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PLACING THE EMPLOYEE'S DIGITAL EXPERIENCE: AT THE TOP OF TODAY'S BUSINESS PRIORIES

This article was written by Roger Camrass, director of CIONET UK and a visiting professor of the University of Surrey, and is based on the conversations during a dinner on employee's digital experience, sponsored by VMware in January 2020.

Employee experience does impact business performance

With all the attention on the customer experience in recent years it seems that the employee has been short-changed with respect to digital innovations. This could be very short-sighted on the part of commercial organisations. A recent survey of 3,600 respondents in the EMEA region sponsored by VMware revealed that:

- The digital employee experience is linked directly to competitive position, and employee sentiment (how individuals feel about their organisation)
- In a tight talent market, employee experience matters, especially when recruiting and acquiring millennials (25% of such newcomers are likely to leave within 12 months)
- Employees want a voice. HR is the ideal candidate for expanding the digital employee experience in collaboration with IT

All these findings reinforce the view that employee experience is critical to growth and profitability in a digital age, but there appears from the survey to be a perception gap between what IT can do, and where HR sits in this critical arena.

The most disappointing fact is that not much has happened to employee experience in the last three years, with only 20% of organisations implementing a fully digital workplace during this period.

Why the lack of progress?

With five generations of employees in today's workforce the picture is somewhat confused. Delegates around the table agreed that high on the list of obstacles was mindset and culture that often preferred the status quo and sought to avoid risk. Government appeared to have major difficulties due to its size and the high degree of

fragmentation between departments. Recent government 'hub' campuses have been beset by differences in departmental policies that cover areas such as video conferencing and collaboration.

Further obstacles arise from functional silos. IT has been largely responsible for the employee digital experience over past decades, but HR is fast realising that it needs to be involved given employee sentiment within the workplace. In 2017 an HR department of a leading utility ran an employee survey on working conditions. Technology came last on the list of satisfactory services causing a radical rethink within the IT organisation that included greater emphasis on mobile devices and applications.

All the tools are "here" and "now"

From a technical point of view all the tools are available today to deliver a truly exceptional employee experience comparable to that of the consumer. Most organisations have adopted a 'bring your own device' with equal tolerance for Apple, Windows and Android operating systems. Many of the internal core applications now have a web front-end and can be accessed by any mobile device. Containers within the employee device can separate corporate and personal data. End-to-end security is available now in both the mobile and multi-cloud environments. Single ID can replace multiple access codes.

Some of the delegates have adopted vending machines to equip their employees with accessories for fixed and mobile devices. This has saved much paperwork and employee time. Service catalogues offer employees a wide range of applications, both public and private, to conduct their business in the office and elsewhere. Tasks such as submission of expenses and procurement approvals can be undertaken in minutes from any physical location saving hours during the week.

Security is a challenging issue in a 'bring your own everything' world, but modern cloud-based capabilities can ensure safe working in the office or on the move. According to VMware the prospect of 'anywhere, anytime, anyplace' working is now entirely feasible for every sector, including blue light services such as police and health workers.

How to improve the employee's digital experience

Much has been learnt already from the customer experience and related journey. All of this can be transferred directly to the employee experience. Companies such as VMware have analysed the core processes involved in running any business such as processing expenses and issuing new orders and have produced simple procedures that reduce time and complexity. According to recent studies the cost of carrying out administrative tasks has been cut by over 85% through improved 'digital' support. This leaves vital capacity for mission critical tasks such as apprehending a criminal in the police force.

The most important step forward for many employees is a 'bring your own device' policy that enables them to abandon multiple phones, laptops and PCs. According to delegates, many employees look for just two devices – a smart phone and Tablet to answer all their corporate and personal needs. This requires a single ID identifier and a high degree of trust that employees will respect corporate security measures.

According to a Harvard Business Review article 'How Netflix reinvented HR' the company has given its employees the freedom to work 'anywhere, anytime, anyplace'. This carries a high degree of personal responsibility.

What can organizations do to improve employee experience?

The tone of the dinner suggested that although the tools are readily available, from smart devices to web-based applications and services, the adoption has been slow and challenging. Some simple steps can be taken to accelerate employee experience and thus improve business performance:

- Bring IT and HR organisations together to solve this issue and work collaboratively on solutions
- Employ the latest technologies and services to support a 'bring your own everything' world embedded within a secure, end-to-end environment
- Consider the relationship between physical office facilities and digital, or 'virtual' workspace to improve the overall 'work' environment
- Communicate with employees about how you are proposing to introduce digital workspace and what the implications may be for individual responsibility and consent

The benefits will be more engaged staff, improved productivity and renewed growth potential. It is time for the 'C' suite to act on this neglected aspect of the business and be prepared to invest more resources in its workforce.

VMware welcomes you to read and share its recent report on 'The Value of Digital Employee Experience: An EMEA Perspective' available here. This report identifies and analyses the digital experience factors employees rank highest and where improvement is needed, reflects on how empowered employees can help HR attract and retain talent and what IT and HR can do to improve the digital employee experience.

About CIONET

CIONET is the leading community of more than 10,000 digital leaders in 20+ countries across Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Through this global presence CIONET orchestrates peer-to-peer interactions focused on the most important business and technology issues of the day. CIONET members join over a thousand international and regional live and virtual events annually, ranging from roundtables, programs for peer-to-peer exchange of expertise, community networking events, to large international gatherings. Its members testify that CIONET is an impartial and value adding platform that helps them use the wisdom of the (IT) crowd, to acquire expertise, advance their professional development, analyse and solve IT issues, and accelerate beneficial outcomes within their organisation.

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