Exploring the implications of market orientation for hospitality employees: A case study approach

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ABSTRACT

When considering the existing body of knowledge in relation to market orientation and brand management, the role of the employee in the process has been strongly advocated (e.g. Gummeson, 1991; Harris and de Chernatony, 2001; McDonald, de Chernatony and Harris, 2001). However, the exploration of these concepts within the context of hospitality is limited. To explore such issues, the collection of data followed a single case study methodology, analyzing several subunits within a hospitality operation via ten in-depth interviews with managers from each of the divisions within the organization. Data analysis resulted in the identification of several themes such as direction, involvement, employee selection, employee satisfaction, flexibility, management role, influencing role, relevance and comprehension of differences. The findings of this research have advanced our understanding with respect to market orientation and brand management theory within the hospitality sector. As such, the findings of this study offer a number of practical and theoretical implications and lay the foundation for future research.

INTRODUCTION

Market orientation, or customer orientation, has been promoted in the literature as providing an organizational framework in which superior competitive advantage is achieved through the provision of better value to consumers relative to competitors (Siguaw, Brown and Widing II, 1994; Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Narver and Slater, 1990). Furthermore, effective implementation of a market oriented business philosophy necessitates understanding of customers, competitors and organizational processes associated with providing superior value to consumers (Noble, Sinha and Kumar, 2002). Increasing competition within the hospitality sector combined with the significance of customer-employee interaction in the provision of a hospitality service, suggests that successful organizations within the hospitality industry would fare well if they were to adopt a market orientated business philosophy. Having said that, there appears to be a paucity of evidence in the literature in relation to market orientation specifically in the hospitality sector (Gray, Matear and Matheson, 2000).

When reviewing the market orientation literature (e.g. Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Narver and Slater, 1990; Gummeson, 1991), it is apparent that successful implementation of market orientation mandates the active involvement of all employees within the organization, not just management. This is attributed to employees representing a conduit between consumers and the organization. As such, employees have a powerful impact on how the consumer perceives the organization (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001) and, conversely, how the organization perceives its customers. For example, hospitality employees interacting with customers in boundary spanning roles, on a daily basis, accumulate important customer related information that can be used to improve the hospitality offering to its customers, thereby increasing the competitive advantage.

The emphasis afforded to the role of employees in the realization of a market oriented business philosophy suggests employees, therefore, need to be aware of what being customer focussed means in relation to their roles and responsibilities. This is particularly true in the hospitality industry where employee/customer interaction is high. In fact, the benefits to the employee of knowing how their roles fit within the customer-focussed philosophy is realized through reduced role conflict and ambiguity (Jones, Busch and Dacin, 2003) and their increased ability to meet the needs of their customers.

Given the prominence of market orientation and brand management in the marketing literature, advocating the role of the employee in the realization of these strategies, and the applicability of these strategies to the hospitality industry, the importance of these issues cannot be overstated. However, to date, these issues have attracted little research attention within the hospitality domain. This study is exploratory in nature and, as such, uses a qualitative research approach to examine the role of employees within a market-oriented hospitality operation. Specifically, this study considers the perspectives of operational managers in relation to the adoption and affect of market orientation initiatives on employees' roles and responsibilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For more than four decades, academics in marketing have emphasized the market concept (the philosophical foundation of market orientation) as being a cornerstone of marketing thought (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993). Market orientation puts the customer at the centre of overall activities of the organization and is regarded as a pivotal factor in securing and maintaining market leadership in today's competitive environment (Pulendran, Speed and Winding II, 2000).

A shared belief among academics and a growing body of empirical evidence supports the proposition that market orientation is positively associated with superior performance (Webb et al, 2000; Pulendran et al, 2000) as well as being synonymous with the term customer orientation (Shapiro, 1988; Deshpande, Farley and Webster, 1993). However, Gummeson (1991) argues that market orientation does not occur simply because management identifies it as their new strategy. Market orientation only becomes alive when all members of an organization are aware of how employees contribute to revenue through excellence in customer relations and actively promotes this through the performance of the employees. Market orientation has to reach the front line in every department, function and organizational tier (Gummeson, 1991; Harris and Ogbonna, 2000). Furthermore, Gummeson (1991) argues that if an organizational culture is focussed on the customer, then employees must be aware of what being customer focussed means, in relation to the roles and responsibilities of their jobs. Organizations can help employees reduce role conflict and ambiguity, thereby increasing job satisfaction and commitment to the organization, by enabling a market-oriented environment (Jones et al, 2003; Siguaw et al, 1994; Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). In other words, market orientation must be translated in a manner that hospitality employees can understand and accept ownership of their role within a customer-focussed operation.

