

# Introducing the APEX model (Activities driving the Practice of EX)

How organizations can  
systemically improve  
employee experiences



 TIPEOPLE

# Contents

Why we created the APEX model	3
How we created the APEX model	4
What we learned while creating the APEX model	5
The components of the APEX model	7
How the APEX model works	10
How the APEX model can help your organization	12

## Highlights

The APEX model exposes and organizes what's driving the practice of EX. It reveals what it takes to improve employees' experiences in ways that are sustainable and replicable.

It provides leaders with the foundation to chart their organization's path on EX, for maximum success.

The APEX model is based on research we conducted with dozens of global EX leaders and on our experience of more than 150 EX projects with clients.

## Audience

This report is for anyone who wants to intentionally chart their organization's path on EX. Naturally, EX leaders and HR leaders come to mind.

But this report is also relevant to key players in organizations who are keen to benefit from the business value that comes from a systemic approach to improving EX, and who play a significant role in shaping large parts of people's experience at work. This includes business leaders, CX leaders, and IT leaders, for example.

# Why we created the APEX model



## Defining employee experience (EX)

At TI People, we use the definition for employee experience developed by our non-profit partner, [The Exchange](#):

*The interpreted reality of sensory impressions, thoughts, feelings, actions, and interactions of a person at work.*

More than ever, organizations are realizing that focusing on employee experience (EX) can make work better for people while putting important business outcomes within reach. With an EX focus, organizations are beginning to crack the code on vital internal challenges, such as attracting and retaining talent, bolstering productivity, and improving customer experiences, too. It's a defining moment for EX, and it's fueling an unprecedented wave of growth for the field. The role of EX manager is in the top 25 fastest-growing jobs in the US according to a 2023 LinkedIn report<sup>1</sup>, and 60% of the 500 largest US listed companies have established EX roles<sup>2</sup>.

But as EX leaders strive for meaningful change, they're also facing difficult obstacles. We know from past research that 39% of EX teams start with no budget<sup>3</sup>, and nearly half of teams are small, often just 1-3 people<sup>3</sup>. Many team members are also new to their roles, and because the field itself is also new, best practices can feel hard to come by. Adding to that, senior leaders' expectations of EX leaders are high, yet unclear. As for EX leaders' peers, they may question the need and purpose of this new EX leader role and may assume they themselves are already doing what's needed to improve people's experience at work.

**EX leaders find themselves asking vital questions such as: How should we focus and strengthen our efforts on EX? What is my team's role in enabling our progress?**

**That's why we (TI People) are introducing the APEX model.**

The APEX model exposes and organizes what's driving the practice of employee experience. It also provides the foundation for leaders to determine how they can chart their organization's path on EX, for maximum success.

This model comes at a pivotal time for EX leaders and their organizations. Data from our last State of EX report revealed that 94%

of respondents say that improving employee experience is more than just a short-term project at their organizations<sup>3</sup> and more than 50% claim it's a permanent change in how their organizations operate<sup>3</sup>. At the same time, 79% struggle to coordinate EX work across their organization<sup>3</sup>. The APEX model was born out of an urgent need to support EX leaders with clarity and guidance as the field expands.

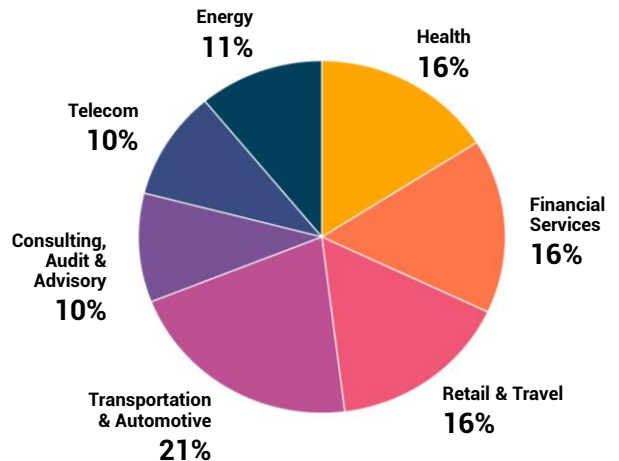
# How we created the APEX model

To create the APEX model, we reached out to dozens of EX leaders around the world and across industries to discover:

- What are they trying to achieve?
- What do they and their teams do to get there?

