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Internal Brand Training in the Learning Industry

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INTERNAL BRAND TRAINING IN THE
LEARNING INDUSTRY

By
Audrey Ellison

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LEARNING INDUSTRY

By

Audrey Ellison

We hereby certify that this Dissertation submitted by Audrey Ellison conforms to acceptable standards, and as such is fully adequate in scope and quality. It is therefore approved as the fulfillment of the Dissertation requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Business Administration.

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CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions or writings of another.

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Audrey Ellison

ABSTRACT

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Companies in the learning industry are in the business-to-business marketplace and the companies focus on providing services to their customers. In service businesses delivering on the brand promise is aligned with the services employees deliver to customers. The learning industry was used to research whether a commitment to internal brand training impacts business performance. Two of the initial hypotheses were supported; a learning orientation increases commitment to internal brand training and internal brand training increases employee commitment to the brand. The third hypothesis, employee brand commitment improves business performance, was not supported. A re-specified model found.

- Learning orientation directly affects Brand Training and Employee Brand Commitment
- Brand Training directly affects Employee Brand Commitment and Business Performance
- Employee Brand Commitment directly affects Business Performance

The largest direct effect on improved business performance is employee brand training, yet it is the area with the least number of hours of training in the organizations, which provides an opportunity for practitioners.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will focus on introducing the topic of the dissertation. The purpose of this study is to explore the commitment to internal brand training and business performance in the learning industry. In the learning industry (training/performance development), similar to other service industries, the customer interaction with employees is a component of brand perception (Wentzel, 2009). The interaction between the customer and employee is part of the brand experience for the customer (Judd, 2003). Companies in the learning industry need to compete for the "hearts and minds" of their customers, but it is through employees that the brand is brought to life. Less is known about the role of brands in business-to business (B2B) than in business-to-consumer (B2C) markets (Lindgren, Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). The learning companies compete in the B2B market, where brand image can be a driver of corporate success in B2B (Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010). There is competitive advantage to brand in B2B (Bendixen, Bukasa & Abratt, 2004). Especially in service industries, the brand is strongest when there is aligned between employee behavior and brand identity (Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010), as the employees are the "driving force for successful service brands" (King & Grace, 2012, p. 470), particularly in the service sector (Mangold & Miles, 2007).

The learning industry will be used to conduct the study. Organizations in the industry sell learning, training and/or performance solutions to other companies. While some of the companies offer training programs, the market is more closely aligned with services rather than product marketing. Brands have not been as significant in this market as in the business-to-consumer markets. Features and benefits have been more prevalent than branding in customer purchasing decisions in the industry. The purpose of this study is to answer the question: does a commitment to internal brand training increase business performance in the learning industry?

Background

Branding plays a special role in service companies because a strong brand can increase customers' trust of an intangible purchase (Berry, 2000). The concept basis of branding in B2B comes from earlier work in service quality. In the 1980s, delivering quality services became a marketing priority for research and practitioner implementation (Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman, 1988). Service marketing faced different problems and requires different strategies than goods marketing (Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1985). The unique characteristics of services create the need for specific strategies to address the differences. Despite all the research on consumers, it is still difficult to capture the depth and meaning of consumers' thoughts as they are not always aware of their thoughts (Zaltman, 2003). Most practitioners have no idea why customers behave as they do (Carbone, 2003).

Service and product knowledge cannot be gained in the same way – service is experienced and requires an opposite view of conventional product marketing practices (Shostack, 1977). Employee commitment to the organizational values is critical in service businesses for delivering on the brand promise (Wallace, de Chernatony & Buil, 2011) as the brand is embedded in the organizational culture (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2007). King and Grace (2009) found that employee based brand equity is important for brand citizenship behaviors in service organizations. However, the organization attributes that help an employee live the brand are not necessarily the same in different organizations (Maxwell & Know, 2009), so it is important for management to understand what makes their brand attractive to their employees. The more an employee identifies with the brand the more the brand comes alive with the customer (Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2009).

Delivering consistently good service is difficult since service firms may not always understand what high quality means to their customers, what attributes of service are needed to meet customer needs and what levels of performance are necessary to deliver high quality service (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry, 1985). However, the definitions of brand and branding continue to evolve; the evolution of marketing in demonstrated in service-dominant brand logic (Merz, Yi & Vargo, 2009). Service-dominant logic (SDL) implies that value is created by the customer rather than part of the product (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Value for the customer is created through interactions between customers and service providers (Gronroos, 2004). SDL can be applied to learning, creativity and innovation in meeting customer needs (Mele, 2009). The learning industry firms tend to be smaller firms, which rely on employees to implement SDL (Finney, Spake & Finney, 2011). Consumers reach satisfaction decisions by comparing performance with expectations with different expectations for different products and services (Bitner, 1990). “The Unified Services Theory (UST) suggests that organizations can stand out from their competitors by focusing on certain, or different customer inputs” (Sampson & Froehler, 2006, p. 340). UST can be applied to the learning industry in both real and virtual customer contact of the front and back office operations (Sampson & Froehler, 2006).

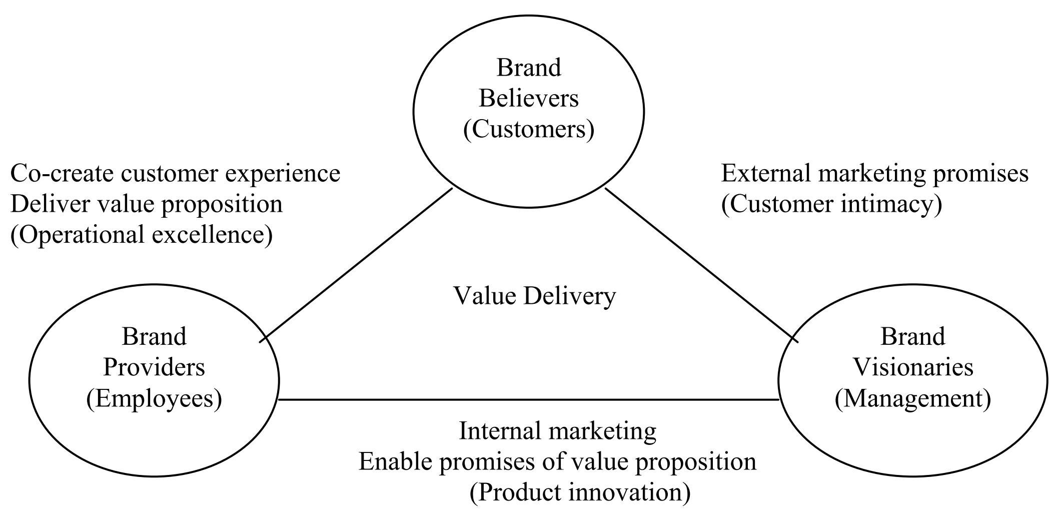
If expectations exceed performance, dissatisfaction occurs and if performance exceeds expectations, satisfaction occurs. The implications of the study included the importance of managing and controlling every service encounter to enhance the perception of service quality; not meeting expectations provides an opportunity to turn around the service encounter. Customer service is a component of the marketing mix. The branding of service deals with what happens in other people's mind (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2007). The leadership becomes brand evangelists that define and defend the brand (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2007). However, employees can also become brand saboteurs if their behavior detracts from the brand (Wallace & de Chernatony, 2009).

People are key to delivering the brand promise in service companies. People-power has been presented as a "5th P" of the marketing mix, because employees can be a powerful element in helping an organization differentiate their brand service to gain competitive advantage and deliver customer value (Judd, 2003). The employees of an organization have not usually been considered part of the marketing mix, however in service companies it is the employees that deliver value to the customer. If employees are not customer-oriented, the organization will not achieve customer orientation (Judd, 2003). Organizations need to market to their employees so employees can promote the brand to customers**.** Hence, Judd (2003) proposed a 5th P people as a critical element of the marketing mix. Lovelock and Wirtz (2007) added three more Ps to create the 8P model of service marketing. The additional Ps include: process, the means by which product elements are delivered; physical environment, the appearance of the place where services are delivered; productivity and quality, as defined by the customer to differentiate service (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2007). The authors added some characteristics to the 4Ps: place includes time and place, which means delivery method being physical or electronic; price includes other user outlays, which is defined as convenience; and promotion includes education, which is about understanding what is relevant to the customer (Lovelock & Wirtz (2007). While there is some thought that the 4Ps (place, product, promotion, price) are outdated in today's service economy with emphasis on customer relationship management, it seems more important to add elements than to delete other components of the mix. In service organizations' customer contact is not limited to sales and marketing; it might include anyone in the organization. Therefore, the brand communication and customer-orientation needs to permeate the organization. Business-to-business marketing in service organizations utilizes people-to- people contact as the differentiator.

Priyadarshi (2011) found that employer brand can be a predictor of employee satisfaction and brand can be a communication tool. Communication becomes critical in using people as the differentiator. In developing an integrated marketing communications plan, organizations need to consider internal communication and marketing to employees (Gilly & Wolfinbarger, 1998). A subsequent study found that when employees believe advertising is effective their focus on customers increases (Celci & Gilly, 2010). The phases of internal marketing required are employee motivation and satisfaction, customer-orientation and strategy implementation (Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000). In fact, it could create a new area for marketing, business-to-employee (B2E), which would enable employees to become brand ambassadors (Oliva, 2005). Srivastava and Thomas (2010) used the terms brand visionaries and brand believers. B2E marketing looks at employees first. In the business press, *First Break All the Rules* (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999) *The*

Customer Comes Second (Rosenbluth & McFerrin-Peters, 2002), and *Guts* (Freiburg & Freiburg, 2004) the idea of putting employees before customers and doing business as unusual were presented. By treating employees as customers, they can in turn provide better service to customers. If employees are the key asset in B2B service organizations, they need communication and marketing to provide a customer-orientation. Hsieh (2010) in *Delivering Happiness* talks about culture as the brand. He said that core values "define the company's character and brand" (p. 184). Internal marketing is a topic that has been discussed by the business community and practitioners. Companies try to emotionally engage employees and connect them to the brand. Leaders need a strong brand vision for employees to be able to align brand providers and brand believers (Srivastava & Thomas, 2010). "To deliver a strong brand experience for customers the organization needs to develop strong internal alignment with the brand among internal stakeholders and resources, and strong external alignment with external stakeholders, partners, customers and consumers" (Srivastava & Thomas, 2010, p. 465). Srivastava and Thomas called this brand alignment (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1: Brand Alignment Framework (Srivastava & Thomas, 2010)



In our service economy, employees are critically important to the service brand and require a shared understanding of their brand's value (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2005). In developing a brand strategy in service businesses, it may be that what the employees think and feel about the brand is more important than what the customers think and feel. Customers' experiences create emotional reactions to the service, which includes pleased, disappointed, frustrated, and infuriated (Berry & Lampo, 2004). Connecting emotionally with customers helps make a brand powerful (Berry & Lampo, 2004). Employees need to internalize the brand concept, as it is human behavior that helps build a strong brand especially in labor-intensive service organizations. Berry and Lampo (2004) explore the clues that emotionally connect the employees and customers to the brand. They found that creating a strong brand of labor-intensive services comes from human opportunities. Therefore, integrated marketing communications need to support the brand and allow employees to deliver on the brand promises. Integrated marketing communication is one of the easiest ways for a company to maximize the return on investment in marketing (Belch, 2003). While there is no consensus on the financial impact of internal marketing, there is agreement that improving service, improves customer satisfaction and retention, which can lead to better business results (Hesket, Sasser & Schlesinger, 2003). Bharadwaj, Tuli and Bonfrer (2011) found that brand quality increases shareholder value. Practitioners continue to seek ways to align customer retention and customer service. Companies are also pressured to develop better value for customers and manage relationships as assets (Ramaswami, Srivastava & Bhargava (2009).

Statement of Problem

Many of the companies in the learning industry do not actually offer a tangible product. Therefore, the employee can become the differentiator. While most of the companies spend considerable time and energy providing sales people, consultants and customer service representatives with brand information, it is not necessarily cascaded to all levels and people in the organization. B2E communication in the industry has potential for improvement. The companies in the study are relatively homogeneous in their offerings to customers and take similar approaches to marketing their services. The difficulties occur in the internal rather than external marketing (Lings, 1999). Therefore, the research problem is: Does a commitment to internal brand training increase business performance in the learning industry?

The marketing theories presented laid the conceptual framework for understanding relationships between internal branding and employees delivering on the brand promise (Punjaisri, Evanschitzky & Wilson, 2009). Baumgarth and Schmidt's (2010) research looked at three elements of brand orientation behaviors for internal brand to achieve organizational goals: commitment, knowledge and involvement. Commitment is defined as attachment to the brand in attaining goals, knowledge is based on the learning process and internal communication, and involvement is focused on contributing to overall company success (Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010).

Definition of Terms

Brand as defined by Armstrong and Kotler (2011) identifies the products or services and differentiates product/service from competition. "Branding has become so strong that hardly anything goes unbranded" (p. 216). It is one of the most important tasks for marketers.

Brand Commitment is based on an individual's brand loyalty (Beatty & Kahle, 1998). It is related to organizational commitment (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005).

Brand Promise identifies what the customer should expect from interactions with products, services and people (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007). It is what the brand represents to the customer.

Customer experience is the service-encounter and touch points between the customer and the service provider. The customer judges the experience based on the provider behaviors and clues (Berry & Lampo, 2004).

Internal brand means informing employees about the brand through internal promotion (Mitchell, 2002). It is important to promote the brand internally and externally with similar messages (Mitchell, 2002). Employee commitment to the brand becomes evident with customer dealings (de Charatony & Cottam, 2006).

Internal communications is the exchange of knowledge required to gain employee commitment and a sense of responsibility (Varey & Lewis, 1999). Organizations create patterns of communication to exchange knowledge (Ballantyne, 2003).

Internal customer satisfaction translates to external customer satisfaction. If the employee is satisfied it creates positives behaviors that create positive external customer interactions (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003). Service quality provided to customers is linked to the marketing techniques provided to employees (Gronroos, 1994).

Internal marketing is using marketing techniques to sell to employees and providing them with an opportunity to experience the service provided by the organization as if they were customers of the organization (Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000). To be internal marketing, marketing techniques need to be used with employees (Gronroos, 1982). Satisfying employees becomes a pre-requisite to satisfying the customers (Lings, 2004).

Learning organizations are the organizations that provide services to other organizations focused on training and consulting. Senge's (1990) definition will also be used.

Market Orientation is a theory defined by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) as the consistency between organizational actions and the marketing concept.

Services are intangible and activity-based (Gronroos, 1982). The process becomes the product.

Scope

The scope of the study will be in one industry and will not explore the effectiveness of the different marketing techniques utilized in other industries. The companies to be included are members of the Instructional Systems Association, which includes the major companies in the learning industry.

Assumptions

Since the survey questionnaire was developed using questions from previous studies, it is assumed that validity and reliability will apply to the questions.

The following methodological assumptions apply to this study:

1. Respondents will be honest in their responses.
2. Respondents will be free to answer questions without organizational repercussions.
3. Organizations will allow access.
4. Respondents will not have any response bias, since information is organizational rather than personal.

