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A STUDY OF THE CORPORATE CULTURE OF A RELATIONSHIP MARKETING ORIENTED FIRM

Summary

Relationship marketing is a new approach to marketing that requires a change in the corporate culture of the firm in order to be implemented in a strategic level. But, although many authors defend that the corporate culture of a firm has an extraordinary impact on the success of a relationship marketing strategy, there are no studies about the main features of the corporate culture of relational firms. So, this research is interested in discovering the main characteristics of the corporate culture of relational firms.

Key words

Relationship marketing, corporate culture, exploratory study.

Relationship marketing

The traditional paradigm of marketing, based on a transactional type approach and on the concept of the marketing mix, brought useful tools to the area in which it had been initially developed, standardized mass consumer goods. However, this dominant marketing paradigm began to weaken at the beginning of the 70's when was attempted to be applied in the context of services and business between companies (Grönroos, 1994a; Coviello *et al.*, 1997; Gummesson, 2002).

Since then, a new approach to marketing, named relationship marketing, has emerged that emphasizes the importance of establishing and maintaining relationships between customers and buyers, in comparison to the transactional orientation of the classical marketing paradigm (Gummesson, 1987; Christopher, Payne, & Ballantyne, 1991; Kotler, 1992; Grönroos, 1994; Webster, 1994; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995a). Buttle (1996b) points out that the first definitions of relationship marketing (Berry, 1983; Jackson, 1985) centred their focus of attention on relationships with external customers. However, later on, other authors have understood the concept of relationship marketing from a wider perspective, adding other actors and relationships, apart from those established between a company and its end users (Christopher

et al., 1991; Kotler, 1992; Hunt & Morgan, 1994; Gummesson, 1994; Ballantyne, 1994; Grönroos, 1994 a). The visions of this group of authors go far beyond the classical customer-company relationship and centre their interest in the relationship networks established by the companies.

Grönroos (1994a, 1997) defends that transactional marketing and relational marketing both exist in opposite ends of a continuum. On one hand, a transactional approach would probably be the most suitable for mass consumer packaged goods, where the producing companies have no direct contact with the end user, or have minimal contact (Grönroos, 1996; Grönroos, 1997a). On the other hand, for services companies, which have more intensive and continued relationships with their customers, it would no doubt, be more suitable to implement a relationship marketing strategy (Grönroos, 1997a; Buttle, 1996b).

Kandampully and Duddy (1999) follow the idea of Grönroos's "strategy continuum", but suggest that two kinds of relationships should be distinguished; primary relationships between the company and its customers and secondary relationships which are more complex and are made by means of interrelations in a network, in which the company and other actors interact to offer a value, perceived as superior, to customers. For their part, Moller and Halinen (2000) also establish a difference between the relationship marketing theories. They distinguish between market-based relationship marketing that "can be characterised as the management of the firm's customer base, where the major challenge is to treat large numbers of customers individually and still profitably" (p. 45) and network-based relationship marketing that "can be briefly described as the management of interdependencies between business actors" (p.47). Coviello et al. (1997) propose that inside the marketing area four basic types of practices can be recognised: transactional marketing, database marketing, interaction marketing and network marketing. The last three types are characterised by their relationship orientation.

These three groups of authors defend a very similar approach. On the one hand, they recognise the existence of a relationship orientation, centred basically in developing existing relationships between the company and its customers, though they use different terms to describe the same concept (primary relationships; market-based relationship marketing; database and interaction marketing). On the other hand, they recognise the existence of a broader relationship orientation which includes the group of relationships which the company establishes with the other actors (external, such as suppliers, partners or governments; as well

as internal, such as employees) and that are structured in networks (secondary relationships; network-based relationship marketing; network marketing).

A study by Coviello *et al.* (2002) shows that, on a general level, consumer and goods companies approach their markets using a more transactional orientation than business and service firms. So, this study reinforces, in a way, the argument of the strategy continuum defended by Grönroos, according to which service companies should adopt a relationship orientation. However, this same study by Coviello *et al.* (2002) also suggests that service firms, apart from using relationship marketing, also, in parallel, use some transactional marketing. So, both practices and orientations seem not to be mutually exclusive, but can live together within service firms though, in theory, relationship marketing practices should dominate. Consequently, Coviello *et al.* (2002) do not view transactional marketing and relationship marketing as separate paradigms or as extreme opposites. The two approaches coexist and firms use one or the other approach depending on the type of business they are involved in and the customers they serve.

