Fieldwork by Citrix

Thrive with employee experience

Three principles to guide your EX strategy



You've intuitively felt that Employee Experience (EX) matters...

...but might have struggled to express exactly why it's so critical for success, or figure out how to nurture it. Creating the conditions for employees to drive innovation and delight customers is something few organizations have the entire recipe for. While most understand EX starts with culture, even digitally mature organizations may lack a precise understanding of the impact that the technology and physical spaces used every day by employees can have on their work experience.

What's been missing is a roadmap—a set of principles that can be infused into an organization's operating model, regardless of sector or industry, to improve EX. These guiding behaviors can illuminate a clear path to EX maturity. This research will help you develop a deeper understanding of EX, offering clear tactics to help you operationalize it within your organization and create an effective flexible remote work strategy—backed by insights from deep quantitative research coupled with knowledge from a diverse group of experts including leaders and practitioners in IT, HR, and others driving revolutionary changes in EX today.

This research identifies three principles which can help you create a better EX and underpin a more effective hybrid work strategy:

1. Empower **individual progress**

2. Deepen **empathy** from human insights

3. **Partner** to foster linked and shared EX ownership

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Foreword

Over the past several years, the chatter around employee engagement has grown to a fever pitch.

The reasons are clear: an engaged workforce is a fundamental requirement to fuel business growth. To find that growth, business leaders have been making more investments in their people, seeking positive returns. In fact, 74 percent of executives anticipate significant ROI from an improved employee experience.[1] And they believe EX matters. In a 2019 study conducted by Citrix and The Economist Intelligence Unit, executives saw improved productivity, engagement, and customer experience as the top reasons to improve employee experience. But beyond the direct impact on employees, executives also ranked improved profitability, talent retention, and innovation and creativity as close followers.[2]

While the reasons to focus on EX are clear, many organizations struggle with how to operationalize EX strategies. To help answer the question of how to improve EX, Fieldwork by Citrix conducted a global survey of both practitioners and experts in EX to explore what strategies and practices separate the good from the great. This research aims to help the new architects of EX across IT, HR, and Real Estate examine their own strategies and operating models and infuse them with the latest thinking on how to make concrete improvements to EX and unlock the potential of their greatest assets: their people.

We complemented these interviews with a quantitative study to gauge how different organizational behaviors and activities corresponded to EX maturity. Our research uncovered three principles and a robust set of actions to help you nurture EX within your organization and develop a more effective flexible work strategy.

We hope that as you read, you identify tactics that can inform your own EX practice.

Tim Minahan
Executive Vice President, Business Strategy and Chief Marketing Officer, Citrix

About the study

Methodology

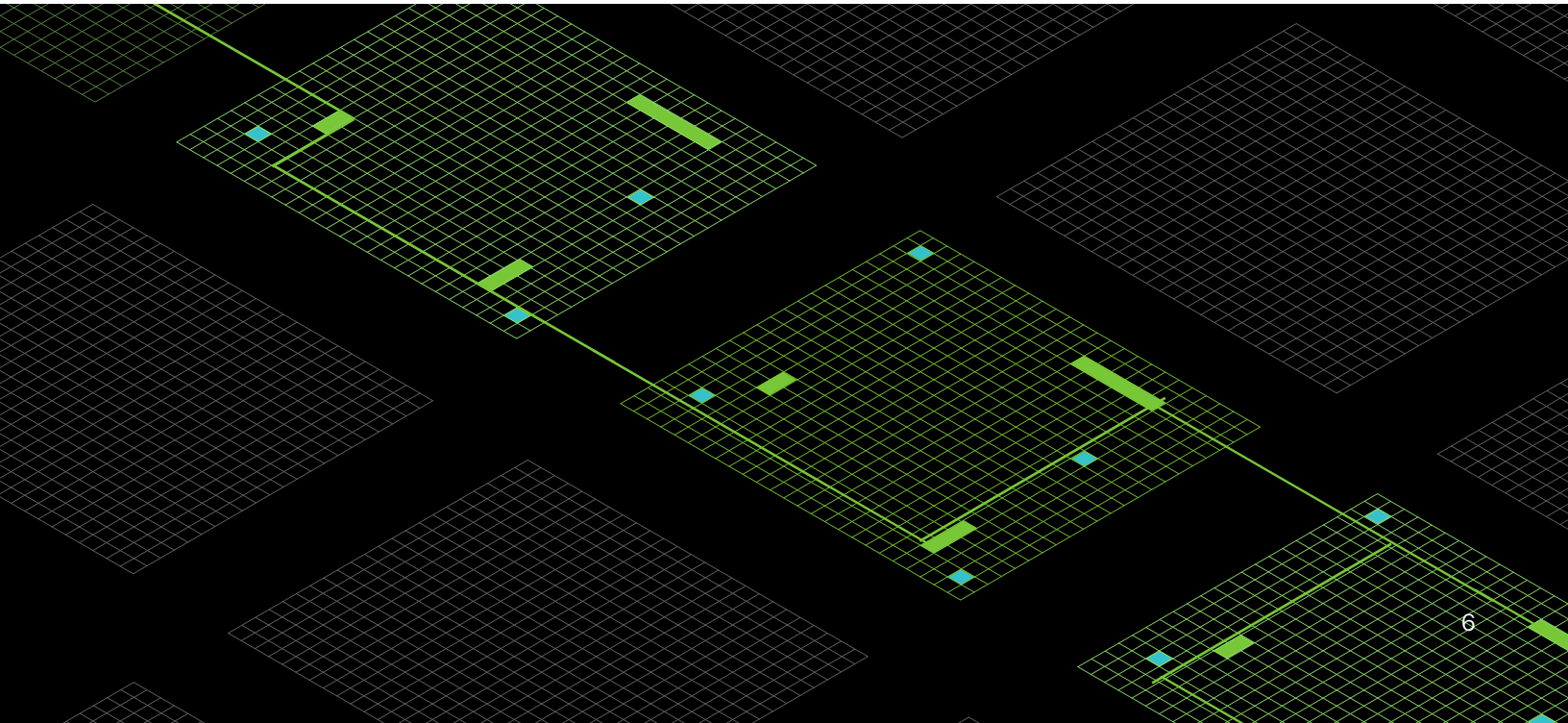
We surveyed 783 decision-makers in HR, IT, and Real Estate across five countries: the US, UK, Germany, Japan, and Singapore. Industries we covered included Financial Services, Manufacturing, and Healthcare. We supplemented this research with conversations across a diverse group of experts, including leaders and practitioners in HR, IT, and Real Estate. Across a spectrum ranging from “Learner” to “Advanced,” respondents self-identified how mature they felt their EX practices were. We then performed a regression analysis to validate and gain more insight into specific activities and initiatives associated with maturity.

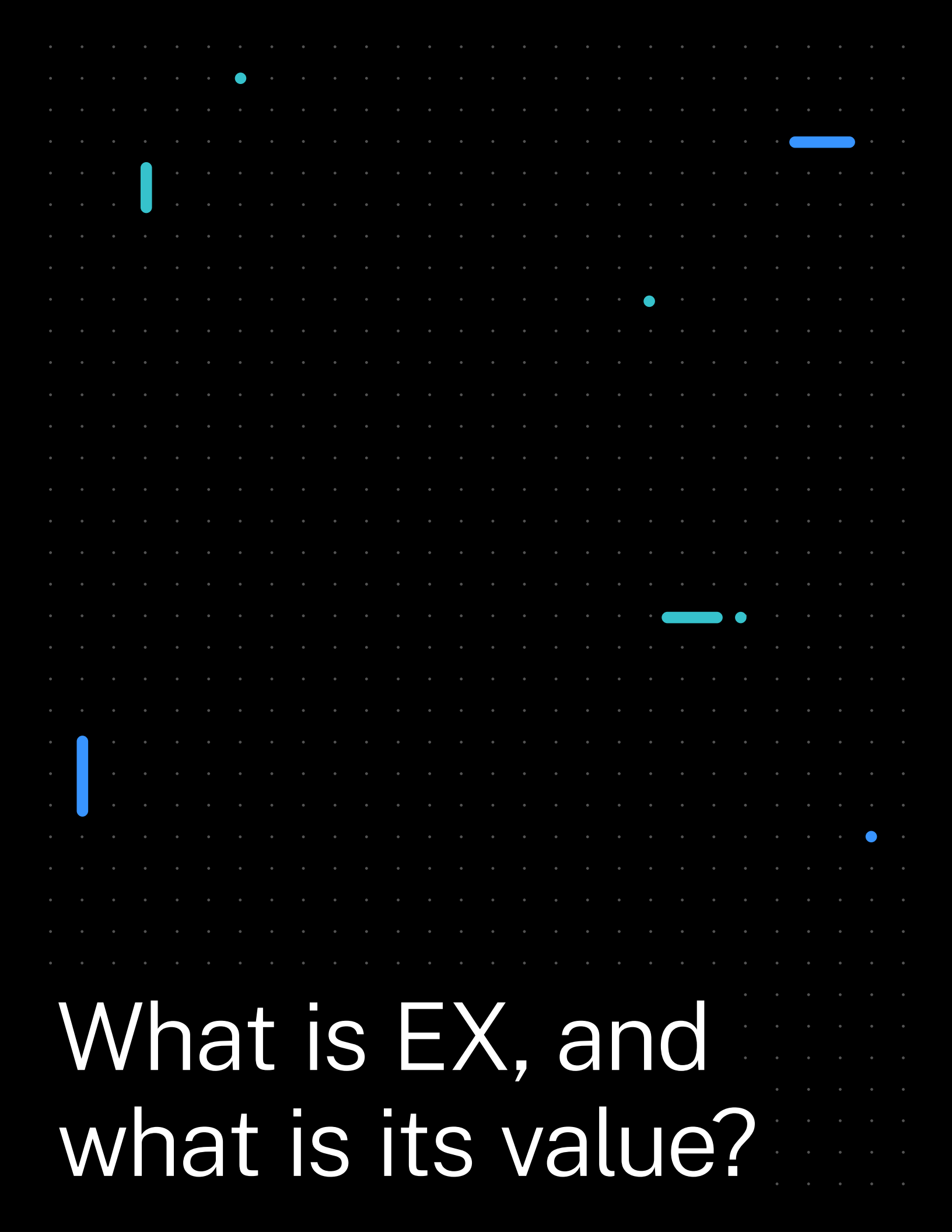
Online survey: n=783

Countries: US, UK, Germany, Japan, Singapore

Industries: Financial services, manufacturing, healthcare

Roles: Decision makers in HR, IT, and Real Estate





What is EX, and what is its value?

While many different and detailed definitions of EX exist, it helps to start with a simple, widely used one that mirrors the definition of customer experience.

Employee Experience (n., \ ɪm-ˈplɔɪ-i \ ɪk-ˈspɪriəns \ | abbrev. 'EX'): The sum of employees' perceptions of their experiences working within an organization.

In our interviews with practitioners across an array of organizations, it became clear that great EX starts with a culture that invites people to bring their whole selves to work. Employees at advanced EX companies feel supported and cared for by their managers. Indeed, 31 percent of executives with advanced EX strategies say that strong managers who provide authentic support for employees is important, and rate such qualities at near statistical parity with having the right technology to do the job (37%).

But while fostering a supportive environment is a unique and powerful asset, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that with the rush to implement remote work and hybrid work models, emotional sensitivity alone doesn't necessarily lead to great EX. An organization's EX is shaped by three dimensions:

- **Culture.** The energy of a company, or how it feels to interact with colleagues and work somewhere.
- **Digital Space.** The digital tools that enable employees to work effectively at any time.
- **Physical Space.** The environment where employees work—from desks to remote spaces.

