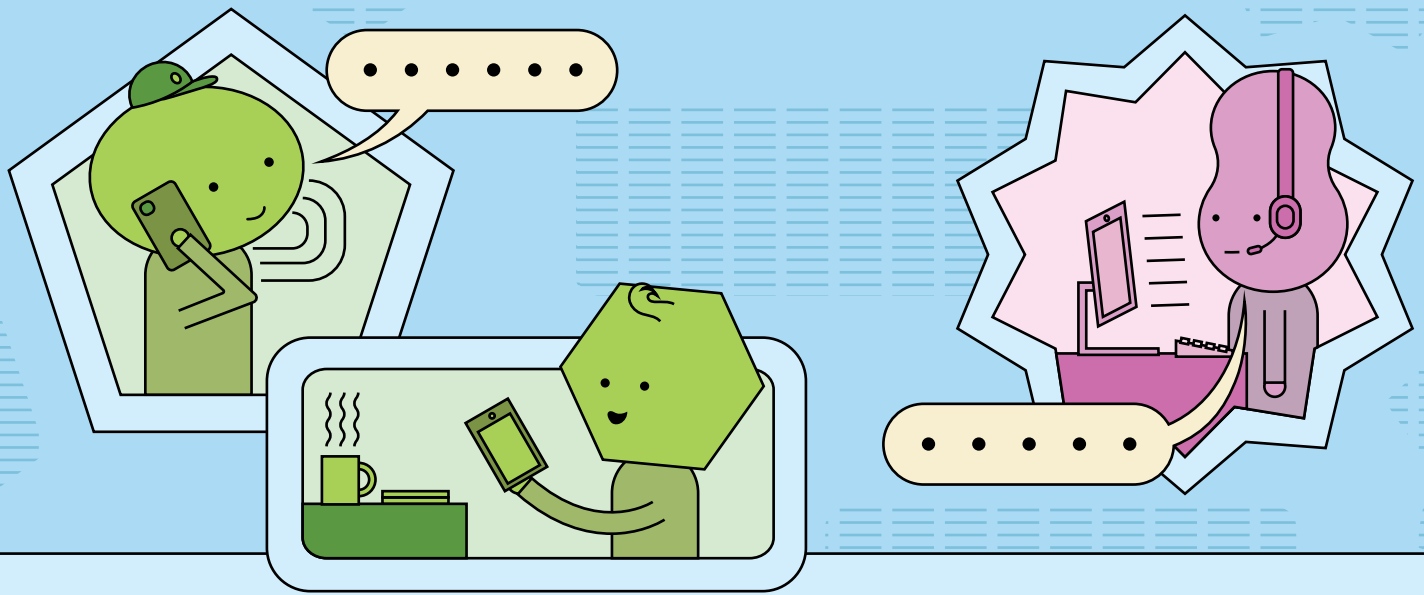
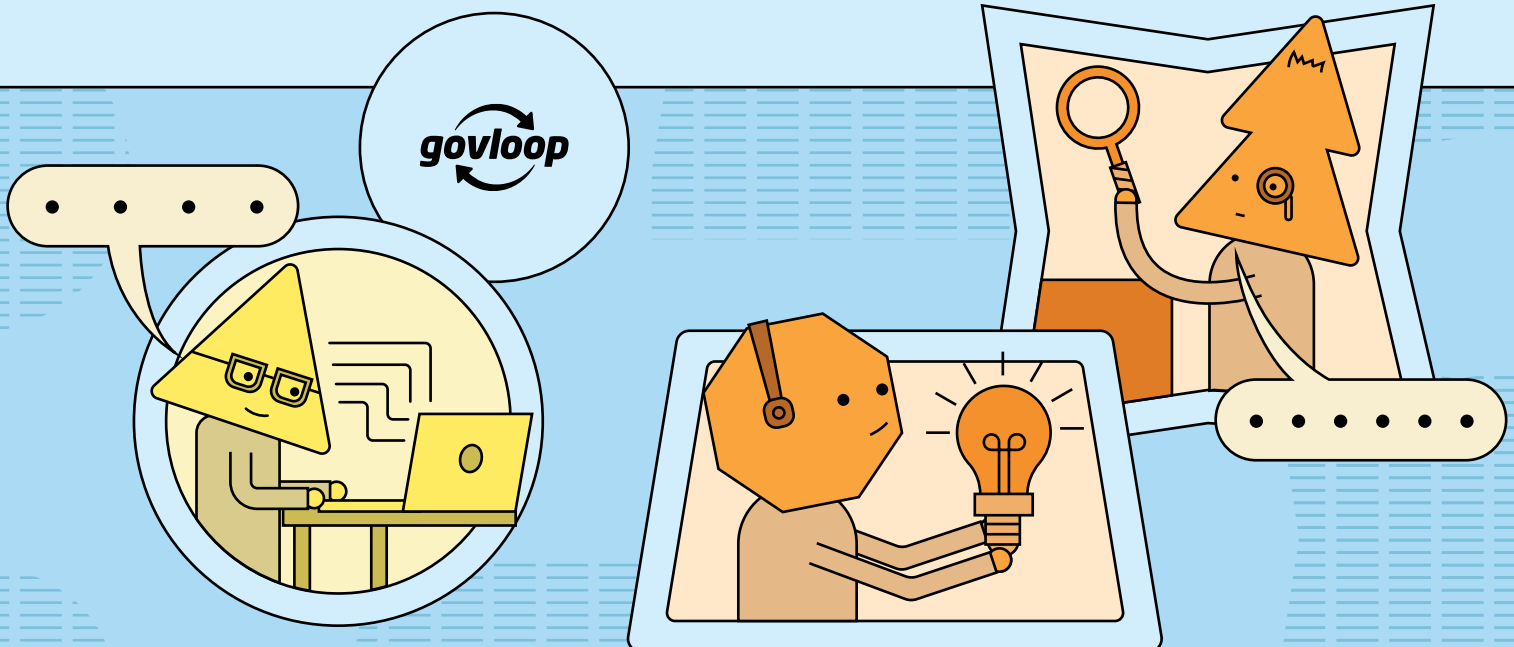
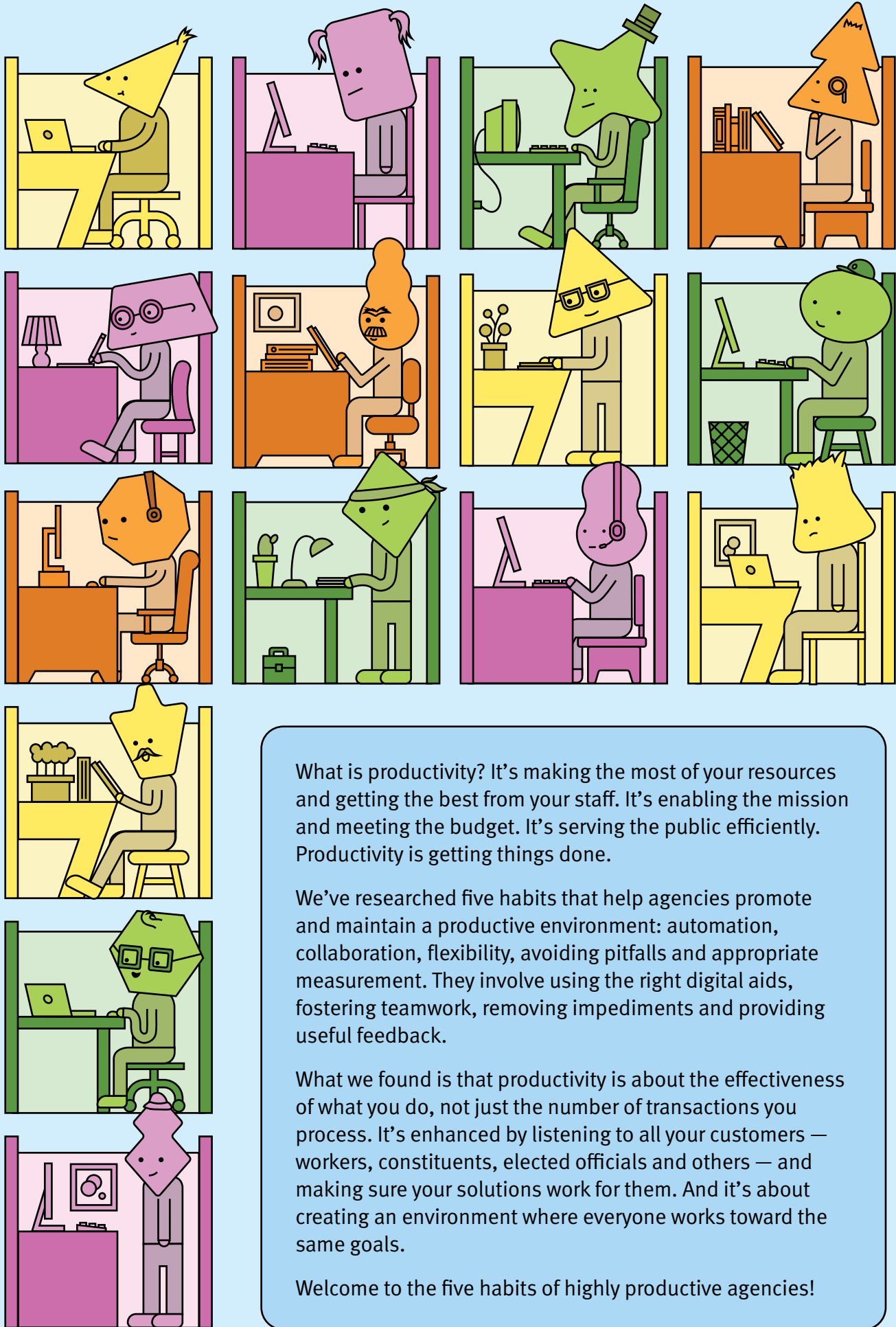




The **5** Habits of Highly Productive Agencies





What is productivity? It's making the most of your resources and getting the best from your staff. It's enabling the mission and meeting the budget. It's serving the public efficiently. Productivity is getting things done.

