

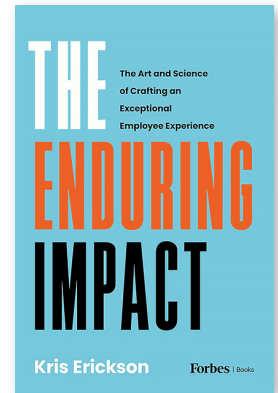


# Executive Book Summaries<sup>®</sup>

## The Enduring Impact

The Art and Science of Crafting an Exceptional Employee Experience

by **Kris Erickson**



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### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Many organizations struggle to attract, engage, and retain talent in a workplace where employees expect more than compensation and benefits. Leaders often invest in programs and perks, yet still face disengagement, turnover, and cultures that feel transactional rather than purposeful. The challenge is not effort but focus: too many initiatives address symptoms instead of the underlying experiences that shape how employees feel, perform, and commit over time.

*The Enduring Impact: The Art and Science of Crafting an Exceptional Employee Experience* offers a practical, evidence-based way to address this problem by reframing employee experience as a strategic discipline. The book provides leaders with a clear framework for designing everyday workplace experiences that foster trust, purpose, and sustained engagement. Rather than relying on incentives, it shows how to turn employee feedback into actionable insight, align individual roles with organizational mission, and create consistent moments that reinforce fulfillment and performance.

Written by Kris Erickson, cofounder of Workforce Science Associates, the book draws on more than 30 years of research and one of the world's largest employee feedback databases. Erickson introduces the six tenets as a blueprint for building cultures where people thrive. Blending data, real-world examples, and practical guidance, *The Enduring Impact* positions employee experience as a measurable driver of long-term organizational success.

### IN THIS EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARY

- Learn how to design employee experiences that drive engagement and retention
- Understand how the six tenets translate research into daily leadership practices
- Find out how to align purpose, culture, and performance across teams
- Examine how fulfillment-driven leadership strengthens long-term business outcomes

### Introduction

As the modern workforce evolves, employees are searching for more than just a paycheck. They are looking for purpose, fulfillment, and a connection to something larger than themselves. For leaders, this shift presents both a challenge and a tremendous opportunity: How do you create an experience that not only attracts top talent but also retains and engages them for the long term?

Each year, Workforce Science Associates (WSA), a consulting firm built on one of the world's largest databases of employee survey responses, analyzes feedback from tens of millions of employees across nearly two hundred countries and every major industry. This vast collection of data provides unparalleled insight into the ever-changing landscape of work and what employees truly value.

At the heart of it all is the concept of fulfillment: the idea that true engagement stems not from short-term perks or surface-level initiatives but from creating environments where employees experience lasting satisfaction and purpose. Enduring fulfillment is about aligning organizational goals with the personal aspirations of employees, fostering a workplace where people can develop and thrive, not just as professionals but as individuals.

### WSA's Six Tenets of the Employee Experience

WSA's six tenets of the employee experience represent the essential elements that, when managed effectively, lead to a workforce that is not only productive but also deeply engaged and fulfilled. The six tenets are as follows:

1. **Trust:** This is the foundation of any strong relationship. Trust between employees and leadership is the bedrock of engagement.
2. **Mission:** Employees need to feel connected to the organization's purpose and direction. When they understand their role in the larger mission, their work becomes more meaningful.
3. **Communication:** Open, honest, and two-way communication ensures that employees are informed, heard, and aligned with the organization's goals.
4. **Appreciation:** Acknowledging and celebrating employees' contributions makes them feel valued and respected within the organization.
5. **Support:** Feeling supported helps employees feel connected to their peers and the organization as a whole, fostering a collaborative and supportive environment.

6. **Growth:** Providing employees with opportunities to learn, grow, and advance is crucial for maintaining their engagement and motivation.

By focusing on the six tenets of the employee experience, leaders will learn how to build workplaces where trust is strong, communication is open, and everyone feels valued and connected to a larger mission.

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#### CHAPTER 1

### The Art and Science of Exceptional Experiences

It's safe to assume we all know and have felt what an exceptional experience looks like. And when it happens, the emotional response is a spark that connects you to a brand, driving repeat business over time. As leaders, regardless of the industry you're in, you want employees to create a memorable experience for your customers. The question is how you can replicate experiences like these consistently and at scale.

