The 3P Academy – Getting Busy People Fixing Tough Problems

Improvement Team's Guide to Customer Needs

In both lean and six sigma methods, understanding your customers is right at the heart of continuous improvement. In lean it's called value, in six sigma, voice of the customer. Why is it so important?

- In lean, anything which isn't meeting a customer need / adding customer value is a waste – a potential drain on resource, which could be better used elsewhere. Removing waste can improve efficiency, reduce process lead time and errors, and enhance customer experience
- Understanding value can help us to prioritise our potential improvements. If something's not adding value, don't waste time enhancing it
- Understanding our customers (and the value we bring) helps to strengthen relationships and our competitive position. It can also better equip us for favourable pricing negotiations
- It can help us innovate, enhancing products and services to better meet our customers' evolving needs; and to better manage expectations and customer experience where there are needs that we're unable to meet
- Understanding the full range of customer needs helps make sure we don't improve one area of performance at the accidental expense of another – which is alarmingly easy to do, unless we see things from the customers' perspective
- And any of our improvement project's secondary gains can also be reported as part of the project's successes

Let's start by unpacking what we mean by 'customer'. Because we're not just talking about the end consumer… Customer is anyone who's not taking part in the process, but has a requirement of it. That could be someone external to the business, like the Regulator… For example, if you're applying for a mortgage, you as the end customer don't care about being identity checked. You know you're who you say you are – but legally that check's required, making it a value-adding activity.

Customers could also be within the business. For example, the finance team might need data from a process to be able to correctly invoice clients; so generating that data is a value-added activity. Some processes might have only internal customers – those like payroll, or producing internal reports.

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People actually taking part in the process aren't customers. When teams first start to look at value and waste, there's often a lot of 'it has to happen so that' – a process step enables something else later in the process. That doesn't make it value-add, but a waste which we can't currently get rid of. It's still waste…

So one way to start identifying value and waste within our process is to map it, recording each of the process activities in sequence (this doesn't need to go deeply into detail about exactly how each step is carried out).

To be value-add, any process step must satisfy all 3 of these criteria:

1. The activity changes the item, or creates something which didn't previously exist
2. The change or what's created is something the customer specifically wants. Would they willing pay for that step?
3. It's the first time it's happened

If any process step fails to meet one or more of those criteria, then it's a waste. Even if it's one we can't currently get rid of…

So how do we know what our customers actually want?

You'll have noticed that to analyse our process steps this way, we do need to know what matters to our customers – what they'd be willing to pay for… So that's something which we explore right at the start of any improvement project. Some customer needs might already be captured in product specifications or service level agreements. But they don't reflect the full experience of dealing with us, which also needs to be understood.

Many organisations have systems for gathering customer feedback through regular surveys or after-contact pop-ups. Complaints, service requests or warranty claims can be useful data on the needs we're not meeting too well; and repeat business, reviews and referrals can indicate what we're getting right. But these metrics will only ever reflect some of the needs and expectations. There may be many others of which we're unaware (or could forget) if we're not having regular, open communications with our full range of customers.

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Let me ask you to think for a moment about some of your own needs… You're meeting up with friends for dinner on Friday evening, and you have to choose a restaurant. What needs would shape your choice? You might consider location, cost, type of food they serve, ambience…

These are the needs you're aware of, that you'll talk about when asked, and that you'll weigh up for different restaurants to choose. These are the types of needs you'll most hear about in conversation with your own customers. The types of need which we call **satisfiers**.

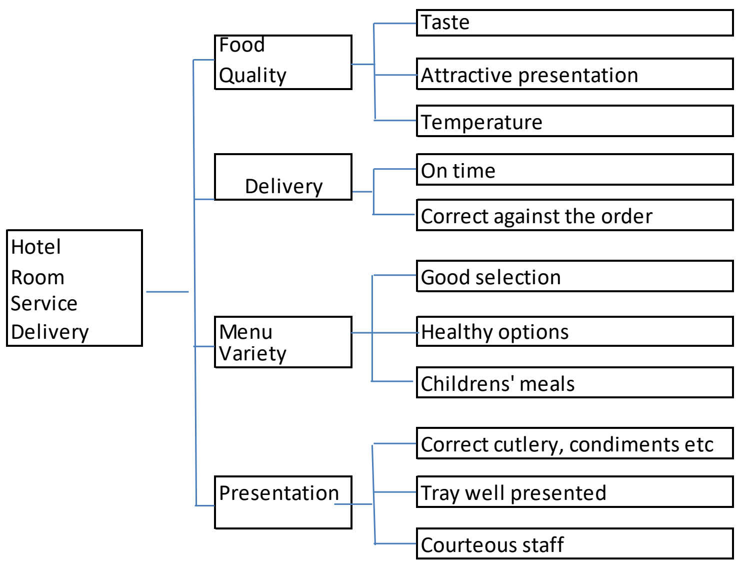
But there are two other types of needs to consider. In choosing your restaurant, you probably didn't include 'it doesn't give me food poisoning'. This is an example of a **dis-satisfier**. Something that's so much of a given, you didn't think to say it – but if that need isn't met, you've had a terrible experience.

