Splunk Global Restart

Build a More Resilient Workplace With Data in Five Steps

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Data Will Drive Everything

The COVID-19 pandemic is the biggest challenge many of us have faced in our lifetimes. It's not merely a business disruption or an economic crisis. It is both those things, and a human catastrophe, and a stress test of government systems, healthcare capacity, and social bonds. This virus is forcing us to rethink how most of us do our jobs, socialize and pursue our passions, at least until a vaccine is available and in wide circulation.

The entire world is working to understand macro- and micro-level situations and to coordinate our responses. And we are confronting this global challenge with data in near-real-time. We have the systems, tools and capabilities to apply data to produce innovative responses and effective solutions.

In a sense, this crisis underscores exactly where we are as a technological society. We are at the dawn of the Data Age, in which digital data allows humanity to devise effective, rapid responses to global challenges.

Data will drive the relentless pursuit of effective tests, treatments and vaccines. At the same time, businesses have to reopen, supply chains must be maintained, children must continue their education. Reopening organizations is going to be a multistage journey, from planning to restarting to building more resilience for the longer term. Every company is going to need to define its own approach. No two manufacturers, for instance, will follow exactly the same approach, much less manufacturers versus retailers or professional services organizations. But every successful approach will be guided by, and responsive to, data.

I believe the approach outlined in the following pages will be useful to leaders of any organization as they solve their individual challenges for how to move forward. We're all in uncharted waters, but together we can navigate any challenge.

Doug Merritt
President and CEO
Splunk Inc.

Data Will Help Us All Get Back to Work

"Return to work" is a misleadingly simple label for a complex problem. Many office-based workers have been able to work from home — and even this most fortunate solution has challenged many organizations. But not all companies can shift a majority of jobs to work-from-home.

The corporate headquarters of a retailer or manufacturer might be able to move a thousand desk jobs to improvised home offices, but shops, warehouses and factory floors require in-person staff working closely together or interacting with the public. Service technicians and other consultants make in-person visits. Our supply chains are dependent on the people who transport raw material and physical goods from place to place and door to door.

At the societal level, we need to adjust to new practices and expectations; social distancing has been the most obvious example. At the governmental level, we need strategies to enable smooth, safe restarts; leaders today grapple with testing, among other challenges. Every organization needs its own plan for the future, and that plan must consider the context of local practices, policies and progress against the disease, as well as the specific needs of the organization and the situation within its facilities.

All of that is data. Investigating and analyzing available data, from within and outside the organization, can help leaders devise the most effective strategies for their facilities and teams. "Return to work" strategies have to solve more than the problem of bringing back necessary workers as safely and as soon as possible. Effective strategies have to be prepared for renewed outbreaks of COVID-19, and they must build greater resilience for other large-scale disruptions.

Speed is of the essence as a crisis unfolds. We've seen this as the coronavirus pandemic has played out globally: Often the difference between a contained or widespread outbreak has been preparedness, and specifically the ability to monitor the situation and act swiftly in response to given conditions. Organizations must have a clear strategy that includes immediate responses to new variables, and the ability to gather and interpret the data that would trigger those responses.

Much easier said than done. Companies are awash in data — more, and more kinds, than they know how to use. Every digital system and application is producing data. Every time an employee scans a badge on-site, or a remote sensor pings the network, or an employee files a service request or completes a service call, potentially useful data is created. But in a churning sea of undifferentiated data, how do you determine what's important to getting people back to work, and keeping them safe and productive?

The goal of this document is to offer some fundamental starting points as you look to your data for the best strategies for bringing people back to work and continuing to build a more resilient organization.

Five Steps You Can Take Today

Resilience doesn't happen overnight. But there are steps every organization can take right now to establish the safest and most productive reopening strategy, down to defining what "reopening" means in your industry and for your organization and individual teams. And in defining the return to work under current adverse conditions, we can begin to shape our responses to future crises and build resilience for the long term.

For more than 15 years, Splunk has helped organizations of all sizes, across industries and geographies, to navigate urgent, complex data problems. Based on what we've learned with and from our customers, we've summarized a few steps every organization can take to use data to build a more resilient workplace.

This is not a business continuity planning document, but these steps can help you frame your thinking, while making sure that essential data is front and center in your planning process. We have focused on actionable steps you can take today, whether you're already resuming interrupted operations, or just beginning to approach that challenge.

