



FOURTH CONSECUTIVE
**VOICE OF THE FIELD
SERVICE ENGINEER**

April 2021

FOURTH CONSECUTIVE: VOICE OF THE FIELD SERVICE ENGINEER

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Service Council launched its fourth consecutive Voice of the Field Service Engineer (VoFSE) survey in late 2020. This annual survey strives to uncover the feelings, perspectives, and recommendations of those on the front lines of service delivery.

This report:

- summarizes the findings revealed in the survey,
- highlights the positives and negatives about the job as perceived by the technicians,
- and makes some suggestions for actions management can take to improve the efficacy, job satisfaction, and sense of worth for the field staff.

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

More than 725 technicians, ranging in age from 18 to greater than 75, participated in the survey. 60% are Millennials (25 – 44 years old), more than 20% are Generation-X (45 – 56 years old), Centennials and Baby Boomers (18 – 26 and 57 – 75 years old) comprise the rest. A full 60% of respondents have made field service a career, having worked in it for ten years or more; more than four in ten have been in field service longer than 15 years. Additionally, 38% of respondents have worked at the same organization for ten years or more; 22% have been at the same company for fifteen years or longer.

Field service technicians from 23 distinct industries responded to the survey. The most frequently represented industries in the survey are: Automotive, Healthcare, Industrial Equipment and Products, Construction, Agriculture, and IT and Telecom. Other industries with significant representation include Oil and Gas, Consumer Goods, Transportation and Logistics, Utilities, Government, Facilities Management, Paper and Lumber, and Aerospace and Defense.

Participants from the United States provided most of the responses, at 52%, but there was also significant international representation in the survey, with EMEA, Asia/PAC and Canada contributing a combined 47% of survey answers. Latin America provides the balance.

In which geographic region do you work? (Primary area of work)

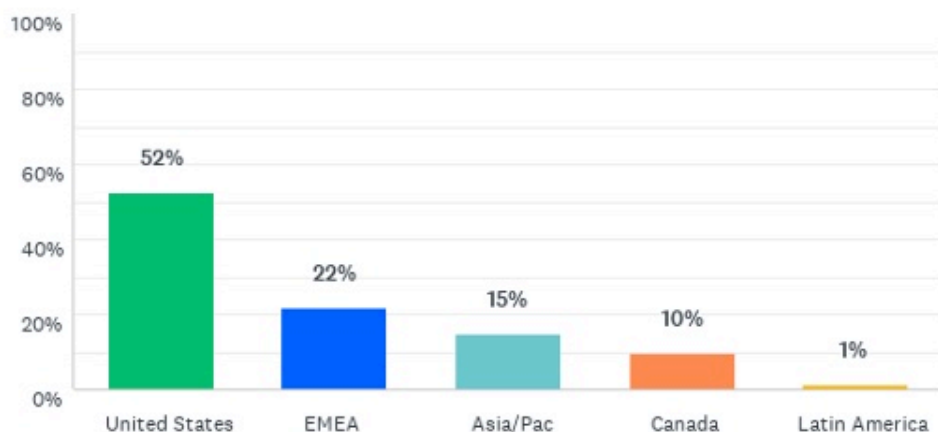


Figure 1

FIELD SERVICE AS A JOB

Nearly 2/3 of survey respondents said they chose field service because they like fixing things; 38% changed careers to become field service technicians. More than half said they stay in field service because they like being in the field, and not tied down to an office or a specific location.

What keeps you in Field Service

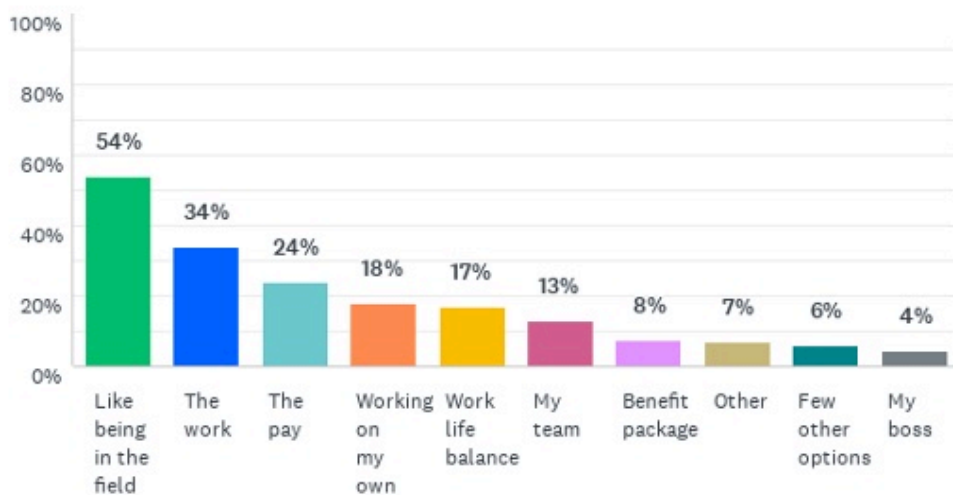


Figure 2

That data notwithstanding, it's also very important to point out that 60% of respondents said field service may or may not be their long-term career. 27% said not, 33% are not sure.

