

Fortified | Quarterly

MODERNIZING PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY
FOR GREATER READINESS

07

VISIT WWW.ONDAROWAVE.COM



LINKEDIN @ONDARO

ondaro



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter from the Executive Editor	4
On a Fire Line, Trust Can't Wait for a Phone Call	6
The Next Public Safety Crisis Isn't the Roads. It's Who Knows How to Run Them	12
Ask an Ondaro Expert How Digital Transformation Is Reshaping Workers' Comp Case Management	16
ServiceNow Perspective People, Process, Then Technology	22
Executive Insights	26

WWW.ONDAROWAVE.COM



Letter from the Editor

Readiness is often measured at the moment of response: how quickly a crew mobilizes, a case moves forward, or a service is restored. But that moment depends on work done long before it. People need reliable information, clear processes, and the confidence to act across teams and agencies.

This issue of Fortified Quarterly looks at the systems behind public health and safety. These systems rarely attract attention when they work well. When they fail, the consequences can reach people at their most vulnerable.

Matt Gilchrist opens with a view from the fire line, where responders who have never worked together must be able to trust one another's qualifications immediately.

James Haslam examines a related challenge in transportation and public works: as experienced employees retire, agencies risk losing the knowledge that keeps essential infrastructure running. Both stories show why modernization has to account for the people doing the work and the information they depend on.

Our conversation with Crystal Gallivan and Ty Higley brings that question into workers' compensation case management. A connected case record can reduce delays and give injured workers better visibility into what happens next. AI can help staff organize and route information, while people retain responsibility for decisions that require judgment.

Steve Malone of ServiceNow adds a perspective shaped by decades in public sector transformation: start with frontline experience, plan carefully for the transition, and make accountability clear.



A firefighter needs a qualification they can verify. A new employee needs access to knowledge a retiring colleague once carried. A caseworker needs a complete history, and a claimant needs to know where their case stands. Greater readiness begins with making those things dependable.

***These are different settings, but they share a practical question:
What will help someone do the right thing when it matters?***

I close this issue with a personal reflection on what I learned growing up alongside my father's career in public works. His work shaped how I think about transformation today: as a responsibility to care for the systems people rely on and leave them stronger for those who come next.



Thank you for reading.

Elysia Gerber
Chief Portfolio and Marketing Officer
Ondaro





On a Fire Line, Trust Can't Wait for a Phone Call

Public safety runs on agencies helping each other. That only works if everyone can trust data from people they've never met.

By Matt Gilchrist, Sr. Account Executive, Ondaro

On a large wildfire, most of the people fighting it have never worked together before. A strike team from one state parks next to a crew from a different department, a different agency, sometimes a different country, and within minutes they are relying on each other in conditions where a wrong assumption can cost someone their life. Nobody has time to call a previous supervisor and ask whether the person next to them is actually qualified to run a division or sign off on a task. The response depends on something most people never think about: whether the data says yes immediately, and whether everyone on that line can trust the answer.

I have spent more than a decade working with federal, state, and local agencies on the systems that sit behind emergency response. The lesson I keep relearning is that public safety is not really a single agency's problem to solve alone. It is a trust problem between agencies that do not report to each other, do not share a budget, and often do not know each other's people.

Technology either makes that trust easy to extend or it makes agencies fall back on guesswork, phone calls, and paperwork nobody can verify in the moment. Here is what I have learned about why that gap matters, what closes it, and where I think this is headed.



The trust gap is the real risk

When people talk about outdated government systems, they usually mean something is slow or clunky. In public safety, the more dangerous version of that problem shows up between agencies that are supposed to be able to lean on each other the moment something goes wrong.

California's experience with its 911 modernization is a useful, if extreme, illustration of what happens when that trust breaks down at scale. The state spent roughly 450 million dollars on a regional overhaul that was scrapped in late 2025 after dispatchers in early rollout counties could not process calls or even see the number a caller was dialing from. One resident tried calling 911 five times to report a fire and never got through.

The backup systems many centers still lean on date to the 1970s, and as of early 2026 hundreds of dispatch centers had gone seven to ten years or longer without servicing core equipment.

Most agencies will never face a failure that dramatic. But the everyday version is just as real: a dispatcher in one county has no fast way to confirm that a crew from another agency showing up to help is actually certified for the position they are filling. So, the choice becomes either slow everything down to verify by phone or move forward on trust that has not actually been earned by the data. Neither option is good, and both happen more often than leaders realize.

What happens when the only proof you have is a piece of paper

I sat in on a product walkthrough with a former wildland dispatcher who now works with us, and she said something I have not been able to shake. Before her agency digitized its qualification records, a firefighter earning a new position carried a paper task book into every assignment so a supervisor could sign off on tasks by hand. If that booklet was lost, soaked, or burned, there was no backup copy anywhere else in the system. I asked what happened next. She said, plainly, you'd have to start over. Sometimes that meant losing a full fire season or two of progress toward a role the agency badly needed filled.

