A SOCIALCHORUS REPORT

Digital Employee Experience

Raising the bar
Introduction

2020 has ushered in a new era of work. Employees around the globe are embracing the enforced remote and hybrid working as they strive to collaborate and communicate with their colleagues in a more effective manner. They are doing so with enthusiasm due to their desire to keep in touch with managers and colleagues at a time when face-to-face contact has been vastly reduced.

Workers are keen on collaboration tools and comms, but the sheer volume of new technology is not only challenging from an implementation point of view but also from a maintenance and sustainability one. In fact, Gartner’s Digitalising HR to Improve the Employee Experience report highlights just how much those in HR must do to support employees today, compared to a decade ago.

Against this backdrop, business leaders must recognise that it is business imperative to provide an engaging Digital Employee Experience (DEX) that works for everyone on their team.

The successful implementation of DEX depends on harmony between the tech expertise of CIOs and their IT teams, and the human input of HR and Internal Communications departments. Yet our research has uncovered a gulf in the motives and actions of these groups that is currently hampering efforts to improve DEX within their organisations.

At a time when employees are crying out for information about the business they work for, their roles, or simply the need to engage with each other—on their terms, as efficiently as possible—it’s incumbent on these different departments to bridge this divide.
If they can, then not only will employee engagement improve, but organisations will be able to provide a DEX that raises the game and sets the bar high. A recent Forbes report, The Experience Equation, further confirms this by stating that 89% of surveyed executives at companies that consider themselves revenue-growth leaders agree that better employee experience (EX) leads directly to better customer experience (CX). The survey indicates that high EX drives high CX and that CX fuels revenue growth. Among executives representing companies that regard themselves as leaders in expanding total sales, 54% strongly agree that CX leads to fast revenue growth, compared with 36% of executives representing average or below-average companies (ABAs).

The push and pull of employee engagement

Our extensive new research among senior CIOs, HR and Internal Communications experts shows purchasing power lies firmly with IT heads.

In essence, this means there is potential for decisions to be made about the efficacy of workforce communication solutions without necessarily considering human need. Can this really be the ideal way to develop better DEX?

A ‘pull’ approach to DEX technology

Among CIOs only, 88% claim the buck stops with them in purchasing decisions for collaboration and comms tools. Just 11% state it’s a decision for HR/ICs.

The survey also highlights why CIOs believe they have good reason to be in charge of tech choice. More than 4 in 10 (41%) worry that centralising employee engagement through a single vendor/platform—rather than using a blend of technologies their workers prefer—will needlessly complicate matters. US and Nordics CIOs (46% in each) are more concerned than their UK counterparts (30%). As Sam Marshall of ClearBox Consulting stated in 'The Myth of the Digital Workplace Hub,' “On the surface [having one place to go for everything] sounds appealing because it sounds simple, but I reckon that, if you ever achieved it, you wouldn’t want it. It’s a bit like how a one-stop shop sounds like a convenience store but turns out to be a mega-mart.”

In addition, 40% of CIOs say new tools might add more ‘noise’ to existing channels rather than complementing or enhancing them. More than a third (36%) suggest employee adoption would be low and a quarter admit their business doesn’t provide enough access to devices that facilitate better comms. Just 14% say they have no concerns, although this rises to a fifth in the UK.
Taken as a whole, CIO attitudes can be described as a ‘pull’ mentality to DEX: they say build a platform and workers will come to find the information. Yet, as Sam Marshall highlights, “Nobody starts their workday from the same entry point,” which is why CIOs need to listen to their colleagues in HR and IC.

**A ‘push’ approach to DEX technology**

Now compare the solution-related concerns of CIOs to the human anxieties of HR/ICs, who feel the following factors are important (selected responses):

- **44%** Ability to assess wellbeing
- **43%** Easy accessibility of information
- **39%** Reaching people wherever they are
- **29%** Ability to analyse who engages with content

Certainly, there is a desire among HR/ICs for DEX to align with employee concerns rather than the technical aspects of roll-out observed by CIOs. This is perhaps unsurprising when well over half of HR/ICs (57%) state they are under more pressure, since remote working became the norm in the pandemic, to develop a cohesive approach to employee engagement.

