workday.

The Employee Experience Gets Personal

Meaningful engagement and connections have never been more important.

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Introduction

The disorienting upheaval of 2020 led to the rise of the largest remote workforce in history. This in turn helped accelerate digital transformation among businesses scrambling to remain agile, in part by keeping their most important resource safe, happy, and productive. The global COVID-19 crisis affected industries and regions across the globe very differently, but companies everywhere are taking away one vital lesson: invest in workers.

This is one reason why so many businesses today are exploring how they can improve the experience they provide to employees.

"A Big Wake-Up Call"

Employee experience, notes talent management expert Josh Bersin, was a "a big wake-up call" of COVID-19. "It took a global health crisis for business and HR leaders to wake up to the fact that when people don't feel safe, supported, or emotionally secure, they simply cannot do their jobs."

Indeed, if 2020 taught people managers anything, it's that employee experience matters more during times of uncertainty. When millions of people shifted to remote work virtually overnight, organizations everywhere received a crash course in what workers need: frictionless access to information, resources, and interactions—and meaningful engagement with their colleagues, regardless of location. Beyond these basics, ensuring employee safety and well-being are urgent priorities. So is training for both remote workers and their managers.

The good news is that research suggests many companies are rising to the occasion. Employee engagement rose during the early days of COVID-19 amid new levels of trust and transparency. Moreover, a global 2020 HR Sentiment Survey by Future Workplace, an HR advisory and research firm, revealed that HR organizations and business leaders placed employee experience at the top of their list (47%) for initiatives and budget spend.

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In a world where money is no longer the primary motivating factor for employees, focusing on the employee experience is the most promising competitive advantage that organizations can create.

Jacob Morgan
Author, *The Future of Work*
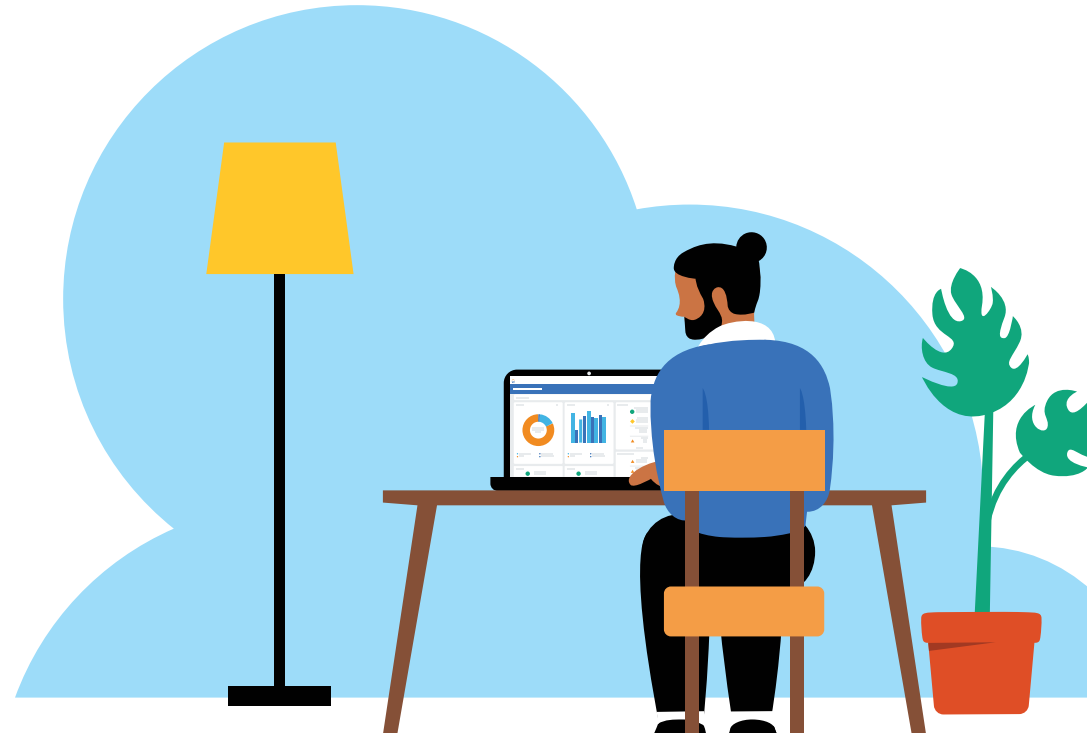
Overcoming Headwinds

The challenge, however, is that employers will continue to confront significant pandemic-induced headwinds well into the future, as a large proportion of employees continue to work remotely. Faced with the question of how to balance remote and in-office work, companies must determine how to create an employee experience that meets or exceeds expectations.

