Observe, Measure and Assist: Three Emerging Ways to Drive Workforce Digital Dexterity

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Initiatives: Digital Workplace Program and 1 more

Application leaders can increase workers’ digital dexterity by using digital experience monitoring tools to observe enabling infrastructure, by implementing experience-level agreements to measure success, and by deploying digital adoption solutions to aid the development of application competencies.

Overview

Key Challenges

- System monitoring is often done at a component level, a practice which ignores end-to-end effectiveness from the employee’s perspective and makes broad complaints about system performance nearly impossible to track down.

- SLAs are oriented toward IT-focused metrics and are only tenuously linked to the needs and sentiments of the employee population and to business goals.

- SaaS applications change rapidly, and work processes often span multiple SaaS applications, which makes it hard for employees to acquire and maintain application proficiencies.

Recommendations

Application leaders responsible for digital workplace strategies should:

- Make the “employee experience” aspect of system performance a key concern of the IT group by implementing digital experience monitoring (DEM) tools.

- Improve IT-driven business and employee experiences by implementing experience-level agreements (XLAs).

- Boost employees’ proficiency with complex applications and increase ROI from application portfolios by using digital adoption solutions (DASs).

Introduction

The duty of a digital workplace leader is to identify and implement technologies and disciplines that promote workforce engagement and digital dexterity. To that end, three IT approaches that
reflect digital workplace values are emerging beyond typical digital workplace programs:

- The use of DEM tools to ensure applications and their underlying infrastructure are optimized for employees by providing an employee-centric view of how employees experience technology, based on observation and modeling of employees' behavior over time.

- The introduction of XLAs, an employee-centric take on SLAs. Rather than making commitments to system performance, XLAs use business-oriented outcomes such as time to proficiency, satisfaction with IT services and avoidance of incidents.

- The adoption of DASs, which work with SaaS applications (and sometimes legacy systems) to promote employees' proficiency with applications and improve employee engagement.

These three approaches can be used independently. They can also be used with each other, with DASs overlaying the process, DEM tools monitoring the experience, and XLAs providing the overarching commitment to improving the business process experience using data from DASs and DEM tools. Neither DASs nor DEM tools nor XLAs are currently among the portfolio of a typical digital workplace leader. That is noteworthy because it demonstrates how the desire to become a digital workplace can and should permeate the entire IT organization and help institute a pervasive employee enablement mindset across the IT organization. Digital workplace leaders can use the three approaches outlined above to build bridges to other parts of the IT group.

Analysis

Make the “Employee Experience” a Key Concern of the IT Group by Implementing DEM Tools

The inability to proactively identify user experience problems, the growing complexity of IT environments and the difficulty of justifying monitoring technology investments are persistent problems for the IT organization:

- IT monitoring teams tend to focus on identifying application and infrastructure performance problems by relying on a multitude of domain-specific tools, such as database, server, network and application monitoring tools. Employee-facing problems are typically discovered through service desk calls, which creates frustration and friction in the remediation process for employees and IT professionals. DEM, however, holistically monitors infrastructure, applications and processes.

- Although tracking stability and using performance metrics has worked for monolithic and static application architectures, the distributed and dynamic nature of modern IT environments necessitates a new approach. It requires a set of technologies that measures performance from the employee's endpoint and reveals the impact that degraded performance can have on the business, revenue generation and brand reputation. DEM tools can monitor signals such as application behavior and endpoint-centric performance for applications — including SaaS — over
which IT staff may have little or no control. DEM tools are becoming an integral part of IT monitoring initiatives and are being deployed along with other technologies, such as application performance monitoring, network performance monitoring and diagnostics tools.

- One of the biggest challenges organizations face when investigating monitoring technologies is finding a business justification for the investments, because many monitoring tools stop at the infrastructure or application level and lack obvious business value. DEM, however, spans infrastructure, applications and business processes, culminating in a focus on the user experience — thus making the business value readily apparent. Additionally, DEM tools can help digital workplace leaders understand utilization rates and the cost of cloud services.

Additionally, remote working initiatives resulting from COVID-19 have accelerated the need to deploy DEM tools in order to track and manage experience of users accessing applications and systems via infrastructure such as home Wi-Fi networks, over which IT teams have no control.

Digital workplace leaders should use DEM tools to analyze the employee technology experience by taking a top-down and outside-in approach — in other words, one that moves from the end user to the infrastructure and that observes user behavior and its impact on system performance. This dual approach captures and understands the health of workflows that affect how employees interact with applications. Capturing end-user metrics and tracking them across flows of interactions can help organizations model business processes and support employee journeys.

Vendors of DEM tools include Apica, Aternity, Catchpoint, Martello Technologies (GSX), ITRS Group, Lakeside Software, Nexthink, Quantum Metric, Rigor and ThousandEyes.

**Recommendations**

Application leaders responsible for digital workplace strategies should partner with infrastructure and operations leaders to:

- Use DEM tools to extend the monitoring of critical components in order to an end-user (or endpoint) perspective.
- Link DEM metrics to performance-monitoring solutions and IT service management processes in order to accelerate the identification and resolution of problems.
- Focus DEM on the services for which employee surveys show least satisfaction (weighted by business-criticality).
- Capture business-centric metrics from critical applications to highlight their business value.