Our third type of need is the **delighter** – the need you didn't even think of, until it's been met, then you've had a great experience. You choose your restaurant, not knowing that it's their 25th anniversary weekend. You turn up to find that they're celebrating by making all the drinks free. Woohoo!

And of course, these needs aren't static. What began as a delighter can become expected, the absence of which then becomes a dis-satisfier. If we're not regularly talking with customer, we might not know this. Their expectations are shaped by everyone else they deal with, not just us – which we'd also miss out on understanding without regular dialogue.

How do we record these needs?

The simplest way is in a diagram called a needs tree, which looks like this



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On the left hand side of the tree, we start with the name of the process, the product or the service whose customers we're talking about. The middle layer captures the group headings or categories of need, which then branch off to the individual needs themselves. The tree makes no mention of how we go about meeting those needs. For example, your customers don't care how you train your staff. But it might be important to them to be dealing with someone who works error-free, and is prompt and courteous – so that's what we'd capture on the tree.

Sometimes the categories of need are obvious – we can capture those first, then brainstorm the individual needs coming off each. But when you're working with operational teams, you can also capture it the other way round, using an affinity brainstorm.

Before the session

Decide who's taking part – you want a representative group from across the whole process, including any key internal customers, and people who have regular contact with external customers. Your ideal group size is 8-12 people.

Introduce people to the session aims, why you're doing it (especially if it's part of a wider improvement project, which your Charter can help you to introduce to them), how the session will run, and how you'll use its output.

If you're going to be working physically together, give each participant a pad of the oblong sticky-notes and a sharpie-type pen. If you're going to be working virtually, give them access to a suitable software like miro or mural, and show them how to generate 'sticky notes'.

Ask them to record the customer needs, each on its own note. For this, they'll often imagine going through the process as the customer, noting down their requirements as they come to mind. You might want to use different note colour for the needs of internal and external customers.

During the Session

Good facilitation is key. If you're wanting to take part in the session (adding your own ideas), ask someone else to facilitate.

The facilitator's role is to keep the session moving, park anything not directly related (set this as an expectation in your intro), give participants equal air-time, and make sure everything gets recorded.

You are allowed to edit notes to clarify, with the originator's approval.

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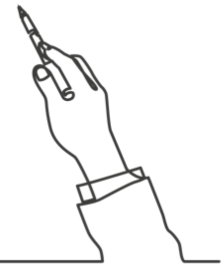
You'll need a big wall or suitable area on which to stick all the sticky-notes. Welcome your participants, quickly recap how the session will run, and what will happen afterwards. Then work your way round the room, inviting one note at a time, and sticking them up. Ask each person to read their next sticky-note. If the group agree it's related to one that's already there, stick it next to it. If not, stick it on its own. This means that you'll initially end up with about 20 individual notes – that's OK. If you're working virtually, the process is exactly the same – make sure only the facilitator is moving notes around, otherwise it gets really confusing.

Keep going, and categories of related ideas will start to emerge. As a category or common theme becomes clear, label it and focus in, asking for all other needs that fall under that category. New notes can be written during the session as new ideas pop up, building on each other's input.



No Evaluation is the general rule of brainstorming – saying whether an idea is good or bad is off limits. But you are allowed to test understanding and check for fit, and you should include this in your session introduction. So for example there's a note which someone doesn't understand, anyone in the room is welcome to ask for a little more information. It should be an open discussion.

This initial round-the-room capture typically takes about 40 minutes. Once you have this first draft, then reference any data or specific customer feedback, adding new notes for any additional needs which it highlights.

After the Session

- Share the context and needs tree with the participants and also the wider audience from the operational processes, inviting them to add any needs which might have been missed
- If possible, validate with real customers. Ask them to rank their key needs, or at least highlight which few are most important, to help guide your improvement priorities
- Make sure your operational metrics are fit for purpose, being properly aligned with customer value and driving the right behaviours to deliver the best customer experience
- In scoping an improvement, make sure your main target is something which matters to customers, and look what additional value you might deliver alongside your main goal (these will form bullets in your business case section of the charter)
- Keep it live – re-visit and update regularly as part of your on-going conversation and relationship building with key customers

Because your customers, and the value you add, are at the very heart of every thriving business…

3PAcademy
Performance through People and Process

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Introducing the 3P Academy - Getting Busy People Fixing Tough Problems

Delivering exceptional performance isn't easy, especially when everyone's busy. Even the most compelling vision and solid business case aren't always enough to deliver sustainable change, and the performance you know is possible.

The 3P Academy is dedicated to helping businesses like yours to develop a culture of world class continuous improvement, and the breakthrough KPI performance which it enables. Our support follows two parallel paths…

Performance through People

Your people are amazing – one of your biggest business assets. Some of the time…

Because no matter how talented, dedicated or experienced they are, every one of your people deals with stress and uncertainty every day: Competing priorities, difficult customers, tight deadlines…

They'll take most of those challenges in their stride. But the more they build up, the more they impact performance, which can easily snowball. So we embed the resilience, communication and influence skills to keep your people performing at their collective best, even under pressure.

