Behind the mic: Celebrating 50 episodes of digital workplace insights (Ep. 51)

00:00:07 Patrycja Sobera

Welcome to the Digital Workplace Deep Dive. I am your host, Patrycja Sobera, and you probably may wonder what happened to Weston Morris, who usually hosts this. Please don't panic. He has not given up. In fact, Weston has just completed the 50th episode of this fantastic podcast, so we decided to do something fun and flip this episode around and have him as the guest. We thought it would be great to go back and find some of the most interesting snippets from those past episodes and share them with you today. I'm just so excited to say that the man himself, the absolute industry legend, is in the other seat, and I get the pleasure of asking all the difficult questions today.

00:00:51 Patrycja Sobera

Weston, I am delighted to have this opportunity. Before I ask all those difficult questions, I really want to congratulate you on your career to date because it has been one heck of a fantastic ride. You are a thought leader, a visionary, an innovator who has got this amazing ability to bring people together, to really accomplish big things. I have the pleasure to work with you and see this every day. But before I worked with you and joined Unisys three years ago, like anyone joining your organization, I did my research.

00:01:25 Patrycja Sobera

And guess what? I stumbled upon your podcast on XLAs at the time, and we were just starting on this journey with my previous team, but I thought, wow, these guys at Unisys are taking this to the next level. Well, and the rest is history. I joined, I never looked back. I've been here three years, and we'll pivot back to the excellent episode and perhaps cover a little bit more on the overall experience later.

00:01:53 Patrycja Sobera

But this is about you, and you have just received the Mark L. Cohen Lifetime Achievement Award here at Unisys. Beautiful. Thank you for showcasing. And we couldn't think of a more deserving winner of this award. So, congratulations. But where are we to start? Perhaps from the beginning, right? And really, tell us about where, how and when you started your journey in the digital workplace.

00:02:25 Weston Morris

Yeah, I mean, I don't want to sound like I'm going way back to the very beginning, but I will just a little bit. I attribute it to my parents. I mean, my mom, I often say she was born in a log cabin and delivered by a veterinarian. How could she possibly drive me to be interested in IT? But she was always curious, always on the farm that she grew up on, always asking her dad, my grandpa, how things work and how to understand how technology works, whatever the technology is. And she's still that way today. She's over 90, and she will record some health program on her computer, transfer it over to an editing program and edit out the commercials, and then send it to the less techie friends of hers so that they can listen to it. Just cracks me up that she does this.

00:03:14 Weston Morris

That curiosity from her and my dad, he was always… he grew up under the depression and you didn't have money, right? You just had to fix everything. And so, he was always trying to figure out how the debugging process works. How do you repair things? What's wrong with that thought process? And I think both of those led me to… you know, when I started college, I was like how does a computer work? And so, I really wanted to know how a computer worked, and that's what was driving me was just the curiosity. Once I learned I go, oh, now we can do things with this. And of course, my dad's training and the natural ability for debugging things, of course, lended itself very well towards being a programmer and being able to solve problems with that, and then later solving problems and consulting with our clients.

00:04:03 Weston Morris

That curiosity. How? What do you do? How does a bank work? How does this work? And it's just so thrilling for me to understand how all these processes that we use as a consumer, what's going on behind the scenes and then helping them to figure out what's the technology that's going to make that better, especially for the employees, the digital workplace side of things, so that's what's led me here.

00:04:25 Patrycja Sobera

Fantastic, I love that link to the employees. I manage a large team, and employee experience and focus are at the core of everything we do, and my heart is deeply in that aspect. But listen, I mentioned that before I joined Unisys, I was actually searching on excellence and experience and this was one of the very few that covered that topic, and I can see that link to curiosity now. I love how you tackle what's current, what's important to

the industry in every single podcast that you do, 50 podcasts, thousands of listeners to today. How has the podcast evolved since the first episode?