We've researched five habits that help agencies promote and maintain a productive environment: automation, collaboration, flexibility, avoiding pitfalls and appropriate measurement. They involve using the right digital aids, fostering teamwork, removing impediments and providing useful feedback.

What we found is that productivity is about the effectiveness of what you do, not just the number of transactions you process. It's enhanced by listening to all your customers — workers, constituents, elected officials and others — and making sure your solutions work for them. And it's about creating an environment where everyone works toward the same goals.

Welcome to the five habits of highly productive agencies!

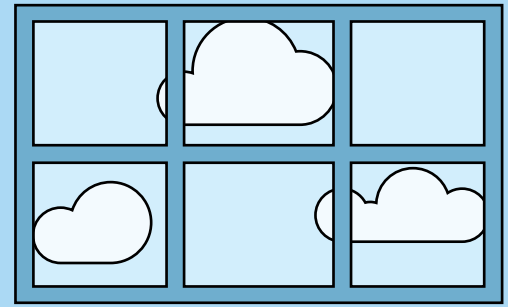
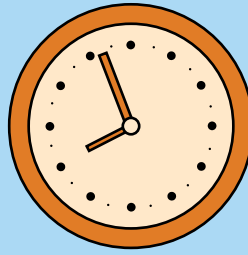
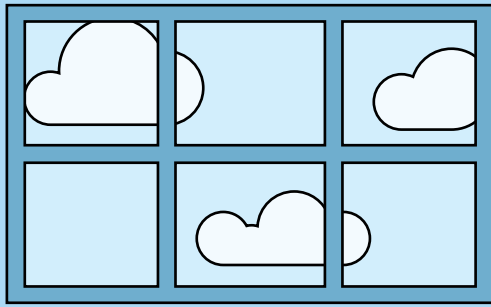
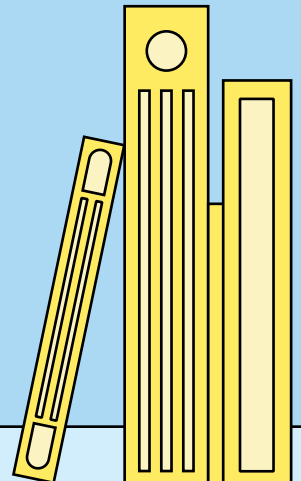
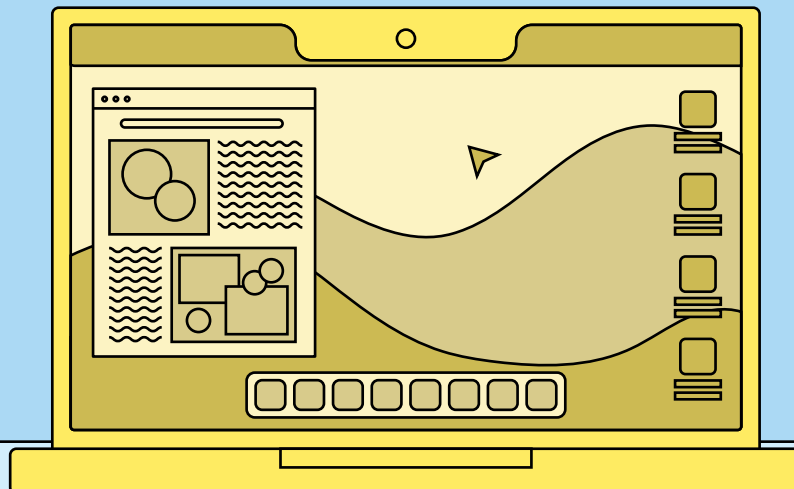
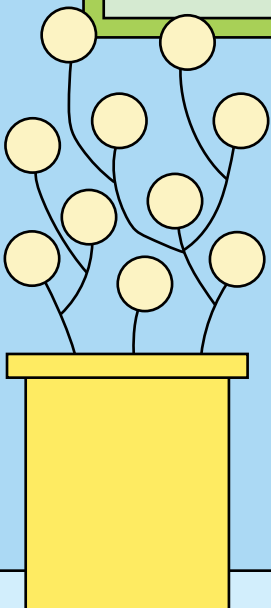
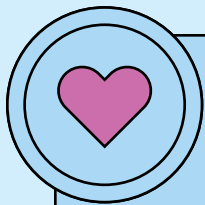
A green bulletin board with a light green border. It features several pink sticky notes pinned to it with purple pushpins. The notes are arranged in a grid-like fashion, with some overlapping. The top note is a header, and the others are individual entries with titles and page numbers.

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Some Favorite Productivity Hacks

Increasing productivity doesn't have to be complicated, and moving forward doesn't always require charts, schedules, and complex plans.

We asked six of our experts for their favorite productivity hack — one simple, memorable tactic for accomplishing more. Here's what they said.

A Little Help From Your Friends

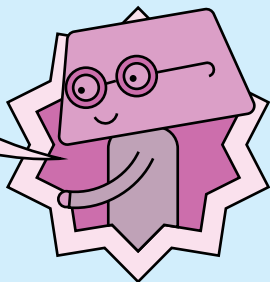
When you know what you're doing, work tasks fly by. But when you don't, sometimes you struggle.



In those moments, said Charlotte Lee, Customer Experience and Innovation Strategy Executive at Granicus (GovLoop's parent company), reach out to team members who are experts in the challenging task and ask for help.

That applies as much to managers as to new employees, she said, because nobody is a master of all trades. A paralyzing moment for one team member may be an opportunity to shine for another.

"Rather than always trying to do something yourself, consider who in your office is best at a task and ask them for help," said Lee.



Take Breaks for Breakthroughs

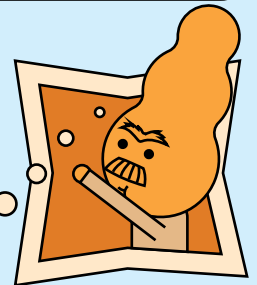
Our bodies aren't designed for nonstop physical work, nor are our brains designed for constant cognitive work.



Tucker Duval, Employment Generalist in the Athens-Clarke County, Georgia, Unified Government, said the best trick for increasing productivity is to rest.

A successful pace comes from "letting go a little bit and understanding that you'll be more productive, do better work and feel better when you take breaks and rest as you need to," Duval said.

What feels restorative is unique for each worker, so respecting their self-knowledge helps increase individual and organizational productivity.



Listen Up

Wouldn't it be great if everything we designed and released into the world just *worked*?

Unfortunately, sometimes when something is put to use, it does more harm than good.



The best way to avoid that is "actually talking to people," said Shonte Eldridge, Founder and CEO of Drake Strategy & Associates. She recommends convening small focus groups of fewer than 10 people. You can avoid many problems before they happen by consulting stakeholders and constituents, she said.

Those conversations can help by previewing the project, bringing stakeholders into the process, and uncovering areas of risk — and possible solutions.

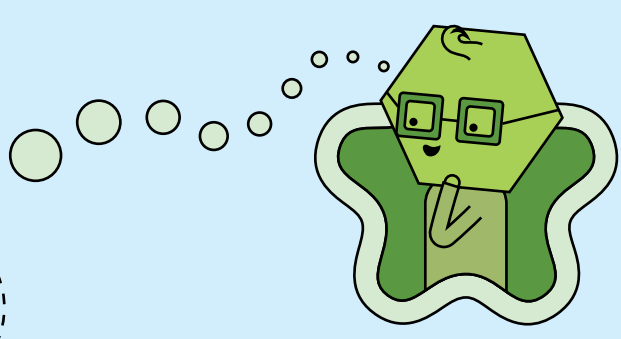
Keep the Cards on the Table



When you need to check in on a project, said Bill Brantley, Senior Training Specialist in the Navy Inspector General Office, email isn't always the best solution. Online product management or workflow tools can keep things moving, even when a team member can't respond. The information is always available and allows for asynchronous collaboration, which is especially useful with a distributed workforce.

That can save minutes, hours and even days that would be lost to trying to contact team members.

"If we can cut down the amount of time someone's searching for things in the workday and let them just get to the work, that helps a great deal," Brantley said.



Nothing Beats a List

Technology gives us so many ways to keep track of things. But sometimes the best solution is a simple one.



"To stay on top of my workload, I list all my tasks and commitments throughout the week," said Shakima Tozay, Senior Social Worker in the Department of Veterans Affairs. "It's incredibly satisfying marking each one off as I move through the list. Not only do I appreciate seeing the progress I'm making, but this simple hack also makes life easier, too."

So, keep your lists. As Tozay said, there's value not only in the "to do," but in the "done," to reinforce your sense of accomplishment.



