SQUIZ

The digital employee experience

How to leverage technology to create digital EX with strong ROI

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Pivot employee experience (EX) to the "new normal"

It's an understatement to say COVID-19 shook up the traditional office "9-to-5" landscape. Even areas least affected by the pandemic have experienced monumental changes.

What were thought of as impossible tectonic shifts reverberated throughout the world in weeks. The early tremors obscured our view of the traditional "9-to-5" workplace. Organisations were either forced to shut down or had strict density limits placed on them in the name of public health.

Employers first had to pivot to physically relocate their workforce. Then they were forced to shift their transformational efforts from the customer to consolidate, secure, and reimagine their workforce.
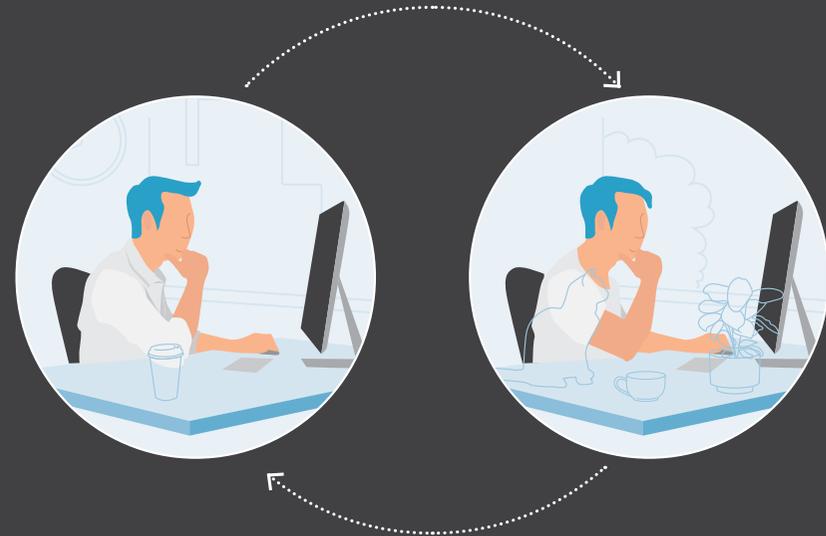
Organisations that executed well and showed they really cared [1], were rewarded with a distributed workforce that is happy to be finally free of the office "9-to-5". Their employees are feeling more productive and engaged. If they don't want to go back why should they? [2]

1. COVID-19 and the employee experience: How leaders can seize the moment, McKinsey, June 2020
2. How COVID-19 Transformed Employee Experience, Forbes, October 2020

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The "new normal" is the new challenge

There's a dark cloud for that silver lining. Organisations have tried remote and work from home (WFH) in the past and in some notable cases have unwound them in the end.[1]

In 2020 employers either shut down completely or had to quickly mobilise to protect the physical health of their customers as well as their workers. Where possible, employees migrated from the office to their homes.[2] Hopefully the business could survive through varying degrees of lockdown.

What happened to employee wellbeing? Some employees are feeling isolated, disconnected, and overworked. Don't forget they have a pandemic to deal with as well.

In the US, at least, although 72% of survey respondents said they were unafraid of returning to the office, 24%[3] of them said it was "not likely" that they ever would.

In the return to office phase – if there ever is one – the new normal likely includes a lot more remote working. Employers need to know employee expectations and needs have changed for good.

"The pandemic has become an unwitting global laboratory for models of work that could have otherwise taken decades to unfold."[4]

US .... **72%** **24%**

said they were unafraid of returning to the office.

said it was "not likely" that they ever would return to the office.

