



CUSTOMER EMPOWERMENT IN FINANCE

Why greater choice and control for poor customers is better for business and will help achieve financial inclusion

ANTONIQUE KONING AND GAYATRI MURTHY

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This paper was written by Antonique Koning and Gayatri Murthy at CGAP and is part of CGAP’s Customer Centricity initiative. The authors would like to thank Monique Cohen, Michelle Kaffenberger, Ignacio Mas, and Anton Simanowitz for their contributions and guidance to the research and the production of this paper. The authors would also like to thank the peer reviewers from CGAP: Gerhard Coetzee, Rafe Mazer, and Camille Busette for their valuable comments and suggestions as well as Anna Nunan and Eileen Salzig for their editorial support. Last but not least a word of thanks to our partner financial services providers who share their experiences and lessons to benefit others.

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Cover photo by Jeanette Thomas

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Photo by Mary Thibaut

1.

THE CASE FOR CUSTOMER EMPOWERMENT

The spread of digital technologies and social media and the increasing availability of data and information help customers to make informed decisions about products and services and give customers more agency in shaping their experience.¹ Digital technologies are also helping businesses collect data on their customers, making it easier to customize products and services to customer needs. Businesses like Amazon know that they are serving customers who can choose from a wide range of products and services—customers who have the agency to make their voices heard. This is a world where the customer has control, where the customer is empowered. Empowered customers compel businesses to treat them well. Indeed, this has propelled companies across many industries to focus all of their operations on their customers’ needs in order to grab a larger market share.

Businesses created around empowered customers and the power of digital technologies are entering the financial services marketplace. Digital payments services, such as [ApplePay](#) and [Venmo](#), and web-based investment advisers, like [Betterment](#) and [Wealthfront](#), put choice and control in the hands of customers and make finance a seamless part of customers’ lives. These types of financial services are readily available in the developed world, and increasingly, they are catering to elite and high-income customers in emerging markets around the world.

With very few exceptions, poor people are largely excluded

from the world of highly customized financial services. Digital technologies have been leveraged in financial services for poor people, but typically the aim has been to ease access and delivery of services, not to increase the relevance of financial services to their lives. As a result, these digital accounts often remain unused or are used only to receive a payment and to cash out. This means that financial services providers do not generate enough business value from this segment to make a compelling business case, and large numbers of low-income customers remain financially and economically excluded.

Recently, there have been advances in customized products, such as crowdfunding, digital credit, alternative credit-scoring models like those vetted by social networks, pay-as-you-go solutions for solar energy, and so forth. But by and large, companies do not invest in technology to serve, or to understand, low-income customer needs. These customers often live in an environment of scarce services and have little control over their financial lives. They may not always vote with their feet by choosing another financial services provider, but

they do register lower use and high inactivity in their accounts when they do not find them to be relevant or useful.

Products and services must be designed so that customers can shape the services around their needs and wants. This sense of customer empowerment often leads to high use and creates more value for the businesses serving this segment.

Customer empowerment is fundamentally about the customer’s engagement and experience. It is about making people feel they can exercise choice, are treated with respect, and are listened to. It gives customers a sense of control.

1. As used in this paper “agency” refers to “what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important” Sen (1985).



LACK OF USE AND ITS COSTS. According to Fin-
dex (World Bank 2015), 666 million out of 721 million
accounts opened between 2011 and 2014 were bank
accounts, and 54 million of those were created on mobile
phones. CGAP estimates that only half of the bank
accounts are being used, and their cost of acquisition
may not be recoverable. As a result of low or no activity,
the other half generates a loss and a high probability that
businesses will not recoup the cost of opening and run-
ning those accounts. According to GSMA (2016)—an
association of mobile network operators—only a third of
mobile accounts are used frequently (more than one time
in 90 days). CGAP estimates that it takes six months, on

average, for mobile money
accounts to break even. While
precise figures on cost of
acquisition and break even
are not available globally, it is
clear that low use affects the
business case for financial
inclusion. If account use can-
not be increased, investment
in acquiring low-income cus-
tomers will continue to be
seen by businesses as a drain
on resources.

Research shows that *choice, respect, voice, and control* are the cornerstones of customer empowerment for all customers (including low-income customers) in their use of and engagement with digital financial services.³

What is customer empowerment?

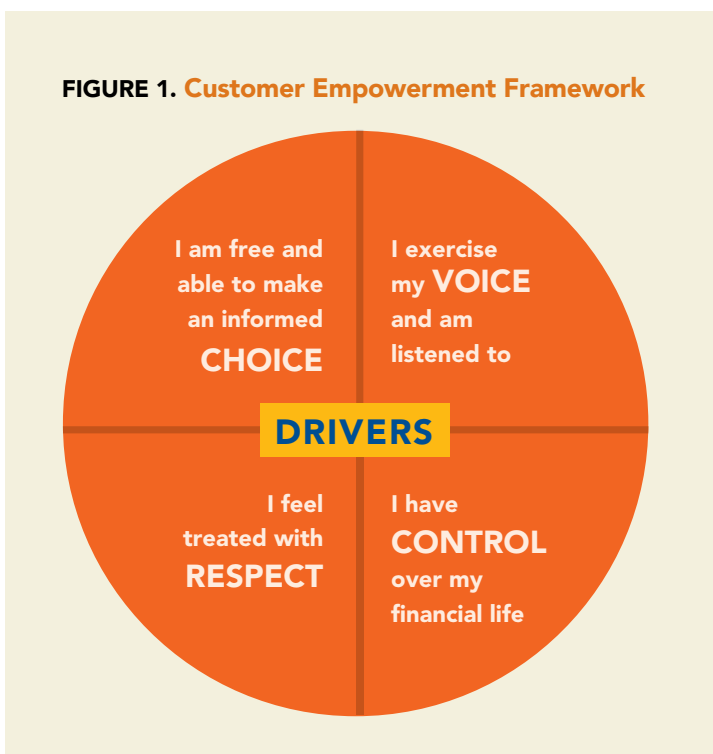
Empowered customers:

- Are able to make informed *choices* about financial services.
- Feel treated with dignity and *respect*, regardless of transaction size.
- Are able to *voice* an opinion, which prompts accountability by the financial services provider.
- Are able to exercise greater *control* over their use of financial services and, consequently, their financial lives.²

Financial services providers need to incorporate these drivers into their services to enable customer empowerment. Consequently, customer engagement is improved, and this propels greater business value.

One's sense of empowerment is influenced by many factors. Whether someone can feel empowered is heavily influenced by societal and cultural norms and other aspects that financial services providers have little or no control over. However, financial services providers can *facilitate* customer empowerment by engaging with customers in a way that reinforces choice, respect, voice, and control. Customers interact with financial services providers at several touchpoints in the customers' journey, which offers multiple opportunities for providers to positively influence a sense of empowerment.

FIGURE 1. Customer Empowerment Framework



2. This resonates with the concept of financial health that has made its way into the literature, see for instance, the approach developed by the [Center for Financial Service Innovation](#).

3. We conducted primary research with low-income customers and financial services providers in India, Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire, and the Philippines, and secondary research in a variety of case studies around the world.

How does customer empowerment differ for low-income customers?

Low-income customers look for the same things in their financial services as customers in more well-off segments do. However, they have uncertain and inconsistent money flows that the more well-off segments do not have. Well-off segments have access to a broad range of financial instruments that are relevant to their lives and help them to build safety nets (Mas and Murthy 2017). But financial services available to low-income customers often do not accommodate their particular needs. For low-income customers, the four drivers go unmet in the following ways:

When these drivers are unmet, customers face moments of disempowerment.⁴ When the moments of disempowerment pile up, customers retreat (often back to the informal services even though they may be suboptimal), inactivity rises, and businesses lose value from serving this segment.

CHOICE. I often need to make a choice between limited product and service options, for which I often lack credible information.

RESPECT. The size of my transactions and my socio-economic status prevent me from receiving the same respect and dignity that other customers receive.

VOICE. When things go wrong, I'm not heard. When designing a new product or service for me, financial services providers do not seek my opinion; they assume they already know my needs without engaging with me.

CONTROL. Formal financial services do not help me maintain control over my finances. They're not designed to help me manage my income and outflows, especially if circumstances change rapidly.



Photo by TNS

"I wish I had gone to school. If only I could read and write, I could have been in a better position. I would have [been able to keep] better records for my business, I would be in a position to sell my business ideas to a bank and get loans, or even organize training for women in my tontine [savings group]. But, instead, I am afraid because if I try, someone may not take me seriously because I cannot express myself well."

—Female, rural, 31–45 years old, Côte d'Ivoire

4. "Disempowerment" is used to describe the outcome of an action or process that "makes a person or group less powerful or confident," according to *Oxford Dictionary* (accessed 29 March 2017).

What are the business benefits of customer empowerment?

Although digital technologies can deliver financial services to poor people at scale and at lower costs, businesses will not gain value on their investments unless the services they offer are designed to facilitate a sense of empowerment that prompts low-income customers to use these products regularly. In fact, businesses the world over know they can create business value by offering relevant services and creating brand loyalty.⁵ Yet this approach is rarely, if ever, applied to lower-income segments in the financial services sector. For too long financial services providers have focused on revenue gains by expanding the number of accounts or the number of transactions made by this segment. This works only to a limited extent, and ultimately

does not necessarily create the business value providers expect.

This guide helps you to rethink your offerings and value proposition for low-income customer segments, particularly in the rapidly digitizing financial sector. To enable customer empowerment, businesses must see their customers as active players and build products that increase customer confidence and trust in the business. This in turn has the potential to increase value for businesses and for customers, and move the needle on financial inclusion. This guide offers a business framework, along with practical tools, to drive change within your organization, and is intended for you, no matter where you sit within your organization.

To enable customer empowerment, businesses must see their customers as active players and build products that increase customer confidence and trust in the business. This in turn has the potential to increase value for businesses and for customers, and move the needle on financial inclusion.



Photo by Quicksand

5. For examples from other industries, see Burritt and Kilara (2016).

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The Customer Empowerment Guide can be used for either end-to-end projects or specific aspects, such as user research or design strategies, or projects. You can read the guide straight through, or read only the sections that address your specific needs or situation. The guide proceeds as follows

SECTION	MAIN TAKEAWAYS
1. The Case for Customer Empowerment	Understand how core concepts of customer empowerment, such as choice, voice, respect, and control, offer better value for your business and for your customers.
2. Start with Your Customer	Whatever your budget or timetable, uncover areas of disempowerment felt by customers or found in the customer experience.
3. Design Customer Empowerment Actions	Choose solutions to your empowerment challenges, then design and run small-scale prototypes that improve different aspects of customer empowerment.
4. Organize to Deliver Customer Empowerment	Understand how organizational structure, incentives, and communications can help institutionalize a customer empowerment culture in your organization.
5. Measure Customer and Business Outcomes of Customer Empowerment	Measure the success of customer empowerment endeavors and decide which to move forward at scale—with or without modifications.

WHAT'S YOUR GOAL?	READ THESE SECTIONS				
	1	2	3	4	5
Launch new customer empowerment initiatives	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Launch new products or services offerings	✓	✓	✓		
Introduce staff to the customer empowerment approach	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Change incentives for customer-facing roles				✓	✓
Launch and embed a customer empowerment culture throughout your organization				✓	✓



Photo by Jeanette Thomas

2.

START WITH YOUR CUSTOMER

To build engaging services for low-income customers, start by understanding your customers' lives. **This chapter shows you how targeted customer research need not be expensive nor complex. Targeted research can help you to identify ways to serve low-income customers better and to create greater business impact.**

Some examples of customer-focused businesses are explored. Janalakshmi Financial Services in India built customer profiles based on financial aspirations and household characteristics, which helped it to customize financial services to suit different segments of customers. Arifu, a digital learn-

ing company in East Africa, created specialized financial learning content for farmers, women, and youth based on their income flow and the type of businesses they ran.

Ultimately, you will learn to answer three questions:

- A. Who is my low-income customer?
- B. What is my customers' journey?
- C. What are key moments of disempowerment across the customer journey, i.e., instances where choice, respect, voice, and control may be denied?

A. Who is my low-income customer?

Get to know your customers by gathering and distilling information about them

A practical way to start customer research is to segment your target market. Segmentation helps divide a market into small sets of customers with common needs and priorities so you can design strategies to target them. The [CGAP Customer Segmentation Toolkit](#) guides you through the process, outlines capability requirements for taking on a segmentation exercise, and gives examples of organizations that have done segmentation and possible outcomes.



SEGMENTATION, JANALAKSHMI IN INDIA—A PYRAMID WITHIN A PYRAMID

OVERVIEW: In 2013, Janalakshmi, a large urban microfinance institution serving 4 million customers, wanted to develop a deeper understanding of its customers. It recognized that, while it primarily provided group loans (that did not vary except for size) to customers, the urban poor it served were not a monolithic, homogenous set. A segmentation exercise helped to uncover “pyramids within the base of the pyramid,” which allowed Janalakshmi to cater to specific needs and aspirations.

PROJECT HYPOTHESIS: Stronger customer profiles based on financial aspirations and household characteristics can help the business to customize financial services to suit different customer segments. More relevant offerings will result in better uptake.

METHOD: A cross-functional team (with members from product development, service delivery, and marketing), along with teams from CGAP and IMRB Live Labs, applied design thinking to extract customer insights. Research efforts included the following:

- Qualitative interviews to understand household expenditures and microenterprise financial data. Results were used to delineate household attributes and create unique customer segments.
- Survey of 1,000 customers to verify and deepen profiles.

INSIGHTS-GATHERING TOOL: The findings helped create a segmentation tool, aptly called “Kaleido,” which refers to the dynamic nature of the lives of the urban poor. The tool supports staff and agents to segment the customer base by capturing information on five key areas: events, attitudes, businesses, household composition, and finances. Families provide details upon enrollment and update profiles as the relationship progresses. In addition to being a tool to assess financial progress, Kaleido has evolved into a rich source of data for developing new products.

