

# The new employee experience strategy for the everywhere workplace



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**HRMorning.com** keeps HR professionals informed and prepared by delivering reliable insights, practical tools, and high impact training that covers the most relevant HR topics, management principles and labor law changes.

# Foreword

COVID-19 changed everything.  
Critically, it changed work.

While most people used to work in the office  
all the time, now many don't.

About 60% of employees now have jobs that  
can be done remotely much of the time,  
according to research from The Pew Research  
Center. Only about a quarter of employees  
worked remotely before the coronavirus.

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For most people showing up to work meant just that: Going into the office 40 hours a week. Doing the assigned work. Making a few friends. Joining a softball league. Collecting a paycheck every two weeks.

Today, the employee experience looks quite different—since “showing up to work” can involve turning on the computer in the home office, slipping on a headset, answering a Zoom call, or meeting colleagues on a Virtual Happy Hour.

For HR leaders and their front-line managers, the challenges of managing a distributed workforce abound—from rebuilding the employee experience and staying connected to collaborating and communicating effectively with people across time zones and cultures.

“We have so many jobs now that, in the past, were not done remotely,” says Mary Stern, VP of Human Resources at Simpplr. “So the challenge is, how do we maintain that collaboration and free flow of ideas that used to happen? How do we maintain the engagement and those water-cooler moments? How do we get the feedback and do the reviews now?”

# Why now's the time to invest in employee experience



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Fortunately, all this is still achievable. HR leaders, their teams and executive allies can maintain company culture and community, even with a distributed workforce.

Now is also the time to become more proactive, as hybrid and remote work is here to stay and will likely become a bigger factor in the world economy.

To this point, [McKinsey researchers](#) found about 25% of the workforce in advanced economies can work from home almost five days a week, likely setting a change in the geography of work as people and companies shift out of large cities and into suburbs and small cities.

Despite this great shift, some functions will still be better in person, McKinsey found. Those include negotiations, critical business decisions, brainstorming, sensitive feedback and onboarding. Yet people can effectively handle the precursors to all of those—research, information exchange and preparation—remotely.

The challenge is how to manage the employee experience in this new era. It's critical to stay ahead of dynamic changes taking place around work. It's vital to keep employees connected and engaged; allowing them to feel disconnected from their leaders and the organization can lead to lower engagement and unnecessary turnover.

Fortunately, leaders care more than ever about the employee experience. Almost [90% of executives in a Willis Towers Watson study](#) said that enhancing the employee experience is a top priority over the next three years. To put that in perspective: Nearly 50% of leaders said the same prior to the pandemic.

Let's look at the critical elements of the employee experience—a then versus now analysis—and uncover ways to improve it for a distributed workforce.



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## Meetings

**Then:** Remember conference rooms? Coffee-stained tables? Stale doughnuts? Endless PowerPoint presentations? OK, in-person, on-site meetings weren't all that bad. As McKinsey researchers noted above, they're particularly powerful when negotiating and brainstorming. Plus, in-person meetings offer organic opportunities for people to connect.

**Now:** We meet online more often. Video technology makes it easy for people to connect across space and time differences, though they can at times be fraught with technical issues.

**Improving the experience:** Online meetings tend to be more function-focused, yet employers want to provide time and opportunity for organic engagement. We know one manager who almost often arrives at digital meetings a few minutes late so her team can "chat it up" without her. Another one company hosts monthly on-site "Super Days" with meetings scheduled on Health (flexible office choices, team-building and employee wellness), Wealth (cross-functional, sprint-like work sessions and fun events), and Growth (personal and professional development).



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## Collaboration

**Then:** Before the pandemic inspired the widespread shift to remote work, employees collaborated formally and organically. We scheduled meetings and had impromptu conversations at the coffee pot or water cooler that sparked the next genius idea.

**Now:** Organic, informal collaboration moments are less likely to happen when people don't spend as much overlapping time in the office. Teammates and cross-functional groups can still collaborate formally through online tools like internal communication apps and video meetings.

**Improving the experience:** During formal brainstorming, leaders will want to make extra efforts to nurture organic collaboration. Create whiteboards in your internal communication app with just a question: "What could we do about ...?" Then say no more. Invite team members to comment and see where they go. Schedule a weekly online "Coffee Break" with no work agenda and see what happens.



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## Socializing

**Then:** There were happy hours, Bagel Fridays, Employee Resource Group (ERG) lunchtime get-togethers and walking or smoke breaks.