1. IBM tells employees working at home to get back to the office, CNN Business, May 2017
2. Report: Investment in Tech has helped post-pandemic recovery, B & T Magazine, September 2020
3. Back to the office? Professionals weigh in on plans for return, safety and remote working in new Korn Ferry survey, Korn Ferry, October 2020
4. Digital Workplaces Take Off As Technology Investment Spared From Soft Economy: Telsyte, Which-50, July 2020

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The change was already in play

It won't surprise anybody that "losing the commute" came as a welcome change for many office workers. The push for more flexibility already had momentum before 2020 rolled along full of disruptive opportunity. In previous years only 7%[1] of organisations allowed the majority of their staff to work from home. In 2020, that figure rocketed to 44%, or even 65% for organisations over 200 employees. Those figures could be conservative. Gartner estimates 88%[2] of organizations have encouraged or mandated employees to WFH.

Now employees have had a taste of WFH, they have an increasing appetite and expectation for more flexibility; at least some WFH time and relief from the strict confines of traditional "9-to-5" office hours.

The majority (63%) of Australian workers want to work remotely at least some of the time, with a skew towards older workers who are even happier to work away from the office than their GenY or Z colleagues. More than half (52%) feel there is a better culture of productivity,

1. Report: Investment in Tech has helped post-pandemic recovery, B & T Magazine, September 2020
2. Gartner HR Survey, Gartner, March 2020
3. Report: Investment in Tech has helped post-pandemic recovery, B & T Magazine, September 2020.

PRE-COVID

7%

of organisations allowed the majority of their staff to work from home

2020

44%

of organisations allowed the majority of their staff to work from home

and three in five expect that productivity gain to continue. In addition, when they were sent home, many (73%) were given expanded responsibilities.[3] It's a silver lining, considering the changes were forced on them.

In the new normal, agile organisations will try to leverage the new normal. To do that they need to foster a virtual culture that supports remote workers and keeps them metaphorically close.

"Australian employers, especially the larger ones that can be slower to adapt, need to sit up and take note if they are to remain attractive in the eyes of today's employees."

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The next new transformation

Australian research shows 67%[1] of organisations have already decided their next transformation efforts will focus on employees. That's a turnaround from 2019 when 61% were focused on customers.

They see the need to remain attractive to existing and new employees alike. Full-time workers in Australia (86%) are more likely to stick with an employer who offered them remote working[2]. Yet they also crave collaboration time. While they love the flexibility, most would rather have at least some physical face-time. They recognise the social and productivity benefits of physical workplace interactions.[3]

As the disruptions emerged, it quickly became apparent organisations would need to shift their focus from customers to employees.[4] This switch from Customer

Experience (CX) to Employee Experience (EX) adopts thinking from Product Management,[5] to focus on the quality of an employee's "lifecycle" from onboarding to termination.

Pioneering companies like Airbnb were ahead of the curve having already morphed its HR department to become the Employee Experience department in 2018.[6]

The wellbeing risks of the pandemic are obvious. Large organisations (70%) have already launched mental health and personal development programs,[7] but it goes further than that. Expectations of an engaging EX is becoming the new normal for employees. Since it pays big dividends in productivity and organisational outcomes[8]. The new challenge is that in the new normal, a positive EX will have to be found online.

"The employee experience is the journey an employee takes with your organization. It includes every interaction that happens along the employee life cycle, plus the experiences that involve an employee's role, workspace, manager and wellbeing." [9]

1. Report: Investment in Tech has helped post-pandemic recovery, B & T Magazine, September 2020
2. Teleworking in Australia: Latest Trends and Perceptions, McCrindle Research Survey, May 2013
3. Teleworking in Australia: Latest Trends and Perceptions, McCrindle Research Survey, May 2013
4. The 2020 HR Sentiment Survey, Future Workplace, 2020
5. The employee experience: Culture, engagement, and beyond: 2017 Global Human Capital Trends, Deloitte, February 2017
6. What happened when Airbnb blew up its HR department to focus on "employee experience", LinkedIn Weekend Essay, March 2018 in 2018
7. Report: Investment in Tech has helped post-pandemic recovery, B & T Magazine, September 2020
8. People Geek Guide: Employee Experience, Culture Amp, April 2019
9. What Is the Employee Experience?: Gallup

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COVID-19 relocated employee experience (EX)

Way back in the pre-pandemic world of 2019, EX was all about office perks. The solutions were things like standing desks, nap pods, bring-your-dog-to-work days, social events, and fruit boxes. The boundaries of EX were fairly defined within the office 9-to-5 time, maybe with some major events thrown in.

