

FIELD SERVICE WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT: EMPOWER TECH 3.0

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→ **Aly Pinder Jr.**, Senior Research Analyst,
Service Management



Report Highlights

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More than half of organizations have an executive mandate to improve field service efficiency.

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The Best-in-Class are 52% more likely than Laggards to have prioritized the investment into mobile tools to provide technicians with better access to information in the field.

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Nine out of ten Best-in-Class firms have a centralized database for service history and data.

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The Best-in-Class are twice as likely as peers to incent technicians to identify cross-sell and up-sell opportunities.

This report will take a look at the changing profile of the field service technician in a new customer-centric environment. It will also explore the challenges, opportunities, and best practices in regard to hiring, motivating, and retaining these valued members of the service organization.

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Field service has always been about a technician, a schedule, a customer, and a piece of equipment. The difficulty comes from deciding which part of this equation receives the lion's-share of resources, investment, and attention.

The face of service, and in particular field service, has been changing for some time now. The goals, challenges, and skill sets necessary to excel at delivering service to customers are no longer what they used to be. As seen in Aberdeen's [State of Service Management 2015: Connect to Your Customers](#) (March 2015) report, customer satisfaction is by far the top metric being used to judge the success of service. Historically, KPIs tied to the internal efficiencies of service were the key determinants of a well-oiled machine. As this transformation has occurred, has the profile for the service employee or field technician changed with it? Should service leaders expect the same attributes from the service team as they did in past decades?

The Future of Field Service Begins Now

Field service has always been about a technician, a schedule, a customer, and a piece of equipment. The difficulty comes from deciding which part of this equation receives the lion's-share of resources, investment, and attention. The scales have clearly tilted in favor of the customer. Whether in a B2B or B2C market, service organizations can no longer neglect the whims and expectations of customers. Aberdeen's [State of Service research](#) highlighted how customer expectations, increased competition, and a lack of skilled resources have made service infinitely more difficult in 2015. But in a customer-focused world, the role of customer-facing employees like field service technicians or the support team is heightened, which has made the field service technician integral to success.

Customer Satisfaction is a Lagging Indicator, Strengthen Service First

In order to succeed in the eyes of customers, organizations have to get service right. Whether reactive, proactive, or predictive, service has to be there to solve customer issues. But too often,

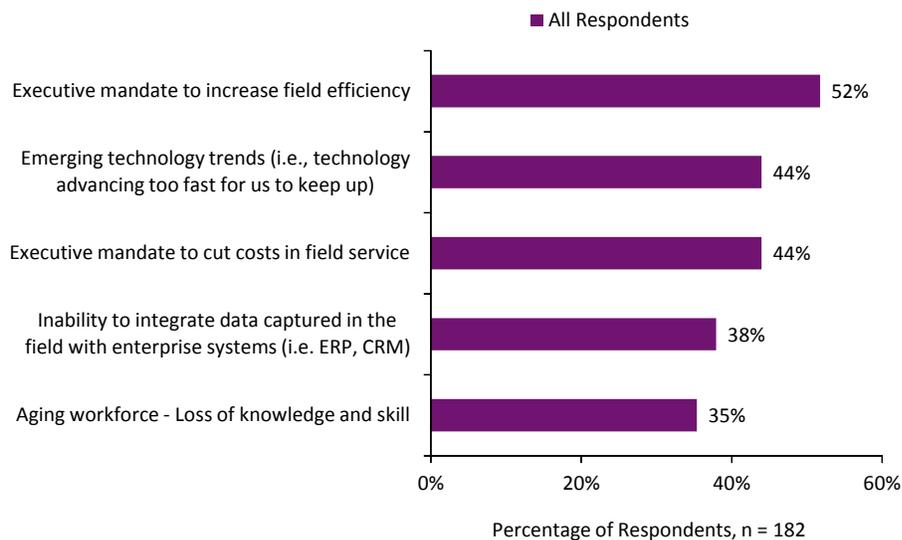
→ [Read the full report, "State of Service Management: Connect to Your Customers"](#)

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organizations think a feedback survey or customer satisfaction study will help them make customers happy. Field service excellence should be a priority, to ensure the right service team is in place to interact with customers, solve issues, and partner in order to show worth.

