



## Client Experience (CX) In the New Normal:

- Striking the Balance Between High-Touch and High-Tech
- Key Drivers of CX During COVID-19
- Data-Driven CX
- Lessons Learned One Year into the Pandemic



**JOINT COUNCIL'S EXECUTIVE MONTHLY REPORT**

Developed by the Research Committee

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# 1. Introduction

In Canada, the COVID-19 pandemic (“the pandemic”) fast-tracked the adoption of a digital first mindset as a necessity across government.<sup>1</sup> Previous discussions of “when” Canada would be fully connected have turned into concrete funding, timelines and roll-out of a digital first mindset across all levels of government. According to KPMG, at the start of the pandemic, governments at all levels made two years worth of progress towards digital transformation in two months.<sup>2</sup>

The impact of the pandemic on client behaviour was also immediate. Across all demographics, the pandemic caused a significant shift in the decision-making and expectations of clients.<sup>3</sup> As a result, previous standards of what was considered to be great client experience (CX) quickly became insufficient.

To adapt to the new normal, government organizations are forced to rethink their approach to clients and realign themselves to the changes presented by the pandemic. Governments are refreshing their CX strategies to strike the right balance between the human touch and digital automation.

1, 2. [Digital: It is not the future, it is today](#)

3. [Global Customer Experience Excellence research 2020: The COVID-19 special edition](#)

4. [Balancing Humanization and Digitization: 3 Key Customer Service Trends](#)

## Why is this Report Important?

- The pandemic made digital imperative to the delivery of public services. It is important for government to understand the journey and satisfaction of clients to ensure their needs are met in the “new normal”.
- While digitization has revolutionized the way clients interact with government, digital interactions are not a cure-all for CX challenges. During the pandemic, the demand for human-focused customer service has increased simultaneously with the desire to communicate through contactless, digital channels.<sup>4</sup>
- At the beginning of the pandemic, the Joint Council’s Research Committee published an [Executive Report](#) that examined CX. This Executive Report offers a review of CX lessons learned since the pandemic began.

## What is covered in this executive report?

This report includes the following:

- Introduction
- The Balance Between High-Touch and High-Tech
- Key Drivers of Good CX During COVID-19
- Data-Driven CX
- Lessons Learned One Year into the Pandemic

## 2. Striking the Balance Between High-Touch and High-Tech

It is important for organizations to determine which CX strategy is essential to help create the best client experience. According to Medallia, there are two key factors to consider when determining whether human or digital interaction is the right fit in government's CX strategy:<sup>5</sup>

1

Invest in personalized, human interactions at points where the client is seeking advice or likely to experience strong emotions

2

Minimize effort for the client (especially for interactions that happen frequently)

5. [Improving Customer Experience in the Wake of COVID-19](#)

6. [Digital Innovations Will Enhance CX in Government and Timing Couldn't Be Better](#)

7. [Forrester: Digital Government Reaches New Heights But Websites Need Work](#)

8, 9. [Balancing the Human and Digital Customer Experience](#)

### Human CX

Although [research](#) indicates that most clients are increasingly engaging with government through digital channels, some clients still prefer traditional channels more than newer digital options.<sup>6</sup> [Research](#) has shown that nearly 60% of clients prefer to contact customer service via phone if they had an urgent customer service issue.<sup>7</sup> CX strategies should look for key moments where the human touch could add value. For example, when a client is seeking advice or guidance. Although some elements of advice can be automated, it is important to make it easy for a client who prefers human interaction to make that connection. This is even more critical when the client has tried to use an automated process (such as a chatbot or online-help search) and still requires assistance. In these cases, it should be seamless to switch from the digital or AI interaction to a human one.<sup>8</sup>

### Digital CX

The pandemic has increased the importance of digital service delivery, especially for government services that were typically accessed in-person prior to the pandemic. The shift from in-person to online channels has created a more digital savvy client that demands easy and effortless interactions. To respond to the heightened expectation of clients, the use of technology should complement the human element of the CX without creating new frustrations.<sup>9</sup> One way of doing so is by minimizing efforts for the client by digitizing interactions that occur frequently (i.e. checking the status of an application). This can improve convenience for clients and reduce effort and cost for both clients and organizations.

