



Digital Employee Experience Takes Center Stage

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The coronavirus phenomenon hitting the world in early 2020 has highlighted a range of issues across the political, societal and economic spectrum. From a business and IT operations point of view, one of the most glaring phenomena has been a massive and sudden shift to home or remote work. Companies around the world have been forced to send their employees away from offices, to work from home. Colleges, universities, and school systems moved classes to online formats.

In some ways, the IT operations implications are glaringly obvious—IT teams have had to procure tools rapidly to equip newly remote workers. But in other ways, the IT operations implications are less obvious, but still quite profound, because this rapid shift underlines the degree to which employee engagement and productivity has undergone a radical digital transformation. The adoption of new technologies and digital tools over the past decade, specifically cloud and SaaS applications, and on-demand, real-time conferencing and collaboration suites, has made remote work possible to a degree unimaginable not too long ago.

The bottom-line result of all this investment is that today, the digital workplace is everywhere, digital interactions are central to business workflows and user experience has, therefore, become of paramount importance. An article by Microsoft on how they are reinventing the employee experience was published February 26, 2020, just as the pandemic crisis was starting to spill into the western world, and is a timely reminder that leading businesses are all-in on making the most of this trend, no matter what the current events. Yet, for too many organizations, digital employee experience is still in the “emerging” or “future of work” category of thought and planning. Current events show that this is no longer a feasible stance.





Transforming beyond customer experience

Digital transformation for most enterprises has mostly been focused on shifting the delivery of customer experiences from brick and mortar to digital interactions. The goal of this transformation has largely been revenue growth. Building those new digital experiences has been mostly done in the cloud, for agility reasons. Online companies exploded to disrupt traditional businesses, first for B2C (think Amazon, eBay, etc).

But then the B2B SaaS wave started, led by Salesforce, which is still the largest

free-standing SaaS company. SaaS has taken enterprise IT by storm. Netskope reports that the average enterprise has roughly 2,400 cloud applications deployed today and 89% of enterprise users are in the cloud. While many of those are part of marketing tech stacks, SaaS apps have now colonized every corporate department. Take human resources as just one example. According to an October 2019 Kenneth Research report, SaaS-based HR management systems are projected to grow at a CAGR of 10.2%

from 2016, to an estimated market size of \$20.3 Billion in 2023. That's just HR! By the Fall of 2019, Office 365 had 200 million subscribers. Everyone now uses Webex, Zoom, GoToMeeting, BlueJeans or some collaboration suite. The adoption of B2B SaaS and the workflow transformation it brings is well established. That's why it's so easy today for companies and colleges to simply send everyone home and keep business and classes going.

Remote work is maturing, but still faces challenges.

The ease with which so many workers can transition to full-time remote work in a time of crisis is encouraging in one sense, but it belies underlying challenges.

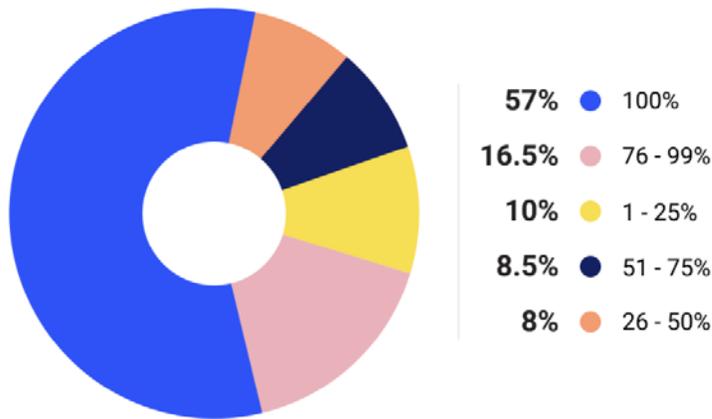
Remote work is commonplace and not going away. According to Buffer's 2020 annual "State of Remote Work" survey results, remote workers are quite happy and 97% would recommend it to others.

The major reasons for remote work content stem from saving time on commutes and enhancing workers' personal lives. That jibes with the fact that 80% of the respondents work primarily at home, 57% work exclusively remotely and only 8% work more than 50% of the time at a corporate office. But there are still real challenges, namely that communication and collaboration in hybrid workforces is still

difficult. 20% of those surveyed by Buffer named it as their biggest struggle with working remotely. And larger societal issues impact remote workers, with 20% naming loneliness as their biggest challenge to remote work.

What's fascinating about this survey is, even though remote work is quite common (88% of respondents report that their companies have very liberal remote work policies or are an all remote workforce), concrete policies that support remote work are still uncommon. For example, 80% of respondents' companies don't pay for home Internet and 72% don't pay for cell phone costs. Given that real estate savings for full-time remote workers are extremely beneficial to the bottom line, the lack of supportive expense policies likely indicates that most businesses consider remote work to be somewhere between a perk and an obligation. But expense policies are just one facet of creating an employee experience strategy that holistically encompasses both in-office and remote workers. Enabling end-users to work remotely is an indicator of employee digital experience.

What percentage of your work time do you spend working remotely?



