

# Fortified | Quarterly

NEW FRONTIERS IN  
EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

06



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 **Ondaro**



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MAR/26



## Letter from the Editor

The pace of change has never been faster. And for the first time in a long time, that is not hyperbole.

In the span of eighteen months, AI has moved from a compelling demo to a production reality inside the world's largest organizations. Large language models that barely existed two years ago are now routing service requests, summarizing case notes, drafting knowledge articles, and handling employee inquiries that used to require a human. ServiceNow, with the acquisition of Moveworks, is able to fundamentally rethink what enterprise software does. The line between "finding information" and "getting work done" is collapsing, and it is collapsing faster than most transformation roadmaps anticipated.

This is not a technology refresh cycle. It is a reinvention of how work happens.

And yet, in the middle of all of it, the most important question is still a human one: "Does the employee feel understood? Not by the ticket system. Not by the knowledge base. By the experience their employer has built for them, the one they encounter every single day, at every moment of friction, confusion, or need.

That tension between the extraordinary speed of AI innovation and the very human expectation it is now responsible for is what this issue of *Fortified Quarterly* is focused on. What does it actually take to close the gap between what employees expect and what their workplace tools deliver? And more importantly, what does it mean for the organizations, platforms, and AI companies that are responsible for answering it

### **The gap is real, and it is widening.**

Despite years of digital investment, work is still more complex than it should be. Employees move between disconnected systems, search for information across platforms, and navigate processes designed for the system, not the person. The result is friction that shows up everywhere: in adoption numbers, in support tickets, in engagement scores, in turnover.

The good news is that organizations are closing this gap by bringing existing capabilities together into a single, intelligent experience for work, one where the platform becomes the front door, and employees can move from question to action without ever needing to know what's running underneath.

### **Consumer innovation has something to teach us.**

Great consumer experiences never focused on technology. They focused on the experience consumers felt interacting and engaging with the brand.

This same philosophy is now the central design challenge in enterprise AI. The breakthroughs at OpenAI, Anthropic, Moveworks, and others have raised the bar permanently for what conversational AI can do. The enterprise question is not whether those capabilities are impressive. It is whether they can be trusted to act on behalf of a real person, inside a real workflow, with real consequences.



*ServiceNow's most recent innovation with EmployeeWorks, Otto and Slate represent a meaningful answer to that question. EmployeeWorks gives employees a single intelligent layer to find, act, and complete work across hundreds of applications. Otto brings the conversational capability that Moveworks built into the ServiceNow ecosystem. Slate inverts the old portal logic entirely: instead of the employee learning the system, the interface adapts to the employee. This is not an incremental update. It is a philosophical shift, and a fundamental reinvention.*

“

**AI strategy without measurement is an expensive experiment.**

In a market flooded with new AI companies, there has been a tremendous amount of fear, uncertainty and doubt, that has not only complicated the stock market, but creates a tremendous amount of noise for executives trying to navigate this space. In order to companies to success, there are three key areas that need to be prioritized.

The first is the absence of a measurement framework before anything gets built. Too many organizations launch AI initiatives without defining what success looks like. The second is use case selection driven by what sounds exciting rather than what employees actually do every day. The third is the infrastructure problem: organizations want AI that can take action, but the underlying systems are not connected, the data is not clean, and the permissions model was not built for automation.

Every article in this issue, from every author and vantage point, arrives at the same place: the experience of being a person at work matters. It affects how people show up, how they contribute, how long they stay, and what they tell others.

The platforms, the AI models, the design methods are all in service of that truth. And the organizations that move fastest are the ones that hold it at the center of every decision: not “what does our system support?” but “what does our employee need?”

The tools are changing faster than anyone anticipated. What has not changed — what will never change is that the experience of being a person at work matters.

The organizations we work with every day are not waiting for the perfect platform or the perfect moment. They are making decisions now, with urgency and intention. This issue is for them and for every leader who believes that how people experience work is worth getting right. We do. Let's get to work.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephanie Otto'.

By Stephanie Otto

SVP, Global Partnerships, Strategy & Innovation  
/ Executive Editor, *Fortified Quarterly* /  
Executive Director, Customer Advisory Board



## COVER STORY

# Reimagining Work in the Age of AI, Expectations, and Intelligent Platforms

**Closing the gap between expectation and execution by turning fragmented tools into a unified, intelligent experience for work**

*Written by Nate Aiken, Practice Strategy Lead, Moveworks.*

The way we experience work has fundamentally changed.

Employees no longer compare workplace tools to other enterprise systems. They compare them to the seamless digital experiences they encounter every day. That shift has quietly raised the bar, and many organizations are still catching up.

For a growing portion of the workforce, these expectations are not new. They have been shaped entirely by intuitive, on-demand digital experiences. When workplace tools fall short, employees do not simply accept the friction. They find alternative ways to get their work done, often outside of sanctioned systems.

At the same time, leadership is under pressure to deliver more with fewer resources. Productivity must increase without adding headcount. Transformation investments must show measurable return. And employees expect intuitive, modern experiences that make their work easier, not harder.

This is the new frontier of Employee Experience. It is no longer a secondary initiative. It is a core driver of business performance.



# The Experience Gap

Despite years of digital investment, work is still more complex than it should be.

Employees move between disconnected systems, outdated intranets, and inconsistent interfaces just to complete basic tasks.

Information is difficult to find. Processes take longer than necessary. Engagement remains low.

THIS FRICTION SHOWS UP IN VERY REAL WAYS ACROSS THE BUSINESS:

1

Employees lose time navigating systems instead of doing meaningful work

2

HR and IT teams absorb repetitive, avoidable requests

3

Critical information is missed or underutilized

4

Adoption of enterprise platforms stalls

Many organizations already have powerful platforms like ServiceNow in place. Yet those platforms are often positioned as tools for IT rather than as a foundation for the entire business.

CLOSING THAT GAP IS WHERE TRANSFORMATION BEGINS.

