THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DIGITAL EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE (DEX)

Seeing hidden friction, strengthening workforce performance

TeamViewer

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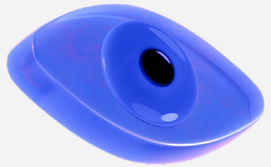


The most damaging forms of digital friction are often the least visible.

Digital employee experience (DEX) is frequently framed as an optimization discipline focused on reducing tickets, accelerating resolution, and lowering operational costs. These metrics are measurable and important, but they describe outcomes, not the underlying function of a mature DEX practice.

Much of the friction employees experience never appears in traditional IT metrics. Instead, it accumulates quietly through interruptions, system instability, unclear expectations, and constant context switching. Over time, this creates a persistent cognitive load that fragments attention, extends recovery time, and erodes performance.

Research across psychology, cognitive science, and digital workplace studies suggests that **digital systems function less as tools to be optimized and more as environments that shape human performance.** When those environments are unstable, employees compensate through workarounds, vigilance, and repeated effort. Silence in the ticket queue is often mistaken for stability, when in reality it often reflects normalized friction and hidden strain.

High-maturity DEX organizations operate differently. Rather than reacting faster to visible failures, high-maturity DEX organizations operate differently. Rather than reacting faster to visible failures, they **focus on reducing the conditions that create disruption in the first place.** They prioritize user-present signals over aggregated averages, detect instability earlier, and apply proportionate responses that reduce recurrence rather than amplify noise. This is the difference between measuring activity and measuring stability. Traditional metrics like ticket volume, mean time to resolution, and cost efficiency remain relevant, but they are lagging indicators of system stability.

The deeper value of DEX lies in reducing:

DISRUPTION SEVERITY

How often and how severely work is interrupted.

IMPAIRED WORK TIME

When employees are present but not fully effective.

SILENT COMPENSATION

The hidden effort required to work around friction, accumulating thousands of lost focus hours.

Organizations that learn to see sooner and solve smarter do more than optimize IT operations. They create environments where attention lasts longer, recovery is faster, and performance remains steady under increasing demand. Instead of thinking about DEX as a simply technical initiative, it’s better to understand it as an investment in sustained **human capacity.**

THE MISUNDERSTANDING OF DEX

Much more immersive than tools, digital systems are the environments where modern work happens.

Digital employee experience is often framed as a performance initiative:

- REDUCE TICKETS
- MODERNIZE INFRASTRUCTURE
- IMPROVE SERVICE RELIABILITY

These are familiar and worthwhile goals grounded in optimization of speed, efficiency, and costs, but they describe outcomes, not the role DEX plays in shaping the employee experience.

Findings in cognitive science, organizational psychology, and digital workplace research suggest that digital environments function less like tools to be optimized and more like systems that regulate attention, workload, and performance[i]. Each notification, platform switch, system delay, update prompt, and monitoring signal, functions as a potential stressor.

Research also shows that interruptions fragment attention and prolong recovery time through a phenomenon known as “attention residue.”[ii] When digital friction is frequent, recovery is disrupted, focus erodes, and employees begin operating cautiously rather than confidently.

Over time, digital friction becomes physiological.

Technostress DEFINITION

> Strain caused by continuous interaction with digital systems.

Technostress, the strain caused by continuous interaction with digital systems, has been linked to overload, hyper-accessibility, continuous change, and poorly integrated tools, contributing to fatigue, disengagement, and burnout.[iii] These effects reveal the limits of viewing digital environments through a purely technical lens.

Employee experience research defines experience not simply through system uptime or device health, but through the employee's perceived ability to work effectively, safely, and without unnecessary friction.[iv] Studies suggest that systems can appear operationally healthy while the human experience surrounding them remains fragmented, cognitively taxing, and psychologically draining.[v] The research also consistently demonstrates that perceptions of culture, environment, and technology meaningfully influence engagement, job satisfaction, and turnover intent. Technology functions as the operational nervous system of the modern organization.

When that system is misaligned, it disrupts employees' ability to regulate their physical and cognitive state. Performance suffers quietly at first, but measurably over time.

