

EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE AND TWO CASE STUDIES IN E-COMMERCIAL SECTOR

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Abstract: Employee experience is defined as the intersection and implementation of employee expectations, needs and requests with organization design. In this study, after the literature review on employee experience, the practices of employee experience in a business operating in the e-commerce sector are presented. The data used in the article were obtained through interviews with managers responsible for employee experience functions in two businesses operating in the field of e-commerce in December 2019. At the end of the study, suggestions for researchers and professionals were given. The article is uniqueness in terms of the Turkish field, as it is both a review of the relevant literature on the concept of work experience and presented two examples of its application.

Keywords: Employee experience, design thinking, employee engagement.

JEL Classification: M12, M54, M59

I. Introduction

The focus area of human resource management is the management of people in the context of employer-employee relations. This orientation, more narrowly, requires the most efficient use of people's abilities and the satisfaction of employees' needs in order to achieve the strategic goals of the organization (Stone, 2008: 3). Human resources management has gone through many stages after the Industrial Revolution until it came to this goal. Qualifications such as personnel management, human resources management, and strategic human resources management are the appearance of these stages on the basis of naming (Lundy, 1994). Morgan (2017) describes the development of the employer-employee relationship as the stages of usefulness, productivity and interaction in terms of mental transformation, social relations and technological development. The fact that people have become a key player in competition has led managers to concentrate on two areas. The first is to attract talented employees to the business, and the second is to maximize the potential of existing employees. In recent years, "Employee Experience" (EE) is one of the concepts that has come to the fore in this context. Many studies indicate that there is a direct link between VO and employee engagement (Choudhury, Dutta, & Dutta, 2019; Cadmus, 2012; Rampersad, 2006). According to some authors, human resources (HR) has entered a new era called employee experience (Gheidar & Zanjani, 2020). According to Morgan (2017), this period is almost a silent revolution for organizations. When employees have a positive experience in organizations, they feel better, become more committed to their organizations, become more sensitive to the work they do, and increase their productivity. EE has become a remarkable HR trend recently, with its influential reports published by global consulting firms (Mahadevan & Schmitz, 2019).

In this article, firstly, the conceptual framework of employee experience is presented, and then the case studies of two companies operating in the e-commerce sector in Istanbul are presented.

- How do practitioners fill in the content of the employee experience concept?
- How does the employee experience affect the human resources function?
- Is there evidence of a relationship between employee experience and employee engagement?

The data were obtained by face-to-face structured interview method with the relevant business managers. The data were classified and evaluated according to the information presented in the theoretical framework.

II. Literature Review

EE is the holistic perception of the relations that the employee has from every point of the organization in which he works throughout his employment (Plaskoff, 2017). EE is the sum of all the experiences an employee has in connection with the organization, from the first moment he or she establishes a connection with the organization as a potential candidate, to the moment he terminates his employment (Ludike, 2018). As soon as potential candidates recognize an organization brand, they think of it as an employer and start the mental evaluation process about that organization by imagining a career for themselves in that organization. From the

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application process to starting a job, every employee has certain expectations about daily business life that they hope to be met (Raia, 2017).

Managers have long realized that employees are just as important as customers and deserve just as much respect. Organizations that are aware of this are implementing many different practices in order to improve the employee experience and maximize their potential (Bonsu, 2020). For example, IBM has developed applications that try to understand what employees experience and feel, starting from the onset stage, in order to bring the employee experience to life (Burrell, 2018).

Despite being close in association, the similarity between employee experience and customer experience is rather superficial. Customer experience refers to the relationship a customer has with a brand. Customer experience reflects the organization's outward view, while employee experience reflects its inward view (Maylett & Wride, 2017). Employee experience is the sum of the interaction perspectives of the employees with the organization they work for (Morgan, 2017).

