
What is Personalisation in Human Resources?



Personalisation – the Employee Experience Gold Standard

In recent months “Personalisation” has emerged as the gold standard of Employee Experience (EX) and is rapidly becoming a major focus of attention for HR.

The link between Personalised EX and increased Profits is firmly established. Yet, according to Vishal Muktewar “Less than 29% of enterprise organizations provide hyper-personalized digital experiences (DEX) to their employees.” What is more, “despite the known benefits of this kind of personalization, 63% (of organisations) offer no individual personalization in their DEX whatsoever.” (Muktewar, 2022)

In this blog I will define Personalisation in HR; show examples of HR Personalisation; remind us why it is important; and outline some top tips to help you start your HR Personalisation journey

What is Personalisation in Human Resources?

Rather than having a “one size fits all” approach, Personalised HR uses data to allow employees to choose which elements of Reward, Benefits, L&D, and other “products” best suit their situation and needs. Additionally, employees use technology to access the elements they want in much the same way as a Consumer might access a company’s products.

The Key to HR Personalisation: Data-Led design

Put simply, “Personalization is the act of tailoring an experience or communication based on information a company has learned about an individual.” (Sweet, 2019)

However, as Tom Haak has pointed out: “Most people analytics efforts today are very much focused on the needs of the organisation. Focusing on the benefits of people analytics for the employees requires a different approach.” (Haak, 2019).

So, in order to provide employees with personalised Reward, Benefits, L&D, etc., organisations need to consider these different elements not as *Benefits* employees are provided with, but as *Products* which employees evaluate and consume.

If the various pillars within HR were to consider themselves as Product Designers, they would “want to ensure that their end products are shaped by the needs and wants of their customers and will be used and loved by them.” (Adams, 2018)

Adams continues: “Product designers don’t just observe their end-users, they’ll often get them involved in the design process itself.”

Whilst HR Services have started to use Design Thinking techniques to obtain data from employees, it is just as important, if not more so, for HR pillars to do the same.

Personalised HR Products

Imagine two employees, born on the same day, joined the company on the same day, same role, and same level within the company. However, they are completely different people with different aspirations.

“One size fits all” will fail both.

In **Reward**, for instance, as *Incentive and Motivation* points out: What’s the point of providing football tickets to your top-performing sales staff if they don’t like football? (Incentive & Motivation, 2021)

If only one or none of your sales team like football, it's not worth it.

Allowing employees to personalise elements of their reward makes them more engaged. Just because someone is 55 years old doesn't mean they necessarily want to put more money into their pension (and it's arrogant to think they have to).

In the world of Personalised **Benefits**, "Employees expect to have access to benefits that suit them, right now." As Helga Viegas points out: "Medical insurance is at the heart of [these personalised benefits]. We are already seeing an increasing demand for, and the delivery of, benefits covering gender reassignment, fertility treatments such as egg freezing, and mental health programmes, for instance. (Viegas, 2020)

In **Learning & Development** it has long been clear that "you should no longer teach everybody the same lesson at the same time" ... [By] "allowing learners to set their own goals and work independently from the trainer... they can learn at their own pace and take ownership of their learning progress." (Schwartz, 2021)

Personalised HR Services

Despite what we in HR might wish, people only engage with HR when:

- There has been a personal event in their lives – perhaps the birth of a child
- They are at a stage of their employee journey, such as Promotion
- HR has initiated the interaction, say, Annual Pay Review.

No matter what the trigger, when people engage with HR Services, they either want information, want something done or want something fixed.

In a Personalised HR Services experience:

- When looking for **information**, rather than being presented with long policy documents or FAQs to plough through, employees are served only the content that's relevant to them – not only based on their role, tenure, location, employment type, but also the intent of what they are searching for and in a format that suits their learning style.
- When wishing to **get something done**, rather than being expected to self-serve using multiple HR systems (which means first they must first be trained on how to use those systems), an overarching Experience layer or chatbot acts as an intermediary.
- When needing to **get something fixed**, rather than having to self-triage and raise a case with the correct service desk, Artificial Intelligence analyses their problem and assigns it to the correct person(s).

Examples of HR Personalisation

Unilever's Personalised Total Reward

In an interview with Louron Pratt for *Employee Benefits*, Peter Newhouse, former Global Head of Reward at Unilever, says “We decided that because not all employees are the same, they need to have the opportunity to choose what benefits they would like that suit their needs.”

