Catalyst

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The challenge of getting public systems to think Customer Service

V. Ravichandar
Chairman, Feedback Consulting,
hopes there are idea nuggets here that could
make for better outcomes in public delivery.
He can be reached at
ravi@feedbackconsulting.com

Custommerce strives for service excellence by making firms Customer centric. The mail asking me to contribute a piece about achieving customer service orientation in local government delivery systems was a monumental challenge. Unlike the private sector environment where there is a compelling business reason for being customer centric, government agencies with its near monopoly on key services in most cities (think water, sanitation, electricity, public transport, property registration, birth/death certificates, etc.) have disdain for the idea that they are here to serve us, the citizen customers.

There have been root-cause analyses and solutions for government agencies to be more service oriented. The challenge is getting even a single page of the many solutions out there implemented on the ground. How do we get to desirable end outcomes (eg. customer service orientation) in a public ecosystem of monopoly operators, negligible vision, institutional silos and varying stakeholder (politico, bureaucrat, Corporate, NGO, citizen) motivations? A few thoughts of the challenges faced in getting government agencies to be customer centric and some possible solutions:

Outcome orientation missing
Government is about making announcements of projects involving crores of rupees and promises that normally don't materialise. It has agencies that operate in tight silos. The concept of an outcome orientation which normally involves integration across government agencies to deliver citizen benefits is absent. The governance structure in our cities is flawed - no one is truly in charge and consequently you have the Chief Minister answering queries about a city whenever there is a major failure. And individual agencies normally pass the buck since it is difficult to pinpoint responsibility.

We need governance changes like a directly elected mayor who has the bottom line on ensuring a city works. And we need a culture of thinking outcomes. For example, if we wish improve travel times with less fatalities on our roads, emphasis on public transportation with care for pedestrians in planning is the solution track to be adopted. To do this we will need our government agencies to adopt a very different planning and implementation mechanism from the current agency-driven plans in isolation.

Citizen charters a necessary tool

Anna's movement asked for citizen charters and grievance redressal mechanisms as one of the reforms. It is warranted since a charter sets out what citizens can expect from a government agency. But a charter by itself is not a panacea for our service woes. It needs to be granular in terms of the service metrics and the agency needs back end mechanisms to fix issues that arise. For example, setting out a help line number is of no use if the infrastructure at the back end cannot support fixing the stated problem. Further, just like the RTI has penal clauses for officers not complying with the requirements, citizen charters need to be backed up by punitive measures if the metrics are not met.

Public report cards on government agencies

The Public Affairs Centre in Bangalore was a pioneer in conducting surveys and putting out report cards on government agencies like the Corporation, Development Authority, Public Transport, Police, etc. With media publicity, this does act as a call to action to government agencies. But the initial euphoria often dissipates and the report findings are often forgotten. While report cards are welcome, we need to find ways to continuously highlight government agency failings in customer service on a sustained basis. The social media promises to be a potent channel for highlighting shortcomings in public delivery.

Need for an accountability platform

Our bureaucracy, a key cog, has fine officers working under severe institutional and personal constraints. We need to celebrate their performances since they have nothing akin to private sector reward and recognition programs. We need public accountability platform with half-yearly summits where agencies report on their past performance and what can be expected going forward. This has been tried out with considerable success by the Bangalore Agenda Task Force in early 2000. This allows performing officers to get recognised by the public (and political leaders) and drive a virtuous cycle of embracing higher targets and matching performance among agencies.

Use more technology in civic services

The defining characteristic of this era is technology and we need to find smart ways to harness them in our civic services infrastructure and delivery. Some possible examples: Citizens being harassed by auto drivers - their SMS to be reckoned as an FIR; pool city traffic centre data with insurance firms and increase insurance premium on errant drivers; use district metering to zero in on unaccounted for losses in water and power; integrate the back end of government agencies to be able to respond to citizen grievances in real time, etc.

Citizens need to be vigilant

Finally, we citizens have a major role to play. The system is realising that the citizen-government trust deficit is widening and needs to be addressed if their hold on power is to be retained. Let us use it to get the desired outcomes by using social media and other avenues to keep the spotlight on better performance. Greater civic responsibility is needed and, if not forthcoming, implementation through the rule of law must be encouraged by civil society. If we all demand the same outcomes and work alongside, there is a greater chance of getting government agencies to become citizen oriented.

