

Service with Purpose

Better Service at Less Cost!

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Despite doing all the right things, going on all the right courses and employing all the right people, we as individuals and organisations still sometimes veer off track. Goals are not being achieved and the strategy seems to have as much traction as a car on an oil slick. Tinkering around the edges will only have a small effect on results. Fundamentally, an organisation must ask why it exists (purpose), examine how it interacts with the outside world (service), and then find that sweet spot where purpose and service meet.

Service factors

For an individual or organisation to diagnose the strength of its service, there are many factors to be considered as follows:

- *Evidence* – measure the level of service in the organisation using methods such as customer service surveys, mystery shopping or qualitative interviews with key clients.
- *Consistency* – evaluate whether service is always at the same great (or poor) level.
- *Reinforcement* – ascertain whether the actions of everyone in the organisation reinforce the service ethic.
- *Priority* – consider whether service is a high priority and if it is used as a filter through which to rank other priorities.
- *Engagement* – determine whether staff must be enticed to give great service or if it is just ingrained in what they do.
- *Efficiency* – identify how much time and money is spent on service or service initiatives.

Levels of service

Ultimately, the service delivered is a combination of the above factors. The more factors evident, the higher the level of service being offered as follows:

Anti-service

Is where the organisation seems to strive to provide bad service, even if it is not the intention. Some government departments and tradespeople fall into this category. As a consumer you experience what you consider to be the antithesis of good service. At this level almost none of the service factors are present.

Accidental service

Is where an organisation accidentally or occasionally gives good service despite themselves. Often the staff member giving great service will be forced to comply with normal practice. Consider a call centre employee who is monitored on strict time measurements, but takes the extra time to help a struggling customer. This 'inefficient' behaviour will be corrected to ensure it is not repeated. Such accidental service is not tolerated. At this level there is only the slightest evidence of service.



Transactional service



Is where the organisation is more focused on the transaction than the service. These organisations are perceived to have good service while things are going well, but problems occur when the system fails. For example, airlines believe they are defined by their aircraft fleet, in-flight entertainment or on-time arrival. To a large extent this is true; however they are defined by the customer when things go wrong i.e. when

connections are missed or baggage is lost. It is not difficult to find transactional service — banks and grocery chains provide plenty of examples. At this level there is some evidence of service when things go well, but otherwise service is poor.

Forced service



Is where the organisation recognises that service is important and forces staff to give good service. The 'service initiative' may be implemented by a new manager or someone who just decides service is important. This is often seen in service industries where the staff are forced to give a pleasant welcome and pretend to be enthusiastic about providing someone with a meal.

Sometimes the forced service can become institutionalised — the fake smile in the lobby of some hotels is a classic example. At this level there is growing evidence of service, as well as some reinforcement and priority. Have you ever tried to force a child to eat their greens?

Embraced service



Is where the organisation uses various schemes and techniques to harness the power of service. Management is behind service and training programs, and they may be woven into performance measurements for staff incentives, but it all seems like hard work and requires constant vigilance. At this level, there is solid evidence of service, it is reinforced and given a high priority but it is not an efficient use of resources. In fact,

the initiatives may become prohibitively expensive.

Integrated service



Is where the organisation's service ideals are fully integrated into all aspects of its operations and the process is almost effortless. It seems as if everyone knows the organisation's service position and acts autonomously without any necessary back-up and validation. It's just 'what we do' and the organisation is in the flow. At this level, service is evident, consistent, reinforced, prioritised, efficient and staff are engaged in the process.

Organisations that are not in the integrated service category will most likely have service issues. The cause of these issues is usually a lack of organisational purpose. Often the organisation will strive to see small incremental service improvements and a misguided solution is to spend more money. However, spending more money is not necessarily the answer.

In order to achieve integrated (effortless) service, the organisation must know with what it is integrating. The cause of many service problems is a fundamental misunderstanding or confusion about the reason why the organisation exists.

If it is difficult for an organisation to understand why it exists past the five-year plan or some competitive position statement, it must fundamentally ask the question what purpose it has in the world. Answering this question will define position statements, missions, visions and goals.

Evaluating purpose

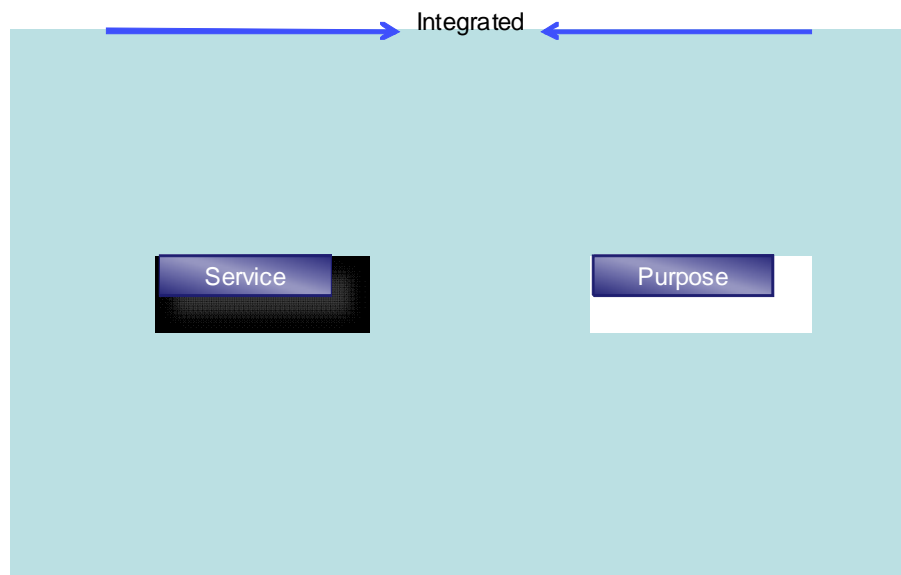
One must consider the organisation's current purpose, evaluate it against the following list of diagnostic principles and check off as many as possible. Purpose should be:

- *Personal* – something that is unique to the organisation; not a generic statement.
- *Immeasurable* – anything that is measurable, by definition, becomes a goal.
- *Unequivocal* – it should be crystal clear whether an activity is consistent or not consistent with purpose.
- *Perceptible* – the purpose must be known (communicated), and the language commonly understood by everyone in contact with the organisation.
- *Controllable* – the organisation should be able to control whether or not it lives true to its purpose irrespective of competition or markets.
- *Endurable* – the purpose should be something timeless and without barriers.

When well-elucidated purpose and service come together, the organisation is truly integrated and value is maximised. When service and purpose are not integrated, the value created by the organisation is capped.

Some small companies and retail stores are destined to never break through this cap because they do not have a clear purpose or service ideal.

Integrating service and purpose



The solution is to be aware of the factors influencing service and open up the organisation's purpose to the outside world. Opening up does not mean giving up any trade secrets, rather it is a 'state of being' that becomes the ultimate communication device.

Purpose can be an island if it is not opened up to the world.

The problem is that success can lead to constriction, which chokes further growth. A diagnostic can determine your position in the outside world — it can be grasping, grabbing, clenching or open. A struggling organisation may find it is grasping with identity and poor service. It may learn to grab onto something useful like a service ideal or a new production technique, which is then clenched and protected from the outside world. An organisation will truly be integrated with its purpose and service when it opens that purpose to its staff, suppliers and customers.

To work backward from service or performance problems, the organisation must identify its purpose, be aware of any factors attacking the purpose and open its purpose to the world.

The solution is not to give away secrets, but to make clear to the world the reason why the organisation exists (purpose) and how it will interact with the world (service). Unless you know why your organisation exists, how will your customers?