


# 5 Steps to Create a Better Employee Experience for Deskless Workers





Leaders are finally admitting what deskless workers have known for a long time—their needs have been overlooked compared to their desk-based colleagues. This is a glaring misstep considering **80% of employees across the globe** are deskless, meaning they don't work in an office environment.<sup>1</sup> Instead, they work on the front lines in fields such as manufacturing, retail, hospitality, and healthcare—all of which are seeing record numbers of resignations.

Deskless workers keep our society functioning, but the stress and abuse many experienced during the pandemic took a toll. In Australia, 20,000 out of almost 400,000 nurses left the industry in 2021 due to emotional and physical exhaustion, causing a troubling shortage in the country.<sup>2</sup> A spring 2021 survey of US hospitality workers who quit their jobs found that more than half wouldn't go back to their employer for any amount of money, and a third left the industry altogether.<sup>3</sup>

While the retail sector continues to experience substantial turnover as well, the manufacturing industry was the hardest hit in the US at the end of 2021, seeing a nearly **60% increase in workers** quitting compared to pre-pandemic levels.<sup>4</sup> China, the largest exporter of goods in the world,<sup>5</sup> is facing its own manufacturing woes. Factories struggle to find workers as younger generations opt for more-flexible jobs.<sup>6</sup> The ability to retain and hire deskless workers is critical to business survival, the global economy, and our supply chain. Drastic changes must be made to the employee experience—and they must be made now.

<sup>1</sup> Sherri Bartels, "Provide a better employee experience for the 2.7 billion hourly deskless workers in the world," Oracle, January 13, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Tom Livingstone, "Mass exodus of nurses putting strain on Australian industry," Today, December 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Katia Dmitrieva, "Half of U.S. Hospitality Workers Won't Return in Job Crunch," Bloomberg, July 8, 2021.



The challenge organizations face is ensuring all employees have the same touchpoints with the company so they can stay connected. This requires interactions to be tailored to the deskless workforce to support their needs and meet them anywhere they are. Their experience is intrinsically linked to an organization's bottom line because consumers want to order and receive goods quickly, find the services they need easily, and receive care when they need it. But if your organization struggles to hire and keep deskless workers, your productivity, efficiency, and morale all suffer. Ultimately, so do your customers, which means they won't be loyal for long.

Here are five steps to create a better employee experience for your deskless workers.



<sup>4</sup> [\*"Workers Are Leaving Manufacturing Jobs At Record Numbers," MSNBC, January 13, 2022, video, 5:45.\*](#)

<sup>5</sup> [\*Mark Jahn, "Which Country Is the Largest Exporter of Goods in the World?," Investopedia, July 21, 2021.\*](#)

<sup>6</sup> [\*Stella Yifan Xie and Liyan Qi, "Chinese Factories Are Having Labor Pains—"We Can Hardly Find Any Workers," Wall Street Journal, August 25, 2021.\*](#)





# ① Continuously listen and act on feedback

Research from Josh Bersin finds most organizations have a basic, transactional relationship with their workforce—one that offers minimal support.<sup>7</sup> But that causes a problem. If the only thing an employee gains from your organization is a paycheck, it's easy for them to walk away if they can make a dollar more across the street.

The research proved that you get back what you put into your workforce. The more an organization invests in its employer-employee relationships—for example, by providing support, a sense of purpose, and equitable growth opportunities—the more the company benefits from enhanced teamwork, innovation, and creativity.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, most global workers share other expectations of their organizations, such as accountability for making socially responsible decisions.

**83% of people** want to work for a company that clearly demonstrates progress on sustainability and social initiatives, and **69% would even leave** their current employer to work for a brand that takes these areas more seriously.<sup>9</sup> While addressing these universal wants is necessary, you must also understand what's uniquely meaningful to your deskless workers. To do that, you need to ask them and listen to their responses before you can deliver.

<sup>7</sup> *The Big Reset Playbook: Deskless Workers*, The Josh Bersin Company, October 2021.

<sup>8</sup> See note 7.

