

Reversing Roles – Change Management Challenges

Adapt, adopt, improve, was a traditional business mantra and 'continuous improvement' became a catch phrase for organisation change. But embracing change is not always a natural attribute of individuals or company teams. Turning developed thinking and practices on their head does not come easily. Reversing established ways of thinking and practices tests how far we can move out of our natural comfort zones where we feel competent and in control.

Marketing has moved from 'pushing', 'pulling' and talking 'at' to communicating directly 'to' an individual not a customer segment stereotype. Social media has changed the marketer's role – stop trying to just sell and promote but now engage, entertain, debate and converse.

'Targets' are now the retailers not their customers. Who is tracking who with latest technology given the anarchy of the 'Tweet' Universe? Reverse role playing with retailers as prey and customers as predators was always there with cherry-picker consumers taking advantage. Groupon and the like representing 'organised' consumers have instigated potential retailer

mugging scenarios. Buyers can manipulate unsuspecting sellers in a winner-takes-all market place. Client customer relationships need to be relearnt and traditional skills and activities reversed. The internet click experience was originally based on brick formats and selling environments. Now physical retail is informed by the digital visit and reality. The store brand experience enables the digital selling process. Traditional retail has become 'experiential' to inspire but not necessarily to make an immediate sale.

Designing a store or shopping centre used to be about creating a selling machine. Now it can be the catalyst and support for internet purchase. Architects, designers and marketers brought up on creating enticing 'customer journeys' or point of purchase 'moments of truth' should reevaluate what they need to achieve and communicate to create the desired reaction and maximise a multi-channel retailer's sales and profits. Corporate brand identities used to be based on carefully crafted print applications but now digital animated morphing versions can represent the key application.

Coordinating an organisation's IT, marketing and real estate departments becomes critical in achieving a synergy of channels and touchpoints. The property sector has been slow to change and adapt to the new realities of an empowered customer. This is reflected in the belated recognition by shopping centre developers that they are in an active retail

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partnership with their tenants not simply facility management landlords. The priorities of a landlord mentality can lead to the design and management of centres which reflect an operational mindset more interested in the priorities of security rather than visitor shopper convenience and wellbeing. Given first and last impressions can make or wreck a visit experience, it is still incredible car parking – this key touchpoint, can still be a low priority in terms of creating a pleasant positive perception and easy comfortable process.



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Commercialisation led by an operational and accountancy-based management culture can be a disaster if extracting maximum rental income from a space outweighs customer and retailer interests. The result of selling every potential building elevation, internal walls and bulk heads to extract maximum advertising revenue are only too obvious where centres have appeared to sell their ownership to the highest bidder. Creating a strong centre brand is hardly helped when massive tenant anchor signs and excessive random advertising are prioritised and the centre name and signatures in terms of the building architecture and brand identity become minor secondary elements.

A temporary victory for the accountants valuing direct income can represent potentially, a longer-term major negative equity when measuring the asset value of an anonymous centre which seems to have sold its soul.

Retailing is an art and science reflecting the need to match emotional and rational consumer demands and redressing the balance between operation and trading criteria is a constant challenge. Immediate measurable benefits make the more intangible issues difficult to prioritise. Marketers have typically always had difficulty in proving their case

for increased budgets. The three criteria of project management – cost, time and quality illustrate the difficulties in assessing hard facts and soft abstract values. Cost and time are quantifiable and easily understood. Ironically, quality is the make or break factor but the most difficult to evaluate and manage in terms of projected figures.

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Adapting and adopting new practices in an increasingly customer controlled environment demand a fundamental acceptance in a change of attitudes and roles. Creating first-choice brands involves a wide range of activities, channels and formats. Places, products, services and people need to be effectively aligned to achieve the best synergy and efficiency. That takes different skills, collaborations and ways of thinking.

Turning the traditional management pyramid upside down with the customer-facing employees on top and the CEO and Board at the bottom is still a simple way of illustrating a customer orientated culture. The real test is a changing emphasis from just customer-centricity to a staff centric culture. This means investing as much care in engaging and communicating to employees and providing motivating working environments that match the company's efforts towards their target external audiences and users. We clearly need to adopt more role reversal thinking across organisations.

Optimum capital value is ultimately based on an organisation and its assets' brand equity, i.e. its image and reputation in a market place for target audiences. Perhaps the toughest company challenge is moving from a control to an empowerment culture. That means changing a deep-rooted comfort zone for management at every level. Reversing years of top-down thinking will not be easy particularly in cultures where avoiding responsibility is endemic.

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Maybe some courses in reverse psychology can change attitudes and behaviour. Encouraging managements to reward initiative and allowing staff to take financial responsibility is a measure of confidence and employee engagement. Seeing 'Security' as part of proactive customer service operation could immediately enhance the status, functions and, most importantly, the behaviour and attitude of individuals concerned.

Tough times present tough choices but a willingness to change is a prerequisite for creating added value. Reversing traditional thinking to go forward could be an effective move...

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