Because job roles and processes will only continue to change, organizations have a unique opportunity to prepare themselves now for the fluid work environment that is emerging. One way is to adopt modern tools and technology that make life easier for people at work. By enabling agility and offering a personalized experience aimed at improving efficiency, knowledge sharing, and collaboration, companies can create an environment that supports excellence and, therefore, drive engagement.

Even after the pandemic ends, ongoing disruption is bound to present challenges to individuals' health, well-being, and productivity. The efforts companies make now to foster confidence and promote the well-being of employees will only help them manage a work environment that is likely to look very different from the workplace of the recent past.

How to do this? The answer is multifaceted, but it includes relying on modern enterprise software that evolves as fast as work does, offering a connected digital experience that drives self-service for employees and harnesses advanced technology such as machine learning (ML) to rapidly generate relevant insights, recommendations, and assistance along the way.

This eBook explores the most critical aspects of the employee experience, and offers insight into options that are available to employers today.

Designing Intentional Employee Experiences

The workplace is undergoing dramatic—and likely enduring—change. The total global percentage of remote employees is expected to double in 2021, according to a survey from U.S.-based Enterprise Technology Research. Data suggests that anywhere from about 16% to nearly one-third of employees will remain permanently remote, while 76% of employees worldwide say they want to continue to work from home an average of two days a week. In doing so, they'll enter a hybrid world where they alternate between office time and remote work.

In this rapidly shifting landscape, how can employers manage, support, and develop a productive, happy, and satisfied workforce?

It begins by defining a vision and philosophy for managing the employee experience. And that process begins by placing employees at the center. This means understanding what's important to them and how they like to work, as well as anticipating their needs and enabling their best contributions while helping them build capabilities and make connections. By doing so, organizations can nurture people's potential and their performance, allowing them to feel a sense of meaning and belonging.

The employee experience is about more than simply boosting productivity—it also addresses skills development, career growth, and overall health and well-being. Nonetheless, addressing productivity and utilization is a good starting place, as these are critical to employee satisfaction and business success. Improving them remains an uphill battle for most organizations. According to a global 2019 Economist Intelligence Unit survey, easy accessibility to the information workers need to do their jobs is so critical that it ranks #1 on the list of leading technology enablers to improve the employee experience.

When workers have tools that allow them to gather information and do their jobs more efficiently, they are freed up to undertake strategic, meaningful work. Enabling productivity and offering intuitive, streamlined tech solutions are also necessary to meet the needs of employees, particularly millennials and Gen Z workers who have grown up accessing information in real time.

The Building Blocks for Employee Experience: Focus on the Four Pillars

The best way to approach a solution is to focus on the four pillars of employee experience management.

1 **Context:** This is the critical starting point for employee experience. We gather rich context from data that helps us truly understand our people and create personalized, meaningful experiences. As employees come to expect the workplace to deliver the same personalized experiences they get from consumer technologies, enterprise systems need to thoughtfully compile context about their workers—from their physical location to their skills, employee sentiment, well-being, and more.

2 **Content:** Next, organizations must use this context to curate specific content—information, resources, connections, and learning—that is personalized to employees and creates moments that matter.

3 **Course of Action:** Leveraging the employee context to send curated content to individuals allows you to put each worker on a path forward—one that provides assistance and guidance while taking into account individual aspirations.

4 **Course Correction:** By delving into highly personalized context, content, and action plans, companies gain the insights required to evaluate, measure, and improve their employee experience in a rapidly changing business environment.

The Power and Importance of Machine Learning

Chatbots help advise and guide workers to find the information and help they need.

Machine learning plays a significant role in making the four pillars personal, relevant, and engaging. ML improves the employee experience by harnessing sophisticated algorithms to understand, learn, and anticipate what employees need when they need it—allowing organizations to surprise and delight their team members. This includes suggesting tasks, applications, announcements, and recommendations that guide employees through critical moments and empower them to do their best work.

Natural-language processing goes even further, fueling chatbots that serve as virtual assistants to guide workers to the information and help they need, eliminating the frustration of hunting for answers. Natural-language processing allows users to find what they are looking for faster because the system is able to understand common speech—no specific system commands required.

