

## EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE IN THE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES INDUSTRY IN POLAND

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**Purpose:** To increase knowledge about Employee Experience (EX) within the development services sector in Poland and the management of employee impressions in the workplace.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The research was conducted using a partial, ad-hoc diagnostic survey method based on a custom-designed questionnaire. The study was carried out with a purposive sampling method among organizations affiliated with the Polish Chamber of Training Firms (PIFS), focused on providing development services.

**Findings:** Respondents indicated that organizational culture plays a crucial role in shaping their overall experiences as employees in training companies. While the majority recognized that employee experience impacts customer experience, almost half had not yet formed an opinion on the creation of new HR roles, such as experience and sensation module designers. It was found that the surveyed training companies consider a variety of customer experiences when designing development services, with intellectual, emotional, and social experience modules being the most dominant. However, there is insufficient knowledge and experience regarding the experience market and EX within the development services industry in Poland.

**Research limitations/implications:** Due to the low response rate, generalization to the entire population is not possible. The conceptualization of EX in the development services sector requires further empirical diagnostic research.

**Practical implications:** The research findings may be useful for training company owners interested in the experience market and in managing both employee and customer impressions.

**Social implications:** Raising awareness of the experience market and highlighting the importance of the new EX paradigm in human capital management.

**Originality/value:** The article has cognitive value which contributes to the development of management and quality sciences, specifically in the area of human capital development.

**Keywords:** Experience Economy, Employee Experience, Employee Experience Management, Customer Experience, Development Services, Human Capital, Training.

**Category of the paper:** Research paper.

## 1. Introduction

The development of human resource management concept requires from management entities to redefine products and services provided to the staff and, simultaneously, to modernize and extend personal processes as well as the instrumental range (Lipka, 2024, p. 34). This type of changes may also refer to entities connected with human capital development, that is training companies. It appears that in the development services sector there should also be an EX-transformation, during which the focus point in human resource management would be transferred from the process described from the organization's perspective to experience, that is the employee's subjective perspective (cf. Lipka, 2024, p. 121).

Particular modules of employees' and clients' experiences should be in the center of interest of managers in charge of various industries, including the development services sector. For example, it is worth quoting from an interesting lecture "Brain during providing and receiving didactic classes", organized as part of International Congress on Education Quality: "Emotions are absolutely essential in business. Everything has an emotional context. You have to emotionally indulge the client. Emotions are critical in decision making" (Błaszak, 2024). It seems that in practice we do not always think in terms of the experience economy and we do not focus on the emotional, behavioral, or social modules of internal and external clients' experiences (employees and customers, respectively).

Impression management is therefore an interesting research problem. The purpose of the study is to determine whether training companies pay attention to the experience of trainees when designing development services? What modules (sensory, emotional, intellectual, behavioral and social) are present in training services designs? What is the awareness of people working in the development services industry in Poland with regard to the experience market and employee experience? How do they evaluate aspects such as physical space, technology used in the company, and organizational culture in shaping the overall employee experience.

The originality of the presented article results from the fact that employee experience in human resource management is currently being born, and employee experience economy which is its context, has not yet reached the stage of expansion or maturity, but still remains in the experimental stage (see Lipka, 2024, p. 14). Undertaking this topic in relations to training companies rendering various development services is certainly a novelty.

## 2. Literature Review

Recent literature has emphasized the need to consider the management of human capital in terms of the experience economy and from the perspective of impression management (Plaskoff, 2017; Gojtowska, 2019; Lipka, Król, 2021; Lipka, 2022, 2024; Bereś, 2022). The philosophy of human capital management has shifted from a customer-focused experience to a more employee-centered approach, oriented towards the absorption and immersion in experiences by employees, while they passively or actively participate in designing these experiences (Pine, Gilmore, 1998, 1999). A new category, *employee experience* (EX), has emerged (Panneerselvam, Balaraman, 2022; Malik, Budhwar, Mohan, Srikanth, 2022).

This topic has gained importance due to recent significant cultural, social, economic, and technological changes in contemporary organizations (more in: Molek-Winiarska, 2022). It is also linked to the employee lifecycle and involvement (Wilczyński, Kołoszycz, Karolewska-Szparaga, 2023), forming a new paradigm in human capital management.

