



If Employee Experience Isn't Your Top Priority, It Should Be

How Department Leaders Can Improve EX Through Knowledge Engagement



Employee Experience Is Everyone's Business

Employee experience should be top of mind for you even if you don't work in HR. As employee expectations change and distributed workforces become increasingly common, leaders across all departments must consider the impact the employee experience (EX) has on their team and the entire organization. When organizations prioritize EX, employees are empowered to work, share knowledge, and collaborate effectively, whether they are working in the same location as their colleagues or not.

Better employee retention is often the first benefit people associate with a positive employee experience, and while important, it's certainly not the only one. Businesses are increasingly investing in EX initiatives to:

- ✔ Attract and retain top talent in a competitive job market
- ✔ Develop a culture of knowledge engagement to drive innovation
- ✔ Improve business performance and efficiencies

Employee Experience vs. Employee Engagement

The terms *employee experience* and *employee engagement* are sometimes used interchangeably but have different nuances. Below, we've defined how we're using these two terms in this guide.

Employee experience (EX)

encompasses the entire journey an employee takes with a company, from pre-hire to post-exit. Where someone works, the tools they use, the resources available to them, and their interactions with their co-workers are all components of the employee experience.

Employee engagement

encompasses an employee's mindset and behavior at work and is a part of the overall employee experience. Some factors that may influence an employee's level of engagement include whether they see the organization's values aligning with their own, whether they have the tools and resources they need to be successful, and whether they see opportunities for professional growth and advancement within the organization.

Attracting and Retaining Talent

In the wake of the global coronavirus pandemic, we've entered a period that some have dubbed "the Great Resignation." According to a 2021 study from jobs site Monster, 95% of workers are considering changing jobs, and 92% are even considering switching industries.¹ The Great Resignation is impacting both blue- and white-collar jobs, with industries including hospitality, retail, manufacturing, technology, and healthcare being particularly hard hit.²

Some workers who were furloughed or began working remotely during the pandemic have prioritized flexibility and greater work-life balance, potentially causing them to rethink returning to an in-person workplace with strict hours. However, the rise in resignations isn't just about access to remote work and flexible hours. In the 2021 Monster study, workers cited burnout and lack of growth opportunities as their top reasons for considering a career change.

The takeaway for functional leaders who want to grow their teams—and retain their existing talent—is that the employee experience will determine whether a worker stays or goes. With more and more employees leaving their current roles, and with remote work opening up job opportunities to larger pools of candidates, there's a lot of competition amongst employers to attract top talent. Workers recognize that they can be selective in their next career move, and they won't settle for a role with a high stress to job satisfaction ratio, or one with limited growth opportunities.

Increasing Knowledge Engagement and Innovation

Organizations with great employee experiences establish a sense of psychological safety. In other words, employees feel comfortable contributing work and sharing ideas without fear of negative repercussions. The more psychologically safe a team member feels, the more willing they will be to collaborate with co-workers, share knowledge across teams, admit when they need help, and take on new challenges. This benefits the team and the entire organization: in fact, a two-year study from Google found that psychological safety was the most important dynamic for its most effective teams.³

When employees are comfortable documenting and sharing what they know—and leveraging the collective intellect of their peers—knowledge becomes a sustainable resource for the organization. Employees can tap into and contribute to the organization's growing knowledge base, and knowledge can be easily transferred from one person to many. Rather than constantly reinventing the wheel, employees and teams can build on the information and resources already available to them.

When employees are empowered to share their knowledge, they are able to contribute to innovation across the organization. Innovation occurs when people bring existing knowledge and ideas together in a new way, and sharing knowledge across an organization brings together valuable perspectives and approaches that might otherwise be siloed to individual teams. 83% of digitally mature companies rely on cross-functional collaboration for innovation, according to Deloitte and MIT Sloan Management Review.⁴

Improving Business Performance to Gain a Competitive Advantage

An organization's employee experience can have a big impact on business efficiencies and growth, and can even help companies stand out in their competitive landscape. Here's the proof:

- ✔ High employee engagement is associated with 18% productivity gains and 81% lower absenteeism, according to a Forrester Research report.
- ✔ The same Forrester Research report also found that high employee engagement leads to 23% higher profitability.⁵
- ✔ Employee experience has a direct effect on customer experience. Businesses with cultures of high employee engagement achieve a 10% increase in customer ratings and a 20% increase in sales, according to Gallup.⁶
- ✔ Gallup also found that highly engaged workforces outperform their less engaged competitors by 147% in earnings per share.⁷

It's Time to Improve the Employee Experience Through Knowledge Engagement

We've seen that a great employee experience can positively impact retention, talent acquisition, cross-functional knowledge sharing, innovation, productivity, and business performance. That all sounds great—but how can department leaders ensure they are helping to shape a positive employee experience, especially at a time when 54% of employees report that they don't feel engaged with their work?⁸

Business leaders across all departments can improve their organization's employee experience by championing and implementing knowledge engagement initiatives, which enable employees to share, discover, and collaborate around knowledge. A knowledge engagement strategy is foundational to the employee experience: it ensures employees have access to the knowledge they need to work successfully, and it allows employees to share their own knowledge with a large audience and see its impact across the organization.

