



ENHANCING EMPATHY

Experience as a Service® in
the Federal Government

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INTRODUCTION

Customer service is a critical link between the public and the federal government. It is a key component of public trust, a driver of agency mission, and a tangible expression of the responsibility government agencies have to their customers. This is not always simple. Customer service is multifaceted, and when the customer base is the general public, it can be challenging to ensure that all feel that their needs are being heard and addressed. However, the customer is only one part of the equation.

It is equally important that agencies are making strategic investments in the assets at the forefront of their mission — their employees. A streamlined customer experience that accounts for both the needs of their customers and their employees isn't simply a nice-to-have. It is a potentially transformational component of the relationship between the public and their government.

As agencies decide how to invest in building a better customer experience, how do experts from the public sector feel about the current landscape? What are their biggest challenges or pain points? What are some steps that they can take to improve the experience for both customers and public servants?

Government Business Council (GBC), the research division of GovExec, partnered with Genesys to answer these questions and more through a survey of 150 federal, state and local professionals.

PURPOSE

With insights collected from government experts across the federal government, GBC has organized the following playbook as a set of actionable takeaways for interested stakeholders. It aims to faithfully capture the current understandings and challenges facing public sector leaders as they look to improve their customer experience.

BACKGROUND

The last decade has seen significant federal investment into improving customer experience, promising a digital-first future that aims to reduce burdens on employees and create seamless interactions for the public. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated some of the existing gaps in customer service. The sudden increase of requests for assistance, from trying to sign up for a vaccine to receiving relief aid, strained agency resources and call center agents. Slow processes contributed to fear and frustration among the public, which led to decreased overall trust in the agency's ability to help them, and the government at large.

To support agencies in strengthening their customer experience services, there have been numerous federal mandates that provide tools, education and organizing principles. Executive Order 14058 on transforming customer experience,¹ the establishment of an Office of Customer Experience,² and tools like the Digital.gov Customer Experience Toolkit³ are key examples of the resources and guidance available for federal agencies, as well as a demonstration of the commitment to improving the public's interactions with the government across the board.





PLAYBOOK OVERVIEW

To build government experiences that meet the real needs of the public and make the best use of agent skills, we suggest that government agencies consider the following steps:

Play 1: Understand the expectations

Service expectations have risen for agencies from the public and government administration. Understanding both customer pain points and federal mandates is key to strategic investment.

Play 2: Empower your employees

Frustrated customers lead to frustrated agents. By providing employees with the tools, training, and support they need, agencies are investing in both their customer experience strategy and their best assets – their agents.

Play 3: Erase the white space

Increasing your visibility across the entire customer service journey by identifying friction points and data gaps is crucial in deciding where to focus first. And ensuring your agency has the data it needs – that there is no “white space” – is necessary to make informed, analytical choices.

Play 4: Map your journey

Addressing all these simultaneous needs can be challenging. Journey mapping offers agencies a clear and concise way to understand their path forward, ultimately lowering costs, supporting efficiency, and improving the experience for customers and agents.