The concept of experience within EX refers to the sum of employee experiences in interaction with various sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and relational factors during their work in a company (Maylett, Wride, 2017). The employee experience encompasses the range of engagements an employee encounters with various individuals, technology, procedures, and their physical or digital work environment. It includes both the minor aspects of daily tasks and occasional events or changes over time (Miles, 2023). The phenomenon occurs in the human mind as a result of external stimuli and is processed based on past experiences, mental needs, and individual strategies (Kacprzak, Dziwanowska, Skorek, 2015, p. 30).

Creating an excellent employee experience can lead to a transcendent customer experience (CX) (Maylett, Wride, 2019) and provide the company with a competitive advantage (Fulcher, Cote, Marasco, 2021; Hunt, 2022; Popelka, 2022). There is a lack of empirical research on employee experience management (Dębek, Ślęzyk-Sobol, 2016), where employees are treated as internal customers in the context of internal marketing (Abhari, Saad, Haron, 2008). The study of both Polish and foreign literature on the subject reveals significant gaps in the conceptualization of EX in the workplace environment (Morgan, 2017, 2019; Katzmayr, 2020; Yidiz, Temur, Beskese, Bozbura, 2020; Lipka, 2022; Molek-Winiarska, 2022; Whitter, 2022; Anzman, 2020; Lammer, 2023).

Both EX and CX concepts (see: Vilani, 2019; Kalbach, 2021) can be applied to the development services sector. For example, during the learning process, clients (training beneficiaries) may experience new phenomena, reflect on what has happened, conceptualize and draw conclusions, or experiment (Bereś, 2022, p. 118). The experience scale can range from a low (mediocre) level to a high (mastery) level (see: Bereś, 2022, p. 127). It is worth noting that in services, the role of employees in shaping customer experiences is fundamental.

### 3. Research Methodology and Characteristics of Respondents

For the purpose of the study, a custom survey questionnaire was constructed based on a literature review, consisting of 9 closed-ended questions (5 substantive, 4 demographic). The link to the questionnaire was made available via Google Forms. The tool was pilot-tested in July 2024, with the main study conducted in September 2024.

The survey was conducted using purposive sampling. The target group consisted of companies affiliated with the Polish Chamber of Training Firms (PIFS), whose main activity is the provision of development services. As of August 27, 2024, there were 373 institutions affiliated with PIFS (PIFS, 2024). These organizations were selected because they are characterized by high-quality services, adhering to the Code of Good Practices (PIFS, 2024), and their owners and employees are potentially more knowledgeable about new management concepts and approaches.

Due to legal regulations regarding data protection, email addresses could not be directly obtained from the largest company associating training companies in Poland (PIFS). In September 2024, the author contacted the companies by phone. The website contained only a publicly available list of company names, locations and voivodeships. While in possession of the data, the Author personally obtained 365 current email addresses, mainly from company websites and by searching for service providers in the Development Services Database (Development Services Database, 2024). Eight companies from the list had no available email addresses.

On September 12, 2024, 365 individual email invitations were sent to participate in the survey, six of which failed to reach their recipients due to technical issues. The messages received contained information such as “the message was not delivered to the address because the remote server is incorrectly configured”, “the message was not delivered because the recipient's address was not found or the recipient cannot receive the message”, “the address may be misspelled or may not exist”, “the message was not delivered to the recipient because the domain was not found”.

The survey form closed on September, 19 this year. Most responses were sent in the first days of the survey. 359 invitations were successfully delivered, 13 completed questionnaires were received, resulting in an response rate of 3.62%. The timing of the study coincided with a flood crisis in Poland, which prevented follow-up reminders or extension of the survey period. This result is lower than the 5% level characteristic of online and mail surveys (see: Szpunar, 2008, p. 45). This type of survey was consciously opted for due to its lower cost and budget constraints, as well as its shorter implementation time, also bearing in mind that there are certain limitations of survey research (such as self-selection of respondents, decreasing completion rates over a long period of survey implementation) (Maćik, 2005, pp. 108-109).

The respondents included 13 individuals (9 women, 4 men), with 10 business owners and 3 employees. The majority represented micro-enterprises (9) and small businesses (4). The vast majority provide both training and consulting services (10 responses), while the remaining ones offer solely training services (3 responses). Only one company engages in other, additional activities.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Employee Experience – Managing Employee Impressions in the Polish Development Services Industry

Most respondents agreed with the statement that their company invests in creating positive experiences for its employees (see Table 1).

