DIMENSIÓN EMPRESARIAL

INTERNAL MARKETING: A MODEL FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND DEVELOPMENT[i]

MARKETING INTERNO: UN MODELO PARA LA IMPLEMENTACIÓN Y EL DESARROLLO
INTERNAL MARKETING: A MODEL FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Internal marketing (IM) is increasingly recognized as a tool to institutionalize organizational values, improve employee commitment and enhance customer satisfaction. Its implementation and development have not been sufficiently supported by the literature. A theoretical model would contribute to its conceptual development and facilitate its application in the organization, enabling to achieve strategic objectives such as customer orientation, organizational commitment, and organization performance. This paper proposes a theoretical model for implementing and developing IM in organizations. It identifies the evolution and the different theoretical approaches, such as: (a) the employee as a customer of the organization; (b) IM as a process; and (c) the culture of external customer orientation. The proposed model considers IM as a path for performing the strategic management of human resources through the marketing perspective.
Keywords: internal marketing, customer orientation, internal customer.

RESUMEN

El marketing interno (IM) se reconoce cada vez más como una herramienta para institucionalizar los valores de la organización, mejorar el compromiso de los empleados y mejorar la satisfacción del cliente. Su implementación y desarrollo no han sido suficientemente respaldados por la literatura. Un modelo teórico contribuiría a su desarrollo conceptual y facilitaría su aplicación en la organización, permitiéndole alcanzar objetivos estratégicos tales como la orientación al cliente, el compromiso organizacional y el desempeño de la organización. Este artículo propone un modelo teórico para implementar y desarrollar IM en organizaciones. Identifica la evolución y los diferentes enfoques teóricos, tales como: (a) el empleado como cliente de la organización; (b) IM como un proceso; y (c) la cultura de la orientación al cliente externo. El modelo propuesto considera la mensajería instantánea como un camino para realizar la gestión estratégica de los recursos humanos a través de la perspectiva de comercialización.
Palabras clave: marketing interno, orientación al cliente, cliente interno.

RESUMO

O marketing interno (MI) é cada vez mais reconhecido como uma ferramenta para institucionalizar os valores organizacionais, melhorar o comprometimento dos funcionários e aumentar a satisfação do cliente. Sua implementação e desenvolvimento não foram suportados pela literatura. Um modelo teórico contribuiria para o seu desenvolvimento conceitual e facilitaria sua aplicação na organização, possibilitando atingir objetivos estratégicos como orientação ao cliente, comprometimento organizacional e desempenho organizacional. Este artigo reflexivo propõe um modelo teórico para implementar e desenvolver IM nas organizações. Identifica a evolução e as diferentes abordagens teóricas, tais como: (a) o empregado como cliente da organização; (b) IM como um processo; e (c) a cultura de orientação externa ao cliente. As considerações do modelo proposto IM como caminho para a realização da gestão estratégica de recursos humanos através da perspectiva de marketing.
Palavras-chave: marketing interno, orientação ao cliente, cliente interno.

INTRODUCTION

Many organizations and researchers have recognized the importance of internal marketing (IM) in increasing employees' commitment with the organizations and customer satisfaction (L. Berry & Parasuraman, 1992; Conduit, Matanda, & Mavondo, 2014; Grönroos, 1990; Kotler, 1998; Lee, Chen, & Lee, 2015; Lings & Greenley, 2009; Pitt & Foreman, 1998; Shiu & Yu, 2010). The concern of the marketing department with consumer satisfaction has been largely addressed (Oliver, 2010), and IM is one of the main tools to institutionalize marketing orientation, (Conduit & Mavondo, 2001; Ferdous, Herington, & Merrilees, 2013; Ferdous & Polonsky, 2014; Lings & Greenley, 2009; Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1990).

Originally, IM was developed to achieve external customers satisfaction (L. Berry & Parasuraman, 1992; Flipo, 1986; Grönroos, 1990; Kotler, 1998). It is possible to recognize IM as a strategy to practice organizational beliefs and focus on the market. Studies have also demonstrated that IM have an impact on further dimensions such as performance (Lings & Greenley, 2009), employee satisfaction (Shiu & Yu, 2010), and organizational commitment (Caruana & Calleya, 1998; Yang, Huang, & Wei, 2015), among others.

