EXposed - EX practices uncovered:
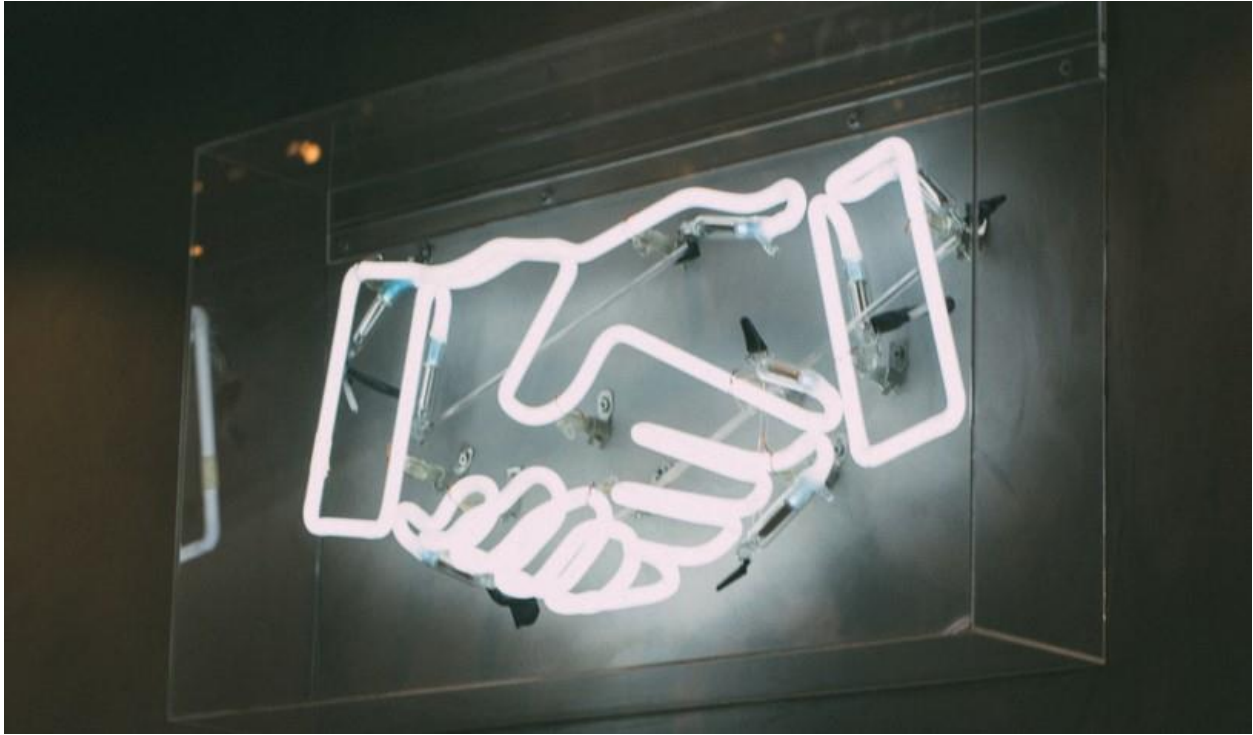# Building the necessary alliances to manage EX

Photo credit: Charles Deluvio

Posted November 29th on Linkedin

To manage EX at scale, intentional alliances must be built up across the organization. But figuring out how and with whom to build alliances isn't always obvious. This article sheds light on these important questions.

This article is part of a series called EXposed: EX practices uncovered. In it, my colleague Timo Tischer and I reveal the practices of organizations advancing on the practice of employee experience.

Why does this matter?

Organizations that are serious about wanting to create "great EX for all" generally understand that progress toward this aspiration cannot be solely driven by the HR function. Most EX leaders intuitively get that the business plays a role in improving EX, that IT plays a role in improving EX...indeed that virtually all major players across an organization have some responsibility in shaping or delivering great experiences for people at work, and yet so many still struggle to have an EX-focus infiltrate all of HR, let alone spill beyond it.

To start moving EX toward an enterprise-wide sport, EX leaders must be adept at **fueling organizational understanding and buy-in** to an EX-centric operating system: a system of practices that allows for the continuous improvement of people's experiences at work. And to do this, one key activity to reach this goal of fuelling organizational buy-in is to **build the necessary alliances to manage EX**. Note: This goal and this activity are part of the APEX model (the Activities driving the Practice of EX) – which you can learn more about [here](#).

Let's first clarify what we mean by a few terms within this important activity 'build the necessary alliances to manage EX'

What do we mean by "manage EX"?