As such, it is evident that market orientation is not simply a marketing function (Webb et al, 2000). Market orientation plays a pivotal role in the achievement of superior business performance (Pulendran et al, 2000) and is, therefore, a whole of business philosophy that needs to permeate every function (Harris and Ogbonna, 2000; Varey, 1995) of the hospitality operation. When market orientation is embraced throughout the hospitality operation, the resulting culture is one that reflects the characteristics that accommodates and, thus, satisfies changing consumers' desires and expectations.

However, satisfying consumer desires and expectations, based on traditional functional benefits of a hotel, may no longer be sustainable. This is attributed to the rapid speed to market that technology advances have provided (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001). Hospitality operations in the past have successfully 'owned' product categories based purely on functional benefits. For example, Ritz Carlton in the 1980's (Lewis, Chambers and Chacko, 1995) was considered to be the only luxury hotel company that consistently met high standards i.e. functional benefits. However, according to Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000), positioning based on pure functional benefits can be limiting in today's competitive environment, thus making it hard for organizations to evolve. This is because technological advances have made it increasingly easier to replicate functional benefits, thereby weakening the organization's position in the market (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1997, Vincent, 2000).

In relation to the Ritz Carlton example, the ease with which other luxury hotels could replicate the standards set by Ritz Carlton was motivation enough for the company to maintain their high standards but, also, establish a mechanism for differentiating itself from other competitors in the luxury hotel market. How they did this was to consider the total guest experience, as it was believed that this was what the guest ultimately paid for. This is evidenced by the comments of James DiChiara (Vice President, Sales, Ritz Carlton Hotel Company) who said "people talk about the beauty of our hotels. But you know, I'll bet when they get back home they don't talk about the carpets and the chandeliers. I'll bet they talk about their experience" (Lewis et al, 1995, p26)

This example of how Ritz Carlton evolved their positioning from pure functional to a combination of functional and symbolic/emotive attributes is consistent with the

recognition that positioning a product, based only on a functional benefit, can be limiting (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000). Organizations need to focus, not only on enhancing the functional aspects of their product, but also creating an emotional bond between the product and consumer that reflects the consumer's desires and expectations (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001). In the context of hospitality, such emphasis ensures that the organization is less vulnerable to functional related changes and is able to create more meaningful relationships with the consumers (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000).

While functional characteristics are product related, the emotional characteristics of an organization are created and reside in an organization's brand (Simoes and Dibb, 2001). It is the brand, therefore, that provides the emotional bond between the consumer and the organization (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1997). According to Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000), the brand must resonate and connect with consumers and, in turn, the brand be sought after by consumers (Bachman, 2001). In the context of hospitality, brands are particularly important because they enable consumers to differentiate one operation from another and to understand what the organization can and will do over time (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000).

With the increasing emphasis on ensuring consistency between the projected brand image and consumer's own perceptions of the brand (Bachman, 2001), the role of employees, as representing a source of customer information (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001), needs to be considered. This is particularly so, in the context of hospitality, because employees constitute the interface between a brand's internal and external environment and, as such, have a powerful impact on how consumers perceive the operation. It is, therefore, essential that employees' behaviour is consistent and,

thus, reinforces a brand's advertised benefits. If inconsistent, the credibility of the brand will be undermined (Samli and Frohlich, 1992).

Therefore, brand building needs to be undertaken from the bottom up and involves intricate analyses of every aspect of interaction between the consumer and the organization (McDonald et al, 2001). Further more, Samli and Frohlich (1992) argue that despite a well conceived positioning of a brand and development of a good communication plan, a brand can still die if insufficient attention is given to the role employees play in producing and delivering the product or service. While it is the responsibility of the marketing department to market the brand through external marketing communication channels, the success of the brand is largely contingent on the ability of employees to deliver what has been communicated (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1997, Simoes and Dibb, 2001).

