

Who should own customer experience in your organization?

A practical guide to CX governance models.

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Introduction

Ask ten people in a typical mid-sized company who owns the customer experience and you will usually get eight different answers. Marketing claims it because of brand and acquisition. Operations claims it because of service delivery. Sales claims it because of relationship. The CX team — if there is one — claims it because the role title says so. The result is the well-known governance anti-pattern: customer experience is officially owned by everyone, which means in practice it is owned by no one.

This paper is a practical guide for CX directors and managers who need to fix that. It is not a book on the philosophy of customer-centricity. It is a working playbook of the five governance models that exist in the real world, a decision framework for choosing the right one for your company, and a maturity ladder for moving between them as the programme grows up.

Governance is not the same as org chart. Two companies with the same reporting line can have very different CX outcomes depending on how four underlying levers — strategy, voice, execution and decision rights — are configured. We start there, in Chapter 1, before walking through the models themselves.

What you'll get:

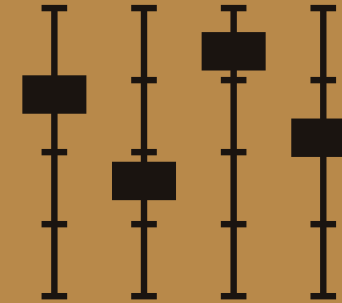
- The four levers that define a CX governance model
- Five working models, with strengths, weaknesses and best-fit scenarios
- A side-by-side comparison matrix you can take into a board meeting
- A decision framework keyed to your company's size, industry and stage
- A five-step maturity ladder for evolving governance over time
- A 90-day audit and a self-assessment scorecard

Who this is for:

- CX and EX directors trying to clarify ownership
- Voice-of-customer leads negotiating with operations and product
- Heads of service who report into the wrong function
- Anyone preparing a CX governance proposal for the CEO

What's not here:

Reporting-line templates for specific companies, salary benchmarks, or org-design theory. The aim is to help you pick a model and start the conversation with the executive team.



The four levers

Governance is more than an org chart

Before choosing a model, separate four levers that any working governance design has to configure. Two companies with identical reporting lines can have very different CX outcomes, because these four levers can be tuned independently.

1. Strategy. Who sets the customer-experience strategy, the target metrics, and the prioritisation rules between competing investments. Usually one role: a Chief Customer Officer, a CX director, or — in CEO-led models — the CEO themselves.

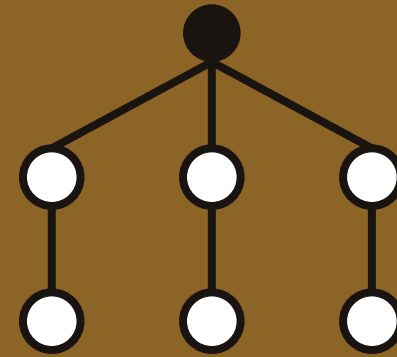
2. Voice. Who owns the collection, analysis and dissemination of customer feedback (surveys, verbatim, complaints, behavioural signals). This is the layer most often confused with ownership of CX as a whole, but it is only one of the four levers.

3. Execution. Who ships the changes — to touchpoints, processes, products and communications — that the strategy and voice layers identify. Almost never a single function: this is where governance has to be cross-functional by design.

4. Decision rights. Who can authorise spending, sign off on customer-impacting changes, and escalate when functions disagree. This is the most political lever and the one most often left undefined.

A quick diagnostic

For each of the four levers, write down one name. If you cannot, or if more than one name appears anywhere, you have found the layer where your governance is unresolved. Fix that before redesigning anything else.



Chapter 2

The five models

Models 1 — 3: CEO-led, Dedicated CXO, Marketing-led

Five distinct governance models exist in the wild. They differ in where strategy sits, who controls voice, and how decision rights are distributed across functions. None is universally right — each is the correct answer in a specific context.

Model 1 — CEO-led

The CEO is the accountable executive for CX. There is no separate CX function at C-level; a small staff team supports the CEO and coordinates cross-functionally.

Best fit: Small or founder-led companies, or those in turnaround. Works only if the CEO genuinely cares about CX.

Model 2 — Dedicated CXO / CCO

A Chief Experience Officer (or Chief Customer Officer) sits at C-level with cross-functional authority. Reports to the CEO. Owns the strategy, voice and decision-rights levers.

