

Skills4Retail
Building sustainable growth

Leadership in the Experience Economy

Workshop 4: Six Pillars of Customer Experience Excellence

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Objectives

- The Objectives of this workshop is to give a clear understanding of the 6 Pillars of Customer Experience and show how they can positively impact work in a retail setting

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environments
organization
interaction
(in)direct
contact
journey
feedback
business
expectations
relationship
brand
touchpoints
CUSTOMER
EXPERIENCE

What is Customer Experience (CX)?

Customer Experience (CX) refers to the overall perception and emotional impression that a customer forms based on every interaction they have with a brand, product, or service—before, during, and after the purchase

It encompasses the entire customer journey, including:

- Marketing and awareness
- Sales and onboarding
- Product or service use
- Customer support and issue resolution
- Post-purchase engagement and loyalty programmes

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Why is Customer Experience Important?

- Drives loyalty and retention – customers are more likely to return and recommend
- Impacts revenue – positive experiences increase spending and lifetime value
- Differentiates brands – in competitive markets, experience often trumps price or product alone
- Boosts employee engagement – happy customers often reflect a strong internal culture

CX is not a single moment—it's the sum of all moments, companies that excel in CX, design every aspect of their business around the customer's needs, expectations, and emotions

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Introduction to the 6 Pillars (Overview)



How the 6 Pillars Were Developed

- KPMG's six pillars of customer experience excellence were originally designed for the retail industry
- They are now however accepted across many sectors as a clear framework for Customer Experience
- The 6 pillars are an outstanding framework in which to build a sustainable and successful Customer Experience model

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What is Personalisation in CX?

- Personalisation in customer experience (CX) is the practice of tailoring products, services, and interactions to the unique needs, preferences, and behaviours of individual customers.
- This is achieved by leveraging customer data, such as past purchases, browsing history, and demographic information, to deliver relevant content, recommendations, and support at every stage of the customer journey

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The Impact on Brand Loyalty & NPS

- Brand loyalty significantly influences consumer behaviour, driving over 80% of repeat purchases in many markets.
- This profound connection between consistent preference and purchasing habits defines how companies build enduring customer relationships

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Best-in-Class Example: Amazon or Ritz-Carlton





Best-in-Class Example: Amazon or Ritz-Carlton

Amazon has revolutionised customer experience through relentless focus on convenience, speed, and personalisation.

From its "1-Click" ordering to same-day delivery in many regions, Amazon has set a new standard for seamless shopping. Its recommendation engine tailors product suggestions based on customer behaviour, while features like easy returns and real-time tracking reinforce trust and satisfaction.

Amazon’s customer-first culture, famously championed by Jeff Bezos who insisted on an empty chair at meetings to represent the customer, has shaped a service model where friction is minimised and expectations are consistently exceeded

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Best-in-Class Example: Amazon or Ritz-Carlton

The Ritz-Carlton delivers customer experience excellence through a deeply personalised, emotionally intelligent service culture.

Each employee is empowered to spend up to $2,000 to resolve a guest issue without seeking management approval, reinforcing a culture of ownership and trust. Staff are trained to notice and remember guest preferences — from favourite drinks to room setup — turning stays into memorable experiences.

The brand's service philosophy, "We are Ladies and Gentlemen serving Ladies and Gentlemen," reflects a commitment to dignity, respect, and excellence at every touchpoint, creating not just loyalty but genuine emotional connection with guests

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Comparison Group Discussion

- Both are brilliant yet very different. Discuss where both have similar traits and how they deliver excellence in different ways. Where are the learnings from both Amazon and Ritz Carlton that you could bring back with you to your business?





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What is Integrity in Customer Experience?

