Getting Higher in the Tree: Using Customer Journey Mapping to Understand Customer Experience

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the customer experience and using that information to customize energy efficiency program offerings can help utilities move above the low hanging fruit and harvest more and deeper savings from their programs. Customer journey mapping provides a fast and effective way to gather data to support customer experience research. It is also a valuable means of aligning program stakeholders, prioritizing improvements in customer experiences, identifying key moments of truth for program participants, and pinpointing where to make operational improvements.

The journey mapping process applies a holistic approach to understanding the customer or trade ally experience. The mapping process involves several stages of activity that enhance understanding of the personas of program participants and other key players in the program, the timeline of activity, the emotions of the players, the player touch-points, and program channels or activities.

Journey mapping has become increasingly popular in energy evaluation. This paper will draw insights from several journey-mapping initiatives for both residential and C&I programs to discuss journey mapping options, benefits, best practices, and options for improving on journey mapping initiatives. The paper will start with an overview and definition of what journey mapping is and why it benefits the utility. The second section will focus on the "how-to's" including a review of the variety of ways that journey mapping sessions can be organized. The final section will discuss best practices in conducting utility-focused journey mapping and how the findings from such initiatives can be refined and polished in ways that encourage future use.

Background and Introduction

Generating energy savings from efficiency programs is always top-of-mind important for utilities and other program administrators, but it becomes even more of a concern as programs mature. In one respect, mature programs are indicative of past success. They are battle-tested and provide value to the utility and its customers. In another respect, these programs have already tapped the core of their market showing notable saturation, which is why efficiency – not just in energy usage – is important. Examining the underlying process and its related impacts on the customer experience can uncover ways to reach more and deeper savings. Customer journey mapping is one fast and effective way to gather data to support customer experience research.

Customer journey mapping is a powerful tool used to understand how customers experience a program. It can help align the thinking of utility staff and other program administrators, prioritize improvements in the customer experience, identify key moments of truth, and pinpoint where to make operational improvements. It is a "holistic approach to understanding the flow of experiences a customer has with a [program or utility]" (Toporek 2015). It is a highly customizable process that can be highly complex presenting a "cradle to grave" view of the program (Richardson 2010). Its greatest value is in helping organizations understand their customers' motivations and feelings, which can be used to improve customer satisfaction and program engagement (Boag 2015a).

Two of the core benefits to developing a customer journey map is to identify gaps and build group buy-in among key engagement stakeholders.

1. **Identify gaps in process.** Utilities can identify how their programs fail to deliver optimal outcomes to participants and prioritize ways to improve the overall customer experience. In this case, gaps can exist between pathways into a program, channels into other programs, and in how the program serves alternate customer types (Boag 2015b).
2. **Build group buy-in.** Facilitating meaningful discussion among key program stakeholders encourages group buy-in and alignment (Haid and Buckley 2014). Group buy-in can also enable continuous improvement through socializing journeys, which support stakeholder engagement with the journey mapping process (Grocki 2014). Figure 1 below identifies stakeholder relationships and roles in the journey mapping process.

