

HOMWORKING

IN FINANCIAL SERVICES OPERATIONS

The Top 15 Problems & Solutions



INTRODUCTION

At Corporate Modelling, we have been working with a broad range of existing and new clients since the start of the COVID19 pandemic in Q1 of 2020 to develop workplace solutions that support the “new normal” – in particular homeworking.

Businesses within Financial Services which already had strategic solutions for homeworking were forced to rapidly develop them further through the period of the pandemic.

Businesses which have taken a shorter-term tactical approach at the beginning of the pandemic, and have not developed their solutions further, may now consider a review of the long-term suitability and consider potential strategic alternatives.

The long term ‘direction of travel’ will continue to be towards extensive homeworking as part of the operating model mix.

Corporate Modelling is pleased to offer our OPX (Operational Excellence) platform which provides such a strategic solution.

Highly modular and quick to implement, OPX supports end-to-end processing, from the digital capture of incoming work, back office workforce optimisation, smart work allocation, robotic process automation (RPA) to the automated output of digital customer communications.

This is overlaid with powerful and granular operational oversight metrics (including independent quality assurance) which are adaptive and easily configurable.



“Royal Bank of Scotland has told about 50,000 staff that they will continue to work from home until at least 2021. The state-backed bank has told employees it will adopt a “cautious” approach to returning to work. Its decision affects about four-fifths of them.”

July 2020

BACKGROUND

Financial services businesses in the well-regulated UK environment vary in size and function from small mutual building societies and specialist insurers to the very large banks, insurance companies, outsource service providers and specialist lending institutions.

The locations where staff work have typically been large head/satellite offices in the UK and offshore plus UK branch offices.

Between 2020-2022, these operating models have had to rapidly develop to accommodate large numbers of staff homeworking on full time or part time basis with only occasional visits to a traditional office. In this respect there are common problems and solutions across financial services arising from homeworking.

We hope some of these examples will resonate with readers who are responsible for delivering operational activity or for its support and governance.



Financial services businesses will typically have some elements of a generic operating model such as:

- back office administration
- customer facing front office
- branch network
- outsourced functions with UK/non-UK third parties and
- a robust risk and compliance requirement

COVID19 PANDEMIC

The Covid19 global pandemic has required the imposition in the UK of restrictions on movement, travel and group size meeting for work, socialising and education.

Through the past 2 years, there have been a series of temporary local on/off partial lockdowns with more complex restrictions and variations in the detailed rules applying across different countries.

Staff personal circumstances (such as home location, room space, services, shielding, self-isolation, children, students and elderly parents in the family) have impacted their availability for work, working patterns and possibly well-being.

All of this presents management challenges to the effective running of operations.

TOP 15 HOMEWORKING PROBLEMS & SOLUTIONS FOR RUNNING OPERATIONS

INFRASTRUCTURE

Problem:

Lack of basic hardware, software, broadband or network to enable homeworking using similar processes and desktop environment to the normal head office location.

Solution:

Requires responsive IT services and strategic partner suppliers. Plus, a homeworking support platform like OPX which is scalable, quick to implement and has very light-touch integration with the existing corporate IT set up.

Problem:

Unable to move any paper around the organisation.

Solution:

Digitise all incoming paper customer demand by scanning, indexing and triaging if required to allocate item to correct OPX based work queue(s). Encourage/nudge customers to engage via website portal/email/SMS, enabling minimal staff in the 'mail room'.

Flexibility while maintaining control and business efficiency

Problem:

Restricted numbers of staff able to work in head/branch/offshore locations.

Solution:

Create the ability to manage staff working in many locations including homeworking with the OPX workforce management platform.

Problem:

Need for contingency planning to enable practical response to local infection spikes or major second wave of the pandemic with further restrictions and impact on staff.

Solution:

Enable flexible metrics and 'what if' scenario planning tools as provided by the OPX platform.

Problem:

Need to ensure best use of staff and skill sets available at any point in time given that both staff location and their level of availability may fluctuate.

Solution:

Use OPX driven performance metrics to steer management to the most efficient allocation of work recognising the need for positive customer outcomes. The OPX platform provides high granularity of both individual staff skills and the processing tasks they are qualified to perform. OPX also enables flexible automatic remote reallocation of work queue items to other staff who are available with seamless handover of any work in progress.

Problem:

Need to direct work items to available suitably skilled staff ensuring that work is prioritised to meet business needs, ensures positive customer outcomes and (where relevant) meets contractual SLAs.

Solution:

OPX core functionality has real time work allocation process and flexible set up of teams and work groups.

Problem:

Line managers and/or team leaders not available at short notice.

Solution:

Use core OPX functionality to manage teams in real time flexibly and remotely by the next layer up of management or merge short term into another similar team.

Problem:

Ensure remote homeworking staff continue to receive on-going upskilling and on-going support to perform new tasks so they can perform a broader and more complex range of processes.

