



**Market Connections™**  
Research you can act on.  
A portfolio platform of GovExec

---

# Empowering the Federal Workforce through Improved Digital Experience

---

October 2024

Sponsored by:

riverbed /  swish



## Executive Summary

The federal government is driven by its mission, but fueled by its workforce, making it crucial to support its employees' productivity and satisfaction by ensuring a positive digital experience (DX). As technology increasingly underpins work environments, effective digital experiences across devices, applications, and networks are key to employee engagement and overall productivity. However, the current digital landscape within the federal government continues to be marred by frustration and inefficiencies. The report has three major findings:

### 1. POOR DIGITAL EXPERIENCES HINDER PRODUCTIVITY AND SATISFACTION

Federal employees face significant delays and frustrations due to slow networks, outdated devices, and inefficient digital tools, leading to lost productivity and dissatisfaction. Some employees have considered leaving or have left their organizations because of these issues.

### 2. PROACTIVE IT SOLUTIONS AND SELF-REMEDiation ARE ESSENTIAL

The current reactive approach to identifying IT problems, mostly through employee help desk tickets, is inefficient. Implementing observability tools and empowering employees with self-remediation capabilities can reduce delays, improve productivity, and lessen the burden on help desk services.

### 3. LEADERSHIP IN DIGITAL EXPERIENCE IS CRITICAL

Agencies that have a Chief Experience Officer (CXO) see faster issue resolution and improved digital experiences. Leadership dedicated to improving digital tools and environments can significantly enhance employee satisfaction, productivity, and retention.








# Introduction

Today, the digital expectations of both citizens who access government services and federal workers tasked with driving those services are sky high. Regarding improved digital experiences, GSA Administrator Robin Carnahan noted, [“government departments are currently faced with an unusual combination of both the funding and political will needed to upgrade services.”](#) The strategic importance of positive digital experiences is further evidenced by the recent [Government Service Delivery Improvement Act](#), as well as [Executive Order 14058](#).

In an increasingly digital world, total experience – meaning the ease, accessibility and performance of devices, networks, and applications – is becoming an increasingly crucial metric for satisfaction and productivity. Slow or ineffective digital environments mean time spent working to address IT service quality issues rather than on the mission. Building a robust digital ecosystem for both the public and public servants means more efficient and rapid interactions, improved service delivery, better feedback loops and more powerful tools. These effects reverberate throughout government with fiscal and geopolitical impacts that range from better use of taxpayer money to powering innovation that keeps the US at the forefront of mission, supporting US competition on the global stage and with its adversaries.

With so much at stake, how do federal employees feel about their current digital experience? Riverbed and Swish partnered with market research firm Market Connections to survey 200 federal civilian and defense agency IT decision makers. The goal of this research was to:

-  Understand the pain points in federal employees’ digital experiences.
-  Discuss the consequences of poor digital experience on productivity and satisfaction.
-  Examine the role and impact of a Chief Experience Officer.

The following report presents the findings of that research and explores what they might mean going forward.

## WHO WE SURVEYED



The 200 respondents to this survey came from a wide range of both federal civilian (60%) and defense (40%) agencies. Respondents were largely involved in IT roles, but all were screened to be involved in the selection or management of firms that implement IT or digital services. Nearly half of respondents were GS-13 or higher.



## A frustrating present

Despite federal mandates and agency-level modernization strategies, current employees paint a frustrating picture of delays, slowdowns, or interruptions that affect their job performance and overall satisfaction. “Operational drag,” or the delay spent on trying to get technology to work rather than time spent working to solve a problem, has significant effects not only on the work output, but on how federal employees see their work. Forty percent of all respondents say that colleagues have left their organization due to frustrations with their digital experience, and 32% report that they have considered it themselves. Over half (57%) believe that their organization’s outdated devices and applications affect their ability to attract top talent. An overwhelming 82% of respondents would like their jobs more if their applications and devices worked better.

The impact of these statistics cannot be understated. A slow or subpar user experience means lost productivity, dissatisfaction, and potential loss of employees themselves, along with their skills and expertise. They also undermine the federal government’s ability to position itself as an attractive employer. All this calls for a radical rethinking of the interplay between device functionality, productivity, and mission.

## Modernizing end-to-end DX

Devices, networks, and application performance are the key conduits of activity, and tightly coupled when it comes to delivering good user experience. When healthy and working together seamlessly, these systems create a powerful digital ecosystem for the work of government. However, any failure in this ecosystem can have significant effects. Half (49%) of respondents report that slow, buggy, or crashing applications are among the most frustrating experiences at work, and 32% report that this is the single most frustrating aspect of their digital experience. Even just the first step – logging on – can start the day off poorly. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (62%) say it takes “forever” for their computer to boot up and one in ten respondents say that the time it takes to log in is the single most frustrating aspect of their digital experience. Even one hour of lost productivity for one employee can cost taxpayers up to \$13,260 a year<sup>1</sup>. For an agency of 100,000, that’s over \$1.3b in potential lost productivity.

