



Spill-over Effects of Internal Marketing on Organisational Subjective Performance

Nimer Qayum Mir^{1*}

¹ College of Business Administration, University of Ha'il, KINGDOM of SAUDI ARABIA.

*Corresponding Author (Tel: +966 509662844, Email: n.mir@uoh.edu.sa).

Paper ID: 12A11D

Volume 12 Issue 11

Received 29 April 2021

Received in revised form 22 July 2021

Accepted 29 July 2021

Available online 07 August 2021

Keywords:

Customer satisfaction; Management support; Internal communication; Espirit de corp; Service effort; Internal marketing activity; Employee job attitude; Job attitudinal responses; Employee empowerment; Organisational performance.

Abstract

Marketing researchers have long been advocating the relevance of internal marketing for improving organisational performance in general. This is more so in service organizations for being more people-oriented. In this study, some of the typical internal marketing activities, those that perform a pivotal role in shaping contact employee desired behaviour at service encounter level, have been identified. The study matches perceptions from both the contact employees and their customers in several services setting like insurance, postal services, and banking in the Indian context. Specifically, the results reveal that desired change in several contact-employee job attitudinal responses (esprit de corps and service effort) and organisational subjective performance is positively explained by some of the internal marketing activities so identified in the study like perceived service standard communication, perceived supervisors support and perceived empowerment at the service encounter level. Additionally, the results report that these job attitudinal responses play a mediating role in between the causal relationships, thus connecting the positive effects of internal marketing activities to organisational performance. From the findings, internal marketing positively influences employee esprit de corps and service effort, organisations need to continuously monitor all the dimensions of internal marketing to improve their service delivery system and consequent performance.

Disciplinary: Management Science.

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Cite This Article:

Mir, N. Q. (2021). Spill-over Effects of Internal Marketing on Organisational Subjective Performance. *International Transaction Journal of Engineering, Management, & Applied Sciences & Technologies*, 12(11), 12A11D, 1-11. <http://TUENGR.COM/V12/12A11D.pdf> DOI: 10.14456/ITJEMAST.2021.214

1 Introduction

Internal marketing is a modern marketing management concept and there has been a fair bit of research in this area over the past two decades. In addition to ensuring that internal marketing leads to a better customer-oriented awareness amongst the employees (since employees are the

target market in an internal marketing campaign), it has many other positive effects in an organisation. This paper seeks to investigate how the prevalence of internal marketing in an organization has a positive influence on employee job attitude and organisational subjective performance in particular.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Internal Marketing

The idea of internal marketing was first mentioned by Sasser and Arbeit (1976) in their work who mentioned that employees are the first market of an organisation. Berry (1981) was the first to define internal marketing as considering employees as the internal customers of an organization and that their needs and wants should be identified and satisfied. Accordingly, Berry's philosophy of internal marketing emphasizes making employees' jobs attractive and a source of employee satisfaction which in turn is expected to result in better external customer experience. Rafiq and Ahmed (2000) define internal marketing as an effort that uses a market-oriented approach to overcome resistance to change and coordinate and integrate the employees towards the implantation of organisational strategies to eventually create satisfaction amongst customers through creating customer-oriented employees.

Lings (2004) viewed internal marketing mainly from two perspectives: total quality management perspective and human resources perspective. According to the former perspective, the author considers all employees as well as departments as internal customers and suppliers to one another within the firm (Lukas and Maignan, 1996). The author believes that better the experience of these internal customers and suppliers within the firm, better would be the experience of external customers (Brooks et al., 1999; Soomro & Al-Sehli, 2020). The later perspective of internal marketing is based on the idea that the success of external marketing, largely depends on the firms' ability to carry out internal marketing practices in a way that aims at training, developing, satisfying, motivating, and getting employees to the workplace with as much as possible enthusiasm.

2.2 Domains of Internal Marketing

To identify important domains of internal marketing, Foreman and Money (1995) identified vision, reward, and development as important components. Conduit and Mayondo (2001) identified education, training, management support, human resource management, internal communication, and the involvement of employees in external communication as a component. Ahmed et al. (2003) shortlisted management support, business process support, and inter-departmental coordination as important dimensions. Rafiq and Ahmed (2000) identified empowerment, inter-functional coordination and integration, and customer orientation as important components in their model. Tsai and Tang (2008) identified service training, performance incentives, and vision for service excellence as important dimensions. Various other scholars have identified other dimensions as

well. There is however no unified consensus to a single framework on the domains of internal marketing as of yet.

