Management of Telecommunications Services:
A Vital New Content Area and a Course Model for the College of Business

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ABSTRACT

Telecommunications companies are facing a challenge in satisfying changing customer demands related to telecommunications services. Historically, the industry challenge was managing the changing technology; today, the industry also must focus on the management of telecommunications services. The purpose of this paper is twofold: (1) to provide an argument for the importance of the management of telecommunications services as a vital new course area at the university level and (2) to describe one possible model for a new undergraduate course, Management of Telecommunications Services. The paper is targeted to university faculty and administration and corporate representatives responsible for technology education. The ultimate goal of the course is to align the university curriculum with the needs of the telecommunications industry and provide industry with entry-level Information Technology (IT) employees who have an understanding of the fundamentals of the management of telecommunications services.

Keywords: information systems; IT education; IT management; telecommunications; telecommunications technology

INTRODUCTION

The deregulatory impact of the 1996 Telecommunications Act resulted in fierce competition for customers by telecommunications firms. This competition has intensified, and in order to increase the size of their customer base, many telecommunications companies are striving to create a competitive advantage through an increased variety of service offerings. These telecommunications companies hope that by adding new types of services to their existing service offerings, they can achieve economies of scope (Grover & Saeed, 2003).

As telecommunications companies face challenges in satisfying customer de-

mands related to telecommunications services, telecommunications providers have been forced to rethink the fundamental way in which they do business. Historically, the industry was driven by the management of changing technology; today, the industry also has to focus on the management of telecommunications services. Hall (1996) summed up the new challenge facing the telecommunications industry regarding the management of telecommunications services: "services are now being defined in terms of what they provide to users. For suppliers this requires a radical change of perspective from being technology providers to becoming service providers, which must also be reflected in the approach to management" (p. 10).

The turmoil in today's telecommunications industry's services sector is a reflection of the state of the service sector in the United States. In the U.S. economy, where services account for 73% of the gross domestic product, the entire service sector is in a constant state of change that is causing upheavals in the traditional ways of doing business (Lovelock & Wright, 2002).

Top managers in the telecommunications industry recognize the crucial importance of the effective management of customer services. One industry person noted that "several years of good quality communication service can be shattered in a few minutes if the customer care processes are poor" (Adams & Willets, 1996, p. 1).

In response to the changing critical success factors for telecommunications companies, the field of management of telecommunications services began in the mid-1990s with the initiation of research and applications geared toward providing better management of telecommunications services. Managing the services that telecommunications providers deliver to their customers is defined by Adams and Willetts (1996) to mean "the entire customer-service spectrum, including order handling, service quality, problem handling, billing, service development, and so on" (p. 29). Adams and Willetts (1996) stress that to satisfy customers' requirements, the effective management of telecommunications services involves the continuous rebalancing of three objectives: (1) reduction of cost; (2) improvement of service quality; and (3) reduction of time-to-market of new services.

Organizations are beginning to realize that adequate attention to the Service Management function can bridge the gap between the technological functions (Element Management and Network Management) and the Business Management function. Telecommunications industry organizations must effectively manage services in order to satisfy the level of quality services demanded by customers. In turn, effective service management can generate more revenue and have a positive impact on the successful Business Management function. Figure 1 represents the managerial functions of an organization in the telecommunications industry.

Because service management in the telecommunications industry is not well understood, attention is now being directed to the management of telecommunications services. Ward said that for the telecommunications industry, service management remains its least understood area and that "the next frontier is service management" (Ward, 1998, p. 157).

This paper will provide support for the growing importance of the management of telecommunications services as a vital new course area at the university level and will describe one possible model for a Management of Telecommunications Services course.

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