00:05:05 Weston Morris

You know, I knew you were going to ask that question. So I actually went back to look at it and it kind of caught me by surprise because we've been living the journey and then you take a step back and realize what that journey was. You know, prior to the pandemic, we were focused a lot on how do we reduce the cost of providing a digital workplace, the tools, the support that end users need to do their work. And that was what it was all about. Automation, RPA, those sorts of things. Then the pandemic hit, and it totally changed it. If you look, there was no episode on XLAs prior to that and the Great Resignation and the focus of business on how do we keep our employees happy? How do we keep them productive at home, at work? If they're working remotely that really changed things around and that kick-started the need to focus on experience level agreements or employee experience. How do we measure it? How do we improve it? That shifted a little bit after the pandemic as the pendulum swung a bit back towards the business. But it's a balanced view at this point.

00:06:02 Weston Morris

It isn't just about cost reduction. It isn't about making your employees super happy. It's how do I provide an environment that does make them happy, but ideally is giving productivity the optimal productivity back to the business. And it turns out that using XLAs and focusing on employee experience is very key to that, because if you think about it, anytime you've had a bad experience as a consumer, whether it's with a call center or at the retail or airlines, a lot of times the reason you had a bad experience is because the client-facing employees at that company are having a bad IT experience, and they just pass that on to you. It hurts you as well. So, there's a strong connection between customer experience and employee experience. And that's I think where we are today.

00:06:54 Patrycja Sobera

Absolutely. And we often talk about this link between CX, EX and BX. And, by the way, for the listeners who joined us, we will be posting some links to previous podcasts we're talking about because of course with 50 of them, there's a plethora of knowledge and fantastic industry insights. Can you share perhaps one of your favorite moments or episodes from your podcast and tell us what made it memorable for you? Of course, as a host, right? Because I can imagine there are some fantastic stories you could tell.

00:07:31 Weston Morris

You know it's things that make me smile, laugh, unexpected things. Just giving a couple of examples. Episode 27. So, going back a little bit, but halfway through the series I interviewed Neil Miller. He's the host of another podcast that I highly recommend, The Digital Workplace. He's had a lot of guests on and to prepare for it, I went back and listened to several of his recordings from his podcast. And I noticed at the beginning of every one of them, he does this captcha test. You know, the capture test to see if you're a bot. He does it at the start of his podcast, so he asks the question that only a human can answer, at least before GenAI. I don't know if he's had to change things since then, but I used that to open our episode with him.

00:08:14 Weston Morris

I think what I asked him was about, what are his travel plans and why would he be making that trip? I was pretty sure Neil Miller was not a bot, so that was cool. But he did a... One of my favorite episodes that he did that we talked about was the seven types of meetings. He's written an e-book on it, and I learned a lot by looking at that. I thought I knew how to run a meeting, but then I realized there really should be a very different structure for different types of meetings. As an example, one where you're dispersing information, you just want everyone to be quiet and listen and absorb. So how do you present that information in a way that will be absorbed properly? There are others that are like a brainstorming session where you really want a lot of collaboration. You've got meetings where you first need to do some ice breaking to get people—they don't know each other— so how do you get things started to get the juices flowing?

00:09:03 Weston Morris

One of the things that he did... he mentions that on his website, he has 150 different icebreakers and he... Yeah, I know it's a lot. So, I said give me an example of one, and he thought for a second and says, "O, here's one: what would people find out about me if they rummaged through my recycling bin and stuff I've thrown out over the last week?" And I just love it. You can just imagine, Patrycja, walking through ours.

00:09:29 Patrycja Sobera

Horror and shock on my face. Please don't. Over there. Great idea. But I love it.

00:09:35 Weston Morris

Yeah, but it gets you to talk about yourself. Well, I would be throwing... I'm very conscientious or I just toss it all in or whatever. It would reveal a few things about you. Another episode similar to that was when I interviewed Jim Kalbach. That was the next episode, number 28. He's a TED Talk speaker. He's also the evangelist for the company Mural, M-U-R-A-L, that provides collaboration tools. I asked him, "Hey, you obviously use your own tools. What is one thing you do to encourage almost like an ice breaker as well, but it might be for a team meeting where people were getting... you all know each other, but how are you feeling?" That kind of thing, and he says, "Oh yeah, we've got this thing called 'Pick your Nick.'"