We also relied on our experience of leading more than 150 successful EX projects with clients around the globe. With this extensive research and experience, we explored the current realities of EX, while deepening our understanding of how context affects an organization's unique approach.

**Industry representation of interviewed EX leaders**



# What we learned while creating the APEX model

## What are EX leaders trying to achieve?

Although EX leaders had many different answers, the essence was universal:

*“I want to create a best-in-class employee experience.”*

*“We aim to create consumer-grade experiences for our people.”*

*“Simply put, I need to ensure a great EX for all.”*

“Great EX for all” became a catchphrase throughout our research because it captured the essence of so many EX leaders’ aspirations. While it may sound simple, we know it’s not easy to achieve. First, most organizations are not aligned on what “great EX” even means. Second, EX leaders can’t do it alone; they must enlist the entire organization’s help.

Third, the work is never-ending; “great EX for all” is a moving target. Organizations can always improve more experiences for more people. At the same time, employees’ expectations are always evolving, and the context of the work is always changing. There’s always another milestone to chase.

## What do they and their teams do to get there?

In identifying which practices and approaches are really working for EX leaders, we found that “great EX for all” requires organizations to develop a new organizational “muscle.” They need the ability to distribute accountability for improving experiences, and they need to turn the effort of experience improvement into something ongoing and continuous.

We describe this new muscle as the ability to systemically improve employee experiences.

The APEX model was built on everything we learned by asking those two questions and analyzing the answers. We uncovered and organized what EX leaders and teams do, to help EX leaders everywhere as they strive to systemically improve experiences.

# Which “experiences” are we referring to?

Throughout this report, you will notice our reference to employee experiences is plural. That's because the experience of employees can be chunked up into smaller experiences that we refer to as moments. When we speak about experiences, we are not just referring to the typical HR-led moments anchored to the employee lifecycle – such as, I interview or I pursue a new role. We are referring to any and all moments for people at work, including the day-to-day and job specific moments – such as, I solve a customer issue – which are inherently business-led.

## Is an EX leader essential?

**Creating this role is often an important step in a company's journey to systemic change.**

When an EX leader doesn't exist in an organization, different players (e.g. HR, IT, business) may manage to improve parts of the employee experience that they have some responsibility for, but they may be going about this work in disparate and disconnected ways that reduce the potential for impact.

Having a dedicated role provides a more methodical and unified approach to experience improvement efforts by answering critical questions, such as:

- What are the moments that make up our people's experience at work?
- How do we measure / listen to our people's experiences across moments?
- How do we prioritize the improvement of moments needing most attention?
- Who is responsible for the design, delivery, and eventual improvement of the products, services, and various interventions that shape our people's experiences?

An EX leader can serve as the driving force that elevates the organization's ability to systemically improve employee experiences, turning the focus on EX into a value-driving practice, for its people and the business.

# The **components** of the APEX model

Through our interviews with EX leaders, we amassed a stockpile of data that we compared, grouped, and synthesized into activities, goals, and focus areas. First, we found 28 activities that are vital. Example **activities** include:

- Clarify the business rationale for managing EX, in our organizational context
- Collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data to understand experiences
- Define specific responsibilities for improving employee experiences to ensure accountability

Next, we probed the relationship between the activities and the **goals** they help organizations achieve. We found that activities contribute to six goals:

- Shape the EX strategy
- Fuel organizational buy-in
- Understand experiences and elevate insights
- Act on insights to drive impact
- Enable others to improve experiences
- Build supporting EX structures

Then, we discovered that those goals contribute to three **focus areas**:

- Organize to improve experiences
- Improve critical work experiences
- Build capabilities to improve experiences, at scale

The APEX model brings these findings together.

