



## Down Under

### John Jeston

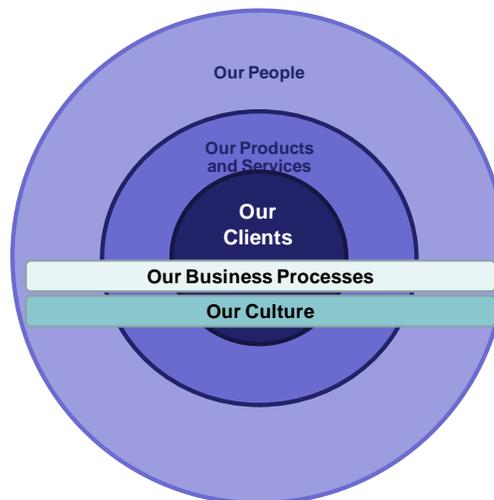
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## Should we really be Customer Centric?

In this brief Column I would like to visit a topic that is considered by many to be sacrosanct – customer-centricity. Should we ‘really’ be customer-centric when we are improving or developing our business processes?

By far the majority, if not all of, the literature we all read about BPM promotes the tenant that we **must** be customer-centric. For example, the “outside-in” point of view suggests that we must always place the customer at the center of everything we do. Lean also suggests that the customer must be placed first – ‘voice of the customer’.



**Figure 1 – Customer-Centric view**

Figure 1 shows this approach with our clients/customers as the center of the universe. Many organizations will next place an emphasis on the products and services they sell, followed by ‘Our People’ or employees. The figure also shows that the organizations business processes must deliver this service and be supported by the creation or enhancement of an appropriate culture.

Even though there is this huge emphasis on customer-centric service, many BPM and business teams do not understand that there is a clear difference between the delivery of customer ‘service’ and an outcome of the customer being ‘satisfied’ (see figure 2).

You can service a customer exceptionally well and yet the customer can still be dissatisfied. I remember personally being ‘serviced’ exceptionally well by a well known computer company (at least in its opinion) and yet I did not buy one of their laptops a second time because of my deep dissatisfaction with the way I was serviced.

The general consensus is that it is about 17 times more expensive to gain a new customer than to keep an existing one, and yet organizations continually invest significantly in trying to create a

“wow” factor, to gain new customers, rather than investing in eliminating the things that annoy the customers (the irritation zone), thus risking loss of the existing customers. The ‘line of indifference’ suggests that there is a zone where spending the organization’s money on improving service and satisfaction will actually add little or no value to the customer relationship.

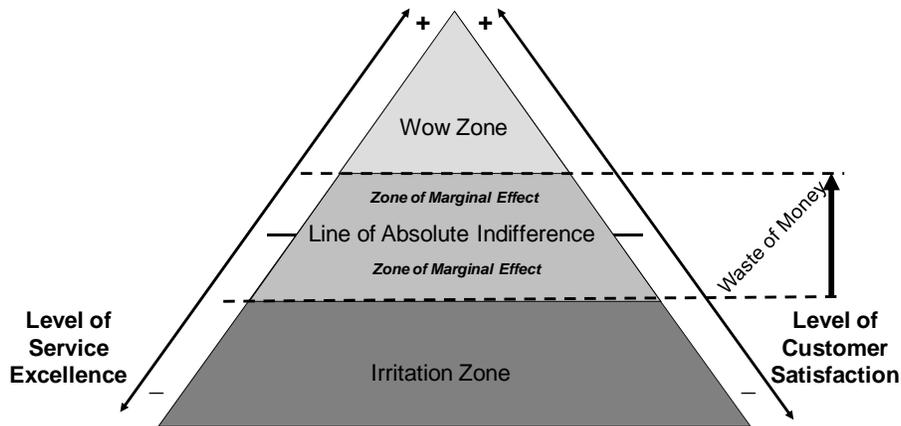


Figure 2

If we create business processes that add significantly to the service and satisfaction levels of the customers (let’s just call it service from now on), can they be delivered to a high standard with dissatisfied or unhappy employees? I would suggest not. Average processes will often yield a high level of service to customers if delivered by happy enthusiastic employees; and yet the opposite is not necessarily true.

To deliver both a high level of service and satisfaction, perhaps we should take a different view and place our employees (our people) at the center of our process considerations. After all, average or sub-optimized processes plus happy enthusiastic employees most likely will equal happy customers. Figure 3 shows our people (employees) at the center, with customers next followed by our products and services.

When looking at placing your employees at the center, I am not just speaking about assisting employees to develop their skills and capabilities. It is about engendering the right ‘attitude’ and creating the right environment for them to work in. Employees need to understand and appreciate that their employer and managers care about them. Managers need to lead from the rear and remove roadblocks for employees. Managers need to be proactive and anticipate potential issues and roadblocks.

Remember, when looking at an organizations culture:

“Culture is caught, not taught”.

If the senior executives and management do not ‘live’ the culture they wish to have, they should not be surprised when they do not get the culture they want. Culture WILL be *caught* from these senior executives and managers, so behavior and attitude matter.



Figure 3 – People-Centric view

So should we be customer-centric or employee-centric?

The reality is we need to be both. Without customers there is no business and therefore no employees. Conversely, without employees there is no business and therefore no customers and no employees.



Figure 4 – the Ying and the Yang

So customers and employees are the Ying and the Yang of business as shown in figure 4. If you get *both* right, supported by a customer and employee focused culture and business processes, then your organization will be “the best organization to work with”.

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