

Managing Virtual Teams and Boosting Workforce Culture and Retention

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SPOTLIGHT



UNDERWRITTEN BY



Introduction

Adapting to change is a critical part of professional development. So is improving communications across teams, especially in a virtual environment, and managing your career growth while investing in others.

That's why public servants need practical resources to meet these and other pressing challenges. But where do you start? How do you take those insights and actually put them into action while juggling many other priorities?

Well, even in the midst of change and uncertainty, more than half of the GovLoop community said that professional development and learning new skills is a priority right now.

Is professional development and learning new skills a priority for you right now?



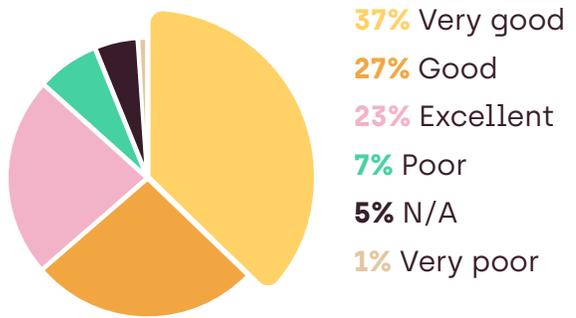
So we put together this actionable and easy-to-use resource for you to review and start implementing today. In it, we highlight two key issues that agencies are grappling with as they seek to better understand and support remote employees:

1. Managing virtual teams
2. Promoting workforce culture and retention

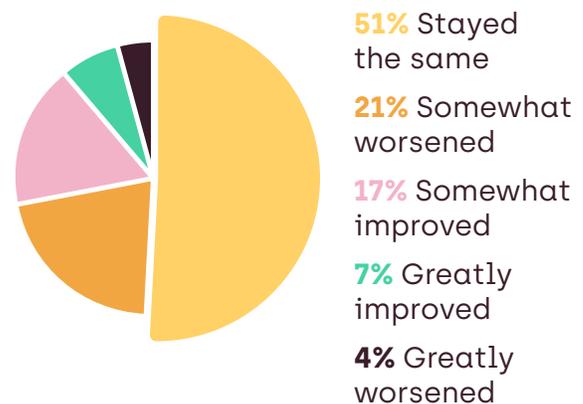
For each section, we provide a brief summary around the issue, detail tactical steps you can take to respond, and provide you with a team activity and personal resources to begin putting into practice what you learn. Let's dive in!

In September 2020, we surveyed 318 GovLoop community members to learn what's top of mind for govies responding to workforce changes.

How would you rate your organization's ability to adapt to working in a remote environment?



How did the shift to remote work affect your ability to interact with your manager and other leaders?



5 Pointers for Employee Retention in the New Normal

As agencies continue to be resilient and adjust operations, approaches and procedures, it's critical to not forget about your employees. They are arguably the most valuable asset in weathering these challenges and achieving your mission. Essential employee care means considering five questions.

1. Can we fill empty seats?

Opportunity: If you have unfilled positions that put pressure on other employees or leave pieces of projects undone, now is the perfect time to hire for those vacancies. From position description to interviewing to onboarding, a process that works smoothly and quickly allows you to nab great candidates and fulfill needs.

2. Can we connect deeper with our people?

Opportunity: Virtual work is good — some agencies are seeing record levels of productivity. But nothing can replace human connections. Inquiring about how things are going or how employees are handling challenges allows managers to suggest personalized forms of self-care, such as flexibility in the workday.

3. Can we create culture without an office?

Opportunity: Remote teams can get a big boost in energy and creativity by engaging with one another. An energized workforce is a successful workforce. The task now is to recreate some of that office comradery and culture. Think about team lunches while connecting over virtual platforms or assigning partners to check in with one other.

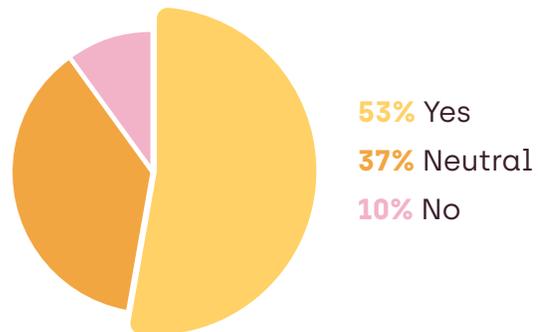
Dig Deeper

There are eight ways you might be negatively impacting coworkers.

