

A black and white photograph of a man with a beard and short hair, looking directly at the camera. In the background, a whiteboard is visible with some handwritten text and diagrams, including the letters 'S.A' and a circular diagram with lines radiating from it.

A TRANSFORMATION BUSINESS CASE THAT WRITES ITSELF

OPINION PIECE



Improved productivity, reduced employee attrition rates and an empowered workforce committed to your customers. With business outcomes like these, it's no wonder that providing a heightened employee experience is now a strategic imperative.

In the battle for talent, HR leaders and the wider business have two clear employee priorities. These are firstly, to provide people with a better experience in the workplace, or risk them moving to other employers; and second, to do everything possible to attract the talent needed to deliver strategic objectives - and then retain that talent for as long as possible.

The ability to achieve these priorities has user-centric employee and workplace services at its core. And delivering re-designed services requires new thinking, new technology, and transformed (automated) processes.

I have written on this subject before and this is the third in a series of opinion pieces on workplace transformation and employee experience. The first ("Putting 'human' back into Human Resources") looked at what it takes to capture, analyse, interpret and use data to drive a better employee experience. The second ("A transformation business case that writes itself") discussed the need for HR to work with IT to 'create an HR service fit for a digital future'. Now I want to look at this topic from a more commercial perspective and consider the link between reengineered processes and the business/experience outcomes.

Engaging with Generation Me

This commercial perspective looks at what the ability to engage seamlessly with Generation Me in the workplace means for a company's productivity, competitiveness and long-term success. Firstly, however, what or who is Generation Me? Digital has created a new workforce, one that is always connected and expects to operate at work just as easily as it does at home. This is Generation Me, for whom being able to access business and HR services through the channel of their choice, from anywhere, at any time, is integral to their experience at work.

In the Generation Me workplace, business leaders work together to understand the commercial impact of transforming the employee experience. And I am a firm believer that good HR and business processes – underpinned by the right enabling technologies – are required to differentiate one organisation from the next. For example:

- Managers able to speed up their on-boarding of talent with the use of robotic process automation (RPA) will spend less time chasing up resourcing approvals and more time both managing their teams and getting new joiners embedded in the business. Automatic updates ensure that new joiners aren't sitting around waiting for the kit they need to get started. Instead they are quickly productive with everything in place from day one, enhancing the employee experience
- An employee who can easily engage with their employer via simple, standardised processes, or use self-service channels to manage basic requirements, will feel more empowered and engaged with the business

- HR managers freed up by RPA taking over labour-intensive tasks, or robots (chatbots) handling simple queries, can play a more strategic role in the business, supporting managers and coaching and managing talent and succession through the organisation
- A process by which an automated artificial intelligence (AI) tool checks a leave request against a team's booked leave so that the manager's approval isn't required will give an almost real-time response to the employee. This enables employees to better manage their workplace experience, leaving them feeling valued and empowered

These examples are all about the employee experience and each one has a tangible business impact. In the first instance, managers spending less time on administrative tasks and more on nurturing their teams will be better equipped to retain good talent. In the second instance, a happy, empowered employee is a more productive employee. This, in turn, has a knock-on effect on the wider customer experience. And here, I am going to quote Sopra Steria's Engaging Generation Me brochure, which states: "Crucially, the workplace that empowers its people with real-time data services, intuitive easy-to-access employee services and automated self-help will be better placed to achieve broader strategic customer experience goals."

There is a further, and fundamental, benefit of greater automation. By freeing up managers and employees from manual, time intensive back office tasks, they can focus on their real job and do it even better – after all, no business really wants to pay productive employees to fill in resource or holiday requests.



Ditch the duvet

There is also a real bottom line impact in the decreased attrition rates achieved by making processes easier to engage with and use. People struggling to get things done, or simply feeling frustrated at the level of process and bureaucratic hoops they have to jump through, aren't motivated to get out of bed. The result? They'll take a duvet day. I believe that by using automation, smart tech and AI, it's possible to help smooth the flow of processes and remove unnecessary manual activity, making people happy to come into work. This reduces short-term absence and the subsequent need to plug in agency staff, pay overtime, or let customer engagement suffer.

An oft-heard complaint, of course, is that all of this takes investment. Yes, I agree, it does. But the business case is clearly writing itself in terms of a better employee experience, improved productivity, reduced absenteeism, and more employee enthusiasm for focusing on the end customer. And the longer you can retain talented employees, the better for your bottom line. One estimate suggests that UK organisations alone are losing £340bn

from employee attrition. This is due to the costs accrued by search, reviews, screening, interviews, offers, negotiation, on-boarding, co-worker networking and the inevitable learning curve.

That's why HR, in partnership with business, finance and technology leaders, must continue this journey of transformation. One that moves employee services and business processes from being unfit for the digital age, to more user-centric processes and intuitive technology at every stage of the employee lifecycle. A good starting point is to look for what might be deemed low-hanging fruit, those existing assets that can be leveraged to make a big transformational impact, without necessarily costing the earth to achieve. For example, providing mobile access to an online reporting capability, such as employee expenses, could be all that's needed to quickly fix an ongoing employee frustration. Or by adding a digital tool on top of an existing process, you might transform a laborious admin task, quickly and at relatively low risk.

An Apple-like experience

HR must build a picture of what it should look like in today's increasingly digital workplace. What will it take for HR to become as intuitive as picking up a new Apple device? Let me clarify this by asking 'when was the last time you had to even look at the instructions for an Apple device, compared with how often you have to double-check employee processes?'

