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Is your Manufacturing or Services Business COVID-19 ready?

(A 15-point guideline of work strategies to navigate your business through COVID-19)

Desperate times call for desperate measures.

The last few weeks have probably been the most volatile weeks on Planet Earth since World War II.

While many countries are facing a lock down situation to maintain social distancing in order to avoid close human contact, which is a primary source for the virus to multiply, the question on everyone's mind is: How long can we be confined to our homes and how long can we afford it in economic terms? We are already experiencing shortages of materials because Manufacturing has been put on hold in many companies and if it does not resume soon, it will lead to more job losses and companies going bankrupt. All this can create a Socio-Economic turmoil and an increase in riots, crime and violence when humans are brought to the bounds of survival.

I think, most governments understand this well and some governments have even decided against implementing a lockdown, since they believe that economic activities must continue.

For countries where there is a current lockdown present, the imminent question is "How can business resume once the lockdown is removed?"

It's a forgone conclusion that life will not be the same as before the Coronavirus pandemic erupted. In addition, experts, such as Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, said "the earliest the US may get a coronavirus vaccine will be in 12 to 18 months."

"So how do we conduct economic activities until then?" This is the key question each company needs to start thinking about and put strategies in place. This applies to all types of businesses, whether it is a Manufacturing, Logistics or Services business, a family business, trader or a professional services provider.

As a Professional Services provider for the core Manufacturing sector for the last 30 years, I have drawn some suggestions for different businesses. This may not be a complete guideline but a starting point for

each business to put a COVID-19 SOP in place. This can ensure that the business can operate, and necessary precaution and safety measures are implemented.

COVID-19SOP Guideline

Primary Objective

The Primary Objective of this guideline is

- To ensure that the social distancing guidelines, as prescribed by the government and health authorities, are followed in the work area for the safety of everyone.
- To ensure that business activity can resume and continue with minimal disruptions in production and customer service

For the purpose of ease, I will classify the industries into two distinct categories:

- Manufacturing, Logistics and Service industries that deal in some form with material and human contact (i.e. core Manufacturing operations, transportation, hospitals, healthcare professionals, etc.)
- Professional Services Industry that can deliver services electronically.

The guidelines provided below are more from a Manufacturing and Logistics industry perspective, although a few pointers can also apply to large professional service providers.

Manufacturing, Logistics Industries

People Related SOPs

The 5 key decisions that you need to evaluate and define in your COVID-19SOPs are:

1. **Which part of the workforce needs to operate from your factory/office and which part of your workforce can continue to work from home.**

Even though you might not work in a pure services industry, every business has a back-end staff for accounting, IT, HR, and other areas that can operate remotely or partially remote. As an example, if you have 100 employees, 70 could be attached to your direct factory (workers and supervisors) but the other 30 could be sales, support operations and management staff. Typically, 30% of your staff may need to operate from a physical office but the rest can operate from home on a staggered basis. You need to analyze your workforce, their job roles and create a matrix to define their primary place of work.

Furthermore, you may also want to analyze if a staggered shift process can be implemented in your core manufacturing area. This will help follow social distancing norms in your manufacturing facilities, and will also help reduce the load on public transportation during peak hours which could aid to the transmission of COVID-19.

2. **What type of hygiene and cleaning regulations do you need to implement in your factories and offices to maintain social distancing and other COVID-19 guidelines?**

Identify every part of the workplace to check if every employee can maintain social distancing norms, identify areas where hand sanitizers and/or soap dispensers must be provided for e.g., reception area, washrooms, etc. Identify areas where protection gear needs to be provided in terms of gloves, masks, full body protection gear, etc.

Above all, you need to put a procurement process in place to ensure that these items are available on your premises and procured timely.

3. **What types of electronic and IT tools for audio/video conferencing meetings do you need to put in place so that your remote staff can continue to perform their jobs?**

For your remote teams, you will need to review and define what tools they need to be provided with, in order to work from home. Such tools can include laptops, VPN access to your servers, Internet bandwidth, remote audio and video conferencing capabilities, phone or mobile connectivity, printers and scanning machines etc. This may require a substantial capital investment, hence provisions in your budget will have to be made.

