Employee experience – disruptive approach to employee engagement

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Abstract: The adoption of this concept has gained higher momentum during and post pandemic as employee wellbeing became the need of the new normal. This complex concept of employee experience and its design is simplified by adoption of the technology. Employee experience is a new concept, and it will coexist with the employee engagement. This paper attempts to provide insights based on literature of research scholars and published books along with the practical experience of the authors of paper. The conceptual model of employee experience along with proposed expectations model of employee experience provides insights to organisations to arrive at appropriate employee experience design for their employees. Our conclusion is both employer and employee have expectations of the experience at the workplace and off the workplace and implementing EX strategy – one that considers employee perceptions, workplace variables, drivers of retention and employer brand, is necessary for consumer-style approach to HR.

Keywords: employee experience; EX; digital transformation; engagement; future of work.

Biographical notes: Vandana Mohanty has over 13 years of combined experience in academics and research. She is adept at research procedures, developmental and training activities, development of learning materials, editorial work, and processes. Her professional horizon holds teaching and developing courses in human resource management, organisation behaviour and managerial economics. She has published number of papers in referred national journals and has attended various national conferences and presented papers. Her research interests include diversity management, gender diversity, and employee experience. Currently, three students are working under her for their PhD.

Mangesh B. Kulkarni is a professional with more than three decades of experience in the human resource management field across critical areas like succession planning, talent management, organisation development and employee experience management. He has successfully contributed to various organisations in the areas of business function and human resource management. Designing and implementing employee experience interventions is a key area of interest for him.

1   Introduction

One of the many challenges across the companies is sustained motivation of workforce or in other words highly engaged workforce. There are number of studies conducted by various organisational bodies in defining employee engagement practices and enabling the organisations to implement the same. One of the pioneers in the space of employee engagement practice is Gallup. The 12 question framework of employee engagement designed by Gallup provides us 12 important dimensions which need to be focused to ensure engagement of workforce. With the evolution of technology and human resource practices over last 20 years employee engagement practices remained largely prescriptive in nature with minor customisations as per the need of organisation. The standard prescription of certain parameters to be focused involved focus on business and achievement of business objectives to drive engagement interventions across organisations. This was more static approach in defining interventions related to employee engagement. With changes in organisations, workforce, expectations of workforce the static measures and actions of engagement need to respond to pace of changes in organisations and workforce expectations.

2   Employee experience defined: literature review

Plaskoff (2017) in his research 'employee experience: the new human resource management approach' emphasises the need for redefining the relationship between organisation and their employees. With multigenerational workforce at a workplace working together the different groups have different expectations. A holistic approach towards meeting the expectations of different groups defined by demographic and non-demographic variables is most effective through an experience definition of these groups. This experience approach goes beyond perks and benefits and focuses on employee as a whole approach and this will be possible by applying design thinking process for design of employee experience. The researcher have proposed principles to design an employee experience like understanding people and their needs, embrace expansive and holistic thinking, make the intangible tangible, insist on radical participation, iterate and experiment, trust and appreciate the process. The researcher concluded that human resource practices in the experience economy must create experiences and there is a need to redefine human resources approach in the organisations.

    Employee experience is based on the concept of customer experience. Employees are treated as consumers of the workplace. Employers are expected to focus on their

employee as they focus on the customer and meet the expectations of the employee. The employee benefits by happiness about employer and employment whereas employer benefits by productive workforce and strong employment brand which attracts talent in the market.

Morgan (2017) in his work 'The employee experience advantage' describes employee experience as combination of three major factors – physical workplace environment, technological environment, and cultural environment. To improve employee experience, he says to get rid of the old idea of an employee life cycle and think instead about the important parts of each person's life. A moment that matters is any event that has a big impact on how you feel about your job. It could be your first day at work, getting a raise, having a baby, going to a team-building exercise, or having a birthday.

Gallup (2018) defines 'the employee experience as the journey an employee takes with your organisation. It includes all the interactions an employee has with your organisation before, during and after their tenure. These interactions shape employees' perceptions of your organisation and directly affect employee performance and your brand as an employer. Employees have become 'consumers of the workplace'. With the Covid19 pandemic a new generation of worker expectations, greater workplace transparency and a tightening labour market have increased interest in improving the employee experience.

