Designing the workforce experience with the human at the center
If you’re among the 50+ percent of the workforce considering a career change, you know how much the experience you have at work matters, every day. If you are among the leaders of organizations across industries charged with navigating through this massive disruption to the workforce, you know that many of the issues driving workers to consider walking away from their employers predated the pandemic.

Before March 2020, many organizations were able to do business without meaningfully addressing issues that cause negative worker experiences: inefficient technology; outdated ways of working; poor culture; and lack of diversity, equity, and inclusion were the norm. Back in 2016, the World Economic Forum predicted that failure to address the underlying causes of these issues would be the biggest risk to businesses in the future – and they were right.
A lot of times people tend to hear “workforce experience” and think talent surveys and HR — it’s so much more than that. There are a variety of perspectives out there about how to define it. Our perspective is that workforce experience is just like customer experience — it is “the sum of a human’s lived experiences at work and how they feel about their organization.” Emotions create our experiences and drive our choices. They are informed by our values, needs, and desires as they relate to the critical relationships we have with our organizations – whether we are interacting with them as customers, workers, or partners.

Deloitte believes there are eight key relationships that influence a worker’s experience at an organization – two of which have been newly incorporated into our leading practice perspective. These elements include a worker’s relationship with the work they do, the people they work with, the places they work, the technology they use, their connection to the company mission, their sense of belonging, and the growth that delivers value to their career.

In today’s rapidly evolving work environment, nearly every organization, irrespective of industry, is grappling with how to transform the experiences their workers have every day. They are struggling to appeal to multigenerational preferences, build collaborative ways of working in digital environments, cultivate human connection in hybrid environments, and orient to a world where workers have just as much power as customers to impact brand and market performance. Organizations are asking “How might we understand worker values, needs and desires, and deliver experiences that differentiate them in the market for talent?”
Employers who are winning in today’s hypercompetitive market deeply understand their workers, articulate who they are and declare what they stand for as employers, and then live up to those expectations. This is not an easy task — so how do they do this?

They do it by using human-centered design thinking that places the worker at the center and challenges biases.
1 Deeply understand your workers

Understand what drives your workers’ choices: what they are telling their friends, families, and social feeds about what it is like to work for your organization. What motivates them? What drains their energy? Not only is this the data you need in order to meaningfully solve experience challenges, it is largely open source data and already impacting your ability to attract the workers you need: 79% of job applicants use social media in their job search and 73% of millennials found their last position through a social media site.
Articulate who you are and declare what you stand for as an employer.

Develop an employer value proposition and brand that feels authentic and resonates with your workers’ lived experiences – one that communicates what meaningfully differentiates your organization in the highly competitive market for talent.

And then, live up to those expectations.

Design an effective workforce experience strategy and capability that drives the outcomes your organization needs and desires, by partnering with functions across your organization that influence the lived experiences at work. The key here is using a proven method that has worked for decades to improve customer experiences: human-centered design.
To do this, you need to understand what employers winning in today’s hypercompetitive talent market know (that other employers do not).

Workforce sentiment data and insights are table stakes
To meaningfully understand your worker desires and sentiments — and the differentiated experiences they value — you need data beyond what we have traditionally collected through talent and HR surveys.

It requires an approach that expands your aperture and challenges bias
As you do with customer experience, you must place the worker at the center, understanding what they value and desire, and the differentiated experiences you deliver and aspire to deliver in the future.

You need to partner across functions and enabling areas
In order to accomplish this, you cannot work in silos. Collaborate to build on the data you have, and thoughtfully collect worker sentiment data through focus groups and psychologically safe interviews.
That is what Deloitte’s Workforce Experience by Design practice does differently: we use human-centered design thinking, combined with our market and workforce insights, to design experience solutions that move the needle on retention in the short term, and meaningfully differentiate employers in the markets where they compete for talent in the long term. Here is how we do it...

**Step 1: Frame the challenge.**

In a rapidly changing world, organizations must meet workers where they are at, communicating a relevant value, and delivering an exceptional workforce experience that meets a diversity of needs.

