

Internal marketing and McKinsey's 7-S: Discovering their relationship

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Abstract

This study conceptually analyses each of the seven elements of the 7-S framework individually with internal marketing and intends to discover the relationship between them. Many studies have shown a theoretical construct, Internal Marketing (IM), to be a good tactics for achieving successful development and implementation of strategies in organisations and a practical construct. McKinsey's 7-S framework is a valuable tool for diffusing a strategy throughout an organisation. Though both these aspects are seemingly close to each other, surprisingly, there is no study explaining the interaction between the two. The purpose of this study is to understand their relationship.

The conceptual examination of each of the seven elements of the 7-S framework individually with internal marketing has led to the development of a model that explains the relationship between them. The concept of this study will opened up new opportunities for further research and will give a new perspective to McKinsey's 7-S framework.

Keywords: Internal Marketing, McKinsey's 7-S, Strategy, Implementation, Relationship.

Introduction

Long ago, Peter Drucker²⁴ said that since the purpose of business is to create a customer, it has two and only two basic functions: marketing and innovation. Immense advantage can be gained through effective marketing and innovation. Whereas the objective of the business is to create a customer, the role of marketing is to keep and convert the customer into a satisfied one. Its relevance is more in the current hyper-competitive environment.

The latest marketing philosophy advocates a holistic marketing concept wherein internal marketing (IM), a component of it, is designed to keep the employees motivated, happy and satisfied. A satisfied employee engenders satisfied customers.⁵ IM is an ongoing process that occurs strictly within an organisation whereby the functional process is to align, motivate and empower employees at all management levels to consistently deliver a satisfying customer experience.⁷

Besides creating a satisfied customer, a business needs to be effectively organised to sustain itself. To understand the

organisational effectiveness, McKinsey's consultants, Tom Peters and Robert Waterman, developed a 7-S framework (figure 1). Its propriety can be gauged from the fact that though it was introduced in 1970, it remains an important tool for understanding the effectiveness of an organisation. This model, since its inception, has become popular and is widely used by practitioners.

McKinsey's 7-S framework has its origin in practice rather than theory. It was developed in an attempt to explain McKinsey's beliefs about manufacturing and service firms' operations ex post facto.¹² This study examines the relationship and interaction between IM and the 7-S framework in their shared objective of enhancing the business's effectiveness. The study demonstrates the critical role of IM in each of the seven elements of the framework.

Strategy

To fully utilise the benefits of marketing and innovation, a firm has to have a strategy. A strategy provides a direction and scope for an organisation and ways to achieve an advantage by leveraging its resources and competences.⁴¹ "Without a strategy, the organisation is like a ship without a rudder, going around in circles. ... without an appropriate strategy effectively implemented, failure is only a matter of time."⁶⁷ Hence to succeed, organisations have their theory of business. Translating and applying this theory in their business is a strategy. It is this strategy which is widespread in the organisation and helps in achieving profits.

To ensure profits and survival in this volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world, businesses must do better than their competitors and win a greater share of the customer's wallet. "Value is what buyers are willing to pay and superior value stems from offering lower prices than competitors for equivalent benefits or providing unique benefits that more than offset a higher price".⁶² Hence businesses need to possess some competitive advantage (CA). There are different ways to create CA; it can be created by cost leadership, differentiation, focused cost leadership, or focused differentiation.⁶¹

Cost Leader: In cost leadership, a firm's target is to be a low-cost producer. The source of cost advantage can be many; economies of scale, proprietary technology, reduction of wastage and efficient production to name a few. A cost leader exploits all opportunities to reduce costs without compromising on the quality of the product, albeit without any frills added to it. A firm following a cost leadership strategy will achieve higher returns at near-industry-average prices.