Read these scenarios.

Tired of forced morale-building events?
Try this instead.

My supervisor recognizes and appreciates the contributions I've made while working remotely, compared to in the office:



4. Can we look at our policies with fresh eyes?

Opportunity: What worked before may no longer make sense or be practical for employees working remotely. This extraordinary time is an opportunity to evolve how government works. Even if offices reopen, allowing telecommuting may make more sense now that employees have had months to work out the kinks and managers have seen proof points.

5. Can we move forward?

Opportunity: Your strategic plan may be a mess, but now is not the time to drop into a holding pattern. Reassess your plans and adjust for new realities. Start moving forward by taking small steps. Look at your current state and your desired future state and identify gaps. Be more agile.

Simple Ways to Foster Kindness, Respect and a Sense of Belonging

We used to count on small talk in the hallways to connect with team members. Or we'd swing by someone's desk to check in. But how can we still make meaningful connections in the virtual world? Here are eight ways to ensure your colleagues feel seen.

1. Show that you care.

Show that you care about your employees by authentically checking in on all of them. Right now, during this relentless pandemic, everyone needs to be asked how they are doing and if they need any help or support.

2. Make everyone feel visible.

Consider who in your office might be getting overlooked or even worse, might be feeling invisible. Think of small ways you can build a better relationship with these employees. This could be as simple as learning one new thing about each of them.

3. Respect their expertise.

One way to show your employees that you respect their expertise is by asking for their advice. Go beyond praising their work by asking them if they could share with you some of their presentation tips.

4. Compliment their resiliency.

If you know someone who has experienced a difficult time and has managed it well, compliment them for their resiliency. Honor the strength they have shown during this challenging time by sharing this observation with them.

5. Be receptive.

Look for ways to show you are approachable and receptive. When someone asks for a minute of your time, take five minutes at some point in your day to talk to them.

6. Enrich them professionally.

Brainstorm some topics your team would benefit from and hold a few development sessions. Helping your employees in their development shows that you take their professional growth seriously.

7. Establish a valuable career connection.

Help employees get closer to their career aspirations by making a valuable connection for them. Introduce your employees to someone in your network who can help advance their career development.

8. Have meaningful conversations.

Posing thoughtful questions and having meaningful conversations can help employees feel admired. Ask your team something like, "What has been one of your biggest challenges and how did you overcome it?" or "What is your proudest accomplishment?" Asking these kinds of questions and allowing everyone to share creates special moments among team members as they learn more about one another.

Dig Deeper

Do you want to connect with your team in a deeper way?

Lead with compassion.

Looking to build strong relationships across your organization? Skip-level meetings can help.

Get started.



Let science help make your next hire

Enhance your hiring process by gaining insights from the behavioral data in Infor's Talent Science®. Discover the top five characteristics for remote worker success and bring them into your organization.

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What Data Can Tell You About Current and Future Employees

An interview with Marcus Mossberger, Industry and Solution Strategy Director, Infor

No matter how massive, minute or complex an agency's mission, each one has a common purpose: They're in the business of people.

But the nature of that business has drastically changed in response to COVID-19. Many agencies are operating in a virtual environment and can't rely on instincts or in-person interactions to manage a workforce they can't physically see.

Especially now, they need a data-driven, technology-enabled approach to matching people with government priorities, said Marcus Mossberger, Industry and Solution Strategy Director at Infor. **"We look at the cognitive, cultural and behavioral data of individuals to make better decisions for and about our people."**

Infor specializes in talent management software that uses behavioral and performance data to select, develop and retain the right people — a space that government leaders are increasingly tapping into.

Mossberger explained how behavioral data, which can be used to analyze individual characteristics such as humility and acceptance of authority, can help agencies better understand employees, their needs and how their talents align with the mission. Behavioral data can help agencies:

1. Respond to the short and long-term implications of remote work on employees.

"We're in a bit of a new world," Mossberger said. "Candidly, I don't think we're going back to any degree of normalcy for the near future."