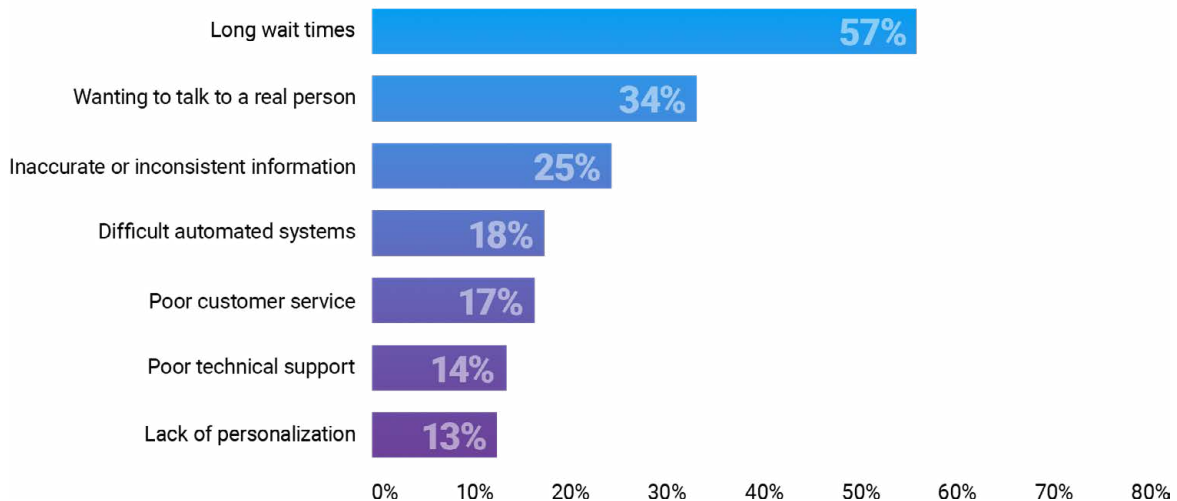




1 PLAY ONE: UNDERSTAND THE EXPECTATIONS

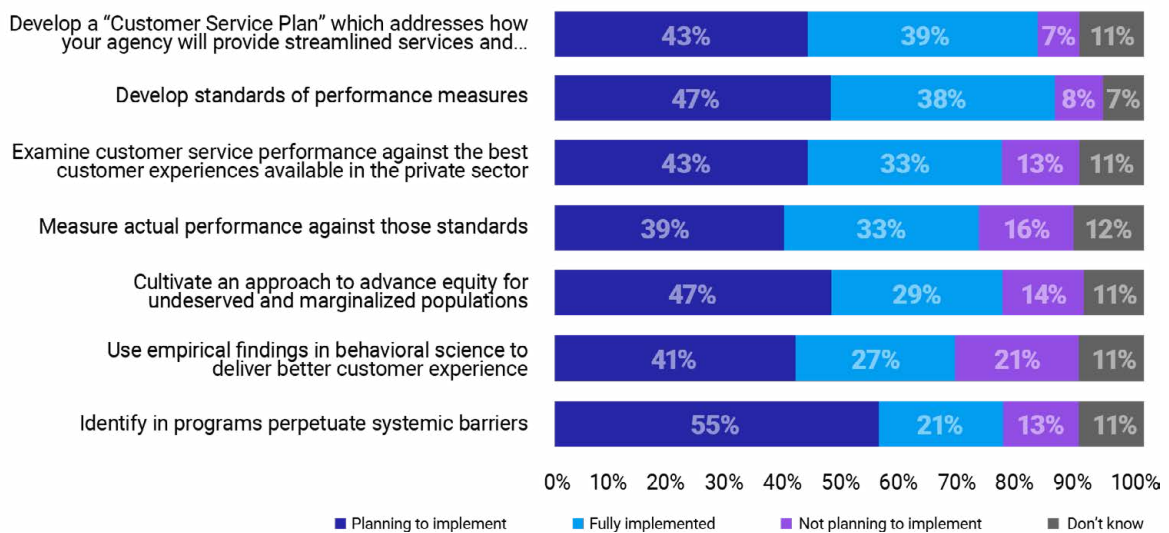
For the private sector, excellent customer service ensures customer loyalty. The government, on the other hand, is often a sole-source provider of necessary services, meaning that customers often have no choice but to wait a long time to be served or navigate confusing automated messages. Positive experiences with the government, therefore, are highly correlated with public trust. The American Customer Service Index, which measures customer satisfaction in government on key indicators like efficiency and ease of government processes; ease of accessing information; and courtesy and professionalism of customer service, found that 66% of citizens were satisfied with federal government services, down from 70% before the pandemic. Customer perspectives of agency courtesy and professionalism also declined for the third year in a row. At the same time, 85% of customers expect government services to match or exceed commercial service providers.⁴ The difference between expectations and experience can challenge an agency’s ability to fulfill its mandates. And, at a time where only 20% of Americans report trust in their government, it is more critical than ever to shore up these relationships.⁵ Understanding where the pain points are in a customer’s experience is a crucial first step.

What are the two most frequent customer complaints over the last year?



Public expectations are just one factor agencies must consider. As far back as the E-Government Act of 2002, both Congress and the Executive Office have set modernization goals aimed at improving the public’s interaction with government agencies. While important, these mandates often specify multiple goals or objectives. This can be challenging for agencies with limited resources such as funding personnel. Nevertheless, organizations are working hard to meet all expected targets. Thirty-nine percent of respondents have already developed their customer service plans, and 38% have developed their standards of measurement. However, for most of the Executive Order’s metrics, many respondents are still in the planning stages or currently have no plan to implement. Developing strategic plans that will address not only customer experiences but also meet mandatory requirements is an important but complex process.