00:10:26 Patrycja Sobera

Pick your Nick, yes.

00:10:27 Weston Morris

Yeah, I had that same puzzled look, "Pick your Nick." What do you mean? He says, "Oh yeah," so he showed me. He dragged it up. It was like nine different photos of Nicolas Cage from various movies he's been in, and if you've watched him... He's got a wide range, from crazy to confused and happy to sad to in love.

00:10:44 Patrycja Sobera

Romantic. Absolutely, yeah.

00:10:47 Weston Morris

That is pretty crazy. So he just throws that up at the start of the meeting and everybody in the meeting drags their name onto the Nicolas Cage that they feel like that day and that may cause a little bit of conversation or even if it doesn't, you're doing OK. I can see that someone's having a bad day or someone's super excited and that kind of sets the stage for a regular meeting where you have people getting together, maybe for a status call or something like that.

00:11:14 Patrycja Sobera

Love it. Love this. Fantastic examples. Thank you. And one of those, perhaps great opportunities to talk about how you feel and you're right. I don't think we cover that enough. In meetings and conversations, expressing your state of emotions by just doing something as simple as that without going into any detail. Right. I think many would feel

that's one for stealing. Try and do that, maybe open a meeting like this. Thank you for sharing that, fantastic.

00:11:42 Patrycja Sobera

So, these were memorable to you as a host. Obviously, these are the ones that you've clearly kept so many memories from, and you know things that you perhaps implemented in day-to-day life. But what were the most popular podcasts? Those that hit thousands of listeners, and why do you think they struck a chord with our audience?

00:12:05 Weston Morris

Yeah, I'm glad you let me know to think about that question ahead of time. We have some data from the marketing folks to pull up the stats on the podcast, and it was surprising to me in some cases. Others I was like, oh yeah, I'm surprised that wasn't number one. But the top one over the years has been an early one, number 16. I interviewed Ian Fisher well before the pandemic, seven or eight months beforehand, asking him for predictions about digital workplace and IT. He gave five predictions.

00:12:41 Weston Morris

And then the pandemic hit. And so, it was coming up. Time for episode 16, I said, you know what? I'm going to look at Ian Fisher's predictions and see how many of those still make sense, hold true or have value now that we're in a pandemic, and all but one really held up over time. They were still useful. I won't share all those. If you want to listen to that, go listen to that podcast.

00:13:07 Weston Morris

Again, episode number 16, but I did focus on one thing. I went back and listened to it again last night. And this is still very applicable today. He talked about the importance of agility, and that was the pandemic, right? You had to react. We weren't talking about how important it is to work from home and to have video and all. We weren't talking about that in February of 2020. But by April, everybody was talking about it.

00:13:34 Weston Morris

Agility was needed, and he also highlighted that there's a big difference between what IT thinks employees need a lot of time versus what they actually need. And then he really drove down the importance of providing an experience that is going to enable employees to

just do their job, to be productive, and you have to be measuring that experience. IT doesn't necessarily know best, and that is still very true, I would say even more true, today.

00:14:07 Patrycja Sobera

Fantastic example. I love these predictions in all kinds of industries, and I think it's always interesting to potentially reinvite the guests and, to your point, great to hear that you relistened last night and many of these predictions hold true. Just pivoting to a slightly different passion of mine. I'm a big cryptocurrency fan, and I often listen to episodes, and there's always this dreaded question around what do you think the price of Bitcoin will be by year end? And then what they do, they really bite you back a couple of months later or next year and it's like, hmm, remember what you said there? So, no fantastic pivot there, and I think a great story around the end predictions, and of course, we'll reinvite our audience to listen back to that. And as you said, agility being such a strong common denominator when it came to post pandemic changes of that whole attitude in terms of what was important. Fantastic story. Was there anymore, Weston?

