

joyous

Invisible Employees

Shining a light on your
deskless workforce



You can't be inclusive if you're exclusive

Everyone knows it's important to build a workplace where people aren't excluded on the grounds of race, age or gender. So we hire for diversity, and write policies detailing acceptable management practices and zero tolerance for discrimination.

But there are other signs your workplace might be throwing up invisible barriers. If you've got a distributed workforce but you never hear from the people who work in your stores, drive your trucks, clean your hotels or pour your concrete, then this book is for you.

Invisible employees are the workers who escape our attention. The ones who aren't sitting in front of a screen all day, who don't have access to the intranet, who can't read our emails and who probably couldn't name a member of our leadership team. Because they're out of sight, they're usually out of mind. And that's a real shame, because they have a lot to contribute.

It's an inclusivity issue but it isn't about demographics. It's about communication, access to information, and giving everyone the same opportunity to contribute: whether they're in your head office, their home office, or out in the field.



Desk-based employees aren't the only employees that matter. Front line, field, deskless and service staff make up the vast majority of workers worldwide – and they need attention too.

75%

of employees are
non-desk workers

2.7bn

people worldwide



Engaging invisible employees

We're all striving for an inclusive organizational culture. We want work to be a place where everyone feels heard, and valued, and everyone has the chance to contribute. But when we say 'everyone', do we really mean everyone?

All people are included, but some are more included than others

A retail chain has a lot of moving parts. There's head office, with HR and marketing and accounting staff. There are stores, with sales associates and security and inventory managers. There are warehouses, with stock handlers, forklift operators and truck drivers.

All these people make up the company, but when it comes to employee experience, it's not typically the truck drivers who get the most attention.

It's not unusual for large companies to consider office-based staff as *the* people that need to be engaged. Head offices have Friday drinks and team lunches, breakout spaces and lunchtime yoga. Workstation ergonomics are assessed. AC levels are monitored. Email and Slack are used for team communication and company updates. Even remote desk workers connect to their peers via Zoom or Teams during the day. Branch offices may get some of that love, warehouses very little. There might be a corkboard.

In-equal opportunities

It's not just the 'stuff'. Office staff have more access to the leadership team. They have more opportunities for training and team building. They're more likely to have HR contact that isn't a mandatory review or disciplinary meeting. Software and systems decisions are more likely to be made at C-level, so technology is more likely to suit desk-based workers. Even if they're remote, they're likely to receive support so they can continue to deliver to the level of their office-bound peers. And so, these more 'visible' employees get more attention, and tend to be more engaged as a result.

Two stats from Bain & Company really highlight the importance of visibility:

- Engagement (as measured by eNPS) falls with each level an employee is removed from the CEO: from 62% at the C-level to -5% 7 levels down.
- Service and production staff have the lowest levels of engagement: 6% vs 33% for management.

71% of non-desk employees are not actively engaged in their company, and only 22% feel connected to the organization's purpose. Clearly, we still have some work to do to bring these invisible employees into the fold.



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Exclusion by (HR software) design

Approximately 75% of all employees are non-desk employees, so implementing systems that require regular computer access risks excluding a lot of front line and behind the scenes staff. Ditto if people need email to log in to your system of choice – 83% of employees don't have a company email address.

While nobody's suggesting a return to paper-based systems, access and ease of use should be a consideration in all technology decisions. Mobile is one option for improving accessibility: 95% of people in the US and UK own a cellphone of some kind, and 94% of companies already use some kind of mobile solution. So even if people don't spend their days behind a desk, there's still technology you can use to reach – and engage – them.

Turn on the light switch

The less visible employees are to head office, the less engaged they're likely to be. Which is unfortunate, because they want to contribute and have a lot of useful information you might not get otherwise. Increasing visibility to all levels of the organization should be a priority: start by opening communication channels and giving all employees equal air time.

If you want to build an inclusive culture you need to include all employees in the conversations, not just the ones you see most often.



Bring everyone into the conversation

If you're not asking front line workers for their ideas on improving customer experience, you're really missing out.

When you want to know how customers feel and what aspects of customer experience you can improve, you ask them – most service companies use some form of Voice of the Customer or NPS survey.

It also makes sense to ask front-line employees what they see in their day to day work. Because these people work most closely with customers, they're going to be able to give you information that you wouldn't otherwise have.

In short: to improve the customer experience, it's a good idea to consider both customer and employee feedback.

