



Creating a Change Agent Culture in Marketing

By Laura Patterson

This year, numerous studies of the marketing discipline and numerous articles highlighted the challenge and need for marketing to capture, manage, synthesize and leverage data and analytics. Marketing organizations around the world want to become more data-driven, but the explosion and rapidly growing volume of data as well as the lack of effective tools make this difficult. In the meantime, they are revamping their organizational lineup, adding more analytical talent and capabilities that enable them to boil oceans of data and produce mountains of reports.

Access to this information and refined analytical and process skills create an opportunity for marketers to generate business-relevant insights. Having the necessary skills and technological infrastructure are becoming table stakes to successfully compete and serve customers. These capabilities are evolving into the building blocks of every marketing organization's foundation. Today, marketing leaders use data, analytics, metrics, and modeling to tackle point problem and to enable organizational change. To be effective change agents, marketing leaders need to move from being a blocking and tackling organization to taking a more holistic approach -- one that integrates analytical, process, strategy, planning, and performance management expertise.

Being a change agent is a noble aspiration, but what does that entail? Change agents are catalysts. A successful change agent improves the organization's ability to achieve a higher degree of output. When acting as a change agent, marketing leads the creation of a vision of what could or should be. Marketers then identify what it takes to realize this vision and go about amending or replacing strategies, procedures, and processes that are obstacles to achieving the vision. We operate on two planes -- one where the organization currently is, and the other being the ideal state.

Since marketing should be the antenna for the organization -- gathering and interpreting the signals -- we are in a better position to act as change agents. The business environment is always changing, and therefore, the company that can create, manage and master change has the greatest potential to thrive. Being a change agent means more than just coming up with a brilliant idea -- it is about bringing the idea to life and engaging the rest of the organization. Creating, managing and mastering change is a skill. The skills we have in marketing to connect and engage with external customers and prospects are the same skills we need to connect with and engage people within the organization. That's what gives marketers an advantage as change agents. The steps we use to impact and drive change externally also enable marketing to impact and drive change internally.

These vital steps are:

1. Link change explicitly and tightly to real performance outcomes. Change is not for the sake of change; change should improve business performance. The result of change should be concrete, specific, quantifiable, business outcomes.
2. Develop concrete initiatives that support the outcomes and focus on what it will take for these initiatives to affect the organization's operation in a positive way.
3. Include the human dimension in your calculations. People do what people do. They embrace, they resist, they obstruct, and they rise to the occasion. Listen closely. People dodge drafts. Find ways to enroll people into the process.
4. Develop and market the message. When we sell to different market groups, we develop appropriate campaigns. Employ this approach inside. Segment your internal markets and tailor the message accordingly. Leverage both the informal and formal networks.
5. Disruption is an important part of the process. Being a change agent means you're going to discomfit people around you. You're going to interrupt the "way we do things." As change agents you must be able to step outside of your own comfort zone if you want to take people outside of theirs. Key to being a change agent is producing and keeping a healthy tension alive in the organization.

Here's an important point to remember about being a change agent -- the first person who must change is you. A change agent models the way. We must live the vision we see and the behavior it requires if we want others to do so. The rest of the team will be watching us. We must develop the skills and techniques to change how we work if we're going to help others acquire the skills and techniques to change how they work. Being on the front line enables us to capture, manage, and synthesize market and customer data sooner and faster. As a result we are ideally situated to use analytics, metrics, and process to act as organizational change agents.

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