In his request for information on "Ancient Marketing-Like Thinking" another author is indirectly contributing to a common and potentially dangerous misunderstanding about the origins and nature of marketing--namely a widely held belief that marketing isn't marketing until it is done formally and some marketing specialist has labeled it marketing. Marketing historians (like Bartels) suggest that yes, there may have been some primitive efforts that looked like marketing stretching back into the reaches of time, but somehow, for most, it really isn't "marketing" as we "marketers" know it.

Few marketers will acknowledge that any "real" marketing existed until about 1930, and many will date it from the emergence of the so-called "Marketing Concept" of the 'sixties with its "revolutionary" emphasis on a consumer orientation which is treated with a reverence usually reserved for "Tablets of Stone" (!!) This essay will attempt to; 1) outline current marketing thinking about the boundaries of the marketing discipline, 2) show the harm caused by this mis-conception, 3) show why it IS a mis-conception, and 4) outline what can be done to sort it out.

THE BOUNDARIES OF THE MARKETING DISCIPLINE

The boundaries of marketing are often defined in three ways, history, formal orientation, and corporate labelling. And, until activity crosses one of these three boundaries, most marketers would say what is under scrutiny is not really "marketing". As already discussed, with regard to history, few would label anything until about 1930 as "marketing". And, most would wait for the arrival of the Marketing Concept with its emphasis on consumer orientation before applying a marketing label to economic activity. Within the "real world" of corporate activity unless some formal "marketing" department or personnel are present few would say any economic organisation really "does" marketing.

Putting this all together, we marketers put our faith in these boundaries and confidently think we live within a discipline that is relatively new, was changed dramatically by the Marketing concept, and needs us marketers to "do" it within an organisation--Right?? WRONG!! With apologies to Leavitt, I think this is Marketing Myopia with a capital "M".

UNDERSTANDING THE HARM CAUSED BY CURRENT THINKING

I bought into this same thinking (particularly that involving labelling) and didn't understand the harm it caused until my PhD dissertation was written on nursing home marketing in 1975. This was a revolutionary topic for the time as back then even the formal AMA definition of marketing focused on the selling of PRODUCTS for a PROFIT. Obviously, mine had to be seriously "out of line" as it focused on the marketing of (shock!!) a service frequently offered (horrors!!) by non-profits and government departments.

However, I persevered, completed the dissertation, and was introduced to an entire industry that nobody thought did any marketing. Over the next twenty years I was in charge of laying in the first formal marketing training for that industry through conferences, trade associations, and corporations that might control as many as a thousand nursing homes spread throughout the
U.S. My impact was great enough that I was written up in a later book (Molloy, 1991) as one of the "Fathers" of marketing to the entire industry.

In this role I had ample opportunity to learn the harm caused by current thinking that, since the nursing home firms didn't have a marketing department in any shape or form, they couldn't be marketing. This harm was most evident in two problems, an organisational resistance to anything that could be even remotely labelled marketing, as well as a very short shelf life for anyone unfortunate enough to be their first time marketing manager—and dared to actually carry out his/her function.

The organisational resistance was most visible in people with a health care background (nurses, doctors, physio-therapists, etc.) who would agonize over "should we market?"..."can we market??"..."what will people think if we market??"..."are we really the kind of outfit that HAS to market??". As such, any formal marketing efforts were undertaken with great reluctance and internal resistance that wasn't helped by the fact that the people resisting (along with everybody else) thought their organisation hadn't been marketing before. To them this whole area of marketing was a new and scary thing.

This organizational resistance made the second problem, the short shelf life of first time marketing managers, even worse. This problem was manifested by the fact that the majority of people I observed holding these positions normally lasted no longer than about a year before they were fired with great satisfaction by unified action of the leaders of other functional areas within their firm. At first I thought these unfortunate events were people-specific until they happened with so many of my clients I knew they had to be situation-specific.