EX ≠ engagement

You'll often hear the terms "employee experience" and "engagement" thrown around interchangeably, but they're not the same thing. Engagement is the outcome of a continued positive employee experience, and in order to see its benefits, organizations must focus on the employee experience. "The path to getting a positive engagement score is by creating and sustaining a positive [employee] experience," says one HR executive at a financial services firm. "The engagement metric helps you understand whether you're hitting the mark or not, but you don't tackle engagement. You tackle the experience to generate the outcome of an improved engagement."

Engaged employees drive compelling business outcomes

While most leaders will agree that EX is important, not all can point to specific outcomes for their businesses that investments into EX might yield.

In contrast, EX is often "baked in" to the operating models of some organizations; one leading financial services firm requires that project owners demonstrate what the impact on EX will be as part of the ROI for not only broader transformation efforts, but also ad hoc initiatives. Some of the greatest improvements leadership seek to drive can be reduced to four business outcomes:

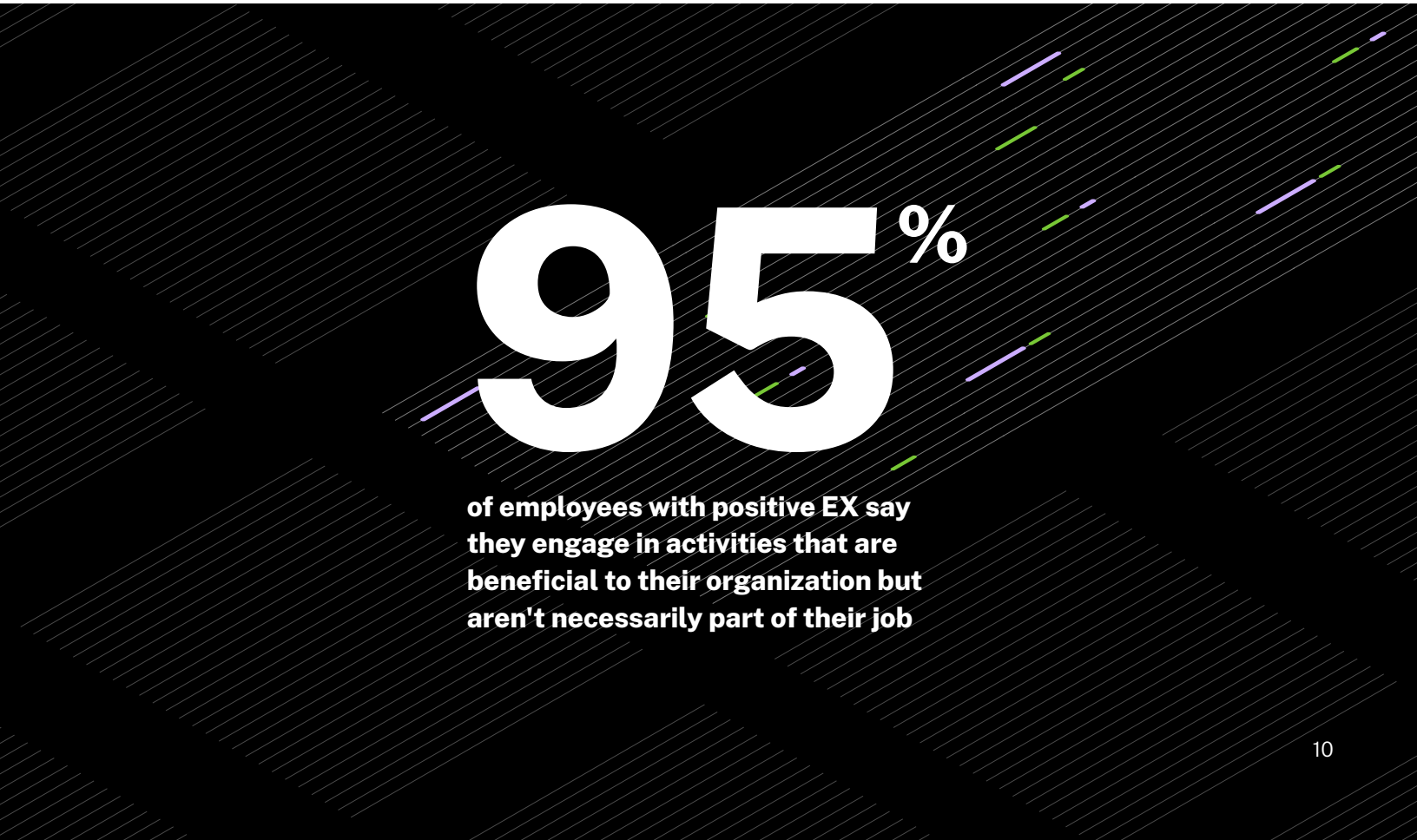
- **A reduction in turnover.** Every company Citrix interviewed is focused on the first of these, desperately trying to avoid losing their most talented employees. "It used to be that there was a vertical career ladder, then it shifted with upskilling and reskilling to a diagonal one, says Mark Taylor, Global Markets Lead—Interactive at Cognizant, shares. "But now employees bounce to another company to continue their development." This can be problematic. One large study found that an increase in turnover from 12% to 22% reduces productivity by 40 percent and financial performance by 26 percent.[3] But with engaged employees, organizations experience 59% less turnover.[4]

- **Improved customer experience.** Engaged employees also deliver better customer experiences. The Temkin Group, now the Qualtrics XM Institute, has studied this relationship for over 10 years, and found that 79 percent of employees who work at companies with "significantly above average" customer experience in their industry are "highly" or "moderately" engaged, compared with only 49% at companies with "average" or "below average" customer experience.[5] These companies have happier employees who are more willing to provide above-and-beyond customer service. Another study showed that engaged employees generate 81 percent higher customer satisfaction scores.[6] Spencer Osborn, Head of Strategy at Cognizant, shares, "We try to map the most critical moments of a customer journey, and then map EX improvement to those moments—and that's where we see real value."

- **Attraction of new talent.** Over 20 years ago, McKinsey declared that business faced "The war for talent"—and it's a battle that every company faces today as they struggle to find the right people to carry their businesses forward. Older companies sometimes

struggle to compete with technology firms for the digital-savvy talent they need to aid in transformation efforts. Gallup's research suggests that millennials don't just work for a paycheck, they seek a purpose.[7] "The war for talent has undergone massive shifts," says Mark Taylor of Cognizant. "You need to engage employees' hearts and minds." Notably, 75% of end users said that technology is a key deciding factor when evaluating potential employers.[8]

- **Increased discretionary effort.** When employees are engaged, they're more likely to exhibit what is often viewed as the holy grail of productivity: discretionary effort. An IBM study showed that 95 percent of employees reporting a positive experience with their company say they expend discretionary effort, meaning they engage in activities that are beneficial to their organization but aren't necessarily part of their job. The number drops significantly for employees reporting a poor employee experience.[9] The head of culture and engagement at a leading financial services firm with over 15,000 employees defines engagement as "… a measure of how much someone's willing to deliver additional effort, in order to deliver on the cultural behaviors that you defined as critical in your environment." Increased discretionary effort translates to productivity growth, but even more critical—*it's where innovation happens*.



EX was hard before—now it's even harder

However compelling the results, most companies struggle to foster an engaged workforce.

Gallup, which has been tracking and reporting a US employee engagement metric for 20 years, found that the range of engaged employees falls between 26% and 34%, meaning that even at the best of times two-thirds of employees are not engaged. Worse yet, between 13 percent and 20 percent are "actively disengaged" during the same period.[10] This worrisome group can cause havoc by damaging customer relationships and dragging down coworkers.

Executive teams focused on shaping and improving EX face a combination of converging micro and macro issues. On the micro level, they're looking to transform the way they operate, or operationalize EX. But on the macro level, there are broad trends like automation that are accelerating across a broad swath of industries.

These tensions were in full view in Citrix's "**Work 2035: How people and technology will pioneer new ways of working.**" In the course of research, it became clear that leaders believed technology would augment employees, while employees feared that they would be replaced by technology. This is a digital disconnect, and at the moment, it's growing unchecked. Good EX presents an opportunity to proactively combat the disconnect. In this sense, an EX strategy is not just a tool for today's challenges, but an insurance policy against those that may arise tomorrow.

Our research found that creating the conditions for increased discretionary effort is the key to breaking through plateaus in productivity and boosting the creativity—and passion—that will help companies innovate through the massive shifts in the social and economic fabric that the future will bring. Many of the shifts were already underway before 2020 conspired to distract, stress, and in some cases, demotivate workers. In this environment, finding ways to increase focus and discretionary effort are critical.

COVID-19 has strained—and forever reshaped—work

As COVID-19 took hold, business leaders were forced to contend with a new form of disruption for which there was no playbook. Remote work isn't new, but the pandemic took the traditional notion of being a remote worker and bent it beyond recognition. Without the structures of support generally available to people working remotely, including daycares and schools, or the social connection and outlets for all, the turbulence at the intersection of work life and personal life created an urgency for businesses to better understand employees' lives and reimagine how work could be done.

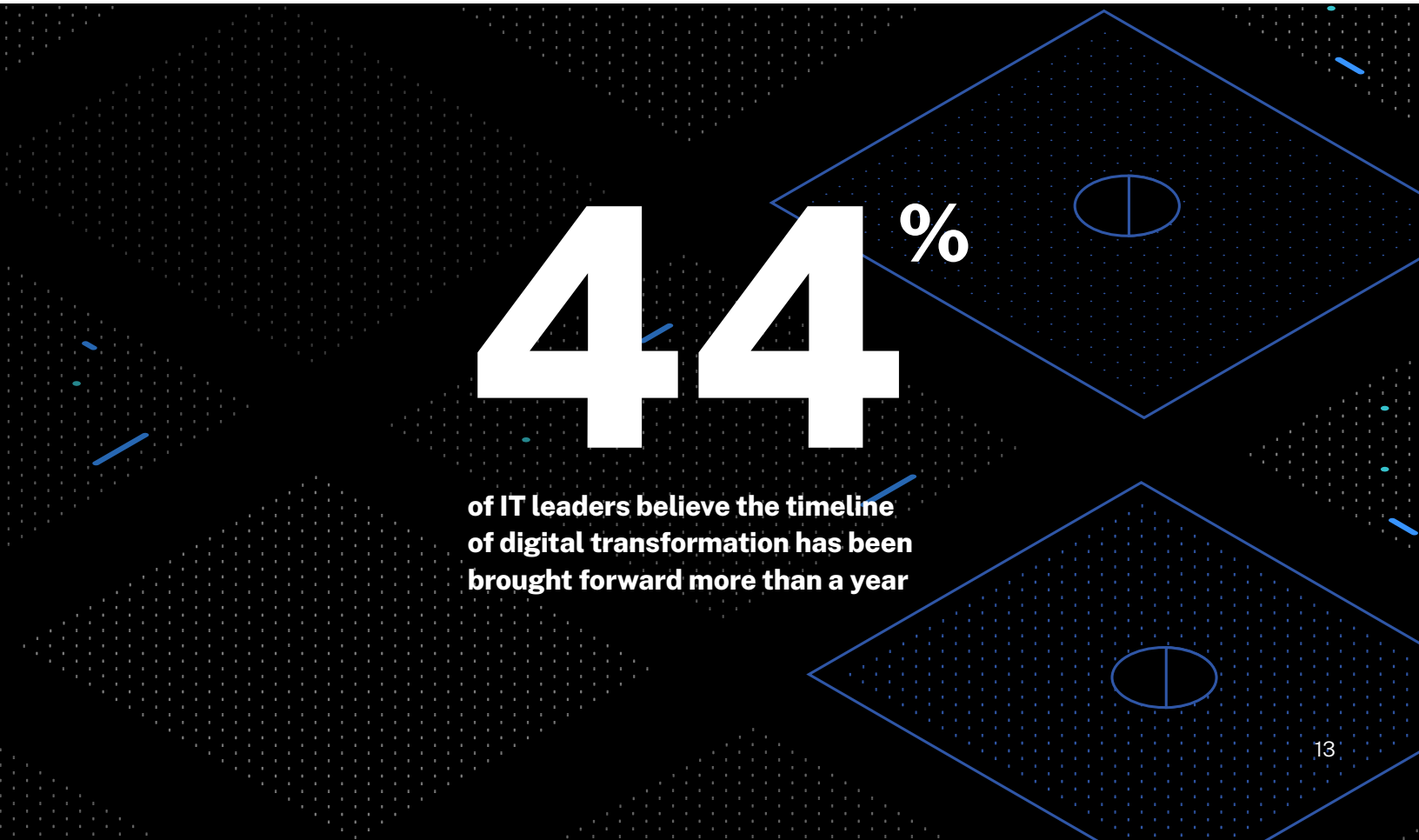
With respect to employee experience, the pandemic:

- **Accelerated the urgency and pace of digital transformation.** Prior to COVID-19, interest in employee experience was growing. The pandemic has forced companies to accelerate their digital initiatives to contend with the long-term, staggering changes to their businesses and customers. IT leaders believe that the crisis has accelerated digital transformation—44 percent think it's been brought forward by more than a year.[11] The Head of Digital at a large New England-based financial institution commented that the projects that he couldn't get funded before the pandemic are now moving ahead at top speed. It's not just a US phenomenon; 70 percent of executives from Austria, Germany, and Switzerland said the pandemic is likely to accelerate the pace of their digital transformation.[12]

- **Propelled IT into the spotlight.** The pandemic has also elevated the perception of IT's role in the employee experience, setting the stage for IT's increased importance in arguably the most pressing strategic issue facing organizations today. IT departments have more visibility than ever before into business operations as they seek innovative ways to apply technology, and many IT leaders plan to seek a promotion. Notably, over three-quarters of IT leaders (77%) agree that IT is currently seen as business critical to their organization. And over half (55%) of IT leaders believe that their new job title should be "working from home warrior" or "corporate savior."[13]

- **Improved perceptions of remote work.** Many news outlets and companies heralded the arrival of the great remote work experiment, and there have been positive changes. In fact, 68 percent of workers believe that working from home with the right tech makes them more

productive than working in an office.[14] It also has unlocked time that was once trapped in a commute. “[When] people were coming to office, they were spending one hour, one and a half hour or some people two hours…to travel [to the office],” notes an IT leader in India. “All that wastes a lot of time, but in this scenario, the time is being utilized fully and people are more balanced they are able to give some time to their family.”



Progress is a critical—and often overlooked—driver of EX

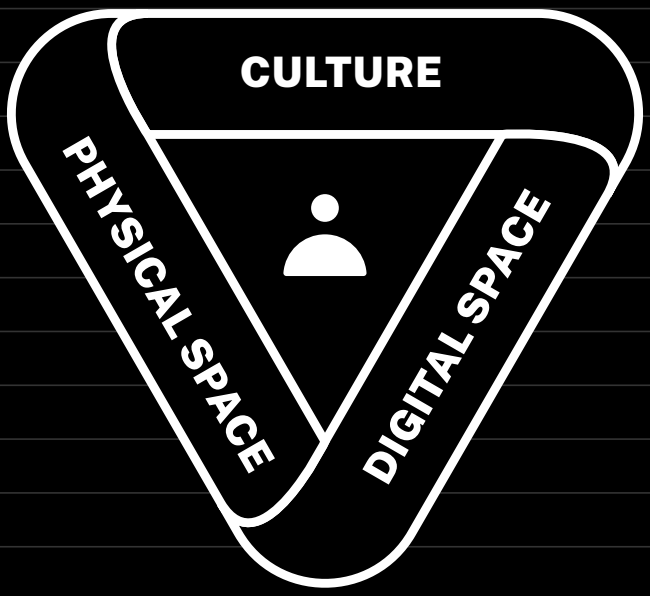
So, how do you create an employee experience that leads to engagement? An influential study conducted by Dr. Theresa Amabile at the Harvard Business School examined the necessary conditions for engagement by looking at over 12,000 accounts of people's days at work.[15] Pay, perks, and bonuses all had an impact, but were not as important as individuals' sense of making progress in their work.

Dr. Amabile found that employee emotions are most positive, and motivation is highest, when people feel they're making headway in their jobs, or when they receive support that helps them move past obstacles. Conversely, employee moods and motivation were lowest when individuals felt stuck or faced headwinds impeding their accomplishment. And when you think about that, technology plays an outsized role in our ability to get work done, or not, every day. An HR leader at a global gaming company says, "From a customer point of view, I see IT as a huge hygiene factor. We mostly work digitally, especially now. If everything I do is slow, difficult, or I don't have the tools … you don't care how motivational everything is. Every moment feels like a struggle." Meerah Rajavel, Citrix CIO, shared, "Happiness in a job is not just about a paycheck, it's also about how easily we can do a job."

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>
> **Meerah Rajavel**
> Chief Information Officer, Citrix

Focusing on flow helps reveal what drives your people

Someone's ability to be productive is dependent on their ability to focus, or at minimum limit distractions. We also refer to this focus as flow, a term coined by the psychologist Dr. Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, and further explored and popularized in the book "Drive" by Daniel Pink. Dr. Csikszentmihalyi describes flow as focused motivation. It's the feeling from being totally absorbed in the work you're doing to the point you lose track of time, fully engaged, and things seem to come easier to you. A 10-year McKinsey study revealed that top executives reported being five times more productive while in flow.[16] The same study stated that if you could increase the amount of time in flow by 20 percent, workplace productivity could double.



Three dimensions shape EX

Culture

What makes a company culture is subject to many definitions, but it includes the values and behaviors, diversity & inclusion initiatives, giving back—essentially the day to day feeling of what it's like to work at a company.

It's influenced by the people, practices, and programs of an organization. "An organization is a system that comes together around a shared purpose with explicit and implicit agreements about how we'll work together to bring that purpose to life. We've found a way to label it...we call it culture." says Donna Kimmel, Chief People Officer at Citrix.

A healthy culture supports a thriving business

A recurring theme in interviewing EX leaders around the world was the notion that if you take care of employees, success naturally follows. Daniel Schumacher, VP of Global IT applications at Komatsu, a leader in construction machinery manufacturing, put it this way:

"Executive leadership puts people first. I think that leads to happier employees which then flows into more positive customer

"Executive leadership puts people first. I think that leads to happier employees which then flows into more positive customer experience; it has virtuous cycles to it."

Daniel Schumacher
VP of Global IT applications, Komatsu

experience; it has virtuous cycles to it." That's a sentiment echoed by Scott Ronan, Head of Technology Infrastructure at Accor, a global hotel brand. "We believe that an employee that is happy and comfortable in their position is going to perform better," he says, "which means they're going to help us work together better as a team and achieve the objectives that we want to achieve."

So, what creates the conditions for employees to thrive? Our survey found the top cultural factors that contribute to a positive EX are a flexible work environment (40%) and opportunities for growth (40%). Feeling a connection to one's team (27%) and feeling inspired by leaders (27%) are virtually as important to cultivating a positive employee experience as having access to the right technology to do the job (30%). Organizations with mature EX practices were far more likely to incorporate wellness programs like mindfulness programs and health resources than organizations with less mature practices. And that comes through in practice: 30 percent of EX Advanced organizations offer wellness programs, compared to just 12 percent of Learners. Many interviewees also cited diversity and inclusion as critical to a good employee experience.

EX Advanced organizations are **2.5x** more likely to prioritize well-being than EX Learners

EX Advanced organizations are **2x** more likely to prioritize access to the technology needed for employees to do their jobs than EX learners

Digital space

The digital space consists of the technology or digital tools that enable employees to work effectively, efficiently, and easily from anywhere, at any time.

An employee's ability to get work done every day is tied to technology—but these tools also shape how an employee feels about where they work. Notably, the tools IT organizations implement to manage and secure employee technology also influence that technology experience. Advanced EX companies prioritize, regularly evaluate opportunities, and stay nimble by actively bringing in new digital technology to solve problems. One-third (33%) of EX Advanced organizations rate themselves as Digitally Mature versus only 9 percent of Learners. When we look at the differences between EX Advanced and EX Learners, the factors that separate them are "access to technology to do my job."

"EX is very important for the company," says Scott Ronan of Accor. "The need for employees to be able to do their job wherever they are has become incredibly prevalent and making sure we have the backend to keep up with it."

33%

of EX Advanced organizations rate themselves as Digitally Mature

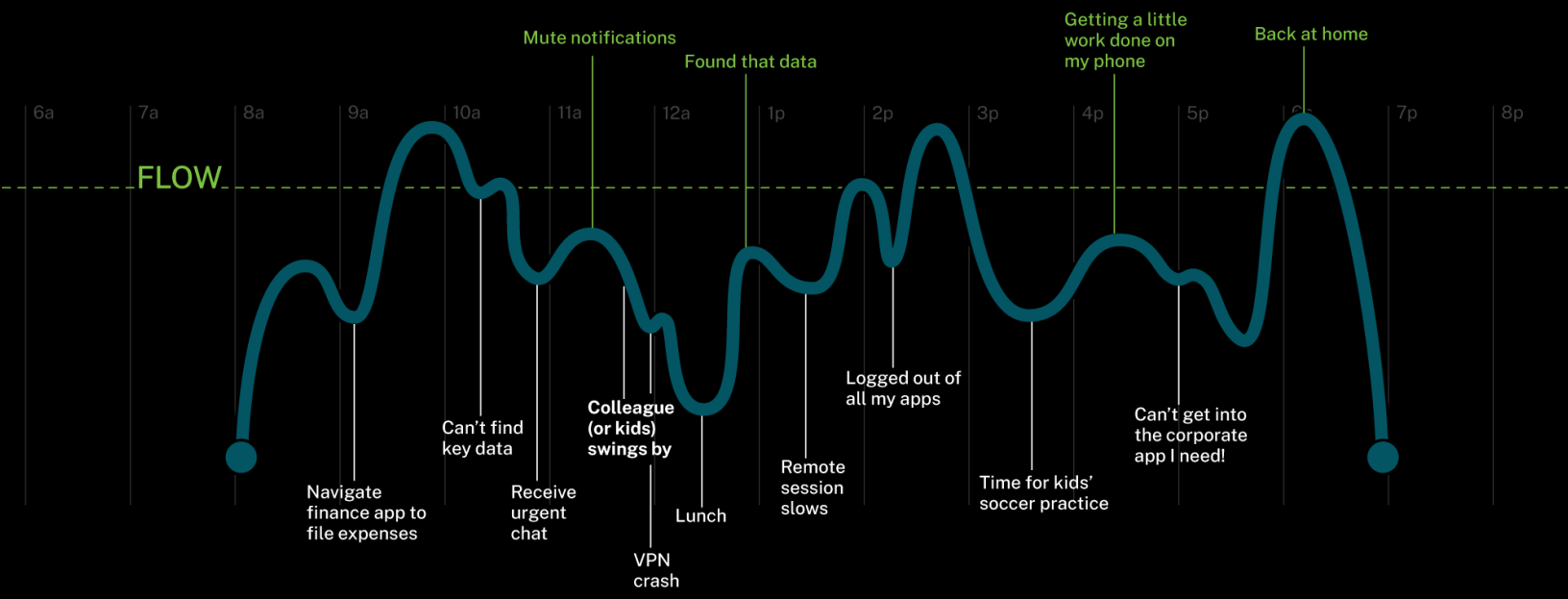
9%

of EX Learners say the same

Employee daily journeys underscore technology's impact on progress

The technology we give employees can either enhance or detract from their ability to get work done. A typical day at work can bring a raft of distractions, frustrations, and roadblocks. Whether they're the unintended consequences of IM or chats, spotty performance from apps delivered on-premises, hybrid, or multi-cloud environments—or VPN failures that might stop remote workers dead in their tracks—technology enhances or detracts from someone's ability to make progress every single day (See Figure 1.) "When I first joined, we couldn't even get conference calls to work," says an HR Director at a global gaming company. "We could never meet, and every single video conference would pause halfway... IT used free tools, so I talked to IT and let them know this is slowing down our business because we can't communicate." The rapid increase in remote work magnified the importance and influence of technology on individual progress, and as companies plan for flexible work in the future—this won't fade.

