

A SOCIALCHORUS REPORT

Embracing Hybrid Working

DEX for deskless success

Introduction

The office will never be the same again.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed life in many ways, but how we work has been one of the most seismic shifts in history.

According to McKinsey, up to **four times as many employees** could work from home in the future compared to pre-pandemic levels.¹ Meanwhile, research by *Forbes* magazine found **80% of businesses** believe their workforce will spend at least a quarter of their time doing their job remotely.²

Hybrid working seems here to stay. With countless statistics being bandied about, SocialChorus decided to zero in, using an international study to discover what employees want from their working lives and how companies are prepared to meet those needs.

Human resources and internal communications teams (HR/ICs) are beginning to recognize that their digital employee experience (DEX) strategies must be built around the switch to hybrid working. This new approach to working is not just for the remainder of the pandemic but beyond as the world rolls up its sleeves in a collective effort to recover.

The ability to offer an equally slick and fulfilling experience to all employees, no matter whether they are based in the office or at home, or deskless and on the frontline, will be critical to attracting and retaining talent as we move forward.

This strikes to the present debate about inequitable employee experience. Firms face justifiable criticism if they are unable—or unwilling—to provide an equally satisfactory experience to desk-based and deskless workers.

The vast majority of your employees are ready for the hybrid working revolution and the opportunities it brings. The big question is, are you? And will your DEX be up to the task?

¹ <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/whats-next-for-remote-work-an-analysis-of-2000-tasks-800-jobs-and-nine-countries>

² <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescommunicationscouncil/2020/11/11/the-future-of-work-the-hybrid-workforce/?sh=77aa9f4a362a>

DEX and the deskless worker

Working life will never be linear again. No longer will the bulk of the world's workforce shuttle repeatedly between where they live and where they do their job. Traditional employment patterns are changing so that hybrid working becomes commonplace, not a curiosity.

The upheaval wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic has thrown the spotlight on a new kind of equality. Does every employee—whether working at home, remotely, on the frontline, or a combination of all those methods—enjoy the same experience?

This is a hot topic of discussion in DEX. In a 2020 survey, *Forbes*³ found just **56% of deskless workers** in the US **felt connected and engaged** with their employers. Furthermore, **84% of deskless workers** said they **don't get enough direct communication** from management, and only **10% felt strongly connected** to their companies.

Judging by our study, the DEX disparity between wired and frontline workers is often overlooked. When CIOs were quizzed about the major challenges digital transformation presents, well over a third (38%) cited a disparity in DEX between wired and frontline workers. The problem is biggest in the Nordics (42%), followed by the UK (38%) then the US (34%)—a sizeable proportion in all the markets we studied.

CIO CONCERNS AROUND BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION CHALLENGES

Response	ICO %	NORDICS	UK	US
Adoption of new IT	48%	49%	41%	55%
Enforced acceleration of change	48%	45%	48%	52%
Tech stack complexity	40%	36%	34%	51%
Disparity of DEX between wired/frontline workers	38%	42%	38%	34%
Diversity across organization	35%	35%	35%	35%
None	4%	3%	5%	5%

³ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2020/04/21/dont-ignore-the-deskless-workforce/?sh=1e5623eb15fe>

In part, this is interesting because CIOs—often focused on more technical aspects of implementation—are grasping the “digital experience divide” that can affect certain segments of the workforce who might feel marginalized by new tools.

HR/ICs also recognize the difficulties of dealing with different types of employee. They admit they have changing priorities relating to communication with distinct employee groups. Although 59% claim to equally prioritize office-based and deskless workers, a fifth say they focus on employees in the office compared to just 12% who prioritize deskless colleagues.

The flexible revolution

So deskless/frontline workers are often overlooked in employee engagement strategies—but it’s time for this to change. The pandemic has brought their value to corporations, coworkers and customers to the forefront as never before. Many businesses are realizing they are as crucial to the success of an organization as their office-/desk-based workforce.

Advocates of a common DEX experience can rightly point out that anything else amounts to inequity, leaving the deskless disconnected. Organizations risk subjecting them to an inferior employee experience. At a time when many frontline workers are putting themselves at risk to help others, that seems difficult to justify.

All of which highlights the need for digital transformation of workforce engagement tools to deliver better productivity.

