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**EMPLOYEE'S COMMITMENT TO SERVICE  
OFFERING STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION**

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**EMPLOYEES' COMMITMENT TO SERVICE-OFFERING STRATEGY  
IMPLEMENTATION**

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# EMPLOYEES' COMMITMENT TO SERVICE-OFFERING STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

## Abstract

This article addresses the issue of implementing a service-offering strategy within the manufacturing sector. The current research develops a model hypothesizing links between key antecedents of employee commitment to the implementation of a service-offering strategy. The results from a test of the research model within a medium sized French manufacturing company are reported and discussed.

## Résumé

L'article s'intéresse à la mise en œuvre d'une stratégie d'offre de service dans le secteur industriel. La recherche présentée développe un modèle des antécédents de l'engagement du personnel dans la mise en œuvre de la stratégie d'offre de service. Le modèle est appliqué à une entreprise industrielle Française et les résultats sont présentés et discutés.

**Key-words :** Service Management and Marketing

Service implementation

Commitment.

**Mots-clés:** Management et marketing des services

Mise en œuvre du service

Engagement

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## INTRODUCTION

Service fever takes hold in manufacturing companies. Some managers are even tempted by a true service revolution aiming at “a company without plants”, like Serge Tchuruk, the CEO of Alcatel, a French telecommunications equipment manufacturer. Such a managerial perspective is supported by considerable research in the fields of marketing and management, revealing the need for service-offering strategies in manufacturing firms. Predominantly, this research has focused on the formulation of service strategy and more particularly on the benefits drawn from the implementation of such strategies: financial benefits (Mathe and Shapiro, 1993; Srivastava *et al.*, 1998), strategic benefits (Anderson and Narus, 1995; Mathur, 1988) and marketing benefits (Frambach *et al.*, 1997; McMurrian and Wilson, 1996). Yet, the best service-offering strategy will be useless without adequate and efficient implementation by the manufacturing organization, which suggests that implementation is the essential link between the formulation of a strategy and the achievement of expected outcomes. However, it is not that easy, nor natural, for a manufacturing firm to carry out a service strategy as it could encounter resistance to change. Surprisingly, there is rarely any discussion of the specific challenge of implementing a service strategy within the manufacturing field. Given the unique characteristics of service management, the issue appears particularly urgent.

Testing a model of marketing strategy implementation, Noble and Mokwa (1999) have shown that commitment influences individual performance and the overall success of the implementation effort. Defining marketing strategy implementation as “the communication, interpretation, adoption, and enactment of a marketing strategy”, the authors put forth the different dimensions of implementation and clearly state that implementation is not just an issue of doing but is also composed of cognitive and affective components.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to investigate how manufacturing companies may improve their employees' commitment to the implementation of a service-offering strategy. We first review the foundation literature for the concept of commitment. We then describe a conceptual model that hypothesizing links between key antecedents of employees' commitment. We conclude by discussing the results from the test of the model and we offer both managerial implications and avenues for further research.

## PERSPECTIVES ON COMMITMENT

Because commitment issues embrace different domains of management, the concept needs to be clarified. The concept of commitment is largely integrated in management and four main domains of application can be distinguished: organizational behavior, strategic management, relationship marketing and service management.

It is in the field of organizational behavior that the most popular kind of commitment is encountered - organizational commitment. Organizational commitment was initially defined by Porter *et al.* (1974) as the strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization. More recently, the idea of a commitment to specific organizational values has been proposed, in particular through the notion of commitment to ethics (Weaver, Treviño and Cochran, 1999). The strategic management literature has mainly worked on the commitment to a decision (Narayanan and Fahey, 1982). Locke, Latham and Erez (1988) define goal commitment as one's attachment to or determination to reach a goal. Wooldridge and Floyd (1989) focus on consensus commitment, which they define as the extent to which members of the strategy team agree with and support the chosen strategy. In the domain of marketing, commitment has been placed at the heart of the relationship marketing model proposed by Morgan and Hunt (1994). The authors introduced the concept of relationship commitment to characterize the situation where an exchange partner believes that an ongoing

relationship with another is so important as to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it.