Mahadevan and Schmitz (2020) state that today there is an increasing emphasis on employee experience and has to be considered in positive light only. The employee experience can have a underlying outcomes of discipline and control. The authors note that the use of employee experience may legitimate less than ideal HR practices. HR practices have undergone a multitude of improvement towards a supposedly more caring and gentle forms which initially is extremely promising but has occasionally shown to be terribly detrimental. Today HRM is based on the strong and convincing projection of a positive employer brand (such as 'best employer' or 'employer of choice'). This means that companies go to great lengths to offer a compelling employee experience. In this way of thinking, the success of every stage of an employee's life depends on how well they adept the management of the employee experience, from hiring and firing to retaining employees training and development, promotion, and the employee's eventual departure. Employee experience is a form of practise and is always changing because it comes from the interaction between employer and employee and rejects the idea that work experience as a fungible commodity that can be exchanged by the organisation and the employees.

Bersin (2021) in his book *The Definitive Guide: Employee Experience 2021* revealed that "employee's re-evaluation of their lives means employee engagement has been replaced as a company imperative by employee experience: the need to help people do and be their best, spanning engagement, retention, health, productivity, leadership, and trust". The study had defined evolution of employee experience from early 1900 Industrial Engineering era where focus was output to today's focus on design of experience aimed at productivity across four stages. Between the two stages lies employee engagement with focus on retention and feedback and responses processes focused on engagement.

Zacher and Rudolph (2022) had tried to assess employee experience by analysing a number of theoretical and methodological issues. First, the authors discussed the theories that could be used to explain how employee experiences and behaviour change during a

crisis. These include stress theories, theories of adjusting to changes at work, career construction theory, event system theory, transition-adaptation theories, the crisis management and resilience framework, and the social identity model of identity change. Second, they explained methodological considerations and best practises for research design, sampling, measurement, and analysis strategies in quantitative empirical studies. In this work, they have provided a summary of many theoretical methods, spanning from stress to transition-adaptation to social identity theories that have been and might be used to investigate employee feelings and behaviour during times of crisis. These theories offer an external component, (e.g., stressor, event, shift in job position, or life transition) that individuals perceive, respond to, and may cope with differently.

A report by Gartner (2022) defines "employee experience as how employees internalise and interpret the interactions they have with and within their organisation and the contexts that influence those interactions". The report also states that employee disengagement and the resulting cost to the bottom line are the reverse of a positive employee experience. The structure and culture of an organisation are the bedrock upon which the quality of the work experience for employees is built.

Employee experience cannot be defined in a single, universal manner. Different definitions of the employee experience have been provided in the literature. Similar to this, each organisation has the ability to define the employee experience depending on the requirements and goals of the workforce.

3   Research objectives

This research is an integrative literature study. The research objectives are:-

- To understand concept of employee experience, key variables of employee experience and its impact on employee engagement practice.

- To understand changes in employee experience post pandemic of COVID-19 with evolving expectations of workforce.

- Using understanding of employee experience to propose the model for practitioners to design the employee experience programmes.

4   Employee experience to employee engagement – an added dimension

Future of work research provided insight to all of us to review the work and workplace of today and reshaping of the work and workplace of future with technology fully embedded into it. The study envisaged a longer time for such a change however pandemic accelerated the change to today. The changes post pandemic has given rise to adaption of experience economy into the world of work. Yadav and Vihari (2021) in their research state that in the world of experience economy, employee experience is taking a centre stage to drive employee engagement. During and post COVID-19 the meaning and expectations of work employee has significantly changed. Based on a closed ended survey and focus group discussions across employees of corporations in India their study identified 6 dimensions of employee experience. These dimensions are cohesiveness, vigour, well-being, achievement, inclusiveness, and physical environment. This study

analysed the data using structural equation modelling to validate the construct of employee experience using these dimensions and the analysis revealed that strategic intervention of employee experience design using these six dimensions to promote pro-organisational behaviours have direct influence on employee experience. The results indicated that organisations should emphasise on these dimensions to strengthen the ties with employees by providing the necessary environment with these variables.

