

THE EVOLUTION AND APPEARANCE OF THE INTERNAL MARKETING CONCEPT (IMC): A STUDY IN THE CONTEXT OF 4PS

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Abstract

In the current time there is a vexed question known as internal marketing concept. The lack of widely accepted definitions of the IM concept and a relevant valid measure has lead to increased attempts by academia to investigate the related concepts and measures, especially in India and Indian context. The main purpose of this paper is to review and analyse the whole dimensions (past, present and future) of the internal marketing concept by applying the traditional 4Ps marketing mix. The paper links this to today's knowledge era where the concept of knowledge management, in order to enhance customer service quality in the service encounter, has found its place in internal marketing campaigns. This paper concludes that further empirical research is required into the efforts of the IM campaigns which involve sharing and retaining; furthermore, on its effects on the overall and total quality of customer services.

This paper will be helpful to the various research scholars in the national and international universities. This paper proposes some operational definitions also for further uses in Indian context.

Keywords: Internal Marketing, Knowledge Management, Services Marketing, 4Ps in Internal Marketing.

Introduction

Rafiq and Ahmed (2002), in his book - *Internal Marketing: Tools and concept for customer focused management*, have examined internal marketing from the perspective of development of internal marketing (IM) concept which is a mix of - employee motivation & satisfaction, customer orientation and strategy implementation, and change management components. This book critically

develops the IM concept in another way. This examination enables readers to see the correspondence between the IM context and the traditional marketing concept. Why the knowledge management concept needs to be brought into the internal marketing concept in today's knowledge era? – few reasons also focused by this book. This idea originated from and was enriched by Halal's (2000) proposition that "internal markets are the foundation for a knowledge economy".

Another one dimension of internal marketing can be defined as "Create an internal environment which is flexible and responsive, and nurtures common values and behaviour which reflect organizational goals and its synergy with the marketplace." (Foreman and Woodruffe, 1991).

Internal Marketing

Definitions

The internal marketing system is a parallel learning or collateral structure (Zand, 1974; Bushe and Shani, 1991) which can permanently operate in tandem with the formal structure. Internal marketing as a way of working can foster and enable the required integration by providing a dynamic, open communication system. Relationships are based on exchange transactions and constructive competition, but not limited to the use of price as a form of control, because they are driven by democratic enterprise (Halal, 1996). This process of enacting work activities requires a new organisational form - the 'projectised' network (Peters, 1992) or 'flexible firm' (Atkinson, 1985). In this network bonds are created and maintained through exchanges of value, recognition of mutual dependence, the exercise of free choice, and the creation of an internal or domesticated market (Halal et al, 1993).

Berry (1981) has studied the all dimensions of employees and defined internal marketing as - "Viewing employees as internal customers, viewing jobs as internal products and then endeavoring to offer products that satisfy the needs and wants of these internal customers while addressing the objectives of the organisation." Lings (2000) and Rafiq and Ahmed (1993, 2000) describes that the scope of the literature on IM is enormous though its boundaries are ambiguous. However, the early study on the IM area appears to be concise and much more crystal-clear on its nature and scope.

Effective internal marketing, which would contribute to effective marketing, would require financially rewarding personnel, management commitment to sales training and self-development revision of personnel transfer policies and a redefinition of management in terms of helping people to achieve through work (Berry, 1974).

He also defines IM as "applying the philosophy and practices of marketing to the people that serve the external customers so that (i) the best possible people can be recruited and retained, and (ii) they will do the best possible work."

Background

The Nordic School of Service Marketing recognises that internal marketing, as well as being a set of marketing tools, is a philosophy that actively promotes motivation, rather than using the passive approach used traditionally.

The function of marketing is not only to provide products for sale, but also to take care of the staff. It seems that direct human contact between customer-contact employees and the customer is demanded, because of the simultaneous characteristic of service. Consequently, employee relations and their interaction with customers become critical in providing a quality service (Ferguson and Brown, 1991). Furthermore, IM comes to play a vital role in this situation.

The basis of the internal marketing concept has two aspects. *Firstly*, every employee working in the organisation has their own customers. These customers are so-called internal customers (Brown et al., 1996). *Secondly*, employers need to provide benefits and services for their employees, so as to satisfy them, and then, this will result in delivering better services to final customers in effective and efficient ways (Grönroos, 1990a). Therefore, it is important for employers to apply the marketing strategies and tools used for external and/or final customers to the internal customers, i.e. employees.

Historical perspectives

More than 25 years ago, internal marketing (IM) was first proposed as a solution to the problem of delivering consistently high service quality by Berry et al (1976). The IM concept emerged and has been developed in literature since the 1970s. A number of firms have gradually identified and utilised the internal marketing program; one possible reason for this is that "internal marketing is considered a prerequisite for successful external marketing" (Grönroos, 1990a, p.8). In addition, several authors (e.g. Berry and Parasuraman, 1991; George, 1990; Grönroos, 1985; Gummesson, 1987a; Lings, 2000) claim that implementing IM campaigns will result in an increase of service quality. Essentially, internal marketing focuses on engendering marketing-oriented management. (Varey, 1995; Grönroos, 1983) The historical perspectives section is developed on the basis of the 4 Ps marketing mix.

The product component

Flipo (1986) claims the product for employees is defined as "the job", accompanied with the basic operational skills of the training program (supported also by Berry, 1984b; Grönroos, 1990; Greene et al., 1994; Quester and Kelly, 1999). From the perspectives of Thomson, Berry and Davidson (cited by Berry, 1984a), internal marketing is, "...viewing jobs as internal products, and ... endeavouring to design these products to better meet the needs of these customers." According to Greene et al. (1994), "the successful service company must first sell the job to employees before it can sell its services to customers."

Four elements of the product component of IM which have been identified by several authors include:

- Selecting right personnel (Berry, 1984b; Tansuhaj et al., 1988; Berry et al., 1991; Grönroos, 2000; Hogg & Carter, 2000);

- Considerations of empowerment (Brown et al., 1996; Shotack, 1996; Grönroos, 2000);

- Effects of training (Harrell & Fors, 1992; Henry, 1994; Cahill, 1995; Higgins, 1996; Grönroos, 2000);

- Effects of teamwork (Bak et al., 1994).

The price component

Berry (1984a) describes price as "service pricing can be a market-tool in the service field just as price is important to marketing goods". Flipo (1986) refers to the price as the opportunity costs of engaging in 'the job'.

In few marketing researches which are conducted by, Berry (1984b), in the Banking industry and

proposed that: internal marketing enables a bank to attract and retain the best employees and gain the best work from them by way of the effect of their satisfaction and secondly, requirements for employee satisfaction can be found from the internal marketing research. The research also obtained feedback from employees in terms of company policies, working conditions and other job-related matters

The former enables employees to have a certain degree of freedom to arrange working hours rather than the '9 to 5' type of fixed shifts, while the latter provides employees with other benefits such as health insurance, annual leave, holidays and the like. According to their needs and wants, all these benefits motivate each employee differently. Such benefits offered to the different internal market segments are also claimed by Piercy and Morgan (1991), Harrell and Fors (1992), and Lings (2000).

Researchers bring into the perceived benefits and costs something more than opportunity costs. If employees figure out the fact that the opportunity costs of working their job responsibilities exceed the perceived benefits of attending team meetings, then the process may be seen as a negative 'net value'. Consequently, they may not put effort into participating in team meetings. (Lovelock, 1996).

The promotion component

Several findings mention that communication is characterized as a crucial component as there is a relationship between internal customers and suppliers, prior to the services which are delivered to customers and between internal and external customers. The communication channels and social interactions between these parties need to be smoothly created. Customer feedback which is received by the front-line employees should be transferred to internal suppliers for the further products and services improvement and advancement. In addition, customers' expectations need to be brought into discussions and dialogues between internal customers and suppliers (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1993; Taylor and Cosenza, 1998; Grönroos, 2000; Lings, 2000).

Internal customers have to be told what advertising and promotional campaigns are on at any particular point in time as Grönroos (2000) gives examples of some practical methods in the provision of internal brochures and booklets to service providers and the effective application of two-way communication channels. Some researchers also suggests advertising campaigns not only get external customers' attention and encourage potential customers to buy products, but also should attract employees as "a possible second

audience", and motivate employees to perform correctly and accordingly (Berry, 1984b).

The place component

The place is referred to as a location where the jobs are offered near the living places of internal customers. Allocating the right persons to the right place is crucial, especially customer contact employees (Flipo, 1986).

Critical issues

Internal marketing vs. External marketing

The interdependence between IM strategies and EM strategies, Flipo (1986) proposes that, "the more cooperative the interrelations (customer-orientation for personnel, useful participation for clients), the easier the marketing objectives are to meet". This implies that external customer satisfaction will be influenced by internal satisfaction and that satisfied employees who are motivated on the basis of their needs and wants, determine to what extent external customers are satisfied (see Heskett et al., 1994; Rafiq and Ahmed, 2000; Frost and Kumar, 2000; Lings, 2000). So, it is necessary to design and implement an internal marketing strategy, because of its focus on stimulating employees' enthusiasm and on producing consistent behaviour (George, 1990; Varey, 1995). Tansuhaj et al. (1988) developed the Services Marketing Management Model which connects the concept of internal marketing with external marketing. This model implies that IM strategies and tactics enable employees to be inspired with loyalty, to be involved in the job decision-making, and to be satisfied with the job being offered, furthermore, to be stimulated in their behavior toward excellent quality of service provision.

