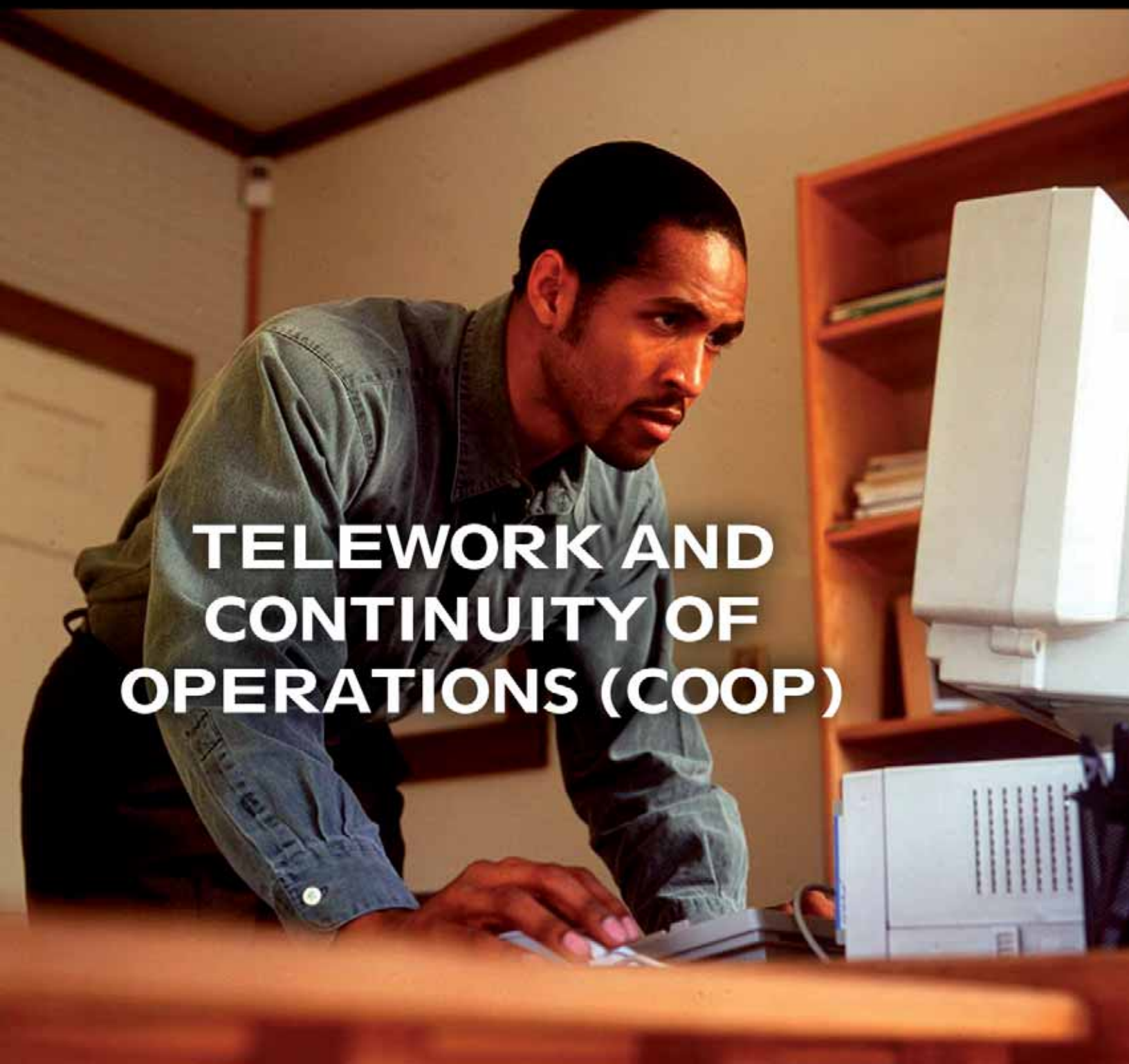
SPECIAL REPORT

Homeland Defense JOURNAL



TELEWORK AND CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS (COOP)

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Special Report

TELEWORK AND CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS (COOP)

By: Don Philpott, Editor, Homeland Defense Journal

Teleworking, sometimes called telecommuting, is an innovative business solution that enables employees to do productive work away from the traditional office. Modern technological advances have made it easier to work anytime, anywhere, and any place.

