

Excellences in Internal Marketing Approach: human resource management as source of competitive advantages

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Research paper

1. Introduction

Based on an empirical study done in Italy last February 2009, the paper relates about the actual diffusion of Internal Marketing (IM) approach, with a twofold purpose: a) to analyze the specific knowledge, the functions, the activities and its (in)succes in the organizations; b) to study the relation between IM and company's performances, so that the organizations with the best approach of IM really present the higher level of performance in their respective markets. That is the particular human resource and people management of a "illuminated" organization provide a real competitive advantage *versus* the competitors.

Despite the Internal Marketing has deep roots and can be found a large literature, especially in service marketing literature from '70, it seems to be a recent discipline yet, with indefinite boundaries and even still to be systematized, in particular in italian business context. Considered that in the most actual perspective IM identify a particular kind of strategies and policies aimed to attract, motivate, develop and make skilled the best human resources of an organization - in order to pursue the business goals and objectives, improving at the same time their quality of life and maximizing the *job and employee satisfaction* - the relevance of human resource management is even greater because of the actual economic worldwide crisis.

The paper is structured as follows. First, an overview is presented of the theoretical foundations of Internal Marketing approach. Next, the findings of an empirical study directed to the companies classified as the best in 2009 by the *Great Place to Work Institute* is presented. The paper concludes with a general discussion about the implications of the study and some conclusions, without avoiding to highlight some research limitations and suggests for further research.

2. The Internal Marketing approach: theoretical framework

The IM concept began to emerge in marketing literature in the mid-70s, in parallel with the increasing diffusion of studies on service companies. In fact, the specificities of "service" product made to emerge a new topic barely and insufficiently considered before in the traditional industrial marketing perspective as the contact personnel management (Normann, 1984; Eiglier e Langeard, 1988; Berry e Parasuraman, 1991; Zeithaml, Parasuraman e Berry, 2000). This factor in

promoting and selling services appeared so relevant that it was considered a fifth “P” in respect of the traditional 4 P of marketing-mix, able to give birth to a new strand of studies directed specifically to deepen the management of this particular variable and the respective tools, as rewards and incentives, able to make the organizational climate favorable even in really competitive context (Eiglier e Langeard, 1988, Albrecht, 1992; Varca, 1999 e 2001; Chung e Schneider, 2002). IM concept appeared the first time in 1981 in an article of Berry (1981) and soon after in the Gronroos’ (1983, 1990) and Lovelock’s (1984) contributions, where it was intended as a set of activities and tools aimed to attract, motivate and keep the contact personnel.

In particular, they consider that marketers must develop techniques and procedure to ensure that employees are able and willing to deliver high-quality service. The internal marketing concept evolved as marketers formalized procedures for marketing to employees. Internal marketing ensures that employees at all levels of the organization experience the business and understand its various activities and campaigns in an environment that support customer consciousness. The objective of internal marketing is to enable employees to deliver satisfying products to the guest. As Gronroos notes (1983; 1990), “the Internal Marketing concept states that the internal market of employees is best motivated for service-mindedness and customer-oriented performance by an active, marketing-like approach, where a variety of activities are used internally in an active, marketing-like and coordinated way”.

Internal marketing is marketing aimed internally at the firm’s employees; better it uses a marketing perspective to manage the firm’s employees, “selling” to them the company’s strategy and its way of working. From the operational point of view, Internal Marketing is a process that involves the following steps: establishment of a service culture; development of a marketing approach to human resource management; dissemination of marketing information to employees; implementation of a reward and recognition system (Gronroos, 1983; 1990).

The basis of this perspective is the analogy employee-customer: the employee represent a market that has to be studied in terms of needs and expectations and to be better satisfied by adapted working positions, in order to guarantee the improvement of their performances in respect of final customers. If IM concerns the management of contact personnel with the aim of encouraging the customer orientation and implement effective marketing policies to transform employees into loyal (internal) customers, it follows that only Marketing Department can be responsible of this decision-making area (Berry, Parasuram, 1991; Berry, 1995; Marchiori, 2001; Ahmed, Rafiq, 2000 2002).

