How to increase healthcare employee engagement

HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY

Contents

Foreword

Many companies have a workforce that consists of both office and frontline workers, but decision-making is typically dominated by those in the office while frontline workers are often excluded from the process.

Modern organizations recognize the need to include everyone and create a cohesive and engaging employee experience for the entire workforce. With a rising generation of tech-savvy workers, mounting external pressures, and enterprise-level computing advances, organizations have the proper motivation to realize the goal.

Frontline industries, including the healthcare industry, urgently need to make this change, and they stand to gain the most from doing so. Traditionally, compared to other sectors like technology, telecommunications, and finance, these industries need to catch up regarding digital transformation and change management. However, conversations with industry players reveal a mass awakening.

It is estimated that these eight industries employ up to 2.7 billion workers, the bulk of the global workforce. And with 80% of the total workforce being frontline, it's a wonder that some of the companies have been so successful, as one industry professional put it.

As stewards of the fourth industrial revolution (Industry 4.0), these organizations must adopt, embrace, and evolve with the changing workforce and its needs.

In fact, in a recent Simpplr survey of 1,500 HR executives of organizations, with more than 20% of their workforce comprised of frontline employees, we uncovered some alarming stats:

↘ **More than 30%** of companies lack the technology to adequately engage frontline employees

↘ **40% of companies** surveyed say they communicate with frontline employees only once a week

↘ **54% of companies** recognize that failing to help frontline employees stay connected and engaged is costing them productivity

↘ And the recognition by **38% of respondents** that a technology gap is making it more difficult to retain and recruit talent

Survey results

Simpplr surveyed 1,500 HR executives of organizations in which more than 20% of their workforce comprises frontline employees. The survey was conducted in March 2023.

61%
of companies are concerned about recruiting and retaining frontline employees

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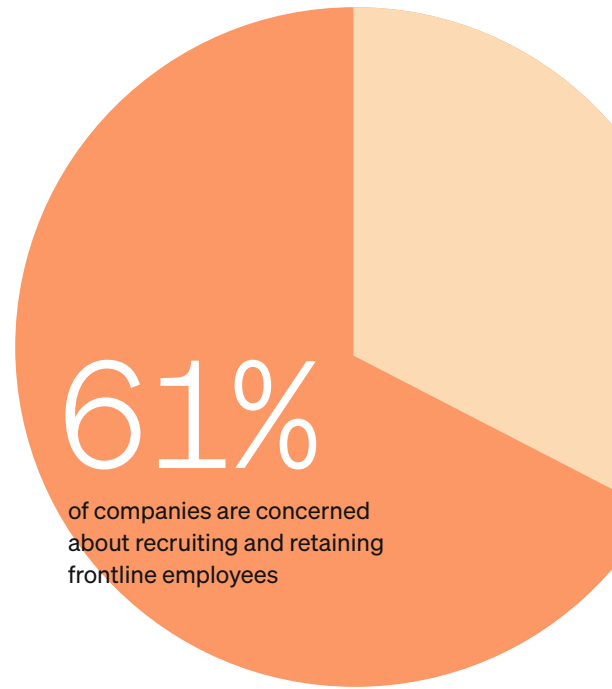
Companies Lack the Right Technology to Adequately Engage Frontline Employees

54%
of respondents reported the lack of engagement amongst their frontline employees impacts their productivity.

Frontline employees regularly miss important company communications, especially if they are infrequent and disjointed.

↘

Lack of Consistent Frontline Employee Communication

40%
of companies surveyed say they communicate with frontline employees only once a week.

When it comes to connecting, including, and supporting frontline employees, 60% favor including them in more organizational opportunities, events, and activities despite these channels not being conducive to the way frontline employees work.

↘

Frontline Employees Need Leadership and Team Support to Stay Engaged

60%
of respondents say the relationship frontline employees have with their manager is the most important part of delivering an exceptional employee experience.

Many frontline employees can't receive direct communications from their supervisors, as most don't have a corporate email address, which can impact the connection they have with their leader and team.

Like boomers, who long outgrew calling trees, voicemails, and PA systems, millennials—increasingly forming the majority of frontline workers—don't understand or want to work with dated systems like cloud-based ERPs, which may seem quite advanced by the industries' traditional standards.