What struck me was not just the wasted time. It was that the only proof of that person's readiness lived in one physical object that nobody outside their own chain of command could see or verify. A supervisor from a partner agency working the same incident had no way to vouch for that firefighter's progress, because there was nothing to check against. **When trust depends on a single piece of paper surviving a fire, it is not really trust. It is luck.**



How visibility changes everything

The clearest example I can point to is CAL FIRE's move to digitize qualification and task book records and connect that data in real time to the national wildfire data hub that synchronizes information across the interagency community. Before, a request to open a new qualification moved through a paper chain: a form to a supervisor, a signature, a trip to the training chief, another signature, a trip to the unit chief, and finally a manual entry into a national system.



A single missing certificate could send the whole request back to the start, even after it had already cleared two levels of approval.

What changed was not just paperwork speed. Approvers gained a consolidated view of everything a candidate had completed instead of hunting across systems, and when something was missing, they could request just that document instead of rejecting the entire application. The system was built to recognize personnel from other agencies working the same incident, not only its own people, so a trainee working under a supervisor from a different department could still get credit and verification through the same process. That is the piece that matters most to me: the system was designed from day one to extend trust past its own organizational boundary, not just to make one agency's internal paperwork faster.

The same pattern shows up at a larger scale in interagency resource ordering, where dispatchers used to manually enter coordinates into roughly two dozen separate systems, any one of which could send a crew to the wrong county or the wrong state. Moving that onto a single, shared platform gave the wildfire community real time visibility into more than 10,000 deployed personnel during peak season, all cross-checked automatically instead of typed in by hand two dozen times.



Where AI earns trust, & where it hasn't yet

People ask me constantly where AI fits into all of this. My honest answer is that the most valuable use right now is quiet and unglamorous: catching the small inconsistencies a human reviewer would eventually catch anyway, but faster, things like a certification that is about to expire, a duplicate record across two systems, or a request missing a required attachment. That is AI helping people trust their own data faster, and agencies are already seeing real value from it in administrative work.

Where I get more careful is anywhere AI moves from flagging a problem to deciding an outcome that affects who gets deployed or how a case is handled. Researchers tracking AI adoption in policing have documented real risks around bias and oversight as departments push AI further into investigative and operational decisions, and regulation has not caught up. Only a couple of states currently have specific safeguards for generative AI in police work, and more than two dozen cities have already pulled back on AI contracts after documented misuse.



“

The line I try to hold with agencies is simple: AI should make it faster to verify what is true. It should not be the thing deciding who is trusted.

Overcoming the common mistakes

The mistake I see most often is agencies building a system that works beautifully for their own people and forgetting almost everyone they actually respond alongside is not their own people. A mutual aid partner, a neighboring county, a different state's task force, an entirely different agency altogether. If a system only recognizes its own users, it has not actually solved the trust problem. It has just made the internal paperwork nicer while leaving the interagency handoff exactly as manual and unverifiable as it always was.

The second version of this mistake is assuming interoperability will happen naturally once everyone eventually modernizes on their own timeline. It does not. It has to be a deliberate design choice from the first requirements conversation, built to the data standards the broader interagency community already relies on, not bolted on years later once two systems have already grown apart.



A place to start with no budget at all

If you are a state or local leader with no budget for a major initiative, do not start with a full inventory of every legacy system you own. Start with one question: pick the mutual aid partner or neighboring agency you rely on most, and ask honestly whether you could verify, in under five minutes and without a phone call, that someone from their team is qualified and available right now. If the honest answer is no, then that single relationship tells you exactly where the risk actually sits, and it gives you a small, well scoped place to start fixing it before you ever touch a bigger platform decision.

What safe looks like when nobody has to ask

My hope for the next decade is that the question I opened with stops being a question at all. When a crew from one agency parks next to a crew from another, nobody should have to ask who is qualified to be there. The systems behind them should have already answered it, the same way we trust a badge without needing the story behind it. Getting there is not really about any single piece of software. It is about agencies deciding, deliberately, to build systems that extend trust past their own front door instead of only protecting what happens inside it.

**That is what safe
looks like to me:
not a faster response,
but a response nobody
has to second guess.**



With more than a decade of experience supporting federal, state, and local agencies, Matt helps organizations modernize operational processes, improve readiness, and strengthen mission delivery through technology enabled solutions. He has worked extensively with emergency services and public safety organizations on complex workforce and qualification management initiatives.





The Next Public Safety Crisis Isn't the Roads. It's Who Knows How to Run Them.

By James Haslam, Sr. Account Executive, Ondaro

Every state department of transportation (DOT), transit authority, and public works leader I talk with is fighting the same fire, even when they'd never use that phrase for it: aging infrastructure and a retiring workforce, hitting at the same time. Roads and highways just earned a D+ on the American Society of Civil Engineers' 2025 Infrastructure Report Card, with 39% of major U.S. roads rated poor or mediocre. That's the visible half of the problem, and it's the one that makes headlines.

The half that doesn't make headlines is more dangerous. The people who've kept these systems safe for the last twenty years such as the traffic engineers, the dispatchers, the DMV examiners, the operators who know which intersection floods first and which bridge groans before it fails are retiring. What's more alarming is that agencies are losing them faster than they can replace them.

When I sit down with a public sector leader, budget comes up first. Underneath it is almost always the harder question: who's going to know what to do when the person who's always known walks out the door?

