Healthcare is a 24/7 industry. Yet, many organizations still rely on a shared services operation to provide services and information to employees from just 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. In a world where mobile apps and digital solutions have become the norm, this approach is no longer acceptable.

Becker’s Hospital Review recently spoke with Rhonda Blatti, director of employee experience solutions at ServiceNow, about the importance of the digital employee experience in healthcare, as well as best practices for deploying these technology solutions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated digital strategy development in the healthcare sector

Creating a robust digital employee experience has been on healthcare leaders’ radar for some time, but until recently it has remained on the back burner. A recent global survey conducted by ServiceNow and ESI ThoughtLab found that close to half of healthcare and life sciences organizations (43 percent) were beginners with regard to the maturity of their digital employee experience. Only 21 percent of organizations were considered to be leaders.

These findings are perhaps not surprising. Prior to the pandemic, many health systems directed their resources to major initiatives like the rollout of electronic health records (EHRs). Once healthcare organizations implemented EHRs, they turned their attention to large on-premise information systems. Many of these were architected in the mid-1990s, before the Internet, mobile devices, social media platforms, and analytics. Shifting legacy supply chain, finance, enterprise resource planning, and human capital management systems to the cloud became a high priority.

When the COVID-19 pandemic erupted last year, the importance of the digital employee experience was thrust into the spotlight. “Overnight, healthcare organizations had a remote workforce, and they needed to create a telework environment for them,” Ms. Blatti said. “At the same time, they had to find ways to deliver new services to employees in response to CDC requirements and keep the workforce engaged.”
Digitization is essential for communication, collaborative working, and real-time access to the tools and information that clinicians and staff need to do their jobs well. According to ServiceNow and ESI ThoughtLab’s research, missed opportunities in healthcare include digital assistants and chatbots, as well as video and chat for remote working.

Digital engagement spans the entire employee life cycle from hire to retirement and beyond

One challenge health systems face is engaging the workforce from pre-hire all the way through retirement and into alumni status. Siloed information systems in human resources, IT, finance, and other functional areas make it difficult to support automated workflows, such as clinician and staff onboarding. Vertical enterprise solutions limit organizations and make it impossible to deliver services at speed.

“When you look at the way systems have run in the past, you find a lot of manual processes,” Ms. Blatti said. “Manual steps work when people are in the same office. You can deliver a Post-it note to your colleague down the hall with a new hire’s Social Security number, for example. Systems with manual steps break down, however, when people work from home. During the pandemic, people realized that they couldn’t function efficiently and effectively, which prompted healthcare organizations to look for a better way.”

Rather than relying on vertical, siloed information systems, health systems are recognizing the need for a horizontal digital employee engagement solution that spans the entire enterprise. The model is familiar to healthcare leaders. EHRs digitize the patient record and share that data in a horizontal manner across the organization. Wherever a patient goes within the health system, providers can access the individual’s complete medical history.

“ServiceNow, with its horizontal platform, can deliver relevant and targeted content to any member of their workforce from pre-hire to retirement and beyond,” Ms. Blatti said. “We know the makeup of the workforce, what kind of services they need and how to deliver it to them.”

Digital Employee Experience Among Healthcare and Life Sciences Organizations

43% were beginners
21% were leaders

*Data from a recent global survey conducted by ServiceNow and ESI ThoughtLab
Clinician and staff onboarding is one scenario where digital employee engagement can add value. Streamlining this process is of particular interest to many healthcare organizations. Onboarding providers can be a lengthy and expensive process. If the credentialing isn’t completed in a timely way, enrolled providers are unable to deliver patient care in a billable capacity. This can be a multi-million-dollar problem for healthcare organizations, according to Ms. Blatti.

Digital employee engagement has also proven to be invaluable at the other end of the employee life cycle. “During the pandemic, we found that healthcare organizations using ServiceNow as a platform across the enterprise were the most agile,” Ms. Blatti said. “One customer deployed new services in less than 24 hours and one of those services was re-hiring retired physicians to provide frontline care to COVID-19 patients.”

Since ServiceNow can store the retired physicians’ certifications in its document management system, which makes it easy for the health system to quickly pull these individuals back into the workforce, a capability that is particularly relevant during the pandemic. Certifications are just one example of the information that ServiceNow uses to deliver services that employees need in real time.

ServiceNow understands where employees are located geographically, their level in the organizational hierarchy, and other key characteristics, such as full-time or part-time employment status, and whether or not an employee is a union member. Based on this data and more, ServiceNow creates a digital fingerprint of employees that can be used to engage the workforce using a holistic approach.

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Rhonda Blatti, Director of Employee Experience Solutions, ServiceNow
Not all mobile strategies are created equal

To complement their digital strategies, most healthcare organizations are also adopting mobile strategies. This makes sense in a world where nearly every employee has a smartphone. Research conducted by ServiceNow and ESI ThoughtLab found that the return on investment for mobile-enabled work experiences in healthcare is high, yet investment levels in these technologies have remained low. When developing mobile strategies, health systems must remember to meet the employees where they are on their journey - anytime, anywhere, any device.

“Healthcare HR departments typically have around 15 systems on average,” Ms. Blatti said. “These may include learning management systems, recruiting systems, payroll systems and systems for compensation and benefits. If an organization’s mobile strategy is based on providing a different app for each system, employees’ phones quickly become hostage to those apps.”

A better approach is a mobile strategy that offers a singular pane of glass that enables users to access all the services and information that they need. To achieve this goal, it can be helpful to analyze the employee experience from a persona-based perspective. Healthcare organizations must identify different groups of employees, what services they need, when they need them and how they prefer to consume those services.

“When you base a mobile strategy on downloading more apps or creating different user experiences across applications, it creates more confusion and frustration for employees,” Ms. Blatti said. “Start with the end in mind and don’t silo solutions. More than ever in healthcare, the goal is for employees to focus on delivering patient care and outcomes. If they are spending more time figuring out where to find information and get help for their own needs, you haven’t addressed that issue.”

Digital strategies to enhance the healthcare employee experience are here to stay

Digital strategies to support the employee experience aren’t going away anytime soon in healthcare. Looking ahead, remote work is likely to persist, even as more people are vaccinated
for COVID-19. To maintain social distancing requirements, fewer employees can work in offices than before. Healthcare organizations will need new approaches for administrative staff, such as remote work in conjunction with hoteling solutions.

Fortunately, healthcare organizations recognize the benefit of digitizing employee experiences. In ServiceNow and ESI ThoughtLab’s survey, respondents indicated they believe digital employee experiences result in increased employee productivity and engagement, as well as higher profitability and better customer experiences.

When it comes to the digital employee experience, the key to success is delivering enterprise-wide workflows. “Everyone has recognized that the more they can digitize workflows, the better off they will be,” Ms. Blatti said. “They are figuring out how to move information horizontally and eliminating fiefdoms based on job security.”

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To learn more about ServiceNow Healthcare Solutions, please visit https://www.servicenow.com/solutions/industry/healthcare.html.