To what extent is your agency implementing each of the following aspects related to the EO on customer service?

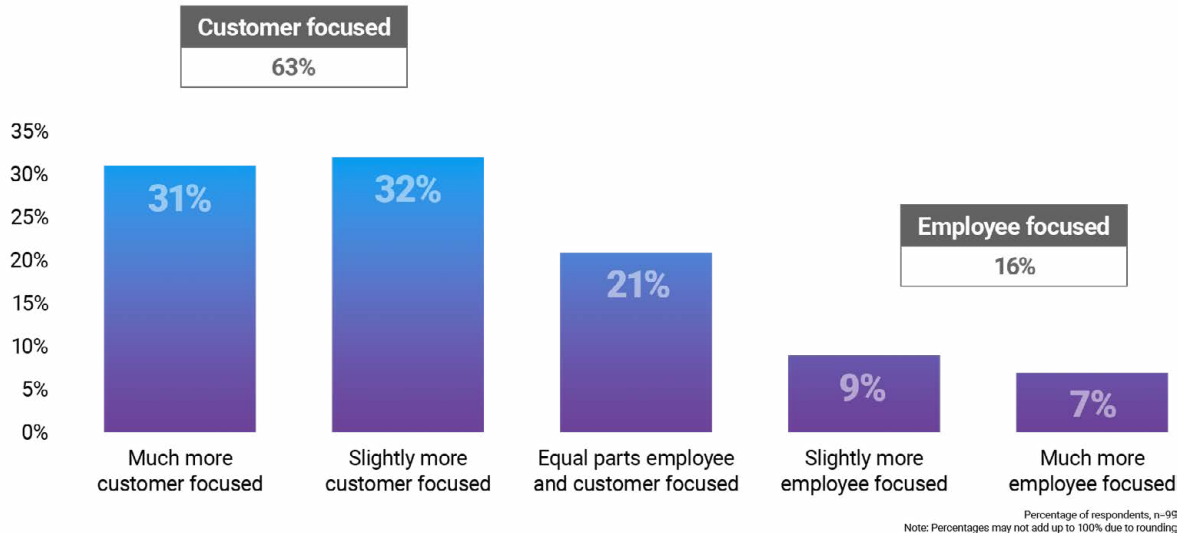


2 PLAY TWO: EMPOWER YOUR EMPLOYEES

For the private sector, excellent customer service ensures customer loyalty. The government, on the other hand, is often a sole-source provider of necessary services, meaning that customers often have no choice but to wait a long time to be served or navigate confusing automated messages. Positive experiences with the government, therefore, are highly correlated with public trust. The American Customer Service Index, which measures customer satisfaction in government on key indicators like efficiency and ease of government processes; ease of accessing information; and courtesy and professionalism of customer service, found that 66% of citizens were satisfied with federal government services, down from 70% before the pandemic. Customer perspectives of agency courtesy and professionalism also declined for the third year in a row. At the same time, 85% of customers expect government services to match or exceed commercial service providers.⁴ The difference between expectations and experience can challenge an agency’s ability to fulfill its mandates. And, at a time where only 20% of Americans report trust in their government, it is more critical than ever to shore up these relationships.⁵ Understanding where the pain points are in a customer’s experience is a crucial first step.

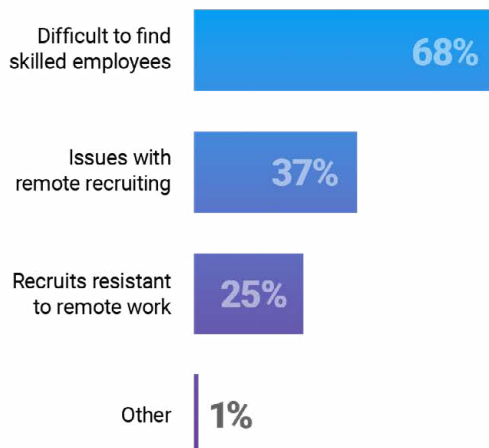


Does your agency have an equal focus on agent and customer experience?