TeamViewer's Andrew Hewitt, a former Forrester analyst and leading voice in digital employee experience, and organizational psychologists from The Lumin Group agree:

> **DEX is not just about optimizing systems. It is about stabilizing human performance within them.**

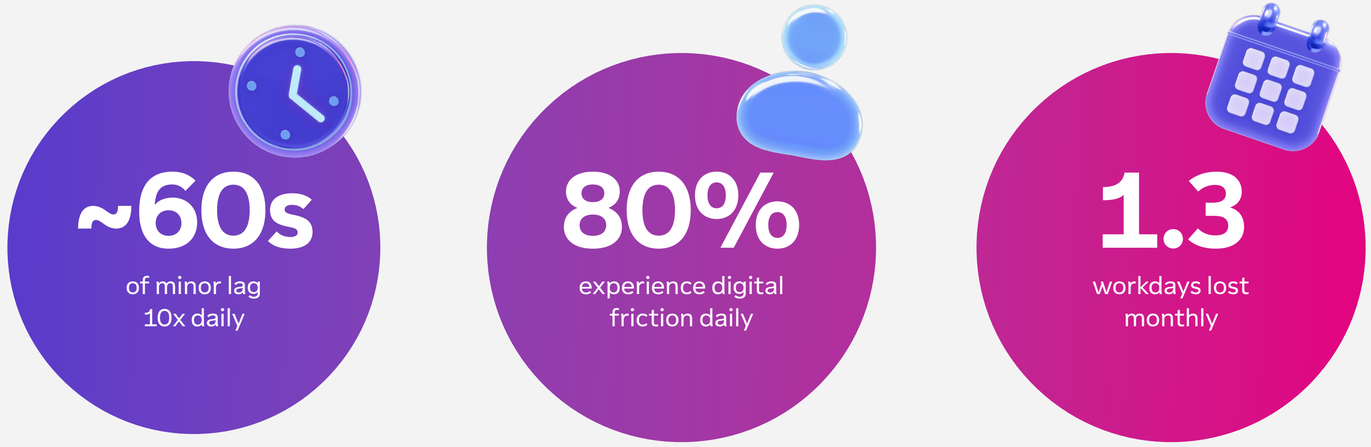
This introduces a critical distinction.

Optimization asks: How fast can we resolve failure?
Stabilization asks: How often are we forcing recovery in the first place?

Most organizations are optimized for the former. But the experience of work is shaped by the latter. To understand why this is a problem, we need to examine how digital friction actually behaves in everyday work.

THE INVISIBLE LOAD: FRICTION AS REPEATED STRESS EXPOSURE

Digital friction rarely appears catastrophic.



It shows up in small moments: a lagging application, a forced update too close to a deadline, a constant stream of notifications, or tools that require excessive context switching.

Individually, these moments feel manageable. Collectively, they behave less like minor technical issues and more like repeated stress exposure.

Psychological research distinguishes between **stressors** as the external triggers and **stress** as the internal response.[vi] In digital workplaces, these stressors are consistently pervasive, including hyper-accessibility, constant interruptions, sensory overload, continuous change, and performance monitoring.[vii] Each stressor requires recovery. Each unexpected disruption erodes focus and drains energy.

Consider a knowledge worker who loses 45–60 seconds to minor performance lag ten times per day. That's up to 10 minutes of disruption, with each instance requiring cognitive reorientation. No ticket is filed, no outage is declared, and yet attention is repeatedly fractured.

Employees rarely experience disruptions as isolated incidents.[viii] Instead, they experience them as a persistent background condition of work. This turns the digital workplace into an environment requiring continuous micro-adjustments. Small interruptions, delays, and recurring prompts accumulate into a form of low-grade vigilance that steadily drains attention and patience.

Most organizations don't measure the cumulative impact of small periods of digital disruption throughout the workday, even though these small intervals compound rapidly at scale. Prior research from TeamViewer found that 80% of employees report losing time to digital friction, averaging 1.3 workdays per month.[ix]

Over time, recovery windows extend. Performance variance increases. Work feels busier, but less effective. Chronic digital friction is an environmental condition. If this accumulation happens continuously, leaders need to understand why these conditions remain largely invisible to the systems designed to detect them.

How digital friction drives human dysregulation

DIMENSION OF IMPACT	WHAT HAPPENS	RESULTING EFFECT ON WORK
Attention interruption	Repeated notifications, system delays, and task switching prevent sustained focus	Loss of flow state, reduced work quality, and lower task satisfaction
Cognitive overload	Multitasking and constant context switching increase mental demand	Mental fatigue, slower decision-making, and increased error rates
Physiological strain	Continuous low-level stress responses triggered by instability and interruptions	Fatigue, reduced resilience, and diminished long-term performance capacity
Anticipatory anxiety	Employees begin expecting disruption based on repeated experiences	Hyper-vigilance, hesitation, and reduced confidence in systems
Psychological disruption	Constant change, unclear norms, and rapid AI adoption reduce predictability	Lower psychological safety, reduced engagement, and resistance to new tools

WHY WE MISS IT: THE MEASUREMENT BLIND SPOT

Many IT organizations rely on ticket volume, response time, and outage metrics to gauge digital health.