**Table 1.**

*The structure of responses to the question: “Does your company invest in creating positive experiences for its employees?”*

Response options	Number of responses
Agree	7
Partially agree	4
Neither agree nor disagree	2
Partially disagree	0
Disagree	0

Source: Own elaboration based on own empirical research.

*Employee experience* refers to how employees feel about what they encounter and observe while performing their professional duties (First Steps with Employee Experience, 2024). This experience relates to three aspects: the physical space, the technology used in the company, and the organization's culture (Morgan, 2017, 2019). In the study, respondents evaluated the importance of these aspects in shaping their overall experiences as employees of a given company (see Table 2).

**Table 2.**

*The structure of responses to the question related to the importance of aspects in shaping overall employee experiences in a given company*

	No importance	Low	Average	High	Very high
Physical space	2	0	1	5	5
Technology used in the company	0	0	1	7	5
Organizational culture	0	0	1	4	8

Source: Own elaboration based on own empirical research.

Table 2 shows that according to the respondents, organizational culture is of great importance, and technology used in the company also holds significant importance (see Shivakumar, 2020). Subsequently, respondents were asked to respond to three statements and indicate to what extent they agree with them (see Table 3).

**Table 3.**

*The structure of responses to the question: "To what extent do you agree with the following statements?"*

	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Partially disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Partially agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>
Employee experience in our company impacts the customer experience.	1	0	0	2	10
Due to the growing importance of the experience market, it is essential to designate an experience and sensation module designer within the HR team.	2	0	6	1	4
Managing employee impressions in the Polish development services industry is an important issue.	0	0	3	3	7

Source: Own elaboration based on own empirical research.

It turned out that, according to respondents, managing employee impressions in the Polish development services industry is considered an important issue, and employee experience influences customer experience. However, nearly half of the respondents do not have a clear opinion regarding the creation of new HR roles, such as experience and sensation module designers, which stems from the assertion that "it is necessary – due to the increasingly crystallizing experience market – to create new HR roles: experience and sensation module designers" (Lipka, 2022, p. 171).

In a subsequent question, respondents assessed the impressions left by their company's activities among employees and customers. It is noteworthy that they rated the impressions among customers higher ("very good" – 9 responses, "good" – 4 responses) than those among employees ("very good" – 6 responses, "good" – 7). Perhaps they prioritize customers over employees, which is contrary to the EX concept (see: Tetzlaff, McLeod, 2016).

#### **4.2. Experience Modules Among Customers of Development Services**

The study also asked to what extent companies provide tailored services that stimulate/shape specific types of experiences for customers (see Table 4). The following experience and sensation modules were identified:

- Sensory module, for example with visual, auditory, taste, olfactory, and tactile stimuli (Lipka, 2022, p. 17),
- Emotional module, where experiencing various emotions (both success in acquiring new competencies and failure in helplessness while facing challenges disproportionate to one's skills and abilities) is embedded in the employee training process. Learning

itself is defined as an iterative process of modifying prior experiences, i.e., their transformation (Kolb, 1997, pp. 138-156, cited in: Lipka, 2022, p. 61).

- Intellectual module, forming a fundamental component of learning processes. Cognitive processes occur during an active learning approach, i.e. learning through discovery; mastery training; guided exploration; analogical transfer or adaptive transfer (Łaguna, 2010, p. 138, cited in: Lipka, 2022, p. 81).
- Behavioral module, with specific actions and behaviors designed. This module may use performative utterances (e.g., learn, accept a challenge, develop your skills, participate in training, use e-learning, improve your competencies) (more in: Lipka, 2022, pp. 111-112).
- Social module, which focuses on relational experiences and sensations (Lipka, 2022, p. 131). For example, it takes into account the benefits of networking and organizing cohort-based courses.

**Table 4.**

*The structure of responses to the question: "To what extent does your company provide tailored services that stimulate/shape the following types of experiences for customers?"*

Experience modules	Small extent	Fairly small extent	Medium extent	Large extent	Very large extent
Sensory	1	2	4	3	3
Emotional	0	2	0	6	5
Intellectual	0	0	0	7	6
Behavioral	0	2	3	3	5
Social	0	2	1	3	7

Source: Own elaboration based on own empirical research.

