

ENABLING ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE BY TAKING A CUSTOMER-CENTRIC VIEW

Imagine you own a coffee shop; it's been running for about a decade and is well known for great brew and delicious food. But sales are beginning to slump. You haven't changed your winning formula, so what's the problem? You consider the options, rally your staff, tweak the menu, change the shop layout and try to replicate what your competitors are doing, but nothing helps. Your staff are unhappy with the changes and, so it would seem, are your customers.



Now apply this example to your bank, insurance company or mobile service provider. Too often, we repeat the same mistakes when things start going wrong. Yet, despite the obvious, we persist in the hope that ultimately the same actions will yield a different result.

As technology continues to influence every aspect of our lives and the way we do business, change becomes ever-more ubiquitous. It is widely recognised that effective change management enables success – those who adapt, succeed – and this applies to the changing needs of the market, and to propagating change in organisations. If this is so widely recognised, where does it all come apart, and how can a customer-centric, fact-based approach benefit the change process?

Change comes from the people

Given the importance of change management, and the regularity with which it's failed in the past, it's time to start

thinking about it differently. There are two main perspectives to consider – the organisation and the customers.

From an organisational perspective, change management relates to an often under-utilised asset – the organisational ecosystem. Buy-in from the ecosystem is critical to organisational success – they need to understand why the change is happening and they need to believe in that why. Simply, it's a “what's in it for me?” driver of change.

Successful change management must harness the collective energy of the ecosystem to create hype, reinforce behaviour and sustain the wave of change. For your coffee shop, this means engaging staff to co-create a case for the change, before rolling anything out. What better way to ensure buy-in, than to allow people to be a part of defining the change?

This type of viral social change is nothing new, but it hinges on a fundamental principle that must be leveraged to ensure effective transformational change: a people-centric approach. This people-centricity is two-pronged: getting the right 'why', and then spreading the change.

Where do customers fit in?

Joe was a regular at your coffee shop and always ordered a skinny cap with wings. Joe was always well-dressed, enjoyed reading the paper and often chatted about current affairs. You started to notice Joe wasn't coming in all that often anymore, and eventually stopped coming in altogether. You reactively started your campaign of menu and layout changes in an attempt to win Joe – and others like him – back. To no avail.



What could you have done differently? For starters, you could have spoken to Joe when you noticed he was coming in less frequently; asked about his customer experience and needs. After all, there are many customers like Joe, who expect service providers to adapt to their changing needs. You also could have looked at the data available to you – Joe's interests, the conversations you had with him and the comments he left on feedback cards over the years.



Customer-centricity should form the basis of every business change – why do something if not for the benefit of the customer? Is it really worth the hassle, and associated cost, of redesigning your menu if it's not what your customers want? This is where understanding the customer experience is vital. You need to use customer-centric

approaches to better research and design for your customers' needs, and mine and analyse available data effectively. Things you never knew about your customers are probably right under your nose.

Customer-centric, data-driven change is fast becoming the golden thread that pulls offerings to market and ensures their success. It's no longer a case of "if you build it, they will come" but rather "if you don't know what they want, they will go elsewhere". If you'd done this in the first place, you might have realised Joe wanted free Wi-Fi so he could access the news on his tablet, while enjoying his skinny cap with wings.



Wake up and smell the coffee



If change is viewed holistically, the broader business context considered, and a compelling 'why' co-created, it's possible to see successful organisational change. By understanding your customer, testing hypotheses and quickly learning from failings, basing decisions on facts, executing iteratively with agility, and doing this persistently, you will have done everything possible to ensure success. In the end, the best coffee shops aren't always the ones with the best coffee. Often, they're the ones with a thriving ecosystem that enhances the overall experience for their people and customers.



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