Meet the Boss

EMPOWERING EMPLOYEES: BUILDING THE DIGITAL EXPERIENCE OF THE FUTURE

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A Meet the Boss ebook, in partnership with Workgrid

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"Every employee
has potential,
passion and
purpose"

Frank Pathyil, Workgrid

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INTRODUCTION

The work environment has undergone a major facelift in recent years, with the way we communicate, the way we work and where we work from all seeing dramatic shifts. These paradigm changes are putting extra pressure on organizations to meet the growing demands of its staff, who want an end-to-end work experience that's seamless, intuitive and mirrors the way they run their personal lives. Technology is, of course, being called upon to bear the biggest part of the workload with these changes – but the results so far have been mixed. As different departments have embarked upon their own independent overhaul of solutions and processes, with systems selected based on specific department or line of business priorities, it's led to disconnected workflows and requirements that don't take employee needs into consideration. As a result, employees often feel overloaded with competing technologies, which creates a negative workplace experience. Employee engagement and retention rates are being affected, productivity is suffering and even revenue is being impacted – all despite the well-intentioned quest to improve the employee experience.

So, what's holding businesses back?

How do you create a digital workplace strategy that puts employees at the center and allows for a seamless and modern experience? And how do you empower them to focus on the meaningful work that's the cornerstone of a truly engaging employee experience? We invited 18 IT and HR leaders to talk about these very issues.

2.5x

Companies with engaged employees pull in 2.5x more revenue

87%

Highly engaged employees are 87% less likely to leave their companies

5%

5% of companies have strong digital experience programs in place

CORPORATE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL AND DELOITTE HUMAN CAPITAL TRENDS

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CHAPTER 1

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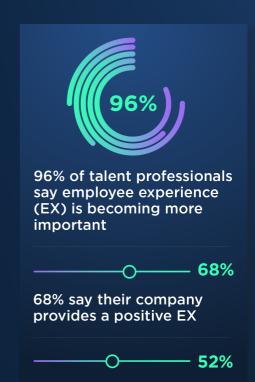
IDENTIFYING THE BARRIERS

Overcoming the challenges in developing an effective employee experience strategy.

The road to an effective employee experience strategy is filled with obstacles: from digital disruption and culture to determining whose responsibility it is to take ownership.

While every organization faces its own unique obstacles, conversations with a group of senior IT and HR executives from a wide variety of companies highlighted some common barriers to delivering an employee experience fit for the digital age.

Silos

One of the key complications to establishing an enterprise-wide employee experience strategy is a lack of cross-departmental collaboration, asserts Penny Outlaw, Chief HR Officer at Partners in Health. "There are silos,

96%

96% of talent professionals say employee experience (EX) is becoming more important

68%

68% say their company provides a positive EX

52%

Only 52% say EX at their company has improved over the last 5 years

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Companies rated highly on 'open and effective management' saw 143% higher headcount growth

143%

LINKEDIN GLOBAL TALENT TRENDS, 2020

and there are some people that only talk to certain other people because of how that work streams through the business," she says.

This kind of unintentional segmentation can often cause friction in rolling out a company-wide employee experience strategy. The result is low usage rates for new software and frustration when employees are forced to to navigate a complex web of both legacy and newer platforms.

Putting the employee at the center of transformation efforts is vital to cutting across these functional silos, says Femmie Schippers, VP for HR Systems at Schneider Digital. "Sometimes we've taken the employee for granted, and that's a mistake because it's something that we never do with our customers," she explains. "We're focusing more on employees now, but that's a mindset shift that requires change across the business. We still have a lot of thinking to do across multiple functions: it touches HR as well as finance and a lot of different areas. It's important that all departments exchange, communicate and share learnings so we don't make the same mistakes."

Complex technology landscape

Simplifying the complexity of the technological landscape is high on executives' agendas – including Len van Greuning, VP and Technology Officer at John Hancock Financial Services.

"Organizations tend to have a wide array of diverse and antiquated technologies, and that creates challenges with some of the integrations" he suggests. "In some

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cases, that means they're really missing the basics, which makes its difficult for employees to be productive."

Frank Pathyil, Director of Strategy and Partnerships at Workgrid, agrees and highlights another problem that adds additional complications when streamlining the digital workplace – the notion of bring your own device (BYOD).

"We're in an age now where we can bring our own technology to work. Unfortunately, that means that we can bring our own technology to work – even when we're not allowed to."