Lastly, service management and marketing literature has proposed the notion of management commitment to service quality (Ahmed and Parasuraman, 1994; Hartline and Ferrell, 1996).

Ahmed and Parasuraman (1994) define management commitment to service quality as “encompassing the conscious choice of quality initiatives as operational and strategic options for the firm, and engaging in activities such as providing visible quality leadership and resources for the adoption and implementation of quality initiatives”.

Beyond the literature that focuses on different perspectives of commitment, there exists a stream of research positioned at the borderline of different domains of management. That appropriates the concept of organizational commitment for various purposes. For instance, Hunt, Chonko and Wood (1985) applied the concept of organizational commitment to the field marketers’ job performance and Darden, Hampton and Howell (1989) specifically focused on retail salespeoples’ organizational commitment. More recently, Noble and Mokwa (1999) integrated the concept of commitment within a model of marketing strategy implementation. Similarly, literature on service management questions the impact of organizational commitment. Surprisingly, Hartline and Ferrell (1993) report a negative relationship between employee commitment and service quality, noting that front line employees who are more committed to the organization may be less committed to customers. However, Hartline *et al.* (2000) use employees’ organizational commitment to assess the dissemination of a customer oriented strategy. Lastly, in the specific domain of front line employee management, Singh (2000) discusses burnout tendencies as a direct antecedent of front line employees’ commitment.

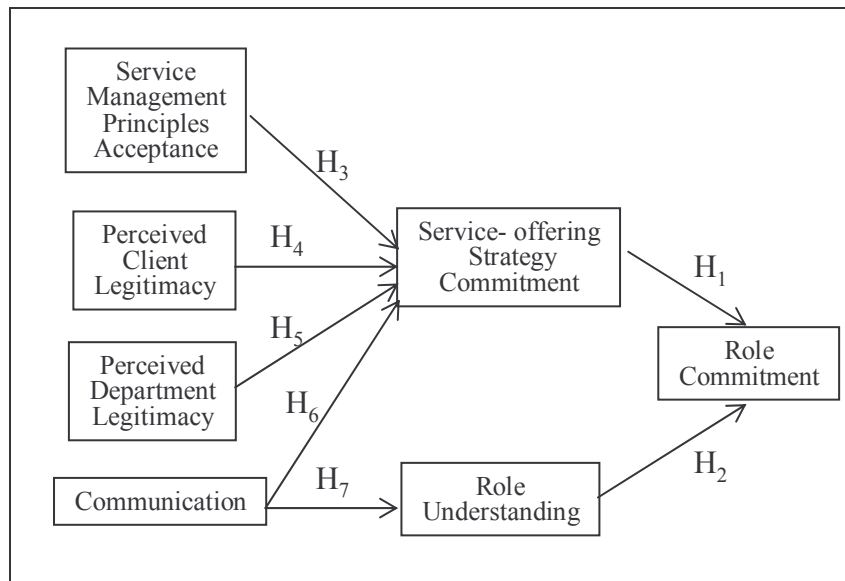
Even if commitment has been extensively studied in management, the roots of the concept are found in social psychology. Kiesler (1971) defined commitment as the binding of the individual to behavioral acts. Consequently, behavior or action is the ultimate proof of