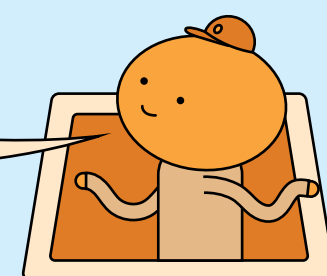
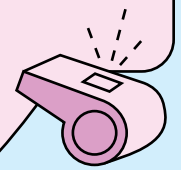
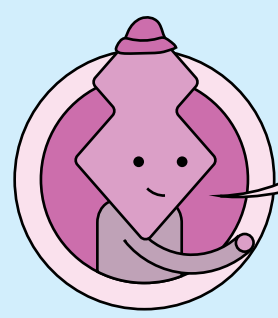
A Coach Is a Game-Changer

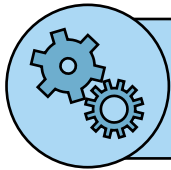
Your manager and colleagues don't have all the answers to improving your personal productivity. You'll do most of that work on your own. But there is help.



Nefertiti DiCosmo, Supervisory Life Scientist for the Environmental Protection Agency, recommends enlisting a productivity coach. Coaching is available to federal employees through the [Federal Coaching Network](#), and some states, such as [Virginia](#), offer individual and team coaching.

"A coach is meant to tap into your potential as a person and find the way that works for you," said DiCosmo. It's all part of allowing people to work in the way that's best for them, she said. "And a coach will help you do that. It'll help you hack yourself."

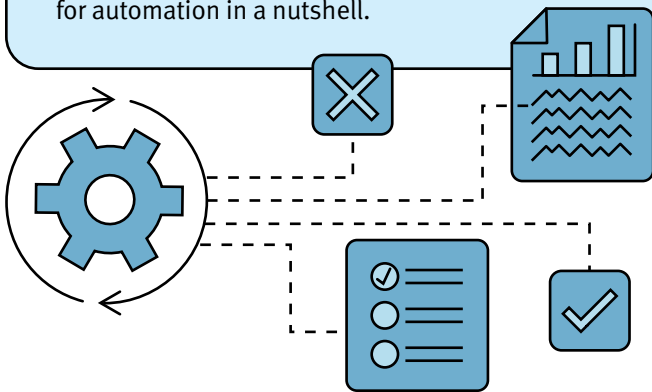




Habit #1: Automate (Thoughtfully)

What is Automation?

The basic proposition of automation seems simple enough: Software can handle tasks that are repetitive, rules-driven and don't require judgment more effectively than humans. Think about speed dial on your phone. Once programmed, the phone can dial a number faster than you ever could manually and never get it wrong. That's the vision for automation in a nutshell.



Solving the 'Blank Page' Problem

Automation tools such as AI-driven chatbots and low-code/no-code development might not be able (yet) to do all your work for you, but they can get you started, said Charlotte Lee, a GovLoop Featured Contributor and a Customer Experience (CX) and Innovation Strategy Executive at Granicus (GovLoop's parent company). Rather than staring at a blank page, you can use a tool such as ChatGPT to give you something to work with and spur your thinking. "You no longer have to start from scratch."

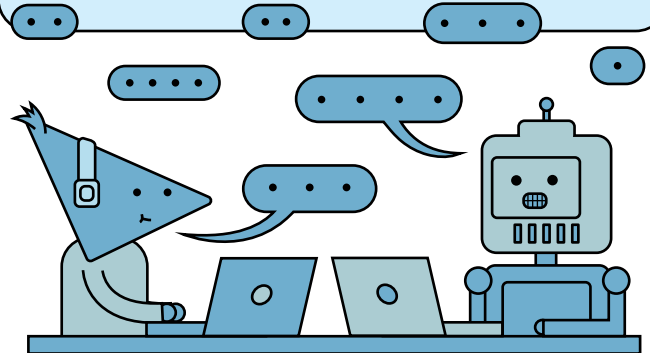
Why is Automation Important to Productivity?

Automation's benefits can be measured in terms of speed and accuracy. Unlike humans, software does not need to take breaks and it can repeat the same tasks without missing a step — or getting bored and sloppy.

One popular tool is robotic process automation (RPA) — software that people can "train" to handle specific tasks or processes, such as capturing and analyzing data from digital forms.

For example, U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services once used RPA to process two million backlogged records in just one hour, according to the 2021 [State of Federal RPA Report](#). "Doing it by hand would have taken nine months to complete," the report states.

Ideally, automation frees up workers to focus on more meaningful tasks, leading to greater job satisfaction and higher retention. Fifty-five percent of employees "feel good about replacing repetitive tasks with automation," according to a [study](#) by ADP Research Institute.



How Self-Help Helps Everyone

Increasingly, government agencies are offering employees the same kind of self-service portals they provide for constituents. A common use case is password changes. Rather than submitting a help ticket and waiting to hear from IT, employees can use an automated system to make the change. That's a win for workers and help-desk employees alike, said Shonte Eldridge, a GovLoop Featured Contributor and Founder of Drake Strategy and Associates. "That's one thing that's made government a lot more efficient — helping our employees have a better customer experience," she said.

How It's Done

Don't take it as given that automation is a boon for employees, especially as artificial intelligence (AI) enables agencies to automate a wider range of activities — and potentially displace human workers.

In time, automation is likely to eliminate positions that focus solely on the repetitive, rules-driven work at which automation excels, experts say. The recent emergence of AI-driven chatbots, such as ChatGPT, has only elevated some workers' concerns; Business Insider recently listed the 10 roles that AI is likely to replace.

If you're in a leadership position, you can improve the odds of success with automation in two ways:

- **Be transparent.** Clearly communicate an automation initiative's aims and how it will and will not affect employees. "Your project may seem simple on paper, but when we add people to the mix, it gets really complicated really fast," said Chetrice Mosley-Romero, Cybersecurity Program Director for the Indiana Office of Technology and Department of Homeland Security, speaking at a GovLoop virtual event last year.
- **Get employees involved.** No one understands the work better than the people who do it. "Getting employees directly involved not only has the potential to ease their concerns, but also provides critical input to help ensure the implementation will actually achieve the results intended and perform as expected," writes Lin Gensing-Pophal at the Society for Human Resource Management.

If you're a frontline employee, focus on building skills that position you to work effectively with automation, not be replaced by it. Such skills include "communication, complex analytical skills that often require careful judgements of multiple factors, and creativity," according to a study by the Brookings Institution.

Automation Tips

Keep it real. Don't gloss over your or others' concerns about automation. Facilitate conversation and debate.

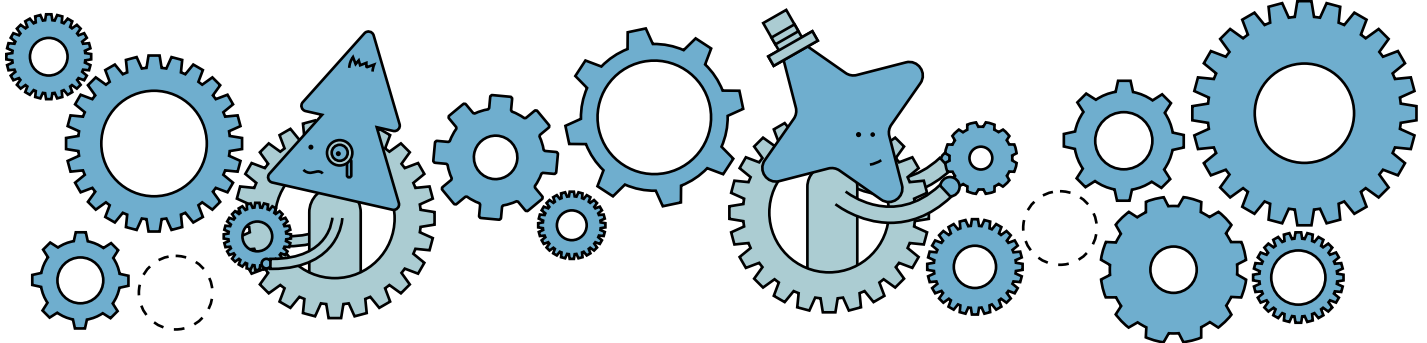
Find allies. If championing an automation project, partner with employees who understand your vision and have influence in the organization.

Don't fret. Recognize that failure is just another way to learn when trying new things.

Meet people where they are. Understand that not everyone is ready for change; take their concerns seriously, and slow down if necessary.

"Show [people] that you're willing to go that extra mile [to incorporate their ideas], even if it means you put the project behind a little bit or have to rework something."

– Chetrice Mosley-Romero,
State of Indiana



Learn more

[How to Overcome Workday Burnout](#)

[Worksheet: How to Make Automation Work for You: Tips and Takeaways](#)

[Next-Level Transformation: 11 Steps for How Your Agency Can Get There](#) (Watch on demand)



How to Stop Worrying about IT and Focus on the Data

An interview with Matthew Alexander, Field Solutions Architect, Pure Storage

For IT staff, managing legacy storage technology is a losing proposition: It takes an increasing amount of time and energy but provides diminishing returns.

For example, many agencies manage multiple storage systems, each for a different type of storage format — e.g., block, virtual machine, file or object. Each format has benefits, but it can be a bear to manage all those individual systems and the interfaces involved.

That's why Pure Storage offers an integrated data platform with an operating system called Purity that manages that complexity, said Matthew Alexander, Field Solutions Architect at Pure Storage, which provides flash-based storage solutions.

By simplifying the IT environment, an agency can focus on “getting value from the data rather than managing the hardware on top of which it runs,” Alexander said.

The Benefits of Flash

Legacy storage can also be a drag on your overall IT environment's performance and on the efficiency and sustainability of that environment. Alexander learned that firsthand when he was a systems administrator/architect with a government agency.