Employee experience and employee interaction, although close to each other, are different concepts. Employee interaction is short-term changes made to improve the way organizations work (Copeland, 2015). Employee experience is the long-term redesign of the organization (Morgan, 2017).

The purpose of managers' interest in the employee experience is to create an organization in which people will want to work. An organizational environment is remarkable for employees in three ways: physical environment, technological environment and corporate culture (Green, 2016). The physical environment is the physical space in which employees work. The technological environment includes everything from applications, hardware, software, user interfaces, and design used while doing business. Elements such as video conferencing platforms, internal social networks, business management tools, human resources software, billing systems are all part of the technological environment. Corporate culture determines how the employees are treated in the organization, the products or services produced, the partnerships established, and how the employees really do their jobs (Morgan, 2017).

Employee experience also includes organizational design to meet employee expectations, needs and desires (Morgan, 2015). In order for the design to be made, the organization must know its employees. Experience is subjective because people have different perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. If everyone acted and thought the same way, it would be pretty easy for organizations to create the perfect employee experience. Every organization has employees with different experiences. Employee experience as a very important and key point of business difference; cannot be left to chance (Morgan, 2017: 46-37).

The concept of employee experience, which is mainly based on customer experience and partially user experience, includes marketing and design thinking concepts as well as data and technology-oriented approaches. Design thinking is based on an approach that enables organizations to cope with complexity and supports innovation. This understanding can be evaluated as a human-centered systematic approach that focuses on the end user and encourages interdisciplinary collaboration. As such, it is a suitable tool to transform HR from the current "process developer" role to the "experience architect" role, repositioning HR to be relevant to all aspects of the business (Mahadevan & Schmitz, 2019).

Design thinking is not just about solving problems; It is an approach to business innovation that focuses on finding solutions and moving the organization towards ambitious goals. When looking for a solution to a problem, people, technology and business are evaluated together. The customer or the user is always at the center. Design thinking has been used for years to find new things and solve problems. However, its use in human resources is a relatively new phenomenon (Bersin, Solow, & Wakefield, 2016; Elsbach and Stigliani, 2018). Design thinking; It consists of five stages: empathy, identification, comprehension, model creation and testing (Stickdorn & Schneider, 2012).

Some authors consider the role of employee experience designer as a new tool for HR managers to establish their legitimacy within the organization (Mahadevan & Schmitz, 2019). Employee experience design is presented as a "game changer" in HRM.

In the literature, a close relationship is established between employee experience and employee engagement (Bonsu, 2020; Arnold, 2018; Tucker, 2020; Lemon, 2019). Dedicated employees are more deeply concerned with the future of the organization and try to put forward more than job descriptions for the success of the organization. People's perceptions of the meaning of their workplace are directly linked to their level of commitment and performance. Employees always want their work to have meaning, and when organizations do not give them this share, they intend to leave. Committed employees make more effort to express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally while performing their duties (Tshukudu, 2020).

In a study conducted by in-depth interview method and trying to reveal the employee engagement experiences of managers, the following findings were reached (Lemon, 2019): a) Employee engagement begins with dialogue. b) Dialogue creates context and strengthens the employee engagement experience. c) Active listening strengthens employee commitment. d) Face-to-face communication makes employee commitment more meaningful. e) Formal intra-organizational communication with all kinds of tools adds meaning to employee commitment.

III. Method

3.1. Research Design

In order to see the reflection of the working experience in practice, research was conducted in two businesses operating in the e-commerce sector in Istanbul. Due to the intensive use of technology and new business model design, the e-commerce sector was considered as a suitable sample for such a research. The interviews were conducted face-to-face with the manager of company A using structured questions, and written answers were received from company B. The questions asked to the managers are:

1. How would you describe the employee experience?
2. What practices are implemented in your business within the scope of employee experience?
3. How do employees participate in employee experience management?
4. What are your tools for monitoring and measuring the employee experience process?
5. Do you have any observations about the contribution of employee experience management to the job performance of employees?
6. What are the necessary conditions for the execution of the employee experience management process in an enterprise?