Figure 1: The moments that enhance or detract from personal productivity



Physical space

The physical space where an employee works might be an assigned desk, a collaborative open environment, a factory floor, a retail store, or a private room inside a local office.

Of course, any employee with a laptop may also work remotely from home, a coffee shop, or an airport. But like technology, the physical spaces where work happens can greatly influence the personal productivity of an individual.

One recent study found that ceiling height has a consistent impact on the nature of respondents' thinking. Participants in the study were asked to rate their current body state or feeling. Those who were in the room with higher ceilings responded more favorably to words associated with freedom, such as "unrestricted" or "open." Those in the lower-ceiling room tended to describe themselves with words associated with confinement. This impact on mood was directly transferred to mental processes; those in the high-ceiling group were more effective at relational thinking, creating connections and the free recall of facts.[17] Workers of the future will need to become adept at recognizing the kind of thinking that different tasks require, and making adjustments to their work environments that can enhance their ability to accomplish these tasks.

"Physical space, when done right, should augment how people work together, reduce friction in what they're trying to accomplish, and help make culture happen," shares Jenna Geigerman, Director of Real Estate & Strategy, Citrix.

COVID-19, however, has forced a re-evaluation of physical space

"We had five years of transformation descend on us in one week," says Jenifer Barkon, Chief Talent Officer, Material, a marketing and research agency. "We built physical offices with the sole mission of driving informal interaction between employees, but now we all work at home." While the pendulum may

seem like it's swung in favor of remote work, it's important to recognize that physical space and interaction will always have a place. EX Advanced, Average and Learner organizations all similarly see "physical office as a space to collaborate" (63%, 65%, 69%, respectively) when it comes to implementing employee engagement strategy.

"The corporate world has always doubled down on the importance of collaboration and human interaction and I think that still holds true," says Citrix's Geigerman. "Now we are in a world where everyone goes home and gets a taste of the flexibility to do your work the way that works best for you. This has forced us to recognize that the old ways may not be true, and you don't have to be in the office all the time... But, it's dramatic to think we can work remote all the time. There needs to be a happy medium."

Figure 2: Facilities procedures likely to be implemented before transitioning back to office

	Total (n=783)		EX Advanced (n=199)		EX Average (n=486)		EX Learner (n=98)	
	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%
Adopt rigorous disinfecting/ cleaning procedures	1	48%	6	36%	1	50%	1	67%
Reconfigure employee seating (e.g., more distance between desks)	2	46%	2	40%	2	47%	2	55%
Reconfigure meeting rooms, break rooms and other common areas to promote social distancing	3	45%	4	39%	3	45%	2	55%
Ask employees to use personal protective equipment (e.g, gloves)	4	39%	8	35%	4	40%	4	41%
Workplace IoT (Internet of Things) technology to promote safety/provide tracing	5	37%	1	43%	5	39%	12	19%

Even though IoT is 5th on average, it's ranked first by EX Advanced organizations



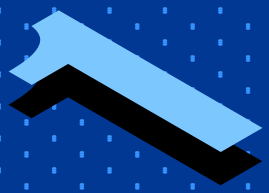
Three principles to power your EX transformation

An operating model defines how your organization delivers value and how it is run. It defines how a strategy will be executed or operationalized now and in the future.

There are many visions of operating models, but most include elements focusing on leadership, governance, structure, capabilities, and services. As companies continue to adapt to an increasingly digital world, recalibrate from the disruption wrought by COVID-19, and harness trends in automation, focusing on employee experience offers a path to outperform those that don't. Fieldwork by Citrix is building on the pioneering work of organizations like the Temkin Group/Qualtrics and Forrester, as well as consultancies like Deloitte, Fujitsu, PWC, Cognizant, and others that have been helping companies with their transformations. In our research we identified three principles that create conditions for an advanced employee experience. Each of these principles are must-haves as you look to operationalize EX and create your future flexible work strategy.

The three principles:

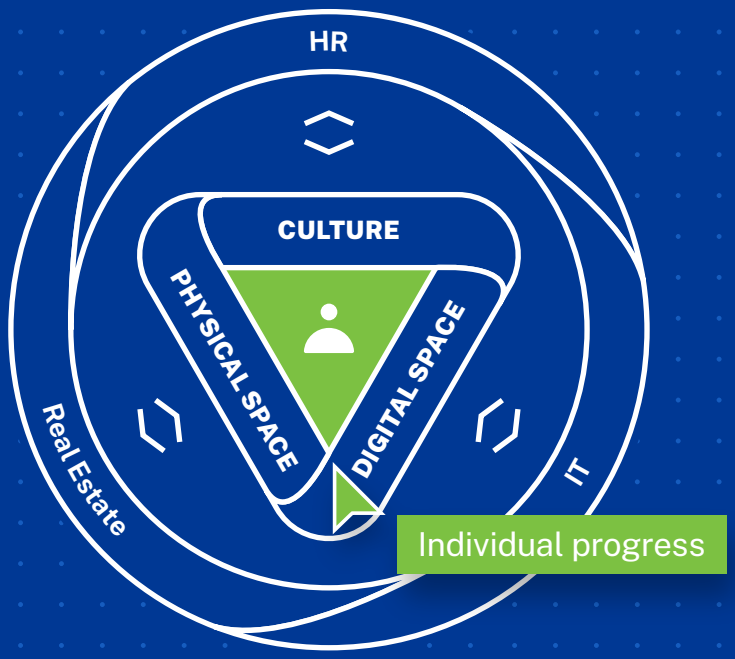
1. Empower **individual progress**
2. Deepen **empathy** from human insights
3. **Partner** to foster linked and shared EX ownership



Individual Progress

1. Empower **individual progress**

For some companies, a remote workforce has opened the door to more attrition, as competitors seek to lure away employees. In an attempt to keep employees engaged, a recent article cited the lengths that biotech companies were going to ensure they didn't lose their best talent. From **virtual cocktail making classes to ukulele building classes**, companies are on a treadmill to keep people happy. While fun, they miss on what really matters most to their employees: individual progress. As Dr. Amabile found in her research, a proven, vital component of employee experience is ensuring your people derive a sense of accomplishment from their work every day. In fact, 52 percent of EX Advanced organizations say that their organizations tailor the day-to-day experience on an individual level, versus 33 percent for EX Learners.



Progress happens at the:

- **Job level:** One HR leader at a high-tech company echoed a sentiment shared by many others: "We've seen a consistent thread in their feedback surveys over the years—our people complain about their ability to make progress." Further examination pointed to multiple factors, including difficulty in finding information and working with teams outside of their own. Progress is also shaped by space. At another high tech manufacturer, the open office environment made it difficult for the legal team to make sensitive phone calls. But they were situated near a marketing team that was constantly collaborating aloud, sending the legal team scrambling to find private rooms.
- **Career level.** In addition to making progress in their work, individuals seek to advance their careers. "Performance management and engagement are usually interconnected," says an HR director at a global gaming company. "Someone who is performing well will be naturally engaged. The two have a link, and the linchpin of that link is the manager… Are you learning and growing? Does your manager care about you? Does [your] manager instill a sense of purpose in you?… People leave when they no longer have a sense that they're developing or growing." Also critical is learning and development. As automation continues to shape the future of work, both upskilling (helping individuals to grow in their effectiveness in their role) and re-skilling (training individuals to take on a completely new role) are essential. Amazon famously committed $700 million to upskilling employees across the entire enterprise.[18]

52%

of organizations say they tailor the day-to-day experience on an individual level

33%

of EX Learners say the same

Progress is personal

At both the job and career level, Daniel Pink's notions of autonomy, mastery, and purpose are convincingly and tangibly present. But there are no broad brush answers: facilitating progress for employees happens at an individual level.

Even in the same roles, individuals might have different workstyles to be effective. For instance, as part of a workspace design initiative led by Geigerman's team, Citrix found that for a sales rep making cold calls to prospects, one rep might prefer the energy of an open and collaborative space while another might want a quiet space to focus on conversations. Furthermore, they might differ in their "digital dexterity", or readiness to adopt new technology.

Tactics like these extend directly from how Citrix manages relationships with its people. "It's about the individual," says Donna Kimmel, Chief People Officer at Citrix. "It's truly about understanding that individual's choice for working anywhere, anyhow, anyway, on any device. That's what's really going to drive a difference." Marc Curtis, Head of Workplace Innovation at Fujitsu, agrees. "You've got to put the person at the center of it," he says. "And ultimately, it has to be about the personalization of that experience for the individual. And for me, that's what technology gives us the ability to do." In other words, leaders must care about their employees and provide the environment and tools for individuals to be and do their best.

> "Ultimately, it has to be about the personalization of that experience for the individual."

Marc Curtis

Head of Workplace Innovation, Fujitsu



Empathy

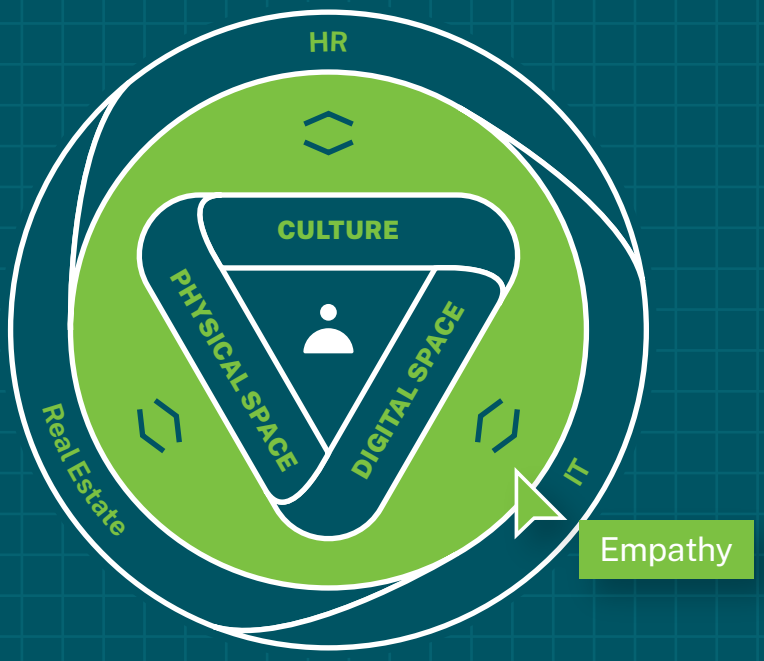
2. Deepen **empathy** from human insights

To develop a clear picture of what progress means at the individual level, you need to develop empathy for individual employees. Empathy gives you a window into the world of employees and how you can help them progress in their roles. Starting at a young age we're prodded to be better listeners, but that usually means listening to a teacher, parent, or coach. Unfortunately, difficulties with listening carry over into the workplace.

