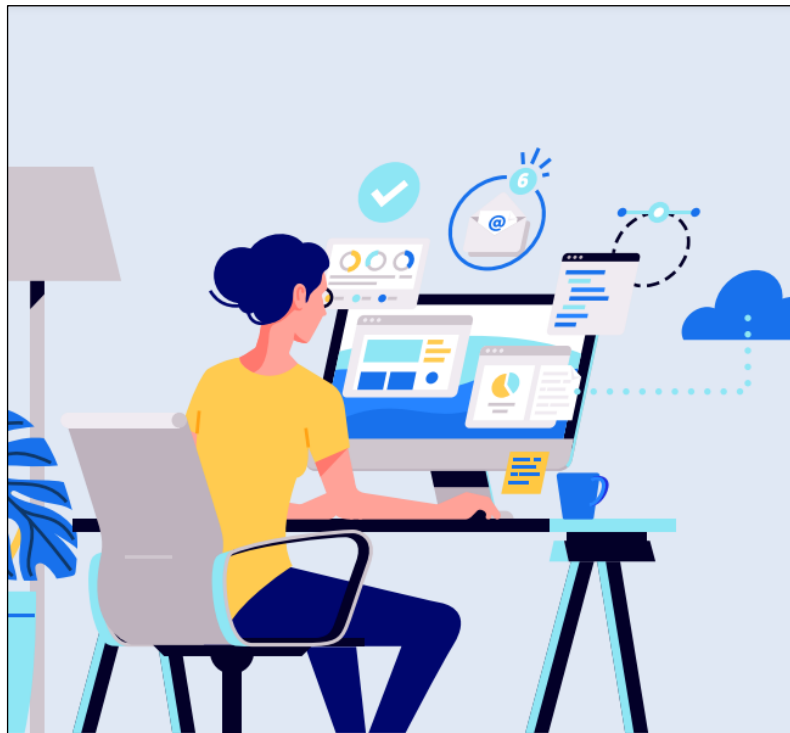




How Agencies Streamline Operations with Agile Workflows

Atlassian Guide



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MARKET TRENDS REPORT



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Introduction

The sudden onset of the coronavirus and the government's response highlighted places where the federal government's digital transformation has succeeded, exposed where it is lagging and created once-in-a-lifetime conditions for agencies to make real and lasting workplace change.

The pandemic hit federal agencies with a seismic event powerful enough to remake government workspaces, most notably with the unprecedented, large-scale shift to remote work and digital services. Now, as the pandemic subsides in the United States, the federal government is analyzing the full impact the crisis has had on agencies' operations, workers, culture, workflows and processes – and exploring opportunities to improve the way government does its work.

Early reviews are mixed. In some areas, government agencies were able to step up and meet the challenges of the pandemic head-on. Given the circumstances of the unplanned, large-scale relocation of employees and the considerable challenges of pulling it off, government workforces made a somewhat seamless – if at times painful – transition to remote work. But the pandemic also exposed gaps, including the persistent challenges of legacy applications that became a blocker for enabling a remote work environment.

The pandemic's aftermath is also revealing that the upheaval has been a catalyst for overcoming significant challenges, such as enabling government employees to work effectively and securely from anywhere. Moreover, with federal workers now familiar with remote work environments and new platforms, agencies now have a rare opportunity to finally raze bureaucratic silos, reroute workflows, create more dynamic channels of communication, speed innovation and improve mission attainment.

In short, the pandemic has emerged as an agent of creative disruption and a catalyst for reimagining how government gets things done.

To learn more about post-pandemic productivity gains in federal agencies – and the IT tools that support those ambitions – GovLoop developed this report with Atlassian, a leader in collaboration and productivity solutions. This report will discuss ways agencies can take advantage of the current opportunity to create more agile and productive workplaces.

By The Numbers

81%

of federal workers say their agency is successful at accomplishing its mission.

3%

of federal workers teleworked daily prior to the pandemic.

59%

of federal workers teleworked every day during the peak of the pandemic.

68%

of federal workers say managers communicate the goals of their organization.

48%

of federal workers reported greatly or somewhat increased work demands because of the pandemic.

23%

of federal workers reported that the pandemic was either extremely or very disruptive to their ability to do their work.

58%

of federal workers say they are satisfied with the involvement they have in decisions affecting their work.

40%

of executives reported that the top benefit of digital transformation is improved operational efficiency.


Agencies Seek More Agile, IT-Enabled Workflows

Challenge: Breaking Free From Status Quo

The primary challenge for government agencies in the post-pandemic era is to capitalize on a rare opportunity to overhaul the way agencies execute their missions, from completing simple tasks to managing complex programs.

Despite ongoing modernization efforts, many government organizations have been stuck in a top-down, linear style of workflow management. This type of approach has created work silos and impeded productive cross-collaboration.

A secondary challenge is resisting the impulse to declare victory and focus on getting “back to normal.” The successful shift of workers to remote work has been a major accomplishment but stopping there would



be premature – and a missed opportunity to modernize government operations. The agility and flexibility that remote work unleashed can be captured and extended in the office and in more familiar telework patterns.