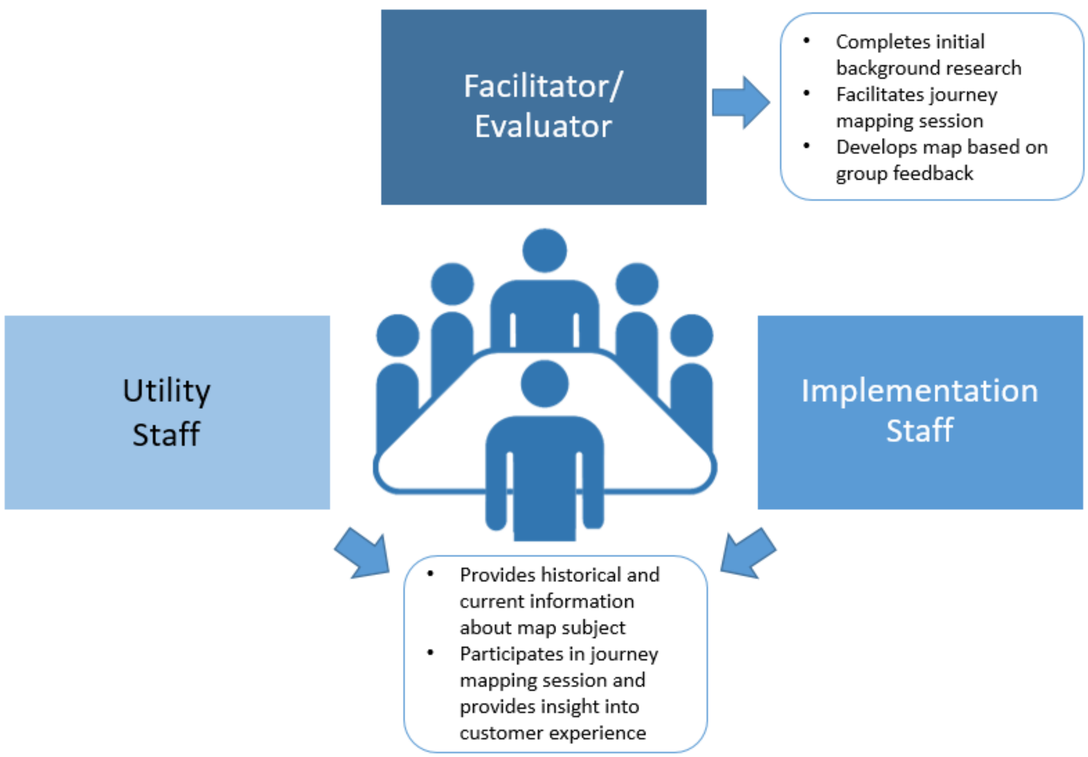

Figure 1. Journey Mapping Stakeholders. *Source*: Navigant 2016.

Facilitators can either leverage data previously collected to support program evaluation research or conduct primary research to prepare for the journey mapping process (Figure 2). Examples of primary research include interviews and survey work that is conducted in relation to the journey mapping effort. Facilitators can also take advantage of previously planned interviews and include questions to support journey mapping work. When results from interviews or survey work are used after the fact, it should be treated as secondary research since the spirit of data collection was not aligned with the goals of the journey mapping work. Other secondary research resources include the review of program materials and collateral, which can highlight how the program is designed to operate (e.g., program operations manual review) and how it is marketed to customers or trade allies (e.g., review of marketing plans and advertisements), and the review of the program theory and logic model, which should identify program inputs, outputs, and goals. Facilitators of customer journey mapping are also encouraged to take advantage of any available program resources, like past evaluation reports, social media feeds, or utility-conducted customer-focused research, to help develop a full understanding of the program prior to facilitating a journey mapping session (Boag 2015b).

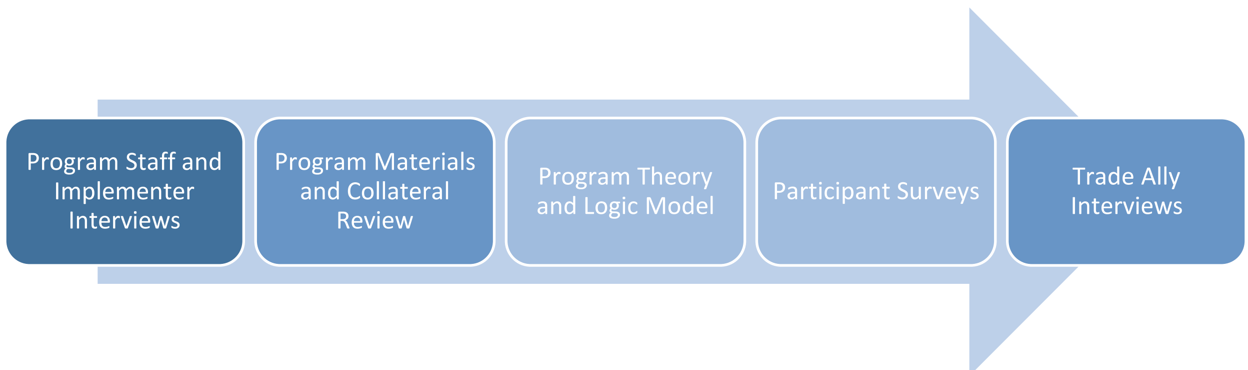

Figure 2. Primary and Secondary Journey Mapping Research Activities. *Source*: Navigant 2016.

In utilizing primary and secondary resources, facilitators can develop a process map to help guide the journey mapping session with program stakeholders, which highlights channels in the customer experience. Process mapping can provide tremendous insight into the various interaction points customers and trade allies have with a utility or other program administrators through the project process. By providing a detailed view of program operations and activities, process maps can help teams understand potential breakpoints in the process. A process map serves as a starting point for overlaying customer emotions into a journey map and aids in refining processes to uncover efficiencies that save time and make it easier for customers and trade allies to participant in programs and save energy.

Customer journey mapping has become more prevalent outside of market research and is becoming more widely utilized within the energy industry. Journey mapping is a valuable tool for utilities because it helps reframe how customers are viewed by the organization. In this case, the process can help to “transform conversations about ‘meters’ or ‘rate payers’ into discussions about ‘customers’ and ‘people” (Eyl 2014). Drawing insights from several journey-mapping initiatives for both residential and commercial and industrial (C&I) programs, this paper will discuss journey mapping methods, benefits, best practices, and options for improving journey mapping initiatives. The following sections will focus on a case study example of journey mapping, then cover the “how-to’s” of journey mapping, and present a review of best practices as well as delve into how the findings from such initiatives can be refined and polished in ways that encourage future use.