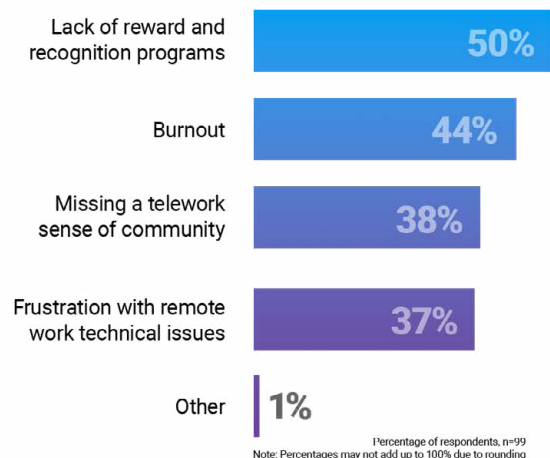


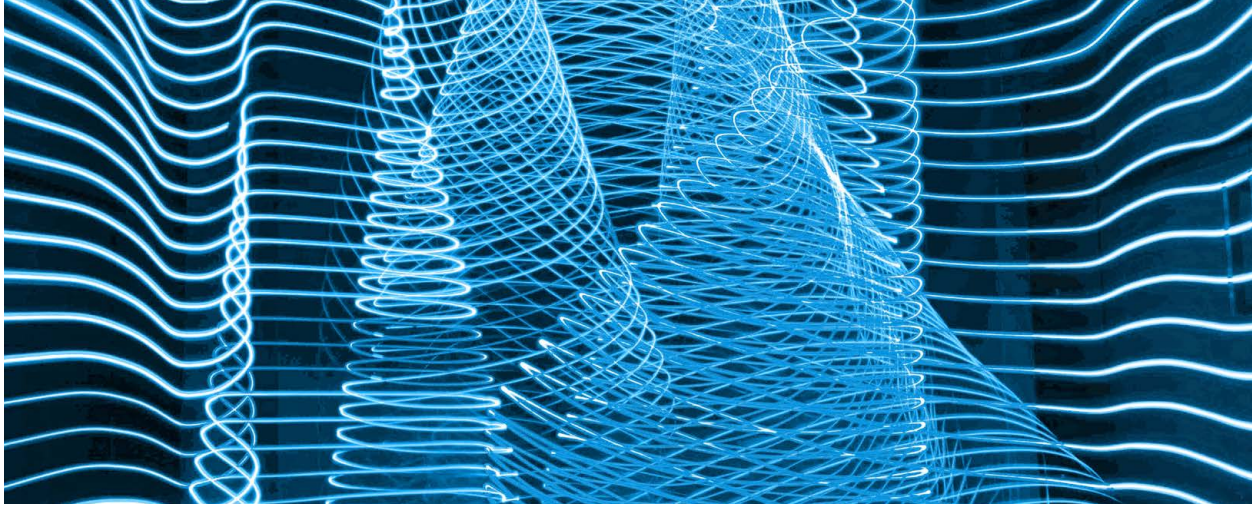
The demands of the pandemic strained many public-facing agencies and, although the world has returned to somewhat normal levels of requests for assistance, there are lingering effects. A March 2023 survey found that 52% of government employees report feeling burned out.⁷ Lack of recognition, burnout and technical issues all affect an agency’s ability to retain their contact center staff, in turn affecting their ability to offer a positive customer experience. Agencies also face problems recruiting skilled technical employees, particularly younger workers. As the “silver tsunami” approaches and older employees retire, it is crucial that agencies ensure their working environment is attractive. Taking steps to improve employee morale and increase retainment may also assist with recruitment. Employees who feel empowered are more likely to feel motivated, make data-informed decisions, creatively problem-solve, and respond more efficiently to requests from the public. They are also more likely to stay, keeping their important institutional knowledge and customer expertise within the agency, and to recommend their agency to potential new hires. All these factors can lead to better customer service.

How has your post-pandemic call center model affected recruiting contact center staff? Select all that apply.



How has your post-pandemic call center model affected retaining contact center staff? Select all that apply.