RESULTS: The project resulted in the creation of a Customer Council, where senior management undertake at least one Kaleido customer immersion experience every quarter. This process involves two hours of deep immersion with a customer and the customer’s family. Although the segmenting was successful, mainstreaming Kaleido into the business proved challenging. Making the business case for a national Kaleido scale-up required creating new technology to profile at scale, for which there were limited incentives, and the project stalled. But as Janalakshmi is transitioning to a full-service bank in 2017, a partnership with IBM Watson is taking Kaleido to the next level by piloting it as a digital advisory tool that provides

continues



Photo by Jeanette Thomas

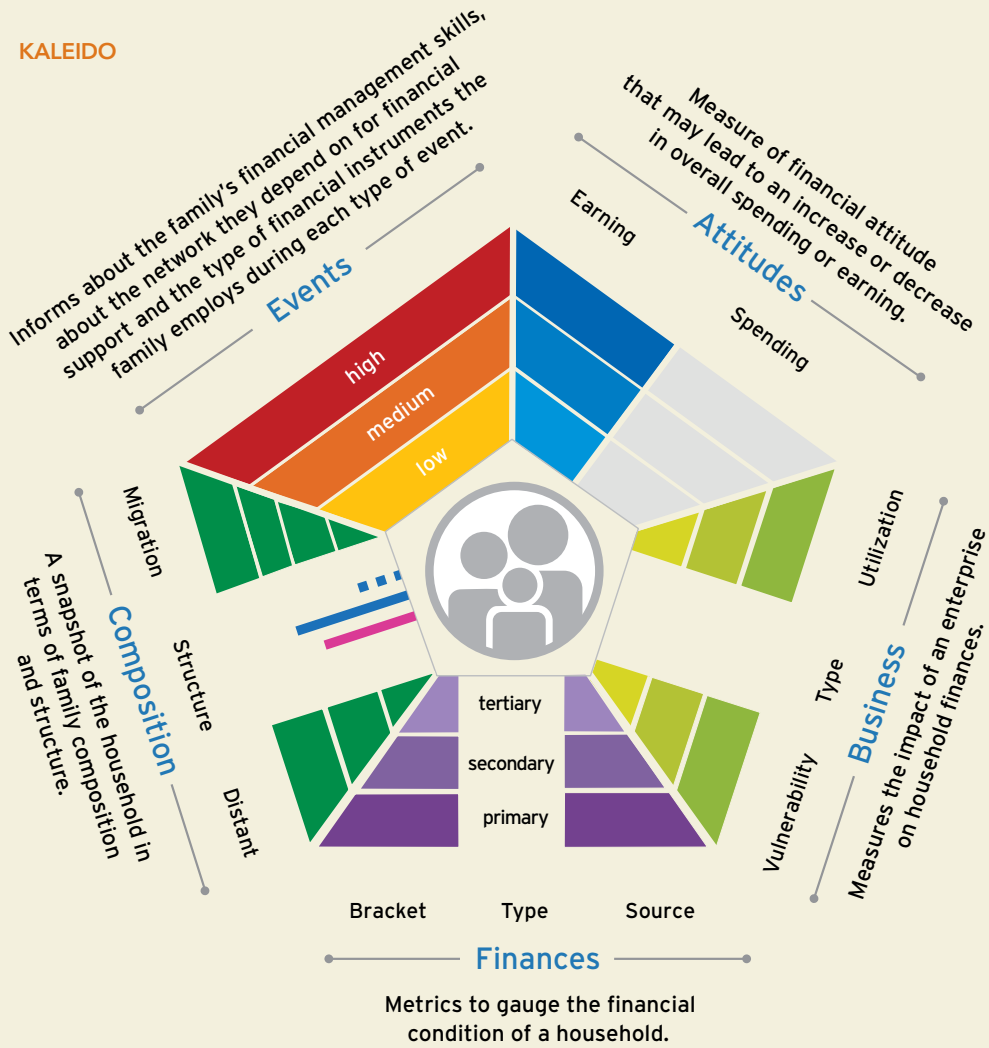
“It was a good way to take a step back, get into the customers’ shoes and see what they need and what their requirements are. And then to be able to offer a product that addresses their needs directly.”

—N. S. Muthukumaran, vice president, Client Insights and Analytics, Janalakshmi Urban Foundation

a financial plan and a set of services to achieve plan goals. Each plan is generated by Watson then communicated to the customer by a frontline financial adviser. High-quality financial advice is provided at an affordable

price point and at scale since Janalakshmi is no longer limited by the cost of hiring and training financial advisers and it helps to ensure high-quality advice is given.

KALEIDO



Personas is another tool you can use. **Personas** are written descriptions of representative users in a target group. Think of it as a distilling tool for the segmentation exercises. Like characters in a story, personas draw us in and represent unique perspectives—illustrating needs, goals, behaviors, contexts, influences, and challenges. Personas bring together common characteristics of similar people into one

“archetype.” They are often used to capture and present data from various sources, such as interviews and segmentations. Businesses can use persona insights to customize services, delivery methods, and marketing to specific subgroups and even to build an organization’s empathy with these customers.



PERSONAS WITH ARIFU IN KENYA—TAILORED PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

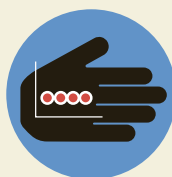
THE EXPERIMENT: Can digital technology help deliver high-quality information to your customers when they need it, and deepen engagement and trust? If this information is correctly tailored, can it improve customer engagement with products and services? Arifu, a digital learning company based in Nairobi, sought to answer these questions through a pilot program with 100,000 low-income customers of a major East African bank. The goal was simple: to engage customers about managing their finances and small businesses via two-way mobile SMS conversations. Arifu sought to understand these customers and their needs and to customize content appropriately. Technology existed to create algorithmic chains of SMS-based communication (e.g., if she replies A then send content B), but Arifu needed to build the right profiles and decision matrices based on a clear understanding of the customer segment. It focused on three distinct groups of low-income customers: smallholder farmers, women, and youth. Qualitative interviews and focus group discussions placed customers into demographic groups, and exploration began. Financial advisory content was aimed at two different personas: day-to-day earners and steady earners. Business advisory content was directed to three different personas: aspiring business, full-time business, and agribusiness.

Initial customer interviews showed that while demographic differences such as gender and age were important, more significant differences in information needs arose from customers’ income flow and the type of business they ran. Successful female business owners defied every stereotype associated with lack of agency. They were not particularly interested in learning how to balance budgets; they wanted to understand how to access larger loans to expand their growing businesses. On the other hand, if a customer struggled with how to shape infrequent income into a manageable financial plan, age and gender were less important. Sticking to a demographic framework for the pilot would not have worked, so Arifu distilled interviews into the two sets of personas. Financial management advice was closely tied to income streams. Based on how they described their business, customers were directed to a specific branch of entrepreneurial advice.

IMPACT: The first phase of the two-phase pilot concluded in December 2016. By the end of the first phase, Arifu engaged 55,081 customers (half the target), yielding an average of 14.4 messages per customer. Impact on customer engagement with the bank’s products and services will be available at the end of phase two in December 2017.



Day2day earner



Steady earner



Aspiring business



Full-time business



Agribusiness

Financial advisory content had to be tailored for two personas—day2day earners, who saw great fluctuation and uncertainty in income, and steady earners, who generally have a consistent income flow.

Business advisory content had to be tailored for three personas. Aspiring business owners would like to start their business or already have, but are not yet able to generate enough revenue to make that their sole source of income. Others have stable, full-time businesses. Agriculture-based businesses have very distinct information needs around seasonality, pricing, etc.

 **TOOLS**

GROUP INTERVIEWS: You can come to a quick understanding of a community's life, dynamics, and needs by conducting a group interview. Resource: [Group interview](#), IDEO.org design kit.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS: There is no better way to understand the hopes, desires, and aspirations of those you are designing for than by talking with them directly. Resource: [Interview](#), IDEO.org design kit.

CARD SORT: This simple exercise will help you identify what is important to the people you design for. Resource: [Card sort](#), IDEO.org design kit.

B. What is my customer's journey?

Step into the shoes of your customer and walk through a journey with your services

After delineating customer segments and personas, the next step is to understand customer interaction with your services. A **Customer Journey map** illustrates the steps your customers go through in engaging with your company, whether it be a product, an online experience, retail experience, a service, or any combination.⁶ It also communicates the customers' expectations and subsequent experience at each interaction with your organization. The map contains every touchpoint from the point a customer feels the need for a service to the point he or she identifies your particular offering and uses it (see figure). Staff should engage in journey mapping so that customer insights can be complemented with insights from various customer-facing employees, including sales agents and call center staff. A **journey map** will help you to gain clarity on what customers experience when they interact with your products and services, and thereby help you to focus on particular design elements and test changes in your current design and service delivery.



TOOL: CUSTOMER JOURNEY MAP

What are the stages of the journey?	1. Latent need	2. Feel the need	3. Search	4. Select	5. Onboard	6. Use	7. Migrate up	8. Migrate down
CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS What expectation and emotions does the customer bring to each of the touchpoints?								
DELIGHT OR PAIN? What positive and negative experiences occur throughout the journey? Pick the touchpoints.								

6. <https://hbr.org/2010/11/using-customer-journey-maps-to>

The following is a customer journey map filled out by **Card Pioneer Microinsurance (CPMI)** after it completed a journey mapping exercise with customers and agents in the Philippines. The map

compares customer engagement at each step of the journey with the stages in a romantic relationship going from first impressions to courting and marriage. Articulating steps in the process, and cus-

CARDINA'S CUSTOMER JOURNEY

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

COURTING

How they hear	Why say yes/no	Apply for insurance	Submit application	Application (loan) approved
<p>Cardina hears about the various or specific insurance policy from her personal network, family, or friends who heard about it or signed up, from fellow CARD members who discuss recent events, or from a brief presentation by an account officer or MIC at one of the regular CARD meetings.</p>	<p>WHY YES: Cardina will likely decide to take the policy if she sees/hears proof of someone successfully claiming, from a situation that could also happen to her. She may like the simplicity of signing up, minimal documentation, and easy payments.</p> <p>WHY NO: Cardina might decline because she may not understand enough about it and is not interested enough to find out, or thinks the price is too high and thinks it might be a scam or not trust it. If she does not attend the CARD meetings regularly she may miss the presentations or announcements about the policies.</p>	<p>CASH: Cardina can go to CARD office and pay the entire insurance policy in one lump-sum amount.</p> <p>LOAN: Cardina can fill out a loan proposal form with the account officer at the center meeting.</p>	<p>RELATIONSHIP: A family member or fellow CARD member will vouch for Cardina.</p> <p>PROCESS: Account officer visits Cardina's home to conduct an assessment.</p> <p>PROCESS: The account officer then returns to CARD office and completes all the necessary forms for approval.</p>	<p>The account officer lets Cardina know when her loan is approved, and books an appointment.</p> <p>Cardina takes a jeepney or tricycle ride to the CARD office, but then has to join a long queue and waits her turn.</p> <p>The MIC helps Cardina fill out the proof of cover form and answers any questions. She signs the master roll with the unit manager and account officer, and keeps the proof of cover for her own file.</p> <p>Cardina is now insured and gets an SMS confirmation.</p>

GAPS AND HEADACHES

	<p>VALUE: Cardina may see no value in the policy, as she already has base coverage through her CARD membership and sees this as a less important expense.</p> <p>PERCEPTION: Cardina may not want to "invite bad luck" or think of anything negative happening, so avoids thinking about insurance.</p> <p>"I didn't buy Sagip because it's expensive and I have other obligations (college tuition, grandchildren, etc.)."</p> <p>"We don't like to ask about how to do a claim because it's not a nice conversation. We don't want to think about anything bad happening."</p>	<p>INFORMATION: Cardina may sign up without fully understanding the detail of what she is covered for, what the processes are, and how long it will last. She may be motivated by a successful claim story, but does not correctly select the policy that is relevant to her own circumstance.</p> <p>"I got this because something similar happened to my neighbor."</p> <p>"I was on the wrong (individual) plan, so when my husband died I wasn't covered. Now I advise others through my experience."</p>		<p>TIME: If Cardina misses her appointment it means another long wait, and more paperwork for the MIC to arrange another appointment with the account officers.</p>
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continues

customer sentiments and headaches along the customer journey was an eye-opening experience. It illuminated moments in the journey when people drop out and when they like a service and recommend it

to others. In a very human way it revealed the discord CPMI sometimes faced between customer needs and business concerns, and allowed CPMI to plan for improvements and innovations.

