



July 2011

Volume 1
Number 3



Published quarterly by
EBONYI STATE UNIVERSITY
sponsored by TETFund

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MANAGING MARKETING-PHYSICAL DISTRIBUTION INTERFACE ACTIVITIES IN NIGERIAN COMPANIES: COOPERATION OR CONFLICT?

By

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Abstract

The goal of this paper was to examine the problem areas that need to be addressed in coordinating and managing the internal interfaces within companies and to identify principles of best practice to deal with these problem areas. Specifically, forty interface activities were selected for inclusion in the survey. Respondents were asked to rate each of the activities on a scale of 1 to 5 in relation to the degree to which they perceived cooperation to be necessary. The survey identified areas of cooperation as well as conflict. Results from a study among 41 managers and 85 Marketing and Distribution employees within 11 firms in Lagos state, Nigeria, showed that a sense of cooperation rather than conflicts exists between Marketing and Physical distribution managers for the great majority of interface activities. It was concluded that when conflict or significant disagreement as to the level of cooperation was found, it related primarily to nodal activities and to inventory control and warehousing. These represent areas in which opportunities for improving cooperation appear to be greatest. To this end, it was recommended that some of the things which can be done in order to promote greater cooperation are education, job interchange, incentives, top management emphasis, and varying degrees of organizational change. These findings provide guidance to organizations in their efforts to encourage constructive negotiation behavior between departments,

1. INTRODUCTION

Companies begin their marketing effort by focusing on customers, finding out who they are and what they want, and developing a marketing plan to reach and satisfy their needs. An integrated systems approach is normally employed to execute the marketing plans properly. This marketing system has been defined as "an interacting set of institutions, activities and plans designed to facilitate exchange transactions between an organization (business or non-business) and its market." (Egan, 2008). The heart of the system is the marketing mix, which consists of product, price, place, and promotion, or the so-called "4

P's." Successful marketing requires the delicate blending of the various components of the mix (Adeleye, 2003).

Place, generally thought to include channels of distribution and physical distribution management, is a vital part of the mix. In many firms, however, the place aspects associated with physical distribution are performed apart from the marketing department. One reason for this is the fragmentation of physical distribution activities that frequently exists throughout the organization. Similarly, in an increasing number of firms the physical distribution function is organized as a separate department to manage both the inbound and outbound flows of materials and goods. In either case, the separation of activities between physical distribution can contribute to marketing's success and vice versa, and that both are important contributors to the overall success of the firm.

Although it is widely acknowledged that the division of goals and tasks over different departments causes coordination problems, little research has been conducted on employees' perceptions of these goal differences. This is a serious limitation, because research on intergroup relations has shown that perceptions of intergroup differences, especially when they are biased, are one of the main sources of interdepartmental problems and conflicts. The objectives of this paper is to examine the problem areas that need to be addressed in coordinating and managing the internal interfaces within companies and to identify principles of best practice to deal with these problem areas. The following research problem is addressed: are there differences between departments within organizations with regard to perceptions of their own goals and those of other departments? What are determinants of these perceived goal differences? And finally, what are the consequences of perceived goal differences in terms of interdepartmental conflict? The paper is organized as follows: We begin by a brief introduction. Subsequently, we provide the literature review. The next section presents the research methods used in the study. Then the empirical analysis of the interface activities chosen was tested by the use of statistical t-

tests. The survey result was given. Finally, implications, summary and conclusion were presented,

2. THE NEED FOR COOPERATION

Organizations are purposeful in nature, pursuing goals such as profit maximization, survival, and benefit to society (Miller and Arnold, 1998). As organizations grow larger, the overall organizational goals have to be split up into several different sub goals and divided over organization divisions, units, departments and people. As soon as goals are distributed over different departments within the organization, the problem of coordination arises. Organizations face the difficult problem of how to coordinate the goals and activities of all their members in such a way that overall company goals, such as making a profit and guaranteeing survival, are met. This is a serious problem because the goals of different departments not only to be different, but can also be incompatible (John, 1991).

