

RELATIONSHIP EQUITY: AN UNDEVELOPED ASSET

While access to the Internet did not create the need for improved interface design and attention to customer processes, it certainly delivered much needed justification for these activities. Embracing the Internet, however, returned responsibility for successful interaction back to the design of the application. In the past, well-planned corporate technology implementations generally ensured success by including a significant investment in user training. Users were “molded” by the training to fit the solution.

In the case of “in-house” applications, training simply taught employees to use a tool as it was designed — there was no assurance that the design either fit the overall process, nor the individual’s preferred workstyle. To compensate for designs that didn’t necessarily match their own reality, employees generally had to invent workarounds and shortcuts. Working with a tool long enough both to discover and perfect such workarounds took a significant investment in time and mental prowess on the part of employees. Asking customers to do the same on the Internet is a death warrant. It opens opportunity for anyone to offer a “better” experience — one without the effort. Bottom line: while switching costs are somewhat high for employees (they either need to find a new assignment or a new job), switching costs are very low for customers — if you don’t like the experience with one site, try another.

While companies are fairly competent at assessing and managing “real” costs (such as the cost of training), there is often no responsibility for assessing the less tangible costs of customers doing business with them. While many companies spend hundreds of thousands of dollars pursuing new business with various sales efforts (including investments in automated selling technologies), they will often have no resources allocated to identifying and eliminating any “barriers to entry” for customers who are trying to do business with them. Such barriers represent a “cost” to the customer — when the cost gets too “high” (either in time or effort), customers will go elsewhere. For really diligent customers, “elsewhere” may simply be another channel. Frustration over an online channel may cause them to seek out a phone channel — which is why access to information about other channels, such as phone numbers, is a critical component of online design.

Complicating the matter is the fact that even before the introduction of the Internet most companies had not optimized their processes to fit the needs of the individuals interacting with them over their existing channels. Adding an online experience only adds to the exposure of flaws in current processes.

With the growth of investments in Customer Relationship Management (CRM) activities, companies obviously understand that aspects of their core business strategies need to change. Unfortunately, a good portion of that investment is still being focused on sales automation. As noted earlier, investing in the pursuit of new customers is hardly commendable when the customers who can be obtained for “free” are somehow prevented from establishing a relationship with the company. Nor does a focus on improving sales (with a predominant focus on the pursuit of new business) really add to the building of relationships.

There are many well-detailed approaches for improving customer relationships and support as to why such effort is important. The most significant references for this detail include:

- Customers.com — How to Create a Profitable Business Strategy for the Internet and Beyond, by Patricia B. Seybold, Ronnie Marshak
- The One to One Fieldbook — The Complete toolkit for Implementing a 1 to 1 marketing program, by Don Peppers, Martha Rogers and Bob Dorf
- Now or Never — How Companies Must Change Today to Win the Battle for Internet Consumers, by Mary Modahl

In spite of the great detail these references provide, there is a slightly different perspective to their recommendations that seems to hold additional opportunity for businesses to capitalize on: the concept of increasing *relationship equity*.

LEVERAGING ECONOMIC FACTORS

An attribute specific to American business economics is a focus on the pursuit of profits. The recent falling-out-of-favor of internet-based companies was a reflection of this principle having been suspended for too long (patience ran thin).

There are two primary methods for increasing profits: increasing sales and/or decreasing costs. Particularly during economically challenging times, businesses will focus on one or both of these methods, but will often use poor judgement in their approach by pursuing short-term gains that are often accompanied by hidden costs. Sales may be temporarily increased, but if costs to sustain the sales are higher than normal costs, profits erode.

There is another method for increasing profits that is sometimes overlooked: increasing the equity of existing resources. Equity is the difference between the value something has to the “owner” and its value in the open market. If a company purchases a piece of equipment and that equipment is used in some way that it returns a value far and above its market worth, that added value is equity to the company. That equity can equate to reduced costs (by producing something for less cost than the competition) and/or increased profits (ability to sell more product at a higher margin).

