

Creating New Knowledge Pathways Between the Office and the Front Line

As knowledge workers have evolved to meet the challenges and opportunities of digital, many businesses have prioritized and realized transformative digital knowledge strategies that have changed how office work gets done. Now, businesses with field services at their core are coming into the fold. They are grappling with how to leverage their organizational knowledge to empower front-line workers to work more safely, efficiently, and effectively in the face of increasingly complex work.

Industries like utilities, oil and gas production, telecommunications, and construction are being confronted with the challenges of an aging workforce, the emergence of alternative operations and service models, the rise of newly engaged and digitally active consumers, and an onslaught of transformative digital technologies. To negotiate these new challenges, these field service-heavy organizations need to reimagine and reconfigure how they operate.

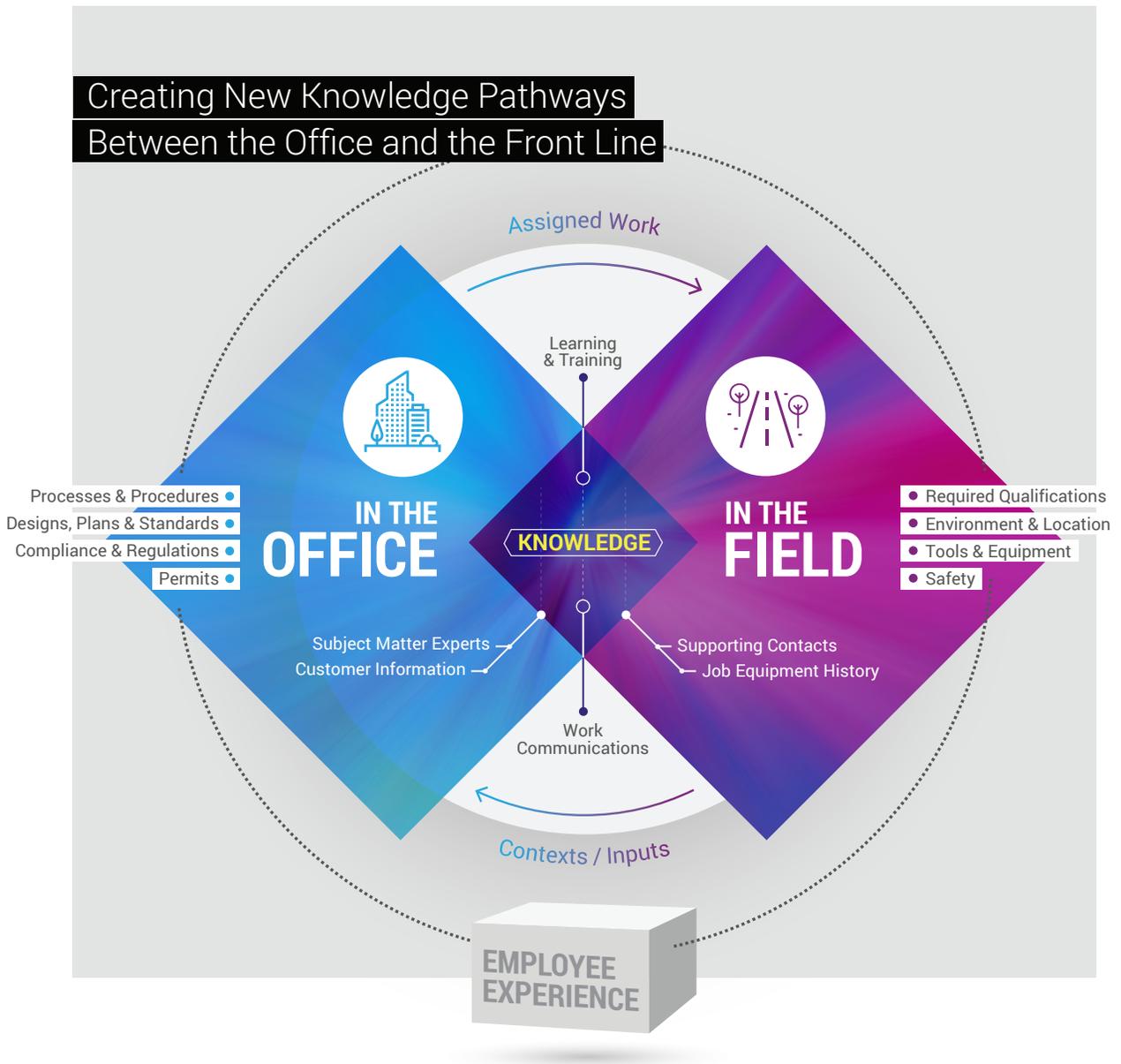
Specifically, they must rethink and integrate the traditional organizational silos that separate administration from the front line, office from field, and knowledge from technical workers.

The impact of digital on front-line work

Digitalization is already blurring the boundaries between office and field by placing tools in the hands of front-line workers that provide access to work management, work assessment, and direct client engagement. Similarly, digital capabilities relay insights and inputs from the field to the office in ways that significantly impact work management and design. However, increased congruence and collaboration between office and field is not an intuitive process. In fact, the introduction of digital capabilities ahead of (and independent from) much-needed conversations about information architecture and operations models has only compounded the problem.

As digital capabilities continue to bridge office and field, it is imperative that organizations design for increased collaboration. The guiding principle underpinning this design must be a targeted transition from traditional, hierarchical operations – where directives flow exclusively and executively from office to field – to decentralized and multidirectional knowledge networks.

Multiple knowledge pathways establish the infrastructure and the culture for bidirectional work, and enable innovation in these open spaces of collaboration. Networked relationships make digital capabilities actionable by bridging work-related content emanating from the office with contexts, data, and insights originating in the field, thereby converting and mobilizing this content into functionally operationalized knowledge, in real time.



Knowledge networks in action

Knowledge networks bridge office and field by sourcing and surfacing work-related content, such as training, qualifications, safety, work methods, and regulatory and corporate compliance procedures, as work-related knowledge in context, just-in-time, and just-enough. Moreover, insights from the field are brought back to the office through feedback channels, subject-matter-expert contacts, and robust data capture. These insights inform decisions that reposition work management, work design, and customer relations as field-informed operations.

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Well-designed employee experiences become the critical nodal points through which knowledge networks are made meaningful and purposeful. Employee profiles hyper-contextualize the scene of work, yoking operation-wide content, work, social collaboration, data and innovation capture. Pathways convert content to knowledge, and knowledge becomes an organizational capability rather than an enshrined, tightly-controlled, and narrowly defined asset.

Digital transformation is organizational

As field service businesses continue their digital transformation efforts they need to strategize and design for cultural change, as much as they do for digital change. Legacy field service businesses – organizations that in some cases utilize century-old operating models – cannot assume that the simple importation of digital solutions will somehow alter siloed and disconnected work practices automatically. Such a transition demands deep operational and cultural transformation that begins by reconsidering and reimagining how employees and departments learn, create, and disseminate knowledge. To leverage the exponential value unlocked by digital capabilities, firms need to empower their employees to think and work innovatively and collaboratively.