THE POWERFUL HABITS OF TECH COMPANIES

Marion Gamel

Tech companies started to revolutionise the world we live in a couple of decades ago, not just because they started in a garage, but because they came up with different ways to do business. There's good news: You don't need to be a tech company to function like one. There's a real opportunity for companies that are not tech-led in a wide range of industries including gaming, to adopt some of the tech ways of doing business and to benefit from similar growth, efficiency and innovation.

I worked for a decade for two leading tech companies - Google and Eventbrite - before becoming Betsson's CMO. Now as an Executive coach, I help leaders in gaming and other industries transform the way they function, focusing on agility, accountability, customers and talent.

Agility

Gaming companies evolve in a fast changing environment. There's a permanent need to adapt. This calls for an agile workforce that is comfortable with frequent changes. Driving change and fostering a culture of agility can start today with any change, no matter how small. Making your team comfortable with change is the required first step to guiding your workforce towards agility.

In life, change is inevitable. In business, change is vital" said Warren Bennis.

Change is a "brain thing". It is therefore important for leaders to understand the process of change. Our brain is not fond of change. Doing habitual tasks on autopilot is easy and reassuring. Embracing new ways consumes a lot of brain-energy and

demands full attention.

There are 3 key ingredients that leaders must give to their team, while change is going on, to help them go through change as painlessly as possible:

- Time: Dealing with change is a psychological process involving several steps. People go through this process at their own pace. It is therefore hard to plan for it, let alone compress this time into an "average" that works for everyone. While it's common for leaders to want the change to be implemented the minute they made a decision about it, it's more efficient to agree on an acceptable amount of time during which the change is being processed. It's a time to ask questions, address concerns and to communicate the benefits of the change. As your team becomes more agile, the required time to process change will decrease, but it should never be nil.

- Repetition: Embracing a new way of acting or thinking requires practice in order to reach fluency. As a leader, you also need to repeat the message about the change several times. While this may feel patronising, it is important to remember that the harder something is to hear, the less it is heard! Repetition of the message is as key as repetition of the new task.

- Attention: Attention is a limited resource. While a team pays attention to something that is changing, they're not paying attention to much else. As a result, deadlines could be missed.

Driving a deep change in your organisation may require that you let go of some over-challenging objectives for a while, or that you help your team prioritise and only focus on 2 things instead of the usual 10.

Additionally to these 3 key ingredients, leaders need to acknowledge people's emotions, sharing their own in the process. They must communicate generously about the change so the level of trust never drops. They also need to create psychological safety within their team, as everyone's focus should momentarily shift from pure results, to learnings.

Accountability
Accountability means clarity about who's responsible for what, what employees' and teams' commitments are, and transparency on progress and results. A by-product of accountability is ownership and pride, which are important ingredients to employees' retention, satisfaction and performance.

Some companies' workforce is very busy, but no one knows exactly who's doing what. When things go wrong, no one knows what broke or who broke it, which can lead to finger-pointing. Other companies have a workforce where everybody's clear about their area of responsibility and their commitment. When something breaks, the responsible team or individual steps forward, looks for an explanation, learnings and solutions. Tech companies are the second kind.

To achieve high level of accountability, Tech companies use a tool called OKRs (objective and key results) that was invented decades ago at Intel. OKRs is a technique of setting and communicating individual objectives, making sure everyone's working towards the same strategic goals. OKRs ensures everyone knows what's expected of them, and what they can expect from others, driving efficient collaboration and accountability.

Implementing OKRs is simple, the big part of the job is to decide that your organisation is ready for this level of clarity and commitment. If it is, one of the members of the management team should be the sponsor of OKRs. A project manager is then given a couple of months to train everyone on OKRs, starting with managers, getting the first OKRs drafted, and setting up a process in place so OKRs are, in time, integrated in the way teams function and collaborate and become a habit.

Customer

Most companies think that they are customer-centric, it's mentioned somehow in their mission statements: "Delight the customer". Most companies are not customer-focused in a truly holistic way, I have also witnessed this in gaming where I witnessed an extreme focus on our industry,: What my competitors offer? What my competitors announced for last quarter? Who is merging with whom? Who gets my customers once they left me? Focusing on your industry only gives you a partial view of your customers. It's the equivalent to believing that all your customers do all day long is play casino or think about playing casino.

I advise leaders I coach to focus on their consumers rather than their industry, asking questions such as: What were my customers doing before coming to my site? What function does gaming play in their life? How do they make decisions to use a brand over another?

Before coming to your site, your customers are living their normal digital life: They were listening to music on Spotify, checking out friends on Facebook, watching a series on Netflix, bidding on eBay, and booking a holiday using a mix of AirBnB and Trailfinder. Your customers' digital consumption is the environment that influences their expectations when they are on your site. As a result, Facebook, Amazon, AirBnB, Spotify are the websites that yours is being compared to. If a large percentage of your users first and foremost seeks a few minutes of entertainment when they play casino, it means that your direct competitors are other available sources of entertainment: Netflix, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest… How does your customer experience compare to the one offered by Internet giants'?

Talent

Companies know that their work force is at the root of success and failure. Yet, most companies encounter talent issues, which are like toothache: They rarely go away by themselves.

Here are a couple of truths that I have learned during my last 20 years spent working for tech companies:

1. Talent is not "an HR thing". Talent is the responsibility of every single leader. When it's time to improve talent acquisition or retention, HR cannot magically fix the mistakes or oversights that leaders made. There is not such thing as "talent issues", there are Leadership issues.
2. Leaders, whether local MD or C-level, should focus about a third of their time on talent: Acquisition, retention, growth path, efficiency.

Embracing these 2 facts put leaders in a good place to solve their company's talent issues, which in a small market places like Malta and in insestuous industries such as gaming, can be severe.

I often share with leaders a tip learned from tech-companies on assessing your company's talent situation: Start by looking at recent business disappointments and some remarkable business successes. Find out how talent specifically contributed to them: Skills, manpower, leadership, organisational structure of a function... The key to assessing your talent "issue" is to start with your business reality so you understand how talent is fueling success and failure and what to enhance or change. Don't start thinking about talent using HR data such as attrition. However interesting, if the only metric that matters is revenue, then start with that and work your way to understanding how and what talent is impacting that.

Tech companies have revolutionised the way we conduct business. By emulating the way they tackle agility, accountability, customer and talent, gaming companies can be on par with the optimal digital growth. It's the right time to focus on the ways of tech companies, as gaming will soon be a 100% digital industry. Whether you decide to drive the agility of your team, to benefit from optimal accountability, to focus on customers or to deal with talent differently, there's a bit of tech wisdom for everyone!
:: **CGi**

---

i **MARION GAMEL**

Marion Gamel is a C-level executive with over 20 years of experience. Having started her career as an entrepreneur, she then worked for Google and Eventbrite and was Chief Marketing Officer at Betsson Group. Marion has been coaching leaders around the world since 2015 and is a Registered Business Coach.