CREATING A STRATEGY FOR A SELF-DIRECTED ORGANIZATION IN THE ERA OF CHANGES FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF INTERNAL MARKETING

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Eveliina Tanninen

Examiners: Assistant professor Jenni Sipilä

Professor Liisa-Maija Sainio

ABSTRACT

Lappeenranta–Lahti University of Technology LUT

School of Business and Management

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Eveliina Tanninen

Creating a Strategy for a Self-directed Organization in the Era of Changes from the viewpoint of Internal Marketing

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Current external challenges, such as the uncertain economic situation, prevalent viruses, and conflicts between countries affect individuals and businesses. Various changes have led to new ways of working and methods where managers are expected to react quickly and efficiently. The purpose of the study is to support and challenge traditional marketing and human resource management models and to create a strategy for the target company from the perspective of internal marketing during the challenges. The literature review and previous research provide the basis for the development of internal marketing to this day. The study was conducted as qualitative research using interviews as a method of empirical contribution. The theoretical framework of the study builds a foundation for the theory, which is utilized throughout the study.

The aim of the study is to provide tools for a self-directed organization to support the company goals in times of changes. The study highlights the role of managers, where employees are perceived as internal customers among companies. The results show that previous literature and research are in line with empirical results: internal marketing is seen as an important in measuring the potential of an organization and individuals. In the end, companies need to focus on internal factors to maximize external benefits and prepare for risks. In addition, the roles and collaboration of business leaders and self-directed employees are considered significant in a self-directed organization where communication, openness, encouragement, and potential perception are emphasized. Companies and business leaders need to be aware of current trends, developments, and competition. The purpose is to shape and enable a work environment where employees and the entire work community develop, creating long-term and satisfied customer relationships.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Lappeenrannan–Lahden teknillinen yliopisto LUT

LUT-kauppakorkeakoulu

International Marketing Management

Eveliina Tanninen

Strategian luominen itseohjautuvalle organisaatiolle muutosten aikakaudella sisäisen markkinoinnin näkökulmasta

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Tämänhetkiset ulkoiset haasteet, kuten epävarma taloudellinen tilanne, vallitsevat virukset ja eri maiden väliset konfliktit vaikuttavat yksilöihin ja yrityksiin. Erilaiset muutokset ovat johtaneet uusiin työskentelytapoihin ja menetelmiin, joissa johtajilta odotetaan nopeaa ja tehokasta reagointia. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on tukea ja haastaa perinteisiä markkinoinnin ja henkilöstöjohtamisen malleja sekä luoda strategia kohdeyritykselle sisäisen markkinoinnin näkökulmasta haasteiden aikana. Tutkimuksen laaja kirjallisuus ja aiemmat tutkimukset antavat pohjan sisäisen markkinoinnin kehityksestä tähän päivään. Tutkimus toteutettiin kvalitatiivisena tutkimuksena, jossa empiirisen osuuden menetelmänä hyödynnettiin haastatteluja. Tutkimuksen teoreettinen viitekehys rakentaa pohjan tutkimuksen teorialle, jota hyödynnetään läpi tutkimuksen.

Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on tuoda itseohjautuvalle organisaatiolle työkaluja, jotka tukevat yrityksen tavoitteita muutosten keskellä. Tutkimus korostaa johtajien roolia, jossa työntekijät koetaan yrityksen sisäisinä asiakkaina. Tulokset osoittavat, että aiempi kirjallisuus ja tutkimukset ovat linjassa empiiristen tulosten kanssa: sisäinen markkinointi koetaan tärkeäksi organisaation ja yksilöiden potentiaalin mittaamisessa. Lopulta voidaan todeta, että yritysten tulee keskittyä sisäisiin tekijöihin, jotta ulkoiset hyödyt voidaan maksimoida ja riskeihin varautua. Tämän lisäksi yritysjohtajien ja itseohjautuvien työntekijöiden roolit ja yhteistyö katsotaan merkittäviksi itseohjautuvassa organisaatiossa, jossa kommunikaatio, avoimuus, kannustaminen ja potentiaalin havaitseminen korostuvat. Yritysten ja etenkin yritysjohtajien tulee olla tietoisia nykytrendeistä, kehityksestä, ja kilpailusta. Tarkoituksena on muokata ja mahdollistaa työympäristö, jossa työntekijät ja koko työyhteisö kehittyvät luoden pitkäaikaisia ja tyytyväisiä asiakassuhteita.

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Writing this thesis will complete the years of study at LUT University. Even though I have had the chance to move on my professional path, the journey to this point has been long and educational. I have gained a huge amount of new learning, knowledge, and experience for myself. I can say that I am proud of myself and what I have achieved, the journey was not an easy one.

However, I would not have gotten to this point without the endless support of family and friends and especially, my dear Felix. Thank you for everything you do for me. In the end, I want to say special thanks to Jenni Sipilä for your support, help and perseverance, during this process.

I'm ready for the next chapter and I can't wait what the future will bring me.

Mels, Switzerland, 3rd of May 2024,

Eveliina Tanninen

LIST OF SYMBOLS

IM	Internal marketing
EM	External marketing
HRM	Human Resource Management
RM	Relationship marketing
IMO	Internal market orientation
EMO	External market orientation
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019

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1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to provide an extensive insight into internal marketing in today's organizations in the times of crisis and changing environment. The purpose of this thesis is to implement internal marketing in the case company through a strategy. The thesis starts with an introduction chapter presenting the background and the scope of the research. Furthermore, the research problems and -questions are defined and the main literature and development of internal marketing are discussed. The executed theoretical framework, key concepts and business functions are shortly presented. Afterwards, the chosen methodology and data collection methods are reviewed, the empirical findings are discussed, and the case company is presented. The end part of the thesis covers the conclusions and results, gathering the previous literature and research to answer the research questions. Furthermore, the managerial implications are discussed and the practical suggestions and the strategy for the case company are defined. Finally, the experienced limitations of the thesis are evaluated and, in the end, possibilities for the further research around the topic is discussed.

1.1 Background of the thesis

Today’s companies and organizations face a lot of changing factors and challenges, both internally and externally, that have a lot of impact on, among other things, the company’s results, employees, and operations. Indeed, according to Chebbi et al. (2020, 209) today’s business environment is intensive and challenging, and it can be experienced as an opportunity and at a same time as a threat to companies’ operations. In many industries managers are dependent on external market conditions, which impose internal practices on all firms that want to be competitive. (Flipo 2000, 86) The increasing amount of crisis around the world has pushed organizations to think how to manage different functions and operations. Organizations that have a plan how to prepare for changes will have less issues regarding the outcomes than those companies not considering any pre-activities in advance. (Fill & Turnbull 2019, 466) Global pandemic, cross-border tensions affecting trade, internationalization, personnel and organizational change, company-level mergers, acquisitions, growth challenges and opportunities, bold- and innovative management

solutions, teamwork, employee innovation and -involvement, rewarding and today's trends are just a few of the things companies and employees face in their daily business. Companies are expected to perform well in the changing environment to maintain and develop the vision of future. The times of crisis in the era of changes and exceptional circumstances force companies, and especially business leaders think outside the box on how to optimize the results and overcome the challenges. (Lejeune, Mercuri, Beausaert & Raemdonck 2016, 307)

Organizational crisis can surprise every company and increase uncertainty, change, and disrupt the normal business and organizational operations in a sudden and short time of period. All types of crises can lead to negative outcomes and therefore in times of crisis, leaders are required to take actions that bring change to behaviors, beliefs, and outcomes in crisis management. (Bundy & Pfarrer 2015, 361) To recognize a crisis -characterized by uncertainty and unfamiliarity- is the first thing that leaders need to do. Actions such as work-from-home policies and adaptation of new tools might not just be temporary moves but actions that have long-term effects. Behaviors and mindset that will prevent leaders to overreact, but instead to look positive aspects is needed. (D'Auria & De Smet 2020) In competitive and dynamic business environment, employees continuous learning needs to be secured by supportive organization. (Lejeune et al. 2016, 307)

Many companies are forced to adapt oneself to changes, also at short notice, for example, in terms of Covid-19 pandemic. During the exceptional time of the pandemic, uncertainty and challenges brought many social relationships, health, and economic wellbeing uncertainties to organizations and individuals (van Mulukom et al. 2022, 9). Additionally, Covid-19 forced employees to work from home, which increased the amount of teleworking among companies. Before Covid-19, remote work was usual among self-employed. The results from European countries show that in 2009, 30% of the self-employed were usually or sometimes working from home and in 2019 the amount increased to 36%. Teleworking among the dependent employees that usually worked in office was 7,5% in 2009 and 11% in 2019. In 2019, in Finland, Sweden, and Netherlands the employees working from home in a regular basis or sometimes the result was above 30% and in comparison, in half of the European countries the results were under 10%. The factors that effect on teleworking among European countries are industrial structure, differences within sectors, employment status by firm size, rate of self-employment, and digital skills of employer. (Moens et al. 2022, 729; Milasi et al. 2021; Eurostat 2022)

The trend of teleworking has been increasing. In July 2020, the e-survey results shows that 48% of employees worked at home and 34% reported working exclusively from home. The employees that were exclusively working from home varies across Europe. In Croatia, Poland, and Slovakia the results were around one-fifth and in Germany, Austria, and Finland the result were around 30%. The highest results with 40% were in France, Spain, and Italy, and more than 50% in Belgium. (Ahrendt et al. 2020, 31-33) The data from 2021 showed that the employed persons rated by sex (all genders), age (from 15 to 64 years old) who usually work from home was in Finland 24.8%, in Germany 17% and in European Union-27 countries a 13.4%. (Eurostat 2022) To date, Covid-19 has been in the world consciousness for over five years and the discussion of the effects of the pandemic have been widely discussed over the world and among many different industries. The consequences have been and are still major in terms of economic development and prospects and will also lead to future debate.

As a result of Covid-19, 54% of a surveys employees had worked previously from home but 46% were new teleworkers. (Ahrendt et al. 2020, 33) During the time of teleworking, self-leadership and independency have grown the importance in organizations. According to Stewart, Courtright & Manz (2011, 185, 190) self-leadership has been studied across the literature for over 30 years, but it has been also forgotten or ignored, especially in team level. Employees' continuous development and support by organizations in the today's dynamic business environment is crucial. Continuous learning, employee reflection and -development plan is positively affecting self-directness (Lejeune et al. 2016, 307) and existing human resources are crucial to achieve competitive advantage and maintain employee performance, according to Rino & Rafika (2017, 1).

As "*Remote working has become the 'new normal'"* stated by Nemteanu & Dabija (2021, 1), it is additionally experienced challenging for many employees: anxiety, increased digitalization and decreased social connections and change in communication can lead to burnout and frustration. Furthermore, remote working effects on employee satisfaction and in the end to the overall work performance. To maintain productiveness among organizations, human resource management (HRM) needs to be considered, especially during Covid-19 pandemic. Due to Covid-19, the business environment came critical and complexity especially for the role of leaders to take charge of their organizations and employees. Additional competencies such as empathy, compassion, mindfulness, and

sensitivity are expected from leaders. In addition, it is important to understand employees' differences through personal level during the changes and challenging times where managers need to react accordingly. (Nemteanu & Dabija 2021, 1, 11)

This research is done for a case company, which have adapted remote working as a new normal through Covid-19, gone through internal organizational changes and affected from today's external factors. The case company operates internationally in a process industry and have strong presence of self-directed employees. Therefore, this thesis utilizes internal marketing (IM) for the case company, where the role of leaders and importance internal communication is highlighted.

Internal marketing presents the way how organizations can meet the needs of its employees, increase performance and impact positively to the different behaviors and attitudes (Lawton-Misra & Pretorius 202l, 205). Internal marketing is a broad topic that has been examined by several researchers throughout the years. In the beginning, research was based on the need to increase individual and personnel management and customer services. (Bohnenberger et al. 2019, 2) The word marketing is necessary for any organization in terms of marketing campaigns (Cooper & Cronin 2000, 178). According to Huang (2020, 165), internal marketing concept has been central topic among many marketing and HRM discussions for many years. The idea is to implement internal marketing into HRM related marketing-like activities to fill in the end the managerial needs. According to the concept of internal marketing, HRM should include marketing related topics, for example research, promotional communications, segmentation, and internal communication and advertisement to inform and assure management and organization. Internal marketing is a style of management with key objectives of flexibility and commitment. (Egan 2011, 171)

Kotler and Keller (2019, 45) state that internal marketing activities are more crucial than the direct external activities. To success in marketing among companies, it is important to involve all departments and teams to achieve the same targets and goals. Strong alignment between different departments is needed, for example: engineering and production design need to align to make right products and finance together with accounting to make right financial decisions and profitability measures. The role of senior management is also very significant for the success: the vision and philosophy of the company to serve customer in the end, need to be clearly said and communicated to all employees. Everyone needs to

understand, appreciate, and support the marketing efforts stated in the company. As stated by Kotler et al. (2019, 45, 47) "*In order to be efficiently implemented, internal marketing has to be approached as a management process that is strongly influenced by the organizational culture and leadership climate."* To success in implementing internal marketing, the implementation of marketing activities needs to take place: competition among internal employees should be taken seriously, which can be compared to the competition among external customers and therefore, internally placed marketing activities to all employees in all stages of organization and employee development is crucial. (Berry & Parasuraman 1991, 151; Cătălin et al. 2014, 15)

1.2 The aim of the thesis and the research questions

This thesis aims to provide a comprehensive viewpoint to internal marketing in terms of todays' organizations. The purpose is to find out the opportunities that internal marketing can bring to organization that operates internationally and has self-directed employees. The managerial purpose of this thesis is to give practical support and evidence for internal marketing implementation to the case company. The objective of this thesis is to create new knowledge of internal marketing in the case company in times of crisis. The previous literature, past research, and next discussed five different factors build a basis for the thesis research questions. The five different factors that answer to the question about the relevance of this thesis are *1) today's world situation and the times of crisis, 2) HRM and marketing point of view, 3) the importance of self-directed employees*, *4) the role of leadership and management, and 5) effects on the business performance*.

Organizational structure plays a key role in companies' processes. Employees are expected to manage and create advantage to the organization with the communication and coordination among different organizational levels. (Rino et al. 2017, 1) The first aspect that build an important starting point for the thesis research question is the fact that today's rapidly changing world situation effect on companies. Indeed, in the times of changes, it is crucial for organizations to prioritize internal processes where communication and information stands out (Goyal & Srivastava 2021, 35). The essential elements of organizational success are satisfied employees and talent retention (Staniec & Kalińska-Kula 2021, 33). In time of crisis and era of changes, companies need to be aware and make

observations of the ongoing world situation and trends to respond to the challenges and to maintain the required operational and organizational level. Lawton-Misra et al. (2021, 207) points out that leader's behavior, choices, analysis of status and recognitions of individual differences need to be considered and managed to have best possible outcome during challenging times. Pearson & Clair (1998, 60) define organizational crisis as a *"low-profitability, high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made swiftly.*" In this context, era of changes is discussed through times of crisis, which is defined as a wide range of internal and external factors that push companies to think, innovate and challenge in everyday business. This includes for example war in Europe, Covid-19, and organizational changes. The investigation of internal marketing in the case company in today's changing environment is important for the thesis. Based on these background aspects, the research question is as following:

RQ: What is the role of internal marketing in the times of crisis?

Another aspect, which have not been studied as much and, which creates an opportunity for new knowledge is the relationship between HRM and internal marketing in times of crisis. Incoherent, competitive, and unstable environment have raised the importance of valuable human resources in modern business. (Staniec et al. 2021, 33) Companies are often relying on HRM, but the marketing point of view is missing. According to Bowie et al. (2017, 307) recruiting, training, and rewarding are important HRM functions that need to be understood by marketers to influence strategies that ensure employees can present the company's values and brand. In the end, the experience which marketers can give to customers matter the most. (Bowie et al. 2017, 307). In this respect, it is important to take HRM point of view to the next level and bring marketing sights into todays' organizations. Berry, Hensel & Burke (1976, 10) state in the early state of the literature the relationship between internal marketing and HRM: internal marketing program helps to move away from the traditional HRM perspective (getting things done through people) and recognize employee potential so that goals of individuals and -organizations can be reached simultaneously. Internal marketing is widely discussed for many years, and defined by many researchers, but not many companies are not utilizing or implementing the concept in practice. (e.g. Mahnert & Torres 2007; Ahmed & Rafik & Saad 2003) In addition, internal marketing is not much investigated in

the manufacturing sector (e.g. Huang 2020), especially not in the case company, which gives an objective for the research and sub-questions.

The third aspect that is worth to discuss and investigate is the role and effect of self-directed employees in today's organizations and companies. Self-directed employees are an important part of today's organizations. According to Stewart et al. (2011, 185) in the individual level, self-leadership push to improvement in affective responses and improved work performance. In addition, empowering and shared leadership are important for self-leadership. Related to the previous, the role of leadership and company management in the crisis is a fourth and one interesting aspect to investigate. The role of strong management in times of crisis and in internal marketing concept is interesting to look closer to. The last point for the background of the research questions can be summarized from the performance and outcome perspective. The case company's business performance can be discussed through the status and experiences in the organization and in addition the marketing-like effects for the company in short- and long run. Based on these background aspects, three sub-questions are presented to give a holistic view to the main research question.