## A Unified Experience for Work

The next phase of digital transformation is not about introducing more tools. It is about bringing existing capabilities together into a single, cohesive experience.

Forward-looking organizations are reimagining ServiceNow as a unified front door for work. Instead of asking employees to navigate systems, the platform becomes the place where work starts and continues.

In this model, employees are not searching for answers across multiple environments. They are guided to what matters most. They receive relevant information based on role and context. They can take action in the same place where they find answers.

The intranet evolves from a static repository into something far more dynamic. It becomes a system of action, connecting knowledge, services, and workflows in a way that feels intuitive.


## Designing for People, Not Systems

Technology alone does not solve the experience challenge.

Many organizations have attempted to improve their portals by redesigning the interface. While visual improvements matter, they rarely drive adoption on their own. When the underlying structure and content do not reflect how employees actually work, engagement remains low. As noted internally, focusing only on aesthetics without substance does not create real value.

### A more effective approach starts with human-centered design.

This means understanding how employees think, how they search for information, and how they complete tasks. It requires structuring content in language that makes sense to the user, not the system. It also means building governance models that keep information accurate and relevant over time.



*When done well, the result is not just a better interface. It is a more confident workforce. Employees know where to go, what to do, and how to do it correctly the first time.*



# The Role of AI in the Experience Layer

AI is accelerating the urgency of this transformation.

Many organizations are investing in AI, yet they struggle to translate that investment into real impact. The reason is simple. AI depends on a strong foundation of structured data, clear processes, and a consistent experience layer.

In many cases, the same behaviors employees use to work around friction today are now shaping how they engage with AI.

Without that foundation:



EMPLOYEES DO NOT  
KNOW WHERE TO  
ENGAGE WITH AI



KNOWLEDGE REMAINS  
TOO FRAGMENTED FOR  
MEANINGFUL ANSWERS



AUTOMATION EFFORTS  
FAIL TO SCALE ACROSS  
THE BUSINESS

*or they engage in ways that fall outside secure, governed, and compliant practices*

**THIS IS WHERE NEW CAPABILITIES  
LIKE SERVICENOW EMPLOYEEWORKS  
COME INTO FOCUS.**

EmployeeWorks extends the experience from access to execution. It connects AI, workflows, and integrations so employees can move from question to action without friction. Instead of navigating multiple systems, they interact with a single intelligent layer that orchestrates the work behind the scenes.

**This marks a shift in how work gets done. It is no longer about finding information. It is about completing tasks with speed and confidence.**



# Turning Experience into Business Value

Employee Experience is often discussed in terms of engagement, but its impact is operational and measurable.

Organizations that invest in unified experiences are seeing meaningful improvements in how work flows across the business. Self-service adoption increases, reducing pressure on HR and IT teams. Employees spend less time searching and more time executing. Redundant systems can be consolidated, lowering costs and simplifying architecture.

In many cases, modern portal experiences have driven employee satisfaction above 90 percent. More importantly, leaders gain visibility into how employees interact with systems and where friction still exists.

This level of insight allows organizations to continuously improve, making Employee Experience an ongoing capability rather than a one-time initiative.

## A Cross-Functional Priority

***Employee Experience no longer sits within a single department.***

***It spans HR, IT, and business leadership, each playing a distinct role:***

HR BRINGS INSIGHT INTO EMPLOYEE NEEDS, JOURNEYS, AND ENGAGEMENT

IT ENABLES THE PLATFORM, INTEGRATIONS, AND SCALABILITY

BUSINESS LEADERS DEFINE PRIORITIES AND MEASURE IMPACT

The organizations that move fastest are the ones that align these groups around a shared objective. They treat Employee Experience as a strategic capability that drives performance across the enterprise.

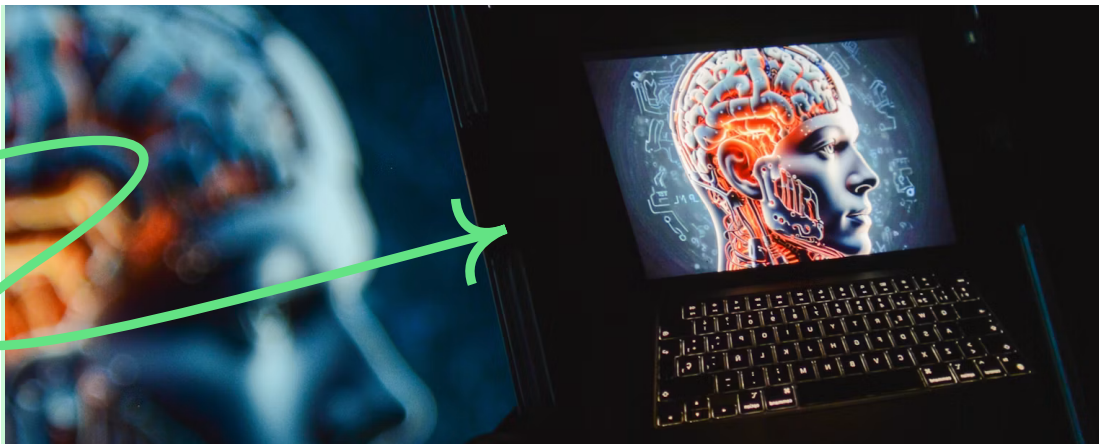


## Building Momentum Through Focus

Transformation does not need to start with a large, complex program.

Many organizations begin with a focused initiative such as a modern employee portal, a redesigned onboarding experience, or a unified knowledge and service layer. These efforts deliver immediate value and create a foundation for future expansion.

As adoption grows, organizations can layer in more advanced capabilities, including AI-driven experiences and automation. Over time, the experience becomes more intelligent, more personalized, and more deeply integrated into daily work.



## The Path Forward

The future of work will be defined by experience.

Organizations that lead in this space will create environments where technology feels seamless and intuitive. Employees will spend less time navigating systems and more time contributing meaningful work.

