

Aiming for Perfection...

The traditional view of Marketing Excellence needs a radical overhaul if it is to benefit Pharma as it navigates these 'interesting times'

As Katie copies last year's SWOT into her annual marketing plan, the electronic chime signals the arrival of yet another email. Her action list has barely moved all day as a series of near critical events have moved themselves firmly into the red quadrant: Urgent AND Important. As yet another distraction calls, she cannot resist the distraction and pauses to take a peek.

The descriptive header announces, "Marketing Excellence Team reveals the launch of 'Our Way'." Katie had of course heard about the new company-wide programme and was expecting great things, but the 9 GB attachment is now causing her ripples of anxiety. A double-click reveals a 132-slide deck of predictably closely packed text and flow diagrams.

Katie's experience is not unique. In her case, the Marketing Excellence Programme comprised a launch email followed by a set of templates landing remotely in her Inbox, with a centralised training session proposed later in the year. The philosophy seems to be that if you can create the ideal set of templates for a complete marketing plan, train people to complete it and collate into one binder, you will have taken a step towards marketing excellence.

The truth is that we are all busy people, budgets are tight, we have restrictions on travel and therefore the quick fix is always tempting. In the interests of time and money, it seems much more practical to develop the tools and templates centrally and then to roll them out regionally and globally using remote communication. Enforcing the change by insisting on a rigid structure to the Brand Plan completes the execution and then at plan time, the templates all arrive duly completed.

As in Katie's case, often the training event does not coincide with the training need. For example, if you are trained in something you will not need to use for six months, or you have already completed, you may either not pay full attention or may have forgotten what you needed by the time you have to use it in earnest.

Katie's is perhaps an extreme example, but we can all recognise flavours of our own organisation within it. So if there is a better way – what is it and how would you put it into practice?

As Angélique Arnold argues in her well-known quote, “Perfection consists not in doing extraordinary things, but in doing ordinary things extraordinarily well.”ⁱ So it is with marketing excellence – the more we complicate things, the further we get from the perfection we desire. The simpler we can make marketing excellence and the more expertly we can execute it, the more satisfying will be the result and the less arduous the journey.

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Before plunging into a review of the conditions necessary to achieve marketing excellence, it is probably worthwhile to consider what we mean by marketing. There are as many answers to this question as there are marketing authorities on the planet. Most definitions centre on the needs of the customer, or the processes and practices that surround them. Definitions dance around the subject, failing to step into the light and address the very core of what marketing actually is. But as Philip Kotler refreshingly first defined it, marketing is “a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they want and need by creating and exchanging products and value with each other.”ⁱⁱ Thus, the very essence of marketing lies in the creation and exchange of value. This is a key concept for Pharma right now, where a clear understanding of what value is to a Clinician, to a Payer and to Society is vital to our very survival.

Value is, as every marketer knows, a subjective perceptual thing - elusive, ever changing and inconsistent as much within the same customer as between different ones.

Value is the very currency in which we deal as marketers, and our job is its successful creation and exchange with our customer. This relies firstly on a deep understanding of what value looks and feels like to them; secondly the ability to share that knowledge across the organisation; and finally on having the capability to develop and deliver the right offering effectively.

It follows that a marketing excellence programme must be designed to enhance the organisation’s ability to create and exchange value with customers. This is a fundamental aspect of how the business operates and surely requires a significant effort to embed successfully.

Some definitions of marketing emphasise it as process, concept and orientation. Viewing it through each of these windows in turn gives us a valuable insight into its true meaning. When we view marketing in this light, we are liberated from the idea that it is the province of a particular department and the responsibility for it crystallises across the organisation in every single role and function.

Given this perspective any wholesale change in our marketing approach must surely best be achieved through a combination of process, concept and orientation. Yet, perplexingly, although a complete and integrated programme is needed to bring about this sort of change throughout an organisation, we generally seek to achieve it through modifying process. We express it through a well-crafted set of plan templates and with the inevitable rigid timeline and process chart setting out exactly how the programme will be 'rolled out' or worse 'cascaded'.

As we will discuss, it is the extent of engagement of the people making up the business that will define the success of implementation and not the beauty and sophistication of the templates or the elegance of the schedule. If we are seeking to change the perception of value through the eyes of our customer, any modifications to process, concept or orientation must deliver that specific change in order to be successful in improving marketing effectiveness.

It is clear that within any complex organisation, there has to be strong and efficient process. This is after all the backbone to effective activity, but what about concept and orientation, are we leaving these out at our peril?

