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Best Practices to Meet the COVID-19 Manufacturing Quality Challenge

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented many urgent challenges for manufacturing production, quality, and calibration teams. Implementing new processes, safe working practices, and effective digital strategies will not only help overcome COVID-19 hurdles but will also provide significant ongoing benefits after the pandemic is over.

SIMCO serves over 3,000 high tech manufacturers, the majority of which are Essential Businesses in medical device, aerospace, and defense industries. This guide presents best practices we have learned from these customers, industry experts, and our own operations for maintaining manufacturing quality during the COVID-19 crisis.

Create COVID-19 Plans & Processes

The new challenges presented by COVID-19 certainly require new plans and processes, including establishing or updating your Business Continuity Plan and automating new COVID related processes. The following are a few of the plans and processes industry leaders are prioritizing for the COVID-19 crisis.

Business Continuity Plan

This essential document must be updated or created to detail your organization's plans to continue operations during different possible scenarios of the COVID-19 pandemic. Suggested content includes:

- Outline how your organization will operate and respond to the potential growth or spread of a coronavirus outbreak
- Think broadly and cover all major aspects of caring for your employees, customers, partners, organization, and company
- Include considerations for different job classes (including essential and non-essential), facilities, operations, and other key aspects of your business that could be impacted by the pandemic
- Establish different risk levels based on a clearly defined set of criteria and operating guidelines. Specify different actions for each risk level based on facility type, local infections, or other key factors.

Create COVID-19 Plans & Processes *(cont.)*

SIMCO complemented our existing Business Continuity Plan with a new COVID-19 specific plan which defines 4 levels of operation, depending on the impact of the pandemic in each community where our labs are located. We expect this to be a dynamic process over the next 12-18 months. Make your plan visible to relevant managers and continuously update it with new information from your organization and outside experts, including the WHO and CDC.

COVID-19 Processes

The pandemic requires that your organization create crisis-specific processes to manage:

- Health supplies, cleaning services, hygiene procedures
- Employee health, timecard reporting, status, self-reporting
- Tracking the real-time readiness and capacity of critical suppliers
- Other COVID-19 related processes specific to your organization (for example, SIMCO created new processes for workspace & equipment hygiene and field service)

Digitizing these processes ensures consistent, streamlined execution. To learn more, download our free Digital Strategies for COVID-19 ebook.

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Safe Working Practices

A top priority during the pandemic is to ensure safe working practices for your employees, partners, and customers, no matter where they are working.

Onsite Employees

- Ensure only essential personnel enter your facilities
- Check for fever or other symptoms before allowing entry
- If a family member tests positive, require self-quarantine and a test to return to work
- Provide personal protective equipment (PPE) - masks, Nitrile/ Latex gloves, as well as face shields and gowns if appropriate
- Mandate social distancing – always keep at least 6 feet of separation between people
- Eliminate handshakes, leaning near other employees, and all physical contact

- Train employees regarding frequent hand washing, sneeze/cough into sleeve, do not touch face
- Implement staggered shifts and breaks to assist with social distancing measures
- Provide essential employees with a letter for traveling and commuting that verifies their essential status
- Do not allow group gatherings, e.g. allow only one chair per table in the lunchroom

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Safe Working Practices *(cont.)*

Workspace Hygiene

- Add resources to ensure adequate cleaning and gathering of PPE supplies.
- PPE supplies should be safeguarded against theft
- Create processes to clean workspaces and equipment with sanitizer solution of 60% Isopropyl Alcohol to 40% water
- Wipe down working surfaces at the beginning and end of each shift and when entering a new work area
- Wipe down keyboard, mouse, monitor, phone, and equipment face panels, handles, knobs, and cases before and after each use
- Frequently wipe down facility handrails, doorknobs, handles, elevator buttons, desks, countertops, light switches, cabinet/file drawer handle and knobs, chair arms, copier, printer, fax, telephones, dry erase markers, bathroom fixtures, & kitchen knobs/items

Safe Working Practices *(cont.)*

Work From Home

Many office workers and support staff can now work very effectively and safely from home using the latest digital technologies:

- Provide employees with PC, mobile phone, broadband connectivity, VPN, security

- Productivity and communication tools - email, file sharing, chat, audio/video conferencing