Then, IM concept has evolved as an instrument of contact personnel management methodology in services firms in human resource management able to maximize the human capital of the company. In particular the different IM approaches can be analyzed referring to the contributions of Berry (1995) e Marchiori (2001) that highlight three different stages of evolution of the discipline, respectively the *functional*, *inter-functional* and *holistic* one. As seen, if the *functional approach* identify the first step in which IM is considered exclusively the instrument focused on motivating the front-line personnel to maximize the final performances, a second strand of studies – due to be referred to the *inter-functional approach* - identifies IM as a support to the external marketing strategies, since every business

strategy always involves some problems at the organizational level (Normann, 1984; Eiglier Langeard, 1988; Gronroos, 1990; Piercy e Morgan, 1991). In this sense, IM can follow two directions: a) offer support to the marketing function on the problems concerning the implementation of marketing strategy; b) change the attitudes of contact staff and convince them to act in accordance with the objectives established by the firm. In this perspective, Gronroos (1990) stresses and distinguishes the difference between strategic and operational/tactical aspects: strategic one concerns the fostering a culture of customer orientation and service inside the whole organization; the tactical activities allow the managers to implement the marketing strategy by informing, convincing and creating consensus on the proposal, to make the personnel be able to compete in the market. Then, within the same approach, Percy and Morgan (1991) highlight three level of the internal marketing plan: traditional one (i.e. the contents of external marketing strategy to be implemented by the organization); the power (i.e. the organizational changing as the consequence of the marketing strategy) and, finally, the political aspect, concerning the cultural change eventually required for people.

So, the *inter-functional approach* intend IM as a set of strategies and policies focused not only on front-line, but even the back-office personnel to guarantee the maximum fluidity of the internal processes (Marchiori, 2001; Ahmed e Rafiq, 2000 e 2002). In other words, IM is intended as a methodology for managing and improving the inter-relationships between the employees (and by extension between top management and the employees) as in customer and suppliers relations, to improve the productivity of the organization in accordance with the principles of total quality management, even in industrial enterprises too, as some authors confirm (Trabucchi, 1992). It follows that in this perspective, the internal service is relevant as the external one (Albrecht, 1992 e 1994) and the employees are considered as different stakeholders with proper interests. This is an internal marketing to support the Directorate Staff, especially in analyzing the internal market, listening to the internal customer, integrating personnel management, marketing and external relations, developing guidance to meet the customer's internal needs and expectations and managing the internal market following the change in the external market (Coletti, Iacci, 1990; Goeta, 1993; Boldizzoni, 1993 e 2003; Nacamulli R. C. D., Boldizzoni D. 1993; Auteri, 1990, 1992, 1996). So, within the company IM introduces a market, relationships regulator alternative to the hierarchy. However, this vision may lose sight of the enterprise as a whole.

Finally, the *holistic approach* extends further the perspective, considering IM able to cover the whole organization - the back-office first and all kind of the employees, then. In this case, IM is intended as a really strategic management philosophy adopted first of all by the top management aimed to support the implementation of development processes of the firm, through methods of human resource management that encourage the involvement and participation, acting on motivation, attitudes, expectations of human resources in order to improve performance against the customer (Marchiori, 2001; Ahmed e Rafiq, 2000 e 2002). To highlight, this is a more general approach than the previous that actually involves not only the business services, but every company and the whole staff, due to the changed competitive environment and studies of the same marketing.

George (1990, with Gronroos, 1991) and then Gronroos (1994 e 2000) are among the first to speak of holistic approach, considering the IM as an integral part of the

strategic management of service enterprises (Marchiori, 2001), as a sort of guide for senior management in the development of organizational policies and management, consistent with the strategic choices. Employees are not like customers to be met in itself; the attention is focused on creating a customer focus through a process of personal influence on culture based mainly on the participatory (Gronroos, 1994 e 2000; Ahmed e Rafiq, 2000 e 2002).

However, the theoretical basis of holistic lie not only in the most recent trends in marketing – as the relationship marketing – but in fact also in the most recent developments of participatory and organizational issues within the broader human resource management. Hence, it's possible to take action to adjust the internal labor market by relying on three key components: communication, compensation and reward, rules and procedures.