In the VUCA world of work, added with the new dimension of pandemic and making it more complex, organisations need to innovate their approach towards human resources. The two key stakeholders of the organisation, the employees and the end customer, are expecting organisations to respond faster and quicker to the ever changing external environment. The landscape of expectations of these stakeholders has moved from hygiene to contemporary practices in the way organisation responds to their needs. The way organisations interact with various stakeholders also has dramatically changed, enabled by the technology. The world of work and the marketplace has crossed the physical barriers and redefined the way overall engagement with the organisation by the stakeholders. The new focus on 'experience' of the organisation backed by the world of big data than the event based and need based engagement, has opened up boundary less set of opportunities for all the stakeholders including employees.

Traditional approach to engagement of employees is focused on issue-based actions which has a short term impact. The employee experience approach is based on concept of relationship between organisation and the employee. This relationship is result of number of touch points between organisation and the employee over a long term period. The two critical elements of employee experience, feeling or perception about organisation at various touch points and resulting memory, are cornerstones of this relationship. Engagement through positive employee experience is one of the most disruptive trend in recent years in employee engagement practice, forcing organisations to redefine the way they engage the employees post pandemic era.

A study by Glob Force Work Human Research Institute (2016) and IBM Smarter Workforce Institute (2017) concluded that 'meaningful' work is the largest determinant of good employee experience. The poll indicated that the UK's Employee Experience Index score is 64%, marginally below the European average (65%) and below the worldwide average (70%) (69%). Meaningful labour contributed 30% in the UK, three points over the global average. Meaningful work maximises employee abilities and talents while aligning with shared fundamental values. Building on the foundation of meaningful work, research suggests that a more positive employee experience can be inspired by combining and integrating employee workplace practises: enabling empowerment and voice (17%), fostering a culture of recognition, feedback, and growth (16%), supporting co-worker relationships (16%), and building organisational culture (16%) (contributes 15% to employee experience).

Work-life balance and opportunity to recharge and unplug contribute 9% to employee experience. Employer involvement, which only covers a small percentage of what 'work' entails, is being replaced by employee experience. Experience is considered as wider and more holistic – encompassing all of an employee's perceptions about their work interactions, matching their greater expectations. The research indicated that great leaders and managers can deliver high levels of clarity and direction, while focusing on the human workplace behaviours that generate pleasant employee experiences.

Modern businesses value flexibility and agility as competitive advantages, and invigorating rather than restricting staff. Today successful organisations are developing human-centric environments that are supporting pleasant employee experiences – in essence, they let workers do their jobs. A pleasant employee experience is one that is impactful, powerful, and ultimately human, allowing employees to put more of themselves into the workplace over time.

5   Why employee experience matters?

The pandemic has redefined the future of work and has highlighted the role of employee experience in the times of crisis. Abhari et al. (2021) studied the relationship between customer experience management and employee experience management in a service industry. The research identified dimensions of customer experience management and established a relationship between these dimensions and the dimensions of employee experience. Employee experience dimensions of expectations, needs and preferences off employees demonstrated a direct relationship with respect to changes in the customer experience. This study of employee experience from job crafting perspective can encourage and support employees who are playing a significant role in implementation of customer experience management.

