



THE BAT-TERFLY EFFECT OF WUHAN AND HOW INFOSYS BPM RESPONDED TO IT

By **Vijay Narsapur**

VP - Strategic Business Practice Head -
Customer Experience & Human Resource Management



A Calm Beginning

The world of operations before COVID19 was a very predictable one. One that was dominated by operations conducted largely from traditional office premises, with dedicated work spaces for clients, dedicated network infrastructure, and processes that were defined to the “T” with dual (but precise objectives) of getting specifications and costs right under all circumstances. Security and compliance was always the guiding factor, and certainly contributed to the continuing tradition of making only incremental changes to the operating model. Agents worked in earmarked, security cleared spaces and networks, clients traveled once in a while to see their operations, end customers and stakeholders had adapted to speaking and working with people across the world. Clearly, the BPO outsourcing model that had been in existence since 1995 and had delivered benefits to the tune of billions to hundreds of clients across the globe. There were hardly any signs of this scenario every changing – really what was the need even?

A Butterfly flutters its wings

The January of 2020 was like every other January prior – well almost. There were

the standard rumblings in the world of business, politics, sports religion and such. The excitement of the Olympic year, combined with that of the election year in the US was beginning to build, albeit in a measured way. Then something innocuous happened – stories of a SARS like ailment began to make the rounds, and attention began to accumulate around this subject. The world in general woke up to bewildering news on 23rd January 2020 – that Hubei province (which contains the city of Wuhan) had been locked down. People were quarantined into their homes, and the world witnessed scenes of surreal emptiness in the malls, restaurants, play arenas and business parks of China.

While work and life largely continued unchanged for Infosys (and our competitors worldwide) with a watchful eye, worrying news began to filter in about the health in European countries and the US. The Infosys BPM team was dealing with the regular beat and flow of business, in order to close what was turning out to be a capital year, and was laying down plans for an even better one. Business discussions with potential new clients were in full swing, and operations were working at

breakneck speed to deliver to objectives committed at the beginning of the year.

The Buildup

Come the second half of March, the “Corona” stories, sarcastic ones, funny ones, serious ones, and fantastic ones, started doing the rounds – regularly. Except for two bolts from the blue, almost simultaneously. Italy and Philippines were declaring a lockdown it was understood. The former because they thought that COVID19 had already become a serious problem, and the latter because they wanted to prevent the worst. Law enforcement and military organizations were involved in both situations.

And then – 16th March – Philippines announced a lockdown. Citizens and workers were formally advised to stay indoors and not venture out for any work, leisure or other activities, beginning the 17th of March. Then, in quick succession, two state government in India announced a progressive lockdown beginning 18th March. Infosys’ centers in China and Europe also came under stress and had to go into locally enforced lockdown status. The size and scale of this impending issue was

now clear to all stakeholders, with offices, schools, public transport, leisure activities etc. coming to a halt.

The Turbulence Appears

The week of 16th March was a new experience for everyone – it was as if Infosys employees, clients and all others flown into an air pocket in mid-flight. We were being tossed around due to prevailing uncertainties and it felt like Infosys was not going to be able to deliver to its client commitments!

It was self-evident that our model, with its intensive use of campus housed offices and an exclusively on-premise culture, dedicated workspaces etc., reliant on in-person interactions, was not going to be useful in this situation. We had to change – INSTANTLY. By 23rd March, almost all Infosys BPM locations were off limits to employees either by government diktat, or by decision from the company.

The Calming and Rebuilding

As a first step, Infosys BPM started with invoking the standard, agreed upon BCP plans that had been baked into our client contracts. The plans, normally cater to scenarios where a single center, location, country etc. become inoperable, and generally resort to a method of working with skeleton staff and infrastructure a few days. Both Infosys and clients recognized

that this method and approach was not going to work.

Basic elements on physical segregation, no pen-paper environment, CCTV monitoring are the controls that were thought to be basic controls at the forefront of access level security.