Organizations are challenged to support BYOD, as well as the particular preferences of different departments, which often leads to many overlapping tools. "We considered Slack, WhatsApp and all the different, more casual communications platforms" says Outlaw. "Some organizations want employees to communicate via certain channels, while for others it's not so important. For us, we consolidate all our products under Microsoft, which drives our communication channel of choice."

35%

35% employees across the world admit the tech in their home is more cutting-edge than what they have at work

DELL FUTURE WORKFORCE STUDY

Such a scenario highlights exactly how the growing issue of application sprawl happens.
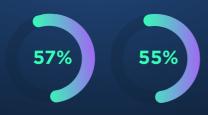
"It's a situation that very rapidly gets out of hand," Pathyil explains. "Organizations are already adding their own apps to the environment, then on top of that vendors are bundling different apps in with their offerings, you might inherit systems through mergers and acquisitions, and before you know it, there are all sorts of duplicate applications that all do the same thing. You eventually lose track of what you have and then you have

to start adding systems just to manage systems. It all adds up to a very complicated digital environment."

So what does it all mean? "First of all, it's important to remember that none of these decisions were done carelessly; it's just a natural consequence of
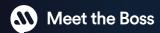
growth," says Pathyil. "All of them were well considered, tactical decisions. But in aggregate, it leaves us with a very splintered experience."

Employees are happiest, more fulfilled and most engaged when focusing on work that matters, he explains. "I don't think that's controversial. Every employee has potential, passion and purpose. But today's digital workplace is creating significant inefficiencies, and employees are disengaged because of that."

It's clear that a new approach is needed.

Biggest roadblocks to improving employee experience:

57%

Not enough people dedicated to it 57%

55%

Not enough budget 55%

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"None of these decisions were done carelessly; it's just a natural consequence of growth"

Frank Pathyil, Workgrid

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CHAPTER 2

GETTING THE QUICK WINS

How to drive immediate improvements in employee productivity and satisfaction.

When Andy Grove was in charge at Intel, he famously refused to respond to internal emails on a Friday. Why? Because he was getting swamped. His inbox was a time-suck and affecting his ability to be productive. He needed more time.

And so he changed the culture. By resetting expectations, he not only won back more time in his working day, he also reduced the amount of unnecessary communication between him and his reports and empowered them to take on more decision-making responsibility for themselves. It was a productivity win all around.

While this approach wasn't necessarily a solution to the problem – many of those questions were still waiting for Andy on the following Monday, after all – it did buy him time and space to focus on business-critical tasks, make

"We're trying to make the onboarding journey simpler and more seamless"

Femmie Schippers, Schneider Digital

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98%

98% of executives say onboarding programs are a key factor in retention rates

50%

Companies with effective onboarding having seen a 50% increase in new hire retention

KORN FERRY FUTURESTEP SURVEY 2017

important decisions, and prioritize what was most critical. It's the definition of a quick win.

Quick wins are necessary to get some much-needed early momentum behind your employee experience efforts. They generate a sense of excitement, lay the foundation for future efforts,

and provide valuable breathing space to consider your next move. So, how have other organizations been able to generate quick wins with their employee experience transformations?

Start at the beginning

"We started with our onboarding journey because we wanted to standardize that process across all of the different countries in which we operate," offers Femmie Schippers at Schneider Digital. "We picked a couple of principles and are currently applying those across all the different functions."

Those core principles include the development of more self-service capabilities, often using mobile tools and platforms. "We're trying to make the onboarding journey simpler and more seamless for our employees," says Schippers. "Once we've done that we can move to the next stage, where we go in and apply that same level of employee experience across the board."

It makes sense to start with that first-touch experience and set the tone for the journey to come – there are a

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"I think the key is to provide a simple, coherent user experience"

Larry Bolick, Aquent

lot of tricks to creating an effective an engaging onboarding experience. It's also a valuable exercise in cross-departmental collaboration, because the employee experience spans across all interactions within the organization. Over the course of the employee lifecycle, workers will be impacted by HR, IT, and internal comms – as well as other departments based on their job role – so bringing some consistency to that varied experience is critical.

For Larry Bolick, CIO at Aquent, developing a seamless approach when it comes to tools and technology is crucial to improving the employee experience.

"I think the key is to provide a simple, coherent user experience across all the various systems and touchpoints that we ask employees to interact with," he suggests. "We're seeing a little bit of that with single sign-on solutions today,

but there is still a long way to go."

