



Process Improvement Trends Report 2024

In 2024, two big things matter most for business operations: efficiency and empathy. Companies are focusing on strategies that prioritize customer satisfaction while pursuing operational excellence. From building customer-centric processes to harnessing the power of AI, here are five key trends shaping the business landscape this year.

As you delve into these trends, keep in mind the importance of understanding your customers' perspectives. Remember, our upcoming process improvement course is being shaped by your valuable feedback!

If you haven't already, [click here to take the survey](#) and help us create a course that truly meets your needs. And who knows your contribution might just land you a free spot in the course!

1. Customer Experience As Number One Priority: Empathy Drives Efficiency

[Gartner's study on marketing leaders](#) highlights a shift in focus, with 80% of companies expecting customer experience to be the key differentiator in the marketplace. In this era of instant gratification, customer experience is everything. Expect to see:

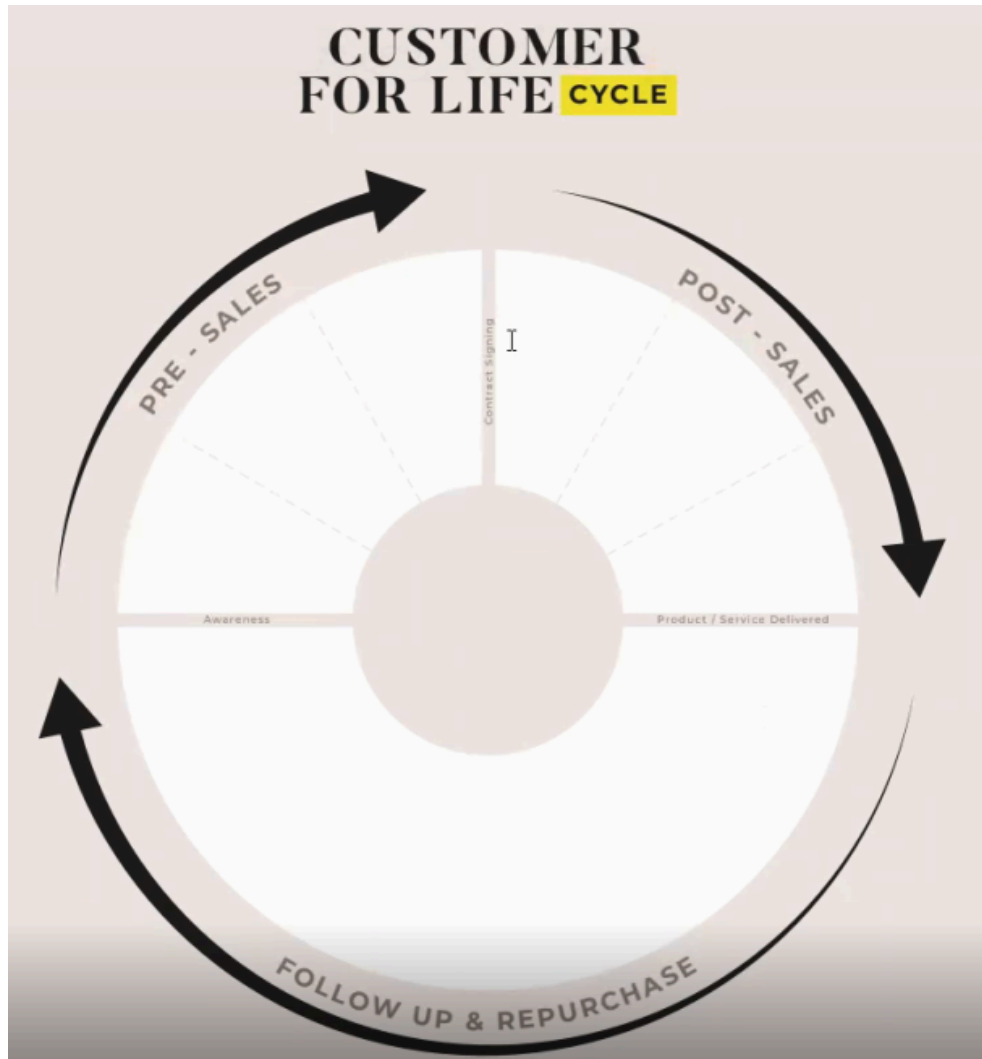
Empathy-Based Process Design

- **Shifting mindset:** Move from "one-size-fits-all" processes to understanding individual customer motivations and frustrations. Analyze customer data, conduct journey mapping workshops, and actively listen to feedback to identify key pain points and desired outcomes.
- **Designing with empathy:** Keep your customers' needs in mind at every step of the process. This could involve creating personalized onboarding journeys, offering flexible options at checkout, and providing proactive support based on their specific needs.

- **Prioritizing emotional touchpoints:** Pay attention to moments that matter most, like buying something or getting help with a problem. Design these experiences to build trust, calm their nerves, and make them feel connected to your brand.

Elevating Customer Journey Mapping:

- **Holistic Mapping:** Go beyond traditional touchpoints (e.g., website, store) to include every interaction a customer has with your brand, online and offline. Consider pre-purchase research, social media engagement, post-purchase support, and follow-up or repurchase. Every business goes through pre-sales, delivering what's promised in post-sales. Not all continue to follow-up and encourage repurchases. To retain customers long-term, closing this loop is essential.



One of the most effective tools in holistic mapping is [the goods and information flow](#). It's the tool that Toyota uses for everything. It documents the flow of goods and information across the entire customer experience, from pre-sales to follow-up and repurchase.

