

Episode 29: Transforming Front line Worker Experience for the Future of Work

In conversation with

Drew Ehlers, Global Futurist & Head of Global Partners, Zebra and

Saurabh Sharma, AVP & Global DWP PMG Head, HCLTech

You are listening to HCLTech Digital Workplace Podcast, the place where industry experts, analysts, and veterans help us identify, understand, and prepare for upcoming digital workplace technologies and trends. If you haven't subscribed to the channel already, do it now for regular updates. This episode starts in 3, 2, 1.

Sumit Kumar – Hello everyone and a very warm welcome!

I am Sumit Kumar from HCLTech and this digital workplace podcast episode is going to be interesting. Our guests will talk about a unique technology space – Front line worker experience transformation. Our guests for today are **Drew Ehlers**, Global Futurist & Head of Global Partners, Zebra and **Saurabh Sharma**, AVP at HCLTech Digital Workplace business. Drew and Saurabh, thank you for joining us.

Sumit Kumar – Drew, could you please tell us what Zebra is and how your solutions support customers?

Drew Ehlers – Zebra is a global company and our mission and vision is to connect everyone and everything. One of our goals is to ensure that your employees are empowered to do their jobs every day. We accomplish this by deploying devices, software and services that empower frontline workers to maximize productivity. The working environment provides real-time data that aids in decision-making and optimizes their workflows.

The second area focuses on connecting everything, where Zebra solutions are designed to fit seamlessly into a rich ecosystem of integrated platforms. To achieve this, we work collaboratively with our partners, such as HCLTech, to ensure that our solutions remain at the cutting edge of technology, providing you with a consistent, interconnected experience.

Lastly, the ubiquitousness of data is an area that has exploded over the past decade or so. The ability to take real-time data and drive data-fueled insights helps with decision support so that workers are supplied with the critical information they need when, where, and how they need it.

Sumit Kumar – The advent of Covid three years ago brought to the forefront the surmounting challenges from frontline workers' perspective and the sudden need to maintain operations without compromising on experience. So how are HCLTech and Zebra addressing the challenges of frontline workers amid such transformational times?

Saurabh Sharma – Absolutely, the pandemic highlighted the reliance on frontline workers, who make up over 80% of the global workforce. These workers face challenges such as limited access to technology and resources, constraints in adopting modern technology, lack of training to bridge skill gaps, and difficulty in contextualizing their unique workplace setups. These workers face challenges in bridging skill gaps and adapting to technology, which has been a significant challenge in the transformation process.

Drew Ehlers - Covid caused a significant impact on e-commerce, with people expecting three years to scale growth and equip frontline workers with technology. Zebra and its partners, like HCLTech, prioritized ensuring workers returned to work safely. Consumer expectations remained unchanged but accelerated due to unsafe access to brick-and-mortar stores and warehouses. So we aimed to collaborate with partners to address these issues for joint customers.

The Covid pandemic has led to a significant shift in the supply chain, with online sales and e-commerce doubling in three months where they had been planning for a three-year horizon to catch up with that growth. This has led to a shift from a linear supply chain to a hub and spoke model, where every node becomes a fulfillment node. This dynamic process is across the entire network, including DC warehouses and brick-and-mortar stores. Our solutions utilize IoT endpoints, mobile computers, scanners, printers, and RFID for operational efficiency, location understanding, and safe work for frontline workers.

Zebra, a leader in the **Gartner® Magic Quadrant™** for Location Services, has been working on this for decades to help people get back to work safely. We continue to drive safe environments and efficiency through our partner network. Automation adoption has also been a significant factor in the transformational times, with acquisitions in areas like AMRs, and industrial automation with robotics. Another acquisition we made with Matrix, which focuses on machine vision. It helps in auto inspection and identification, ensuring manufacturing process efficiency from the start. Those goods are passed through supply chains and fulfilled by either humans or robots in those different environments, thereby increasing efficiency and reducing returns and recalls.

There are many different areas of focus in the supply chain, depending on the challenge and problem being solved first. This dynamical movement was happening throughout all environments, whether you were looking at manufacturing, healthcare, retail or, um, transportation and logistics. Supply chain became the key to it all. For us supply chain geeks who have worked in this field for decades, the supply chain is now cool because everyone knows about it and knows that it is critical for getting people what they want.

