

EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT

Reyhan BAŞARAN¹

Introduction

The conditions of the business world are evolving day by day, especially with agile transitions to technology and knowledge-based industries. In times of agile change, with the increasing speed of economic, socio-cultural and structural transformations, companies' integration with new management trends and business dynamics gains importance in order to gain competitive advantage. The continuous change process, which affects today's working life, also accelerates the transition from physical to digital. The transition from the “Industry 4.0” phase, where digitalization and cyber-physical systems developed, to the “Industry 5.0” phase, where personalization and cyber-physical-cognitive systems gained importance has already started. The dynamics of working life also differ in the face of the rapid change and innovation demands of the markets, and therefore the necessity for employees to interact with their jobs and companies in different ways arises. Companies should strive not only for the automation of technology in the functioning of working life, but also for its role in enhancing the employee experience. A transformation process in which different generations co-exist in business life, changing the mentality of work and expectations also has an impact on the dynamics of business. In recent years, many companies have implemented modern approaches based on design-oriented thinking processes that aim to improve employee experience by re-framing traditional human resources practices in order to add value to human resources management strategies. When the literature is examined in general, it is seen that interest in researches on employee experience management along with employer branding practices has recently increased.

In order for companies to gain competitive advantage and to improve profitability, the existing human capital should also be retained in addition to attracting new talents. In order to maintain employee engagement in the work, it is important to review and evaluate the holistic work relationship that employees establish with their employer. The interest in employee experience management is increasing globally day by day, and with this new approach, it can be argued that a paradigm shift has occurred in human resources management and practices. It is seen that companies with a strong employer brand and employee experience management are more advantageous in attracting qualified human capital to the company, as well as increasing the motivation, commitment and engagement of the employees. Employee experience could be defined as a versatile process that includes the

¹ Assistant Professor
Istanbul Kent University
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
International Trade and Logistics Department
reyhan.basaran@kent.edu.tr

employees' reactions to all their interactions within the company. Considering the studies conducted so far in the literature, it is seen that the concept of "employee experience (EX)" is primarily influenced by the terminology of "experience economy" and then by the "customer /user experience (CX/UX)" methods and approaches with its use in the fields of "information technologies" and "marketing/sales". If employee experience management is considered as an extension of customer / user experience concepts; with an approach based on design-oriented thinking and human-oriented design model, it aims to be attentive to the employee by providing meaningful and positive work experiences. This study aims to present a general perspective by taking current approaches into consideration about the concept of employee experience and the conceptual development of employee experience management and implementation processes.

1. The Concept of Employee Experience

Employee life cycle, employee value proposition, employee engagement are among the concepts that have been emphasized in the literature in recent years in the field of human resources management. It can be proposed that the employee experience brings a holistic perspective to the interaction of all these concepts. Within this framework, the value of the subject of employee experience has been increasing in recent years, both within the scope of management science literature and in the strategic human capital management approaches of business management. When the literature is examined, it is seen that employee experience methods and approaches are considered as a game-changer, new and effective approach that breaks the routine and cause a new paradigm shift in the field of human resources (Plaskoff 2017: Sivathanu 2019). According to Morgan (2017), the term employee experience is the sum of all interactions that occur between the employee and the organization. It is the employee's perception of the combination of the company's cultural, physical and technological environment. According to the CIPD (2020) report, employee experience is a new concept that often used to describe the way organizations create a positive work environment that empowers individuals to reach their potential, encouraging both productivity and innovation. It also includes understanding the role of trust in the employment relationship established between employee and employer and promoting a happier, healthier workforce.

It gains value in the process of discovering and implementing the employee experience approach in terms of strategic human resources management, realizing the organizational goals and objectives of the companies, as well as strengthening their position in the market against their competitors. In this competitive environment, it is important for companies to understand and manage the needs of their employees. Company managements strive to understand the employee value proposition process in order to improve employee experience. The employee experience process includes the evaluation of the interactions of the employees with the company, starting before the recruitment process and continuing after the job placement and leaving the job. Throughout this

process, the effect of psychological contracts (Rousseau, 1995), which includes the mutual obligations of the employer and the employee, but mostly shaped within the framework of the employee's perceptions and expectations, should not be ignored in terms of understanding the employee experience. When the employee fulfills the duties and responsibilities expected of her/him, she/he expects that the employer will also pay back in a financial and moral framework. Any perception of deficiency in the formation of the framework may cause the psychological contract of the employee to be breached and thus a decrease in the job performance, in addition to the job withdrawal approach, the employee experience may also be negatively affected. Employee experience could also be considered as a work engagement approach; negative experience on the employee's side may result in the feeling of engagement to the employer and the work being affected adversely.