When the principle of equity growth is considered and applied in business, it is most often associated with hard goods — such as a piece of equipment or land — or monetary capital. These things can often be monetized in some way to reflect “gains” on financial statements. Perhaps because it cannot be directly monetized, the potential of building equity in human capital goes largely untapped. The reference to human capital here does not just apply to what is more commonly referred to as human resources, or employees. The fact is, a company can be influenced, affected, and otherwise be a concern for a range of individuals collectively referred to as stakeholders: employees, customers, vendors/suppliers, stockholders.

Each of these different groups has some vested interest in the success of the company as an entity. Without a particular company, employees lose jobs, customers lose a source of products/services, vendors/suppliers lose valuable partnerships for their own existence, and stockholders lose the value of their investment. They all have an interest in the success of the company. It is a symbiotic relationship. By increasing the value of both sides of the relationship — the value of the company to the stakeholder and the value of the stakeholder to the company — the overall equity increases.

There may be some fairly advanced readers who have said to themselves, “Wait a minute. Wasn’t it the value of the relationships (with references and measures of “numbers of eyes” etc.) that internet-based companies were leveraging to support their models?” Indeed. But their models fell apart when the “equity” of the relationships did not hold enough value to sustain the relationships. In other words, the cost of switching relationships was less than the value of the relationship in the first place — customers sought and found other methods to fulfil their needs. Many companies simply failed in their ability to attract and retain online customers because their online processes were too costly in time and effort for it to be worth a relationship in the first place. Others miscalculated the demands of online customers in terms of what their expectations would be both online and offline, and failed to integrate the Internet as simply one additional means (albeit a very powerful *interactive* channel) to support and grow a relationship with customers.

THE SYNERGY OF RELATIONSHIPS

Increasing the value of customer relationships is a predominant principle in CRM practices. Most related advice is sound but stops short of identifying how to reach the recommended goals, other than in general terms. Specifically, most of the literature focuses on a specific “who” (the customer) rather than the “what” or the “why”. When these and other questions are brought into consideration, it becomes clear that the customer is not the only entity that requires attention. For all of the reasons given to improve and manage relationships with customers, those reasons equally apply to all stakeholders: employees, vendors, etc. Building relationships with stakeholders is in the best interest of a company; without the support of those stakeholders, the company, as an entity, will cease to exist. Serving the needs of one stakeholder at the exclusion of the others, will eventually cause an imbalance in the overall equilibrium, at which point no one is well served.

Indeed, companies have gained competitive advantage by improving relationships with “other” stakeholders. Wal-Mart provided daily sales information to their major suppliers to improve management of their supply chain; customers were better served by consistent “in stock” availability of products. The value of the information provided to the suppliers allowed them to lower their prices to Wal-Mart, who then passes on the savings to their customers.

Companies that have been held in esteem for their success at customer service cannot sustain those accomplishments without treating their employees with the same level of respect and courtesy. Clearly, the level of attention with which Nordstrom’s customers have reported to receive would not be possible if the staff did not clearly understand what it meant to be treated well. With a more mobile workforce and a strong correlation to career growth through change, companies have to work harder to build employee equity to disincite excess turnover (which can otherwise lead to decreases in customer satisfaction when continuity is lost). This illustrates that switching costs for employees is less than it has been in the past. If the employee has a number of factors that they have to seriously consider “giving up” when they leave a firm, those are the items of “equity” that employees hold in their relationship with the firm. They value that equity. Increasing that equity increases the cost to switch (as they have to forgo the value of the equity that has been built).

BUILDING STAKEHOLDER EQUITY: A FOCUS ON EMPLOYEES

Building solutions that clearly focus on increasing stakeholder equity takes a special approach. Such an approach is distinguished primarily by its focus on assessing what stakeholders value before determining what the solutions should deliver. These assessment activities would most closely align with the requirements phase of the typical systems development methodology. These activities are detailed later, within the context of a specific situation.

The strategies developed for distinct stakeholder groups will have similarities and differences. When developing a comprehensive corporate strategy for all stakeholder relationships, distinct plans would need to be made for: “retail” customers (B2C), “commercial” customers (B2B), vendors/suppliers (B2B), and employees (B2E). While the B2* term is generally associated with an online presence, this approach will focus on the “whole” relationship, regardless of channel. That is, requirements should not be gathered specifically for the needs of a Web delivery. Requirements should be gathered to focus on improving the relationship. Determining which channel enhances that relationship, under what conditions, is discovered as part of the process but is not the focus of the research.

