



How to Create Best-in-Class Employee Experiences in a Hybrid Workforce

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As organizations continue to navigate the shifting landscape of COVID-19, it has become clear that one thing is here to stay: remote and hybrid workforces.

HR leaders are already under pressure to keep up with the demands of this new work reality, fighting to retain top talent in a highly competitive market. But the pandemic has also dramatically shifted employee priorities, from the way workers define success to the development opportunities they want to make the most of their careers. Employees are more selective than before and want to work for companies that prioritize them in the long term. One of the top priorities of this new hybrid workforce is improved employee experience. In fact, a recent survey of 500 HR leaders found that 92% confirmed employee experience is a top priority this year.





Prioritizing employee experience brings unique challenges in an environment where in-person interaction is no longer the norm and employees are feeling stressed and more burned out. The new hybrid workforce increasingly worries about feeling isolated, losing out on opportunities for advancement and not having the tools to succeed in their roles.

The good news is that future-forward HR leaders can implement strategies to prioritize the key aspects of

employee experience by enabling connections and relationships, fostering career development and ensuring their workforce has the right tools and technology to succeed. Doing so can improve engagement, increase productivity and support recruitment and retention. But it also helps the business as a whole. **Organizations with high employee experience have double the customer satisfaction, twice the innovation and 25% higher profits than companies that provide an inadequate employee experience.**

Critical factors in employee experience

One of the biggest lessons of the pandemic is that the traditional ways of working don't fit people's lives anymore. Employees are not interested in merely showing up at work, doing a job and receiving a paycheck. They want the work they do to have a purpose—to contribute to the greater good. And they want to be treated as an integral part of a company's overall mission. This, in a nutshell, is employee experience. According to Gallup, "employee experience is the journey an employee takes with your organization. It includes all the interactions an employee has with your organization before, during and after their tenure."

Creating a positive and supportive experience is obviously important for the employees themselves, helping them feel valued, motivated, appreciated, and engaged. Global HR industry analyst Josh Bersin says that employee experience means seeing work more holistically. "Ideally," he says, "work should be ... fun, enjoyable, enriching." It's a place where "you grow and you help others and you get a sense of social value from it."

But focusing on employee experience is also critical for business success. Bersin stresses that offices with poor employee culture have a harder time recruiting or retaining talent, being productive and even increasing sales. Creating positive employee experience is twofold, he says. "It's about making work productive and meaningful for people and for the company."



Top executives agree with this assessment. Oracle's recent Employee Experience Survey asked 100 HR top leaders about (1) the importance of employee experience for organizations, (2) challenges in prioritizing employee experience in a hybrid environment and (3) priority tactics to support employee experience. It found that 82% of company leaders think maximizing employee experience is either extremely important or very important. But many of them are overwhelmed by the prospect of creating positive employee experience in a hybrid or remote workspace.

Seven out of 10 executives identify maintaining a strong corporate culture as the main priority but don't know how to achieve that. They also have concerns about maintaining employee morale (51%), dealing with productivity dips (48%) and supporting their employees' career advancement (38%), among others.

HR executives know they need to shake things up and create a better employee culture in the new workforce, but more than half say that their top-priority initiatives have not been as successful as they would have liked. That's why Oracle has compiled some clear, actionable steps to help HR leaders show up for their employees and their company, improving morale while boosting the bottom line.



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Actions to maintain and improve employee experience in a remote workforce

Make Employee Well-Being a Business Priority

To create optimal employee experience, organizations must ensure that their employees have pathways to network, gather and forge meaningful connections and relationships at work. This approach treats employees as whole people, acknowledging the talents, goals and challenges that impact their lives. Bersin believes that one of the biggest lessons companies are learning from the pandemic “is that well-being and mental health and resilience are business priorities.” And employees’ well-being hinges directly on their relationships with leaders and peers.



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Company executives understand the need to step up and provide relationships and connections in uncertain times. In Oracle's Employee Experience Survey, 35% of executives say creating a strong corporate culture is a strategic priority for them, and **over a quarter want to provide more opportunities for connection and camaraderie.**

As the pandemic gutted many of the traditional forms of relationship-building at work—water cooler chats, company parties, in-person meetings and projects—companies have improvised ways to meet these needs for connection and office culture. One company in Oracle's recent survey said it created a centralized intranet where employees could gather for social events—from costume parties to bingo nights. Another company sent small, branded gifts to their clients and checked in with each employee regularly and personally to gauge their needs, questions and concerns throughout the pandemic. Another firm created virtual workshops in which leaders shared a talent or skill with the people on their teams. Bersin shared that a company he works with is trying out park meetings, where people can fulfill their need to gather by meeting in public spaces.