What seemed to be causing the difficulty with first time marketing managers appeared directly linked to the idea challenged by this essay that "...it 'ain't' marketing until some marketer calls it 'marketing'. To the "non-marketing" organisation the whole concept was a new and scary thing. However, their apprehensions were made even worse by the arrival of their first practitioner attached to that same philosophy who uniformly believed; a) their new employer had never marketed before, b) the newly arrived marketer would therefore be "God's Gift to the Organisation, who c) would be greeted with open arms by their newly embraced employer. This usually proved an explosive combination.

The problem would normally start with the hiring and placement of the first time marketing manager by an employer who viewed it with both suspicion and great expectations (simultaneously!!). Usually nobody doing the hiring had a clear idea as to what this hapless soul was supposed to do, but generally it revolved around some idea of marketing as being promotion (only). And, the marketer was therefore supposed to accomplish miracles with brochures, signage, and (perhaps) advertising.

This might even seem to work for a limited time if no competitor had anything better. However, sooner or later this first time marketing manager would stagger back to their employer, and announce, "I can't do this anymore!!". Others in the organization who viewed marketing in general with suspicion and this marketer in particular with distrust because of the marketer's own perception of self-importance would inquire, "Why not??"

What would next be said normally proved a bad choice of words because the marketer would invariably say something along the lines of "What we are selling is rubbish!!" What was really happening here is that the marketer was finding promotion alone would not do the job, and they were trying to effect changes in the other four "P's" (for those with a McCarthy background) by
suggesting different locations, more appropriate pricing strategies, or more attractive offerings in terms of product-type amenities (e.g., landscaping, food, etc.).

The minefield this first time marketer was entering was caused by the fact that everyone was missing a basic point--namely that THE ORGANISATION HAD ALWAYS BEEN MARKETING (sort of) in the sense that somebody somewhere had to have been making the non-promotional decisions being challenged. And, when the first time marketing person wanted to start contributing to these decisions, not only was he/(she) suggesting that those who formerly made them were wrong, but also that the marketing manager's power, prestige, etc. should be enhanced by allowing the marketing department to control them. Complaints like, "Since when did marketing run this company were frequently heard"...just before the heads of the departments so challenged managed to talk the CEO into getting rid of their marketer.

Reflection upon these issues convinced me that the concept of marketing activity being clearly labelled as marketing seemed to be wrong in these instances. Chasing out how this idea came into being eventually required looking at the other limits of what is--and is not--marketing.

**UNRAVELLING “TIMELESS” MARKETING MYOPIA**

It seemed that the best place to start challenging the perceived boundaries of marketing was with the oldest of them--history.

To me at least there appears to be only one point in time when marketing (albeit of a primitive sort) could NOT have been present, when man was either little more than an ape swinging from a tree or living in the Garden of Eden (interestingly enough both Darwin and Genesis work equally well here!!). At this point every human could be pictured as a single unit labelled both "Producer" and "Consumer". If a primitive human were hungry they ripped a banana off a tree (produced it) and then ate it (consumed it). Since producer and consumer were one and the same nothing could go wrong, for only a mad person would produce something that they (the consumer) either didn't know about or want.

However, since nobody could make enough of everything for themselves they hit on the first step in the development of both humanity and marketing, Specialization. One primitive would specialize in farming (to grow food) and another in hunting (to produce clothing). This set in motion a new problem in that the farmer had a huge stack of food, but no clothing. The second would have lots of clothes but no food. This required the next step, trade between them to resolve the imbalances.

This trade signalled the advent of something that hadn't been there before, a division between production and consumption. When the self sufficient were simultaneously the producer and consumer of all they needed, under specialization something new was introduced, people grouped into "producers" and "consumers". What made (and makes) it difficult to see is that for products and services in general everyone has to be members of both groups simultaneously, but when it comes to any specific product/(service) most gainfully employed people are members of one group or the other. For instance, when it comes to education I am a "Producer", but when it comes to almost everything else (food, clothing,etc.) I am a "consumer".

Once the world breaks into these two groups the trade that has to emerge bridges something that wasn't there before, namely physical and mental distance. By physical distance what I mean is that under self-sufficiency producer and consumer were literally under one skin, but under specialization they must be two separate units and therefore there is a physical distance between them. This physical distance brings with it something even more challenging, a mental
distance. By mental distance what I mean is that, under self-sufficiency, the mind of the producer was simultaneously the mind of the consumer, but under specialization the mind of the producer is separate from the mind of the consumer, and therefore an error of the producer making something the consumer either doesn't know about--or in a form they don't desire--becomes possible.

