CXCARES

We TIE people together
TRUST, INTEGRITY, EMPATHY

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Our group of global customer experience (CX) professionals (#CXCares) has been connecting over the past few months to support and inspire each other through the Covid-19 pandemic. Reflecting on the many challenges facing organizations and the CX community as they continue to manage and recover from the economic crisis, we want to share our views about the future in this Whitepaper. The objective is to provide some guidance, direction and inspiration to fellow professionals, with practical ways to accelerate the emerging opportunities through recovery and beyond.

Connecting the dots...
Even though organizations have delivered customer experiences since the dawn of bartering, it is only in relatively recent times that CX has become recognized as a profession, culminating in the formation of the Customer Experience Professionals Association (CXPA) in 2011.

This Whitepaper provides a broader definition of CX and its transformational 'power' - especially in these unprecedented times. Furthermore, the Whitepaper 'unpacks' opportunities and practical suggestions to embed experience management in your organization.

CX is the representation of everything an organization does that enables customers to interact with its products and services. User experience, customer service, service design and employee experience, are all examples of 'components' that enable the delivery of the desired level of CX. All these disciplines and activities contribute to a company's interactions with its customers and affect their perception of it.

CX, as a discipline, delivers tangible outputs to the organization through structured methodologies and competencies. We must use technologies and processes appropriately and in alignment with the customer journey to improve CX so that it results in a tangible financial benefit.

In 2020 and beyond, digital transformation presents the greatest opportunity to enable the delivery of better, 'frictionless' customer experiences – making products and services even more accessible to customers.

Despite this, the thing that a customer is still most likely to remember about their experience with an organization is the way an employee makes them 'feel'. Therefore, the successful 'marriage' between people and technology is critical.

Customer Experience Management (CXM) - which refers to experiences that define the relationship between an organization and all its stakeholders - enables organizations to focus on the interests of its entire ecosystem. Relying on a holistic approach offers economic outcomes and market advantage.

The ecosystem consists of customers, employees, shareholders, suppliers and all other partners contributing to the customer journey.

The importance and role of the customer experience have been demonstrated throughout the global pandemic. Although many organizations will sadly not survive, those with a strong focus on CX have been better able to adjust and adapt, as they were already responsive to changes through their approach to CXM.

Having the ability to align service delivery to stakeholders' needs, pain points, and challenges with agility and adaptability have provided the 'survivors' with the opportunity to look forward with optimism.

The following OPPORTUNITIES were identified and are the inspiration of this Whitepaper

1. Close the gap - moving people centricity to center stage

2. Facilitate change that shows results in the short term

3. Use technology to accelerate the transformation

Close the gap - moving people centricity to center stage

1

Customer centricity is not a new concept. Although not always successfully incorporated at all levels of business, the opportunity is now particularly advantageous to push it to the top of the agenda. That is because the pandemic has placed the spotlight on the changing needs and expectations of customers. Designing new ways to address these changing needs holds the key to speedy economic recovery.

However, CX goes beyond the experience of customers - the opportunity lies in including *people* across the entire ecosystem, therefore evolving CX into SX (Stakeholder Experience). We also refer to this big picture as **people experience**.

Understanding the experience and needs of all, at any point, can help identify potential issues and areas for mutual gains. Using the opportunity to bolster insights from all stakeholders in the ecosystem will significantly improve the alignment of CX to business planning and unlock the way forward!

We see the strong emerging focus on employee experience, enhanced with other "people" in the ecosystem, such as candidate experience, partner experience, shareholder experience etc. as part of the new way to differentiate.

This increased focus on people has opened the doors to establishing new people-driven strategies centered around needs and behaviors. It has required the re-alignment of 'normal' business models, propositions and customer journeys.

It also brought about an awareness of a broader range of customer personas through emerging 'vulnerable customers' (people in self-isolation, the elderly etc.) and 'special customer groups' (like health services and essential workers). It highlighted the importance of more considered service delivery for different segments going forward.

It is all about human or people connection. There are more compassion and more energy towards human connection than ever before.

