



**THE CHIEF
INSIGHTS
OFFICER:
IT'S ABOUT WAY MORE
THAN
DATA**

Many companies now have data dependence baked into their DNA. They collect and mine vast amounts of information on customers and prospects to uncover trends, patterns, and opportunities to sell products and services across multiple touchpoints. “Data obsession” is a thing. Google the term and the search engine returns page after page.

All of this increased reliance on customer data has led many organizations to add a new position to the C-suite focused on understanding the customer. Often coined the Chief Customer Officer, 35 of the Fortune 500 companies have one¹. The role means many things to many people, but it often majors on data-driven insights. I believe that’s too narrow a definition and misses a key point: *data alone isn’t enough to create great customer experiences.*

Bring the Voice of Your Customer Into the C-Suite

To create great experiences, you need human insights to build empathy and deeply understand what customers think, feel, say, do, and want. That means creating opportunities to do this first-hand. This often requires a culture shift at companies that have grown accustomed to examining reams of data and then pumping out new products or services as quickly as possible to stay competitive.

That’s why I’ve approached my job a bit differently since I was named Chief Insights Officer at my company a year ago. My responsibility is to guide our customers in using data to shed light on their own customers, with a major focus on how human insight can feed into decisions that drive outstanding customer experiences. These recommendations are based on best practices we see in the industry.

Regardless of the title — Chief Insights

Officer, Customer Experience Officer, Chief Customer Officer, or Chief Empathy Officer (a title my company had considered for my role) — it is critical to create a role in the C-suite to be the voice of the customer, personify their needs, and build a culture of empathy.

Isn’t the C-Suite Crowded Enough?

Is it really necessary to add yet another executive to the increasingly crowded C-suite? “If your organization happens to be one of the few with customer satisfaction and experience woven deeply into its culture, the answer is no,” a McKinsey report² said. “For most companies, though, this is not the case. While nearly every organization claims to be customer-centric, few really are.”

In a nutshell, this executive role focused on building institutional knowledge of customers should have a dedicated focus on the human side to drive stellar customer experience. It’s impossible to feel what a customer experiences merely by analysing data. Empathy doesn’t come from reading a screen, but by finding ways to get inside customers’ heads and truly understand how products or service thrill or frustrate them.

What could be more important? As a Gartner report³ put it, customer experience (CX) is the new battlefield, with the vast majority of companies saying they compete mostly or completely on the basis of CX. Business leaders agree as well. A survey by consulting firm Walker⁴ found 39% of CEOs consider customer experience to be the most effective way to create competitive advantage — a number higher than talent, product, efficiency, brand and pricing.

The fact is, most companies don’t do a good job deeply understanding the customer, the market opportunity, and how they can deliver products that truly rise to the occasion. They just go into build mode without enough research (human insights as well as data).

Data Is a Commodity. Empathy Is the Differentiator

One of my most important responsibilities as Chief Insights Officer is to help companies understand how building customer empathy needs to be in the job responsibilities of everyone across the organization who touches the customer in any way, and what processes they can put in place to execute this way of thinking.

Lastly, but most importantly, it is the Chief Insights Officer’s job to help organizations understand that data is a commodity while empathy is a true differentiator. A company’s competitors have access to the same types of data. If they don’t, they can purchase it. Competitors have access to the same AI and machine learning technologies. They have access to the same CRM and automated marketing systems.

The race to combine technologies to collect, process, mine, and analyze all this data is important in a data-driven world. But data only gets you so far, especially if it is looked to as a proxy for customer understanding. Building customer empathy is the way to win in today’s business environment, and it should be the Chief Insights Officer’s primary job to show how that’s done.



Janelle Estes
Chief Insights Officer
UserTesting

Janelle is an expert research practitioner fascinated by human behaviour and intrigued by data insight. She brings over 15 years’ experience conducting large-scale customer research initiatives for both B2C and B2B companies across a variety of industries to help them transform their customer, user, and brand experiences. Janelle is responsible for stewarding the future of Human Insight and translating that into opportunities to evolve the UserTesting platform.

<https://www.usertesting.com/>

¹<https://www.inmoment.com/blog/what-does-chief-customer-officer-need-be-successful/>

²<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/mckinsey-digital/our-insights/why-your-company-needs-a-chief-customer-officer-cco>

³<https://www.gartner.com/en/marketing/insights/articles/key-findings-from-the-gartner-customer-experience-survey>

⁴<https://www.walkerinfo.com/Portals/0/Documents/Knowledge Center/Featured Reports/WALKER-Customer-focused-CEO.pdf>