He continues: “Offering a flexible, total reward offering has, therefore, enabled Unilever to provide its employees with a personalised experience; they receive constant updates to remind them of new benefits on offer, and which ones are best suited to their current situation.” (Pratt, 2020)

“We decided that because not all employees are the same, they need to have the opportunity to choose what benefits they would like that suit their needs.”

Peter Newhouse

Full disclosure – Peter used to be my boss and I developed the first version of Unilever's reward system, the developed version of which has now been commercialised and become a spinoff company, *UflexReward*.

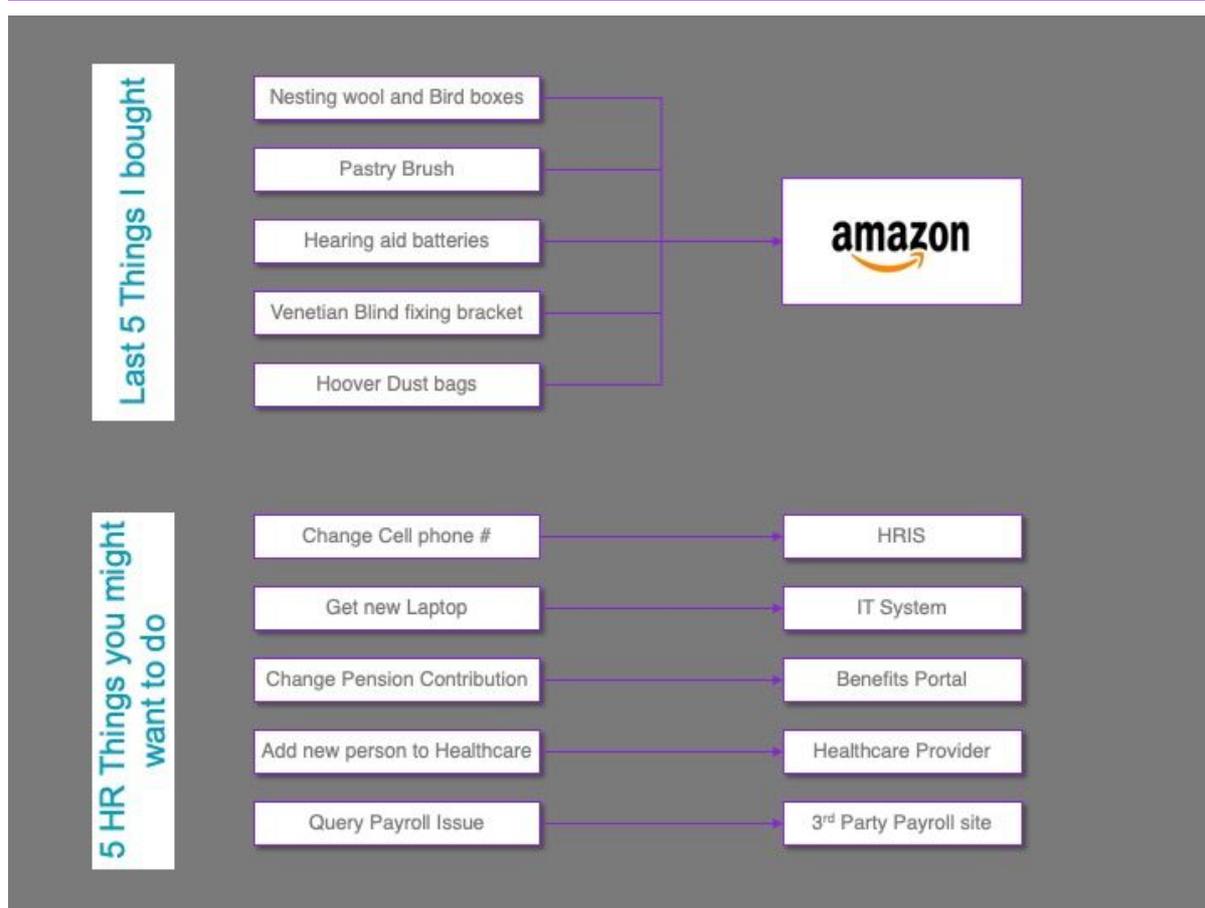
Personalised HR Services: Portals, Chatbots, APIs and more

Having personalised HR Products is all very well but, if the way employees access them isn't personalised as well, then the problem is not resolved.

And the problem is that the technology employees use at work lags way behind the technology they use in their personal lives.

As Benefex recently pointed out: 60% [of employees] say workplace tech is less advanced than consumer tech”. (Benefex, 2022)

And, as Sapient Insights Group explained in their 2020-2021 survey, the average organisation now deploys 16.24 HR solutions.



