

Unlocking the future of intelligent employee experiences



When did the workplace start to change? Was it during the pandemic, when working from home became our “new normal”? Was it in the 1970s, after Ray Tomlinson sent the first email? Or maybe it was 4000 years ago, when a poorly executed business transaction in the Mesopotamian city of Ur was immortalized on a clay tablet—the first recorded instance of “as per my previous email” in history.

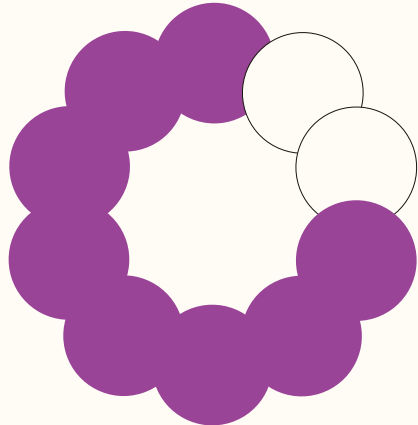
The more things change, the more they stay the same.

In our second annual Employee Experience Trends Report, we identified three trends that indicate how our workplaces are in the midst of monumental changes. New technology and economic changes in recent years have transformed the way we work, both experientially with distributed workforces, and materially, with the tools we use to actually get work done.

There’s a reason why employee experience is top of mind for leaders this year: an overwhelming majority agree that better employee experience and service – and the myriad factors that go into creating those experiences – drive better business outcomes, like customer retention and higher workplace productivity. But fluctuating economic conditions and the vast adoption of AI are changing the way leaders think about employee experience.

Our first trend centers on AI-augmented workforces, and how over the last year, artificial intelligence went from a curious novelty to becoming a widespread, tangible means of creating better, more efficient workplaces. And while the benefits of AI are clearer in some sectors – like AI customer service agents – in other spaces we are only beginning to see its effect.

In our second trend, flexible work scenarios continue to reign supreme while IT and HR Leaders grapple with the surge of applications used to keep workplaces together, demonstrating a need for secure AI and adaptable tools. In our third trend, we see how workplaces are going all-in on data to inform decision making. Amidst rapid technological changes, businesses need better, flexible tools to navigate new workplace paradigms, understanding that fostering great employee experiences can give them the upper hand in today’s ultra-competitive landscape.



83%
**of respondents agree that
employee experience is a
top priority**



Trend 1

IT and HR Leaders are focused on building an AI-augmented workforce

Teams are enhancing employee service and support with AI – and the data shows they feel good about it.

Practical, real-world AI solutions are everywhere. The question is no longer “when?”, but “how?”. Today, we’re seeing businesses use intelligent tools to bolster their employees to innovate, personalize employee service experiences, and create new efficiencies.

The customer journey is a familiar framework to most people in business – and one that has become much more complicated as new tech introduces new touchpoints. The same can be said for the employee journey. Defining moments, like onboarding or interactions with IT, look totally different in the era of flexible, distributed work than they did a decade ago.

It’s more common to hire and onboard new employees totally remotely – a now widespread practice that was, until recently, totally uncommon. Now, IT and HR Leaders are leveraging AI-powered tools, both in training and in workflows, with nearly 40% indicating that they have many AI tools on offer while 35% say they’re planning to expand their offerings.

What does this look like on the ground? Well, over a third of respondents say they’re using AI to personalize support experiences for their employees, changing the way they interact with internal services like IT and HR. And to equip employees with the right skill set for these new ways of working, the same amount report that they’ve invested in AI-based training, indicating a strong trend towards the normalization of AI.

IT and HR Leaders see three key benefits from AI in the workplace

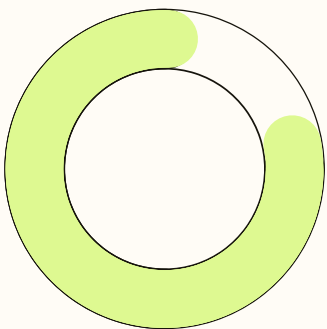
With AI already transforming the workplace, IT and HR Leaders noted certain benefits that align with the goal of enhancing employee service and support. Nearly half of the respondents indicated that faster data processing and increased productivity were significant factors in AI adoption.