Table 4 shows that services strongly shape relational modules for customers and to a large extent - intellectual modules. If we sum up the affirmative responses ("large" and "very large" extent), the dominant experience modules are intellectual, emotional, and social.

## 5. Discussion

The research findings are relevant because they helped determine that the development services sector invests in building positive employee experiences, and the organizational culture plays an important role in their shaping. Employees' experience in that sector impacts the clients experience in the development services. The current findings are connected with the previous findings which said that positive employee experience results in appropriate customer experience which leads to retention of existing clients, acquisition of new clients from recommendation, cross-sales. Interestingly, in the long term appropriate EX allows for the return on own capital investment exceeding competitors performance by 2.3-3.8% annually (Smit, Vestergaard, Henriksen, 2020, p. 17).

Impressions left by training companies operations among clients were assessed better than those concerning employees. It seems that those companies should take better care of holistic human-centered design (Gustaffson, Caruelle, Bowen, 2024, pp. 333-356). The development services sector should be considered in terms of experiences market of both employees and clients. It is important to embark on experiences of various degrees of differentiation, characterized by immateriality, elusiveness, loftiness, subjective perception and evaluation (cf. Pine, Gilmore, 2020).

As A. Lipka emphasizes employee experiences impact client experiences and vice versa, which is connected with the theory of affective infection (Wróbel, 2016; after: Lipka, 2024, p. 122). There is an evolution of personal function model in the direction of omni-experience model, in which an individual absorbs experiences of sensory, emotional, intellectual, behavioral, relational nature in order to collect experiences and build on that basis (Lipka, 2024, p. 122).

This research may initiate the acceptance of the omni-experience model in the development services sector and the need to explore the following key issues: employee journey (EJ), employee lifecycle (EL), employee touchpoint (ET), employee moments of truth (eMOTS), employee friction points (EFPs) (cf. Lipka, 2024, pp. 35-37).

## 6. Conclusion

The study was exploratory in nature. Challenges were encountered in obtaining a representative response. Due to the low response rate, generalization to the entire population is not possible. It became clear that for the measurement of employee experience to have real cognitive and practical value, it should be supplemented with qualitative methods, as employee experience is a multidimensional construct (see Dębek, Ślęzyk-Sobol, 2016, p. 77). An attempt to gather expert opinions and comments from experts, key industry representatives was made on the final day of the quantitative survey by inviting members of the Council for the Development Services Sector Competence (Council Members, 2024), but unfortunately, no responses were received.

It appears that employee experience in the development services industry also requires time, commitment, and openness to change (Komorowska, 2024). The empirical diagnosis of the EX research area in the development services industry requires continuation and extension. This research concludes that training companies, when designing development services, do not equally consider various sources of employee experiences. An important reason for this may be their insufficient knowledge and expertise concerning the experience market and EX. Organizational culture can play a very important role in shaping their overall experiences as employees of a given company.



To emphasize the new research finding, it should be noted that among customers of development services, intellectual as well as emotional and social modules are significantly shaped. A similar trend can be observed in educational institutions, some of which are introducing innovative solutions in the field of relational education (see: Hausner, Jelonek, 2022).

The conclusions obtained from the study have both theoretical and practical implications. The article draws attention to the new EX paradigm in human capital management and presents the development services sector in the context of the experience economy, thus extending theoretical knowledge in this area. As a result, it becomes necessary to include the concept of Employee Experience Management in future research. The article can serve as an inspiration for owners of training companies who want to look at problems in the organisation not only from a business perspective but also from an employee perspective, those who are interested in enhancing work organisation and streamlining activities towards employees, as well as improving the quality of employee and customer experiences (see: Wojciechowska, 2023), who want to manage interdependent customer and employee experiences (Urbański, Dziewa, 2023, p. 148).

According to the author, a paradigm shift is occurring in the development of human capital in the context of the evolution from the training market to the experience market. Shaping experiences for both employees and customers is becoming crucial. This means that when designing specific training investments, sensory, emotional, intellectual, behavioral, and social experience modules should be considered (more in: Winnicka-Wejs, 2024, pp. 150-151).

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