

The human connection: Why your employees are your biggest and best driver of public service delivery excellence

How to empower your people to
go above and beyond for citizens



The citizen experience imperative

The public sector's mission is to deliver the essential services that citizens and businesses need. Meeting citizens' expectations of those services, however, takes work. As the majority of citizens become more digitally literate, there's often a view that public sector organisations should focus that effort on activities like redesigning websites for improved user experience or continuing to switch to deliver services digitally.

But a great citizen experience isn't created through great service design or accessible digital channels alone – especially for those who remain digitally excluded. More than anything, it's created by people – by engaged employees who go to work every day determined to do their best for the citizens they serve. And there's a growing body of evidence that employees are more engaged when they have a positive experience of work, the workplace and work culture.

In this paper, we look at the link between the overall employee experience and the standard of service delivery in the UK public sector. We also outline the role of technology in improving employee experience, with suggested actions for leaders across your organisation.

As we emerge into a world where an engaged workforce is ever more essential to successful public outcomes, we hope it gives you an opportunity to step back and think about how small steps can lead to maximum impact.

Employee engagement is key to a positive citizen experience

Public sector organisations have many levers for improving the citizen experience throughout its lifecycle. The Centre for Public Impact lists five such levers – from re-designing services around the user to widening access to digital transactions.¹

But elsewhere, research suggests another big – and often neglected – lever: ensuring employees are motivated to deliver the best possible experience for the people and communities they serve.

In the private sector, Gallup² and Watson Wyatt³ among others have demonstrated that a more engaged workforce results in a superior customer experience, which in turn leads to increased customer loyalty and improved financial performance.

While public sector objectives differ from the commercial aims of the private sector, there’s still a strong link between employee engagement and citizen satisfaction. The 2009 MacLeod Report⁴, conducted for the then Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, reported that:

- Councils with higher levels of staff advocacy (a key characteristic of employee engagement) were **more likely to be rated ‘excellent’** by the Audit Commission⁵
- Hospital Trusts rated ‘excellent’ were **twice as likely** to employ people who advocate strongly for the organisation⁶
- **78%** of highly engaged public sector employees believe they can make an impact on public service delivery or customer service⁷

There’s a halo effect for government, too. According to the Harvard Business Review:

“When citizens report having positive interactions with public servants, they are three times more likely to hold positive opinions of government in general.”⁸

So for any public sector organisation looking to improve the citizen experience, the first place to focus is on its internal equivalent: the employee experience.

1. Centre for Public Impact, [5 ways to improve the citizen experience](#), September 2018
 2. Gallup, Engagement predicts earnings per share, 2006
 3. Watson Wyatt, Continuous Engagement: The Key to Unlocking the Value of Your People During Tough Times, 2008
 4. David MacLeod and Nita Clarke, [Engaging for Success](#), 2009 (page 52)
 5. Ipsos Mori/Improvement and Development Agency, Lessons in Leadership, 2006
 6. Healthcare Commission, Sixth Annual National NHS Staff Survey, 2008
 7. Towers Perrin, Executive Briefing: Engagement in the Public Sector, 2007
 8. Harvard Business Review, [Why Government Workers are Harder to Motivate](#), 2014

A new rulebook for employee experience

But what makes for a great employee experience in the public sector? It's a timely question, because the COVID-19 pandemic has forced organisations of all kinds to reconsider what motivates and engages people at work. In the private sector, we're seeing that what really motivates employees isn't a "work hard, play hard" culture or workplace gimmicks like ping-pong tables and free coffee, but the things that motivate us all as human beings: a sense of belonging, and of being valued, respected, listened to, invested in and fairly rewarded.