These indicators matter, but they are incomplete.

Tickets capture declared failure but not tolerated friction. Aggregation compounds the issue. Enterprise-wide averages mask repeated user-present degradation events (e.g., slowdowns) that occur dozens of times per week within specific groups. These are events that never cross traditional thresholds. So, while dashboards appear green, experience feels red. This gap between reported issues and lived experience is reflected in employee sentiment: **47% of employees report increased frustration and reduced job satisfaction, while 42% directly associate digital friction with burnout.**[x]

Rather than a sign of maturity, silence in the ticket queue can be evidence of adaptation. Employees compensate. They retry actions. They wait. They adjust their behavior, and eventually they stop reporting issues altogether. What goes unreported still shapes behavior in a very real way.

High-maturity DEX practices treat quiet dashboards with skepticism. They ask: Where are people compensating? When are users active? Where does degradation cluster? If traditional signals fail to surface these conditions, then the issue is not visibility alone. It is that the measurement model is incomplete.

THE SHIFT: FROM OPTIMIZATION TO REGULATION

If digital friction functions as a persistent environmental stressor rather than a series of isolated technical failures, then the role of DEX must change.

DEX has traditionally been framed as an optimization initiative. Improve performance, reduce tickets, lower costs: these are outcomes. They aren't the mechanisms that sustain performance.

Andrew Hewitt emphasizes that many organizations focus on optimizing the delivery of IT services rather than understanding how those services shape the employee experience itself. IT ensures that systems function, but often overlooks how those systems influence engagement, focus, and productivity in practice.

A growing body of psychological and workplace research, in turn, describes digital systems less like machinery to be tuned and more like environments shaping human performance. Digital environments function as regulating systems that shape how stable or volatile work feels for employees.[xi] When those conditions are volatile, employees compensate through vigilance, repetition, and workarounds. But when they're stable, attention and effort remain focused on the work itself.

This understanding demands an operational shift. The focus moves from how quickly failures are resolved to how often employees are forced to recover from them. A well-managed digital environment maintains stability much like a building's climate system, without requiring constant user intervention. Viewed as stability infrastructure, DEX becomes a practice of maintaining steady, low-friction environments where disruptions are less frequent and employees spend less time compensating for instability. Because when that regulation layer breaks down, the burden shifts to the individual. Workers begin compensating for the system themselves. They monitor more closely, retry actions, stay hyper-aware, and brace for disruption. Over time, they're not only doing their jobs, but also managing the environment required to do them. This is the cost of unstable environments.

A well-managed digital environment maintains stability much like a building's climate system.

WHAT STABILITY LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

When friction accumulates quietly, the solution isn't louder alerts, but earlier insight and proportionate response. High-maturity DEX organizations invest in seeing problems sooner, before volatility compounds. They prioritize user-present signals over static averages. They distinguish between noise and meaningful impairment.

"See sooner"

is about predictive awareness: detecting degradation before it escalates.

"Solve smarter"

is about proportionate intervention: reducing frequency, shortening duration, and automating recurring instability.

Not all issues require escalation. Chronic instability requires ongoing treatment, not reactive spikes in response. Reactive models amplify operational noise. Proactive stabilization reduces measurable volatility.

When digital ecosystems stabilize, employees spend less time recovering and more time progressing as focus extends and trust rebuilds. This shift moves DEX from reactive response to proactive stability, and its impact isn't just operational, but human.

THE HUMAN LAYER: ATTENTION, SAFETY, AND RECOVERY

Digital environments shape attention, influence psychological safety, and determine how easily employees recover from disruption.

Repeated interruptions fragment attention. Unresolved instability creates uncertainty. Over time, employees begin to anticipate disruption rather than trust the system. Employees operate cautiously. They check more often and hesitate before acting. They always remain partially focused on the possibility of failure. Even when systems are functioning, the expectation of instability remains.

Humans are more attuned to threat signals than stability signals.[xii] Employees quickly notice when something breaks. They rarely notice when systems are working smoothly. This creates an inherent bias toward frustration and reinforces the perception of instability.

Regulation reduces this burden. A well-regulated environment minimizes unnecessary context switching, clarifies expectations, and reduces the cognitive cost of returning to work after disruption. It allows employees to focus without bracing for interruption.

However, technology alone isn't sufficient. As Hewitt highlighted, even perfectly functioning systems can't overcome a culture that reinforces constant interruption, hyper-accessibility, and fragmented work patterns. Stability must exist at both technological and organizational levels. When these align, employees experience something rarely measured but deeply felt: the ability to work with fewer interruptions, reduced vigilance, and less need for recovery.

Employees quickly notice when something breaks. They rarely notice when systems are working smoothly.