Case Study: DTE Energy’s Energy Efficiency Program for Business

DTE Energy’s (DTE) Energy Efficiency Program for Business is a mature program serving C&I customers throughout the state of Michigan. DTE’s interest in journey mapping started with its driving focus on superior customer satisfaction and its culture of continuous improvement. Navigant with the help of DTE staff and DNV GL staff, the implementation contractor for the program laid the ground work

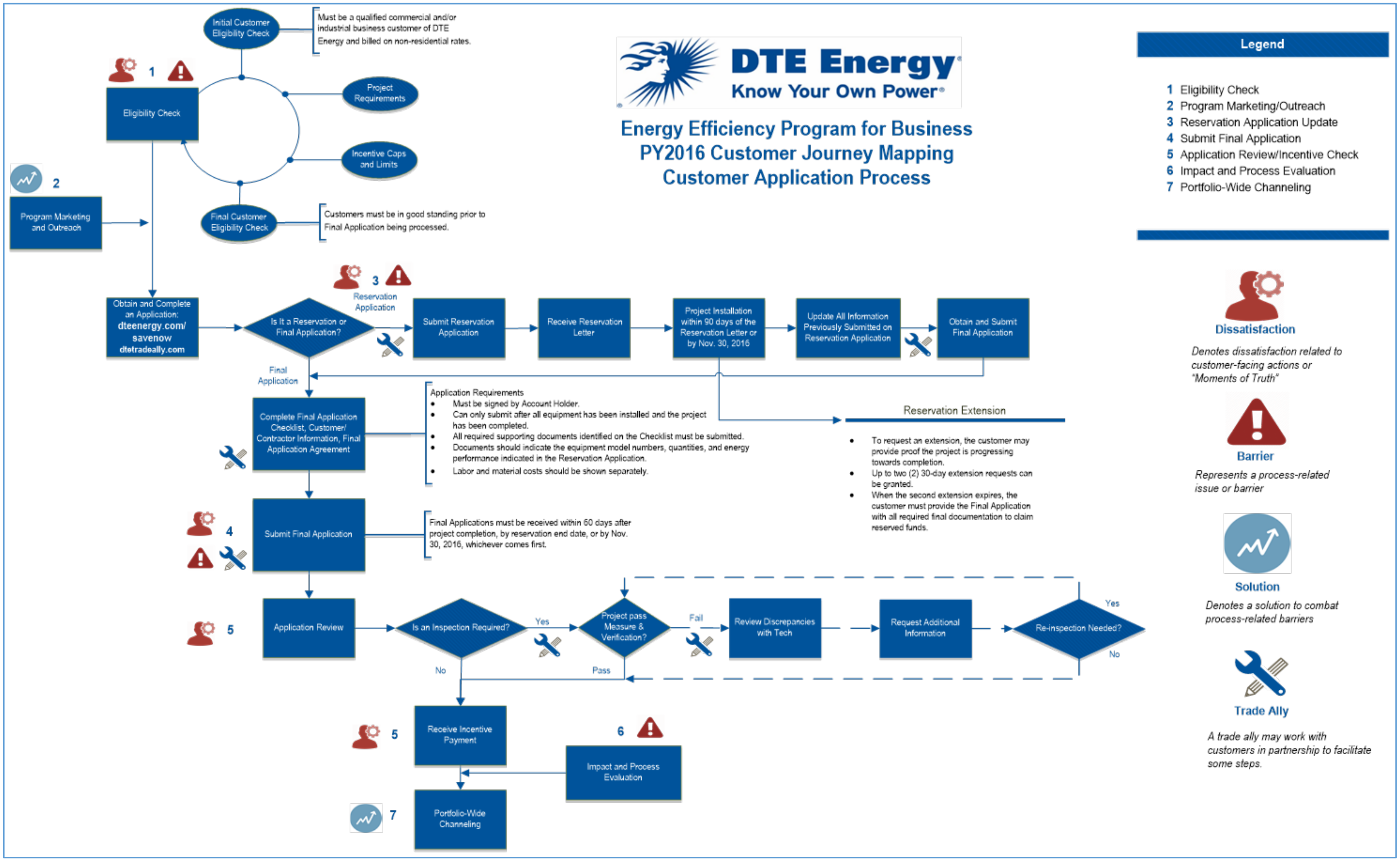

Figure 3. DTE Energy Efficiency Program for Business Process Map. *Source:* Navigant 2016.

for understanding key elements of the program resulting in a unique and customized customer journey map that led to several immediate program improvements.

