

THE EVOLUTION OF EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE RESEARCH (2016–2025): A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW AND AN INTEGRATED EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE ECOSYSTEM FRAMEWORK

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Abstract: Employee Experience (EX) is one of the most important concepts in Human Resource Management, which reflects a shift from managing employees as one of the organizational resources to designing overall workplace experiences. The dimensions like employee well-being, engagement, innovation, and organizational sustainability are positively enhanced because of the shift in EX. But still the literature remains disconnected across various conceptual definitions of EX, theoretical perspectives and various methodological approaches. The existing literature mainly focuses towards bibliometric trends, descriptive summaries, which provide very limited theoretical integration. Also, there are very limited insufficient understanding that how EX emerged as an independent research domain. Addressing this gap, the present study systematically reviews EX research published between 2016 and 2025. This study examines its conceptual evolution, theoretical foundations, methodological development, and emerging research directions. Following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, fifty peer-reviewed Scopus-indexed journal articles were selected using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The selected studies were analysed through a combination of systematic literature review procedures and NVivo 12 Plus qualitative thematic analysis. The review identified significant shifts in EX research over the past decade, revealing a transition from a human resource practice centred on engagement and workplace satisfaction to a multidimensional organizational capability integrating employee well-being, inclusiveness, organizational cohesion, achievement orientation, vitality, and physical–digital work environments. The findings further demonstrate an increasing convergence of organizational behaviour, psychology, strategic HRM, digital transformation, and sustainability within Employee Experience journey. Based on the findings, the researcher proposes the Integrated Employee Experience Ecosystem Framework (IEEF), a theory building framework which includes external environmental influences, various organizational drivers, EX dimensions, employee and organizational performance into an integrated conceptual model. This model is unique in such a way that the framework conceptualizes EX as a dynamic organizational ecosystem characterized by reciprocal interaction among leadership, organizational culture, emerging technology, employee perceptions and strategic organizational outcomes. The study makes four principal contributions. First, it provides complete synthesis of ten years of EX research by identifying the evolution of the field across two developmental phases. Second, it includes theoretical perspectives into a comprehensive explanatory framework. Third, the study presents empirically derived EX dimensions supported by systematic NVivo analysis. The study finally proposes a future research agenda which identified priority areas which consists of artificial intelligence, digital employee experience, hybrid work, sustainable employee experience, employee analytics, and human–AI collaboration. Collectively, these contributions advance EX from a fragmented organizational concept toward a mature interdisciplinary research domain. This study provides a practical guidance for organizational leaders to design employee-centred workplaces capability by supporting innovation, resilience, and sustainable competitive advantage.

Keywords: Employee Experience, Human Resource Management, Systematic Literature Review, NVivo, Employee Well-being, Digital Employee Experience, Organizational Behaviour, Integrated Employee Experience Ecosystem Framework



1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In this twenty-first century workplace has changed significantly due to digital technologies, globalization, demographic shifts, evolving employee expectations, and growing attention to organizational sustainability. Organization is now not only competing with financial resources and technology capabilities, but also to attract right employee, engage them, develop them and retain the talented employees. In this context, Employee Experience (EX) has emerged as an important strategic capability that extends beyond conventional Human Resource Management (HRM) by focusing on employees' overall experiences throughout the employment lifecycle.

EX explains the overall employee perception based on existing organizational system, managers, leaders, peer group, workplace environments, digital technologies, and organizational culture. These experiences start with recruitment and selection process, onboarding, performance management, training and development, career development, workplace relationship and finally organization exit. Each and every stage of an employee inside the organization influences employee experience. Unlike other individual dimensions such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, employee engagement, EX provides a larger perspective by understanding how entire organization dimensions interact collectively and influence employee well being and organizational performance.

The strategic importance of EX has increased significantly over the past decade. Positive employee experiences are increasingly related with stronger engagement, organizational commitment, innovation, customer satisfaction, employer branding, retention, and sustainable competitive advantage. Thus, organizations started to invest and map employee journey, digital workplace technologies, well being programmes, providing flexible work practices, and personalized HR systems.

The COVID-19 pandemic changed and transformed traditional work practices. New work practices like remote and hybrid work increased the dependence on digital collaboration, virtual leadership, artificial intelligence, and HR services with the support of technology. During and after pandemic, organizations started to give priority towards employee wellbeing, psychological safety and workplace flexibility. Employee Flourishing Climate became the central part of the organization. At the other end, EX started to expand from workplace centred idea into multidimensional concept by integrating physical, psychological, technological, and social experiences.

Even after the study growth in human resource literature, the concept related to EX remain fragmented. Few studies differ in their definitions, theoretical perspectives, measurement approaches, and research methods. Few researchers emphasize engagement and employee journey, while others focus on organizational culture, well-being, workplace design, or digital experience. The field also relies heavily on cross-sectional research, with relatively limited longitudinal, mixed-method, and qualitative evidence.

These limitations highlighted the need for a systematic review towards EX which integrates the conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and empirical development of EX over the last decade. Such a synthesis is necessary to clarify the evolution of the field, identify its core dimensions, and provide a stronger foundation for future theory development and organizational practice.

1.2 Research Gap

Despite the growing body of EX research, several important research gaps exist in the literature. First, existing reviews mostly summarize previous studies without critically examining how EX has evolved as an independent field of research. As a result, its intellectual development over the past decade remains unclear. Second, the literature relies on fragmented theoretical perspectives. Although theories such as Experience Economy Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Organizational Support Theory, Job Demands–Resources Theory, and Self-Determination Theory have been widely applied, they have rarely been integrated into a comprehensive framework which explains the relations among organizational drivers, employee experiences, and organizational outcomes. Third, qualitative combination remains limited. Most studies examine individual dimensions such as leadership, well-being, organizational culture, or

technology in separate rather than identifying the recurring dimensions that jointly define EX. These gaps in the existing literature highlight the need for a systematic review that integrates conceptual, theoretical, and qualitative evidence to advance Employee Experience.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

- i. To systematically review the evolution of Employee Experience research published between 2016 and 2025.
- ii. To examine the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological development of Employee Experience scholarship.
- iii. To identify the dominant dimensions of Employee Experience through NVivo-based qualitative thematic analysis.
- iv. To develop an Integrated Employee Experience Ecosystem Framework (IEEF) that synthesizes the principal findings of the review into a unified conceptual model.
- v. To propose a structured future research agenda capable of guiding Employee Experience research during the coming decade.

1.4 Contributions of the Study

In this study five important contribution will be done towards EX. The first contribution is to systematically analyse last ten years (2016-2025) of EX research by clarifying the intellectual evolution of EX. Second, the researcher integrates various related organizational theories into a unified conceptual perspective. Third, by combining the systematic with NVivo based thematic analysis and identify the core dimensions repeatedly used to measure and define EX. Fourth, to propose the Integrated Employee Experience Ecosystem Framework (IEEF), by explaining the relationship between external factors, organizational capabilities, employee experience and organizational outcomes. Finally, the study outlines a agenda for future research focusing towards artificial intelligence, digital employee experience, sustainable workplaces, employee analytics, and human–AI collaboration.

