Employee Experience Platforms Take Off
Enter Applaud

the **joshbersin** company

As most HR leaders know, employee experience is a massively important but complex challenge. While most HCM and payroll systems were designed to be easy to use, companies have had to build tools for onboarding, benefits administration, wellbeing, time scheduling, remote work check-ins, leave administration, and hundreds of other use cases. Modern platforms like Oracle HCM Cloud and SuccessFactors are almost infinitely scalable but not designed to meet every need.

Enter the employee experience platform market. Through tools like Microsoft Viva, ServiceNow, YOOBIC, WorkJam, Firstup, and a new vendor, Applaud, companies can build "mini-applications" and secure workflows on top of their existing systems. And these new value-add tools can inherit and use the security, language, and data management infrastructure in place.

We recently talked with several mid-size organizations and found some important advances. Platforms like Applaud are easy-to-use, easy-to-build self-service tools that leverage technology like iPaaS (integration platform as a service) to integrate employee applications with almost any backend application, which lets HR managers design and build employee experiences without the help of IT.

Imagine you want to build a new employee portal and then a series of workflows, journeys, or mini-apps for your workers. You want the applications to use your enterprise security; you want the applications to know the job level and possibly job privileges of the user; and you want the application to be easy to build, mobile-enabled, and easy to use.

This, in a nutshell, is what Applaud has built. We met with Applaud in early 2022 and found that its platform was an affordable, easy-to-use employee platform. Applaud lets an HR manager create custom data fields, workflows, and content experiences at scale. And while many large companies may do this with their IT department, Applaud is easy enough to use for HR managers and business partners to adopt.

Hedge Fund Company

End-to-end employee portal and apps on top of Workday

Consider a 2,000-employee quantitative hedge fund company headquartered in New York City. The company used Workday as its HR platform and needed an easy-to-use mini-app for caregiver leave. Without hiring any software engineers, the team built a series of applications within Applaud (see Figure 1).

As you can see from this interface, employees can find and view benefits, update or monitor their time off, find and consume their formal learning, update their goals, view their pay, and access the company's third-party wellbeing offerings and recruiting tools all from one place.

Figure 1: Services Catalog
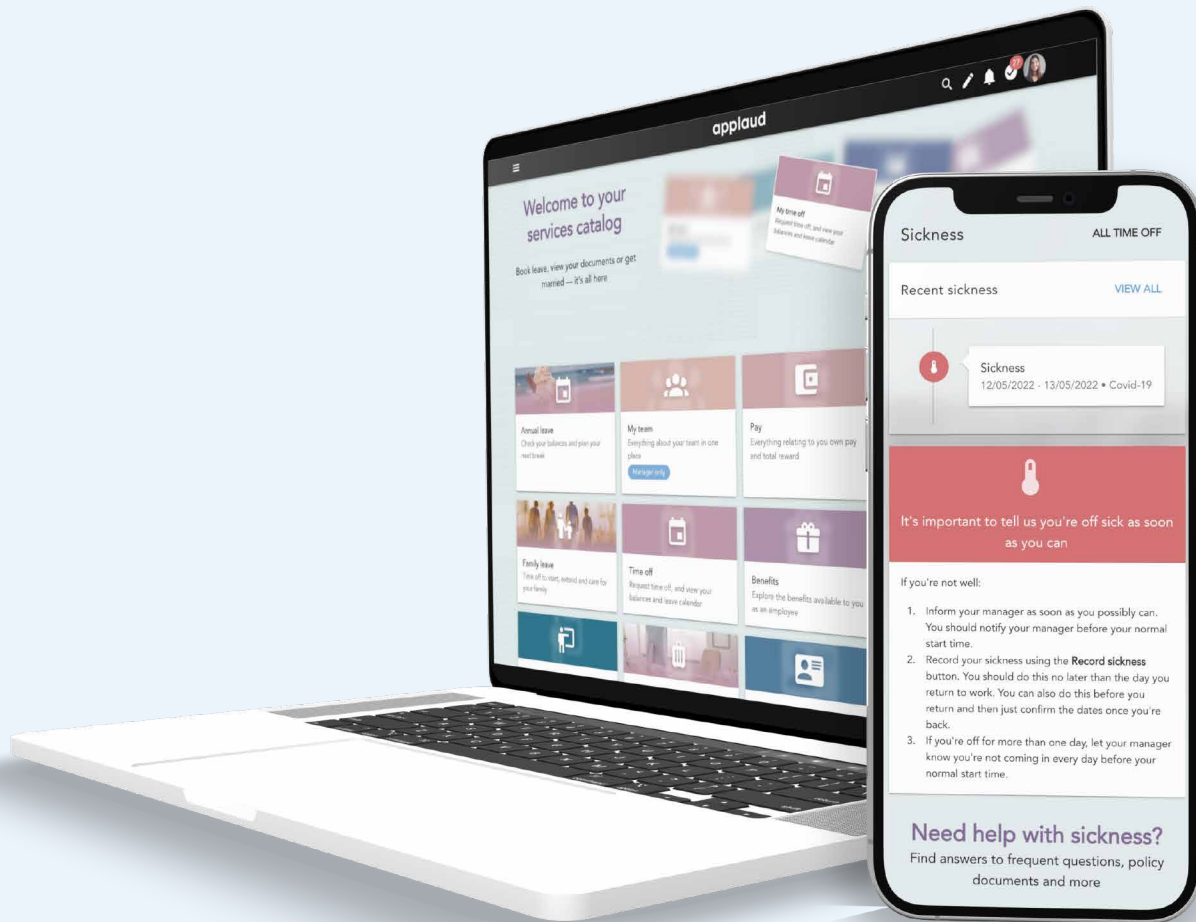
Source: ApplaudHR.com, 2022

