How to Activate the Untapped Insights of Your Workforce

MARKET TRENDS REPORT

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Introduction

The ways employees experience their work environment — and the continuous events that shape it — can't be defined by a single stat or moment in time. The employee experience journey, from hiring to retirement, is diverse. It's the culmination of many moments, whether that's getting a new manager, the desire to share fresh ideas or feeling bogged down with time-consuming workarounds.

Each of these events leaves indelible marks on the workforce that shape employees' sense of belonging, connections with their colleagues and overall quality of work. When supervisors, senior leaders and human resources professionals commit to understanding the unique and collective experiences of the people they lead, these rich insights help teams and individuals to thrive in inclusive and equitable ways.

This isn't a novel concept. But the COVID-19 pandemic has thrust the employee experience to the forefront in new ways, especially as employees grapple with burnout and agencies reimagine how they can better serve the workforce and the public.

If leaders want to effectively understand their people — the heartbeat of their organizations — they must operationalize empathy. This means understanding and being sensitive to the needs and wants of employees, including what they believe is and is not working well. Operationalizing empathy moves decision-makers to make meaningful changes that factor in employee experiences and voices.

But how do you chart a path from where you are today and where you'd like to be in the near and long term? GovLoop partnered with Medallia, which specializes in experience management, to assist you on your journey. In this report, we identify the common challenges agencies face in their quest to understand and activate the untapped insights of employees and the effective best practices that organizations have embraced.

By The Numbers

The 2020 **Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey** provided a snapshot of workforce sentiments on issues ranging from the nature of their work, to direct supervisors and collaboration with colleagues. Here's a look at some of the highest and lowest scores:

▼ **43%** believe the results of the survey will be used to make their agency a better place to work.

▼ **51%** said that senior leaders in their organization generate high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce.

▶ **60%** feel that managers promote communication among different work units (for example, about projects, goals and needed resources).

▲ **79%** think their supervisor is committed to a workforce representative of all segments of society.

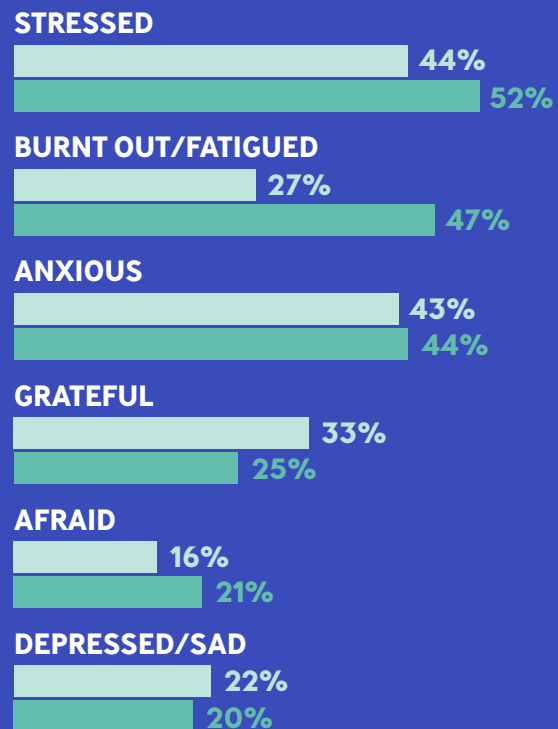▲ **83%** said their supervisor listens to what they have to say.

"Federal employees reported that a key driver of workforce resilience came from front-line supervisors taking an active role in supporting their employees, especially regarding health, safety, and work-life needs."

— Office of Personnel Management

The **Center for State and Local Government Excellence** surveyed public sector employees in May and October 2020 about their views on finances and employment due to COVID-19.

▪ **MAY 2020**   ▪ **OCTOBER 2020**

Employees feelings about the pandemic while at work:

STRESSED
44%
52%

BURNT OUT/FATIGUED
27%
47%

ANXIOUS
43%
44%

GRATEFUL
33%
25%

AFRAID
16%
21%

DEPRESSED/SAD
22%
20%

Trust in government leaders to make appropriate decisions regarding employee safety during COVID:

LOCAL	STATE	FEDERAL
67% / 54%	67% / 50%	39% / 29%
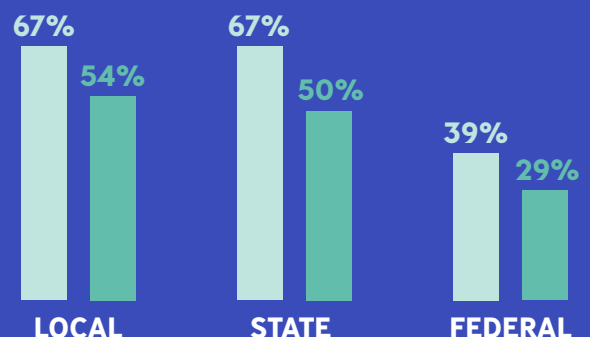
Understanding the Employee Experience

The Challenge: Tapping Into Employee Insights

If you want to get to the root of what's stopping you from truly connecting with your people, you have to get introspective. Sometimes one of the biggest blockers can be personal and organizational assumptions about how your employees feel, why they feel that way and how best to move forward.

"We can be very selfish," said Lora Allen, a former federal recruiter who now serves as a Principal CX Advisor for Public Sector at Medallia. "We're very outcome-based in government; we're all about the results and building the business case. We can often forget about the person and their experiences, what they need to be successful in a remote environment, to onboard in a new organization or to deal with workplace stresses."

When we pause to listen more deeply to our employees, we begin to see that our employees can teach us how to get better at serving our customers too.