Align around people, not silos

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges to overcome is getting people to think beyond traditional job roles and outside of departmental silos.

Breaking down the walls that exist between teams and functions not only drives greater productivity through better collaboration, but also enables employees to feel part of the wider organizational picture. "One thing that our CEO has tested is to break up the silos by creating work pods – basically forcing people together that she thinks need to work more collaboratively," says Partners In Health's Penny Outlaw. "That's worked well so far. Breaking down those silos is critical to improving both productivity and the overall employee experience, because employees are more engaged."

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Focus on small delighters

There are many routine tasks employees complete every day that, if they were improved, could have a big impact on employee experience. These could be approving expenses, requesting time off, or finding the contact details for someone within their organization.

To identify what these moments of opportunity might be, organizations often conduct employee journey mapping exercises to better understand the lives of their employees. Partners in Health worked with employees to learn what their particular needs were, recognizing that not all employees are looking for the same outcomes.

"We've talked a lot about employee life events, and the fact that we all have different needs at different points of our lives," says Outlaw. "People that are younger want different things than older people. They have different goals and

motivations, so having a strategy that accommodates the diversity of employee lifecycles is key."

Mapping out the employee journey for the different personas within your organization – personas that cover different ages, different roles and different work environments – illuminates opportunities for small delighters that can leave a lasting impact on the employee experience.

While quick wins are invaluable in the short-term, it pays to keep the bigger picture in mind if those wins are to translate into meaningful, longer-term changes in the culture – which means a holistic, organization-wide approach is critical. "When it is successful, employee experience is an ongoing conversation between IT, comms and HR," says Pathyil. "The fact of the matter is, it is ever evolving, so we need to move to an employee-focused approach that is much more design-thinking oriented."

"People that are younger want different things than older people"
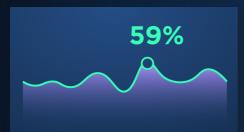
Penny Outlaw, Partners In Health

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CHAPTER 3
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ALIGNING FOR SUCCESS

How to build the strategy and team you need to transform employee experience.

59%

While 59% of companies expected their new platform to be easier to use, only 35% achieved the employee experience they wanted

35%

JOSH BERSIN, 2019

As organizations seek out the latest innovations in the hope of digitizing recruitment, career management, learning, wellbeing and payroll, it's easy to overlook the level of human support required to ensure successful integration and rollout.

Offering an end-to-end employee experience requires assembling cross-functional teams that at a minimum span IT, HR, and internal comms, as well as any other departments that make sense. Femmie Schippers explains: "You have to have a team that spans the entire enterprise. If you don't, you won't be able to deliver that employee experience. It's a completely cross-functional initiative, that's the magic sauce."

But how do you get cross-departmental collaboration and encourage employees to be fully invested? By enlisting the

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help of a strong executive sponsor. Help from the highest levels of the organization is critical for making employee experience a priority. Leadership needs to align the goals and objectives of each team, creating a shared success that fuels efforts towards corporate-wide digital transformation.

Having executive sponsorship and shared goals, along with a steering committee devoted to delivering these digital projects, just like any other large task, is a great starting point. However, to ensure uptake, employees have to be at the heart of the strategy, says Workgrid's Frank Pathyil. "We have to really think: now that we've done all these things around breaking down silos, how do we step back and put the employee at the center?"

Pathyil suggests that for best-in-class organizations, that means embracing more of a holistic experience.

"It's really understanding where the employee is and meeting them where they are," he explains. "It's centered around the needs and desires of the

2.4x

2.4x increase in the number of LinkedIn members whose current job titles include the phrase "employee experience" since 2014

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employees versus the needs and desires of each organizational function. Make things contextualized, make things self-service, make things easy to consume. A well-supported employee can access what they need, when they need it."

Guided by employees

"Ultimately, we have to be guided by employees," states Pathyil, "It's very important to consider what the

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employee wants, not just what the line of business goal is for that employee."

That means creating avenues for real time feedback. "The optimal approach would be to have an open and trusted feedback channel that's always available for employees to provide comments when those 'moments of truth' are top

89%

89% of HR leaders agree ongoing peer feedback and check-ins are key for successful outcomes

GLOBOFORCE, 2018

of mind," states Brett Caldon, Workgrid CEO. "The process needs to be trusted by employees though and that trust must be earned."
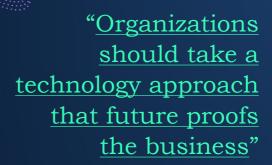
Frank Pathyil agrees. "You need to listen to employees, ask for their feedback, respectfully answer them and, if you can make incremental improvements, do that. Small wins can be very quick delighters." Consistently demonstrating that feedback is heard and acted on creates a strong sense of goodwill and drives positive engagement with employees who then feel ownership of their employee experience.

