

How to Ease the Transition to Hybrid Work

As difficult as it was to shift into remote work in March 2020, many agencies now find it even more challenging to transition to hybrid work. How do you tweak your policies, processes and technology to support a fluid work environment in which many employees split their time between the office and home?

That was the focus of a recent GovLoop virtual event titled [“4 Ways to Support Work From Anywhere.”](#) Here are the key takeaways from that event.

Communicate Clearly... And Listen Closely

In the early days of remote work, government officials talked about the importance of clear, intentional communications. As employees move into a hybrid environment, good communication is as important as ever, said Katy Kale, Deputy Administrator at the U.S. General Services Administration.

In particular, organizational leaders need to focus on interpersonal communications. Rather than just pushing out information, they need to take time to listen to employees, both to ensure they understand what’s been said and to hear their concerns.

“We need to make sure that we are spelling things out, but at other times we need to be actively listening,” Kale said. “We need to check back to make sure everybody’s having the same understanding. And, if not, we need to make sure that we’re addressing any conflicts as they arise.”

One simple technique is paraphrasing, she said. When someone makes an important point, try expressing what you heard, and asking if you got it right.

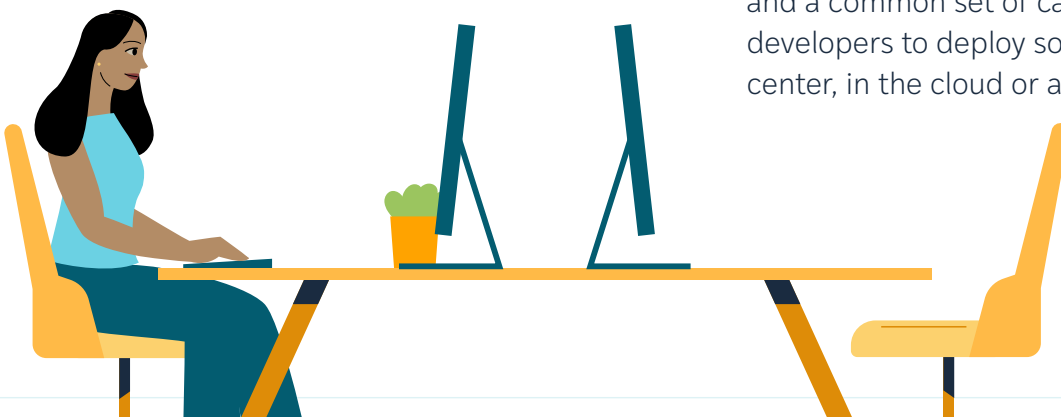
Provide a Seamless Experience for Your Developers

One of the challenges of working in a hybrid work environment is providing your employees with technology that works no matter where those employees are located. This is especially challenging when it comes to software development, said John Dvorak, Chief Technology Officer for Red Hat’s North America Public Sector, which provides enterprise-level development and automation tools and platforms.

Agencies run the risk of ending up with one set of development tools for software running on premises, another for software in the cloud, and yet another for systems in the field, Dvorak said.

In effect, an agency can end up being a de facto product company, spending an inordinate amount of time and energy trying to build and maintain those tools and make them work together effectively, he said.

The alternative is to adopt an automation platform designed to work across the hybrid environment. For example, Red Hat’s OpenShift platform provides a consistent user experience and a common set of capabilities that enable developers to deploy software in the data center, in the cloud or at the edge, said Dvorak.



Require Return to Office Only When Necessary

At present, many organizations are pushing employees to return to the office, but a blanket mandate is not always necessary, said Jonathan Feldman, Chief Information Officer for Wake County, N.C.

The question is whether, for any given job, in-person work is what HR calls a bona fide occupational qualification, Feldman said. That is, can you objectively state that a person can't do their job if they are not on site?

Clearly, in-person work is a must for people providing services to constituents at public facilities or technicians working on equipment in the field. But for many employees, that's just not the case.

The Wake County IT team is a case in point. The IT team is fully remote, with some working locally but others scattered across ten states. The fact is, most employees can do their jobs from anywhere, so it doesn't make sense to mandate in-person or even hybrid work, Feldman said.

If you push people back to the office unnecessarily, "you might lose some of your best and brightest," he said.

Turn to Tech to Ease Work Burdens

Not everyone agency can turn to remote workers to augment its staff. For example, as noted earlier, remote work is not an option for field technicians. Except that it is, in a manner of speaking.

Drone technology is emerging as a critical tool for various kinds of field work, said Justin Gedney, Senior Systems Engineer at Lyme Technology Solutions, which the U.S. Small Business Administration has certified as a HUBzone firm.

In many cases, when it comes to observing equipment, structures or terrain, a person can cover ground a lot more efficiently and effectively using an unmanned aircraft system.

"One UAS platform can be equipped with different sensors and attachments that collect data from different sources — and that can collect more accurate data — that then can be analyzed and processed more effectively with our storage and our edge compute devices," Gedney said.

Lyme Technology Solutions works with edge computing solutions from Dell Technologies. Dell's servers and workstations are well-suited for processing the large volumes of data collected by UAS platforms for use in mapping, surveying, environmental monitoring, and more, he said.

*To get more insights,
[watch the full event on demand.](#)*