Service management trinity

Bak et al. (1994) define internal marketing as employing "a marketing perspective for managing an organisation's human resources". On the other hand, "Rafiq and Ahmed (1993) specifically attempt to draw a boundary around human resource management and tell the marketing profession to stay out" (cited by Cahill, 1995). In response, Cahill (1995) refutes their proposition and advocates internal marketing as "good human resource management with a view to satisfying external customers".

By using the Service-Profit Chain, a high level of employee retention and employee productivity may indicate high levels of employee commitment. Employee commitment comes from having satisfied and loyal employees. (Heskett et al., 1994) Employee satisfaction, in turn, primarily comes from high-quality support services and human resource policies that

increase employees' commitment and motivation. A successful internal marketing process will produce highly motivated and well-trained customer-contact employees, who always do the right thing first in the right way, and perform the right behaviour when approaching their customers. Therefore, HR managers and marketers should incorporate the practices of marketing activities with employees' orientation and training programs; after all, a marketing manager may not have training skills for the employees. Overall, cooperation between human resource, marketing and operational departments, i.e. the so-called concept of "The Service Management Trinity" (Joseph, 1996; Lovelock, 1996), is the best approach to successfully implementing internal marketing practices.

Beyond Year 2002

Barnes and Morris (2000) and Berry and Parasuraman (1991) say that the IM campaigns which satisfy the qualified staff's needs can be conducted through the provision of the "job" products. Critically, from the human resource management perspective, many practitioners and scholars have attempted to plan various types of programs and systems for minimising the loss of intangible human assets; however, it seems that a considerable employee turnover rate still exists in reality.

Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) say knowledge management (KM) is not an unfamiliar term in the services marketing literature. For example Ballantyne's study (2000) in the banking industry explores the case that, with the implementation of the internal networks, new knowledge was discovered and circulated by the means of interaction and collaboration techniques. This can be transferred to today's terms of 'knowledge sharing' and 'knowledge creation'. KM can be defined as "attending to processes for creating, sustaining, applying, sharing and renewing knowledge to enhance organizational performance and create value" (Allee, 2001).

The concept of a learning organization which has been pointed out in Cahill's article (1995) is closely relevant to the KM concept about the notions of sharing vision, continuous learning and organizational learning. Cahill (1995) proposes that an application of the learning organization concept as a tool, which can be incorporated into the implementation of internal marketing as he believes that "the metamorphosis of an organization into a learning organization is a necessary step in the correct performance of internal marketing". It seems that strength of the IM concept

is that an employee's continuous learning and testing capacity can be developed through the implementation of internal marketing. The way that employees continuously evaluate their experiences and performance and then learn from them, enables an organization to become stronger and stronger in time, because of its core competence.

Teitjen, M.A. and Myers, R.M. (1998), identifies If the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation programs which have been developed are employed, but promote knowledge sharing and capturing, this may lead to a different result in terms of the overall organizational competitiveness and effectiveness and quality of services. This could also minimize the effect of outgoing individual knowledge, i.e. to alleviate a negative effect of a company's 'Intellectual Capital' which is a sister concept of knowledge management (KM).

In today's knowledge era, increased numbers of companies are attempting to establish KM practices in their systems. KM can be described as the process in which employees are stimulated to capture knowledge from internal and external customers and any type of stakeholders, share what they know and learn with others, apply them to the routine operations, create knowledge of new products and services, and retain them in organizations. (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995) Presumably, these practices will result in acquiring more customer and product knowledge, enabling marketers to have an accuracy of marketing analyses, and then enriching internal customers' competences to deal with their customers. Consequently, the quality will be advanced during the service encounter; furthermore, this leads to strengthening customer satisfaction and loyalty, and to stimulating repeat business.

Conclusions and Suggestions for future study

By the handling of various concept we can state that the notion underlying the internal marketing strategies, is that marketers have to concentrate on the internal market as much as on the external market, if they want marketing plans and strategies to be successfully and effectively carried out within their organisation. Therefore, it is very important to build the right and appropriate internal environment to strengthen customer-consciousness. In doing so, Marketing, Human Resource and Operational departments have to work together, by means of internal marketing practices, since it is an effective strategy for ensuring that those departments keep working with the marketing department.

Under the IM umbrella, how marketers incorporate

KM to the marketing concept becomes important, especially in today's knowledge era. Noticeably, with the study of marketing discipline, how the concept of the learning organisation and KM can be integrated into the internal marketing notion is an empirical, perhaps a critical, research question; after all the former concepts are derived from the 'management' field. In other words, the 4Ps components of the IM concept which will apply to today and future business operations may be slightly different from the ones which had been developed before. The study will also need to give greater attention to the potential IM problems and difficulties for services industries as they compete with other firms in the knowledge era.

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