

A New Approach to EX: Introducing the Worker Experience Framework

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Employee experience (EX) is on the lips of C-suite leaders across the globe. Changing workforce demographics and a shortage of people with the skills organizations need have resulted in CEOs prioritizing employee experience and organizational culture despite an uneven labor market.

Unfortunately, EX is widely misunderstood, with no common definition and many misconceptions of what is included and how to use it. In this report, we first bust 4 common myths of employee experience and then establish a new approach to thinking about experience: the Worker Experience Framework.

What is employee experience?

Some understand EX to be the HR service experience; for others, it means the employee's experience in serving the customer; and for still others, it means the employee's experience of the work environment. Without clarity on a definition of EX, it is extraordinarily difficult to improve it. Therefore, we define it as:

Employee experience: What it's like to work at my organization.

The 4 myths of EX

Myth 1: EX is the employee version of customer experience (CX)

On the face of it, EX and CX have a lot in common. Unfortunately, the CX analogy is not a perfect one for EX for three primary reasons.

- ① **The customer journey and employee journey are not as similar as companies might think:** While a customer journey map may accurately recognize the majority of a customer's experiences with a company, an employee journey map does not. Based on quick calculations, the different stages in the employee journey map only represent, on average, between 3% to 9% of an employee's time at an organization.
- ② **Common "moments that matter" are not necessarily those that matter most to employees:** While there are some "moments that matter" that do matter more to employees than others, most organizations fail to use data to figure out which moments actually matter to their specific employees. Instead, many organizations (or their vendors) use an employee journey map and focus on the items listed there, such as onboarding, becoming a parent, receiving a promotion, or exiting the company.



- ③ **Employees' and customers' relationships with organizations are different:** For customers, the relationship can range from purely transactional to a more in-depth relationship. For employees, the relationship tends to be longer-lived, deeper, and more complex. Some people define at least a part of their identities based on their job, which makes the employee / employer relationship fundamentally different from that of the customer / company relationship.

Myth 2: EX = digital experience

Much of the conversation on EX has focused on “digitizing” EX or making it more “consumer grade.” While digitization is important, it is not enough. HR should think about the omnichannel EX—meaning thinking holistically about both the digital and physical experience and how they interact together.

The key is to think about how the two aspects of EX—the digital and the physical—should work together.

Myth 3: EX management is primarily about measuring employees' experiences

Nearly every EX vendor almost always talks about measuring it but rarely about what they can actually do to improve it. This holds true for many practitioners too. Measurement and monitoring of EX are certainly a critical part of its management. However, they are not enough.

To improve EX:

- All those involved in creating it need to have a role in making changes.
- Data and insights should not be limited to HR.
- Clear and actionable recommendations should be shared with employees and managers.

Myth 4: EX should primarily be about employees

With the rise in volatility and uncertainty, leaders are increasingly looking to structure their organizations to be responsive to change.

Organizations can be more responsive by using contingent workers (contractors, freelancers, temporary workers, project-based workers, 1099ers, etc.), which allows organizations to more quickly adjust the size and skills of their workforce, given business needs. The use of contingent workers is already prevalent, with [McKinsey](#) estimating that 36% of workers at large companies today are contingent.

Therefore, if companies maintain the mindset that they can only think about employees when thinking about the experience, they may be cutting off more than one-third of the people doing work for them. Companies should think broadly about experience and what they can do to enable it, regardless of worker type.

A myth-free way of thinking about worker experience (WX)

There are 3 core tenants to a myth-free WX framework

① WX needs to focus on what workers actually experience

There are 6 elements of the work experience (see Figure 2). Collectively, these items comprise the entire work experience, not just an HR process-based employee journey:

- **The work:** The work workers do and for which they are paid. The work itself forms much of their worker experience.
- **Essential support:** The basic resources workers need to do their work and get compensated, such as technology, tools, and resources; and any other essential support they need to be able to do their work.
- **Expectations & feedback:** The clarity workers need about what's expected of them in terms of the work they do and feedback on how they are doing. This also includes their expectations of the organization and their feedback to the organization on how it is meeting their expectations.
- **Communication:** The information workers need, beyond job / task-specific work, to do their job. This could include information on new strategic directions for the company, announcements of changes in leadership, acquisitions of other companies, etc.
- **Development & growth:** The learning and development workers need to do their job today, as well as to do it—or another job—in the future. Further, this is the growth they can expect in their career or job over time.
- **Connection & relationships:** The connections and relationships with other people workers need to collaborate, be seen and respected, and feel like they belong.

A more holistic understanding of the different elements of the WX can help leaders and workers alike understand what is currently being done across all the different areas and make appropriate adjustments, given organizational and worker needs.

