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The digital workforce experience

Getting technology to work at work

BY ARTHUR H. MAZOR, SANDRA HOUILLIER, MAUDE TREMBLAY-CHARLAND, JANNINE ZUCKER, AND STEVE WINSOR

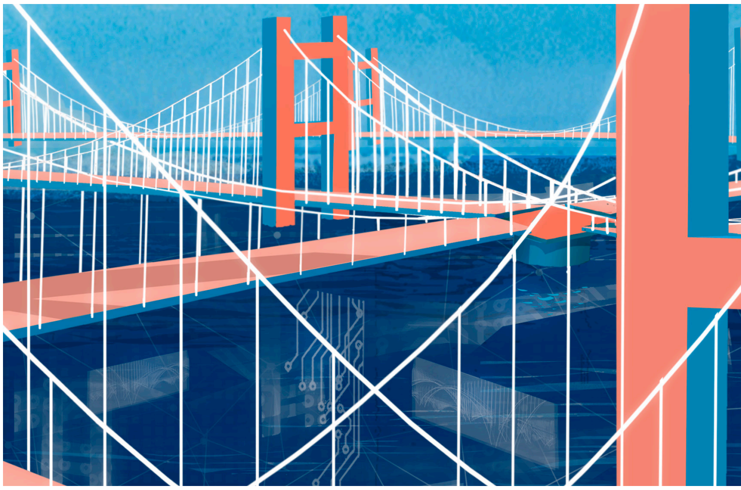
ILLUSTRATION BY EVA VÁZQUEZ

Today, the complexity in our personal lives is made simple through well-orchestrated services and great experiences enabled by digital technology. With just a few clicks or taps on a screen, we can book a multicity vacation, stream a recommended video on a device of our choosing, or buy a product online with next-day delivery. All are complex services to deliver; yet they are easy to request and receive. The seamless digital experiences to which we have become accustomed in our personal lives have created an expectation for better experiences, with near-flawless technological enablement, in our work lives as well.

However, when we join an organization, things are often very different. The experience we have as a worker is not at all the same as the one we have as a customer. We often struggle to effectively connect with our colleagues and to uncover the information we need to be immediately productive. Instead of the intuitive digital experience we have as customers in the outside world, we may be asked to maneuver through complex internal organizational structures, processes, and systems, often with no straightforward way to get support. Indeed, 70 percent of workers report having to enter the same data in multiple systems to get their job done.[1]

Why does this matter? Because in a world where people expect to be able to engage with each other and with organizations with the greatest of ease, a digital workforce experience that doesn't measure up to the commercial standard can cause a great deal of frustration—contributing to a negative workforce experience overall. And that's a problem, because the quality of the workforce experience matters a great deal to productivity and engagement. According to one recent study, organizations with the most compelling workforce experiences generated 22 percent higher engagement among their workers than organizations with a less compelling workforce experience. These workers were also four times more likely to stay in their jobs than those at organizations with a less compelling workforce experience.[2] What's more, organizations with the best workforce experiences also enjoyed 12 percent greater customer satisfaction than other organizations, and their three-year revenue growth rate was 2.3 times greater than the average of the whole sample.[3]

The good news is that organizations *can* improve their digital workforce experience and, along with it, worker engagement and productivity. To do this well, however, means devoting the same level of focus to workers' internal digital experience—and to the systems, processes, and capabilities that support it—as is given to the digital experience offered to external customers. In our experience, this degree of focus and investment is unfortunately



rare: While companies make enormous investments in their efforts to offer the best experiences possible to their customers, few if any invest anywhere near as much to offer an equally compelling workforce experience.

