Moving Beyond the Moment

Practical Steps for building an Integrated Employee Experience

By Janet Ramey and Mike Mitchell

As the world slowly emerges from the pandemic, companies find themselves struggling to attract and retain the talent to pursue emerging opportunities. Challenges around re-engaging the workforce are combining with a growing war for talent as the global economy heats up. According to the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM), the tide is turning. SHRM cites a study that shows that "more than half of employees surveyed in North America plan to look for a new job in 2021." Forward-looking enterprises are ramping efforts to not only attract new talent but also to retain existing employees, alleviate worker burnout and increase engagement.

Employee Experience (EX) is a critical, but often misunderstood and under-resourced, toolset to address these challenges. Ninety-two percent of HR leaders say EX is top priority for 2021. According to Deloitte, however, nearly two-thirds (59%) of executives report they are not ready or only somewhat ready to address the challenge. Operations leaders, this is your opportunity to step up.

Operations: Ideally Positioned to Lead EX for the Enterprise

Functionally designed and implemented systems tend to produce a series of disconnected moments rather than a cohesive experience. A common example is employee onboarding. Because each functional player -- recruiting, IT provisioning, compensation approvers, hiring managers, onboarding compliance teams -- has its own agenda to manage, it's no surprise that the experience feels fractured and designed to serve the needs of the process rather than that of the new hire taking the journey.

With end-to-end focus on business processes that cross functional boundaries and frequent touchpoints with employees through delivery of critical services, Operations is well-positioned to lead EX. By leveraging its people, data, and systems, Operations can transform the employee's day-to-day experience interacting with the company. Deep domain expertise, niche skills and capabilities to drive stakeholder alignment, change management and communication make a strong case for Operations to lead in this space.

Where to Start: Building Holistic Experiences

Let's borrow a page from the teams that focus on external Customer Experience (CX). CX focuses on the sum of interactions a customer has with a business, both pre- and post-sale, and identifies opportunities to deliver a positive, meaningful experience across those interactions. Employee Experience (EX) teams

have a parallel opportunity to deliver frictionless employee journeys. A key difference: success in CX is often measured in revenue and repeated use -- measures that don't translate directly into internal value drivers. As a result, companies often struggle to address EX with the same discipline as they approach CX.

Building a holistic experience starts with defining key journeys from an employee perspective, rather than a functional point-of-view, and then accurately measuring pain points and enhancements to those journeys. How, you might ask, is journey mapping different than process mapping? Why do both?

Operations team successfully use business process mapping tools and techniques to remove bottlenecks and redundancies, reduce inefficiency and increase scale. These tools generally focus on the process itself and seek to streamline interaction between people, systems, and data.

By contrast, experience and journey mapping puts focus on the consumers of the process and considers the inputs, effort, and efficiency from their point of view. Experience focus complements and balances process efforts, ensuring process improvements don't overburden consumers and experience enhancements don't create undue process burden.

Employee Experience = Cultural + Physical + Digital

Industry definitions of EX center around the employee lifecycle from recruit through exit. We define EX as the sum of interactions that support employees on a day-to-day basis and are key to employee productivity and engagement. These interactions are shaped by cultural, physical and digital elements:

Cultural - the norms of the company, including how employees can expect to be treated. This includes management interactions, training, work style, career opportunities, feeling valued and peer support. Studies have shown that cultural alignment has the strongest impact on EX. Employees often accept issues in other areas if they strongly align with a company's values and culture.

Physical - the spaces to work and interact with colleagues. This element has gone through accelerated change with remote working and remains vital to make collaborative work inclusive, whether teams are together in person or not. Offices have served as foundations for culture and work communities as a catalyst for human connection, and many roles and industries remain dependent on the office environment.

Digital - the digital tools employees use to interact with each other and perform their duties. For many, virtual collaboration has become the primary way they experience work. An ever-expanding landscape of tools deployed by different organizations leads to disjointed experiences, complicated by different interfaces to find and learn to complete required tasks.