Creating positive customer experiences must come from the employees themselves. In other words, it is not the experience that you want to replicate at scale; rather, it is the desire in each of your employees to create them.

The root of positive intent and motivation by employees is a concept called *employee engagement*, which is the most empirically researched employee attitude in the field of industrial-organizational psychology and business management. Engagement essentially translates to capturing the heart of the employee. Broadly defined, it's the way in which leaders motivate employees to be more committed, conscientious, and proud of the organization they work for.

#### Boosting Engagement

As a concept grounded in science and research, engagement is a composite measure of satisfaction, intent to stay, advocacy, and pride in the organization.

If you can get the critical aspects of their overall experience at work right, you will be rewarded with higher levels of engagement. That's why it is so important for you to understand what is truly important to employees versus all the merely interesting data that often surfaces in employee feedback.

If you're focused on issues that are unimportant, three things tend to happen:

- Your employees are more than likely going to stop giving you feedback.

True engagement stems not from short-term perks or surface-level initiatives but from creating environments where employees experience lasting satisfaction and purpose. ”

- They will be convinced you don't care enough to listen to what they have to say.
- Supervisors and managers become frustrated because they are spending their time attempting to improve their employees' experience, yet engagement doesn't change, or worse, their experience declines.

Improving the employee experience starts by doing the things you know you can do right and well. If you do that, you earn the right to continue to ask for feedback from employees.

Employee engagement has a direct impact on many critical operational and financial employee and business-level metrics within an organization, especially those resulting from organizational efficiencies impacting gross profit margin, earnings before interest, tax, depreciation, and amortization (EBITDA), and normalized income.

What we know is that lesser-engaged employees just work less safely. They work less accurately. They're more likely to "phone it in," and the consequences are usually measurable.

### The Science of Exceptional Experiences

While art is about knowing *how* to create a great experience, science is about knowing *what* the experience should be. Our research has taught us that no matter where in the world you sit, no matter what industry you work in, and no matter your job role, there are six foundational experiences that continually emerge across organizations that have a substantial impact on the employer-employee relationship.

We refer to these six aspects of employee experience as tenets because they are timeless truths that have revealed themselves repeatedly over decades of research. These six tenets hold the core principles to unlocking an exceptional employee experience.

Ultimately, what matters most throughout our lives are the collections of experiences we have and the feelings their memories give us. These experiences matter. They follow us home after work. They stay with us. For anyone with a role to play in improving the employee experience, we are fortunate to have an opportunity to not only inspire great work but also, when done exceptionally, provide fulfillment that can endure a lifetime.

## CHAPTER 2

### Trust

Of course, leaders play a role in all experiences. But trust is an experience that cannot be created or given; it must be earned, which means that trust is an outcome measure. The very best leaders demonstrate competence, benevolence, and integrity. In doing so, they earn our trust.

Trust plays a key role in employee motivation and commitment. In an environment where trust is prevalent, employees feel a sense of security and belonging. This feeling translates into higher levels of motivation, greater commitment to the organization, and employees' willingness to go above and beyond in their respective roles.

### By the Numbers

- Employees who have confidence in their senior leaders' decisions are twelve times more inclined to fully trust them than those who don't.
- 88% of employees who believe senior leaders act in line with company values trust them and are fourteen times more likely to be fully engaged.
- Those who believe senior leadership shows that employees are key to the company's success are fifteen times more likely to be engaged.

### Building Trust

Building trust is a delicate process. The most prevalent and empirically supported model of trust is composed of ability (i.e., competence), benevolence, and integrity.

#### Competence

Competence is achieved through accountability and consistency. Leaders must take responsibility for failures as well as successes. This accountability fosters a culture in which team members feel safe to take risks, make mistakes, and learn from them, knowing that their leader will support them through the process.

#### Benevolence

Benevolence is about empathy and caring. It's about acknowledging the challenges faced by employees, both in and

out of the workplace, and providing support or flexibility when needed. Recognizing that each employee has a unique set of circumstances and needs is key in fostering a trusting and supportive work environment.

