

Support: Can It Be a Value Creation Strategy for Positive Marketing?

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Abstract. In pursuit of improving people's wellbeing and engaging in positive marketing, this paper addresses the application of Vickers' Appreciation System to deepen our understanding of how people comprehend their environment and respond to improve their situation. The paper highlights how companies can collaboratively engage in people's appreciation and support them in fulfilling their needs.

Keywords: Support-Seeking Behaviour, Collaboration, Value Creation, Vickers' Appreciative System.

1. Introduction

Most business managers are still holding on to an outdated dogma of doing business that was designed a century ago for a customer that no longer exists (Zuboff & Maxmin, 2002). These managers find it difficult to accept the reality that 21st century people are different, and do not easily fit into their outmoded business practice. 21st century people do not desire to be treated as standard consumers. The 'new' people, regarded as constantly constructing their individualities, enter the experience of consumption as part of that construction (Gordon & Valentine, 2000); thereby exercising the power they have to create the life that they want to live in (Zuboff & Maxmin, 2002).

On the other hand, managers - especially marketers - are accustomed to treating people as consumers. Once people are labelled as 'consumers', they are dehumanised and lose their identities (Gordon & Valentine, 2000). Seen as consumers people have for half a century been regarded as homogenous, so that companies can segment, target, and build relationships based on their brands (Henry, 2012). Not surprisingly, many companies fail to build authentic relationships with people.

Such treatment is unsustainable as people do not want relationships that are primarily based on corporate efforts to secure future sales. They want companies to build relationships that can serve meaningful and beneficial experiences for all parties (Hendry, 2012). However, companies have long been inward-looking to achieve internal efficiencies, and less effort has been made to align to the customer's demand in the real world (Gordon & Valentine, 2000). These businesses typically remain inflexible and hold to their traditional practices to secure stability and predictability for their businesses (Gordon & Valentine, 2000). Zuboff and Maxmin (2002) assert that businesses designed for internal efficiencies and working on certainties are not capable of transforming themselves to become outwardly driven, flexible, and responsive to individual people.

In summary, businesses that take a myopic view of people as resources and are inwardly orientated towards efficiencies typically create frustration, disappointment, resentment, and lack of trust. Increasingly, people are acting in their self-interest and expect companies to recognise them as individuals rather than as distant parties in mere transactions (Zuboff & Maxmin, 2002). Businesses that create discontent and unhappiness for people are fundamentally unsustainable (Haque, 2011). Thus, companies need to reinvent their businesses so they can serve people with goods and services that have enduring and meaningful outcomes.

The following sections explain how people respond to their environment, as the basis for better understanding how companies can engage and become a part of people's 'appreciation' process.

2. Vickers' Appreciative System

Geoffrey Vickers proposed the 'appreciative system' as a model of how human comprehend and react

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to their environment (Regev et al., 2011; Varey, 1998). Williams (2005) points out that the process that Vickers modelled is central to humanity. According to Vickers (1968), humans inherently have the capacity to respond and act accordingly to their appreciation of the situation. Vickers added that to be a human, one has to be experiencing relations, showing accountability, and responding to the situation in their own terms (Williams, 2005). In an appreciative system, there are three essential judgements one has to make: reality judgement, value judgement, and action judgement. Wyk (1997) further explains that these judgements are a sequential process: first, a reality judgement of “what is the case?”, followed by a value judgement on “what ought to be the case?”, and finally an action judgement about “what to do?” that results in action that can resolve the differences between what is experienced and what is desirable.

The reality an individual observes (reality), and its comparison with the norm (value) in a particular setting, is what Vickers (1968) refers to as ‘appreciation’. Vickers (1968, p. 191) further elaborates that “facts are relevant only by reference to some judgement of value and judgements of value are meaningful only in regard to some configuration of fact”. As such, appreciation comprises conjointly related judgements of reality and value (Vickers, 1968). Vickers further elaborates that the actual setting of reality and value is unknown and can only be apparent in judgements. The exercise of these reality and value judgements tends to change the appreciative setting. An individual’s ability to make a judgement depends on mental capacity, the availability of information, and the current state of readiness to see and value (Vickers, 1968).

In addition, most of the problems individuals try to solve depend on their own appreciative setting, making it difficult for others to confirm without making assumptions about how the judgements might have been made (Vickers, 1968). As such, individuals take action based their own appreciative setting, in the context of their own judgements of reality and value.

2.1. Appreciative process

Vickers’ appreciation is viewed as a cyclical process in which individuals make sense of the world that they are in (Checkland, 2005; Stowell, 2012). The initial stage of the process relates to on how individuals construct their reality. An individual’s interest and concern will be the starting point of the cycle for the individual to construct their situation (Vickers, 1983). The individual’s interests and concerns are shaped by their earlier experiences of “perceptions, interpretations, judgements, and action” (appreciative setting) (Checkland, 2005, p. 287).

Next, the person will make a reality judgement by selecting relevant facts from that situation (Vickers, 1983). At this stage, the person’s readiness to see forms reality to them. In other words, a reality judgement is what an individual prepares to sense in themselves and in their environment (Regev et al., 2011). At this stage, the reality judgement enables the individual to understand ‘what is the case’ of the present situation (Stowell, 2012). Burt and Heijden (2008) view this stage as a process of sense-making based on the perceived facts of the situation.