But where leaders see the potential, employees are already seeing the benefits: 83% of respondents cited AI's capacity for decision making and increased efficiency as a major highlight, with nearly 80% noting that the quality of their work has actually improved due to AI capabilities.

Also notable is the way that AI is shifting expectations. After a decade of persistent digital transformation and the recent meteoric rise of

AI, employees' expectations are shaping themselves around the swift, high-quality service experiences they've come to expect from their favorite brands.

If a customer doesn't want to repeat themselves while interacting with a brand, why would your employee? If a boring, repetitive task can be automated or improved with AI, doing so will allow the employee to focus on more meaningful, engaging, and high-value work. And there's a business case for increased efficiency: 83% of respondents say they are now able to provide data-driven insights faster, allowing them to make better business decisions.



83%
of IT and HR Leaders agree that AI tools provide employees with data-driven insights for better decision-making

How do IT and HR Leaders feel about AI?

81% agree that AI enables employees to handle complex tasks more effectively

79% agree that AI capabilities enhance the quality of work performed by employees

76% agree that AI tools enable employees to take on new responsibilities that were previously impractical



Tesco uses Zendesk to meet the needs of their 300,000 employees. With a globally distributed footprint, Zendesk is the flexible and scalable solution they need to manage high volumes of tickets and complex use-cases – quickly, painlessly, and cost-effectively. To stay on top of ticket volume, they're looking to advanced AI features like enhanced ticket routing with intelligent triage to support agent efficiency and get the most out of self-service.

“We’re constantly striving to improve the experience our colleagues have when they need help with something, and Zendesk is a big part of that. Delivering a quality experience is very much a top priority.”

Adam Bruce
Head of Product, Service Desk,
Help & Automation at Tesco





Trend 2

IT and HR Leaders are pushing for more adaptability and customization to meet rising expectations

“That’s how we’ve always done it,” is an attitude that doesn’t work for today’s workforce, who are adaptable and used to change. They’ve seen the way that dramatic shifts can happen overnight. In order to stay abreast of changes, they expect the tools they use to be as flexible and adaptable as they are.

For IT and HR Leaders, this poses a challenge. There’s a difficult balance between maintaining team cohesion, flexible working arrangements, and customizable tools. According to our research, some IT and HR Leaders struggle with flexibility in the workplace, citing both concerns with their ability to accurately measure productivity and their ability to maintain cohesive team culture as reasons why. And the tools they use at work need to meet this need,

allowing them to customize solutions for unique business needs. Today’s workplace tools need to adapt to them. It goes to show that flexible doesn’t necessarily mean effortless.

Despite concerns, IT and HR Leaders overwhelmingly agree that better employee experience – and flexible work experiences – are better for the bottom line. 87% agree that flexible schedules are actually crucial to enhancing productivity, which is good news for employees whose workdays are constructed around things like childcare or appointments. Work-life balance is highly regarded by IT and HR Leaders, with 84% agreeing that the ability to customize work location is a key contributor.

To ensure organizational flexibility among a distributed workforce, it's crucial to invest in tools that are scalable, adaptable, and customizable. Self-service tools allow internal teams flexibility when interacting with their colleagues: Frequent requests can be automated or streamlined with AI, and complex or sensitive interactions can be handled by the right people securely. 83% of respondents say that their organization has invested in HR platforms to facilitate employee self-service, freeing up time for their teams to focus on high-value tasks by deflecting common questions. And these tools have a direct correlation with ESAT, with 80% of respondents agreeing that productivity and job satisfaction significantly improved due to enhanced self-service tools.