commitment, positioning commitment theory as a behavioral theory. Moreover, commitment is variable, meaning that one can be committed to different degrees. If we compare this conceptual foundation with the way the concept is applied in management we notice a discrepancy. In the specific case of relationship commitment, Gilliland and Bello (2002) point out the blurring limits of this concept: “the term commitment is broadly used to refer to antecedents and consequences, as well as the process of becoming attached and the state of attachment itself”. In order to be more respectful of the conceptual foundation we have to distinguish a behavioral commitment, translated directly into acts and behaviors, from an affective commitment, related to a psychological attachment. It is safe to consider the psychological attachment as an antecedent to the behavioral commitment; together, they contribute to the emergence of the state of commitment. This opposition is recognized in the literatures on strategic commitment (Guth and McMillan, 1986), relationship commitment (Gilliland and Bello, 2002) and management commitment to service quality (Mohr-Jackson, 1993). However, psychological attachment is the construct of common interest in management (Gilliland and Bello, 1992) and the initial definitions of organizational commitment (Porter *et al.*, 1974; Steers, 1977) are consistent with the notion of affective commitment. In the present research we follow this tradition of focusing on psychological attachment, but we acknowledge that it represents only a part of the concept of commitment.

## PROPOSED MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

The conceptual model proposes antecedents to employees' role commitment to implementing a service offering strategy within a manufacturing company (figure 1). The model mostly derives from a review of the literature but it also benefits from a preliminary field study. The next sections present the variables of interest and hypothesized relationships.

FIGURE 1  
Hypothesized Model of Role Commitment to Service Strategy Implementation



*Outcome variable*

Employee role commitment is the outcome variable of interest. As several commitment theorists have suggested, employees are not only committed to their organisation but also to their jobs and careers (Kiesler, 1971; Mowday *et al.*, 1982), and Darden *et al.*, (1989) suggest that there is no systematic relationship between organizational commitment and job commitment. Noble and Mokwa (1999) have shown the multidimensionality of the concept of commitment by distinguishing organizational commitment from strategic commitment and role commitment. In the vein of job and career commitment, the authors have defined the concept of role commitment as “the extent to which a manager is determined to perform his or her individual implementation responsibilities well, regardless of his or her beliefs about the overall strategy”. We adopt this definition in the context of service-offering strategy implementation, meaning that we focus on the extent to which an employee is determined to perform his or her implementation responsibilities well in relation to the service-offering strategy, regardless of his or her beliefs about this strategy. Consequently, the main objective

of the study is to capture some of the antecedents of employees' commitment to their role in the service implementation process.

#### *Service-offering strategy commitment*

Individual beliefs about the service-offering strategy are expected to influence the extent to which people are committed to its implementation. Service-offering strategy commitment is coherent with the strategy commitment concept proposed by Noble and Mokwa (1999) and is defined as the extent to which someone supports the goals and objectives of the service-offering strategy. According to Guth and Macmillan (1986), low or negative strategy commitment creates significant obstacles to effective implementation. However, some authors in strategic management point out the complexity involved in interpreting the consensus-performance link (Bourgeois, 1980; Dess and Origer, 1987), suggesting that agreement on goals may not be necessary for high levels of firm performance. Despite the suggested complexity of the relationship between strategy commitment and role commitment, we expect that:

H<sub>1</sub> : Higher levels of role commitment are associated with higher levels of service-offering strategy commitment.

#### *Role Understanding*

In this research, role understanding means that employees grasp the logic of the service-offering strategy being implemented and consequently know what they have to do regarding their implementation responsibilities. It is accepted that understanding is different from commitment to strategy (Dess, 1987; Wooldridge and Floyd, 1989) so that commitment may be high but understanding low. Role understanding is similar to the concept of role clarity, defined by Kelly and Hise (1980) as the degree to which individuals receive and understand

information needed to perform their jobs; and to role ambiguity, defined by Kahn *et al.* (1964) as the discrepancy between the information available to the person and that which is required for adequate performance of his role. Darden *et al.* (1989) demonstrate that role clarity is one of the factors with the most significant impact on career commitment. Moreover, role ambiguity has been thought to impede the opportunity to improve performance (Singh, 1993). We prefer to focus on role understanding rather than on role ambiguity or role clarity because these concepts are theoretically more complex and refer to a broader definition of employees' role. In this study, we examine understanding with respect to a limited part of the employee's role. We anticipate the following relationship:

H<sub>2</sub> : Higher levels of role commitment are associated with higher levels of role understanding.