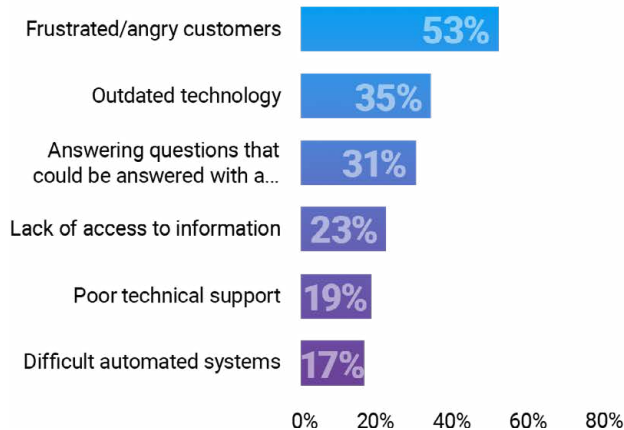


3 PLAY THREE: ERASE THE WHITE SPACE

A key step in building a better customer experience is identifying friction points and “white space” in an agency’s process. White space (the gap between a customer’s expectations and the services they receive) represents an opportunity for federal agencies to reimagine these interactions. Where is an experience fragmented or de-personalized? What is the customer expecting that they are not receiving? These gaps can lead to frustrated and angry customers, which in the short term can lead to unpleasant interactions for both the agent and caller, and in the long term can erode public trust in the agency.

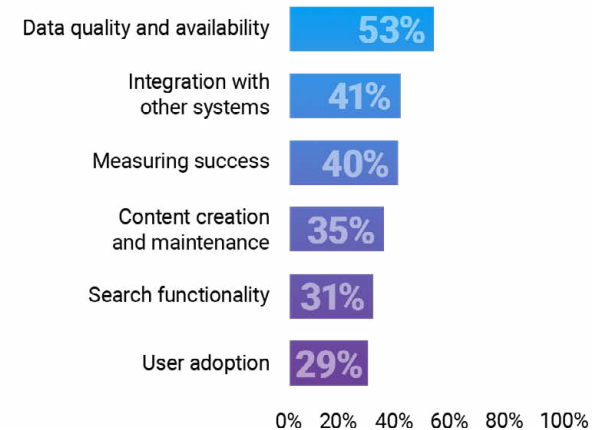
53% of respondents have struggled with frustrated and angry customers over the last year

What are the two most frequent agent experience complaints over the last year?



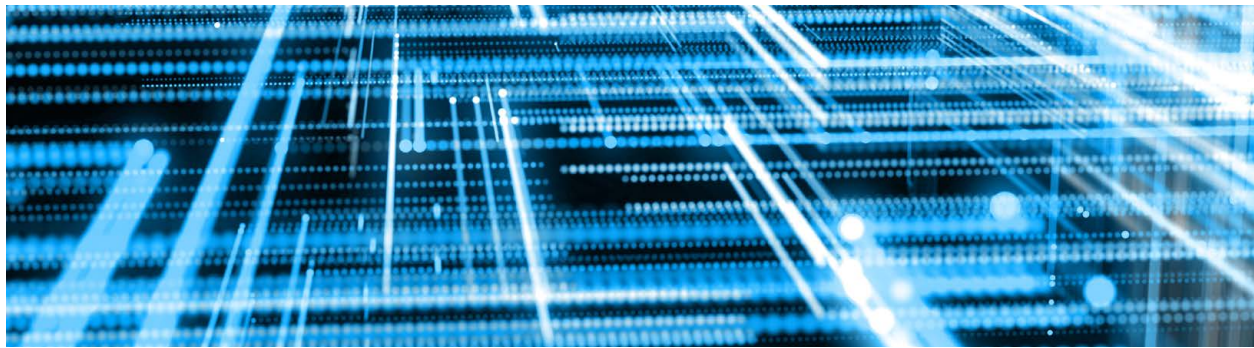
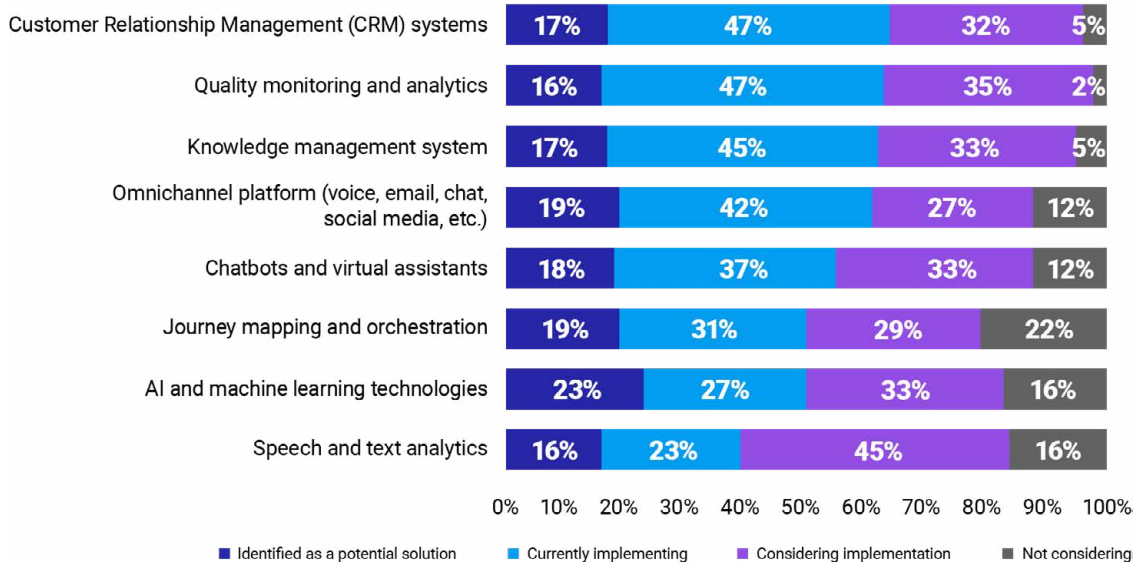
53% of respondents find that the availability and quality of their data is challenging in their call centers