Data security and privacy concerns are increasing as teams seek to deliver on these flexible and distributed work expectations.

Employee data and communications contain highly sensitive information, and the use of AI in employee interactions rightfully raises questions about its safety. Security and performance are top concerns for businesses with distributed workforces. Remote and hybrid work models have heightened the need for robust security measures to protect sensitive data and ensure safe online interactions.

Nearly 40% of businesses surveyed emphasize the challenge of maintaining data security and protecting sensitive information in remote work environments, underscoring the critical need for robust cybersecurity measures.

Only 36% of organizations say they are focused on addressing data privacy and security challenges associated with the use of AI, highlighting the need for greater safeguards around data.

Catering to rising demands for flexibility and self-service, teams are seeking out EX tools that match the ease and adaptability of consumer-facing applications



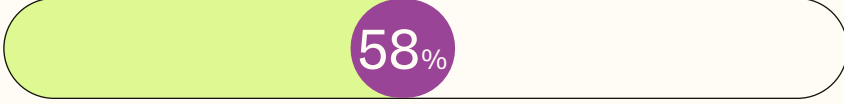
81% agree that implementing self-service tools leads to a significant increase in employee satisfaction



80% agree that their company could improve its employee experience



71% agree that the level of service they receive as a customer is better than the level of service they receive as an employee



58% agree that software related to their employee experience is dated and difficult to use



Fender is using Zendesk to communicate across teams. For example, the Sales and Operations department uses Zendesk to communicate when setting up prices and new deals, so all the history of those conversations can be tracked back, which keeps everybody in the loop and helps with future planning.

By keeping all of these conversation streams within Zendesk that span B2B, B2C, and internal channels, Fender has a central knowledge base that keeps everyone up to date on progress.

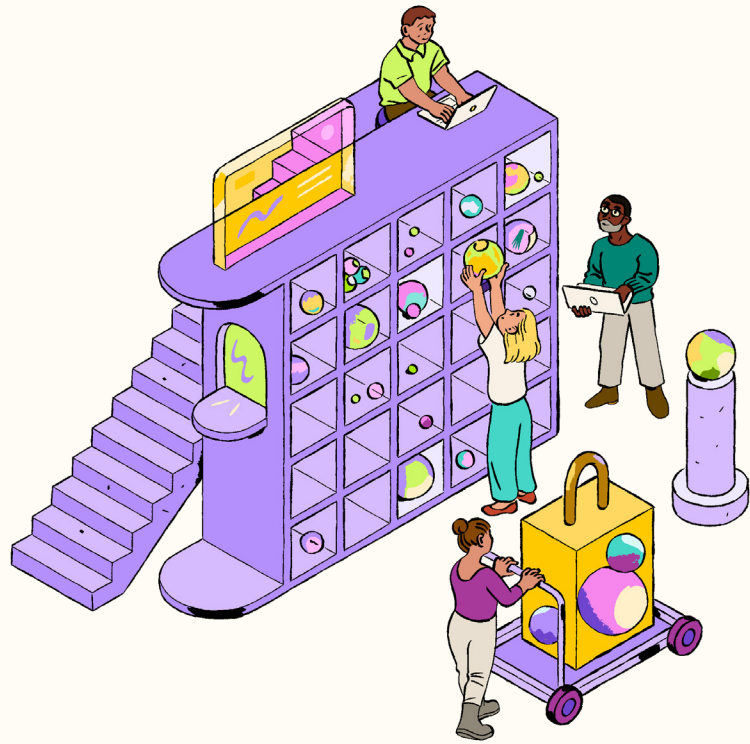
“At this point, we’re looking around to find people to pull into Zendesk so that we can make it even more efficient. We are just trying to get as many different departments into Zendesk as we can.”

