

VIRTUAL EMPLOYEES

An Employee Experience (EX) Case Study



As we discussed in our [HR Agility whitepaper](#), the demands of the workforce are changing. One of the most noticeable changes affects where people are working. Much of the modern workforce has traded in its commute and cubicle for the increased flexibility of working remotely. These workers are sometimes called remote, mobile, or virtual employees. Whether this means working from the comfort of home, or settling down in a coffee shop for the day, more and more employees are demanding the choice.

Currently, 43% of employed Americans spend at least some time working remotely.¹

Forging the right employee experience has always been a key to increasing employee engagement. That notion is even more imperative when it comes to a remote workforce. Keeping these employees fully engaged can be quite the task, but knowing who you're dealing with can mean all the difference.

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

While the number of people working remotely is on the rise, the concept is still fairly new. As a result, best practices on how to do it right are still being established—evidenced by the current state of virtual employee engagement.

Compared to traditional non-remote employees, virtual employees are:²



PERSONAS

When thinking about designing an employee experience for your virtual workforce, it's important to remember that one size does not fit all. As with in-office employees, remote workers represent a bevy of various workstyles and personalities. We have conducted our own research in the format of a user experience (UX) case study to narrow down this variety into six unique virtual employee personas. You'll need to identify which of these personas aligns with the individuals of your virtual team before you can support their unique needs.

THE NATURAL

PROFILE

What's to be said about the Natural? They come into a virtual role and thrive. **Productivity, engagement, and overall job satisfaction are all increased the very first day a Natural becomes a virtual employee.**

The increased flexibility and autonomy suit their personalities and work styles in a way no traditional office job can. The daily success achieved by the Natural makes them a pleasure to work with.

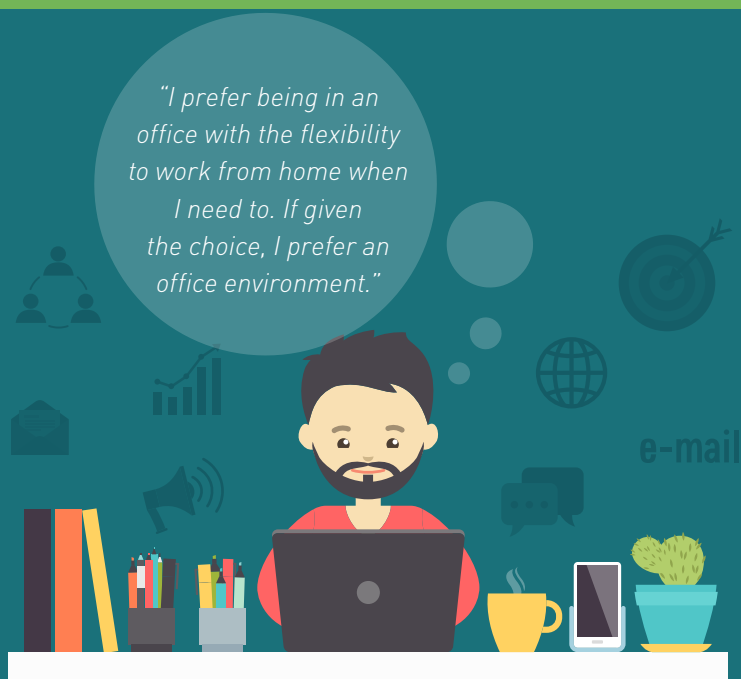


CHALLENGES

The work output of the Natural is only as good as the resources they have access to. Every remote position requires a different set of tools to ensure success, and the Natural can easily become disenchanted in the role without those tools. The ease of sliding into remote work may carry a risk of complacency down the line—pulse checks are important even for high performers.

SOLUTIONS

The Natural can be used as a sort of litmus test for the design of your virtual employee experience. Communicate with them to discover what resources they need access to in order to succeed. With open communication, feedback from the Natural can point out any gaps in tools or benefits your virtual team needs—helping you create the optimal virtual employee experience.



CHALLENGES

Not having a strict preference in work style means that the ideal balance of in-office work to remote work is a moving target. The Hybrid might be fine with working from home one day a week at first, but preference can change due to a number of external factors. Keeping the Hybrid engaged can be a constant struggle.

THE HYBRID

PROFILE

Sometimes, workstyles aren't so black and white. When it comes to shades of gray, the Hybrid is one of the only personas that doesn't have a hard preference for working from home. Rather, **the Hybrid actually enjoys a mix of traditional in-office working and remote employment**, sometimes with a slight preference for one over the other. Employees like these usually like to work a few days from home, and a few days in the office.

SOLUTIONS

Finding the right mix for the Hybrid can be challenging, but not impossible. Treat each Hybrid differently, and communicate with them to discover their preference. If remote work is a new venture for the Hybrid, allow monthly check-ins to reevaluate their schedule. Establish a period of time that can be used to "try out" a few different schedules before coming to a mutually agreed upon mix.