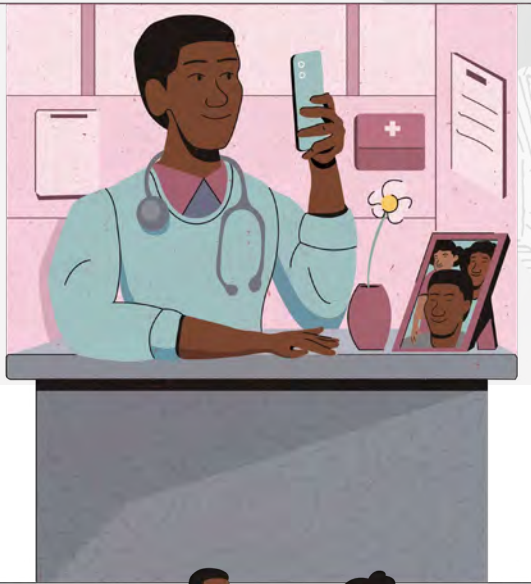
<sup>9</sup> *"No Planet B: How Can Businesses and Technology Help Save the World?"* Oracle and Savanta, 2022. (PDF).





## Tino's Experience

### HEALTHCARE



Meet Tino. He's a nurse who works the third shift in the ER and has a young family. Tino's burned out between his demanding job and wanting to be there for his kids. With his rigid schedule, Tino feels like he's always letting someone down by not being as engaged as he wants to be at work or home. He can't find the right balance.

### Oracle Fusion Cloud Workforce

**Management**, part of Oracle Fusion Cloud HCM, makes it easy to give your employees more flexibility to help them harmonize their work and home lives. The Time and Labor feature lets organizations rotate and split shifts and make dynamic shift changes. It also offers robust hourly worker support to ensure employees take their breaks and to help them easily track their schedules to request changes.





Companies must monitor employee sentiment and engagement levels frequently to measure their ongoing progress against initiatives. Continuous feedback gives employees a voice. The data lets HR check blind spots and confirm they're delivering an inspiring and equitable employee experience that alleviates pain points for the group and individual workers. As Heather Whiteman, PhD, people data enthusiast and assistant teaching professor, explains, you also must be sure that you're asking the right questions when looking for insights in your data.

“Some might use data to try to predict how many people are going to leave. What if we flipped that question around and said, How do we use analytics and data *for people*? And we start to understand what are the things that will really motivate employees and connect with them on a personal level that can bring about a great retention rather than a great resignation.”

—Heather Whiteman  
PhD, people data enthusiast,  
and assistant teaching professor<sup>11</sup>



<sup>11</sup> “Redesign Employee Engagement with Analytics,” Oracle, March 7, 2022, video, 42:06.



## ② Communicate purposefully, and enable employees to take action easily

One of the top criticisms people typically have of their organization is a lack of communication. To feel connected, workers want to be aware of significant company news, initiatives, and information that affects them directly. Failure to share crucial details with your workforce results in detachment, productivity loss, and a poor employee experience. This impacts your deskless workers the most since they're not in an office environment where news can travel quickly from the C-suite to hallways and break rooms.

**Oracle HCM Communicate**, part of the **Oracle ME** employee experience platform on Oracle Cloud HCM, gives HR the power to send personalized communications by location, job category, seniority, and other attributes to quickly share relevant information directly with deskless workers and other workforce segments. HR can track who is reading and acting on communications and analyze response data in real time. Additionally, based on how a person interacts with the communication, HR can send supplemental messages automatically to suggest an action.



For example, a follow-up communication could prompt an employee to fill out a survey or incident report, enabling two-way communication to keep them engaged. Follow-up communications can do other things too, such as providing step-by-step guidance through **Oracle Journeys**, part of Oracle Cloud HCM. This guidance can help employees complete compliance tasks or navigate life-change events. Indispensably, all the links go to mobile-friendly web pages.

The ability for deskless workers to complete actions 24/7, wherever they are, enhances their experience and increases organizational efficiency, which results in cost savings. The extra time an employee spends filling out a paper form to request time off, apply for a job, or register for training could be spent on their core duties. Management and HR also must devote unnecessary time inputting this information into the proper system when the worker could have done this in the first place using a mobile-friendly web page backed by an integrated HR system.

US businesses have raised wages for deskless workers by **7% to 10%** since the start of the pandemic, but it's not enough to recruit and retain them.<sup>12</sup>



<sup>12</sup> [\*Deborah Lovich, David Welch, Julia Dhar, and France Joris, "Why US Frontline Workers Are Quitting," Harvard Business Review, March 14, 2022.\*](#)

Lastly, impactful communication must be transparent and two-way. Deskless workers want to contribute to their organizations, but the majority say their employers sometimes, rarely, or never listen to their feedback.<sup>13</sup> Being in the field and working face-to-face with customers gives frontline workers unique insights into process improvements, which surveys can capture. In particular, deskless workers in the US, UK, and Australia said the most important topics they can give feedback on are the areas that matter most to them—operations (**54%**), health and well-being (**49%**), and safety (**46%**).<sup>14</sup>