This is not just about improving usability. It is about transforming how work happens at every level of the organization.

Platforms like ServiceNow, combined with innovations like EmployeeWorks, are making this possible. They provide the foundation for a workplace where people, processes, and knowledge come together in a way that feels natural.

The opportunity ahead is clear. The organizations that act now will not only improve employee satisfaction. They will unlock a new level of productivity, agility, and performance.





# AI-Powered Future of Work: Lessons from 20 Years of Consumer Innovation

**As AI becomes the interface, the real design challenge isn't what employees see, it's whether they feel understood.**

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*Written by Stephanie Otto, SVP, Global Partnerships, Strategy & Innovation  
Executive Editor, Fortified Quarterly  
Executive Director, Customer Advisory Board, Ondaro*

Twenty years ago, I was not thinking about employees or the enterprise experience gaps that were surfacing.

I was thinking about the person on the couch, in the living room. The one holding a remote control, flipping through 500 channels, trying to find something worth watching. My job was to innovate. To envision something brand new for the consumer with amazing companies, including TiVo, WebTV, Cisco, AOL, Fandango, Showtime, HBO, TV Guide, Comcast, and many others. I needed to collapse the distance between that person and the moment they stopped searching and started watching.

That problem sounds simple. It was not. It required understanding human behavior at a level most engineers didn't think about. It required obsessing over friction, the half-second pause, the confusing menu, the sonic branding and verbal recognition that something happened, the recommendation that missed by one degree. It required believing that design was not just a beautiful interface. It was the difference between an experience people loved and one they abandoned.



I am so grateful for that part of my life and that experience. The collaboration, the excitement, the relationships built, the level of innovation - it was all extraordinary. I was also fortunate to receive two Emmy Awards for the work. But the awards don't really matter. What mattered was what they recognized; innovation in experience design changes how people feel about technology. It builds trust. It builds loyalty. It changes behavior in ways that data and technology alone never predict.

I carried that belief with me when I made the decision to leave telco, media and entertainment to join the world of ServiceNow, to see if experiential design could have the same impact for the enterprise, for the employee, as it did for the consumer.

## Why Enterprise, Why Then and Why Now

The honest answer is that the media and telecommunications industry was changing and consolidating. I wanted a new challenge, a new opportunity to transform the enterprise.

Consumer experiences had been transformed. The apps we use in our personal lives to travel, to bank, to Uber, to find entertainment had been obsessively refined. Friction was the enemy. Delight was the goal.

Then I watched people go to work.

The contrast was jarring. Smart, capable people navigating portals that looked archaic.

Submitting requests into systems that provided no acknowledgment, no visibility, no sense that anything had happened. Searching for answers across hundreds of different tools. Waiting.

The enterprise experience was broken. Not because the technology didn't exist. Because nobody had applied the same conviction to fix it.

***That is why I came into the ServiceNow ecosystem. I believed that how people experienced work and how they experienced the rest of their lives was a problem worth solving. A problem I knew how to think about.***



## What ServiceNow Is Building and Why It Deserves Recognition

Innovation and the concept of reimagination and reinvention is imperative in today's world.

ServiceNow recently released EmployeeWorks, Otto and Slate, all born from the Moveworks acquisition, and all are genuine innovation not incremental improvement. Not a portal refresh. A fundamental shift for the employee experience and their workplace.

Each of these experiences are at the center of that thinking.

***ServiceNow was a recognized leader in the IDC MarketScape Worldwide Employee Experience for Integrated Employee Workspaces 2025 and Moveworks is trusted by global enterprises such as Siemens, Toyota, and Unilever, used by 5.5 million employees, and companies such as CVS Health saw a 50% reduction in live agent chats in 30 days across IT, HR, and store operations.***

EmployeeWorks is the AI front door for employees that empowers users to find, search, and act across hundreds of business applications seamlessly through a single interface. It's contextually aware, highly personalized and provides autonomous workflow north, south, east and west across the organization.

Otto is a unified, enterprise-wide AI experience that sits across the ServiceNow platform, making AI native across every workflow and across every product.

Slate is ServiceNow's new AI first conversational driven employee experience designed to replace traditional click and browse interfaces with a dynamic interface layer that adapts to the employee, surfacing what is relevant based on role, context, recent activity, and what the platform knows is likely needed next. It is not a homepage. It is a living workspace that changes with the person using it. Combined with Otto's conversational layer, Slate means employees no longer have to navigate to find help. Help finds them.

These experiences represent something I have not seen in enterprise software before, a commitment to meeting employees where they are, with what they actually need, in the moment they need it. No ticket numbers. No knowing which system to ask. No taxonomy to memorize. Employees need actions, not only answers, and want outcomes, not just responses. For CIOs evaluating Copilot, Glean, or ChatGPT Enterprise, ServiceNow doesn't just answer, it completes the work across hundreds of enterprise systems.

ServiceNow's new approach to employee experience deserves the same recognition TiVo received as the first experience that understood what you wanted to watch. It earns that recognition because it starts with the human, not the system.



## The New Frontier and Its Challenges

Every frontier changes the people who cross it. And this one is changing something fundamental about the craft I deeply care about.

For twenty years, the work of a user experience designer was clear: understand the human, map the journey, reduce the friction, test and iterate. The output was a design, an interaction model, a set of intentional decisions about what a person would see, touch, and feel. The designer held the pen.

That is no longer entirely true.



***When AI becomes the interface, when Otto listens, interprets, routes, and resolves, the traditional design surface shrinks. You are no longer designing a screen. You are designing a behavior. You are designing trust. You are designing the invisible architecture of how an AI decides to respond, what tone it uses, when it escalates, and when it acts on its own.***

The opportunities are not the same. There is no wireframe for a conversation that doesn't happen the same way twice. There is no pixel-perfect spec for an AI agent that adapts in real time to context it was never explicitly trained for.

