

Catalyst

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Customer Service Excellence Foundation is a not-for-profit organization
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Customer Centricity: An Experiential Journey

Well, it has been a privilege to share my thoughts on a subject that is so dear to me personally and professionally. In the following paragraphs, I have tried to maintain a balance between walking down memory lane and readers' interest.

Re-collecting my classes in IIM-A, I remember "customer satisfaction / centricity / awareness" as mere words in international case studies. To be frank, customer "as an entity" did not matter then in India. Come 90s, customers became important due to the liberalisation happening all around. I joined the automobile Industry. The industry threw lot of challenges as well as opportunities. These were more pronounced in the passenger car segment. International car manufacturers like Ford started declaring customers as top priority and started claiming ownership to lifetime of the customers - a new paradigm for customers and the channel members alike.

The company I was in (TVS) has a diversified dealership and distribution business. Here I started looking at opportunities and threats created by changed environment. When I looked within, I realized different verticals have different stakeholders at the center of their businesses - in a way like "center of gravity" in physics. I quickly realised that while customers and customer service are important, there are other dominant stakeholders who decided the growth, profitability and longevity of the business. I sensed that while customers are needed to do business they are not at the centre. Quickly it dawned on me that "customer centricity" is different from "customer as focus," "customer service," "Customer First," and so on.

Here are few examples from my world. For decades I tolerated PSU banks. For that matter every one of us indeed! When privatisation happened I decided to switch over to a private bank. And what did I see? Well-lit, clean and air-conditioned lounges for doing



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banking transactions, friendly officers, fewer queues, and automated customer interaction devices. Good Customer Service!

Then I asked myself, what is customer centricity? I had an opportunity to discover very soon. There was a business that was getting incubated within TVS - Independent multi-brand car service. I was appointed President of this new business. My business card declared me as "President - Customer Centric Business." Then the real learning started.

An opportunity came in to diversify. I went to the drawing board, met customers, evaluated their concerns and realized that "organized emergency assistance" is a need that is waiting to be fulfilled. Born was "24X7 Emergency Road-side Assistance from MyTVS" in southern India. At that time I had formed an idea of what it means to be "customer centric". To give an expression to this, I broke the regular practice of inviting the first customer for a "puja" in our office to "get" the membership card. We, as the business team went with all puja articles and "presented" the membership card to him. That was the launch. What I did was to "present the card in his puja room!"

To be modest, the concept was an instant hit. We were being equated with "angels from heaven in times of need." I was elated.

One day a CEO of a company from Sweden asked me "Is there a business without customer centricity?" I

said yes, and explained. He also agreed that there could be many. But he left saying “all businesses ultimately will be customer centric.”

Meanwhile, I got myself a luxurious Volkswagen (VW) car for INR 20 Lacs. I must say the car was aspirational with several features. But the sad thing is I don't even know half of it. Yes, they gave a detailed “Owner's Manual” listing down all the rider friendly and safety features. However, to me it was of no use as I never got “the time” to sit down and try my hands. I always felt that the economic benefit of the car was only INR 10 lacs. I always wondered whether it would have been better if a company representative came and explained all the features with a presentation, demonstrated, and hand-held the new customer. It could have cost them not more than INR 10,000. However, suddenly the economic value of the car could have zoomed to more than the actual value.

With all due respect to VW, I felt they were not customer centric!

Thanks to the late Steve Jobs' paranoia, Apple came out with products that were expensive but met the customer requirements “fully.” Apple did not release its product to the market before it was perfected. Unlike some rivals who would launch a product which in its trail, would create demand for patches, upgrades, and antivirus software, how is it that Apple alone can come out with technology-enabled products without any manuals? All their products are designed simple enough for a user to understand. It helped shape up my thoughts on this dear subject. Apple is truly customer centric!

What a contrast! So today Apple is far bigger than VW! At least on the “mindshare quotient.”

My journey with the diversification and above two moments of truth, and many more like that, has opened up doors of knowledge. I questioned myself “will it not be right if MyTVS goes pan-India to help vehicle owners in the event of a breakdown?” And make customers sit down and explain the importance of its offering. And, pan-India we went. Our revenues more than trebled.

Was it a Eureka moment? No.

I must mention that there are nation-wide cultural and environmental lacunae to provide enabling climate for such customer centricity to flourish.

