

Undergraduate Education: The Implications of Cross-Functional Relationships in Business Marketing— The Skills of High-Performing Managers

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ABSTRACT. Like other specialty areas in the business school curriculum, marketing management classes emphasize an analytical perspective and provide students with a valuable set of strategy tools, but fail to come to grips with other facets of the managerial work of marketing—namely, the relational skills that are required for managing across functions, reconciling diverse interests, and creating integrated strategies and customer solutions. By serving as an advocate for the customer at various levels of the organizational hierarchy and across functions, the business marketer must initiate, develop, nurture, and sustain a rich network of relationships with multiple constituencies within the firm and within customer organizations. To effectively perform this challenging interdisciplinary role, a unique set of relationship management skills are required. This article explores the collaborative skills that high-performing managers have mastered and examines the resulting implications for the business marketing course. Recent research is examined that reveals the characteristics of reputationally effective managers, isolates the factors that define effective

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cross-functional exchange episodes, and details the specific behavior that top-performing account managers employ. By exploring the relational competencies that are instrumental to the work of marketing managers, the business marketing course can fill an important gap in the marketing curriculum. doi:10.1300/J033v14n01_08 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2007 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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The traditional business school curriculum, undergraduate and MBA, creates borders between the business functions as each specialty area emphasizes one part of the manager's job to the exclusion of the others (Mintzberg and Gosling 2002). Indeed, Mintzberg (1994, p. 11) observes that it is a curiosity of the management literature that its best known authors all seem to emphasize one domain of managerial work over others: "Tom Peters tells us that good managers are doers . . . Michael Porter suggests they are thinkers. Not so, argue Abraham Zaleznik and Warren Bennis: good managers are really leaders." Moreover, many other writers across the business functions emphasize that good managers, in the end, are essentially scorekeepers. Taken together, all of the parts of a manager's job may be covered, but even that may not provide students with a true understanding of the nature of managerial work (Bennis and O'Toole 2005; Sayles 1993).

To that end, Mintzberg (1994) offers an integrated view of managerial work that considers the roles that managers perform at three levels: managing by information (communicating and controlling), managing through people (leading and linking), and managing action, each implemented inside and outside the unit. At the core, a manager comes to a job with a theory about how a business or unit should be managed and a concrete view of variables that will shape strategy. Like other specialty areas, the marketing curriculum emphasizes analytical decision making and provides a rather narrow view of the managerial work that marketing managers perform. For example, limited attention is given to the challenges involved in managing through people or to linking or communicating across units. By contrast, managers are portrayed as strategists or controllers and limited recognition is given to the much tougher work of managing across functions, reconciling diverse interests, securing required resources from senior management, and handling everyday

implementation. Based on extensive field studies, Mintzberg (1994, p. 19) concludes that managers devote a great deal of time to “networking—building vast arrays of contacts and intricate coalitions of supporters beyond their own units, whether within the rest of the organization or outside, in the world at large.” According to Cross, Davenport, and Cantrell (2003, p. 20), what really distinguishes high-performing managers from their peers is their ability to “tap large diversified networks that are rich in experience and span all organizational boundaries.”

Given its interdisciplinary nature, the business marketing course provides an ideal vehicle for providing students not only with analytical skills, but also with a deeper understanding of the soft skills that successful marketing managers have mastered. In the last special issue of the *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing* devoted to education, we defined the distinctive contribution the undergraduate business marketing course provides to the marketing curriculum, detailed the central themes and knowledge areas for the course, reviewed trends in business practice, and offered a number of course design suggestions (Hutt and Speh 1998). Drawing on recent research, the purpose of this article is to explore the interfunctional skills of high-performing marketing managers and, where possible, consider the associated implications for the business marketing course. To this end, we review a set of studies—each conducted in a *Fortune* 500 business-to-business firm—that explored the characteristics of high-performing marketing managers or account managers. Rather than providing a comprehensive description of each study, our goal here is simply to provide a portrait of key findings and identify common characteristics that define high-performing managers. In line with this objective, we will review recent research that explored the characteristics of reputationally effective managers. Next, we explore the characteristics of effective cross-functional exchange episodes and isolate the specific behaviors that high-performing managers employ. Finally, drawing on recent research, we examine the characteristics of top-performing salespersons and account managers, identifying factors that set them apart from their peers.

INTERFUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN BUSINESS MARKETING

As companies realign the structure of the organization to be more market-oriented and responsive to changing customer requirements and competitive conditions, there is a greater need to share information

across functional groups and organizational boundaries (Day 1994). The importance of this topic to practicing managers is highlighted in the summary of the Marketing Science Institute workshop, "Interfunctional Interfaces: The Management of Corporate Fault Zones," where Montgomery and Webster (1997, p. 15) conclude: "There was a strong consensus that issues at the interface of marketing with other management processes, functions, and disciplines are among the most important that managers are dealing with in the current environment."

The success of business marketing strategy depends to a large degree on contributions from R&D, manufacturing, logistics, and technical service. Planning in the business marketing setting therefore requires more functional interdependence and a closer relationship to total corporate strategy than planning in the consumer goods sector. In a classic article, B. Charles Ames (1976, pp. 95-96) points out, "Changes in marketing strategy are more likely to involve capital commitments for new equipment, shifts in development activities, or departures from traditional engineering and manufacturing approaches, any one of which would have companywide implications." Thus, workflow interdependencies generate interactions between marketing managers and other functional specialists as these managers seek to connect customers to product, service delivery, and financial systems within the firm (Moorman and Rust 1999).

Interfunctional issues also assume a critical role in the sales strategies of business-to-business firms. Given the concentrated nature of demand, many firms are adopting a key account focus and creating sales teams composed of individuals from sales, marketing, finance, logistics, and other functional groups to tailor customized solutions for large customers. The key account manager assumes a lead role in coordinating selling activities and facilitates cross-firm communications among functional experts (Cannon and Narayandas 2000). Others, like IBM, use ad hoc teams with the relationship manager calling upon technical specialists within the company when they are needed (Weitz and Bradford 1999). Research demonstrates that successful key account programs provide the lead relationship manager with ready access to resources and support across functional areas (Homburg, Workman, and Jensen 2002; Schultz and Evans 2002).

While practitioners are embracing process-based organizations that integrate functions with teams, some experts admonish marketing scholars for failing to take an active role in fostering interfunctional research and dialogue. For example, Day and Montgomery (1999, p. 11) note: "Marketing should provide a leadership role in the successful manage-

ment of these interfunctional interfaces. If marketing abdicates its responsibilities (enabled by its organizational position as the external interface of a corporation, its methodological background, and its training), there can be no complaints if other disciplines address these problems without much input from marketing.”

Given the critical role that interfunctional processes assume in business practice and the challenging interdisciplinary role that business marketing managers assume in the firm, attention now turns to a set of studies that examined the skills of high-performing managers.

REPUTATIONALLY-EFFECTIVE MANAGERS

While strong cross-functional relationships are crucial for new product development success and effective strategy execution, some business marketing managers may be more adept at fostering effective cross-functional relationships than others. Bond et al. (2004) empirically examined the factors that distinguish reputationally effective managers from their less-effective peers. Drawing on the intriguing research by Tsui (1994), reputational effectiveness is defined as the degree to which a manager has been responsive to the needs and expectations of constituents. In particular, the study examined the relational skills and social networks of more (versus less) reputationally effective managers.

A large business unit of a *Fortune 500* high-technology firm provided the context for this study. The sample consisted of managers who were actively involved in the new product development process. Using a two-phase research approach, the informal communication network of 268 managers from marketing, R&D, manufacturing, and other functions was captured first. Likewise, the reputational effectiveness of each manager who was identified as a member of the network was measured. In the second phase, the relational competencies (e.g., role-taking ability, openness) of the managers who participated in the initial phase were examined.

As predicted, the results indicate that role-taking ability is related positively to a manager's reputational effectiveness. Role-taking represents the ability of managers to put themselves in the place of others. By accurately defining the perspectives from which others operate, marketing managers can be more responsive to specialists in different departments and can achieve greater reputational effectiveness. Interestingly, the study found evidence of an inverse relationship between communi-

cation openness and effectiveness. By sharing too much information with colleagues—or alternatively, information that does not directly relate to the task at hand—the reputational effectiveness of a manager is damaged. Importantly, the results reveal that the social network characteristics of a reputationally effective manager differ from those of less effective colleagues. Closeness centrality, the efficiency with which an individual can contact all of the others in the network, was associated with reputational effectiveness. Compared to their less effective colleagues, these managers are more successful in developing a web of connections that can be used to secure the support, understand the needs, and respond to the expectations of diverse constituents. This finding affirms Kanter's (1989) view that three basic commodities allow managers to achieve their objectives in organizations: information, resources, and support. On balance, then, “the results demonstrate that managers who are successful in working across functions appreciate the cognitive and emotional perspectives of diverse constituents and develop relationship ties that provide them with ready access to others across the organization” (Bond et al. 2004, p. 44).

Course Coverage and Suggestions

Occupying a boundary position between the firm and its customers and an integrative role across functions, a central and fundamental challenge for the business marketer is to minimize interdepartmental conflicts while fostering a shared appreciation of the interdependencies (Hutt and Speh 1984). To serve customers and to secure the required support at various levels of the hierarchy and across functions, business marketing managers must initiate, develop, and sustain a network of relationships with a number of constituencies within the firm. Like managing relationships with customers, cross-functional relationships involve a set of mutual expectations concerning roles, trust, influence, and performance (Gabarro 1987). To secure insights into the cross-functional relationships of a marketing manager, some instructors use an assignment that asks students to interview a marketing manager or sales executive and to develop the social network for that manager, profiling key relationship ties across departments. Here the manager might be asked to identify colleagues with whom they frequently interact and to evaluate the degree of closeness of those relationships. In completing this network, the manager might also be asked to review the network, identify particularly influential or reputationally effective managers, and to describe the characteristics of those managers that set them apart

from others in the network. For a range of other social network exercises and valuable sources on the subject, see the works of Cross and Parker (2004) and Uzzi and Dunlap (2005). In turn, for a rich illustration of how a social network can be constructed in an organization setting, see the work of Krackhardt and Hanson (1993).

HIGH-PERFORMING CROSS-FUNCTIONAL MANAGERS

From innovation management to strategy development and implementation, the work of business marketing managers demands frequent and intense interactions with other functional managers who have differing goals, time horizons, and professional backgrounds. While some valuable past research studies have explored the nature of these cross-unit exchanges (Reukert and Walker 1987; Workman, Homburg, and Gruner 1998) or the influence of the marketing function (Homburg, Workman, and Krohmer 1999), little attention has been given to the specific behaviors that individual managers employ to achieve those task-related goals that involve the collective contributions of colleagues across functions.

To explore the characteristics of high-performing cross-functional managers, Hutt et al. (2005) interviewed 111 managers who are actively involved in the new product development process at a *Fortune 100* high-technology firm. Using the critical incident approach, detailed accounts of effective and ineffective cross-functional interactions were gathered from managers representing R&D, marketing, manufacturing, sales, and other functions. Respondents were asked to think about a specific interaction with a particular manager and to provide a detailed description of the purpose and outcome of the interaction and the reasons that this episode was particularly memorable as effective (ineffective). To accurately reflect the diverse set of cross-functional exchanges, the study participants were asked to recount both effective and ineffective interactions with managers from multiple functional areas. Each interview was tape-recorded, transcribed, and systematically coded by two judges. The transcribed interviews yielded 500 codable cross-functional episodes.

Table 1 highlights and defines the five major themes that were revealed in the analysis: communication, sensitivity, task-related behaviors, skills, and compatibility. Observe that the table also includes the sub-themes for each category and illustrative phrases that represent effective or ineffective incidents. Rather than detailing the results for each

TABLE 1. Critical Incidents in Cross-Functional Interactions: Themes and Illustrative Phrases

