

**White Paper:**

**Does Clever Talk Replace Action in Your Marketing Organization?**



**By Christopher Quinn**

## Overview

In this White Paper we will discuss:

1. How 'Smart Talking' obscures the underlying capability issues within marketing organizations.

How can organizations that 'say the right things' and express attitudes which seem to indicate an understanding of marketing concepts perform so poorly? .

## The Issue

This issue is not new and was outlined in a Harvard Business Review article entitled 'The Smart-Talk Trap' co-authored by Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert I. Sutton. In this insightful piece they describe something called the **'Knowing-Doing Gap'**. They believe that the root of this gap is not being "due to the inertia of indifference or ignorance but of knowing too much and doing too little". Increasingly people within organizations place value on 'sounding intelligent' on issues by deftly utilizing the buzz words of the art. Who can disagree with the assertion that 'we need a robust Omni Channel Strategy?' But ask ten people to describe the executional elements of an Omni Channel Strategy and be prepared for many different answers.

## How is this behavior enabled in organizations?

Pfeffer and Sutton think that it occurs because "when confronted with a problem, people act as if discussing it, formulating decisions, and hashing out plans for action are the same as actually fixing it". In our work with companies we have also seen this issue in which people readily substitute talk for action. It is

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reinforced when companies embrace expressed attitudes instead of observed behaviors as an indicator of their capability status.



OR



***Can you imagine someone asking you the time and you relied upon the length of the shadows cast by a tree to estimate the time instead of utilizing the Swiss watch on your wrist? That is no different than relying upon express attitudes (words) to assess the organization's capability and readiness to execute plans rather than the behavior's you can observe.***

### Why does this matter?

It is a problem because it disguises the underlying issues that impact marketing execution. "After all, talk, unlike action, carries little risk. But it can paralyze a company". So how can the focus shift in such a way that the 'knowing-doing gap' does not obscure the real issues impacting organizational performance?

## What is the solution?

There are a few guiding principles that organizations can apply to move beyond 'talk & attitudes' to truly identify and address capability issues that impact performance:

1. Understanding that knowledge is necessary but NOT sufficient
  - a. Clearly knowledge informs action & practice but it is not the same thing
2. Emphasizing observed behaviors and practice over expressed attitudes
  - a. What people do has more to do with the outputs they generate than the words or attitudes they express
  - b. Ensure you gain the perspective on behaviors of both the manager and their direct report to identify any alignment issues that need to be addressed
3. Utilize behaviors to establish the expected standards of marketing practice and answer the question- 'What does good look like"? (Not what does good 'sound' like!!).
  - a. If it is not shared and cannot be described- it can never become a standard

**Expressed Attitudes**  **Doing**

**Observed Behavior**  **Doing**

Any understanding of marketing performance must be based on the identification and assessment of the behaviors and actions that generate the outcomes required. Push beyond the marketing buzz words and 'smart talking' to the true drivers of results- Knowledge & Behavior.

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If you want to learn more about undertaking a marketing capability transformation let us know by contacting us at [info@imprintlearn.com](mailto:info@imprintlearn.com).

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and learning solutions tailored to marketing capability development. He led global marketing organizations both large and small during his 16+ year career as a commercial leader/practitioner in technology based companies. Learn more about Chris at

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