A review of the literature highlights the significant impact that the adoption of a market oriented business philosophy can have on any business, in particular that of hospitality operations. Further to this, the importance of harnessing the power of successful brand management strategies to successfully position a property in a very competitive market is highlighted. In both the adoption of market orientation and brand management practices, the role of the employee is advocated. However, in order to ensure the effective adoption and implementation of these practices, hospitality operations must consider practical implications.

This study, therefore, seeks to further understand the implications for employees in the realization of a market oriented business philosophy, specifically from the perspective of hospitality operational managers. The desire to uncover manager's perspectives is

grounded in the fact that management support is considered to be the single most important component in guiding employee behaviour (George, 1990; Harris and de Chernatony, 2001; Pulendran et al 2000) and, therefore, warrants further investigation.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The notion of the customer being at the centre of overall activities of an organization so as to deliver superior organizational performance has given rise to the term market orientation. While the adoption of a market orientation has implications across the organization, the role of employees in market orientation, in particular, has been reviewed in the literature (Gummeson, 1991; George, 1990, McDonald et al, 2001; Mohr and Bitner, 1995) as they represent the translator of customer information into meaningful business decisions.

Further to this, it is suggested that brand management represents a key element of market orientation. As such, employees' ability to deliver on the communicated brand promise consistently is suggested to be dependent on the employee's awareness of the brand (McDonald et al, 2001; Harris and de Chernatony, 2001; Schneider and Bowen, 1985; Balmer and Wilkinson, 1991). The significance of the application of market orientation and brand management practices in the hospitality is evident in the literature review, as hospitality operations continually seek to deliver a customer experience that is superior to its competitors. Therefore, in order to understand the implications of the adoption of market orientation and brand management strategies for hospitality operations, the following research questions are posed.

RQ1: To what extent do managers believe that a market orientation business philosophy requires employee awareness of the business philosophy?

RQ2: To what extent do managers believe that a market orientation has an impact on employees' roles and responsibilities?

RQ3: To what extent do managers believe that employees should have knowledge of the organization's brand (i.e. objectives, actions and communication campaigns)?

RQ4: To what extent do managers believe that employee knowledge of the brand will lead to appropriate employee behaviour in delivering the brand promise?

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research methodology chosen to address the research questions of this study was qualitative in nature. As such, a single case study technique was utilized and data was collected via in-depth interviews. Selection of the case, a description of the interview participants and the interview protocol are further discussed.

Case

The selection of managers for this study needed to be drawn from an organization that actively promoted itself as being market oriented, employing brand management techniques to ensure superior organizational performance. In other words, the research needed to be site specific i.e. a single case design, as it had to focus on a setting where market orientation and brand management strategies take place (Marshall and Rossman, 1997). Further to this, as the research questions posed referred to managers' perspectives, Marshall and Rossman (1997) argue that as human actions, in this case perceptions, are influenced significantly by their setting in which they occur, the study of interest should be conducted in the managers' natural setting. As such, it was important

that the participants in this study were selected from the same organization or site so as to ensure consistency among the organizational setting. The hospitality operation selected for this study was located in Australia, with over 2000 employees and operations that ran 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. The hospitality operation was deemed to be relevant as it actively promoted itself to be market oriented, adopting brand management practices as indicated in their 2003 business plan.

Participants

Having identified the site, it was necessary to specify the population from which the subunits of the case were selected (Zikmund, 1997). The purpose of this study was to explore the perspective of managers who guide or influence employee behaviour. In reviewing the organizational structure of the hospitality organization, it was the middle management and supervisory level that has maximum interaction with employees, thus directing their behaviour. As such, a sample of middle management and supervisors representative of the six sub-cultures or divisions within the hospitality operation, were selected for interviews. These divisions represented were Finance; Hotel; Gaming; Human Resources; Food and Beverage; and Other (Purchasing, IT, Marketing, Surveillance, Public Relations).

