

Q&A on the Book Build a Next-Generation Digital Workplace

Key Takeaways

- Digital workplaces/employee experience platforms (EXPs) are digital platforms where employees can collaborate, connect, and share information and use it for their day-to-day tasks, enabling them to work from anywhere.
- Unlike traditional intranet platforms, digital workplaces can be accessed anywhere, anytime, and on any device.
- Employee experience platforms cater to various crucial use cases such as learning and training, information delivery, knowledge management, self-service, gamification, content management, and personalization and such.
- Digital workplaces aim to engage employees at all touchpoints and impact employees' daily lives.
- Employee experience platforms primarily aim to improve the overall productivity and employee engagement through personalized employee dashboards, intuitive information architecture, and Omni-channel access and such.

The book [Build a Next-Generation Digital Workplace](#) by [Shailesh Shivakumar](#) explains what employee experience platforms (EXP) are and how digital technologies can be used to improve employee productivity, increase employee engagement, and support collaboration.

InfoQ readers can download the [front matter of Build a Next-Generation Digital Workplace](#) and can [preview Build a Next-Generation Digital Workplace](#).

InfoQ interviewed Shivakumar about how employee experience platforms differ from traditional intranet platforms, the business benefits of employee experience platforms, the role that augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) play in digital workplaces, how employee experience platforms support collaboration and help professionals and agile teams to become more autonomous, how to ensure that different generations in organizations use the employee tools, and how organizations can become a digital distributed business.

InfoQ: Why did you write this book?

Shailesh Shivakumar: *To engage employees effectively and to improve their productivity, organizations are investing in many digital technologies. Employee experience platforms (EXP) are the primary engagement platforms for employees. Having been involved in the end-to-end development of few employee experience platforms, I thought of defining the core success factors of EXPs such as EXP design strategy, transformation themes, emerging trends, migration from legacy intranet platforms, collaboration strategy, best practices, platform operations, and maintenance and such.*

I have detailed these concepts along with case studies in the book so that readers can adopt these best practices while developing EXPs.

InfoQ: For whom is this book intended?

Shivakumar: *Digital architects, project managers, CIO, software developers, business analytics, test engineers, support and maintenance engineers*

InfoQ: What purposes do digital workplaces serve?

Shivakumar: *Next generation digital workplaces enable employees with self-service features to improve their productivity. For instance, employees log service desk tickets to complete a task or to get policy document. EXPs can enable self-service by providing a search-driven knowledge base to provide the required information quickly.*

Another key feature of digital workplaces is that they provide an enhanced collaboration platform for all employees; EXPs provides various collaboration features such as blogs, wikis, chat, forums, communities, shared calendars, people search and such for employees to effectively communicate and collaborate.

Using personalized content delivery, next generation digital workplaces provides the content and functionality based on employee attributes such as preferences, history and recent trends, and inspire and engage employees across all touch points; EXPs provides engagement features such as chat bots, virtual assistants, voice bots, and services to actively engage all employees.

Digital workplaces add value to the employees' daily activities and increase loyalty, brand affinity, and job satisfaction, and improve the work-life balance for employees by providing various communication modes. For instance, EXPs enable remote login, mobile apps, and collaboration tools to give employees options to work from anywhere.

Organizations can realize the overall vision and objectives of the organization; communication, collaboration and employee engagement are common goals of an organization. EXPs are well-positioned to address these goals.

Digital workplaces optimize the operational costs through self-service and automation; by optimizing the maintenance activities such as automated patching, health checks, monitoring, and alerting, organizations can reduce the operation cost.

Digital workplaces improve the overall agility and responsiveness of the organization. By adopting the agile delivery model for EXPs, delivery organizations can enable quicker releases.

InfoQ: How does an employee experience platform differ from traditional intranet platforms?

Shivakumar: *The following are the main differences between traditional intranet platforms and employee experience platforms:*

- *EXPs provide a Lean and web-oriented architecture built on open standards with a lightweight integration model so that it is easier and quicker to onboard new features or extend existing features. For instance, EXPs provide Single Page Application (SPA) based on JavaScript frameworks (such as React, Angular or Vue) to provide light-weight, responsive and interactive user experience.*
- *EXPs provide intuitive, integrated and personalized user experience to actively engage employees. EXPs' personalization is based on preference, access device, location, time, user history and such.*
- *EXPs provide productivity improvement tools such as self-service features, optimized business processes, and automation tools to improve employee productivity. Some of the key self-service and productivity tools provided by EXPs are chat bots, search, recommendations, automated employee workflows (such as automated approvals), mobile apps and such.*
- *EXPs use forward-looking technologies such as mobile-enablement and cloud enablement to provide high availability and on-demand scalability. By providing cloud native EXPs, we can provide on-demand scalability and high availability.*
- *EXPs provide employee-centric, responsive, omni-channel-enabled, and rich user experience with intuitive information architecture.*

InfoQ: What business benefits do employee experience platforms gain?

