

EMBRACING CUSTOMER CENTRICITY IN GOVERNMENT HR

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More so than in other years, 2024 has made me acutely aware of how cycles appear in our world. Some natural, long-term cycles were most noticeable: a total solar eclipse crossed over the United States for the last time until 2044 and the 13- and 17-year cicada broods simultaneously emerged for the first time since our Founding Fathers were alive. There is a momentous presidential election cycle that is palpably present in our daily lives. But there is also an opportunity to bond together to support our summer Olympic athletes in Paris. In 2024, I have also humbly observed my first full fashion cycle, where clothing trends from my youth—that I thought would be obsolete—have reemerged as stylish.

But there is one cycle that never surprises me when I hear it discussed in the media. That cycle is the perennial debate over whether the employer or employee has the upper hand in the job market. Regardless of this job market cycle's ebbs and flows, the truth of the matter is that the workforce always has a degree of choice—and government human resources (HR) organizations cannot lose sight of that.

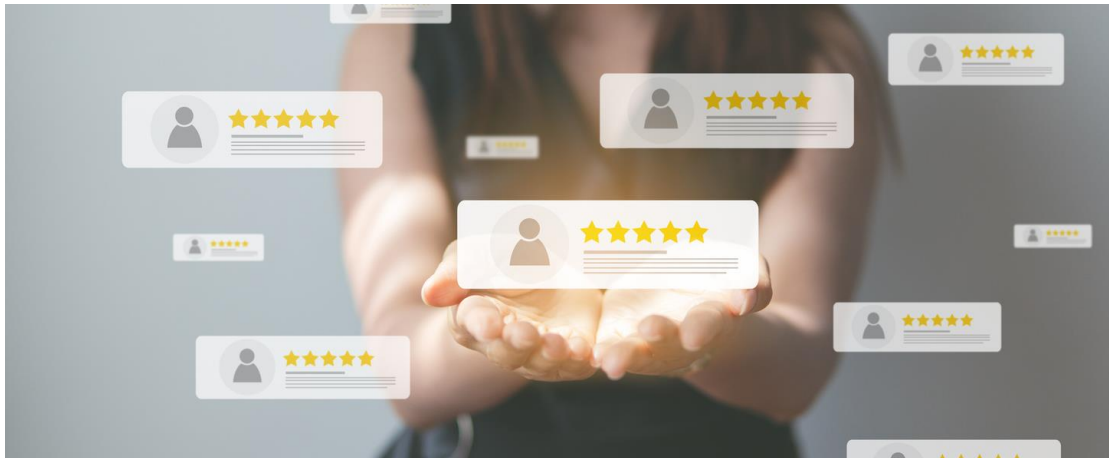
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That degree of choice has intensified with increasing pressures on government HR organizations to adapt and develop into customer-centric functions. While the burden has historically been on the employee to follow the HR office's methods of conducting business, that is no longer the case in this changing workforce economy. Organizations are feeling the effects of shorter tenures at companies, higher degrees of choice within and outside the public sector, the gig economy, smaller pools of qualified talent, and project-based work. These conditions tie directly to macro forces of change. Macro forces are the catalysts for systemic shifts in the employee-employer relationship rather than cyclical swings in the job market dialog. Each of these conditions lends itself to the need for government HR processes and interactions to be efficient.

Government HR offices can neither afford to have their employees or prospective hires encounter painful processes nor be reliant on traditional ways of working.

Understanding Customer Centricity



Approaching internal and external business operations with a customer-centric mindset is the path forward for organizations seeking to become a premier employer. Think about it this way: if employees and potential hires were paying for these HR services, would they still work with the HR organization? Customer centricity refocuses operational elements of working on how to maximize the customers'—the employees', business partners', and potential hires'—positive experience with the HR organization. Customer-centric HR organizations prioritize convenience, accessibility, empathy, and responsiveness over traditional bureaucratic processes and practices. Failure to adopt a customer-centric posture will increasingly impact organizational performance and operations. However, the benefits can improve employee satisfaction and retention, unlock new operational efficiencies, and promote a motivated workforce.

Macro Forces of Change

Macro forces of change, the underlying shifts in the employer-employee dynamic, transcend the job market cycles that news media regularly reports on. Affecting HR offices across industries and sectors, the following macro forces for change drive the need for HR offices to become more customer-centric.

Technological advancements create a push to modernize processes, enabling more efficient and personalized services. HR offices should prepare to embrace AI to the extent possible as it enables them to provide personalized services that create a competitive advantage. Toffler Associates foresees a [convergence of AI and the workforce](#) due to AI's ability to transform every corner of the workforce.