SQ1: What internal marketing actions support self-directed employees in the times of crisis?

SQ2: What internal marketing actions support leadership in the times of crisis?

SQ3: How internal marketing effects on business performance?

1.3 Preliminary literature review

This chapter gives an overview to the previous literature and theory of internal marketing in times of crisis. The aim of this chapter is to give the support for the literature review and theoretical framework later discussed in the thesis.

Since the beginning, internal marketing was considered as a marketing approach to highlight the external marketing functions, satisfaction, and loyalty (Huang 2020, 166). Jalilvand et al. (2019, 1075) define internal marketing as a *"firm's a unique resource, which is tactic, organizationally embedded, causal, ambiguous, and imperfectly imitable, which facilitates the development of new ideas and in turn creates competitive advantages*." Internal

marketing can be thought as a process towards the development of internal partnerships and relationships. The overall objective of internal marketing is to implement motivated customer minded employees. (Grönroos 1982, 166) Internal marketing is considered to have actual effects on the work engagement, satisfaction, leadership, and overall turnover. On the other hand, the concern around these same topics is present during pandemic. (Uludag, Oluwajana, Ekanem 2023, 2347)

In normal and stable situation, without existing crisis, companies can increase processes and increase B2B relationships better than during the challenges (Obal & Gao 2020, 247). Times of crisis can be stated as something that happens suddenly and where companies' capacities and resources regarding the response are measured (Fred Garcia 2006, 4-10). For example, Covid-19 gave uncertainty, pressure, and economic challenges especially for medium-sized companies. (Eichholz, Knauer & Winkelmann 2023, 443) In addition to Covid-19, the war in Ukraine and economic crisis need not only patient from the companies but support from global governments and communities (Tomczyk 2022, 145).

According to research by Makovec Bren et al. (2012, 436), organizational performance is affected by times of crisis, which can be seen from the lack of innovation and increase of HRM functions, especially in economic crisis. The relationship between internal communication and crisis during pandemic is investigated: the importance of personal growth and interaction (Sharples et al. 2023, 1486) and predicting through digitalization the future views for the business and effects to satisfaction of employees in the times of crisis (Eichholz et al. 2023, 443) are highlighted and discussed. In addition, external and internal processes are affected by the crisis and therefore leaders need to make decisions to ensure the long-term business connections. However, short-term decisions made by the management can end to permanent, good, and effective solutions. (Obal et al. 2020, 247) For example, Covid-19 gave several opportunities and new solutions for companies to implement in daily operations. The traditional internal communication is extended to social media platforms to maintain connection to the customers. The normal activities that companies are used to need to continue, even though the work is moved to home and remote during times of crisis. (Susanto 2021, 1) Digitalization and solutions to replace traditional office work came permanent and took a step forward due to recent crisis mentioned above (Tomczyk 2022, 145).

The past literature around internal marketing in the times of crisis focus on specific country or company sector to investigate the effects of crisis from marketing point of view, but not specifically through the internal marketing concept or perspective. There is a gap between internal marketing as a term in times of crisis and therefore, the findings in this chapter gives the proof for research gap, which is discussed and investigated in the section 2 of this thesis.

1.4 Theoretical framework of the thesis

This thesis aims to implement and adapt internal marketing to the case company. This thesis framework is first presented in the figure 1 and then later in the figures 3 and 4 further developed as part of the data collection methods, empirical overview, and conclusions. In addition to the Bohnenberger et al. (2019) framework, the previous literature and research questions builds the theory of the thesis.

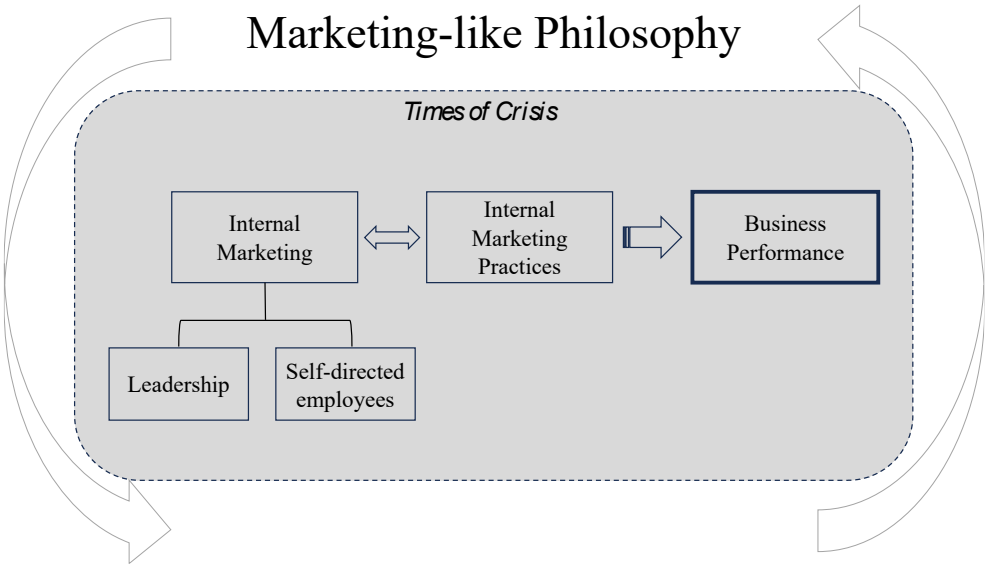

Figure 1. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of the thesis is discussed detailed in the chapter three, and it covers specific key concepts of the thesis: internal marketing, marketing-like philosophy, leadership, self-directed employee, internal marketing practices and business performance in times of crisis. Times of crisis is a central part of the topic and research questions of the thesis and for that reason the outcomes of utilizing and adapting internal marketing among companies is considered from the perspective of the times of crisis. The marketing-like

philosophy is the starting point for the theoretical framework, followed by the relationship between management and employees in the organization. The affects that internal marketing practices (e.g. employee development) have towards internal marketing implementation and to outcomes for business is further discussed.

The theoretical framework of this thesis is supported by research: "*Internal Marketing: A Model for Implementation and Development"* by Bohnenberger et al. (2019). The research builds a supportive background for the theory and key concepts and is further discussed in the chapter two and three. In addition, the framework supports the empirical part of the thesis and the research questions by building the supportive background for the empirical investigations. Bohnenberger et al. (2019) framework is not used in the original form but modified as part of the thesis to serve best the purposes. In addition, few main topics are excluded and discussed in the chapter 3.1.

1.5 Definitions of the key concepts

The definitions and key concepts of this thesis theoretical framework (figure 1) are defined in this chapter. In addition, the key concepts are discussed and analyzed further in the next chapters and used throughout the research, for this reason, most relevant concepts for the thesis are explained shortly, to understand the meanings in the later chapters and connection to the research questions.

The past years have emerged as a time of uncertainty, bringing new challenges to the global awareness, such as economic- and, financial crisis, climate change, Covid-19, and war in Ukraine, which can be defined as the **times of crisis**. (Tomczyk 2022, 145) During the crisis time, companies that participate full organizations and implement a plan in a management level overcome crisis have better possibilities on positive outcomes. The communication during crisis is crucial and therefore companies should develop a strategy to overcome the challenges. (Fill 2019, 469)

Marketing-like philosophy, presented as the starting point for this thesis theoretical framework, is built around the idea of treating employees as the internal customers. This mindset builds the basis to implement marketing-like tools and activities to achieve the required and desired results. (Ahmed et al. 2003, 1221-1227) Employee motivation through

marketing-like activities is further highlighted by Grönroos (1982, 163): "*internal marketing concept, holds that an organization´s internal market of employees can be influenced effectively and hence motivated to customer-consciousness, market-orientation and sales-mindedness by a marketing-like internal approach and by using marketing-like activities internally."* Berry et al. (1991, 151) defines **internal marketing** as "*attracting, developing, motivating, and retaining qualified employees through job-products that satisfy their needs. Internal marketing is the philosophy of treating employees as customers…and it is a strategy of shaping job-products to fit human needs"*. The aim of internal marketing is to adapt internal activities that motivate employees to serve customers well (Kotler et al. 2019, 45).

Gummesson (1991, 69) define the concept of employees as internal suppliers and customers. This approach assumes chains of internal customers, such as administrative and manufacturing, within organization. In other words, internal customers (employees) that are not daily cooperating with external customer, is expected to treat internal customers as if they are external to the organization. (Egan 2011, 171) Concepts, which are related to internal employees are in the research discussed as self-directed employees. **Self-directed employees** can be defined as individuals taking greater responsibility on personal level and where the learning is self-managed. (Guglielmino & Guglielmino 2001, 37-38) Self-management is in the middle of external factors and self-leadership, push employees and teams in organizations to think what duties to do and how they should be done. (Stewart et al. 2011, 19)

To support self-leadership among self-directed employees the support of management and leaders are considered crucial in times of crisis. Mohanty (2018, 366) define **leadership** as: *"the ability of an individual to lead or guide other people, teams or organization."* Different leadership strategies and leader's personalities effect on the employee engagement. Communication, authority, vision and mission, mind, and general performance are few characters that leaders own. (Mohanty 2018, 366) To receive positive advantage during time of crisis, effective leadership is needed (Fred Garcia 2006, 4).

Marketing-like thinking that includes managerial actions enable internal market orientation (IMO) i.e. implementation not only in organizations internal context but also in external orientation. Functions assisting IMO involvement among teams and organizations include pertaining the needs of individuals to support intelligence and meet the expectations. (Lings & Greenley 2005, 291-292) To support IMO, different **internal marketing practices** are

considered to increase employee commitment and satisfaction. For example, vision, development and rewarding are practices that have positive impacts on job satisfaction. (Joung et al. 2015, 1618) Marketing techniques, employee participation, development and satisfaction, internal market research, internal and external communication are crucial internal marketing practices and tools that support employee involvement towards internal marketing implementation (Bohnenberger et al. 2019, 7-9).

In the end, the implementation of internal practices leads to business performance. To define the values of the activities, companies are considered to measure their **business performance.** Companies' business performance can be measured for example through sales, satisfaction, cash flow and profit. (Morgan 2012, 104) The implementation of internal marketing through marketing-like tools and practices and the performance outcomes are discussed in the section two.

1.6 Research methodology

It is typical for scientific research to solve a problem (Puusa & Juuti 2020, 11). Research must look at the connection between theory, empiricism, and practice and therefore methodology as a term conducts the theory and method refers to techniques used to analyze the data (Puusa et al. 2020, 4, 56). This research has been conducted through qualitative research method using semi-structed interviews. Interviews include different themes and key questions that help discussion and further analyzing. In addition, for empirical research, the additional supportive questions can be included if the interviewer consider this as value adding element and further increase the participation of the interviewee. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 391)

Interviews are one of the used methods among researchers to collect the needed data (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2022, 32) and without an exception, used also in this research to collect relevant data of the case company. Additionally, interviews were considered to bring relevant information of the interviewee's expectations, experiences and information around the research topic and phenomenon.

This thesis included together seven different interviews, with together 29 interview questions. Additional questions were conducted during the interviews and during the

interviews, the definitions of the main terms were defined. The top management interviews give information from the level what is only available internally and on the high level. Therefore, it is considered to introduce the case company and the interviewees in this chosen methodology as anonymous.

1.7 Research delimitations

The thesis includes few limitations regarding managerial perspective and the case company itself. In general, the interviews are limited only to a specific number of interviewees, which are done only from a specific company. This gives the main limitations itself to the thesis. The interviews are made only from the management level employees to further maintain internal marketing strategy to the top management. The importance of leadership is highlighted several times further in the thesis in internal marketing processes but in general, in all functions. During the times of crisis, organizations need a good strategy with strong leadership. Based on these, in terms of interviews the employee perspective and participation are excluded to focus on implementing internal marketing strategy to managers.

Furthermore, the used theoretical framework excludes few factors (e.g. teaching, market research) from the original Bohnenberger et al. (2019) framework, to limit the content and to analyze the factors with strong connections to each other, only relevant factors were chosen to the research. Idea of the framework is to include marketing-like philosophy to gather the idea of internal marketing in this thesis, which is further discussed in the chapter 3.1. In the end, the research focuses only on the business-to-business (B2B) aspect, as the case company operates with other manufacturing related industries, suppliers, where business in defined as a strong process industry. B2C context is excluded in this context. However, the role of customer and competitors are highlighted further in this research in terms of the external effects and outcomes.

1.8 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided to theoretical and empirical part. Chapters two and three consists of theoretical discussions and chapters four and five consists of the empirical results and analyzes. In the chapter six, the empirical and theoretical contributions are combined. The

background of the research is presented in the first chapter of the thesis. The goal and objective of the thesis is discussed through theoretical framework and research questions and -problems. Furthermore, preliminary literature of internal marketing in times of crisis, methodology, delimitations, and the key concepts of the research are reviewed.

The second chapter presents relevant literature and theorical background for this thesis and the definitions around the main topics are discussed. The chapter aims to give overview to the origins of internal marketing and to provide summary of the past research around the used concepts. The idea is to look to internal marketing development in companies during the years. The third chapter presents the theory around the subject through the theoretical framework. The main theoretical objectives, key concepts, and business functions around internal marketing is discussed in detail to examine the theory further in practice.

Chapter number four presents the methodology and the chosen data analyzing practices around the topic. The theory for empirical research is given through the introduction of qualitative research. The fifth chapter introduce, analyze, and compare the empirical findings in detailed and present the research question and three sub-questions of this research. The background of the case company and the interviewees are presented.

Last chapter number six gathers the theoretical and empirical together into the final conclusions. In addition, the research questions are answered and analyzed. In the end, the theoretical outcomes, and managerial implications together with the practical internal marketing strategy for the case company are defined. Finally, experienced limitations and suggestions for future research of this thesis are discussed.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter the main literature around the topic is presented from the early days to today's literature. The aim is to create an overall insight to internal marketing and to the context, which it has been studied during the years. The first part of this chapter starts with the holistic marketing dimensions, which builds the basis for the background of the literature and further discussions and development in the research supported by the main frameworks, models, and practices used in the literature. In addition, the literature related to self-directed employees and leadership is highlighted in the times of crisis. The last section presents the conclusions of literature review.

2.1 Holistic marketing dimensions for internal marketing

In this section, a holistic marketing approach is explained, to understand better internal marketing origins and its connections to other marketing functions. Holistic marketing builds the basis for marketing-like activities to be integrated in organizations. For example, development and design functions support the implementation of these activities. Holistic marketing approach does not only support implementation of marketing activities, but it helps to recognizes the full overview of the characters linked to each other, which help to analyze in terms of challenges what marketing activities and factors to focus on. Holistic marketing can be defined to four factors: relationship-, integrated-, internal, and performance marketing. One of the factors, is defined as internal marketing, which is strongly related to the other factors, (Kotler et al. 2019, 43-44) but chosen as a leading and most relevant factor for this thesis to build the basis for the analysis and further discussions. The holistic marketing dimension are presented in figure 2.

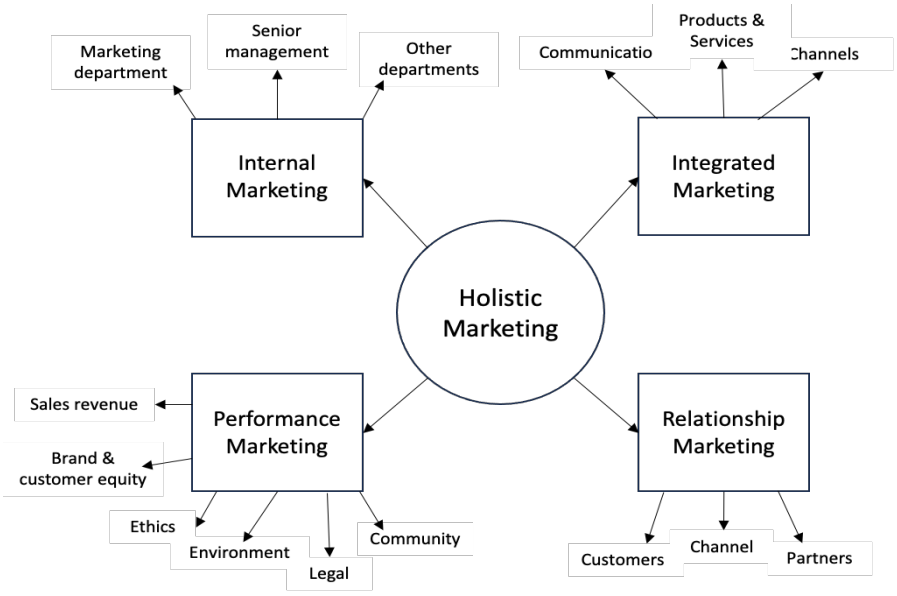

Figure 2. Holistic Marketing Dimensions (Kotler & Keller 2019, 43)

Internal marketing, which is defined in the next chapter (for example by Berry et al. 1991) consists, from the holistic marketing point of view, from marketing department, senior management, and other departments of a company. Based to the holistic view, internal marketing has different approaches. According to first approach different marketing functions, for example advertising and product management need to fit and work together to maximize benefits. The second approach highlight the importance of other departments: marketing needs to be embraced through the customer-oriented thinking. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 24)

To benefit from holistic marketing approach, it is important to build strong internal relationships between all organization and management levels to succeed. As stated by Cătălin et al. (2014, 9) to meet the customer needs, companies must first align internally and think employees as internal clients. Therefore, to support holistic marketing approach, a marketing communications flow is briefly discussed. The idea of communications strategy is to achieve objectives from the production to the end customer. The needed channels and stakeholders are utilized to encourage organizations to note the potential and increase value. The organizational strategies of communications include stakeholders from customers to trade unions and from distributors to media. In all marketing communication in the companies' profile of strategy all stakeholders need to be involved and considered. (Fill 2019, 215-216) Communication is the most important part of internal marketing analysis,

and therefore those involved in the communication chain need to be aware of the role and impact throughout the organization.