Following 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina we now realize that it is even more important to have trained staff able to work from home or designated government centers during a major disaster and maintain some continuity of operations.

Federal agencies have been mandated to allow 20 percent of all eligible staff to telework, yet despite the many advantages of teleworking few have made a great deal of progress toward achieving this. According to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) less than 10 percent of the 1.2 million federal employees eligible to telework do so.

“Despite the increased attention to telework and lowering of some barriers, including technology, “there is still work to be done to fully integrate telework into the culture and business practices of some federal agencies,” said Linda Springer, OPM Director.

There is better news about the role of telework in federal agency planning for continuity of operations (COOP). COOP establishes defined procedures that allow an agency or organization to continue its essential operations in case of a major emergency. So far 27 agencies have fully integrated telework into their COOP plans, while 48 say they are considering adding telework to their COOP plans.

Agency officials say that the biggest barrier to telework is ensuring someone is available to cover the office. However, more than half of all federal workers claim that management resistance and cultural change are the main reasons why teleworking is not more prevalent and management training on telework needs to be addressed.

Most federal agencies acknowledge, however, that there are no real reasons why more people should not telework. Concerns over information technology and security have been addressed and overcome. The technology and infrastructure already exists to allow federal teleworkers to work efficiently, effectively and securely from home or Government (GSA) Telework Centers. The concept of teleworking is not only compelling, it is inevitable.

The Benefits of Teleworking

Every year, traffic congestion caused by millions of Americans commuting to and from work results in 3.7 billion hours of lost productivity, adds up to 92 million work weeks for commuters stuck in gridlock, and costs the nation $63.1 billion in wasted time and fuel, according to the Telework Exchange.

An Intel study showed that federal workers spend more time in traffic commuting each year than they do on vacation. That is one reason Congress and the Executive branch have increasingly promoted and mandated telework.

It improves the Government's ability to recruit and retain a high-quality workforce in a competitive job market, protects environmental quality and energy conservation by reducing traffic congestion and vehicle emissions, improves employees' work lives by allowing a better balance of work and family responsibilities, and reduces absenteeism and work-related stress. Studies have also shown that teleworking improves the quality of work and increases productivity.

“If government does not adopt more flexible working practices, as have been adapted to a large degree in the private sector, then the ability to attract the best and the brightest will become even more challenging, said Steve O’Keeffe, executive director of the Telework Exchange, a public-private partnership promoting teleworking.

“If you add to this equation COOP/preparedness planning requirements, the case for teleworking becomes even more compelling. The ability to work from an alternative workspace is an integral part of COOP/preparedness planning whether a person works from home or from a telework center,” he said.

Continuity of Operations Planning (COOP)

A recent Telework Exchange survey found that 73 percent of federal workers said they would not come into the office in the event of a pandemic outbreak. "If Uncle Sam is going to call in sick, who is going to run the country?" said O'Keeffe.

In the event of a pandemic or other major disaster, there are obvious benefits in having staff available who can work remotely or from home and ensure continuity of operations, he said.

Access to communications, applications, data and even other people is necessary so that government programs and processes can continue when the workplace closes down due to fires, hurricanes, power outages and the like, or when employees cannot or should not come into the office because of a flu pandemic, transit strike or blizzard.

Teleworking is vital to COOP because the ability to communicate and exchange information in a disaster is critical. A telework program creates an emergency communications system during a crisis and a resource to keep key employees engaged and in touch during an emergency.

It also enables employees to remain close to their family during a crisis, reduces reliance on transportation and other infrastructure which may be seriously overstretched during an emergency, and it provides the basis for a speedier path to resumption of normal operations.

In order for this to happen a telework program has to be up and running and tested before the disaster occurs so that there can be an orderly transition of operations. The focus must then be on continuing to deliver effective citizen services – the demand for which is likely to be much higher in the event of a disaster.

Teleworking Success Stories

- The Maryland Department of Transportation experienced a 27 percent increase in productivity when more than 100 employees opted to telework
- American Express teleworkers produce 43 percent more business than office workers
- The U.S. Department of the Treasury saved $100,000 per year in leased office space by allowing employees to telework on a regular basis.
- AT&T realized about $150 million in annual savings by teleworking - $100 million through direct employee productivity, $35 million through reduced real estate costs and $15 million through enhanced employee retention.