Nearly nine in ten participants said equipment repair is their primary work. Many also provide routine, scheduled maintenance. Slightly more than 1/3 also focus on installations and one in five concentrate on inspections. Training, upgrades, and software/firmware-related work are primary work activities for a smaller number of technicians.

FIELD SERVICE AS A JOB

Field service technicians universally agreed that more knowledge, specifically more technical knowledge, is needed to perform their jobs now vs. when they started in field service. Three-fourths also concurred that products have become more complex. Seven in ten said both customer and management demands have intensified, undoubtedly adding additional stress to what is often a stressful job to begin with. Yet, more than 60% of survey respondents also agreed that IT tools are making their job easier, helping to offset these added challenges.

	Greater Knowledge Required	More Technical Skills	More Complex Products	Higher Customer Demands	Higher Manager Demands	IT Tools Make Job Easier
Agree	91%	89%	75%	71%	71%	61%
Disagree	2%	3%	8%	5%	6%	16%
Neither	6%	8%	16%	20%	19%	21%

The survey also makes it very clear that technicians lean heavily on each other for support and technical assistance, with a significant majority preferring to call a colleague over other options; less than half said they preferred to call technical support.

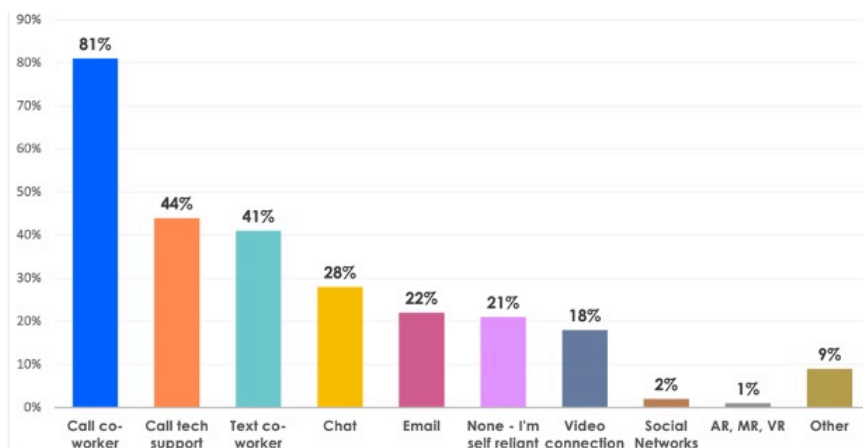


Figure 3

FIELD SERVICE AS A JOB

The survey asked for technicians' thoughts on a variety of technologies that can impact their performance in the field. Responses are detailed in Figure 4. A significant majority believe on-demand videos are very helpful. More than 2/3 are familiar with the Internet of Things (IoT) and agree that technology is extremely beneficial. Nearly four in ten believe budding technologies such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) are very helpful. However, it's important to point out that almost none of these same technicians report that AR and VR are on their "go-to" list when they need support (see figure 3). This attests to the fact that AR and VR solutions are not yet widely deployed in the field, but it also underscores the important role that these emerging technologies can – and should – play in helping field service people advance their strengths.

What are your thoughts on the following technology areas that can impact field service performance?