Ten interviews were conducted which included six males and four females, ranging in age from 27 years to 55 years. The average years of service was 7.6 years with the minimum being 1 year and the maximum years of service being 18 years. For a profile of the participants refer to Table 1.

--- Insert Table 1 here ---

Interview Protocol

The selection of in-depth interviews was deemed to be the most effective method of data collection to address the research questions due to the ability to get large amounts of data quickly, the ability to follow up and seek clarification and the need to rely only on a single primary method for gathering data (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). In addition, researchers in this area of study have extensively used in-depth interviews (e.g. de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1997; de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998; Asif and Sargeant, 2000; Grace and O'Cass, 2002). As the objective of this study is to uncover and describe the participants' perspectives, employment of in-depth interviews as the sole way of gathering data is deemed as an appropriate and sufficient methodology (Marshall and Rossman, 1999).

So as to ensure this study answered the research questions, as well as to ensure consistency amongst the interviews, a measurement instrument, in the form of a semi structured interview protocol, was developed. Based on the review of the literature, four umbrella and twenty probing questions were developed to aid in the collection of data. The interviews, ranging in duration from 45 minutes to one and a half hours, were audio taped and transcribed for ease of comprehensive and systematic analysis. This included a process of "reduction" and "interpretation" (Marshall and Rossman, 1989).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Upon the completion of the analysis of data collected, it was apparent that all participants promoted the concept of employee awareness of the business philosophy, market orientation, as well as the subsequent strategy of brand management. In support of the concept of market orientation, several employee implications or themes were uncovered, namely, Direction, Involvement, Employee selection, Relevance, Employee

Satisfaction, Flexibility, Management Role, Comprehension of Differences and Influencing Role. As such, these themes are further discussed and a summary of results is presented in Table 2.

--- Insert Table 2 here ---

Direction

When interviewing the ten hospitality operation managers, direction was the first theme that participants identified. For the purpose of this analysis, direction can be defined as employees having a collective (i.e. the same) understanding of the organization's business philosophy, so as to deliver consistent results across the organization, as defined by the business philosophy of market orientation. Consistently across all ten interviews, participants advocated the importance of employee awareness of the market oriented business philosophy as it provided employees with direction necessary to generate desired business outcomes. For example, one interviewee stated: "I think it makes it easier for them, knowing where the company is coming from, where it is etc, that we are all heading in the same direction."

As brand management is a key element of market orientation, it was not surprising that awareness of the hospitality operation's brand also provided employees with the necessary direction to carry out their roles and responsibilities. In fact, "It helps them do their job. The brand is telling them what the property is and what it means to the guest" (Interviewee comment). Evidence of how knowledge of the brand influences employees' roles and responsibilities and, therefore, reinforces the need for employees to have knowledge of the organization's brand, is reinforced by this comment, "If they don't know what it (i.e. the brand) is they cannot deliver the brand promise. Team members must know what the brand is otherwise they are working in the dark." In this customer

focussed organization, the role of the brand in providing direction to employees was considered very important based on the fact that the brand represents what the customers think the organization stands for.

The concept of direction is advocated by Cardy (2001) who argues that the business philosophy provides a rational and strategic means for managing the internal work environment, thereby ensuring all employees are heading basically in the same, or consistent, direction. In addition, the direction provided by the adoption of a market oriented business philosophy reduces role conflict and ambiguity (Jones et al 2003, Siguaw et al 1994; Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). In terms of brand management, the literature also identifies that knowledge of the brand provides employees with direction. In fact, knowledge of the brand, according to Harris and de Chernatony (2001), inspires employees and helps them understand how their roles relate to it. In other words, provides employees with direction in how to deliver the brand promise. The findings here strongly support this argument with managers (interviewees) promoting market orientation and awareness of the brand as providing the direction that employees need to successfully execute their roles and responsibilities.

Involvement

The next theme that emerged was that of involvement which is defined as the employees' interaction with, or being part of, the consequences or products of market orientation. For example, one consequence of market orientation at this hospitality operation is the customer promotions offered. In terms of employee involvement, results of the interviews revealed that participants thought is was essential to involve employees in the process because "you see the team members involved in the process right through to the end and they feel part of it...like anything you touch and feel, you believe

in it yourself" (Interviewee observation). In fact, another interviewee commented, "we get everyone involved because they are looking at their customer, what their customer would like and what their customer would want".

