

# The **smart** manager

India's first world-class management magazine



**DOV SEIDMAN**  
building the human  
operating system.  
[ PAGE-38 ]



**MICHELLANA JESTER**  
mit sloan india lab: a case  
for action-based learning.  
[ PAGE-44 ]

MAY-JUN 13 | VOL 12 | ISSUE 3

## Economy and industry not growing **IS AN EXCUSE**

**Vineet Nayar**

Vice Chairman and  
Joint Managing Director  
HCL Technologies



SCAN THIS TO STAY  
CONNECTED

## BOOK EXTRACTS

organisational schizophrenia: impact  
on customer service quality

*by gopal k gureja*

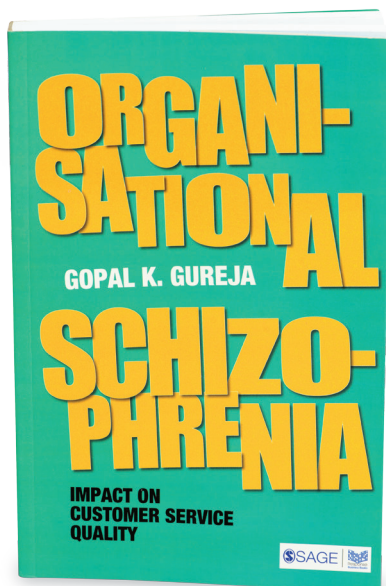
The **smart**  
manager  
India's first world-class management magazine



---

# organisational schizophrenia: impact on customer service quality

by gopal k gureja



**Gopal K Gureja**

SAGE Response  
2013, 376pgs, ₹550, Paperback

**T**hat clear, concise, open communication is of fundamental importance in building relationships, conveying information, changing behaviour and interacting with others is not in question. Our chief concern, as George Bernard Shaw so rightly said many decades ago, is that ‘The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.’

This illusion can and does create innumerable problems at the workplace. Poor communication can impede action, cause embarrassment, and result in customer defection, create employee dissatisfaction and much more.

Transmitting information is not necessarily ‘communication’ in itself. Many managers (and others), in line with the ‘conveyor theory of communications’ adopt an attitude that a communication is completed once the text or data is transmitted. But this is not the case. Such a manager responds to a communication failure by stating, ‘But I sent you a mail.’ In the absence of an interpretive behaviour, we have only raw data or perhaps noise and illusion. Communication is a

stimulus, a response, a feedback, getting at the same wave length, and finally ending up in a desired behaviour. Unless that change is seen, communication has not served the purpose it is intended to serve. The responsibility for ensuring that the end result is achieved lies with the ‘manager’.

And above all, poor communication can create disconnect between policy and practice. Let us straightaway move to some examples captured in respondents’ VOICES.

## **poor communication causes complaint escalation**

In response to my query about the complaints reaching the managing director of a company, this is what his executive assistant had to say.

‘The main reason for a customer to seek the intervention of the managing director or of the chairperson is a communication gap between him and those who are supposed to attend to his needs. When I try to understand the problem and offer assurance that I will have the right people attend to the problem and get back, the customer, very often is not satisfied by that. He insists that I put him through to the MD.’

‘Do you have any reservations?’ the customer would ask.

‘There’s no problem but the MD is tied up in a business review meeting.’

‘What kind of business review is going on when your company cannot honour its commitments and what is worse is that no one is available to talk to and explain the reason for delays.’

‘This is the kind of language and tone the customers use when they speak to me. But I can make out that they are upset more because of lack of communication or poor communication rather than the problem itself. And that they are justified in finally calling the MD.’

That is not surprising. According to an analysis made several years ago, seven out of ten customer complaints addressed to a company’s CEO in a six months period, presented a highly exaggerated picture because of poor communications. Sure enough, the genesis of the complaint lay in some fault—a short or wrong supply, missed delivery dates, upset project schedules, delayed or ineffective service response or some behavioural problem—but as we went through the details of the episodes we found unmistakable evidence that the intensity of customer’s irritation stems more out of poor communications rather than the real problem itself. Lack of understanding

of each other’s position, attempt to win arguments, and misinterpretation of communications continue to delay attempts to grappling with the real issue and hence the problem finds its way up to the CEO.

### unwritten commitments

In many companies the propensity to over-promise is so great that salesmen virtually promise the moon, while trying to grab a new order. This can generate unreasonable demands and if the right people are not informed in time it can create customer conflict. Sometimes competitive compulsions may dictate the necessity of making certain out-of-line commitments but they must be made explicit within the organisation. It is the element of surprise at the lower end of a process that creates potentially conflicting situation. It is important to exercise a certain discipline for a long-term relationship with the customer and not to invite defiance from those who are made to feel small. Here are some VOICES decrying such over-commitments as reasons for defaults in customer service.

- The problem is that the unwritten dialogue is forgotten by the sales engineer as well as by the customer. We, understandably, begin to process the order exactly as per the written contract. It is

during the execution of the order that controversies begin to arise because of verbal or implied commitments made at the time of negotiations.

- There are many over-commitments in case of tender-based orders. In other cases, however, we have flexibility in quoting delivery period.
- Maybe because of lack of knowledge sales engineers might over commit some time. We deal with it suitably. But if delivery commitment is totally unrealistic and has been made without checking with factory that is a problem.
- We do send back-end people to go and meet customers to understand that the compulsions of a sales engineer and also to help them explain the real issues to the customers. We are beginning to see a new realisation and change of behaviour.
- If there is something really tricky we either ask for more time or take the customer into confidence and then decide.
- There are certain things which no sales or service engineer can change. So why make commitments which, later on, can create problems. If you are very clear with the customer upfront he understands.

---

**In many companies the propensity to over-promise is so great that salesmen virtually promise the moon...**

---

### the same story again

The story of ‘communication’ in another respondent company is the same. Transparent to the core,

the company has no hesitation whatsoever in sharing information as necessary and yet some times very crucial information takes its own time to sink in and get reflected in the employees' behaviour.

Engineering inputs have been a major constraint, resulting in very poor figures of on-time delivery of orders. The failure rate to stick to the committed delivery period has been embarrassingly high for the company that has a great brand value. The company decided to make a fairly high investment in design and engineering software—Product Lifetime Management (PLM)—to overcome this constraint. This is an extremely important initiative the advantage of which will affect almost every customer touch point and yet some people in this loop have not heard enough of PLM.

'Over-commitments' on the part of sales engineers eventually do find some justification and, in some cases, even some

---

**The least that the company expects of its sales representatives is total adherence to the company's basic design philosophy and operating processes.**

---

appreciation. Breaking into a new corporate group, matching competition's manoeuvres, strategic importance of a given order are all common grounds for offering the 'moon'. While some exceptions are part of a deliberate strategy, the least that the company expects of its sales representatives is total adherence to the company's basic design philosophy and operating processes.

The following statements give an impression that there is scope for more discipline in ensuring change of behaviour in line with the agreed internal directives.

- We are now reviewing all designs and are making sure that everyone agrees with the design standards and design philosophy.

This was not being done as a matter of discipline.

- An observation that 'jobs were being handled on first-come-first-served basis and that people were not being open about the creation of backlog' again shows a communication gap within.
- One of our directors used to send a newsletter to branches and to customers on e-mail. But since the time he has shifted to a new assignment no one has taken over. Youngsters like us never took the initiative.■

Reprinted by permission of SAGE Response. Excerpted from Organisational Schizophrenia: Impact on Customer Service Quality. Copyright © Gopal K Gureja, 2013. All rights reserved.