The agency shifted to flash-based systems from Pure Storage. Flash storage has no moving parts, so it is faster and requires less energy. Flash also is much denser, storing the same volume of data in a smaller system. All told, a flash-based system consumes 90% to 97% less electricity to store the same number of bytes.

For the agency, it was a revelation.

“It's interesting that when we incorporated flash storage in our environment, we didn't realize how much our previous storage platform was negatively impacting the performance and the availability of our environment, and ... how much operational complexity we had,” Alexander said.

The Weight of Technical Debt

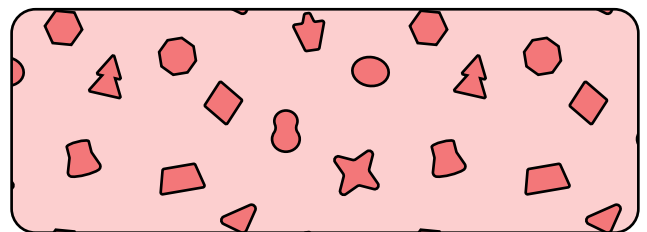
Then there's the problem of technical debt. Rather than investing money in new technology, an agency keeps investing in the legacy tech, scraping by as long as they can but having little to show for it.

Agencies need a storage solution that evolves as requirements evolve, Alexander said.

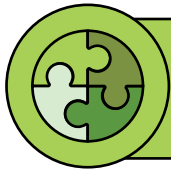
That's the idea behind Pure Storage's Evergreen program. Through this program, an agency can purchase a storage platform today, and Pure Storage will keep the hardware up to date over time and add new software features as they become available. And unlike when buying a whole new system, there's no need to spend money on data migrations.

Another budget challenge is that many agencies have integrated their compute, network and storage systems. That architecture requires an agency to scale up all three technology stacks in lockstep. Being able to scale granularly where you need it — e.g., just storage capacity — can help with budgets, Alexander said.

In short, by simplifying the IT environment and reducing technical debt, an agency can focus on “getting value from the data rather than managing the hardware on top of which it runs,” he said.



PURESTORAGE®



Habit #2: Foster Collaboration

What Is Collaboration?

It's a long word with many syllables but, at its core, collaboration is simple: People work together toward a common goal. You can collaborate with colleagues on a big project, or with friends to find the perfect restaurant. And while productivity is possible when you work by yourself, longer-term success — and happiness — requires a collaborative spirit.

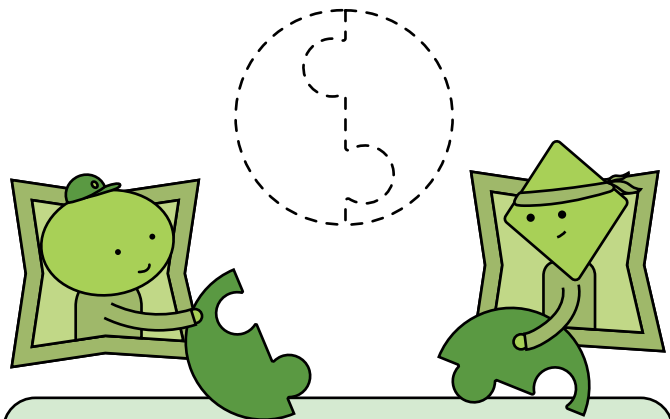
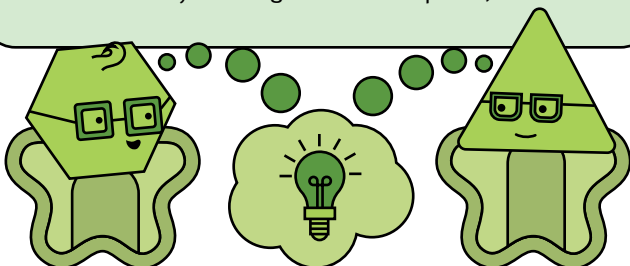
Collaboration: The Secret of Successful Teams

No matter how novel our individual ideas are and how many tasks we complete by ourselves, the truth is that we can accomplish more by engaging with our colleagues. And with that greater productivity comes something less tangible: camaraderie.



"If you have that collaborative culture with a respected and engaged chain of command, you're likely to be more productive, and you're likely to have more content and loyal teammates," said Alex Wilson, Senior Program Analyst with the Government-wide IT Accessibility Program in the General Services Administration's (GSA) Office of Government-wide Policy.

Wilson, who worked in the private sector before joining government, believes that collaboration is easier today than in the past. "Often I speak to individuals, especially people on my team, [and] people feel like they've gotten closer and gotten to know their teammates better, even some that aren't actually working in the same place," he said.



Leadership

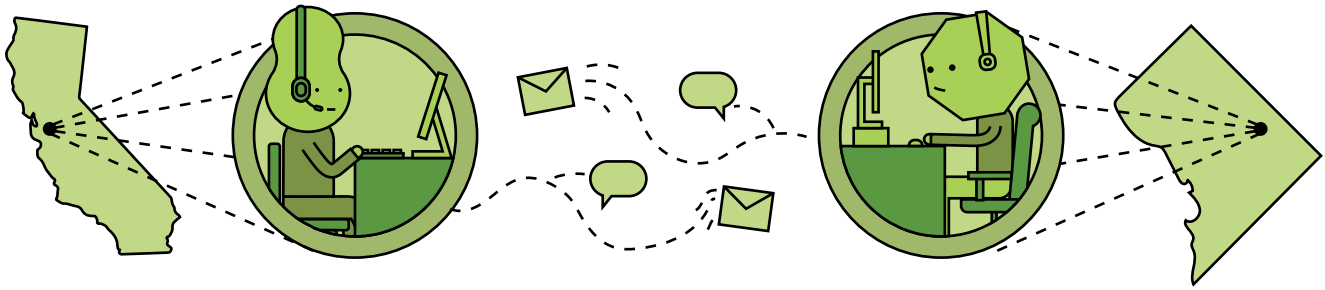
A collaborative workforce doesn't appear out of nowhere: It's fostered by leadership. Employees emulate how their managers communicate and what they prioritize, so leaders who embrace collaboration encourage their team members to follow suit, explained Wilson.

That means routine team meetings are important opportunities. Typically, "you're only focusing on work updates as opposed to making a conscious effort to figure out how your teams are doing, getting to know your team and paying attention to mental health," he said. Devoting just five minutes per meeting to making personal connections has an impact.

When asked why some organizations struggle to create a collaborative environment, Wilson acknowledged that some jobs are inherently solitary and that technology access can be difficult. But he also pointed to poor performance management.

Prioritizing competition "doesn't lend itself to collaboration,...to a good work environment, because you never want to share information. You never want to help someone else because if someone goes up, then you go down," he said.

"I've worked in organizations that cherish that competition over collaboration," he continued. "And I think in the long term, in highly competitive cultures, especially within government, that [management approach] won't be successful."



Relationships

It may seem counterintuitive, but sometimes being physically close is more isolating than working miles apart.

Wilson spent entire days unable to interact with teammates in the same building because they were in separate meetings, on different floors or set apart in another way. But the surge in virtual technology has made distance irrelevant.

In person, working with the same few people can become habit, but the virtual world can cultivate a broader team and more opportunities for collaboration.

A virtual forum “can often allow people to really share their ideas more easily than you would in a huge conference room or [the] big hangar-like room that some organizations have,” he said.

“I’ve worked in organizations that cherish that competition over collaboration. And I think in the long term, in highly competitive cultures especially within government, that [management approach] won’t be successful.”

– Alex Wilson, GSA

Technology

An array of technology can facilitate teamwork, and Wilson had advice for agencies considering their options.

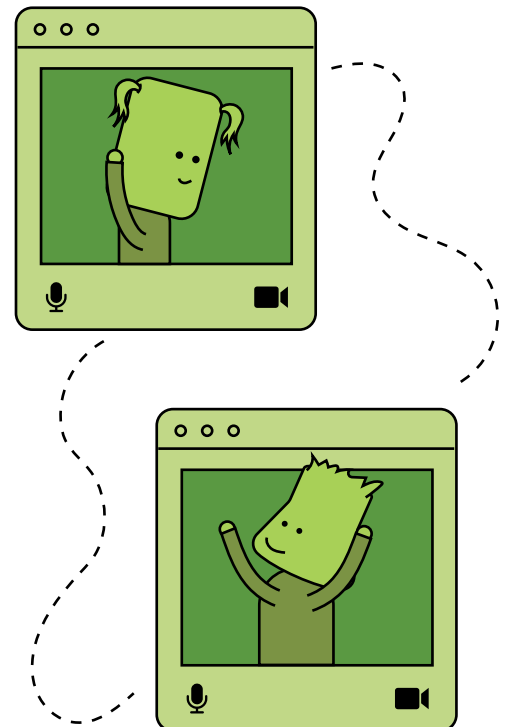
Organizations need simple-to-use, reliable virtual meeting software that has ways to easily present and share information and send direct messages to colleagues, he said.

They need a good file management system, so employees don’t waste time hunting for documents, and simultaneous collaboration tools so staff can work together in real time. Task-tracking software, which helps teammates monitor deadlines, also is a necessity, Wilson noted.

And as a member of the Government-wide IT Accessibility Program, he underscored the importance of ensuring that everyone can use agency systems without difficulty because inclusivity increases productivity.

Technology offers more possibilities today than ever before — and teammates should embrace it to build more fruitful personal and professional relationships.