### Integrity

Integrity begins with transparency. Transparency in leadership is not a one-way street; it involves being receptive to feedback and ideas from the team. It means creating an environment with open dialogue, where team members feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions. Integrity also requires authenticity. Authenticity creates a foundation from which trust can flourish. It involves being transparent about the challenges and successes of the organization and being open about our own vulnerabilities and learning experiences.

### Challenges to Overcome

The thing with trust is that it takes a long time to earn but just a second to lose. Once lost, rebuilding that trust can feel like an insurmountable task. Trust and communication are always important, but even more so in the face of events that question the foundation of trust: those moments that test not only a company's resilience but also its very soul.

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## CHAPTER 3

### Mission

As leaders, one of our key responsibilities is to recognize and nurture the north star, the purpose behind the work, in our teams. This requires fostering an environment where employees feel safe to take risks and voice their opinions, so that they may grow from their experiences.

It also means being attuned to the individual journeys of our employees, understanding their motivations, and helping them align their personal visions with the company's goals. This alignment is crucial in building a workforce that is not only skilled and efficient but also resilient and adaptable.

This sense of mission, of being part of something bigger than ourselves, is a fundamental component of the employee experience. It drives engagement, productivity, and, ultimately, fulfillment both within and beyond the workplace.

### By the Numbers

- Employees who believe their company has an outstanding future are twenty-five times more likely to be engaged, while those who lack that confidence are a staggering seventy-five times more likely to be disengaged.

- 76% of engaged employees say their leadership team communicates a motivating vision of the future, while only 24% of engaged employees do not believe they do.
- 89% of employees who see a link between their work and the company's vision are fully engaged and are thirteen times more likely to be engaged.

### Instilling a Sense of Mission

The need for an organizational mission is driven, first and foremost, by the fact that people want to work for a cause, not a company.

Most people want to be excited about where they work and the direction of the organization. After all, the future of the organization is their future—at least, it could be. A lot of times, senior executives believe that simply talking about the corporate strategy is enough for people. But what employees really want to know is *why*.

We call this strategic alignment, which is an important component of mission. Strategic alignment is like a jigsaw puzzle. When it's understood, senior leaders can paint a picture of what the future looks like for the organization. Every single employee can pick up a puzzle piece and say, "This is me, and I know where I fit" and at the same time see how their piece is essential to the beautiful picture of the completed puzzle. When everyone is able to help put the puzzle together, everyone sees the picture clearly.

### The Role of Senior Leaders

Senior leaders often grapple with the challenge of effectively communicating the company's direction and purpose. Strategic alignment isn't just about setting goals; it's about creating an aspirational yet achievable picture of what an organization strives to become.

Creating strategic alignment requires a delicate balance between aspiration and realism. Employees are smart; they can detect when a vision is authentic and when it's merely lip service. An authentic vision resonates with the values and beliefs of the organization and its people. It's ambitious but grounded in reality.

### Challenges to Overcome

Inspiring a mission is not without its challenges. There are often difficulties in achieving consensus on the vision. Different departments and stakeholders sometimes have conflicting priorities and agendas, making it hard to present a unified front.

The very best leaders demonstrate competence, benevolence, and integrity—and in doing so, they earn our trust.

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Moreover, in companies that are either publicly traded or beholden to private equity, the pressure to meet financial objectives can sometimes overshadow the broader vision. This can lead to a short-sighted approach, where the focus is on immediate results rather than long-term, sustainable growth.

Leaders must be adept at navigating the diverse personalities and skill sets within their teams, ensuring that each member is engaged and contributing effectively. This often involves tailoring communication and management styles to suit different individuals, a skill that is crucial yet challenging to master.

#### CHAPTER 4

## Communication

It's not just *what* we communicate but *how* we communicate that shapes the employees' experience. Time and again, feedback from our employee surveys reveals that teams with high levels of engagement maintain open and honest communication. These teams don't just exchange information; they share ideas, challenges, and successes.

Effective communication extends beyond just the positives. Handling difficult conversations with empathy and respect is equally important. Whether it's addressing performance issues, organizational changes, or personal challenges, how these conversations are handled matters.

