

Considerations on the strategic service perspective

by Carlo Clementi

The relationship between service, competitiveness and business performance is clear and proven by numerous studies and research conducted on primary companies worldwide. However, the combination is not so diffused in the real world, especially among smaller companies. This leads us to consider this aspect as a structural weakness. The inability of some organizational entities to consider the relationship between growth processes and the adoption of an appropriate strategic service perspective constitutes a limit to a proper organizational and business development.

The companies and institutions wishing to adopt a strategic service perspective must take a first step of conceptual nature. It is fundamentally important for these organizations to become aware that the resources to sustain competition, which tends to be increasingly intense, are no longer those on which they normally work on, or in other words those that "contain" value. The resources that currently prove to be more important in generating value, regardless of the industrial sector references, are those through which companies can modify other resources, those capable of generating value through their use. These resources fall within the definition of intangible resources, since they are those that derive directly or indirectly from knowledge and information. Intangible resources have a dual value for the company or the institution that contains them, on the one hand they operate to foster a distinctive sustainable advantage, as they make difficult to understand the characteristics of factors or processes that otherwise could be imitated by possible competitors, while on the other they are the platform on which the company has the possibility to structure and develop further knowledge, as well as its own service proposal.

Due to the characteristic of being dynamic, time dependent and in a constant development, knowledge and information do not allow any interruption or immobility, those who have them. Companies that do not know how to use these resources appropriately, because they fail to provide the market with an appropriate level of innovation, quality, customization and integration to the new expectations of customers both in terms of products or processes, tend to be quickly marginalized. Adopting a strategic service perspective allows

companies to lay a solid foundation for a stable development and innovation activity, which is also possible through relationships fostering a more informed approach. Abandoning the transactional relationship, that is linked to the sale of goods or services, the service perspective facilitates the adoption of relational processes, aiming at satisfying customer needs on the basis of activities of understanding and sharing mutual goals. Innovation, as an ability to regenerate, create, integrate, and transform generating value of resources, is instrumental to support the relationship of mutual interest with customers, as they are increasingly more competent and demanding in evaluating both their partners and various market proposals.

Adopting a strategic service perspective allows the company or institution to refine, more consciously, and enhance, more effectively, its own range of competences. This path allows to gradually transform the important baggage of knowledge, experience and procedures, from simple resources to real strategic factors. These are increasingly important for companies, especially in times of low credit or excessive market volatility, as they provide consistency and robustness to the projects that companies intend to pursue. However, during economic slowdown, additional capabilities prove to be essential, such as being aware of future market trends or adapting organizational processes to changing social and economic scenarios. These abilities draw their *raison d'être* from the company's competence to collaborate. In Ancient Greece it was already believed that an evolved society is the result of the necessity of mutual value creation, satisfied through the mutual exchange of services. Therefore, the capabilities that allow a good collaboration within the network of partners, associates or stakeholders make it possible, at various levels of the structure, to gather new information and knowledge to improve and sustain a long-term relationship with customers.

In order to deliver a better service experience to the client, aiming at mutual value creation, the collaborative relationship must be considered. The latter, which links relational and operational capacities to carry out activities together with other complementary organizations, must be associated with the integrative competence, the one needed to harmonize various information, activities and processes.

A service perspective, which aims to maximize the benefit for both clients and companies, cannot avoid considering aspects of corporate culture and leadership for an appropriate human resource management. It is from these aspects that the company draws its own innovative skills, grounds its knowledge, and lays the foundations for value creation activities. Organizational culture and managerial style are also important because they set the internal infrastructural context of the company, which is essential to facilitate relational dynamics based on commitment, trust, dialogue and learning. These elements become particularly useful for an effective and symmetrical communication that allows on the one hand, the creative cues to emerge and become innovations for customers, and on the other hand, a new competence to be fixed into a procedure, so as to become part of the corporate intangible assets.

Market evidence reveals that those companies which have decided to move to a strategic service perspective are aware of being dynamic realities and they want to become even more performing. Adopting such an approach to improvement highlights how much the company or the institution has understood and learned on the importance of developing better co-operation and co-creation capabilities within its own network. In addition, there is the need for these organizations to improve their ability to integrate resources and services, in order to provide a high quality experience to their customers, as well as to play an active part in the ongoing path of making employees, processes and company functions collaborative and coordinate so the service provided can be more fluid and effective.

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