Transforming Government Services:

Customer Experience, Citizen Trust and Employee Engagement

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Introduction

Even before the novel coronavirus hit, agencies faced hurdles in delivering services as a result of rising customer expectations and mandates such as the 21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act. Now, the efficiency of these services — from administering health care to pandemic relief — is more urgent.

The success of government services lies in three factors: **citizen trust, customer experience (CX) and employee engagement.** These factors are linked in such a way that improving one improves the others, while detracting from one detracts from the others.

For instance, citizen trust depends on CX because reliable, timely and easy interactions with an agency is what encourages a person to trust that agency. Similarly, good CX powered by the right technologies often streamlines mundane processes for employees so they have more time to do meaningful work and stay engaged.

Cloud technology is a vital instrument that can transform and elevate all three areas. In GovLoop's three-part Fireside Chat with Genesys, a CX technology provider, government and industry experts discussed best practices and lessons learned around citizen trust, CX and employee engagement at agencies such as the Veterans Affairs Department, U.S. Forest Service and Small Business Administration. Read on to learn more.

Speakers

Barbara Morton, Deputy Chief Veterans Experience Officer at the Veterans Affairs Department (VA)

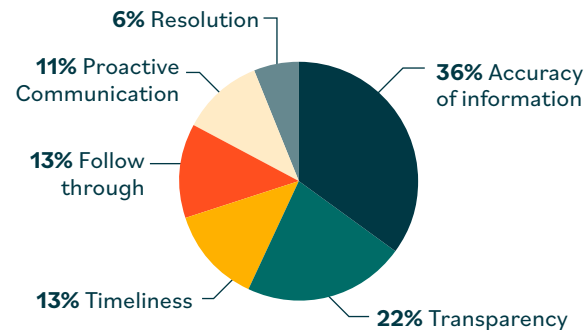**David York**, Senior Vice President of U.S. Public Sector at Genesys

Anne Petersen, Director of Experience Design at 18F

Ryan Hillard, Systems Developer at the Small Business Administration (SBA)

Citizen Trust: Integrating the First Touch

Citizen trust in government has always been important, but now it is more than ever, said Barbara Morton, Deputy Chief Veterans Experience Officer at the Veterans Affairs Department (VA).

At GovLoop and Genesys' Fireside Chat in April, virtual attendees were asked: To improve citizen trust in your agency, which of the following is most important?

- 6% Resolution
- 11% Proactive Communication
- 13% Follow through
- 13% Timeliness
- 36% Accuracy of information
- 22% Transparency

Citizens want to quickly access and trust the information they receive from agencies in times of emergency and tranquility. Cloud computing is one technology that allows agencies to deliver consistent and secure communication when citizens need it most. This, in turn, increases the trust citizens have in government.

"Any interaction with a government organization has to be easy, effective and emotionally resonant," Morton said. When these three qualities are met in a customer's experience, trust in that organization goes up.

One of the main challenges to improving citizen trust, however, is consistent messaging. For an organization as large as VA, with nearly 400,000 employees and contractors, it can be difficult to convey consistent messaging from local, frontline facilities to nationwide VA communications.

That is why the Veterans Experience Office (VEO) is undertaking a key integration effort across contact centers so that agents who are serving veterans have the same information across different facilities and channels. By leveraging cloud so that veterans do not have to repeat the same information, VA is positively impacting the trust veterans have in its services.

"The cloud helps by providing a multichannel solution, but that alone does not solve the problem. What is needed is to share context across the different channels," said David York, Senior Vice President of U.S. Public Sector at Genesys.

To provide context for employees across different channels, VEO deployed customer experience training for VA's workforce to ensure consistent messaging. "Employees are the first touch citizens or veterans have with an organization," York said. Over 90,000 employees have taken the "Own the Moment" training to ensure that a common tone exists for how employees interact with veterans, their families and caregivers. "That's something I'm particularly proud of," Morton said.

Enabling and training the workforce is critical, because without empowering them to interact with citizens through a common organizational mission, citizens' experiences and their trust in the organization will struggle, York said.

Further, many employees at this time are faced with an overload of information and communication. So having the right information at their fingertips and leveraging communication technologies, such as chatbots or other assistance powered by artificial intelligence, will help lift the overload and produce clear, trustworthy communication.

