



TO BE CUSTOMER-FOCUSED, WE HAVE TO BE PROCESS-FOCUSED

In today's world, the customers run the business. Ultimately, that's who we all report to. Those people who pay the bills are the real boss, so that's who we have to please. And they're becoming more demanding, more unforgiving, with every passing day.

Since the people we serve and sell to are truly the ones in charge, a customer orientation should drive all of the organization's activities. We need to start with the customers' wishes, with what they want from us, with what they consider value.

It's not our opinion that counts. As the supplier, our perspective on what represents value, quality, or worthwhile work may be quite different from the customers' thinking. But if we're smart, and if we take a process-centered approach, we'll start by determining what customers really want from us. Then we'll work backward from there.

A process is a series of related steps or tasks that together create value for the customer. The most important word here is "customer." A process perspective on a business is the customer's perspective. That's because processes are the means by which an organization produces its products and services. And the only things that customers really care about are these outputs. Our *results*. Customers are totally uninterested in our organization chart, strategic plan, personnel policies, or such. The important thing to them is the value we deliver. So if we're going to be customer-focused, we have to be process-focused.

Most processes are cross-functional. That is, they span the white space between the boxes on the organization chart. *Primary processes* are those that directly result in a product or service that is received by the organization's external customers. Examples could include the sales or product development processes.

There also are two other types to consider. *Support processes* produce products that are invisible to the external customer. Like the recruiting and hiring process. Or the internal help desk. They go on behind the scene, but they're essential to the effective management of the business. Finally, a third category is *management processes*. This includes actions that managers should take to facilitate the smooth functioning of the business. For instance, budgeting or strategic planning.

All three types of processes, however, should be customer-centric.

A key point to keep in mind is that an organization is only as effective as its processes. In fact, over the long haul, even strong people can't compensate for a weak process. Sure, some occasional success may come from individual or team heroics. But if you pit a good performer against a bad process, the process will win almost every time.



Boiled down, what all this means is that weak processes cause weak performance. So in our efforts to serve the customer, let's first focus our people on process improvement.

Concepts in this paper are from the *Rummler-Brache Process Improvement Certification Workshop*.

