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Bridging the Experience Gap

Connecting Organizational and Project-Level Employee Experience in Large Enterprises

ANNA KUBIAK
ASSOCIATE EXPERIENCE
SENIOR MANAGER, **MARS**

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ABSTRACT

Despite significant progress in employee experience (EX) design, many large organizations are still evolving in how they connect enterprise-level insights with functional initiatives and project-level improvements. Engagement surveys and organizational metrics surface valuable themes, while local EX and UX work drives meaningful enhancements to specific processes and journeys. Yet these rich sources of insight often sit alongside one another rather than operating as an integrated system that informs strategic decisions end-to-end.

This paper proposes a maturity step for EX organizations: a framework to scale up what is already been happening on a smaller scale: for linking three interconnected layers of experience, the organizational level (culture, engagement, belonging), the functional level (key processes and services), and the project level (micro-journeys and system interactions). I describe how a more adaptive, semi-permeable experience loop, where organizational signals guide priorities, and project outcomes feed back into broader learning can help organizations move from descriptive listening to predictive, evidence-based decision-making.

To operationalize this evolution, I outline two pathways: (1) using predictive analytics to explore potential causal relationships between micro-experiences and enterprise outcomes; and (2) designing aligned measurement architectures that allow functional and project-level metrics to meaningfully connect to organizational EX dimensions. I conclude with practical considerations for governance, data integration, and cross-functional collaboration to support this ongoing maturity journey.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, organizations have made meaningful progress in expanding and professionalizing employee experience (EX) design. Engagement surveys, pulse checks, and analytics now provide powerful signals about cultural strengths and opportunities (Harter et al., 2003), while functional and project-level initiatives such as enhancing onboarding, refining HR systems, or improving performance processes, continue to advance local experiences across the enterprise.

As this work expands, many organizations are now exploring how these different layers of experience insight might be connected more intentionally. Organizational metrics offer a valuable strategic lens, yet they do not always translate directly into priorities for functional or project teams.

At the same time, local EX and UX improvements are often measured through focused KPIs that reflect their immediate domain, making it challenging to understand how these outcomes contribute to broader enterprise goals such as engagement or retention.

Rather than a gap, this reflects a natural stage of EX maturity: multiple experience activities evolving in parallel, each adding value in its own way. The next opportunity is to bring these efforts into greater alignment, creating a more systemic way for organizations to listen, prioritize, design, and learn.

This paper offers a conceptual, systems-level perspective on how employee experience work can be more coherently understood and governed as organizations mature, rather than a description of a fully implemented operating model. By integrating measurement and decision-making across organizational, functional, and project levels, organizations can progress toward what I describe as a Closed-Loop Experience System (CLES) - an evolving model in which experience insights inform strategic choices, and project outcomes continuously feed back into enterprise learning.

THE MULTI-LAYERED NATURE OF EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

Scholars increasingly view employee experience as a multi-dimensional construct that integrates cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components of employees' interactions with their workplace (Plaskoff, 2017). However, in practice, EX management tends to fragment along organizational hierarchies and specializations.

Three main layers can be distinguished:

1. **Organizational Level – Cultural and Strategic Experience:** This layer captures macro perceptions such as belonging, purpose, and trust in leadership, measured via engagement surveys or culture audits (Harter et al., 2020). These indicators provide strategic insight but are typically lagging and difficult to translate into action.

2. **Functional Level – Process and Service Experience:** At this level, experience is examined within specific functions or processes (e.g., HR, IT, Operations). Measures such as process satisfaction, service NPS, or case-resolution time provide a more actionable view but often remain siloed, reflecting functional priorities rather than integrated experience outcomes.

3. **Project Level – Design and Interaction Experience:** This is where UX and service designers operate, improving micro-journeys such as system usability, onboarding workflows, or benefits enrollment. Metrics are project-specific: usability scores, completion rates, or adoption levels and seldom connected upward to organizational goals.

Level	Scope	Typical Metrics	Common Gaps
1. Organizational Experience	Culture, belonging, engagement	Engagement, retention, pulse scores	Insights are often high-level and diagnostic but lack direct pathways to action or accountability.
2. Functional Experience	HR, IT, or Service experience	Process NPS, satisfaction	Metrics are operationally useful but remain siloed, preventing synthesis across functions or linkage to strategic outcomes.
3. Project Experience	UX/UI design, micro-journeys	Usability, adoption, satisfaction	Focus is narrow and tactical; improvements are rarely translated into enterprise-level learning or measurable cultural impact.

Table 1. Hierarchical Structure of Employee Experience and Common Integration Gaps

In theory, these levels should form an experience continuum, where organizational insights guide project selection and project outcomes inform enterprise strategy. In reality, each layer uses distinct taxonomies, tools, and governance structures, resulting in vertical misalignment (between levels) and horizontal fragmentation (across functions).

As Senge (1990) noted in The Fifth Discipline, organizations are systems of interrelated processes, not collections of independent parts. Yet EX management often fails to embody this principle measuring experiences within subsystems without accounting for the interdependencies that shape overall engagement.