# The APEX model

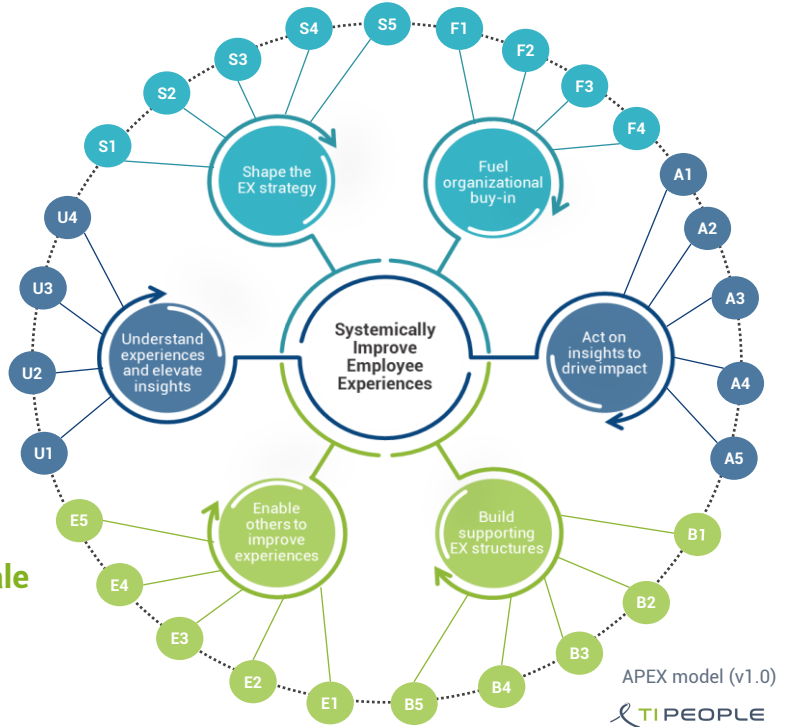
3 focus areas

6 goals and 28 activities

Organize to improve experiences

Improve critical work experiences

Build capabilities to improve experiences, at scale



## A preview of the activities that make up the APEX model

Below you'll find a preview of the activities that make up two of the six goals.

At the end of this report, there are instructions for accessing the full model.

### Improve critical work experiences

#### Act on insights to drive impact

- A1** Find internal partners to improve experiences
- A2** Build & test solutions with employees & partners to improve experiences
- A3** Implement solutions to improve experiences
- A4** Monitor experience metrics to assess whether experiences have improved (impact)
- A5** Connect experience metrics to business outcomes to show results of the work

### Build capabilities to improve experiences, at scale

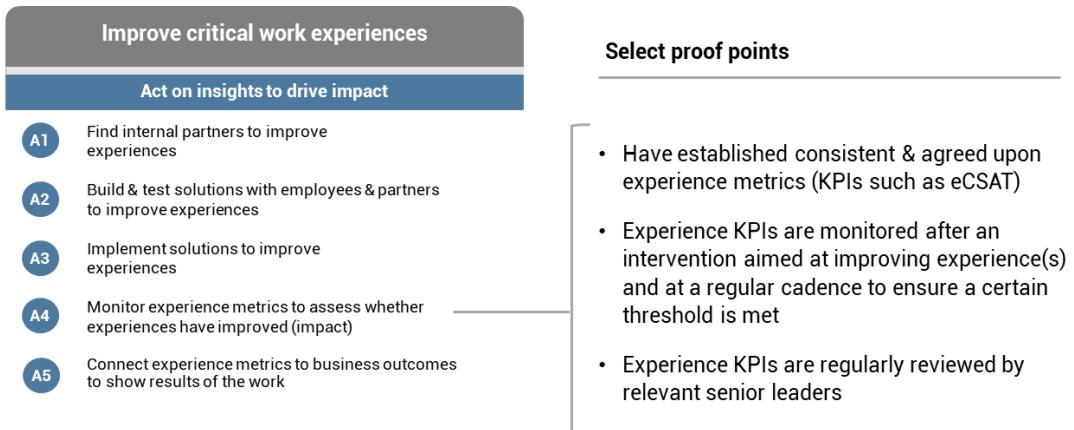
#### Enable others to improve experiences

- E1** Define specific responsibilities for improving employee experiences to ensure accountability
- E2** Educate on the core practices / ways of working that help improve experiences
- E3** Advise / coach those working to improve experiences
- E4** Establish & convene communities / councils / governance groups that play a part in managing EX
- E5** Equip experience owners with data tools they need to improve experiences they shape and / or deliver



# How does one know what **good** looks like?

We have also developed proof points to reflect observed leading practices, to serve as a yardstick to assess proficiency on each activity. See below, an excerpt of proof points for the activity “monitor experience metrics to assess whether experiences have improved.”



