

## MARKETING ORIENTATION AND TEACHING PHILOSOPHY: A PERSPECTIVE FROM DOUGLAS MCGREGOR

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### ABSTRACT

Alternative approaches to marketing pedagogy can be seen as consistent with instructor assumptions regarding student perceptions, motivations, and goals. These assumptions can be seen as analogous to marketer conceptualizations of consumers. Based upon the six types of marketing orientations familiar to all marketing instructors, a comparison is made to teaching philosophies and pedagogical approaches. The ideas of Douglas McGregor are also shown to be relevant to marketing and to educational assumptions and methods.

### ALTERNATIVE MARKETING ORIENTATIONS

In January of 1960, the *Journal of Marketing* published an article by Robert Keith (1960) entitled "The Marketing Revolution." In his article, Keith described four "eras" or periods of thought and practice through which his organization, The Pillsbury Company, progressed. Keith believed that these eras were representative of four philosophically unique approaches to marketing goods and services. Since the publication of Keith's article, other writers have modified, refined, and extended the basic thesis advancing this evolutionary process. The most important of these augmentations is Kotler's (1994) description and development of a fifth orientation, and Sirgy's (1991) suggestion of a sixth orientation.

The first of the approaches to marketing is termed the *product orientation*. This approach emphasizes superior quality and/or performance, and focuses the organization's strategy around informing the consumer about the advantages (both concrete and abstract) of purchasing and consuming goods and services that are both comparatively better (than those of competitors) and also more costly. In order to effectively implement this orientation, organizations utilizing the product concept must effectively communicate to consumers that wise shoppers will be willing to pay more in order to enjoy the exclusive benefits that can only be derived from higher quality. This process also typically incorporates efforts to instill in consumers the methods for recognizing and respecting superior product attributes.

In contrast to the product orientation, the *production orientation* focuses upon systems for producing large

volumes of products in an effort to drive down costs by exploiting economies of scale and economies of scope (shared costs). In the production orientation, the organization efficiently distributes a "good enough" product that offers value to the consumer that is leveraged through low prices. Marketers adopting this approach typically attempt to show consumers that their product is comparable to those of competitors, but is less costly (in terms of money, time, or commitment).

The third approach to marketing is known as the *selling orientation*, and is based upon the premise that customers are unlikely to perceive or understand the merits of purchasing this product. In some cases, organizations resorting to the selling orientation do so because they have competitively inferior products. That is, there is a realization that the product will not "sell itself" on its own merits, and thus great efforts must be made to compel customers into purchasing the product. Alternatively, some organizations employing the selling orientation do so because they feel consumers need additional (non-product, non-price) incentives in order to make the purchase. As a result, organizations approaching customers from the selling orientation typically resort to aggressive selling and promotional efforts, with the goal of manipulating or coercing customers into purchasing the product.

A considerably higher plane of enlightenment in marketing thought is understood to be embodied in the *marketing orientation*, also known as the marketing concept. The marketing concept "holds that the key to achieving organizational goals consists in determining the needs and wants of target markets and delivering the desired satisfactions more effectively and efficiently than competitors" (Kotler, 1994, p. 18). The motto of the marketing concept is "find a need and fill it," and its credo is "The Customer is King." The marketing orientation is founded upon the assumption that consumers are knowledgeable, intelligent, and rational, and base their product purchases upon a careful consideration of the relationship between their own needs and product attributes. The thinking underlying the marketing concept was espoused as early as the 1940s and 1950s (Bell & Emory, 1971; Samli, Palda, & Barker, 1987). In 1958 the term "marketing concept" was coined to describe the philosophy behind this approach and, "by 1965 practically all introductory

marketing texts included some discussion of the ‘new’ marketing concept” (Bell & Emory, 1971, p. 38). What distinguishes the marketing concept from the other orientations is that it is purely driven by the needs and preferences of the customers, rather than the existing abilities, preferences, or expertise of the firm. This distinction is important in that, “the assumption of consumer primacy is the central normative point on which marketing turns as an applied discipline” (Hirschman, 1983, p. 46).

A fifth perspective, representing a supposedly higher stage of marketing evolution is what Kotler (1977) termed the *societal marketing concept*. The societal marketing concept – or orientation – is an attempt to harmonize the goals of business to the often-conflicting plurality of goals in society and in the processes of customer satisfaction. As such, it postulates that, “the organization’s task is to determine the needs, wants, and interests of target markets and to deliver the desired satisfactions more effectively and efficiently than competitors in a way that preserves or enhances the consumer’s and society’s well-being” (Kotler, 1994, p. 29). It should be noted that the societal marketing concept is founded upon one dominant and critical proposition. This is the assumption that, “consumers’ wants do not always coincide with their long-run interests or society’s long-run interests,” and given this, marketers should take a custodial approach to long-run consumer and societal well being (Kotler, 1977, p. 4).