For this new relationship marketing orientation to be successfully developed it is interesting to notice that a huge amount of authors agree in that, the main basic requirement is the creation and development of a corporate culture which supports this new approach (Heskett, 1987; Webster, 1988; Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Hunt & Morgan, 1994; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Palmer, 1996; Buttle, 1996b; Grönroos, 1997a; Gummesson, 1997; Piercy, 1998; Coviello & Brodie, 1998; Ahmad & Buttle, 2002; Jarrat & O'Neill, 2002). This new corporate culture should include an orientation towards the customer, allowing for a wider knowledge of customer needs so that they can be better met (Webster, 1988; Barnes, 1989; Gummesson, 1991; Webster, 1994; McKenna, 1994; Helfert, Ritter & Walter, 2002).

Corporate culture

Modern studies on culture have been conducted since the 1920s, but it was not until the 1980's (Hatch, 1993; Alvesson, 2002) that management scholars began to be increasingly interested in this concept. The major focus of this literature was on the influence of the corporate culture on the performance of companies. The book *Corporate Culture and Organizational Effectiveness* by Denison (1990) is one of the main contributions of this

functionalist approach to the topic of corporate culture that tries to link financial performance with corporate culture.

Possibly the most influential author in this decade was Schein (1981, 1983, 1984, 1986, 1992), who was the first one to create a model for analyzing the culture of organizations. He was also interested in intervening in the culture of these organizations. According to Schein (1992, p. 12) the culture of a group can be defined as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems”.

Since Schein established his conceptual framework, based on a functionalist and a coherentism approach to the concept of culture, some authors have worked following his ideas and have tried to improve his model. That is the case of Martin and Siehl (1983) and Hatch (1993). However, on the other hand, some other schools of thought have highlighted some aspects that Schein and the functionalist school completely ignored, as is the case of the symbolic school. So, the symbolic school, as opposed to the functionalist school, is not interested in the possible relationship between corporate culture and organizational performance. The symbolic school focuses its attention on the meanings and symbols that are created in an organization, that hold it together, and that need to be deciphered and interpreted. The most influential author of this school of thought, Clifford Geertz (2000, p.145), conceives culture as “... the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action”. From Geertz’s works, other authors, such as Smircich (1983), Louis (1985), Schultz (1995), or Alvesson (2002) have developed some interpretations that they have applied to the specific field of managerial organizations. In this paper we are interested in meanings and symbols, but we also recognize the relevance and functionality of processes and artifacts which are more akin to be managed.

Research methodology

Although many authors have claimed that the corporate culture of a firm has an extraordinary impact on the success of a relationship marketing strategy (Heskett, 1987; Webster, 1988; Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Hunt & Morgan, 1994; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Palmer, 1996; Buttle, 1996b; Grönroos, 1997a; Gummesson, 1997; Piercy, 1998; Coviello & Brodie, 1998;

Ahmad & Buttle, 2002), there are not empirical studies about the main characteristics of the corporate culture of relational firms. Only few scholars (Deshpande & Parasuraman, 1986; Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver & Slater, 1990; Deshpandé *et al.*, 1993; Slater & Narver, 1994) have paid some attention to a related subject; “the relationship between organizational culture and the philosophy engendered by the marketing concept” (Turner & Spencer, 1994, p. 110).

Desphandé and Webster (1989) agree on the fact that few conceptual studies have focused on the relationship between corporate culture and marketing. And, in words of Winklhofer *et al.* (2006, p.173) “Despite the increasing attention devoted to relationship orientation (particularly in the marketing literature), no study appears to be anchored in the cultural definition of the construct despite the relevance and usefulness of taking this perspective as evidenced by the marketing orientation literature”. Therefore, given the non-existence of a developed, descriptive, theoretical framework that includes the fundamental characteristics of the corporate culture of businesses with a relationship marketing orientation, that allows for the introduction of a model with explanatory variables that can measure as well as allow for statistical tests to be developed, this research leans towards adopting a methodology of an exploratory type. So, this research is interested in discovering the meanings that are created inside firms (with a relationship marketing orientation), that build their corporate culture and make sense of it.

