

The Impact of Strategic Learning on the Effectiveness of Internal Marketing in the General Company for Food Products in Iraq

دور التخطيط الاستراتيجي في فاعلية التسويق الداخلي لدى الشركة العامة لمنتجات الأغذية في العراق

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Abstract

This research aims to examine the impact of strategic learning on enhancing the effectiveness of internal marketing within companies. It seeks to understand how the acquisition, sharing, and application of knowledge can contribute to strengthening the internal environment of the organization. Strategic learning refers to the process adopted by management to develop future capabilities through continuous learning, environmental analysis, and leveraging past experiences to make more efficient and flexible decisions.

Internal marketing encompasses all activities aimed at improving employee satisfaction, fostering internal engagement, and creating a positive work environment, which ultimately leads to higher levels of commitment and organizational loyalty. The significance of linking these two concepts lies in the fact that strategic learning can enhance employees' skills, improve internal communication systems, and increase the effectiveness of incentive programs all of which directly support the success of internal marketing.

This study employs a descriptive-analytical approach through a review of recent literature and previous studies, aiming to construct a theoretical framework that clarifies the nature of the relationship between strategic learning and internal marketing. Expectations suggest that organizations embracing a philosophy of strategic learning are more capable of developing their internal environments and fostering employee satisfaction and productivity, which in turn reflects positively on overall organizational performance.

The research recommends integrating learning processes into managerial and marketing plans, providing continuous training opportunities, and promoting a learning culture within the workplace to ensure alignment between organizational goals and employee needs.

Keywords: Strategic Learning, Internal Marketing, Food Companies

How to cite this article: Mahmoud BI, Alkhafaji MA. The impact of strategic learning on the effectiveness of internal marketing in the general company for food products in Iraq. *Int J Drug Deliv Technol.* 2026;16(7s): 268-277; DOI: 10.25258/ijddt.16.7s.31

Introduction

Contemporary organizations operate in environments characterized by rapid change and intense competition. To navigate these conditions, they constantly seek tools and strategies that promote sustainability and excellence. One such tool is strategic learning which enables organizations to enhance their capabilities and responsiveness through continuous learning and knowledge generation. This approach builds resilience by leveraging past experiences, adapting to transformations, and innovating solutions effectively (Cui, 2025).

Strategic learning is increasingly recognized as a critical capability that enables organizations to adapt, innovate, and maintain a competitive edge in dynamic environments. It is defined as an organization's ability to continuously acquire, interpret, and respond to internal and external information in ways that shape strategic actions and outcomes. According to Thomas and Lipton (2021), strategic learning involves "the intentional and ongoing process of using insights from past experiences and current feedback to inform and refine strategic decisions". Similarly, Li and Wang (2022) define it as "a systemic approach through

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which firms integrate learning processes into their strategic planning to ensure agility and sustained performance". From a cognitive perspective, strategic learning also entails the alignment of mental models with changing business realities; Zhang and Reimer (2023) emphasize that it "requires reflective thinking and adaptive capabilities that allow organizations to reassess assumptions and realign strategies in response to uncertainty". In a more applied sense, Patel and Singh (2020) argue that strategic learning "bridges knowledge management and strategic execution, enabling firms to convert insights into purposeful actions". Moreover, Ahmed et al. (2021) stress the role of organizational culture, noting that "strategic learning thrives in environments that encourage experimentation, dialogue, and continuous improvement". Collectively, these perspectives highlight strategic learning as an evolving, multidimensional construct essential for organizational resilience, strategic foresight, and long-term success in volatile markets.

Strategic learning has become a vital organizational capability in today's complex and rapidly changing business environments. It enables companies to adapt, innovate, and maintain long-term competitiveness by aligning their learning processes with strategic objectives. The significance of strategic learning lies not only in acquiring knowledge but also in applying it systematically to enhance decision-making and performance.

Strategic learning helps organizations anticipate and respond proactively to environmental changes, thereby improving their agility and resilience (Bontis, Crossan, & Hulland, 2020).

