

TOMORROW:AM

Better than world class?

Implanting brand distinctiveness into the way your business thinks and acts

Marketing Week Employee Brand Engagement conference 28 April 2008

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The sixth force

Companies spend much time, and money, shaping a differentiated customer and consumer experience. Yet often the employees' working experience is similar – apart from the occasional away-day or event.

In many disciplines (such as my background in fmcg marketing) personnel rotate between employers every two or three years, with greater loyalty to their profession than their job.

Many companies have almost nothing to set them apart from the inside. Even the environments look the same – down to the tedious, ubiquitous style of open plan offices.

Porter's five force model is the nearest thing to marketing orthodoxy. Yet it omits the impact of the employees: the interaction between company and workforce. This is a hidden sixth force, at least equal in strength: the alignment of employees to the company's goals and approach.

It is this factor that explains the differential success of competitors within a market, yet it is normally omitted not only by 'outside in' models such as Porter, and also by 'inside out' models, which frequently define employee engagement in the narrow sense of employee satisfaction.

Flawed by definition

Brand engagement [n] 1. *the process of forming an attachment (emotional and rational) between employee and brand*

A pure employee retention perspective. Not only is this too limited, it is also false – it is not always in the business' interest to have 'attached' employees.

Brand engagement [n] 2. *the alignment of an organisation's people and processes through the brand to ensure services, products and their delivery consistently live up to the brand promise*

This definition reflects how employee engagement impacts brand equity by shaping the customer/ consumer experience: directly for service providers, but implicitly for product manufacturers too, through the quality of communications, activations and innovations, and through intermediary relationships.

Some benefits of employee brand engagement

- Loyalty: Increased staff retention: lower costs of staff churn.
- Recruitment: Employer brand reputation: higher quality and ease of recruitment.
- Communication: Employees as a media channel to customers and intermediaries.
- Product/service: Employees as customer brand experience: deeper, richer experience.
- Approach: Brand as way of working: more consistently aligned and effective thinking.

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Reaping the benefit of a branded way

If the brand encapsulates a motivating idea, how can that shape everything the company does? Across the organisation – not just marketers, but sales, finance and operations.

The value is in devolved thinking – knowing that across the organisation, people are making choices based on better assumptions and common judgement criteria.

- Take better decisions
 - Key business imperatives can be hard-wired in
- Interact better between global and local teams
 - Greater local judgement reduces the need for quality supervision.
- Reduce the cost of conflict
 - More aligned contributors (across internal functions and suppliers).

Finding the right way

Bespoke corporate principles and processes must harness:

- Market position and category realities
 - Ensuring employees grasp the realities of context.
- Capabilities and competencies
 - Ensuring employees intuitively exploit the company's true strengths.
- Brand and culture assets
 - Ensuring the whole company 'lives' the strength of its brand
- Leadership vision/ mission
 - Imbuing a common purpose

Case study: defining The InBev Way

InBev, the world's leading brewer, sells global brands such as Stella Artois, Becks and Brahma, as well as local champions including Cass (Korea), Chernigivske (Ukraine), Jupiler (Belgium), Klinskoye (Russia), Labatt (Canada), Sedrin (China) and Skol (Brazil).

Our culture is about ownership – a spirit of individual and team responsibility, where results are earned through hard work and disciplined execution with no short cuts. InBev's culture defines us as a company, unites us wherever we do business, and is the one thing our competitors can never copy. Above all, we are a sales driven company, and everything we do is geared towards our mission of creating enduring bonds with consumers through brands and experiences that bring people together.

source: inbev.com

Implications for InBev's employee brand engagement?

- World's leading brewer: Establish horizons beyond the beer category: market definition
- Local champions: Build the bedrock of national brands: devolved approach to strategy
- 'Ownership': Foster an investor culture: investment justification, not budget allocation
- 'Enduring bonds': Go beyond functional: premium brands not commoditised products
- 'Together': Focus on the point of purchase: from media led to experience led

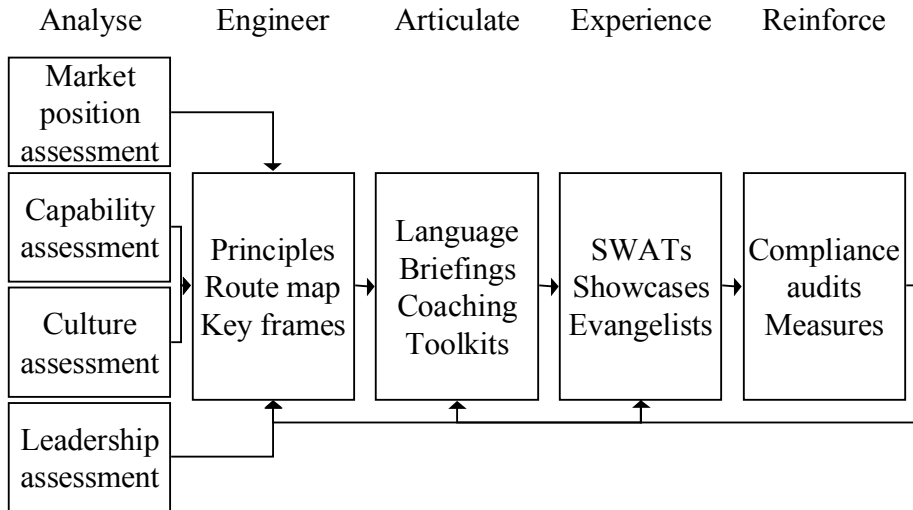
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Beyond 'World Class'

