

Customer-Centric Culture

Guide to Customer-Centric Culture

July 2023

[ccw.org.uk](https://www.ccw.org.uk)

Report prepared for the
Consumer Council for Water by

dragonfish
culture + performance



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Section 1: Foreword By Emma Clancy

The most important element of any company's performance is its culture.

This may seem like a hyperbolic statement, however, if we break down what company culture refers to and the impact it has on an organisation, its importance becomes clear. Culture begins with what people do and how they do it – it drives many aspects of business performance and influences the decisions colleagues make every day – from the boardroom to the operational teams out in the field.

Successful organisations have a culture based on a widely shared set of beliefs supported by a clear strategy. Organisations need to ensure employees understand the benefits and feel connected to their strategy and vision, rather than feeling the negative effects of change in order to ensure alignment. Without this buy-in from staff, there is a risk to a business's success. Company culture is everyone's responsibility.

Now is the perfect opportunity to point the lens towards company culture. Our research¹ shows that trust in the water sector is falling but crucially, there is still time for this trend to reverse if companies focus on truly making their culture customer-centric. By developing a focus on culture and people, it

will also help the water sector to build better relationships with their customers, encourage them to trust them, and ultimately it will play a vital element in supporting the work they need to do to address the challenges the sector faces. We're asking companies to show a commitment to putting their customers first and demonstrate how they are developing a customer-centric culture.

To support the sector, we have commissioned this review to explore what a "customer-centric culture" consists of and how it can be measured so that objective comparisons can be made. This review identifies the key elements of an effective customer-centric culture, sets out some best practice principles and highlights a number of potential opportunities for future consideration.

CCW believes passionately that the sector needs to focus on culture and people and we would like companies to join us on this mission.



Emma Clancy
CEO, CCW

¹ <https://www.ccw.org.uk/publication/perception-and-trust-in-water-companies/>



Section 2: Executive Summary

Consumer Council for Water (CCW) is the independent voice for water consumers in England and Wales. CCW is responsible for championing customers' interests and supporting positive improvements in customer experiences and complaints resolution. To support this, CCW wants the sector to embrace the concept of developing a Customer-Centric Company Culture.

This research report commissioned by CCW, is based on research carried out by culture consultancy dragonfish in the first half of 2023. It explores the benefits of a Customer-Centric Company Culture and its impact on the customer, organisations, employees and partners. The research was conducted through desktop and document immersion, conversations with leaders both inside and outside the sector and a survey.

This report identifies the best practices and traits exhibited by organisations that have successful customer-centric cultures. It focuses on three key questions: how can companies: (1) build and shape, (2) measure and monitor and (3) publish and track their customer-centric cultures?

Trust is key. It acts as the 'ultimate currency' in the relationship that all institutions build with their stakeholders. Without trust, *'credibility is lost, and reputation can be threatened'* (Edelman, 2023). Being a customer-centric organisation means that the

customer trusts the business to have their interests at heart, that the customer matters, and that their promises have been met. The overall perceptions of the water sector impact a customer's perception of their water company. CCW's recent Water Matters found that in 2022, trust in water companies fell to 7.21 – down from 7.33 in 2021 – to reach its lowest score since monitoring began. While recent trust and perception research carried out by CCW shows that customer trust in the water sector is falling and that (50%) of people's perceptions of the water industry are negative, whilst only a third have positive (34%) perceptions. This is important because customer confidence impacts employees, too, as it's proven to affect recruitment and engagement. This is made more challenging when you consider that many employees of water companies are also customers.

A customer-centric culture can only be built by developing employees as well as considering the customer experience. Without motivated employees, building a customer-centric culture will be hard or impossible to achieve. Maintaining ongoing engagement and consistent dialogue around culture, particularly focused on customer-centricity, is key for embedding a customer-centric culture within an organisation. This means periodically assessing against culture through employee engagement surveys and pulses and implementing necessary measures to foster success.

When building a customer-centric culture, the sector operates within two unique settings.

- **Firstly**, the business models – most of which are commercially driven and have no customer choice. As customer choice is the primary corporate stimulation for developing customer-centric cultures, it removes a key impetus for change unless a complete understanding is applied to the value of customer-centric cultures.
- **Secondly**, the customers' and consumers' place in the product life cycle are unusual. Customers of the water sector are not simply end users of water, they are an integral part of the water cycle, and their behaviours and attitudes play a crucial role in ensuring future water sustainability. Water companies' roles and reliance on customers are growing over time as water sustainability becomes a more significant strategic challenge for the water sector and a point of significant investment. The customers' trust and positive, active engagement are essential about meeting future challenges and changes in consumer behaviours that are required over time.



A greater focus on raising the bar for employee engagement across the sector will help water companies to attract the best talent that they need to tackle future challenges.

A considerable opportunity exists for water companies to change the nature of their relationship with their customers, to become innovators and leaders in creating customer-centric cultures and, most importantly, to do this collaboratively across the sector and in partnership with the Regulators.

A unique opportunity exists to be innovative on transparency.

Currently, a customer, or any interested stakeholder, has to hunt through corporate websites to find meaningful insight and it is then limited to:

- Ofwat-set customer measures such as C-Mex
- Responses to specific studies such as the CCW's annual Water Matters or bi-annual Testing the Waters report
- Part of wider reports such as the Annual Performance Reports

It requires effort and energy to understand a water company's (and the water sector's) performance and, more importantly, what is being done to improve it. This lack of transparency potentially leaves the customer's main source of information as the press.

Enabling customer-centric culture within an organisation means designing the customer into the company's DNA: where employees collectively and individually share goals of creating great customer experiences so that every employee has a part to play.

This research uncovered 6 key traits that customer-centric organisations do:

- **Make customer and customer experience everyone's role** through training, regular connection with the customer, Customer Champion networks, and meaningful and consistent reward and recognition.
- Apply **customer-centric organisational design** (be it functional-, divisional-, matrix-, or team-based); this progress can be accelerated by addressing the traits of a customer-centric organisational design – i.e. the need for simplicity, clarity and transparency.
- By making the **customer the true North Star**, by prioritising customers' needs through a transparent and authentic 'Purpose, Vision, and Values' that is customer-focused, an organisation

can more easily create clarity and understanding with its employees and customers.

- Ensuring the **customer is embedded in the company's DNA** – this means putting 'belief' into everyday decisions and actions, effectively reflected in behaviours and designed and embedded in processes, systems and policies, consistently demonstrated across the Leadership and Manager population, and also over time.
- Gain a **deep understanding of their customers and utilise them as active partners to improve the customer journey**; this means hearing the customer's voice and ensuring this is articulated to the entire organisation in a way that can drive real, practical action.
- Having a **clear customer data strategy**; underpinning customer data architecture allows an organisation to proactively use the customer data they are entrusted with to drive better customer outcomes in a way that fully respects and protects their data and privacy rights.

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Leaders and managers play a critical role in driving customer alignment within their organisation, implementing strategic imperatives that support clear understanding. This means leaders must demonstrate customer-centricity underpinned by empathy while supporting and encouraging managers to recognise and celebrate positive behaviours that lead to significant customer impacts.

Through the research, opportunities were identified: (1) for greater alignment across and between regulated companies and the Regulators, and (2) for simplification of customer objectives and plans. There exists a wealth of high-quality thinking and advice within the sector, but gaining traction will be hard unless water companies' regulatory environments align on the essential components that make up a customer-centric culture and the

ambition, both in the near-term for today's customers, as well as in the medium to long-term for the customers of tomorrow.

Finally, on measurement and publishing the data, metrics that constitute customer-centric cultures come from both the customer and employee experience and therefore, recommendations for how to actively start to build customer-centric maturity and measure progress have been identified.

Failure to deliver customer outcomes could, in turn, lead to consumer pressure (via active press and media), which could lead to a shift in the current business model. Addressing customer-centricity today in the right way, ensures a sustainable business model for the future.



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Section 3: Introduction and Methodology

CCW identified research into Customer-Centric Company Culture as important to the water sector as part of its aim to support consumers and customers of water companies in England and Wales. The report aims to provide insight, guidance and best practice for how to embed this approach into ways of working and making an impact.

As a result, we refer to both customer and consumer interchangeably acknowledging that when individuals use the services of a water company, they inhabit a different role to the traditional consumer/organisation dynamic, becoming fully part of the water lifecycle.

The report aims to answer three questions, namely:

1. What are the key customer experience (CX) attributes of a customer-centric culture that drives sustained high performance?

· Definition: A 'CX attribute', for the purpose of this report, is the practical day-to-day things that one would see happen in a CX leading company that together drive their customer-centricity and their customer-led culture

2. How can a customer-centric culture be measured in a meaningful way so that it drives continuous organisational improvement and customer advocacy?

3. How can the above measures be published to drive true transparency and, ultimately, drive greater organisational trust?

How to use this guide

This report summarises key insights aiming to provide practical and actionable recommendations to build a Culture Centric Culture. For this report, a customer-centric culture is defined as follows:

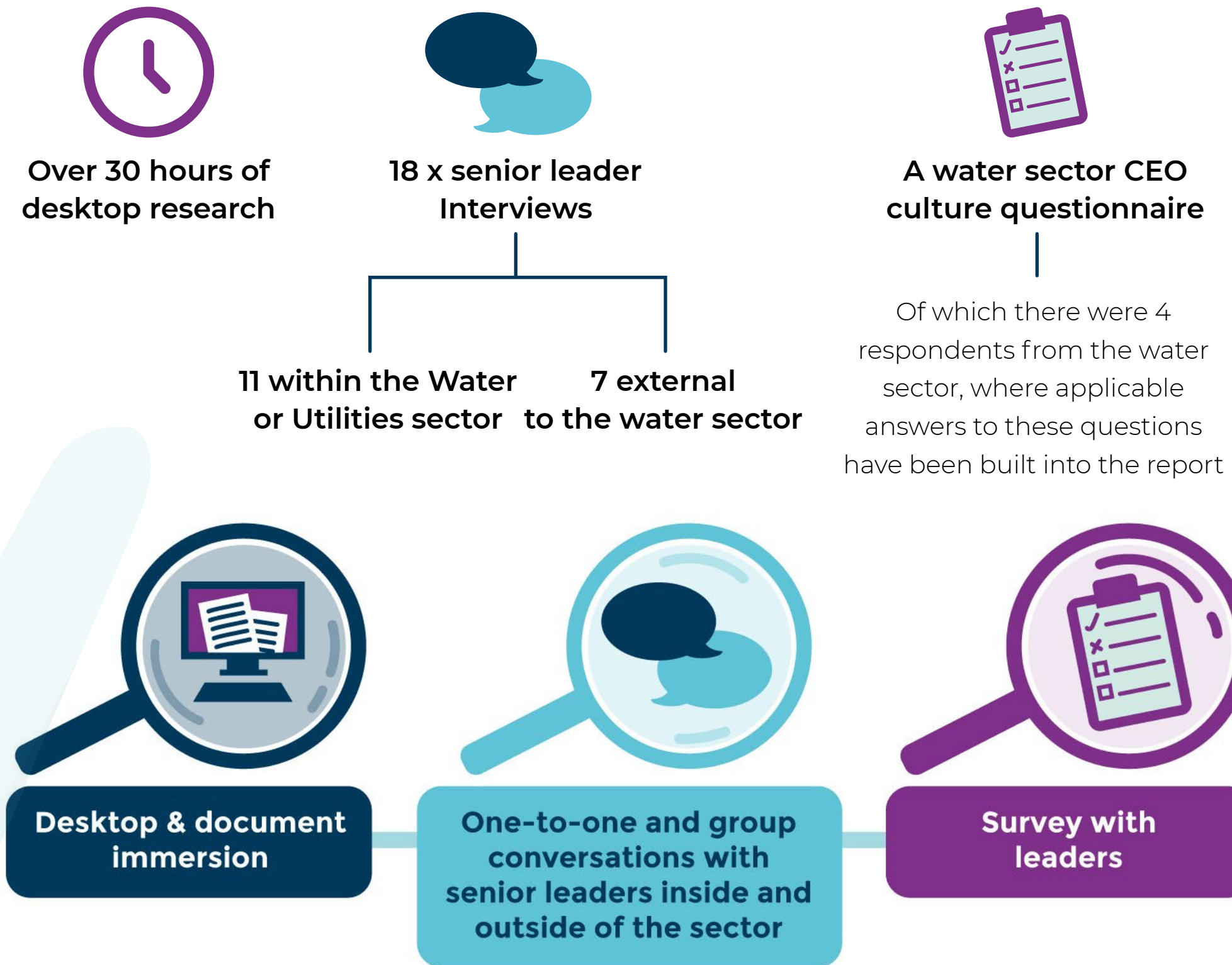
A customer-centric culture is an organisational culture that puts the customer at the heart of decisions and actions to deliver exceptional customer experiences and increase customer loyalty, trust and advocacy. customer-centric cultures aim to build close, meaningful connections between a company, its employees and its customers and, in doing so, fuel sustainable business growth.

Fostering a customer-centric culture benefits all companies, regardless of their structure or model. This report will principally apply to companies, but a wide range of stakeholders, including workers and investors, should also find it interesting.

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This research is predominantly informed by document and desktop immersion, conducted in tandem with a series of one-to-one interviews with senior Customer Directors of organisations to understand the importance of customer-centricity. To ensure that this report is impactful, a diverse research approach has been used that leverages insights from both within the UK water sector and externally.

To ensure richness and relevance the following research techniques were utilised:



Of which there were 4 respondents from the water sector, where applicable answers to these questions have been built into the report

Research findings inform this report, and key insights are summarised under **'The 6 Common Traits'** of leading customer-centric companies.

Figure 1 dragonfish's research scope and approach



Section 4: Customer-Centric Culture. A General Definition

Customer-centricity is an organisation's ability to truly understand its customers and anticipate their wants, needs, perceptions, and expectations.

Three things customer-centric organisations do:

1. Agree and be clear on who the customer is and have a shared and deep understanding of them.

"When you put your customers into the heart of your business, make customers part of the culture, then you become customer-centric"

Prof. Dumitrescu, 2007

2. Build a culture that encourages and empowers employees to act upon their heightened understanding of customers, using this knowledge and insight as a lens through which to make informed and data-led decisions.

"Customer-centricity is not the idea of being centred around 'the customer' in some faceless, nameless, generic way. It's about understanding which customers to be centred around. It's about gaining a strategic advantage by focusing on the right customer. And then to have the insight, the courage, the ability and the corporate alignment to prioritise those customers over the others"

Prof. Fader, n.d.

3. Think and feel like a customer to understand how every business decision, process change and customer touchpoint affects the customer experience. Ultimately, a customer-centric mindset permeates all aspects of the business that drives long-term customer value.

"The most customer-centric organisations can answer any question by deciding what's best for the customer, without ever having to ask."

Levie, 2011

"A customer-centric organisation is one where every decision is taken with the customer in mind... a customer-centric organisation will systematically align itself around the customer's needs. This affects every aspect of its behaviour – from its choices of who to hire to which strategy to adopt. In other words, customer-centricity is a mindset adopted by the executive leadership and baked deep into the organisation's operating model"

Cable, Colborne, and Harris, 2022

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Section 5: Developing a Customer-Centric Culture that is Meaningful and Practical

What does a customer-centric culture mean in practice?

Earlier in this report, we defined customer-centricity as the ability of an organisation to truly understand its customers and anticipate their wants, needs, perceptions and expectations. Customer-centric organisations put the customer at the centre of their decisions and actions relating to products and services; creating meaningful experiences to strengthen customer satisfaction, loyalty and advocacy. This involves gathering and analysing customer feedback, building and strengthening customer relationships and continuously adapting, evolving and improving to meet changing customer needs and expectations. These aspects need to intentionally infiltrate every aspect of the organisation – its culture: assets such as values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. These elements help a company express its personality and align its people as they collectively work towards delivering the purpose, mission and/or vision. By ensuring the customer is front-of-mind when considering all of these elements, you can develop a customer-centric culture.

