the basic functions required to maintain stability. Schools shifted to distance learning. Trials were held in virtual courts. Call centers turned to chatbots and citizen apps to provide surge capacity to help citizens get the services they need. Some new ways of working are simply stopgap solutions. But others can improve mission delivery moving forward. Because in some cases, doing things differently means doing things better.

Ask yourself…

Does the solution improve mission delivery?

Versatility: Do different things

You supported citizens and businesses in unconventional ways, being versatile to innovate at speed and scale. Public health agencies got vital supplies from private hospitals. Hackathons tapped the collective power of experts from across disciplines. Pragmatic programs redirected surplus agricultural products to families with food insecurity. Pushing the boundaries of "what government does" meant delivering the mission in new ways.

Ask yourself…

Does the solution provide a new way to deliver on the mission?

Sustainability: Define the future

You want to build on some solutions to springboard to the future. This means making refinements and putting enablers around them to operationalize them for everyday use. For example, telemedicine is about new patient-provider relationships, not just technology tools. Remote work is about supporting the "whole worker," not just providing a flexible work arrangement. Quality and assurance must be met, but these processes can also be reimagined.

Ask yourself…

Can I make the solution standard practice with the resources I have?

THE NEXT: Emerge Stronger.

As you plan for a post-lockdown future, the concepts of resilience, versatility and sustainability should inform your strategic planning. In addition, your priorities and decisions should account for five shifts in attitudes and ways of interacting.

CITIZENS

All eyes on public service.

SERVICE

The human face of virtual.

COLLABORATION

Building without boundaries.

WORKFORCE

Workforce superpowers.

TRUST

The new social contract.

All eyes on public service

What's happening

COVID-19 heightened people's awareness of the role of public service in our daily lives. Citizens and businesses realized that there are certain things only government can do. They saw government acting to protect public health. Now they are equally focused on what government is doing to support economic recovery. This hyper focus on public service offers a window of opportunity to reestablish the public service brand. What you do during this time—and how—has implications for people's perception of government and their relationships with the public sector.

All eyes on public service

How to outmaneuver uncertainty

Seek and use expert advice.

As public health officials and scientists took center stage, their visibility had a positive impact on confidence in government and people's willingness to change their behaviors. Continue to seek expert advice and retain this transparency and access moving forward.

Plan for all possibilities.

Delivering the public service mission amid so much uncertainty takes stamina. Build yours with scenario planning. Drive outcomes-based decisions by using digital twin technologies—digital replicas of the physical world—to explore "what-if" and "then-what" scenarios.

Build the muscle to flex.

Disruption will come again. Be ready to quickly scale and pivot capacity. Understand priorities, assess real-time data, redeploy people and resources, and make new arrangements with staff and suppliers to be more proactive and responsive as circumstances change.

WHAT'S WORKING

Governments had ongoing dialogues with citizens to explain why flattening the curve matters for individuals, health systems and society as whole. They communicated the actions that needed to be taken and if they were working. Bringing citizens along on a journey grounded in data, evidence, action and impact is a model for the future. By building evidence-based relationships and explaining the "why" behind actions, you can improve service delivery and participation.

The human face of virtual

What's happening

Virtual interactions will not end with lockdowns. Perfecting this service delivery model is about more than selecting the right technology. It's critical to bring that spirit of human connectedness to situations when we cannot be together physically. Maintaining these connections is so essential in government because many of the services that agencies provide are vital to people's livelihoods. Even as the virtual century[2] takes hold, there will be a demand for face-to-face services. The trick is to provide the right mix of virtual options and alternatives to meet diverse needs.

The human face of virtual

How to outmaneuver uncertainty

Know your customers.

Forget any assumptions you may have about who your customers are. People who have never needed the social safety net are turning to you now. Tap into the tremendous data stores at your fingertips to understand who they are, what they need, how they want to receive it, and design services based on intent, not transactions.

Emphasize equity of access.

