



Steering the customer experience

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It's in your own interest

Working as Key Account Managers means that you are constantly moving your scope from the bigger picture, to the smaller. You need to manage the long-term strategy as well as tactical and operational challenges in order to keep a smooth partnership with your customers. Many people are involved from both your and the customers' side.

As the Key Account Manager you have the overall responsibility to ensure that operations work seamlessly, here and now (*Ed. Some companies try to offload this onto other staff. It doesn't work, customers don't accept it.*), but you also need to stay one step ahead in understanding coming needs and to feed these back into your organization.

It's within this last step, understanding needs and feeding them back into your organization, that Customer Experience Management (CEM) processes can serve your interest the most.

Working on the frontline, meeting customers on a regular basis, means that you will receive a constant flow of customer feedback, both negative and positive. Through this you have a unique position within your organization, since you have a much clearer understanding than your backstage

colleagues of how your products and services are received by the market.

Unfortunately, often there are no established processes to make sure that these customer insights are debriefed from the frontline and brought straight back to functions like R&D, Marketing, Production, top management and all other support functions. They need these insights to understand what to prioritize in order to improve the customer's experience and make it easy to do business with you.

As Key Account Managers it's in your interest to develop the CEM process, or urge your executive leaders to understand how important it is to base all decisions on real customer needs.

The 3-step process of Customer Experience Management

Step 1 – Listen

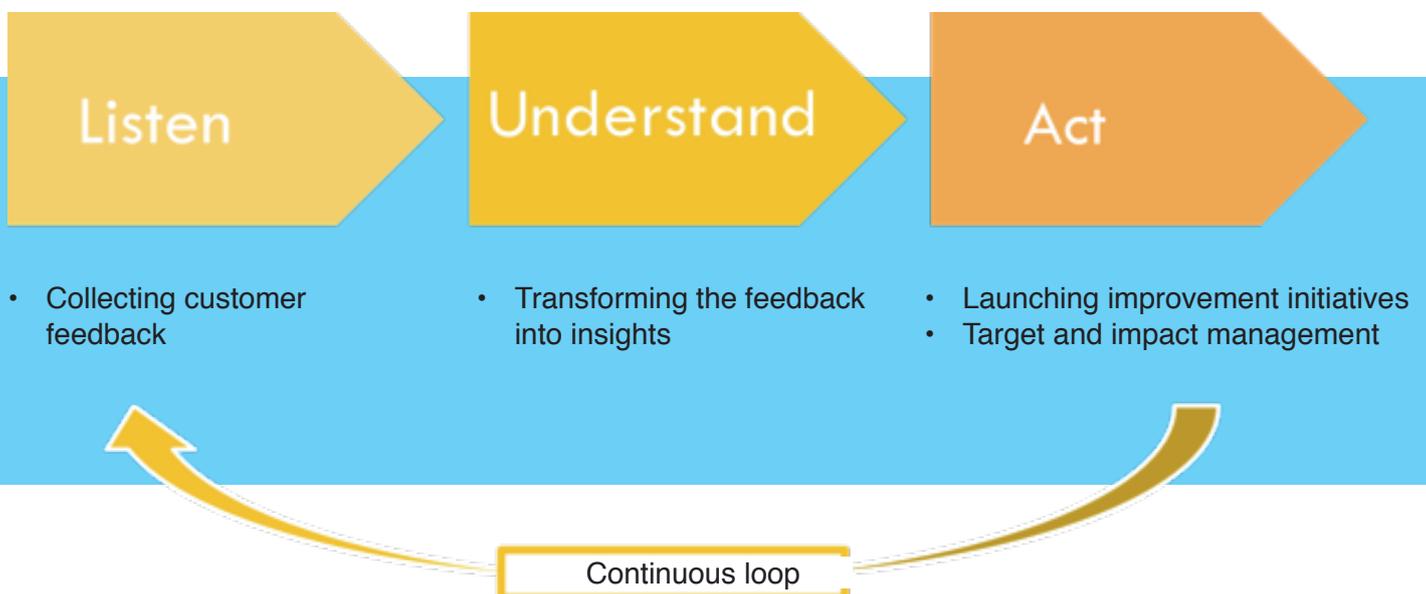
The first part of the CEM-process is about being able to listen to your customers.

You know all about this, but remember that the rest of the organization rarely meets customers and they don't have access to first-hand feedback. Help

them to see what you already know by collecting feedback from different customer segments in a structured way. Analyze and interpret the gathered feedback and help the support functions to see their own work from the customer's perspective. Help them to become better in supporting you by improving the customer experience.

E-mail surveys are recommended to start with since they are reliable, have a global reach and are quite cheap to set up. Send them out twice per year and try to reach customers from all segments and markets. Surveys are quantitative which means that they are efficient when it comes to numeric questions (e.g. 'How likely is it that you would recommend us to someone you know, on a scale 0-10?'). The answers will provide you with insight on how your KPIs are developing and it will show you what major problem areas you have. But the method will not give you answers on why the customers experience problems or what to do to avoid these problems.

