

# The Employee Experience of Healthcare Workers

*A study of the impact and drivers of a more human workplace*



In 2016, the IBM Smarter Workforce Institute and Globoforce's WorkHuman Research Institute® joined forces to conduct a major, global research study to find out what makes a great employee experience.

According to the study, employee experience was defined as a set of perceptions that employees have about their experiences at work in response to their interactions with the organization. A positive – and ultimately human – employee experience, in which employees are able to invest more of their whole selves into the workplace, can be powerful in improving employee outcomes such as performance and retention<sup>1</sup>.

In fact, healthcare could be considered the most 'human' of endeavors as the performance of healthcare professionals such as physicians and nurses directly affects the physical and mental well-being of patients. Research has already clearly identified links between healthcare work attitudes and patient outcomes<sup>2</sup>, as such employee experience is an important concept worthy of attention.

Global cross-industry research findings were published in a white paper [The Employee Experience Index: A new global measure of a human workplace and its impact](#). In this paper, we focus on the employee experience specifically of those working in healthcare in the United States to answer the following questions:

- What impact could a positive employee experience have on workforce outcomes?
- How could healthcare organizations drive more positive and human employee experiences?

## The Employee Experience Index

As explained in detail in [The Employee Experience Index: A new global measure of a human workplace and its impact](#), the Employee Experience Index is a 5-dimension, 10-item index that captures the core facets of the employee experience.

The Employee Experience Index measures:

- **Belonging** – feeling part of a team, group or organization
- **Purpose** – understanding why one's work matters
- **Achievement** – a sense of accomplishment in the work that is done
- **Happiness** – the pleasant feeling arising in and around work
- **Vigor** – the presence of energy, enthusiasm, and excitement at work

The original research not only defined the Employee Experience Index, it also went on to look at what drives employee experience and what results organizations can expect when they create a more positive and human organization. The framework for these relationships is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. A framework of drivers and impact of employee experience at work



Employee experience has its beginnings in the direction and support of leaders and managers, who drive organizational practices that create the employee experience. Ultimately, a positive employee experience is associated with improved employee outcomes such as better job performance, increased discretionary effort and higher retention.

### Employee experience linked to performance and retention

Our research reveals that healthcare employees who experience a sense of belonging, purpose, achievement, happiness and vigor perform at higher levels and are more likely to contribute “above and beyond” expectations. They are also less likely to quit.

### Positive employee experience linked to more effort

More dramatically perhaps, healthcare employees with more positive experiences at work are much more likely to report significantly higher levels of discretionary effort<sup>i</sup> (98 percent compared to 67 percent) (Figure 2). In a healthcare setting, this is likely to have a direct impact on patient satisfaction and outcomes; research studies have identified links between the discretionary behaviors of healthcare professionals (e.g., nurses, doctors, pharmacists) and hospital performance in terms of service efficiency, patient satisfaction, patient re-visit and recommendations to others<sup>4</sup>.

The results of these analyses suggest a positive employee experience can contribute to higher motivation to apply extra effort at work and go “above and beyond” typical job responsibilities.

Figure 2. Employee experience is positively associated with discretionary effort at work



Source: WorkTrends™ 2016 US healthcare worker sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=495)

Note: The scores are reported as percent favorable, the average level of agreement across the three items that measure discretionary effort.

### Positive employee experiences linked to retention

Talent retention is a challenging issue for many organizations, including those in the healthcare sector. Healthcare providers face significant cost challenges from attrition, not only because of the resulting need to recruit and onboard new healthcare employees, but also because of the use of temporary staff and payment of overtime to cover any shortages. The good news is that a more positive employee experience could help. Our analysis reveals that healthcare workers with low Employee Experience Index scores are more than twice as likely to say they want to leave compared to those with more positive experiences. The difference is 27 percentage points (48 percent vs. 21 percent) (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Positive employee experience is associated with lower turnover intention<sup>ii</sup>



Source: WorkTrends™ 2016 US healthcare worker sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=495)