“Organisational culture stems directly from the values shared by the organisation. It is the unwritten code of conduct made up of core values, cherished beliefs and priorities”

Gartner, n.d.

“Organisational culture is about who you are, what you do, why you exist, where you’re heading and how you’ll get there. Key to success is alignment, with everyone understanding the role they play to ensure the culture thrives.”

dragonfish

“Culture isn’t just one aspect of the game; it is the game. In the end, an organisation is nothing more than the collective capacity of its people to create value.”

Gerstner, 2002

“Human interactions can make or break success, culture is how your colleague feels about working on Monday on a Sunday night”

Dawn Creighton, Head of Customer Strategy, Performance and Experience, and Elouise Leonard-Cross, Head of People Strategy and Experience, Northumbrian Water.

“(It’s about recognising that) customers are key stakeholders in the business; they pay for everything we do – we need to deliver great service.”

Mike Gauterin, Customer Service Director, United Utilities

“We view culture as the cumulative effect of what people do and how they do it – and it determines an organisation’s performance.”

Dewar and Doucette, 2018

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A customer-centric culture will:

- Focus on building a deep understanding of customers and how they use/engage with their products - enabling teams to anticipate their needs and preferences more effectively
- Build empathy for customers across the organisation
- Engage customers, actively seeking out opinions, valuing feedback
- Promote a customer-first mindset with employees empowered to make decisions that prioritise customer's needs

A customer-centric culture, then, will have clearly-defined values, beliefs, behaviours and ways of working that actively support individuals and teams to focus on developing customer-centricity in their everyday actions, interactions and decisions. This, in turn, will enable teams to deliver their organisation's purpose, vision and strategy.

Intentionally shaping culture to enable customer-centricity is key. To enable a customer-centric culture means bringing the customer into the company's DNA: where employees collectively and individually share the goal of creating great customer experiences, and every employee has a part to play – from the CEO to the newest employee.



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Creating a Customer-Centric Culture starts with alignment

Evidence-based research points towards culture as a powerful factor in the long-term performance and effectiveness of organisations. The dragonfish research study Cracking the Culture Code takes this further to determine that culture alignment is a critical factor in high-performance and sustainable growth. When organisations harness and understand the links between their people, brand and customer, culture alignment can be achieved.

The culture alignment model below shows how the employee and customer experience are intrinsically linked and to maximise their impact, they should be managed together to create competitive advantage; identifying shared moments that matter.

This involves:

- **Employee experience** – an employee experience that goes beyond job satisfaction and emotional commitment; that carefully considers ways to dial up not only connection to the customer through day-to-day experiences but also designs processes and experiences that reflect the organisation’s purpose and values.

- **Brand and culture clarity** – a clearly articulated and compelling customer-centric culture framework and narrative including vision, purpose, mission, values and behaviours, embedded through the employee experience.

- **Customer experience** – with a focus on developing and maintaining customer-centricity, empathy, and insight.

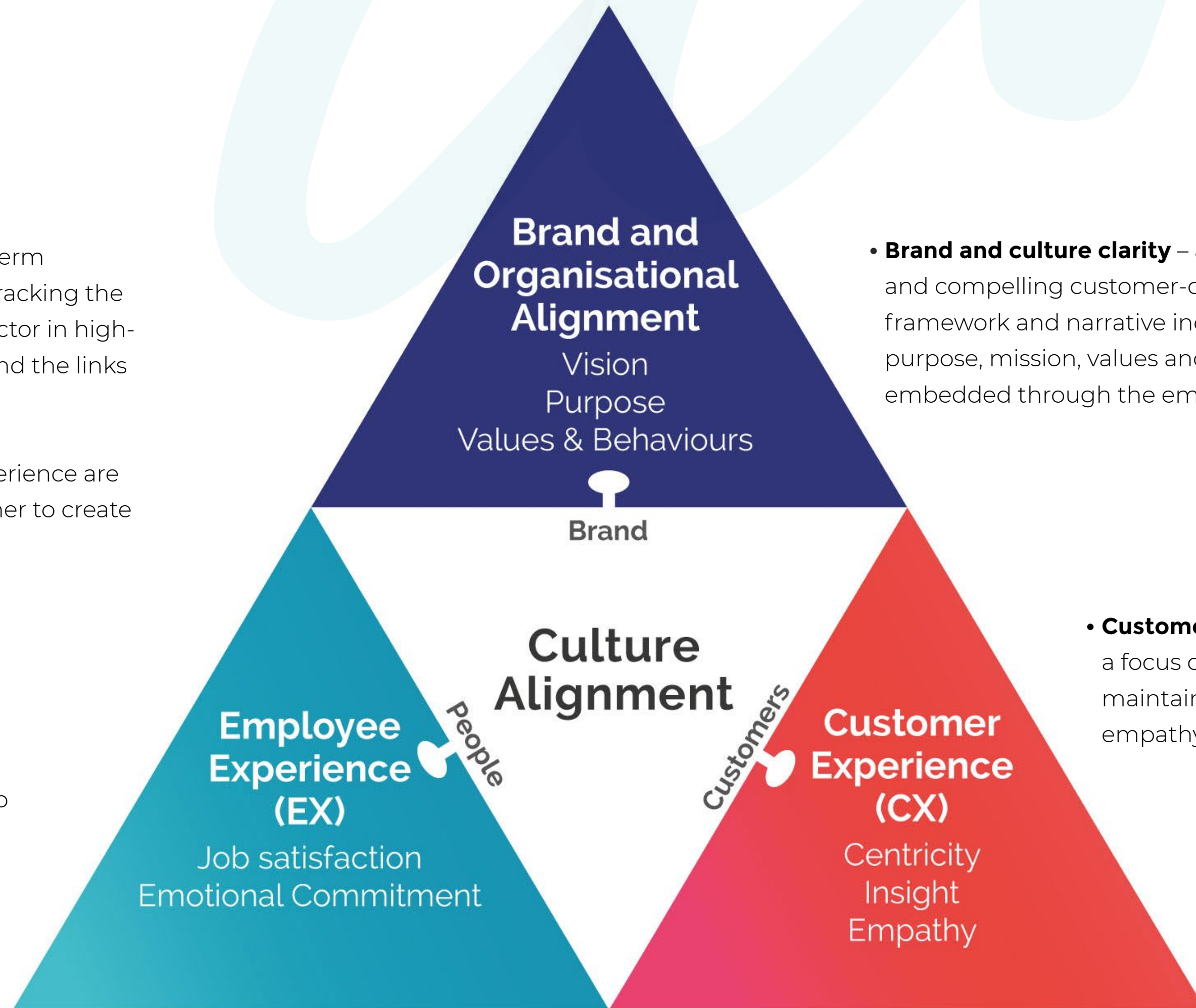


Figure 2 dragonfish’s Culture Alignment Model



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“High-performing organisations have four things in common – job satisfaction, emotional commitment, brand alignment, and customer alignment”

dragonfish Cracking the Culture Code Research 2.0



Job satisfaction and emotional commitment are typical engagement measures that are generally thought to provide important foundations for a positive culture. However, the dragonfish research shows the biggest difference between high-performing and low-performing organisations is the level of brand and customer alignment – where employees feel highly connected to their culture (Vision, Purpose, Values and Behaviours) and the customer.

Customer-centric culture is all about putting customers and employees at the heart of your company strategy. This means unifying teams around a universal customer language and exposing market truths that inspire and are usable. By putting customers and people at the heart of company strategy, organisations can attract, convert, service and retain customers and improve profitably. In turn, this creates greater customer connection and, ultimately, increases customer lifetime value. Only through people can a company truly deliver great customer-centricity.

Proof point



“Culture drives performance. Regardless of industry, healthy companies outperform unhealthy ones by a factor of three. We define “health” as the organisation’s ability to align around a common vision, execute against that vision effectively, and renew itself through innovation and creative thinking”

Camp et al., 2023



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How to embed customer-centricity into the everyday, avoiding the trap of a superficial culture

Organisational culture is not demonstrated by what you say; it's shown by what you do every day. It starts with why an organisation exists – the purpose – and ends with the day-to-day products, services and experiences delivered for customers, employees and communities.

The trap is that many organisations talk about being customer-centric, but only some truly enact their culture through how they actually make decisions, prioritise and behave.

This lack of adoption at a practical level of an organisation's values is the most corrosive factor to trust – both for the customer as well as the employee as their day-to-day experience is not reflective of the articulated company purpose and values.

Compounding, corrosive factors are where an organisation tries to address this by:

- Putting energy (e.g. research and communication budgets) into trying to manage the perceptions rather than understanding and addressing the underlying experience.
- Justifying why decisions (that are counter to their purpose and values) had to be taken, for example, 'We could not do the right thing by the customer this time because ...'



Section 6: Why Trust is so critical for the water sector

Customers are a core part of the product lifecycle and the key to mutual success.

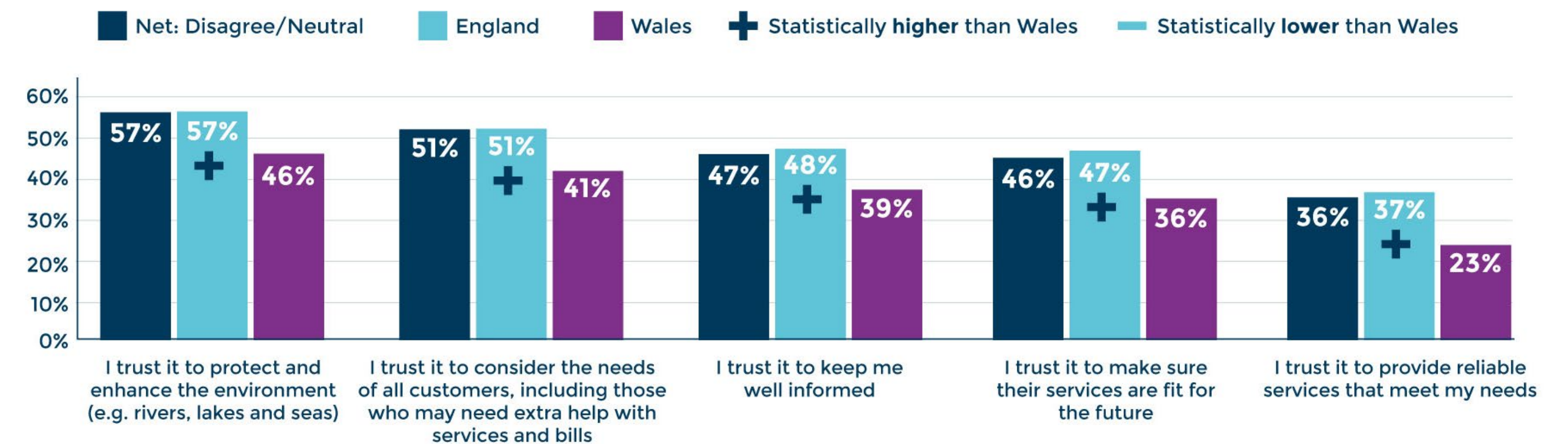
Customers' and consumers' basic need is to trust their water company: trust that when they turn on the tap, the water will be there and will be safe; trust that when they flush the toilet, the wastewater and sewage will be treated properly; trust that all of this is not harming the environment and that it will be sustainable over time. Customers and consumers take all of this for granted, and its provision is a base expectation. Customer and consumer trust in the water sector is a basic expectation.

The Covid pandemic has seen people around the globe question their trust in all forms of leadership and, in 2021, people started to trust business organisations more than governments, NGOs or the media (according to global research by the Edelman Trust Barometer). This represented an opportunity for CEOs to turn the tide around trust.

CCW's Water Matters 2022 found that people's experiences and perceptions have decreased over the last five years with the trend 'for trust in England and Wales on an upwards over the long term but flat or downwards over the last five years' (CCW, 2022).

Consumers in England are less likely to trust their water company across all these metrics than those in Wales

NET: Disagree/Neutral per trust statement by nation



NET: Disagree/Neutral is composed of neither agree nor disagree, Net: Disagree, and don't know/No opinion
 Q4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements when thinking about your water company?
 Base: All respondents (2,138); England (1,735); Wales (403)

Figure 3 Trust and Perceptions: Trust in England and Wales (CCW, 2023)



CCW's independently commissioned research on Perceptions and Trust in Water Companies (Yonder Consulting, 2023) found that when asked to sum up their Water Company in a word or phrase, a third of people (34%) in England and Wales chose a negative phrase. When asked to do so for the water industry as a whole, the number of people responding with a negative phrase jumped to half (50%), and 3 in 5 (62%) said that their perception of their water company had not changed in the last year. Where there was change, it tended to be for the worse (23%).

With Ofwat's research also reporting an overall decline in trust in the water sector, with the percentage of respondents disagreeing increasing year on year for the statements 'My water provider... acts in the interest of customers,' 'in the interest of communities,' and 'in the interest of the environment' (Ofwat and Savanta, 2023).

% Disagreeing (1-3/10) with each statement about their water company

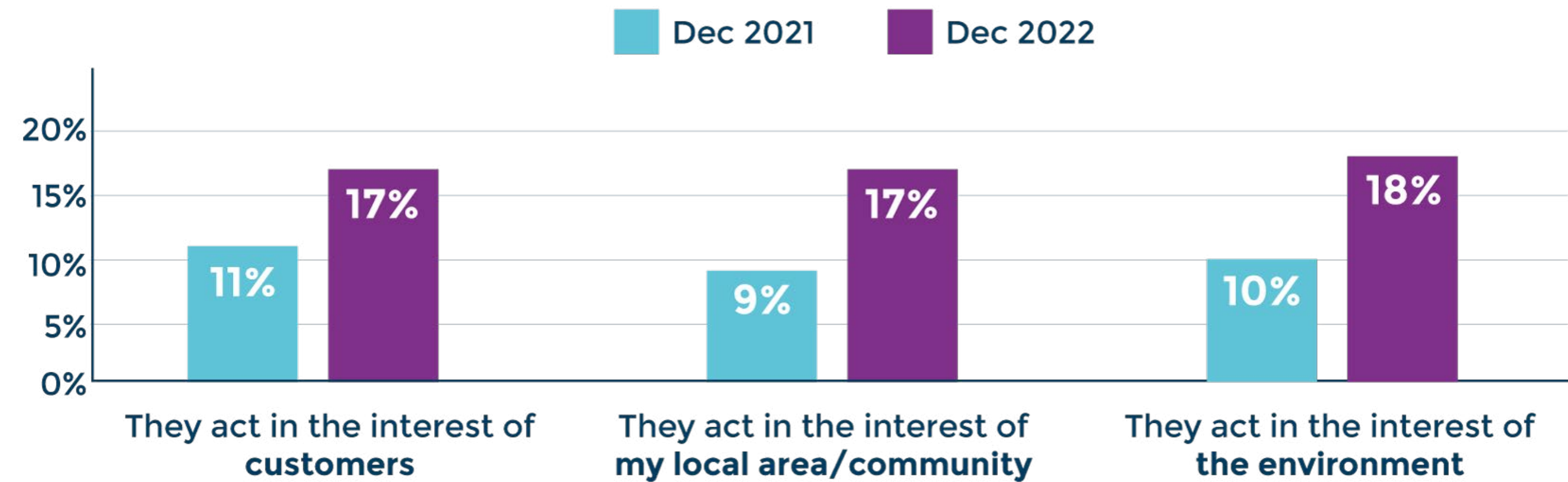


Figure 4 Trust and Perceptions: People's view of the water sector (Ofwat, 2023)

Unique trust factors for the water sector

What makes water unique is the customer's and consumer's place and role in the product lifecycle. Customers of the water sector are not simply end users of water, they are an integral part of the water, they are essential partners and stakeholders who contribute to the success of water companies. Their role, and the water sector's reliance on their partnership, is growing as water sustainability continues to be a strategic challenge for the water sector and a point of significant investment.