Facilitating a positive employee experience boils down to offering people the right information at the right time—and right in the flow of work—to help them unlock their full potential. It requires simplifying technology, reducing manual and duplicative work, and minimizing employee frustration. These are not new problems for the workplace, but solving them requires new solutions.

How Workday Can Help

With Workday, you can empower employees in new ways, create connections across the enterprise, provide guidance during difficult moments, and inspire talent with the right recommendations and opportunities to grow.

The Workday employee experience management solution is built on a single source of rich data that spans the Workday product ecosystem. By applying ML to this data, Workday helps you go beyond employee productivity management tools and process automation so you can focus on the unique journey each employee takes within your organization. The Workday employee experience incorporates all the milestones that happen along the employee lifecycle, as well as the growth of their skills and capabilities, relationship with their manager, and well-being.

Notes Greg Pryor, executive director at Workday, "Our aspiration is not to have a remarkable employee experience for some, but to have a remarkable employee experience for all."

Empowering Employees

Providing a positive employee experience turns on the ability to empower them. And to empower them, they must harness technology in a thoughtful way. By improving workflows, organizations can increase worker autonomy and provide knowledge and support through relevant points on the employee lifecycle.

Spurring productivity and engagement is vital, of course. Achieving that involves clearly articulating where people should focus and surfacing the insights, tasks, and reports they need to apply that focus. What does this look like? Well, like a lot of things. It might be providing easy access to a policy, or presenting new insight from a knowledge article. Maybe it's helping them find an answer through a virtual assistant, or offering career progression coaching. It's not one thing but many, with all these touchpoints combining to not only help employees achieve more, but to also help them feel connected, successful, and fulfilled.

Clear Steps Along a Hyper-Personalized Path

All of this is part of adopting a hyper-personalized, easy-to-use approach that meets people how and where they prefer to work, while giving them a supportive hand along the way. It's important to deliver an inviting experience that mirrors the ease (and even delight) that consumer technology has taught us all to expect. For instance, an empowering employee experience should:

- Chart personalized courses of action to help workers grow

- Offer employees clear steps to get where they need to go

- Provide ways to quickly search for information, with results revealed in natural language

- Ensure that all aspects of the experience are accessible from any device

It's All About the Platform

The most advanced employee experience solutions meet all these requirements. They can provide a unified, frictionless platform that guides workers through important milestones such as onboarding and career development, and even managing through difficult circumstances. These solutions also offer personalized dashboards and quick actions ranging from time-off requests to co-worker lookups that can be accessed on any device. For example, if an employee is transitioning into a manager role, they'll receive curated suggestions, content, and actions related to onboarding. These prompts and nudges help the employee navigate the awkward acclimation phase of a new role while helping them connect, collaborate, and get things done.

Predicting—Then Delivering—What People Want

Unlike static employee portals, these new tools provide everything from career development guidance and HR policies to payroll details. And because the most advanced environments are powered by ML, they enhance the employee experience by predicting what people want and giving them seamless access to what they need.

The right platform saves employees time, improves their satisfaction, and creates goodwill. And in addition to cultivating happier, more loyal workers, the improved workflows the platform enables also save companies time and money while lessening the burden on HR.

Creating and Extending Connections

The knowledge economy is making data usage and analysis more complex, turning today's companies into a maze of systems—some interconnected, but many siloed and difficult to access and understand. Employees waste time navigating disparate applications while trying to collaborate with colleagues. This problem was exacerbated by the mass migration of corporate employees to remote work in spring 2020—a migration that will probably be, as we have noted, at least partially permanent.

As the traditional workplace recedes and is replaced by a cloud-based, access-anywhere workspace, collaboration tools, such as Microsoft® Teams and Slack, have become even more critical. (In March 2020, the number of people using Teams on a single day reached a record 44 million, after reaching 20 million only 4 months before.) These tools have become absolutely essential to driving projects forward and keeping remote colleagues connected. Integrating them with employee experience platforms allows workers to stay in what have become their natural workspaces, even as they give workers seamless access to information and resources they need to do their jobs.

For example, more and more organizations are relying on carefully crafted objectives and key results (OKRs) to align their people and accelerate growth. These OKR tools need to be integrated into employee experience platforms so that workers understand not only the outputs expected of them, but also the outcomes. In other words, they will see a list of deliverables in their dashboards, but they'll also gain clarity as to why they need to deliver those things. This outcome-first mindset helps increase an employee's satisfaction and energy, which immediately affects the bottom line.