2.2 Background of internal marketing

Internal marketing has been investigated and part of in the discussions for almost 40 years (Huang 2020, 165): more than 200 internal marketing studies appear in the literature, according to Huang & Rundle-Thiele (2014, 196). In the 1990s there were 21 empirical research about internal marketing. After 2000s there were 161 publications and in 2015, there were 23 publications and 43 different definitions of internal marketing. The biggest increase in the amount of the research happened after year 2006. (Huang 2020, 165-169; Huang & Rundle-Thiele 2015, 572)

Churchman (2016, 5-6, 18-19) present the evolution of employee communication over the years; from 1980s to 1990s the management started to use communication to motivate employees and improve performance, which led to the shift from internal PR to internal marketing. Through the new terminology, including 'internal customer', organizations started to talk about using communication to support their employees with organizational goals, especially quality and customer service. Visions and missions got more powerful meaning inside organizations and individual employees trusted to be more autonomous and make more decisions; the language of empowerment started. Employees were given much more freedom in their work. Many old theories stepped away from the fact that organizations needed to be more flexible and adaptive. In addition, strategy was no longer only a set of concepts, but a practical response to changing conditions. The changes were markable: employees were considered as an important and crucial source of the company and to receive competitive advantage. The term management changed more to leadership and employees were called colleagues and partners; employees were expected to be 'passionate' about what they were doing. From the earlier days onwards, more internal communication specialists were recruited. (Churchman 2016, 5-6, 18-19) The concept of marketing in organization's internal activities came to marketing and service management literature in the late 1970's, but the concept has origins already from the in twentieth century (Varey & Lewis 1999, 926). Marketing was formerly concerned more from the external marketing point of view, where the internal relationships and meanings were limited (Arndt, 1983, 52).

Berry et al. (1976), Sasser & Arbeit (1976), George (1977) were one of the first researchers using the concept of internal marketing. The further conception (Grönroos 1982; Rafiq et al. 1993; 2000; Berry & Parasuraman 1991; Gummesson 1991; Varey et al. 1999; Kotler et al. 2019; Huang,2020), implementation (Piercy & Morgan, 1991), application (Snell & White, 2009) and internal market orientation (IMO) (e.g. Sasser et al. 1976; Lings et al. 2005) has been part of the internal marketing literature for decades. George (1977, 91) state internal marketing as: *"A suggested perspective for service retailers in meeting the dual challenge of employees who are both producers and sellers and of low wages and low status in the concept of internal marketing."* From a marketing perspective the implications existed among the service firms. Employees were seen as part of the processes, seethe differences and decrease uncertainty among customers. (George 1977, 91-92)

Berry et al. (1976, 8) and Sasser et al. (1976, 65) definition of internal marketing started by defining *"jobs as internal products and employees as internal customers",* to meet organizational goals. IMO on the other hand, raised the discussion from the view the employees who are serving customers and the daily point of contact, are most important resources to companies. In addition, employees who are satisfied, committed, and motivated are crucial for customer relationships in long run. (Sasser et al. 1976, 65; Berry et al. 1991, 152-153) According to Grönroos (1982, 161) internal marketing can be defined as a *'managerial philosophy'*, which has two outcomes: strategic and tactical implications, which effect to all company operations.

After the first definitions, further meaning of internal marketing was executed. Internal marketing relationship and connection to external marketing implementation as part of internal marketing strategy (Piercy et al. 1991, 82), to the implementation of strategies and discussion of HRM (Rafiq et al. 1993, 219), to the perspective of measuring internal marketing as process in quality management (Lings & Brooks 1988) and, to the marketing-like approach, for example marketing planning and marketing mix tools in the discussions and implementation took place. In addition, concept of a 'relationship marketing' is related to internal marketing implementation and highlighted in the literature (Grönroos 1999, 327-331; Grönroos 1994; Gummesson, 1991).

2.3 Internal marketing development

The process of internal marketing developed to definition of internal market orientation (IMO), which is often related to internal market concept and -practices. Employees are the first contact for the customers and therefore IMO identifies the needs of employees, which are a prerequisite to satisfy the wants and needs of the customers. (Lings et al. 2005, 408) In addition, the concepts and research of internal marketing went ahead to the from IMO to external market orientation (EMO). Internal marketing activities influence to the external marketing (EM) strategies and programs. Internal marketing and EM are together seen as processes that improve continuously and result in as advantages for whole organization. (Ferdous et al. 2013, 647)

There is a debate among research that internal marketing communications are as important as external ones. However, internal marketing can be seen as essential condition for external marketing. In the end, close alignment between internal- and external marketing is important to receive positive business implications. (Grönroos 1994, 12; Lings et al. 2005, 302) Internal marketing suggests that external marketing is utilized first internally before making external marketing solutions (Huang, 2020, 165). Statement by Blythe (2006, 66) is in line with this: company's internal environment is the smaller version of the external environment. Indeed, for example Piercy et al. (1991, 82) research reviewed the possibilities to involve external marketing strategies to internal marketing activities.

The relationship between internal- and external marketing is underlined among previous literature. A framework by Ferdous et al. (2013) presents the external marketing factors that consists of: development and implementation of relevant external marketing activities, externally received solutions and results and EMO. To success in the end measured by customers. The Ferdous et al. (2013) provides literature of the development of IMO, internal marketing programs and EMO and further on and external marketing programs. (Ferdous et al. 2013, 641) The importance of companies' external and internal communication for organizational learning is also stated in the previous literature. For example, according to Cohen & Levinthal (1990, 133) both inward-, and outward-looking capacities are important for effective organizational learning and the dominance of either one is not good. Organizations use inward-, and outward-looking dimensions to balance internal- and external marketing activities. If a company has an outward-looking organization practices,

for example interaction with customers, the results of inward-looking activities will be intensified, because the utilization of external knowledge. Additionally, outward-looking practices (i.e. external factors) will increase value if inward-looking practices are considered. (Cohen et al. 1990; Foss et al. 2011, 983)

2.3.1 Further development to specific contexts

According to Wieseke et al. (2009, 123) there are only few empirical research on internal marketing. However, several research state that internal marketing literature have been empirically examined in different contexts related to service industries. For example, tourism, retail bank and finance, medical, and IT industry. Tertiary industry was the top industry researching internal marketing during years 1990-2016. In addition, Western and European countries lead the research in this same industry. (Huang et al. 2014, 196; Huang 2020, 165-169)

The focus among the studies have varied a lot during the years; different industries and regions have been investigating internal marketing. For example, Gray (2006, 717) research focus branding and brand strength from the internal marketing point of view in New Zealand firms; improving internal marketing to keep employees informed about customer needs, market changes and company initiatives help customers to better results. Internal marketing is also investigated through banking industry, for example Mazzarolo, Mainardes & Montemor. (2021, 810) research show how internal marketing affects employees' perceptions of banks' strategic trends in terms of market, brand, value, and competitive advantage. Studies show that internal marketing has significant and positive effects on motivation and employee commitment (Bailey, Albassami & Al-Meshal 2016, 821) and on the customer satisfaction (De Bruin, Roberts-Lombard & De Meyer-Heydenrych 2020, 199) in the bank sector in specific countries. Additionally. the connection of internal marketing and organizational learning in employee performance and -innovation, in petroleum and oil industry is investigated by Imani et al. (2020, 1).

Affirmative internal marketing effects to customer satisfaction (Brooks, Lings & Botschen 1999, 49; Kadic-Maglajlic, Boso & Micevski 2018, 291), customer orientation (Bohnenberger et al. 2019, 1), improved service quality (Berry et al. 1991, 152-171), employee satisfaction and engagement (Huang et al. 2014, 202), organizational commitment

(Schulz, Martin & Meyer 2017, 1294) have been stated by many researchers and can be seen in the literature, also among other industry sectors. However, problems utilizing internal marketing concept in action is also stated in literature (e.g. Rafiq et al. 1993, 221). For example, in segmentation, internal market (Lings et al. 2005) and arguments regarding the relationship between HRM and internal marketing (Gyepi-Garbrah & Asamoah 2015).

Recent research has focused more broadly to other organizational functions related to internal marketing and for example its implications and orientation in practice. According to Kadic-Maglajlic et al. (2018) internal marketing concept have been studied through strategy and functionality. The strategic point of view raises the importance to involve whole organization and especially, the employees who are expected to see as internal customers of the organization. From the functional point of view other activities and departments are involved. These motivates employees to become market and customer-oriented that enhance market performance. (Lings 2004, 411; Lings & Greenley 2010, 321; Kadic-Maglajlic et al. 2018, 292)

According to Park & Tran (2018, 412), when employees are internally considered as customers the outcomes can be more positive. For example, for salespeople engagement this thinking helps to adapt and focus on the customer-driven- and relative sales attitudes, which can result in long term customer relationship and commitment. The results indicated also that the customer-oriented behaviours among salesperson can be seen as good things as the behaviour plays a role between internal marketing and external customer responses. (Park et al. 2018, 412) The positive impacts can be stated additionally by Jalilvand et al. (2019, 1064): internal marketing and entrepreneurial behaviours support innovation among family businesses. Recent research (e.g. Rudawska, Weerasiri & Wiścicka-Fernando 2018; Chebbi et al. 2020; Liu, Liston-Heyes & Ko, 2010) have also used the term internal stakeholders (employees, managers, teams etc.) related to internal stakeholder theory in many studies. This term is more broad than internal customer and discussed for example as part of implementation process, see chapter 3.4.

2.4 Internal marketing frameworks and models

Different frameworks and models of internal marketing are reviewed by several researchers. For example, a framework studied in the early phase of the literature by Tansuhaj, Randall

& McCullough (1988) show a marketing management model that show the effects between internal marketing and EM activities. Arndt (1983, 52) define three tasks of internal marketing: *"information-, the competence development-, and the motivation function"*, which emphasizes the importance of disseminating information internally to groups participating in marketing practices. Furthermore, Ahmed et al. (2003) research present a model for implementing internal marketing strategies to involve employees to the operations. In addition, internal marketing mix is presented to support cooperation between employees and customers. The conceptual model describes the potential and connection between internal marketing mix, organizational capabilities, and the use of marketing-like philosophy on business performance. It can be stated that internal marketing mix has positive effects on organizational level to the business performance and employees. In the end organizations implementing marketing activities and who focus on employee satisfaction and their specific characters are experienced to combine internal marketing mix and the results in organization.

Furthermore, research by Lings (2004) constitute to the theoretical framework of internal marketing. Lings (2004, 409) define three behavioural dimensions of IMO: "*internal market research, communications, and response"*. These dimensions are discussed in the previous literature as well, for example Wasmer & Bruner (1991) highlight the importance of information gathering. Another theoretical framework is by Jalilvand et al. (2019) to highlight three main factors around topics of internal marketing practicalities, entrepreneurial mindset, and innovative competencies. Research results provide valuable information to family business context, where internal marketing competencies are highlighted and the positive effects on those businesses on entrepreneurial actions are noticed.

The essentials of internal marketing are presented in addition to the frameworks and models, in the previous literature. Rafiq et al. (2000, 456) defines five elements of internal marketing according to the existing literature, such as coordination of functions and marketing-like behaviours. The elements highlight the cooperation between employees and customers to implement specific strategies for organization. In the beginning, the marketing-like thinking is highlighted to receive employee- and customer satisfaction. During the years, internal marketing concept has developed: employee satisfaction was concerned by Huang et al. (2014), customer orientation by Park et al. (2018) and Grönroos (1982) define internal

marketing as a marketing-like approach. Rafiq et al. (2000, 455) presents the model for internal marketing for implementation in services as a conclusion of the previous literature. Arndt (1983, 52) define three tasks of internal marketing: information-, the development-, and the motivation activities and, according to Berry et al. (1991, 152) there are seven essentials of internal marketing that are used in practice.

2.5 Internal marketing and leadership

Internal marketing is referred as a managerial process. Based on this, and in parallel to the previous chapter definitions, internal marketing can be further defined as actions taken by the management, which are implemented as part of company processes. Managerial and whole organizational implications and accomplishments rely on the support of individual managers and the communication between the teams. However, as stated in the research, there are challenges for managers to implement internal marketing practices. (Schultz 2004, 111) The importance of leadership is discussed and highlighted in the previous literature among internal marketing implications and therefore the concept of leadership cannot be avoided. Therefore, a separate paragraph is considered as an important for the thesis to highlight the importance of the connection between leadership and internal marketing and in the end the role of the self-directed employees in the thesis context: in the era of changes and times of crisis.

Internal marketing was already evident in the previous chapter; the concept is highlighted already in the early stage of the literature, for example by Grönroos (1982, 161) defining internal marketing as a managerial philosophy. According to Lings (2004, 405) the need for strong leaders, who focus employees internally and consider customers externally is recognized long time ago. Furthermore, the role of leaders is highlighted in internal marketing development for example, by Ferdous et al. (2013, 637). The role and background of self-directed employees is evidence in the literature. Self-directed learning is a wide concept, which has been known since 1970s among adult education literature. It can be defined as a process that individuals take, with the help of other people or then without. The goal among self-directed individuals is to learn and identify the personal resources and strategies to receive the best results in a personal level. However, to be strongly self-directed, the process is not only perceiving the techniques on how to manage operations individually

and in personal level, but it is also using the needed knowledge and resources around and have critical view on the learning process. (Loeng 2020, 1-3, 9) In addition, self-directed employees have been studied in the entrepreneurial context. The results show that entrepreneurs who maintain personal skills have more possibilities to receive new knowledge and therefore self-directness is considered as a crucial part of performance. (Tseng 2013, 425)

For managers, it is important to analyse the process and steps during and afterwards implementing internal marketing to see what can be improved to receive and maintain employee satisfaction. The implemented processes need support from managers in all steps to maintain the perceived activities. (Huang et al. 2015, 581) In a competitive environment, companies are seeking for the greatest profit and therefore many successful businesses and organizations can focus on the right factors. For example, empowerment of individuals, the use of incentives and training to increase employees' commitment to the organization and to make operations more efficient are crucial for the businesses. Enterprise can be stated as an organization of individuals. The role of individuals needs to be taken seriously and seen as the main resource of the company, which cannot be replaced. Internal marketing effects positively to organizational commitment, dedication- and increase employees' skills and knowledge of the company, if organization provides training and educational plans. In addition, rewarding system and good communication culture guarantee better satisfaction. Charismatic leadership leads employees to a successful business with the right thinking. (Lee et al. 2015, 67-68) Wieseke et al. (2009, 123) highlight managers role in organizational identification in terms of internal marketing: leaders play crucial role of bringing organizations as a one. Different leadership styles are discussed and highlighted in the previous literature. Internal marketing effects for the leadership are discussed by Awwad & Mohammad Lafi (2023, 299) in Jordanian commercial banks. According to the research, the participation and support in addition to goal-oriented management have positive impacts on internal marketing, meanwhile passive leadership styles does not lead to positive outcomes. In addition, the impacts of market orientation are highlighted in the research among 196 branch managers. (Awwad et al. 2023, 299) Transformational leadership plays important role in implementing human resource variables to gain the attention to employees. (Akbari et al. 2017, 258)

Leadership can be defined as fundament to success in an organization, where the presence of leaders significantly improves the ability of their followers towards the profit of the organization. (Toker 2022, 230) Leadership and good management play a crucial role in companies during a crisis time. Covid-19 has brought new insights to the changing environment, and it is widely investigated among today's literature, also in terms of internal marketing. For example, research by Nemteanu et al. (2021) gives another perspective from job satisfaction to internal marketing through a framework and Bartsch et al. (2021, 71) research showed the effects on service industries and investigate how to lead employees in service industry effectively during Covid-19 and how the digital transformation and remote work affects to this.

Covid-19 has led to organizational crisis and pushed to actions such as mergers, downsizing, and shutdowns among companies. In such an organizational crisis, employees usually experience a loss or lack of resources, which is resulted to hide the resources and knowledge to result into loss of competitive advantage. Conflicts and job insecurity push to knowledge hiding behaviours, which effects negatively to job performance. Transformational leadership help to control the negative effects regarding knowledge hiding. (Nguyen, Malik, & Budhwar 2022, 161) According to Marques-Quinteiro et al. (2019), self-leadership have positive effects with employee adaptive performance and job satisfaction in changing work environment. In addition, self-leadership training can be used as a valuable tool to help organizations improve and support employees job satisfaction and performance to adapt to the work and organization during organizational crisis (Marques-Quinteiro et al. 2019, 85) and therefore highlighted in this thesis through self-directed employees and the role of leaders in the times of crisis. The role of leadership to internal marketing and the relationship to theoretical framework of the thesis is further discussed in chapter 3.3.

