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Why all good transformation is human-first

In recent years, businesses have embraced digital transformation as the answer to many challenges which threaten their long-term performance. However, is this over-reliance on technology eroding relationships with customers?

Digital transformation projects have long promised to revolutionise operations, but haven't always resulted in the promised efficiency and cost reductions. Almost three quarters (73 percent) of IT decision-makers agree that while the huge potential of digital projects is often talked about, most of the time they fall short of being truly transformational or revolutionary.

"With technology, there seems to be two movements at the moment," says Gobeyond Partners CEO Mark Palmer, "one is trying to make our lives easier and more straightforward. The other is a snowball effect of layer upon layer of technology vying for attention with no consideration of the customer. Think about the app alerts that keep popping up on your smartphone, or emails asking you for customer feedback. Many people are simply not interested in this type of activity. Being pro-tech is good, but only appropriate tech that will genuinely make peoples' lives easier."

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The rapid expansion in capability and accessibility of technology has made a big impact on customer service. Today's customers can browse and switch between competitors with more ease than ever before, comparing your service to that of more agile start-ups or organisations in completely different sectors. As the 2019 Customer Satisfaction Index from [The Institute of Customer Service](#) recorded a fourth consecutive drop in customer satisfaction, it's no coincidence that we found 71 per cent of managers in our recent survey were concerned about the impact changing customer expectations will have on their company's growth.

Customers are seeking more human-led guidance, particularly for complex journeys or queries. "Tech can achieve more in a single step, such as verifying ID or signing documents, but people still want explanation and reassurance about products and services," says Peter Nicol, SVP Strategic Partnerships and Alliances at Vizolution. "It's about being able to hold the customer's hand and walk them through the channel of their choice." Indeed, 63 per cent of people prefer face-to-face communication when making big decisions, according to the Social Market Foundation.

Engaging your colleagues

It isn't just speaking with customers that can foster a more human-centric approach; it's talking with employees and clients too. "For me, it's about not spending time in an office locked in meetings or calls," says Mark Palmer. "It's about getting out there, meeting people and listening to their concerns. We know that 70 percent of change programmes fail to achieve their goals, largely due to employee resistance and lack of management support. I am a fan of John le Carré's advice: 'The desk is a dangerous place to see the world from.'"

In our quest to have the fastest chatbot or most efficient AI-generated text, we've neglected the nuts-and-bolts of customer service itself: the customer.

By placing human experience at the heart of everything, organisations can focus on delivering value. This means taking an end-to-end view of the customer journey, leveraging digital technologies to augment human interactions, and engaging colleagues on the change journey.

The power of experience

As faceless digital startups flood the market, there's an advantage to being a more human firm. Mark Palmer, reflecting on his own experiences said "You can now order a Jaguar Land Rover online from its website, delivering it straight to your house, just like a Tesla. But when I buy a car, I like to sit in the seat, smell the leather, listen to the stereo. I don't go to a dealership because I want a faster car; it's experiential."

There also isn't a 'one size fits all' approach to human experience. Mark explains "It's a fine balance with each client we work with to support existing processes, remove wasteful activity, introduce appropriate tech and upskill colleagues to drive improvements,".

But one thing's clear. In the 2020s, technology has the best chance of reaching its true potential when it complements humans, rather than replaces them. As Bruce Daisley reflected at our Future of Service conference; "Success in the future won't be determined by technology, but humanity. And those companies that recognise that will do the best."

Giving power back to the customer

A recent Gallup survey revealed only eight per cent of British workers are engaged in their jobs. As Bruce Daisley, bestselling author, technologist and former European VP of Twitter points out, this means more people are actively disengaged in their jobs than engaged.

When the London office of Twitter had reached 200 people, things went awry. That year, Bruce recalls that 40 per cent of staff left. "Every Thursday was somebody's leaving do," he remembers. That ratio has since been converted into a two per cent leave rate, with Daisley fostering employee engagement by hosting smaller, more focused meetings, channelling curiosity ("when we're distracted, we achieve less") and empowering staff to "reclaim their lunch hour".

In a recent survey from the Customer Contact Association we uncovered a worrying discrepancy that reflects a broader trend; 95% of executives felt their company actively engaged with staff to encourage ideas for process improvement, but only 52% of agents agreed that this happened.

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Bestselling author, technologist and former European VP of Twitter

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