What do you find are the major knowledge management challenges in call centers?



Artificial intelligence, cloud technologies and automation capabilities have grown ever more powerful, and with them the opportunities for agencies to use data-driven analysis and metrics to optimize the customer journey. Customer service systems and processes that can capture and interrogate data from all agency touchpoints can provide key visibility for decision-makers; those that incorporate AI or other machine learning technologies can be transformational for federal employees.

How are you addressing these challenges?

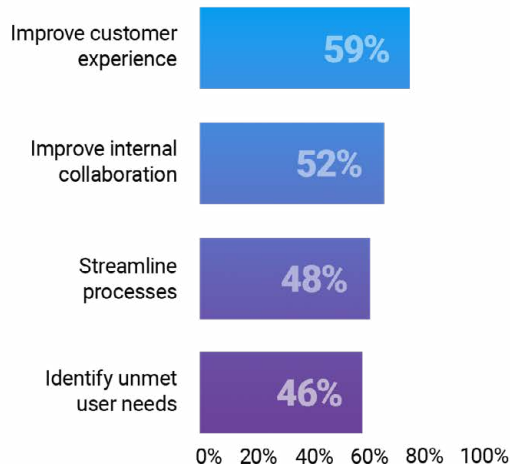


4 PLAY FOUR: MAP YOUR JOURNEY

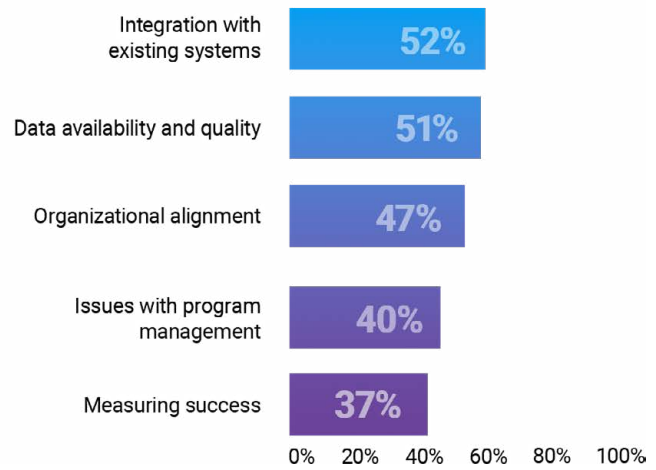
Planning the future of an agency’s customer experience requires strategic planning, investment and a clear understanding of the customer’s experience from inception to completion. Agencies that have already adopted journey mapping and orchestration have done so to both improve the customer experience and improve their internal collaboration, gaining a clearer understanding of the challenges facing their customers and their agents. Journey mapping reduces costs and improves efficiency by identifying processes that can be optimized or enhanced, as well as evaluating resource allocation.



Why has your agency adopted journey mapping and orchestration as part of your strategy?