This move – from passive customer to active participant – was articulated in 2017 as part of Ofwat's *Tapped In* report. It also introduced the FACE Customer participation model (see Fig. 5) in an endeavour to change the customer's relationship their water provider.

The Customer Participation Model

There are four strategic areas of action to increase customer participation, each with its own objectives, engagement techniques and principles for delivery.



In the following sections we use this 'FACE' model to explore and assess the opportunities for and benefits of increasing customer participation in the sector.

Six Key Ambitions

Water companies in England and Wales can:

Co-imagine the future
with their customers

Co-create the future
with their customers

Engage customers to **adopt actions**
or behaviours at scale to achieve
real change

Engage citizens to **own improvements**
to water resilience in their communities

Give customers **more control**
over water in their homes

Give customers **more control**
over their service experience

Figure 5 FACE customer participation model taken from Ofwat's 2017 'Tapped In' report



A second unique factor facing the water sector is the absence of choice: the ultimate power a customer or consumer has over the water companies they choose as suppliers or with whom they choose to do business – distinguishing factors such as the level and quality of services for which they have to pay do not feature in 'customer choice'. This means that the customer relationship that typically exists in commercial, competitive markets does not exist in the water sector. To address this discrepancy, water companies' engagement with consumers needs to go far deeper. Trust and positive, active engagement with water companies is essential if future challenges and changes in consumer behaviours over time are going to be met effectively and efficiently.

Of course, this uniqueness also brings its own challenges. With customer trust in the water sector falling, it's time to embrace these challenges. There are risks associated with maintaining the status quo, these include (but are not limited to) falling behind other sectors, ongoing poor investment decisions in infrastructure, and alienating customers and regulators.

The challenges identified in this section of the report culminate in two specific trust-related challenges: the 'perception ripple effect' and 'low customer trust in their longer-term needs and priorities'.

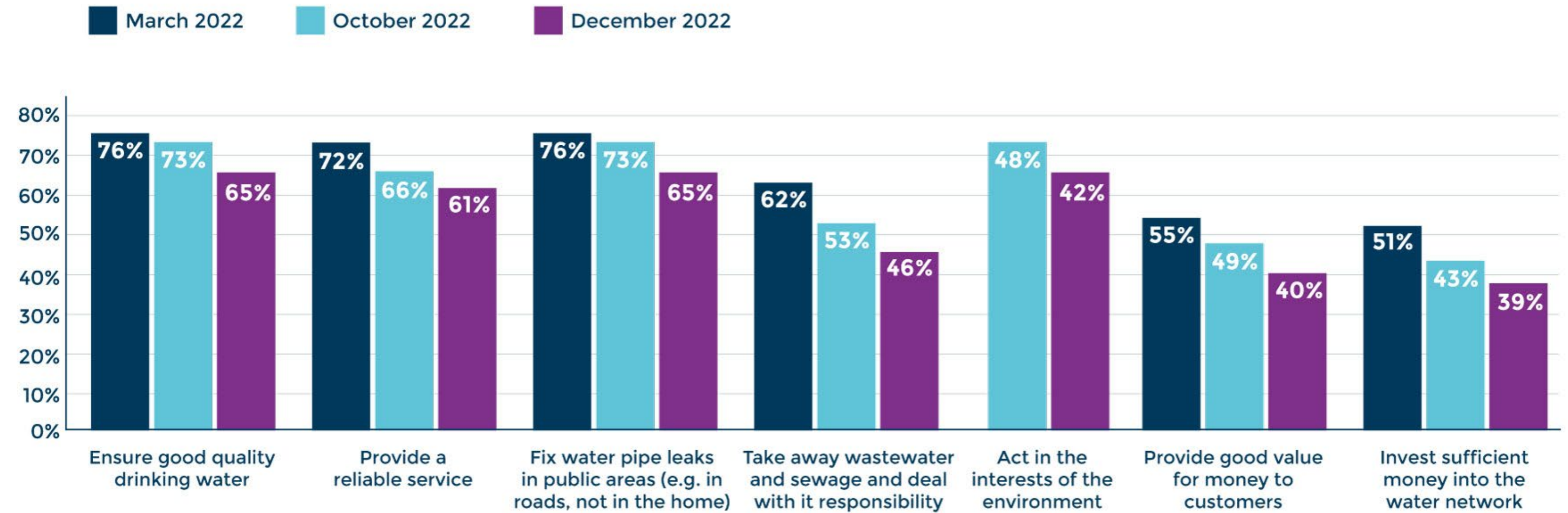


Figure 6 Trust and Perceptions: People's view of the water sector (Ofwat, 2023)

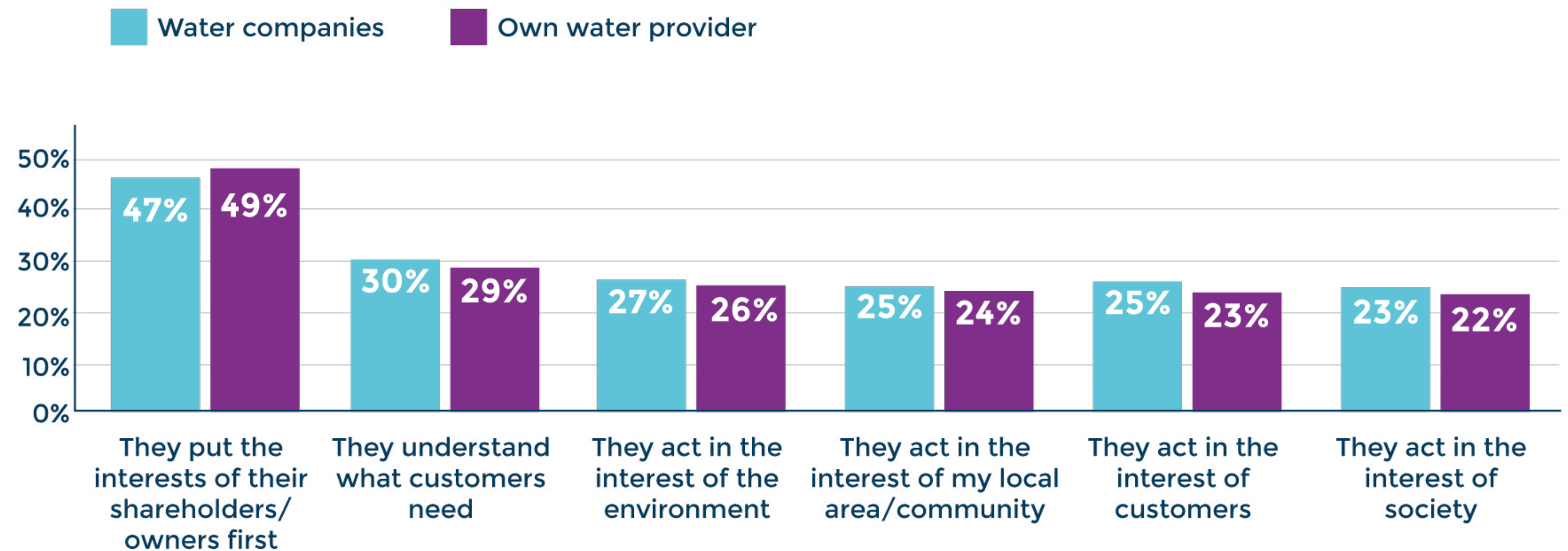


The “perception ripple effect”

A customer’s perception of their water company is influenced by the overall perceptions of the water sector. I.e. a negative press event relating to one subsequently influences the customer’s perception of their own water company.

This is especially true of the customer perception of ‘**profit before customer**’. 49% of customers surveyed believe that (where these exist) water companies put the interests of their investors and shareholders first. (*Ofwat, 2023*).

Views on water companies vs. own water company



We would typically expect respondents to have a more positive view of their water company than of the sector as a whole as seen in CCW’s Perceptions and Trust in Water Companies research. This is due to having more exposure to the brand, more of a relationship and the local connection to their area of the country.

However, here we see no significant differences between the views of the sector and their own water company.

Figure 7 Trust and Perceptions: Views on water companies vs own water company (Ofwat, 2023)



Low customer trust in their longer-term needs and priorities

While trust is significantly higher in the day-to-day delivery of water supply: for example, providing good quality water (65% trust score) and good service (61% trust score), the level of trust drops dramatically when looking at factors that have a more profound, longer-term impact on sustainability and the environment, for example, 'invest in the network' (39% trust score) and 'do not harm biodiversity'. (35% trust score)

The ability of a water company to change and 'culturally' respond to the two trust-related challenges (the trust ripple effect and low trust in the longer-term view) are impacted by specific industry challenges faced by water companies that make cultural change hard.

These are:

- **Perceived 'heavy regulation'** – five regulators with individual purposes. While not all water companies see it the same way, there appears to be a perception held by a few water companies that they are more 'regulator-centric', making it harder to transform into truly customer-centric organisations.
- **Risk of complacency** – a lack of choice for the customer can invite the challenge of complacency as it removes the average 'top-line' drivers of customer-centricity.
- **Process and procedure driven** – while water companies are mostly privately owned, they have legacy backgrounds in the traditional process, procedural-, and system-oriented ways of working – it's hard to build agility around existing practices; this may also support the regulator-centric view since responding to regulations requires process, procedures and systems.
- **Engineer legacy** – water companies are traditionally concerned about assets and infrastructure and less about the people who rely on the assets.

This is not unique to water, and evidence shows that it is possible to change company-centric practices. In the utility sector, disruptors such as Octopus Energy are turning the engineering-centric model on its head and, as such, consider themselves customer-first. **'Customers are the most important thing in our business'** says Octopus Energy's Global Director of Product and Marketing, Rebecca Dibb-Simkin. **They pay everybody's wages'** (Carroll, 2022).

Leaders in CX benefit from a high level of consumer trust as the consumer is aligned to the company's Purpose and Values, and they have shared Beliefs (**Learn from Others – The 6 Common Traits of Leading Customer-Centric Companies** explores this further).

What good looks like:



What Good Looks Like: Southern Water's Nick Eves suggests **'we should change our organisational focus of outcome to the perspective around "how are we spending customers' money?" and invest in a qualitative approach to understand how customers genuinely feel about this'**
Nick Eves, Head of Customer Insight, Southern Water.



The hidden costs of low trust – tackling the root causes and not just symptoms

Low organisational trust (from the customer, employees, communities, Regulators or the general public) creates hidden costs that are not always associated with the absence of a customer-centric culture.

Conversely, leading CX companies excel in these areas:

- **Hidden employee costs:** Southern Water's Chief Customer Officer, Katy Taylor, notes that *'there can be a feeling that because water companies have a monopoly, it sometimes doesn't matter how bad it is as customers can't change. However, the knock-on effect of this is that it's becoming more difficult to recruit people into the sector due to reputation issues. We have seen candidates drop out, which is likely due to this. We may find it harder to get talent into the sector.'*
 - **Difficulty attracting and retaining talent** – low trust levels can lead employees to disengage with the organisation, resulting in higher turnover rates. Similarly, low levels of trust from a customer perspective may impact the ability to attract talent, particularly when trust affects reputation.
 - **Lower productivity** – low levels of trust internally can lead to a lack of collaboration and communication between teams and hinder productivity. When a lack of trust permeates an organisation, people feel less likely to speak up, collaborate,

share information or work towards a common goal.

- **Higher levels of stress** – a low-trust environment can lead to increased absenteeism, illness, and burnout
- **Hidden operational costs:** *'Working hard for something we do not care about is called stress, working hard for something we love is called passion'* (Sinek, 2011).
 - **Lower quality** – lower levels of trust can lead to less focus on quality and, therefore, more time invested in rework.
 - **Increase in customer complaints** – low levels of customer trust can lead to increased customer demands and unnecessary customer contacts and complaints.
 - **Decreased innovation** – trust is essential in fostering an environment of innovation and risk-taking. When employees feel they work for an organisation with low levels of trust, they are less likely to share ideas, be creative and embrace change

Low organisational trust can significantly impact an organisation's bottom line; a significant step forward for water companies is to understand their organisational context and culture today – whether and where low trust exists and what may be the root cause(s) and impacts.



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Opportunity for the Water Sector to be leaders in trust by focusing on a customer-centric culture

Despite the challenges facing the Water Sector, there is a unique opportunity to become an innovator and leader in creating customer-centric cultures and, most importantly, doing this collaboratively across the water companies and in partnership with the regulators.

As we know, water, the very product itself, could be considered a commodity that we all take for granted. Still, environmental and social priorities are changing, and an opportunity exists to change the nature of the relationship with water customers and consumers by focusing on a customer-centric culture that creates and maintains trust.

Water is integral to life, and as such, water companies have an opportunity to be essential to their customers, as well as their communities, by placing the customer needs at the heart of their business and decision-making.

The shift towards a customer-centric culture and what water companies consider essential would require a conscious, deliberate and consistent effort led by CEOs. This journey should start with an open, honest, cross-organisational conversation (including the regulatory bodies) on what it means to have a customer-centric culture. This report aims to be a catalyst to start this conversation.

Proof point

“Trust is maintained when values and beliefs are actively managed. If companies do not actively work to keep clarity, discipline and consistency in balance, then trust starts to break down”

Sinek, 2011

UK 2050 Water Innovation Strategy lays the foundation for heightened collaboration in the sector. The vision is ***“to create open collaboration opportunities across the water sector to drive transformational change through innovation that delivers greater value for customers and the environment”***

Spring Innovation, 2021

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Section 7: Learn from Others

The 6 Common Traits of Leading Customer-Centric Companies

If you were to observe the day-to-day workings of leading customer-centric companies, you would see common activities, approaches and mindsets that, together, bring the customer-centric culture to life every day in the decisions they make, the products and services they deliver, and how they engage and treat not only their customers but also their employees, supply chain and communities.

This section explores the 6 common traits of leading customer-centric companies with examples that bring to life the fundamental customer-centric traits exhibited that are used to drive a customer-centric culture.



Figure 8 Culture Alignment Trait Wheel



CCW

Focus: Employee Alignment

Trait 1. Employee Alignment: Make customer and Customer Experience everyone's role

Developing a structured approach to customer closeness and empathy is a common trait for customer-centric cultures looking to deliver an exceptional experience for the customer. However, this starts with your people and ensuring that everyone within the organisation feels responsible for the customer and their experience.

This means:

- Ensuring there is ongoing training for people around the customer (even when they are not directly involved with or connected to customer-facing roles), attached to every part of the company.
- Exploring opportunities for stable connection with the customer, brought to life through sharing meaningful and impactful customer stories.
- Introducing and developing Customer Champions across multiple departments and roles; the role can vary, but it's about deepening understanding and sharing stories.
- Considering reward and recognition and their role in helping people feel connected to the customer in more meaningful ways.

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How it comes to life:

1.1 Meaningful training about the customer

- **Ensuring a clear foundational understanding of the customer** so that all employees understand how their role impacts customers.
- **Easy and accessible customer insights.** While there may be plenty of data available, the key is sharing what is relevant and will have the most significant impact on most employees.
- **Training available for everyone.** It could be helpful to start this during induction so that people who join an organisation do so developing a shared understanding that can then be enriched.
- **Consider who delivers the training and how,** ensuring that the training is dynamic and engaging using multi-channel platforms (e.g. face to face, e-based, micro-bite learning, videos, etc.).
- **Regular and continuous evolution:** Training shouldn't be considered a 'one-off', it's useful to keep this information relevant, shared regularly, tested and updated to ensure maximum relevancy.

“72% of leaders believe merging teams and responsibilities around the customer experience will increase operational efficiencies.”

