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Marketing A Hospitality Program And Its Product

Abstract

In his dialogue entitled - Marketing A Hospitality Program and Its Product - Jürgen Chopard, Dr. es Sciences (Economics) Director, Centre International de Glion, Glion, Switzerland, Dr. Chopard initially offers: “The recruitment of qualified personnel is extremely difficult in an industry with a poor image; where career paths are not well defined. The author discusses the employment of marketing management techniques to improve the positioning of hospitality education and create a more attractive perception of the hotel industry.”

As outlined in the above paragraph, Dr. Chopard vectors-in on marketing strategies from two standpoints; the educational side with its focus on curriculum, and the larger, industry side with its emphasis on public perception and service. These are not necessarily, nor should they be viewed as disparate elements.

“ Although some professionals may see schools of hospitality education catering to two markets, students on one hand and industry on the other, in fact, their needs should be viewed as the same and hence a single market,” Dr. Chopard says to bolster his assertion.

“The marketing concept is a management orientation that holds that the key task of the organization is to determine the needs and wants of target markets and to adapt the organization to delivering the desired satisfactions more effectively and efficiently than its competitor,” the author confides, with an attribution.

From these information/definition leanings, Dr. Chopard continues on a path that promotes the Centre International de Glion, Glion, Switzerland, which he is affiliated with. Why, because they endorse the same principles he is explaining to you. That’s not a bad thing.

Essentially, what Dr. Chopard wants you to know is, education and business management are synonymous and therefore should share the same marketing designs and goals.

“It is hard to believe that as critically important a sector as education does not use for its own management the techniques which it teaches and which have largely been proved in other fields,” the author provides as counterpoint.

Since pedagogical needs so closely relate to the more pragmatic needs of the industry in general, these elements should seek to compliment and engage each other, in fact, collaboration is imperative, Dr. Chopard expresses a priori.

“The cooperation of future employers is indispensable in the preparation of the product, so that it is capable of providing the expected services. The need for close relations between training establishments and the hotel and catering industry seems obvious,” Dr. Chopard says.

The author reveals some flaws in hospitality marketing strategy, and then contrasts these against how a successful strategy could/should be implemented.

Keywords

Chopard, Marketing a Hospitality Program and Its Product, Education, Over-qualification, Under-qualification

Marketing A Hospitality Program and Its Product

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The recruitment of qualified personnel is extremely difficult in an industry with a poor image where career paths are not well defined. The author discusses the employment of marketing management techniques to improve the positioning of hospitality education and create a more attractive perception of the hotel industry.

During the period of rapid economic growth with its high level of consumer demand, few people in industry in general spoke of marketing. The development of this concept, so far as Europe is concerned, occurred in the '60s when the first symptoms of market saturation appeared. It was under the combined pressure of a fall in turnover, an economic slow-down, and an increase in national and international competition that the more dynamic enterprises gave the market greater consideration. Until then, management had been oriented toward the product concept.

The product concept is a management orientation that assumes that consumers will favor those products that offer the most quality for the price, and therefore the organization should devote its energy to improving product quality.¹

Although some professionals may see schools of hospitality education catering to two markets, students on one hand and industry on the other, in fact, their needs should be viewed as the same and hence a single market.

The view of educators is often one of product concept which results in this illusion of two distinct markets with different needs. In contrast, if the needs of both groups are examined using the marketing concept, a very different perspective emerges. The marketing concept suggests that, through a thorough analysis, one can ascertain that these needs are identical. This is still the approach favored by most of the schools that limit themselves to traditional programs and aims and are not disposed to modify them, at any event in the short term, in the light of changes in the job market.

The marketing concept is a management orientation that holds that the key task of the organization is to determine the needs and wants of target markets and to adapt the organization to delivering the desired satisfactions more effectively and efficiently than its competitors.²

The hotel and catering industry, indeed the whole tourism sector, is still experiencing a remarkable period of expansion. This development cannot continue without structural adaptation and without an important input of personnel, both in quantity and in quality. A solution to the difficulties of recruitment may be found in the marketing approach, which implies using all the tools made available by this management method, not only in the industry itself, but also in professional training establishments. This is one of the reasons why the Glion International Center has devoted so much attention to the marketing and promotion sector. From the marketing angle, the problem of recruitment and training for the hotel and catering industry can be resolved by designing and promoting a product which takes account of the needs and wishes of people likely to be attracted by these professions.

To compare enrollment and teaching to a product is an unusual procedure which is likely to shock those for whom education cannot be managed like a private enterprise, always in search of greater efficiency and the best possible competitive performance in the market. The comments on management reported by P.F. Drucker can be extended to the marketing concept:

The administrators of American hospitals rejected everything concerned with management until the period 1970-75: 'We are responsible for running hospitals and are not business men' they said. (In universities, the teachers are still saying the same thing, while complaining of the poor management of their institution.)³

It is hard to believe that as critically important a sector as education does not use for its own management the techniques which it teaches and which have largely been proved in other fields.