Summary

The concept of internal market orientation and internal branding is based on the work in service marketing and service quality. Internal and external marketing need to be aligned and communicate similar messages especially in industries where the employees are the key touch point with the external customers and customers are not passive receivers (Lings, 2004). This can help create brand loyalty. Fram and McCarthy (2002) posit that an increase in employee loyalty is the result of an increase in satisfaction with management, which in turn increases customer loyalty and revenue.

Organizations in the B2B marketing need to develop brand ambassadors through business-to-employee marketing (Olivia 2005). Brand commitment is developed through communication and leadership (Burrmann & Zeplin, 2005) that demonstrates commitment and enables employees to live the brand (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2005). If employees live the brand, they can engineer positive customer experiences (Berry, Wall & Carbone, 2006). Based on the literature, the evolution of marketing appears to be from business to consumer (B2C), to business-to-business (B2B), to business-to-employee (B2E).

An internal marketing orientation is an extension of external marketing orientation from the work of Kohli and Jaworski (1990); it is the basis for internal market orientation. Internal marketing is a more recent field of study, which combines internal and external focus (Lings & Greenley, 2005). Internal market orientation studies are a newer field of study in marketing with fewer studies than external marketing orientation. The alignment with business outcomes is less defined (Gounaris, 2006).

Chapter I addressed the topic to be studied. Chapter II will review literature in the areas of service brands, internal marketing orientation, learning orientation, delivering on the brand promise, and customer satisfaction and business performance defined as repeat business, referrals and retention.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will review the literature beginning with service brands, which is basis for the brand issues in the learning industry. The adage that happy employees create happy customers (George, 1990) suggests connection between customer outcomes and role of employees. Internal marketing orientation is the foundation for internal marketing. The literature review will explore concepts in the component areas being addressed in the research: service brands and internal marketing will be explored as antecedents to commitment learning orientation and brand training impacting business performance defined as repeat business, referrals and customer retention. Each of the concepts will be explored separately then brought together as the basis for the research. Empirical research and conceptual studies will be used.

Theoretical Framework

Berry (1981) defined the term internal marketing as “viewing employees as internal customers, viewing jobs as internal products that satisfy the needs and wants of these internal customers while addressing the objectives of the organization” (p. 25). Internal marketing impacts both employee and customer satisfaction (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003). “Internal marketing is the philosophy of treating – indeed ‘wooing’ employees” (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml, 1991, p. 151) to create loyalty and impact profitability.

Narver and Slater (1990) explored market orientation in commodity business and found correlation between orientation and customer retention. Along with Kohli and Jaworski (1990), they found that market orientation required the involvement of all employees. To achieve an internal focus employees need to be treated like customers (Mohr-Jackson, 1991). The internal customer-supplier model is rooted in Total Quality Management and is based on service quality being dependent on internal service (Gronroos, 1982). Internal Customer Orientation (ICO) focuses on internal markets, which ignoring has been equated with marketing myopia (Levitt, 1960). Balmer (2011) posits the new marketing myopia as maintaining culture through an institutional focus. Gummesson (1998) calls it service marketing myopia and says service quality must be balanced internally and externally. George (1990) suggests a linkage between the organization and external customers is enhanced when employees feel good about the organization. Perceptions of internal service quality have been theoretically linked to external service quality perceptions (Heskett, Jones, Loveman, Sasser & Schlesinger, 2008). Hunt and Morgan (1995) note the importance of the interaction of employees learning from each other on sustaining market orientation. The organization becomes “the marketer and the market” (Foreman & Money, 1995, p. 761); the internal marketing must parallel the external marketing to be effective. Organizations can achieve maximum effectiveness by balancing internal and external marketing (Lings, 1999) In fact, internal marketing may need to precede external marketing (Prasad & Steffes, 2002). Effective internal marketing strategies need to cascade, top to bottom, down the organization and create mutual value satisfying the needs of the organization and individual (Ballantyne, 2002). The employee brand commitment pyramid study (King & Grace, 2008) found that as internal marketing increased employees brand commitment also increased (Figure 2.1).

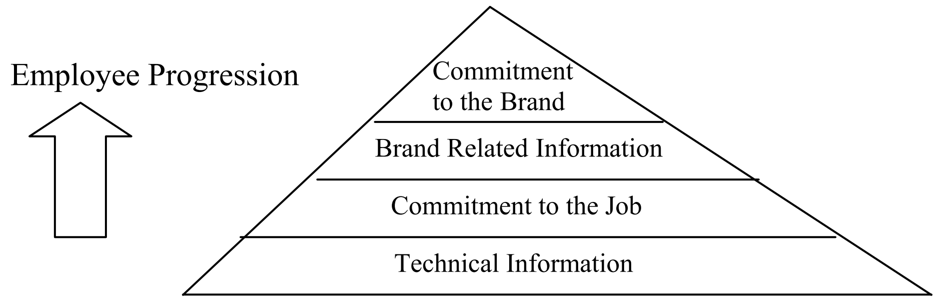


Figure 2.1: Employee Brand Commitment Pyramid (King & Grace, 2008)

The marketing theories presented laid the conceptual framework for understanding relationships between internal branding and employees delivering on the brand promise (Punjaisri, Evanschitzky & Wilson, 2009). Baumgarth and Schmidt's (2010) research looked at three elements of brand orientation behaviors for internal brand to achieve organizational goals: commitment, knowledge and involvement. Commitment is defined as attachment to the brand in attaining goals, knowledge is based on the learning process and internal communication, and involvement is focused on contributing to overall company success (Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010).

Service Brands

Strong service brands reach customers on an emotional level. It is the service providers that influence brand perception. Employees are influenced by the brand advertising (Gilly & Wolfinbarger, 1998) and employees create the customer experience. For long-term brand success, the direct actions of employees impact the customer experience, which is individualized to match customer expectations (Ind, 2003). Organizations need to win the hearts and minds of customers and employees, which is enhanced through the internal cultural experiences of employees (Leavy & Gannon, 1998). Relationship marketing has been explored as an alternative paradigm to service quality (Palmer, Lindgreen & Vanhamme, 2005). In services, employees are critical in building and communicating brand values (Thorbjornsen & Supphellen, 2011). Culture supports brand value in the service sector (Wallace & de Chernatony, 2011).

Service quality (Berry, 1987) and market orientation theory (Narver & Slater, 1990) are the antecedents to B2E marketing. Service quality includes employee satisfaction and impact on customer. Market orientation leads to superior value being offered to the customer. The literature on internal marketing includes communicating and training employees (Gummesson, 1991), motivating and developing employees (Gronroos, 1982), and attracting, hiring and retaining customer-oriented employees (Berry, 1987). Having the right people in customer contact positions is critical to breaking the cycle of failure and improving employee satisfaction (Schlesinger & Heskett, 1991). Loyalty is the fuel that drives financial success especially in today's volatile economy and can build a sustainable competitive advantage by creating enduring relationships built on trust with employees and customers (Reichheld, 2001). The earliest literature found on the internal marketing communications discussed including internal customers in all marketing communications (Joseph, 1996). Hallowell, Schlesinger and Zornitsky (1996) focused on the antecedents in service-provider gaps. The service-profit chain looked at the value of an internal service quality environments and employees as a measure of service quality (Heskett, et al., 2008). Internal advertising and marketing are critical components of integrated marketing communications (Gilly & Wolfinbarger, 1998) and of increasing employee focus on customers (Celci & Gilly, 2010). Bringing the brand to life through developing organizational culture, fostering employee values and capturing hearts and minds was explored by Leavy and Gannon (1998). In 2001, Frost and Kumar adapted SERVQUAL (Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman, 1996) for an internal focus called INTSERVQUAL. Employees as an element in increasing customer trust is part of the focus on service quality in service businesses (Berry, 2000). Organizations need to systematically manage the customer experience by humanics or the behavior/appearance of service providers (Haeckel, Carbone & Berry 2003).

Employees are powerful component in helping an organization differentiate, gain competitive advantage and deliver value to customers (Judd 2003). People are considered the "5th P" of marketing to gain competitive advantage and increase customer value. The 5th P explores humanizing rather than institutionalizing relationship marketing and develops the concept of creating a 4P (product, place, price, promotion) strategy for internal marketing efforts (Judd, 2003). People power needs to be formalized and managed as a distinct component of the internal marketing mix and needs to become a key element in the marketing strategy (Judd, 2003). It requires institutionalizing the power of people to create a market and customer orientation (Judd, 2003). Managing the internal marketing mix to better serve the external customer was studied empirically by Ahmed, Rafiq and Saad (2003). They found the key elements necessary for marketing orientation are empowerment, leadership support, rewards, internal communication and training/development. In service organizations, the personnel are value-adders, therefore organizations should consider shifting 5% of the marketing budget to internal marketing (Johnson & Weinstein, 2004). The success of a service brand in associated with employee behavior (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005). The brand spirit needs to be embedded throughout the organization (M'zungu, Merrilees & Miller, 2010). An internal marketing orientation applies marketing external theories to internal employees, which makes a difference in delivering service brands to customers. Internal brand is strong when employees communicated the brand consistently (Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010). To deliver the brand promise employees need to buy-into the brand (King & Grace 2012). Internal marketing and communication help drive employee buy-in. Melewar, Gotsi and Andriopoulos (2012) stated there is a need for more studies on how “organizational activities affect employee ‘on brand’ behavior (p. 606).

Internal Marketing

The marketing concept is a foundation theory for marketing. As presented by McKitterick (1957), the marketing concept changed focus from promoting products to understanding customer needs. McNamara (1972) further explained the marketing concept as the need for customer orientation and recognizing the important role of marketing. McNamara also focused on integrating marketing and organizational communications. Successful organizations more effectively understand and satisfy the needs of customers, and more efficiently meet those needs than the competitors (Slater & Narver, 1998). Meeting customer needs is one of the cornerstones of successful organizations.

The theories of marketing orientation with a focus on external customers were developed and researched by Narver and Slater (1990) and Kohli and Jaworski (1990). The market orientation theory introduced by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) focused on the consistency between organizational actions and the marketing concept. They suggested benefits that included higher job satisfaction, better employee commitment and improved business performance. The applications were focused on external marketing. Market orientation and business results were studied by Narver and Slater (1990). The external studies are an antecedent to internal market orientation. Deshpande, Farley and Webster (1993) linked organizational culture and marketing orientation to business performance. Lings (2004) explored an internal market orientation treating employees the same as external customers in promoting marketing programs. Lings described an internal marketing orientation as “identifying and satisfying the needs and wants of employees as a prerequisite to satisfying the wants and needs of customers” (p. 408). Lings suggested that an external marketing orientation was dependent on an internal marketing orientation. The internal benefits to a company include employee satisfaction and commitment; the external benefits include profitability (Lings, 2004).

Kotler (1994) discussed three types of marketing that work together: external, internal and interactive. “Internal marketing describes the work done by the company to train and motivate its employees to serve customers well” (p 470). The critical role of internal marketing is demonstrated in Kotler’s triangle. The relationship between the three types of marketing forms a triangle (Figure 2.2).

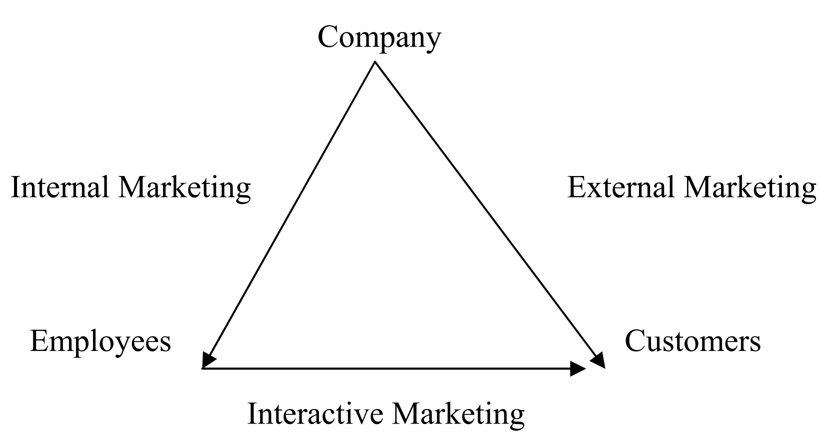


Figure 2.2: Triangle of Marketing (Kotler, 1994, p 470)

The idea of treating employees as customers in service businesses, specifically in banking, was introduced by Berry (1981). In service businesses, it is about “selling performance” (p. 34) and “thinking like a marketer” (p. 39). Berry (1987) stated “market to the employees” (p. 6) as there are special challenges stemming from intangibility and the “people factor” (p. 5). Marketing applications are reflected in internal marketing including research, communication, segmentation and advertising. Employees should be a second audience for marketing campaigns (Berry, 1997). The more intangible the service, the greater the branding challenge (Berry, 1997). Internal marketing needs to be as strategic as external marketing and management should think like marketers in recruiting and training employees. Internal marketing is not just about people in customer contact roles, but rather an integral part of the entire organization’s success (Joseph, 1996). In the service economy, internal marketing can help create a sustainable competitive advantage (Javadein, Seyed, Estiri & Ghorbani, 2011). Internal marketing has been found to have a positive impact on employee commitment and business performance; training is an organization activity that influences employees (Zaman, Javaid, Arshad & Bibi, 2012).

Learning Orientation

George (1990) focused on the holistic process of internal market orientation measurement as opposed to the internal market orientation studied by Narver and Slater (1990). In 1990, Kohli and Jaworski discussed employee involvement in marketing activities that led to improved customer satisfaction. These studies developed the basis for internal market orientation as an outgrowth of market orientation. The more recent literature focuses more on internal market orientation and internal marketing culture. The link between business outcomes and internal market orientation studies emerged about five years ago (Lings & Greenley, 2005; Gournaris, 2006). Lings and Greenley (2005) validated internal orientation and Gournaris (2006) upheld three dimensions of internal orientation: intelligence, dissemination and response. The importance of using information was also validated. Information motivates internal customers to achieve results (Gournaris, 2006). Current literature is demonstrating the alignment of internal and external market orientation. However, studies are just beginning to validate the link between internal marketing and business results. Hwang and Chi (2005) found a significant relationship between internal marketing, employee satisfaction and performance in hotels.

Tomaskova (2009) found three barriers to internal market orientation: internal, sectoral and external environments. The internal environment is influenced by top management, employees and inter-functional coordination. Internal market orientation influences business performance and is enabled by internal and external activities (Tomaskova, 2009). Internal marketing measurement scales were first introduced in the 1990s by Foreman and Money (1995). They identified four distinct types of internal marketing: 1) one department to another; 2) whole organization to employee segments; 3) departments marketing to the entire organization; and 4) organization is the marketer and market (Foreman & Money, 1995). It is in the fourth quadrant that organizations can be most successful at internal marketing. Internal training helps capture hearts and minds of employees to deliver a strong B2B brand (Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010).