Note: The scores above are reported as percent favorable, the average level of agreement across the two items that measure turnover intention.<sup>v</sup>

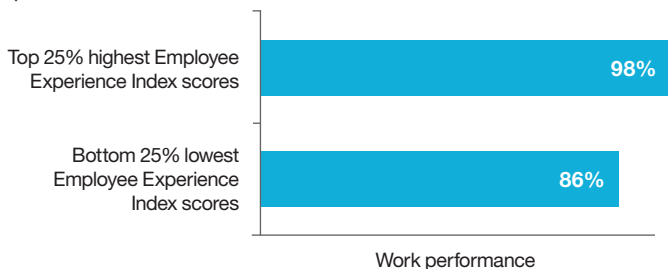
<sup>i</sup> Discretionary effort refers to employee activities that are beneficial to the organization but not necessarily part of the job. It was measured by respondents reporting that they were always willing to give more effort to get the job done, they enjoyed devoting a lot of extra effort to their work, and consistently went above and beyond what is expected of them at work.

<sup>ii</sup> Turnover intention was measured by respondents reporting that, within the next 6 months, they were seriously considering leaving their organization and planning to look for a new job.

## Positive employee experience linked to better work performance

Healthcare workers with Employee Experience Index scores in the top quartile are more likely to report high levels of work performance<sup>iii</sup> than those whose scores are in the bottom quartile (12 percentage points higher) (Figure 4). However, it is worth noting that work performance is high even for those with low Employee Experience Index scores (86 percent). This is a notably higher figure than for our global cross-industry analyses, where high levels of work performance were reported for 73 percent of respondents. (See our white paper [The Employee Experience Index: A new global measure of a human workplace and its impact](#) for more details.)

Figure 4. Employee experience is positively associated with work performance



Source: WorkTrends™ 2016 US healthcare worker sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=495)

Note: The scores are reported as percent favorable, the average level of agreement across the three items that measure job performance.

## Creating the ideal employee experience

Our study has clearly made the case that employee experience matters in the healthcare industry. The question that naturally arises is “what can healthcare providers do to improve employee experience?” We examined two primary sets of driving factors – leadership and workplace practices – that can provide organizations with the tools and insight they need. A preliminary exploration of these workplace behaviors and practices is provided below.

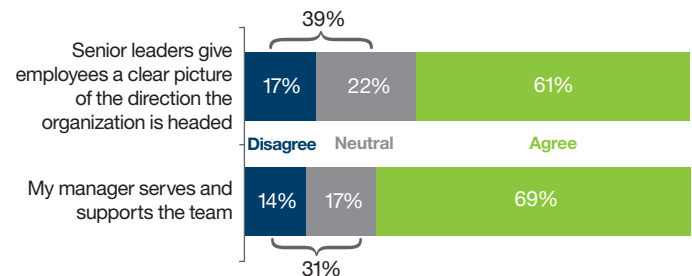
## Leadership Sets the Stage

Leaders and supervisors play a powerful role in setting the overall tone and direction of an organization, effectively setting the stage for a more positive employee experience<sup>5</sup>. This begins with a high level of clarity around future direction and why employees matter in successfully moving the organization forward.

Our data suggest there is room for improvement. For instance, 39 percent of healthcare workers do not feel their senior leaders are providing clear direction about where the organization is headed. Providing more clarity would help senior leaders to more fully align employees and their behaviors with organizational goals.

Managers and supervisors also play a crucial role in creating a positive work environment, by providing a level of personalized support and commitment to their teams. However, almost one third (31 percent) of employees in our sample do not feel their managers were effective in serving and supporting the team.

Figure 5. Leader and manager practices linked to employee experience



Source: WorkTrends™ 2016 US healthcare worker sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=495)

<sup>iii</sup>Self-reported work performance was measured by respondents reporting that, in the last three months, they had been very productive at work, worked hard to get their job done on time, and completed work to a high standard.

