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Bridging Personal and Workplace Innovation for a Modern Workforce

The Innovation Gap: Bridging Personal and Workplace Innovation for a 2020 Workforce

There is a giant gap between the workers' digital experiences during their personal time and when they are working from 9 to 5. Our personal lives are incredibly modern. We have smart homes and smart TVs. We can start our cars in the airport parking lot as soon as our plane hits the tarmac. We can talk to the person delivering a package to our front door from our phone.

Our expectations are being set by the Amazons and the Ubers of the world, which is why it's discouraging when the digital tools we use for work are slow, unintuitive, or outright unhelpful. Flashy workplaces filled with ping pong tables and beer fridges are less important to today's employees who now realize they were intentionally-crafted distractions rather than positive influences on employee experience (EX).

What Makes Customers Happy?

One of the greatest misconceptions held by modern companies is around what exactly makes employees happy. According to Forrester Principal Analyst David K. Johnson, "There's plenty of research that proves that happy employees are more productive, but Drs. Teresa Amabile and Steven J. Kramer made an important discovery in 2010 that turns conventional wisdom about where happiness at work comes from, upside down. The most powerful source of happiness at work isn't money, free food or recognition, but rather getting things done; making progress every day toward work that we know is important."[1]

The most important factor for employee experience is for workers to feel productive, and technology is a critical component of this equation. Sander de Brujin, Head of Global Employee Experience at ING Group says that ING's focus is helping people stay ahead in life and in business. He said, "People expect intuitive, flawless experiences. That's true of our customers and our employees." At the end of the day, creating a modern employee experience needs to make communication and collaboration more of a consumer-like experience for employees.

It's also important to remember that EX is an ongoing evolutionary path. ING Group Product Owner Joris Kok shared that digital EX is not something you buy. It's not simply a product; it's a strategic transformation of the business that will change how employees do their jobs better, faster and easier. ING took an EX Journey approach and found that it boosted employees' sense of enablement and empowerment, leading to engaged teams that produce better, are more efficient and are ultimately more profitable.

[1] Johnson, David. "Why High Performance People Need High Performance Technology." Forrester, April 2, 2016, https://go.forrester.com/blogs/16-04-02-why_high_performance_people_need_high_performance_technology/

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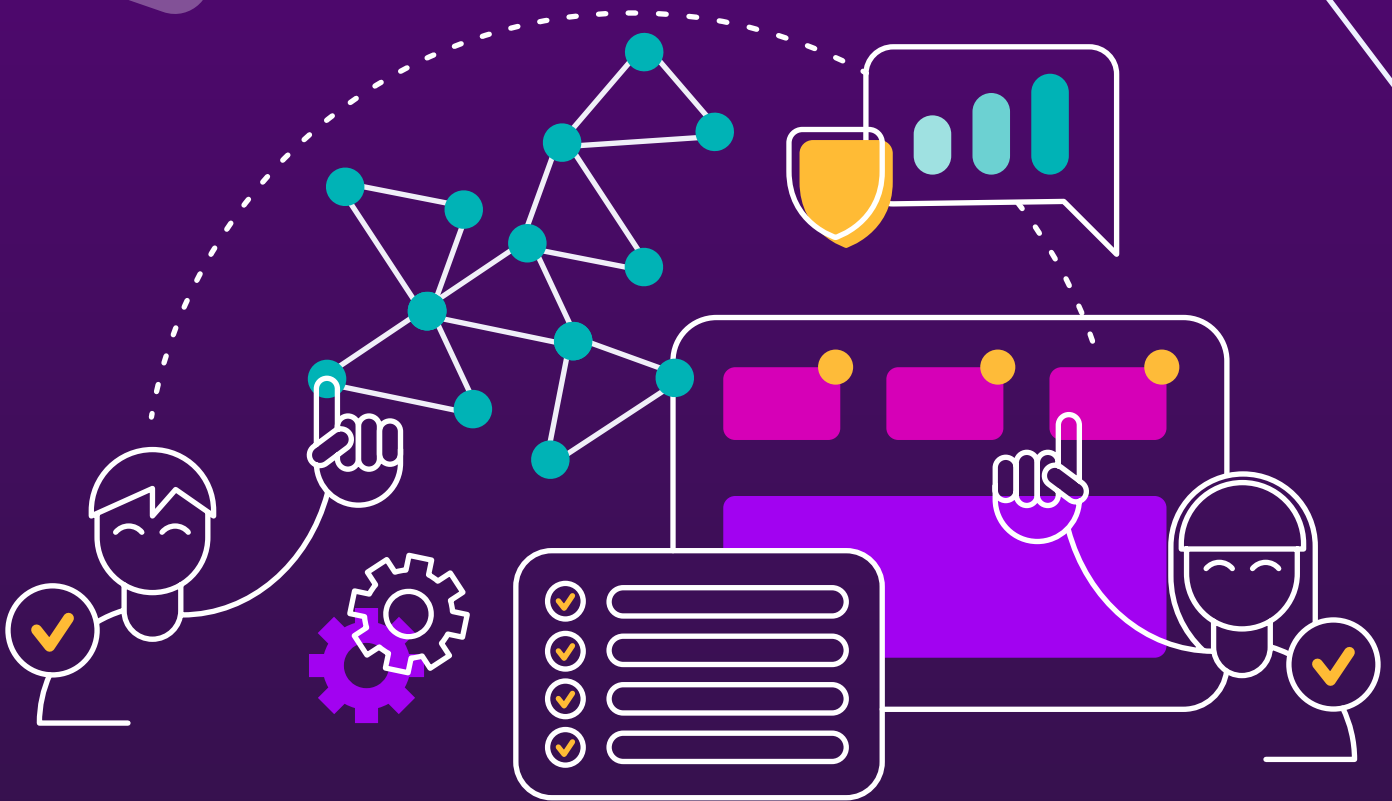
The Many Faces of Flexible Work