Darren Antram
Director of Sales Operations, Fender

The need for enhanced IT support and team collaboration is vital for distributed workforces. Long gone are the days most people come face-to-face with their IT departments. Many employees are hired and onboarded remotely, necessitating the need for IT teams to be agile. 37% of respondents stressed the importance of enhancing remote IT support capabilities to swiftly address software-related issues to ensure smooth operation and minimal downtime.

Moreover, 36% of businesses acknowledge the difficulty in facilitating team cohesion and collaboration in distributed work environments, indicating a need for solutions that foster effective teamwork and communication.

That doesn’t mean flexibility is going away, probably owing to the fact that most employees strongly prefer remote work – 77% of respondents agree that their organizations have clear strategic plans to implement flexible work arrangements and decision-making processes in their operations.



Trend 3

IT and HR Leaders are embracing evolved data-driven strategies to drive the business

In recognizing EX's pivotal role in business success, leaders are now adopting new and evolved data-driven strategies to inform EX and business decisions. There is a demonstrable need for new data measurement capabilities in order to navigate fluctuations in flexibility and AI adoption, to ensure enhanced productivity, employee satisfaction, and foster a healthy corporate culture.

While flexible workplace arrangements remain popular, 60% of respondents agree that remote work has made it difficult to maintain the same level of productivity as pre-pandemic times, while 66% attest to the difficulty of monitoring and evaluating performance of their remote employees. Underscoring the need for change, businesses are seeking out EX solutions with data at their core. Of course, not all tools are created equal. 24%

of respondents identify challenges like limited integration with other systems or inadequate data reporting, highlighting the necessity for tools and solutions that integrate seamlessly into existing tech stacks.

A unifying pattern among respondents was the importance of having the right data at hand to make informed decisions that align with both financial constraints and strategic objectives. Troubling economic conditions led 35% of respondents noting an increased focus on cost-efficient technologies, highlighting the role of analytics in identifying areas to improve operational efficiency without compromising employee experience. There is a noticeable pivot towards solutions that offer deeper insights into employee



Monese adopted Zendesk AI for customer service, but the solution is no longer being used solely as a customer service tool and has been adopted seamlessly in other operational departments. This means complex customer queries—such as when the AI detects phrases that suggest fraud or money laundering—can be passed over to the relevant team who can work within Zendesk to solve the problem.

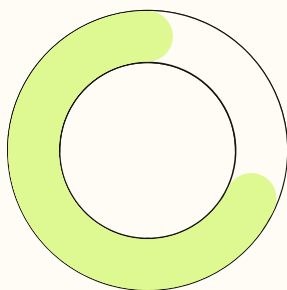
“Ops used to see Zendesk as a tool to send customers emails. But now they realize it helps manage influxes of work,” says Wright, who points to Zendesk for its reporting functionality, too. “When operations were struggling to find data, the customer services team had those because of Zendesk.”

Daniel Wright
VP of Customer Service at Monese

engagement, satisfaction and productivity, with 46% of respondents citing a strategic emphasis on implementing new tools and tech. These tools likely consist of analytic platforms that enable the measurement of EX metrics, providing a data-driven foundation for continuous improvement. 33% of respondents report that AI-driven data analytics platforms are at the forefront of this initiative, enabling EX teams to extract meaningful insights on employee performance and engagement.

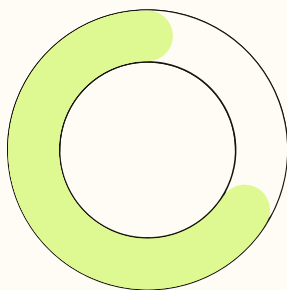
These tools not only automate routine tasks but also offer predictive analytics to forecast future trends in employee behavior and satisfaction, thereby informing strategic decisions. For 84% of respondents, EX is a critical business priority, with an equal amount seeing it as a key competitive differentiator, especially when it comes to retaining top talent.