MARRIAGE



<p>Cardina makes weekly installment payments at the regular CARD meetings.</p>	<p>A house fire causes Cardina to lose the family house, possessions, and money stored there. Her husband has to go to hospital for smoke inhalation injuries. This is a very stressful period for everyone.</p> <p>Cardina reports the fire to the center chief or the account officer. The account officer, unit manager, or MIC visit Cardina to assess and verify the damage. They tell her what documentation she needs to file a claim.</p> <p>Cardina arranges for a barangay certificate and fire report from the local authorities, and also a medical certificate for her husband. She gives these to the account officer who submits it to the partner relationship officer, who files the claim.</p> <p>Within 1–5 days, Cardina gets a call or SMS from the PRO saying her claim has been approved. She will either go to the provincial office to collect her payout or have it deposited into her CARD account.</p>	<p>At the center meeting, the account officer reminds Cardina that her policy will be expiring soon.</p> <p>Cardina fills out a loan renewal form with the account officer for another year of coverage. This is the same process as a new application form.</p>
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<p>TIME: Cardina may not have time to attend all the meetings and finds this to be inconvenient, and the meetings feel like a burden/obligation.</p>	<p>INFORMATION: Cardina may not know what she can claim for, so may not even try unless she is told.</p> <p>INFORMATION: It is not clear what documentation is needed or what the process is. Cardina may have lost the opportunity to get documents at the right time (e.g., at hospital) and will have to go back.</p> <p>COST: It takes time, money, and effort to get the relevant documents. There are clearance fees to pay for the barangay certificate and fire certificate. The cost of hospitalization may be almost as much as the claim, so it may not be worth the effort.</p> <div data-bbox="406 1579 790 1926"> <p>“Mom didn’t know the [eye] accident would be covered. The only thing she remembered was that she would get a benefit if someone died.”</p> <p>“The form might cost 500 pesos, and the claim is only 600.”</p> </div>	<p>NO REMINDER: Cardina does not have an easy way to remember when her policy expires, the account officer may not tell her, or she might miss the meeting when reminders were made.</p> <p>NO GRACE PERIOD: If Cardina’s policy lapses, contestability rules immediately re-apply, with no benefits for previous or loyal customers. She is treated as a brand new customer.</p> <p>DISAPPOINTMENT: If Cardina experienced a rejected claim, she may feel discouraged and not want to continue with the policy.</p> <div data-bbox="901 1624 1252 1948"> <p>“I got busy and forgot, and it lapsed. Sayang (waste).”</p> <p>“My baby died in my womb. I thought I was covered but the policy covers only live birth. I got nothing.”</p> </div>
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C. What are key moments of disempowerment across the customer journey, i.e., instances where choice, respect, voice, and control may be denied?

Apply a customer-empowerment lens to identify points of intervention

Think of an illiterate customer trying to navigate complex mobile banking menus. Or think of a farmer facing limits on the number of withdrawals at an ATM during a weather emergency, or a mother not being able to divert school fees savings for a hospital bill when her child is ill. An inappropriate set of financial services leaves them feeling powerless when shocks occur. This manifests into a lack of trust in the financial system, lack of confidence in themselves, and consequently, exclusion from the world of formal financial services. In this section, we address each of the key drivers of customer centricity—**choice, respect, voice, and control**—and discuss ways in which you can pinpoint where these moments of disempowerment may occur in your customer’s journey.

Choice

Know how low-income customers access information about a financial service. Identify ways to make necessary information available to them and give them options to access, portion, and spend their money. In particular, focus on leveraging and building social networks.

Customers from high-income segments often are able to make an informed choice from a range of formal products and services. Low-income customers often do not have this choice because services are limited both by location and eligibility (e.g., lack of identity papers or a credit history). Financial inclusion interventions have focused on increasing choice by expanding traditional eligibility criteria (electronic know-your-customer methods, alternate credit history models) and using digital technologies or agent

banking to go beyond brick-and-mortar branches for greater access.

But even when choices are available, useful information may be hard to find. Low-income customers have to know the right people or have the right technology and literacy levels to access and use services. Marketing materials may be in a language that customers do not understand, and billboards or television ads may not be available in the remote areas where they live. Staff may be trained and incentivized to market only to high-income customers and may not know how to sign up low-income customers who do not have the right form of identification. All of these factors may result in customers feeling alienated and uncertain when they are looking for services that meet their needs.



Photo by Esther Lee Rosen



THE ROLE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS AND IMPORTANT NODES

Social networks are important to everyone, but they are especially so for poor customers who do not have the safeguards and guarantees provided to other segments, especially those related to credible information on financial services. Poor people may want to reach out to knowledgeable and powerful people in their social networks to gain information and access to services, and to overcome the exclusion they face in the formal financial system. Often those with power, education, or influence (such as a village leader) have credible information about services or access and skills in digital technologies. Access to these people facilitates one's own access..

Take a look at how your products and services are currently marketed and delivered. Can you make access more equitable? How easy is it for low-income people to find out about your offerings, understand eligibility and onboarding, and use them? If networks are strong and equitable, and include early adopters, can you use them to spread information, design customized marketing, and build trust in your products and services?



TOOL

CUSTOMER IMMERSION: Once a month, meet a few customers at their homes (without other staff). Discuss complaints, customer experience, and preferred channels of communication. Share insights with staff after each session.

Respect

Improve customer experience for poor customers and teach staff/agents how to treat customers with respect.

Simply stated, treating customers, no matter their socioeconomic level or transaction size, with respect is a driver the whole organization should adopt and reflect in all operations. Low-income customers are often wary of interacting with formal financial services for fear, often well-founded, of being treated poorly. When they visit a branch or transact digitally, a harsh word from a teller is often interpreted as an explicit sign that they are in the wrong place. They may therefore exclude themselves from the financial system. Even in organizations with a committed workforce and a strong mission to serve low-income customers, socio-cultural inequities may be reflected in a customer's experience with products, services, interfaces, and staff.



"There is a girl in my neighborhood, we call her 'Satellite.' She has A-level education, she is well-networked. She is very informed. She explains a lot of things to people in our neighborhood. If we want to know anything, we go and ask her. She knows everything!"

—Female, urban, 31–45 years old, Côte d'Ivoire

Photo by TNS

Fallouts in the customer journey

	Need	Search & select	Onboard	Use	Regular use
ARISING ISSUES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial services lack relevance Inhibitions and fear of formal services. (Technology and language are "not for me".) Customers require information about costs, speed of services, but agent or bank staff are unwilling to share information or contact details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of information about services Services that are not affordable Unfavorable trade-offs between formal and informal services (strictness of repayment schedule) Risk of failure (high penalties if something goes wrong) Negative experiences with a provider of word of mouth on such experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenges with registration (PIN, navigation, literacy) Lack of respect and discretion Poor product interface Inadequate staff/agent engagement (unequipped front line, rude behavior) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor customer service, e.g., acting as if customer is not worth it for the small amount they transact Disrespectful attitude, skipping to serve other customers first Disconnect between promised and actual experience (not reliable, fraud risk) Inadequate recourse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customers expect to evolve their relationship with the financial services provider, and instead continue to be treated as newcomers Reluctance to teach self-reliance. Wanting to retain power over the customer/segment so reluctant to spend time encouraging self-reliance

Source: Customer research in Kenya and Côte d'Ivoire (TNS/Enclude); CGAP Customer Experience Toolkit; Janalakhshmi Customer Experience Playbook (CGAP and Dalberg).

While pricing of financial services is important, the customer experience is crucial for customers to perceive the value of a service and to sign up to use it. Poor customer experience can stem from many factors, including class inequity, lack of literacy, and gender inequity between staff and customers. The customer experience is strongly influenced by non-financial “costs,” such as psychological stress or social discrimination. Other disempowering factors stem from the culture of the organization, how its own staff are treated, and poor onboarding and training of frontline staff and agents.⁷ In addition, low-income customers often have to leapfrog from cash directly to digital money, bypassing intermediate products and services, such as ATMs, debit cards, etc., that would have helped to familiarize them with digital money. Also, digital services often are not designed for people who have low technological capabilities or literacy levels. In fact, lack of respect is not limited to physical interactions; poorly designed digital interfaces also can convey disregard.

7. Staff who deal with customers directly, including staff at branches, shops, door-to-door money-collectors, or those at customer services locations or hotlines.

I was very excited when I heard about mobile money. I knew it was going to be a good thing for me as a businesswoman. But when I started using it, I did not like the experience. On several occasions I went to the agent to do some transactions. Each time the agent would act as if he was not happy to serve me. He would ask me how much I want to transact. When I told him the amount, he would tell me to wait, but he would serve other people who wanted to transact with more money. That made me feel unimportant and I decided that I will not keep my money with these people. That waiting also wasted my time and made me lose out on customers because I had to leave my business to go to the agent.

—Female, Côte d'Ivoire, scoping research



TOOLS

MYSTERY SHOPPING. Use [Mazer, Gine, and Martinez \(2015\)](#) to learn about how to conduct a mystery shopping exercise. Mystery shopping involves sending people acting as consumers to businesses, government agencies, or other services providers to test the reaction to a typical customer inquiry. Mystery shopping visits help businesses to better understand differentiated treatment of low-income or inexperienced consumers, quality of product advice, and compliance with consumer protection rules, such as pricing transparency and disclosure. The guide provides information on how to design, execute, and analyze mystery shopping exercises for a range of financial services. It includes sample field guides, such as questionnaires, shopper training materials, and sales staff surveys.

FIND THREE AGENTS IN THE COMMUNITY. Use [Experiment 6](#) in the Customer Experience Workbook. Visit a town or village with low adoption rates of your products and services. Find three agents that can assist you. Document the process through notes and images. As a next step, test agents' responses to a specific challenge you could face as a customer (e.g., unable to set up your mobile wallet).

FOLLOW A FRONTLINE STAFF MEMBER. Use [Experiment 8](#) in the Customer Experience Workbook. Ask a frontline staff (or a customer) for permission to follow her or him while she or he is interacting at a branch. Document the interactions without intervening. Identify specific moments of the interactions that caught your attention, and describe them in your notebook.

Voice

Create a dialogue with your customer in which the customer feels able and willing to speak up. Assure the customer that her or his voice is being heard. This approach will help solve problems and create trust.

Imagine you are a low-income migrant customer in a city, sending most of your monthly income to your family in the village back home. You use a mobile payments service, enter the phone number of your relative, and hit send. A few minutes later, you realize you entered one digit incorrectly and most of your monthly income is now sitting in a stranger's account. You panic. You call the customer care number of the payments service, but you are kept on hold for an hour. When you finally reach a customer care representative, you are told the issue will take three or more days to resolve. You are told that getting back your money depends on the customer who received your money who may or may not be willing to wire the money back. Your money is gone, and you are on your own. Research confirms that fear of making a mistake and not being able to get money back through a reversal or roll-back process is why low-income people rely on agents to transact on their behalf.⁸

An experience like this one signals to low-income customers that they are not important to your business and that you may not understand what it means to lose your money because of one incorrect digit. The customers' voices are not heard in your organization.

This type of incident accounts for a significant number of complaints received from "mass market customers" by the customer care team at Safaricom.⁹



Photo by Hailey Tucker

"I bought a phone and registered it on M-Pesa. I had some chama money I was told to send. But instead of sending I mistakenly bought airtime worth 7000 shillings. I asked the M-Pesa agent, and he told me that there is no way he can help me. He told me to talk with someone from that shop and if he will accept, I will transfer the airtime to his phone and he will sell it to people. The shopkeeper refused. I decided to sell the airtime myself. It took me five months to sell the airtime."

—Male, inexperienced with mobile money, rural, Kenya

8. See [B-Kash InterMedia research](#).

9. 12,000 calls per day in September 2015. Interviews by Enclude with Safaricom staff, September 2015.

It is important to listen to customers when improving and designing new products or services, but often their voices go unheard. For example, Janalakshmi's customer research showed a recurring issue of customers losing a day of work and wages, because delays and incomplete loan groups meant having to wait for hours for disbursement at crowded branches. Janalakshmi listened to its customers and tested a solution to reduce waiting time: an approach where all paperwork was completed early in the morning at a community center close to where the loan group lives. The prototype was effectively co-created and tested with customers. Each loan customer still had to show up individually at the branch throughout the day to get money on his or her ATM card, but the wait time was shorter. And with fewer customers waiting, staff could process more loans each day.¹⁰

Control

Understand the uncertainty, inconsistency, and constant shocks this segment faces.

Low-income people often do not have a steady source of employment, and they work many jobs in an attempt to stabilize their income flows. They expect revenue from one job to carry them through until another source pays out. Farmers may accept lower paying jobs in the off season to help them smooth income flows. Lower-income segments are often more concerned with the timing of funds, easy access to liquidity, and ways to smooth income gaps than higher income segments.¹¹ They tend to make frequent withdrawals and small deposits. They need access to frequent small amounts of credit to overcome liquidity gaps. The turnaround time of an insurance claim payout is critical to a low-income person. Life for people in this segment is characterized by constantly changing circumstances that require them to continuously recalibrate their short- and long-term goals. Without a safety net, they need the discipline of a term deposit one day and the flexibility of a credit card the next. When a child falls gravely ill and hospital fees need to be paid, the term deposit for higher education loses utility and must be broken to save a life. Financial services that do not work with these rhythms deprive customers of control over their lives.



SAFARICOM, KENYA—PROBLEM-SOLVING AT M-PESA

Safaricom Kenya recently launched an additional function, "Hakikisha," on the M-Pesa menu to mitigate the fear of losing money by entering a wrong digit. This function enables subscribers to confirm a recipient's name before completing a transaction. Hakikisha means "to confirm" in Swahili. Previously, only the recipient's number was visible before a transaction was completed, and M-Pesa users were able to see only the recipient's name in the confirmation message they received after completing the transaction. This resulted in errors and left them with the onerous task of calling the Safaricom call center to seek a reversal of the transaction, which takes time and is not always successful. In most cases, by the time the customer gets through to customer service, the unintended recipient had either withdrawn the funds or transferred them to a third party. This feature translates to a better experience for the user.

Resource: Buku (2015).



TOOLS

LISTEN IN ON A CUSTOMER CARE HELPLINE:

Make notes and share them with your staff.

SHADOW YOUR DISPUTE RESOLUTION UNIT:

Analyze customer and transactional data. Call your own helpline with a complaint, observe how you are treated, and look for areas that can guide improvement of services.

RESOLVE FIVE CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS:

Pick 5–10 customer complaints. Try to resolve the complaints from start to finish. Make a note on how your operations could be enhanced to better service customer complaints.