Principal Financial took a similar EX Journey that had a clear mission statement: "Our Digital Workplace will help us unleash our potential by connecting people, information, and ideas to develop solutions." Digital workplace discussions typically center around tools and technology, but it's equally as important to focus on creating a connection between employees, information, and ideas.

Principal Financial has worked hard to build a culture where employees work like they live. At their Des Moines, Iowa campus, seventy-five percent of the organization's employees are deskless. Principal Financial Enterprise Architect Keith Kratochvil says, "To accommodate that majority population, we were careful in building both our digital and physical workspaces. We shifted to more flexible hours and began allowing employees to work remotely. We also we built shared workspaces and 450 Skype-enabled rooms that employees have logged more than 1.5 million Skype hours from in the past 12 months."

Organizations must understand that flexible work environments are not one-size-fits all. Flexible work is all about allowing your employees to work in the way that works for them. Work-life balance is something that must be self-regulated, while at the same time supported by the company. This is the key to truly fostering innovation and productivity from your employees. Nothing will make your employees more productive than if they have access to all the information they need in one place and are empowered to do their jobs in a way that makes sense for them personally.

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## You Don't Need Just One Employee Experience – You Need Thousands

EX strategies must always have the employee at the center. Businesses must empower their employees with tech, business processes, and other support they need to be successful. Too often, businesses' EX strategies are easy to manage and implement for their internal teams but don't fit into employee workflows. Businesses should create personalized experiences for every employee – from maintenance to the C-Suite – to optimize the performance of their staff.

This is where it's important to consider "employee verticals." The concept of verticals is one most of us understand. For business, a vertical is a market niche like retail or financial services. Sales and marketing use the concept of verticals all the time to make sure the right messages getting to the right potential customer in the right roles. In the employee experience world, the goal is to make sure the right messages are getting to the right employees. That's where employee verticals come in.

Organizations must create experiences that cater to the different roles and personas that exist in an organization under the guise of giving every employee in their entire workforce a chance to work smarter, not harder. This will allow employees to communicate and collaborate across the enterprise - in essence - giving a voice to these workers that they traditionally have never had.

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Here are some examples of employee verticals and how their employee experience platform (EXP) needs differ.
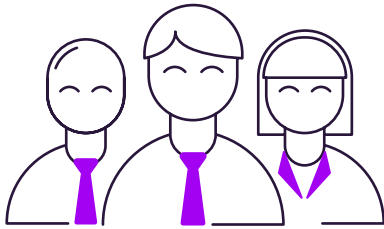
THE "LEADERSHIP TEAM"

Consider the C-suite executive. In between managing a budget, meeting with stakeholders, and running an entire department, members of the leadership team also need to connect with their workforce. Corporate communications are crucial in the day and age where millennial employees crave facetime with their CEOs, and employee engagement hinges on each member of the team understanding the impact their work has on the organization. Implementing an EXP allows the C-suite team to deliver personalized, targeted communications to each and every person on the payroll with minimal effort.
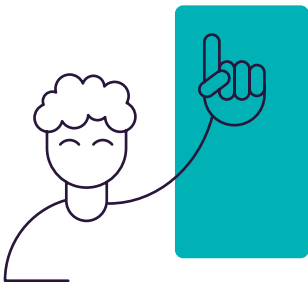
THE "DESKLESS WORKER"

