Defining the Future of Service Delivery

By John Granger

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that perhaps more than anything else, business success can depend on being built for change. That can be especially important for the delivery of IT and business services—the heartbeat of companies' most critical business operations.

Across every industry, many organizations have had to rapidly respond to the crisis and shifting business conditions, while also assessing their ability to absorb shocks from future unforeseen events.

When the pandemic hit, many organizations put business continuity and resiliency first. In many cases, transformational work had to pause. The focus was often on protecting the well-being of their employees while shifting mission critical activity to remote work, strengthening network bandwidth and security, and communicating clearly with customers, suppliers and employees. Many of those who were already on the journey to hybrid cloud could quickly scale up or scale down based on workload demand.

But they recognize that may not be enough. In the "new normal" where disruption and local lockdowns could be around every corner, many organizations will want their IT and businesses service delivery to be able to accelerate digital transformation despite disruption. They will also want the ability to anticipate and adapt with speed and resilience as business conditions shift.

A New Standard: Dynamic Delivery

For many clients, the pandemic is spurring them to accomplish in months what they had previously envisaged would take years. Our experience has been no different: Working with clients before and during the pandemic has enabled us to bring forward the next era of delivery—a more dynamic model of delivery.

As described in a new study from the IBM Institute for Business Value, this model has three key building blocks: enhanced and automated **processes for contactless delivery,** deep thinking about how we function as **humans in the network** and the latest **delivery foundation.**

Taken together, these components have the potential to accelerate delivery speed and scale, enhance timeline confidence, improve access to expertise and build business resiliency and security.

Contactless delivery *Shift to "virtual collaboration"*	**Automated methods** Contactless portable methods, enabled by virtual garages	**Virtual commercials** Compliant contracts, enabled by digital processes	**Transparent governance** Digital dashboards to foster transparency and collaboration, enabled by a platform
Humans in the network *Shift to "personal accountability"*	**Virtual leadership and engagement** Inspiration virtual leadership, enabled by remote engagement	**Global talent standards** Flexible and available expertise, enabled by standardized practices	**Ubiquitous knowledge management** Interconnected digital knowledge platform and processes
Delivery foundation *Shift to "on cloud"*	**Resilient and scalable infrastructure** Adaptive delivery infrastructure, enabled by on-demand support	**Pervasive platforms and tooling** Cloud-based collaborative delivery platform	**Embedded security and privacy practices** Secured and compliant delivery methods, enabled by robust policies and monitoring

At the heart of the model are enhanced, automated **processes tailored for contactless delivery,** regardless of whether the delivery scenario is 20%, 40% or 100% virtual. This involves automated and virtualized service delivery methods, commercials and transparent governance. AI and automation can be applied to workflows to help improve employee efficiency and rapidly scale delivery. And at the same time, teams can use "virtual garages" that apply design thinking, Agile principles and DevOps tools and techniques to innovate and create new methods in response to shifting needs. Strong governance across all processes can help mitigate risk and enhance timeline confidence.

But the model goes much beyond the processes alone. It requires leading, engaging and enabling the **humans in the network** to work wherever they are, with virtual skills development and communities of practice. It means building in the capability to rapidly mobilize expertise via virtual squads who can quickly innovate or resolve issues. It also should include global talent standards for access to flexible and available expertise, and ubiquitous knowledge management.

Finally, we believe the model requires a **delivery foundation** that starts with a resilient, scalable infrastructure. It should be comprised of a robust network that can support work from home, non-traditional locations or physical co-location at sites based on changing business conditions. It also includes virtualized, pervasive and AI-enabled platforms and common tools for employee collaboration and innovation, as well as embedded security and privacy practices and policies to help protect proprietary data and reduce risk exposure.

At IBM, we can provide these capabilities to clients through a holistic model we call IBM Services Dynamic Delivery.

The Opportunities

Since the start of the pandemic, we have successfully moved to a contactless delivery model in numerous IBM Services client engagements, and we are already seeing the benefits. To cite three examples:

• To help meet government requirements, a client in the insurance industry needed to automate its systems in order to quickly process claims for COVID-19 testing. The solution was designed and implemented in three weeks with a virtual team.

- A retailer boosted its infrastructure to support an unprecedented spike in e-commerce orders. 24/7 support and on-time virtual delivery enabled the client to dramatically increase its application availability.
- The pandemic brought pressure for a client in the oil and gas industry to ensure adequate fuel availability and avoid supply chain problems that might result from panic buying in the market. Quick creation of a multi-channel help desk, as well as automated processes, enabled the company to increase order processing and reduce downtime.

Organizations that are taking advantage of this are not just recipients of new types of delivery—they are able to transform themselves in turn. This can include rapidly evolving their culture to focus on inspirational leadership and personal accountability, adapting new ways of working—like design thinking and agile methodologies—and adopting new kinds of virtual collaboration tools, among other things.

The future is never 100% clear, especially when the world has sustained a global shock as severe as the COVID-19 pandemic, whose social and economic impact is still being felt. But given that we always live with uncertainty, dynamic delivery of services can help enable businesses to not only survive but be prepared to thrive, come what may.

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