As a department leader, your knowledge engagement strategy often starts within your specific department or team, where there is clear value it can drive across the functional area. But you ultimately have the opportunity to demonstrate the value of this strategy to other leaders, helping to expand a culture of knowledge engagement organization-wide. As your network of connected knowledge grows, employees have more opportunities to contribute to and leverage your organization's collective intelligence, leading to a better overall employee experience.

In the next section, we'll further explore the relationship between knowledge engagement and employee experience, and then break down the different EX areas that can be strengthened by building a culture of knowledge engagement.

Knowledge Engagement Impacts the Employee Experience

Knowledge engagement is the practice of proactively harnessing and building upon a core set of knowledge, empowering teams to tap into a collective source of intelligence so that the value and utility of that knowledge constantly grows. It goes beyond traditional knowledge management—which focuses on documenting and cataloging knowledge and is relatively static—to take advantage of organizational information and individual expertise that is perpetually evolving.

For many organizations, this means investing in a knowledge engagement platform that centralizes company knowledge and makes all information searchable, as well as building a company culture that encourages people to share what they know and collaborate around the knowledge of their peers.

So, what does all this have to do with the employee experience?

Adopting a knowledge engagement strategy helps eliminate friction and enable employees across four major categories of workplace activity: **finding, contributing, preserving,** and **applying** knowledge.

Finding Knowledge

The average knowledge worker spends close to 20% of their work week searching for the information they need to do their jobs.⁹ When employees spend the equivalent of one full day a week looking for information rather than moving the needle on more impactful activities, they can become understandably frustrated.

When knowledge is centralized and searchable, employees can find the information they need as they work, rather than wasting time searching multiple repositories, combing through email or chat threads, or trying to track down the right subject matter expert. With one destination for organizational knowledge, employees significantly reduce their search time. That means they get more time back to spend on meaningful activities that give them greater job satisfaction and help support the organization's goals.

Contributing Expertise

In organizations that prioritize knowledge engagement, employees aren't just encouraged to consume the knowledge of their peers—they are also encouraged to contribute their own. Employees are rewarded for sharing their expertise and ideas, reinforcing this behavior so that documenting and sharing knowledge becomes the norm.

When employees contribute to a centralized knowledge engagement platform, they can see who is engaging with their contributions and how their knowledge is being leveraged across the business. This gives them a strong sense of how their work fits into the larger organization and how their contributions are making a tangible impact.

Preserving Knowledge

Lost knowledge is a huge pain point for both employers and employees, especially considering approximately 10,000 people retire every day.¹⁰ On top of that, the average person changes jobs 12 times over the course of their career (according to a Bureau of Labor Statistics study of Baby Boomers), meaning that companies are regularly losing employees and their individual knowledge for a variety of reasons.¹¹

A knowledge engagement culture, combined with the right technology, encourages employees to document all knowledge that could be valuable to their peers and preserve it where everyone who needs it can access it. This way, when an employee leaves the company for any reason, their knowledge stays, and other employees can continue benefiting from it rather than facing the frustrating prospect of rebuilding knowledge from the ground up.

Applying Learnings

According to Forrester Research's Employee Experience Maturity Assessment, "What matters most for employee engagement is being able to make daily progress in the work that they perceive matters most. When employees know what's important but don't feel like they can achieve it, they feel at risk."¹²

Easy access to the knowledge that exists across the organization unblocks employees and gives them the resources they need to make that daily progress. They are able to take institutional knowledge and learnings from their peers and apply it to their work, whether they are assisting customers, troubleshooting internal processes, making product decisions based on research, or anything in between. And greater access to knowledge translates to faster and more confident decision-making, fewer errors, and more successful outcomes overall.

Putting Knowledge to Work Across the Employee Experience

Now that we've offered a high level view of how knowledge engagement impacts the employee experience, we'll dive deeper into some of the knowledge engagement best practices that have a positive impact on some of the key points of the employee journey:

- 1 Onboarding as a new employee (and staying up to speed as a more tenured one)**
- 2 Career growth through ongoing learning opportunities**
- 3 Making meaningful daily progress through access to knowledge**
- 4 Collaborating across teams by breaking down silos**
- 5 Building a culture of inclusion and engagement by democratizing knowledge**

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Ramp Up Onboarding (and Keep Employees Up to Speed)

The importance of a great onboarding process can't be overlooked. Onboarding sets the tone for the ongoing employee experience, helping new hires get acquainted with the business and the co-workers that they will collaborate with. It also plays a key role at different points throughout the employee journey: employees may need to go through an onboarding process when they change roles or teams, or when they need to be brought up to speed on new products, policies, or other changes within the organization.

Without effective onboarding, employees may grow frustrated with unclear expectations and a lack of resources. And based on that bad experience, they are not likely to stick around for long. According to an Aberdeen Group study, 86% of senior executives believe that a new hire makes up their mind about whether they are going to stay with a company long-term within the first six months of being hired.¹³ Given that the cost of replacing an employee can range from 50-200% of that employee's salary (depending on their seniority level), that's a risk businesses can't afford to take.¹⁴

When employees go through a clear, structured onboarding process, they experience less friction and are able to ramp up more quickly. SHRM reports that companies with standardized onboarding programs experience 50% greater new hire productivity than those that don't. And when employees ramp up efficiently, they experience greater satisfaction and are likely to stay with an organization longer. New employees who go through structured onboarding are 58% more likely to be with the same organization three years later.¹⁵

While departmental leaders likely aren't responsible for managing the onboarding process for their entire organization, they can still help shape the onboarding experience for their team members. Below are recommendations for specific activities that you can put into practice, ideally with the support of leadership across the organization.



