

Employee Experience: Why Happy Employees Make Happy Customers

The next revolution in people management is upon us: Employee Experience.

Employee Experience is a growing movement in the enterprise dedicated to leveraging the same sophisticated methodologies businesses use to understand their customers and applying it to employees. By analyzing every interaction employees have on their journey with the company, organizations seek to create world-class experiences that lead to better performance outcomes and better customer interactions. Today, **nearly 80% of executives** rate Employee Experience as a top business priority.

Employee Experience: Why Happy Employees Make Happy Customers explores the areas organizations need to conquer in order to deliver a differentiated and fulfilling Employee Experience.

Here's what you can expect from our comprehensive look at this exciting new business specialization.

- 1 Learn what Employee Experience is and how it impacts customer experience and business outcomes.
- 2 Chart the past, present, and future of the burgeoning Employee Experience movement.
- 3 Understand the relationship between Employee Experience and employee engagement (and why both are important).
- 4 Explore the ins and outs of the three EX domains: the Procedural Employee Experience, Textural Employee Experience, and Emotional Employee Experience.
- 5 Get a glimpse at how to adapt your organization to the rapidly-evolving Employee Experience landscape.

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Chapter 1

Happy Employees Make Happy Customers

*“Take care of your employees
and they’ll take care of your business.”*

– Richard Branson, Founder of The Virgin Group

Every organization wants happy customers.

Happy customers make for return business, consumer advocacy, a positive company reputation, money in employees’ pockets, and satisfied owners. But most importantly, the success happy customers bring helps organizations deliver shareholder value.

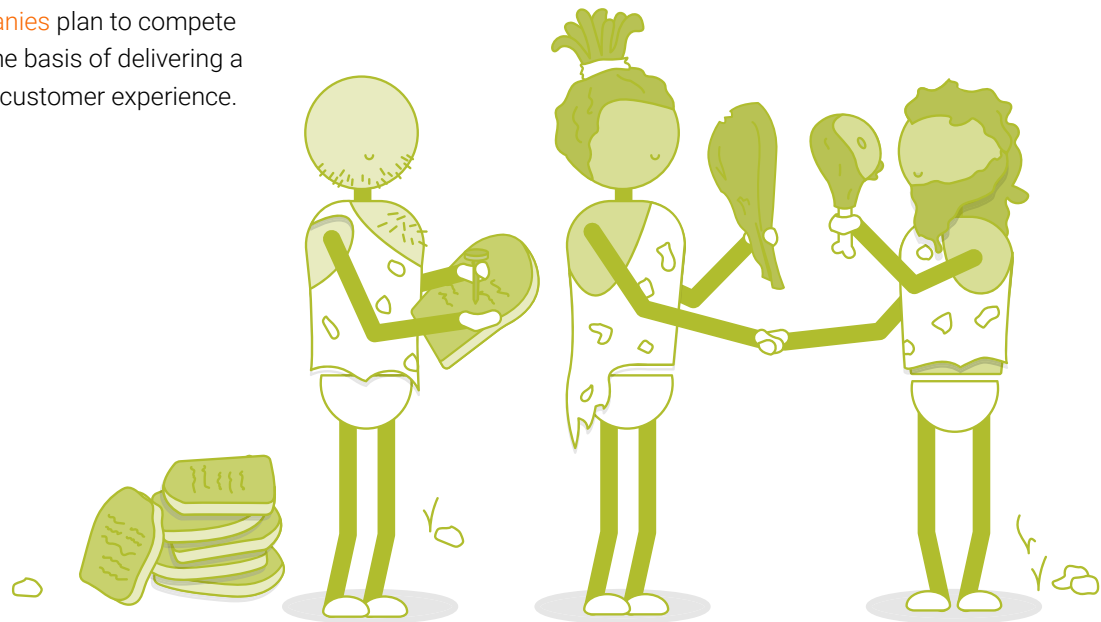
Every organization has an obligation to its shareholders, the owners of the company and figures with the most investment in its financial value. According to Stanford University Professor of Organizational Behavior **Jeffrey Pfeffer**, the belief that shareholder wealth should hold a “preeminent” importance took root in the '70s. From that point on, a simple ideology emerged for CEOs to navigate business strategy.

Focus on
shareholders first,
customers second,
employees last.

The quickest way of delivering shareholder value, in theory, was to create a customer-centric organization where every interaction produces a satisfied and loyal clientele. Fast forward to today, we can see how the specialization of customer experience, or CX, evolved from this ideology. Organizations became so focused on delivering shareholder value that they started analyzing every interaction customers have with the company to optimize a better journey and more reliably generate profit. Today, **89% of companies** plan to compete primarily on the basis of delivering a differentiated customer experience.

The idea of improving the customer experience is as old as, well, pretty much the very first business transaction. Customer service, customer relations, whatever you call it, for as long as people have been selling things, they’ve wanted to learn what makes their customers tick so they can sell even more. While CX, formally speaking, is a more recent practice that leverages sophisticated techniques like journey mapping and audience segmentation, its doctrine is nothing new.

Within CX, however, a new movement has emerged that suggests the framework of shareholder capitalism doesn’t quite have it all figured out. It’s not just that singular focus on customer experience limits the potential business performance of a company. By actively devaluing the experiences of employees—the people handling and producing the company’s goods and services—companies are placing an artificially low ceiling on the experiences customers can have.



1.1 The Employee Experience owns the customer experience

Employee Experience (EX) is a growing movement in the enterprise dedicated to leveraging the same sophisticated methodology businesses use to understand the customer journey and applying it to their workforce.

Employee Experience is not a fad. It is the next people management revolution, and it's a top priority for CEOs across the globe.

When Deloitte surveyed executives from around the world for its 2017 Global Human Capital Trends report, nearly 80% rated Employee Experience as important or very important for business strategy. Much fewer, however, have actually been able to operationalize EX within their organization. Only 22% of executives reported that their companies were excellent at building a differentiated Employee Experience.

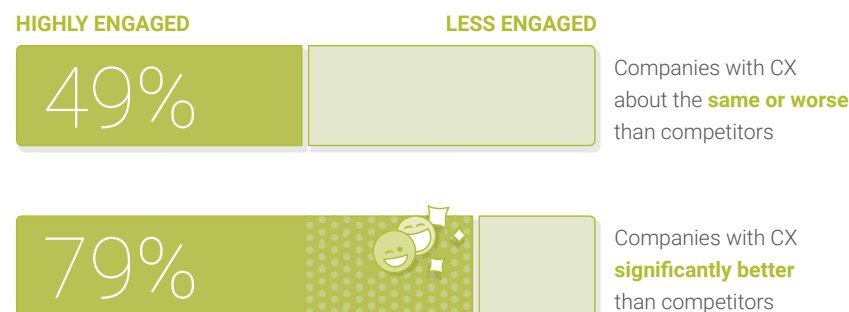
Why are executives so eager to build up their Employee Experiences? Because, to put it simply, the Employee Experience owns the customer experience. When employees are treated right—when they can engage in their work and find meaning in how their roles contribute to a greater purpose—they go above and beyond to pay that feeling forward to customers.

CX expert Blake Morgan calls the link between customer experience and Employee Experience “undeniable.” In 2018, she reported in Forbes that companies that lead in customer experience have 60% more engaged employees.

Morgan is not alone in her findings. The link between employee engagement, the elevated state of employee motivation and performance, and customer experience is well documented.

In its 2017 Employee Engagement Benchmark Study, The Temkin Group found customer experience leaders have substantially more engaged employees compared to organizations who deliver average or poor customer experiences.

Customer experience leaders have more engaged employees



Adapted from The Temkin Group

The closer you look, the easier it is to see how the link between Employee Experience and customer experience manifests within specific industries. Take **healthcare**, for example. In hospitals, the patient experience is entirely dependent on the level of care provided by nurses and doctors. And when nurses, specifically, are engaged in their work, it's reflected in patient outcomes. According to **Gallup**, the employee engagement levels of nurses are the number one predictor of patient mortality rates and hospital-acquired complications. The quality of nurses' Employee Experience, in other words, is literally a matter of life and death.

In **retail**, a strong focus is placed on how employees care for customers. Because of the nature of the industry, frontline retail employees have a direct and immediate relationship with the company's customer base. Naturally, retail organizations want this relationship to be as positive as possible.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, we see a link in this industry, too, between retail Employee Experiences and the quality of service employees provide customers. In 2015, **The Answers Corporation** found that the employee engagement levels of retail employees had a direct, positive, and causal relationship with customer satisfaction. In other words, retail employees who had experiences that were motivating, inspiring, and overwhelmingly satisfying went above and beyond to confer similarly uplifting experiences on their customers.



1.2 Employee Experience is bigger than customer outcomes

"The formula is simple: Happy employees equal happy customers," writes **CEO Magazine's Sharon Swift**. "Similarly, an unhappy employee can ruin the brand experience for not just one, but numerous customers."

Naysayers, however, will often point to how their businesses have done just fine without devoting extra effort to improving Employee Experience.

"Unhappy employees will still serve my customers. As long as they dot their 'I's and cross their 'T's, why should I care if they're happy?"

The truth is, they're not completely wrong.

It is possible to deliver positive customer experiences with a disengaged and unhappy workforce, but it is by no means ideal. In a **BI Worldwide study**, 8% of American workers surveyed "strongly disagree" they are happy with their current jobs. Out of that population of dissatisfied employees, 55% agreed or strongly agreed they would be "willing to work especially hard for my organization's customers."

Unhappy employees can still work hard to deliver good customer experiences. But it's important to understand from their view that they're just doing their jobs. People will still fulfill the obligations of their roles if they're getting paid for it. And if the Employee Experience is subpar, a paycheck is all their roles will ever be to them.

When employees are disengaged, burned out, and unhappy, you have to widen your view beyond customer outcomes to understand the full scope of costs.

Happiness and engagement raises employees' innovation potential. Translated into the language of CX, employees will seek out opportunities to not only serve your customers well, but boldly experiment with ways to make their experience even better.

