

Performance Architecture Roger Addison and Carol Haig

## Performance Architecture: Through the Customer's Eyes

Have you recently phoned your bank, insurance provider, or utility company? Did a live person answer? How many buttons did you have to push? How many questions did you answer, repeatedly? How long was it before you got to the person or information you needed? Did you, perhaps, just hang up in disgust? The interactive voice response (IVR) automated telephone answering system is one of the unfriendliest and universally reviled of user processes. As Performance Architects invested in designing all aspects of work to produce desired results in efficient and supportive ways, we see the majority of IVRs as prime candidates for redesign. And they are not alone.

### Crazy-Making Processes

- In a small and highly unscientific survey, we asked colleagues to share the processes that make them crazy. From our collection:
- Product registration systems requiring personal information that is then used for marketing additional products to the registrant.
- Trying to get a tax form from a bank that sends the customer back and forth between two departments without resolution (this one has continued for four years).
- Insurance billing systems that are set up exclusively for monthly payments. Customers who want to pay for more than one month must make special arrangements with their agent.
- Going for an annual mammogram and providing a complete breast cancer history each year (20-plus and counting) to the health plan organization that diagnosed the cancer in the first place.
- Airlines ask for information on the phone and then the agent at the airport asks the same questions
- Hidden costs in a process – an airline gives a price for the flight then adds costs for seats, luggage, and food.

### Processes that Delight

To be fair, many processes are easy to follow, efficiently structured, explained well, and quick to complete. Some examples:

- Returning shoes, or any product, to Zappos.com at no cost.
- Boarding a Southwest Airlines flight by assigned group and taking any available seat.
- Setting up almost any Apple product for the first time.
- Quick start guides for many products.

- Any service or sales interaction with Consumer Cellular in the U.S.
- Sunday deliveries from Amazon.com.
- Amazon's return process for incorrect or problem orders.

In our observation the best processes are created in organizations that begin their thinking with the customer and make sure that the customer's wants and needs are the focus of all operations. A customer-focused organization is the natural birthplace of customer-friendly processes.

## The Customer-Focused Organization

A customer-focused organization is built, organized, and operated with the customer at its core. Everything that takes place within such an organization is driven by and evaluated against what is most important to the customer.

Indeed, "The customer-centric organization creates products, processes, policies, and a culture that are designed to support customers in their endeavors and to provide them with a great experience as they are working towards their goals." (Marshak, p. 2)

Some organizations that have been recently listed in the top tier of customer-focused organizations include names that are familiar in the U.S. (Ciotti, p.1)

- Amazon
- LLBean
- Apple
- Zappos
- Ritz-Carlton

Other lists feature organizations from around the world. So, what do these customer-focused organizations have in common?

## Characteristics of the Customer-Focused Organization

The behaviors of customer-focused organizations typically include: (Marshak, p. 1)

Committing to customer success

- Engaging with customers from the start
- Aligning with customers from the top down
- Building a customer-focused culture
- Recognizing the customer across all functions
- Designing processes and policies from the customer's viewpoint
- Measuring what matters to customers
- Encouraging customer innovation

Customer-focused, sometimes termed customer-centric, organizations are most likely to invite their customers to collaborate on the design of products, services, and even processes to ensure that the customers' needs are met.

"The companies that get it are customer-centric. They put the customer at the heart of decisions, ideas, marketing, system design and more." (Hyken, p. 2, 5). They:

- Empower employees to make decisions to benefit the customer
- Hire people who fit the culture and have personalities that align with the organization's core values, mission, and vision

- Invest considerable time and money in soft skills training in service and relationship-building
- Know the importance of their employees and take a people-first approach

## Building the Customer-Focused Process

Customer-focused organizations are likely to have methodologies for building customer-pleasing processes. The Airlift & Tanker Division of Boeing, for example, zeroed in on 50 key processes over five years. They used a 7-step approach to engineer these processes and increased their “exceptional” rating from customers by 10 times in three years. (Hunsaker, p. 1, 2). The 7 steps:

Define the process

1. Use 6-10 manageable steps
2. Establish metrics that matter to the customer

Measure results

3. Determine performance
4. Analyze process stability

Improve the process

5. Set goals
6. Analyze and plan improvements
7. Implement improvements

By definition, the most customer-focused processes are flexible and easily adjusted to meet changing needs. When an organization co-creates a process with a customer it is best to provide scenarios or general guidelines, enabling the process to be adjusted for each use case. And, “The organization should be prepared to accept failure. Learning by doing will help to understand customers better and organize processes optimally. Failure is a rich source of information and learning points.” (Van den Bergh, Thijs, Oyku, Viaene. p. 1)

## Inside-Out or Outside-In?

Too often, processes are designed for the good of the organization rather than for the good of the customer. An Inside-Out orientation will produce a process that meets the organization’s needs above those of the customer. Conversely, an Outside-In approach is designed through the customer’s eyes, and will result in a customer-focused process that will potentially delight the user.

The organization that masters the Outside-In process will necessarily be matching their processes to the experience they want to deliver to their customer. Unfortunately, it is not enough to define terms and set a process development goal to use an Outside-In methodology. Colin Shaw, a customer experience expert, suggests that these requirements be met to ensure the development of a successful customer-focused process: (Shaw, p. 2)

- Name the owner – an individual or cross-functional team – for the process
- Commit, from the top to the bottom of the organization, to the belief that all parts of the organization affect the customer’s experience
- Create a detailed map of the expected customer emotions at each step in the process
- Include the customer in the design process
- Commit to exceeding the customer’s expectations at every interaction with the organization and the process

Our favorite outside-in customer service process both delivers and delights:  
[https://www.youtube.com/embed/NK-T\\_t166TY?feature=player\\_embedded](https://www.youtube.com/embed/NK-T_t166TY?feature=player_embedded)

## Good Intentions Hijacked

We recently read Atul Gawande's latest book, *Being Mortal*. In support of one of his main themes, Gawande explores end-of-life medical care and the institutions available to patients and their families in the U.S.

In the 1980s, Keren Brown Wilson built her first assisted living facility in Oregon, U.S.A. She wanted to create a patient-focused resource to replace the nursing home. She envisioned a place where residents could be old and frail and physically limited and still able to live with freedom and autonomy. She wanted to eliminate the submissive, no-choice processes used to manage care in nursing homes and make a better life possible for people with limitations. (Gawande, p. 87)

This story of assisted living is woven through Gawande's book. Today, there are many assisted living facilities in communities across the U.S. Unfortunately, very few have been able to maintain the customer-focused vision Keren Wilson had so many years ago. Most are inside-out facilities, hijacking a brilliant concept and diluting it in the name of streamlining operations and maximizing profits, all to the detriment of the residents and their families.

## Call to Action

Consider your organization. To what extent is it Customer-Centric in culture, marketing, sales, service, operations? How are processes developed and built? How customer-friendly are they? Use the Checklist below to help you evaluate your organization and generate ideas for improvement.

## The Customer-Centric Checklist

Consider how customer-centric your organization is. Mark **Yes** or **No** for each question.

<b>Yes No</b>	Do you have a clear idea of who your customers are and what needs they have?
<b>Yes No</b>	Do you know which of your customers are most valuable to you?
<b>Yes No</b>	Does your business strategy/mission mention anything about your customers?
<b>Yes No</b>	Do you hire/develop your staff with your customers in mind?
<b>Yes No</b>	Do you have a process by which customers and employees can give feedback and review/act on this within your business?
<b>Yes No</b>	Do you have a customer complaints process which enables quick resolution of customer problems?
<b>Yes No</b>	Are all your employees empowered to deal with customer complaints?
<b>Yes No</b>	Do you know how satisfied or loyal your customers actually are?
<b>Yes No</b>	Do you provide specific services or incentives for your most valued/loyal customers?
<b>Yes No</b>	Do you deliver what you promise in your advertising/marketing to your customers?

Based on your answers, what changes would you suggest for your organization? For process design and improvement?

## Conclusion

To produce a process that delights customers and meets or exceeds their needs requires a mindset typically found in customer-focused organizations. Such places are imbued with a customer-first mindset and an unflagging interest from all employees in meeting and exceeding customer expectations. Conversely, organizations without such a focus generally make their customers do more work to access the products and services they want. Processes in these organizations are developed from the inside, looking out, rather than outside-in through the customer's eyes. Consider where your organization fits on the inside/outside spectrum of focus and how processes could be improved to do more for your customers.

## References

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