INTRODUCE A VOICE OF CUSTOMER PROGRAM:

CGAP's Voice of the Customer (VoC) Guide shows you how to better integrate your customers' voice into your business models and practices, establishing a dialogue between you and your customers, thereby increasing customer satisfaction and activity. It makes the case for a VoC program and helps you implement solutions pointing to possible channels, tools, and methods, beyond just traditional customer service, to optimize your interactions along the customer journey (Tyler and Koning 2017).

10. Access to money when it is needed, where it is needed, and how it is needed are central to people's process of money management. See Cohen (2016) and Gash and Gray (2016).



UNDERSTANDING MENTAL MODELS FOR BETTER PRODUCTS AND SERVICES: Mas (2015)

stresses the importance of understanding the rhythms and behaviors that underlie low-income people's lives when you design digital financial services for them. If your organization understands the trade-offs customers make and the rules-of-thumb they use to balance flexibility and discipline, you'll find opportunities to turn learning into a habit and make their lives easier (Mas and Murthy 2017).

Mas observes three unique money management principles: animating money, liquidity farming, and income shaping.

ANIMATING MONEY. A farmer divides income from various sources into expense "jars" associated with specific objectives, e.g., roof repair, bicycle maintenance, wedding expenses, school fees. However, he gets a loan for house repairs even though he could use the money saved for other purposes. Low-income people often earmark funds by attaching stories and timelines to it. They animate money with goals that protect the money from being spent frivolously. Projecting emotions onto money helps them avoid small, frequent temptations and creates money management procedures that are intuitive and adaptable.

LIQUIDITY FARMING. Instead of spending money on her own family, a mother buys food for her neighbor's wedding. What initially appears to be a counterintuitive choice, actually gives the family "insurance" against future shocks. Low-income people actively cultivate relationships with others—family, friends, employers, local stores, moneylenders, and even financial institutions—who can help them in times of need. Even though they are financially stretched, they may provide a loan to a friend or contribute a special dish to a wedding. Then down the road they are better placed to ask for financial help themselves.

INCOME SHAPING. A bean farmer buys a cow even though he could have made more money in the long run by spending it on farm equipment. Revenue from selling beans would have given him more money overall, but it pays only once or twice a year while the frequency of income generated from the cow's milk is crucial for daily expenses. This act of shaping income results in a patchwork of income-generating activities that are well-timed to meet expenses.

Resources: [How the Poor Manage Money \(video\)](#) and ["How the Poor Organize Their Money."](#)

"The key is to enable customers to preserve their current mindset and behaviors, instead of forcing them to change to fit digital tools. In this stage, the value of digital financial services comes from letting people do what they have always done, just with a greater sense of control, convenience, reliability, security, and perhaps privacy."

—Mas (2015)



TOOLS

ASSESSING WHERE YOUR BUSINESS STANDS REGARDING THE KEY DRIVERS: Use this table after your research and insights are documented to pinpoint the most important drivers to enforce in your organization.

	YES, WE DELIVER	YES, THOUGH IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED	NO, WE DO NOT DELIVER	NO, WE ACTUALLY INHIBIT THIS
CHOICE				
RESPECT				
VOICE				
CONTROL				

OPPORTUNITY BRIEF: An opportunity brief summarizes findings and synthesizes your initial customer research to present a case for next-phase research and development. Use **Tool 3** in the Customer Experience Workbook.

The next sections outline how you can facilitate customer empowerment by applying the key drivers in your organization. The drivers often are mutually reinforcing, meaning that actions and examples cited in the following often can influence more than one driver or depend on another driver to be reinforced. Together they can lead to customer empowerment.



Photo by Jeanette Thomas



Photo by Quicksand

3.

DESIGN CUSTOMER EMPOWERMENT ACTIONS

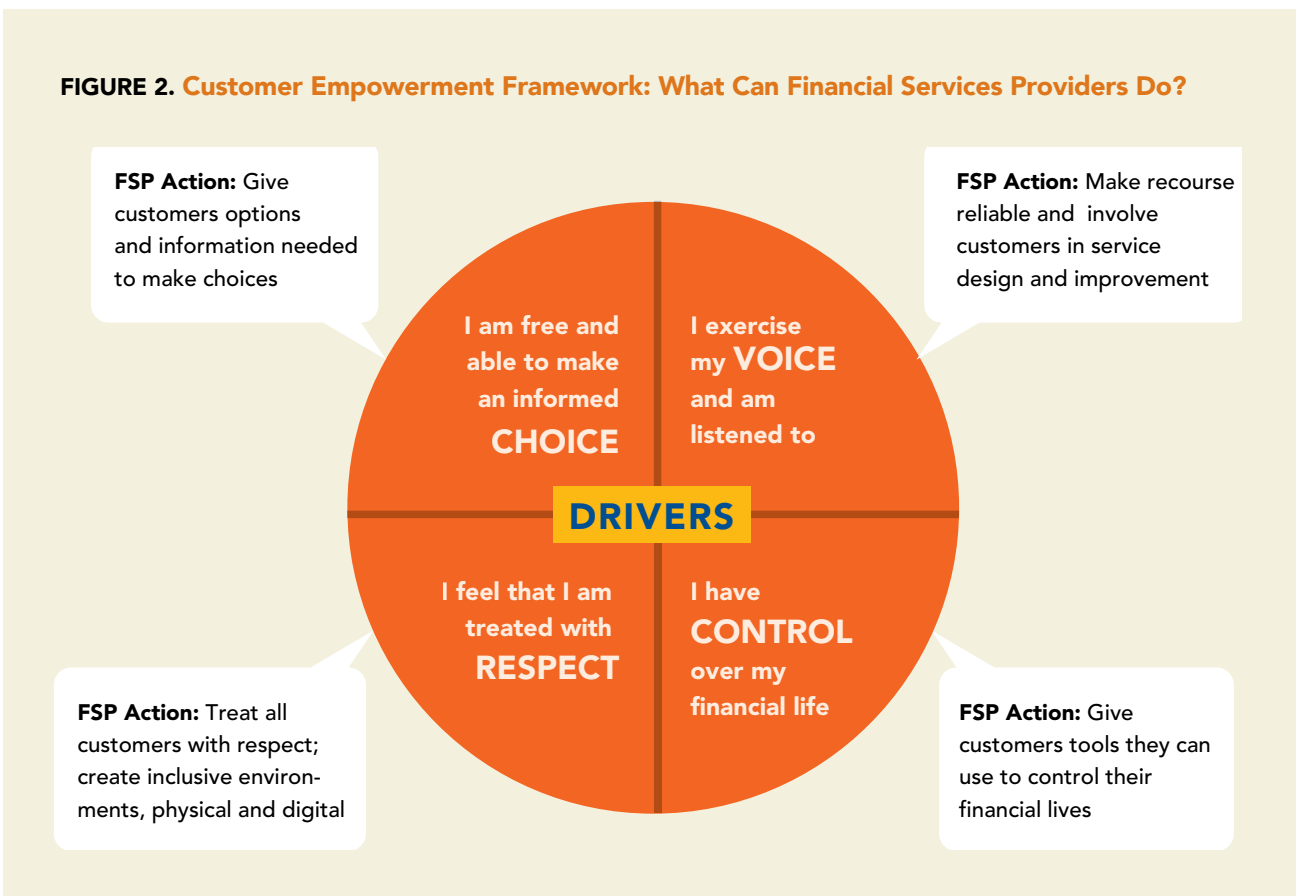
Once you have an understanding of your customers' needs and know the points of disempowerment, you can focus on strengthening the influence of the four customer empowerment drivers (choice, respect, voice, and control) in your services. You can do this by providing necessary information and choice; respecting and listening to customers; and, ultimately, giving customers tools that enable them to exercise greater control over their financial lives.

Facilitating customer empowerment is an incremental process. Using the following menu of actions for each driver (Figure 2), choose the actions that

best reinforce the most crucial drivers for your organization. By gradually introducing these drivers through the suggested or similar actions, you can earn customer trust and confidence. It will be important to cultivate “active patience” along the way by engaging with customers while recognizing that change is a gradual, incremental process that takes time.

Because the drivers are mutually reinforcing, some of the actions presented here use more than one driver. Your best bet is to find a balance between the drivers that will help you to achieve greater customer empowerment.

FIGURE 2. Customer Empowerment Framework: What Can Financial Services Providers Do?





SUMMARY GUIDANCE ON POTENTIAL CUSTOMER EMPOWERMENT ACTIONS

CHOICE

- **Make information about services widely available.** Provide information in a form that matches customer capability and that helps customers decide which products and services are useful and how to use them. Do not overwhelm them with too much information. Speak their language.
- **Communicate across multiple channels.** Adapt to different ways people learn and access information. Leverage social media platforms. Repeat messages frequently and customize them.
- **Leverage customer networks.** Identify influencers and early adopters, and work with them to define messages about product type and functionality. Consider them to be ambassadors of your business by providing them with free services and/or devices.
- Provide customers options to access their money, portion it, and spend it flexibly.

RESPECT

- **Foster an inclusive environment.** All staff should treat all customers respectfully and fairly. Ensure this principle is ingrained into the culture of the organization, from the top down.
- **Simplify enrollment and onboarding.** Make interaction with financial services seamless, intuitive, and frictionless so customers have a positive experience—especially the first time they use your products and services.
- **Be transparent and consistent.** Be predictable when engaging with customers and avoid unequal treatment.

VOICE

- **Use a continuous feedback loop and active listening.**
- **Offer easily accessible and effective recourse options.** When services don't work as intended, make sure customers know where to go—assure them there will be no negative consequences.
- **Work with customers to create design enhancements.** Seek your customers' views when designing new solutions or improvements intended for them.

CONTROL

Design for shortfalls, shocks, networks, and aspirations.

- **Adapt services to the size, timing, and predictability of money coming in.**
 - **Help customers balance flexibility and discipline as circumstances change.**
 - **Integrate customer networks to manage their liquidity flows.**
 - **Appeal to customers' aspirations.** Help reduce vulnerability and improve well-being.
- Deliver with space for trial and error, intuitive use and learning, and minimal risk.*
- **Allow for trial and build safeguards against error.** Encourage opportunities to test without risk of loss, which allows for "learn by doing." Reinforce customer confidence in transacting, regardless of level of education or experience.
 - **Build intuitive digital user interfaces.**
 - **Minimize risk for your customer.**

A. Choice

MAKE INFORMATION ABOUT SERVICES WIDELY AVAILABLE. Provide information in a form that matches customer capability and context. Increase your presence and facilitate easy access to your products and services in places where low-income customers live or work. Your marketing strategy should convey what services can do for customers and should be tailored to speak to customer segments in their own language and appeal to their concerns. To avoid alienating illiterate customers, use visual or oral representations of your products and services.



BEHAVIORALLY INFORMED PRACTICES FOR FINANCIAL CAPABILITY BUILDING

The Center for Financial Inclusion ([CFI 2015](#)) identifies seven practices for financial capability building using behaviorally informed techniques.

1. **TEACHABLE MOMENTS.** Reach customers when they are making financial decisions. For example, in Mexico, Banamex customers who use Saldazo (a Visa card-based transactional account with an optional mobile service, co-branded with OXXO) receive an SMS after each transaction. The messages encourage account use and provide tips on how to use the account, such as how to send money or buy air time. Messages are timed and tailored to the customer account lifecycle: new, frequent use, and inactive customers receive different messages.
2. **LEARN BY DOING.** Let customers practice using products. The LISTA Initiative, introduced by the nonprofit organization, Fundación Capital, is a mobile education initiative for enhancing financial capabilities. It provides women with tablets loaded with the LISTA application, which enables women to teach themselves about financial matters and monitor their progress.
3. **NUDGES AND DEFAULT OPTIONS.** Timely reminders and default options support good habits. Card Bank in the Philippines redesigned its account-opening process with help from behavioral design firm Ideas42. It used “behavioral nudges” focused on helping customers set savings goals, instilling discipline to savings commitments, and personalizing their savings experience by visually tying it to their goals. As a result, initial deposits for new accounts were 15 percent higher than those that had not received behavioral nudges. These customers were also 73 percent more likely to initiate a transaction and to make more frequent deposits and smaller withdrawals (Fiorillo, Potok, and Wright 2014).
4. **RULES-OF-THUMB.** Mental shortcuts help turn learning into habit. Banco Adopem in the Dominican Republic distilled business decisions into easy-to-implement steps that address behavioral bottlenecks microentrepreneurs face in managing their finances. Customers were given simple rules-of-thumb to make “reasonably good” financial management decisions without needing to understand all the accounting or business planning approaches used by higher-income groups (Drexler, Fischer, and Schoar 2014).
5. **MAKE IT FUN.** Games and humor aid learning and retention. CRISIL in India trains frontline staff, known as CRISIL Mitras (Hindi for “friend”), to facilitate learning by encouraging discussion and interaction with customers. It created games based on the games native to the region that many customers played while growing up.
6. **CUSTOMIZE IT.** Tailor advice to an individual’s specific financial situation. For example, see the following story of [KGFS Wealth Management Counseling](#).
7. **MAKE IT SOCIAL.** Leverage the influence of peers and culture. Janalakshmi and KGFS train community members to become staff and promote conversations about financial services among customers.



Photo by Jeanette Thomas

Continuously communicate across multiple channels. Identify appropriate times to communicate, and use multiple channels to get your message across. Insights from research on customer lifecycles and demographic and psychographic characteristics can help tailor timing and communication tools and channels that customers are sensitive to. Spread information through social networks, word-of-mouth, and social media, like Facebook. In Myanmar where literacy is high and smartphone penetration is at 75–80 percent of the

population, Wave Money, the mobile banking service by Telenor Myanmar and Yoma Bank in Myanmar, uses Facebook to respond to comments and questions. It communicates with customers through a range of multimedia: photos, videos (i.e., interviews with staff explaining services), cartoons, and text updates. When Wave Myanmar launched its mobile money service, it reached out to 5.4 million of the 12 million Telenor subscribers on Facebook.