Obviously many front-line and service staff won't be desk-bound, so you might not want to use email for this feedback. Get out on the shop floor, use breakroom notice boards or consider web- and mobile-based alternatives for communication.

Sarah managed a supermarket that was seeing higher than usual theft at the self-checkout: most likely people scanning pine nuts as peanuts or routinely forgetting things at the bottom of the cart. She wasn't on the shop floor every day, so she was getting this data second-hand. She initially thought she could fix it by hiring more intimidating door staff or installing more cameras. It might have worked... or it might have been completely ineffective.

Then she figured it'd really help to talk to the people who did have first-hand experience of self-checkout behavior.

Sarah already employed people at the checkouts, so she could just talk to them. She asked them what people were doing at the checkouts, and what the staff found was most effective when it came to preventing theft. It turned out the best way to stop people from getting cheap pine nuts was to go over and show them where to find the button for pine nuts.

So Sarah started asking her checkout staff for regular updates; not only to keep shrinkage in check, but also to find other ways to improve customer experience in her store. It became a regular feedback loop. She recognized employee contributions, and when people saw that their input was valued and even used, they kept contributing.



50%

of non-desk employees
say communication helps
them do their job



20%

of front line employees
are never asked for their
thoughts on improving
customer service

Deskless employees want to contribute



84%

of non-desk
employees don't
receive enough
communication
on the job



53%

of managers want
online tools to
communicate
with teams more
effectively



Collecting feedback from deskless workers

Every employer should care about employee experience

Quick recap: employee experience is everything people think, feel, do or encounter at work. If this experience is negative it can lead to poor performance, low engagement and unfavorable business results. We already know that deskless workers make up the majority of the workforce, so be sure you work with them to make their experience a positive one.

Getting started with EX

Talking to people is one of the best ways to understand what's going on in your teams. So, don't worry about investing in tech when you're first starting your EX journey; just get talking! You can build from there.

Talk it out

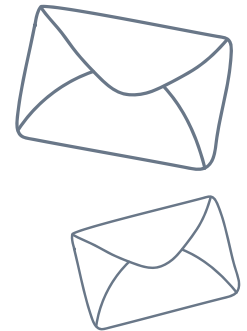
Collecting feedback can be as simple as asking employees what they think. This is best done at team level, because it's a lot easier for managers to talk to their teams than it is for business leaders to talk to entire companies. The easiest way to get started is to come up with a set of questions ([here's one we prepared earlier](#)). Pass this on to your managers, who can use it as a framework for their one-on-one meetings. You'll just need some place to record responses; a shared folder or spreadsheet is ideal if you don't have an HRIS.

Send an email

If your team has email access, you can send your questions out and follow up in person after they reply. You'll still need somewhere to record the responses, but people can give feedback in their own time and don't have to wait for their manager to set up a meeting. This might be tricky in companies with a lot of deskless workers, as many of them won't have email addresses. If you're concerned you can't reach everyone you need to via email, then try one of the other options...

Use survey software

Online tools like SurveyMonkey let you use your questions to create a survey. You can then send the survey link out via whatever channel works best for your team (email, mobile, chat, web, social media) and wait for the responses. Using a survey tool means your responses are collated automatically and you won't need to generate reports manually. It also means people don't necessarily need email (or a computer!) to participate, which makes online survey tools a good fit for a deskless workforce.