- Integrity in CX means consistently acting with honesty, transparency, and strong moral principles in every customer interaction. It involves delivering on promises, being truthful about products and services, maintaining ethical standards in pricing and service, and taking responsibility for mistakes

- Businesses that demonstrate integrity build trust, foster loyalty, and enhance their reputation, which are essential for long-term customer relationships and success

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What Integrity Means in CX

- Integrity is an outcome of consistent organisational behavior that demonstrates trustworthiness.
- There are trust-building events where organisations have the need to publicly react to a difficult situation, and trust building moments where individual actions by staff add up to create trust in the organisation as a whole.
- For all customers, it is the degree to which the organisation delivers on its promises that is consistently top of mind

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What Expectations Means in CX?

- In CX ‘expectations’ refer to the standards and outcomes that customers anticipate when interacting with a business, across products, services and every touchpoint
- These expectations are shaped by previous experiences, industry norms, marketing, and recommendations
- The expectations may be based on how the business promises its customers, and whether or not it delivers on the promise

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What Influence can CX have on trust and loyalty

- A positive experience builds trust by meeting or exceeding customer expectations, ensuring transparency, and delivering, consistent reliable service
- Trust is established when companies communicate clearly, respond quickly and do what they promise
- Transparency and empathy in interactions are increasingly important, especially as consumers become more discerning about how brands use technology and data

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How Exceeding Expectations Drives Loyalty

- Exceeding (not simply meeting) customer expectations can significantly boost loyalty and retention, as customers who feel ‘wowed’ are much more likely to stay with a brand, make repeat purchases and recommend it to others

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Best-in-Class Example: Apple or Disney





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Best-in-Class Example: Apple or Disney

Apple creates outstanding customer experiences by seamlessly blending innovative product design with intuitive service touchpoints, ensuring every interaction feels personalised and effortless

Disney delivers magical customer experiences through storytelling, attention to detail, and a deeply embedded culture of exceeding guest expectations at every moment





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What is Time and Effort in CX

- Time and Effort in CX refer to how much work, measured in time, energy, and resources, a customer must invest with a company

- Effort is measured by the Customer Effort Score (CES), a key CX metric that captures how easy or difficult it is for customers to interact with a business

- Time is a component of effort, such as how long a customer waits for a response or how quickly they can complete their shopping goal. The less time required, is usually the better experience

- In summary, minimising the time and effort customers spend is crucial for a positive customer experience and long-term loyalty

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Best-in-Class Example: Spotify or EasyJet Mobile Check-In

Best-in-Class Example: Spotify or EasyJet Mobile Check-In

- **Spotify** demonstrates time and effort excellence by delivering a seamless, intuitive user experience that reduces friction at every step of the listening journey.
- From personalised playlists to smart search functionality and offline listening, Spotify anticipates user needs and eliminates unnecessary steps, allowing users to access and enjoy their music effortlessly.
- Features like “Daily Mix,” “Discover Weekly,” and “Smart Shuffle” minimize decision fatigue, saving users time while enhancing satisfaction. Its clean interface, responsive design, and smooth transition between devices ensure that users spend less time navigating and more time immersed in content they love

Best-in-Class Example: Spotify or EasyJet Mobile Check-In

- **EasyJet's** mobile check-in process exemplifies time and effort excellence by streamlining travel administration into a quick, user-friendly experience.
- The app allows customers to check in, choose seats, download boarding passes, and receive real-time updates with just a few taps—significantly reducing queues and wait times at the airport.
- By enabling features like mobile passport scanning and auto-reminders for check-in, easyJet empowers travelers to manage their journey more efficiently and with greater control.
- This commitment to reducing hassle enhances customer confidence and loyalty while reinforcing easyJet's brand promise of low-cost, convenient travel

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How the 6 Pillars influence brand loyalty and Net Promoter Score (NPS)





Correlation to Repeat Business & NPS

Apple and Amazon—two brands with high NPS—consistently lead in repeat business because they:

- Set expectations clearly
- Deliver reliably
- Fix problems proactively
- Reward loyalty
- Create emotional engagement with their brand

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Correlation to Repeat Business & NPS

