

Sidelined? The Future of Marketing in the Contemporary Organisation



J O H N E G A N *

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the perceived sidelining of marketing, and in particular Relationship Marketing, within the contemporary organisation and analyses the potential consequences of this. Based on in-depth interviews with eleven top European marketing practitioners the research suggests that marketing's status has moved on little from the time when Whittington and Whipp (1992: 53) lamented that 'the marketing profession appears to still lack influence' and the call went out to bring marketing back to the centre stage by ditching the marketing mix in favour of the relational paradigm. Indeed, if anything, the position of marketing (and the marketer) appears, from this research, to be even more out of step in the contemporary organisation despite the general acceptance of customer-centric strategies, the traditional domain of the marketer. The reality of the new century is marketers are rarely seen to have either the competence or the powerbase to influence senior management. As a symptom of this demise the paper notes that marketers have effectively lost control of relational strategy as Relationship Marketing transforms, in many cases, into general-management-dominated and -controlled Customer Relationship Management (CRM).

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INTRODUCTION

As marketing entered the last decade of the twentieth century its reputation was becoming decidedly tarnished. Whittington and Whipp (1992: 53) lamented at this time that, 'the marketing profession appears to still lack influence'. The marketing function was being marginalised in many organisations (Sheth and Sisodia, 1999: 84), including marketing pioneers such as Proctor & Gamble and Unilever (Doyle, 1995: 23), where the posts of Marketing Director were abolished. Companies were questioning large expenditure on marketing without a measurable return on investment (ROI) and accountants were looking to reduce costs and increase rates of return. Brand-building exercises with largely immeasurable outcomes were no longer seen as justifiable. Marketing was openly criticised for lack of innovation in the face of hostile markets and for adopting defensive strategies to cope. The call went out to bring marketing back to the centre stage by replacing the marketing mix model with the up-and-coming relational paradigm.

Relationship Marketing (RM) was 'the hot topic of the marketing discipline in the 1990s' (Möller and Halinen, 2000: 29). By the end of the last millennium it had almost become 'synonymous with marketing' and as such it was 'difficult to conceive a marketing problem or issue that does not have the notion of building, maintaining or dissolving relationships at its core' (O'Malley and Tynan, 2003: 38). Relationship Marketing had become 'the new phenomenon' (Petrof, 1997: 26) or, conversely, was taking the discipline 'back to its roots' (Grönroos, 1996: 13). Relationship Marketing became the leading subject for discussion at academic and dedicated practitioner conferences, academic journal articles and specialist marketing magazines. It formed the basis of a host of specialised academic and practitioner texts by writers such as McKenna (1991), Christopher et al. (1991, 1994, 2002), Payne and Christopher (1995), Buttle (1996), Mattsson (1997), Gordon (1998), Gummesson (1996, 1999), Sheth and Parvatiyar (2000b), Hennig-Thurau and Hansen (2000), Barnes (2001), Donaldson and O'Toole (2001), Wong (2001), Varey (2002), Egan (2003), Little and Marandi (2003) and Bruhn (2003). Such was Relationship Marketing's perceived importance that few, if any, marketing books failed to include at least one section dedicated to the concept.¹

RM was 'in vogue' among contemporary marketing academics as well as practitioners, not only in services and business-to-business markets where it initially emerged, but also in mass consumer markets where it was originally shunned (O'Malley and Tynan, 1999: 587). Even scholars who were at one time leading proponents of the previously dominant transactional or 'exchange paradigm' (including, for example, Kotler and Hunt) became intrigued by the relational aspects of marketing (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2000a: 121). Surely a concept of such magnitude would prove marketing's salvation.

Despite the prominence of Relationship Marketing and its interest amongst academics and practitioners alike there was still nothing to suggest in 2005 that marketing's status within organisations had improved significantly as a result of this 'paradigm shift' (Kotler, 1992; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1993; Grönroos, 1994; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Buttle, 1997; and Gummesson 1997, 1999 and 2001). As if in response to this continued perceived failing changes in the nature of Relationship Marketing began to become evident over the period. In particular, some researchers challenged the notion of a breadth of internal and external relationships so central to the Relationship Marketing concept, arguing that non-customer relationships were 'outside the domain of marketing' and that their inclusion in the marketing research agenda 'risks diluting the value and contribution of the marketing discipline in directing relationship marketing practice and research and theory development' (Parvatiyar and Sheth, 2000c: 7). Closely associated with this reversion to the single dyad was the rise of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) as a distinct, albeit ill-defined, concept.

