



MOVING FORWARD WITH TELEWORK IN THE DEFENSE COMMUNITY

Amy G. Manley, IIDA and Ellen Keable, CCMP™
Jacobs Workplace Performance Strategies

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AUTHOR:
Amy G. Manley, IIDA and Ellen Keable, CCMP™
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On the cover: CLDJ Members Participate in Holiday Zoom Call | Photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Colin Sens

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic transformed business and workplace models virtually overnight. Early indicators show that for many people, long-term flexibility concerning when and where they work is increasingly important and will continue to be even when the health crisis has been resolved. For organizations and communities connected to the military, telework during the pandemic expedited changes already underway, especially regarding operations, technology, and people strategies for modernization. These organizations and communities have undergone a pivotal shift from “we can’t” to “we must” on the subject of providing flexibility for service members, military spouses, and civilian employees. Though telework was once thought impossible in much of the Armed Forces and defense community, telework during the COVID-19 pandemic has proven that we can still accomplish the mission. Indeed, many leaders in the defense community propose that telework is here to stay:

“We’re not going back,” Air Force Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Stephen Wilson said Wednesday at the Air Force Association Virtual Air, Sea, Space and Cyber conference. “We’ve had an 800% increase in our ability to do this teleworking digital experience. Nobody wants to go back to what we were doing. So, how do we take this challenge and use it as an opportunity to move us forward?”

Federal News Network, September 16, 2020, [Telework is here to stay](#)

Long-held concerns about security, workforce management, and technology are being met with technical and managerial innovation. As one expert writes, “The lingering pandemic is pushing the Pentagon and its agencies to launch various telework pilots that could forever change the way the department operates” (*Frank Konkel, Nextgov, August 19, 2020 [Pandemic Pushing Pentagon Toward Classified Telework](#)*).

The enduring resilience and flexibility gained through telework may prove to be a silver lining of the pandemic. Based on evidence of telework benefits during COVID-19, a hybrid work strategy that combines onsite work with telework would help us expand future opportunities; advance mission; serve the workforce, their families, and communities; reduce costs; and increase efficiency, resilience, and agility for the future.

Vice Admiral Yancy Lindsey, commander of Navy Installation Management Command, said, “The majority of our staff’s been teleworking for the last year essentially. And we found many areas we were actually more productive and can better execute our mission from a telework, remote work perspective than we are when we require employees to come in and sit in a building and an office and do that work.”

He said the Navy’s post-pandemic work plan may mean that 60% to 65% of employees “never need to step foot in a Navy building again,” which helps employees, cuts down on overhead costs and opens the talent pool.

May 6, 2021, [ADC Live Interview](#)



Telework in the era of COVID-19 has proven we can still accomplish the mission.

Over the past year, experience and research on telework benefits have shown that there are **four broad categories of opportunities for ongoing transformation of work** for the Department of Defense (DoD), Federal agencies, their partners, and communities:

- **Mission Delivery**
- **Supporting Our Workforce, Families, Veterans, and Communities**
- **Efficiency, Resilience, and Agility**
- **Increased Access to Talent and Skills**

NEW OPPORTUNITIES: MISSION DELIVERY

Telework supports mission execution by bolstering resilience for continuing operations and support for workforce effectiveness. Telework opportunities are important elements of a high-performing workforce and culture strategy. Workforce health and performance are also central to achieving mission, with more attention being paid to the impacts of work-life quality on service members and civilian employees, their spouses, families, and communities. Healthy workforce and organizational cultures promote workforce and career development, morale, pride, reputation, formation of team and community relationships, and a sense of belonging. Being the employer of choice helps the defense community hire the most qualified candidates and increases retention rates, allowing service members and civilians to build a lifetime career and transition institutional knowledge of work and the culture to incoming talent.

“We fully embrace this culture of teleworking,” said Air Force Reserve Chief Lt. Gen. Richard Scobee. “Even in the post pandemic environment that we will find ourselves in eventually, a telework culture can remove barriers for us and the reserve component. It’s really about making it easier for airmen to serve. I want all our airmen to find it easy to continue to serve, whether it’s in a part-time or full-time capacity. Why would you go back to anything different?”