Sumit Kumar - **How are Zebra's rugged and purpose-built devices better suited to the unique needs of the different vertical markets you serve? And how do they differentiate compared to commercially available mobile devices?**

Drew Ehlers - Our product portfolio is designed by the best engineers in the world, focusing on worker and workflow-centric design. Our devices are designed to work in various environments,

including cold chain coolers, hot truck loading areas, and vast enterprise environments. We ensure that our devices are not a challenge in these environments, allowing workers to focus on their tasks without encountering any challenges. We are experts in building portfolios around workflows and worker experiences and have partnered with Google Android to create an ecosystem around worker experience.

We take these factors into consideration when developing our portfolio, ensuring that our devices perform the same in different environments, whether they are on a forklift or a robot. This approach allows us to differentiate our portfolio from commercially available devices that may not perform the same in different environments.

Sumit Kumar – **It's really interesting that technological revolutions have spread across industries and functions. However, the digital transformation involving frontline workers has been limited. Drew and Saurabh, what are your thoughts on this?**

Saurabh Sharma – Gartner estimates that there are 2.7 billion frontline workers, almost twice as many as office workers. But when it comes to the transformation approach, most strategies only catered and focused on office-based workers. The reason we believe this happened was that the entire strategy of workplace transformation was not inclusive. It was siloed. It was largely believed that only operational technology or OT, and not IT initiatives mattered for these employees. But most progressive organizations have now come to realize that the par IT and workplace initiatives entail improving not only the productivity of this workforce but also experience, safety and wellness.

Drew Ehlers – Covid has refocused the worker experience by focusing on creating safe and productive environments for frontline workers. This shift has led to a focus on closing the labor gap, as people either choose not to do a job or feel unsafe doing it. The goal is to develop a worker-centric experience solution that drives digital transformation into the hands of these workers. This involves considering the human worker and the experience of different generations working in different environments, either as digital natives or adapters.

Mobile computing was one of the areas we looked at as a way to differentiate the worker experience by having intelligence at their fingertips, regardless of whether they're in a brick-and-mortar or digital. They become an empowered knowledge worker who can help create not only a highly productive and efficient working environment for their worker experience but also a very fulfilling job in stocking shelves and helping with inventory. But there's also this customer experience part, now that 76% of customers are back in brick-and-mortar stores and doing shopping. To create an even greater customer experience, employers need to prioritize efficiency in their workforce. This means that workers must be able to quickly and accurately complete their tasks, but also have the skills and knowledge to provide exceptional customer service when needed. By emphasizing productivity and customer service skills, organizations can ensure a seamless customer experience in brick-and-mortar stores. We had such a strong labor market previously that we didn't need to emphasize it. But now, with the labor constraints that we've seen, there's a refocus on the frontline worker experience in finding

out what they need not only from a worker experience standpoint but also what outcomes they're trying to drive.

One of these outcomes is customer experience. As an employer, one of the outcomes we want to achieve for those frontline workers is not only retention but also a great worker experience. Intelligence can enhance worker experience by providing access to applications like inventory, task management, and training. These models drive heightened knowledge and empowerment, depending on the vertical, such as retail, healthcare, or customer service. Technology and mobility can drive these outcomes through different workflows, enhancing the overall experience for workers. By leveraging technology and mobility, organizations can create a more empowered and knowledgeable workforce, ultimately improving their overall performance.

Sumit Kumar – Tell us about HCLTech and Zebra partnership and how HCLTech, Zebra and Microsoft are working together to modernize the frontline worker experience.

Saurabh Sharma – HCLTech's Digital Workplace Services utilizes its extensive catalog encompassing every aspect of business, deploying the value chain with a commitment to supporting front-end employees and delivering on the promise of equitable experiences for all personas as a key outcome.

HCLTech, Microsoft, and Zebra have come together with a comprehensive portfolio ranging from rugged purposeful devices. Frontline support services and AI automation and analytics-centric platforms and IPs can radically transform the productivity, engagement, experiences, and wellness of frontline employees.

Drew Ehlers – The collaboration between HCLTech and Zebra, as well as the broader ecosystem that we've created with Microsoft, share a common goal of truly driving outcomes for the environment, the company, and the worker. And there are numerous outcomes that we consider when it comes to frontline worker experience. In my opinion, having engaged employees is the most important factor that contributes to a great worker experience.