For this study owing to the paucity of resources, internal communication, empowerment, and management support have been used.

2.3 Consequences of Internal Marketing

Internal marketing is an effort that is focused on employees, this effort leads to various other consequences in addition to a pro organizational orientation of employees towards customers. Different scholars in their works have identified various consequences. Iliopoulos and Priporas (2011), Kameswari and Rajyalakshmi (2012) identified that internal marketing leads to an increase in job satisfaction. Khansa et al. (2012) and Tortosa et al. (2009) mentioned that internal marketing leads to an increase in business performance. Lukas and Maigan (1996) identified that internal marketing leads to enhanced customer experience.

This study will ascertain if internal marketing has a positive consequence on job attitude and organisational subjective performance. Job attitude for this study is measured with the help of esprit de corps and service effort.

Though the subject of internal marketing continues to receive attention from both research scholars and business professionals for several years, yet it has remained almost unexplored in India. One of such unexplored areas is that of the Indian service sector which has been experiencing considerable growth. Therefore, it is timely to diffuse the understanding of the concept of internal marketing and its relevance to desired service employee outcome and consequent service performance.

Employee job attitudes including those considered in the present study like employee service effort and esprit de corps are positively related to organizational performance. Therefore, identification of drivers to desired employee job attitudes from a marketing perspective in the Indian context is of critical importance to service industries. Ironically, very little research has been focused on understanding the complex relationship between internal marketing and organisational performance in a developing country like India. Though the author assumes the drivers of desired job attitudinal responses and its outcomes that hold true for developed countries, should be equally applicable to the Indian service setting, nevertheless, in view of the dynamics of the environment, a culture that is different from that what prevails in developed countries, testing of the relationship in the Indian context with samples from the service sector would be a useful attempt to plug the gap. This is more so about the variable of internal communication and esprit de corps those have been included for the first time to understand the relationships between internal marketing and service performance.

3 Relationships between Job Attitudes and Internal Communication, Employee Empowerment, and Supervisory Support

3.1 Internal Communication and Job Attitudes

'Effort' is considered one of the significant concepts in motivation theory (Mohr and Bitner, 1995). It is the extent to which an employee invests himself in his or her work role or simply the extent of one's expenditure of energy into work role (Locke et al., 1981). As the expenditure of one's energy is within one's control of an employee, the effort level is thus, largely dependent upon the way the employee perceives the organizational characteristics (Brown and Leigh, 1996). Drawing on this, it is logical to assume that the greater the employees' perception about internal marketing practices like communication, empowerment, supervisory support, the greater will be employee service effort level.

There are several pieces of evidence in the past that effective communication between management and employees result in several desired employee job attitudes like higher levels of innovation, commitment, reduced absenteeism, greater productivity (e.g., Young and Post, 1993). The clarity in communication about service standards to be attained by service employees improves the firm's service delivery (e.g., Parasuraman et al., 1988) and performance (Young and Post, 1993). This in turn is expected to develop a feeling of worthwhileness by contributing and consequently results in higher levels of job satisfaction (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). It is reasonable to assume that satisfied employees are expected to spend more energy at their job place.

The service delivery specification gap, popularly known as (gap 3) that gets in the way of service delivery, is mainly due to ineffective communication between management and service employees about what, when, and how to deliver (Zeithaml et al., 1988). Conversely, the greater the communication, the greater the match between customers' expectations and their real experience or greater the customer orientation. Since customer-focused organizations have employees who believe strongly in organizational goals, values, generally take pride in belonging to such an organization, and want to maintain organizational membership (Kelley, 1992; Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). Therefore, it is logical to assume that effective communication between service employees and their management will result in greater employee job attitudes like their commitment, involvement in service effort, and esprit de corps.

3.2 Empowerment and Job Attitudes

Empowerment involves giving employees latitude over certain task-related activities thus, increasing employee adaptability (Scott and Bruce, 1994) and service performance (Rogers et al, 1994). The sense of accomplishment, in turn, improves employee satisfaction, and here lies the justification as to why empowerment is reported as one of the significant antecedents to employee attitudinal and behavioral changes like increased job satisfaction, reduced role stress, and role

ambiguity (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1998). Thus it is logical to relate empowerment to employee service effort and esprit de corps.