Federal News Network, September 16, 2020,
[Telework is here to stay](#)



Telework improves the work-life quality of service members and civilian employees.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES: SUPPORTING OUR WORKFORCE, FAMILIES, VETERANS, AND COMMUNITIES

Our military personnel and their families are the linchpin to every sector of the defense community. Telework provides opportunities to reduce relocations, while also enabling connectivity to continue career paths or sustain educational progression when those moves are required.

Extending telework from civilian employees to service members has increased the ability for boundaryless teams to work on projects around the globe with a reduced need to relocate for assignment changes. Pre-pandemic, service members had a permanent change of station (PCS) roughly every two to three years, creating significant disruptions for families and careers. Additionally, reducing the number of moves a service member makes saves the defense community the high costs and productivity losses from multiple relocations. (A 2016 NPR article, [As Military Moving Costs Rise, It's Difficult For Officials To Keep Track](#), notes that Permanent Changes of Station (PCS) cost the military about 4% of the total budget.)

The ability to telework provides additional support for the spouses and families. Military children may change schools more than six times between kindergarten and high school (*USO, 2018*). Having options to telework means active-duty members can have longer durations for their installation tours, spouses can obtain local jobs (or work remotely when moved), families can build stronger ties to communities and civic institutions, and

children can have better continuity with their education. Telework is an important tool for longer-term work location assignments, reducing threats to productivity, workforce retention, organization health, and overall mission execution.

Benefits to Members: Telework can enhance the professional development of our service members with new ways of learning, training, and upskilling or reskilling – all of which are essential as new technologies and resources continue to evolve at an accelerated pace. Integrating the concept of continuous learning is critical in creating an agile workforce and empowering service members with the knowledge needed to drive high performance. By providing long-distance learning, the defense community can empower its members to engage in active and ongoing skills building, set a pace aligned with schedule and family commitments, maintain necessary certifications, and focus on the most relevant content. A recent article on the U.S. Army Installation Management Command discussed the success of digital learning to ensure Army environmental professionals worldwide remained trained and mission-certified during COVID-19. The success of this model has shaped future remote learning programs and implementation globally.



“We began switching to distance learning where possible more than a year ago to reduce travel costs associated with training so the Army could better fund its modernization efforts,” says Dave Giffin, U.S. Army Installation Management Command’s G-4 Environmental Division Chief. “That early transition really set us up for success and allowed us to continue to train our environmental staffs across the globe during COVID-19.”

U.S. Army.mil, July 13, 2020, [Training Improved with COVID-19](#)

Telework provides opportunities to reduce relocations.

Benefits to Spouses and Families: Advances in virtual platforms and technology create opportunities for portable jobs that spouses can maintain even when they need to relocate, which research shows is a highly coveted opportunity among the spouse population (*Hire Our Heroes (HOH) Military Spouse Career Journeys, 2020*). As stated earlier, service members had a PCS roughly every two to three years on average before the pandemic, which disrupted families and careers. With telework, spouses can keep their jobs regardless of relocation, allowing for more career growth, financial security, personal fulfillment, and stability for the family, all of which improve family health and wellness while reducing stress.

“Military spouses indicated a strong preference for remote work and flexible work situations. When asked to pick their ideal work situation, a plurality of 41% [of spouses] choose ‘a job that can be done remotely;’ in second place is ‘a job that permits working from home some days a week’ (22%).”

HOH Military Spouse Career Journeys, 2020

The flexibility that comes with a service member’s ability to telework and reduce the frequency of PCS allows for greater support at home and access to stable childcare, which allows spouses to work locally/ remotely.

“With each PCS, military families must continue to have access to quality, affordable childcare to enable military spouses to enter and/or return to the workforce. In some locations, particularly those with high concentrations of service members as well as large metropolitan areas, wait lists for childcare can often average six months or more.”

HOH Collective Effort for Military Spouses, 2020

The opportunity for spouses to telework gives them greater flexibility and helps them avoid gaps in their resumes that would otherwise hinder their career growth.

“Uncertainty around length of stay in a location and resume gaps caused by frequent moves caused a disconnect between employers and spouses that affects spouses of both active duty and retired service members.”

HOH Military Spouse Career Journeys, 2020



Portable jobs benefit spouses and families.

Benefits to Military Veterans and Caregivers:

Telework also supports our military veterans and their caregivers. Working remotely allows them to work in jobs that can leverage their unique talents and experiences regardless of where they live.