The same [BI Worldwide data](#) reports a strong correlation between employee happiness and innovation. Only 6% of employees surveyed who "strongly disagree" they are happy in their current job say it brings out their best ideas. Among those happiest at work, the proportion spikes to 82%. So while an unhappy employee might deliver a decent customer experience, they find themselves unable to innovate in their roles.

And let's not leave common sense at the door. If an employee is energized, stimulated, and motivated by their work experiences every day, they'll want to stay around for longer. The longer they stay, the more expertise they develop, along with institutional knowledge of how best to serve your customers. One last time, we'd like to reference [BI Worldwide's](#) data acknowledging this: 88% of the unhappiest employees surveyed wish they were working somewhere else and 62% are, in fact, planning to leave in the next 12 months.

BI Worldwide is hardly the only firm making these connections.

A joint report from IBM and Globoforce found a strong relationship between better Employee Experiences and key performance outcomes. The organizations leveraged a 5-dimension, 10-item [Employee Experience Index](#) to measure the experiences of more than 23,000 employees spanning 45 countries and territories.

The results? Employees who ranked in the top 25% highest index scores were linked to better work performance, higher levels of discretionary effort, and were more likely to stay with the company. Those with index scores in the bottom quartile, conversely, ranked markedly worse in each of these areas.

The [same Temkin Group report](#) we discussed earlier illustrates key behaviors that result from great Employee Experiences on a more granular level. The firm found that the engaged employees delivering great customer experiences are more likely to:

- Recommend the company's products and services to people who need them.

- Stay late at work if something needs to be done after standard work hours.
- Do something good for the company, even if it is not expected of their role.
- Make recommendations about improvements the company can make.
- Recommend friends or relatives apply for jobs with the company.

As the expression goes, a rising tide lifts all boats. When organizations create great Employee Experiences, the whole company wins: employees, customers, leaders, executives, and shareholders. Still, many questions remain. Just what is Employee Experience? How do you build a differentiated experience? And who is responsible for the Employee Experience?

Throughout this resource, we'll answer all those questions and more.

Chapter 2

What is Employee Experience?

The first thing to understand about Employee Experience is that unlike other concepts such as engagement, productivity, or job satisfaction, we currently lack a shared language for discussing and understanding EX.

With a concept like employee engagement, experts and thought leaders may have their own unique definitions that reflect their brand, but most—if not all—understand that engagement is in essence, unlocked employee performance potential. In contrast, Employee Experience, as a formal concept and strategic business discipline is frankly a messier concept to discuss.

2.1 A very brief history of the current Employee Experience movement

Since Elton Mayo's discovery of the **Hawthorne Effect** in the 1920s, it's been common knowledge that making humane modifications to work conditions correlates to employee performance improvement. While the concept of managing people in organizations is by no means new, the idea that their experiences can be managed holistically is, arguably, still in its infancy.

In 2009, San Diego State University's Kaveh Abhari proposed that through "**Employee Experience Management (EEM)**," companies could deliver excellent experiences to employees, with an emphasis on improving their professional and personal development. If firms are successful in creating these experiences, Abhari says employees would become laser-focused on satisfying customers' "experiential needs." But even though EEM involves people management and development, he says it is not quite a human resources function.

Abhari argues there is a key distinguishing factor separating EEM from human resource management (HRM). HRM leverages standard people management techniques to align employees with broad (and sometimes vague) organizational objectives. EEM goes a step beyond that. With an emphasis on cultivating inspirational leaders, empowering cultures, and empathetic workforces, EEM motivates employees to deliver the "right experiences" to customers and accomplish organizational objectives with greater efficiency.

Whether or not you can credit Abhari for christening Employee Experience its proper noun status is debatable but his thinking in this arena remains disproportionately weighted on its customer-centric effects. What an Employee Experience framework is—or how you build one—would not be adequately explored until nearly a decade later.



2.2 The Limits of Employee Engagement

In the intervening years, a people management concept more mature in age took the center stage in business strategy conversations: employee engagement.

Engagement is perhaps the most advanced and nuanced means of describing employee motivation and performance. As the world transitioned from a product-based economy to the knowledge economy, business leaders recognized that there was a ceiling to the potential performance improvements gained from manually making people and processes faster. In order to get the most out of this new workforce of knowledge workers, leaders would need to create environments that engaged employees and motivated them to go the extra mile in their work.

Early 20th Century

Efficiency

The primary performance focus of the industrial era centered on strategies that made employees physically perform labor and make product more quickly.

1920s to 1960s

Morale and Satisfaction

Elton Mayo's "Hawthorne Experiments" suggested that when companies take an interest in the well-being of employees, performance and bottom line outcomes improve.

1970s and 1980s

Commitment

A deviation from command-and-control management styles. In commitment strategies, performance potential is believed to be unlocked by securing employee 'loyalty.'

1990s to present

Engagement

Term coined by William Kahn in 1990. Kahn believed employees go above and beyond when they can express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally in their roles.

Engagement was, and will continue to be, a strong focal point in business strategy because it acknowledges that employees need to be emotionally stimulated by their work—not just intellectually stimulated—to unlock their performance potential. And what subject could be more complex to unpack than human emotion?

But there are limits to the engagement discourse.

In the business world, there are two types of employee engagement. The first type is the emotional state of unlocked performance potential, which we've discussed above. The second category is engagement as a metric and KPI businesses have operationalized to track and improve.

While it is absolutely crucial that organizations develop methods to measure engagement scores, the strategies they deploy to improve these measurements miss the forest for the trees. Bring Your Pet to Work Day, flexible PTO policies, a nearly unlimited supply of snacks, soda, and beer—these perks and programs are nice-to-haves that might lift the mood of an employee's day, but ultimately do little to emotionally stimulate them.

Perhaps as a reflection of this misunderstanding, Gallup's research indicates that global employee engagement levels are chronically low. The firm's [2017 State of the Global Workplace](#) report shows that 85% of employees are not engaged or actively disengaged from their work. What's clear from this data is that despite the significant number of organizations working to improve their workplaces, a focus on engagement is not enough.

To fix the gaps in engagement strategies, a new focus is required that takes a holistic look at everything employees experience in their roles.

2.3 Enter Employee Experience

Remember how just a few short years ago, it felt like every HR manager under the sun found a way to work the phrase "Employee Experience" into their titles? That all started with Airbnb's Mark Levy. In 2015, [Forbes](#) pinpointed Airbnb as the first organization to truly embrace the holistic thinking of the "workplace as an experience."

Levy, in particular, was profiled in the article for transitioning the formal title of his role from that of Chief People Officer to Chief Employee Experience Officer. This title change was not superficial. The purview of Levy's role expanded beyond the expected duties of HR business partners. As a Chief Employee Experience Officer, Levy was charged with creating "optimal employee experiences" across physical, emotional, intellectual, virtual, and aspirational domains.

As Forbes contributor Jeanne Meister [explains](#):

"The role of Chief Employee Experience Officer combines traditional human resource functions of recruiting and talent development with marketing, real estate, facilities, social responsibility, and communications."

Soon after the article published, Levy's way of thinking caught on. HR managers everywhere followed suit with Employee Experience role changes, creating a bubbling interest in this new business specialization. Just two years later, interest in Employee Experience skyrocketed with the publication of noteworthy books, articles, and research exploring its many facets.



Tracy Maylett and Matthew Wride's *The Employee Experience*, published in January 2017, explores EX as it relates to the expectations employers have of employees. The book argues, when companies are clear with employees on promises and expectations, the experience it creates leads employees to engagement.

The Employee Experience Advantage by Jacob Morgan, published just two months later, articulates EX as the antidote to the countless failed engagement strategies. Morgan argues that organizations become "experiential" by intellectually and emotionally stimulating employees in the environments where they work.

Gethin Nadin's *A World of Good*, takes a global perspective on the rise of Employee Experience. He documents how countries all over the world are making localized changes to their EX that pave the way for worldwide transformation. Nadin argues, however, that EX must be truly focused on the individual worker: "I believe that part of the employee experience is to understand your

employees as people and to build an emotional connection with them."

2.4 How are thought leaders defining Employee Experience?

With so much of this domain to explore (and so much yet to be explored), how can our earlier sentiment about the lack of a "shared language" for EX be true?

In simple terms, each of these authors and thought leaders understands that EX is, in some way, about the experiences employees have at work. However, each definition differs in substantial and meaningful ways. Which experiences matter, why they matter, and whom they matter to can all vary across these diverging schools of thought.

Need examples? Let's look at a few operational definitions of Employee Experience:

"The Employee Experience is the sum of perceptions employees have about their interactions with the organization in which they work."

– Tracy Maylett and Matthew Wride

Maylett and Wride center EX on employees' perspectives and rationalizations of their interactions with the company. The figurative and literal contracts forged between employee and employer, along with each party's expectations of the other, are what ultimately determine the value of the Employee Experience.

"Employee experience is the long-term redesign of the organization that puts people at the center."

– Jacob Morgan

Morgan's *The Employee Experience Advantage* anchors EX to employee-centric organizational design. Morgan views "experiential" organizations as

those with their center of gravity being an essential, indispensable employee population that all functions of the business revolve around.

"[EX] is the sum of everything an employee experiences through his or her connection to the organization."