**Implement Experience-Level Agreements to Improve IT-Driven Business and Employee Experiences**
Originating in the world of managed service provision, XLAs help drive better IT experiences by using elements of DEM, sentiment analysis and traditional service-level metrics that monitor the timeliness and effectiveness of supporting processes. The goal of XLAs is to optimize computing power, networks, access rights and applications, so that employees can be as productive as possible in a wide variety of workspaces, including home offices, which have become increasingly important during the coronavirus pandemic.

XLAs are not exclusive to outsourcing. Gartner also knows of a few implementations for internal IT use. However, similarly to internal SLAs, internal XLAs tend to be less effective, due to a lack of firm commitment to actual business outcomes. When outsourced, XLAs will be harder contractual obligations with better chances of follow-through. In addition, most internal implementations are limited because of the high level of investment in tools necessary to build and operate successful XLAs.

Table 1 gives two examples of how XLAs have been implemented successfully by means of collaboration between clients and service providers.

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<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Implemented Solution</th>
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<tr>
<td>Employees complain that the process to fix or replace old PCs impedes their ability to get work done.</td>
<td>Introduction of a kiosk and smart locker for PC inventory at remote site locations, combined with a move to cloud-based backup to expedite hardware replacement. The XLA combines employee sentiment, Net Promoter Score and user downtime due to IT processes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employees complain that a variety of IT support services are too rigid and force them to obtain services that conform to IT schedules, not employee schedules.</td>
<td>Introduction of vending machines for procuring commonly used IT peripherals; addition of a flexible scheduling tool for walk-up support; and increased self-help options, enabling employees to fix problems that would normally require IT intervention. The XLA combines employee sentiment, time to fix, percentage of incidents fixed via self-service and cost of IT support.</td>
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Source: Gartner

Digital workplace leaders should consider XLAs to help prioritize what matters most to employees in the technology experience, learn how they might improve it, and identify what metrics could drive progress and define success. Setting up six candidate XLAs is a good first step. These should then be “socialized” both within and outside the IT group, before picking one, two or three for a trial run.

In other words, the immaturity of XLAs lends itself to an iterative approach, where failing fast (and succeeding quickly) is part of the investigation phase. XLAs should be thought of as a long-term
evolutionary approach to synchronizing technology deliverables with business and employee experience needs, one that reflects the increasing role that technology plays in employee engagement.

Recommendations

Application leaders responsible for digital workplace strategies should:

- Identify the greatest sources of employee frustration with technology services and the biggest IT impediments to employee productivity. This can be done at organization, division or team level.

- Determine the quickest way to alleviate these frustrations and determine what combination of metrics would best prove success or failure by observing the impact that changes have on users’ satisfaction and productivity.

- Start slowly with a couple of XLAs, assess results and iterate. Use the results to guide and encourage dialogue between IT staff and other employees.

- If a managed service provider is involved, use its experience of creating XLAs for companies in your industry as a starting point. Then work out the differences specific to your business.

Use Digital Adoption Solutions to Boost Employees’ Proficiency With Complex Applications and Increase ROI From Application Portfolios

DASs are evolving quickly as technology buyers become educated about the value they bring to organizations and digital transformations. Employees are increasingly asked to use new and constantly changing applications — which can lead to “change fatigue,” increase stress and make employees less responsive to organizational change efforts.¹ DASs can increase employee satisfaction, reduce fatigue and thus increase productivity by offering guidance on how to use applications (see Figure 1).

Although native application UIs may seem intuitive, when business processes are integrated, the navigation experience can become complex. When employees are faced with lengthy and complex processes, they often become frustrated and disengaged. A DAS overlays the UI of applications and guides employees through business processes. These processes can include tasks within a single application or across multiple applications. DASs (and DEM tools) can also monitor and track where employees are disengaging and becoming frustrated by, for example, disaggregating the application stack in order to understand where performance problems occur. Analytics provided in these solutions are key to helping an organization understand where guidance is needed, as well as for measuring and tracking improvements in performance.

Figure 1: Digital Adoption Solutions Improve Productivity
The in-application guidance helps employees navigate workflows and processes quickly and efficiently, and increases data accuracy. In some cases, DASs support robotic process automation, which can even eliminate the need for data entry. The guided learning offered by DASs within applications can provide a faster time to proficiency than traditional training methods.

DASs often use gamification and “nudge” techniques to encourage participation. If an organization uses Google Drive for sharing and collaboration, for example, a text-based nudge can encourage employees to save files to a shared drive — and show them how. Once an employee adopts the suggested behavior, that specific nudge is no longer offered. Gamification elements encourage employees to increase utilization through competition with peers — they can include leaderboards and noncash rewards.

All these aspects of DASs use positive reinforcement to boost proficiency.

DAS vendors include AppLearn, Apty, Digital Attitude, EdCast, InsideBoard, Newired, Pendo, Toonimo, tts, Userlane, WalkMe and Whatfix.

**Recommendations**

Application leaders responsible for digital workplace strategies should:

- Search for existing DAS investments by their organization to avoid duplication.
Deploy DASs, particularly for applications with low satisfaction or proficiency rankings.

For maximum ROI from DASs, prioritize processes that consume the most time due to their complexity or repetition, or that produce the most mistakes.

**Evidence**

1 Based on findings of the 2019 Gartner Employee Experience Head of Function Survey.

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*What's Trending With Application Leaders?: Digital Dexterity and the New Work Nucleus*

*Increase Sales Productivity With Digital Adoption Solutions*

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**Supporting Initiatives**

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