As Buttle (1996b) and Grönroos (1997a) maintain that a relationship marketing strategy is especially suitable for service companies, which have more intensive and continued relationships with their customers, and various studies (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Storbacka, Strandvik & Grönroos, 1994; Yau *et al.*, 1999; Hibbard *et al.*, 2001) indicate that the relational approach to marketing in service businesses usually results in an increase in profits, it was decided to focus the present research in a service industry. And, analyzing the Spanish service industries (INE, 2006) it is evident that tourism is the most important one. Moreover, inside the tourism industry, the hotel sector is the one that stands for the largest income figures (INE, 2006). Furthermore, as Lewis and Chambers declared, perhaps “nowhere is RM more apropos than in the hospitality industry” (Gilpin, 1996, p. 148). As a consequence, NH Hoteles, one of the best well known Spanish hotel companies for its relational practices was selected to conduct the field research. So, the research question of the present study is: Which

are the characteristic meanings that constitute the corporate culture of NH Hoteles and that allow this company to have a relationship marketing orientation?

In depth interviews have been the key instrument for data collection at NH Hoteles. The selection of the sample has been done according to the criteria of theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This saturation occurs when new cases do not add more relevant differences and similarities to the ones that have been found until that moment.

So, NH Hoteles is the unit of study of the present research, and, as it is mainly adopting an integration approach to the study of culture (Martin, 2002) some in depth interviews have been aimed at the top managers of the company. But, as this dissertation also recognizes the possibility of the existence of subcultures (Martin & Siehl, 1983) or ambiguous interpretations of the culture, some in depth interviews have also been aimed to mid managers (hotel managers), as well as to front-line employees (receptionists, waiters and room maids); those who are in direct contact with the final customer and, as a consequence, have a high influence on the final level of customer satisfaction.

All in all, 35 in depth interviews were conducted in four different NH hotels (three in Barcelona and one in Madrid), as well as in the corporate office, until saturation criteria was reached.

The interpretation of the data has been done in line with the proposals that have emerged from the base of the grounded theory method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The NVivo software has been really helpful in defining codes and carrying constant comparisons, which are the core of grounded theory. Apart from the fact that grounded theory is a method which allows the emergence of the theory from the fieldwork and is, therefore, extremely useful for the formulation of new theoretical models, some of the main researchers in the area of relationship marketing have strongly defended the unusual possibilities for the progress of this discipline. For example, according to Gummesson (1991), one of the fathers of relationship marketing, “the scientific methods in marketing did not lead up to the generation of a valid marketing theory and paradigm shifts, only to the testing and refinement of existing theory (p. 4) [...] I consider the systematic work to achieve grounded theory the most complete and balanced method available” (p. 8).

Findings

The results of this research lead to maintain that the two main characteristics (central values) of the corporate culture on which a company can construct a relationship marketing strategy are client orientation and a high degree of concern for employees. Furthermore, eight of the characteristics defining corporate culture that have emerged from this research (trust, commitment, camaraderie, access to management, teamwork, innovation, mobility and adaptation to change) seem to correspond to values that facilitate the development of the two central values. Finally, these two central values and eight facilitating values seem to be strengthened through four internal policies: communication, training, recruitment and promotion. However, at the same time, it appears that these central and facilitating values can also reinforce the effect of the internal policies.

These different factors (values and internal policies) emerged during the process of coding that was conducted following the indications by Strauss and Corbin (1998). The data which was fractured through the process of open coding was later on reassembled into categories and subcategories. As Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 135) state “the researcher begins to link categories with their subcategories, that is to notice that these seem to be conditions – these actions/interactions, these consequences”. So, along the process of open and axial coding it became clear that the two main categories were client orientation and concern for employees (which were renamed as core values). From this process also emerged some other subcategories (facilitating values and internal policies) that were connected to the two main categories.

- Insert Figure 1 -

Central values

The two central values (client orientation and concern for employees) of the corporate culture of relational firms that have emerged from this research are connected with the classification schemes in the field of relationship marketing developed by Coviello *et al.* (1997), Kandampully and Duddy (1999) and Moller and Halinen (2000). On the one hand, client orientation – significant and shared throughout the whole organisation – seems to be the pillar that facilitates the management of primary relationships. On the other hand, an intense

concern for staff and employees leads to think that it is the base that would have to facilitate a better management of internal secondary relationships, which are vital in managing service environments (Grönroos, 1990), as is the case with the tourist sector.