The first step in the process involved the development of a process map (Figure 3) identifying the entire customer process, as shown in . This exercise included an extensive review of the program's Operations Manual, Policies and Procedures Manual, applications, and marketing materials across program channels, in addition to conducting interviews with DTE Program Management staff and the implementation staff.Navigant developed the process map to use as a frame to guide discussions with key stakeholders, including in it visual aids to identify points of dissatisfaction, process-related barriers, and potential solutions, in addition to calling out areas where customers are touched by trade allies in their project process.

Navigant extensively vetted the process map internally with staff working on DTE's impact evaluation, then met with DTE staff and implementation staff to produce a detailed process map reflective of program touch-points with the customers and trade allies participating in the program. When the journey mapping session was held, Navigant invited all DTE program staff, including those managing related programs to gather their feedback on the process. Navigant also invited the implementation staff for the program to facilitate a conversation and develop a common understanding of program goals, and personas, major and minor touch-points to understand how to improve the customer experience and foster greater engagement with the Energy Efficiency Program for Business and DTE.

With all stakeholders present, Navigant facilitated a session working through each stage of the customer journey mapping process, where the group discussed how different customer types (i.e., electric and gas C&I customers, large, medium, and small C&I customers) experience project entry and eligibility, exposure to program marketing and outreach, completion of a Reservation Application and Final Application, completion of application review, receipt of incentive check, impact and process evaluation work, and portfolio-wide channeling engagement. Following the conclusion of the journey mapping session, Navigant developed a customer journey map highlighting the findings from the journey mapping session and overlaying those with past customer satisfaction survey findings to produce a detailed exploration into the pain points and successes experienced by C&I customers.

Navigant identified several opportunities to improve accuracy, increase participation, and increase customer satisfaction because of the journey mapping exercise:

Accuracy Improvement. The journey mapping exercise revealed that the channels of communication among stakeholders can periodically break allowing customers to become confused about program policies or incentive levels. To improve the accuracy of communications, Navigant recommended consistent reporting of program policies, especially to program-participating trade allies, who communicate with participants most often and can bridge the program knowledge gap. This included expanding the program's training offerings to include details on program policies and procedures to serve as an easily accessible resource to program stakeholders.

Participation Improvement. The design of the Energy Efficiency Program for Business focuses on its Prescriptive and Non-Prescriptive elements. Program staff indicated that the additional program offerings, like Retro-commissioning and Business Energy Consultation, a small business program, are less known by C&I customers, although still under the umbrella of the larger program. Navigant recommended taking advantage of cross-selling opportunities across the C&I offerings to increase internal coordination and participant channeling. Thus, DTE's program managers and implementation contractors held a joint kick-off meeting and has initiated a pilot program involving a concierge format to help guide customers systematically from one offering within the Energy Efficiency Program for Business to the next logical program offering.