Organizations hit roadblocks along the way: You might not be given access to employees. You might fear the ability to act on what you hear. You might hear something that creates unanticipated work.

Empathy separates advanced organizations from the pack

Our quantitative study uncovered how different organizational behaviors and



activities were connected to EX maturity. Most organizations all have shared values and norms—there wasn't much difference between the advanced orgs and the less mature ones. We started to see some differences in the middle tier of activities; in other words, advanced orgs were doing these things more than the less mature ones. These represent a set of operational EX initiatives. Of interest, financial value starts to show up more here. This makes sense, because as companies look to embark on new EX initiatives, they need to gain the budget to do so. And this happens by investigating, socializing, and evangelizing the value of EX.

Where this data became very interesting was at the top of the pyramid: we saw the most separation between EX Advanced orgs and Learners around a set of empathy-driven activities. Advanced orgs were far more likely to be using techniques like design thinking and journey mapping to improve EX.

There's a science to it

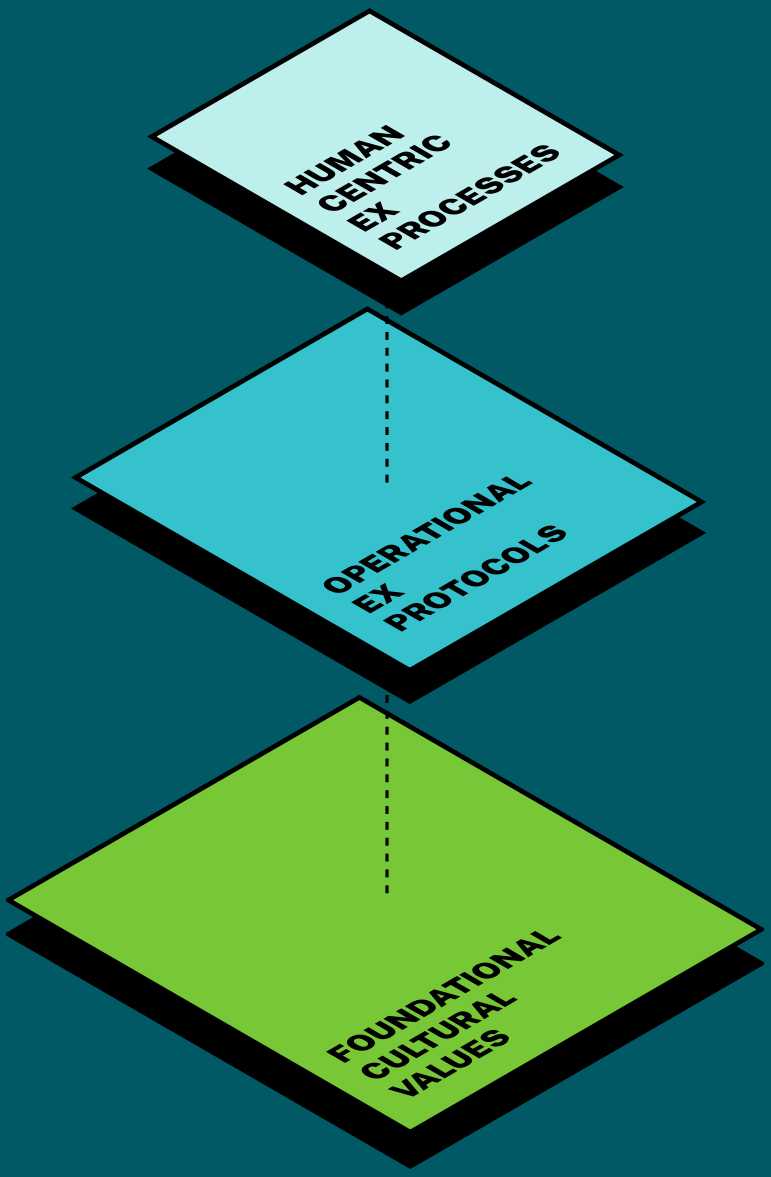
Developing empathy doesn't translate to "more surveys." There's precision and intent behind effective employee listening. Marissa Gonzalez, a technology leader who has built an EX function in IT from the ground up for a major financial services organization. "Any company that delivers an exceptional customer or employee experience knows that there's a method to this," she says. "There's a real science behind it. And if you're hiring someone to do this work, you need to make sure they know that science and how to apply it." As with science, there's a method and process to effectively develop empathy for employees. IT leaders have traditionally relied on helpdesk ticket data. If you don't engage in active listening, you'll miss the 'silent sufferers'—those employees that don't go out of their way to call the helpdesk when they have a problem.

Data science will help build empathy at scale

In the future, Advanced EX organizations are not just going to have more frequent or precise data, they're going to have access to advanced analytics to better understand EX. A small handful of companies look at daily signals from their workforce, and apply data science to make the right connections and decisions. We spoke with a large high-tech company doing this already, and while they may seem like unicorns today, more and more companies will have access to this kind of approach in the future.

"Leaders need to be cross-disciplined, agile and innovative in business change," says the CIO at a US defense company. "This often means the CIO is partnering with the CMO and CDO for customer lifecycle development, [and] the HRD or CPO for digitalizing HR (improving HR services and processes and or the employee experience using technology and data), leading to deliverables that create the organizational impact we all aspire to."

Companies with advanced EX functions engage in empathy-driven activities



EX Advanced organizations were at least 60 percentage points more likely than EX Learners to:

- Measure and analyze experience with devices and applications to improve EX
- Utilize specific employee personas/ segments
- Utilize iterative processes like Design Thinking
- Utilize employee journey mapping focused on common/ day-to-day-tasks
- Utilize employee journeys that detail the entire employee experience

- Have EX best practices that managers and leaders can adapt
- Utilize KPIs to measure employee experience
- Managers are measured/ incentivized for employee experience outcomes
- Quantify improvements to employee experience in financial terms
- Cross-functional role(s) specifically focused on enhancing EX

- Have organizational values and norms
- Actively promote and distribute the cultural values



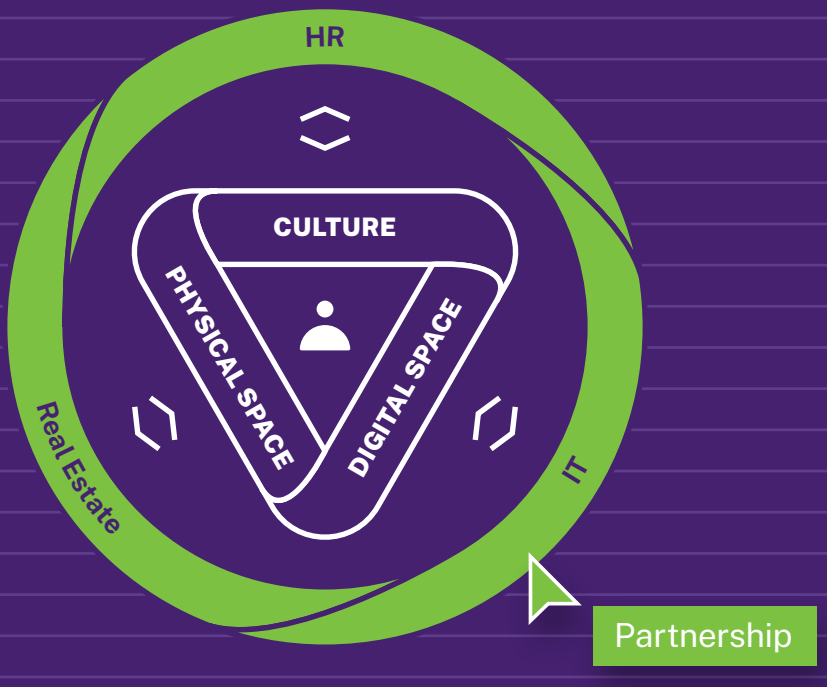
Partnership

3. **Partner** to foster linked and shared EX ownership

"Break down the silos!" "Create cross-functional collaboration!" This is a sampling of soft advice often given to solve so many business challenges. With EX, however, it's a critical principle. The ability to create an experience with the right recipe of culture, digital space, and physical space requires that they work together in a meaningful way—and for many organizations it's a way they haven't worked together in the past.

"IT and HR sit together in the office and have their own floor," says Jenifer Barkon, Chief Talent Officer, Material, a marketing and research agency. "They run stuff by one another, and both have a shared objective which is to create an appealing workplace that is exciting and modern."

Our quantitative study found that 64 percent of EX Advanced orgs were far more likely



to have substantial partnerships in place (i.e., shared goals or KPIs) between HR, Real Estate, and IT—and only 21 percent learners did the same. The payoff for EX is clear: "Partnering is more than just breaking down silos," says the Head of Culture and Engagement for a global financial services firm. "A lot of times employee experience [initiatives] feel added, which makes it less prioritized. By partnering, it helps decrease lift and cost of your EX initiative in a way that helps increase the value impact."

Partnership doesn't mean control

There's a popular misconception that it falls to HR to shape organizational culture, yet so much of a company's culture is shaped outside that department. Along with IT and real estate leaders, those organizations assume the role of trusted advisors that guide the rest of their business. Each acts as a subject matter expert on Culture, Technology, and Physical Space, respectively, and collaborates with their business peers to shape these inputs into EX. This is born out in the research, with Advanced EX organizations more successfully including operational departments (31%) in EX strategy development versus Learners (19%).

64%

of EX Advanced organizations say their HR, IT, and Real Estate departments have one or more shared goals