– Denise Lee Yohn

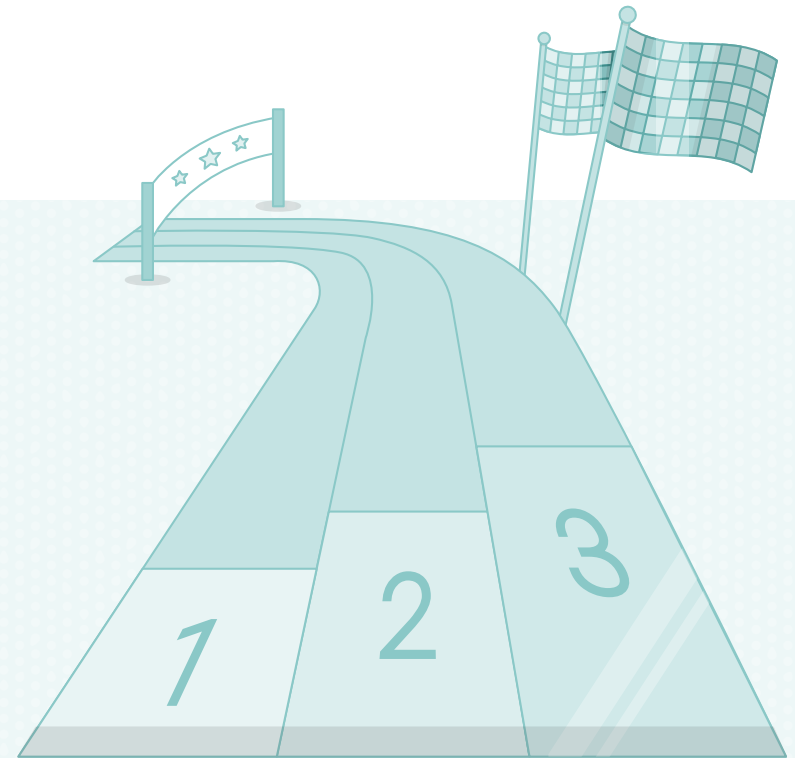
For *Forbes*, Yohn emphasizes that Employee Experience is something that occurs throughout an employee's tenure with an organization. What matters is the length of time an employee spends with an organization, and the quality of the journey they have as they transition from one company milestone to the next.

What's important to note is that none of these definitions necessarily conflict with one another. Maylett and Wride's definition does not negate Morgan's, nor Morgan's with Yohn's. Broadly speaking, all are concerned with employees' experiences, but there are enough differing elements to each that makes it clear EX is still in its exploratory phases as a business specialization. In other words, we're still trying to parse out which experiences are the most important, why they matter, and how we can make them better.

And, frankly speaking, that's fine.

How we define, understand, and navigate our experiences, in life and in work, is difficult enough—and it's an immensely personal process.

It's fine for there to be different schools of thought for Employee Experience so long as we don't lose sight of the end result: better experiences for employees and, in turn, customers.



2.5 How does Bonfyre define Employee Experience?

Employee Experience is a representation of an organization's relationship with employees.

The Employee Experience is the culmination of various elements through which companies communicate to employees how they are prioritized and valued throughout their journey with the company. This includes, but is not limited to, the work employees do, the spaces they occupy, and even the quality of personal and professional relationships they can build within the company.

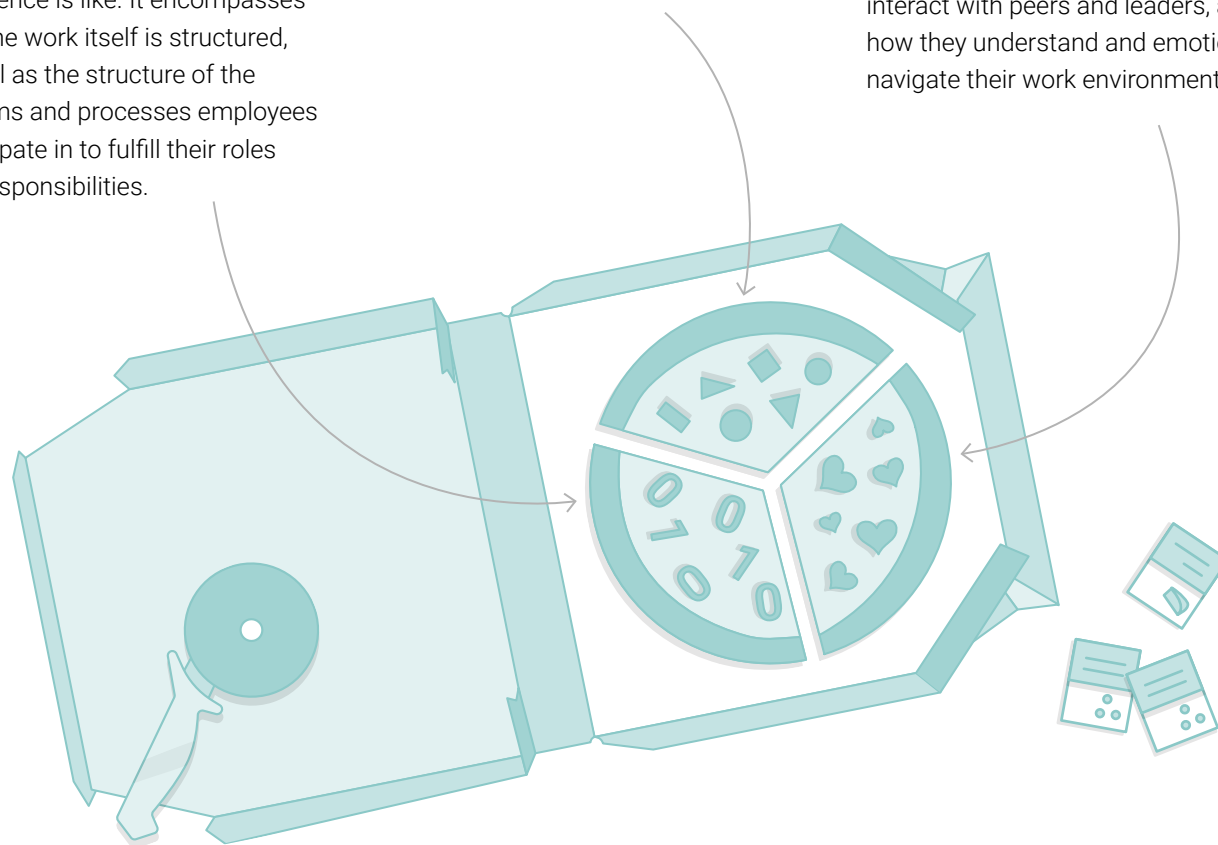
Employees will, in turn, perceive, process, and react to these elements—make sense of their experiences, in other words—in order to understand their role in the relationship the company has formed with them.

In our framework, three categorically different types of experience come together to create the overall Employee Experience.

1. The Procedural Employee Experience, or what the work experience is like. It encompasses how the work itself is structured, as well as the structure of the systems and processes employees participate in to fulfill their roles and responsibilities.

2. The Textural Employee Experience, or what the environments that surround the work feel like. It includes how companies build their cultures, their physical work spaces, and the technology portfolio it provides to employees.

3. The Emotional Employee Experience, or how employees' feelings and emotions influence their daily behaviors and perceptions of the company. It concerns how employees, both as individuals and as a collective, think about the company, interact with peers and leaders, and how they understand and emotionally navigate their work environment.



We'll explore each distinct experience more in later chapters, but here's why it all matters. Prevailing research, best practices, and conventional wisdom tells us that employees cannot engage in their roles when they have dysfunctional work experiences.

As we mentioned before, engagement is the product of the motivating forces that unlock employees' untapped performance potential. But critically, employee engagement is a signifier of effects, not causes. Engagement is the product of the forces that stimulate and motivate employees to work harder, better, and faster. Engagement is not, and should not be mistaken for, those motivating forces. It is the result of them.



In the grand equation of cause and effect, Employee Experience is the cause, employee engagement is the effect.

For employees to be able to engage:

- The experience of the company's systems and processes must enable employees to get their work done, when and how it needs to be done. These experiences should enable them to find key information at a moment's notice and empower them to become key decision makers and problem solvers in their roles.
- The experience of the company's environment and culture must facilitate employees' work, instill purpose and meaning in their individual contributions, and add value to their development as people and talent.

- The experience of the company's emotional culture must help them form relationships with leaders, immediate managers, and colleagues based in foundational emotions like trust, belonging, and altruism.

Employers want engaged employees. Great Employee Experiences are how they will get them.

Chapter 3

The Procedural Employee Experience

Work is the one true constant of the Employee Experience. It's why we can even talk about EX in the first place.

What “work” constitutes can vary significantly across just about every single variable imaginable: country, industry, organization, department, and role. Bottom line, there is no Employee Experience without “work” and, unsurprisingly, the systems and processes that define our work make up a huge part of the Employee Experience.

3.1 What is the Procedural Employee Experience?

The Procedural Employee Experience is the work experience employers have structured for employees to partake in every day. The Procedural EX occurs in every organization, regardless of its size or whether it's tried to build a specific type of work experience for employees. Since work, in the many forms it can take, exists in all organizations, so too does the Procedural EX.

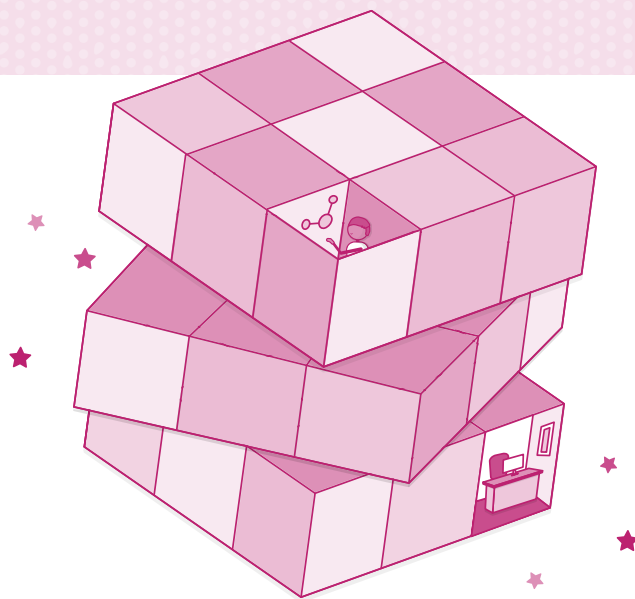
The Procedural Employee Experience is comprised of the systems and processes employees participate in throughout their journey with the organization. It also includes the actual "work" the employee does and how the company dictates the terms of performance.

Procedural Employee Experiences designed with intent and forethought will revolve around optimizing how employees participate in these systems and processes. Intentional design of the Procedural EX will take into account ease of participation, speed of task completion, and how seamlessly an employee can transition from one system to the next.

And when it comes to the work itself, a great Procedural Employee Experience will shed the decades-old skin of command-and-control leadership. If employees' procedural needs are truly being prioritized, then leaders cannot commodify key decision-making ability related to employees' daily tasks.

