4 key principles for evolving the employee experience

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What is a workplace? What is a workforce? Chances are, we all could have easily answered these questions a year ago or less. But now the only sure thing is uncertainty. While many companies are looking ahead to reenvision how physical offices will function, remote work is here to stay. According to recent Gartner research, 48 percent of employees will work remotely after the pandemic, compared to 30 percent pre-pandemic. That is a 60 percent increase. **"We suspect that the workforces of Twitter and Facebook will be less remote in 10 years than their leaders are predicting today, but much more remote than they could have imagined six months ago,"** said the Harvard Business Review.

Everyone is trying to figure out what the employee experience looks like when work from home is such a significant facet of the next normal.

Read on for four major guideposts as you actively evolve your company's employee experience in the ever-changing—and highly remote—next normal.

01

Drive productivity through access to knowledge

One thing employees report struggling with while working from home is that seemingly simple questions seem to take twice as long to answer when you can't lean over and ask someone—either because you don't know who to ask, or childcare or other factors mean someone's green light on Slack isn't always on. Gartner also reports that employers are planning to expand their gig-worker population to enable a more flexible workforce, both for cost savings and to address temporary absences due to illness or caregiving. With that flexibility and expansion may come compounded communication hurdles.

As formal learning and institutional knowledge get shared primarily over Slack and a "quick chat" over Zoom, increasing access to institutional knowledge will be a critical driver of productivity. **"There's a concern right now about a lack of the center of excellence, of that peer-to-peer sharing and experiences,"** says Teresa Anania, vice president of customer success at Zendesk. **"In terms of tools, what are we finding and gravitating to that is most needed? Workflow automation, tools that enable collaboration, tools that enable identification of who's on point so no one gets lost."**

In the Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends Survey, 2020, 75 percent of surveyed organizations say creating and preserving knowledge across evolving workforces is important or very important for their success over the next 12 to 18 months. Only 9 percent, though, say they are very ready to address this trend; this represents one of the largest gaps between importance and readiness across this year's trends.

75%

say creating and preserving knowledge is very important for success in the next 12 to 18 months.

9%

say they are ready to address this trend.

Source

Success story...

When the State of Tennessee was first modernizing to better serve its citizens, one issue that immediately surfaced was the need to capture priceless employee knowledge, especially that of veteran civil servants who can leave a gaping void once they retire. They turned to Zendesk to address that issue for the department by enabling knowledge capture, but it has also provided another benefit: New employee onboarding times have been reduced from six months to six weeks.

"What we found is that if we can transfer that knowledge from 30- or 40-year employees into articles into the knowledge base, then any temporary or part-time staff can use that knowledge to answer the same type of questions that they're being asked on the phone and sound like they've been here for 10 years,"

Dustin Swayne
Deputy Commissioner, State of Tennesse

TN Department of
Labor & Workforce
Development

Consider implementing an internal knowledge base to:

Significantly decrease the time employees spend searching for information

Capture institutional knowledge for the benefit of all

Decrease time to onboard new employees

Quickly and easily onboard contingent employees

02

Cultivate cross–team collaboration

Cross-team collaboration is becoming more important—and more difficult—than ever. There are roadblocks when employees, especially those on different teams who don't know each other well, can't meet face-to-face. New employees and contingent workers must also remotely develop the relationships that are inherent to successfully completing projects.

To help with this, HR leaders should look for solutions that remove the logistical barriers to collaboration so that employees can spend more time actually collaborating... as opposed to figuring out who the right people or processes are. Additionally, simple forms and business rules help quickly communicate what's required to support a request, so teams aren't wasting cycles in meeting about projects that don't have the minimum requirements to get started.

Success story...

For example, when OpenTable was revamping its internal help desk, it found that a favorite aspect of Zendesk was its ability to keep employees in the loop.

"The built-in triggers send email updates automatically as we process a ticket. We keep hearing that we're so much more responsive now—but it's not because the agents are doing anything differently,"

"It's because the system is automatically providing feedback to the employee, which we didn't do before."

