

Employee Experience in the Age of the Everywhere Workplace: Why IT Needs to Lead the Charge

It was an abrupt and, in many cases, overnight shift. Worldwide, companies sent millions of employees home as COVID-19 closures rolled out — and IT teams rushed to find immediate solutions to ensure organizations stayed productive.

Two years later remote work has only increased, as IT teams find new ways to power every employee experience, no matter where, when and how business happens. Software, devices and networks ensure critical connections stay intact and that employees can continue getting work done successfully, while modern apps and integrations have made video conferencing and global collaboration everyday happenings — again, all thanks to IT.

With these more profound and more public initiatives, IT also gained greater visibility among both employees and C-suite leadership. This was a significant differentiator during these last two years and brought about a more dynamic climate for IT teams to evolve their core functions and step into a more strategic, business-building role.

Early-stage shifts to remote work, though, were just the beginning of IT's recent evolution. Now, as companies grapple with the impact of the "[Great Reassessment](#)" and "[Great Resignation](#)," there's a new mandate: [rethink the employee experience](#) through high-value, high-tech touchpoints. In other words, build out dynamic digital employee experiences that support this real-time demand [for greater employee autonomy, including radical flexibility](#).

And architecting this modern landscape lands squarely in IT's court. Move over, HR — or, at the very least, make some serious room at the table for your IT partners. Because more than ever, IT is leading the employee experience charge.

Think about it.

IT is responsible for coordinating and optimizing rich, seamless "everywhere" workplaces that empower employees.

IT determines and rolls out the platforms, apps and experiences that keep workers connected, whether they're in the conference room or a local coffee shop.

IT builds the robust foundations that virtually every employee experience builds off — knowing that the gap between employee success widens without highly-optimized, always-on and universally-intuitive tech.

Building the foundation for a positive, productive workplace environment now ladders directly to IT. IT is the critical owner of the modern employee experience, and these strategic responsibilities are only going to increase and accelerate — and IT leaders must seize the opportunity.

This ebook unpacks the marketplace shifts and emerging trends driving the demand for improved employee experience, and the unique role IT now plays. By understanding the forces shifting our collective business environment and how technologies like AI and automation are increasingly playing a role in experience delivery, you'll be better equipped to champion your team through this ongoing evolution — and, with it, amplify IT's influence within your organization.

IT's evolving — and fast-growing — role in the new business landscape

While the initial shift to remote work created a tsunami of immediate IT demands and increased troubleshooting, the Everywhere Workplace is now the norm. Now, companies are ready for their next high-tech transformations, centering around employee experience.

However, this shift isn't as well-defined as traditional HR-driven employee experience initiatives. HR teams typically focus on well-defined cultural needs such as helping employees achieve better work/life balance, boosting recognition opportunities or cultivating a better sense of belonging and inclusion.

While no small task, these initiatives tend to come with specific goals and KPIs that can be gauged through surveys and online reviews, for example, or tied back to recruitment and retention data.

There's no well-defined roadmap to a successful digital employee experience, though, or even guardrails for what constitutes "good." That, though, shouldn't prevent you or your team from pushing ahead and identifying ways to improve employee experience and publicly tie your work to broader-reaching goals like employee satisfaction and retention.

Doing that starts by taking a step back and understanding high-level organizational needs and

priorities, as well as employee hurdles to success. With this information, IT teams can create conditions that support employee experience needs and organizational KPIs. For example:

- Is productivity lagging as more and more employees shift to remote or hybrid work?
- Has turnover increased, despite added flexibility?
- Have KPIs such as a time to market, sell-through rates or recruitment been impacted in recent months?

These are just a few potential high-level concerns. By digging into these organizational needs, you and your IT team will be well-positioned to create experience strategies and technology frameworks that solve some of your company's biggest challenges — and will be able to tie them back to what matters most.

Evaluating IT initiatives through the lens of employee experience

Again, the shift to IT as the central employee experience driver is relatively new. As a result, there's no go-to playbook that defines what a good digital employee experience looks like. However, there are several key characteristics that ensure IT initiatives support top-level needs and goals. With a shortlist of potential IT solutions and tools in place, it's important to evaluate them against these qualities — productivity, contextualization and security — before putting them in motion.

1

Productivity: Does this new initiative support, enhance or improve employee productivity?

Employees need to have the same level of productivity — and success — whether they're in the office or out. For example, suppose a remote employee can't access a file, connect with a colleague, route work for review or take another key next step. In that case, it's problematic — and it's not a positive employee experience for that individual and those internal and external stakeholders directly impacted by their stalled workflow.

Employees — whether they're in the office or out — expect a seamless workplace experience. They want to log on and have instant access to everything they need to keep their tasks moving forward. IT teams need to be prepared to support those needs, no matter the device, platform or location. Self-service options such as training videos, troubleshooting how-tos or even automated help via chatbots or virtual assistants facilitate greater productivity by ensuring employees have instant, 24/7 support, without the wait.

Omnichannel and asynchronous communication can also help support employee flexibility and experience. With “flexibility” encompassing not just where employees work but also when, asynchronous and cross-channel communication ensure all stakeholders can engage and move work forward on their preferred platform on their schedules. This supports the push for broader flexibility — and, with it, a better employee experience.

While this may sound like table stakes, many organizations aren't there yet. Seventy-two percent of employees say they can't find the information they need with their company's current systems. For many, even basic connectivity continues to be a problem.

2

Contextualization: Does this new initiative support omnichannel employee experiences and preferences?