That's not just a transportation story. It's the same story in public works, corrections, emergency management, and every other public sector function where the job is, at its core, keeping people safe. The systems are aging. The revenue models that funded them are shifting under everyone's feet. Gas tax collections are already falling by double-digit percentages in state after state as electric vehicles displace fuel purchases, even as remote work has permanently dented transit ridership and fare revenue. And the workforce that has quietly absorbed all of that volatility for decades is aging out right along with the infrastructure.



Where this needs to go in the next 24 months

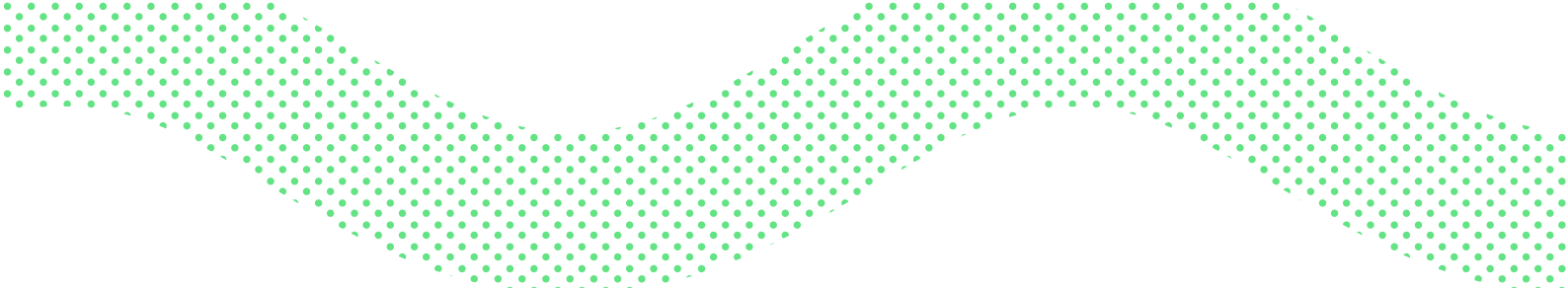
Sit down with almost any transportation or public safety agency and you'll find the same underlying issue: no single system of record ties their critical services together. Asset management, work orders, permitting, citizen and rider requests, HR and procurement all live in its own legacy tool, spreadsheet, or paper process. That means nobody; not frontline staff, not leadership, not the public, has real-time visibility into what's actually happening across the operation.

That's not just inefficient but a visibility gap, and visibility gaps are where safety incidents live. It's also getting more dangerous by the year, because IT and operational technology like traffic signals, fare systems, fleet telematics are converging in ways that create new points of failure. Multiple independent industry analyses over the past two years have documented triple-digit percentage increases in phishing and ransomware attempts aimed squarely at transportation and public infrastructure operators. A patchwork of point solutions, each with its own custom integration, is exactly the kind of environment that convergence exploits.

The most important shift may be the one nobody's talking about

Ask people what's changing fastest in the public sector right now and most will point to fleet electrification, new funding models like congestion pricing and public-private partnerships, or AI pilots in traffic optimization. But the trend I think gets the least credit is internal workforce experience capturing how the work actually gets done before the people who do it retire.

Everyone's excited about rider-facing AI and chatbots. The bigger near-term win is automating and documenting internal processes: case management, cross-department coordination, the informal playbooks that live in one person's head. That's not a flashy transformation story. It's the one that determines whether an agency can still function safely five years from now.



Where AI is actually landing and where trust hasn't caught up

Back-office automation and customer support are where AI is genuinely in production today: virtual agents handling paratransit scheduling, automated disruption and detour alerts, AI-assisted service desk routing. Camera-based enforcement is a good real-world example of the upside. Transit systems that have deployed AI-assisted violation detection have seen citation volumes jump by an order of magnitude compared to manual enforcement, because the technology catches what a person watching a handful of cameras simply can't.

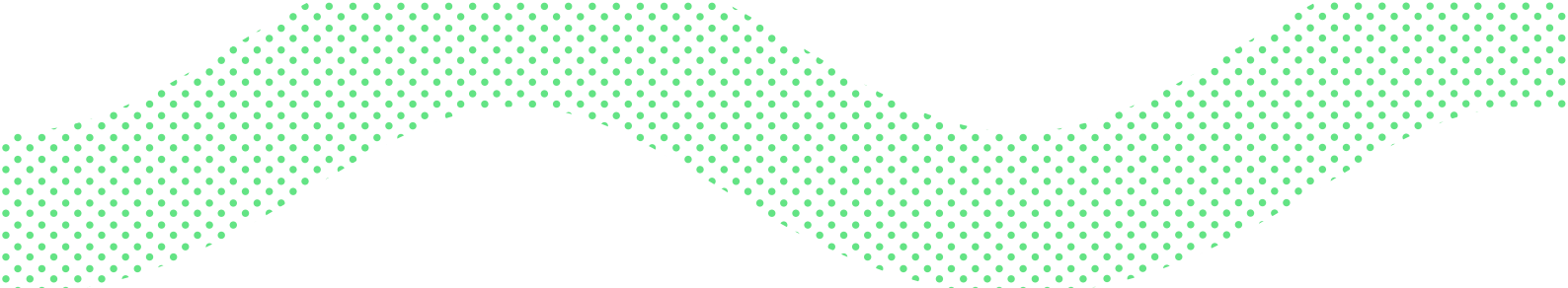
What's still mostly hype, or stuck in pilot, is agency-wide autonomous operations and fully "lights-out" AI decision-making. Public trust hasn't caught up to the technology: six in ten U.S. drivers still say they're afraid to ride in a self-driving vehicle, according to AAA's most recent survey. Most agencies I talk with are still building the policy frameworks, data-ownership rules, and human-in-the-loop controls before they'll let AI touch anything safety-critical at scale, and that caution is warranted.