Business in the 21st century is operating in a precarious environment of unemployment, lagging sales for most industries, and rising physical distribution costs which Nigeria is inclusion (Afolabi, 2006). Reaganomics is new, and many are taking a wait-and-see approach. Less regulation permeates the environment, yet customer service requirements are high and consumer interests are still paramount. In short, it is a time when the skills of business people are tested. It is a time when marketing and physical distribution must work together in a cooperative environment if a firm is to compete successfully. The need for cooperation in managing interface activities has been stressed by Ellinger and Keller (2006) among others:

The interface is created by the arbitrary division of the firm activities. This results in certain of these activities not being entirely the responsibility of any one organizational entity.

Managing the interface activities by one function alone can lead to suboptimum performance for the firm by subordinating broader company goals to the goals of the individual function.

This potential danger is a result of the departmentalized form of organization structure so common in companies today. To manage interface activities effectively, some form of cooperation among the functions involved needs to be established.

More evidence of the need for greater cooperation between departments can be found in the findings of a recent report of the business education forum in 2009 as quoted by Lank (2009). The report states that many firms face

the prospect of financial ruin if their marketing and physical distribution departments do not link up to achieve common goals. The report states;

Marketing people are discovering that physical distribution cannot be viewed simply as a backup support for marketing forecasts and goals. The spiraling cost of inventory and transportation alone can wreak havoc on projected sales and profits overnight. On the other side of the coin:

Likewise, physical distribution is learning it should anticipate future needs rather than be called upon constantly to put out fires.

The evidence is quite clear that strategic corporate planning will be necessary for firms to be successful in the 21st century. Strategic planning is concerned with a firm's long-range future and its overall strategy of growth (Oghojafor, 1998). As such, it is the type of planning for which top-level managers are primarily responsible. The literature indicates that marketing and physical distribution are being called upon more and more to provide input into corporate strategic planning (Rahim, 2002). Such input should come from a unified source in order to avoid the formulation of conflicting and otherwise suboptimal strategies (Lin and Germain, 1998). This will necessitate greater cooperation on the part of both marketing and physical distribution managers.

3. NATURE OF THE STUDY

While indications are clear that marketing and physical distribution managers must cooperate, evidence indicates that there is less cooperation than one would expect (Nauta, 2000). Often the marketing department looks upon the physical distribution department as cost minimizers with no grasp of customers' needs. On the other hand, physical distribution managers often see marketing as being the kingpin, always asking for service at any cost. Indications are that both sides in the past may have been guilty of neglecting the physical distribution service aspects of marketing (Kotler, 2003).

While much has been written regarding the need for better relations between the two sides, relatively little has been done in the way of empirical research in this area. One study, conducted by Rahim (2000), looked at conflict which may exist between marketing and physical distribution. The main source of the conflict appears to be ambiguity with respect to who should have organizational jurisdiction and the extent to which there should be interdependence. Rahim found that interface areas with the most disagreement over organizational responsibility were inventory, order processing, packaging, and

customer service. Another study of marketing and physical distribution executives, by Bichou and Gray (2004), concluded:

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the survey was that both marketing and physical distribution executives lamented that each believed the other did not fully recognize and appreciate their function. This was by far the most commonly noted problem for both groups of executives. In such an environment, it is not surprising that cooperation may be lacking.

Thus, while the need for cooperation and coordination is generally recognized, there are pressures working on both sides which appear to have an anti cooperative effect. This research was undertaken to examine the present status of marketing/physical distribution cooperation and to identify areas and options for improvement. This information should prove useful to top management as well as to physical distribution and marketing executives. Likewise the study was conducted to add to the rather sparse empirical research base previously mentioned with respect to the physical distribution/marketing interface.

4. RESEARCH METHODS

Sample

Eleven manufacturing organizations participated in the study. All organizations were medium-size autonomous or semi-autonomous manufacturing plants, with a minimum of 70 and a maximum of 1000 employees (M=286; SD=299). Only one of the eleven plants was an autonomous organization; ten plants were semi-autonomous parts of large (multinational) organization. All plants had manufacturing, physical distribution and internal marketing departments at the same physical location.