Survey team members about their onboarding experience.

The best way to find out what's working (and what's not) with your onboarding program is to ask the people who have gone through it. Ideally, you should give your team members an onboarding survey after they have met a specific milestone, such as completing a training series or being at the company for 60 days. Topics to cover in the survey include how well the employee understands their responsibilities, how easy (or difficult) it is for them to find the information they need, whether they feel like they have the tools they need to succeed, and how relevant they feel their training has been to their role.

If your HR department already has an onboarding survey in place, it still pays to take an active role in reviewing the survey responses and identifying areas for improvement within your department. For instance, if you discover that employees in your department want training that is tailored more specifically to their roles, you could partner with the training manager to adapt the current training curriculum.

Preserve training materials in a knowledge management platform.

It's not realistic to expect employees to retain information that they heard once during a training session in their first week. Repetition is necessary for new information and skills to become ingrained, which is why it's important to preserve all training materials (for both onboarding and ongoing training) somewhere that employees can access on demand.

In addition to making training materials easy to access, you should make sure it's as easy as possible for employees to find the specific training content they're interested in revisiting. By using a platform that deep indexes all content (not just titles and descriptions), you'll give employees the ability to find relevant training materials through a keyword search—and you won't have to waste time manually adding tags to each individual piece of content.

Create series for guided learning.

Centralizing your training materials in one searchable location is a great way to start empowering employees to take ownership of their learning, but facing down hundreds of training documents—or long walls of text—can be intimidating. Breaking training into bite-sized learning modules and then organizing those modules into series will make the material more approachable, provide guidance around the order in which to consume content, and allow employees to learn at their own speed.

Use video for training on demand.

If you lead any training or learning workshops, consider recording them and adding the videos to your knowledge management platform. This will benefit both employees who attended the training and may want to revisit the material and those who weren't able to attend but are interested in the subject matter. As an added bonus, it can reduce the time and costs associated with in-person training, as video training can be delivered to a much larger audience, at any time and in any location.

Video can also be beneficial for training employees on topics that are more visual in nature. For example, if you're training employees to use new software, it may be more helpful to record a walkthrough of the platform rather than relying on step-by-step written instructions alone. Not only will video content capture nuances that might be missed in written content, it also helps with retention: a study from SAVO Group (now Seismic) found that pairing visuals with information increases retention by 65%.¹⁶

Encourage employees to ask (and document) questions.

No matter how thorough your onboarding process is, employees are bound to have questions as they get to know your organization, change roles, or learn about new products or policies. Rather than just fielding questions from your team members ad hoc, encourage them to publish the question in your knowledge management platform. This provides a couple of benefits:

- ✔ They will be able to socialize the question across the organization, allowing them to tap into a wider breadth of knowledge in the responses.
- ✔ Questions and responses will be preserved and searchable so that anyone who has the same question in the future can check the platform and learn from what has already been shared.

Track employee engagement with company knowledge.

How do you ensure that employees are actually engaging with and understanding the onboarding and training materials available to them? If your knowledge management platform has built-in engagement analytics, you can look at post views and employee activities to see who has seen what content. You can also embed checkpoint quizzes in training materials to evaluate employees' understanding. This provides an extra layer of accountability and also helps employees feel confident that they grasp the material.

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Questions with Tammy Shelman, AGIA Affinity



Vice President of Customer Experience

1. Can you tell us about your role at AGIA Affinity?

As Vice President of Customer Experience, I am responsible for managing all aspects of customer support and service. This responsibility expands to Training, Quality, Customer Advocacy, the oversight of customer analytics, and business process improvement.

2. As a third-party insurance marketing and administration company, AGIA is in an industry where information and policies change quickly. How do you make sure your member service associates stay up to date?

To ensure our Member Benefit Advisors stay up to speed, we leverage KATE—our Bloomfire-powered knowledge management solution. We also leverage customer and user experience analytics and micro-learning techniques to manage technical proficiency. Measuring our ability to locate answers quickly and accurately is paramount. The suite of metrics in the KATE analytics tool helps the training team to measure success and create actionable plans.

3. How are you using KATE, your Bloomfire instance, to support onboarding and training?

Our industry is constantly changing. To stay up to speed on all client, carrier, and product changes, we rely on KATE to keep our contact centers and other operational areas technically proficient.

KATE is the epicenter of our learning ecosystem and has been adopted by all operational employees. This is accomplished by introducing KATE within the first week of onboarding. This ensures all employees understand how to quickly find information to successfully achieve onboarding goals.

To establish good utilization habits, employees are encouraged to continue using KATE after onboarding through Knowledge Checks. Knowledge Checks are considered quality audits and are included in our quality metrics. Through KATE, we also leverage scavenger hunts, polling on relevant topics, videos, and utilization contests to make learning fun. Results from contests and metrics are shared with all employees within the organization. We are also looking into gamification and micro-learning plug-ins such as Kahoot to embed directly into KATE.

The training and leadership team are also highly engaged in KATE. All documentation is consistently curated to ensure it remains the source of truth. The team focuses on utilization statistics and leverages strategies to make certain that all associates understand how to find the information needed to perform their roles.