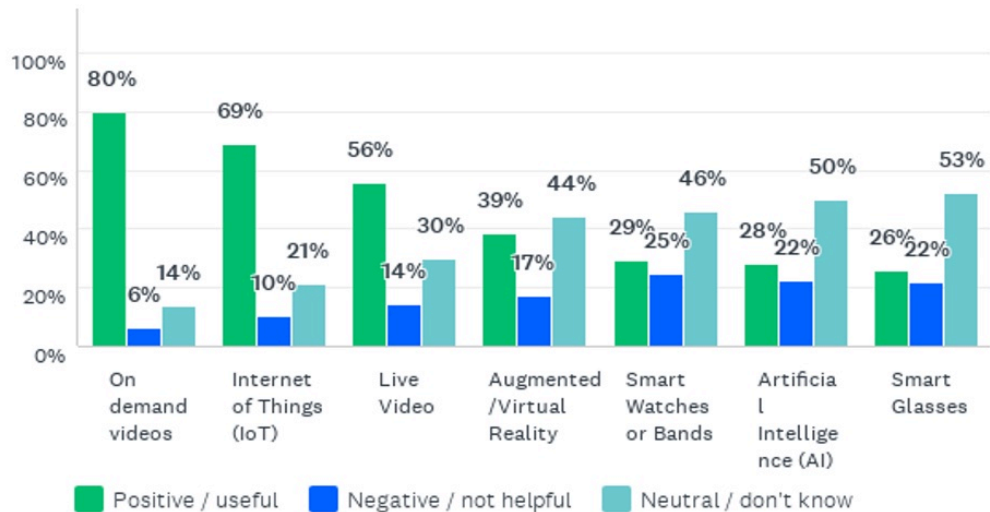


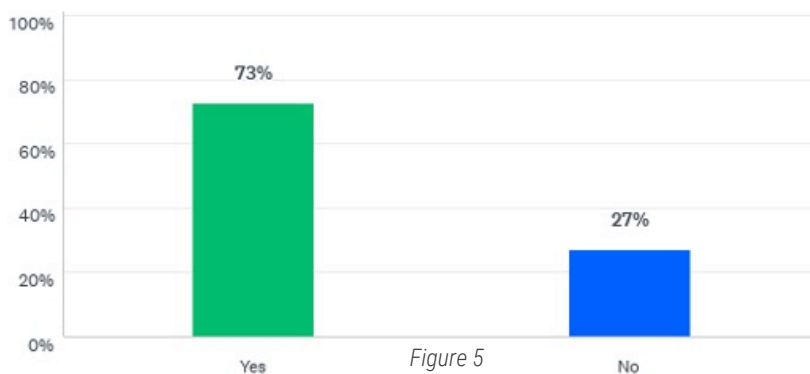
Figure 4

LIKES/DISLIKES/SATISFACTION

The top two answers provided when asked what technicians like best about their day-to-day work are “solving problems” and “fixing and repairing things.” These answers support and reinforce the “I like fixing things” answer that nearly 2/3 of technicians gave when asked about why they chose field service. Notably and significantly, interacting with customers rounded out the top three answers about what they liked best.

It will come as no surprise to anyone that the predominant answer to the least favorite part of the job question was “paperwork and admin.”

Do you feel that you spend too much time on paperwork in your day-to-day work?



Pressure to work faster, time spent finding information, and being tracked via GPS are closely bunched for the second through fourth least favorite aspects of the job.

Nearly four in ten survey respondents liked where they work, having stayed with the same organization for longer than ten years. Nearly one-quarter more have been with the same organization for more than five years. As you might expect, tenures greater than 15 years are most often reported by the older respondents. Notably however, 36% of all respondents have remained with the same employer for less than five years, the bulk of those less than three years. The majority of those saying they’ve changed jobs in five years or less are between 25 and 44, among them, the most likely to change jobs are those between 25 and 34.

LIKES/DISLIKES/SATISFACTION

The disparity in the propensity to stay put or move on certainly appears to be age-related, at least in part.

We suggest two of the dominant reasons for this disparity are:

- Workers, especially older workers, who have stayed longer with the same employer developed a sense of loyalty to that company early in their tenure. Those employees didn't just develop that sense of loyalty on their own, the company culture, policies, compensation packages, and overall employee relations doubtless helped engender and nurture that loyalty.
- Today's employment environment is more fluid. Employees today are much more likely to be aware of other opportunities due to the proliferation of social media, job boards, and word-of-mouth from colleagues who have moved on. In fact, more than 73% of the 25 to 44-year-old technicians who responded to this question have been at their current employer for less than five years, more than 42% for less than three years! Additionally, today's equipment is often more complex and sophisticated, requiring those technicians who service that equipment to develop greater knowledge and skills. While this is great for their employers and customers, it also makes those skilled technicians prime targets for recruitment by competitors.

Should this high rate of turnover among millennials persist, and as more experienced employees continue to retire, taking valuable knowledge and experience with them, service management could be faced with significant skills gaps in their field workforce. These are cautionary statistics. Furthermore, the data suggest that nearly 60% of technicians may not stay in field service. Considered in aggregate, this information should serve as a forewarning to field service management, deserving of management attention and action.