So, IM is a management strategy where the focus is on building good relations between people at all levels in the organization, so that it creates a mentality of a service orientation and customer throughout the company staff. Top management, HRM and Marketing Dept. they all contribute to the implementation of internal marketing: in particular, it has the organizational tools that can be used in internal marketing, while the marketing offers guidance on how these and other tools can be used to improve results (from the relationship marketing point of view), by competent personnel and client-oriented. The importance of IM, therefore, is to provide the top management the ability to manage activities involving human resources in a more systematic and strategic way.

Thomson (1992) in the same period defines IM how to create an organizational climate stimulating human resources, through the development of a communication designed to encourage and motivate all members of the organization. Then IM acts on the internal relations and resources, so that they work harmoniously to achieve the overall objectives of the firm. The goal is not to meet the needs of internal customers as to harmonize them with those organizations. The principle behind the model is also maximizing the value inherent in the internal relations and resources, both mediated by the cultural element.

The approach is oriented towards full exploitation of human capital available through the two modes: a) customization of the working relationship that allows the company to harness the skills and knowledge of the individual; b) coordinating all internal relations in order to exploit the synergies between the different knowledge and skills available.

So, the *holistic IM* approach is now defined as a human resources and relationships development strategy for the purpose of knowledge (internal) renewal, under capacity to exploit and enhance the intellectual capital, human and social. In this perspective, other authors are even more interesting for the subsequent development of internal marketing (Levionnois, 1991; Thomson, 1992; Varey e Lewis, 1999 e 2000; Ahmed e Rafiq, 2002). They highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the previous IM models, develop methods and techniques for implementation of marketing plans departing from previous classic approaches, extend the internal marketing to different sectors by services one and, in particular, focus on the management of internal relationship (Gummesson, 1999; Ballantyne, 1997; Voima, 1998; Varey and Lewis, 1999 e 2000).

In general, the contributions of the authors mentioned are called "theories of management of internal relations"; they can be considered both a critique of the

contributions earlier than an additional way to address the internal marketing, extending the analysis to what happens inside and outside the enterprise. According to the relationship marketing, this extended holistic approach highlights the network membership of “critical” internal and external relations, with which the firm is confronted with. IM is therefore the management of human resources to be mobilized for continuous improvement through the complex system of economic, social and technical relationship that are involved.

3. Findings

According to the literature, the IM concept seems to have reached a certain maturity and having a sufficiently structured methodological setting. In order to assess what is the diffusion of this approach in the real world of business, an investigation was carried out as reported by the companies as among “the best places to work” in Italy, as seen from the 2009 ranking of the Great Place to Work Institute, founded in 1991 by Robert Levering in the U.S. and present in 40 countries worldwide. For over 20 years the institute conducts research to verify the quality of work environments of business, by sending a relatively structured questionnaire to any applicant who makes explicit request. This survey is focused on the evaluation of existing internal relations, respectively, between employees and management (to measure the degree of internal trust), between employees and their job and their company (in order to appreciate their pride and the sense of belonging to the organization), and between the employees themselves (to verify the degree of camaraderie). So, the first companies in the ranking published every year in Italy by Il Sole 24 ore should be those with the best organizational climate and with and those with higher levels of job and employees satisfaction.

So, it has been defined a sample consisting of the top 20 ranked companies (Tab.1), which was sent a structured questionnaire of 25 questions, in order to investigate respectively the sensitivity towards and the specific knowledge of the IM concept, the role and the strategic relevance of IM inside the organizations, the nature and the variety of the IM policies adopted and the methods for measuring the IM effectiveness and assessing job and employees satisfaction.

