

Video at the Core of Government Telework

Overcome Resistance with Face-to-Face Interaction



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White Paper



What You Will Learn

Governments are accelerating adoption of telework to support continuity of operations (COOP), reduce costs, enhance recruitment and retention, and increase environmental sustainability. This white paper, intended for executives planning telework strategies, explains the essential role of videoconferencing, or telepresence, for engaging and managing a remote government workforce:

- Enabling face-to-face interaction between employees and managers builds trust.
- Team interactions are more efficient when participants can see each other's facial expressions to gauge their reactions.
- Being able to see coworkers helps teleworkers feel more engaged and contributes to job satisfaction.

The State of Telework Today

The definition of telework has expanded from working at home to working anywhere outside headquarters, including remote offices, co-working facilities, or rural healthcare clinics. Work has become what you do, not where you are.

With the passage of the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010, government agencies have a mandate to prepare their organizations to implement telework in order to:

- Strengthen COOP plans
- Reduce real estate costs
- Improve work-life balance to attract and retain top talent

In its 2010 Telework report to Congress, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) reported that nearly 114,000 federal employees teleworked in 2009¹. Seventy-two percent of agencies had integrated telework into their COOP planning, and 33 of the 79 agencies that provided data reported cost savings as a result of telework.

1. U.S. Office of Personnel Management, "Status of Telework in the Federal Government," February 2011

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Toppling Barriers to Telework

Despite the clear benefits of government telework, some resistance persists. In the OPM study, 47 percent of respondents who experienced barriers to telework mentioned management resistance. This finding reinforces the conclusion of a 2010 study by Booz Allen Hamilton and the Partnership for Public Service, which listed managers' top concerns as:

- Teleworker productivity and accessibility
- Teleworker alienation or disengagement
- Impeded interactions or collaboration
- Data security
- Agency collaboration tools

Notably, the first three concerns on the list involve emotion and perception, not technology.

Understandably, employees who pick up on their manager's resistance may hesitate to telework. A study of Silicon Valley telecommuters by the Mineta Transportation Institute correlated the number of days of teleworking with employee satisfaction². As expected, people who teleworked 2 to 3 days a week were more committed to the organization and more satisfied with life in general than those who did not telework. The more surprising finding is that people who telecommuted 4 to 5 days a week were, on average, only slightly more satisfied than people who did not telework. While the study authors did not propose an explanation, follow-up focus groups suggest a lack of senior management support for telework and an organizational mindset that workers have to be physically present to be effective.



2. Mineta Transportation Institute, "Facilitating Telecommuting: Exploring the Role of Telecommuting Intensity and Differences Between Telecommuters and Non-Telecommuters," June 2010.

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Telepresence as a Strategy for Engaging and Managing Teleworkers

The public sector workforce has become more dispersed, and many teams include at least one team member in a remote office. Cisco® TelePresence® technology helps these virtual teams work efficiently by enabling face-to-face interaction. Continuing improvements in the telepresence user experience and cost models now make it practical to extend the office boundary even further away from headquarters—to workers in the field, at airports, and at home.

Telepresence helps overcome many of the barriers to telework. Enabling employees and managers to interact face-to-face helps to build trust, fosters effective teamwork and collaboration, increases meeting efficiency, and even helps people avoid meeting fatigue.

Building Trust

Trust is the main reason managers hesitate to promote telework, according to the Booz Allen Hamilton survey. Managers want reassurance that teleworkers will be as productive as they would be if the manager could spontaneously sit down with them. Telepresence helps bridge the trust gap by enabling managers to meet with remote team members as often as necessary, face-to-face. With modern endpoints, initiating a telepresence call is as easy as a simple phone call. Either party simply dials the other, and the system automatically turns on video if both endpoints have the capability.

Fostering Effective Teamwork and Collaboration

Some managers fear that without casual workplace interaction, so-called water-cooler communications, employees may become isolated or disengaged. Telepresence enables team members in any location to greet each other face-to-face, helping them feel more engaged and part of the team. As early as 1992, people have reported that video makes their interactions more satisfying, and that the perceived value of video increases proportionately with video quality.

Telepresence also provides the visual cues that help teleworkers accurately gauge other people's level of agreement or understanding, helping them interact naturally. For example, seeing a remote colleague's raised eyebrow, head shake, or mouth opening to speak, teleworkers can stop to ask what the coworker thinks, contributing to more efficient meetings and better decision making. Conversely, without these visual cues, the teleworker may be perceived as less socially adept.

3. John C. Tang and Ellen Isaacs, "Studies of Multimedia Supported Collaboration, Sun Microsystems, 1992

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Increasing Meeting Efficiency

In voice-only conferences, participants inadvertently talk over each other because they cannot tell whether the current speaker has finished or is simply taking a breath. Participants may also be tempted to multitask, by sending emails, for example. Meetings take longer when people are not paying full attention or need to ask the speaker to repeat a question.

Telepresence provides the visual cues that make team meetings and one-to-one interactions more efficient. What's more, knowing that others can see them, participants are also less likely to multitask, giving everyone in the meeting more confidence that others are paying attention. These factors can contribute to shorter meetings.