Fast forward to 2020 and many of these "perks" focused on the physical office space are no longer relevant. Organisations play a key role in impacting an employees' overall wellbeing and the 'self' they bring to work. If they no longer interact with them in a physical sense, there needs to be a reset in EX thinking to create a more virtual connection between the employee and their employer.

1. Teleworking in Australia: Latest Trends and Perceptions, McCrindle Research, May 2013

Australians willing to earn less in exchange for flexibility [1]

28% willing to earn **5%** less

14% willing to earn **10%** less

6% willing to earn **20%** less
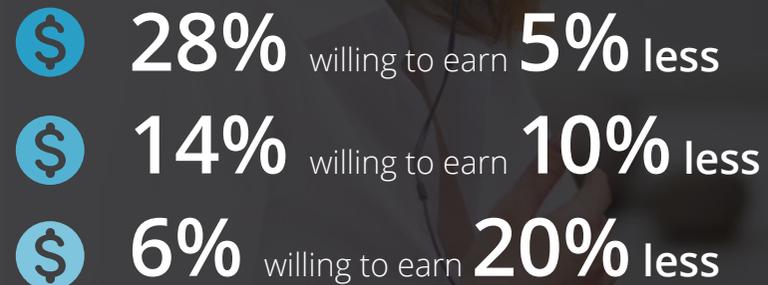
More productive working remotely

Overall 55%	73% Builders	61% Baby Boomers	52% Gen X	45% Gen Y

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Return of the Intranets

In contrast to the employee's perceived benefits of remote working, the effects of isolation, disconnection, and the blurring of work-life boundaries are engagement killers that can lead to lower productivity. Your employees still need a place to "connect, communicate, vent and share", just like they would in a physical workplace environment.[1] 'Digital' needs to step up to play an even more active role in fostering positive virtual cultures, providing multiple touch points, and maintaining a human element online.

Collaboration, connection, open communication, and knowledge-sharing remain key touchstones, even when the workforce is out of sight. With the pandemic adding a layer of liability and increased risk, the need for timely, tailored communications around safety, mental health, and wellbeing become a critical factor in your EX.

In early 2020 organisations were quick to respond with equipment, regular check-ins, and a Zoom storm of meetings that helped keep productivity high. Senior practitioners now need to recognise that as remote

1. Return of the Intranet, Raconteur, May 2020
2. IES Working at Home Wellbeing Survey, April 2020
3. Digital Workplaces Take Off As Technology Investment Spared From Soft Economy: Telsyte, Which-50, July 2020

48%
of remote workers reported long and irregular hours initially

60%
of remote workers were showing increased symptoms of fatigue

working persists, emergency routines and frustrations can become something of a burden. In the UK, 48% of people working remotely reported long and irregular hours during the initial weeks of lockdown, and 60% said they were showing increased symptoms of fatigue.[2]

The employee Intranet can either become a lifeline – connecting employees to the heart of the business fostering collaboration between remote and on-site employees – or the clunking machine that leaves them feeling lost and frustrated.

"The pandemic has become an unwitting global laboratory for models of work that could have otherwise taken decades to unfold,"[3] according to a new study from emerging technology analyst firm Telsyte. The challenge with digital transformation projects is that 38 per cent fail because of technical issues. Others due to conflicting projects and priorities.

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A stitch in time

Those that could go remote probably already have and may stay that way. Those who will return to the office are likely to find some colleagues didn't. Once the office lease runs out, a hybrid office/remote workplace might be new normal for your employees.

The convenience of the dedicated company office, with all its opportunity for team cohesion, community, and ease of communication is on the line. Nearly half of organisations surveyed in 2020[1] are responding to the rapid transition to distributed work by reviewing their general workplace design and space utilisation. The new thinking around co-working space in distributed locations may supplant the dedicated employee desk space.