- **Emotion Mapping:** Tag emotions onto each step of your customer journey - happy, frustrated, or confused. This helps you spot moments of delight, annoyance, and missed connections. Fix frustrations, amplify happy moments, and make everything easier to follow. Create a journey your customers love, not just tolerate.
- **Actionable Insights:** Don't just map the journey; transform it! Use insights to prioritize improvements, redesign pain points, and personalize communication based on emotional context.

Boosting Real-time Feedback Loops:

- **Embrace omnichannel feedback:** Collect feedback through various channels (surveys, polls, social media, live chat) to capture different perspectives and reach different customer segments.
- **Go beyond satisfaction:** Measure not just satisfaction (e.g., NPS scores) but also emotional engagement and effort. In fact, there are several [reasons why you don't have to use NPS](#). Net Promoter Score doesn't give the big picture of what you need to know—the specific metrics on X, the reasons for customer behavior and so on.
- **Close the feedback loop:** Make it easy for customers to provide feedback and actively respond to their concerns. Show them how their feedback is being used to improve their experience.

Additional Points:

- **Investing in employee training:** Equip employees with empathy-building skills to actively listen, understand customer needs, and deliver personalized service.
- **Metrics that matter:** Develop and track metrics that go beyond traditional business metrics and capture the emotional impact of the customer experience.

By hyper-focusing on customer experience through empathy-driven design, journey mapping, and real-time feedback loops, businesses can build stronger relationships and boost customer satisfaction. Making the [customer experience a priority can improve revenue](#) and ultimately drive efficiency and success.

2. Agility and Adaptability Take Center Stage

A [study by McKinsey](#) found that 85% of CEOs believe the pace of change in their industries is accelerating. This means yesterday's best practices can quickly become tomorrow's roadblocks.

In order for businesses to thrive, they must continue to adapt to changes in the industry as well as consumer preferences. Netflix pivoted from DVDs to streaming to stay relevant, while Kodak clung to film photography and lost ground to digital cameras. Expect to see more companies:

Embrace change: Embracing a culture of continuous improvement and rapid experimentation is key to staying ahead of the curve in a dynamic market.

Toyota's [Kaizen philosophy](#) encourages constant small improvements, resulting in incremental gains that compound over time. They reduced production time for the Prius by 40% using Kaizen principles.