The remainder of this text is presented in a way that could be part of a proposal (sample deliverable content) that sets the stage for engaging in equity building research. In this scenario, the “client” (internal or otherwise) was expecting the content to focus on improving their Web presence so the sample situation will appear to have a Web focus. The research (requirements gathering) that is conducted should clearly not have a Web-centric focus so that processes external to the online experience can be identified and optimized to ensure that the online experience is successful.

Because a good volume of work has already been published on improving customer relationships (and is equally applicable to other stakeholder relationships), the details of increasing stakeholder equity is illustrated by using an example of focusing on employees as stakeholders. The remainder of this paper focuses on a hypothetical situation. In this situation the intent is to improve the equity equation, specifically as it relates to one employee group: flight attendants for an airline. The model presented here, while focusing on a specific stakeholder group can be generally applied to other groups. Many references to “employee” (specifically as it relates to titles of deliverables, etc.) can generally be replaced with the term for any other stakeholder.

Some of the distinctions for delivering solutions for B2E are already embodied in the work and research of: Corporate or Enterprise Portals, Enterprise Content Management and Knowledge Management. The work of all of these disciplines can and should be leveraged and reworked to specifically support increasing employee equity.

THE VALUE OF EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIPS

Industry principles and practices for improving customer relationships are equally applicable to employee relationships. Employees, just as customers, need to be sought out and encouraged to establish and build improved relationships—the simple offer of employment is not enough in this competitive marketplace.

In this regard, when leveraged as an interactive communication channel rather than a simple information delivery tool, the Web becomes a vital strategic component to support and enhance relationships with stakeholders. Leveraging the potential of online interaction allows the company to gain advantage by improving their equity equation – increasing the net value of a relationship over its intrinsic market value. By having assets that are worth more than their market value, the company gains a competitive edge that others cannot attain – the unique value of their own human capital.

The challenge is that gaining this advantage requires making additional investments in “transient” assets – assets that can sever a relationship, such as human capital. There is risk in making an investment in an asset that has the power to take its value elsewhere. The goal is to ensure that the value that the company brings to the relationship is worth more than what is offered by the general market. A balance must be sought to increase both the worth of an employee to the company and the worth of the company to the employee – reciprocal equity.

UNIQUE CONSIDERATIONS FOR FLIGHT ATTENDANTS

In recruiting, hiring, and retaining exceptional flight attendants, the company faces particular challenges. Consider the following:



- ❑ **Strength in Numbers**
Since 1990, the growth rate in flight attendant positions across the industry has increased by 1% annually. The body of attendants serving this company represents a large portion of the whole industry (99,000 in 1998). This collective represents an “imposing” force in the industry. With the support of their union, they can leverage attention.

- ❑ **Demand Drives Opportunity**
This airline has consistently increased the number of

flight hours it logs each year. As these hours increase, demand will continue to grow for flight attendants to provide customer service. More staff will continue to be required.

- ❑ **Candidate Pool is Shrinking**
In 1990 the US Department of Labor predicted that the number of applicants would far outstrip the number of available jobs through the year 2000. By the year 1998, the number of applicants was nearly equal to the number of openings. But there is more to this fact. Over the years the airlines have dropped many restrictions on weight, age and other “unwritten” factors. This means that during this time, the available pool of applicants has increased, yet the number of applicants has just kept pace with the growth. In real terms, the pool of applicants is shrinking. This poses significant attraction and retention challenges for all airlines.

- ❑ **Salary is not the Draw**
The median entry-level salary reported for flight attendants in 1998 was \$13,350. This represents a 0.3% annualized growth rate since 1990 — losing ground against inflation. With a minimum requirement for 2 years education or work experience beyond a high school diploma. This is not a job that is pursued for income potential.
- ❑ **Comparable Jobs Pay More**
The US Department of Labor compares the work of a flight attendant to an emergency medical technician. Even after 6 years of experience, flight attendants do not make the same median salary as an entry level EMT.
- ❑ **Traditional “Perks” are Losing Ground**
Many of the benefits that are touted to “make up” for the lesser salary are losing their luster. While flight attendants are said to have an average of 15 days off a month, nearly 1/3 of that will be “lost” in time away from home due to layovers and flight cancellations. Schedules are variable, so second job opportunities must allow for extreme flexibility. The physical and emotional demands of the job can be taxing.
- ❑ **No Incentives for “Off the Clock” Activities**
While the rules vary from airline to airline, flight attendants are not necessarily paid for all of the hours they are required to be “on the clock” for the company. Paperwork is often done during uncompensated hours; most customer interaction requires some sort of paperwork. This means that there is a disincentive for meeting longer-term customer needs such as ongoing relationship building activities. The industry sends the message that these activities do not provide enough value to warrant compensation.



