

## Employee Needs and Preferences for a Digital Workplace

### Executive summary

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## Employee Needs and Preferences for a Digital Workplace

Final Report

Prepared for Shared Services Canada

Supplier name: Environics Research

May 2018

This public opinion research report presents the results of an online survey and focus groups conducted by Environics Research on behalf of Shared Services Canada. The online survey was conducted with 2,842 federal public service employees. The focus groups included eight sessions made up of six to eight public service employees. The research study was held between February and March 2018.

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## Executive summary

### Background and objectives

Shared Services Canada (SSC) is looking to provide the next generation of digital communications tools to support the digital workplace of the future. This effort involves examining innovative, cost-effective digital technologies to pave the way towards the workplace of the future. It will also provide the opportunity to find other digital means for public servants to communicate and collaborate in a common platform.

This research was designed to engage the people who will use the digital workplace on their needs and preferences: federal public servants. Engaging Government of Canada (GC) employees on their needs and preferences for digital communication and collaboration is a user-centric approach that will enable SSC to procure and provide tools to its customers for program and service delivery.

The objectives of the research are to:

- Shed light on how GC employees use existing digital communication technology in their current roles;
- What needs they have;
- What employees deem important in relation to digital communication tools; and
- Their preferences related to a digital workplace.

### Methodology

Both quantitative and qualitative research was conducted to address the research objectives.

- **Quantitative:** An opt-in online survey was conducted with 2,842 federal public servants between February 26 and March 9, 2018. The survey was implemented in-house by SSC; since there is no single comprehensive email list of all federal employees, the survey was distributed and publicized through various means. As a result, this represents a convenience sample, and a margin of sampling error cannot be reported.
- **Qualitative:** A series of eight (8) focus groups was conducted between March 13 and 15, 2018, with federal government employees who indicated in the survey their interest in participating and consent to contact for that purpose. Six sessions were conducted in-person at a focus group facility in Ottawa with employees who work in the National Capital Region (NCR), and two groups were conducted over the telephone to include employees who work outside the NCR. Six sessions were conducted in English and two in French.

A more detailed description of the methodology is presented at the back of the report (Appendix A), along with copies of both the quantitative (Appendix B) and qualitative (Appendix C) research instruments.

### Statement of limitations

Qualitative research provides insight into the range of opinions held within a population, rather than the weights of the opinions held, as would be measured in a quantitative study. The results of this type of research should be viewed as indicative rather than projectable.

## Cost of research

The cost of this research was \$109,867.41 (HST included).

Research: \$97,227.80

HST: \$12,639.61

## Key findings – quantitative phase

### Work arrangements, connectivity and mobility

- There is a fair amount of use of non-traditional working arrangements. One in five employees *normally* work outside the office provided by their department/agency, either from home or from another location. In addition, half of employees who normally work from the office spend at least part of the week working remotely (i.e., from another location). For office workers who do not work remotely, it is typically because they do not have the option (63%) than that they choose not to (37%).
- Seven percent of respondents indicated that they work in a remote geographic area (i.e., outside urban centres or in northern locations). Unfortunately, consistent access to telecommunications services in these areas is not universal: close to one-third describe their Internet connection (32%) and cell phone reception (35%) as inconsistent.
- There is widespread use of devices that support mobility. Employees are most likely to use laptops for work purposes (78%); three in four employees also use either a smartphone or a cell phone (the former is somewhat more widely used). Currently, there is considerably less use of tablets (11%).
- The phenomenon of Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) is evident in the federal workforce: more than one-third of smartphone, cell phone and tablet users are using their own devices, either exclusively or in addition to an employer-provided device. Because smartphones are most widely used of these three devices, the overall level of BYOD is also highest for this device: one in five of all employees are using a BYOD smartphone for work purposes. BYOD is lowest for laptops (only 13% of users).

### Current use of email and other tools

- The influence of non-traditional work arrangements and mobility-related needs are evident in the tools that employees say they use daily to accomplish their work. Aside from document printing and copying tools (78%), mobile computing (70%) and mobile phone (65%) equipment are the most widely used tools on a daily basis.
- A majority of employees estimate that they receive between 25 and 100 emails on an average workday (including both TO: and CC:). Email is widely used for activities that could be handled in other ways. For instance, email outweighs use of other existing GC tools for document sharing and for instant messaging. As well, use of email for document filing is on par with use of departments' document management systems.
- Employees report using digital tools most frequently for quick questions, to increase efficiency (i.e., look for information that can be re-used; find instructions, tools or forms), and to collaborate on documents.
- Employees who self-identify as having a disability have mixed views about access to adaptive or assistive tools and technology in their department. Roughly equal proportions say there is wide/some access (33%) limited/no access (32%) or are unsure what is available (34%).

### Importance of and satisfaction with digital tools

- When asked to rate the importance of ten digital tools in enabling them to work effectively, employees prioritize remote network access (84% very important) and mobile computing equipment (83%).
- A gap analysis indicates that the priority areas for improvement (i.e., digital tools that are of greatest importance to employees, but also the ones they are less satisfied with) are Wi-Fi connectivity in the GC workplace, mobile phone equipment and video/Web/audio conferencing. One in four employees or fewer say they are very satisfied with each of these three digital tools (among those able to provide an opinion).
- Secondary priorities for improvement (i.e., weaker satisfaction than ideal, but of importance to a smaller number of employees) include the Record and Information Management system, the reservation system and collaborative tools/technologies.

