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RETHINKING HYBRID WORK IN GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

How trust and technology will shape success in hybrid work

GN Making Life Sound Better

Hybrid work is the future of public institutions

In order to succeed with hybrid work, public organizations need to consider the changing nature of trust and technology.

In a recent OECD report entitled The Future of (Remote?) Work in the Public Service, Fatima Fonseca, the Portuguese Secretary of State for Innovation and Administrative Modernization, noted that "we have a unique opportunity to accelerate important transformations because now we have a collective understanding of what is possible, what is needed, and what can go wrong." She reported that 86% of the administration's managers agree that now is the right time to discuss new working models because things are fresh in our minds. Similarly, 65% of managers and workers consider that it's possible to continue teleworking most of the time.[1]

Our own data strongly confirms these trends. Of the 5,036 global knowledge workers we recently surveyed in our Hybrid Ways of Working 2021 Global Report, 75% report that they want to be able to work from anywhere in the future.[2] Additionally, having the autonomy to make their own decisions about how, when, and where they work is essential: 61% said they prefer that management allows them to come into the office when they need to and work from home when they need to. Similarly, 65% want to be able to set their own schedule in the future.

Needless to say, in a hybrid working world where employees will work from the office, home, or another place entirely, public servants will be more distributed than ever before. This creates a pressing need to rethink the relationship between organizations and employees, as well as the role audio and video technology will play in ushering in a new era of public management.

To make sure that public institutions can continue to serve both their employees and their constituents in a hybrid future, it's crucial that leaders adopt new management strategies to foster trust both within their organization and with the broader public. This will require a delicate balance of new methods of management, inclusive communication, and secure communications technology. In this guide, we provide a roadmap for organizations to succeed in hybrid working to the benefit of society at large.

To successfully implement hybrid work, public sector leaders will need to build trust on two fronts: internally in their leaders and employees, and externally by ensuring secure and reliable communication with citizens.

Julie Klinge Johansen,
VP of Public Sector, Jabra

[1] The Future of (Remote?) Work in the Public Service

[2] Jabra Hybrid Ways of Working: 2021 Global Report

Growing from remote work: Three core truths

To build resilient and inclusive hybrid organizations, leaders must grow from the challenges of the past 18 months.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, leaders were tackling a multitude of challenges simultaneously, impacting them just as acutely as those they lead. Naturally, they responded by implementing reactive remote working strategies to ensure continuity of operations and minimize disturbances. But as we move away from legislatively mandated remote working to strategically implemented hybrid working, it can help to identify what we've actually learned from this remote work experience. Summing up the findings from our research and other key studies, here is a set of core truths about remote working, which will remain relevant as leaders develop their hybrid work strategy.

Truth #1: Knowledge workers can be just as productive remotely, but are more so for some tasks than others

When workers were forced to work from home in an almost overnight transition, leaders worried about the potential impacts on productivity. But research has shown that knowledge workers have actually been more productive at home during the pandemic.[3] The change in work environment essentially allowed workers to focus on the individual work that really mattered, spend more time interacting with clients and business partners, and get drawn into fewer large meetings.

Our data shows that employees equally prefer to work from home and the office when it comes to individual tasks such as concentration, creative thinking, and administrative work. However, when it comes to more collaborative, socially oriented tasks such as training new team members and presenting material, they prefer the office space. Encourage your employees to consider how their tasks align with the spaces to which they have access and support them with the right tools to be productive in those spaces.

[3] Research: Knowledge Workers Are More Productive At Home

GROWING FROM REMOTE WORK

Truth #2: Physical presence cannot and should not be used to evaluate an employee's performance or value to the organization

Studies have shown that in-office employees are more likely to receive a promotion than remote employees.[4] This is because when employees are in the office, it's easy for managers to observe their engagement in work and culture – engagement which often informs, whether intentionally or unintentionally, an employee's performance evaluation. But the remote work experiment of the pandemic has forced us to rethink these types of biases. As employees now see a hybrid future where they will work in multiple locations, 69% say they would rather managers focus on their output – that is, the actual work they deliver – over time spent in the office. Moving forward, it's critical that leaders decouple performance from presence to ensure fair opportunities for all employees, based solely on their performance and work outputs. They must find strategies to ensure fair evaluation and recognition, regardless of location.

## Truth #3: Technology is central to the experience

During the pandemic, technology has enabled us to remain safe and productive from wherever we are. But at a more fundamental level, it has also given us the opportunity to revisit how we regard our work life and the possibilities of how work could be arranged in the longer term. With the rise of platforms like Microsoft Teams or Zoom and emerging channels of both synchronous and asynchronous communications, we now have many more options for how we can execute tasks and optimize our time.

