

Eight Ways to Drive Customer-Centricity into Your Operations

Take these steps to build customer-centricity into the core of their operations

It's the rare business that would argue against being customer-centric. At least one report found companies cede more than \$62 billion annually to their competitors by frustrating would-be and current customers with poor service. Numbers like that make it clear that satisfying today's Amazon-influenced consumers is imperative. The challenge is that organizations must emulate the digital natives' laser-sharp focus on customers. The good news is digital tools and techniques exist right now to help companies drive and keep customer-centricity at the heart of their operations. Here are eight digital-first steps to take now when planning customer-service strategy.

Break the factory model.

Organizations must shut the doors on the factory assembly-line customer service model and collapse their front, middle and back offices to create customer-first digital services. In the traditional factory approach toward customer service, customers are handed off from rep to rep, each with their own area of expertise. That model is no longer acceptable. Consumers now expect the person who takes their call to see them through to a resolution. Analytics, automation, and AI can connect customer service reps to the knowledge and resources they need to be the consumer's single point of accountability.

Design for humans.

Put customers at the center of process redesign. What are the customers' needs? Why and when do they reach out for service? Anthropological and ethnographic research techniques answer these questions. Yet that's only the start of designing for humans. It's when the model meets operations that human-centric design really takes off. The question "what does the customer want?" must be answered specifically in real time as well as in the aggregate. Evolving consumer needs, tastes, and habits must be captured and incorporated into engagement models, and the data necessary to do that is best captured via operations. Refining engagement and operations models to ensure they remain customer-centered essentially never ends.

Build in agility.

Engagement and operating models must quickly adapt to changing consumer demands, both in real-time and over the long term. A digital-first, omnichannel engagement strategy provides the agility to satisfy a wide spectrum of customers quickly and cost effectively. Software bots and robotic process automation (RPA) can create real-time messages and updates to push to customers. Web portals and AI-driven chatbots guide customers, helping them reset passwords, change order shipment dates, etc. Customers who are less

comfortable with technology or who have complex questions, such as inquiries about loans or high dollar purchases, can be steered to human agents.

Deploy analytics.

Analytics enable companies to know their customers—by name, transaction history and preferences—and delight them by anticipating their requirements. With analytics, organizations may combine transactional data about a specific customer along with publicly available social and demographics data to generate accurate sentiment analysis and segmentation. Analytics can build on those insights to supply real-time intelligence to help AI and human agents manage interactions more effectively, such as offering an avid competitive runner a fitness tracker optimized for marathon training vs. a smart watch with health monitoring options. Each of these encounters helps algorithmic models learn more about customers, providing insights businesses need to stay customer centric.

Automate intelligently.

AI and machine learning tools can automatically route customers based on sentiment, such as recognizing a potentially irate customer (third contact in two hours), to a human agent well rated for service. Robotic process automation (RPA) solutions can automatically extract data from relevant systems and populate a customer history in real time, while an AI tool recommends next-best actions based on the data. Such automation ensures each interaction is successful on the customer's terms.

Measure differently.

Traditional customer satisfaction metrics are inadequate to measure success in a digital customer experience world. An impressive net promoter score doesn't guarantee new business from referrals. Analytics eliminate these vague measures of success and zero in on engagement value, capturing granular data about how channels

and human agents perform. Smart analytics reveal detailed customer engagement patterns, whether for queries, sales or collections, making it possible to understand precisely how long it takes different customers to click on "help," add items to an order or pay a bill. Companies may use this data to segment customers, goals and strategies. Algorithm-driven analysis identifies the optimal channels for reaching segments and also provides insight into how human agents perform. Dashboards make this data easily available for tremendous visibility into results across every channel.

Customize reskilling.

Measurable insights into agent performance enable individualized training to address specific weaknesses and augment strengths. The agent who is strong on service learns to incorporate more cross-selling techniques while the great seller learns to show empathy so his customer satisfaction results match his revenue generation.