### Collaboration

- Collaboration is widespread across the GC. Seven in ten (71%) federal employees say that their work requires them to collaborate with individuals outside their department or agency, including more than three in ten who collaborate with individuals outside the GC. Notably, when asked what tools they use to aid in collaboration, employees mention email and telephone as often as specialized tools that have been developed for that purpose.
- There is extensive interest among federal employees in using digital tools that support collaboration. Seven in ten (70%) federal employees say they are very interested in using such tools, and this is the case for a majority of employees regardless of demographics or their workplace characteristics (including those whose work does not currently require collaboration).
- Federal employees can be divided into four segments along a continuum from low to high use of and interest in existing digital collaboration tools. There is limited differentiation between the segments by demographic and workplace characteristics, with the exception that SSC employees tend to have higher use of and interest in these tools. Social values are arguably a more valuable way to help to explain the varying orientations to these tools, and to inform communications and operational strategies.
  - The High use segment are likely to be early adopters: they tend to be risk-takers who are naturally predisposed to technology. This group is likely to respond to messages about how digital technologies can provide the opportunity to learn from, and to communicate sincerely and spontaneously with, others, as well as help to alleviate time pressures.
  - The Moderate use segment also has a tendency towards social learning and desire for communication with others (although not as strong as for the High use segment). These are “bridging” (common) values that could be used to bring Moderates further along the usage continuum.
  - The Occasional use segment has a greater tendency than others to reject unquestioning respect for and deference to authority. Rather than a traditional, top-down approach to introducing new tools, efforts will be needed to engage them in the decision-making and roll-out processes – so that they feel their point-of-view is reflected in the outcome.
  - The Low use segment is most anxious about technology (believe it causes more problems than it solves) and least attracted to large groups, suggesting they are unlikely to be motivated by the “coolness” factor or the social aspects of these tools. This group believes in teamwork and everyone

pulling their own weight, and thus may respond favourably to messaging that focuses on the aspects of the tools that allow federal employees to fulfil their roles and responsibilities as part of a team.

### Final comments

- In response to an open-ended survey question about whether they had any final comments or suggestions, participants raised five key themes: the desire for functionality (making sure that whatever tools they have work for them); interest in technologies and policies that allow them to work remotely; removing obstacles that reduce the effectiveness of digital products (e.g., slow adoption, lack of training, tools that don't work well together); desire for improved document management and sharing systems; and interest in a government-wide instant messaging system.

## Key findings – qualitative phase

### Collaboration

- Federal government employees who participated in these focus groups instinctively understood what is meant by “collaboration”, indicated that it is an important aspect of their jobs, and that they expect that the degree to which they collaborate will only continue to increase.
- For most participants, collaboration involves working closely with other members of their department/agency and requires the use of digital communications tools to connect with colleagues who work from home or other locations, as well as with those based in other parts of Canada. The emergence of “communities of practice” for those who fulfil a specific role/task within different departments/agencies was also held up as an example of collaboration in action.
- Although many participants felt that collaboration is officially encouraged within the GC and that many employees are keen to find additional methods of collaboration, there are a number of cultural and logistical barriers that frequently stand in the way, including:
  - Cultural resistance, particularly on the part of “middle management” who do not view collaboration as part of their department/agency's core business functions, or who feel it is unnecessary;
  - Technological barriers, including low bandwidth/lack of Wi-Fi in government buildings;
  - Data security/privacy barriers due to GC data security requirements; and
  - Informational barriers related to a perceived lack of knowledge/training regarding the tools that are available.

### Email and other digital communication tools

- Across all groups, participants indicated that they rely on email to communicate with their colleagues in their department/agency, as well as in other areas of government. Email is very much regarded as the primary method of communication, except when it is preferable to speak to someone directly (e.g., to avoid extensive back-and-forth on a challenging issue). However, there is also a fair amount of concern expressed about the degree of reliance on email, related at least in part to the sheer volume of email and the time spent replying to and managing emails.
- When participants discussed specific digital communications tools and how these tools are applied to their work, three key themes emerged:
  - The perception that the GC has access to, or is using, too many digital communication tools that are not effectively integrated in a seamless manner (e.g. logging in through a single portal);

- The view that employees do not receive enough training or support on how best to leverage these tools; and
- The fact that most tools are not widely adopted, which means it is easier to use existing methods, such as email, to communicate.
- Email appears to be used extensively because it overcomes these barriers in ways that other individual tools do not, making it by default the single most widely adopted form of communication.

### Opportunities to build greater digital collaboration

- Federal government employees who participated in these sessions strongly desire more training on the different tools that are available to them. Many agreed that the training they currently receive when new tools become available is cursory – and that because they are not sufficiently trained, they and their colleagues do not integrate the tool fully into their work, which means that they continue to rely on email to accomplish digital communications tasks.
- In addition to receiving more formal, hands-on training, many participants also liked the idea of establishing “ambassadors” or “champions” of specific digital communications tools within departments and agencies who would serve as peer trainers for their colleagues.
- Another key issue that was raised by some participants is that they do not feel they have a great deal of control over which tools are adopted by their departments/agencies. Some of these participants (many of whom tended to think of this issue on a government-wide policy level rather than a personal level) did not feel that the tools that are adopted necessarily fit with their business objectives and that they are not optimally coordinated or integrated with other tools. This was something that these participants regarded as a key issue to address when considering further adoption of digital communication tools.

### Political neutrality statement and contact information

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