

The rise of the employee experience manager - Advice to organizations creating this role



February 13, 2023

By Stephanie Denino

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If you have the field of employee experience on your radar, you will have surely seen the recent news: according to LinkedIn, the role of employee experience manager is [one of the fastest growing jobs](#) in the U.S.

In my time in this field, I've come across many roles with 'employee experience' in their titles, and know they vary wildly; from highly strategic to tactical, from broad across all experiences to narrow on specific topics, just to name a few axes of difference. This variability in the role indicates to me that the field of EX remains young and much work is still ahead to help organizations appreciate the unique identity of these roles.

When I first started in an EX manager role in 2016, I was focused on four things: 1) uncovering the good, the bad and the ugly about employee's experiences through deep ethnographic research, 2) finding and pursuing opportunities to drive EX improvement work with a willing partner in HR or in the business, 3) advising others trying to improve employee experiences across the organization, and 4) building essential capabilities to power this work, such as measuring EX.

When employees came to learn that such a role existed, many commented that it sent a signal to them of the commitment the organization placed on improving their experience. Now that these roles are far more common, employees may not interpret their existence in the same way.

As I look back on what I learned in my 6 years in that EX role (as part of a broader global EX team) and as I bring in more recent perspectives now that I am working with many organizations to help them progress meaningfully on EX, there are a few pieces of advice that come to mind for organizations creating this type of role.

First, it's worth calling out that there is a lot of [EX "repackaging"](#) still going on; organizations relabeling things they are already doing or teams/functions that already exist, under the label of EX. With this comes the challenge of an EX role being no different from what has come before. In fact, it is often unclear how the role differs from other roles addressing aspects such as culture, engagement, well-being, and other related areas. Given it has been more recent to emerge, the EX role is at risk of becoming a "gap filler" – where all the things that are not owned by other teams end up going ("No one owns reflections on return to office, hybrid ways of working, or wellbeing? Let's give that to the EX manager/team!"). And in doing so, this may fuel confusion or resentment from surrounding teams leading on adjacent topics ("Why do

they get to be called the EX manager/team? Isn't what I am focused on just as strong a contributor to our people's experience!?”)

Advice: don't let your EX role become a hodgepodge of unowned topics; recognize that EX is a new discipline that isn't just topically focused as other teams in HR may be. Instead, it requires a whole new set of data-driven and human-centered practices (among others) that enable the role to surgically focus on improving experiences that are highly important to employees.

Second, by virtue of where EX managers often sit organizationally (70% of EX roles are in HR as per the [State of EX 2023](#) research), they tend to focus on HR-owned services (e.g. onboarding, well-being, etc.) and stay away from improving the day-to-day work for people (e.g. serving customers). By focusing on the core of people's work, EX roles can position themselves to make a real difference on the root causes of things like burnout - which are so deeply connected to the actual work - as opposed to providing remediation once the harm has been done. EX managers may believe they have to get HR's house "in order" before they can earn the right to move outside of HR.

Advice: the truth is, they can have impact across the business by taking a broader view on the experiences that are highly important to people and not satisfactory, so encourage them to go where their impact can be greatest.

Third, given how undeniably important it is for organizations to create great experiences for their people, EX managers must beware of the strong possibility for EX “pollution”: many initiatives being launched to push in any possible way to improve experience. To people on the receiving end, this often feels overwhelming and/or doesn't hit the mark (“I don't need you to provide me with access to yet another wellness training that I won't find time for!”)

Advice: make sure your EX manager is empowered to prioritize what will most make a difference, based on data directly from your people, and when possible encourage them to simplify the experience.

Finally, because the EX role is so inconsistent across organizations, it makes it difficult for EX managers to compare their role to that of others, and to understand what growing in maturity looks like. Without externally recognized best practices, this role may miss reaching its potential by continuing to be ill-defined and therefore misunderstood.

Advice: Encourage your EX manager to look externally to the ways in which this role is being shaped, so that they may have a vision for how it can evolve in your organization.

If you're interested in joining a growing member-driven collaborative of EX practitioners (named the EXchange), reach out to me.

[More to come](#)

In many ways, these pieces of advice only scratch the surface on all that can be said about what EX roles are and how they can best be approached. In the near future, I will be sharing the results of research my team and I have done to uncover the practices that allows EX leaders/functions to drive real impact for their people and their business, through improved experiences. Stay tuned!