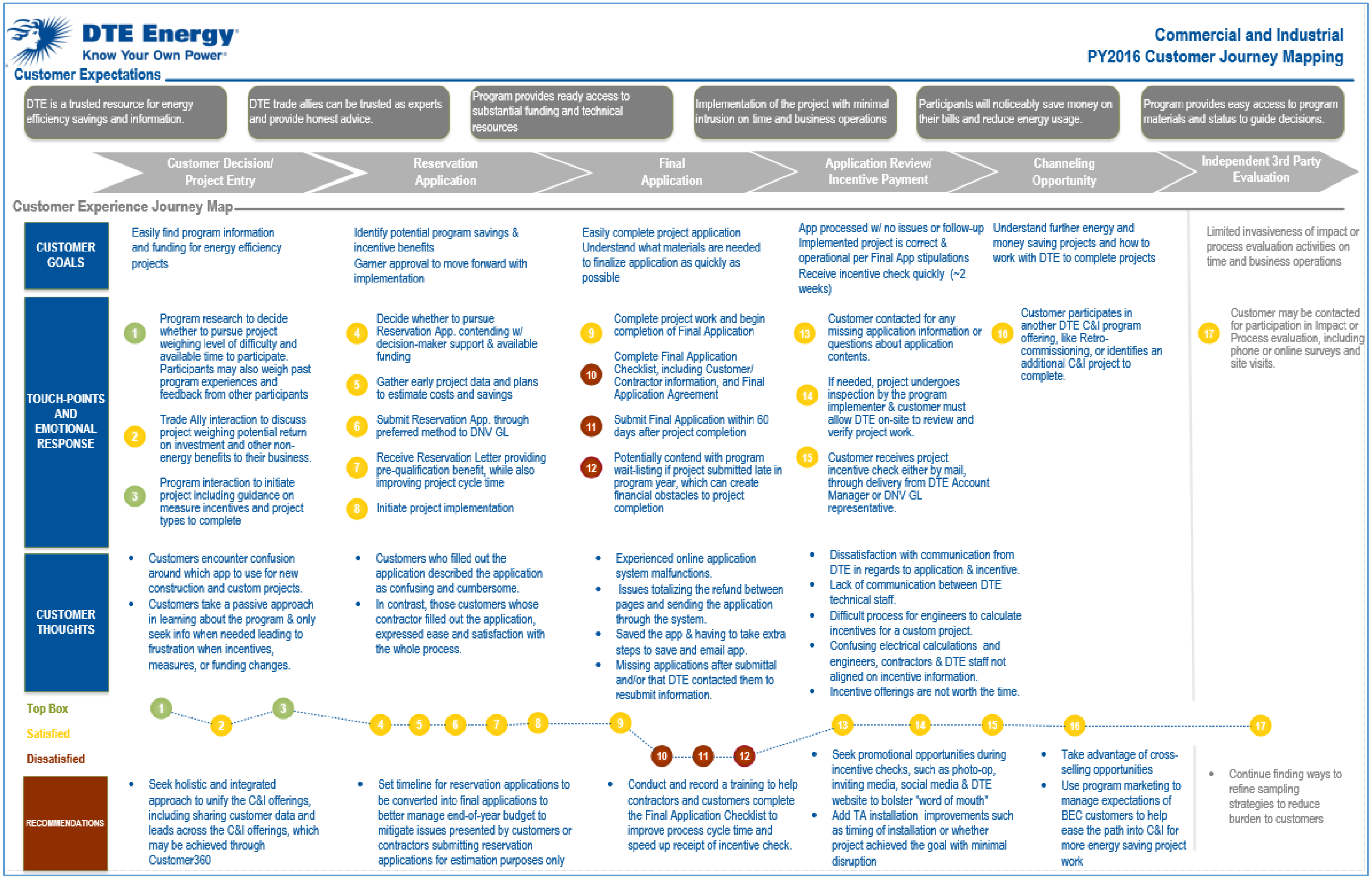

Figure 4. DTE Energy Efficiency Program for Business Journey Map. *Source:* Navigant 2016.

Customer Satisfaction Improvement. The group discussed ways to capitalize on the completion of a project and convert the initial project into repeat program participation. Through the journey mapping session, DTE and program implementation staff collaborated on ways to take advantage of the promotional opportunity presented in providing participants with their incentive check at the close of project. Understanding that word-of-mouth attention to the program can be increased through photo-ops, inviting media, and advertising on social media and DTE's own website, the group elected to establish a process to coordinate and promote participant check delivery events and use social media and industry-level advertising to bolster interest in the program.

Figure 4 presents the full customer journey map for DTE's Energy Efficiency Program for Business, including the lens or customer expectations, customer goals, touch-points and emotional response, customer thoughts, and recommendations for improvement.

Approaches to Journey Mapping

The general process of developing a journey map involves several steps oriented toward understanding the customer experience process, the minor and major touch-points, and all potential pathways, including on-stage (i.e., customer-facing) and off-stage (internal) touch-points (Toporek 2015). It is also valuable to assess the magnitude or intensity of touch-points, as well as to think about customer perceptions of their experiences relative to the goals, needs, and expectations of the program, which can help prioritize action and change. Ultimately, the journey mapping process can help a utility or other program administrators examine whether the customer experience aligns with and supports their brand's promise to customers through the creation of a map visual identifying the key touch-points, the common customer reactions, and actionable recommendations to improve interactions (Eyl 2014).

Customer journey mapping can be customized to support pilot or mature utility programs, but there are several components needed to make the journey mapping process effective in identifying process issues and aligning group interests. These components include identifying personas, lens, emotion, touch-points, channels, and insights.

Personas. In developing a journey map, it is key to understand the various stakeholders involved in the overarching activity. These stakeholders can be viewed as "personas." Each persona represents a viewpoint, need, motivation, and ultimate experience – both positive and negative (Tincher 2013; Grocki 2014). Personas can be an individual participant type or it can be representative of a group. Prior to holding a journey mapping session, the group facilitator must work with stakeholders to identify personas to be focused on in the session. This exercise of developing personas included in the mapping develops a deeper understanding of the customer and trade ally, which are important personas in many utility programs, and identifies ways to improve the process for these stakeholders that are in-line with what the program can deliver. The number of identified personas can be as broad or as narrow as needed, but sets the focus for the effort.

Lens. Lenses are words representing key concepts, brand attributes, or mindsets that help us look at a problem or scenario in a different way. In an exercise with stakeholders, the group is encouraged to generate as many ideas to improve program processes as possible in a short time, which can be used to develop a future state view of the program (Grocki 2014; Risdon, 2011). Lenses are also useful for setting the goals of journey mapping where the lens through which the program is viewed is the issue that is in most need of improvement.

