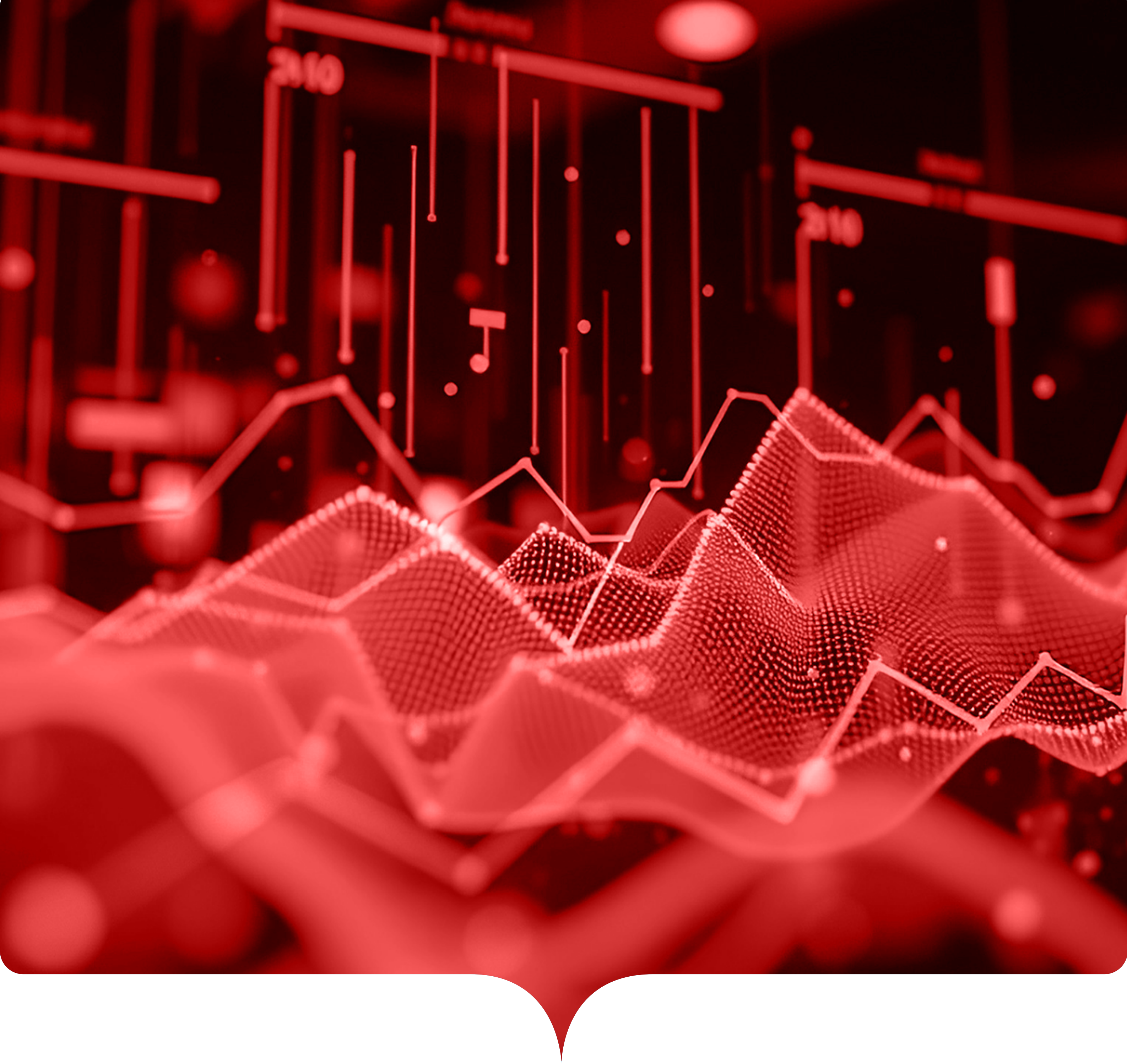


FROM SLAS TO XLAS: WHY EXPERIENCE IS THE NEW IT CURRENCY

Synoptek

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As enterprises accelerate digital transformation, expectations of IT have fundamentally shifted. Availability, response times, and ticket resolution, which were long the cornerstone of IT measurement no longer reflect how technology is experienced by employees, customers, or the business.

According to Forrester, 73% of technology decision-makers report that improving digital experience is now a top business priority, ranking above cost reduction and infrastructure modernization in many industries.