Tab.1 The top 20 companies ranked by *Great place to work Institute 2009*

1. Fater spa	11. Medtronic Italia Spa
2. Microsoft Italia	12. S.C. Johnson Italy Srl
3. Coca Cola HBC Italia	13. Cefriel
4. Cisco System Italy	14. Genzyme
5. Elica Spa	15. Bristol Myers Squibb
6. W.L. Gore & Associati Srl	16. Novartis
7. Fedex Express	17. Sanofi-Aventis Spa (sede di Scoppito – AQ)
8. Mars Italia Spa	18. National Instruments Italy
9. American Express Services EUR Ltd	19. SAP Italia
10. Decathlon	20. Diegeo Italia Spa

Source: *Great Place to Work Institute*

It is interesting to note that in the first 20 positions are only 3 really Italian businesses (Fater Spa, Elica Spa, Cefriel); then, is useful to consider the strong variability of this ranking over the years. For example, the first classified in 2008 –

Google Italia - is not present in 2009 because it decided not to participate to the *Great Place Work Institute* survey.

After an initial screening of business on the basis of willingness to investigate the issue in research, businesses were reduced to 13, but only the 30% of the initial panel is distinguished by a high level of commitment towards the internal marketing approach. In these cases, besides sending the questionnaire, were conducted visits to places of companies and extensive personal interviews involving CEOs, Marketing & Communication Managers, Human Resources Managers, Training & Leadership Development Manager. In particular, some excellences emerge – as *Cefriel, Coca Cola, Cisco System, L.G. Gore, Elica Spa, Microsoft* – for their commitment level about what IM approach founded and developed continuously in their organizations. Also, it does not seem a coincidence that the majority is represented by subsidiaries of American multinationals, which have adopted the IM perspective in Italy since the mid-90s. On the contrary, Elica spa has developed an approach to internal marketing only in 2006, but with excellent results, as shown in 2009 to fifth place in the ranking.

The detailed analysis of cases of excellence has helped to highlight some significant features of the interpretation of the internal marketing in Italy (Tab. 2).

Tab. 2 – Summary of main findings

	Microsoft	Coca Cola	Cisco System	Elica	G.L. Gore	Cefriel
Ranking GPWI 2009	2	3	4	5	6	13
IM since	1995	1995	1998	2006	-	-
IM approach	Formalized Refer to: Mktg& Communication Director	Formalized Refer to: Mktg Manager	Formalized Refer to: Mktg& Communication Manager	Internal Communic.& Employer branding Formalized Refer to:Mktg &Communi cation Mnger	Internal Communic. Partially Formalized Refer to: HRManager	Internal Communic . Partially Formalize d Refer to: HR Manager
IM concept	IM identifies the soft, cultural and communicative elements of HR mngt, that work using the more concrete tools in the tradition of engineering and organizational management	HR dealing with people working well in team to achieve the goals of success, while IM goes beyond, taking care to make good people even outside the course of employment	IM goes beyond the HRM, concerning the employees' style of life, their welfare and their happiness, the sphere of physical and psychological one, not only to work with the team for achieving the business goals			The HR management is based on full transparency for information at all levels
IM Plan	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
IM Plan Contents	-identification of objectives;		-listening phase of	-definition of the plan:		

	-integrated strategy; -messages -tools and methods; -budget; implementation - measuring results		employees -definition of the plan on the basis of budget -phase of implementation and enforcement -control and monitoring	activities and services for employees to be implemented, once verified by the management		
Budget	Yes	Yes	Yes/ 5% tot Mktg Inv.	yes	Internal Comm.	Internal Comm.
Team	“virtual” inter functional team, consisting of 4 people at the corporate level: PRmanager, InternalComm, Personnel Director, CEO	Team working	1 employee + Marketing Dept (25 employees)	Team dedicated to listening to the needs of employees		
Unit	MKTG DEPT	MKTG DEPT	MKTG DEPT	MKTG DEPT	HRM	HRM
Responsible	Teamworking Mktg Dept, HRM, RP, CEO	Mktg Director	Teamworking Mktg Dept, HRM, CEO	Teamworking Mktg Dept e HR	CEO & collaborators	CEO collaborators
The employees are....	Each employee is covered, a witness and spokesman of the mission of Microsoft: allow people to express their potential. Microsoft is committed to contributing to the growth of the country and society, thanks to digital technology that can all live better, pursuing their economic goals in keeping with its ethical commitment	the password is “fun”, they are called to do their work as serene as possible, combining lightness with great professionalism and innovation; this makes the employees happy and motivated, even if sometimes it is necessary to extend office hours	The resources that allow Cisco to achieve the business goals in full respect for their autonomy From the CEO to the receptionists everyone works together for one goal: “make happy the company as those working for it“	partner in achieving the business goals. is the fundamental harmony and cooperation at work, because customer understands when the final product is the result of a teamwork	the primary thing the pivot and the core of the corporate culture	They represent the firm The two fundamental and essential company’s assets are: the social capital and the relationships. The jobs are stable and well paid, because the employee must be motivated and proud to work for the company. In January, each employee is assessed for the distributio