Emmett et al.'s (2021) employee experience research states that persons who report having a favourable employee experience are 16 times more engaged than those who report having a poor employee experience, and are eight times more likely to desire to stay at a firm. In a world when so many individuals are re-evaluating why they work and where they work, experience is critical to how firms differentiate themselves. Indeed, McKinsey research indicates that employees at leading experience firms are 40% more likely to exceed job expectations. The same paper emphasises that in the post-pandemic period, firms must reorient away from the old top-down paradigm and toward one based on design thinking basics, in order to deliver an exceptional employee experience. This change enables businesses to prioritise their employees by studying and responding to their perceptions of their employee journeys, and then offering targeted interventions that focus on important times that matter to enhance happiness, performance, and productivity. Thus, businesses may become more motivating, collaborative, and focused on generating meaningful and delightful experiences. Organisations take this strategy in collaboration with their employees to create individualised, authentic, and motivating experiences that improve individual, team, and organisational performance.
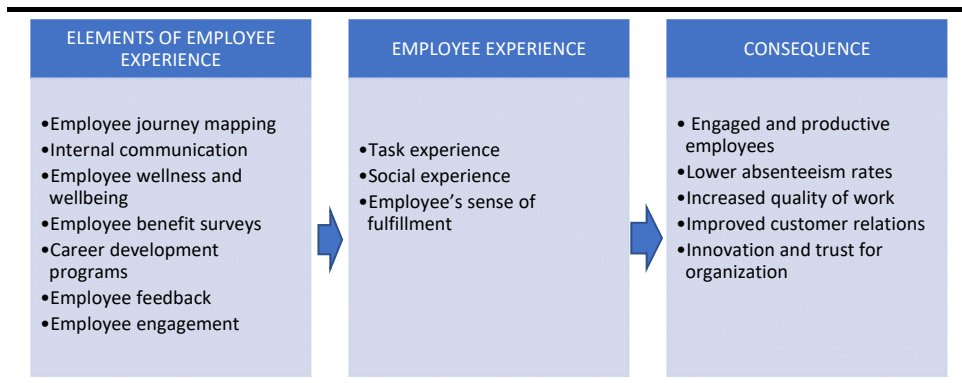
The report by Gartner (2022) indicates that many organisations are turning to employee experience as an important way to address talent pressures. Employee experience also connects with and influences other talent priorities. There are various elements in the HR process that have an impact on the employee experience. Managing them will lead to positive consequences. Elements like mapping the employee journey which is a unique way of showing the company's goals and values, as well as the steps that go into getting there. The best employee experiences bring the company's values to life and contribute to the development of a strong culture. A distinct culture may assist a firm in attracting individuals that will fit in and succeed in its workplace. Employees are the organisations most valuable asset, and keeping them healthy and happy is critical for business growth. Similarly employee productivity, burnout, and absenteeism will all suffer as a result of pressured, worried, and unhealthy personnel. Employee health is also

related to employee experience. Employees will not feel motivated to give their all if their employers are unconcerned about their physical and mental health. Furthermore, as technology advances, the definition of wellbeing and wellness evolves. People are speaking out more about their social and emotional well-being. A number of research studies on employee engagement have time and again concluded that performance of the company and employee engagement or engaged workforce has strong correlation. An engaged workforce creates a delightful customer experience and drive high performance across organisations. Employee experience is an integral part of a new toolkit to create highly motivated and engaged workforce.

Employee experiences are based on the different psychological needs or desires that motivate or inspire people at work. There are three ways to look at employee experience (refer to Table 1).

- The task experience: how easy the assignment is to do. This means having the right tools and resources to get the job done quickly and well. Employees will be very unhappy if they have bad experiences on the job. Employees think that their boss does not care about them, their work, or their skills.

- The social experience: Workers need to feel like they belong somewhere. This includes things like whether or not employees like working with their co-workers, whether or not they feel like they are part of a team, and whether or not the team has a good dynamic and is working toward the same goals.

- Employees' sense of fulfilment: Does the job give people what they want or what they expect from their jobs? This is different for everyone and can change over time. Every person has a different idea of what makes them happy. Some people work so they can spend time with their families when they're not at work. Others, thankfully, get to do work that they enjoy, which makes them feel more fulfilled.

Table 1 Conceptual model of employee experience (see online version for colours)

ELEMENTS OF EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE	EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE	CONSEQUENCE
•Employee journey mapping •Internal communication •Employee wellness and wellbeing •Employee benefit surveys •Career development programs •Employee feedback •Employee engagement	•Task experience •Social experience •Employee's sense of fulfillment	• Engaged and productive employees •Lower absenteeism rates •Increased quality of work •Improved customer relations •Innovation and trust for organization

Source: Researcher's own compilation

When employees have a good experience at work, the organisation gets the benefit. The workforce is more engaged and productive, and the whole firm benefits significantly. EX efforts boost their productivity and job quality. This translates into greater revenue and better profitability. According to human resource professionals, benefits should not be judged just against the bottom line. The human value is just as important as customer

value and financial value. Improving the work experience entails more than merely collecting comments at an annual review. To effectively increase EX, organisations must appreciate their people, continually listen to their demands, and consistently take action.