The Journey is as Important as the Destination

Employee journeys are often the combination of cultural, physical, and digital elements interacting to deliver an outcome or complete a task. Often, the components of the journey are delivered by multiple organizations using different indicators of success. A better approach centers the design and delivery of the journey to meet the user's needs efficiently and effectively.

The leading method for identifying and prioritizing journeys is to leverage a combination of employee and management interviews. Key moments within a journey are best identified by interviewing employees who recently and or regularly take the journey.

Case Study: Onboarding Journey

XYZ is a global company that enjoys a positive reputation as a place to work -- a boon to recruiting top talent. Company-wide surveys report high satisfaction and employee engagement. XYZ has put a strong focus on building engagement and extending its culture to new joiners and has designed structured orientation sessions at the regional headquarters or, when travel is not possible, delivered remotely. New hires consistently rate the orientation 4.5 on a 5-point likert scale.

Everything seems to be going well in orientation, but department heads are complaining to Human Resources (HR) that new employees are struggling to get up to speed. The New Hire Orientation team reviews their survey and finds no issues and high scores. The enterprise engagement survey also shows strong scores for employees with tenure under 1 year. Are these random complaints, or is there something else going on?

To get to the bottom of the issue, HR contacts Operations for perspective, data, and insights. A check of the process maps and major KPIs shows that performance is in line with expectations. It's clear there's something happening that's evading the metrics.

Jointly, HR and Operations pull together a team of newly hired employees and functional representatives to map the end-to-end onboarding journey. Rather than focus solely on the new hire's first week, they expand inquiry to include the first 60 days. The mapping identifies the following key moments, owners and KPIs, as illustrated in Figure 1.
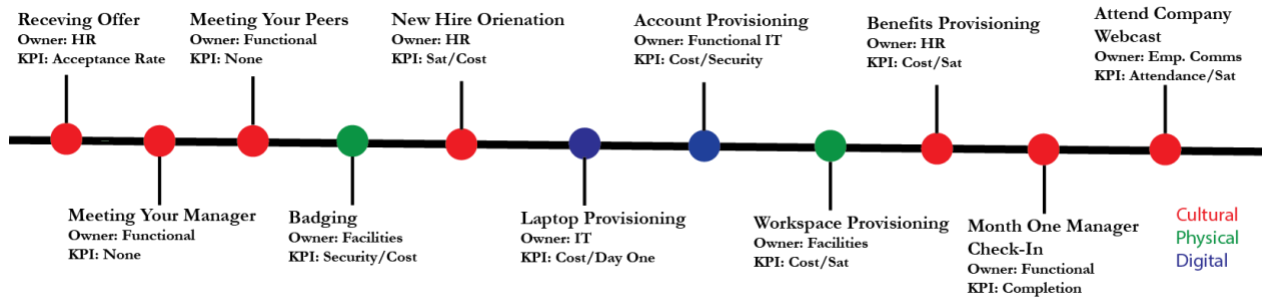
Figure 1. Onboarding Journey, KPIs and Owners

The team decides to drill further into each moment to tease out pain points. They gathered input from a larger pool of new hires to rate both individual moments and overall onboarding experience. As a result, pain points not captured by the existing survey approach emerged:

Meeting Manager and Peers - new hires reported their manager not being available on their first day or in some cases the first week. Some reported that meeting peers was left to chance, with no formal introductions.

Account Provisioning - new hires reported feeling unsupported in getting access to the tools and accounts they needed. Laptop and standard account provisioning were generally available from day one, but new hires were left to navigate role-specific access on their own. This delayed their access to systems and tools by days or even weeks.

Siloed Data - new hires were frustrated by having to set up profiles and enter the same data in multiple different systems. Each platform or department seemed to be an independent, unconnected entity.