Amazon encourages employees to "fail fast" and learn from their mistakes. Their Fire Phone might not have been a hit, but the lessons learned shaped their later successful Alexa devices.

Remote and hybrid workforce: Remote collaboration tools and flexible work models are essential for managing distributed teams and ensuring efficient communication. The remote-first workplace requires innovative approaches to collaboration and process optimization. Expect to see:

- **[Asynchronous Communication](#):** Leveraging technology to facilitate effective communication and decision-making across time zones and geographies.
- **Virtual Process Workshops:** Collaborative brainstorming and process design sessions conducted remotely with the aid of digital tools.
- **Cloud-Based Tools:** Centralized platforms for [process documentation](#), data sharing, and real-time project management foster team cohesiveness despite physical distance.

3. Data-Driven Decision Making

IDC estimates that businesses globally will spend over \$215 billion on business intelligence (BI) and analytics software in 2024. Using data to make smart choices is becoming crucial for any company that wants to win. It's all about turning your

information into a golden ticket, so you will see more organizations focus on data-driven decisions. This means building strong systems, powerful tools, and hiring expert data people to transform your company's data into gold.

- **Data as a strategic asset:** Investing in data infrastructure, analytics tools, and skilled data professionals is key to extracting actionable insights from organizational data.

Example: A supermarket chain invested in advanced sales data analytics. They discovered the surprising effect of rainy weather on cheese sales. Analyzing historical data led to strategic stocking adjustments, boosting cheese sales by 15% on rainy days.

- **Data-driven process optimization:** Using data to identify bottlenecks, analyze performance, and make informed decisions about process improvement initiatives.

Example: A consulting firm specializing in digital marketing services noticed they were losing clients after the initial onboarding phase. Data revealed that only 50% of new clients completed their first project cycle. To solve the problem, they improved the onboarding process by developing automated systems to deliver personalized proposals faster and streamline the initial project setup. They also enhanced communication by training employees on active listening and increased personalization by tailoring project plans to individual client needs and preferences.

By implementing these data-driven improvements, the consulting firm saw a 40% increase in client retention, significantly boosting their revenue and client satisfaction.

- **Metrics and dashboards:** Real-time monitoring of key performance indicators (KPIs) is crucial for measuring the impact of process changes and making adjustments as needed.

Example: A hospital implemented a real-time dashboard tracking patient wait times, bed availability, and doctor schedules. This enabled them to adjust staffing and patient flow, reducing wait times by 30% and improving patient satisfaction.

These data-driven methods [increase objectivity in the workplace](#) by eliminating biases and opinions that might otherwise influence decision-making.

4. Balance Sustainability and Ethics

[A 2023 study by Accenture](#) found that 63% of consumers are willing to pay more for sustainable products and services. Customers are increasingly demanding transparency, eco-friendly practices, and responsible sourcing, while investors are prioritizing companies demonstrably committed to ethical and sustainable practices. As a result, integrating these values into process improvement is no longer just the "right thing to do," it's a strategic imperative for long-term success. Expect to see:

- **Eco-friendly processes:** Service-oriented businesses are increasingly looking for ways to optimize processes for environmental sustainability and resource efficiency.
- **Ethical AI:** Making sure AI is used ethically in automating processes and making decisions is crucial for maintaining trust and transparency with customers.
- **Social responsibility:** Incorporating social impact and ethical considerations into process improvement initiatives is shaping a more responsible business landscape.

5. Demystifying AI: From Hype to Hands-on

AI is no longer just a buzzword. The time of AI hype is shifting towards real-world use. Businesses are moving past trial runs and starting to integrate AI solutions into their main operations. According to Gartner (2023), 61% of businesses are actively investing in AI to improve processes. Expect to see:

Generative AI

Generative AI is like a creative machine that learns from existing content and then uses that knowledge to invent brand new text, images, sounds, or even code, always striving to capture the style and quality of its training data. Examples include:

Automate process design: This refers to using technology and algorithms to automatically generate or optimize workflows based on predefined criteria like input, output, resources, and constraints. This could involve tools like process mining, robotic process automation (RPA), and intelligent workflow engines.