State of Remote Report 2020

buffer.com/state-of-remote-2020



Digital natives make digital experience an existential matter

Paul Chapman, CIO of Box, has written eloquently on the need for CIOs to empower today's digital native workforce. In March 2018, Chapman wrote on CIO Online, "Removing technological friction to enable a modern, digitally native workforce is critical to not only attract and motivate staff—but also retain them." The May 2019 VMware study conducted in partnership with independent research firm Vanson Bourne, underlines that point of view. According to that study, strong digital employee experience is linked to higher business competitiveness, growth and net promoter scores--which translate into more referrals and hiring in competitive labor markets. 73% of employees and HR respondents said that the state of a digital workplace would influence their decision to apply or accept a position at a company.

Most organizations lack clear vision for digital employee experience

The digital lifecycle of the employee journey encompasses a variety of stages that employers must think about. For example, when a new employee goes through onboarding, the difference between needing to interact with a single or a dozen different portals and user interfaces either streamlines the experience or creates pain points. Building integrated touch points for employee digital interactions with company systems is one of Deloitte's major recommendations for establishing a great digital employee experience.

However, business leaders in most cases have yet to see digital employee experience as business critical. According to Step Two survey conducted in late 2018, only 11% of organizations even had a definition for digital employee experience.

This lack of vision plays out in the IT realm. There is a disconnect between IT and employees in many cases, because the way that IT measures its delivery and what employees want isn't the same. According

to the VMWare study, IT teams tend to focus on how fast they deploy new tools, and 95% of IT respondents think they're delivering what employees need. But 42% of employees and HR disagree with that take, which is a significant divergence. The good news is that both sides agree that getting this arena right is a priority, but a majority (61%) found that there was a lack of common understanding.

Top obstacles to prioritising employee digital experience





Delivering great digital interactions is challenging in a cloudy world

One thing that most studies related to employee digital experience don't delve into is the ongoing operational delivery of app performance that supports great digital interactions. But this is not a trivial matter in an IT landscape that has radically changed. With the cloud and Internet becoming the center of IT infrastructure, IT teams no longer own or control much of the estate that they rely on to deliver these experiences, yet the way that most IT teams attempt to manage performance is via traditional methods more fit for the 1990s than the 2020s. In many cases, IT teams are functionally blind to external factors such as provider-run networks, apps and infrastructure that can impact user experience. In their February 2020 Gartner research note entitled "How to React to the Impact of the Cloud on IT Operations Monitoring," Pdraig Byrne and Sanjit Ganguli write that "cloud adoption means that the IT operations organization no longer has the same access to the infrastructure and networks that underpin its services; this creates gaps in visibility in its current monitoring."

The challenge is that while most of the apps and services that IT operations teams must support to deliver great employee digital experiences are chosen by other organizations with little IT input. However, operations teams are "still held accountable for service availability." Unfortunately, IT teams are spread thin in terms of resources and skills. And often, it's tempting to overly focus on just covering new pieces of the environment without thinking holistically about the outcome that the business or employees need. Just like IT and employees diverge on what constitutes great digital workplace enablement, it's quite common that IT teams are overly focused on the state of the IT infrastructure, at the expense of understanding how the experience they're delivering is measuring up (or not).



The user needs to be at the center of IT service delivery

A key mindset shift that many IT teams can benefit from is understanding that while the components of the IT environment need coverage, the most important priority is to start with the end in mind. It is critical for IT and teams today to understand how user experience is going, vis-a-vis not just historical performance, but against industry benchmarks.

If you have awareness of your app experience delivery, then what comes next isn't "what data should we be collecting?" but rather, "what are the key parts of the service delivery chain for our employee digital interactions, and can we

see and understand them?" For example, it does no good to over-focus on collecting AWS VPC logs (as useful as they are), when you're missing the bigger picture that for your most critical SaaS or cloud-migrated apps, you need to be able to see the performance of the app-layer (as much as is possible when you don't own the code in SaaS scenarios), infrastructure layer, all the networks belonging to SaaS, ISPs, Secure Web Gateway (SWG) and SD-WAN, to internal networks, to home/ cafe Wifi, to endpoint agents. All the pieces of that delivery chain need to work perfectly for the employee to have a great experience. Can you discern which part is performing and which isn't? Can you pinpoint causes along that delivery chain and solve problems? Can you escalate effectively to one of a myriad possible providers who might be causing a problem? If you can't do that, then you might have an amazing VPC flow log collection method and storage, and you might totally miss the goal when it comes to delivering consistent, great digital employee experiences.

Digital Experience Monitoring plays a role

If you're not sure you have the visibility portfolio that will help you manage to user experience outcomes effectively, then it's time to learn more about Digital Experience Monitoring (DEM). DEM starts with the user in mind, and offers visibility into the entire delivery chain from end-user to app. DEM solutions combine app experience scoring, collective intelligence-based benchmarking, real user traffic, internal and external network insights and endpoint visibility, to give you the visibility you need to ensure great user experiences. When employee digital experience matters more than ever, DEM is a way to ensure that you're doing what's needed to make users happy.

If you're ready to get this level of visibility, contact us at info@sinefa.co and we'll get you started on your DEM visibility journey.

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About Sinefa

Sinefa is a digital experience monitoring platform that delivers visibility into the entire service delivery chain from endpoint devices across internal and external networks, through applications and APIs, enabling you to plan smarter, deploy easier, resolve issues faster, and run your business smoother.

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