

DANGER OF DISINTEGRATION

Rob Brickle highlights the impact of poorly integrated customer (and stakeholder) relationship management.



Rob Brickle: how do you spot the symptoms?

Big organisations often suffer from a disease called disintegrated customer and stakeholder relationship management. Unfortunately, many companies don't know they've got this malaise. Everything feels fine – but the disease is actively eating away at revenues and profits the company would otherwise enjoy.

This sickness is most prevalent in multi-departmental and hierarchical organisations serving multi-departmental and hierarchical customers. It affects the company brain so that the left and right hands are often working against each other.

So how do you spot the symptoms and understand the business case for the cure?

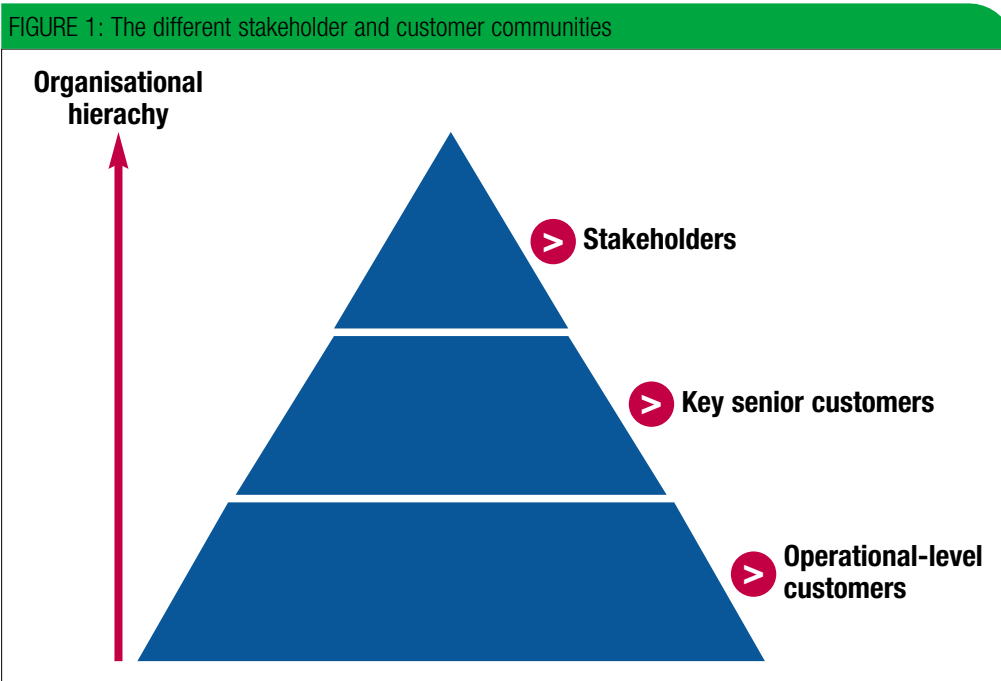
Most organisations know they need to manage their relationships with their key stakeholders and customer communities but are often unclear about the best way to do this. In addition, they are sometimes confused about the interface between the different communities and how any interventions that are designed to deal with them interact.

Why is this? Sometimes it's because these relationships are managed from different (and occasionally competing) parts of the organisation; sometimes it's simply because the objectives of these engagements are themselves unclear.

It helps if there is a holistic view, held by senior management, of the relationships that exist and how they should be managed. Without this discipline, the outcome will be lost or unfulfilled opportunities and a business that stands still in terms of improvement whilst the rest of the world moves on around it.

Let me put forward a model to illustrate this. Simply put, relationships exist hierarchically both across the organisation and within its stakeholder and customer communities.

For example, in a manufacturing environment, operational day-to-day relationships may exist between engineers or procurement specialists in both the supplier and customer organisations. There is hard data available to help manage and



better understand these day-to-day interactions and what may need to happen at an operational level to improve them. By their very nature, the relationships at this level are largely reactive, responding to stimuli rather than anticipating them.

Meanwhile, there will be infrequent interactions between the senior executives of both organisations that will deal with significantly different issues and have far greater implications for the supplying business. Here you will be dealing with softer data or measures, where the only way the relationship can be successful is if it is managed proactively.

Finally, stakeholders such as institutional investors, media, industry or political groups require another different management strategy. Figure 1 shows a simple representation of this.

If you are clear about who the actors are at any level, and what you intend by any interventions designed to manage the relationship, there will be a good chance that what you do and how you do it will be of value to, and meet the requirements of, the business.

Who knows, it may even prove to be valuable to and meet the requirements of the targeted community – now that's novel!

To achieve this, you need to take a number of steps in order to define a model that is appropriate to your business. These include clarity about your target; the objectives of dealing with a particular group; what interventions may be required; and what ideally would be the outcome. You also need clarity about the interaction between the different communities and how information flows between them.

Where organisations often go wrong – even if they appear to be clear about the different communities and their ownership – is that they end up implementing interventions that try to achieve a multiplicity of purposes.

Your company will benefit if you decide who you want to engage with at any level, how you do it, and what you do with the information you gather.

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