Finally, as Sirgy (1991) notes, a further level of marketing philosophy evolution is exemplified in efforts to improve the “quality of life” of individuals in society, rather than merely satisfying needs while avoiding individual or societal harm (as in the societal marketing concept). In the *Quality Of Life* orientation, the goal is to provide goods and services that make significant and important differences in peoples’ lives that transcend mere product consumption satisfaction. As a result, the Quality Of Life philosophy of marketing aims to, “make *happy people in general*,” rather than merely happy customers (Sirgy, 1991, p.4).

Exemplified by, and resulting from, the inclusion of most of these various marketing philosophies or “orientations” in virtually every *Principles of Marketing* textbook, this “evolution” of marketing thought has come to represent one of the most important cornerstones (if not the most important cornerstone) of marketing pedagogy. As a result, every student of marketing is expected to understand the differences among these marketing perspectives and the manner in which marketing has evolved.

These various orientations also represent the disciplinary axis of marketing because every marketer is assumed to embrace at least one of these orientations and incorporate its assumptions into the firm’s marketing practices. This is assumed to be true even for organizations that do not explicitly recognize the distinctions among these marketing orientations or how their own marketing practices reflect unique philosophical understandings of the domain and parameters of effective marketing.

## MARKETING ORIENTATIONS AND MARKETING PEDAGOGY

As outlined above, these six marketing orientations exemplify different perspectives from which each organization both understands and conceptualizes individual consumer perception, motivation, and needs in its markets. From these perspectives, organizations then develop strategies for communicating to, and interacting with, those markets. If education can be understood as a marketable (and marketed) service, as it most surely is (Desai, Damewood, & Jones, 2001), then educational institutions and the individual service providers working for an institution must implicitly approach the promotion, production, and delivery of the institution’s service from one of the six marketing orientations noted above. While the overall institutional marketing efforts, strategies, and policies of universities can be easily recognized and categorized according to the orientation from which they are derived, rarely are individual educators within those institutions so aligned.

Despite the centrality of these orientations to marketing pedagogy, then, few marketing educators understand or consider how their own unique approaches to teaching might be identified with one or more of these same six orientations. In other words, while each marketing educator likely possesses a unique and perhaps even well-articulated perspective of teaching, few have considered how this personal teaching philosophy corresponds with a particular marketing or service-delivery philosophy or orientation. Thus, while conceptualizing students as customers is a well-understood notion within marketing pedagogy (Desai, Damewood, & Jones, 2001), the multidimensional nature of this equation is not commonly acknowledged or debated. In simple terms, each instructor’s approach to, and assumptions regarding, students and learning can be seen as consistent with one (or more) of the six orientations of marketing.

If an instructor, for example, conceptualizes students as having a well-developed and well-articulated set of

learning goals and needs, then these students would be well-served by a service (marketing) program delivered from the perspective of the *marketing orientation*. And, this instructor would be inclined to clearly identify these goals and needs and then craft course topics and methodologies around the effective satisfaction of these needs.

In similar fashion, instructors who teach mass sections of students, or who believe that students are only taking the course in order to satisfy graduation requirements, will likely approach their pedagogical duties from a production orientation. These instructors may believe that incoming student quality is the primary determinant of course or life success, and thus teaching excellence is relatively unnecessary. Conversely, teachers who have a high estimation of the worth of their course for later student success will probably want to impress upon students the importance of the topic. Operating from the notion that “weeding out” inferior students will ensure quality control, these product orientation teachers will implement methodologies and policies geared toward demonstrating the gravity and significance of these topics, and set difficult standards that keep grade distributions low (Mohr, 2007). Instructors who value student acceptance (in the form of positive course evaluations) but also believe students to be unmotivated and uninterested in the material will likely take a selling orientation approach, using incentives such as “extra-credit” points to encourage student attendance, participation, and learning.

The societal marketing orientation would be consistent with a pedagogical approach that assumes students are motivated but also unclear regarding those theories and tools that will be most valuable to them in later life. A professor adopting this perspective will likely attempt to develop instructional methodologies that lead students down an educational path that culminates in numerous “Aha!” experiences yet also provides career skills which may not be appreciated until much later in time.

Finally, the Quality Of Life orientation would likely be translated into pedagogy through efforts to provide students with tools and experiences that can not only facilitate and illuminate their university and career goals, but also provide them with conceptual, philosophical, and analytic means for enriching the totality of their lives. Some professors, for example, assign students the tasks of writing “business plans” for their lives and composing their own epitaphs.

## DOUGLAS MCGREGOR AND PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

According to the well-known management theory of Douglas McGregor (1960), “Theory X” managers begin with the assumption that their employees are stupid, lazy, dishonest, resistant to change, and naturally at odds with the goals of the organization. Managing from this perspective, “Theory X” managers interact with their employees in adversarial ways that inevitably encourage the very same behaviors they abhor. In contrast, McGregor promoted a “Theory Y” perspective, where workers are *a priori* assumed to be intelligent, motivated, honest, and eager to make positive contributions to the organization. McGregor theorized that managing from this “win-win” “Theory Y” perspective would initiate a “self-fulfilling prophesy” where workers treated with respect, trust, honesty, and appreciation would develop those qualities most desired in employees.