#### *Service Management Principles Acceptance*

Several scholars share the assumption of the uniqueness of service management. For example, Levitt (1972) contrasted the service way of thinking to the manufacturing way of thinking. According to the author, service thinks *humanistically* whereas manufacturing thinks *technocratically*. Bowen and Greiner (1986) underline that the *dynamics* of the service sector differ from those of the manufacturing sector. Bowen *et al.* (1989) speak about *prototypical* differences between service and manufacturing firms. Schneider and Bowen (1995, p. 1) consider that the *service game* is a different game from manufacturing, and so the rules to win these two games are different. Their stance goes further than the simple, traditional opposition between service and goods by suggesting that there exists a unique service management system. Consequently, the implementation of a service strategy thrusts the manufacturing company into a new cultural and organizational environment and Bowen *et al.* (1989) suggest that a manufacturing company will benefit from the implementation of a service strategy only

if it succeeds in expanding its traditional industrial culture with a service culture. In particular, it is acknowledged that the organizing principles for service firms are specific (Kingman-Brundage *et al.*, 1995). The bulk of literature on service organizations emphasizes the logic of integration and collaboration (Kingman-Brundage *et al.*, 1995; Normann, 1986; Schneider and Bowen, 1995). In this research, service management principles acceptance means that employees adhere to the logic of integration and collaboration between people and functional departments. This discussion suggests the following:

H<sub>3</sub> : Higher levels of service-offering strategy commitment will be associated with higher levels of service management principles acceptance.

#### *Perceived legitimacy*

We consider that employees involved in the implementation of a service-offering strategy may perceived two distinct potential beneficiaries of the strategy: the client or the department responsible for the service strategy. Employees are likely to perceive differently a strategic decision and to develop different beliefs about it (Frankwick *et al.*, 1994) and Deshpandé and Webster (1989) suggest that differences in world views might help or hinder the enactment of marketing decisions. Thus, we expect that each person involved in the implementation of the service-offering strategy will formulate his or her own interpretation of the strategy and a perceived legitimacy. Considering the potential benefits expected from the implementation of a service-offering strategy, we anticipate that some employees may feel threatened by such a strategy, especially those belonging to the traditional manufacturing side of the firm. Those employees may be afraid of a potential loss of power and authority, leading to defensive behavior from those who perceive that their domain might be altered by a new strategy (Ashforth and Lee, 1990). If the beneficiary of the service strategy is perceived to be a specific department, significant resistance is likely to appear and impedes strategic

commitment, whereas if the perceived beneficiary is the client, we may expect weaker resistance from this political viewpoint. Thus:

H<sub>4</sub> : Higher levels of service-offering strategy commitment will be associated with higher levels of perceived client legitimacy.

H<sub>5</sub> : Lower levels of service-offering strategy commitment will be associated with higher levels of perceived department legitimacy.

### *Communication*

The variable communication illustrates the extent to which a person is informed and can express herself on the service-offering strategy implementation. In the research, communication does not stand at the level of strategy making but exclusively at the level of an opened debate around the daily reality of service-offering strategy implementation. Mohrman (1979) found that a key factor related to commitment is “political access”, that is being able to raise issues and to secure serious attention to those issues. According to Mohrman’s analysis, being able to participate in a wide range of decisions is not what makes for commitment; rather, what matters is the possibility of gaining an appropriate forum on those issues that are important to the individual. In the same vein, Westley (1990) suggests that the “strategic conversation” between superior-subordinate dyads has a strong effect on middle managers’ motivation in strategy implementation. Several streams of research on innovation and organizational conflicts also focus on communication. Promotion and acceptance of change is strongly connected to the capacity of managers to convince powerful functional groups to support them (Homburg *et al.*, 1999). Keller (1986; see also Dougherty, 1992) argues that the quality of internal communication enhances team project performance through people involvement. Studying the introduction of a major service initiative in a large

company, Houston *et al.* (1998) showed that people weakly involved were more negative and critical toward this venture. Therefore, we would anticipate the following:

- H<sub>6</sub> : Higher levels of service-offering strategy commitment will be associated with higher levels of communication.
- H<sub>7</sub> : Higher levels of understanding will be associated with higher levels of communication.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### *Design*

We sought the cooperation of a manufacturing company involved in the implementation of a significant and ambitious service-offering strategy. While potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings, a concentrated analysis on a single firm offers deeper insight and an embedding context (Houston *et al.*, 1998). Moreover, a single firm setting reduces problems associated with the high diversity of service strategies implemented by manufacturing firms. A single setting approach is often used for studying employee issues in service organizations (Singh, 2000) and for approaching complex intraorganizational phenomenon (Frankwick *et al.*, 1994).

The manufacturing company studied is a medium size French company, designing, producing and selling technological products. The company serves both military and civil markets, in France, where it is leader, and in international markets. For several years, the company has been involved in a strategy focused on service and quality in order to reinforce its competitive position. A department has been created, dedicated to quality, innovation and service (hereafter referred to as SQ Department) and several service-oriented strategies or actions have been developed. In this research, we focus on a specific service-oriented action entitled “problem warning”, which consists in improving the efficiency of clients’ complaint handling.

We are specifically in the field of customer service as this service action addresses the general quality of interactions between a seller and a customer (Parasuraman, 1998). The survey was implemented some months after the introduction of the service action.

In collaboration with the SQ Department, we identified all the people involved in the implementation of this customer service action. Each participant received an e-mail from the SQ Department announcing the survey packet which included a survey questionnaire and a cover letter from the researcher. The survey packet was sent to the professional address of the 72 identified people. After one month, participants were sent a second wave of packets. In all, 42 people responded to the survey for a response rate of 58% . No significant differences for the key constructs have emerged across late and early respondents.

### *Measurements*

To test the research model, we both used existing scales and developed new measurements. The measures of role commitment and strategy commitment were adapted from the Noble and Mokwa (1999) scales. To measure legitimacy we used direct measurements and we developed new measures for the remaining three variables. In order to develop measures on understanding and communication we relied on a preliminary qualitative study which encouraged key executives of the company to discuss their feelings regarding the implementation of the service-offering strategy. The measure for service management principles acceptance was derived from the literature on service management and service culture (Bowen *et al.*, 1989; George and Bowen, 1995; Grönroos, 1990; Kingman-Brundage *et al.*, 1995). Each initial pool of items was discussed with researchers in related fields.

### *Analysis*

In preparation for the analysis, we combined scale items to produce a summed score for each variable. We assessed the quality of our scales through the analysis of their unidimensionality and reliability (except legitimacy due to its single-item operationalization). Noble and Mokwa (1999) reported adequate reliability and unidimensionality for the role commitment and strategy commitment scales. We slightly modified the existing scales for use in the company context and performed further statistical tests on each scale of the study.

A principal component factor analysis permitted to assess the unidimensionality of the scales. It is generally recognized that a scale is unidimensional when (1) the first factor explains more than 60% of variance (2) the Measures of Sampling Adequacy are above .50 for each item and (3) the scree test shows only one factor. All of the scales met these conditions. Second, each construct's reliability was assessed using the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient. Table 1 summarizes the measurement statistics for the study constructs. The standard deviations, means and correlations for these variables are shown in table 2.

Table 1  
Alpha coefficients, average variance extracted, factor loadings and t-Values for scale items