Operating under this assumption, how might you use data to better understand employees' adaptiveness to remote work for an extended period or indefinitely?

"There are certain behavioral characteristics that predict people may be a better fit for the remote work lifestyle," he said. "Think of things like self-discipline, pace and need for recognition."

Technology can help agencies think through these scenarios and make suggestions for interventions and positive reinforcements when needed.

2. Strategically plan for workforce reskilling and future jobs.

There's no question that the federal workforce will be doing a lot more around reskilling in the future. Reskilling involves learning a completely new skill set based on a demonstrated aptitude.

"When you look at the future, we're preparing generations for jobs that don't even exist yet," Mossberger said. "In today's environment, having to do it virtually adds another factor to consider."

Behavioral analytics can help agencies identify transferable skills across the workforce. Although it's difficult to predict every skill that will be required, employees who exude emotional intelligence and are good at problem-solving are often ideal candidates for reskilling.

3. Understand various teams and how they operate most efficiently.

How teams functioned in the office isn't an absolute indication of how they will operate in a remote environment. Having behavioral data to support or refute assumptions about team dynamics is key.

Understanding what variables, such as skill sets and environment, impact team dynamics is crucial for hiring as well.

COVID-19 has made widely dispersed workforces the future of agencies, Mossberger said. Behavioral data can help agencies understand what's best for their employees and more readily adapt to change.

Planning Performance Appraisal Success in a Virtual World

Has your assigned work changed from the beginning of the performance period? Regardless, it is never too early to think about how to plan for performance appraisal success, especially in a virtual world.

Know the Standards

- What is the description of the highest rating standard in your performance appraisal system?
- Does your assigned work still align with the standards in a virtual world?
- Do regulations allow for flexibility in doing your work?
- Can you streamline delivery processes?
- What technology does your IT department have now that can assist you?
- Use brainstorming apps like ideaboardz, realtimeboard or Bubbl.s to generate ideas and innovate.

Over-communicate and get things done sooner than promised. And, most importantly, request a meeting with your supervisor to review your ideas. Bring a variety of suggestions to update your work and meet the highest standards of performance in a virtual world.

Get Feedback

- What level of performance is the supervisor expecting?
- Share this outline with them to ensure you get effective performance feedback.
- Create questions using the keywords in the performance standards to gather feedback about your work.
- Ask how you can improve your performance to meet the highest rating while working virtually.

Do video meetings, rather than phone calls, so that you can identify visual cues that indicate agreement or confusion. Document the feedback and send a thankyou email. In the email, summarize what you heard. Emphasize how you will continue to do what you do well, and how you will work to do better. And reference the keywords in the highest rating when you mention your accomplishments and what you are confident you will improve.

Make a Plan

- A great way to plan the alignment of your work with the highest-level performance standard is to create a matrix.
- Insert the performance standards at the top, and include work that meets each standard in a corresponding cell below.
- Start today by scheduling 15 minutes to work on the matrix each day. This way, when you have to complete your performance write-up, you have everything you need.

Dig Deeper

Ensuring a successful and productive relationship with your boss is a two-way street.

Learn to manage up.

What's the difference between good and bad bosses?

Know the difference.

What's Next for You?

Your learning journey doesn't have to end here. If you found this resource helpful, make sure to **download our full professional development playbook**. In it, we cover additional topics, including:

- Navigating change management with tools, technology and empathy
- Improving communication
- Embracing diversity and inclusion as a core value
- Mapping career goals

Personal reflection:

Take five minutes to ask yourself this question and provide honest feedback: What have you done to better understand and connect with your manager and colleagues in recent weeks? What's one actionable step you can take to regularly improve that connection?

Positive: What's one positive thing that has happened this week? This can be a personal win or team-oriented.

Interesting: What's something interesting that you've observed or experienced that you want to share?

Negative: Are there any negative or need-to-know issues you'd like to discuss? Don't be discouraged by "bad news." This is an opportunity to solicit help and ensure everyone is on the same page about an issue.

Try This Today!

Connecting with your team

One approach we use at GovLoop to discuss change is PIN updates. Using this approach allows you to share positive updates (P), interesting updates (I) and negative or need-to-know issues (N). Try this format at your next team meeting or individual check-ins.



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