



Drive Transformation Through a Connected Employee Experience

MARKET TRENDS REPORT



Executive Summary

The competition to recruit and retain top talent is fierce — and not always waged on a level playing field. Every day, government agencies go head to head with private sector organizations that can offer higher salaries, better training, more opportunities for advancement and more satisfying relationships with their employers.

That's how federal workers can see it, at least.

The 2020 edition of the Best Places to Work in the Federal Government survey derived an employee engagement score for federal workers of 69 — the highest score for government employees since 2003 — yet eight points lower than the employee engagement score in the private sector.

Employee engagement is no longer a luxury for government agencies. Without the ability to match salaries offered by private companies or dole out cash bonuses, agencies need to better engage workers. **At a time when remote work is spreading like the pandemic that necessitated a surge in its adoption, worker engagement is emerging as a top priority.**

When worker engagement becomes a critical component of an organization's ability to fulfill its mission, it can rightly be called the “connected employee experience.” Connected experiences engender loyalty, affinity and camaraderie. In the absence of connected employee experiences, relationships among workers and organizations can be strictly transactional.

To learn more about how agencies can strengthen connected employee experiences, GovLoop teamed with Salesforce, which provides an enterprise-level solution for improving employee engagement throughout the lifecycle of workers. This report will discuss how agencies can get better at connected employee experiences, from candidate recruitment and onboarding through training, continuing education, advancement and separation.

By the Numbers

98.3 days

The average time-to-hire for new federal employees in fiscal year 2018, the most recent year for which data is available. That's 1.3 days faster than in 2015, when time-to-hire for feds was 99.6 days.

\$500 billion

Estimated productivity losses attributed to disengaged workers in the U.S., annually.

82%

The increase in new-hire retention among organizations with a strong onboarding process. Productivity of hires at those organizations is 70% higher than at organizations with weak onboarding.

65.9%

of federal employees say their talents are used well in the workplace, compared to 79% of private sector workers.

70%

Estimate of American employees not working to their full potential.

12%

of employees strongly agree that their organization does a great job onboarding new employees.

“To thoroughly address engagement, agencies must consider the antecedents of engagement and the contextual factors impacting engagement as well as engagement itself.”

- “Engaging the Federal Workforce: How to Do It and Prove It” (OPM)

The Drive Toward a Connected Employee Experience

Challenge: Legacy Systems Disrupt Employee Experiences

Employee engagement is critical to the success of workers, teams and organizations. Engagement exists when employees buy into an organization's mission and culture; when they feel they're part of something bigger than themselves; when they're personally invested in the success of the mission. You know it when you see it — and when you don't.

“As employee engagement increases, agencies see increased productivity, increased work quality and increased retention of top talent,” said Michael Piccoli, Principal Solution Engineer for Salesforce. **“Agencies that decrease their emphasis on employee engagement can expect to see decreases in those areas.”**

Government legacy systems, some of which were developed decades ago, weren't built to maximize employee engagement in the current environment. The inflexibility of those legacy systems makes it almost impossible to manage data and processes in a way that promotes frictionless employee experiences — the kind of positive interactions that strengthen employee engagement.

Legacy systems create numerous pain points for agencies:

- Critical HR processes are cumbersome and inefficient, slowed by manual inputs
- Unintegrated data from multiple sources obscures visibility and operational insights
- Fragmented, inflexible systems don't support comprehensive management of employee lifecycles

All of these pain points lead to disengagement among workers, who can feel like cogs in a machine.

“At every level of government, employees feel disconnected from the organization because they can't define their relationship to the organization or its processes,” said Michael Hauser, Global Defense Strategy Executive, Salesforce Global Public Sector.

Unsatisfactory experiences at the front end of the employee lifecycle can mar the quality of engagement for years to come. “Recruiting and onboarding continues to be one of the most important challenges facing agencies,” Hauser said. “These are make-or-break interactions.”

Solution: Transform Legacy Systems Into a Robust Tech Asset

As recruiting and retention of top-tier workers intensifies, agencies will seek competitive advantages. “There truly is a war for talent out there,” said Hauser. “To win it, agencies need a game-changer.”

As remote work expands and agencies have fewer opportunities to instill workplace culture by traditional means, the systems employees use will play a bigger role in determining employee engagement. These systems, if done well, will facilitate work while also promoting connected employee experiences that drive up loyalty, morale and retention. Poorly conceived systems will erode connections between workers and employers.

Any viable solution must include legacy systems that don't support employee engagement. Those systems are inextricably entwined with agencies' operations. They're not going away.

Agencies will consider modern, cloud-based solutions that integrate legacy applications and their collective data. A unified system — an engagement layer sitting on top of the legacy systems — is designed to deliver a range of benefits to agencies and workers:

- Integrated data across departments
- Streamlined processes to improve HR productivity and efficiency
- Worker interfaces and user experiences that support the entire employee lifecycle
- Unified views of candidates and employees that advance workforce strategies
- Recruiting and onboarding processes that help employees succeed
- Improved employee engagement, promoting retention and a stable workforce
- Greater mission success

Agencies will know they're succeeding when employees' user experiences more closely resemble what they've come to expect from private sector companies.

“The capabilities that the average person today enjoys in their nonworking life — going online and ordering from Amazon, doing their banking — can almost all be done remotely. In the federal government, employees are still standing in line waiting for things to process,” Hauser said.

Best Practices in Employee Engagement

A modern, cloud-based platform strengthens the pillars of workforce engagement that support operations and mission attainment.



