The Costly Game of Telephone

We all know the game of telephone well. You start with one person on one end who tells the person next to them one thing

and that passes on down to the final person who then reveals what they think the first person actually said. It is almost always something completely different. And the more people you can stuff in that chain between first and last person, the more off and thus funnier it becomes. However, in business, there is a more serious risk of lots of layers in the decision-making chain and how it can distort, if not really create problems, as the end action or direction is way off course from the original intent and need. We are seeing this today in office as owners contemplate how to not only make sense of today's confusion but act appropriately.

A New Kind of Capital Management: For those of us that have suffered through a few budget cycles in the historic world of asset management, sorting through capital plans is no small task. There are several iterations, occasional yelling and gasping at the first rolled up number produced, and ultimately plans that create the rules by which the asset gets to play by for the next twelve months and beyond. The challenge with this process is that it often treats the asset as very static, all or nothing, and assume once completed correctly, you can be finished for ten years. However, when I look at the kind of spend decisions now necessary to consider such as IT infrastructure, more robust flexible offerings, and other things, we are essentially introducing additional layers into the game of telephone. The other capital items have not gone away (still need new HVAC, roofs, and elevators), but if the overarching strategy and purposefulness for that asset gets lost, and thus the communication between owner/operator and occupier is clouded by the additional layers, then the prioritization and resulting effectiveness of that capital will often prove disappointing if not problematic.

Know Where You Want to Go: Candidly part of what made identifying and finding success in deploying both PropTech solutions *View The Space* and *Honest Buildings* back in 2014 and 2015 was that there just was not all that much out there on the tech solution side competing for our time and headspace. We needed both of those to be a better operator and could be focused on making them work and become better and better. The PropTech space has absolutely exploded with ideas and companies everywhere now, and while that is exciting long term for the significant advancement and improvement of office environments, for the moment owners/operators without a clear sense of where they are and where they want to get to will be extremely vulnerable to spending big amounts of time and resources on solutions that ultimately should have been sequenced differently or avoided altogether. The priority should be leveraging staff time and talent while simultaneously enhancing the user experience in durable and sustainable ways.

People Still Count the Most: Maybe it's a result of the current proliferation in PropTech solutions and/or the industry tendency to view operations as a commodity, but I am surprised to see how little many groups seem to value human capital right now to effective strategy and execution. Implementation and adoption at the property level for many of these initiatives remain a significant cog in the wheel.   In this more serious game of telephone we're in, if you looked down your chain and could immediately identify the two people in the chain who you knew with almost 100% certainty were going to be most prone to mess up the messaging for everyone, wouldn't you focus on that, even potentially replacing them?   It's not easy and should always be done well, but that's why they call it leadership. We seem to hope it's not there, build elaborate additional layers of work arounds, all ultimately delaying decisions if not enabling poor ones. Teams more than ever crave purpose, a cohesive plan, and leaders who get it,who care and who package and impart the vision and message in a clear and compelling way.

When I lay in bed at night and do a quick recap of the highs and lows of that given day, more often than not, the successes and failures can often be traced back to quality and effectiveness of the communication I have been part of. The clarity, graciousness, and timing of that communication always seems to go a long way in determining the quality relationships I create or maintain and thus the resulting quality of the outcomes from those. I am not sure what needs to happen for owners and operators of work environments is all that much different.

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