2.6 Summary of the literature review

This chapter reviews the discussion around internal marketing, which has varied among researchers during the years. The different internal marketing levels and frameworks are stated by different researchers. However, it can be stated that the different approaches come together in the end by focusing on the same outcomes, to the discussions of internal- and external customer- and employee communications, solutions, cooperation, and business

outcomes. In addition, internal marketing needs support and cooperation with senior management and communication with the whole organization or specific teams, to get the connection and understanding, appreciation and support around the marketing efforts by every personnel in the company. (Grönroos 1982, 166, Kotler et al. 2009, 24)

Internal marketing development can be identified in to three approaches. One approach can be identified as *"the employee as a customer of the organization"* (Bohnenberger et al. 2019), where Grönroos (1982, 161) and Berry et al. (1991, 151) stated internal marketing as a philosophy, that considers employees as internal customers. The goal of internal marketing is to implement specific marketing activities to the operations. In addition, the objective is to implement long term customer relationships, where the role of employees and managers is crucial. (Berry et al. 1991, 151)

Importance of individuals are highlighted. However, Rafiq et al. (1993, 230) points out the issues of thinking 'employees as customers', which needs to be considered from other perspective. Another approach is to think internal marketing as function that considers alignment between all the different departments. For example, specific marketing department needs to cooperate with service department to overcome challenges of specific products. The process can be also stated through IMO (internal market orientation). The third approach can be stated as cultural developments towards external practices, i.e. customers and -marketing (e.g Ferdous et al. 2013). In the end, internal and external customers seek to improve overall performance among companies (e.g Lings 2004; Bohnenberger et al. 2019, 1-4). Based on the research by Huang (2020, 177) the leading idea of internal marketing can be utilized as following: the external marketing success rely on the focus of customer-based strategy and the internal marketing success rely on the focus of employee-based recognitions. In the end, both approaches need internal marketing support to reach positive effects and outcomes on the organizational or individual performances. (Huang 2020, 177)

In terms of internal marketing implementation, there are positive effects to HRM: increase of productivity and satisfaction. The role of managers is highlighted in the literature and from managerial perspective there are possibilities to create organization with customer focused view, which can strengthen the brand awareness, and decrease costs. The support of holistic marketing factors presented in chapter 2.1 are important for implementing internal marketing in companies. (Cătălin et al. 2014, 15) As a result of the pandemic, employers and managers involve different internal marketing strategies, such as marketing approaches and

specific communication with top management. According to Goyal et al. (2021, 39) technology has been a real lifesaver, where internal communication is crucial for the cooperation and connections and been saving many situations in terms of relationship management.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework utilized in this thesis is presented and analysed in the following chapter. The framework presents the main theoretical perspectives, key concepts, and business functions around internal marketing and their relationship to the research problem. The aim is to define the theories behind internal marketing organizational environment and the benefits it brings into the business performance in the end. The purpose is to encourage internal marketing philosophy as part of organization and highlight the importance of today's leaders and self-directed employees as part of it. The theoretical framework is presented in the chapter one and again in this chapter to make the reading more convenience.

3.1 Theoretical background

The previous chapter of the thesis reviewed the literature of internal marketing while the theoretical framework highlights and discusses the topics around the main theory of the research. The theoretical framework consists of the relevant concepts of the thesis, which are discussed through research questions. The purpose of the different theories and concepts is to implement marketing strategies as well as possible and measure the competencies and advantages of models and frameworks. The theoretical framework of this thesis is based on one main framework and developed by previous literature and research questions and it is presented next, in figure 1.

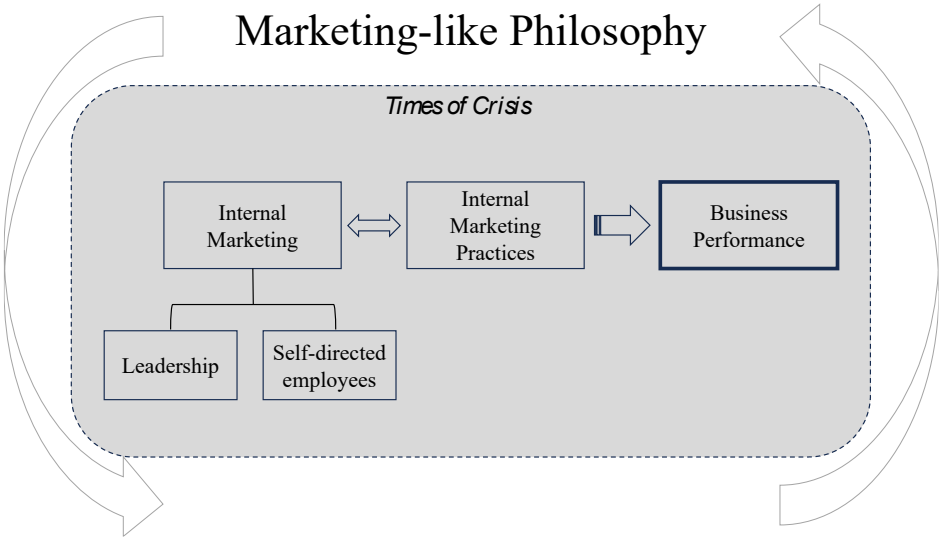

Figure 3. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of the thesis shows the relationship between internal marketing, leadership, self-directed employees and internal marketing practices and their effects on the business performance in the times of crisis. Huang (2020, 177) define internal marketing as a *"employee-view process, embedded within consequence, agendas, and interests."* The goal of internal marketing is to participate marketing -like behaviors and to build organizations to create long term customers. Internal marketing strategy rely on the creation of employees as internal customers. (Berry et al. 1991, 151) Rafiq & Ahmed (1993, 222) in the other hand define internal marketing as a "*planned effort to overcome organizational resistance to change and to align, integrate and motivate employee towards implementation of the company and functional strategies."* However, Rafiq et al. (1993, 230) points out the issues of thinking 'employees as customers', because the needs among employees are changing in the rapidly growing and competitive environment. Arndt (1983, 52) define an internal marketing as a rewarding system, where motivation and HRM functions play crucial role among other marketing actions.

Marketing-like philosophy builds the basis for the theoretical framework of this thesis. Internal marketing relationship to leadership and self-directed employees is important in terms of the outcomes. Furthermore, as visualized in the framework, leadership and self-directed employees support internal marketing practices and on the other hand, internal marketing practices support leadership and self-directed employees. According to Guglielmino (2001, 38), self-directed employees highlight the learning of individuals

towards self-management. Self-direction is seen as a good and important thing in the case company, especially in remote work, which was highlighted during Covid-19 and in work where travel is commonplace. In the case company, managers give employees a lot of personal responsibility, which sometimes also brings challenges. This is why the importance of communication, or internal marketing, is emphasized, especially during times of crisis, which is in this thesis highlighted through Covid-19 and war in Ukraine, but it also does not exclude other experienced organizational changes or internal and external uncertainty.

The role of leadership is discussed throughout the research and the importance of leaders and good management highlighted in terms of times of crisis. Leadership, which is defined as the individual's ability to lead, need cooperation between managers and employees. To increase employee involvement and in the end serve the customers best, a good strategy from leaders is required. (Mohanty 2018, 366-367) In the end the ability to response in the crisis, is considered the best competitive advantage the company can gain. (Fred Garcia 2006, 4)

Internal marketing practices help the process of implementation in terms of outcomes of employee and business performance. According to Bohnenberger et al. (2019, 7) internal marketing practices are actions and tools used internally in the organization to help in internal marketing implementation and further support for the best possible business external outcomes. In this thesis, business performance is considered to measure the value and economical success of the internal marketing activities in terms of external business outcomes (Morgan 2012, 102). To maximize the performance of the entire business, customer satisfaction is seen as an important factor to innovate employees and create long-term customer relationships and therefore in this thesis the concept of business performance highlight additionally the role of external customers in the outcome.

According to Berry et al. (1991), a marketer cannot think only external marketing aspects; satisfying the need of internal customer, a company enhance its ability to satisfy the needs of its external customer. To conclude, to succeed, firms must know their potential in internal marketing through need-meeting job products: internal marketing leads the way to external marketing and -customers. (Berry et al. 1991, 152, 171) In this respect, this thesis theoretical framework points out the importance of internal marketing and related concepts around it to have successful internal marketing environment among organizations.

This thesis theoretical framework, presented in the figure 1 is supported by research by Bohnenberger et al. (2019) "*Internal Marketing: A Model for Implementation and Development",* which state three premises of internal marketing implementation as a whole: "*the beliefs of the organization, the coordination of the process and the main activities and actions*." The premises build three main pillars to the start: executive level, human resources, and marketing followed by practices such as teaching, recruitment of employees, adaptation to work, internal communication, external communication, and market research. Research suggests internal marketing as a solution for performing the HRM actions through the marketing perspective towards external customers. (Bohnenberger et al. 2019, 1-16) However, the framework of this thesis excludes few points of the Bohnenberger et al. (2019) framework: teaching as a main factor and part of external communication the new product and service launches, performance of the organization in the media and in market research the topic of segmentation internal customers is not directly discussed in the framework. The most relevant concepts from the framework are next discussed. In addition to the supportive framework by Bohnenberger et al. (2019) the theoretical framework of the research is based on the previous literature presented in the previous chapters one and two and based on the research questions presented in the chapter one.

3.2 Marketing-like philosophy

The starting point of this thesis framework is to have a marketing-like philosophy: the most important thing for company to successfully implement internal marketing is to think employees as internal customers. Through this thinking, internal marketing is not only reflected to implementation practices, but also to attitudes and culture of organizations oriented towards the external customers. (Bohnenberger et al. 2019, 6-7) A challenge that is behind of this is that employees might feel so important that everything should be done to make them feel fully satisfied (Rafiq et al. 1993, 222).

Another premise is the management of the processes, which highlight the importance of HRM. Marketing and HRM conclude to the implementation and development of the internal marketing. Compared to the traditional HRM practices, the leading difference is the philosophy behind, which guides internal marketing operations to think employees as internal customers, as stated earlier in the research. The marketing practices that maintain

the company strategy should result to the connection and cooperation with external customers, i.e., marketing department need to be integrated as part of the processes. (Bohnenberger et al. 2019, 1-16) The marketing-like philosophy support the direction towards internal marketing behaviors. According to Varey et al. (1999, 938) internal marketing gathers functions to support management and employee relations. Human resource development, strategic- and quality management, communications, and macro-marketing. Internal marketing should be seen as a multi-dimensional concept, which enables marketers to understand employees' perceptions of how internal marketing is practiced inside organization. (Huang et al. 2015, 573) A business that utilize internal marketing-like behaviors should gather information of what employees need and the analyze the needs to respond them in the best possible way. Motivation and satisfaction among internal customers (i.e. employees) create value for the company. (Jalilvand et al. 2019, 1075)

The marketing-like philosophy and -activities is not a simple task and needs attention from managers, in executive level. (Bohnenberger et al. 2019, 1-16) To improve marketing processes internally, the role of leaders and its employees in the organization is important. Bohnenberger et al. (2019) framework present the activities that are needed from the managers and self-directed employees. The internal marketing practices in general, which are linked to the whole process on implementation and orientation of internal marketing to get better performance, are discussed after the importance of leaders and employees.

3.3 Leadership and self-directed employees

First thing for companies establishing internal marketing thinking and internal marketing objectives internally is to search motivated employees and clients, because personal motivation and satisfaction are the most important objectives of the implementation plan and with the help of right people and through the implementation of internal marketing there is room for satisfaction among employees and customers. (Cătălin et al. 2014, 11-15) The relationship between managers and employees is crucial for internal marketing. Indeed, the connections are considered as value adding resources that will save money, time and in the end, energy of all participants (Sasser et al. 1976, 4). According to Varey et al. (1999, 926) internal communication can be stated as a contract between employer and employee, where managers have the possibility to reorganize the invented processes to suit employees the

best. The framework of the thesis points out the importance of leadership and self-directed employees, which are crucial in today´s organizations and in the process of internal marketing orientation for companies and organizations.

Managers need to focus on leadership and support a proper environment, while making a long-term vision on marketing communication, in which employees contribute the communicating to customer. Organizational climate that is supportive and filled with trust between management and personnel lead to accepted internal marketing processes in all organizational levels. (Cătălin et al. 2014, 11-15) Snell et al. (2009, 195) suggest that managers need to set comprehensive view for the organization and regarding the expectations of internal marketing: why achieving goals is important and who should be involved in implementing internal marketing.

For managers, the importance of managing internal marketing activities are people and processes. Environmental uncertainty is not always predictable or controllable, but especially businesses need to count their resources on where to concentrate. The innovation and sustainability among companies, especially for family businesses is in the end the responsible of the younger generations, who need to be properly trained to maintain the operations and get business advantages. (Jalilvand et al. 2019, 1064-1075) Some organizations need changes in organizational culture, to get employees involved, for example to the company's brand (Aurand, Gorchels & Bishop 2005, 169).

For the employees, it is important to understand and embrace the organizational objectives, which increase the motivation and goal achieving will become more concrete. For this reason, it is important that managers participate to active goal achieving settings, that support the objectives. Furthermore, supportive programs and training that increase employee loyalty and help to achieve goals among all stakeholders are crucial. (Cătălin et al. 2014, 11-15) Self-directed employees are expected to have more confidence in their inner willingness to learn and perform than in the guidance and motivation provided by the environment. (Lejeune et al. 2016, 323)

According to Staniec et al. (2021), internal employee branding is connected to HRM strategy that helps to build positive benefits and employee engagement. The aim behind communication is to create positive climate and atmosphere, with the support of employees. Managers supports on the creations of the organizational culture and atmosphere, but

employees involve to outcomes. (Flipo 2000, 86) Wasmer et al. (1991, 40) state that after setting the internal marketing goals, marketing managers need to investigate the used resources in the organization, through internal marketing research practices. The higher engagement among employees and management there is, the more successful communication and internal marketing implementation among can be obtained. Furthermore, a holistic marketing approach can't be implemented without proper leadership. (Cătălin et al. 2014, 11-15) According to Cooper et al. (2000, 178) internal marketing is more a management function than a marketing one, because of the process of employee involvement.

Internal marketing adaptation can be measured with the following activities: motivation, talent recognitions, and empowerment. These are referred to the implementation of 4P's. External communication in the other hand reflect to the communication happening outside the company, for example participation to activities, awards receiving, advertising campaigns etc. If employees are thinking as customers, the process becomes easier, and results can be obtained. Market research can be efficient if HR has the knowledge of employees. (Bohnenberger et al. 2019, 1-16)

One of the most investigated dimensions of internal marketing is internal communication. Marketing department have various tools for communication, for example in many companies, the marketing department utilize the advertising agency that offer communication tools. (Huang et al. 2015, 573; Bohnenberger et al. 2019, 10) Internal communications are applied by internal marketing managers who seeks to improve discussion climate in the company (Tansuhaj et al. 1988, 33) and internal responsiveness is discussed through internal marketing practices: importance of measuring and rewarding the employee of the work (Berry et al. 1991, 166). Internal communication highlights the importance of communication of messages between members of the organization. Through internal marketing implementation, internal communication must create feedback mechanisms regardless of hierarchical levels, for example continuous internal communication instruments keep organization well informed and motivated. The used tools can be departmental meetings, workshops, seminars, team buildings, informative manuals and for example guides, manuals, or any electric messages among personnel. (Cătălin et al. 2015, 11-15)

3.4 Practices and implementation

Leadership and self-directed employee implementation can result to a successful internal marketing practice. According to Lings (2004, 409), actions that increase internal marketing implementation (i.e IMO) are: internal market research, communications, and response. Bohnenberger et al. (2019) developed the idea and stated the internal marketing practices as: teaching, recruitment of employees, adaptation to work, internal communication, external communication, and market research, that help the implementation process. In addition to these, employee segmentation, which is suggested to be one of the practices, is based on work related motivation and attitudes.

To utilize internal marketing functions, definition of employee segmentation needs to be done. Six different employee segments are stated; survivors (work to gain money), seekers (work for personal satisfaction), transcendentalist (work for self-improvement), participants (work for results), enthusiastic (work for happiness) and finally addicts who work for the job, which turns out to be routine and necessity. (Cătălin et al. 2014, 11-15) According to Blythe (2006, 71), to segment internal marketing, internal 'customers' need to be divided to those who support the plan, to those who might be interested to support the plan and to those who are against the plan. Each of the departments and groups need to be approached in different way, because people have different needs and concerns.

The first stage of the internal marketing implementation is to analyze the current situation in the organization and company. The current situation provides analyzes for further investigation. Employee attitude towards company and company's attitude towards employee and the relationship and effects on organizational culture and leadership of individuals gives evidence for the analyzes of status. The strategic analysis can be made through empirical methods inside organization. (Cătălin et al. 2014, 11-15) Responsibilities of teaching and training practices, is usually in the hands of HR department, because of the resources. However, marketing department can contribute with the received information upon investigations, to support employees and other departments with activities that involve to customer orientation. For example, training for better decision making, and knowledge of the customer. The prerequisite for employees' involvement and further to introduce to the needed job is effective and efficient recruitment process in the beginning. (Bohnenberger et al. 2019, 1-16) This is also stated by Berry et al. (1991), that highlight the importance of

recruiting talents, which is related to the role of managers and self-directed employees. As defined in the beginning, the framework of the thesis describes following: leadership and self-directed employees supports the internal marketing practices and internal marketing practices support leadership and self-directed employees.