Deflieze, 2023

What good looks like:

Starling Bank's customer training requires

“Customer Service agents go through six weeks of training before they start talking to customers on their own”

Starling Bank, 2021

Welsh Water have a customer training programme


“to give people the tools to put customers at the heart and bring our vision to life. The training takes place in mixed groups; to break down silos and help understand how everyone plays their roles”


Sally Gronow, Head of Customer Service, Welsh Water.



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1.2 Regular connection with customers and the sharing of closeness stories (regardless of role)

- **Consider how employees connect with customers.** Inviting all employees, regardless of role, to undertake a day per quarter in the contact centre is one way in which Customer-Centric organisations create this connection.
- **Through customer closeness stories.** Thoughtful stories collated by customer-facing teams that enable people from different parts of the company to connect with the customer and the impact that the services/products have on them. Both from a success and failure perspective that share the real human impact of the service.

Qualtrics notes that it's important to **'Share customer success stories internally where you have closed the loop and turned a bad experience into a good one. This will help to humanise the brand and show employees the value of taking action on poor experiences'**

Kaemingk, 2020

What good looks like:

To bring the customer to life for customers not on the front line, Dawn and Elouise at Northumbrian Water say:

'First thing that is key is that it needs to be led from the front, front-line staff actively talk about the customer from the front line all the time. They talk of customer-centricity and unrivalled customer experience, focus research on what matters most to their customers'

Dawn Creighton, Head of Customer Strategy, Performance and Experience, and Elouise Leonard-Cross, Head of People Strategy and Experience, Northumbrian Water.


Chris at Arriva Trains Group says


'Impactful feedback brings customer impact home – e.g. your trains were delayed that meant I didn't get to my father's funeral – there are real consequences to the journey. What we're actually doing is facilitating part of a transaction – the rail journey is only a portion of that. This has driven a much closer connection to the customer'


Chris Brooks, Managing Director Bidding, Arriva Group.




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1.3 Development of a dedicated Customer Champion Network

- **Define the role/s:** Setting out clear guidance developing clear aims to support the Customer Champion Network, for example, how they will create greater connection to the customer for colleagues.
- **Recruit and attract team members for a Customer Champion Network:** Share and leverage enthusiasm for customers among teams and bring together influencers (from within the organisation) that will have the biggest impact on connecting the organisation with the customer.
- **Meet regularly:** Establish ways of working that are beneficial to the aim and intention of the group.
- **Share with the wider company:** It's all about sharing something or deepening the organisation's relationship and understanding about the customer.

What good looks like:

'Welsh Water has recruited a network of Employee Engagement Champs that get together once a quarter, and attend exec meetings to represent Employee Engagement.'

Sally Gronow, Head of Customer Service, Welsh Water.

At Starling Bank, they make all Customer Service Agents customer champions, giving them the opportunity to make an impact on the customer experience. There is a *'Slack channel called "Bright Ideas", which is used to funnel feedback and ideas from Customer Service agents. Every week, they go through the suggestions and present a selection to the product team and engineers... Many of our most popular product innovations are suggested by our Customer Service Agents, who are available 24/7 to talk and chat with customers about how they use their Starling app.'*

Starling Bank, 2021

1.4 Embedded through reward and recognition

- **Informal employee recognition.** Capturing daily actions, behaviours or an impact that colleagues have had on the customer which can be celebrated.
- **Reward linked to the customer:** Research concludes that when employees are measured or rewarded against objectives, it drives motivation. Embedding customer performance indicators into employee objectives and goals is a proven and effective way of driving customer-centricity, as long as the goals genuinely serve the customer's best interests.
- **Structure customer recognition that collates stories across the organisation and create an opportunity to focus on and celebrate customer successes.**

What good looks like:

'United Utilities has a recognition scheme which gives customers the ability to send in 'Wows' on any interactions, these are then built into the Wow Awards. Through Wow of the week a customer spotlight is shared on a weekly basis which includes incentivisation. We have been the first company to get over 100,000 of these awards'

Mike Gauterin, Customer Service Director, United Utilities.

'At Welsh Water, customer performance is built into reward mechanisms – including an annual staff reward scheme for people if we've hit certain metrics (financial and customer). There's also a performance-related pay process for people. Everyone has customers in their objectives'

Sally Gronow, Head of Customer Service, Welsh Water.

Trait 2. Employee Alignment: Customer-centric organisational design

Best practice shows companies that prevent disjointed silos, have a flat structure that includes clear roles and a high level of accountability. Customer ownership should be shared across the company; leadership should have a high level of visibility down the organisation - and the customer should have visibility up the organisation. To enable quick decision-making, employees should be empowered to make decisions closer to the customer.

How it comes to life:

2.1 A simple and clear organisational design, that has:

- **As flat a structure as possible** with, ideally, a maximum of 7 to 8 levels between the CEO and the frontline.
- **Functions grouped around the customers they serve and/or the stage of the customer journey they are responsible for**, and not around historic product groups or internal functions. This creates a closer relationship between a team/employee and the customer and deepens their understanding of their customers (which, in turn, leads to discovering new and unmet customer needs).
- **Multidisciplinary teams** working to solve customer challenges.

2.2 Functional transparency, with:

- **Clear roles and responsibilities for teams shared across the organisation in the form of an Accountability Structure chart.** An Accountability Structure chart clearly depicts the different groups within the organisation and includes an outline of their roles and responsibilities, their key internal and external customers and describes their key processes and their people.

Franz, writing for Forbes (2020), posits that *‘You cannot be customer-centric without putting employees first. We know that the employee experience drives the customer experience, so you have to design and deliver a great experience for employees first in order for them to take on customer-centric behaviours.’*

What good looks like:



‘Going back to basics to redefine vision and recast purpose – from “we keep the lights on” (crisis/reactive mode) to “to power communities to thrive today and move towards net zero for tomorrow” (more inspiring/impact-focused). It’s important that everyone across the organisation understands the part they play – a philosophy that spreads throughout the organisation from top to bottom. Our new Operating Model is based on putting the customer at the heart of all decisions, processes and thinking – we’ve established a new customer service function responsible for customer journey and interaction, but at the same time building an understanding of how all other parts of the business support customer – creating a line of sight to the customer and delivering purpose through customer-centricity’

Chris Burchell, Electricity Distribution Managing Director, SSE (Managing Director – Utilities Sector).

A photograph of a young child with blonde hair sitting in a blue plastic tub. The child is holding a bucket and pouring water over their head. The background is a blurred green outdoor setting. The text 'CCW' is overlaid in the top left corner in a light blue, cursive font.

CCW

Focus: Brand and Organisational Alignment

Trait 3. Brand and Organisational Alignment: Customer is the true North Star

Our research found that organisations with a customer-centric culture share a genuine belief that the customer should come first, and this is reflected in their culture and philosophy. These companies make the customer their true North Star in three practical ways.

Firstly, they communicate their intention through cultural assets such as their Purpose, Vision, Values and Beliefs. Secondly, it's expressed clearly through their brand and tone of voice, which is connected and relatable to the broad diversity of the customers they serve. Thirdly, above all, they put customers first in real-life situations, making sure they take this stance when making decisions and keeping the customer in mind.

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How it comes to life:

3.1 Through a customer-led Purpose, Vision, and Values, that is:

- **A customer-inspired, simple, and authentic Purpose and/or Vision:** The cultural assets like Purpose (and/or Vision) are inspired and designed around the needs of the customer and not those of the company and use a clear understanding of the customer's needs.
- **Values co-created with the people:** The Purpose and Vision are underpinned by a set of unifying Values that have been co-created with employees to aid understanding.
- **With Values used as signposts to behaviours and a person's role.** They become the everyday signpost to the Purpose and Vision and help every employee (not just customer-facing).
- **Used every day to create a common language:** The Purpose and/or Vision is referenced regularly by leaders and employees alike, so that they share a common language.

Purpose, Vision, and Values are a unifying and motivating factor for employees in high-performing, customer-centric companies. Dragonfish's *Cracking the Culture Code* research discovered that within the top 20% of high performing organisations, the key drivers of culture which positively impact performance are: alignment to an organisation's Vision, Purpose, and Values, and Behaviours, along with customer connection, centricity and empathy.

However, these factors are seemingly underutilised in many companies at present.

'Seventy per cent of employees said that their sense of purpose is largely defined by their work... [However], 'only 18 per cent of respondents believed that they get as much purpose from work as they want. Sixty-two per cent said that while they get some purpose from work, they want to get even more.'

Dhingra et al., 2021

What good looks like:

'Ultimately our vision, goal, and purpose binds us all together – to earn the trust of our customers every day.'

It's what we're here to do'

Sally Gronow, Head of Customer Service, Welsh Water.

'We've developed a new purpose that's about how our business enables communities to grow – hospitals, schools, families – and the support provided to them to help them achieve net zero. It's important that everyone across the organisation understands the part they play – a philosophy we want to spread throughout the organisation from top to bottom'

Chris Burchell, Electricity Distribution Managing Director, SSE (Managing Director – Utilities Sector).



3.2 Through empathetic and authentic communications and brand tone of voice, that is:

- **Joined-up external communications and internal customer communications:** This enables employees to be fully informed so they may stand as true ambassadors for the organisation.
- **Communication tone of voice that reflects the customers and communities the organisation serves:** the communications of the organisation should promote and reinforce key messages around the Purpose, Vision, and Values throughout the organisation (often both internally and externally) and should be used consistently in all communications – from the Annual Report through to daily verbal communications.

Lucidpress discovered brand consistency can increase revenue: *Thirty-two per cent of people reported that consistent messaging increased brand revenue by over 20%. However, they also found that the power of brand is underutilised – 15% of companies don't even have brand guidelines and only 30% of brands have guidelines that are well-known and accessible by the entire organisation. Brand guidelines are crucial tools in the 21st century; with employees spending more time on social media, company-wide brand consistency should be a top priority.*

Howarth, 2023

What good looks like:

A key part of Starling Bank's training revolves around their "friendly" tone of voice. *'For example, when you receive an email from Starling, it will never start with "To whom it may concern". We prefer to keep it simple and approachable – as well as professional. I've been in the Customer Service industry my whole career, and of everyone I've worked for, Starling engages with customers the best,' says Joel, 27. 'People don't want to be spoken to like robots – they want to have open, honest conversations. Starling does that really well.'*

Starling Bank, 2021

'Northumbrian Water has developed a human-first and regional-focused brand personality for all internal and external communications. This helps to ensure a cohesive internal and external comms strategy that keeps employees in-the-know before customers get to see on any key press releases, etc. This is crucial as it means they're not caught out when asked by friends and family about an issue, and can act as brand ambassadors'

Dawn Creighton, Head of Customer Strategy, Performance and Experience, and Elouise Leonard-Cross, Head of People Strategy and Experience, Northumbrian Water

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3.3 Through a longer-term view of a customer's value that consistently guides decisions, where:

- **A longer-term view of a customer's value is prioritised over a short-term cost or revenue view.** Such as looking at customer lifetime value versus a quick-win.
- **The customer view provides a common anchor even during extreme, unique situations instead of blindly following internal policy:** 'How would the customer feel?' Is the primary mantra and the customer is the primary consideration. Even when faced with difficult or challenging circumstances.

What good looks like:



'We made goodwill payments to customers over Christmas despite not being obligated to. The water came back on for a few minutes in the middle of the night which would have voided any customer claims. However, Welsh Water voluntarily gave customers money back and ensured that businesses had their lost profit covered'

Sally Gronow, Head of Customer Service, Welsh Water.

Trait 4. Brand and Organisational Alignment: Customer is embedded into the DNA and the everyday

Organisations that have true customer-centric cultures take their customer-centric Vision and Purpose and embed this into their DNA - i.e. from Values and into enacting behaviours (that give the Values meaning), which in turn, steer ways of working, systems, processes, policies, employee experience and even the underpinning organisational structures and operating model. To take the customer from being a belief (e.g. the North Star) and into the DNA takes time and continued focus, so they use a proven customer experience approach and model (such as KPMG Nunwood 6 Pillars or Net Promoter System) to bring impact and structure to the journey. This, ultimately, enables their people to connect with the customer in a meaningful way and aligns all organisational assets towards meeting the needs of the customer. This is the critical step from espoused to enacted cultures.

What we mean by Espoused and Enacted Culture:

Espoused: in this context refers to the beliefs, values, and principles of an organisation. The stated ideals and objectives that guide the action. Espoused values are typically expressed through official statements however may not always be carried through into actual real-life behaviour.

Enacted: refers to the actual behaviour and practices within an organisation. Enacted values represent the values and behaviours that are demonstrated and reinforced through day-to-day actions and operations.

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How it comes to life:

4.1 With the use of proven CX approaches and models, that is:

- **A structured CX maturity assessment approach to understand where they are today, with regard to their CX, and how to improve.** A CX maturity assessment approach enables an organisation to understand the extent to which they are customer-centric. A company's CX maturity level can then be practically assessed (usually annually) and reported on over time as a measure of their customer-centric culture.
- **A structured and enabling CX improvement programme, which reports directly to the C-Suite.** That takes the required changes identified by the CX maturity assessment, and delivers said changes over time as part of a formal, structured CX transformation programme.

There are many proven CX Models. One to consider is Qualtrics XM Institute's customer experience maturity assessment. Take a look at the Practitioner's Guide of this report to find out more.

Evidence showed that Business to Business (B2B) and Business to Customer (B2C) brands that use innovative CX strategies are three times as likely to perform well.

(Abramovich, 2021).



What good looks like:



'At Northumbrian Water, we use a recognised and structured approach to CX that uses KPMG Nunwood's "six pillars" to frame customer needs. We apply this structured approach to everything we do for the customer – from customer journey design to service design, to customer closeness training, and beyond. Using the six pillars of customer experience of excellence (by KPMG), we drove the model into the organisation, ensuring it resonated with all of our strategies. It's used by all the directorates; it's not completely embedded by all, but it is by a high amount. The six customer pillars determine how we deliver customer experience and how to make it come to life; the priorities are what the customer thinks are important (for example, unrivalled customer conversation training across the business). We're also certified by the Institute of Customer Service'

Dawn Creighton, Head of Customer Strategy, Performance and Experience, and Elouise Leonard-Cross, Head of People Strategy and Experience, Northumbrian Water.

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4.2 Through customer-informed and inspired behaviours that:

- **Give the customer-inspired Values meaning and impact.** Behaviours take the Purpose, Vision, and Values into the company DNA as they provide practical guidance for employees (leaders, managers, individuals and teams) on how they should behave and what they should prioritise in their daily roles.
- **Have been co-created with the employees.** It's vital that the creation of the behaviours needed is done in partnership with employees. This step of co-creation ensures authenticity and employee belief in the behaviours as they reflect their voice and reality.

CIPD states that *that 'Understanding and influencing organisational systems and human behaviour is integral to developing a positive culture and healthy working environment... It has become increasingly important for all people professionals to have a good understanding of organisation culture and behaviour.'*

And Forbes explains that when it comes to customer-centricity,

'acceptable behaviours must be outlined to help employees and executives know what it means to be customer-centric. And no processes or policies should be developed without the values (and, hence, the customer) in mind'

Franz, 2020

4.3 Through a customer-centric employee experience and life cycle the:

- Customers are brought to life at each stage of the employee lifecycle, so employees (and even prospective employees) understand the customer, the importance the company places on them, and how the employee's role is critical in the overall delivery for the customer every day.

What good looks like:



'Everyone is recruited for attitude and behaviours rather than experience. We hire based on the right soft skills and have seen some nice results; for example, our rant and rave scores have been high as a result'
Lucy Kinder, Head of Shared Services for Customer Services, Thames Water.