That's exactly why governance can't be an afterthought. A single platform with one data model underneath IT, assets, HR, and citizen services means that when an agency does add AI, it's governed by design, with approval workflows, audit trails, and human oversight, instead of becoming another ungoverned tool sitting outside IT's visibility. For agencies answering to a board, a legislature, or a federal funding auditor, that distinction is what makes AI adoption defensible instead of a liability waiting to surface in an audit.

What this looks like when it works

I think about a mid-size transit authority I worked with that was running service requests, asset tracking, and incident management across disconnected legacy tools, with a call center fielding a few thousand calls a month and no automation behind it. After consolidating onto a single platform with automated workflows and a self-service portal, agencies in that position typically see service request efficiency improve by roughly 20 percent, a similar drop-in service desk call volume, and 20 to 25 percent more efficient operations overall. The reason isn't the software. It's that staff stop chasing status updates across five systems and start working from one queue, which means they catch problems sooner instead of later.





Where this needs to go in the next 24 months

The agencies that come out ahead over the next two years will have moved from reactive, fragmented systems to a connected platform where AI is governed rather than bolted on, so every automated action carries an audit trail and a human checkpoint. They'll have used that same platform to capture the process knowledge that's currently walking out the door with retiring staff, so a shrinking workforce isn't starting from scratch every time someone leaves. And they'll have modernized asset and funding management enough to actually track and justify the new revenue streams such as congestion pricing, EV fees, public-private partnerships that are replacing a gas tax base that isn't coming back.

The agencies that stay on point solutions and manual workarounds won't fail because the technology got away from them. They'll fall behind because they'll no longer have the staff capacity to keep up manually, at the exact moment the public is counting on them not to.

James Haslam is a Senior Government Account Executive at Ondaro, where he brings a consultative approach and deep ServiceNow expertise to State and Local Government and Education (SLED) clients across the Eastern U.S.



Before joining Ondaro, James spent more than two years at ServiceNow on its State and Local Government and Education team. He has helped lead Ondaro's SLED practice for more than five years, working with public sector leaders to modernize the systems their communities depend on. James is located in Southern New Hampshire, spends a lot of time outdoors, and travels throughout the Northeast and Midwest frequently.



Ask an Ondaro Expert: How Digital Transformation Is Reshaping Workers' Comp Case Management



Crystal Gallivan

Manager, Senior Architect



Ty Higley

Manager, Senior Architect

Workers' comp claims touch a lot of hands: an adjuster, a medical reviewer, a case manager, sometimes an attorney, all working from pieces of the same file. Every handoff is a chance for something to stall, get missed, or force a claimant to call in just to find out what's happening. As state agencies look to modernize case management, the real questions are what actually changes for the people involved and where technology should and shouldn't take over judgment calls.

We asked Crystal Gallivan and Ty Higley, both Managers and Senior Architects at Ondaro, to talk through what digital transformation looks like in practice: how a single connected case record changes the day-to-day for adjusters and claimants alike, what breaks down in agencies still running on manual intake, and where AI can responsibly take work off people's plates without taking over the decisions that need a human behind them.



1

Workers Comp claims often bounce between adjusters, medical reviewers, and case managers before an injured worker gets an answer.

How does digital transformation improve the experience for the State agency, the injured worker, insurance company and employer? And what does “faster resolution” actually look like for the people filing claims?

GALLIVAN: One of the biggest changes is that everyone involved in the case can work from the same record. Instead of the adjuster, medical reviewer, and case manager all having pieces of the information in different places, the notes, communications, documents, status, and activity can all live together.

That also helps when someone involved in the process is outside the organization. A medical reviewer, for example, may still respond through email, but that response can come back into the case instead of sitting in somebody’s inbox waiting to be noticed or forwarded. The case manager can see it as soon as it comes in, and the history stays with the case.

For the claimant, fast resolution is not just about how many days it takes to close the case. A big part of the experience is knowing what is happening while they are waiting. They can receive updates through email or log into a portal and see the status and activity on their case without having to call a case manager just to ask for an update.

You can also build in things like response targets, reminders, and escalations. If the agency is waiting on a medical review or another required response, the case manager can see how long it has been

outstanding and automated reminders can help keep that work from sitting too long.

Ultimately, the goal is that people are not chasing information around. The information comes back to the case, everyone is working from the same record, and both the case manager and the claimant have much better visibility into what is happening.

HIGLEY: In a manual process, every handoff is its own task. For example: entering data, attaching documents, and emailing the next person to pick up the file. Automation removes those steps. When a claim lives on a single connected record, it carries its full history as it moves, so no one rebuilds the file at the next desk, assignments route automatically, and documents captured once are reused everywhere they’re needed.