3.3 Supervisory Support and Job Attitudes

Supervisory support is a belief among employees about the extent to which their supervisors create a facilitative climate of psychological support, mutual trust, friendliness, and helpfulness (House, 1971). Greater supervisory support, greater socio-emotional resources within the work environment. The supervisor's support may be considered as a part of the job, thereby, influencing contact employees' motivation, job satisfaction and performance (Babin and Boles, 1996), and service effort level (Brown and Peterson, 1994) in the workplace.

Further, drawing on social exchange theory (SET), positive perception about management supports results into an obligatory feeling among employees and they try to find ways to reciprocate to do something valuable for management. Therefore, they exhibit desired job attitudes that may include better effort level and esprit de corps.

In view of the preceding discussion that highlights direct linkage in-between internal marketing variables and several employee outcomes, the hypothesis is proposed.

H#1 Greater the perceived internal marketing practices, the greater the employee job attitudes (service effort and esprit de corps in this study).

3.4 Job Attitudes (Esprit de corps, Service Effort) and Organisational Subjective Performance

Subjective performance is one of the dimensions of organisational performance which is determined based on either customer or employee perception with reference to service quality perception, customer satisfaction, or employee satisfaction (Rust et al., 1994). Since customers' evaluation of a firm's delivery is largely influenced by the amount of service effort put in by the employee. This study justifies the linkage between service effort and customer satisfaction and consequent subjective performance. Similarly, team spirit, or what is referred to here as 'esprit de corps' is one of the vital drivers of effective service delivery. This is because it means a deeper sense of integration among employees within a group or an organisation. This kind of attitude reflects mutual support, freedom of expression, and genuine caring within the group of employees. (Zeithaml, 1988) referred to this attitude as 'teamwork construct', so crucial for reducing the gap between service quality specifications and actual delivery, thereby improving consumers' evaluation (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990).

In view of the linkage between desired employee job attitudes and customer evaluation, we propose the hypothesis,

H#2 Greater the employee job attitudes (service effort and esprit de corps in this study), the greater the organisational subjective performance.

Wherever an independent variable is the justified driver of some dependent variable which in turn is itself driving variable to some other outcome variable, there are possibilities of testing mediation effects of the mediating variable. The review of literature that clarifies the basis of previous hypotheses leads us to believe that the above condition is fulfilled, thereby prompting the author for testing the mediating effects of intermediating variables in the present study i.e., job attitudes (service effort and esprit de corps). Accordingly, the hypothesis is proposed,

H#3 Job attitudes mediate the relationship between employee perceived internal marketing practices and organisational subjective performance.

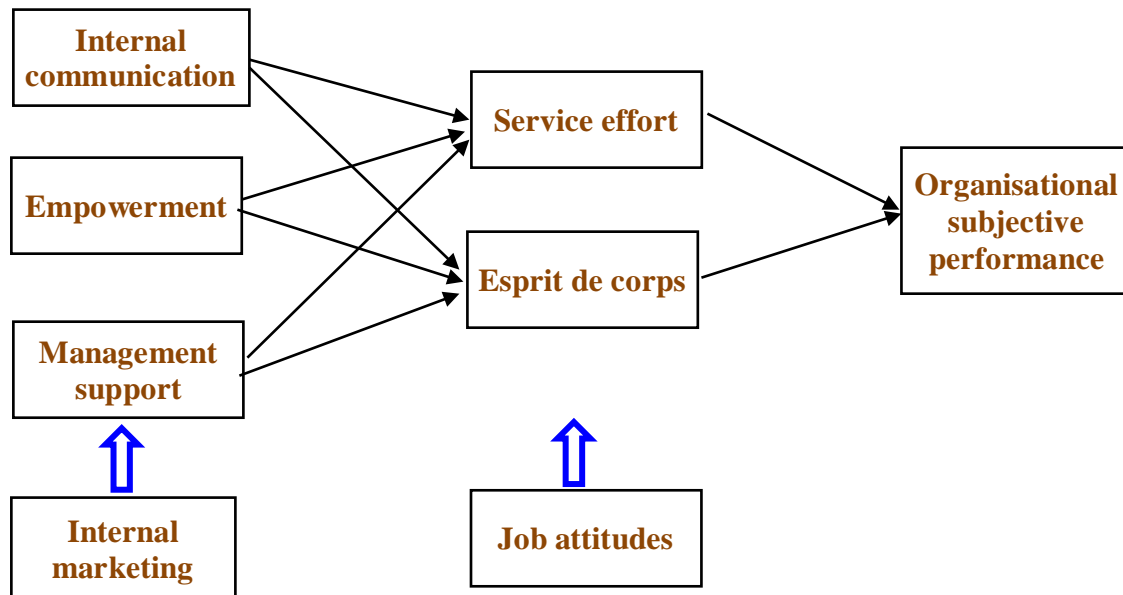


Figure 1: Impact of internal marketing on organisational subjective performance via employee job attitudes.