Despite these advantages, few studies have addressed a suitable conceptual-empirical structure for IM implementation and development. For example, few researchers have mentioned the activities involved in this process (Conduit & Mavondo, 2001; Grönroos, 1990; Rafig & Ahmed, 2000), the responsibility involved in the implementation of these activities (Conduit et al., 2014; Flipo, 1986; Lowry, Borna, & Inks, 2007; Rafiq, Ahmed, Rafig, & Ahmed, 1993), or assessment measures (Foreman & Money, 1995; Lings & Brooks, 1998; Weber, 2015). There are still those who indicate that this theme needs further theoretical and empirical discussion (Cassundé, Ferreira Cassundé Junior, Alencar de Farias, & Costa de

Mendonça, 2014). IM actions may also create a recursive movement between internal and external stakeholders' satisfaction, helping establish an organizational culture linked to its strategic positioning. Therefore, it is believed that the exploitation of this topic deserves attention.

The main goal of the present study is to propose a theoretical model for the implementation and development of IM in organizations. It offers a contribution to the conceptual development in the academic environment and facilitate its application in the practitioners' organizational context. The proposed model is focused on the direct application of IM in organizations, enabling the organization to achieve strategic objectives, such as orientation toward the customers, contribution to the organizational commitment, and improvement in organization performance.

The study is structured into four sections, namely: (1) retrospective view of IM, (2) theoretical approaches, (3) IM coordination and practices, (4) IM models and (5) the proposal of a model for implementation and development.

RETROSPECTIVE OF INTERNAL MARKETING

Internal marketing is an interdisciplinary topic that has been investigated by marketing experts and, with less intensity, by human resources experts. The first studies were based on a growing concern with better personnel management and customer services. Berry, Hensen and Burke (1976) addressed the topic when, for the first time, it was related to the production of high quality services. For these authors, IM "is concerned with making available internal products (jobs) that satisfy the needs of a vital internal market (employees) while satisfying the objectives of the organization" (Berry et al. 1976, p. 8).

Berry (1981) was the first author who referred to employees as internal customers. Flipo (1986) emphasized the lack of knowledge about the topic and conceptualize it as the strength that marketing executives have, in order to

put their marketing strategies into practice and develop an internal notion of customer orientation.

In the 1990s, the topic was strengthened. Grönroos (1990) considered the need for approaching the nature and concepts of marketing to other functions, with particular emphasis on the relationship with fields relating to personnel management and organizational behavior. This has also been suggested by Collins and Payne (1991), when they discussed a new perspective for the human resources department. The possibility of using the same models and methods for the external market (customers) and the internal market (employees) was suggested by Piercy and Morgan (1991), such as the use of McCarthy's 4Ps (product, price, place, and promotion) by employees. Hales (1994) argued that IM featured ambiguous concepts and a similarity with personnel management.

In the second half of this decade, many IM results were investigated, such as the satisfaction of external and internal customers (employees) (N. F. Piercy, 1995), quality of services, the orientation and strategy of marketing, total quality management, organizational management, internal services productivity, innovation, corporate image, and internal integration (Varey, 1995) and organizational learning (Cahill, 1995). In the end of that decade, Varey and Lewis (1999) made a retrospective of the topic that revealed the need for integrating IM with the entire company and not only with the marketing or human resources departments.

In the new millennium, the topic continues to be the focus of attention and a largest number of studies has been dedicated to the association between IM and personnel management, describing aspects such as motivation, organizational commitment, communication, and empowerment, among others (Lee et al., 2015; Matanda & Ndubisi, 2013; Shiu & Yu, 2010; Tortosa-Edo, Sanchez-Garcia, & Moliner-Tena, 2010; Yang et al., 2015).

Three basic approaches can be identified in the development of IM, namely:

- The employee as a customer of the organization (L. L. Berry, 1981; L. Berry & Parasuraman, 1992; Foreman & Money, 1995; Grönroos, 1990; Nickels & Wood, 1999). Berry and Parasuraman (1991) highlighted that IM is the philosophy of considering the employees as internal customers. On the other hand, Rafiq and Ahmed (1993) warned about problems that can occur when employees are considered internal customers, mainly because their needs can constantly grow and the resources are scarce, especially in a highly competitive environment.