CCW

Focus: Customer Alignment

Trait 5. Customer Alignment: Deep understanding of their customers and utilise them as active partners to improve the customer journey

Creating a solid understanding of customers among employees and partners is key. This qualitative and quantitative engagement should capture and gather insight that helps employees get closer to customers and makes it easier for them to understand how to create a positive impact for the customer in their everyday roles. This translation of data, insight and the customer voice can be expressed through personas and segmentation, brought to life with clarity through a set of simple customer principles that guide decisions, and explored through customer journey mapping to understand the as-is and future intention. Fundamentally, customer engagement and involvement should be genuinely two-way and connect, not only to gather insight, but to consult and partner with customers so they may help shape important decisions that impact them.



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How it comes to life:

5.1. Through robust customer and market research capability, utilised in the design of products and services, with a:

- **Deep understanding of their customer and prospective customers' needs (as well as the market landscape – i.e. political, economic, social, technical, legal/regulatory and environmental).** This understanding goes beyond surface-level information and is based on insights gained through research and engagement with groups both qualitatively and quantitatively. This is managed by a dedicated research function and the data is used across the company to inform current and future decisions.
- **Use of a proven, customer research-led product and service design methodology** such as Design Thinking or Double Diamond Design model. This ensures that all products and services are customer insight- and research-led, and target the key customer wants and needs from the outset. This ensures product market fit (that can be measured) and the creation of trust.

What good looks like:

'While we look at core demographics, we also segmented according to demands – particularly taking into account age and wealth'

Mike Gauterin, Customer Service Director, United Utilities.

Forbes states there should be **'no discussions, no decisions and no designs without bringing the customer's voice into the conversation'**

(Hyken, 2022). Listen, know and understand your customer.



5.2. Through customers as partners and point of inspiration, with:

- Active use of customer forums such as panels and focus groups that have real organisational impact and are not just a 'tick box' exercise. Forums should represent the diversity of customers' communities within the region, and be used to understand and create clarity over their needs, wants and preferences. Only by understanding these groups can a company tailor its services, products, channels, and communication strategies to meet the needs and expectations of customers better.

What good looks like:

"In their recognition that 'authentic and true customer participation is an exciting prospect for the water industry and one that can set [us] apart,' Northumbrian Water highlighted the opportunities that customer participation brings with it, including: utilising local knowledge and expertise (allowing them to develop innovative solutions); generating widespread behavioural change – increasing ownership of issues and appreciation of the value of water; and reinforcing customer trust and confidence "
(Northumbrian Water, 2017).

Proof point

Corporate Culture's 2017 report, *Tapped In: From passive customer to active participant* (commissioned by Ofwat), outlined some of the core benefits of customer inclusion:

- 1 'To get ideas for improvement from a wider audience;'
- 2 'To improve commercial results;'
- 3 'To understand customer preferences;'
- 4 'To improve customer trust;'
- 5 'To improve customer satisfaction;'
- 6 'To become more resilient and reduce future risks;'
- 7 'To change customer behaviour.'





5.3. Through a description of the customer that drives understanding and action, with:

- **Practical and useful segmentation of the customer, household, and region.** This segmentation uses a comprehensive set of customer attributes covering demographic, geographic, behavioural and psychographic (i.e., opinions, habits, interests, and activities) ideas.
- **Engaging and human personas.** The companies bring to life the customer segments via the use of visual and engaging personas. The personas are simple and make the customer feel more accessible and relatable, communicating the information in an engaging way.

'A united view on the customer journey across the organisation is key. Consistently excellent end-to-end customer and CX journeys that are used by multiple different teams and updated quarterly. This means completely mapping the touch points – and exploring how this moment can be optimised. It's also important to plan ahead and consider if there's a journey map for future customers too'

Ali Powell, CEO & Founder, Commercial Acceleration.

What good looks like:

Dawn Creighton, Head of Customer Strategy, Performance and Experience, and Elouise Leonard-Cross, Head of People Strategy and Experience, Northumbrian Water explained that Northumbrian Water has developed neighbourhood personas, which are in all comms. The strategy is to sound like a good neighbour, which is incredibly important to the organisation. Because they recognise that their people are also their customers (97% of staff are customers). Therefore, ***'there has to be a really cohesive internal strategy, if they don't get the internal message right then the external will fail too.'***

5.4 Through making clear what matters most to customers to aid organisational alignment, with the:

- **Use of clear and simple customer 'universal truths' in the form of Customer Principles. The universal customer truths are the common needs and everyday wants across ALL customer segments.**

5.5 Through a structured approach to understanding and improving the customer journey, with a:

- **Use of a proven approach to mapping and optimising the customer journey and experience such as KPMG Nunwood's 6 Pillars. It is the process of exploring each touchpoint and interaction that an organisation has with a customer throughout their entire journey. This map may be based on customer data (such as customer feedback and behaviour) as well as input from employees.**

5.6 Through robust customer and culture measurement, with:

- **A robust 'Voice of the Customer' programme. That drives better outcomes for customers and is the heart of a customer-centric culture.**

Trait 6. Customer Alignment: 'Clear customer data strategy.'

The existence of a well-defined customer data strategy, with data compliance and data quality at heart, is critical to a customer-centric culture and improved customer outcomes. Without a well-refined customer data strategy (the 'what' and 'why') and an underpinning and enabling customer data architecture (the 'how'), it's near-impossible to deliver a consistent (and cost-effective) great customer experience in line with the organisation's customer-centric purpose.

How it comes to life:

6.1 Balanced offensive and defensive customer data strategy, which has a:

- **Business strategy that is underpinned by a customer data strategy** with a clear articulation of how the business strategy is reliant on and enabled by the customer data strategy (and vice versa).
- **Understanding of all data assets in the form of a customer data catalogue** that covers all customer data locations, data sets, processes, models, permissions and rules.
- **Understanding of the data quality and ownership** of the above, with emphasis on data quality gaps, accessibility and duplication.
- **Defined business use cases for customer data**, split down by:
 - **Defensive use cases** i.e. required to meet regulatory and security requirements (e.g. GDPR & ISO 27001)
 - **Offensive use cases** i.e. to drive better customer experience and commercial outcomes (e.g. personalisation)
- **Clear data tech road map and investment plan** with supporting investment business case (informed by the above use cases).

CX Today states that

'more than 19 in every 20 CX leaders have invested or plan to invest in data integration, data integrity or data enrichment technologies'

Mitchell, 2022.

However,

'Fifty-four per cent of organisations stated that their biggest barrier to leveraging data was fragmented or siloed data'

Deflieze, 2023



6.2 Underpinning and enabling customer data architecture that is:

- **Coordinating and integrating disparate data sources** so that data is available to drive the defined business use cases and, ultimately, improve business outcomes.
- **Ensures the consistent application of the master data management rules**, including data quality and data compliance.
- **Able to support advanced data practices to enable next generation business use cases** such as machine learning and artificial intelligence based solutions as well as real-time data availability to support hyper-personalisation of the customer experience.

Data Maturity Path

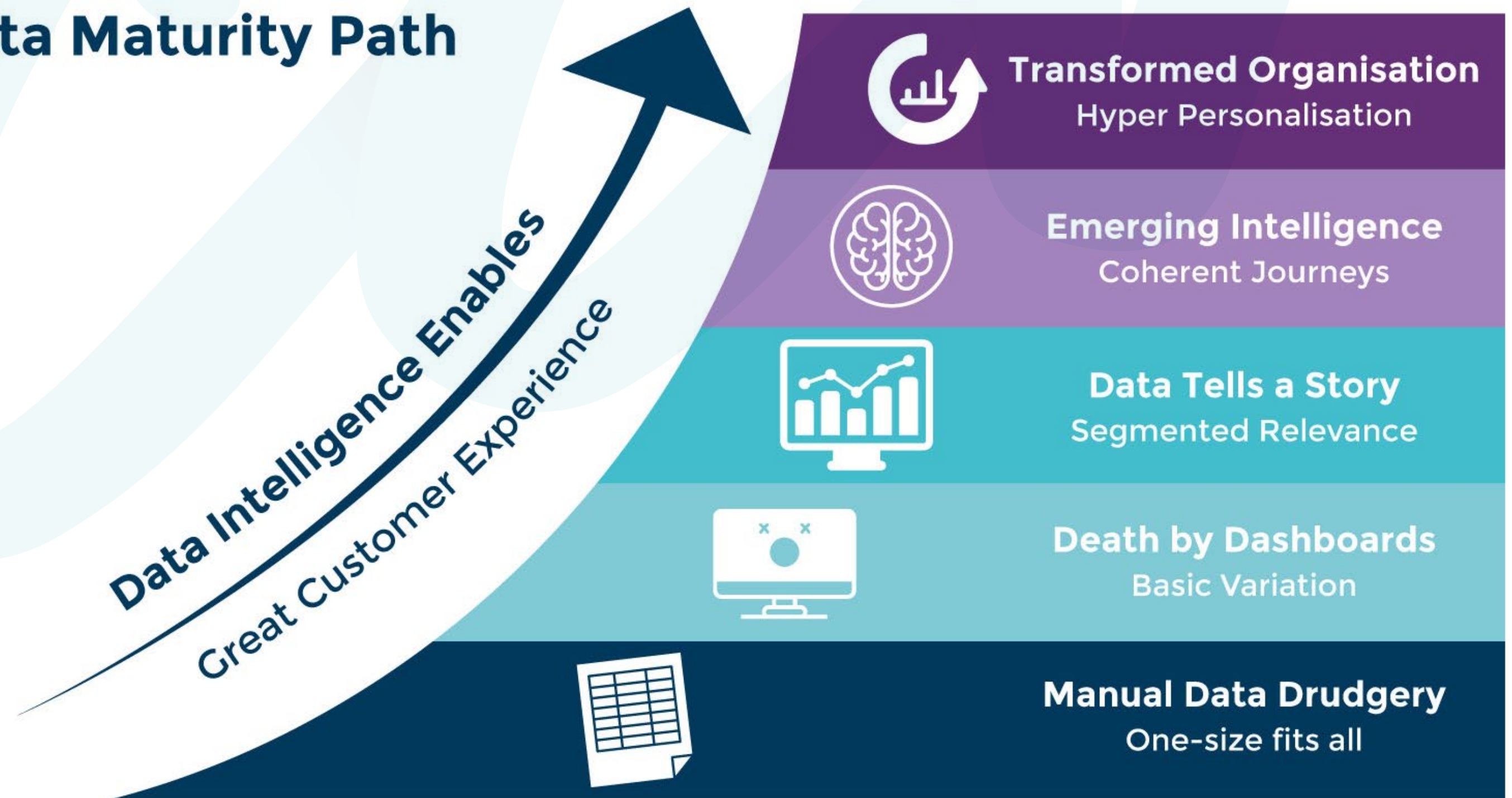


Figure 9 Euler data maturity pathway; 'From manual data drudgery to hyper personalisation'

What good looks like:

During the research, Nick Eves, the Head of Customer Insight for Southern Water, expressed the shift his organisation has been making around customer-centricity when he explained that 'A couple of years ago customer insights weren't really shared within Southern Water – this has changed. We're now talking about customers more than ever. Some of the ways this comes through is during monthly exec summaries which share customer insights. Sharing in an accessible and useful format is key.'

Section 8: How to measure Customer-Centric Cultures and drive positive change

We recognise that many companies within the water sector are already conducting elements of Culture Measurement (e.g. EE Surveys), so this report provides a holistic and comprehensive customer-centric culture measurement blueprint (a framework with example metrics), based on established and emerging global best practice. This has then been refined to a set of recommended metrics that could be taken into a customer-centric culture Dashboard, which are made up of insights already captured today.

Key Point

This **blueprint for customer-centric culture measurement** can be **held up against existing approaches to identify gaps and opportunities**. This in turn, it is hoped, will act as a catalyst for greater cross sector conversation, collaboration and innovation in the area of customer-centric cultures.

Culture measurement is relatively new (and provides an opportunity to innovate)

Many companies have culture-articulation documents that show how a company's Strategy, Purpose, and Values all fit together. In addition, they are often supported by cultural narratives or playbooks, and on occasion, these are also embedded in a company's Code of Conduct.

In fewer cases, organisations have taken the next step and gone on to define and measure culture, usually to meet regulatory requirements and stimulate internal, board-level conversations.

An example is United Utilities and their Culture Dashboard, which uses the Denison Consulting Culture model. The dashboard tracks 63 measures under People, Purpose, Values, and Business Principles. This is used by the United Utilities Board (and its supporting Committees) to stimulate discussion on key topics and performance against set targets.

Key Point

The challenge (and opportunity) is that the activity of measuring and publishing regular cultural performance data **is not consistently adopted across the corporate world**, and where it is used, it **does not follow a common approach and has differing scopes**.





For example, where culture measurement approaches do exist today (e.g. culture dashboards), they are often:

- **Static** and report annually (or bi-annually, at most). As opposed to being used frequently to guide decisions
- **Target the board** as the key audience. As opposed to being useful and accessible for the entire organisation
- **Internally focused**. As opposed to being designed for external sharing with customers and other stakeholders
- **Stimulated and limited to regulatory needs** such as the UK Corporate Governance Code 2018. As opposed to being stimulated by the customer
- **Use a restricted view of culture**. Instead of looking at the broader signals of culture. Limiting themselves to:
 - **Diversity, Inclusion, and Equality**
 - **Risk management** view of culture (especially FCA regulated businesses)
 - **Are based on Employee Engagement surveys** as the main source of insight
- **Do not consider their investors culture** and how their investors' culture influences their own
- **Are not linked to the experience** a customer or employee receives, which is the ultimate proof point of a culture

Key Point


An opportunity exists to take inspiration and build on the United Utilities example, other existing activity across the Water Sector, and external best practice and **create a common approach which focuses on culture (and company performance) through the lens of the Customer.**


The unique elements being that the measurement approach focuses on:

- Alignment of what a company says – i.e. its Purpose and Values (**the Espoused Culture**), through to
- The day-to-day experience delivered for the customers and also their employees (**the Enacted Culture**)


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The value of measuring a customer-centric culture (going beyond regulatory asks)

Culture is an ecosystem that can evolve organically in response to external and internal stimuli (like the Covid pandemic and climate change), or by design and towards a conscious and considered future state.

To ensure a culture evolves in a considered and intended way, it is vital that culture is defined, clearly articulated internally and externally, and then assessed and measured on an ongoing basis.

