

Performance in Service Interactions: Employee-Job, Organizational Mission Alignment - A Social Identity Perspective

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Abstract

Marketing by Organisations is an increasingly complex aspect of its operations. It is evident in the increasing complexity and weight of the Marketing Plans' Expectations in the now highly competitive environment. The dynamic nature of the market aggravates this, the competitors and the changing expectations in terms of deliverables. The Marketing concept can be seen as a business philosophy and a mission-oriented approach to its interaction with its publics to create value. Despite the increasing role of technology in organisations, maintaining the interactional aspect of Marketing is a humane function and is executed by humans. With the increasingly complex nature of the Markets in which organisations work, the interactive element is seldom limited to the scenarios or themes covered in the Job Training and General Tacit Skill developed through experience. This highlights the challenges in managing the marketing function in such a dynamic ecosystem, mainly while still being considered a firm with its economic interests.

Keywords: Motivation, Personality, Social Psychology, Social Identity, Mission, Service Encounters

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Introduction

Marketing by Organisations is an increasingly complex aspect of its operations. It is evident in the increasing complexity and weight of the Marketing Plans' Expectations in the now highly competitive environment. The dynamic nature of the market aggravates this, the competitors and the changing expectations in terms of deliverables. The Marketing concept can be seen as a business philosophy and a mission-oriented approach to its interaction with its publics to create value. Despite the increasing role of technology in organisations, maintaining the interactional aspect of Marketing is a humane function and is executed by humans. With the increasingly complex nature of the Markets in which organisations work, the interactive element is seldom limited to the scenarios or themes covered in the Job Training and General Tacit Skill developed through experience. This highlights the challenges in managing the marketing function in such a dynamic ecosystem, mainly while still being considered a firm with its economic interests therein.

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The importance of alleviating the perceived associations with the 'Firm' for organisations is made clear in Vargo and Lusch's (2017) renewal and update of the Service-Dominant Logic for Marketing which proposes an all-actor model for marketing in an ecosystem. This suggests that a 'firm' like any other public within the ecosystem has to be in an interactive loop and constant contact with its publics and for them to perceive the organisation as an entity within the eco-system that is existent with its motivations and end goals to co-create value for both the public and the firm. Again, this external interaction is well documented with activities such as Public Relations, Corporate Social Responsibility Activities and Marketing and Corporate Communications. Despite being focused on themes of

brand associations and ideals, these activities are mostly external to the core function of the organisations in terms of the value chain. The core function lies in the organisation's service interaction with its external public. The activities and behaviour of front-line customer contact personnel are determined predominantly by the role definition and expectations by the society and type of industry and the organisation's mission and orientation. This includes ensuring a clear understanding of the customer's needs and preferences (Saxe and Weitz 1982; Homburg, Weiseke and Bornemann 2009) and a competitive intelligence and market intelligence and knowledge of the organisational functions (Jaworski, Macinnis and Kohli 2002). This is a considerable burden for both the organisation and the front-line staff (FLS) to engage with the customer productively. This has led to the seminal piece by Bhattacharya and Sen (2003), who propose a Social Identity based model to explain and manage the customer interaction with an Organization. The underlying theory of Social Identity suggests that the customers' compare their self-identity with the firm's perceived identity attractiveness in terms of distinctiveness, similarity, and prestige to associate with the firm's identity to form a pseudo-human aggregate. The paper has brought about a flurry of research into identity management practices and has accentuated the importance of social identity for the marketing domain. The highly influential paper also followed this by Homburg, Wieseke and Hoyer (2009), which integrated the social identity concepts to the service-profit chain and linked unity with its performance. It is also important to note that research already has been done on concepts of organisational citizenship behaviour on sales performance (Mackenzie, Podsakoff and Fetter 1993) and how to manage social behaviour in a corporate setting (Scott and Lane 2000). However, the usage of parsimonious controls for the interaction is lacking in terms of managing from line staff behaviour. This paper, intends to add to the existing literature by providing a framework with mission alignment as the primary control over the effects of FLS role-job congruency, organisational identity congruence and employee performance. This research also has interesting Managerial Implications in terms of control over performance through organisational culture.