- If you track NPS, you are indirectly measuring the likelihood of repeat business
- Use NPS feedback to reduce friction, strengthen emotional loyalty, and create “wow” moments—this will naturally improve your retention and repeat purchase rates



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Resolution as a Trust-Building Opportunity

- How a business resolves issues plays a big part in building trust with the customers



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Resolution as a Trust-Building Opportunity

- Resolution is a powerful trust-building opportunity in retail, as how a brand responds to problems often leaves a stronger impression than the issue itself.
- When handled with empathy, speed, and accountability, effective resolution can transform a negative experience into a moment of loyalty reinforcement.
- Customers want to feel heard and valued, and a prompt, fair response signals that the business genuinely cares.
- For example, clothing retailer Zappos is renowned for its no-hassle return policy and empowered customer service teams who go above and beyond to resolve issues—even sending flowers to customers after particularly challenging situations. This approach not only fixes the problem but also builds long-term emotional trust and advocacy

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How Quick, Fair Recovery Boosts Loyalty

- In the fast-paced world of retail, service failures are inevitable — but how a business responds can significantly impact customer loyalty.
- A quick and fair recovery process demonstrates that the company values its customers and is committed to making things right.
- When issues are resolved promptly, transparently, and with empathy, customers often feel more appreciated than if the problem hadn't occurred at all. This phenomenon, known as the *service recovery paradox*, highlights that effective recovery can actually strengthen customer trust and loyalty. In a competitive retail environment, businesses that train their teams to handle complaints with fairness, empowerment, and speed not only retain customers but often turn them into vocal advocates

Empowering staff to resolve issues at source

- Empowering staff to resolve issues at source is critically important in delivering exceptional customer experience, especially in retail.
- When frontline employees have the authority, confidence, and tools to fix problems immediately, it prevents frustration from escalating and shows customers that the business trusts its people to do the right thing.
- This not only leads to quicker resolutions but also creates a more seamless and personalised experience. Empowered staff are more engaged, feel valued, and take ownership of the customer journey — all of which contribute to increased satisfaction, loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth.
- In contrast, rigid hierarchies and delays in decision-making often result in lost trust and missed opportunities to turn service failures into moments of loyalty

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Empowering staff to resolve issues at source

- John Lewis is well known for empowering its employees—referred to as Partners—to resolve customer issues directly and with discretion.
- Partners are trusted to take initiative in delivering excellent service, whether by offering immediate solutions, fast-tracking replacements, or even arranging complimentary services when appropriate.
- This empowerment is backed by a strong culture of ownership as the business is employee-owned, which motivates staff to act in the customer's best interest. The result is a consistently high level of service and a reputation for trust, care, and reliability across its stores in the UK

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Empowering staff to resolve issues at source - (see handout)

- Discussion - How important is it to empower staff to resolve issues at source?



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Human Connection in The Experience Economy



Human Connection in The Experience Economy

- In the Experience Economy, where customers seek memorable and emotionally resonant interactions, human connection is a key differentiator that drives loyalty and value. While technology enables convenience and scale, it is the warmth, empathy, and authenticity of human interactions that create lasting impressions. Whether it's a friendly greeting, a moment of genuine understanding, or personalised support, these connections turn transactions into experiences.
- Brands that invest in emotionally intelligent, customer-focused teams can create a sense of belonging and trust that no algorithm can replicate—transforming everyday service into something truly memorable

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Emotional Drivers Behind Loyalty & Advocacy

- The emotional drivers behind loyalty and advocacy go beyond functional satisfaction and into how a brand, service, or experience makes a customer feel. When these emotional needs are consistently met, customers not only return — they become advocates, recommending the brand to others. Below are key emotional drivers that influence both loyalty and advocacy



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Emotional Drivers Behind Loyalty & Advocacy

1. Trust

- Why it matters: People stay loyal to brands they believe are reliable, honest, and consistent.Impact on advocacy: Trust breeds confidence to recommend a brand to others without fear of it backfiring

2. Feeling Valued and Appreciated

- Why it matters: Customers who feel seen and appreciated are more likely to return and speak positively about their experiences
  Examples: Personalised service, thank-you gestures, loyalty rewards that feel meaningful.