Internal marketing model is a mix of functions that can be used on motivating employees, and which consists of the "soft" and "hard" aspects of organization. In addition to the previous literature, Ahmed et al. (2003, 1223) refers to research by Galpin (1997) to state the internal marketing mix elements such as rewarding, training, senior management involvement, physical presence, and operational changes are considered supporting organizational environment. The idea to implement the mentioned functions, is to develop resources of management, supported by the literature of HRM. The objective of the functional strategy is serving business performance. (Ahmed et al. 2003, 1223)

Although, the discussed mix is gathered from the previous literature, it is also defined as part of the "original" 4P's. Grönroos (1994, 14) states that there is a need for paradigm shift and new approach from 4Ps to for example, relationship marketing. Marketing mix, the 4Ps is integrated to internal marketing, for example by Blythe (2006, 70) and Kotler et al. (2019). The elements can be included to internal markets: actual product is a marketing plan and the actions that encourage the plan to be successful, the price is what the internal customers will have to give up for the plan to be effective, the communication and promotion is the key area in terms of explaining the plan so that it is understood and the distribution or place is where the exchange takes place, for example a virtual meeting room. (Blythe 2006, 70-72) Kotler et al. (2019, 47-49) update the original 4P's to reflect the holistic- and internal marketing concept to a modern marketing management perspective that consists of: people, processes, programs, and performance, which encompass with today's marketing realities. The trust towards internal marketing among employees is important to marketing success; marketing or any change implemented will only be as good as the people behind the functions. For successful process management, marketers need to be unified towards what marketing activities, including long-term relationships. Programs reflect to all consumer-directed activities that accomplish for the firm and lastly, performance in holistic marketing measure the implications of outcomes. (Kotler et al. 2019, 47-49) Communication, is the only element in the marketing mix that can change the negative effects into positive ones, for

example in terms of work conditions or in the industries with lower salaries. (Flipo 2000, 86)

One practice and approach to the internal market research could be data collection of the organizational culture (Wasmer et al. 1991, 40). According to Lings (2004, 409) internal market research helps to identify the exchanges of value, in terms of segmentation and building strategies for these internal market segmentations. In addition to see the external employee conditions, which are important factors. Realizing the competition in the employment market among employees sharing similar skills is crucial. The competition for employees may arise from separate and different organizations that don't consider themselves as competitors. (Lings 2004, 410) Therefore, internal marketing research helps to identify the level of employee satisfaction towards the job; in the low satisfaction level managers can redesign and modify jobs to best support the required and needed solutions. (Lings et al. 2005, 293) These types of redesigning and practices by management to serve employees before customers, support the statement of treating employees as internal customers (Berry et al. 1991).

Companies can succeed in internal marketing by implementing the personal development and attraction, motivation, and retention of employees. Companies that involve different marketing practices will most effectively compete for talents. In addition, companies who provide vision and meaning to the workplace, will offer employees with great skills and knowledge to perform the required roles, bring people together through successful teams, leverage freedom, support achievements through measurement and rewarding. (Berry et al. 1991, 152-171)

According to Grönroos (1982, 164) internal marketing can be implemented to strategic- and tactical level. Creating a customer-based strategy for internal environment, four different elements are needed. First factor that is needed is supporting management methods, second is supporting personnel policy, third one is -internal training policy and the last ones are - planning and control procedures. All these factors are important for the whole organization in every step of the marketing processes and needed to be understood first in the managerial level. Part of the strategy is to provide employees services, campaigns, and single marketing efforts. This means that the philosophy of thinking ‘employees as the first market’ is the key to success. Employees need to understand why they are expected to perform in a specific way and to accept the activities of the company to get the customer trust; a service must be

fully internally accepted before it is launched to customers. (Grönroos 1982, 166) The role of self-directed employees is important to fill the needed activities in hand and unprompted. Part of the philosophy is to have a control of internal marketing, especially during the internal marketing implementation to save costs. (Cătălin et al. 2014, 11-15) For example control over internal competition must be managed and limited by managers (Flipo 2000, 86).

3.5 Performance outcomes

The theory around internal marketing outcomes highlights the importance of the whole organization and its performance. A successful organizational culture leads to marketing philosophy that encourage innovation and achievements among employees. (Cătălin et al. 2014, 11-15) In the thesis theoretical framework the outcome of internal marketing practices is defined through business performance outcomes. Business performance indicates to the external outcomes and -customers that are established through internal marketing implementation practices.

The role of marketing strategies to business performance is investigated through many theories and researchers. Business performance can be divided to market performance and financial performance. Market performance include for example sales and satisfaction and financial performance measures the costs, profit and for example the cash flow. (Morgan 2012, 102-104) In this thesis business performance highlight the received economic advantage and customer loyalty in long term. In addition, the business performance is highlighted through received results, when implementing internal marketing: organizational performance (e.g. profitability and sales), to maximize competitive advantage, general attitudes towards customer, quality, organizational commitment, individual skills, market research, employee orientation to customer, employee satisfaction, and external customer relationships are considered to result in measuring the business performance. (Bohnenberger et al. 2019, 7) Employee behaviors have important role on employee performance (Barksdale & Werner 2001, 146) to recognize the motivation and employee satisfaction in the company. Companies need to give recognition to the employee-customer interaction and the attitudes of employees, which effect on the behavior of the firm although positive customer attitudes and behaviors can improve firm performance in sales, market share and profitability. (Tansuhaj et al. 1988, 33-36)

Internal marketing is considered to have positive effects on organizational commitment, which will additionally affect positively on the business performance. In the end, charismatic leadership increase organizational commitment and the performance of the company. (Lee et al. 2015, 67-68) The commitment of employees and managers, the whole organization, to implement and understand the positive effects of internal marketing.

To have successful outcomes from the business point of view and serve the external customers well, the connection and importance of self-directed employees and leadership discussed previously in this chapter, cannot be forgotten. Employees are the most critical productive resource and firms most important link in the service delivery system; to have satisfied customers, the firm must have satisfied employees. To serve the needs of the market, the firm must first serve the needs of its internal markets by upgrading its capabilities and by creating a separate career track for customer-contact employees. The motivation behind job satisfaction among employees stands in the opportunity to make meaningful contribution to the firms' success, to be part of the team, to be recognized of the work and the opportunity for personal growth inside the firm. (George 1977, 90-92) The main thing is to respond to the wants and needs of employees by creating jobs and thus satisfying and maintaining motivation (Lings et al. 2005, 293), which will in the end be increase through salary, wages, benefits, and promotions. (Tansuhaj et al. 1988, 34)

Tansuhaj et al. (1988, 33) suggest that internal and external marketing elements of marketing program are closely related to each other. Internal marketing elements: recruitment, training, motivation, communication and retention effect on employee attitudes and employee behavior and these are related to the external markets and its elements, such as pricing, advertising, personal selling, institutional image, and quality control. An effective external marketing program results in customer perception, -satisfaction and -loyalty. (Tansuhaj et al. 1988, 33-36) If company realizes its potential in internal marketing, it can have attracted, motivated and developed employees that serve customers also in long-term.

To succeed, the companies that involve practices such as employee involvement and market research will most effectively compete for talent market share, offer a vision that brings meaning and purpose to the workplaces, offer people with great skills and knowledge to perform their service roles better, bring people together through successful teams, leverage freedom, support achievements through measurement and rewards and finally, base job-product design decisions on research. (Berry et al. 1991, 152-171) It is important to see

internal marketing in terms of its performance outcomes and focus on the implementation of the marketing (Rafiq et al. 1993, 230).

4 METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

This chapter of the thesis presents the theoretical background and basis to the empirical part discussed in the next chapter five. The methodology of the thesis is defined to provide overall overview to the design behind the research. First the research methodology is presented, followed by the main aspects of qualitative research. In addition, the chosen data collection and -analysis methods are presented and discussed. Interviews are presented detailed to answer to the theory of chosen methods.

4.1 Research methodology

In any empirical research data must be collected and the mechanisms following the decisions to collect the data rely on the type, volume, quality, and research design. Research may require primary data generated by the researcher, or secondary data gathered by existing resources, or both. (Mukherjee 2019, 54, 75) In this research, both primary- and secondary data is used to answer the research questions and finally to meet the objectives around the topic.

Primary data can be collected for example through group- and one-to-one interviews, including specific focus group and through structured-, -structured or in-depth interviews. In general, a research interview is a communication between interviewer and interviewee, where interviewer asks thought-out questions and to which interviewee listen and respond. Semi-structured interviews consist of research themes and key questions and concepts, which can vary from between interviews and which can include schedule, comments, and open discussion of the topics. (Saunders, et al. 2016, 388, 390-391) The primary data of this research was collected through one-to-one (face-to-face) semi-structured interviews from the case company, which is operating internationally in the process industry and manufacturing high-end products. The case company have many employees around the world; however, the interviews were made from management level to provide support for the implementation of the internal marketing strategy in the times of crisis. The case company is further presented in chapter 5.1 in detailed.

The aim of the semi-structured interviews is to provide valid and reliable data to the research questions that cannot be established or found elsewhere. Another reason to conduct semi-structured interview was to gather information of the employees own experience, expertise, and knowledge on the topic: how they experience internal marketing in the challenging times. Secondary data, in the other hand, which needs to be gathered from their respective sources that counts on the relevance, accuracy, reference to the period of interest etc. (Mukherjee 2019, 75) and, which is a matter of detective work, means data that is collected for some other purpose, and it can be used for example to compare with other own research findings.

There are three types of secondary data: document, survey, and multiple sources, which include for example organizations database, books, journals, and online publications. (Saunders et al. 2016, 319, 344) To receive background information of the case company, the secondary data is collected from the case company's homepage. However, in this research the secondary data sources were minimal and not much needed, because the empirical interviews provided open, broad, and deep insights to the company's operations.

4.2 Qualitative research design

Qualitative research can be seen as a basis for various techniques to analyse qualitative materials, but also as a basis for reconceptualization of social sciences to change the forms of life and to investigate new ways of being. (Packer 2011, 3, 6) Qualitative research can be defined as *"an iterative process in which improved understanding to the scientific community is achieved by making new significant distinctions resulting from getting closer to the phenomenon studied."* (Aspers & Corte 2019, 139) The value and character of a qualitative study is based on the individual's personal opinions, ideas, and experiences on the discussed topics (Puusa & Juuti 2020, 56). In qualitative culture, the discussions concern the meaning and definition of concepts in which a typical qualitative answer includes a list of attributes or characteristics that create the concept (Goertz & Mahoney 2012, 128). The ideal type of qualitative study has several key attributes, for example flexibility: the details cannot be established in advance, but further decisions can be adjusted and added along the way (Brown 2010, 230).

In this thesis and as stated by Denny & Weckesser (2022, 1166), the qualitative research begins with one or more research questions that may be improved and reformed as the research is carried out to narrow the research aim or purpose. Qualitative research can improve research designs, help teaching and communication between researchers and diminish the gap between researchers. Qualitative research investigates the relations between categories that change in the research process. (Aspers et al. 2019, 139, 146-147) This thesis uses qualitative research design to collect relevant and valuable resources of the case company through empirical interviews. The idea of the interviews is to analyse the role, existence, and future potential of internal marketing in the case company.

4.3 Data collection methods

In qualitative research, collecting the correct data through correct methods is crucial for the research validity. No method should be chosen without considering the suitability of solving the research question. Criteria such as efficiency, accuracy and reliability should be considered in advance. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2022, 32) There are three main methods in qualitative research: interviewing, observation, and sampling. As a strategy, interviews are the most used and research friendly solution for gathering the needed data in qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews emerge as a dialogue between interviewer and interviewee. The interviews are scheduled in advance and organized around predetermined open-ended, additional, and spontaneous additional questions. (DiCicco-Bloom et al. 2006, 314-315) In addition, as a data collection method, semi-structured interviews are one of the used ones (Kallio et al. 2016, 2955). An interview can be viewed as a conversation with a pre-set goal. It is a discussion that takes place on the initiative of the researcher and is therefore led by the interviewer. The aim is to collect data that allows to analyse the phenomenon in the research. It is possible to select people for the interview who are known in advance to have experience of the subject being studied or knowledge of the subject. The interview is a flexible method for data collection, as it gives the interviewee the opportunity to direct the search for information in a direction that is relevant to research issues, and the interviewee can ask for clarifications and explain the topics in more depth. (Puusa et al. 2020, 99,102)

In this research, the method for collecting empirical data are interviews. The research uses semi-structured individual in-depth interviews that include themed-, and open-ended questions, which are prepared in advance. During the interviews, additional questions were raised. The interview questions, which are followed detailed in the chapter five, were formed beforehand and discussed with the professor and case company representative to fill the expectations of the interviews. This thesis interview questions were formed based on the theoretical framework, previous research, and research questions. Therefore, the interview questions are placed in the theoretical framework as a reference and to make the overall picture easier to perceive. The interview questions related in theoretical framework are presented in figure 3.

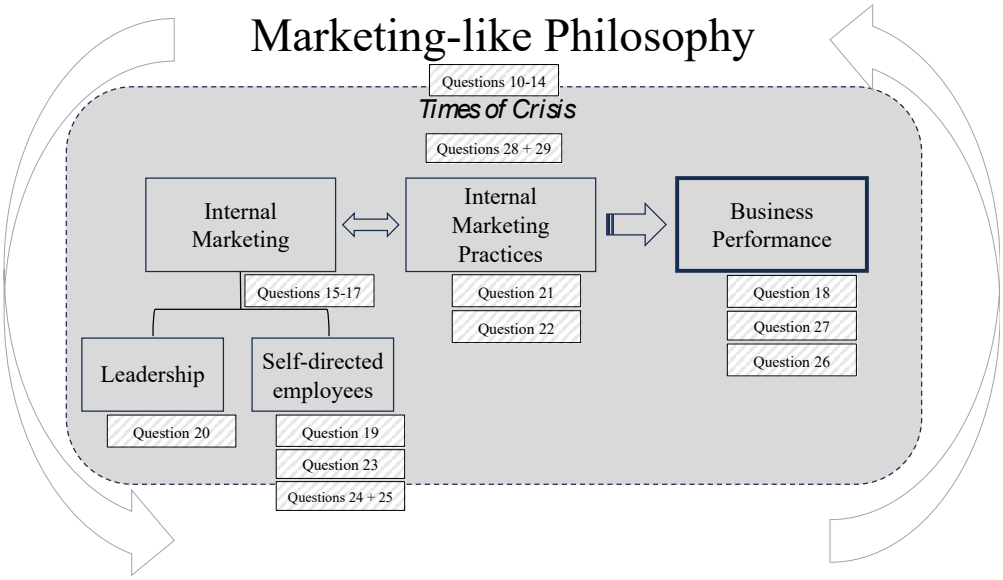

Figure 4. Theoretical framework vs. interview questions

The data generated through interviews are based on verbal communication and spoken narratives. The key feature in one-to-one interviews is their depth focus on the individual. The qualitative interviews provide an opportunity of in-depth understanding of the personal context within which the research phenomenon is located, detailed investigation of interviewers' individual perspective, and a very detailed subject coverage. (Ritchie et al. 2013, 55-56) According to DiCicco-Bloom et al. (2006, 314-315) Semi-structured in-depth interviews are most widely used interviewing format for qualitative research that are performed for an individual from 30 minutes to several hours and allow the interviewer to examine deeply into social and personal matters.

All the interviews were done from the same case company that is presented in the chapter 5.1. The goal was to get various sights and different opinions through the interviews. Together, seven managers were interviewed: two from German office and five from Finnish office. The interviews of German office were made in English and the Finnish office interviews were made in Finnish. The interviews were conducted through Teams -meetings that lasted approximately 1-1,5h.

In addition, all the interviewees were managers as the goal of the research is to give support for the management level in the companies. Before the interviews, e-mails were sent to the interviewee candidates. In the email the research was briefly presented, and the time schedule was suggested. In addition, interviewees were asked to sign a permission for the interview in terms of collecting the personal data of the interviewees. The interview questions were divided to three different phases. First the introduction questions were presented. After that the supportive questions followed by the main research questions. These specific steps helped to structure the interview and analyse the data in the end.

4.4 Data analysis methods

In qualitative research, the analysis of the data is strongly connected to the data collection. Therefore, data analysis can be stated as an ongoing process in which thematic patterns emerge. This requires ongoing contemplation to the data to ensure the meaning of it. In addition, analysis involves locating and noting the themes that address the research questions, which result in the evidence of finding the solutions and key results. (Galletta 2013, 119, 121-122) The key element is to describe, interpret and understand the phenomenon studied in the research. The purpose of qualitative analysis is to generate rich valuable content, to result in defining the presented phenomenon under study, in which the researcher aims to compile the overall processes of a verbally clear and understandable description with their steps. (Puusa & Juuti 2020, 139, 143)

The data of this research is analysed through thematic analysis method, which is used in analysing large amount of data (Nowell et al. 2017, 2) and in which the research themes are gathered to understand and analyse to research. (Gibbs 2007, 1-22) Thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative research and it can be defined as: *"a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data."* Thematic method can analyse the

"experiences, meanings and the reality of participants" or investigate the ways of the experiences are affected to the society. (Braun & Clarke 2006, 79-81)

In this thesis, the analysis of the data started already during the interviews. During the interview, it was possible to make several observations and extract them immediately after the interview into a separate document for final analysis. Responses that were repeated or radically different, as well as the interviewee's clear opinions and consistency of responses, helped build a basis for analysis and build a model and the need for work for the case company. After the first interview, it was possible to note what additional questions can be asked to the next interviewee, for example, questions regarding the cultural differences in German and Finnish office were raised additionally to gather further information on the internal marketing usage.