Technology is at the heart of innovation, even for service. In order to cut the cost of executing on a service call or truck rolls, organizations must continue to get better at what they already do. The adage “do more, with less” shouldn’t mean with less investment, just less wasted effort. Top performing organizations have looked to cut costs and make the service team more productive through the right investments, which provides the field team with the knowledge and insight to do their jobs smarter AND faster (Figure 1). All of this helps focus on the true indicator of success, meeting the needs of the customer – by ensuring assets are productive and attaining optimal performance levels.

Figure 1: Challenges Facing Field Service Demand New Answers to Old Problems



Source: Aberdeen Group, April 2015

The Field Service Workforce Management Best-in-Class Defined

In the February and March 2015 Field Service Workforce Management [study](#), Aberdeen used three KPIs to distinguish the Best-in-Class organizations (top 20% of aggregate performers) from the Industry Average (middle 50%) and Laggards (bottom 30%), with the mean performance amongst the Best-in-Class as follows:

- 87% performance in first-time fix rate
- 81% performance in worker utilization
- 11% annual improvement in worker productivity

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The average age of a technician is approximately

40 years old.

→ [Related Research, "Service Mobility: The Right Technology for the Tech"](#)

The continued success of field service is also dependent on the ability for service organizations to be able to replace the workforce. Even though the average age of a technician is approximately 40 years old, more than a third of organizations see an impending problem as the workforce continues to age. The loss of expertise in field service can be even more detrimental because technicians are often the face of the organization, dealing directly with customers and equipment in a time of need. Furthermore, without the technology infrastructure in place to capture this expertise, service knowledge will be lost with those technicians as they leave the workforce. These challenges have a direct impact on the viability of the service organization to compete and have the ability to deliver quality service to customers.

Invest in Building a Powerhouse Team

This most recent point on the service technician evolutionary track demands that a number of tools and processes are in place to ensure that a heightened experience can be delivered to the customer. The Best-in-Class continue to invest in mobile technology to ensure the service team and teams that interact with the field have real-time visibility into service work (Table 1). As detailed in Aberdeen's [Service Mobility: The Right Technology for the Tech](#) (August 2014) research, eight out of ten organizations see mobility as a strategic initiative for their business, and top performers are using mobility to drive at key metrics for success – such as employee satisfaction, workforce utilization, first-time fix, and service contract renewals. In order to attain this level of performance, the Best-in-Class have looked to some key strategies to excel.

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Table 1: Invest in Continued Innovation

Strategic Actions	Best-in-Class Organizations
Invest in mobile tools to provide technicians with better access to information in the field	44%
Increase availability of service knowledge in order to diagnose and resolve service issues more quickly	41%
Improve forecasting of and planning for future service demand	41%
Increase frequency of training for field technicians	37%
Develop standardized scheduling processes	37%
Develop real-time visibility into field assets (i.e., people, parts, vehicles)	33%

Source: Aberdeen Group, April 2015

➔ **Empower technicians with the service information to solve problems.** The emergence of a younger generation of technicians is on the horizon (see Aberdeen research on [Millennials](#)). These technicians have always grown up with the Internet and connectivity to peers. This level of creativity and innovation behooves service organizations to capitalize on this talent by giving technicians the advanced tools to go beyond just doing their job, or by letting them use the tools they already carry in their pockets (see Aberdeen research on [BYOD](#)).

➔ **Put the team in a better position based on a superior plan.** Visibility into the service team and service resources has immeasurable value in regard to efficiently delivering service and excelling at meeting customer needs. Not knowing where technicians are or whether or not they have the right part in advance of a dispatch has a trickle down impact on issue resolution, secondary truck rolls, technician engagement, and customer satisfaction. Forecasting and planning for future service demand ensures that technicians are put in a position to succeed

Analyst Note:

Some metrics were not used to determine the Best-in-Class, but these KPIs further highlight the differentiation between the top performers and their peers:

- 11% average year-over-year improvement in service workforce productivity, vs. 2% improvement among Industry Average and 1% worsening for Laggards
- 7% average year-over-year improvement in service revenue, vs. 3% improvement among Industry Average and 1% worsening for Laggards
- 5% average year-over-year improvement in first-time fix, vs. 2% improvement among Industry Average and 1% worsening for Laggards
- 3% average year-over-year improvement in asset uptime, vs. 1% improvement for Industry Average and 4% worsening for Laggards

➔ [Read the full report, “BYOD: A Flood of Devices in the Field”](#)

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Research Fact:

On average, technicians are **scheduled** for **3.7 jobs** per day but only **3.2 jobs are completed** daily

→ [Read the full report, “Employee Engagement in Field Service: Create a Culture of Learning”](#)

for the customer and the company, ultimately ensuring that more jobs can be **resolved** for a given customer in the day (see sidebar). Enhanced analytics tools have helped organizations get better at planning for future service needs. Technicians in 2015 want to be more than firefighters, reacting to service needs; they want to be proactive partners delivering value. And in order to attain this next level of service, organizations must ensure they know when a problem will occur or who is the right resource / technician to go out, and can confirm that technician has the tools to solve the client need.

- **Invest in continuous learning.** As discussed in Aberdeen’s [Employee Engagement in Field Service: Create a Culture of Learning](#) research (February 2014), only 41% of organizations felt they were ‘excellent’ at retaining desired field workers. In order to keep good employees, organizations need to show that they are valuable and not just replaceable cogs in the grand machine. The Best-in-Class provide their field team with the training to excel at their jobs while also ensuring they have the information to quickly diagnose and resolve issues. When technicians don’t have the skills or tools to get good at what they do, they will get frustrated and potentially leave. To keep good employees, organizations need to invest in their success and continued value.

The Past, Present, and Future of Service Technicians

In order to meet the changing environment of service, organizations have had to identify the skills needed in this new world and ensure the service team could perform. The evolution of the service technician has changed the relationship between the organization and the technician, and the technician to the customer.

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- ➔ **Technician 1.0** - Turn wrenches efficiently and move on to the next job. Customer service takes a back seat to ensuring the technician can meet SLAs and visit as many jobs as possible. This technician isn't incented or trained to manage customer expectations or to interact with customers in a manner that would lead to a value-add exchange. Tech 1.0 is driven to use their own knowledge or a paper manual to hopefully close a work order, but there are no guarantees that they will have the right skills, tools, or information to solve the problem on a first visit.
- ➔ **Technician 2.0** - Sell service to the customer. Be the eyes and ears of the sales organization in order to unearth new opportunities for the benefit of the organization. Customers want more than a technician who shows up; they demand resolution. Tech 2.0 is required to be able to use technology tools (i.e., mobile devices) to resolve the issue at hand for the customer upon a first visit.
- ➔ **Technician 3.0** - Tech-savvy field worker who needs to be a customer partner; building relationships and adding value. The next generation of technicians must embody the qualities found in the versions before, but also become even more customer focused. Customers have options, more so than ever. Service cannot just deliver the minimum level required by an SLA. Tech 3.0 must not only be able to ensure resolution is reached, but also understand the customer needs, which may go beyond the work order.

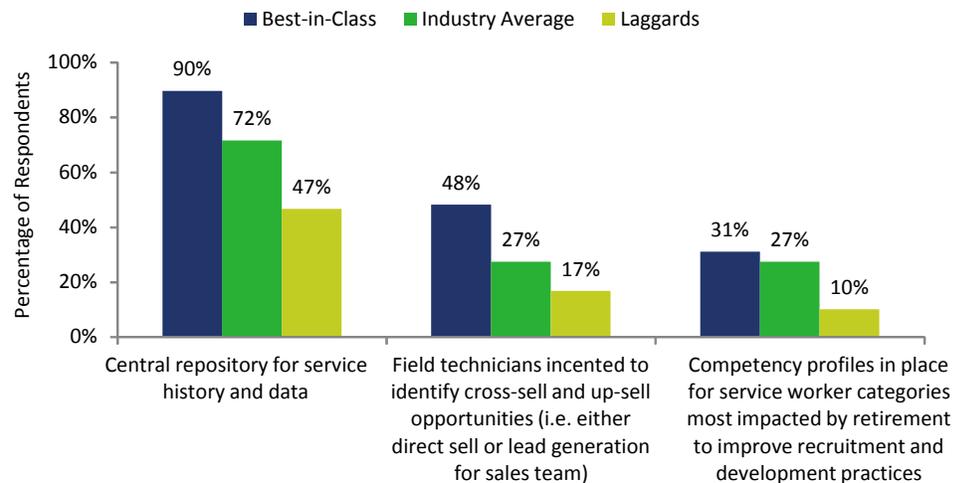
In order to find, incent, and teach technician 3.0, service organizations must look to bolster some key internal processes. The Best-in-Class have focused on three pillars to success to