3. A Sense of Belonging or Connection

- Why it matters: When a brand creates a community or makes customers feel part of something bigger, it taps into our social and identity needs
- Impact on advocacy: People advocate for brands that reflect their identity and values

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Emotional Drivers Behind Loyalty & Advocacy

4. Positive Surprise and Delight

- Why it matters: Going above expectations creates emotional highs — a powerful anchor for memory and loyalty. Examples: Unexpected upgrades, proactive problem resolution, kind gestures

5. Feeling Understood

- Why it matters: Brands that demonstrate empathy and emotional intelligence make people feel safe and cared for.
  Impact: These experiences build strong emotional bonds and make customers feel seen as individuals

6. Empowerment and Control

- Why it matters: Customers who feel in control of their journey (e.g. through intuitive digital interfaces or flexible options) experience confidence and autonomy
- Link to loyalty: Reduces stress, increases satisfaction, and enhances repeat engagement

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Emotional Drivers of Customer Experience

Emotional Driver	What Customers Need to Feel	Experience That Builds Loyalty	Resulting Advocacy Behaviour
Trust	Safe, confident, secure	Consistent service, transparency, reliable problem-solving	Will recommend brand confidently
Feeling Valued	Appreciated, not just a number	Personalised communication, gratitude gestures	Becomes emotionally invested in brand
Belonging & Connection	Part of something meaningful	Community engagement, shared rituals, insider status	Speaks as part of the brand community
Surprise & Delight	Excited, emotionally uplifted	Exceeding expectations, small surprises	Shares stories and experiences proactively
Being Understood	Seen as a person, not a transaction	Empathetic support, tailored solutions	Advocates brand's human touch
Empowerment	In control, confident, respected	Self-service options, intuitive design, flexibility	Endorses brand for ease and freedom
Shared Values	Aligned, inspired, loyal	Ethical sourcing, sustainability, inclusivity campaigns	Champions brand's purpose publicly
Recognition	Important, acknowledged, loyal	Loyalty tiers, thank-you notes, special treatment	Shares loyalty perks and recommends joining

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Understanding the Six Pillars of Customer Experience



Applying the Six Pillars in Practice: Real-World Examples and Best Practices









Personalisation

1. Personalisation: Tailor Every Touchpoint

- Best Practice: Use customer data to personalise communications, offers, and service interactions

- Example: Amazon recommends products based on browsing and purchase history, creating a highly personalised online shopping experience

- Tip: Train staff to use names, remember preferences, and follow up on past interactions

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Integrity

2. Integrity: Act with Honesty and Transparency

- Best Practice: Deliver on promises and admit mistakes when they happen

- Example: Zappos built a brand on trust by offering free returns and encouraging staff to act in the customer's best interest—even if it means recommending a competitor

- Tip: Embed a culture of ethical decision-making and reward behaviour that reflects brand values

Expectations

3. Expectations: Set and Surpass Them

- Best Practice: Proactively manage expectations through clear communication and consistent delivery

- Example: Ritz-Carlton empowers employees with a discretionary budget to resolve guest issues, often exceeding expectations in the process

- Tip: Use preemptive messaging e.g., delays or updates, to align expectations before issues arise

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Resolution

4. Resolution: Fix It Fast—and Well

- Best Practice: Empower frontline teams to resolve issues quickly without escalation

- Example: JetBlue Airways turned a customer service complaint into a viral win by responding within minutes on social media and offering an immediate resolution

- Tip: Track and analyse common complaints to identify systemic fixes, not just one-off solutions