## Two **threads** running through the model

Across each of the six goals and a majority of their underlying activities, we saw the importance of being data-driven and human-centered. These two threads emerged again and again, and we believe they must permanently infuse this work.

**Data-driven:** moment-centric data (data about touchpoints in the context of moments) moves EX work from being based on the opinions of a few to being based on the perspectives of many, as organizations strive to improve any part of the experience. It also allows organizations to drive a continuous improvement logic in how it approaches making experiences better and better over time, while allowing teams to measure and communicate the impact of this work.

**Human-centered:** human-centered design mindsets and ways of working are obvious necessities when attempting to improve experiences. Indeed, effective solutions and interventions must be intentionally built, tested, and integrated with an understanding of and the involvement of the people they will serve. This human-centricity ethos permeates all six goals, bringing empathy, co-creation and iteration to the overall journey of becoming a more EX-centric organization.

# How the APEX model works

The APEX model reveals what it takes to improve employees' experiences in ways that are sustainable and replicable.

To be successful in this quest, EX leaders must help their organization progress in some way on all six goals, because they are all mutually reinforcing. Together, they are the basis of an EX-centric operating system.

For example, when starting this work, EX teams benefit from getting the minimum required level of buy-in to improve a specific part of the experience for a targeted group of people. And then, when teams bring back success stories about the work's impact, they're armed with the most powerful way to continue to fuel organizational buy-in. Seeing is believing!

The more you look at these six goals and their underlying activities, the more interconnections you will see. So often, progress on one goal is a prerequisite or an enabler of progress on another goal.

We should also highlight that all goals aren't created equally. Two goals require outsized focus across any organization: "Understand experiences and elevate insights" and "Act on insights to drive impact" because of their direct tie to improving experiences. Not surprisingly, an organization will never systemically improve experiences before it learns, through ongoing practice, how to first improve experiences. We depicted this visually by placing these essentials closer to the core of the model.

## Must an EX team do it all?

The short answer is, no. The EX leader and their team can and should leverage existing functions and resources in the organization to perform the activities in this model, while holding others accountable and participating in different activities to varying degrees. And the more this work scales, the more others in the organization are doing their part in improving critical work experiences.

The role of EX leaders and their teams can vary greatly, depending on context, maturity, and ambition. But the best EX leaders and teams understand that they are the overall orchestrators, relying on these goals and activities to bring about an EX-centric way of operating, across the organization.

# How EX leaders can use the APEX model for systemic improvement: Walk, Run, Fly

The logic of the APEX model has implications for how EX leaders can shape the path for this work. To create the ability for systemic experience improvement, we found that a “walk, run, fly” approach works best.



**Walk:** As EX leaders begin the journey on EX within the organization, they must first do the few critical activities that will allow them to improve a specific experience for a targeted group of people. By tackling something specific and measurable early on, leaders can demystify this work, build momentum and credibility for their team’s work, and generate greater demand for this type of effort.



**Run:** As EX leaders and their teams continue to progress, they can take on more activities to have a bigger and broader impact – i.e. improving more experiences for more people. Along the way, improvements become driven—more and more—by those who’ve been enabled through past work.



**Fly:** As EX leaders and their teams mature, they help the organization more fully execute the activities that make up the APEX Model, and in doing so, EX work becomes even more continuous and distributed across the organization. At this stage, the organization begins to truly see the benefits of systemic improvement—it has created an EX-centric operating system.

# How the APEX model can help your organization

More than anything, the APEX model offers clarity at a time when EX leaders are facing a unique set of challenges. Their roles are both poorly defined and in unprecedented demand, and many feel trapped in a tug-of-war between competing priorities, often balancing high expectations with low budgets. While EX roles do vary wildly across organizations, our research revealed that many successful organizations share a similar set of activities, goals, and focus areas.

The APEX model, born of this shared wisdom, shines a spotlight on those activities and goals so that they can become a reference point for anyone doing this work.