6   Employee experience with disruptions in work and workplaces

1   Employee journey in future of work and employee experience: the relationship between employee and the organisation is defined by employee journey. Experience of an employee is defined by series of interactions between elements of organisation and employee during this journey of employee with the organisation. The employee journey is full with milestones and interactions, and the quality of those experiences has a direct impact on employee happiness, engagement, commitment, and, ultimately, performance. A corporation must truly understand and empathise with employees as individuals and as members of representative groups, (e.g., generations), think holistically about the entire experience rather than just discrete events, and recognise that perception of the relationship. The relationship begins before the employee joins the company and continues after he or she leaves. As a result, the employee journey outlines the underlying relationship between the employee and the organisation. Instead of approaching this trip with a standard 'transactional' human resources strategy, the business must have a deeper understanding of each employee's needs, goals, concerns, and emotions along this journey. The objective is to provide an experience that shows concern for employees throughout the employee journey. Employee journey mapping is one of the fundamental steps in designing the engagement actions across the organisations. Future of work would create connected workplaces enabled through deeper interaction of employees with technology. These technology enabled interactions will redefine employee journey milestones in a way that the relationship between organisation and employee will be based on a quantitative measurement at each interactions. These measurements will enable an effective delivery of employee expectations in a cost effective and more impactful, memorable experience for individuals and groups employees. Technology will make the employee experience a seamless journey both for organisation and employee.

2   Pandemic driven future of work changes and employee experience: pandemic has increased speed of changes in future of work. COVID-19 has presented humans with unparalleled humanitarian and human expectations issues. Many businesses across the world have responded to the challenge, moving quickly to protect employees and transition to a new style of working that even the most stringent business continuity plans had not anticipated. Many employees have enjoyed the new experience of working from home, others are weary of it. Occasionally, the same person will feel varying emotions and degrees of happiness or misery at various points in time. Productivity has improved for employees who perform a variety of occupations; it has decreased for others. Numerous types of virtual cooperation are effective; others are not. Certain individuals receive mentoring and engage in informal, unexpected, and critical talks with co-workers; others miss out. The pandemic has impacted employee needs and wants. As these are first time needs and wants the employee

experience solutions driving the engagement of employees are unique to the organisations.

3   Workplaces of future of work and employee experience: leaders from an array of sectors will use the lessons learned from this large-scale work-from-home experiment to reinvent how work is performed and the role of the office in innovative and creative ways. Many employees who no longer have to commute or travel have found more productive ways to spend their time, more freedom in managing their personal and professional life, and have decided that working from home is better to working in an office. Working from home is a new experience for a lot of people, and while some like it, others find it tiring. The same people have experienced diverse emotions and intensities of happiness or despair over time. The traditional work place models are complemented with or at some places changed to hybrid work models, flexible workplaces, focused on wellbeing than only on engagement. Experience designs need to consider these very different set of emotions and fears of employees.

4   Culture and employee experience: every company and its culture are unique, as are the circumstances of each individual employee post COVID-19 organisation practices are focused on providing a human touch to all processes related to human resource management. The focus on process execution without losing the purpose of the process, which essentially is to provide and meet the needs of the employees, is increasingly becoming important for positive employee experience. Employee experience recognises that varied life stages, personal situations, and even personality types make different offers appealing to different people. Rewarding a person is rarely the most compelling answer. Employees want to feel empowered to affect results that matter to them, as well as a strong feeling of identification and belonging.

7   Designing employee experience

The key considerations in designing an employee experience are:

1   Organisation's responsibility – in many of research studies conducted by organisations like Gallup, it is an established fact that the responsibility for engagement of employee is always a shared responsibility. The two stakeholders who are driving employee engagement are the immediate manager of an employee and human resource function in the organisation. The famous Q12 model of employee engagement of Gallup will soon need reorientation considering the future of work and future of engagement as employee experience becomes an integral part of employee engagement practices. The employee experience is a boundary less concept that means the engagement paradigm which is within the boundaries of an organisation may no longer be relevant in future of work. The boundary lessness of an experience of the organisation will bring in all the stakeholders of the organisation, in defining and driving employee engagement in future of work. All the interactions of an employee within and outside the organisation need to be seamless in such a way that employee perceives a positive feeling about such interactions. The conventional responsibility of employee engagement with manager and human

resource function will expand to leadership, customers, suppliers and such other stakeholders of the organisation. Along with these stakeholders employee himself also will be equally accountable for a wonderful experience in delivering his or her responsibilities as defined by the organisation.