The concept of employee experience, which has been frequently used in the human resources management in recent years, has been developed with the adaptation of existing user experience applications in the information systems and customer experience approaches in the fields of sales and marketing to human resources management. In information systems and consumer contexts, user or customer experience refers to how a user or customer interacts with a product or service. The use of the concept in the human resources management has similar qualities, referring to the sum of what an employee experiences in the process of interacting with her/his employer. Developments in both the internal and external environment of the human resources management also raise interest in adopting the employee experience approach. In this context;

- (1) Competitive structure of the skilled talent market,
- (2) An evolved consumer experience,
- (3) Technological advances with the transition to cloud technologies in human resources applications, more employees have access to cost-effective tools (virtual assistants, user-friendly interfaces, chatbots), providing an employee experience which is at the same level with today's consumer experience,
- (4) Dissatisfaction with traditional work engagement approaches, employers' need for methods of participation that are more appropriate to the realities of today's work environment (Tucker 2020,183).

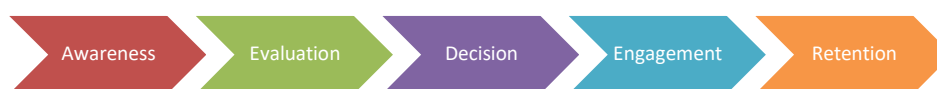
Human resources management practices usually focuses on controlling or influencing employee actions to achieve company goals, regardless of whether employees' basic needs are met. Employees who are satisfied with their job are dedicated to add all their effort to the work by fully contributing to the mission of the organization. Since existing frameworks of traditional human resources practices are assumed to have a limited impact on employee motivation, there is a need for a

radical reframing of the relationships between employees and employers. Employee experience approach comes into play in line with this need (Plaskoff 2017,137).

2. Employee Journey Map

It is seen that the design setup for the employee journey map can be developed similar to the customer journey map. The essence of the customer journey map can be viewed from the perspective of putting yourself in the customer's shoes (Holmlid & Evenson 2008,343). The key stages of the customer journey map include awareness, consideration, purchasing, service and loyalty, and each stage has different touch points. Similar mapping steps shown in Figure 1 could be used for the employee journey map:

Figure 1: Employee Journey Map Fundamental Stages



Employee journey maps can be considered as an important strategic tool that can help to understand in-depth issues such as who employees are and what they need, and how they interact at key touch points of the company. Most of the information for creating the employee journey map comes from employees, their expectations, goals, satisfaction, what they want to achieve, their basic tasks, the obstacles and difficulties they encounter affect the emergence of the map. Therefore, scoping is important, depending on the purpose of the employee journey mapping. It should be decided whether journey mapping should be carried out primarily for a specific group of employees or for a potential employee. What the employee's persona is can be considered as the starting point in determining the scope.

In the scope phase, after identifying employee persona and employee phases, it is important to determine the touch points in the mapping of the employee experience and to determine the conflict points by conducting research on the employee experience. It is necessary to resolve the conflicts detected in the next stages and revise the journey mapping by periodically reviewing them. Employee personas; persona means mask in Latin, and in terms of employee use, it can also be considered as the employee's character, social aspects, skills, ideal employee profile or segmentation of the employee. Transforming a completely foreign person into a "candidate", then an "employee" and then a "employer brand advocate" profile forms the basis of the model of employee experience.