The importance of understanding people in all interactions with brands has to be embedded in the future.

More than ever, companies have to focus on connecting to and building trust with customers, employees and other stakeholders.

There are many good examples of organizations becoming more empathetic to their clients, employees and partners within this period. But we can still amplify these benefits.

2 Facilitate change that shows results in the short term

CX professionals are in a unique position to use coaching as a holding space for leaders to think differently. The skills, capabilities, methodologies and tools in the CX toolkit, can now be used to impact business strategy significantly.

Moving away from CX, towards **customer experience management** or **PEOPLE experiences**, creates a more collaborative design framework to ensure buy-in for change and transformation. CX professionals should now accelerate the connections within the ecosystem. Not only will it break down internal silos, but it will improve ecosystem collaboration and the overall experience across all stakeholders and stakeholder groups.

The pandemic has created rapid changes, primarily driven by panic. There is an opportunity, now more than ever, to talk about having a customer-centric approach within individual departments (especially client-facing ones - such as sales, marketing and customer support).

People should no longer hide behind bureaucratic processes because nothing will change if that happens. Using tools such as **agile** will result in internal changes across service delivery, not only relying on technology as a change agent. Agile can fast-track transformation, even over short time periods.

CX professionals can use the opportunity now to facilitate design initiatives, looking at journeys from both customers', employees' and other stakeholders' perspectives.

We should be using "as-is" or current journeys as the starting point to identify the gaps, including technology and other systems or processes, for improved "to-be" (future state) journeys.

Journey design should also include service blueprints to facilitate the internal tactical execution of the adjusted journeys. Without the necessary system and process changes, the desired experience for the future may not materialize.

3 Use technology to accelerate the transformation

Technology has been the 'thread' holding the world together throughout the pandemic. It is the way that everyone has stayed connected, continued with work or school, relaxed, learned, stayed informed and made purchases.

Technology enabled the opportunity for the redeployment of *everyone* - from office or school to home. The accelerated adoption of technology has been unprecedented. This transformation holds much potential for customer experience.

Technology can never replace human interaction, but **personalization,** using **artificial intelligence** and **machine learning** can bridge significant gaps in the hearts of "people" and experience.

Augmented reality also brings the opportunity to personalize experiences in new and unique ways. Being able to access and experience products three-dimensionally in the comfort of one's home is opening an entirely new personalised experience of brands.

For instance, in a study completed by SAS, **immersive technology** (augmented reality, chatbots and holographic technology) will be viewed by 50% to 60% of the participants as a part of our daily lives by 2030.

Technology also holds the key to the growing need for cost-cutting and improved efficiencies as a result of the economic pressure from the pandemic. It makes for an excellent case to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning capabilities to simplify and accelerate customer journeys. However, this transformation should be insight-led and customer-focused.

Customer experience can also become the catalyst for digitizing traditional face-to-face or phone-based services by redesigning customer journeys for seamless omnichannel integration in the 'new normal'.

The pandemic has escalated the opportunity to use technology to the advantage of customer experience through the current and future reliance on technology.

Key areas to focus on for success

1

Shift leadership's focus towards empathy, integrity and trust

Amplified empathy - the gateway towards the new normal

Organizations had to focus on empathy: to engage in conversation and allow people to talk about experiences during the lockdown and the global pandemic. These conversations with all "people" in the ecosystem have provided much-needed insights around emotional responses, and behavioural changes during these unprecedented times, as well as demonstrating the integrity of leadership.

As employees are working from home, customers, and other people in the ecosystem are too. Recognizing what people's experience was (and still is) working from home, what their real challenges are (and were) and rewarding staff for their contribution to the purpose of the business – for what they have done for the organization.

Reflecting and acknowledging the impact of the pandemic on all stakeholders will also build TRUST. These insights will create the platform for re-designing journeys for economic recovery and beyond.

Consider doing the following:

- Create opportunities just to talk. Try to understand what it took for employees to be able to deliver within these times and what has changed for them.

- Use tools such as empathy role play to experience employees' (and customers') realities.