Connected and Extensible

Connectivity should improve user experiences, not erode them. Dashboards built like homepages, custom card interfaces that work like high-tech Post-It notes, and cross-system messaging, notifications, and approvals eliminate friction and wasted time while boosting employee morale and engagement. The best platforms bring to workplace tech baked-in capabilities that allow the easy interaction that bots have normalized in consumer technology. Workers no longer need to feel the intricacy and complexity of the systems that power their work, and IT won't face challenges wrestling with disparate systems and technologies; instead, single points of entry that extend their existing workplace applications and surface new data make work feel intuitive and straightforward—and importantly, more productive.

So why aren't all organizations using a modern, cloud-based platform that has already figured this out so organizations don't have to? Traditionally, this sort of system integration and extension existed as separate products and tasks. Not only does that drive up cost and complexity, but it slows the pace at which the organization needs to deliver new solutions (experiences), not new tech. Invariably, this also leads to more tech sprawl.

Today, these purpose-built integration and extension capabilities must be baked into a modern platform, and not exist as general-purpose tech stacks that operate elsewhere. Taking advantage of the close proximity to existing data, process, and transactions will always deliver better and faster results than moving, reconciling, and auditing the changed data between those stacks. Prebuilt connectors to third-party systems, as well as low-code development tools for developing unique pages and tasks that appear natively within core applications, are hugely important. Combined with SOAP- and REST-based web service APIs, this level of extensibility provides seamless access to business operations and processes across the platform, allowing for a fast transition to the cloud and rapid evolution as business needs, tools, and technologies continue to change. Since businesses don't have time for lengthy deployments, these integration and extension tools deliver out-of-the-box benefits, including ready-made payroll integrations, orchestrating cross-system processes as well as performing easy configurability of capabilities around business processes and reporting. The idea is to streamline digital transformation without creating roadblocks in day-to-day work.

How Workday Can Help

Every organization is imperfectly unique and wants to build and present experiences that resonate with its people. Ideally, the "right" way to do that is by utilizing what's already in the box. That's why Workday Extend has created a new and unprecedented level of extensibility for a company and its customers. The product opens up the same cloud environment that Workday uses, and it's designed based on the belief that innovation belongs not just at Workday, but at your company as well.

Workday Extend allows an organization to seamlessly deliver new capabilities, surfacing relevant data and tasks for employees natively through their existing Workday Human Capital Management, Workday Financial Management, and Workday Student applications, as well as the employees' application homepage. By using a purpose-built platform and tools, new apps can be built, deployed, and managed from a central place with speed and confidence. This allows for the creation of many new apps—such as automating the request for a corporate credit card as part of the onboarding process for a new manager—eliminating manual, labor-intensive approvals normally involving the finance group.

Providing Support

Every employee would love the direct phone number of that one coworker who can provide help when they need it. But absent this mythical colleague, workers require systems and tools that are intuitive and insightful and—critically—that enable self-sufficiency. And when an employee has accomplished all they can on their own but still needs help, the experience of connecting to the appropriate colleague should be simple and painless, with technology supporting and easing those interactions.

Many of these questions fall to human resources, but that can overwhelm the team. A better employee experience enables self-sufficiency by creating, organizing, and maintaining HR knowledge in an easy-to-use system that can be updated in real time. This way, a simple search will return robust and actionable content—including HR videos, supplemental articles, and related links—that reduces the need to create a case. If, however, an employee still requires additional help, they can open a ticket immediately—whether on their desktop, through email, or on their phone—and easily track the progress of their case.

Using Context to Curate Support

But employees, of course, also need support that extends beyond queries about benefits or policies. This is where the context pillar comes into play. By considering the context around each individual, organizations can curate support and resources in ways that unlock workers' potential and enable their performance. Doing so, in turn, unlocks the value that people attach to their role and to their employer. This helps create a sense of belonging, reinforcing the feeling that their organization is supporting them exactly where they are, in the flow of their work.

For many organizations, this doesn't come easy. They struggle to provide this sort of best-in-class support because their data doesn't exist in one place. To support colleagues, workers need critical data to answer questions and knock down challenges. An intelligent data foundation that offers a unified pool of information and insight creates a single source of truth—the single most vital component of the modern employee experience.

By offering proactive assistance along the way, whether it's a basic need or a more complex and context-sensitive issue, companies can ensure their employees are supported, engaged, and productive.