Theme Subtheme	Definition	Illustrative Phrases
Communication	The exchange of information between cross-functional managers	
Openness	The sharing (withholding) of information	Free/open exchange of ideas (+); Hidden agendas (-); Lack of candor (-)
Frequency	The amount of communication	Met every Friday (+); We never met (-); Needed more communication (-)
Quality	The effectiveness of information that was exchanged	Great job telling the story (+); Sketchy information (-); Communication unclear (-)
Sensitivity	A managers' willingness (resistance) to transcend a functional perspective and consider alternative points of view	
Perspective-Taking	The degree to which a manager understands another's point of view or situation	Putting ourselves into each other's shoes (+); Functional mindsets (-); Seeing the "big picture" (+); Lack of understanding (-)
Flexibility	Managerial actions that demonstrate a willingness to discuss, negotiate, or make concessions	Give and take (+); Dogmatic (-); Compromise (+1); Dictatorial (-)
Task-Related Behaviors	Behavioral responses to a particular request, task, or situation	
Responsiveness	Timeliness or promptness of a managerial response	Responsive (+); Prompt (+); Slow to respond (-)
Follow-Through	Completion or failure to complete an agreed-upon task	Did what they said they would (+); Did not complete (-); Ignored requests (-)
Initiative/Avoidance	Willingness to assume an active role in accomplishing (avoiding) routine work-related goals	Super proactive (+); Avoiding responsibility (-); Takes ownership (+)
Overcoming Adversity	Commitment (lack of commitment) to surmounting barriers that emerge in unusual circumstances	Willingness to do whatever it takes (+1); Every attempt was countered by a reason why we couldn't (-); Can do/can't do attitude
Skills	An individual's level of proficiency at handling tasks and interactions	
Competence	Level of expertise that a manager brings to completing a specific task or the overall job	Very knowledgeable (+1); Not particularly skilled (-); Thorough (+1)
Professionalism	Appropriate (inappropriate) manner in which an interaction was conducted	Polite (+1); Very rude (-); Short tempered (-)

Theme Subtheme	Definition	Illustrative Phrases
Preparation/ Organization	Amount of time and effort that is invested in preparing for and organizing a task	Not well prepared (-); Very organized (+); Clear agenda (+)
Compatibility	Shared or complementary understanding of the task (or of each other as individuals)	
Collaboration	A managers' gestalt evaluation of the environment for a cross-functional exchange	Worked well/did not work well as a team; Supportive (+); Blaming/finger pointing (-)
Goals and Objectives	Explicit references to a shared (different) purpose	Shared vision (+); Differences in focus (-); On the same page (+)
Synergy	The benefits (drawbacks) of collaboration with cross-functional partners	Combined expertise (+); A waste of time (-)
Interpersonal Dynamics	The level of interpersonal compatibility	Good personal relationship (+); Lack of trust (-)

(+) = phrase representing an effective incident
 (-) = phrase representing an ineffective incident

theme, our goal here is to provide a portrait of the work style and specific behaviors that distinguish high-performing cross-functional managers from their peers.

Mastering the Soft Skills

While many managers likely assume that their reputation in the organization is shaped by hard skills like technical proficiency or marketing savvy, the top-of-mind characteristics that colleagues emphasize in describing effective managers center on soft skills like openness, initiative, or responsiveness. Before acknowledging the expertise or job competence of a manager, colleagues will first provide a litany of relational skills that a focal manager possesses.

Communicating

All managers spend a great deal of time interacting but when colleagues describe the communication style of their high-performing cross-functional counterparts, they focus on three consistent themes: openness, frequency, and quality. Interactions with high performers are described as "candid," "unencumbered," and characterized by a "free flow of thoughts and suggestions," whereas ineffective episodes reference "defensiveness,"

“hidden agendas,” and even “the intentional withholding of information.” Self-disclosure is a feature of close interpersonal relationships but takes a different form in working relationships: disclosures about self are less important than openness about task or organizational issues. Compared with others, high performers more freely reveal task-related information to colleagues in other units and do so in an efficient manner. High-quality communications were captured in successful cross-functional episodes that clarified the situation, goals, roles, and/or responsibilities for both parties. “*We met and developed a clear sense of each other’s priorities.*” By contrast, ineffective incidents were characterized by confusion and a lack of clarity that tended to exacerbate cross-functional tensions, increase frustration, and damage trust.

Transcending Boundaries

Rather than a “functional mindset,” high performers demonstrate perspective-taking skills—the ability to anticipate and understand the perspectives and priorities of managers from other functional units. “He’s a superb marketing strategist but he recognizes the special technical issues that we’ve been working through to get this product launched on schedule.” Valuable in forging relationships across boundaries, perspective-taking amounts to actively considering the mental model that guides another manager and anticipating that individual’s response tendencies (Schwalbe 1991). Such role-taking allows a manager to build pockets of support for a particular course of action by forecasting and then addressing discrepancies between their goals and those of other constituents. Perspective-taking skills also assist a manager in transferring knowledge across boundaries and in assimilating and using knowledge that two subunits can only create together.