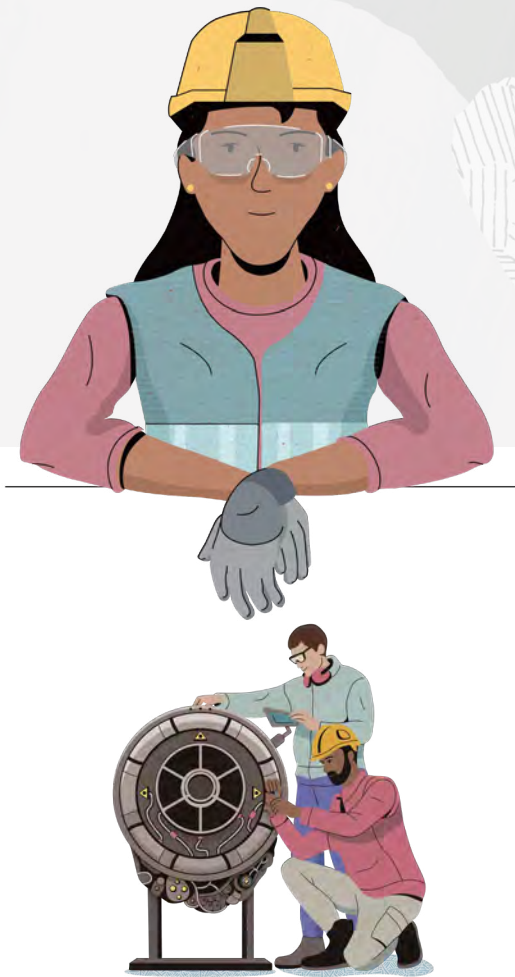
<sup>13</sup> See note 10.

<sup>14</sup> See note 10.



## Mariam's Experience

### MANUFACTURING



This is Mariam. She works on the floor of a large manufacturing company and is concerned that safety isn't a big enough priority. Employees must report accidents and hazards using the company's internal website, which isn't mobile friendly. Instead of walking over to the shared computer terminal when they spot a hazard, many workers wait to report it until the end of the day and then forget.

**Oracle Workforce Management** has an incident management feature that gives employees a modern way to report hazards, accidents, and near misses—right from their mobile device. HR and other stakeholders are alerted to problems instantly so they can act immediately.

### ③ Improve employee well-being for deskless workers

A person's total well-being—their physical, mental, social, and financial health—greatly influences their experience as a deskless worker. An employee assistance program is only the beginning. Workers on the front lines need enough sick time and paid time off to take care of themselves and their families. Good benefits are a must too. Many employees are also searching for purpose in their work and want to make a difference, and when they exceed expectations, they want to be rewarded. All of this contributes to a positive sense of well-being, but the greatest factor may be a sense of safety in the workplace.

**A mere 13% of the 2.7 billion deskless workers worldwide have paid sick time.<sup>15</sup>**


Many deskless workers have multifaceted, physically demanding jobs. Yet only **6%** of manufacturing companies design their day-to-day work to give people time to rest, reinvent, and innovate compared to **21% of technology firms** and **29% of professional services companies.**<sup>16</sup> This is a recipe for burnout and accidents. Some of the worst workplace disasters in memory were caused in part by exhausted employees, including the Exxon Valdez oil spill, the Chernobyl nuclear plant disaster, and the Space Shuttle Challenger explosion.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> "New Bersin Research Unlocks the Secrets for Creating a Supportive Environment for Vital Deskless Workers," PR Newswire, November 17, 2021.

<sup>16</sup> See note 7.

<sup>17</sup> Eric Suni and Dr. Abhinav Singh, "Excessive Sleepiness and Workplace Accidents," Sleep Foundation, April 21, 2022.





Sadly, too many organizations don't put their people first. The problem is so rampant that the US National Safety Council recently redefined their definition of "impairment" to include fatigue, reflecting its role in workplace safety after a survey showed it causes **13% of work injuries**.<sup>18</sup> The organization urges employers to combat fatigue and other factors that affect safety, such as mental distress. In a dynamic environment with moving machine parts or miles up in the air on a construction site, a mistake could be deadly.

## How to mitigate fatigue and burnout

- Create a culture of safety.
- Avoid seesaw schedules.
- Develop procedures to handle fatigued employees.
- Allow workers to report that they're too tired or distracted to work without penalty.
- Encourage employees to report accidents, near misses, and hazards.

