

EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE (EX)

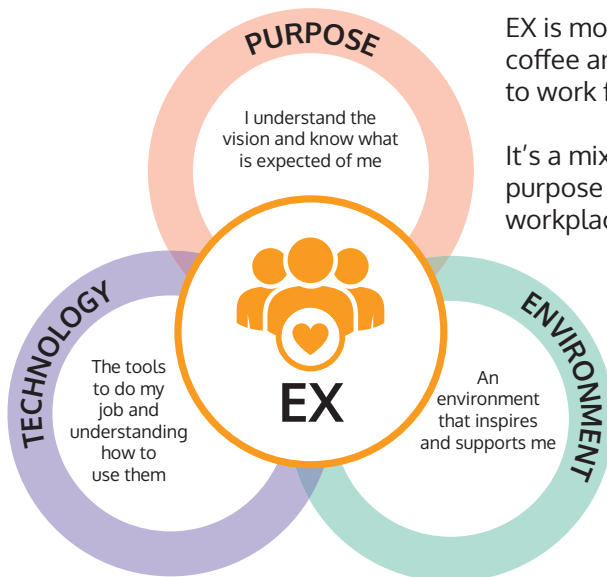


HR's new frontier

When Airbnb HR Director Mark Levy's role was rebranded as Global Head of Employee Experience in 2015, he may not have been aware that the decision would open the floodgates. Ever since, HR teams around the world have been getting their design thinking hats on and scrambling to create memorable employee experiences.

So strong is the appeal of EX that HR is itself repositioning itself. Following an endless stream of titles, from plain old Human Resources through to People & Culture and People Operations, HR's newest titles include People Experience, and yes, Employee Experience. Spurred by early adopters such as Sunsuper, KPMG, MYOB and LinkedIn, these titles are gaining traction in organisations globally. Although a name does not maketh a team, it's easy to see why EX is being embraced.

What is the employee experience?



EX is more than good coffee and being able to work from home.

It's a mix of technology, purpose and the physical workplace itself.

EX defining features...



It covers every touchpoint an employee will have with an employer, from hire to retire. It encapsulates what people encounter, observe or feel over the course of their employee journey at an organisation.



It looks at more than engagement and culture and brings together all the workplace, HR, and management practices that impact people on the job.



It borrows elements from the customer experience (CX) – it's trackable and uses design thinking principles.



It places data at the heart of HR operations. Data can be gathered through traditional engagement surveys, pulse feedback tools, a multitude of wellness and fitness apps, and employee self-service tools.



It's heavily impacted by changing expectations of the workforce: transparency, personalisation and empowerment are key concerns, especially for Millennials.



It's a process of continuous improvement, based on the input and feedback gathered directly from employees.

There are natural links between the EX and the CX – a fact recognised by Naomi Simson, founder of RedBalloon, and co-founder of The Big Red Group. "For a very long time I've been talking about how happy customers come from having a happy team. Clearly, the momentum is building around that philosophy," Simson says.

"When we think about the employee experience, it's not about what you give to people; it's the framework you create for people to allow them to do their best work. To be challenged to greatness. When they're doing their best work and being challenged that reflects in the customer experience," she adds.

Leaders make a huge difference in providing not just frameworks for success but also the vision and values by which success will be achieved. Ultimately, Simson says employees will be asking 3 questions:

- Do I know what I'm here to do?
- Did anyone notice?
- Do I feel proud to work here?



From the frontline

“Our employees have an expectation for a consumer-grade user experience in their work with us. If we are not delivering the same type of service they feel like they are being left behind, so there is a big internal focus on making sure the employee experience is in line with the way we ensure our customers are a focus.”

Victoria Pickles, Director of Human Resources, Western Union APAC

Looking beyond employee engagement

Taking cues from software engineers and their focus on the user experience (UX) in relation to websites and apps, the EX covers every touchpoint an employee will have with an employer, from hire to retire. Rather than focus narrowly on employee engagement and culture, organisations are developing a holistic view on the entire EX, bringing together all the workplace, HR, and management practices that impact people on the job¹.

Organisations have started tracking EX in much the same way they'd track customer experience via net promoter tools, social media monitoring, and customer segmentation. If positive customer interactions can be tracked and replicated, these organisations believe the same philosophy can apply to attracting and retaining the best people. “I think it would be very difficult to execute on a fantastic customer experience if you aren't first delivering a great employee experience. In fact, I don't think you can have one without the other.” Those words come from Tony Reynolds, General Manager of Employee Experience at Cathay Pacific².

The airline has placed such a priority on maximising the link between customer and employee experience that it has rebranded its HR department as the Employee Experience department. Its philosophy mirrors the more traditional customer experience focus: delivering excellent service and understanding what matters most to employees. It's this last point, obtained through detailed employee data, which underpins EX. After all, it's difficult to improve anything if you aren't gathering and assessing feedback.

1. <https://www2.deloitte.com/insights/us/en/focus/human-capital-trends/2017/improving-the-employee-experience-culture-engagement.html>
2. <https://www.hrtechnologynews.com/news/people-analytics/this-is-the-future-for-hr-insights-from-major-airline/101662>

From the frontline

"Clients do not come first. Employees come first. If you take care of your employees, they will take care of the clients."