RM/CRM CONUNDRUM

Although 'breadth of domain' and its 'permeable and elastic' boundaries have always been an issue in Relationship Marketing (see Brodie et al., 1997; Coviello, Brodie and Monro, 1997; and O'Malley and Tynan, 2000), the new millennium saw a rift develop between those who conceived marketing from a broad and pluralistic orientation and those who took a narrower functional marketing perspective (Egan, 2003). In effect ideas are polarising between those researchers who continue to support the holistic, multiple-relationship understanding of relationship marketing and those whose focus is solely

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concerned with the 'customer-supplier dyad' (Payne, 2000) and the functional integrity of the marketing department. It would appear that many of the practitioners and academics who, in the past, wholeheartedly embraced the philosophy of a web of relationships have 'moved-on' (or is it back?) to concepts that claim to focus on the fundamentalism of customer relationships (Egan, 2003). In this version of RM the content is, according to Gummesson (2003: 168), 'locked in a box of simplistic, one-to-one, customer-supplier relationship, an approach touted especially in CRM'.

It is this ruthless focus on CRM and its associated technology as a means of 'managing the relationship' with customers in mass markets which challenges marketing and the relationship marketer. Whether or not the customer wants or values this type of relationship, it is effective from the company's perspective and a means of manipulating customer behaviour. Among RM researchers relational strategies were rarely seen as a universally applicable approach, rather they were seen as being context-specific, usually restricted to services or business-to-business operations. It was generally acknowledged that most consumers of mass-produced and mass-distributed convenience goods were not looking for a relationship and might just as well be handled by a mix-management approach (Baker, 2002). On the other hand service operations, together with business-to-business relationships (Ford, 1997; O'Malley and Tynan, 2003), were always seen to be 'relationship oriented' (Grönroos, 1995: 252) and the natural home for RM strategy development. Ironically, in practice, it was the mass marketers who have appeared to be determined to make relationships work through the medium of CRM. As O'Malley and Tynan (1999: 595) note, these marketers have 'ignored the fact that RM was intended as an alternative approach to marketing in contexts which differ significantly from mass marketing situations and where high interpersonal interaction occurs'. In this brave new world RM, in the attempt to take it into the mass market, seems to have transmogrified into Customer Relationship Management.

CRM

To its many advocates in academia and marketing practice, CRM is seen as the practical application of Relationship Marketing. The

definition of CRM as 'technology-enabled RM' (Little and Marandi, 2003: 197) would hold more credence, however, if it were more directly influenced by RM philosophy. Much of the foundation for CRM technologies can be found, not in the relationship marketing literature, but in the database, data-mining and decision-support literatures (Wetsch, 2003). It has manifested itself not in shared and managed customer knowledge across a learning organisation but rather as the purchase of a software package (Evans, 2003) and its subsequent application. Companies would appear to be using technology they don't understand very well in order to help them implement a process (RM) they are also largely unfamiliar with (O'Malley, 2003).

None of this would matter much if CRM projects were seen to be working. The return to a concentration on the customer-supplier dyad and/or dependence upon CRM technology could be forgiven by relational marketers if, as a result, companies were seen to be benefiting but, for the majority, this does not seem to be the case. According to Gartner, CRM has risen from the bottom 3 of 25 possible management tools surveyed in 2001 to the top half in 2003, when 82 per cent of the global executives in the study said they planned to employ it (Rigby and Ledingham, 2004: 118). In Europe and North America, where nearly 40 per cent of the companies in high technology, aerospace, retailing and utilities have invested in CRM systems, including two-thirds of all US telecom operators and half of all US financial service companies (Ebner et al., 2002), reports persist (e.g. Wetsch, 2003; Ebner et al., 2002) of high, perhaps 70 per cent to 80 per cent, failure rates. In the banking sector, the biggest users of CRM technology, Ebner et al. (2002) estimate that barely 20 per cent of organisations had raised their profitability as a result of CRM implementation and that few, if any, will ever see a return on investment (Rigby and Ledingham, 2004).

So the managerial context of CRM is that of a popular, innovative, technologically enabled approach which has been oversold and is currently under-delivering to its adopters. Despite these appalling results Wetsch (2003) estimates that businesses would spend \$12 billion worldwide on CRM technology in 2004. Add to this the cost of training, opportunity costs and, in certain situations, loss of goodwill from inappropriate application, and the cost to businesses of

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what must be regarded on the surface as a failing philosophy puts this in a realm of its own. The general findings, as O'Malley and Mitussis (2002: 234) note, must at the very least, 'serve to put advocates of CRM on notice'.