This is not isolated to one or two slow computers. As more people return to the office, networks are under heavier demand and are subsequently underperforming. Half (48%) of respondents are frustrated by their slow networks, with 19% reporting that it is the most frustrating aspect of their digital experience. In addition, over half (56%) get kicked off their network or experience slowness frequently. Over a third report losing ten to 29 minutes a day, with 22% reporting losing anywhere from one to four hours a day.

Bottlenecks, errors, latency, or misconfigurations can lead to poor user experience, loss of productivity, and frustrated employees. Eighty-two percent of respondents say their productivity would increase if their applications and devices worked better.

### Frustrations with current digital ecosystems

 **62%**

ARE FRUSTRATED BY HOW LONG IT TAKES THEIR COMPUTER TO BOOT UP

 **56%**

REPORT GETTING KICKED OFF NETWORKS/ EXPERIENCING FREQUENT SLOWNESS

 **49%**

ARE FRUSTRATED BY SLOW, BUGGY, OR CRASHING APPLICATIONS

OVER **1/3** 

REPORT LOSING 10 TO 29 MINUTES OF PRODUCTIVITY PER DAY

<sup>1</sup> - Based on [average 2024 federal salary](#) of \$106,462 and typical 260 days worked p/year.

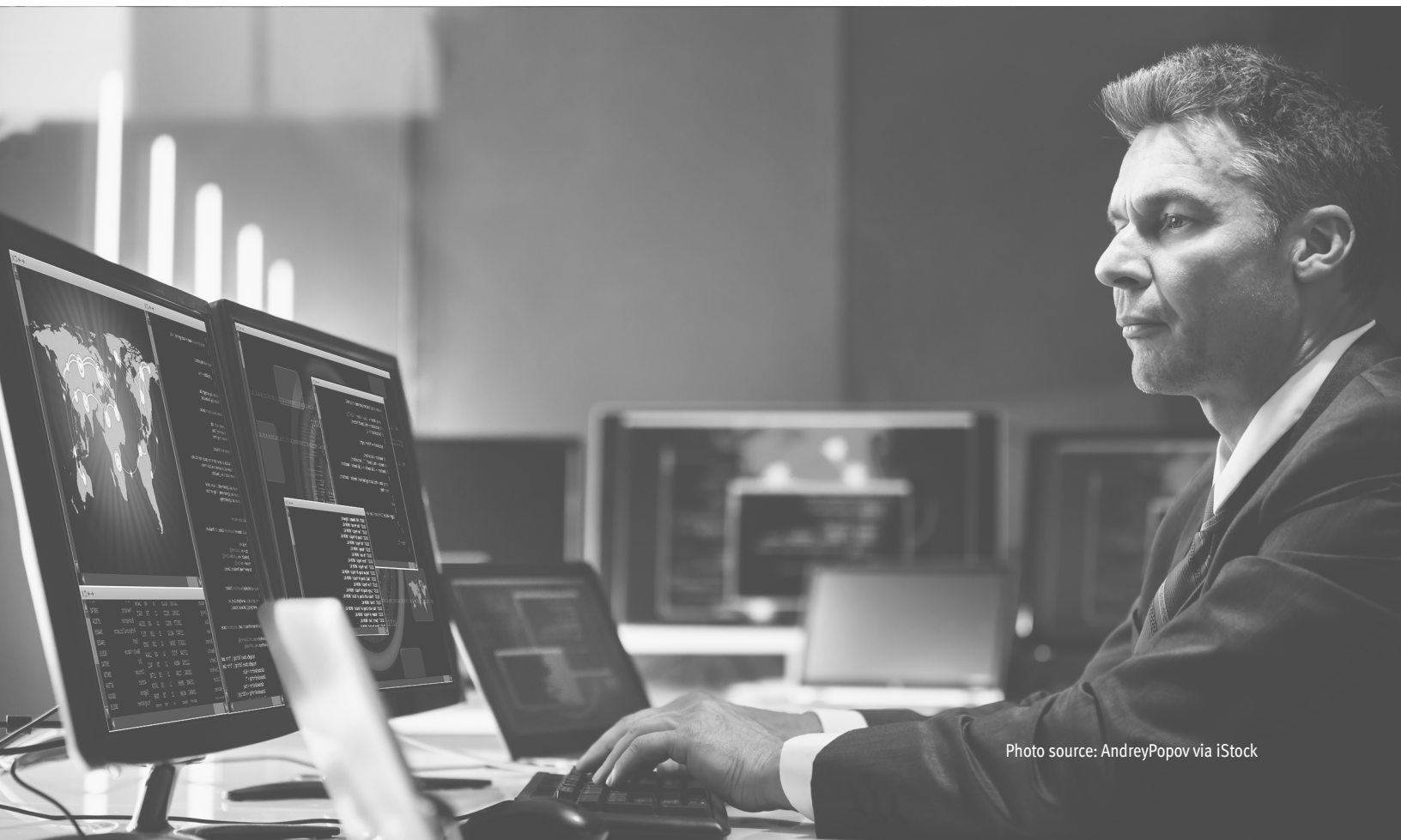


## Identifying the issues

However, even finding the source of a problem in an agency's digital domain can itself be a challenge. Employee complaints continue to be the way most agency users identify issues in the IT environment. Three quarters (74%) of respondents note that their complaints are the top way their organization identifies IT problems. And there is little they can do about it without assistance from another team – 64% of respondents report that their agency does not allow users to independently fix common IT issues without intervention from the help desk, and 68% of respondents say that these help desk tickets are the way their agency typically identifies IT problems. This adds extra time for employees waiting for a fix, and an additional burden on the help desk to triage and solve numerous simultaneous issues.

These delays have an impact. One third of respondents report that they don't experience rapid IT fixes. While issues are generally identified and responded to within the day or even less, nearly half (48%) of respondents report it takes more than three days (and up to over a month) to remedy a problem. Taken together, these responses indicate a typically reactive, rather than proactive, approach. The top four methods of identifying IT issues (employee complaints, help desk tickets, customer complaints, and systems crashes) are all predicated on something going wrong in the process first, slowing down necessary functions for both users and customers. This time spent toiling to identify and remedy issues is inefficient and severely impacts both staff productivity and mission velocity.

Preempting problems is key here, and that's where observability can be powerful. Only 31% say that they use a solution that monitors their IT environment to proactively identify issues. Observability tools give a birds-eye view to IT professionals of all potential bottlenecks, slowdowns, or issues that need fixing, even before users encounter them. Observability is foundational to developing a data-driven service desk that is highly effective, continuously improving, and ensures great Digital Employee Experience (DEX).