Scale	Coefficient Alpha	Variance Extracted <sup>a</sup>	Item <sup>b</sup>	MSA <sup>c</sup>
Role Commitment	.87	.63	I take tremendous pride in my responsibilities in the PW <sup>d</sup> action.	.73
			I am committed to my role in implementing the PW action.	.85
			I am determined to meet my personal objectives in the PW action.	.79
			In implementing the PW action, I try to work as hard as possible.	.69
			I intentionally expend a great deal of effort in carrying out my responsibilities in the PW action.	.84
			I give a tremendous effort in implementing the PW action.	.85
Service-offering Strategy Commitment	.83	.66	I think the PW action is a great idea.	.80
			I personally feel that the goals of the PW action are appropriate.	.84
			I don't think the PW action is in the best interests of the company. (R)	.82
			I can't say that I support the PW action. (R)	.79
Role Understanding	.94	.87	I understand very well the PW action.	.75
			I quite understand the goals of the PW action.	.74
			I know exactly what I have to do in the PW action.	.87
			It would be very easy for me to explain to someone the running of the PW action.	.85
Service Management Principles Acceptance	.85	.78	The company must value team work mixing people from different departments.	.84
			The company must value collaboration across different departments.	.59
			All the members of an organization must aim at team working.	.62
Communication	.78	.61	I personally feel well informed on the PW action.	.67
			I know about what people from other departments do in relation with the PW action.	.75
			I can express personal ideas on the PW action and be listened.	.68
			We are regularly informed on the benefits of the PW action for the company.	.67

<sup>a</sup>: % of variance explained by the first component

<sup>b</sup>: All on a five-point scale where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree"

<sup>c</sup>: Measures of Sampling Adequacy

<sup>d</sup>: Problem Warning

(R): reverse-coded item

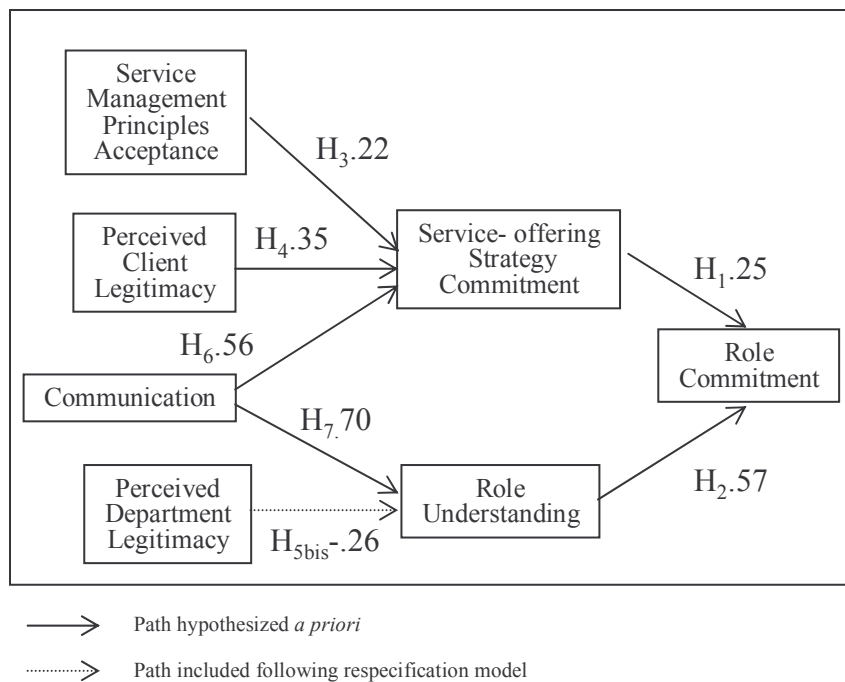
Table 2  
Measure Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations

Measure	Mean	Standard Deviations	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Role Commitment	3.80	.70	-						
2 Service-offering Strategy Commitment	4.10	.60	.58	-					
3 Role Understanding	4.00	.90	.71	.56	-				
4 Service Management Principles Acceptance	4.50	.40	.31	.29	.229	-			
5 Perceived Client Legitimacy	4.00	1.00	.27	.59	.340	.07	-		
6 Perceived Department Legitimacy	2.00	.90	-.19	-.215	-.43	.04	-.22	-	
7 Communication	3.10	.90	.62	.688	.74	.13	.51	-.27	-

Notes: Correlation coefficients of .31 or greater are significant at  $p < .05$  level, and coefficients of .43 or greater are significant at  $p < .01$  level.