00:15:05 Weston Morris

Yeah, it's episode 47, just recently that I did with you. I said, we need to sit down and talk with Patrycja Sobera because you just keep winning these awards, and I see at least one back on your desk back there. Two or three, now that I look a little more closely. But HDI, SDI, and other organizations recognize the great work that you're doing in delivering a great experience in supporting people in IT and the digital workplace. So, I said, OK if you're that successful, let's find out why. What's different about what you're doing? And I was thinking, is it going to be technology? Is there some secret sauce? And it turned out there was a bit of secret sauce. It's how you work with your people. And you told this story about how one of your service desk agents in the middle of the day just shouted out, "I saved a life!"

00:15:57 Weston Morris

People that didn't know what was going on were like, what are you talking about? You saved a life? We help people with PCs, and so the person explained what's happening there is, I know my client. My client is a hospital.

00:16:17 Weston Morris

That person that I was helping was an emergency desk admitting person. I just imagine their PC being down. My grandma coming in with a heart attack, not being able to be registered to come in for help and that actually delaying things long enough that she didn't

get the help she needed and possibly die. So that is how seriously you trained your people to pay attention to their work, thinking not about what they're doing, but why they're doing it. The customer and what they're doing. And that connection, I think, is just brilliant. I mean that. And for that reason, I think that was a very highly rated episode, Patrycja.

00:16:52 Patrycja Sobera

Oh, thank you for saying that. That warms my heart. As you said, it's all about the team and teamwork. We have some fantastic people working here at Unisys. But you're right. It's all about that bigger picture. I had the pleasure of assisting with a new go-live for a new client yesterday and that sense of belonging, that understanding of the business, the values that that business is there to deliver to the public or their end users. It's just so crucial. And in fact, these boot camps, we do these boot camps to really give our agents and our associates the opportunity to really feel and see what it means to work for our clients, and I think that's a perfect example of that. I see the life story and that meaning behind what we do every day now. Thank you for that. That's fantastic to hear.

00:17:39 Weston Morris

So I'll pull up just one more example.

00:17:42 Patrycja Sobera

Please, yes.

00:17:43 Weston Morris

Yeah, in episode number 43. A lot, as you may have commented earlier, a lot of the episodes are dealing with XLAs and experience. That's really been exposed since the pandemic, and it's just so important. But the other topic that has impacted the digital workplace starting early last year, is generative AI. There's a demand to understand that and to know it. So, I thought, let's invite Suzanne Taylor, Ph.D., to talk about it, and as I'm listening and learning, I know our guests were as well. One of the big questions I had was, OK, we've had AI for a long time.

00:18:20 Weston Morris

We're now calling it traditional AI, machine learning, natural language processing, things like that. What is the difference between that traditional AI and this new GenAI, generative AI, and she boiled it down so simply—I love it when guests go back and listen to the whole episode—she gave the example of how traditionally AI is about recognizing patterns. For

example, if you had a bunch of photos of graffiti in London—where you are there, Patrycja—you might train it to be able to identify Banksy.

00:18:52 Weston Morris

And you want to protect them. It's a great thing. So that's what it does. It identifies, and it has this pattern recognition, whereas generative AI is about creating. You're taking all this knowledge and then creating something. So for example, the difference between the two, I might say, OK, go identify all the Banksys, and then I could talk to generative AI and say I want to make a graphic for a presentation I have that's about how bots are taking over the world and make it look like a Banksy.

00:19:22 Weston Morris

And they could do that. That's the difference. The pattern recognition versus the creating of new content. I thought that was very helpful for me.

00:19:29 Patrycja Sobera

I love it. I didn't know what it was. I remember this episode very well because I recommended that all my team listen to it, and I think it was that simple in terms of the description. I think Suzanne has done a fantastic job there in terms of explaining this in such a human way, using very different kinds of examples and analogies. I invited all of my team to make sure that they listen to it now. Thank you for sharing. Fantastic. Well, listen.