21%

of EX Learners say the same

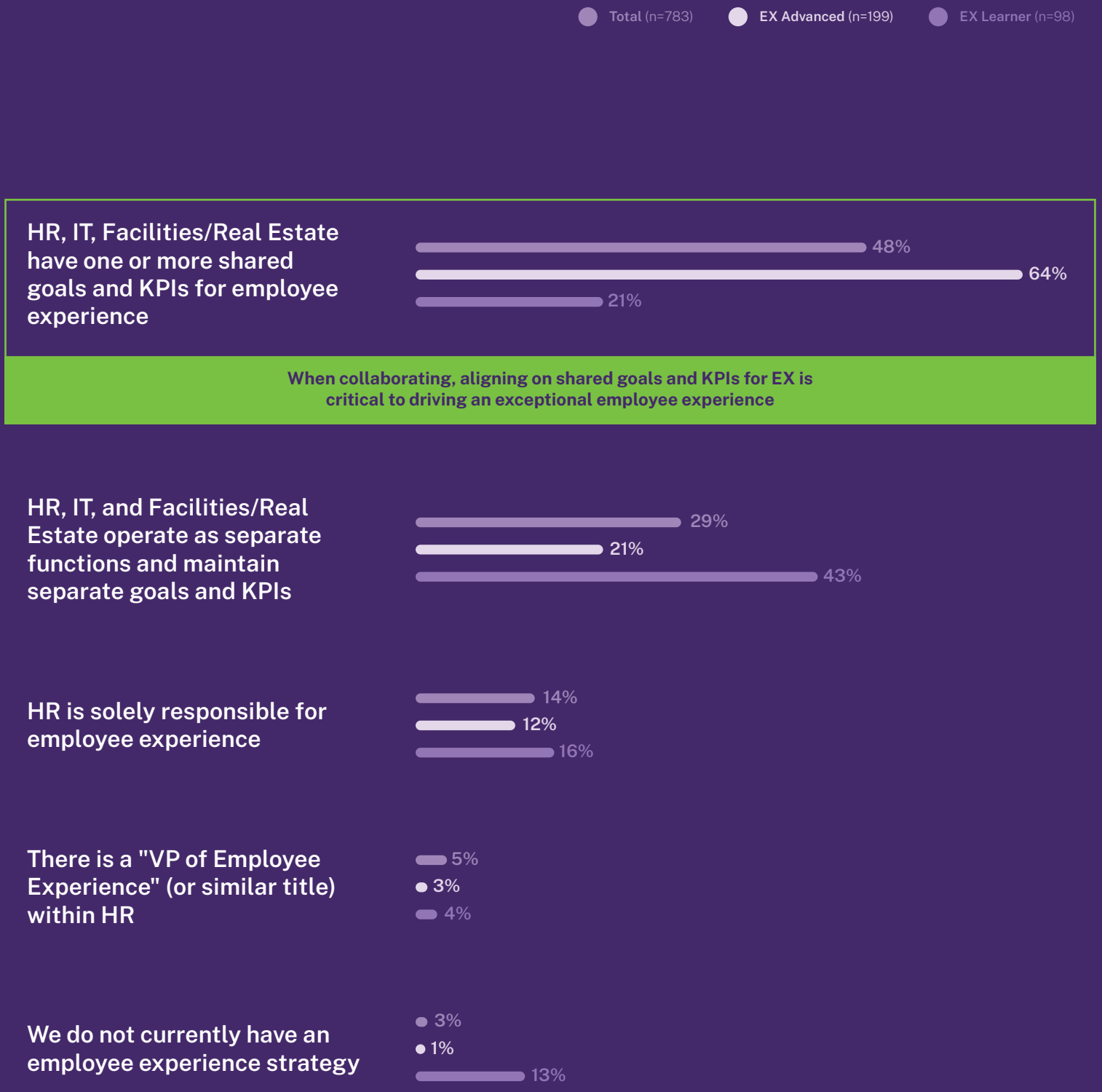


Figure 4: The importance of aligning on shared goals

Putting the principles into practice

Every organization is facing the same challenge today: how to adapt to this new world of work forced by the emergence of COVID-19 and shape their flexible work strategy.

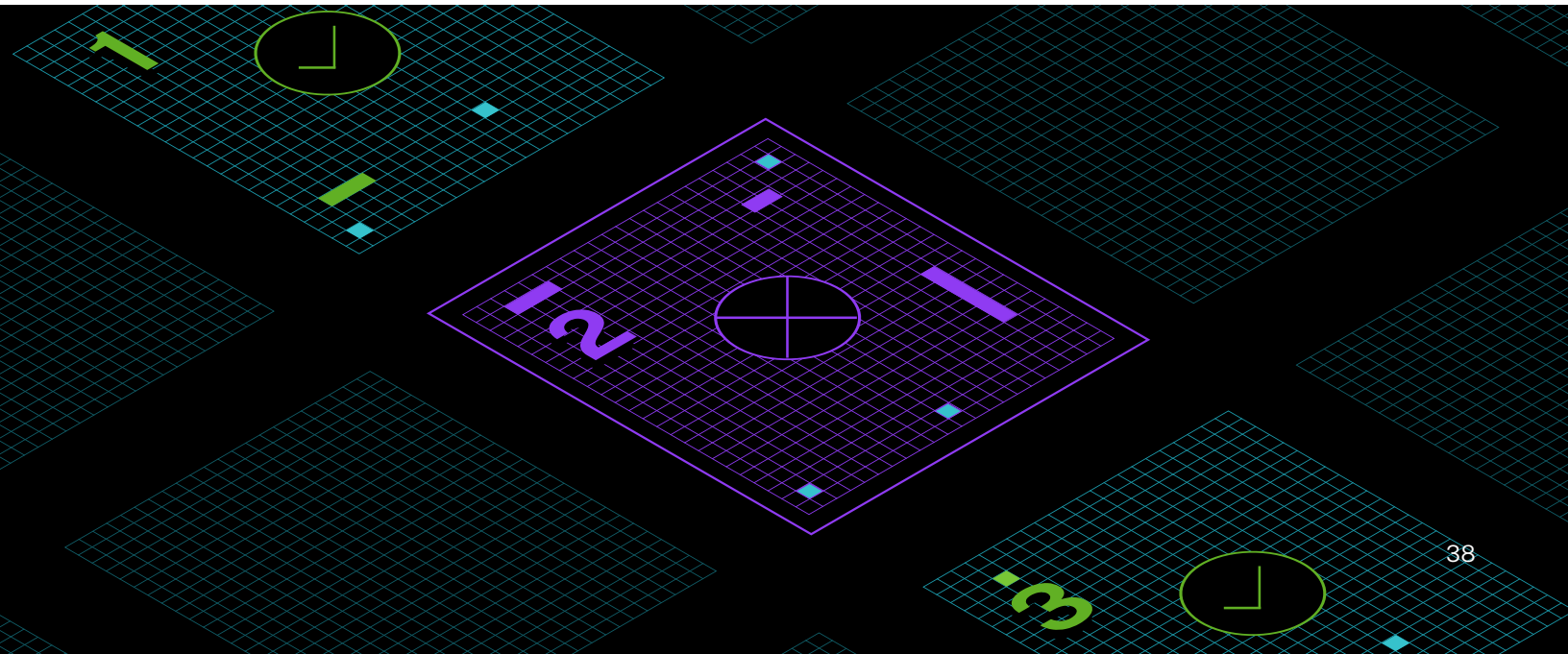
Even as the pandemic passes, companies don't see a way back to the old way of working and how they approached physical office space, technology, or even culture. "COVID is going to pass, but we still need to be ready for the next crisis that comes along," says one IT leader at a US financial services company, sharing a widely held apprehension. The principles around individual progress, empathy, and partnership are at the heart of actions that you can take to operationalize EX and create a more enduring and effective flexible work strategy. Our research uncovered practices and insights that shape the way companies operate. These levers tune several elements of company operating models, including culture and values, structure, governance, technology, and services.

1. Start with an assessment of your EX maturity

The first question is...where do I get started?

You can't get somewhere unless you know where you are, and this starts with an assessment. "You can't step in and say what's wrong; you have to go in with a neutral pair of eyes," says an HR director at a global gaming company. "It's like being a doctor and I have to run tests and take measurements before saying what the ailments are."

Companies we interviewed excel in some areas, but are developing in others. Citrix created a maturity assessment to aid customers in identifying parts of their operating model that need attention and effort to create the necessary conditions for a world class employee experience. There is no common linear path as companies have individual journeys toward EX excellence. For instance, organizations like Komatsu have a focus on employee progress deeply ingrained in its culture as part of "The Komatsu Way." The result is that the seemingly necessary imperative to make financial justifications for EX investments is absorbed into a cultural understanding and management philosophy. Our data and interviews showed that having well understood cultural values and norms that are actively promoted is part of that foundation, along with technology that facilitates remote work.



A sample EX assessment

Organizations with advanced EX strategies use survey instruments to periodically assess their performance and progress. Feel free to adapt this example to your organization's needs.

Name _____

Title _____

Date _____

How much do you agree with each of the following statements?

0 = Completely disagree
1 = Somewhat disagree
2 = Neutral
3 = Somewhat agree
4 = Completely agree

Statement	Rating	Notes
We have a widely shared and unified vision and direction for Employee Experience (EX) across the organization that is supported actively and visibly by senior leaders.	0 1 2 3 4	
Leadership uses EX insights to inform decisions.	0 1 2 3 4	
There is active collaboration between HR, IT, and Real Estate with business stakeholders to help us shape our employee experience strategy.	0 1 2 3 4	
We capture frequent and precise feedback and ideas from employees about their experience.	0 1 2 3 4	
We continuously improve the employee experience by using human centric and interative design methods with insights from direct user input and engagement.	0 1 2 3 4	
We quantify and track the value of EX in financial terms or established business metrics.	0 1 2 3 4	
Our technology facilitates flexibility to allow employees to work remotely with an uncompromised experience.	0 1 2 3 4	
We ensure supporting a positive EX is core component of our culturual norm.	0 1 2 3 4	
We have staff focused on the people side of change management to ensure a great employee experience (e.g. ADKAR or Kotter's Change Management Model).	0 1 2 3 4	
We have team members in HR, IT, and Real Estate who have ownership of ensuring that employees have a great employee technology experience.	0 1 2 3 4	

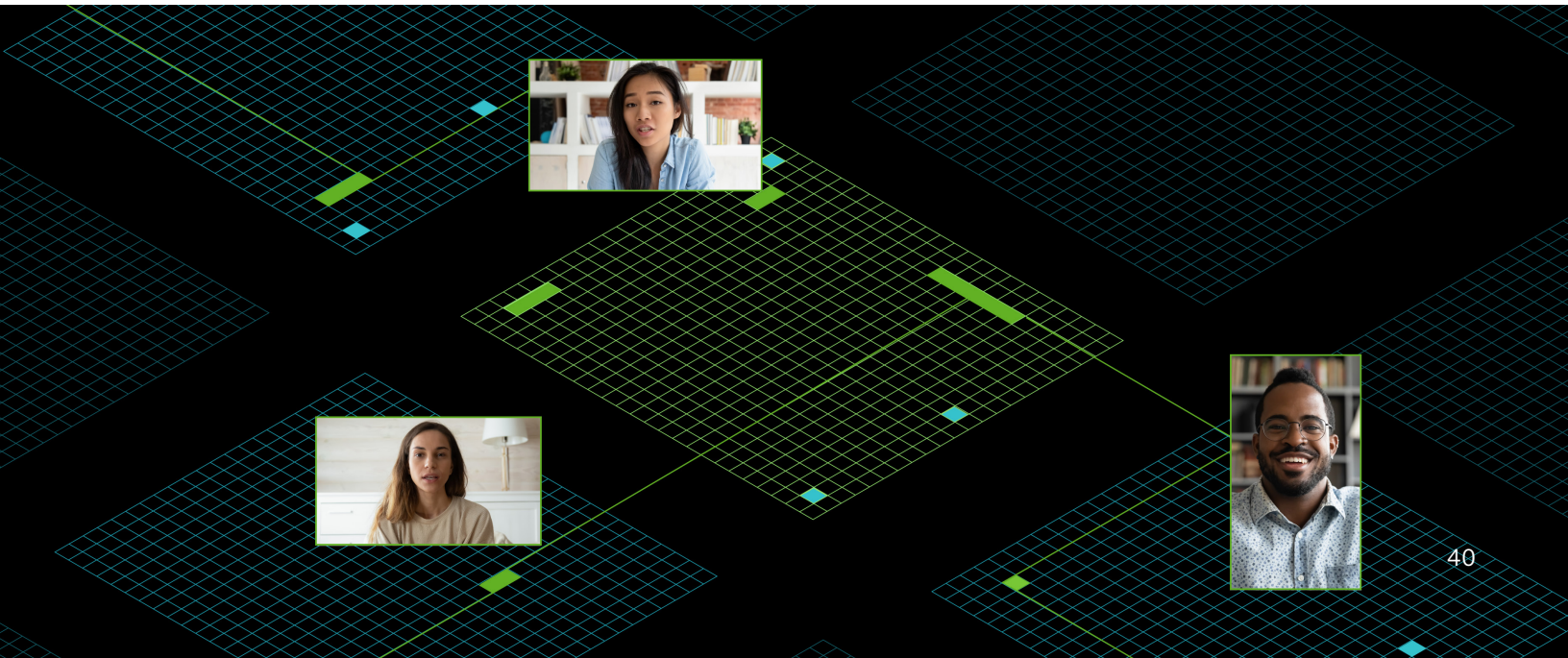
2. Create an experience culture that pervades your organization

Leaders must drive the transformation and executive teams set the tone for the entire organization—but that's only the start.