It fosters a culture of continuous improvement and knowledge sharing, which is crucial for innovation and sustainable growth (Huang & Yu, 2021).

Companies that engage in strategic learning are better equipped to align internal capabilities with external opportunities, leading to enhanced strategic alignment and execution.

By integrating learning into the strategic management process, organizations can transform themselves into learning-oriented entities that thrive in uncertainty and change.

Internal marketing (IM) has emerged as a critical organizational strategy that aligns employee

engagement with external customer satisfaction and long-term business success. It involves treating employees as internal customers and ensuring their motivation, satisfaction, and alignment with the organization's goals (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2020; Pappasolomou, 2021). Several scholars have defined internal marketing in ways that highlight its multidimensional nature. For instance, Jaworski et al. (2020) define internal marketing as "a strategic approach that promotes internal communication, motivation, and employee empowerment to enhance service delivery and performance." Similarly, Nguyen and Ngo (2021) describe it as "a management philosophy that integrates human resource practices with marketing principles to align employee behavior with organizational values." According to Al-Haddad and Gallar (2022), internal marketing "focuses on fostering employee commitment and satisfaction as a precursor to customer satisfaction and loyalty." In the view of Reijonen and Laukkanen (2023), internal marketing is "a continuous organizational process aimed at developing employee capabilities and attitudes to support the brand promise." Finally, Park and Tran (2024) define internal marketing as "an internal communication system that ensures employees understand, accept, and deliver the firm's strategic objectives with consistency and enthusiasm." Together, these definitions underscore that internal marketing is not merely about internal communication but a holistic organizational practice that bridges human capital and strategic market orientation.

Internal marketing plays a foundational role in strengthening the internal dynamics of organizations, especially in service-driven and customer-centric industries. By aligning employees with organizational goals and fostering a culture of engagement, internal marketing becomes a bridge between strategic planning and operational excellence (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2020; Pappasolomou, 2021). Its importance extends beyond traditional HR functions and contributes directly to the firm's external performance. The significance of internal marketing can be summarized in the following key points:

-Enhancing Employee Engagement: Internal marketing ensures that employees feel valued and

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involved, which boosts their emotional commitment and productivity (Nguyen & Ngo, 2021).

-Improving Service Quality: By training and informing employees effectively, internal marketing enhances their ability to deliver consistent and high-quality service (Jaworski et al., 2020).

-Strengthening Organizational Alignment: It fosters shared understanding of the company's mission and values, reducing ambiguity and misalignment (Al-Haddad & Gallear, 2022).

-Increasing Employee Retention: A positive internal environment reduces turnover by enhancing job satisfaction and loyalty (Park & Tran, 2024).

-Facilitating Change Management: Through transparent communication and internal campaigns, internal marketing helps reduce resistance to change and builds readiness among employees (Reijonen & Laukkanen, 2023).

-Promoting Brand Advocacy: Employees who are internally motivated are more likely to act as brand ambassadors, reinforcing the company's image externally (Papasolomou, 2021).

Simultaneously, internal marketing has become a key managerial philosophy that treats employees as internal customers, emphasizing motivation, engagement, and effective communication. This approach fosters a positive work environment, boosting employee satisfaction, loyalty, and overall productivity (Serafim et al., 2024).

The current study investigates the relationship between strategic learning and the effectiveness of internal marketing. It examines how strategic learning practices enhance internal marketing's performance, improve employee satisfaction, and strengthen organizational cohesion. This alignment is increasingly valued for its capacity to balance organizational objectives with employee needs amid human capital investment (Serafim et al., 2024; Nadia & Imran, 2023).

Study Methodology

The hypothetical framework is considered one of the fundamental pillars in constructing the theoretical model of the study, as it contributes to clarifying a series of presumed logical relationships

and influences among the research variables whether these relationships are quantitative and measurable or qualitative and based on analytical interpretation. This framework aims to present a comprehensive and integrated conceptualization of the factors the study seeks to explore, enabling the analysis of their mutual interactions at both the individual and organizational levels.

