

## INNOVATION IN GOVERNMENT®

# The Best of What's New in Hybrid and Remote Work

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*As the pandemic subsides, state and local agencies navigate permanent workforce changes*



# Transforming the Workplace

*Long-term adoption of remote work will drive technology modernization and new management policies*

**M**ore than a year after state and local government agencies shifted employees to remote work, their biggest workforce challenge may be just starting.

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck in March 2020, agencies scrambled to expand secure connectivity and acquire mobile devices, but most state and local CIOs say their organizations transitioned relatively easily to working from home on an emergency basis. Now, with COVID-19 cases in the U.S. dropping dramatically and economies reopening, public agencies face a more complicated issue: figuring out where and how state and local government employees will work going forward.

“We’ve been through a giant social experiment in the last 15 months, and we’re heading into an even bigger one,” said Lee Rainie, director of internet and technology research for the Pew Research Center, during the NASCIO Midyear Conference in May.<sup>1</sup>

## **Permanent Changes**

Center for Digital Government (CDG) research indicates the pandemic will permanently alter the nature of work for public employees.

A 2020 CDG national survey found almost 75 percent of respondents anticipate hybrid work — where employees work from home at least on a part-time basis — will be their long-term model. The trend is particularly strong at the state level where just 16 percent of respondents anticipate returning to a fully in-person work environment.

In California, for example, multiple state agencies expect large percentages of their workforces to continue working remotely at some level post-pandemic. CalPERS, the state’s massive public employee retirement system, expects about half of its workforce to continue working remotely on either a full-time or part-time basis after the pandemic subsides, says CEO Marcie Frost.<sup>2</sup>

Other California state agencies are moving even more aggressively. Covered California, which operates the state’s health insurance exchange, anticipates 10 to 20 percent of its staff will stay fully remote, while perhaps another 50 percent could have part-time remote schedules. And FI\$Cal, a department created in 2016 to operate California’s statewide financial information system, has permanently moved 90 percent of its staff to remote work.<sup>3</sup>

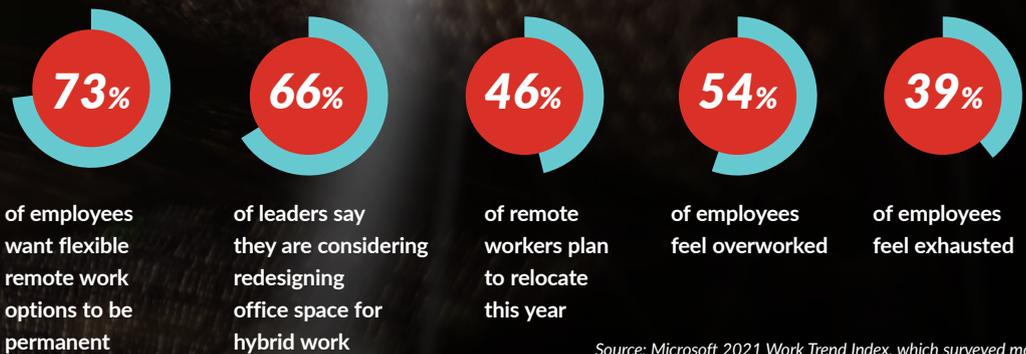
## **New Challenges**

Transitioning to a permanent hybrid work model presents new technology and management challenges for government leaders.

Technology modernization, which was kickstarted during the pandemic response, must continue. Cloud-based systems capable of supporting the new work-from-anywhere model will be critical, as will digital document and signature capabilities that eliminate paper processes. In addition, agencies must keep strengthening virtual collaboration platforms to provide equal engagement and advancement opportunities for in-office and remote workers.

Because large numbers of employees will never return to the office full time, agencies anticipate reducing their physical footprint, but remaining office space will need upgrades. Brick-and-mortar locations will likely become shared spaces where employees can reserve desks or meeting rooms. These facilities will require better audio and video systems to support seamless collaboration between in-person and remote staff. Agencies will also need reservation and scheduling systems to manage shared office spaces.