That's also true for the public sector, where there's also evidence of a further driver – the feeling of making a positive difference to citizens' lives. Research published in the Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory in 2001 has shown that 57% of public sector employees are motivated by their organisation's core purpose.⁹

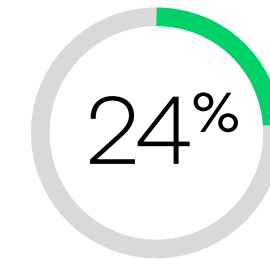
When public sector employees feel all of those things, their engagement deepens. They're motivated to go above and beyond for the organisation and its customers. From the front line to the back office, they're more likely to spend time getting to know individual citizens, and working in collaboration to find solutions to that help those citizens achieve their goals.

Introduction of internal recognition awards at Chesterfield Royal Hospital NHS Foundation Trust contributed to a 38-point increase in employee engagement from 2016-2019.¹⁰

The importance of digital transformation in the employee experience

The pandemic highlighted the critical role that digital transformation plays in this new employee experience. When staff were asked to work from home, those whose employers ensured they had the right devices, connectivity and access to systems were more likely to give their all. A Virgin Media study with CEBR found that public sector organisations that accelerated their digital progress during the pandemic saw a 5.7% increase in employee productivity and 4.3% increase in employee satisfaction.¹¹

But those who were left to fend for themselves were still expected to keep their part of the organisation operating. They struggled. They didn't feel the same level of value or support from their leaders. Through distraction and frustration, they were unable to deliver their best – either for their employer or for the citizens it serves.



of UK workers were planning a job change in November 2021.¹²

We're now seeing the full impact of that disaffection. Huge swathes of the workforce – from knowledge workers to front line staff – are voting with their feet, in what news headlines have dubbed the Great Resignation, Big Quit or Great Reshuffle. In November 2021, Randstad UK found that 24% of UK workers were planning a job change. And it's driven not just by the way were treated during the pandemic, but also by how they believe their employer will continue to treat them.

Further reading: Creating a dynamic workforce

Our survey of thousands of employees reveals where employers should focus to promote productivity in the world of dynamic working. [Get the full report](#)

9. Happy, [The Benefits of Happy Workplaces in the Public Sector](#), October 2017
 10. [NHS Employers case study](#), March 2021
 11. Virgin Media Business, [How Covid-Driven Digital Change is Transforming Our Public Services](#)
 12. The Guardian, ["The Great Resignation"](#), November 2021

Three focus areas to create a great employee experience

So what can public sector employers do to create a positive employee experience that drives a positive citizen experience? From our research and our own culture at Virgin Media O₂, along with our work with organisations across the UK public sector, we believe it comes down to doing the right things in three key areas:

- **People:** Respecting and valuing people, rewarding them fairly, and investing in their future
- **Place:** Creating the right spaces for people to achieve a high standard of service delivery
- **Technology:** Providing digital tools and infrastructure that support and enable people, not hold them back

In each case, a renewed focus on digital transformation can help leaders, managers and employees to create a positive, productive and engaged workforce, where everyone is enabled to give their all.

As we emerge into a new world, it is a good time to step back and look at your employee experience through each of these three lenses. Are you allowing each to be as good as they possibly could be, or could you do more to ensure your people are engaged, motivated and ready to deliver the kind of experiences today's citizens increasingly expect?

Let's look at each in turn, with some recommended actions for your leaders to consider.