For veterans with physical and/or emotional challenges, virtual platforms provide more flexibility to support their unique needs. Veterans may have a caregiver who can also benefit from flexible remote work opportunities to balance employment with providing care. Working remotely limits or omits stress-filled commutes and distractions for those with sensory concerns and provides much broader employment opportunities for veterans to leverage specialized skills and experiences. Distance learning combined with teleworking can enhance veterans' specialized skills and experiences for career development, mentoring, and peer support. Teleworking can also provide geographic flexibility to enable remote-employed veterans to live near a support system or any specialized medical care.



Working remotely allows our veterans to leverage their unique talents and experiences regardless of where they live.

Veterans interviewed for an article in *Military Times* about telework described the benefits of creating a lifestyle balance for their medical requirements, family needs, Veterans Administration care, and relocation to be closer to family support systems (*Davis Winkle, Military Times, November 27, 2020, [Remote work could be silver lining of pandemic for some veterans, including those with PTSD](#)*).



Telework enables flexibility to accommodate veterans' needs.



Telework brings more time for family life and exercise, therefore enhancing overall well-being.

Benefits to Communities: When telework reduces the frequency of relocations for service members, it allows people to build and sustain relationships in their communities (both on and off base), maintain their school enrollment, and contribute to civic life and institutions. By staying in their communities for longer periods of time, military families become familiar with and gain access to off-base and community resources, reducing the need for installations to provide all requirements on site. Simply stated, telework can improve the quality of life for families with better access to more diverse resources.

Telework also benefits sustainability and wellness for communities and organizations. Reducing office space and commuting may improve carbon neutrality due to reduced energy use, but additional study will be needed to document actual savings from working remotely. Community and personal wellness have

become front and center during the pandemic. By reducing commuting time and providing more flexibility, telework brings the potential benefits of stress reduction and more time for family life and exercise, therefore enhancing overall well-being.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES: EFFICIENCY, RESILIENCE, AND AGILITY

We have discussed the cost savings of telework for the defense community through reducing PCS and efficiencies gained with digital transformation. There are additional ways that telework can improve operational efficiency, cut costs, and increase value.

Real Estate/Space Efficiency: With more DoD agencies and partners considering telework programs, there is a clear opportunity to reduce real estate usage and increase office space efficiency for cost savings. Many private sector organizations are moving to a hybrid work model where some or all employees can work remotely – at home, in alternative office locations, at customer sites, or in their home office (*Kathy Gurchiek, SHRM, January 27, 2021 [Hybrid work model to be new norm](#)*). Each organization's hybrid model addresses the number of days in the office and days out differently, but all have the same goal – to allow employees the flexibility to work off-site for some percentage of time. In doing so, the employees' desire for more control and balance over work and personal demands provides these organizations the opportunity to realign the amount of space required to support on-site office work. Reducing cost of space allows reinvestment in core mission elements.

Telework models also provide real estate savings and space optimization by providing fewer workseats (offices and workstations) than staff for non-site essential work. Teleworking models typically have staff select the best place in which to work when on site – a workstation, office or meeting room based on the work to be accomplished that day. By reducing the amount of space required to house staff on any given day, the defense community also reduces the use of energy, water, and space – all driving to cost savings for the organization.

Project Resourcing Efficiency: DoD projects and teams often require unique skill sets and expertise not always available at every site. Leveraging remote work and connectivity allows seamless project resourcing without redeploying staff for cost savings and stronger team results.

Work Efficiency: Military organizations found that digital innovations such as e-signatures were used so operations could continue through telework during the pandemic. The effects of these digital innovations have been streamlined work processes, which are both a result of telework and a requirement for continued remote work. These types of digital transformations advance mission with work efficiency and force readiness to achieve organizational outcomes.

“The adoption of digital transformation and automation in the defense sector has long been held back by fears that they would come at the cost of losing personnel. With the pandemic adding to the existing pressure on global militaries to reduce admin costs and decrease the size of headquarters, many military organizations have found the opposite to be true—digital transformation and automation are resolving their issues and, in the process, dismantling the blockades that have been holding back administration and headquarter reform for years.”

Matthew Medley, Hitting the Accelerate Button: The Impact of COVID-19 on Digital Transformation within Defense, Link: [IFS Blog, October 26, 2020](#)



A hybrid work model satisfies employees' desire for more control and balance over work and personal demands.