Blog

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80/20 Service Myopia
http://custommerce.blogspot.com/2012/01/8020-service-myopia.html

Book Choice

DELIVERING QUALITY SERVICE
Balancing Customer Perceptions and Expectations

VALARIE A. ZEITHAML, A. PARASURAMAN AND LEONARD L. BERRY

Authors:
Valarie A. Zeithaml, A. Parasuraman, Leonard L. Berry

NSE — NATIONAL STOCK EXCHANGE OF INDIA LIMITED

The National Stock Exchange of India Limited has its genesis in the report of the High Powered Study Group on Establishment of New Stock Exchanges. It recommended promotion of a National Stock Exchange by financial institutions (FIs) to provide access to investors from all across the country on an equal footing. Based on the recommendations, NSE was promoted by leading Financial Institutions at the behest of the Government of India and was incorporated in November 1992 as a tax-paying company unlike other stock exchanges in the country.

The National Stock Exchange (NSE) operates a nation-wide, electronic market, offering trading in Capital Market, Derivatives Market and Currency Derivatives segments including equities, equity-based derivatives, Currency futures and options, equity-based ETFs, Gold ETF and Retail Government Securities. Today, NSE network stretches to more than 1,500 locations in the country and supports more than 2,30,000 terminals.

With more than 10 asset classes in offering, NSE has taken many initiatives to strengthen the securities industry and provides several new products like Mini Nifty, Long Dated Options and Mutual Fund Service System. Responding to market needs, NSE has introduced services like DMA, FIX capabilities, co-location facilities and mobile trading to cater to the evolving need of the market and various categories of market participants.

NSE has made its global presence felt with cross-listing arrangements, including license agreements covering benchmark indexes for U.S. and Indian equities with CME Group and has also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Singapore Exchange (SGX) to cooperate in the development of a market for India-linked products and services to be listed on SGX. The two exchanges also will look into a bilateral securities trading link to enable investors in one country to seamlessly trade on the other country's exchange.

NSE is committed to operate a market ecosystem which is transparent and at the same time offers high levels of safety, integrity and corporate governance, providing ever growing trading and investment opportunities for investors.

National Stock Exchange office in Mumbai

Think

Does your company have a list of Customer Touchpoints (on paper)?

Are all the Touchpoints designed to enhance Customer Experience / Satisfaction?

We're all marketers now

Engaging customers today requires commitment
from the entire company and a redefined marketing organization.

Tom French, Laura LaBerge, and Paul Magill

For the past decade, marketers have been adjusting to a new era of deep customer engagement. They've tacked on new functions, such as social-media management; altered processes to better integrate advertising campaigns online, on television, and in print; and added staff with Web expertise to manage the explosion of digital customer data. Yet in our experience, that's not enough. To truly engage customers for whom "push" advertising is increasingly irrelevant, companies must do more outside the confines of the traditional marketing organization. At the end of the day, customers no longer separate marketing from the product - it *is* the product. They don't separate marketing from their in-store or online experience - it *is* the experience. In the era of engagement, marketing *is* the company.

This shift presents an obvious challenge: if everyone's responsible for marketing, who's accountable? And what does this new reality imply for the structure and charter of the marketing organization? It's a problem that parallels the one that emerged in the early days of the quality movement, before it became embedded in the fabric of general management. In a memorable anecdote,

one of former Chrysler CEO Lee Iacocca's key hires, Hal Sperlich, arrived at the automaker in 1977 as the new vice president of product planning. His first question: "Who is in charge of quality?"

"Everybody," a confident executive replied.

"But who do you hold responsible when there are problems in quality?" Sperlich pressed.

"Nobody."

"Oh, shoot," Sperlich thought. "We are in for it now."[1]

To avoid being "in for it," companies of all stripes must not only recognize that everyone is responsible for marketing but also impose accountability by establishing a new set of relationships between the function and the rest of the organization. In essence, companies need to become marketing vehicles, and the marketing organization itself needs to become the customer-engagement engine, responsible for establishing priorities and stimulating dialogue throughout the enterprise as it seeks to design, build, operate, and renew cutting-edge customer-engagement approaches............

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