



Understanding Internal Partnerships for Improving the Employee Experience



Overview

Given the broad scope of what can be considered part of the employee experience, HR leaders believe — unsurprisingly — it is a shared responsibility within and beyond HR. The most effective HR leaders are evolving their existing internal stakeholder relationships and establishing new ones with the aim of improving employee experience. This report helps HR leaders identify and prioritize the most valuable employee experience internal stakeholder partnerships.

Key Findings

- Seventy-three percent of HR leaders believe the HR function is the joint owner of designing and delivering the employee experience.
- Today, the majority of HR leaders most frequently work with stakeholders within HR on employee experience initiatives. They also believe their relationships within HR are most important for improving the employee experience.
- As HR leaders apply a more expansive view of the employee experience to their work, the internal stakeholder relationships they are prioritizing will also likely need to shift, taking HR leaders more frequently outside of HR.

Recommendations

When establishing partnerships with other leaders to improve the employee experience, HR leaders should:

- First audit how they are currently spending their time with different employee experience stakeholders and the importance of those stakeholder relationships for improving the employee experience.
- Identify the stakeholder relationships where there is a gap between the importance of the relationship and their current level of investment in that relationship.
- Approach each relationship as an opportunity to advance employee experience goals while also influencing stakeholders to think differently and more expansively about the employee experience and their role in improving it.

Introduction

Employee experience, which we define as “the interactions employees have across all touchpoints in their day-to-day work and the contexts that influence those interactions,” ranks as the third overall focus for HR leaders in 2019. While HR has the ability to significantly influence employee experience, HR leaders recognize they cannot make progress alone. In our recent survey, 73% of HR leaders agreed designing and delivering a quality employee experience is a responsibility shared by multiple business functions [1]. As such, making progress on employee experience requires particularly strong partnerships with stakeholders from both inside and outside HR.

When working to improve the employee experience today, HR leaders’ most common partnerships are internal, with recruiting, learning and development (L&D) and diversity and inclusion (D&I) cited as the top three (see Table 1). Outside of HR, its most common partnerships are with communications, operations and IT.

Table 1: HR Leaders’ Current Partnerships on Employee Experience Priorities

Rank	Stakeholder	Percentage of HR Leaders Currently Partnering With Stakeholder
1	Learning and Development (L&D)*	69%
2	Recruiting*	58%
3	Diversity and Inclusion (D&I)*	57%
4	Communications	56%
5	Total Rewards*	43%
6	Operations	37%
7	Talent Analytics*	32%

Rank	Stakeholder	Percentage of HR Leaders Currently Partnering With Stakeholder
8	Information Technology (IT)	29%
9	Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	27%
10	CEO/Board Members	24%
11	Marketing	24%
12	Strategy	24%
13	Real Estate	15%
14	Finance	12%
15	Other	9%

Source: Gartner (February 2019)

**Internal HR partners*

The stakeholders cited most frequently by HR as important for improving the design and delivery of the employee experience were also all within HR: L&D, recruiting and D&I. The first non-HR stakeholder, communications, was fourth.

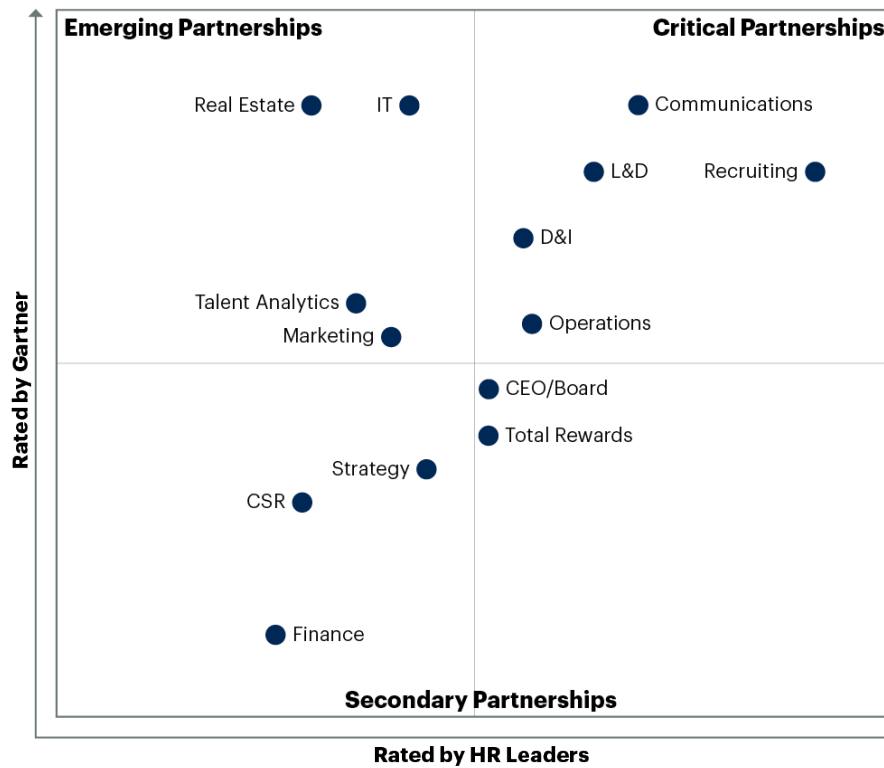
These results run counter to the growing sentiment that employee experience improvement requires greater partnership with non-HR stakeholders. They highlight the need for HR leaders to re-evaluate the relationships they're prioritizing for employee experience improvement.