The challenges are not the same either. The old risk was a confusing menu. The new risk is an AI that confidently does the wrong thing, and the employee has no idea where the error entered.

Designing for that failure mode requires a different vocabulary entirely.

This is not a reason to step back from the frontier. It is a reason to step forward with more rigor, more humility, and more honesty about what we don't yet know.



## What We Carry Forward

I think about the lessons that transferred from the consumer to the enterprise.

THEY TRANSFER AGAIN HERE.

**The best experiences were never about the technology. They were about the moment a person stopped being frustrated and started feeling understood. TiVo did not win awards because it had a hard drive.**

**It won because it felt like it knew you.**

That same question “what does it feel like to be understood by a system?” is the one the entire industry is now chasing.

The breakthroughs in large language models that OpenAI and others pioneered have permanently raised the bar for what conversational AI can do. The quest for the enterprise isn’t raw model capability, it’s whether AI can be trusted to act on behalf of a real person, inside a real workflow with real consequences and if AI can be embedded into the organizational DNA. AI transformation is a human endeavor and today we must empower every employee with the skills and

confidence to leverage AI in ways that drive innovation. We need to help people maximize their potential, make work more meaningful, and free up time for creativity and purpose. That is where the experience layer matters most and that is where Ondaro spends much of its time.

The experiences ServiceNow is building with EmployeeWorks, Otto, and Slate will not win because of the model underneath or the architecture behind it. They will win because employees feel understood and asking for help at work feels as natural as asking your phone for directions.



ServiceNow is innovating at a speed second to none. This is a company that acquired Moveworks not just for the technology, but for the belief that employees deserve a conversational experience as capable as the best consumer AI they use every day. The ServiceNow platform brings together ServiceNow's trusted agentic AI capabilities and intelligent workflows with Moveworks intuitive front-end AI assistant, enterprise search and agentic reasoning engine, creating an enterprise AI platform that turns conversations into completed work. It is a company that built Slate not to modernize a portal, but to eliminate the concept of "navigating to get help."

It is a company whose leadership stands on a stage and makes commercial guarantees to go-live in under 100 days because they believe the experience will actually deliver.

That is not the posture of a platform company adding features. That is the posture of a company that has decided innovation and employee experience is worth fighting for.

Twenty years of consumer experience taught me what that conviction looks like when it is real. I have spent enough time watching enterprises settle for less to know how rare it is.

ServiceNow is not settling.

And neither are we.

**At Ondaro, that conviction is not theoretical. The measure of it is in the work and in the companies that trust us to get it right.**

Vertex Pharmaceuticals won the ServiceNow Employee Portal of the year in 2024, along with Visa in the top 10. This year, the NBA and UCLA Health joined that list, placing Ondaro amongst a rare group of partners with 4 top 10 finishers in the last 2 years. Four extraordinary organizations. Four teams that believe the employee experience was worth fighting for and were willing to build something genuinely new to prove it. That trust is not something we take for granted. It was what we build towards every day.



# Ask an Ondaro Expert: Designing for How Work Really Happens

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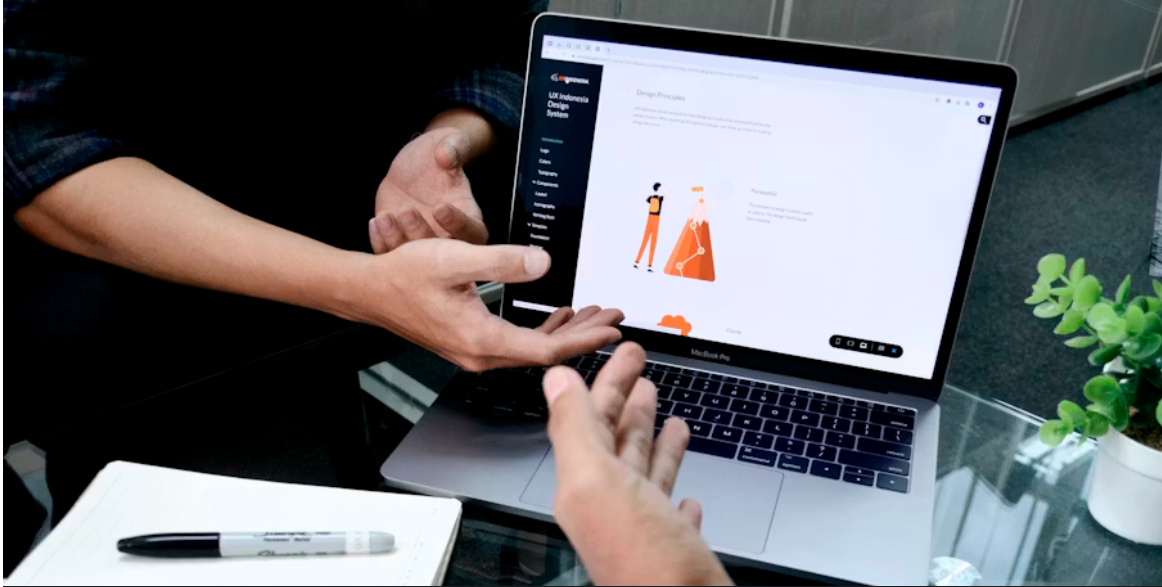
**Ryan Curtis**  
UX/UI Design Manager  
Ondaro

**As organizations invest in modern employee experiences, many are rethinking the role of portals, intranets, and HR service delivery.**

With new innovations like ServiceNow EmployeeWorks reshaping what is possible, the conversation is shifting from static interfaces to dynamic, employee-centered ecosystems. But building a better experience is not just about better design. It requires a deeper understanding of how employees think, work, and navigate their day-to-day.

We sat down with Ryan Curtis, UX/UI Design Manager at Ondaro, to unpack what organizations often get wrong, what actually drives adoption, and how UX design is evolving in this next frontier of employee experience.