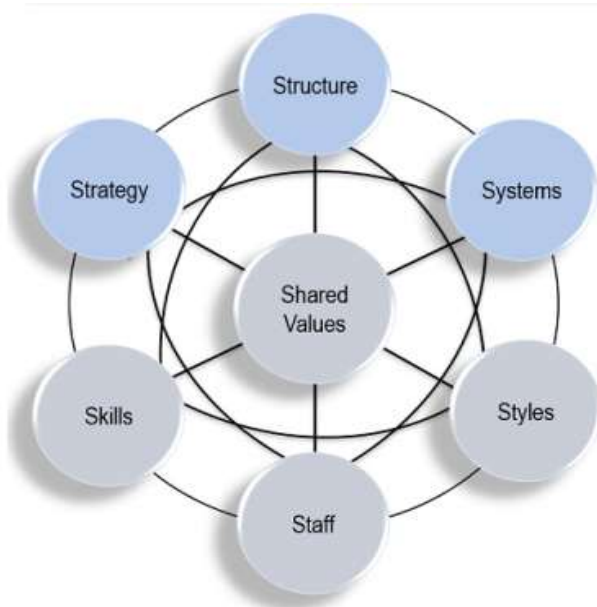


Figure 1: McKinsey's 7S Model

Differentiation: A firm seeking to follow a differentiation strategy must first identify an attribute widely valued by the customers and should be willing to pay a higher price. In a differentiation strategy, the firm positions itself as the one that meets the customers' unique requirements. In fulfilling the customers' wants, it charges a premium price. This results in the firm achieving an above-average performance and earning higher returns. A word of caution, though, is that the firm should ensure that a higher cost of production does not offset the premium price.

Focus: Focus is the third generic strategy with two variants – cost focus and differentiation focus. Here the strategy is underpinned on the selection of a segment and serving them to the exclusion of others. Though the strategy provides a narrow competitive scope, the focuser achieves a competitive advantage in the chosen segment even though it may not have an overall competitive advantage. Both the variants of focus strategy depend on the differences between a focuser's target segments and other segments in the industry. If there is no difference between the focuser's target segments and other segments in the industry, the focus strategy will not succeed; otherwise, the focuser will achieve above-average performance resulting in higher returns.

Though formulating a strategy is the first step towards success, the most crucial step is its implementation. While designing, a strategy requires expertise in formulating, its implementation is a different matter.⁸² Implementation of a strategy is treated as a separate phase in academics. Though sometimes implementation is seen as a “strategic afterthought”,⁶⁵ formulation and implementation must be interconnected.⁵⁶ Industries are littered with examples where strategies were never implemented successfully.^{27,75}

The reasons for unsuccessful implementation can be attributed to many and amongst them are: one,

implementation of a strategy is seen as less "glamorous" than designing a strategy^{4,37} two, the management believes that strategy communicated well to the employees equals implementation⁶ and three, many firms lack in the knowledge of doing i.e. implementing the strategy.⁵⁷ Managers find McKinsey's 7-S framework useful for diffusing a strategy throughout their organisations.²⁰ Strategy implementation within any organisation is more likely to succeed when all seven elements are in alignment.³³

Pryor et al⁶⁴ argue that "People are the process owners (individuals and teams) who are responsible for ensuring that a process performs as expected." Hence, employees' commitment is of utmost importance. In the literature, the employees' commitment is considered an emotional attachment, deep involvement and enjoying the membership of the organisation where they are employed.⁴³ Employees contribute to the success of a business organisation.³ With this in mind, businesses implement what is known as 'Internal Marketing' (IM), believing that happy and satisfied employees promote the corporate image and serve the customers well.⁴⁴

Proposition 1: Internal marketing is a necessary part of any strategy for the success of an organisation.

Structure: An organisational structure defines how people are organised⁵¹ and the formal configuration between individuals and groups with the allocation of tasks and authority.³¹ Hence, one can agree with Alfred Chandler's¹³ view that the organisational structure follows a strategy. As if to substantiate this view, the implementation of strategies mainly focused on the organisational structures.¹ To increase the chances of success, a firm might match its structure with its strategy to achieve higher performance. Organisations should have all the structural dimensions to implement generic strategies.⁶¹ Empirical research has also found that firms with higher performance have consistent structural configurations, suggesting that they impact the organisation's performance.⁴⁸

Lynch⁴⁷ argues that organisational strategy strongly influences organisational structure. In recent research on the relationship between strategy and structure, it was found that in the long term, strategy both shapes and follows organisational structure; however, the effect of strategy shaping the structure is more substantial.²⁹ In a dynamic environment, business strategies need to adjust continuously⁷⁴ to remain relevant. As the strategies adapt along with the changing strategies, roles and functions, too, need to be rearranged, implying realignment in the structure. Otherwise, it may lead to people working against each other⁷¹ resulting in the demoralisation of the employees.

The organisational structure affects employees' motivation.¹⁵ Moreover, many organisational structures today do not allow employees to exploit their full potential²⁶ leading to their exit. This is an avoidable loss to both the

individual employees and the organisations. It has now been shown that employee motivation has a major impact on organisational productivity and performance.³⁸ Since the functional process of IM is to motivate employees, IM will necessitate that the structure of an organisation is one that also, besides motivating, aligns and empowers employees to commit to their best and deliver high performance. Hence emerges the following proposition.

Proposition 2: IM has a guiding effect on the organisational structure.

Systems: The third hard element is systems. The systems are the organisation's processes and procedures that form the base for daily activities; they are also referred to as organisational systems. A sound organisational system is a prerequisite for the smooth functioning of the organisation. They must be implemented to be sustainable in the context of the firm's strategic plan.⁵⁵ Also, high-performance work (HPW) systems enable firms to gain a competitive advantage.⁴⁵ Further, the systems must be well documented and made known to all the employees in the organisation for its implementation.¹⁸

Besides providing guidelines to routine activities, organisational systems should also lead to the organisational commitment by the employees and additionally, HPW systems promote employee competence, motivation and commitment.¹⁹ Organisational commitment has three major components, namely, a) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organisation's goals, b) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organisation and c) a definite desire to maintain organisational membership.⁶⁰ HPW systems also improve employee knowledge, skills and motivations.^{58,68}

Many studies have established that HPW systems promote better job performance, creativity and innovation^{14,17} and a change in the practices is positively related to changes in job satisfaction leading to change in customer satisfaction.⁵⁹

Organisational systems consist of three types of organisational control (i.e. output, process and normative control) that enhance employees' trust in the organisation.⁸⁰ However, often, while designing organisational systems, the welfare of the employees is neglected.⁷⁶ This has the unpleasant consequences of causing the company to lose control over its employees and its market effectiveness.⁹ Employees' attitudes and abilities are considered a part of company value and reflect in the balance sheet.⁵³

Employees' attitudes are also key mediators in the HRM performance chain.⁵⁰ IM aims to align employees' attitudes with the firms' objectives and motivate them to deliver their best; it automatically builds in the organisational systems.

Proposition 3: Internal marketing should be an integral part of the organisational system.

Moving from the hard elements of the model to the four soft elements, one can notice that they are all people-oriented. They consist of employees and intangible elements such as their skills, style of functioning, culture and the work environment that evolves from their cooperation. Beyond organisational systems and its structure, a firm, when implementing a strategy, needs to consider the soft elements of 7S as well the cultural aspects and human resources perspective.⁶⁵

Staff: Every employee, by whatever name they are called, "people," "labour," "intellectual capital," "human capital," "human resources," "talent," or some other term, is a resource¹¹ and they are distinctly important.⁷⁸ A firm creates a competitive advantage by properly organising its human resources.²³ Because of this, firms require employees to improve through education continually.²¹ No wonder learning is now defined as a competitive strategy.⁸ This also supports Drucker's view that organisations should invest in their people.²¹ Despite this, many organisations look down on the employees as a cost rather than an asset.²¹

Human capital differentiates an organisation from others. Good human capital in an organisation starts with good recruitment and selection process. The concepts of recruitment and selection mean a wide variety of things; it can be understood simply as finding and attracting applicants to fill a vacant position and then choosing the right applicant for the job.³² Also, the right recruitment and selection process can ensure the hiring of the right candidate for the position; this would improve retention and promotion when required.

However, all the recruits need to be trained to inculcate the right work culture and equip them with the knowledge to carry out their assigned roles. Staff training and development are necessary for their effectiveness²² and these activities can take place simultaneously or sequentially.¹⁶ The highly skilful and knowledgeable staff help the organisation's development.² Also, learning and career growth stand out as initiatives important for improving employee experience.³⁶

Training impacts employees' behaviour and skills, enhancing performance and constructive changes.⁶⁹ Training is seen as the most effective way of motivating and retaining employees in an organisation.³⁹ Further, training also increases employees' commitment.⁴⁶ Thus, satisfied, highly motivated and loyal employees represent the basis of a competitive company.²⁸

Research has shown that employees with the same skills and equivalent income have different motivations and performance.⁷⁹ Since the factors that motivate each employee are unique,⁶³ the management should consider different ways to motivate the employees. Thus, the employees need to be aligned, motivated and empowered to deliver good performance.

Proposition 4: Internal marketing has a major influence on the staff.