Source: Telework Exchange

CaseStudy #1
FEDERAL JUDICIAL CENTER (FJC)

The FJC is the research and training center for the federal courts, a function that puts a premium on effective communication and collaboration.

"Web-based communications expand our reach. We've traditionally performed face-to-face information transfer, but with tight budgets, we rely more and more on online communications. However, online work conferencing doesn't replace our current programs; it supplements and enhances them. Online conferencing gives us more flexibility," said, Dr. Mark J. Maggio, FJC Education Division.

"The nice thing about WebEx — which we've used for a few years — is that all you need is the Internet and the telephone, and you're all set," he said. "It's accessible to anyone we've attempted to reach. We use WebEx Meeting Center and Training Center to conduct everything from meetings to training to breakout groups."

Maggio said that Web-based knowledge

transfer is a powerful tool in the public sector, because government needs are constantly changing. Web-based conferencing doesn't just obviate the need to purchase plane tickets or drive long distances — it makes meetings and presentations more robust, more compelling, and can accelerate processes and productivity.

WebEx technology also makes it possible for FJC to operate online national workshops, which hundreds of people attend from around the country, in real time, without having to travel or take time from the office.

"We'll soon use WebEx technology to train judges, who are busy people," he says. "The judges have enthusiastically embraced this online training program. We can point to a strong return on investment from the sheer ease of information delivery."

WebEx's Training Center also promises to provide the agency with the ability to deliver more targeted educational and training content. "Often, the more tailored the content is, the more engaging it is," says Maggio, "and WebEx is allowing us to provide that higher level of engagement to our customers more than ever before."

WebEx's Meeting Center serves to greatly expand and enhance the telecommuting experience for many of its employees, as well as provide a key component to the agency's continuity of operations plan. Dr. Maggio, who telecommutes one day a week himself, points out that this has been "a big plus" for the organization, and has played a role in helping to avoid any "brain drain."

Case Study #2
SUN MICROSYSTEMS, INC.

Sun Microsystems is the global supplier of network computing solutions that power the world's most demanding businesses. The company's Open Work Services Group plays a critical role in maximizing both corporate productivity and employee satisfaction. "We decided to invest in people rather than real estate, and we began offering employees the option to work at home," says Chris Saleh, the Group's Program Manager.

In 2006, Saleh's group conducted a corporate-wide survey that confirmed Sun was deficient in collaboration tools enabling employees to work over distance. "We needed a solution that made it possible for our employees to collaborate in real-time with co-workers and partners around the globe," he states.

WebEx was already in place at Sun but wasn't used much, Saleh says. "When we realized we needed an enterprise-wide collaboration tool, we decided to re-examine our WebEx deployment."

Today, Sun primarily uses WebEx Meeting Center across the organization to communicate with, train, and support internal and external customers located around the world.

WebEx helped the Open Work Services Group deliver on its initiative to enable Sun employees to work from anywhere, any time—reducing costs, increasing productivity, and opening new business opportunities for the company.

"Today, more than half of Sun employees no longer have permanent offices. WebEx provided the collaboration tool we needed to bridge distances and geographies, and effectively boost productivity," says Saleh. As a result of the new work environment, Sun has increased employee satisfaction and saved on energy and real estate costs.

Case Study #3
BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS (BLS)

The BLS is one of the major statistical agencies within Fed Government and is responsible for gathering and distributing a wide range of employment related information such as unemployment statistics, job creation and so on. It gathers this information from all 50 states and has a constant need to provide training both for its own staff and those responsible for providing and using statistical data.

Traditionally this was done by face to face meetings in the Washington D.C. headquarters, at

one of BLS's six regional centers or at other convenient locations. This was expensive both in terms of time and travel. More self-paced computer training using course coursework management systems was introduced but people complained that this lacked the real time interaction many participants liked and wanted.

That is why BLS invested in WebEx Training Center, said Robert Jordan, a BLS program analyst.

"It allowed synchronized meeting training sessions with video conferencing and provided a much better way to reach the trainees around the nation. It was a desk top solution with real time video and a lot of functionality.