### 3. Key Drivers of Good CX During COVID-19

In 2020, Neustar hosted a webcast titled [Improving Customer Experience in the Wake of COVID-19](#). The webcast featured three public sector CX experts that shared their insights on successfully serving clients effectively during the pandemic. According to the experts, there are three main drivers of good experience during the pandemic:<sup>10</sup>

#### Speed

A key driver of CX is the speed of resolving a clients' problem(s). The perception of clients regarding what is quick and slow has changed.<sup>11</sup> Clients are likely to have anxious thoughts faster (i.e. "Is there a problem?", "Is my problem going to be resolved?", etc.). Due to this anxiety, organizations are required to operate faster for clients to perceive their needs are being met.

#### Empathy

A significant component of CX is empathy and emotion. The pandemic has demonstrated that the most common emotions experienced by clients are fear, discomfort, and uncertainty.<sup>12</sup> This has forced governments at all levels to respond to these emotions. What is powerful about COVID-19 is that organizations and clients are going through the crisis together. This presents a unique opportunity for the public sector to lead with empathy and understand how to defuse pandemic-related emotions experienced by clients.

#### Accuracy & Clear Communication

Good experience is driven by accuracy, clear communications, quick problem solving, and personal connection. The pandemic has highlighted the need for human interaction and connection.<sup>13</sup> This reinforced the importance and significance of contact centres and the role they play in providing communication and experience on the front line.

### Human-Centred Design

According to an article in Medium, Human-Centred Design (HCD) is a methodology that "empowers an individual or team to design products, services, systems, and experiences that address the core needs of those who experience a problem".<sup>14</sup> HCD is a useful methodology to use in government to design the tools to achieve the key drivers of good CX.

While there are many forms of the Human-Centred Design process, the stages can be summarized as follows:

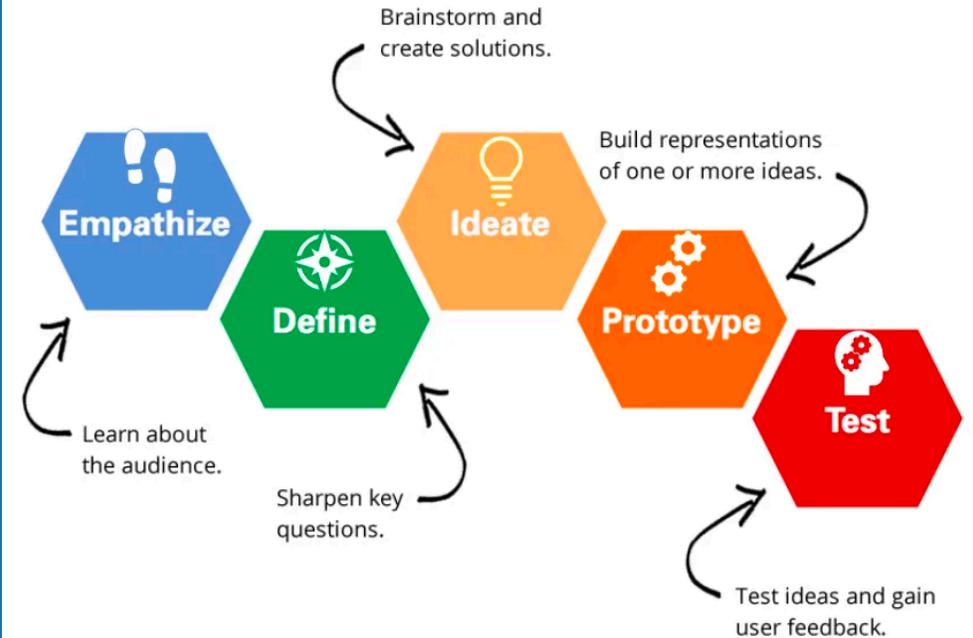


Image Source: [Human-Centered Design vs. Design-Thinking](#)