4. How has the rise of remote work changed the onboarding process and experience for new member service associates?

Having a solid knowledge management solution in a virtual work environment is a must. While we continue to experience success with KATE, we saw our largest improvement in KATE utilization at the onset of the pandemic. In early 2020, we were forced to shorten our new hire training, and send our new hires home during the pandemic. We relied heavily on KATE to help close learning gaps and answer questions from the new hires. The new hires expressed sincere appreciation for KATE and were able to quickly master our workflows from home. While other organizations experienced high turnover due to poor training, KATE helped our organization retain our talented employees and set them up for success.

To help employees deal with isolation and stress during the pandemic, we created a wellness community to help employees learn best practices to cope with anxiety during the pandemic.

5. AGIA Affinity is a very data-driven company. How have you been able to leverage the reporting in KATE to improve knowledge engagement?

While I believe I addressed this question in my previous responses, I can share that some of our most popular KATE metrics include:

- ✔ Views and downloads
- ✔ Number of contributions
- ✔ Hands on buzzer [i.e. average time to answer a question]
- ✔ Percent of answered questions

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Increase Job Satisfaction with Opportunities for Ongoing Improvement

Humans are curious by nature, and that curiosity extends into the workplace. Employees want to seek out new knowledge and continue learning on the job, and if they feel like they are stuck in a rut with nothing new to learn, they are likely to seek out a new role. In fact, 33% of professionals say their top reason for looking for a new job would be because they felt bored and wanted a new challenge.¹⁷

Conversely, employees who do feel they have ongoing learning opportunities at work are motivated to stay with their company for longer. An astonishing 94% of employees say they would stay at their company longer if it invested in helping them learn, according to LinkedIn's 2019 Workforce Learning Report.¹⁸

In addition to craving opportunities to learn new skills and expand their knowledge, employees also want to see that ongoing learning paves the way for career advancement. Career development is one of the top benefits people look for in a new job, and employees who feel like they are advancing in their careers are 20% more likely to be at the same company in one year's time than those who feel that they aren't.¹⁹

Department and team leaders are well-positioned to provide ongoing learning and professional development opportunities to their team members. Not only will these opportunities help keep employees engaged, they will also help cultivate new skills and areas of expertise that will benefit the entire organization.

Here are some tactics to start cultivating a culture of learning within—and beyond—your department.



Make training on products, processes, and other changes available across departments.

Collaborate with other department leaders to make your educational materials available across the organization, as training that was originally developed for one department may resonate with a wider audience. For example, perhaps a technology company's product team created resources on a new feature to help the sales and technical service teams explain this offering to customers. Those resources could also help the marketing department identify a unique selling proposition to feature in their messaging, or prepare customer service agents for new questions they may start hearing.

Even educational materials that might only seem applicable to one team or department initially can benefit a cross-functional audience. For instance, if a customer insights team receives training on a new tool or methodology that they are going to use to conduct research, they could record the training session and share it across the organization. While team members from other departments may not need to understand how to use this methodology themselves, seeing the training recording may give them a better understanding of what the insights team is working on and what the results of their next project mean to the larger organization.

Not everyone will engage with all the optional educational resources their organization shares, but making these materials available to everyone will create a greater sense of transparency and ensure that everyone has a shared view of products, processes, and the customer experience, no matter what department they are in.

Ask team members what they want to learn.

If you're not sure what your team members want to learn, just ask. If you have one-on-one meetings with your direct reports, that's a great place to start gathering input about what your team members are most interested in learning. However, you can also send out surveys to the larger team or department to crowdsource and prioritize ideas. Employees will appreciate being asked, as it shows the company is invested in their development.

Gathering input from employees can also help you identify current skills gaps and make the case for investing in new training initiatives. After all, if a majority of team members are requesting training in a specific area, that demonstrates a clear learning need.



Encourage team members to document and share their learnings.

When team members attend training sessions, workshops, or conferences—or participate in any other learning activities that not all their peers are able to join—ask them to document their top takeaways and share them in the organization’s knowledge management platform. This will amplify the value of the learning opportunity by opening it up to a wider audience and making it available on demand. It can also benefit the team member who is documenting their takeaways, as it will require them to think critically about what they have learned and how to communicate it to their peers.

Make sure to provide positive reinforcement for employees who document their learnings, whether it’s a thank you in an email, a shout out in a department meeting, or even some kind of gamified reward, like a gift card for the contributor whose write-up gets the most views in a quarter. This will encourage team members to keep sharing their write-ups until the behavior becomes routine.

Establish a peer-to-peer learning program.

Ongoing learning doesn’t always have to be driven by senior leaders or experts from outside the organization. 55% of employees say their peers are the first people they turn to when they want to learn new skills, making a formal peer-to-peer learning program a valuable tool for improving the employee experience.²⁰

Peer-to-peer learning gives employees a low-pressure environment in which they can take advantage of the knowledge that already exists within the organization. Employees don’t have to worry about preparing for a test or having their manager evaluate them: they are simply working with small groups of their peers to develop new skills and put them into practice.

To make a peer-to-peer learning program a success, it’s best to bring in a facilitator from another department who can serve as a neutral third party and establish some ground rules around confidentiality and how participants share feedback. This will help establish a safe environment where employees feel they can share ideas and test out their learnings without negative consequences.

Promote self-directed and self-paced learning.

