

A holistic approach on internal marketing implementation

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Abstract

Adopting a holistic marketing vision starts with building strong internal relations at all hierarchical levels. Companies must first take care of internal clients' needs in order to better meet customer needs. The scope of this article is to present the concept of internal marketing and the way internal marketing is implemented in organizations that adopt a holistic marketing vision. The article explores the content and objectives of internal marketing and argues the necessity of building internal relations. We contribute to developing the internal marketing concept by offering a broader perspective on the concept, combining a holistic marketing vision with a management vision regarding internal marketing implementation. We further present an overall view of the internal marketing implementation process. We propose an internal marketing implementation model that strengthens both internal and external relations by meeting the needs of internal clients and promoting a holistic marketing vision.

Key words: internal marketing, holistic marketing, marketing vision, internal relations, internal clients



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INTRODUCTION

A company's marketing goal is to provide its customers value, ensuring at the same time a satisfactory revenue for the organization. In this context, all companies need to adopt a holistic view of the undertaken marketing demarches. This holistic approach is based on the idea that everything matters. A lot of companies disregard this point of view and focus only on external relationships, partially or totally neglecting internal relationships (Gummesson, 2003). Building an organization that cares for each individual client always starts with building strong internal relationships. All companies that are able to do so will obtain higher performances.

Originating in services marketing, the concept of internal marketing approaches the problem of building internal relationships by treating the employees as the company's first customers (Bruhn, 2001). Currently, the concept of internal marketing has extended outside the boundaries of services marketing, becoming a paradigm for all organizations that seek business excellence and a necessity for companies that have implemented or pursue the implementation of a holistic marketing vision.

From a managerial perspective, the implementation of internal marketing involves accepting the idea that the internal and external markets of an organization are similar and can be treated in a similar manner (Berry, 1981). Therefore, internal marketing will be addressed as a set of both internal and external exchange relationships (Gummesson, 2003). The management needs to use specific methods and procedures in order to address internal marketing as a process.

This article explores the concept of internal marketing and its implementation, both in a managerial vision and a holistic marketing vision. A set of methods and basic procedures necessary for the successful implementation of internal marketing was developed. In order to determine the best practices in the field of internal marketing and to create an efficient implementation model, a research model was developed based on secondary data analysis. The purpose of the model is not to identify specific behaviors to be further presented and commented, but rather to identify the overall common features of the internal marketing process of organizations which can help establish a viable implementation model. To test the validity of the listed characteristics, an iterative process was initiated for determining the common patterns that emerge from the observed models.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

The concept of internal marketing originates in the field of services marketing. In the services sector it was observed that the employees' degree of satisfaction influences their performance in relation to

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customers (Brown and Lam, 2008). As in the case of services customer satisfaction is determined mainly by the quality of personnel performance, it became clear that satisfying the needs of employees is essential for a high level of customer satisfaction (Ballantyne, 2000). Thus the necessity to consider employees as a company's first customers appeared, necessity which became the starting point of internal marketing as a managerial process.

Over time, the concept has evolved from its traditional approach, expanding to all types of organizations and incorporating specific management instruments. Thus new approaches have emerged, placing the process of internal marketing on the boundary between the fields of human resource management and marketing. Specific elements of the management staffing function are combined with a marketing vision applied at the level of the organization's internal environment. Internal marketing is the philosophy of treating employees as customers and is the strategy of shaping jobs as products that fit human needs (Cahill, 1996). As a process, internal marketing consists in attracting, developing, motivating, and retaining qualified employees through job-products that make employees happy (Aburoub et al., 2011).

The latest definitions regarding internal marketing highlight the importance of the measures taken to improve external relationships through a holistic approach. These measures are conjugated in a strategic demarche at the level of the entire organization in order to support the change. Internal marketing is the strategy of developing relationships between internal members, where staff decisions, autonomy and know-how combine to generate and spread organizational knowledge that will challenge internal activities which need to be changed in order to enhance the quality of customer relationships (Ballantyne, 2000).

External marketing relationships can be expressed through the value proposition that an organization will submit to their clients. The goal of internal marketing here is to ensure that the personnel are prepared to offer this value. Thus internal marketing is the task of hiring, training and motivating employees who are able and willing to serve customers well (Kotler and Keller, 2008).

The transition from conceptualization to implementation is generally a difficult task, mainly because the proposed concepts have to prove their applicability, consistency, efficiency and equivalence with practical situations. Sometimes various concepts are radically changed or even removed during the transition from conceptualization to implementation, due to the failure to comply with one or more the above mentioned criteria. Internal marketing implementation should consider all the above implementation criteria well, in a holistic marketing approach. The implementation of internal marketing entails the systematic optimization of internal processes, with the help of marketing management and human resources management tools, in order to impose marketing as an internal way of thinking through a consistent orientation both on clients and personnel (Bruhn, 2001).