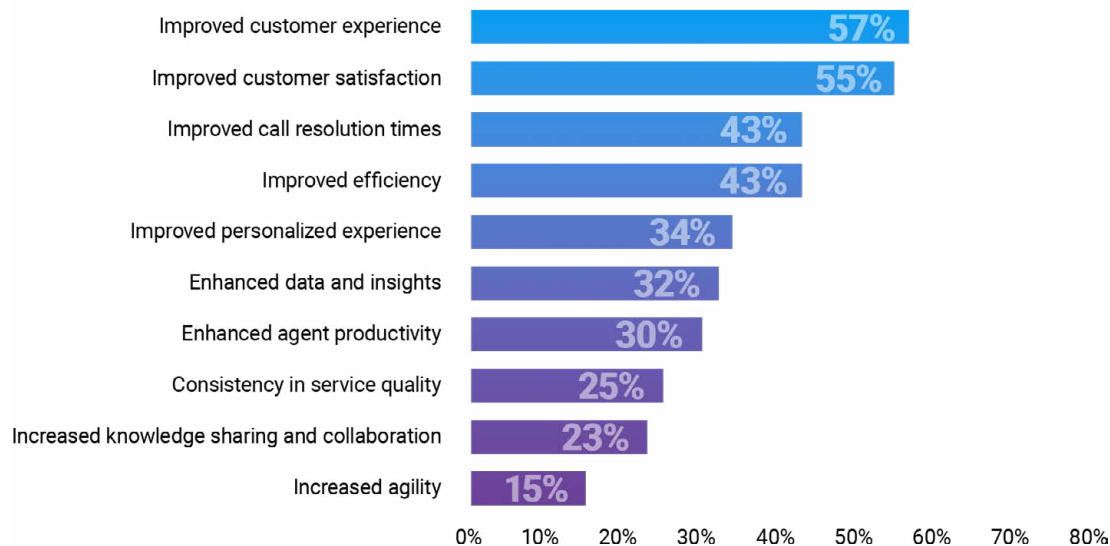


What do you find are the major challenges in implementing customer journey mapping and orchestration in contact centers?



Journey mapping is an exercise in transparency and awareness. Where are the bottlenecks in a citizen’s call to the IRS or the VA? Where do customers tend to get the most frustrated? What processes or touchpoints can be changed to make the experience easier and more successful for both the citizen looking for assistance and the agent providing it? Honest evaluation of the customer journey provides the blueprint agencies need to target pain points, leading to strategic technological investments and priority-setting. Improved customer experience and satisfaction are key metrics for federal agencies to understand how their technological investments are working, providing both an important validation of an agency’s work and an idea for what works. This can lead to streamlined systems, foster collaboration across different departments, and identify areas where agencies can work together to provide more seamless and integrated services to citizens.

What type of metrics is your agency using to track if your technology is a success?



BEST PRACTICES

As agencies continue their work to improve their customer service offerings, there are several best practices that can guide them, including the following.

Know where you want to go and plan out the path.

- Listen to customer expectations and challenges, with plenty of opportunities for feedback.
- Understand and uplift employees as the drivers of a truly successful customer experience.
- Look for opportunities for automation or customer self-service.
- Locate and leverage data strategically.
- Invest in tools and partnerships that streamline processes, alleviate repetitive burdens on employees and meet the expectations of a digital-first government.
- Focus on knowledge management as a means of enhancing both the customer and employee experience.

INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVE

While it's clear that digital transformation is crucial to customer experience (CX), defining a clear strategy to achieve this presents a challenge, according to the recent Government Business Council survey on Experience as a Service® in Federal Government. Many acknowledge the relatively new discipline of knowledge management is a critical component of this transformation, but they haven't identified or implemented many of the essential tools, policies and procedures to apply this practice within their customer experience approach. And while respondents acknowledge the federal mandates to increase the level of trust between the federal government and their customers, the data shows that most agencies aren't equally focused on their employees. One of the more promising results points to an upward trend in the adoption of journey mapping to improve customer satisfaction and other critical CX metrics.

Genesys, a recognized leader in customer experience solutions, addresses these challenges through the delivery of Experience as a Service. Genesys believes the careful application of journey mapping and analytics enhances visibility across the entirety of each customer's experience. Applying this insight, combined with knowledge management capabilities and a dedication to deliver empathy across overall experiences, enables the successful transformation of government agencies' overall CX strategy.