You can build relationships in many ways—whether that's clear communication, sincere check-ins or opportunities for virtual camaraderie. The important thing is to show your teams that they matter, that you have their back and that you're fighting for them on every level. "The companies that are thriving in the pandemic are empowering people and giving people a lot of sense of purpose and energy," Bersin says. "And, most importantly, they're trusting them."

Prioritize development, learning and training

According to Bersin, a whopping **40% of Americans changed roles, managers or employers during the pandemic.** The job market is hot, and with so much disruption employees now feel empowered to demand better treatment, development and training as they navigate new career paths. Organizations of all types need to support all their employees in their work, helping them grow, learn and advance toward their goals.





Investing in employees through fostering a productive and employee-focused workplace can have far-reaching impacts on an organization. “People are huge drivers of an organization’s success,” says Annette Wellinghoff, vice president of HCM transformation at Oracle Human Capital Management. Creating a successful business “doesn’t only mean that we need to hire the right people. It really means we need to empower those people that they have.” To do that, executives must make skills development a critical priority—both for employees looking to grow their careers and for managers who want to help their teams achieve personal and collective goals.

Training managers to be effective at leading remote or hybrid teams is critical to employee experience. But of those who responded to Oracle’s Employee Experience Survey, **47% were concerned about supporting an employee through their entire career cycle, and 38% were experiencing difficulties in supporting their employees’ professional development and career advancement.**

Wellinghoff stresses that employee experience “really boils down to how we train [employees], how we develop them and how we treat [each other] on an ongoing basis.”

Managers can help employees develop in myriad ways. They can connect them to AI tools that help identify their strengths, set goals and monitor their progress. They can host regular training and upskilling events based on company interest. They can provide personal mentoring for employees looking to rise in the ranks as well as employees wanting to take smaller career steps. And they can prioritize internal team building, education and hiring. Good employee experience helps move workers through their development the same way brands help customers through their journeys, Bersin explains. “Employee Experience is a domain that forces you to think about employees as if they were the customer because, in reality, all great companies are great for employees.”

Empower employees with the right technology

To create an employee experience that acknowledges the best in each individual and ensures engagement and productivity, organizations need to provide an integrated, seamless employee experience at every step in their journey, from onboarding, to viewing payslips, to participating in company initiatives. Luckily for HR executives, the pandemic saw an explosion of tools and technology designed to help remote employees do all of the above.

While 47% of executives who participated in the Oracle survey said they had seen success in empowering hybrid employees with the right technology, over half did not feel they had adequate strategies for using these technologies.

Bersin lists smart deployment of appropriate technology as one of the top things companies can do to make employees' lives better. Employers can use AI to identify skill or hiring gaps in their internal workforce. They can also use collaboration tools to brainstorm and track projects; social software like Slack or Microsoft Teams to keep everyone communicating and on the same page; robots that remind employees to take breaks or make steps toward a career goal; and automation tools to simplify rote tasks like invoicing