00:19:56 Patrycja Sobera

You know from hosting and interacting with so many influential figures, right? I can imagine there probably have been a ton of unexpected insights or things that perhaps you didn't set the episodes to achieve. But they kind of sneak through. So just keen to hear what are those more unexpected, more important insights you've gained?

00:20:23 Weston Morris

I feel like if I have an aha moment, then likely my listeners will too. Episode 37, it happened while we were recording, and I stopped and I said, we need to dig into this deeper. I was interviewing Matt Evans and Matt Burgon of Qualtrics. They do art surveys. A lot of their stuff is employee experience for inside of a company. It would be for employees. HR is using it, right? IT, not so much. And then here we are helping the CIO to measure employee experience using XLAs and experience level agreements. We're looking at a lot of data, what's objective data that's coming off PCs and the devices and things like that.

00:21:03 Weston Morris

They're looking at the people's happiness, asking them how they're feeling. We're looking at bringing those together to make an XLA more powerful. What occurred to me while talking with them because their audience is HR and my audience is the CIO, is that we now have a vehicle for CIOs and CHROs to start having a conversation collaboratively about employee experience.

00:21:25 Weston Morris

I have never seen that before, really. HR is often on this side and IT's over here. Now they're coming together. And today, I'm seeing clients of ours and other enterprises where the CIO and CHRO are talking about employee experience. I think it's going to have a great payoff with great dividends.

00:21:44 Patrycja Sobera

Well, great. Great example there. Any others?

00:21:48 Weston Morris

Yeah, episode 44. It's interesting, here I am working at the digital workplace, and all the services we provided historically are for information workers. They're people that have a dedicated PC or laptop or device. They might be mobile, have a laptop, tablet, or something like that. I have completely overlooked the biggest, the largest employee base, and that is frontline workers.

00:22:15 Weston Morris

During the pandemic, we all started paying attention to our frontline workers. We got to go home as information workers. But frontline workers could not. They're the people that stayed in the factory, stayed in hospitals, did the emergency, the police, made sure the factories were still producing the toilet paper that we were all hoarding. You remember during the pandemic.

00:22:34 Weston Morris

But these frontline workers, their work environment got worse during the pandemic. Ours got better and coming out of it, I did episode 44 where we asked, how do we improve the frontline worker experience? You know Stacy Harder and Rich Owen on my team. This is what we live and breathe. It's just brilliant listening to them on how they are finding ways to

make it possible for the frontline workers to collaborate better, to have the tools they need to get access to AI, things like that, to make their job better. So that was another one.

00:23:05 Patrycja Sobera

Yeah, absolutely. And again, just hearing you talk about this will be one that I'll certainly go and relisten to, particularly when talking to our clients about the frontline worker's importance to the success of any organization. Great example there. Thank you. Well, listen, we talked about the more serious stuff and more relevant business insights, but let's shift a little bit and look at some fun or unique behind the scenes stories from recording the podcast. I'm sure there are thousands of those, and you've got a number of stories to tell. The ones you want to tell, of course. You can leave the rest for another time over a beer or two. But what are they? I bet there are loads.

00:23:49 Weston Morris

Well, people have asked me about the music. They go, where'd you get that? I don't recognize it. It actually came from a colleague of mine, Barry Tannenbaum. He's now retired. Super technical. Microsoft Ranger. Really understands IT. E-mail exchange was his expertise in the day. He has a blues band, and I said to him, hey, would you mind recording a riff for me, composing something, recording it? And he did, and that's what we're listening to in every one of the episodes. Hey, Barry, if you're listening, thank you very much for making this a better podcast.

00:24:23 Weston Morris

The other thing was I'm seeing unexpected collaboration that's happening as a result of the podcast. You think you record it, you put it out there, that's it. But I get a lot of people reaching out to me on LinkedIn or elsewhere. I've had at least a couple of folks reach out and go, hey, I heard so and so on this episode. That sounds too good to be true. Is that real?