As the ways we work change and the workforce becomes increasingly decentralized, it doesn’t make sense to rely on in-person, one-time training sessions. That’s not a learning model that meets the needs of employees. LinkedIn’s Workforce Learning Report found that 74% of employees want the freedom to complete training courses in their spare time, at their own speed.

Centralizing all educational and training materials in one platform that employees can access at any time, from anywhere, empowers employees to learn at their own pace. This can make learning feel more manageable, as employees can break materials into smaller chunks and review them when time allows. It also makes it easy for employees to revisit materials at any time, helping them retain the most important information so that they can apply it to their work.

5

Questions with Beth Borghi, Curriculum Associates

Knowledge Manager



1. As a knowledge manager certified in Knowledge-Centered Support (KCS), how are you thinking about the employee experience in your day-to-day work?

We are committed to making knowledge for our field teams effortless. For us this means streamlining internal content locations so that Bloomfire is the one source of truth; saving our employees time by creating content that is concise, clear, and written in digestible bites; and enabling “knowledge on the go” for our teams who are on the road. Bloomfire being mobile-friendly was a critical functionality for us

2. In your experience with change management, what do you think are the biggest hurdles for employees in shifting to a knowledge-driven approach in their organization, and how do you help employees overcome them?

I have rolled out knowledge initiatives in many different types of organizations, but one constant employees have is the fear of “not knowing something”. Especially for knowledge workers, this can bring insecurities or self-consciousness. In all of our trainings, we normalize the concept that collective knowledge is greater than individual knowledge. We demonstrate this with games where we crowdsource knowledge. Once we launch a knowledge initiative, reward participation over perfection; we emphasize that knowledge is a journey, not a destination. With reuse and flagging, knowledge is perfected over time.

Another common challenge encountered in change management is that frontline teams may say “knowledge isn’t my job.” In truth, knowledge belongs to us all and we all have a role to play – whether it is using, flagging, fixing, or adding knowledge. Leadership buy-in and advocacy is critical, but it is equally critical for frontline teams to be excited about “what’s in it for them”. Will this increase team morale, improve CSAT, reduce shoulder tapping, shorten onboarding time, make it easier for you to get your job done? Our knowledge program spans Sales, Account Management, Professional Development, and Tech Support, so our knowledge program model supports and rewards different types of knowledge, knowledge roles, and a variety of benefits.

3. How do you approach self-service knowledge access at Curriculum Associates?

My mantra is “Repeat, Repeat, Repeat”. In addition to publishing knowledge contributions, we email them in newsletters each week, and announce them on recurring team calls.

We’ve also encouraged knowledge owners to partner with us on improving communication flows. Before I joined, we had a habit of burying critical information in emails, which meant employees’ primary knowledge base was their email inbox. A big change was working with teams to quickly get this content added to the knowledge base instead, and then use these emails to point to the source of truth.

Most of our questions and answers from the field are triaged and answered via internal cases or email aliases. The teams who own these channels are responsible for adding/editing knowledge base content to reduce the need for repeat questions and answers.

4. How do you encourage Curriculum Associates employees to document and share their knowledge?

I partner with knowledge owners to make it easy for them to create and maintain their content. My Content Specialist and I are both former professional Librarians, so we bring information science, UX best practices, adult learning theory, information seeking behavior, taxonomy and cataloging experience to our approach to knowledge.

Curriculum Associates is very eager to share knowledge with one another, so my challenge here has been less around encouraging employees to document, and more around breaking down silos, streamlining content, and providing consistency and structure.

Today, we have several dozen content owners, and this is expanding every month as we continue to build out our knowledge program. Each author attends a Bloomfire training provided by us to “license” them to author or moderate their content areas. I am always trying to strike the right balance between enough governance to keep content structured and beautiful and easy to use, but not prohibitive.

5. What kinds of ongoing learning and development opportunities are available to Curriculum Associates employees, and what role does your knowledge management strategy play in this?

We have a large L&D team who rolls out learnings all year long, in addition to intensives (bootcamps, team meetings, academies, etc.) several times a year. Wherever possible, these LMS courses and live sessions reference the knowledge base.

For Product Releases, we work with a cross-functional team to determine the outputs for different levels of feature changes. For example, does this change require a change to our messaging, or an operational change? Or do we just need to demonstrate what is changing and what the impact is? In these release readiness meetings, we’ll determine if something should be an LMS training versus a knowledge article, for example. Sometimes these are brief feature demonstration videos hosted on Bloomfire—a much more lightweight effort than an LMS course, but accessible and trackable. Our users love people able to search for a keyword spoken in a video and being able to go right to that point in the video.

3

Make Knowledge Accessible in the Flow of Work

In their 2021 Employee Experience Playbook, Forrester Research identified several common characteristics of companies with great EX, including:

- ✔ Giving employees easy access to the tools they need to improve and do their best work.
- ✔ Increasing access to organization-level resources.²¹

These characteristics both tie into a daily part of the employee experience: employees must be able to find the information they need to make decisions and complete tasks, and they must be able to find it in a timely, efficient manner.

Timely and efficient are the operative words here. Any time an employee has to significantly disrupt what they are working on to find information, they get out of the flow of their work and lose momentum. Research shows that after an interruption, it takes workers close to 25 minutes on average to get back on task.²²

When employees can't easily find what they are looking for, they aren't just losing momentum on their work. They also have to dedicate time and energy to tracking down the appropriate resources, potentially looping in co-workers to assist in the search. No one wants to spend hours of their day looking for the information they need to complete their work, attempting to navigate a maze of Google Drive folders or hunt down the right subject matter experts across different departments. It's unproductive, frustrating, and can have a significantly negative impact on the overall employee experience.