2. Employee Experience: Conceptual Evolution and Theoretical Foundations

2.1 The Emergence and Evolution of Employee Experience

The concept of EX has developed significantly over the last decade. EX reflects a major shift from managing employees as important resources to design meaningful and sustainable workplace. In the traditional HRM dimensions like Job satisfaction and employee engagement examine specific aspects of employee work. But EX integrates employee overall interactions with leadership, organizational culture, workplace technologies, and the work environment. EX therefore represents an overall organizational philosophy rather than an isolated HR practice.

The growth of EX can be divided into two phases. The first phase 2016 – 2020, focused mainly on developing its conceptual foundations. During this phase, researchers differentiated between EX and other related organizational dimensions. Majority of the study, emphasized towards employee journey, leadership, workplace design, organizational culture, and HR practices. In this phase, EX was considered as a strategic approach to enhance engagement, employee retention and improve organizational performance.

During the second phase, 2021–2025, marked significant development in EX conceptual expansion. The COVID-19 pandemic forced the new normal like remote work, hybrid work, and digital transformation. Organizations increasingly adopted Artificial Intelligence (AI) enabled HR systems and digital collaboration platforms. Organizations started to give more attention towards employee well-being, psychological safety, inclusiveness, and workplace flexibility. Consequently, Employee Experience evolved into a multidimensional ecosystem integrating physical, psychological, technological, and social experiences.

This evolution demonstrates that EX has continuously adapted to changing organizational environments. It has not simply refined existing HR concepts. Instead, it integrates multiple organizational perspectives into a unified framework. This broader perspective explains employee's cumulative workplace experiences and their contribution to sustainable organizational performance.

Table 1. Employee Experience Evolution Matrix

Dimension	2016–2020	2021–2025	Future Direction
Leadership	Supervisory	Inclusive	AI-Augmented Leadership
Workplace	Physical	Hybrid	Intelligent Workplace
Technology	HRIS	Digital EX	AI-Powered EX
Well-being	Benefit	Strategic Capability	Sustainable Well-being
Employee Role	Resource	Partner	Co-creator of Experience

The above table 1 clearly explains the intellectual progression of various dimensions. The dimension leadership shows the shift from Supervisory to inclusive. The dimension shifted from physical to hybrid. The dimension technology rapidly shifted from human resource information system to digital EX. The dimension well being was shifted from benefit to strategic capability of the employee. The dimension employee role was moved from resource to partner.

2.2 Defining Employee Experience

EX, even after its growing importance, it remains as one of the most conceptually diverse dimensions in human resource management. The existing definition in the literature varies across disciplines, organizational contents, and research objectives. Few researchers identified and emphasized employee perceptions of organizational interactions, while other researchers focus mainly towards employee journey, workplace touchpoints, organizational culture and work environment. This diversity in the literature reflects the multidisciplinary and evolving nature of EX.

Across the literature, four common characteristics consistently emerge. First, EX is developing through continuous interactions across the employment lifecycle. Second, it is multidimensional, integrating cognitive, emotional, behavioural, social, physical, and technological experiences. Third, it is subjective, as employees interpret similar organizational practices differently. Finally, it is dynamic, evolving with changes in leadership, organizational systems, technologies, and workplace environments.

Based on these characteristics, the researcher defines “Employee Experience as the cumulative cognitive, emotional, behavioural, social, and technological perceptions employees develop through interactions with organizational systems, leadership, workplace environments, colleagues, and organizational culture throughout the employment lifecycle, ultimately influencing employee well-being and organizational effectiveness”.

Table 2. Evolution of Employee Experience Definitions

Period	Dominant Focus	Conceptual Characteristics
2016–2018	Employee journey and workplace interactions	Employee Experience viewed primarily as a sequence of organizational touchpoints influencing engagement and retention.
2019–2020	Organizational culture and leadership	Greater emphasis on organizational culture, leadership quality,

		workplace design, and employee-centred HR practices.
2021–2023	Employee well-being and digital workplace	Integration of hybrid work, psychological safety, digital collaboration, employee well-being, and organizational resilience.
2024–2025	Intelligent Employee Experience	Increasing emphasis on AI-enabled HRM, employee analytics, personalization, sustainability, and adaptive organizational ecosystems.

2.3 Distinguishing Employee Experience from Related Constructs

EX is very closely associated with several established dimensions related organization performance, which often creates conceptual uncertainty. Ex is often confused with employee engagement, organizational commitment, employee well-being, job satisfaction and organizational culture. However, these dimensions signify different theoretical concepts.

EX explains employee interest and their emotional involvement in their work. Employee job satisfaction refers to employee's overall evaluation of their jobs. Organizational commitment describes their emotional attachment with their organization, while employee well-being focuses on their physical and psychological health. Organizational culture represents the shared values and norms that form workplace behaviour.

EX entirely different from other dimensions because it integrates within a broader organizational perspective. EX identify overall perception formed through continuous workplace interaction across their lifecycle at their workplace. Therefore, engagement, satisfaction, commitment, and well-being should be viewed as important dimensions or outcomes of EX rather than equivalent concepts. This distinction supports stronger theory development and more comprehensive organizational practices.

2.4 Intellectual Evolution of Employee Experience Research

The literature identified that EX has evolved through four major stages. Every stage reflects changes in organizational priorities and workplace practices.

Stage 1: Administrative Human Resource Management. Organizations viewed employees mainly as organizational resources. HR activities mainly focused on recruitment, payroll, compliance, performance appraisal, and workforce administration. Employee experiences received limited strategic attention in the existing literature.

Stage 2: Employee Engagement. Organizations slowly recognized the importance of employee motivation and organization commitment. Organization invested in leadership, communication, recognition, and organizational culture to improve employee performance and retention.

Stage 3: Employee Experience. Organizations understood that employee engagement alone will not predict organizational performance. EX emerged as a broader concept integrating employee journey, leadership, workplace culture, employee well-being, workplace design, and organizational interactions.

Stage 4: Intelligent Employee Experience. Recent developments introduced artificial intelligence, employee analytics, digital transformation, hybrid work, and intelligent HR systems. Organizations now design personalized and technology-enabled employee experiences which continuously improve organizational performance. Thus, EX has changed its dimension for HR function into a strategic organizational capability. EX now integrates people, technology, leadership, and organizational culture to create meaningful workplace experiences.

2.5 Transition to Theoretical Foundations

The conceptual journey explained that EX has progressively expanded beyond traditional HRM boundaries. As EX evolved, researcher diverted their theoretical perspective to explain how organizational experiences influence employee attitudes, behaviours, and organizational outcomes. Understanding the theoretical foundation is important because they provide explanatory mechanisms underlying EX research. The following section will critically examine the major theories related to EX, and explain their association to propose Integrated Employee Experience Ecosystem Framework (IEEF).

2.6 Theoretical Foundations of Employee Experience

The growth of EX has been significantly supported by theoretical development. Like traditional HRM construct, EX cannot be explained in a single theory. EX draws from multiple theories like organizational behaviour, psychology, strategic management, sociology, marketing, and information systems. Each theory explains a different aspect of workplace experiences. However, none independently explains the complete nature of Employee Experience. Therefore, EX requires an integrated theoretical perspective.

The systematic review explains that the theoretical development of EX has closely followed with conceptual evolution. In the existing literature, many organizational behaviour theories explained only employee and organization relationships. In the recent studies only motivation, employee well-being, digital transformation, hybrid work, artificial intelligence, and organizational resilience were included. This development demonstrates that EX has evolved from an HR practice into a multidimensional organizational capability.