Great Procedural Employee Experiences will empower employees to be real-time problem solvers in the field, no matter where their role is located on the organizational chart.

Leaders who build up the Procedural EX will trust employees to resolve complicated work issues with colleagues and clients, and provide them the authority and resources to do so.



3.2 Poor processes make for poor Employee Experiences

At a significant number of companies, the Procedural Employee Experience is in disarray. For all of the benefits new technology has brought to the modern workforce, an unintended, and perhaps somewhat inevitable, consequence has come with it: employees everywhere are overwhelmed.

Deloitte cemented the “overwhelmed employee” as a serious phenomenon that “nearly every company” experiences with some disconcerting findings from its [Human Capital Trends](#) survey. According to the firm, 65% of executives rated overwhelmed employees as an urgent or important trend—and 44% said they were not ready to deal with it. What’s more, the companies that are dealing with it aren’t doing it well.

Fifty-seven percent of respondents say their organizations are weak when it comes to helping leaders manage difficult schedules and helping employees manage information flow.

So why is the Procedural Employee Experience suffering at so many organizations? The primary offenders appear to be a mixture of hard-to-find information, bad work systems and processes, and the learning curve of new technology. Together these factors all create a perfect storm where information flows to employees from all sides, but none of it is what they need to get their jobs done.

What it looks like when the Procedural Employee Experience suffers:



57%

of work interruptions result from social media tools or from switching between disparate standalone applications. ([Deloitte](#))



72%

of employees report not being able to find the information they need within their company’s information systems. ([Deloitte](#))



41%

of knowledge workers’ time is spent on discretionary activities (unimportant work tasks) that offer little satisfaction and could be accomplished competently by others. ([HBR](#))

3.3 Who owns the Procedural Employee Experience?

At most organizations, the company and its leaders predominantly own the Procedural Employee Experience because they dictate, design, and execute the structure of the systems and processes. In an ideal world, this would not be the case.

In *Not My Circus, Not My Monkeys*, author Lance Gibbs describes how organizations strip employees of their agency and voice as it pertains to everything from company policy to processes to even problem-solving capabilities. They do this by creating cultures of silence that actively and tacitly discourage displays of honesty and vulnerability—the necessary ingredients for the honest conversations that provoke change at the ground level.

“It affects employee motivation in the end, because people feel that they can’t change outdated or irrelevant policies,” Gibbs writes.

“This, by the way, is by design; there is a motivational bias for change not to occur. No worker wants to fight the status quo and possibly lose his job.”

Organizations in touch with the changing times, however, understand there’s a different way, one in line with the core tenets of great Procedural Employee Experience.

Employees, the people who use the companies’ work systems and processes every day, often understand these processes better than the people who designed them. Through repeated use day-in and day-out, employees develop a deep institutional knowledge of which systems work, which don’t, what their pain points are, and how they can be improved to suit employee and customer needs.

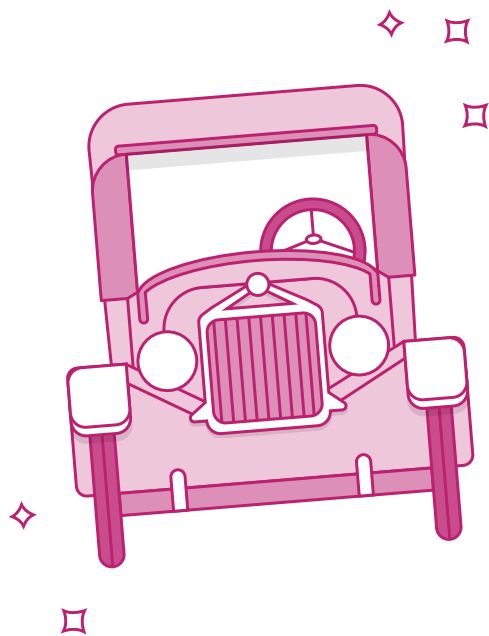
Don’t sleep on this knowledge base. Instead, cultivate it, empower employees to introduce their own thoughts and ideas for improvement, and, most importantly, authorize them to act on it. “Authorization to act” is a concept Gibbs explores in his book. He describes it as “when a company gives their employees the power to act and determine how to best approach their responsibilities.”

Authorization to act helps companies create a shared ownership of the Procedural Employee Experience with their workforce. If a faulty policy, system, or process prevents employees from serving a customer or getting their work done, they no longer have to follow it blindly. When employees have authorization to act, it means they have the trust to resolve critical work issues by leveraging their institutional knowledge of the way the company works. Still, the issue of poorly designed systems and processes must be resolved.



3.4 How do we embrace the Procedural Employee Experience?

Historically, companies have invested the most into their Procedural Employee Experience of all three EX domains. In the quest for maximizing employee output and business outcomes, they've spent no shortage of time, money, and resources into optimizing the procedural elements of the work experience.



"What's the shortest amount of time we can accomplish this task in?"

Perhaps the most prominent example of this thinking comes from Henry Ford. In 1913, Ford famously slashed the Model T car's production time from **12 hours down to just 90 minutes**. He did this by introducing the assembly line to his process, an ingenious invention that dramatically transformed his workers' Procedural Employee Experience.

In the original production process, crews of workers would manually build a Model T from the frame-up, performing various manual tasks all around the product. With the assembly line, the product moved to the employee, not the other way around. Each employee has one task to perform and would perform it on each car part delivered to them on the line.

The Procedural Employee Experience changed immediately after the assembly line's introduction. A process that was once exhausting and time intensive became faster, more repetitive, and safer overnight. Workers were able to produce more vehicles and Ford was able to lower the Model T's price, making it a success with consumers.

Fast forward to today. Businesses continue to fixate on similar procedural revolutions, trying to turn hour-long processes into 30-minute processes into 15-minute processes, and so on. Digital technology is the latest vector of evolution for the Procedural Employee Experience.

Tools like Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS), Customer Relationship Management (CRM) programs, and marketing automation software are all hallmarks for modern procedural improvements, creating new industry standards for the way employees catalogue, access, and leverage critical information related to their roles. In just a few short years, AI and robotic process automation are

poised to spur the next great leap in procedural changes too.

But there is a catch.

You cannot make a great Procedural Employee Experience with technology alone. Despite all the new high-tech bells and whistles in our workplace, we're not getting any more productive. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows productivity growth has slowed to a crawl since 2011. The tools developed in the past eight years have provided **the lowest productivity improvement of any technology era**.

There are only so many shortcuts a company can take with technology before it has to reconsider how its human workforce interacts with its systems and processes.

Companies must take a hard look at the very structure of the work experience it's designed for employees and find new ways to center the employee within it. This is all possible with **design thinking**.

As it pertains to the makeover of work systems, design thinking involves examining the purpose of a process and how it can better serve the people who use it. Design thinking eschews the typical approach of adding additional layers of complexity and nuance to create depth. It is not so much streamlining or paring down complexity as it is refining the core experience of a system or process and ensuring it produces its intended outcomes.

In the grand scheme of the work experience, executive leaders, key decision makers, and even some HR personnel often view the systems and processes employees use as distinct and separate entities from one another. Employees, however, do not. Employees participate in each of these systems and processes in an integrated, fluid, and continuous manner.

All together, these components come to define the experience of working. So, if an employee feels a high degree of friction as they attempt to participate in a system—or transition from one process to the next—it brings the Procedural Employee Experience down.

Embracing the Procedural Employee Experience means centering employee needs within work systems and processes and maximizing the fluidity and seamlessness between them. Questions like the following should be top of mind when making company systems and processes employee-centric:

- What is this system designed to do? Does it accomplish that goal?
- Who was this process designed for? If not employees, then whom?
- Does the intended audience have the ability to provide feedback on the process?
- How can we make the core experience of this program more simple and intuitive?
- What are employees' roles within this system and how can they be amplified to grant more agency?
- How can we help employees make the best decisions faster?

Simple, intuitive, and pleasurable systems and processes are the through line with design thinking. We encourage you to apply the questions above to your own specific work processes to better center employees within the Procedural Employee Experience.

Chapter 4

The Textural Employee Experience

Take a moment to think about the places where you do your work.

What do these spaces feel like? How are they designed? Does the design help you accomplish your daily goals, or does it distract from them? The Textural Employee Experience is concerned with all of these questions.

4.1 What is the Textural Employee Experience?

In the last two decades, we've seen a rise in the publicization of companies' work environments. Companies today feel it's important to publicly display images of their physical workspace—its floor plan, furniture, appliances, and everything else you can show off.

In particular, this practice places a strong emphasis on making the company look sleek and modern with a litany of perks: open floor plans, foosball tables, game systems, company-subsidized Apple computers, a perplexingly unlimited supply of company branded swag, and any other trend du jour you can name.

Some purport these perks to be the cure-all to companies' employee engagement woes. Others see them as key recruitment tools for highly-skilled talent. If you can show top candidates they're allowed to **have fun at work**, they'll pick you and not your competitors, the thought goes.

These, and other perks like them, are all clear gestures towards the idea that the feeling of a company's work environment matters. The problem, however, is that very few of these artifacts actually speak to what the experience of work in these spaces is like. This phenomenon, which goes by a couple of names but "**fake culture**" is one of our favorites, is a smokescreen. It's about projecting an image of a great Employee Experience without ever requiring leaders to put in the work to create one.

That brings us to the Textural Employee Experience.

The Textural Employee Experience considers texture of a company's work environment, the experience of the spaces where we perform our work. It is the antithesis of the fake culture phenomenon.

Fake culture emphasizes flashy toys and treats that have surface-level appeal to employees, but lack any intrinsic value to the work experience.

The environments a company creates, and the experiences they

The Textural Employee Experience is about designing work spaces that satisfy employees' innate experiential needs—like flexibility, accessibility, inclusivity, and agility.

provide, need to facilitate employees' work and enable them to keep pace in a highly-competitive, rapidly-changing global economy. How we design our places of work must, above all else, have intrinsic value to employees. The Textural Employee Experience must create meaning in employees' work spaces and enhance the overall environment.