Customers have options, more so than ever. Service cannot just deliver the minimum level required by an SLA.

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ensure they are able to empower the next generation of field service leaders.

Figure 2: Learn from the Past, and Build for the Future of Service



n = 182

Source: Aberdeen Group, April 2015

The modern technician is more than just a ‘fix-it’ person; they need to be a true partner with customers.

First off, nine of out ten Best-in-Class firms ensure that service history and data is stored in a **centralized database** accessible to the service team and other functions. The key here is that the insight being captured in the field doesn’t remain in the minds or trucks of the field service team, but instead can be leveraged by other technicians, the back office, or even the customers. This combined knowledge helps to create an environment of collaboration and shared creativity, which will be the hallmark of the next generation of service workers.

The Best-in-Class also make sure they are **incenting** the right behaviors to achieve the goals of the organization, namely customer satisfaction and profitability. Top performers are twice as likely as peers to incent technicians to identify cross-sell and up-sell opportunities. Once again, the modern technician is more than just a ‘fix-it’ person; they need to be a true partner with

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customers. This collaborative partnership empowers technicians while also ensuring they look for opportunities to add value to the customer relationship, not just move on to the next job.

And finally, the Best-in-Class are more likely to work with HR to build **technician profiles** to ensure that as technicians leave the business, the company will be more likely to find the next great crop of techs. The loss of knowledge has a great impact on the ability to maintain service excellence, but the Best-in-Class ensure that they will not miss a beat if a particular technician retires or leaves the company. The next technician will be ready and capable to step up to the challenge on day 1.

Takeaways

Service excellence means a different thing today than even just a few years back. Even for manufacturers of equipment or B2B organizations, customers have options for the services they demand. In order to be successful at outperforming the expectations of customers and the competition, service organizations should focus on empowering its field service team and follow a few best practices:

- ➔ Technology investment in field service must be a continuous evaluation, not a one-time expenditure.
- ➔ Field service excellence begins with having the right techs in this customer-centric environment.
- ➔ Field insight is only useful if it can be assessed and acted upon by others within the organization.
- ➔ Training isn't an HR issue; it is a service excellence must.
- ➔ Customers want value, not just a warm body that shows up on a schedule.

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For more information on this or other research topics, please visit www.aberdeen.com.

Related Research

[Social Field Service: Collaboration on the Fly](#);
March 2015

[State of Service Management 2015: Connect to Your Customers](#); March 2015

[Evolution of Smart Service: Connected to the Future of Resolution](#); March 2015

[Emerging Workforce in the Field: Tech-Savvy to Technician](#); December 2014

[Gamification in the Field: The Right Behaviors Lead to the Right Results](#); December 2014

[Service Mobility: The Right Technology for the Tech](#); August 2014

[Employee Engagement in Field Service: Creating a Culture of Learning](#); February 2014

[Field Service 2014: Access to the Right Information Empowers a Results-Driven Workforce](#); January 2014

Author: Aly Pinder Jr., Senior Research Analyst, Service Management (aly.pinder@aberdeen.com)

About Aberdeen Group

Since 1988, Aberdeen Group has published research that helps businesses worldwide improve their performance. Our analysts derive fact-based, vendor-agnostic insights from a proprietary analytical framework, which identifies Best-in-Class organizations from primary research conducted with industry practitioners. The resulting research content is used by hundreds of thousands of business professionals to drive smarter decision-making and improve business strategy. Aberdeen Group is headquartered in Boston, MA.

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