To help employees become more productive, agile, collaborative and effective

wherever they work, agencies need to bring modern workflows to three key areas of work:

Task and Small Group Work Management

Individual task and small group work management covers the lifecycle of a task, from planning and tracking to execution. That includes:

- Prioritizing actions
- Collaborating with others
- Setting deadlines and task assignments
- Tracking, monitoring and reporting on status

It also covers those smaller projects that might have shorter deadlines or don’t need a large set of resources.

“Historically, in government, the project management layer has been well-tooled,” said Jim Dodson, Public Sector Sales Lead at Atlassian. Not the same can be said for “the other two layers, a step higher and a step below,” he said.

Optimizing how this work is managed can add hours back into the day for workers and create whole new workflow efficiencies. Poor task and work management results in missed deadlines, cost overruns and an increased burden across the team.

Project Management

The middle type of government work is often the backbone of any agency’s strategic mission. It focuses on managing complex, highly collaborative projects across multiple departments. This kind of project management involves long-running programs, complex interrelated workflows, multiple stakeholders and auditing.

It’s the essential “tracking and execution of work and connecting it with the overall program,” Dodson said.

Given the complicated nature of government project management, project teams need agile, secure, easy-to-use tools that improve collaboration and intelligently automate the tracking of tasks, milestones, deadlines, assets and even finances.

Complex Program Management

The program management layer of government work comprises oversight and analysis of tasks, work and projects that support strategic and mission-critical initiatives. Complex programs have many stakeholders and sub-projects, requiring the aggregation of team data to track and assess resources, costs and risk.

“Government agencies are still struggling with accountability and transparency into the work that they’re doing and being able to tie it to the overall strategy of the organization,” Dodson said.

What's needed is a "platform that connects all those layers together to give a much broader level of transparency and accountability of the work that's being done, with the ability to drill down to the individual task level if needed," he said.

This ensures that not only are individual tasks being completed and projects are being completed in a fundamental way but that the overall program is meeting its budget objectives and timetables.

Solution: Work-Specific IT Tools

Advancing government capability and effectiveness demands workflows that are more:

- Efficient
- Collaborative
- Transparent and connected to the mission
- Better integrated throughout an agency

Effective IT tools support day-to-day individual task and small group work management and essential project management functions. The most effective tools, however, go beyond supporting the different types of work done by government agencies to provide a holistic, mission-centric view of workflows and processes. They bridge the "disconnect between project or program management and mission success," Dodson said.

Integrating task, project and program management enables greater organizational visibility, enhanced communication and cross-team collaboration.

A platform that connects all those layers together provides a broader level of transparency and accountability of the work being done – as it's happening. A connected platform supports completion of individual tasks and projects while ensuring that the larger program meets budget objectives and timetables. Agencies should be able to see all of that progress in real time across a single platform.

"Managers and executives need transparency and accountability," Dodson said. "The only way they're going to get that in a distributed world is through collaboration tools that provide transparency and the tracking of work to achieve accountability."

Advanced tools "connect the strategy, objectives and goals of the organization to team-level work and the overall strategy of the organization," he said.

Robust solutions help teams overcome the challenges that are a drag on mission attainment, including poor transparency, lack of accountability, the inability to consistently connect the dots of strategy, goals and objectives and insufficient timelines for tracking objectives and work that's performed in support of the overall program.

"That's probably the largest disconnect that we see today," Dodson said.



"Federal legacy systems are becoming increasingly obsolete. ... Critical legacy systems use outdated languages, have unsupported hardware and software, and are operating with known security vulnerabilities."

– Government Accountability Office report

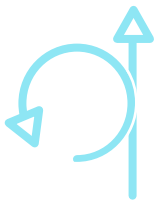
Best Practices for Agile Workflows



1. Consistently cultivate a collaborative culture.

Productive workplace cultures encourage sharing and transparency, in part by connecting the strategy of the organization, its objectives and goals, to team-level work and making it visible to everyone on the team. Making those connections enables teams to understand how they're progressing and how the work they're doing ties to the overall strategy of the organization.

Choose solutions and workflows that make it easy to include others, share data and tasks easily and showcase progress.



2. Be agile – now.

Don't wait until you've found perfection to make improvements. Small, iterative changes over time will yield better results than a single "big bang" at some distant time in the future.

The pandemic has expanded the scope of what is possible, and underscored the power of trying new things. During the pandemic, agencies working without a pandemic primer were nonetheless able to move toward IT modernization, putting in place tools and processes to support an agile government environment. The pandemic provided a real-world scenario to test tools and processes and a roadmap for continuing that journey. Agencies should continue to embrace the trial culture.



3. Level up.

First, scale. Second, scale fast.

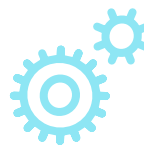
For many agencies, an agile scaling gap exists. Fortunately, government organizations are adopting scaled agile frameworks (SAFe) to close those gaps: Large Scale Scrum (LeSS), Disciplined Agile Delivery (DAD) and Spotify, an autonomous framework for scaling agile.

Having identified a framework of process, agencies are asking how, from a process standpoint, they can connect the entire organization and the work that's being done. For best results, agencies need the right tools.



