| **Audit Phase** | **Factors to Consider** |
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| Audit Planning | * Are all planned audits still essential, or are some audits of lower risk activities better canceled or delayed? Also consider the priority of planned audits as you may have less auditors if they become sick or need to care for family members. * Is it still feasible to conduct the planned audits on the scheduled dates? Are key auditees still available? Will they still have time to devote to audits? Should the audits be delayed or re-focused? * Can your co-source provider also work remotely and be as efficient, rigorous and secure as needed? * Do you have capacity among your technology-savvy auditors to assist those who are less confident in using technology to work remotely? * What information do you need to provide to senior management and to operational management (auditees) about the planned audits? For example: changes to timing, scope, meetings, feedback, reporting and methods that will now be executed remotely. |
| Engagement Scoping | * Are all the topics in the engagement scope still important? * Can all planned topics be audited remotely? What about risks or controls that require on-site verification or direct observation such as physical controls? Should they be de-scoped or can local management provide adequate confirmation? Can cameras or other similar techniques be used effectively? * If technology has replaced traditional audit techniques, are there any additional topics to add into the scope or are there better tests that can now be executed? For example, could you use unstructured data along with structured data, or external data as well as internal data? * Do you have access to the necessary systems and data to conduct your audit? * What (additional) checks are needed in order to rely upon data in the absence of live meetings, access to documentation and on-site verification? * Does audit have the technology to access the essential systems and data? Do auditors have the ability to analyze the type and volume of data necessary? * Do auditors working remotely have the right work environment, technology, network links and software licenses? * Are there any legal restrictions on accessing data when auditors work remotely in their home country, or if they need to move any downloaded data from one country to another? * Should any topics be added to the audit scope due to the impact of coronavirus? Consider whether the outbreak impacts operations or surfaces new risks at the site under review. * Can auditors work simultaneously on different audits or simultaneously audit the same topic at different locations using remote auditing techniques? |
| Audit Execution | * How will the need to access and analyze data impact the normal scheduling of audit work and the quality assurance (QA) of their work by the audit manager or QA team? * Will the combination of data analysis and phone/video calls with auditees provide sufficient evidence to reach conclusions and comply with the audit methodology? * How can audit verify the accuracy of its analysis of data, for example, by referencing other data, documents and management? * Can you use technology to record interviews conducted remotely with auditees, and are those recordings acceptable as evidence in working papers? * How will auditors get necessary documentary evidence to support or supplement their analysis of data? How can they verify that the documentation is real and complete when the auditee scans and sends it? Can audit access an electronic document recording system which may normally be reserved for senior management? * How easy will it be for auditors to schedule calls with auditees to answer queries about their data analysis? This will be challenging if auditees are absent, working remotely or busy dealing with the direct impact of coronavirus. * Will the audit team have a midpoint discussion to decide whether they have conducted sufficient work to form a conclusion? Given that there will be changes in the circumstances and scope, how will discussions be carried out and documented? How will decisions be made to comply with an audit methodology? |
| Reporting | * Will audit need to adapt its protocols, including raising serious issues at the midpoint and regularly inform auditee management about progress and conclusions? * Who will be available to discuss control issues and action plans if some needed auditees are absent or unavailable? * How will audit adapt methods to update auditee management when staff are working remotely? Will changes be needed to the frequency of updates and the format for communications? * Will this situation delay the issuance of reports or allow reports to be reconsidered when senior management are once again available? * Should audit consider only reporting the most serious issues identified, given the limited capacity of management to introduce change to remediate the issue? |
| Follow Up | * Does audit need to be more flexible when following up on reported control issues or when checking progress on actions plans if auditees are absent or unavailable? * Could issue follow-up be made easier if data can be reassessed 3 months after the original audit to verify the controls are still working, or check that the agreed improvements have been made? * How will late or delayed issues be reported to the executive committee and audit committee? Will any (temporary) dispensation be permitted given the challenging situation that management is facing? * How will audit obtain appropriate proof from management that planned actions have been introduced and that control issues are now adequately mitigated? |
| Other Considerations | * Will you have a process to listen to auditors, to learn and evolve your way of working as you start to use remote auditing more frequently? * Can you learn from other assurance teams in your company that may already be working remotely, such as ISO, quality auditors or any assessors of hazardous operations? * Once the threat of coronavirus recedes, how will audit evaluate the lessons learned and whether there are benefits to continuing to deploy remote auditing as a technique at your organization? * What are the unique management challenges posed by remote working? Is it more difficult to motivate, coordinate and communicate with teams who are based in multiple locations? |