## Human Workplace Practices Make the Experience

Leadership initiates momentum towards a positive employee experience, while workplace practices carry that momentum forward.

Employees in all industries are bringing much higher expectations to the workplace and making greater demands of their work experiences<sup>6</sup>. Practices that acknowledge the uniquely human qualities of the workplace address these new expectations. These practices can be viewed across multiple levels: **environment**, **work** and **person**.

### The Environment

Employees expect their organizations to be responsible and act with integrity in dealing with all manner of stakeholders, including employees themselves. When they do, a full 84 percent of healthcare workers describe a positive employee experience, 37 percentage points higher than when those expectations are unmet. See Figure 6.

Supportive **coworker relationships** are also an important driver of a positive work experience. When those relationships are present in the workplace, healthcare employees report a much more positive employee experience than when that support is absent (81 percent compared to 46 percent) (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Organizational integrity and co-worker support are associated with a positive employee experience



Source: WorkTrends™ 2016 US healthcare worker sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=495)

Note: The scores above are reported as percent favorable, the agreement level of the survey question.

### The Work

The drivers of employee experience also extend to the work itself. Meaningful work ensures that healthcare employees' skills and talents are being fully utilized and there is greater alignment to shared, core values. According to our data, full utilization of skills and alignment to core values are related to a 45 to 48 percentage point increase in employee experience for healthcare workers (Figure 7). Employee experience is just 36 percent when employees do not report their work is consistent with organizational values, compared with an Employee Experience Index score of 81 percent when healthcare employees' work is consistent with those core values.

Figure 7. Meaningful work associated with a positive employee experience



Source: WorkTrends™ 2016 US healthcare worker sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=495)  
 Note: The scores above are reported as percent favorable, the agreement level of the survey question.

Figure 8. Feedback, recognition and growth associated with positive employee experience



Source: WorkTrends™ 2016 US healthcare worker sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=495)  
 Note: The scores above are reported as percent favorable, the agreement level of the survey question.

Also critical to positive employee experiences are **feedback and recognition** of performance, as well as opportunities for professional development and **growth**. Eighty-five percent of healthcare workers who receive recognition of their performance, and 81 percent of those receiving feedback reported a positive employee experience, compared to 47 and 49 percent, respectively, of workers that did not (Figure 8).

### The Person

Shifting the focus to practices that impact individuals themselves, a positive employee experience emphasizes the benefits of greater freedom through **empowerment and opportunities for their voices to be heard**. Also important is the time for employees to **pursue non-work activities and recharge**.



Within a human workplace employees are given the freedom to decide, and opportunity to participate in, determining how work is best accomplished. Healthcare workers who feel their ideas and suggestions matter are more than twice as likely to report a positive employee experience than those who don't (87 percent vs. 43 percent). A similar pattern emerged among healthcare workers who had the freedom to decide how to do their work (83 percent vs. 49 percent) (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Empowerment and voice associated with positive employee experience



Source WorkTrends™ 2016 US healthcare worker sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=495)  
Note: The scores above are reported as percent favorable, the agreement level of the survey question.

More positive employee experiences are also associated with employees' flexibility to manage their work and other aspects of their lives. We see a 20 percentage point difference in employee experience when work schedules are flexible (Figure 10). Furthermore, there is a 25 percentage point difference in employee experience when healthcare workers have an opportunity to recharge when they are not at work (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Work-life balance associated with positive employee experience



Source: WorkTrends™ 2016 US healthcare worker sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=495)  
Note: The scores above are reported as percent favorable, the agreement level of the survey question.

## Conclusion and recommendations

Our study identified five components of employee experience — belonging, purpose, achievement, happiness, and vigor — and revealed that more positive employee experiences are linked to better performance, extra effort at work, and lower turnover intentions.

We also identified the key organizational practices that drive more positive employee experiences: organizational trust; co-worker relationships; meaningful work; recognition, feedback and growth; empowerment and voice; and work-life balance.



