

Beyond the Brand: Balancing the Business Personality

No longer the threadbare cliché of old, in the world of the service provider, people are truly the most important asset. Without good people, there can be no viable long-term business, and so attracting good people is crucial. However, it doesn't stop there. Good people represent the skills, competences and capabilities of the business, and are the driving force behind the development of efficient business processes. They are the product and they represent the viability of the business. Beyond attracting them, it is important to nurture them and invest in them, or risk losing them.

However, there is another, less obvious aspect of the function of the employee within a services-led business, which has a direct impact upon the organisation's prospects for success in the marketplace. Once embedded within the organisation, each employee exercises a subtle influence over the personality of the organisation as they go about their daily routines. Whether through formal meetings, informal chat, the development of customer relationships, interfacing with suppliers or simply talking to colleagues within the organisation, people communicate. In doing so, norms develop, opinions are voiced, and an ever-changing or dynamic equilibrium emerges. The bottom line is that each conversation and each action represents the essence of a fluid business personality.

In a world where communication with the customer is the stock in trade for service providers, business managers and executives face a stark choice: either get involved to directly influence how the personality of the organisation is articulated externally or allow its unfettered evolution to spill over into the marketplace for better or for worse.

Professional service providers have long been content to believe that the external personality of the organisation can be influenced indirectly using traditional human resource management techniques. In-house HR techniques such as the annual employee attitude survey tend to support the conclusion that if the employees appear to be happy then, by tenuous extension, the personality of the business is being positively represented in the marketplace. Yet the age-old disconnect between HR and Marketing is well-recognised by strategy commentators, and is increasingly being exposed.

The banking crisis of 2008 has provided a focal point for those questioning the veracity of service providers in the financial services sector. The fall-out from that crisis has repercussions across the range of sectors in the UK's service economy. Professionalism is under the spotlight; **Honour, reputation and trust** are back on the agenda; The personality of the business has become a differentiator. Yet neither HR nor Marketing, in isolation, appears to have the tools or the remit to take advantage.

Capturing the Reality

For the majority of busy executives, business personality remains an esoteric concept, and one which attracts less focus than it deserves. Some equate personality with 'brand' when, in reality, it is often the case that the goal of a branding exercise is to

disguise aspects of the true business personality. In the wake of the banking crisis, with the professionalism of service providers open to greater scrutiny, it has become important to close the gap between what the brand says and what the business personality implies in the marketplace. By ignoring this 'marketing credibility gap', businesses risk the *de facto* adoption of a market strategy with an unacceptably high risk of unwanted negative exposure.

There are 3 perspectives worth capturing on the personality of a business:

- **Executive View:** *How the Executive views the business personality today.*
- **Executive Aspiration:** *What it should look like in the future.*
- **Organisational Reality:** *What it actually looks like today.*

A variety of visioning and structured analysis techniques already exist to enable managers of a business to easily determine the Executive View and develop their aspirations for the future. However, without a solid understanding of today's reality, the Executive View may be uninformed, and the Executive Aspiration for the future may be unachievable or hopelessly out of touch with the reality.

Gaining a sound understanding of today's Organisational Reality is therefore crucial, and is the reason why we have developed **AP2**, a tool for monitoring the **Balanced Business Personality**. AP2 lies at the heart of a structured investigation into what drives the personality of a service sector business, and leads to action on a range of factors designed to enhance professionalism and close the marketing credibility gap. Its key attributes are:

- A structured investigation of the organisation's personality drivers
- An analysis of the resulting Organisational Reality
- Based upon the work of world-renowned leaders in business strategy
- Performed within a secure, private, anonymous online environment
- Designed to balance the Business Personality

AP2 has been developed in response to a sea change in the attitude of buyers towards the professional credibility of service providers. As selection criteria change and attitudes towards marketing-led service messaging harden, suppliers of services can no longer rely upon traditional communication techniques to attract business. The gap between market messaging and the true business personality of the service provider has been exposed, and it is now time for service providers to substantiate their professional credentials as never before.

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