Recruiting

Government agencies' recruitment efforts — announcements of openings on the agency's website and a link for applying on USA Jobs — often pale in comparison to the methods of private sector competitors.

"Agencies' strategies are disjointed because of legacy systems, by funding and by the inability of recruiters to communicate with candidates directly," said Piccoli. "A cloud-based system that unifies backend applications delivers a multitude of options for accessing and connecting with richer beds of talent over time."

By connecting workforce management to recruiting activities and engaging employees in referral programs, better candidates surface faster.



Onboarding

The average time to hire candidates selected for employment in the federal government is around 100 days. Legacy systems contribute to the delay at agencies. Piccoli said he knows of one agency that has 97 core HR systems of record.

Dissuaded by long onboarding times, some recruits give up and walk away. "The drop-off rates are somewhere in the 50% to 60% range when they see it's 60 days or longer," he said.

Providing candidates and employees with a single point of access for all relevant data goes a long way toward building employee engagement. "Your life becomes much easier when you know where everything is," Piccoli said.



Employee Development

A robust employee-engagement system integrates disjointed learning management systems to deliver transparency, a connected learning environment, clear opportunities for growth and expectations about the skills and experiences needed for advancement. Employees in such an environment are more likely to feel connected and empowered.

"You have to be able to connect all those dots to make it transparent for the employee ... to see exactly what's going on in their career," Piccoli said. "Without a modern API (application programming interface) strategy to get data in and out of these systems, things are never going to change."



Workforce Planning

A cloud-based integration layer helps agencies track resources and skills needed to execute on their missions and forecast resources required to meet mission goals.

"Workforce planning is about building targets for the organizational structure of the future, which ties back to recruiting activity, training and development and where you're trying to recruit," Hauser said. "When that whole system is built on one platform, it's very easy to update on the fly and to have all of those systems talking to each other."

"Providing a person-friendly engagement layer that supports the employee lifecycle and is well integrated with legacy transactional systems (pay, time, benefits, etc.) will engage employees and empower the entire organization."

- Michael Hauser, Global Defense Strategy Executive, Salesforce Global Public Sector



Digital Engagement in Action

Government organizations use Salesforce to modernize employee experiences, from pre-hire to retire, and to support mission-critical activities and digital engagement with citizens. Salesforce can be deployed to function as the “experience” or “enhancement” layer that sits on top of agencies’ systems in order to simplify intake for key processes, including personnel action requests. Built-in business process automation enables Salesforce to deliver operational advancements that further increase efficiencies.

Salesforce meets the unique needs of agencies by way of low-code app development capabilities embedded in the Salesforce platform. These capabilities empower agencies to augment and modernize manual processes — while retaining the ability to locally modify or change business processes in response to evolving policies, directives and procedures.

Salesforce enables employees to easily access connected, personalized information using mobile applications. Access to personal information improves recruits’ onboarding experiences. It accelerates new employees’ connectedness to the organization and its mission, while also increasing access to opportunities for professional growth and development. Salesforce helps employees help themselves — wherever they are — by providing self-service tools for managing and accessing key information, from personnel and training data to payroll and benefits information.

At the management level, Salesforce Analytics benefits agencies by providing overviews of talent-acquisition efforts segmented by demographics, regions and other criteria. Armed with this data, agencies identify recruiting needs and execute recruitment efforts using optimal channels aimed at the deepest talent pools. An enterprise resource planning approach avoids disruptions to existing core HR systems of record.

HOW SALESFORCE HELPS

Salesforce 360 Platform for Government and its purpose-built applications help government organizations attain levels of employee engagement needed to accomplish missions in a fast-changing world.

“We help agencies perform new hire intakes that lead to better mission execution and better constituent services. We create applications that let agencies access better information so they can execute and deliver services more efficiently and effectively,” Piccoli said.

Salesforce is robust and highly customizable. Purpose-built applications like Employee Experience for Public Sector can be quickly tailored to organizations’ unique needs. Salesforce’s flexible configurability is a key attribute, said Hauser, who likened it to a “box of Legos that can be put together to do whatever you need accomplished.”

“Salesforce improves not just the lives of your customers but also the lives and the day-to-day experience of your employees. You can take what you’re doing in the HR world, tie it all together with our platform, and give your employees and your leadership an entire employee lifecycle capability,” Hauser said.

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Conclusion

Employee engagement has evolved from a nice idea to an essential mode of operation. In the era of COVID-19 and the expansion of remote work, employee engagement is emerging as a critical success factor.

At every stage of the employee lifecycle, from recruitment and onboarding to advancement, continuing training and through to retirement or separation, employee engagement correlates with success.

The biggest challenge to better employee engagement is legacy systems. The right cloud-based solution unifies disparate legacy systems, providing comprehensive views of data and seamless interactions with systems and information.

Ultimately, better user experiences produce more engaged employees, more efficient organizations and higher levels of mission attainment.



ABOUT SALESFORCE

Salesforce transforms the way departments, agencies, and their community of contractors meet the unique demands of today's constituent, service member and employees, and more effectively deliver on their mission. With the innovation of the Customer 360 for Government, Salesforce is helping government strengthen public trust. The FedRAMP-authorized Salesforce Government Cloud Plus - the #1 enterprise cloud, built for government - gives stakeholders the mobile, self-service tools they need to connect data, process, and people while also reducing the risk, cost, and complexity of traditional IT. Salesforce's trusted cloud accelerates transformation to rapidly deploy solutions with a multi-tenant cloud infrastructure that meets all security and compliance requirements.

Learn more: salesforce.com/government



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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