

ABSTRACT

Göteborg University
School of Business, Economics and Law
Department of Business Administration
P.O. Box 610
SE 405 30 Göteborg, Sweden

Author: Mikael Wickelgren
Language: English
ISBN 91-7246-228-0
Doctoral thesis, 2005
352 pages

Engineering Emotion

Values as Means in Product Development

Product development (PD) is today the core process of automobile companies, especially if the producer has ambitions in prestigious market segments. Some car companies, e.g., Volvo Car Corporation (VCC), have entered on a path of brand development efforts as a vital part of their strategic change process. The producers want to make premium products that offer added values beyond transportation. The technical product has to be complemented with a story or narrative that adds an emotional dimension to the product. The product becomes more than just a thing – it becomes a social object. In the studied new car project, VCC's goal explicitly aimed at emotional charging the products in development. Consistent with this goal, the project managers engaged in systemized HR-based team development activities fully integrated in the PD project, i.e., an internal emotional management process. Both goals aimed toward keeping the company in the forefront of the fiercely competitive automotive industry. Thus, there were completely rational reasons for infusing emotionality into VCC's cars. However, dealing with emotions in PD in the conservative automobile industry can be problematic. Traditionally, the industry has focused on instrumental rational reason and suppressed (soft) emotions.

When competition drives PD projects to their limits, the cost of the sophisticated development work needed today increases. Managing PD projects is a challenge of immense proportions and pressure on PD management teams is enormous. Additionally, the general flux in today's erratic car markets requires responsible managers to act, even when they lack certainty about either the means or the ends of their mission. Management action begins with the company values that guide their work. VCC nurtures their company values and works hard to translate them into products for the customers. PD managers translate the values into new products through extensive deliberation where the actual decisions made are rarely noticed as they happen. This study investigates how emotionally charged products (cars) are created and how management deals with the challenges that result when a company tries to create more emotionally charged products under conditions of uncertainty about both design, production and marketing.

Key words: Product development, automobile industry, strategic change, emotion, social objects, management work, deliberation, complexity, uncertainty, value based management.

Printed in Sweden
by Grafikerna Livréna

© 2005 Mikael Wickelgren
and BAS Publishers