It is important to analyse data precisely and have a consistent process behind it. For example, recording and systemized process helps analysing and the reader to see the methodology behind. (Nowell et al. 2017, 1). However, this requires a permission of the participants beforehand (Denny et al. 2022, 1166). This thesis interviews were recorded, which ensured the validity of information and support of the data analyses. To support the analysing further, the interviews were divided into different sections, to be in the alignment with the theoretical framework and highlight the research questions. First the introduction questions, second the supportive questions and third the main interview questions. During the interview notes from each question were written down and finally after the data collection, the interview recordings were transcribed into written from separately under each interview, which helped to analyse the data and report the results and answers of the interviewees afterwards.

In addition, to maximize a reliable data, for qualitative research it is important to decide the approach for the analysis to, either a deductive- or an inductive approach can be used. In deductive approach the existing theory is utilized to shape qualitative process and aspects of data analysis or inductive approach that seeks to build a theory to match the data. (Saunders et al. 2016, 569) In this research the deductive approach is used to maximize the qualitative process and reliability of the research, which is discussed in the next chapter.

4.5 Reliability and validity of the thesis

To recognize a trustful and valued qualitative research, the methods and analysis mentioned in the previous chapters need to well managed and gathered (Nowell et al. 2017, 1). Quality of the research reflects to the concepts of reliability and validity. Reliability means the measures and continuity of the data and validity highlights the meanings of the used measures. (Saunders et al. 2016, 202) In terms of reliability, the starting point of the study is crucial. The concept around relativity reflects to an idea where the researcher can access objective truth and reality. For example, one way to determine if a result is reliable is that if two reviewers end up with a similar result. In addition, the reliable and quality of the research can be measured in the context of understanding the meaning and subjects by all the participants. To secure the quality, all available material and data must be considered, e.g. in the literation phase. In the end, the actions researcher takes, measure the quality and reliability of a research. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2022, 189-195)

For the final outcomes, it is important to form the interviews accordingly (Kallio et al. 2016, 2955). As already mentioned, all interviews were recorded and afterwards overwritten as readable form for the analysis. Saunders et al. (2016, 572) highlight the importance bringing up the ways interviewees said things, not only what they said. Therefore, the research uses direct quotations from the interviewees to also support the data reliability point of view. The quality of the interviews can be monitored by the fact that there is a good interview frame and the purpose, and themes of the interviewees have been explained in advance so that the whole is understood. Practice matters, such as recording, time management, etc., should be checked in advance. To receive valuable and quality content, it is recommended to go through the interviews immediately after the interview. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2022, 189)

For this thesis analysis, it is important to note that the interviews at the German office were not conducted in their own language, which may have an impact on the scope of the answers to the interview questions or the results. In these situations, there is room for misunderstandings. However, this was known in advance from all the participants. Five out of seven interviews were conducted in their own language, in Finnish, which minimize the probability of misunderstanding. However, these were translated later to English. The recordings and additional questions throughout the interview secured the reliability of these steps. The video interviews in Teams helped to see also the facial expressions of the

interviewers and the transcribed the recordings verbatim afterwards to secure the quality. Furthermore, the research findings and results are authenticated through theoretical findings which present the quality and overall reliability of the thesis.

5 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter compares, analyses, and presents the performed interviews of the thesis. In the beginning, the background of the case company and the interviewees are presented. After that the background questions the premises of internal marketing were discussed. In addition, the interview results of the main key concepts of theoretical framework, presented 1.5, were discussed. Furthermore, the main themes effecting internal marketing in times of crisis are presented and the factors effecting the implementation are stated. In the end, the interviews are gathered into conclusions.

The main idea of the interviews is to answer to the research questions and find out the role, effectiveness, and benefits of internal marketing in the case company. Performed interview questions support the research in both the theory and analysis phases. One of the goals of the research is to give evidence for case company on how to receive better results in the organization through internal marketing and how the organization should utilize internal marketing to achieve better results internally to maximize external factors. The strategy and decisions are set in motion by the management of the case company. It is important that senior management internalize the importance of internal marketing to maximize the benefits. The information provided in the sections 5.1 and 5.2 are based on the interviews and viewpoints of the interviewees and their current situation in the company.

5.1 Background of the case company

The research is made for a case company operating in the manufacturing- and process industry. The case company is family-owned, international company together over 800 employees all over the world. The company manufactures high-end products for example in Finland and Germany. According to the interviews, the produced products are used in the process industry, and defined as specialized products. The processes consist of purchasing of raw materials, manufacturing, planning, calculating, sales, packaging, shipping, etc. The goal is to provide good quality to the end customer.

According to the pre information from the company representative, few main details were highlighted: organizations and employees are strongly self-directed, and the company is

having in general many generational changes in the next years. The company and the organization in Finland went through an acquisition about ten years ago. The acquisition brought changes to the organization and structures. The thesis focuses mainly on the unit in Finland and its two offices in two different cities. The initial and final idea is to utilize the research in the whole company. More specifically, the main idea of the thesis is to give supportive and new information of internal marketing to management to utilize internal marketing in future in the company. Therefore, the interviewees were from both units, from Germany and from Finland. This guaranteed important information from the company, but also for the results through variety of observations and different discussions around the thesis.

5.2 Background of the interview and the interviewees

Together seven semi-structed interviews were examined. The age rank of the interviewees is between 27 to 62 years. The youngest interviewee is recently graduated and taking over the main processes of the case company. Interviewees have many years of experience and knowledge in managerial positions in different companies, different organizations, but also in the current case company. Some interviewees have worked in the case company for several years. All the interviewees have high level educational background. In this research interviewees are presented as following: *interviewee 1* as I1, *interviewee 2* as I2, *interviewee 3* as I3, etc., to simplify and clarify the general narrative of the work. The relevant information for the thesis of the interviewees is presented in a Table 1.

Table 1. Overview of the Interviewees

Interviewee	Duration of employment	Management level position	Status of working remotely
I5	Over 20 years	Yes	No
I2	Over 20 years	Yes	Sometimes
I1	Under 10 years	Yes	Sometimes
I6	Under 10 years	Yes	Sometimes
I4	Under 10 years	Yes	Almost everyday
I3	Over 20 years	Yes	Almost everyday
I7	Under 10 years	Yes	Sometimes

The interviews started with an interviewer's presentation and a short introduction to the research. The topic and the main subjects were briefly presented. In addition, the main objective and purpose, the importance for the company and the factors that build interesting starting points for the research were discussed. The interview structure is based on the theoretical framework and the research questions. Like already mentioned in chapter 4.3, the interview questions are divided to three different phases, followed by the main research questions.

The actual interview started with general background questions including age, gender, educational background, nationality, duration of employment, status of working remotely and if the interviewee work as a manager. Additionally, the introduction questions included questions of the department and organization the interviewees are working and what is their role and what kind of positions they have worked in before. The purpose of the background questions is to start the interview casually, to help interviewees get more easily into the topic and interview itself, but also helping to compare the results between participants. In addition, the background questions in structured interviews are predictive of job performance. (Hartwell, Johnson, & Posthuma 2019, 128) The answers are based on the person's current situation in the company. Interviewees talked about themselves openly and freely at the beginning, briefly leading to the topic itself. The purpose of the background questions is to clarify the background and history of the interviewees in the company. Additionally, the idea of the background questions is to support the analysis phase and to compare whether, for example, the duration of the employment relationship has an impact on the results and experiences regarding the current situation and what ideas there are for the future.

The last question of the introduction discussed the status of remote work, which is considered as an important general question for the thesis background. One out of seven of the interviewees considered to be most of the time presence in the office and not working remotely and especially not after Covid-19. The rest of the interviewees considered to work sometimes, approximately one to two days per week at home and the rest in the office. Answers with “almost everyday” is referring to work remotely with few days exceptions to work physical in the office.

5.3 Towards marketing-like philosophy

After the background questions, supportive interview questions gave interviewees the chance to describe company in their words. As defined in chapter 3.1 there are three premises of internal marketing implementation: beliefs of the organization, the coordination of the process and the main activities and actions. The interview results show that the case company is considered as a small and traditional, technology- and a process industry company, which is part of a bigger group, owned by a family. These factors were seen important and advantage in decision-making process. For example, the threshold to call the principals and owners is easy and the time for respond is short.

"The commitment and entrepreneurship are such features that can be seen here that it is a family business, as well as precision, even small things are looked at carefully, both in a financial and qualitative sense." – Interviewee 1

Additionally, case company is described financially healthy and a workplace with good atmosphere, agile and competent organization. Additional details of the company processes were raised during this question, and they are presented detailed in the chapter 5.1.

The beliefs of the organization are discussed through values: visibility of processes is considered as a crucial value of daily business. Customer value, quality, flexibility, and respect towards colleagues are considered as an important resource in the company. According to the interviews, examination of the financial results and maximizing internal benefits where the profitability is the key driver, is typical value for a family company. However, few interviewees considered difficult to describe specific values of the case company. In addition, cultural differences in terms of used habits between German and Finland were mentioned.

The results showed that the coordination of the process and the main activities and actions vary depending on the position and daily business, but in the end, strong alignment between colleagues is daily. For example, some positions in the case company require detailed knowledge of the full process: importance to understand what customer want and need, from the technical specification to contracts, which finalize the projects. The importance of the whole team in the processes are highlighted. Managing processes in general, but also project leading, evaluation, financial analysis, product development, controlling and quality

management are highlighted in several interviews. The importance of making operational guidelines to support employees as their best is considered crucial.

5.4 Internal marketing effects in times of crisis

As stated in the chapter 1.2, the thesis sub-questions and the theoretical framework discuss internal marketing effects on business performance, self-directed employees and to leadership in the times of crisis. The results show that six out of seven interviewees stated directly that internal marketing has effects on business performance. One interviewee did not see direct effects. However, after discussing the topic, it was stated that having internal marketing in the company, the satisfaction among the team would increase, and in the end, grow the performance indirectly. The other six interviewees consider that internal marketing plays a crucial role in business and therefore effects on the business performance. The interviewers highlighted customers and competitor's role for business and in the end the influence on the projects.

" The worst situation is if the company and its employees do not understand its customer's market needs. In our business, it is extremely important for us to have understanding here to know what the customer requires and want." – Interviewee 1

This statement supports the rest of the discussion with other interviewers, as for example I2 thinks that the better people are informed internally, especially regarding the company's references the more they share with the customer and are better prepared for the customer encounters. Additionally, I4 thinks that if all employees have the right mindset and the benefits for the company in mind, it gives the customer a feeling to come back to us and not to the competitor. The key function in the business is well functioning equipment and the price; how well all projects are handled, the better the result is for the next projects. Behaviours and the attitudes can have positive impact in the end on the business performance, according to I7. In the end, it can be stated by I5 that internal marketing do not give any negative impacts on business operations and when considering the big picture; internal marketing improves the company's operational capabilities and therefore it affects the business.

According to the interviews, internal marketing effects on self-directed employees and employees can get motivated from their own success. Personal responsibility is considered

as good thing, but it can give also mixed opinions, according to the results. This can be also stated by I1 as there is a lot of self-directed operations in the company, which result in agile, good, and entrepreneurial spirit in every level. However, according to the interviews there is also the other side of having a very strong self-directed organization; when the company is in a hurry, or the resources are tight, the efficiency suffer, and some tasks are overlooked or consciously not done. The role of leadership increase and in addition, managers need to take their own role more, otherwise the situations are not managed in the end.

As already mentioned in the chapter 5.1, the case company operates in a process industry, which consists of many important and crucial steps, from the planning to the end customer. I1 highlight, that in the process the first steps are always crucial, because they are also calculated and effect on what happens in the middle, but also in the end to give customer what they ordered.

According to I2 internal marketing can be seen part of a project business, as the business flows from the projects. The better people are aware of the status of the projects and the more they are committed to it. If employees understand their role in the supply chain, the better. I5 and I6 also support these statements, as the internal marketing effects through the motivation of the employees are considered as important; the more employees are motivated the more they are self-directed. I4 in the other hand considers that internal marketing and self-directed employees are two different things. Company needs strong existence of self-directed people, because of the process and project requirements and internal marketing stands more on the side of thinking as together and as one. I7 highlight the importance of people's own decisions and freedom but also the possibility to trust one another. It is important to give trust to the team and people. Through the trust also when working remotely and separate from another team, through the confidence, internal motivation can grow, according to I7 and I3.

According to all interviewees, internal marketing effects on the leadership. The results in general highlighted the capability of self-directed organization; the matter how leadership is managed in self-directed organization. According to I1, the fact that organization is strongly self-directed and when the managers think employees are self-directed in every situation, it is not good. I1 continues that internal marketing can be improved in every area in the organization: in sales, manufacturing, planning, implementation, and support (process point of view) and if internal marketing is increased, it grows the awareness and thereby timely

reaction to act and lead not only for managers but also for the whole organization and teams. In stressful situation and under pressure internal marketing is important, stated by I2:

> *The better informed we are about various announcements and events through internal marketing (including announcements internally and keeping updated of the situations) the better opportunities we have to handle the situations and react fast as managers, for example in the absence of an employee. -Interviewee 2*

I4 define internal marketing effects on the leadership through the presence of management: to get internal marketing work in the company, it requires managers who are present in the office to manage the daily processes. The leader needs to know where the people are and what they are doing to give them work accordingly and handle the internal marketing well. According to 15, if there is no internal marketing or it is not well handled, it effects to the job and the performance lack and problem management will get harder.

5.5 Operational practices to support internal marketing

As presented in chapter 3.1 the operating methods and practices which support further internal marketing implementation can be stated as human resources, recruitment of employees, internal- and external communication and market research. According to the results, human resources and employee recruitment exists in the case company, but it will need more support in future, when more people are hired to the company and the processes are transferred to the next generations. In the current world situation, it is a challenge to recruit new employees.

> *This is the issue in general. It is not easy to find the right people to do the job; with right background, who are motivated, right approach to the business which we are in."*
>
> *- Interviewee 7*

According to I2 in international company, there are strong connections, which is stated as a good thing to recruit new people. However, the training of new employees is not always easy, because of the practical support and the need of wide basic knowledge. The company does not have actual educational program for employees. However, a full alignment with different management teams is executed and the systematic trainings exists.

According to the interviewees, internal marketing can be seen as a communication between different departments (e.g. sales and deliveries). The importance of internal marketing and

communication is known among the organization, as stated in the chapter two, but it is not used in the full potential. In addition, the results showed that there is a need for increased communication in the different process levels. Based on these, internal marketing in a self-directed organization during the times of uncertainty is considered crucial. According to I1:

"The capability of the organization is measured under exceptional circumstances. All organizations can perform and are capable in normal situations, but the best organizations survive even in exceptional circumstances."- Interviewee 1

The communication between German and Finland office is done in a daily basis. In addition, a weekly reporting, which sum up the accomplished and changes in organization and which is shared with the management team, is used for internal follow-ups. According to interviews there are cultural differences between Finland and German offices. For example, decision making, participant involvement, analyzing, timing, and communication can be sometimes handled differently in the offices. Internal marketing could increase the communication and help to focus on the resources depending on if employees are sitting in separate places or then travelling as stated in the section two of the research.

For internal communication, the main communication happens through e-mails, Teams, WhatsApp, and phone calls. An internal magazine is published with internal and external customers in a regular basis. The traditional face-to-face meeting during lunch and coffee breaks are considered as an important part to increase communication between colleagues and teams internally. According to one I5 internal communication is experienced difficult and challenging if employees are not working in same place. However, the different possibilities for communication makes the processes faster and, in the end, manageable. Internal communication through announcements and workshops could be better managed according to the interviews. According to I4, there is never too much internal communication, even though the case company is smaller, the communication needs to exist.

For external communication, the case company use information letter, which is shared for all employees. In addition, social media platforms, e.g., LinkedIn, company's own website and Instagram are used for communication. The external communication, which maintain the external relationships, happens mainly through customer contacts and in addition is considered important for market research. For example, different exhibitions, where all stakeholders are present are good channels to increase positive communication and message to all parties. As stated in the chapter 1.5 the current times (Covid-19 and war in Ukraine)

have affected on the companies' processes and made organization to adapt into new. The result show that the exceptional times and the current world situation have affected to case company's operations and internal communication. Effects on Covid-19 affected more on the daily organizational level and war in Ukraine in the bigger scale. According to the results, as a cultural change, remote work was the biggest internal change due to these external factors, which affected the entire chain in the organization. Daily business, such as deliveries, travelling, and visits on site became harder, because of the war. Due to Covid-19, the risk of being sick affected to projects. In addition, the challenge of adapting and training young employees was considered difficult during the times of crisis. However, transformation to remote work gave employees better rhythm and prioritization of the tasks. In addition, the nature of project sales changed as stated by I7:

> *"Before we didn`t know how to close deals without visiting the customers. It was impossible, because it was always a standard to go on the site, visit the factory and spend time there. Nowadays we can close big deals with virtual handshakes."- Interviewee 7*

According to I6 the internal communication and general atmosphere in the company has changed, because of the global situation. The crisis has changed in the way of thinking and managers are more open to different solutions.

