

White Paper:

# Driving Customer Experience Quality from the Front Line

## Part 1 – Strategic Considerations



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For large and small companies alike, driving high customer satisfaction results is a challenge many fail to manage. A common issue is revamping normal business operations in the current environment and implementing change that increases customer experience quality. By implementing an upside down strategy where the customer drives the customer experience through the Service Management Organization (SMO), a company creates an environment where every decision is made with a customer focus.

Creating a quality customer experience starts with a clear understanding of the current environment. Once the environment is understood, companies must define how to drive a quality customer experience and standards from the front lines of the organization back through the various areas of the company where customer satisfaction principles can lack luster. This is a concept that some of the more advanced companies have embraced and demand that their partners clearly understand and continuously improve. When focused on the customers' experience, customer loyalty leads to increases in organic growth. Dale Carnegie once said, "Success is getting what you want. Happiness is wanting what you get." The SMO can drive product and process efficiencies between groups and reduce costs while increasing customer service, creating value for both the company and the client.

The "Customer Quality Environment" (CQE) – shown in the diagram below - directs the guiding principles of customer satisfaction throughout the organization. This requires the knowledge to enhance the current environment and develops the engine for customer satisfaction. Complete reinvention of company processes is not the answer. Typically, it's a matter of tweaking the existing systems and processes by creating a mission and changing the "rules of the game."

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The mission of the CQE is to understand the client and provide the highest levels of satisfaction by ensuring clients are proactively informed, their needs are responded to effectively and their business risks are minimized. Expected results include the highest levels of measured client satisfaction, a reduction in service desk cycle times and reduced operational costs. The goal is to eliminate redundant, inconsistent operations and collaborate between product lines while transparently displaying data in a manner that drives knowledge out to the tips of the organization. The CQE drives business-process redesign in a very practical manner allowing customers to grow and mature with their respective service providers.



Upon creating a CQE, companies must first start with a set of **“Guiding Principles”**. These six principles change the “rules of the game” as well as set organizational expectations internally and externally:

#### Employ a “Fix it Once and Forever” mentality across the company

No problem should happen more than once without the proper knowledge management and problem root-cause analysis addressed. To ensure proper closure and communication of the resolution internally and externally, organizational alignment must occur between the problem resolution group, development organization, product group and the marketing organization.

#### Ensure “Nothing is Left to Linger”

From the time an incident occurs to permanent resolution a champion must drive the issue to completion. Every step of the way the champion monitors the progress and drives efficiency through the problem mitigation process. This ensures transparent communications happen throughout the organization and mitigates road blocks along the way.

#### Full transparency of key metrics internally and externally

Metrics are imperative to understand where the company can improve. The more people can view and understand the metrics, the more ownership is assumed and care given to improve the metrics. Real-time data transparency should be driven out through the clients, support personnel, internal leadership and the company's network of providers, balancing costs and technology. The unknown often drives the way people respond to issues. Conversations become purely about the facts when ensuring clients and providers (internal and external) can see how the company is performing. Hidden agendas go away which creates an environment of trust and combined “skin in the game”. All involved begin to take ownership of the quality of service.

#### Guiding Principles...

- 1) Employ a “Fix it Once and Forever” mentality across the company
- 2) Ensure “Nothing Is Left to Linger”
- 3) Full transparency of key metrics internally and externally
- 4) Communicate with clients succinctly and often
- 5) Ensure complete alignment of business requirements and technology capabilities
- 6) Proactive detection and resolution of issues

*“The challenge is to create a Customer Quality Environment by leveraging what you currently have to enhance the customer experience.”*

#### Communicate with clients succinctly and often

Let clients know everything from the company's strategy down to the minute tactics that drive customer satisfaction. Clients should be “in the know.” Increase the level of commitment internally that drives positive behaviors by communicating a deliverable to the client. Staff becomes more engaged when working for a larger cause - the one paying the bills - the client. Crisper communications also come by communicating more with the client. Increased client communication develops a collaborative work environment which drives inefficiencies out of a poorly aligned company. A properly aligned communication path gets the message to the client faster, and also helps protect the company brand from miscommunications. The very nature of being “correct with the client” elevates the level of correctness within the work environment. Customers want solid communications and they want sound delivery of what is communicated.