Client orientation

The analysis and interpretation of the in depth interviews show that NH managers stress the customer orientation of the company and the importance of knowing clients and providing them with an excellent (and preferably personalised) service.

Felipe, a hotel director, put forward the vision that NH managers have of their clients by stating:

...well, clients mean everything to us.

However, it is interesting to notice that this customer orientation is present at all levels of the company. NH corporate culture therefore seems to be strongly customer oriented. In virtually all the interviews held, employees spontaneously stressed that clients are the most important asset for the company. As an illustrative example, even a room maid stated that the customer was King. However, one should note that all NH managers continually press the customer orientation of the company home, making staff fully aware of it. As a result it seems that the message has been thoroughly assimilated by frontline workers.

Concern for employees

The second central value of the corporate culture of NH is the high concern for employees that emanates from the management positions. That means that management is able to see the employees as an internal client and therefore as a resource to be managed and not simply as a cost that has to be assumed. In this sense, the NH Director of Human Resources in Spain argues that:

...employees are a resource, not an expense.

All hotel directors interviewed also shared the view of the Director of Human Resources. They all agree in that the hotels are excellently presented but at the end of the day it is the employees of the chain who make the real difference to client perceptions regarding service. Thus, it appears that NH management sees staff from a relational marketing perspective, perceiving them as internal corporate clients with whom relations need to be established and managed.

Accordingly, the vast majority of NH employees perceive that the company looks after them and takes their views into consideration. Some of the factors that undoubtedly shape this perception are the various communication channels that exist, particularly the meetings and bottom-up mechanisms for gathering the opinions of employees. The training policy and promotion opportunities also foster this impression.

Facilitating values

Apart from the two main central values the present research suggests that the corporate culture of a relational firm is also composed by several facilitating values that can strengthen the central values and reinforce the internal policies of the company. These eight facilitating values are the following: trust, commitment, camaraderie, access to management, teamwork, innovation, mobility and adaptation to change.

Trust

At NH, although there is a corporate hierarchy and objectives to be met, managers trust their staff and give them ample scope in carrying out their jobs. Moreover, this trust seems to have a knock-on effect right the way through the chain of command. So, this case study suggests that trust is one of the most important characteristics for a company aiming to adopt a relationship marketing orientation.

Consequently, this research reveals that trust, in particular, facilitates internal communication at both as vertical as well as horizontal level. Without the existence of trust between all the parties concerned, it is practically impossible for a true dialogue to be developed. In addition, trust also facilitates formal and informal training within a company. In the case of informal training, which in NH is carried out through “learning by imitation” and through “learning by

doing”, the level of trust that is placed both in the most veteran workers as well as in those who have recently joined the company, is very high. Additionally, the step-by-step promotion processes are also an example of the trust that the company has in its employees, given that the company decides to fill management position vacancies with employees from within their own organisation, instead of hiring external personnel from other companies.

Finally, trust is a value that seems to favour the development of another value, namely that of commitment to the company. The Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing by Morgan and Hunt (1994) also defends this same idea.

Commitment

There seems to be strong staff commitment at all levels at the company but especially so in the case of directors. This is particularly striking with regard to those hotel directors who have spent their professional careers in NH. In any event, it seems clear that commitment is a core value shared by the majority of the employees throughout the hierarchy, even though some express this more openly than others. This commitment exists because staff feels that the company trusts them and cares about them and its basic because it generates a dynamic whereby both parties (company and staff) are convinced that it is worth investing in a long-term relationship (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

Therefore, commitment favours training policies given that employees take these policies seriously and understand their usefulness in attaining the strategic aims of the company. Equally, the existence of a high level of commitment to the company seems to encourage employees to sign up for promotion programmes. This research suggests that the most committed employees are those who also aspire to holding positions of responsibility and importance within the organisation. Finally, commitment also seems to strengthen the transmission of the messages that management seeks to communicate and the acceptance of these messages by employees. Commitment, then, also seems to foster customer orientation.

Camaraderie

In one way or another, almost everyone said that there was strong camaraderie among staff. All of those interviewed stressed the good work atmosphere at NH. Even people, who were demotivated for one reason or another, were quick to stress the excellent staff relations.