THE HONEYMOONER

PROFILE

A seasoned veteran in their field, but brand new to working from home, the Honeymooner hasn't been in their virtual role for long, but they sure are enjoying all of the perks that come along with it. The infatuation stage is in full effect, and working from home has retained its novelty.



CHALLENGES

The unfortunate, but universal truth of life is that anything new is doomed to become old. **Once the “new and shiny” feel wears away, you never know what to expect from a Honeymooner.** Perhaps they embrace the role in a way that complements their personality and skillset. On the other hand, it is possible that the unique challenges prove to be too much for the Honeymooner.

SOLUTIONS

Open communication with the Honeymooner is vital to their engagement. As the veil of the new experience is lifted, the challenges of remote work become apparent. It is then crucial that the Honeymooner feels comfortable. Partnering them with a seasoned remote employee for regular touch bases offers the Honeymooner a resource that can be crucial to their progression. Cloud-based HCM solutions put access to the company directory at their fingertips—making the search for a virtual colleague a breeze.



CHALLENGES

Always mere steps from the office, separating work-life from home-life becomes tough for the Overachiever. For some, increased output is simply an attempt to create a perception. In an office, coworkers and managers can physically see them working. Meanwhile, productivity for a virtual employee seems to be measured by output—without a high pace, the Overachiever fears that their team will think they are not working at all. If this fear continues, these workers risk succumbing to their greatest challenge: burnout.

THE OVERACHIEVER

PROFILE

Likely one of the hardest working people in their department, **the Overachiever is laser focused in their position no matter where they are.** In fact, many virtual employees who identify with this persona find that they accomplish more when they work remotely. They report having fewer distractions without the usual “water cooler” talk that occurs in most offices. Removing the daily commute also curbs any anxieties brought on by rush hour traffic.

SOLUTIONS

To avoid burning out the Overachiever, simply reassure them of their value to the team. Consistent communication will keep everyone on the same page—leaving less room for fear to creep in. Set clear long-term goals to keep focus on the big picture. Look for performance management tools that empower you to assess measurable objectives and review employee progress at any time. With a proper HCM solution, your Overachiever can rest easily knowing exactly what is expected of them.

THE SOLO ACT

PROFILE

When it comes to efficiency, no one does it better than the Solo Act. **They flourish when left alone to execute on projects**, and typically find that too much teamwork can bog down most processes. For leaders who prefer to avoid micro-managing their team, having a Solo Act on board creates a frictionless dynamic that satisfies both parties.



"I like that I'm not interrupted as much as when I used to be in the office. People can drop by your cubicle and ask for help and that can throw off your momentum."

CHALLENGES

While the Solo Act finds success in autonomous work, the lack of collaboration comes at the cost of innovation. The exchange that occurs during collaborative projects turns good ideas into great ideas. Depending on the project at hand, simply getting things done shouldn't trump the enriching process of teamwork.

SOLUTIONS

First, don't let consistency lead to silence. Even when working siloed, reassure the Solo Act that their work is valued and quality is high, and communicate that they are respected by the other members of the team. To help foster innovation, encourage these employees to bring others on board their projects whenever feasible. It's important to acknowledge the Solo Act's strength, but collaboration will help the Solo Act develop a broader view of their role, and produce nuanced work that would have been lost otherwise.



"I find making and sticking to a routine very important, like making a pot of coffee each morning."

THE CREATURE OF HABIT

PROFILE

The Creature of Habit has every hour of their day planned out. **Their schedule is sacred and they do not deviate from it.** This keeps them organized, focused, and on task. Working from home allows them to strike a perfect balance between accomplishing their work and satisfying personal tasks without a hitch. Because of all of the structure in the Creature of Habit's life, they are likely to always meet their deadlines and can be counted on fully.

CHALLENGES

Since the Creature of Habit thrives in a controlled and structured environment, the exact opposite may be felt when matters breach the bubble of their daily planner. A last-minute, unannounced meeting that interferes with a previously planned for event may cause some stress for the Creature of Habit. If they cannot adapt quickly to the ever-changing dynamics of the workplace, they may find the stress to be overwhelming.

SOLUTIONS

You may be hard-pressed to change the ways of a Creature of Habit. Typically, all that can be done is to restructure their habits. Rather than trying to make them something they are not, embrace the Creature of Habit's affinity for structure. Assign them to tasks and projects that are rooted in repetition. Even tedious tasks that other colleagues would do anything to avoid may be quickly adopted by the Creature of Habit—as long as there is a cycle to the monotony.

CONCLUSION

When designing the perfect experience for your virtual employees, it's crucial to always remember that there is not one perfect experience. The ideal experience will be determined by your virtual employees' personas. Identifying them is the first step towards optimizing employee engagement and happiness for your virtual team.

1. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/15/us/remote-workers-work-from-home.html?_r=1
2. 2017 State of the American Workplace, by Gallup



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