10. [Improving Customer Experience During COVID-19](#)  
11, 12, 13. [Improving Customer Experience in the Wake of COVID-19](#)  
14. [A Guide to Human-Centered Design Methodology and Process](#)

## 4. Data-Driven CX

A well-developed data analytics system, with a data-driven CX strategy at its core, enables the public sector to deliver superior service and increase client satisfaction levels.<sup>15</sup> Data-driven CX provides a positive experience to both the public sector and clients. Some benefits of a data-driven approach include the following:

1

**Improved Understanding of Clients.** Data provides insight into who clients are, how they access programs and services, and how they prefer to engage with government. This enables the development of products and services that are reflective of client needs.

2

**A Clear Picture of What Works.** Collecting feedback from surveys and/or online forms provides visibility into what works and what does not. This enables government to identify specific issues experienced by clients.

3

**Better Decision Making.** Data-driven CX is critical to the future growth and development of government. Utilizing data to identify trends, preferences, and/or issues enables decisions to be made quickly and accurately.<sup>16</sup>

15. [3 Ways To Elevate Your Customer Experience With Effective Use of Data](#)

16. [Data-Driven Customer Experience: The Organizational Challenge](#)

17. [Report to the Clerk of the Privy Council: A Data Strategy Roadmap for the Federal Public Service](#)

18, 19. [Improving Customer Experience During COVID-19](#)

### Examples of Leveraging Data to Inform CX and Increase Client Satisfaction

Improving services for Canadians by joining datasets: Two of the Government of Canada's largest service providers, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) and the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), together manage over 100 million interactions with Canadians every year. The two departments joined forces to improve the delivery of services to Canadians by creating connected datasets which inform decisions and spur innovation.<sup>17</sup>

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs conducted client experience interviews and found that clients feared exposure to COVID-19 when visiting government offices. The organization determined that the facility-cleaning processes should be made more visible to showcase how frequent the space was sanitized. According to the organization, clients felt more at ease if they saw people actively cleaning spaces when they visited for appointments.<sup>18</sup>

Forrester Research found that one of the easiest ways to improve CX is to identify the top common client questions and/or problems, perform a root cause analysis for each, and then solve those problems.<sup>19</sup> According to Forrester Research, there is a high chance that several of these most-common problems can be solved quickly. It is important to leverage the insight of contact centres to accurately establish the client journey map and pinpoint specific issues.

## 5. Lessons Learned One Year into the Pandemic

In April 2020, the Joint Council’s Research Committee published a report titled, “[The Balance Between Digital & Human Touch in Customer Experience](#).” This report was released at the beginning of the pandemic, when public sector organizations across the country fast-tracked digital transformation efforts to respond to the service delivery needs of clients. Overall, innovation and adaptability have been key to government’s CX strategies. Over the past year, the success of these strategies have been impacted by how well government listens to clients and react accordingly.<sup>20</sup>

The CX lessons since the Research Committee’s April 2020 report have been imperative. The following are some lessons learned during the pandemic that can be leveraged to shape operations in the future:



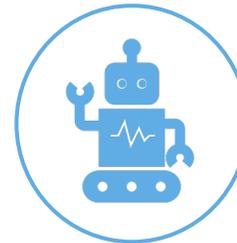
When things return to a sense of normalcy, government should not discard their adaptations from this period that have improved CX, operational efficiency, and flexibility.<sup>21</sup> Organizations have completed a significant amount of work to respond to the uncertainty presented by the pandemic and are beginning to flourish.