CONCLUSION

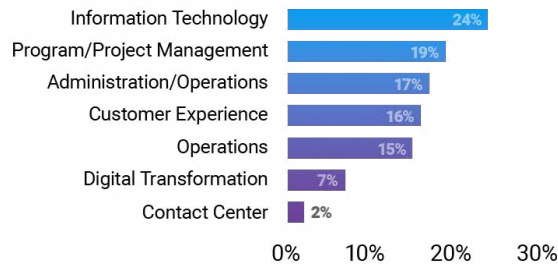
A positive customer experience strategy is more than just "nice to have." The interaction between government agencies and the public is something sacred – it is the everyday expression of the government's duty to serve its people and steward taxpayer money well. Government customers do not have another brand or option to choose if they do not enjoy their experience with an agency. But poor experiences mean that they have less trust that the government will fulfill their mission. At the same time, public servants need support to be able to fulfill these expectations.

In this digital age, customers expect to interact seamlessly, intuitively and rapidly with government agencies. Agents should also be empowered with the tools and training that make the best use of their skills. Leveraging data can help agencies understand what they need and where to go, enhancing customer experience and addressing what is most important – supporting those who need assistance and those who help them.

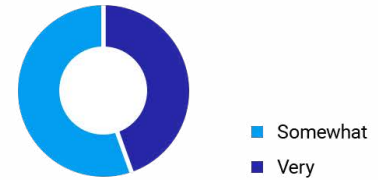


AUDIENCE PROFILE

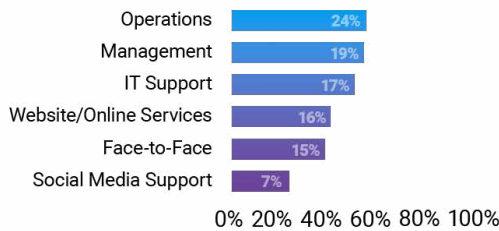
Which of the following best describes your job role/function in your organization?



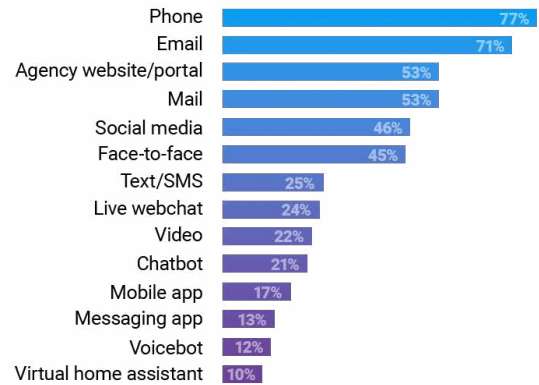
To what extent are you involved in or familiar with the strategy and operations of your organization's contact center and customer engagement channels?



In which of the following ways are you or have you been involved in your organization's contact center? Select all that apply.



Through which channel(s) does your organization currently offer constituent services? Select all that apply.



CITATIONS

- <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/12/13/executive-order-on-transforming-federal-customer-experience-and-service-delivery-to-rebuild-trust-in-government/>
- <https://www.fedscoop.com/paper-based-processes-cost-government-billions/>
- <https://digital.gov/resources/customer-experience-toolkit/>
- <https://www.theacsi.org/news-and-resources/reports/2023/01/31/federal-government-report-2022/>
- <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2022/06/06/public-trust-in-government-1958-2022/>
- <https://www.opm.gov/fevs/reports/governmentwide-reports/governmentwide-reports/governmentwide-management-report/2022/2022-governmentwide-management-report.pdf>
- <https://www.eaglehillconsulting.com/insights/government-employee-burnout/>



ABOUT



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About Genesys

Every year, Genesys® orchestrates billions of remarkable customer experiences for organizations in more than 100 countries. Through the power of our cloud, digital and AI technologies, organizations can realize Experience as a Service®, our vision for empathetic customer experiences at scale. With Genesys, organizations have the power to deliver proactive, predictive, and hyper personalized experiences to deepen their customer connection across every marketing, sales, and service moment on any channel, while also improving employee productivity and engagement. By transforming back-office technology to a modern revenue velocity engine Genesys enables true intimacy at scale to foster customer trust and loyalty.

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