It was observed that 41 managers and 85 low-level physical distribution and marketing employees were interviewed. Of the 41 managers, there were 11 (27%) manufacturing managers, 12 (29%) physical distribution managers, 8 (20%) marketing managers, and 10 (24%) general managers. The number of managers interviewed in each organization ranged from 2 to 6. All managers were male. Their average age was 46. 95% of them had a University degree. They had worked at the plant for 11 years on average, and spent an average of 6 years in the current position. Of the low-level employees, 61% were male. Their average age was 36 years. 29% had a higher degree. They had worked in the current plant for 13 years on average, and an average of 6.5 years in the current position. 41 (48%) physical distribution employees and 44(52%) marketing employees were interviewed.

An important prerequisite of the study was to identify areas or activities where the potential for cooperation exists (i.e. physical distribution/marketing interface activities). On the basis of a literature search and discussions with practitioners, 40 such activities were selected. These activities are listed on the left side of Table 1. Although this listing is meant to be both representative and comprehensive, it by no mean should be regarded as all inclusive.

The 40 interface activities were grouped into the following three categories: (1) link activities, (2) node or nodal activities, and (3) link-node integrating activities. These categories are adapted from those presented in the Management of Business Logistics. Under this classification, the nodes represent spatial points in the distribution system where the movement of goods is stopped for storage or processing. Examples would be plants and warehouses. Nodal activities (i.e. those that typically occur while the goods are in processing or storage) would include inventory management, warehousing, materials handling, and packaging. Links represent those parts of the logistics system connecting the nodes (i.e., the transportation system and its ensuing activities). Finally, link-node integrating activities are those that have an impact on both nodes and links and determine the ultimate size, shape, and performance of the distribution system. Examples of these activities would be customer service, plant and warehouse location, and order processing. For purposes of this study, traditional marketing functions such as pricing, channel selection, and sales forecasting also have been included in the integrator category.

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they believed marketing and physical distribution should work together in performing each of the 40 activities. Preference was indicated by the use of a rating scale from 1 to 5, with 1 representing an extremely low need for cooperation and 5 representing an extremely high need for cooperation. Customary methods for controlling non-response bias were employed. The overall response rate from both groups was approximately 33 percent. Mean scores were calculated for each of the 40 activities (Table 1). Scores for marketing managers were compared with those for physical distribution managers, for each activity, by the use of statistical t-tests.

5. MARKETING/PHYSICAL DISTRIBUTION INTERFACE

TABLE 1

PERCEIVED LEVELS OF COOPERATION FOR PHYSICAL DISTRIBUTION/MARKETING INTERFACE ACTIVITIES

S/N	INTERFACE ACTIVITIES	GROUP INDICATING HIGHEST NEED FOR COOPERATION	MARKETING X SCORE	PD X SCORE	t-test results		
LINK ACTIVITIES							
1	Availability of transportation products or markets		M	3.44	3.40	NS	
2	Transportation consolidation for new products or markets		M	3.37	3.21	NS	
3	freight classification for products		M	2.80	2.47	*	
4	Availability of back-hauls in private transport operations		P	2.43	2.54	NS	
5	Freight rate negotiation		p	2.07	2.20	NS	
6	Determining the impact of private vs. For-hire transport		P	2.79	2.90	NS	
7	transportation support for advertising campaigns		M	3.85	3.74	NS	
8	use of transport vehicles as a form of adverting		P	3.25	3.46	NS	
9	Selection of transport mode for finished products		M	2.71	2.61	NS	
10	Consolidation possibilities for finished goods		M	2.66	2.65	NS	
11	Review of orders prior to shipment		M	3.14	2.90	NS	
12	Whether to expedite an order or not		M	3.84	3.39	*	
13	responsibility for loss and damage claims		M	2.80	2.48	*	
	Overall X for link category			3.10	2.92		
Node Activities							
14	the number of warehouses		M	4.02	3.76	NS	
15	Determining the type of warehouses needed, e.g private or public		M	2.93	2.49	*	
16	warehousing items that are being advertised		M	3.98	3.66	*	
17	determination of the cost of carrying inventory		M	3.76	3.33	*	
18	development of inventory levels		M	3.81	3.65	NS	
19	Determination of safety stock levels		M	3.80	3.50	*	
20	Development of inventory system, e.g KARDEX vs ON-LINE		M	3.009	2.89	NS	
21	Inventory control of advertised items		M	3.73	3.62	NS	
22	Determination of the cost of a stock-out		M	3.73	3.62	NS	
23	Determining who carries the inventory, e.g seller vs. channel		M	3.55	3.26	NS	
Members							
24	Matching products with materials handing systems		M	3.41	3.17	NS	
25	Selection of a materials handling system		M	2.69	2.26	*	
26	Pilferage considerations in package design		P	3.27	3.38	NS	
27	Freight classification considerations in package design		P	3.48	3.65	NS	