- IM as a process. Considers that all departments of an organization are simultaneously suppliers and customers. From the marketing department, that identifies the customers' needs, to the guaranteed services department, that solves the problems of products or services. This perspective has its origin in "total quality management" (Lings & Brooks, 1998). For Conduit and Mavondo (2001), for example, IM is called "internal customer orientation", i.e., orientation toward internal customers from a process point of view. The employees should receive the best possible quality products supplied by their predecessors in the internal supply chain, so that they can provide the best ones to their successors (Conduit & Mavondo, 2001).

- Development of a culture of orientation toward external customers. It can be divided into two groups. The first considers the topic as an extension of external marketing (Ferdous & Polonsky, 2014; Flipo, 1986; Kotler, 1998), and the second relates the concepts of marketing to the two types of customers (internal and external) looking for an alternative to improve the performance of the companies (Ahmed, Rafig, & Saad, 2003; Ahmed & Rafiq, 2002; Cahill, 1995; Foreman & Money, 1995; Gilmore, 2000; Lings, 2004; N. F. Piercy, 1995; N. Piercy & Morgan, 1991; Rafiq et al., 1993; Varey, 1995; Varey & Lewis, 1999).

The convergence between these approaches relies on the external customer satisfaction. This is achieved when the employees are recognized as internal customers (L. L. Berry, 1981; L. Berry & Parasuraman, 1992; Grönroos, 1990; Nickels & Wood, 1999), when the focus is on the process (Conduit & Mavondo, 2001; Lings & Brooks, 1998), and, moreover, when there is a culture of orientation toward customers (Ahmed et al., 2003; Ferdous et al., 2013; Foreman & Money, 1995; Lee et al., 2015; Matanda & Ndubisi, 2013; Shiu & Yu, 2010; Tortosa-Edo et al., 2010).

INTERNAL MARKETING: COORDINATION AND PRACTICES

The literature addresses four alternatives for IM coordination:

- By the human resources department, by which advanced practices of human resources lead to a process of IM (Bansal, Mendelson, & Sharma, 2001);
- By the marketing department, according to which IM involves the power of marketing managers over the employees in order to achieve the external strategies (Flipo, 1986; Gilmore, 2000; Kotler, 1998);
- By both these departments (Conduit et al., 2014; Lowry et al., 2007; Rafig & Ahmed, 2000). Bansal et al. (2001) also admit that the interaction between the two departments is a viable alternative;
- By the executive level (Grönroos, 1990; Rafiq et al., 1993; Wieseke, Ahearne, Lam, & Dick, 2009). Ballantyne (2000) and Grönroos (1990) sustain that IM management goes beyond the borders of the traditional marketing field. For Rafiq and Ahmed (1993), this ambiguity may result in serious conflicts and suggest that IM coordination should be made at the executive level.

Regarding IM practices, employees' development is one of the most cited ones (Conduit et al., 2014; Conduit & Mavondo, 2001; Grönroos, 1990; Kotler, 1998; Lings,

2004; Rafiq et al., 1993). The concern is not only about learning the task at hand, but the set of factors that develops the employees in a more integrated way. This is presented in various activities promoted by the organizations, and is related to the improvement of daily tasks, new work methods, greater knowledge of external customers and their needs, values, practices and policies of the organizations, the improvement of the employees' quality of life (Conduit et al., 2014; Lings, 2004), among others. Employee development is also related to the creation of a customers' culture of knowledge (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2002; Kotler, 1998). Employee training may be conducted so that they know "what" and, mainly, "why" tasks should be done (L. L. . Berry & Parasuraman, 1991). Finally, this practice is very useful for the development of skills and sensitivity to perceive customers' needs, thus contributing to customer orientation (Conduit & Mavondo, 2001).