Think beyond the simplistic allure of fake culture. Focus instead on the experience and feeling employees get from interacting with their places of work:

- Are your work environments flexible and inclusive enough to meet employees' diverse and shifting needs?
- What is the one feeling you want

employees to take away from their places of work?

- Are these environments accessible to all employees?
- What makes the experience of your work environment different from your competitors?

Every employee population is different. What matters most is that employees see an intrinsic value in your Textural Employee Experience.

They should feel the physical environment enhances the work experience and enables them to perform at their very best. Take the time to understand the experiences they want out of their places of work—not the ones you think they want. Then deliver those experiences.

4.2 How do we embrace the Textural Employee Experience?

The Textural Employee Experience amounts to much more than just a single furnishing, perk, or program a company provides. The environments a company creates, and the feeling their design produces, can influence employees' work just as much as process and procedure does.

If you'll recall from [Chapter 2](#), Jacob Morgan's EX school of thought revolves around the concept of places of work. In his book *The Employee Experience Advantage*, Morgan says all Employee Experiences are informed by the design of three environments: the physical, technological, and cultural.

Morgan argues that how companies design these three environments—what companies put in them, how they serve our needs, and ultimately how they evolve over time—determines whether or not an organization is “experiential.”

Experiential, here, refers to companies that deliver the best Employee Experiences.



What's the secret of experiential organizations? Morgan says it's that they design better environments because “they simply know their people better than any other organization and they genuinely care about them.”

Using Morgan's framework, we'll look at what embracing the Textural Employee Experience means for each environment.

4.3 Physical Environment

There is perhaps no better example of the fake culture phenomenon than the rise of the open office space.

The floor plans look attractive, clean, and welcoming when displayed front and center on a company website or Glassdoor page. What's more, they also invite the promise of dynamic and creative “collisions” between colleagues—spontaneous interactions provoked by the openness of the space that lead to collaboration and innovation.

Research shows, however, [open plan offices](#) don't actually produce

those interactions, at least not at the frequency intended. [Researchers Ethan Bernstein and Stephen Turban](#) studied the data from employees' electronic badges, microphones, email, and chat tools at two Fortune 500 companies that made the transition to open floor plans. The intention was, just as described above, that the new design would provoke new opportunities for company innovation.

However, employees did not take to the new design. After the open floor plan was implemented, employees spent 73% less time interacting with colleagues face-to-face. Instead, they used digital tools to supplement their communication needs. In that same time period, employees' email use increased 67% and use of instant messenger tools rose 75%.

“What it was doing was creating not a more face-to-face environment, but a more digital environment,” [Bernstein said](#). “That's ironic because that's not what people intend to try to do when creating open office spaces.”

Before we go any further, we'd like to clarify that the purpose of this point is not to join the growing dogpile on open offices. We're not even going to go so far as to say they don't "work," because clearly the employees still found ways to communicate. Deep down, these organizations had some semblance of the right idea: by engineering creative design of the physical office space you can produce more collaborative work outcomes.

The problem was that they did not consider employees' agency—specifically whether their employees would want to collaborate more in an open space. When presented with a new floor plan that upended the way they naturally worked, the employees responded with actions that unambiguously communicated: "No, this is not the way we collaborate."

All conventional wisdom—from academic research to the lived experiences of employees—points towards "flexibility" as the emergent design principle of the modern era.

While it takes much less time and effort to apply one design style to

an entire space, it comes at the cost of being inclusive of a workforce that's **growing more diverse by every metric**. By designing for flexible work experiences first, organizations can not only accommodate the changing nature of work, but also create environments better suited for more diverse groups of people.

A **University of Sydney** study shows that the top concerns in physical work environments for employees in both open and cubicled environments: sound privacy, visual privacy, noise level, temperature, air quality, and amount of space. A physical work environment that embraces the Textural Employee Experience will center flexibility to overcome these core issues.

Flexibility does not refer only to diverse work space layouts—which can (and should) offer cubicles, open spaces, and everything you can possibly think of between those poles. Employees need the flexibility to work from decentralized locations—home, coworking spaces, coffee shops, you name it.



Forty percent of employees say they want flexible work arrangements so much **they'd consider taking a pay cut for them.**

Flexibility is by no means a universal solution to creating a great Textural Employee Experience in the physical environment. Many organizations—hospitals and industrial manufacturers, for example—have strict legal regulations dictating the floor plan of their worksites. We're not advocating you break the law just to work a swanky open concept break room into your space. But the more agency and freedom you give employees to navigate your physical environment (within your means, of course), the more ingenious ways they'll find to use it.

★ *Practices to consider for embracing the Textural Employee Experience in the physical environment:*

- Office design that accommodates employees with diverse work preferences: quiet rooms, collaboration areas, open areas, and, yes, even cubicles.
- Policies that allow employees to work remotely—from home or coworking spaces—without penalization or an artificial cap to disincentivize use.

- Accessible accommodations for disabled employees beyond what is legally required—particularly collaboration spaces and meeting rooms.

4.4 Technological Environment

Because the Textural Employee Experience is concerned with the feeling of “places of work,” we have to evaluate technology as its own environment. In our last chapter on the Procedural Employee Experience, we discussed how technology can clash with poorly designed systems and processes. In this section, we're going to look at why that is.

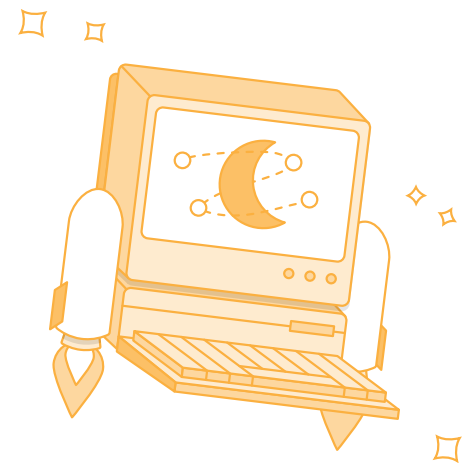
In the Textural EX, technology is at once a resource for accomplishing our work goals and an environment where our work occurs. As such, the utility of a company's tech tools wields a considerable influence over our experiences. How easy it is to use them, what we can do with them, how generally accessible they are, and how passively intrusive they are to our workflow all dictates, in some way, the manner in which we complete our tasks.

The feeling of technology being something employees “experience” is intrinsically tied to the nature of work. Not so long ago, workplaces offered employees the most advanced and sophisticated technology experiences in their lives.

The workplace was what carried us through technological innovation to the next as the world transitioned from a product-based economy to a **knowledge economy**. First industrial machinery, then computer mainframes, then early desktops. These major technological movements were once commodified within work environments of the past. People had to go to work to experience the “next big thing” changing our world, because this technology was not affordable for average consumers, nor was it even designed for home use.

We probably don't need to tell you the tide has shifted.

If you're reading this resource, in all likelihood you accessed it using a high-speed internet connection and a device several orders of magnitude more powerful than **the computers that sent us to the moon**.



Consumer technology is what drives the technological revolutions your average person experiences today. From smartphones to wearable technology to virtual reality headsets, we now live in an age of information and innovation where consumers can leverage high-tech gadgets to enhance nearly every aspect of their lives.

Save for maybe the workplaces currently building the **tech of tomorrow**, most organizations were left in the dust by the consumer technology revolution. Organizations were used to keeping a tight grip on the devices and tools their workers could use on the job. But when employees started bringing in their own devices—tools equipped with slicker UIs than the systems they use to perform their work—it opened a door that could never be closed again.

Even today, many workplaces are saddled with legacy technology systems so woefully misaligned with modern sensibilities that they prevent employees from performing even basic tasks. Here's what a report from **The Workforce Institute of Kronos International** has to say about this phenomenon.



48%

of employees surveyed worldwide wish their workplace technology performed just like their personal technology.



55%

of U.S. employees surveyed spanning the public safety, education, retail, and healthcare industries say it's easier to search for new movies on Netflix than it is to check the details of the employee benefits.



35%

of employees surveyed worldwide feel their job is harder than it should be because of outdated processes and legacy technology.

Today, there's no shortage of options for workplaces to catch up. Name a technology issue relevant to the Employee Experience, and there's likely a solution for it. Productivity and collaboration? There's an app for that. Employee feedback? There's an app for that. Performance management? Well, you get the picture.

So how do you go about picking the right tools for employees? We'd like to call attention to the core principles we highlighted earlier: flexibility, accessibility, inclusivity, and agility. Employees want modern experiences out of their work technology. They want systems that are intuitive to use, accessible from mobile platforms, and dynamic enough to get the information they need without creating a high degree of friction in their day.

★ *Practices to consider for embracing the Textural Employee Experience in the technological environment:*

- Adopt enterprise technology with user experiences that match consumer-grade technology—tools suited to the modern sensibilities of a diverse and ever-changing workforce.
- Make the company's hardware and software suite readily accessible to any and all employees that need it.
- Ensure technology platforms cater to desktop and mobile devices.
- A well-staffed, well-resourced IT department, or in lieu of that, a clear, direct support protocol to help employees resolve technical issues.
- Equitable technology arrangements for remote and decentralized employees.
- A regimented practice for curating the company hardware and software library—that is, expanding tools and hardware when employees need it, and removing technology when they don't.

4.5 Cultural Environment

Peter Drucker is often quoted as saying “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.” Whether he actually said that is **up for debate**, but the idea behind this undeniably powerful expression has caught on nonetheless. A business strategy cannot be successful if it is not compatible with the company's cultural environment. But just what is culture?

Company culture is embodied in the norms, traditions, values, and beliefs that an organization, its leaders, and employees participate in both formally and informally. We've spilled plenty of digital ink on the **importance of culture** in the past. As it pertains to the Textural Employee Experience, think of it as the ties that bind the company together. It is the environment created by “the way we do things around here” and the shared purpose employees gather around.

Embracing culture in the Textural Employee Experience requires identifying the company's shared purpose and using it to incite meaning in the daily work of employees.

Meaningful work is a profoundly powerful employee motivator.