Teams are looking for EX data to help address the following challenges:



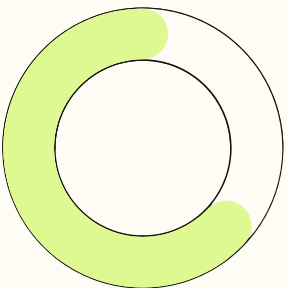
66%

agree that they have difficulty monitoring and evaluating the performance of their remote employees



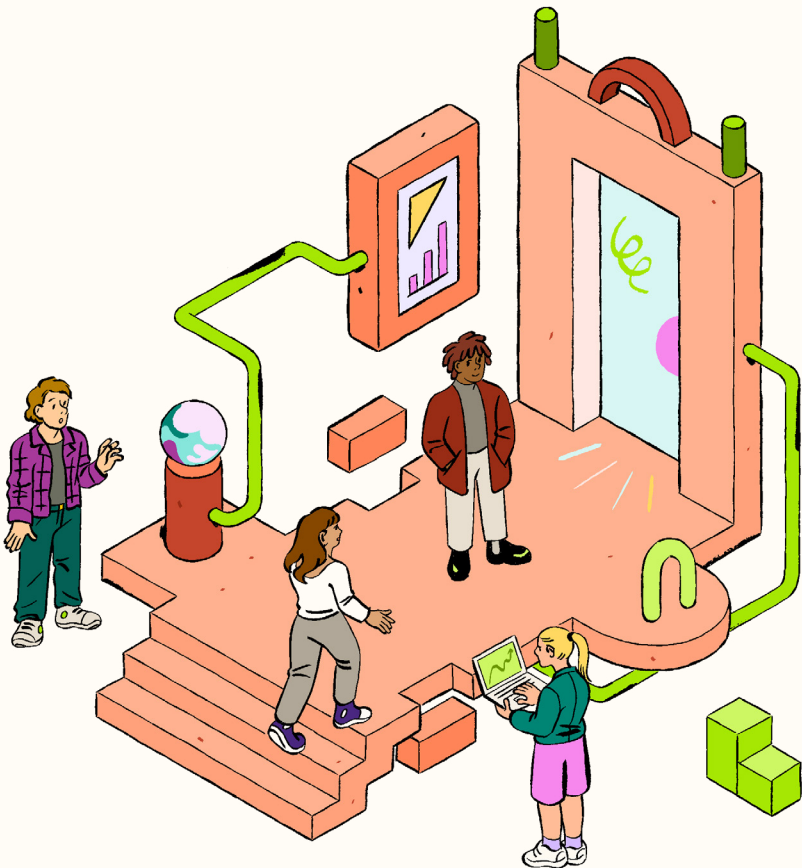
63%

agree that communication barriers are a significant challenge when managing their remote workforce



60%

agree that remote work has made it difficult to maintain the same level of productivity as pre-pandemic times



Closing words

The three trends in our second annual EX Trends Report are not merely responses to current challenges, but are actively shaping a new paradigm where employee satisfaction and business outcomes are intrinsically linked – a link that EX decision-makers simply cannot ignore.

For IT and HR Leaders, better business outcomes hinge on the future of work, which is itself reliant on the successful and secure integration of AI, flexible employee service experiences, and data-driven decisions.

It's no wonder that IT and HR Leaders see such a strong link between the bottom line and employee experience. The workforce has changed for the better: It is highly skilled and adaptable to great change. From the widespread shift to remote and hybrid workplaces to the rapid proliferation of AI in the workplace, employee experience is more sophisticated than ever before.

Here at Zendesk, we're ready to guide you through these immense changes. Over the course of 2024 and beyond, we'll be providing additional insights and best practices to create amazing AI-powered employee service experiences.

Methodology

We surveyed more than 800 employee experience leaders that primarily included decision makers in IT and HR, from 17 countries, and organizations ranging from small business to enterprise during July and August 2023.

Countries surveyed include Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, Thailand, United Kingdom, and United States.



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Zendesk is helping
businesses unlock the
future of intelligent EX.**

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