That said, solution providers have to understand the complex needs of these organizations by taking stock of existing pain points to address operational challenges and potential disruptions that new technology might bring.

Specifically, while they are keen on adopting advanced IT options to unify their communications, people, and workplace, they are looking for solutions that areeasy to implement and maintain—things that do not add extra work to overburdened IT departments.

Understanding organizational pain points in the healthcare sector

One of the biggest challenges facing the healthcare sector today is the attraction and retention of a frontline workforce.

Generally, across all main sectors, people are on average 25% more likely to quit their jobs today than before 2019, and most of those who leave their jobs (65%) do not return to the same industry.

Recently, in its biannual Job Optimism survey, "of more than 2,500 professionals in the U.S., 46% of respondents are currently looking or plan to look for a new role in the first half of 2023, up from 41% just six months ago."

46%

of respondents are currently looking or plan to look for a new role in the first half of 2023

Although the main reasons they plan to seek new employment in 2023 include salary (61%), benefits (37%), and flexibility (36%), it turns out what they're also searching for in new roles often revolves around company culture. 2023's candidate pool shared its top turn-offs that cause loss of interest in roles for which they're applying:

56%
Unclear or unreasonable job responsibilities

50%
Poor communication with the hiring manager

36%
Misalignment with the company culture and values

For many organizations, this is the first time they are thinking seriously about the employee experience, especially for frontline workers in the healthcare sector.

There are many reasons why workers leave their current jobs in the frontline healthcare sector. One of the ongoing trends is the Great Resignation. Another trend known as the Great Retirement emerged when people took early retirement during the pandemic.

These experienced workers left a big void, causing problems with the training and mentoring of new recruits. Resignations of new employees followed, and of those who remained, many were likely not interested in taking on extra responsibilities to support an unguaranteed future role. Quiet quitting began to plague the younger workforce, and the skills gap grew, creating a less-than-ideal situation in the healthcare sector.

Given the rising costs of replacing and reskilling lost employees, healthcare organizations must address the underlying reasons for frontline staff turnover. And as they continue their process of digital adoption, they must identify and understand pain points in the industry and build strategies to attract and retain the best employees.

Another huge consideration revolves around smashing silos. Information and knowledge must be seamlessly shared and generally available to all, regardless of location. Having the most up-to-date information significantly impacts healthcare worker effectiveness and can lead to dangerous disconnects when information sharing is anything less than seamless.

To that end, there are a host of factors affecting frontline healthcare workers today, including:

↘ Employee shortages, especially in critical areas where nurses and physicians are required. This leads to overwork, burnout, and decreased quality of care for patients.

↘ Inadequate access to personal protective equipment (PPE) and other critical supplies needed to protect themselves and patients.

↘ High levels of stress and emotional exhaustion are caused by long working hours, unpredictable patient loads, and exposure to trauma, and can affect patient well-being.

↘ Administrative burdens, such as paperwork and electronic medical records, takes away valuable patient care time.

↘ Limited resources and funding makes it difficult for healthcare organizations to invest in new technology, training, and other initiatives that can improve patient outcomes and overall quality of care.

↘ Lack of communication and coordination between different healthcare providers and institutions, across distributed workforces can lead to fragmented care and misunderstandings, delays and mistakes in treatment.

↘ Longer wait times to receive care, which can exacerbate patient conditions or lead to complications.

↘ Privacy and compliance issues that can cause complications.

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90%
of all
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fail

Gartner

A healthcare company seeking to attract and retain frontline talent, must understand that digital transformation toward a system to alleviate these issues is not the end, but the beginning, and that technological upkeep can prove more laborious than manual processes when not appropriately vetted ahead of implementation.

As a result of underestimating the need to map out ongoing upkeep ahead of time, many companies acquire digital systems that quickly prove inefficient. They either do not keep pace with changes, become a dumping ground, or create a bottleneck and are abandoned. The failure rate is staggering. According to Gartner, 90% of all intranets fail. But they don't have to.

So, what other things are healthcare organizations missing, and what's at stake for failing to implement effective employee experience programs for their frontline workers, specifically?

Diminished productivity and increased risks to safety

Diminished productivity in the frontline healthcare sector refers to a decrease in the efficiency of services that impact patient outcomes and employee experience. These are caused by several factors including worker shortages, inefficient work processes, lack of investment in equipment and technology, low morale, high levels of bureaucracy and regulations, and more.