STAKING A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

NEW ERA DEMANDS NEW STRATEGIES

To maintain a resource base of quality flight attendants, changing market conditions will require the company to adopt new strategies and practices. As the market continues to change, practices will need to be tried, reworked, abandoned and otherwise modified. The evolving environment requires a continuous rate of change that hasn't been experienced before. Creating an infrastructure to support continuous change will be mandatory.

RESEARCH ESSENTIAL FOR ACTION

Decisions as to what actions to take and when to take them become more critical: There is little room for arbitrary action. Planned actions should be assessed and prioritized based on greatest potential for return. Field research must be conducted to identify those things that would attract and retain flight attendants. The challenge for this research is that it must be well designed. Surveys are not they only, nor necessarily the best method of soliciting feedback. When you are hungry and go into a nice restaurant, everything on the menu looks good.

LISTENING IMPROVES RESULTS

This level of research requires a commitment to financial investments that go beyond the historical “requirements gathering” approach. Indeed, this research can and should use increasing proportions of overall budgets, and it should be budgeted based on continuous efforts, not work loaded in the early stages. How can this investment be justified? Recently, the Director of Design for IBM.com reported that after many years and

different versions of their public Web site, they finally released a new design that was entirely based on user feedback and requests as opposed to internal department drivers. The results during the first week were an increase in sales by 400%.

While much of what is outlined here focuses on improving research done in the early phases, it is no less important to continue to “listen” to the parties of the relationship during each and every interaction they engage in and remember what they “said”. Designing for relationship “memory” requires additional investment above and beyond the initial research.

INCREASING THE EQUITY EQUATION



Engaging in a relationship requires some form of interaction between two entities. The Web provides an environment that uniquely optimizes opportunity for interaction. In particular, it allows for each individual to choose to engage in the relationship at a time that is convenient for them and for the length of time that is appropriate for the moment.

However, a relationship must be optimized through all channels of interaction, not just the online environment. It does little good to optimize an online channel, if the relationship goes awry in another channel. All channels — email, mail, phone, in person, etc. — are interdependent. Regardless of the channel, strengthening relationships requires attention to key activities:

- ❑ **Establish**
Due to the general nature of a Union-based workforce, lack of trust is an inherent barrier to successfully establishing anything more than a symbiotic relationship. By working to better understand the cause of mistrust and the opportunities to build trust, a specific plan can be developed to move beyond mere mutual dependence.
- ❑ **Build**
An infrastructure is put in place to allow a relationship to be established and flourish. Between two individuals, some sort of “protocol” might be agreed upon as to how they will relate to one another, allowing for environmental factors. If there is physical distance between them, they might exchange addresses or phone numbers - without which they could not interact at a distance. Other considerations are given to identify and remove barriers.
- ❑ **Nurture**
These types of activities would relate to the “care and feeding” of the relationship; the kinds

of actions that imply a commitment to the success and continuation of the relationship. These activities would also focus on the “listening” and “remembering” aspects of the relationship.

❑ **Enhance**

While nurturing activities are more aligned to the “basic” needs of a relationship, enhancing activities are those which hold the greatest potential to increase the equity equation. These are the unexpected surprises and actions that are truly personal in nature. Such personal touches cannot be added without truly understanding the individual needs of the recipient.

DOING THE HOMEWORK

The dynamics of building relationships with “many” individuals is far more complex than building personal relationships. While there are many unique ways to optimize “collective” relationships, just as in personal relationships, getting to know individuals a bit better is a good place to start.