The perhaps predictable result of this lack of investment is that many workers don't find their workforce experience very fulfilling, engaging, or even particularly satisfactory. Deloitte's 2019 Global Human Capital Trends survey, for instance, found that less than half (49 percent) of the responding HR and business leaders believed that their organizations' workers were satisfied or very satisfied with their job design. Only 42 percent thought that workers were satisfied or very satisfied with day-to-day work practices, 38 percent thought that they were satisfied or very satisfied with work-related tools and technology, and 38 percent thought that workers had enough autonomy to make good decisions.[4]

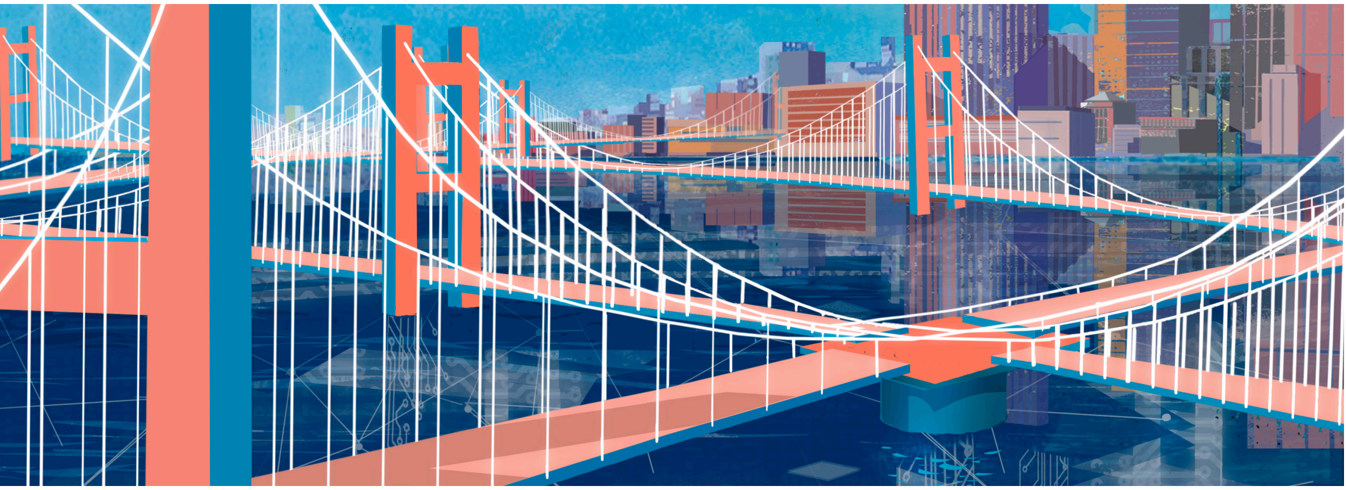
Transforming enterprise service delivery with better governance and technology

Of course, there's more to enabling a positive workforce experience than getting the digital dimension right. But our work with a variety of organizations suggests that the digital experience is often where leaders have a great, perhaps the most, opportunity for improvement.

Where might those opportunities lie? The details of what technologies might be needed to enable different kinds of work are unique to each industry and, to some extent, every organization. But across the board, one major area that can often benefit from improvement is the way the enterprise of the organization itself interacts with its workers. The opportunity is nothing less than to transform enterprise service delivery. By leveraging technology and establishing cross-functional, enterprise-level governance, organizations have the chance to streamline and simplify the transactions between the workforce and the enterprise, fostering greater engagement and driving more productivity in both the front and the back office.

The vision of a unified engagement platform

A dozen or so years ago, the concept of helping workers navigate an organization's various systems, tools, and sources of information was, at best, translated into an intranet portal through which to



access various organizational systems (the old-fashioned “link farm”). Each function, especially the ones supporting workers (such as IT, HR, finance, security, legal, facilities, supply chain, and procurement), typically developed its own set of functionally optimized digital tools and processes, along with its own service delivery structures and governance mechanisms. As a result, workers faced multiple points of contact for requesting transactions, making approvals, viewing request statuses, and actually receiving services. A new employee, for instance, might have to make four separate requests through four different systems to obtain a laptop (through the IT system), get a badge (through security), enroll in benefits (through HR), and set up direct deposit (through finance). For that employee, things would be much easier if he or she could simply place *one* request for “onboarding”—and then take care of various onboarding activities through the same point of access using the same interface.

Having many disparate back-end systems doesn't have to mean a fragmented front-end user experience.