This ensures that it is proactively managed as:

- **Culture is an asset.** And, like all assets, it can be measured and managed to enable an advantage
- **It is not just about the measurement,** it's about using this data to consistently drive new conversations, learnings and better decisions
- **The outcomes are real.** The result of measuring, monitoring, and improving culture is better outcomes for customers, employees and, ultimately, the overall business performance

An effective customer-centric culture measurement approach has organisational benefits which include:

- A unique organisational view as a customer-centric culture is the glue – all the way from the experience you deliver every day to your key business outcomes
- Brings together the people, customer and brand perspectives, as organisational alignment is vital to success
- Unites disparate data sets from different areas of the organisation that can otherwise sit in silos
- Finds new linkages that could usually be overlooked
- Prompts the right questions to ask 'why', and do so through the customer's eyes
- Directs where to probe deeper to find root causes rather than symptoms of poor performance
- Triggers the right actions to improve culture and, ultimately, business results
- Facilitates the setting of targets for the key drivers of a customer-centric culture
- Ensures a customer-centric culture is tangible to the whole organisation and externally
- Links culture to employee goals via the cascade of relevant measures into reward and recognitions systems
- Ensures customer-centric culture is transparent to the whole organisation and externally

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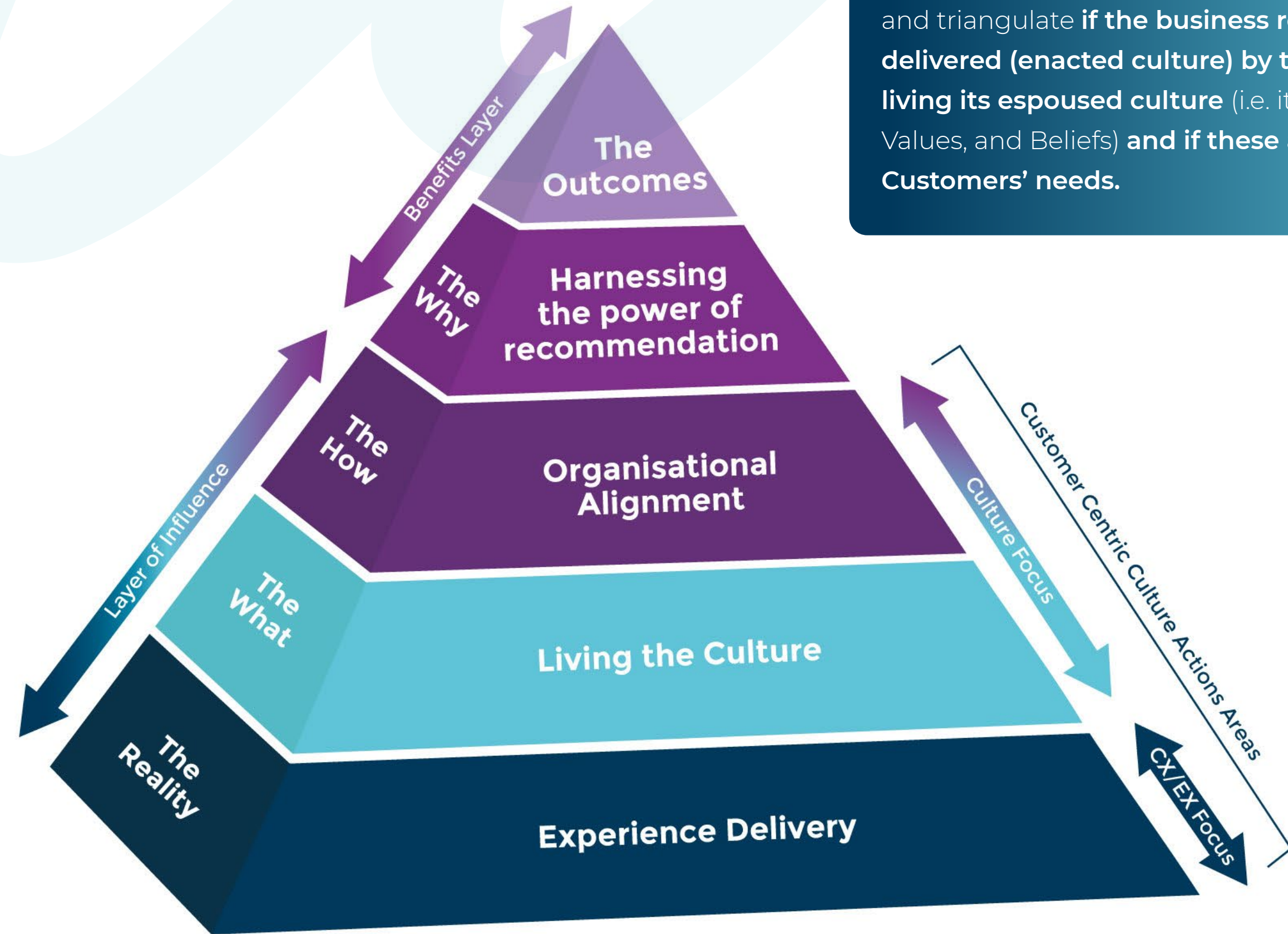
A framework for customer-centric culture measurement (5 levels from Experience to Outcomes)

To ensure the measurement approach for a customer-centric culture is holistic, it needs to look at the company through five lenses. This ensures proper alignment from what a company says (Espoused Culture), what it delivers daily (the Enacted Culture) and, ultimately, the business results.

The five levels that form the framework under which to select measures are:

- Level 1.**
The organisational outcomes measures - For the customer, employees, shareholder, and Regulators
- Level 2.**
The perceptions of the customers' and employees' measures - Would they recommend you?
- Level 3.**
Organisational alignment of brand, customer, and employee measures - Is the company acting as one aligned culture, in line with the espoused Purpose and Values, or are subcultures present?

- Level 4.**
Living the culture measures - Do people clearly understand what the company Values mean to their role (via clearly articulated Beliefs) and are they living these every day?
- Level 5.**
Day-to-day experience delivery measures - Is the company delivering a great experience every day for the Customers and Employees; if not, what is the root cause and required action?



Key Point

Measuring a customer-centric culture through the five lenses allows a person to objectively observe and triangulate **if the business results are being delivered (enacted culture) by the company living its espoused culture** (i.e. its Purpose, Values, and Beliefs) **and if these align with the Customers' needs.**

Figure 10 The customer-centric culture Measurement Framework

Within the framework are two key levels: namely, Organisational Alignment and Living the Culture, as these are elements that are often missed in current Culture Measurement approaches, yet they are key to positive customer outcomes.

Figure 11 (right) illustrates what these levels are, and the following subsections below explore them in more detail.

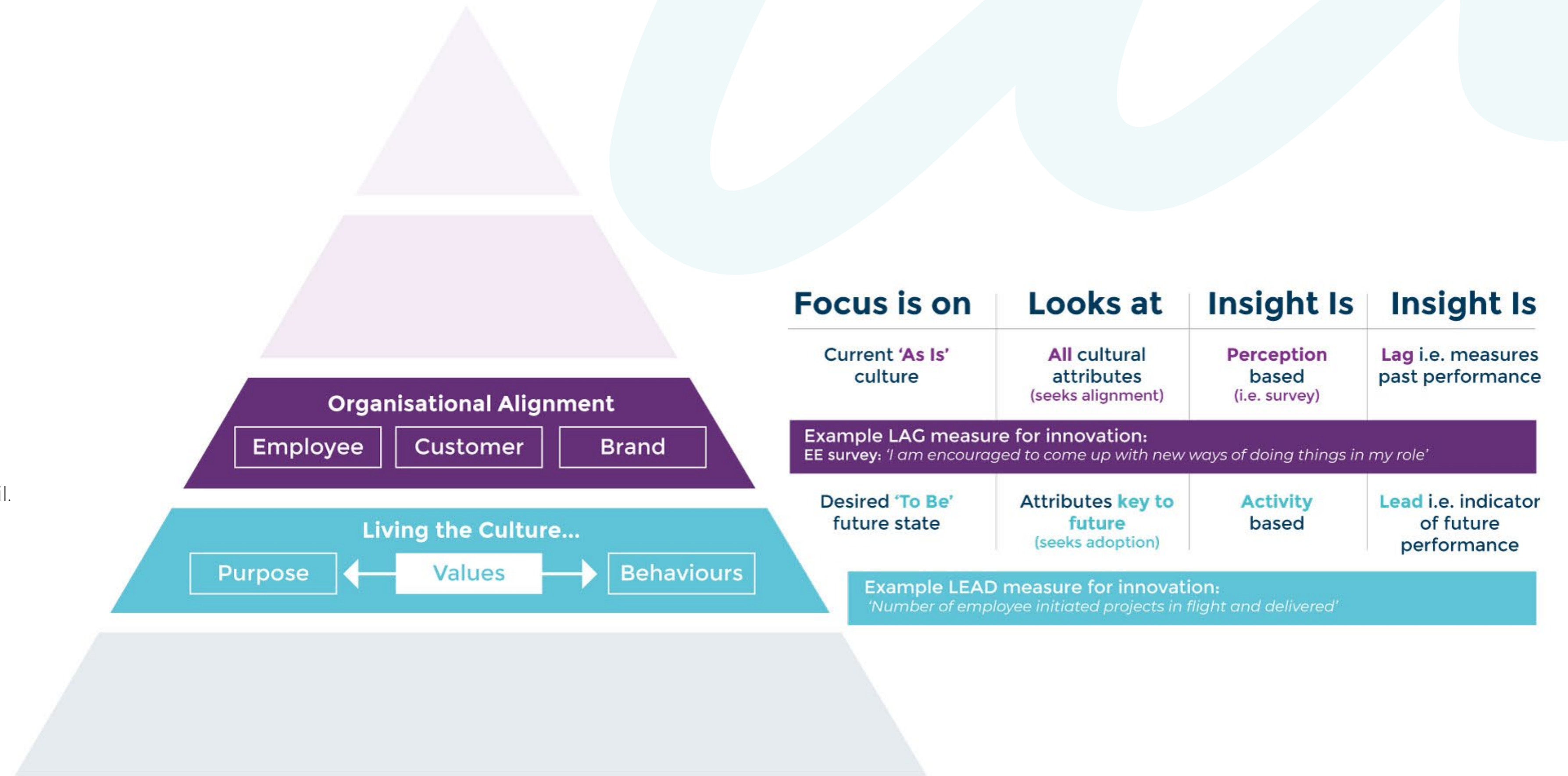


Figure 11 Focus on Organisational Alignment and Living the Culture measurement levels



Focusing on ‘Organisational Alignment’ level (the lens into if the company is acting as one or if subcultures exists)

The Organisational Alignment level assesses the ‘As-is’ culture and looks to see if an organisation is truly aligned around their customer.

As explored in **Section 7. Developing a customer-centric culture that is Meaningful and Practical**, Job Satisfaction and Emotional Commitment together make up Employee Alignment and these are the foundational elements of a customer-centric culture (see Fig. 12).

High-performing customer-centric organisations go beyond key dimensions under Employee Alignment, such as ‘role clarity’, ‘Tools for the job’, and ‘Recognition’ and build corresponding high levels of alignment in Brand and Customer Alignment.

Traditionally, Employee Alignment is measured via EE surveys, but these currently have blind spots and do not touch on Customer and Brand Alignment in a meaningful and practical way.

This can be overcome by enhancing an EE survey via the addition of specific questions to ensure that it covers areas such as Brand and Customer Alignment.

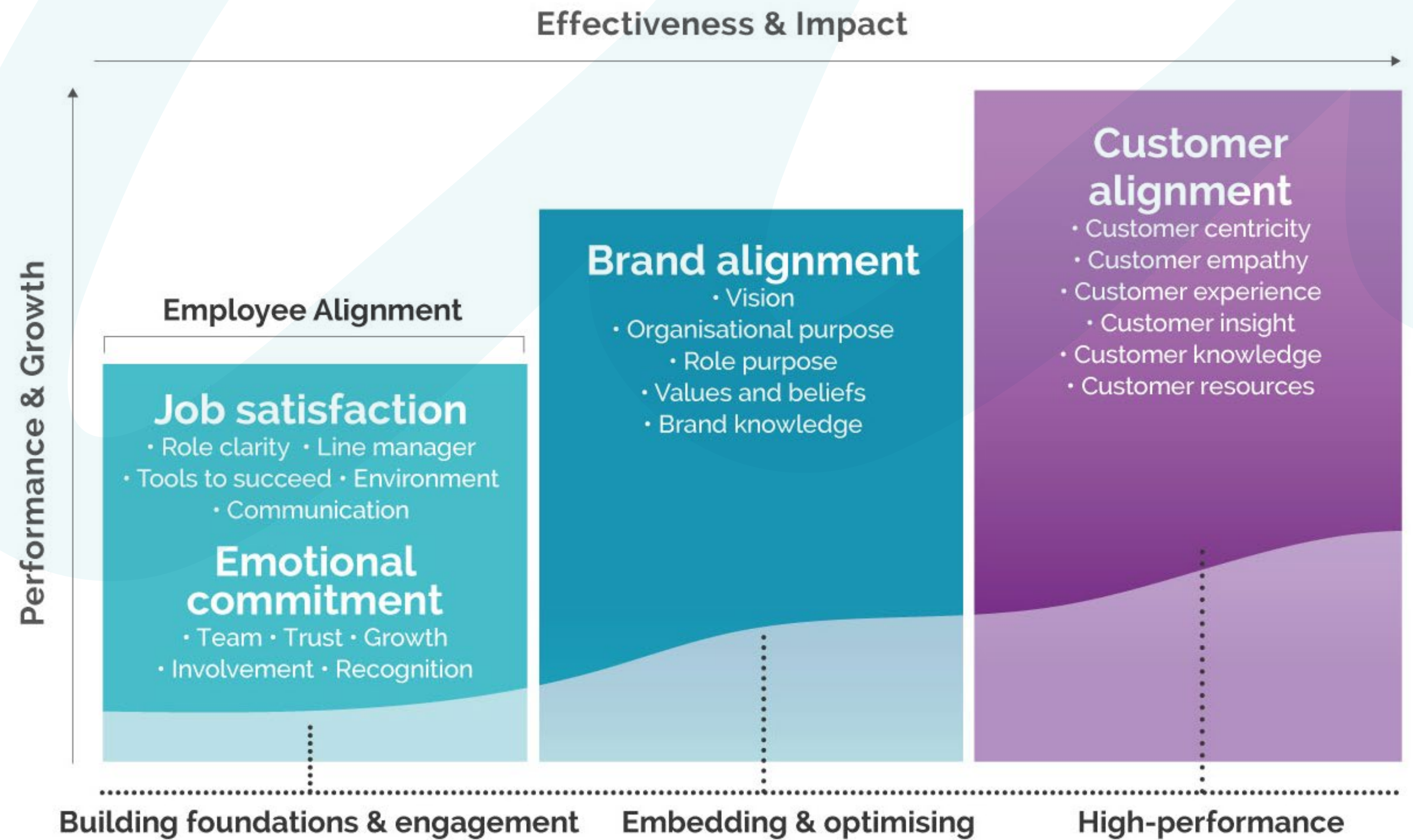


Figure 12 Drivers of a customer-centric culture



Example Customer Culture measures (to sit within the 5 level framework)

When it comes to selecting the right measures to place under the customer-centric culture measurement framework, there is no one-size-fits-all set of measures as these are determined by the nature of the industry. An organisation needs to invest time in their selection.

To aid in this process, the following (fig 13) shows potential measures that are signals of a customer-centric culture, and could be used to stimulate debate and agreement on what is the art of the possible for the Water Sector.

Please note: These show the suggested measures for inclusion in a Customer-Centric measurement approach; it is not recommended that every effort needs to be used. The key is thinking across the 5 lenses/layers to make sure that there's balance in the approach.