Deskless employees might not have the same tech

80%

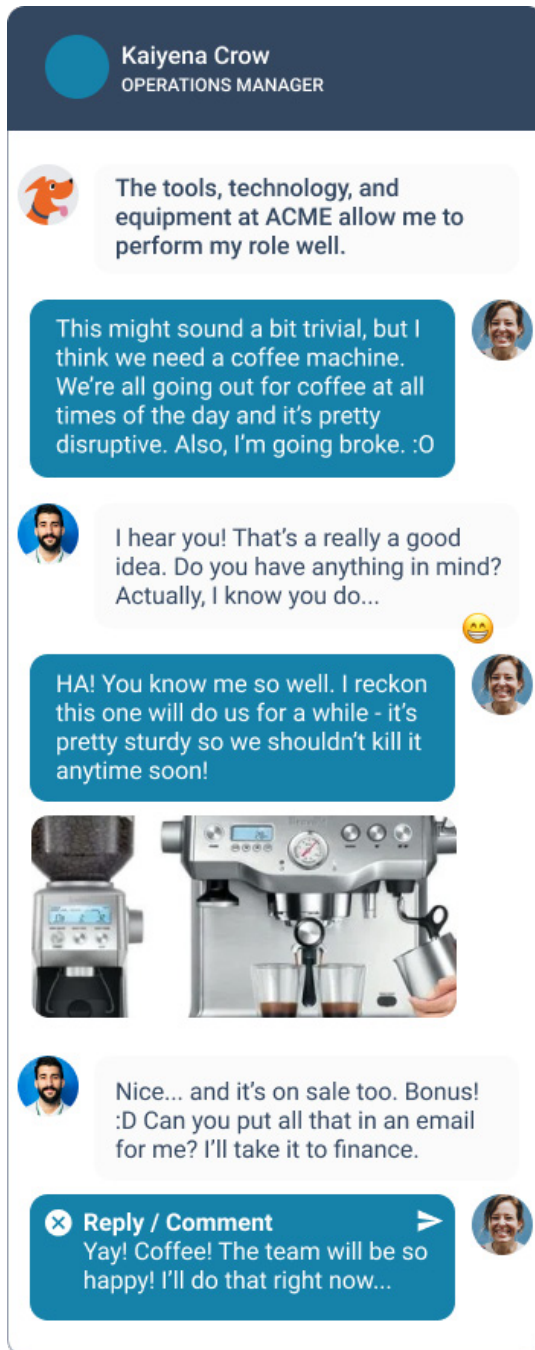
of the global workforce
doesn't have enough
access to technology

45%

of non-desk workers have
no work intranet access

83%

of employees don't have a
corporate email address



Try employee feedback software

Some tools are specifically designed for collecting employee feedback – Joyous is one, though a quick Google search will give you a lot of options. Look for something that lets you build surveys and reporting, and that gives you the ability to customize questions as your needs change. If you can use one tool for both ongoing feedback and engagement surveys, great! If you have a large remote or deskless workforce, remember to find a tool that doesn't require people to have an email address or computer access.

Now you've got answers to your questions!

How far you drill into the data is up to you: is it more useful to report at a team, division or business level? You want information you can *use*, so think about what you want to achieve and then start looking at the data.

Consider:

- The average score for each question. Is it high? Low? Look at the reasons people give for their scores. Is there an obvious or common cause?
- The difference between the current score and the score last time you asked the question. Is it significantly higher or lower? Ask questions to identify why that is.
- Scores across departments or locations. Is one area doing much better or worse than the others? Ask questions to find out why, and use that information to improve the experience or model behaviors to the rest of the company.

