

Use Employee Personas To Design Employee Experience For A Hybrid Workforce

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Employee personas -- models that represent different groups of employees -- are useful tools for ... [+]
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Companies that adopt a hybrid workforce model need to rethink their employee experience (EX). In this new reality, work is no longer a place; it's an activity. An office is no longer a given; it's an optional offering. And a company no longer has a single EX; it has thousands of them. So, business leaders now need to design and manage new EX in new ways, drawing upon tools such as employee personas.

What Are Employee Personas & Why Are They Useful Now

Employee personas are models that represent different groups of employees. Like customer personas, they synthesize data and insights from multiple data sources and incorporate multiple variables to create rich profiles of segments of people that describe their needs, values, behaviors, etc.

Using employee personas makes more sense now than ever before, because in many ways, employees have become customers of work. People have adopted a consumer mindset to their jobs, using sites such as LinkedIn and Glassdoor to decide where to work the way they might decide where to go to dinner. Plus, the pandemic, economic slowdown, and the social tensions that have risen in the last year have impacted people in vastly different ways. So, different employees in a single workforce have vastly different needs—and employers must understand and address those differences. A customer approach to EX can direct appropriate responses to these changes and anticipate new ones that are likely to arise in the future.

Companies should design and manage EX with the approaches used for customer experience (CX). Tools such as segmentation, journey mapping, and lifetime value modeling facilitate the development of EX that is more attractive and relevant to employees. Employee personas in particular contribute to more personal and valuable EX. They transform the abstract concept of an employee into a relatable, identifiable person with specific needs and expectations. This is especially helpful now because people are working in entirely new situations and companies are having to overcome unprecedented change.

Employee personas are an effective EX design tool because they enable companies to:

1. **Value differences.** Beyond simply acknowledging and identifying that different people require different designs, employee personas cultivate appreciation for those differences by translating vague assumptions and broad generalizations into specific, actionable insights into how to engage, equip, and empower people.
2. **Understand intangibles.** Employee personas go beyond the basic information about employees that might be used in a typical segmentation (age, level of position, job title or function, or years of experience) and include insights such as people's motivation for work in general and for working at the company specifically, their extro- and introversion, their preferred styles of communication and learning, how they spend their time working (current and desired), and more. This depth and dimension can reveal unstated or even unknown needs and expectations that managers should address.
3. **Design with empathy.** By personalizing employees and describing a specific person—instead of a generic notion—to design for, employee personas facilitate true understanding and therefore better EX design.

How Have Companies Used Employee Personas

Some organizations have already been using basic employee personas to understand and design for employees. IBM, for example, created three main personas—the “IBMer”, the “Manager”, and the “Upline” or “Executive leader”—and then identified the critical moments of truth that defined the employee experience and created the most value for each. Starbucks came up with three employee segments and named them “Careerists” (those

looking for long term career advancement with the company), “Artistes” (those wanting a community-oriented and socially responsible employer), and “Skiers” (those working mainly to support other passions such as skiing. This enabled Starbucks to be more targeted with its employee engagement and provide more choices to meet employee needs.

More advanced approaches have been developed in recent years. To facilitate digital transformation at Deutsche Telekom, the company created 22 personas that explained differences in characteristics, values, working styles, collaboration behaviors, digital mindsets, and future orientation within its workforce. Then leaders and teams used the personas to inform the design of IT products and services, define requirements for future working spaces, and create specific measures by target group for change management.

One company that uses employee personas in a way that most directly applies to the new work world today is Cisco. To guide a complete redesign of its workspaces, the company identified five employee personas:

- Highly mobile: salespeople, account managers, systems engineers
- Campus mobile: business development managers, executives, manufacturing, and logistics
- Remote/distance collaborator: Analysts, customer service and support, HR, legal, marketing, training, program and product managers
- Neighborhood collaborator: engineers, finance staff, many managers
- Workstation anchored: administrative staff, software and network engineers

By studying how each persona spent the work day, Cisco was able to create different types of spaces to meet different employee needs, such as concentrating, collaborating, learning, or socializing.

How Should Employers Use Employee Personas To Design Hybrid Work

Today, employers need to adopt a similar approach to EX to identify differences in work environment and collaboration needs—as well as access to resources, desire for inclusion *and* privacy, technological competence, mental and emotional well-being, and more. They should then identify discrete groupings of employees; determine the size and importance of each; and, for each, profile a prototype person including a name and picture(s) along with detailed insights about what they want and need in this new world of work. These personas should be used to develop completely new EX designs that bridge the gaps caused by a hybrid workforce, leverage the flexibility that hybrid offers, and ensure all employees are engaged appropriately.

Employee personas enable companies to understand employees not as “talent,” “human capital,” or “headcount”—but as humans who want and need to be engaged meaningfully if they are to perform their jobs well and contribute to the organization’s success in this new hybrid work world.

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