Richard Branson, Entrepreneur and Founder, Virgin Group

Traditional engagement surveys can help improve EX but so too can pulse feedback tools. These tools not only obtain more timely insights into what employees are thinking about the organisation but can also provide feedback as to the success (or otherwise) of various initiatives and programs launched by the EX team, such as learning, onboarding and recruitment. On the latter, the Australian arm of Uber is using differentiated recruitment processes and in-depth 'listening experiences' to find the best talent for its expanding operations and obtain feedback on its own recruitment operations³. In other organisations, employee data is being gathered through a multitude of wellness and fitness apps, and employee self-service tools.

Of course, engagement surveys have been conducted for decades. What's new are the platforms used to deliver the surveys, and the insights and analysis that are now possible with that data. For example, employee data can be compared with customer, commercial and operational data. New approaches such as design thinking and employee maps are also being utilised by EX teams to understand and improve the complete experience. They are also using employee net promoter scores to measure employee satisfaction⁴.

What is design thinking?

Questions to help you think like a designer:

1

What do employees experience on their journey from being hired to leaving the company?

2

What does a great employee experience look like end to end?

3

How can HR help build human-centred design principles throughout the organisation?

3. <https://www.hcamag.com/hr-news/australian-hr-experts-agree-ex-is-here-to-stay-250883.aspx>

4. <https://www2.deloitte.com/insights/us/en/focus/human-capital-trends/2017/improving-the-employee-experience-culture-engagement.html>

Let's take a look at how a focus on EX can impact some of the key areas of HR's involvement in a business. It's easiest to compare HR's role from the past to its role today and the immediate future.

	HR of Yesterday	HR of Today and Tomorrow
Employee experience	Employee experience is defined by annual engagement surveys	Employee experience is defined as a holistic view of life at work, requiring constant feedback, action, and monitoring
Culture	Culture is mentioned on company websites, but is not measured or defined through behaviour	Tools and behaviours are used to measure, align, and improve culture during change, mergers or acquisitions, and other major initiatives
Learning & development	L&D is centrally administered and usually only done retrospectively, in light of performance-related issues	Self-service learning experiences are shaped by design thinking's central principle of putting the user experience ahead of the process
Reward & recognition	Compensation, benefits, and rewards are managed with a focus on benchmarking and fairness	Compensation, benefits, rewards, and recognition are designed to improve the life of each employee, with a balance of financial and non-financial rewards
Health & wellbeing	Health & wellness programs are focused on safety and managing insurance costs	An integrated program for well-being exists, focused on the employee, their family and their life inside and outside of work
Remuneration	Remuneration is designed to cover salary, overtime, bonuses, and stock options	Remuneration includes non-financial rewards: meals, leave entitlements, fitness, and wellness programs
Technology	Employee self-service is viewed as a technology platform that makes it easy to complete HR transactions and reports	The EX platform is mobile and includes digital apps, prescriptive solutions based on employee journeys, and ongoing communication that supports employees
Data & analytics	Employee data is used for retrospective analysis	Predictive analytics is used to forecast ahead and can be linked with design thinking to recommend solutions directly to the employee

How can tech enhance EX?

Keeping in mind that technology is the enabler and not the standalone solution to a better EX, workers want technology that is:



Intuitive. Work tech functionality should mirror consumer tech functionality. It shouldn't require a training module or lengthy instruction manual.



Personalised. It should be able to make recommendations and suggestions – again, similar to consumer retail and entertainment platforms like Amazon. For example, a learning path should be customisable to the employee's role, with suggested content recommendations that are relevant to them.



Collaborative. It needs to be interactive and embedded into the tools employees are already using, so they can interact in real-time and more efficiently access the information required to do their jobs.



Flexible. Employees want to be able to work from anywhere at anytime; they also want to be able to easily check and update their own personal information so self-service is a must-have.



Seamless. Employees want single sign on access to multiple HR services that may rely on other departments for information, and integrated access to onboarding, payroll, performance, learning tools and everything else required in the workplace.

From the frontline

"We're not looking at employee experience just from the HR point of view but at all elements that impact the employee experience, and making sure it aligns with and supports the type of client experience we want to deliver as a business."

Liam Hayes, Chief People Officer, Aurecon

Making a start

Not sure where to begin? Here are some tips:

1

Start small. EX is not just about large-scale sweeping changes. Instead, consider initially focusing on one area to assess what the employee experience is – for example, how learning is delivered and whether it's matching what your employees expect from corporate L&D.

2

Consider experiences for the entire workforce. All segments of the workforce – candidates, full-time, part-time, freelancers, gig employees, even alumni – will expect elements of the employee experience to be designed to attract and engage them.

3

Don't focus on policies and procedures in isolation. Instead, focus on how policies and procedures are affecting employees and their experience within your organisation.

4

Work on regular communication and contact with employees. Consider implementing frequent performance discussions and train your managers on how to have constructive conversations.

5

Embrace design thinking. Observe and learn what employees are doing every day and discover new ways to simplify work and improve productivity, performance, and engagement. Encourage employees to design what the ideal experience might look like by identifying 'key moments' during an employee's journey that can have a significant impact on their overall experience.

6

Move beyond annual or biannual engagement surveys to regular pulse surveys and open feedback systems. Use candidate interviews, stay interviews, ongoing performance conversations, and exit interviews as ways to build a complete, real-time understanding of the issues your employees face.

7

Obtain leadership buy-in. The involvement of senior leaders is critical. They can even be accountable for the employee experience through goals, rewards and other performance programs.

Matching employee expectations

It's clear that workforce expectations have changed, and this is yet another reason why it's time to look seriously at employee experience. As Deloitte states: "In a digital world with increasing transparency and the growing influence of Millennials, employees expect a productive, engaging, enjoyable work experience."

Are you ready to commence your EX journey?

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