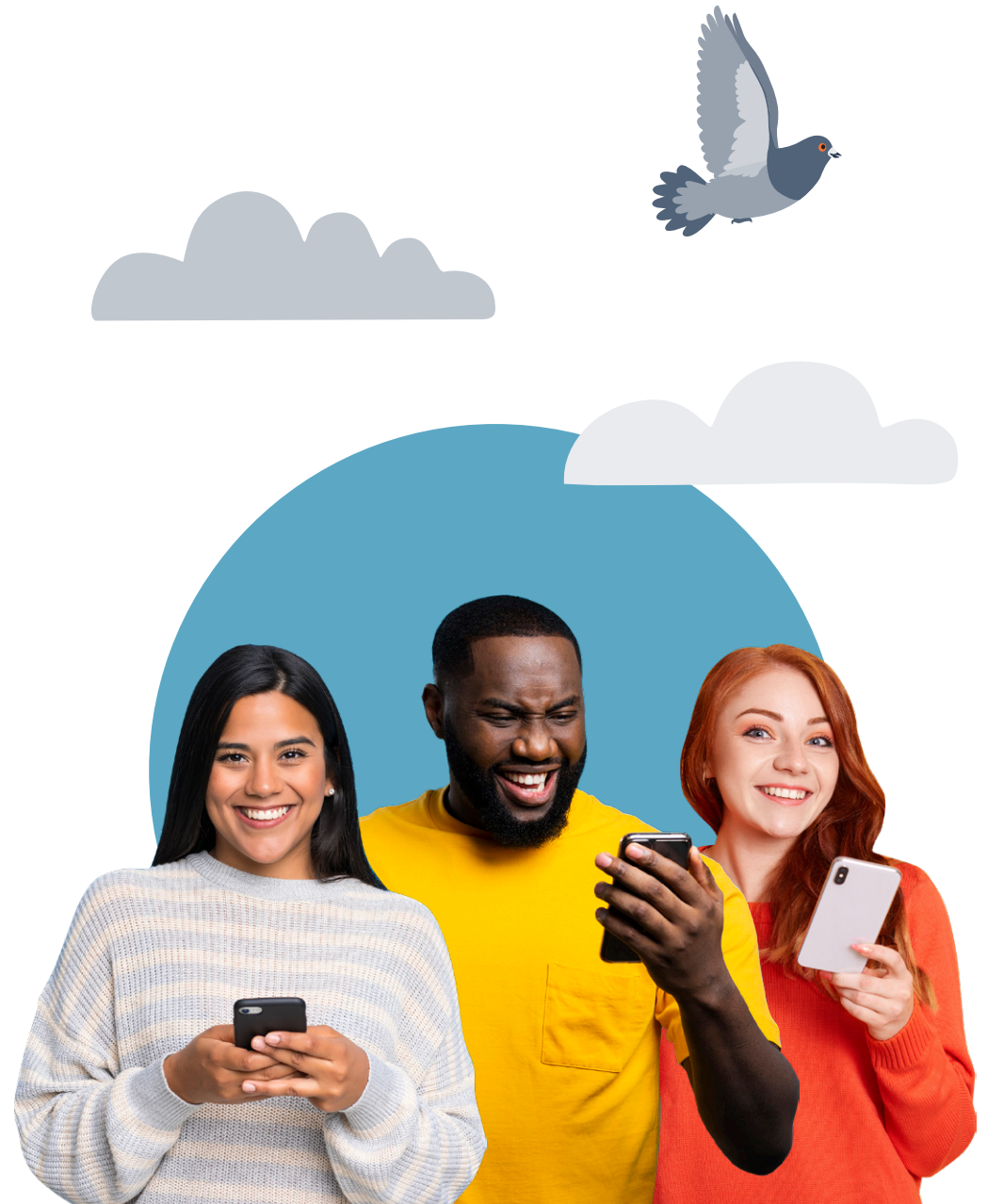
Remember the score is only one part of the picture. It's important to follow up by asking questions to find out why people feel the way they do.

Talking to people about their achievements and concerns is also a great way to help them feel like they're a meaningful, valuable part of the company. So don't neglect those conversations!

Deskless employees are probably **mobile** employees

95% of US and UK citizens
own a cell phone

94% of companies use
mobile solutions



Deskless tech: the case for mobile

Deskless employees aren't necessarily techless employees

Most adults own a cell phone, so it follows that most deskless workers will have a mobile device of some kind. And we always have them close at hand: the average person checks their phone 110 times a day, and front line workers use messaging apps up to six times a day. So despite not being tethered to a desk, non-desk workers are still likely to be connected.

Great news, right? We can just use mobile channels to communicate with workers and get a read on engagement.

Not so fast. Communication in companies isn't fabulous to begin with: 80% of US employees feel stressed because of ineffective communication, and only 13% think their leadership does a good job of it. Which probably comes down to a combination of not saying the right things, and not saying them in the right way. We can fix one of those things by using the right channels – the other one's going to require more strategic work around internal comms.

Deskless employees feel particularly disconnected. They're four times more likely to agree that their company communicates more effectively with office staff than with the people who don't have desks.

Why?

Most employee communication still happens over email or at staff meetings (in person or online): only 9% of companies are using mobile to connect with employees. But there are more employees with mobile access than there are employees with email access (not to mention a third of all emails are trashed or ignored anyway). And there are more deskless employees than people working at desks, so meetings aren't a great fit for the majority of employees.

So shouldn't we be using mobile more often?

Mobile increases efficiency

When workers have immediate access to the people and information they need, they work more efficiently: however people spend about 20% of their work time looking for this information.

While desk-based employees can chat with workmates or fire up Zoom to get direction from leaders, deskless workers have to go further to find a helping hand. They might have to wait for the end of a shift, or for the next morning's team briefing, or for the one person on site with the filing cabinet keys

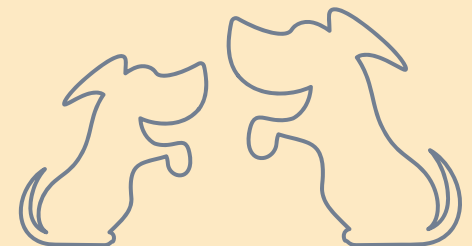
Apparently there's been a rebrand?