Figure 2: Employee Experience Fundamental Stages



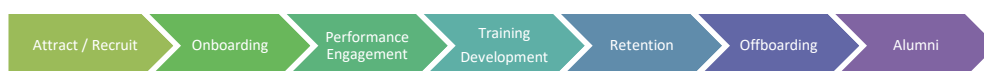
In the setting of an effective employee experience, first of all, making the candidate employee gain the awareness of the employer brand in the audience position, then directing the candidate to the recruitment, placement process by following the job postings, vacancies, interacting at the existing touch points on the employee journey map, and finally becoming the advocate of the employer brand, are important indicators in terms of revealing the success and effectiveness of the employee experience. Failure to provide a clear and accurate communication with the candidate at any touch point during this journey, for example during the recruitment process, will lead to the breaking of the touch point connection at the beginning of the employee experience process and to the negative experiences, and damage the brand perception of the employer. For this reason, the fact that the employee experience is designed in a positive and effective setting is important for companies to provide competitive advantage in strategic human resources management. Today, companies include creating a strong and positive employee experience among the key performance indicators of management levels.

The employee journey dynamics experienced for each employee when joining a new organization are unique. Although the employee journey map is prepared in a standard format suitable for that corporate culture, there will be different bends, stopping points or turnoffs for each employee during the journey. Employee experience is a combination of all these moments. When it comes to service and support, employees have critical needs around the day. Traveling professionals often need supportive travel services. Remote workers expect to have new laptops, tablets and phones and to have uninterrupted access support. Employees generally evaluate their employers through these services and support activities. When viewed in terms of traditional motivational approaches, salary payment is important among the hygiene factors, but the work culture, management and working environment, in other words, the generally experienced employee experience is much more important. Whether it is to resolve a wage payment discrepancy or problem, or is related to a complex schedule such as paternity leave, these situations are important opportunities to please employees. When companies achieve employee satisfaction and succeed in maintaining it, they gain the appreciation and admiration of their employees. If it is unsuccessful, employees start to complain and share these negative conditions on social media (Bersin 2019,3).

3. Employee Life Cycle

It should be taken into account where and at what stage the employee is in the employee life cycle. Is it before the recruitment process, in the orientation phase or in the process of leaving the job? The first of the most important steps in an employee's experience is the orientation phase. A break in the experience at this stage can negatively affect the employee's commitment attitude in the future. Future-oriented organizations strive to provide a consistent, meaningful, and memorable experience at all stages of the employee life cycle. Considering that, as a standard, employee journey develops in three basic categories such as pre-employment, employment and post-employment, employee journey maps can be created that describe various touch point experiences throughout the life cycle of each employee with the company.

Figure 3: Structured Approach to Employee Life Cycle Stages



Employees who interact positively in employee experiences throughout the employee lifecycle come to work because they really want and excited, not because they have to come to work. Employee experience design is therefore more important than standard employee lifecycle approaches and ensuring employee participation, especially in the transformation processes of human resources.

4. Employee Experience Design

It is observed that the customer loyalty, brand reputation and profitability of companies that apply "design-oriented thinking" and "human-centered design" methodologies to both product development and customer service are greatly affected. In Plaskoff's (2017) study of employee experience: new human resources management approach, it is stated that employee experience is also borrowed from similar design principles, tools and processes and adapted them to the working environment and the design of their experiences with the employer. This adaptation is aimed to have a positive effect on the reputation of the employer brand, organizational commitment, work engagement and productivity increase.

In Morgan's (2017) book, 'employee experience advantage: how to win the war for talent, by giving employees the workspaces they want, the tools they need, and a culture they can celebrate?' that provides a detailed perspective to the employee experience, taking into account the factors that employee experience differs from employee participation. Instead of short-term solutions focusing on

additional benefits to keep employees motivated in ensuring employee engagement; employee experience is the long-term redesign of an organization that puts employees at the center. Employee experience, apart from the standard task patterns, not focusing on financial gain, it is generally the reason for motivating employees to be at work. The designed employee experience consists of the expectations, needs and desires of the employee and their organizational design. Employee experience can then be considered as an antecedent to employee engagement and business value creation. In particular, the results of business value creation include innovation, productivity, profitability, stock price, earnings, growth, talent attraction and retention, consumer satisfaction, diversity, overall satisfaction and employer brand outputs. Experiential organizational structures takes into account fundamental changes in four areas: (1) taking non-systematic data from senior managers, creating instant interaction environments with the employee instead of periodic employee satisfaction surveys, (2) appearing in the best employer lists more than non-experiential organizational structures, (3) work metrics (average profit, income per employee, employee turnover reduction), (4) high stock performance. Requirements for experiential organizational structuring in terms of effectiveness of employee experience design;

Experiential Organization Structuring

- (1a) Taking care of employees,
- (1b) Using feedback mechanisms effectively,
- (2a) Defining the reasons to be at work,
- (2b) Providing a physical, cultural, technological environment,
- (3a) Creating an employee analysis function,
- (3b) Creating important / memorable moments,
- (4a) Creating an employee experience team,
- (4b) Don't think like a factory but like a lab

It is seen that the “employee journey map”, one of the important elements of employee experience design, is developed on the basis of the concept of “customer journey map” in which customer-oriented service processes are visualized. There are many areas and touch points where the employee journey interacts, the quality of employee experience is also measured by employee satisfaction, dedication, commitment and ultimately having a direct impact on performance. In order to develop this approach, it is necessary to transform the basic relationship between the employee and the organization. Rather than the traditional “operational” human resources strategy, a structure in which the organization can understand the needs, wishes, concerns and feelings of each employee in more depth is at the forefront. The purpose of adopting this strategy is to provide an experience design that *takes care of employees in the context of the business*, rather than providing services. In this context,

employee experience can be defined as the holistic perception of the employee regarding the relationship established with the employer and developed as a result of the encounters at the existing touch points on the employee's employment journey map. Plaskoff (2017) suggests six principles that can guide the improvement of employee experience:

Employee Experience Fundamental Principles

- (1) Understand the employees and their needs in detail,
- (2) Adopt expansive and holistic thinking,
- (3) Make the intangible tangible
- (4) Insist on multi-layered participation,
- (5) Repeat and experiment
- (6) Trust and appreciate the process

Instead of making assumptions or generalizations about employees in terms of employee experience design, it is essential that trying to discover who they really are and understanding their needs. In the realization and even formulation of the vision and mission statement of the organization, a work culture can be developed in which employees reach their full potential, develop engagement and commitment to work. Employee experience focuses on experience and individual overall. It is important to consider individual differences in terms of the effectiveness and efficiency of the employee experience design setup. The employee is evaluated from multiple perspectives, cognitively, emotionally, socially, politically, economically and physically. Instead of looking at individual steps during the work, the whole journey should be examined in the design thinking process. The effective design of the employee journey, which generally consists of many touch points, affects the quality of the employee experience. These touch points are usually determined by employees' interactions with other employees, communication, physical environment, procedures and policies, traditions, as well as external sources consisting of friends, family, media and former employees. In order to take a complete look at the employee experience, it is important to know that the journey begins before the first day of work and even before accepting the job offer, and also understand that it does not end the day after leaving the job. The company's impact can extend far beyond the employee's experience with the company. The critical thing is to understand and experience this journey from the employee's perspective. The design thinking techniques behind the employee experience emphasize the visualization or “concretization” approach of abstract concepts in visual models or physical structures. Mapping is one of the critical tools used in these processes. Various map models can be used to organize and visually represent complex and unstructured data. Mental model mapping acts as a tool

for defining and organizing employees' conceptualization of certain events, objects, relationships, or functions. Empathy map, on the other hand, allows to put yourself in the place of employees and to think and feel from their perspective. Design thinking processes require extensive, broad, multi-level and equitable participation throughout the organization. The employee experience approach acknowledges that solution design takes time and improves as new information is collected and new situations arise. Employee experience design teams are encouraged to experiment with new ideas in isolated parts of the organization, and to adapt based on feedback and new findings. The design thinking process consists of five steps: research, definition, design, prototype development and implementation. Although this process seems linear and structured, the principle of repetition and re-experiencing should not be overlooked. For this reason, we could say that the employee journey is not in linear setup either. Improvements in design develop over the course of the process and continue to evolve as new feedback is provided or new ideas emerge. While the process is generally seen as a tool that leads to a result, in the employee experience approach, the process is considered as a critical component of change in a framework that is often more important than the outcome itself (Plaskoff 2017,137-140).

In order for the employee experience to be developed and adapted, it should be paid attention to strengthen the experiential organizational structure and design it under the guidance of employee experience principles. In the transition of human resources management to the Industry 5.0 phase, it is necessary to transition from the classic company intranet and employee portal applications which is used for employee interaction to digital and personalized employee experience platforms.

5. Employee Experience Score

Morgan (2017) established the framework of employee experience and emphasized 17 features necessary for organizations to develop an effective employee experience design that employees are excited about especially coming to work and be at work. These features often develop in physical, cultural and technological environments that focus around the reason for being at work.

The physical environment consists of features (1) that allow employees to bring friends or visitors to the working environment, (2) provide flexibility, (3) reflect organizational values to the working environment and (4) provide the opportunity to benefit from multiple workspace options.

The cultural environment is (1) dedicated to the well being and healthy life of the employee, (2) top management and managers are seen as coaches or mentors, (3) employees are treated fairly, (4) providing resources for learning and development, encouraging employees in this direction, (5) guidance comes from employees, (6) believes in diversity and inclusion, (7) employees feel they are a member of the team, (8) has reasonable goals and objectives, (9) everyone feels valuable, and (10) the organization is viewed positively.

In the technological environment, it should be taken into account (1) accessible to everyone, (2) providing a well-designed, useful and valuable consumer-grade technology opportunity, and (3) features where employee needs meet business needs. The implementation of each of these 17 variables separately affects both the organization and the employee as a whole. Morgan (2017) developed the "employee experience score" based on these 17 variables and created the "employee experience index" in which companies are ranked collectively. "The Employee Experience Index" can be taken into account as an indicator of how successful employers are in providing their employees with positive employee experience. Researches on "the best employers to work" in recent years are also evaluated by considering whether companies provide the best employee experience for their employees.

Conclusion

In today's working environment where personalization and cyber-physical cognitive systems gain importance with the new industrial phase "Industry 5.0", generalized and standard human resources applications have started to be replaced by personalized and agile human resources systems. Transformation processes play a critical role in working life dynamics and the way companies do business. In order to ensure a successful and efficient transformation process, companies need to develop employee experience designs that are compatible with the Industry 5.0 phase and VUCA business world conditions, beyond improving their digital adaptations. Employee experience, which is based on design-oriented thinking and human-oriented design model, aims to provide meaningful and positive working experiences that care for the employee. Development and implementation of employee experience will contribute positively to the productivity, organizational and financial performance processes of the organization as well as employee engagement, commitment, retention and attracting new talents. Company managements need to improve their employee experience in order to gain competitive advantage in terms of a strong, solid and sustainable human capital strategy. The impact of a strong employee experience design on creating a strong employer brand and thus on the success of the customer experience strategy is inevitable.

REFERENCES

- Bersin, J. (2019, February 15). The Employee Experience Platform Has Arrived. <https://joshbersin.com/2019/02/the-employee-experience-platform-a-new-category-arrives/> (accessed: 12 October 2020).
- CIPD (2020, July 2). “Workplace Technology; Employee Experience.” <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/work/technology/workplace-technology-employee/> (accessed 7 October 2020).
- Holmlid, S., & Evenson, S. (2008). “Bringing Service Design to Service Sciences, Management and Engineering.” in Hefley, B., Murphy, W. (eds) *Service, Science, Management and Engineering: Education for the 21st Century*, Springer Verlag, 341-345.
- MORGAN, J. (2017). *The Employee Experience Advantage: How to win the war for talent by giving employees the workspaces they want, the tools they need, and a culture they can celebrate*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley.
- Plaskoff, J. (2017). “Employee Experience: The New Management Approach.” *Strategic HR Review*, 16(3), 136-141.
- ROUSSEAU, D. M. (1995). *Psychological Contracts in Organizations: Understanding Written and Unwritten Agreements*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sivathanu, B. (2019). “Design Thinking – A Game Changer in Human Resources Management.” *International Journal of Scientific and Technology Research*, 8(9), 956-958.
- Tucker, E. (2020). “Driving Engagement with The Employee Experience.” *Strategic HR Review*, 19(4), 183-187.