That makes “faster resolution” measurable rather than aspirational. A claim can be acknowledged the day it’s submitted, work gets assigned by the system instead of pulled from a shared queue by hand, and filers can see current status without calling in to ask. Overall, the review process is quicker and more transparent for the people filing and the people working the claims.



2

A lot of government Workers Comp programs still run on manual intake and disconnected case tracking. What does modern case management do differently for these agencies, and what breaks down when that transformation doesn't happen?

HIGLEY: Modern case management gives an agency one system of record. Intake is digital and structured, so information entered once is reused across the whole claim instead of re-keyed at each step.

Assignments route on rules that the staff control, time-sensitive steps are tracked automatically, and supervisors see workload and aging on a dashboard.

The benefits are...

1

HOURS OF MANUAL DATA ENTRY REMOVED

2

FEWER ERRORS

3

A CLEAR VIEW OF WHERE EVERY CLAIM STANDS

4

STAFF TIME REDIRECTED FROM CHASING STATUS TOWARD MOVING CLAIMS FORWARD

When that transformation doesn't happen, work stays manual and disconnected. The same data lives in several places and doesn't always agree, deadlines depend on someone remembering them, and leadership has no reliable metrics on volume or throughput.



A lot of government Workers Comp programs still run on manual intake and disconnected case tracking. What does modern case management do differently for these agencies, and what breaks down when that transformation doesn't happen? (cont.)

GALLIVAN: Modern case management gives everyone involved in the process one place to work. Instead of having information spread across spreadsheets, shared drives, email inboxes, and different tracking tools, there is a single case record where the communication, documents, status, and activity all live.

That reduces a lot of the manual work that happens in disconnected processes. People spend less time trying to figure out whether someone responded, where a document was saved, who owns the next step, or what the current status actually is. Claimants and other authorized participants can also get updates without having to call someone just to find out what is happening.

Another big benefit is reducing the dependency on institutional knowledge. In a lot of manual environments, the process works because the people who have been there for years know how it works, which spreadsheet to check, who to email, where a certain document lives, or what needs to happen next.

That becomes a real problem when someone is out, leaves the organization, or when a new employee needs to be trained. A modern case management system puts more of that process into the system itself, so employees are not relying as heavily on tribal knowledge to move work forward.

It also makes it much easier to support multiple people who may be involved in the same case. You may have a claimant and an attorney, for example, and both can have appropriate access to updates rather than depending on one person to relay information to the other.

When this kind of transformation does not happen, communication is usually where you feel it first. There are more phone calls, more follow-ups, more manual status checks, and more opportunities for something to get lost between people or systems. It also becomes much harder to audit the process because the full history of the case may be spread across several places.



3

Where does AI have the biggest impact in a Workers Comp workflow, routing claims, verifying eligibility, flagging fraud, and how do you help agencies balance moving fast with automation without losing the human judgment these cases often need?

GALLIVAN: For me, the biggest value of AI in Workers Comp is helping the people who make the decisions get to the right information faster.

There can be a huge amount of information associated with a Workers Comp case such as intake information, medical documentation, correspondence, case notes, prior activity, and supporting documents. Even just being able to summarize a long-running case can save someone a significant amount of time, especially if they are picking it up for the first time or need to make a decision quickly.

AI can also help with things like classifying incoming requests, routing work to the right team, summarizing correspondence, identifying important details in documents, or surfacing information that may be missing.

Fraud is another area where AI can be useful, but I think it is important to make the distinction between flagging something for review and making a fraud determination. AI can identify patterns or inconsistencies that may deserve a closer look, but a person still needs to evaluate the context and make the actual decision.

Eligibility is similar. A lot of eligibility requirements are based on defined rules, dates, thresholds, or required documentation, and traditional automation is often very good at handling those kinds of things. AI can support that process by helping interpret unstructured information or bringing the relevant facts