						n of awards and bonuses that are still above the industry average.
Great Place to work survey: why?	The results confirm the effectiveness of the approach based on innovation, passion for technology and optimism towards digital technology. The values of the brand is also promoted to employees too, fostering a dynamic culture inclined to innovation to allow people to express their full potential. This results in knited and skilled staff team.	The company is always in the top 3 positions and what it is gratifying as to confirm the ability to build over time a positive work environment on a human in which everyone has the opportunity to realize its full potential through personalized support and training, for its professional growth. This is positive, which translates into an extraordinary ability to appeal to the Youth, in a high employee retention and in a broad involvement of staff, essential to improve the business performances.	It is a moment of confrontation, since the firm believes in people and their diversity in culture, education, personality and traditions. To have fun doing the job is the philosophy of the company; fun is a value that requires a really open communication, because information is power and empowering team working too. So, everyone can hear the vision, mission, the role and objectives.	It 'an important stimulus, because the company's success is due not only to products but also to people and the environment in which they work. Checking the quality of work done, this event is particularly important at the moment in which the company is facing an internal reorganization and the listing.	It is an event consistent with the internal organization culture aimed at improving work environment, trust, fairness and self accountability	It is present since 2005 in the first 35 companies in Italy; it has won the Innovation Award 2008. The participation in research is an important occasion to check the quality of relations with in the company and form improving the corporate image through market.
IM tools & methods (benefits)	Incentives Education, training, master and Executive courses Flexible hours Food services & tickets Health care services Internal asylum Fitness & SPA Social facilities Open day	Incentives Education, training, master and Executive courses Flexible hours Food services & tickets Health care services Fitness & SPA Social facilities Open day Cultural facilities	Incentives Education, training, master and Executive courses Flexible hours Health care services Internal asylum Fitness & SPA Social facilities Open day Cultural	Incentives Education, training, master and Executive courses Flexible hours Food services Health care services; Fitness & SPA; Social facilities; Open day Cultural facilities	Incentives Education, training, Flexible hours Food services Health care services	Incentives Education, training, master; Internal Corporate & Skipper academy Excellence Award Flexible hours Tickets Health care services

			facilities Travelling facilities	Travelling facilities		Ext asylum Open day Cultural facilities
IM programs Evaluation	Microsoft Poll The annual International survey; Feedback from managers every 6 months; Qualitative questionnaires addressed to all employees, after each new initiative;	International Survey; internal qualitative surveys at regular; interpersonal communication; Internal talks	Pulse survey International Survey	<i>Great place to work</i> outcomes/ Internal talks and meetings Questionnaires	International Survey; internal qualitative surveys at regular; <i>Great place to work</i> outcomes/ Performance& Development instruments	<i>Great place to work</i> outcomes/ Internal talks and meetings
Job & employee satisfaction	Microsoft Poll The annual International survey	Questionnaires Internal talks and meetings	Pulse survey The annual International survey	<i>Great place to work</i> outcomes/ Internal talks and meetings	Performance& Development index for job satisfaction; Survey for employees satisfaction	<i>Great place to work</i> outcomes/ Internal talks and meetings
Benefits obtained since IM adoption	Increased sense of belonging to the company; employee motivation; employee loyalty, reducing turnover at physiological degree; greater commitment; productivity increase in the demand for internships through word of mouth.	Increased Employees' satisfaction; employee motivation; Increased sense of belonging to the company; greater commitment of the employees; reducing turnover.	increase in corporate performance, reducing turnover, through people satisfied with their working lives and environment in which they work.	Increased employee motivation; employees' satisfaction; the sense of belonging to the company; greater commitment in pursuing business goals, reducing turnover, with really significant improvement of economics and of corporate image.	Increased sense of belonging to the company; greater capacity in problem solving.	Increased employee satisfactio n

4. Discussion

The research objective is to verify the awareness of Internal Marketing concept and the formalization level of IM approach, as well as the existing relation between these factors and business performances, in the organizations investigated, from the first 20 firms presented in *Great place to work Institute* list published in Italy at beginning of 2009.