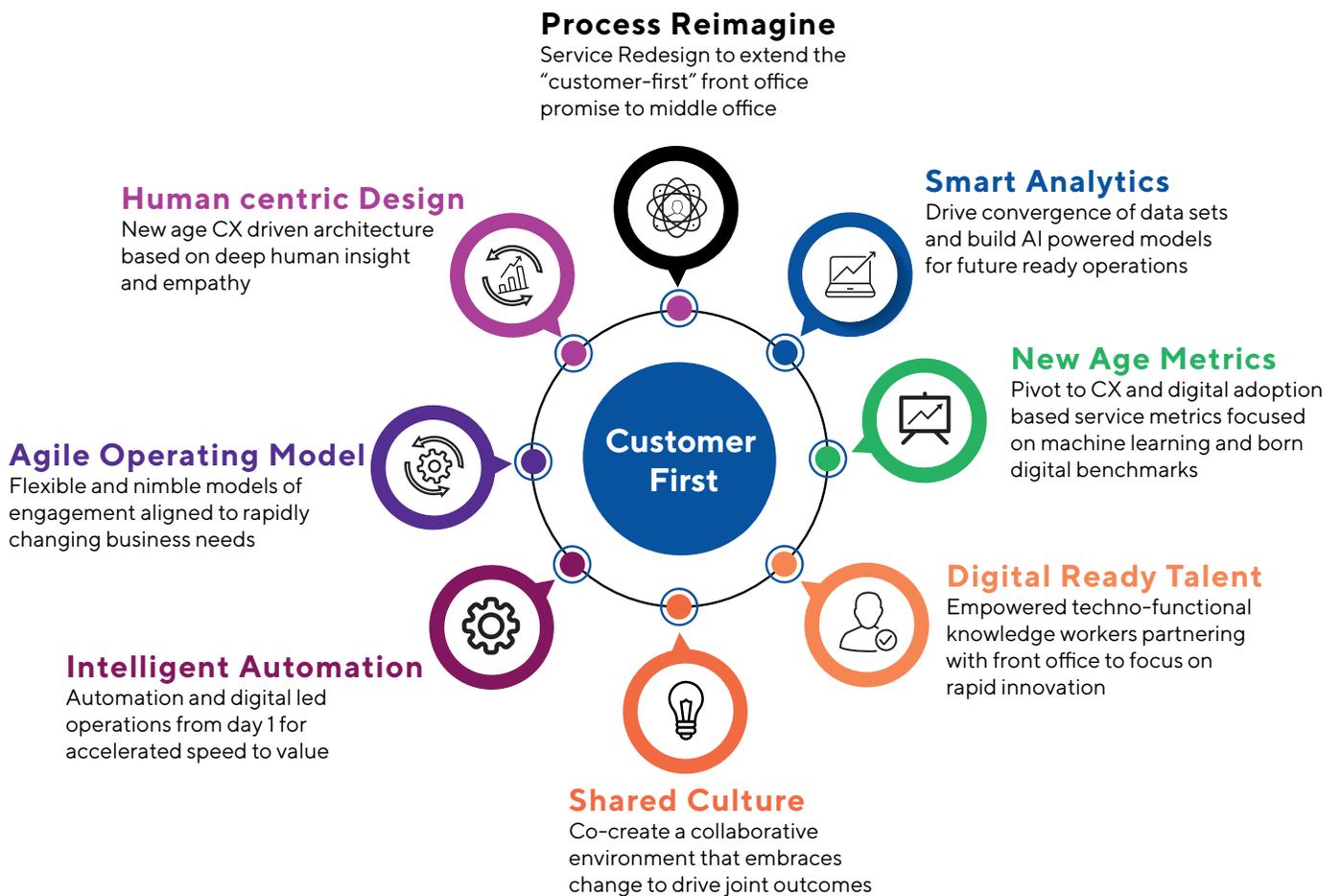
Empathy and other soft skills are critical because humans will deal with more complex customer interactions as simpler transactions become virtual and automated. Human agents also need to collaborate seamlessly with digital tools and AI-driven agents, stepping in smoothly when a chatbot or virtual assistant can't understand what a customer is asking.

Co-create and collaborate.

Most organizations will find it expensive and complex to build their own digital customer-centric operations. Platform-based solutions reduce capital expense and shorten time-to-market with new capabilities. Third-party digital customer service providers can bring best practices and lessons learned from managing millions of customer interactions. It's critical that organizations select providers able to fully reflect their culture, brand and messaging and who can collaborate on

creating new, mutually beneficial solutions. Such partners should be comfortable with outcomes-based or gain-share delivery models. Reducing

costs per call or headcount are archaic success measures; value generation is what counts.





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