One current oversimplification is to abstract from the marketing concept promotion, in all its aspects, and market research. These tools are then available for constructing the central element, which is the "product" (and which may, of course, in fact, be a service). The first step is the definition of an offer capable of satisfying a demand. This generally represents only the first stage in the satisfaction of more basic needs. As Kotler says:

A person never buys an object for itself, only for its function... The key element lies in the service which it renders, and it is this service that the marketing manager tries to sell... basically, the physical object is just a means of solving a problem.⁴

How then can we define a product in the field of training, and what services must it provide? The student who enrolls in a professional school normally has a specific aim, that of preparing for a professional career. Consequently, it is with reference to this expectation that we must develop the policies and procedures of our teaching offer.

Training Must Meet Career Goals

If professional training is not viewed as an end in itself, but as a means of ensuring a career, its detailed planning implies taking account of a wide range of factors, some of which will be in contradiction with the short-

term expectations of the student: expectations whose satisfaction would in fact be to the detriment of a genuine preparation for the profession. It is the center's policy to avoid attaching excessive weight to suggestions made by students during their period of studies, but rather to favor the feedback from graduates who have been able to test their training in practical everyday life.

Schools cannot by themselves prepare students for professional life and guarantee a career. The cooperation of future employers is indispensable in the preparation of the product, so that it is capable of providing the expected services. The need for close relations between training establishments and the hotel and catering industry seems obvious. In fact, however, it is not always easy to reconcile the different considerations and divergent interests. Teachers, usually expert in a particular discipline, are not very inclined to take account of short-term aspects, while industry, on the other hand, wishes to hire people capable of being productive immediately.

Schools cannot, in a relatively short time, train students to be efficient in fairly subordinate operational jobs, while, at the same time, providing them with the necessary background to enable them to fill responsible executive posts a few years later. Complementary training and experience, in one direction or another, will always have to be acquired later on. By designing study programs so as to integrate them into a career perspective, it is possible to adapt the curriculum and teaching methods so that the product offered corresponds as closely as possible to the long-term aspirations of the students who have chosen this way to professional life.

Since some limit to study programs is unavoidable, we must decide which subjects should be taught in the school by defining their pedagogical objectives in behavioral terms. Highly developed operational abilities, for example, are not always an advantage for future managers. In this respect, Ansoff says:

...to assure a suitable sharing of the attention paid to strategic decisions and to operational decisions. It is not easy to arrange such a balance. In most firms, everybody - from the top to the bottom of the hierarchy - is busy with a multitude of operational problems...those which cannot be settled at the lower level become the business of the managers...Strategic decisions do not have this "generating" character: they do not automatically insist on their share of the manager's attention. If the manager does not actively take care of them, they will remain eclipsed by operational problems.⁵

It often happens that short-term operational activities are a refuge which permit the manager to avoid taking strategic decisions and reflecting on long-term developments.

The development, in liaison with the industry, of a study program which takes account of precise career needs will reduce the dissatisfaction connected with overqualification or with unsuitable programs. Realistic needs may be very different from what is "modern," "good publicity," "interesting to teach," or simply "difficult to eliminate." To

define one career is to accept that there are many and that the training program must be centered on the kernel elements determined beforehand.

Market Segmentation Must Be Part Of Training Plan

Most educational institutions aim their programs at the same segments of the employment market, and this common range of objectives should give all students the chance of being hired at an operational level, so that after a few years they can attain a higher management position. However, aiming at a very large target enables schools to accept a large number of students without specifying exactly which career they will be guided toward and without being obliged to ensure that the possibilities of employment in that field are really available. The universities, for example, train a large number of psychologists, sociologists, and other researchers, whose only hope of avoiding unemployment is to find teaching posts of their own.

Today no enterprise engaged in production would pretend to cover the entire market with only one offer. Consumers rapidly realize that their specific needs are better satisfied by particular products aimed at particular segments of the market. In an intensely competitive environment, recognition of their own strengths and weaknesses constrains firms to innovate and to show originality in the products of all sorts which they put on the market, whether physical products or services. Errors are normally penalized rapidly by a diminishing share of the market and, if customers are actively dissatisfied, by a loss of image.

The choice of market segments is part of what Igor Ansoff calls "strategic decisions:"

...which concern essentially external, not internal, factors, more specifically the choice of the products which the firm will make and the markets where it will sell them. The basic strategic problem, in fact, is to establish a sort of 'induction agreement' between the firm and its environment, or, more simply, to decide which is its field of activity and which types of activity it will seek to participate in.⁶

In the educational field, the laws of free competition do not operate so obviously. They may be active for private institutions, but have little influence in public schools. In this environment, the need for strategic reflection has not yet been accepted as essential. It is a marketing error not to conceive of the professional training product in terms of its usefulness for a career, and it is a further error if this training is not aimed at a specific sector of the employment market. In both cases, the resulting dissatisfaction tarnishes the image of the hotel and catering industry as well as the professional training schools themselves. It seems that to put a high quality offer on the market boosts the firm's communal ego, no matter how ill-adapted the offer may be to professional life. In reality, quality is best defined by the fit between the offer and the needs to be satisfied. In the field of professional training for the hotel and catering industry, there are a large number of qualitatively different market slots to be filled. A sensible diversification of the offer together with original solutions will provide a greater contribution to solving the problem of recruitment and training than a single overall solution lacking the systematic approach of the marketing concept.