Best fit: Mid-to-large companies where CX is a differentiator. Strongest model when the role has real authority — not just a title.

Model 3 — Marketing-led (under the CMO)

CX reports into the CMO. Treated as part of brand, customer journey and engagement. Common in B2C and e-commerce.

Best fit: Companies where brand and acquisition dominate the customer relationship.

Strengths

Strong customer-journey thinking, good integration with brand and digital, marketing typically has the budget and analytical capability.

Failure modes

Service-delivery issues get under-prioritised because they sit outside marketing's authority; CX becomes a survey-and-comms function rather than a cross-functional change agent; operations resents marketing 'telling them' how to serve customers.

Models 4 — 5: Operations-led and Federated

The other two common models put CX outside marketing — either inside operations and service delivery, or across the organisation as a federated capability with a small central team.

Model 4 — Operations-led (under the COO)

CX reports into the COO or head of customer service. Treated as a service-delivery and process discipline.

Best fit: B2B and complex services, manufacturing, telcos, financial services, healthcare.

Strengths

Operational discipline, close to the people who actually deliver value, strong on process improvement and SLA management.

Failure modes

Brand, marketing and digital touchpoints get neglected; CX becomes a complaint-handling function; growth-stage strategic thinking is harder to plug in.

Model 5 — Federated (centre of excellence)

A small central CX team sets standards, owns the voice infrastructure and the master scorecard. Functions own execution. A senior executive (often the COO or CEO) holds the decision-rights lever.

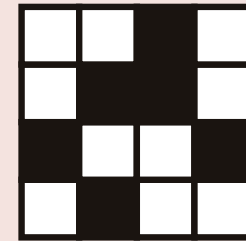
Best fit: Large or multi-business companies; the typical end-state for mature programmes.

Strengths

Scales across business units; embeds CX into functions rather than fighting them; the master scorecard becomes a board-level artefact.

Failure modes

Central team becomes a 'voice factory' with no authority; functions ignore the standards; the executive sponsor disengages and decision rights collapse.



Chapter 3

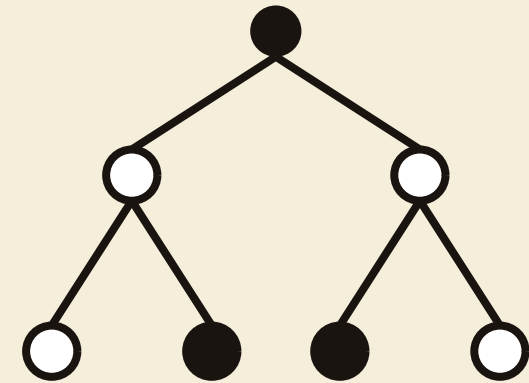
Comparison

Side-by-side view of the five models

The matrix below rates each model on six dimensions. Use it to screen out models that clearly do not fit your context, and to anticipate the failure modes you will need to design around with whichever model you pick.

Dimension	CEO-led	Dedicated CXO	Marketing-led	Operations-led	Federated
Speed of decision	High	High	Medium	Medium	Low to medium
Cross-functional reach	High	High	Low	Low	High
Strategic weight	High	High	Medium	Low	Medium to high
Risk of silo capture	Low	Low	High	High	Medium
Scales with company size	Low	High	Medium	Medium	High
Maturity required	Low	Medium	Low	Low	High

How to read this matrix
 No model scores well on every dimension. The matrix is for elimination — strike out the row that would be fatal in your context (e.g. low scaling for a 50,000-person enterprise) and choose from what remains.



Chapter 4

Decision framework

How to pick the right model for your company

Four questions, answered honestly, narrow the choice down to one or two viable models for any given company. We've used this in roughly forty client engagements; in our experience, two of the four questions almost always dominate the decision.

Q1 — How big is the company, and how complex is the customer base?

Under ~200 people: CEO-led usually works and a dedicated CXO is overkill.

200-2,000 people: a Dedicated CXO or Marketing-led / Operations-led model fits. Over 2,000 people, or multi-business: Federated is the only model that scales.

Q2 — Where does your customer relationship live?

If brand and acquisition dominate (e-commerce, FMCG, B2C subscription): Marketing-led works. If the relationship is service-heavy (B2B, telcos, healthcare, financial services): Operations-led or a CXO model fits better.

Q3 — What stage is your CX programme at?