Research shows nine out of 10 employees would be willing to earn less money over the lifetime of their careers if it meant they could make their work more meaningful.

The question is, how do you cultivate a sense of purpose at work?

Company mission, vision, and value statements get a lot of criticism (**sometimes rightfully so**) for often being bloated and long-winded affairs mired in hard-to-parse corporate jargon.

Done right, however, these statements are the north star of the company's greater mission, a primary tool for the organization to conjure feelings of inspiration and motivation in its workforce.



Consider how your work environment has operationalized these statements. Each should be concise and clear. Any employee should be able to understand them and extrapolate how their role figures into the larger framework of the organization's goals.

The mission statement should plainly state the organization's purpose and goal. The vision statement should describe the organization's ideal state. In other words, what the company looks like when it's accomplished its goals and provided real human value to the world. The values statement is where it gets interesting.

Company core values are what dictate the architecture and tenor of your cultural environment.

If the mission and vision statements are what project the company goals, then the values statement is what articulates the methodology for getting there.

The compass providing the organization's true north. As Bonfyre's Director of Employee Experience Rob Seay [wrote on this very subject](#):

“Core values are a Rosetta Stone, helping employees decipher the language of their work environment. They dictate everything about an organization, from its brand, to the type of employee it wants to attract, to the rules of engagement in the work environment.”



An organization that reveres its core values will use them to inform every facet of the Textural Employee Experience's cultural environment. “The way we do things around here” should be authentically communicated and reinforced in everything from managers' leadership styles to benefits offerings to conference room etiquette. And from their interactions with these elements, employees should be able to intuitively understand and be inspired by it.

★ *Practices to consider for embracing the Textural Employee Experience in the cultural environment:*

- Develop mission, vision, and value statements that reflect the true nature of work at the company.
- Allow for cultural “co-creation” opportunities, like [culture committees](#), that enable employees to build their own programs and activities and take ownership of its values.
- Ensure your benefit and wellness offerings reflect your organization's mission.
- Practice what you preach. Empower and reward leaders and employees who exemplify your values.
- Give employees a voice. Regularly solicit their opinions through job satisfaction and employee net promoter score (eNPS) measures to identify areas for improvement.

Chapter 5

The Emotional Employee Experience

In the book *Not My Circus, Not My Monkeys*, author Lance Gibbs discusses how you can succinctly encapsulate customer experience in terms of emotions.

“In a word, customer experience is about feelings,” Gibbs writes. “It is about how a customer feels when he interacts with a company. If processes are efficient and employees are happy, then the customer will have a positive feeling.”

Gibbs' rule of thumb applies just the same for employees as it does for customers. Employee feelings and emotions play an indispensable role in the overall Employee Experience. Our feelings are the rubber stamp on the sum of our experiences, the marker of final determination of whether our experience was, in simple terms, "good" or "bad." And for company leaders, employees' feelings are the ultimate arbiter of whether an EX strategy was a success or a failure.

In our EX framework, the role our feelings play makes up what we call the Emotional Employee Experience.

5.1 What is Emotional Employee Experience?

The Emotional Employee Experience is perhaps the most important element of our Employee Experience equation. It directly concerns how employees, both as individuals and as a collective, think about the company, how they interact with peers and leaders, and how they understand and navigate their work environment.

The Emotional Employee Experience is fundamentally responsive in nature. How employees feel and perceive their experiences with the company are a reaction to the work they do and the environment around it. Thus, a company's Emotional EX is a response to the design of its Procedural and Textural Employee Experiences.

At the individual level, our emotions are how we make sense of the world around us. If an employee chafes against a high-friction process, or if they find their office's open floor plan too distracting, their emotions are what register how they feel about it and how capable they are to navigate the issue.

Just as the work we do and the environments we do it in have the capacity to change, the Emotional Employee Experience can fluctuate along with it. Some days we feel emotionally capable to accomplish all of our goals, no matter the adversity a faulty procedure and poorly-designed work environment throws in our way. Other times, our neglected emotional

health can limit what we can get done, even when great processes and environments are enabling us to do our very best. Such is the power of our emotions and the Emotional EX.

5.2 Our perceptions shape the reality of the Employee Experience

Just because the Emotional Employee Experience is based in our emotions does not mean it is so completely ephemeral that it is impossible to track or strategize around. The connection between

emotional health and bottom line outcomes has been well documented for years. That goes for both employees and leaders alike.

Companies with CEOs and management teams who lead with emotionally intelligent characteristics like compassion, forgiveness, and integrity see a nearly five times higher average return on asset as organizations with "low character" leaders. On the other side of the organizational chart, happy employees are up to 20% more productive than unhappy employees.



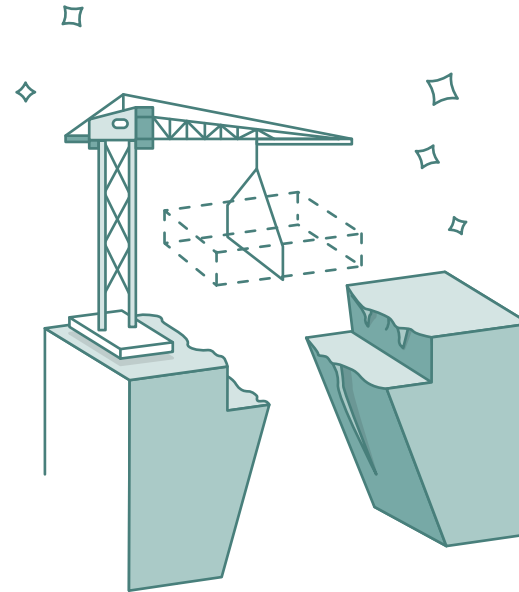
Beyond the clear performance link, the Emotional Employee Experience is in no way limited to the experiences and feelings of any one employee—and it should not be minimized as such. What employees think and feel in a day, week, month, or even a just moment ultimately cascades into thoughts and feelings about their collective experiences. Employees typically do not keep these feelings about their experiences to themselves. Rather, they communicate with their colleagues and, together, build collective perceptions about what it's really like to work at the company.

This collective experience employees share is no secret in most companies. Have you ever seen a Glassdoor page for a company littered with incensed and emotional reviews from current and former employees? Reviews, for example, that communicate a clear dissonance between the lived experiences of employees and the uplifting and empowering image the company projects on its website.

That is the power of the collective Emotional Employee Experience. Try as the company might, it cannot dictate to employees the experiences they are having. The validity and emotional truth of their lived situation will prevail and make itself known, be that through poor performance, missed financial targets, or a **tarnished company reputation** (and Glassdoor page).

This dissonance created when a company neglects its Emotional Employee Experience actually has a formal name. It's called a **perception gap**.

Perception gaps form when the experiences between employees and leaders become so misaligned that they view the state of the company in starkly different terms.



How common are perception gaps?
According to a study by [Weber Shandwick and KRC Research](#), only 19% of employees feel strongly that the work experience their employer promotes publicly is matched by reality.

PwC and The Katzenbach Center's [2018 Global Culture Survey](#) broadly illuminated how these perception gaps appear in practice. Generally speaking, company leaders in the C-Suite and Board will be happy with the organization's state of affairs, but employees feel they're out of touch with what's really going on at the company.



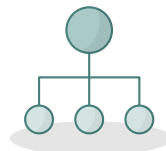
63%

of leaders said they had strong cultures, but only 41% of employees felt the same.



87%

of leaders felt proud to be a part of their organizations—57% of employees shared those feelings.



58%

of leaders believe their organizational chart reflects "how things get done." Less than half of employees agree with them.

The perception gaps that arise from poorly managed Emotional Employee Experience amount to more than just minor quibbles between employer and employee. They represent a fundamental misalignment between these parties on everything from what the company is to what it stands for to how it accomplishes its goals.

5.3 Emotional cultures are the foundation of the Emotional EX

It might be easy for leaders to disavow ownership of the Emotional Employee Experience. "Shouldn't individual employees just do a better job managing their thoughts and feelings at work?" Candidly speaking, it's never been that simple. We're all human and our emotions affect us whether we like it or not. The Emotional EX impacts leaders too, and because they cast a long shadow over the organization, they'd be wise to not shirk this responsibility.

Larry Senn's **shadow of a leader** theory states that, over time, organizations inherit the characteristics of their leaders.

The actions and attitudes executive leaders take “cast a shadow” over the organization's lower levels, modeling what behaviors for success look like in the company's ecosystem.

If leaders model themselves as trustworthy, for example, managers and employees further down the organizational chart will be inclined to not only “inherit” trustworthiness, but also put their trust in the leaders where it originated.

In this framework, leadership also sets the tone for the company's emotional culture, also known as the shared emotional values within a workplace. If, for example, leaders actively work to suppress a natural expression of emotions in the workplace, that too will ripple through the organization in the same manner. For **Harvard Business Review**, authors Sigal Barsade and Olivia A. O'Neill illustrate how this phenomenon

manifests when leaders neglect, mismanage, or suppress emotional cultures.

“Employees who should be showing compassion (in health care for example) become callous and indifferent,” Barsade and O'Neill write. “Teams that would benefit from joy and pride instead tolerate a culture of anger. People who lack a healthy amount of fear (say, in security firms or investment banks) act recklessly.”

In our **research**, we found that there are five emotions at the center of all great emotional cultures.



Trust

The bedrock of all high-performing organizations. Trust is built when employers operate on a principle of assuming (and acting with) positive intent, and display authenticity, transparency, and accountability in interactions with employees.

Happiness

The feelings of positivity, optimism, and excitement that enable us to persevere in even the toughest of times. What makes us “happy” is unique to each individual. Some find happiness in the pursuit of pleasure, others find it in fulfilling their full potential.

Altruism

The backbone of a workplace's support system. Altruism lets employees know they're cared for—and that they should care for their colleagues. At work, you see altruism when employees use discretionary time and effort to help colleagues, or when they sacrifice resources that might benefit themselves for the greater good of the organization.

Belonging

The universal need to feel connected with those around us. Belonging can only develop through frequent, positive interactions between individuals who demonstrate respect and care for one another.

