
LEADING TRENDS

The X Factor



In 2023, with increasingly disloyal parents and unrest among employees, we think the experience (X) factor will have much to say about schools that thrive and those that do not. Student experience (SX) and employee experience (EX) matter most regarding whether students and teachers stay or go. With a tight labor market and fewer school-age students in many areas of North America, whether they stay or go matters more now than ever. Yet, we find that too few leaders—whether on governing

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boards or in administration—take the X (experience) factor into account when evaluating institutional performance.

Employee experience (EX) is super-relevant, given that many schools have recruiting and retaining excellent faculty as strategic priorities. McKinsey, the global consulting firm, [describes EX](#) thus:

“Student experience (SX) and employee experience (EX) matter most regarding whether students and teachers stay or go. With a tight labor market and fewer school-age students in many areas of North America, whether they stay or go matters more now than ever.”

"Employee experience considers what people value in the broadest sense, acknowledging how life stage, personal circumstances, and even personality type make different propositions attractive for different people. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the most motivating answer is rarely just to be paid more. Rather, employees want to feel a powerful sense of agency—being able to influence outcomes that matter to them—allied with a strong sense of identity and belonging. That means agency in work and agency about work."

On the surface, independent school and university faculty seem to be among the most likely people to feel agency in and about their work. But do they? And do they feel it at your institution?

The student experience (SX, or sometimes CX for "customer experience") includes and extends beyond the classroom to include accessibility of faculty, ease of accommodations for everything from learning needs to childcare (for universities), and presence or absence of friction in dealing with institutional bureaucracy. Tribal Group, a UK-based consultancy, [describes SX](#) to "comprise three key elements - and students will naturally place different weight on each component depending on what they want from their learning journey:

- **Academic and intellectual development** – the teaching and learning they will experience, along with goal setting and progression, assessment and feedback, etc.
- **Social/emotional activities and networking** – the extra-curricular facilities available to them during their time as a student that will nurture cultural, political, sporting, and artistic interests and peers.
- **Welfare and support services** – the funding, accommodation, health facilities, counseling, pastoral care, etc., that each student has access to."

In short, one could ask whether the student experience energizes or enervates. Calculus has not changed in a long time; the value we add is summed up in the student experience. Asking about SX is crucial; otherwise, you do not really know.

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