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Why have I been reading lately that while customer centric behavior is increasing in companies, it's still more of an inside-out process than outside-in? Having thought about it, I came to the conclusion that one of the reasons is because *words matter*.

Take the word "management," as in "customer relationship management" (CRM) or "customer experience management" (CEM); it has meaning *and* connotations. Several dictionary definitions include "the organizing and controlling of the affairs of a business or a sector of a business," "the act of handling or controlling something successfully," and "the skillful handling or use of something such as resources."

But word connotations are often subjective. For example, "management" connotes, to me, an activity done *internally* to an organization, something that someone *volunteers to be subjected to*, and, as one of the definitions suggests, something that is *controlled*, but in a "I've got the responsibility and you don't" sort of way. The most important connotation I get, though, is that "management" is a *passive and short term* activity.

Which brings me to the point of this editorial; CRM and CEM, tools used to help achieve customer centric goals, shouldn't use the word "management" as part of their descriptions.

Why? Let's start by looking at the word "relationship." It means (dictionary) "the connection between two or more people or groups and their involvement with one another." The connotations I apply are *collaboration, work together, share, and have joint interests*. In other words, you can't manage a relationship without the cooperation of *both* parties who, basically, volunteer to enter into the activity.

Managing the "experience?" The company can manage the experience all it wants, but the customer can opt out at any time during the process. They control whether or not and how they participate in the experience. In essence, they're doing the management, not the company. Again, both the company and the customer have to cooperate to make the "experience," using the word I connote with it, *positive*.

*Words matter.* When it comes to "customer relationship" and "customer experience," the word "management" sends the wrong message as to what work needs to be done in the short term *and* the long term. Furthermore, it implies an *internal* point of view, i.e. inside-out, biased by "we can control what 'relationship' and 'experience' we want to provide" and, potentially, leave out the most important reason CRM and CEM exist – *the customer!*

When "management" is paired with technology solutions, it can lull company individuals in thinking they're successfully managing relationships and experiences by analyzing the data collected through transactions - which are business deals but not necessarily the "relationship" or the "experience" CRM and CEM have in mind.

*Words matter and should be chosen to promote the goal and drive the activities described by them.*

So what words would I choose? I favor active words like "building" and "growth." Not only are they active and accurately describe the work that needs to be done, they also, in the context of a company, connote *teamwork, collaboration and trust*. "Growth" further connotes the *need to take care of, change, and on-going activity*. These are words that describe what I need to do to forge "relationships" and provide positive "experiences." And, since "customer" is a descriptor word, it more than implies that the "raw" material, in the form of knowledge, has to come from the customer – some through transactions but most from collaboration.

Think about it: if you asked your customers "How would like me to manage our relationship?" would you get a different answer than if you asked them "Would you like to help me build and grow our relationship?" The second question is much more customer centric and would, probably, get "yes" as an answer.