As stated in the section two through previous literature, market research is part of internal marketing implementation. The results show that there is not existing a regular market research process in the case company. However, according to the interviews, the world market and pricing trends are followed and there is no time to do separate market research. However, during Covid-19, when business stopped all over the world, there was room to do market research: what customers want, and how the company can help them and what projects need to be generated in future.

5.6 Towards internal marketing implementation

The purpose of this chapter is to give evidence for implementing the strategy for the case company. As stated in the chapter two, internal marketing implementation needs practical support to succeed in organizations. Based on the interviews, many practical suggestions, and thoughts to increase internal marketing in the company was raised. For example, internal marketing could help with clear structure in the beginning of new projects and expand the

distribution list regarding the general information flow. In addition, employee application for internal communication is suggested. I2 states that, when company grows, it needs more visibility.

The results highlighted the importance of employees and self-direction. To implement internal marketing in the case company the interviews considered employee motivation as one of the key characters. As stated in chapter 2.4, one of the internal marketing elements include employee motivation. According to I7, from the leadership point of view, it is important to understand employee's motivation to the job to increase internal marketing. To make the people more motivated, it is crucial to understand, what is the motivation behind to do the job, which can be different for all. In the end, managers need to know who they are leading. I5 in the other hand states that it is important that in different part of the processes there is implemented the correct actions to prevent for example misunderstandings and in the end not providing the customer what they need. This is supported by I1:

> *"When we consider the success of the first steps in our processes, we come to internal marketing. If internal marketing is not playing a role in the beginning and if it is not considered as a support of the processes, we face to delays, error costs and in the end the customer pays on this. "– Interviewee 1*

Although, the topic of self-directed employees is covered earlier in the interviews, additional questions were raised during the discussions. Managers point of view on how they consider self-direction is seen in employees as valuable in terms of implementing the strategy. The results showed that self-directed employees are considered a very important part of the organization and future company. For example, I5 states that the operating methods mentioned in the previous chapter 5.5 needs to support to keep the organization short and internal bureaucracy simple to make decisions and actions quickly. During projects, when the company is small and agile, it is easier to find fast solutions and to this, a responsible and self-directed employee is the key. The job characters require commitment from self-directed employees in the case company, according to I6. According to I3 and I6 it is good that employees act as their own managers. Self-direction gives more activity and self-directed, innovative, solution-oriented, and good-spirited employees in a perfect situation, which will improve the internal marketing implementation in long term.

According to I2, there are employees who need more guidance and want to be supported more. In the end, the interviewees stated that even though there is self-direction in the

company, the training to the job needs to be done, but in the end the idea is to give possibility to self-direction if the internal motivation of an employee requires so. Therefore, during the recruitment process, interviewees stated that it is important to look on correct people and personal difference, which would support additionally internal marketing implementation. The employees were highlighted as important part of the company:

> *"There is no need or room to hide individuals because everyone needs to perform. The underperformance can be seen immediately and therefore it is crucial to develop the individual approach to the people. The reason to do that is the need of individuals, which are different for all: different habits, personality and that is why we need to have different kinds of personal approach for the people."- Interviewee 7*

Employees can be supported with the presence of external factors and the physical internal meetings could be organized and when there are many things in teams and a lot of new people have arrived, informal events bring more freedom and discussion. I5 instead states that by training the staff, motivating, and being flexible towards the organization is the key but also the attitude is important. Everything comes from individuals, that is, appreciation and actions, according to I3 and I4.

To develop and maintain companies processes towards implementation in the times of crisis and era of changes there needs to be considered the outlook of the competitors as stated in the chapter 3.4. and the factors effecting competitive advantage as stated in the chapter 2.3. According to interviewees the smaller size and less bureaucracy of the case company is seen as a positive thing, for example, when there are few points of a contact from the beginning of the projects to the very end it makes everything easier, as stated by I4. The world-wide high-quality valued products, functional, - innovative and customized solutions are a strength are considered as a competitive factor. Employees with certain skills are utilized in specific tasks to receive advantages for all. The flexibility and versatility of the organization allows the company to go into projects where the competition is less than normal. The capacity of the resources separates case company from the rivals, according to I2 and I4. The dedication to the projects by giving information in the short period of time and quick reaction makes customers feel important and can be seen as a competitive advantage and difference to huge companies with bigger bureaucracy.

5.7 Conclusions of the findings

As a conclusion, all the attributes that emerged in the theoretical framework were discussed within the empirical interviews. The structure of the interview is based on the theoretical framework i.e. previous research and research questions presented in chapter four in figure 3. Together seven interviews were conducted from a case company. The interviewees are all management level employees as presented in Table 1. Topics of internal marketing factors, self-directed employees, leadership, and communication are evaluated and the relationship to each other discussed. The overview of the conclusions is presented in the figure 4 and further discussed in the last chapter six to give the theoretical support behind. In figure 4, results are presented in two different boxes. First box states if the factor is currently existing in the company, according to the interviewees in terms of internal marketing, internal marketing practices, leadership, and self-directed employees. The second box states the main outcome of the factor and for the specific interview questions.

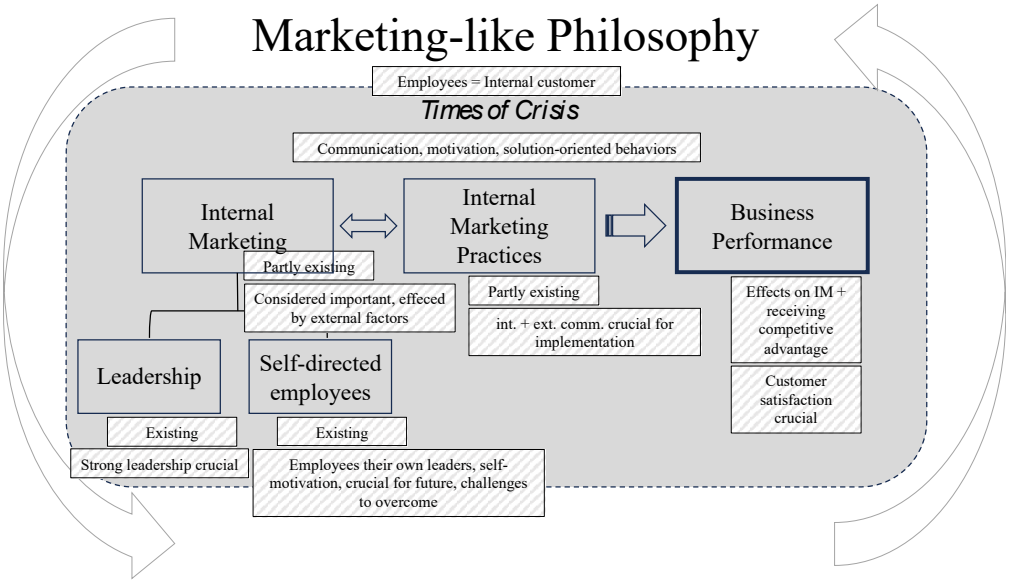

Figure 5: Overview of the conclusions

One of the objectives of the interview was to find out whether the case company is currently using and utilizing internal marketing, i.e. thinking employees as internal customers as stated in the chapter 3.2. Four out of seven interviewees recognized immediately that internal marketing is used in the company. The rest of the interviewees didn't directly state that

internal marketing is currently used. However, they pointed out the usage of internal communication, but they didn't use the term internal marketing. This can be also recognized in all interviews; the term of internal communication is known and used more frequently rather than the term of internal marketing. In addition, all interviewees considered internal marketing as a crucial element to implement in times of crisis. Five out of seven interviewees considered that Covid-19 and war in Ukraine have effects on the company's internal marketing and the communication. According to the interviews, internal marketing is considered as an emerging function in the company, however, there is room for improvements through practical implications, which are discussed further in the next chapter six.

As a conclusion, it can be stated that internal marketing effects on self-directed employees and leadership. The organization of the case company can be defined as self-directed. According to the empirical findings this is considered as a good thing and as a competitive advantage. However, the challenges of having strong presence of self-direction are mentioned and importance of strong leadership and communication in these situations are highlighted. For example, the importance of processes and meetings between management team were discussed. The amount of communication is experienced differently among the interviewees due to the different roles in the organization. For example, I4 experience communication differently, because of the amount of travelling compared to I5 who experience a low-level organization with working more in the office. To sum up, the company has many different functions where the importance of leadership is emphasized at different points.

In addition, self-motivation of employees is stated to be crucial for the internal marketing implementation in times of crisis. The expectations from managers in today's and in future's organization in a self-directed organization during the times of crisis can be stated as following: systematization of issues and processes, clarification of management and their functions is crucial. The support towards self-direction is wanted, but right and strong leadership needs to be taken place to cope with tight situations. Managers need to support and give employees the possibility to trust and do the job, because without the people there is no way for us to be successful.

Based on the interviews, internal marketing practices stated in the chapter 3.1, exists partly in the case company. HRM and recruitment processes exists, but there are challenges to find

the right talents, due to the aging organization and current world situation. There is no systematic market research in the processes, but the global trends are partly followed through customers and other stakeholder connections. However, internal, and external communication is considered crucial for future and internal marketing implementation and especially during times of crisis. Internal tools for communications are used but more visibility for example to projects are suggested.

As stated in chapter 3.1 business performance can be defined as the outcomes, such as customer satisfaction through internal marketing practices. According to the interviewees internal marketing effects on business performance through customer satisfaction and long-term relationships. If the internal practices are done well, the effects on business and external communication are positive in terms of receiving competitive advantage. Especially, self-directed employees which bring value to the company effects on the performance. The case company's strengths, which exists as competitive advantage include customer consultation and -understanding, agility, and closeness. From a competitor's perspective, the challenge is the resources that are limited to a few people. Specific skills are needed due to the aging organization, which was highlighted as one of the challenges in recent years. The resource management is not ready to be successful. The normal steady operating situations work, but it is not possible to respond in the best way in the exceptional and challenging times with current methodology.

To manage internal marketing implementation successfully during times of crisis, internal methods and strategy needs to be placed. Communication, trust, motivation, innovative, solution-oriented, and good-spirited employees are needed in parallel of strong leadership to implement internal marketing in times of crisis.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The last chapter of the thesis finalizes the empirical results of the research by providing answers to the research questions. The theoretical contributions and outcome are presented and compared to empirical results, as summarized in figure 4. In addition, the practical and managerial implications are presented in terms of utilizing the strategy for the case company. The last part of the chapter discusses the main research limitations and suggestions for future research.

6.1 Results and conclusions

The thesis aims aim to provide a comprehensive insight to internal marketing in today's organizations in the times of crisis and changing environment. To support the aim of the thesis and to give knew knowledge, the overall picture of internal marketing is analysed through previous literature, research, and empirical interviews of the case company. Five different factors presented in chapter 1.2: *today's world situation and the times of crisis, HRM and marketing point of view, the importance of self-directed employees, the role of leadership and management, and effects on the business performance* builds a basis for the thesis research questions and give the relevance of the study and are discussed throughout the research and highlighted in the interviews. According to research (e.g. Huang 2020), the concept of internal marketing has been known among researchers and as part of discussions for years. However, not many companies are utilizing or implementing the concept in practice and especially in terms for the thesis, there are not many research existing of internal marketing in the manufacturing sector, like discussed in chapter one. In addition, in the era of changes companies need to be aware of the current situation to adapt and answer best to the challenges. These were considered to build an interesting starting point for the thesis. Therefore, this thesis aims to analyse the outcomes of current situation in the case company and the environment of self-directed employees and how important they consider internal marketing during times of crisis.

Based on the above aspects, the main research question of this thesis is to examine the role of internal marketing in the times of crisis, followed by three sub questions to give

comprehensive answer to the main research question. The first and second sub-question investigated what kind of internal marketing actions support self-directed employees and leadership in times of crisis. The third sub-question asked directly how internal marketing effects on the business performance.

As a conclusion, it can be stated that the role of internal marketing is crucial in times of crisis. To consider employees as internal customers helps the organization to maintain employee motivation and satisfaction to further receive customer satisfactions in long-term. In addition, the role of internal marketing is to support and give marketing perspectives to manage internal operations successfully. Furthermore, the results show that strong management, motivation and trust of employees, work environment support self-directed employees. In addition, the results provide evidence that for example HRM functions, internal communication, and market research support leadership. In the end, internal marketing effects on business performance through the implementation of internal marketing practices and functions such as employee satisfaction. All three sub-questions investigated the potential of internal marketing in todays' organizations and are discussed more detailed through the results in the next chapter.

As a conclusion and according to the empirical results, current external challenges, such as the uncertain economic situation around the world and the war in Ukraine affect individuals and businesses. Covid-19 have led to new ways of working and methods in which managers are expected to react quickly and efficiently. According to the background information of the interviewees there was no proof that that gender, age, nationality, or educational background effected on the experience of internal marketing. However, the department- and role of the interviewee, the duration of the position and the current working status in terms of remote work effected to the results how the role of internal marketing and communication is experienced among the employees. For example, interviewees who had worked longer shared same experience of internal marketing in practice than interviewees, who have not worked in the same role many years: new employees had new thoughts and ideas from other perspective. This was considered as a valuable difference for the later discussion and results.

6.2 Theoretical contributions

In this chapter the research findings are compared and analysed with the existing academic literature. As mentioned in the chapter 5.7 the interview questions are placed in the framework to support the conclusions. As a conclusion, it can be stated, that the previous literature and research are in line with empirical results: the internal marketing existence in the case company is considered important to realize the potential of the entire organization and individuals.

For this thesis, marketing-like philosophy builds the theoretical background and the whole starting point for internal marketing implementation: importance to think employees as internal customers. According to the research (e.g. Ahmed et al. 2013; Rafiq et al. 2000) marketing-like philosophy and approach effect on implementing internal marketing successfully to get positive competence between internal marketing and business performance.

Implementation of internal marketing include three premises (Bohnenberger et al. 2019): the beliefs of the organization (i.e. considered values), the coordination of the process and the main activities and actions. For the approach, empirical results in general and as whole support the idea of having marketing approach in the behaviours, acting, and thinking. The results show that marketing -like philosophy exists, but not in marketing itself or internal marketing terms. The case company is described as family-based business, which is considered to bring advantage and value in the long run. The family-based background is stated to be reason for specific processes and actions done in the company, with a small hierarchy and not much bureaucracy involved during decision making processes. This can be considered as a potential for existing internal marketing mindset. Based on the interviews, the company values are related to the background of the family business. However, there is differences in between German and Finland offices and in addition, the responsibilities of main actions and activities vary through the processes and involve the whole organization part of the everyday actions, even though the empirical interviews were conducted only from the management level. This can be supported already from the beginning, as already stated, through the holistic marketing point of view (Kotler & Keller 2019). In addition, according to Beveridge (2021, 142-143), cultural differences effect on marketing from the communication point of view, for example, expressions and way to present things.

Furthermore, different communication styles between cultures, have effects on to conflict and crisis management. (Beveridge 2021, 142-143)

According to the previous research, (e.g. Lings 2004) internal market research help to identify the exchanges of value and therefore according to the interviews, it is good that internal- and external communication has its place in the case company, however, there is no specific system behind market research. The empirical findings are aligned with the theoretical framework and stated by Bohnenberger et al. (2019, 2) internal marketing actions may create internal and external stakeholder satisfaction to help organizational culture linked to the strategic position. However, according to the interviews, especially after Covid-19 the way of communication changed internally and externally: *"two and half years back, it was hard to imagine that we would communicate to customers like this",* according to I7. In general, the exceptional times and the current world situation, war in Ukraine, affected to the case company's operations. The issue of aging organization and the risk to lose talents during the challenging times were addressed by most of the interviewees. In the other hand, the importance of leadership in internal marketing was raised during the interviews in general. According to the research (Bohnenberger et al. 2019) recruitment and employee adaptation is one of the critical parts to implement internal marketing in practice and to align on the values.

As mentioned in the previous chapter 5.7. the conclusions of figure 4 are further discussed in this next paragraph. According to the empirical findings, it can be stated that internal marketing exists in the case company. However, the internal marketing philosophy of treating employees as customers as stated by Berry et al. (1991) was not stated directly by the interviewees. As a result, the term internal communication stood out, and not all recognized the internal marketing term as part of the everyday operations. However, the usages and definition of internal marketing in case company support the previous research. For example, according to the interviews internal marketing is about different information flow, interest to other member projects, the enjoyment of success, targets for developments and for example sharing sales results between different levels in the organization.

The motivation and threshold to approach other employees is perceived as a strength. Several research support these few mentioned characters, for example according to Nemteanu & Dabija (2021) internal marketing presents the way how organizations can meet the needs of its employees, increase performance and impact positively to the different behaviors and

attitudes. In addition, Grönroos, (1982) define internal marketing as different activities towards employees to get motivated and customer-oriented employees to the company. Internal marketing is the process towards the development of internal partnerships and relationships. (Kotler et al.2019) The importance of these activities were further highlighted among the interviewees.