## Remote Work Opportunities and Challenges



Source: Microsoft 2021 Work Trend Index, which surveyed more than 30,000 public and private sector employees in 31 countries.

Finally, results from a recent Microsoft workforce survey – which covered public and private sector organizations – indicates employers must do more to support remote workers' basic technology needs. More than 40 percent of employees said they lack essential office supplies at home, and one in 10 don't have an adequate internet connection to do their job, according to the survey. More than 46 percent said their employer does not help them with remote work expenses.<sup>4</sup>

Even more critical are the policy changes agencies must implement as they lead remote and hybrid workforces into the future. That transition will be a significant one for managers and supervisors in state and local government, where remote work was rare before the pandemic.

"You need to give tools to your managers, because this is very different than watching people at their desks from 8 to 5," says Russell Fong, chief administrative officer for the California State Controller's Office. "All the things we've taught managers throughout their careers are different than what you want to do in today's environment."<sup>5</sup>

Agencies will need to develop key performance indicators for programs and

processes, and they will need to implement effective processes for measuring the output or performance of individual employees.

Work/life balance is another concern. The new model for work blurs traditional lines between home and office, and many employees are feeling the strain. The Microsoft survey found 54 percent of respondents feel overworked and 39 percent feel exhausted.<sup>6</sup>

Overcoming issues like these was a frequent topic of discussion at the NASCIO Midyear Conference where state CIOs expressed concerns about workplace culture.

"I'm not concerned from a technology perspective," explained Texas Department of Information Resources Executive Director Amanda Crawford, "but from a

logistical and management perspective how we're able to keep cohesive teams."<sup>7</sup>

### Becoming a Better Employer

Navigating the shift to permanent remote and hybrid work demands that agencies take a fresh look at the technologies and policies related to supporting and managing their workforces. But these changes will bring significant benefits.

Digitizing and automating processes will make agencies more productive and efficient. So will giving employees tools that let them work seamlessly from home, in the office or anywhere else. In addition, new flexibility around remote work, as well as moving toward performance-based management techniques – instead of management by attendance – ultimately could make government a better and more desirable place to work.

<sup>1</sup> State CIOs Look to Future With Digital Services, Hybrid Work. <https://www.govtech.com/pcio/state-cios-look-to-future-with-digital-services-hybrid-work>

<sup>2</sup> Navigating the Future of Work. <https://papers.govtech.com/Navigating-the-Future-of-Work-138778.html>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> The Next Great Disruption Is Hybrid Work – Are We Ready? <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/hybrid-work>

<sup>5</sup> Navigating the Future of Work. <https://papers.govtech.com/Navigating-the-Future-of-Work-138778.html>

<sup>6</sup> The Next Great Disruption Is Hybrid Work – Are We Ready? <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/hybrid-work>

<sup>7</sup> State CIOs Look to Future With Digital Services, Hybrid Work. <https://www.govtech.com/pcio/state-cios-look-to-future-with-digital-services-hybrid-work>

# Modernizing Contact Centers to Enable Remote Work



*The pandemic forced government contact centers to modify how they provide services. Ivory Dugar, senior solutions consultant at Genesys, answers the equipment and workforce optimization questions that are top-of-mind for agencies that extend operations to remote agents.*

## **How has remote work impacted government contact centers?**

The need for contact center agents to provide services from home forced organizations to ask some important questions. First, do we have the right solution and connectivity in place to handle calls that are directed to agents at home; in particular, do we need to migrate to a cloud-based solution? Second, do our agents have the right equipment? Third, with agents moving from place to place, how are we going to manage our personnel from a workforce optimization perspective?

## **What challenges should organizations address to make remote work successful?**

To ensure callers have a secure, fluid and reliable customer experience, agencies must maintain diverse channels of communication. Another challenge is ensuring that contact center agents have secure and timely access to their agency's database, intuitively orchestrated communications and sufficient bandwidth for reliable connectivity. Organizations also need to minimize the learning curve associated with introducing new endpoints such as Bluetooth-enabled headsets, softphones and web real-time communication (WebRTC), which eliminate the need for traditional desk phones and

enable workers to use their laptop for voice or digital interactions.

