



CONNECTING THE DISCONNECTED — A NEW ERA



msq



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INTRODUCTION

The last few years have been anything but ordinary. We've traversed through economic, political and social crisis, seemingly on a daily – sometimes, hourly! – basis. From it some winners have emerged. But there have also been many, many losers. And for everyone, life and work has changed. Forever.

A new way of operating in pursuit of growth in business has been established that is a combination of necessity, pragmatism, innovation and new best practice.

From our privileged position at the intersection of marketing, technology and data, we have seen this change at close hand. We have observed the challenges presented and opportunities taken.

Which is where our latest study was born. Our ambition was to explore and decode what changes have taken place in order to help encode a new formula for value creation and growth in a new era.

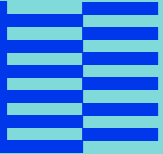
To understand this at a more meaningful level, we spoke to 50 leaders from client organisations across marketing, data and technology functions and across brands and businesses in multiple categories.

At several levels, we found that, with all the external forces potentially creating increasing distance and potential division, the key to success was in the ability to find points of connection. Whether at a human, technological, process or information level, those companies and people that were able to **connect the disconnected** found their way to value and growth faster.

We call this the art of *Connectonomics* – the ability to find connections that create value for brands, businesses and customers. And we've identified six key drivers of those connections, which we'll dive into in more detail in this white paper. We'll hear from CMOs, CTOs and CIOs who are doing it well. We'll look at the fresh challenges that each area brings, and we'll look at where new investment and structural shifts need to be made. If you'd like to discuss any driver further, we'd love to hear from you.

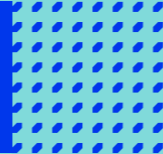
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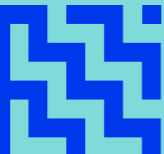
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MASTERING NEW CULTURES & OPERATING MODELS

With the shift in ways of working and advancements in technology, old structures and processes are less effective and fit for purpose than they used to be. Unless you were born into this era, there are structural and cultural challenges to getting things done.

This is about more meaningfully connecting roles, tasks, people and process.

For instance, being successful requires the ability to subvert silos to get access to the information and development processes that deliver effectively. During our qualitative research we heard stories of businesses implementing new leadership meetings that established new alliances across the group, or forming 'squads' for special projects, such as Christmas activity. One Chief Digital Officer admitted to not knowing the names of some team members working in other disciplines, but a shift to a horizontal team structure for delivery allowed them establish a common language that extends beyond the day-to-day work carried out.

We saw the prominence being put on the employee experience. Ensuring it matched the nature of the business and the holistic needs of said talent. As onboarding processes change dramatically (try explaining to a new joiner as little as a decade ago that their first

day would be in their bedroom, rather than meeting people face to face and struggling to work the coffee machine) how is the organisation's culture being conveyed, and every role catered for so that teams and individuals can deliver effectively?

Indeed, it was fascinating to talk to industry leaders about how they're approaching the combination of remote, face-to-face and hybrid working in the best way to drive engagement and efficiency. The key thing to remember is that it's still a challenge that must be prioritised. We're not here to discuss whether Covid is 'over' or not, but having been subjected to three years of articles on 'working from home' between 2020 and 2022 it's easy to feel jaded, to blindly accept whatever 'new normal' people have fallen into and move on. But the truth is that every business' 'new normal' is different, and needs to be thought-through, communicated and implemented as such.

But perhaps the word that came up more than any other during our conversations was 'agile'. How is Agile working for businesses? Some organisations we spoke to have embraced it with open arms, others are dipping their toe in, but almost all recognised the practical and cultural benefits to be had.

Truly implementing Agile practices, however, is easier said than done. Force fitting frameworks and a lack of monitoring and measurement has become a frustration for many businesses more intent on buzzwords than genuine digital transformation. Are you 'being agile' or just 'doing agile'?

LEARNINGS FROM SUCCESSFUL COMPANIES

Establish best practice in hybrid working that optimises performance and delivery for your business. Create clear expectations and recommendations on how best to work for each deliverable and invest in technology that's fit for purpose.

Take time to truly understand agile. Provide clear definitions of roles and ownership, the outcomes sought and the metrics of success. Are you investing in the right tools and skills to make Agile work, and applying it where appropriate?

Subvert silos beholden of old corporate structures to better connect information, capabilities and people around emergent business or customer growth needs. Create greater visibility of projects and workflows and demonstrate the impact of better connectivity.

Create a culture of openness and publicly prize flexible thinking and working.

Think carefully about the new kind of employee experience you are looking to create that attracts and retains the talent you need to win.

“It's difficult to plan anymore. After recent experiences, people just don't buy in to 3-year plans. But you need to make sure you still have a vision and best practice for the sake of the brand's long-term health.”

Insight Chief

“We've learnt to be agile, but we had to go right back to basics. Defining what our teams did, explaining the language around agile and learning the principles. It's the only way to have clarity.”

Global Innovation Chief

“The level of planning needs to increase in the new environment - where 'things would be caught' before they were an issue, the fact that people are working in vacuums means that they sometimes make decisions that it is not their decision to make!”

Chief Marketing Officer

REIMAGINING THE ART OF LEADERSHIP

As cultures and operating models change, so must individuals. That means changes in the approach to team and functional leadership, to better fit the reality of changing roles and expectations.

This is about better connecting moments of influence, inspiration and control with sharply defined content, direction, support and inputs.

It's about having a meaningful presence. Shaping key moments and creating new expected behaviours and routines to drive better teamwork. Employees demand more quality communication – not necessarily more communication per se, but more appropriate and connected communications in the right channels.

During our C-suite interviews, we found many leaders struggling to find the right way to stay visible and connected to their teams as hybrid working and a broader range of challenges became the new normal.

One CMO admitted to undergoing 'a complete rewiring' of how they managed motivation and performance, having to think more succinctly about where and when their support was needed most.

Meanwhile, as it gets harder for leaders to be fully in the loop on projects, a greater focus is needed on the OKRs, rather than inputs and activities. That also means connecting roles and functions in new ways – multiple leaders found they were forging deeper relationships with subject matter experts to allow themselves to really dig into the detail they need to succeed. Data and tech literacy is being prioritised with de-centralised learning that becomes less about training in a formal capacity and instead focusing on upskilling by being closer to the relevant operations and teams.

One business we spoke to created a peer group of cross-functional leaders to share common learnings and support expert learning as needed. Others have invested in new platforms and formats to truly understand and upskill in agile.

But not everything highlighted was necessarily new thinking – more an emphasis by our C-suite interviewees that what we know as 'best practice' is more critical than ever to follow through on. With the reduction in face-to-face interactions, two-way feedback is not just a nice to have, but a critical way of operating. Central spaces for questions, feedback and sharing must be invested in. And as the expectation increases for people to 'self-manage' their upskilling, leaders must be more considered in what makes them a role model of today.

LEARNINGS FROM SUCCESSFUL COMPANIES

Are you focused on outcomes or inputs? OKRs are no longer 'nice to have' goals, they are essential.

Be a leader with 'meaningful presence'. Understand your channels of communication and focus more deeply on the content you share. Communicate progress and updates clearly and at timely, regular moments.

Embrace continuous learning. Connect roles and functions and establish peer groups that can upgrade skills and transform teams.

Invest in new communications platforms. Understand the mix of media and message to get engagement and clarity.

“It used to be beneficial to be a jack-of-all-trades, knowing a little about a lot of things. But I've had to go deeper into newer technologies, to have an added depth of knowledge to reassure myself about our approach to projects. Because you have to be aware of what's really going to help the business and what's the Emperor's New Clothes.”

Chief Digital Director

“As a modern leader you need real resilience as you get further distanced from the detail. You have to get comfortable with not having all of the answers.”

Chief Marketing Officer

“The best candidates we speak to today are Leonardo Da Vincis – someone who is great at art and science. That dual view is critical and leaders need to be able to demonstrate both if they're to act as role models to the breadth of people that now make up most digital and marketing teams.”

Chief Marketing Officer



SEEKING A SINGLE VIEW OF EVERYTHING

The continued acceleration of depth and breadth of available data, historically disparate ways to collect and store, combined with the desire to make smarter, more informed decisions, has created another bulge in the information age. But are organisations themselves mature enough to take advantage?

This is about connecting the data and information more meaningfully to the people and communities, to make them more effective at decision making and delivery.

Unsurprisingly, a large chunk of the organisations we spoke to indicated that their data lives in many parts of their business, often with closed access and controlled in silos.

The pandemic shifted things along, for sure. The need for faster understanding and action lifted some barriers and allowed sight to those who most needed it. But visibility and connectedness broadly remains difficult, and greater time investment is needed in understanding the data that an organisation holds and how it can be surfaced most effectively.

Creating appropriate access for functions, teams and partners will better inform strategy and execution. The closer you can be to your

customers, the deeper, more contextual insights you'll have. We spoke to businesses creating new insight forums and data sharing sessions, dedicating resource to embracing a wider variety of new sources and analysis platforms to widen access.

Of course, this is where many organisations we interviewed – particularly those with less mature brands – encounter challenges. Next level knowledge management causes confidentially implications. Tech therefore needs significant investment to avoid slip ups.

But we also spoke to businesses whose investment in greater intelligence has allowed for more rapid product launches, or smarter shifts in brand positioning.

It also requires a cultural change. One large multinational we spoke to highlighted a change in focus between 'group' and 'market' roles. Group began taking control of wider global insights, leaving markets to deal with insight that was specific to them. As a result, the group function was accepted and valued by markets more readily, and insights were captured and faced much faster than they had done previously, where each market was left to their own devices.

However, one large retailer we spoke to found that their culture was readily accepting of 'the data and tech revolution', but its tech platforms were unable to help them keep up. It's a delicate balance, and disconnected organisations are quickly thrown off kilter at a time when the opportunity is so great.

LEARNINGS FROM SUCCESSFUL COMPANIES

Embrace the new insight age. Develop a central store that offers greater opportunity to see and connect everything, creating a single source of truth with flexibility, open access and catalogued use cases.

Produce new and related metrics to understand behaviour and performance at a more granular level. Embrace the redundancy of some information – the classic strategist 'superpower' of seeing what is not helpful as much as what is helpful becomes all the more crucial.

Get buy-in from the C-suite. Greater drive and understanding from the top overcomes political barriers and creates a more insight-driven culture.

“Our biggest challenge right now is missing or unconnected data. An organisation today needs a single view of potential customers so you can flex different journeys and understand how you can build better segmented propositions. It requires a big investment, but it's a critical one.”

Chief Marketing Officer

“The coming together of data, tech, insight and marketing was a critical moment for us. Successfully coalescing around big uses cases completely changed how we approached our customers.”

Global Head of Insight

“We completely democratised the intelligence we had in the business. Creating a weekly insight download, inviting more Directors to join our statuses and sharing recordings for those who couldn't make it changed the hierarchy and allowed us to finally take advantage of the data we actually have.”

Chief Insight Officer

CHAMPIONING DIRECTED DATA

For those who are set up to embrace the new insight age, the challenge becomes using information in the right format and frequency to cause a step change in the way an organisation thinks, acts and communicates with its customers.

This is about connecting the data with the delivery platform so that format and function are in lock-step.

Organisations of all shapes and sizes are clearly recognising tensions here. Whether that's because multiple silos in the business cause data to be disconnected, or because new sources of data are needed, as old sources aren't agile enough.

The move to more personalised marketing continues, but few leaders we spoke to were completely happy with the relevance of the data they held to generate purposeful personalisation that can be used to drive genuine creative performance.

Retail marketers highlighted progress – one global retailer we spoke to outlined the momentum that their sales associates now

felt after being equipped with more accurate real-time customer information.

But how is personalised messaging going to work going forward online, in a cookieless world? And further down the line – although there were many variations in opinions on just how far down that line would be – how will AI and Machine Learning make an impact?

Some Chief Insight Leads were sceptical – one felt that their data transformation approach had actually moved forward very little over the past 3 years... another described the opportunity for AI to transform how businesses use data in the short-term as “bollocks”. But there was a general consensus amongst CMOs that investing in dynamic content and programmatic would continue to be a priority in order to better tell brand stories.

How, as a business, can you make customers feel empowered to share their data? Can you use personalised content in a way that doesn't quickly become an annoyance?

How do you strike the balance between the inevitable volume/quality trade-off that a new era of directed data brings? Knowing when continuous, real-time and predictive data works best, understanding how it will be used and what actions are required from different departments (be it automated or human-led) will continue to be an agenda point for the C-suite over the next 12 months and beyond.

LEARNINGS FROM SUCCESSFUL COMPANIES

Embrace and implement a culture of real time reporting and diagnostics for optimisation, and make predictive insight a key part of execution and scenario planning.

Understand what technology is needed to create and deliver directed data and connect it to the required channels.

Use dynamic content development to get more right first time, measuring and re-targeting to build relevance and performance.