Table 3. Theoretical Foundations of Employee Experience (2016–2025)

Theory and Description	Contribution to Employee Experience
Experience Economy Theory: Organizations create value by deliberately designing meaningful and memorable experiences.	Explains why organizations should intentionally design positive experiences across the employee journey.
Social Exchange Theory: Employees reciprocate favourable organizational treatment with positive attitudes and behaviours.	Explains how support, recognition, and fairness strengthen engagement, commitment, and retention.
Organizational Support Theory: Employees respond positively when they believe the organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being.	Positions perceived organizational care as an important foundation of positive Employee Experience.
Psychological Contract Theory: Employees develop unwritten expectations regarding what the organization should provide in return for their contribution.	Explains how fulfilment or violation of organizational promises shapes trust, commitment, and Employee Experience.
Job Demands–Resources Theory: Employee motivation and well-being depend on the balance between workplace demands and available resources.	Shows how supportive resources enhance Employee Experience, while excessive demands contribute to stress and disengagement.
Conservation of Resources Theory: Employees seek to acquire, protect, and preserve valuable psychological, social, and organizational resources.	Explains how supportive experiences build resilience and how resource loss can weaken Employee Experience.
Self-Determination Theory: Employees flourish when their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fulfilled.	Explains why empowerment, development, meaningful work, and positive relationships improve Employee Experience.
Positive Organizational Scholarship: Positive workplaces promote flourishing through trust, resilience, compassion, psychological safety, and meaningful work.	Extends Employee Experience from reducing dissatisfaction toward enabling employees to thrive and perform sustainably.

2.6.1 Digital Employee Experience: A New Organizational Paradigm

One of the most important developments identified in this review is the emergence of Digital Employee Experience (DEX). Earlier Employee Experience research mainly focused on physical workplaces and interpersonal relationships. However, modern organizations increasingly operate through digital platforms, artificial intelligence, and collaborative technologies. As a result, employees now evaluate organizations based on the quality of their digital interactions.

Digital Employee Experience extends the traditional concept by including recruitment platforms, employee self-service systems, learning management systems, collaboration tools, AI-enabled HR applications, and employee analytics. These technologies shape employees' experiences throughout the employment lifecycle. Unlike traditional technology adoption studies, DEX explains how digital technologies influence employees' cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and social experiences. Employees increasingly expect workplace technologies to be simple, personalized, transparent, and supportive of both productivity and well-being.

Overall, Digital Employee Experience represents a major shift in Employee Experience research. It transforms technology from a supporting HR tool into a strategic organizational capability that shapes workplace experiences and future organizational performance.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to examine the evolution of Employee Experience (EX) research published between 2016 and 2025. Rather than narrating reviews, SLR follows a structured and transparent process for identifying, selecting, evaluating, and synthesizing published studies. This approach minimizes selection bias and improves the reliability of the findings. The review follows the PRISMA 2020 guidelines to ensure methodological transparency and replicability. In addition, in this study researcher used NVivo 12 Plus to conduct qualitative thematic analysis. This integration helps identify recurring themes, relationships, and emerging patterns, thereby strengthening the methodological rigor and conceptual understanding of Employee Experience research.

3.2 Review Protocol

The researcher developed the research protocol before the literature search commenced to ensure consistency throughout the review process. The protocol specified:

- the review objective,
- search databases,
- search keywords,
- publication period,
- inclusion and exclusion criteria,
- quality assessment procedures,
- data extraction strategy, and
- qualitative coding procedures.

Establishing these criteria in advance reduced the possibility of subjective article selection and ensured that only studies directly relevant to Employee Experience were included in the final analysis.

3.3 Literature Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted using the **Scopus** database because it provides extensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals across Human Resource Management, Organizational Behaviour, Psychology, Business

Management, and Information Systems. Scopus is widely recognized as one of the most comprehensive bibliographic databases for systematic reviews and has been extensively used in high-impact HRM review studies.

To identify relevant publications, combinations of the following search terms were employed:

- "Employee Experience"
- "Workplace Experience"
- "Digital Employee Experience"
- "Employee Journey"
- "Employee Well-being"
- "Employee Engagement" AND "Employee Experience"
- "Human Resource Management" AND "Employee Experience"

Boolean operators (AND, OR), truncation symbols, and phrase searching were applied to maximize retrieval while maintaining relevance.

The search was restricted to studies published between **January 2016 and December 2025**, reflecting the decade during which Employee Experience emerged as a distinct area of academic inquiry.

3.5 *Data Extraction*

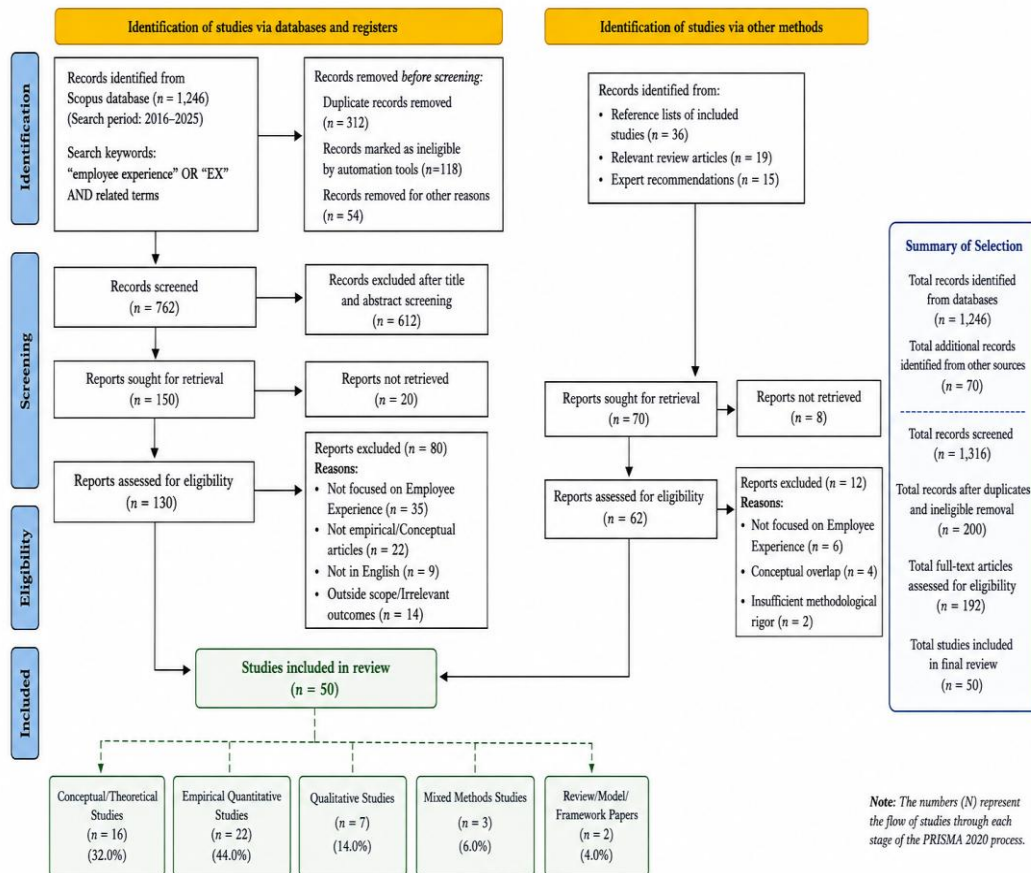
A structured data extraction form was developed to ensure consistency across the selected studies. For each article, the following information was recorded:

- author(s),
- publication year,
- journal,
- country,
- research objectives,
- theoretical foundation,
- methodology,
- sample characteristics,
- analytical techniques,
- principal findings, and
- implications for Employee Experience.