Some people lack access to technology tools and connectivity. And sometimes, there's simply a need for a face-to-face connection. Support all stakeholders and situations by creating multiple pathways for people to interact with the digital and physical channels of their choice.

Design from the outside in.

Solutions that work for people come from a diversity of inputs. Innovate service delivery with approaches that are deeply centered in human design concepts. There are many effective virtual approaches to co-creation, so you can follow these principles even when face-to-face input sessions are not an option.

WHAT'S WORKING

Telemedicine arguably saw the biggest growth as a result of COVID-19 of all virtual services. COVID-19 amplified and accelerated its use, shifting the value proposition from convenience to necessity.[3] Case in point: In the United Kingdom, the National Health Service is using a video chat tool that was developed in just one weekend for 35,000 consultations a day.[4] To sustain this model, public health systems will continue to refine patient and provider experience, technology infrastructure and outcomes measurement.

Building without boundaries

What's happening

Collaboration surged in the COVID-19 world. The private sector repurposed supply chains and refocused operations to provide vital resources. Different levels of government and public agencies came together around a common mission. Strengthening the relationships forged during the crisis can create a greater and more integrated role for non-government entities, businesses, nonprofits and citizens. New ways of working should be codified and continually refined to build on the gains made and strengthen future preparedness.

# Building without boundaries

How to outmaneuver uncertainty

Build a powerful team.

Just months ago, no one would have thought distilleries and perfumeries could help address shortages in hand sanitizer. But they did. Identify the partners you need to help you deliver the mission—be sure to include some creative options. Make it easy for them to work with you, relaxing "arm's length" processes that complicate collaboration.

Create a culture of "we."

The spirit of "we're in this together" created a rallying cry for people during the crisis. Align around a shared purpose now both within your organization and across your ecosystem partners. Take advantage of a shared purpose to energize teams and improve working relationships.
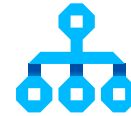
Unite around shared outcomes.

Nothing brings us together better than a shared understanding of the outcomes needed and a sense of urgency for delivering them. As you evolve ecosystem relationships and create new ones, ensure that everyone understands the desired outcomes from the start.

WHAT'S WORKING

The Ministry of Social and Family Development in Singapore saw an increase in domestic violence inquiries during lockdown. The government created a multi-agency task force to explore this issue and develop better ways to address it. The group includes public agencies, courts and community organizations like hospitals and crisis shelters. A key objective is to strengthen collaboration and refine a "whole of society" response to helping families in crisis.[5]

Workforce superpowers

What's happening

Public servants have risen to the challenge of unimaginable circumstances during the crisis. As agencies prepare for work after COVID-19, building a resilient workforce is a priority. Balancing the need to be productive and deliver outcomes for citizens and business with keeping employees safe is critical. There are opportunities to push the boundaries of productive remote work and leverage human and machine collaboration for a more adaptive workforce. Doing this well takes a truly-human spirit and empathy that informs expectations and interactions with employees.

Workforce superpowers

How to outmaneuver uncertainty

Reconfigure work structures.

The future of work in many agencies is likely to be a hybrid of remote work and office work. Assess all the functions within your agency to determine which roles are best completed in which model. Account for the impact on service delivery and effective team collaboration.

Rethink essential skills.

The pandemic has taught us the importance of adaptability, flexibility and the ability to work well amid uncertainty. These are now essential "super hero" skills for your workforce. Improve performance across your organizations by valuing these traditionally overlooked soft skills, developing learning programs to cultivate them and recruiting for them.

Create a safety experience at work.

To be productive and engaged, your workforce needs to be safe and feel safe. As you adapt the workplace to bring employees back to the office with approaches like staggered schedules or part-time telecommuting, develop and communicate new safety protocols. With every employee having different safety thresholds, explore personalized policies as possible.

WHAT'S
WORKING

Citizen volunteers stepped up to become part of the public "workforce" during the crisis. The State of Oklahoma extended its human services digital platform to collect volunteer contact information and skills data so the state could mobilize aid once it was safe to do so in person. More than 3,000 volunteers signed up within the first week, looking to engage with their local government to help their communities.

