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RESPOND

RECOVER

THRIVE

Government continuity
Operationalise
government services
for a COVID-19 world

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Introduction

In conjunction with the dedicated response required for the COVID-19 crisis, government like other organisations must focus on the "business of government" by ensuring that service delivery is restored, scaled up and even redesigned to operate in a COVID-19 world.
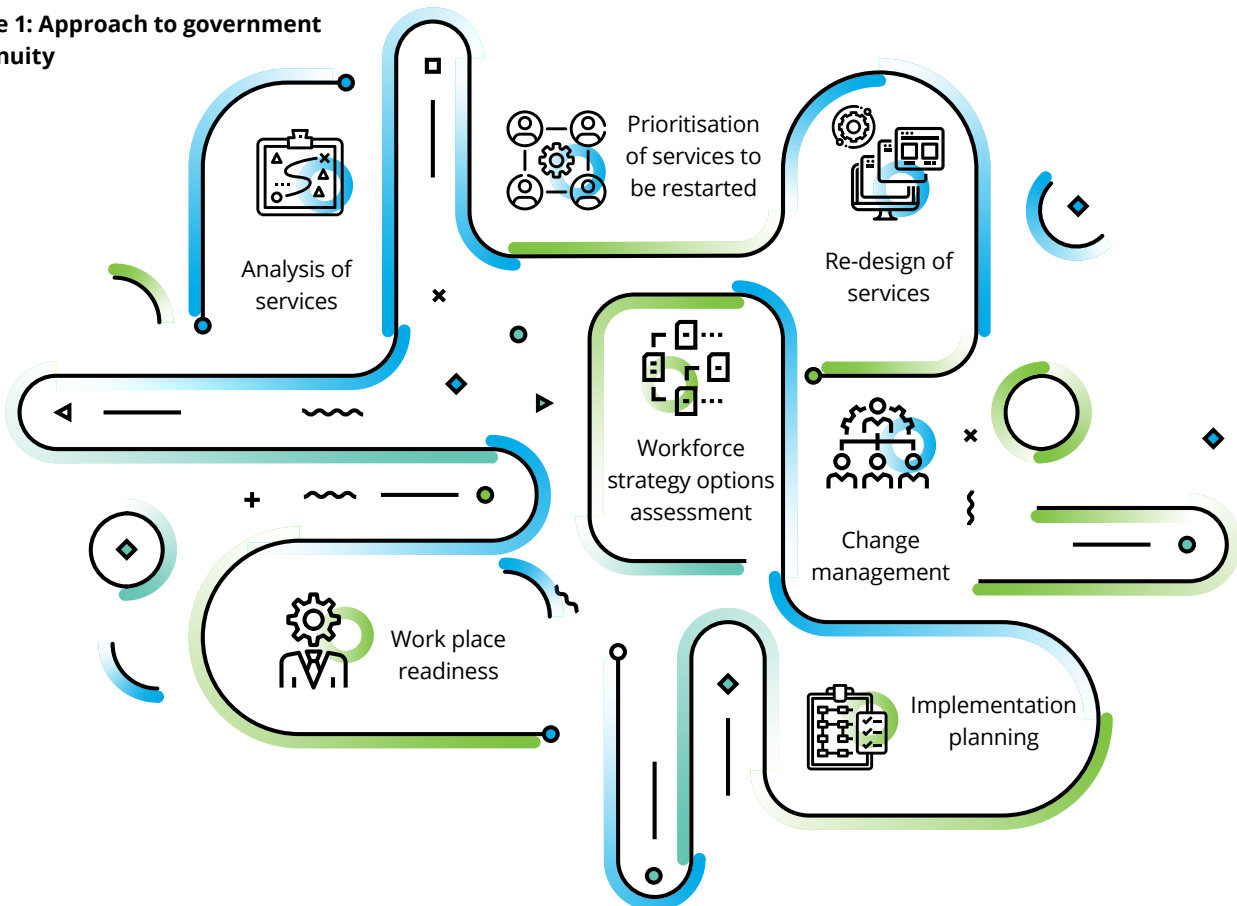
While the initial focus has been on government continuity planning, the pressure is now on to operationalise services in a time of unprecedented change.

This will require the application of alternative models of delivering services and re-allocation of resources as required. This will require alternative workforce strategies and the readiness of the workplace to manage the containment of the pandemic. Lastly this will require various measures to strengthen Occupational Health and Safety structures within institutions to adequately manage the workforce.