Achievement

Our drive to accomplish our goals and be recognized for it. The validation we derive from our sense of achievement has the power to push us to new levels of motivation and satisfaction in our roles.

5.4 How do we embrace the Emotional Employee Experience?

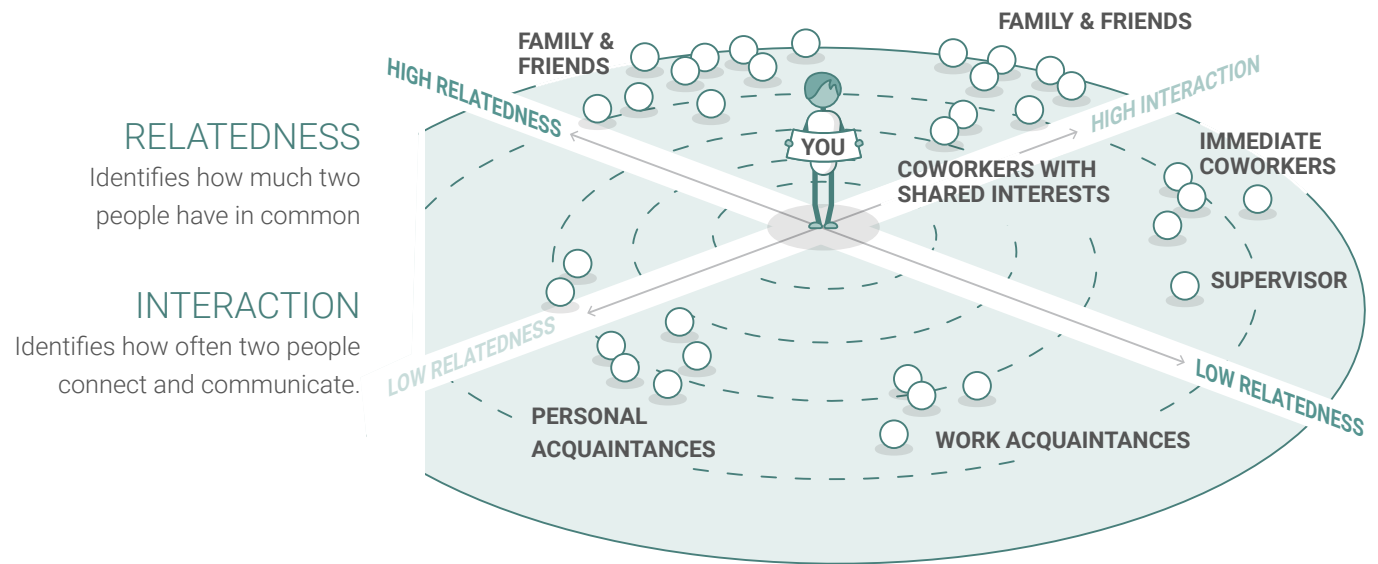
To recap, the Emotional Employee Experience concerns how our thoughts and feelings influence our perceptions of the company. Employees and leaders both participate in this element of EX because—no matter who you are—our emotions naturally influence how we behave at work.

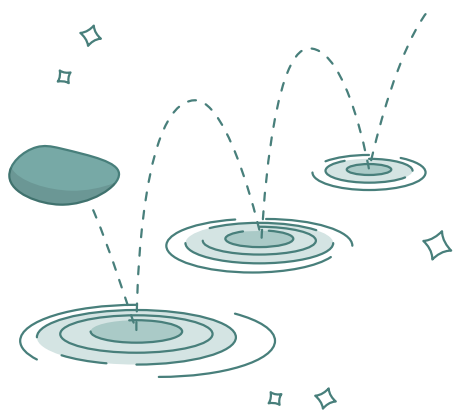
However, when we're not able to express those emotions and share them with one another, the company's emotional culture suffers. Perception gaps form that create stark misalignments in the priorities and expectations of employers and employees. Left unchecked, these perception gaps have an insidious effect on the company, undermining employee performance, destroying team morale, and making it markedly more difficult for the company to accomplish its goals.

Perception gaps create wedges in the connections between employer and employee. Embracing the Emotional Employee Experience means recognizing the significance of human interpersonal relationships—the connections between all of the people that make up an organization.

Relationships in the workplace are a byproduct of two primary factors: interaction, how often two people connect and communicate, and relatedness, or how much two people have in common. Relatedness cannot be discovered without some degree of interaction for obvious reasons; if two employees never interact, they never have the opportunity to learn about their common interests.

The de facto stance in many companies is that the most important workplace relationships employees can build are those between team members, their managers, and other colleagues in proximity to their department. Our view, however, is that every connection you can chart across the workplace relationship spectrum is important.





Let's use CEOs as an example. CEOs may never have close relationships, those high in interaction and relatedness, with their frontline employees. However, they do have immediate connections with the rest of the C-Suite and the managers who report to them. Following the shadow of a leader framework, the emotions and behaviors they communicate in interactions with those parties creates a template for what is and is not "acceptable" within the company.

While a CEO may never interact with a specific frontline worker, that emotional template still ripples all the way down to them. Whether the **five core emotions** at the heart of all high-performing organizations—Trust, Happiness, Altruism, Belonging, Achievement—are present in this template is, first, the choice of the C-Suite and the relationships they choose to maintain. Then, however, it becomes the choice of the leaders beneath them to preserve those emotional values in their relationships with peers and direct reports.

Beyond the leader's shadow are the various systems and processes in orbit of our work that contribute to the emotional culture, like internal communication strategy, employee feedback protocol, and rewards and recognition programs. These systems are divorced from the act of work itself, but nevertheless shape employees' identities within the workplace.

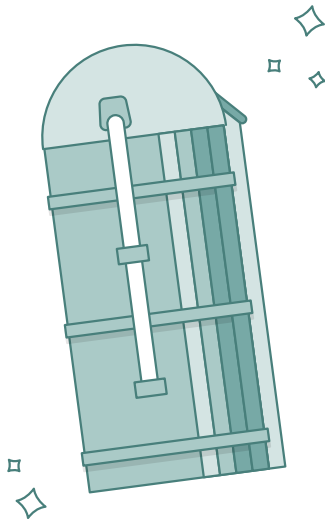
Many think of these systems only in terms of their procedural elements, but in fact they have a tremendous emotional impact on employees. The presence or absence of these systems that lie in orbit of our work signifies a company's investment in its people. The way they are structured and executed communicates the company's emotional values and how it builds relationships with its workforce. Below, we'll briefly explore what this means within the context of "orbital" systems like internal communications, employee feedback, and rewards and recognition.

Internal Communications

We've written a whole white paper about how internal communicators can overcome their **greatest challenges** to build strategies suited to the needs of employees, so we won't belabor the point too much here. But we'd like to take a moment to evoke **the words of Les Landes**, an engagement and communications expert and past **Around the Bonfyre interviewee**, as it relates to a common pitfall of enterprise communication practices:

"If it's not two-way, it's not communication—it's just message distribution."

Internal communication refers to all work communication that occurs internally within the company. It applies to not only employer-employee communication but also employee-employee. Silos present an enormous problem for the latter.



Employees become siloed when they only understand the requirements and responsibilities of their individual work, and not how it contributes to the full scope of a company's process. Silos directly stymie collaboration and innovation because they prevent employees from leveraging the full knowledge base of their colleagues to overcome bottlenecks.

Moreover, when silos prevent employees from communicating with colleagues and leaders outside their function, it limits the network of relationships in the company. With no way to access colleagues beyond their function, employees can't build trust or foster a sense of belonging throughout the organization. If they are to ever permeate the company, these two foundational emotions, in particular, require consistent contact between individuals from every function and position on the organizational chart, representing every potential communication dynamic top-down, side-to-side, bottom-up.

Internal comms strategies that break silos with cross-functional channels, like say a **digital hub for centralized company communication**, proactively enhance the Emotional Employee Experience. They empower employees to solve problems and build relationships with peers spanning different departments, companies, and even countries.



Employee Feedback

Earlier, we discussed how employees' institutional knowledge of the company's systems and processes has the power to completely transform the Procedural Employee Experience. Without an employee feedback system in place to collect that knowledge, it's impossible for leaders to understand the necessary changes the company needs to make on a systemic level.

But more than that, employee feedback systems matter just as much for the Emotional Employee Experience. In Chapter 2, we likened the holistic Employee Experience

to the company's relationship with its employees. In this section, we went deeper and discussed how strong relationships between employer and employee create perceptual and emotional alignment between both parties in the company.

Relationships are at the very core of the Employee Experience. And what's the one thing that keeps relationships strong and healthy? Communication. More specifically as it relates to the Emotional Employee Experience, communication and feedback from employees.

You might be wondering how communication from employee feedback systems differs from that coming from an internal communication program. Here's how we think of it. Employee-centric communication empowers employees to speak up. Employee-centric feedback systems have the power to make them **feel heard**.

Employees want to feel like partners in their relationship with the company.

When they communicate to the upper ranks of the organizational chart, they want to feel like they're being listened to, that their ideas have merit and are worth implementing. It's an essential component contributing to their happiness at work. Notably, 75% of employees would stay longer at an organization that addresses their feedback and listens.

According to Deloitte's 2017 Human Capital Trends Report, 79% of companies today survey employees annually or less often, and 14% never survey employees at all. Annual surveys are often long, and capture important data regarding the company's progress on issues like engagement, job satisfaction, morale, and more.

These surveys are undeniably important, but there's just one problem: they occur far too infrequently to capture the most relevant information about employees' experiences.

Think bigger than the classic employee suggestion ballot boxes. Employee feedback can become much more convenient and accessible to your workforce. New survey platforms make it easy to check the pulse on employees' most pressing issues on a quarterly, monthly, and weekly basis. Digital social channels enable employees to speak up the second they experience pain points with their work. Leverage both, frequently, for an employee-centric feedback practice.



Employee Recognition

Employee recognition systems are vital to a company's ability to motivate employees and drive desired changes in their behaviors. But critically, recognition is also a strong relationship-building measure. It is bar none the best means of making employees feel a sense of achievement and pride in their work.