Based on these responses, and how they compare to those of CIOs, HR/ICs can be said to believe in ‘push’ workforce communication. They view engagement in terms of what employees need.

Experience tells us that CIOs are incorrect to state that organisations can simply implement collaboration and comms tools and expect widespread uptake in return. Businesses must meet their people where they are and not assume they will just arrive at an information hub.

So, the big question is: can CIOs and HR/ICs collaborate for the sake of a better DEX, improved engagement and increased productivity?
All hands on DEX

Collaboration is a prominent issue. A Gartner report found 73% of HR leaders believe their function should be the joint owner of designing and delivering the employee experience.

Senior leadership has a key role to play in unifying conflicting views, and their input is desirable if DEX is to be successfully rolled out and managed across their organisation. However, our research shows a significant proportion of the C-suite remain unconvinced about the vital benefits employee engagement can bring. According to HR/IC respondents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOW HR/IC THINKS C-SUITE VIEWS THE BENEFITS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy-in is crucial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believes in internal comms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t believe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It’s revealing that HR/ICs rate CIO buy-in the least important of this group, and consider CIOs to have among the lowest belief in internal comms. Across the board, however, there isn’t a huge gap between the believe in/don’t believe in options.

A truce for tech’s sake

Perhaps the starkest example of corporations lacking collaboration around DEX is revealed by just 30% of HR/ICs stating they collaborate with IT to deliver successful employee engagement (although, interestingly, 53% of CIOs believe this is the case).

But all is not lost. Although still in a minority, 44% of our respondents believe HR/IC teams are vital to the success of an employee engagement programme. A similar proportion (41%) say a collaborative approach to delivery involving CIOs and HR/ICs is already in place at their organisation.

Source: ©Gartner, Inc. ‘Gartner’s Understanding Internal Partnerships for Improving the Employee Experience’
It’s worth stating the onus should not be placed solely on CIOs to change the way comms technology is implemented. Gartner also revealed in recent research that a large majority (72%) of employees believe HR staff don’t sufficiently involve workers in identifying business needs and, as the analyst group calls them, “Moments That Matter” to an organisation. It also goes on to highlight that the execution of these ‘moments’ live across HR, leaders, managers and even employees from other functions within the business.

The benefits of dual DEX decisions

Despite these difficulties there are benefits to be realised if consensus can be found between CIOs and heads of HR and Internal Communications. When asked to name their organisation’s biggest opportunities around employee experience, both groups agree increased productivity could be the greatest outcome: 56% of CIOs cite this output along with 47% of HR/ICs.

They also closely align on the concept of engagement equaling improved employee retention (50% of CIOs suggesting this is the case vs. 42% of HR/ICs) and affording leadership the ability to reach all employees (41% vs. 37%).

Putting the HR in harmony

There’s more room for optimism based on the thoughts of both groups about how employee experience can be improved. Enabling two-way communication, through better DEX underpinned by technology, is a popular response among both CIOs (46%) and HR/ICs (40%). Meanwhile, almost as many CIOs (41%) as HR/ICs (44%) agree that investing in mental health and wellbeing support should be a major part of any programme.

If further proof of a growing desire to collaborate on DEX is needed, 45% of CIOs and 43% of HR/ICs agree their organisation’s HR/IC team is vital to successful employee engagement.

Methods may differ across these disciplines, but there is mutual respect, too, and perhaps even a willingness—from CIOs in particular—to learn from their opposite numbers. This will be a crucial aspect of collaboration on DEX going forward.
The road to best-in-class DEX

Of course, better DEX is not just a matter of more collaboration. Other barriers to improvement exist. The Gartner report, *Understanding Internal Partnerships for Improving the Employee Experience*, adds that:

“As HR leaders apply a more expansive view of the employee experience to their work, the internal stakeholder relationships they are prioritising will also likely need to shift, taking HR leaders more frequently outside of HR.”  