We tested the hypothesized model using the AMOS 4 program (Arbuckle 1999). The initial model exhibited unsatisfactory fit characteristics. A review of the modification indices showed strong support for a structural path from “division legitimacy” to “role understanding”. We conducted a detailed review of the notes from the qualitative interviews, which suggested this could be an appropriate addition to the model. Model modification is appropriate in exploratory research if it is not used as a substitute for *a priori* hypothesis development (Anderson and Gerbing 1988). After making this addition, model fit improved substantially. This measurement model produced the following fit statistics:  $\chi^2 = 23$ , d.f. = 14, GFI = .87, CFI = .91. Although the  $\chi^2$  statistic is significant, the other indicators of absolute fit (GFI) and relative fit (CFI) suggest that the model fit the data satisfactorily. The final path model is shown in figure 2.

Figure 2  
Path Model Results  
(standardized coefficients)



We accomplished hypothesis testing by examining the standardized parameter estimates and their t-values (table 3).

Table 3  
Standardized Parameter Estimates and their t-Values

Relationships	Standardized Coefficient	t-Value
Service-Offering Strategy Commitment → Role Commitment	.25	2.03
Role Understanding → Role Commitment	.57	4.72
Service Management Principles Acceptance → Service-Offering Strategy Commitment	.22	1.99
Perceived Client Legitimacy → Service-Offering Strategy Commitment	.35	3.15
Communication → Service-Offering Strategy Commitment	.56	4.98
Communication → Role Understanding	.70	6.76
Perceived Department Legitimacy → Role Understanding	-.26	-2.52

All t-Values are significant at  $p=.05$

## FINDINGS

Most of the hypothesized relationships were supported. The two fundamental hypotheses (H<sub>1</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>) were supported meaning that employees' commitment to their implementation role is clearly related to both their commitment to the service-offering strategy and their understanding of the role they have to play in the service-offering strategy implementation. As was hypothesized, service management principles acceptance (H<sub>3</sub>), perceived client legitimacy (H<sub>4</sub>) and communication (H<sub>6</sub>) influenced service-offering strategy commitment. Consequently, people are more inclined to be committed to the service-offering strategy when they accept the logic of integration and collaboration of service management, when they perceive that the customer is at the heart of the service strategy and when they consider that dialogue is possible. The relationship between communication and understanding (H<sub>7</sub>) is also significant as is the added path between perceived division legitimacy and role understanding (H<sub>5bis</sub>).

Role understanding has the strongest direct effect on role commitment. This result emphasizes the need for employees to understand their implementation responsibilities and grasp the logic of the service-offering strategy being implemented. The smaller coefficient for the path between service-offering strategy commitment and role commitment, nurtures the discussion in strategic management of the complexity of the commitment-performance link. Similarly, the results of Noble and Mokwa (1999) show a relatively weak relationship between strategy commitment and performance. Consequently, to be committed to their role, employees must primarily master the logic and the process of the service-offering strategy being implemented. Among the antecedents of service-offering strategy commitment, communication has the strongest effect, whereas service management principles acceptance has the weaker effect. The service management principles acceptance variable has been developed in this research by focusing exclusively on the organizational uniqueness of service management principles

through a logic of integration and collaboration. It is noteworthy that perceived client legitimacy has more effect on service-offering strategy commitment than service management principles acceptance has. Perceived client legitimacy would be close to the essence of service culture approached by Schneider and Bowen (1995, p.243) as a culture within which “employees believe that customers deserve excellence and in which they see themselves and others behaving in ways that delight customers” (p. 243). Others, such as Schneider *et al.* (1997), evoke this “fanatic attention to the hard details that create and elevate customer experiences”. Consequently, this result suggests that dissemination of a service culture has more impact on the commitment to a service-offering strategy than does the dissemination of service organizational principles, even in the case where implementation of the service-offering strategy relies on the logic of inter-departmental collaboration.