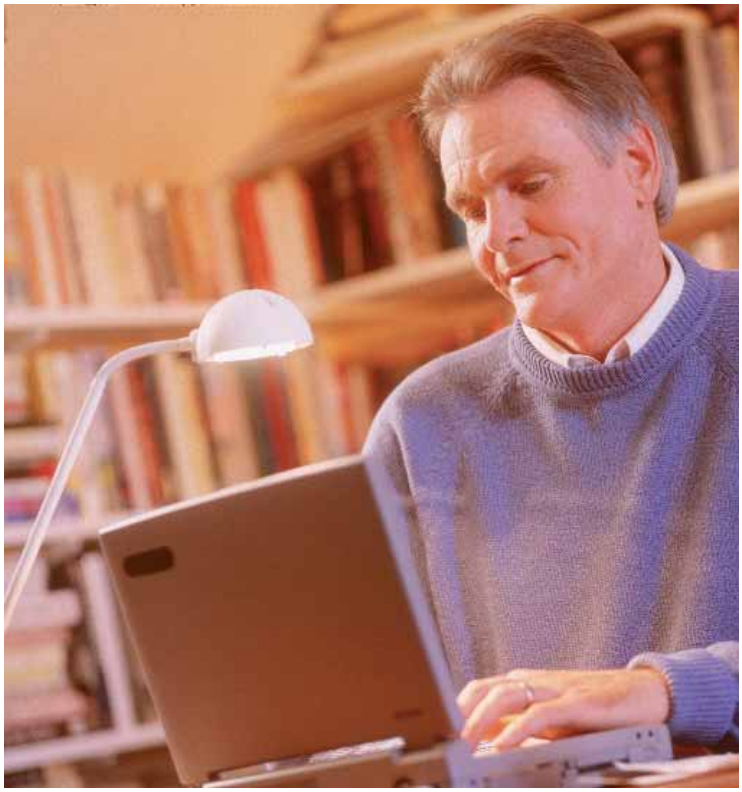
"In fact it had so much functionality that we are designing our training courses around what it can do rather than simply use it to present our old courses," he said.

"More important, it has allowed us to meet the challenges of training and knowledge transfer in a rapidly evolving world," he said.

Solution Providers

WebEx Communications, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Cisco Systems, Inc., is a world leader in providing on-demand applications – such as Web Office, Meeting Center, Training Center, Support Center, Event Center, Multipoint Video and Integrated VoIP. These all provide real-time collaboration capabilities and allow users to leverage the web as an efficient channel for remote interaction.

WebEx offers agencies proven online collaboration tools to power an effective telework solution for its employees and dramatically shorten work area recovery time. They transform business disruptions into business-as-usual.



For telework to be effective it must rely on services like video teleconferencing, web conferencing, and phone and Internet connectivity. That means the providers of these services must be absolutely reliable and prepared for any eventuality.

WebEx offers the most secure web collaboration service on the market. Every year it undergoes an extensive security audit to achieve the highly

regarded WebTrust certification and produce a SAS 70 Type II report.

The WebEx MediaTone Network is the only private network designed with a global switched architecture. This switched architecture works similarly to the telephone, allowing data packets to be sent via the fastest route possible and then compiled at the other end. This significantly reduces latency and enables a robust multimedia experience across any number of platforms. This means if one of the WebEx data centers is affected by a disaster such as a hurricane, operations can be shifted to another data center, without any compromise of security or speed of service. An additional security benefit of this unique switched architecture is that no meeting and session data is stored anywhere on the MediaTone network. The meeting and session data is switched directly from the presenter to the attendees in the meeting.

Government employees using on-demand services in their day-to-day work can easily transition into crisis mode because they are familiar with the service. On-demand eliminates the need to buy expensive hardware and software that needs to be installed at a remote location or a point to point telework solution that sits and waits to be used. This on-demand saves the government both time and money.

WebEx makes it possible for geographically dispersed users to join a virtual emergency operations center and actively participate in recovery efforts. It also gives every participant access to critical information from a centralized workspace and the ability to share presentations, documents, and applications instantly, take advantage of real-time video and Internet audio capabilities and to work together interactively.

With the WebEx Solutions for Business Continuity, agencies can now use the same WebEx services they use to improve their day-to-day productivity to ensure that they keep running with telework. This will dramatically shorten work area recovery time, protect revenue by keeping the lights on and create a more resilient collaboration infrastructure.

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