This structured approach facilitated both descriptive analysis and qualitative thematic coding.

Figure 1. PRISMA Literature Selection Process

PRISMA 2020 Literature Selection Process



3.6 NVivo-Based Qualitative Analysis

Following article selection, the full texts of the included studies were imported into NVivo 12 Plus for qualitative analysis. NVivo was selected because it facilitates systematic coding, theme identification, pattern recognition, and qualitative synthesis across large bodies of textual data. The coding process followed the principles of thematic analysis and consisted of three sequential stages.

a. Open Coding

During the first stage, individual concepts, keywords, organizational practices, and recurring ideas associated with Employee Experience were identified without imposing predetermined categories.

b. Axial Coding

Conceptually similar codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories by identifying relationships among organizational practices, employee perceptions, and organizational outcomes.

c. Selective Coding

Finally, the broader categories were integrated into higher-order themes representing the principal dimensions of Employee Experience. This process resulted in six dominant dimensions that form the empirical foundation of the Integrated Employee Experience Ecosystem Framework (IEEF) proposed later in the study.

3.7 Data Analysis

The analysis proceeded in three stages.

First, descriptive analysis summarized publication characteristics, journal distribution, geographical coverage, research methods, theoretical foundations, and analytical techniques.

Second, NVivo-generated qualitative coding identified recurring concepts, thematic relationships, and dominant Employee Experience dimensions.

Third, the qualitative findings were integrated with the conceptual and theoretical review to develop the **Integrated Employee Experience Ecosystem Framework**, thereby linking empirical evidence with theory development.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1 Overview of the Reviewed Literature

The researcher identified 50 Scopus indexed, peer reviewed journal articles which published between 2016 and 2025. The selected articles provide the empirical foundation and represent diverse discipline like Human Resource Management, Organizational Behaviour, Organizational Psychology, Strategic Management, Information Systems, Hospitality, Healthcare, and Business Administration. This diversity in this research demonstrates the multidisciplinary nature of Employee Experience research. The researcher took care in identifying different research design, including quantitative, qualitative, mixed-method, conceptual, and review approaches. Overall, the findings confirm that EX has evolved into a multidisciplinary field with growing conceptual, methodological, and strategic importance.

4.2 Publication Trend (2016–2025)

One objective of this review was to examine the evolution of EX research over time. The publication trend shows a steady increase in academic interest between 2016 and 2025. During 2016–2018, publication activity remained limited, reflecting the emerging nature of EX research. Studies mainly focused on conceptual definitions, employee engagement, organizational culture, and workplace design.

Research increased from 2019 as organizations recognized EX as a strategic organizational capability. The COVID-19 pandemic further increased research interest through remote work, digital collaboration, employee well-being, and organizational uncertainty. Between 2022 and 2025, EX research entered a rapid growth phase. Studies increasingly focused on digital transformation, artificial intelligence, hybrid work, employee analytics, organizational resilience, and sustainability. Overall, the publication trend confirms that EX has evolved from an emerging concept into an established multidisciplinary research field.

Table 4. Annual Distribution of Reviewed Studies

Period	Characteristics of Research
2016–2018	Concept formation, workplace experience, employee journey, organizational culture
2019–2020	Leadership, employee engagement, workplace design, organizational performance
2021–2023	Employee well-being, hybrid work, digital workplace, resilience, psychological safety
2024–2025	Artificial intelligence, employee analytics, sustainability, intelligent employee experience

4.3 Evolution of Employee Experience Research

The identified review articles indicates that EX has evolved through two clearly distinguishable development phase.

Phase I (2016–2020): Conceptual Establishment

In the first phase they article mainly focused on conceptual clarification. Researchers required to distinguish EX from related organizational construct which includes employee engagement, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and organizational culture. The constructs like Leadership, employee journey, workplace environment, organizational culture, and human resource practices emerged as dominant research themes. EX during this period was generally viewed as an organizational intervention designed to improve employee engagement and retention.

Phase II (2021–2025): Strategic Integration

In the second phase reflects substantial conceptual expansion.

Rather than concentrating solely on employee engagement, researchers increasingly examined the following constructs like employee well-being, hybrid work, digital employee experience, organizational resilience, diversity and inclusion, sustainability, artificial intelligence, and employee analytics. EX consequently evolved from a Human Resource Management initiative into an enterprise-wide organizational capability integrating people, technology, leadership, and organizational strategy.

Table 5. Comparative Evolution of Employee Experience Research

The below table 5, clearly explains the intellectual transformation of EX during the review period (2016 to 2025)

Dimension	2016–2020	2021–2025
Primary Focus	Engagement	Employee Experience Ecosystem
Leadership	Supervisory leadership	Inclusive and digital leadership
Technology	Supporting HR function	Core Employee Experience driver
Employee Well-being	Secondary outcome	Central Employee Experience dimension
Workplace	Physical office	Physical–digital ecosystem
Organizational Objective	Retention	Organizational resilience and sustainability

4.4 Distribution by Research Methodology

The methodological review shows that EX research remains dominated by quantitative studies. Nearly one-third of the reviewed studies used cross-sectional survey designs. These studies mainly examined relationships between EX, employee engagement, organizational commitment, leadership, organizational support, and performance using SEM or PLS-SEM. Qualitative studies mainly used case study approaches to examine organizational culture, employee journeys, workplace transformation, and digital workplaces. Mixed-method studies remained limited, despite their potential to provide a deeper understanding of EX. Recent studies increasingly adopted systematic reviews, bibliometric analysis, and conceptual approaches. This methodological diversity indicates the growing maturity and development of Employee Experience research.

Table 6. Distribution of Research Methodologies

Research Method	Observed Trend
Cross-sectional Survey	Most frequently used
Qualitative Case Study	Increasing

Mixed Methods	Emerging
Conceptual Papers	Moderate
Systematic Reviews	Increasing after 2021
Bibliometric Studies	Emerging

4.5 Distribution by Industry

Employee Experience research has been conducted across diverse organizational contexts. The majority of studies focused on Information Technology, Financial Services, Hospitality, Healthcare, and Higher Education. More recent studies increasingly examine Employee Experience within hybrid organizations, multinational corporations, and digital organizations. However, comparatively limited research exists within manufacturing, logistics, public administration, agriculture, and small and medium-sized enterprises. This imbalance suggests opportunities for future contextual expansion.

Table 7. Major Industries Represented

Industry	Research Intensity
Information Technology	High
Hospitality	High
Financial Services	Moderate
Healthcare	Moderate
Higher Education	Moderate
Manufacturing	Low
Public Sector	Low
SMEs	Very Low

4.6 Theoretical Distribution

The reviewed literature employs multiple theoretical perspectives. The most frequently adopted include Social Exchange Theory, Job Demands–Resources Theory, Organizational Support Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Conservation of Resources Theory. Recent studies increasingly integrate digital workplace theories and employee well-being perspectives. This theoretical diversification indicates growing recognition that Employee Experience represents a multidimensional organizational phenomenon requiring interdisciplinary explanation.

