Lighthouse Customer Experience - Discovery Research: Understanding VA API Teams that Provide APIs

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Introduction (3 minutes) *Enable Captions*

Thanks for joining me today! My name is [facilitator name] and I also have some colleagues on the line observing and taking notes.

- Today, we would like to talk for about an hour about your experiences with managing your APIs.
- [If more than two in attendance, address how I will manage this. E.g., For some questions, one of you may be better suited to answer, while the other person may be better suited to answer other questions. I will defer to you on who is better suited to answer. And there may be some questions where I'll ask for thoughts from both of you.]
- This is not a test. If you don't have the answer to a question in the moment that is not a problem, we can follow up with you after the session.
- And, if there are any questions that you prefer not to answer for any reason, that is no problem.

Seek informed consent

- Do you have any questions about what the study will entail or how the information you share will be used?
- Do you consent to participate in this study, and have the information you share used in the ways I previously described?

Privacy notice for video, audio, and screen recording

- We'd like to create a video and audio recording of your feedback today. You are not required to be recorded, and choosing not to will not impact your participation today or any future use of our products.
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- We use the recordings to accurately capture your feedback which will be used to improve our products and services. They will be deleted immediately after our notes are captured.
- **[CONSENT]** Are you comfortable if I record my screen and audio as we talk today?

Start recording.

Okay, I've started recording. I want to confirm again, are you comfortable if I record my screen and audio as we talk today?

Great! Thank you.

Warm Up / Team Culture Questions (5 Minutes)

1. Briefly, tell me about your team.
   - What VA department or program is your team a part of?
   - What is (are) your role(s) on that team?
2. Can you think of a time when your team adapted to a significant change in tooling or processes?
   - Who introduced the change?
   - Overall, how did that change perceived?
   - Was it successful?

The Team's APIs (5 Minutes)

3. How many API(s) does your team own?
   - What types of APIs are they? (REST vs Soap, etc.)
   - What typically drives the decision to create a new API?
   - What, if any, standards do your team follow when creating APIs?
   - How often does your team deploy to production?
4. Roughly how many products integrate with your API(s)?
   - Are your APIs available publicly, only within VA, or only for a single user?
   - Who is the target user of your API(s)?
   - How do you decide who can or cannot obtain access to it?
   - Are you interested in expanding the number of teams who use your API(s)? Why or why not?

Making APIs Available to Consumers (10 Minutes)

I'm interested in understanding what it looks like to make an API available in production so that teams can integrate with it.

5. Once an API is mostly developed, what are the steps your team takes to make it available for potential users?
   - What, if any, steps are automated?
   - What part(s) are the most challenging?
   - What, if anything, works particularly well?

If not covered in question 5, ask questions 6-7:

6. How are your APIs secured and authenticated?
   - What technology is used to secure and protect access (e.g., OAuth, mTLS)?

- How do your consumers get to your API? (e.g., they traverse a Gateway, straight HTTPS)
- Are there any specific compliance requirements that need to be met?
- How easy or difficult is maintaining ATO after it has been established?
- What, if any, bottlenecks exist?

7. How many environments do you have for your APIs?
   - What do they do?
   - What type of data do you have in each environment? (PHI/PII/Mock Data)

8. Do you have service level agreements (SLAs) for each environment?
   - What are your target SLAs?
   - How are API performance and availability monitored?
   - Who has access to the performance information?
   - Who do you report it to?

Consumer Journey from API Team Perspective (22 Minutes)

Now I'm interested in understanding what it looks like for a consumer to find, access, and use your API(s).

[Discover & Evaluate]

9. How do potential consumers discover and learn about your API(s)?
   - Are consumers able to interact with the API before requesting production access?
   - If yes, how? (what environments)
   - Do they interact with real or dummy/fake data?

[Integrate]

10. What does it look like for a consumer to get access to an API in the production environment?
    - What do they have to do to request access?
    - What does your team need and have to do to grant the access?
    - What, if any, parts of the process are automated? Manual?
    - What, if any role, does your team play in supporting teams with the ATO process?
    - What, if anything, in this process is challenging?
    - What, if anything, works well?
    - How are consumers and access managed over time?

11. Are there specific requirements that your team must follow when it comes to the distribution, rotation, revocation, and storage of keys and tokens?
    - What, if anything, is challenging?
    - What, if anything, works well?

[Deploy & Observe]

12. What tools, if any, are used to track usage of your API(s)?
    - What, if any, usage metrics are made available to consumers?
    - How are they made available?
    - What, if any, additional metrics would be useful to your consumers? Why?

13. How are unplanned incidents detected? (Particularly for incidents that are caused by systems they depend on)

- Do you have a process in place for managing and communicating unplanned incidents?
  - If yes: what does it look like?
14. Are planned maintenance managed and communicated with consumers?
  - If yes: Where and how is that communicated?

Communications

15. If a consumer runs into an issue with or has a question about your API, how and where do they seek support? How do you respond to questions and issues from consumers?
  - Are there any challenges with this process?
16. How do you get feedback from users about their experience using your API(s) and the data they provide?
17. How do you communicate changes to your API(s) to the teams using it?
  - Does your communication approach differ for breaking vs non-breaking updates?

Overall

18. Overall, what, if any, challenges do you have as it related to teams accessing and using your API(s) in their products?
19. Overall, what, if any, challenges do consumers have with accessing and integrating with your API(s)?

Lighthouse (5 Minutes)

20. Are there any benefits you see to using a VA-provided API management system to make your API(s) available to consumers?
  - If yes: What benefits?
21. What, if any, concerns would you have about used a VA-provided API management system to make APIs available?
22. Are you familiar with VA Lighthouse's API platform developer.va.gov?
  - If yes: Have you considered making your team's API(s) available through Lighthouse's API platform?
  - If yes: What were your considerations? Why did you decide not to?
  - If no: Why not?

Secondary Questions (3 Minutes)

(Low priority questions. I will ask these if there is time.)

23. Prior to building an API, does your team look at existing VA APIs?
  - Where do you go to look for existing APIs?
24. Does your team want to deploy more or less often than you currently do?
  - What is keeping you from deploying at your preferred frequency?

Thank You and Closing (5 Minutes)

25. If you had a magic wand and could change anything about building and managing APIs at VA, what would you change?

These are all the questions I had for you today.

26. Is there anything we didn't cover that you'd like to add?
27. Do you have any questions for me?

I really appreciate you taking the time to share your work and thoughts with me today. The information you've shared is very helpful.

If I have any follow up questions, is it okay if I reach out to you via email or Slack?

Well, thank you so much again, and enjoy the rest of your day!