Yet most IT organizations still rely on metrics designed for a different era. This whitepaper examines the shift from Service Level Agreements (SLAs) to Experience Level Agreements (XLAs), a move driven by experience gaps, rising business expectations, and growing evidence that experience directly influences productivity, satisfaction, and outcomes. Drawing on analyst research and real-world managed IT environments, it establishes why experience-led measurement is becoming foundational to modern IT and how it underpins the evolution toward Managed Experience. (MxP™).

THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY AND THE CHANGING INDICATORS OF IT VALUE

Experience has become a strategic differentiator, not just for customers, but for employees and internal stakeholders. Analyst research shows that organizations increasingly view experience as intertwined with business performance.

IDC reports that more than 60% of Global 2000 enterprises now link digital experience metrics directly to business KPIs, including productivity, retention, and revenue growth.

This shift reflects a broader reality:

- Employees expect intuitive, low-friction digital environments
- Customers expect consistent, always-on engagement
- Boards expect technology investments to demonstrate business impact

Experience is no longer a soft metric it is a strategic one.

WHY SLAS NO LONGER TELL THE FULL STORY

SLAs were designed to measure system performance. They were never designed to measure human impact.

This limitation is now quantifiable.

According to the 2024 Global IT Experience Benchmark based on 1.86 million end-user responses across 130+ countries, organizations that met SLA targets still experienced:

- Up to 40% higher perceived productivity loss among users during incidents
- Significantly lower satisfaction scores when recurring issues were present even if resolved quickly

In other words, SLA compliance does not equal positive experience.

Common patterns include:

- SLA dashboards that suggest systems are meeting their thresholds alongside frustrated users
- Fast resolution of incidents that recur frequently and perhaps shouldn't even come up in the first place
- Technical compliance masking business disruption

From a business perspective, these gaps matter. Industry research consistently shows that poor digital experience contributes to employee disengagement and measurable productivity loss in large enterprises.

SLAs measure service delivery.
They do not measure value delivery.

XLAS: BRIDGING IT PERFORMANCE AND BUSINESS REALITY

XLAs emerged to close this gap by translating technical performance into experience and outcome insight.

Analyst research supports the shift toward experience-led measurement. In its 2024 research on digital workplace transformation, Forrester emphasizes that organizations must move beyond operational SLAs to measure employee and customer experience outcomes if they want technology investments to drive real business value.

XLAs focus on:

- User sentiment and satisfaction
- Productivity and effectiveness
- Business and operational impact

They do not replace SLAs. They contextualize them.

Tenets That Contribute to Effective XLAs

Experience-first: Measures experiences that matter not just system output

Outcome-driven: Correlates IT activity to business results

Continuous: Evolves as expectations change

Multi-signal: Combines telemetry, behavior, and sentiment

XLAs connect IT performance to human and business reality.

UNDERSTANDING EXPERIENCE: DOMAINS, SIGNALS, AND CONTEXT

Experience is multidimensional and cannot be captured through a single score.
Research emphasizes that experience measurement must span employees, customers, and operations to be meaningful, warning that siloed metrics distort decision-making.

Core Experience Domains

1. Employee Experience (EX)

Employee Experience refers to how current employees interact with workplace technologies as they perform their daily responsibilities. This includes the usability of applications, system reliability, accessibility, digital friction, workflow interruptions, and overall satisfaction with the tools required to do their jobs.

When employee experience is strong, technology enables productivity, reduces wasted time, and minimizes frustration. When it is weak, even technically compliant systems can generate cumulative productivity loss through repeated disruptions, latency, and inefficiencies.

2. Customer Experience (CX)

Customer Experience reflects how external users engage with digital platforms, support systems, and service interfaces. It encompasses reliability, responsiveness, ease of navigation, and consistency across touchpoints.
Technology performance directly influences customer perception. Downtime, latency, or inconsistent interactions can quickly translate into revenue risk, churn, and reputational damage even if internal SLA targets are technically met.

3. Operational & Business Experience

Operational and Business Experience captures the broader organizational impact of technology performance. It includes operational continuity, agility, scalability, process efficiency, and resilience during disruption.

In this domain, experience is reflected not only in user sentiment but in measurable business indicators such as cycle time, throughput, error reduction, and responsiveness to change.

Organizations gain the most value when these domains are measured together rather than in isolation.