Reaching a disparate workforce

The good news is, many businesses recognize the shift to hybrid working and what it means for the future of HR and internal comms. Our respondents say a newly remote workforce is the biggest change wrought by the disease (38%). Changes are being more keenly felt in the UK: 46% say their workforce is more remote now, against 36% in the US and a third in the Nordics.

Over a quarter (27%) of all respondents cite the need to reach all employees, regardless of their device of choice, as another major change.

Employee expectations are also evolving. According to HR/ICs, there’s a clamor among their wider workforce to hear from senior leadership (30%) and understand more about the business (23%).

In response, firms are changing the way they communicate. Just a quarter have either maintained or reduced communication levels since the pandemic broke out:



With this revolution in employee engagement and experience will surely come more responsibility and scrutiny from the C-suite—and that means DEX becoming even more of a boardroom priority.

DEX as a strategic imperative

Respondents see multiple strategic opportunities in employee engagement that will boost the entire business—with their own stock rising as a possible byproduct of successful DEX.

More than half suggest employee engagement is an opportunity to maintain or increase productivity levels (51%), while 46% believe it can improve retention, ensure all workers are reached (39%), mobilize all staff (36%) and align the workforce to corporate goals—and each other (34%).

HR/ICs PERCEIVED BIGGEST OPPORTUNITIES OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Response	%
Increase/maintain productivity	47%
Improve retention rates	42%
Ensure safety	42%
Reach all workers	37%
Mobilize all workers	30%
Align all workers	30%

As much as these benefits are within the grasp of all organizations, they can only be achieved if each employee's experience is as positive as that of their colleagues—remote or otherwise.

Nearly half of those in HR/IC roles (45%) criticize the lack of real understanding at their firm about how to genuinely improve employee engagement, including hybrid and frontline/deskless workers.

HR/ICs must heed the findings of our study to ensure their organization is geared for success. They have become even more crucial to better business outcomes after a pandemic that has turned employee engagement and experience on its head.

Their colleagues in the boardroom—not least CIOs with whom they collaborate to manage digital transformation—will expect their expertise to equate to achieving business objectives.

That means applying DEX principles and platforms across the entire workforce.

Breeding hybrid success

Businesses will get nowhere fast without investing in employee engagement across the workforce—in fact, it's the key to success.

According to the latest report from IDC, the key is making the right investments in DEX. Its COVID-19 survey revealed 47% of organizations that had longer-term digital transformation strategies in place before the pandemic are now showing strong signs of business growth.

HR/ICs feel the following factors are important in employee engagement:



These responses speak of the belief among HR/ICs in “push” workforce communication. They view engagement in terms of what employees need.

HR/ICs must recognize and react to the needs of all employees regardless of their location and situation. For example, desk workers are overwhelmed by too many messages and tools, while deskless workers struggle to access systems designed for office workers.

The solution lies in rolling out personalized experiences—a necessity understood by 38% of our respondents. Tools have been created to personalize DEX by providing each worker with the specific tools and information they need, based on data including their role, location and preferences. A digital assistant provides continuous access to these apps and systems to help employees become more productive and efficient.

Meanwhile, 48% of respondents in HR/IC roles think employee engagement can be enhanced by communicating regularly with the whole workforce. Many companies have difficulty connecting with everyone, however—especially frontline workers, busy desk workers and employees in the field.

New platforms are available that deliver content and system access to the endpoint the employee uses most often. This endpoint can be a device, such as a mobile phone or a smart TV channel, email and collaboration tools, or a system like Microsoft 365 or Salesforce.

Conclusion: make DEX your reality

The newly hybrid workforce has high expectations of how employers should engage with them, and of the types of experience they should provide.

This is true regardless of role and workplace location—be it a warm home, a spacious office or a drafty field.

HR/ICs have shown they are willing to invest time and budget in proven DEX technology that brings together entire organizations—creating a shared purpose that ultimately boosts the bottom line.

They are more determined than ever to include deskless, frontline and remote workers alongside office-based employees in their strategies for success. Doing so will also tackle inequity between the experiences of desk-based and deskless workers at a time when all employees deserve to be fully connected with—and valued by—their organization.

This report contains a summary analysis of quantitative research conducted by Opinion Matters on behalf of SocialChorus. The survey sample included 750 chief information officers (CIOs) and 753 HR/internal communications (HR/ICs) professionals. The research was conducted in the Nordics (Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Norway), the UK and the US, in October and November 2020. All percentages are rounded up.

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 personalized 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