Knowing the peculiarities of internal marketing is necessary for its efficient implementation. Despite the diversity of opinions regarding the concept of internal marketing, several particularities of the internal marketing process can be highlighted. Firstly, internal marketing is a company's philosophy regarding relationships between the company and its employees which in order to be efficient has to be supported by the organizational culture and by all employees, regardless of their hierarchic level. Secondly, internal marketing is a management process conducted in a marketing vision. Therefore its planning, implementation and control instruments are mainly specific to management and its philosophy, while its communication and internal research tools are mainly specific to marketing. Thirdly, internal marketing takes into account both internal and external relationships, thus ensuring both a customer-oriented and an employee-oriented view.

The philosophy of internal marketing is to improve the company's external marketing activities (Cahill, 1996). From a managerial perspective, internal marketing is a key factor for high performance in any organization, because having happier employees often leads to more pleased clients (Filip et al., 2011). Employees ensure the smooth running of the company and employees' loyalty is critical for business success. For example, any employee from any department can make the difference between a gained loyal customer and a lost customer. Moreover, personnel can be an important differentiation point against competition (Bell et al. 2004) and organizational culture can be an important source of competitive advantage (Cameron and Quinn, 2011).

Through internal marketing implementation, a company can improve the above described aspects, by placing at its very core the company's employees and the actions taken to increase their degree of satisfaction, motivation and loyalty. Moreover, through internal marketing an efficient management of change can be implemented (Rafiq and Ahmed, 2000) and an integrated organizational culture can be created, focused on achieving corporate objectives (Kelemen and Papisolomou-Doukakis, 2004). Consequently, the purpose of internal marketing is to outline within the organization an omnipresent marketing vision.

INTERNAL MARKETING IMPLEMENTATION MODEL

The implementation of internal marketing in organizations is often seen as a set of activities with the purpose of optimizing the internal processes in the organization (Bruhn, 2001). The implementation process itself is not highlighted in literature, papers mainly focusing on describing activities related to internal marketing. The main purpose of the proposed model (figure 1.) is to remove potential implementation barriers and to improve the internal marketing process by using mainly an iterative process rather than a descriptive one.

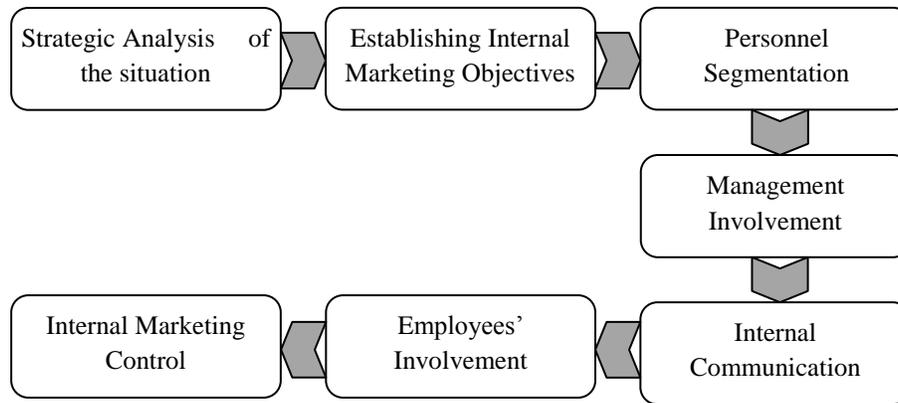


Figure 1. Internal marketing implementation.

The model is divided in seven distinct stages and can be easily applied in organizations with various sizes and different resources. The proposed model does not only provide a list of steps that need to be followed, but is trying to argue why all these stages need to be followed during the implementation process.

FIRST STAGE: STRATEGIC ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION

The starting point of internal marketing implementation is the analysis of the current situation the company is facing. This analysis will focus on identifying strengths and weaknesses in four major areas: employees' orientation towards clients, company's orientation toward personnel, organizational culture and leadership style. Employees' orientation toward clients and company's orientation toward personnel are valuable status quo indicators of internal marketing implementation.

An appropriate organizational culture is the foundation for internal marketing implementation (Rafiq and Ahmed, 2000). A proper organizational culture incorporates a marketing philosophy, encourages innovation and emphasizes employees' achievements and their need for affiliation. Inadequate cultures need to be submitted to change. The change has to include the entire organization and to organically integrate the marketing vision throughout the entire process. The lack of marketing vision leads to a failure of implementing internal marketing in the organization.