People: Create a culture where people feel valued and supported

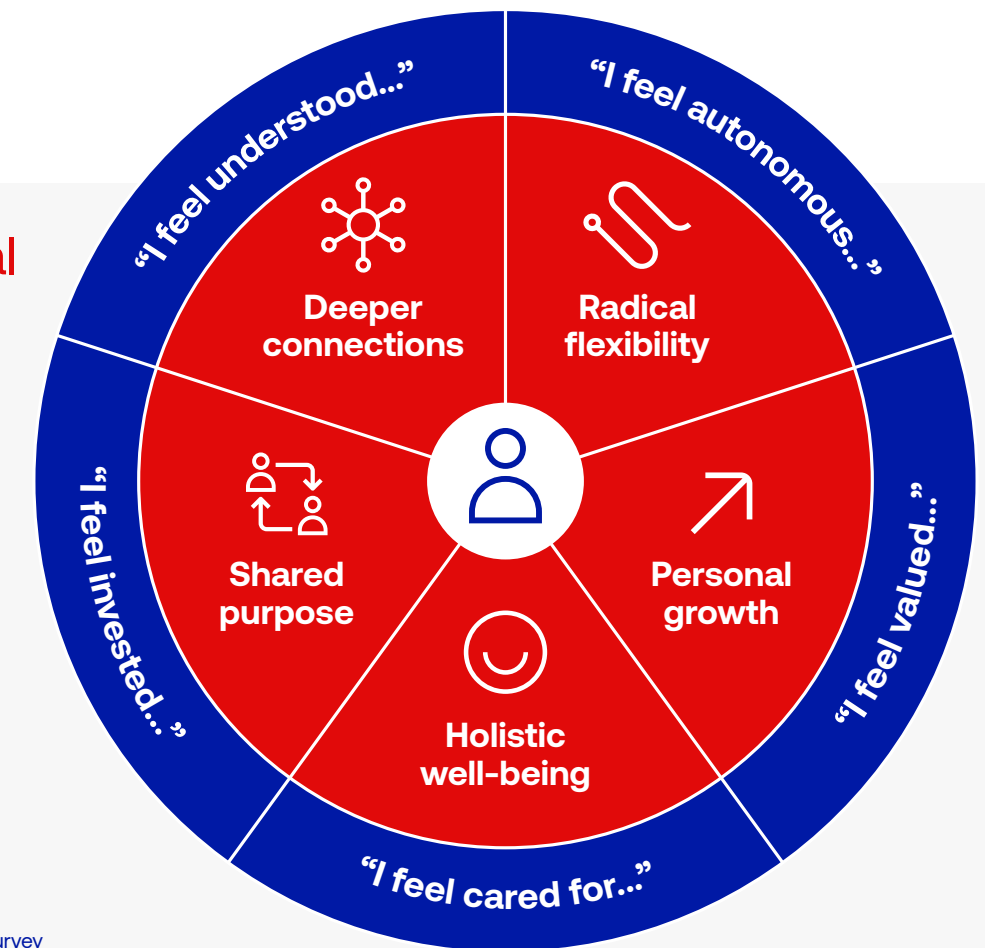
It might sound simple, but the best ideas usually are. Even small things like saying “thank you” and giving specific praise can be powerful drivers of employee engagement. Showing you value your people, by helping them to achieve their personal and professional goals, is key to keeping talent and knowledge within the organisation.

Gartner calls it “The Human Deal”, and find it increases employee satisfaction by 15%. Bersin & Associates research from 2012 backs it up, finding that organisations that practise effective employee recognition enjoy a 31% lower voluntary turnover rate.¹³

This can be more challenging in a dynamic working environment when you’re managing a mix of in-office and remote workers. But it’s here that technology can be a great enabler of a positive work culture. Used wisely, it can bring teams closer together, enable access to mentors, information and learning, and provide managers with vital insights into the needs of individuals and teams.

The human deal

The human deal increases employee satisfaction with the EVP by 15%



n = 5,000 employees worldwide
Source: [Gartner 2021 EVP Employee Survey](#)

13. [Bersin & Associates Unlocks the Secrets of Effective Employee Recognition](#), June 2012

Bring teams closer together

Collaboration tools are advancing at a rapid rate, addressing many of the shortcomings of the videoconferencing platforms that were the saviour of many businesses in the early days of the pandemic. Today there are myriad options for hybrid and remote working, from Microsoft Teams whiteboards for brainstorming to Monday.com for task collaboration. Tools like Culture Amp and Quantum Workspace, meanwhile, can forge a stronger sense of togetherness and belonging.