Any of these factors can result in longer wait times for patients, decreased quality of care, increased healthcare costs, and a poor work environment.

To alleviate these issues and their associated risks, organizations need to invest in employee training and development, adopt appropriate technologies, streamline workflow processes, and reduce bureaucracy to drive productivity, ensure care of the highest quality, and foster employee satisfaction.

Diminished productivity in the healthcare sector can lead to numerous safety risks for both frontline workers and those for whom they care:

↘ Job stress and burnout lead to high turnover rates, disruption of care continuity, and a higher workload for remaining workers. Stressed, overwhelmed frontline workers cannot deliver quality care. If staffing is inadequate, problems can arise with the procurement and management of essential supplies and equipment shortages. Patient safety and levels of care are compromised.

↘ Inadequate PPE affects frontline workers' confidence and can have a serious impact on workers and patients alike with the risk of transferred infections.

↘ Too much administration and paperwork take workers away from their patients and this can be harmful.

↘ Low employee morale causes diminished productivity, which results in a negative work environment and impacts the quality of care that patients receive. It is essential to ensure workers are adequately supported.

↘ Poor communication is one of the greatest risks in the healthcare sector. When frontline workers are inadequately informed, or rushed, they may fail to effectively communicate with patients, or colleagues, resulting in misunderstandings, errors or seriously harmful consequences.

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Communication has always been an integral part of organizational productivity, and now it plays a more significant role in engaging workers and making them feel connected. And this connection is crucial. A Gallup study found that engaged teams have 21% greater profitability and 17% higher productivity than disengaged teams.

Beyond that, poor communication increases worker safety risks, opening the company up to lawsuits at the very least.

Word of mouth and printed fliers are not great methods for sharing critical information, yet many locations with frontline workers depend on these

methods. And what happens when you can't reach the worker on time to inform them that their shift has been changed or they are needed in a different location? Again, unnecessary risks are taken, and damage can result.

Everyone should feel included and connected and never learn of company updates from news media or with little time to process the change, as is often the case for frontline workers.

Change management failure without internal alignment

When an organization undergoes change, initial implementation and long-term success hinge on internal alignment. The difference could be as slight as promoting a colleague to supervise others or something bigger like a company-wide shake-up or a merger or acquisition.

It's hard to maintain a stable work environment amid such changes when employees are misinformed or misaligned. In addition, transparency cultivates a culture of trust, whereas sudden changes lead to rumors, discord, and employee resignations. It's essential to communicate the change to frontline workers early and often and to measure employee sentiment around fundamental changes with real-time mobile surveys so you can act quickly on misalignment to prevent loss of productivity and other avoidable challenges.

It's essential to communicate the change to frontline workers early and often

An example of change management failure in the health sector without internal alignment is the implementation of electronic health records (EHRs). While EHRs have the potential to improve patient care and streamline administrative processes, their implementation hasn't always been successful. Without internal alignment between frontline healthcare providers, administrators, and the IT department, the adoption of a process like EHRs can lead to resistance, confusion, and frustration.

Adopting new practices requires workers to change their work schedules and adjust their habits for new technology. Without proper training and support they may struggle to adapt, leading to decreased morale and productivity. On the other hand, IT teams might not fully understand the needs of frontline workers, and this could lead to more frustration.

Implementing new processes, like EHRs, can also be a challenge where different departments and stakeholders are concerned. Administrators will have different priorities for caregivers, and without aligning these, decisions about processes may not fully meet all requirements.

Without internal alignment between departments and stakeholders, adopting new methods and technologies can lead to resistance rather than improved patient care and administrative efficiency.

Increase in the number of disengaged, detached, and dissatisfied employees

Engaging employees is the first step to creating a satisfying employee experience. Without engagement, when a worker feels their job lacks meaning, detachment and dissatisfaction result.

In recent years, the disengagement of frontline healthcare workers has increased because of factors like overwork, burnout, lack of recognition, inadequate resources, low job satisfaction, insufficient pay, and others. And the pandemic exacerbated all of these things.

Frontline healthcare is highly demanding, requiring commitment, long hours, and the management of high-pressure situations. Given the shortage of workers, those in the healthcare arena must often work beyond their limits, which leads to burnout, disengagement and resignations.