According to the participants, involvement, which in simple terms can be just being informed, in the organization's philosophy, increases comprehension and, therefore, acceptance of why changes are made in the business. This is evidenced in a statement made by one of the interviewees, who explained when employees are aware of the business being market oriented they feel part of something bigger and, therefore, more significant. "I think it is important for them to know that (i.e. what the business stands for) because they feel part of the big team and they are always hungry for why we (the organization) are doing things".

Employees increased involvement in the achievement of organizational objectives was perceived to not only engender increased acceptance and therefore "buy-in" but also active participation in the process. The significance of employee involvement can be attributed to the expectation that employees are able to act appropriately on their knowledge of customers (Martin et al, 1998). The findings here, in the context of hospitality, support the views reflected in the literature that the involvement of employees (at all levels of the organization) in market orientated initiatives is essential and should permeate every aspect of the organizations function (Narver and Slater, 1990; Harris and Ogbonna, 2000; Martin, Martin and Grbac, 1998; Varey, 1995).

Employee Selection

Further to involvement, participants suggested that employee awareness of the market oriented business philosophy has a direct relationship with employee selection.

Employee selection can be defined as the recruitment and/or subsequent development of employee traits that will enable the effective delivery of identified market oriented initiatives, for example delivering the brand promise. The participants believed that employees needed to be aware of the philosophy/brand in order to be successful candidates and secure long term employment. Employee selection, and how it relates to employees needing to be aware of the market oriented business philosophy, is evidenced in the following statement, "It (market orientation) affects them right from the start because in their position descriptions you have those qualities/competencies that you want to employ". Their comments reflect how awareness of the business being market orientated can improve employees' chances of being successful, as they know what the organization is looking for.

Market orientation in a service-based industry (such as hospitality) involves direct interaction between the employee and the customer and it was, therefore, felt that employees were required to possess customer-orientated skills, sometimes even at the expense of the prerequisite job skill. For example an interviewee comment was, "you can train them to do different roles but you would expect they have the qualities required to work in a market oriented organization......We can teach the skill – it is much more fundamentally important to get somebody with the right cognitive thinking".

This emphasis on recruiting customer focussed skills before technical skills, reflects a shift in the traditional focus of recruitment for hospitality operations, where technical skills have been previously promoted to be the key indicator for successful selection. However, in this hospitality operation, three of the six interviews reflected that the selection of customer-focussed employees was paramount to being successful in a market-oriented organization. They promoted that, in doing so, the organizational and

individual employee work goals are consistent. This supports the notion that, as employees are direct participants in the implementation of customer focussed strategies (Brown et al, 2002) and, therefore, crucial to success, it is imperative that their behaviours support the market orientation of the business.

Relevance

In contrast to the themes that have emerged in support of employee awareness of the market oriented business philosophy and the organization's brand, some participants couched their acknowledgement of the need for employee awareness in terms of it needing to be relevant to the audience. Relevance can be defined as information needing to have some bearing or significance to the employee so as to be meaningful and, therefore, comprehendible. The need for relevant information to be provided is evidenced in the following statement, "They need it (market orientation) interpreted into how it affects them in order for them to grasp it and use it" (Interviewee comment).

In fact, three interviewees clearly identified the need for employees to understand, not only what the organization stands for, but also what is in it for them personally. They believed that once the employees know that there is something in it for them, even if it is just job satisfaction or recognition, then they are happy to deliver what the organization wants them to. Without relevance the concept of brand and the need for employee awareness, could possibly be rejected, deemed irrelevant. This thinking is evidenced in the statement provided by one interviewee, who perceives some managers may feel employees don't need to know about the brand to carry out their roles and responsibilities and, therefore, perceive it to be irrelevant. "I would say it is important (for employees to have knowledge of the brand) but there could be an argument that says not all people need to know what it is... how we get to those people is really a challenge"

He goes on to further illustrate what that challenge entails, "We have facility cleaners and I have to try and find a way (to make it relevant) – my biggest challenge when we do training 'how do we impact the brand when all we do is scrub dishes' – I have to try and find a way."