The conundrum of RM and CRM coupled with the perceived lack of influence by marketers raises a great many questions. Why has a concept such as RM, with a reasonable and perhaps age-old track record, transmogrified into CRM and under whose influence, that of practitioners or academics? Might CRM be marketing's potential salvation? Does CRM share (or indeed have any) theoretical foundation with RM (beyond the rhetoric) and, if so, what's gone wrong? Is CRM a consequence of marketers losing control of marketing and/or is CRM a management process rather than a marketing strategy? Why does CRM appear to have more intrinsic appeal amongst practitioners than RM and why? Have those academics who have accepted the CRM mantle and redefined RM theory got it wholly wrong, been misunderstood, lacked empirical verification or can they blame misapplication by practitioners? Perhaps those academics associated with CRM have simply 'gone native' in search of practitioner acceptance or are under pressure to raise further research funding. Have marketers any real strategic influence on the contemporary organisation or is it being relegated to a functional silo? There is a complex series of questions that cry out for further research into the interchange between academic developed theory and practitioner action. The long-term objective of this continuing research is to resolve some of these uncertainties. This paper represents a first step towards that aim as it reports on the views of senior marketers, heads of marketing departments and others purporting to develop marketing strategy within their particular organisations.

METHODOLOGY

The complexity and social interaction surrounding this research seems to dictate the use of a qualitative research methodology to take a 'broader and more holistic' perspective (Carson et al., 2001: 66) and address people's 'lived experience' (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 10) through exploring the 'richness, depth and complexity of social science research such as that involved with relationships'

(Malhodra and Birks, 2000: 155). According to Janesick (2000: 387–388) common ‘rules of thumb’ amongst qualitative researchers are that they are looking for meaning (the perspectives of the participants), relationships (regarding structure, occurrence, distribution, etc.) and tension (misfits, conflicting evidence, etc.). So theory building, where the purpose of the study is to seek out meaning and understanding of the phenomena, replaces theory testing (Carson et al., 2001: 11).

Of the various data collection methods available, in-depth interviews with ‘elite informants’ was seen as the methodology most likely to achieve results in this research. These focus on elite interviewees, individuals who ‘are considered to be the influential, the prominent, and the well informed people in an organisation or community, and are selected for interview on the basis of their expertise in areas relevant to the research’ (Marshall and Rossman, 1995: 83). The advantages of such interviewees are that these ‘elites’ have valuable information gleaned from experience. They are likely, given their seniority, to have a clearer view of their own operation, industry and wider domains in the past, present and future, and there are indications that their evidence tends to be more reliable (Mitchell, 1994). These advantages have to be balanced against the disadvantages of the limited accessibility of such elite interviewees. In this regard a researcher’s business contacts, experience and ability to reach individuals at the top of organisations is crucial.

A convenience sample of eleven interviewees were chosen on the basis of their seniority as managers or directors, their status as relationship-orientated marketers – as indicated by the job title or job description – or where relational strategies were evident or claimed publicly by their company. Anonymity was promised to the interviewees and so generalised descriptions of the sample are shown in Table 7.1 below. The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions, which addressed the interviewee’s experience of and reflections upon marketing practice, the contribution of marketing in general and that of RM and CRM in particular. The average interview was of forty-five minutes duration. They were audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim. The text was analysed following the generalised sequence of steps including data reduction

106 *The Future of Marketing in the Contemporary Organisation***Table 7.1: General Description of Interviewees**

Interviewee	Job Title	Company Description
A	Managing Director	Major consultancy specialising in RM/CRM
B	Chief Executive Officer	Business-to-business automotive industry
C	Director	Relationship marketing top 5 consultancy
D	Marketing Director	UK top 10 financial institution
E	Head of Relationship Marketing	Top 5 UK supermarket retailer
F	Development and Communications Director	Charitable foundation
G	Marketing Consultant	Top 5 computing organisation
H	Chief Executive, Marketing	Top 5 petroleum company
I	Marketing Director	Top 10 UK conglomerate
J	Marketing Director	Major UK daily and Sunday newspaper
K	Managing Director	Major UK service company

and transformation, data display and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 10). Patterns and themes, which were similar across scripts, were noted to allow for earlier readings of the text to inform later readings, and to allow for later readings of the transcripts to explore patterns not noted on the initial analysis (Thompson and Haytko, 1997).