The problem has the potential to get worse, not better, given many companies’ probable future technological trajectory. The average number of systems workers must access as part of their day-to-day jobs has recently risen from eight to 11,[5] and 27 percent of surveyed workers estimate they lose up to an entire day every week on irrelevant emails and messages.[6] Furthermore, as more and more organizations reduce their reliance on traditional, monolithic systems of record in favor of more nimble, microservice-based architectures, they will actually have more, not fewer, back-end technologies.

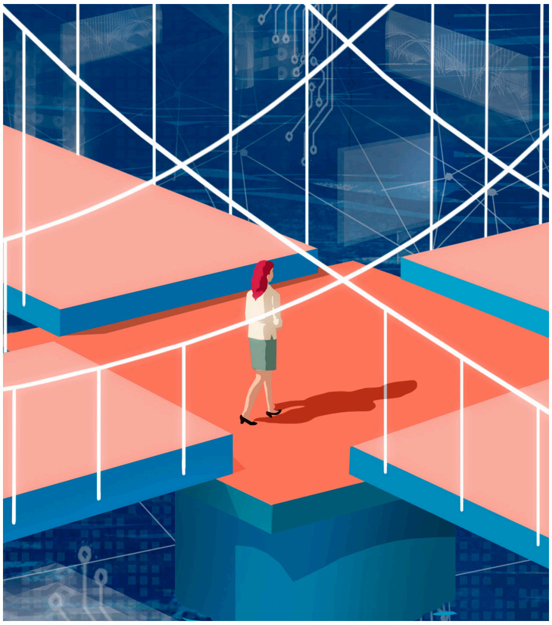
But today, having many disparate back-end systems doesn’t have to mean a fragmented front-end user experience. Technologies are available that make it possible to create what we call a “unified engagement platform”: a user-experience layer that can span across systems to provide a seamless digital experience. Some leading companies, in fact, are implementing this kind of unified engagement platform today to create a single, brand-aligned digital experience for their employees, managers, and service delivery agents. These platforms seek to integrate core systems of record into a single enterprise service management platform, and may also incorporate an ecosystem of automation and collaboration tools such as chatbots, robotic process automation (RPA), and enterprise social platforms.

A well-designed unified engagement platform can do more than enable a seamless digital experience for employees, managers, and agents when they request and manage services. It can also include enterprise-grade workflow tools to simplify service delivery and improve service delivery speed and accuracy across the enterprise. To do so, a platform must tightly integrate personalized knowledge and content with case management; be able to capture service-level compliance; and provide operational reporting and analytics so outcomes can be measured and the system continually improved. A platform that can do all this while delivering services through the channel and form factor of the user’s choice can be of enormous benefit to an enterprise, not only by improving the digital experience but by increasing service delivery efficiency. For instance, Australia Post has recently implemented an integrated experience and workflow platform that—besides streamlining workers’ access to and delivery of enterprise services—has cut the training time for its customer sales and service agents in half and reduced the average number of clicks per transaction from 160 to 11.[7]

Further, the same technology that bridges functional systems to improve business users’ access to services can also give individuals and teams within the functions an integrated platform from which to provide those services. For instance, cases can be automatically routed to the appropriate department, team, or person, and workflow tools can help manage those cases according to predefined timelines with detailed fulfillment instructions and checklists. Procedures, guidelines, and policies are all documented within the system, immediately accessible to those who may need to refer to them. Dashboard reporting allows supervisors and managers to track metrics and perform analytics to evaluate performance and support improvement efforts.

On the cusp of the future

Pioneering enterprises are also looking at the bigger technological picture by integrating innovative automation and collaboration technologies into their unified experience platforms. Take HR technology as an example. Some 40 percent of large enterprises have implemented cloud human capital management (HCM) technology in the hope of transforming the HR experience by centralizing HR and payroll data.[8] But at the same time, as many companies were implementing cloud HR platforms, a major marketplace shift was turning these platforms into table stakes: the development of new, complementary technologies for automation, communication, collaboration, and service management. These newer technologies are just now reaching the point at which they can address rising workforce expectations for a consumer-grade experience in everything they do across life and work.



