



Systems Thinking is Vital to Customer Experience Business Results

By Lynn Hunsaker

"Do the whole job" is a mantra needed by our companies and society at large. Piecemeal efforts and short-term strategies ultimately lead to finger-in-the-dike management that is rampant today. All of the recent customer experience studies indicate that vital linkages are broken between:

- Survey results and business results
- Data and actions
- Goals across functions and business units
- Incentives and desired behaviors
- Multiple voice of customer sources
- Views of what customers want
- Brand promise and what's delivered

What's missing here is systems thinking! Systems thinking is a commitment to doing the whole job. It's a holistic view of the components of an entity in the context of relationships with each other and with other entities, rather than in isolation. Doing the whole job is imperative for real improvement in customer experience. Every internal handoff may have a ripple effect on the customer, or at least on the customer-facing employee. In other words, frontline employees are only as effective as the rest of the organization enables them to be. Coordinated deployment is essential among the following keys to systems thinking:

- Keep the big picture in mind
- Anticipate cause-and-effect
- Analyze root causes
- Nurture shared vision
- Fight sub-optimization: self-centricity versus [customer-centricity](#)
- Manage stakeholders
- Manage change expressly
- Embrace constructive [customer feedback](#)
- Improve internal handoffs
- Enable each company group to learn their impact on customer experience
- Select [metrics](#) that are both actionable and predictive
- Balance incentives with intended outcome



Customer loyalty/retention was priority number one in the first four reports from The Conference Board's CEO Challenge survey. Recently that topic is superseded by execution, adaptability, economic performance, and sustained growth. Yet, 89% of firms view customer experience management (CEM) as either very important or critical to the firm's strategy in 2009, according to Forrester Research's Obstacles to Customer Experience Success report. Lack of systems thinking may account for the execution and adaptability hot buttons, as means to customer loyalty/retention, which if managed correctly, ultimately leads to stronger economic performance and sustained growth.



Perhaps the information age offers us too many options, and causes us to be sidetracked by piecemeal strategies that ultimately become regarded as fads, although they may be valid and valuable components of the bigger picture. Systems thinking brings us back to basics. At the end of the day, superior customer experience is all about integrity. Doing the whole job reflects what's needed from every individual as well as the champions of [customer experience management](#).

For more information, see [Marketing Operations Customer Profitability Services](#).

Call to Action

If your company is facing challenges in any of the areas discussed in this article, or if you are thinking about creating a marketing operations function or increasing the effectiveness of the one you already have, you should start with a "current state assessment" that will help you evaluate the overall health of your marketing and/or Marketing Operations today. Doing so will help you zero in on those areas that represent your most difficult challenges as well as your greatest opportunities for bringing the significant benefits of MO best practices to your organization.

About the Author:



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