4. **What tools and training will you need to put in place to capture attendance of remote working staff to fulfill various statutory labor guidelines?**

Most companies have attendance registering systems at their workplace in the form of swipe cards, biometric attendance recording or even punch cards. For team members that are going to operate from home, these types of capturing mechanism will have to be put in place. This means that you may have to make investments in systems and processes that provide you with remote attendance Sign-in and Sign-out capabilities that will also connect with your system.

5. **Review Insurance and related policies for protection and/or coverage for medical conditions and/or loss of business.**

You will need to review your Medical group policies and other Insurance policies that cover your facilities, and Business Continuity Insurance policies for coverage under COVID-19 incidences in your workplace or with your workforce.

Incident Related SOP

In case of a positive COVID-19 test at your workplace, you will need to define your SOP special guidelines.

The SOP needs to address

6. Immediate isolation measures to be taken

Implement enough checking processes to prohibit entry to any employee who shows symptoms related to COVID-19. This will require you to put an elaborate SOP for entry guidelines for every person entering your facilities.

In addition, if an employee starts complaining about any symptoms while at work, you will need to put in a SOP for immediate isolation of the employee. A special quarantine area will need to be defined within your workplace, so next steps can be determined.

7. Immediate contact tracking to be done to identify all members who would have come in his/her contact.

You will need to immediately track every person the employee came in contact with recently and record all names. Ensure that these people are isolated within your designated quarantine area until the authorities arrive.

8. Notification to relevant authorities for medical test, sanitization of areas etc.

Your SOP should have a definition of your nearest medical facility, contact numbers for COVID-19 help lines etc. so that no time is wasted when an incident occurs and team members are adequately aware of what action needs to be taken in case of a COVID-19 incident. Adequate banners and instructions posted on notice boards are encouraged.

9. How the absence will be treated in terms of attendance, leave and payroll.

You will also need to define your HR policies in case any employee is affected, quarantined, isolated, under treatment and thereby unable to attend to work. Such measures will be required until COVID-19 becomes a treatable disease and the pandemic status is removed by the World Health Organization (WHO).

10. A Business Continuity Plan in case an entire department or a unit must be shut down due to COVID-19 contamination.

There is a high chance of a department or a unit to become non-operational due to contamination. A business continuity plan must be defined for every department or unit in case they become nonoperational for a minimum period of 14 days.

Impact on your Supply/Chain

The business you are doing depends on many external sources, such as your suppliers of materials, and your vendors for various services, etc. Therefore, it is apparent that in the wake of COVID-19, their businesses have also been impacted and their ability to service you, SLA, lead times and other important factors would have changed, which can lead to disruptions in your supply chain.

There are steps you can take to minimize the amount of Supply Chain disruptions caused by external sources:

11. **Review the Material procurement lead time of all your items and suppliers.**
12. **Redefine these lead times in your Manufacturing planning to ensure that your purchase orders are placed in time for the raw material to arrive at your factory.**
13. **Redefine your safety stock parameters considering the revised lead times**
14. **Redefine your Manufacturing lead times given that your manufacturing process may slow down due to various COVID-19cautionary measures**
15. **Inform your customers about potential shipping delays due to longer lead times in manufacturing and transportation.**

Pro-active planning of these will help your business to normalize quickly and avoid potential chaos in your business environment.

The lockdown period can be effectively utilized to examine all the above parameters, form a COVID-19 Business Continuity team and assign them the task to create COVID-19 SOP guidelines for business processes, so that as soon as the lockdown is released, you have an action plan in place and can start executing these necessary steps.

I hope that this guide will help you successfully navigate your business during these unprecedented times. Please feel free to reach out to info@9EDGE.co in case of any questions.

Best of Luck,
Tusharr Mehta
Managing Partner of 9EDGE Inc.
www.9EDGE.co