Conceptual Framework

The Framework Employs Social Identity's concepts of Self-Categorization and Group-Identification in organisational context to push for employee performance at the customer interaction level through positive distinctiveness and prototypical conformation (Ashforth and Mael 1989). Here the focus is on the service and sales personnel involved in the service interaction as they form the boundary spanners for the firm through their contact with the external public and many times become representative of the firm itself (Ahearne, Bhattacharya and Gruen 2005). In the following section, the paper discusses the individual linkages in the model.

Job-Role Congruence – Effect on Performance

For this paper, the Job-Role Congruence conceptualises the interaction between the emotional labour associated with an organisational function and the individual's personal preference for the role. In service interactions, the congruence of the service personnel with their immediate supervisors or the organisation improves the quality of the interaction and the overall performance of the FLS (Ahearne, Haumann, Kraus, Wieseke 2013). Sales management literature also suggests that the service provider's effect on the customer's satisfaction and loyalty involved in the interaction has varied effects, with some personality traits providing better results than others (Homburg, Giering 2001). This highlights the challenge of firms deciding their personnel as specific personality profiles cannot always be hired for a particular role which may also lead to fatigue. At the same time, the congruence between the FLS and the immediate supervisor is also preferred. Borrowing from Hochschild's (1979) theory of Emotion Work and Emotional Labour, emotional labour is the act of displaying the appropriate emotion. Society and the organisation generally define the appropriate emotion in a service context, and there may be a mismatch based on what is displayed and what is felt. This is as Rafaeli and Sutton (1989) have termed the Display Rules; these dictate what can be displayed in particular contexts irrespective of what is felt. The display rules have two characteristics that determine the interaction, the norm strength (group-consensus), and the norm intensity (potency), which is contingent on the service

interaction; the higher the strength or potency, the more significant the greater the effect of the display rules. Hochschild (1979) suggests two ways to handle the display rules, through surface acting or deep acting. Surface Acting is the case where the only emotion is displayed but not felt, leading to a kind of expressive dissonance. Deep Acting is when both are revealed, and the felt emotion results in emotive congruence (Rafaeli and Sutton 1989). It is widely accepted that Emotive Congruence leads to long term health and, in turn, to better performance from the employee (Barjak & Heimsch, 2021).

P1: Job-Role Congruence positively affects the performance of the Front-Line Employee

Organisational Identity – Effect on Performance and Main Effect

Organisations have increasingly turned to Market Orientation as the preferred Marketing Strategy tool. This entails the entire organisation being integrated and focusing shift focus from an internal emphasis to an external emphasis, i.e., Market, Customers and Environmental Factors. (Day 1994; Kumar, Jones, Venkatesan and Leone 2011). In such conditions, the FLS are expected to share a strong sense of oneness towards the company. The Social Identity theory provides a mechanism to achieve this. Upon hiring or allotting new personnel to a new job role, every organisation uses investiture and divestiture techniques in a dyadic construction to build employee's social identity concerning the organisation (Van Maanen 1978). From an employee's perspective, the employee evaluates his fit to the role before associating themselves to the role identity; this happens on two levels, comparative (relative) and normative (practical) (Haslam, Postmes and Ellemers 2003). It is also valid to comprehend that if the identity is attractive (distinct, prestigious, similar and trustworthy), the employee will choose the same as their organisational identity (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994). This is particularly true and desirable for FLS, who form the 'face' of the company and provide different avenues to the market (Hartline, Maxham, Mckee 2000). Thereby, having higher organisational identity congruence improves the performance of the FLS.

Additionally, personality still plays a significant role in the effectiveness of the actual job-role congruence. Organisational identity provides a mechanism that ensures the entire group of personnel live under the same understanding and acceptable behaviour (through culture); this improves the Job-Role Congruency by better accepting the display rules (Deal and Kennedy 1982). Social Identity theory also suggests that if the organisational identity congruence is strong, then through social conformity, the display rules' processing moves from surface acting to more deep acting, resulting in better performance again (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993).