- Use software to digitize and automate new COVID-19 processes and existing processes to allow remote productivity

- Make sure managers communicate frequently with remote employees to assign appropriate projects, balance workloads, and ensure employees feel connected

- Include these additional hardware, software, and telecom service costs into the budget. Consider cloud-based software, which allows you to pay per use instead of incurring large upfront capital costs

- Be wary of security and privacy risks associated with new tools and higher utilization

Safe Working Practices *(cont.)*

Limit Travel

- Eliminate or minimize travel by replacing in-person meetings with conference calls or videoconference meetings
- Replace in-person audits with remote audits - many auditing bodies, including the FDA, are actively moving to support this change
- Use screen sharing capabilities for presentations and whiteboard meetings

For more information on safe working practices, visit these resources:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

- World Health Organization (WHO)

- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) - Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19

- U.S. State Department Travel Advisories

- CDC U.S. Travel Advisories

- FDA Remote Audits

Improve Communication

Manufacturing and quality leaders now face many questions from employees, customers, and suppliers about shutdowns, processes, personnel, and more. The following are a few recommendations from our customers on providing clear, consistent communication during the pandemic:

- Provide solid, up-to-date information via email and internal and external websites

- Frequent, informative communication is key (for example, SIMCO sends regular emails & video messages to employees, as well as email and web updates to customers and partners)

- Instead of onsite meetings, use email, chat and video for remote staff

- Managers should connect with employees daily and encourage questions and feedback

- Ensure quality and manufacturing teams are communicating frequently regarding plant schedule changes, volume fluctuations, supplier issues, etc.

Improve Communications *(cont.)*

- Your supply chain status may be highly dynamic during this stressful economic period - frequently reach out to key vendors and partners to ensure your supply chain and operations are functioning as smoothly as possible (for example, SIMCO is monitoring key supplier status on a weekly basis)

- For Essential Businesses, it is critical that all suppliers know your status and can support manufacturing continuity

- For Non-Essential Businesses, it is important that suppliers are kept informed of your manufacturing status and are ready to support you when needed

- Make accurate, up-to-date information about your operations available from your business systems and quality software

Automate Existing Processes

To allow remote workers to maximize their productivity, it's also important to identify existing manual, paper-based processes that can be automated and digitized. The following are a few key recommendations for digitization:

- Automate processes such as calibration, maintenance, validation & compliance, asset tracking & physical inventory, work requests, OOT and NCR case management, and more
- Utilize software with automated, paperless digital workflows and service scheduling, procedures, record storage, notifications, electronic signatures, and validation

For more information on how to digitize Manufacturing Quality processes, download our free Digital Strategies for COVID-19 eBook

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Utilize Shut Down Time

If your operations are partially or fully shut down, use the extra time to improve your existing operations and prepare for full operations to resume. The following are a few recommendations from our industry-leading customers on how to best utilize this shut down time.

- Work with partners and suppliers to ensure services and supplies are fully available once the shutdown ends
- Get equipment calibrated and serviced ahead of time or during shutdown to avoid any service backlogs that may arise after the crisis is over
- Schedule repairs and preventive maintenance during plant shutdowns, particularly on production equipment which is normally difficult to take out of service
- Use this time to automate your manual processes using software as described in the previous section

Summary

While the COVID-19 pandemic has created significant new challenges for manufacturing quality and calibration managers, these challenges can be overcome by implementing best practices for safety, communication, and process improvement.

Digital technology plays a major role in meeting these new challenges and recommended digital best practices. To learn more about which processes to digitize and how, download the free **Digital Strategies for the COVID-19 Manufacturing Quality Challenge eBook**.

If you have suggestions for other best practices that can be shared in future versions of this guide, please send to **news@simco.com**. Thank you in advance for your contribution!

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About SIMCO

SIMCO is a leading provider of quality services and software for lives-at-stake manufacturers in biomedical, aerospace and defense. Founded in 1962 to service NASA and high technology firms in Silicon Valley, SIMCO is committed to providing the highest level of quality and customer service in the industry.

Today SIMCO's 21 calibration labs and its CERDAAC software serve over 3,000 organizations, including 16 of the top 20 global medical device manufacturers and 14 of the top 20 global aerospace and defense manufacturers.

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