Reframing the employee experience
We get it: Employee experience (EX) can be challenging to wrap your arms around since it shows up everywhere and affects everything.

What worked before likely does not still meet employees’ expectations. In a time of transformative change — with the influence of hybrid and remote working brought by the pandemic and shifts in the economy triggering a hot talent market — EX is even more crucial as finding and keeping top talent becomes increasingly more competitive.

The business benefits of a strong EX are undeniable: Companies that exceed their performance goals are three times more likely to have EX as a core part of their people strategy.¹ Now is the time to evaluate and reframe your employee experience.

Everyone is talking about EX. But what is it, exactly?

We define employee experience as the interactions — big and small — between organizations and their people that, ideally, engage and inspire employees, align individual purpose with organizational purpose, and unleash the energy and passion that lead to high performance.

An employee’s expectations, shaped by who they are and what they value, affect employee experience, as does their work environment, which covers the physical workplace, technology and those less tangible things, including culture, programs and processes and daily interactions. And finally, the life, career and organization events that happen on an employee’s journey also defines the employee experience — whether it’s a relatively simple or routine event, such as knowing where to go on their first day, or a more significant one, like starting a family or taking on a new role.

¹ Mercer. 2020 Global Talent Trends.
What does it mean to build better employee experiences?

It’s about providing satisfying answers to employees’ big existential questions about their work and lives, like “Am I growing?” “Do I have opportunities to build new skills?” “Do I have mentors who support and help guide me?” Addressing these questions should undoubtedly be a crucial part of your EX strategy.

But building an exemplary EX is just as much about finding solutions for the more mundane, often headache-inducing parts of employees’ working lives. It’s about easing the burdensome tasks facing employees that can distract, add stress and anxiety, and even lead to burnout. It means removing things that stand in the way of higher-value work and streamlining — à la Marie Kondo — and getting down to the essentials of what really matters in the moment. It’s not about cluttering your employees’ world with more things (Read: processes and procedures). Instead, EX is about clearing the way and making room for your employees to do better work, do it more efficiently and get more recognition for and satisfaction from their efforts.

To better understand the power of EX, think about the last outstanding customer experience you had. Let’s say you were out for dinner with close friends at your favorite restaurant. The appetizer arrived at the perfect time. Your nearly empty glass was refilled without you having to ask. Your needs were anticipated in an attentive yet in-the-background way, allowing you to focus on the conversation and give the people with you your undivided attention. The fact that you were having a great experience just seemed to unfold naturally, enabling you to live fully in the moment and focus on what matters.

In an ideal world, that’s what EX should feel like.

Build belonging, together

Better employee experiences spark a virtuous cycle: If employees feel they belong and feel cared for, they’ll respond in kind with “discretionary effort” — a willingness to go the extra mile and exceed expectations.

What’s crucial to understand is that these experiences are co-created. A company’s leadership or HR team isn’t solely responsible for creating better employee experiences — everyone must play their part in building an inclusive, welcoming culture. An exceptional EX is something that each individual in an organization yearns for and, ultimately, helps to create.

Success depends on asking questions and giving people the tools to create a culture of belonging. For example, a middle manager may have daily interactions with a report that significantly shape that individual’s experience. So, a critical question that companies should ask is, how can we give our middle managers the skills they need to ensure their people feel supported to succeed and encouraged to bring their whole selves to work? Leading organizations are equipping managers to build relationships that promote equity and inclusion, and help their reports balance their personal and professional lives. Notably, nearly a quarter (23%) of HR leaders are adapting manager training to help managers lead in a virtual or blended working environment.2

Create experiences your employees crave

We've seen a shift in what employees say would make them stay with a company. Historically, this was higher compensation or more benefits; increasingly, it is a sense of security, an opportunity to grow professionally and flexible working — notably, more than half of employees (54%) say they will only join a company if they can work remotely or have a hybrid work schedule. Further, our research has shown that the experiential elements of work — such as career development, meaningful work and a sense of belonging — have the highest impact on employee commitment and intent to stay.

We've found that — regardless of job or industry — employees are looking for experiences that are:

- **Enriching**
  Help me learn, grow and make an impact with the work that I do.

- **Efficient**
  Provide me with a frictionless work environment.

- **Embracing**
  Make me feel like I belong and can bring my whole self to work.

- **Empathetic**
  Support me with caring for myself and what matters in my life.

Design an employee experience that delivers measurable impact

To do this well, you must define your goals for your EX. An employee experience mindset is also critical: Focusing on the problem you're trying to solve through the lens of an employee's experience makes it easier to peel back the layers and uncover the crux of an issue.

The must-haves to support your EX goals?

- A strong mission, vision and values.
- Employee pulse surveys and listening programs, which offer critical insights.
- An authentic leadership voice, which provides vital support for your efforts.
- A willingness to look within, using a say/do analysis to identify the disparities between words and actions (for both employers and employees).
- A consistent, unified way of sharing information about your progress in elevating the employee experience is essential.

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Employee experience is more than a catchphrase. It’s a mindset shift, and it’s critical to creating an environment where people thrive. Every organization provides an employee experience — whether it’s good or bad is up to you. According to our 2022 Global Talent Trends research, the top three drivers of thriving at work are (1) feeling valued for one’s contributions, (2) doing work that’s fulfilling and (3) having fun. But it’s challenging to have fun when things feel hard and barriers arise at every turn. Employees say the second-biggest obstacle they face is organizational complexity; outdated technology is also high on the list. By taking steps to overcome these challenges and thinking more strategically about EX, you’re not only ensuring your people are more satisfied, but also fostering innovation and creativity.

As you consider what you offer employees — your EVP, benefits, learning and development, flexible work opportunities — it’s vital to remember that none of these alone can create a great employee experience. They must work in tandem, and they all play a part.

When you’ve done EX right, its success can’t be attributed to just one thing. It’s every interaction. Every intervention. If you get it right, employees will choose experience over higher pay or more perks — every time.

Transform your employee experience with Mercer Belong®

Today’s digital world offers consumers simple, personalized experiences that effortlessly and instantly meet specific needs. Yet at work, numerous apps and platforms often compete and overlap, leaving employees unsure of where to go and frustrated by a disconnected experience. In an ultra-competitive labor market, it has never been more important to maximize the results of your investment in the employee experience.

Mercer Belong is a forward-thinking engagement platform that helps employees make sense of it all. Belong gives you a powerful and effective way to connect with your employees about their rewards, careers and well-being. With its Socrates.ai-powered virtual assistant, Belong transforms each interaction into the easy, personalized, consumer-grade experience your employees have come to expect.

Learn more

Safeguard your EX now to prepare for the future of work

Shore up your mission, vision and values. Creating a compelling story aligned with your organization’s direction — and telling it often — is the foundation for leading your organization through crisis and future challenges.

Evaluate and modernize your employee value proposition (EVP). The world of work has dramatically changed. Proactively modernizing your EVP and communicating why your organization is still the best place to work allows you to maintain a strong employment deal, helping you attract and retain key talent — even during the rockiest of times.

Build for resiliency. Create strategic playbooks and integrate effective employee communication avenues for executing plans in a meaningful, consistent way throughout the organization. Connect with people at any time through personalized digital communication, ensuring channels for two-way communication and feedback. Use these communication channels on an ongoing basis, developing them as a trusted source of information and support.

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Learn more

5 Ibid.
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Mercer offers a suite of consulting services and digital tools to help transform your employee experience, accelerate digital implementation, communicate with employees and support change. To learn more, reach out to your Mercer consultant or contact us.