



Seven Constructs That Create a Customer-Focused Culture

Service and support organizations with a customer-focused culture create customer loyalty—the key to profits and growth

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In an industry where the pace of change accelerates relentlessly, how do you create a service culture that builds customer loyalty? Organizational culture is the ‘personality’ of an organization that manifests itself as the behaviors, traits, attributes, and artifacts of its members. The culture shapes how people see their world and how they function within it. An organization’s culture shapes personal and group values and attitudes including perceptions about what works and what doesn’t work, what is helpful and what is not, what makes sense and what does not.

The “7 Cs” of a customer-focused culture are the essential building blocks of creating and sustaining a loyal customer base. These seven essential constructs are addressed by asking and answering questions about your organization, your customers, and the world in which you operate. The understanding you gain will guide your actions towards a customer-focused culture that will be highly admired by your loyal customers and greatly envied by your competitors.

1. Customer-Focused Strategy

Create a customer-focused vision of what you want your organization to be and where you want it to be within a specified time period. A clear and cohesive strategy addresses some specific, forward-looking questions.

- What are the assumptions about your business and the world outside your business that will guide your decision making, and what are their implications?
- What are the overriding beliefs and values that will guide your thinking and behavior both internally and externally?
- What are the products and services you will and will not offer?
- What are the customers and end consumers you will and will not serve?

- What is the basis of your competitive advantage and how sustainable is this over your strategic time frame?
- Where is the thrust for new business and growth?
- What does this vision say about the core competencies you need to own or outsource?
- What financial growth and return expectations do you seek to achieve?

2. Characteristics

Define the characteristics of your culture and align this with your vision. Identify what characteristics you want to emphasize and to what degree. For example, do you want to emphasize quality or cost and to what degree? Do you want to emphasize tactics or strategy and to what degree? If you want to win by providing a world-class customer service and support organization, you must have characteristics that are customer-focused.

- What do you want your customers to think about you?
- How would you like your customers to describe you as an organization?
- How would you like your employees to describe your organization?
- What behaviors should leaders in your organization exhibit?

3. Commander and Chief

Your current leadership exerts significant influence on culture. The personalities, biases, and styles of your organization's leaders become entangled in its culture. As your employees and customers learn about your leaders, they begin adapting their characteristics.

- How would you characterize your leader's viewpoints and actions?
- What philosophies have your leaders adopted?
- What credos/mantras/myths have your leaders promoted?
- What is the operating style of your commander and chief?

4. Commitment

Commitment is how strongly the people in the organization believe in its basic precepts and how faithfully they carry them out. Without a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's customer-focused goals and values, you will fail to bring your customers and employees on board and successfully implement your vision.

Commitment requires that your customers and employees exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization and have a strong desire to remain a member of your organization. Commitment ignites action and fosters motivation. It is the glue that brings about a cohesive culture.

- What is required to get buy-in and cultivate commitment from your

high-value customers and from your employees?

- What do you need to do to sustain a high level of commitment from your customers and employees?

5. Communication

Communication has a profound influence on the success you will have in implementing your vision. Communication is not merely words or pictures; it includes facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, proximity, body language, and even the timing and setting in which the communication occurs. Communication is central to the roles that leaders play in inspiring, mobilizing, cheerleading, and energizing. Communication acts as a catalyst for building a customer-focused culture.

- What information needs to be communicated? To whom? In what manner? And how frequently?
- What types of communication need to be made visible to your customers/employees?
- What should be the mix of factual and emotional in specific types of communications?
- How important is the nature/medium/tone of communication compared to the message?
- What are the individual preferences of your customers/employees as to the medium, timing, length, and frequency of communication?

6. Competency

Competency is achieved by translating and integrating the knowledge, skills, beliefs, and values of your customer-focused culture into specific practices and policies applied in appropriate settings. When your service organization is culturally competent in its customer focus, you establish positive helping relationships, engage the customer, and improve the quality of services you provide.

- How well do your leaders and employees understand and accommodate the cultural mores of your employees/customers?
- Do you have the right kinds of intelligence and cultural knowledge deployed where they are needed?
- How well are personal values and beliefs matched with organizational values and practices?
- Do your leaders have the strategic thinking skills necessary to maintain a long-term, customer-focused perspective?
- Does your human capability development plan (acquisition, career development, training, and retention) support a customer-focused culture?

7. Consequence

The consequences of behaviors can significantly impact culture. Recognizing and rewarding good performance can increase motivation

and create a high-performing environment. From your employees' perspectives, consequences don't necessarily have to be formal rewards (monetary benefits, time off, promotion, company car, etc). They can also be part of daily interactions (a pat on the back, a thank-you, prestigious or challenging assignments, public recognition, etc). Consequences don't come solely from management. Peers, customers, and subordinates can also be powerful sources of consequences.

- How well do consequences encourage customer-focused behavior?
- Are appropriate consequences provided consistently and in a timely fashion?
- Are the consequences meaningful to the individual?
- What consequence system do you have in place for your customers/employees?

Culture is deep-seated and often difficult to change, but leaders can influence and alter an organization's culture. It isn't easy and it cannot be done rapidly. But by focusing on these seven constructs for creating a customer-focused culture, leaders can transform their existing culture and achieve levels of customer loyalty that will soar profits and propel your organization towards long-term growth.

About Shellina Damji.....

Shellina Damji is a senior consultant with Kepner-Tregoe, Inc. Her primary focus is on strategy formulation and implementation, the facilitation and delivery of critical thinking skills, and analysis of organizational processes.

Kepner-Tregoe (KT) helps organizations dramatically improve strategic and operational outcomes. Combining proven technologies, capabilities, experiences, and a way of doing business—the KT Way drives predictable, measurable results. KT collaborates with organizations to diagnose their greatest needs and design effective solutions. KT brings together just the right resources to deliver rapid results. Because the work is collaborative, improvements are sustainable and add lasting value. This approach offers a more effective alternative to traditional business consulting.

KT has a systematic, ITIL-recognized approach that streamlines customer care programs, accelerates resolution, and reduces costs. In collaboration with KT, support organizations dramatically reduce the time and cost to resolve the most expensive, high-risk, mission-critical problems, preserving and strengthening important customer relationships.

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