Infosys BPM was thus presented with an opportunity to work with client, employees, and local authorities in order to change our operations model mid-flight. We addressed almost all areas of our business, right from contracts to employee management, in order to get beyond this 'air pocket'.

Infosys BPM undertook a multipronged effort to combat this situation.

First and foremost,

- Infosys' leadership set up a global war-room, supported by several geography and function specific war-rooms to deal with the situation
- The role of these constructs was to collect information, structure it, analyze, and recommend (and in some cases, actively take) decisions
- This war-room was headed by an executive committee member and supported by several other senior leaders in the organization
- During the initial period before the lockdown when the fears of the illness were rampant, Infosys BPM senior

leadership made it a point to be present in our offices in person so as to calm employee apprehensions

- A structured communication flow through calls, meetings, templates etc. was setup in order to make and execute decisions, and further to explicitly demonstrate to clients and employees alike that we are ACTIVELY combating the situation, as opposed to allowing business situations to unfold uncontrolled

Next, we engaged very aggressively with the relevant government authorities...

- To ensure that we were given enough time to transport operations enabling assets to employee homes, so that work could continue (after seeking client permissions)
- To ensure that BPO related services were declared as 'essential services' in the delivery geographies
- To share with them the approaches and methods being adopted in the time of crisis proactively, so that government oversight related issues are avoided later
- To offer our services to the government in such a time of crisis, so as to generate goodwill, which could be used to support the operation



Payment as Usual (and Beyond) in Unusual Times

How Infosys BPM ensured on-time payments to keep the lights on for its client's suppliers across the globe



Achievements

20,000 Active Suppliers **Live and Real-Time** **160 Company Codes**
 Diverse Cash Forecasting Buckets **\$2 Bn Payment per Month** Deep Forecasting Views
Quick Strategic Decision making Dynamic Filters – Informed Decision Making **45 Business Units**
 Early Payments for SME Suppliers **100,000+ Invoices per Month**

Challenges

Government Directives **COVID-19** **Critical Function**
100% Work from Home Enablement **Outbreak** **Lockdowns**
Quarter end **Transition to WFH** **Risks of Business Going Bankrupt**

Infosys BPM Approach

Existing DCC capabilities of domain expert and Big Data setup leveraged

Dynamic Cash Forecasting Dashboard created with daily refresh

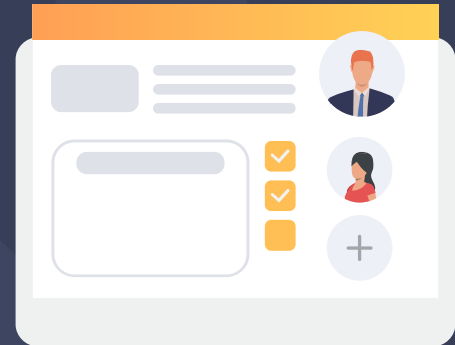
Visibility on projected cash outflow provided by the dashboard for a day, day + 1, week, month, and future months

Single source of truth provided on 'live' basis for decision support system

Various data drill-down capabilities added for quick decision making and early payments

Drill-down capabilities included region, business unit, spend bucket, company code, and vendor country

"This is truly exceptional in the times when we have so much of anxiety about external environment... A big Thank you for your leadership!"
 - Director – P2P Operations, Group Services



1 Single source of truth	90% SME suppliers	10+ Years of partnership
------------------------------------	-----------------------------	------------------------------------

© 2020 Infosys Limited, Bengaluru, India. All Rights Reserved. Infosys believes the information in this document is accurate as of its publication date; such information is subject to change without notice. Infosys acknowledges the proprietary rights of other companies to the trademarks, product names and such other intellectual property rights mentioned in this document. Except as expressly permitted, neither this documentation nor any part of it may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, printing, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of Infosys Limited and/ or any named intellectual property rights holders under this document.