### By the Numbers

- Employees who feel their company supports open and honest two-way communication are sixteen times more likely to be fully engaged—92% of those who sense this openness report high engagement levels.
- Employees who feel that their ideas and suggestions count are eleven times more likely to be engaged than those who don't.
- Those who say they receive the information they need to do their jobs effectively are nine times more likely to be engaged than those who do not, while those who say they do not receive the information they need to do their jobs effectively are eighteen times more likely to be disengaged.

### Communicating Effectively

The art of communication is indeed a balancing act. On the one hand, there are essential components to effective communication that never change. And on the other hand, communicating effectively requires personalization.

Personalized communication is something that you have to practice. Who is your audience? How are they going to receive the information? Each of us has our own style and unique ways of processing information. Acknowledging and catering to these individual needs will not only improve communication but also deepen your connections.

Personalization also plays a significant role in navigating difficult conversations, such as providing constructive feedback or discussing sensitive issues. During these vulnerable moments, approaching the conversation with a deep understanding of the individual, their feelings, potential reactions, and the best way to convey the message, can have a significant impact on the outcome.

### The Five Rules of Communication

The reason communication is so tricky is that, while your approach must be individualized, there are some ground rules that should never be broken.

1. **Clarity and honesty.** In a crisis, people look to their leaders for direction and truth. Even when the news is not positive, clear and honest communication helps in building trust and setting realistic expectations.
2. **Timeliness.** Information can change rapidly. Delayed communication can lead to rumors and misinformation, exacerbating a situation. Quick and frequent updates, even to merely convey that more information will follow, are crucial in managing the narrative and keeping everyone aligned.
3. **Empathy.** Acknowledging fears and concerns, offering support, and being available for questions and discussions can go a long way. And as we prioritize empathy in our professional communications, it can become a skill ingrained in our behavior, positively impacting our interactions outside of work with family, friends, and even strangers.

4. **Consistency.** Mixed messages can create confusion and erode trust. Consistent messaging ensures that all leaders and managers within the organization are on the same page and is vital for effective communication.
5. **Listening.** Let's not forget the often overlooked skill of active listening. Active listening isn't just hearing what is being said but also requires a conscious effort to understand the underlying message and the emotions attached to it. Active and attentive listening helps ensure that communication is not just a transaction but a meaningful exchange.

### Challenges to Overcome

Establishing open and honest two-way communication isn't without its challenges. Research has found that an alarming four out of five Americans are stressed by poor office communication and that 17% of employees would recommend firing their CEO based on how the company communicates.

In a world where technology has made communication faster and more accessible, finding ways to connect personally and deeply can be tough. The meaning behind emails and texts can easily be lost in translation. It takes a concerted effort to ensure that communication retains its human touch, irrespective of the medium.

You may need to rethink your communication strategies, embrace technology, and find new ways to foster connection and engagement. As you move forward, remember that effective communication is not just about the message or the medium; it's about personalization, clarity, timeliness, empathy, consistency, and, above all else, being a really good and empathetic listener.

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#### CHAPTER 5

### Appreciation

I use the term appreciation, not recognition, as the concept of recognition is too broad. For example, when people hear "recognition," they sometimes think of years of service awards, the gold watch, or similar milestones. These are important, but they are not the crux of what drives a positive employee experience. Our experience surveys at WSA show that what truly drives appreciation is the feeling of being valued for the work you do and for who you are as a person.

This doesn't mean ignoring problems, especially in environments where safety and precision are crucial. However, focusing on positive reinforcement can lead to better results.

When people see that their good work is noticed and appreciated, they are more likely to continue performing well and even improve.

### By the Numbers

- 88% of employees who feel recognized for their hard work report being fully engaged at work. Employees who feel appreciated for their efforts are ten times more likely to be fully engaged than those who don't receive recognition.

### Showing Appreciation

Showing appreciation is about individualization. It's about the relationship I have with each person who directly reports to me. It's about making them feel valued, both for their contributions and as individuals. One size does not fit all. You can voice appreciation all day long, but if the appreciation given is not relevant or appropriate to the person receiving it, the words fall flat and can actually be counterproductive.