As 84% of knowledge workers believe that technology can help all employees have equal access to opportunities at work, managers have the added responsibility to explore the different tools available and how they can give the best work experience possible to their employees. Without a robust and easy-to-use tech ecosystem in place, true flexibility will be difficult to achieve, and productivity will be sub-optimal.

Technology is critical to a work-from-anywhere future

'Collaboration technology is critical to a work-from-anywhere future.'

Agree
Disagree

	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers
Agree	74%	84%	86%	86%
Disagree	27%	16%	14%	13%
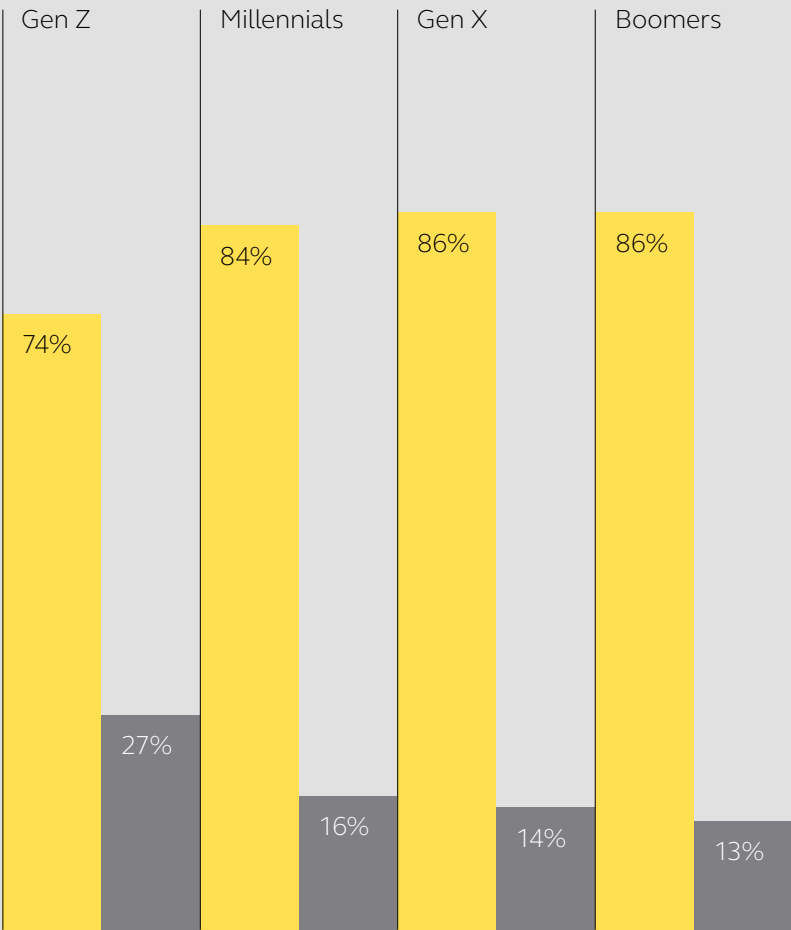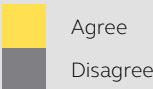
Managing hybrid teams with trust

Trust begets trust. In order to gain it from constituents, leaders first need to trust the people who have dedicated their career to serving them.

Trust is the cornerstone of public service. It's also the foundation of good management. To build your organization's reputation of trustworthiness amongst the general public, leaders of public institutions need to start by cultivating a culture of inclusivity and trust within the organization itself. While the on-site supervision of traditional ways of working was often used as a means of understanding teams' output and focus, the distributed nature of the workforce in hybrid working will complicate these methods of trust-building. Here are two management methods that leaders can implement to cultivate a workforce built on mutual trust.

Establish a principles-based hybrid working strategy

For the better part of a year, much of the hybrid work discussion has centered around how many days employees should come into the office or if they can continue to work from home. As a result, many organizations are beginning to require that employees be present at least two or three days per week. This is an example of a policy that serves as part of a larger hybrid working strategy.

As an alternative to a policy-based strategy, leaders should consider communicating key hybrid principles, which will guide their organization or their team's approach to hybrid. A principles-based alternative to policies in a hybrid working strategy sets a standard for how managers expect their team to operate – a mutually-agreed standard which is optimal and encouraged but not enforced by rigid policies on where and when they need to work. In lieu of enforcement, managers need to foster high-trust team environments.

Luckily, hybrid work itself can be the part of the solution to both the question of productivity and trust. In addition to the 79% of workers who believe that a hybrid work model will allow them to ultimately be more productive, our data suggests that it will also be a benefit to trust in teams. When asked how a hybrid work environment would affect multiple aspects of workplace relationships, 89% of knowledge workers indicated that it would either increase or maintain their sense of trust in their team.[5] And because hybrid work will have a positive effect on trust, a principles-based approach to leadership can be highly effective. To sustain these levels of trust within your teams and boost your employees' satisfaction with their hybrid setup, consider the principles of your organization and how they may be used to guide your approach to hybrid.