4.8 NVivo-Based Thematic Analysis of Employee Experience Research

4.8.1 Introduction

Descriptive analysis explains research article publication patterns, methodological characteristics, and theoretical developments in EX research. However, it does not fully explain the conceptual structure underlying the field. Therefore, the selected studies were analysed using **NVivo 12 Plus** to identify frequent concepts and relationships among them.

Unlike bibliometric analysis, thematic analysis examines the actual content and meaning within the selected studies. Systematic coding helped identify the major concepts that designed EX research during the review period. This approach provides a deeper understanding beyond descriptive findings.

The coding process in this study followed three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding identified recurring concepts in EX, while axial coding grouped related concepts into broader themes. Selective

coding integrated these themes into core dimensions of EX. These dimensions provide the empirical foundation for the Integrated Employee Experience Ecosystem Framework (IEEF) developed later in this study.

4.8.2 Open Coding

The first stage consists of open coding of the selected articles. In this phase, concepts related to EX were identified without imposing predetermined categories. The objective of this phase was to capture the diversity of organizational practices, employee perceptions, and workplace conditions discussed across the literature. The coding process generated numerous recurring concepts, included employee well-being, leadership, organizational culture, trust, collaboration, communication, workplace flexibility, employee engagement, organizational support, diversity, inclusion, psychological safety, innovation, resilience, digital workplace, hybrid work, learning and development, recognition, career growth, physical workplace, technology, and employee journey.

Although terminology varied across studies, many concepts referred to similar organizational phenomena. For example, "managerial support," "supervisory support," and "leadership support" reflected a common underlying construct. Similarly, "employee wellness," "mental health," and "psychological well-being" represented closely related concepts. The open coding process therefore produced a broad conceptual map of EX that served as the basis for further analytical refinement.

4.8.3 Axial Coding

In this stage the thematic analysis involved organizing concepts into broader analytical categories by examining relationship among the dimensions identified in the open codes. In this stage several meaningful patterns emerged. Leadership-related concepts consistently appeared alongside organizational trust, communication, empowerment, and collaboration, indicating that these concepts collectively represent the quality of interpersonal organizational relationships. Similarly, employee well-being, psychological safety, work-life balance, resilience, and organizational support frequently co-occurred, suggesting a common well-being dimension. Recognition, career development, learning opportunities, meaningful work, and performance feedback were repeatedly associated with employee motivation and achievement. Physical workplace design, hybrid work, digital collaboration, AI-supported systems, and technological infrastructure clustered around employees' interactions with their work environment. The axial coding process therefore reduced numerous individual concepts into broader analytical categories while preserving their conceptual relationships.

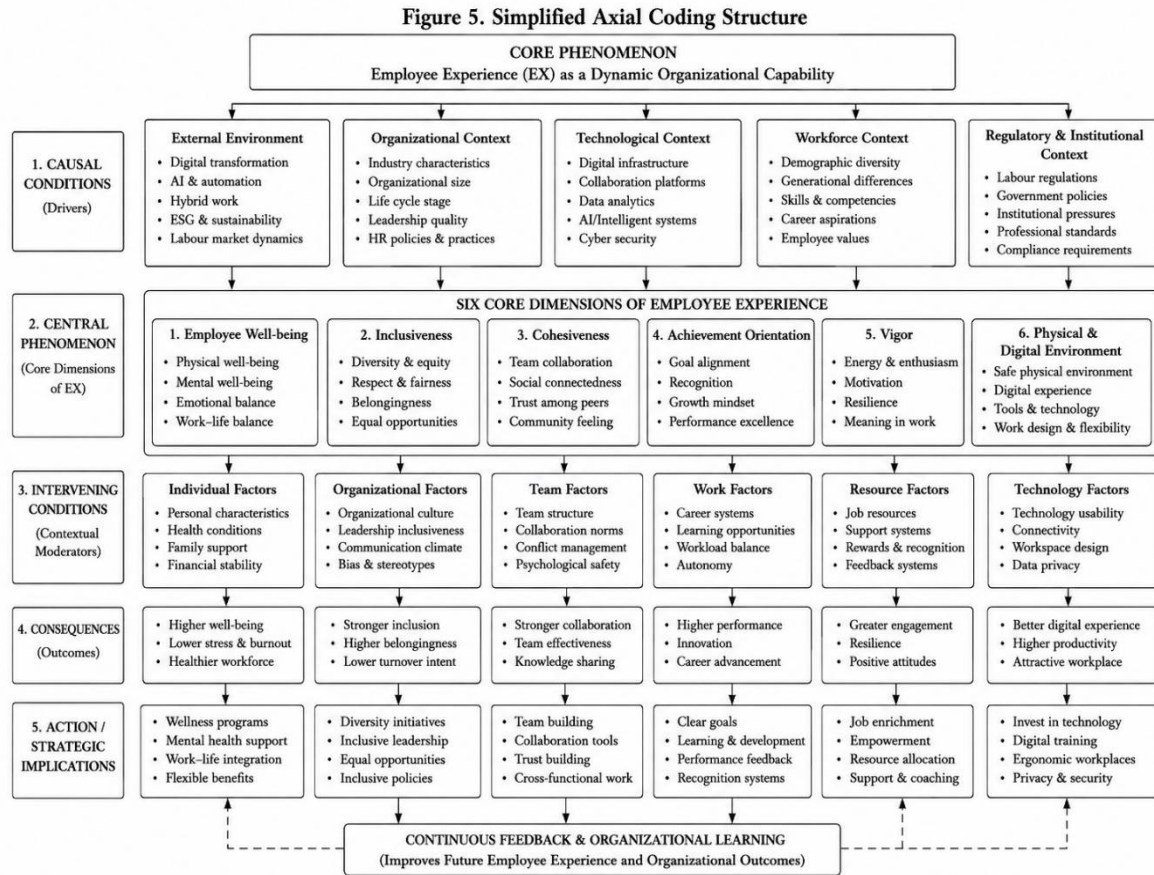


Figure 2. Simplified Axil Coding Structure

4.8.4 Selective Coding

In the final coding stage, the thematic analysis integrated the broader analytical categories into a comprehensible structure. Selective coding identified six core dimensions that consistently appeared across the reviewed literature and collectively represent the multidimensional nature of Employee Experience. These dimensions are Employee Well-being, Inclusiveness, Cohesiveness, Achievement Orientation, Vigor, Physical and Digital Environment. These themes emerged inductively from the literature rather than being predetermined by existing theoretical frameworks. Their consistency across different industries, countries, and methodological approaches suggests that they represent the core conceptual architecture of Employee Experience.

