Exploring Performance

Federal agencies that create a productive work environment are better positioned to meet customer needs

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Introduction

Assessing the experience of the federal government's myriad customers is a challenging task. While agencies have made meaningful strides to measure how well they are delivering services to the public, there is still a lack of reliable performance measures that allow for cross-agency comparisons and offer agency leaders an understanding of the factors that will best help them build a strong CX culture.

Through research and case studies, however, we know that organizations that create productive environments for their employees are better positioned to deliver on their critical missions and provide a better experience for the people they serve. We also know that agency mission-support services—acquisition, finance, human capital and information technology—are a fundamental component of the federal employee experience and organizational success.

Given these previous research findings, the Partnership for Public Service set out to understand what measurable elements of agency work environments correlate with a positive internal customer experience for federal employees which drives a positive experience for the public. Using a variety of employee experience and human capital data, we identified four factors that are linked to a productive internal employee customer experience and developed a new way for federal leaders to assess and enhance the performance of their organizations in CX.

This product is intended to serve mission-support leaders as they look for ways to improve service delivery to their internal customers, as well as agency executives who seek to drive change within their organizations and enable a better experience for the public.

Senior leaders such as Assistant Secretaries for Administration and Management, and Customer Experience Officers can also benefit from this product as they think about the roles internal functions and internal employee experience play in their work to support enterprise-wide CX efforts across their agencies.

Analysis

To identify the links between the experience of federal employees as customers of mission-support functions and other elements of agency work environments, the Partnership built a dataset composed of employee satisfaction and human capital data from 21 of the 24 CFO Act agencies[1]—the Cabinet departments and largest agencies within the federal government.

The primary data source for the outcome variable in our analysis was the 2023 Mission-Support Customer Satisfaction Survey led by the Office of Management and Budget and annually administered by the General Services Administration. This data was used to capture employee satisfaction with the support and services they received from their designated HR, IT, finance and procurement functions. Alongside this measure, we compiled data from the Partnership and BCG's 2023 Best Places to Work in the Federal Government® rankings, the Office of Personnel Management's human capital dataset, FedScope and the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey to capture various aspects of agency work environments that served as our explanatory variables.

Using a variety of statistical analyses, we explored the relationship between internal customer satisfaction, as measured by the 2023 Mission-Support Customer Satisfaction Survey, each workplace category from the Best Places to Work rankings that measure a variety of aspects of the employee experience, and several variables measuring other aspects of agency work environments:

- Employee Engagement
    - Defined as: Employees' satisfaction and commitment to their work and organization
    - Hypothesis: Agencies with better internal service delivery see higher internal customer satisfaction and employee engagement.
    - Data source: The 2023 Best Places to Work rankings
- Internal Communication
    - Defined as: Employees' perceptions of their agency's culture of communication and information sharing, and how leadership communicates with the workforce

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[1] The National Aeronautics and Space Administration and Department of Veterans Affairs do not participate in the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey – electing to conduct their own surveys – and do not ask all of the questions necessary to calculate workplace category and communications scores. Therefore, they were not included in the analysis.

- Hypothesis: Agencies with more effective internal communications from leaders and managers can foster better collaboration between mission-support functions and their mission-focused counterparts and see higher internal customer satisfaction.
    - Data source: The 2023 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey
- Goal Clarity
    - Defined as: The employee's sense of how clearly leaders communicate the organization's priorities, work unit goals and expectations of their work, and how that work relates to the agency's goals
    - Hypothesis: Agencies in which leaders are clear about their expectations of employees, work unit goals and organizational priorities see higher internal customer satisfaction.
    - Data source: The 2023 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey
- Relative Size of Mission-Support Workforce
    - Defined as: An agency's mission-support workforce as a share of its total full-time, nonseasonal, permanent workforce
    - Hypothesis: Agencies with larger mission-support workforces relative to the rest of the agency can deliver better internal services and see higher internal customer satisfaction.
    - Data source: FedScope

In the end, this analysis revealed statistically significant, positive relationships between internal customer satisfaction with mission-support services and:

- Employee engagement ($p = 0.02$)
- Internal communication ($p = 0.03$)
- Employee input ($p = 0.01$)
- Effective leadership ($p = 0.04$)

In other words, the Cabinet departments and independent agencies with higher rates of employee engagement and satisfaction with leadership, communication and employee input reported higher employee satisfaction with the support and services from their human capital, IT, finance and acquisition functions.

Given the established link between effective mission-support services and agency performance, these findings underscore the importance of focusing on the employee experience to enable a better experience for the public.