3.2. Information About the Interviewed Businesses

Interviewed businesses are shown with A and B codes. Company A has foreign capital. The company employs 200 people. In company A, the interview was held with the Work Experience manager. The design of human resources applications is made by the parent company, and there is no human resources department or human resources manager titled manager in the company in Turkey.

Company B is a domestic capital company and employs 650 people. In company B, the employee experience function is organized under the Business Support Department. 7 people work in the unit and their titles are as follows: Employee Experience Management and Employee Happiness Manager (1 Person), Employee Experience Designer (1 Person), Employee Experience Management Business Partner (5 Persons). All employees in the Business Support Department are directly or indirectly responsible for employee experience management.

IV. Research Findings

In this section, the answers of the interviewed business managers to the research questions are given.

1. How would you describe the employee experience?

Company A: Company A was established as a Turkish company. Previously, the company had an HR department. After joining the global company, the HR department was closed here, as in other units around the world. People experience naming is used instead of HR.

I came here alone as the person responsible for the work experience. I discovered it by implementing employee experience practices. People expected the services they received from HR before from me. Thereupon, I started to form teams in the needed areas and distribute the responsibilities to the employees.

Our friends from different titles took part in the teams. Sometimes someone with a lower title became the leader of the team, hiring people with higher titles than him. These teams turned into incubation centers. Friends grew up in these incubation centers and developed their competencies. They learned how to make a budget, how to follow the budget, how to organize an event. They have learned to give and receive feedback. We've started to do that here as well. Generation Z wants initiative in business life. They have the mentality of what this company will do not just for me, but for the society. It is a generation that takes initiative, wants to try, does not want to stick to a single job description, and wants to have a say in different fields.

Company B: Our company aims to provide a holistic employee experience by gathering all the support functions that the employees under the Business Support Department may need in order to show high performance. Employee experience; It represents the total value that current employees and potential employees give to the business as a result of their interactions with Business Support applications.

2. What practices are implemented in your business within the scope of employee experience?

Company A: We created an employee council outside of the work teams. This assembly is renewed every year by election. We're building a ballot box here. Propaganda is being done. One or two representatives are selected from each department, depending on its size. You can enter the parliament a maximum of two times. We meet with employee council representatives every 15 days and discuss the problems. Our focus is on action plans regarding the employee satisfaction survey we conduct twice a year. We write and experience a number of procedures, if it doesn't work, we throw it away immediately. Decisions on these issues are always made by the representatives of the parliament.

We have identified all the points we can touch, starting with the recruitment phase of people, and developed a plan accordingly. This plan is always open to renewal according to the feedback we receive. For example, we send a seed to the house of someone who is just starting a business. So that you can grow up with him.

In our business, matters related to wages and benefits are managed globally. We don't get into those issues in the assembly here.

Employee experience application also has a dimension extending to candidates. In this context, we have developed a social responsibility project. We will start implementing this year. We will select 10 candidates who have completed two-year schools in the field of technology and provide them with an intensive technology training for three months within our company. At the end of the program, we will give those friends a certificate proving that they have been trained in software programs used in company A. We plan to hire one or two of them according to our needs.

Company B: In our employee experience management, all elements of the company culture form the basis of our employee experience management processes. We positioned our team as the team that supports the employees in their employee experience journey and changed the name of our team from "Human Resources Department" to "Business Support Department". Employee Happiness and Employer Brand Management, Corporate Transformation Architecture, Administrative Affairs, Corporate Information Management Systems functions are included in the "Business Support Department" to find and train a qualified workforce in line with our company's corporate goals and strategies, and to employ these talents to create a happy and high-performing employee in line with the company culture. It designs all its applications with the aim of living the experience. While designing our employee experience applications as the Business Support Department, we defined our current and potential employees as "users" interacting with the Business Support Department applications. At every step of the project, we redesign the processes with the "User Experience (UX)" perspective. Company culture, recruitment, internal communication, employee motivation, employee experience and employer brand management, training, reward and wage management, performance development and talent management... At this point, we are the solution and strategy partner of all departments.