Appreciation is most effective when it's simple and personal. This might seem counterintuitive in a world where big gestures often get the most attention, but it's the small, sincere acts that can make a profound impact. Timing is also crucial when it comes to appreciation. Positive reinforcement is most effective when it's immediate and specific.

Effective appreciation is about being personal, consistent, and timely. It's not about the size of the gesture but the sincerity behind it. By understanding and implementing these fundamentals, leaders can foster a workplace where employees feel genuinely valued and motivated. This leads to higher engagement, better performance, and ultimately a more successful and fulfilling work environment.

### Challenges to Overcome

Appreciation isn't always straightforward. There are pitfalls to avoid and challenges to navigate.

When we don't make the effort to appreciate our employees, especially during significant periods in their lives, it can have unintended consequences and deeply personal. It's not just about the immediate inconvenience or hurt feelings; it's about the message it sends.

While pay and benefits are not primary motivators, they can become a major demotivator when the pay is inequitable or too low to make a living. In either case, it is critical to separate pay from appreciation; they are not the same thing.

People want to work for a cause, not just a company.

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## CHAPTER 6

### Support

Support is a fundamental and universal human need, deeply embedded in our social DNA. Understanding support in the context of the workplace is essential for creating environments where employees thrive, innovate, and contribute to their fullest potential.

Employees know they are supported when they feel accepted and valued, when they know they have a voice, and when they can see that their contributions matter.

#### By the Numbers

- Employees who feel part of a team are seven times more likely to be engaged compared to those who don't. Furthermore, 77% of employees who feel isolated from a team environment report low engagement levels.

#### Demonstrating Support

Creating a system of support can be achieved by implementing practical actions that allow every team member to feel integral to the organization. Let's distill this process into four key steps that not only enhance individual fulfillment but also drive the collective success of a team.

- **Acceptance:** Ensure that every person on the team is embraced with open arms and feels welcome and part of the group.
- **Appreciation:** In this context, "appreciation" means valuing each person for who they are and what they bring to the table and recognizing both their strengths and their limitations without trying to change them.
- **Contribution:** Encouraging employees to play to their strengths and find their "sweet spot" leads to a multiplicative effect on the team's performance. This means actively seeking out and creating opportunities for team members to shine in areas where they excel.
- **Fulfillment:** Individuals gain fulfillment when they know they are making a meaningful difference. It's the sense of satisfaction that arises from being part of something bigger than oneself.

It is important to note that creating an environment of mutual support is much harder in practice than it is in theory. Employees often find themselves interacting with coworkers they might not ever meet or get to know outside of work. While we benefit from the power of diverse thinking and perspectives, don't expect it will simply happen naturally.

Purposeful mutual support starts at the top, with senior leadership demonstrating the behaviors of acceptance, appreciation, and contribution. One of the best ways to reinforce these behaviors is to look for others who are modeling them and celebrate those individuals.

#### Challenges to Overcome

Fostering a sense of support can be exceptionally challenging. Despite the best efforts, 40% of people still say that they feel isolated at work.

One common challenge is overcoming unconscious biases that affect our understanding of other people. Our perceptions, and the lens through which we see the world, are based on our experiences. For some, it can be hard to look through a new lens in order to understand a different perspective.

Resistance to change can come from various levels within the organization, from leadership to frontline employees. Overcoming this resistance requires modeling the right behavior combined with clear communication, as described earlier.

## CHAPTER 7

### Growth

Growth and development are often used interchangeably, but they encompass different yet complementary aspects of personal and professional advancement. Growth is about increasing one's capacity and capability, often tied to acquiring new skills, knowledge, and experiences. Development is about evolving and maturing as a person, which includes honing one's strengths, gaining deeper self-awareness, and expanding one's potential. Together, they form the bedrock of a fulfilling and successful career.

When we think about growth, we often picture a linear trajectory: starting at one point and steadily moving upward.

However, real growth is often far more complex. It can be lateral or diagonal, and it may even take a step back before moving forward. True growth ultimately happens when we step outside of our comfort zone, take on new challenges, and learn from our experiences.