It's easy for these workers to feel undervalued and unrecognized for what they do, and this increases the tendency to become unmotivated and disengaged. Inadequate training and development programs and lack of career opportunities don't help either. Poor methods of communication play a significant role in employee disengagement. When the only information an employee receives is company news via in-person team meetings and it feels irrelevant, they tune it out.

The absence of two-way communication between leadership and frontline workers is palpable and destructive. If there are no connections to leadership or other colleagues, nothing personalized for them, they feel like a number and become detached.

Being connected to other employees, having regular communication with their leaders, and expressing themselves, are all hallmarks of a satisfying employee experience. This requires a streamlined two-way system that is not simply a way to pass instructions but, more importantly, an avenue for interpersonal engagement and shared understanding.

Addressing these issues is crucial to increasing engagement, improving productivity, enhancing the well-being of healthcare workers and driving better outcomes for patients.
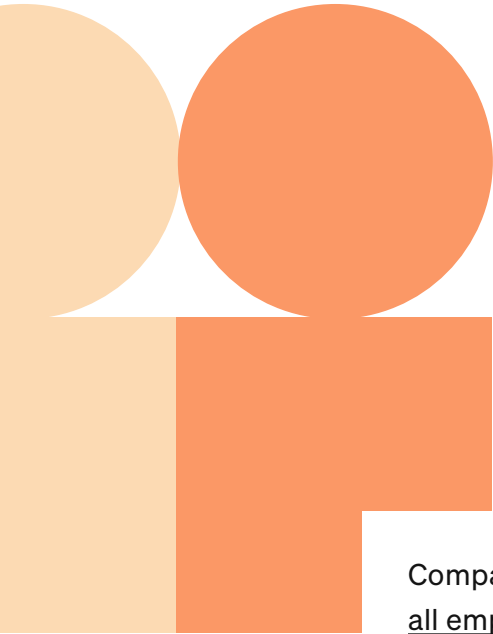
Poor methods of communication play a significant role in employee disengagement.

Exclusion of frontline workers from the company culture

Company culture needs to be reflected in all employees. Unifying a workforce in line with common ideals demands connectivity on all fronts.

Company culture is absolutely vital to employee experience with underline almost half of all employees underline saying it is more important than their workspace or the technology available to them. Feeling they don't fit in is also a primary reason for resignation. Most workers want to be part of a broader community, one where they understand their impact and worth across the organization and where they feel part of the big picture.

Company culture is extremely important for frontline healthcare workers and can have a significant impact on employee experience and well-being, as well as the quality of care provided to patients. A positive company culture leads to improved job satisfaction and employee retention rates, which in turn have a positive impact on patient outcomes.

Also, a supportive work environment that recognizes and values the contributions of frontline healthcare workers, particularly those in a distributed workforce, can improve efficiency and reduce burnout. On the other hand, toxic or negative company culture can lead to high turnover rates, reduced morale, and lower quality of care for patients. It is crucial for healthcare organizations to prioritize building a positive and supportive company culture to enhance the experiences and outcomes for both staff and patients.

A healthcare company with a positive workplace culture reflecting strong ethics and values will attract the best workers. To review an existing culture, or to instigate something entirely new, consider the following:

↘ Ensure your frontline healthcare employees have a sense of purpose and belonging

↘ Connect your workers with a collaborative internal communication system

↘ Welcome a diverse workforce

↘ Recognize and reward autonomous actions and celebrate teamwork in real-time

↘ Request employee feedback on how to increase engagement

The creation of an intentional work culture does wonders to combat stress, the number one enemy of the frontline healthcare workforce. Few people are able to remain long in a job where high levels of constant responsibility and accountability around patient well-being and mortality create monumental stress on a daily basis. This is particularly true if they are nots getting the care and support that they need for their own physical and mental health requirements.

Decrease in the frontline worker talent pool as skilled labor retires

The aging workforce and retirement of frontline workers both leave a void where skilled labor is required and raise a need to re-think training, mentoring, and knowledge transfer.

One of the key drivers of early retirement was the COVID-19 pandemic, where workers were exposed to unprecedented volumes of work, trauma, risks, and uncertainties, while also being able to save money because of global shutdowns.

These two factors combined made early retirement an attractive option. Taking the ongoing effects of this into consideration, healthcare companies must now ensure that there is a ready talent pool. This transition must be as streamlined as possible to avoid dips in productivity and performance.