The basis of our corporate culture is the values we create together with our employees in line with our vision and mission. Working with talents in line with company values, raising voluntary value ambassadors for the dissemination of culture and values, and the happiness of our employees are among our company priorities.

"In line with our vision of "creating happiness by bringing people together with their dreams", we build environments where employees can work with high motivation. With our employee value proposition "You are the owner", in which we place our employees at the center of all our human resources strategy by saying to our colleagues, "You are a part of the realized successes, goals, you are the owner", we say to them, "You are the owner of your future, success, values and life". Thus, we reshape all our processes together with our employees, and reinterpret our values and corporate culture.

In line with these values, our employee experience processes are designed with the "Positive Psychology" methodology. Our core competencies have been determined in line with company values, and our performance system, which we call Rota, has been designed to measure these values.

3. How do employees participate in employee experience management?

Company A: The Employee Experience Department, which has become a department that acts with the logic of customer service, uses a ticket system in order to follow metrics and SLA (service level agreement) in communication with employees. Creates a ticket in the system regarding the employee question/problem, and this ticket goes before the Employee Experience officer. Requests/experiences from employees are evaluated at the employee council meeting, which meets every two weeks. When each ticket is closed, a survey is sent to the employee and he is asked to evaluate the service he received on that ticket. After the activities carried out in the company, it is tried to learn the positive and negative thoughts of the employees about the activity through the survey.

Engaging in the employee experience happens through practice teams and employee councils.

Company B: Information and two-way communication (recognition, appreciation, acknowledgment, feedback, etc.) form the basis of our employee experience management culture. Communication and information channels used in our company are defined. Through these channels, our employees are free to express their ideas and feedback, whenever they want, in any format they want, within the framework of the rules of respect. We ensure the participation of employees in employee experience management easily, thanks to the open communication we maintain with employees.

4. What are your tools for monitoring and measuring the employee experience process?

Company A: We have two tools for this. The first is the employee satisfaction survey we conducted ourselves. The other is an annual independent survey conducted by Great Place to Work. For the last two years, we have been selected as the best company in Turkey in our category. We have received many awards, especially in the management of differences.

Company B: a) Face-to-face meetings, b) Instant feedback surveys, c) Periodic employee experience evaluation surveys (annual, monthly, etc.), d) Workshops, e) Focus group studies.

5. Do you have any observations about the contribution of employee experience management to the job performance of employees?

Company A: The most important indicator in this area is the decrease in our workforce turnover rates. We had a very high turnover rate before. The low turnover rate is a very important indicator in an industry where competitors are so aggressive in recruiting. We can say that there is a direct relationship between the increase in employee experience and company performance.

Company B: At Company A, we design every application we implement for our employees with the perspective of employee experience, with our corporate culture that focuses on "people" and "trust". By shaping all our processes together, we build environments where our employees can work happily with high motivation. Happy employees create more value. More innovative ideas, less error rate, etc... This is directly reflected in the business results. In this way, the company provides a sustainable competitive advantage by increasing its profitability. It also creates a strong employer brand for potential employees thanks to its happy employees. A strong employer brand also helps to attract and retain high potential talent.

6. What are the necessary conditions for the execution of the employee experience management process in an enterprise?

Company A: First of all, it is very important for the managers to internalize and support the application. The second condition is employee ownership. So you need to spread it on the base. It has to come from there. You need to talk to him. The things that are called "do this" from the top don't work very well in companies like us anymore.