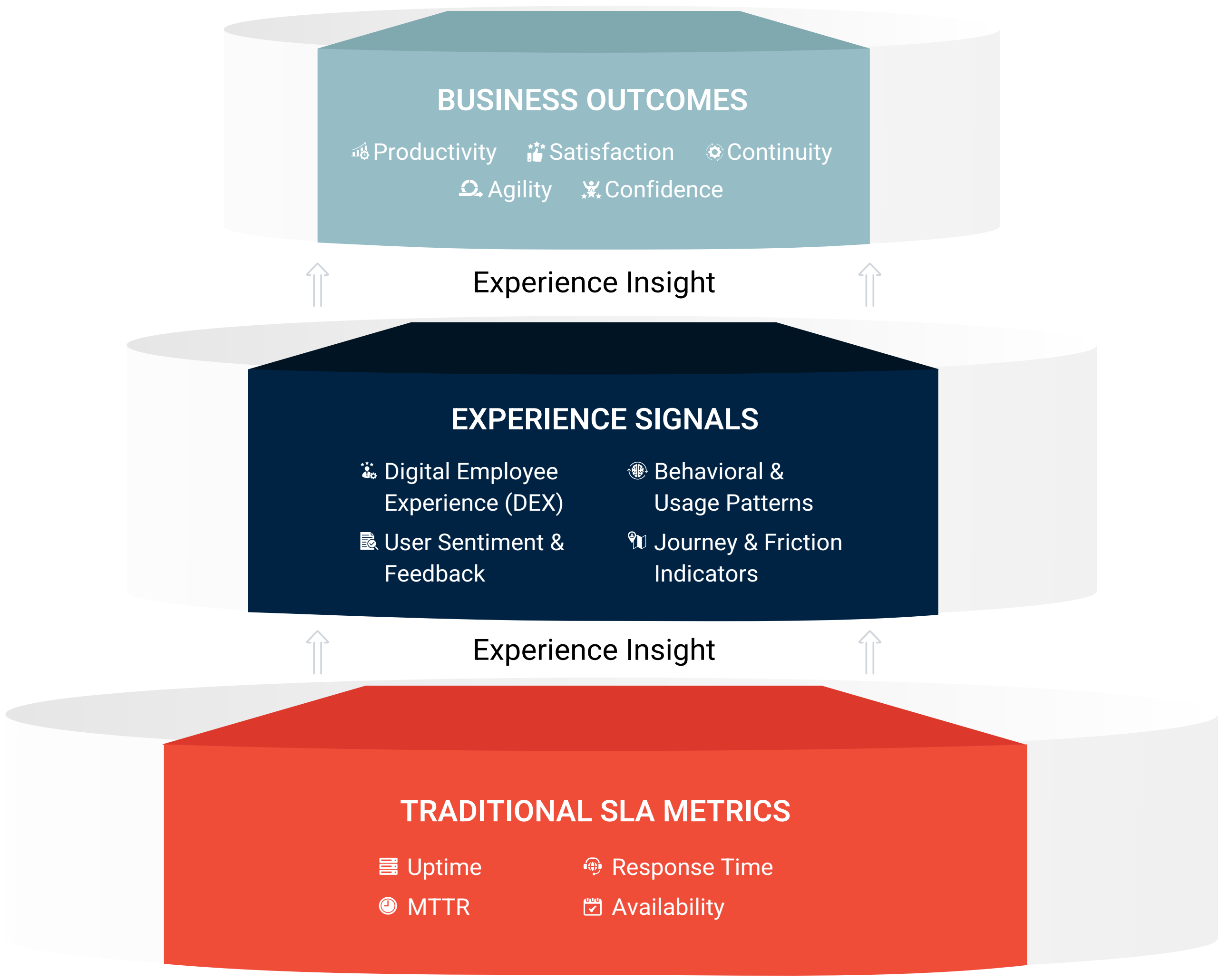
Experience must therefore be informed by multiple signals system telemetry, behavioral usage patterns, sentiment data, journey analytics, and business performance indicators to provide context that traditional SLAs cannot.

Key insight:

No single metric defines experience. However, when organizations align multiple signals through XLAs, they gain meaningful visibility into how technology performance impacts real user outcomes.

From Performance Metrics to Experience Insight

Translating Performance into Experience and Outcomes



Technical Performance

Experience Level Agreements translate SLAs into experience insight and business outcomes.

FROM INTENT TO MEASUREMENT: WHAT LEADERS ARE LEARNING

Organizations that make meaningful progress with XLAs tend to share one defining characteristic: they do not begin with tools, dashboards, or experience platforms. They begin by clarifying why experience matters to the business and where it has the greatest impact.