FINDINGS

The research suggests that, regardless of the 1990s perceived dominance of the Relationship Marketing paradigm, the position of marketing (and the marketer) appears even more contentious in a growing number of organisations than at the beginning of that decade.

Whereas in the 1970s the President of American Express (Amex) said to one interviewee, 'if you ever want to make it to senior levels in American Express then you should go into Marketing' [I], the reality of the new century is marketers are rarely seen to have the 'competence or power to influence senior management' [G]. The recipient of the Amex President's advice took a more general management career path and, despite his marketing title, 'wouldn't describe myself as a marketer ...and a wonder if in some ways that's a sort of defensive statement right from the start, which says something about marketing' [I].

Senior management have a poor view of marketers. As one director noted, in the marketing arena, 'it is not obvious to me that there is a sufficiently powerful body of ...deep insight and intellect' [H]. Despite general support among interviewees for 'marketing-led' [H], [I] and [K] strategies within an organisation, marketers apparently are 'still not ...taken that seriously' [I] in the modern organisation. As one interviewee noted, 'until marketing can really hold their own with some of the very bright, very capable, finance directors around I don't think they will ever have the credibility, even I think to have the stature or status within the business, forgetting about even getting on the board' [I].

Marketers are seen (by nature and/or nurture) to be different from their colleagues. It is suggested that 'certain types of people that tend to go into [the marketing] discipline [who] tend to have a different non-structured view of the world and therefore ... [are] not going to fit well within a corporate environment' [E]. Above all they tend to 'take risks' [E]. They are gambling with the organisation's resources in an attempt to 'get the odds tipped 5 per cent in your favour' [D] in the hope, but not expectation, that you will 'win more often than you'll lose' [D]. Others would not see the odds as being that favourable. Because these people are 'entrepreneurial ... [they] tend to get it right 1 times out of 10 possibly ...calculated risks, you will get them wrong as [many] time[s] as you will get them right' [E]. A marketer, for example, is seen to be 'prepared to just splash £5 million on a new advertising campaign ...with the hope that it's going to do a job' [J]. By comparison 'it is very rare [to see] a finance guy take a risk' [E].

Because they are perceived to take risks the supposed corollary is that 'most marketing people aren't that commercial' [J] and that

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‘most marketers probably have ten percent of the understanding of ...financial issues and ...financial data [knowledge] that accountants do and ... [this] holds them back’ [I]. It was also claimed that marketers are ‘quite immature in terms of the way they approach things ...business naïve’ [J]. They are widely perceived as being these ‘creative types, [who] spend lots of money but aren’t really accountable, don’t understand anything about value creation and are not very numerate’ [I]. They are characterised as ‘creatives’ who ‘wallow in how good the advertising is ...and at the end of the day, all market shares are probably going down and the markets falling but no one cares because they made a wonderful ad the other day that won an award’ [J]. Although these generalisations may be ‘as ridiculous as the generalisation that every accountant is a complete bastard cutting costs’ [I] when ‘70 per cent of CEOs in the FTSE 100 are accountants or come from a finance background’ [J], the view from the top is that of a not very prudent risk-taker, whose instincts are at odds with the commercially minded businessman/woman. They have ‘this rather woolly flavour’ [H] which causes them stand out as misfits in a commercially minded company.

Whether these perceptions are fair or not they are reinforced by the general view that ‘marketing is a cost, it’s not a revenue’ [J]. As a result those ‘from outside marketing, from the financial perspective, see marketing [as] those who spend the money and finance guys who actually turn that into profit’ [E]. So marketing is seen to be about ‘spending money (and) not necessarily gaining the return ...finance is about saving costs and helping to churn out and achieve profit margins’ [C]. Rather than hard facts, ‘they start arguing on emotional principles, which aren’t fact based, they’re not P&L [profit and loss] based, and people don’t ...treat them and trust them; credibility ...is what it comes down to’ [J]. Because they are perceived to be ‘not sufficiently accountable for the expenditure’ [K] they are seen ‘from a shareholder point of view [as] not as safe a pair of hands as somebody with an accountancy background who’s used to being very accountable’ [K]. In particular, ‘don’t talk to marketers about shareholders, they haven’t got a clue’ [G].