Solution:

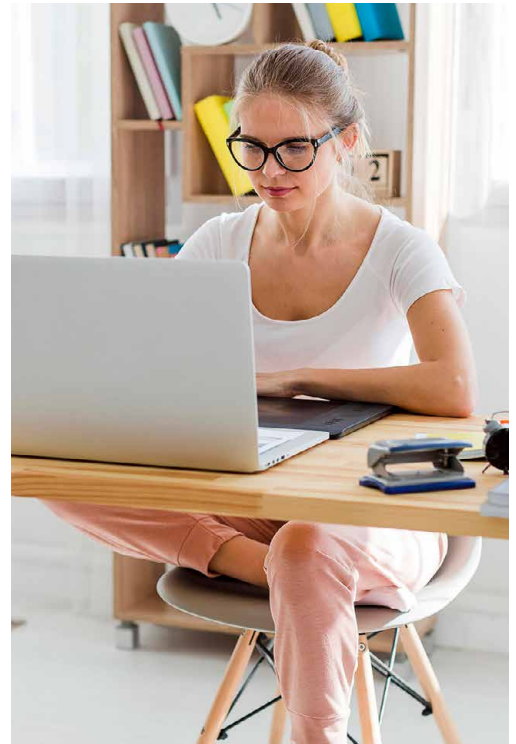
The OPX platform (using the “Scriptflow” module) will provide real time process specific and contextual help. Particularly useful for telephone or on-line chat-based customer interactions, or low frequency processes.

Problem:

The pandemic is clearly driving increased customer demand for both information and action (e.g. claims) due to both changing economic circumstances and higher levels of anxiety. Growing volumes of work types require resource from across front and back office to be applied quickly to key focus areas of customer demand.

Solution:

One of many management tools within OPX is the ability to create process specific “virtual super teams” on a temporary basis to manage areas of outstanding customer demand. The OPX platform also holds data, both live and historic, at a granular level to enable rapid insights to be drawn which drives management actions to optimise resource allocation to emerging demand.



Problem:

Concern about potential adverse changes to the efficiency of operations staff now working in the ‘new normal’ of homeworking/ hybrid for the longer term. In particular the impact on both customer satisfaction and the bottom line of corporate profitability overall.

Solution:

OPX metrics enables accurate measurement and tracking of efficiency and cost both ‘real-time’ and historic over any time periods to enable benchmarking and show trends. Data from clients where the OPX platform has been introduced to a traditional pre-pandemic operating model show efficiency improvements of up to 20%. It is expected that similar or even higher levels will be achievable for a homeworking/hybrid operating model.

MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT

Problem:

Need continually updated operational oversight from three perspectives: past, present and future.

Solution:

The OPX platform has detailed metrics and reporting on the past and present which is easily configurable by operational management. No past information about operational performance is lost and is held at both level of the individual member of staff and types of process completed (including task time and quality). The information available supports detailed capacity planning for the future view.

Problem:

Need to know that agreed work prioritisation is being maintained, who is doing the work, where it is being done and the levels of efficiency and quality that are being achieved. Also, to understand the changing size and shape of work queues (i.e. outstanding work) and likely future staff availability to plan ongoing and future operational requirements.

Solution:

OPX offers live activity dashboards that enable close management at a team leader level with whatever level of MI that is required for line and senior management.

Problem:

Need regular and “one off” MI as to how business is coping with demand, especially given likely challenges caused by homeworking.

Solution:

OPX ‘quick reports’ give information at both individual and team level with aggregation up operational structure layers to show overall operational performance for the enterprise.

PEOPLE WELLBEING

Problem:

Lack of manager or team leader face to face contact with operational staff to facilitate assessing staff effectiveness alongside an increased requirement to monitor individual’s welfare – and to act where necessary.

Solution:

OPX enables processing tasks to be seamlessly referred by remote team members to their team leader real time for support and guidance. Team leaders also have detailed performance metrics on all work done over what time periods and to what standard by team members. This will enable team leaders to have value add conversations with their teams to discuss both performance and any other emerging issues (real or perceived). Softer issues will be referred to HR.

Problem:

A need to ensure disrupted working patterns and continuity of hours worked can be monitored.

Solution:

The core OPX platform captures individual work performance and this can be fed back to both staff and team leader (and at a summary level to line management) to ensure that an optimum combination of hours worked and required levels of productivity are achieved.

“Remote working has been one of the most tangible impacts of coronavirus on the economy. For many, it could be here to stay.”

Roger Barker, director of policy at the IoD.



CONCLUSIONS

We think that:

- Homeworking has become a permanent feature for back and front office staff – it is ‘the new normal’.
- Pandemic restrictions affecting businesses and their staff have defined the new business environment.
- Tactical solutions for initial pandemic response should be reviewed for suitability as a long-term strategic solution which meets business needs for quality, efficiency, flexibility and risk.
- Positive customer outcomes should be ensured and end customers protected with minimal reported failure demand.
- The OPX platform from Corporate Modelling provides all the above problem solutions and more.

This whitepaper was written by:

Harry Taylor - BSc FFA FSAI Actuary and former UK Operations Director for Abbey National Bank and Santander Bank.

Paul Barrow - former COO of HCL Insurance Business Services Ltd.

If you want to follow up on anything above, please contact:

Alex Allan
 CEO Corporate Modelling
 Mobile 07966 288561
alex.allan@corporatemodelling.com
corporatemodelling.com