

How to Create a Success Framework for Your Employee Experience

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Employee experience is not a one-and-done endeavor—it's both a success-determining variable and an organizational ecosystem that brands must pay constant attention to. Much like customer experience (CX), employee experience (EX) is about forging human connections that make people feel a fundamental, emotional link to a company's people, goals, and vision.

Today's conversation focuses on achieving these connections using a methodology called the Success Framework, which challenges organizations to think about employee experience in five steps:

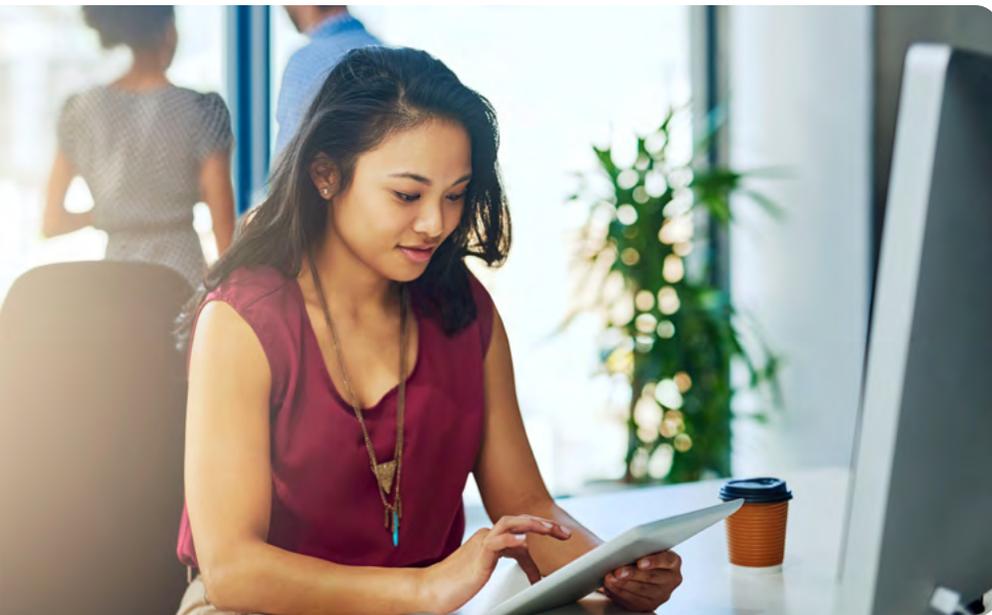
- 1. DESIGN**
- 2. LISTEN**
- 3. UNDERSTAND**
- 4. TRANSFORM**
- 5. REALIZE**

So, without further ado, let's jump into how this framework works and how your organization can tune it toward a fundamentally improved employee experience.

DESIGN

I've seen a lot of brands jump right into turning employee listening posts on and marking that as the start of their EX program. However, our framework encourages brands to consider an element that must come before that: design. Many brands overlook doing some homework and thinking critically about what EX goals they need their program to accomplish, just as a lot of third-party vendors stop at providing a library of best practices instead of a dedicated, consultative approach. Pre-planning and consultation are both crucial to a healthy EX program.

There are two critical elements that should inform your program design process: the gap between your current and desired culture, and the link between employee experience and your organization's strategic business outcomes. The vision factor refers to the state of trust within your organization, and, relatedly, how willing employees are to provide candid and/or anonymized feedback (about their experience or customers').



Organizations that are early on in their employee experience improvement efforts must remember that building a culture that thrives on employee feedback and engagement is a process. As it is with everything from getting healthier to learning a new skill, sustainable change requires continuous effort, not a once-a-year initiative. The more employees see leadership acting on their feedback, the more they'll be willing to share as they begin to trust that their feedback is valued (and anonymized).

Understanding that an improved employee experience is more than a nice-to-have and that it truly impacts your bottom line is also critically important. Leaders make daily decisions about organizational investments based on expected returns, so being able to articulate how employee feedback ties to tangible operational and financial improvements is a must here.

Employee feedback can improve process efficiencies and resolve customer issues more effectively, helping your organization retain those customers. Plus, the idea that increased engagement leads to lower absenteeism, greater productivity, and lower employee attrition will grab the attention of decision makers who control the budget. Engaging with key stakeholders about your program's business impact before requesting investment will put your effort on the right track right out of the gate.