“It’s [really] important to get to know your colleagues, especially the ones you work with daily,” Wilson stressed. “You just need to make time for it.”



Learn More

[Developing a Collaboration Mindset](#)

[How to Promote Collaboration with Your Team](#)



How to Accelerate Speed to Insight

An interview with Andy MacIsaac, Director of Solutions Marketing for Public Sector, Alteryx

One of the best measures of productivity when it comes to data is speed to insight — that is, how quickly employees can begin turning data into meaningful analysis.

Unfortunately, employees often have to spend an inordinate amount of time doing the preliminary work of ETL: extracting data from various sources, transforming it into usable formats and loading it into a data lake or warehouse.

"If it takes me all week to put together a report, is that really a valuable use of my time?" asked Andy MacIsaac of Alteryx, an analytics automation platform.

The Case for Automation

The thing about many of those tedious tasks is that they are perfect candidates for automation, being repetitive and rules-driven. An automation platform can carry out such tasks more quickly, said MacIsaac.

Among other things, an automation platform should:

- Include "connectors" that make it easy to extract data from multiple sources
- Provide drag-and-drop tools for transforming data into new formats
- Automate the process for loading data to its target destination

Automation also reduces the opportunity for human error, MacIsaac said. When tasks are tedious and repetitive, it's easy for people to slip up, especially if they are trying to knock it out as quickly as possible. Automation tools don't get bored or distracted and miss stuff or hit the wrong button.

The Case for No-Code/Low-Code

Another way to increase productivity is to provide no-code/low-code tools. Such tools, built around visual and interactive user interfaces, enable people to automate tasks without manually writing code.

With these tools in hand, employees can learn to create their own programs, rather than waiting for someone in the IT department to get around to it. The result? People who are not trained as data specialists can begin delving into analytics and increasing their own data literacy.

The Alteryx Analytics Automation platform provides low-code/no-code tools for the full analytics lifecycle, from doing basic chores like data prep and wrangling to data visualization and enrichment (e.g., adding geospatial data).

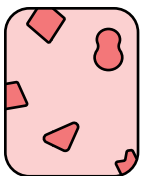
The same platform also provides tools for applying artificial intelligence and machine learning, natural language processing and other advanced analytics capabilities.

"We meet people where they are," MacIsaac said. "Not everybody knows how to code in Python, and that's perfectly fine. And if they do know Python and want to do some custom coding, they can ingest that into the platform as well."

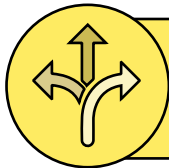
In some cases, people who do not start out as data specialists choose to start building their skills, taking advantage of the company's various training and certification programs, he said. Alteryx also has an engaged user community where people can post questions and share insights.

In any case, the goal is to help people harness the power of data without getting stuck on mundane tasks.

"It's really about enabling analysts to unleash their creativity, their problem-solving and to really apply themselves to deeper, more valuable work," MacIsaac said.



alteryx



Habit #3: Be Flexible

What is Flexibility?

Flexibility is about fostering an environment where everyone can do their best work. That may mean adjustable schedules, remote work, accessibility or other forms of inclusion. Tools designed for recruitment and retention that make employees happy make them more productive, too. The key to positive flexibility is responding to workers' needs in the way that's best for them.

Why Is It Important to Productivity?

First and foremost, flexibility allows employees to focus on their work. If you're worrying about whether you can pick up your child from school, wrangling with the bureaucracy over a name change, struggling to concentrate in a noisy office or facing a draining commute, your attention and energy are inevitably divided. Adapting working conditions to employee needs reduces those distractions.

And that increases quality output. In a [survey](#) by International Workplace Group, 85% of private-sector businesses worldwide reported that flexible hours and remote work had increased productivity, and 63% credit it with raising productivity by 21% or more.

Also in the private sector, gender, ethnic and cultural diversity correlate to increased [profitability](#) and innovation.

Accommodating parents, seniors, disabled workers, women and people from historically under-represented groups helps keep them in the workforce and sharing their skills and experience.

Respecting individuals' experiences and needs reduces conflict between their jobs and their lives. It builds trust, positivity and commitment — and all of that contributes to greater productivity.

“Every individual person is their own expert in what works best for them. When the organization and leadership trust people to make choices that work best for them, the outcome is higher-quality work and increased productivity.”

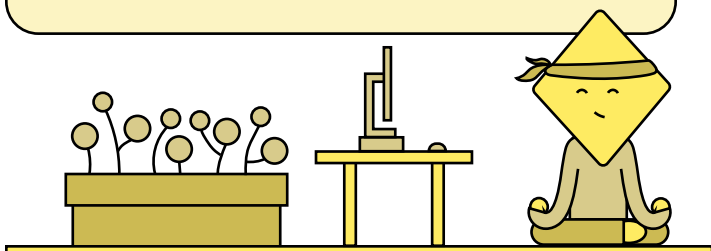
— Tucker Duval, Athens-Clarke County, Georgia

Flexibility › Autonomy › Productivity

Tucker Duval, GovLoop Featured Contributor and Employment Generalist in the Athens-Clarke County, Georgia, Unified Government, says having a say in working conditions and even the scope of their jobs makes people more productive.

“The number one thing that improves work life for me and my team is autonomy,” he said. “It’s increased our ability to recognize opportunities and empowered us to act on them.” That autonomy extends to “expand[ing] beyond the rigid boundaries of the job description to craft our jobs in ways that make more sense to us, as well as to work in settings and styles that are best suited to our individual needs.”

Attaining that autonomy requires the belief that “every individual person is their own expert in what works best for them,” Duval said. “When the organization and leadership trust people to make choices that work best for them, the outcome is higher-quality work and increased productivity.”



How It's Done

We've learned a lot about managing a distributed workforce in the past few years. Telework and flexible scheduling help people meet their obligations while staying productive, and they also allow many disabled, neurodivergent and older employees to work with less stress. Policies should be explicit about what options are available and how to access them. As far as possible, policies should apply to everyone, to avoid the appearance of favoritism.

According to a report from McKinsey, inclusion is essential to making the most of diversity programs. **That means a culture that:**

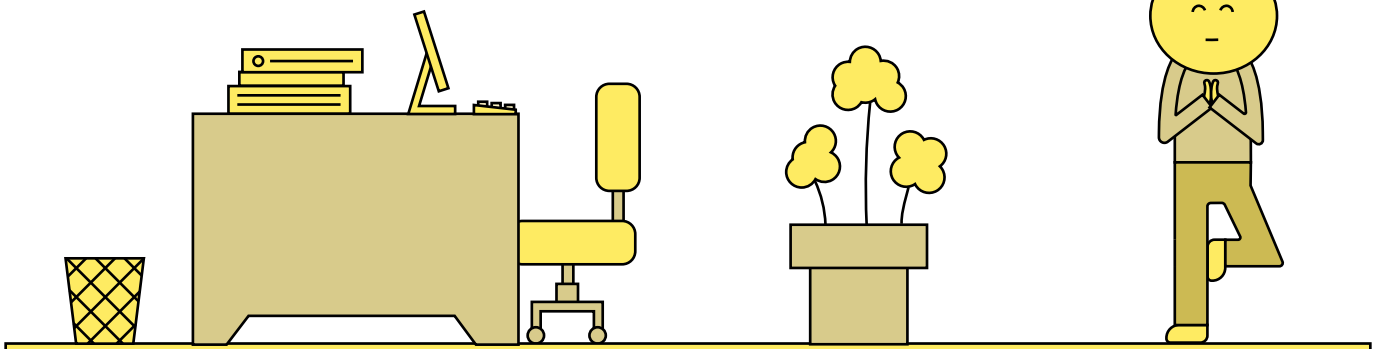
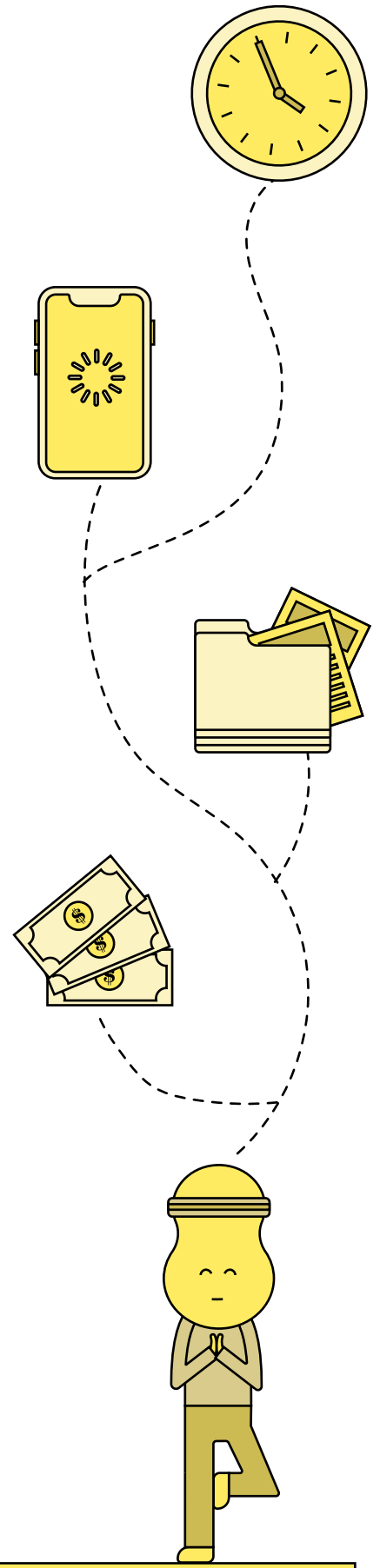
- **Is fair and transparent** about pay, promotion and recruitment
- **Demands mutual respect**, including addressing bias, bullying and other discrimination directly
- **Shows an organizationwide commitment** to support the well-being and contributions of all employees