On the client front,

- There was an urgent need to explain the on-the-ground situation to them (many were not meaningfully informed about the lockdown's implications, since most client geographies went into quarantine rules AFTER locations like India/Philippines/Poland etc.).
- Secondly, we sought permissions from clients to move employees into a work-from-home model as our contracts almost never considered that possibility.
- Naturally, there were concerns about security of data and operations in general; these concerns were solved by
 1. Explaining to employees that the only change in their work was the location

shift from office to home, and that all strictures were still to be followed. An undertaking was taken as such from all employees to this effect

2. Ensuring that suitable technological protections were put in place in order to track and audit employee actions on assets during this period of work-from-home
 - In extreme cases, we cooperated with clients and transferred work back to client sites and employees wherever the need to do so was felt. This was in a minority of the cases where clients did not award permissions for WFH from affected geographies
 - Several clients stepped forward and contributed to the asset mobilization effort by providing laptops etc. for their operations.

With employees,

- Infosys ensured that we maintained open and transparent communication. At no point in time did we allow employees to feel that they would be used as 'cannon fodder'. Essentially, leadership worked under the same conditions as normal employees – almost all meetings were done face to face
- Social distancing education was immediately provided to all employees

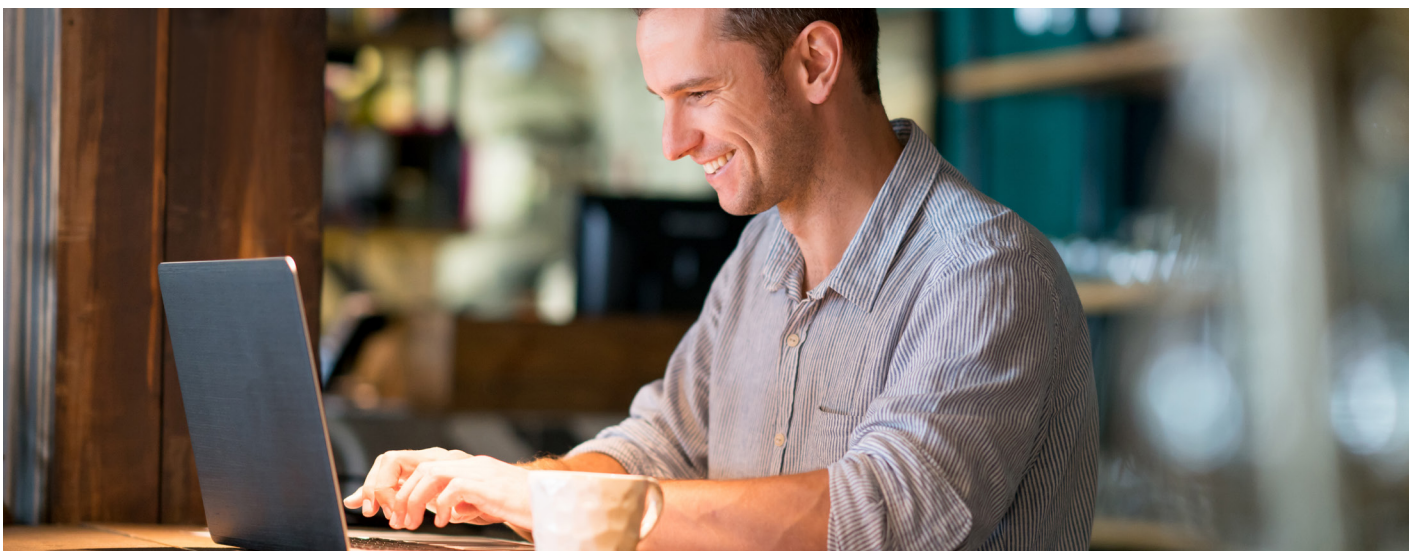
- Suitable changes were made to company policies related to work-from-home methods
- Employees were authorized to use company provided transport in geographies like the Philippines and India, to facilitate movement during the partial lockdown period. This decision, in synch with movement related permissions from the government, enabled assets to be transported to employee homes
- Employees were also provided reimbursements for usage of personal data and broadband connections wherever necessary
- In short, employees were made partners in every step of this process. A large part of "what to do" came from the employees