Emotion. The heart of the journey mapping process is understanding customer emotion and depth of emotion. Emotion should be tracked to illustrate the feelings customers have during the journey (Kaplan 2016). Here, survey data can be extremely helpful in bringing a quantitative angle to a largely qualitative process. Journey mapping facilitators can also bring in interview results and other metrics tracked by utility or implementer staff to support findings related to customer feelings and reactions to steps in the program process.

Touch-points. A helpful step in understanding the customer experience involves identifying all potential touch-points. Touch-points represent places in the process where the program or utility reaches the customer. In some journey mapping exercises, facilitators may develop a process map outlining each touch-point to enable the identification of disconnected experiences, brand inconsistencies, or moments of truth, interactions that leave lasting positive or negative impressions on customers (Grocki 2014; Kaplan 2016). Identifying all the steps in the process and customer touch-points is imperative to understanding where things are working for customers and where there is a breakdown.

Channels. The interaction points in the process, also known as channels, show where activity happens for the customer or trade ally. It can also determine whether there needs to be additional paths or even separate maps to identify action and context in the process (Grocki 2014; Kaplan 2016). Channels can also be viewed as the means through which a customer or trade ally is touched by the program either through in-person meetings, phone calls, email addresses, or the utility or implementer website.

Insights. Through the review of personas, lens, emotion, touch-points, and channels, stakeholders involved with the mapping exercise develop a detailed understanding of the customer experience flow, representing the current state of the process. In examining the program's current state, stakeholders can uncover ways to close service gaps and develop process improvements. When actionable process improvements are identified, it is key to document these recommendations to produce a future state for the program (Kaplan 2016). Further, in discussing these findings with the stakeholder group, consensus can be developed, which can support future implementation and continuous improvement efforts.

Figure 5 below presents the complete journey mapping process, which also includes exercises, like developing an empathy map and affinity diagram. Empathy maps depict the various facets of a persona and are used to organize observations, build a deeper understanding of the customer's experience, and draw out surprising insights into what customers need, think, feel, see, hear, say, and do. It is a very fluid and qualitative activity, but can spur on deep discussion that bring to light customer successes and challenges. Affinity diagrams organize ideas with the goal of finding cohesion in the stakeholder group's understanding of the program. Affinity diagramming helps narrow focus on the right solutions for the audience to form a cohesive vision of the future of customer experience (Grocki 2014).

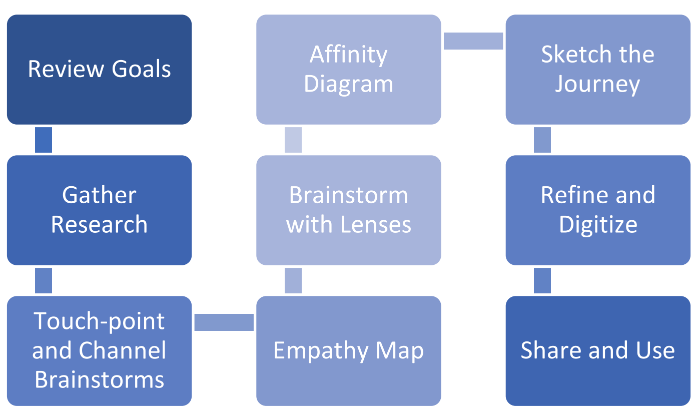

Figure 5. Customer Journey Mapping Steps. *Source:* Grocki 2014.

There are several ways to run a journey mapping session, but the central focus in a successful session should be the customer's perspective. To help stakeholders participating in a journey mapping session, facilitators can break the session into phases to focus on touch-points in the customer experience process, which can allow the group to brainstorm on what are the potential pain points or moments of truth at each step in the process. Facilitators are also encouraged to bring in verbatim responses from customers or trade allies to discuss at each touch-point to remind the group of what the customer felt about the touch-point bringing the experience and proposed solution to life. Further, using other voice of the customer data, like satisfaction survey results or net promoter score[1] findings can help bring a quantitative angle to the discussion and support the group's findings and conclusions (Tincher 2013).

The development of the journey map can be an interactive activity, where participants in the session are given a simple journey mapping grid to use as a brainstorming tool[2]. Following the journey mapping session, facilitators should review all data, both analytical and anecdotal, collected in the session in tandem with previously collected materials to develop a visualization of the journey map. The visual developed should tell the story of the customer experience and should be reflective of group inputs to create a shared vision of the process. Figure 6 below presents an example of a common journey map structure highlighting the three core elements of journey maps: the ***lens***, the ***experience***, and the ***insights***. The lens section identifies the focus of the journey map, including the key persona and scenario. The experience section illustrates how customers act and feel at key touch-points. This section can feature supporting documentation, like quotes or pictures, and often contains a visual that tracks the emotional curve customers experience through each touch-point. Finally, the insights section provides a summary of findings, including identified pain points, successes, and opportunities, while also identifying parties responsible for forward improvement (Kaplan 2016).