Table 8. Six Core Dimensions Identified Through NVivo Analysis

Dimension	Representative Concepts	Organizational Meaning
Employee Well-being	Mental health, resilience, work-life balance, psychological safety	Employees' physical, psychological, and emotional wellness
Inclusiveness	Diversity, belonging, fairness, equity, participation	Employees' perception of equal opportunity and organizational acceptance
Cohesiveness	Trust, collaboration, teamwork, leadership, communication	Quality of interpersonal organizational relationships

Achievement Orientation	Career growth, learning, recognition, meaningful work	Opportunities for development and accomplishment
Vigor	Energy, motivation, enthusiasm, engagement	Employees' psychological vitality and willingness to contribute
Physical and Digital Environment	Workplace design, hybrid work, AI, digital platforms, technology	Physical and technological context shaping employee experiences

4.8.5 Relative Importance of Themes

Although the dimensions Employee Well-being, Inclusiveness, Cohesiveness, Achievement Orientation, Vigor and Physical and Digital Environment contribute towards EX, their relative importance differed across the existing literature. The dimension Employee Well-being developed as the most important dimension, particularly in studies published after 2020. This reflects the increased organizational emphasis on mental health, resilience, and psychological safety following the COVID-19 pandemic. The second most prominent theme was Cohesiveness, emphasizing leadership quality, communication, collaboration, and organizational trust.

The dimension achievement orientation became very important as organizations shifted toward continuous learning, employee development, and meaningful work. The importance of the Physical and Digital Environment increased considerably in recent years, reflecting the widespread adoption of hybrid work, digital collaboration platforms, artificial intelligence, and intelligent HR technologies. The development of dimension Inclusiveness reveals growing recognition of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging as integral dimensions of EX rather than independent organizational initiatives.

Finally, Vigor represents employees' psychological energy and enthusiasm, linking Employee Experience with sustained motivation and organizational performance.

4.8.6 Interpretation of the NVivo Findings

The result of thematic analysis provides important insights. EX has shifted from traditional HR practices like recruitment, performance appraisal, and compensation. In the present scenario EX includes psychological, social, technological, and workplace dimensions that collectively outline employee perceptions.

Second, the dimensions Employee Well-being, Inclusiveness, Cohesiveness, Achievement Orientation, Vigor and Physical and Digital Environment are interconnected, earlier it was considered as independent dimension. Effective leadership strengthens cohesion, well-being, and motivation. Similarly, an inclusive culture improves psychological safety, belonging, and overall Employee Experience.

Third, the findings indicate that EX should be considered as an organizational ecosystem rather than separate HR practices. Positive EX develops through the interaction of leadership, organizational culture, technology, employee development, workplace design, and organizational support. These findings provide the foundation for the Integrated Employee Experience Ecosystem Framework (IEEF) which is presented in the discussion section.

5. Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This review aims to explain the intellectual evolution of EX and establish a stronger foundation for future research. The systematic review and NVivo-based thematic analysis confirmed significant changes in EX research between 2016 and 2025. EX has evolved from an operational HR practice focused on engagement and satisfaction into a multidimensional organizational capability. It now integrates the constructs leadership, organizational culture, employee well-being, digital transformation, inclusiveness, and sustainable organizational development.

The findings of the research revealed three important changes in EX research. First, the concept has moved from isolated HR practices to an overall employee journey in the organization. Second, theoretical development has shifted from individual theories toward interdisciplinary integration. Third, research methods have moved beyond

quantitative studies to include qualitative, mixed-method, and systematic review approaches. These developments indicates that EX has reached higher intellectual maturity level and requires an integrated theoretical perspective to explain its growing organizational importance.

5.2 From Human Resource Practice to Strategic Organizational Capability

One of the important findings of this review is the changing organizational role of **EX**. Earlier studies viewed EX mainly as a group of HR practices designed to improve engagement, commitment, and retention. Recruitment, onboarding, recognition, workplace design, and leadership development were treated as separate dimension to improve employee attitudes.

The findings explained a clear shift from this approach. Contemporary EX is increasingly integrated with organizational strategy rather than limited to the existing HR function. Leadership, organizational culture, technology, sustainability, digital transformation, and employee well-being now work together to shape workplace experiences. This change reflects a shift from transactional HR practices toward experience-centred organizational design.

Therefore, EX should be hereafter viewed as a strategic organizational capability rather than only an outcome of human resource. A positive EX can strengthen organizational resilience, innovation, employer branding, customer experience, and competitive advantage. This perspective places EX within broader organizational strategy and extends its importance beyond traditional HR practices.

5.3 The Intellectual Evolution of Employee Experience

The comparison between Phase I (2016-2020) and Phase II (2021 – 2025) clearly explains the difference in the evolution of EX. The first phase mainly focused towards conceptual development, leadership, employee overall journey in the workplace, and workplace design. The second phase mainly concentrated towards digital transformation, hybrid work, AI, employee well-being, and organizational resilience. This shift in EX reflects the growing strategic importance of EX.

Table 9. Intellectual Evolution of Employee Experience

Dimension	Phase I (2016–2020)	Phase II (2021–2025)	Intellectual Shift
Conceptual Focus	Employee journey	Organizational ecosystem	Expanded scope
Organizational Role	HR initiative	Strategic capability	Enterprise-wide integration
Technology	Supporting function	Core experience driver	Digital transformation
Employee Well-being	Secondary outcome	Central organizational objective	Human-centred perspective
Workplace	Physical office	Hybrid physical–digital workplace	Contextual transformation
Organizational Goal	Engagement and retention	Resilience, innovation, sustainability	Strategic orientation

The above table 9 demonstrates that EX has evolved from developing individual employee outcomes towards supporting broader organizational transformation.

5.4 Employee Well-being as the Central Organizing Principle

The NVivo analysis identified Employee Well-being as one of the most prominent theme in Employee Experience (EX) research. Earlier HRM studies considered well-being mainly as an organizational outcome. However, recent EX research positions well-being as a core dimension that shapes overall workplace experience. Leadership, organizational culture, workplace flexibility, psychological safety, meaningful work, employee development, and

digital workplace design contribute to employee well-being. In turn, positive well-being strengthens engagement, commitment, innovation, and organizational resilience. This finding indicates an important conceptual shift in EX research. Employee well-being should therefore be viewed as a central dimension rather than only an outcome of organizational practices. This perspective also connects EX with Positive Organizational Scholarship and sustainable HRM.

5.5 Digital Transformation Has Redefined Employee Experience

The dimension digital transformation was one of the striking contextual developments identified which influence EX. Earlier EX research primarily examined only physical organizational environments. Employees interacted predominantly through face-to-face communication, traditional leadership, and physical workplace design. The reviewed literature demonstrates that this assumption is no longer adequate in the future. Employees now increasingly experience organizations through enterprise collaboration platforms, AI-supported HR systems, virtual meetings, employee self-service technologies, digital learning platforms, people analytics, and intelligent workplace applications. In this era, technology has evolved from an organizational resource into a central component of Employee Experience itself. This finding suggests that future Employee Experience theories must clearly incorporate digital organizational environments rather than treating technology as an external relative variable.

5.6 Employee Experience Is a Dynamic Organizational Ecosystem

In this study, one of the most important findings identified are the relationships among the six dimensions identified by NVivo thematic analysis. The analysis demonstrates that Employee Well-being, Inclusiveness, Cohesiveness, Achievement Orientation, Vigor, and the Physical–Digital Environment rarely operate independently. Instead, they continuously reinforce one another through reciprocal organizational interactions. For example:

- Inclusive leadership strengthens organizational trust.
- Trust enhances cohesion.
- Cohesion improves employee well-being.
- Well-being increases employee vigor.
- Higher vigor promotes innovation and organizational performance.
- Organizational success enables further investment in employee development and supportive technologies.