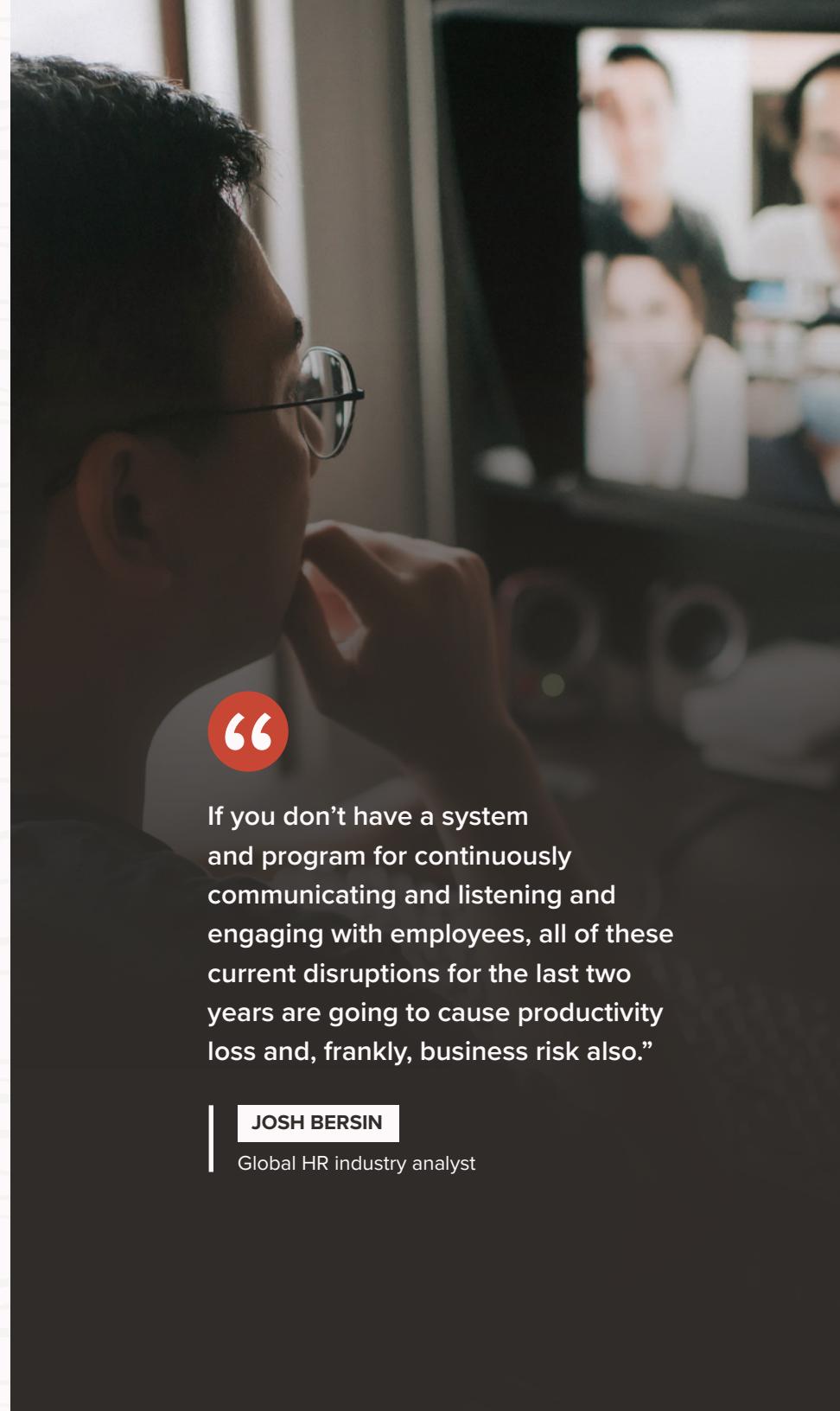
and to-do lists. One company that responded to Oracle's Employee Experience Survey said it used a tool called Office Vibe to get a temperature check on employee needs and concerns so it could respond as quickly as possible. But when it comes to technology, Bersin cautions, less is more. "Simplify the technology. Replace a lot. Replace the old stuff that's not working and focus on the front end." In other words, technology should make employees' lives easier—not harder. Aim for that.



Listen to the needs of the workforce

Every organization should prioritize employee experience, but how that looks will vary. To attract and retain top talent, organizations should build an employee experience tailored to the needs of its workforce, addressing problems specific to its own workplace and culture.

A true leader is a true listener, Bersin says. “As leaders, we have to be very, essentially, quiet. We need to let employees speak up so we know what’s on their mind. That helps us make better decisions.” And with the help of new technology, listening doesn’t have to look exactly like it used to. It can look like offering tech-based feedback tools so that people can air their concerns and questions in real time. Or it can mean executives use video messages to share their concerns for employees and solicit feedback. Regardless of what it is, organizations need access to real-time data from across the organization to make quick, informed decisions about what’s best for their employees and the company. “If you don’t have a system and program for continuously communicating and listening and engaging with employees,” Bersin says, “all of these current disruptions for the last two years are going to cause productivity loss and, frankly, business risk also.”



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Global HR industry analyst

Any employer listening to employee demands during the pandemic knows that flexibility is one of the most important ways it can improve employee experience. In fact, half of HR respondents to Oracle's study say that the need for more flexible schedules is the employee need that has changed the most during the pandemic. Successful companies, Bersin says, will be the ones that realize "being at work is not work. Work is work. And you may do it at home and you may do it in the car, and you may do it in the office, or you may do it in a meeting room."

The key is that employers trust their workers and listen to what they say—then act on their concerns. They need to show their employees that they value their opinions, respect their time and, most importantly, trust them to do their work in new, more flexible ways. "Trust in the remote environment is key," Wellinghoff says. Trust develops when employers act with consistency and integrity toward the people who contribute to the health and wealth of their business.

Maintain a thriving culture

More employees today care about purpose-driven work than ever before. Organizations can no longer coast on their reputation or invest in their brand at the expense of their employees. They need to establish, and then prioritize and communicate, their values, and they need to build a culture that reflects those values. In purpose-driven companies, employees can participate in that culture in meaningful ways from wherever they work.

Over a third of HR executives surveyed acknowledge that maintaining a thriving corporate culture is one of their top priorities in an era of remote work. But getting there will require real investments in employees and the issues that matter most to them. Some companies who responded to our survey have fortified office culture by listening to employee concerns about flexibility and letting them work wherever they want, providing virtual gatherings, remotely catered lunches or online yoga events to keep cohesion. Others have increased education benefits, mental health options or pay in ways that reflect employees' needs. All are working to create the conditions that foster good work—from the beginning of someone's career to the end.