Camaraderie is a value that seems to facilitate the existence of a better work climate and therefore the existence of better internal communication, a basic aspect for developing a relationship marketing orientation. In addition, the present case study reveals that camaraderie also facilitates informal training, which is based on the interaction between the most experienced employees and those who have recently joined the company. A final aspect to highlight here is that camaraderie also seems to promote another value, namely that of access to management.

Access to management

Another characteristic feature of the corporate culture of NH is the access staff has to managers, who are open types who like contact with staff rather than being desk-bound. This may be one of the legacies of the founder of the company, who impressed the need to listen to staff upon his managers. The trait could then have been perpetuated through the strong socialization processes of the organization.

The majority of employees shared this perception as Soledad, a receptionist, explained:

...We've never had an authoritarian director at the other hotels I've worked in. Access to the director was never a problem either. Quite the contrary, you could talk to him freely and frankly.

This research suggests that internal communication policies are considerably strengthened when there is a perception that management is accessible to the other company employees. This accessibility favours the development of a dialogue in which employees understand that their opinions are being taken into account by the company.

Teamwork

The vision of David, a hotel director, sums up the strong teamwork existing inside the company:

...We all play for the same team. I think it's the result of working in a company in which the four or five top bosses would sit down with you and freely discuss things.

Thus, teamwork has always been one of the hallmarks of NH. In addition, teamwork may have been fostered by the fact that senior managers were accessible to staff from the inception of the company. Senior management thus set an example of the need for fluid communication between all departments and ranks so that staff could work shoulder-to-shoulder. Additionally, teamwork also favours training, both formal as well as informal. When employees feel that they are contributors to a single team, it is more likely that they will share experiences that may help the group to improve upon its daily performance.

Innovation

Innovation seems to be, according to this research, one of the most important facilitating values for any company that aims to adopt a relationship marketing orientation. This is because adopting a relationship-type orientation implies accepting new points of view, reviewing many of the existing company policies and developing new values.

NH makes a big effort to innovate, always bearing in mind that the purpose here is to better meet both client and staff needs. Consequently, the aim of these innovations appears to be value creation, which is the final objective of a relational marketing strategy (Ravald & Gronroos, 1996; Gronroos, 1997b). The majority of the staff perceives the company as innovative and highlights the host of measures exhibiting this corporate attitude.

Staff mobility

This research suggests that geographic employee mobility seems to facilitate the dissemination of certain values throughout the entire company. In addition, the step-by-step promotion policies, which call for candidates to have held various positions within the

company in order to be promoted, also help to disseminate a fairly homogeneous corporate culture.

Adaptation to change

The transition from a transactional marketing orientation to a relationship marketing orientation is a long and complex course. In order to complete this undertaking successfully, it is essential to have employees who can adapt to change and who are capable of interiorizing the new values and policies required by the new orientation. However, changes are always difficult to accept in any kind of organisation and NH is no exception. Oscar, CRM and Loyalty Manager, commented:

...it all involves a lot of suffering. No one should think it is a bowl of cherries because it isn't.

Despite the reservations stemming from any process of change, the new relational marketing strategy has been implemented fairly quickly and staff now sees the benefits. Perhaps the low average age of NH employees is one of the factors facilitating these changes. Hence, another feature of the corporate culture of NH appears to be its staff's ability to adapt to changes, something that is possibly aided by their strong commitment to the company.

Internal policies

In agreement with the results obtained in this research, the two central values as well as the eight facilitating values seem to be influenced by four internal policies: internal communication policies, training policies, recruitment policies and promotion policies. At the same time, it appears that these four internal policies can also be reinforced by the central and facilitating values.

Internal communication policies

The internal communication policies of any company may consist of top-down and bottom-up communication channels, as well as channels that also favour horizontal communication, among the different departments in the organisation.

At NH the top-down mechanisms make it possible for the messages that senior managers want to see reinforced to reach all members of staff. According to this case study, for a company that has a relationship marketing strategy, these messages should focus primarily on client orientation. The bottom-up mechanisms seem to be equally important, and these make it possible to listen to the opinions of employees and generate the perception that they are being taken into consideration and, as a result, that the company is concerned for them.