These reciprocal interactions demonstrate that Employee Experience functions as an interconnected organizational ecosystem rather than a linear sequence of organizational practices. This interpretation provides the conceptual justification for the Integrated Employee Experience Ecosystem Framework (IEEF) developed in the following section.

5.7 Comparison with Existing Review Studies

A major contribution of the present review lies in how it extends prior Employee Experience reviews.

Table 10. Comparison with Existing Employee Experience Reviews

Review Characteristic	Previous Reviews	Present Review
Review period	3–5 years	10 years (2016–2025)
Review approach	Narrative or bibliometric	Systematic review + NVivo thematic analysis
Theory integration	Single or limited theories	Integrated multi-theoretical synthesis
Thematic synthesis	Limited	Six empirically derived dimensions

New conceptual framework	Rare	Integrated Employee Experience Ecosystem Framework (IEEF)
Future research	General recommendations	Structured roadmap (2026–2035)

5.8 Transition to the Integrated Employee Experience Ecosystem Framework

The discussion shows that Employee Experience (EX) has evolved beyond individual HR practices into a multidimensional organizational ecosystem. It develops through continuous interactions among organizational systems, employee perceptions, digital technologies, and workplace practices. However, existing theories explain only specific aspects of EX and lack an integrated perspective.

Therefore, this study proposes the Integrated Employee Experience Ecosystem Framework (IEEF). The framework is developed from the systematic review, theoretical synthesis, and NVivo findings. It integrates external environmental drivers, organizational capabilities, six core EX dimensions, employee outcomes, and organizational performance within a single model. The IEEF represents the major theoretical contribution of this study. It provides an integrated understanding of EX and establishes a foundation for future empirical research and theoretical development.

6. Integrated Employee Experience Ecosystem Framework (IEEF): A Theory-Building Perspective

6.1 Introduction

The result of the analysis clearly explained that EX has evolved through conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and organizational developments. The NVivo analysis further identified six core dimensions that consistently predict and explains EX across different organizational contexts. However, existing literature mainly examine individual factors without explaining how they interact to create Employee Experience.

To address this gap, the study proposes the Integrated Employee Experience Ecosystem Framework (IEEF). The framework integrates the overall findings from the systematic review, theoretical analysis, and NVivo results. It explains EX as a dynamic ecosystem where external dimensions influence organizational capabilities, which shape employee experiences and other related outcomes. These outcomes further contribute to organizational performance through continuous feedback. Thus, the IEEF provides an integrated perspective for understanding and examining Employee Experience.

6.2 Foundations of the IEEF

The Integrated Employee Experience Ecosystem Framework is developed based on four observations identified from the reviewed literature.

First, Employee Experience is identified as multidimensional. It cannot be explained independently through employee engagement, organizational culture, leadership, or technology. Instead, it explains the overall outcome of multiple organizational interactions occurred throughout the employee lifecycle in the organization.

Second, Employee Experience is identified as dynamic rather than static. Employees continuously revise their perceptions based on organizational conditions, leadership practices, technologies, and other career opportunities evolve.

Third, Employee Experience is identified as reciprocal. Employees not only respond to organizational environments but also influence environments through dimensions like innovation, collaboration, organizational citizenship behaviour, and organizational learning.

Fourth, Employee Experience is identified as contextual. External environmental changes like artificial intelligence, digital transformation, labour market conditions, sustainability expectations, and hybrid work, shape organizational decisions and employee expectations simultaneously.

Collectively, these observations suggest that Employee Experience should be conceptualized as an ecosystem rather than a linear organizational process.

Figure 1. Integrated Employee Experience Ecosystem Framework (IEEF)

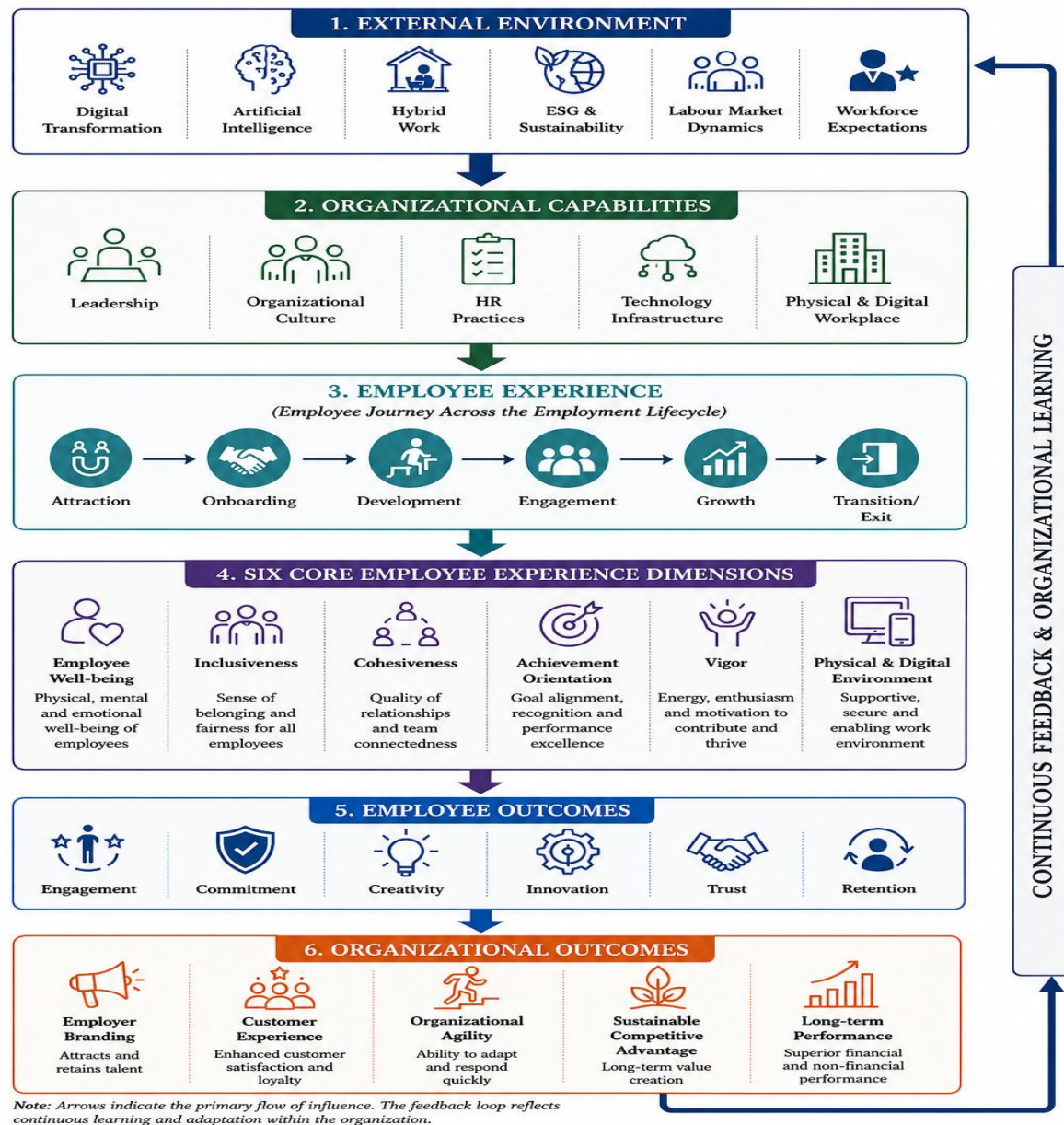


Figure 3. Integrated Employee Experience Ecosystem Framework

6.5 Theoretical Propositions

In order to strengthen the theory building contribution, the IEEF is proposed by research propositions that future researcher can test it empirically.