One consumer system vs multiple HR systems

“As a first step, many organisations are deploying personalised portals to introduce personalisation at the first touch point with their employees, whilst offering access to all HR services and content on one platform.” (Kennard, 2021)

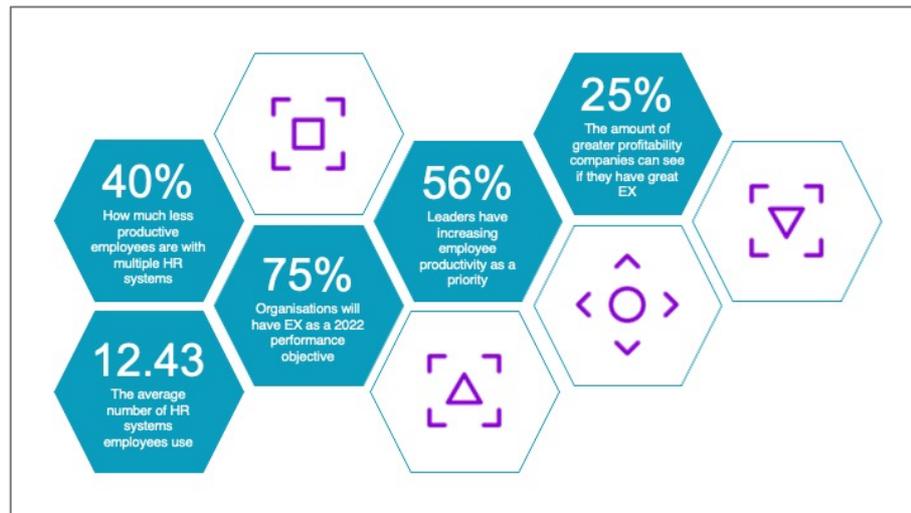
APIs are linking to core systems, surfacing data as well as allowing data to be updated from outside those systems either from within portals or via chatbots.

But we still have a long way to go before employees can enjoy a true Netflix-like experience, where they use the system to ask for paternity leave and are prompted to add their new child to their health insurance!

Why is HR Personalisation Important?

So why is all this important?

In simple terms – money. There is clear evidence that a great EX boosts employee engagement which in turn leads to Customer satisfaction. Satisfied customers become loyal customers providing increased profits.



Personalisation provides that great Employee Experience.

As Jason Fowler, Head of HR Northern & Western Europe at Fujitsu Global, has pointed out: “Personalised offerings provide a greater sense of connection between the employee and the organisation. By fostering a relationship that suits the employee’s circumstances, and an environment where the employer cares about these things, it means individuals can better focus on their work in a more engaged and committed way.” (Pickup, 2020)

7 Tips and Reminders for HR Personalisation

1. Remember that Employees are People, Profiles are variables. Think of employees as Consumers and Customers
2. Use Design Thinking techniques to create the products you offer your people (Benefits, Learning and Development, etc.). Make them flexible and relevant to them. Unless the law dictates it, e.g., Workplace pension, let them choose products which match their personal needs.
3. Build HR Services journeys in the same way that Sales & Marketing build Customer journeys. Use as much data as you possibly can to personalise experiences. If you know someone is based in Malaysia, don't give them details for India. Never ask them a question if you already know the answer:
4. When employees are self-serving information, get rid of overarching FAQs which require them to search for the pieces which are relevant to them and only serve them with bite-sized relevant content.
5. When people are looking to get something done, use data and processes to act like Amazon.
 - a. If someone asks for paternity leave, for instance, remind them about adding their new child to their health insurance (if that's available). But make sure they haven't already done it first!
6. When wanting to get something fixed – like a lost payslip, make it easy for people to transfer to a human if required.
7. Reduce the number of systems your people must use by developing an overarching Experience layer – a chatbot or a portal. The design itself can be Universal, but the content should be personalised. One place to go is so much better than 12!

Conclusion - Personalise HR for higher productivity

In short, the old way of doing things where HR Products were chosen for employees by HR, and HR Services relied on employees' time and effort have passed.

Despite progress already made in the field of Employee Experience, Freedom of choice and data-driven customer-like experiences tailored to the individual are the key to unlocking productivity going forward.

About the Author



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About KMW3

KMW3 was founded by Keith Williams and Keren Sutherland to support HR leaders develop and implement impactful HR digital transformation centred around Employee Experience with a special focus on HR Chatbots. Corporate clients have included General Electric, Anglo American and UNDP; and individuals from around the world have participated in mentoring sessions.

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