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Time and Effort

5. Time and Effort: Make It Easy

- Best Practice: Map the customer journey to identify friction points and streamline processes

- Example: Apple reduces in-store wait times with mobile checkouts and self-service options, making the experience seamless

- Tip: Look for ways to digitise repetitive tasks or enable customers to self-serve when appropriate

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Empathy

6. Empathy: Understand and Care Deeply

- Best Practice: Train staff in active listening and emotional intelligence

- Example: Southwest Airlines employees are trained to look beyond the transaction, offering compassion and flexibility during moments of customer stress e.g., missed flights due to bereavement

- Tip: Collect qualitative feedback (not just scores) to understand the emotional tone of interactions

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Employee Experience as a Driver of Customer Experience



Employee Experience as a Driver of Customer Experience

- Employee experience is a powerful driver of customer experience, as engaged, valued, and empowered employees are far more likely to deliver exceptional service. When staff feel supported, trusted, and aligned with the organisation's purpose, that positivity naturally extends to customer interactions. A culture that prioritises wellbeing, clear communication, recognition, and development fosters employees who are not only more productive but also more emotionally invested in the customer journey. Simply put, happy employees create happy customers—making employee experience not just a HR priority, but a strategic imperative for delivering consistent, high-quality customer experiences

Internal Communication & Culture Alignment



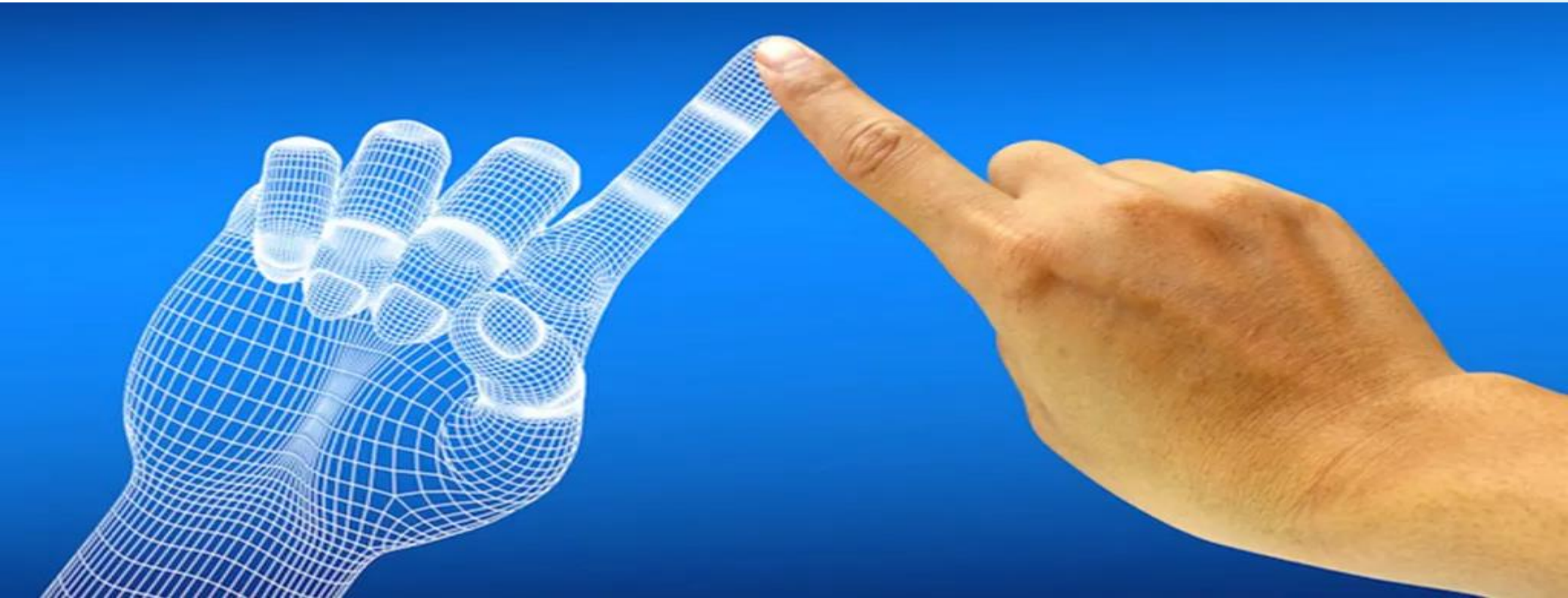


Internal Communication & Culture Alignment

- Internal communication and culture alignment are foundational to a cohesive and high-performing workplace. Effective internal communication ensures that employees at all levels are informed, engaged, and aligned with the organisation's goals, values, and strategic direction. When communication is clear, consistent, and two-way, it fosters trust and encourages collaboration, innovation, and accountability. Culture alignment happens when the way people behave and make decisions reflects the stated values and mission of the organisation. Together, strong internal communication and culture alignment create a unified environment where employees feel connected to a shared purpose, boosting morale, retention, and overall organisational performance

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Digital vs Human Touch in Applying the 6 Pillars



Digital vs Human Touch in Applying the 6 Pillars

