EMPLOYEES' SATISFACTION - THE KEY TO A SUCCESFUL INTERNAL MARKETING STRATEGY

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Abstract: *Internal marketing is one of the most important aspects that the company should consider in order to become more efficient and effective in dealing with the business environment. The current paper aims to underline the importance of the employees' satisfaction at the job site in the context of developing a successful internal marketing strategy. The paper presents in a literature review style, the concepts of consumer satisfaction, trust, employee satisfaction as well as pointing out the main activities that are needed to be understood by the companies and at the same time implemented in order to achieve success.*

Keywords: *Internal Marketing, Strategy, Satisfaction, Trust, Employees*

JEL classification: *M31, O15*

1. Introduction

One of the most important aspects related to the concept of internal marketing and the development of a viable internal marketing strategy is a clear understanding and consideration of the fact that the employees are satisfied and motivated to do their work better or at the same time they should also be motivated. Most of the time when discussing the issue of satisfaction, we do it from the perspective of the external customer of the company rather than the internal customer of the company, and the same thing can be said about trust.

The study of customer satisfaction has covered over the years a multitude of approaches in relation to aspects like service quality, educational satisfaction, customer loyalty, customer retention (Jashireh et al, 2016; Hansemark and Albinsson, 2004; Hayes, 2008). At the same time, within the realm of internal marketing, employee satisfaction has been covered by many authors (Comm and Mathaisel, 2000; Myskova, 2011; Mithlesh et.al., 2023) that link the idea of satisfaction with human resources issues, and less with marketing related aspects.

2. Defining customer satisfaction and trust

Customer satisfaction can be defined from the perspective of consumers as the comparison of previously held expectations with perceived product or service performance (Homburg et al., 2005, Anderson et al., 1994). At the same time, customer satisfaction can also be defined and measured as consumer ratings of specific attributes related to products and services (Gómez et al., 2004).

The well-known specialists in services marketing Berry & Parasuraman (1991) defined and analysed customer satisfaction by proposing four elements in relation to the customer:

- a customer's expectations before service delivery and consumption.
- their perception later of how the product or service has been delivered.
- the reinforcement or contradiction of those expectations and perceptions during the post-purchase evaluation stage, in which cognitive dissonance can occur.
- the complaining behaviours of dissatisfied customers..

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At the same time, Zamazalová (2008 in Suchánek et.al., 2015) also mentions the key factors that affect customer satisfaction, and which can be used to measure customer satisfaction. These factors are product (in terms of its quality, availability etc.); price (convenient payment conditions and others); services; distribution; and image of a product. As we can see, Zamazalová (2008) mentions the factors in relation to the marketing mix components (the 4 P's).

The second concept that we are underlining in the current paper is *trust,* which is probably one of the most important economic assets in the world of business and finance, without it we would be living in a completely different, considerably poorer, and more backward place. According to the Economist (2023), trust represents "a necessary condition for much economic activity; suppliers must trust that their customers must pay them, and customers must trust that the goods they buy are satisfactory". Although a general term, trust represents a *sine qua non* condition necessary for the development of, on one hand, long term business relations between companies, and a secondly it represents a condition that leads to the development of long-term relations between employees and employers.

3. Employee satisfaction in the realm of internal marketing

Employee satisfaction is defined as the "combination of affective reactions to the differential perceptions of what he/she wants to receive compared with what he/she actually receives" (Cranny et.al., 1992 in Aydin and Ceylan, 2008). Edmans et. al (2014) defines employee satisfaction as a managerial tool that significantly enhances recruitment and retention … of rank-and-file employees which are key assets, and company agents for innovating new products, building customer and supplier relationships, and mentoring subordinates. Also, employee satisfaction is connected to usage of human resources and influences the quality and amount of work done by them (Harris and Moran, 2000).

The key to the development of a good internal marketing strategy based on internal customer (employee) satisfaction is to create an internal environment where the employees can feel satisfied, and they must feel appreciated by the management of the company, this in time leads to a higher quality service and thus satisfy their external customers.