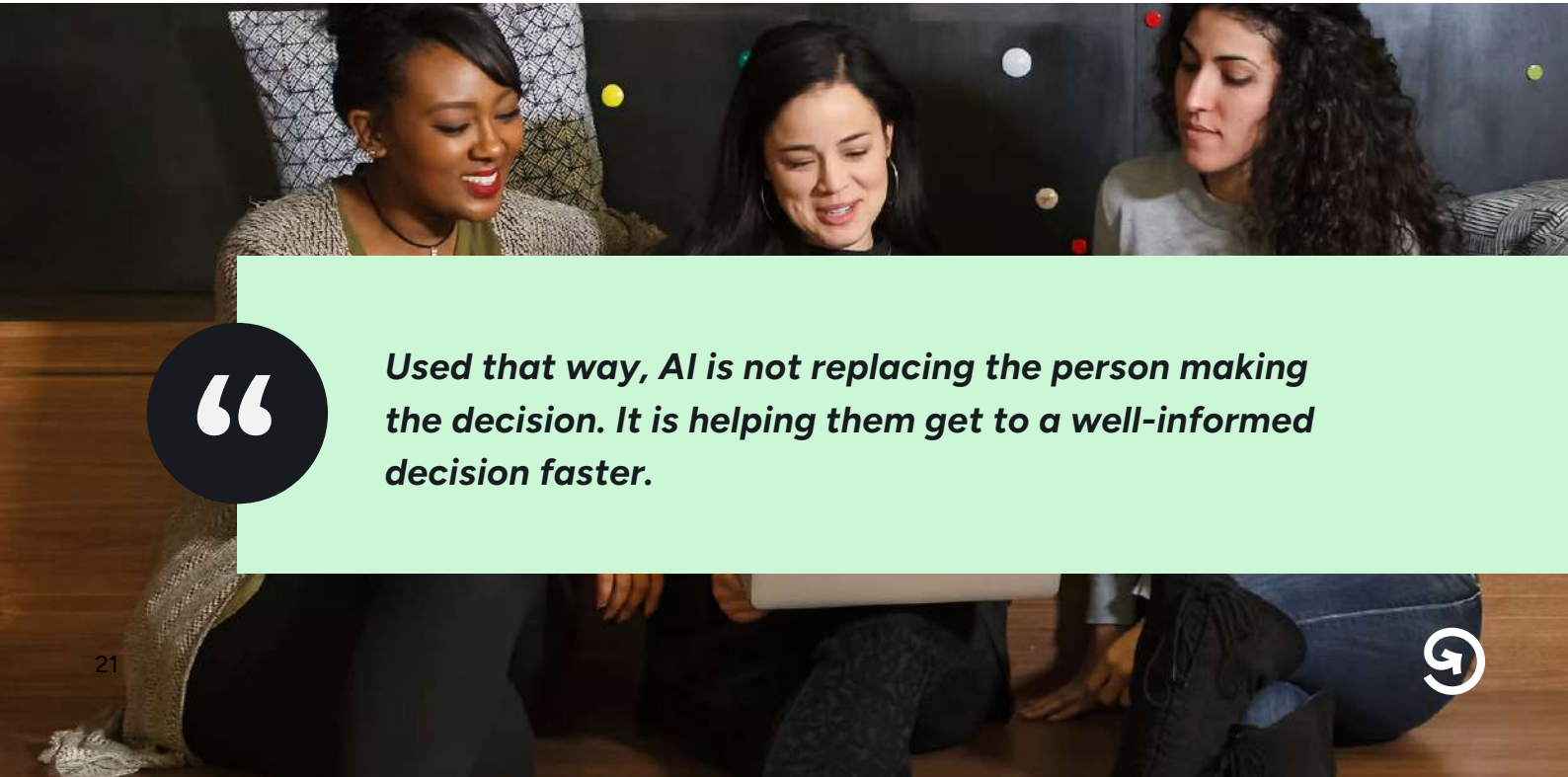


Where does AI have the biggest impact in a Workers Comp workflow, routing claims, verifying eligibility, flagging fraud, and how do you help agencies balance moving fast with automation without losing the human judgment these cases often need? (cont.)

HIGLEY: The biggest and safest impact is on intake and triage, before any decision is made. AI can read incoming documents and pull structured data from them, so a reviewer starts with a complete file instead of building one by hand. It can route and prioritize work, match a claim to the right reviewer, and surface anomalies worth a closer look.

The balance comes from being explicit about what AI does and doesn't decide. AI drafts, summarizes, routes, and flags; people make eligibility and benefit determinations and handle the cases that call for discretion. It's important to still keep human sign-off on any decision that affects a claim. That way the reasoning is explainable, and the audit trail is intact. Used this way, automation clears the repetitive load so staff can spend their time on the judgment the work actually needs.

GALLIVAN: The main goal is to use AI to remove some of the administrative and cognitive work around the decision. Let the technology help organize the information, summarize it, route the case, identify missing information, and surface potential concerns. Then let the adjuster, reviewer, or case manager apply the human judgment that these cases often require.



“

Used that way, AI is not replacing the person making the decision. It is helping them get to a well-informed decision faster.

SERVICENOW PERSPECTIVE

People, Process, Then Technology

Lessons from Four Decades
in Public Sector Transformation



Steve Malone

Industry Partner Go to Market
Lead – Global Public Sector
Director at ServiceNow

Few people have watched public sector technology evolve as closely as Steve Malone. With over four decades in the software industry, Malone now leads Industry Partner Go to Market strategy for Global Public Sector at ServiceNow, working alongside the company's top partners to help government and public health agencies modernize on a single platform. We contacted Malone to share his experience and insights about where transformation efforts succeed, where they stall, and what leaders should be asking before they sign with a technology partner.



1

You've spent over four decades in this industry, now focused on scaling ServiceNow's top global partners in public sector. What's the biggest misconception public sector leaders have about what a unified platform can actually solve?

A unified platform exposes misalignment, cost inefficiencies etc. when an agency is decentralized. However, by centralizing it, it doesn't automatically cure the challenges. Siloed departments typically operate differently. We have all heard "People, Process and then Technology" which change management is the bigger challenge to overcome. Over time a unified platform will help to create more efficient and consistencies across agencies which makes it much easier to support and integrate.



2

Public health and safety agencies operate with almost no room for error. What does it take to modernize mission-critical operations, like case management or emergency response, without disrupting service along the way?

Running parallel processes and phased in migration will help to make the migration process the most successful. Organizations need to have a hard date when they transition to a new solution that gives users time to feel comfortable with the new system but not allow users to have a dependency on prior systems.