## Can you share a project where improving the visual design alone would not have solved the problem? What did you uncover instead, and how did that change your approach?

One healthcare customer came to us with a request for a visual and technical assessment of their portal, along with guidance on where to improve. As it turned out, Ondaro had originally built their portal years earlier, and very little had been updated since then.

When it was first built, many widgets and functionality had to be custom. Now, with Employee Center Pro, those same capabilities come standard and are continuously upgradable. Instead of simply refreshing the visual branding on top of outdated functionality and a chaotic taxonomy, we explored a different path.

We prototyped options that leveraged Employee Center Pro, showing what a future state could look like. This included a branding refresh, elimination of technical debt, adoption of modern platform capabilities, and a rebuilt, user-friendly taxonomy. What started as a surface-level request quickly evolved into a broader conversation about the platform's potential. The customer ultimately transitioned to a much more streamlined Employee Center Pro experience across their global organization.



## **When organizations come to us asking for a “better intranet” or “modern portal,” what do they usually think they need versus what they actually need?**

We hear this in nearly every engagement or early conversation with customers. Most commonly, they think they need a polished interface design paired with a powerful search feature that can magically solve all the other issues. Those are definitely high on the list of must-haves, but often there are other design activities that will better support and enhance them.

In my experience, the most impactful design activity is card sort testing with users to build a more intuitive taxonomy and content structure from the ground up. To summarize, what a customer thinks they need is a flashy branded design, but what they really need is direct employee engagement to help bridge communication gaps with empathy and common natural language.

## **How do you balance branding and usability, especially when a company wants a highly customized, on-brand experience that might conflict with simplicity or clarity?**

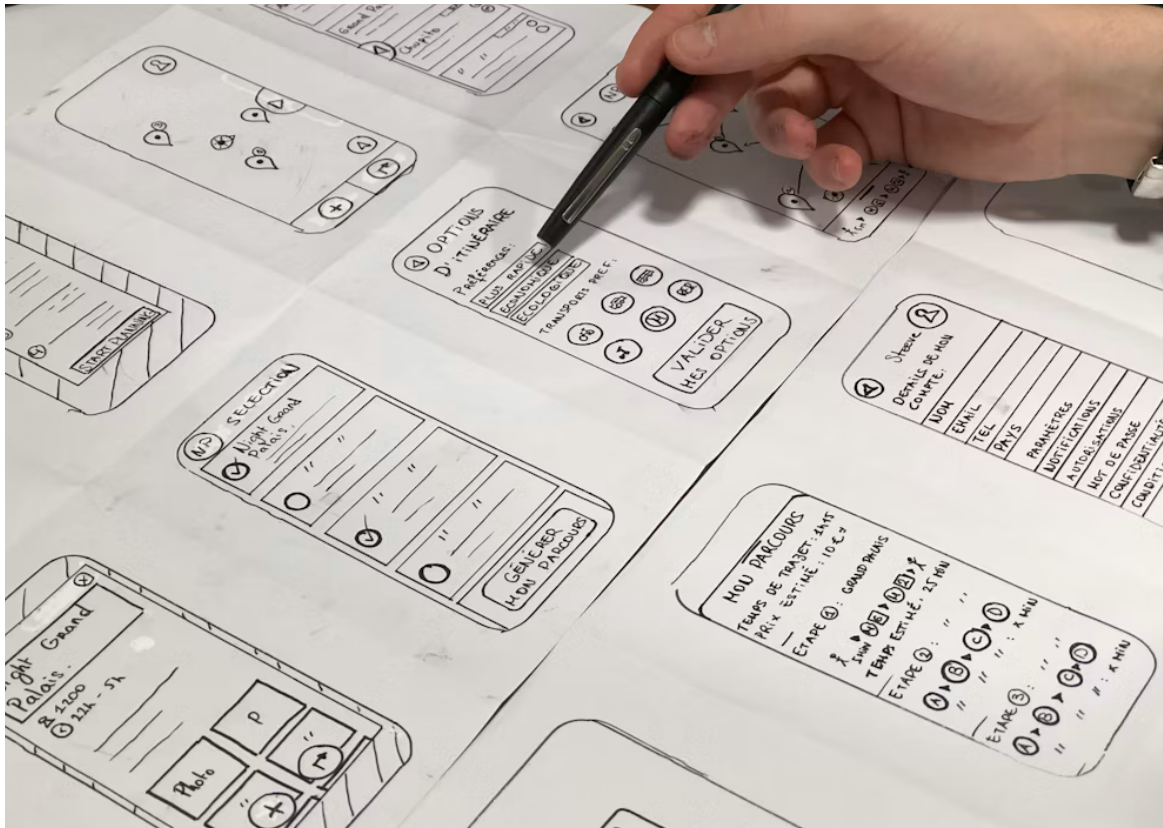
My role is all about finding balance. Between how employees think and how leadership thinks. Between what looks visually compelling and what is technically feasible.

During the branding phase, I typically design at least three theme options. Each aligns with core brand elements but explores different approaches to layout, contrast, information density, and styling. This creates a spectrum, from clean and minimalist to rich and high-contrast,

helping customers understand the trade-offs between simplicity and complexity.

We also conduct usability testing and focus groups to gather feedback directly from employees. This input helps the core team make informed decisions with confidence. At the end of the day, I provide recommendations backed by experience, but the goal is always to guide customers toward choices that work best for their users.





## What are some of the most common design mistakes you see in intranets or employee portals today, even in organizations that have invested heavily in them?

**Two major ones stand out: complex customizations and poor taxonomy.**



Custom widgets may work well initially but often create challenges during upgrades, introduce unintended issues, or fail to deliver enough value to justify their cost. Customization should either provide high value, such as enabling key integrations, or remain simple to minimize technical debt. On the taxonomy side, many portals are

structured around departments like HR, IT, and Facilities. While logical to leadership, this does not reflect how employees actually think. This disconnect makes navigation harder and reduces adoption. Organizations that shift toward a more intuitive, employee-centered structure consistently see better engagement and fewer support tickets.