Organisations have already made a significant technical investment equipping their WFH teams. With new demands for the IT department to facilitate more remote customer interactions, those with a focus on the workforce must reduce the investment side of the ROI equation. If your new virtual EX program is ever going to fly, it needs to be realistic.

Fortunately, in the new normal, C-suite interest in EX has risen to strategic importance as 88.9% of organizations recognize the value of EX as important to the organisational strategy or a crucial strategic differentiator. With only 38.3% happy with their EX capability, closing the gap on execution is going to be the challenge.

Pivot to remote working

Organizations have an opportunity to improve EX during the later phases of COVID-19 by shifting focus from core health and safety needs "to a more nuanced approach that recognizes differences among the workforce".[2]

The smart ones will completely reimagine the physical office as a collaboration space that employees only visit periodically. Instead, the new focus will be on the virtual or digital workplace where the relevant tools, communication, and resources their teams need to thrive can be accessed seamlessly.

1. 2020 Intelligent Workplace Report, NTT Limited, 2020
2. COVID-19 and the employee experience: How leaders can seize the moment, McKinsey, June 2020".

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In the fast-paced pivot to remote working [1], digital tools for policy, payroll, calendaring, and document management need to keep up. Many of these were bolted on to existing employee portals, which can just as quickly lead to unmanageable digital complexity. Which in turn results in poorer EX.

Successful companies will overhaul internal communications strategies by streamlining and tailoring critical information delivery on one hand, while providing digital 'watercooler' venues to foster a virtual culture that offers seamless transition between onsite and remote working.

Create a single source of truth

Use document management, intelligent search, and intuitive publishing to eliminate confusion with a one-stop-shop for all important company information, communications, and tools.

Personalise the experience

Customers expect personalised experiences. Now your employees do too. Meeting this EX objective can enhance engagement, improve productivity, and reduce the risk of miscommunication.

Stay engaged and aligned

Open up new two-way channels of communication that connect employees and empower them through access to updated information and resources across the organisation.

Who's who

Remote workers, especially new hires, in large organisations need an up-to-date organisational chart to identify the right person when seeking approvals or asking for help.

1.   Whitepaper: Resetting the Future of Work Agenda: Disruption and Renewal in a Post-COVID World, World Economic Forum, October 2020

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The transformation challenge

The big problem with digital transformation projects is that 38 per cent fail due to technical issues[1]. Others fail because of conflicting projects and priorities.

If the IT department has enough on its plate without the added burden of building a new virtual workplace, organisations can move the cost and pain of technical debt by turning to the cloud. An new Intranet deployment can bring legacy systems and siloed applications together, and cut the chaos out of your tech stack by creating a central hub so employees can focus on their job rather than struggle with the complexity.

Think about complexity this way: according to the most recent report from Blissfully[2], the average small business uses 102 different apps, mid-market businesses use an average of 137 apps and enterprises have, on average, 288 different SaaS apps across their businesses. There is also generally a lack of single portal where an employee can go and get access to all the different systems. If this sounds frustrating for an existing employee, imagine the impact on a new employee's EX.