28	Loss and damage consideration in package design	M	3.47	3.43	NS
29	Inventory management consideration in package design	M	3.66	3.49	NS
Node-link integrating					
30	Determining customers service levels for finished goods	P	3.72	4.05	*
31	Determining locations of warehouses	M	3.98	3.76	NS
32	Sales importance of warehouse location	-	3.87	3.87	Ns
33	Use of sale persons as information links	M	3.64	3.57	NS
34	Pricing methods e.g, FOB, zone, basing point, etc	P	3.54	3.74	NS
35	Selection of the channel of distribution	P	3.31	3.66	*
36	Sales forecasting	P	3.58	3.78	NS
37	Determining methods of order processing	P	3.40	3.42	NS
38	Order processing methods of advertised items	M	3.42	3.36	NS
39	Determining methods of handling back orders	P	3.46	3.56	NS
40	Developing an overall order processing system	-	3.70	3.70	NS
	Overall x for integration category		3.60	3.68	

*indicates the arithmetic mean for a given interface activity.

NS - not statistically significant

*-statistically significant at the .05 level or lower

Using a two-tail t-test

M-marketing managers

P-PD managers

6. SURVEY RESULTS

For 11 of the 40 interface activities, there was a statistically significant difference between marketing and physical distribution managers over the level or degree of cooperation needed. This represented slightly more than 25 % of total interface activities in Table 1. A majority of 6 of these significant differences were found in the nodal category, with the link and node-link integrating categories having three and two significant differences, respectively. These statistically significant differences accounted for approximately 20 % of the activities in the link and integrating categories and for almost 40 % of the activities in the nodal category. In the following paragraphs, each of the categories will be analyzed separately.

Link Activities

Traffic management is frequently regarded as the backbone of physical distribution. Most surveys

have shown that this is the functional area included in most physical distribution departments (Amason, 1991). Likewise, the transportation activities typically account for the largest share of the physical distribution budget (Olakunori, 2006).

In general, marketing and physical distribution managers seem to agree on the level of cooperation required. Statistically significant differences were found for only three of thirteen activities. These activities were: Activity 3, determining appropriate freight classification for product, with marketing managers indicating a greater need for cooperation in this activity; Activity 12, determining whether to expedite an order, with marketing managers indicating a greater need for cooperation; and Activity 13, responsibility for loss and damage claims with marketing managers indicating a greater need for cooperation.

Node Activities

Nodal activities have the potential for considerable overlap. For example, inventory control touches almost every part of the business organization (Srivastava, 2006). With so much overlap, it is not surprising that marketing and physical distribution managers frequently disagreed about the need for cooperation on these activities. Statistically significant differences were found with respect to six of the sixteen nodal activities, twice as many differences as found for any other category. All of these differences were found in the inventory

control and warehousing areas, with the exception of a single significant difference found in the materials handling area.

Specifically, disagreement as to the level of cooperation was found for the following activities: Activity 15, determining type of warehouse needed (e.g., private or public) with marketing managers indicating a greater need for cooperation in this activity; Activity 16, storage of items that are being advertised, with marketing managers indicating a greater need for cooperation; Activity 17, determining the cost of carrying inventory, with marketing managers indicating a greater need for cooperation; Activity 21, inventory control of advertised items, with marketing managers indicating a greater need for materials handling system, with marketing managers indicating a greater need for cooperation.

Link-Node Integrating Activities

As is true for the nodal activities, the integrating activities have a high potential for affecting many departments within the firm. In contrast to the nodal activities, however, there was comparatively little disagreement as to the level of cooperation needed. Statistically significant differences as to agreement were found for only two of the eleven activities. These activities were as follows: Activity 30, determining customer service levels for final goods, with physical distribution managers indicating a higher level of cooperation needed; and Activity 35, selection of the channel of distribution, with physical distribution managers indicating a greater need for cooperation.