Nascent (no real programme yet): start with whichever function has the most natural fit and keep it lightweight. Scaling: Dedicated CXO is often the right next step. Mature: Federated with a strong central scorecard is the destination.

Q4 — Does the C-suite already agree CX is strategic?

If yes: a Dedicated CXO or Federated model with C-level sponsorship is viable. If no: a Marketing-led or Operations-led model is the realistic starting point — and your first job is to demonstrate the business case for CX as a strategic priority.

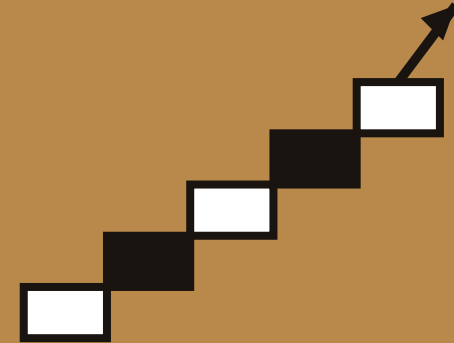
Typical landing patterns

Small B2C, brand-driven → Marketing-led, with a roadmap to a CXO at 200+ people.

Mid-sized B2B service → Operations-led or Dedicated CXO, depending on C-suite buy-in.

Large enterprise, multi-BU → Federated centre of excellence, with the CEO or COO as executive sponsor.

Founder-led growth company → CEO-led initially, transitioning to Dedicated CXO as headcount scales.



Chapter 5

The maturity ladder

Five levels of CX governance maturity

Governance is not static. Most companies move through three to five of these levels over a three-to-five-year arc. The honest assessment of where you are matters more than ambition — programmes that try to skip levels reliably stall.

Level 1 — Ad hoc

Surveys exist but nothing is owned. Verbatim is read occasionally. No metric is reported to the executive team. No decision rights are defined.
Most common in companies under 100 people, or in functions that have just started measuring.

Level 2 — Functional

One function (usually marketing or service) owns CX. A defined metric is tracked. Voice is collected systematically. Other functions ignore it.
Typical of growth-stage companies; CX is seen as the responsibility of whoever measured first.

Level 3 — Coordinated

Multiple functions contribute. A cross-functional working group meets monthly. No executive is accountable. Voice has structure; decisions are slow.
The most fragile level — easy to stall here for years. The fix is a defined executive sponsor.

Level 4 — Sponsored / Federated

An executive is accountable (CXO, COO or CEO). A central team owns the voice infrastructure and scorecard. Functions own execution. Decision rights are clear.
The first level at which the loop reliably closes. Most mid-to-large enterprises that 'have CX figured out' live here.

Level 5 — Embedded

CX is a strategic capability built into the operating cadence. Goals and incentives across the company reflect it. The board reviews CX metrics quarterly.
Rare. Typically a 3-5 year journey from Level 4, only viable when the CEO genuinely prioritises CX as a competitive moat.



Chapter 6

Anti-patterns

Six structural mistakes we see again and again

These are not edge cases. Across roughly forty client engagements, the same six structural mistakes recur — and they kill programmes regardless of which governance model is nominally in place.

01 'CX is everyone's job.'

Distributed responsibility without accountability. Sounds inspiring, produces nothing. The fix is naming a single accountable executive — even if the work is genuinely cross-functional.

02 The CX team that's a survey factory.

Voice is owned but strategy, execution and decision rights are not. The team sends surveys and writes reports no one reads. Symptom of a Marketing-led model that never expanded its mandate.

03 Reporting into a conflicting function.

CX rolls up under Sales (incentivised on volume), under Finance (incentivised on cost) or under IT (incentivised on stability). Each conflicts with CX outcomes. Pick a function whose KPIs already depend on customer satisfaction.

04 EX split from CX.

Two separate functions, separate dashboards, separate executives — even though the data shows EX and CX are tightly coupled. Splitting them doubles the cost and halves the impact.

05 Voice without authority.

The CX team can measure but not change. Surveys arrive at people who have no mandate to act. The fix is to align voice collection with the function that owns the touchpoint or process.

06 The C-level sponsor who moves on.

CX governance was bootstrapped on the personal interest of one executive who has now left. Without institutionalised authority — in the org chart, in goals, in operating cadence — the programme withers within twelve months.



Chapter 7

The 90-day audit

Three months from diagnosis to a working proposal

This is the audit we run with new clients when the brief is "our governance isn't working." Each phase produces a deliverable. By day 90 you have a model recommendation, a decision-rights map and the first 6-month implementation plan ready for the executive team.