Leadership influences the way in which companies answer to implementation difficulties (Sarros and Santora, 2001). A successful implementation of internal marketing is ultimately determined by people (Wieseke et al., 2009). Their capabilities, motivations, attitudes and abilities will have a major role during the implementation process. Companies must recognize and use the leadership potential of their own people.

The instruments used for strategic analysis are particular to marketing research and can be used in various forms like: questionnaires filled in by employees, focus groups, internal online discussion groups, in-depth interviews with employees, complex psychological profiles of employees or internal benchmarking (Morgan, 2010). The results of these analyses shape some priority measures that need to be applied by the organization. All these measures can become a starting point for improvements and substantiate the internal marketing objectives set by the company. Strategic analyses will describe the existing situations, will evaluate the impact of these situations on the organization and will describe the associated risks using empiric methods.

SECOND STAGE: ESTABLISHING INTERNAL MARKETING OBJECTIVES

Based on the above strategic analysis, the adequate internal marketing objectives will be issued. These objectives will be subordinated to the general objective of internal marketing: developing a strong motivated staff ready to satisfy all clients' needs (Gronoross, 1983). Defining the internal marketing objectives will give a coherent image to the results desired.

Because internal marketing requires a consistent orientation to both customer and staff (Bruhn, 2001), it is necessary to divide objectives into two categories: internal objectives of internal marketing and external objectives of internal marketing. External and internal objectives of internal marketing may concern the tactical area of marketing (a short or medium time horizon) and also the strategic area of marketing (a long or very long time horizon). A systematization of internal marketing objectives is shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Systematization of internal marketing objectives (Bruhn, 2001).

	Internal Objectives	External Objectives
Strategic Area	Personnel motivation	Differentiation over competition
	Personnel satisfaction	Gaining new customers
	Personnel involvement	Positive word of mouth
	Personnel loyalty	
	Awareness of client importance	
Tactical Area	Employee informational database	Client satisfaction
	Employees' know-how	Customer-oriented behavior
	Employees' acceptance	

Personnel motivation and satisfaction are major objectives of any internal marketing plan. Satisfied and strongly motivated employees have higher performances when dealing with clients (Gummesson, 2003) and they are less prone to change their workplace (Ballantyne, 2000). Therefore, the levels of personnel loyalty and involvement are influenced by employees' satisfaction and motivation. A loyal staff significantly contributes to reducing the costs for recruitment, selection, formation and integration and ensures continuity even when the organization passes through difficult times (Gronross, 1983).

From a holistic point of view, acknowledging the importance of clients is vital for obtaining higher performances. A company's marketing results are influenced not only by the quality of the marketing department, but by its entire staff, who must acknowledge their role and responsibility for attracting, serving and delighting customers (Kotler and Keller, 2008).

Successful businesses are built around successful ideas implemented with the help of the right people. This is why employees' know-how is very important. Skilled employees may easily implement a good idea and will further contribute to its development in the future (Zampetakis and Moustakis, 2007).

In order to prevent the occurrence and development of resistance to change, it is necessary to increase the acceptance level of employees. The main methods used are aimed at encouraging employees to embrace the objectives of the company and to get involved in the planning and implementation of action plans (David, 2008).

A competent staff that is willing to offer superior value to customers is the main competitive advantage of a company. In practice, any employee can make the difference between a new client and a lost client. A company can easily turn its staff into an important differentiation point, as well as into an element that attracts new customers (Johnson et al., 1986). As mentioned above, through the implementation of

internal marketing it is possible for employees to reach a higher level of satisfaction, which will lead to more satisfied customers.

THIRD STAGE: PERSONNEL SEGMENTATION

To be able to use the adequate internal marketing instruments, clear employee segmentation must be considered. Segmentation criteria that can be used are: age, nature of relationship with the company, hierarchical position, professional background, work related attitudes or employees' objectives (Bruhn, 2001).

When managers develop internal marketing strategies, they most often use a segmentation based on the employee-customer interaction, using as segmentation criteria the frequency of relationships with customers and the nature of these relationships (Saros and Santora, 2001). Customer relationships can have a low or high frequency, while interactions can be personal or through different intermediate channels. Even if this segmentation method is simple, in practice it is often inefficient, because it does not take into account employees' motivation and attitude towards work. From our point of view, a segmentation founded on motivation is more efficient, leading to six different segments (Table 2). Each identified segment needs to be approached through specific instruments, adapted to the segment's basic characteristics (Wehrli, 1995), as people are essentially different and their feedback will vary depending on the instrument used.