Digital is here to stay. Although preferences for certain digital channels come and go, digital has become a primary interaction vehicle. It is also going to remain this way for the foreseeable future.<sup>22</sup>



Phone calls are not going away. Clients want the option to interact with government using their channel of choice and pivot from one to another. However, their options must include the human CX. When people are dealing with something that is highly sensitive and/or emotional, they still want to talk to live representatives.<sup>23</sup>

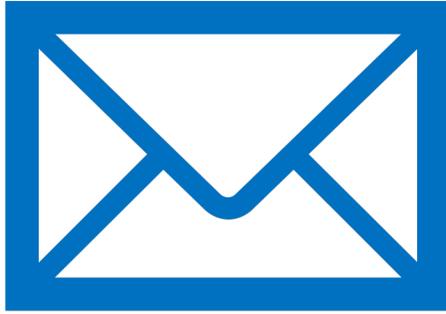


Clients are happy to use self-service solutions, as long as they work and provide the information and answers they need on a timely basis. The introduction of artificial intelligence (AI)-driven conversational self-service tools is changing the service landscape for the better.<sup>24</sup>



The CX and client journey must continue to improve. Clients are no longer willing to tolerate poor service. Clients consider all touchpoints to be part of a holistic client journey and do not distinguish between different departments.<sup>25</sup>

20. [Customer Experience in the New Normal: Lessons Learned One Year into the Pandemic](#)  
21. [Pleasing customers during a pandemic](#)  
22, 23, 24, 25. [CX Lessons Learned from the Pandemic](#)



## For Further Reading

- [How Technology Can Improve CX for Government Services](#)
- [Digital Innovations Will Enhance CX in Government and Timing Couldn't Be Better](#)
- [Mobile app acceleration during the pandemic](#)
- [How can governments deliver customer experience like Amazon or Apple?](#)
- [Human-Based Customer Service Also Crucial to Citizen Engagement](#)

## Other noteworthy articles:

[Why the public sector can't afford not to get personal with citizens](#)

[Artificial Intelligence: Current state of play](#)

[Future of networks in the new normal](#)

[The role of government and division of power: National survey reveals Canadians' views divided about pandemic management](#)

[Government should do more to protect well-being in the digital world, says report](#)



## Research Repository

Access the Citizen First [Research Repository](#).

**Recent entries on the research repository:**

### [Data Management in a Digital World](#)

This report explores data management in the public sector. It includes the following: Data management: lifecycle & benefits, Digital trends & public sector applications, Improving data accessibility, Cyber security implications, and Seven key data lessons learned during COVID-19.



## Trends in the Daily Newsletter



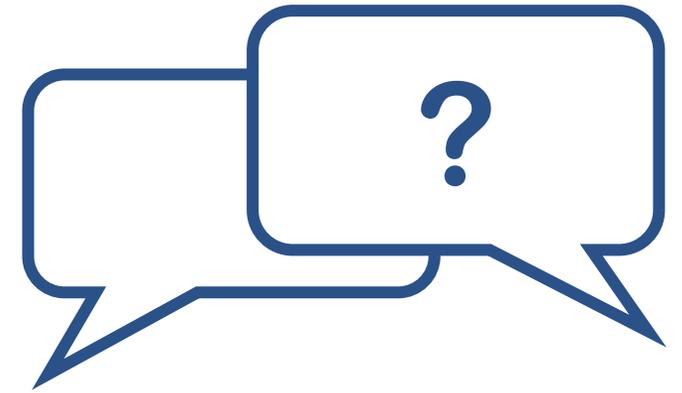
According to [GovTech](#), forward-thinking government organizations are putting an end to waiting in line. They're implementing new tools that allow clients to schedule appointments, check their status on a web page or mobile app, skip the line and receive a text notification when it's their turn.



A recent report by [Gartner, Inc.](#) identified the top 10 government technology trends for 2021 that have the potential to accelerate digital innovation and optimize or transform public services. These trends rose from the challenges wrought from the pandemic and the need for flexible operating models that support significant disruptions.



According to [Mandarin](#), the last year has shown the value of cloud computing in the public sector. When the shift was made to working remotely in lockdown, organizations that were already operating in a cloud-native manner switched to remote working seamlessly. For those that weren't operating in the cloud, there was a realization that operational resilience and agility were being jeopardised by a reliance on traditional ICT infrastructure and services.



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