Shivakumar: *The following are the benefits of employee experience platforms:*

- *Self-service and empowerment: Employees gain tools and services that empower them to do their activities quicker. Once we analyze the key tasks of employees in persona and user journey, we can optimize the tasks and automate them in EXPs. For instance, a sales persona is interested in product sales reports which can be enabled by dashboard experience, on-demand reports and by providing analytical tools.*
- *Work-life balance and work flexibility: The digital platform provides anywhere, anytime, and on any device seamless experience.*
- *Social and collaboration: EXPs provide social and collaborative features in a modern digital platform. This further increases employee productivity.*
- *Leveraging modern digital technologies: Cloud, mobile apps, social media platforms, and analytics are mainstream digital technologies that have gained huge popularity. Digital platforms leverage these technologies to meet the expectations of modern employees. Leveraging modern digital technologies provides a competitive advantage.*
- *Automation: The digital platform leverages machine learning and artificial intelligence technologies to automate routine activities and to provide contextual and relevant recommendations and other features. Automation and self-service reduces operation cost.*

InfoQ: What role can augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) play in digital workplaces?

Shivakumar: *AR and VR are still in an emerging stage in the area of employee experience. AR/VR technologies provide immersive training simulations and can be used for the following purposes:*

- *Product demos and walk-throughs; for instance, AR-enabled EXP mobile apps can provide product details based on the product photo or video.*
- *Compliance, regulatory, safety, and security training: Manufacturing and retail organizations have stringent safety and compliance requirements. For such scenarios, AR-enabled EXP mobile apps can provide interactive security and compliance training.*
- *On-the-job trainings: EXP mobile apps can guide employees through an AR feature.*
- *Task walk-throughs: AR and VR enabled mobile apps can provide interactive task walkthroughs (such as employee approval processes and security clearance processes) for employees.*
- *Remote assistance: AR and VR enabled EXP mobile apps can help employees in remote debugging of machines, code setup and such.*

InfoQ: How can employee experience platforms support collaboration?

Shivakumar: *EXPs provide in-built collaboration features such as blogs, wikis, calendars, searches, forums, communities, feedback handling, surveys, reviews and ratings, knowledge management, feeds, and bookmarking to enable collaboration among employees and share and exchange information and ideas. EXPs provide flexibility for employees to work from anywhere and collaborate at any time by providing user-friendly collaboration tools such as chats and forums, and harness collective intelligence among employees by providing knowledge base with searches. EXPs enable the co-creation of content and services to rapidly develop and deploy services and improve productivity through collaborative tools and services. EXPs also enable self-service among employees by providing tools such as searches, reports, dashboard views and such, and provide a centralized knowledge base for sharing information.*

The search in EXPs empowers employees with relevant search (such as content search and people search) to ensure that employees find the relevant information quickly. EXPs also provide personalized and contextual information to employees in a unified dashboard view. For example, an EXP dashboard for sales people can provide the region specific, product specific sales information based on the user preferences.

InfoQ: How can employee experience platforms help professionals and agile teams to become more autonomous?

Shivakumar: Automation and self-service are the key design principles of EXP. Features such as contextual search, decision-making tools, AI-driven recommendations, chatbots, knowledge bases, virtual assistants, voice search, and personalization enable employees to find the information quickly, thereby reducing the dependency on other support staff. Agile teams can record product information such as reports, sprint velocity, risks and dependencies in EXPs so that they are visible to the team management.

InfoQ: How can we ensure that different generations in organizations use the employee tools that are provided?

Shivakumar: As part of the user experience design of EXPs, we identify the user personas (group of users with similar needs, wants and goals) and map their user journey across various channels.

Based on the user personas and user journeys, we enable the following:

- Provide relevant tools and features to complete their day-to-day tasks
- Based on the usage patterns, enable the experience on various devices.
- Provide self-help and contextual FAQs to reduce the learning curve.
- Recommend relevant content, features and organization news.
- Personalize the user experience based on preferences and browsing patterns.
- Provide chatbots and virtual assistants to find information more quickly.

By providing seamless experience across all user channels, EXPs cater to various generations.

InfoQ: What's your advice on becoming a digital distributed business?

Shivakumar: *Organizations need to focus on the following aspects to become a digital distributed business:*

- *Provide digital channels (such as web, mobile web, mobile app, kiosk and services) to cater to a distributed audience.*
- *Identify the main users of the digital applications and provide seamless user experience across all channels and devices.*
- *Based on persona analysis and user journey mapping, optimize the design of the EXP.*
- *Provide features such as localization, search, collaboration, and personalization to optimize information discovery.*
- *Provide cloud enablement to ensure high availability and on-demand scalability.*
- *Enable analytics to track the user interaction and fine tune the user experience.*
- *Optimize, automate and simplify business processes.*
- *Provide self-service features such as search and knowledge base to improve user experience.*

About the Book Author



Shailesh Kumar Shivakuma is an inventor, author, and senior architect specializing in digital technologies. Shivakumar earned a PhD in computer science and is the author of seven technical books published by the world's top academic publishers. He also has

published a dozen technical white papers, authored eight textbook chapters and has published more than ten papers in international journals. Shivakumar holds two US patents and five patent applications.

Discuss

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