## **How can contact center modernization support remote work and improve constituent experience?**

It starts with a sound, strategic methodology for migrating contact center activities from an office to agents' homes. This is where seasoned contact center business and solution consultants can provide strategic guidance for getting from point A, whether that's a premises-based or cloud-based solution, to point B, a platform solution that places contact center agents in a reliable remote environment. These conversations help agencies identify areas that might yield greater efficiencies, benefits and cost savings; create a solution roadmap; justify costs; and set performance benchmarks.

## **What should agencies consider before enabling contact centers for remote work?**

First, security controls are critical to protect caller's credit card numbers, electronic health records and other private data. Second, agencies must consider how their state- and agency-level security practices around VPNs, remote desktop protocol (RDP), ports and firewalls affect a remote worker's endpoint in terms of access to their virtual desktop, voice traffic passing through the virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) or RDP, and bandwidth restrictions that might cause poor voice quality. Third, to ensure people with the right skills are at the right place at the right time, organizations need to automate workforce optimization. Fourth, they need to decide whether to repurpose existing devices such as SIP hard phones or procure things like Bluetooth-enabled headsets to enable

WebRTC and softphone communications. Finally, agencies must consider unified communications so remote workers can connect and communicate with back-office workers in a timely way.

## **What questions should organizations ask vendors when they consider a remote agent solution?**

I suggest these three: 1) What would our security posture look like? Does the solution support security standards such as HIPAA, GDPR and PCI, and is the customer's data secure regardless of the communication channel — voice, chat, SMS, bots and so on? 2) Does the solution support flexible phone options — such as WebRTC, generic SIP and remote — so agents can remain connected and proficient wherever they are? 3) Does the solution support E911 (Enhanced 911)? Both Kari's Law and Ray Baum's Act require that contact centers enable agents to dial 911 without having to press or dial a prefix beforehand and provide the location of the endpoint the agent is calling from.

## **Many government contact centers pivoted quickly to remote work. What should they revisit now?**

A lot of agencies overlooked E911 support for remote workers. That needs to be corrected. Agencies should also reconsider repurposing office-based hardware and software for employees working from home. Reusing that equipment may seem like a cost-saving strategy; however, with the availability of softphones and WebRTC, there really isn't a need to repurpose equipment as the sole method of communication but rather as an additional option for agents.

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# The Digital HQ: Flexible, Inclusive and Connected



*Dave Macnee, senior relationship manager for Slack's Future Forum, and Kevin Carter, customer success leader for public sector at Slack, share research data on remote work and discuss technology and strategies for getting remote work right.*

## **What trends are you seeing around employee expectations for remote and hybrid work?**

Employee expectations have changed. Data from the Future Forum's quarterly survey of 9,000 knowledge workers — the Remote Employee Experience Index — shows employees want to maintain a flexible working model even once the pandemic ends. Only 17 percent of those surveyed want to return to work full time in the office. The vast majority — 63 percent — want some form of flexibility.<sup>1</sup> In addition, recent Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey results show government employees who telework at least three days per week have higher employee satisfaction and engagement index scores than those who telework two or fewer days per week. Employees who are ineligible for telework have the lowest engagement scores of all the workforce.<sup>2</sup>

## **As organizations rethink what's possible in terms of work, what does the future look like?**

Organizations realize remote work is not simply a preference, it's a work style that's

going to be negotiated with potential employees. As we think about the talent government needs to attract, the digital headquarters will become the norm. Based on our Future Forum primary research and conversations, we believe the digital HQ will be one that is flexible, inclusive and connected.

## **What challenges stand in the way of sustainable remote/hybrid work?**

What we've seen over the past year hasn't just been about working from home. It's been working from home during a pandemic. As the pandemic has stretched into its second year, employees are feeling the strain. The data show that even though the work-from-home experience is better than working in the office full time, employee satisfaction with work-life balance has declined and stress and anxiety have increased. A contributing factor to that stress is the pressure to demonstrate productivity. A third of remote workers say they feel pressure to make sure their managers know that they're working.