Resilience and Agility: Activating continuity of operations plans during the pandemic included guidance to maximize telework and minimize in-person contact to limit the potential spread of COVID-19. Without the ability to work remotely during the pandemic, many organizations and agencies would have had to slow or discontinue operations to avoid the alternative requirement for personnel to work under hazardous health conditions.

One of the key benefits of continuing telework post-COVID would be increasing our experience and capabilities in technology, management, and performance to maintain a resilient workforce and enhance agility for continuity of operations. The dispersion of telework promotes business continuity in the event of threats or disruptive events.

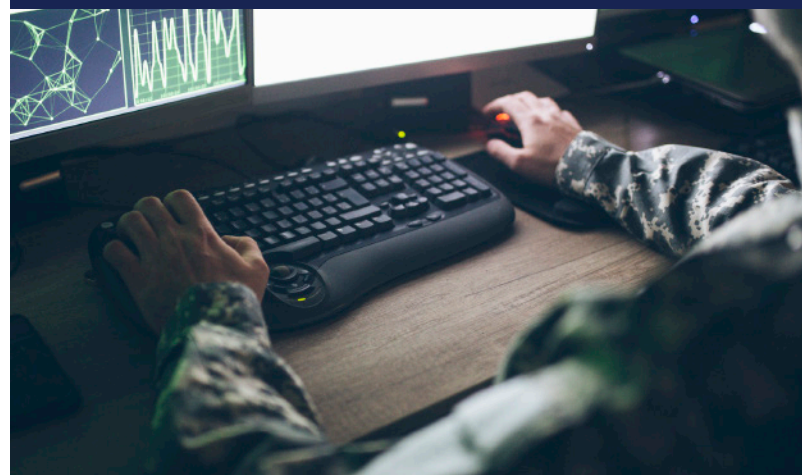
Security: During the COVID-19 pandemic, the defense community saw exponential growth in secured technology platforms and cyber security software. Protecting classified information is essential and has been one of the primary obstacles to telework pre-COVID. However, there has been increasing acceptance of software separation in lieu of physical barriers such as a SCIF to protect classified data and enable remote working outside the facility. In a recent article, Frank Konkel, Executive Editor for *Nextgov*, discusses how the DoD expanded its remote working capabilities tenfold by August 2020:

“For decades, the Pentagon’s classified work—the handling of data designated at secret, top secret and other classification levels—has been done in physical facilities called SCIFs, or sensitive compartmented information facilities that provide physical barriers to ensure classified data is safeguarded. Increasingly, pilots across the Defense Department are looking for software to provide the same kinds of barriers in the digital realm, according to Stephen Wallace, systems innovation scientist within the Defense Information Systems Agency’s Emerging Technology Directorate.”

Frank Konkel, Nextgov, August 2020, [The Defense Information Systems Agency and the U.S. Air Force are expanding their classified remote network capabilities](#)



Working remotely maintained mission during COVID-19.



Exponential growth in secured technology platforms and cyber security means telework will be even more viable in the future.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES: INCREASED ACCESS TO TALENT AND SKILLS

The DoD is locked in a fierce competition for talent. The Army's [published People Strategy](#) states, "Creating a robust pipeline of new talent into the Total Army is our main effort through 2028 because it will ensure that we have the breadth and depth of talent needed for the [Multi-Domain Operations] MDO-capable force of 2035 envisioned by the Army Strategy."

Enabling large-scale telework options in human resource markets where the military services do

not have major installations unlocks huge pools of specialized skills and talent that until now were largely inaccessible to the DoD at a reasonable cost. Telework and flexibility in work locations enable service members and their families to remain in service and in communities longer. In essence, telework offers these talented individuals the opportunity to be part of our defense community without having to necessarily uproot their whole household.



The DoD is locked in a fierce competition for talent, and telework is instrumental to attracting talented individuals.

MOVING FORWARD

Future of Work models need to acknowledge that many of the immediate public health challenges faced during the pandemic will not continue into the future. As such, these models will further enable us to translate lessons learned during this difficult time to optimize our workforce and bring value to our mission.

To effectively move forward, we need to evaluate and improve upon what has worked well, address barriers for change, and continue the necessary investments in technology, security, and training to enable productive, healthy, and resilient ways of working and providing benefits to our service members, families, and communities. These actions align perfectly with the core charter and purpose of the Association of Defense Communities.