There are three types of employee experience partnerships that emerge from our research (see Figure 1):

- Critical: Partnerships that we and HR leaders believe have a strong ability to influence the design and delivery of the employee experience.
- Emerging: Partnerships that HR leaders tend to undervalue but we believe are more important in the design and delivery of the employee experience.
- Secondary: Partnerships that HR leaders may risk overvaluing in the design and delivery of the employee experience.

Figure 1: Importance of Partnerships to the Employee Experience

Importance of Partnerships to the Employee Experience



Source: Gartner (February 2019)

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HR leaders should continually evaluate their assessment of the importance of different internal stakeholders for employee experience improvement.

Partnering With HR Leaders to Improve the Employee Experience

All HR leaders say they are currently focused on improving the employee experience. As a result, HR leaders' partnerships within HR likely don't require establishing the importance of employee experience but rather, discussions of how teams within the HR function can work together to provide more integrated employee experience support.

Critical Partnerships: L&D, Recruiting and D&I

These three partnerships — “critical partnerships” — are those where HR leaders’ and our assessments of their importance are aligned. To improve the employee experience, many HR leaders work with L&D leaders to design and facilitate training programs that build skills and competencies for employees. Many HR leaders are partnering with recruiting on the development and implementation of attraction and onboarding strategies to improve the candidate experience, a critical component of the overall employee experience. Finally, when working with D&I leaders, HR leaders should likely focus on ensuring diversity and inclusion strategies foster a psychologically safe and inclusive work environment.

Emerging Partnership: Talent Analytics

Only 9% of HR leaders today believe talent analytics teams have the ability to impact the design and delivery of the employee experience. In the era of digitalization and the rise of big data, however, this partnership will become increasingly valuable to the design and delivery of the employee experience. HR leaders should partner with talent analytics leaders to collect and analyze data to better understand employees’ expectations, needs and values. Talent analytics leaders also oversee important efforts to monitor employees’ continued satisfaction with their day-to-day experiences.

Secondary Partnership: Total Rewards

Forty-three percent of HR leaders are currently partnering with total rewards leaders to design and deliver the employee experience; however, only 21% of leaders believe this team has the ability to influence employee experience. While total rewards leaders are responsible for some of the key elements of attraction and retention — compensation, benefits and rewards — their less direct contact with employees relative to other HR teams suggests HR leaders have room to reassess how they work together. Many HR leaders recognize they must go beyond perks to creating a compelling employee experience. Regardless, HR leaders should partner with total rewards leaders to ensure compensation, benefits and rewards programs meet the expectations of employees.

Partnering With Non-HR Stakeholders to Improve the Employee Experience

As previously stated, 73% of HR leaders believe HR is the joint owner of employee experience. However, non-HR stakeholder partnerships are currently an underutilized area for HR leaders and should be a key area of focus moving forward.

Critical Partnerships: Communications and Operations

Communications and operations ranked as the two most common partners outside of HR, with 56% of HR leaders currently partnering with communications and 37% partnering with operations. HR leaders believe these are also the most influential partners outside HR, with more than a quarter believing these functions have the ability to influence the design and delivery of the employee experience.

Partnerships with communications and operations both present valuable opportunities for HR leaders as these functions' responsibilities directly impact employees' day-to-day experiences and perceptions of their organization. For example, communications controls the communication channels through which the employee experience can be articulated and shared. HR leaders should partner with communications leaders to support employee communications and manage communication strategies. Additionally, the operations function is responsible for managing and ensuring operational systems, processes and policies align with the organization's mission. As such, HR leaders should work with operations to ensure work processes enable employee productivity.