When the team investigated root causes, they identified that coordination and mis-set expectations between functions -- HR and the business units -- and misaligned goals -- security and cost rather than ease of access and use -- were the cause. With respect to data, the proliferation of cloud-based platforms had rendered each system a silo and led to the time-consuming and frustrating configuration experience.

These pain points highlight the pitfalls of taking a siloed approach to measuring employee journeys: the issues in the end-to-end journey are not visible or captured effectively by existing measures. Program-level KPIs were too narrowly siloed while the company-wide surveys were focused too broadly. A focus on journey-level metrics exposes performance at specific moments while also revealing pain-points due

to systemic issues of functional coordination and data silos. Journey-level measures capture experience at a cultural, physical, or digital level.

Going forward, XYZ chose to survey new hires at the journey level and measure experience more holistically. This change increases insight into issues but falls short of solving EX issues programmatically.

Establishing an Employee Experience Center of Excellence (COE)

The EX Center of Excellence (COE) enables the enterprise EX strategy. By developing the governance, methods, structures, and skills needed, the COE brings enterprise EX strategies to life. This generally involves:

- Industry benchmarking and research
- Setting strategy and aligning projects to execute it
- Establishing governance and setting aligned metrics and targets
- Collaborating to set technology and design standards
- Developing required skills and allocating resources to deliver key capabilities such as program management, UX design and journey mapping
- Leading cross-functional engagements to develop & implement EX improvements.

When building an EX COE, it's important to consider the talent equation needed to deliver value. Effective COEs are lean, empowered, and agile, able to access and activate function and domain experts across the functional domains. They have a clear charter and cross-functional executive support, underpinned by governance. And perhaps most importantly, they can access budget and prioritize cross-functional priorities above functional ones to achieve the enterprise EX goals.

Key capabilities to build within the EX COE include:

- **Program Management** to organize the portfolio of projects, track progress across identified journeys and engage the network of experts to support journey mapping.
- **Change Management and Communication** to monitor consumer and stakeholder sentiment and concerns, build engagement strategies and monitor success and adoption of experience changes.
- **User Experience** and **Graphic Design** tools, methods, and practitioners to establish and maintain UX standards, prototype new experiences, coordinate journey mapping and improvements.
- **User Research** to identify and consolidate existing user data, conduct employee listening exercises, coordinate journey mapping, synthesize results and identify patterns and trends across and between journeys.
- **Data Architecture** to identify, connect and leverage user data to improve the employee experience through personalization, prediction, and automation.

A strong link to the IT architecture is also required. Ideally, the architects who set standards for access, security, tools and technologies reside in the IT organization and have a strong connection to the EX COE to align with end-user rather than functional priorities.

The COE must also have the support and mandate to activate extended teams to pursue journeys that involve and impact multiple functions. Extended team members bring domain-specific knowledge and skills to execute the work. They also act as change agents within their functions to articulate the strategy and its benefits, align goals, and drive execution.

Finally, it is critical that the COE has the visible support of executive leadership. Lacking sponsorship, it is challenging to maintain the extended team's engagement and implement meaningful cross-functional change.

Governing EX across the Enterprise

Executive understanding and support for focus on holistic, human-centered EX is the foundation for aligning the enterprise. It's critical that C-Suite members understand the need for EX leadership and collaboration beyond a single organization (often HR) and support the cross-functional alignment required to pursue enterprise experience strategies.
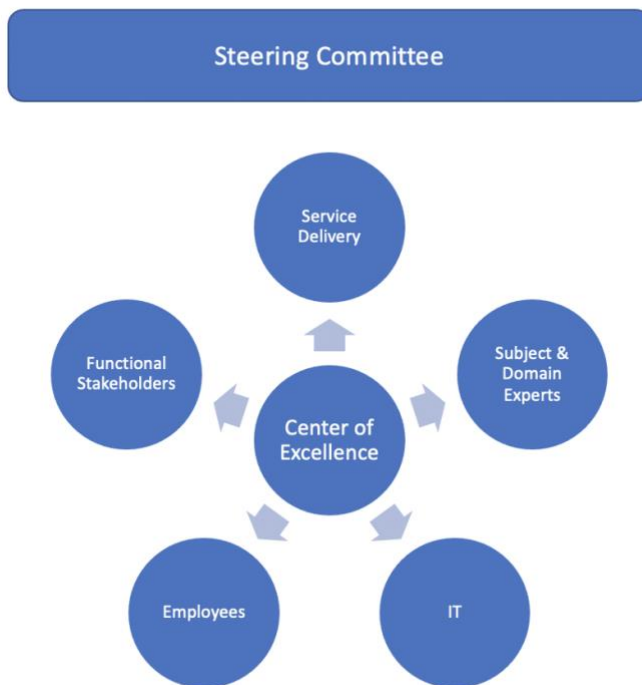
Figure 2. Governance Framework

