The power of eight employee experiences

And take a one question diagnostic on how you fare in delivering them

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In my earlier column on Founding Fuel on why the Human Resource (HR) function needs to be agile (https://www.foundingfuel.com/article/you-want-an-agile-company-but-is-your-hr-agile/), we discussed two key aspects:

1. That the HR function must be at speed with the customer—to ideate, learn, deploy talent and build the right organisation capabilities.
2. And that agile HR blurs the lines between the customers and employees. This essentially means an employee experiences what the customer does.

If these work in tandem, employee experiences mirror customer experiences designed and delivered by the company.

Employee experiences are about design thinking

I had also articulated how smartly designed digital interfaces can enhance employee experiences. This includes things like the ability to access information customers may need, simplify routine tasks, or make it easy for employees to choose and access solutions or services they need.

❝ The future of employee experiences is more about designing and applying customer thinking to employees ❞

That said, I have to say—the future of employee experiences is not exclusively digital. It is more about designing and applying customer thinking to employees.

But it seems a majority of the discussions, thinking and papers by thought leaders and companies are emerging from a digital business or digital HR perspective. I think that is discomforting. Because to me, digital is just one of the elements of 'How' of an employee experience. It does not contain the 'What'.

Similarly, the obsession with employer branding. Many companies have created this as a parallel brand proposition to what their customer brand stands for. I'd argue, it must be the same for both customers and employees.

One brand for employees and customers

To deliver outstanding experiences to customers and employees, there needs to be only one brand promise, not different interpretations or definitions. How you deliver that brand promise may differ.

**❝ There can only be one brand promise to customers and employees ❞**

But there can only be one brand promise to customers and employees.

Take General Electric as a case in point. It has worked hard to articulate sharply what the brand is all about, how it matters, and why it is still relevant in a digital world. This TV commercial, *What's the Matter with Owen* (http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x35t2cx)*, offers pointers to just that. It has Owen, a programmer just hired by GE, perceived as an old-world company. But he has 'kind-of-a' problem explaining to his friends from college or his folks at home what is it that he is

going to be at work on and why it matters. It seamlessly bridges a gap between generations and "working on trains" becomes a defining term to bridge the gap in understanding the term 'digital industrial'.

May I suggest you watch this interview (https://youtu.be/MEhLYG-3hwY) with Linda Boff, the chief marketing officer at GE as well? She offers a good insight into the thinking behind this campaign: Stay true to your brand, the reality and the aspiration. And do not create a parallel brand for employees.
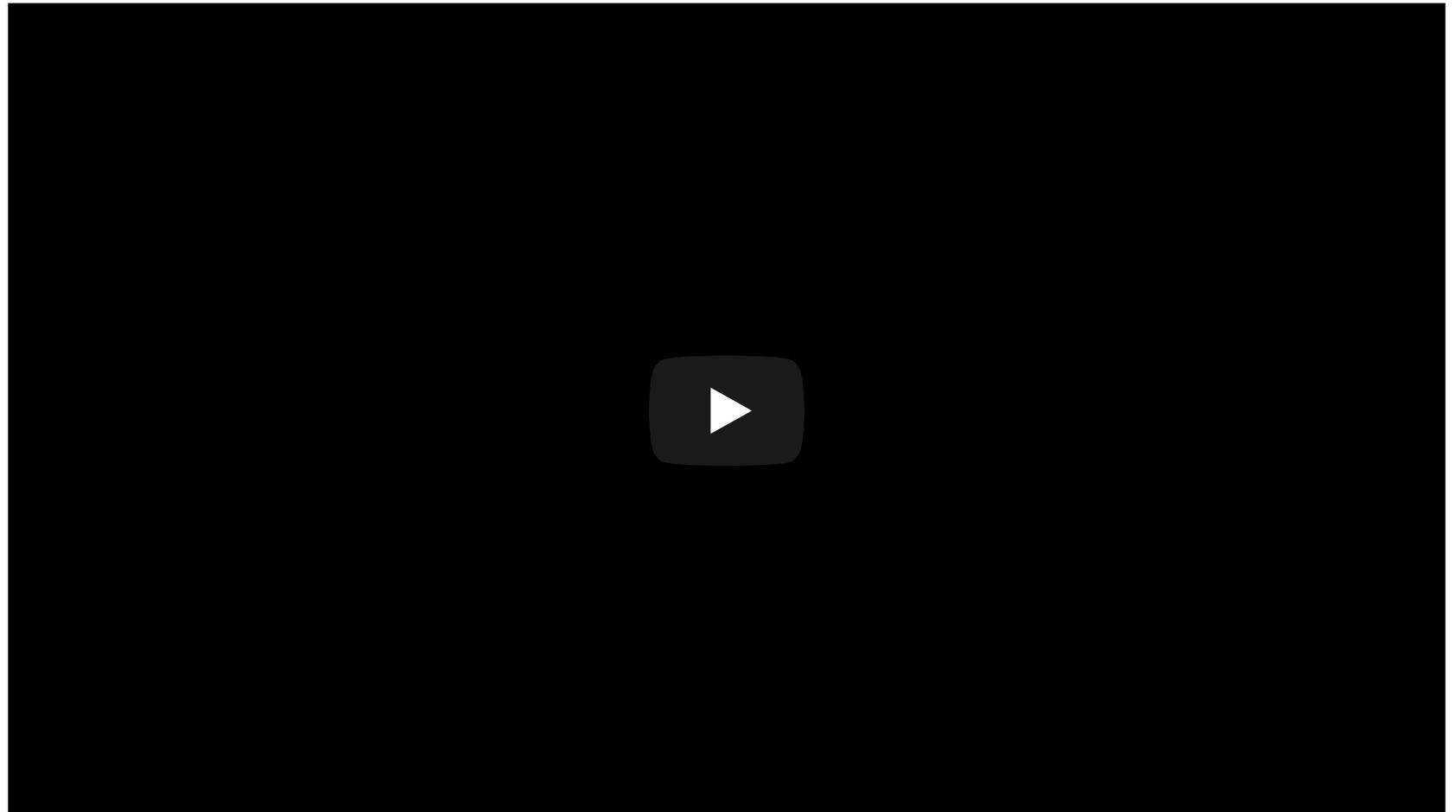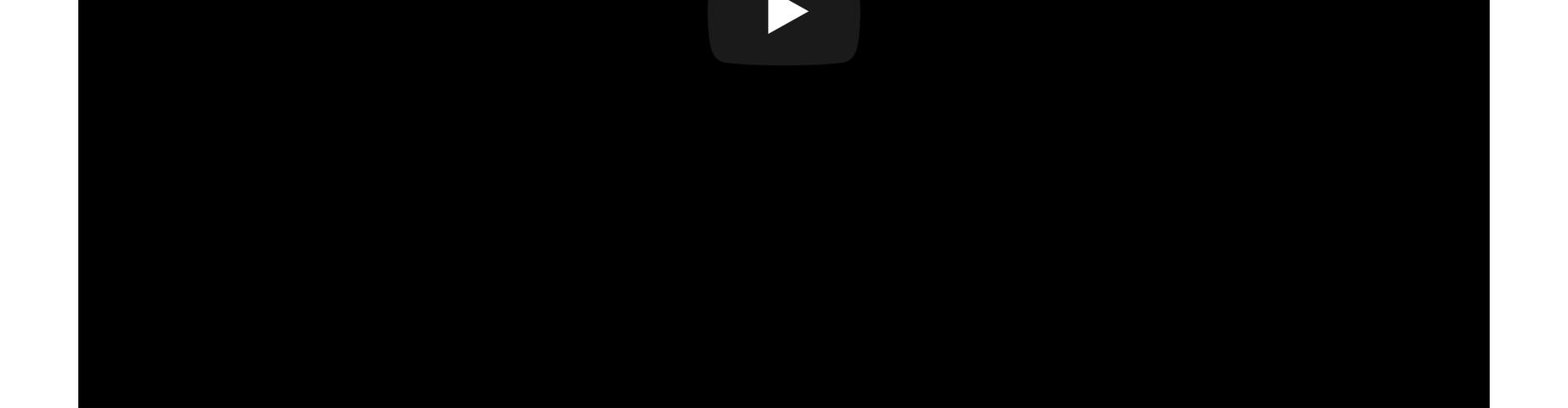

To develop one brand for employees and customers, you will have to answer three questions:

1. What does my brand stand for today and in the years to come?
2. What are the specific aspects of the brand that are a promise?
3. How does the customer experience these brand aspects?

The Coca-Cola TV commercial *That's Not My Name* is a good answer to these three questions.
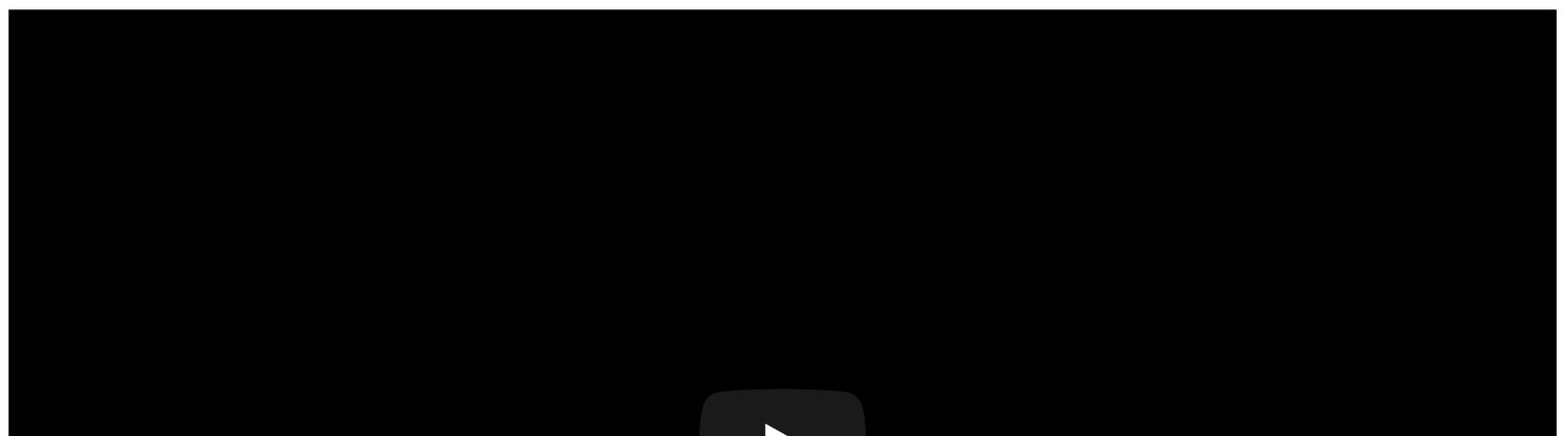
It replaces the iconic brand name with the names of its consumers. It exemplifies contemporary pop local culture. Its music resonates both the message and irresistible charm of the brand. In short, that's what the company and employees strive to be a part of.

The eight employee experiences (E8©)

Employee experiences are not "touchy feely teddy bear" talk. They are very tangible experiences of your external brand at work internally.

Consider this, if your company delivers 'transparent pricing' to your customers, are you transparent in how performance is assessed for your employees and paid for?

That raises some questions:

1. How can we translate a brand into a tangible employee experience?
2. And how do we do this by applying customer thinking?

❝ Employee experiences are very tangible experiences of your external brand at work internally ❞

To answer that, I sat and penned down what was the best part of all the companies I worked for or consulted with. This was a list of 20-plus companies. They spread across industrial applications, packaging, packaged consumer goods, retail, pharmaceuticals, banking, financial services, agriculture, media, manufacturing, consulting, and oil and gas.

The answer: Eight experiences matter the most to employees. I've encapsulated them in the chart below.

E8©: The 8 AGILE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCES©

AGILE HR INSIGHT: 8 EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCES THAT ARE SIMILAR TO CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES

The Capability Experience

The Transparency of Decisions Experience

The Purpose Experience

The Last Mile Simplicity Experience

The New World Manager Experience

The Straight Talk Experience

The Plug n Play Experience

The Continuity Experience

The E8© have been identified from studying customer experiences from 20+ Companies in FMCG, Retail, Industrial, Engineering, Banking & Financial Services, Agriculture, Media and Telecom.

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A quick insight into these experiences:

1. The firm's **purpose** is well communicated, well understood and well applied consistently across the organisation, cultures, and geographies.
2. The New World manager handles only two tasks: performance management and reward. Everything else is **owned and driven by employees.**
3. An employee finds it easy to **plug-and-play**—to draw upon resources, knowledge or tools to perform on the job every day.
4. An employee feels the **capability** of the company in delivering to customers. It is easy to deliver on expectations.
5. Decisions are **transparent.** An employee understands the thinking and data/information used.
6. Employees experience **simplicity** of people programmes or work practices in the last mile—the point of touch or execution.
7. There is **straight talk**. Any questions get a forthright, fact-based response.
8. Employee or work **issues are resolved seamlessly** between the manager or any other department. There is no need to start over again each time you connect to resolve an issue across the value chain.

To design and deliver these eight experiences you may need digital capability. But first, you need fundamental design capability. It calls for a higher order of purpose from HR.

Designing these experiences is not about processes alone. Instead, think about how all aspects of HR and the organisation can come together as a single point of experience for employees. If you have ever been placed on hold by a customer service call centre to be

bounced around from technical service to accounts to service, you'll know exactly what I mean by this. What a customer wants is a seamless single point of experience.

66 Design will determine what HR does and how **99**

To design experiences like these, some basic principles have to be applied. Design will determine what HR does and how.

Go ahead; test yourself on this one-question mini diagnostic:

Test a few of your basics that drive E8©

Take a one-question mini-diagnostic (fully anonymous). Open only till January 30, 2018.

START NOW! (https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PREPCO)

It helps to keep these on top of your mind as you go about designing your employee experiences:

1. These experiences are from an employee's point of view. They are not about functional aspects like organisation development, pay/reward, training or hiring experiences.
2. Take a holistic approach to HR analytics. Most of the data HR uses today is static and lacks Big Data. It is centred on movements, age, performance, etc. Instead, start tracking how these experiences correlate to customer outcomes. Ask how are they driving the desired culture or performance? You will then have much richer data and a holistic view of an employees' life at work. It will allow use of HR data for your firm's strategic needs.
3. You may need to look outside for deep expertise, if necessary, to identify employee experience opportunities. HR may not have such expertise internally. Through partners, deep expertise can be deployed and withdrawn for rapid results.
4. Simplify the centres of expertise (CoEs) in HR. It is common to have such go-to teams of experts for recruitment, talent management, organisation development, compensation and benefits, leadership or training. In my view, you need only two CoEs: Employee Experiences and Organisation Capability. The former will integrate all areas of talent, rewards and training. The latter will focus on organisation design, leadership and succession, mergers and acquisitions, etc.

To define employee experiences, HR needs to redefine its involvement

HR will have to redefine its involvement and capability to influence areas in its control. Any point of poor experience anywhere in the company is an HR issue—not just the employee experiences with HR. Poor employee experiences impact your firm's ability to attract talent, foster engagement or create a great culture. In my experience, companies that do this well don't have a 'within HR' focus. They spend a lot of time with people on jobs identifying design opportunities and influencing them.

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And they don't think of how to deliver experiences before they design what experiences to deliver. That way HR becomes an intelligent function. Not a digital copy of the existing confusion or complexity or silos.

TAGS AGILE HR (/tag/agile-hr/) COCA-COLA (/tag/coca-cola/)
EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCES (/tag/employee-experiences/)
GENERAL ELECTRIC (/tag/general-electric/)
BRAND COMMUNICATION (/tag/brand-communication/)

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Hari Abburi is a global human resources executive with a focus on agility and design thinking for organisations, leaders and HR.

His work, approaches and solutions are often described as creative, innovative, unconventional and are anchored in simplicity. He has keen interest in emerging technologies and their interfaces with people. His experience and expertise is to shape differentiated, creative people strategies and organisation models in high growth companies, M&As/integrations and startups at both regional and global levels.

His two papers, 'Imagination, Watson, Not HR Strategy' (http://preparationcompany.com/thinking/imagination-watson-not-hr-strategy/) and 'Gig it Up: How to Integrate Gig Talent into Strategic

Workforce Planning (http://preparationcompany.com/thinking/gigitup/)', give you insights into the latest thinking on Agile HR.

Hari works with chief executives and chief human resources officers on specific long-term impact solutions. His paper on Agile HR focuses on why agility and design thinking are the future of HR effectiveness and highlights the exponential change required.

He is presently consulting (http://preparationcompany.com/) in people strategy, Agile HR, leadership and accelerated change. His leadership experience includes roles as Global Head of OD & Talent – Hoerbiger; Leadership Consulting Practice Lead, Southeast Asia – Aon Hewitt; Vice-President HR for Bharti Retail; and Director HR Southeast Asia for Baxter Healthcare. He was also associated with GE and Coca-Cola India.

Key insights from him also include his role in building 'Leadership that shrinks the world' (http://preparationcompany.com/a-shift-from-entrepreneurial-local-growth-to-globally-integrated-growth/) (a Harvard Business Client Case) and 'Self-driven learning for leaders (http://preparationcompany.com/eigenverantwortlich-lernen/)'; people strategy for retail: 'Being the society we serve' (http://preparationcompany.com/dignity-of-work-works-for-all/); his role in anchoring cultural change on a global scale (http://preparationcompany.com/people-opportunities-hoerbiger-year-book-2015/); points of view on 'skills for life' (http://preparationcompany.com/skills-for-life-mission/); and building a service industry mindset (http://preparationcompany.com/service-oriented-mindset-is-a-must/).

He has won awards for designing Corporate University (http://preparationcompany.com/award-ceremony-global-council-of-corporate-universities/) that reflects and multiplies the brand culture. At Aon Hewitt Southeast Asia, he was part of the global research on Top Companies for Leaders (http://preparationcompany.com/fortune-award-for-sp-setia-top-companies-for-leaders-2011/) and Best Employers Study. (http://preparationcompany.com/human-resources-summit-best-employers-study-2011/)

Hari is a faculty at several universities on subjects such as change management, leadership and succession, HR strategy, growth capabilities, culture and international human resource management. He is also a speaker at several industry forums and conferences in Asia and Europe.