On the other hand, when employees can quickly find the information they need, in the flow of their work, they free up more time to focus on impactful activities and experience greater job satisfaction. This can also translate to a better customer experience, especially when it comes to front line employees who must access knowledge to assist customers. Even employees who don't directly interact with customers can positively impact the employee experience when they have their organization's collective knowledge at their fingertips. Employees can apply this knowledge to product and service innovations, operational improvements, marketing activities, and more.

As a department or team leader, investing in a knowledge engagement initiative can help you connect team members to knowledge the moment they need it. Below are several best practices to keep in mind as you embark on this initiative.



Make knowledge searchable.

There's a reason why "Google" has become a verb: people are used to performing a quick online search to answer the questions that come up in their daily lives. Employees should be able to benefit from the same convenience in their work lives, which means that all company knowledge must be documented and made searchable.

When evaluating knowledge management platforms, it's important to look for solutions that deep index all content—not just titles and tags. This will help employees find relevant content even when they don't know the title or exact match keywords. It will also help employees discover information across different file types, including slide decks, videos, and audio recordings. No matter how knowledge has been preserved, employees should be able to tap into it through an intuitive search.

Allow for different paths for information discovery.

While many people like to start looking for information through a keyword search, it's worth keeping in mind that team members may follow different paths to discover content. Think about the experience of online shopping: you might start with a keyword search, then apply various filters to narrow down your search results. Employees should be able to do the same in your knowledge management platform.

It's also important to remember that even within a keyword search, different employees may use different terminology. For example, one employee might use the term "remote work," another might use "WFH," and another might use "telecommuting" when searching for articles on future of work trends. Your knowledge management platform should be able to handle synonym searches so that even when employees search using a term that doesn't appear in a piece of content, they are still discovering the information that's relevant to them.

Embed knowledge access across your tech stack.

Considering that a single disruption can derail employees for close to 25 minutes, it's essential to enable employees to find knowledge in the flow of work whenever possible. A knowledge management platform that integrates with the tools your team members use every day—such as your chat platform or CRM—will allow employees to pull your centralized company knowledge into the platform they already have open, rather than toggling to a new tab or screen.

This might seem like a small detail to consider when choosing a knowledge management platform, but the time saved when you minimize disruptions can add up. When you eliminate friction by allowing employees to search and retrieve information within the platform they are already using, you also increase the likelihood that employees will actually tap into company knowledge and apply it to their work.

Provide easily digestible context up front.

Before employees read a lengthy article, watch a recorded training session, or parse through a detailed research report in a slide deck, they want to know the content contains the key information they are looking for. You can help your team members identify relevant content faster by providing some quick context clues with all contributions. (If you're working with other content contributors, set guidelines to ensure they are adding the appropriate context as well.)

Adding thumbnail images to all contributions provides a great visual shortcut for content consumers. The human brain can process images in just 13 milliseconds, meaning that seeing a thumbnail can help employees gauge what a piece of content is about faster than they could from just reading the document title.²³ Thumbnails can also be used to visually group together related content (for example, all product updates could incorporate a thumbnail with the same color).

Short descriptions or summaries at the top of a document can also help content consumers determine if it makes sense for them to keep reading. Because it can be time consuming for contributors to add a summary to every piece of content they share, it's worth looking for a knowledge management solution that can ingest text-based documents and automatically generate a description and summary.

Look at search trends to identify knowledge gaps.

Arming employees with a powerful search engine is just half of the equation: you also need to ensure that the information employees are searching for is documented and available to them. If your knowledge management platform provides built-in reporting, you can look at the most frequently used search terms to better understand what employees are looking for and whether there are existing resources that meet their needs. From there, you can build a list of new knowledge assets to create and collaborate with the appropriate subject matter experts to add them to the platform.

5

Questions with Jason Pafford, Orvis

Instructional Designer and Communications Specialist



1. Can you tell us about your role as an Instructional Designer and Communications Specialist at Orvis?

In my role at Orvis, I manage our knowledge base for our Customer Care Center along with handling internal communications for the business. Additionally, a good portion of my time is spent creating and facilitating training for our associates, new and established, on everything from processes to soft skills to product.

2. You work closely with frontline teams that impact Orvis' customer experience (CX). How do you see the employee experience from those teams impacting CX?

I love this quote from Simon Sinek: "Customers will never love a company until the employees love it first." Orvis has a unique culture, and we're fortunate to remain a company that is family-owned and family-run. That feeling of family runs through our Core Values all the way to our front-line. When you take it down to the basics, that front-line employee is our company and our brand—keeping them happy and supplying them with the tools they need to be successful is key to building a relationship with our customers.

3. What do you think is one of the biggest employee experience challenges facing customer service teams today?

With the quick change in how we work (and going predominantly virtual), the biggest challenge to EX is keeping the human connection and facilitating the idea of 'team'. Many organizations had to quickly move into a virtual environment without the planning on how we can translate culture and relationships so that our teams feel supported and connected. In business it's already easy to have a siloed environment and even easier to move back to that in a virtual world where you're missing out on those essential off-hand conversations in the hall, at the coffee maker, etc. We have to be very thoughtful in how we proceed to make sure that we don't fall back into siloes and that we continue conversations so that every associate's voice feels heard.