Balmer and Greyser (2006) developed a model for a corporate marketing mix that addresses the internal components of delivering on the brand promise. The six elements include (p. 735):

1. Character: corporate identity – “what we indubitably are”
2. Communication: corporate communication – “what we say we do”
3. Constituencies: marketing/stakeholder management – “whom we seek to serve)
4. Covenant: corporate and brand management – “what is promised and expected”
5. Conceptualizations: corporate reputation – “what we are seen to be”
6. Culture: organizational identity: “what we feel we are”

Character makes the organization distinctive. Communication is internal and external. Constituencies is about meeting the wants and needs of customers. Covenant is an informal contract regarding the brand. Conceptualization is about brand perception. Culture is the employees’ values, beliefs and assumptions. This model shows the crucial role employees play in the brand process. Employee training is one of the four ways that Taormina (2004) found to socialize the brand, build internal brand knowledge to manage the brand and motivate employees to bring the brand to life. Socialization is learning how the organization works and behaving in appropriate ways for the organization (Taormina, 2004).

Market orientation and learning orientation are related. Learning was studied in the context of market orientation (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). Market orientation is the foundation if a learning organization (Slater & Narver, 1995). Senge (1990) popularized the learning organization concept. Senge suggested that leaders are responsible for learning in organizations and for creating an environment where people can expand their capabilities. Senge (1990) stated that learning is both a natural occurrence and based on experience gained on the job. Learning organizations acquire and transfer knowledge (Senge, 1990). In a knowledge society (Drucker, 1992) it is important for people to learn and learn quickly (Schein, 2004). Individuals must acquire new knowledge periodically, or become obsolete, as change is the only constant in organizations (Drucker, 1992). Drucker (2006) stated that thinking was hard work and he challenged the conventional wisdom of how to manage organizations where people use their minds rather than their hands. Service businesses rely on people to manage the service encounters, but without proper training the service will be inconsistent (King & Grace, 2006). Employees need to understand their role, which comes through educating employees (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2005). The employee brand image is driven by communication and messages; training significantly impacts brand delivery by employees (Miles & Mangold, 2004). By becoming a learning organization and training employees to deliver on brand promises, organizations can achieve competitive advantage and develop employee brand (Mangold & Miles, 2007). Organizational culture and training affects employee attitude and delivering on the brand promise (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007). Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) found that "training is one of the major mechanisms in internal branding" (p. 62). Employees satisfied with training have higher job satisfaction and deliver better service to customers (Kim, Leong & Lee, 2005). It is important for organizations to capture customer complaints and requests to systematize information flow (Day, 1994b). People motivated to listen to the customer and take action are a valuable resource (Day, 1994b). By eliminating functional silos, organizations can share critical customer data to gain insights and foster organizational learning. By sharing information for organizational learning, organizations can avoid myopia and amnesia (Day 1994b).

Sinkula, Baker and Noordewier (1997) suggest that learning organizations are committed to learning to achieve success. Learning organizations have a shared purpose, are open-minded, have the ability to change and understand their actions (Sinkula, et al., 1997). Learning in organizations needs to be continuous to stay ahead of changing market and customer needs. An organization cannot be competitive in their market and knowledgeable about customers without continuous learning (Marinova, 2003). To stay competitive, organizations need gather and utilize information (Sinkula, et al., 1997). Marquardt (2004) found that by unleashing the power of learning, organizations could improve products and services. A learning orientation can positively impact competitive advantage and market share; it could also impact product innovation (Baker & Sinkula, 1999). Market-driven organizations capture knowledge to drive sales (Day, 1994a).

Communication is a critical component of internal branding and learning-orientation. Communication creates a sense of involvement and responsibility (Varney & Lewis, 1999). Knowledge must be communicated up, down and across the organization with a customer-orientation filter internally and externally (Ballantyne, 2003). It is the hierarchical exchanges that support internal marketing (Ballantyne, 2003). Internal marketing has become method of communication (Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000). Through training and communication, employees decrease role conflict and ambiguity and increase organizational commitment and job satisfaction (King & Grace, 2006). The other benefits of training include increased customer satisfaction, retention and repurchase behaviors (Mangold & Miles, 2007). Companies with strong training programs improve the ability to deliver on the brand promise (Mangold & Miles, 2007).

External brands are perceptions are formed in customer's minds through marketing; communication helps bring the brand to life internally (Siems & Lackus, 2010). Being a learning organization and marketing internally is a partnership between the marketing and HR functions. HR is responsible for communication and marketing is responsible for messaging. The Conference Board study and report "Engaging Employees Through Your Brand" (Dell & Ainspan, 2001) found brand to be motivators for existing employees and enticements for recruiting, which is another alignment for HR and marketing in learning organizations. According The Conference Board research employees that rate the brand highly deliver on the brand promise to customers (Dell & Ainspan, 2001). Brand should be a part of every internal communication and organizations need to get employees talking about the brand (Dell & Ainspan, 2001). The brand becomes a mantra or karma of the organization (Bedbury & Fenichell, 2001). There is a link between brand and culture (Whisman, 2009). People in an organization need to be trained to understand the real purpose of branding; it is the "inside out approach" to branding (Whisman, 2009, p. 370). There is a strong link between culture and the learning organization. However, strong learning cultures are not necessarily a guarantee that the business will achieve desired results (Senge, 1990). Market orientation and learning orientation are aligned in creating superior value for the customer (Slater & Narver, 1995). Internal marketing can help reshape the culture and improve functional integration; it is an important component of providing value for customers (Simberova, 2007). Therefore, marketing messages should be a part of the business-wide process (Simberova, 2007).

Narver and Slater's (1990) market orientation study validated the link with business results. It demonstrated a correlation that has been the basis for many additional studies. Additional studies by Slater and Narver found support for their original work (1994) and link between marketing orientation and implementation of the learning organization (1995). The 1995 study found a link between entrepreneurial behaviors and business performance. Senge's (1990) focus was on systems thinking as central to organizational culture and the ability to produce results. A market-oriented culture enhances the learning process, which allows employees to become a competitive advantage (Slater & Narver, 1995). The concept of internal culture influencing performance was supported in a study conducted in Japan (Deshpande, et al., 1993). The findings are not necessarily replicated for other cultures, but it still provides interesting data.

Recent research has found a positive relationship between a learning orientation and business performance, which justifies a learning orientation (Goh, Elliott & Quon, 2012). However, the authors stated more research was needed to understand how to build a learning orientation. An organization's ability to learn how to learn is a source of competitive advantage and business performance (Morgan, 2012). Martinette and Obenchain-Leeson (2012) found a significant relationship between learning orientation with both business performance and competitive advantage; their findings were compatible with previous research. They found that "organizations with a learning orientation should focus on exploiting and enhancing existing competitive advantages in order to maintain a positive and significant relationship with business performance (p. 56).

De Clercq, Honig and Martin (2012) found that a learning orientation increases a passion for work in entrepreneurial organizations. Papasolomou and Vrontis (2006) found that a learning orientation helps to help brand intangibles (services) and build employee commitment. Employee training can help prepare people in the organization to be receptive to the brand promise and commit to brand buy-in (King & Grace, 2012). A study of small and medium-sized software businesses found that those companies looking to improve performance need to focus on brand orientation; market and brand orientation enable performance either directly or indirectly (Reijonen, Laukkanen, Komppula & Tuominen, 2012).

Internal Brand Training

Companies in the service business that are known for good training, effective communication and delivering on the brand promise include Disney, Starbucks and Southwest Airlines (Mangold & Miles, 2007). Starbucks does little advertising but a lot of employee training to demonstrate positive attitude and behavior (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005). Employees that are satisfied with their training provide better service to customers (Kim, et al., 2005). Southwest "aligns their external promises with their internal operations" (Srivastava & Thomas, 2010, p. 469). Disney is known for the training of employees to deliver on the brand promises (Chong, 2007). The brand is instilled in employees at Marriott so they become the brand (Joshi, 2007). Sears found that changing its culture to change employee behavior and attitude in order to impact customer satisfaction, which had a positive impact on revenue (Ricci, Kim & Quinn, 1998). The Genius Bar at Apple was designed to delight, engage and inspire bringing together the brand promise, the brand believers and the brand providers (Srivastava & Thomas, 2010). Singapore Airlines, renowned for their service excellence, runs an academy where staff are regularly trained to deliver the brand promise (Srivastava & Thomas, 2010). The core values of Singapore Airlines are instilled in employees in training (Chong, 2007). British Airways differentiates its services with a distinct experience for the traveler (Chong, 2007).

After Berry's pioneered the term internal marketing, different definitions emerged to explain various versions of the concept. The main ideas centered on the effects on internal branding on employees, organizations and external customer satisfaction (Ahmed, et al., 2003; Ballantyne, 2003; Lings, 1999; Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000; Varey & Lewis, 1999). Employees are central to building and maintaining a brand image, which in turn impacts the organization's success (Harris & de Chernatony, 2001). Employees are critical as they represent the brand to the customer (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003). Delivering on the brand promise requires consistency as gaps between customer expectations and brand promise can impact organizational performance (Zeithaml, et al., 1988). External branding has been the focus of much of marketing. Studies have shown a significant relationship between branding and customer behavior (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005). Although it has received less attention, internal branding has become more important to both practitioners and academics (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007).

Employees need to be recruited, hired, trained and motivated to deliver service to customers. If employee wants and needs are met, then employees are engaged and enthusiastic. However, if their needs are not met external customer satisfaction becomes more difficult to achieve. When employees are treated like customers and marketed as if they were customers they have the opportunity to understand the customer experience thus deliver it to external customers (Ahmed, et al., 2003; Ballantyne, 2003; Lings, 1999; Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000; Varey & Lewis, 1999). External customer satisfaction is the outcome of internal marketing (Ahmed, et al., 2003). Rafiq and Ahmed (2003) hypothesized that effective internal marketing creates employee satisfaction, which results in increased customer satisfaction. Internal marketing creates customer loyalty (Ahmed, et al., 2003). “Internal marketing is attracting, developing, motivating and retaining qualified employees through job-products that satisfy their needs. Internal marketing is the philosophy of treating employees – indeed ‘wooing’ employees” (Parasuraman, et al., 1991, p 151). This requires implementing external marketing techniques to sell “products” internally allowing employees to experience what the external customer experiences dealing with the organization (Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000).

Employees need to be trained to deliver consistency to customers. They need to understand their role in brand value and apply their skills (King & Grace, 2006). Through training, role ambiguity can be reduced and commitment to the organization can be increased, thereby improving job satisfaction (King & Grace, 2006). Training impacts the delivery of brand values and enables employees to deliver the brand value; it helps develop loyalty and positive attitudes of employees (Beatson, Lings & Gudergan, 2008). Training can help capture employee hearts and minds to support positive brand behaviors (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2005). Employee training affects attitude towards the brand and brand image (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007). If employees understand the desired behaviors and actions, they can deliver the brand promise. Communicating the brand purpose to employees helps them understand their brand role (Harris & de Chernatony, 2001). Communication and training empower employees to deliver on the brand promise; therefore, they are critical components of internal branding. Chong (2007) found that internal communications should be the "first frontier" in delivering value to the customer; training can transform employees into "embodiments" of the brand promise (p. 201). Today internal branding can be considered a new sub field of marketing (Seims & Lackus, 2010). Internal communication is an essential element in external customer satisfaction (Seims & Lackus, 2010). The brand promise delivered internally helps organizations position externally; it can be a competitive advantage (Judson, et al., 2009).

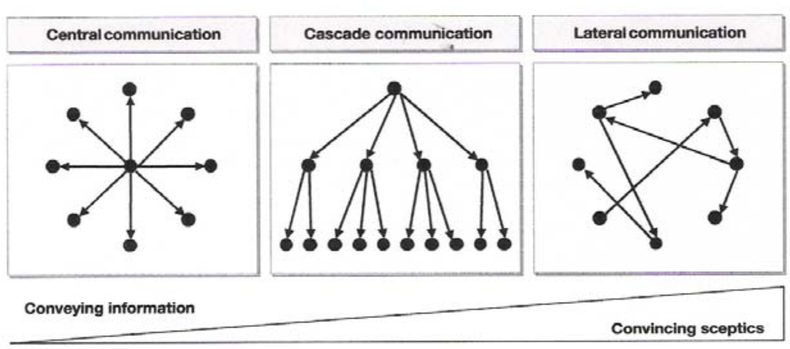
Brand knowledge transfer, which in part is defined as training, influences brand management practices (King & Grace, 2012). There is value in having a brand aware workforce that can bring the brand to life (King & Grace, 2012). "How to do" brand behaviors is more important than "how to feel" about the brand (King & Grace, 2012). Brand-centered training enhances employee brand behaviors; therefore, building brand strength through employees can be fine-tuned through pro-brand training/HR practices, which help employees to feel engaged and responsible for the brand (Chang, Chiang & Han, 2012).

Employee Brand Commitment

Service organizations recognize the importance of quality in exceeding customer expectations (Ballantyne, Christopher & Payne, 1995). Internal marketing is one way to obtain improve customer experiences and increase the level of service quality

(Ballantyne, et al., 1995). Internal marketing helps eliminate departmental silos and creates an opportunity to improve service quality throughout the organization (Lings & Brooks, 1998). Gronroos (1982) focused on the importance of using outside marketing techniques internally. "Without active and continuous internal marketing efforts the interactive marketing impact on customers will deteriorate, service quality will suffer and customers will defect" (Gronroos, 1994, p. 14). Internal marketing needs to be properly implemented to create a competitive advantage (Ballantyne, 2003). Internal marketing requires communication with employees, which creates involvement and responsibility (Varey & Lewis, 1999). The organizational communication develops a perception of customer-focus and service quality. The communication patterns impact the marketing message (Figure 2.3). The communication methods need to align with the message. Employees can help communicate the marketing messages to promote buy-in (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005).

Figure 2.3: Communication (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005)



In service organizations, where customer contact is the product, internal marketing becomes more critical (Wasmer & Bruner, 1991). Employees must understand how to sell the services and use customer information to foster continuous improvement (Ballantyne, 2003). Employees with customer contact develop relationships that can help implement service improvements; it is through long-term relationships that adaptability, flexibility and responsiveness can be developed (Gronroos, 1994). The relationships promote understanding of customer expectations and experiences, service failures and recovery, and using relationship marketing to create service-based advantage to meet or exceed customer expectations (Parasuraman, et al., 1991). To create a positive customer experience, the employees must believe in the brand and the brand promise, which is created through internal advertising (Gilly & Wolfinbarger, 1998). Employees must practice the brand values during service encounters; each touch point requires consistency (Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2009). However, organizational commitment to brand should go beyond the marketing department and focus on organization-wide practices (Melewar, et al., 2012).

Studies have demonstrated a link between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction (Foreman & Money, 1995). Barnes and Morris (2000) found that the higher the internal customer satisfaction, the higher the external customer satisfaction. For employees the result is productivity, while for customers the result is satisfaction. While Piercy (1995) supported that external satisfaction is dependent on internal satisfaction. Gronoos (2006) posits the need for everyone in the organization to be marketers to achieve desired results. Hwang and Chi (2005) further supported this construct in an empirical study supporting internal marketing leading to employee satisfaction leading to improved organizational performance. However, nothing is more powerful than the customer experience as delivered by service providers (Berry, 2000).