Consider local vs global objectives and how they may be joined up.

“GDPR and all it brings is still a conundrum for customers, let alone our business. We've found customers opting out and then complaining that we're not talking to them. When we tell them that they've told us not to, they often respond along the lines of 'oh right but I didn't mean it like that, I just don't want these type of emails'. How do you manage their expectations?”

Chief Marketing Officer

“The only way to get personalisation at scale is to become an agile organisation. We've worked hard to join up our intelligence far better than before and create new segmentation models that mean we can actually do more personalised messaging.”

Chief Technology Officer

“Directed data is something we always knew we were going to have to invest in, but it's still challenging. You keep pulling the thread and realising there's way more engagements and touchpoints with our buyers than you thought – even if you've been in the business for years like I have.”

Chief Marketing Officer

DELIVERING MEGA PRAGMATIC INNOVATION

Speed to execution is a rapidly increasing condition for success in the new era. Previously, innovation has often been characterised by separate ownership and pre-launch evaluations, with stage gates causing time delays and resourcing frustrations.

But MVP is becoming the new 'ready'. Multiple C-suite leaders discussed the spirit of 'good now' being better than 'great tomorrow' as a fundamental cultural shift within their departments and wider organisation, with new guardrails and working practices needing to be put in place to accommodate as such.

This is about better connecting delivery and development disciplines and performance outcomes tightly to maximise opportunity and minimise risk.

The ways to evaluate and enable new products and services have become more pragmatic and optimise-focused. Fixed time for deliveries, with multi-discipline teams engaged from the off requires a new kind of leadership, with clarity of roles and ownership becoming ever more vital.

Many Chief Technology Officers spoke about building feedback loops into the launch process up front, with the need for more joined-up insights teams engaged to help those first versions be more effective by being based on sharper insights.

Meanwhile, as innovation proliferates across channels, making sure experiences are and can be connected gets harder. Many Tech and Marketing leaders spoke of starting projects that united the online and offline experiences from the very beginning – taking advantage of the increased connectivity between online and offline channels that were forged 'out of necessity' during the pandemic.

It once again requires a new shaping of teams and ability to cede ownership where necessary. More than one Chief Technology Officer spoke of how his tech team is now leading on product development that would have once been led by marketing. This unification has also helped businesses leverage scale more readily – sharing ideas and using innovative approaches to solve common problems.

And the most successful way to do that is to ensure you're always adopting a customer-first approach. Bringing customer thinking and insight into the product development process early, articulating both customer and commercial outcomes equally and connecting the desired delivery and design agendas.

As one Chief Marketing Officer said: "when the project gets going, it needs to move fast. So getting the brief, process and requirements clear up front is critical. And the only way to do that is to bake in human-centered thinking."

LEARNINGS FROM SUCCESSFUL COMPANIES

Demand clarity on what customers want and what the brand needs to deliver to be differentiated, before products are designed and delivered.

Be clear on metrics when developing online and offline experiences in unison. Understand project ownership structures and use common language that's explicit about what's needed to be delivered.

Set fixed times for delivery and be comfortable that MVP is the new ready. Where possible, launch products in the cloud and optimise remotely.

Have a clear vision on how you'll take customers with you – bring behavioural thinking into the mix and be able to articulate the desired customer and commercial outcomes.

Speed is now paramount, so simplicity is key. Align on the metrics and have clear customer measures for success. Be open to evolution and ready to solve problems for people and the business in flight. It's hard for legacy organisations, but the best businesses bake all this into the brief."

Chief Marketing Officer

The way we work now is a bit faster and a bit punchier. You do something quickly, demonstrate results and then you get buy-in and investment to do more. The old days of massive waterfall innovation projects being approved is not the way anymore."

Chief Digital Officer

Relationships with the rest of the C-suite has changed. There used to be lots of paperwork and time taken to get decisions made. Now, finance are happier to sign off on the tech team going away for a problem-solving week which may result in nothing. But they know we have to innovate."

Chief Technology Officer



BAKING IN CREATIVE TREASURES

When things move at pace, efficiency can trump effectiveness. Effectiveness can undermine equity. And satisfaction can miss opportunities for distinctiveness. Yet to get closer to customers, you need sincere, enduring emotional bonds.

This is about connecting the brand agenda and sales agenda and the power of craft with the pragmatism of speed.

The evolutionary role of emotion in human psychology is to attract us to things that are good for us and repel us for things that aren't. And so it is with customers' relationships with brands – they're attracted to the 'good guys', the ones that genuinely enhance their lives.