How Workday Can Help

Workday offers multiple tools designed to help HR be more proactive in meeting employees' needs. For instance, paths created with Workday Journeys allow you to support employees through major career milestones and smaller career "micro moments." Since Workday already houses so much rich data, the paths contain not only HR data, but also knowledge articles, videos, Workday tasks, and external links—all while serving as a point for case creation.

With Workday, employees can digest curated content at their own speed and in whatever order works best for them, no longer being limited by rigid business processes.

Inspiring Talent

Workers and employers support one another in many mutually beneficial goals. To ensure their own success, for example, employees want access to the right training, connections, mentors, and opportunities to grow and develop. Employers, for their part, want to attract great people and provide an environment that allows them to do excellent work, which leads to happy customers and a strong bottom line.

But despite this collaborative effort, there's still a lack of attachment: about one-third of millennials and half of Gen Z workers plan to leave their jobs in two years or fewer, according to Deloitte's 2020 Millennial Survey—and that actually represents a significant improvement over previous years. Considering the costs associated with hiring and training new employees, this statistic is alarming.

Investing in People—and Their Experience

So how do you keep employees? It starts with investing in them professionally—and in their employee experience.

Actively engaging with workers and measuring satisfaction begins with employment. To create engagement, you need to show people how their careers can grow from day one. And the best way to do this is by putting them in the driver's seat. That means giving them access to feedback and mentors, or asking them to determine the skills they want to develop and then surfacing applicable projects that can serve as growth opportunities. Listening to employees' goals and then actively assisting them in gaining new abilities helps them stay empowered, engaged, and loyal.

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Workday People Experience is intuitive for every user, from employees to managers, which means that we are able to empower our managers in real time with live data, removing the burden from HR.

Dalia Kendik
Head of Digital Human Resources,
Thomson Reuters Holdings Inc.

By collecting personalized context, creating content, and analyzing employees' interactions, organizations can better understand how to help employees thrive and build long, happy tenures. It also allows you to identify problems, such as areas within your organization that have a high churn rate, and dive into the underlying reasons to develop a stronger retention strategy.

But beyond studying easily identifiable worker demographics—such as the exiting employee's role, location, compensation, and so forth—it's also important to drill down into belonging and sentiment data to examine workers who aren't yet out the door, but who might be on their way if things don't improve. Have these people identified skills and career interests? These insights can be jumping-off points for supportive, ongoing conversations that allow employees to bring their whole selves to work. This helps create a sense of belonging by encouraging employees to look past their present dissatisfaction and visualize the future they want, and then take steps to achieve it.

In a rapidly emerging world where employees can work for anyone from anywhere, finding ways to keep workers engaged, challenged, and inspired might be the difference between watching high performers rise through the ranks or seeing them leave for a competitor.

Employee Experience Management Is Value Management

Perhaps more now than ever before, the most successful and agile companies are those that are focused on nurturing the talent that their business relies on. What was once viewed as a necessary cost burden—the staffing and managing of the workforce—has given way to a new business imperative: empowering employees to do their best work by ensuring they are appropriately supported, valued, resourced, and nurtured. And as we've seen, investing in a modern employee experience yields dividends: an increase in employees' productivity and engagement levels.

But what about the true ROI?

Executives surveyed for the 2019 Economist Intelligence Unit report "The Experience of Work" named a range of benefits derived from investing in the employee experience. They include improvements in people metrics such as productivity (cited by 43% of respondents), employee engagement (41%), talent retention (30%), innovation/creativity (28%), and talent recruitment (21%). But those executives also cite other business benefits, including improved customer experience and satisfaction (36%), improved profitability (31%), and accelerated digital transformation (23%).

A Commitment to Transformation

Achieving those metrics requires a commitment to transforming the traditional employee experience. Experience shows that cloud-based platforms enable a company-wide approach to workforce planning—and this drives real savings. This kind of planning allows companies to reevaluate their talent strategies to maximize hiring investments and better align talent with corporate objectives. By creating a single source of truth based on an intelligent data foundation, an employee experience platform ensures that

companies effectively manage and retain their largest expense and most strategic asset: their people. And in creating a more agile workforce, a cloud-based platform also uncovers insights that inform the business.

Highly skilled workers drive business growth and innovation. By fostering autonomy, career development, and a sense of meaning and belonging—all delivered through a frictionless employee experience—organizations can develop the workforce of the future and meet the challenges that await with agility and confidence.