3

Your background is in Unified Communications and VoIP. How does that experience shape the way you think about connecting frontline responders and caseworkers to the data they need in real time? Where do agencies usually get this wrong?

I have hosted many Contact Center Transformation Workshops in my career, where leadership comes with a list of requirements. My first question is how much of this information came from frontline works input? I found that by interviewing the frontline works first, you get the real picture of what is working and not working. Many organizations have 5+ systems that front-line works have to learn and swivel chair in that they may also have a dependence on tools such as e-mail verse a workflow application. Leveraging a workflow platform that offers case management, AI for call deflection and call summarization that turns the Contact Center into an Exception Center and routes calls to the right person will create a closed loop process. This increases customer satisfaction, increased efficiency, and happier employees. It also provides great dashboards to support leadership metrics.

4

Budget pressure never lets up in government. Can you share a real example of an agency using a data-driven approach to cut costs on ServiceNow, without cutting services or headcount?

A good example comes from state HHS (Health and Human Services) agencies in Tennessee using ServiceNow during disaster response and periods of high demand. By leveraging real-time operational data, agencies gain visibility into where citizen demand is occurring, what services are being requested, and where work is backing up. That insight allows leaders to dynamically redeploy existing staff to the highest-need locations instead of adding headcount or relying heavily on overtime. For example, when demand spikes at a local office, managers can shift caseworkers to customer-facing roles based on actual service demand rather than fixed staffing models. Additionally, automated workflows and verification processes reduce manual effort, accelerate benefit processing, and help identify potential overpayments or fraud earlier. The result is lower operating costs, improved productivity, and better citizen service without reducing staffing levels or service availability. We reduced the cost per transaction rather than the number of employees in Tennessee.





5

Picture a public sector CIO about to greenlight a transformation project. What's one question you'd tell them to ask their technology partner before signing anything? Why does that question get skipped so often?

"What's your plan for when this goes wrong, and who's accountable?" I encourage any technology buyer to validate the partners skills, certifications, prior experience and how they answer this question before making any final decisions. Price sometimes is more of a motivational factor than the quality of who is delivering the project. When the project does go sideways, and many do, the finger pointing starts. The integrator says the agency didn't follow their methodology. The agency says the requirements were unclear. Either way, it's the agency left absorbing the impact: the schedule slip, the cost overrun, the service degradation.

"Having a highly qualified partner who can also take accountability when things go wrong is very important."

EXECUTIVE INSIGHTS

Transformation is Stewardship

What my dad's career in public service taught me about stewardship, digital transformation, and the systems we all depend on.



Elysia Gerber

Chief Portfolio & MKT Officer
Ondaro

My understanding of public infrastructure began with my dad.

Steve Kotke spent 27 years with the City of Minneapolis, ultimately serving as Director of Public Works and City Engineer. For a decade, he led the department responsible for many of the systems that quietly make a city function: streets and bridges, drinking water, sewers and stormwater, snow removal, recycling, transportation infrastructure, and more.

He began his career as a civil engineer, gradually taking on greater leadership responsibilities. By the time he became director, I was in my early twenties, and conversations about his work became a way for us to connect.

I loved hearing about the complexity behind it all. A street project involved far more than engineering. It involved downtown business owners, residents, city council members, and others, each with their own priorities and concerns. Every decision sat within a larger network of systems, responsibilities, and people.



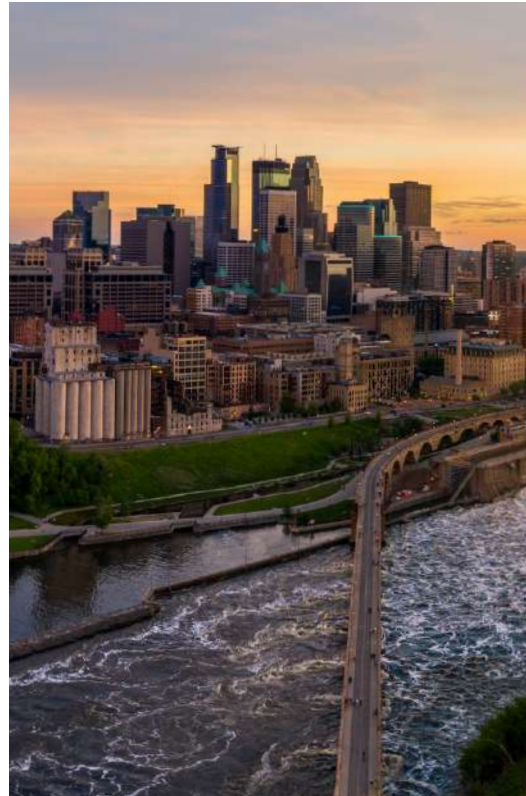
“

***I found those connections endlessly fascinating.
And occasionally, an event made the stakes
impossible to miss.***

When the I-35W bridge collapsed in Minneapolis in 2007, my dad was one of the public leaders responsible for helping the city respond. His years with the city also brought major storms, bridge closures and reconstruction, new transit infrastructure, and the ongoing challenge of maintaining aging assets with finite public dollars.