A good onboarding and assimilation process improves morale for new recruits and for existing workers who want career advancement or to level up their skills.

An effective communications system can enhance this by highlighting employees' contributions and helping to train and educate tomorrow's skilled workers and future leaders so they can take over with minimum disruption.

Healthcare industry recommendations

Many frontline workers in the healthcare sector suffer from stress and the pandemic brought additional, unbearable pressure to bear on a global scale.

Paperwork and emergencies aside, daunting is the culture where decisions carrying life-or-death consequences must be made several times a day.

Many people are overwhelmed by the workload and its responsibilities and experience physical and mental health problems as a result. This, in turn, affects productivity and patient care, and results in high employee turnover.

In the healthcare sector, practitioner engagement is vital. A detached, distracted worker or a quiet quitter can cause misunderstandings, delays, and mistakes that can lead to catastrophic failures involving patient health and that of their colleagues and themselves.

Creating a good internal communications system, regularly updated, is highly recommended for any company employing frontline workers. This keeps everyone connected and informed, clarifies job responsibilities and tasks, enhances employee experience by offering support, and drives company culture.

Workers have a safe space to ask for help, offer feedback or openly discuss issues in the workplace. Safety risks are reduced, information about change is shared in real time, and productivity is maintained.

↘ Engage healthcare workers to reduce detachment, dissatisfaction, and quiet quitting

↘ Include frontline workers in a diverse, equal culture so the whole workforce is united with regard to the company mission, values, ethics, and goals

↘ Maintain an ongoing talent pool so qualified workers can take over quickly from those who resign or retire

Where frontline health workers aren't recognized, supported and appreciated, company culture needs improvement.

Creating a mobile link for the frontline workforce

Realizing the importance of engaging their frontline workforces, early adopters of employee experience platforms are already reaping the benefits. They provide an excellent opportunity for other companies to learn and implement similar systems designed to handle their unique internal needs.

As two Simpplr customers illustrate below, creating a cohesive employee experience that not only supports but amplifies efforts is entirely possible. Best of all? There are virtually no additional demands for IT.

The companies represented are FlexCare Medical Staffing and Guardant Health. FlexCare is a nationwide leader in travel nursing, therapy, and allied staffing services for top healthcare facilities around the country. Its mission is to improve the lives of everyone they touch by delivering premier staffing solutions with integrity and transparency.

Guardant Health is a leading oncology company that is dedicated to helping patients at all stages of cancer live longer and healthier, through the power of blood tests and the data they unlock.

Both providers recognize the importance of a cohesive approach to insight, with optimal care hinging on an informed, organized understanding of client needs. And the first client population that each provider needs to understand is their own medical professionals providing this world-class care.

FlexCare skyrockets viewership with frictionless access to cohesive content

FlexCare needed to make it easier to access video content as part of a push to create a more efficient training program that was both accessible and inclusive, particularly for visually impaired employees.

Knowing that their employees work primarily in a fast-paced, often mobile environment, the company envisioned quickly-digestible videos with an easy-to-use, frictionless interface. connection and information overall. It needed to offer the ability to search the platform for the content employees wanted at a given moment and act as a hub for employee With Simpplr's Native Video, FlexCare developed an easy-to-use, accessible intranet with auto-transcribing, auto-captioning, and a robust search engine that made it easy for employees to find any video in seconds. Everyone in the organization could access the videos in fact, since they were stored within the intranet.

They saw an immediate 650% increase in video viewership from these efforts, with staff demonstrating increased knowledge and morale. Workers feel more included and engaged with the company since they can now take part in pre-recorded all-hands meetings, tap into the videos they want, and see company updates right from their desktop or mobile devices.

The effort was wildly successful and comes with the added benefit of saving IT substantial time that is no longer spent dealing with frequent troubleshooting or answering questions repeatedly for employees—the answers are right at their fingertips.

<u>Guardant Health</u> transforms and unifies company-wide communications

Creating technology to help eradicate cancer is essential, and the people who do it need the finest work environment and equipment available. The first step in this process requires seamless access to the company's data and knowledge base to make the best decisions. Unfortunately, Guardant Health found its data and information were siloed.