- Do empathy mapping with your employees to understand their realities.

- Help your employees to amplify their empathy for customers' realities, using empathy maps. It will escalate their understanding of similar realities (challenges, fears) and experiences.

- Bring the "customer chair" into the boardroom to land the message to leadership that you should consult customers in ALL decisions.

The trust you gain as a result of using empathy to listen and understand is much needed in the arsenal for the future of different businesses. Trust also develops when the behavior supports understanding.

Many companies have broken people's trust by their actions during this time. One of the essential principles for CXM is underpinned in integrity and taking ownership of people's problems and challenges. Taking responsibility will be even more important, going beyond the pandemic.

Let's take an example from the past. One of the biggest challenges the business world faced post the economic crisis in 2008, was integrity. That is because people lost their faith in financial institutions. And equally so right now, as people are losing faith in governments and institutions. Therefore, **showing up with integrity in all business decisions will build must needed trust.**

We have seen beautiful examples of this with ordinary people doing extraordinary things: e.g. employees going above and beyond their roles, or showing compassion and helping others, making peoples' experiences more bearable and restoring some faith in humankind.
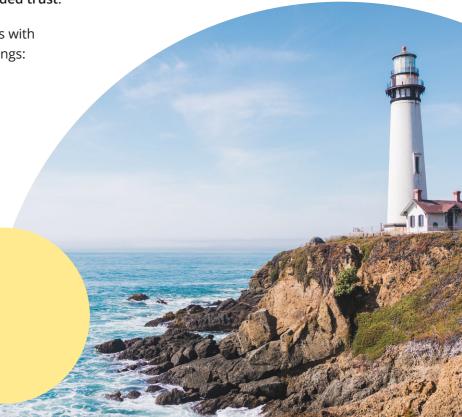
For the best short-term results, start to embed empathy into your strategic thinking, conversations and

ALL business decisions on the road to recovery. **Trust and integrity, based on compassion, will result in sustainable results.**

Considering *people* will be vital, even after the pandemic. People remember how companies responded during their time of need. Unless you make intentional effort through empathy and integrity, you cannot restore broken trust.

Some organizations have shown how "doing the right thing" paid off, in terms of trust. These changes were instituted on the back of empathy. Good examples include putting the customer before financial gain in the short term, to secure long-term loyalty. These organizations have deferred payments, put subscriptions "on hold", removed penalty clauses for early termination of contracts and the like.

2 Use lessons learned through the lockdown to develop new habits

Reflecting on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown has offered unique global lessons. One common threat, with a collective response, has created new pathways in the history of humankind.

Now we need to use these lessons to create new habits. If it becomes a habit, it becomes the way of running your business. It becomes part of you. Identify positive patterns and embed them in the business.

The following universal lessons should form part of new habits that feed humans on a deeper level

Increased Collaboration

Forced by fear and necessity, people globally collaborated and shared much more freely. In the pre-Covid days, travel (at a high cost) was the only way to increase the opportunity to connect and collaborate with people outside one's direct "bubble".

In the event of forced home-based business networking, many professionals started reaching out and collaborated far beyond previous constraints. The digital borders opened up relationships that otherwise may never have been possible to develop!

A case-in-point is our group of CX professionals, #CXCares, authors of this Whitepaper, who started connecting every week to support other members of the group and to learn about and from each other. Supporting each other expanded everyone's network of influence exponentially.

This collaboration is also the cornerstone of bringing the ecosystem onto the design and innovation tables. We should nurture the habit of increased collaboration and sharing as an essential element in cost-saving as well as escalated value-driver for business going forward.

Reflection on what is important

Another lesson every human learned globally was to reflect. By spending time at home, with family or alone, presented a unique opportunity for everyone to reassess what is essential and truly important in life.

Most people realized that the insatiable need to acquire "things" did not bring happiness, and none of these accumulated "things" could help to avoid the threat to our health or lives. What it did achieve to a far greater extent, was to make people re-evaluate everything.