4 Methodology

Data was collected with the help of a survey which was hand distributed amongst respondents working in the insurance sector, postal services, and banks. A conscious effort was made to include all possible categories like rural, suburban and urban areas in the sample, from October to December 2020. Each contact employee received 1 employee questionnaire and 4 customer questionnaires. The contact employees were evaluated by their customers and the responses were then aggregated (averaged) and matched with employees' perception of Internal Marketing. A common identification number was allotted to contact employees and customer questionnaires to facilitate the matching process of contact employees and customer perceptions. This kind of matching process is suggested by numerous authors e.g., Schneider and Bowen, 1985. Of the 200 employee questionnaires distributed, 108 questionnaires were received, the response rate was hence 54%. And of the 780 customer questionnaires distributed, with a response rate of 42%, 327 questionnaires were received.

As far as the research instrument was concerned, a Likert 5-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree was used. To measure internal communication and empowerment, SERV*OR scale tested by Lytle et al. (1998) was used. Management support was

measured using 4 items from Teas' (1983) scale. Employee service effort was measured using 6 items from Mohr and Bitner's scale (1995). Esprit de corp was measured using 6 items of Jaworski and Kohli's scale (1993) and organisational subjective performance was measured using six items from Maloles scale (1997).

5 Analysis and Results

Having respondents' data, the first was to assess its reliability via calculation of Cronbach alpha values. Reliability analysis was carried out on the scales and the reliability coefficients of components were as follows, internal communication had a reliability coefficient of 0.67, empowerment had a reliability coefficient of 0.54, management support had a reliability coefficient of 0.63, service effort had a reliability coefficient of 0.71 and esprit de corps had a reliability coefficient of 0.69. Overall the reliability of the customers' questionnaire measuring subjective performance as a whole was 0.73, well above the prescribed cutoff point (Nunnally, 1978).

For investigating various dimensions under study, the scores of the constituent components were computed as simple arithmetic means of the corresponding item scores. After satisfactory results from the reliability analysis were generated, regression was carried out on the variables to test whether the independent variables identified in the study had a significant effect on organizational subjective performance.

First, regression was carried out to measure the impact of internal marketing variables identified in the study on job attitudinal responses.

Regression Equations for impact of IM on Job attitudinal responses:

- $y_1 = b_1x_1 + b_2x_2 + b_3x_3 + e$;
- $y_2 = b_1x_1 + b_2x_2 + b_3x_3 + e$;

whereby, y_1 = esprit de corps; y_2 = service effort; x_1 = internal communication; x_2 = empowerment; x_3 = supervisory support; e = error term.

The SPSS 11.0 for windows was made to run, whereby using 'forward regression', data pertaining to y_1 to y_2 was entered as dependent variables one by one and that of pertaining to x_1 to x_3 was entered as independent variables.

Table 1: Results of Regression analysis between IM variables and employee job attitudes.

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables	
	Esprit de corps	Service Effort
1. Internal Communication	0.21(ns)	0.33*
2. Empowerment	0.12**	0.22*
3. Supervisory Support	0.28**	0.25*
R ²	0.23	0.28

Note * <.001 ;**< .01;*** <.05; and ns not significant.

The results in Table 1 indicate that each of the internal marketing practices (internal communication, empowerment, and supervisory support) is a significant driver of employee desired

job attitudes. A variation of 23-28 percent in job attitudes is explained by internal marketing variables. The results clearly indicate that the more service managers are effective in communicating about service standards, the more likely employees will be appropriately oriented, thereby positively influences their service effort ($b = 0.33, p < 0.001$). Additionally, greater the discretion and latitude provided to contact the employee to decide of their own while offering services, greater the service efforts ($b = 0.22, p < 0.001$) and their esprit de corps ($b = 0.12, p < 0.01$). Similarly, positive perception about supervisory support results in greater service effort ($b = 0.25, p < 0.001$) as well as esprit de corps ($0.28, p < 0.01$).