## **What can organizations do to ensure employees succeed in remote/hybrid work environments?**

There isn't a one-size-fits-all approach. The organizations we see doing this well are taking this moment to intentionally rethink and redesign work. They're thinking about the principles that guide their mission and the guardrails they need to try new things in a safe and controlled manner. As for specific tactics, that means doing things like giving people flexibility in when they work as well as where they work. We

found that the flexibility in when people work has an even higher impact across all five remote employee experience factors than a person's location — it's having control over your schedule. Success also means finding ways to foster a sense of belonging both when people are working remotely and when they are in a shared physical space. When organizations bring people to the office, what is the intent and what do they need to do to support that intent?

## **How can technology help keep employees connected, engaged and productive regardless of where they work?**

Technology is foundational for connecting employees and fostering a culture of inclusion where remote workers have access to the decision-makers, information and opportunities that traditionally may have been restricted by time and place. It's important to find collaboration tools that let employees work effectively; build community even if they're outside the office; and engage with citizens, agencies and other external partners as easily as their internal teammates do. It's also important to have things like systems of record, where all conversations and decisions are maintained so that everyone has access to the same information regardless of where they work. Finally, agencies need a single tool to bring together things like incident management systems, customer relationship management systems and code development so employees can easily access and leverage them wherever they are.

<sup>1</sup>Hybrid rules: The emerging playbook for flexible work. Future Forum. <https://futureforum.com/2021/01/28/hybrid-rules-the-emerging-playbook-for-flexible-work/>

<sup>2</sup>Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey. Office of Personnel Management. <https://www.opm.gov/fevs/>

# Slack for Government

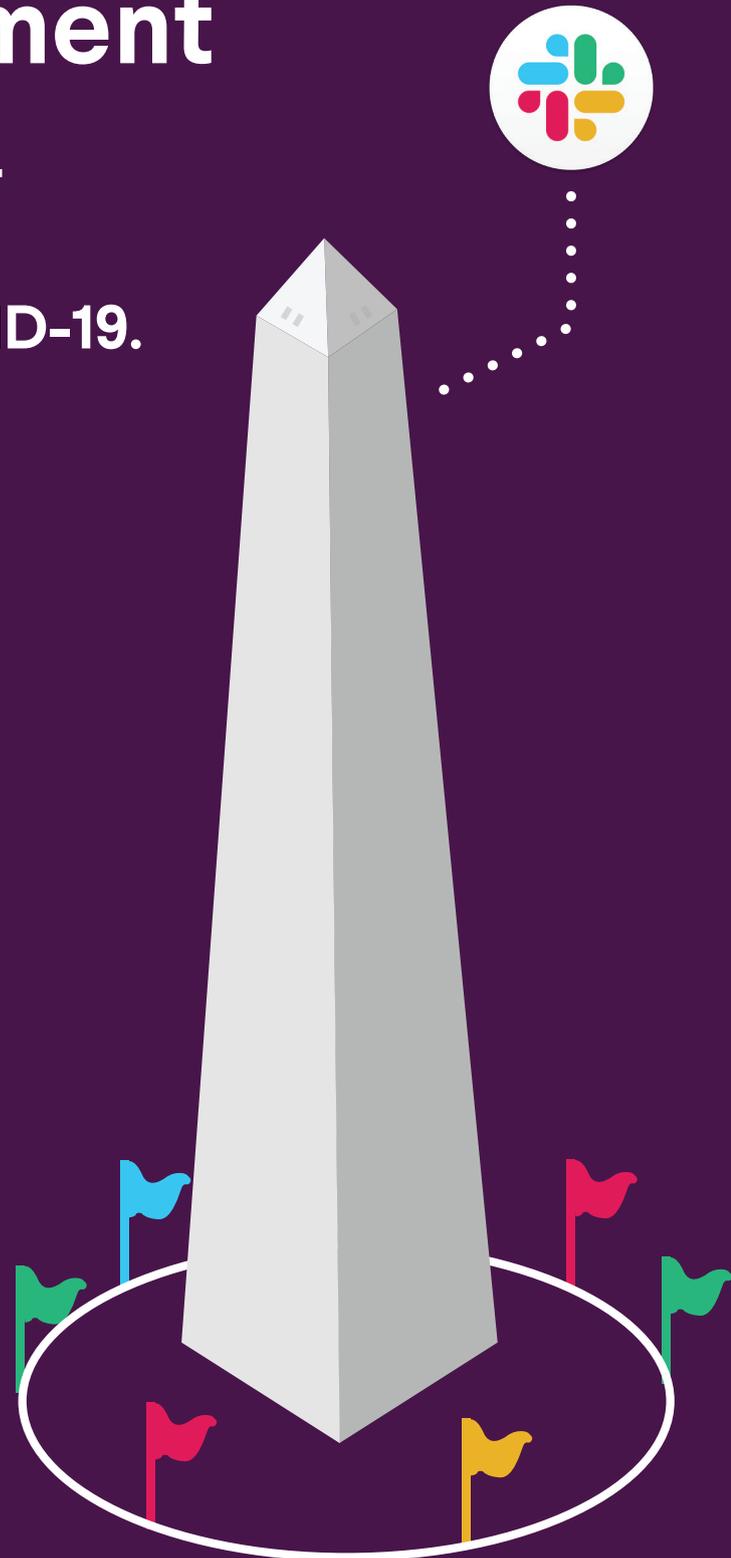
**Government agencies and their partners face unprecedented challenges in response to COVID-19.**