Only **15%** of junior employees feel a strong sense of belonging, and just **16%** are highly engaged.¹⁴

Improve access to people and information

Professional development is an essential part of the employee experience, with every investment in learning paying for itself by better equipping the workforce to meet citizens' needs. Remote workers need the same access to formal and informal development opportunities as their in-office colleagues, and technologies like virtual and augmented reality for training, and virtual water-cooler apps that connect junior hires with senior colleagues, can help.

Bank of America pioneers virtual reality training

In 2022, Bank of America will debut a series of VR experiences for employee training – with simulated scenarios to help them navigate customer conversations and respond to customers with greater empathy.¹⁵

¹⁴. [Achievers Workforce Institute](#)

¹⁵. VR Scout, [Bank of America Turns to VR for Soft Skills Training](#), October 2021

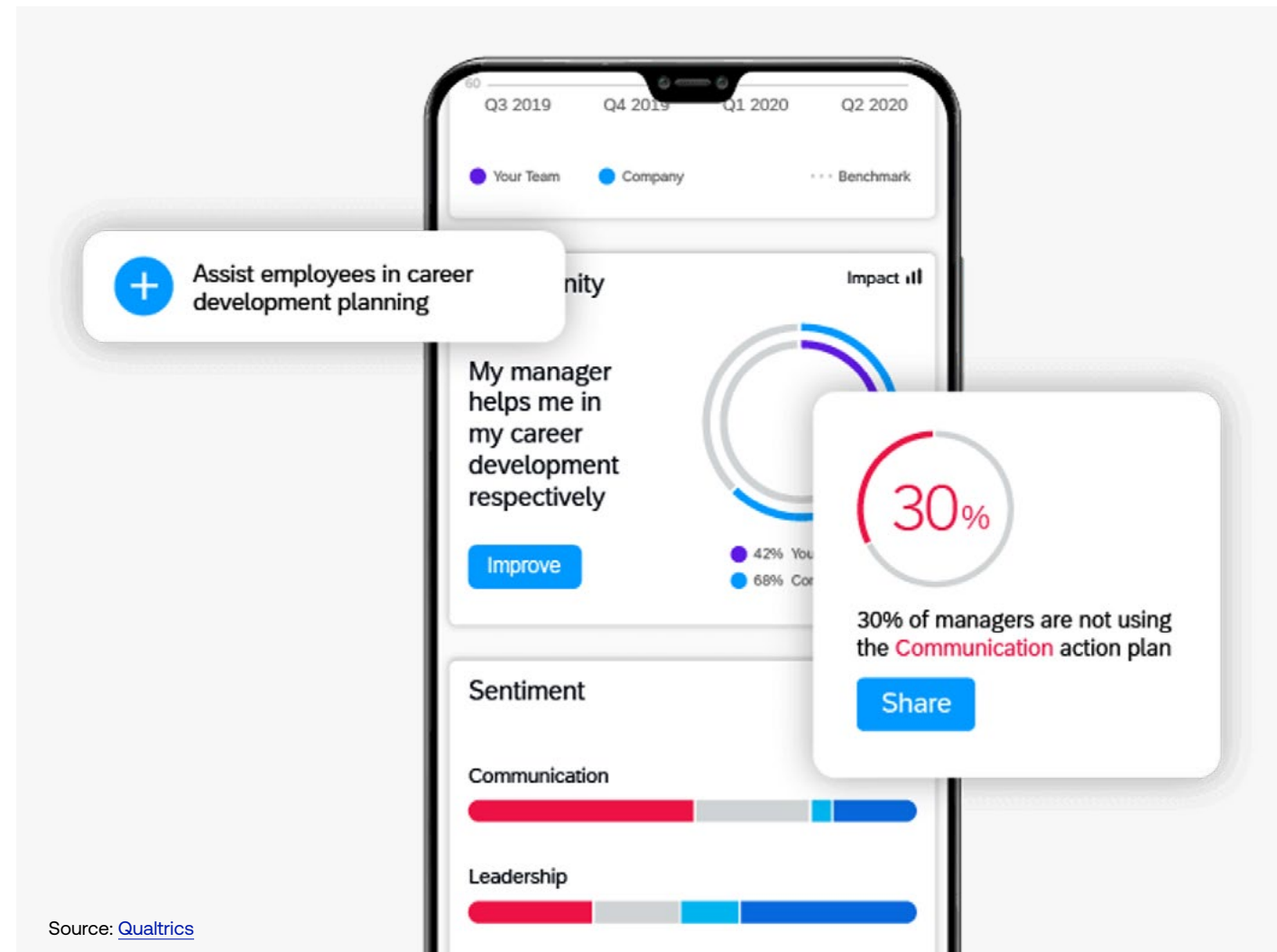
Get insights into workforce needs

In a hybrid working environment especially, managers need to know where their team is excelling and where individuals or whole teams need help to be at their best. New AI-powered tools, like Qualtrics, provide insights into individuals' workloads and skills gaps, as well as overall team dynamics and areas of friction or inefficiency.

Armed with this knowledge, managers can take action to re-balance workloads, invest in skills training, or tighten up processes.

Further reading: People strategy

For a deeper dive into how to optimise the employee experience in the new world of dynamic working, read our white paper: [Freedom, flexibility and fulfilment: Re-imagining work in the age of the dynamic workforce](#)



Actions

- Continuously measure employee experience across the organisation
- Evaluate current employee offering against that of potential rival employers
- Map employee engagement metrics to citizen experience stats
- Identify areas of employee experience to prioritise for citizen experience impact
- Ensure the work environment reflects citizens' expectations
- Provide tech that allows people to work effectively and enhances employee satisfaction

Place:

Create the right spaces for people to do their best work