Communication is a practice that can be divided into internal and external. Internal communication — such as goals and objectives of the organizations — is related to the information provided by the organizations mainly to their personnel. On the other hand, external communication is provided to the customers and the community through advertising or newspaper ads. Usually new information about the company should be provided to external customers and employees at the same time. The proposal of IM is that this new information is firstly disclosed to the employees and then to the external public (Conduit et al., 2014; Grönroos, 1990; Rafiq et al., 1993). Communication may also exist between managers and employees and between managers with respect to employees' needs (Lings, 2004). The first is characterized by the usual communication processes composed of information relating to work, the organization, goals, objectives, and planning; which may be conveyed by means of direct contacts, newspapers, and reports. The second refers to the communication process that occurs between the top hierarchical levels when they analyse employees' needs.

Another practice is related to financial incentives and recognition of employees by means of an appropriate wage system. Service companies usually use reward systems, such as bonuses and prizes for employees who directly work with external customers. This practice can also be used to motivate all the employees (De Farias, 2010; Lings, 2004; Rafiq et al., 1993). An adequate wage system means that it reflects at least the average of the industry in which the company is involved. Where employees have direct contact with the customers, as is the case of service organizations, it is essential that they are recognized. Dissatisfactions relating to financial problems may immediately be transmitted to customers (Bansal et al., 2001; Lings, 2004).

Segmentation of internal customers (employees) is another practice described in several studies (Grönroos, 1990; Lings, 2004; Rafiq et al., 1993). The segmentation of the internal market is the grouping of employees according to their needs, characteristics, and desires. Ahmed and Rafiq (2002) provide two possibilities of segmentation, namely: one referred to the contact with the external customers, i.e., the employees who have and those who do not have contact with them; and the other is related to functional aspects of the employees. This is relevant to the extent that the expectations of each segment can be more adequately met (Lings, 2004). The identification of employees' needs and desires is made through market research, which can also be used to control the impact of the policies for personnel management on the employees (Grönroos, 1990; Rafiq et al., 1993).

Employee recruitment (Kotler, 1998) is an activity performed by the human resources department that can benefits from IM concepts. It involves the selection of employees to be part of the company, when the adherence of values between the organization and those of the new employees should be identified and maximized (Lings, 2004).

INTERNAL MARKETING MODELS

IM models emerged in the 1990's and in theory, all the models lead to external customer satisfaction by means of internal customer satisfaction. The structure of the models can be divided into three dimensions, namely: (1) antecedents; (2) IM tools and practices; and (3) IM results. Table 1 provides an overview of the models and the elements they include.

There are two fundamental issues in the model proposed by Berry (1981), i.e., the orientation toward the customers, which must be developed with the employees, and the specification of the practices that can be used by the companies.

The model proposed by Grönroos (1985, *apud* Ahmed and Rafiq, 2002) is more specific with respect to the practices that can be used as alternatives to have motivated employees and oriented toward the customers, in addition to being satisfied with the work and recognize the importance of their roles. Tansuhaj et al. (1988) proposed a model for management of service marketing. This model highlights IM as a first action to achieve customer satisfaction and loyalty. The model proposed by Rafiq et al (2000) includes various items, but it does not directly deal with the activities that can and should be developed to achieve employees' motivation and satisfaction. One of the positive issues of the model is empowerment, although it is only aimed at front-line employees, who need greater autonomy to optimally serve the customers. The model makes a connection between the elements that compose IM and its relationship with external customer satisfaction (Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000).

Table 1. Elements of IM models.

Elements of IM	(L. L. Berry, 1981)	(GRÖNROOS, 1985)	(Tansuhaj, Randall, & McCullough, 1988)	(Rafig & Ahmed, 2000)	(Bansal et al., 2001)	(Ahmed et al., 2003)	(Ferdous et al., 2013)
ANTECEDENTS							
Inter-functional coordination				X		X	X
Employee regarded as customer	X						
Integrative marketing		X					
Marketing-like approach				X		X	
Reduction of job status discrepancy					X		
Management support and confidence		X			X	X	X
TOOLS AND PRACTICES							
Application of marketing techniques/tools	X					X	
Attract and retain employees	X	X	X				
Bonus and wage system							X
Participative employee (participative management)	X	X					
Empowerment		X		X	X	X	
Teaching		X	X		X		X
Shared information		X	X		X		X
Internal marketing research (research, segmentation, strategies for each segment)							X
Recognition					X	X	
Job satisfaction			X	X	X		
Job security					X		
Tasks as products (work importance)	X	X					X
RESULTS							
Competitive advantage	X						X
Attitudes oriented toward the services or the customers	X	X		X			
Service quality	X	X	X	X	X		
Organizational commitment					X		
Specific individual skills.						X	
Market behavior						X	
Employee oriented toward the customers		X			X		
Performance of the organizations (profitability, sales)		X				X	
Satisfied employees (motivation)		X	X	X		X	
Involvement in the work			X				
External customer loyalty			X		X		