- Balancing digital efficiency with the human touch across the Six Pillars of Customer Experience—Personalisation, Integrity, Expectations, Resolution, Time & Effort, and Empathy—is essential for delivering exceptional service. Digital tools can streamline processes, offer convenience, and personalise experiences at scale, particularly under the pillars of Time & Effort and Expectations. However, the human touch remains vital in moments that require emotional intelligence, trust-building, and nuanced understanding—key elements of Empathy, Integrity, and Resolution. For example, while a chatbot might handle routine queries swiftly, a compassionate human response is irreplaceable in resolving sensitive issues or demonstrating authentic care. True customer experience excellence lies in knowing when to automate and when to humanise, ensuring that technology enhances rather than replaces meaningful connections

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Digital vs Human Touch in Applying the 6 Pillars

> **You've got to start with the customer experience and work backwards for the technology. You can't start with the technology and try to figure out where you're going to try to sell it.**
>
> — Steve Jobs

Measuring Across the 6 Pillars

- It is important to measure how our business is doing based on the 6 Pillars of Customer Experience. By using the framework, we can measure for improvement.



CX Self-Assessment Tool Based on the 6 Pillars

A Customer Experience (CX) Self-Assessment Tool based on the Six Pillars of Customer Experience—Personalisation, Integrity, Expectations, Resolution, Time & Effort, and Empathy—is a practical framework that helps organisations evaluate how well they are delivering on the key drivers of customer loyalty and advocacy. The tool typically includes a series of reflective questions, rating scales, or indicators for each pillar, allowing teams to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. For example:

- Under Personalisation, it may ask: *"Do we use customer data to tailor interactions in a way that adds value?"*
- For Integrity: *"Do customers trust our brand to act in their best interests?"*
- For Expectations: *"Are we clear and consistent in what we promise—and do we deliver?"*

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CX Self-Assessment Tool Based on the 6 Pillars

- For Resolution: *"How effectively and empathetically do we resolve customer complaints or problems?"*
- Under Time & Effort: *"Do we make it easy for customers to get what they need without unnecessary steps?"*
- And for Empathy: *"Do customers feel genuinely heard, valued, and understood?"*

By scoring and reflecting on each area, organisations can benchmark their current CX performance, prioritise key initiatives, and track progress over time. When used consistently, the tool fosters a culture of continuous improvement and customer-centric thinking across all departments

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A Checklist for Six Pillar Implementation

Integrity

- [ ] We focus on creating a great first impression to establish trust from the outset
- [ ] We have identified key trust-building moments and ensure we deliver on them
- [ ] As a company we stand for something more than profit for shareholders
- [ ] Our people are wholly competent at what they do
- [ ] Our people are likeable and engaging
- [ ] We always keep our promises and do what we say we will do