They needed to unify employees and data and chose Simpplr as the best path forward to achieve these goals. They had numerous locations, teams and new workers onboarding all the time, so the clock was ticking, as getting the company knowledge base to new employees is crucial.

The launch exceeded expectations, folding in more teams and information than originally planned—and ahead of schedule. Its implementation was equally impressive, happening faster with more sites than initially envisioned, all while reducing the load on IT. And user adoption was incredibly simple, with teams immediately able to consume and build out sites with ease.

Guardant Health successfully unified its platforms, personalities, thought processes, and people to create the best possible employee experience. And the platform continues to expand to meet the company's evolving needs, including individual and group personas and other forward-thinking innovations as they arise.

Creating a successful employee experience program that engages everyone

Bringing your frontline workforce into the fold is a purpose-led initiative. It is more complex than merely adopting digital technologies and practices. It requires you to go the extra step of ensuring that you're using those tools and techniques to create a work environment that facilitates your goal.

This might sound vague in theory, but in practice, it's a matter of creating a sound plan and following it step by step. First, think about how you will get buy-in from your employees. Show them that this new system is designed for their benefit.

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So, how do you prove to them that things will be different once they adapt to a new and inclusive employee experience? You do this by degrees.

You recognize them individually and set goals to help them achieve those targets. Then, you give them the needed resources, connect them to other colleagues, and inspire them through regular and direct communication. And you closely monitor how it all goes as you learn and improve.

Coming from a norm of being barely recognized, never mind appreciated, most employees crave a sense of belonging. But most frontline employees have become accustomed to the exact opposite, which accounts for the massive resurgence of quiet quitting and career changes.

And as they see your commitment to them and their development as a member of your team and as an individual, their commitment to your company will also grow.

Implementing successfully will require a long-term commitment, but success is inevitable with the right drive and tools.

Success best practices

When it comes to the day-to-day running of the program, some tips to keep in mind are:

↘ Map out the messaging. Decide from the start what content will be shared through the program. This will also help you design a suitable platform with all the features you need and without unnecessary add-ons.

↘ Give leaders a channel to communicate with employees, as two-way communication fuels engagement and belonging.

↘ Limit alerts. The frequency and timing of alerts are essential. Refrain from over communicating or over-alerting and note the timing of alerts. For example, avoid making people feel like they are on overtime by sending messages in the middle of the night or during the holidays.

↘ Personalize communications. Segment the messaging to provide a personalize demployee experience for everyone.

↘ Tell people their own stories. Employees are connected to the company when they are connected to each other. Be flexible and reactionary; some of the best content comes from stories you didn't plan by monitoring feeds where employees share stories.

Success outcomes

The effort to engage your frontline employees will pay off quickly and in many ways:

↘ All employees have an easy-to-access platform that centralizes company communications, knowledge, and people.

↘ Internal communications (IC) can target and personalize communications to respective audiences, leading to further engagement.

↘ Management, office staff, and production workers are connected and engaging on the same platform, heading off disconnects.

↘ Through a mobile-first approach, all employees are alerted via SMS and can respond and react swiftly as one unit, boosting overall productivity.

↘ With a platform designed to be operated by clicks, not code, IC can govern and manage employee experience platforms without IT dependencies.

↘ The employee experience is personalized and frictionless to improve engagement and collaboration.

↘ Greater agility, faster employee reaction times, and better decision-making from open lines of communication.

↘ It improved worker productivity by accessing company resources, updates, and critical communications.

↘ We have increased employee attraction and retention by aligning workplace culture, employee recognition, and providing better support.

↘ Digital adoption is purpose-led to drive organizational transformation and change initiatives toward success.

Getting ahead—connect and develop engagement with all your employee

The call to engage the frontline employees is a call for organizations to engage all their employees, whether at the office, in the field, in the plant, or elsewhere. You can gain inspiration and be better prepared to roll out your employee experience program by studying what others are doing through webinars, events, podcasts, and other resources.

Then when you finally launch, you can learn from your platform through sentiment analysis, employee engagement surveys, and other feedback channels.

Simpplr is constantly learning from how companies are using their intranets. So, we stay curious, watch for employees' adoption of our program, and use the insights to bridge the remaining gaps, ever innovating as we keep a ahead of the technology curve!

There's always more work to do, and Simpplr keeps customers on the cutting edge. Connect for a demo if you want to learn more about how we can help you transition.

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

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

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