Once the reality judgement has been made, the individual weighs the situation as desirable/ undesirable, or positive or negative, and might seek corrective action (Burt & Heijden, 2008) towards ‘what ought to be the case’ (Stowell, 2012). At this juncture, the individual is making a value judgement. They are weighing the reality with their values, norms, standards and beliefs, which are the outcomes of their earlier cycle of appreciative setting (Checkland, 2005). These values, norms, standards, and beliefs are not fixed, but “changed and developed by the very process of applying them” (Vickers, 1968, p. 144). As such, the criteria of what is good/bad, or acceptable/unacceptable, depend on the individual’s judgements of the situation.

The third stage of the appreciative process is action judgement. At this stage the individual seeks an answer to the question ‘What shall I do about it?’ based on the reality and value judgements made in the first two stages (Stowell, 2012). Thus, reality and value judgements come together in the need to take appropriate action. This action not only affects the present situation, but embodies conditions for future experiences (Checkland, 2005); from their action judgements, the individual learns the features that have been considered important and those that have been ignored in the perceived situation.

According to Checkland (2005), the whole appreciative process is a continuous cycle. In each cycle, the standards, norms, and values are revised in relation to the immediate setting of reality and value (appreciative setting). Checkland (2005, p. 289) contends that this model is “groundless and self-creating”, as it has no absolute set of settings, but rather the settings keep changing with the individual’s judgements.

The process of appreciation consists of perceiving, judging, and desiring relationships (with others – people and resources) through actions (Blackmore, 2005) that are interactions with others. An individual's action is drawn from the act of appreciating the situation, and added to how that individual responds to everyday life experiences.

2.2. Support-seeking behaviour

From the perspective of human agency, people are regarded as agents, who are capable of organizing, are active in regulating actions, and who are accountable for those actions (Bandura, 2006). However, people do not always have direct control over what affects them in their environment. Therefore, people appreciate their situation and subsequently take appropriate action to correct the situation if needed. In taking action, people can blend any of the three modes of agency: individual, proxy and collective (Bandura, 2006). In most circumstances, individuals cannot solve their problems without support from others. People tend to exercise socially mediated agency (proxy agency) in seeking support from others who have the resources, knowledge, and ability to support them (Bandura, 2006). This is the context that presents companies with opportunities to anticipate needs, negotiate, and subsequently influence people's value creation process (Gronroos & Ravald, 2011). At this juncture, both companies and people are working together, collaboratively pooling their knowledge, skills, resources and actions to produce desired outputs. People are exercising their collective agency in working together with companies, influencing each other's practices (Bandura, 2006). Thus, reciprocal outputs are no longer standardised service or products controlled by top management, but rather more fluid in form in that they are tailored for individual people.

3. Support: Collaborative Value Creation

Support is not merely an enhancement of customer service or a fix to a good or service problem (Zuboff & Maxmin, 2002). Support has a much a deeper meaning than help: 'support' is backing someone in every step of action to fulfil needs, whereas 'help' is giving assistance to someone. Several synonyms for 'support' promise as hold up or maintain ("Support", 2012) in relative to 'help' as aid or assistance. Support, then, requires a deeper commitment from companies to be accountable for people's consumption experiences (Zuboff & Maxmin, 2002), in which goods or services are the mediators for an on-going relationship between companies and customers.

Support offers mutual benefits for both parties in the relationship. For people, support allows their voices to be heard, responded to, and taken into consideration for possible solutions (Zuboff & Maxmin, 2002). On the other hand, companies committed to support will be better able to establish collaborative relationships and subsequently produce meaningful outputs (goods/services) that are valued by people. The company is, then, more flexible in working together with people to produce outputs they value. Therefore, value creation is no longer predominantly controlled by companies but becomes a collaborative effort between parties (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Each participant plays a part in contributing value for themselves, and for the other party (Vargo et al., 2008).

These collaborative efforts enable effective utilization of resources and avoid the wastage caused by producing outputs that are not desired by people (Varey, 2012). In addition, people are more prone to integrate resources appropriately to arrive at meaningful outcomes. Value destruction through misuse of resources that fails to meet the expectation of the other party (Plé & Caceres, 2010) can be avoided in the process of support. Value is phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). In other words, the reciprocal output will have no intrinsic value, but people's experiences of using the output help them to realise meaningful value. This aligns with the concept of value-in-use as "customer outcome, purpose or objective that is achieved through service" (Macdonald et al., 2011, p. 671). We propose that the role of companies in today's marketplace is to support people's value creating processes, working collaboratively to mutually produce beneficial outputs (Payne et al., 2008). In this way, companies are engaging in people's appreciation and supporting their needs to realise value. This approach can be a basis for positive marketing that is actively involved in improving people's wellbeing.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, value creation is viewed as a collaborative activity of parties in integrating resources, in which value is always determined by the beneficiary (Vargo et al., 2008). This paper gives a deeper insight

into how people (as beneficiaries) conduct appreciation of their situation, their form of judgements, conjointly produced outputs, and finally, how value is realised for them.

5. References

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