Average number of SaaS apps used

Small business — 102

mid-market businesses — 137

mid-market businesses — 288
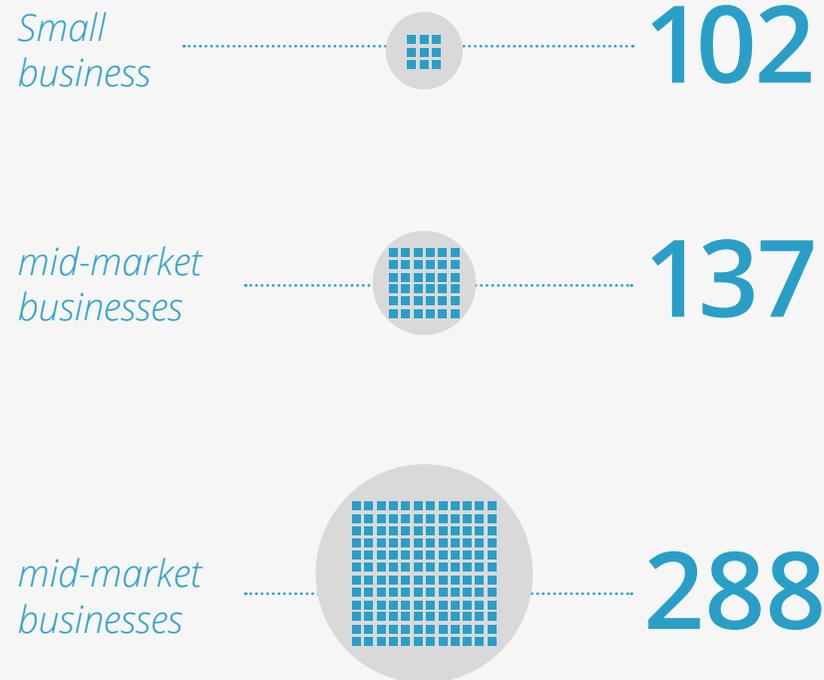
1. Digital Workplaces Take Off As Technology Investment Spared From Soft Economy: Telsyte, Which-50, July 2020
2. The 3 Biggest SaaS Trends in 2020, The Blissfully Report, March 2020

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Supercharge employee onboarding

In August 2020, Randstat updated its annual Employer Brand Research[1] to reveal what Australian workers want from their employer in a post-COVID world. A healthy work-life balance was already the number one feature a prospective staffer looked for in a new employer. Interestingly though, company culture – which had not appeared in the top-three at the start of the year – is now the number two priority for employees, overtaking salary or benefits in importance. This is new territory for many organisations who now face the challenge of building an engaging company culture with employees who work from home.

There is also more pressure on businesses to compete within the talent market. HR teams continue to face the challenge of making good first impressions with new starters combined with fast-tracking their productivity.

1. What Australians want from an employer in a post COVID world, Ranstad, August 2020
2. State of the American Workplace Report, Gallup, 2017
3. Why 33 Percent of New Employees Quit in 90 Days, Psychology Today, March 2019

only 12%
of employees call the onboarding experience great

And whilst most companies have some form of onboarding, just 12%[2] of employees call the experience great. The result is that employers are losing many of their people before they really get started.

Most employees decide whether they will stay with an organization during their first 90 days[3] and misperceptions can take a long time to fix. Onboarding is a critical phase in the employee lifecycle. Moving beyond "Where do I sit?", effective onboarding enables new recruits to reach their full potential faster and stay longer.

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Leverage a modern Intranet for seamless and effective onboarding

Simplify the tech

Many organizations lack a single portal where employees can access various systems. They also tend to have feature-laden, complex portals that are difficult to navigate. This can be a real turn off to your new employee. Simple tech on the other hand will help them feel confident and fully functional more quickly. Think about putting important company information, communications and tools in one place.

1.   The True Cost of a Bad Hire, Brandon Hall Group, August 2015

Drink from the digital watercooler

Over 33% of companies with effective onboarding programs use social networking to connect new hires with other employees[1]. Your Intranet is not only the perfect place for new employees to know about their co-workers, leaders, and the workplace culture. A positive Intranet enables innovation through collaboration and team building. By adding the functionality of liking, commenting, and sharing, you can further help foster a positive onboarding experience.

Enable 2-way comms

A top-down approach to communication is no longer effective when it comes to employee engagement. You can help new employees feel heard and valued by implementing and promoting feedback channels throughout the organization, regularly soliciting feedback from new hires. It's also important to make sure you respond quickly to ideas and questions so that employees get the message their input is valued.

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Customize and personalise

Every employee is different, with different roles, profiles, and objectives. So, it makes sense to personalize their onboarding experience. At a minimum, onboarding material should be specific and relevant to their role and location. A good Intranet should also enable you to analyse employee behaviour to learn what the new hires need help with so you can personalize their training.