Based on the study's objectives which aim to analyze the impact of strategic learning on the effectiveness of internal marketing within the environment of the General Company for Food Products-two main variables have been identified that constitute the core of this framework:

Independent Variable: Strategic learning this represents a set of organized and continuous processes adopted by the company to generate knowledge and apply it in decision-making and performance improvement.

Dependent Variable: Effectiveness of Internal Marketing useless to the degree of efficiency and effectiveness of marketing policies and programs directed toward employees within the company.

Research Problem

Modern organizations particularly within the Iraqi business environment-face increasing challenges related to the efficiency and effectiveness of internal marketing. These challenges directly affect employee satisfaction, performance levels, and ultimately, the organization's ability to achieve its strategic objectives. Internal marketing is considered a vital tool for empowering employees and strengthening their commitment, through effective communication, motivation, and the development of a supportive organizational culture. However, the effectiveness of these practices is often influenced by the organization's capacity for learning and adaptation, which is encapsulated in the concept of strategic learning.

In this context, the central question arises regarding the extent to which the General Company for Food Products is capable of employing strategic learning processes as an entry point to enhance internal marketing effectiveness by developing employee capabilities, facilitating knowledge sharing, and improving decision-making. Accordingly, the research problem stems from the need to diagnose

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the level of strategic learning within the targeted company, and to analyze its impact on the dimensions of internal marketing, in order to understand the nature of the relationship between these two variables and whether strategic learning acts as a catalyst for achieving more responsive and sustainable internal marketing effectiveness.

Hypotheses

There is a statistically significant impact relationship between strategic learning and the effectiveness of internal marketing at the General Company for Food Products in Iraq.

Strategic Learning Objectives

Strategic learning aims to align individual and organizational learning processes with long-term goals and competitive positioning. In today's volatile and complex business environment, defining clear strategic learning objectives is essential to guide knowledge innovation, and performance improvement. These objectives p organizations to not only adapt to change but also proactively spe their futures through systematic learning and strategic alignment (Wang & Ahmed, 2020). The main objectives of strategic learning include the following:

-Enhancing Organizational Adaptability One core objective of strategic learning is to enhance the organization's capacity to adapt to environmental changes by integrating new knowledge into decision-making processes. By fostering continuous learning at all levels, organizations can improve their strategic responsiveness and agility (Nguyen & Mohamed, 2021).

-Promoting Innovation and Knowledge Creation Strategic learning fosters an environment where innovation is not incidental but intentional. It promotes knowledge sharing, cross-functional collaboration, and experimentation, enabling the creation of novel solutions and value-added services (Fernández-Mesa & Alegre, 2022).

-Aligning Learning with Strategic Goals Another fundamental objective is ensuring that learning initiatives are directly aligned with the organization's strategic direction. This alignment guarantees that learning efforts contribute to building competencies that support long-term success (Wang & Ahmed, 2020; Nguyen & Mohamed, 2021).

-Developing Strategic Thinking Capabilities Strategic learning also aims to cultivate strategic thinking skills among employees and leaders. This involves the ability to analyze complex situations, anticipate future trends, and make informed decisions that consider both short-term and long-term implications (Fernández-Mesa & Alegre, 2022).

Dimensions of Strategic Learning

Strategic learning is a multifaceted process that enables organizations to align their learning activities with long-term objectives, environmental dynamics, and internal capabilities. It is not merely about acquiring knowledge but involves transforming that knowledge into strategic action. Understanding the dimensions of strategic learning provides a framework for evaluating how organizations build and apply knowledge to sustain competitiveness and foster innovation. One of the most comprehensive and widely accepted frameworks for strategic learning dimensions was proposed by Thomas and Allen (2006), and later elaborated by Real, Leal & Roldán (2014). These dimensions have been reinforced and adapted by subsequent research to reflect the challenges of the digital era, global competition, and organizational agility. In contemporary literature, five core dimensions of strategic learning stand out as fundamental:

-Knowledge Acquisition: This dimension refers to the organization's ability to identify, obtain, and assimilate relevant information from both internal and external sources. It includes scanning the environment, benchmarking, market research, and learning from past experiences. Knowledge acquisition is considered the starting point for any strategic learning process and sets the foundation for informed strategic decisions (Real et al., 2014; Wang & Ahmed, 2020).