The 6 elements of a worker's experience range in importance to the organization and the worker



Figure 2: The 6 elements of worker experience | Source: RedThread Research, 2023

② The “when” and “where” of WX need to be designed for

There are temporal and locational components to WX. Folks often over-index toward transition experiences at the expense of the regular, day-to-day experience of workers. This is unwise, as the culmination of those everyday experiences is often what most signifies WX.

It is important to consider the “moments” as well as the everyday experiences. Companies should think about WX along a “when” continuum, ranging from “transition experiences” to “daily experiences.”

In addition, it is important to focus on the “where” of WX, which needs to take into account the “omnichannel” hybrid experience. Here too, folks should use a continuum, with digital experiences on one end and physical experiences on the other.

If we bring these concepts together, we get Figure 3 on the next page, which describes the different types of experiences workers have.

Figure 3 helps us think through all of the different spaces where we need to design the WX. As a framework, it puts equal weight on all of the experiences and should be used as a mechanism to ensure companies are thinking through the full range of potential worker experiences.

Companies may find through qualitative or quantitative data collection that some aspects of WX are more important to focus on for specific personas or user types. Just because they can address all aspects of WX, it doesn't mean they should. Yet, they also shouldn't forgo thinking about some aspects of WX just because they are not top of mind or are hard to measure.

Worker experience happens in transition and regular experiences, as well as in digital and physical spaces

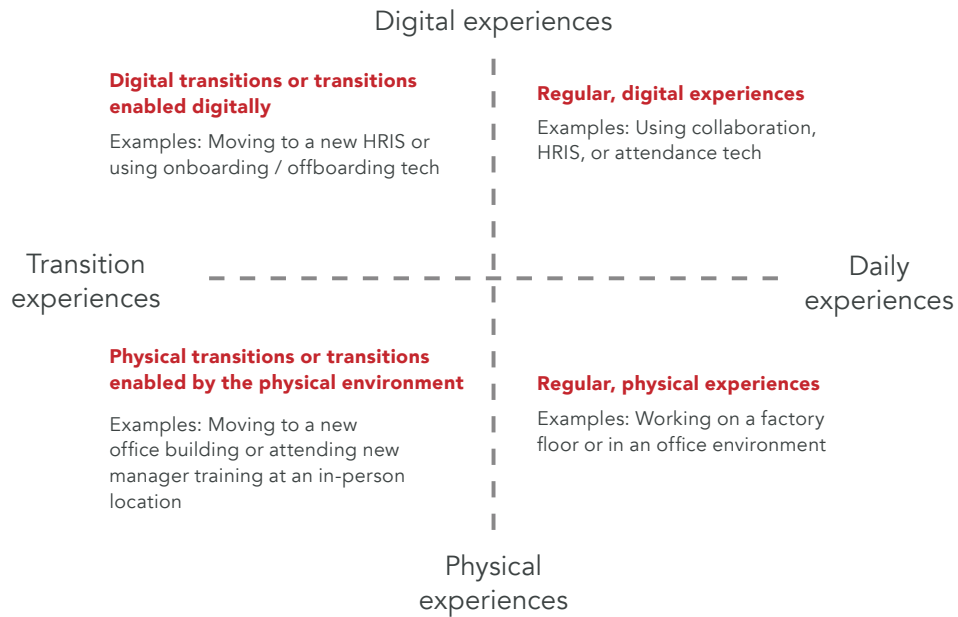


Figure 3: The “when” and “where” of worker experience, with examples | Source: RedThread Research, 2023.

3 **WX management is more than measurement**

Most vendors in this space have been able to measure and monitor worker experience or engagement, but they have yet to be able to show they could improve it. This challenge extends to many practitioners.

To fix this, companies should think about WX management using a new 4M model: measure, monitor, motivate, and mobilize (see Figure 4).

The 4M model of WX management encourages leaders to go beyond measurement to driving change