Through ethnographic methods, research is conducted to identify what employees want and need to better interact with and maintain a relationship with the company. Results are gathered to create a series of deliverables that identify the following:

- ❑ Touchpoint Analysis or Interaction Leverage Opportunities
- ❑ Key Employee Processes
- ❑ Employee Personas/Scenarios
- ❑ Key Interaction Business Rules
- ❑ Employee Value Assessment
- ❑ Cross-channel Optimization
- ❑ Personalization Opportunities
- ❑ Organizational/Cultural Design Optimization

These deliverables become the requirements not only for building an interactive environment, but also for optimizing employee interactions across all channels.



TOUCHPOINT ANALYSIS AND INTERACTION LEVERAGE OPPORTUNITIES

While either of these titles could be used for the same report, each has connotations that are somewhat distinct. While two separate deliverables might be created, the “fact gathering” for both reports would be done at the same time, with the same individuals, with distinctions in questions that most employees wouldn’t recognize as being “different”.

The main focus of a *Touchpoint Analysis* is to identify those processes that involve the relationship of the company to a stakeholder (employee, retail customer, commercial customer, vendor/supplier). In the particular case of the employee-to-company or company-to-employee relationship, this research will more specifically focus on activities that are of a “personal” nature such as the types of tasks that would interface directly with Human Resources, rather than the relationship of the employee to their own work tasks. In the analysis, specific ethnographic research is conducted to identify:

- ❑ The various channels that either the employee or the company uses/prefers for relationship tasks (mail, email, phone, online, in-person)
- ❑ Whether or not processes are seamlessly integrated across channels
- ❑ Whether or not there are exception management processes to support cross-channel activities (that might get “lost”) and to support those needs that fall outside the “norm”

- ❑ Whether or not there are adequate feedback loops built into each channels to continuously improve the process

Once the touchpoints have been identified, then it is determined how to optimize those interactions. There might be a series of reports to determine appropriate optimization and subsequently a series of strategies will be developed to address those areas. For example, a strategy would need to be developed to optimize the use of content. While content is a term that generally applies to online interaction, it equally applies to the menus and scripts on automated phone systems and literature/forms distributed in physical form to employees.

The details of the research done for managing content might include the discovery of:

- ❑ How content is currently being leveraged
- ❑ Whether or not the “form” is effective (if errors are occurring and/or people are having problems, the “understanding” quotient needs to be tested)
- ❑ Whether or not there are current processes/tasks that can be enhanced by links/access to existing or new content

KEY EMPLOYEE PROCESSES

As the aforementioned research is conducted, there will be a variety of processes identified. Those processes should be captured in a comprehensive fashion, if possible, in a process management tool that goes beyond a simple graphical representation. These process representations then themselves become “content” items that can be used to link directly to critical content that supports these processes.

This deliverable becomes a more concise, comprehensive representation of the research conducted above and is “actionable” in this form (if the appropriate technology is engaged).

EMPLOYEE PERSONAS/SCENARIOS

Each employee will approach processes with a perspective that is shaped by their:

- ❑ Role
- ❑ Responsibility / Goal
- ❑ Level of experience
- ❑ Workstyle or personal approach

A series of personas are developed to represent some of the key “perspectives” of major groups of employees, as distinguished by the attributes above. Each of these personas is then put in a “setting” to accomplish some of their predominant (most oft repeated) activities. Each setting can result in multiple activities that an individual may attempt to engage in while interacting with the company. Each of these, with any variation, becomes a separate scenario.

Scenarios capture the details of specific processes of interaction. Managing these with added attributes can be very powerful. For example, if a database was established to manage scenarios, one entry would be the scenario itself. Another might be the actor(s). Then focusing on some of the less obvious types of attributes, one very significant one would be an attribute that defines whether or not the scenario has been validated — whether or not there is empirical evidence that this situation actually occurs (which could be validated by experience, over time). Another attribute might indicate how significant the scenario is (the equity value to the employee) to determine the impact of changing or eliminating support for such a scenario.

When the design of processes are driven by the data supported by a scenario database, the opportunity for disagreement (opinions as to what actions are “right”) can be more readily mitigated — it’s no longer a matter of opinion.

EMPLOYEE VALUE ASSESSMENT

Drawing deductions from the other research conducted, this report helps to define which features provide the most value to the individuals using the system and whether or not changes in the design are needed to further optimize interactions.