Emerging Partnerships: IT, Real Estate and Marketing

IT, real estate and marketing are key partners for improving the employee experience; however, fewer than 15% of HR leaders believe these functions have the ability to influence the design and delivery of the employee experience.

IT and real estate leaders are uniquely positioned to help improve the technology, workspace and work processes that employees come in contact with on a daily basis, while marketing can share customer experience best practices and tools with HR leaders. HR leaders should work with IT and real estate to ensure the technology and workspace they are providing meet employee expectations and empower employees to be productive. Furthermore, HR leaders should partner with marketing to understand how to effectively apply personas and journey maps — two approaches commonly used by marketing leaders to empathize with customers — and use these to identify areas for improvement within the customer experience.

Secondary Partnerships: CEO/Board, Strategy, CSR and Finance

Less than one-third of HR leaders have established partnerships with the CEO/board, strategy, CSR and finance departments to influence the design and delivery of the employee experience. HR leaders have cited various reasons for deprioritizing these relationships, some of which include these functions' limited and targeted interactions with employees and the small proportion of the workforce they impact.

Regardless, these groups are still important to HR leaders who are seeking to improve the employee experience. For example, while the CEO and board have little direct contact with employees, they are an important source of influence and strategy, and HR leaders need buy-in from them when deploying any employee experience initiative. Additionally, CSR programs that consider the needs of employees can result in increased employee engagement.

3 Questions to Use to Reset — or Establish — Your Stakeholder Partnerships

As HR leaders take steps to establish new partnerships and adjust existing ones, they should start by discussing three foundational questions with their colleagues:

1. How would you define employee experience? Given the concept of employee experience is both relatively new and expansive in nature, agreement on its definition and scope across all functions is important. Often, key stakeholders have narrow definitions of employee experience because of the scope of their responsibilities. For example, recruiting leaders are focused on the candidate experience, while IT leaders are focused on the user experience. Establishing a universal definition and a mutual understanding of the scope of employee experience across functions will ensure alignment with a common goal.

2. How important is employee experience to you based on your current objectives? A deeper understanding of other functions' priorities allows HR leaders to identify overlap between objectives. Once identified, those areas of overlap provide HR leaders with a straightforward starting point for partnerships. While all non-HR functions have at least one core objective that connects to employee experience, HR leaders already see variability in stakeholders' interest in improving the employee experience. In cases where stakeholders are less interested in establishing a partnership, conversations with those functional leaders (or the HR business partners aligned with those functions) can help uncover objectives related to employee experience that the stakeholder hadn't previously considered. HR leaders can also use this as an opportunity to share data on the scope and impact of employee experience while making the case for a greater focus on the employee experience.

3. What talent challenges or priorities do you have for your function this year? Limited partnerships with non-HR stakeholders sometimes result from misunderstandings about how HR can help stakeholders, rather than an active disregard for HR's support. HR leaders often use questions like these to capture direct, open-ended feedback from their stakeholders; they are also helpful tools to use when establishing employee experience partnerships. Armed with this information, HR leaders will be in a better position to recommend employee experience initiatives or actions that will help non-HR stakeholders make progress on their talent challenges or priorities.

Conclusion

Given the broad scope of employee experience, partnerships with leaders inside and outside HR are critical to designing and delivering a compelling employee experience. Different functions design and deliver different processes, systems and tools that impact employee experience. As such, HR leaders need to invest time in understanding other function's roles in enabling the employee experience.

Recommended by the Authors

- [“Improving the Employee Experience: Working With the Communications Function”](#)
Discover why the communications function is important to the employee experience, what communicators' current needs are and how HR leaders can partner with communicators to improve the employee experience.
- [“Improving the Employee Experience: Working With the Real Estate Function”](#)
Examine real estate's role in the employee experience, its primary responsibilities and ways to effectively partner with real estate leaders.
- [“Improving the Employee Experience: Working With the IT Function”](#)
Learn about the IT function's role in the employee experience, IT leaders' current priorities and ways to effectively partner with IT leaders to improve the employee experience.

About This Research

This research is drawn from our 2019 Employee Experience Stakeholder Quick Poll and research from Gartner's Corporate Leadership Council. Collectively, we surveyed hundreds of organizations, HR leaders and Gartner analysts to understand HR leaders' partnerships in the design and delivery of the employee experience.

Endnote

[1] 2019 Employee Experience Stakeholder Quick Poll