Skills: One needs to have people skills to understand co-workers, stay together for about eight to nine hours a day and perform daily duties and responsibilities. People skills, in simple terms, are the art of co-existing together in the workplace, building a relationship based on trust and respect to have productive interactions to ensure performing one's responsibilities and enabling the smooth functioning of an organisation.

Whatever an employee's role is in an organisation, the employee's ability to work effectively in a team will impact the organisation. Thus, people skills add value to the organisation as it helps in resolving issues or conflicts.⁴⁹

Besides people skills, the next most important skill sought in an employee is organisational skill. This skill encompasses a set of capabilities to plan, prioritise and achieve the organisational goals one is responsible for. Organisational skills are necessary for multitasking and ensuring that the organisation runs successfully and achieves results consistently.⁸¹

Employees' skills and abilities can be broadly classified as intellectual and physical characteristics. Intellectual abilities are an individual's mental capabilities closely related to how a person makes decisions and processes information. They include factors such as Comprehension, Language fluency, Inductive reasoning, Quantitative aptitude, Perceptual speed and Memory. It is out of scope to delve into each separately and overall representation suffices for the paper. The physical abilities include factors such as strength, flexibility, stamina and other psychomotor abilities.

Only the employees' skills build the organisation; people without the requisite skills will not find a place. As discussed earlier, training plays a vital role in honing employee skills

and empowering them to develop new skills and be more productive.⁴⁰ One of the important roles of IM is to empower employees.

Proposition 5: Internal marketing plays a major role in shaping employees' skills.

Style: All humans have their natural behaviour patterns regarding how they work and live. Kim Christfort, coauthor of *Business Chemistry: Practical Magic for Crafting Powerful Work Relationships* and national managing director of Deloitte Greenhouse Experience, says, "Some people like risks, others prefer rules. Some want consensus, while others want to win."

David Merrill, an industrial psychologist, described that two dimensions of people's character could explain how they behave: assertiveness and responsiveness (Figure 2). First, assertiveness is the degree to which people are seen as forceful and directive. The second is responsiveness, the degree to which people are empathetic or sensitive. The four people styles that emerge from the interaction of the two factors are:

Analyticals (Thought Man) are people who crave data — the more, the better they are less assertive and less responsive.

Amiables (People Man) are also less assertive but more responsive; they are friendly and generous with their time and are excellent team players.

Expressives (Front Man) are, like amiables, more responsive. However, they are also more assertive.

Drivers (Action Man) are, like expressives, more assertive. But they are less responsive and more concerned with the job at hand.

An employee's work style is related to the individual's input; nevertheless, it is essential for organisational success. Work style can be defined as a series of "personal work-related characteristics".⁷³