Of the eleven activities for which statistically significant differences were found, the above two integrating activities were the only ones in which physical distribution managers indicated an overall higher need for cooperation. For the other nine activities, marketing managers indicated a greater need for cooperation. This leads to the conclusion that marketing managers presently have more serious complaints regarding the level of cooperation than do physical distribution managers.

The survey results have important implications for physical distribution and marketing managers, as well as for top management. Overall there appears to be considerable agreement as to the level of cooperation required for performing the forty physical distribution/marketing interface activities. This is borne out by the fact that over 70 percent of the activities had no statistically significant differences associated with them. Given this high level of agreement, it can be said that a relatively strong sense of cooperation rather than conflict exists.

However, when the activities are analyzed in terms of categories, the results are not as favorable. In the link and integrating activities, there is a relatively high cooperation needed. In contrast, there is much less agreement as to the level of cooperation needed for nodal activities.

Disagreement over the need for cooperation in nodal activities may represent a serious problem for the firm. It is in these activities that both sides must be more open-minded and receptive to working together. Also, these would appear to be activities that are fundamental to the success of strategic planning. The selection of materials handling equipment, for example, is a vital factor in the efficient operation of a physical distribution system, but if the system is not compatible with the customers or if the system constantly damages or selects the wrong items, irreparable harm may be done to the marketing effort. Therefore cooperation is essential.

More specifically, the study results indicate special remedial areas for both marketing and physical distribution managers. For example, physical distribution managers should place the greatest emphasis on improving cooperation with respect to the nodal activities. For fourteen of the sixteen activities in this category, marketing managers indicated a greater need for cooperation (Table 1). Within the nodal category, special emphasis should be placed on inventory control and warehousing, as a majority of the statistically significant differences were found in these functional areas.

The study results also suggest, but to a somewhat lesser extent, that physical distribution managers should strive to improve cooperation involving link activities. That opportunity for cooperation exists is indicated by the fact that marketing managers perceived a greater need for cooperation for nine of the thirteen link activities, with three statistically significant differences,

On the other hand, the results suggest that marketing managers should pay greater attention to the integrating activities, given that physical distribution managers indicated a greater need for cooperation for six activities - (1) determining customer service levels and (2) selection of the channel of distribution - the greater level of cooperation indicated by physical distribution managers was statistically significant.

With respect to overall levels of cooperation by category, both marketing and physical distribution managers indicated that the greatest level of cooperation was required for the node-link integrating category. (See overall group means by category in Table 1). Next in importance was cooperation in the nodal category and the lowest need for cooperation was perceived with respect to the link category.

Likewise, the overall category means indicate that physical distribution managers would prefer to see greater cooperation with respect to the integrating category, while marketing managers would prefer greater cooperation in the node and link categories.

Indirect, the results also have implications for top management. The interface areas and activities requiring greater cooperation between marketing and physical distribution have been identified. It is top management's responsibility to bring about greater cooperation if strategic planning is to be successful and if suboptimal decision-making within the firm is to be avoided. In this regard, a review of the distribution literature suggests the following potential options for ensuring greater cooperation:

Education or Training. Greater emphasis should be placed on teaching physical distribution personnel the marketing implications of their jobs. Similarly, marketing people should be made more cognizant of physical distribution management. This education may be provided in a variety of ways, ranging from formal academic courses to in-house training programs (Bogun, 2008).

Job Switching. Organizations should place more emphasis on job switching or rotating marketing and physical distribution personnel. Each side may then learn to appreciate the other's position,

System of Incentives. Cooperation should be rewarded. This reward can be monetary or nonmonetary, or a combination of the two. For example, De Dreu.; Dierendon and Dijkstra (2004) recommended a series of cross charges or some form of cost-saving, sharing arrangement.

Top Management Support and Participation. A spirit of cooperation must permeate the organization, and it must begin with top management. Participation also is essential since top management is in the best position to evaluate the impact of physical distribution/marketing interface decisions on the overall firm (Munduate, Ganaza., Peiro. and Euwema (1999)),

Coordinating Committees. Committees comprised of representatives of both marketing and physical distribution, as well as other organizational interface areas, would provide a means of communication by which a greater degree of cooperation could occur (Jameson, 1999).

