

THE ROLE OF MARKETING-BASED APPROACHES IN INCREASING THE MILITARY EDUCATION'S PERFORMANCE

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Abstract: *In a constantly changing environment that may be described by an acronym such as VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous), military organisations should limit their traditional approach to doings things by means of complicated chains of command, and adopt instead different techniques in which flexibility and creativity play the pivotal role. This article briefly examines some models of marketing, and attempts to apply them to a hypothetical military educational organisation in order to conclude upon the usefulness and appropriateness of marketing tools in improving organisational performance in the military educational system.*

Keywords: *marketing, military system, military education, organisational objective, organisational performance.*

1. INTRODUCTION

A constantly changing reality inherently calls for developing and re-developing models and approaches, especially when the term “reality” defines the present global environment. The tremendous political, economic and social transformations occurred during the last decades, such as the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the military conflicts in the Far East and former Yugoslavia, as well as the more recent events such as the economic crisis or the nuclear experiments of Iran have resulted in the necessity of re-shaping both business and security objectives, strategies and attitudes.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the extent to which marketing approaches specific to the business environment may be applied to military organisations, given the fact that the former have been developed in relation with private or corporate organisations – more prone to change and, therefore, to adaptation and flexibility, whereas the latter are hierarchical, bureaucratic, and rigid *par excellence*.

There is no right or wrong model of marketing planning, as each serves different businesses with different purposes, structures,

and values. Nevertheless, pointing out the common aspects of some of the models, as well as the differences between them could offer a more comprehensive perception of marketing planning processes. This is the purpose of the first part of this paper.

Its next stage attempts to apply the theoretical models to a specific organisational context, whereas the final part aims at deciding upon at the usefulness of the models to the organisation in question.

2. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

After analysing the data resulted from a survey carried out among UK consumers and industrial companies more than twenty years ago, Griffin [1] concludes that ‘marketing’ is but one of the many terms “used to describe one of the main functions of business” as the survey subjects reported the use of other terms, such as ‘strategic’, ‘business’, ‘operational’, to name only three.

However, the content of what the study presented as “a marketing plan” was described in “very similar” ways, as two-thirds of the respondents indicated. Regardless of its name, the document contained the following elements:

- SWOT analysis of the business;

- business objectives (to be achieved during or by the end of the year);
- business strategies on how to achieve the objectives;
- tactics regarding each element of strategy;
- forecast;
- estimate of income, expense, and profit;
- assessment methods to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the plan and each element of the strategy.

On the other hand, one may consider different theoretical models, such as the marketing planning processes respectively developed by McDonald in 1984, Majaro in 1993, and Westwood in 1997. The most conspicuous aspect in this case is the high degree of resemblance among the models on the one hand, and between the models and the study findings on the other hand.

All the models mentioned above contain common elements: corporate objectives, SWOT analysis, assumptions, and strategies.

As far as McDonald's and Westwood's models are concerned, the resemblance can be further expanded to the sequence of the first stages: setting corporate objectives, carrying out internal and external marketing research, SWOT analysis, marketing objectives.

Nonetheless, the order of the last stages of the two models is not identical: whereas McDonald [2] suggests that programme implementation should be followed by measurement and review, Westwood [3] considers that these two stages should be separated by a control system phase, whose role is to ensure that all the necessary conditions for the plan implementation are met.

Another difference between McDonald's and Westwood's models is the emphasis on feedback: McDonald advances the idea that the feedback loops should connect all the marketing planning stages, from assumptions to measurement and review, while Westwood's opinion is that the feedback role should be restricted to the intermediate phases, from marketing objectives and expected results to budget setting.

On the other hand, Majaro's marketing planning process [4] may be regarded as a hybrid of the previous two models, in the

sense that it contains the same elements, but positions the marketing audit phase on the first place, unlike McDonald and Westwood, who begin their planning processes with setting the corporate objectives.

Another characteristic of Majaro's model is placing great emphasis on information gathering and feedback at every level.

Each model lends itself to different organisational profiles, according to its strengths and weaknesses. Thus, one can argue that Majaro's model is clear, logical, and offers good knowledge of the market environment, but at the same time the audit procedures may be expensive. Consequently, it would be appropriate for small organisations that are new on the market.

On the other hand, McDonald's model is both simple and comprehensive, in the sense that it focuses on the organisation, as well as on the market. Also, it provides information on competitors, estimates results, and gives alternative plans. However, it has significant shortcomings such as the lack of specific information on customers and budgetary constraints.

Finally, Westwood's model encompasses strengths such as focus on employees, which increases their motivation and participation, opportunity to review the plans, and emphasis on external preferences. On the other hand, its implementation may be expensive and time-consuming, which makes it unsuitable for large or multi-facet organisations.