"If we are able to make the adaptations that the new world is demanding of us, that will be a key ingredient for moving forward [in citizen trust]," Morton said.

"Any interaction with a government organization has to be easy, effective and emotionally resonant."

Barbara Morton
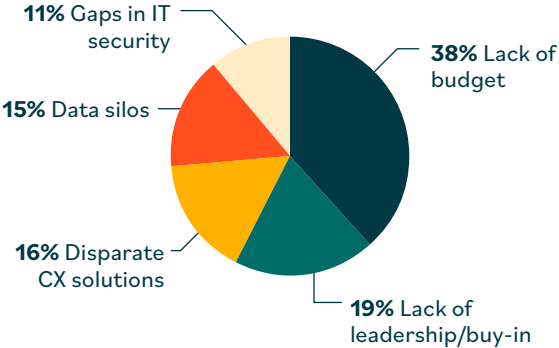Deputy Chief Veterans Experience Officer, VA

CX: The Christmas Tree Project

Across all generations, people are demanding better customer experience from their government. It's not a surprise because people depend on the government to provide important and often critical services.

"We rely on the government for many things, like federal assistance to parks and libraries. It's incredibly important we serve the public well in all aspects of what we do," said Anne Petersen, Director of Experience Design at 18F.

Petersen and York shared government's biggest challenges and best practices to provide excellent CX for its citizens.

At GovLoop and Genesys' Fireside Chat in May, virtual attendees were asked: What is your biggest barrier when it comes to improving CX for your citizens?

11% Gaps in IT security

15% Data silos

16% Disparate CX solutions

19% Lack of leadership/buy-in

38% Lack of budget

Familiar Obstacles

The largest obstacles to CX in government are really the general pain points that it experiences overall — procurement, hiring and budget.

"We've got a unique view in 18F in that we work with many different agencies," Petersen said. "We get the inside scoop not only at the federal level but for state and local too. All across the board, the biggest barriers are the core items: procurement, hiring, budget."

Solving all these core challenges boils down to having a unified understanding of the need. Agencies first need to identify and understand the CX need they have, whether that's granting smoother access to permits or modernizing its digital experience with a limited budget.

"The best way to do that is to do the research with the people you're trying to serve," Petersen said. In other words, organizations need to try to understand the challenge through a user- or customer-focused perspective. What are their experiences? What is their feedback?

Having a customer-centric view will help guide the best solution to an agency's CX challenge, whether it has to do with procurement, hiring or budget.

Let's Break it Down Now

When it comes to taking actionable steps to improve CX, working iteratively is best.

That's what 18F and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) did together. In 2018, they launched Open Forest, an online portal for purchasing Christmas tree permits. Through the portal, people were able to buy permits online and print them out at home so they could go to their nearest national forest and bring home their Christmas tree in record time. They no longer had to be locked into obtaining permits during weekday business hours at USFS office locations.

On top of that, with the existence of the Christmas tree portal, USFS was able to expand this purchasing system for other permits, such as its Special Use permits.

The agency worked iteratively by selecting a pilot project that could be built up and expanded for similar use cases. And importantly, it selected a project that was representative of the people or customers it was going to serve.

Leadership Buy-In

Before all this happened, however, the agency needed leadership support. Without leadership buy-in, none of the CX-enhancing initiatives at any agency can take place.

There are resources that can help, and they come in the form of partnerships.

Partnering with 18F, for example, was one critical component to bringing USFS's Christmas tree portal to fruition.