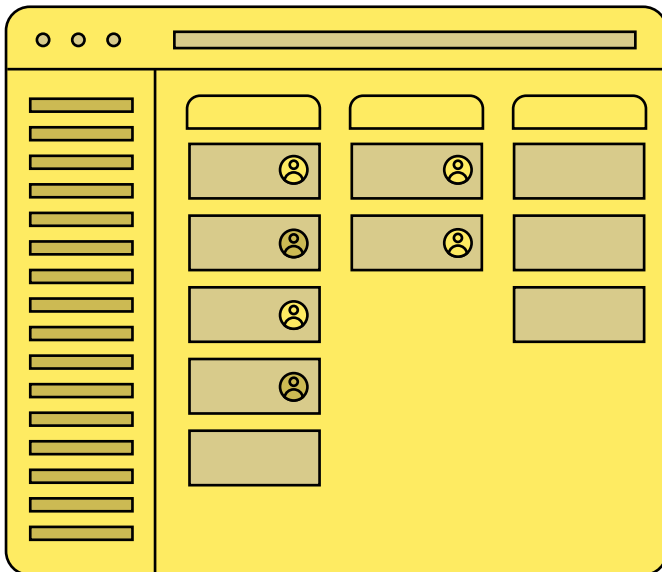
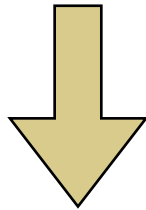
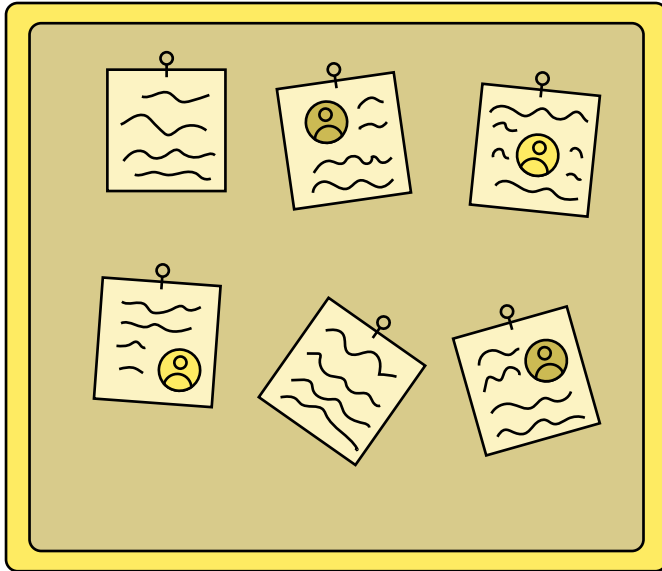
To make a workplace where everyone is comfortable, you'll need formal disability, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) policies and practices that foster accommodation and belonging. Employee resource groups are a way for employees to support one another — and also a source of policy recommendations.

The right technology is essential to productive flexibility. Choose platforms and applications that promote collaboration among a distributed or hybrid workforce. Make sure remote workers have the same experience as in-office employees, including access to documents and project planning, so that everyone is on the same page.

It's essential that these tools are accessible by design or compatible with assistive technology. Many employees without an identified disability still benefit from features such as screen magnification or noise-reducing headsets. And don't forget the low-tech options, such as adjustable chairs, footrests and partitions.

Be open to what employees need. What enhances productivity for one person may inhibit it for another. Make it easy for employees to request accommodations.





Visual Project Planning Made Virtual

There was a time when Bill Brantley kept flipcharts decked out with sticky notes on the walls of his office to organize projects.

“My team could come into my office, look at the charts and know where we were,” said Brantley, GovLoop Featured Contributor and Senior Training Specialist at the U.S. Navy Inspector General Office. “We would joke that they didn’t even have to talk to me. When we went remote, I just went with the virtual version.”

His office uses the planner function in Microsoft Teams, but there are similar options in other collaboration platforms. “It’s a lot like an electronic Kanban board — very visual,” he said. “Cards” on the board replace the sticky notes.

The shared board lets Brantley’s team keep up with tasks and deadlines, but now they can check in from anywhere at any time. And it helps people get up to speed when they return from time off.

Tips for Productive Flexibility

- **Use effective,** accessible collaboration tools.
- **Make sure the experience of information sharing is the same** for in-office and remote workers.
- **Have explicit policies** about telework and scheduling.
- **Promote inclusion,** not just diversity.
- **Where possible,** make options available to everyone.

Learn More

[Build Great Relationships to Build Great Teams](#)

[Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in Action](#) (Watch on demand)

[How to Manage and Collaborate With Different Generations](#) (Watch on demand)



Make Your Records a Productivity Asset

An interview with Mary Ellen Buzzelli, Director of State, Local and Education Strategy, and Ashley Hawkins, Director of Federal Operations, Iron Mountain Government Solutions

Increasingly, we expect everything to be online and easily retrievable. But a surprising number of government records are still on paper, stored in dusty boxes and available only through manual search. What if your employees could readily search by keyword, or metadata points, to quickly locate key documents and records, even when remote? Now your data becomes a productivity asset.

“Records and information, whether they’re paper or digital, are the lifeblood of government,” said Mary Ellen Buzzelli of Iron Mountain. “They’re the key to making the government responsive, efficient and effective.”

“Agencies still manage offices full of paper, which severely limits the sharing, analysis and distribution of that critical information,” said Ashley Hawkins, also of Iron Mountain.

Address Present Needs in Real Time

Records management isn’t just for archives, though. It enables agencies to assess data as it comes in and use it to plan future responses. Buzzelli cites the example of snowplows equipped with location sensors. Capturing those locations for public works dispatchers in real time means knowing where the plows are and deploying them in response to residents’ complaints. And that data can be used to plan for future storms.

Take the Present Into the Future

“Records management solutions are also fundamental in preparing for a scalable transformation future, building the foundation for more advanced technology like AI, that can empower faster, smarter decisions,” Hawkins said.

She offered these tips for making records more productive:

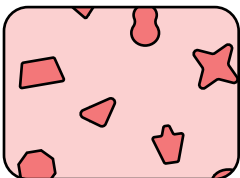
1. Understand your data — its current formatting, its uses and its accessibility.
2. Switch from physical to digital file storage.
3. Once you’ve built a digital foundation, establish standard, repeatable business processes and workflows.
4. Collaborate with internal stakeholders on the recordkeeping requirements of current and upcoming projects.
5. Seek emerging technologies, such as AI and data analytics, to automate workflows and share across the organization.

Bring the Past Into the Present

Getting records into the digital world is a formidable task for agencies already coping with limited resources. That’s where an information management expert like Iron Mountain comes in. Using intelligent data capture, AI and machine learning, they digitize and organize existing records, making them accessible and secure.

In one midwestern city, Iron Mountain took 6.1 million records from multiple sources — contracts, human resources, facilities, drawings and property records — digitized them and uploaded them into a secure cloud repository. “Now they have a centralized view of all their data assets, so employees are able to easily search for documents,” Buzzelli said. “If you have information readily available, you can capture valuable insights, whether it’s from structured, unstructured or semi-structured data.” Valuable insights benefit not only citizen services, but also policymaking and productivity.

“If we have the information, we can gain the insights to make good, intelligent policy decisions,” said Buzzelli. “It’s all about getting information into the right hands at the right time.”





Habit #4: Make Good Choices

What Are Good Productivity Choices?

Good choices help you head off — or recover from — efforts that may be intended to enhance productivity...but don't. It's not a matter of good tools and bad tools; the issue is right tools vs. wrong tools. Whether you're choosing applications, platforms or management strategies, focus on the problem you're trying to solve, the people doing the work and what they need.

The Right Choices Make Productivity Easy

When you think of "productivity tools," you're likely to envision a suite of apps that facilitate collaboration or maybe robotic process automation taking routine tasks off of human hands.

But meeting an agency's goals efficiently takes more than software. And the process starts long before you're shopping for products and vendors. Spoiler alert: Productivity is about people.

Fit the Tools to the Team and the Task

When it comes to improving and sustaining productivity, tailor apps and strategies for the people who will use them and the tasks they face.

"I think knowing your audience and knowing the capabilities of your audience" are essential, said Rao. "Collaboration tools like Teams and Slack have been advocated as helping increase productivity, and they can and do, but the question comes down to what is needed by your team to do what they need to do."

When work is not going smoothly, Rao said he analyzes the problem with the team and asks, "What do you need?"

