

SECTION 1. COMMUNICATION THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

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CUSTOMER CENTRICITY AS THE MAIN FACTOR OF PRAGMATICS IN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

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“Customer centricity” is a relatively new concept that began to exist only 100 years ago. This term was first mentioned in the Harvard Business Review in 1990, when new business models were being created for the reconstruction of work with clients [5, p. 96]. This caused a change in the thinking of managers and employees, because before this publication appeared, the question of adapting the product to the consumers’ needs had not been raised. At the same time, the first ideas for measuring full customer satisfaction (consumer audits), employees’ productivity and loyalty to customers and the relationship of these indicators to the company’s profit began to be actively discussed. Later, the term “customer centricity” was mentioned many times in business publications, but it gained popularity only in 2000 after the publication of the article “The antecedents and consequences of customer-centric marketing” in an

influential marketing journal. It was after this event that the term “customer centricity” began to be actively used by management and marketing professionals.

However, the question of defining the term “customer centricity” remains open. Sema Walton, the executive director of the Wal-Mart chain of stores, in our opinion, completely reveals the meaning of the mentioned concept: “There is only one “boss” and, regardless of whether a person steps on shoes to survive in the world, or, “boss” is still one. This is a client! A client is a person who determines whether your business will be successful or not” [1, p. 20].

Customer Service Training Manual provides the following explanation of the term customer centricity: “Customer service means providing a quality product or service that satisfies the needs/wants of a customer and keeps them coming back. Good customer service means much more – it means continued success, increased profits, higher job satisfaction, improved company or organization morale, better teamwork, and market expansion of services/products” [1, p. 25]. That is, it is emphasized that a product that is truly customer-oriented should satisfy the customer’s need and motivate him to return to the same company or service again, which will result in subsequent sales.

According to the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP) customer centricity is a kind of “ecosystem and operating model that enables an organization to design a unique and distinctive customer experience. This architecture enables the business to acquire, retain, and develop targeted customers efficiently for the benefit of customers and the organization” [6, p. 20]. Emphasizing on providing a unique and special experience for each consumer, meaningful both for a customer and a company as a whole, the authors of this theory aim to use individual communication strategies of different types, namely lexical ones, and to achieve the effect of a unique customer experience.

Pete Fader explains the phenomenon of customer centricity as follows: “Customer centricity is a strategy to fundamentally align a company’s products and services with the wants and needs of its most valuable customers. That strategy has a specific aim: more profits for the long term. This is a goal that every business would like to achieve, of course” [2, p. 20]. So, the main task of customer orientation, according to Peter Fader, is to connect the needs and wishes of customers with the products and services of a concrete company, because it is these actions that will bring more income in the long term.

It is important to note that companies that are truly consumer oriented understand not only WHAT is important to their customers, but in all their actions are pushed away from the needs of consumers. In this context, customer centricity is a teamwork, innovation promotion, focus on average customers, readiness to help a customer at any time, even if it is not always in the company's interests.

However, "customer centricity" often implies a different, deeper meaning than it seems at first glance: "Customer focus must lead to something meaningful, will probably require sacrifices and is just one of the steps necessary to become truly customer-centric. A customer focus puts your customers high on your list of priorities. When you put your customers into the heart of your business, make customers part of the culture, then you to become customer-centric" [4, p. 201].

According to Peter Fader, not all the companies are truly consumer oriented, even such progressive business leading companies as Nordstrom, Walmart, Apple, Costco and Starbucks. The analysis of the cooperation of these companies with their clients allows to conclude that they are customer friendly, but not 100% customer-centric. This evidence can be explained by the fact that, despite the huge number of customers of these companies, they almost do not implement customer support programs and do not claim to have a better knowledge of their target audience [2, p. 177].

Nevertheless, the statement that the mentioned business leaders are not 100% customer-oriented is not unanimous. Opinions about the principle of consumer orientation of the world technological leader Apple, which specializes in the production of electronics, software and online services, are particularly ambiguous. A special feature of this corporation's work is mainly the ambition to bridge the physical and psychological barriers between the client and the company's employee. Even when entering a store with Apple equipment supply and customer service, a buyer will not see any walls, shelves or queues. All he comes across is just a consultant, standing in front of him, who is ready to help. According to the company's internal values and company culture, all employees adhere to the rule "we don't serve, we help clients" [3, p. 87].

Another example of Apple's customer centric approach is that they started to provide innovative solutions to their customers instead of creating innovative products. Creation of a special service "The Genius Bar" in the Apple Store, where a highly qualified specialist will help with any question or problem related to Apple technology may be a good example of such an approach. In addition, Apple users admit that this brand is the most loyal to consumers. Many of them literally become fans of the company's products

and are ready to wait for several days in front of the Apple Store to buy a new gadget [3, p. 24].

Thus, customer centricity in business is not always one of the components of the companies' successful business models. Companies develop sophisticated communication strategies to serve their customers, constantly emphasizing how significant it is to be focused on customers. At the same time the service of such companies is not always perfect and 100% customer centric, and the phrase "customer friendly" is not an absolute synonym for the word combination "customer centric".

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