In particular, some excellences emerge – as *Cefriel, Coca Cola, Cisco System, L.G. Gore, Elica Spa, Microsoft* – for their commitment level about what IM approach

founded and developed continuously in their organizations. In these cases, specific investments and resources are set and assigned to that cause too.

But several differences are worth to be considered and analyzed. First of all the IM vision is not so clear and structured in all the companies investigated. So, there is a group of firms (represented by *Coca Cola*, *Cisco System*, *Microsoft* and the Italian company *Elica*) which differs for a really structured and formalized IM process, to which a specific role and/or unit have been attributed in the organization, with even a specific budget and human resources exclusively dedicated. Sometimes the unit is permanent, but represented by a inter-functional “virtual” team as in *Microsoft*. In any case, the IM activities (or Internal Communication activities as called in *Cisco System* and in *Elica*) are the responsibility of Marketing Department (and not of HRM Dpt), although is essential the cooperation with the other business functions. In particular, particularly in *Cisco* there are two policy areas: “internal communication” and “employer branding”. The last relates to the enhancement of vision and corporate culture to employees so that the internal image is consistent with that promoted outside. In these companies, IM strategies change as the business strategies do, to support top management in pursuing the general goals; often, IM approach has been introduced as a part of corporate strategy by the US headquarters or the first time a reorganization took place at the local level.

Then, in all these companies, a IM annual plan (realized all internally or thanks to external consulting) structured by specific and rigid steps is presented, to prove how seriously IM approach is considered. The second group of firms (formed by the smaller *Cefriel* and the american *W.L. Gore*), on the contrary, manifests a great commitment too, but are not used to act and decide in IM terms explicitly, neither a specific unit is expected (the refer is the HRM and the CEO), focusing the attention on internal communication, internal services and benefits in support of human resources management, applied in such a way that is able to improve the organizational climate and to maximize job and employees satisfaction.

Each of the companies analyzed consider the role of human resources in the same way: they are all important and essential to pursue the business objectives – from the CEO to the receptionists - but not as a productive factor, but as actors and protagonists in a complex process. It is also interesting to note that enterprises of larger size (especially in *Microsoft*, *Cisco System* and *Coca Cola*) is clear the difference between IM and traditional HRM, that the Marketing&Communication Manager of *Cisco System* summarizes in this way: “*IM goes beyond the HRM, concerning the style of life of the employees, their welfare and their happiness, the sphere of physical and psychological one, not only to work with the team for achieving the business goals*”.

But why these companies accept to be involved in the *GPWI* survey? In general, they consider this opportunity as a moment to verify the effectiveness of their human resources management in its broadest conception. But it is an important moment of truth in competition too, to improve the internal and external corporate image. From the particular italian firm’s point of view, the survey is a stimulus to improve themselves, being aware of the fallout in terms of attractiveness to potential human resources. Then, the outcomes of *GPWI* represent a real cheap and useful internal operational tool to evaluate the activities directed to the human resources. However, since the participation of companies is voluntary and the human resources involved in are selected by the companies themselves, is desirable

and hopeful that the companies do not make use of the final results as the only data referring to.

There are other differences between the various set and mix of internal marketing tools too, relating the internal communication specially. More complex, articulated and sophisticated are those created and offered by *Coca Cola*, *Cisco System*, *Microsoft* and the Italian company *Elica* – characterized by stimulating and innovative way of working and organizational context – while more shortlist and not so structured set of specific instruments appears in the smaller *Cefriel* and *W.L. Gore*, which have focused on consolidated standard benefits especially and on interpersonal communication. In any case, this not influence the satisfaction expressed by the respective employees; so that it probably depends on the whole atmosphere and relations' networks in which they are involved.