"You need to listen to employees, ask for their feedback, respectfully answer them"

Frank Pathyil, Workgrid

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"Organizations should take a technology approach that future proofs the business"

Brett Caldon, Workgrid

Technology that bridges the divide

Once you've built your vision for a unified employee experience, it's time to think about what software is right for your business. Whatever technology you choose, it needs to be able to support your holistic strategy and serve as the center of gravity for the entire employee experience, positively impacting all the major touchpoints throughout the employee journey.

It's also important to remember that the needs of your employees are going to change over time, so you need a solution that can evolve to meet changing requirements. Caldon puts particular emphasis on that point: "Organizations should take a technology approach that future proofs the business with agile, plug-and-play solutions. Companies need tools in place that enable them to make pivotal changes as they progress because things are advancing much faster than ever before."

Building an open and extensible platform that supports seamless integrations and allows for multi-channel delivery is one way to accomplish this, giving organizations the flexibility they need to meet the changing needs of their employees.

Pathyil supports a layered platform approach. "The ideal approach is to

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create an application above a bunch of source systems," he says. "Imagine an experience layer that exists between the employee and the technological complexity of the organization. Using platform technology that can integrate with core systems and create a cornerstone experience for employees gives organizations a lot of freedom, especially since it isn't coupled with a main system of record."

Measuring success

Measuring success for employee experience is challenging. eNPS scores provide a good snapshot, but many of the benefits of an improved employee experience are intangible. One way companies can measure success is by identifying specific measurable areas of employee experience to work on. For example, simplifying and automating some IT help desk functions can speed up time-to-solution, reduce IT help desk costs, and reduce small tasks going to the IT team, freeing them up for higher level initiatives.

"There isn't one single metric you can use for employee experience,"

suggests Janine Marchi, Workgrid's Director of Marketing. "But you really need to understand the processes your employees go through and what is hindering those moments – so things like personas and employee journey mapping can really help. If you can identify moments within that journey where you can collect feedback, and tie that back to something larger such as engagement rates or turnover or productivity levels, that's a good start."

"There isn't one single metric you can use for employee experience"

Janine Marchi, Workgrid

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CONCLUSION
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WHAT WE LEARNED

Five key lessons

#1 Collaborate across departments

When separate business functions work in silos, the company-wide employee experience suffers. Find ways to get different departments involved in the process of implementing a solution that makes the work day easier for employees, whether by streamlining onboarding, answering important questions about HR issues like maternity/paternity leave, submitting support tickets, managing approvals, requesting time off, etc.

#2 Streamline your systems

It's not reasonable to completely wipe the slate clean and start fresh with all new technology, but employees need help simplifying their work day. This is where implementing digital experience layers that insulate employees from the complexity of technology and abstract only the important information they need to know or take action on can make a real difference. It also has the added benefit of preserving the employee experience when organizations change backend systems.

#3 Focus on the employee

Customer service has historically been a huge differentiator when it comes to fighting off the competition, but employee experience is rapidly moving up the ranks. Design processes and systems around the needs of employees, rather than forcing them to adjust to the

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complexities of enterprise systems. You can do this by focusing on employee intent and designing backwards from there. For example, simplify the approval process by putting the critical information they need at their fingertips so they can complete the task quickly and get on with their day. Businesses that put the employee at the center of all their processes not only have happier employees, but end up with much happier customer as well.

#4 Future-proof your employee experience

With the expectation that your employee experience will evolve, choose a platform that can grow with you. Leveraging open and extensible technology along with an experience layer approach gives you the flexibility to adapt to a changing work environment and switch out backend systems based on the needs of the organization while maintaining a consistent experience for employees.

#5 Plan on being in it for the long haul

Employee experience isn't a one and done initiative. It's a process of gradual improvement that needs consistent nurturing if it's going to have positive, long-term impact. Check in with employees often. Ask for their opinions on their experience. They'll not only be glad to tell you, they'll feel appreciated that you cared enough to ask – and even happier still if you take action on their feedback and communicate that to them.

Employee experience is about people. The more you keep that in mind as you embark on this transformation, the more effective and impactful your efforts will be.

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