Successfully managing EX means that an organization has built the necessary organizational muscle to systemically improve employee experiences. Mainly, the organization has learned how to:

- Identify all moments that make up a person's experience at the company
- Measure & listen continuously to people's experiences across these moments
- Regularly prioritize focus, effort and investments on moments needing most attention
- Clarify responsibilities (who "owns" which journeys, moments and touchpoints) to ensure accountability
- Improve the experience in key moments, relying on the right improvement method (incremental fixes and when needed, bigger re-design efforts)
- Monitor whether efforts are moving the needle, to adjust and improve
- Connect all experience metrics to business metrics to show the results that EX improvement work enable
- Embed EX metrics into the objectives of senior leaders across the organization

What do we mean by "alliances"?

Alliances are partnerships and working relationships with key players that must be engaged to fully manage EX. Alliances across the entire HR function (for example with heads of talent, HR OPS, HR IT and people analytics), with IT, with the business and with CX leadership tend to be some of the most powerful alliances that are required to put on foot a more systemic way to manage EX.

How are alliances built?

In the beginning, we often see EX teams trying to build alliances through roadshows explaining the WHY of EX, incenting leaders to do their part in improving EX, but this conceptual and unspecific ask is unlikely to get them very far. Alliances can only truly be built through real work pursued together to improve some part of the experience that the allies are responsible for. But, before a working partnership can be established, targeted allies need to understand the value of EX improvement, in the context of things they care about.

What are we seeing?

Below, we show how two organizations stretched their intentional management of EX by convincing key leaders across the HR function and into the business, about the value of this work.

Case 1: Building an alliance with the head of HR

In one global retail organization of roughly 170,000 employees that is highly and visibly committed to CX, their EX leader understood the importance of capturing and channeling experience data (moment and touchpoints data, as written about here) to all 'experience owners' (e.g. head of candidate experience, head of onboarding, head of performance management), so that they could continuously improve the products and services that enable these experiences. The value to the HR leadership team was an attractive one: for the HR function to increase its impact and its efficiency through ongoing incremental improvement of the experiences it shapes and delivers. Starting with data, this HR function has created an EX-centric operating system in which all prioritization of effort & investment is directly tied to experience metrics measures across journeys / moments / touchpoints.

Today, there are named journey owners for every HR-driven aspect of people's experience (e.g. I onboard, I transition) that are fed with an ongoing stream of data about the moments and touchpoints performance within these journeys, so that local and global teams can make incremental improvements to their products and services in an ongoing way. **Here, EX improvement work isn't limited by the capacity of a central team, instead it's been properly distributed and scaled across the function.**

Case 2: Building an alliance with the business leader of a high-value and high-volume talent segment

In one NA-based technology firm with 15,000 employees, the EX leader pitched a project to an HRBP and business leader of a sales workforce that was slowing in productivity (a.k.a. sales drag). Instead of talking about 'improving experiences' this EX leader spoke about 'removing friction' that was getting in the way of their sales team, while quantifying the cost of attrition and lost revenue.

Through this partnership, they mapped out the day-to-day moments of this sales workforce (e.g. I identify new sales opportunities, I stay informed about our offerings, I manage the contracting process), collected moment-centric experience data to uncover work friction for these sales executives, and proceeded to make targeted improvements to low satisfaction and high importance moments. Having understood the power of this kind of continuous improvement, this business leader is wanting to repeat this approach to continue reducing friction in their salesforce's work.

What do we recommend?

How to pitch a new alliance

3 related tips are important as anyone prepares to pitch a new alliance:

1. Find a business problem that experience improvement work can help address

For the business, focus on helping solve a problem that has inevitable roots in people's experience: high attrition, low productivity, low attraction, or declining customer NPS.

For HR, focus on improving the quality design and delivery of products and services that enable key moments of people's experience, so that the HR function may increase its impact and its efficiency.

2. Identify specific leaders with these problems, that would be willing partners

Some leaders think they have it all figured out, but others are willing to be helped to innovate and improve. Focus on the latter.

3. Speak the language of those leaders, to meet them where they are

For example, some business leaders may not care about continuously improving their people's experience, but do care about continuously improving their people's productivity – so tracing a line between removing friction from people's experience and their productivity is often the way to position the power of this alliance.

Who to prioritize building alliances with

If an organization is to ever manage EX fully, it needs to find ways to involve the organization's biggest experience owners. As we said earlier, while every function in the organization can lay claim to being a part 'owner', the two biggest 'owners' in any organization tend to be HR and the business.

On one hand, HR often leads the shaping of processes, policies and technologies enabling common lifecycle moments that all people experience. On the other hand, business leaders predominantly shape the experience of the actual work, through decisions on structures, priorities, and processes, for the specific people in their unit.

Given this reality, we often recommend to EX leaders to figure out how to make inroads both through HR and the business.

So, who will you pitch to next? Let us know if we can help.