## How do you design for how employees actually think and work? How do you uncover that in practice? What methods or exercises make the biggest difference?

Part of it comes from personal experience as an employee across multiple organizations. More importantly, it comes from engaging directly with the customer's employee population.

Through interviews, card sorting, focus groups, and usability studies, we gain a deep understanding of user motivations and pain points. These activities help validate known challenges and uncover new opportunities.

Including employees in the process not only improves design outcomes but also supports broader change management efforts by creating organic champions within the organization. In my experience, user interviews and taxonomy card sorting are the most impactful activities.



## Can you share an example where a small design or experience change had a big impact on adoption or engagement?

One example was an employee onboarding portal for a construction company. The customer had created a physical welcome kit for new hires, with its own distinct branding elements.

We mirrored those design cues in the portal experience, including typography, color hierarchy, tone of communication,

and visual styling. This created a cohesive onboarding journey across both physical and digital touchpoints.

The result was a more immersive and consistent experience that helped new employees feel confident and supported as they entered the organization.

## With AI and tools like EmployeeWorks entering the picture, how do you see the role of UX design evolving in the next few years?

AI is evolving rapidly and can offer significant value to designers, especially when it comes to processing large amounts of data or synthesizing research insights. By accelerating these tasks, designers can focus more on solving complex problems.

That said, AI should not replace every aspect of design work. There needs

to be a balance, with clear guidelines to preserve craftsmanship, maintain customer trust, and ensure a strong human connection.

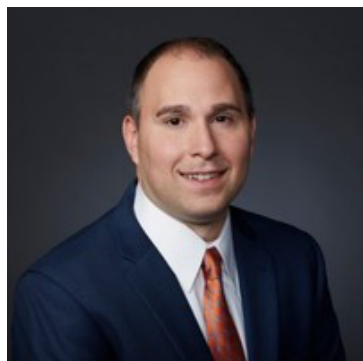
In the coming years, I expect UX designers will increasingly focus on validating and refining AI-generated outputs rather than being as hands-on in every stage of the process.



## CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT

*Ondaro works across industries, from global consumer goods to professional sports, helping organizations reimagine how employees experience work through the ServiceNow platform. That range of experience is what allows us to bring both deep platform expertise and real-world perspective to every engagement. The stories that follow reflect that breadth: two very different organizations, two very different challenges, and one consistent outcome.*

# Rethinking the Employee Experience: What We Learned Building One That Actually Works



### **Nick Ricciardi**

**Vice President,  
Head of IT Customer Experience  
NBA**

When we set out to reimagine how employees at the league access information and services, we weren't just rebuilding a portal. We were rethinking the entire relationship between employees and the systems meant to support them. That work recently earned us second place in ServiceNow's Best Employee Experience contest.

The win wasn't about great design. It was about connection. We introduced one-touch publishing and used the scale of the ServiceNow platform to unify content, data, and services across IT, HR, Facilities, and Finance into a single Employee Portal. But the real shift was moving from a model where employees had to seek out information to one where we delivered it to them — often before they even knew they needed it.



## GETTING PEOPLE THERE

Nearly 90% of our global workforce was on the portal within the first week of launch. Change management made that possible. We engaged employees early in the redesign process, secured strong executive sponsorship, and ran a steady communications campaign over six months that included tactics such as digital signage, leadership spotlights, and email outreach. We used a consistent “drip” approach with Employee Portal updates that built awareness, excitement, and anticipation. By launch day, people weren’t discovering something new; they were finally getting access to something they’d been waiting for.

## WHERE MOST TEAMS GET IT WRONG

If you’re thinking about improving your employee experience, start by mapping every place employees currently go to find information or get something done. Then ask yourself: what would it look like to bring that into one place? The goal isn’t another portal; the goal is reducing friction.

The biggest mistake I see? Teams spending too much time perfecting topic pages and navigation trees. Well-designed pages have value, but employee behavior has fundamentally changed. People expect to search for answers the way they do on Google or ChatGPT, not browse through menus. If your content isn’t findable through search, it doesn’t matter how beautiful the page is. Invest as much in content quality, search, and discoverability as you do in design.

## AI: Helpful Where It Earns Trust

Our approach to AI was intentional. We used it where it added the most value — helping employees find answers quickly from trusted, company-curated content. When employees needed broader information beyond our curated environment, they could access web-based AI tools through a separate browser experience. That boundary was deliberate: it made clear when they were leaving company-approved content and reinforced our guiding principles for responsible AI use.

Trust isn’t built by deploying AI everywhere. It’s built by being transparent about what it’s doing and why.

***The lesson I’d leave with any organization on this journey: the technology is often the easiest part. Winning the employee experience is really about change management, content strategy, and meeting people where they are; not where you wish they were.***



# From Fragmented to Foundational: How Kellanova Reimagined the Employee Experience

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## Karen Coyne

Director of Global Information  
Systems, Employee Experience &  
Data Privacy  
Kellanova

In October 2023, Kellogg's split into two independent companies: WK Kellogg Co, retaining the North American cereal business, and Kellanova, which took the global snacks and international cereal portfolio with brands like Pringles, Pop-Tarts, and Cheez-It.

Kellanova was going through its own transformation as a company when we reached an inflection point: our employee experience was no longer aligned with the expectations of a modern, digital workplace. Employees didn't know where to go for help. Requests were being routed across multiple systems. HR teams were spending too much time triaging work instead of delivering value.

We have upwards of 300 HR technology tools and systems of record, but employees don't need to know that. What they need is one place to go for anything. Any problem, concern, or question. We needed to move from a collection of tools to a unified, intuitive System of Engagement.

More importantly, it wasn't just an efficiency issue — it was a trust issue. When employees can't easily access support or get consistent answers, it erodes confidence in the function. That clarity became the catalyst for change.