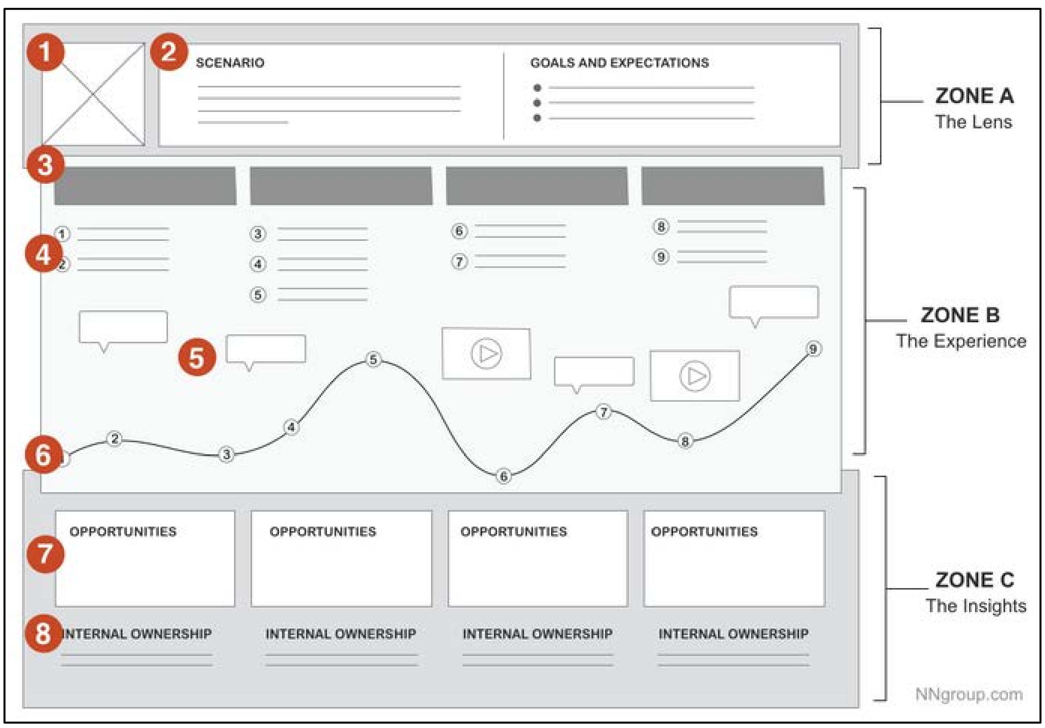

Figure 6. Detailed Customer Journey Map Structure. *Source:* Kaplan 2016.

[1] Net promoter scores measure customer loyalty and are derived from responses to the scale question "How likely is it that you would recommend [Organization X/Product Y/Service Z] to a friend or colleague?", which is used to determine whether respondents are promoters or detractors of the subject (Qualtrics 2017).
[2] See Boag 2015b for an example of a simple customer journey mapping grid layout.