#### Ensure complete alignment of business requirements and technology capabilities

While communicating with the client is essential, of equal importance is the proper alignment of the product organization and technology. Aligning technology is not just about putting the right application in for the right product, it's much larger and more complex. Technology alignment entails focus on **“People, Processes, and Power”**.

**People:** Technology organizations must have at minimum a 3-year forecast of the business in order to address staffing the right people for the right products. Technology training is transitional. It takes many months to create a technology staff that can provide value on top of “keeping the lights on” for the business.

**Processes:** There should be a very clear definition of how a product gets from business requirements to production. There are many project and product development lifecycle methodologies that handle this, but the main priority is how the organizations align and how the communications flow between each group within the organization. Understanding when and how information is shared along the various business and technology processes addresses many of the inefficiencies that plague project success. Communication must be direct and information must have completion time frames attached. Clear expectations between technology and the business verticals are also characteristic of a truly-aligned CQE.

**Power:**

- *Processing Power.* Applications and machines get faster and cheaper each year. The right balance must occur between costs and functionality.
- *The Power to Make Decisions.* Empowerment must be given to the staff that has the capacity to create efficiencies. Bottom up decision making also drives a more creative work environment.
- *The Power of Suggestion.* No question should go unheard. It's necessary for companies to continuously reinvent, reeducate and reevaluate process and people to deliver improvement to their client base year-over-year.

**Proactive detection and resolution of issues**

Systems and people must be put in place to proactively address issues before they happen. A reactive approach to managing client issues eventually creates an environment of negativity that leads to poor customer satisfaction. All clients know problems occur. The experience is defined through how the problems are handled. The key is to find and communicate the problem before the client does. This creates an environment of trust that increases satisfaction survey scores and reduces the need to continually manage bad press.

Having the SMO drive customer satisfaction initiatives throughout the company takes communicative management and senior leadership involvement from the start. Each initiative molds the way business and technology groups look and act. To mitigate managing the hard decisions on the back end of an initiative, ensure leadership buy-in up-front in order to increase chances of having a positive experience. It is important to create "communication leadership" that allows internal leadership and external clients to communicate openly and with candor. It develops partnerships throughout and allows the SMO to mold what people expect of each other.

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Client involvement positively impacts the way an internal staff thinks. When the client is involved in decision making customer satisfaction scores also go up. The creation of a client advocate or advocacy group drives client satisfaction standards through innovation alignment. By creating product with client input, proper expectations are set which minimize impacts to customer satisfaction when problems occur.

Through driving innovation from the SMO, the company creates, without additional costs or effort, a knowledge center of excellence that has accountability for continuous improvement. The SMO becomes the product leadership voice

for the client, the research and analytics hub, the systems and tools integrator, the client data management expert and, most importantly, the business process improvement specialist that drives efficiency throughout the company.

Analytics about the customer experience should be known throughout the organization. Create alignment from sales to the service desk by implementing know-it-all systems that give the total customer experience picture. These systems tie together industry analytics, sales, systems performance, SLA metrics and other client-specific information. By aligning and distributing real-time information about client transparently, knowledge transfer between groups happens without the need for physical interaction. This saves time and money allowing the company to focus on what's important.

Creating information analytics through knowledge management, business intelligence, data mining and cross industry analytics is important - however, it has to have an audience to make it useful. Having an "everyone knows" communication platform allows for communication to happen preemptively. A preemptive style of communication through multiple protocols (i.e. email, dashboards, phone calls, paging, marketing bulletins, texting) creates an environment where communication becomes the norm. The closer to real-time the communication is delivered the more correct cross organizational communication becomes allowing for total integration from the service desk through to executive leadership.

Where to start building alignment throughout the organization starts with the creation of the CQE. Part 2 of this paper ("Implementation Considerations") addresses the framework that facilitates the transformation to making decisions based on what the client wants. It begins with **Understanding** the current environment including communication handoffs, then

**Architecting** the solution where a formal plan is created and sound delivery where a facilitator drives success. Once the plan is executed, as part of the plan, a continuous improvement process shows how the organization **Delivers** in the client's best interest.

As companies look to create market differentiation, they must think about an upside down model for customer service. The model proves to the customer that the business is totally customer-focused and not the other way around.