Applaud identifies the employee's role, level, and country from Workday and then presents a customized view of these applications based on the employee's tenure, gender, and other demographic characteristics. While some of these interfaces take the user to Workday, the employee mostly interacts within Applaud, which lets the company build a "simple and mobile-enabled" employee experience on their own while still benefitting from the power of Workday (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Benefits Library
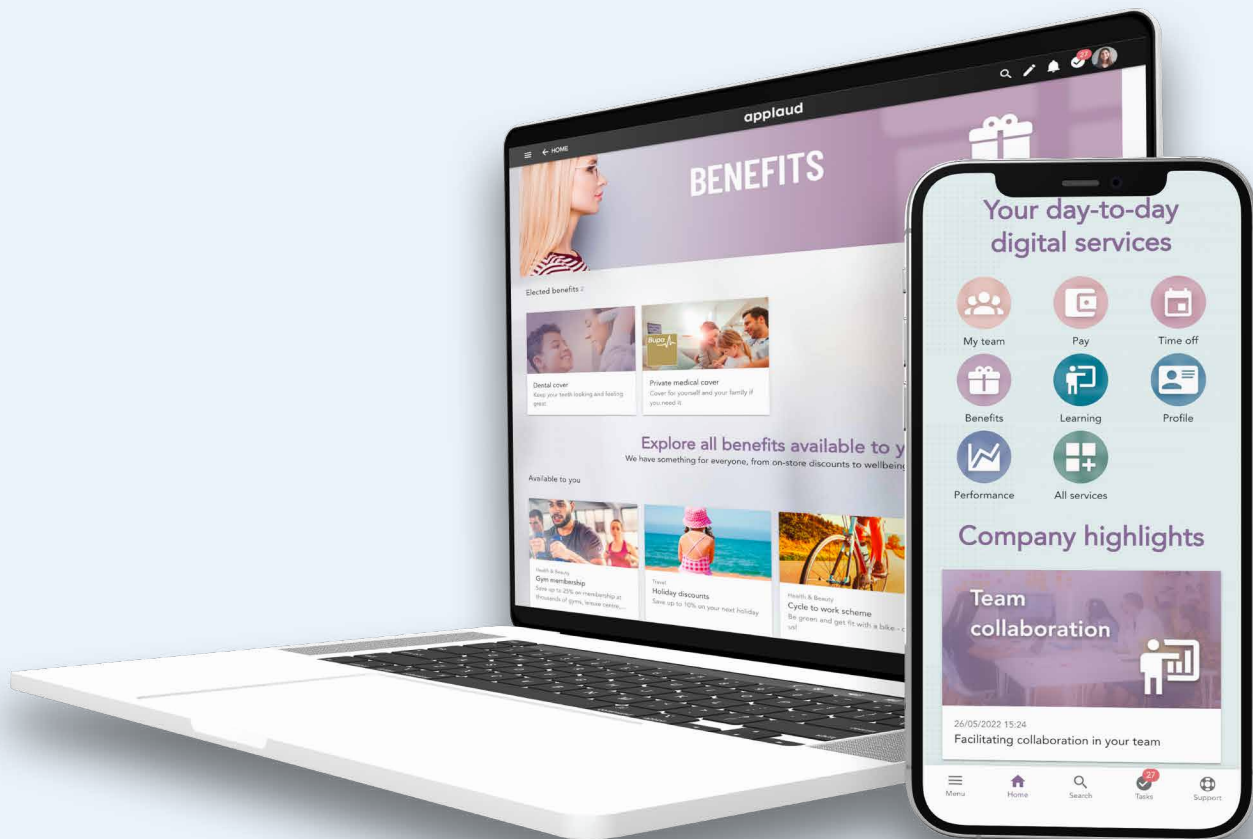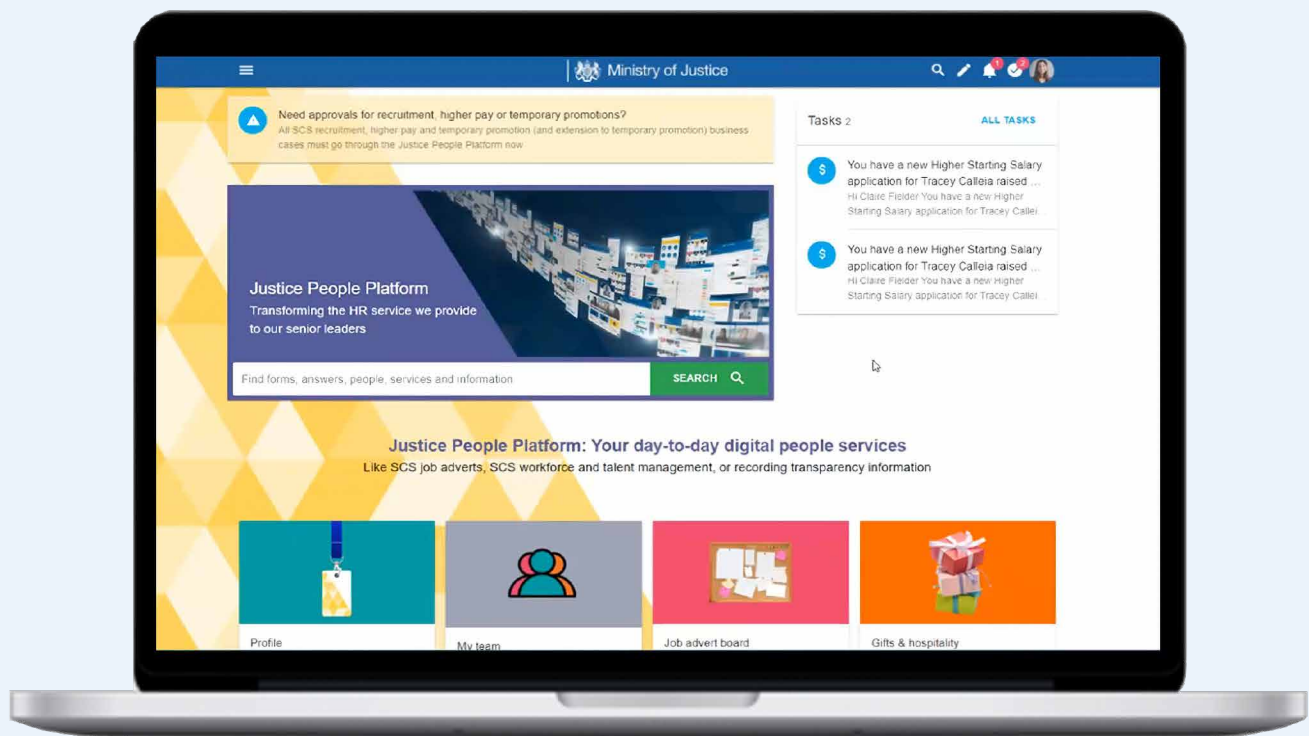