Remote working has been popular among self-employed, and it has become more and more popular during the years (i.e Moens et al. 2022, 729; Eurostat 2022), also in the case company, as discussed in the interviews. Many factors and challenges related to HRM have become new normal and important in everyday operations on (Nemteanu et al. 2021, 1, 11), employee's self-leadership, independency (Stewart et al. 2011, 185) and in the role of leadership (Lawton-Misra et al. 2021, 205).

According to the interviewees, the presence of internal marketing during the times of uncertainty and changes is important. In the current world situation, war in Ukraine and Covid-19, was raised in the thesis to support the viewpoint regarding times of crisis. All operations were affected due to the external factors stated in the thesis, for example Covid-19 changed everything from travelling to the sales negotiations into online business and War in Ukraine forced to build new relationships and customers that replacement the lost sales from Russian market. Remote work gave a lot of flexibility and advantages, however, challenges such as communication flow suffered. Based on the empirical findings and past research, companies need to focus on internal factors to maximize external benefits and prepare for challenges.

The research sub-questions discussed internal marketing effects on business performance, self-directed employees, and leadership. According to the empirical findings, the topics are strongly related to each other and therefore it can be stated they all have effects on internal marketing and marketing -like thinking in general. The answers in general highlighted the capability of self-directed organization; the matter how leadership is managed in self-directed organization effects in the end to the business performance. Effects on business performance, customers, and competitor's role for business the following was highlighted by I7: *"We need to consider the prices compared to competitors and factors related to trust building to customers and to show them why we and not the competitor. This is depending on a lot of the performance of the employees, if they are confident and motivated to do the job."* In the case company, a strong presence of self-directed people is required due to the

processes and job character. According to the interviews, internal marketing has effects on self-directed employees and personal responsibility is considered as good thing. However, it gave mixed opinions and raised the issues of not taking enough leadership when the organization is too self-directed. Motivation and trust during remote work, role of leadership and freedom to decide, were highlighted during discussions. A question where all interviewees agreed on was that internal marketing has effects on the leadership. The literature is in align with this as self-directed employee have positive impacts on individual development and learning activities in the organization (Lejeune et al. 2016, 323). To conclude, the roles and collaboration between business leaders and self-directed employees are considered significant, especially in a self-directed organization where the concepts of communication and openness are emphasized.

6.3 Managerial implications

The purpose is to implement internal marketing to the chosen case company and as a managerial purpose to give practical support and evidence of the effects of internal marketing for the management level in the era of changes and times of crisis. In addition, to provide a strategy for the case company, the aim is to challenge the normal and traditional HRM perspective more to the marketing point of view so that the human potential is developed, and individual and organizational goals can be reached at the same time.

The research findings gave many managerial implication proposals as the concept of internal marketing emphasizes the role of managers, where employees are perceived as internal customers and key drivers of development. The philosophy on the concept is based on encouraging, supporting, understanding, and discovering the potential of employees. In addition to the case company, the discussions and findings can be used in any other existing company that is having organizational changes or self-directed employees due to for example, after Covid-19 changes in the office working policies. The thesis is targeted to a small and medium sized company working internationally, but the strategy can be utilized in any organization, for management level. The managerial implications are related to the practical support i.e. suggested strategy for the case company and therefore discussed detailed in the next chapter 6.3.1.

Changes that occur on the outside often affect the internal factors of the company. Changes can be seen in the short or long term. The resources of the company are on the shoulders of the employees, and the management, of the entire organization. Every individual in the company is valuable. Without employees and individuals, there is no company or outcome to pursue. For this reason, it is important for the management to know how to manage individuals, people and, ultimately, the organization during changes. Based on the empirical findings, to realize value-creating employees, there is a potential to use internal marketing that challenges leaders to think in a new way, but also to challenge traditional management models and person management. It is important that the real challenges of the target company itself are known and communicated, so that the response is fast, thus maximizing the benefits of internal marketing. As a conclusion, leaders need to be aware of current trends, developments, and competition in a self-directed organization where the potential of individuals needs to be considered is highlighted as a crucial for the process and whole organization.

6.3.1 Internal marketing strategy for the case company

The goal of the thesis is to bring tools to a self-directed organization to support case company's organizational goals, values, and visions in the era of changes and times of uncertainty and help to focus resources correctly. As mentioned earlier, the original purpose of the concept, and at the same time of the study, is to support and challenge traditional personnel functions and management models, without excluding current used methods. The entire organization must sign common values and understand what the company is aiming for, and for this reason managers must be aware of the motivation of employees, and the desire to share the same values towards the goals.

Without a strategy, it is difficult to achieve goals. The strategy in the middle of the change must be workable. The strategy starts at the management level of the company. The purpose of the strategy is to help case company to implement internal marketing in practice as part of their processes. According to Ferdous et al. (2013, 646) for organizations, it is important to design internal marketing initiatives that prepare its employees to better execute the external marketing programs, push the process more end-customer focused and resulting in the achievement of a superior marketing performance.

During the years, the case company has gone through many organizational changes to streamline the operations. According to the interviews, there is room to increase internal customer thinking i.e. internal marketing. For example, customer feedback should go through the entire organization, so that everybody is aware of the feedback. Additionally, interviewees gave many suggestions to implement a tool in the company's processes, gives the opportunity to implement internal marketing further in the company.

According to the literature in chapter two, companies with a goal-oriented targets should implement internal marketing as part of their operations. To grow company and to modernize the processes, more visibility is required, i.e. the bigger company, the is potential for more visibility. To conclude, reasons to implement internal marketing strategy for the case company can be stated as: *1. Internal organizational changes* 2. *Strong presence of self-directed employees*, 3. *Increasing number of employees retiring*, 4. *supporting the existing processes for future*. Based on these, a strategy for the case company is implemented and presented in a figure 5. Further support and solutions of implementation for management is provided in chapter 3.3. which aligns with the previous theory and literature.

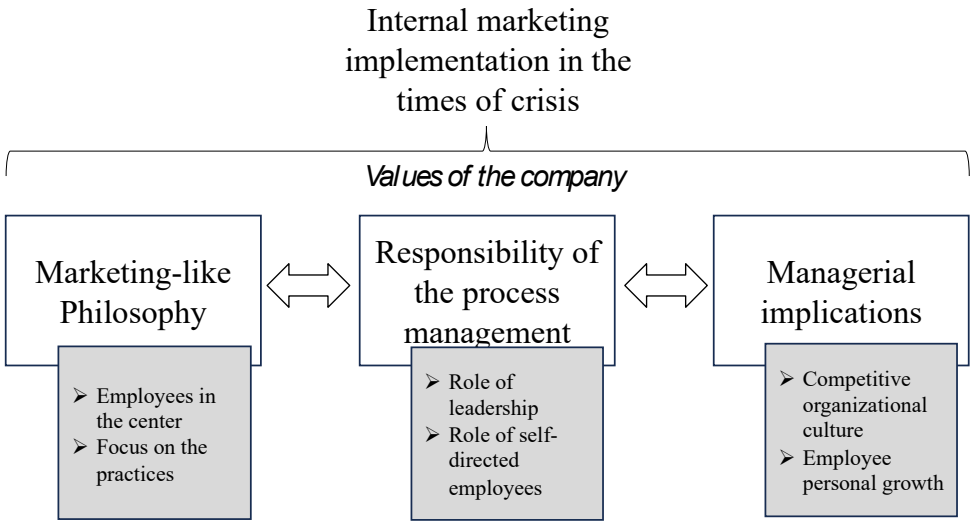

Figure 6. Strategy for the case company

To maintain the existing strengths and resources, e.g. case company's quality and flexibility, it is requested to include values in the strategy: everybody in the company should understand the used values, which guide the operations and define the company's culture and the employees' satisfaction and commitment and are thereby reflected in internal marketing. During the recruitment situation and interviews the company values need to be stated clearly

when stating the role and position. Values need to be considered in all steps, for example in the development discussions, monthly letters, and announcements, to measure employee satisfaction. Communication and listening to the employees are important: to listen employee ideas is important in terms of building the right organizational culture: how individuals are considered as part of the work community and how the operations are maintained.

To have a full understanding of the marketing-like philosophy the employees need to be in the centre and based on the interviews the focus on the internal marketing practices, which result in employee- and customer satisfaction. In this sense, the responsibility of the process management is crucial, and the role of the leaders is extremely important. The relationship and cooperation between managers and employees' is the key. Even thought, the organization is self-directed employees need to be implemented as part of the planning and target setting. This way they are more motivated to achieve the goals. Good atmosphere supports target setting and cooperation and even more importantly, personal growth. Therefore, management of the processes should include personal training- and development plans, as also stated in the interviews.

For the practices and implementation of internal marketing, leadership and self-directed employees are needed. This includes teaching and training practices, e.g. in induction and continuous improvement, where soft and hard measures can be both motivators. To receive managerial implications and successful organization culture leads to positive encouragement and achievements among employees, in both, employee and business performances, which is considered as competitive advantage. It can be stated, that when people are motivated, they build successful teams together and this supports different performance measures in a positive way. The company needs to be developing and going to the future, as the way of education of young people is changing, creative and proactive solutions are being implemented through e.g. AI. The challenge is to make the transition fluently to the next generations and maintain the current operational level.

6.4 Limitation and further research

According to the previous literature some limitations were recognized for internal marketing implementation among companies. The main problem contributing internal marketing in

practice, is that there is not existing a single unified concept (Rafiq et al. 2000, 449; Ferdous et al. 2013, 637; Huang 2020, 166) or a systematic work of how internal marketing works. Most of the work on internal marketing is more conceptual than practical (Ahmed et al. 2003, 1221). There is a high degree of reluctance and ignorance towards the concept of internal marketing, which leads to the lack of application in companies in practice (Mahnert et al. 2007, 54). This can be proofed by the empirical results: all interviewees experienced the concept of internal marketing as a little bit different and more from the simple internal communication perspective. However, in the end, the above-mentioned limitations are a reason to implement internal marketing to the case company: this thesis information can contribute relevant information for further research for internal marketing implementation.

Two out of seven interviews were not held on the interviewee's native language, which can affect the emphasis on the discussed topics. In addition, the rest of the five interviewees were later translated to English, which may always affect the final interpretation of the discussions.

In addition to wide discussion of internal marketing, the connection to relationship marketing is considered interesting and important for future research. Importance of the concept can be stated: relationship marketing (RM) emphasizes the importance of internal customer and internal marketing orientation in addition to external marketing orientation (Gummesson 1991, 69). Relationship marketing (RM) consists of four key components: customers, employees, marketing partners (i.e., channels, suppliers, distributors) and members of financial community (shareholders, investors, analysts). In this concept, marketing must not only conduct to customer relationship management (CRM), but partner relationship management (PRM) as well. (Kotler et al. 2009, 20-22) RM seeks to build relationships within the organization: create the wanted value to customers between the organization and its stakeholders. (Egan 2011, 38)

To limit the original research question and purpose of this thesis, the research strategy was targeted to management level and empirical part based on the management level interviews. For this reason, there is room for future discussion to implement such a strategy for specific part of organization and to employee level. In addition, the interviews could utilize employees in discussions and analyse employee experience of internal marketing concept and implementation possibilities. This could increase the possibility to recruit young employees when their point of view is analysed.

The study was conducted according to the current world situation and the interviewees status. Since the interviews, the world situation has deteriorated in terms of the economic situation. Having more focus on this point in external factors, could be interesting to investigate in future research. In the end, the strategy is aimed at companies in general who are operating and experiencing the era of changes in organizations, regardless of what external challenges are.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: The interview questions for the case company in Finnish

Taustakysymykset:

1. Ikä
2. Sukupuoli
3. Koulutustausta
4. Kansalaisuus
5. Millä osastolla / organisaatiossa työskentelet?
6. Mikä rooli sinulla on työssäsi?
7. Millaisissa tehtävissä olet aiemmin työskennellyt?
8. Työsuhteen kesto yrityksessä?
9. Toimitko esihenkilöroolissa?
10. Teetkö tällä hetkellä etätöitä?

Kysymyspatteristo:

11. Miten kuvailisit yritystäsi?
12. Millaisia arvoja yrityksenne edustaa? Näkyvätkö yrityksen arvot päivittäisessä arjessa?
13. Mitkä yrityksen prosesseista kuuluvat sinulle ja miten ja millä tasolla niitä koordinoidaan?
14. Mitä ajattelet yrityksen käytössä olevista toimintatavoista ja käytännöistä esimerkiksi?
    a. henkilöstön kouluttamisessa ja sopeutumisessa,
    b. rekrytoinnissa ja prosesseissa
    c. sisäisessä kommunikaatiossa ja viestinnässä
    d. ulkoisessa viestinnässä
    e. markkinatutkimuksessa

15. Koetko, että poikkeusajat ja tämänhetkinen maailmantilanne ovat vaikuttaneet yrityksesi toimintaa? Miksi, miten? Esim. vaikutukset tiimien työntekoon ja rooliin? tai onko uusia toimintatapoja tullut päivittäiseen työntekoon?
16. Hyödynnetäänkö yrityksessä tällä hetkellä mielestäsi sisäistä markkinointia? Jos kyllä, niin millä tavalla? Jos ei, niin miksi ei?
17. Kuinka tärkeäksi koet sisäisen markkinoinnin yrityksessäsi (poikkeusolosuhteissa)?
18. Onko Covid-19 tai Ukrainan sodalla ollut mielestäni vaikutusta yrityksen sisäiseen markkinointiin? Onko sisäisen markkinoinnin merkityksessä havaittu muutoksia Covid-19 tai Ukrainan sodan takia? Millaisia muutoksia?
19. Koetko, että sisäisellä markkinoinnilla on bisneshyötyjä? Jos kyllä, niin miksi ja millaisia?
20. Koetko, että sisäisellä markkinoinnilla on vaikutusta työntekijöiden itseohjautuvuuteen? Jos kyllä, niin millaisia vaikutuksia?
21. Koetko, että sisäisellä markkinoinnilla on vaikutuksia johtajien/esimiesten työhön? Jos kyllä, niin millaisia vaikutuksia?
22. Miten sisäistä markkinointia voitaisiin lisätä yrityksessä? Puuttuko yrityksestä/organisaatiosta mielestäsi jotain työkaluja/toimintamalleja, joilla voitaisiin edistää sisäistä markkinointia? Mitä työkaluja kaipaisit lisää päivittäiseen työntekoon?
23. Kuinka kommunikaatio toimii yrityksessä/paikallisorganisaatiossasi/tiimissäsi? ja kuinka usein olet yhteydessä muuhun konserniorganisaatioon / omaan tiimiin?
24. Miten itseohjautuvuus näkyy mielestäsi työntekijöissä?
25. Miten itseohjautuvuutta voitaisiin tukea yrityksessäsi?
26. Miten tärkeäksi koet itseohjautuvuuden tulevaisuuden organisaatiossa? Ja miksi?
27. Koetko, että itseohjautuva työntekijä tuo lisäarvoa yritykselle? Jos kyllä, niin mitä lisäarvoa? Entä mitä haasteita koet sen tuovan?
28. Millä tavalla eroatte mielestäsi kilpailijoista?
29. Mitä toivot työntekijöiltä / esihenkilöiltä tämän päivän ja tulevaisuuden organisaatiossa?
30. Mitä toivot esihenkilöltä / työntekijältä itseohjautuvassa organisaatiossa?

Appendix 2: The interview questions for the case company translated to English

Background questions:

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Educational background
4. Nationality
5. In which department / organization do you work?
6. What role do you play in your job?
7. What kind of positions have you worked in before?
8. Duration of employment in the company?
9. Do you work as a manager?
10. Are you currently working remotely?

Interview questions:

11. How would you describe your company?
12. What kind of values does your company represent? Are the company's values visible in everyday actions?
13. Which of the company's processes belong to you and how and at what level are they coordinated?
14. What do you think about the operating methods and practices used by the company, for example?
    a. in human resources
    b. in recruitment of employees
    c. in internal communication
    d. in external communication
    e. in market research
15. Do you feel that the exceptional times and the current world situation have affected your company's operations? Why, how? For example, the effects on the teams' work and role? or have new methods of operation come into daily work?

16. Do you think that internal marketing is currently being used in your company? If so, in what way? If not, why not?
17. How important do you think it is to have internal marketing in your company (under exceptional times)?
18. In your opinion, has Covid-19 or the war in Ukraine had an impact on the company's internal marketing? Have there been changes in the meaning of internal marketing due to Covid-19 or the war in Ukraine? What kind of changes?
19. Do you think that internal marketing effects on business performance? If yes, how?
20. Do you think that internal marketing effects on self-directed employees? If yes, how?
21. Do you think that internal marketing effects on the leadership? If yes, how?
22. How could internal marketing be increased in the company? Do you think the company/organization lacks any tools/operational models that could promote internal marketing? What tools would you like more for your daily work?
23. How does communication work in your company/local organization/team? and how often are you in contact with the rest of the group organization / your own team?
24. How do you think self-direction can be seen in employees?
25. How could self-direction be supported in your company?
26. How important do you think self-direction is for the organization of the future? And why?
27. Do you feel that a self-directed employee brings added value to the company? If yes, what added value? And what challenges do you think it brings?
28. In what way do you think you differ from your competitors?
29. What do you expect from employees / managers in today's and future's organization?
30. What do you expect from a manager / employee in a self-directed organization.