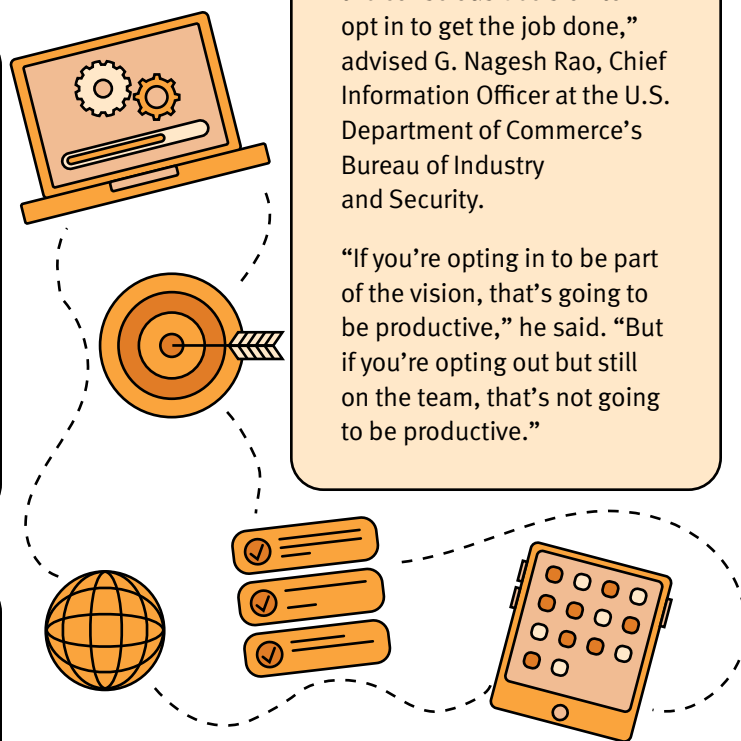
Start With a Committed Team



"The first thing to ensure productivity is everyone

being on the same page, understanding the common shared mission and making the conscious decision to opt in to get the job done," advised G. Nagesh Rao, Chief Information Officer at the U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security.

"If you're opting in to be part of the vision, that's going to be productive," he said. "But if you're opting out but still on the team, that's not going to be productive."



Facilitate Adoption

For an app or strategy to help productivity, employees must use it, Rao said. That means trying out the tools to prove their benefit and rolling them out step by step.

"You can put new tools out there, but if the folks are not willing to adopt and use them, it's not going to work. You need evangelists to show how the tools can be useful and effective. If you just throw it out there and say, 'We're all using this now,' it's not going to work," Rao explained.



“If you’re opting in to be part of the vision, that’s going to be productive. But if you’re opting out but still on the team, that’s not going to be productive.”

— G. Nagesh Rao

Make the Transition Worth the Disruption

Ironically, new ways of doing things can reduce productivity before enhancing it. To minimize that risk, it’s not only important to choose the right tool, but the right time.

“We had rolled out a suite of new collaboration apps, and there was a lot of confusion. People didn’t want to use it, not even videoconferencing, when they were used to just a phone number and a passcode,” he recalled.

Although training and support were available, “it’s more about people making the time to sit down and learn,” he said. In this case, the pandemic and mandatory switch to telework forced the learning curve. “Necessity is the mother of all inventions,” Rao said.

Be Patient

Of course, you can’t always count on a national emergency to push adoption. You’ll have to anticipate snags. Sometimes it takes patience for the wrong time to become the right time.

“I’ve seen cases where a tool was adopted more slowly, where people gravitated to it over time,” Rao said. Change is a constant — and so is resistance — but eventually, people come to accept what was once new.

“I think there will always be issues because we have a multigenerational workforce,” he said. “We have folks who are pre-technology and then we’ve got folks who are digital technology natives. There are going to be folks who adopt and adapt and those who will never want to adopt or adapt. But they’re all looking for the right tool to solve the problems.”

Learn More

[Part 1: Common Tech Pitfalls on Government Teams](#)

[Part 2: Introducing Tech Best Practices to Government Teams](#)

[Uh-Oh: Leadership Strategies for Plans Gone Awry](#)
(watch on demand)

[Fail Forward — What to Do When it Doesn’t Work Out](#)
(watch on demand)



A New Way to Think About Managing Data

An interview with Chris Townsend, Vice President for Public Sector, Elastic

Any agency undertaking an enterprise-level data initiative is likely to experience some serious growing pains.

Let's say an agency's security operations center wants to use analytics to improve its ability to detect and respond to threats throughout its environment. The problem is the necessary data is scattered across the organization and stored in siloed systems both on premises and in the cloud or, more likely, in a multi-cloud environment.

Legacy data management solutions simply were not designed with that kind of scenario in mind, leaving data specialists stuck with laborious manual processes.

"The way that we have many of our systems today, making that data available to our government analysts can be very cumbersome," said Chris Townsend, Vice President for Public Sector at Elastic, which helps agencies find the answers they need from data in real time and at scale.

A Data Lake Reality Check

Some organizations try to alleviate their data complexity by dumping all their data into a central repository, such as a data lake. In theory, it makes sense to manage all that data from a single source, but Townsend doesn't expect many agencies to choose this approach in the long term.

One problem is scale. With enterprise-level initiatives, too much data is spread around too far to make a central repository a practical solution. But even if it's doable, a data lake doesn't fit with how most agencies want to operate, Townsend said. They're going to continue to maintain some of their data on premises and some on their various cloud platforms.

"We need solutions that are more flexible in allowing access to all that information in a very fast, efficient and cost-effective manner that's operationally sound," he said. "That's where things are going."

A Different Tack

An increasingly popular alternative is to leave that data in place, but to index it using a common platform that makes the data readily accessible and findable. This is the approach that Elastic takes.

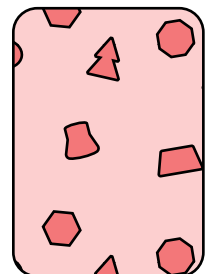
This decentralized architecture — sometimes referred to as a data mesh — makes it possible to handle growing volumes of data without running into performance problems.

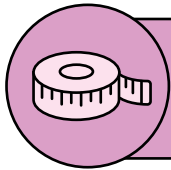
The Department of Homeland Security has deployed the Elasticsearch platform as part of its Continuous Diagnostics and Mitigation (CDM) program. Elasticsearch is the foundation for the CDM Dashboard II, which enables cyber teams at the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency to search cyber data in hundreds of federal agencies as part of threat-hunting efforts.

Without this distributed architecture, such a sweeping data effort would be very costly and complex, Townsend said. Elasticsearch allows the data to remain in its original location with each agency, which is also a benefit for security and compliance.

The Elasticsearch platform can also help agencies with a variety of use cases, such as enterprise performance monitoring, real-time situational awareness, investigative intelligence, AI insights and more.

"We're deployed in some of the largest government agencies at scale, because this is a very flexible, efficient way to index and ingest the data," he said.





Habit #5: Measure Productivity Productively

What is Measuring Productivity?

Productivity measurement tells you how well you're doing.

But it's challenging to gauge in the public sector, where the goals are complex and quantitative measures cannot always reflect the values of an agency's mission and public service.

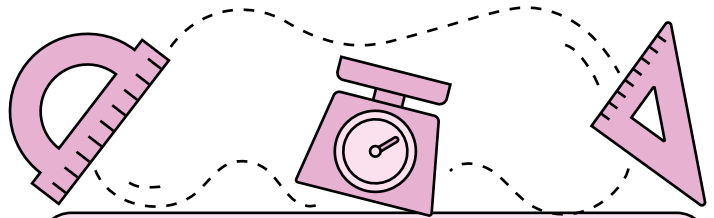
So, effective measurement in government has a qualitative component. And that requires creative thinking about what outcomes are important and how to calculate them.

How Measurement Supports Productivity

You can't tell you are improving productivity if you can't measure it. But measuring productivity *productively* means finding measurements that illustrate that you're meeting program goals. To do that, look beyond what's *easy* to measure to find what's *relevant* to measure.

Choosing the wrong metrics can result in projects that fail to make a positive difference, no matter how successful they appear. The right measurements can guide future efforts and inspire your team.

Good measurements also help you communicate with constituents and elected officials about what you're accomplishing and how you're responding to their concerns. Setting a baseline shows that you take the issue seriously. Sometimes good measurements result in bad news — but they also point the way to improvement.



How It's Done

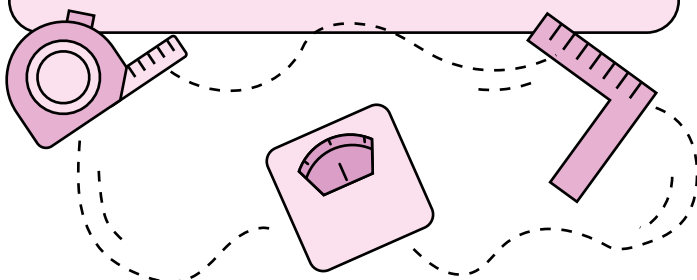
Several types of metrics address productivity — and they are not how long employees stay at their desks or how many emails they answer.

Output metrics show what you're delivering to constituents, **process metrics** track your operations and **activity metrics** measure your efforts to improve performance. Where output metrics may point you toward future improvements, process and activity metrics show the way. As you analyze the relationships between them at your agency, be sure to get the most out of them.

Engage everyone in the process. Employees should design mission-based priorities to share with their teams — daily, weekly and longer-term — to eliminate confusion and align understanding. Then, employees and managers can evaluate how well those priorities support the mission. Gabriela Mauch, Vice President of the [ActivTrak](#) Productivity Lab, champions the idea of empowerment, along with trust and personal accountability — all of which free employees to manage their work processes and managers to focus on growth and influential insight.

Look at the past, present and future. It's wise to examine where you started and where you're going, in addition to where you are. Tracking outcomes and operations over time helps you set goals for the future. Stay mindful, too, of your current resources. Remember that employees are subject to their circumstances, including how long they've had their jobs, the guidance they've received and their skill level.

It's important not to evaluate employee performance in a vacuum. Frequent conversations between employees and managers and regular employee self-reviews will help.