There is little sympathy, therefore, for the perceived derogation of fiscal duty by marketers. The ‘fact that Marketing Directors are

being asked about ROI shows how bad they are' [G]. They 'have to be prepared to justify [the] investment in marketing in exactly the same way as anybody else in your business would be asked to justify their investments' [D]. They are 'a cost that has to work for the company' [J]. The call has gone out from management that 'it's only through metrics that you can improve your learning ...they need to test and learn and re-test' [C]. They are still seen as so inept that they have 'failed to win the hearts and minds' [G] of their organisational colleagues. As a result 'what you don't see is marketing graduates graduating up through the company to become big leaders and sitting on the board of their companies' [H]. As marketers are not perceived as leaders or rational decision-makers, 'they're not involved in the strategy ...End of game for the marketers' [G].

The recognition of the lack of a marketing (and marketer) powerbase within an organisation is widespread and accepted with a certain resignation. One marketing director of a major newspaper noted, for example, that in his organisation 'we ultimately don't dictate where the paper goes and we don't ultimately dictate what's in the paper, so why on earth should we be central [to] decision-making' [J]. As a result marketers are seen to have little 'influence over all the money-making departments' [J] of the organisation and 'have no competence or power to influence senior management' [G]. Marketers are seen to 'generally ...live and work [at] a marketing level' [C] rather than at the strategic end of the business. They would appear to be constantly fighting against the organisation. As one interviewee noted, 'I've been talking about this concept for probably a year and a half and it scared the hell out of everyone' [J]. As a result management 'tend to put [out] all the blocks' [C], raising barriers in front of marketing initiatives. As one respondent observed, 'what could be a fantastic relationship marketing strategy ends up being watered down by all the politics of an organisation' [C]. Risks still continue to be taken, however. As was noted by one marketer, 'we are probably the only people ...who are trying to talk to people on an individual basis. No one else is doing that yet because, to be honest, we're doing this in a very clandestine way, so it doesn't get screwed by anyone else' [J]. Such are the pressures on the marketer to conform that there is a danger of the spirit of

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contemporary marketing being subsumed back towards the level of corporate functionalism.

One symptom of this loss of status would seem to be that marketers are being usurped in their traditional role as the principal interface with the customer. The question being asked is 'who owns the customer ... is it the marketing department ... the after-sales [or] is it the accounts department?' [B]. The answer is, perhaps, not as clear as in the past when it might generally be assumed that marketing was a major influence at the customer interface. For example, when questioned regarding marketing strategy, Relationship Marketing was perceived by some senior marketers as a cog in a bigger Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system (for example [A] and [B]). This view of marketing includes 'doing all the data and understanding customers, taking external research, driving the insights around what the custom needs' [I]. Rather than a functional marketing responsibility CRM was seen as 'about customer management' [I] and was frequently described as a company-wide approach. It was where 'you have the whole enterprise geared-up to relate [and] interact with customers and prospects' [B]. The same respondent added somewhat wistfully it was 'marketing [as] we used to call it in the old day' [B]. This general feeling that marketers had lost control of customer interaction to general management was widespread. As one interviewee noted, 'marketing is part of management ... only one element' [C]. As control is seen not to rest with functional departments it has become a management role with steadily less marketing input. Although it was mused that 'maybe marketers should be in charge of CRM' [B] they were not seen currently to be taking a lead in the process. Marketers rather were seen to live in 'an ivory tower, central function ... [and to have] lost sight of what it actually feels to be a customer' [I]. In contrast organisations are encouraging a more process-driven management of the customer. In this respect CRM, in particular, was seen as a means of recognising consumer behaviour and either encouraging or modifying it. The suggestion was a need to restructure systems and processes so that companies 'can target the right thing and not the wrong things and reward people for doing the right things' [H]. It was a means of either helping to 'look for behaviour they want from customers, rewarding that behaviour and helping perpetuate it' [A] or alternatively, 'change their behaviour' [I] and 'the

way customers interact with you' [I]. Rather defensively, behaviour change (when challenged on its meaning) was described as 'just ... a chance to market' [I] rather than any attempt at 'brainwashing' [I]. Several interviewees felt that practice had gone beyond RM and CRM to what was variously called 'relationship management' [G], [K] or 'customer management' [H], if anything further emphasising the managerial approach at the expense of marketing. Cross-organisational 'management control' was in this way regularly highlighted as, it was suggested, CRM 'is when you have the whole enterprise geared up to relate with, interact with, customers and prospects' [B] or 'saying the whole enterprise, dealing with the whole customer' [G]. The concept of developing longer-term relationships, although undoubtedly part of the rhetoric, would appear to have been replaced by this management and a form of manipulation of customers reminiscent of the charges against traditional marketing in another decade.