Our desire to feel achievement and accomplishment in our pursuits, both personal and professional, is universal. Recognition is the act that accesses this emotion most directly. Within the context of the company, recognition is an emotional acknowledgement of the importance of an employee—their role, their contributions, and their organizational identity. It is the company displaying for all to see that an employee and the work they do matters.

There are two core categories of employee recognition: micro-recognition and macro-recognition.

Macro-recognition is what typically comes to mind when you think of recognition systems. They're the big awards companies give out at monthly, quarterly, and annual intervals that recognize things like service, tenure, and noteworthy performance outcomes.

The primary pitfall of macro-recognition, however, is that it almost exclusively comes from a top-down dynamic, with the company recognizing employees or leaders recognizing direct reports. Employees can tangentially contribute to macro-recognition through practices like nominating peers, but they seldom take on the role of the recognizer.

That's where micro-recognition comes in. Micro-recognition involves informal gestures of praise that celebrate and positively-reinforce noteworthy behaviors as they happen. Anyone can be the recognizer in micro-recognition—employees, managers, leaders. It's social, agile, flexible, and it enables employees to uplift and motivate their colleagues and teams as they accomplish their goals.

Both types of recognition are important, and the more you promote micro-recognition, the easier it is to expand recognition's scope beyond noteworthy business outcomes.

Recognition-rich organizations that center Employee Experiences in their practice understand that only recognizing outcomes isn't enough. You have to also recognize the noteworthy performance "inputs" that lead to those outcomes. As a catalyst for driving change behaviors and positive reinforcement, recognition must be salient to be impactful. The closer employee recognition is to the noteworthy behavior being recognized, the bigger its emotional impact. Use macro-recognition to celebrate your important wins, but make sure you (and your employees) use micro-recognition to acknowledge the behaviors that created them.

A company's orbital systems like the ones we've discussed above all play a powerful role in how employees make sense of their organizational citizenship. But embracing and maintaining the health of Emotional Employee Experience is a shared responsibility.

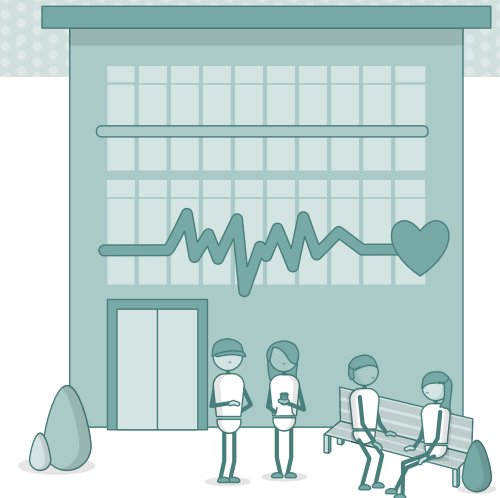
Leaders are responsible for providing these systems, and moreover, creating the opportunity for employees to emotionally connect with colleagues, higher-ups, and the company as a whole. Employees, in turn, are responsible for recognizing those opportunities and seizing them to enhance the company's emotional culture.

But, above all else, both parties have a responsibility to make good faith efforts at building relationships with one another.

Human relationships are what lie at the heart of every highly-engaged culture. They're what differentiates great Emotional Employee Experiences from bad ones.

These connections are what help employees emotionally align themselves with the company and its goals. They're what help employees process negative emotions brought on by their work experience, and what ultimately empowers them to work with others (and the systems available to them) to improve it.

Without strong human relationships throughout the entire company, it is impossible to have a great Emotional Employee Experience.



Chapter 6

Prepare for the Employee Experience

Let's take a step back to recap all we've learned here.

Great Employee Experiences beget great customer experiences. When employees are satisfied and engaged by their roles, they go above and beyond to deliver great experiences to prospects, clients, and their peers that foster positive, long-lasting relationships with the company.

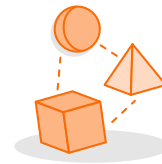
Employee Experience, formally, is a representation of a company's relationship with its employees.

The way an organization designs the core experiences employees have within its walls communicates how it prioritizes and values its human workforce. This is important because all manner of research and conventional wisdom tells us employees cannot engage in their roles when they have dysfunctional experiences in the workplace. If companies want engaged workforces, they have to deliver excellent Employee Experiences across three primary domains:



Procedural Employee Experience

The experience of the act of work itself and the systems, processes, and procedures employees participate in every day.



Textural Employee Experience

The structure and design of the many “places of work” in a company, including physical workspaces, the technology we use to accomplish our goals, and the organization’s cultural environment.



Emotional Employee Experience

The feelings and perceptions that influence the way employees, both as individuals and as a collective, understand and navigate their work environment.

By embracing employee-centric organizational design, companies can bring each of these three domains into synergy and produce Employee Experiences that holistically engage the entire workforce’s mind, body, and soul.

So what's next?

As we bring this resource to a close, we leave you with a few parting sentiments.

Find an EX framework that works for you. We are certainly not the first to offer up a definition and framework for Employee Experience. We will not be the last either. Ours is but one path for quantifying and operationalizing EX within your organization. Whether this is the appropriate mold for your organization is ultimately your decision—and it's not a decision you have to make today. As time passes, you'll see more EX definitions and frameworks popping up from authoritative sources. If you want additional insight, we encourage you to read up on as many as you can until you find something that works for you, your organization, and most importantly, your employees.

Build a cross-functional team to manage it. Bringing the three EX domains together to create a synergistic and harmonious

Employee Experience requires a true team effort. Although Human Resources is traditionally burdened with the labor of “soft” people management concepts like engagement and culture, EX is not an area this department can solely own.

In a 2019 webinar titled *The Employee Experience Platform: A Groundbreaking Solution Arrives*, global HR marketplace analyst Josh Bersin cites survey data stating 87% of professionals believe ownership of Employee Experience must be a shared partnership between HR, business leaders, and IT. We'll even go so far as to say you need key employee voices and representatives taking on their fair share of ownership of the EX domains too. Regardless of the specific make-up of your cross-functional EX team, picking those with the most passion, impact, and influence will set you up for success.

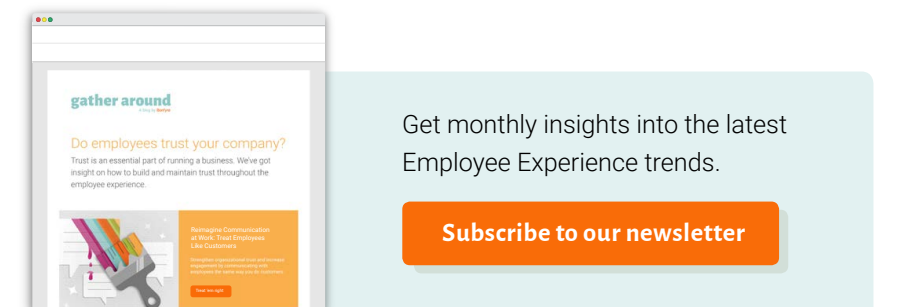
Stay involved in the conversation.

Employee Experience conversation is evolving rapidly. Like the evolution of employee engagement before it,

it's going to take a while before the dust settles and there is a collective, cross-industry understanding of what EX looks like. In the meantime, don't let it change too much while your back is turned. Stay a part of the conversation, instead. Follow thought leaders like:

- **Josh Bersin**, HR Analyst
- **Tracy Maylett**, Co-author of *The Employee Experience*
- **Jacob Morgan**, Author of *The Employee Experience Advantage*
- **Denise Lee Yohn**, Leadership consultant and EX thought leader
- **Gethin Nadin**, Author of *A World of Good*

Employee Experience has no bounds. An employee's experiences do not stay confined to a single work environment. Employee Experience does not “stop” at the end of a work shift, or even when an employee leaves the company. The memories, thoughts, and feelings employees have towards their experiences follows them home and lives with them long after. The sum of these experiences informs employees' mood when they show up for work, how they interact with customers, and how they speak of the company long after they've left. In many ways, an organization's Employee Experience is every bit as important to a company's legacy as the actions its founding leaders take shaping it.



When all is said and done,
what experiences do
you want your employees to have?

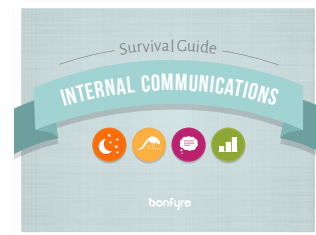
Want to learn more about why
Employee Experience matters? Check
out [Employee Experience, Explained](#)

[Download ebook](#)



For communications advice that
leads to better Employee Experiences,
grab our [Internal Communications
Survival Guide](#)

[Get the guide](#)



Contributors

At Bonfyre, we value cross-team collaboration on projects. This resource is no exception. Learn more about the contributing team who helped write, design, and produce it.

But wait, there's more! Here's what they say is the most important part of the Employee Experience to them.



Matthew Stolpe

Project Lead, Writer, Editor

"For me, trust is the most fundamental element of the employee experience. If the company doesn't trust its employees, and vice versa, it's hard to envision anything getting done."



Erin Muzughi

Project Manager, Web Manager

"Collaboration and mutual contribution. I am happiest when I'm on a team of motivated individuals who solve problems together and strive to accomplish our shared goals."



Lisa Weber

Designer, Illustrator

"It's all about balance for me. My positive experience centers around finding the balance between doing inspiring work while also feeling like I am part of a strong community."



Emma Randolph

Illustrator

"Connecting employees to the value of their work. Seeing the impact of my work drives the passion for what I do."

Employee experience matters. Bonfyre can help.

Bonfyre is a mobile-first and desktop-friendly employee experience platform built to reach every employee regardless of location, role, or language. Dedicated digital communities foster conversations between coworkers, leaders, and the company, giving each employee a voice, and more importantly, a deeper connection to their daily work lives. Bonfyre metrics give leaders the key insights and data needed to understand the conversations and trends happening throughout their organization.



Employee Communications



Surveys and Feedback



Recognition and Praise



Internal Meetings and Events



Insights and Reporting

Ready to keep your entire workforce engaged
and informed while combating turnover?
We're here to help.

Email us at sales@bonfyreapp.com

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