KGFS WEALTH MANAGEMENT COUNSELING

KGFS provides “wealth management”—tailored financial advice—to every enrolled client. The KGFS model is built on the customer empowerment drivers of choice, respect, voice, and control. Each KGFS institution is expected to serve the entire population in its catchment area. In some KGFS branches, wealth advisers receive a list of specific households to which they recommend a customized set of services. The service offer is based on in-depth household assessments that help clients get the services they need. KGFS works as an agent of banks, insurance companies, mutual funds, and pension funds to facilitate use of their services. For example, a KGFS wealth adviser would recommend that highly indebted households refrain from further debt and refinance with cheaper debt; encourage households with income too low to

achieve goals to think about ways to bridge the gap; and give advice on business expansion when relevant. Staff are incentivized to complete household analyses and deliver advice correctly. By limiting their geographic focus to be hyper-local, KGFS institutions are able to react more quickly to local events, such as a bad harvest or low rainfall, by relaxing repayment dates or extending emergency loans. Staff use only local dialects to communicate with each other and with clients; all signage and documents are also in local dialects. KGFS’s main source of revenue comes from interest on credit products. Because most KGFS institutions cannot take deposits, they borrow money wholesale and lend it to clients.

Resource: [Ananth, Chen, and Rasmussen \(2012\)](#).

Leverage access to customer networks. Low-income people leverage social networks to gain the information they need and to navigate the system. In Bihar, India, women who were members of a self-help group formed by the Jeevika program used their network to obtain information about a range of financial services available in the region (Simanowitz, Koning, and Banerjee 2015). Consider involving and engaging people from the same community you plan to serve to share information and help customers access your services. Doing so will help you to broaden your own and your customers’ networks. Influential customers can become your most valuable channel for raising awareness. Target first movers for adoption in a community, and let them spread the word.

Provide customers options on how to access their money, portion it, and spend it flexibly. Flexibility is a key reason low-income people choose to use informal financial services. Informal services are better suited for managing their unpredictable inflows and outflows. In Côte d’Ivoire, Advans offered a unique payments service to agricultural workers using its digital channel, switching payments from cash to digital (Riquet 2016). Advans realized that it had to create a compelling value proposition that was flexi-

“In India, migrants we interviewed had a much more positive attitude to using and trying out services, and this seemed to stem from a more risk-taking and entrepreneurial attitude (some had lost money on high-return chit funds). They were more confident than others and aware of their ability to interact with service providers and explore new possibilities.”

—Anton Simanowitz (2015).

ble enough to meet farmers’ needs. It offered cocoa farmers a digital savings account in partnership with a mobile network operator and used a USSD channel that is accessible on all phones and can be used by illiterate farmers. Farmers decide how much money they want to receive in their personal Advans savings accounts; the remaining payment is made in cash. This gives farmers greater choice and flexibility, and allows them to gradually become comfortable with the digital service. At the end of 2016, more than 7,000 cocoa farmers from 58 cooperatives had subscribed to the service and had a savings account in a formal financial institution.

B. Respect

Understanding the underlying stumbling blocks that create negative experiences will help you to identify areas for improvement. You can make small changes to the incentives of staff and agents who interact directly with customers.

Foster an inclusive environment. Even before they engage with your business, customers may already have inhibitions that deter them from accessing your financial services. They may think that formal financial services are meant only for the highly literate, which deters people who have lower levels of education, or that the services are only for rich and employed people who have excess money and can save. The prospect of using digital services can be daunting for people who are not familiar with technology.¹² Many poor customers worry that

if they make a mistake or if something goes wrong, there will be no one at hand to help them—and that they will ultimately lose what little money they have.

Help people overcome these fears. Employing people from the same community and social strata as your customers is a common practice that many microfinance institutions have used to build trust. Mom-and-pop stores that offer branchless banking follow the same logic.

I had one day gone to the bank to deposit money in my account. There was a very long queue. I asked the guard to help me fill in the forms, and I joined the queue. When I looked at other people on the queue, I noticed that most of them had big bundles or several notes that they needed to deposit. I also noticed that some were withdrawing huge amounts of money. I felt ashamed that I was only holding a 500 shillings note. I was ashamed of myself and felt out of place. I think the bank is for people who have a lot of money.

—Monica, Kenya

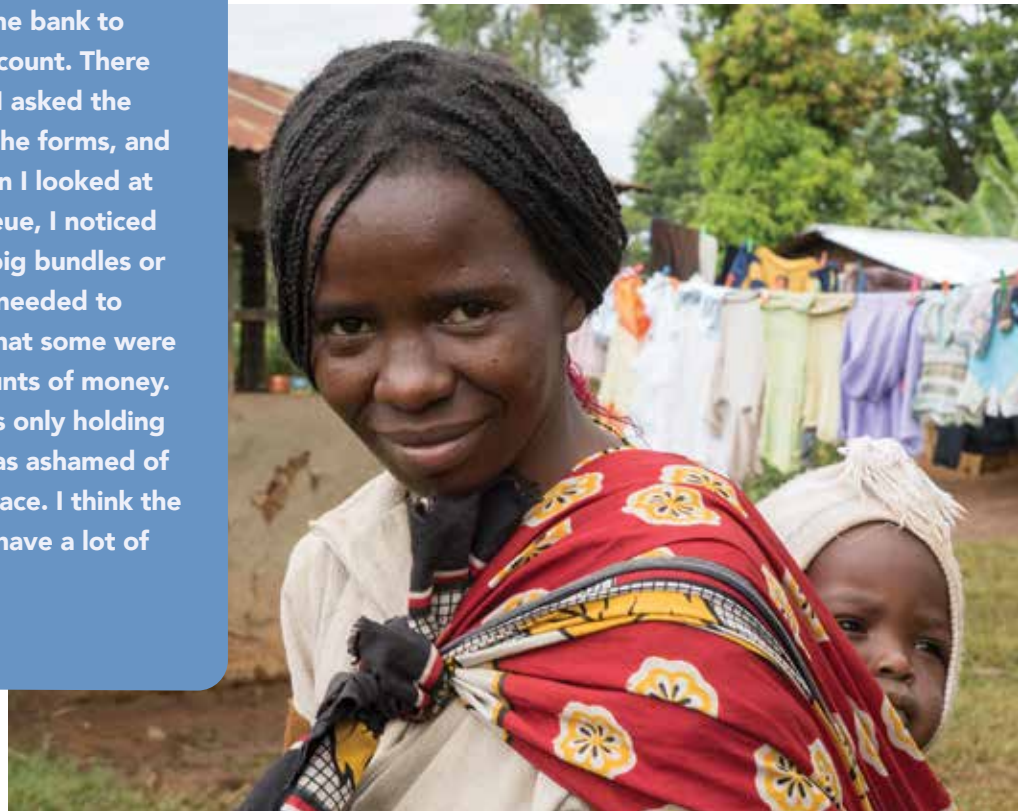


Photo by Peter Kapuscinski/World Bank

12. Mozilla Foundation (2017) found that, in Kenya, digital skills are essential (though not sufficient) for adoption of digital financial services.



IMPROVING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AT BRANCHES, JANALAKSHMI, INDIA

In April 2015, CGAP, global development advisers Dalberg, and Janalakshmi conducted immersion exercises in customer homes and in Janalakshmi branches in Bangalore, India. Customers often were afraid to ask staff questions. Some said that they had been treated disrespectfully in the past and did not feel empowered to express dissatisfaction. Sometimes basic amenities were missing at branches—it is often the case that the poorer the neighborhood, the fewer the amenities. For example, drinking water was not available and bathrooms were designated “staff only.” Security staff at one crowded branch told a customer that she could enter only when her entire loan group was present. Other customers who did not understand their enrollment training and made mistakes in loan repayments reported that they felt discouraged when reproached. Researchers spoke to Janalakshmi customers in groups and in their homes about their experiences during key interactions with Janalakshmi. Some customers reported feeling disrespected.

Janalakshmi’s head of products, Ashwini Jain, notes, “Given the type of customer we are talking about, there is a bit of distance between them and us. Our approach toward them is a more top-down, ‘I’m the boss, you are the servant,’ kind of an approach. It’s more

about how our behavior and our attitude needs to improve for a good customer experience.”

To address poor customer experiences, Janalakshmi created a list of essential basics that need to be in place at its branches. Adherence to the list should ensure a basic minimum customer experience at every branch and agent location and reinforce a distinct brand. Janalakshmi then prototyped a program called Jana Basics where water, clean bathrooms, large waiting areas, baby-feeding zones for mothers (most Janalakshmi customers are women), and children’s play zones were provided at two branches in poorest-of-poor areas that lacked these facilities. The positive impact of the prototype showed that the non-negotiable essentials needed to scale nationally. Staff in the prototype presented the customer-satisfaction results and cost-per-branch to implement Jana Basics (US\$250). Since then, senior management has given a green light to Jana Basics across India. All new branches will have the basic features, and existing branches are being retrofitted with these basics 25 branches at a time. So far 130 branches have implemented Jana Basics, and going forward, all new branches will implement these improvements from the start.

Resource: [Janalakshmi video](#).

“We need [at least] a chair and a fan. . . . We should be asked what we want and helped quickly.”

“If we ask someone for help in filling out a form, we are asked to wait for half an hour and then ignored.”

“I went at 10 am (to the branch) and waited there ‘til 4 pm to be served. However long we wait, the officials are never on time for us.”



Photo by Jeanette Thomas



METLIFE SIMPLIFIES ENROLLMENT AND SAVES ON CUSTOMER CALLS

In recent years, global insurance company MetLife introduced a number of interventions for empowering staff and customers. MetLife was growing fast, globally, through acquisition, but it was considered at the bottom in terms of customer experience. As a quantitative and analytical organization, the company appointed a chief customer officer and focused on data to convince employees of required change. In focusing on the biggest business drivers—costs, earnings, and revenue—MetLife figured out how to better respond to customer needs while adding business value.

It simplified and shortened insurance policy forms, which resulted in savings on postage and printing. And, more importantly, the number of calls to the call center dropped significantly. Previously, sending out 39 million forms resulted in 20 million

calls. After the forms were simplified, calls dropped to 1 million.

Another MetLife experiment also affected the productivity of its call center: some operators were allowed to talk to a caller for as long as required to resolve a problem in one call. Operators were often unable to resolve issues within the maximum three minutes allotted for speaking with customers. Many customers were left unsatisfied and called again, further increasing the burden on the call center. By eliminating time limits, the number of calls was reduced and customers were happier. Under this new policy, the median time operators spent on the phone for one call was three minutes, eight seconds, which was close to the original cut-off point.

Resource: [Interview](#) with Claire Burns, chief customer officer, MetLife.

Simplify enrollment and onboarding. Evidence shows that most customers of mobile money services drop out at the trial or registration stage.¹³ If you can reduce the burden and cost to the customer, especially at this point, you may be able to significantly impact future use and return on cost of acquisition:

- Simplify or reduce the number of forms customers need to complete.
- Facilitate PIN code security.
- Limit requirements on people's time and assets (e.g., accept digital rather than paper photographs) or ensure staff are available to walk users through a first and second transaction.

Be transparent and consistent. Transparency fosters customer trust. Providing updates on the status of a customer's finances can be reassuring to the customer. Research shows that "knowing your balance" is very important to poor people. For example, in many mobile money apps, "balance" is a main feature of the home screen. Quick and easy access to an account balance reassures customers that their money is safe and that the bank or mobile network operator has not touched it. Customers who can access their balances also feel in control of their finances. Eko India Financial Services launched call-based balance checks and transaction inquiries using missed-call technology. The server recognizes that customers with certain mobile numbers who place a missed call need a specific service, like checking their wallet balance, so Eko sends a text response accordingly (Varghese and Bhargava 2016).

13. In Ghana, for example, a majority of mobile money customer drop-outs happened between the time customers were made aware of the service and when they would try it out. Another drop-out point was when they moved from trial to registration. In Pakistan, HBL discovered most of the welfare payment beneficiaries found it difficult to use their PINs at the ATM because their inclination was to input their PINs from right to left as in Urdu (West and Lehrer 2014).

C. Voice

Every interaction with customers is an opportunity to learn something about them, and digital technologies have transformed these interactions. We hear more customer voices on more platforms. Customer interactions can be deeper and more democratic. One of the many results of using technologies is the ability to gain excellent customer insights, which can lead to better profiling and customization of innovative products and services and marketing efforts. Use every interaction to listen to your customers and involve them in product and services improvements. Make sure recourse options function well and are easily accessible.

Ensure a continuous feedback loop and active listening. Low-income people may not feel comfortable speaking up because they believe they will not be taken seriously (Simanowitz 2015). Think back to the techniques addressed in [Section B](#) on how to learn from your customer. Introduce a systematic, easy-to-use method for

capturing insights, and train your call center operators on what to look for and which insights may be relevant. Give concrete examples of how past customer insights, for instance, have led to fewer calls and to service improvements. Show call center staff their role in the process by aligning their incentive structure to insights contributions. A decentralized customer care function, for example, in regional offices or branches as opposed to on the national level, can improve customer access to staff.

“When you engage with your customers and are open with them, you earn their trust, they give you feedback, and you can establish an iterative process for co-innovation.”

—Director of Consumer Insights, Unilever



Photo by Gayatri Murthy



JUNTOS FINANZAS—REAL-TIME INTERACTION

Juntos is a real-time automated conversational platform that engages with customers via SMS on behalf of financial services providers. Juntos aims to provide timely, valuable information when customers have questions, such as “How do I deposit money?” “What’s my account number?” and “Where can I get additional help?” Juntos also reaches out to customers to positively influence financial behaviors with messages such as “Saving today is the way to achieve your future goals. How much will you put away this week?”