## Chief Experience Officer: A core function

Agencies who move toward a proactive approach around remediation are likely to see more satisfied and productive users, but this takes dedicated leadership. [Executive Order 14058](#), Transforming the Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government, mandates and outlines the role of a Chief Experience Officer (CXO) for public-facing agencies. The CXO's role focuses on improving the digital experience agency-wide, for both the public and employees. OMB continues to issue [further guidance](#) to help agencies meet this goal. Still, nearly half of respondents do not have a Chief Experience Officer and have no plans to hire one, and for those who plan to hire, 84% do not see it happening within the next 6 months. This is a missed opportunity for cohesive leadership, especially cooperation between CXOs and CIOs.

The experience of the 15% respondents who do have a Chief Experience Officer appears to be significantly better. Half report that their digital experience has been improved and were far more likely to report that their agency is working to provide them with better equipment (90% of those with a CXO compared to 69% who do not have one and do not plan to hire one).

The role of a Chief Experience Officer is not simply to check a mandated box. Agencies with CXOs are resolving issues much faster than those without, in turn leading to more satisfied and productive employees. CXOs must pay attention to the processes through which government works, including, and especially, examining where those processes are being held up. A crucial part of this role is feedback. Forty-three percent of respondents report that they are not regularly asked for feedback. Feedback loops are an essential tool in understanding the lived experience of those interacting with applications and processes, and indispensable for leaders looking to improve. Every agency should be looking at how to build multi-dimensional feedback mechanisms, along with other ways to center the experience of their employees in their modernization strategies.

## Empower with self-remediation

Perhaps one of the most important ways for agencies to ensure that their employees are satisfied is to empower them to solve problems themselves. Self-remediation capabilities are powerful tools that allow employees to address issues instantly, rather than submitting help desk tickets and waiting for them to be solved by a centralized team that is often overloaded.

The benefits of self-remediation are evident. Among those respondents whose organizations allow self-remediation, 79% respond that IT issues are resolved quickly, compared with 62% of those whose agencies do not allow users to address their own issues. On the other hand, those without self-remediation capabilities reported consistently higher frustrations. The majority of those without these capabilities, 87%, say they would be more productive and 86% say that they would like their job more if their applications and devices worked better, compared with 71% and 73% respectively of those who can self-remediate. This difference is even larger when it comes to perceived network issues – 65% of those without self-remediation say that they have frequent connection issues with their network, compared with 37% of those with these capabilities.