A hybrid work model that includes both on-site and remote work opportunities requires careful planning and consideration of desired outcomes, to include mission, workforce, families, and unique requirements. There is no one right approach. Creating a strategy that works best for your organization should consider the following key factors for success:

- The nature of work and specific responsibilities.** Identify which types of roles can successfully be delivered remotely and clarify those requirements for on-site work. For example, administrative and desk-based functions are often easier to transition to teleworking than manufacturing, research, or field-based work.



To effectively move forward, we need to continue the necessary investments in technology, security, and training.

- **Investment in infrastructure, technologies, and workplace strategies that optimize both the workforce and work environment.** The opportunity to save money by reducing space is real but requires reinvestment in the tools and technologies to harness those savings. New infrastructure to support teleworking models may include workspace scheduling platforms; highly flexible, responsive state-of-the-art heating/cooling/water systems; and work environments that actually increase the number of collaboration and meeting spaces for staff when on site.
- **Security levels.** What technology tools are in place for cyber security and classified work? What levels of secured technology proved resilient for remote work during the pandemic, and how can these be replicated or expanded in the future? What are the plans for digital transformation, and how will they impact physical versus software-based separation requirements?
- **Mission and culture.** Identify goals for workforce effectiveness to achieve mission. How will telework support your workforce and organizational culture to sustain or increase effectiveness and efficiency? What protocols and guidelines are needed to enable this transition? How will you continue to reshape your culture to reinforce community and purpose? Clear steps and programs must be defined. Risks of social isolation, particularly for veterans, are important to address with programs to connect with other employees and service members.
- **Policies and programs for training and mentoring.** Remote working requires managers and leaders to be more deliberate about giving direction, reinforcing skillsets, and mentoring their teams. Most people have not been trained to mentor, much less provide remote oversight. Leaders, managers, and supervisors will require training and clear policies to ensure the necessary knowledge transfer and upskilling occurs to prepare our service members and employees for the future. Increased opportunities and direction for distance learning should be promoted.
- **Change readiness.** Assess your teams' willingness to embrace change and continue current practices and opportunities post-COVID as part of a hybrid of on-site and remote work. What will be the biggest benefits and hurdles for leadership? For people managers? For employees and service members? For families and communities? What can you do to help with change management?
- **Communication matters!** A recent 2021 survey by McKinsey of over 5,000 full-time corporate and government employees found that people who are feeling anxious due to a lack of communication about the future are 2.9 times more likely to have moderate to high levels of burnout. Organizational leaders need to communicate more, even if they are uncertain about the future, to help improve well-being now (*McKinsey.com, April 1, 2021, [What employees are saying about the future of remote work](#)*).



Communication matters!

HARNESS THE MOMENTUM OF CHANGE

The pandemic accelerated change more quickly than expected to advance flexibility and readiness responses with telework. Looking to the future, we need to build on the momentum and opportunities to advance mission; support our workforce, families, and communities; and increase efficiency, resilience, and agility for ongoing transformation of work for the DoD and all Federal agencies and partners.

“The COVID-19 pandemic was disruptive on a global scale. It accelerated rapid institutional changes in organizations and relationships at every level, in all sectors of society. This kind of disruption is something we see once in a lifetime. We were forced to reorganize our internal and external relationships and how we interact in our homes, workplaces, and broader communities. As we evolve to a new normal, we’ll continue to examine our traditions, leave some legacy thinking behind, and embrace new ideas and behaviors.

We will be more productive, resilient, and connected by innovations in technology. And we’ll think differently about how we maintain organizational relationships. The painful adversity of the year behind us has opened unique opportunities in the years ahead.”

Bob Ross, Executive Director, Connecticut Office of Military Affairs/ President, Association of Defense Communities, Board of Directors

We need to ***harness the momentum of change*** in order to advance mission and support our workforce, families, and communities.



PHOTO CREDIT

pg. 2: *20th Fighter Wing Legal Office Maintains Resiliency During Pandemic*
Photo by Tech. Sgt. Erin Mills, 2D Audiovisual Squadron

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pg. 12: *Family Day* | Photo by Senior Master Sgt. Ralph Branson, 121st Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs



1201 Connecticut Ave NW #500B
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 822-5256

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