Employee Customer Experience Factors and Scores

Using the results of the analysis, the Partnership calculated employee customer experience scores for 21 of the 24 CFO Act agencies by averaging their respective customer service satisfaction, employee engagement, internal communication, effective leadership and employee input scores. This new measure, and accompanying rankings, shed light on the organizations that provide the most constructive environments for mission delivery and a productive external customer experience. All scores are out of 100.

Employee Customer Experience Factors - Scores and Rankings

The ECX score is comprised of the elements that enable a productive customer experience for the public.

	Agency	ECX Score	Employee Engagement Score	Effective Leadership Score	Employee Input Score	Internal Communication Score	Employee Customer Service Satisfaction Score
1	General Services Administration	81.5	84.5	84.3	73.3	82.8	82.8
2	Office of Personnel Management	74.1	75.4	79.1	64.2	73.1	78.8
3	Department of Energy	73.5	77.0	77.7	66.9	73.6	72.5
4	Environmental Protection Agency	72.1	77.9	77.6	64.8	71.6	68.7
5	Small Business Administration	72.0	76.9	77.2	59.5	70.9	75.5
6	National Science Foundation	71.9	76.3	75.7	62.5	67.7	77.4
7	Department of Health and Human Services	70.5	75.2	76.5	63.4	70.9	66.3
8	Department of Housing and Urban Development	70.3	71.9	76.0	61.9	71.0	70.9
9	Department of Labor	69.4	71.9	75.1	60.5	67.9	71.5
10	Department of Transportation	67.6	70.9	71.6	59.7	63.8	72.0
11	Nuclear Regulatory Commission	67.5	65.0	72.4	59.4	69.6	71.2
12	Department of Commerce	67.3	72.1	74.6	54.8	66.6	68.3
13	Department of the Treasury	67.0	68.4	72.5	54.2	66.8	72.9
14	Department of Education	66.7	68.8	74.7	59.2	67.5	63.4
15	Department of the Interior	64.9	68.3	69.8	59.0	61.1	66.2
16	Department of Defense	62.1	63.7	67.8	54.0	58.7	66.4
17	Department of Agriculture	61.5	64.7	69.7	54.9	59.7	58.6
18	Department of State	60.5	60.8	67.5	55.0	56.7	62.4
19	Department of Homeland Security	59.7	60.8	65.9	50.0	56.0	65.8
20	Social Security Administration	57.6	52.1	62.7	43.2	56.8	72.9
21	Department of Justice	57.5	57.5	62.8	49.1	48.8	69.2

■ < 62.1 ■ 62.1–67.5
■ 67.5–71.9 ■ ≥ 71.9

All scores are on a 100-point scale

Table: Partnership for Public Service • Source: FEVS, Best Places to Work, and CSS Survey

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the agencies responsible for providing mission-support services to the rest of government—the General Services Administration and the Office of Personnel Management—registered the highest scores, a reflection of their investments to improve and sustain the quality of their mission-support services and their employee experience.

On the lower end, some of government's largest organizations—the Department of Homeland Security, the Social Security Administration and the Department of Justice registered the lowest scores. For most, this was driven by lower internal communication and employee input scores, an element that can be difficult for large agencies to manage effectively. Our research and work with federal agencies have shown that crafting a detailed communications plan to collect, disseminate and inform employees of changes made based on feedback can be an effective way to build a culture of open communication and help employees feel that their voices have been heard.

Recommendations

Below are recommendations that federal leaders can use to create more effective organizations that better serve both their employees and the public:

- Use this data as a starting point for a deeper investigation with employees into the challenges in their experiences that impact their ability to deliver a positive experience for your customers.
- Invest in mission-support services to ensure they are equipped with the talent, resources and authority they need to effectively support their internal customers and enhance mission delivery
- Develop a detailed communications plan to guide your efforts in collecting, disseminating and informing employees of changes made based on their feedback. This can be an effective way to build a culture of open communication and demonstrate to employees the value of their input.

Future of the Employee Customer Experience Factors

The Employee Customer Experience Factors reflect the Partnership for Public Service's ongoing commitment to identifying the essential components of agency success. Like the Best Places to Work rankings, this analysis makes government performance more transparent to improve accountability and serves as a tool to help federal leaders improve their organizations and deliver better outcomes for the public.

This work also aligns with our vision for a better government and our ongoing advocacy efforts around systemic reforms to empower change in government and a renewed focus on providing efficient, customer-friendly services to the people.

Looking ahead, the Partnership sees several opportunities to enhance this analysis and provide additional insights for federal leaders:

- **Continue to explore the relationship between the internal customer experience and agency performance:** Further investigation of the impact of the internal customer experience on overall agency performance can provide deeper insights into how mission-support functions influence agency outcomes.
- **Add additional variables:** Incorporating additional variables that capture other aspects of agency work environments, such as the ratio and status of political leadership, can help build a more comprehensive assessment of factors that influence agency performance in CX.