Internal branding creates powerful brands by "aligning internal processes and brand reality by internalizing the brand and delivering on brand promises. It is internal dissonance rather than external forces that kill a brand (Khan, 2009). It is an organization's "attempt to tell their story" (Judson, Aurand, Gorchels & Gordon, 2009, p. 54). Building a strong internal brand means that marketing moves beyond the marketing department into the DNA of an organization. External branding is most successful when internal branding is used (Sartain, 2005). In building a brand, employees are a critical asset (Sartain, 2005). Success of a brand is closely linked to employee behaviors (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003). Organizations that fail to deliver on the brand promise internally are wasting their external brand efforts (Khan, 2009). Therefore, in service businesses internal branding can in turn, increase customer trust of an intangible (Berry & Lampo, 2004). Employees need a "sense of identification and involvement" to help achieve organizational goals (Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2009). Ambler and Barrow (1996) first introduced the employer brand concept and employees as guardians of the brand image. Ambler (2003) offered an employer brand commitment ladder to illustrate retention of high-performing employees (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4: Brand Commitment Ladder based on Ambler (2004)

Employees change brand – No brand loyalty
Employees value brand and see it as partner in achieving their goals
Employees are satisfied – co-dependent on brand
Employees are satisfied – no reason to change brand but no reason to excel
Employees are devoted to brand, manage brand erosion and maintain performance standards

Creating an internal brand is strategic and requires senior management commitment. Internal branding requires the same level of commitment as external branding. Engaged employees deliver the brand promise and internal branding created engaged employees. The brand image needs a systems approach aligning values, policies and behaviors. It requires commitment from the top of the organization as demonstrated though actions and behaviors. The brand needs to be promoted to employees; they need to be educated about brand value to deliver it (Aurand, Gorchels & Bishop, 2005). Commitment to the brand comes from living the brand, top-down, and trusting employees (Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2012). Brand information needs to be accessible to all employees; the more information is shared with employees, the more the brand behaviors are activated (Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2012)

Employer branding originated in the 1990s in the U.K with the work of Simon Barrow (Gaddam, 2008). Ambler and Barrow (1996) defined the role of employer branding as a framework for improving employee recruitment, retention and commitment. Employer branding helps retain current employees and attract future employees by creating an identity in the marketplace. It ensures employee commitment and loyalty, profitability and growth, stakeholder and competitor respect; it has an indirect correlation with profitability (Gaddam, 2008). Brand connection is emotional both internally (customer) and externally (employee). Discontented employees can have a more detrimental effect on long-term retention and recruitment than a dissatisfied customer, which impacts business success (Gaddam, 2008).

Employer branding has theoretical foundations in consumer and corporate branding as well as organization culture and policies (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). The study found three key characteristics: “1) being known and noticeable, 2) being seen as relevant and resonant, and 3) being differentiated from direct competitors” (p. 163-164). Employer branding requires the alignment of the human resource management and marketing functions and metrics within an organization. Communication is critical in cascading the employer brand message internally.

The service sector has been slower to adapt a brand management approach to the customer experience, as personal interactions are complex (Mosley, 2008). However, “employees have a significant impact on the service experience” (Mosley, 2008, p. 126) and studies have shown a correlation between satisfied employees, satisfied customers and business results. In service businesses, employees provide the brand differentiation. If employees do not experience the brand promise, they cannot deliver on the brand promise. The employer brand should focus on employee expectations and “emotional benefits” (p. 131) by focusing on the employee experience. Organizations need to manage communication channels and customer/employee touch points. The employer brand reinforces distinctive customer experiences that differentiate the organization from its competition. To achieve employer brand, management must focus on the “total employee experience” (p. 132), which is reinforced by leadership and management. When employees internalize the brand, they can deliver on the brand promise consistently (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2005). Internalizing the brand image and values is critical for employees in a service role (Berry & Lampo, 2004). In service industries internal brand building is related to employee commitment (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2005). Leadership plays an important role in employee commitment (Wallace, de Chernatony & Buil, 2013).

In service industries the customer experience as delivered by service providers may be the only brand perception (Harris & de Chernatony, 2001). Maintaining consistency from one service provider to another maintains the brand credibility as inconsistency undermines the brand (Samli & Frohlich, 1992). The service encounter and the quality of the interaction become critical (Solomon, Surprenant, Czepiel & Gutman, 1985). As there is no tangible product, the customer perception is based on the behavior of the service provider (Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman (1996). Customers judge service encounters on employees' efforts and abilities based on behavior cues (Specht, Fichtel, & Meyer, 2007). Employee behaviors and cues relate directly to customer experience especially in service businesses (Berry, Wall & Carbone, 2006). Therefore, marketing becomes the role of all employees; everyone that touches the customer is responsible for delivering on the brand promise and avoiding variation on the outcomes delivered to customers (Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000).

The research in the link between organizational culture and market orientation is the foundation for employees delivering on the brand promise. Narver and Slater (1990) explored organizational culture and customer value creation. They found that the level of marketing orientation impacts the culture, which in turn, impacted organizational performance. The study validated measuring market orientation and performance to determine optimal market orientation to achieve desired results (Narver & Slater, 1990).

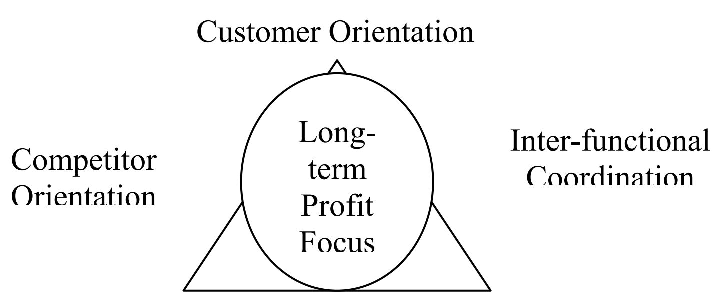


Figure 2.5: Market Orientation (Narver & Slater, 1990)

Figure 2.5 shows the market orientation model of Narver and Slater (1990) showing the relationship between market orientation and long-term profitability. The study showed a correlation between high marketing orientation and high profitability. Senge (1990) explored the link between a learning organization culture and market orientation. The subsequent work of Slater and Narver (1995) found that the learning organization was important for implementing market orientation. The study explored influencing employee behaviors to improve business results, especially in an entrepreneurial environment. The learning process of employees can be a sustainable competitive advantage (Slater & Narver, 1995). Deshpande, et al. (1993) offered the dimensions of culture, customer-orientation and innovation as construct of measuring market orientation and business results. The study said that market-orientation and customer-orientation are the same and part of the organizational culture putting customers first without ignoring internal stakeholders (Deshpande, et al., 1993). While the Deshpande, et al. study was conducted in Japan; the positive correlation between culture and performance did have implications for other organizational cultures.

Jaworski and Kohli (1993) conducted a study which found a dependent relationship between market orientation and the responses of customers, employees and performance with the antecedents being senior management, organizational systems and dynamics of departments. They also found a strong correlation between employee rewards and customer satisfaction (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993). When moving to an internal market orientation, the employee becomes the customer. As the economy moved to being service-driven, the focus on the employee internal market theories began to be developed. An internal focus for market orientation became clearer as more studies were conducted (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993). Rafiq and Ahmed (2000) began looking at the meaning of internal marketing. Barnes and Morris (2000) linked internal with external customer satisfaction, which was further supported by a study that supported the link and the need to improve internal communications to increase employee involvement (Barnes, Fox & Morris, 2004). Hwang and Chi (2005) found a link between internal marketing, employee satisfaction and business results. There is also a link between organizational culture and brand (M'zungu, et al., 2010).

Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) found a positive relationship between internal branding and delivering on the brand promise to external customers, which was based on internal communication. The employee brand commitment is related more organizational commitment than to products (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005). Employee organizational commitment has been studied in organizational behavior. King and Grace (2008) found that increased employee commitment led to an emotional attachment to the brand thus an increased employee commitment to deliver on the brand promise (Figure 1.1). The benefits of an internal market orientation include increased employee commitment, increased emotional attachment to the brand (King & Grace, 2008). Internal marketing has a basis in HR and social relationships (Joshi, 2007). Service marketing should encourage interactions between everyone emotionally involved in the branding process (Joshi, 2007). Internal branding focuses employees on delivering high quality though training, standards and reward (Kelemen & Papasolomou, 2007). Giving employees the same status as external customers motivates them to improve performance (Kelemen & Papasolomou, 2007).

The employee branding process, which involves understanding the brand image and being motivated to engage in brand behaviors impacts organizational outcomes (Miles, Mangold, Asree & Revell, 2011). Internal branding is a key success factor as employees are the bridge between strategy and implementation (Mishra & Munshi, 2012). It is through internal branding that employees learn to live the brand; it is the process for creating engaged employees (Mishra & Munshi, 2012). Employee brand behaviors support organizational goals and outcomes; brand citizenship behaviors are an important brand metric (King & Grace, 2012).

Business Performance

Internal brand orientation is a deliberate process, not a project that an organization implements to build and sustain the brand to improve business performance (Gromark & Melin, 2011). There is an increased understanding in B2B markets that understanding and commitment internally has a positive impact on business performance (Lynch & de Chernatony, 2004). Customer satisfaction is based on meeting and exceeding customer expectations. The higher the level of satisfaction, the greater opportunity for loyalty and repeat business (Armstrong & Kotler, 2011). Reichheld and Sasser (1990) found a direct relationship between customer satisfaction and profitability with employees being the primary factor in customer satisfaction. Customer retention, repeat business and revenue are outcomes of customer satisfaction (Anderson & Narus, 1998). The level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction impact loyalty and defection respectively. Organizations need to focus on the most valuable customers to impact the lifetime value of a customer, which in turn impacts sales (Rust, Moorman & Dickson, 2002). The relationship between the service provider’s commitment and customer satisfaction has become vital in B2B markets. Brooks (2000) found a direct correlation between employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction and financial results. The employee variables were commitment, enthusiasm, capability and internal service quality. The customer variables were satisfaction and loyalty (Brooks, 2000).

Customer expectations play an important role in customer delight. Expectations may be based on market (doctor vs. bank) or reputation (Ritz-Carlton vs. Super 8 Motel). It is important for the organization to understand expectations (Schneider & Bowen, 1995). In service organizations quality is based on customers' experience with the delivery of services; how and what is delivered are important (Schneider & Bowen, 1995). Satisfied customers are more likely to be retained as customers and refer others through positive word-of-mouth (Spreng, MacKenzie & Olshavsky, 1996). Knowing what the customer wants and needs can create a competitive advantage in the marketplace (Ramaswami, et al., 2009). Repeat business and referrals are measures of customer loyalty leading to profit and growth (Reichheld, 2001).

Senge (1990) found a positive correlation between the learning organization and business performance. Learning can be a competitive advantage in creating value for customers (Kaplan, Norton & Atkinson, 2001). While Kotter and Heskett, (1992) found that corporate culture is not a guarantee of business performance without relevant strategies, today Schein (Kleiner & von Post, 2010) sees momentum in responsive and energized cultures that lead people to behave differently. It is critical for people in the organization to have the "skills to deliver the brand" (M'zungu, et al., 2010, p. 609). Leadership plays an important role in ensuring that employees deliver on the brand promise (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2007). Consistency in delivering on the brand promise improves the brand reputation from the customer perspective (M'zungu, et al., 2010) and consistency should be a key goal for service organizations. It is critical that organizations measure brand awareness among employees to be sure they deliver on the brand promise (Andruss, 2010). Howden and Pressey's (2008) first dimension of customer value was the know-how of service providers to "advise on solutions" (p. 796) as defined by "knowledge of customers' business, knowledge of customers' industry and applied knowledge" (p. 797), which appears to validate the need for training employees. An organization's ability to 'learn how to learn' can become a competitive advantage and have an impact on performance (Morgan, 2012). The framework posited by Morgan (2012) offers a rationale for focusing on internal as well as external marketing strategies to drive business performance. Creating value through marketing employee skills can impact organizational performance since people buy from people and the value customer value can be based on employee knowledge and skills (Orr, Bush & Vorhies, 2011).

Repeat business. The learning industry is finding that customer-centric training that helps to motivate how customers are served can make a difference in repeat business (Cooperman, 2010). Repeat business can be impacted by focusing on the value proposition delivered to customers (McLaughlin, 2011) since repeat business is usually the most cost-effective method for impacting the bottom-line. Customers move to other companies/brands when there is poor service; therefore, organizations need a process for addressing customer turnover (Jaffe, 2010). Customers that are treated well, tend to stay. To help achieve the loyalty necessary for repeat business, companies need to focus on the customer experience and building brand loyalty; people in the organization need to understand the customer perspective (McGill, Harding & Yep, 2010). Relationship management can be one of the keys to repeat business, which needs to be designed. The best source of new leads can be existing customer referrals.

Referrals. Customer referrals are a tool for customer acquisition and an effect on customer evaluations (Schumann, et al., 2010). Villanueva, Yoo and Hanssens (2008) demonstrated that referral customers are more profitable. Schmitt, Skiera and Van den Bulte (2011a) found a 16% higher value than non-referred customers in terms of profit margin and retention in both the short and long-term. Referral customers require fewer marketing efforts and generate more revenue at a lower cost (Schmitt, Skiera & Van den Bulte, 2011b). Organizations are using word-of-mouth and referrals to acquire new customers as it plays a role in purchasing behaviors (Kumar, Petersen, & Leone, 2010). Their study developed a measure of customer referral value (CRV). They found that past referrals could help predict future referrals, as there is a gap between intentions and actions. Organizations sometimes ignore customers that could make referrals; they could be doing more to "harness the power of referrals" (Kumar, et al., 2010, p. 16) for accelerating purchasing behaviors. Social networking use for word-of-mouth is increasing; therefore, building a strong social network can become an advantage (Kumar, et al., 2010). The corporate brand is defined by the organizational culture and aligns employees with the business strategy (Ackerman, 2010). Good customers are good matchmakers (Schmitt, et al., 2011b) and are often long-term customers. In today's business environment of social networking word-of-mouth (WOM) has become a critical way to sustain and grow a business. In professional services WOM referrals may be harder to obtain, as customers may be more reluctant to provide referrals, so trust needs to be built through training (Law, 2008). WOM communications among existing customers can influence customer loyalty and switching behaviors (Schumann, et al., 2101).

Customer Retention. Customer retention impacts business performance and profitability. Dawkins and Reichheld (1990) found retention to be a competitive weapon and indicator of the direction of profits. In their analysis of 100 companies, they found that a 5% change in retention can affects profits from 25-85% (Dawkins & Reichheld, 1990). Therefore, they see retention as a competitive advantage. A drop in retention rates can be the spiral into disaster; it can also be an early indicator of potential problems. Retention is often based on the relationship and interactions between customers and service providers (Christou, 2010). Conventional wisdom says that long-term customers are more profitable (Dawkins & Reichheld, 1990) making retention a critical business outcome. Management practices and tasks have a positive impact on customer retention (Gilaninia & Solaymani, 2011). “Satisfaction is an important and necessary mediating variable between employees’ efforts and customer retention” (Chen & Quester, 2007, p. 779). Learning enables a company make proactive decisions that increase customer retention, which can improve profits (Sun & Li, 2011). Customer to employee relationships was found to be driver of “dedicational behaviours” (Kim, Ok & Gwinner, 2010, p. 1144) of customers and their repeat business actions. When customers perceive a customer orientation they are more likely to become loyal to the brand (Ha & Joby, 2010). From a practitioner perspective, Blade (2010) advocates the 5% - 75% rule where a 5% retention effort can pay back 75% in profits for the lifetime value of a customer. Customer loyalty and relationships need to be managed across the organization to impact retention rates. Customer retention today is influenced by, but not necessarily changed by online marketing and communications (Yoon, Choi, Sohn, 2008). Customer retention is more likely when the staff can deliver services (Jones & Farquar, 2003).