We solicited feedback about how technicians view their employers' efforts to help them perform specific aspects of their job. A healthy majority saw many efforts as positive, including finding information to help resolve problems, completing required forms, seeking help when needed, and returning used/defective parts. However, half found it difficult to know what parts they'll need for a service visit and said it's difficult to report new opportunities for part or service sales.

My company makes it easy for me	Strongly or somewhat agree	Strongly or somewhat disagree	Neither, N/A, Don't Know
Find information to help me resolve problems	63%	22%	15%
Complete forms tied to a service	62%	19%	18%
Seek help if I am stuck	68%	20%	13%
Return used/replaced parts	62%	20%	18%
Know what parts I'll need for a service visit	50%	34%	16%
Record new opportunities (new parts sales, service work, etc.)	50%	22%	29%

We also asked several specific questions about technicians' satisfaction regarding their relationship with their employer. The most positive findings are:

- A significant majority are quite happy with their company's focus on safety.
- Most are satisfied or very satisfied with their benefits and salary.
- A slim majority agree the company is interested in their feedback. However, more than 1/3 also say the company does not leverage their feedback to make improvements in service process and delivery.

We also inquired if they feel like their work is important, understand their company's vision, are well-led, and other factors about their employer. Most respondents were generally positive, but there is potential concern for career guidance, job recognition and rewards, and mentoring for improvement.

Do you agree:	Yes	No
My work is important; I can draw a straight line between my role and the company	85%	15%
I understand the vision, strategy, and goals of my company & team.	76%	24%
I am well led; our leaders are talented, trustworthy, and ethical.	61%	39%
I am correctly and fairly compensated.	57%	43%
My manager knows my career aspirations; we are working together to achieve my goals.	54%	46%
My team and I are publicly recognized when we deliver strong results.	50%	50%
I get coached privately regarding areas where I can improve.	43%	57%

Following are areas of potential concern that deserve management attention and possible corrective action:

- 1/3 or more of the survey respondents are extremely or somewhat dissatisfied with learning opportunities, training, guidance, and mentoring opportunities available to them.
- Similarly, more than 1/3 strongly or somewhat disagree that their company cares about or is interested in:
 - leveraging their feedback (previously mentioned),
 - addressing their concerns,
 - advancing their career opportunities,
 - engaging their employees.
- In addition, only slightly more than half of participants are encouraged to think about new ways of doing things. More than 40% don't believe they can provide input for innovations. And one in three say they don't have time to think about or have access to resources that could result in improvements.

Which of these statements is true regarding your role in field service innovation at your organization? (Please select all that apply)

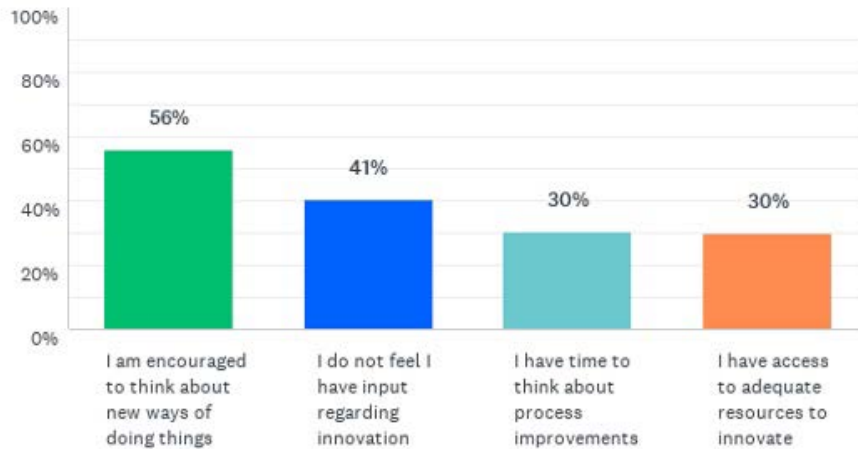


Figure 6

Mobile

The use of mobile devices in field service is now ubiquitous; 99.5% of survey respondents use mobile devices in their field service work. Laptop usage is reported most often, followed by smartphones, then tablets. (Figure 7) That data corresponds reasonably well with the sentiments respondents shared about what devices they prefer to use; 42% prefer laptops, and an equal 29% prefer either smartphones or tablets. The mobile features technicians rely on and use the most are email, access to service manuals and knowledge base articles, texting, navigation, and access to checklists and safety forms. But other high-priority features identified by technicians are not as readily available on the mobile devices as they would prefer, including the ability to view service history before going to a customer site, and the ability to easily locate available parts inventory when needed. Nonetheless, the use of mobile devices is overwhelmingly accepted and appreciated by the vast majority of field service technicians.