However, mention should be made that the practical application of such models requires adaptability and flexibility of interpretation, both regarding the terminology used and the contents of the plans, as "the number of components of the plans structure and the amount of wording that goes with each are, in the end, a matter of management style"[1].

The idea of combining the marketing and managerial aspects originates from the fact that the two activities represent different perspectives of the same unitary issue: the effective and efficient running of the business. This viewpoint is supported by Simkin's opinion [5]: "To be credible, marketing planning must include an understanding of managers' behaviour and the broader

organisational context in which it takes place”.

3. THE ORGANISATIONAL PROFILE

Due to the nature of the hypothetical organisation taken into consideration hereby, the term “commandant” will substitute the term “manager” in the context of this paper.

The organisation’s objectives should derive from its mission and may consist of the following:

1. To develop understanding of concepts, principles, methods and techniques related to military subject matters.
2. To implement modern operational methods and techniques in the field of defence and security.
3. To carry out scientific research for supporting the fundamentals and application of military sciences.

Romania’s national security is determined by the regional, European, and global security. The collapse of the communist regime in December 1989 has imposed a new approach to defence issues, while the NATO integration process has resulted in the necessity of reforming the Armed Forces. The educational dimension is an essential part of the deep reform process of the Romanian military system, and it must reflect the latest tendencies and approaches in the field.

Consequently, when setting the corporate objectives, the commandant must give serious consideration to the elements of market orientation, which is “the aspect of business culture that motivates employees throughout the organisation to place the highest priority on the profitable creation and maintenance of superior customers’ value” [7]. The model techniques are external and internal marketing research, which leads to the aspect of using various methods of internal and external marketing research data collection.

These include the already traditional ways based on suggestion boxes, interviews – whether they are of a personal, mailing, or telephone nature – or the more modern email contacts or Internet approaches. Regardless of the method in which it is provided, the feedback is essential. However, Malhotra and

Peterson [7] advance the idea that more and more marketing research problems will be addressed based on secondary data alone due to the extensive nature of secondary data available over the Internet, from business, government, and syndicated sources. Mention should be made that the organisational objectives must be clear and communicated properly to the staff. It is important that the objectives meet the so called SMART criteria, i.e., specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timed.

The next step is the classical SWOT analysis, which “consists of two parts: one dealing with the external environment (opportunities and threats), and the other with the internal set of organisational resources (strengths and weaknesses)” [6]. One can argue that the SWOT analysis is subjective and consequently its results are debatable. However, “the SWOT analysis is ultimately about making informed judgements which may themselves be informed in some way by the results of a market analysis” [6].

Then, the model refers to the action plans, namely addressing the segment, target, and positioning issues, as well as generating promotion plans, so an interesting question arises: “Who is the real customer? Is it the student, the student’s current employer, or society at large?” [8].

Last but not least, the promotion strategy options refer to the organisation’s competitive advantage of uniqueness and monopoly.

After all these stages have been clearly established, the plan is explained to the staff as “effective service delivery requires motivated and customer-conscious employees” (Grönroos) [9]. During this phase the role of internal marketing is vital. As Ahmed and Rafiq [9] argue, the employees’ behaviour or attitudes are essential “for the effective implementation of a particular corporate or functional strategy”.

As Nicholls *et al.* [8] notice, in today’s changing educational environment, “a new balance must be found between commercialism and professionalism”, but “academics do not necessarily enjoy promoting their services”. One way to overcome this difficulty is using an

opportunistic and reactive method, based on the fact that “discussions with colleagues in business schools elsewhere suggest this type of approach is not unusual” [8].

Also, the organisation can make extensive use of ways in which risk can be reduced for the student and to facilitate the student's decision-making processes, which would include prompt and accurate feedback to enquiries, as well as a “more proactive approach to promotion and perhaps, too, greater use of alumni associations” [8].

Finally, the controlling, reviewing and updating systems are applied. At this stage, the progress of the plan is assessed by monitoring the number of potential students who manifest their interest in the courses by telephoning or accessing the organisation's website.

Another element to be considered is the compliance with the set budgets, whereas according to the data collected, consequent measures are taken: accelerating the advertising campaign, reducing or increasing the budgetary allocation within the established limits.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This paper attempts to explain how a combined marketing approach to achieving the objectives of an imaginary military educational organisation (based on Westwood's marketing planning process) is not only useful, but also necessary, because it ultimately enforces the very issue of credibility of the unit as a service provider. This illustrates the idea that “unless schools succeed in improving their marketing, they will stand accused of not practising what they preach” [8]. Considering the profound challenges posed by the current economic, strategic,

political, cultural, and social events, the paramount importance of providing competitive military education cannot be overstated.

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