We hope it serves as an anchor and tool to help EX leaders, and those who care about it in any organization, assess and reflect on what they are focused on today and what they need to prioritize next. It is our hope that with the help of this model, individuals in these roles can find success faster in their quest for “great EX for all.”

## Looking to the future

Through this work, we have captured the current activities and goals driving the practice of EX. This model, released in October 2023, is therefore titled v1.0 but will undergo improvements as we continue to do this work with our customers and partners, touching an ever-widening circle of practitioners. That may mean identifying new activities or leaving aside certain activities that aren't as relevant. It will also definitely include updating proof points to continue to reflect the leading practices for how these activities are being performed. Through our continued curation of this model, we will aim to capture the collective wisdom on the evolving discipline of EX.

## Engaging further

[Reach out to us](#) if you are a leader / practitioner attempting to affect systemic change on EX in your organization, and you would like to:

1 Access the full model

2 Discuss and provide input to the model

3 Reflect on how the model can be a useful tool in your context

# References

- 1 2023 Jobs on the Rise: United States. LinkedIn research.  
Available at: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/linkedin-jobs-rise-2023-25-us-roles-growing-demand-linkedin-news/?trackingId=uNMINEr/T9yEaRRWaZZrrA==>
- 2 Gartner (2023). The Future of Work: How Employee Experience is Driving Performance 2023.
- 3 Jennifer E. Sigler (2022). *The big, bad state of EX: Findings from the State of EX 2022 Survey*. Research sponsored by TI People and FOUNT.

# About the authors

## Stephanie Denino

Stephanie is the Director of Applied EX practice at TI People, leading the Americas region. She has been focused on the field of EX since 2016 as a practitioner, advisor, writer, and speaker. Before joining TI People, she spent six years building up the Global Employee Experience team at Accenture.

Contact Stephanie at [stephanie.denino@ti-people.com](mailto:stephanie.denino@ti-people.com)

## André Fortange

André is a co-founder of TI People. He is a trusted advisor to CHROs and senior HR teams of leading companies, specifically on EX and HR transformation. Before founding TI People, he was with CEB/Gartner as Managing Director for Germany, Austria, and Switzerland and held senior management positions as a member of the Management Board at Kienbaum and Senior Manager at Accenture.

Contact André at [andre.fortange@ti-people.com](mailto:andre.fortange@ti-people.com)

## Dr. Timo Tischer

Timo leads TI People's consulting services as Director in Europe and holds a PhD from the University of St. Gallen. Working in the EX space since 2016, he is regularly writing and speaking about the topic. In his advisory work for leading organizations, Timo can also draw on his yearslong consulting experience at CEB and The Boston Consulting Group.

Contact Timo at [timo.tischer@ti-people.com](mailto:timo.tischer@ti-people.com)

## Maris Garcia

Maris is Head of Human-Centered Design at TI People and FOUNT Global. With deep experience in design research and strategy, she has guided teams across sectors and industries in creating services, strategies, and tools to help change mindsets, behaviors, and conditions. She previously led the Diversity + Inclusion Studio at the University of Chicago and social innovation projects at Greater Good Studio and Gravitytank.

Contact Maris at [maris.garcia@ti-people.com](mailto:maris.garcia@ti-people.com)

## Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the help of a broad group of contributors. Special thanks to Christophe Martel for his input which shaped the ideas in this report, to Anne Eidelman for her help in framing and conducting the research, and to the full TI People team. We are also grateful to the leaders who were interviewed for this research and all leaders and practitioners who have helped advance this thinking through our project work together.

# About TI People

TI People is an employee experience consultancy which partners with organizations to accelerate business results through improved work experiences. Since 2016, the company has worked with leaders across the globe who are eager to shape and apply the practices that will allow them to systemically improve experiences. Thanks to this ongoing work in the field, TI People understands what makes progressing in this space challenging and what is required to have impact. Established in 2016 by long-time CEB veterans, TI People is headquartered in Washington, D.C. and Hamburg.

Find out more at [www.ti-people.com](http://www.ti-people.com).

## Copyright

TI People's research assets and models are protected by copyright as noted on [www.ti-people.com](http://www.ti-people.com).