The right environment is critical for employees to be at their best, whether the space is physical or virtual, public-facing or internal, in the organisation's premises or outside of it.

One of the great inequalities of pandemic home working was the disparity between employees who were able to operate from dedicated home offices and those who were vying for space – and connectivity – in family homes or shared accommodation. This in itself is contributing to the Great Resignation, sounding a wake-up call to employers to better understand and address employees' spatial needs.

Today, the organisations most focused on employee experience are re-thinking spaces in three ways: optimising their own physical premises, supporting home or remote working, and creating new, virtual spaces for collaboration and engagement. In all three, technology plays an essential role.

Optimise physical premises

The most employee-focused organisations are re-assessing the purpose of the office in a dynamic working world, and adapting their physical space accordingly. The ever-creative Lego Group, for example, lets people choose a space that suits the work they're doing at any given moment. In its London office, the top floor is for creative work, the middle floor for meetings and collaboration, and the bottom floor for quiet, "head-down" work.

Furniture, lighting and layout are all key considerations in the new-style office, as are new enabling technologies – from indoor location intelligence to understand how space is used, to hybrid conferencing tools that allow remote and physically present workers to collaborate effectively.

Enable remote working

According to Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng, remote working in the civil service is "here to stay".¹⁶ Whether they're working from home or a local café, employees need a safe, comfortable and well-equipped environment to do their best work. For employers, that means ensuring the right tech is available to employees wherever they choose to work, including adequate connectivity, secure access to relevant systems, and task-appropriate devices.

Support for home working may also involve allocating budget for ergonomic task chairs and height-adjustable desks, in line with health and safety policies. Shopify and Twitter are just two of many organisations that now offer employees an allowance to kit out their home office.