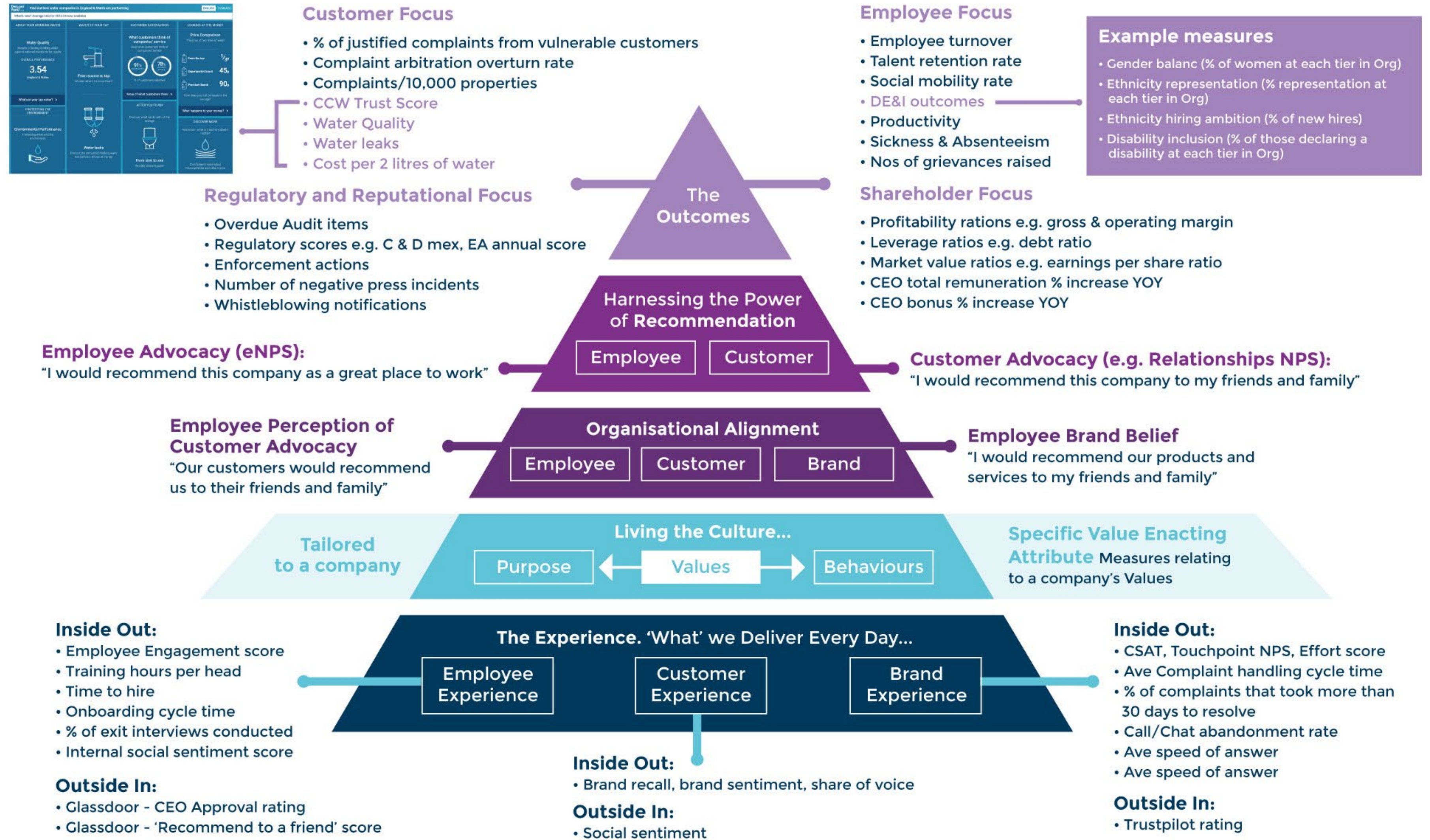


Figure 13 Example measures by customer-centric culture Level



Where to start? A Simple Culture Dashboard Recommendations on metrics

To find a common starting point for customer-centric culture measurement, based on the metrics and measures that organisations (within the water sector) consistently measure currently, the following set of recommended actions could be turned into a simple Culture Dashboard around customer-centric cultures.

Recommended Measurement Dashboard

Culture Measurement Level		Starter Measures
Measuring The Outcomes	Customer:	Trust Score
		C-Mex
		D-Mex
		ODI/PCs
		EPA/NRW APR
		Enforcement Action
		Complaints
	Employee:	Complaints Overturn Rate
	Employee attrition & retention	

Culture Measurement Level		Starter Measures
Measuring Organisational Alignment (Through the following employee survey questions)	Employee:	I would recommend my company to friends and family.
		Our customers would recommend us to their friends and family.

Culture Measurement Level		Starter Measures
Measuring Living the Culture (Through the following employee survey questions)	Purpose:	My company's purpose helps me to see how I contribute and add value.
	Values:	I feel motivated and empowered to live our values every day.
		Leaders actively role-model our values and behaviours.

Culture Measurement Level		Starter Measures
Measuring & Harnessing The power of recommendation (Through the following employee survey questions)	Customer:	On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely are you to recommend our business to a friend or colleague (NPS)
	Employee:	On a scale from 1 to 10, how likely are you to recommend my company as a great place to work? (eNPS)

Culture Measurement Level		Starter Measures
Measuring The Experience	Employee Experience:	Employee Satisfaction
		Employee Engagement
	Customer Experience:	Customer Satisfaction
		UK Customer Service Institution (Trustpilot)
Brand Experience:	Track brand sentiment (% positive, % negative and % neutral)	



Selecting the proper measures (and getting started)

While selecting the correct measures, it's worth ensuring a balanced approach, and the measures should be a mixture of:

- **Lag** measures – such as 'Likelihood to recommend as a place to work' (via an Employee Engagement survey).
- **Lead** measures – such as 'Call/Chat abandonment rates'.
- **Inside-out** measures – such as 'complaint volumes/10,000 properties'.
- **Outside-in** measures – such as 'Customer Trustpilot Rating'.
- **Quantitative** measures – such as 'training hours per employee'.
- **Qualitative** measures – such as 'CEO Approval rating' (via Glassdoor).

Some measures will be simpler to source than others. Later in the report, we discuss what constitutes a good metric and how best to start this journey of customer-centric culture measurement.

Data quality is critical to a customer-centric culture Measurement as 'Bad data in = Bad data out' and inaccurate and misleading data undermine the best intent and generate mistrust.



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Spotlight on Transparency

(and external publication of customer-centric culture data)

Focusing the conversation and driving action (it is not just about measurement – the ‘Listen, Learn, Improve, Transparency’ virtuous circle).

Measurement alone does not change a situation.

To be truly customer-led, and most importantly customer data-led, means bringing the Voice of the Customer (VoC) into all corners of an organisation to drive new conversations and organisational focus. So that the day-to-day decisions (from the Boardroom to the frontline) are informed by the perceptions, needs, and wants of the customer

This doesn't happen just once a year or a quarter but is almost real-time, so the company is constantly evolving and responding to the VoC.

The leading CX organisations, such as American Express, Hilton, and Apple, use the well-proven VoC virtuous circle of ‘listen to your customers, learn what matters to them most, commit to and deliver improvement and, finally, make the whole cycle transparent internally and externally.”

The Listen, Learn, Improve, and Transparency cycle needs to be motivated by positive organisational intent and a willingness to be challenged and change, with the customer's voice being the catalyst.

All too common, organisations launch a VoC programme, as it is ‘the thing to do’, but are not open to challenge and change and use the activity to:

- Justify why the current customer KPI results are ‘okay’
- Look at reasons why the change required cannot be done (customarily put down to cost and other priorities)
- Spend time and energy trying to prove the data is wrong (and why it should be ignored)
- Commission additional research or data gathering to support the status quo or delay a decision

The positive and genuine intent of the Board and C-Suite is critical to achieving real, customer data-led change, as well as attaining customer-centric cultures.

Transparency is also crucial as this is the link to the customer and how trust is built. The willingness to discuss and engage with the customer (and other stakeholders) regarding the performance – and, most notably, what has been learnt and committed to by the company and then delivered – is vital.

This cycle of ‘Listen, Learn, Improve, and Transparency’ is a never-ending process and requires an owner that is empowered to be the internal VoC. As a result, it's usually driven by a VoC function who, critically, owns the cycle but does not own the results and actions.

Key Point

A common error is tasking the VoC function with driving and delivering customer improvement actions themselves. This is counter to creating a customer-centric culture as it does not drive the right ownership across the company. The customer improvement actions (that would arise out of a customer-centric culture measurement approach) are owned by the whole organisation and specifically, the functional owners responsible for the root causes of the issues, as they are the Leaders who have accountability for the processes, people, systems and policies that may need to change.

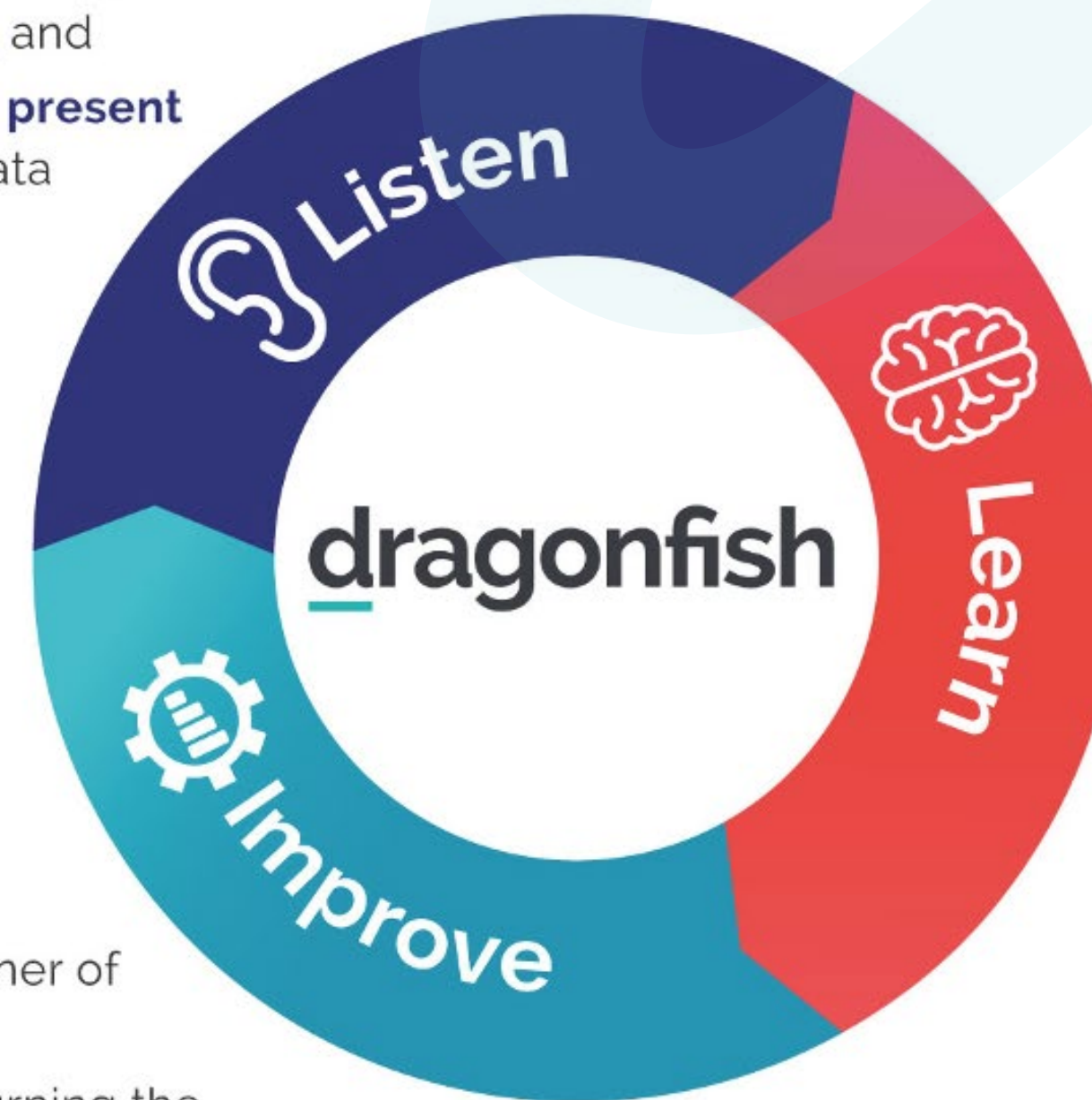


Creating the capability to **listen** i.e.

- **Capture** the data on a regular basis,
- Ensure its **accuracy**, and
- Find the best way to **present and visualise** this data

Creating the capability to **improve** i.e.

- **Collaborate** across the company to find the owner of the key drivers,
- **Support** the owner in turning the driver into an action, and
- Provide **transparency** internally and externally to show 'we heard, we learnt, we did'



Creating the capability to **learn** i.e.

- **Analyse** the data for the key drivers or low (or high) performance,
- Present the findings to **stimulate debate**, and
- **Create focus** on the key drivers and need for action

Figure 14 The Listen, Learn, and Improve cycle for customer-centric culture measurement



The following part of the report aims to share best practice for each of the stages of a VoC approach – **Listen, Learn, Improve, and Transparency**, looking at each of the stages in turn.



Listen Stage:

2 key elements leading CX companies have mastered the ability to capture accurate and actionable data and insight from across the end-to-end customer experience.

1. Presence of enabling and empowering VoC teams that report directly to a C-Suite member. This team is responsible for designing and managing the VoC activities and driving the VoC 'Listen, Learn, Improve, and Transparency' cycle. They are neutral and empowered to be the true VoC, even if that means surfacing uncomfortable truths – which should be welcomed and not ignored internally.

2. Robust set of customer listening posts. The VoC team establishes and manages customer insight activity. They have a clear understanding of all customer insight available and ensure no blind spots. **These cover:**

- Customer interactions across the end-to-end customer journey and lifecycle using approaches such as NPS and tools like Medallia or Rant and Rave. They ensure that the full end-to-end customer journey is regularly measured – and not just the traditional areas such as contact centres
- Qualitative studies into areas of specific need such as areas of customer concern or new emerging customer needs and wants



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Learn Stage:

2 key elements - leading CX companies have mastered the step of taking their customer experience and insight data (Listen Stage) and creating succinct and actionable customer experience reporting that contain the most important issues and opportunities. These simple and digestible reports create clarity on the true customer performance and focuses organisational minds and conversations on the most important customer topics and needs.



1. Impactful and succinct customer experience reporting: The VoC function ensures the wealth of customer insight is distilled down into a few succinct and accessible reports. **These reports:**

- Focus on the vital few measures that matter to a customer across the customer journey and unite the whole company from support functions through to the front line
- Are easy to read and follow a consistent format over time so that the reader can focus on the content
- Are refreshed regularly and are pulse checks on CX (e.g. monthly, as opposed to quarterly or annually)
- They are for consumption by the whole organisation, starting with the Board and C-Suite
- Can be drilled down into when required – i.e. to help identify root causes of poor performance

2. Ownership that starts at the top: The top CX companies start at the top. They have clear customer ownership in the C-Suite and Board. Ownership means the C-Suite (and the Board) reviews and discusses their customer performance reports as often as they do their financial performance and see the two as linked. They look to their VoC function to be the customer’s conscience and encourage and welcome their constructive challenge.



Improve Stage:

2 key elements - leading CX companies act on what they have learnt. They understand and focus on the actual root causes (and not symptoms) of customer issues and channel organisational time and resources to fix them urgently. They don’t look to justify the reason why it is okay or why they can’t act.

1. Focus on the top drivers of satisfaction or dissatisfaction: They have learned it’s essential to focus on the most impactful drivers of customer performance instead of trying to do everything. They are guided by their data and use statistical tools to help understand which dimensions of CX matter most to the customer so the whole organisation can focus on the top 3 to 5 issues and opportunities to improve CX.

2. Action-orientated senior focus and review: The Board and C-Suite not only review the CX reports regularly, but they also most critically discuss and agree on the actions that should be taken. These actions are allocated across the organisation to the relevant functional owners. The Board/C-suite maintains a line of sight of the action until it’s closed and the desired improvement is seen in the CX data.



Transparency Stage:

2 key elements - leading CX companies understand that it's vital to show (internally and externally) the whole listen, learn, improve cycle. Customer trust is built when they see their needs and wants matter to an organisation as demonstrated by decisive action. After all, **'what you do serves as proof of what you believe'** (Simon Sinek, 2015).

1. They Involve the whole company in the above cycle: via living 'Learning Loops' – as first articulated by Bain and Company (**Fig 15**). They are:

- **Inner learning loops** are designed to involve and target **individuals** where they are the root cause of a customer's issue → **Improvement actions are at a micro level** – e.g. additional training or coaching
- **Outer learning loops** are designed to involve and target **teams and functions** (and the stages of the end-to-end customer journey they own) where they are the root cause of a customer's issue → **Improvement actions are at a macro level** – e.g. process, policies or system redesign or change

2. They engage in two-way conversations with customers.

Namely:

- **Individually with the customers that gave them negative feedback** (e.g. via social media, Trustpilot, or via a CX survey) within 48 hours of receiving the feedback. They use the opportunity to say sorry and thank the customer for the feedback, and commit to using the feedback to learn and improve. The market-leading CX companies will even go back to the same customer

weeks/months later and tell them about the changes they have put in place as a result of the feedback. This is supported by UK CSI's number one focus area in 2022 being 'make a personal connection'.