World Class is a common cry of organisation leadership seeking to establish consistent and better working processes across global organisations. World class is an attractive idea, but implicitly generic. Training programmes teaching 'best practice' skills – from negotiations to shift management – serve to make organisations more similar, not more different.

'Best practice' is often actually counter-productive – a distraction from the important job of shaping a distinctive working culture.

Tomorrow:AM's approach to employee brand engagement



1. Analyse

Explore what makes your way unique. What factors affect your options? Consider competitors. Where are the real differences? A well expressed 'mission'/ 'vision' or a clear corporate positioning will already address this. But beware, until now it may have only existed on the company website or in corporate advertising. You are about to put it in to practice. Do not rely on the words. Make the analysis robust.

2. Engineer

Build a chassis. Envisage how the behaviour should work. What questions will get asked? What decisions will get made? What are the key milestones and supporting documents?

- Key frames (shape counts) can be the lasting imprint (but the fewer the better)
- Avoid over-quantification of judgement making
- Keep definitions precise

Roll out a few core processes first. Engage different functions in sequence..

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3. Articulate

Express it coherently

- as a single narrative: to make it simple to understand (avoiding gratuitous terminology)
- as a 'deduced' solution: to make it unarguable – the natural product of your situation
- in a language that's yours: real value in using bespoke terminology to set yourself apart. (industry jargon, by comparison, has exactly the opposite effect)

Build an appropriate system of briefings, coaching, tool-kits etc. to propagate the approach.

4. Experience

Intervention – moving from talk to action – is critical, but often omitted. This is the opportunity to overcome cynicism, squeeze out 'lip service' and 'box filling', draw out best practice examples. There are a number of ways to structure interventions, for example:

- **SWAT:** Send expert teams to work in market with teams tackling challenging projects. By committing to quality and to addressing the real issues this technique creates best practice, builds good will and road-tests the process.
 - **Showcases:** Build pathways for best practice, to share experiences across the organisation. This reinforces the matrix – acknowledging the diffusion of expertise. It builds momentum as theory visibly turns into practice. It keeps the process rooted in the business while cementing common language.
 - **Evangelist networks:** Identify the key audiences with most impact and disproportionately invest time with them. As well as streamlining the programme, this can lead to a greater sense of shared ownership across the organisation.
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5. Reinforce

Implement a system to monitor whether the hard-wired behaviours are sticking and techniques being applied. The first 12 to 18 months is critical: once its been around longer than that, it is probably there for good. Learnings here help to tighten the structure, refine and streamline the communication, and select further interventions

Channelling not crushing

Advocates of brand 'alignment' often imply that employees should be emotionally aligned, rather than 'restricted' by process. In their model, employees must merely be inspired by vision. I disagree. Aligned teams share behaviours not just attitudes. Channelling thinking can liberate it – any ad agency knows it is easier to be creative from a tight brief. Establishing distinctive ways of working actually makes it easier to transmit vision simultaneously. People come out of the immersion excited about the tools available and challenges faced.

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Dialogue beats communication

The best experiences and reinforcements move from (parent-child) communication to (peer-peer) dialogue and word of mouth: more compelling, and more long lasting..

Digital environments offer huge scope because they enable the initiation of internal communities for employees to explore whether every part of the organisation lives the brand.

Learn from consumer marketing

- **Research:** Employee surveys and internal focus groups help set the agenda. How well do you actually know what your employees think? And how they really behave?
- **Activate don't just communicate:** Evolve internal channels. Employee brand engagement is fundamentally experiential. The weekly corporate email has limited cut through. One-way messages are less effectively internalised and remembered.
- **Be singleminded:** The greater the clarity of the corporate brand, the more likely to connect. Revisit the vision to find a single brand narrative. Carve it out if necessary.
- **Substantiate:** Prove the solution as a product of the situation. Amplify decisions taken and sacrifices made because of it. Empty claims and promises fade or fail.

Footnotes – Tomorrow:AM experience in employee engagement

Alex Bicknell has 8 years consultancy experience working with large organisations to develop and implement distinctive brand experiences for both customers and employees.

Projects that Tomorrow:AM has collaborated on in the last year include:

- Defining and implementing a people-driven global positioning for **Ernst & Young**. Specific focus on the roles of HR and the learning and development agenda
- Building better marketing plans with **Unilever** brand teams in Europe and Asia through hands on application of a shared global process
- Continuing to define and refine the **InBev** Way and engage with key markets to build skills and common language

Ready for Tomorrow:AM?

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