4. Get the right tools for the job.

The right tools adapt to agencies' needs. Until recently, many collaboration and workflow management solutions were one-size-fits-all – and the size they fit was not well proportioned to government work. The tools were notoriously difficult to set up, challenging to use, couldn't scale to meet mission needs and didn't surface progress and issues clearly. But today's suite of modern workflow and collaboration tools allows agencies to select the right tool for the job – whether it's individual task and workflow management, project management or complex program management. The right tools allow collaboration among multiple teams, automation where it matters most and easy management and tracking of work. And they do it all with a high degree of transparency and accountability.



5. Automate with discretion.

Automate everything, right? Wrong! Automation can make a huge difference in the quality and quantity of work, but only when it's intelligently applied. Automating project tasking and program reporting is an easy win for an agency. Automating document delivery may not make as much sense when an agency can better support employees by centralizing knowledge articles into a single site that is accessible by everyone, regardless of location or device.

Automating service functions such as a help desk makes sense, particularly in a distributed work environment. Help desk solutions that provide automation to enable self-service are critical to support remote workers and citizens. Automated searching and surfacing of relevant knowledge articles to users and user-generated password resets help to offload already burdened service teams, and free workers to focus on critical bug fixes and other more strategic issues.

Case Study



Developing tools to operate NASA's unmanned space exploration missions – Voyager, Ulysses and the Pathfinder rovers sent to Mars – requires a high degree of collaboration. Contributors include teams from the agency's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, the Ames Research Center in Silicon Valley and the Johnson Space Center in Houston.

To help those teams collaborate and keep joint projects on track, rocket scientists used tools developed by Atlassian, such as Jira and Confluence, to manage creation of an operational application. The tool, Ensemble, was developed to help teams tackle high-stakes issues across disparate geographical areas. The creation of Ensemble used other

Atlassian tools as well, including Fisheye, Clover and Bamboo, which manages development of the code.

“We needed an infrastructure to let us develop Ensemble efficiently,” said Dave Mittman, a lead software developer at JPL.

Atlassian's tools worked. Ensemble's built-in agility and responsiveness makes it possible for code written by engineers today to remotely drive rovers on the surface of Mars tomorrow.

“The Atlassian ecosystem is a big benefit for a team that's collaborating across geographical locations,” Mittman said.

HOW ATLISSIAN HELPS

Atlassian is a leader in the development of agile project management solutions that help government agencies attain their missions by improving workflows, project management and collaboration.

Atlassian solutions help agencies effectively manage and report on a wide variety of agency work and projects, and to streamline government work processes:

Jira Software – advanced project and issue tracking for agile software development projects of all sizes and types; supports planning, tracking, releasing and reporting

Jira Align – enterprise agile planning that connects complex programs' execution to the mission and strategic agency imperatives

Jira Work Management – project and issue tracking in support of business teams like HR, procurement and operations

Jira Service Management – high-velocity service management that empowers development, IT operations and business teams to collaborate at speed to deliver great customer and employee service experiences

Confluence – remote-friendly, easy-to-use team workspace that fuels knowledge management and collaboration

Trello – visual project collaboration and user-friendly lightweight task management solution. An SaaS-only solution, Trello has earned FedRAMP authorization.

Where Atlassian differentiates itself is the full platform of tooling that connects the project management layer with the program management and strategy layers,” Dodson said.

Learn more: atlassian.com/government

Conclusion

Despite all the hardships agencies experienced with the pandemic, the upheaval shook agencies out of well-worn workplace practices and forced them to consider new ways of doing business. The unplanned migration of federal workers required the uptake of modern, cloud-enabled solutions on an unprecedented scale. Moving workers and workflows off of legacy systems and applications was the first step in streamlining government workflows. Agency teams thrived when moved from a rigid process to something that's more agile, transparent and collaborative.

In a nimble agency, the right tools serve as an internal skeleton that promotes visibility and information-sharing across the breadth of the organization. Robust tools also connect the three major types of work (task management, project management and program management) done by agencies, enabling practitioners at every level to maximize their efforts and understand how their contributions affect and improve on mission success.

“There will be revolutionary gains of efficiency across the federal government as agencies adopt new tools and new thinking about how work should be performed,” Dodson said.

ATLASSIAN

ABOUT ATLASSIAN

Atlassian is an Australian software company dedicated to unleashing the potential of every team. Atlassian enables open teamwork in businesses of any size with products like Jira, Confluence, and Trello, best-in-class integrations, and trusted teamwork practices that give cross-functional teams the flexibility to iterate while maintaining alignment on shared outcomes. Learn more at atlassian.com/government and engage with other users at community.atlassian.com



ABOUT GOVLOOP

GovLoop's mission is to “connect government to improve government.” We aim to inspire public-sector professionals by serving as the knowledge network for government. GovLoop connects more than 300,000 members, fostering cross-government collaboration, solving common problems and advancing government careers. GovLoop is headquartered in Washington, D.C., with a team of dedicated professionals who share a commitment to connect and improve government.

For more information about this report, please reach out to info@govloop.com.



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