Embrace Customer Obsession To Achieve Mission Success

HOW TO ACCELERATE THE DIGITAL FUTURE THROUGH EXCEPTIONAL GOVERNMENT CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE
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PART ONE

Vision: Engaged Customers Ensure Mission Success

As governments around the world deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and global recession, the need for digital transformation and exceptional government customer experience (CX) has never been greater. Your customers have rising expectations of digital experiences from the brands they interact with, and they expect the same — or more — from public services provided by governments and their respective agencies.

We don’t just mean the experiences of only your citizens and constituents. This should also include all other stakeholders as well, such as government employees, tourists, overseas investors, and nonresident business owners. Their experience is equally crucial to a government’s ability to achieve mission goals.

Governments in Asia Pacific are starting to recognise this. The Singapore government unveiled its Digital Government Blueprint in June 2018, outlining a plan to better leverage data and harness new technologies to build a digital economy and society. In September 2019, the Australian government published the findings of an independent review of the Australian Public Service, which outlined recommendations for a proposed 20-year program of sustained change across service delivery, strategy, leadership, capability, culture, structure, partnerships, and technology.

True transformation must be led by customer obsession. That doesn’t mean giving in or resetting priorities to customer whims; rather, it means using customer insights as the foundation of all decisions, including the use (or not) of digital solutions. This kind of transformation will require government leaders to drive changes in culture, habits, operating models, and priorities to get the most out of their teams. Easier said than done, but once achieved, it can unlock massive value.

Why is customer obsession in public service important? We analysed data from Forrester’s Customer Experience Index (CX Index™) and found that when CX improves, positively engaged customers are more likely to comply, trust, and forgive; government operations cost less and run more smoothly; and people’s faith in the country rises.
Poor government CX leaves customers less willing to comply with federal directives, seek authoritative information, apply for optional services, speak well of departments, trust them, or forgive them for mistakes.

Government agencies around the globe lag their private-sector counterparts in embracing digital transformation to deliver positive CX. Forrester’s CX Index data shows that the quality of most government agencies' CX is poor and uneven and lags that of the private sector.

Even Small CX Improvements Have Big Benefits
For each 1-point improvement on the 100-point CX Index scale

**COMPLIANCE**
2% more customers do what the organisation asks of them

**ENGAGEMENT**
2.5% are more likely to seek expertise
3% are more likely to sign up for optional services

**ADVOCACY**
4.4% more will say positive things

**TRUST**
2.8% more customers will trust the organisation

**FORGIVENESS**
2.7% more will forgive the organisation when it makes mistakes

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PART TWO
Strategy: Embrace A Customer-Obsessed Operating Model

The blueprint for government customer obsession relies on having leaders who are willing to challenge the status quo; they must be willing to embrace an "adapt and learn" mindset, delivering incremental improvements and increased value based on ongoing customer feedback.

The first step is to adopt what Forrester calls a customer-obsessed operating model: A customer-obsessed government organisation uses its knowledge of and engagement with customers to drive its leadership, strategy, and operations in ways that ensure mission success.

The customer-obsessed operating model requires a shift in four important operating principles from a more traditional approach to one that embodies design thinking. Customer-obsessed organisations point to success factors within these six operational levels to drive the biggest impact: structure, culture, talent, metrics, processes, and technologies.
PART THREE
People: Elevate Your Employee Experience To Help Them Succeed In Their Mission

No government can achieve mission success without an army of dedicated employees. Due to the unique pressures of government employment and the need for the best talent, employee experience (EX) is even more important in the public sector. Making your employee experience a key aspect of your organisational decision-making process is one way to tackle this issue. Having great employee experience empowers and motivates them to get more done and bring their passion into their work.

The most influential operational levers in the customer-obsessed operating model revolve around your people.

Structure, talent management, and culture matter more than any of the other operational areas.

Customer-obsessed and digitally mature enterprises systematically identify, hire, nurture, and retain top digital talent. For example, Singapore’s government not only announced a series of initiatives — including raising salaries and offering strong learning, development, and leadership opportunities — to strengthen engineering as a career in the Singapore Public Service, but it has also invested significantly in skills development, including technical expertise, and new interagency collaboration.

Data from Forrester’s Employee Experience Index (EX Index) helps organisations prioritise where to make improvements, and our analysis highlights the impact of technology and other factors causing employee burnout. Irrespective of the specific nature of the work, most jobs today are heavily dependent on technology. Every day, employees have to find and access task-critical information, collaborate with peers, communicate effectively with customers, and use support systems within the organisation — which technology can significantly help or hinder. Government agencies can start by improving the employee experience through the building or refreshing of technology capabilities that enable their workforce to do their jobs better.
PART FOUR

Technology: Innovate With Digital Technology To Drive Mission Success

Customer-obsessed organisations approach digital technologies in a very different way. They heavily invest in technology, systems, and processes needed to serve their customers — and adopt new architectural and software development approaches that allow them to quickly shift and innovate as customer expectations continue to rise.

In the current climate, here are three initiatives that Forrester recommends you focus your attention on:

1 ACCELERATE DIGITAL INITIATIVES

Customers have come to expect that government agencies will provide agile, convenient experiences equal to those found in the private sector. The public sector recognises the need to move fast, as the gap between private and public is growing larger.