The new social contract

What's happening

There is a need for a new social contract based in trust—a willingness for people to change their behaviors for the benefit of public health and the greater good. Keeping the public's trust is an ongoing process. Trust can disappear at any time. It rests on how governments lead nations through economic recovery and shape policies and a safety net that help protect people's personal and financial health and their personal safety. Public service organizations that are good stewards of public trust during this recovery period will have it as a critical foundation for governing through the next crisis.
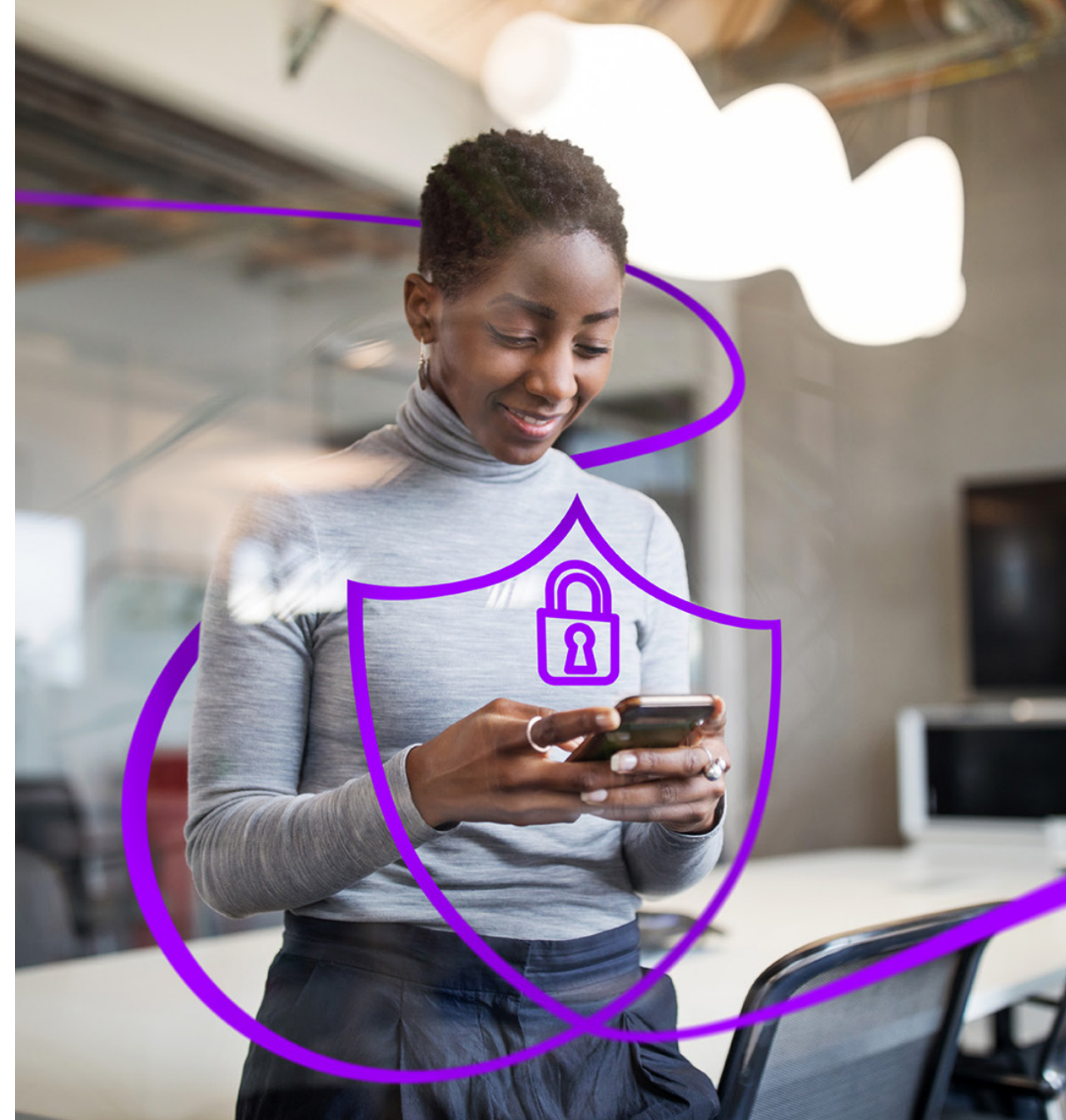
The new social contract

How to outmaneuver uncertainty

Keep eyes and ears open.

