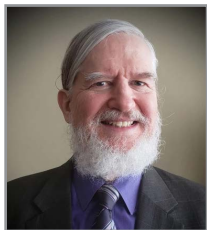


## ISSUES TO WATCH

**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.