All the notices on the bulletin board are from last month.

I didn't know the company was being sold until I saw it on Twitter.

We only hear from HO every couple of weeks.

The CEO doesn't talk to us, so I guess we're not that important.





to show up. Mobile closes that gap, making it easier for non-office staff to access information from the rest of the company, reducing time wastage by 15% and potentially increasing revenue per employee by 5%.

Mobile increases engagement

Mobile won't solve every engagement problem, but it's certainly easier to make people feel like part of the team when they can actually connect with it. By requiring workers to log in to the intranet for induction information or staff updates, or by only sending messages from the CEO via email, you're excluding workers who don't have access to those channels.

Sure, line managers with responsibility for deskless workers can hold their own on-site briefings to share that information. But then you're introducing degrees of separation from the company's leadership, and that in turn creates a disconnect.

You can leap right in with a mobile app that covers all employee-facing functions, or just make sure your performance, payroll and comms tools are mobile accessible. Three quarters of companies will be increasing their use of mobile for connecting with employees in the coming year, so you'll be in good company.

Whatever you do, if any number of your workers are front line, service or deskless, make mobile a priority.

We need to
consider deskless
employees when
it comes to
technology

↑ 33% Productivity

↑ 23% Employer
experience

↑ 21% Cost savings

But that's
not usually
the case

11%

Of tech buying
decisions are made
by the end user;
51% by the c-suite

1%

Of software VC is
invested in tech
that supports
deskless workers



Invisible inclusivity cheat sheet

Enable everywhere access to information and expertise

Choose systems and software that are built for mobile or that allow mobile access. Make sure they're easy for people of all ages, language ability and education levels to understand and use.

Give everyone in the company a way to communicate with each other, and a way to easily get the information they need to do their jobs successfully.

Give BYOD serious consideration: most employees will already have their own phones (most will use them throughout the day). If people can use devices they already have, they're more likely to engage.

Include everyone in the conversation

85% of employees say they don't receive enough communication at work. Encourage people to talk about their work experiences, to celebrate successes and ask for help or feedback when they need it. Business leaders should also take part, modelling behavior and demonstrating the importance of inclusive conversations to the company.

Be sure all company communications are shared beyond head office, and not solely via email. Encourage a sense of belonging by using channels that all employees can participate in.

Ask customer-facing staff for insights on improving customer experience

If you want people to feel included at work, listen to what they have to say about their work. The people closest to your customers are in the best position to tell you about customer experience. Use tools that make it easy for them to share these insights with everyone else in the company, and commit to evaluating those suggestions that have merit.

Involve end-users in technology decisions

It's 2021. All employees have technology requirements. Even non-desk employees need to clock in and out of their shift, apply for leave, look at roster changes, ring up a sale or consult the employee handbook. If you're looking for software that these employees will use as part of their job, include them in the decision making process and be sure you invest in the tools that are right for them.





Further reading

<https://blog.beekeeper.io/10-ways-to-reach-your-non-desk-employees/>

<https://www.slideshare.net/EmergenceCapital/mobile-enterprise-trends-2015-emergence-capital>

https://news.gallup.com/topic/employee_engagement.aspx

<https://www.staffconnectapp.com/how-to-engage-non-desk-employees/>

<http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/mobile/>

<http://blog.tribeinc.com/tag/non-desk-employees/>

<http://blog.tribeinc.com/2018/03/27/non-desk-employees-can-be-a-rich-source-of-customer-intelligence/>

<https://www.socialchorus.com/silicon-valley-is-failing-80-percent-of-the-global-workforce/>

<http://desklessworkforce2018.com/>

<http://newtheory.com/stats-prove-how-addicted-we-really-are-to-our-cellphones-its-even-scarier-than-we-thought/>

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<https://insights.staffbase.com/hubfs/Whitepaper/HBR/Staffbase-Whitepaper-EN-ROI-of-an-Employee-App-B.pdf>

<https://hbr.org/sponsored/2018/12/the-business-case-for-an-employee-communication-app>

<https://www.gatehouse.co.uk/download-state-sector/>

<https://insights.staffbase.com/blog/non-desk-frontline-offline-employees-internal-communications-for-all-infographic>

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