Feedback from the public helps you understand the impact, efficacy and "unintended consequences" of policies, programs and operational changes. Stay tuned to public sentiment through virtual town halls and social media monitoring. Acknowledge any issues that arise and clearly communicate your response and what happens next.

Be radically transparent.

Clear, honest communication is important during times of uncertainty. Define expectations openly and honestly to fuel collective action and voluntary participation. Remember that meaningful communication is a way to bring in trusted human connections that people miss in a more virtual world.

Act as expert data stewards.

Citizens' willingness to share personal data is key to your ability to predict and prepare for future outbreaks. Ensure that there are strict data protections at pan-national, national and organizational levels. Make cultural changes so that data is used effectively and responsibly.
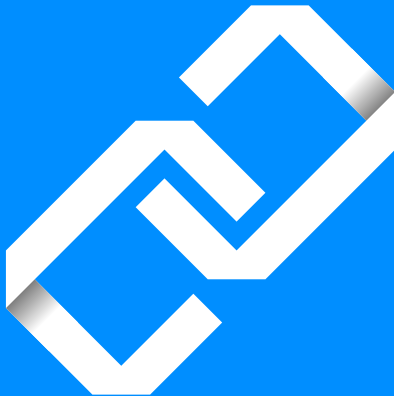
WHAT'S
WORKING

While public health surveillance programs raise privacy concerns, people are consenting to sharing their contact tracing data. This consent is for the present, but the social contract and the public trust that makes it possible is elastic. It naturally ebbs and flows. People will do their part as long as government does its part. When personal data is involved, people expect to be told what is being done with it and why, how long it will be used, and what happens to the data when this period ends.

BE
AMBITIOUS
BOLD
FLEXIBLE

Every nation's circumstances are unique. But we all have something in common. The virus is still among us, and strengthening preparedness for future disruptions is critical. This will take bold collaboration, tremendous flexibility and relentless innovation from across the public sector. What's encouraging is that history has taught us lessons in co-existing with threats to daily life—and people have persevered.

Times of crisis teach us things we didn't know about ourselves. This is true for public service organizations. You took action with a can-do, must-do spirit to confront the virus. As the world moves past this uncertain time, expect a "never normal" economic and societal landscape shaped by rapid shifts in norms, values and behaviors.

The pandemic accelerated many transformations that were ongoing in government. Of all its horrible impacts, this is a rare positive. You can build on this momentum. Meeting the needs of citizens, businesses and public servants means harnessing the power of transformative technologies and becoming a truly data-driven organization that analyzes, shares and acts on data insights to make a lasting difference in people's lives.

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ABOUT ACCENTURE

Accenture is a leading global professional services company, providing a broad range of services and solutions in strategy, consulting, digital, technology and operations. Combining unmatched experience and specialized skills across more than 40 industries and all business functions—underpinned by the world's largest delivery network—Accenture works at the intersection of business and technology to help clients improve their performance and create sustainable value for their stakeholders. With approximately 505,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries, Accenture drives innovation to improve the way the world works and lives. Visit us at www.accenture.com.

HOW ACCENTURE CAN HELP

Accenture is doing urgent, fast-paced work for a number of U.S. states—including California, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New Mexico among other states—in support of their contact tracing efforts. We are bringing our strongest and best digital and management capabilities to serve states' critically important efforts to protect their citizens and reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Our work is focused on program management, information technology systems implementation, and support for virtual contact center operations, helping states launch and manage operations quickly and at scale to address the ongoing pandemic.