A Generic Concept of Marketing

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PHILIP KOTLER

The proposal that marketing is relevant to all organizations having customer groups was advanced in the January, 1969 issue of this journal.
It is now stated that the original broadening proposal should be broadened still further to include the transactions between an organization and all of its publics. The author sees marketing as the disciplined task of creating and offering values to others for the purpose of achieving a desired response. The generic view of marketing is defined by a set of four axioms and leads to new marketing typologies and views of the tasks of marketing management.

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ONE of the signs of the health of a discipline is its willingness to reexamine its focus, techniques, and goals as the surrounding society changes and new problems require attention. Marketing has shown this aptitude in the past. It was originally founded as a branch of *applied economics* devoted to the study of distribution channels. Later marketing became a *management discipline* devoted to engineering increases in sales. More recently, it has taken on the character of an *applied behavioral science* that is concerned with understanding buyer and seller systems involved in the marketing of goods and services.

The focus of marketing has correspondingly shifted over the years. Marketing evolved through a *commodity focus* (farm products, minerals, manufactured goods, services); an *institutional focus* (producers, wholesalers, retailers, agents); a *functional focus* (buying, selling, promoting, transporting, storing, pricing); a *managerial focus* (analysis, planning, organization, control); and a *social focus* (market efficiency, product quality, and social impact). Each new focus had its advocates and its critics. Marketing emerged each time with a refreshed and expanded self-concept.

Today marketing is facing a new challenge concerning whether its concepts apply in the nonbusiness as well as the business area. In 1969, this author and Professor Levy advanced the view that *marketing is a relevant discipline for all organizations insofar as all organizations can be said to have customers and products.*[1] This "broadening of the concept of marketing" proposal received much attention, and the 1970 Fall Conference of the American Marketing Association was devoted to this theme.

Critics soon appeared who warned that the broadening concept could divert marketing from its true purposes and dilute its content. One critic did not deny that marketing concepts and tools could be useful in fund raising, museum membership drives, and presidential campaigns, but he felt that these were extracurricular applications of an intrinsical business technology.[2]

[1] Philip Kotler and Sidney J. Levy, "Broadening the Concept of Marketing," JOURNAL OF MARKETING, Vol. 33 (January, 1969), pp. 10-15.

[2] David Luck, "Broadening the Concept of Marketing—Too Far," JOURNAL OF MARKETING, Vol. 33 (July, 1969), pp. 53-54.