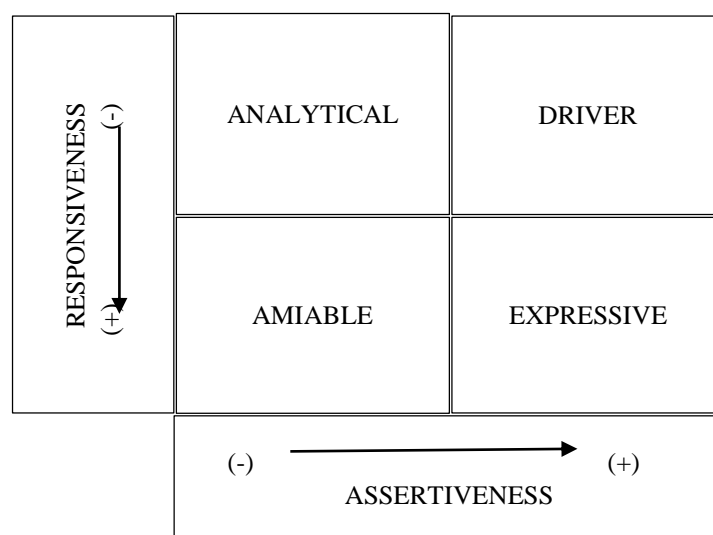


Figure 2: The People Style Grid

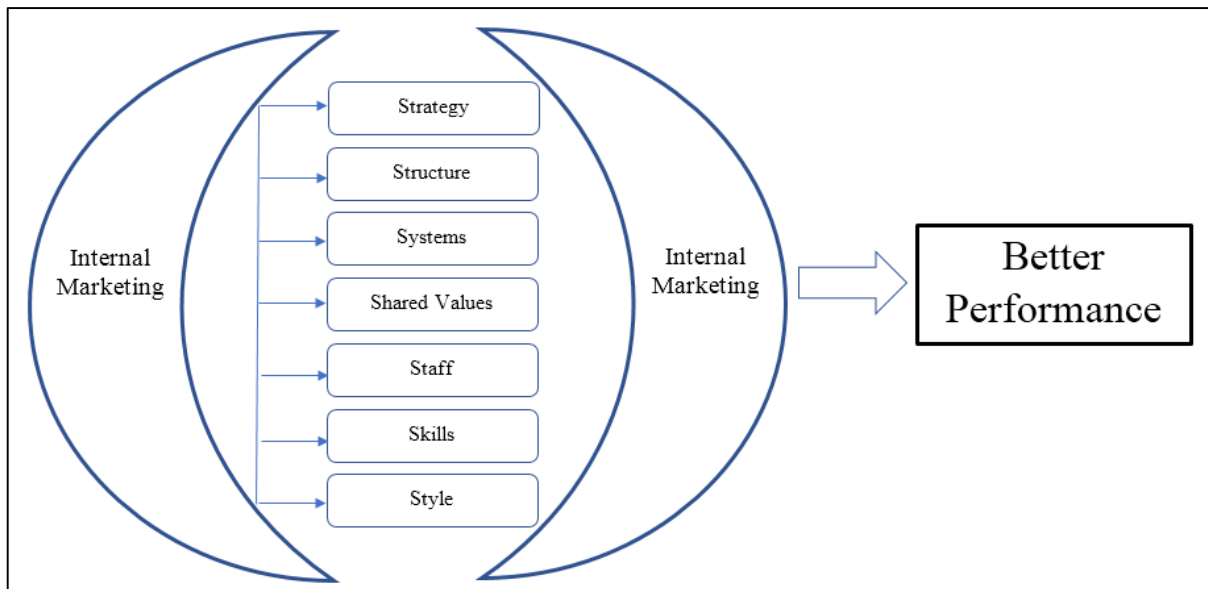


Figure 3: Internal Marketing – 7-S Model

Research in the area of work style has also looked at the impact of work conditions on individuals such as flexible work schedules and employees' welfare.³⁴ A study has also examined the relationship between work style and smoking.⁵² A recent empirical study has emphasised the role of organisational support as a stimulative and encouraging frame for creative attitudes in the workplace.⁵⁴ The above study's findings open up the scope for modelling the influence of organisational climate over employees' work styles. An earlier study has shown that a supportive work environment can protect against burnout, can reduce conflict and can improve cohesiveness.³⁰ Internal Marketing has also been found to have a very strong impact on creating "Work Engagement".⁷²

Proposition 6: Internal marketing influences the work style of the employees.

Shared Values: Shared values are an essential component of organisations. Shared values are different from company values. Whereas the latter stand for the company's approach in achieving its mission and vision, shared values have more to do with how employees relate to one another. Shared values engender trust and link employees together into a group. Shared values, also called core values, are usually developed by the top management and then adopted by the other organisation members.

Shared values, beliefs, or perceptions employees hold within an organisation, are collectively described as Organisational Culture (OC).⁶⁶ OC is unique to an organisation and keeps evolving as the employees interact.³⁵ OC has a macro-level impact on an organisation's long-term strategies, policies and decision-making. They are relatively stable and support organisational development.⁵⁴ OC is very important and plays a prominent role in determining whether or not the organisation is a good place to work.⁴² OC is also related to employees' effectiveness.⁷⁰ "Employees who believe that management is concerned about them as a whole person, not

just an employee, are more productive, more satisfied, more fulfilled. Satisfied employees mean satisfied customers which lead to profitability."⁷⁷

Proposition 7: Internal marketing shapes the shared values of an organisation.

Internal Marketing is a fundamental process that encompasses all the 7-S: Strategy, Structure, Systems, Shared Values, Staff, Skills and Styles of an organisation. It is an essential element for the success of any organisation. The 'Internal Marketing -7-S' model that emerges from this research is illustrated in figure 3. IM encapsulates the 7S framework and 7S exists in the environment of IM. The success of any organisation begins with IM.

Conclusion

Whatever be the external environment, internally, the employees' morale and commitment must be kept high and instil a feeling that they will win. IM is supposed to do exactly the same.

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- (Received 18th October 2022, accepted 20th November 2022)