While there has been mention of including some metric that identifies the value of a particular scenario to employees, this report would include the detail of why and how the value applies.

Before the design, assessing what employees value will be mainly dependent on what they say. But research suggests that equally important is what they do. Data to support both of these is gathered through effective feedback loops in the design of the system. This would allow individuals to comment on any problems encountered as they happen (problems decrease the value of the site). But there should also be periodic reviews of the site design that assess value based on deductions that can be drawn (and can also be validated through interviews) from site statistics: high/low page hits, point of entry/exit assessments, etc. Also to be considered should be feedback from the Help Desk (or other support function), including artifacts discovered in records kept and through support personnel interviews.

KEY INTERACTION BUSINESS RULES

There will be any number of rules that define the nature, condition and various “state” considerations of a relationship. For example, if an employee is “on leave”, rules that govern their relationship with a company may be different than when they are not on leave. All of these rules need to be defined and managed in order to be consistently applied across multiple channels. As companies increase in complexity, word of mouth and/or the ability to find the right document which contains such rules, may prove to be less than optimal.

Having business rules managed in a central location allows a company to more quickly modify the rules and have them be applied across all related channels. Having the business rules tied to their related processes helps to identify any impact the rules will have on the processes. Thus appropriate changes can be put in place to avoid process breakdown. All of these activities are necessary to avoid adding conflicts in relationships.

Focusing specifically on the management of the Web, there are business rules to be considered for something as “minute” as the management of content. In this case, there are specific rules that should be considered to assure the “validity” of content, which can be impacted by the following conditions:

❑ Timeliness

Particularly as it relates to policy, there may be a need to include a history of policy as it related to specific timeframes. For example, a certain policy may have changed, but it is important to have access to what the policy was 6 months ago. Content of this type should include (not only as part of the metadata, but also visually represented as part of the displayed content) some form of “Valid Starting” and “Valid To” dates. Other content should just “expire” after the “Valid To” dates are exceeded. These decisions have to be made for all content.

❑ Freshness

All content should be reviewed over a periodic basis to assess whether or not a change in conditions impacts the validity of the content. Each content item should have a date set for review and a process put in place to “pull” items and put them into a review process before their “expiration” date.

CROSS-CHANNEL OPTIMIZATION

Once key processes can be prioritized based on value, the processes need to be designed to support access and involvement through a variety of channels. Various scenarios are considered and supported with experience data. Based on observations of past employee behaviors, processes are designed to support the channels they prefer to use to complete processes. If there are business reasons to justify the use of a particular channel — for example, online form filling may be

significantly less expensive than its paper-based alternative — incentives need to be put in place to increase the value of the online channel to the employee.

What those incentives need to be will depend on the individual situation. A focus on incentives should not detract from an evaluation to identify any disincentives. Often, certain channels are avoided because the “cost” to use the channel is beyond the participant’s willingness to invest. This should be considered a design flaw and corrected.

Cross-channel optimization implies that for each process, any channel that can participate in the process is designed to support the others.

PERSONALIZATION OPPORTUNITIES

As a result of observations made by creating the previous deliverables, it may be obvious that certain content can be more effective if provided in different forms/tones. As a result of the Stakeholder Personas/Scenarios, and from observations made from server statistics, it may be recognized that certain types of individuals may need content that is more specifically designed to meet their needs. Clues for personalization opportunities may be found in “failure” points: site statistics that show individuals consistently leaving a certain page (particularly if it is not a “logical” point of exit), or obvious points of “misunderstanding” identified by the Help Desk, that seem to occur more frequently for certain groups of users.

ORGANIZATIONAL/CULTURE DESIGN OPTIMIZATION

While some of the artifacts already described might appear to be key deliverables for defining organizational change (processes, rules, etc.) there are deeper influences to be identified and considered. An organization is an organism. It survives just like any other living entity:

- By successfully obtaining and effectively utilizing life-sustaining resources
- Through symbiotic relationships with other entities
- By adapting to stimulus from the surrounding environment
- By providing value (contribution) to the greater whole

Like other organisms companies are also subject to the rules of “survival of the fittest”. Companies gain competitive advantage by leveraging differentiators. In today’s fast-moving, dynamic environment the ability to maintain an industry distinction for an extended period of time is limited. Therefore, companies cannot maintain competitive advantage without continuous evolution.

