Coronavirus – guidance for members

As well as managing your own personal circumstances, there is also the obvious challenge of working through the constantly evolving situation in the contact centre.

To help you the CCMA team have drafted some practical advice that you might find useful:

Provide leadership

Contact Centre Leaders often have responsibility for a large number of people who will look to their team leader and managers for reassurance. As well as ensuring that you are visible during this period, take time out to think about what leadership messages you and your team leaders are giving out to your people.

Spend time every day with your team leaders coaching them through this period.

Share best practice

Talk with other CCMA members to share ideas and best practice on managing your operation through this period. Liaise with local forums and nearby businesses to see if there are opportunities to work together and reduce the risks. Engage with your businesses partners and suppliers to understand what support they can provide you with.

Communication:

People need regular access to accurate, informed, expert information in order to provide reassurance.

- Ensure that the contact centre 'has a voice' and is adequately represented at all internal meetings relating to the issues

- Create a clear communications plan so that everyone knows where to go for information and understands how frequently that information will be updated. Ideas include setting up an intranet page, sharing a daily podcast from your HR team, providing a daily brief for team managers to share.

- Keep your customers informed about what's going on. Their patience and understanding will help your employees to get through their busy and stressful days especially if there are shortages. Consider messages on IVR and on your website to advise if you are short staffed and thank them for remaining patient

- Ensure that your team are engaged in all decisions affecting customers, so that your team members are able to handle enquiries effectively. Gather feedback from your team members on what customers are asking and feed into the wider organisation.

- Provide prompt updates when advice changes.

- Ensure team managers know where to go to get specific instructions when responding to individual employee cases

- Keep people informed with regular, consistent <u>expert</u> advice and discourage sharing of random, inaccurate and panic generating gossip.

- Allocate 'champions' whose responsibility it is to ensure practices are being adhered to across the contact centre and to gather feedback from the frontline on issues and concerns.

- Ensure that communications remain positive and accurate and that your teams are not contributing to scare mongering. Leadership is critical.

Education:

It's important that your teams are well educated on the issues and take time to bust any myths.

- Use team briefs and buzz sessions to help educate your team members and keep them informed of any changes in policy or practices

- Deliver a session on 'How to wash your hands effectively'. New guidelines are available online https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/best-way-to-wash-your-hands/

- Deliver a practical session on 'alternative handshakes to avoid spreading the virus' https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51733376

- Discuss how your teams can help people in the local community. Contact Centre teams excel when it comes to helping other – discuss ways that you can look out for the vulnerable people living in your local community

- Use team briefs to reassure your teams; let them talk about their worries and concerns and 'myth bust'. They will be anxious about the long term impact of the virus

HR policies and practices:

- Refresh employee contact details in your business continuity plan to help with future communications

- Review absence policies with your HR team to ensure that it is appropriate for the current situation

- If policies are updated ensure that these are communicated to everyone, and well understood by team managers in particular

- Consider the mental wellbeing of employees that are forced to work remotely – how can they remain connected with the organisation and colleagues

- Be aware that some individuals cope better than others during times of uncertainty and will require different levels of support, so be alert to team members anxiety levels.

Operational levers

- Review what non-essential contact centre projects can be put on hold, thereby releasing resources

- Look at options for offering flexible hours – e.g. reduce staffing levels if possible and arrange for team members to pay back hours later in the year

- Have a team focused on forward planning – we will come out of this crisis, ensure that you have a plan to return to business as usual as quickly as possible.

- Review all self-service options for customers to assist in handling a potential increase in customer demand.

- Look at options for delaying any launches or promotions in anticipation of increased absence levels.

- Outsourcers have lots of experience in dealing with business continuity, handling peaks, reacting quickly in a crisis situation. Engage with an outsource organisation to understand what they might be able to do to help you.

- Engage with your technology providers to understand what capabilities they can deploy to support you. There are many technology solutions that are available to our industry, talk to the experts to understand what options are available to you.

- Look at roles and responsibilities and assigning resources to where they will be needed most. Explore if there are opportunities to upskill or reassign people.

Alternative ways of working:

- Consider if homeworking can work for your operation – talk with your IT colleagues, and homeworking specialist organisations to see what's possible.

- Consider using WebEx, Skype, Zoom or Glisser live as alternative ways to communicate with other sites.

- Give some thought to roles and responsibilities and whether support teams like QA, training, continuous improvement etc can be upskilled to take customer calls as a contingency if required.

- Where possible, reduce the density of desks across the operation.

- Consider 'zoning' your operation around skills – mix skills across floors to reduce the risk of losing all staff with same skill. Create smaller groups of same skilled people on each floor and office

- Consider restricting access to each department/zone in the building using pass access and different entrances – this may limit the spread of the virus. It also enablers you to close a zone for deep clean if required

Preventative Measures:

Your organisation will no doubt have implemented preventative measures for all employees. These are likely to include the following:

- Review your business continuity plans – use scenarios to ensure you have all eventualities covered and address any gaps.

- Increase the frequency of cleaning in key touch points in common, high traffic areas like door handles, reception desks, meeting tables etc.

- Provide alcohol-based hand sanitiser and antibacterial wipes on each team for colleagues to keep their working area clean.

- Provide guidelines and visual reminders of the importance of handwashing and other good practice issued by the WHO

- Use alternative greetings to avoid physical contact – some suggestions include hand on heart, peace sign, a wave, or just say hello.

- Consider non-essential travel, and if there are alternative ways to communicate. Some organisations are putting total travel bans in place, but others are enabling managers to use their judgement and make risk-based decisions. A blanket approach can cause panic and worry and may be unnecessary.

- Check with any external visitors to see if they've recently been to one of the countries on the FCO website defined as a higher risk and then politely asked them not to visit and to reschedule for another date.   This should now be extended to anyone showing any mild symptoms to stay away.

Useful websites

https://www.who.int/

https://www.cipd.co.uk/news-views/coronavirus

https://www.nhs.uk/

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coronavirus_disease_2019

https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/