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Several recommendations emerge for cultivating more positive work experiences and achieving better results in the healthcare sector:

### Diagnose

- Listen regularly to the voice of your employees (through platforms such as census and pulse surveys, social listening, etc.) to understand the nature of their experiences at work.
- Conduct a drivers analysis to diagnose the culturally relevant practices in your organization that are strengths to build upon or areas for improvement.

### Act

- Recognize the unique role that leaders and supervisors play in defining employees' work experience, and enable supervisors to design experiences consistent with core values.
- Ensure the organization's actions are conveying the values intended and nurture an environment that reinforces mutually supportive co-worker relationships.
- Help employees understand the deeper meaning of their work and how it contributes to the wider organizational purpose and goals.
- Treat performance as a continuous conversation, fueled by social recognition, feedback and growth opportunities.
- Offer employees opportunities to participate in decision-making and trust them with the autonomy they need to find the best paths to achieving success.

### About WorkTrends™

WorkTrends™ is a research program initiated in 1984, originally designed to track trends in specific workforce themes over time. WorkTrends has evolved to a large global online survey completed by workers from a cross-section of industries around the world, on a variety of contemporary topics of

interest to HR and business leaders. In 2016, the WorkTrends survey was administered by the IBM Smarter Workforce Institute in 45 countries and territories, in a cross-section of industries, thousands of different organizations and all major job families. Globoforce was a key collaborator on the employee experience content of the 2016 WorkTrends survey.

### About IBM and the IBM Smarter Workforce Institute

Today's human resources organizations need to attract and grow top-performing talent, create engaging social and collaborative cultures, and connect the right people to get work done. IBM solutions combine market-leading talent management and social collaboration tools with the power of workforce science and advanced analytics. We help organizations build impassioned and engaged workforces, and deepen client relationships that can lead to measurable business outcomes. To learn more about IBM Smarter Workforce solutions and services, please visit [www.ibm.com/software/smarterworkforce](http://www.ibm.com/software/smarterworkforce)

The IBM Smarter Workforce Institute produces rigorous, global, innovative research spanning a wide range of workforce topics. The Institute's team of experienced researchers applies depth and breadth of content and analytical expertise to generate reports, white papers and insights that advance the collective understanding of work and organizations. This white paper is part of IBM's on-going commitment to provide highly credible, leading-edge research findings that help organizations realize value through their people.

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## About Globoforce and the WorkHuman Research Institute

Pioneer of the WorkHuman® movement, Globoforce helps make work more human for millions of people and organizations worldwide. Its cloud-based social recognition software helps build award-winning cultures where employees feel more appreciated and socially connected at work – driving a sense of belonging and inspiring the entire organization to reach its full potential and achieve business success. Founded in 1999, the company is headquartered in Framingham, Mass., and Dublin, Ireland.

The WorkHuman Research Institute at Globoforce is dedicated to the understanding and application of global workplace practices that create more engaged, productive, and ultimately more human work cultures. In collaboration with leaders in the human resource industry and global research experts, the WorkHuman Research Institute publishes original research on current trends that affect and influence the employee experience, culture management, and leadership.

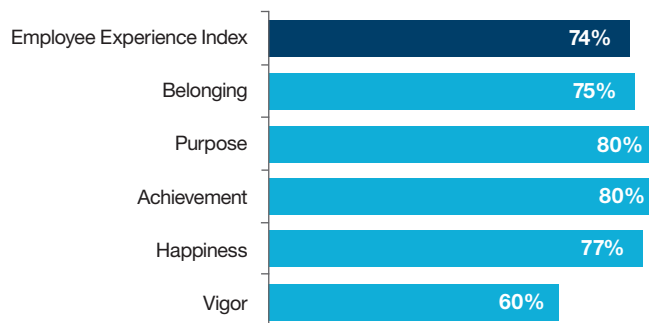
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## Appendix A: Demographic Analyses of Employee Experience Index

### Employee Experience Index scores by dimension

The global Employee Experience Index score from our research sample is 74 percent. This is quite positive, but leaves some room for improvement. Of the five dimensions of the Employee Experience Index, purpose and achievement are the highest (80 percent) and vigor at work is the lowest (60 percent) (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Employee Experience Index scores in the healthcare sector



Source: WorkTrends™ 2016 US healthcare worker sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=495)

Note: The scores are reported as percent favorable; that is, the Employee Experience Index score is the average level of agreement across the ten items in the Index. The score for each employee experience dimension is the average level of agreement across the two items that measure that dimension.