In dynamic environments, firms that systematically acquire strategic knowledge are more capable of sensing opportunities and threats, leading to improved innovation performance (Fernández-Mesa & Alegre, 2022). This capability is also critical in industries that are highly competitive or regulated, where external intelligence significantly impacts strategic direction (Nguyen & Mohamed, 2021).

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-Knowledge Distribution and Sharing: Once knowledge is acquired, it must be shared effectively across different levels and units of the organization. Knowledge sharing fosters collaboration, breaks down silos, and ensures that strategic insights reach decision-makers at all levels. This dimension is essential for building a collective intelligence that supports unified strategic action (Wang & Ahmed, 2020). Strategic learning is not confined to top management; it thrives in an environment where cross-functional communication and openness are encouraged. Knowledge distribution also plays a role in organizational culture, where transparency, trust, and a willingness to share are cultural enablers of effective learning (Fernández-Mesa & Alegre, 2022).

-Knowledge Interpretation and Integration: Strategic learning requires not only acquiring and distributing knowledge but also interpreting it in ways that align with the organization's strategic context. This dimension includes the processes of filtering, analyzing, and integrating information to generate meaningful insights for decision-making. It involves cognitive, cultural, and strategic filters that determine how knowledge is perceived and applied (Real et al., 2014). This dimension highlights the importance of strategic sensemaking a process where managers give meaning to complex and ambiguous data. Interpretation and integration are key to avoiding information overload and ensuring that knowledge is not just available, but also strategically actionable (Nguyen & Mohamed, 2021).

-Strategic Memory and Retention: Strategic memory involves storing valuable knowledge and lessons learned in accessible formats, such as databases, procedures, and cultural norms. It ensures that strategic learning is cumulative and that the organization does not repeat past mistakes. Strategic retention supports long-term capability building and knowledge continuity even during leadership transitions (Wang & Ahmed, 2020). Organizations with strong strategic memory are more resilient and can respond better to crises by drawing upon a repertoire of past experiences. This dimension becomes even more critical in industries facing high turnover or knowledge drain (Fernández-Mesa & Alegre, 2022).

-Strategic Knowledge Application: The ultimate test of strategic learning is whether knowledge is effectively applied to strategic planning, innovation, and performance improvement. This dimension reflects the organization's ability to translate learning into practice. It includes modifying strategies, redesigning processes, and reallocating resources based on newly acquired knowledge (Real et al., 2014). Strategic knowledge application also requires supportive leadership mindset that values experimentation, tolerates failure, and promotes adaptive change. Without application, learning remains theoretical and fails to deliver tangible strategic benefits (Nguyen & Mohamed, 2021).

Dimensions of Internal Marketing

Internal marketing is one of the modern managerial concepts that reflect a fundamental shift in viewing employees as internal customers who deserve appreciation, motivation, and empowerment an approach that directly impacts the quality of services provided to external customers. The success of organizations depends not only on the quality of their products or services but also on the loyalty and engagement of their employees and their understanding of the organization's vision and mission (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2020, Papasolomou, 2021). Hence, understanding and analyzing the dimensions of internal marketing is essential to improving organizational performance and enhancing employee interaction. Core Dimensions of Internal Marketing.