The research model hypothesized a negative influence of perceived division legitimacy on service-offering strategy commitment. Our results suggest a negative influence of perceived division legitimacy on role understanding, meaning that employees perceiving department legitimacy have more difficulty to grasp the logic of the service-offering strategy being implemented. This finding is particularly noteworthy when considering the significance of the influence of role understanding on role commitment. Consequently, the study shows that role understanding is not only influenced by what the organization can master, that is to say a communication process and strategy, but also by variables such as division legitimacy over which the organization may have less control. Whether we approach the implementation of a service strategy within a manufacturing company as an innovation, it has been proposed that innovations generate divergence among groups of people within the organization (Dougherty, 1992), and that innovation is an interpretive process engendering potential barriers (Day, 1992). Because of different thought worlds (Dougherty, 1992) perceptions may also differ.

Our results support the view that internal and political barriers impact the success of service implementation.

Strong support was found for the influence of communication on both service-offering strategy commitment and role understanding. The communication variable has been developed in this research in the way of an open debate around the daily reality of the service implementation permitting employees to get information and to express their ideas. This finding has implications for manufacturing companies meeting with organizational resistance regarding service implementation. It shows that communication is critical and that it must be able to provide people with information and to listen to them. At this stage of the discussion it may be proposed to distinguish two kinds of communication: one for persuasion - the communication required to gain employee support for the service strategy and illustrated by H<sub>6</sub>; the other for information – the communication required to build an open debate on service strategy implementation and illustrated by H<sub>7</sub>. It seems that manufacturing companies need to invest in these two kinds of communication but considering the prominent effect of communication on understanding, we propose that in the process of implementing a service strategy within a manufacturing company, information is more urgent than persuasion.

## CONCLUSION

The development and testing of a model of role commitment to service strategy implementation is a step in improving our understanding of service strategy implementation in manufacturing companies. Several promising findings result from this work. In order to enhance employees' commitment to service implementation, it is necessary to develop both their strategic commitment to the service strategy being implemented and their understanding of the role they have to play in this implementation. The findings also stress the importance of communication and understanding. Communication appears to be at the heart of the

implementation success as it impacts in the model the two antecedents of role commitment. Employees need to grasp the general environment of their implementation role by getting an overview of the service strategy.

For most managers, understanding the antecedents of commitment is a key to motivating employees toward achieving specific organizational goals. The different findings of the current study indicate that manufacturing employees need to be clearly connected and committed to the implementation of a service strategy. In particular, employees are significantly reassured by communication aimed to inform, and conversely, disturbed by any perception of a service strategy takeover by specific department. Indeed, considering the potential benefits from a service strategy implementation, we may anticipate that some employees could feel threatened, especially those belonging to the traditional manufacturing side of the firm. Those employees may be afraid of a potential loss of power and authority, and one might witness defensive behaviour from those employees who perceive that their domain might be altered by the service strategy. Consequently, manufacturing companies have to focus their attention on removing internal barriers and on the appropriate design of a clear and balanced communication process.

The findings reported in this paper must be tempered to some extent by the limitation of the study. On one hand, the study is limited by its focus on a single firm setting. Such a design research permits to eliminate the variation due to differences in the organizational environment as well as issues concerning the kind of service strategy being implemented. However, the limited sample size reduces the potential for generalization, even if a significant majority of the employees involved in the specific service-offering strategy responded. On the other hand, there exist significant correlations between some measures, introducing the possibility that collinearity may have influenced hypothesis testing. Finally, the model's explanatory power is limited by its included constructs. With further research, the model

could be expanded by examining other ways to ensure and secure employee commitment, such as structural tools like cross-functional teams (Franwick *et al.*, 1994). Approaching the implementation challenge of service strategies within manufacturing companies through the issue of security echoes Schneider and Bowen's (1995) approach considering that security is one of the basic needs of service customers. It also emphasizes the cultural challenge of service implementation within industry: service culture is different from manufacturing culture, that's why people may feel threatened and unsecured and so implementation enigmatic.

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