Referring to subsidiaries of U.S. multinationals, they make a lot of investments on internal communication by new media; so, besides the traditional meeting, informal and formal events, convention, training&education and workshops there is a great use of intranet, blog, video, electronic newsletter. In particular Cisco has recently launched a blog (*Cisco Employee Connection*) in which it's possible to find any information related to the company e to each company's employee, becoming a real working tool. Then, Cisco has created a video channel as an internal You Tube to promote increased participation in business, as in related decision-making as for instance that concerns the design of workplace.

Further comments concern the different typologies of benefit directed to the employees. There is generally a wide variety of proposals that can be classified respectively in *standard* (i.e. economic incentives; personalized training, education, master, internal corporate academy; flexible hours), higher social value-added ones (i.e. internal food services, asylum, health care services, check-up and assurances, facilities for family and so on) and finally those related to leisure (i.e. fitness centre, cultural facilities, travelling facilities and so on). The selection of benefit in all companies investigated is the result of a continuous analyzing and monitoring employees' needs process. Some of benefits are proposed and perceived as a really message of how they caring about the employees, as the first internal asylum in Italy and the first "concierge to rent for a day" by Microsoft (in order to highlight the commitment in diversity management for a really significant presence of women) or the reimbursement of eyeglasses for every employee because of much time spent in front of the pc in Cefriel during the day .

Other significant evidences relate to the evaluation methods of internal marketing strategy and policies implementation. So, if Italian branches of USA companies – as *Coca Cola*, *Cisco System*, *G.L. Gore*, *Microsoft* – can take advantage of international internal marketing knowledge and applications of respective headquarters, it is not the same for Italian firms (*Cefriel* and *Elica*) that have to use the outcomes of the *GPWI* italian office and the job and employees satisfaction outputs of some internal surveys – a methodology, however, that seems not so yet formalized and consolidated.

Finally, it is important to emphasize how highly is the shared nature of the business benefits achieved by the introduction of internal marketing. Between them, it's possible to highlight the employees' sense of belonging, their commitment, the loyalty and the reduction of employees' turnover, with undoubtful effects on business performances and internal and external image. Despite the operational

difficulties concerning the measure of this aspects, there is a general awareness and perception about the (economic and organizational) return on this investment.

4. Conclusions and suggestion for further research

The findings demonstrate in general the low diffusion of Internal Marketing Knowledge, but also the emerging interest about the IM approach – strategies and policies – from the best companies in service and industrial sectors too. The excellences as *Cisco Systems, Elica, Microsoft, Coca Cola, Cefriel, W.L.Gore* are in the first 20 positions of the Italian Great Place to Work classification, but only two of them, in fact, are really Italian companies.

Then, in these companies characterized for the best IM practices, the survey shows as the responsibility of Internal Marketing activities doesn't belong to the human resource department, but to the Marketing Department.

This is true especially in all the companies operating in extremely competitive markets (as in IT or soft drinks sectors), where competition require focusing on strategic and distinctive competences, referring to the best human resources of the organization. So, IM approach is something both strictly correlated with culture (and not necessarily with business size) and essential for business strategy. About that, it is important to highlight that where internal marketing approach is developed and pervasive – as in *Coca Cola, Cisco System, Microsoft* and the Italian company *Elica* - the firms hold the leadership of the respective markets and have noticed a rapid improvement of the revenue rate growth, since they have invested in internal marketing activities as in *Elica* (from the 2006).

The relevance of human resource management from the IM point of view is even greater, because of the actual economic worldwide crisis; so that, managing, involving, motivating, reassuring people become a really critical distinctive competence of a manager in any company's function or area.

That implies not only a new measure's evaluation system of managers is necessary but even a revision of the concept of firm's value creation itself, because that outcomes and the benefits for the organization due to of this competence's portfolio are not yet included in the profit or in the share value.

Findings really interesting have to be checked by a new quantitative research to go better inside the correlations between IM and business performances, referring to a larger panel of case histories, because the participation to the *Great Place to Work Institute* survey is voluntarily and it is not so well-known from the most italian companies. So, it is even hoped for a qualitative research to go inside the organization, even with ethnographic techniques.

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