Internal market orientation has a positive impact on employee motivation, which has a positive impact on customer satisfaction and profitability (Lings & Greenley, 2009). The fifth "P" in the marketing mix, people, is a "strategic resource of the profitability" (Rao & Kumar, 2012, p. 5) of an organization. The Rao and Kumar (2012) study found a strong relationship between internal branding and motivation. It recommended that companies devote time and attention to internal marketing.

Hypotheses

The research is based on literature review and the purpose of the study. Studies have shown a positive correlation between training and performance (Taomina, 2004). Previous research has shown the business performance value of internal brand training (Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010); therefore, this study will attempt to show the important role of internal brand training in increasing business performance. For the purposes of this study, business performance is defined and operationalized as repeat business, referrals and customer retention. It will venture to demonstrate that a learning orientation, employee brand training and employee brand commitment exerts a strong influence on repeat business, referrals and customer retention, thus creating a competitive advantage for those companies focused on their brand. The brand in the hearts and minds of the internal people is the building block for a strong B2B brand (Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010). Developing the emotional commitment of employees to the brand can help develop brand advocate customers; emotional commitment can be ensured through training (Lynch & de Chernatony, 2004). In the learning industry business performance measures include repeat business from, referrals by, and retention of existing customers.

The research question is: Does a commitment to internal brand training increase business performance in the learning industry? The primary purpose of the research is to explore a connection between internal brand training and business performance as brand image is reflected to customers through the employees (Miles, et al., 2011). A focus on training can inspire employees to serve customers to impact business performance (Yafang, 2008). Employees make "buying decisions" on organizational goals; they are driven by knowledge (Thomson, de Chernatony, Arganbright & Khan, 1999). Emotional connections also need to be made between the employee and the organization to strengthen performance (Thomson, et al., 1999). The aforementioned previous research provides justification for the following hypotheses of this study.

H1: A learning orientation increases commitment to internal brand training.

A learning orientation can be a competitive advantage, which can affect business performance (Calatone, Cavusgil & Zhao, 2002). Goh, Elliot and Quon (2012) found a positive relationship between learning and performance and justified an investment in a learning orientation. The key success factor for business has become the human factor and knowledge is a key to business success (Shiu & Yu, 2010). Creating a learning environment, internal marketing and treating employees as internal customers can help increase employee satisfaction and better position the company to satisfy external customer needs (Papasolomou & Vrontis, 2006). The Papasolomou and Vrontis (2006) study suggested that a competitive advantage with customers could be due in part to an investment in employees. A learning orientation is a powerful weapon in "achieving brand differentiation and retaining external customers in a competitive and homogeneous industry" (Papasolomou & Vrontis, 2006, p. 184 & 188). Their research found that problems branding intangibles could be overcome with an emphasis on internal marketing. In today's marketplace communication about the brand may not be enough for employees to deliver on the brand promise (Raj & Jyothi, 2011). Employee performance is important in the success of the brand, since customer perception is impacted by employee behaviors that transform the brand into reality; training could impact brand behaviors (Morhart, Herzog & Tomczak, 2009). Through training companies could drive the brand values into the organization (Srivastava & Thomas, 2010). Training helps staff to a strong mentality to meet organizational goals (Papasolomou & Vrontis, 2006). Therefore specific internal brand training may also be necessary for employees to increase brand commitment. Employee training can help prepare people in the organization to be receptive to the brand promise and commit to brand buy-in (King & Grace, 2012). Training can be a cost-effective way to create brand identity and ensure the delivery of consistent messages to the marketplace. De Clercq, Honig and Martin (2012) found that a learning orientation increases a passion for work in entrepreneurial organizations. Many of the companies in this study are entrepreneurial and/or began as small entrepreneurial companies.

H2: Internal brand training increases employee commitment to the brand

Training is a formal messaging system used by organizations to communicate brand messages and values to employees (Mangold & Miles, 2007). When training is a central focus of delivering on the brand image, organizations can become an all-star (Mangold & Miles, 2007). As competition in services increase, training employees is a strategy for increasing organizational commitment (Tag-Eldeen & El-Said, 2011). A clearly defined brand enables employees to understand the meaning behind the brand and the brand perception of the customers. The more employees understand what the brand stands for, the greater the commitment to the brand (King & Grace, 2008). Employees need to understand the connection between the brand promise and brand delivery (Raj & Jyothi, 2011). They have to know the brand values to be able to deliver on the brand values. Organizations need to develop a brand orientation mindset to create a competitive advantage (Judd, 2003). Brand needs to be communicated internally to be understood externally through a commitment to learning. Communicating the brand through training allows employees to understand the brand and deliver on the brand promise. There is a strong correlation between understanding the brand and delivering on the brand promise. It is the role of leadership to ensure that everyone in the organization understands the brand and can deliver on the promises consistently (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2005). Successful companies renew their brand culture and understand the employees' emotional commitment to the brand as it is the employees that deliver on the brand promise (Srivastava & Thomas, 2010). When there is internal brand commitment, it is easier to deliver service consistency to customers and to develop a shared commitment to the brand.

Internal brand knowledge has a mediating effect on employees delivering on the brand promise (Punjaisri, Evanschitzky & Wilson, 2009). Delivering on the brand promise means that companies need to align, people, resources and operations (Srivastava & Thomas, 2010). Branding can help energize the organization to reinforce business goals (Causon, 2004). It is important to involve the entire organization in the brand to empower staff to meet organizational goals (Causon, 2004). Staff intellectual and emotional buy-in can enhance business performance (Thomson, et al., 1999).

Organizations can improve performance by defining the brand to the employees (Miles, et al., 2011). “Employees must know and understand the brand image; they must be motivated to engage in behaviors necessary to deliver brand image to others” (Miles, et al., 2011, p. 492). Thus, the brand differentiation comes from the execution of strategy and employee brand behaviors.

Baumgarth and Schmidt (2010) found that there was an important role for brand-oriented corporate culture in building internal brand equity. They found a strong influence of internal and knowledge, commitment and involvement on internal brand equity. “Business-to-business branding depends on a brand-oriented corporate culture” (p. 1257). Southwest Airlines uses training to help employees identify with the organizational culture and values associated with the brand (Miles & Mangold, 2005). Much of Southwest’s positive brand image in the marketplace is attributed to employee branding (Miles & Mangold, 2005). King and Grace (2012) provided insight into internal brand behaviors and employee brand behaviors. Employee buy-in behaviors help bring the brand to life. Bringing the brand to life through training can improve business performance (Magableh, Kharabsheh & Al-Zubi, 2011).

H3: Employee brand commitment improves business performance

Employee brand behaviors affect customer satisfaction (Chang, Chiang & Han, 2012), which in turn can impact business performance. Satisfied customers impact positive word of mouth and repurchase intentions especially in high value purchasing (Wangenheim, 2003). A brand represents the relationship between the organization and its customers, but it is also important to represent the relationship with employees (Raj & Jyothi, 2011). Market-driven companies that deliver on the brand promise create a value for customers that is demonstrated in business results. By focusing on brand knowledge across the organization, the organization can create a competitive advantage and improve business results. Internal brand orientation is a deliberate process, not a project that an organization implements to build and sustain the brand to improve business performance (Gromark & Melin, 2011). Customer satisfaction is based on meeting and exceeding customer expectations. The higher the level of satisfaction, the greater opportunity for loyalty and repeat business (Armstrong & Kotler, 2011). Shiu and Yu (2010) found that "internal marketing positively affects organsational performance" (p. 805). They found that employees are the major marketers for an organization and can help improve organizational performance. Internal marketing is a powerful weapon in "achieving brand differentiation and retaining external customers in a competitive and homogeneous industry" (Papasolomou & Vrontis, 2006, p. 184 & 188). Referrals are a proven tool for customer acquisition and retention (Schumann, et al., 2012). Customer retention, repeat business and revenue are outcomes of customer satisfaction (Anderson & Narus, 1998).

The business outcomes are defined as repeat business, referrals and customer retention. With an increased commitment to internal marketing and to internal brand training is it predicted that repeat business, referrals and customer retention will be better than the groups with less training. Organizations can help build brand strength through brand training (Chang, et al., 2012), which can impact business results. Internal brand knowledge comes from training. Internal brand training allows employees to deliver on the brand promise. Delivering on the brand promise helps improve business performance, defined as repeat business, referrals and customer retention.

The three hypotheses are illustrated in the research model (Figure 2.6)

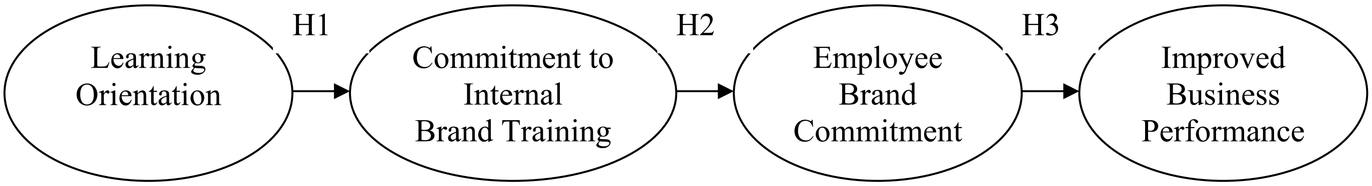


Figure 2.6: Research Model

Summary

Chapter II reviewed the literature and introduced the research hypotheses. If employees are truly a company's most valuable assets, they need to be trained to deliver on the brand promise. Communicating the brand throughout the organization to create brand ambassadors is an important step in living the brand and engaging employees in delivering on the brand promise. Service brands are linked to employee behaviors, which are linked to a learning orientation. To deliver on the brand promise, employees need to understand and live the brand promise. In service businesses, where the people are the only "product" it is critical to develop consistency of service, which makes it critical to align internal and external communication. Employee satisfaction impacts customer outcomes (Achilleas, Spyros & Giannnis, K. (2011). Building a strong brand internally improves business outcomes. When employees are trained to deliver the brand promise to customers, customer satisfaction in terms of repeat business, referrals and customer retention can increase.

The internal and external measures of business success can be aligned (Heskett, et al., 2008). However, the business results can be difficult to measure especially when organizations do not use consistent measures of business success. Practitioners have found it difficult to relate customer satisfaction with business outcomes. While there are some positive studies, there is still a need for more research. Therefore, studying the relationship between internal brand training and customer outcomes provides an opportunity for research. Baker and Sinkula (1999) found that a learning and marketing-oriented environment has a positive effect on performance. The effectiveness of learning can influence business performance (Senge, 1990). While organizations understand the importance of brand, there are difficulties in prioritizing the brand for employees (Gromark & Melin, 2011).

> Delivery of a strong brand does not take place in a vacuum. Brand partners need to be aligned to deliver on the brand promise…those who master the triangle of brand alignment stand triumphant in the eyes of their shareholders, customers and partners. (Srivastava & Thomas, 2010, p. 470)

In the "experience economy" employees play a critical role in the success of the brand; training helps align the brand values with employee commitment (Chong, 2007). Understanding the link between performance and marketing is critical (Morgan, 2012)

Chapter III will address the research methodology that will be used to conduct the study. It will also address the data analysis.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The focus of the study is on education (training) as a determinant of internal branding. Mahmert and Torres (2007) identified seven factors of success and failure in internal branding: organization, information, management, communication, strategy, staff and education. They found that out of the first six dimensions the need for education arises to prevent failure. SOAR – service over and above the rest – is an example of a training program used by Singapore Airlines to deliver on their mission; their training program helps distinguish the service at Singapore Airlines (Chong, 2007). The airline communicates organizational objectives, culture and brand values through training. "Internal communications and training are the first frontiers where the battle for the consumer is fought and won – or lost" (Chong, 2007, p. 210).

Population

The study uses members of the Instructional Systems Association (ISA), a professional association of companies in the learning industry. The association currently has 75 organizational members with a revenue range of $3-50 million. Their database has approximately 300 names. Additional companies in the industry that are not members of ISA can also be surveyed, if necessary. The companies offer both products and services. An email from the executive director of the association introduces the research study to the ISA database (Appendix A) of names in sales/marketing and training/learning. The questionnaire uses Zoomerang/SurveyMonkey ™. The survey is for two weeks. Using the ISA survey system, reminders are sent to those who have not returned the survey. The association usually has about a 75% return rate on surveys. Identities remain confidential. The research results will be shared with the Association. While the name of the organization is included in the questionnaire, it is to ensure two responses from each organization. The data will be shared in aggregate, not by organization. Specific organizational information will not be shared with ISA members. Figure 3.1 illustrates the breakdown of ISA job titles. The source is ISA. The goal is to survey two executives in each organization. One sales/marketing and one education/learning executive from each organization are used. The organizational responses are averaged from the two respondents. Using the ISA database the highest-level title in the data based in the functional areas are selected and invited to complete the survey: sales, marketing, training and development/education/learning. The total sample size goal is a minimum 100 responses. Additional learning industry organizations that are not members of ISA can be added if necessary. Several learning organizations were used in the test that are not members of ISA and volunteered to be included in the study.

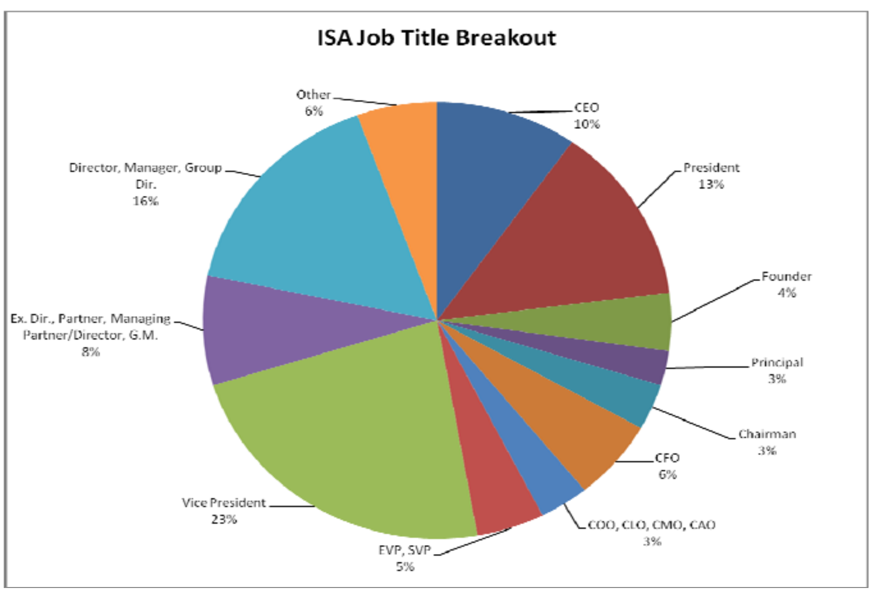


Figure 3.1: ISA Job Title Breakdown (Source: ISA)

Methodology

The questionnaire was developed using existing questions in previously published research. Since some questions were translated from other languages, English was corrected if necessary.