- **Generally, with customers as part of the ongoing relationship** to lend transparency into the business and its performance. This is explored further in the next subsection below.

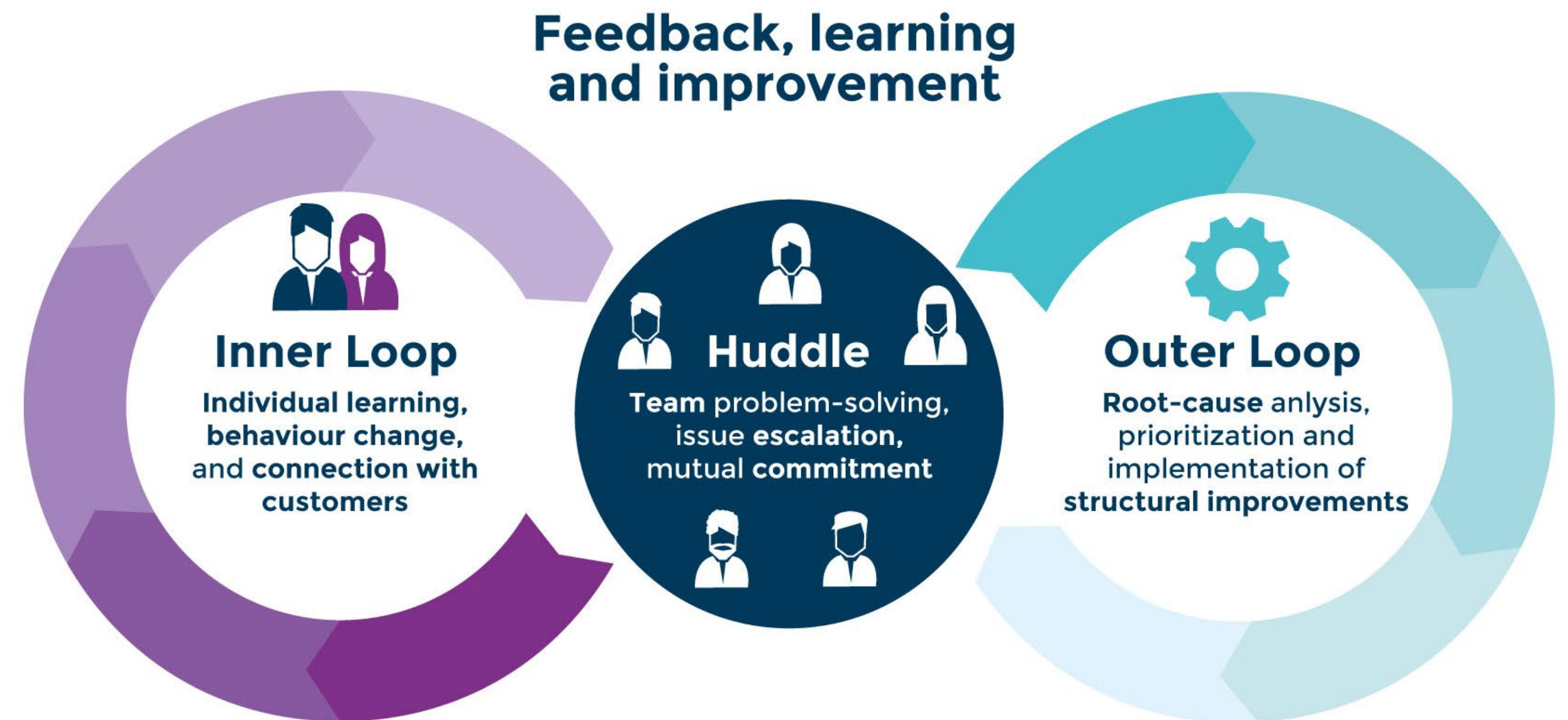


Figure 15 Inner and Outer Improvement loops (Bain and Company)



Spotlight on Transparency (and external publication of customer-centric culture data)

Being open, transparent and then publishing the customer-centric culture measurement data (mentioned earlier in **Learn from Others - The 6 Common Traits of Leading Customer-Centric Companies**) is key to building customer and stakeholder trust.

This is supported by the UK CSI's number 2 focus area for 2022 which was 'Demonstrate transparency, ethical governance and practice' (**Fig 16**).

UK CSI 2022: 10 Focus Areas



- Be clear and transparent about prices, terms and conditions and changes to these. Avoid hidden costs
 - Provide transparent information about the consequences of product and service choices for levels of service and support
 - Demonstrate fair treatment of all employees in pay, conditions and employment practices
 - Ensure that sales or service incentives promote behaviours that support customer experience objectives
- Practice transparent governance and reporting of business and financial performance, customer satisfaction, employee engagement and environmental impact
- Develop collaborative and respectful relationships with regulators, suppliers, partners and other stakeholders
 - Continually review how effectively the organisation identifies and meets the needs of vulnerable customers, or customers whose personal circumstances have changed
 - Share best practice, especially about managing the needs of vulnerable customers, to help raise standards
 - Ensure your risk management strategy and mitigation anticipates changing customer expectations and behaviours.

Figure 16 UK CSI 2022 10 Focus Areas



The publication of any data should go further than static communications via corporate websites and be part of a wider customer engagement approach that ensures two-way customer conversations around performance.

In addition to 'business as usual' public affairs and marketing activity, this can be achieved via the following channels:

- **'One-to-One' engagement comms as part of the customer journey stages** – e.g. the sharing of relevant insights on a customer's bill. A good example of where this is being done well is at Northumbrian Water and their customer bills that clearly show how a customer's money is being spent.
- **'One-to-Many' engagement comms as part of a pre-planned, proactive customer-centric culture engagement communications plan** – e.g. via email, SMS, forums and social media platforms as well as via physical and virtual events.

When publishing customer-centric culture measurement data, it is advisable to consider the following principles of good transparency:

- **Keep it fresh and frequent:** This is the pulse check on your culture and customer performance. Annual, or even quarterly, is not good enough as the data will be stale and not keep customers engaged.
- **It is not just about numbers:** Don't limit the publication to just a set of numbers. Transparency on what was heard, what was learned, and what will be done (and has been done) is vital to building trust.
- **Avoid the spin:** Try not to fall into the trap (as mentioned earlier) of saying 'why it's okay.' Truly listen and respond to the customer's concerns and avoid what may be perceived as excuses in the customer's eyes.
- **Make it personal:** Use a tone that reflects the character of the region and the customers.
- **Join up the internal and external comms strategy:** to ensure employees are informed and aware of the customer performance and committed improvement actions, so they can act as brand ambassadors.

The current level of transparency, with regard to customer-centric culture performance data, gives the water sector an opportunity for improvement and transformation.

Currently, a customer, or any interested stakeholder, has to hunt through corporate websites to find meaningful insight and it is then limited to:

- Ofwat-set customer measures such as C-Mex
- Responses to specific studies such as the CCW's annual Water Matters or bi-annual Testing the Waters report
- Part of wider reports such as the Annual Performance Reports

It requires effort and energy to understand a water company's (and the water sector's) performance and, more importantly, what is being done to improve it. This lack of transparency potentially leaves the customer's main source of information as the press.

CCW



The two exceptions are CCW's Water Company Performance and DiscoverWater.UK which do provide a single source of customer-relevant measures. DiscoverWater.UK provides customers with the ability to click through to a company's website if a person wants more information. The challenge is when the customer clicks through, they end up being directed to landing pages that don't mirror the Discover Water clear layout and are directed to Annual Performance reports etc. This breaks the transparent end-to-end journey for the customer.

This presents a unique opportunity. As mentioned earlier, customer-centric culture measurement is a relatively new concept, and this also applies to the publication of the relevant data and insight.

Key Point

As with customer-centric culture measurement itself, a unique opportunity exists to also be innovative in the approach to Transparency.

The work started by Discover Water and CCW's Water Mark could be built on to provide a:

- **Single source of customer truth for the Water Sector:** Of a wider set of measures, inspired by the customer-centric culture measurement framework, that all water companies sign up to and commit to reporting on in unison
- **Unbiased and independent:** Hosted by an independent body to act as the water sector's VoC function and be the unbiased VoC
- **Link the water sector to the water company:** Make the link to the water companies themselves who, as active partners and contributors, mirror the


same reporting format, look and feel on their own websites; thereby, maintaining the end-to-end transparency journey


- **Drive consistency in a customer-centric culture approach across the water companies:** Underneath the central reporting, the water companies could use the same set of measures to enrich and inform their own internal 'Listen, Learn, Improve' cycles and ultimately, make the link into the EX via the reward systems
- **Create a community for change:** Be underpinned by a community of leads, from across the water companies and regulators, who act as the central forum for sharing of best customer-centric culture

In essence, it could be the catalyst in creating a movement, with the aim to build customer trust, and do so as a sector as opposed to individual companies.


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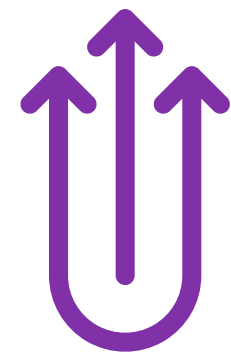
Golden Rules (to ensure adoption and early traction)

To ensure customer-centric culture measurement gets traction, it is advisable to consider the following:

- **Use it as a carrot, and not a stick:** Do not link measurement to reward too early. Ensure people understand the aspiration for the culture, how it relates to their role, and how they influence the outcomes being measured
- **Don't wait for reporting perfection:** It's a journey to build a full set of customer-centric culture measures. Start small with what you have and build from there over time
- **Fill in those culture blind spots:** Focus on what you should measure, not what you can measure. Create an action plan to close the gap on your ideal customer-centric culture measures as this is the start of a journey



Where to go from here (suggested, practical next steps)



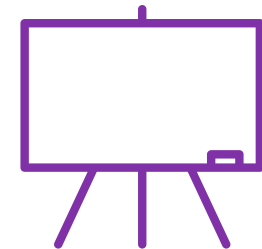
1. Create a community of empowered leads from across the Water Companies and Regulators. Membership should be optional and not mandatory for the water companies (and mandatory for the regulators) as this is a good test of a company's positive intent with regard to the customer.



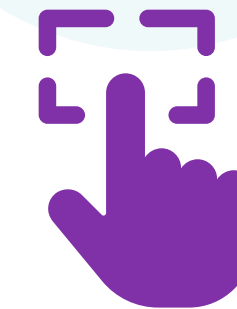
2. Agree on a common aim and intent for this activity and capture in the form of a Project Charter (which could be signed by participating CEOs and shared externally).



3. Share best practice as many water companies have already made this journey.



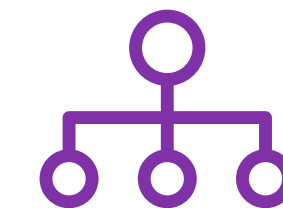
4. Determine the best way to present and visualise the data. Clarify the outcomes that are trying to be achieved by the transparency tool and approach; what capabilities are required?



5. Select the key customer-centric culture measures (inspired by the framework shared earlier):

This community should:

- Endeavour to agree on the measures to track
- Set out clear, mutually agreed definitions for each measure for consistent interpretation.
- Check the data availability and quality for the selected measures, and
- Create and own a plan to close the gap on 'ideal measures'



6. Establish a (simple) governance model.

- What will the reporting process be?
- Who will report on each measure, and when and how?
- Who will be responsible for developing and tracking improvement actions?



7. Starting is the hardest part. Find a point of consensus and nurture it.

This could be the start of a new journey for the water sector to build true customer trust, powered by enabling customer-centric cultures



Section 9: Observations and Conclusions

Emerging Observations and Conclusions

Although this research was commissioned to explore the attributes of a Culture Centric Culture, specifically, how they can be measured and the data published to create transparency, it has led to some deeper and more fundamental observations that are key to evolving customer-centric cultures in the water sector, and ultimately building consumer trust.

The observations:

1. Act as one:

- a. The Regulatory relationships and landscape could hamper (rather than enable) customer-centric cultures – it is about education and alignment across the whole sector around what is meant by ‘customer-centric cultures’ (including the regulators). The whole sector needs to align, simplify and focus efforts in this area. One agenda, one effort.

- b. Trust – The water sector lives or dies together – in the customer’s eyes, trust is equally about the water sector as a whole as it is about a customer’s own water company. Customer trust is key to the water company’s future success and the entire sector risks moving at the pace of the slowest-moving water company with regard to rebuilding this customer trust unless they work together on a shared ambition and aim.

- 2. Genuine customer intent: mixed motives exist behind current customer research and measurement – some companies seek to understand new truths and to change, while others aim to justify the status quo or to learn how they can ‘manage’ customer expectations
- 3. Walk the Talk: Evidence of enabled not enacted Cultures – some have taken their Values and turned them into customer-centric ways of working and thinking (an ‘enacted’ culture); for others they are still potentially posters on a wall where the experience delivered to their customers (and employees) on a daily basis is a different, contradictory reality (an ‘espoused’ culture).

Conclusion

This report, and the desire for it to act as a catalyst for the creation of customer-centric cultures as evidenced by measurement and transparency, is dependent on cross-sector collaboration including the regulatory bodies.

If this level of collaboration, underpinned by a true shared intent, could be established then the water sector has the opportunity to do something unique and innovative in the area of customer-centric culture measurement that would set a new standard across the corporate world.

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Section 10: Acknowledgements

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all the individuals who took part in the research conducted between March and April 2023. Your valuable contributions and willingness to actively participate have been instrumental in the study.

We extend our thanks and appreciation to each participant for their openness and willingness to share both challenges and opportunities. Your candid insights and honest feedback have enriched our understanding of the subject matter and have significantly contributed to the quality of our research.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the support and insight provided by the CCW. Your sector knowledge and valuable suggestions have been pivotal in guiding the report.

About the author **dragonfish**

Dragonfish is a multi-award-winning global culture and performance consultancy (part of the Global Lawton Creative and Innovation Group, with offices in Southampton, London, Los Angeles and Sydney). They partner with ambitious brands across a wide range of sectors to deliver genuine behavioural change and drive sustainable growth.

About our research:

Using their independently commissioned research series 'Cracking the Culture Code,' they have developed a unique framework for harnessing the links between people, brand and customer. The driving sustainable growth, high-performance and customer-centric cultures company has also invested in research with over 4,000 organisations (employing millions of people), linking the attributes of culture with performance into a unique benchmark and maturity model, and have invested hundreds of hours sharing our research and insights at our events, which are open to all.

'The concept of developing a common framework to produce a sector-wide customer-centric culture measurement dashboard is ambitious and innovative, something we've yet to see elsewhere. The dragonfish Cracking the Culture Code research provided a practical framework for segmenting both metrics and insights. This process has enriched our own understanding of customer-centricity and working with CCW, and the sector has been a privilege. We look forward to seeing how companies put these findings into action.'

Andree Gowar, Research & Strategy Director, dragonfish.

'Being part of this research for CCW has been both interesting and enlightening. It has allowed us to capture and distil best practices from across the sector (and beyond), while also identifying commonalities among organisations with truly customer-centric cultures. I am grateful to all the individuals who have participated in the research and shared openly their successes and challenges. The potential impact of this research lies in fostering a shift towards customer-centric thinking and cultivating a customer-first culture, even in times of uncertainty or challenge.'

Laurence Cristofoli, Senior Consultant, dragonfish.

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Section 11: Glossary and Appendix

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