Meanwhile, organisational membership of co-working hubs can enable employees to work closer to home, reducing the inefficiency and climate impact of long commutes while providing a dedicated working environment with opportunities to socialise. There are productivity benefits, too: Virgin Media and CEBR found that increased remote working has resulted in an extra two hours of work a day for the average employee.¹⁷

During the pandemic, Shopify and Twitter offered newly-remote workers **\$1,000** to set up an ergonomic home office.¹⁸

¹⁶. The Guardian, [Civil servants working from home not at risk of pay cut, says Kwarteng](#), August 2021
¹⁷. Virgin Media Business, [How Covid-Driven Digital Change is Transforming Our Public Services](#)
¹⁸. CNBC, [Working from home? You might be able to expense a new desk](#), June 2020

Create virtual spaces

A lot of remote engagement with members of the public and colleagues still takes place via laptop, desktop, tablet and phone screens. But new options are also emerging that can further close the gap between physical and virtual. As head-mounted displays get smaller and lighter, there are opportunities to visualise and share spaces in new ways. In South Korea, for example, the metropolitan government of Seoul is developing a metaverse platform to bring public services to tech-savvy citizens in digitally innovative ways.

Seoul looks to the metaverse to widen access to public services

Government needs to keep pace with citizens' expectations of digital service delivery – and for the municipal government of the South Korean capital Seoul, that means following (or perhaps even leading) its tech-savvy citizens into the metaverse. In 2022, the city of Seoul will debut a metaverse platform featuring a virtual mayor's office and tours of historic sites, among other services.¹⁹

Here in the UK, Leicester Fire & Rescue Service has pioneered the use of VR headsets to train officers to conduct fire investigations,²⁰ while at Northumbria Water Group, AR is enabling remote experts to provide their expertise to in-the-field teams (see box).

Northumbria Water Group uses AR-assisted remote experts

For Northumbria Water Group, O2 Business created a high-speed audio-visual link that connects technicians in the field to remote experts, allowing complex faults to be resolved faster. Experts optimise their time by advising remotely, using augmented reality for greater accuracy in description and real-time demonstration using graphics and annotation, rather than having to physically go to each job where their expertise is required.

[Read the full case study](#)

Further reading: Workspace strategy

For a deeper dive into how leading companies are adapting their workspaces for the new world of work, read our white paper: [Talent, tools and space: New workplace strategies for a dynamic working world](#)

Actions

- Move from a 'workplaces' approach to a 'workspaces' strategy
- Support employees to work in the places that suit them best
- Align the real estate footprint with the modes and rhythms of dynamic work
- Establish the right balance of desk space, collaboration space and social space
- Provide tech that lets people work effectively in mixed-use offices and co-working spaces
- Adapt physical and digital spaces for optimal employee and citizen experience
- Explore new technologies that can improve digital and physical spaces

19. Quartz, [Seoul will be the first city government to join the metaverse](#), November 2021

20. Leicester Fire and Rescue Service, [Technology Used to Train Staff Working Remotely](#), April 2020

Technology: Provide digital infrastructure and tools that support and enable your people

While technology enhances investments in people and spaces, it also plays a more direct role in the employee experience. And in many public sector organisations, that role is not a positive one.

That's because the internal infrastructure and systems that people use to get work done aren't usually up to the modern standards of the (cloud) apps and digital experiences they use in their life outside of work. Internal systems tend to be designed primarily for data entry or extraction, with the user experience a secondary consideration. And while many citizen-facing digital experiences are shiny and new, internal systems in the public sector are often a decade or more old – and frequently running on even older infrastructure.

The resulting clunkiness has a high cost in terms of citizen satisfaction and employee productivity and retention. It can create a poor citizen experience – from the phone enquiry that takes ages to get to the right person, to a request for help that gets lost between departments and systems. And when employees are frustrated with these same systems, they're less engaged and more likely to leave.

Progressive employers, meanwhile, are snapping up talent by offering the latest devices, tools and systems running on a modern network, thus empowering people to perform at their best. There are many ways technology can be used to deliver a superior employee experience, but a few of the basics are:

Focus on foundational technologies

These are the engine of modern business, so they require special attention. From providing the right device type to designing around scalability during busy times, being able to access the right information at the right time in the right places is critical.