Resolution

- [ ] Our people take clear ownership of an issue and see it through
- [ ] We provide accurate and consistent answers at point of contact
- [ ] We resolve issues at first point of contact
- [ ] We practice heroic recovery and react immediately to customer issues
- [ ] We provide accurate timescales for problem resolution
- [ ] We equip customers to resolve problems themselves if they prefer to

A Checklist for Six Pillar Implementation



Expectations

- ☐ We know the set of expectations that customers bring to interactions with us
- ☐ We use this knowledge to accurately set and manage customer expectations
- ☐ We understand where in the customer journey we need to be accurate in delivering on expectations
- ☐ We are careful when we set expectations, even in small ways



Time and Effort

- ☐ We are clear on the return on time we provide to our customer for every interaction
- ☐ We make the customer's time investment pleasurable
- ☐ We inform the customer as to the time investment they need to make to achieve their objective
- ☐ We are clear on next steps and what may go wrong
- ☐ We systematically remove unnecessary steps in the process

A Checklist for Six Pillar Implementation

Personalisation

- [ ] We show the customer we know them
- [ ] We understand and follow their preferences
- [ ] We show the customer we recognise our history together
- [ ] We find interesting ways to show how we use the individual knowledge we have of the customer to better serve them
- [ ] We apply our knowledge to put the customer in control at point of need
- [ ] We show the customer we value them and their business

Empathy

- [ ] Our people invest time to listen to their customers
- [ ] Our people are able to give the right emotionally intelligent response based on the customer's emotional needs
- [ ] Our people establish an emotional connection with customers at every interaction
- [ ] Our people make this connection by expressing our brand
- [ ] Our people are able to show that they care personally about the customer

A Checklist for Six Pillar Implementation

- The above 3 slides or the *'Checklist for Six Pillar Implementation'* which is included in this topic support materials, offers the ability to regularly check how the business is performing against the Six Pillars

- Use the checklist to measure the level of six pillar implementation in your business

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Aligning Training & Onboarding with Pillars

- Aligning onboarding and training with the Six Pillars of Customer Experience Excellence helps embed customer-centricity from day one

- Training , evaluation, recognition will all help in ensuring that the six pillars are seen as an important element of the business

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The Role of Leadership in Sustaining CX Excellence

- The role of leadership in sustaining Customer Experience (CX) excellence is both strategic and cultural. Leaders set the tone, model the behaviours, and align the structures that embed CX into the organisation’s DNA

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Recap of the 6 Pillars and their Interconnectivity

Leadership Role	CX 6 Pillar Alignment	Human Skills Alignment
1. Setting the Vision	Expectations, Integrity	Strategic Thinking, Visioning, Communication
2. Modelling the Right Behaviours	Integrity, Empathy	Emotional Intelligence, Authenticity, Role Modelling
3. Empowering Teams	Personalisation, Resolution	Coaching, Empowerment, Trust-building
4. Making CX Measurable	Expectations, Time & Effort	Accountability, Analytical Thinking
5. Creating a CX Culture	Empathy, Integrity	Culture Building, Storytelling, Inclusion
6. Listening & Acting on Feedback	Empathy, Resolution	Active Listening, Responsiveness, Growth Mindset
7. Leading CX Innovation	Time & Effort, Personalisation	Change Leadership, Creativity, Customer Co-Design
8. Leading with Human Skills	All Six Pillars	Emotional Intelligence, Ethics, Collaboration

Group Activity/Breakout Discussion

- Using the Six Pillars - discuss in your group how you would apply each of these to real customer situations or issues



Reflection and Commitment: What Will You Do Differently Tomorrow?

- From this workshop on the Six Pillars of Customer Experience - consider what you will do different in your workplace tomorrow

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Key Takeaways - Discussion

- Discuss in your group, the key takeaways from this workshop

10 minute discussion - 10 minute feedback

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