

Collaboration Tools in NATO

Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Project Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic had a wide-reaching impact on working practices globally. Many nations implemented confinement plans or lockdowns where populations were either mandated or recommended to work in shifts, or work from home if at all possible. Similar policies were also implemented to varying extents by NATO entities. This new way of working presented many challenges for NATO staff, as well as revealing new requirements for tools to support routine work and decision making.

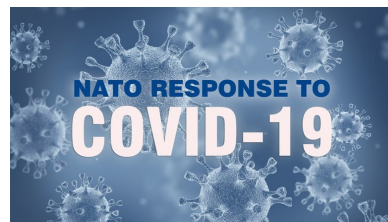
NATO responded quickly to the increasing demand for these virtual *collaboration tools* that would allow its staff to work safely from home, while still ensuring that the Alliance could conduct *business as usual*. Moreover, it was considered that at least some of the tools could potentially benefit the Alliance in the longer-term, even after the COVID-19 pandemic.

As such, the JALLC was tasked to provide an overview of staff experiences using the available collaboration tools during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to inform efforts to develop potential tools that could be used NATO-wide in the future.

Key Findings

The assigned JALLC Project Team collected data from two sources: the NATO Lessons Learned (LL) Portal (NLLP) and interviews that were conducted by an AI voice-bot as part of an experiment in connection with the JALLC's ongoing innovation efforts.

A number of challenges and suggestions for improvements to the use of collaboration tools and/or the online collaborative working environment were identified, including in the following areas (see overleaf).



Above: the NATO Communications and Information Agency (NCIA) responded quickly to the need for staff to be able to work remotely. Source: www.ncia.nato.int

“Some of the tools could potentially benefit the Alliance in the longer-term, even after the COVID-19 pandemic.”



The NATO Lessons Learned Conference 2021 was successfully held during the COVID-19 pandemic using an online collaboration tool which allowed almost 500 participants to take part remotely.



Key Findings (continued)

Standardization and Standard Operating Procedures

Interviewees recognized the need for standardization of collaboration tools and procedures to increase interoperability among HQs and avoid the use of different tools for the same purpose in different HQs.

Training on available tools

18% of interviewees mentioned training in the context of challenges and stated that they felt they needed better training on how to use the available collaboration tools for their work.

Accessibility

Many staff suggested that key NATO collaboration tools should be made available for staff to use remotely. Further, in general, improved access to duty networks from home would have overcome many of the challenges staff experienced with virtual collaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Classification

Interviewees faced many challenges with handling classified information during the COVID-19 pandemic. Noting that not all information on the classified networks needs to be kept/managed/used in that environment, one recurring suggestion from interviewees was to allow certain classified information to be accessed on networks that are available remotely. Another suggestion was to ensure that the key collaboration tools are also available on those networks which would facilitate remote working and the correct handling of NATO information.

One-Stop-Shop

Several staff mentioned that, in their experience, it would be beneficial to combine a number of collaboration tools (or features thereof) into a one-stop-shop style solution that would allow them to better conduct routine tasks and events online. Ideally, staff would be able to hold an online meeting and simultaneously (for example) be able to access document handling systems, use an online whiteboard, and chat in a dedicated forum; essentially mimicking real-world working, but in an online environment.

Key Takeaways

The study showed that the military needs for collaboration tools are diverse, ranging from the need for staff to be able to work with classified information from home—e.g. for intelligence or current operations functions—to the need for staff to be able to work with others who do not have access to NATO networks—e.g. during exercises, training and education, and conferences.

The observations and suggestions captured during this study will contribute to ensuring that the Alliance continues to function as efficiently as possible, even under challenging circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic presented.

Project Team

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