Most hotel and catering enterprises are medium sized. Both the executives and the personnel need a fairly broad general training oriented toward human relations and communications. In a labor-intensive service industry, these aspects play a particularly important role. With respect to selection, and also to the development of management aptitudes and leadership, the problem must be defined in career terms. The evaluation of the purely scholastic aspects of the students' work does not show whether they possess those other indispensable qualities needed for professional success. Motivation for the chosen profession, awareness of the attitudes needed in a service industry, physical and mental toughness in the face of overwork, mobility, initiative, and the ability to fit into a team or a given environment are all equally important parameters, but much more difficult to evaluate *a priori*.

Although "management" has its theories, it remains essentially a practical activity. Unless offers are aimed directly at certain "careers" and "jobs," there is a danger of giving students generalized information on different techniques instead of training them toward a specific approach to problem-solving while enabling them to master certain useful tools. Teaching "management" is indispensable in so far as this knowledge forms part of a study program linked to specific goals and that it reinforces the understanding of other subjects.

Selection problems are never easy to attack and undefined objectives only compound the difficulties. By fixing the school's requirements at the start, not only in academic terms but also in relation to aptitudes for a specific career in a particular segment of the profession, it becomes possible to be both more selective in the admission process, and also, given suitable promotion, to attract more young people who are clear-headed about their career perspectives into the hotel and catering business.

Overqualification, as much as underqualification, is a source of discontent. Certain schools claim to "create" high executives as if just sitting on a university bench, however prestigious, conveyed an automatic right to a CEO's chair. Professional success is not linked uniquely to the school's standing. Personal qualities, hard work, continued self-education, and a little luck are equally important.

Increased competition in the employment market has made success more uncertain. Overqualification, though it might appear advantageous in obtaining a job, will lead to dissatisfaction and a loss of motivation if the career does not advance as expected. Neither the employer nor the employee will have gained in effectiveness.

Underqualification, originating in blurred study programs and indulgently-awarded diplomas, is equally harmful. By the time the employers realize the extent of the gaps in the employee's knowledge, they have already wasted a considerable amount of time and, in addition, have had to invest in supplementary training. The employee, on the other hand, will be discontented not to obtain a post for which he thought he had been prepared. His usual reaction will be to transfer his frustration to the hotel and catering industry as a whole, so endowing all his job possibilities with a negative image. He will rarely attribute his setbacks to his own weaknesses and inappropriate training.

Collaboration Between Schools and Industry Is Essential

Every expanding industry has problems with recruitment and personnel training. By using the techniques of marketing, the hotel and catering industry is in a position to create a positive image and to sell the "professional career" product. To do this, a judicious cooperation with the educational institutions is essential. At Glion, for instance, since 1974, regular career weeks are organized during which numerous hotels and hotel chains profit from the opportunity of presenting their own organizations and their views of the hospitality field.

An important factor in attracting capable people into the industry is the existence of schools providing quality training at all levels. The interests of the industry and of the schools run together when it concerns opening the way to a well-defined career for students of good potential.

Certain aspects of the "quality" of the training play a decisive role in stimulating employment in the hotel and catering business. The theoretical background given to the students must correspond to the reality of the requirements for a specific professional career. To situate the teaching at obviously too high a level will not improve its value, and the same is true for training ill-adapted to a given employment market. These factors create disillusion, provoke the loss of motivation, and give rise to an exodus toward other professions. The minimum to be expected from professional schools is that they maintain and increase students' motivation throughout the period of studies; otherwise, many of those who intended to take up the profession will be diverted from their initial choice, which is certainly not in the industry's best interest. An important indicator of the value of a school's performance is the number of students who actually stay in the hospitality profession. At the Glion International Center, the figure is followed closely. More than 70 percent of the members of the Graduates' Association (comprising over 1000 members: 50 percent of all graduates) are currently working in the hospitality and tourism industry.

For the hotel and catering industry, the promotion of a positive image with regard to genuinely possible careers must accompany concerted action with the training centers. Schools must not limit themselves to providing a background of theoretical knowledge but, by the quality and relevance of their programs, reinforce motivation and the attraction of the profession.

The requirements of the many different occupations in the hotel and catering industry should be defined sufficiently accurately that suitable training programs can be devised. Many types of careers are possible; they may aim at different levels or be alternative ways of attaining the same objective. What is essential is to diversify the training offer in such a way as to enable the students to select their routes according to their tastes and aptitudes.

Only a systematic approach using all the resources of the marketing concept will reveal satisfactory solutions to the problems of finding and keeping qualified personnel.

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²*Ibid*, p. 31.

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⁴Kotler, p. 145.

⁵Igor Ansoff, *Strategie du Developpement de l'Entreprise* (Corporate Strategy), (Hommes et Techniques Editions, 1971), p. 17.

⁶*Ibid*, p. 16.