### Self-remediation capabilities

**79%** 

OF THOSE WITH CAPABILITIES SAY IT ISSUES ARE RESOLVED QUICKLY

**65%** 

OF THOSE WITHOUT CAPABILITIES REPORT FREQUENT NETWORK CONNECTION ISSUES



Employees who are empowered to solve their own problems save time and frustrations and are more likely to report positive digital employee experiences. This positive experience means a higher velocity workforce, improved productivity, fewer process bottlenecks, less fiscal waste, and more focus on the mission rather than on frustrating delays.

## Best practices

Digital transformation is not an easy journey. Agencies are being asked to rapidly modernize their tools to provide better experiences for the public they serve but achieving modernization while working within legacy or siloed IT environments can be challenging. What are the key steps?



### 1. CENTER THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE.

Robust digital experiences must be based on the real needs of the users themselves. Yet standalone surveys can receive low employee response rates and may not be fully representative of employee sentiments or experiences. This means that organizations must get both broad and granular. It is critical to collect both qualitative and quantitative data from end users through surveys, net promoter scores, and end user experience monitoring solutions to drive total experience management across the enterprise, offering powerful and timely insights that enhance employee engagement and drive rapid decision-making.



### 2. INVEST IN OBSERVABILITY.

Waiting for IT issues to be escalated up leads to long help desk ticket lines, stalled work, and often slow recovery. For a full picture, organizations need to have eyes throughout the whole IT ecosystem. Where is the problem really coming from, the device, network, or application? The inability to answer this question makes diagnosing and solving common problems more challenging, leading to lower productivity for employees and frustration for IT teams. Investing in observability and DEX tools that give insight into both the granular individual experience as well as the enterprise ecosystem supports both IT and the employee user communities.



### 3. BE PROACTIVE, NOT REACTIVE.

Relying on employees, customers, or downed systems to identify problems creates delays and frustrations. Solutions that observe digital experience touchpoints and proactively identify issues before they create significant impact will keep work moving smoothly and remove obstacles before they arise. How long do bootups and logins take? How long does it take to open an email or access an application? What are the key constraints or errors by user groups, locations and applications that if addressed provide outsized returns? Eliminating the barriers and blockages that slow these experiences means that agency IT leaders can use data-driven decisions to proactively not just solve problems before employees even notice but continuously improve experiences and mission outcomes.



### 4. EMPOWER THE EMPLOYEE.

Self-remediation is a powerful tool for employees, supporting a high-velocity edge workforce and offloading ticket load and effort from centralized service desk staff. Employees who can solve their own problems are more likely to be satisfied and productive, reducing operational lag or backlog and supporting employees to deliver the work they were hired to do.

## CONCLUSION

The respondents are clear: a poor digital experience affects their ability to do their job. From improving network, device, and application performance to strengthening employee ability to self-remediate, investing in a better and faster digital ecosystem means more productive and satisfied employees. In an increasingly online world, addressing these concerns must stay a priority.

“The expectations are higher than ever for digital-first experiences,” says Andy Lewandowski, digital experience adviser to the Federal Chief Information Officer. Agencies that prioritize positive digital experiences are telling their users that they matter – that their work and skills are valued, that they should be empowered instead of frustrated, and that leaders like Chief Experience Officers are working to provide the leadership and support that they need. As the capabilities of digital tools become increasingly powerful, providing employees with the support they need to harness these tools efficiently and effectively is equally powerful.





## ABOUT

# riverbed

Riverbed is the only company with the collective richness of telemetry from network to app to end user, that illuminates and then accelerates every interaction, so organizations can deliver a seamless digital experience and drive enterprise performance. Riverbed offers two industry-leading portfolios: Alluvio by Riverbed, a differentiated Unified Observability portfolio that unifies data, insights, and actions across IT, so customers can deliver seamless, secure digital experiences; and Riverbed Acceleration, providing fast, agile, secure acceleration of any app, over any network, to users anywhere. Together with our thousands of partners, and market-leading customers globally – including 95% of the FORTUNE 100 –, we empower every click, every digital experience. For more information, visit: [www.riverbed.com/federal](http://www.riverbed.com/federal).

# swish

Swish provides solutions and engineering services to the U.S. Government focusing on high-quality outcomes. Certified engineers research and evaluate technologies and develop full life cycle solutions to ensure maximum operational value and exceed expectations and requirements. Swish is a Service-Disabled, Veteran-Owned and HUBZone certified Small Business. [www.swishdata.com](http://www.swishdata.com).



Market Connections delivers actionable intelligence and insights that enable improved business performance and positioning for leading businesses, trade associations, and the public sector. The custom market research firm is a sought-after authority on preferences, perceptions, and trends among the public sector and the contractors who serve them, offering deep domain expertise in information technology and telecommunications; healthcare; and education. For more information visit: [www.marketconnectionsinc.com](http://www.marketconnectionsinc.com).