Will this country change and not have mountains of problems if the government is people centric? On one side, we are short of MBBS graduates and CAs but several seats in engineering and arts colleges go vacant. Why is it that grains go rotten in government cold storage or end up feeding rats than hungry countrymen? Why is it that primary health centers are not being trusted while private institutions make

money? Probably because, as a country, India doesn't pay enough attention to the demands of end consumers.

One thing is for sure. Government, bureaucracy, vested interests and legal systems are just not geared to allow the country to become customer centric. They do all the injustice all the time, in public interest!

I believe that customer centricity does not mean a mere “Customer Satisfaction Cell or CSI scores”. It's an attitude that runs across the organization, be it their vision or mission statements, policies, philosophies of higher management, empowerment of customer interfacing employees, and so on. My experience and life journey have taught me, that “ATTITUDE” is the key word that “defines customer centricity.” It is an unending journey that every organization has to go through to get that “ATTITUDE.”

I can tell from my experience that financial parameters will automatically fall in place. While it will definitely take a bit longer, for sure it will and it shall be bountiful!

All this is summed up in my current views:

- Customer centricity is an attitude. It cannot be learnt from books. It has to be gained from life by analysing and experimenting with oneself and life continually.
- Once it is imbibed it will be the centre piece in everything that the organisation does.
- It is an attitude that will propel the organisation to derive its mission, vision, business purpose, goals, business opportunities, policies, 4- or 5-Ps as you like it, recruitments, lay-out of offices and training - almost everything else, with CUSTOMER, HIS LIFE, AND NEEDS at the center. All others can be derived from this or are centred around it.
- The attempt then will be to ask such questions as to who is the customer, how does he live, what does he like, how this idea or product would fit in making his life fuller. Such introspection and insight tell us how to arrive at specifications of the product, how to distribute them, etc. I am very sure you need not worry about price or profits!
- Do that well, no one else can be a market leader.

But there are limitations - first and foremost, our laws. The legal and bureaucratic systems are such they will not allow you to be customer centric, right now! I hope, like my business acquaintance from Sweden said, “all businesses one day will become customer centric, and so will the Government!”

- R. Srivatchan

Thomas Assessments Pvt. Ltd.

Background

Thomas International provides people assessments which empower business leaders to transform the performance of their teams and individuals - and deliver an immediate impact on their organization.

We help our clients recruit, retain, develop, and manage their people. Thomas Assessments provide insight into your people resources - what motivates them, their core strengths and limitations, and their potential. And these assessments add a high level of certainty to all your people-related decisions.

Thomas has been at the forefront of assessment innovation for 30 years. We provide assessments in 56 languages and have a presence in over 60 countries. Today we are working with 32,000 companies and 250,000 trained Thomas users worldwide. Our clients span every type of business of all sizes and complete over 1.5 million assessments every year.

In India, Thomas Assessments Pvt. Ltd (TAPL) has been in existence since 1998. Starting with two offices in Bangalore and Mumbai, the Organization now has offices in 8 cities, a team of 62 consultants and works with over 700 client organizations across a range of industries and practices - From PSUs like BEL, HPCL, NLC, and ONGC to leading organizations such as Volvo, Cap Gemini, Murugappa Group, Toyota Kirloskar, Godrej & Boyce, Britannia Industries, Ashok Leyland, TAFE, etc.

Science packaged in an easy-to-use format

At Thomas, scientific validity is at the core of everything we do.

Our assessments are driven by sound theoretical principles which means they are robust and reliable. They are validated by the "British Psychological Society" and other leading institutions around the world to ensure they deliver accurate and objective results.

But what sets Thomas apart is the fact that our assessments are packaged in a way that makes them quick to use and straightforward to understand. Our client service teams advise and train clients and provide practical assistance to create maximum value for them.

Assessment Practices

Spanning the entire employee lifecycle, from recruiting and retaining staff, to developing and managing performance, our assessments provide our clients with a high level of certainty in all their people decisions.

Recognizing that superior work performance involves, among other things, an optimum combination of intellect, skills, and behaviour, Thomas Assessments span a wide gamut of services that provide insights into all these components.

Personal Profile Analysis (PPA)

Provides accurate insights into professional work behaviour styles. As the Times said, "We hire people for their technical skills, but lose them for their behavioural faults."

Job Benchmarking

Helps in defining the most effective work style for a job. Derived

from business and role needs and customized to client organizations.

General Intelligence Assessment (GIA)

Provides normed insights into work intelligence – incorporates concepts of both fluid and crystallised intelligence to indicate a person's learning ability and the ability to handle complex tasks.