Tips for Measuring Productivity:

- **Measure outcomes** and conduct constituent and stakeholder surveys.
- **Keep track of your processes** and collect productivity data that improves operations.
- **Make a timeline** of your activity improvements.
- **Create individualized productivity measurements** based on career journeys.
- **Collect measurement insights** from employees, to empower, coach and support them.
- **Be aware that workers are different** — when evaluating their progress, one size does not fit all.

Say ‘No’ to Micromanaging

Managers can wind up evaluating how people work, rather than the work itself.

“The surefire way to reduce someone’s productivity is sweating the small stuff,” said Nefertiti DiCosmo, GovLoop Featured Contributor and Supervisory Life Scientist at the Environmental Protection Agency. She recalled times when high performers’ output slowed because they had to focus on monitoring their work behavior rather than their actual work.

“Being nitpicky is going to reduce people’s ability to be productive,” she said. But refocusing on the mission relieves stress and increases productivity.

Plan and Communicate

Watching your employees’ every move is a mistake.

“It displays distrust in the team’s capabilities and hinders your leadership,” said Shakima Tozay, GovLoop Featured Contributor and Senior Social Worker at the Department of Veteran Affairs.

Instead, prioritize planning and communication, because “miscommunication about goals and instructions can be another source of diminished output.”

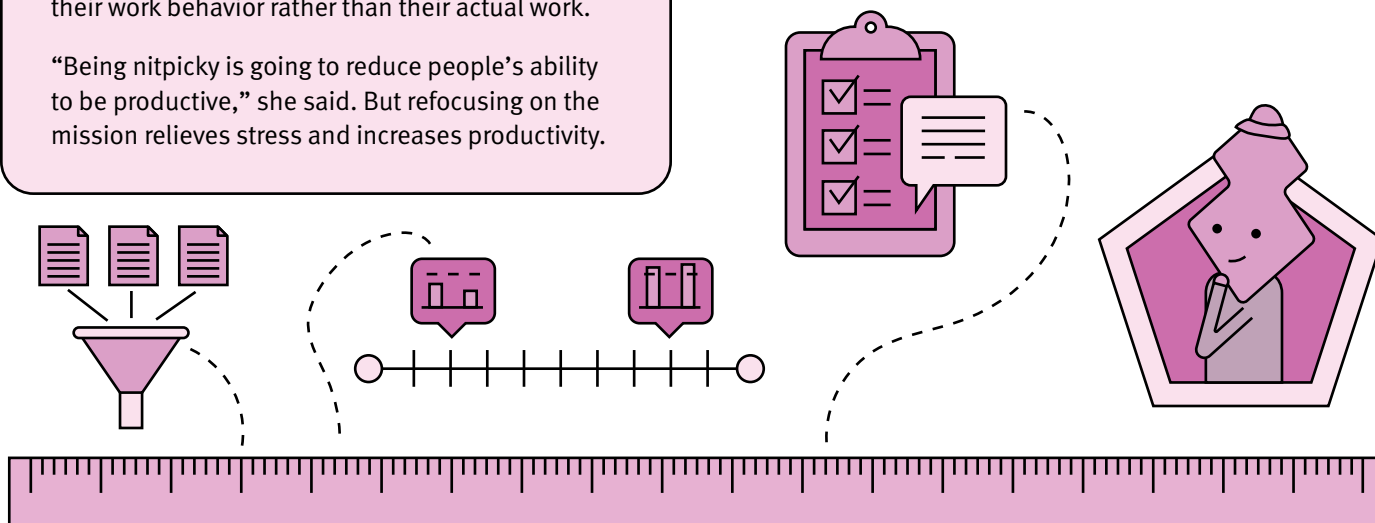
“Ask the employee what other aspects of their work are not easily measured, then figure out how to best capture their efforts,” said Tozay.

She recommended frequent check-ins about progress and milestones. “Even during times of crisis and uncertainty, a leader should take time to plot an approach,” she added.

Learn More:

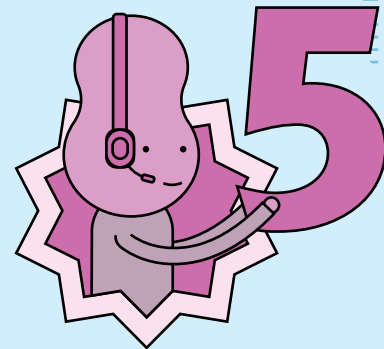
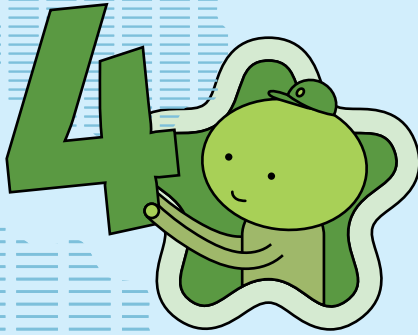
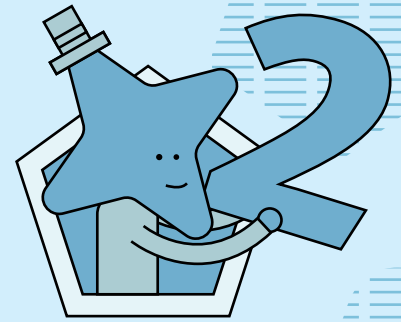
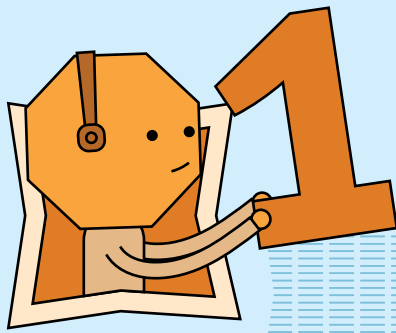
[Performance Metrics: Lessons for Public Leaders](#)

[Utilizing Data to Help Your Team Improve Processes](#)
– GovLoop Academy (Watch on demand)



“Let people do the work, and then spend your time as a manager discussing improving quality or quantity.”

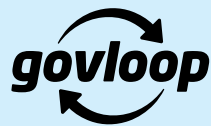
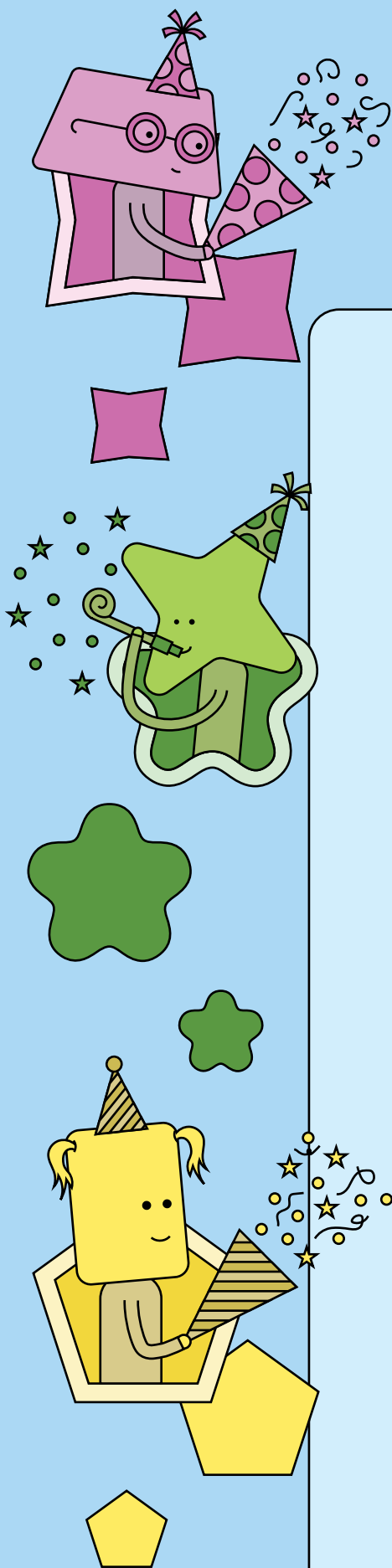
— Nefertiti DiCosmo,
Environmental Protection Agency



Make Yours a Highly Productive Agency: 5 Takeaways

Productivity is a moving target, but there is one constant — the people doing the work. Give them the tools, conditions and communication to understand the task and perform it well, and they'll make your agency a productive one.

- 1. Getting started with automation isn't automatic.** Prepare your team by being clear about what processes will change. For team members, building skills will help you work effectively with automation.
- 2. Leaders set the tone for congenial collaboration.** To cultivate a productive, collaborative culture, prioritize non-competitive idea sharing and genuine connections. Adopt easy-to-use virtual meeting and project-tracking tools.
- 3. A workplace where everyone feels comfortable will be productive.** Encourage flexibility to accommodate different schedules, working styles, locations and other accessibility challenges.
- 4. Focus on the problem you plan to solve and on what will help your team.** Choose the right time for change, adopt technology specific to the task, and be patient as people learn new tools and navigate the transition.
- 5. The right metrics for assessing productivity should reflect your mission and project goals.** Involve the team in setting appropriate measurements and communicate frequently about what the metrics show.



About GovLoop

GovLoop's mission is 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 the public sector.

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

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Authors

John Monroe, Director of Content

Lauren Walker, Senior Staff Writer

Susan Kirby-Smith, Senior Staff Writer

Candace Thorson, Managing Editor

Stephanie Kanowitz, Contributing Writer

Designer

Marc Tom, Junior Graphic Designer