Source: ApplaudHR.com, 2022

The Applaud employee portal directly accesses Workday for many HR applications, Cornerstone for learning, and Dovetail (case management) for service tickets and Q&A. This hedge fund company thinks about Applaud as an easy-to-use tool like Squarespace, Wix, or WordPress that enhances their preexisting systems. The HR department can build and easily integrate Applaud with Workday, and the company's Wiki (Confluence), with no need for a systems integrator. ◼

The UK's Ministry of Justice

Employee experience and performance management on top of legacy systems

This small HR team manages a large population of over 80,000 officials who worry about courts, prisons, and many other similar issues. The backend systems are legacy and Oracle-based, and as with most government agencies, the IT department is pretty busy. Thus, HR licensed Applaud and built their own employee portal and employee experience applications (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Ministry of Justice Homepage

Source: ApplaudHR.com, 2022

As you can see from the interface, the system is easy to use and designed to provide direct access to pay, employee communications, the employee's profile, team profiles, employee directory, and more. These apps, including a performance management app developed by HR, were all built without using or consulting a software engineer or database analyst. And since Applaud can enable you to brand the applications to your own specifications, the entire interface looks and feels like the rest of the Ministry's systems (see Figure 4 on the next page).

Lots of tools are built into the portal. Applaud lets the customer build custom or choose preconfigured templates, integrate with help-desk or case management systems, and integrate with the organization's applicant tracking system to show employees open jobs with internal postings. In this organization's case, Applaud pulls together the Ministry's jobs from the central government job site.

Figure 4: Ministry of Justice Branded iPad
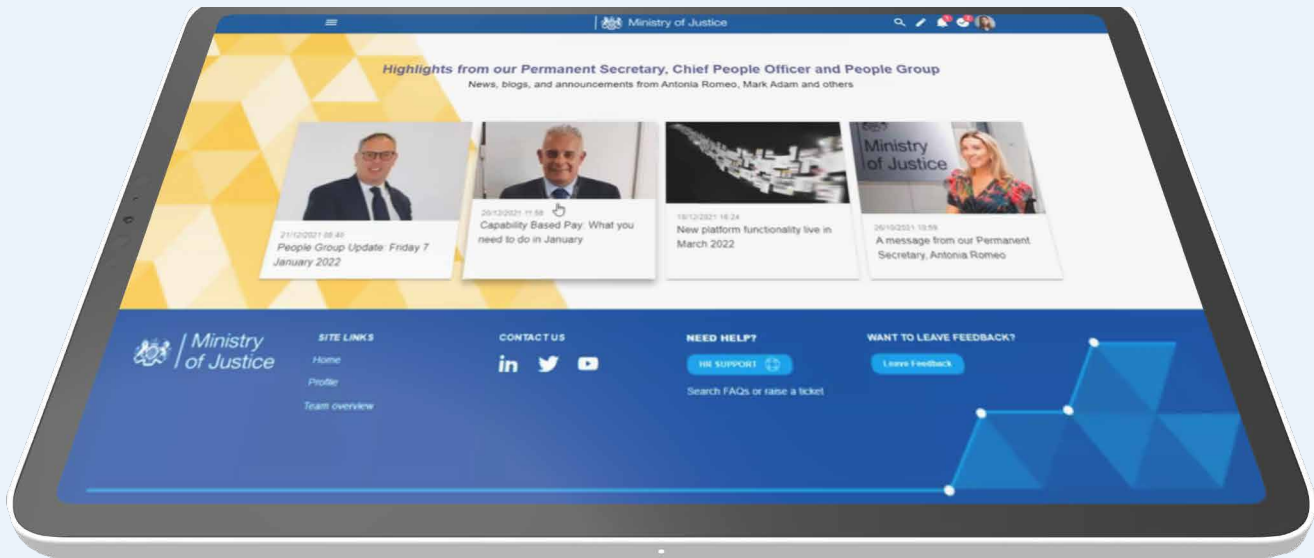
Source: ApplaudHR.com, 2022