Performance through Process

Process isn't usually a word to quicken the pulse with excitement. Yet there's a process for everything your business does, from welcoming new customers to creating your annual reports.

When they're working they get little attention, but when processes aren't at their best, the mistakes and work-arounds become a silent capacity thief – leaving less time for what everyone's really meant to be doing. And your KPIs get harder to maintain, let alone improve.

We're experts at getting operational teams delivering breakthrough process improvements, to enhance productivity, capacity and on-time delivery, reduce quality issues and complaints, and improve customer experience - leading to less stress, and a healthier bottom line.

Some of Our Key Numbers

People We've Trained

Over 1,000

Processes they've Improved

More than 5,000

Resulting annual value

Around £75million, and counting…

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What We Do

3P Academy Transformational Programmes

There's nothing we love more than working with you to embed the shared skills, systems and language of performance throughout your business. This is typically a 12 month programme, and suits a six-plus-figure business employing 50 or more people.

Every programme's designed bespoke, tailored to your specific needs, and is delivered bite-sized to fit into busy schedules. Workshop sessions are hands-on, so participants apply their new skills to deliver improvements as they learn – projects typically deliver between £15K and £250K of business value within the first few months.

A Guided Project or Process Improvement

For smaller businesses or those who want to focus on a specific improvement, we facilitate strategic projects and deliver the first significant step-change within a selected process area. Using our unique blend of continuous improvement and the latest behavioural science, this can also include Lean Six Sigma Yellow or Green Belt certification for your improvement champions.

Masterclasses and Keynote Presentations – developing Resourceful Thinking

Our interactive sessions are designed to equip your people to perform at their best, even under pressure. There are 12 topics, which can be delivered stand-alone for a conference or away-day, or as a series, including How to Keep Stress Useful, How to Deal with Uncertainty and Change, Handling Difficult Conversations and Effective Decision-Making.

Described as 'a vitamin boost for the emotional immune system', the most common outcomes include improved sleep quality, resolving repetitive worrying, improved motivation and problem-solving, and reduced friction in important relationships.

Developing Your Leaders

These half-day interactive Masterclasses equip your leaders to navigate the complexity of competing priorities, internal politics and challenging personalities, putting them at the heart of your developing improvement culture. Topics include how to influence and lead change, communicate more effectively, and deliver exceptional performance (even when everyone's busy).

Coaching and Consultancy

We also work one-to-one with individuals, and with leadership and change teams for personally tailored skills development. Designed to help you cut through the complexity to fast-track your improvements, overcome the blind spots, and deliver performance improvements more swiftly and smoothly.

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Introducing Sue Evans, 3P Academy Director

My whole career's been about creating effective, lasting change. I spent the first half of it embedding Continuous improvement within international organisations including Danone, Corning and Lloyds Banking Group. Highlights include two programmes which more than doubled site productivity, and delivering £1.9M waste reduction in under 5 months.

Hands-on experience at both ends of the World Class spectrum has given me a unique perspective for nurturing an improvement culture from any starting point.

Gaining my first Six Sigma Black Belt qualification over 25 years ago, I was part of a world-class business. Our strategy, systems and culture made breakthrough change straightforward. At the time I thought that was normal… On moving to my next role, I quickly discovered that it wasn't.

I moved to a business with no strategy, few systems, and none of the culture and infrastructure which I'd come to take for granted. So I set about creating it. I presented a no-spend, £1million saving initiative, only to be told "Don't worry about it". It was the first time I'd encountered a solid business case and plan getting no support. And it floored me.

But bit-by-bit, I found ways round the complacency and objections, engaging the operational teams to more than double productivity and halve process scrap, in less than 8 months. After delivering further £multi-million breakthroughs in a second from-scratch organisation, I established what's now evolved into the 3P Academy. Our programmes are carefully crafted from a signature blend of Continuous Improvement and Behavioural Science.

Across 10 years of delivering to around 25,000 people from hundreds of organisations, I've maintained an average feedback score of 9.2 out of 10. As well as supporting leadership teams to embed an improvement culture, I've mentored a diverse portfolio of projects, ranging from £15K to over £600K annual business value.

I'm a Master Practitioner and Trainer of NLP (neuro-linguistic programming), and an Approved Havening® Practitioner, trained in each by the original creators. I have a Diploma in CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy), a combined Diploma in Hypnotherapy, Coaching and NLP; and Institute of Leadership and Management certification as a Mentor and Coach. I'm also a Fellow of the Professional Speaking Association – one of less than 70 across the whole of the UK and Ireland.

It's my mission to get people fixing the problems which no one else has been brave enough to tackle. Because in many businesses, the answers to unlocking ground-breaking improvements are hiding right there, in plain sight. I believe in every individual's right to a challenging and fulfilling working life, and in every organisation's right to reap the rewards of building and supporting a capable and motivated workforce. That might sound idealistic, but the right know-how can make it your reality.

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