**Now:** Socializing has taken on new meaning in the hybrid workplace. People need to make special arrangements to actually interact in-person. Otherwise, it's hosted Zoom happy hours, online team building events, virtual games and chat rooms designated for non-work agendas.

**Improving the experience:** Some employees may not like the events or feel as if there an obligation is to attend. Take a step back and eliminate the things that creep into employees' personal time and interests. (They can schedule that on their own, with each other, if they choose). Instead, survey employees about the rituals—old and new—they want to take forward or reinvent.





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## Communication

**Then:** We were already moving rapidly to more digital communication well before the pandemic. Nearly every workplace had multiple communication channels. While researchers continually find face-to-face communication the most effective way to get things accomplished, email, text, apps and phone calls had their place at work.

**Now:** With employees working from everywhere, we've cemented our relationship with digital-first communication. Email gives the space and continuity to communicate asynchronously. Apps, document-share platforms and chat rooms let us work in real time when we aren't face-to-face.

**Improving the experience:** Despite all the workplace communication channels available, there's an overriding goal to create better experiences; deliver transparent, clear messages, regardless of the channel. That's especially true when you're relaying important HR-related policy changes and compliance requirements. Ask for top-down commitment to give regular rundowns on company goals and realities. Ask front-line managers to meet to have smaller discussions on those matters. Then they can share feedback up to the top level.





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## One-on-One feedback

**Then:** It used to be a proper one-on-one meeting. A manager would meet an employee in an office, on a walk, or over coffee. And they spoke face to face where they could not only hear words, but read body language and ask for immediate clarification.

**Now:** One-on-ones and top-down feedback can still happen in person, yet it's increasingly over video. And that's fine—as long as leaders keep a regular, expected cadence of the meetings.

**Improving the experience:** It's easy to miss emotional or body language cues during online meetings. Managers will want to be sure to ask emotion-gauging questions throughout conversations. Questions such as “How are you feeling about work?” or “How would you describe your level of concern/excitement/frustration/hope right now?”



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## Onboarding

**Then:** New hires came into the office, filled out paperwork, took a facility tour, were introduced to people and then went to lunch with their new team. They trained side-by-side with a mentor, colleague or trainer, learning formal rules and processes. At the same time, they picked up on informalities as they absorbed the corporate culture.

**Now:** With a distributed workforce, new employees get indoctrinated online, and possibly in the office for a few days. They typically don't meet as many colleagues as they would have and have fewer opportunities to meet new people organically in the break room. It can feel isolating, rather than welcoming.

**Improving the experience:** Remote or hybrid, you can still give new employees a feel for the company culture. But it will just need to be more intentional. At one company, new employees get an "Onboarding Buddy"—an employee who was hired in the past two years—who they can call for help with random questions and anything they might need. New employees feel more comfortable asking these relatable colleagues. And often, the Buddy enjoys the informal mentoring role.



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## Training

**Then:** Beyond the initial onboarding training, regular, developmental training was mainly in-person and hands-on. Teams interacted. Leaders stood in front and walked through job-specific information. Or HR trainers guided employees through required policies and procedures.

**Now:** Training is increasingly done online with AI tools, gaming elements and limited personal interaction. Employees can take required training on demand. HR and other leaders can fill online tools with information and support materials to be accessed from anywhere, anytime.

**Improving the experience:** Incorporating interactive elements to training will help with engagement and information retention. Most training information can be put online and on demand. But doing this eliminates the interactions with the leader and fellow trainees. Whenever possible, schedule group meetups after the required training where employees can discuss what they took away from the session and hear how they're putting the lessons in practice. This is also a great way to foster interdepartmental relationship-building.



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## Career development

**Then:** Career management was typically conducted through in-person meetings and training. Employees also witnessed their colleagues in action, so they sometimes saw work that intrigued them. That might have inspired them to work toward the next—or different—role.

**Now:** Employees don't see others doing their work as much, and can't easily aspire into a bigger or different position. Career development meetings are done via video more often—if they're done at all. The same is true for training toward the next step in a career path.

**Improving the experience:** In-person or online, career development efforts pay off with employee retention. So it's critical that HR help managers continue to make these conversations a priority. Even better, give managers tools to develop goals with each employee, map out the course to reach goals and direct employees to the resources they can tap to get there to streamline the process and employee experience overall to foster interdepartmental relationship-building.

# Why master the new employee experience

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HR professionals have long been advocates for improving the employee experience. Finally, now that so many companies have distributed workforces, the positive impact of creating healthy employee experiences are being discussed.