Source: elaborated by the authors.

Bansal et al. (2001) proposed a model that has a strong orientation toward the human resources department, but does not consider the contributions of the marketing department to the creation of the IM process. This model includes a set of practices which are mostly used by human resource managers. In this sense, it is worth considering the criticism of Barney et al (2001, p. 627): "individual practices may be imitable" and cannot contribute to the creation of a competitive advantage. In addition, the criticism of Hales (1994) to this model makes sense, because if IM is only composed of isolated practices, there is no reason to do something so different. On the other hand, the main contribution of the model is that the human resources department should take part in the process in an active manner using the practices that are already being used by the marketing department. The model proposed by Ahmed, Rafiq and Saad (2003) requires a relationship between IM and the skills that affect the performance of the organizations. The model proposed by Ferdous et al (2013, p. 640) regards the perspective of IM, since "it consists of three major components: internal market orientation; development and implementation of internal appropriate marketing programs; and internal outcomes", and the perspective of external marketing, since "it also has three major components: external market orientation; development and implementation of appropriate external marketing programs; and external outcomes".

### 1. Model Proposition for Internal Marketing

Here, we propose an IM model that includes the strategic direction of the organization, the coordination of the process, and the tools or practices that can be used. The relationship between the planning process, IM, and external marketing is essential in companies oriented toward the customers (Kotler, 1998; N. F. Piercy, 1995; N. Piercy & Morgan, 1991).

The model should consider the IM as an organizational role for the development of a culture oriented toward the customers. In this regard, according to some authors (Ahmed et al., 2003; Cahill, 1995; Foreman & Money,

1995; Gilmore, 2000; N. F. Piercy, 1995; N. Piercy & Morgan, 1991; Rafiq et al., 1993; Varey & Lewis, 1999) the proposed model considers that IM is a way of performing the strategic management of human resources through a marketing perspective and, in this case, with an orientation toward external customers.

Taking these issues into consideration, the model of IM proposed (Figure 1) is structured based on three premises: (1) the beliefs of the organizations; (2) the coordination of the process; and (3) the main activities and actions.