Ensuring that a focus on individual progress is an integral part of organizational culture requires more than leadership. It requires managers to think and act in a consistent way. "For our new CEO, employee experience is very central," says a Senior Vice President of Onboarding at a major bank. "She talks about a sense of belonging, individuals' strength, and what employees can add to the organization… the emphasis is more on the employee and less on the organization."

When you define values or behaviors for your organization, you can't just put "We value Employee Experience" on a poster and say it's part of your culture. You have to reinforce it at all levels, recognizing and rewarding the desired behaviors, while managing performance against that. Executive teams must not only buy in to the importance of EX, but drive it at their level by encouraging collaboration and incentivizing the organization with the right goals and KPIs to let them know they're on the right track. Culture doesn't come to life just at the top—it's manifested in how people work together and treat each other at every level.

"Our leadership is very vocal about it," says a Head of Culture and Engagement at a global financial services company. "Engagement measurement is not just for the executive



leadership team to see and aggregate scores. We break down the respective score for each people leader in the organization and action on our learnings at all levels of the organization... For example, when you're looking at a promotion, we look at how they did on engagement measures—how did they do? What type of environment did they create for their teams? How have they shown progress in terms of actions against what they learned from engagement?"

"[We] target specific actions to reposition the [employee] experience in a way that aligns with the culture that we're defining," she continues. "This happens through activities such as administrating the various array of employee data collections that we manage (engagement surveys, focus groups, data mining, listening)... We make sure [we're] thinking through how this translates into day-to-day actions to make sure that we have congruence between the culture we espouse and the experience that our employees feel."

> "Engagement measurement is not just for the executive leadership team to see and aggregate scores."
>
> Head of Culture and Engagement, global financial services company

Culture can also reinforce values that drive intended business transformation. One HR leader from a global tech company told us about an employee value proposition initiative intended to help the company shift from a hardware to a services business model, fostering values and behaviors around creativity, risk-taking, and customer centricity.

Support EX with a focus on employee well-being

COVID-19 forced a big, sudden shift to remote work that's blurring the lines between work and life for employees. That, and the stress of the pandemic itself, is resulting in heightened levels of stress and burnout, which can have profound effects on the mental health of employees and their ability to be productive. To continue to support employees through a future with more remote work, organizations need to focus on the well-being of the entire employee—not just the one that exists from 9 to 5.

Our research found that wellness programs are among the top practices that differentiate Advanced and Learner organizations in EX—second only to access to technology for workers to do their jobs. Investing in employee well-being is crucial to maintaining productivity and engagement, and an overall improved employee experience through different horizontals and verticals.

Electronic access is a main driver of participation in well-being programs. In fact, the pandemic has put pressure on organizations to explore possibilities offered by technology to improve mental well-being and support their employees. Well-being programs range from simple gym membership subsidies to technology platforms that can customize access to resources and programs based on individual users' unique goals and health status. For example, resources could be tailored to someone who's managing diabetes versus someone who may be pregnant and needs more support in prenatal care, or one who's looking for strategies to help save for college.

Figure 5: The positive impacts of technology on EX

	EX Advanced (n=199)		EX Learner (n=98)	
	Rank	%	Rank	%
Employee communications	3	29%	1	40%
Employee surveys and engagement	2	30%	5	21%
Digital workspaces (including Single Sign-On)	1	32%	3	32%

Leaders from Enterprise companies value digital workspaces (40%) much more than their counterparts (-30%)

3. Instill EX into technology governance

IT governance aligns technology initiatives with business goals—but can also be used to create experience.

In a prior role, Marissa Gonzalez has helped make EX a part of a technology change governance process. When new technologies or changes were being rolled out, the change's impact on EX had to be considered for the initiative to move forward. Common questions leaders would probe on included, "Were employees involved in the design of this change?" and "Were they included in the testing?" The addition of an EX stakeholder in the governance process got other teams to think more deeply about the impact of their services on EX—and quickly adapted how they approached implementations. While this is an example of technology governance, this same idea can be up-leveled and applied to broader service and process changes.

Moreover, ensuring multiple disciplines feed in to an EX strategy is a best practice unto itself. Some 64 percent of EX Advanced organizations share goals across multiple departments, including IT, HR, and Operations, and 68 percent of them rely on a coalition of employees/departments to create their EX strategy.



As part of their End User Computing transformation program, Willis Towers Watson is delivering centralized application and desktop virtualization services through a solution referred to internally as Flexible Provisioning—or "Flex" for short. "Flex will help drive significant operational efficiencies for the growing organization through enhanced information security, reduced business risk, and improved business continuity while improving both employee and business productivity," says Andy Champion, Head of Workplace Technology Engineering at Willis Towers Watson. Once an organization is able to provide this kind of flexible experience, it becomes possible for them to personalize the experience in any number of ways for specific roles and work-styles and open up ways to simplify employee tasks.

Set the right destination for your roadmap with a technology experience vision

When asked about technology to improve EX, right after the table stakes of messaging, collaboration, and communications, were digital workspaces. *What does a great employee technology experience look like?* This became even more prevalent for large companies as they seek to help employees access the resources they need in an easy, effective, flexible, responsive, reliable, and secure way. A simple framework that you can use includes these probing but vital questions.

Is it:

- **Effective**—Can employees accomplish what they're looking to get done?
- **Easy**—Do they have to expend more time and effort than they otherwise would?
- **Flexible**—Do employees have the flexibility and autonomy to use the devices they want and work where they want?
- **Responsive**—Does the solution perform at a high level and as well as the employee expects?
- **Reliable**—Can the experience survive minor disruptions like device failure or handle larger ones like COVID-19?
- **Secure**—Are employees protected from threats that put themselves or your organization at risk, and is their privacy protected?

Accor measures progress on a similar set of criteria: "Our business analyst sits down and compare numbers pre vs. post innovation," says VP of Technology and Infrastructure Scott Ronan. "We grade based on [various] factors which are ease of use, speed, technical complexity, times used, how easy is to learn for users, cost, is it providing benefits such as reducing time for task."

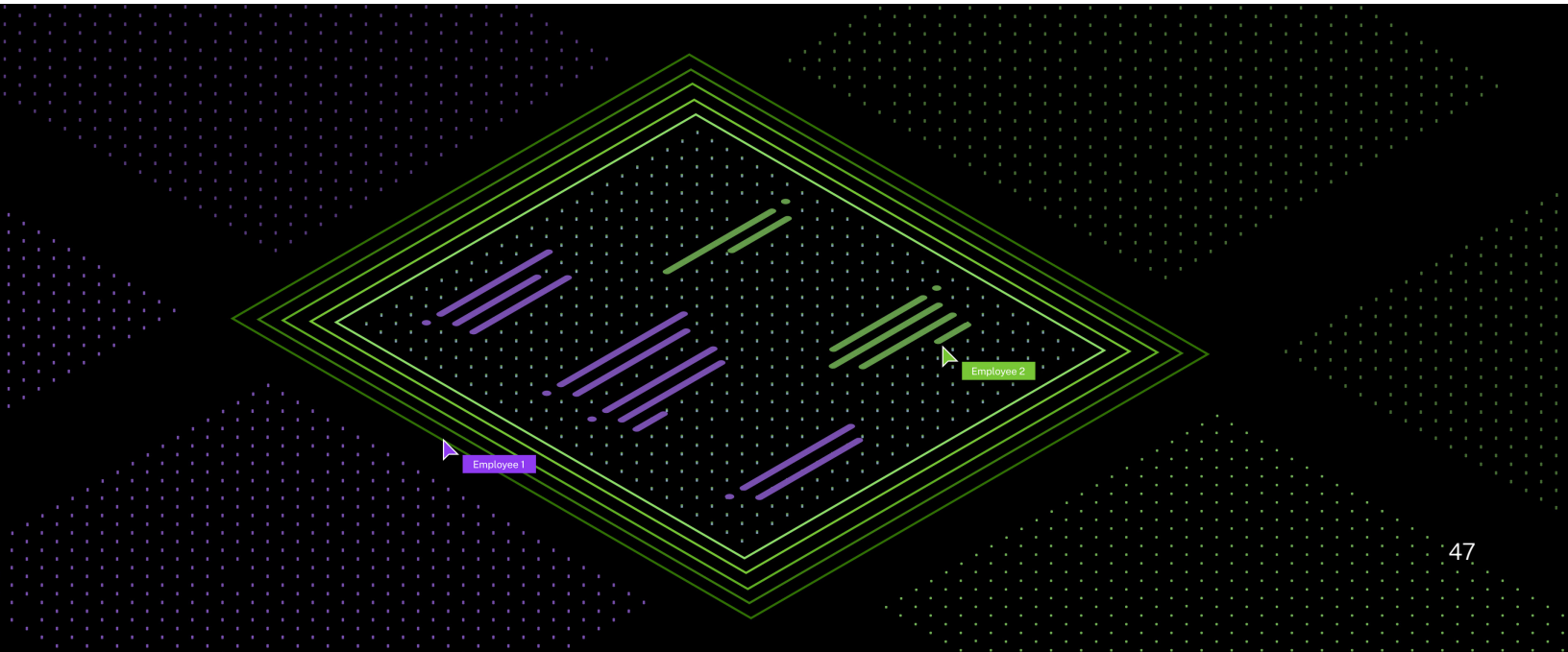
Leverage security to improve EX along the way

Experience is often viewed as a casualty for improving security. Even worse: employees find ways to circumvent heavy-handed security controls that hamper their progress, nullifying the intent security controls meant to protect your business. It doesn't have to be this way. A recent Forrester Research report, "Enhance EX With Zero Trust," shares that implementing Zero Trust, a modern model for security, gives employees more choice, reduces friction in accessing key information resources, and improves technology performance. It also states that implementing Zero Trust can help improve employee perceptions of your company and contribute to a good security culture. For instance, by shifting away from VPNs to Zero Trust Network Access, IT teams can ease access to on-premises and cloud-based apps, offer passwordless direct access to cloud resources, and improve latency and timeouts.

5. Create a closed-loop listening strategy

Employee surveys that probe on different dimensions of EX are commonplace. However, many organizations struggle with putting insights from these surveys into action. Furthermore, the length and infrequency of these surveys—usually annual, with some kind of mid-term pulse—limits their usefulness as they can be disconnected from specific initiatives and "survey fatigue" can limit their effectiveness as frequency increases. Partnership is critical to limit survey fatigue. Worse for IT, HR, and Real Estate leaders, they're often left with just helpdesk ticket data to try and telegraph employee sentiment. Advanced organizations do use traditional surveys – but it's what they do next is what matters.

Personas are not new in IT, Real Estate, or HR. But how these personas are created, and what kind of insights they can offer, has evolved. By employing a system for listening that's coupled with action, companies can infuse personas with enabling individual progress. Effective personas don't just focus on tools, but what people are trying to accomplish. What are your employees' "jobs to be done?" This theory created by business theorist Clay Christiansen highlights that often we think about the tools people use, not what they're trying to accomplish. Many employee personas created in IT focus more on the level of service, apps or devices an employee needs but not what it is that they're trying to do—and that's an approach that must change to support a better EX.



Employee listening tactics

EX leaders who are redesigning their listening approach can think about listening in "layers" or "a triage of layers," of which there are four:

- **Top-level signal.** Annual or asynchronous benchmark EX surveys shed light on to where the heat is. These are a starting point, and let EX teams know where they should start to focus. It's also critical that you take action. "There's no set frequency of running a survey," an HR leader at a global gaming company says. "We shouldn't be running a survey for the sake of doing it. The frequency depends on the ability to act. Worst kind of surveys are just understanding how employees feel. We can't do much with it … If we're not doing something about [the survey results] there is no point of running a survey. What's the point of asking if you're not doing anything about it?"