## Building a Business Case That Held

When it came to leadership buy-in, I was deliberate: our ROI would not be driven by job loss or workforce reduction. Instead, we took a more sustainable, employee-centric approach by rationalizing our technology landscape — identifying duplicate systems, overlapping tools, and external contracts that could be retired as we consolidated into a single platform.

I often referred to it as a “Kickstarter model.” We reinvested a portion of the savings into the transformation itself, while returning the remaining value back to the business. It created credibility and momentum because the investment was visibly self-sustaining.

None of that would have been possible without the right partner. Picking a partner that truly sees your vision and can execute on it is one of the most important decisions you’ll make, and it’s one I don’t think leaders talk about enough. Our partnership with Ondaro was foundational to everything we built. They got it from the start, and their ability to execute our vision at every stage is what turned strategy into reality.



## Measuring What Matters

Success for us was defined by both measurable cost efficiency and a clear improvement in how employees engage with HR. We tracked reduction in technology spend through system consolidation, improved case resolution times, increased self-service utilization, and employee satisfaction with HR interactions. The platform gave us the insights and scalability to continuously evolve, not just launch and walk away.



## Laying the Foundation for AI

The portal work was a critical enabler for AI — and I mean that literally. AI depends on structured, centralized, governed data to be effective. Without that foundation, AI tends to amplify inconsistency. With it, AI can meaningfully enhance the experience.

For Kellanova, that foundation was built by clearly defining and categorizing content across all search sources, establishing strong content ownership and data structures, and ensuring clean, well-connected, fully integrated data. By bringing requests, knowledge, and workflows into a single platform, we established a unified entry point that now allows us to layer in capabilities like intelligent search, virtual agents, and case summarization in a way that feels seamless and relevant. It's positioned HR to shift from reactive support to proactive, personalized service delivery.



## What I'd Tell Other Leaders

Start with the experience, not the technology. The most successful implementations are grounded in simplifying the experience, not just digitizing existing complexity.

A few things I've learned the hard way:

**Rationalize before you modernize.**

Eliminate duplication and streamline processes before layering in new technology.

**Anchor your business case in tangible value**

Leadership responds to clear financial outcomes.

**Design for adoption**

Simplicity and intuitiveness will drive usage far more than feature depth.

**Establish governance early**

Consistent data, workflows, and ownership are essential for scale and for future AI enablement.

**Choose your partner wisely**

I cannot overstate this. Ondaro's partnership wasn't just helpful, it was the difference between a vision and a result. Find a partner who understands where you're trying to go and can actually get you there.

**Think beyond go-live**

The minute you launch, it's already outdated. From day one, I was clear this is not a one-time implementation — it's a continuous evolution.

We've adopted a pseudo-Agile mindset: reviewing reports, studying user behavior, maintaining an enhancement backlog tied to business priorities and ROI, and pushing updates to production every other week. Going on our third year, and things have never been better.

At its core, HRSD is a transformation of both experience and operating model. When done well and with the right platform, the right governance, and the right partner — it doesn't just improve efficiency. It fundamentally elevates how employees connect with and experience the organization, which is ultimately the core of Human Resources.



## EXECUTIVE INSIGHTS

# The Tolerance for Friction Is Gone. Here's What That Means for Enterprise AI



**Ben Durham-Kilcullen**

Chief AI Officer

Ondaro

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Ben Durham-Kilcullen, Chief AI Officer of Ondaro, spends a lot of time in rooms where the question “will AI replace me?” is hanging in the air and no one’s answered it directly.

In this conversation, he gets into what’s actually changed — not just in technology, but in what employees expect from the tools their employers give them. He covers why most AI initiatives miss before they even start, what it takes for platforms like ServiceNow to move from tracking work to actually doing it, and why an AI strategy without a measurement framework is just an expensive experiment.



## 1

## From your perspective, how is AI fundamentally changing what employees expect from workplace tools and digital experiences?

Employee expectations are eclipsing what the typical organization can facilitate in a scalable and secure fashion. Employees have had access to consumer AI - ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot, and now they're walking into work and asking why their enterprise tools don't work the same way. The expectation has moved from "help me find the right form" to "just handle this for me." That's a fundamentally different product requirement and it dramatically shifts their expectations and demands of the business.

What's really changed is the tolerance for friction. People used to accept that enterprise software was cumbersome because it was powerful. That trade-off is largely gone in user's minds. If the AI in their personal life can draft an email, summarize a document, and route a request without them clicking through five screens, they expect the same from the tools their employer provides. Organizations that don't close that gap are no longer managing a UX problem, they're dealing with an adoption and retention problem.

## 2

## How do you see AI evolving the role of platforms like ServiceNow, especially when it comes to moving employees from simply finding information to actually getting work done?

ServiceNow has always been strong as a system of record — the place where work is tracked. What AI is doing is pushing it toward becoming a system of action. The difference is significant. Finding information means an employee still has to interpret it, decide what to do, and execute. Getting work done means the platform is completing steps on their behalf, within defined guardrails.

What makes ServiceNow particularly well-positioned for this is that it sits at the intersection of workflows across IT, HR, finance, and legal.

AI has the most leverage in platforms where the data, the process, and the decision authority already live in the same place. The challenge and the opportunity is governance. Giving AI the ability to act rather than just inform requires organizations to think carefully about what decisions agents can make autonomously, which ones need human review, and how they audit what happened. That's where the real implementation work is, and honestly, it's where a lot of organizations underestimate the effort.



## Many organizations are investing in AI, but not all are seeing meaningful impact. What are the most common gaps you're seeing between AI ambition and real employee experience outcomes?

### A

#### ABSENCE OF A MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK BEFORE ANYTHING GETS BUILT

Organizations launch AI initiatives without establishing what success actually looks like - no baseline, no target metric, no defined business outcome tied to the investment. Before you select a single use case, you should be able to answer: what KPI does this move, by how much, and over what timeframe? That could be time-to-resolve on service requests, employee self-service rate, hours saved per role per week - it doesn't matter which metric, but there has to be one. Without it, you're spending real money on something you will then struggle to prove worked.