Over time, those conversations helped me appreciate something that has stayed with me throughout my own career: The systems we depend on most are often the ones we notice least, until they stop working.

Today, as we talk with public-sector organizations about digital transformation, AI, automation, and platforms like ServiceNow, I think about that lesson often.



Because beneath all of the technology, public-sector transformation is ultimately about the same thing my dad spent his career doing:

Building and maintaining systems people can trust.

Transformation means something different when everyone is your customer

Businesses choose their markets. Governments don't get to choose their constituents.

A public agency serves people who live on their phones and people who avoid screens entirely. People with abundant resources and people with almost none. People navigating a routine request and people interacting with government during one of the hardest moments of their lives.

Serving that full range of people means balancing priorities as well as meeting individual needs. The same project can be essential to one neighborhood, disruptive to a local business, and a difficult budget decision for city leaders. Making government work better requires understanding those perspectives and the connections between them.

Public agencies also operate under constraints most private-sector transformation programs don't fully share: public accountability, procurement requirements, regulatory mandates, political transitions, aging infrastructure, legacy technology, workforce shortages, and intense scrutiny over how every dollar is spent.

In that context, innovation has to deliver practical improvements in how government works. That purpose becomes even more important as AI expands what public-sector leaders can do.

The opportunities are substantial: automating repetitive work, connecting fragmented systems, giving employees better access to information, and helping agencies respond faster and use their resources more effectively.

But success has to be measured in plainer terms. Does a constituent get an answer faster? Does an employee spend less time copying information between systems and more time solving problems? Can a department spot a small issue before it becomes a big one? Can leaders make better decisions with limited resources? Do residents experience government as something built to support their needs?

Technology is the mechanism. Public value is the outcome.



Modernization is an act of stewardship

What I came to respect most about my dad's work was the weight of decisions whose consequences would last well beyond his time in the role. In his office at City Hall hung portraits of every director of Public Works going back to the founding of Minneapolis. He understood his place in that history and took seriously the responsibility of caring for what others had built.

You inherit systems built by the people before you. You keep them running while people use them every day. You decide where limited money will do the most good. And the choices you make become what the next person has to work with.

That same responsibility extends to digital infrastructure. A city depends on the systems that help employees coordinate repairs, respond to residents, and manage resources just as it depends on its streets, bridges, and water systems. How those digital systems are built, connected, and maintained shapes how well the city can serve people for years to come.

For years, digital modernization has too often meant buying one more application to fix one more problem. Over time, those individual decisions leave teams with disconnected systems, manual handoffs, duplicate data, critical knowledge living in the heads of a few veteran employees, and processes shaped around the limits of old technology instead of the needs of people.

AI raises the stakes. Put AI on top of fragmented processes and unreliable data, and it can amplify those weaknesses.

The bigger opportunity is to build a connected operational foundation, where people, processes, data, technology, and increasingly AI agents work together across departmental lines. Each workflow we improve should contribute to that larger whole—and leave the next team better equipped to serve the public.

That work starts with one question: **What does the public need this system to accomplish?**

Then we work backward.





The best transformation may eventually become invisible

Public works holds another lesson for digital government.

When infrastructure works really well, nobody thinks about it.

You turn on the faucet and clean water comes out. You set out the recycling and it's gone the next morning. A snowstorm ends, and a day later the streets are clear. Behind each of those moments are thousands of decisions, people, assets, and processes, all adding up to something that feels effortless to the person on the receiving end.

That's a high bar for digital transformation, and the right one.

Picture government services where residents never have to figure out which department owns their problem or type in their address for the third time. Where employees can find what they need, and routine work moves on its own, leaving more time for the cases that call for real judgment and care.

AI brings more of that within reach.

Getting there requires careful work behind the scenes: improving processes, connecting systems, establishing clear accountability, and maintaining what already works. It also takes the kind of judgment I came to appreciate in my dad's stories: knowing who a change affects, weighing competing needs, and putting limited resources where they matter most.



Build for the people who come next

When we first talked about my dad's work, I was fascinated by how all the pieces fit together. Through my own career, I've come to appreciate the judgment that requires: listening to people with different priorities, understanding the dependencies, and making decisions whose effects reach beyond the problem in front of you.

Public-sector leaders have an extraordinary opportunity right now. AI and automation can fundamentally change how government operates and how people experience public services.

Realizing that opportunity means staying focused on the people those services exist to support.

The real transformation happens when a public employee can serve someone better. When an agency can do more with the resources entrusted to it. When complexity disappears for the constituent instead of being passed along to them

The conversations I shared with my dad showed me how much care and coordination sits behind infrastructure most of us never think about. Maybe that's what we should aim to leave for the people who come next: **systems they can simply trust.**





ABOUT ONDARO

Ondaro is the leading Elite, pure-play ServiceNow partner in the Americas. We have helped thousands of clients achieve their transformation goals leveraging ServiceNow, the AI platform for business transformation.

Through strategy, implementation, transformation and operational services, we help our clients transform the complex landscape of business operations into streamlined, secure, automated processes.

Whether you need help getting started fast with ServiceNow product capabilities or going big with transformational impact, Ondaro can help you navigate what's next for you.

VISIT WWW.ONDAROWAVE.COM

LINKEDIN @ONDARO