Development, in contrast, is more introspective. It involves a deep understanding of our strengths and weaknesses, our motivations, and our values. It's about becoming more self-aware and using that awareness to guide our decisions and actions.

### By the Numbers

- 92% of employees who believe their career goals can be met are fully engaged and are eighteen times more likely to be engaged than those who don't believe their career goals can be met.

### Fostering Growth and Development

In today's fast-paced business environment, companies that prioritize growth and development stand a better chance of thriving. This requires a fundamental shift in how managers view their employees and their potential. Rather than merely filling positions with individuals who can perform specific tasks, managers must focus on promoting, recruiting, and hiring individuals who demonstrate a strong work ethic and a desire to grow.

A practical way to uncover your employees' aspirations and strengths is through frequent feedback and check-ins. These check-ins don't have to be formal or time-consuming. Sometimes, a quick five-minute conversation can provide valuable insights and guidance.

Furthermore, managers should leverage these conversations to celebrate achievements, no matter how small they are. Recognizing and acknowledging progress boosts morale and motivates employees to continue striving for excellence.

Another practical but commonly overlooked approach is to involve your employees in conversations about their growth. Employee-driven development is an essential component of growth whereby employees are involved in mapping their own developmental journey.

### Challenges to Overcome

Fostering individualized growth is a multifaceted endeavor that often presents challenges. However, with a commitment to creating a supportive environment, these challenges can be effectively addressed.

One of the most common challenges is resistance among those around you. Some of your peers or leaders might be accustomed to a particular way of doing things and push back against necessary new initiatives aimed at promoting individualized growth and development. This resistance can stem from complacency, a lack of understanding of the benefits, or from the traditional mindset of "This is how we've always done things."

Resource limitations are also cited as a challenge to providing growth and development opportunities. This perceived obstacle is especially challenging in smaller organizations that lack larger HR departments with teams focused on learning and development and internal mobility.

Generational differences also pose unique challenges. If your team ranges from millennials to boomers, their aspirations and even their own definitions of growth and development can vary widely.

The key to addressing these challenges is to remember that fostering growth is not an HR responsibility or a senior leadership responsibility; it's *your* responsibility. You'll be surprised how effective modeling growth behaviors can be. Follow the practical steps of regular check-ins, involving employees in the mapping of their own growth journey, and celebrating the small wins by recognizing efforts toward personal and professional growth.

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### CONCLUSION

## The Enduring Impact

Employee experience requires more than measuring engagement or job performance; it's the intentional practice of creating an environment where employees can thrive both professionally and personally.

In reflecting on the enduring impact of our work, it's essential to recognize that fulfillment at work transcends the confines of the office and influences the quality of life beyond it. When employees find genuine fulfillment in their work, it positively impacts their personal lives, their families, their friends, and their communities.

Each of the six tenets of enduring experiences contributes to a holistic approach that impacts the employee experience, one that not only drives measurable business success but also offers enduring fulfillment for our employees. By focusing on these core tenets, organizations can create workplaces where employees are motivated, engaged, and deeply inspired to do their best work.

I hope to have given you proven, practical actions to guide you in orchestrating experiences that create enduring fulfillment in the lives of those with whom you work and live. You have the power to make these experiences meaningful, impactful, and consequential. Strive to create environments where everyone has the opportunity to thrive, grow, and find true fulfillment. In doing so, you will not only drive success for your organization but also have a meaningful impact in the lives of those around you.

The power of the six experiences truly has the opportunity to change the trajectory of people's lives, including yours. Thank you for joining me on this journey. Here's to creating workplaces where everyone can experience the profound joy and satisfaction that comes from truly fulfilling work.



**Kris Erickson** is cofounder and executive consultant at Workforce Science Associates, a global experience management consulting firm based in Lincoln, Nebraska. She helps organizations improve business performance through evidence-based employee experience strategies. With more than thirty years of experience, Erickson has partnered with Fortune 500 companies to design programs that motivate employees, strengthen engagement, and drive productivity. She previously held consulting roles at Kenexa, IBM, and Gallup, and served as vice president of human resources for a healthcare company. Drawing on behavioral science and research, she builds high-performance cultures that deliver lasting results for organizations and their people.

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