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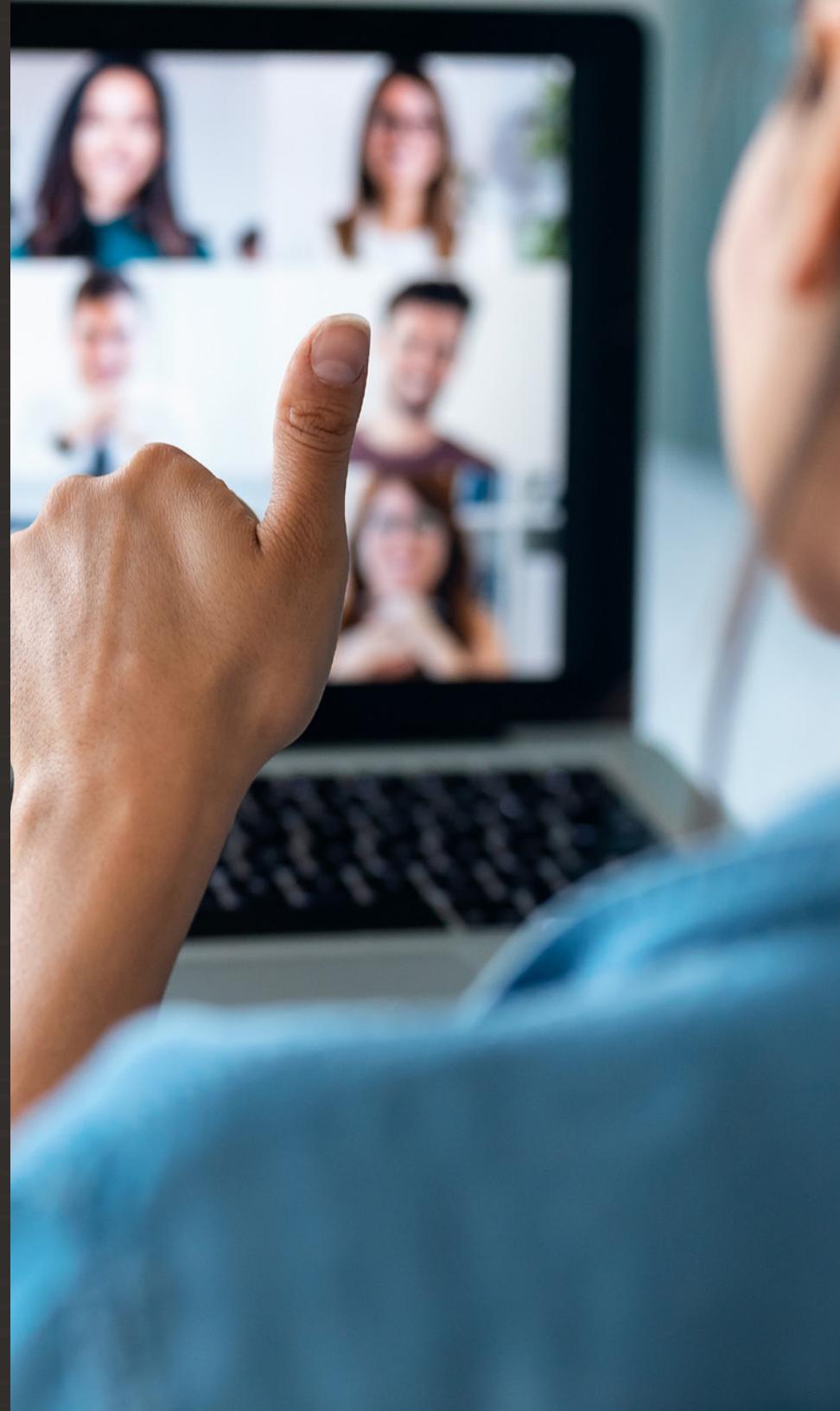
A Happy Employee and a Healthy Bottom Line

The recent pandemic brought into focus the importance of communicating with, connecting to and supporting employees especially in the midst of a crisis. Successful employers will be the ones who prioritize employee experience throughout the employee lifecycle from onboarding to growing their careers. They'll make it easier for employees to build connections, advance, have access to the right tools and succeed in their roles — no matter where they are or how they work.

Creating a rich employee experience goes beyond check-ins and group activities, however. It requires prioritizing employee needs in every aspect of their lives, from their physical fitness to their hopes and career dreams. It's about creating what Breslin calls “human-centered leadership.” In this there is no distinction between a thriving office culture and a thriving business—or a happy employee and a healthy bottom line. “Every business issue you have is a human issue,” he says—and every human issue is a business issue. Companies that create a rich employee experience with dedicated workers will simultaneously create a loyal customer base of satisfied consumers.

Survey Approach

Surveyed 100 HR leaders about (1) the importance of employee experience for organizations, (2) challenges in prioritizing employee experience in a hybrid environment and (3) priority tactics to support employee experience.





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