By refining and expanding the Employee Customer Experience Factors, the Partnership for Public Service aims to support federal leaders in creating environments that foster delivery on their critical missions and service to the public.

Author

Brandon Lardy leads the Partnership's data science practice and internal data strategy. Raised by lifelong federal employees, Brandon's appreciation for public service led him to the Partnership in 2015, where he spent six years managing quantitative data projects before serving as a public sector strategist for an AI startup. One of Brandon's favorite public servants is Shirley Ann Jackson, the first Black woman to earn a doctorate from MIT and the first woman and Black American to lead the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

METHODOLOGY

DATA SOURCES
The analysis for the Mission Enabling Index relied on data from the following sources:

- OMB and GSA's 2023 Customer Satisfaction Survey
- The Partnership's 2023 Best Places to Work in the Federal Government Rankings
- OPM's 2023 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey
- OPM's FedScope Database
- The Partnership's 2024 National Trust in Government Survey

BEST PLACES TO WORK SCORE
The Best Places to Work employee engagement and satisfaction score is derived from three different questions in OPM's Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey: I recommend my organization as a good place to work. Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your job? Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your organization? To calculate the score, we use the percentage of positive responses in a weighted formula. The more the question predicted intent to remain on the job, the higher the weighting. The weightings for the formula are proprietary and are weighted according to a formula developed with the Hay Group (later acquired by Korn Ferry) in 2007.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SCORE
The Mission-Support Customer Satisfaction Survey is an annual, voluntary survey led by OMB and managed by GSA that asks federal employees to rate how satisfied they are with mission-support functions and services, how important specific mission-support services are to achieving outcomes, and whether a function serves as an effective strategic partner. Employees are asked to rate their perception of satisfaction, importance, and strategic partnership for 24 service areas on a 7-point Likert Scale within the following four support functions:

- Acquisition
- Finance
- Human Capital
- Information Technology

The 2023 Mission-Support Customer Satisfaction Survey score was calculated using the aggregated percent of positive responses to the question of satisfaction across the four services and represents the percent of employees who reported being satisfied with the services they receive from each function.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION SCORE

The internal communication score was calculated using the following questions from the 2023 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey:

- My organization shares results from the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey.
- Information is openly shared in my organization.
- Managers promote communication among different work units.
- How satisfied are you with the information you receive from management on what is going on in your organization?

GOAL CLARITY

The goal clarity score was calculated using the following questions from the 2023 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey:

- I know what is expected of me on the job.
- I know how my work relates to the agency's goals.
- I know what my work unit's goals are.
- I have a good understanding of my organization's priorities.

MISSION-SUPPORT WORKFORCE DEFINITIONS

Using the mission-support function definitions from the 2023 Mission-Support Customer Satisfaction Survey and OPM's Handbook of Occupational Groups and Families, the workforce for each mission-support function was defined using the following occupational groups:

- Acquisition: 1102
- Financial Management: 0501, 0503, 0505, 0510, 0525, 0530, 0540, 0560, and 0561
- Human Capital: 02xx
- IT: 2210

STATISTICAL METHODS

The Partnership tested several different statistical methods for this analysis but settled on the following to determine the magnitude and statistical significance of relationships between the variables of interest.

- Mann-Whitney U Test: The primary test used to determine significance of difference in mean scores between groups of agencies; selected because of its performance with smaller sample sizes and lack of reliance on a normal distribution
- T-test: A secondary test used to validate results from the Mann-Whitney U test; not selected as the primary test because of its assumption of a normal distribution and sensitivity to smaller sample sizes
- Analysis of Variance: A secondary test used to validate results from the Mann-Whitney U test; not selected as the primary test because of its assumption of equal variances between groups and sensitivity to outliers

Project Team

Arfa Alam
Senior Manager, Research, Analysis and Evaluation

Elizabeth Byers
Manager, Research, Analysis and Evaluation

Bryon Casebolt
Associate Manager, Programs, Research, Analysis and Evaluation

Delaney Hyde
Associate Graphic Designer

Mark Jacobson
Vice President, Research, Evaluation and Modernizing Government

Brandon Lardy
Senior Manager, Data Science and Strategy

Tim Markatos
UX Design Manager

Audrey Pfund
Creative Director

Sahil Singh
Manager, Customer Experience, Programs, Research, Analysis and Evaluation

PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

Partnership for Public Service
600 14th Street NW
Suite 600
Washington, DC 20005

(202) 775-9111

ourpublicservice.org

@PublicService

partnershipforpublicservice

rpublicservice