Learning orientation (questions 1-4) is from Sinkula, Baker and Noordewier (1997) study and relate to the learning orientation construct. The study explored commitment to learning and shared vision, which supported learning. The questions are from their Commitment to Learning (COMMIT) construct that had a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.87. They found discriminant validity on the distinct constructs. Their validation assessment found statistical significance. The results showed that a more positive learning orientation resulted in "increased information generation and dissemination" (Sinkula, et al., 1997, p. 305), which impacted marketing strategies. They also found that a "more positive learning orientation will directly result in increased market information generation and dissemination" and "an indirect effect on market information dissemination" (Sinkula, et al., 1997, p. 314).

The internal brand-training construct used Gromark and Melin (2011) for questions 5 and 6 and Chang, Chiang and Han (2012) for questions 7 and 8. They developed a brand orientation index (BOI) that was based on previous research. The question used was from Factor 1 with a Cronbach's alpha of .79 the question from Factor 6 had a .69 Cronbach's alpha. The approach factor (1) looked at brand management as a core competence and an investment. The goals and follow-up factor (6) related to companies' ability to measure goal achievement. "Multiple linear regression analysis was used to assess the general fitness of the model and eight dimensions on BOI" and "all eight dimensions had a significant impact at a 95 or 99% level (p. 403). They identified "eight factors that constitute the underlying dimensions of brand orientation" (p. 406) which can lead to organizational profitability. The study found a significant relationship between brand orientation and profitability. The relevant factors used had the highest influence on brand orientation: approach and implementation. Chang, Chiang and Han (2012) used two factors: 1) brand-centered reward and training and 2) brand-centered evaluation. The Cronbach's alpha for the two factors was 0.96 and 0.861 respectively. The cumulative variance is at an acceptable level of 63.32 percent. Discriminant validity exists among their constructs. This study found that employee brand citizenship behaviors contribute to customer satisfaction and performance of the brand (Chang, et al., 2012). They found a relationship between brand-centered practices and employees motivated towards brand citizenship behaviors (Chang, et al., 2012). Questions were simplified, but the meaning was not modified.

After searching numerous databases through ProQuest and EbscoHost, and no instruments, scales, surveys or questionnaires to measure the Internal Branding construct, it was deemed necessary to employ questions from Gromark and Melin (2011) and Chang, et al. (2012). Each of these studies measured the construct validity as a sub-theme of their research. Since it is critical to establish construct validity from the measurement instruments and because the design was to incorporate four questions for the construct, it was necessary to utilize questions from two studies to find optimal test questions. Questions with the desired level of specificity on the construct could not be found in one study.

Employee brand commitment questions are from Burmann, Zeplin and Riley (2009), (questions 9-10) and Burmann and Zeplin (2006) questions (11-12) translated by Baumgarth and Schmidt (2010). Burmann, et al., (2009) found that internal brand management can become a competitive advantage. It is employee behaviors that are “at the heart of any brand” (Burmann, et al., 2009, p. 265). Brand commitment is the efforts of employees to attain the brand goals. The study showed that brand commitment leads to brand citizenship behaviors, which leads to brand strength. The questions in the study were newly formulated and were validated in the pre-testing stage. Since the article and questionnaire were separate documents, there was not a clear alignment between the questions and the findings. The validity and reliability criteria for the brand citizenship dimensions had a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.835 or higher. The questions selected from the 2009 study are similar to the 2006 Burmann and Zeplin study, which Baumgarth and Schmidt (2010) used in their internal brand equity construct. The questions were from the scale on extra-role behavior. An expert panel of 12 doctoral marketing students was used to assess the validity of the formative constructs. No Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were below 0.80. The Baumgarth and Schmidt (2010) study found that there was an important role for brand-oriented corporate culture in building internal brand equity. They found a strong influence of internal and knowledge, commitment and involvement on internal brand equity. “Business-to-business branding depends on a brand-oriented corporate culture” (p. 1,257). A mix of questions from the 2006 and 2009 study were tested. Questions used were from both studies, using the ones that test best with the executive group. The employee brand commitment construct relates to questions 9-12. Questions were made consistent in the use of words (company/organization, employees/managers/colleagues).

Questions 13-15 relate to the business performance construct. The questions are from Suliyanto and Rahab (2012). The questions have been modified slightly to improve the English translation. The study found that learning capabilities and employee commitment to organizational goals did not directly impact business performance. However, marketing orientation encourages learning orientation, which can be a source of improving business results. They used a covariance structure analysis and collected data from 150 small/medium businesses. All of their variable indicators were valid with a factor loading of 0.5 or above. Their construct reliability was above 0.7. The questions come from their business performance construct, which had a construct reliability of 0.987. The three questions selected had a factor loading of 0.946, 0.942 and 0.713 respectively. These questions are considered as formative rather than reflective in defining the business performance construct.

Demographic questions are asked about organization's repeat business, referrals, customer retention and hours of training, which relate to business performance. Questionnaire is in Appendix B. Companies, not individuals, are identified to ensure that two respondents from each company have completed the questionnaire.

Questionnaire Test

A test of the proposed questionnaire was completed with ten executives: three marketing vice presidents, three sales vice presidents, two sales and marketing vice presidents and two chief training/learning executives either in the learning industry or in consulting. Two of the marketing VPs have doctorates; both are practitioners in marketing working in learning/consulting and are teaching as adjunct faculty. People contacted were in Florida, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts and Texas. Several asked to have their organizations be part of the final study. They were asked if they could answer the questions for their organization and what was being tested with the questionnaire. All said the questions could be answered, although suggested that some questions were vague. While they did not necessarily use the same words as the construct, they did understand what was being tested. The overwhelming response was to simplify the questions, clarify where a question was vague and eliminate wordiness if possible. It was also suggested to be consistent and not use organization in one question while using company in another. Consistency with use of managers, colleagues and employees was another suggestion.

As a result of the test and suggestions of the executives, changes were made to the question. Changes to questions 1-4 included changing organization to company and simplifying question 4. Questions 5-8 were simplified. The questions simplified eliminated some words without changing the meaning of the question. Eight different questions were tested for the brand commitment construct (questions 9-12). The questions came from a Baumgarth and Schmidt (2010) translation of questions created by Burmann and Zeplin (2006) and questions from Burmann, Zeplin and Riley (2009). The questions were similar and the four that tested best were selected.

Data Analysis

Exploratory factor analysis is used to establish the uni-dimensionality if the constructs Learning Orientation, Commitment to Internal Brand Training and Employee Brand Commitment. The manifest variables for these constructs are treated as reflective. The manifest variables for Improved Business Performance is treated as formative. The model and hypotheses are tested using PLS (partial least squares) path modeling. The method is a “causal modeling approach aimed at maximizing the explained variance of the dependent latent constructs” (Hair, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2011, p. 139). PLS applies to both formative and reflective constructs and can be used when the sample size is relatively small (Hair, et al.). It finds a linear regression model by projecting the predicted variables and the observable variables to a new space (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2004). PLS being is used in social sciences and marketing research; it consists of structural parts and a measurement component, which reflect latent variable relationships (Haenlein & Kaplan). It provides visual results to assist with data interpretation and can model several response variables at the same time (Haenlein & Kaplan). PLS supports prediction-oriented goals and can be used for theory testing and “typically follows a two-step process that involves separate assessments of the measurement model and the structural model” (Hair, et al., p. 144). PLS can indicate how well the entire bundle of predictors predicts the outcome variable (Haenlein & Kaplan). The hypotheses are tested by the significance and direction of the path coefficients measured in the path model presented in Figure 2.6.

Summary

The study is designed to demonstrate the role played by internal training and brand building in creating a brand-oriented culture in the B2B learning industry. The emphasis is on the role played by employees in the business results of the brand. In B2B services capturing the “hearts and minds” of the employees is one important aspect of the success of the brand. The importance of the study is looking at existing employee engagement in the employer brand. It is the employee value proposition (Rosethorn, 2009). Chapter IV will analyze the data and present the findings.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings from the data from 102 people representing 51 companies in the learning industry. There was one research question: Does a commitment to internal brand training increase business performance in the learning industry? The research question leads to three hypotheses:

H1: A learning orientation increases commitment to internal brand training.

H2: Internal brand training increases employee commitment to the brand

H3: Employee brand commitment improves business performance

The research model has four constructs: Learning Orientation (Learn), Commitment to Internal Brand Training (BTrain), Employee Brand Commitment (BComm) and Improved Business Performance (BusPerf). The chapter will review the results. Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis is being used to assess the study results. PLS refers to the optimal least squares to fit part of a correlation or covariance matrix (Wold, Ruhe, Wold & Dunn, 1984). It is a linear technique computed between latent variables (Wold, et al).

Questions 1-15 is rated on a 10-point Likert-scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Questions 16-24 ask respondents to select from a category to answer the question. Question 25 asks for specific hours of training in Sales, Product Knowledge (Product), Internal Marketing (Marketing) and Internal Branding (Branding). Question 26 asks for the tenure of the Top 10 customers. Questions 25 and 26 were fill-in-the blank questions. Each question requires a response.

Respondents

The respondents were sent a link to SurveyMonkey to complete the survey. All of the companies that received the survey were in the learning industry. The companies were not in a specific geographic area but all are US-based companies. The companies self-select as to whether or not to complete the survey. The only requirement was that two people per organization complete the survey and that one being in sales/marketing and the other in learning/training/development. The respondents include 57 males and 45 females. For purposes of this study the job function breakdown was more important than the gender breakdown. The demographic data include job functions, number of employees, revenue, and type of business.

Table 4.1: *Job Functions*

Job Function	Number of Respondents
Marketing	8
Sales	13
Sales and marketing	23
Learning/development/ training	45
Other [1]	13
Total	102

The goal is to have an even distribution of respondents in sales/marketing and learning/development/training. The learning/development/training total is 45 and the sales/marking total is 44. There are 13 in "other" providing a balance of sales/marketing (48) and learning/development/training respondents (52). There was one CEO and one person who did both marketing and development for a total of 102 (refer Table 4.1).

[1] Six respondent identify themselves as CEO, president, general manager and/or founder plus sales. Two people identify themselves as CEO and learning, and one person each self-identify as falling into one of the following five job functions: marketing and development, product development and marketing, change management and learning, CEO, consulting and marketing.

Companies in the learning industry tend to be small companies (less than 100 employees and less than $10 million in revenue), which is supported by the breakdown of the number of employees in Table 4.2. The number of employees and revenue numbers are consistent with ISA membership information. The relationship between number of employees and revenue is also consistent with ISA data.

Table 4.2: *Number of Employees*

Number of Employees	**Number of Respondents**
Below 50	61
51-99	6
100-250	18
More than 251	16
Total	102

Table 4.3 *Revenue*

Revenue	**Number of Respondents**
Below $500,000	24
$501,000 to $1 million	15
$1-10 million	25
More than 10 million	38
Total	102

Table 4.4: *Type of Business*

Type of Business	**Number of Respondents**
Product only	4
Service only	32
Product and service	64
Value-added reseller	0
Other: product, service and value-added reseller	2
Total	102

Fifty-five of the respondents or 54% state that more than 50% of their revenue is generated from repeat business. An additional 36 or 35% state that more than 20% of their revenue is from repeat business. The revenue from referrals the total number at more than 20% is at 74 or 73% with 25/25% stating that 50% or more of their revenue is from referrals. Forty-nine of the respondents state that revenue from referrals stayed the same over the last year and 52 state that customer retention stayed the same over the last year. So overall, the respondents' generate more than 20% of their revenue from repeat business and referrals with customer retention and the number of referrals staying the same in the last year.

Table 4.5: *Hours of Training per Person per Year*

Type of Training	Total Hours	Average	Highest	Lowest
Sales	4016	56.61	800	0
Product	2808	27.53	300	0
Marketing	1758	17.24	200	0
Branding	1191	11.03	50	0

According to the Training Industry Report (2012), which is an annual survey conducted by the industry and a trusted industry source, the average number of hours for training in small companies in 2012 was 45 hours per employee per year; this includes all types of training at all levels of an organization. The number is an increase over 2011, which had an average of 37 hours. American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) 2012 State of the Industry Report (Miller, 2012), reports an increase of an average of 49 hours from 40 hours. The content areas researched by ASTD were not an exact match to this study however, sales was the highest number of hours with product knowledge second; internal marketing and brand training were not included in the research. This annual study has been conducted since 1997.

Reliability and Validity

The first step in evaluating a model is to examine its reliability and validity measures of the constructs evaluating convergent and discriminant validities. Construct validity of the initial model proved to be a problem in that not all of the manifest variables for learning orientation loaded adequately on the latent variables (refer Table 4.6). The loading of Question 4 on Learning Orientation was very low indicating that it needs to be discarded and the model rerun. Furthermore, the use of Questions 13-15 as formative indicators proved problematic. This is probably the result of the high degree of multicollinearity between these variables as illustrated in Table 4.7.

Table 4.6: *Results with Question 4 – Cross Loadings (Monofactorial Manifest Variables)*

	Learn	BTrain	BComm	BusPerf
Q1	**0.916**	0.275	0.425	-0.107
Q2	**0.946**	0.300	0.496	0.024
Q3	**0.907**	0.323	0.512	0.068
Q4	**0.202**	0.107	0.049	0.231
Q5	0.332	**0.760**	0.358	0.124
Q6	0.306	**0.844**	0.439	0.180
Q7	0.161	**0.865**	0.453	0.266
Q8	0.278	**0.834**	0.513	0.100
Q9	0.405	0.482	**0.828**	0.439
Q10	0.360	0.490	**0.863**	0.212
Q11	0.488	0.416	**0.880**	0.209
Q12	0.542	0.464	**0.910**	0.255
Q13	0.000	0.342	0.228	**0.675**
Q14	-0.002	0.349	0.270	**0.803**
Q15	-0.043	0.360	0.108	**0.320**
AVE Mean	0.649	0.683	0.758	0.401
Comp Reliability		0.896	0.928	0.954

Table 4.7: *Correlation Matrix for Questions 13-15.*

Variables	Q13	Q14	Q15
Q13	**1**		
Q14	**0.960**	**1**	
Q15	**0.704**	**0.759**	**1**

The model was rerun excluding Question 4 and treating Questions 13-15 as reflective rather than formative measures. The results are presented in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: *Adequate Reliability Using AVE and Convergent Reliability*

Cross-Loadings (Monofactorial Manifest Variables)

	Learn	BTrain	BComm	BusPerf
Q1	**0.911**	0.276	0.422	-0.125
Q2	**0.964**	0.301	0.495	-0.033
Q3	**0.915**	0.324	0.514	0.088
Q5	0.342	**0.765**	0.358	0.361
Q6	0.301	**0.846**	0.441	0.374
Q7	0.149	**0.862**	0.454	0.367
Q8	0.260	**0.830**	0.512	0.133
Q9	0.402	0.482	**0.837**	0.383
Q10	0.368	0.489	**0.857**	0.092
Q11	0.498	0.415	**0.878**	0.165
Q12	0.540	0.463	**0.906**	0.121
Q13	0.000	0.344	0.235	**0.974**
Q14	-0.016	0.350	0.278	**0.988**
Q15	-0.060	0.361	0.114	**0.821**
AVE Mean	0.866	0.682	0.761	0.873
Comp Reliability	0.951	0.896	0.928	0.954

After Question 4 was eliminated and Questions 13-15 were changed to reflective, validity was re-evaluated. To test convergent validity factor loading, average variance extracted (AVE) and internal reliability was used. Factor loading ideally should be 0.7 or higher. AVE of 0.5 or higher suggests adequate convergence. AVE can be a measure of reliability; the composite reliability is included as a measure of internal consistency (Chin, 2010). Each measure is related to the construct and does not have a stronger relationship with another construct (Chin, 2010). Item loadings are higher than cross loadings supporting discriminant validity (Chin, 2010). The blocks of items agree in the representation of the constructs and have a narrow range (Chin, 2010), therefore convergent validity is adequate. Composite reliability was used to test internal reliability; 0.7 is acceptable. Table 4.8 shows AVE and composite reliability as adequate.