- **Refinement.** Based on the survey results, deploy subsequent methods to dig deeper into those areas. If technology is an issue, is it the tools people use for work, or client-facing systems? One financial services EX leader shared, "We are piloting virtual anonymous focus groups… where you bring in 50+ people into a single session. It's a rapid way for us to ask pointed, targeted questions but get feedback from a large volume of people in a single setting." Passive means can also help refine or shape solutions. Companies like Mars Drinks and Citrix outfitted rooms with sensors so that they could track usage and make better plans for office redesign based on behaviors of the people using the space—employees don't always do what they say! Journey or empathy maps can also be effective tools to refine ideas.

- **Validation and prioritization.** The next phase is to test possible solutions with employees and gain their input on priority. Leaders know there is no shortage of issues to tackle, yet only so much budget or time—so it's important to pick the right solutions to prioritize. The same financial services EX leader shared "We then send a pick list back to the employees to ask them to prioritize what would be the most impactful things for you for us to work on."

- **Feedback.** Finally, organizations must gather feedback so that they can refine and shape solutions. This step also has the added benefit of demonstrating action to employees, letting them know that their voices were heard.

Consider the employee's daily journey, but don't lose sight of the employee lifecycle

By honing in on an employee's daily journey, you can uncover the roadblocks they face and help co-create solutions to help them be more effective. By helping them find progress, you're super-charging their experience. "Every company talks about onboarding and enabling sales force, but don't place as much attention to helping that person every day throughout their time with their company," says Meerah Rajavel, CIO at Citrix.

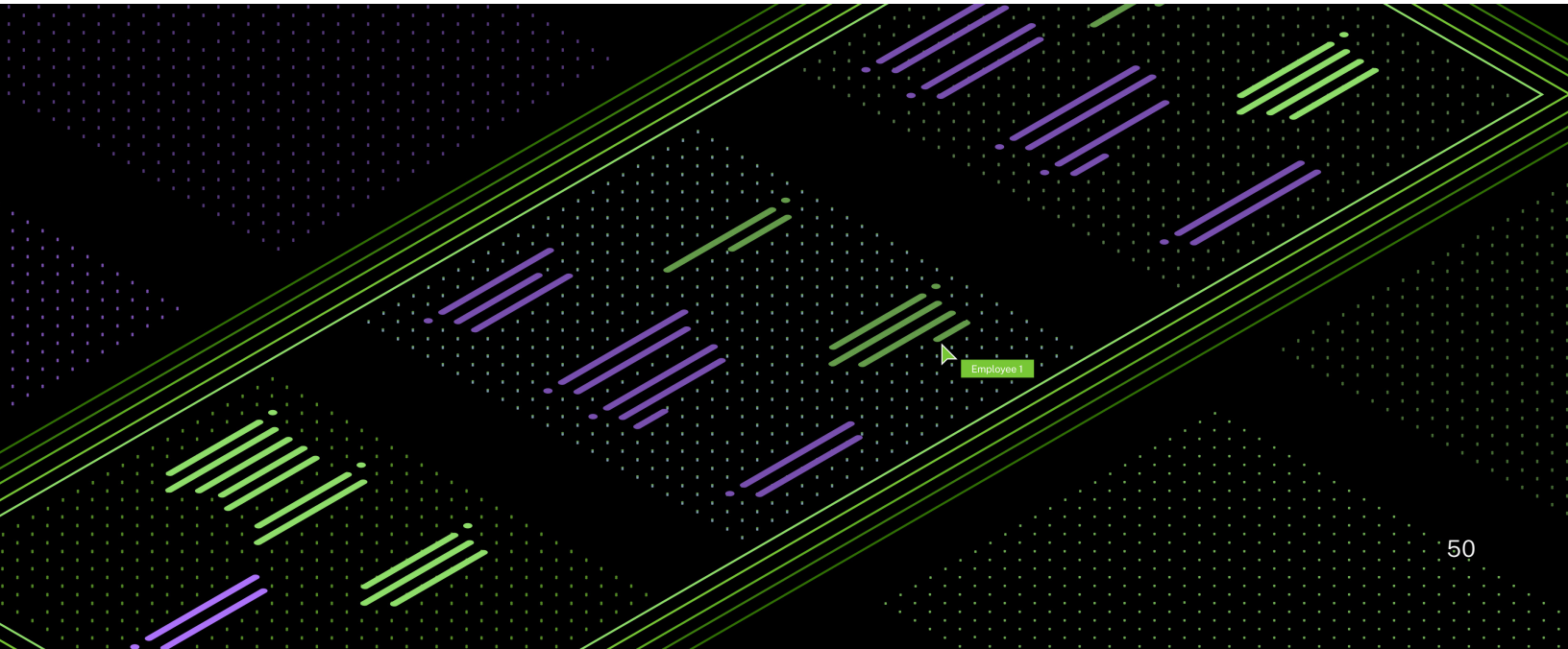
Businesses must also focus on the employee lifecycle—thinking about the moment a candidate finds out about a potential role to the time that they leave the organization. By doing so, they look to create a network of advocates for the company and maybe boomerang employees. One financial services organization we spoke with does new hire journey mapping to understand how employees feel at each onboarding touchpoint. They plot this out and optimize the trajectory for the best employee experience (e.g., after a ton of paperwork, give them a welcome message instead of more paperwork). This is subsequently rolled up to a broader view of that journey.

6. Overcome the inertia in organizational structures

Organizations often struggle with how to break from patterns that result in siloed activity. Tactics to help break down silos range from the shorter term to more permanent options. These include:

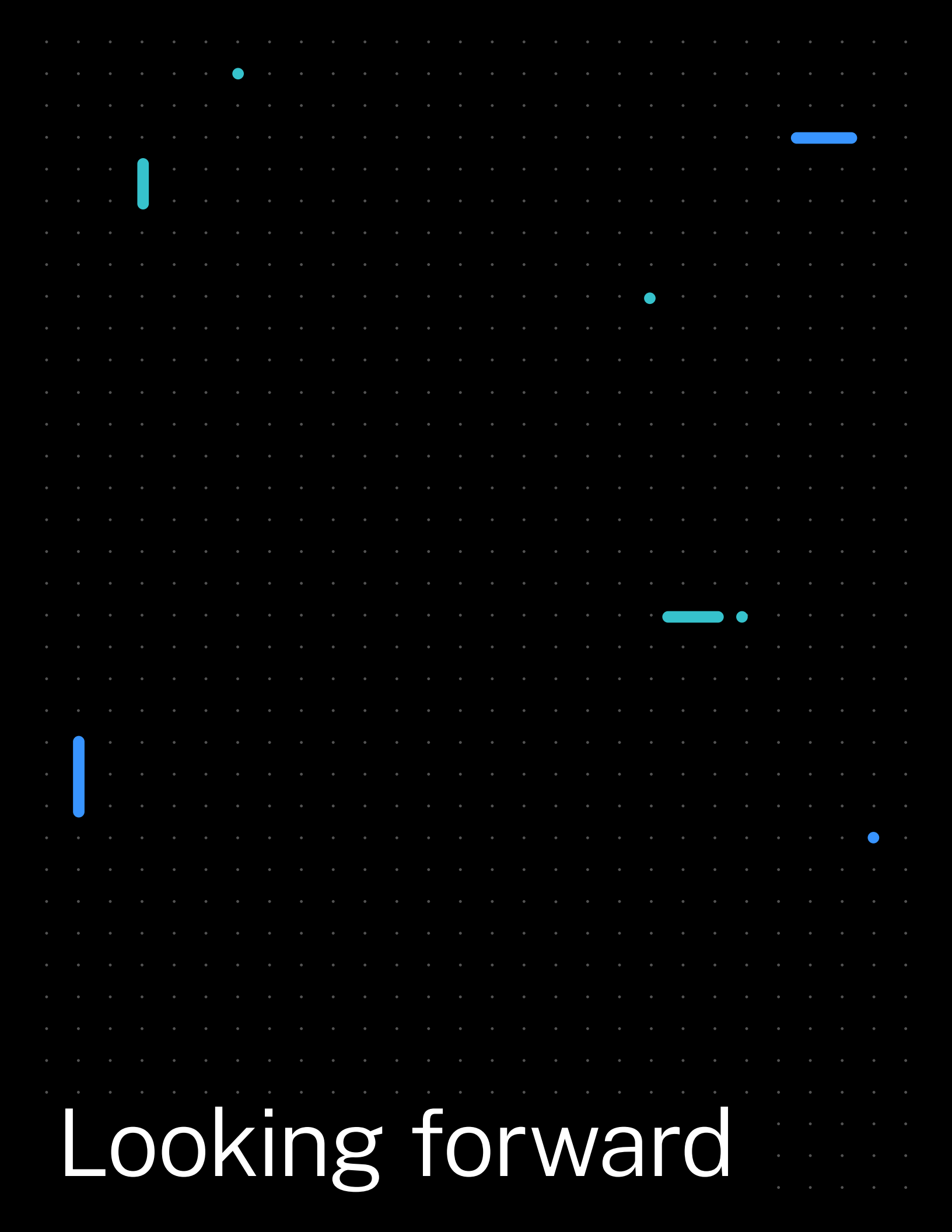
- **Workshops with stakeholders.** Renee Flores, Citrix's Director of Design Thinking, conducts design thinking–inspired "visioning" workshops both internally and with customers to help re-frame problems and devise effective solutions. These brainstorming sessions focus on identifying a vision for "what does great look like?" For instance, during a recent roundtable with financial services IT leaders, the group painted a vision for their future flexible work strategy that included perspectives on not only technology, but also the culture and well-being of the employees that they serve. The exercise then identifies roadblocks to achieving this vision and brainstorms ideas to get around the roadblocks. These are most effective when stakeholders from across the business participate—and identify some concrete next steps that they can take.

- **Cross-business councils.** These councils are made up of representation from HR, IT, real estate, along with business stakeholders. At Citrix, leadership in these areas meets regularly to collectively tackle EX issues, including how to create an effective flexible work



strategy and how to bring people back into offices safely. “Small employee experience council gets together once a quarter and discuss things that are important to each department,” says Scott Ronan of Accor. “That is then taken back up to the executive leadership and then it comes back to the people as an objective to achieve in their team’s development plan.”

- **Departmental cross-pollination.** Companies have also been moving people into other parts of the organization to break silos and foster partnership. One global auto manufacturer made this happen by moving IT personnel into HR and vice-versa. At Willis Towers Watson, Champion noted that IT talent is spread throughout the organization. “We have technologists embedded within our business, including key segments that deliver software and consulting services to customers,” he says. “These technologists are focused on enabling those businesses with core IT services and software, with consultancy capabilities.”



Looking forward

There is no linear path to EX excellence, and no uniform level of EX maturity.

While some organizations may be more advanced in how they manage Culture and Physical Space, they may lag in how they approach Digital Space. We did not encounter an organization that neared perfection in all three. This makes every organization's journey unique as they refine their EX.

In the next 15 years, 91 percent of professionals believe that their organization will spend more on technology than on human workers.[19] While automation may replace some roles in the future, it will also be deployed to augment employees—increasing the complexity of managing the Digital Space input into EX. According to Forrester Research, advances in automation technologies will mean that humans increasingly work side by side with robots, software agents, and other machines.[20] Creating an effective partnership between people and technology will require a level of care and purposefulness.

The principles of Individual Progress, Empathy, and Partnership will not only set up your business for outcomes like improving CX today and increasing innovation today, they will set your organization up for success no matter the circumstances. By implementing the actions mapped to the three principles of employee experience, crafting durable, high quality EX within your organization will not feel like work. It will feel like your best work.

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