There are some **key capabilities** required to give effect to such a strategy and this can be implemented based on the high-level approach in the figure below. Each of these capabilities can be considered and customised based on the needs of different institutions.

Figure 1: Approach to government continuity

Analysis of services

Prioritisation of services to be restarted

Re-design of services

Workforce strategy options assessment

Change management

Work place readiness

Implementation planning

Overview of key capabilities

The **mission realignment** will focus on reviewing government priorities and services to determine what is critical to enable the business of government to continue during the 'respond and recover phase' based on the anticipated scenarios and the agreed upon response measures. It will be critical to align across government on the approach to be taken in the response and recovery to adequately direct government structures in their planning and ensure consistency including the knock-on effect for 2021-2022. Lastly it will be important to determine which measures adopted during the response and recover period should be integrated into government going forward to enable a more adaptive government.

Plan and budget re-alignment will focus on revising existing plans to enable the re-prioritised objectives and resources to support the response and recovery through the pandemic. It will be important to determine which resources can be re-directed to the emergency response and how plans can be executed differently through alternative workforce strategies that will be required to contain the pandemic. During this process it will be important to align with stakeholders (both within government and externally) on the implications of re-prioritisation and address any fallout. Lastly this should also include a plan for the phased re-opening of government services and new models of operating e.g. renewing of vehicle licences online.

The focus should be on alternative **workforce strategies** to support overall job retention while ensuring workforce productivity during the response and recovery to the pandemic. These strategies should guide human resource policies to enable working remotely, shift systems etc. This will require due consideration to be given to varying job profiles and workplaces to consider the viability of these options. It will also then require consultation with employees on the impact of such changes and an appropriate change management programme to support the implementation.

As various government institutions begin to re-open, a **workplace readiness** assessment will be needed to identify and put measures in place to support the containment of the virus. These might include measures such as pre-screening, spatial re-organisation, renovation of ventilation, visitor access permission, installation of isolation sites etc. There are also measures that might be required to support workforce in having productive employee experience such as access to aftercare, counselling support, financial counselling.

The focus of **occupational health and safety** will be to provide guidance to various entities on what is required both in preparation for the re-opening of government as well as the continued operation during the pandemic. This should also include training of occupational health representatives and the committees across different institutions. There should be channels set up to continuously provide updates based on changes in directives to help institutions adapt to changing requirements and put in place measures to enforce compliance. This function should take responsibility working with the comprehensive health response workstream to track and monitor all cases in the civil service and the management thereof.

The change management capability will focus on developing an **appropriate change management approach** and plan and work with the various teams to implement the plan taking into consideration change readiness of both employees (and in some cases partners/service providers) and systems (processes, technology and governance). Creating and embedding a change agency model to give effect to the step change required will require careful consideration and astute leadership.

The organisation should create appropriate monitoring controls to assess the effectiveness of the implementation by focusing on leading indicators. This will allow the organisation to then adapt and adjust its implementation to ensure that outcomes can be achieved. Figure 2 provides some examples of leading indicators that can be considered. It will be important to identify appropriate sources of these measures and create the reporting structures to ensure visibility.

Figure 2: Leading indicators

Restart of services

- Opening of services at the appropriate time
- Services reach and utilisation
- % cost of restructuring services

Deviation from 20/21 plans and budgets

- Targets that need to be deferred
- Budget shortfalls
- Track performance against raised plan
- Wage bill deviations

Productivity of the workforce

- Number of employees that can resume work (remote/onsite)
- Number of employees full time occupied

Safety of the workplace and the workforce

- Number of occupational health incidents
- Proportion/rate of disruption to the workforce

Ability to transition into the "new normal"

- Level of change readiness
- Number of alternative delivery models successfully implemented
- Data and system modification
- Number of jobs/roles redesigned

Building capability and capacity

- Number (relative significance) of new capability enhanced/developed
- % of new tools of trade adopted
- Number of people re-skilled

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Engagement with citizens (customers) is pivotal in this process as they are the ultimate beneficiaries. Therefore, **having a detailed understanding of citizen profiles will support the team in ensuring that any changes are carefully considered and managed to ensure a smooth transition**. By carefully managing stakeholder expectations in accordance with the department or agency's institutional mandate we are able to create a more conducive environment for change.

While this is an arduous task with many obstacles to overcome it has created an opportunity for government institutions to make a fundamental shift in their service delivery model and create more resilient structures to be more in tune with citizens' expectations. It also creates an opportunity to revitalise the civil service by supporting a transition to a digital government that will leverage fourth industrial revolution capabilities and reposition the state more favourably.

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