

Protecting the Customer Experience

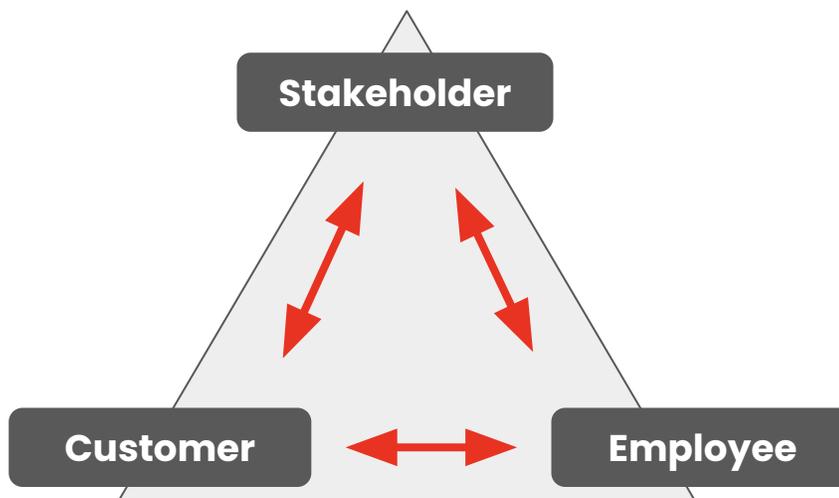
by Lauren Feehrer



Anticipating and addressing customer impacts early in the transformation process strengthens satisfaction and fosters loyalty.

Maintaining a Balance

When we explore a transformation initiative we must examine the impact through three key lenses: the customer, the employee, and the shareholder. Equally important, we must keep these perspectives in balance.



While maintaining balance is crucial, customer protection — though essential — is often overlooked. By anticipating and addressing customer impacts early, we can foster greater satisfaction and loyalty.

Meet The Author

Lauren Feehrer has over 24 years of experience in Customer Experience (CX) strategy.

She's worked with clients like Dell, Best Buy, IDEXX Laboratories, and Merck, her work has been recognized with the North American Customer Centricity Award for Best Customer Experience Strategy.

Lauren earned her Bachelor's Degree in Communication Studies, Journalism, and Leadership from the University of Rhode Island, graduating summa cum laude.

She works across KG's two practice areas of Ways of Working and Technology Adoption.

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/laurenfeeher>



During a critical period of transformation, the customer experience faces the following risks:

- **Disruption Sensitivity:** Customers are already dealing with disruptions during a change initiative. Ensuring a smooth transition helps maintain their trust and prevents frustration.
- **Increased Risk of Negative Impact:** Changes in processes, products, or services can lead to misunderstandings or dissatisfaction if not carefully managed. Prioritizing the customer experience will help to mitigate these risks.
- **Customer Retention During Transition:** The success of a change initiative can hinge on how well it's received by customers. Protecting their experience is key to retaining them through the transition.
- **Maintaining Brand Loyalty:** Customers' perceptions of the brand can be significantly affected by how well changes are handled. Positive experiences during change can reinforce loyalty, while negative ones can lead to a loss of trust.
- **Feedback on Change:** Customers provide valuable feedback on the impact of changes, which can guide further adjustments and improvements. Protecting their experience ensures that feedback is constructive and focused on positive outcomes.
- **Competitive Edge:** In times of change, customers might explore alternative options. A strong focus on their needs and concerns helps retain them and maintain a competitive advantage.
- **Mitigating Backlash:** During a change initiative, effective communication and a focus on customer experience can help minimize backlash and facilitate smoother adoption of new processes or products.

Let's explore strategies and tools to maintain a strong customer focus throughout the transformation process.



Is Your Customer In The Room?

How do you keep your team focused on the customer, especially when they aren't physically present? Ensuring the customer remains a central consideration requires more than just surface-level attention. When customer personas are not only created but genuinely integrated into the organizational culture — beyond just marketing efforts — they become indispensable tools.

Embedding personas both physically and digitally, and weaving them into daily practices and decision-making processes, transforms them into valuable sources of insight and innovation. By integrating these personas into your organization's culture, you guarantee they drive meaningful changes and align with customer needs and expectations.

For a persona to be valuable, we need:

- **Detailed and Accurate Information:** Gather comprehensive data on the persona's demographics, needs, goals, and behaviors.
- **Real-Life Context:** Base insights on actual customer experiences and feedback to ensure relevance and accuracy.
- **Jobs to Be Done:** Identify the specific tasks or goals personas are trying to accomplish. This helps in tailoring solutions to their needs.
- **Cross-Functional Involvement:** Foster collaboration across departments to make sure that personas effectively influence all aspects of the business, from design to customer service.
- **Accessibility and Visibility:** Make personas easily accessible to all team members and integrate them into tools and documentation with visible reminders, such as posters, cardboard cutouts, quick reference guides, and engaging videos.

During your transformation process, keep the customer perspective central in decision-making by focusing on questions like "What would this persona want?"



Gather Customer Insights

Customer insights are pivotal in shaping successful transformation initiatives. By leveraging methods such as customer advisory boards, focus groups, online communities, and research surveys, organizations can gain a deep understanding of customer needs and preferences.

Engaging directly with customers through these channels helps identify key pain points, desires, and expectations, which can inform and refine transformation strategies. This proactive approach helps address potential issues before they arise and keeps the transformation aligned with what truly matters to customers.

Real engagement with customers provides critical insights that guide decision-making and prioritization. Emphasizing genuine interactions helps ensure that the transformation aligns with customer expectations and adapts to their evolving needs. This ongoing dialogue fosters a customer-centric mindset, ensuring that the transformation delivers tangible value and strengthens long-term relationships.

Communicate Early and Often

A clear and transparent communication plan is essential for success, as it helps manage expectations, mitigate concerns, and maintain trust throughout the transformation process. It's not just about informing customers of what's changing but also about how and why these changes will benefit them. By keeping communication open and consistent, you can proactively address potential issues and provide the support customers need during the transition.

Sample Customer Communication Plan – A template for developing a communication strategy that keeps customers informed and engaged throughout the transformation process.



Customer Experience Case Study

Have you had your coffee today? If you did, there's a good chance it was from Starbucks, ordered via their mobile app. Remarkably, over 70% of their sales now come through this channel. So, how did Starbucks make sure its digital transformation was centered around the customer?

According to HBR's Mike Walsh, Starbucks' approach to digital transformation is a prime example of a customer-centric strategy. In his article, **How to Navigate the Ambiguity of a Digital Transformation**, Walsh notes, "In an emergent digital strategy, learning is what allows you to leverage your digitalization efforts to evolve faster than your competition."

For Kevin Johnson, President and CEO at Starbucks, a key driver powering the company's digital transformation has been their ability to learn at scale. He believes that increasing innovation velocity requires a **learn and adapt approach**. Starbucks' current mantra is to "go from idea to action in 100 days."

Starbucks continually learns and adapts to customer needs through several strategies. They measure connection scores using email surveys, conduct focus groups to gather feedback, and encourage open innovation with the **"My Starbucks Idea"** platform. Recently, they have been leveraging machine learning and artificial intelligence to understand and anticipate individual customer preferences.

The results speak for themselves: since starting on its digital journey in 2008, Starbucks' stock has outpaced the growth of its industry peers, showcasing the significant value of a customer-focused digital strategy.

Written by: Lauren Feehrer, CCXP, President & Founder, LoyaltyCraft Consulting