Imagine if HR offices of the future have enough information about the work that must be done and each government employee's skills that there are no longer job descriptions. With more information, AI could create personalized "task packs" that perfectly match the work an organization needs with the skills of each employee. Personalized career paths for employees, designed with data on the employee's performance, skills, and professional interests, allow for more rewarding career opportunities and greater alignment with organizational needs.

Changing workforce expectations

brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic require HR offices to cater to expectations of flexibility, work-life balance, benefits, and meaningful work. The pandemic produced shifts in the employee mindset toward employment dynamics, and those mindset shifts will not recede any time soon.



Imagine if there were no longer hard lines between full-time and part-time, employed and retired, or boss and subordinate. Work structures, roles, time commitments, and relationships are dynamic, and matching the employees' desires, the organization's needs, and the work that needs to be done is a necessary part of doing business. Government HR will need to manage a wide variety of employer-employee relationships to attract the desired talent.

Rapidly shifting skill requirements as change happens faster and faster—from technology, global forces, innovative practices, or new cultural norms—many skills will have shorter and shorter windows of usefulness in the job market, requiring employees to embrace lifelong learning. This macro force also puts a spotlight on those critical skills that are timeless, such as strategic thinking, leadership, collaboration, critical thinking, and empathy. Toffler Associates has worked with our government HR clients to navigate the [Top 9 Future of Work Disruptors](#) and address rapidly shifting skill requirements.



Imagine if having multiple careers over a lifetime is the norm. Skill requirements will change frequently and tenure within a field of more than five to ten years will provide little advantage. Moving to a completely new career at 35, 45, 55, or beyond has little professional impact. HR organizations would need to adapt to working with individuals with more transitory careers.

Increased competition for talent with the private sector underscores the need for government HR to adopt practices that maintain a competitive stance. These private sector competitors often have HR practices that are more advanced and employee-focused, signaling alignment with the demands of the workforce.



Imagine if the commercial and government employee experiences were so dramatically different that employees self-select into which experience matches their needs. Customer-centric HR organizations create an invaluable experience tailored to the individual, leading to increased employee retention and stronger sector cultural fits.

These “Imagine if” statements represent a further distant future, but it is helpful for HR organizations to think about how the world could transform to understand how to plan for today.

Strategies to Embrace Customer-Centric HR Practices



Introducing customer centricity across HR operations is no small feat, so here are several opportunities for government HR organizations to embrace.

- **Data Analysis Informs HR Strategy.** Customer centricity is more challenging to achieve without complete data and strong analysis driving organizational decision-making. HR organizations can gain valuable insights into employee engagement, talent acquisition and retention, performance, customer experience, and more when the organization weaves data analysis into its operational nature. Customizing the customer experience based on personal needs, preferences, and data depends on high-quality data. Using data to tailor digital and live customer experiences, implement strategies, and target issues produces a customer-centric HR model that promotes an impressive HR organization.
- **Digital Transformation Is a Necessity.** To remain responsive to changing digital technologies in the HR space and keep pace with customer expectations, government HR organizations should incorporate digital services, such as mobile applications, digital communication channels, and AI features, to improve the customer experience. With high-quality data analysis as a prerequisite, digital transformation drives more informed HR decision-making. Pairing opportunities for self-service with easy-to-use digital tools, clear information, and accessible support can create a more enjoyable customer experience.
- **Understand Your Audience.** Why is marketing obsessed with segmentation and personalization, but HR has no language for “employees who do the same thing or have the same skills but have different motivations, desires, needs, and preferences”? The organizations that will win the battle for talent will understand that each employee is unique, and to maximize their productivity and contribution to the organization, they must be treated uniquely. Customer centricity requires some level of customization, at the segment or individual level.
- **Continuous Process Improvement Is Key.** HR organizations should regularly revisit their processes, policies, and practices to determine where they could simplify operations, thus improving the HR practitioner and customer experience. Streamlining processes can quicken service delivery, improve satisfaction, and create positive impressions in each interaction with the HR organization.

Is Your HR Organization Ready to Become Customer-Centric?

In becoming customer-centric, government HR organizations should be mindful of how technology should augment, not replace, human interactions. Maintaining the human element throughout each customer interaction is important to becoming an employer of choice that retains and supports its workforce and attracts the best talent in today's complicated market. By incorporating digital tools to transform the customer experience, data analysis to promote effective decision-making, and process improvements to reshape how business is conducted, government HR organizations can more effectively serve their customers and attract the skilled workforce they need.

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