The combination of the top-down and bottom-up mechanisms is what makes it possible to generate a dialogue between company management and employees, which can be extremely beneficial in improving such important elements as internal processes or work climate. Finally, the appropriate management of horizontal communication channels seems to be essential for lubricating the internal mechanisms that provide a customised service, in accordance with a relationship marketing orientation.

Training policies

According to this case study training policies also seem to be very important in developing a relationship marketing orientation. Moreover, it seems essential for this type of training to be perceived as something relevant to the employees, that it could help resolve some of their day-to-day problems. In this sense, training at NH usually emphasises aspects linked with customer care. An additional benefit to investing in internal training seems to be the perception of the employees that the company is concerned about their professional development.

Recruitment policies

NH has a very strict recruitment policy that seems to help to maintain the main corporate values. Through recruiting members of staff while they are still studying for their qualifications in Tourism, and given that they join the company with an internship contract, this makes it possible to confirm whether or not new recruits have adapted to the philosophy of the company before they are offered a fixed contract. On the other hand, it also seems to ensure that they will not have been corrupted by any other corporate culture and that, as a result, will be more receptive to assuming the values of client orientation and concern for

employees as their own, values which are central for a company aiming to become oriented towards relationship marketing.

Promotion policies

From this research, it seems that the step-by-step promotion policies facilitate the progressive assimilation of the central corporate culture values of a company oriented towards relationship marketing by its employees. Another important aspect to consider is that well-defined promotion policies seem to generate the perception among employees that the company is concerned for them and for their professional development. However, for these policies to be recognised as positive it is essential for them to be carried out via transparent processes, as it is the case at NH hotels.

Implications and limitations of the research

The present research has many important academic as well as managerial implications. From the academic point of view, this research deals with an existing gap in the relationship marketing literature and opens up a broad range of research opportunities, as much in the field of relationship marketing as in the field of corporate culture.

A possible line of future research could lie in exploring several more cases within the service sector, following the constant comparison method, in order to complement the present case and to compare the results of the present research, as well as to refine the cultural model of a company with a relationship marketing orientation. The following step would be to conduct a quantitative study to test the prototype of model that has begun to be constructed through the present study, and thus be able to obtain conclusions that can be generalised.

From the managerial perspective this research also has important implications given that it provides a guide on the values and policies that should be developed, and how these should be developed in order to be able to put a relationship marketing orientation successfully into effect.

The first important limitation of the present case study is that the results obtained are based on the analysis and the interpretation of a single case. However, Eisenhardt (1988), for example,

argues that the in-depth study of a single case can produce relevant scientific knowledge and refers to several works that have been carried out in this respect.

The second limitation is that interviews in hotels in Spain could have been conducted over a greater geographic range. The 35 interviews have taken place in three NH hotels in Barcelona and one in Madrid. It is also certain that important differences between the corporate cultures of the different hotels have not been found, and that these are quite homogenous.

Another consideration to be put forward is that the interviews have been limited to NH chain hotels located in Spain. It is probable, had interviews been conducted in hotels owned by the company in other countries, that these would have revealed substantial differences in the corporate culture of these hotels. The reason for this lies in the fact that the growth policy of NH abroad has been based on the acquisition of pre-existing chains, which as a result have a considerable cultural baggage of their own.

Finally, it should be emphasised that the conclusions of the present research cannot be generalised. The research methodology is qualitative and it only permits developing a first approach to the constituent characteristics of the corporate culture of an organisation that has a relationship marketing orientation. In addition, it would also be necessary to further explore the existing relationships between the various characteristics.

Conclusions

The present research has special relevance, given that it is the first empirical study that tries to establish the characteristics that constitute the corporate culture of a company with a relationship marketing orientation. Surprisingly, little empirical research has been developed at the crossroads of relationship marketing and corporate culture, although a large number of authors maintain that a change in the existing corporate culture must take place in order to successfully implement a relationship marketing strategy (Heskett, 1987; Webster, 1988; Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Hunt & Morgan, 1994; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Palmer, 1996; Buttle, 1996b; Gronroos, 1997a; Gummesson, 1997; Piercy, 1998; Coviello & Brodie, 1998; Ahmad & Buttle, 2002).

However, it is important to underscore that the paper presents only a prototype of one possible cultural model and that several different cultural models, capable of successfully developing a relationship marketing orientation, may coexist.

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Appendixes

Figure 1: Prototype model of the corporate culture of a relationship marketing oriented company