A foundational step to getting started is to understand what data is available to you — what data your organization gathers and analyzes, as well as what outside data sources can help you understand regional health, governmental policies, and industry-specific challenges and opportunities. For most organizations, that was largely a part of business as usual. In this unusual time, the challenge is to look at that data and decide how to approach it from a new perspective.

01

Design Your Data Strategy With Privacy in Mind

Understanding workplace-generated data — badge activity, factory floor sensors, elevator traffic patterns — is key to developing a return to work strategy that is right for your organization. The patterns of activity and human connections it reveals can help you devise ways to help keep your workforce safe. Effective strategies also take into account the social and legal implications of monitoring your workforce and are designed with their privacy in mind. For example, while employee badge data can help you visualize patterns of foot traffic, which may be helpful to developing a social distancing program, it's important to protect the identity of the employees you track and place acceptable limits on where you track them. This can build trust with your employees and demonstrate respect for their privacy rights.

Establishing a cross-functional team of stakeholders, including privacy, compliance and HR professionals, can help you develop a program that adheres to your organization's code of conduct and the law. By including security professionals, you can also help ensure that the data you collect is securely stored, accessible only to those who need it, and securely disposed of when no longer needed.

Once you develop a program that meets your needs, consider how you socialize it in advance, so that your employees know what you are doing and how you are doing it, and have assurances from you that their privacy rights are protected. And as with all programs, careful oversight is best to ensure that the safeguards you design work properly and are respected. Integrity, transparency and oversight are essential.

02

Empower Teams to Investigate Data

Returning to work will require us to solve many new challenges. We will have to reconsider open office floor plans, shoulder-to-shoulder assembly lines, and communal spaces from conference rooms to cafeterias. Even with our best minds applied to planning and mitigation, we will be tested by unknowns and we will have to solve new problems. Constantly asking *why* and requiring more data will enable the flexibility necessary to manage in this environment.

Should we spread out the desks in the office? (But then how will everyone fit?) Should we stagger work hours? (And how will that affect collaboration?) How can we effectively monitor the health of our workforce without being unnecessarily invasive? Which health metrics actually help us fight the spread of disease? What's the current status of outbreak in the local community?

Note that investigating data doesn't mean investigating individuals; in fact, it is the opposite. When you're dealing with large data sets across many different devices, systems and interactions, you need the capabilities and skills to ask questions of your data and follow each answer to deeper insights.

You may need to ask scores of questions before you get a sense of what the data is telling you. It calls for a mindset that empowers curiosity. Basic data on workplace traffic flow can lead to a series of investigative inquiries:

- **Are employees straying from their work stations or usual work areas?**
  - **Were they all on break?**
    - Should we stagger breaks or otherwise alter policies to keep people safe?
- **They weren't all on break?**
  - **What was happening on the floor at that time?**
    - A machine was stopped.
      - Was it mechanical failure, or failure in a machine on which it was dependent?
      - Was repair delayed by lack of parts, a technician, etc.?
      - Was the stoppage due to human error or a staffing issue?
      - Do we need to improve training, supervision or worker availability?
    - Was it stopped for lack of raw material?
      - Do we have a problem in our supply chain?

To ask these questions, and follow them to the right answer, you have to have the necessary framework in place. You need the data, and the tools to access and explore it. Depending on where the answers lead, you will need badge data, HR and ERP data, device performance data, WiFi data, and more. You won't get to the ultimate answer until you're able to ask the right question. You may also have to think of data differently — independent of the devices that produce it. Yes, your employee badges are primarily a physical security device, but examining the data from a timestamp and location perspective may open your eyes to location information critical to your investigation and thinking.

To ask (and answer) the right questions, you need technology that breaks down silos and supports easy access to all types of data; and training to empower skilled investigators to access the data, follow problems to their sources, and escalate/collaborate as needed to act on a solution.

03 Establish Partnerships and Basic Access to Public Data

Safely returning to work requires more than a safe workplace. An organization must understand the current state of affairs across its community to understand infection rates, the status of shelter-in-place orders or social distancing recommendations, the capacity of local healthcare systems, the availability of protective equipment, and more. You will want to understand how the status of local transportation networks is affecting health and safety. You may have to consider the effect of weather on all of the above as your region heads into hurricane or wildfire season, or as a particularly bad winter storm bears down.