Such evolution can be supported or negated by a number of factors. Organizations have a culture and a self-sustaining energy that are both fed and constrained by:

- What has gone before (corporate lore)
- The “tone” of the tribal language (corporate lingo)
- The unwritten rules of engagement (corporate mode)

These things contribute to the essence of an organization— things that make it what it is. Good or bad, it simply “is”. Trying to change an organization requires that its essence be respected. Organizations, just like individuals, cannot change their personal code overnight. The theory of self-reference proposes that an organism can only grow and develop based on its own sense of where it is and where it has been. To ignore this concept would be like trying to attempt a personality transplant on an individual. The likely result would be some form of psychosis— the adaptation to something so totally foreign that is “packaged” into an acceptable reality.

The only successful method of quickly changing from one personality to another is to kill the self-memory and eliminate the host. Some companies have found cause to take such radical action in order to move forward and survive. Others simply create a new host to start anew.

When a radical approach is not appropriate, there are effective methods for supporting evolution. To support evolution to a more relationship-focused organization there are a variety of activities to be defined and implemented. These activities should be defined and implemented by a combination of professional discipline specialists adept at:

- ❑ Organizational design
- ❑ Corporate anthropology
- ❑ Change management
- ❑ Performance consulting
- ❑ Systems thinking
- ❑ Core competency strategy

While additional definition of the resulting activities are outside the scope of this paper, the implementation of these activities are imperative to the success of all other efforts defined herein.

REPRESENTING THE NEEDS

The following persona is offered as an example of the form the research deliverables would take. Based on some general deductions made from flight attendant demographics, we introduce the fictional employee, Kristin Monroe.

MEET KRISTIN

Kristin is a 22-year-old, single female who has been with this airline as a flight attendant for 2 years.



While Kristin originally intended to get a 4-year degree in physical education at Arizona State, during her sophomore year she took part in a local competitive biking event and was “hooked”. With youth and health on her side, Kristin decided that completing her 4-year degree could be put on hold to pursue her passion and ability to become a serious competitor in mountain bike events. After considering various options, Kristin concluded that being a flight attendant would provide a flexible working schedule to accommodate training and events. She was also enticed by flight privileges that would enable her to attend international events.

While Kristin discovered that entry level pay for flight attendants was not competitive to other career options, for now, the flexibility and the travel benefits provided added value that other jobs could not. In addition, she planned to work her way into equipment sponsorships to defray additional costs. If she was successful, her income could be augmented by the occasional winnings from an event. The public attention and the

personal well-being offered by this pursuit of her passion, held additional value for her.

Sharing an apartment with 2 other flight attendants, helps Kristin is to control costs and share general living responsibilities.

KRISTIN’S CHALLENGES

While Kristin doesn’t have sights on competing in the Olympics, she does have goals as to the number of events that she wants to compete in. While her plans have worked generally well, thus far, Kristin is beginning to get frustrated by being “stuck” in a reserve status. She finds it increasingly difficult to try and fit her schedule around events.

One time while bidding, Kristin didn’t have her personal calendar with her and ended up bidding for a flight that conflicted with a major event she had been looking forward to for some time. She has discovered, often after the fact, that there were individuals who could have covered for her, but there was no way for her to find them and negotiate an exchange of schedules.



Her time away (layovers), while considered “time off” is not at home where she has her bike and training routine, so she has to compensate in other ways. Combining the physical demands as a flight attendant with her rigorous training, Kristin from time to time has needed the services of a sports medicine professional and/or equipment for therapy. She has found it difficult to find qualified services when she is in other cities.

Kristin is also finding it increasingly difficult to successfully fly standby due to what seems to be a trend of increased overloads and cancelled flights.



Being a true road warrior, Kristin is personally challenged by managing finances. Since she is more often away from home than not, she needs to manage a variety of activities on the road such as general banking, bill paying, and tax preparation (both US and state).

Kristin realized that she had spent a lot of time making discoveries about her various “off time” destinations that she wished someone might have shared with her before she got there. She truly wants to be able to share some of her discoveries with her colleagues. She would also like to plan a more informal biking “encounter”, and coordinate it to share with other biking enthusiasts across the company.