Demonstrating Responsiveness

High-performing managers place a priority on cross-functional relationships and are revered by their colleagues for their *responsiveness*. Remembering effective cross-functional episodes, colleagues describe high performers as “timely,” “prompt,” “responsive” (i.e., “When I need critical information, I turn to him and he gets right back to me”). Moreover, high performers follow through and “deliver on their promises.” Importantly, responsiveness does not imply mere acquiescence to constituent demands but, instead, represents a more proactive effort by a manager to discern the expectations of functional partners and act in a way that minimizes the discrepancies that may exist between functions.

In contrast to their peers, high performers are more willing to take the *initiative* or assume an active role in advancing work-related goals that are important to multiple functions. Perhaps because of the complexity and ambiguity that surround roles and responsibilities for cross-functional processes, “taking ownership,” “taking the lead,” “volunteering,” and “demonstrated commitment” were particularly valued by colleagues. In analyzing critical episodes, coworkers frequently identify situations where a manager was able to overcome obstacles to meet a special demand or deadline (i.e., a customer problem; an emergency shipment).

Seeking Common Ground

Remembering interactions with high performers, managers described their cross-functional counterparts as “positive,” “supportive,” and “encouraging.” Often, managers stated that “we worked as a team” or “there was a spirit of cooperation.” Instances of “finger pointing” and “blaming” characterized ineffective exchanges and such episodes were recalled with some frequency across functions.

Colleagues also report that effective cross-functional managers differ from their peers by demonstrating a willingness to focus on goals—a step above their functional home—at the project or business unit level. Such an approach, refreshing to colleagues, centers attention on objectives that unite, rather than divide, functions. Effective interactions are guided by shared goals and values: “We both agreed on our basic business philosophy—the need for a more market-based focus versus technology focus. Once we agreed, we knew we could take the incremental steps in joint planning to basically foster this approach.”

Course Coverage and Suggestions

Rather than operating in isolation from other functional areas, the successful business marketing manager is an integrator—one who understands the capabilities of R&D, manufacturing, logistics, and customer service and who capitalizes on their strengths in developing marketing strategies that are responsive to customer needs. Indeed, managing this web of working relationships constitutes an important component of the managerial work of a business marketing manager. As this research demonstrates, managers who excel at cross-functional relations have mastered the soft skills, such as interpersonal communication, persuasion, and influence—topics that receive rather limited exposure in the business school curriculum. Moreover, they are viewed as responsive

by colleagues across functions (Tsui 1994). Rather than implying a uniform pattern of compliance to the demands of colleagues, responsiveness represents a more proactive effort to diagnose the expectations of functional partners and to act in a way that minimizes the discrepancies that may exist between functions. When sensing such discrepancies, high performers can respond by (1) offering a timely and credible rationale for an action, (2) altering the expectations of a constituent, or (3) adapting their behavior or proposal to accommodate the preferences of a functional partner (Tsui et al. 1995).

Drawing on this perspective, the business marketing course can be enriched by applying a relationship management perspective to *both* internal constituents as well as external constituents (customers, channel partners) in line with Morgan and Hunt (1994). To this end, special attention should be invested in exploring the goals, priorities, and orientations of different functions and the role that reputation, trust, and commitment assume in cross-functional relationships. The perspective-taking skills of students can be enhanced by providing them with a more thorough examination of the thought world differences that are present across functions. For example, discussions of the buying center give prominent attention to how the choice criteria and response tendencies of purchasing managers differ from those of other decision participants, such as R&D managers. Parallel attention can be given later in the course to thought world differences that emerge when a strategy is being negotiated across functions (Hutt and Speh 2004).

Rather than relying exclusively on marketing executives, some business marketing classes use speakers from other functional areas—like R&D or supply chain management—to demonstrate the perspectives and priorities that other functional areas embrace. Alternatively, opportunities exist at many universities to develop joint projects that bring together marketing and engineering students to grapple with the complexities of market opportunity assessment, product design, and strategy. To illustrate, many engineering programs include a senior-level course where students compete in a local or national product design competition and the participation of marketing students is encouraged (Eppinger, Fine, and Ulrich 1990). Other suggestions for projects and exercises for the business marketing class are provided by Lichtenthal and Butaney (1991), who describe course goals and pedagogical tools such as cases, readings, and business information sources. The focus on individual managers now turns to the strategies and skills of high-performing sales specialists and account managers.