P2: Organizational Identity Congruence of the employee positively affects performance through a) a moderating effect on the main effect and; b) direct effect on performance

Organisational Mission – Effect on the Organizational Identity's Influence

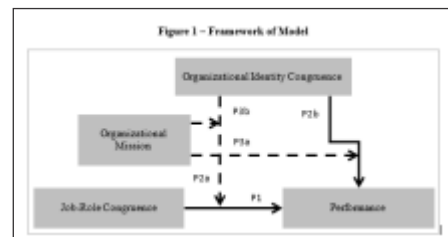
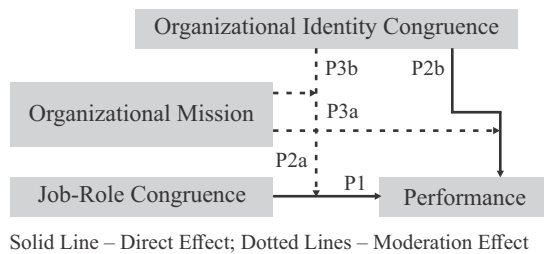
The organisation's core values, often from the critical aspect of the identity, and the organisation's mission statement provide the organisation's image, vision, mission, purpose, and goals (Klemm, Sanderson and Luffman 1991; Leuthesser and Kohli 1997; Whetten and Godfrey 1998). This Organizational Mission is relatively Long Run in nature compared to most other aspects of a firm (Albert and Whetten 1985). The Mission statement needs to be implemented well enough to ensure effectiveness. The literature suggests by holding the three components of the statement (Motivational, Formal and Dynamic) together with Authenticity, Coherence and Integrity (Rey and Bastons 2017). A mission statement generally offers two functional purposes, a strategic tool for the company and a cultural tool (Babnik, Breznik, Dermol and Sirca 2014). Mission statement's Cultural Function as a representative feature of the Organizational Culture is why it is suitable as the primary control variable. To understand this in greater detail, two characteristics of Social Identity need to be elaborated on in an organisational context, Salience and Contextual Nature (Haslam and Ellemers 2005). Salience is a vital feature to remind the constituents of a group of its feature and its differentials concerning other groups (Oakes 1987).

The effects of social identity must materialise for self-categorisation to occur. The groups' association also does not form universal truths and offer very contextual outcomes resulting in a lack of reliability as a tool. Social Identity only works effectively if the traits are salient and non-contextual, perhaps existing at a higher abstraction level (Haslam and Ellemers 2005). Literature also highlights that despite autonomy being an important parameter for social identity, it can also form in organisational context just through simple allocation and negative affect cases through an immersion in the new identity group (Becker and Carper 1956). Saliency can also be controlled as a symbol that aids the management of social identity. It is also essential that for a proper fit to occur, identity must be coherent and consistent over time (Biesanz and West 2000). The Organizational Culture perspective of the Mission Statement fits these criteria while still

providing strong empirical evidence of being useful for the performance itself, albeit through the employees' motivation and imbuing them with a strong sense of mission (Campbell and Yeung 1991). There is also extant literature showing improvement of personnel's productivity through a stronger sense of belongingness and a common consensus of organisational practice (Akerlof and Kranton 2005; Carpenter and Gong 2016; Bart, Bontis, Taggar 2001) (Hameduddin & Lee, 2021). And as Turner (1985) highlighted, Social Categorization and Self-Concept are a Social Cognitive Theory for Group Behaviour and is the only way to mobilise them.

P3: Organizational Mission Congruence of the employee positively moderates the influence of Organizational Identity Congruence on the a) main effect and; b) direct effect on performance

Figure 1 – Framework of Model



Discussion and Implications

The model proposed in this framework provides a parsimonious theory that has interesting managerial implications. The service quality interactions can be significantly standardised by improving the organisational identity and made more relational (Homburg, Wieseke and Hoyer 2009). By appropriately controlling and implementing the organisational mission, it is possible to boost the performance of FLS without the need for constant monitoring and a reasonable improvement of employee health.

The model focuses on the organisational culture aspect of the mission statement and display rules during service interactions. Both of these are culture-specific, and with larger companies needing cross border operations, it is advisable to ensure the themes overarching them are significantly generalizable.

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