At the most basic level, it doesn't make sense to bring your employees into a workplace that you've carefully redesigned for maximum safety if they're all commuting on a public transportation system where social distancing is impossible, amid a massive spike in community infections.

To make decisions about whether it's safe to gather, and in what numbers, organizations will need fast, easy access to public data sets on the city and county level. Public-sector organizations should work to get information to, and from, businesses in their community to communicate best health practices and to better understand conditions in the community.

With those partnerships in place, organizations should be prepared to act as swiftly as the data may indicate, and to share responses and conditions throughout the partnership networks as appropriate.

04 Form a Cross-Functional Rapid Response Team

Building a resilient organization and bringing employees back to work means many organizations will need to go beyond data and technology. Collaboration across business functions should be strengthened to help organizations remain resilient and act swiftly when the need arises.

As an example: When an employee tests positive for COVID-19, multiple stakeholders need to know and act quickly. Operations may need to close off access to different parts of a factory floor and quickly sanitize exposed areas. HR may need to inform other employees and make recommendations about testing and self-quarantine. If the affected employee came into contact with customers or other visitors, more steps and more teams may be involved. Notifications and backup plans need to be pre-established and triggered immediately.

Preparing for these types of scenarios can begin now. Start by building a team and processes that can help you respond quickly and effectively. Define roles, accountability, meeting cadence, communication structure and relevant procedures.

Strong, cross-functional teams will help you harness the power of your organizational data to accelerate response times, see past blind spots and ultimately automate your approach so you can quickly and effectively remediate issues and return your employees to work.

05

Prepare for a Wave of New Data

We were already entering a new Data Age. Decades of digital transformation and technological advance have brought us to the advent of artificial intelligence, 5G networking, augmented and virtual reality, and more. There was going to be a lot more data, and a lot more to do with it, before the coronavirus crisis. But in an era of pandemic, as well as other climate-level disruptions such as more severe storm seasons, organizations must work with their data to improve resilience and respond to potentially disruptive conditions as they emerge — if not sooner.

If the fundamental challenge of the Data Age is more data, and more possibility, than we might now be prepared for, and the COVID-19 crisis has elevated the urgency of using data in the moment to make business-critical and life-saving decisions, how can companies prepare? How can we ensure that an onslaught of data not only does not overwhelm us, but empowers us to make better, faster decisions with more at stake than ever before?

The answer is to build a system and a process that is flexible enough to adapt to the changing landscape.

The steps include:

- Create an inventory of digital data you already possess that could prove valuable to investigation and protection of your employees in the event of an on-site incident.
- Invest in systems that can quickly correlate your existing data inventory with new data without a massive overhaul or a complete remapping.
- Ensure that you're able to incorporate data no matter its source, structure or type. That includes historical data, streaming data, structured data and unstructured data.
- Adapt for the demands of an age driven by data. Anticipate massive data volumes from devices, systems and interactions.

The early days of our workplace restart will require a great deal of manual work, and we will all be necessarily focused on the steps that allow us to resume operations as quickly, safely and effectively as possible. But the long-term payoff of that manual work and all the strategic planning and investment will be systems that enable us to work better and faster with all available data, to make better decisions for our organizations, our employees and our communities.

These five steps, and their underlying principles, are simply a starting point. They're a challenge — the first set of questions your organization needs to answer to assure the immediate health and safety of your employees and the long-term success and resilience of your organization.

We are a technology company, and we believe in the power of technology. The innovations that will occur over the next few years to assist your business resiliency and employee safety efforts will be astounding — and they'll be digital. Make sure you are ready to take advantage of these innovations that can fill gaps in your monitoring and response capabilities.

The singular imperative underlying Splunk's work with every customer is to shorten the distance between comprehensive data and intelligent action. We help organizations gather and understand their data, and then turn it into the right move at the right moment. We think the steps in this document will help any organization continue down that same path, and respond more effectively to the challenges that now confront us all.

For more on Splunk's recommendations and approach to the coronavirus pandemic, visit our COVID-19 Response page for the latest updates. If you'd like to know more about how the Data-to-Everything Platform can help you meet your objectives and better weather unpredicted challenges, contact us. We're here to help.

Learn More

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