THE EXPERIENCE ECOSYSTEM GAP

Many organizations find themselves at an interesting stage in the evolution of EX maturity: multiple layers of experience activity from organizational listening to functional improvements to project-level design, are advancing in parallel, yet not always in a fully integrated way. This creates an opportunity to strengthen how insights and actions flow across the broader experience ecosystem. Three areas often emerge as part of this developmental pattern:

1. **Strategic Alignment Opportunities:** Organizational listening tools such as engagement surveys and pulse checks surface valuable cultural themes. However, these broad indicators do not always translate directly into which functional or project-level initiatives are prioritized. In many organizations, decisions are shaped by a blend of strategic focus, leadership priorities, and compliance needs with enterprise EX data serving as one of several inputs.

2. **Measurement Fragmentation:** Project-level metrics such as system satisfaction, task ease, or adoption rates provide clear operational insight, yet they are often defined independently of organizational constructs like career growth or psychological safety. Without a shared measurement architecture, it can be difficult to meaningfully connect insights across levels or understand how local improvements contribute to enterprise outcomes.

3. **Evolving Feedback Loops:** Experience initiatives frequently generate meaningful local impact, but their influence on broader organizational indicators is not always visible. This reflects a wider challenge across industry: as EX practice matures, organizations are increasingly seeking ways to ensure that what is learned at the project or functional level can inform enterprise understanding and vice versa.

To progress toward a more connected experience ecosystem, organizations are beginning to treat EX not as a series of discrete activities, but as an adaptive system of interrelated insights. Strengthening the flow of measurement, analytics, and decision-making across levels enables a more cohesive feedback loop supporting better prioritization, predictive insights, and ultimately, more strategic use of experience data.

THE CLOSED-LOOP EXPERIENCE SYSTEM (CLES)

The Closed-Loop Experience System (CLES) is a framework designed to integrate EX data and action across all organizational levels. It enables a continuous flow of insight from enterprise measurement to project intervention and back creating a cycle of listening, diagnosing, designing, and learning.

4.1 Foundational Principles

The CLES model rests on three foundational principles:

- **Continuity:** Experience metrics are designed as a continuum, ensuring that data at the project, process, and organizational levels can be connected methodologically.

- **Reciprocity:** Experience insights inform both top-down strategy and bottom-up learning. Organizational metrics identify priorities; project data refines strategic understanding.
- **Causality:** The system seeks to identify and model causal links between micro-experiences (e.g., onboarding usability) and macro-outcomes (e.g., retention, engagement).

4.2 The Four Stages of the Experience Loop

1. **Listen Broadly (Organizational Sensing):** Collect and analyze large-scale experience data through engagement surveys, sentiment analysis, and retention patterns to identify broad themes of friction or strength (Harter et al., 2020).

2. **Diagnose Locally (Functional Deep-Dive):** Translate organizational findings into specific domains for investigation. For example, low "career growth" scores may lead to analysis of learning system usability, mobility processes, or manager feedback practices.

3. **Design Specifically (Project Execution):** Translate organizational findings into specific domains for investigation. For example, low "career growth" scores may lead to analysis of learning system usability, mobility processes, or manager feedback practices.

4. **Learn Systemically (Integration and Reflection):** Post-implementation, assess whether project outcomes have influenced functional and organizational indicators. Feed these insights into dashboards and governance discussions to guide future investments.

Over time, the loop produces an adaptive system in which experience design informs strategy and strategy evolves through experience data.

ANALYTICAL PATHWAYS FOR INTEGRATION

Two analytical pathways can operationalize the Closed-Loop Experience System: predictive analytics and metric alignment.

5.1 Predictive Analytics: Quantifying Experience Impact

Predictive analytics can identify which micro-experiences most influence enterprise outcomes. Using regression or structural equation modeling, organizations can test hypotheses such as whether satisfaction with onboarding correlates with engagement or early retention (Shuck & Reio, 2014).

This approach moves EX measurement beyond description toward causal inference. For instance, an organization might discover that the "sense of preparedness after onboarding" explains more variance in engagement than compensation satisfaction, highlighting where targeted design can drive greater strategic value.

Machine learning techniques can further detect non-linear relationships and early warning signals of disengagement (Mohiuddin et al., 2023). Embedding these insights in EX dashboards allows leaders to make data-informed investment decisions.

5.2 Metric Alignment: Designing Hierarchical Consistency

Predictive analytics relies on the existence of methodologically aligned metrics. Therefore, the second pathway is to design experience metrics hierarchically ensuring conceptual coherence from micro to macro levels.

For example:

- Organizational construct: Career Growth
- Functional indicators: Learning system satisfaction, clarity of progression pathways
- Project-level metrics: Completion rates in learning modules, usability of career portal

This structure allows organizations to "zoom in" from an engagement driver to the functional and project metrics that contribute to it. Conversely, improvements at the project level can "roll up" to organizational outcomes, enabling traceable impact measurement.