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The Slack for Government guide explores how government agencies are bringing their people, tools, data and processes together in Slack to increase remote work productivity and secure collaboration.

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# Giving Remote Workers Access to Resources They Need



*As organizations shift to remote work, they need to rethink how they manage users, applications and devices. **Chip Carr**, senior manager of public sector for NVIDIA, discusses how virtualization and other strategies can simplify IT management and create a consistent user experience regardless of a worker's location or device.*

## **What challenges do organizations face around growing use of remote work?**

There are five basic considerations for a remote work infrastructure: security, IT management, productivity, mobility and communication. During the pandemic, remote workers may not have had time to get an approved device, so they connected with their own device from a home network. Different users connected at different speeds and with different device capabilities. IT had to scramble to manage associated hardware and software to ensure remote workers could be productive.

## **How can organizations take remote work to the next level?**

They need to provide the same secure, reliable access to computing resources whether people work remotely or in the office. Consistent, secure access helps organizations overcome disruption. We saw that with our customers that had implemented GPU-enabled virtual desktop solutions prepandemic. They switched to remote work without missing a beat. Their workers simply connected from home and they were productive on day one. Delivering GPU-accelerated virtual machines also provides higher user density, simplifies and centralizes IT management,

and enhances security because data and applications reside in the data center, not on end-user devices.

## **What approaches support remote work modernization?**

In the past, you issued a worker a laptop so they could work remotely, and then they connected into the VPN. All their applications and data ran on the laptop. That's impractical when you have to manage potentially thousands of users, their devices and their applications. To maintain consistency and continuity, organizations must shift to a centralized, software-defined approach, where IT staff control applications, security settings and the delivery of computing resources from the data center.

## **How can organizations optimize processes to support remote and hybrid work?**

Centralized IT management and virtualization technology are critical to manage infrastructure and address changes quickly and at massive scale — whether that's to patch a vulnerability across all user devices, upgrade applications or deploy additional computing resources. IT can make a change once via software and then distribute it to everyone's device within minutes with minimal downtime. Software can monitor network traffic and resource utilization in aggregate and then automatically allocate resources as needed so organizations don't have to invest in higher-performance user devices or purchase more hardware. In addition, organizations can isolate workloads and systems for security or other purposes, meaning multiple workloads and operating systems can run on the same device.