HIGH-PERFORMING SALES SPECIALISTS

Given the increased attention that is devoted to customer relationship management in theory and practice, account management and personal selling occupy a prominent position in the business marketing course. Clearly, the success of business marketing strategy hinges on sound and effective front-line execution by account managers. If you review the performance of salespersons at most business marketing firms, large or small, you will observe individuals who consistently perform at a level that sets them apart from peers. A recent study by Gonzalez et al. (2005) tackled this question: what are the characteristics that distinguish high-performing sales specialists from their counterparts? Specifically, the study explores the way in which exceptional performers acquire and use information to manage customer relationships.

Drawing on the social network literature (Krackhardt 1990), as well as on studies of expertise in organizations (Ericsson and Lehmann 1996), this research conceptualizes knowledge creation as a social process that is guided and shaped by the set of social relationships that managers have forged both within and across organizations. The study is based on the premise that, because of the size, diversity, and strength of their social relationships, high performers will possess more elaborate knowledge structures, in terms of their breadth and depth, than low performers (Sujan, Sujan, and Bettman 1988; Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan 1986). In turn, these knowledge structures allow them to adapt their sales strategies to create a diverse set of customer solutions. The data for the study were drawn from face-to-face interviews with 60 salespersons in a *Fortune 500* firm: 20 high-performing salespersons, 20 average-performing salespersons, and 20 low-performing salespersons. The performance classification was based on the revenue and profit performance of the account managers over a three-year period. Depth interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed to reveal information use and knowledge characteristics that distinguish high- versus low-performing salespersons.

The salespersons were asked to review their customer lists and categorize customers into groups based on the characteristics they found most useful in managing customer relationships. Compared to low performers, the results show that high performers possess more elaborate knowledge structures (i.e., a more refined level of knowledge concerning customer goals and characteristics). In classifying customers, high performers showed a greater tendency to emphasize customer goals while low performers emphasize customer demographics. Compared to

poor performers, high performers categorize their customers based on attributes that lead to better sales and profit performance. By aligning the organization's objectives and capabilities to the customer's characteristics and goals, high performers are better able to establish and maintain rewarding customer relationships. Interestingly, the results also reveal the value of internal and external communication networks to high-performance salespersons. Compared to their colleagues, the results demonstrate that high performers draw on a more extensive communication network within the firm *and* forge a more extensive network of relationship ties within the customer organization.

Course Coverage and Content

This research demonstrates the value of adopting a network perspective of buyer-seller relationships that includes three components: a selling center, a buying center, and ties across the organizational boundary (Fichman and Goodman 1996). While dominant attention is given to the formal sources of information that customer relationship management (CRM) systems provide to enhance sales performance, the study also highlights the value of informal sources of information that an account manager can secure from other members of the selling center. High performers were more inclined than their colleagues to seek information outside of their immediate work group. Likewise, organizations should consider the degree to which the market segmentation plan is aligned with the implicit segmentation strategies used by salespersons. In this study, high performers emphasized micro-level segmentation (e.g., customer goals) while low performers focused on macro dimensions (e.g., customer size).

Many instructors use sales executives as guest speakers in the business marketing course. Often, the learning outcome for students can be enriched by asking the salesperson to focus on the issues that surround one or two important accounts and highlight the key social ties that unite the buying and selling firm. Attention now turns to the skills and processes that surround the management of account teams.

HIGH-PERFORMING ACCOUNT MANAGERS

The execution of sales strategy for high-technology markets requires coordinated action from a diverse array of specialists who are assembled to create a superior customer solution. Steward (2004) examined

the internal working relationships that surround high-opportunity customer engagements in the business market and isolated the coordination strategies used by high- versus low-performing account managers in crafting customer solutions. The study tested the premise that high-performing account managers are more adept at diagnosing customer requirements and priorities, assembling the appropriate set of internal experts, and choreographing the actions of this ad hoc group in a manner that creates distinctive value for the customer organization. Multiple methods (depth interviews with 60 account managers and an associated interview with the supervisor of each account manager) were used to explore the relationships among coordination strategies and account manager performance at a *Fortune 100* high-technology firm.