This distinction is more than philosophical. According to research by McKinsey & Company, 70% of digital transformation initiatives fail primarily due to lack of alignment with strategic objectives or business outcomes, rather than because of insufficient technology alone.

In these cases, experience measurement quickly becomes noisy, fragmented, and difficult to act upon. Teams generate scores and sentiment data, but lack a shared understanding of what success looks like or how insights should influence decisions. As a result, experience metrics are reviewed but rarely used.

By contrast, organizations that succeed with XLAs take an intent-first approach. They start by aligning leadership around a small number of experience questions that are directly tied to outcomes, such as:

- Which experiences most directly influence productivity, satisfaction, or continuity?
- Where does friction create disproportionate cost or risk for the business?
- Who is accountable for improving experience once it is measured?

This shifts experience from a reporting exercise to a decision-making lens, ensuring that measurement informs prioritization and operational improvement rather than simply generating additional dashboards.

Leaders are also learning that effective XLAs require clear ownership. Experience spans IT, digital, operations, and business teams, but accountability cannot be diffuse. Organizations that define who owns experience outcomes rather than just who measures them—are far more likely to translate insight into action.

Ultimately, intent-first XLA programs recognize a simple truth:
experience data has no inherent value until it shapes behavior.

When experience intent is clear, measurement becomes focused. When measurement is focused, action becomes possible. And when action is consistent, experience evolves from an abstract concept into an operational capability.

MEASURING EXPERIENCE IN THE REAL WORLD

XLAs combine quantitative and qualitative insight:

- Experience indices
- Trend analysis
- Correlation with outcomes

This approach is increasingly common. Research states that organizations using experience metrics alongside SLAs are better able to justify IT investment decisions to business leadership.

Case Evidence: Managed IT in Healthcare
In a managed IT environment supporting healthcare delivery, experience signals were used to identify which application disruptions had the greatest impact on clinical workflows. Rather than prioritizing incidents by severity alone, IT teams aligned response to experience impact reducing disruption in care delivery and improving operational focus.

This reflects a broader industry finding: experience data improves prioritization where traditional metrics fall short.

OPERATIONALIZING XLAS WITHOUT ADDING COMPLEXITY

A frequent concern is that XLAs add overhead. Analyst research suggests the opposite when implemented correctly.

Case Evidence: AI-Enabled IT Operations that Put Experience First
In a multi-practice healthcare environment, AI-driven analytics correlated infrastructure and application signals with experience degradation. This enabled IT teams to act before user impact escalated, shifting from reactive resolution to proactive experience management.

Experience became operational because it guided decisions.

THE EVOLUTION FROM SLAS TO MANAGED EXPERIENCE

Most organizations do not transition from SLAs to XLAs in a single step. Instead, they progress through a series of maturity stages as expectations, capabilities, and confidence evolve.

In early stages, IT organizations remain SLA-centric, focusing on uptime, response times, and efficiency. While necessary, this model treats technology as a utility rather than a value driver.

As experience gaps become visible, organizations move into experience-aware measurement, layering sentiment and feedback on top of traditional metrics. This stage often reveals a critical insight: technical success does not consistently translate into perceived success.

More mature organizations advance to outcome-driven XLAs, where experience metrics are explicitly tied to productivity, satisfaction, continuity, and business impact. Here, experience data begins to influence prioritization, investment decisions, and operational trade-offs.

At the highest level of maturity, experience becomes more than a metric it becomes the defining principle of how services are delivered.

This shift is giving rise to a new definition of what it means to be a managed services partner. Traditionally, a Managed Service Provider (MSP) has been evaluated on uptime, efficiency, cost control, and operational stability. While these remain essential, they are no longer sufficient in an environment where business value is defined by productivity, engagement, continuity, and customer perception.

A new category is emerging: the Managed Experience Provider (MxP™).

A Managed Experience Provider puts experience first. Rather than managing infrastructure alone, an MxP manages how technology is experienced by employees, customers, and the business. Experience signals are embedded into service governance, operational prioritization, and continuous improvement. Performance is evaluated not only by whether systems are available, but by whether they are enabling outcomes.

In this category, success is measured by questions such as:

- Are employees more productive?
- Are customer journeys smoother and more resilient?
- Is the business able to operate with greater agility and confidence?

This represents an evolution in the managed services market itself. Organizations are no longer seeking providers that simply "meet SLA." They are seeking partners who understand the relationship between technology performance and human impact.

Synoptek is the first provider to formally define and operationalize the Managed Experience approach embedding experience measurement, outcome alignment, and continuous optimization into the core of managed services delivery.