## **How does artificial intelligence (AI) and graphic processing unit (GPU) technology support workers in remote analysis of images, graphics and other visuals?**

Modern remote work infrastructure enables developers and researchers to remotely train robots and develop AI applications for image classification, object detection, image translation and more. Take the example of a public utility that maintains power lines that run through trees. Workers typically inspect the lines to make sure tree limbs won't damage lines in a high wind. A better approach is to embed a high-performance, low-power GPU into a drone that uses the power of AI to inspect lengths of hard-to-access power lines in real time.

## **What advice do you have for organizations as they move into the future with AI?**

AI is transforming how computers perform perceptual tasks such as computer vision, pattern detection, speech recognition and behavior prediction. These improvements make it possible to automate labor-intensive jobs. Agencies can start moving down this path by identifying critical manual tasks that take an inordinate amount of time and then determining whether part or all of these tasks can be automated. Organizations can often automate upfront tasks such as gathering and preparing data for analysis. Done manually, these tasks can consume as much as 80 percent of an analyst's time. By leveraging large amounts of data, organizations can build models to predict and refine internal processes that set a course for the future.

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# Managing Process and Cultural Change



*The shift to remote work requires significant change to workflows and organizational culture.*

**Jim McClurkin**, senior director for public sector at SAP Concur, suggests approaches that will help governments modernize and prepare for the future.

## **How did creative uses of CRM and other business applications help governments navigate the pandemic?**

Necessity is the mother of invention. Many organizations repurposed technologies that were not originally directed at supporting remote work. They customized and conformed these technologies for a suddenly remote environment. One example is the repurposing of auditing and fraud detection systems so organizations could pivot from largely paper-based purchase order processes, which became impossible in a remote work situation, to non-purchase order environments for expense management. State and local agencies that lacked those adaptive technologies suffered a lot more than ones that did.

## **What should organizations consider as they more fully commit to remote and hybrid work?**

First, organizations need a network and network security protocols to support their processes. Next, a lot of existing processes have nothing to do with how someone would work remotely. Organizations must rethink their workflows, approvals and other processes to fit the remote environment. Finally, different organizational cultures and their workers have different tolerances for change. It's

important to honestly assess where you're starting from so you can put the appropriate level of vision and planning in place to make that happen.

## **How can organizations bring the intelligent enterprise to remote work?**

In our worldview, the core of the intelligent enterprise is that the cloud becomes the highway for remote workers. On-premises technologies, paper-based processes and the physical handling of documentation are the opposite of the intelligent enterprise, which uses the cloud to create an automated flow of this information. It makes those workflows, approvals and information available anywhere and on any device. Organizations must be open to re-evaluating their processes and how they work. But when they do this, it opens a vast opportunity to improve processes.

## **How can organizations improve workflows and processes across and between remote and onsite work environments?**

Number one is prioritizing what's important in workflows – with the overall focus being the desired business outcome. Organizations need to streamline workflows, create more efficient processes and give employees greater latitude on how they get their work done. The intelligent enterprise gives organizations visibility they never had before. Old-fashioned processes and workflows prevent organizations from having visibility into things like cashflow, outstanding invoices and approvals. Now that this information is at their fingertips they can consider any number of new processes to replace their old paper-based processes.

## **How can agencies foster data sharing, especially as the workforce becomes more distributed?**

Trust is at the top of the list. A lot of organizational cultures have been in place with the same leader, the same teams and the same routines for many years. That's all gone out the window. To foster trust, you have to be accessible and open to change. You also must honestly evaluate what's important to the organization – not only so you can get your work done and be successful, but also to ensure you're protecting taxpayers' dollars in terms of waste or abuse. Part of that ability to trust gets back to visibility. Once you have visibility, you can more easily trust what's going on.