When leaders are very strict on saying what people should not do, employees get more concerned and have a higher need for reassurance, which stalls productivity. Having too many strict rules makes things complicated and frustrates people. People can really deal very well with autonomy, and they appreciate the flexibility.

*Holger Reisinger,
SVP, Jabra*

MANAGING IN HYBRID WORK

Spotlight your tech strategy to attract top talent

In Deloitte's The State of the State 2020-2021 report, many public sector leaders noted "the potential for more remote working" and how it may help them "access wider pools of talent as well as streamline their estate needs." One leader even stated that "geography is irrelevant and you've got to think about how this means we can access talent from around the country."[6] To do this, however, they'll need to have the right tech strategy in place.

During the remote work transition, the lack of digital maturity in many organizations became rapidly apparent. While some distributed organizations which had been operating remotely for years had the tools in place to transition seamlessly, many did not. And for the latter, this lack of proper tools and technologies was felt most of all by the employees who relied on them to communicate and execute their daily tasks. So now, when looking for a job, employees will be looking for employers that take a "virtual-first" approach to work; they'll be making sure that their prospective employer will invest in their ability to stay connected. In fact, 80% say they would rather work for an employer that invests in technology to connect the workforce in the hybrid future.

Investment in superior, professional technology that seamlessly connects teams will play the same role that many on-site benefits such as lounge areas or lunch plans have played in the past: it will signal that you value your employees and care about their wellbeing. Showing that your organization not only allows employees to work flexibly, but also enables them to do it with tools fit for a flexible world, will be a major differentiator in the search for top talent.

Top benefits of technology for an inclusive workforce

Helping provide equal access across different work environments
44%

Helping employees feel comfortable with virtual workspaces that are accessible anywhere
42%

Helping make everyone feel included and represented in meetings
41%

Reducing meeting fatigue
37%

Giving employees equal screen space
30%

Professional technology fit for a hybrid public sector

With employees working in multiple locations, their communications will need to be more secure than ever. New communications tools will help both public servants and constituents feel safe when working together for a better future.

Government agencies are increasingly becoming the target of cyber- and ransomware attacks. The Center for Strategic and International Studies, an American research institute focused on security policy, keeps a detailed record of every significant global cyberattack against governments since 2006.[7] Totaling more than 60 pages, the list is a stark reminder of the variety and sophistication of many of these attacks, and how vulnerable communications channels are to corruption by malicious actors.

As government agencies around the world prepare to implement hybrid working models, they need to counterbalance this increased worker distribution with flexible, professional technological infrastructure that is built to encrypt data for a more secure communications experience.

Flexible devices built for military-grade privacy

Wireless communications tools such as headsets are becoming more desirable as employees increasingly move between work locations; they're simply more flexible and easier to transport. But without the right security standards, many of these tools may be vulnerable to hacking or signal interference. For example, many consider consumer audio devices quite convenient, but they lack the necessary encryption capabilities to properly secure the sensitive subject matter of many public sector conversations.

To ensure that the wireless communications tools you choose offer robust, reliable security across all communication points – pairing, authentication, and encryption – IT decision makers must ask a few key questions. Have the devices been independently tested and verified for military and government security requirements? Can they be managed remotely in a safe and efficient manner, so they always remain up to date on security firmware updates? These are some of the crucial considerations for wireless communications hardware.

Beyond this, other features will offer an added layer of security. Whether for wired or wireless audio devices, high-quality noise-cancelling microphones and advanced digital signal processing algorithms filter out background noise and surrounding conversations, ensuring that no sensitive information is transmitted from your side of a call. This will safeguard every audio interaction you have with your constituents and make sure they're fully protected from end to end.

[7]Significant Cyber Incidents

Because the transition to hybrid is organizational change at a mass scale, we need to make it comfortable for people to join the conversation at their own pace. As of now, when many people think about hybrid, it isn't just standard knowledge that they can work from anywhere and that they'll need a new set of tools. We need to combine inclusive communication and innovative technology to thrive in a hybrid future.

Aurangzeb Khan,
SVP, Jabra

SECURITY

Edge AI for secure end-to-end video communication

Of course, audio devices aren't the only we way communicate. During the remote work transition of the pandemic, videoconferencing became a central fixture of our work lives. Now, with workers both in the office and in other locations, this video collaboration will continue, but with an increased level of complexity.

Intelligent video systems help to address these new layers of complexity. By collecting and processing data to enable new video features such as whiteboarding, active speaker tracking, or Picture-in-Picture, they facilitate a more interactive and humanized collaboration experience.