Before the implementation of Applaud, many of these applications were in spreadsheets, Excel macros, or other desktop tools. For example, if an employee is offered a gift from a vendor (a book, lunch, or other gratuity), there are a series of forms to fill out and route for acceptance. Instead of filling out a form in Microsoft Word and emailing it around the bureaucracy, all this functionality is now programmed right into Applaud.

Applaud's system can either store data locally (it has its own integrated database) or it can send employee data into the backend HR system. The entire performance management system for senior leaders in the Ministry, including check-ins, goals, reviews, and feedback, will be implemented entirely in Applaud, which eliminates the need for the team to acquire a dedicated performance management system. ■

Ease of Development: Employee Experience and Case Management Differ

Many HR departments see chatbots, case management, and employee experience as one integrated set of problems. In most cases, however, companies already have a case management system (often used by IT), so Applaud's "no-code" solution fits right in.

What about the need to adapt the system as the organization changes? The hedge fund company mentioned earlier (which uses Workday) has reorganized the company in several ways, and the Applaud system automatically adapts. The "HR Hub," as the Applaud system is called, has become one of the most popular systems in the company. In fact, most employees never use or see Workday at all, since most interfaces and reports are available through Applaud.

Importantly, this system can scale. Experian uses Applaud for more than 20,000 employees and the system manages access to learning, performance management, HR service delivery,

and soon onboarding. A trust within the UK's National Health Service (NHS) has more than 15,000 employees and will be using the system for employee service delivery, offboarding, and other employee applications. Most of these companies got their first portal or HR hub up and running in a few weeks, with full rollouts within several months.

Low Code and Easy Integration: The Future of Employee Experience Platforms

The Applaud customers we interviewed told us Applaud has become one of the most important systems in the organization. While Workday, Cornerstone, Oracle, and other legacy systems play a vital role, they are not always easy to use, and many employee journeys cross systems. By developing employee applications in Applaud, the HR teams can make work easier for employees, quickly create new applications and communications, and brand the experience in an integrated way.

About the Author

Josh Bersin

Josh founded Bersin & Associates in 2001 to provide research and advisory services focused on corporate learning. He expanded the company's coverage to encompass HR, talent management, talent acquisition, and leadership and became a recognized expert in the talent market. Josh sold the company to Deloitte in 2012 and was a partner in Bersin by Deloitte up until 2018.

In 2019, Josh founded the Josh Bersin Academy, a professional development academy that has become the "home for HR." In 2020, he put together a team of analysts and advisors who are now working with him to support and guide HR organizations from around the world under the umbrella of The Josh Bersin Company. He is frequently featured in publications such as *Forbes*, *Harvard Business Review, HR Executive, The Wall Street Journal, and CLO Magazine.* He is a popular blogger and has more than 800,000 followers on LinkedIn.

The Josh Bersin Company Membership

The Josh Bersin Company provides a wide range of research and advisory services to help HR leaders and professionals tackle the ever-evolving challenges and needs of today's workforce. We cover all topics in HR, talent, and L&D. The Josh Bersin Academy—built on our research and powered by Nomadic Learning—helps HR practitioners grow key foundational skills. Our corporate membership program provides HR teams and senior leaders with the skills, strategies, and insights to build cutting-edge HR and people strategies through a combination of research, assessments, professional development, exclusive events, and community. In 2022, The Josh Bersin Company introduced the Global Workforce Intelligence (GWI) Project to guide market-leading businesses and their leaders through the challenges of industry convergence while remaining future-focused.

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