It can be more powerful for stakeholders to back up their CX ideas with partnerships that can come alongside them, York said. It's because organizations such as 18F are a rich resource of information and experience in addressing CX for many different agencies.
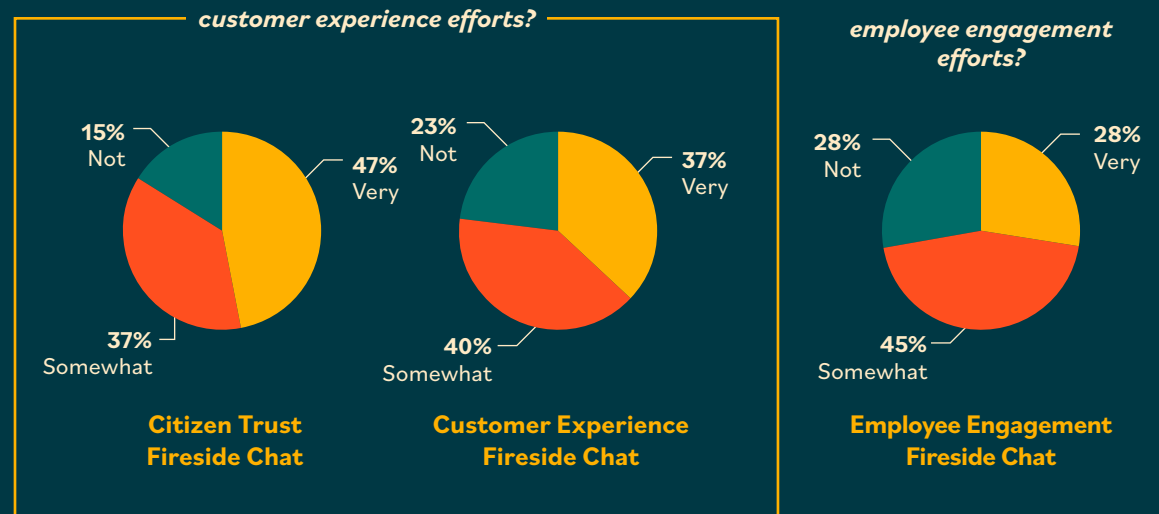
Other organizations York highlighted were the General Services Administration's CX Center of Excellence (CoE) and the American Council for Technology and Industry Advisory Council (ACT-IAC).

Through partnerships, iterative work and keeping the customer front and center, it is possible for agencies to provide the CX that customers demand.

How Significant Is Cloud to Your ...
CX vs. Employee Engagement

Across the three-part Fireside Chat, we asked the same question to the government audience: How significant is cloud? Depending on the topic, results varied.

How significant is cloud to your...

customer experience efforts?

Citizen Trust Fireside Chat

- 15% Not
- 47% Very
- 37% Somewhat

Customer Experience Fireside Chat

- 23% Not
- 37% Very
- 40% Somewhat

employee engagement efforts?

Employee Engagement Fireside Chat

- 28% Not
- 28% Very
- 45% Somewhat

For instance, cloud was generally seen as more significant for customer experience (CX) than employee engagement. But on top of that, depending on the context of CX — citizen trust or general CX — respondents were more likely to say it was very significant for citizen interactions.
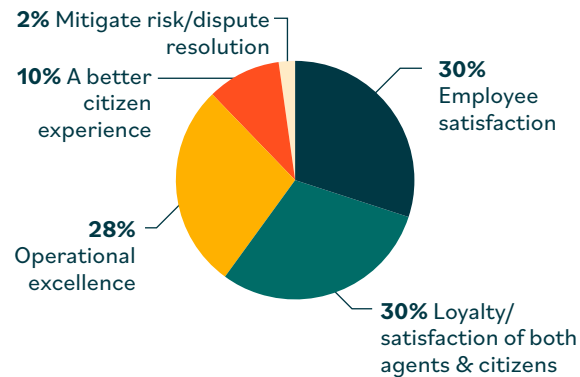
In other words, respondents viewed cloud as most significant in citizen CX efforts, but less so in employee engagement efforts.

Question to consider: *Why is cloud more significant to CX than employee engagement?*

Employee Engagement: Time for Worthwhile Work

Five years ago, employees at the Small Business Administration (SBA) spent their Friday afternoons doing nobody's favorite task: clearing emails. The agency used an on-premise system that held 200 megabytes of storage. That is 0.4% of the email capacity it uses today. Limited storage meant employees had to spend hours clearing out their inboxes so they could receive emails Monday morning.

At GovLoop and Genesys' Fireside Chat in June, virtual attendees were asked: What is the top benefit you see for better employee engagement?