Beyond establishing their CX programs, many governments have also launched digital transformation initiatives. However, the focus has been on deploying established technologies for incremental improvements to existing capabilities or in reaction to moves by similar departments in other countries.

Digitally mature organisations apply modern software design, development, and deployment processes, such as customer-led design, Agile development, and DevOps to rapidly deploy new digital capabilities. Mature organisations also let customer personas, journey maps, and insights steer technology investments. For example, NASA launched its Space Apps Challenge to facilitate Agile development, bringing together governments, private agencies, and individuals for two to three days to create open source solutions to problems. At the heart of this collaboration was a focus on creating tools for individuals and companies to improve their lives and to create value with the data (including engineering, finance, and Earth) that the agency had.

At the same time, we are on the cusp of an emerging technology revolution: AI, machine learning, the internet of things, augmented and virtual reality, and blockchain. Some of these technologies may not be able to deliver value today, but government leaders need to understand their possibilities and chart a course that allows organisations to capitalise on this new breed of technologies to advance mission goals.

The governments of France, New Zealand, and South Korea all have initiatives underway to embed digital competencies and ways of working. Automation will be at the centre of the future of work, as the power of robotics gains steam.

2 EMBRACE AUTOMATION TO POWER THE FUTURE OF WORK

The benefits of automation are obvious — it can free up precious resources on high-volume, low-complexity tasks. Many government agencies, like their private-sector counterparts, have also started implementing chatbots on their websites to answer frequently asked questions. For example, Australia launched a COVID-19 information app featuring self-isolation registration and a WhatsApp chatbot with pandemic information. Singapore deployed doglike robots by Boston Dynamics in part of Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park that played a recorded message reminding visitors to maintain social distancing. The robots’ cameras estimate the number of visitors but don’t gather any data on individuals.

The implementation of automation will have far-reaching implications on societies and economies, and there is pressure on governments around the world to alter their policies to help citizens displaced by automation. Governments will need to move faster than most to catch up to a digital-automation dynamic that can threaten or empower their jurisdictions.

As governments and organisations around the world invest more in automation technology, few have evaluated if they
have the right competencies internally to succeed in automation. For automation to be successful, employees must trust these bots. This trust won’t be easy to achieve, as people’s opinions of robots tend to skew negative.

To get employees excited about their potential new robotic coworkers, government leaders will need to demonstrate how they stand to benefit. Existing data shows that people enjoy their jobs more after robotic process automation relieves them of mundane, hassle-filled tasks. These positive experiences can be used to start shifting the workplace culture to think optimistically about robotics, rather than seeing robots as a threat or something to fear.

**3 PROTECT YOUR CUSTOMER TO BUILD TRUST AND GAIN A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE**

The currency of privacy and security is trust: an intangible, dynamic emotion that defines whether your customers believe you will protect their interests and identity, which is vital in public service. Customers have a greater expectation of governments to keep their data secure. Our government CX research shows us that each time a government department’s CX Index score rises by 1 point, 2.8% more customers will trust the organisation. However, cyber threats are prolific and continuously adapting. We are in a cyber arms race where cyber criminals have a broad threat surface to play with and no shortage of tactics to do damage.

One way to protect your customers’ data is to assume you’ve already been compromised; you simply don’t know it yet. We call that Zero Trust — a term that Forrester coined in 2010. That is the necessary mindset in today’s hostile environment. “Trust but verify” sets you up to be on the defensive. Zero Trust may seem like an ephemeral concept, but it is, in fact, a proactive, well-defined, architectural approach that aligns with and enables your business-critical priorities.

In Australia, the lack of trust in the government due to prior incidents has hindered the adoption of COVIDSafe. Citizens cited the My Health Record debacle (in which over 2 million Australians opted out of having an e-health record), the disjointed response to the census platform crash in 2016, and the government’s blunder mid-pandemic with a backflip on claims that the myGov website crashed as a result of a cyberattack as reasons not to download the contact-tracing smartphone app.
PART FIVE
The Path Forward

In the age of the customer, customer obsession isn’t a buzzword; it’s a requirement for mission success. Your customers have more leverage than ever before, and as a result, their expectations are higher. Customer centricity will be vital to a successful public service. Whole-of-government and agency leaders need to change the way they do business. They can start by asking the right questions, such as:

• What is the most efficient way to deliver our mission?
• What aspects of our experiences are critical to maintaining the trust of our customers and employees?
• How can we sustain trust and empathy while reducing costs?

Pivoting to a customer-obsessed mindset requires a reset of common assumptions about where to look for quick performance improvements and the role of the agencies more broadly. This approach puts both customers and employees at the centre of the design process. Identify the ideal relationship between them and your government systems and processes while helping to identify where your internal ecosystem is limiting your organisation’s potential.

Adopting a customer-obsessed mindset ensures the highest impact of technology design and delivery. Agencies that find this new way will emerge from this crisis with lean, agile, and focused organisations.

“This is not a passing storm after which we will return to a comfortable normal. This new world requires leaders to think and act differently.”

– George Colony, Forrester founder and CEO, on the age of the customer
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