Greater connectivity between marketing, insight and tech teams are great for operational efficiencies but can't come at the expense of enduring ideas.

Both Chief Marketing Officers and Chief Technology Officers spoke of the tension between delivering volume and value, without sacrificing creativity – which has meant marketing teams taking more time to develop and evaluate creative thinking as a matter of course – and educating parts of the business as to the importance of putting emotional connections at the heart of their broader comms strategies.

Many leaders discussed their intentions to revisit their brand ecosystem – developing distinctive brand assets that can seamlessly deliver clear, consistent and engaging brand messages across a growing number of channels.

Baking brand experience into every designable moment is now table stakes, one CMO pointed out. A new wave of brands were already raising customer expectations as to what's possible, and the pandemic exacerbated that further. Customers know they can get cheaper, faster, easier etc., but now know they can do so whilst still enjoying a 'proper brand experience'.

Because still, big idea creative thinking can travel across channels. And insight-driven creativity can help you get closer to customers in more meaningful and relevant ways.

LEARNINGS FROM SUCCESSFUL COMPANIES

Go slow to go fast. Take time to develop strategies and ideas for optimisation before industrialisation.

Balance big, bold ideas with more targeted incremental gains. But ensure you're always delivering at least base level creative standards, being mindful of consistency and cut-through.

Implant a brand guardian into the product and tech design teams. Have clear and engaging brand propositions and experience signatures that can be seamlessly delivered across the ecosystem.

Understand how you will measure distinctiveness, differentiation and emotional connections for maximum short and long-term impact.

“With the cost-of-living crisis, more than ever you need your brand to be a valued part of people's lives. We're not just competing with other businesses in our sector, we're competing with a customers' increasing energy costs, or for the share of money they may instead want to spend on a holiday.”

Head of Insight

“We're shifting focus back on brand. During the pandemic, I don't think we were alone in putting less attention on that than we should have. Having a programme that is intentionally intended to raise brand awareness as well as demand, using our brand assets correctly, is our next big investment.”

Chief Marketing Officer

“In our industry, I don't see enough organisations keeping their brands omnipresent. You get tentpole moments of targeted six- and twelve-week campaigns, then you forget about it and move on to the next thing. You're hitting a fraction of customers. And it's all at the end of the funnel, when the customer is in market, and not doing enough to build a relationship ahead of when they may be ready to buy.”

Chief Marketing Officer

APPLYING CONNECTONOMICS

Day-to-day and long-term challenges have changed rapidly for business leaders over the past three years and will continue to do so faster still going forward.

By conducting conversations with individuals across the C-suite – all of whom have their own unique takes on a new era of communications – we’ve seen that the underlying principle that unites successful organisations is that of connectivity. Connecting products, connecting innovations, connecting departments, connecting KPIs... and ultimately connecting with customers.

The themes outlined in this White Paper we believe are the most common starting points for tech-led business transformation to take place right now. Each theme brings its own challenges and opportunities, and as we delve deeper into Connectonomics we’ll unpack in detail what CMOs, CTOs and CIOs can do within each to drive genuine value.

Visit the [Connectonomics](#) area of our online publication, [Joined-up Thinking](#) to find out more, or join our community of comms leaders for panel discussions, bespoke roundtables and intimate knowledge sharing sessions where progressive, global brands will share their own examples of success (and challenges!) in [Connecting the Disconnected](#).

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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MEET MSQ HOME TO JOINED-UP THINKING

MSQ is a next generation creative and technology group. A global group of diverse thinkers who blend human insight with data, technology and creativity to help brands and businesses join everything up, build closer customer relationships and drive accelerated growth.

We’ve built MSQ this way because we can see the value that Connecting the Disconnected has to our clients’ business. We bring together award-winning, expert capabilities to uniquely deliver across disciplines, fully supporting and joining up the needs of the CMO, CTO, CIO and CFO.

Our frameworks, processes and tools support this – covering the whole length of the customer journey spectrum.



With a range of bespoke tools and products:

North Star Framework

Insights Engine

Earned Equity

Creative Automation

Creator Hub

Effectiveness Framework

Digital Asset Management

CXM Tools

Global Studio

MSQ Commerce

MSQ B2B

With thanks to insight from Marketing, Technology and Insight leaders from businesses including...

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Bupa	MoneySuperMarket Group
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