4. How do you think that knowledge engagement—that is, team members’ ability to find, share, and collaborate around knowledge—impacts the employee experience at Orvis?

At the end of the day, I think we all want to feel that we’re doing our jobs well. That is an integral part of the employee experience. In order to accomplish that, it’s incredibly important that every associate has access to the knowledge they need to succeed—be that an operating procedure or our newest line of products—so that they can create the amazing customer experience that is our goal at Orvis. Not only does the knowledge need to be accessible, but it’s also vital that it be intelligent, quick, and accurate so that they’re confident that the information is exactly what they need at that moment.

5. A report from Forrester Research found that one of the key characteristics of companies with great EX is that they give employees access to the tools and information they need to improve and do their best work. How is Orvis arming employees with the knowledge and resources they need while they work?

Beyond our Bloomfire knowledge base, we find that one-on-one support of our associates has been most effective in not only creating the customer experience that we want, but also in building the camaraderie among teammates that we’ve missed during the past year and a half. We do so through assist lines, online internal chats with product experts, and using other communications tools that create a human connection so that our front-line associates feel supported in every way—it’s self-service through our knowledge base or beyond.

4

Fuel Cross-Functional Collaboration

No employee exists in a vacuum—and they shouldn't feel like they do. To be as successful as possible, employees need to be able to collaborate with co-workers within their department and across other functions. Unfortunately, cross-functional collaboration is lacking at many organizations. One study found that 75% of cross-functional teams are dysfunctional and fail on at least three of the following criteria: staying within budget, staying on schedule, sticking to specifications, meeting customer expectations, and staying aligned with company goals.²⁴

Knowledge silos are one of the biggest hindrances to cross-functional collaboration. Silos can occur for a number of reasons: employees may not feel comfortable sharing information outside of their teams, they may feel they don't have time in their workday to connect with co-workers outside of their department, or they may simply not understand what other teams are working on and how they could collaborate, just to name a few obstacles.

Silos hurt operational efficiency and can lead to duplicated work. For example, a research team embedded in one line of business might commission a research project similar to one already commissioned by another research team simply because they don't know what the other team has been working on. Or a sales representative might create their own collateral to share with a prospect because they don't realize that the marketing team has already developed a piece of content that meets their needs.

When teams or departments become too siloed, the customer experience may also suffer. 54% of organizations report that their CX operations are managed in silos, potentially leading to inconsistent messaging across channels and a disjointed, frustrating customer experience.²⁵

From an employee experience standpoint, silos can feel isolating and prevent employees from seeing how their work impacts other departments or supports company goals. Employees may miss opportunities to collaborate on meaningful, innovative projects with peers outside of their team because they don't know what knowledge and resources are available across other departments.

When employees collaborate successfully across teams and functions, they reduce duplicative work, tap into resources and knowledge that helps them work more efficiently, contribute more to innovation efforts, and stay aligned around company goals and the customer experience. While these positive outcomes are good for the business, they are also great for the employee, who is able to spend more time on meaningful activities and see how their work supports business goals.

While successful cross-functional collaboration obviously requires the input and participation of multiple business functions, there are steps you can take now to encourage greater collaboration across and beyond your department.

Establish a shared view of company goals and vision.

If your organization hasn't published its vision, mission statement, and company goals somewhere that everyone can access at any time, it's time to change that. Centralize this information in a knowledge management platform and work with other department leaders to provide regular updates on progress towards goals. This will help team members focus on the purpose behind their work and stay aligned with other departments that are, ultimately, working towards the same goals.

Reduce friction for subject matter experts.

A vast array of subject matter expertise exists across your organization, but if your SMEs aren't documenting their knowledge, it can become siloed within a single department, team, or mind.

So, how do you get the SMEs you work with to document knowledge that will benefit the organization, especially when they are pressed for time and have other priorities? Make it as easy as possible for them to share their knowledge in the form that makes the most sense for them.

A subject matter expert might balk at the idea of spending several hours writing an in-depth step-by-step tutorial, but they might be more amenable to the idea of spending 15 minutes recording a screen capture video that walks through those same steps. Or an SME might prefer participating in an informational interview on a phone call—which could be recorded and shared in a knowledge management platform—rather than answering the same questions over email. The trick is to meet your busy SMEs where they are. The more they are able to share knowledge in ways that feel frictionless, the more they will share overall.

Establish a sense of psychological safety to eliminate information hoarding.

Research suggests that one of the main reasons people hoard information at work is due to fear of negative repercussions, such as criticism or losing a competitive advantage.²⁶ You can address this fear and encourage people to share what they know across teams by making sure they feel a sense of psychological safety.

Establishing psychological safety might sound like something that's easier said than done, but there are concrete steps you can take to create a more psychologically safe environment for your team members. Make an effort to thank people for their contributions, implement their ideas when possible, and explain the reasoning when they can't be implemented. Pause and ask questions in meetings—and pause long enough to give participants a chance to think and respond. Provide different pathways for employees to share their ideas rather than relying on meetings alone. And when you make mistakes, own up to them and explain what you've learned so that team members can feel more comfortable taking risks and owning their mistakes.