As brand management is not a term that the interviewees, nor their employees, used everyday, the need for relevance, which in turn increases comprehension, was considered essential if maximum effect was to be achieved. While it is commonly accepted that management face an array of barriers when developing market orientation (Harris, 2002), relevance has not previously been identified within the literature. The findings here may indicate that relevance is a case specific barrier, (relevance is described as a barrier for without it, market orientation is perceived to be rejected by employees). Harris (2002) argues that given the diversity of barriers, it is not surprising to find evidence that the development of market orientation is far from universal. He goes further to say that different management teams, in response to the diversity of potential barriers, will develop individual forms of market orientation. In other words, the identification of relevance in this research study maybe attributed to the individual development of market orientation as it pertains to this organization and the environment in which it operates and, therefore, may possibly not be generalized across all market oriented organizations.

Employee Satisfaction

Employee Satisfaction was another theme that was perceived by nine of the participants to be a resulting factor of market orientation's impact on employees' roles and responsibilities. Employee satisfaction is concerned with employees' contentment with their role and the positive attitude that emerges from that satisfaction. For example,

evidence of one interviewee's belief that market orientation has an impact on employees' roles and responsibilities in the form of employee satisfaction is provided in their following statement. "I believe if they do (i.e. have awareness of market orientation and how it relates to their roles and responsibilities), they have better job satisfaction because customers react better to them. They also place greater value on their own activities – their own work"

In addition, other comments closely link the notion of direction (as previously discussed) to that of employee satisfaction. For example, "So long as they are given direction, know their scope, know what they have to do, they are happy." This being the case, it would appear that employee satisfaction may well be a by-product of the direction that is provided through well-implemented market orientation business philosophy.

In summary, it was evident that managers perceive market orientation to provide employees with a sense of purpose in relation to their roles and responsibilities, which in turn engenders a sense of pride or employee satisfaction. By providing employees with clear guidance and direction, the potential for role conflict and confusion dissipates, resulting in increased job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Jones et al 2003; Siguaw et al, 1994). In this sense, it is not surprising that the theme of employee satisfaction has been identified in this study, due to the well-established link within the literature between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction (Heskett et al., 1994).

Flexibility

In contrast to the previously mentioned themes, flexibility was a theme that was alluded to in a lesser extent. Flexibility, as a theme is concerned with how employees carry out their roles and responsibilities in direct response to customer interaction. In some areas of the organization, market orientation appears to have created an atmosphere that enables employees the opportunity to adapt and, therefore, impact their roles and responsibilities in order to serve the customer. This is evidenced by the following interviewee statement, "because we are so customer focussed – the systems that we have in place do allow us to do a lot...the environment we work in gives us quite a bit of scope which is given to the customer service reps, which helps them when dealing with customers"

While only five of the ten participants promoted flexibility, it was deemed meaningful, as it was evidence of how the adoption of a market orientated business philosophy has directly impacted employees' roles and responsibilities. For example, "Employees have learned to become more flexible.... how can we make the customer's stay more enjoyable – the adaptability – the flexibility....It has taken them (employees) a bit of time to accept that they have to be reactive to customers" (Interviewee comment).

The theme of flexibility was perceived to be an outcome of being market oriented as the ability to deliver what the customer wants sometimes necessitated a flexible, as opposed to procedural, approach to customer service. While the majority of participants did not promote the theme of flexibility, it was deemed relevant to include in the analysis as it illustrated how a shift in organizational thinking from one paradigm towards market orientation, can directly impact employees' roles and responsibilities. Further more the market orientation literature advocates the need for responsiveness to information pertaining to customers (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). By making employees aware, de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley (1999) believe employees should be able to retain the

flexibility to deal with different people and different situations, while still conforming to the organization's objectives.