2% Mitigate risk/dispute resolution

10% A better citizen experience

28% Operational excellence

30% Employee satisfaction

30% Loyalty/satisfaction of both agents & citizens

In a cloud environment, employees no longer have to spend their Friday afternoons so joylessly. Instead, they can spend valuable time doing meaningful, mission-focused work. Today, at SBA, that is administering pandemic relief to small businesses through the Paycheck Protection Program.

Using cloud infrastructure, the agency was able to stand up a call center for small businesses in six hours. "That would have been a 90-day procurement cycle in our old world," said Ryan Hillard, Systems Developer at SBA.

Cloud technology saved the agency months of time. Having more efficient workloads increased engagement by eliminating mundane work.

"There is this strong relationship between cloud adoption and employee engagement from the aspect of speed. By that I mean, the rate at which you can take feedback, iterate on that and improve that application you're building is so much faster in a cloud environment," Hillard said.

If employees are able to improve faster, they will likely have more time to do meaningful — not mundane — work. They will also likely see faster outcomes. If the outcomes are positive, that boosts satisfaction and investment in their work. If the outcomes are negative, employees can iterate and improve more agilely than before.

Adopting cloud does not, however, automatically mean employee engagement will go up. To have highly engaged employees, Hillard said the workforce needs to understand what the mission is and have a high level of devotion to it. Cloud computing can be a valuable tool for encouraging devotion to the mission by freeing time for worthwhile work.

As York said, employees need to be enabled with tools, training and processes to be engaged.

What if they aren't engaged? That is not a question cloud technology can resolve. Instead, agency and managerial support are key. "People tend to be afraid of change. The challenge here is how you manage that change," York said.

Hillard's approach is to find the disengaged employee's WIFM (pronounced "whiff-um") — "What's in it for me?"

"I am someone who believes no one comes to work to do a bad job on purpose. Most people are working in systems that do not support them," Hillard said. **"If you find what's in it for them and start to approach [engagement] from that angle, that is a way to take disengaged employees and bring them back to the light."**

When it comes to employee engagement, Hillard urged supervisors to invest in their employees. He recommended setting aside one day a week to upskill them, which is what SBA does.

"We have so much potential in the workforce. We should invest in them and get them to the point where they compete with industry, like we used to," Hillard said.

How Genesys Can Help

By partnering with Genesys, agencies can improve their call center operations and customize their citizen journey using the right combination of technologies at the appropriate scale to meet their specific needs.

The Maximus Genesys Engagement Platform is a FedRAMP-authorized cloud contact center solution that lets citizens communicate with an agency across all channels – including voice, SMS, and web chat. Agencies can be confident their automation-enhanced CX meets federal privacy and security standards.

3 Points to Take Away From Each Fireside Chat

Citizen Trust

- One of the main challenges to citizen trust is consistent messaging to citizens, especially at large agencies.

- Integrating data through cloud across different channels and facilities can help, so citizens do not have to repeat their information when accessing services.

- Training the workforce on customer experience is key because they are the "first touch" citizens have with an agency.

Customer Experience

- Solving any CX challenge boils down to identifying and understanding the particular CX need an agency has.

- When it comes to taking actionable steps to improve CX, working iteratively is best.

- Leadership buy-in is a must. One of the best ways to get buy-in is through partnerships with other organizations.

Employee Engagement

- To achieve high employee engagement, the workforce must understand the mission and have a high level of devotion to it.

- "Cloud adoption and employee engagement have a strong relationship from the aspect of speed." Employees can receive feedback, iterate and improve faster, which means they have more time for meaningful work.

- To engage disengaged employees, find their WIFM — "What's in it for me?" — and invest in their growth through dedicating time to upskilling.

About Genesys

Every year, Genesys® delivers more than 70 billion remarkable customer experiences for organizations in over 100 countries. Through the power of the cloud and AI, our technology connects every customer moment across marketing, sales and service on any channel, while also improving employee experiences. Genesys pioneered Experience as a Service℠ so organizations of any size can provide true personalization at scale, interact with empathy, and foster customer trust and loyalty. This is enabled by Genesys Cloud™, an all-in-one solution and the world's leading public cloud contact center platform, designed for rapid innovation, scalability and flexibility.

About GovLoop

GovLoop's mission is 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 the public sector.

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