

# TRANS FORMATION



## MARKETING AND PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE SESSION OF THE 26 OF MAY 2021

Research On the Change of Behavioural Patterns and The Current Global Health Crisis

*Executive Summary*

### **The new service relationship, key to the attractiveness of public passenger transport in the Covid-19 pandemic period?**

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Here are three points among the main topics of the research I am conducting for the Francophone Network of Transport Socioeconomics (Paris, June 2021)

#### **1) No satisfied customers with unhappy workers, no customers feeling safe with workers feeling unsafe**

a) Once "invisible", staff in contact with the public are now hailed as "heroes of everyday life". However, they have probably not been often called upon as key players in the service relationship with the public. The "symmetry of attention" is supposed to give as much focus on workers needs as for the clients' ones, a condition to motivate workers to treat clients as they expect to be. But there is a huge gap between what companies say they do, what they think they do, and what they actually do.

b) The fact is that work situations in public passenger transport make the human and social management of workers very delicate. Socio-organisational rigidities of companies in the sector hinder the reactivity of the first lines: the weight of procedures and modus operandi, the heaviness of hierarchical controls, the power of silos between trades, massification of flows and monotony of activities, ambivalence of relations with the public, collective functioning that overshadow the requirements of the "primary task" of the companies.

#### **2) No Marketing, Communication and HR specialists able to share their vision and knowledge without a real, but difficult, integration with other components of the companies**

a) Characteristics of the sector explain why this integration is not easy: the compartmentalization and lack of transversality isolate Marketing, Communication and HR from the rest, especially, from Operations. For other sectors of the companies, Marketing and Communication are often considered to be islands with no real contact with production staff, and in particular staff in contact with the public (information, sales in the field, driving, traffic control, channeling passenger flows, ticket control, security, cleanliness, maintenance, etc.).

b) If travellers perceive that professionals in contact with the public are comfortable despite the risks associated with the pandemic, then they will trust the professionalism of the service provider companies. On the other hand, the development of new digital tools reinforces the need for a human presence on the ground to support customers. As a matter of fact, companies have not sufficiently understood the behaviour of travellers and their need for permanent psychological reassurance while travelling. The health crisis increases the anxiety associated with being with strangers in enclosed spaces (no respect of social distance and feelings of disturbing promiscuity). In all these aspects Marketing, Communication and HR have a key role to play

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**3) The health crisis aggravates the risks observed in the pre-Covid period but presents an interesting opportunity to rebound and accelerate the socio-technical modernization of the sector**

a) To combat unfavourable stereotypes and to reassure the public, transport companies must of course rely on the excellence of their organisation and their professional technical culture. However, behaviour of staff in contact with the public might have a key role to play in the attractiveness of public transport as contact staff can reassure or worry customers. Moreover, contact staff have very precise field information which should be considered more effectively to adapt the transport offer, with no additional costs. A new service relationship may be a critical issue to deal with Covid and post-Covid mobility, and, at the same time, it represents a useful lever for sociotechnical transformation of passenger transport companies.

b) Change management should be designed to help treating a common double pathology in the sector : 1) *troubles in staff identification*: among workers, the sense of belonging is very fragmented (professions, hierarchical levels, local units, trade union memberships,...) which makes it difficult for members of the working community to adhere to a common strategy; and 2) *shortcomings in recognition of workers' skills*: when workers feel that they are being made to feel guilty about the quality of their professional behaviour, they enter in a defensive mode; then, they never fail to point out the numerous organisational obstacles they face which do not allow them to deliver the "work well done" they have in mind. Therefore, a new sociotechnical dynamic is to be based on both customer expectations and the needs of staff. Project management methods are needed that involve both workers and customers in innovative ways.

Here are five practical cases:

1 - In order to raise awareness of the service relationship, a company organises a customer survey administered in the field by several groups of workers representing all the company's professions

*The staff get to know each other and perceive the customer in a new way; the customers appreciate being directly questioned by the company's staff; the company exploits the wealth of information gathered during the survey*

2 - In order to restore on-board sales during the pandemic, the management of a company consults the bus drivers and listens to the trade unions at the same time

*The network is one of the first to resume direct contact with customers, who appreciate the return of a service relationship*

3 - In order to experiment with a new method of managing customer flows, marketing specialists work directly in the field with their operations colleagues

*Used as a lever, a technical project promotes social transformation*

4 - In order to relaunch its social dynamics, the management of a company produces a precise framework which allows Operations middle management to redefine all its functions and interfaces (with Marketing, Sales, HR, etc.)

*The participatory process is based on a shared diagnosis and co-constructed conclusions; the functions of the professions, the organisation and its interfaces are entirely reviewed; managers, staff in contact with the clients and all the trade union organisations are involved*

5 - In order to improve the quality of customer service, a company is betting on the implementation of new methods of local management in the Operations sector

*Multi-skilling of managers is introduced: it ensures a rotation of functions, a better collegiality between all managers, a more operational presence with staff in contact with the public*