At the corporate functions level,

- Infosys BPM changed several policies on the fly. We built a work from home policy literally within hours and rolled it out. This ensured that employees had well paid out guidelines to begin their work, and confusion was avoided
- Normal BAU processes, such as quality, transitions, HR, Facilities support, etc. were still active. Along with client operations, ALL support functions of the

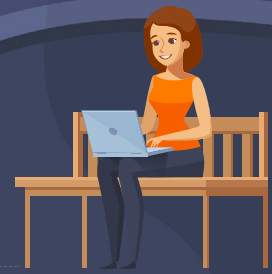
company instantly went into "new BCP" mode, to ensure that work proceeds smoothly

- We redesigned and rolled our several approval processes related to overtime, financial approvals for various decisions etc. in order to improve speed and throughput. Schedules of decision authority were also changed without compromising governance requirements
- Changes have been made and implemented to our attendance policy – given that the old rules no longer apply due to large scale Work-from-Home
- Our finance function has changed several processes (for approvals), and enabled new approvers etc. in order to speed up business. Though processes have been changed, security and compliance has been further strengthened to ensure that there are no slip-ups in this situation
- Employee engagement processes have all been taken on-line. Traditional face to face activities have been substituted with online collaboration, for both group meetings as well as one on one meetings. We expect to start hosting online reward and recognition ceremonies regularly going forward



Business as Usual (and Beyond) in Unusual Times

Infosys BPM ensured employee delight by timely and accurate processing of employees salary across 65+ countries to make the engine more robust



Achievements

70 Legal Entities

3 Geographies – APAC, EMEA, NA

Gross & Net Payroll for ROW Countries

CXO Level Payroll Management

5 New M&A Entities

34,000+ Employees

<1-2% Actual vs Forecast Fund Variance

Client Treasury Function Coordination

BAU Enablement

Biweekly/Fortnightly Payment Runs

65+ Countries

1-3 Days TAT for Payment

Challenges

Last Month of Fiscal Year

New Year Roll-Out

**COVID-19
Outbreak**

Tax Computation Scenarios

Middle of Payroll Cycle

No Correction Chances

Infosys BPM Approach

Market categorization into A, B, and C criticality based on COVID-19 affected countries and employee footprint in those markets

Payroll arrangement into 3 cycles list based on salary credit dates

Client coordination to ensure all service providers have BCP

Laptops/desktops arrangement for employees

Dongle, inverter sourcing for employees to enable work from home

Daily dashboards, huddles, employee dashboards, and review calls with the client

“This is indeed awesome team.. proud of you to have ensured payroll is processed amongst all the challenges”

- Client EVP & Deputy CFO

Infosys[®]
Navigate your next

2 Days to enable BAU	95% Employees enabled for WFH	0 Loss of billing
-----------------------------------	--	-----------------------------



For in-flight Transitions,

- We immediately moved to a 'remote' transitions model. This was an easy shift for Infosys BPM, since we had already foreseen the need for the model

due to emerging visa restrictions etc. previously.

- Our remote transition delivery and collaboration platform, "DIGITRAN" already supports remote process

discovery, process documentation, training material generation, training delivery, agent testing and subsequent certification.