2   What and how: the ongoing and established engagement practices focus on what off engagement. The end results are seen as or defined as drivers of employee engagement. These end results have their roots in the goals of the organisation or business. The disruption to these employee engagement approaches is in addition to focus on end results the focus should also include how the end results are achieved. The results are at the point of time positive or negative. If the results are negative it is reason for underperformance and a potential cause for less engagement open employee. Despite the result being negative or the end goal is not achieved or there is an underperformance, the experience of executing in this underperformance can still be considered as an engaging experience by an employee. In such situation one of the experience dimension – the learning through the process of execution, can act as a very powerful employee engagement enabler. This means the process centred approach towards defining employee experience becomes more or equally import along with the end result.

3   Role of HR function: human resource function need to undergo a dramatic change in the way they have defined and evolved employee engagement practices. For many years the human resource function focused on business goals and supporting engagement practices to drive necessary behaviours among employees. This approach needs to be complemented by an employee experience approach which starts with needs of the employees to achieve necessary business goals. Similar to marketing approach of customer needs, wants and desire, human resource function need to identify employee needs, wants and desires to achieve specific business goals. An employee engagement strategy focused on employee expectation and perception of experience of organisation along with measurable end results is need in the future of work. As the world of work is increasingly becoming agile, human resource processes which drive this agility across life cycle of an employee is essential part of employee experience at work. A human resource function should be employee experience partner along with business partnership in future of work.

4   Voice of employees – experience does not begin and end with corporate leaders; the people on the frontlines must be heard. Many organisations have one of the best practices of conducting a employee feedback survey at regular intervals. The idea behind this employee engagement survey or your voice count surveys is to get the pulse off employees on number of dimensions of employee engagement at work place. This feedback to the organisation helps in understanding the challenges for employee engagement and implementing potential solutions to overcome these challenges. Such survey provides opportunity to employees to communicate expectations at workplace. From the perspective of organisations, the company can identify parameters of feedback and incorporate the same in such survey to understand employee opinion. The output of these surveys is one of the inputs for designing a human centred employee experience design. Such a two way collaboration with the employees is similar to customer voice captured in new product design. Such an approach of deeper and wider employee involvement leads

to an iterative process of designing an intervention related to experience design. Such a process impacts perception of employees about what and how of experience intervention and helps to achieve the desired emotions and feelings odd overall perception off employee experience. As design of employee experience intervention is not a static process periodic feedback from the stakeholders must be an in built part of designing employee experience interventions.

5 Voice of customers – one of the basic premise of experience design is customer centred approach. End customers of organisations have a significant role to play in designing employee experience interventions. The touch point for customers is the employees of the organisation. A feedback of experience of a customer about the overall impact on their decisions based on the interactions with employees of the organisation will be a significant input in arriving at desired employee experience leading to a superlative customer experience.

6 Empathetic leadership – one of the key drivers of experience design is involvement and support of leadership of the organisation. Success on employee experience approach is a function how the leadership of organisation involve and embrace empathetic leadership. The pandemic's consequences led in empathetic action from managers that some employees never expected: volunteering to cover the expenses of backup day-care, additional sick leave, and 'hero pay' for front-line staff. In India, one such case being where the CEO promised that employees compelled to seek oxygen on the black market for family members will be reimbursed without respect to reasonable and customary boundaries and without the need for a receipt. Another company agreed to pay for the education of the children of an employee who died as a result of the infection. Indeed, after years of decline, workplace empathy scores improved in 2021, according to a study conducted by Dale Carnegie. Companies enabled WFH and communicated more frequently and explicitly when driven to do so by the crisis, offering a window into an employee experience that several employees were unaware existed. Many people are now hesitant to return to a period when corporate executives decided to overlook tough topics like burnout, childcare, mental health, diversity and inclusion, and other obstacles of balancing work and family life. Employers must now deliver on what employees want if they wish to maximise the employee experience for better productive workforce.

7 Leveraging technology – employee experience design is a continuous process. An experience which provides an wow effect today may not be equally impactful after some point of time as the variables which are considered may evolve over a period of time and undergo a change. The quality of experience can be improved based on measurement of impact of experience on employee engagement. Experience is a complex process and intuitive process. Personalisation is a significant differentiator in creating a high impact employee experience. Openness and transparency of employee experience system is an essential ingredient of employee experience design. All this is possible provided we have a quantitative data to understand effectiveness of employee experience design. In order to achieve all of this embedding technology solution at various interactions or touch points of employee experience is critical for the success of experience design interventions. Also access to technology for employees to express their feelings, emotions, fears will be

possible buy use of easy to use technology platforms. Hence investment in technology to create awesome employee experience design is a must.