LISTEN

This step of our framework can look pretty different for your interactions with employees versus customers. Whereas engaged (or angry) customers are only too happy to spill the beans on everything they liked or disliked about an experience, getting employees to do the same is very contingent upon that trust factor we touched on

earlier. The other game-changer here is that figuring out how much employees trust your brand doesn't end with the design step—the tools and methods you use to listen to them affect their trust as well.

We could spend all day discussing which listening methods might be better for your organization, but I'll save you some time and just say that when it comes to listening, you need to meet employees where they're at. Employees are extremely sensitive about divulging critical intelligence, particularly within organizations that are early on in their EX journey.

In these cases, organizations must be thoughtful about how this effort is communicated and must ensure that surveys are designed with the level of anonymity that employees expect. For example, it should be made clear that local engagement is most helpful for bringing about change, so employee location/geography should be expected as a demographic. That approach supports a balance between assuring employees that their feedback is anonymous while also ensuring that the feedback is useful to your team and program.

On the other hand, voice of employee (VoE) feedback about the customer experience is focused on CX improvement versus the internal employee experience. In this scenario, organizations that want to gain the most powerful intelligence should seek employee input on where, when, and how employees feel they can provide the most productive feedback.

UNDERSTAND

Disseminating and digesting employee feedback is another process that requires a different lens than that used for processing customer feedback. It also depends a lot on how anonymized and confidential (two different things, by the way) employee feedback is once it's collected. No matter what those variables look like for you, though, our framework challenges organizations to keep a few best practices in mind while figuring out what your employee feedback means.

One of the most challenging elements of understanding your feedback is working with the departments and leaders whom the feedback is about to ensure they don't take complaints too negatively. Receiving and dealing with customer feedback is one thing, but I've seen how hard it can be for some leaders to accept criticism from within their companies. The truth is that accepting negative feedback with grace is the only way to expect additional honest feedback from employees at all.

Relatedly, once that feedback has been received and understood, it's important to humbly and authentically engage employees in creating solutions that address their needs (and to communicate in a way that employees won't construe as defensive or retaliatory). Focusing on the merits of employee critiques and building solutions around them demonstrates that company

leadership is mature enough to not only accept criticism, but to listen to it. This is a win-win for your program, because it allows you to implement the meaningful change your brand needs to be a better workplace while also encouraging employees to submit more feedback, perpetuating a healthy cycle.

When considering how to digest and leverage voice of employee feedback, it is critical that this not be done in isolation. VoE and VoC should be considered two sides of the same coin—both are critical to effectively honing in on improvement opportunities. As such, when mining VoE, an organization should look for common themes across both data sets. From here, organizations can more quickly identify and prioritize resolution efforts for customer pain points.



TRANSFORM

This step is crucial—it's where that aforementioned meaningful change happens, and, frankly, where your employee experience is made or broken. Your employees will be watching very carefully to see how you address their concerns... and whether their feedback is actually used. If your brand does nothing or appears to do nothing, you can bet your future response rates for both engagement AND VoE will plummet even if the feedback is anonymized.

Transforming your employee experience can be a challenge because you need to strike a balance between assuring anonymity and making lasting fixes. Continuously solicit feedback as changes occur to demonstrate that you haven't lost interest in receiving ideas now that the most recent set of intelligence has been brought to life. Factors like these vary from organization to organization, but if your brand can strike this balance, you can be assured that the changes you're making are the right ones.

REALIZE

Realizing your program's results may be the end of this discussion, but it's certainly

not the end of the employee experience journey. Similarly to assessing a CX program, realizing your EX initiative comprises taking a hard look at your results and examining the ties that bind your program to ROI, making it much easier to ask for additional funding the next go around. As we discussed earlier, this is truly a cyclical process; intelligence breeds action, which breeds impact, which breeds intelligence.

More fundamentally, the realize step is about taking a look around your organization to see what your implemented transformations have done for company culture. Do employees seem happier? More invested in their work? Are customers reporting deeper connections with your brand as a direct result of employee passion? If so, pat yourself on the back, but also remember, again, that employee experience is not a one and done. It's a holistic journey that, when undertaken using this framework, creates cultures that employees will feel valued in not just as a workforce, but as people. That difference feeds directly into brands' distinction between being another marketplace follower... or an impactful, highly esteemed leader.

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