AFFINITY TO THIS AIRLINE

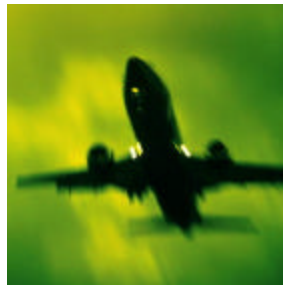
There are a number of reasons that Kristin has chosen to stay with this airline. She:

- ❑ Prefers their mix of bases/hubs (as potential work destinations)



- ❑ Likes the destinations available to her for personal travel, particularly international cities

- ❑ Is comfortable with their safety record



- ❑ Generally enjoys the rewarding moments of customer service opportunities



- ❑ Has found that there is something about this airline that seems to present a more friendly, congenial culture than some of her colleagues experience at other airlines

DIVINING THE DETAILS

To identify and prioritize key content and functions to be featured on the site, some questions that should be answered as part of the research findings might include:

- ❑ What percentage of the collective of flight attendants does Kristin's persona represent? Her situation, while specific to competitive biking, could be extrapolated to any other type of personal endeavor/passion for which travel benefits provide significant value, and still be generally valid.
- ❑ How many other "segments" of fairly unique attributes of employees should be represented by a persona?
- ❑ Because of the irregular schedules, does this career attract/retain fewer mothers than the average? What is the significance of this for attraction/retention strategies?
- ❑ Do those individuals who choose to combine this job with motherhood (or even fatherhood) have special needs/priorities/challenges?
- ❑ Because of the physical and environmental demands of the job, what percent of employees attrit due to injury or lack of well being? If significant in number, what can be done to lessen the effect of or improve the endurance of these demands?
- ❑ Do male flight attendants have any unique needs that are distinct from female attendants?
- ❑ What personal attributes are common among individuals who most enjoy their role as flight attendant? Do the unmet needs of these individuals differ from the "rest"?
- ❑ What barriers (perceived or otherwise) inhibit an individual's ability to perform their job at levels they would consider their personal best?
- ❑ What percentage of flight attendants works second jobs? What are the most frequent types of jobs engaged in?
- ❑ What percentage of flight attendants wants to work additional paid hours? How does this impact the "informal" bidding process?
- ❑ Is this airline prepared to recognize and support a more flexible bidding process that would essentially eliminate an informal (black market) bidding process?
- ❑ What are the most effective ways to strengthen the flight attendants' sense of community: as a professional practice and as employees of this airline? Are there things that can be done to extend this "bond" to readily include new hires?
- ❑ How strong is the resistance factor (lack of trust) of flight attendants to their employer? What key actions could alleviate this factor and/or modify perceptions?
- ❑ How willing are flight attendants to openly share their concerns? What types of feedback mechanisms would be most effective on the site? What are minimal expectations as to the responses to feedback on the part of the flight attendants?
- ❑ Do the attributes of these flight attendants differ that much from the industry at large? What impact does/should this have on recruiting/retention?
- ❑ How is seniority viewed among the ranks? Are there significant segments that seem to defy other segments that are more specific to seniority banding? What about distinctions in lineholder or reserve status?



CONCLUSIONS

By identifying and validating employees' most significant needs, a company increases their equity stake in the employees' values. The greater the mutual equity value, the less likely a relationship will be severed.

As the distinctions between job life and personal life continue to blur, companies should recognize and address employees' *whole* needs, without distinction between work and personal activities. Certainly, prioritization and investment in features/functions to support employee needs should consider value to the company, but in an overall assessment, an item with high priority to employees will have some inherent value to the company (even if not explicitly quantifiable) if satisfied.

As illustrated by the Kristen persona, there are very specific reasons why individuals decide to stay with a particular career and employer. Companies continue to invest in any variety of employee-facing activities (most frequently initiated and implemented by Human Resource staff), assuming that they are somehow going to improve employee loyalty. If those items are not found among the highest priorities of employees' feedback, they are wasted investments.

While the analysis and research defined by this paper is based on strategic principles of Information Architecture (specifically as it relates to Web development), the findings are applicable to all business strategies that affect relationships. By recognizing the broader value of this research, investment in these activities is more readily justifiable.

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