Deskless workers are often the lifeforce of an organization. But traditionally, those without desks were also without technology. Those days are over. Using an EXP with native mobility allows deskless workers to remain connected and engaged with their work, and with the company overall. Whole Foods employees stocking shelves can receive push notifications from management when they're needed at the register; associates on the sales floor can access back room inventory data while standing in front of a customer looking to make a purchase; gameday employees at Fenway Park can search a database of Red Sox facts to answer fan questions. The deskless worker is now integrated and unified with the larger company.

THE "KNOWLEDGE WORKER"

The traditional knowledge worker is the employee who most likely interacts with technology the most. This person uses numerous tools and collaborates online with a broad network. For this particular employee, an EXP provides access to multiple applications within a single umbrella application (we call this the single-pane-of-glass experience.) The end result is one login and one user interface with the ability to leverage the functionality of any number of integrations like payroll tools, project management applications, and content management systems. It's an integrated, efficient, and engaging experience.

THE "IT ORGANIZATION"
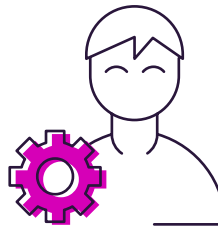
When you think about your IT team, what should come to mind is a highly- skilled group of people dedicated to supporting your technology in ways that others can't. If your IT team is regularly resetting passwords and answering support tickets, they're not being used to their full potential. With an effective EXP, your IT reps can install it once, and turn it over to each line of business to manage on their own. An easy install, a set of APIs that simply hook into your integrated systems, and a decoupled open architecture frees up IT to work on more advanced projects.

The key to delivering a modern workplace transformation is to understand each type of employee and deliver an experience that meets their needs.

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The Epictetus Digital Workplace Implementation Strategy

A popular quote from the philosopher Epictetus says, "We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak." This concept should be applied to digital workplace strategies.

Too often, enterprises implement new digital workplace technology solutions or policies aimed at improving employee experience, engagement, or productivity without actually speaking to their employees. Many of these initiatives fail to gain significant buy-in because they aren't rooted in a true need that is defined by the workforce. Millions of dollars have been wasted because of managements' assumptions or ambitions. The best way to ensure that digital workplace initiatives find their mark is the simplest: ask the people the tools are aimed to help.

The most successful focus groups typically utilize a broad survey that goes out to the entire workforce and then smaller focus groups from individual departments to discuss and confirm the trends that emerged from the survey. Employees will provide valuable insights into how the current tech can be used and repurposed, and where the employee experience can be improved.

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Banner Health polled its employees on the performance of its current intranet platform and were surprisedat the results:

▶ **59%** of employees had trouble finding information they need

▶ **64%** said that search didn't yield helpful results

▶ **63%** of employees believed content on the intranet was not current and relevant

▶ **61%** said they wanted access to the intranet outside of the work VPN

▶ **55%** wanted access to the Banner intranet from their mobile device

These findings were critical in helping Banner Health's digital workplace team create the blueprint for its EX strategy. The company would create a central digital hub that would require a single log-in to access key business apps, enable employees to securely work remotely, make information accessible to nurses and doctors on mobile devices, and design a digital experience consistent with popular consumer apps from top-tier companies like LinkedIn, Apple, and Amazon.

The technology experiences that employees have in their personal lives has shifted the needs of the modern enterprise. The key to updating digital workplace initiatives is to understand that it is a constantly iterative process. Feedback should be continually aggregated and acted upon to ensure a business has aligned its digital toolset with its workers' needs.

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Conclusion

Innovations in consumer technology will only accelerate. Now is the time to close the gap between personal and workplace innovation, before the gap widens even more. The happiest employees are those that are engaged, productive and have all the resources they need to do the work they feel is important. Once organizations understand that EX is a journey, they can fully embrace that mindset and take the first steps of many.

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About Akumina

Akumina is the employee experience platform that empowers global enterprises to quickly create personalized digital experiences that help every employee in every role work smarter, not harder. By offering a customizable, brandable and multilingual platform that seamlessly integrates with leading enterprise cloud applications, Akumina delivers a contextual, collaborative and engaging workplace experience to every user on any device. Akumina's customers include Whole Foods Market, GlaxoSmithKline, Vodafone, the Boston Red Sox and the United States Department of Defense. To learn more visit www.akumina.com and follow us on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter.

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