First, to optimize workforce management to assist in optimally scheduling labor in various environments. It not only helps keep people engaged, but it also helps reduce store labor, as seen in the retail example, by bringing the commentarial value of that and then driving an engaged, streamline workflow around task management and being able to look at their mobile device and know exactly what they're doing that day.

Second, advanced communication and collaboration across that ecosystem with Microsoft teams, and then broadening that out with some of our solutions around task management and workforce management. We really help connect these employees to optimize not only the in-store customer service experience but also the labor productivity, as this will help reduce store labor by at least 5%. The retention of the labor base is crucial for the value of engagement and task management. By enhancing communication across a broad base through Microsoft Teams and task management, employees can be augmented with various features on mobile devices and software solutions. This communication and collaboration can reduce employee turnover by over 30%. By partnering through mobility, communication, and collaboration, and task

management, companies can drive specific outcomes for their end customers. These solutions are deployed in various environments, ensuring a seamless experience for all employees.

Sumit Kumar – It is often said that it's the small pieces that make the big picture. Frontline workers' experience transformation seems a critical piece that completes the big picture of a holistic workplace transformation strategy. So what kind of business impact should customers expect from focusing on transforming their frontline worker experience?

Drew Ehlers – The outcomes discussed are diverse and focused on the supply chain experience. Covid taught us the importance of optimizing inventory by deploying visibility solutions like RFID to automate inventory and provide real-time inventory location to ensure SLAs are adhered to across the different nodes.

The ability to provide real-time inventory information to in-store workers on mobile devices can improve on-shelf availability, planograms, and pricing compliance. Artificial intelligence tools, such as Antuit.ai, can help retailers optimize planning and pricing strategies. Real-time accurate inventory views, such as RFID and barcodes, can also minimize theft and loss, detecting unseen sources of product and cash loss. This real-time view of inventory can help retailers detect unseen sources of product and cash loss, ultimately benefiting the overall operations of the store.

Over the past few years, there has been a significant evolution in self-checkout and self-service modality. People are now choosing between human labor lanes manned by a lady or a gentleman or a more efficient self-checkout experience. This technology is driving the need for an elevated customer experience, increasing transaction value by over 25% and reducing customer wait times by around 23%. By implementing more accurate scanning and computer vision, these solutions can streamline the checkout process, resulting in improved customer satisfaction and reduced wait times. By implementing these solutions, businesses can continue to provide an elevated customer experience and increase transaction value.

As technology becomes more accessible to frontline workers, it improves in-store experience and service. This ensures skilled employees are available to serve customers when needed, while remaining productive when not needed. The digital store experience drives intelligent checkouts, such as human labor, self-checkout, and kiosks for wayfinding and product information. These technologies create in-store order fulfillment and heightened customer experience, driven by frontline workers.

Sumit Kumar – Security is among the leading priorities for enterprises in the post-pandemic world. Can you shed some light on the security aspects of the solution for frontline workers?

Drew Ehlers – Security is a multifaceted concern that requires constant attention. Enterprise security encompasses both internal and proprietary information, as well as customer data-related privacy laws like GDPR. New data privacy laws in the US and globally can impose significant financial penalties on organizations for data misuse, loss, or purging. The data security aspect is also at the forefront, as cloud infrastructure transitions introduce new challenges to corporate security and IT around IoT endpoints. Zebra is well-prepared for these

challenges by considering security needs, environment, and data usage. We ensure that their architectures are sound from a security perspective, ensuring a multifaceted approach to security strategies.

The role of encryption varies depending on the environment, whether it's healthcare policy, financial policy, or data privacy. When considering solutions across various verticals, such as healthcare, transportation, logistics, manufacturing, and retail, it's crucial to avoid compromise on individual accounts and data but also the entire network and its nodes. A holistic security approach should be the first, middle, and last thought in strategy planning, ensuring that security is a continuous and ongoing concern.

Sumit Kumar – Thank you Drew and Saurabh for sharing your insights with us today. I'm sure these insights will be very helpful for business and IT leaders in understanding and approaching the frontline workers' experience transformation. Well, thank you for your time and we hope for an opportunity to host you again.

This episode of the HCLTech Digital Workplace Podcast has ended. But be sure to subscribe for more insights on how to identify, understand, and prepare for a world of possibilities around the new and upcoming digital workplace technologies and trends. Don't forget to rate and review this episode so that we can keep bringing you the most relevant content.

Thank you for listening.