XLAs are not a replacement for SLAs. They elevate them and in doing so, redefine what managed services must deliver.

GETTING STARTED: WHAT SUCCESSFUL XLA JOURNEYS HAVE IN COMMON

While no two XLA journeys look exactly alike, analyst research and enterprise experience consistently point to a common pattern of success.

First, organizations start with focus, not scale. Rather than attempting to measure experience across the entire enterprise, they identify a small number of high-impact services, platforms, or user journeys where experience failure carries real business consequences.

Second, successful initiatives establish shared ownership. Experience cannot be “owned” by IT alone. Effective XLA programs align IT, digital, and business stakeholders around common experience goals and outcomes.

Third, leaders resist the temptation to over-engineer measurement early on. Experience initiatives often stall not because of lack of data, but because complexity overwhelms adoption. When measurement frameworks become too intricate, teams spend more time interpreting dashboards than improving outcomes. Organizations that succeed prioritize clarity and actionability over precision, focusing on a small number of meaningful indicators that directly inform decisions and drive improvement.

Over time, these focused efforts expand, guided by learning rather than assumption. Experience measurement matures incrementally, gaining credibility as it consistently informs better decisions.

Organizations don’t need to measure everything.

They need to measure what meaningfully influences outcomes.

FROM INSIGHT TO EXECUTION: TURNING EXPERIENCE INTO AN OPERATING MODEL

Defining and measuring XLAs is only the beginning. The real value emerges when experience insight is embedded into how IT operates day to day.

This means:

- Prioritizing incidents based on experience impact, not just severity
- Using experience trends to guide change planning and maintenance windows
- Linking experience data to continuous improvement and investment decisions

When experience data consistently guides action, IT shifts from reactive service delivery to proactive experience management. At this point, experience stops being a reporting metric and becomes an operational capability.

HOW ORGANIZATIONS CAN PUT THIS INTO ACTION

Organizations seeking to operationalize XLAs can begin with three focused steps:

1. **Start with one high-impact service.**

   Select a business-critical workflow or platform where experience breakdown creates measurable disruption. Limiting initial scope builds credibility and prevents measurement fatigue.

2. **Define experience signals alongside technical metrics.**

   Augment existing SLAs with a small set of experience indicators such as user sentiment, digital friction points, or productivity impact that provide context for operational decisions.

3. **Establish clear ownership and decision triggers.**

   Determine who is accountable for improving experience outcomes and define how experience data will influence prioritization, funding, and remediation actions.

By starting focused, aligning ownership, and linking measurement to decisions, organizations can evolve experience from insight to execution without adding unnecessary complexity.

Experience becomes sustainable when it is embedded into governance, not layered on top of it.

FINAL TAKEAWAY: WHY XLAS MATTER NOW

The shift from SLAs to XLAs reflects a broader change in how organizations define value.

SLAs answer an important question:
Did the system perform as expected?

XLAs answer a more consequential one:
Did technology enable people and the business to succeed?

In an environment where productivity, satisfaction, and resilience are strategic priorities, this distinction matters. Organizations that rely solely on traditional performance metrics risk optimizing operations while eroding trust and outcomes.

Those that embrace experience-led measurement gain a clearer understanding of impact, sharper prioritization, and stronger alignment between IT and the business.

In the experience economy:

- SLAs keep systems running
- XLAs ensure technology delivers value

XLAs are not a trend. They represent the natural evolution of IT measurement in an environment where experience ultimately defines business value.

Explore the MxP Advantage

Continue Exploring Experience-Led IT

On-Demand Webinar - Board Room Expectations of the Modern CIO →

The Rise of the MxP™: Why Modern IT Requires Strategic, Experience-Led Partnership →

Why IT Needs Experience-based Agreements (XLAs), Not Just Performance Metrics →

How Putting Experience First Drives Better Outcomes: From Fragmented Systems to Aligned Experiences →

ABOUT SYNOPTEK

Synoptek is the first global Managed Experience Provider (MxP™), delivering end-to-end IT and digital transformation services that align technology performance with business outcomes. Powered by its aiXops™ platform, Synoptek provides advisory, integration, and AI-activated managed services across four core pillars: Cloud & Agile Infrastructure, Business Applications & Platforms, Customer & Employee Experience, and Cybersecurity. With 24/7 global delivery, deep industry expertise, and a holistic strategy-to-operations model, Synoptek helps organizations reduce operational burden, accelerate transformation, and continuously evolve their digital capabilities.