Despite the criticism of marketers and marketing it was still proposed that 'the most successful businesses are the ones that are marketing-led organisations' [K] and that 'it's only where marketing is truly at the centre of businesses [that] it dictates strategy, and... changes the way the business works tomorrow' [J]. The question arises as to why there is such a distinction perceived between marketing as a philosophy and marketing as practiced by marketers. The drive to be a market-led organisation is seen as emanating from organisational 'leadership, [because] you've got to have somebody who comes in with passion' [B]. Indeed it is suggested that 'in all the best companies ... the marketing function is much less important as a function but as an activity it's recognised as a board concern. In the worst companies marketing is recognised as a functional activity with very strong rights to itself' [G]. In these companies marketing is 'very much up on the agenda of the CEO and their first line. But there [it is] not even called marketing although you and I would recognise them as marketing topics. They're about us and our customers and our staff. Let's not call them marketing. Let's talk about how we and our customers and our staff and our suppliers can work together to create value. Many of the techniques will clearly be the same' [G].

The importance of marketing per se is, therefore, recognised but this is disassociated from the marketer who is in danger of being eclipsed and/or relegated back to a functional input into the

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organisation. Whereas an earlier marketing age might have seen the marketer's contribution as covering a wide context (associated with the marketing mix) today's marketer has increasingly less influence on the strategy of the organisation. Although, as one respondent noted, there should be 'no difference between a business plan and a marketing plan' [B], it is perceived that marketers 'have failed to win the hearts and minds' [G] of decision-makers. No longer could marketers claim that, 'whereas not everything is marketing, marketing is everything'.² This failure has left marketing with limited influence and responsibility and where 'perhaps the most important thing in the marketing department is marketing comms [communications]' [K].

Marketers and contemporary marketing have been left, therefore, in the unenviable position of being poorly regarded as the misfits in the organisation. Marketers are seen to be working to a different agenda than that of general management and using a different language to express it. The lapse is not because of a lack of communication per se but appears to be, more fundamentally, a difference in understanding as to the nature and form of marketing.

This may be reflected in what appears to be differences in values which in turn influence preferred strategies. Thus the marketer's added value is the management's added cost. Organisational efficiency on the one side is de-investment on the other. Whereas marketers talk of a creative looseness, flexibility, long-term investment and relish an element of risk-taking, general management's language is that of positive action and speedy results with, as far as possible, an absence of risk.

The general movement has been to restrict the influence of marketing. As one respondent noted, 'I think marketing is part of management ...so marketing is only one element of that and therefore relationship marketing is only one element' [C]. It was certainly conceded that 'you can't manage the customer [base] in its entirety just through marketing' [C]. CRM, therefore, was seen as a management tool where 'you have the whole enterprise geared up to relate with, interact with, customers and prospects ...which means not just your marketing and communications people but also your call centres, your accounts department [, etc.]' [B]. Management is looking to fill the gap and providing the coordination of 'marketing [as] we used to call it ...in the old days' [B].

The management approach to marketing may well take the perceived short-term view that 'if you [just] invested in improving the relationship you'd lose an enormous amount of money' [G]. Management of customers, in this regard, is seen to be about 'organisational structure' [I] and about 're-engineering the processes in order to make sure the processes are compatible' [H]. Marketing's vision of the 'special relationship' [D] and 'understanding customer needs and mapping those customer needs' [C] is engulfed by the 'more serious issues [of] project management, programme management [and] change management' [G]. This management model begins to resemble claims associated with CRM that it can help companies 'look for behaviour that they want from customers and rewarding that behaviour and helping it to be perpetuated' [A].

CONCLUSION

This paper reported on a small but influential group of marketers and their views on relationship marketing. CRM is seen as important, valuable and difficult to implement. It is seen to be largely under the control of general management with functional input (including marketing) to the process. It is looking for the most profit at lowest cost and in the shortest time. Relationship building is confined largely to offers and promotions and communication is mechanised. The focus is on the customer-supplier dyad at the expense of other (particularly internal) relationships and customers are segregated on the basis of what they can contribute to the company in profit. The similarities to the traditional marketing management transactional paradigm seems to suggest companies are moving away from the theories and concepts of Relationship Marketing but still using the relational rhetoric to cover their retreat. If marketers are to recover their status within organisations it is unlikely to be through the further development of CRM.

1 For example Michael Baker's popular *The Marketing Book* and Philip Kotler's *Principles of Marketing* both acquired a Relationship Marketing chapter in later editions.

2 See McKenna (1991: 18) and Ballantyne (1997: 345) for variations on this theme

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