In its first deployment in Colombia, the platform was able to automatically handle 93 percent of two-way conversations with customers; this increased to 98 percent nine months later. The response rate to Juntos’s messages increased from 4 percent after one month to 32 percent after three-and-a-half months, which is impressive compared to the typical 1 percent response rate associated with SMS campaigns. Three months after introducing Juntos, account activity increased by 32.5 percent and average account balances by 50 percent compared to a control group.

In a more recent experiment with Mynt in the Philippines, the response rate reached 38 percent in six months. After four months, Mynt saw a 7 percent portfolio-level increase in average wallet transactions and a 20 percent increase in inactive customers’ average transactions over the control group. Mynt discovered that its customers found advice on how to leverage their account for their financial well-being to be more relevant than basic information of how to use their accounts.

Juntos continuously engages with customers and tracks changes in transactional behavior. It is well-positioned to give financial services providers insights into their customers’ needs and behaviors. For example, one of the most popular requests Juntos received from customers in Tanzania was for shopping tips, like “Which shops would offer me the biggest discount for these types of goods?” In response, Juntos partner Tigo Tanzania is exploring how similar messages may offer key intelligence to better segmentation of their customer base and optimize specific categories of merchants that offer particular products and discounts.

Resource: [Valenzuela, Noor, and Holle \(2015\)](#).

One day, I had some money in my account that I needed to send to my chama (savings group). Instead of sending, I ended up purchasing airtime worth 9,000 shillings!!! I went and asked the agent if I could reverse that. He said there is no way. I felt sick. I could not even eat because I could not imagine where I would get 9,000 to pay my chama loan. It took me three months to sell all the airtime to vendors in the village. I was so frustrated. I even swore that I will not use the service again. It took me time before I tried again.

—Karisa, Kenya

Offer easily accessible and effective recourse options. Ironically, the point where things go wrong with customer experience is the same point where you have the opportunity to transform the value proposition to your customer. An effective recourse system is one that customers know about, is accessible, offers timely responses, and is fair. Organize your recourse channels (call centers, websites) based on these factors so customers are aware that the recourse system exists and that information gathered is used to improve your organization. Make good use of customer feedback after an issue is resolved. For instance, give customer care officers the time to listen to customers and address queries rather than cutting short the time they spend with customers (see the case of [Metlife’s call center](#)). Measuring customer satisfaction and including related key indicators in performance measurements of customer care officers improved attention to customers.



BEST PRACTICES FOR AN EFFECTIVE DIGITAL FINANCIAL SERVICES HOTLINE

- **COST-FREE.** If customers need to pay for a call to lodge a complaint, they are much less likely to make the call. Instead, they simply stop using the service or tell others about their negative experience—and you lose an opportunity to turn a complaint into an improvement.
- **SPECIALIZED.** Particularly in organizations that offer a range of services, a dedicated digital financial services hotline can effectively deal with specific questions and issues.
- **CLEAR PROCEDURES.** Have clear procedures and processes in place to expedite resolution of common problems and escalate more serious ones. Some providers develop specialized teams to handle critical issues such as payment reversals, lost SIMs, and forgotten PINs.
- **DEDICATED AGENT.** A dedicated line is recommended to assist agents in a timely manner, and to fast track agent issues and time-sensitive customer complaints.

Resource: Mazer and Garg (2016).

Co-create design enhancements with your customers

Use human-centered design principles to crowd-source ideas and engage customers throughout the design and development process.¹⁴ This approach

gives customers a voice and shows that the business is not assuming it already knows what customers need. Asking customers to help you create appropriate products and services gives customers a sense of control because you are signaling to them that they know what is best for their lives. Focus group discussions and interviews with individual customers can be used to source and test ideas (CGAP 2014 and Ideo.org 2009).

BBVA organizes open talent competitions to source and reward good ideas from the developer community and has created innovation centers in Madrid, Colombia, and Mexico. The innovation centers play an important role in the digital transformation of BBVA Group, which describes itself as a customer-centric global financial services group with large institutions in Spain and Mexico and leading franchises in South America, the United States, and Turkey. Several other banks have created similar innovation labs, including Standard Bank, an Africa-based financial services provider that is active in more than 20 countries. Standard Bank opened a PlayRoom that consists of a high-tech testing facility and “free-thinking rooms” that allow staff and customers to try new innovations and provide instant feedback. The space allows the bank to continuously engage, listen to, and co-create solutions with customers to bring everyday banking value to them (Standard Bank 2014 and 2015). These projects are designed to get employees out of their comfort zones and into environments that are spacious and colorful, to energize and inspire their imaginations (Pilcher 2015).

14. Human-centered design is a process built on learning directly from customers in their own environments and then quickly developing and refining concepts with customers themselves. The process challenges providers to understand, create, evolve, and test possible solutions and repeat the cycle for as many times as it takes (Seltzer and McKay 2014).

D. Control

Whether a savings account, a money jar, or a neighborhood shopkeeper who saves money for them, customers choose options that give customers control over their financial futures. Financial services providers need to recognize how this sense of control can be manifested for poor customers and design products and services that reinforce it. The low-income segment lacks stability and faces rapidly changing circumstances. Products and services must help this segment to create financial predictability. Beyond the way products and services are designed, delivery and interaction also can instill a sense of control.

Design for shortfalls, shocks, networks, and aspirations

Digital technologies create targeted services and speed up product development. Financial technology (FinTech) solutions create financial services that leverage emerging digital technologies and “open banking” efforts to connect banking through applications with nonfinancial solutions customers can use to meet their daily needs. The following are several digital solutions and tools that enhance the control customers have over their financial lives. Most are relatively new innovations that reflect fresh thinking on financial inclusion. Innovations in choice, respect, and voice are fairly common, but control is perhaps the hardest driver to address. The following examples represent interesting experiments and not necessarily best practices.

Customers seek control through the financial services they choose.

Adapt to change the size, timing, and predictability of money coming in

Help your low-income customers mitigate potential shortfalls against future income given the unpredictability of their lives.

Help people balance flexibility and discipline

Financial services providers should offer tools that help customers manage their money digitally in a way that is intuitive and similar to their current informal money management practices—e.g., using features related to time, purpose, and emotion.

Integrate customer networks to manage their liquidity flows

Support poor people’s existing networks through a transactional platform—for example, the crowd-funding platform M-Changa in Kenya.



ECOCASH, ZIMBABWE, SAVE4SCHOOL

WHAT IT IS: A goal-based mobile savings account that allows smallholder families to save gradually for children’s school fees, with an optional microcredit line to fill gaps.

FINANCIAL NEED OR ASPIRATION MET: Smallholder families prioritize their children’s education but struggle to plan ahead for term payments.

HOW IT WORKS: The service leverages Econet’s EcoCash mobile money platform to connect smallholders to a goal-based mobile savings account where they choose a minimum monthly deposit amount (\$2–\$5), with the option to deposit larger amounts as cash flows permit. When school fees are due, EcoFarmer automatically transfers customers’ savings to their chosen school, which pays the EcoCash fee associated with the transaction. Key features include the following:

- Low minimum monthly savings, with the option to save more.
- Flexible payment terms, with no penalties for customers who miss a monthly payment.
- Savings that are locked and paid automatically to schools at the beginning of the term.
- Creditworthy customers (as determined by an algorithm) have the option of accessing a microloan to cover the remaining balance if they do not meet their savings target.

CUSTOMER REACTIONS: A pilot test of the service is scheduled for May 2017.

BUSINESS CASE: Mobilizes deposits; drives smallholder adoption and use of EcoCash.

Resource: [Mattern and Tarazi \(2015\)](#).



EKO—FILL THE WALLET

EXPERIMENT: CGAP worked with Ignacio Mas and Eko India Financial Services to apply Mas' money resolution principles (see [Understand Mental Models for Better Products and Services](#) in creating next-generation financial services). Eko is a payments services provider that helps urban migrant customers send money to their families back home. Many of its customers own smartphones, which are inexpensive and widely available in India. Eko wanted to move beyond remittances and help customers make financial decisions on the Eko wallet, and, in so doing, keep their money in the wallet rather than cashing out.

The Fill the Wallet mobile application was created to give customers more choice in managing their finances and a sense of control. While Fill the Wallet can help customers with conventional actions like saving, sending, and lending money, the goal is to provide customizable tools customers can use to create their own financial rules and relationships and to change or revise them as needed. The project involved building a prototype for a mobile app, which was enhanced by six rounds of user testing with current Eko customers. Several key principles emerged from the app design.

PEOPLE FIRST. Research showed that money management was understood as a transfer of value across one or

more people in a social network. For instance, you can rely on relationships (such as your spouse or a trusted friend) to approve your use of certain funds. You can tie the use of money to specific locations, for example, a pot of money that can be spent only when you are back in the home village. Related to the idea of the importance of people in our lives, user-testing sessions showed that actual images of these people in the app were important (see "People First Approach").

TOOLS NOT PRODUCTS. Instead of focused and complex products, Eko created tools that are useful. If the tools are sufficiently intuitive, powerful, and flexible, customers will use them in ways that suit their own needs.

"Being able to look at a picture of a bike regularly will motivate me to save for it."

—Eko customer

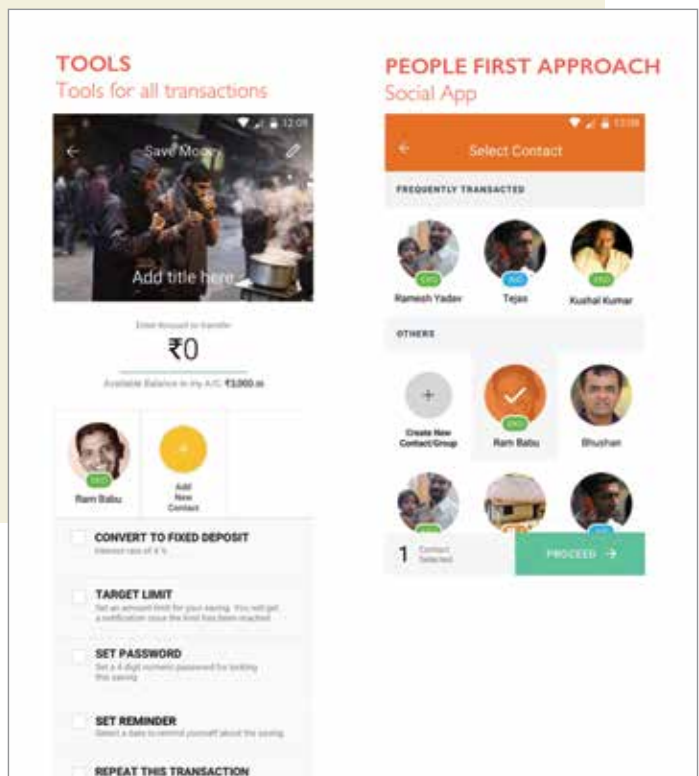
Appeal to customer aspirations

Demonstrate that you care for your customers and that their success also benefits your institution. A key aspect of control is the perceived ability to steer one's own destiny and progress. Many financial services customers strive for a better financial future and to achieve their life's goals. A business can connect to these desires and respond to them. In advanced markets, some banks offer services that support customers' search for houses with information services, an app that protects houses with monitoring devices, and a gamified mobile app that encourages young drivers to drive safely. These are examples of how businesses can help customers

achieve their goals and find value in their lives while indirectly linking them with bank services (mortgages and house and car insurance, in these particular cases).

Deliver with room for trial and error, intuitive use and learning, and minimal risk

Help customers feel more in control and more confident when using financial services.



Allow customers to try out the product or service and build in safeguards against errors

Customers may be more comfortable using your services if they have an opportunity to test them without losing their money. Several applications support “learning by doing” by creating a non-threatening environment for people to test and become more familiar with technology solutions. Here are a few examples (Arnold and Rhyne 2016):

- Grameen Foundation, Eko, and ICICI developed a training program for Cashpor, an Indian not-for-profit microcredit company, to accompany a mobile savings app that focused on addressing Cashpor’s female members who “did not trust that the application was safe to use.” The training gave members the opportunity to try out the app on a mobile device. Trainers encouraged women to try various buttons in an attempt to overcome their fear of making a mistake (GSMA 2015).

- Thrive ‘n’ Shine is a financial education game developed by MindBlown Labs. Players guide avatars through life scenarios and away from bankruptcy. Players become more engaged as they successfully move through the game and start learning about financial systems that previously seemed daunting. Thrive ‘n’ Shine makes financial systems relatable by addressing them in the context of a game (York 2015).

Absa Bank’s Shesha game is an example of customers and financial services providers interacting on equal terms and learning from each other. The learn-by-doing approach is educational on both sides and does not come across as condescending. Playing the game helps low-income customers resolve a key concern: how much money do I have in the bank? The game allows customers to practice checking their balances in a way that is convenient for them and for the bank.



M-CHANGA, KENYA

WHAT IT IS: A crowdfunding platform that digitizes person-to-person fundraising for education, medical emergencies, weddings, and other needs. M-Changa automates a Kenyan giving process called harambee (“coming together” in Shwahili). One of the two founders of M-Changa, U.S.-educated Kyai Mullie was added to his family’s harambee committee when he returned

to Kenya. He saw the challenges of managing the harambee and put his computer science background to use to design a modern version of this longstanding Kenyan tradition.

FINANCIAL NEED: Harvest a personal network for contributions and draw funds in case of emergency.

HOW IT WORKS: The app allows users to fundraise across mobile money channels in Kenya via SMS. They can have one fundraising campaign per SIM at a time and contribute to an unlimited number of fundraising efforts. It is a good example of sourcing insights from informal finance and making them work better via digitization. Through its nonprofit arm, Changa Labs, M-Changa is conducting a research and human-centered design effort to improve the way in which its platform serves low-income people’s needs.