With increased data collection, however, comes the need for increased data protection. When we're on video, both our personal data and the data of our surroundings are captured. This means that if you're sitting in a government office, everything within the video frame can be seen. And even if you're using a feature which obscures your background, the background data must still be sent to the cloud for processing. This transfer to a cloud processor opens up yet another channel of vulnerability for the sensitive data being processed.

On-device artificial intelligence – more commonly known as edge AI – offers a countering solution to this issue. By collecting, anonymizing, and processing all data on the device itself, edge AI-enabled video systems don't need to rely on external or cloud processers, essentially limiting the number of transfer points at which sensitive personal data becomes vulnerable to compromise. This means that data from confidential calls between public sector employees, constituents, or any partners will be secure from end to end. Moving forward, IT decision makers should consider the value of edge AI in providing a more secure communications experience for their organizations.
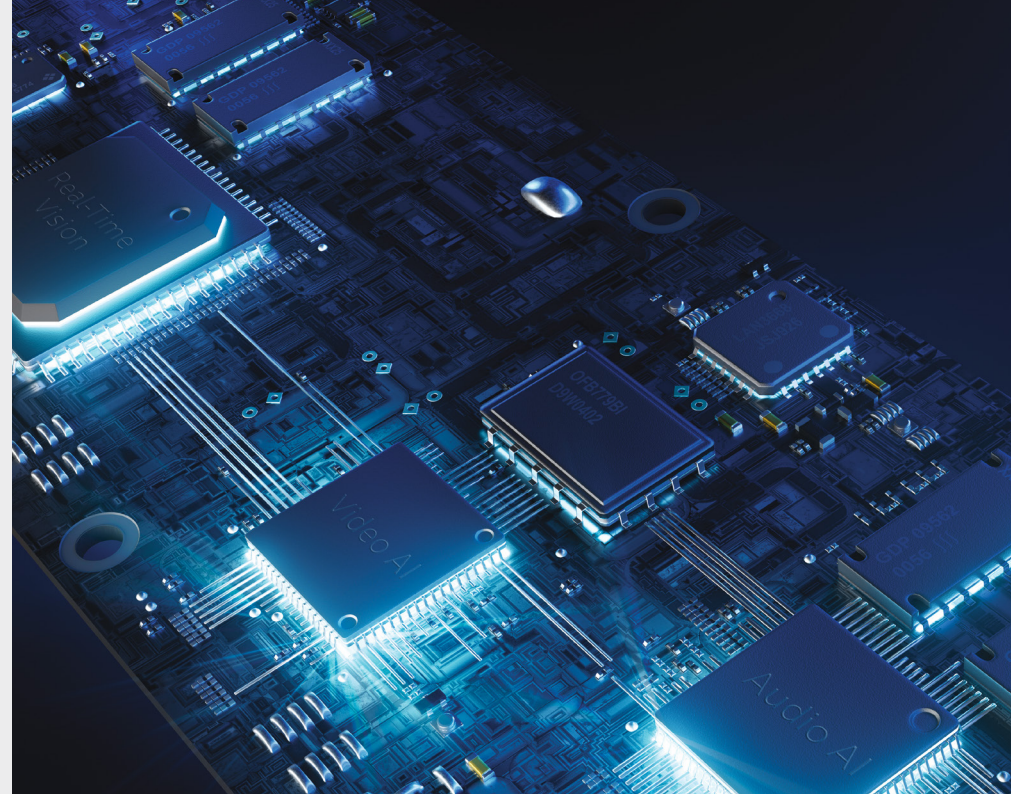
Leveraging inclusive management and secure technology for increased trust

Building constituent trust will rely on the proper implementation of inclusive and secure communications technologies.

The environment in which public sector employees work is rapidly changing. With the office, the home, and almost any other location now considered a viable workspace, the complexity of our communications with colleagues and constituents will increase. These changes in the way we work will require new inclusive management strategies as well as better audio and video technologies for a more secure communications experience when working across multiple locations.

In the future, leaders and managers will need to consider how the way in which they implement hybrid working will impact employee satisfaction and wellbeing. To give everyone the flexibility and autonomy they need while making sure there's still a shared understanding of best practices, leaders should establish principles in place of policies in their hybrid working strategy. And with workers becoming more and more tech conscious, making sure that you not only allow them to work flexibly, but enable them to do it with the right professional tools and technology, will be key.

For IT decision makers, another set of considerations is necessary; they must acquire communications technologies that enable employee flexibility and interactive human connection, without compromising on security. Audio hardware must meet military-grade security requirements, designed for communications encryption and remote device management. And for video, edge AI-enabled devices will provide a highly humanized and interactive collaboration experience, while limiting the transfer of sensitive data to external services for processing.

These management strategies and professional communications tools will be essential to the future of trust in public institutions. Leaders must build strong organizational cultures where employees feel valued and empowered to do their best, while giving them the tools to make sure they can do so in a safe and secure manner.

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