One element of this 'what it takes' is data and analytics. In the first of my three opinion pieces in this series, I used the phrase 'the new black gold' to describe data and its value in shaping a great employee experience. This value is part of the business case for investing in new data and analytics capabilities and HR must work with those in the business who understand the new technologies in this area. It is important to recognise what it will take to get the most out of your structured and unstructured data to support your future workforce management.

For example, do you have a data and analytics team able to use artificial intelligence (AI) and predictive analytics to allow the business to prepare for peaks and troughs of employee activities? This could support forward planning and enable intervention before challenges become issues for the business, such as spotting patterns of absence and identifying those who need extra support. Or it might inform you of the impact of travel challenges, enabling you to send out weather-hazard alerts to a mobile workforce, perhaps suggesting they book hotels, or avoid travelling where the weather is likely to cause real problems.

The start of the journey for the digital workplace

With the right digital capabilities, it also becomes possible to recognise, monitor and predict the external factors that may influence how contented your workforce is, such as data captured from glass-door reviews, salary surveys, and competitor activity. While it is undoubtedly still early days in terms of what is being achieved with new digital workplace technologies, I am excited at the potential for predictive analytics in transforming employee services.

Here, I am going to return to the earlier weather example because, as I write this, it's snowing outside. I know that Sopra Steria's analytics platform (see below) can predict the level of additional bandwidth and resilience needed in our VPN network to ensure it supports the higher than usual

traffic due to people working from home. In being able to forecast this ahead of time, and being alerted to the requirement, our teams can ensure the network is ready to enable people to work - from anywhere. Without this advance knowledge, the sudden increase in remote users could slow the network and leave people unable to work from home efficiently. And let's not forget the 2017 Management Today survey in partnership with Sopra Steria that found greater flexibility in working and career development were deemed most likely to enhance employee experience.

Making data work for better business outcomes

Thus, by being able to correlate different types of data – hours worked, the weather, absence rates, etc. – we can gather a picture of the things that have the most impact on rates of employee absence or reduced productivity. Data truly is ‘the new black gold’ and, with the simple snowy weather example above, we can see the correlation between HR, IT and business outcomes.

Sopra Steria’s advanced analytics platform is already proving its worth in this context. It utilises sophisticated data science models

to help our clients predict future outcomes, rather than just dwelling on historical “rear-view mirror” analytics and reporting. At the core of our solution is an advanced data science engine, which uses industrial-strength mathematical and statistical models to identify patterns and trends within – and across – data sets

This analytics platform sits alongside our virtual HR Assistant, speech activated applications and robotics knowhow to form a set of industry-leading capabilities focused on improving the employee experience.

Collaborating for successful change

It is clear that funds will need to be allocated to the enabling technologies and process automation I’ve been talking about. That’s why HR must collaborate with both finance and IT on this journey, as well as with business stakeholders.

Everyone needs to understand what’s required from a technology perspective, as well as the commercial outcomes of investing in new capabilities. For example, HR and IT might know that the deployment of robotics, automation and process improvement can reduce HR Back Office administration by 50% or more, but does your finance team know this? It is all part of the stakeholder plan and overarching business case.

And what if the business is not be ready to rip and replace legacy IT and move to a new cloud-based platform? There still needs to be a conversation around what has to be done right now as the competition for skills increases and employee expectations grow. Discuss what investment is needed in the workforce to ensure that your processes fit employees’ current needs and continue to support them into the future.

It is possible to make changes without getting rid of existing investments (see ‘DiAL up your employee services transformation’). Thus, the capital outlay can be contained within any budgetary constraints the finance function must work within.

A business case built on tangible outcomes

Crucially, this is a conversation about business outcomes. How HR delivers and enables employee and workplace services in today's digital workplace has a direct impact on your organisation's bottom line. By adapting your processes and introducing new enabling technologies, you will provide the differentiating employee experience that keeps your business competitive and profitable. It's a simple premise and a sound business case.

To help get you there, Sopra Steria's consulting framework, accelerators and digital tools combine to help you rapidly build a business case for driving an improved employee experience.

DiAL up your employee services transformation

Sopra Steria's Engaging Generation Me solutions allow clients to transform at their own pace. That's because they are built to integrate with any HCM modern cloud applications and legacy systems using our DiAL (Digital Abstraction Layer) toolset. This extends the life of existing assets during digitalisation programmes by allowing us to place digital front-end tools on top of behind-the-scenes legacy IT. Enabling transformation without big change to complex, mission-critical business systems in this way, is a cost-, time- and risk- reducing strategy.

We can also monitor the whole programme with our real-time employee engagement analytics platform Engage Now that pulls in a variety of structured, unstructured and Natural Language Processing data sources.



About Sopra Steria

Sopra Steria, European leader in digital transformation, provides one of the most comprehensive portfolios of end to end service offerings in the market: Consulting, Systems Integration, Software Development and Business Process Services. Sopra Steria is trusted by leading private and public organisations to deliver successful transformation programmes that address their most complex and critical business challenges. Combining high quality and performance services, added-value and innovation, Sopra Steria enables its clients to make the best use of information technology.

Contact me to find out more about how you could redefine the user experience for a more productive, more mobile, more connected workplace.

Claudia Quinton

Head of Workplace Transformation

Phone: +44 (0) 370 600 4466

Email: claudia.quinton@ext.soprasteria.com

Visit: www.soprasteria.co.uk/GenerationMe



www.soprasteria.co.uk

SOPRA STERIA
Three Cherry Trees Lane, Hemel Hempstead, HP2 7AH
+44 (0)370 600 4466 - info.uk@soprasteria.com

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