**Oracle Workforce Management's** incident reporting feature captures incident data to give HR better visibility into safety trends. It also lets workers report accidents from any device using guided forms that autocomplete information based on the worker's role. They can easily upload photos or videos, and HR and stakeholders are alerted to events instantly. This allows your organization to respond immediately and demonstrate its commitment to employee safety and well-being.

<sup>18</sup> Angela Childers, "Don't ignore safety risks of on-the-job-fatigue: NSC," *Business Insurance*, March 4, 2021.





## ④ Create better managers

People aren't machines, but even machines require maintenance. Deskless workers need empathy, support, and inspiration. They also need managers who watch out for their well-being and coach them to be more successful in their roles. But great managers aren't born—they're made. Organizations committed to improving the deskless workforce's employee experience must train their managers and supervisors to proactively engage and support the workforce.



## Jamal's Experience

### RETAIL



Jamal's in retail, and morale has been low at his store for months. He wonders if his boss or the organization cares about their workers' experience because they haven't made any efforts to improve it. In fact, Jamal's boss rarely speaks to him and didn't even congratulate him on celebrating his fifth anniversary with the company last week. Maybe it's time for a change.

**Oracle Touchpoints**,\* part of **Oracle ME**, provides a continuous listening and action channel between employees and managers that creates meaningful interactions to build trust, boost retention, and foster growth. Quick employee pulse surveys help managers understand workforce sentiment in real time and remind them to regularly check in with employees for feedback and to celebrate milestones.



In 2021, Boston Consulting Group (BCG) surveyed hourly US workers in the retail, distribution, travel, and food service industries to discover what the best managers do differently. The research showed that they ask exploratory questions instead of immediately scolding an employee when something goes wrong. Great managers also problem solve with direct reports and publicly thank people who find and apply solutions to problems. However, only **10% of leaders** on the front lines do these things consistently.<sup>19</sup>

Organizations need to encourage their managers to create collaborative environments where employees openly share knowledge and help others develop their skills. The BCG survey showed that workers whose managers were dedicated to improving the employee experience had happier employees, and the number of injuries their organizations reported to OSHA went **down by 50%** over the course of one year.<sup>20</sup> This kind of work culture motivates the deskless workforce to be more productive, positioning companies to keep up with increasing demands in their industry and exceed customer expectations. But managers need the right tools to create a thriving workplace.

**84% of deskless workers don't get enough direct communication from their supervisors, leading to decreased productivity and a disconnect from the company.**<sup>21</sup>




<sup>19</sup> Deborah Lovich, David Welch, Julia Dhar, and France Joris, "Why U.S. Frontline Workers Are Quitting," *Harvard Business Review*, March 14, 2022.

<sup>20</sup> See note 19.

<sup>21</sup> Robby Brumberg, "Survey: Companies struggling to engage and communicate with 'deskless' workers," *Ragan*, July 19, 2018.







Managing performance can be challenging, especially when a supervisor oversees many people. But it's a critical way for managers to actively demonstrate their commitment to their team members' growth and workplace experience, to build trust, and to ensure their employees feel valued and heard. Pamela Stroko, vice president, HCM Transformation and Thought Leadership at Oracle, says, "One of the key factors in trust is really simple: Employees feel their managers keep their promises. And when employees trust their managers, they become more emotionally committed to the company."<sup>22</sup>

**Oracle Touchpoints\*** simplifies the trust-building process—creating a continuous listening and action channel between employees and managers. Ongoing check-ins with custom or recommended discussion topics related to a deskless worker's day-to-day activities help make conversations between employees and managers more impactful and offer endless, personalized support. In addition, Touchpoints empowers employees to understand their own sentiment trend and what actions have been taken in response to feedback. Employees can also take recommended engagement actions and schedule one-on-one meetings with their manager to get the support they need. However, the workforce needs more than their manager's support to thrive. They also need their organizations to deliver a positive employee experience and the opportunities they're searching for.

<sup>22</sup> [\*Start with Trust: How to give and earn trust in your organization, HR Dive and Oracle, 2021\(PDF\).\*](#)



## ⑤ Create more opportunities for deskless workers

When companies fall short of delivering an equitable employee experience for all, workers on the front lines are the ones who suffer. Training and developing the careers of deskless workers can be particularly difficult for organizations because these employees often work unique schedules, don't always have access to a computer, and can't leave their workstations for too long. But with the current state of the talent market, organizations can't afford to make excuses anymore. Deskless workers want career progression opportunities, and their wants and organizational needs are finally aligned.