Our clients are framing this challenge in multiple ways: discover what will move the needle on retention and develop innovative solutions in the short term; define a differentiated experience ambition and employer brand that will attract in the long term; and develop a workforce experience strategy, function, and set of capabilities to deliver the employer promise and stay ahead of what workers expect in future organizations.
DESIGNING THE WORKFORCE EXPERIENCE WITH THE HUMAN AT THE CENTER

Step 2: Get to know your workers as well as you know your customers.

A human-centered design thinking approach combines qualitative and quantitative research methods to understand current-state sentiment and future-state desires — it is the same method used for decades to improve customer experiences. It requires moving from bounded discovery focused on formal responsibilities (like data you get in traditional survey-based methods), to open-ended questions that center on individual perspectives, priorities, and sentiments (gathered via AI-powered focus groups and ethnographic interviews). This immersive research serves as a foundation for establishing worker insights to inform future-thinking solutions.

Our method builds on existing workforce data: we use natural language processing technology to evaluate sentiment data the organization already has in free responses from engagement and exit surveys (as well as open-source data). This helps us understand extreme areas to dig deeper with focus groups and qualitative (emotion-based) research.

Ethnographic interviews combine immersive observation and one-on-one conversation to probe deeper in the core topical areas to uncover worker motivations, pain points, and lived experiences. Interviews conducted with individuals in "extreme" circumstances, such as retention focus areas, help gather a complete understanding of the spectrum of the worker's experience.

And when we get to know the worker's experience, we begin to foster human connection and discover new ways to empathize with and understand the worker's values, needs, and desires.

Step 3: Synthesize the data, discover patterns, and generate insights.

The data points gathered in ethnographic research are used to craft insights. Robust internal workforce sentiment research and external marketplace data are used to understand current state and serve as a benchmark for future-state. Common findings within the research data highlight themes and support the development of detailed insights based on workforce sentiment. Actionable and universal insights then serve as a foundation for future efforts and short- and long-term initiatives and priorities.
DESIGNING THE WORKFORCE EXPERIENCE WITH THE HUMAN AT THE CENTER

Step 4: Cocreate solutions based on research-backed insights.

Interactive brainstorming sessions help us to explore and align on research, and discuss and prioritize the most impactful areas to move forward. Design principles are then crafted as a guideline for ideas to ensure the highest impact. Initial concepts are cocreated based on research to be prototyped, tested, refined, and validated by the workers at the center of the challenge.

Step 5: Implement solutions.

Our process has been used to design specific workforce experiences to improve the daily lives of workers and overcome challenges across moments, roles, and needs. Example challenges we have solved include the design of onboarding experiences for new hires; ways of working in hybrid environments to build effective culture; intuitive systems, processes, and digital technology that make workflow seamless for users; and human experience offices, which integrate and prioritize both the customer and worker experience insights, to drive better business outcomes.

Designing a truly differentiated workforce experience is essential to win, not only in the market for talent, but in the markets where you compete for customers. In short, it drives market value. As Tiffani Bova, Global Customer Growth & Innovation Leader at Salesforce, put it: “The fastest way to get your customers to love your brand is to get employees to love their jobs.”

It is not an opinion, it is a fact, one that is supported by countless case studies. About 82% of customers want companies to be willing to take extra steps to ensure the safety and well-being of their employees, reporting that they are more likely to visit or buy from a business that has these steps in place.

High-impact workforce experience organizations are 1.6x more likely to achieve customer outcomes, enjoy 25% greater profitability, double the customer satisfaction, have lower absenteeism, and more than 2.5x the market performance of their competitors.

So, how do you win in the market for talent, and for customers? By placing the worker at the center and designing experiences that resonate with the workforce and differentiate them from the competition.
So how do you win in the market for talent, and for customers? **By placing the worker at the center and designing experiences that resonate with the workforce and differentiate them from the competition.**

Want to learn more?

**Contact:**
Colleen Bordeaux
cobordeaux@deloitte.com

---


This publication contains general information only, and none of the member firms of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited, its member firms, or their related entities (collective, the “Deloitte Network”) is, by means of this publication, rendering professional advice or services. Before making any decision or taking any action that may affect your business, you should consult a qualified professional adviser. No entity in the Deloitte Network shall be responsible for any loss whatsoever sustained by any person who relies on this publication.


Certain services may not be available to attest clients under the rules and regulations of public accounting.

Copyright © 2021 Deloitte Development LLC. All rights reserved. Member of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited.