The Changing World of L&D

From curation to data analysis to multiple delivery channels, learning and development has evolved. Is your organization keeping up?
Of all the conversations around the future of HR, two topics are most likely to make an appearance: technology and the employee experience. Both can be disruptive in good ways and bad, and both will change the role of HR going forward. Though much has been covered about advances in software and automation, employee experience has received far less attention in comparison. Given its ability to be equally game changing, it shouldn’t.

Employee experience, is what people go through in the workplace, all that distinguishes “what it’s like” to be employed in a particular organization. The framing of work as an experience is fundamentally people-centred and it reflects a profound shift in mindset when it comes to managing the workplace. Instead of transactions and metrics, it’s all about what they perceive, how they feel, what compels them, how they interact, how they respond, what they remember. This is how humans are coded, and “how life is lived and remembered.” Look for proof everywhere: museums, music festivals, vacations packaged as experiences, retail customer experiences, even subscription boxes — all are intended to delight the consumer in differentiated, unique ways. No wonder driving HR with policies and procedures against data, costs and profits is problematic.

A Designed Experience

WHAT HR SHOULD KNOW ABOUT EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

By Karen Jaw-Madson
engagement

It’s already established that every employer benefits from highly engaged employees. Intentionally designed work experiences encourage engagement, flow and meaningfulness needed for high performance.

If employee experience is the leading approach to designing the workplace, the next question might be, “Now what?”

Typical responses might be to panic, become overwhelmed, avoid or ignore it for as long as possible. This is a losing battle because whether or not anything is done, an existing employee experience is in place – one that can deteriorate without intentional management. Others might look into how competitors do it, consult with experts and then implement away until something takes, momentum slows or resistance takes hold. Adoption of new practices wholesale won’t work either.

What’s missing are three important characteristics every exemplary employee experience needs:

**RELEVANCE**

All organizations come with their own unique context, the combination of business factors, culture, environment, behaviours, experiences and – of course – people. A well-designed employee experience is based upon a deep understanding of the context for which it is intended. Dragging and dropping or taking anything off the shelf for plug and play and expecting it to work the same way every time demonstrates (intentionally or unintentionally) a lack of understanding and perhaps even carelessness.

**DIFFERENTIATION**

Just like branding, employee experience should be unique and differentiating. Leveraging strengths in one’s unique context goes a long way with establishing differentiation. However, it must be reflected in actual, lived experience to have the impact needed to be memorable. Blasé experience equals blasé employees and the war for talent can’t be won by everyone doing the same things.

**CO-CREATION**

Who better to design the experience than the people who will be expected to live it? Engaging with employees as co-creators allows an organization to leverage their talent, empower people, ensure relevance and even foster enrollment. This sets the conditions for success and facilitates change management going forward.

Now that “the what” of employee experience is established, “the how” comes next. With roots in values-based leadership, design thinking and appreciative inquiry, Design of Work Experience (DOWE) “partners employees with their employers to co-create customized and meaningful work experiences that set the conditions for people and business to thrive.” It provides the much needed, step-by-step “how to” that enables an organization to
prioritize, define, develop and implement aligned people strategies, culture and employee experiences. The DOWE co-creation model is a combination of design and change processes enabled by engagement and capability throughout. These are arranged as a series of five phases, each with progressive learning loops of specific activities.

The five phases of DOWE as explained in the "CYC Book Summary":

"Understand, the first phase of design, is made up of three learning loops: People and Context, Insights and Criteria. Activities in People and Context include: aligning purpose and scope, identifying early assumptions and key questions, planning and implementing user research. The Insights learning loop begins by using different mindsets to develop insights from raw data collected during user research. As a result, thinking is reframed and drives the development of the provocative proposition. Learning is further catalyzed through the creation of visuals. Criteria uses what was learned to establish the most critical requirements in two sets: from the organizational [point-of-view] and the employee [point-of-view]. This becomes the decision-making tool later on in the DOWE process.

"Create and Learn applies learning ‘into the creative design process and combines it with generated ideas through play and experimentation’ in co-creation with others. The learning loops, Explore, Brainstorm and Play, net ‘brainstormed ideas to develop and refine for the new strategies and experiences.’ In Explore, the design team ‘builds knowledge and inspiration by learning from everything and everywhere, hunting and gathering anything that could inform their perspective… it goes beyond doing primary and secondary research – it seeks stimulus to synthesize concepts and ideas.’ In Brainstorm, facilitation guides people to ‘work together to generate options, ideas or offerings that could solve for critical needs and define or enhance a work experience.’ The phase concludes with Play, where the team experiments with ideas to see how they relate to one another, how they work or how they might be modified to work.

"The DOWE process converges with the Decide phase, which is comprised of the Prototype and Select learning loops. Prototype is another form of exploration that further refines ideas and gathers intelligence toward bringing the team closer to decisions. Select brings the development of the Strategy and Design Blueprint to full fruition when the team chooses what best meets three constraints: what is viable, what is possible and what satisfies the previously established criteria?

"The Plan phase comes next and prepares the organization for the change that inevitably accompanies the implementation of the Blueprint to 1) ensure that change reaches sufficient depth and breadth across the organization while maintaining connectivity/reinforcement across all content, actions and activity, and 2) covers what will be done and how during implement. The DOWE process walks the design team through iterative planning to form the Roadmap and Action Plans.

"In this last phase of the DOWE process, Implement, the Strategy and Design Blueprint is brought to life with the implementation of the Roadmap and Action Plans through the learning loops of Manage, Measure and Sustain. Manage goes beyond carrying out plans, it manages meaning in the creation of a new reality at the individual, team and organization levels. Measure serves to ‘gauge progress toward key milestones and enable timely adjustments’ as well as ‘provides data and content for communication and contributes to the change narrative.’ Both a process and an outcome, Sustain drives continued momentum and ensures that changes stick for as long as they’re needed."

Though every organization can benefit from it, Design of Work Experience has requirements not everyone is willing to satisfy. First and foremost, it only works for those that care about people. DOWE also demands the investment of talent, time, effort and a commitment to doing things differently in order to get different results – culture work needs all this because people do. “Sounds like a lot of work,” some may say. The challenge to that might be to ask: How is it working now? What if nothing is done? One only needs to read the headlines to see the consequences of neglect and the excuse of ignorance is no longer valid. Perhaps it should’ve been this way all along, but the best disruption for HR would be to put the “human” in human resources.