Concept is defined as "an abstract idea" – from the Latin *conceptum*, something conceivedⁱⁱⁱ. It therefore arises in the mind and is the product of a thought process. Marketing concepts and customer insights originate from quality research, structured thinking and from asking the age-old question of 'Why?' Concepts come from getting to the root cause of the behaviours, events, trends and features that we observe in our landscape, from making sense of those conceptually in an abstract form or model and then defining a plan of action. Thinking is the raw energy behind competitive advantage and it must therefore be nurtured and supported throughout the organisation.

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It may be desirable to capture and display it in a structured manner, but it is clear that it is not the template that comes first, but the thinking.

Kotter's 8 Step Change Model

Establish a Sense of Urgency

Examine the market and competitive realities

Identify and discuss potential crises and major opportunities

Create the Guiding Coalition

A group with the power to lead the change

Working together as a Team

Develop Vision & Strategy

Create a vision to direct the change effort

Develop strategies to achieve it

Communicate the Change Vision

Use every vehicle possible to communicate

Have the guiding coalition role model the desired behaviour

Empower Broad-based Action

Remove obstacles

Change systems or structures

Encourage risk-taking and non-traditional ideas and activities

Generate short-term wins

Plan for visible improvements (wins)

Celebrate and recognise those responsible

Consolidate Gains and Produce More Change

Use increased credibility to change systems, structures and policies

Hire promote and develop the right people

Reinvigorate the project with new themes

Anchor New Approaches in the Culture

Better performance through better leadership and management

Develop means to ensure leadership development and succession

Orientation is defined as “a person’s basic attitude, beliefs, or feelings in relation to a particular subject or issue”^{iv} and is therefore the result of something held profoundly by that individual. Orientation can only arise from something intrinsic to them or through a gentle shift in the attitudes and beliefs that underpin their specific orientation. As we know well from anti-smoking campaigns, changing behaviour through imparted knowledge alone is a long and failure-prone exercise because knowledge is so easily overridden by one’s attitudes and beliefs.

It seems improbable then, that a programme delivering a centrally-generated set of templates and tools will be sufficient to bridge the three giant pillars of process, concept and orientation. It seems that we need to be able to address attitude and belief as well as knowledge as an inherent part of any marketing excellence programme.

The most successful programmes treat the exercise as a change process, so perhaps we can learn a little from the gurus of change. John Kotter is one of the most respected authors in this area, and his 8 step change model^v has been applied widely in supporting all kinds of change initiative.



In essence, Kotter asserts that it is essential to create a drive for change, a sense of urgency and a restlessness with the status quo. This must be combined with a powerful vision of the future and supported by a strong guiding team that communicates clearly and empowers action. Finally persistence, celebrating short-term wins and locking change into the organisation's processes seals the change.

The implications for something as deep-rooted as a marketing excellence programme are profound – clearly starting a change process by attempting to lock people into a new process is setting out at the difficult end. In order to be successful, a number of conditions have to co-exist:

- **A clear sense of purpose behind the intervention – why are we doing it now?**

Without this, the exercise is rootless and lacks a suitable incentive to be taken up other than the inevitable coercion

- **A clear vision that outlines the future state that will follow – what will this mean?**

Vision is an essential support component especially for intangible initiatives that propose changes for the individual

- **A supportive management culture to help embed change – should I do this?**

Ensuring that line managers are fully engaged from the outset and able to support and answer questions is a pre-requisite for success

- **Engagement with the timetable – is this going to help with my day job?**

For training interventions to work well, they must be aligned with the requirements of people's day to day role, or the knowledge will be forgotten or not taken up in the first place.

- **Organisational preparedness to do things differently – why do we do it this way?**

If the change programme is just about doing marketing in the usual way, but with 'a bit more structure', it is unlikely to represent something sufficiently interesting to fully engage the team.

Marketing excellence is not just a process, a set of tools or a well-executed training programme; it is a state of mind and a way of being. To help us in the creation and exchange of value with our customer, marketing excellence must take a holistic approach that integrates rational process with sound concepts and an all-embracing orientation.

As we progress through the second decade of the 21st century, we can be certain that value will remain a core concept for marketers and customers alike. Only when marketing embraces every aspect of our business and impacts on the processes we build to understand and engage with our customer, the quality of thinking that drives concept formation and the orientation that we take to our customers, can we truly consider ourselves on the road to excellence.

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ⁱ Angélique Arnold, La Mère Angélique (September 8, 1591– August 6, 1661) abbess of Port Royal

ⁱⁱ Philip Kotler and Gary Armstrong, Principles of Marketing, February 11 2005

ⁱⁱⁱ www.oxforddictionaries.com

^{iv} www.oxforddictionaries.com

^v JP Kotter Leading Change, September 1st 1996