In 2022, talent shortages are at a 15-year high globally.<sup>23</sup> By 2030, the manufacturing industry is predicted to face a labor shortage of 2.1 million workers in the US alone, according to a study by Deloitte and The Manufacturing Institute.<sup>24</sup> While attracting candidates can be a problem, **46% of manufacturers** struggle to fill open roles because of skills gaps in the talent pool, **up 12%** from 2018.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> "ManpowerGroup Employment Outlook Survey Q3 2021: Global Results," ManpowerGroup, 2021 (PDF).

<sup>24</sup> Paul Wellener, Victor Reyes, Heather Ashton, and Chad Moutray, "Creating pathways for tomorrow's workforce today," Deloitte, May 4, 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Matt Leonard, "Manufacturing, competing with distribution, struggles to attract labor," Supply Chain Dive, May 11, 2021.





If your organization can't find enough people with the right skills—which most can't—your company must upskill or reskill high-performing talent. McKinsey & Company says organizations need to focus on technology adoption and process improvements to stay competitive in global manufacturing markets, which is good advice for every industry.<sup>26</sup>

Fujifilm experienced the benefits of this firsthand. After moving their HR ecosystem, which consisted of 256 interfaces across 53 disparate systems, to one HR platform using Oracle Cloud HCM, they were able to deliver a better and more consistent employee experience. Jacely Voon, chief people officer, People Culture and CSR, Fujifilm Business Innovation Singapore, says, “Thanks to Oracle Cloud HCM, we’ve been able to drive business priorities by giving our people personalized learning opportunities to increase their competencies, skills, and knowledge.”<sup>27</sup>


Trustworthy data is imperative to make good business decisions, which is why a unified cloud is vital. HR needs complete data and input from department leaders to identify skills gaps that exist now, and they also need to understand where the company is going to identify talent and skill needs over the next 10 to 15 years. Skills Nexus, a feature of **Oracle Dynamic Skills** and part of Oracle Cloud HCM, makes this process easier.

<sup>26</sup> James Manyika, Katy George, Eric Chewning, Jonathan Woetzel, and Hans-Werner Kaas, “Building a more competitive US manufacturing sector,” McKinsey Global Institute, April 15, 2021.

<sup>27</sup> “FUJIFILM transforms HR with Oracle Cloud HCM,” Oracle, May 9, 2022.







Skills Nexus is an AI-powered engine that continuously detects, tracks, and analyzes employees' skills across the organization. HR receives dynamic skills data and recommendations that improve and adapt as employees, candidates, HR, and managers use the system. This allows HR to plan for future talent needs with confidence because the data is always current.

**Quality training is important to 70% of frontline employees in the US, UK, and Australia when considering a new role.<sup>28</sup>**

Critically, training needs to happen wherever your deskless workers are, at times that suit their schedules. That's why mobile and offline learning, available through **Oracle Fusion Cloud Learning**, are important qualities to consider in a solution. With personalized recommendations based on various criteria such as engagement history, current work history, or career goals, employees can feel confident that they're developing the necessary skills to succeed. Subject matter experts can also share new skill solutions quickly by uploading their own content.

In addition to providing career development tools, it's vital for organizations to block off time for deskless workers to upskill while on the clock. Offering tuition reimbursement for courses and degrees related to business needs is worth considering as well. Companies can't rely on hiring people with expertise in growing fields, such as data science, engineering, and robotics, to fill their needs. Instead, they must take control and create the perfect candidates by upskilling and reskilling their own people and promising applicants.

<sup>28</sup> See note 10.



# Companies must act now

The International Labour Organization warns that unemployment rates won't return to pre-pandemic levels until 2023 at the earliest,<sup>29</sup> and pre-pandemic, we were already heading toward a global talent shortage. In 2018, Korn Ferry warned that many countries were on track for deficits in 2020, including the US, Brazil, Indonesia, and Japan. These countries and China are projected to experience significant to severe talent shortages by 2030 without intervention.<sup>30</sup> Every organization with deskless workers should feel the urgency to rethink and redesign their employee experience to offer support that meets the expectations of their people and the talent market.

Organizations that don't won't only fail their deskless workers, they'll fail their customers. Many companies are turning to technology such as artificial intelligence to predict and respond to supply chain disruptions, but to be truly reliable, they must also focus on improving the employee experience for deskless workers to combat talent shortages. Organizations need to move far beyond transactional relationships and create a culture where employees' needs are fulfilled.

<sup>29</sup> *"Labour market recovery still 'slow and uncertain,'" United Nations, January 17, 2022.*

<sup>30</sup> *"Future of Work: The Global Talent Crunch," Korn Ferry, 2018 (PDF).*



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