BUSINESS CASE: There is a broad-reaching tradition in East Africa of informal and formal giving and reciprocity. M-Changa facilitates contributions collected digitally through M-Pesa, Airtel Money, and PayPal, with 20 percent of contributions originating outside of Kenya.

Resource: [Weinglass \(2015\)](#).



Photo by Peter Kapuscinski/World Bank



M-KOPA, KENYA, MEETING CUSTOMERS' NEED FOR ENERGY

M-Kopa provides solar home systems in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. The systems use machine-to-machine technology to enable customers to pay as they use energy—a micropayment solution. The systems use embedded technology that monitors and meters their use. Customers pay an initial deposit and then pay daily installments via a mobile money service until their balance is paid off. Once their balance is paid off, customers own the system outright.

This pay-as-you-go system replaces the need for a loan to finance the large purchase of equipment. In other words, through the digital channel and mobile payments M-Kopa provides asset finance for a “connected” solar energy device, selling this as a service—not as hardware. Families that have a track record of paying for their energy are effectively building their credit history. M-Kopa can use customers’ credit history to provide financing for other assets, such as mobile phones, stoves, TVs, or bikes. It is a flexible pathway to other financial services. In a sense, the business grows with its customers.

Resource: [M-Kopa \(2015\)](#).

“If we have learned anything in the last decade, it is that our ability to make change happen at scale is not about technology: it is about focusing on what customers actually need, being brave enough to rip up some old business models, and good old-fashioned operational delivery in a sometimes very analogue world.”

—Nick Hughes, M-Kopa



ABSA BANK, SOUTH AFRICA—THE SHESHA GAME

Absa is a South African bank that is majority owned by Barclays Africa Group Limited. It routinely experienced weekend and month-end crunches because this is when low-income customers came to the branch to inquire about their balances and do their banking. The heavy use during those times happened even though it can be quite expensive—up to \$2.80 in taxi fares—for customers to get to a branch. About 50 percent of Absa’s low-income customers were registered for mobile banking and had access to their balance through a mobile device. Despite this, only about 20 percent of those registered used mobile banking services, and when they did use it, it was used mostly to purchase airtime top-ups. To help customers feel more comfortable using mobile banking, the bank created the Shesha (“quick, quick”) quiz game. Customers were sent text messages that invited them to play the game.

The game had two parts. First, players took a quiz about how to check an account balance. Correct answers were rewarded an airtime prize. The second part challenged players

to test their knowledge by using their phone to check their account balance. Players who did this were told that they would be entered to win a large cash prize. Fourteen percent of the customers who were invited played the game. Two months after playing the game, these customers checked their balances using their phones 54 percent more often than they did previously; this increased to 61 percent six months after playing. Shesha was a fun way for customers to learn how to check their balances on their mobile devices.

Low development costs (\$26,000) for the game meant that the bank broke even in a relatively short period. Absa recognizes that, in the long run, customer use of digital channels is in the best interest of both parties. In addition to having existing customers perform more transactions, Absa expects to bring in more customers (and lose fewer) as a result of its improved customer value proposition: improved remote functionality and improved service for branch customers as a result of shorter queues.

Resource: [Koning \(2015\)](#).

Adapt your digital user interfaces

When designing and developing your interface, keep in mind what customers care about the most:

- **Ease of access. Ensure that your services are readily available** and close by, easy to use with minimal hurdles (e.g., for registration), and affordable to low-income customers. Consider the range of costs, including psychological costs of accessing digital financial services for the first time and the cost of connectivity and data.
- **Effectiveness of your services.** Customers should be able to use your service as and when needed. Your service should be reliable—customers should be able to count on you and your network. And customers should be able to expect a consistent quality of service delivery.
- **Emotional connection.** While digital services tend to minimize human interaction, customers still want a personal touch and the ability to emotionally connect with a service (Forrester 2016).

Any digital interface customers use, whether it is a phone, ATM, or point-of-service device, should be simple and adaptable to customer capabilities. Applying tried-and-true design principles can facilitate use and navigation by low-income customers who may have limited bandwidth and context. In particular, requirements for illiterate customers need to be considered. Designing products for low-income customers is not about dumbing down technology; rather, it is about making it easy for everyone to use the product or service. This inclusive approach facilitates learning-by-doing for customers who are unfamiliar with and uncomfortable with technology.

APPLYING UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLES OF USER INTERFACE/USER EXPERIENCE DESIGN FOR MOBILE MONEY APPS

Here are a few design principles for mobile money smartphone apps that will help you to facilitate uptake and use and to empower users.

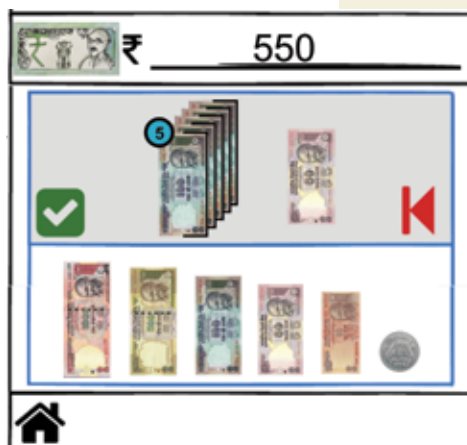
- Make navigation “flat,” not hierarchical, and build on familiarity with functionalities already used.
- Minimize text, incorporate visual cues, and use icons that are intuitive or that quickly trigger memory. Low-literacy users may wish to have the option to hear explanations in their local language.
- Build confidence by doing, rather than by teaching.
- Reduce complexity by simplifying choices based on past use or primary transactions.
- Build in features to check and correct human error. Allow users to easily review past app transactions using standard visual cues of types of transactions to reaffirm.

Resource: [Chen \(2016\)](#).



CASH-BASED INPUT ON MOBILE MONEY INTERFACES

One example of a tool that helps illiterate people and those who are not numerate is cash-based input. Numeric transactions are often complex, and cash or financial transactions are often executed in a language that customers are not familiar with. For example, Matthews (2016) has found in studies in six countries that many illiterate customers cannot read large numbers (three or more digits in length) in writing. To address some of those challenges, particularly with digital finance, providers can design iconography and navigation of mobile money applications for illiterate people to use. Microsave and My Oral Village (2017) have tested a solution that integrates a cash-based input method editor into the design of mobile money apps using visuals of bank notes next to numbers.



Ensure you minimize risks for your customers

In digital finance, an unreliable network, insufficient agent liquidity, or risk of fraud can lead to a breakdown in trust. Negative customer experiences can lead to limited uptake and use or dropping out altogether. Fears and negative experiences may also affect your ability to cross-sell more advanced or higher margin products, such as credit, savings, or premium-paid insurance. You can tackle these issues and minimize risk by:

- Improving service reliability and robustness.
- Making customer interface more user friendly so mistakes are less likely.
- Strengthening agent quality, management, and liquidity.
- Combating customer-affecting fraud.
- Improving the handling of complaints, queries, and redress.

For more ideas, see McKee, Kaffenberger, and Zimmerman (2015) and Buku and Mazer (2017).



TOOLS

CHECK YOUR ASSUMPTIONS: Use this simple “true or false” test to spark reflection and dialogue.

Experiment 11 in the Customer Experience Workbook is a list of nine questions that can challenge your current knowledge on the use of tools to learn about your customers.

SHOW THE IMPACT OF YOUR PROTOTYPE: There are numerous ways to build a low-resolution prototype that tests your initial assumptions. **Experiment 10** in the Customer Experience Workbook gives you a step-by-step approach, starting with a storyboard or concept map, to a low-resolution prototype such as mock-up marketing posters and paper interface “screens” that you can easily test with customers.

USE A PROJECT PLANNER: Using a simple framing and planning tool can help you launch your customer empowerment project. **Tool 5** in the Customer Experience Workbook helps you think about the objectives of your intervention; the key improvement hypothesis you are testing; resource, material, and budget requirements; and your timeline.

PROJECT PLANNER (1/1)

PROJECT CONCEPT:

OWNERS:

	1.		2.		3.		4.		
<p>OPPORTUNITY: What opportunity area(s) does your project explore?</p>	Activities								<p>ITERATION: How can your concept be improved on and iterated over time?</p>
<p>ROLES: Who are needed to make this a reality? What are their responsibilities?</p>	Resources internal/external								<p>SUCCESS: What would success look like for your project?</p>



Photo by Antonique Koning

4.

ORGANIZE TO DELIVER CUSTOMER EMPOWERMENT

Staff and the agents that directly interact with customers are critical conduits for customer empowerment.¹⁵ They drive a positive customer experience. They are your eyes and ears on the ground, and they play a key role in earning customer trust and building confidence. They are instrumental in enforcing the four drivers of customer empowerment. This section addresses how you can influence your staff and agents to be crucial conduits of customer empowerment.

CHOICE. Customer-facing staff and agents help tailor information to customers' needs and can become trusted advisers to support the process of selecting and using financial services (see [KGFS Wealth Management Advice](#)).

RESPECT. Interactions with frontline staff, whether at a bank branch or an agent location, are the main ways customers perceive and judge your organization. Besides the skills, knowledge, and tools frontline staff have, the empathy and respect they show customers will determine their success in delivering a positive customer experience.

VOICE. Frontline staff can be empowered to provide feedback on what they hear from customers.

CONTROL. Since control is the least realized driver in the financial services sector, empower your employees to take initiative and innovate to explore tools and solutions that could provide greater control for their customers.

The culture in your entire organization needs to facilitate customer empowerment. Both structural and cultural adjustments are needed.

Your staff's ability to deliver an empowering experience depends on them having the right information, skills, and tools to engage with customers and having the right incentives. Equip staff and agents—especially those on the front line—to engage with customers in an empathic way. Ensure that they have the necessary information, skills, knowledge, and tools to better understand and engage with the customer. Give them a voice to facilitate a dialogue between the

organization and the customer, and the freedom to take initiative or innovate to improve customer experiences. Put in place appropriate incentives, rewards, and recognition to motivate staff and agents to deliver a positive customer experience and to create value for customers, business, and themselves.

"We look at employees as key stakeholders and believe our customers can be happy only if our employees are happy."

—Samit Ghosh, CEO and managing director, Ujjivan Financial Services, India

The following are a few ways you can provide your staff with the right information and incentives:

- **Make the case for customer empowerment to your staff and identify a quick win.** Combine analyses of your customers' journey with the experiences of your customer-facing staff and/or of your agent. Assess where the largest drop-out incidences occur in these simultaneous journeys and which touchpoint is the best place to intervene. Brainstorm with staff on how to overcome bottlenecks and what resources they need to improve the customer experience. AMK in Cambodia worked with 17 Triggers, a local behavioral design firm, to map the agent journey and ideate solutions to improve agent activity and customer experi-

15. Research shows that employee engagement is positively correlated with customer satisfaction (Feinberg 2015).

ence. This initiative is leading to changes in the way agents are trained and incentivized. Changes include the development of a rating tool, a redesigned agent training program, on-going monitoring and support to agents to ensure that they understand and are able to conduct transactions for the full range of services offered, and regular interactive meetings for agents where they can air issues to management and meet other agents.

- **Recruit frontline staff who can empathize with customers.** Complex products and cross-selling require experience with deep customer engagement. As such, recruiting staff and agents who have the relevant business profile is important. Select agents and customer-facing staff who have trustworthy positions in their community and who empathize with the low-income segment you are trying to service, as well as good business and soft skills, such as the ability to communicate well.

- **Make your staff and agents ambassadors for customer empowerment.** Financial education of frontline staff and agents has proven to be instrumental in ensuring information is well-received and understood by customers.¹⁶ Your staff should become ambassadors for your services, they should know how to use the services, and they should deliver consistent service. For example, Crezcamos in Colombia issued smartphones to all of its loan officers to use beyond making calls. Loan officers are expected to use their phones to map their location when they sell agricultural insurance, to call and text customers, and to share information. The MicroInsurance Center and Crezcamos developed a three-minute video that explains the main characteristics of their product and offers a brief client testimonial. This helps officers to save time and to standardize sales practices (Zimmerman et al. 2016).



CREATING A LEARNING-LED CULTURE AT ZOONA

At Zoona, a payments provider in Zambia, Malawi, and Mozambique, innovation, autonomy, and learning are key focus areas. The fact that Zoona employs a chief people officer underscores its commitment to employee empowerment. Zoona is looking at providing flexibility within its employee value proposition that enables employees to choose what is most valuable to them and best responds to their needs and motivations. For example, some may prefer learning opportunities and education subsidies, others prefer transport support.

Zoona puts a lot of emphasis on developing staff in the customer care center because these staff continuously interact with customers. The center used to be isolated from the rest of the organization, and center staff did not participate in broader company activities. Zoona found ways to inject its culture of free-thinking, empowerment, innovation, and learning into the customer care center. Zoona doesn't believe in a rule-book culture that may stifle innovation and entrepreneurship. Rather, it has co-created ways of working with teams, so called O-WoWs. Through a facili-

tated process, in which everyone had the opportunity to participate, the customer care team has created its own list of agreements that they hold each other to with the ultimate goal of providing excellent customer service. These agreements are linked to Zoona's values and include everything from time keeping, to taking ownership, to making sure they have fun while they work. These values are prominently posted on a wall—empowering team members to bring them into regular team conversations. Management tries to find ways to show staff that they are more than just employees and to respond to some of the intrinsic motivators for their work (e.g., nice workspace with dart board, inspirational posters). It trains staff on “how to own your job,” which empowers staff to control their career paths. The training also focuses on diversity, frontline skill training, empathy building, and handling difficult customers. Zoona has not yet found good ways to measure how empowerment affects employees' interactions with customers, but it expects that happier staff can deliver a more positive experience.