Suggest optimal workflow structures: This goes beyond automation by considering factors like efficiency, resource utilization, flexibility, and error handling. The system

would analyze various potential workflow structures and recommend the one that best meets the objectives and minimizes operational cost and delay.

Predict potential bottlenecks: This involves anticipating issues that could slow down or stall the process. The system would analyze historical data, current resource availability, and predicted workload to identify potential choke points and suggest mitigating strategies before they even occur.

Intelligent Automation

Intelligent automation is like a supercharged robot teammate that learns your processes, automates repetitive tasks, and suggests smarter ways to do things. It analyzes data, predicts bottlenecks, and recommends optimal workflows, turning messy processes into sleek, efficient machines. This boosts productivity, cuts costs, and frees up people for higher-level tasks, taking process improvement to the next level. Examples are:

Hyper-personalized customer experiences:

Imagine this:

- As you browse an online store, the site adjusts product recommendations based on your past purchases, browsing history, and even real-time emotions detected through facial recognition.
- A customer service chatbot seamlessly understands your individual needs and offers tailored solutions, not just canned responses.
- A loyalty program automatically personalizes rewards and deals based on your unique preferences and engagement with the brand.

These are just a few glimpses of hyper-personalized customer experiences powered by AI. By analyzing vast amounts of customer data and leveraging it for real-time personalization, businesses can build deeper customer relationships, boost engagement, and drive loyalty.

Streamlined decision-making with embedded AI recommendations

Think of AI as your trusted advisor, whispering insights in your ear:

- Executives have dashboards infused with AI-driven predictions, suggesting optimal marketing strategies, resource allocation, and investment decisions.

- Sales teams receive real-time AI recommendations for the most likely leads to convert, closing deals faster and more efficiently.
- Doctors get AI-powered suggestions for diagnoses and treatment plans, tailored to each patient's specific health data and potential complications.
- By embedding AI directly into workflows and decision-making processes, businesses can make faster, data-driven choices, minimizing risks and maximizing outcomes.

Automation of repetitive tasks

Remember those mind-numbing, repetitive tasks that drain your employees' time and energy? Intelligent Automation takes care of them:

- RPA (Robotic Process Automation) robots handle routine tasks like data entry, invoice processing, and scheduling appointments, freeing up human workers for more creative and strategic endeavors.
- Chatbots answer basic customer inquiries 24/7, reducing call center volume and improving customer satisfaction.
- Automatic document processing scans and extracts information from invoices, forms, and other documents, eliminating manual data entry errors.
- Automation frees up valuable human resources, allowing businesses to focus on higher-value activities and improve overall efficiency.

By combining these three powerful features, Intelligent Automation is transforming businesses across industries, boosting productivity, enhancing customer experiences, and driving smarter decision-making. It's the future of work, and it's happening now.

But keep in mind that AI is like any [tool for process improvement](#). It is not meant to solve a problem. The success of a tool depends on how you use it. While tools can improve processes, they're no match for genuine interaction and personal connections. When using technology like AI, you also have to understand how it impacts the entire customer experience.

To put it simply...

This year, it's all about making things run smoothly and making customers happy, while always being ready for the next surprise. By prioritizing customer-centric strategies, embracing agility, and harnessing the power of AI-driven innovation, companies can not only meet the evolving needs of their customers but also drive operational excellence. The most successful companies will be the ones who listen, learn, and adapt, all while keeping their customers close.

Ready to put these trends into action? We're building a comprehensive process improvement course based on your feedback! [Take the survey here](#) and get a chance to be one of the three lucky contributors who gets the course for free!

Want to learn more about building strong processes and growing your business? Hear from industry leaders and business mavericks on UNprofessional. [Tune in to the pod now](#) and follow Hilary on social @HilaryCorna.

In your service,

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