At the same time, the development of a positive, satisfying environment and creation of internal encounters can lead to multiple feelings of partnership between company and customers as well as between employees and the company (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003). One of the main goals of internal marketing (Fuciu and Serban, 2022) is to create a positive, engaged workplace culture in which employees feel valued and motivated, and in which they can effectively represent the company to customers. Over time, when dealing with internal marketing, some activities have come to life within the company that are improving the employee satisfaction:
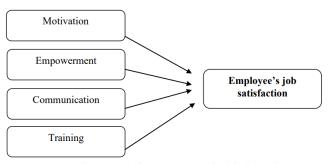
a) *Developing a strong communication between different hierarchical levels* - regular, clear, and transparent communication from company leadership helps to keep employees informed about the company's goals, initiatives, and performance. This can include regular updates, town hall meetings, and other communication channels.

b) *Improving and supporting employee training and development* - providing employees with opportunities to develop new skills and improve their job performance helps to keep them engaged and motivated and can also improve the quality of service they provide to customers.

c) *Create employee recognition and incentives programs* - programs that recognize, and reward employee achievements help to create a positive and motivating work environment and can also help to build morale and foster a sense of loyalty to the company.

d) *Construct a viable and accepted company culture* - building a positive company culture that supports employee engagement and motivation is a key part of internal marketing. This can involve promoting the company's values and mission, encouraging collaboration and teamwork, and creating a positive and inclusive workplace environment.

In 2013, Al-Hawary et al. presented (see figure 1) a model of employee's satisfaction where the authors have identified four elements as the main drivers for the satisfaction at the jobsite:

- *Motivation* – the main factor for a satisfied internal customer is for him / her to be motivated to do the job properly and effectively.
- *Empowerment* - the enabling of the company employees to make decisions within the job area and to be responsible for their own actions and the effects that their decisions are generating (Hur, 2006);
- *Communication* – an effective communication strategy, within the company and with actors outside the company is essential for the employee's satisfaction process because it gives them the possibility to do the job with greater success.
- *Training* – should be considered by the management for the employees because the company personnel is the most valuable resource the company has. Training programs should be aimed at developing skills and competencies at the workplace (Forrest and Peterson, 2006), but also issues like wellbeing, work life balance, team buildings.
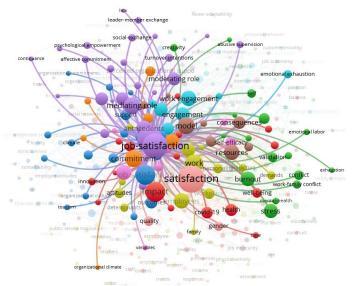
Figure 1: A model of Employee's job satisfaction in the context of internal marketing

Source: (Al-Hawary et.al., 2013, p. 815)

Starting from these aspects we can also consider the motivational factors such as working conditions, friendly colleagues, good remuneration, and job security as aspects that can also lead to employee satisfaction. If we go even further with a short bibliometric analysis (using VOSviewer) of the term *job satisfaction* in the latest 1000 articles and proceeding papers published in Web of Science – Clarivate we can observe, in figure 2 that the connection is done with terms like: *psychological empowerment, leader member exchange, social exchange, organisational climate, affective commitment, mediating role etc.*

Figure 2: A bibliometric analysis for 1000 papers containing the term *Job satisfaction*

Source: author's computation based on WoS-Clarivate data base.

So, from figure 2, we can underline another aspect that connects the employee satisfaction and internal marketing is Maslow's pyramid of needs, were in the everchanging social and economic environments of the employees can lead to an increasingly sophisticated staff needs to do their jobs better and faster (work phone, laptop, car, work from home opportunities etc.). From the perspective of personal satisfaction, one must consider self-actualisation and develop the conditions for the employee to feel that he/she is doing something challenging and interesting, to create the sense of contributing to something worthwhile and meaningful.

4. Conclusions

Creating an environment where the employee is satisfied with his/her job is mandatory for the development of an effective internal marketing strategy. One of the most important aspects that need to be considered is to perceive the psychological benefits of individuals being able to understand their roles within a broader context and interacting less bureaucratically with cross-functional colleagues. Creating an effective internal marketing strategy needs to address the desire of the company to promote communication at the workplace, to empower employees, to develop training programs and to motivate them financially, but also emotionally by promoting a proper working conditions, to develop a friendly and collegial atmosphere at the job, to offer a good rewording package and last but not least to offer the filling of job security over the long term.

Therefore, the importance of employee satisfaction is a high one in relation to the effectiveness of and good results of the company over the long term. To have a successful company with a good image among the customers it has become mandatory to have satisfied internal customers that do their jobs very well, that respect the values and principles of the company and which over time are among the most important drivers of the company image and of its success.

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