Compared with average and low performers, high-performing account managers demonstrate a greater ability to coordinate the activities of internal experts who comprise ad hoc teams. The coordination of expertise is defined as the process of diagnosing the customer environment and subsequently identifying, assembling, and managing an ad hoc team of organizational members who possess the knowledge and skill to provide the appropriate products and services (Faraj and Sproull 2000). Overall, high performers engaged in nearly four times as many activities comprising the coordination of expertise than did low performers. They are particularly adept at diagnosing customer requirements and then securing the active participation of internal experts who not only match the technical requirements but are also compatible with the style and personality of key members of the buying center. Likewise, compared to their counterparts, high-performing account managers possessed a more diverse social network. The results suggest that as the diversity of an account manager's social network increases, the manager not only has a greater breadth of resources from which to select, but also has a more enhanced view of the combinations of individuals who may be best suited for the special needs of a customer engagement.

Course Coverage and Suggestions

Close and enduring customer relationships in the business market require frequent communication, joint problem solving, and a high level of coordination between and among both the buying and selling sides. By isolating the coordination strategies and distinctive relational ties that separate high-performing account managers from their colleagues, the research raises some interesting questions that can be explored in a class module on customer relationship management. To illustrate, what

steps can sales and marketing executives put in place to enrich the cross-unit connections and nurture the development of the soft skills that are crucial in managing internal working relationships? In rapidly changing technological environments, how can management information systems be improved to assist account managers in identifying experts across diverse technical domains and in deploying them for particular customer engagements? For those instructors who are interested in cases that expose the intricate coordination issues that surround account management, two strong candidates are “CMR Enterprises,” Harvard Case #9-501-012 (Narayandas and Caravella 2000) and “Wesco Distribution,” Harvard Case #9-598-021 (Narayandas 1997).

CONCLUSIONS

Like other specialty areas in the business school curriculum, marketing management and strategy classes emphasize an analytical perspective, providing students with a valuable set of tools and a concrete mental model of the variables that shape strategy and drive performance. However, other facets of the managerial work of marketing are given sparse attention. Mintzberg (1994) observes that in management education, “We have been so intent on breaking the job into pieces that we never come to grips with the whole thing”—the integrated job of managing.

Given its interfunctional nature, the business marketing course is ideally suited to provide students with a well-rounded view of the managerial work of marketing. Importantly, we believe that a gap in the marketing curriculum can be filled by expanding the treatment of the relationship marketing component to include the important cross-functional roles that marketing managers and sales executives perform by managing through people—namely leading, linking, and integrating strategies and customer solutions. As individual marketing managers interact with other functional specialists, they establish track records that form the foundation for trust and commitment in their working relationships (Gabarro 1987). Each episode is shaped by previous interactions and, in turn, establishes parameters for the working relationship. Here attention shifts from a functional to an individual level of analysis to bring to life the realities that marketing managers and account managers face in working across functions, securing required resources from top management, building support for a desired strategy course, or coordinating actions to correct a problem that has occurred with a major customer or alliance partner (Hutt

and Speh 1984). Because strategic plans emerge out of a bargaining process among functional specialists who operate under different time horizons, reward systems, and orientations, reputationally effective marketing managers demonstrate a distinctive set of relational skills (Anderson 1982; Hutt 1995).

Our review of recent research on the characteristics of high-performing marketing personnel provides a portrait of the relationship skills that are instrumental to job performance in the business marketing context. First, effective managers build a rich web of interpersonal connections that can be used to secure the support, understand the needs, and respond to the expectations of diverse constituents. Moreover, the managers demonstrate perspective-taking skills—the ability to recognize and respond to the different perspectives of various functional specialists (Davis 1983). Second, if you ask R&D or manufacturing executives to identify a particularly effective marketing manager and to describe the characteristics that set that manager apart, they will emphasize the collaborative skills of that individual. Effective managers are responsive, willing to take the lead, and they find ways to overcome obstacles—bureaucratic or political. Like reputationally effective marketing managers, top-performing account managers and sales specialists develop a rich network of relationships that provide them with ready access to the knowledge and expertise that is required to deliver a superior customer solution. In contrast to formal information sources, informal social ties are essential to transmitting tacit information that often cannot be captured in a formal knowledge management system (Cross and Parker 2004).

By exploring the cross-unit connections that are instrumental to the managerial work of marketing and by isolating the relational competencies that successful managers have mastered, the business marketing course can tie together core concepts across the business school curriculum and provide students with a more integrated and realistic view of the job of managing. In an increasingly interfunctional and interdependent world, companies and universities should be giving greater attention to identifying and developing the competencies that are required to manage interfunctional processes (Montgomery and Webster 1997).

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