While the academic literature offers multiple perspectives on internal marketing, most modern studies agree on a set of key dimensions that form the foundation of this concept:

-Effective Internal Communication: Internal communication is the backbone of internal marketing. It enables management to convey its vision, strategies, and goals to employees. Open, two-way communication helps reduce ambiguity, increase transparency, and foster mutual understanding across organizational levels (Nguyen & Ngo, 2021). It is not limited to delivering information but also includes active listening and constructive feedback, which enhance trust between management and staff.

-Employee Empowerment: Empowerment refers to giving employees the authority and freedom to

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make appropriate decisions within their scope of work, which improves performance and encourages innovation. An empowered employee is more likely to contribute effectively to organizational goals and feel supported by leadership (Al-Haddad & Galliar, 2022). Studies show that empowerment is directly linked to employee satisfaction and loyalty, making it a vital indicator of internal marketing effectiveness.

-Continuous Training and Development: Investing in employee skill-building and knowledge development is a core component of successful internal marketing. Organizations demonstrate genuine care for their employees by offering regular training programs that align with strategic changes (Park & Tran, 2024). Training not only equips employees with competence but also strengthens their sense of belonging and commitment.

-Motivation and Reward Systems: Motivation is a key driver of internal performance. Through fair and transparent reward systems, employees feel appreciated and respected, which promotes teamwork and initiative (Reijonen & Laukkanen, 2023). Motivation mechanisms should include both financial and non-financial rewards and be closely linked to actual performance and achievements.

-Supportive Organizational Culture: Organizational culture is the environment that shapes employee behavior and attitudes. Building a supportive culture based on mutual respect, opinion, and dialogue is essential for internal marketing success. A culture that encourages learning, development, and values individual contributions creates fertile ground for internal marketing (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2020).

-Organizational Commitment: Internal marketing increases employees' organizational commitment by enhancing satisfaction and aligning personal values with those of the institution. Employees who feel emotionally and professionally attached to their organization are more willing to exert discretionary effort (Nguyen & Ngo, 2021).

-Internal Customer Orientation: Internal marketing requires management to treat employees as "internal customers" and focus on meeting their needs while enabling them to perform their roles effectively. The more satisfied employees are, the

more positively it reflects on the quality of service delivered to external customers (Jaworski et al., 2020).

Results and Discussions

The descriptive-analytical approach was adopted to examine the relationship between strategic learning (SL) as the independent variable and internal marketing effectiveness (IM) as the dependent variable. A structured questionnaire was designed comprising three main sections:

- Strategic Learning (SL).
- Dimensions of Internal Marketing Effectiveness (IM), including: internal communication, employee empowerment, training, motivation, and organizational culture.
- Demographic information.

A five-point Likert scale was used to assess responses (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 Strongly Agree).

Population and Sample: The study population consisted of employees of the General Company for Food Products. A stratified random sample of 570 questionnaires was distributed, of which 480 valid responses were retrieved yielding a response rate of 84.2%.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

Job Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Service Staff	325	67.7
Logistics Personnel	95	19.8
Marketing & Guidance Staff	60	12.5
Total	480	100

In Table (1), we observe the distribution of the sample members according to job categories. We find that the largest percentage is the percentage of service staff, which constituted 67.7% of the sample. The category of logistics personnel constituted 19.8% of the sample, while the marketing and guidance staff had the lowest percentage, which amounted to 12.5% of the sample.

Statistical Analysis: The SPSS V.26 software was used for both descriptive and inferential statistics. Reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha,

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and hypotheses were tested using linear regression analysis for direct and indirect effects.

- Reliability Test (Cronbach's Alpha)

Strategic Learning: $\alpha = 0.952$

Internal Marketing Effectiveness: $\alpha = 0.981$
 these values indicate a high level of internal consistency for the measurement tools ($\alpha > 0.9$).