### B

#### PICKING USE CASES BASED ON WHAT SOUNDS EXCITING RATHER THAN WHAT EMPLOYEES ACTUALLY DO EVERY DAY

Sometimes that is because they want AI to be more appealing and sometimes that is because they lack the grounding in the user's day-to-day work. If you're automating a task someone performs twice a month, the ROI on adoption effort will likely be minimal. You have to start by understanding frequency - what are people doing constantly, and where is the effort going? Better yet, where could that effort be better leveraged?

### C

#### DATA AND SYSTEM AVAILABILITY

Organizations want AI that can take action, but the underlying systems aren't connected, the data isn't clean, and the permissions model wasn't built for automation. You end up with an AI that can answer a question but can't close a ticket, approve a request, or update a record. That can quickly devolve into a relatively expensive search or FAQ function.



## 4

## For organizations looking to introduce AI into the employee experience, what are the most important foundations they need to have in place to ensure it drives adoption, trust, and measurable value?

As a leader approaching AI enablement the first topic to tackle is employees' understandable concerns about AI. The question "will this replace me?" is in every room where you introduce AI to employees. If you don't address it directly with a clear, honest answer, you will never get real adoption. People may comply and perform for the demo and then go back to doing things the way they always have. Leadership has to own that conversation. It's critical at this juncture to over communicate and to reiterate the organization's AI strategy and vision which brings us to our next point.

Strategy has to come before tooling. Too many organizations acquire licenses and then figure out what to do with them. You need a clear point of view on what AI is going to do for your people, what it won't do, and how you'll know if it's working. That means

role-specific use cases, not a general AI assistant, but an AI or AI enabled tooling that knows what a service desk agent, a project manager, or an HR business partner actually needs.

Training has to match the specificity of the use cases. Generic AI literacy training has its place, fundamentals are valuable, but the fundamentals alone don't drive behavior change. People need to see their role, their tasks, and their workflows in the training content.

Last but not least, leaders have to go first. If direct managers aren't using AI visibly and talking about it openly, employees read that as a signal that it's optional, not serious or in some cases, not condoned. Even worse, it can cause shadow AI (think shadow IT but specifically AI tooling) to become pervasive. Leadership behavior sets the adoption ceiling.





## SERVICENOW PERSPECTIVE

# What It Actually Takes to Win at Employee Experience

ERIC HEMMER, PRINCIPAL SOLUTION SPECIALIST,  
EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE, SERVICENOW

I've had the privilege of working with what I'd call the best-of-the-best ServiceNow customers who are genuinely passionate about their employees, and who've built world-class experiences that also generate the highest return on investment. After years of judging the Best Employee Experience contest and watching the field evolve year over year, a few things have become crystal clear about what separates the organizations that truly stand out from the rest.

### OWNERSHIP CHANGES EVERYTHING

The primary key is designating a person or a small team who is specifically responsible for the enterprise employee experience. This person designs experiences with employees for employees. They publish branding standards: templates, layouts, tone of voice, typography, color schemes, iconography. They continuously improve accessibility. They monitor feedback and analytics looking for opportunities to enhance the experience.

They treat these experiences like a product for employees, not for stakeholders — and they're firm enough to push back when someone wants to deviate from established standards.

Without that ownership, employees are forced to deal with a mishmash of experiences. That leads to frustration, lost time, low self-service rates, longer resolution times, and higher support burdens. It's a pattern I see consistently on both sides of the contest results.



## THE EXPERIENCE EMPLOYEES EXPECT NOW

The best experiences today are engaging and hyper-personalized. They bring all the information and resources an employee needs to their fingertips through a true digital front door. And AI is fundamentally changing how designers approach that challenge. Experiences are becoming more conversational, more contextually aware of each employee's history, interactions, and needs.

Solutions like ServiceNow's EmployeeWorks automate so many transactions across enterprise systems that employees are now far more likely to complete their work from a single preferred interface without ever leaving it. Looking ahead, AI will also empower employees to generate their own widgets and visualizations. It will allow them pull and combine data from across the enterprise without needing an admin or developer to do it for them.

That's powerful. I'm also particularly excited about the emergence of AI voice interfaces for blue-collar workers, who have historically shunned traditional self-service interfaces.

## AI IN THE WILD: WHAT'S ACTUALLY WORKING

The evolution I've seen in just the past two years has been remarkable. At the 2025 Best Employee Experience contest, most finalists were still dabbling with AI such as improving search, experimenting with automated conversations. In 2026, every finalist was using AI meaningfully.

What makes ServiceNow the right platform for this work is that EmployeeWorks is deterministic and enterprise-wide. Companies don't want AI tools making probabilistic guesses at orchestrating business processes — that's a compliance nightmare. They want a solution with the workflows and guardrails to guide AI so it adheres to established business controls.

## The Partner Equation

Not every organization has professional employee experience designers in-house and that's okay. The right implementation partner brings that perspective to the table. They've seen how to design experiences that get adopted across every cohort of employees. They act as a neutral party to ensure consistency when stakeholders pull in different directions. And experienced partners know how to measure impact and establish governance models that sustain success long after go-live.

That last part matters more than most people realize. The technology is the enabler. The experience and the people who design, govern, and continuously improve it is where the real value is created.



## ABOUT ONDARO

Ondaro is the leading Elite, pure-play ServiceNow partner in the Americas. We have helped thousands of clients achieve their transformation goals leveraging ServiceNow, the AI platform for business transformation.

Through strategy, implementation, transformation and operational services, we help our clients transform the complex landscape of business operations into streamlined, secure, automated processes.

Whether you need help getting started fast with ServiceNow product capabilities or going big with transformational impact, Ondaro can help you navigate what's next for you.

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