This governance framework leverages the COE to actively manage and champion the development and delivery of EX. The broad range of groups allows for design and delivery of holistic EX. By engaging the cross-functional teams in development and implementation of EX initiatives, the COE aligns and phases execution to prioritize enterprise impact.

Measuring EX Success

Establishing an enterprise EX focus is not a panacea or quick fix for systemic issues. With executive support, announcing the EX program sends a clear message to all employees that you take EX seriously and recognize its complexity.

Enterprise and program-level metrics are easily identified in most enterprises. What's missing is the connection at the journey level. Program metrics and KPIs rarely consider the impact on the overall journey. Enterprise metrics are often too broad to be actionable at an individual program, or even journey, level.
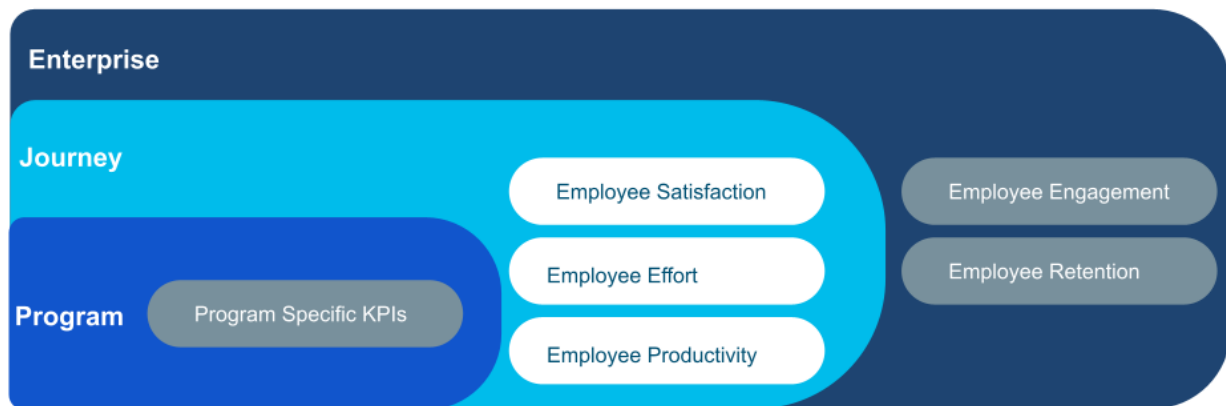

Figure 3. Mapping Enterprise, Journey and Program-Level Metrics

Journeys, by definition, focus on the user and their experience performing specific tasks. As seen in the earlier example, journey mapping is recommended for surfacing and defining metrics at this level. User survey, digital data farming and time to task metrics are good tools to leverage.

Opportunity Awaits

Operations leaders, the time is now. Stepping up to lead a holistic, enterprise focus on Employee Experience raises the visibility, impact, and value of your organization. It also delivers strategic value in addressing issues surrounding talent attraction and retention, as well as employee productivity and

engagement. As the war for talent continues to rage, companies who differentiate their Employee Experience stand to win out.

What's stopping you from taking the lead?