## **What advice do you have for keeping remote employees engaged and developing the (remote) workforce of the future?**

It's projected that 30 to 35 percent of the public sector workforce will remain remote. A lot of these workers will probably be younger. To attract and engage the workforce of the future, you have to keep systems, processes and tools up to date. Younger people run their lives on their phone. If you expect them to submit to completely manual paper-driven processes, you'll probably never get a chance to hire them, much less retain them. You also have to find out what they need to be successful in a remote environment; show them a path to promotion; and demonstrate that remote, hybrid and on-prem teams are aware of and understand their value to the organization.

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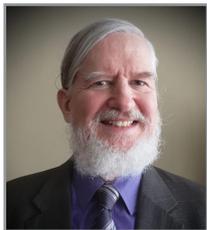
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## ISSUES TO WATCH

**T**he pandemic prompted many state and local government leaders' first venture into remote work. Now, about 75 percent of organizations surveyed by CDG plan to expand their use of remote work. In this Q&A, Peter K. Anderson, a CDG senior fellow, discusses how organizations can successfully forge their way in this new territory.



### **What's driving more permanent adoption of remote work?**

A lot of people have come around to the idea and found that it actually works quite well. They also see that the private sector has been doing it very successfully for years. In fact, the private sector is also embracing remote work more fully. One of the large rental car companies has decided 70 percent of its workforce will continue working from home permanently. Other companies are consolidating sites to account for massive reductions in on-site workers.

### **What do organizations need to consider along the way?**

They need to start by assessing how things have worked so far in terms of network access, speed, capacity and security capabilities at home. "Temporary" meant deploying little to no government equipment at remote sites. Now, organizations will have to revisit that, particularly for employees like IT staff or call center agents who work extensively with digital tools. Mobile devices — whether BYOD or provisioned — also have to be supported in some way. In addition, some tools — for example, printing applications — may need to be both modernized for remote work and scaled back. A municipal stadium CIO recently noted that printing requirements decreased by about 80 percent once his staff went to remote work. That suggested they didn't need to print so much and could probably reduce their printing capabilities — and the costs associated with them.

# Navigating the New Frontier

### **What cultural challenges arise with remote work?**

First, some employees can't work from home due to the nature of their jobs — for example transit operators or utilities personnel. Seeing others in their organization enjoy a work-from-home arrangement can create a sense of inequity, so leaders need to find ways to address that disparity. Second, many people have worked together for years and there's a whole culture around that. Seeing people in a Zoom room is just not the same. That can be difficult for people who thrive on personal connection. Another challenge is work-life balance. If a person already tends to overwork and now there's not a physical space to leave for the day, it can be very difficult to stop working — which ultimately does not serve anybody well.

### **Any advice for managing remote workers?**

Managing remotely is a learned skill. It's one thing to do it temporarily and another to do it on a permanent basis. Some managers think they need to see people in a seat to manage them well and ensure employees are doing what's needed. In the attempt to recreate that in-person experience, they may over-schedule virtual meetings, send numerous texts or require some sort of monitoring via cameras or keystrokes. A better approach is to identify specific time periods where all team members are expected to be available and then free up the rest of the day so workers can focus and work independently as much as possible.

### **How does remote work impact recruitment, especially for hard-to-find talent?**

Having more flexibility and removing the location barrier opens up real opportunities, especially when it comes to competing for specialties like IT. Some states prohibit hiring out of state, but organizations can still widen the pool to include candidates beyond their local headquarters. They can recruit candidates who want to reside in areas with a lower cost of living or who don't have the time to commute, for example. This flexibility also helps attract minorities and women, which in IT work, has been a real challenge.

### **What technologies can help advance the remote work vision?**

Software as a service (SaaS) eases the burden on IT staff, and the total cost of ownership becomes much more appealing if you consider ease of access and security. Most agencies simply can't afford to create that level of security on their own. Upgrades are another advantage. In the past, an organization might wait five years between ERP upgrades, for example. With SaaS, they get quarterly upgrades, and once a year they may even be required to upgrade. That means they'll have the vendor's most current upgrade enterprise-wide, and they're not going to have to find \$5 million every four or five years to do it.