Source: Interview, Megan Viljoen, Zoona

16. See [Microfinance Opportunities](#).

Let your frontline staff be the voice of your customer and facilitate dialogue. Your frontline staff and agents are your eyes and ears on the ground. They often know what worries and wants customers have. Give your staff and agents a voice in your organization so that they can channel customer insights and feedback. If you promote an environment of openness, respect, and transparency, you will have a better chance of capturing critical insights from the field in a timely manner without investing in expensive research. Organizations can use various tools to surface and process employee and customer feedback. For example, Equity Bank in Kenya has a dedicated call center that agents can use to reach out to the bank to ask questions or to resolve issues. Through the agent channel, Equity Bank seeks customer feedback on the services it offers and input into product development (MicroSave 2013). Leadership check-ins with employees and formal suggestion programs are other ways to systematically source knowledge from your staff.

Incentivize proactive behavior and respect for the customer and build long-lasting relationships. This involves monetary incentives for meaningful metrics (e.g., commissions on depth of customer relationships and customer activity, as opposed to number of clients) and can also be expressed in ways that drive employees' intrinsic motivation (e.g., desire to contribute to a common goal, outperform others). Treat your staff and agents with the respect you want them to show your customers. In Indonesia, BTPN, a commercial bank that serves low-income customers and micro and small businesses, is introducing an agent empowerment platform to support agents' personal growth, peer-to-peer network, and healthy competition among agents to motivate and incentivize the delivery of a consistently positive customer experience.



“Customer care staff appreciated that it felt like ZoonA looked at them as more than just employees. This changes even the way they walked about the office. When they feel empowered, they’ll bring their voices to the table”

—Megan Viljoen, ZoonA

Photo by
Yanina Seltzer



UJJIVAN INDIA BALANCES EMPLOYEE INCENTIVES

Ujjivan Financial Services Ltd. has an incentive system for its loan officers that relies on a balance of portfolio quality and quantity indicators and requires that managers carefully evaluate the performance of branch staff. Loan officers are scored on a scale of 0 (poor performance) to 5 (excellent performance) on five assessment parameters: (1) number of borrowers, (2) percentage of idle customers > 60 days, (3) portfolio balance outstanding, (4) client repayment rate, and (5) “customer connect.” The latter is an assessment of how well the loan officer performs the following duties:

- Organizing and leading the branch’s social development programs (including health outreach programs, education activities, and other social programs).

- Identifying customers who need immediate additional support services from the financial institution.
- Participating in meetings for client leaders (“center leaders”).
- Developing positive relationships with customers and delivering excellent customer service.

The customer connect requirement is the only subjective indicator in the incentive system and, as such, requires the time and effort of branch management. However, it is also an indicator that motivates strong client protection practices by loan officers, and has a positive effect on branch culture.

Resource: [Wardle \(n.d.\)](#).

Equity Bank’s credit officers became empowerment officers—empowering someone to realize a dream—and cashier facilitators—facilitating people to transact.”

—James Mwangi, CEO, Equity Bank

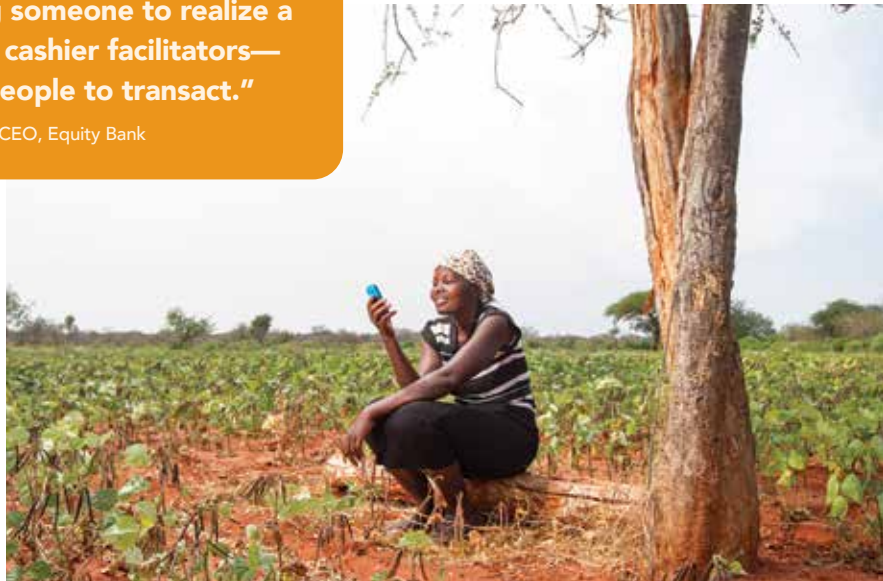


Photo by Mwangi Kirubi



TOOLS

ALIGN YOUR TEAM VALUES: Use a value-mapping tool to help you describe the values embodied in your personal work and in the wider organization. **Experiment 13** in Customer Experience Workbook

TEAM ROLES AND DESCRIPTIONS: Defining team roles for your customer empowerment projects is crucial for success. Teams work best if you start small. If possible, put together a diverse team—team members with different experiences, of

both genders, points of view, and function areas. **Tool 7** in Customer Experience Workbook

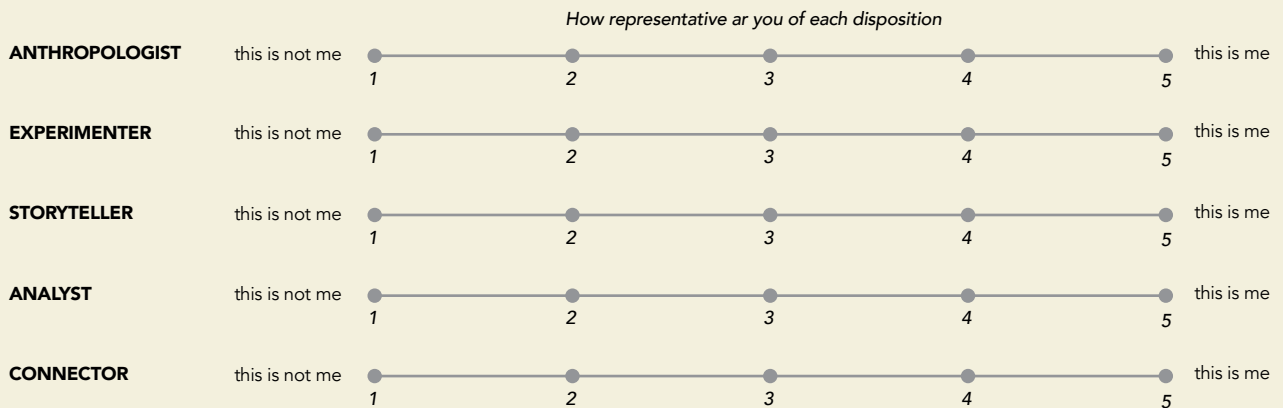
LAUNCH A CUSTOMER COUNCIL: To better understand how a portfolio of offerings holds up, test it with a Customer Council. Over time, use this group to better understand customer preferences, brand impressions, and market direction. **Experiment 17** in Customer Experience Workbook

GROUP GOALS: What are your goals for this project and team? What would success look like?

PERSONAL GOALS: What are your individual goals for this project? Is there a skill you'd like to gain or enhance? A professional milestone?

PROJECT PERSPECTIVES

Share the perspective and disposition you bring to your project team. This will help your team identify how to share work and leverage strengths



What implications do your ratings have for your team role and responsibilities?



Photo by Design Impact Group

5.

MEASURING CUSTOMER AND BUSINESS OUTCOMES OF EMPOWERMENT

Though many of the actions recommended in this Guide may seem obvious and based on common sense, in reality, few financial services providers are customer focused. Changing the way you and your staff interact with customers and changing the mindset of your employees and agents to facilitate customer empowerment requires time, resources, and commitment. At the heart of this endeavor is a shift in attitude. You can start with simple steps that do not require a lot of time or resources. Empowering customers is a process that can evolve over time; it is not a radical transformation that needs to take place in one go. How do you know you are on the right track? To conclude this guide, we share our hypotheses about customer and business outcomes that can result from customer empowerment and suggest ways to measure these outcomes.

START SMALL. The interventions suggested in this guide can have far-reaching results, but they can be expensive to implement. Key business metrics will help you to convince the board and other executives to devote resources to this exercise. This is why the tools laid out in this guide suggest an iterative and incremental approach. You should test your solutions at a small scale—for example, start with two branches or 30 customers. Document results and customer satisfaction. Build consensus in your organization and slowly scale up.

NEXT, LOOK FOR CLEAR RESULTS using an iterative approach. Initially, when improving your services, measure customer satisfaction. Ask your customers how they experienced the improvements. As the prototypes or tests mature, look for changes in customers' levels of engagement and use of your services. The most obvious way empowerment is manifested is through improved uptake and use all along the customer journey. If your customers are empowered and satisfied, they are more likely to channel a greater proportion of their money management through you and to encourage their friends and relatives to do the same. On the other hand, the loan that is not disbursed, the account that is opened but never used, the insurance policy that lapses at the time of renewal, and the transfer payment that goes astray all cost customers in terms of time and money that they, especially, cannot afford to lose. Comprehensive customer value can be difficult to measure. Metrics include retention and expansion of their engagement over a longer period of time, but for practical reasons we use the following proxy.

Value as perceived by the customer is manifested in changes in variables that you can track:

- The number of marketing contacts that in turn become customer sign-ups.
- The share of spontaneous new customer referrals from agent networks.
- The share of active customers in a financial services provider's overall client base.
- Average number and value of transactions per customer.
- Number of products taken up by customers over time.
- Portfolio growth with sustained profitability.

For the business, this leads to long-term value expressed in the following:

- Customer loyalty—increased customer lifetime value.
- Retention—lower organizational costs from amortizing costs over a larger customer base.
- Increased transactions—superior growth through market share gains and cross-selling of products and services.
- Improved bottom line—increased revenue (and achievement of social goals, if applicable).

It can be difficult to attribute an increase in use of your products and services to a single intervention. Moreover, empowerment can be influenced by many factors, some of which are not under your control. Even with good results, conflicts over resources are bound to arise over investments for customer empowerment interventions. You should sketch out the business case for conducting your research. Focus on costs and benefits to the business and the customer.



WHY AND HOW JANALAKSHMI IS ASSESSING THE VALUE OF ITS CUSTOMERS

To respond to business challenges and opportunities related to Janalakshmi's transformation into a small finance bank in India and driving a customer-centric vision, a detailed analysis of Janalakshmi's revenues, costs, and profits from serving its different customers was required to show the case for serving different segments. For this purpose, Janalakshmi updated its data management system to go beyond a transaction view and assigned a unique identifier to each client. Managers could then analyze the cost and revenue drivers at the level of each customer. These analyses enabled the institution to move from a product view of value to calculating the value of customers in each segment in the near and long term. Janalakshmi began to focus on retention as a key factor in determining customer profitability. The longer the customer transacts through the provider, the more profitable he or she can be to the provider. One small segment of low-income customers promised to drive the most growth over the long run: the customers who graduate from small group loans to individual business loans.

After identifying the business opportunity, Janalakshmi conducted customer research and developed its retention strategy for the target group loan customers in order to graduate them and ensure that these clients were selecting the right products and services, including loyalty programs and advisory services. The

institution created a strategic framework for analyzing each segment and for developing customized products and services loyalty programs, advisory services, and channel experience.

In the case of Janalakshmi, knowing how poor families were contributing to the bottom line allowed it to consider how many it can afford to serve, and with what value proposition. The institution found that the cost of servicing its poorest customers is relatively high. However, rather than eliminating services to these lowest value segments, Janalakshmi reinforced its mission to include these groups by re-orienting its strategic approach. This includes using lower-cost delivery channels for small group loan customers, and building into its offer products and services, such as advisory and pension products. For Janalakshmi, however, measuring value purely in financial terms is insufficient. Some elements that contribute to financial value are intangible and hard to measure. For example, maintaining low-income and lower-value clients allows Janalakshmi to position itself in low-income communities as inclusive, thereby attracting a wider range of households to its brand. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it fulfills the organization's social mission of inclusive urban growth.

Resource: [Stahl, Magnoni, and Coetzee \(2017\)](#).



TOOLS

STORYBOARD YOUR IDEA: A storyboard is an easy way to robustly illustrate an offering idea within the life of your organization and its customers. Storyboards provide details on users, flow, interactions, and dependencies, and they act as early stage mock-ups or prototypes. **Experiment 14** in Customer Experience Workbook

MAKE A VIDEO, SHOW YOUR IMPACT: While data are important, sharing stories about people is a

powerful way to leave an impression and resonate with your audience. Create a one- or two-minute video with your camera phone to show the impact to your peers. **Experiment 16** in Customer Experience Workbook

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY: This tool can help you take the pulse of your customers by asking them a few questions. **Tool 9** in Customer Experience Workbook

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY (2/2)

TARGET GROUP	SAMPLE QUESTION*	1	2	3	4	5
	*Note: Questions from a previous project. You'll craft your own relevant questions					
BOTH	How comfortable do you feel at the [service location]?	Very comfortable	Somewhat comfortable	Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable	Somewhat uncomfortable	Very uncomfortable
BOTH	When you have questions, how adequate do you feel the information provided at the [service location] is?	Very adequate	Somewhat adequate	Neither adequate nor inadequate	Somewhat inadequate	Very inadequate
EXPOSED GROUP	Have you noticed any changes at the [service location] (yes/no) If yes, how much do you like these new changes?	A lot	Somewhat	Indifferent	Very little	Not at all
BOTH	Overall, how satisfied are you with your experience at the [service location]?	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	Somewhat unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied
BOTH	How much do you like the facilities at the [service location]?	A lot	Somewhat	Indifferent	Very little	Not at all

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK:

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK:

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