Set clear expectations and hold cross-functional teams accountable.

When leading a cross-functional project team, make sure you're defining goals, desired outcomes, and expectations. Make it clear who is responsible for each piece of the project and what your timeline is for different milestones. Establish a service level agreement for how the team will collaborate (e.g. What meetings do they need to attend? What should they be documenting and sharing with the team?). And, of course, make sure you're tracking your goals and reporting on progress.

Make knowledge sharing a two-way street.

When someone shares their knowledge, it's an opportunity for their peers to build on it. Encourage your team members to engage by asking questions or adding comments when a co-worker shares content that is relevant to them. This helps get people thinking about the way their work intersects with their peers, how they can leverage the expertise of colleagues from other departments, and how they can add their own expertise to the organization's growing knowledge base.

5 Questions with Paul Ponsford, Delta Faucet

Senior Marketing Research Manager

1. Brand-side market researchers typically have internal stakeholders who are “customers” for their research. What are some of your best practices for packaging and communicating insights for your internal customers?

It is an old cliché, but Keep It Simple, Stupid (KISS) is the best answer I have for this question. I have found that most internal clients want to know a couple of points that impact their decision-making. While it is important to touch on some of the amazing methodology we developed to get their answer, it is extremely important to ensure digestible answers to your stakeholders' questions. Another key step is ensuring a clear question to be answered (or objective) for the study. Spending time understanding the actual problem is critical to communicating strong insights and creating a positive experience. (Of course, some slick, but to the point, graphics help, too.)

2. We know Delta Faucet is committed to building a culture of research engagement. Can you describe some of the steps you've taken to cultivate this culture?

For our company, the culture of research engagement has been strengthened by a diligent effort to provide our stakeholders with quality, unbiased insights. We are delighted when we hear our stakeholders tell us they have more confidence in our ability to provide usable insights than outside options. In addition, we are working to align each researcher's interest and aptitudes with specific functional groups.

3. When it comes to cross-functional collaboration, what do you think is one of the biggest challenges that insights teams face today?

One of the biggest challenges is a lack of experience in considering the needs of other groups. This is not to say there is resistance to wanting to do so. It is more that Function A is accustomed to think of a research project as meeting their insight needs. When Function B wants to explore the same insights within their group, Function A has to shift to an expanded application of the insights. For example, think of a study that has been traditionally associated with an innovation group; however, a brand function learns of the study and realizes it has application in their group as well. This will likely push the project into some territory that the innovation group is not familiar with and not as comfortable playing in.

4. How are you breaking down silos between departments at Delta Faucet, especially when it comes to sharing research and insights?

Now that we have a central location for all our insights that is easily accessed by functions across our organization, we have been able to expand exposure of key insights to a broader community than we have in the past. For example, our brand health tracking study used to be distributed primarily to a few key stakeholders. Now, we are posting this report on the Bloomfire platform, and I've noticed that people across the company are accessing this information. I'm excited to see how it is used.

5. What next steps do you have planned to continue improving insights sharing and cross-functional collaboration at Delta Faucet?

As a starting point, we have recently expanded the number of people that have access to Bloomfire. In addition, we will be conducting insight debriefs open to those across the organization.

5

Final Thoughts: What a Culture of Democratized Knowledge Means for Your Employee Experience

We've explored how focusing on knowledge engagement can improve employee onboarding, ongoing learning, information access, and cross-functional collaboration. Improvements across these areas of the employee experience translate to more engaged employees, higher levels of productivity, higher retention, and a better customer experience. But there's one other benefit of knowledge engagement that, while more difficult to measure, is just as important to the employee experience and the success of the organization.

A knowledge engagement strategy and platform help democratize knowledge across an organization, meaning that information is available to all employees regardless of their role, location, or level of seniority. This fosters a sense of inclusion and empowers employees to share what they know with their peers, leading to a greater diversity of ideas.

The democratization of knowledge shows that an organization is transparent and committed to giving all employees access to the same information (barring sensitive content that needs to be shared with a limited audience, of course). Everyone has a shared view of the organization and the work happening across different teams, giving them a stake in the organization's success. And that's good for both the employee and the business: in Deloitte's 2020 Global Human Capital Trends report, 93% of respondents indicated that a sense of belonging at work drives organizational performance.²⁷

When everyone has access to the same knowledge, they also have exposure to perspectives and ideas from co-workers across different teams and departments. This diversity of knowledge is essential for businesses to keep innovating. According to PwC, organizations seeking to stay competitive in the face of accelerating disruption often need to rethink and transform their offerings and operations, and this "requires a collaborative effort from all parts of the organization, no matter how different their processes, systems, and cultures have been in the past."²⁸

As a department or functional leader, you have an opportunity to lead by example. Start by implementing a knowledge engagement strategy for your department, and work with other leaders to expand your efforts across different areas of the organization. Promoting an organization-wide culture of knowledge engagement will help employees stay connected to their co-workers and the resources they need to work productively, ultimately improving both the employee experience and business outcomes.

Endnotes

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About Bloomfire

Bloomfire is the leader in knowledge engagement software, delivering an experience that connects teams and individuals with the information they need to excel at their jobs. Our cloud-based knowledge engagement platform gives people one centralized, searchable place to engage with shared knowledge and grow their organization's collective intelligence.

For more information or to schedule a demo, visit www.bloomfire.com.