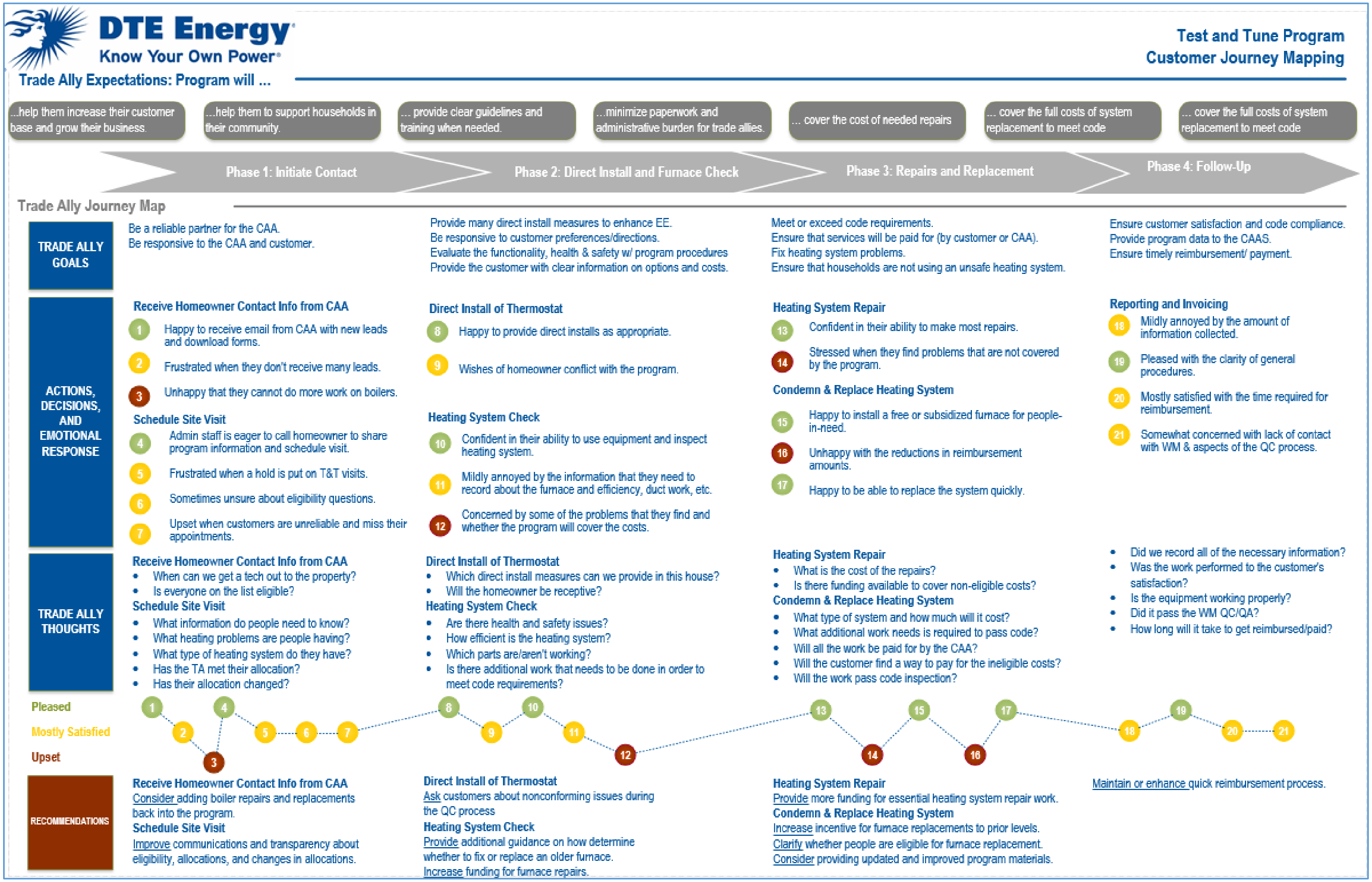

Figure 7. DTE Energy Efficiency Assistance Program Journey Map. *Source:* Navigant 2016.

Figure 7 presents another journey map developed by Navigant for DTE's Energy Efficiency Assistance Program. This map serves as a visualization of the barriers and opportunities posed by the program, as well as an assessment of participant satisfaction with program interactions. The journey map relied on primary data in the form of interviews with program trade allies representing various classes of trade allies to understand how the program fits the needs of its stakeholders and targeted audience. In this case, Navigant presented the completed journey map to program stakeholders to discuss the components of the visualization and review the insights collected through the process with a focus on developing a plan to reach a future state for each program. The goal of these discussions and of the effort as whole was to provide DTE with a holistic view of their programs, including actionable guidance to overcome challenges presented to customers or trade allies and encourage the development of a leaner process more advantageous to fostering participation in these DTE programs. As in the example map shown in Figure 6, this map highlights the lens, experience, and insights from this program, which are currently being applied to the program to adjust program practices to make it easier for contractors to work with customers in the Energy Efficiency Assistance Program, thus increasing the number of completed projects and generating more savings for the program.

Best Practices for Continued Use

Journey mapping is most successful when it is well-planned, thoughtful, and centered on a goal tied to the customer experience, like improving customer satisfaction in a program or identifying cycle time improvements. Paramount among these, the process should always:

- Start and end with the customer experience since the purpose of the process is to understand customer feelings and needs to identify process improvements
- Develop clear goals and a plan to guide the effort from the outset
- Utilize a variety of data, including both primary and secondary resources
- Include and engage key stakeholders representing a variety of viewpoints to enrich the development of the journey map
- Consider breaking the session into phases of the activity to help organize conversation
- Root findings in truth reflecting data derived from not only ancedotal information, but analytical data
- Concentrate on the client's locus of control[3] and narrow the focus to touch-points where there are actionable changes
- Collaborate widely and often sharing the map layout with stakeholders to incorporate feedback
- Create a creative and lasting visual and consider working with a graphic designer to make a journey map that will be used by clients to guide their decision-making process leading them into their future state goals

Applying these best practices to the journey mapping process can help utilites identify and prioritize places to improve the customer experience, help align stakeholder interests, and uncover previously untapped savings. Journey mapping is a valuable tool that can help utilities reach beyond the low hanging fruit and harvest more and deeper savings from their programs, while improving customer satisfaction and strenghening the utilty brand promise.

[3] Locus of control refers to an individual's ability to influence events and outcomes related to their actions.

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