Figure 1. Model of IM management.
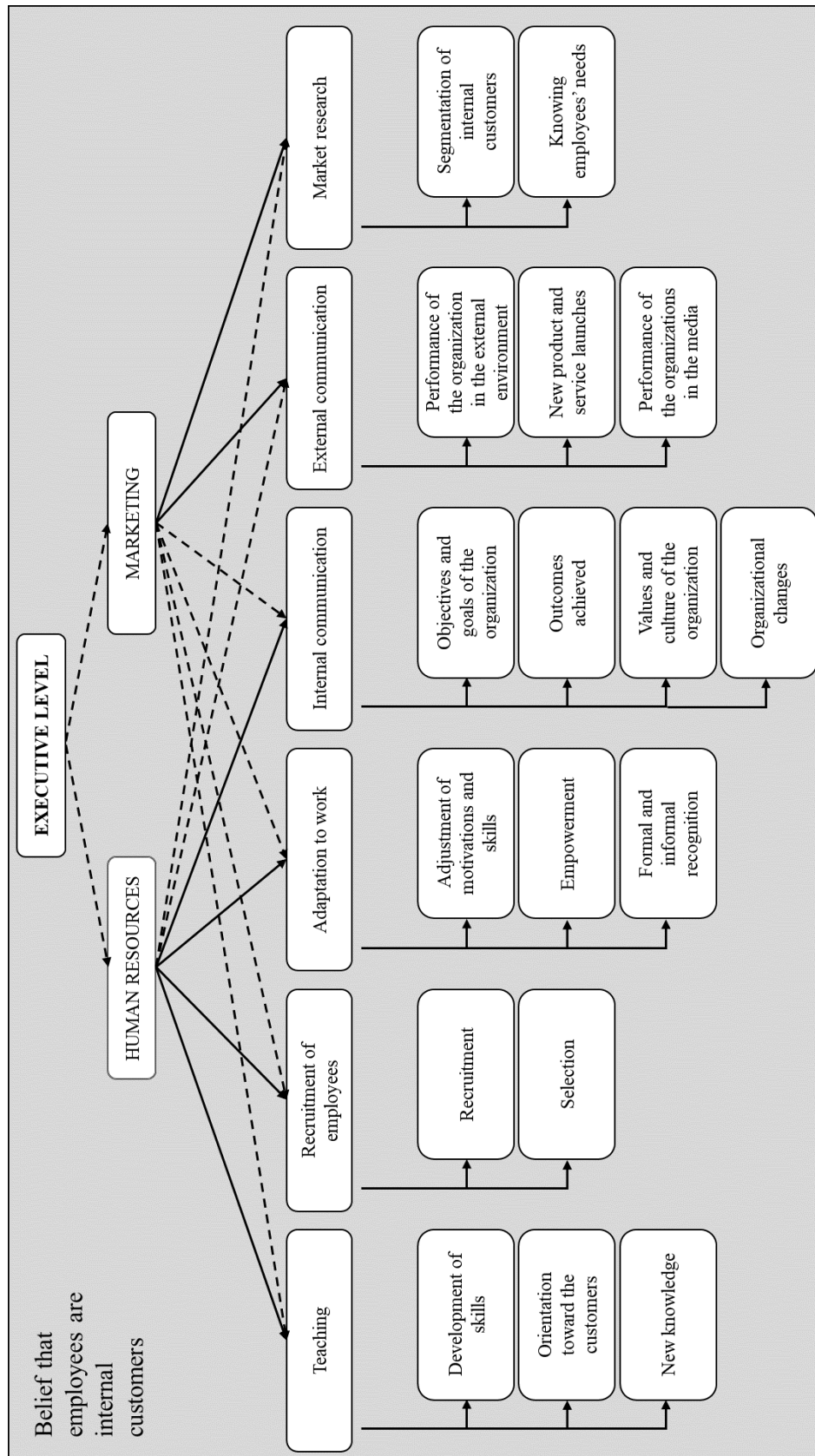
Source: elaborated by the authors.

First premise: organization belief that employees are internal customers

The belief of the organization that the employees are internal customers is the starting point of the model. A model will not be successful if the companies do not take this concept into consideration. This way, it is essential to adopt the belief that employees are internal customers, not only by the executive level, but also by all supervision levels of the organizations (Grönroos, 1990; Lings & Greenley, 2005; Matanda & Ndubisi, 2013; Wieseke et al., 2009).

This issue is even more important in-service organizations. Grönroos (1990), Berry and Parasuraman (1991), Bateson (1995), Kotler, et al (2000), and Nickels and Wood (1999) emphasize the need to valorise the employees as customers of the organizations. The risk of recognizing the employees as internal customers (Rafiq et al., 1993) is that they feel so important that they may sit back and expect that everything should be done to make them feel fully satisfied. This is an aspect that should be considered, and which should deserve managers' attention. This is not a simple task, but necessary for the success of the process. The difficulty in finding how much valorisation is adequate may be one of the reasons hindering the implementation and development of the model.

The adoption of this belief, that considers employees as internal customers of the company, is a strategy that should be consistent with the organizational culture (Matanda & Ndubisi, 2013; Narteh & Odoom, 2015). Figure 1 shows that this belief should be ingrained in the organizations, so that the employees are really viewed as a strategic resource, reason why it is considered here to be a background belief. This way, IM is not only reflected by the implementation of a set of practices, but by a context of attitudes and practices based on the culture of the companies orientated toward the customers.