### Employee Experience Index scores by job level

It appears that the more senior you are in the healthcare sector, the more positive your employee experiences (Figure 12).

Individual contributors (employees who do not manage others) report a lower level of employee experience (70 percent) than managers (85 percent), a gap of 15 percentage points.

In fact, such a gap is not unique to the concept of employee experience. In other studies of worker opinions, we often find that managers tend to answer a range of work attitude questions more positively than individual contributors. One possible explanation could be that managers are more likely to be involved in decision making in organizations, and involvement is associated with positive attitudes.<sup>7</sup>

Figure 12. Employee Experience scores increase with job level



Source: WorkTrends™ 2016 US healthcare worker sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=495) Note: The scores are reported as percent favorable, the average level of agreement across the ten items in the Index.

### Employee Experience Index scores by generation

Despite the popularity of the notion of generational differences, scientific research suggests that differences in work attitudes are generally very small.<sup>8</sup> In fact, an IBM Smarter Workforce Institute study showed that only 0 to 2 percent of work attitude differences can be attributed to generation.<sup>9</sup>

In line with these previous findings, our research reveals no significant differences across generations in their employee experiences (Figure 13). All generations in the healthcare sector report similar levels of the employee experience dimensions.

Figure 13. No difference in employee experience across generations



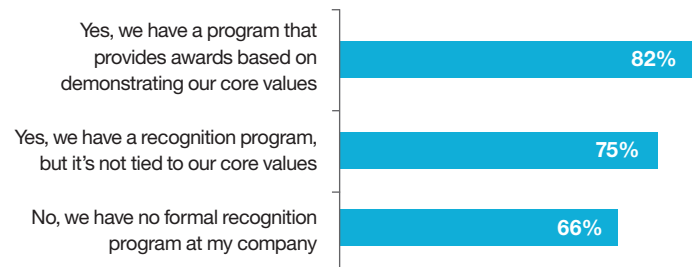
Source: WorkTrends™ 2016 US healthcare worker sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=495)  
Note: The scores are reported as percent favorable, the average level of agreement across the ten items in the Index.

### Recognition and employee experience

The need to be recognized and appreciated is deeply ingrained in us.<sup>10</sup> As a result, we would expect that employees in healthcare organizations with recognition programs are more likely to receive acknowledgment and recognition for a job well done and, consequently, to have a more positive employee experience.

Our research confirms this is the case (Figure 14). Healthcare workers who report that their organizations offer recognition programs, and particularly those that provide rewards based on demonstrating core values, have a considerably higher Employee Experience Index scores than those in organizations that do not offer formal recognition programs (82 percent vs. 66 percent).

Figure 14. Recognition programs linked to greater employee experience



Source: WorkTrends™ 2016 US healthcare worker sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=495)  
Note: The scores above are reported as percent favorable, the average level of agreement across the ten items in the Index.

### Teams and employee experience

Social relatedness is a basic need of human beings<sup>11</sup> and that need is often met in people's work interactions with each other. And this is reflected in our Employee Experience Index; our research confirms that healthcare sector employees working in a team report slightly more positive work experiences than those who work on their own (78 percent vs. 69 percent) (Figure 15).

In sum, our survey results reveal that Employee Experience Index levels vary by job level, whether employees work as part of a team or as an individual, and whether the organization offers recognition programs.

Figure 15. Teamwork linked to more positive employee experiences



Source: WorkTrends™ 2016 US healthcare worker sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=495)  
Note: The scores are reported as percent favorable, the average level of agreement across the ten items in the Index.

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