Long-term results include:

- ▶▶ **Loyalty.** According to [research from Gartner](#), employees reporting a positive work experience are 40% more likely to stay with their current organizations.
- ▶▶ **Performance.** Nearly 45% of the employees in the Gartner study are more likely to be high-performing employees. They enjoy their companies and their work, and are therefore more likely to deliver quality work.
- ▶▶ **Profits.** Employees who are engaged can drive profits up a whopping 50%, according to [Harvard Business School](#) research.
- ▶▶ **Reputation.** Almost two-thirds of HR leaders who achieved high ratings for employee experience saw a correlating positive impact on company brand reputation. Another 53% said that positive employee experience gave them a competitive differentiation in the workforce, an [EY study](#) found.

Managing the employee experience with a distributed workforce in mind will help HR leaders stay ahead of the curve. Ensure that your system addresses:

- ▶▶ **Better collaboration and idea sharing.**  
Help employees interact without hesitation.
- ▶▶ **Compliance with, and promotion of, HR policies.**  
Make policies easy to understand and comply with.
- ▶▶ **Corporate culture.**  
Make it as attractive as possible to candidates, shareholders, clients and employees.
- ▶▶ **Satisfaction and retention.**  
Build internal networks, resources and tools that help employees see and cherish their future within the organization.

# Challenges to improving the employee experience

Creating a better employee experience for distributed workforces has its challenges.

The three biggest hurdles are typically:

## Resistance to change

This is the most common challenge to almost any change initiative. People prefer to stay in their comfort zones, and changing habits, following new processes and responding differently to all the changes can seem intimidating. Tips for success here are to:

- **Be transparent.** Everyone needs to understand the reason for change—not just the high-level benefits the change is meant to deliver
- **Acknowledge the struggle.** Let employees know the potential challenges that may arise and how they'll be helped through those
- **Find champions for the cause at all levels.** Enlist different stakeholders from executives to front-line employees. Have them enthusiastically communicate why the change is happening, how it'll happen and what to expect next

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## Technology aversion

About 40% of employees find their current technology challenging to use. Even more claim what they have doesn't have vital features, according to [research by Forrester](#). If employees don't love the technology they currently have, imagine how they'll feel about new technology! Try to:

- **Roll it out in phases.** You might decide to increase the number of users in phases. Or consider gradually increasing the use of new technology in phases
- **Train.** Then train again. Offer refresher training sessions later on
- **Work closely with the vendor.** They usually can offer expert training and can help tweak the technology to fit your exact needs

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## Time

Allow time for the change to happen. Expecting changes to happen quickly, without letting people, processes and technology to evolve over time is a recipe for disaster. In other cases, leaders and employees take a passive approach to change and don't fully embrace the possibilities. Try to:

- **Add 20% to the timeline.** Many experts agree that full change adoption takes at least 20% longer than expected
- **Set hard deadlines.** This is especially important when encountering user resistance. If people aren't expected to fully adopt technology changes, they'll linger as long as possible

# Next steps



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Now is a great time to invest in digital workplace technologies that work to enhance the employee experience. Nearly two-thirds of executives say that they will increase investments in automation and AI as they face uncertainty and industry changes, according to a [McKinsey study](#). Leaders in the study found the best performing automation was generally in work environments where teams worked closely together. Securing user buy-in and support early is also a best practice for future success.

**Bottom line:** When people collaborate, communicate and become engaged with one another, they accelerate progress.

“Have the right tools, have the right mindset, have the right people,” Simplr VP of HR Mary Stern says. “This is the new normal. We’re not going back.”



# About Simpplr

## Who we are

Simpplr is the modern intranet that transforms the work experience for all employees — wherever and however they work. Simpplr is the only platform that unifies employee engagement, enablement and services, leveraging state-of-the-art AI models to deliver a seamless, cohesive and personalized employee experience.

Trusted by over 700 global brands, including Moderna, Snowflake, Splunk, Penske, Eurostar and AAA, Simpplr customers achieve significant improvement in their employees' productivity, retention and overall satisfaction. Headquartered in Silicon Valley, CA, Simpplr is backed by Norwest Venture Partners, Sapphire Ventures, Salesforce Ventures, Tola Capital and Still Venture Capital. Learn more at [simpplr.com](https://simpplr.com)

## Benefits

- ↘ Designed for the way you work
- ↘ Ready to use in weeks, not months
- ↘ Built for business users
- ↘ Unified, engaging experience across mobile and the web
- ↘ Powerful integration
- ↘ Secure and scalable platform

## Trusted By