Management Role

With all participants promoting their belief that employees should have knowledge of the brand, seven of the ten interviews, uncovered the theme of Management Role as being a potentially moderating variable to employees having knowledge of the organization's brand. Management role refers to the responsibility of managers in the transfer and application of brand knowledge. The evidence of this thinking is apparent in statements such as, "I think we (managers) have become the distributors" and "If you want to deliver to your team, if you want your team to be heading in the one direction, yes you (as a manager) need the brand to provide the direction and leadership" (Interviewee comments).

Participants' view that the management role was a key theme in relation to employees having knowledge of the brand provides evidence to support the notion of leading by example. One interviewee went further to suggest that, in fact, managers specifically having knowledge of the brand is imperative, because of their influencing role within the organization, as is evidenced when they stated "It (brand) is more essential to the people who are driving the brand – the managers need to know what it is and what it means".

Without an active management role supporting and promoting brand initiatives, the likelihood of employees being aware of the brand was perceived to diminish.

The generic literature about all employees i.e. not just marketing employees, needing to have knowledge of the brand is fairly consistent (Gummeson, 1991; de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1997; Simoes and Dibb, 2001). This is attributed to the fact that

employees, representing a source of customer information, have become central to the brand building process (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001). The findings of this research however go further in identifying the specific role of managers in making employees aware of the brand.

Comprehension of Differences

While employees having knowledge of the brand was deemed necessary, four of the ten participants again provided a caveat in the theme Comprehension of Differences.

Comprehension of differences incorporates understanding the different skill sets of the 2300 individuals that work in the hospitality operation. For knowledge to be transferred successfully it is must be presented in a manner that the recipient understands. For example, "Literacy is a challenge for my department – here is some reading material – if they can't understand a written word, how are they going to understand the concept of brand" (Interviewee comment).

Comprehension of differences recognizes also that individuals within the organization have different roles and, therefore, their relationship and subsequent knowledge of the brand is different. Ensuring employees have the necessary knowledge of the brand needs to reflect this thinking as evidenced by the following statement made by one interviewee, "I think you also need to take it down a level and work with each department and say what is specific that you do to support the brand"

In an environment that employs so many people with varying skill sets, the need to acknowledge employee differences when communicating with them, was considered essential if the brand information was to be transferred in an effective manner. As was the case with relevance, the need for organizations to consider the differences of

employees, whether that is in roles or responsibilities or intellectual capability, was not apparent in the literature. However, it may be that revelation of these themes here is the result of data being collected in an applied setting from operational managers as opposed to brand managers or experts who have been used in past research (e.g. de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1997, 1998, 1999).

Influencing Role

Having established that participants perceived employee knowledge of the brand to be important, the theme of influencing role was highlighted. This is attributed to the perception of the managers that employees' knowledge of the brand would influence their behaviour. The definition of influencing role encapsulates the ability to affect or shape employees actions. Evidence of this thinking is provided in the following interviewee statement. "I still think that your framework of your choices and activities should be based on foundations of policy and procedure – your actions and responses based on what opportunities are available to you. In terms of selection of those activities, yes it maybe depending on your brand."

The theme of Influencing role suggests that while knowledge of the brand is not the defining resource to enable employees to carry out their roles and responsibilities, the brand does have a role to play. For example, this is illustrated in the comments of one interviewee, "I think they have the basis already but sometimes it gets a little lost so I believe in reinforcing the brand and keeping it close to them encourages them to handle situations in the correct way."

When considering the impact of the brand on employees' roles and responsibilities, six of the ten interviewees did promote the brand as supplementing the tasks specified in

the systems and procedures. By doing so, employees having knowledge of the brand enabled them to deliver better customer service. Having knowledge of the brand guides employee behaviour (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001) and helps ensure consistency in service delivery (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1999), motivating employees to act in a service-oriented manner (George, 1990; Rafiq and Ahmed, 2000). By guiding and helping employees to carry out their roles and responsibilities, knowledge of the brand plays an influencing role.

CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

The findings identify several themes that have been reflected in the extant literature in relation to market orientation and brand management implications for employees. This includes the provision of direction for employees to be successful, as well as involvement of employees in organizational initiatives. Further to this, the employee selection process is enhanced and with the flexibility afforded to employees when carrying out their roles and responsibilities, employee satisfaction is engendered. Finally, consistent with the findings of this study, the extant literature highlights the important role of managers in the whole process. In contrast to the existing body of knowledge, however, were two themes, namely relevance and comprehension of differences, which were uncovered in this study. These new findings in particular, as well as themes mentioned previously, have implications for both hospitality management and marketing theory.