Thomas Emotional Intelligence Assessment (TEIQue)

Emotional intelligence gives people the edge they need to perform in today's complex business environment. TEIQue tells you how well your people understand their emotions, react to pressure, and manage relationships.

360 degree review system

Provides holistic, observed insights into professional work competencies.

Thomas Team Audit System (TAS)

Aligns team culture and work style with business objectives. Facilitates team analysis and planning.

Personal Assessment and Development Centers

Simulation based, observed insights into managerial and leadership competencies.

Training services

- International certification courses for expert HR practitioners
- Behavioural sensitization for managerial effectiveness for managers
- Workshops on understanding and applying Emotional Intelligence
- Behavioural event Interview workshops
- Competency enhancement programs
- Workshops on aligning team style with business objectives

Each Thomas assessment comes with a report or set of reports which is easy to read, interpret, and understand.

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The humane side to assessments

With a strong on-line (www.thomasinternational.net), delivery system, backed by committed consulting teams across the country, Thomas ensures that its clients get the specific insights that are necessary to support all their people related decision making. Not surprisingly therefore, over 80% of Thomas clients in India have continued partnerships over several years.

Thomas Assessments recognizes that behind every assessment report stands an individual whose professional development will be significantly impacted by the quality of the assessment. This unshaken philosophy of accountability and responsible assessment services continues to be the single biggest differentiator for the Organization.

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Five 'no regrets' moves for superior customer engagement

Tom French, Laura LaBerge, and Paul Magill

McKinsey Quarterly JULY 2012

(Tom French is a director in McKinsey's Boston office; Laura LaBerge and Paul Magill are senior experts in the Stamford office.)

Customers are demanding very different kinds of relationships with companies. Here are some ways to jump-start customer engagement across your organization...

... the critical moments of interaction, or touch points, between companies and customers are increasingly spread across different parts of the organization, so customer engagement is now everyone's responsibility...

The five "no regrets" moves described below help senior executives to move beyond their function-by-function view of customer engagement and to improve the coordination of activities across the broad range of touch points they must care about...

1. Hold a customer-engagement summit

Almost all companies have annual or semi-annual business-planning processes that bring senior managers together from units and functions to discuss strategies and objectives. Yet few undertake a similar process to discuss how to engage with the lifeblood of all companies: customers. We recommend holding such a summit, with a participant list that starts right at the top and cuts across units and functions...

The focus of such a summit is customer engagement, which should not be confused with the customer experience; engagement goes beyond managing the experience at touch points to include all the ways companies motivate customers to invest in an ongoing relationship with a product or brand...

2. Create a customer-engagement council

One of the first outcomes of a customer-engagement summit will probably be the realization that an ongoing forum for focusing management's attention on engagement is needed. This doesn't have to be yet another marketing committee. In fact, your customer-engagement council may already exist under another name, such as the strategic-planning or brand council. The purpose is to bring together

For the full article visit,

https://www.mckinseyquarterly.com/Marketing/Strategy/Five_no_regrets_moves_for_superior_customer_engagement_2999

all primary forms of engagement marketing, communications, service, sales, product management, and so on to coordinate tactics across touch points in a more timely manner.

3. Appoint a 'chief content officer'

... Companies need to create a supply chain of increasingly sophisticated and interactive content to feed consumer demand for information and engagement, not to mention a mechanism for managing the content consumers themselves generate. The emergence of companies-as-publishers demands the appointment of a chief content officer (CCO).

4. Create a 'listening center'

Engagement is a conversation, yet companies are increasingly excluded from many of the most important discussions. More social and other media are available to mobilize your fans and opponents than ever before, and any interaction between a customer and your company could be the match that starts a viral fire. In this environment, companies should establish listening centers that monitor what is being said about their organizations, products, and services on social media, blogs, and other online forums.

5. Challenge your total customer-engagement budget

Many companies struggle to figure out how they can afford all the new tactics, vehicles, and content types required to engage with customers effectively. We propose a different mind-set: recognizing that there's plenty of money, but in the wrong places. Companies can now communicate with customers much more productively: digital and social channels, for example, are radically cheaper (and sometimes more effective) than traditional media communications or face-to-face sales visits. When you make trade-offs across functions, you can free large amounts of money to invest elsewhere...

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OR BOARDROOM,
IT'S THE MOVES
THAT COUNT.**



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