Managing Process and Cultural Change

The shift to remote work requires significant change to workflows and organizational culture. Jim McClurkin, senior director for public sector at SAP Concur, suggests approaches that will help governments modernize and prepare for the future.

How did creative uses of CRM and other business applications help governments navigate the pandemic?

Necessity is the mother of invention. Many organizations repurposed technologies that were not originally directed at supporting remote work. They customized and conformed these technologies for a suddenly remote environment. One example is the repurposing of auditing and fraud detection systems so organizations could pivot from largely paper-based purchase order processes, which became impossible in a remote work situation, to non-purchase order environments for expense management. State and local agencies that lacked those adaptive technologies suffered a lot more than ones that did.

What should organizations consider as they more fully commit to remote and hybrid work?

First, organizations need a network and network security protocols to support their processes. Next, a lot of existing processes have nothing to do with how someone would work remotely. Organizations must rethink their workflows, approvals and other processes to fit the remote environment. Finally, different organizational cultures and their workers have different tolerances for change. It's important to honestly assess where you're starting from so you can put the appropriate level of vision and planning in place to make that happen.

How can organizations bring the intelligent enterprise to remote work?

In our worldview, the core of the intelligent enterprise is that the cloud becomes the highway for remote workers. On-premises technologies, paper-based processes and the physical handling of documentation are the opposite of the intelligent enterprise, which uses the cloud to create an automated flow of this information. It makes those workflows, approvals and information available anywhere and on any device. Organizations must be open to re-evaluating their processes and how they work. But when they do this, it opens a vast opportunity to improve processes.

How can organizations improve workflows and processes across and between remote and onsite work environments?

Number one is prioritizing what's important in workflows — with the overall focus being the desired business outcome. Organizations need to streamline workflows, create more efficient processes and give employees greater latitude on how they get their work done. The intelligent enterprise gives organizations visibility they never had before. Old-fashioned processes and workflows prevent organizations from having visibility into things like cashflow, outstanding invoices and approvals. Now that this information is at their fingertips they can consider any number of new processes to replace their old paper-based processes.

How can agencies foster data sharing, especially as the workforce becomes more distributed?

Trust is at the top of the list. A lot of organizational cultures have been in place with the same leader, the same teams and the same routines for many years. That's all gone out the window. To foster trust, you have to be accessible and open to change. You also must honestly evaluate what's important to the organization — not only so you can get your work done and be successful, but also to ensure you're protecting taxpayers' dollars in terms of waste or abuse. Part of that ability to trust gets back to visibility. Once you have visibility, you can more easily trust what's going on.

What advice do you have for keeping remote employees engaged and developing the (remote) workforce of the future?

It's projected that 30 to 35 percent of the public sector workforce will remain remote. A lot of these workers will probably be younger. To attract and engage the workforce of the future, you have to keep systems, processes and tools up to date. Younger people run their lives on their phone. If you expect them to submit to completely manual paper-driven processes, you'll probably never get a chance to hire them, much less retain them. You also have to find out what they need to be successful in a remote environment; show them a path to promotion; and demonstrate that remote, hybrid and on-prem teams are aware of and understand their value to the organization.

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