- DIGITRAN also has dashboard delivery capabilities such that no element of the transition remains hidden from management

For Work-from-home operations,

- We immediately designed a “work-from-home” operations playbook, and shared the methodology with all members of the operations team, right from agents to program leaders
- In-person events such as floor huddles, coaching sessions, quality assessment sessions, team meetings, team-leader reviews etc. were converted to on-line events. All these events were further standardized so that their efficacy was guaranteed – participant members were issued guidelines on the content of the meetings, template to capture meeting minutes, remote meeting etiquettes etc. This task was carried out by our corporate training team, and is still underway.
- Reporting formats, for both clients and internal operations were made accessible on-line, with an updation schedule being created. This way everyone sees the same information for decision making
- Attendance etiquette (at-work-time, versus off-work-time) was communicated, and is being monitored
- Managers were sensitized to the fact that employees are currently doing a ‘double duty’ both at home and at work, and were taught tips to better manage this situation
- All support functions such as quality, work-force scheduling and staffing, reporting, reviews continue to a BAU rhythm
- In addition, our transformation agenda with clients continues. Our PPM (process progression model) teams continue to guide operations teams on improvements, and related technology teams are continuing with automation and AI experimentation and improvements wherever possible. These activities experienced a temporary break of 3-4 days, but are back on track.
- Transformation meetings have moved on-line, and previously in-person activities are now being conducted virtually
- monitoring by way of team huddles, and network monitoring, to ensure compensatory controls to segregated environment is effectively put in place
- Data exporters and controllers have to rethink on data access needs and environments that these data elements are being accessed at data processor’s end
- The access should only be within remote environments like VDI or Citrix
- Network monitoring and logging, data loss prevention (DLP), and information leakage monitoring by means of standard tools and logging mechanisms implemented on hardened devices, is a must now.
- It will also have implications on certain certification and compliance aspects, for instance healthcare data or credit card data, which require HIPAA or PCI-DSS compliance.
- Net effect of this in the long term, assuming WFH will be now a widely accepted BAU working model, will be higher emphasis on network controls, hardening controls, and people aspects, rather than on physical security controls

On the Technology Front, we have,

- In the days of WFH, organizations need to rely more on employee awareness,

On data privacy and confidentiality,

- In the days of WFH, organizations need to rely more on employee awareness, monitoring by way of team huddles, and network monitoring, to ensure compensatory controls to segregated environment is effectively put in place
- Data exporters and controllers have to rethink on data access needs and environments that these data elements are being accessed at data processor's end
- The access should only be within remote environments like VDI or Citrix
- Network monitoring and logging, data loss prevention (DLP), and information leakage monitoring by means of standard tools and logging mechanisms implemented on hardened devices, is a must now.
- It will also have implications on certain certification and compliance aspects, for instance healthcare data or credit card data, which require HIPAA or PCI-DSS compliance.
- Net effect of this in the long term, assuming WFH will be now a widely accepted BAU working model, will be higher emphasis on network controls, hardening controls, and people aspects, rather than on physical security controls.



Engaged with government authorities BPO services were declared as 'essential services'



We built a work from home policy literally within hours and rolled it out



Successfully completed the transfer of, over 16000 desktops globally



Offered services to authorities to fight COVID-19



Change is good

Overall, our assessment is that the “create a new operating model” effort has been a huge success for us, our clients, and our employees. We are proud to report out that we have received more than 50 appreciations (via emails) from our client stakeholders within the first week of “new BCP operations”. Our employees are exhibiting equal, or in several cases higher levels of productivity without any drop in quality of work, or experience provided to stakeholders. This holds true for front office, middle office and back office operations across diverse business functions such as customer service, finance and accounting, sales and fulfillment, HR services, Legal services etc. Our operations have almost reached pre-COVID19, and in some cases higher levels of both production and stakeholder satisfaction. We have already documented several case studies that outline a specific ‘before and after’ scenario by service line, which are available separately, upon request.

For more information, contact infosysbpm@infosys.com

Infosys[®]
Navigate your next

© 2020 Infosys Limited, Bengaluru, India. All Rights Reserved. Infosys believes the information in this document is accurate as of its publication date; such information is subject to change without notice. Infosys acknowledges the proprietary rights of other companies to the trademarks, product names and such other intellectual property rights mentioned in this document. Except as expressly permitted, neither this documentation nor any part of it may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, printing, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of Infosys Limited and/ or any named intellectual property rights holders under this document.