For example, one global automotive company undertook a major initiative to automate work as well as to enable more effective collaboration within and outside the enterprise, including with its more than 2,000 suppliers and 15,000 dealerships around the world. Using a human-centered perspective to design solutions that cut across functional silos, the organization considered what its employees and partners needed to be more collaborative, speed decision-making, and enhance business results. Ultimately, while multiple technologies from different vendors were introduced, all were integrated into a single common platform for all parties to use. This effort has been credited with driving savings of more than US$2 million to date.

Implementation considerations

By its very nature, an effort to integrate the digital workforce experience across the enterprise is not something that can be confined to a single function. However, a large technology investment in any one function can help jump-start the process if the organization views the implementation as a chance to revamp the whole technology ecosystem. To do this successfully, organizations must drive collaboration across functions and platforms and create enterprise governance structures that optimize workflows and experiences for the enterprise as opposed to optimizing them for any single function. If transformation happens in silos or is solely focused on a single core set of technologies, workforce experience can suffer, and organizations may be left with a suboptimal digital experience, low user-adoption of new tools, and cumbersome processes that have simply been brought from one legacy environment to a newer platform.

No matter what function takes the lead, it's important to take a "worker-centric" rather than a "process-driven" approach to building a unified experience platform—which means designing the platform around the experience people want to have when they use it, rather than basing its design on the steps of the processes it supports. Successful enterprises approach this task by using design thinking to listen to their workers' pain points and needs, gaining insights about their experience from diverse sources: focus groups, surveys, net promoter scores, webpage tracking, and so on. To understand what a "good" digital experience looks like, personas can be created to represent various roles and workforce segments—including workers in the "alternative" workforce, whose representation in many organizations' workforces continues to grow. The organization can then formulate journey maps that depict the personas' current and desired interactions with the organization's technologies, as well as their anticipated thoughts, feelings, and concerns while doing so. Because workers' perceptions of experience don't depend on what function or service they're trying to reach when using the technology, a cross-functional perspective is essential to mapping out a digital experience that is consistent across touchpoints. These journey maps can guide the design of the unified front end and the implementation of the technologies that will enable it. Agile and design methodologies (such as A/B testing, sprints, and rapid prototyping) can be used to quickly tease apart what matters from what doesn't. Metrics to gauge workforce experience—for instance, technology adoption rates or engagement survey results—can help leaders assess the effort's effectiveness, both during implementation and afterward.

Australia Post's approach to developing its integrated experience and workforce platform illustrates how an organization can strive to take a worker-centric view. The organization began by asking and answering three key questions:

1. What do employees require of Australia Post to effectively connect the organization?

2. What must Australia Post enable for employees to feel empowered and motivated to continually evolve and innovate how they do their work?

3. What do employees expect to be able to do for themselves in managing both work and personal administrative obligations?

An important part of this step was the creation of eight personas to represent Australia Post's diverse workforce. The resulting understanding of worker needs then informed the project's overall strategy, including the platform's desired future role, its target architecture, an implementation road map, and even a high-level cost estimate. To bring the strategy to life, Australia Post developed creative concepts for its user interface, with a strong focus on user-centered design, enhanced interactivity, clear layout and format, and direct links to important content.

Australia Post's approach to developing its intergrated experience and workforce platform illustrates how an organization can strive to take a worker-centric view.

It goes without saying that an enterprise must manage change continuously in an effort of this nature. Without a robust change approach, a seamless digital experience will never arise, even with the most advanced enabling technologies in place. To facilitate change, organizations can create a centrally managed community of champions and change agents tasked with disseminating the expected behavior into the workplace.

The bottom line: When people experience technology that works for them *at* work, they are on the path to a positive workforce experience overall—one that can increase organizational loyalty, engagement, and productivity. The sophisticated digital experiences that today's workers enjoy in their private lives has set a high bar for enterprises to clear, but the potential business benefits can be well worth the effort. ●

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