This lesson should bring a much more mindful approach to business if we apply this habit to future-proof business. Appealing to the deeper needs and desires of all stakeholders and resonating with the deep-rooted essence – of what is truly important – should become a habit and re-direct messages and customer experience.

Re-affirming your purpose

Closely related to the lesson of reflection is the lesson of re-affirming purpose. Many companies did not survive the economic pause, yet some did!

This lesson transpired throughout the past few months and forced many people to reflect on their purpose in life. Some managed to re-invent themselves through reviewing what it is they can do to survive during these times. Many businesses also considered their purpose and redirected their business or value proposition.

This lesson should become pivotal to our recovery plan and beyond. The habit of validating business decisions, including customer experience, to the purpose of the business, will bring services and products much more aligned to authentic intent.

3

Facilitate transformational change

The speed of change has accelerated. One could see this in the overnight deployment of the workforce to their homes and remote virtual schooling and the accelerated adoption of technology.

Equally, CX professionals should now mirror this rapid change by using all methodologies and tools to demonstrate how customer experience management can achieve transformation for business during the recovery - and that CX is not merely a theoretical or long-term plan.

Using tools such as Agile, Service Blueprints (service design), future state journey design, stakeholder mapping, can all support the process to facilitate change, as "low hanging fruit". Helping clients or organizations see where and what to change, as well as facilitating the framework to make it happen (Service Blueprint), present the ideal opportunity to transformational programs with escalated results.

We should now place a lot of **focus on cultural change** as the building block to successful and rapid transformation. Closing the gaps between customer and employee expectations can be accelerated by using empathy effectively.

To fast-track cultural change, use shadowing as an approach. Much is said about putting oneself into customers' shoes but very rarely are employees' shoes or colleagues' shoes considered. Spending a-day-in-the-life of a colleague will hugely **increase empathy, understanding and awareness.**

So, this approach will help improve the way people interact with one another and be more conscious and emphatic towards each other's challenges. It provides us with the opportunity to close the gap between customer and employee expectations around the brand promise. It will provide a stable foundation for relationships to flourish.

Another way for CX professionals to **enable change lies in creativity**. Use tools such as LEGO® Serious Play® for scenario-based thinking, to navigate through the uncertain immediate future. We ought to focus more on innovation and thinking of NEW ways to create experiences. These tools help us move from static to **dynamic thinking**.

Earlier in this Whitepaper, we promoted empathy as a way to gain insights into people's state-of-mind and potential behavior changes.

These tools can also **expedite the process of understanding** how, for instance, work-from-home impacted on employee experience, and how to align this to the new normal. Many compromises were needed to get to an employee experience that represents a new work-home-life balance.

By using these tools and techniques, you can unearth rich content. Other evolving technologies such as CEMantica can also demonstrate that CX is not theoretical but is practical and drives real change.

Conclusion

This Whitepaper suggests that Customer Experience Management holds the key to unlock the future, now and beyond the pandemic. Not only do we suggest that **"people" should be the epicenter of strategy and design**, but also for every decision going forward.

Considering all the "people" – customers, employees, partners, suppliers etc. in the ecosystem, it is essential for successful transformation. Understanding their experience and needs at every point should drive design for a more future-proof outcome. We should place much more emphasis on creativity and innovation to craft journeys that bring synergy and opportunities in your entire ecosystem.

We also propose that **leaderships embrace TRUST, INTEGRITY AND EMPATHY as key drivers of the future "people experience".** Doing the right thing for "people" will be the mark of successful leaders and organizations.

The undeniable role and potential that technology can unlock have to be considered so that the **human experience is never compromised**.

The role of CX professionals is to support the optimization of technology to enhance experiences, not alienate people. Seamless, personalized omnichannel experience with your organization is therefore essential. To achieve this, cultural change and design processes, such as service blueprints, are required as they will identify gaps in the internal system to address for real transformation.

For CX professionals, the key is to leverage the opportunities that have unfolded during the pandemic and to make use of all the tools in the CX toolkits to facilitate real change. The intention should be on short-term results to build confidence in the transformation journey and support all organizations on the road to recovery.

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