Your software vendor ecosystem will provide the tools to create smooth experiences for citizens, while your on-premise and cloud infrastructure give you organisational adaptability, scalability and resilience. And reliable fixed and mobile connectivity are essential to keeping people productive.

Unify and speed up communications

Comms are the backbone of all digital interactions, and friction can occur when different people are using different tools to try to work with others. With multiple touchpoints leading to 'channel overload', integrating the ones you rely on will support better collaboration. Ensuring the right latency and data speeds will help remove obstacles to your people being their most efficient and productive version of themselves possible.

Make user experience improvements

Design, usability and functionality all matter. When introducing new tools and features, be sure to get user feedback early and often and draw on new process technologies, like chatbots, to add value to individuals as well as the organisation.

Choosing modern tools that are intuitive and pleasant to use won't just improve productivity, but will also help employees to feel they're being invested in, which leads to higher engagement – and a better citizen experience.

64% of workers spend 30 minutes or more every day switching between the apps they need to do their daily work.²¹

21. Slack, [The State of Work](#), 2020

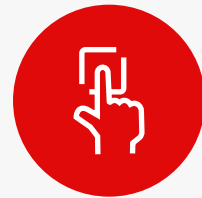
Better workplace tech improves the citizen experience

The tools and systems that public sector employees use have a direct impact on the citizen experience:



Analytics

Cross-channel analytics can highlight areas of the citizen experience that need improving



AI

Intelligent assistants can surface information to help guide face-to-face meetings with the public



Automation

Automated workflows make it easier and faster for citizens to transact online



Data

A single source of citizen data allows smoother collaboration between services and agencies



Devices

Connected devices make it easier for employees to access and update systems on the go



Connectivity

5G and superfast broadband let employees handle citizen enquiries faster and more smoothly

Make smart use of AI and automation

AI can improve the employee experience right across the organisation – from digital assistants like Microsoft Viva that help employees to organise their time, to contact centre bots that retrieve information to help agents answer citizens' queries faster.

For managers, AI-powered “talent intelligence” tools like Eightfold make it easier to find the right people to fill current skills gaps. Automation tools like BluePrism, meanwhile, offload routine tasks to robotic workflows, freeing people to focus on the more value-added elements of their work.

With AI and automation taking on more of the mundane work, employees have an opportunity to upskill to more rewarding work: in fact 70% believe that automation will offer them an opportunity to qualify for more satisfying work.

Further reading: Tech strategy

For a deeper dive into how AI, automation and other technologies can empower a new dynamic workforce, read our white paper: [AI, automation and collaboration: Why tomorrow's talent is human + digital](#)

The pandemic saw a **500%** increase in use of digital channels in the UK public sector.²²

Actions

- Ensure people have the right devices, connectivity and tools for the work they need to do
- Avoid employees having to use “shadow” technologies to get work done
- Address any areas of friction in the employee or citizen experience created by technology
- Explore tools that can support people by automating simple tasks
- Ensure employees are being supported to learn new digital skills

22. TechUK, [The Improvement of Citizen Experiences in the Digital Age](#), May 2021

Talk to us about improving employee and customer experience today

The link between employee experience and citizen experience was established over a decade ago by the MacLeod Report, but the pandemic and its ensuing Great Reshuffle have cast new light on what can happen when the employee experience is neglected.

The good news is that there are changes every public sector organisation can make today to improve it – and those that do will reap the benefits of improved service delivery and increased citizen satisfaction.

At Virgin Media O2 Business, we partner with many public sector organisations across health, justice, local and central government to provide technology solutions that build a positive work culture and deliver a superior experience for members of the public. We also provide support with human aspects of adoption, training and refining, so staff are fully empowered to do their best work for the citizens and businesses they serve.

If you'd like to know more about how we can help you build on your existing technology investments to optimise your own employee experience and your citizen experience, get in touch.

Discover more insights at
virginmediao2business.co.uk