-GARTNER

If the first stage of better DEX is working together, the second is to recognise and overcome these issues. Our HR/IC respondents reveal challenges preventing broader employee uptake of a company-wide communications platform:

### CHALLENGES HR/IC HAVE WITH IMPLEMENTING A COMPANY-WIDE COMMUNICATIONS PLATFORM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>HR / IC</th>
<th>NORDICS</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employees prefer non-company channels</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of devices to access comms</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No mass buy-in</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Wi-fi</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CIOs cite their own concerns, listing their current business transformation challenges:

### CHALLENGES CIOs HAVE WITH IMPLEMENTING A COMPANY-WIDE COMMUNICATIONS PLATFORM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>CIO</th>
<th>NORDICS</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adoption of new IT</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enforced acceleration of change</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tech stack complexity</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disparity of DEX between wired/frontline workers</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity across organisation</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Don’t forget the deskless workers**

The DEX disparity between wired and frontline workers is often overlooked, yet it’s a crucial issue for business operations. The problem is recognised more clearly in the Nordics (42%), followed by the UK (38%) then the US (34%)—a sizeable proportion in all markets.

Many HR/ICs state they have different priorities around communicating to distinct employee groups. Although 59% claim to equally prioritise office-based and deskless workers, a fifth admit they focus on employees in the office compared to just 12% who prioritise deskless colleagues.

While deskless/frontline workers are often overlooked in employee engagement strategies, this may now change. The pandemic has brought their value to organisations, coworkers and customers to the forefront like never before. Many businesses are realising these employees are as crucial to the success of the business as their office-/desk-based workforce.
Conclusion

**The era of better DEX**

With transformative platforms implemented through a smoother decision-making process there is a huge opportunity for improved employee experience. In turn, this leads to increased engagement, boosts staff retention and delivers results to the bottom line.

Technology can underpin collaboration and close the gap between the ‘pull’ engagement favoured by CIOs and the ‘push’ strategies lauded by HR/ICs. The challenge for forward-looking businesses is to start to address and merge those views now. As a recent paper, IDC **FutureScape: Worldwide Future of Work 2021 Predictions**, projected, “by 2023, 75% of the G2000 will make a commitment to providing technical parity to a workforce that is hybrid by design rather than by circumstance.” It goes on to say that “We define ‘technology parity’ as the requirement that all workers have secure access to the resources required to do their jobs no matter their preferred device or if they are local, remote, in the field, or switching between locations.”

“The key to buying and building the best workforce communications platforms is a streamlined approach that involves CIOs, HR/ICs and senior leaders—all the while remembering employees have a voice, too. After the outbreak of Covid-19, communications must be built around what the workforce wants and needs to be able to do their job better. Only by doing this and developing a best-in-class digital employee experience will organisations not only survive but thrive.”

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**GARTNER**

“The HR leaders should work with IT... to ensure the technology and workspace they are providing meet employee expectations and empower employees to be productive.”

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The research for SocialChorus was carried out online by Opinion Matters between 23.10.20-06.11.20 amongst a panel resulting in 750 CIOs and 752 HR/ internal comms respondents in the Nordics (Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Norway), the UK and the US. All research conducted adheres to the MRS Codes of Conduct (2019) in the UK and ICC/ESOMAR World Research Guidelines. Opinion Matters is registered with the Information Commissioner’s Office and is fully compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act (2018).
SocialChorus is the creator of FirstUp, the platform that makes the digital employee experience work for every worker. Using our powerful orchestration engine, we bring personalised information and systems access to every employee where they are—on any endpoint or device, in any language, anywhere in the world. Whether they’re wired, mobile, frontline, distributed or essential, FirstUp gives employees what they need to do their jobs efficiently, and companies what they need to achieve agility. That’s how we help enterprise customers like Amazon, ABInBev, Ford and GSK continue to transform their businesses.

Learn more at socialchorus.com