Company B: Employee experience is a set of relationships and experiences that encompasses the entire company. In this sense, the employer brand promise should be determined in parallel with the company's mission, vision and strategy, and all employee experience practices should be designed with high participation of employees in a way that will serve the brand promise. Universal human values such as physical working conditions, ways of doing business, managerial climate of the company, internal communication culture, participation in decisions, supporting creativity and development, self-expression of individuals, internal social structures, reliability, team spirit, fairness, respect and pride. care and maintenance, etc. It is a multidimensional process.

V. Conclusion and Discussion

In this article, the concept of employee experience, which is one of the new topics in the human resources literature, is emphasized and the practices of two companies from the e-commerce sector are included. From the point of view of scientific literature, it cannot be said that enough data has yet been accumulated to state the impact of the employee experience approach on human resources. However, it is seen that the understanding of employee experience is adopted by businesses that use high technology and have the obligation to adapt quickly to change. Company A, one of the two companies where information is gathered through the interview method, has foreign capital, and human resources functions such as recruitment, remuneration and performance evaluation are carried out by the company's headquarters. The name of the human resources unit in company B was changed to the Business Support Department. Seven employees are employed in the department who are interested in employee experience.

Both businesses, in accordance with the framework determined in the theoretical study, try to monitor and understand the employee experience at every point where the person can have experience within the company, by handling it from the start-up phase. Company A stated that teams that bring together people from different titles are formed in every required field, that these teams prepare and manage their own budgets, and that there is an elected employee council within the company. The main task of this council is stated to be to evaluate the initiatives taken according to the employee satisfaction survey and the experiences from the employees. It has been emphasized that this working style is in line with the expectations of the Z generation. Company B stated that they redesigned all business processes in the company, focusing on the employee, from an employee experience perspective. The positive psychology method is used in the redesign of the processes. Informing the employees; A two-way communication system consisting of recognition-appreciation-acknowledgment and feedback stages is used. Employees can explain their experiences at every stage in accordance with the determined format.

Company A stated that they measure the effectiveness of the employee experience process with an employee satisfaction survey that is repeated twice a year and a survey they make once a year with an independent firm. Company B uses face-to-face interviews, instant feedback surveys, periodic employee experience surveys, workshops, and focus group work for this purpose.

Firm A showed that the employee experience application was reflected in the job performance as the most obvious criterion, which showed that the turnover rate was very low in a highly competitive environment. Company A stated that they observed a positive relationship between employee experience score increase and job performance. Company B states that they put the happiness of their employees at the center within the scope of employee experience, and that happy employees will create more added value with high motivation.

Company A stated that the two conditions for the success of the employee experience process are the support of the top management and the ownership of the employees. Company B stated that the success of employee experience implementation depends on the existence of a corporate culture that supports this purpose and the structuring of physical working conditions and business processes accordingly.

At the end of the study, the answers to the research questions were formed as follows:

- Practitioners start the concept of employee experience from the recruitment phase, as stated in the literature, and consider all processes and areas that the person touches during work.

- Two businesses implementing employee experience restructured their human resources function, starting with their names. Depending on the feedback received from the employee experience, businesses can make changes more rapidly in areas that concern employee satisfaction and happiness.
- Both companies interviewed aim to create an environment where employees are happy and restructure their business processes in line with the feedback they receive. Many studies have found a relationship between employee satisfaction and work engagement (Choudhury, Dutta, & Dutta, 2019; Cadmus, 2012; Rampersad, 2006). Therefore, it can be said that there is a direct relationship between employee engagement and employee experience.

The limitation of the study is that it was conducted with data from only two enterprises. It is not possible to generalize these findings, which are case studies, to the e-commerce sector. Other researchers may replicate similar research with data from at least five representative companies of the industry.

From the point of view of practitioners, employee experience is seen as a topic that HR professionals should put on their agenda due to employee happiness, the rapid change in business processes, and the different values of the new generations that join the working life.

Employee experience is a current issue in terms of human resources. Theoretical studies and field studies on the subject will determine whether this concept has a permanent value in terms of human resources.

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