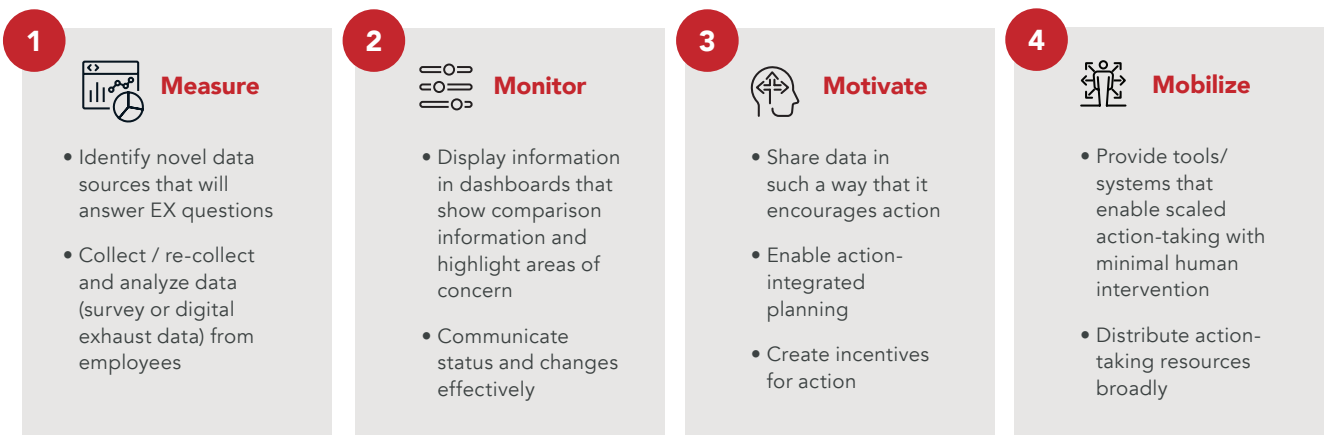


Figure 4: The 4Ms of WX management | Source: RedThread Research, 2023.

Bringing it all together: The new WX framework

The core tenants of WX management include the 6 WX elements, the temporal / locational conditions,

and the 4 components of WX management. When combined, it forms a framework that can be used to assess and understand it (see Figure 5).

The new WX framework brings together the 6 WX elements, the temporal / locational conditions, and the 4Ms of WX management

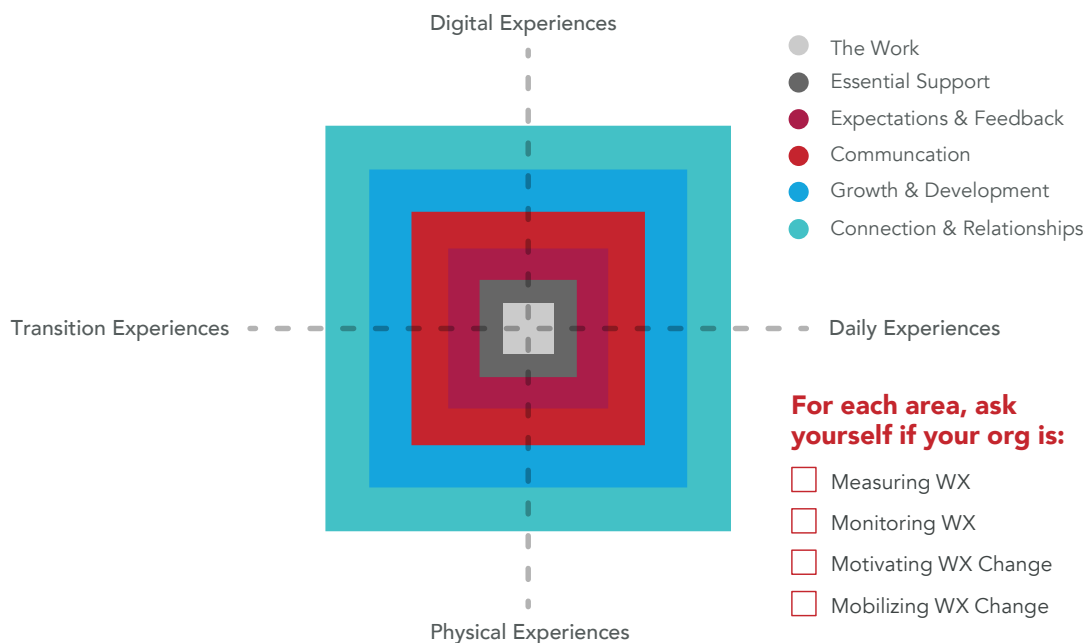


Figure 5: New WX Framework | Source: RedThread Research, 2023.

Companies should use the framework to audit and understand their existing WX practices and tech and to improve them through a 5-step process:

- ➔ Select a portion of the framework for a specific worker persona
- ➔ identify and prioritize the potential sub-experiences within that portion
- ➔ Break down high-priority sub-experiences by the 6 elements
- ➔ Assess their experience management approach by using the 4M model (measure experience, monitor experience, motivate experience improvement, and mobilize experience improvement)
- ➔ Determine priority areas of focus and take action

Looking ahead

There are three core tenants of “worker experience”:

- ① WX needs to focus on what workers actually experience
- ② WX has a “when” and “where” component
- ③ WX management must include motivation and mobilization components

The new WX framework embraces all of these tenets and is an approachable way to think about the complexity that is a person’s work experience. It will allow HR to take a more human-centric approach to enabling the workforce.

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