Has mobility (device/applications/information) made you.....

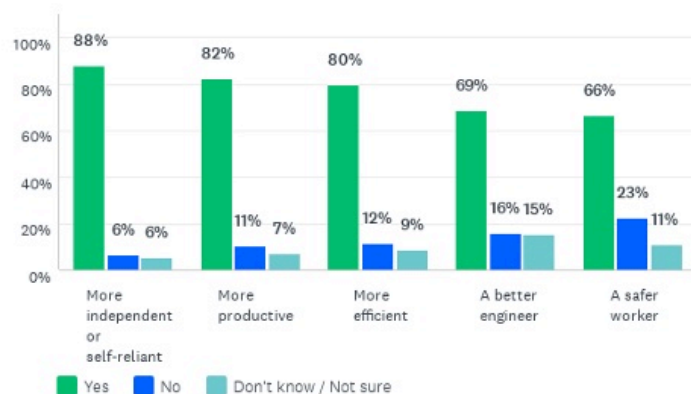


Figure 7

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Most survey respondents have made a career in field service, 60% have worked in the business for longer than ten years; 40% have worked at the same company for ten years or more. Those are relatively positive statistics for field service tenure. However, and this is important, there is a propensity for those between 25 and 44 to change jobs often. Moreover, the survey data reveals that a significant majority in this age group either will not or are not sure if they will continue to make field service their career. These last two factors combined create an ominous signal that a skills and talent gap may be on the horizon. Management would do well to explore programs that will entice their current workforce to remain in the profession, and perhaps more importantly, to stick with their current employer.

There are several areas where field service technicians seem to be satisfied and happy with their job, including benefits and compensation, a sense of pride in knowing that their job is important, opportunities to fix things and solve problems, the use of mobile devices for a large variety of needs, the ability to work in the field, and the chance to work independently but still have interactions with colleagues for support. They also believe their company is carefully monitoring and caring for their safety, an extremely important consideration in today's environment.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The survey also highlights some areas deserving of management attention and action as appropriate:

- Almost all survey respondents agree that more technical knowledge is needed to perform their work. It may be appropriate to re-examine training and mentoring programs to ensure they are adequate to equip technicians with the skills they need for more complex products.
- Technicians deplore paperwork; they consistently agree there is too much.
- Nearly three-fourths say they feel greater pressure from management. Such added pressure has the potential of interfering with technicians' work quality, their work/life balance, and their overall satisfaction with the job and their employer. Management should put procedures in place to monitor the pressure technicians feel and take steps to alleviate it when and if necessary. More potent remedies would include making sure technicians are thoroughly trained and qualified, empowering them to perform their work quickly and accurately. Equipping technicians with tools and IT solutions that help them in their day-to-day work will also help. These steps can alleviate the need for management to apply what technicians perceive as undue pressure.
- Tools like augmented reality (AR), mixed reality (MR), and virtual reality (VR) that can be implemented to specifically aid repair and maintenance activities are becoming more readily available. Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) solutions can be configured to learn equipment behavior and recommend predictive maintenance before problems occur. AI can help walk a technician through a repair by analyzing past equipment performance and service history.

Service Council strongly encourages service management to evaluate and implement tools that will help technicians diagnose and repair problems quickly, and complete required documents more efficiently. Tools such as AR, MR, VR, AI, and ML are still relatively new to the field service ecosystem, so it's understandable that they are not yet widely deployed. Nevertheless, Service Council encourages management to explore these exciting technologies with the eye toward using them to enhance their service delivery and build long-term customer relationships. These tools along with Knowledge Management, IoT (already widely deployed), and other field service specific IT solutions, can empower technicians to provide both exceptional service, and to focus on the parts of the job they enjoy the most – fixing things. The same tools also enable companies to adopt a “Technician Agnostic” service delivery model; that is, service delivery that is consistently accurate, reliable, and thorough, no matter which technician delivers the service.

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About the author

Michael Israel is Service Council's COO. Michael has worked in customer and field service for more than 40 years. He spent 17 years in his early career managing both domestic and international field service operations, including 12 years with IBM's Field Engineering organization. Over the past three decades he has held management and executive roles with major providers of CRM and Field Service software applications, including tenures with IFS, Oracle, and SAP.

His broad experience includes marketing, selling, supporting, and implementing CRM and Field Service software applications. Michael also served as a Field Service analyst for both Aberdeen Group and Technology Services Industry Association (TSIA).



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