Table 2: Statistical indicators for the dimensions of strategic learning and internal marketing according to the responses of the research sample.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	COV	Interpretation
Strategic Learning (SL)	4.82	0.743	0.154	High
Internal Communication (IM1)	4.66	0.738	0.158	High
Employee Empowerment (IM2)	4.64	0.733	0.158	High
Motivation & Rewards (IM3)	4.66	0.688	0.165	High
Overall Internal Marketing (IM)	4.92	0.864	0.175	High

Table 2 shows that the overall mean score for the strategic learning dimensions was 4.82, with a standard deviation of 0.743, indicating a high level of application. The internal marketing dimension achieved the highest mean score, at 4.92, with a standard deviation of 0.864, also indicating a high level of application.

- Direct Hypotheses Testing

Table 3: Simple regression analysis of strategic learning variables and internal marketing dimensions

Hypotheses	Relationship	R	R ²	Sig. Value
H1	SL --> IM	0.389	0.367	0.000
H2	SL --> Employee Empowerment	0.418	0.401	0.000
H3	Employee Empowerment --> IM	0.322	0.312	0.000

Parameter of the form	code	Value	T-test	Level of statistical significance
Stability coefficient	α	1.51	5.678	0.000
Simple linear regression coefficient	β	0.603	11.245	0.000

• Total Effect Analysis

Relationship	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect
SL--> IM (via Empowerment)	0.389	0.197	0.586

The results of the simple regression analysis shown in Table 3 between the independent variable (strategic learning) and the dependent variable with its dimensions (internal communication, employee empowerment, and motivation and reward) reveal the following:

- The correlation coefficient between strategic learning and internal communication was $R = 0.389$, and the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.367$). This value indicates that it is statistically significant, confirming the existence of a correlation between the independent

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variable (strategic learning) and the first dimension (internal communication) of the dependent variable (internal marketing). This means that strategic learning explains 36.7% of the changes occurring in the level of internal marketing, which is a good explanatory percentage that reflects the importance of this variable in the organizational environment at a significance level of $\alpha \leq 0.005$.

2. The correlation coefficient between strategic learning and employee empowerment was ($R = 0.418$), and the coefficient of determination was ($R^2 = 0.401$). This indicates statistical significance, confirming a correlation between the independent variable (strategic learning) and the second dimension (employee empowerment) of the dependent variable (internal marketing). In other words, strategic learning explains 40.1% of the changes in employee empowerment. This suggests that promoting strategic learning practices within the organization contributes to increasing the levels of authority and trust granted to employees.
3. The correlation coefficient was ($R = 0.322$) and the coefficient of determination was ($R^2 = 0.312$) between strategic learning, motivation, and rewards. This indicates that it is statistically significant, confirming the existence of a correlation between the independent variable (strategic learning) and the third dimension (motivation and rewards) of the dependent variable, internal marketing. This means that granting rewards and incentives to employees contributes to improving the internal work environment and enhances the application of internal marketing.
4. Regarding the regression model parameters, the reliability coefficient ($\alpha = 1.51$) was statistically significant, and the regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.603$) had a T-value of ($T = 11.245$) and a significance level of (0.000). This reflects the strong positive impact of strategic learning on

enhancing internal marketing. The positive value of the simple linear regression coefficient (β) indicates that increasing the dimensions of strategic learning leads to an increase in internal marketing indicators.

Therefore, we accept the hypothesis that there is a statistically significant correlation and influence relationship at a significance level of $\alpha \leq 0.005$ between strategic learning and the dimensions of internal marketing (internal communication, employee empowerment, motivation, and reward). In other words, the use of strategic learning is a means of increasing the effectiveness of internal marketing.

Conclusion

The study concludes that strategic learning has a strong and direct impact on internal marketing effectiveness, and that employee empowerment serves as a significant mediating variable. The findings recommend that the General Company for Food Products should adopt structured strategic learning programs and link them with empowerment and internal communication initiatives to enhance internal marketing outcomes. By increasing the delegation of powers to managers, which contributes to raising the level of employee job performance and enhances the sense of belonging to the organization, and participation in decision-making, in addition to adopting a system of incentives and rewards that supports the creative initiatives of employees, which in turn affects raising the level of internal marketing of the organization.

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