Discriminant validity is needed to show that each construct is unique. Each measure is related to the construct it attempts to reflect and does not have a stronger relationship with another construct (Chin, 2010). Each item loads more highly on its own construct (Chin, 2010). Squared correlation coefficients between measures of a construct and measures of conceptually different constructs are evidence of discriminant validity. The individual measured items represent only one latent construct therefore the discriminant validity is acceptable (refer Table 4.9).

Table 4:9: *Discriminant Validity (Squared Correlations < AVE)*

	Learn	BTrain	BComm	BusPerf	Mean Communalities AVE)
Learn	**1**				0.866
BTrain	0.102	**1**			0.682
BComm	0.268	0.276	**1**		0.761
BusPerf	0.001	0.151	0.046	**1**	0.873
Mean Communalities (AVE)	0.866	0.682	0.761	0.873	**0**

Results of Path Modeling

PLS was used to run the postulated path model; the results are presented in Table 4.10 and Figure 4.1. PLS analysis includes establishing the significance of path estimates. The R-squares for each dependent latent variable (LV) to determine if there is significant impact of an independent LV on a dependent LV (Chin, 2010). Significance testing was conducted with 500 re-samples to check the stability of the results (Chin & Dibbern, 2010).

4.10: *Path Significance*

Path	**Path Coefficient**	**Lower Bound 95%**	**Upper Bound 95%**	**Significant**
Learn → BTrain	0.324	0.104	0.585	Yes
BTrain → BComm	0.536	0.288	0.825	Yes
BComm → BusPerf	0.244	-0.221	0.502	No

Hypotheses Results

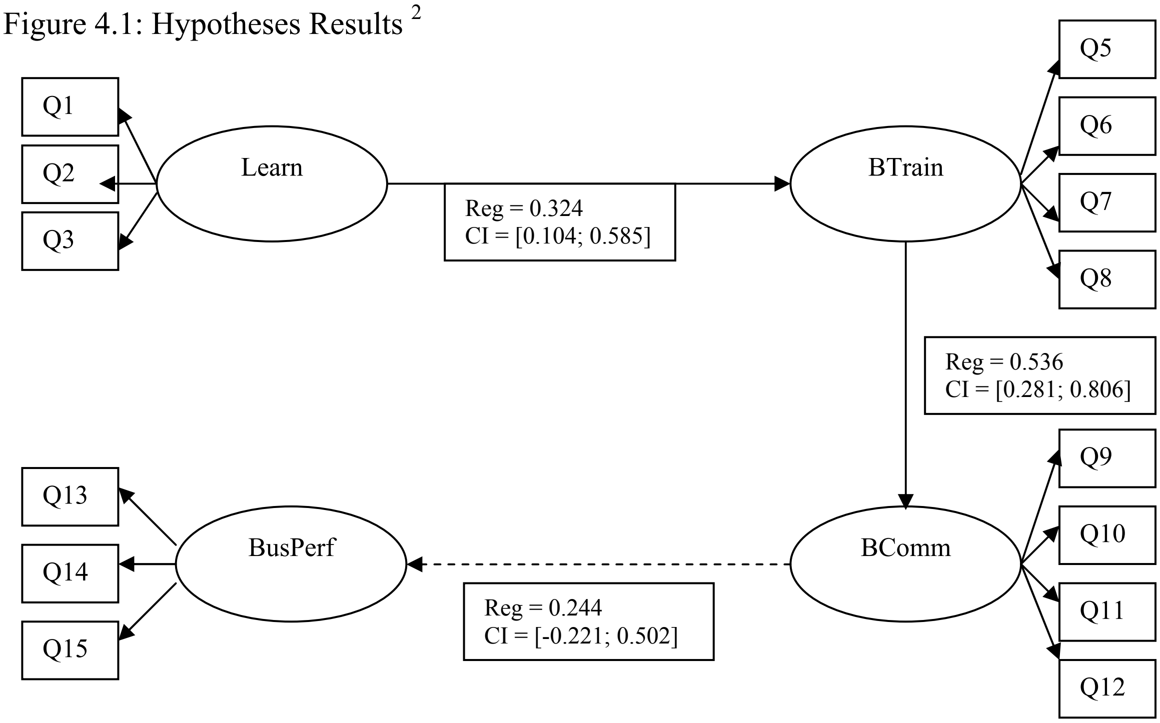
The literature review (Chapter II) provided the foundation for the study. The literature suggested relationships between learning orientation, internal brand training, brand commitment and business performance.

H1: A learning orientation increases commitment to internal brand training.

H2: Internal brand training increases employee commitment to the brand

H3: Employee brand commitment improves business performance

Figure 4.1: Hypotheses Results [2]



[2] The numbers in paratheses are 95% confidence levels.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported. A learning orientation increases commitment to internal brand training. Internal brand training increases employee commitment to the brand. However, Hypothesis 3 was not supported. There was not a statistically significant support for employee brand training improving business performance. Since it was expected that H3 would be supported, reasons for the unexpected result need to be explored.

The hypotheses and research model may not be supported because the relationships and the other latent variables may be both directly and indirectly related to Business Performance. A re-specified model was run in which:

- Learn directly affects BTrain and BComm
- BTrain directly affects BComm and BusPerf
- BComm directly affects BusPerf

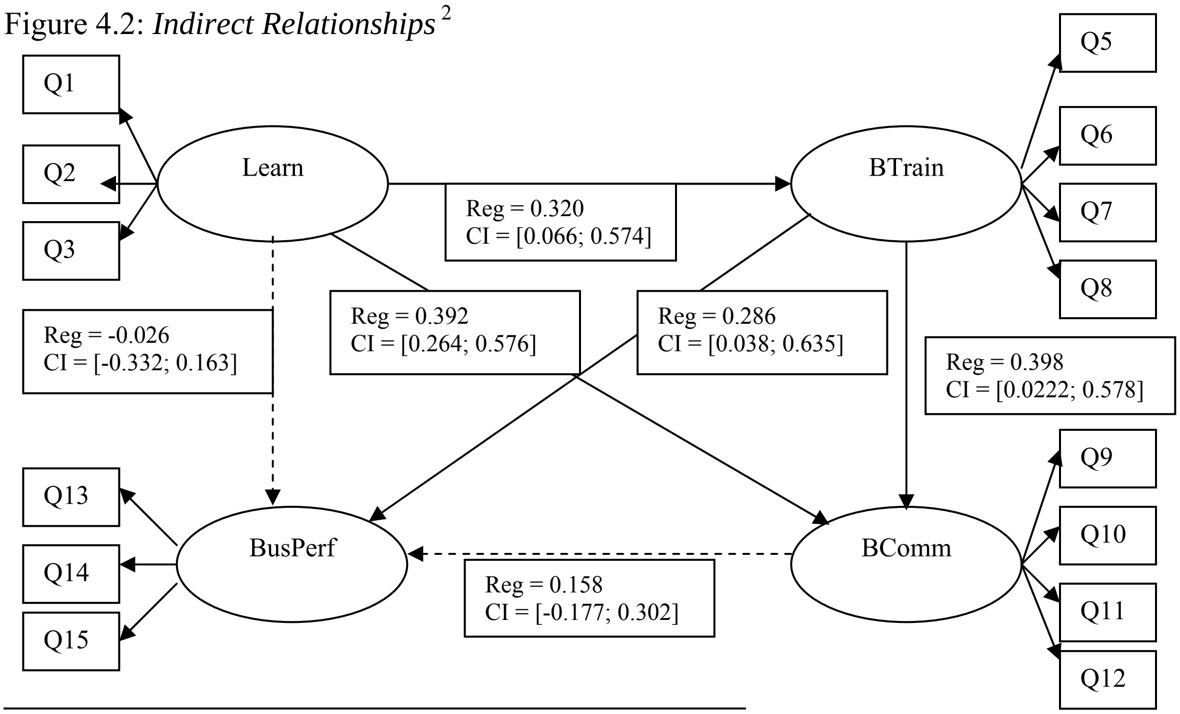
The results of the re-specified model are presented in Table 4.11 and Figure 4.2. Furthermore, the direct, indirect and total effects of the model are presents in Table 4.12.

Table 4.11: *Path Significance Re-specified Model*

Path	**Path Coefficient**	**Lower Bound 95%**	**Upper Bound 95%**	**Significant**
Learn → BTrain	0.320	0.067	0.574	Yes
Learn → BComm	0.392	0.264	0.576	Yes
BTrain → BComm	0.398	0.022	0.578	Yes
Learn → BusPerf	-0.026	-0.332	0.163	No
BTrain → BusPerf	0.286	0.038	0.635	Yes
BComm → BusPerf	0.158	-0.177	0.302	No

The revised model showing indirect relationships is shown in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2: *Indirect Relationships*[2]



[2] The numbers in paratheses are 95% confidence levels.

Table 4.12 *Direct, Indirect and Total Effects of the Re-specified Model*

Path	**Direct**	**Indirect**	**Total**
Learn → BTrain	0.320	0.000	0.320
Learn → BComm	0.392	0.127	0.519
BTrain → BComm	0.398	0.000	0.398
Learn → BusPerf	-0.026	0.174	0.148
BTrain → BusPerf	0.286	0.063	0.349
BComm → BusPerf	0.158	0.000	0.158

Business performance is a key construct and outcome measure for practitioners in the learning industry. The largest effect on improved business performance (BusPerf) is employee brand training (BTrain); the effect is more direct than indirect. Learning orientation (Learn) and employee brand commitment (BComm) effect business performance at a similar total level with BComm having a direct effect and Learn having an indirect effect. Brand commitmnet is effected directly by brand training and more directly than indirectly by learning. Brand training is directly effected by learning orientation.

Employee brand training has the largest effect on business performance. However, the brand training average is the lowest for the four areas tested. The average number of hours for sales training was highest at 56.61 hours versus 11.03 average for brand training. The total for sales was 4016 hours and 1191 hours for brand training. Having a learning orientation has an indirect effect on business performance. According to Peter Senge (1990), learning organizations “expand their capacity to create results” (p. 3) and “need to tap into commitment and capacity at all levels” (p. 4). Learning and commitment are aligned in Senge’s approach. The shared vision of people in a learning organization fosters commitment. The practical focus of Senge’s work supports the finding of a direct relationship between learning and brand commitment. Senge's work supports a direct relationship between learning and business performance. However, learning does not always deliver business results. This study found an indirect releationship, which could be based on the definition of business performance being inconsistent across the different companies in the industry. The study uses customer retention, referrals and repeat business as the definition of business performance. However, there are different defintions of business performance including customer satisfaction, profitability, marketshare, revenue, return on investment, employee satisfaction and competitive advantage.

Summary

Companies in the learning industry tend to have a learning orientation. Since they deliver training to other companies and train employees in customer organizations, the companies support internal training for their own employees. Therefore, a direct effect of learning on brand training and employee brand commitment was expected. Committed employees can deliver on the brand promise. Employee commitment is fostered in the learning and training processes as employees as training can increase employee commitment, which impacts business performance. Employee learning and training can become a sustainable competitive advantage; training is a formal messaging system. Brand training directly effected commitment and performance. The more training employees receive the more commited they are to the organization and the more employees are commited to the organization the more likely they will generate positive business results. Internal brand commitment and knowledge can have a positive effect business results. The study showed a direct effect of brand commitment on business performance. The direct relationships are supported by the Literature Review in Chapter II. The re-specified model provides more practical application than strong theoretical evidence of the hypotheses. The practical significances will be explored in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the research was to answer the question: Does a commitment to internal brand training increase business performance in the learning industry? The constructs were learning orientation, brand training, brand commitment and business performance. The study was conducted using companies in the learning industry through the Instructional Systems Association (ISA). ISA sponsored the research and distributed the survey to their membership.

This chapter overviews the research and summary of results, discusses the limitations and contributions of the study, considers managerial implications and suggests future research. The study expands on the knowledge of a commitment to internal brand training and the impact on business performance in the learning industry.

Research Results

The first hypothesis, a learning orientation increases commitment to internal brand training, was supported. The second hypothesis, internal brand training increases employee commitment to the brand, was supported. The third hypothesis, employee brand commitment improves business performance, was not supported. The results showed that there was not statistically significant support for employee brand commitment improving business performance. The lack of support for this hypothesis was surprising. Since the third hypothesis was not supported, indirect relationships and latent variables impacting business performance were explored using a re-specified model.

The re-specified model showed that brand training directly effects employee brand commitment and improved business performance. Learning directly affects employee brand training and employee brand commitment. Employee brand commitment directly effects business performance. Learning orientation indirectly effects improved business performance. The largest effect on improved business performance was brand training. Therefore, the initial research question was supported by the research. Since the additional direct relationships were not part of the Literature Review, more research was done to support the findings.

The finding for the first hypothesis is supported by the literature. De Clercq, Honig and Martin (2012) found that a learning orientation increases a passion for work in entrepreneurial organizations; many of the companies in the study are small and entrepreneurial. Papasolomou and Vrontis (2006) found that a learning orientation helps to brand intangibles (services) and build employee commitment. Employee training can help prepare people in the organization to be receptive to the brand promise and commit to brand buy-in (King & Grace, 2012). The second hypothesis result is also supported by the literature. Brand-centered training impacts employee brand behaviors; and builds brand strength. Brand training helps employees feel engaged and responsible for the brand (Chang, Chiang & Han, 2012). Engaged employees are more likely to brand ambassadors for the company.