Second premise: the coordination of the process

The second premise is the responsibility of the process management in the organizations. In some way, all the activities developed by the human resources department are related to the employees — i.e., the internal customers — but some activities are more specifically related to the orientation toward the customers.

As Figure 1 shows, marketing and human resources departments are responsible for the implementation and development of the IM. This line of thinking is consistent with that of Rafiq et al. (2000), Lowry and Inks (2007), and Conduit et al. (2014). Also, it is indirectly consistent with a line of thinking in which the process is the responsibility of the marketing department (Flipo, 1986; Kotler, 1998) or human resources department (Bansal et al., 2001), because all the activities are directly or indirectly linked with the two departments. The main difference with the traditional methods of strategic management of human resources is the philosophy that should guide the companies that regard their employees as internal customers and adopt marketing practices that support the major strategy of the companies oriented toward the external customers.

On the other hand, the marketing department should be integrated into the process, because it has a set of information and practices that are essential. The conflicts mentioned by Rafiq and Ahmed (1993) can be minimized according to the determination of the responsibilities for each department.

Third premise: IM practices

The third premise considers the IM practices that should be integrated into the process. It is important to argue that these practices are not the only ones that should be part of a strategic management of human resources. However, they are in line with IM management and orientation toward external customers.

Development

The development is mentioned by several authors (De Farias, 2010; Grönroos, 1990; Kotler, 1998; Narteh & Odoom, 2015; Rafiq et al., 1993) as one of the main activities of IM. The human resources department is usually responsible for this activity because it has the available resources to perform it. On the other hand, the marketing department can contribute with information and resources relating to the training of the employees with respect to orientation toward the customers. Among the benefits of development are the training of employees for better decision-making, greater ability for the execution of their tasks and, on the other hand, the knowledge about customers. It should also be noted that development produces positive effects on the employees with respect to job security and preparation for the future.

Employee recruitment

Kotler et al. (2000) clearly pointed out the need for hiring employees that can serve the customers efficiently. An effective and efficient recruitment and selection process is the initial step to have employees who are willing to do so. The abovementioned development process can help in the construction of this awareness; however, if there is no interest on the part of the employees, few actions will promote a behaviour change. This awareness is even more important when the organizations belong to the service department, in which the interaction with customers is direct and constant (Bateson, 1995). On the other hand, it should be noted that a well-made recruitment will also have positive outcomes for the employees (internal customers), because they will be more satisfied with their work.

Another action involved in employee recruitment is the formal or informal recognition of the performed works (Bansal et al., 2001; Rafig & Ahmed, 2000). It is necessary to consider that one of the main objectives of the employees is the search for better wages resulting from formal recognition. This way, a compensation program, based on achieving objectives relating to the outcomes of the organizations, meets the interests of the employees and

the organizations. Still, according to Bansal, et al. (2001), an adequate wage, or greater than the payment for the category, shows the organizations' commitment with the employees. Informal recognition is related to actions which demonstrate that the managers value the employees. Grönroos (1990) highlights the importance of managers in the process of IM and describes actions that can be performed, such as, for example, the feedback for employees, an internal open atmosphere for the exchange of ideas, and the sharing of management tasks with the employees.

Adaptation to work

Adaptation to work is composed of three actions, namely: the adjustment of motivations and skills; empowerment; and formal or informal recognition. The first item is not cited by the authors as an activity of IM, but the concepts refer to the implementation of the "P" as a product (McCarthy's 4Ps), i.e., the work performed by the employees. One of the concerns should be the adaptation of the employees to work. Empowerment can be related to freedom, responsibility, and confidence. Rafiq and Ahmed (2000), Bansal, et al. (2001), and Bateson (1995) have demonstrated the importance of this component, mainly in service organizations, where the employees have to make an immediate decision or, on the other hand, make customers wait for a response. In manufacturing organizations, in which the contact with the customers is more restricted to the marketing department or technical assistance, empowerment contributes to make the employees more autonomous and work more freely, increasing their satisfaction with the work (Rafig & Ahmed, 2000).

