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Change Management:

Effective Strategies to Combat
Post-Pandemic Challenges

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The crisis we are experiencing today isn't unique; but finds its ancestors in the predicament of the Great Recession in 2008, where we didn't just lose confidence in our financial system, we realized that its morbidity had its claws dug deep into the inefficiencies of financial & economic policies, thereby creating panic & hindering growth of the nations at large. It took time, but we changed. We replaced our rigid financial framework to more flexible inflations-targeting framework, using different combinations of government spending & tax cuts.

Fast forward to 2020, the pandemic dented businesses, small and large, new, and established, private and public, corporates and non-corporations – everything. It led to a vicious cycle that left the organizations oblivious of making key business decisions, but also, led to clients losing confidence in their vendors, and the vendors losing confidence in the supply of materials, resources, and services. But as I said, there is, and will always be a silver lining to the despair we face as an individual, a community, a country, and the world; we are changing!

In the context of the Services industry, with the advent of newer technologies like AI,

Everything-as-a-Service (XaaS), Big Data Analytics, etc, we were anyway preparing to deal with the transformational impact they would have in our everyday lives. However, from an organization's stand-point, what has come to the forefront is the 'Experience'; customer experience for the vendors and user experience for the clients. And therefore, while projects are being delivered, the vendor organizations not only have to ensure that the clients are satisfied, but also ensure that the user experience is top-notch, leading to an enhanced client experience. Hence, focusing on experience-led interactions and journeys has become the differentiator.

That is where change management steps in.

Today, for every interaction designed to manage a change for the users, their experience needs to be reimagined, and put across to them. In other words, if you are leading a change in a vast organization, there definitely needs to be an enormous emphasis on the digital corporate strategy of the organization and an apt mix of the right organizational and technical culture with complementing operating models that supplement the users in the change, but alongside that, an equal focus has to mount on the user experience. Change management needs to be considered as a journey in the life of a user and not an event. The moment we start doing that, we shift our focus on the unique challenges, i.e. leadership alignment, implementation approach and the latest entrant in the list, i.e. the user experience.

Leadership Buy-in:

The pandemic has proved that changes are never effective unless they are leader-led. Because only when it comes from the leadership, humans, in general, pay heed to an initiative. After all, if it wasn't for the governments to step in, and declare the measures as mandatory, would we have cared to follow social distancing as a community? No. Now, why will any leader buy-in to your initiative? You are indeed disrupting the usual course of his business operations of his units, that might lead to delay in the project deliveries owing to their employees being involved in your initiative. It will take a leader to advocate your program for the users to even listen to what you are saying, let alone adopting it and a mammoth effort to convince a leader to back your initiative, unless you have a compelling reason as why his team is in a dire need of the transformation, in which case, he will anyway vouch for. While we may be able to say, 'It is never too late for anything' for everything else, this phrase doesn't hold true for this; it may just be late if leadership isn't involved in the onset of a project.

Staggered Implementation:

Different audience is at different stages in terms of readiness and acceptance of the changes, so change management tactics are prepared and delivered on a group-by-group basis. This could be on the basis of geographies, personas or lines of business depending on the size and nature of the change. Depending on the readiness analysis, if a group tends to be noisier and more reluctant in changing or they would want to defer the roll-out because of business-critical touchpoints, it would hinder, it may not be wise to target them for the 'pilot' roll-out. Often, they would want to

make their decisions based on the success of the project in the 'pilot' areas. For instance, to fight Covid-19, countries came up with different strategies to get their residents vaccinated. The vaccination drives led by various countries were piloted, keeping readiness of the age-groups in consideration. In India, it started with 65 and above, followed by 45 and above, 18-44, while vaccination for 0-17 is on the cards.

Training-as-a-Service:

With the pandemic leaving employees with no time to onboard themselves on the new processes and products, gone are the days when users would take pains of going through stretched user manuals and resources, looking out for the answers to their queries. Today, they want instantaneous help and ready resources to be able to take faster actions and make faster decisions. The systems we design need to be intelligent enough to guide employees of the steps to be taken for completing a transaction. It does not only give a kick-start to the long journey of adoption of the tools, but also quickens time-to-value for the system getting implemented, and time-to-competence of users using the system. It optimizes end user training by enabling learning while doing and helps measure end users' learning progress in real-time. There are many tools available in the market, like Whatfix, WalkMe that enhance user experience, thereby leading to customer delight.

AI-as-a-service:

Although this informative technology started years ago, with the pandemic and in the state of emergency they dealt with, the organizations realized that users could not always be made to rely on support staff to hand-hold them in their transactions, primarily due to unavailability of the workforce and hence, there was a reason to include AI-as-a-service.

Moreover, timeliness of service can make all the difference between a mediocre and a delightful customer experience. The 24*7 virtual assistant you see popping up when you enter an application, or a website is a classic example of an AI-driven service. This robot would usually be trained to answer user questions, whether they are fundamental or complex questions. Of course, its capability to handle the latter category of questions is not built overnight; it takes an extensive

deep-dive into the possibilities of the issues users may face when they begin using the website. These chatbots use Natural Language Processing (NLP) algorithms to learn from conversations with users and imitate the language patterns while providing answers. This frees up customer service employees to focus on more complicated tasks.

It is clear that, long after pandemic is gone, we will need to continue to stick to these changes, because clients themselves have changed and so have their end users.

With demands of our clients, and eventually the users mounting reasonably high after the pandemic, it is time we understood that there are no short-cuts to bringing customer delight. It is a wake-up call for organizations at large, to take radical decisions that help them combat the newest set of challenges.

Author



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