

A background image showing a woman and a man in business attire looking at a laptop. The scene is overlaid with a city skyline and digital data points, suggesting a focus on technology and urban environments.

3 Essentials to Elevating the Federal Customer Experience

WHY FEDERAL AGENCIES NEED TO COMBINE INNOVATIVE THINKING WITH INVESTMENTS IN TECHNOLOGY AND PEOPLE

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Across industries, businesses are striving to evolve culture, processes, and systems to enhance consumer interactions and provide better experiences. While mandates, regulations, and limited resources add additional layers of complexity for the public sector, agencies have significant opportunity and industry support as they work toward improving the federal customer experience.

Widespread consumer initiatives across the private sector — and growing efforts in the public sector — present leaders with a wealth of data and information to guide their strategies. Sophisticated tools and technology have also emerged and evolved, providing an avenue for agencies to better communicate and engage with their customers as well as optimize processes that influence the customer experience.

Technology will be a key enabler in engaging customers in new ways and empowering employees to deliver better service, but agencies need a deeper strategy to enhance the customer experience and prepare for future legislation.

Forward-thinking leaders are considering how to intertwine innovation, technology, and culture to build a customer-centric organization.

Establishing a Foundation for Success and Innovation

To guide strategy and investments, leaders must first understand who their customers are and what influences their perception of a positive experience. Shifting to a customer-centered organization entails a multidimensional view of the individuals an agency serves, from understanding customers' needs to knowing their preferences for how they use and seek services. Using data and analytics to derive these insights aids leaders in understanding what factors and specific tools enable a good experience for their customers, which won't be the same for every individual.

Once agencies have a clear picture of who their customers are, they can better define what success looks like for their organization and establish metrics to measure progress. A sustainable strategy and the outcomes an agency wants to drive should both support the needs of the organization's customers and tie back to its mission.

Widely used metrics like net promoter score (NPS) can be modified to provide agencies with a baseline understanding of how customers perceive the organization. However, having diversified metrics, including business-specific measures, are essential to fully understand whether an agency is truly making progress toward its goals and meeting customers' needs and expectations.

Equally as important is accountability toward new customer experience metrics, and change starts at the top. Aligning metrics and behaviors with organizational goals creates a mechanism to promote accountability. Additionally, a leadership model that encourages, incentivizes, and cascades innovation helps change stick.

Transforming Workflows With Technology

Innovative thinking will be imperative to create more efficient processes for customers and employees. Leaders should be thinking about how to restructure workflows and build flexible engagement models that reflect how customers want to interact with the organization and its services.

As consumers increasingly expect to interface digitally and demand more functionality and convenience, automated and self-service tools that enable contactless and digital-first experiences will be influential in improving satisfaction and accessibility. For example, to make the application process for a new grant program more convenient and user-friendly, the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) developed an online portal with a guided application process. Applicants were able to upload required documents and receive real-time feedback about their program eligibility and estimated grant award, making the overall process more efficient for both internal and external stakeholders.

Building the foundation to support customer-facing innovations begins with optimizing back-end processes and functions.

Tools like customer relationship management (CRM) platforms provide the important infrastructure to derive valuable customer information to create more data-informed customer personas. Organizations can use these insights to customize and automate internal workflows based on who the customer is and what their needs are. This level of standardization enables organizations to better serve their customers and deliver information and services in a more timely, seamless way.

Beyond elevating customer interactions, [innovating processes with tools like automation](#) can prevent workflow bottlenecks that lead to poor experiences. For example, new legislation that required issuing refunds for veteran medical copayments could've turned into a massive backlog with complaint issues, but the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) leveraged robotic process automation (RPA), a form of intelligent automation, to speed up the process and keep staff members focused on their core work.

A Purposeful Approach Is Key to Smart Investments

As agencies invest in new innovations, they must maintain awareness that digital tools and technology are not the solution but rather an enabler. The focus should be on how these tools and technology drive organizational goals and enable the experience and outcomes that consumers desire. A strategic plan for how to select, design, and implement technology is essential to maximizing digital investments and ensuring organizations have the adequate infrastructure and governance to support it.

Without a clear purpose or sufficient resources to maintain them, technology investments can quickly become fragmented and outdated, leading to poor customer experiences and financial results. Leveraging strategic alliances can

provide agencies with the expertise and support to not only implement and customize digital assets but accelerate their value and optimize and evolve them as processes change due to new legislation or as consumer needs shift.

Doubling Down on Employee Engagement

To make real progress toward improving the federal customer experience, agencies must invest in the employee experience. Cultivating a customer-centric organization relies on strong employee engagement. Research shows businesses with high customer experience scores have [1 1/2 times more engaged employees](#) than those with lower ratings.

Highly engaged employees have a stronger sense of purpose and investment in their work, leading to better service and increased customer satisfaction. As workforce challenges persist, employee engagement will be critical to building a resilient culture and sustaining momentum toward customer experience initiatives.

Leaders should be asking whether organizational culture supports employee feedback and well-being and provides opportunities for employees to create and test innovative ideas. Involving employees in creating and continually improving solutions can help foster psychological safety and build the ownership and buy-in to [initiate and sustain change](#).

While enterprise resource planning (ERP) software is often used to enhance productivity and streamline processes, ERPs can be a tool to create a more engaged workforce and an employee-focused culture. By understanding the procedures and processes contributing to employee pain points, ERPs can enable the change employees need to do their jobs more effectively, reducing burnout and improving performance.

In addition to deriving consumer insights, CRMs can be used to analyze employee data. When integrated with human resource systems, CRMs can help agencies understand how people experience work differently, empowering leaders to develop more effective solutions for motivating their teams.

As agencies begin — or continue— their customer experience transformation journeys, it's important to not let the scope of change hinder progress. Starting small or adopting a phased approach can make large-scale transformation more manageable. Having a clear strategy and vision for the future lays the foundation for decision making and provides a framework to keep efforts aligned to desired outcomes and promote continuous improvement.



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