Distribution Specialist. A distribution specialist or group of specialists should work at the staff level to coordinate the distribution efforts of the firm (Achumba, 2000). At the line level, certain individuals could act as "linking pins" to ensure greater coordination involving several interface activities (Olakunnori, 2005),

Matrix Organization. One of the newer approaches to organization, a matrix organization includes horizontal reporting requirements in addition to the traditional vertical chain of command. Organizational activities are structured in both functional and project arrangements, resulting in the use of project managers in addition to the normal functional manager setup (Ohbuchi and Suzuki, 2003). Under matrix organization, physical distribution would have a horizontal or project emphasis, with the line functions in a supporting role (Oladun, 2003),

Unified Marketing/Physical Distribution Department. Cooperation might also be brought about through formal organizational change, in which physical distribution and marketing are combined in one department, for example, under a general manager of marketing. The risk of doing this, especially with a manufacturing firm, is that the inbound or supply side flows (i.e. production-oriented) may be viewed as less important relative to outbound product flows (Grant, 2005).

7. MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to examine the problem areas that need to be addressed in coordinating and managing the interfaces within companies and to identify principles of best practices to deal with these problem areas. This section addresses the principles of best practices adopted by the companies as potential means to deal with these interface problem areas. If companies are to manage this interface more effectively and improve interfunctional communication, the following integration mechanisms identified by our research study and other research (Moenaert, Sounder, De Meyer, and Deschoolmester (1994)) provide considerable scope for relationship enhancement in achieving best practice, Firstly, top management should foster and nurture a positive degree of interest, trust, awareness and support between functional teams. This should assist in addressing the different orientation and experience of the people involved. Managers perceived themselves as culturally different and only seem to be at ease in their own functional areas (Kozan, 1997).

Essentially the kind of strategic thinking and leadership that needs to happen is for marketing to focus on external customers with a clear understanding of manufacturing capability.

Secondly, cross-functional groups organized as venture teams, new project teams, temporary task forces under the direction of a strong project manager are among the most frequently used methods of introducing the above mechanisms (Swaminathan and Tayur, 2003). Furthermore, the composition of such cross functional groups should be addressed other boundary spanning activities.

Thirdly, rules and procedures should be formalized within project teams (Barki, Montreal, and Hartwick, 2004)). This should increase the amount of communication flows between functional areas and ensure the early involvement of functions in the product development process. These rules and procedures should also provide mechanisms for conflict resolution and can serve as a platform for further informal communication. Clear and explicit policies enable manager to manage problem areas constructively (Nugent, 2002). While each group can develop their own functional strategies that relate to the total corporate strategy, they must do so by paying particular attention to the needs of other internal functions (Tjosvoid and Sun, 2001).

Fourthly, decentralization of decision-making and power down through the organization should be implemented. Typically this will have a positive impact on interfunctional communication. Moreover, role flexibility or out-of-role behaviour (e.g. marketing personnel running lab tests) should be encouraged in order to enhance interfunctional communication. In addition, informal interfunctional contacts should be organized to generate mutual respect by sharing experiences and concerns.

Fifthly, performance metrics should mutually be agreed and established. Measuring performance against an agreed set of criteria, which focuses specifically on interfunctional problems, is essential for the effective management of these relationships (Jelin and Mamix, 2001).

Finally, some organization have created mixed career path to deepen and foster understanding between functional areas. Managers cross over functional lines during their development thus ensuring they will better understand the activities, concerns and values of their colleagues in other functional areas (Lichtenberger and Naullau, 1993),

In conclusion, it is important to acknowledge that there are financial implications resulting from these measures. The interface between finance and the other functional areas has received less coverage in the literature. This is probably

because of the less frequent level of interaction at this interface.

Nonetheless, the central role that financial analysis plays in any organization has a major impact on performance (Alper et al, 2000). Issues such as project management, costing and pricing, profit margin analysis and returns on investment, net present value analysis, funding requests and performance metrics should be addressed.

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