REGULATION AS STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE

Digital density—that is, the volume of digital interactions and touchpoints employees navigate each day—is consistently rising. AI systems will increase the number of digital touchpoints employees must navigate each day. The demands placed on digital environments, and the people within them, are growing.

The next phase of DEX maturity is architectural. It's embedded into how digital environments are designed, measured, and governed. It requires measuring user-present experience in context, tracking impairment frequency, duration, and volatility rather than relying solely on aggregate performance.

In this model, DEX becomes part of the organization's operational nervous system: detecting instability early, correcting proportionately, and maintaining equilibrium under increasing load. Instead of faster incident resolution, the differentiator will be preventing destabilizing moments.

In the AI era, where systems operate at the speed of data, sustainable human performance becomes a source of strategic resilience.

Productivity isn't defined by how quickly failure is fixed. It's defined by how rarely instability interrupts meaningful work.

ENDNOTES

[i] Mark, Gloria, Daniela Gudith, and Ulrich Klocke. “The Cost of Interrupted Work.” *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, April 6, 2008, 107–10. https://doi.org/10.1145/1357054.1357072; Porges, Stephen W. “The Polyvagal Theory: Neurophysiological Foundations of Emotions, Attachment, Communication, and Self-Regulation.” Norton Professional Books, n.d. https://wwnorton.com/books/The-Polyvagal-Theory/; Semi-structured interviews with organizational psychologists at The Lumin Group, conducted by the authors between December 2025 and January 2026.

[ii] Mark, Gudith, and Klocke, *Cost of Interrupted Work*, 107–10; Leroy, S. (2009). Why Is It So Hard to Do My Work? The Challenge of Attention Residue When Switching Between Work Tasks. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 109(2), 168–181.

[iii] Giorgia Bondanini, Gabriele Giorgi, Antonio Ariza-Montes, Alejandro Vega-Muñoz, and Paola Andreucci-Annunziata, “Technostress: Dark Side of Technology in the Workplace: A Scientometric Analysis”, International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health 17, no. 21 (2020): 8013, https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7662498/.

[iv] Deloitte, *From Employee Experience to Human Experience: Putting Meaning Back into Work* (New York: Deloitte Insights, 2019); Society for Human Resource Management, *Employee Experience: The Case For* (Alexandria, VA: SHRM Research Institute, 2023).

[v] Mark, Gudith, and Klocke, *Cost of Interrupted Work*, 107–10; Leroy, *Why Is It So Hard to Do My Work*, 168–81.; Craig Brod, *Technostress: The Human Cost of the Computer Revolution* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1984).

[vi] Richard S. Lazarus and Susan Folkman, *Stress, Appraisal, and Coping* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1984).

[vii] Semi-structured interviews with organizational psychologists at The Lumin Group, conducted by the authors between December 2025 and January 2026.

[viii] Lumin Group interviews, December 2025–January 2026.

[ix] TeamViewer SE, *The Impact of Digital Friction on Employee Productivity and Experience: Global Research Report* (Göppingen, Germany: TeamViewer SE, 2025).

[x] TeamViewer SE, *Impact of Digital Friction*, 2025.

[xi] Lumin Group interviews, December 2025–January 2026.

[xii] Lumin Group interviews, December 2025–January 2026.

About TeamViewer

TeamViewer provides a Digital Workplace platform that connects people with technology – enabling, improving and automating digital processes to make work work better.

In 2005, TeamViewer started with software to connect to computers from anywhere to eliminate travel and enhance productivity. It rapidly became the de facto standard for remote access and support and the preferred solution for hundreds of millions of users across the world to help others with IT issues. Today, more than 620,000 customers across industries rely on TeamViewer to optimize their digital workplaces – from small to medium sized businesses to the world's largest enterprises – empowering both desk-based employees and frontline workers.

Organizations use TeamViewer's solutions to prevent and resolve disruptions with digital endpoints of any kind, securely manage complex IT and industrial device landscapes, and enhance processes with augmented reality powered workflows and assistance – leveraging AI and integrating seamlessly with leading tech partners. Against the backdrop of global digital transformation and challenges like shortage of skilled labor, hybrid working, accelerated data analysis and the rise of new technologies, TeamViewer's solutions offer a clear value add by increasing productivity, reducing machine downtime, speeding up talent onboarding, and improving customer and employee satisfaction.

The company is headquartered in Göppingen, Germany, and employs around 1,900 people globally. In 2025, TeamViewer achieved a revenue of around EUR 768 million. TeamViewer SE (TMV) is listed at Frankfurt Stock Exchange and belongs to the SDAX. Further information can be found at www.teamviewer.com.

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