Excepting with the non-significant relationship between service standard communication and esprit de corps, almost all the assumed causal relations are proved true, thus provides ample scope to accept H#1 that greater the perceived internal marketing practices, greater the employee job attitudes (service effort and esprit de corps in the present study).

Regression was then carried out to measure the impact of Job attitudinal responses on organisational subjective performance. On assessing the linkage in-between, the employee job attitudes and organisational subjective performance, again the regression coefficients were calculated with the help of regression equation for the impact of Job attitudinal responses on Organisational Subjective Performance:

$$y_1 = b_1x_1 + b_2x_2 + b_3x_3 + e;$$

whereby, y_1 = organisational subjective performance; x_1 = employee service effort; x_2 = esprit de corps; e = error term.

Table 2: Results of Regression analysis between organisational subjective performance and employee job attitudes.

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable	
	Organisational Subjective Performance	
1. Espirit De Corps	0.24**	
2. Service Effort	0.42*	
R ²	0.39	

Note * <.001 ;**< .01.

Table 2 reveals that both the two employee outcomes considered in the present study positively influence customers 'evaluation. Of the two, the coefficients and p values suggest that service effort is the most influential ($b = 0.42, p < 0.001$) factor on organisational subjective performance. The findings fall in line with those of Gardner et al., (1989), Schneider and Bowen, (1985) thus support a strong relationship between service effort and the customers 'evaluation. The influence is followed by employee esprit de corps ($b = 0.24, p < 0.01$) again corroborated by countless authors (e.g., Hostage,1975), suggesting that improving employee involvement will contribute to improved service provision which in turn increases the customers 'service evaluation. Therefore, considering the results of this study, ample evidence is found in support of the H#2 that

greater the employee job attitudes (service effort and esprit de corps in this study), greater the organisational subjective performance.

The mediation effect of the job attitudes i.e., esprit de corps and service effort in the causal relationships between internal marketing variables and organisational subjective performance was tested by conducting two more regression analyses. The organizational subjective performance was regressed on the internal marketing variables alone and then again along with the mediating variables (i.e., esprit de corps and service effort). This kind of approach is suggested by various authors (e.g., Baron, and Kenny, 1986). The R^2 in the latter situation was 0.631 which dropped to only 0.248 when intermediating variables were excluded. This suggested that these intermediating variables well mediate the relationship, thereby lead us to accept the H#3 that job attitudes mediate the relationship between employee perceived internal marketing practices and organisational subjective performance.

6 Conclusion

This study focused on empirical examination of the hypotheses about internal marketing practices, the effects on contact employee job attitudes, and organisational subjective performance in an Indian service context. Given the findings that internal marketing positively influences employee esprit de corps and service effort, organisations need to continuously monitor all the dimensions of internal marketing to improve their service delivery system and consequent performance. On comparing the regression coefficients and their corresponding p values of internal marketing variables and service effort, internal communication appears to be one of the most influential factors of employee service effort, ($b = 0.033$, $p < 0.001$). Another important observation is the non-significant relationship between internal communication and esprit de corps, which is surprising and should be taken with care for its p-value (< 0.10) is nearer to a cut-off significance level of < 0.05 considered in this study.

The substantial and significant relationship between internal communication and service effort shows that a better communication practice to inform employees what exactly is expected in terms of customer service practices reduces role ambiguity and in turn results in higher employee service effort. The frequency, quality, and accuracy in downward communication can help contact employees clearly understand the service standards and the roles expected of them. There is also scope for suggesting that more discretionary power to contact employees with adequate training to handle the additional empowerment is a welcome idea. Further, the organisations would benefit from understanding, measuring, and diagnosing each dimension of internal marketing to benchmark and monitor how well their particular division, the business unit is performing in each of those areas. Each business unit can be then monitored and managerial and employee rewards can be based, in part, on levels of employee satisfaction with internal marketing practices being followed within the specific business units.

7 Availability of Data and Material

Data can be made available by contacting the corresponding author.

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Dr. Nimer Qayum Mir is an Assistant Professor at the College of Business Administration, University of Ha'il, KSA. He got his Master's and PhD degrees in Business Administration from University of Kashmir. He is also PMP and CBAP certified. His research focuses on Marketing, Strategy and Project Management.