The impact of brand commitment on business performance was not supported in the initial model. Since this was not expected, additional research was explored to explain the finding. A four decade review of Delta Airlines (Kaufman, 2013) found that despite years of focus on employee commitment and involvement, the business results were inconsistent. While the “spirit of Delta” survives, it is “bruised, diminished and less evangelical” (p. 374). Brand commitment impacts performance but there are other factors that can impact performance such as competition and pricing (Baldauf, Cravens & Binder, 2003). Leadership can also have an impact on employee behaviors and commitment; the leader’s role in goal attainment is important (Wallace, de Chernatony & Buil, 2013). Leadership behaviors foster employee commitment, which supports the brand message and business results (Wallace, et al., 2013). Strong brands help organizations achieve competitive advantage and business survival (Santos-Vijande, del Rio-Lanza, Suarez-Alvarez & Diaz-Martin, 2013). Leadership, competitive advantage and pricing were not included in this study as definitions of business performance. The variety of definitions of business performance in different studies could impact the results of the research.

In the re-specified model there was a direct relationship between brand commitment and business performance. The Santos-Vijande, et al. study supports a direct link between brand and business performance since “customer performance completely mediates this relationship” and “firms’ efforts to manage their brands do not immediately improve their financial and market performance” (p. 156). A recent study by Hirvonen, Lauukkan and Reijonen (2013) found that effect of brand orientation on business performance is greater in business-to-consumer than business-to-business markets. It also found that external factors have a greater impact than internal factors on performance. Hirvonen, et al. would suggest that the companies in the learning industry need to “have the same attitude” (p. 18) towards brand commitment/orientation as larger companies to impact business performance.

The indirect relationship in the re-specified model between learning orientation and business results has mixed support in the literature. While Senge (1990) found that strong learning cultures do not necessarily ensure desired business results, he also found that learning could be a competitive advantage. Goh, Elliot and Quon (2012) found a positive relationship between learning and business performance. Reijonen, Laukkanen, Komppula and Tuominen (2012) found that learning could have either a direct or indirect impact on business performance. However, the difference in findings could be based on the definition of business performance. Learning orientation impacts brand commitment and brand training, both of which directly impact business performance. The finding that learning orientation has an indirect relationship to business performance does not decrease the importance of learning orientation; it is an antecedent to training and commitment.

A direct link between learning orientation and brand commitment was found in the re-specified model, which is supported by the literature. A study of small and medium-sized software businesses found that those companies looking to improve performance need to focus on brand orientation (Reijonen, et al., 2012). Hakala (2013) found that profitability is mediated by learning orientation behaviors. A learning orientation helps employees deliver on the brand promise (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007). Delivering on the brand promise is important in the learning industry where brand is more often associated with service than with product.

In the re-specified model direct links were found between brand training and business performance. The direct relationship between brand training and business performance is supported by the literature. Miles, Mangold, Asree and Revell (2011) found that organizations could improve performance by defining the brand to employees, which can happen through training. Southwest Airlines is an example of an organization that has created a positive employee brand that has impacted the bottom-line (Miles & Mangold, 2005). Ji, Huang, Lie, Zhu and Cai (2012) research found that employee training is likely to improve organizational performance. In a study of the Spanish hotel industry Ubeda-Garcia, Marco-Lajara, Sabater-Sempere and Garcia-Lillio (2013) found that training could increase performance levels and competitive advantage. Bringing the brand to life through training can improve business performance (Magableh, Kharabsheh & Al-Zubi, 2011). Brand training was found to have the largest impact on business performance and provides an area of opportunity for the learning industry.

Limitations

This study is conducted in one industry where the companies are relatively small and all are US-based. Conclusions of this study may not be consistent with other industries or larger companies or other countries. The survey is based on perceptions of the people completing the survey. Perceptions are not necessarily aligned with the business realities. Respondents were not asked to research their responses, which could impact the survey results. The respondents were all high-level executives in either sales/marketing or learning/training/development. Employees may have had a different perception than executives. Executives in other organizational functions may also have had a different perception. There was no way to test the honesty or any biases of the respondents. Since responses were based on respondents' perception bias could have been an issue in completing the survey. Data was not compiled regarding years of service to the organization and/or number of years in the industry. Both of these demographic data points could provide area for additional information to determine its impact on business performance. There were no questions or constructs regarding employee satisfaction, which could impact results.

Potential participants were sent the survey link via email, but it was their choice whether or not to complete it. Self-selection could impact results. A few people responded that they did not understand the survey (brand training) and did not want to participate. The research included a limited number of constructs; more constructs and variables could have lead to different results. This study used customer retention, repeat business and referrals as the definition of business performance. There is not necessarily a consistent measure of business success across different companies. Learning and brand orientation have been found to be indicators of competitive advantage (Evans, Brison, Byrom & Medway, 2005). However, competitive advantage was not one of the business performance measures in this study.

Leadership behaviors has been shown to foster employee commitment which can bring brand message to life and impact service performance (Wallace, et al., 2013). Leadership impact on business performance was not included in the study constructs. Leadership communication can help build employee brand commitments (Wallace, et al., 2013). The impact of culture on business performance is an area that was not included in this study. Waal (2013) found that five cultural factors impact high performing organizations. The factors are continuous improvement, openness and action-orientation, management quality, workforce quality, and long-term orientation. These factors could be aligned with brand to study the impact on business performance in learning organizations.

Future Research

Different functional areas in an organization could see things differently than sales, marketing and learning/development. Employees could have different understanding than executives. More attention should be paid to employee perceptions, as they are the ones expected to live the brand promise. Further study is needed into employee and different functional area perceptions of brand training and business performance. Using employees to conduct a study is an opportunity for additional understanding of the constructs and for future research.

Three constructs were used in this study; additional constructs are an opportunity for further study. Factors other than the three research constructs may impact organizational business performance, which impacts research results. The factors that influence business performance need further study. Studies have found that learning had a positive impact on performance. However, the definition of performance was not the same in each study. Practitioners often find it difficult to relate different elements to business performance. Therefore, a consistent definition of business performance could be explored in additional studies. A more holistic approach to business performance could be researched. The relationship between branding and Balanced Scorecard is another potential definition of business performance.

Business-to-business branding is in earlier stages of development as compared to business-to-consumer branding. Business-to-employee branding in service companies that build a brand focused on services rather than product is an opportunity for further study. Brand management and management practices in services businesses without tangible products are other constructs that could be researched.

With the AACSB (2013) Blue Ribbon Commission encouraging more direct and explicit impact on business and management practices, more studies could be done on the complex construct of business performance. It is a potential area that could be clarified with future research. It could be a next step for empirical studies.

Academic Implications

This research contributes to knowledge of a learning orientation, brand training, brand commitment and business performance in the learning industry. This study provides some insight into the learning industry and branding training for employees. The relationship between learning orientation, employee brand training, employee brand commitment and business performance had not been previously studied. This study explored the four constructs specifically in the learning industry.

The study confirmed the impact of learning orientation on brand training and the impact of brand training on brand commitment. The study supported the relationship between learning orientation and internal market orientation with training having a major impact on internal branding. The strong correlation between learning, training and commitment confirmed other studies. The impact of brand training on business performance adds to the body of knowledge of internal branding and training.

More research has been conducted using business-to-consumer branding than business-to-business branding. The study of business-to-employee branding in labor-intensive service industries has even fewer studies. When tangible products are not offered by the service businesses, the branding challenge for employees is greater. This study reinforced the need for internal brand management practices on business results in a business-to-business environment offering more services than products to customers. The importance of internal learning orientation and the positive impact on brand constructs was supported by the study. The study reinforced studies in other industries that showed alignment between employee commitment and positive business results. The research question asked if a commitment to internal training increase business performance in learning industry. The study found that brand training does improve business performance.

Managerial Implications

Managers are searching for ways to improve business performance. For most practitioners, business performance is critical to organizational and marketing success. This study demonstrated the importance of brand training on business performance. Brand-building and developing employee brand behaviors are opportunities for companies in the service sector. Companies in the knowledge/learning industries need to focus on their internal employee brand knowledge and brand management systems. Training is a key component of internal branding. Brand training could be provided to employees to be able to deliver on the brand promise and become brand advocates. In service organizations it is the employees that play a vital role in brand commitment. It is the employees that need to be trained in understanding the brand and brand promise.

The study found that in the learning industry internal brand training had the fewest number of hours and the lowest average number of hours for the four areas tested. Sales training was the highest number of hours and highest average number of hours. The majority of companies in the study reported that revenue; referrals and repeat business remained at about the same level over the past year. Investing more time and money into brand training could have an impact on business performance, since it was the area with the largest impact on improved business performance. The brand training direct relationship to business performance is an area of opportunity for the companies.

Companies in the learning industry could consider developing a common definition of business performance to improve benchmarking within the industry. Business performance is defined in many different ways making it difficult for practitioners to compare business performance across the industry. Developing a comprehensive definition of business performance is critical for management to understand the variables that can link internal brand activities to business results. The learning industry could explore several definitions of business performance specific to the industry.

Summary

Companies in the learning industry need to focus on internal branding and investing in employee brand training to improve business performance. The relationship between the internal marketing constructs and business performance present many opportunities for further research and study. Further exploring the link between brand training and business performance provides a potential opportunity for a different focus in the internal training focus in learning organizations. The results support that internal brand training can lead to improved business performance.

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#db=ufh&AN=5001282

APPENDIX A

EMAIL TO ISA MEMBERSHIP

Email sent to ISA database from Pam Schmidt, Executive Director

Subject Line: Your help is needed, please respond no later than December 10

I invite you to participate in a survey as part of a doctoral dissertation for a friend of ISA enrolled in the doctoral program at Nova Southeastern University.

The questions to be explored:

> Does a commitment to internal brand training increase business performance in the learning industry?

In return for ISA's assistance to the doctoral candidate, ISA will receive a copy of the results and will share it with those who participate in the study. Your individual responses will remain confidential.

We are asking that the questionnaire be completed by two people in the organization: the highest level person in sales and/or marketing and highest level training/learning executive.

Please take 15 minutes to respond to the survey by December 10. Base your responses on your current position within the company. Click here to begin

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/internalbrandingresearch

Thank you for your help and your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Pam Schmidt
Executive Director

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Internal Branding

1. Our company's ability to learn is key to competitive advantage

Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2. Learning as a key to improvement is one of the basic values of the company

Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3. Employee learning is seen as an investment, not an expense

Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4. Learning is seen as necessary to guarantee company survival

Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5. An ongoing training and learning process in brand management is seen as important to reinforce our competitive advantage

Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6. The company actively establishes clear-cut objectives to assess the effect of our brand-building training

Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

7. The company makes value and behaviors of employees consistent with brand value through training courses

Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

8. The company makes new employees understand brand-related value through brand activities (training)

Strongly Disagree ... **Strongly Agree**

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

9. In the company do promotions depend on whether you behave according to the brand identity and enhance the brand image

Strongly Disagree ... **Strongly Agree**

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

10. Employees try to convey brand identity to new employees

Strongly Disagree ... **Strongly Agree**

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

11. Employees behave consistently with the brand values even when they are not controlled or rewarded for doing so

Strongly Disagree ... **Strongly Agree**

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

12. Employees are aware that everything they say or do can/will affect the brand image

Strongly Disagree ... **Strongly Agree**

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

13. Compared to previous years, our company increased sales

Strongly Disagree ... **Strongly Agree**

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

14. Compared to previous years, our corporate profits have increased

Strongly Disagree ... **Strongly Agree**

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

15. Compared to previous years, the number of customers has increased

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ **Strongly Agree**

16. How many employees are in your organization?

- ☐ Below 50
- ☐ 51-99
- ☐ 100-250
- ☐ More than 250

17. What is the firm's revenue?

- ☐ Below $500,000
- ☐ $501,000- $1 million
- ☐ $1 million - $10 million
- ☐ More than $10 million

18. What is your business type?

- ☐ Product only
- ☐ Service only
- ☐ Product and service
- ☐ Value-added reseller

Other (please specify) ____________

19. What is your organizational function?

- ☐ Marketing executive
- ☐ Sales executive
- ☐ Sales and Marketing executive
- ☐ Training, learning, development executive

Other (please specify) ____________

20. Are you male or female?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

21. What percentage of your annual revenue comes from repeat business from your Top 10 customers?

- Less than 10%
- 10-20%
- 21-30%
- 31-40%
- 41-50%
- More than 50%

22. What percentage of your annual revenue comes from referrals?

- Less than 10%
- 10-20%
- 21-30%
- 31-40%
- 41-50%
- More than 50%

23. What is the percentage of increase or decrease in referrals in the past year?

- More than 20% decrease
- 10-20% decrease
- Less than 10% decrease
- Stayed the same
- Less than 10% increase
- 10-20% increase
- 21-30% increase
- 31-40% increase
- 41-50% increase
- More than 50% increase

24. What is the percentage of increase or decrease in customer retention in the last year?

- ☐ More than 20% decrease
- ☐ 10-20% decrease
- ☐ Less than 10% decrease
- ☐ Stayed the same
- ☐ Less than 10% increase
- ☐ 10-20% increase
- ☐ 21-30% increase
- ☐ 31-40% increase
- ☐ 41-50% increase
- ☐ More than 50% increase

25. In your internal (employee) training program, how many hours are devoted to training per year in the four areas listed (please indicate hours for each of the areas)?

Sales Training	
Product Knowledge	
Internal Marketing	
Internal Branding	

26. In your estimation how long has your organization worked with each of your Top 10 longest tenured companies (in years)? Please give years for each of Top 10 (names of companies/customers are not needed).

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	

27. Please provide the name of your company. Name of company will not be shared in results. Name is only needed to ensure that 2 people per company respond to the survey.

Next

APPENDIX C

TIMETABLE

Once the proposal is approved, the research will need to get on the calendar of ISA. It anticipated that it could take two to three months to get on the calendar. Once the email goes out to the ISA membership, there will be two weeks allotted to complete the survey. If additional companies are needed to meet the 100 data sources, then another 3 weeks would be added to the data collection timeframe. The data analysis is anticipated to take one month and the writing of Chapters 4 and 5 about six weeks. It is difficult to determine how long it will take for committee approval of the final chapters.

APPENDIX D

CONSISTENCY MATRIX

Title: INTERNAL BRAND TRAINING IN THE LEARNING INDUSTRY
Statement of Problem: Does a commitment to internal brand training increase business performance in the learning industry?

Proposition	**Source**	**Instrument Item**	**Method of Analysis**
Learning Orientation	Sinkula, Baker and Noordewier (1997)	Questions 1-4	Exploratory factor analysis will be used to establish the uni-dimensionality if the constructs Learning Orientation, Commitment to Internal Brand Training and Employee Brand Commitment. The manifest variables for these constructs will be treated as reflective. The mainivest variables for Improved Business Performance will be treated as formative. The model and hypotheses will be tested using PLS (partial least squares) path modeling.
Internal Brand Training	Gromark and Melin (2011) Chang, Chiang and Han (2012)	Questions 4-5 Questions 6-7	
Employee Brand Commitment	Burmann, Zeplin and Riley (2009) Burmann and Zeplin	Questions 9-10 Questions 11-12	

	(2006) based on Baumgarth and Schmitt (2010)		
Business Performance	Suliyanto and Rahab (2012) Demographic Questions	Questions 13-15 Demographic Questions	