For this you should also introduce a second step in collecting the feedback: the qualitative method. This is typically an interview, which can be a face-to-face meeting or conducted over the telephone. It's an expensive method



Steering the customer experience (cont.)

since it takes quite long time, and therefore has limited reach. Save this for your largest accounts and introduce it as a yearly evaluation session where you discuss your cooperation and how to deepen your partnership. This is where you ask the customer what they would like you to change – What should we do differently to make it easier for you to do business with us?

By combining both the quantitative surveys and the qualitative interviews you will get a good understanding of which areas to improve and what the customers think you should do.

Step 2 - Understand

This is when you analyze all the customer feedback that you have collected.

At first it seems as if you have gathered an endless amount of customer voices and unique feedback, but after a while you will start to see a pattern. The feedback is saying more or less the same thing and usually there is not more than 5-8 unique root problems that the customers are addressing.

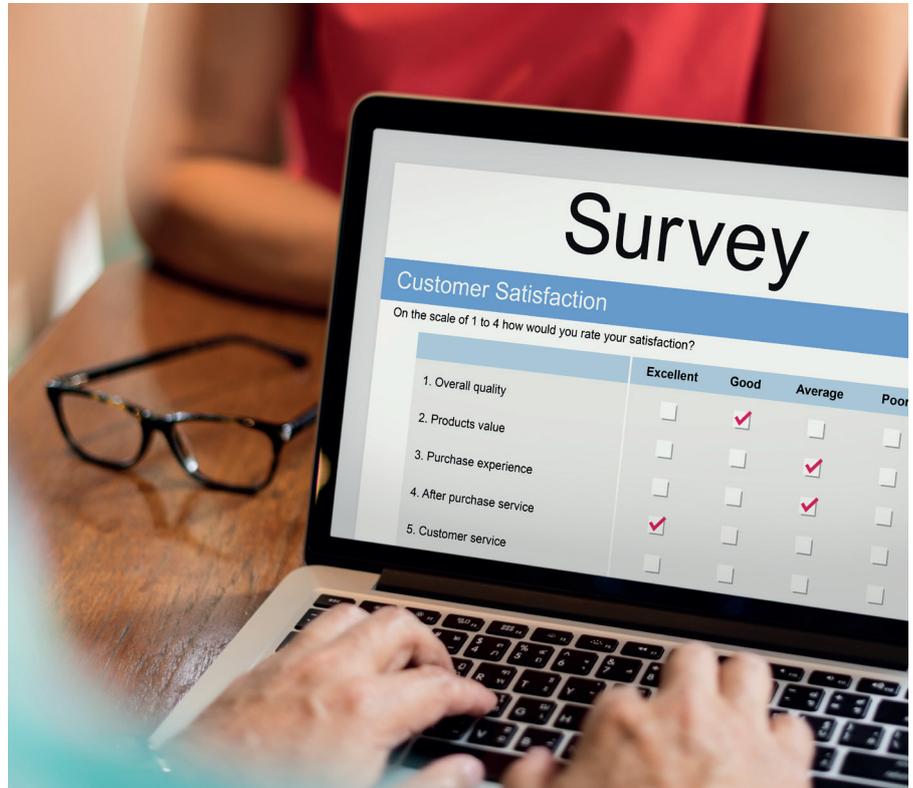
These problems, or focus areas, is where the key to improving the experience lies. But not all problems are equally important, and you shouldn't invest equal resources in improving all of them.

The trick is to determine how much each of these problems drives negative customer satisfaction and to rank them accordingly. Let the customers tell you the ranking of each problem area when you collect the feedback in step 1.

Lastly you need to quantify each problem area to understand how much of your customer base shares the same problems. This is important: it can be that you are only collecting feedback from a specific customer segment or from a specific geographical market and thereby not capturing the statistical truth.

Step 3 – Act

The last stage is the hardest. This is where the business must step up and take over.



Insights should be shared with a cross functional team in which all parts of the business are represented. The problem areas are discussed and ranked according to how much they drive customer satisfaction. Together you will come up with several ideas of improvement initiatives. Some of the ideas are quick and rather simple to implement, whilst others are complex and require major changes within internal processes or IT systems.

The problem areas will 'belong' to different parts of the organization and their processes. So it's natural that the solution lays within their ownership as well, and the improvement initiatives should be run and reported by that part of the organization. Usually this means that, due to the customer feedback gained, some parts of the organization need to change and do things differently, which naturally will meet some resistance at first. But use the customer feedback, which represents statistical proof of how urgent are certain problem areas, to help you build

a business case to create engagement from all parts of your company.

Customer driven business development

The 3-step process never ends but is a continuous loop. Your customer surveys and interviews should never stop and the analyzing of data should, after some time, not only bring attention to new problems but also eventually start to show results. Customers will stop complaining about issues that you have addressed and fixed and the surveys should confirm that.

In this way you will have a never-ending customer driven business development process up and running. Customer Experience Management is a pragmatic way to help your organization become more customer centric through understanding and acting upon the customer's needs.

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