P1: External environmental drivers positively influence the development of organizational capabilities that shape Employee Experience.

P2: Organizational capabilities positively influence the quality of Employee Experience throughout the employee lifecycle.

P3: Employee Experience positively influences the six core dimensions of Employee Well-being, Inclusiveness, Cohesiveness, Achievement Orientation, Vigor, and the Physical and Digital Environment.

P4: Higher levels of the six Employee Experience dimensions positively influence employee outcomes, including engagement, commitment, innovation, and retention.

P5: Positive employee outcomes contribute to superior organizational outcomes, including employer branding, organizational resilience, customer experience, and sustainable competitive advantage.

P6: Organizational outcomes create continuous feedback loops that reinforce future organizational capabilities and Employee Experience.

The above propositions transform the framework from a descriptive model into a testable conceptual framework, making it suitable for future Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), multilevel modelling, or longitudinal empirical research.

7. Theoretical, Managerial, and Future Research Implications

7.1 Introduction

The findings clearly explained that Employee Experience (EX) has evolved beyond traditional HRM into a multidisciplinary field. The proposed Integrated Employee Experience Ecosystem Framework (IEEF) explains EX as a dynamic organizational capability. Based on these findings, this section presents key implications for researchers, organizational leaders, practitioners, and policymakers.

7.2 Theoretical Implications

This review makes four important theoretical contributions to EX research. First, it clarifies the conceptual boundaries of EX by distinguishing it from engagement, job satisfaction, organizational culture, and employee well-being. EX represents a broader organizational capability developed through employee interactions across the employment lifecycle.

Second, the review integrates multiple organizational theories rather than depending on a single theoretical perspective. This integration provides a broader explanation of how organizational practices and employee perceptions collectively shape EX.

Third, the review positions EX as a dynamic organizational ecosystem. The proposed IEEF explains continuous interactions among organizational capabilities, employee experiences, employee outcomes, and organizational performance through feedback mechanisms.

Finally, the NVivo analysis identified six core dimensions: Employee Well-being, Inclusiveness, Cohesiveness, Achievement Orientation, Vigor, and Physical and Digital Environment. These dimensions provide an empirical foundation for future construct development, measurement refinement, and theoretical advancement in EX research.

7.3 Managerial Implications

The review provides various important implications for organizational leaders and HR practitioners. First, organizations should position EX as a strategic priority rather than an operational HR activity. The dimensions like Leadership, organizational culture, technology, and employee development should be collectively support EX.

Second, leaders should ensure and promote trust, transparent communication, psychological safety, inclusion, and adaptability inside the organization. Third, organizations should clearly adopt an employee journey approach by integrating recruitment, onboarding, learning, performance management, career development, and recognition.

Fourth, organization should ensure that digital transformation should always remain with human-centred. The other factors like AI, employee analytics, and digital HR systems should ensure transparency, fairness, privacy,

and human involvement. Finally, organizations should continuously measure EX through multiple dimensions, including employee well-being, inclusiveness, collaboration, development opportunities, digital experiences, and organizational trust, rather than depending only on employee engagement surveys.

7.4 Policy Implications

The findings of this study also have implications beyond individual organizations. The Governments and regulatory bodies at present increasingly recognize employee well-being, digital transformation, and sustainable employment as one of the national priorities. The review suggests that Employee Experience provides an integrative framework through which these priorities can be operationalized.

Policymakers should encourage organizations to develop healthy workplaces, promote lifelong learning, establish ethical AI governance, and support flexible work arrangements which protect employee well-being by maintaining organizational productivity.

Professional HR associations and industry bodies may also consider developing Employee Experience standards and maturity models to assist organizations in benchmarking and continuously improving workplace practices.

7.5 Future Research Agenda

Even though EX research has expanded rapidly during the past decade, still several important gaps exist in the literature.

Priority 1: Artificial Intelligence and Human–AI Collaboration

Future research can be extended to measure how generative AI, intelligent HR systems, algorithmic decision-making, and digital assistants influence employee trust, fairness perceptions about fairness in the workplace, autonomy, and employee-employer relationships.

Priority 2: Longitudinal Employee Experience

Majority of existing study in the literature employed cross sectional designs, future research can be extended towards longitudinal employee experience to understand how EX evolves throughout recruitment, onboarding, career development, organizational change, and employee exit.

Priority 3: Cross-Cultural Employee Experience

Future studies should examine EX across sectors and cultural environments, particularly in emerging economies where organizational structures and workforce expectations differ substantially from those in developed countries.

Priority 4: Sustainable Employee Experience

Ex can be measure along with environment sustainability, Green Human Resource Management, corporate social responsibility, and ESG practices. These dimensions remain underdeveloped and represents a promising direction for future research.

Priority 5: Employee Experience Analytics

The increasing availability of digital workplace data creates opportunities to integrate employee surveys with people analytics, sentiment analysis, social network analysis, and machine learning to develop predictive models of Employee Experience.

Table 11. Strategic Future Research Agenda

Research Priority	Key Research Questions	Suggested Methodologies
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Artificial Intelligence	How does AI influence Employee Experience and organizational trust?	Experimental studies, mixed methods
Longitudinal Employee Experience	How does Employee Experience evolve over the employee lifecycle?	Panel studies, longitudinal surveys
Cross-Cultural Studies	Do Employee Experience dimensions vary across cultures?	Comparative international research
Sustainable Employee Experience	How do ESG and Green HRM influence Employee Experience?	SEM, case studies
Employee Experience Analytics	Can digital workplace data predict Employee Experience?	Machine learning, people analytics

8. Conclusion

Employee Experience (EX) has become a strategic priority as organizations respond to digital transformation, artificial intelligence, hybrid work, and growing expectations for employee well-being. This study systematically reviews EX research published between 2016 and 2025 using a PRISMA-guided review and NVivo-based thematic analysis to examine its conceptual, theoretical, and methodological development.

The findings shown that EX has evolved from a traditional focus on engagement and workplace satisfaction into a multidimensional organizational capability encompassing leadership, culture, well-being, inclusiveness, digital technologies, and workplace design. The review further establishes that EX cannot be explained by a single theory. Instead, it draws on complementary perspectives, including Experience Economy Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Organizational Support Theory, Psychological Contract Theory, Job Demands–Resources Theory, Conservation of Resources Theory, Self-Determination Theory, Positive Organizational Scholarship, and Digital Employee Experience.

The thematic analysis identifies six core dimensions: Employee Well-being, Inclusiveness, Cohesiveness, Achievement Orientation, Vigor, and the Physical and Digital Environment. Based on these findings, the study proposes the Integrated Employee Experience Ecosystem Framework, linking environmental drivers, organizational capabilities, employee experiences, and organizational performance. Despite its restriction to Scopus-indexed articles, the review provides a comprehensive foundation for future research on AI-enabled EX, employee analytics, sustainable HRM, and human–AI collaboration.

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