Internal communication

Internal communication is the most cited component in the literature. Despite being a direct responsibility of the human resources department, the marketing department has various communication tools and knows the ways to obtain good outcomes. In addition, in many organizations, this department may also have support from an advertising agency that offers creativity for the creation of

communication tools. Four specific activities of internal communication are proposed, namely: (1) the diffusion of the objectives and goals of the organization (Grönroos, 1990; Lings & Greenley, 2005); (2) the outcomes achieved and the situation of the organization (Lings & Greenley, 2005), which represent the information relating to the development level of the departments and the organization as a whole, whose advantage is employees' knowledge about the real situation of the organization that provides a certain job security; (3) the values and culture of the organization (Lings & Greenley, 2005; Rafiq et al., 1993), which can be transmitted in different ways and are part of the process of recognizing the employees as customers; and (4) organizational changes (Lings & Greenley, 2005): doubts that are the result of fusions, additions, changes in production, and changes in the market can be minimized with a good communication process.

External communication

External communication represents the communication aspects relating to the organization that occur in the external environment, either through participation in activities carried out by the community, awards received, advertising campaigns, or launch of new products or services (Conduit & Mavondo, 2001). Grönroos (1990) reinforces the importance of the dissemination of advertising campaigns in the organizations before they are released to the external public. Employees that have access to campaigns together with customers may feel betrayed. This way, when there is no interaction/communication between the marketing department and the other departments of the organizations, individualized work takes place and it does not promote positive outcomes. This idea is in line with the belief of recognizing employees as internal customers because it is necessary that they are the first to know the impact of the organizations on the market, so that they can commit themselves with the organizations and the expected outcomes of advertising campaigns.

Market research

Market research meets different objectives of IM and has been proposed by several authors (Grönroos, 1990; Rafiq et al., 1993; Shiu & Yu, 2010). The research model is supported by two specific actions, i.e., the segmentation of internal customers and the knowledge of employees' needs. The segmentation of customers is used to understand the characteristics of the employees in the organizations (Ferdous et al., 2013) and identify the best ways to contact them, so that they can really be influenced by IM actions performed by the marketing and human resources departments. On the other hand, knowledge about employees' needs allows the human resources department to perform activities to address them effectively. It should be recalled that, in times of relationship marketing, the adequacy of all processes is required to make the customers satisfied and connected with the organizations, and for IM this fact is no different. The proposed management model is focused on the direct application of IM in the organizations to achieve the expected objectives, i.e., orientation toward the customers, contribution to the organizational commitment, and improvement in the performance of the organizations.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

It should be noted that the main concept of IM is linked to a belief of management in the companies that consider the employees internal customers — recognizing that they are a strategic resource — and that they are looking for their satisfaction by means of different management practices to achieve greater external customer satisfaction and, consequently, higher performance.

Still, for some organizations, according to Pitt and Foreman (1998), IM is irrelevant or even illegitimate, whereas for others it is important or even essential. For these reasons, it is worth noting that there are no fixed rules. Therefore, it is primarily necessary to make a proper diagnostic of the organization and investigate what the

appropriate instruments are and who should be responsible for their implementation. The model presented here is intended to be a guide that should be adjusted in accordance with the reality of each organization. In addition, it presupposes an impact related to employees' commitment with the organizations, i.e., an alternative for the construction of a competitive advantage (Nickels & Wood, 1999; Porter, 1980) from the development of a culture oriented toward the customers.

Experts in human resources could suggest that this topic is a trend and that IM is a more advanced personnel management (Hales, 1994). Experts in marketing, in turn, could indicate that it is personnel management with the philosophy of being oriented toward customers, which is continuously seeking external customer satisfaction. In theory, the topic could be related to both departments. In academic terms, the two areas do not consider that they can work together to achieve outcomes. In terms of market orientation, the focus of human resources function should be the internal customers, i.e., the employees (Bansal et al., 2001).

The topic of IM arises to address the two areas presenting strategies and practices to effectively promote internal and external customer satisfaction. Therefore, paradigms and barriers between the two areas should be overcome to make a collaborative work possible. The borders of the knowledge areas should be crossed and, more than visualizing existing similarities, it is necessary to identify what can be added and shared between the departments to improve their performance. Further studies conducted in empirical environments should be carried out to confirm the proposed model. In this case, the organizations that have the key elements of the model should be taken into consideration.

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