While business-school academics are easily convinced of the merits of McGregor’s “Theory Y” approach to management, it seems evident that they rarely envision how this philosophical orientation may apply to teaching. When developing course policies and when managing classroom experiences, business-school professors often take a decidedly “Theory X” approach. This is especially true for undergraduate courses. Great efforts are often taken, for example, to repeatedly warn students about the harsh consequences for violations of academic integrity policies, or to clarify the penalties for late assignments or missed examinations. Other policies that reflect this form of thinking include mandated or coerced attendance and participation.

In contrast, a “Theory Y” approach to marketing education assumes that *every* student is capable of high-quality thinking (although each has a unique approach), and comes to class truly wanting to learn and positively contribute (Mackwell, 2004). In general, however, a major (and most unfortunate) obstacle frequently stands in the way of the ultimate implementation of a “Theory Y” approach to student development. This comes in the form of students’ prior exposure to “Theory X” teachers and methods. “Theory X” teachers can frustrate students by making them feel incompetent and confused, and these teachers may create learned dependency and lowered motivation in students by constructing environments based largely upon educational systems of “punishment” rather than reward or recognition. The overall result is a closing of minds, rather than opening or development. The cumulative effects of “Theory X” teachers upon students can be

substantial and difficult to overcome. Nonetheless, it is probable that students can sense when instructors approach them from a “Theory Y” position of genuine honesty, enthusiasm, fairness, and concern, and, when treated in this manner will then gradually relinquish their cynicism and resistance.

### **MCGREGOR’S THEORIES AND CLASSROOM MARKETING ORIENTATIONS**

Because both McGregor’s management theories and the various marketing orientations rely heavily upon particular assumptions of human perception and motivation, overlap between these conceptualizations is inevitable. Specifically, some elements of the “Theory X” interpretation of customers as gullible, lazy, or ignorant can be seen in typical implementations of the product, production, and selling orientations in educational settings. Under the product orientation, while some students are seen as having great potential, all incoming students are seen as ignorant – having no initial ability to understand the value of specific course material. Somewhat differently, under the production orientation, students are seen as lazy and merely “going through the motions” in order to “get their ticket stamped.” In the selling orientation, students are seen as easily distracted or swayed by entertaining lectures and exercises, and student evaluations are seen as popularity contests.

Thus, professors approaching marketing pedagogy from the perspective of the product orientation attempt to enlighten students as to the great value of rigorous coursework, and often utilize punitive (costly) course policies in order to make students approach the subject with greater gravity and seriousness. Those approaching teaching from a production orientation, on the other hand, typically just “go through the motions” of teaching in order to fulfill their “ticket stamping” obligations with utmost efficiency. Finally, teachers adopting a selling orientation implement numerous “bells and whistles” in order to boost teaching evaluations, and course policies often revolve around developing incentives to counteract the laziness of students and to encourage behaviors such as attendance with “extra credit” points and other forms of external rewards.

In contrast, the marketing, societal marketing, and Quality Of Life orientations appear to be more compatible with McGregor’s “Theory Y” notions of assumptions regarding students. These approaches to teaching conceptualize students as motivated, intelligent, and engaged learners (Chonko, 2007). From the marketing orientation, professors would assume that students know the value of learning and

the coursework that confronts them. Thus, instructional policies would likely be geared toward student involvement in the design and implementation of the curriculum. Also consistent with assumptions of “Theory Y,” professors using a marketing orientation would be unlikely to embrace policies of mandatory attendance and participation, assuming that each student would naturally see the value of such behaviors.

From the societal marketing orientation, professors would likely take a modified “Theory Y” approach, under the assumption that students are highly motivated, but may need some guidance regarding which topics and pedagogical methodologies will yield the greatest value for later career success. Instructors using this approach would take a custodial approach to teaching, and see the value of “leading” students toward desired outcomes (such as future career readiness), rather than coercing students or focusing on irrelevant but enticing diversions. This approach would also consider the longer-term impacts of instruction, rather than merely the satisfaction of students within the university setting.

Finally, the Quality Of Life orientation would suggest that business professors might consider how their ideas and teaching methodologies may impact students far beyond not only the present time frame, but also far beyond the boundaries of business itself. This approach would require some insight into how instructional content and methods can stimulate lifelong learning and the introspective development of human values and insights.

### **CONCLUSION**

Clearly, alternative approaches to marketing pedagogy can be seen as highly consistent with assumptions held by professors regarding student perceptions, motivations, and goals. This overlap can be seen as highly analogous to marketer conceptualizations of consumers. Because of these similarities between teaching philosophies, pedagogical approaches, and marketing practice, marketing educators could benefit from examining and understanding how their teaching methodologies and policies reflect or reveal their assumptions and perceptions regarding student motivation and learning. In this analysis, the ideas of Douglas McGregor can be seen to provide valuable depth and clarity toward becoming a more self-aware educator.

### **References Available on Request**