8 Long-term v/s short-term – in real life experience employers or companies design and implement many employee focused actions. These actions are focused on resolving a particular challenge to employee engagement. The impact of such action is immediately felt or visible by more happiness among employees. This happiness remains over a period of short term. The short term experience of happiness provides a platform for building next level expectations by the employees. This leads to potential opportunities for organisation to design and implement another set of actions to build higher level of engagement of the workforce around the same challenge or set of multiple challenges. If we refer to theory of motivation namely Maslow's theory of needs of hierarchy, the satisfaction of lower level needs results into need of satisfaction of next higher level need. The same is true in case of employee expectations. A set of employee experiences meeting certain expectations is followed by higher level of expectations and need for more different experiences by the employees. This means investment of resources by organisation and the employees in continuously creating different experiences and meeting different expectations. Therefore it is important to calibrate expectations of employees to achieve deeper, higher and long term impact on engagement of employee through different experiences.

7.9 Vital few – design of an excellent employee experience which is running across organisation, involving significant resources may not create the same impact compared with a simple employee experience which is well communicated, well understood by employee. In reality a simple experience which is well understood and perceived by employee as meeting his or her need will create a long lasting memory and so deeper and longer engagement with the organisation. Large numbers of smaller and simpler experiences are likely to stick with employees than one large intervention of employee experience. This is based on logic of ability to visualise or perceive cause and effect relationship between employee expectations and experience design intervention. Many smaller interventions also provide opportunity for customisation of employee good experience design.

Looking ahead in future of work, workplaces are transitioning from physical to non-physical world. The definition of workplace is completely flexible. Conventionally a workplace is defined as an office/factory setup in a defined building, at a defined place with specific identified area associated with position in the hierarchy and an individual who is occupying that position. In future of work all this is a past tense. Workplace is not something which one can identify as a fixed location. It is any location where you perform a meaningful activity which meets a purpose linked with broader organisation goals performed anywhere by an employee. With such flexible workplaces conventional approach to engagement of employee also needs to be equally flexible. The engagement practices which required personal connections, need of physical places, physical things will no longer be sufficient for driving higher levels of performance through employee engagement. The employee experience is one of the potential solutions to meet the demand of higher level of or maybe the same level of engagement of employees in such volatile and flexible workplace definitions. The core element of 'feeling' or 'perception'

which is part of any experience will drive engagement of employee with the organisations in future of work.

8 '4E' framework of design of employee experience

The 4E framework of design of employee experience as shown in Figure 1 is based on understanding of expectations from various stakeholders of the organisation. Each of the stakeholders in this framework has unique expectations of employee experience so that they can deliver on goals of the business. These expectations are analysed together and the insights of this analysis are prioritised to create various employee experience designs. As the expectations of the stakeholders will evolve continuously across the period of time and will undergo changes, design of employee experience needs to adopt and respond to these changes on ongoing basis.

1   Expectations of shareholders: the primary expectation of shareholders is to generate wealth over a longer term period of time through growth of business. The distribution of this wealth among shareholders and the communities, defining consistent image of organisation among all the stakeholders and ensuring alignment of all the actions in the business to sustain this image, ensuring ethical and transparent governance of the business are some of the key object use off shareholders. Employees of the organisation are the messengers among all stakeholders and hence shareholders would expect design of employee experience in such a way that employees demonstrate the behaviours which enable achievement of these objectives. For example – an employee experience focused on practice of code of conduct by all the employee in their day today life at work would enable meeting shareholder expectations of employee experience.

2   Expectations of leadership: leaders of the organisation have significant impact on the way employees experience the organisation. The leadership is responsible for setting up vision, and implementation of strategy, goals along with defining employer value proposition employees of the organisation. Leaders would expect employees to deliver not only on goals of the today but also be innovative to meet the growth expectations of the business. An employee experience design which facilitate development of skills and behaviours, build and nurture highly engaged workforce will ensure meeting expectations of leadership. Some of the examples which will provide this employee experience would be on boarding process, reward and recognition process, performance management, etc.