Balance workspaces with social spaces

81% of respondents to CBRE's 2018[2] survey noted amenities, including social space, as integral to the employee experience. Virtual spaces that encourage social interaction and collaboration not only help people feel less isolated, they can also help facilitate creativity and innovation. Think of creating places where new employees can virtually share stories, photos and videos with each other and their fellow employees.

Enable self-service

Empower new employees with easy and self-directed access to information. Think digital and mobile-friendly. A new job often means a heap of paperwork, training, and policy documentation that can be painful to navigate. Simplify these formalities with a checklist embedded in your Intranet and a search function to make it easy for new employees to find what they need, when they need it.

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2.   Americas Occupier Survey 2018, CBRE, 2018

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Turning to a modern SaaS or cloud-based Intranet solution allows organisations to leverage legacy systems, add new functionality, and deploy quickly by placing less reliance on the corporate IT function. With smart integration tools and out-of-the box functionality, smaller investment doesn't mean you have to sacrifice return on your EX initiatives.

Using digital tools to build a virtual culture unlocks a series of human benefits, above and beyond delivering productivity and efficiency gains. Companies that already turned to workplace technology to reimagine their EX are seeing an increase in employee engagement, job satisfaction, and productivity.[1]

And whilst these outcomes are great for employees, they also translate into measurable benefits for organisations beyond attracting and retaining great talent. For those businesses willing to invest in

providing adequate support for remote workers, there are significant dividends; in fact, according to Gallup research[2], highly engaged remote workplaces enjoy:

17% higher productivity

41% lower rates of absenteeism

21% higher profitability

An Intranet focused on great EX can transform a clunky employee onboarding process into an interactive, personalized experience for new hires.

1. The Right Technologies Unlock the Potential of the Digital Workplace, Aruba, 2018
2. The 38 Most Engaged Workplaces in the World Put People First, Gallup, March 2020

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Measuring RoI of Employee Experience (EX) investments

Employee Engagement

- Engaged employees perform 27% better
- As employee engagement increases, employee retention rises by up to 87%
- Characteristics of high performing employees: Talent, high engagement and 10+years long service

Employee Satisfaction

- Median 20% increased rate of satisfaction in workforce

Employee Productivity

- Organizations with strong online digital workplace are 7% more productive
- Productivity 20-25% higher in well-connected employees.
- Less time spent in searching for information

Source: The digital workplace: Think, share, do. Deloitte

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Your to do list is clear

The workplace is changing rapidly. In fact, it already did change, and your C-suite knows it. The change may have been instigated by a pandemic, but the lines of traditional of 9-to-5 work are permanently blurred.

It is a classic VUCA moment [1] – a time defined by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. To maintain and grow employee productivity, wellbeing and engagement you need to find a fast and flexible approach to building a virtual culture.

In this new world, communication is more crucial than ever in reaching employees with critical information and keeping teams connected with the organisation's vision, goals, and their co-workers.

Ultimately, the goal of creating a positive EX is to attract the best people and keep them. Look for practical tools and resources that take the pressure off IT to deliver EX solutions in the post-COVID-19 environment. Watch how feature-rich Intranets can become the new

digital workplace to create a positive and engaging EX through the full employee lifecycle, from onboarding to exit interview.

EX is now 24/7 journey that straddles the home, remote working hubs and the traditional office environment.

Technology must play a critical role in employee touch points, including onboarding

Investing in Employee Experience reaps bottom line returns

Digital simplicity is crucial to ensure faster adoption

The easier the integration, the stronger your IT business case

1. What does VUCA really mean? Forbes, December 2018

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Get in touch

Squiz is committed to providing the practical tools and resources businesses need to respond to the current and post COVID-19 environment. With a range of digital tools and solutions to deliver critical information to your employees, when they need it, Squiz can help your business to establish the ultimate remote working environment.

To find out how Squiz can help to unite your workplace and connect employees on one platform, visit Squiz Workplace

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Get the insights and tools essential for success

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