00:24:44 Weston Morris

And I will assure them it is. What we talked about was a real example, and I'll put them in touch with whomever it was that was a guest. In some cases, it turns out that they end up becoming clients. We provide services to them as a result of that. But there's another type of collaboration too, and that is the expertise that my guests are bringing. I'm realizing, wow, we need to tap into that expertise.

00:25:16 Weston Morris

So a couple of examples: Alan Nance, he's one of the co-founders of CitrusCollab and Neil Keating, co-founder of Bright Horse are two companies that are focused on how to measure employee experience and how to set up an organization to do that work. And then what to do with that data so that you get insights and actions that turn into actual productivity improvements. You learn so much in those. I think that was episode 20. I actually did three with Alan. We started off with the one, then said we have to do another, and we have to do another.

00:25:43 Weston Morris

Alan was talking about the theory. With Neil Keating, we looked at real-life examples. With him, I asked him questions about what people are doing wrong with XLAs and experience management. We did one on anti-patterns like that. It was episode 25, so those were the types of collaboration where we ended up using what we learned from Bright Horse and XLACollab; now, the XLA Institute, as they've merged, has been a great form of collaboration.

00:26:14 Patrycja Sobera

A fantastic example and some legendary industry names like Neil and Alan collaborating with us so closely on this journey of XLAs, starting from XLA 1.0 and now looking at what's around the corner, looking at other areas that XLAs can focus on to drive value. A fantastic example. Thank you. Well, and great segue here from unexpected to fantastic collaborations. I'm sure that how you think about topics for the next episodes is based on the demand, right? The demand from the listeners from the industry. Can you give us a quick glimpse of some of those that are coming soon and what topics you'll be covering?

00:27:04 Weston Morris

OK, let me just pull them up. I won't share all of them here, but maybe find a few. Oh, I love this one. There's work going on with digital twins.

00:27:13 Patrycja Sobera

Oh, wow.

00:27:14 Weston Morris

Yeah, and how to capture knowledge of people. Using digital prints, they can use both technology and people. We're looking at using this with people in the digital workplace to capture the knowledge of people that are retiring. How do we capture not just what's being done, but why? Why is a certain process being followed or why does a certain piece of code do what it does? Obviously, we'll probably have more on AI and generative AI as we see there's a lot of promise there. Is it landing? Are we getting a return on ROIs? So we'll probably look at that, maybe do like we with Neil Keating. We did the anti-patterns of experience management; we will do anti-patterns of AI. We might do something like that.

00:27:52 Weston Morris

And, of course, we've talked about XLA 1.0, 2.0. What does XLA 3.0 look like? We'll have some conversations about that in the future, too, Patrycja.

00:28:02 Patrycja Sobera

Fantastic. I want to listen to all of them. Current and relevant, and there is a lot of conversation in the industry around digital twin. I see quite a lot cycling around that, but you're right. I love the—One: what does it mean? The reality. Two: what are pitfalls to avoid? As you just said with GenAI, I'm sure there will be a lot of interest in those. Thank you.

00:28:26 Patrycja Sobera

I just want to say that if you're new to the podcast and something caught your attention today, as we said, we'll share the links to all the previous episodes—all fifty of those. Weston, thank you for being a guest on your own podcast. I bet it's perhaps a bit uneasy sometimes, but how did you find the experience?

00:28:48 Weston Morris

I was a little bit scared and anxious about getting up, but you made it so easy and just a delightful conversation. Patrycja, thank you. It's been a lot of fun.

00:28:58 Patrycja Sobera

Oh, thank you so much. This wraps up our 51st episode of the Digital Workplace Deep Dive. I am your guest host, Patrycja Sobera, and you'll be very pleased to hear that Western Morris will be back in the host seat for the next episode. Thank you so much for listening.