Whether remote or not, your employees move between devices and platforms throughout the workday — 74% report using two or more, and 52% say they use at least three. Additionally, on average, employees interact with 11.5 systems regularly.

By enabling employees to move seamlessly between devices and platforms, individuals and teams can be more productive, no matter their immediate or preferred environments. For example, suppose that an employee creates a shared design file and routes it for review and feedback via an internal project management tool. In that case, they expect to be able to access that file, review feedback and continue sharing from their mobile device later — without lag, multiple profiles or having to start over.

Ensuring employees have this experience means identifying and integrating tools and applications that work seamlessly across multiple device types. Seventy-one percent of employees say they want “the same level of technology at work — simple, intuitive and easy — as they have in their personal lives.”

3

Security: Is this new initiative secure — for both the employee and the organization as a whole?

Though it may not be top-of-mind for employees, security is front-and-center for employers. Despite most having cybersecurity defense plans, the overwhelming majority of global organizations were hit with at least one cybersecurity incident in the past year. With increased supply chain vulnerabilities — and with that, a boom in cyberattacks and ransomware — companies are investing more in integrated risk management and interdisciplinary cyber capabilities to keep networks and sensitive data secure.

As your team assesses technologies and solutions, it's important to consider security. Mobile apps, cloud computing and the increase in bring-your-own-devices (BYOD) have expanded attack surfaces and, with that, the need for stronger access controls. Though important, these additional security measures can slow employees down, and create less-than-optimal experiences. A forgotten password or lack of access to specific files can curb productivity while IT resolves the issue.

That said, while these measures are important to consider, IT needs to strike a balance between security, productivity and convenience. Complicated authentication, faulty remote log-ins and lack of access to essential information, for example, are poor employee experiences that hinder productivity. Added security must be frictionless and easily work across devices, platforms and access points, ensuring 24/7 access to remote employees.

So...what does it take to provide the right digital experience for employees?

This new vision for IT is powerful. But, with teams stretched thin and the constant, ongoing need to continue supporting remote and hybrid workplaces, leading the employee experience charge can seem like a tall order.

And it is. This shift also puts a big, bright spotlight on IT teams and their ability to strategize, execute and support constantly evolving organizational and employee experience demands

That said, this powerful vision is extremely achievable, and it starts by integrating the right tools — specifically, AI and intelligent automation. Not only can AI and automation take pressure off tapped-out IT teams, but the right automated workflows can create better employee experiences — smoother interactions, greater self-service and faster incident resolution, for starters.

While 67% of decision-makers say they've [accelerated plans or increased automated IT service offerings](#) adoption because of the pandemic, if your team or company is new to AI and automation, there are plenty of ways to start small or build on your existing foundation. Some examples:

- Move from a manual incident resolution process to automation-augmented service management, especially for lower-value manual tasks with high ticket volume. By automating common, lower-value IT service desk requests — browser optimization or password resets, for example — IT teams can ensure more proactive resolutions and simplified service delivery.

To get started, analyze data from the incident and request management system and see what truly requires human intervention and what could be automated.

With an automated system in place, employees can initiate service requests, and those requests can be fulfilled immediately via automation rather than waiting for the service desk.

- Integrate intelligent chatbots or virtual IT assistants to help employees self-serve, and/or to help IT analysts speed incident resolution.

Often employees don't know exactly what service or support they need — but they know they need IT. This AI-powered virtual support agent points users to potential solutions to their issues based on keywords or common help phrases — then can point employees to a video walk-through or simple steps to troubleshoot. This not only curbs an employee's downtime and helps them get back to work faster, but it eliminates the need for first-line support engagement

of a service desk analyst. The more comfortable employees become with self-service options like this, the more it can also reduce their reliance on analysts' time and efforts, driving cost savings.

- Implement self-healing and self-securing automation to proactively monitor and resolve incidents. For example, a bot could detect a low-performing browser and make updates in the background while the employee works, with no human interaction required.
- Apply intelligent routing for support requests via multiple channels. These processes leverage AI to direct employee requests to the right service agent, IT support or self-service portal, no manual review required. This minimizes the number of steps and IT resources involved, speeding time to resolution.

These initiatives can significantly impact both your IT teams and outside employees without overhauling existing IT infrastructure or reimagining employee workflows — and drive meaningful, measurable results. Fifty-five percent of IT teams say they save one to eight hours per service request due to this increased automation. Twelve percent say they save one to two days per request.

With AI and automation in place, the next step is to connect your work to organization KPIs. By spending upfront time understanding organizational goals, it's easy to tie these smart deployments to KPIs, better quantifying their value beyond IT.

Armed with these data-driven connections, the next step is to evangelize every win. Too often, C-level decision-makers and other critical stakeholders are unaware of the impact IT initiatives have on the overarching organization—85% of CEOs, for example, say their company accelerated digital initiatives during the pandemic. However, the majority can't explain their strategy or progress — they just know an IT investment was made.

By touting not just the new initiatives but, with that, their direct impact on KPIs — retention, recruitment and productivity, for example, as well as bottom-line impact — your team and your work will gain greater traction, consideration and organizational support.

That's key, considering remote work, hybrid workplaces and the employee experience mandates continue to evolve — and aren't going anywhere soon. This opens a tremendous opportunity for IT to step in, step up and architect game-changing digital employee experiences. In doing so, IT leaders and teams can ideate and build out dynamic workplaces that support the right-now needs of employees, while architecting a framework for what comes next — environments that elevate the digital employee experience and shine a bright light on IT leaders and teams orchestrating these high-value experiences.

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