Avoiding Phone Fatigue

Anecdotally, some people report they feel more tired after a voice conference than after an in-person meeting of the same length. Researchers speculate that listener fatigue results from people having to work harder to compensate for the lack of visual cues and for the missing audio frequencies in telephone conversations. Telepresence can minimize listener fatigue by providing visual cues and ultra-wideband audio, creating an experience as natural as being in the same room.



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Missions Enhanced by Telepresence

A wide variety of federal, state, and local agencies are currently using telepresence to enhance telework for employees working from home and in remote offices and clinics. Mission benefits include:

- **COOP:** A Department of Defense (DoD) agency uses Cisco TelePresence Movi software to transform teleworkers' laptops into high-definition video systems. Employees can work efficiently and effectively from home during severe weather, disasters, and family emergencies. Other agencies use personal Cisco TelePresence appliances.
- **Retention of expertise after base closures:** To retain experts whose bases were closed under the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) program, DoD agencies have established offices where these resources can telework. At the Mark Center Building in Alexandria, Virginia, among others, DoD employees use Cisco TelePresence Movi to telework.
- **Expanded access to healthcare:** Telepresence enables clinicians in remote clinics to deliver specialist care to citizens in rural areas. For example, the Florida Department of Health uses telepresence to connect specialists in interacting with abused children with emergency rooms throughout the state. Similarly, through a partnership between Indian Health Services and Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, an Indian Health Services clinician who believes a patient is exhibiting signs of depression or anxiety can spontaneously initiate a telepresence call with a behavioral health clinician, who can interact face-to-face with the patient to determine if mental health services are warranted.
- **More effective training:** Telepresence helps trainers better gauge remote participants' engagement. In addition, participants are less likely to multitask, helping them pay closer attention.

What You Need

To offer telepresence as part of a telework program, government organizations need the following technology:

- **Secure remote connectivity:** Employees need to be able to securely connect to the headquarters network from home or any other location. One option is Cisco AnyConnect™ Secure Mobility Client, for always-on VPN connectivity. Another is Cisco TelePresence Expressway, which enables teleworkers' telepresence traffic to securely traverse agency and remote firewalls.
- **Telepresence infrastructure:** Agencies need a video communications server for call admission control, endpoint management, and meeting scheduling. The infrastructure can be on-premises or cloud-based.
- **Telepresence endpoints:** These can range from laptops using client software to high-end, dedicated appliances providing lifelike, full-size video and high-fidelity audio.
- **Media-optimized network, or medianet:** IT teams need the ability to allocate the bandwidth needed for an excellent video experience without degrading the performance of other applications on the network. This requires quality of service (QoS) functionality in network switches and routers. Public sector IT teams also need the tools to simplify video call monitoring and troubleshooting.

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Why Cisco?

Cisco TelePresence solutions provide unique capabilities that address the needs of government agencies introducing or accelerating telework programs:

- Industry-leading call control: Cisco Unified Communications Manager simplifies the extension of video capabilities to branch offices and home offices.
- End-to-end solution: Working with a single vendor simplifies support and interoperability. Cisco offers all needed technology and services: a wide variety of endpoints, the Cisco TelePresence Video Communication Server, professional services, and the underlying medianet. Cisco medianet technologies provide the intelligence to deliver an excellent video experience while also simplifying monitoring and troubleshooting.
- Simple, high-quality user experience: Cisco TelePresence solutions provide ultra-high-quality video and audio, creating an in-person experience that contributes to high adoption. Employees can schedule and attend Cisco TelePresence meetings as easily as voice-only conferences, another factor encouraging adoption.
- Security: Cisco telework solutions extend the agency's security investments outside the agency walls, all the way to the endpoint in the employee's home or branch office.
- Open standards: Based on open standards, Cisco TelePresence systems can interoperate not only with each other, but also with standards-based endpoints from other vendors. Interoperability extends the life of the agency's existing telepresence endpoints and creates choices for future purchases
- IPv6 compliance: The last IPv4 address has been assigned, so new telepresence endpoints need a way to communicate using IPv6. Most Cisco TelePresence endpoints support IPv6 natively. In addition, the Cisco TelePresence Video Communication Server natively supports IPv4 and IPv6 protocols and endpoints, enabling agencies to continue using older video endpoints.
- Proven performance in the public sector: Cisco TelePresence solutions are widely used in state, local, and federal civilian agencies and in DoD agencies, and have a track record of success.

Conclusion

In an era of government cost cutting, telework is an increasingly appealing option. Setting up employees to work productively from locations other than the office saves real estate and commuting costs while also supporting COOP plans and workforce recruitment.

With telepresence, agencies have an opportunity to make teleworkers as effective and accessible as their peers at headquarters. Adding the visual dimension to team meetings and one-to-one collaboration sessions helps foster trust, teamwork, and engagement.

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For More Information

To learn more about the Cisco telework solutions in government, visit:

http://www.cisco.com/web/strategy/government/us_federal/telework.html