3   Expectations of employees: employee expectations would include expectations of experiences which are customised or personalised at various touch points across different business processes. Expectations of employees can be classified as need (hygiene expectations), wants (essential for performance of employees), and desire (wishful aspirations). Design of employee experience based on these expectations of employees could be employee wellbeing program, employee benefits program, challenging projects and assignments, etc.

4   Employee experience design: Optimum experience design analyse the expectations of shareholders, leadership, and employee and prioritise to design the most impactful

employee experience. This is possible by designing physical environment, technological environment and social environment in such a way that employees experience expectations of various stakeholders and achieve desired impact.

Figure 1   '4E' framework of design of employee experience (see online version for colours)
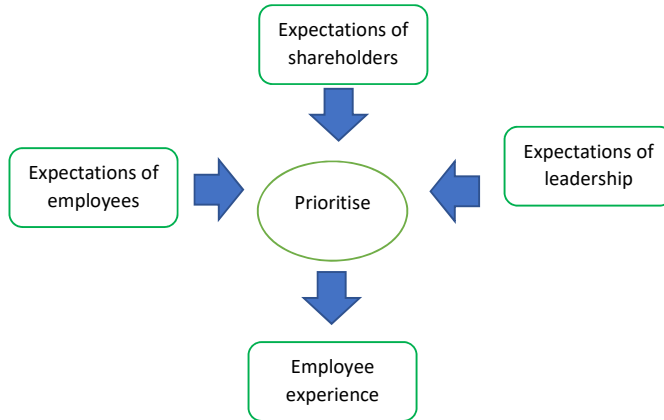
Source: Researcher's own compilation

9   Conclusions and implications

During the earlier stages of the epidemic, most businesses did a remarkable job of meeting their employees' fundamental requirements for safety, stability, and security. However, as we progress further into the new normal, organisations need to recognise that those requisites are changing. Organisations are compelled to align with the expectations of the workforce in a new normal post-COVID-19 pandemic return phase and redesign the employee experience. This redesign focuses on personalisation of experience, among others, using the latest technology in data analytics and artificial intelligence. The results of a recent poll across organisations revealed that 50% of employees anticipate a higher emphasis on employee experience in 2022.

In the new normal, communication across stakeholders, especially between employees and organisations, is at the centre stage. It is imperative that we address the issue of communication channels, which is one of the most pressing issues facing us today. Organisations must guarantee that communications between workers and with other stakeholders are effective, real-time, and uninterruptible. Working in a remote setting has an impact on the overall effectiveness of the organisation when considered as part of a bigger picture that includes employee engagement and experience. In the end, the most significant consequence is the development of trustworthy connections across the organisation and with clients.

To enhance business outcomes, company executives have a natural propensity to concentrate inward. However, in the new reality, firms that foster a feeling of social belonging and inclusivity will be better positioned to provide an improved employee experience and generate subsequent commercial success. The cultivation of a trusting environment is comprised of a number of minor but critical components. Inclusion has emerged as a key component of the employee experience. Good work experience is

dependent on the establishment and maintenance of a culture of inclusiveness that values and celebrates differences. Businesses may do this by forming cross-functional teams and cultivating a sense of belonging and psychological closure among their employees.

Businesses must recognise that each employee is a unique individual with unique requirements of experience, so the use of the phrase 'celebrate individuality' is to be given due importance. Businesses must take a more proactive approach to listening to and reacting to their employees' problems and demands as a result of these developments. In fact, employees who receive a prompt and effective reaction from their employers are six times more likely to indicate that their work has had a beneficial influence on their well-being.

In order for organisations to successfully transition into the new normal, technology will play an increasingly essential role in delivering future employee experiences. Employee well-being may be improved by the use of technology, which is not a new notion. Organisations, on the other hand, will find it simpler to assist workers in better adjusting to their new working environment if they are equipped with the most up-to-date technology solutions.

Employee experience as a disruptive engagement approach looks at an employee as a whole, unlike an intervention, which focuses on addressing a specific issue related to employee engagement. The foundation of all employee experience actions is the relationship between the organisation and the employee. Like in every other relationship, in this relationship also, both employee and organisation have to contribute to nurture and build a stronger bond. Organisations will make an effort to understand the needs and wants of employees to provide an outstanding employee experience at respective touch points, and employees will understand the why and how of the interventions and respond positively. It is the mutual responsibility of an organisation and employee to build an outstanding employee experience.

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