DAYS 1 — 30

Diagnose

- Document the current model on one page — who owns each of the four levers.
- Interview 8-12 stakeholders across functions; capture where they think CX sits.
- Pull the last 6 months of CX metrics and meeting minutes.
- Identify the dominant anti-pattern. There is almost always exactly one.
- Output: a one-page governance diagnostic for the executive team.

DAYS 31 — 60

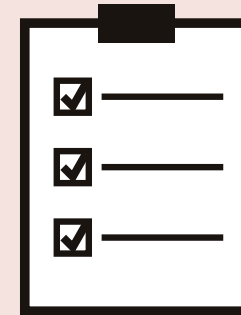
Design

- Run the four decision-framework questions with the executive team.
- Pick the target model (or confirm staying with the current one).
- Define decision rights — explicitly, written down, with names.
- Map the operating cadence: who meets when, what gets decided where.
- Output: a target operating-model document, approved by the CEO.

DAYS 61 — 90

Mobilise

- Communicate the new model internally — without exception.
- Build the first cross-functional working group at the new cadence.
- Set up the master scorecard (or migrate the existing one).
- Schedule the first quarterly executive review.
- Output: a 6-month implementation roadmap with named owners.



Chapter 8

Self-assessment

Where is your governance today?

Twenty statements across the four levers and the operating cadence. Score one point for each statement you can honestly answer "true today" — not "aspirationally" and not "in progress."

STRATEGY

- There is a written CX strategy reviewed by the executive team at least annually.
- One named executive is accountable for CX outcomes.
- CX target metrics are defined and tied to business outcomes.
- CX investment trade-offs have a documented prioritisation rule.

VOICE

- Customer feedback is collected systematically at defined touchpoints.
- Voice data flows to the same place across functions (one source of truth).
- Verbatim is categorised and traceable to themes, not just dashboards.
- Voice insights are reviewed at a cadence — not just when something goes wrong.

EXECUTION

- Functions own the execution of changes that come from CX insights.
- Each major CX change has a named owner and a deadline.
- Changes are verified against the originating metric, not just shipped.
- Stalled CX work is escalated to the accountable executive.

DECISION RIGHTS

- Decision rights between CX, marketing, operations and product are documented.
- Disputes have a defined escalation path with a named tie-breaker.
- Spending authority for CX-driven changes is clear and within budget envelope.
- The CEO knows who is accountable for CX and can name them.

OPERATING CADENCE

- There is a recurring cross-functional CX meeting with the same attendees.
- CX is on the agenda of at least one executive committee meeting per quarter.
- Goals across functions reference customer outcomes, not just function-internal KPIs.
- Quarterly business reviews include a CX section read by the CEO.

Interpreting your score

16-20 · Level 4 or 5 (Sponsored / Embedded). 10-15 · Level 3 (Coordinated) — your governance is fragile; pick a model and an executive. Below 10 · Level 1 or 2 — start with the four levers and a single accountable executive.

Closing thoughts

Governance does not have to be perfect — but it does have to be decided. The companies that get CX right are not the ones that picked the theoretically best model. They are the ones that picked any reasonable model, configured the four levers explicitly, named a single accountable executive, and built the operating cadence to match.

Pick a model, even an imperfect one. An imperfect model that is actually owned beats a perfect model that is theoretical. Decide, document, communicate.

Configure the four levers explicitly. Strategy, voice, execution and decision rights. Write down the owner of each. The single biggest source of dysfunction is leaving one of these unspecified.

Plan for evolution, not perfection. Governance evolves through the maturity ladder. Be honest about where you are today and what the next level requires — and don't try to skip levels.

How InsightSofa can help.

Beyond the platform, our CX strategy team runs the 90-day governance audit from Chapter 7 with clients in the middle of a re-design. The deliverables — diagnostic, target model, decision-rights map and 6-month roadmap — are the ones we use ourselves. We have run the same audit across roughly forty client engagements spanning B2B and B2C, in retail, financial services, healthcare and manufacturing.

The fastest start is a 30-minute working session with our CX strategy team.

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This paper draws on the InsightSofa CX Strategy Team's experience across mid-sized and enterprise clients in B2B, B2C and the public sector, with a focus on programmes that survived their first executive transition.