Metric alignment also creates a shared experience taxonomy a language through which HR, IT, and design teams can collaborate meaningfully (MacDonald, Atwood, & Abowd, 2022).

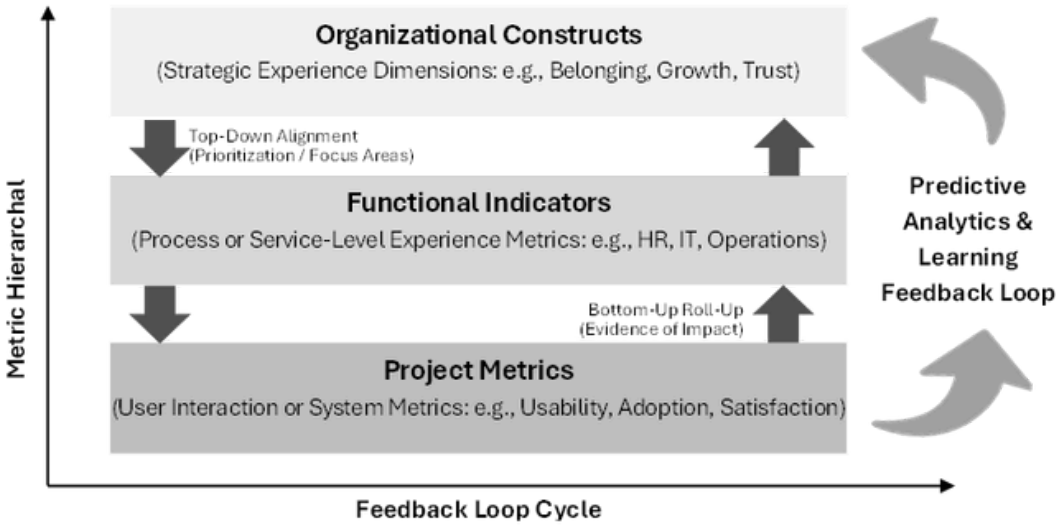

Figure 1. The CLES Metric Alignment Model: Connecting Experience Metrics Across Organizational Levels

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Progressing toward a more connected, multi-level experience system requires attention to both organizational infrastructure and ways of working. Rather than a fixed or fully "closed" loop, this model operates more like a semi-permeable network of experience flows, allowing new insights, data sources, and priorities to enter the system, while letting outdated measures or programs naturally phase out. With that in mind, several considerations can support implementation:

1. **Governance and Alignment:** Organizations may benefit from an Experience Governance Board or EX Center of Excellence that ensures methodological consistency, fosters shared language, and connects insights across HR analytics, design, and operational leadership. This group acts as an integrator, helping experience flows move across functions rather than remain siloed.

2. **Data Infrastructure:** Organizations may benefit from an Experience Governance Board or EX Center of Excellence that ensures methodological consistency, fosters shared language, and connects insights across HR analytics, design, and operational leadership. This group acts as an integrator, helping experience flows move across functions rather than remain siloed.

3. **Capability Building:** A systems-oriented approach to EX invites new capabilities across the organization. EX practitioners may need greater fluency in analytics and behavioural interpretation, while business leaders may benefit from viewing experience signals as leading indicators of organizational health. Embedding these skills into leadership and practitioner development helps maintain the flow of insights through the ecosystem.

4. **Cultural Integration:** Ultimately, the model is sustained by cultural adoption. This includes evolving from project-based prioritization ("what needs fixing?") toward experience-informed investment ("what meaningfully improves associate experience?"). Leadership sponsorship, transparency, and curiosity help create an environment where insights circulate freely and inform decisions at multiple levels.

DISCUSSION

Integrating experience data across levels redefines how organizations create value. Rather than viewing employee experience as a series of interventions, it becomes a strategic sensing mechanism continuously translating human feedback into organizational learning (Kolko, 2015).

This systems-based approach aligns with theories of adaptive organizations (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018), which evolve by integrating feedback loops that connect local action to global purpose. The Closed-Loop Experience System embodies this logic by positioning experience practitioners as translators between micro-level design and macro-level strategy.

Moreover, this integration allows organizations to quantify what has long been assumed qualitatively: that better experiences lead to better outcomes. When project-level improvements demonstrably move engagement or retention, EX functions gain strategic credibility and influence.

CONCLUSION

Employee experience operates across multiple organizational layers, yet these layers often remain disconnected. Organizational metrics highlight cultural issues but lack specificity; project-level initiatives improve local usability but rarely influence enterprise strategy.

This paper introduced the Closed-Loop Experience System (CLES), a framework that connects organizational, functional, and project-level experience data into a continuous learning cycle. By combining predictive analytics with metric alignment, organizations can design experiences that not only improve satisfaction but drive measurable business outcomes.

In doing so, EX evolves from a reactive discipline to a strategic intelligence function, one that enables organizations to see, decide, and act through the lens of experience.

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