In the beginning this error couldn't have been very likely, for the earliest specialization probably took place in the family, then the tribe, then the city, etc. Therefore, the relative physical and mental distance can't have been very great. But, if we push this process far enough with explosions in productive capacity stretching out the boundaries of served markets, we arrive in the twenty-first century. Here we have producers in countries like Japan making incredibly sophisticated products for consumers (for instance in the U.S.) literally oceans away in terms of both distance and mental understanding of the nuances of what they are buying.

Unfortunately, it is only in the latter stages of this evolutionary process that current thinking about marketing as a discipline has developed. Here we can clearly see that the basic job of marketing has always been to avoid errors caused by the physical and mental distances between producers and consumers by making sure that producers don't make anything that their consumers either don't want or of which consumers are unaware.

With the full benefit of hindsight we can see how the Marketing Concept's emphasis on consumer orientation seemed a big step forward in this process of avoiding errors...and also glorify the thinkers who extended this into making decisions related to the "four P's" of the sixties. However, when we do this we can rather arrogantly be missing a very important point. EVEN THE MOST PRIMITIVE MARKETERS AT THE BEGINNING OF TIME DID THE SAME THING!!

This can be seen if we whiz all the way back to the beginning of this evolution starting with the development of specialization. Even the most primitive of producers had to (perhaps unconsciously) be oriented towards their consumers in translating consumer needs into appropriate products, pricing mechanisms, places for sale, and promotion telling people goods were available. And, we can prove that it was done for had these primitives failed to do this no one would have traded for their goods. The farmer would have frozen to death as people refused to trade garments for produce they didn't like. And, the hunters would have starved to death as people refused to trade them food in return for garments that were (for instance) full of holes.

We also can know that these primitive marketing efforts were done successfully, FOR IF THEY HADN'T, EVERYBODY WOULD HAVE PERISHED. WE KNOW NOT EVERYBODY PERISHED BECAUSE WE ARE STILL HERE AND THESE PEOPLE WERE OUR ANCESTORS!!

SORTING OUT "TIMELESS" MARKETING MYOPIA

From this analysis those who agree with it can see the following:

1) Mankind has been marketing (albeit by the "seat of the pants") since the beginning of time in the sense that somebody has always had to make decisions about the component functions ("4-P's") it comprises.

2) The importance given the consumer orientation of the marketing concept is misplaced as it was only a written academic recognition of what had always been required of successful
marketing...in that nobody has every found a way to successfully force consumers to buy something of which they were unaware or was less attractive to them than alternatives.

3) There are no individuals or productive firms who do not "market" in the sense of making (perhaps implicit) decisions about product/service offerings, location of offering, communication of offering, or terms of economic exchange.

4) SINCE WHEN DID MARKETING BEGIN RUNNING EVERY OUTFIT?? IT ALWAYS HAS!! It was just that nobody...including marketers...have thought of it as marketing.

By extension this recognition can help with the problems attendant to "myopia" about discipline boundaries identified earlier.

A) Organisations never have the choice of "will they market?", they only can decide, "will we market 'well'." In other words, ever since an organisation was created it has always been making marketing decisions. So, the agonizing over "Can we market?...Should we market?...What would people think if we market?" is a complete waste of time.

B) Marketing "Well" will only mean doing in a formal way that which has always gotten done some way. And, since things done in a planned way usually work better, this should have some benefit. Beyond that, my experience has been that once organisations (and the individuals within them) learn they are not going to be doing anything new...only how to do what they have always done even better, their resistance drops away.

C) Formal Marketers entering into a "non-marketing environment" would do well to keep both of the preceding observations in mind lest they limit their own acceptance and step on toes that may retaliate.

My own experience has shown that recognition of the three prior conclusions can go a long way to extending marketing's influence into areas that might otherwise deny it entry. However, getting to this helpful position may require marketers, both academic and practitioner to accept rather humbling truths about our discipline they would prefer to avoid.

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