Russ Gangloff
Director of Customer Support, OpenTable

OpenTable™

Consider implementing an employee help desk so:

Teams can track and manage requests, and make more informed capacity-planning decisions

Requests can automatically be routed to the right department, so employees don't have to know the right people to get their jobs done

Employees can get what they need faster with simple forms and business rules

Employees have more transparency into the status of a project (and teams won't get spammed with update requests)

03 Overcommunicate — and find new communication channels

Now more than ever, businesses need to keep employees informed about the latest policies and company news, particularly if there are major changes in staffing levels, leadership, or org structure. Such communication is more difficult at scale, more difficult in an ongoing crisis, more difficult with a fully or mostly remote workforce. And it's nonnegotiable. **"We cannot allow connectedness to disappear from the way we know how to do business and customer experience and service,"** says Teresa Anania, vice president of customer success at Zendesk. **"We have to find ways to create connection."**

More and more, employees are seeking connectedness at work. Gartner reports: **"Employers have been playing an increasingly larger role in society with setting above-market minimum wage, increasing parental leave, pushing for gender equality and taking a public stance on social issues. During the pandemic, employers offered increased support to employees and their communities. Employee support included enhanced sick leave, financial assistance, adjusted hours of operation and child care support."** The report goes on to predict: **"As the pandemic subsides, many employers will expand their involvement in these activities by increasing mental health support and expanding healthcare coverage and financial well-being support for employees."**

This is the employer as a social safety net—a trend heightened by Covid-19 of employers playing a greater role in employee and community support, including both financial and mental well-being. In some cases, organizations have recognized the humanitarian crisis of the pandemic by prioritizing the well-being of employees as people over employees as workers. Gartner predicts that **"the habits employees and managers are forming now will have a long tail and influence the way organizations operate for years to come."** Going forward, companies will be judged by how they treated their employees during the era of the pandemic. How that shakes out is certainly in large part about policies, but the imperative of healthy and effective communication with employees cannot be overemphasized.

Then and now, though, the lone email or Slack you send out detailing employee support will more likely than not get lost in the shuffle. As email and Slack become the primary modes of short-term communication to get work done, HR leaders should look for more curated and long-term ways to communicate. Self-service portals can help HR teams distribute massive amounts of detailed information while providing them insight into most-viewed posts—this could be an indication that there's a lot of interest in that particular topic, or it could highlight where employees are having trouble.

Ensure HR is a prominent part of the internal knowledge base to:

Notify employees about new benefits in a way where the details won't get lost
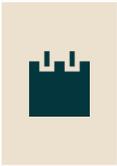
Ensure employees stay up to date on changes to company policy

Enable employees to self-serve and inform themselves on benefits and policies in a confidential manner

Better care for your employees by ensuring visibility into the full range of benefits you offer

04 Automate essential workflows

Leaders in scaling businesses have always known the importance of agile processes to excellent customer experience. The same is true for excellent employee experience. **"HR is undergoing a transformation of operational HR processes to become automated and data-driven,"** says Ann Catrina-Kligman, former global director, HR shared services, at Zendesk. **"Such data insights are enabling HR to move from being a back-office, reactive administrative function into a data-driven strategic partner with the business, using proactive insights to shape talent strategies and the future of work."**

The sudden shift and disruption in the way we work has underscored how essential certain workflows were, and how certain roles were critical to the success of those essential workflows. In other words, the disruption of critical people led to the disruption of critical processes.

To ensure future business resiliency and continuity, HR leaders should lead the conversation with business partners about automating essential workflows so they can continue even in the face of role shortages or other disruptions. In addition to making the business more resilient, automating essential workflows also allows businesses to maintain minimum SLAs or service quality even in the face of great change, allows greater flexibility in changing workflows with minimum disruption to employees or customers, and will free up more time for teams to focus on more complex projects by automating routine or operationally heavy processes.

Success story...

For example, through a combination of business rules, triggers, and self-service, Vodafone has reduced their ticket volume by 70% across its 15,000 employees.

"I can't recommend Zendesk Support enough—I'm a huge advocate. I think it's the best piece of software we've ever used."

"Our employees love Zendesk Support because the automated replies give them confidence that their issues are being managed. Our agents love it because it offers the perfect balance of simplicity and power."

David Bedelis
Learning Technologies Specialist, Vodafone

Use forms, triggers, and business rules to automate simple tasks or approvals to:

Ensure critical workflows can still happen even when teams are disrupted

Maintain service quality and SLAs in the face of change

Automate routine or operationally heavy tasks so your teams have more time to focus on more complex tasks

Allow greater flexibility if you need to change workflows—you will only need to change the triggers/forms/business rules, resulting in less you need to retrain retrain your workforce to do

Conclusion

Remote work will define the workforce of the future—and while we expect ongoing evolution and course correction, that future is very much here. "The sustained working future is more about digitization than ever before," says Anania. The pandemic has revealed the imperative of greater business resiliency and agility generally, but this is most clear in terms of workforce. Like all complex problems, this is an opportunity: HR leaders will be able to lead the conversation around business and workforce strategy—and actively shape what the future of work looks like.

Learn more about how Zendesk's internal help desk can help you improve the remote employee experience

Get started here:
zendesk.com/internal-help-desk/

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