Hospitality Management

The results of this study revealed management's acknowledgement that employees have a significant role to play in a hospitality operation that adopts a market oriented

business philosophy and the subsequent brand management strategies that follow. The themes identified in both the extant literature and this study, for example direction, are premised by the need for employees to be made aware of the market oriented philosophy and their subsequent role in it. Further to this, employees being aware of the hospitality operation's brand and how to deliver the brand promise are also believed to create direction and influence employee behaviour. In doing so employee role ambiguity and conflict was decreased.

As such, the results from this research suggest that for hospitality management to successfully implement market-oriented initiatives, they need to

- Consider the methods by which they can ensure the successful transfer of knowledge to employees that pertains to the market oriented business philosophy and what the organization's brand stands for
- Maintain relevance to the audience in their communication and be mindful of the differences amongst the employees to ensure everyone has an opportunity to be involved.
- Continually engage with the employees in a manner consistent with the marketoriented nature of the organization and reflecting the brand values.
- Give priority to the ongoing, "whole of business", realization, and subsequent
 action, of what market orientation and the brand means to every employee in the
 hospitality operation
- Ensure actions are consistent with words. In doing so comments like 'we say one thing but do another' are less likely to be evident
- Be accountable for the continuous promotion, to employees, of the hospitality operation's business philosophy as well as for actively supporting the initiatives,

in this case the brand, that the organization has identified as being the key to their competitive advantage

As the results from this research can only be generalized to theory in light of the characteristics inherent in the adoption of case study methodology, further research in this area is suggested. In particular, to further enhance the understanding of manager's perspectives of the implications for hospitality employees in the realization of market oriented strategies; other hospitality operations need to be considered. In doing so, this will increase our understanding of what themes are organizationally specific and what themes are inherent in all hospitality operations that try to make market oriented and brand principles operational. Further research in this area has the potential to develop empirically tested themes that all market oriented organizations need to consider when making their strategies operational.

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Table 1. Profile of Interviewees

Interview	Division	Sex	Age	Duration of employment	
1	Human	Male	38	2	
	Resources				
2	Finance	Male	28	6	
3	Gaming	Female	27	10	
4	Food &	Male	32	4	
	Beverage				
5	Other	Male	50	15	
6	Hotel	Female	55	18	
7	Other	Female	28	3	
8	Hotel	Female	38	10	
9	Gaming	Male	33	7	
10	Food &	Male	40	1	
	Beverage				

Table 2. Data Matrix of Results

Interviewee	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
Research Question 1: To what extent do managers believe that a market orientation business philosophy												
requires employee awareness of the business philosophy?												
Direction	Х	Х	Χ	Χ	Х	Х	Χ	Х	Х	Х		
Involvement				Χ	Х	Х	Χ		Х	Х		
Employee Selection	Х		Х		Х							
Relevance		Х		X	X							
Research Question 2: To what extent do managers believe that a market orientation has an impact on												
employee's roles and responsibilities?												
Direction	Χ	Х	Χ	Χ	Х	Χ	Χ	Х	Х	Х		
Employee Satisfaction	Х	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	Х		
Flexibility		Х	Χ				Χ	Х		Х		
Research Question 3: To what extent do managers believe that employees should have knowledge of the												
organization's	brand (i	.e. obje	ctives, act	ions and c	communica	ation camp	aigns)?					
Relevance	X	X	Χ	Χ	Х		Χ	X	X	Х		
Direction		Х	Χ	Χ		Χ	Χ	Х	Х	Χ		
Management Role	Х	X		X		X	X	X		Х		
Comprehension of Differences	Х	X			X					Х		
	Research Question 4: To what extent do managers believe that employee knowledge of the brand will											
lead to appropriate employee behaviour in delivering the brand promise?												
Influencing Role		Х	Χ			Χ	Χ	X	Х			
Direction	Х		Χ	Χ			Χ	Х	Χ	Χ		