Even misunderstandings or lack of clarity around who "owns" the employee experience can be a barrier, said Lee Becker, Vice President of Regulated Industries and Public Sector at Medallia. Although the way employees experience work is a culmination of small moments, organizations often fail to step back and view those moments collectively as a connected cycle.

What agencies are left with is a partial view of what their employees are actually going through and what support they need, said Becker, who spent more than a decade working to improve how veterans receive care and interact with the government.

Much of the workforce is on the frontlines, whether at the border, assisting in the COVID-19 response or providing a host of other public-facing services. They're working long hours and, in some cases, placed at risk when they serve. But their sentiments and experiences aren't regularly captured and factored into ongoing decision-making.

"There is a fundamental capability that's missing within agencies right now," said Becker. **"And it's that ability of being able to truly listen continuously across every moment that matters to their employees."**

Sometimes the survey fatigue myth can overshadow opportunities to create that continuous feedback loop between leadership and employees. What this does is minimize the frequency and ways that you have to learn from your people. If agencies thought this was a challenge pre-COVID-19, they'll have found it's even harder in a hybrid environment — but not impossible.

The Solution: Continuous Listening and Co-Creation

Your employees are constantly signaling how they feel on the job, what their challenges are and how they can be better supported — all without responding to a single survey prompt.

The question becomes: How are you continuously listening, understanding and responding to the indicators that employees are sharing? Do you have a way of capturing and measuring those signals, which could include help desk tickets, customer comments, meeting attendance and, yes, direct surveys?

"Employees want to share feedback on their own terms," Allen said. "Feedback analysis gives agencies a window into the moments that matter most to employees and the ability to monitor and track those sentiments over time."

This can only happen when co-creation is a priority. Don't just stop with feedback. Actually use those insights to shape policies and programs, and then show employees that you're listening by turning their insights into actions. That not only boosts morale and engagement, but it also builds trust.

Employees can take ownership of their experience when they feel seen and heard, Becker said. It comes back to a term we highlighted in the introduction: **operationalizing empathy.**

"It's easier said than done, but it means that you have this ability to continuously listen, to continuously understand and continuously make sure you're there for your employees, and they feel that you trust them," he said.

Best Practices: Prioritizing Equity and Inclusion Across the Workforce

We can't talk about employee experience without acknowledging the degree to which people feel valued and a sense of belonging at work (inclusion) and whether equity ensures they have what they need — support, resources, training, etc. — to succeed. These best practices set the tone for creating a more inclusive and equitable work environment that fosters co-creation, empathy and trust.

1. Start at the top.

Leadership sets the tone for creating a workplace that fosters inclusion and equity. Respect must be at the core of those efforts and explicitly stated and reinforced throughout the organization. At the federal level, President Joe Biden made that clear in January 2021 while virtually swearing in presidential appointees. "If you're ever working with me, and I hear you treat another colleague with disrespect, talk down to someone, I promise you I will fire you on the spot — on the spot — no if, ands or buts," Biden said. "Everybody is entitled to be treated with decency and dignity."

2. Address needs equitably and validate.

Equity gets to the heart of outcomes, and it speaks to the needs of individuals, teams and the organization. Agencies can't simply be satisfied with diversity and inclusion alone. They must also seek ways to validate whether they are putting equitable practices and measures into place, internally with employees and externally with customers and other stakeholders. What's the work experience like when you look across race, sexual orientation and locations, for example? Without measurable outcomes and continuous listening, this becomes an exercise in wishful thinking — at best.

3. Test old assumptions.

What have you come to believe about the state of affairs at your agency and areas for improvement? Testing old assumptions across teams opens your agency up to tap into the signals and insights from the workforce. Here are some questions to consider that can help you begin to test old assumptions: What characteristics are conducive to a diverse, inclusive and equitable workforce? What opportunities do we have to tap into the workforce and understand better ways to accomplish the work? How can we listen, respond to and engage employees in the co-creation of a solution?

HOW MEDALLIA HELPS

Medallia collaborates with agencies by helping them capture feedback in real time, analyze data and empower government teams to provide an excellent employee experience. This data-driven and people-centered work leads to measurably improved outcomes, including satisfaction, engagement and productivity.

The Medallia platform elevates the employee experience by enabling agencies to continuously connect insights across functions and operating units, including HR and IT, while understanding and responding to their people in the flow of work. Rich and intuitive feedback tools are embedded seamlessly throughout the employee journey, capturing real-time signals beyond just surveys. Modern feedback capabilities such as voice, audio and video make it easy for employees to share feedback on their terms.

Learn more: medallia.com/solutions/ government

Conclusion

When agencies have the ability to continuously listen at the organizational, individual and organic levels, they can move beyond simply addressing the squeaky wheel or symptom, to actually addressing the underlying issue.

This collection of direct and indirect feedback matters because, when combined, this data tells the story of your employees' experiences in real time. It offers an in-the-moment pulse for how your people are feeling and opens the door for constructive and actionable workplace improvements.

Leadership is listening, and it's the gateway for building and maintaining trust with the essence of your organization: the employees you've been entrusted to serve.

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ABOUT MEDALLIA

Medallia (NYSE: MDLA) is the pioneer and market leader in Experience Management. Medallia's FedRAMP authorized and award-winning SaaS platform, the Medallia Experience Cloud, leads the market in the understanding and management of experience for customers, employees, and residents. Medallia captures experience signals created on daily journeys in person, digital and IoT interactions and applies proprietary AI technology to reveal personalized and predictive insights that can drive action with tremendous business results. Using Medallia Experience Cloud, government organizations can optimize agency-to-public interactions, at the highest level of security required.

www.medallia.com/government

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ABOUT GOVLOOP

GovLoop's mission is to "connect government to improve government." We aim 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 connect and improve government.

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