Table 2: Employee segmentation based on work related motivation and attitudes

Type	Work incentives and attitude towards work
Survivors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they work to gain money and to live to their standards; • work is a stress factor, a necessary evil, a means through which they achieve what they really want;
Seekers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they work for personal satisfaction, expressed through their achievements (financial or non-financial); • work is a source of satisfaction that contributes to building and maintaining a strong "personality cult" for the individual;
Transcendentalists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they work for self-improvement and to evolve; • work helps them identify and is also a means to become complacent;
Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they don't work for money, but to make their contribution to the final result; • work is purposeful, a source of satisfaction and fulfillment, but it can become a source of intense dissatisfactions in case of poor results;
Enthusiastic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they work for happiness, interacting and helping others; • work is a means of socialization, a challenge that needs a right answer;
Addicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they work because they don't know or don't want to do something else; • work is a refuge, a routine and a necessity;

FOURTH STAGE: MANAGEMENT INVOLVEMENT

The important managerial changes in an organization start at superior hierarchical levels and gradually spread to lower levels through the intercession of informal leaders. According to Harrel and Fors (1992), the successful implementation of internal marketing in an organization is conditioned by the level of managerial support and involvement in the internal marketing process, during all implementation stages and beyond.

Superior hierarchical levels have embraced the philosophy that "internal marketing sustains people, people sustain company performances". Superior management must implement a management vision focused on leadership and on supporting a proper leadership climate, while also adopting a vision focused on integrated marketing communication, in which every employee contributes to communicating the value to customers. Through the support provided by management, a climate of trust should be

created between management and personnel, facilitating the acceptance of internal marketing programs at all hierarchical levels.

FIFTH STAGE: INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Internal communication ensures the transmission of important messages between members of the organization. In the past, internal communication was focused on mass communication of managerial decisions and strategies from the superior management to lower echelons (Quirke, 2008). Therefore, internal communication was centered on vertical communication from top to bottom. However, due to the lack of feedback and communication mediation mechanisms between members, internal communication becomes inefficient because it ignores the vertical communication from bottom to top and the horizontal interdepartmental communication.

Consequently, through internal marketing implementation, internal communication has to create efficient feedback mechanisms regardless of hierarchical levels and to communicate important messages to all concerned members. Internal communication must also be a strong promoter of organizational culture and leadership.

Internal communication may be continuous or sporadic. Depending on its nature, there are specific instruments and related methods. Continuous internal communication instruments will keep internal personnel well informed and motivated. The most commonly used tools are: trainings, weekly internal newsletters, notice boards, journals. Sporadic internal communication instruments will contribute to the rapid, oriented and systematic information and motivation of employees, at irregular time spans. The most commonly used tools are: departmental and interdepartmental meetings, workshops, specialized seminars and conferences, management and personnel team buildings, informative letters, directives and internal norms, guides and manuals, memos and internal electronic messages.

SIXTH STAGE: EMPLOYEES' INVOLVEMENT

Employees' involvement is a combination of measures that build employees' commitment to the company and its activities, stimulating employees' will to work as a team while providing a relevant contribution to the final result (Saks, 2006). For the process to be efficient, employees' involvement needs to be built on relationships of bidirectional cooperation and mutual support between the employer and the employee. A higher level of involvement will have positive effects on employees: a stronger desire to be part of the organization, availability for supplementary efforts when it is required and the drive to issue positive messages about the company to colleagues, friends, social media and competitors (Robinson et al., 2004).

In order to attain a higher engagement level, companies willing to successfully implement internal marketing first need to consider creating a stable work environment that supports excellence and teamwork. Employee performance is closely related to both intrinsic factors (training level, motivation degree, personal expectations, and attitudes) and extrinsic factors (the work environment). Many poor employee performances are closely related to their inability to integrate into the team or to cope with obstacles created by the actual work environment (Hersey et al., 2008). In order to work properly, any employee needs a working environment that creates optimal conditions for personal and professional development. Continuous training is vital for the success of the organization and can help build employee loyalty, thus the periodic organization of trainings and personal development programs is essential. By using these methods, the affective, cognitive and behavioral components of employee attitude are modified in order to meet organizational objectives efficiently (Bruhn, 2001).

