

7 Questions with Bright Horse

Do you want to learn more about Experience and Experience Management from the experts? In these monthly volumes we will be speaking with exciting people who want to share their journey to XLAs . We will learn about their personal journey to experience management, the real-time business insights and advantages of measuring experience and hints and tips about how to succeed in this revolutionary movement. So, sit back and enjoy !

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July's Guest:
Ivor Macfarlane

I've been around a long time, working in service management of one kind or another since 1976, and in the IT version since the 1980s. All that time my passion has been about applying common sense to the work environment. That's driven by seeing how useful everyday common sense and experience is to our work situation as well as our personal one. And also a bit by how much IT people want the answer to be some shiny new tool instead of thinking simply and sensibly.

I worked 23 years for UK government - spending time in forestry, prisons, stores, IT and more - and 30+ years working on and with ITIL. A few periods of being an independent and 7 years with IBM. I'm now supposed to be retired and lazy, living in Portugal; but I can't resist it when someone offers me something interesting to do so I keep a little bit busy still.

I'm not actually in an organisation at all, much less one that is having real adventures in Experience management. The best I can do is answer parallel - or at least hopefully similar - questions about what I can see, what I have seen and why CX matters.

Let's talk!

Tell us about your journey to implementing improved Experience Management and XLAs. How? When? Why?

I think the important journey for me is in terms of how the formalization of CX and how/why it should be measured, analysed and improved is driving organisation towards doing what should always have been screamingly obvious common sense. Every organisation relies on its customers to support them. If your customers don't get what they need then obviously you cannot thrive.

But what should also be clear is that if it isn't easy and pleasant to get what they need then they will either go without or seek an alternative. It is easy to see that in a purely commercial situation - if you have a market stall and it's hard to reach, or the staff are rude then customers will not turn up. But just as true in an internal situation - make your IT unapproachable and the internal customers won't approach you. That leads to a whole range of damage and missed opportunities, from not making best use of the IT available to outsourcing the entire function.

So, back nearer the question - I think we are seeing - and will continue to see a range of journeys:

- Organisations who are not succeeding, who see Experience Management as a way to correct their previous bad performance by helping them target changes to deliver customer needs and therefore generate support from their customer base to enable IT survival
- Those who have always cared about keeping the customer happy seeing the new products as tools to help them improve
- Those that just jump on the latest fashion statement or bandwagon and see Experience Management as the new thing to do. But even they will get benefit if they really do some work there - until they get distracted by the next fashion that come along :(

In your opinion what has caused organisations to focus on Experience Management?

Some of the previous answer applies here too I think. The best organisations will see it as delivering new ideas, new tools and new techniques that help them travel a road they were already on. Others will look at it as a way to get (or get back) customer support and respect.

And some see it as means to help them find out whether or not they are getting things right.

How has the implementation of Experience Management improved your business?

I'm not in business but no business should be able to survive if it doesn't care what their customers think or feel. One key element that adopting a more formalised approach can deliver is - finally - helping organisations get some concrete evidence on how complicated and varied their customer and stakeholder environment can be. Just starting to measure customer experience requires a firm definition of who the customer is. Often the answer to that question turns out to be harder than expected - and sometimes the answer is a surprise.

Once you know that then gathering and analysing the data on customer experience has to offer quick and dramatic opportunities for improvement. And discovering previously ignored stakeholders and bringing them into the fold can be an important quick win.

How would you define Experience/Digital Experience Management?

Knowing that the opinion of those we support matters, measuring it and taking note of what we find.

Or - common sense.



What advice would you give companies who are starting out on their Experience Management Journey?

Do something soon. Establish who you should care about and find out what matters to them. Before you get into detailed and precise measurement, analysis and recommendations, just go talk to people and get a feel for the landscape and the potential. Not just the customers but your own front line staff – in most organisations the service desk know how customers and users feel, what bothers them, what pleases them etc. There is much to learn from sitting with the service desk, sitting with customers and – critically – users. Formal things like surveys and focus groups are grand but start with something less formal – get up, walk about and chat.

And finally, what is something that recently made you smile?

Well, my first thought on that question is something I probably shouldn't share. But in Customer experience terms, one thing that always leaves me cheered is when, while going through the check out in the supermarket, the check-out operator will hear my accent or hear me talking with my wife and try out their English for us. Just a little demonstration of their effort to help me and put me at ease. I find it reassuring about human nature. It also helps a lot because my Portuguese is still practically non-existent.

Share with us a time in your life where experience affected your decision

Every day for the last 60 years (at least). Even if you don't want to admit, we are all influenced by what has happened to us before. I still carry grudges and refuse to use companies and places where I had a bad experience years and years ago. There is one airline I will never use again – there is a credit card company that, although I know they have changed their attitudes a lot – I still would never return to.

One of the key things we should all take away from our personal experiences is how a single unrepresentative experience can overshadow so much good. For me, one instance of bad driving manners in Northern Italy put me off a whole country. And yet also we have bad experiences that – somehow – do not destroy our broader faith: being robbed at gunpoint didn't put me off Brazil altogether.

That innate illogicality is (I think) a key message for us in trying to measure and use customer experience. People are not simple logical things and if we presume to understand from simple measurement and observation then we will be wrong a lot of the time. One of the (less than reassuring) features of most of the IT professionals I've worked with in the last 50 years is their presumption that others' skills are easy to master, and that IT can just do it themselves. In this instance measurement, surveys, human-related data gathering is the prime example. Anyone who has been issued with the kind of simple survey monkey questionnaire used by IT departments to (fail to) discover user satisfaction knows this.

IT needs to realise that this is a complex exercise and they should make use of the professional experience and technology available. BTW I should declare an interest here: my daughter is a research director a leading market research/opinion measurement company – the difference between her approach and the amateur IT one I see a lot is embarrassing.