Secondly, supporting leadership and initiatives regardless of the hierarchic level is essential for internal marketing implementation. To offer services and products perfectly adapted to clients' needs, employees' initiatives for action must be strongly supported. Employees need to be empowered to meet clients' needs through actions that are not included in the job description most of the time. Employees' autonomy during work processes will lead to higher levels of customer service and will also create a feeling of fulfillment among employees (Markos and Sridevi, 2010). Leaders sustain the organization and have a major role in the development and expansion of the organization (Minner, 2005). A holistic marketing approach is impossible without the contribution of leaders. They support and improve both internal and

external marketing activities and may also contribute to linking organizational objectives with employees' objectives (Saks, 2006). For a superior engagement of employees it is mandatory that employees' objectives are in line with organizational objectives (Hersey et al., 2008). Employees who embrace and internalize organizational objectives are better motivated and will make more efforts to achieve these goals.

For implementing internal marketing successfully, companies need to consider developing a dynamic system of compensation and positive motivation, adapted to employees' objectives and expectations. A compensation system is one of the most efficient methods to shape desired behaviors (Saks, 2006). Using this system, a beneficial competition is stimulated between employees and higher performances are encouraged. A highly motivated and rewarded staff is open to furthering organizational values and is probably loyal to the company.

Employees' expectations and objectives are very important for identifying intrinsic motivations and thus for developing an appropriate reward level. Offering employees positive motivations that fit their intrinsic motivations helps them obtain better results at work (Markos and Sridevi, 2010). It is also important to create programs that promote the organization's values and vision among internal customers, because all employees are representatives of the organization's values and vision. Thus when organizational culture is developed, the programs for promoting the organization's values and vision are crucial. Employees cannot support something they don't know or doesn't fit their own beliefs or values (Hersey et al., 2008).

SEVENTH STAGE: INTERNAL MARKETING CONTROL

Internal marketing control is oriented towards the process of internal marketing implementation and also towards the impact of internal marketing activities on internal and external customers (Ballantyne, 2000). During the implementation process, progress must be permanently monitored using proper control measures for auditing the management process (David, 2008). Control by continuous monitoring is a method often used during internal marketing implementation due to lower costs and numerous correction possibilities.

By monitoring objective achievement, the necessary adaptive or corrective measures can be timely adopted. Bruhn (2001) shows that the internal marketing process inherently requires the control of both internal and external objectives at a strategic and tactic level in order to determine the impact on internal and external customers. For the control of internal objectives (strategic or tactical), the instruments often used are: questionnaires filled out by employees, internal focus groups, online discussion groups, in-depth interviews or internal benchmarking. For the control of external objectives (strategic or tactical) the instruments often used are: mystery shopping, consumer perceptual maps, surveys and focus groups regarding clients' satisfaction and loyalty.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper explores the content and objectives of internal marketing, explains the necessity of implementing it and describes the overall implementation process and its supporting pillars. We highlighted how an organization's efforts to attract, motivate, develop and maintain qualified staff able to offer higher value to customers naturally leads to the improvement of its external relationships. In order to be efficiently implemented, internal marketing has to be approached as a management process that is strongly influenced by the organizational culture and leadership climate.

Each stage of the proposed model is centered on solving specific problems in the implementation process. The strategic analysis of the situation defines some priorities regarding measures that need to be adopted by the company and substantiates the internal marketing objectives, being a starting point for result improvement. Establishing internal marketing objectives gives a coherent picture of the results to be obtained. Personnel segmentation allows selecting the most efficient internal marketing tools adapted for various employee segments. Management involvement offers the required support for internal marketing programs and fosters a climate of mutual trust between management and personnel, facilitating the acceptance of internal marketing plans at all hierarchical levels. Internal communication helps to systematically inform and motivate employees. Employees' engagement encourages employees'

commitment to the company and its values, as well as their will to work as a team and to make relevant contributions to the final result. The purpose of controlling internal marketing is to highlight recordable progresses during the implementation process and to create basic corrective actions in case of malfunctions.

The study was focused on shaping a viable model for implementing internal marketing and on objectively arguing the necessity of implementing internal marketing in organizations. A complete answer to the question "Why internal marketing implementation is needed?" may be subject to further research.

The internal marketing implementation process may have a major contribution in improving human resources management by increasing labor productivity and workforce satisfaction. From a managerial perspective, internal marketing implementation may favor creating departments with real customer-orientation, increasing customer satisfaction and implementing an efficient CRM and transitioning to a holistic marketing approach. From a marketing standpoint, internal marketing implementation can help build and strengthen brand equity, obtain higher return of investments, increase the benefits of marketing programs and decrease marketing costs.

All these possible contributions should be presented, debated, analyzed and quantified in future studies. Future research directions should be focused in assessing the impact of internal marketing on the possible contributions described above.

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